Tverrnasjonal komparativ barneforskning:

Muligheter og utfordringer

Seminarrapport

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Tverrnasjonal komparativ
barneforskning

Muligheter og utfordringer

SEMINARRAPPORT

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Norsk institutt for forskning om
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Forord

I april 2002 inviterte NOVA, ved det strategiske instituttprogrammet for barneforskning, til et seminar om tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning: Muligheter og motforestillinger. Seminaret hadde tre målsettinger:

- *Å kombinere ulike tilnærmingsmåter til tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning anvendt på området barneforskning.* For å oppnå dette var det satt sammen hovedinnledninger og kommentarer som til sammen belyste området fra ulike synsvinkler, med innledere fra Belgia, Storbritannia og Norge. Som en refleksjon av at konferansespråket var både engelsk og norsk, er innledningskapitlet og ett kapittel til i denne rapporten på norsk, mens resten av bidragene er på engelsk. At den komparative forskningen er tverrfaglig reflekteres i at bidragene er skrevet med bakgrunn i antropologi, psykologi, sosialt arbeid, sosiologi og statsvitenskap.

- *Å bidra til nettverksbygging.* For å oppnå dette ble det invitert forskere fra instituttsektoren, universiteter og høgskoler med interesse for eller erfaring fra kryssnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning. I alt 30 forskere deltok.

- *Å bidra til kompetanseheving blant norske forskere.* I tillegg til det seminaret tilbød av kunnskap, tok derfor NOVA sikte på å utgi en seminarrapport i etterkant. Her er den!

Seminaret ble samfinansiert av Norges forskningsråd, Velferdsprogrammet, og NOVAs strategiske instituttprogram for barneforskning. Takk til Norges forskningsråd! Takk også til de leseansvarlige, Øivind Fuglerud og Axel West Pedersen, for nyttige kommentarer.

Hellvik, oktober 2002

Elisabeth Backe-Hansen

Innhold

ELISABETH BACKE-HANSEN[1]

Kapittel1. Er det behov for tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning?

> Sammenlikning forutsetter … en viss grad av generalisering, at feno-mener gjøres tilsvarende andre fenomener eller gjøres gjeldende for større grupper, under bestemte betingelser eller mer allment. På den annen side vil en generell forståelse også kunne gi som resultat at noen fenomener er svært spesielle. (Krogstad 2000:89).

> Even when individuals or groups of researchers from different countries work very closely together, they are not necessarily carrying out cross-national comparisons. They may simply be attempting to study a parti-cular phenomenon in different national contexts. (Hantrais & Mangen 1996:1).

Behovet for tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning

Tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning er et område under utvikling, og en tilnærmingsmåte til utvikling av handlingsrelevant kunnskap som etter-spørres stadig mer. Uansett område er nemlig forventningen til denne formen for forskning at hvis det som er forskningens gjenstandsfelt sammenliknes på tvers av kontekst, vil man få en dypere forståelse av fenomenet. Man regner med at slik forskning vil gjøre det mulig å skjerpe analysene, utvikle nye perspektiver og sammenlikne og kontrastere resultater (Hantrais & Mangen 1996). Også i det som kan kalles rent mikroorienterte studier, der man for eksempel primært er interessert i å studere dagliglivet til barn og familier, er det viktig før eller siden å stille spørsmålet om i hvilken grad resultatene er betinget av den nasjonale konteksten. Er de atferdsmønstrene og de sosiale prosessene vi observerer i Norge et resultat av spesielle, kulturelle forutsetninger og av den måten samfunnsinstitusjonene er innrettet på her, eller er de uttrykk for mer eller mindre generelle tendenser og årsaks-mekanismer i moderne samfunn? Hvis slike spørsmål ikke konfronteres direkte, er det en fare for at både det unike og det generelle ved de feno-menene som studeres blir tatt for gitt (Pedersen 2000).

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[1] Elisabeth Backe-Hansen er psykolog og forsker II ved NOVA. Hun er også leder for NOVAs strategiske instituttprogram om barneforskning.

Hittil har det vært langt mer vanlig å studere fenomener som politiske og sosiale institusjoner, administrative og økonomiske strukturer og sosio-demografiske indikatorer komparativt (Hantrais 1999). Et viktig argument for å utvikle tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning er de senere tiårenes fokus på barn som subjekter, med krav på rettigheter og beskyttelse uavhengig av hva slags status deres foreldre har (Kamerman & Kahn 2001). I løpet av de siste omtrent hundre årene har det skjedd en bevegelse fra det som kan kalles et tradisjonelt syn, via et beskyttende syn til et frigjørende syn på hvordan barn skal forstås og behandles. Dette representerer tre forskjellige måter å posisjonere barnet på, som igjen innebærer helt ulike oppfatninger av barns status. I henhold til det som kalles det tradisjonelle synet, trenger ikke barn selvstendige rettigheter ettersom deres foreldre naturlig beskytter dem. Hvis dette synet er framherskende, som det var både i USA, England og for den saks skyld i Norge for 100 år siden, har barn en rettighetsløs status innen familien og ingen spesiell posisjon i samfunnet. Det beskyttende synet, eller det som også kalles velferdsproteksjonismen, innebærer på sin side at staten har en regulerende og intervenerende funksjon i forhold til å beskytte barn, både legitimert med henvisning til spesielle gruppers behov og mer generelt.

Det som kalles et frigjørende syn, innebærer derimot at barn er best tjent med at alle erkjenner deres uavhengige, juridiske rettigheter, og at verken foreldrene eller staten nødvendigvis skal handle på vegne av dem. Historisk er dette et relativt nytt perspektiv som gjerne tidfestes fra midten av 1960-tallet. Siden da har barn i vestlige land fått stadig flere rettigheter. I Norge har for eksempel myndighetsalderen blitt senket, det er innført adgang til å samtykke i bestemte typer medisinsk behandling uten at foreldrene kjenner til det, og adgang til å disponere over penger man selv tjener ved bestemte aldre. Dessuten har barn rett til egen, juridisk representasjon i spesielle sammenhenger, og til å bli hørt fra de er 12 år gamle i spørsmål som angår dem.

FNs barnekonvensjon fra 1989, som Norge ratifiserte i 1991, må ses som en milepæl i utviklingen mot bedre og likere rettigheter for barn i et globalt perspektiv. Samtidig er det for enkelt å si at konvensjonen bare handler om barns rettigheter som autonome individer. Den handler også om det som kan kalles sosiale rettigheter, eller det ansvaret samfunnet har for barn. På engelsk oppsummeres gjerne innholdet i den i form av tre p'er: «Provision, protection, participation». Det vil si at de bærende elementene i konvensjonen er at barn har rett til å få dekket sine behov gjennom tilgang på visse goder og tjenester som utdanning og helse. De har også rett til å bli beskyttet mot risiko, som utnytting og misbruk, og de har rett til medvirkning tilpasset deres alder og modenhet.

Arbeidet med FNs barnekonvensjon, så vel som den økte erkjennelsen av barns kompetanse i ulike, samfunnsvitenskapelige disipliner de siste par–tre tiårene, har ført til et helt annet syn på å involvere barn i forskning. Tidligere var man ganske tilbakeholden med dette, begrunnet med behovet for å skjerme barn mot den risikoen som kan være til stede, kombinert med et syn på barn som lite kompetente til å delta både kognitivt og sosialt (Backe-Hansen 2001, 2002, Morrow & Richards 1996). Nå deltar stadig yngre barn i forskning, med både kvalitative og kvantitative tilnærminger. For eksempel deltar 9–10-åringer i de svenske levekårsundersøkelsene, og barn fra 7 års alder deltar i en ny, norsk undersøkelse om barns bruk av moderne teknologi og kommunikasjonsmidler. På dette grunnlaget er det all grunn til å utvikle komparative tilnærmingsmåter til forskning med barn og unge, utover det som allerede gjøres på grunnlag av registerdata særlig i levekårs- og fattigdomsforskningen. Det er viktig med forskning der barn og unge er informanter, så vel som forskning med barn og unge som analyseenheter.

Behovet for bredspektrede, metodiske tilnærmingsmåter

Komparative studier gjennomføres med vidt forskjellige utgangspunkter. På den ene siden har vi for eksempel statsvitenskapelige analyser av velferds-politiske tiltak, der komparative studier er nødvendige for å belyse for eksempel forholdet mellom økonomisk utvikling, politisk modernisering og velferd (Pedersen 2000). På den andre siden har vi for eksempel antropologiske sammenlikninger, der et viktig, epistemologisk spørsmål dreier seg om problematisering av selve de kontekstuelle forholdene som sammen-liknes, og der sammenlikninger skjer ut fra omfattende dybdestudier. Tverr-nasjonal, komparativ barneforskning kan dreie seg om alt fra studier av sosiale indikatorer på fattigdom og sosial eksklusjon, til studier av hvordan barns liv på skolen utfoldes på tvers av land. Dermed kan det argumenteres for at den komparative barneforskningen bør gjennomføres ved hjelp av et mangfold av metodiske tilnærmingsmåter. Det kan tenkes tilnærmingsmåter som utvikling av egnede, sosiale indikatorer, analyser av registerdata, surveystudier og kvalitative tilnærminger, og i form av sekundæranalyser så vel som gjennom innsamling av primærdata. En slik metodisk spennvidde reflekteres i kapitlene i denne rapporten.

Sosiale indikatorer refererer til utviklingsprosesser og tilstander. Indikatorer kan være av mange typer. Det som gir dem mening, er forankring i teorier som binder sammen indikatorenes verdi og utviklingstrekk eller tilstander. I samfunnsvitenskapene er makronivået det som ofte assosieres med utvikling av sosiale indikatorer, en søker statistiske uttrykk som skal

kunne fortelle noe om samfunnsutviklingen. Indikatorer anvendes imidertid også på mikronivå, og i forhold til psykologisk utvikling så vel som i livsløpsanalyser. Med andre ord gir indikatorer mening hvis de er forankret i en teori om hvordan ting henger sammen. Å ikke lykkes i skolesystemet kan for eksempel forstås som særlig uheldig i et kunnskapssamfunn, fordi slike samfunn krever kunnskap og ofte anvender evnen til å nå et visst utdanningsnivå som et uttrykk for evne til å mestre yrkesdeltakelse generelt. Frafall fra skolevesenet øker dermed risikoen for sosial ekskludering. Hvis store grupper mislykkes, kan dette igjen få følger for storsamfunnet gjennom kriminalitet, økt utrygghet og økt risiko for alle. Når barn og unges forhold til skolen trekkes inn som indikator på sosial ekskludering både i europeisk og amerikansk forskning, er dette nettopp en illustrasjon på denne antatte, teoretiske sammenhengen. Det gir mening å snakke om en slik sammenheng på tvers av land som likner hverandre tilstrekkelig når det gjelder krav til kvalifisering for barn og unge (Backe-Hansen & Frønes 2002). Det er behov for å utvikle nye, sosiale indikatorer som kan fange opp barns situasjon på tvers av land, for eksempel på området sosial eksklusjon og barns velbefinnende («well-being») (Ben-Arieh et al. 2001, Micklewright 2002, Saraceno 2001).

Registerstudier, eller det som kalles sekundæranalyser, har følgelig vært et funksjonelt startpunkt også for tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning. Noen vil se slike studier som en enkel utvei for forskere, siden man ikke trenger å bruke tid og krefter på å samle inn data. Imidlertid er dette nettopp årsaken til at det blir nødvendig å bruke mye tid på å undersøke forskningens teoretiske grunnlag. Det kan bli en tendens for sekundærforskning til å bli for lite teoretisk, fordi den teoretiske refleksjonen som må gå hånd i hånd med utviklingen av for eksempel spørreskjemaer, blir borte på veien samtidig. Følgelig kan det argumenteres for at epistemologiske problemer som er knyttet til sekundæranalyser, er langt vanskeligere å håndtere enn problemer i forbindelse med tilgang til og bruk av data. De epistemologiske problemene er igjen knyttet til at en forsker fra et annet land kan ha vanskelig for å forstå den lokale og historiske forankringen bestemte registerdata har. Dette gjelder både hva slags sosial og politisk konsensus som ligger til grunn for måten registrene blir organisert på, og hvilke holdninger og verdier som representeres. Når det gjelder komparative studier av barns situasjon, er det også et problem at forskningen svært ofte er gjennomført med husholdet som

enhet. Det er derfor viktig å utvikle metoder for å bruke barn og unge som analyseenhet, noe Tone Fløtten diskuterer nærmere i sitt kapittel[2].

Når det etter hvert har vist seg at sekundærdata kan være vanskelige å sammenlikne på tvers av land, ikke minst fordi både rasjonalen for disse registrene og måten de organiseres på kan være svært så lokalt bestemt, er det gjort flere forsøk på å utvikle tverrnasjonale eller harmoniserte indikatorer. Som Koen Vleminckx viser i sitt kapittel[3], gjelder dette også sosiale indikatorer på barnefattigdom og sosial eksklusjon av barn. Det er imidlertid ikke gitt at tverrnasjonal harmonisering er den beste løsningen, selv om dette gjør teoritesting og i neste omgang generalisering enklere. Teoriutvikling handler også om spesifisitet, noe som lett vil stå i motsetning til det abstraksjonsnivået som kreves hvis harmonisering skal bli mulig (Glover 1996). Som det vil vise seg, er dimensjonene konkret–abstrakt og spesifisitetgeneraliserbarhet (dybde–bredde) vanlige utfordringer i tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning, noe som problematiseres i samtlige av kapitlene i denne rapporten.

Tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning bør imidlertid også gjennomføres ved hjelp av spørreskjemaundersøkelser og kvalitative studier, eller det som også kalles primærstudier, spesielt fordi sekundærstudier ofte skjer av makroindikatorer som ikke er mulige å koble på individnivå. Når det gjelder spørreskjemaundersøkelser, kan en tenke seg større, nasjonale utvalg eller mindre, stratifiserte utvalg. Stratifiserte utvalg innebærer at man ikke kan presentere noe «landsgjennomsnitt», men en kan til gjengjeld ha store nok utvalg av grupperinger en er særlig interessert i. Slike utvalg kan i mange sammenhenger være ønskelig, avhengig av design og tema. Dessuten er dette et kostnadsproblem, ettersom nasjonale utvalg krever store investeringer. På den annen side kan kostnader deles mellom ulike formål når slike undersøkelser gjennomføres i flere land.

Uansett valg av design er tilpasning mellom instrumentene som velges nødvendig for å sikre komparative data. Dessuten må avgrensningen av de temaene som skal utforskes, relateres både til hva som kan dekkes gjennom sekundæranalyser av registerdata, og til utviklingen av kvalitative undersøkelser av mindre miljøer. Slike intensive studier krever igjen at designet utvikles slik at det blir en del av den større helheten. Her kan man fokusere på mekanismene, det vil si hvordan de prosessene som kan fanges opp ved hjelp av makrodata, utvikles. Hvis en gruppe barn gjør det bra i skolesystemet, hvilke prosesser ligger bak dette? Om noen marginaliseres, hva er

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[2] Kapittel 4.
[3] Kapittel 5.

mekanismene i disse prosessene (Backe-Hansen & Frønes 2002)? Det er behov for studier som kan danne grunnlaget for komparative analyser av barn og unges opplevelser av sin livsverden og livssituasjon (Roker & Coleman 2000, Van der Hoek 2002). I denne rapporten representerer særlig Hilde Lidéns[4] kapittel en kvalitativ tilnærming til komparativ forskning i ett land, der det er de «tykke» beskrivelsene som realiserer mulighetene for komparasjon. Hennes tenkning kan imidlertid like gjerne anvendes i forhold til tverrnasjonale komparasjoner.

Komparasjonens muligheter og begrensninger

Komparativ forskning gjennomføres med utgangspunkt i en rekke, ulike metoder, og med utgangspunkt i tradisjonelt ganske ulike, faglige forstå-elsesformer. Dette kjennetegner ofte vellykket, komparativ forskning (Hantrais & Mangen 1996), og skaper i seg selv et grunnlag for at mulig-hetene og begrensningene kan diskuteres på til dels svært forskjellige måter. Det framgår også av kapitlene i denne rapporten. En måte å både samle og skille diskusjonen på, er ved å ta utgangspunkt i forskjellige analytiske nivåer. Her vil jeg diskutere fire slike nivåer: Det empiriske eller det meto-diske, det teoretiske, det epistemologiske og det policy-orienterte.

Empiriske eller metodiske komparasjoner vil skje ved bruk av alle mulige metoder, de kan være hypotesegenererende eller hypotesetestende, de kan benytte både objektive og subjektive data, eller primært ta sikte på å få fram gode beskrivelser av situasjoner, prosesser og mønstre. Det er også dette nivået som berøres mest i kapitlene i denne rapporten.

Et neste analytisk nivå er det teoretiske. Anne Krogstad (2000) argu-menterer for at det både er mulig og ønskelig å foreta komparasjoner på grunnlag av et felles teorigrunnlag, ikke bare på grunnlag av felles tilnær-mingsmåter. Det kan være viktig å diskutere ulike teoretiske forståelsesmåter og la dem utfordre hverandre, noe som igjen kan føre til ny teoretisk og begrepsmessig innsikt. Samtidig kan det være en utfordring å starte et komparativt prosjekt med en forventning om teoretisk enighet. Å utvikle gode og meningsfylte konklusjoner på grunnlag av komparativ forskning avhenger til en viss grad av i hvor stor grad de samarbeidsproblemene som også er en del av slik forskning, kan løses (Hantrais & Mangen 1996).

Som Jens Qvortrup argumenterer for i sitt kapittel[5], dreier komparative analyser seg i stor grad om fortolkninger med sikte på å finne funksjonell

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[4] Kapittel 2.
[5] Kapittel 7.

ekvivalens. Dette forutsetter abstraksjon, noe som igjen fører til et behov for å se nærmere på hvordan komparasjoner også kan være realiserbare på et epistemologisk nivå; kanskje er ikke teoretiske komparasjoner tilstrekkelige i denne konteksten. En måte å løfte fram epistemologiske perspektiver på er gjennom å finne analytiske dimensjoner der prosess og bevegelse står sentralt. Det er mulig å utlede fire slike fra kapitlene i denne rapporten, dimensjoner som jeg til dels har vært inne på allerede: konkret–abstrakt, spesifisitet–generaliserbarhet (dybde–bredde), likhet–forskjell og nærhet–distanse. Disse dimensjonene konkretiseres på ulike måter i rapporten. Det er nødvendig med kontinuerlig refleksjon over kompleksiteten i de utfordringene som er knyttet til komparativ forskning! Med Anne Krogstads ord (2000:103) er sammenlikninger «... mulig, ønskelig – og forbasket vanskelig».

Det fjerde og siste analytiske nivået dreier seg om policy og handlingsrelevans. Det spørsmålet som da er nødvendig å stille, er hva formålet med tverrnasjonale komparasjoner er. En svært vanlig hensikt er for eksempel såkalt «benchmarking» eller rangering. Hvem er «best i klassen», «verst i klassen», og hvorfor? Oversikter der europeiske eller andre land rangeres innbyrdes er for eksempel et framtredende trekk i den pågående internasjonale diskursen om barnefattigdom (se Bradshaw 2001). En annen hensikt, som må ses i sammenheng med den første, er komparasjoner med sikte på å synliggjøre såkalte «best practices», igjen med sikte på å forbedre praksis som ikke fungerer eller som fungerer dårlig. Dermed kan komparasjoner også ha en mer ambisiøs hensikt om å trekke slutninger om hvilke virkninger alternative institusjonelle løsninger og politiske tilnærminger har på et bestemt felt – som for eksempel bekjempelse av barnefattigdom eller reduksjon av ungdomskriminalitet. Samtidig er det omstridt i hvilken grad og under hvilke betingelser erfaringene fra ulike land kan brukes til å trekke sikre slutninger på dette grunnlaget (Pedersen 1998).

Tverrnasjonale sammenlikninger kan også ha mer overordnete hensikter, som både Anne Skevik og Jens Qvortrup diskuterer nærmere i sine kapitler. Kunnskap om «de andre» kan gi opphav til begrepsutvikling og problemformulering, nettopp fordi noe kjent blir annerledes når det ses utenfra. Dermed kan også tverrnasjonale komparasjoner gi kunnskap som kan brukes til å levere premisser for alternative ordninger (Pedersen 2000).

Empiriske eller metodiske komparasjoner

I kapittel 3 tar Anne Skevik utgangspunkt i forskning om velferdsordninger og diskuterer blant annet ulike måter forskning kan være tverrnasjonal på. Er

forskning først tverrnasjonal, må forskeren også ta stilling til hva slags status kategorien nasjonal skal ha. Her nevner hun fire typer. Den første er at *nasjonen er målet for undersøkelsen* og gjenstand for forskningens interesse, men deltakerland velges ikke ut for å teste bestemte hypoteser. Slike studier er ikke lenger veldig vanlige. Det er derimot langt mer vanlig å se *nasjonen som kontekst* for det fenomenet som studeres. Da er poenget å undersøke generaliserbarheten av funn om hvordan individer handler, eller systemer virker, i ulike kontekster. En tredje form er den *transnasjonale*, hvor land studeres som del av større, internasjonale systemer. Hittil har den vært lite benyttet, men i en tid med økt globalisering og ikke minst med EU som en overnasjonal konstruksjon, kan transnasjonale studier bli av større interesse.

Den fjerde og siste typen er så med nasjonen som *analytisk enhet*, men på den måten at man studerer variasjon mellom land i forhold til utvalgte variable. I sosialpolitisk forskning har dette vært den vanligste måten, blant annet i form av studier av velferdsordninger i ulike land. Som Koen Vleminckx viser i kapittel 5, er dette også en svært vanlig innfallsvinkel i tverrnasjonal og kanskje også forsøk på transnasjonal forskning om barne-fattigdom og sosial ekskludering av barn og unge, blant annet slik den foregår i EU. Her vektlegges utviklingen av gode, sosiale indikatorer som igjen kan danne grunnlaget for tverrnasjonale komparasjoner. Den faglige diskusjonen vil i første rekke gjelde hvordan disse indikatorene skal konstru-eres, dernest kan resultatene brukes som grunnlag for utforming av sosial-politiske tiltak. I den nordiske undersøkelsen jeg beskrev i forrige avsnitt, ble kommunene som deltok konteksten for undersøkelsen, men valgt ut fordi de liknet hverandre på en del sentrale dimensjoner og ikke fordi de var veldig forskjellige.

Når barnet blir analyseenheten, må også den tverrnasjonale, kompara-tive forskningen åpne for en bevegelse fra makro til mikro. Dette diskuterer Tone Fløtten i kapittel 4. Da blir det også tydelig at kunnskap om barn basert på mikrodata sjelden utvikles med akkurat dette for øyet, men vanligvis bruker voksne, for eksempel i hushold, som enhet. Men vi kan ikke auto-matisk anta at foreldrenes situasjon reflekterer barnas. Vi kan heller ikke automatisk anta at barn som vokser opp i familier med bestemte kjennetegn, opplever de samme levekårene i ulike samfunn. Dette gjelder selv om vi har svært god kjennskap til de samfunnene vi studerer. Vi kan derfor ikke ta for gitt at vi greier å få fram barns situasjon bare ved å studere familiene de er en del av. Dette innebærer også at vi må ta stilling til når det er nødvendig å få fram barns subjektive erfaringer for å forstå deres livsverden, og når det kan

være tilstrekkelig å ha kjennskap til familiens posisjon langs sentrale levekårsvariable.

En antropologisk tilnærmingsmåte innebærer i seg selv komparasjoner, som Hilde Lidén viser i kapittel 2. Når data samles inn ved hjelp av observasjoner, feltarbeid og intervjuer, forlater man imidlertid den variabeltilnærmingen som preger mye av den sosialpolitiske, komparative forskningen. Det som kommer i stedet, er komparasjoner med sikte på en begrenset generalisering, der hensikten er å forstå et enkeltfenomen i lys av knipper av tilsvarende fenomener, og på denne måten bidra til å utvikle gode begreper, klassifikasjoner og typologier. Mer ambisiøse prosjekter kan derimot bruke komparasjoner for å finne fellestrekk og regularitet. Eksempler på barneforskning med dette utgangspunktet kan være studier av ungdom fra ulike deler av Europa som har det felles at de har vært under barnevernets omsorg og skal etablere seg som unge voksne, eller studier av hverdagslivet til små barn i familier med skilte foreldre.

I kapittel 6 argumenterer Geraldine Macdonald for at systematisk syntetisering av forskningsresultater også er en nyttig metode i tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning. Dette er en måte å overskride en del vanlige problemer på, som at det er få studier på et bestemt område i ett land, men mange i et annet, at relevante undersøkelser forblir ukjent internasjonalt fordi de ikke publiseres, og at enkeltstående undersøkelser nærmest automatisk har en god del svakheter. Gode syntetiseringer bør være en integrert del av forskningen, også innen komparativ barneforskning, ikke minst fordi slike syntetiseringer er komparative nærmest av natur. I likhet med Hilde Lidén advarer hun samtidig mot en overdreven tro på likhet, også når fenomener ser like ut på overflaten. Hennes eksempel er plassering av barn i fosterhjem – selv om «fosterbarn» og «fosterhjem» har mange felles kjennetegn, kan det være stor og viktig variasjon mellom land når det gjelder hvordan barn blir fosterbarn, hvorfor fosterforeldre blir fosterforeldre, eller hva slags kontekst fosterhjemsordningen fungerer innenfor.

Følgelig kan ikke empiriske og metodiske refleksjoner ses uavhengig av de andre nivåene for komparasjon. Dette blir spesielt tydelig i kapittel 7, hvor Jens Qvortrup blant annet diskuterer fortolkning som instrument. Vi er ikke ute etter naturalistiske eksperimenter når vi sammenlikner, fordi det er umulig å kontrollere våre variable på den måten som ville vært nødvendig i så fall. Det vi skal få fram, er hva bestemte fakta, fenomener eller praksiser betyr. Dermed er det også funksjonell likhet eller forskjell vi er ute etter, noe som bare er mulig å studere ved hjelp av en forståelse som er begrepsmessig fundert. Hans eksempel er forståelsen av barns skoledeltakelse som arbeid i

moderne samfunn. Dette kan gjøres fordi manuelt arbeid i førmoderne samfunn, så vel som skolegang i moderne samfunn, er obligatoriske funksjoner for barn, og fordi begge har en liknende rasjonale i forhold til den økonomiske organiseringen i typen samfunn det er snakk om. Dette innebærer også at så lenge fenomener og kontekster konseptualiseres på en slik måte at de framtrer som funksjonelt ekvivalente, er det også mulig å gjennomføre komparasjoner både i tid og rom.

