

INCh WP2: Methodology

(March 2015)

The research activities developed in the second work package of the INCh project represent the qualitative research part of the research project.

In the second work package, we apply a *qualitative* research approach on a selection of five relevant cases aiming at gaining in-depth insights in the meaning making of local policy makers, social workers and families in poverty. This research will lead to a profound understanding of the functioning of the networks and service delivery in our study and how people perceive this. This part of the project also looks at the potential match or mismatch between the meaning making of policy makers, social workers and users about the services delivered by the network. Our wish to explore perspectives, experiences and a deeper understanding of the meaning making of people leads to the engagement in qualitative interpretative research.

In this note we will first discuss our research context and we will give a more concrete description of the first cases that will be selected. In the next section we discuss how we will conduct and operationalize the research questions. We clarify our strategies on how we want to collect the data and specify the data-analysis. Lastly we give a short explanation on how we match the methodology of the first and second work package.

Research contexts

In a multiple case study (Stewart, 2012) we will analyze the developments and perspectives of local actors and families with young children in two municipalities in Flanders, two in Wallonia and one in Brussels. These cases are part of a broader pool of municipalities that are selected for the quantitative part of the study (see WP1).

The selection of the cases will be based on several motivations. The cases that will be selected for the research project have to fit the inclusion criteria that were determined for the research (for example inclusion of OCMW/CPAS, poverty rates higher than average, etc.). Within these similarities we also look for diversity between the cases.

The first case that we select for WP2 in Flanders is Zele. This municipality is located in a rural area, although it also has to deal with features and problems that are found in larger cities, including high numbers of ethnic minorities, high unemployment, low average income, high residential density, and so on. This makes it an interesting context to look at as a first case because the number of local actors, as well as the budget, is more limited, compared to larger cities. Recently several projects are being launched in Zele. Next to the funds received by former Flemish minister of poverty reduction I. Lieten that lead to the development of a local network against child poverty, there is a project of VOS (Vlaams Overleg Straathoekwerk) funded by the National Lottery that also supports the establishment of the network. In addition, Zele received funds for the development of a Huis van het Kind. This initiative is led by the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family in Flanders. The clustering of these projects will create an interesting dynamic to examine, not only between different actors involved in the field, but more importantly, also between social services and families in poverty.

The first case that we select for WP2 in Wallonia is not yet defined. We are still collecting information about this network in Liege called "La boussole". This network is located in an urban area and provides services to parents (parental support).

Research questions

In this cluster of research activities (WP2), two interrelated research questions are central:

1. How do local actors shape local networks in the realization of the integration of social provision in the combat against child poverty?
2. Do local networks engaged in combating child poverty contribute to the quality of social provision as experienced by families in poverty?

In what follows, a detailed research is provided for each of these research questions, including a clarification of the strategies of data collection and strategies of data analysis.

Research activities concerning local networks in combating child poverty (research question 1)

In this part of the research, we make a monograph or thick description of all five networks. The networks are examined in a qualitative way and we build on the results that are gathered in the quantitative part of the study for WP1. To obtain a clear vision on the local situation and network, a cartography of local (social) actors is made. The monographs do not have any comparative goal. As Clifford Geertz (1973) argues, qualitative researchers have seen comparison in stark contrast to studying the particularities of the individual case as comparative studies tend to “obscure case knowledge that fails to facilitate comparison” (Stake, 2003). In order to handle the inevitable dilemma between describing the rich individual case knowledge, the “thick of what is going on” (ibid) and the necessity to draw generalisable conclusions, the researchers from Ghent and Liège will develop and share common perspectives on the individual cases. Thus we conceptualise them as individual, free standing, but related (Urban, 2007). By asking similar questions (without expecting similar answers) we will be able to construct a “structural equivalence” (Burt, 1982) allowing us to develop a shared framework to analyse diverse findings.

The research question (how local actors shape networks to combat child poverty?) will be examined at two levels, namely the political level and the social services level. For the interviews with local policy makers and social workers and welfare actors, including the analysis of these interviews, we use concrete findings and fields of tension that emerge from the scientific literature. These can serve as a guideline for our interview questions, and as an analytical frame to analyse the interviews.

The political level:

In this level, we start with a (1) *document analysis*. From the start of the research we collect and document the local policies regarding networking and integration of services in the combat against child poverty. This includes the thematic analysis of policy papers, local project proposals, vision statements of sectors and departments concerned, etc.

Then we examine how policies are implemented in the local context. (2) *Semi-structured interviews* to question what is actually happening in practice. The interviews will be planned with key local social policy makers while using a snowball sampling strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). We give an example of possible subjects:

- How do local policy makers translate European, federal and regional policies into the community area (according to document analysis and opinions of policy makers)?
- What is the conceptualization of child poverty and the vision on combating poverty (short/middle/long-term vision)
- How do policy makers articulate the political agenda and the electoral time schedule with the struggle against poverty?
- What is the place of the user in the development of the public policies?