Teoretiske komparasjoner

Seminarets fokus var metoder i tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning. Følgelig ble det lagt mindre eksplisitt vekt på teoretiske komparasjoner. Implisitt kom det mulige mangfoldet også på dette nivået fram, blant annet gjennom den store spredningen i forskningstemaer som ble presentert. Mangfoldet er også implisitt til stede på grunn av den tverrfagligheten som preger tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning. Men noen eksempler på tenkning om teoretiske komparasjoner finnes også i denne rapporten.

Som Hilde Lidén påpeker i sitt kapittel, dreier teoretiske komparasjoner seg om valg mellom teoretiske perspektiver ut fra deres funksjonalitet, igjen sett ut fra om det er vektlegging av forskjeller eller variasjoner over kulturelle fellestrekk som er viktig. At det foretas valg forutsetter igjen valgmuligheter, som det vil være mange av i barneforskning. Hennes doktorgradsarbeid bygger på feltarbeid i to skoler, men skulle hun for eksempel fokusere på sosiale mønstre, sosiale prosesser for integrering, hierarki eller marginalisering i sine sammenlikninger? Valg av teoretisk ståsted kan være problematisk nok i all forskning, men når komparasjoner skjer på basis av antatte forskjeller og kontraster, blir dette valget enda mer komplisert. Så også når det er flere forskere med ulik profesjonsbakgrunn og ulike preferanser som skal finne en felles plattform. Dessuten er det en forskjell mellom å akseptere det teoretiske grunnlaget for de metodene som velges, og forhandle om et analytisk minste felles multiplum.

Slik Anne Skevik understreker i sitt kapittel, er utviklingen av teoretiske konstruksjoner en viktig rasjonale for tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning. Som sosialpolitisk forsker er det velferdspolitikk og utviklinger på makronivå hun eksemplifiserer med, men tenkningen er like viktig for barneforskningen. Det kan nemlig argumenteres for at ambisjonen om teoriutvikling gjør denne typen forskning svært betydningsfull for akademia som felt. Tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning vil tvinge oss til å bruke mer og mer raffinerte analytiske modeller, noe som igjen vil føre til en utvikling av det begrepsmessige grunnlaget for forskningsfeltet. Dette kan ses som et slags tredje nivå for

teoretiske komparasjoner, der man starter med enighet om premissene for de metodene som velges, fortsetter med enighet om det teoretiske grunnlaget for analysen av resultatene, og ender med en forståelse som kan anvendes utover det enkelte prosjektet. Det særegne ved komparativ forskning blir den større variasjonen og mangfoldet i grunnlaget for forskningen.

Epistemologiske komparasjoner

Når epistemologiske spørsmål får en framtredende plass i forskningen, som de gjør i tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning, finner vi også en nøye sammenheng mellom teori og epistemologi. Dette er ikke fordi epistemologiske spørsmål er irrelevante i forskning med et mindre uttalt komparativt siktemål, men fordi spørsmålene gjerne er mer implisitte, og svarene kanskje for selvsagte. Fra det perspektivet kan vi, som flere påpeker, lære mye av komparativ forskning.

Tidligere i dette innledningskapitlet påpekte jeg at det kan argumenteres for at fire dimensjoner står sentralt i tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning, og at disse dimensjonene problematiseres på ulike måter i kapitlene i denne rapporten i form av epistemologiske spørsmål om forutsetningene for å utvikle gyldig kunnskap. Dimensjonene er konkret–abstrakt, spesifisitet–generaliserbarhet (dybde–bredde), likhet–forskjell og nærhet–distanse.

Anne Skevik og Tone Fløttens kapitler kan sammen stå som eksempler på bevegelser langs dimensjonen konkret–abstrakt. I sin begrunnelse for hvorfor vi ikke alltid velger tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning som metodisk tilnærmingsmåte, trekker Anne Skevik blant annet fram uenighet om hva som er de viktigste problemstillingene for forskningen, problemene med å finne sammenliknbar statistikk, og med å tilpasse nasjonale ordninger til predefinerte kategorier i komparative modeller. Alt dette handler om å møtes på et abstraksjonsnivå som gjør komparasjon mulig. Når Tone Fløtten oppsummerer at for å gjennomføre tverrnasjonal forskning om barn, trenger vi dybdekunnskap om barnas situasjon i de landene vi studerer, påpeker hun samtidig at abstraksjon ikke er mulig uten at den har sin basis i det konkrete.

Geraldine Macdonalds kapittel kan stå som eksempel på bevegelser langs dimensjonen spesifisitet–generaliserbarhet (dybde–bredde). Hun på–peker det hun kaller et interessant paradoks knyttet til systematisk syntetisering av forskningsbasert kunnskap. Jo høyere en slik syntetisering skårer på indre validitet, eller den tilliten vi kan ha til resultatenes gyldighet, jo mer problematisk blir spørsmålet om overførbarhet. Jo mer vi kan kontrollere for, jo mindre sikre kan vi være på at funn for eksempel om en bestemt behandlingsmetode er økologisk valide. Brukerne kan være litt annerledes,

omstendighetene behøver ikke være helt de samme, eller intervensjonen som har vært vurdert prøves ut i en litt annen kontekst når det gjelder sosial-politiske virkemidler. Igjen er det derfor bevegelsene langs denne dimensjonen som er viktig, og ikke en polarisering mellom dybde og bredde.

Jens Qvortrup er den som mest eksplisitt diskuterer bevegelser langs dimensjonen likhet–forskjell i sitt kapittel, når han gjennomgår det epistemologiske grunnlaget for tverrnasjonal, komparativ forskning ved hjelp av sentrale, vitenskapsteoretiske argumenter. Når det gjelder barneforskning, påpeker han for eksempel at to betingelser er nødvendige for å gjøre komparasjon mulig. Det må være en viss likhet mellom kjennetegnene ved barndom i ulike kontekster og en viss ulikhet mellom kontekstene hvor disse kjennetegnene har oppstått eller kan observeres. Dette betyr at konteksten for forskningen må variere en del, men ikke for mye, mens det fenomenet som utforskes må være tilstrekkelig likt på tvers av kontekst. Videre understreker han betydningen av å tenke ut fra *funksjonell* ekvivalens og forskjell. Liknende sosiale indikatorer fra forskjellige land kan fortolkes som funksjonelt forskjellige, mens forskjellige indikatorer kan fortolkes som funksjonelt ekvivalente. Dette innebærer at vi må være omhyggelige når vi konseptualiserer både fenomener og kontekster slik at de kan bli funksjonelt ekvivalente. Dermed understrekes også den komparative forskningens fortolkende karakter, hvilket igjen fordrer at konseptualiseringen skjer på et visst abstraksjonsnivå. Ellers blir det ikke mulig å få fram klasser, typer eller mønstre.

Avslutningsvis eksemplifiserer Hilde Lidén bevegelser langs dimensjonen nærhet–distanse i sitt kapittel. For henne er komparasjon både en analytisk-metodisk teknikk og et erkjennelsesprinsipp. Komparasjon brukes for å etablere analytisk avstand til de fenomenene vi studerer, slik at vi i størst mulig grad blir i stand til å relativisere disse fenomenene så vel som vårt eget blikk på dem. Det er også snakk om et erkjennelsesteoretisk paradoks. Det som kan kalles distanseringens problem, handler om at det som er for nær oss – som vi er totalt innskrevet i – forblir usynlig. Det er først når denne elementære umiddelbarheten blir overskredet, når vi kan se oss selv utenfra, at vi kan oppdage hvor vi befinner oss. Med andre ord innebærer bevegelser langs dimensjonen nærhet–distanse å skape distanse til det kjente, men også nærhet til det ukjente.

Hensikten med komparasjoner

Selv om samtlige forfattere diskuterer hva hensikten med komparasjoner kan eller bør være, kan Koen Vleminckx stå som eksempel fordi han er den som mest systematisk knytter forskning til handling i sitt kapittel. Han skriver om

barnefattigdom og om EUs bestrebelser på å eliminere den. For å få dette til ønsker EU å utvikle et regelmessig rapporteringssystem basert på sosiale indikatorer, som igjen gjør det mulig å synliggjøre forskjellene mellom landene så vel som å følge utviklingen i hvert enkelt land. Dermed blir forskningen, som fører til valg, utvikling og utprøving av de sosiale indikatorene, styrt i langt større grad enn vanlig av målsettingen om å redusere fattigdom og sosial ekskludering. Det er også interessant at et ganske høyt abstraksjonsnivå ser ut til å være en nødvendig forutsetning for handling når handlingen skal initieres og styres av overnasjonale organer.

Avslutning

Gir så denne rapporten innspill som kan føre til nye ideer og ny forståelse av tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning? Jeg tror refleksjoner over dette i rapporten, som kanskje er mer implisitte enn eksplisitte, dreier seg om en viktig forbindelseslinje mellom de fire dimensjonene som ble nevnt tidligere. Jeg tenker her på at dimensjonene på hver sine måter konkretiserer relasjonen mellom «meg selv» og «de andre», i den forstand at bevegelser mellom ytterpunktene i dimensjonene egentlig handler om bevegelser i retning av eller i retning fra noe som likner «meg selv», eller barn i vårt eget land, og i retning av eller i retning fra noe som likner «de andre». Den utfordringen tverrnasjonal, komparativ barneforskning da stiller oss overfor, er at et prosjekt om å gjøre andre mest mulig like oss selv, eller oss selv mest mulig lik andre, sannsynligvis vil være kunnskapsmessig feilslått. Poenget er tvert imot bevegelsene i forståelse mellom utforsking av det forskjellige i det like og det like i det forskjellige.

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HILDE LIDÉN[1]

Kapittel 2. Ytre blikk på det velkjente. Om komparasjon i barneforskning basert på kvalitativ metode

Nytten av en kvalitativ tilnærming

Ingen vet hvordan barna har det, het det i et større avisoppslag våren 2002. Barn og unge undersøkes på skolen, i familien og på helsestasjonen, men helheten, den store oversikten, mangler. Enkeltundersøkelser av barns levekår etterlater et tvetydig bilde, og en levekårsundersøkelse om barn ble etterspurt i avisartikkelen[2].

Store survey-undersøkelser som levekårsundersøkelser når et stort utvalg, men klipper samtidig enkeltindivider ut av deres kontekst. Følgen er at det er vanskelig å forstå det tilsynelatende tvetydige og motsetningsfylte som kommer fram i enkeltbeskrivelser av dagens oppvekstvilkår. Det er ikke sikkert at forskningsspørsmålene stilles slik at de fanger spenningene eller forankringer i kjente fenomener. Det er derfor også nødvendig med tilnærminger som går mer i dybden på fenomenene, for å forstå barns livsverden fra deres eget perspektiv, få fram sammenhenger på tvers av livsområder og sektorer, og for å gi innsikt i effekter av tiltak.

Hovedutfordringen blir å få flere enkeltundersøkelser til å gi en dybde og en bredde i forståelsen av barns livsvilkår og få fram sammenhenger på tvers. Hvordan kan vi bruke komparasjon i denne sammenhengen? Hvordan kan vi foreta en analyse som både får fram kompleksiteten og samtidig forenkler og generaliserer for å kunne gjøre sammenligninger?

Forskningsspørsmålet bestemmer hva slags metode som er egnet. Kvalitativ metode brukes for å:

- finne sammenhenger og mønstre – for eksempel gjennom tidsbruksanalyser
- få fram ulike personers argumentasjon og begrunnelser for handlemåter, og hvordan deres forståelser er knyttet til den sosiale plasseringen de befinner seg i
- få fram både hva de sier og hva de gjør, forskjellene mellom dette og begrunnelsene for det

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[2] Aftenposten 25/3 og Bergens Tidende 25/3

- få fram underliggende tenkemåter, dynamikker og prosesser i sosiale felt, som dermed er en tilnærming til å studere endring

Kvalitativ metode brukes for å få en dybdeforståelse gjennom en bred kontekstualisering av folks oppfatninger og handling. Det er dessuten viktig med en åpen tilnærming der spørsmål og kategorier også kan videreutvikles underveis.

Datamateriale innsamles gjennom feltarbeid som innebærer samtaler og observasjoner, samt gjennom intervjuer, dokumenter og andre former for tekst. Slike data gir ingen avbildning av en gitt virkelighet, men er en fortolkning filtrert gjennom forskerens teoretiske forforståelse og metoderedskaper og nedfelt i skriftform som så igjen skal brukes til en fortolkende analyse av andres forståelser.

Studier av sosiale fenomener gjøres ut fra både eksplisitte og implisitte sammenligninger med andre kjente former og ut fra faglitteraturen. Implisitte sammenligninger ligger i alle beskrivelser av kategorier og praksiser som er forskjellig fra ens selvfølgelige forståelse. For samfunnsvitere som jobber med hjemlig kultur, er komparasjon en fundamental analytisk-metodisk teknikk og et erkjennelsesprinsipp. Vi bruker det for å etablere analytisk avstand til de fenomener vi studerer, slik at vi i størst mulig grad blir i stand til å relativisere disse fenomenene så vel som vårt eget blikk. La meg konkretisere dette med mitt eget arbeid.

I doktorgradsprosjektet mitt, som omfattet småskolebarn i sosialt og kulturelt sammensatte nabolag, gjorde jeg feltarbeid i to skolekretser i indre Oslo (Lidén 2000). Jeg var opptatt av integrerende og marginaliserende prosesser, og sosial og kulturell læring innen og på tvers av ulike hverdagsarenaer. Valget av de to skolene i utvalget var i utgangspunktet pragmatisk, men også tatt ut fra en kunnskap om at de representerte noen forskjeller i barnas tidsorganisering og relasjoner utstrakt i rom, tema som var sentrale i prosjektet. Etter et par måneders feltarbeid ved den ene skolen byttet jeg til den andre skolen, fordi jeg ønsket å følge noenlunde de samme fasene i barnas skoleår begge steder. Skifte av skole, klasserom og SFO-tilværelse opplevde jeg som et lite kultursjokk. Fra å ha blitt sosialisert til én kommunikasjonsstil, til ett samhandlingsmønster, én romlig og temporær organisering, hva som var legitimt, og hva som ikke ble tolerert ved den ene skolen, møtte jeg et høyere tempo og en mer direkte form for kontroll og disiplinering ved den andre. Her var det andre underliggende regler som styrte ungenes samvær. Disse var bl.a. preget av at den enkelte stadig måtte bekrefte sin sosiale posisjon, noe som førte til selvhevdelse, forsvars-

posisjoner, usikkerhet og, for en del barn, tilbaketrekning. Mange elever viste også motvilje mot skolens disiplinering. Det var dessuten andre standarder for hva som var kult, OK og uakseptabelt blant barna.

Den kroppslige opplevelsen av å sitte bakerst i klasserommet var for eksempel annerledes. Plutselig var gjenklangen av min egen skolegang til stede: å dukke seg ned bak nærmeste rygg for å unngå konfrontasjonen med lærerens kollektive straff, og den tause protesten mot lærerens rett til å tillegge deg hensikter du ikke gjenkjente.

Poenget er at i en skoletilværelse som for meg var både fremmed og kjent, var det viktig å få tak i de usynlige forskriftene som styrer samhandling og tenkemåter. Det fantes i hver av de to skolene en ordløs forskrift som barn og voksne forholdt seg til, en slags tekst med en bestemt betydningsstruktur og særegen grammatikk som gjorde det tydeligere hva de skulle gjøre og ikke gjøre, hva de skulle tenke og ikke tenke, hva slags opplevelser som var gyldige og ikke gyldige[3].

For å gripe denne forskriften måtte jeg forholde meg til den som fremmed, som noe ukjent, noe som ikke var forutbestemt og ferdig kodifisert gjennom egen forforståelse. For å stille meg åpen overfor denne lokalt utformede samværsmåten som samtidig inngikk i variasjonsbredden til en større felles kulturell forskrift om jevnalderrelasjoner og skoletilværelse i de nordiske land, måtte jeg, noe paradoksalt, skape en distanse til den. Sammenlikningen av de to skolene hjalp meg i den prosessen.

Ricoeur (1981) kaller dette erkjennelsesteoretiske paradokset et *distanseringens problem*. Distanseringens problem handler om at det som er for nært oss – som vi er totalt innskrevet i – forblir usynlig. Det er som luften vi puster i, det lar seg ikke umiddelbart erkjenne eller identifisere. Det er først når denne elementære umiddelbarheten blir overskredet, når vi kan se oss selv utenfra, så å si, at vi kan oppdage hvor vi befinner oss. Og da befinner vi oss allerede et annet sted.

For meg ble feltarbeidet i de to skolene en måte å skape distanse til det som er kjent på.

Kontrasteringen hjalp meg til å språkliggjøre verdier og kommunikasjonsformer. For ikke minst er barndom og oppdragelse, omsorg og verdiformidling felt som vi oppfatter som naturlige handlemåter. De er kroppsliggjorte, kulturelle ferdigheter, de sitter i ryggmargen og formidles gjennom deltagelse. Og dette var et viktig poeng i avhandlingen: Mye av våre kultu-

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[3] Se Jorun Solheims artikkel *Kjønn som analytisk nøkkel til kultur* for en god beskrivelse av de ordløse forskrifter og om distanseringens problem.

relle ferdigheter tilegnes nettopp gjennom kroppen, eller de går via bevisst-heten, for deretter å bli automatisert og glemt (Connerton 1989). De nedfeller seg som habitus, som dyptliggende disposisjoner for å oppfatte og vurdere verden, disposisjoner som er kroppsliggjorte og hovedsakelig ubevisste. Men som likevel er i endring.

Jeg brukte til slutt videoopptak for bedre å kunne begripe hva som var forskjellene i samværsstil og kommunikasjonsform mellom barna i de to skolekretsene. På denne måten kunne jeg lettere beskrive det essensielle. Begrepene i feltnotatene var i utgangspunktet for grove og normative. Det trengtes en ytterligere distanse for å beskrive det familiære.

Under analysearbeidet var jeg også opptatt av hvorfor jeg reagerte så forskjellig på samværsformene på de to skolene. Jeg ble nødt til å se nærmere på mine egne normative vurderinger og erkjenne at den ene skolen lå nærmere mine egne normative preferanser i forhold til barneoppdragelse.

Etter feltarbeidet satt jeg med beskrivelser av to skoler som skilte seg fra hverandre. Samtidig hadde de en del viktige fellestrekk. Jeg måtte bestemme meg for hvordan jeg skulle tolke forskjellene, og hva slags kon-tekstforståelse som var relevant å trekke inn. Hadde forskjellene å gjøre med lærerene og klassens kjemi, med lokale jevnalderkulturer, med foreldrenes sosiokulturelle forankring, med at den ene skolen lå i et tradisjonelt arbeider-strøk på østkanten av Oslo og den andre på «beste vestkant»? Det reiste seg også et spørsmål om i hvilken grad beskrivelsene var sammenlignbare. *Hva* skulle sammenlignes, var det de beskrevne sosiale mønstrene eller sosiale prosesser for integrering, hierarki og marginalisering? I forlengelsen av dette ble det en vurdering ut fra teoretiske perspektiver hvor mye jeg skulle vekt-legge forskjellene framfor å se de som variasjoner over kulturelle fellestrekk. Dessuten ble jeg konfrontert med spørsmålet om jeg kunne gi beskrivelsene noen gyldighet ut over et enkeltfenomen i en avgrenset tidsperiode.

Jeg valgte å ikke sammenligne enkelttrekk for enkelttrekk, men å kon-trastere fenomener og prosesser for å gi ytterligere innsikt i hvert enkelt case. Så i tillegg til distansering hjalp sammenligningen meg med å stille relevante spørsmål til materialet, gjøre forenklinger, typologisere og med å finne dekkende kategorier og begreper. Den fikk meg også til å reflektere over hva som ble sammenlignet, og dermed til å systematisere fenomener og kontekster.

Komparasjon: Begrenset generalisering

Dette er en relativt enkel bruk av sammenligning der generaliseringsambisjonen er relativt beskjeden. Hensikten med komparasjon der en tar sikte på en slik begrenset generalisering, er å forstå enkeltfenomener i lys av knipper av tilsvarende fenomener og på denne måten bidra til å utvikle gode begreper, klassifikasjoner og typologier. Mer ambisiøse prosjekter, derimot, bruker sammenligning for å finne fellestrekk og regularitet. Da er det avgjørende å være kritisk når det gjelder hva slags fenomener som sammenlignes, og hva slags kontekstualisering som trekkes inn. Fredrik Barth (1994) har for eksempel sammenlignet kunnskapsoverføring. Ved første øyekast kan det se ut som om Barth sammenligner helt forskjellige sosiale former: den muslimske guruen på Bali sammenlignes med innvielseslederen blant OK-folket på Ny Guinea, en gruppe på et par hundre sjeler. Han sammenligner dermed samfunn som varierer i størrelse, religion og økologi. Men Barth er svært omhyggelig med å identifisere handlinger på samme nivå, altså sammenlignbare skalanivåer. En styrke ved Barths analyse er at han tydeliggjør trinnene i den komparative forskningsprosessen. Han fokuserer begge steder på møter der overføringen av kunnskap foregår fra en generasjon til en annen, altså er prosesser sentrale i sammenligningen mer enn det sosiale mønsteret, som også er viktig i beskrivelsene for å få fram kontekstforståelsen. Dette at rikdommen i hver enkelt studie kommer fram, samtidig som sammenligningen belyser mer overgripende fellestrekk, er noe som antropologen Laura Nader (1994) argumenterer for. Hun mener at sammensatte tilnærmingsmåter og en metodologisk bredde er nødvendig for å få fram innsikt i de komplekse sosiale fenomener som samfunnsforskere står overfor i dag.

Komparative prosjekter kan særlig bidra til å få fram en større systematisk tilnærming til et forskningsfelt, noe det argumenteres godt for i en artikkel av Anne Krogstad (2000). Hun mener imidlertid det er viktig å skille mellom de komparative analysene som er hypotesegenererende og de som er hypotesetestende. Når det gjelder forskningsprosjekter som skal lede fram til noen konkrete svar, argumenterer hun for kontekstuelle forklaringer på relativt beskjedent generaliseringsnivå og med utspring i felles teoretisk rammeverk. Når det gjelder sammenligning for å stille kvalifiserte spørsmål, mener hun derimot at en skal være dristig for deretter å formulere forskningsspørsmål som i sin tur kan besvares med nøktern varsomhet og disiplin (Krogstad ibid:104).

Et annet kjennetegn ved komparasjon er måten enhetene for sammenligning defineres og behandles på. Komparative prosjekter inkluderer gjerne

land der nasjonen som case forstås ut fra variabler som kan forklare nasjonale forskjeller. Også casestudier på mikronivå tar gjerne for seg land. Fruktbarheten av å sammenligne caser som har stor geografisk og kulturell avstand, har vært diskutert. Fredrik Barth argumenterer for at avstand ikke innebærer noen vesensforskjell når det gjelder komparasjon, så lenge en sammenligner sammenlignbare størrelser, noe han selv har vist gjennom å sammenligne fenomener i helt forskjellige samfunn i ulike verdensdeler. Andre har understreket at det er innenfor samme region det er mest fruktbart å utføre komparative studier, fordi det da er mulig å diskutere overførbarhet av et case, altså gyldighet av et fenomen innenfor et område med visse sosiale og kulturelle fellestrekk (se Barth 1994, Vike 2001).

Noen eksempler

Det eksemplet jeg brukte fra mitt eget forskningsprosjekt, innebar komparasjon innen samme land og by. Mange kontekster er dermed felles, noe som gjør det mulig å foreta mikrostudier av de sosiale prosessene. En svakhet er at de historiske og strukturelle rammebetingelsene ikke defineres, men tas for gitt. I tilfellet med de to skolene hadde disse enhetene samme status i forskningsprosessen. Datainnsamlingen ble utført av samme forsker, og dermed ble samme forforståelse og teorigrunnlag lagt til grunn for fortolkningsprosessen. Mange komparative casestudier på tvers av landegrenser utføres som samarbeid mellom forskere, der det teoretiske grunnlaget må gjøres eksplisitt og til et felles anliggende. En begrensning her er at kontekstforståelsen av eget samfunn ofte kan være gjort lite eksplisitt, noe som innvirker på datainnsamlingen. En annen vanlig form for komparasjon er at et forskningsprosjekt i et land gjør bruk av eksisterende undersøkelser der problemstillinger og teoretisk forankring kan være bare delvis overlappende eller forskjellig.

At også en slik form for komparasjon kan gi nyttig innsikt, vil jeg belyse gjennom eksempler på komparativ analyse som tar utgangspunkt i forskning om ungdom som vokser opp i sosialt og kulturelt sammensatte nabolag. Dette berører aktuelle temaer som fattigdom, makt, barne- og ungdomskulturelle trender, kjønnskultur, identitetshåndtering og kulturelle endringsprosesser. Jeg har avgrenset forskningsprosjektene til Norden fordi denne regionen har en del fellestrekk når det gjelder utforming av barn og unges oppvekstvilkår. Gjennom dette vil jeg antyde hva et komparativt blikk vil kunne bidra med for å klargjøre hvilke teoretiske tilnærminger, fortolkningsrammer og begrepsbruk som preger forskningsfeltet.

I Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift nr. 1, 2002 skriver Inger Lise Lien om *Ære, vold og kulturell endring i Oslo indre by*[4]. Liens fokus er å se på gjengdannende prosesser i Oslo indre by, og hun er opptatt av hvordan æresbegrepet gis et delvis nytt innhold. Hun baserer seg på feltarbeid på ungdomsskoler og ungdomsklubber, og hun finner voldelige gutte- og jentegjenger ved alle skolene. De tøffeste ungdommene, som Lien kaller de hypermoderne, har frigjort seg fra familien og tradisjonene og har dannet sitt eget nettverk både innen og utenfor sin etniske gruppe. De beveger seg fritt, de kler seg dyrt og vestlig. De utgjør toppen av en maktpyramide, forsvarer sin maskulinitet med vold og kontroll av kvinner, og er opptatt av en moralkodeks knyttet til respekt og ære.

De hypermoderne jentene er i større grad etnisk norske, med foreldre som gir dem frihet ut fra en verdighetskodeks forstått som en liberal etikk der likhet og toleranse er viktige verdier. De tilhører ikke storfamilier med eldre brødre og fettere som kan beskytte dem hvis de blir forulempet. De må forsvare seg selv, eller bli kjærester med de tøffeste guttene. Væremåte og moralkodeks formes komplementært til de tøffe guttene. Innvandringen, hevder Inger Lise Lien, har ført til at æresbegrepet står sentralt i norsk skole. Også lærerne påvirkes av den. Skolen kjennetegnes av en verdighetskodeks som vektlegger likestilling og toleranse, men Lien viser eksempler på at lærere tar etter guttenes æreskodeks for å få autoritet og respekt.

De etnisk norske guttene er feige fordi de trekker seg i konflikter, og fordi de ikke forsvarer jentenes ære. De marginaliseres og sidestilles med de lydige muslimske jentene. Lien argumenterer for at en mulig konsekvens av denne avvisningen av guttene er at disse vil slå seg sammen mot de utenlandske gjengene, forklare sin aggresjon som rasisme og nynazisme og svare med vold. Alternativt vil disse gruppene konkurrere om å overgå hverandre. Begge løsningene mener hun innebærer en fare for at volden kan opptrappes.

Artikkelen inneholder ingredienser som slår an i mediene. Den har en undertone som understøtter skrekkscenariet om hva som foregår i innvandringsmiljøene. Fokus er på problematferd, vold og marginalisering, med de etnisk norske guttene i offerrollen, mens macho-jenter danner voldelige gjenger og foretrekker utlendinger som kjærester. Den treffer unektelig vesentlige sider ved dette ungdomsmiljøet. Samtidig sporer framstillingen og tolkningene til refleksjon. Det som pirret nysgjerrigheten under lesningen av

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[4] Artikkelen har fått medieoppmerksomhet, i Dagbladet som kommentarartikkel ved Sissel Bennech Osvold under tittelen *Om ære og respekt,* i Dagsavisen som førstesideoppslag med tittelen *Norske jenter vil ha innvandrergutter* og med oppfølgende intervjuer av jenter inne i avisen under overskriften: *Alle jenter ønsker seg en macho gutt.*

artikkelen i forhold til komparasjon, er om tolkningene gjør situasjonen mer kulturspesifikk enn den er – og om situasjonen er tolket ut fra en hegemonisk tolkningshorisont. Ville en større grad av komparativ tilnærming skapt en distanse som kunne gitt en annen tolkning?

Det som gjør denne artikkelen egnet til diskusjon i forhold til komparasjon, er at også Hanne Haavind (2002) og Mette Gulbrandsen (2002) med en gruppe hovedfagsstudenter (Noer 2000, Bjørke og Gutterud 2000) har studert samme miljø samtidig med Lien. Dessuten er en del av informantene også de samme som jeg har intervjuet og observert i skole og fritid i mitt doktorgradsprosjekt, mens de da gikk i småskolen. Jeg har også vært tilbake i ungdomsklubbene i dette nabolaget i forbindelse med mitt nåværende prosjekt, der jeg observerer og intervjuer ungdomsskoleelever i sosialt og kulturelt sammensatte ungdomsmiljøer i forhold til deres avgjørelsesmyndighet på skolen, hjemme, blant venner og i forbindelse med fritidsaktiviteter. Fokus her er hverdagsmakt. Det er altså et nabolag som flere forskere studerer parallelt for å få innsikt i kjønnede jevnalderrelasjoner, makt og hierarki, kulturell endring, etnisitet, marginalisering og integrering.

Dessuten finnes det flere prosjekter som ligger nær opptil disse studiene: Viggo Vestels doktorgradsprosjekt om vennskap i flerkulturelle ungdomsmiljøer med empiri fra en ungdomsklubb i en drabantby i Oslo (Vestel 1995, 2000, 2001) og Annick Prieurs studie av maskulinitet, kriminalitet og etnisitet (Prieur 1999a, b). Av danske studier kan nevnes Yvonne Mørcks studie av de veltilpassede minoritetsungdommene så vel som de «hårde drenge» (Mørck 1996, 1999) og Dorthe Staunæs studie av ungdomsskoleelever i en dansk drabantby (Staunæs 2000a, b). Fra Sverige er det Alexandra Ålunds (1997) studie om multikultiungdom fra Rinkeby utenfor Stockholm og Ove Sernhedes studier om ungdomskultur og etnisitet (Sernhede 1996, 1999).

Jeg tar Lien på ordet når hun etterlyser at forskere på innvandringsfeltet må tørre å være mer frimodige – at det er gjennom debatt og kritikk at kunnskap utvikler seg (intervju i Velferd nr. 1, 2002). Det er særlig tre dimensjoner som har relevans for vår diskusjon om komparasjon, nemlig hva slags teori og fortolkningsramme som bringes inn i studiene, hvilket generaliseringsnivå de gis, hva slags begrepsbruk som brukes, og på hvilken måte dette henger sammen med faglig posisjonering.

Teori og tolkningsramme

Alle de nevnte studiene er dypdykk i et komplekst felt, de har en holistisk tilnærming og gir tykke beskrivelser, men samtidig foretas det generaliseringer på bakgrunn av hypoteser. En viktig forskjell mellom de nevnte studiene er at noen fokuserer på innvandrerungdom og har enten bare disse med i utvalget eller at gruppen bestemmer fortolkningsrammen, mens andre nærmer seg feltet ved å studere alle ungdomsrelasjoner i området, der etnisitet bare gjøres relevant når denne dimensjonen ved relasjonene aktiviseres. Dette har konsekvenser for teoretisk forankring og fortolkning.

En annen og beslektet forskjell er studier med en ungdomskulturorientering til forskningsfeltet, til forskjell fra studier som nærmer seg feltet ut fra teorier om barndom og hverdagsliv. En kritisk innvending mot ungdomsforskning er at disse forskerne i stor grad har interessert seg for de synlige ungdommene, især knyttet til problematferd. Én forklaring på dette er finansieringskilden, at statlig initiert oppdragsforskning ønsker fokus på problemer. Men det har også med noen forskningstradisjoner innenfor ungdomsforskningsfeltet å gjøre. Ungdommer som ikke dominerer de offentlige arenaene som forskerne befinner seg på, blir diffuse. Studier av ungdomskultur kan lett bli ahistoriske, de ser fenomener som enestående uten å plassere dem inn i relevante kontekster, både i forhold til livsløp og andre sosiale felt hvor ungdommene deltar. De økonomiske og politiske rammevilkår som former innvandringspolitikk og ungdommenes framtidsmuligheter er også fraværende.

I Haavind og Gulbrandsens prosjekt er utviklings- og endringsperspektivet sentralt. De beskriver barn i overgangsfasen mellom barne- og ungdomsskolen, altså en bestemt livsfase som former de særlige utfordringene de som jenter og gutter møter ut fra sin sosiale posisjon, kulturelle ballast og kompetanse. I Liens framstilling er dette livsfaseperspektivet ikke tatt i betraktning i analysen. Dette gjør at hun ikke helt ser ungdomsskoletiden som en fase kjennetegnet av sosial og identitetsmessig turbulens, noe som kan ha betydning for tolkninger og generalisering av de kulturtrekk hun definerer som generelle endringer i ungdomskulturen. Livsfaseperspektivet, og med det en tilnærming til feltet som tar i bruk velprøvde teorier om jevnalderrelasjoner, mener jeg er viktig for å forstå forholdet mellom de såkalte hypermoderne og marginaliserte og dynamikken mellom gutter og jenter. Det er også et viktig poeng at mange av ungdommene har gått i samme klasse og holdt på med de samme fritidsaktivitetene i mange år, de har en felles historie bak seg. Dessuten har de enda noen år foran seg etter ungdomsskolen, på videregående skole, der styrkeforholdet mellom de sosiale ungdomskategoriene kan komme til å endre seg.

Inger Lise Lien inndeler ungdommene i tre kategorier: de hypermoderne, de moderate og de tilbaketrukne. Dette syns jeg for så vidt er en grei inndeling som fanger posisjoner på et visst tidspunkt. Men en slik typologisering kan samtidig begrense innsikten i det dynamiske ved de unges posisjonering og relasjonene mellom de ulike kategoriene. I Liens framstilling er det de hypermoderne som får oppmerksomheten, de andre kategoriene blir noe diffuse. De blir framstilt med henvisning til de hypermodernes ståsted. Ved å forankre typologiseringen og framstillingen av miljøet i de som befinner seg øverst i dette hierarkiet, mister hun samtidig noen av nyansene i utformingen av kategoriene. De hypermoderne beskriver hun gjennom klesstil, at de er småkriminelle, de har en beredskap for fornærmelser og er særlig opptatt av ære og respekt. Ofte ser disse i liten grad utdanning som framtidsstrategi. Det er imidlertid også andre i dette miljøet som markerer seg med selvstendighet og uavhengighet av familiebakgrunn. I arbeidet med mitt nåværende forskningsprosjekt er det slående mange som forfekter egne meninger, er tøffe og bærer de riktige statussymboler. De er gjerne aktive i sport, jobber og skaffer seg penger selv til klær og mobiltelefon osv. De satser samtidig mye på skolen og respekterer de lærerne som de mener fortjener det. Alternativt markerer de seg som dyktige rap'ere og breakedansere. De er tøffe i væremåte, får respekt og viser kameratskap og lojalitet seg imellom. Innsikt i hva som genererer de hypermoderne kameratgjengene og deres fellesskap til forskjell fra disse mer moderate, er særlig viktig for å få oversikt over hva som kjennetegner de kulturelle endringsprosessene blant ungdom i denne bydelen, ikke minst fordi det er i denne moderate kategorien de fleste befinner seg.

Tilsvarende kan fortolkningen av kategorien *de tilbaketrukne* nyanseres. Lien plasserer både de etnisk norske guttene og innvandrerjentene i denne gruppen. Hun oppfatter dem som sosialt marginaliserte og påpeker at for guttenes del kan denne marginaliserte posisjonen føre til at de utvikler rasistiske tendenser. Men kan ikke denne posisjonen beskrives som tilbaketrukket fordi de ikke opptrer eller markerer seg på de offentlighetsarenaene som de hypermoderne dominerer? De sitter på gutterommet og spiller data, gjør lekser og er med på fotballtrening og andre fritidsaktiviteter. De kvalifiserer seg på denne måten til videre utdanning, med andre omdreiningspunkter i sitt liv der andre referanserammer bl.a. for maskulinitet er virksomme. Dessuten, det er ofte ikke guttene i klassen som er jentenes foretrukne kjærester i denne alderen. Det er derfor ikke sikkert at en tilbaketrukken posisjon sammenlignet med de hypermoderne guttenes innebærer en sosialt marginal posisjon i et bredere sosialt perspektiv. Dermed vil det heller

ikke være grunnlag for å forvente at de tilbaketrukne guttenes tilværelse framelsker rasistiske og nynazistiske holdninger, slik Lien forventer.

Et aspekt som er fraværende i Liens tolkninger, og som står mer sentralt i Annick Prieurs arbeid og de danske studiene, er den hverdagsrasismen som minoritetsungdom erfarer. De mange daglige bekreftelsene på at de oppfattes av andre som annerledes og mindreverdige, bidrar til deres «korte lunte», til en beredskap for å forsvare seg og, for noen, også til bruk av vold. Som en av de «hårde drenge» i Yvonne Mørcks artikkel sier: vreden kommer av mistenkeliggjøringen. «Den der følelsen tror jeg ikke, man kan tænke seg, før man har følt den selv». Rasisme uttrykkes ofte ungdommer imellom, ikke minst minoritetsungdommer er aktive her. Men mer avgjørende kommer rasismen både direkte og indirekte til uttrykk gjennom deres tilskriving av posisjon i samfunnet, noe bl.a. Bourdieu har fått godt fram i intervjuene i sine siste bøker om sosiale lidelser: *La Misére du Monde* (Bourdieu et al 1999, Bourdieu 2000). Denne indirekte tilskrivingen av posisjon kommer også til uttrykk i Haavind og Gulbrandsens undersøkelse, der både de etnisk norske og minoritetsbarna opererer med et klart skille mellom «oss» og «dem». Barna skiller mellom «de norske» og «utlendingene» selv om begge kategoriene har bodd i landet i hele livet. Alle barna brukte disse begrepene, men noen av de med etnisk minoritetsbakgrunn gir uttrykk for at de ikke liker å få merkelappen «utlending». De mener begrepet har en negativ klang og ofte brukes i koblinger som «jævla utlending». Ingen av de etnisk norske barna i undersøkelsen hadde tilsvarende refleksjoner over ordbruk (Gulbrandsen 2002).