The social services level:

At this level, we conduct (3) *participant observations of a selection of meetings* of the actors of the network, as well as relevant meetings between key actors and the coordinators of the network. In this way we gain a more in-depth insight in the actual functioning and implementation of the network. These observations will start after the selection of the cases and will continue during the course of the project.

In addition to the participative observations we conduct (4) *semi-structured interviews* with social workers and social welfare actors who are involved in the network, using a snowball sampling strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Noy, 2007). We examine the formal ways in which the organisations work together in the local network based on formal meetings, protocols, rules, mandates and so on. We also wish to analyse the informal collaboration between individual professionals and organizations that are formed within their concrete engagement regarding complex situations of families (Roets, Bonte, Dermaut, Decoene, Dhondt & Myny, 2013). It is important to examine both forms of collaboration to get an in-depth view on what really happens in local practices.

We give an example of possible subjects:

- How is quality of services formulated by social workers and local policy makers?
- What is their vision on and definition of families in poverty What kind of contacts do they maintain with them?
- How do they describe the needs and concerns of people in poverty?
- How do social workers collaborate with other social workers/organizations?
- Information sharing: matters concerning the (lack of) ethical and privacy related legislation in networks. Information sharing as an opening or as a barrier?
- Network as a panopticon: closer control and monitoring versus efficiency and desirability
- Integration and closer collaboration: changing role identity of actors involved?
- Does a network establish a shared engagement and a shared responsibility?
- Transitions/Forming connections: continuity over time and/or setting
- Dealing with complexity: trying to get a grip on complex situations in order to make them susceptible to intervention, without reducing the complex social reality of families in poverty.

If we want to have a better understanding of the goals, purposes and solutions that are mentioned by the actors in the network, we also have to question what the underlying definitions are of the social problem(s) that form the basis and rationale of the network (for example poverty, child poverty, fragmentation, bad parenting,...).

Yet, at the interface between the service level and the parent level is the information stream about families. Therefore, we will (5) analyse these information streams, by looking at how files (dossiers) are formed on families, who adds what information and who has access to which information. In addition, through methods (3) and (4) we will also track informal information streams on families. The operationalization of this part will be constructed in dialogue with the services.

The material that is collected in the first two sections will be used as a basis to get an answer on the second research question.

Research activities concerning the experience of families in poverty in relation to the quality of social provision (research question 2)

This research question will be examined at the level of families in poverty situations.

In this section we will perform (6) *in-depth qualitative interviews with around ten families in poverty per network*. In this part we will strive to create an interaction between the material and results found from the first research questions and our interviews with parents. This will allow us to confront the perspectives of social workers and policy makers with the perspectives of families in poverty. The insights that we have gained in the first two sections can help us understand and relate certain visions, problems, solutions and experiences of people in poverty. We give an example of possible subjects that confront the opinion of families in poverty with the opinion of policy makers and social workers:

- How do families define poverty? (Connect the European definition of poverty in the opinion of the actors (monetary, accessibility of essential goods and/or essential services, working intensity).
- Is there a difference between child poverty and parents poverty?
- What are the specific/non-specific needs for these two target groups?

In a broad sense we want to look at what is seen and experienced by parents as quality of services. We will examine what is supportive and valuable for parents and what works for parents or what can make a difference for them. We give an example of possible subjects:

- What are the reasons why families appeal or don't appeal to a service/organization?
- What is the relation between families and services/organizations.

This part will be further developed later on in the research process, making sure that the materials gathered in this phase can contribute to conclusions that take on board the perspective of the families.

Research activities concerning the link between the methodology of WP1 (questionnaire, social network analysis) and WP2 (document analysis, participant observations of network meetings and in-depth qualitative interviews).

In this part of the research we confront the analyses of WP1 and WP2. The analyses that we realize for the WP1 concerns the way networks are created and organised. Furthermore, we analyse the role of the coordinator and the impact of the latter on the *effectiveness* and/or *efficiency* of the network. The analysis, which we realize for the WP2, allows us to meet the actors who take part closely or remotely in the network. It will allow gaining a deeper understanding of what effectiveness and/or efficiency may mean from diverse standpoints. The objective of this part of our analysis thus is to make link between the network itself and the various actors who revolve inside and outside of this one. We give an example of possible subjects:

- What is the link between the actions that the network implements (WP1) and the needs of users (WP2) ?
- What is the link between what the network does with subsidies (WP1) and the availability of limited subsidies delivered by policy makers (WP2) ?
- What is the impact of networks and its organization and strategy to poor families and their needs?

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