Dorthe Staunæs legger til grunn en dikotomisering, det hun kaller «annetgjøringens dynamikk», i sin teoretiske tilnærming til studiet av jevn-alderrelasjoner i etnisk sammensatte ungdomsskoler. Et poeng i hennes analyse er at denne «annetgjøringen» er situasjonsavhengig. Utlending er ikke noe man *er*, men noe man *blir* når dette kjennetegnet ved personen vektlegges. I noen skoler tilskrives problemer som oppstår mellom ungdommene så å si alltid deres etniske bakgrunn, mens i andre skoler gjøres dette bare i enkelte tilfeller. Det siste tilfellet gjelder ofte skoler hvor de arbeider for å danne et individorientert fellesskap ut fra andre kategorier enn etnisitet. Hvorfor noen ungdomsmiljøer preges av en sterk vektlegging av gjengfelles-skap kan derfor skyldes det Fredrik Barth har beskrevet som annetgjøringens dynamikk[5]. Maktposisjoner oppnås gjennom å markere skillelinjer der

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[5] Se Introduction i Fredrik Barth (red.): *Ethnic groups and boundaries.* Oslo: Universi-tetsforlaget. 1969.

majoriteten står fram som det umarkerte som dominerer kodene. Majoriteten framstår som det normale, mens de som skilles ut defineres som «de andre» og blir forklart ut fra sin annerledeshet i form av etnisitet[6].

Her igjen er det viktig å ha distanse nok til å se hvilke kontekster som er relevante for å forstå sosial rangering, makt og posisjonering. Hva kan forklares ut fra etnisitet, og hva har med andre former for marginalisering, makt og hierarki å gjøre? Dynamikken som beskrives i mange ungdoms-miljøer i dag, er gjenkjennelig fra studier der arbeiderklasseungdom møter middelklasseskolen (Bernstein 1975, Willis 1978), og fra andre studier av sosialt sammensatte jevnaldermiljøer (Willis 1990, Back 1996, O'Donnell og Shape 2000).

Kritikken om hva slags forståelseshorisont som benyttes, gjelder også for det siste momentet jeg vil nevne, nemlig hvordan vi skal forstå ære og respekt. Lien knytter æresbegrepet til den forankring guttenes besteforeldre har i føydale landsbysamfunn. Hun mener æreskodeksen er importert inn igjen til Vesten og finnes nå parallelt med den verdighetskodeks som hun betegner som den norske og vestlige moralforståelsen. Hun skriver at «flere norske gutter er godt kjent med disse verdiene som innvandrerguttene bekjenner seg til når det gjelder ære og respekt, men de har ikke internalisert dem».

Annick Prieur er også opptatt av ære og respekt i sitt materiale og vektlegger hybridiseringen. Hun skriver at æresbegrepet har sammenheng med noen særtrekk knyttet til en maskulinitetsform hun finner i noen urbane miljøer med mye minoritetsungdom, men at det er et meget komplekst feno-men og derfor meningsløst å forklare det med direkte kulturell overlevering. Begrepene om ære og respekt mener hun antagelig har mindre sammenheng med guttenes besteforeldres landsbykultur. Heller er de hentet fra gangster-filmer, fra hip-hop og rapmusikk, fra en sort medieformidlet amerikansk kultur hvor det gjelder å være *bad, hard* og *cool* (Sernhede 1996, 1999). Her er respekt et nøkkelbegrep sammen med framtredelsesformer som er tett knyttet til maskulinitetsidealer. Og i forlengelsen av det, en sexistisk sjar-gong. I disse miljøene legges det stor vekt på kroppslig kapital, ikke bare uttrykt gjennom fysisk styrke, men også gjennom kroppsbeherskelse i for-bindelse med dans og forskjellige subkulturelle idrettsgrener som skating, snowboard og kampsport hvor ferdigheter og styrke kombineres (Sernhede 1996, 1999). Prieur ser på æresbegrepet som elastisk og meget åpent for

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[6] Se for eksempel *Likhetens grenser* og andre artikler i *Likhetens paradokser* (Lien, Lidén og Vike 2001).

lokale definisjoner. De nye ungdomskulturene inneholder mange elementer som nærmest kan betraktes som et slags kulturelt fellesgods for klikker av unge gutter, og hun tilskriver dette en arbeiderklassetradisjon vel så mye som noe som er formet av innvandrerungdoms foreldrebakgrunn. I indre Oslo øst er det nå gutter med familiebakgrunn fra Somalia, Marokko og Pakistan som forbindes med begreper som respekt og ære, mens det ti år tilbake var de tøffe ishockeyguttene som var opptatt av respekt og hierarkiske posisjoner guttene imellom. Det var de som definerte den dominerende formen for maskulinitet og fikk jentenes oppmerksomhet på ungdomsklubben. Også da fantes det parallelle tilpasningsformer både for gutter og jenter.

Det jeg har ønsket med denne gjennomgangen er å vise hvordan avgrensing av fokus gjenspeiles i teoretiske tilnærmingsmåter, og at dette innebærer noen valg som det er nødvendig å tenke nøye igjennom. Dypdykk i den samme empiriske situasjonen med ulik teoretisk bagasje gir forskjellige framstillinger og fortolkninger. Dette sporer til å stille kvalifiserte spørsmål og til å få fram kompleksitet og variasjon. Samtidig viser gjennomgangen at det også er behov for distansering og kritisk refleksjon av fortolkningsrammer. Gjennom å sammenligne studier innen samme felt kan vi få fram en blindhet for det kulturelt umarkerte i egen livsform, foruten førende samfunnsstrukturer og maktforhold. Dessuten kan det argumenteres for behovet for et dynamisk aldersperspektiv.

Unge med innvandrerbakgrunn forstås gjerne enten ut fra deres kulturelle bakgrunn, eller, som i mange studier innen *Cultural Studies*-tradisjonen (for eksempel Back 1996), med fokus på ungdomskulturer og nye kulturelle uttrykksformer hvor deres hjemmesfære er omtrent fraværende. For å få en helhetsforståelse og for å gripe paradoksene som dette forskningsfeltet er fylt med, er det imidlertid nødvendig å begripe begge sider, det vil si å forstå den helt spesielle posisjon ulike ungdommer står i, ut fra deres familiebakgrunn og i forhold til den omverden de befinner seg i, som klasserommet og fritidsarenaer, utdanningssystem og mulige framtidsstrategier. Ut fra dette er det mulig å få fram det dynamiske og situasjonsspesifikke ved hvordan gruppetilhørighet og identitetsprosesser skapes, og i hvilken grad etnisitet og religion er sentralt for identitet og relasjoner i forhold til andre typer tilhørighet og interesser.

Det komparative blikk berører også spørsmål om hvordan vi kan forenkle for å få spisset problemstillinger med utgangspunkt i en særlig forskningsinteresse, og om hvor problematiserende vi kan være i formidlingen av forskningsresultatene. Hva slags generaliseringspotensiale legger en sammenligning av studier av innvandrerungdom grunnlag for?

Generaliseringspotensiale

De nevnte studiene bekrefter tesen om at det gjelder å forstå dynamikker og prosesser mer enn å beskrive et mønster, å si at «sånn er det her». Jeg mener at studiene også gir grunnlag for å se noen fellestrekk når det gjelder hva som er innvandrerungdoms mulige handlingsstrategier og betingelser i Norden. Dette er først og fremst knyttet til hvordan de tilskrives en sosial posisjon av majoriteten som «de andre», og hvordan de forventes å være problematiske, annerledes, enten ved å forbli lavt på rangstigen, gjennom å vise problematferd, eller ved å være for kulturforankret, som diskusjonen om arrangert ekteskap vitner om. Vi mangler imidlertid kunnskap om de som greier seg bra, der etnisitet ikke markeres. Og i forlengelsen av det trenger vi mer kunnskap om dynamikken som ligger til grunn for ulike handlingsstrategier.

De nordiske forskningsarbeidene om minoritetsungdom viser at det som kan være beskrevet som marginalt i en studie, kan være mer framtredende i en annen og gis andre forståelser enn der de opptrer sporadisk. Ett eksempel er det bevegelige og mangetydige i begreper som respekt og ære. Det er imidlertid ikke bare ideer, men også praksisformer som preges av kulturmiks og nye forståelser. Disse kan gå i flere retninger, som for eksempel uttalelsen til en av de norske jentene i Liens artikkel om at hun bevisst kler seg lite utfordrende: «Jeg forsøker å se anstendig ut på en muslimsk måte fordi jeg vet hva muslimske gutter og jenter tenker.» Lien setter dette inn i en forståelsesramme der et østlig æresbegrep er på offensiven og overtar den vestlige verdighetskodeksen. Sett i sammenheng med andre hybridiseringsuttrykk, kan det tolkes som del av en større kulturell endringsprosess og ikke ut fra en dikotomisering mellom de to moralkodene. Også det sammensatte i det umarkerte kjente, for eksempel hva som tillegges en vestlig verdighetskodes, er nødvendig å studere for å gripe den moralforståelsen som former de unges relasjoner.

Begrepsbruk

Det siste jeg vil kommentere er begrepsbruk. Et generelt trekk ved begrepsbruken i dette forskningsfeltet er at begreper som er vanlige å bruke, både i hverdagen og av forskerne, er normativt ladet av majoritetssamfunnet. Det blir dermed ekstra viktig å reflektere over begrepsbruken.

For eksempel vil begrepene *ære og respekt* være verdiladet i utgangspunktet. Derfor må analysen gi den et spesifikt innhold, begrepene må kontekstualiseres. I de tekstene jeg har sett på er disse begrepene en sentral

del av analysen og settes i sammenheng med ungdommenes tolkninger og bruk. Men også i forhold til begrepene ære og respekt kan majoritetens hegemoniske forståelser gjøres mer eksplisitte for å gripe premissene for hybridisering.

Andre begreper som brukes i Liens artikkel, som for eksempel *kyskhet*, er også ord med særlige, kulturelle konnotasjoner. Valg av slike ladede uttrykk som verken er ungdommenes egne kategorier eller vanlige teoretiske termer, men forskerens valg, er med på å posisjonere forskeren og fortolkningshorisonten. I forhold til disse begrepene er det viktig å spørre seg hvor dekkende de er for det fenomenet de beskriver, og i hvilken grad teksten får fram den empiriske virkeligheten den skal beskrive gjennom begrepet.

En ytterligere refleksjon rundt begrepsbruk er hvordan vi bruker standard gruppeinndelinger. Innenfor minoritetsfeltet inndeles personer både i forskning, i politikk, i mediene og blant folk flest i kategorier ut fra etnisitet og religion. Dette er med på å forme og videreføre bestemte forståelseshorisonter. I mange sosialt sammensatte miljøer brukes begrepet utlending, slik det kommer fram i Gulbrandsens og Liens tekster. Skal forskeren overta denne betegnelsen som analytisk kategori? Ligger det i dette en forenkling og todeling som det ikke nødvendigvis er empirisk dekning for? Slik jeg oppfatter det viser en systematisk komparasjon av forskningen på minoritetsungdom i Norden at det er vanskelig å underbygge en forståelse av denne kategoriseringen bygget ensidig på etnisitet og religion.

De som arbeider innen feltet innvandring og minoriteter støter på et kategoriseringsbehov og samtidig et paradoks. Behovet for å markere familiebakgrunn er ofte der fordi denne bakgrunnen har forklaringspotensiale for analysen. Samtidig er dette et verdiladet felt der slike beskrivelser reproduserer betydningen av denne kategoriseringen (Gullestad 2002). Hva skal en kalle barnet: innvandrerungdom, utlendinger, bindestreksnordmenn, multikulti-ungdom eller bare ungdom?

Avslutning

Casestudier gir innsikt i et begrenset felt. Målet med slike studier er å finne fram til prosesser som kan generaliseres. Ved å beskrive og analysere hvordan sosiale fenomener henger sammen, hva som er drivkraften og logikken i sosiale prosesser, vil dette kunne ha gyldighet ut over den enkelte studien. Jeg har imidlertid problematisert hvordan tolkninger henger sammen med hva slags teori og fortolkningsramme som bringes inn i studiene. Komparasjon bidrar ikke bare til å tydeliggjøre forskerens faglige posi-

sjonering, men er også en måte å skape distanse til det sosialt og kulturelt velkjente på. Ikke minst i forhold til forskning om barn og unges oppvekst er det viktig å tydeliggjøre de rammebetingelser og tenkemåter som tas for gitt, fordi dette er et forskningsfelt som er særlig preget av normative føringer. Et komparativt blikk kan bidra til å trekke inn og problematisere relevante kontekster. Det vil også ha betydning for hvilke forskningsspørsmål vi stiller, og hvordan vi kan forske på og tolke det tvetydige bildet som kjennetegner dagens oppvekstforhold.

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ANNE SKEVIK[1]

Kapittel 3. The advantages and problems of nation-based and comparative approaches to social welfare, with particular reference to the male breadwinner policy and lone parenthood

Introduction

The 1990s have seen a real upsurge in comparative studies of social policy. This is not least true for so-called feminist social policy research, where comparative studies now make up for a large part of the most important texts. Despite this, there has been relatively little debate about the role of comparative versus nation-based research within this field. Researchers rarely need to justify why they wish to study their own country. There is no debate on the merits of nation-based research as such. I assume that comparative and nation-based approaches in many ways can be seen as complimentary, so that the weaknesses of comparative approaches may be the strength of nation-based approaches and vice versa. In the first part of this lecture, I will highlight three main questions. First, what is comparative research? Second, what can a comparative approach contribute in the field of social policy studies? And third, what are the key problems of comparative methodology? In discussing each of these questions, I will use examples from comparative research on lone parenthood. This is a rich and growing field, and it highlights some issues that are of interest for all research on gender relations in the welfare state. In the second part of the lecture, I will present what may be called a case study. I will discuss two studies if the same issue, namely the system for income transfers to women in Norway around 1980. One of these studies is nation-based; the other is comparative and discusses Norway in relation to the other Nordic countries. I will compare the analytical approach and the conclusions of these two studies, in order to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the comparative as well as the nation-based approach. In the final section of the lecture, I will briefly discuss the approach chosen in my own work, that is, a historical and comparative study of only two countries.

What is comparative research?

But first, let me turn to the question of what comparative research is. Despite a strong interest in comparative research in recent years, there is still no established and uncontested definition. At one level, it might be argued that all research is comparative in nature, since all research involves some form of comparison. Normally, however, we reserve the term for studies that compare phenomena across nation states. Comparative research can however treat nations in many different ways. There is not one uniform design, or even one uniform concept of «nation» that defines comparative research. Melvin Kohn, in an article from 1989 (Kohn 1989:20ff), suggests four types of cross-national research. There are studies in which the nation is the *object* of study, those in which nation is the *context,* those in which the nation is the *unit* of analysis, and those that are *transnational*.

Where the nation is the object of study, the researcher's primary interest is in the nations actually studied. The aim of such research is to develop a better understanding of the countries studied, thus the countries are not selected in order to test a particular hypothesis. There have been few studies of this type in social policy research in recent years, but Frank Castles study of «the wage earner's welfare state» in Australia and New Zealand may fall in this category (Castles 1985). So may Mary Ruggie's study of women's employment in Sweden and Great Britain (Ruggie 1984). These studies do not aim at testing any specialised hypothesis about welfare state development or female employment, but seek to develop an understanding of particular traits in the country under study. Such studies create a background for developing new hypotheses rather than hypothesis testing.

It is more common to treat the nation as the *context* for the phenomenon under study. The primary interest in such studies is to test the generality of findings about how individuals act, or social institutions operate, in different contexts. A good example of this approach is Simon Duncan and Ros Edwards study of lone parents' labour market participation rates (Duncan and Edwards 1999). This study is essentially qualitative, interviewing lone parents about their thoughts on employment and motherhood in the UK, Germany and Sweden. Duncan and Edwards are however very careful to stress that they view the nation state as a context for individual action, and not at all the only context. They are also careful to include informants in different types of neighbourhood, with different ethnic background and with different ideologies. They strongly criticise studies that treat the nation state as the only variable, as if lone parents in each nation were a homogenous mass reacting uniformly to financial incentives manipulated by the state. National policies are context, no more and no less.

A third type of cross-national research is the *transnational*, where countries are studied as components of larger international systems. This approach has been of limited relevance to social policy research. As international organisations develop, however, this variety of comparative research may be adopted to a larger extent also by scholars of social policy. Some of the emerging research on globalisation and Europeanisation may fall in this category.

The fourth type of study is the type where the nation is the *unit* of study. This variety is by far the most common in social policy research. In this type of study, investigators seek to establish relationships among characteristics of nations *as nations*. Some have suggested that the aim of this type of research should be to replace the names of countries with the names of variables. If we know that welfare expenditure is higher in France than in Greece, we gain nothing by attributing this to Frenchness and Greekness. Rather, we want to isolate the variables relevant to explain this phenomenon, such as GDP per capita, family structure, urbanisation, or proportion of population working in the industrial sector. Do this for a high number of cases, and you can run a nice regression analysis with welfare expenditure as the dependent variable. This was the strategy of one of the classical studies in social policy, namely Harold Wilensky's «The welfare state and equality», from 1975 (Wilensky 1975). Wilensky's study encompasses no less than 64 countries with different political traditions and regimes. Within research on lone parenthood, it is also usual to treat the nation as the unit of analysis. The large-scale study of the European Observatory on Family Policies in 1995, which was initiated and administered by the University of York and which aimed at understanding variations in lone parents labour supply, had this form (Bradshaw et al 1996). Variation in the outcome variable, labour supply, was sought explained by variation in variables which characterise lone parents, by the structure of benefit system, and by the availability of public care arrangements.

This type of comparative research, where one aims at «replacing country names with variable names» (cf. Przeworski and Teune 1970), is known in the methodological literature as variable-centred. Variable-oriented comparative research can be seen as a variation on the general statistical method: the aim of this kind of research is to test propositions derived from general theories. It is theory-oriented, deductive, and quantitative. The variable-centred approach is concerned with estimating correspondence between relationships that can be seen across many countries, and with broad theoretically based images of macro-social phenomena.

Variable-oriented research is often poised against case-oriented comparative research. In case-oriented research, the researcher typically concentrates on a particular historical outcome, and seeks to formulate historical explanations for this phenomenon. Historical and ethnographic research is often associated with this way of working. Case-oriented researchers will insist that every event must be understood in its own context – it cannot be reduced to a set of variables or a simple model. In the case-oriented approach, the nation will be treated either as the object of study, or as context. The aim of this kind of study is to explain and interpret diverse experiences; it is not to discover or establish laws determining the outcome of the next incident of a similar type. The approach is flexible in its approach to evidence rather than theory-centred, and it is qualitative rather than quantitative.

The debate between the proponents of case-oriented versus variable-oriented research is a vital one within comparative methodology (e.g. Ragin 1987, Rueschemeyer 1991, Janoski and Hicks 1994, Goldthorpe 1997). It does however deal with issues much deeper than the questions on how and why we should do comparative research. At the heart of this debate are some of the most contested issues in the philosophy of science, such as the debate on whether or not there can be «laws» in social science similar to the laws of the natural sciences. I will not take you further into these complex and meta-theoretical debates, that would lead way beyond the scope of this lecture. I wanted to mention this debate, still, because some interesting developments in comparative methodology have this duality as its starting point. Charles Ragin's work, for instance, has aimed at overcoming the split between qualitative and quantitative methods in comparative social science through the development of QCA analysis (Ragin 1987) and 'fuzzy set theory' (Ragin 2000). Whether or not this is a useful way forwards, I'll leave up to you to decide.

Why are we doing comparative research?

Having given a brief overview of what comparative research is, I will now turn to the question of why we are doing it. What are the advantages of comparative research? At the most basic level, a comparative approach can be justified by its usefulness for policy making (cf. Jones 1985). For policy makers in one country, it can always be useful to know what other countries are doing. Comparative research can provide "lessons from abroad"; in other words they can serve to import good ideas. A thorough comparative design is necessary in order to do this, since policy export and import is a risky business. What works in one country may not work at all in another, given

differences in economic and population structure or the overall design of social policy. It is not up to politicians to pick and mix elements they fancy from policies in other countries, but carefully undertaken comparative studies may suggest new directions. This was part of the aim of the European Observatory-study on lone parents that I mentioned above – to teach British politicians a lesson of how other countries were getting lone parents into paid employment. The conclusion of this study stressed the importance of publicly-sponsored child-care, but otherwise pointed out that there were no quick-fix solutions (Bradshaw et al 1996). This is often a valuable lesson to be drawn from comparative research: the issues we are dealing with *are* complicated, no simple moves exist that can solve all problems overnight.

A second reason for undertaking comparative research is that comparative studies promote a better understanding of the home social policy environment. A comparative approach helps us escape «theoretical ethnocentrism», to use the words of Stefan Svallfors (Svallfors 1995:117). There are two types of errors that are easily made on the basis of nation-based studies. The first is to assume that one has found a general social mechanism, while in fact the phenomenon is nationally specific. The second is to assume one has found a national oddity, while in reality one has stumbled upon a general phenomenon. This is an important distinction to make also within the debate on lone parenthood. It gives little meaning to discuss increasing rates of lone parenthood in each country solely as the unfortunate result of resent national policy changes, given that rates of lone parenthood tend to increase in almost all OECD countries. Low labour market participation rates among lone parents is however specific to a few countries, and should be discussed in terms of national policies.

Third, as comparative research gives access to a greater variety of case material, it is an invaluable tool in the development of *theoretical constructs* about social policy formation and development (Jones 1985). It is therefore vital for the development of the academic field itself. Comparative research forces us to apply ever more refined analytical models, and therefore to develop the conceptual basis for the field. Also, comparative methods are absolutely necessary for addressing some of the most overarching questions in social policy research. I would like to say a few more words about this, since this is significant for much of the research that is now taking place within so-called feminist social policy. The comparative approach is not only comparative *method*, it is increasingly «a way of life» for social researchers – a body of research with its own issues and ongoing discussions. I mentioned Harold Wilensky's study of variations in welfare expenditure above (Wilensky 1975). This study is often regarded as the starting point for

comparative social policy research. His structuralist conclusions, arguing that welfare states develop similarly in all countries according to a «logic of industrialism», have however been challenged and enjoy little popularity today. Much research has been devoted to showing that welfare states differ in significant ways. It is not enough to compare welfare states according to how much money they spend on social means, one also needs to discuss how money are spent and how the different institutions operate. Walter Korpi's power-resource-hypothesis has been among the most influential (Korpi 1983, 1989, Esping-Andersen 1985, 1990). According to this argument, welfare states differ systematically because of differences in working class mobilisation and class coalitions in their formative phase. This is a hypothesis that can be discussed and, to some extent at least, tested. The Peter Flora-network's concept of «problem pressure» – that welfare states develop in steps as responses to pressing problems – also provides a framework for comparative research (Flora and Heidenheimer 1981, Flora and Alber 1981).

The relationship between external pressures and national policy formation is at the heart of all this research. By now, there is a relatively established consensus that national politicians have at least some degrees of freedom. A new debate has therefore developed over what kind of social forces influence welfare state formation – is it really all a class issue? A similar debate concerns the precise ways in which welfare states vary. Developments in this area have fully shown how the comparative approach furthers conceptual and theoretical development. Research in this field have deepened our understanding of what the welfare state is, what it does, who built it, what forces are out to demolish it.

In this debate, feminist research is playing an increasingly prominent role. The basic claim of feminist researchers is that we must direct attention away from the exclusive focus on how the welfare state maintains or transforms class relations, towards the ways in which welfare policies trans-form gender relations. Different welfare policies affect gender relations in different ways, therefore this debate is also fundamentally comparative in important aspects. The concept of the male breadwinner model was developed as a tool for comparing welfare states in a way that is sensitive to gender (Lewis 1992). The male breadwinner model mainly emphasises the extent to which welfare states promote or counteract women's exclusion from paid employment. Other researchers have emphasised other aspects of the relationship between welfare policies and gender, such as the extent to which welfare state policy «de-familialise» women. It is in this debate about

relevant dimensions and concepts for gender-sensitive welfare state research I place my own work.

Why are we not always doing comparative research

So far, I have highlighted comparative research as a tool for policy learning, for understanding the home social policy environment in a wider context, and for refining theories and analytical concepts. With all those important advantages, one may ask why we are not doing comparative research all the time. Why not make every research project comparative, and reap those amazing benefits?

Everybody who has at some point been involved in comparative research can give some reasons for why they don't want to do it all the time. A basic and obvious reservation is that comparative research is very difficult to do. It is time-consuming, expensive and complex. Among the problems encountered are lack of comparative data, lingual problems, and all sorts of cultural differences. Whenever two comparative researchers meet there will be a handful of anecdotes about the pains of this kind of research. To share with you some of my own; I was involved in the European Observatory study of lone parenthood in 1995. This study was based on a network of national informants. At the first meeting of the informants, the Swedish informant questioned the basic focus of the study. To her, the problem was not one of lone motherhood as such, but rather a problem of exclusion of vulnerable groups from the labour market. The Southern European informants, on the other hand, were complaining they couldn't find any lone parents, since they tended to live with their own family of origin and therefore disappear from official statistics. As Norwegians, we had no quarrels with the emphasis on lone parents and employment rates, but we were still struggling with the standardised questionnaire. For instance, how were we to respond to the question «are school uniforms free in your country, or are they paid for by the parents?» In Norway, as you know, children do not have school uniforms.

Thus scholars from different countries disagree about what are the most crucial issues, they cannot find comparable statistics, and they have trouble fitting their national system into pre-defined slots in comparative models. Even if these problems could be overcome, however, there are still methodological problems to deal with. If comparative research is seen as a variety of other statistical methods, where countries are treated as variables, then we will encounter the problem of the small N (cf. Goldthorpe 1997:5). There are not that many countries that can be included. The EU includes 15 countries at present, the OECD encompasses 30. But even if all countries in the United

Nations were included – which has not yet been done in social policy research – N would not be higher than 185. This N is easily to small undertake reliable statistical analyses. A related problem is the so-called Galton-problem, which, simply put, is the problem of co-variation among independent variables (Goldthorpe 1997:9). Different countries do not invent their social policy in a vacuum; they tend to adopt lessons from abroad or to get inspiration from the same theories or events. If these processes are widespread, the problem of the small N and Galton's problem run together: we get a situation in which N = 1. These problems make it difficult to draw conclusion about causes and effects in comparative research – there simply is not enough variation.

The «black box»-problem is a problem of a somewhat different nature (Goldthorpe 1997:13). If comparative research is designed in terms of «inputs» and «outputs», as it often is, we loose sight of the actual process that links the two. We may know a lot about the structure of social benefits available to lone parents in a country, and we may have high-quality data about lone parent's poverty rates and employment rates, but we still do not know how the two are linked. In what ways do social benefits influence behaviour and outcomes? How have inputs and outputs changed over time? What we do in comparative research is often to take snapshots; thereby we loose sights of processes. This problem is exacerbated with regard to studies in which the data are only delivered two or three years after being collected, as is the case in the big cross-national databases like LIS and EHPS. In these cases, not only are we getting snapshots rather than an image of process, but we are getting *old* snapshots. In institutional studies it is possible to present reasonably up-to-date data, but also institutions change as well. This is not least true for the study of gender relations in social policy, which is an area in which change happens rapidly. National data on the duration of parental leave or nursery coverage quickly reach their sell-by date.

I will not continue this methodological debate further. Rather, I will now move on to what I have indicated would be part two of this lecture, which is a «case study».

Norway around 1980: the tripartite maintenance system and the separate gender roles model

Much feminist social policy research in recent years has focused on the male breadwinner model and varieties thereof (Lewis 1992, 1997, Sainsbury 1996). The male breadwinner model was developed as a tool for comparative research, to conceptualise how different welfare states treat men and women

differently. In the Norwegian context, however, a similar model had been developed much earlier. Legal scholar Tove Stang Dahl wrote several articles in the 1970s and 1980s where she discussed the «tripartite maintenance system» for women (i.e. Stang Dahl 1984). This model referred to Norway only. To highlight some advantages and disadvantages of the comparative and nation-based approaches, it may be useful to put the 'tripartite maintenance system' side by side with comparative analyses based on the male breadwinner model. Such an analysis of Norway in an international context is undertaken by Diane Sainsbury, in her article «Gender and the Social-Democratic Welfare State» from 1999. In discussing those two contributions together, it is not my point to compare them in terms of quality. Rather, I use them as an illustration of advantages and disadvantages of comparative and nation-based designs. The two studies are selected because they are useful to highlight some crucial issues.

Tove Stang Dahl's starting point for writing about these issues was her concern for women's right to money. She was engaged in a debate about how women's financial security and independence could best be secured, given the situation that most women found themselves in. She argued that marriage and housewifery is the framework around women's lives, that most women would be housewives for shorter or longer periods of their lives, and that housewives' right to money was fragile and contested. Married women had no obvious place in the labour market, and their rights within the social security system were limited. Women therefore found their maintenance within a triangle that is pictured in figure 1.
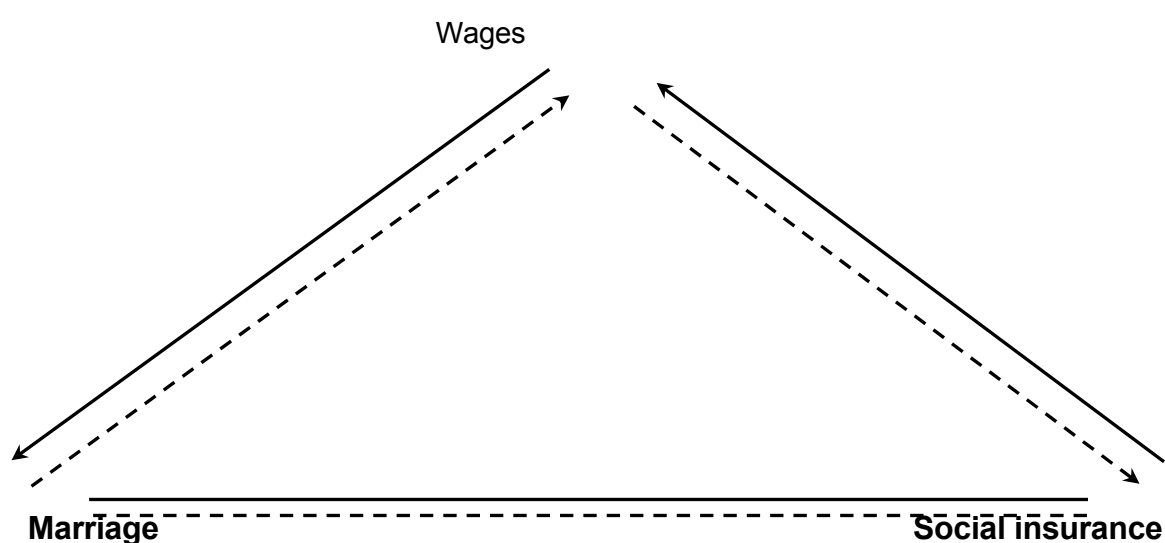

Figure 1. The tripartite maintenance system.

Source: Stang Dahl (1984)

In the figure, the unbroken arrows represent the strongest legal mechanisms of push and pull in the labour market and social insurance, whereas the broken arrows show women's marginal and hazardous position. The arrow from marriage to wages is broken, as can be seen in the figure. This illustrates that married women are seldom pulled from economic dependence within marriage to independence through earnings. Financial support through marriage is the primary option for married women. The unbroken arrow in the opposite direction emphasises this: when women marry, they are no longer expected to provide for themselves. Low wages and discriminatory hiring policies push women out of the labour market. The arrow from marriage to social insurance is also broken. This represents women's situation in the event of divorce or the death of a provider, or when having a child outside marriage. Rights in these situations are fragile, Stang Dahl argues. The lines leading away from social insurance are both unbroken. The line between social insurance and marriage illustrates how women lose their benefit entitlements when they marry. The unbroken arrow from social insurance to wages represents the efforts that are made to push insured women towards the labour market through transitional benefits and education benefits. The broken arrow in the other direction shows how women's partial inclusion in the labour market is reflected in the social security system.

Stang Dahl's main argument is that women as housewives and irregular workers should be secured better within the existing social security system. This is a process that is moving in the right direction, she argues: in the earliest social security legislation in Norway, housewives had no entitlements of their own – they were «subsidiary persons». In the 1950's they were elevated to the status of «family members», and in 1971 housewives became independent members of the National Insurance. This process of inclusion should be continued, Tove Stang Dahl argues, and she believes it will be. However, there were glaring injustices in the late 1970s system. For instance, if a housewife decided to look for employment outside the home and no such employment was available, she would not receive unemployment benefit. For many housewives, the minimum old age pension might be the first time in their lives they receive their own money as of right. Stang Dahl's ultimate argument is that this system should be extended, by guaranteeing everybody a citizen wage.

Table 1: Three gender policy regimes

Dimension	Male breadwinner model	Separate gender roles model	Individual model
Ideology	Strict division of labour Husband = earner Wife = carer	Strict division of labour Husband = earner Wife = carer	Shared tasks Father = earner/carer Mother = earner/carer
Entitlement	Unequal among spouses	Differentiated by gender role	Equal
Basis of entitlement	The principle of maintenance	Family responsibility	Citizenship or residence
Recipient of benefits	Head of household Supplements for dependants	Men as family providers Women as caregivers	Individual
Taxation	Joint taxation Deductions for dependants	Joint taxation Deductions for dependants for both spouses	Separate taxation Equal tax relief
Employment/wage policies	Priority to men	Priority to men	Aimed at both sexes
Sphere of care	Primarily private	Primarily private	Strong state involvement
Caring work	Unpaid	Paid component to caregivers in the home	Paid component to caregivers in and outside the home

Source: Sainsbury 1999

Diane Sainsbury's argument is quite different. Like so many feminist researchers in the 1990s, she engages in a debate with Gösta Esping-Andersen on the three worlds of welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen 1990). Her project is to show how the Scandinavian, or social-democratic, regime falls apart if policies towards women are placed at the centre of the analysis. For women, there is no unified social-democratic regime, she argues. Since her main aim is to counter Esping-Andersen, she utilises data from the same time period he did, that is, the early 1980s. This is also the period Tove Stang Dahl refers to. As an analytical tool, she outlines three «gender policy regimes» (table 1). This model outlines eight distinct dimensions of gender policy regimes, and indicates three different ideal-types: the male bread-winner model, the separate gender roles model, and the individual earner-carer model.

The male breadwinner model is mainly associated with the UK; none of the Nordic countries bore much resemblance to this model. The Nordic countries are therefore to be found somewhere between the separate gender roles regime and the individual earner-carer regime: Norway resembles most the separate gender roles regime, while Denmark is closest to the individual earner-carer regime. Finland is somewhere in between. Sweden was a

separate gender roles regime in the 1960s, but have since the 1970s shifted towards the individual earner-carer regime. This is Diane Sainsbury's overall conclusion.

Sainsbury's main message in her discussion of Norway, is that in Norway, *«Income maintenance programmes and taxation have privileged the family provider as well as the caregiver»* (Sainsbury 1999:81). More-over, she argues, there was a reluctance in Norway to introduce policies aimed at aiding women to combine motherhood and employment. Norwegian women were therefore encouraged by the structure of taxation and the social security system to be housewives and full-time mothers. The lack of publicly sponsored child-care underlined this policy. Within the taxation system, joint taxation and tax relief made part-time work a quite attractive option for the wife. Part-time employment was prevalent among Norwegian women, and the overall employment rate was lower than in other Scandinavian countries. Most important of all, *the principle of care* is seen as exerting a strong influence on Norwegian policies: Sainsbury emphasises universal child allowances, maternity grants, and tax allowances for working mothers. The existence of what resembled a carer's wage for single persons with caring responsibilities is strongly emphasised, and what she interprets as a 'carer's wage' is the transitional allowance. This «carer's wage» was – and still is – payable to lone mothers, including widows, and to single persons who nursed a close relative. This pension furnished a minimum income for carers, but the rules for integrating benefits, wages and taxes in practice discouraged paid employment while in receipt of this benefit.

In comparing these two studies, the most striking difference is the *structure of the analytical tools*, that is, Stang Dahl's triangle compared with Sainsbury's table. Stang Dahl's figure illustrates flow between different corners of the maintenance system, and the different push and pull mechanisms. Sainsbury's table lists elements of a country's gender policy, and demonstrates three ideal types. The model used in the nation-based study is simple and flexible; the model developed for comparative study is complex and rigorous. In a comparative study, we need to know exactly what we are looking for and what we are comparing. Therefore we need stringent and often complex models as analytical tools. In a nation-based study, we can afford to be more flexible and take in a fuller picture. The different designs may therefore be useful for different purposes: in nation-based studies, issues are raised and we get a feeling for what we should be looking for. In comparative studies, analytical tools are refined.

Another interesting difference between the two studies is Stang Dahl's emphasis on change. She writes as if reporting from an ongoing process, of which the outcome is far from certain. Her article is also a *contribution* to the ongoing debate, in that it ends with a set of reform proposals. Sainsbury's article, on the other hand, is a snapshot of the state of things in the early 1980s. This is a variety of the «black box»-problem that I mentioned earlier: in comparative research, data are typically assembled once, and they refer to one specific time. We rarely have the opportunity to go back and update our data, and even if we do we can rarely do more than register that some changes have happened. The debates and political struggles are not often conceptualised. Neither nation-based nor comparative studies can predict the future. As long as we are discussing relatively limited and concrete issues such as the structure of benefits for working mothers, nation-based studies are however better suited to keep a finger on the pulse of the contemporary debate.

Third, one cannot help but noticing how differently the two studies interpret the benefit arrangement for lone mothers in Norway. Diane Sainsbury discussed them as a carer's wage, and highlighted how the tapering rules discouraged the combination of benefit and paid employment. This she saw as one important aspect of the Norwegian «principle of care» in social policy. For Stang Dahl, there is an unbroken arrow from social insurance to wages. The transitional character of benefits for unmarried and widowed mothers is emphasised, as is the existence of education benefit for this group. For Sainsbury it is a carer's wage, for Stang Dahl it is mainly a tool to encourage employment among women who are not privately provided for. Now the transitional allowance for lone parents is ambiguous in this respect, thus both interpretations are perfectly valid. I still think this disagreement illustrates some inherent problems in both nation-based and comparative research. Nation-based studies are prone to *myopia*; comparative studies are prone to *misunderstandings*. Tove Stang Dahl might have discussed the transitional allowance differently if she had had the acute knowledge we now have about how special this arrangement has been in a European context. The transitional allowance may have been designed to encourage lone mothers to take up paid employment, but at least a benefit of this type existed in Norway. In most other countries, it does not. On the other hand it is quite clear that Diane Sainsbury has not known the background for this benefit, nor the debate about the way it was implemented. She overlooks how the transitional character of the allowance was emphasised when it was introduced, and she also overlooks the other benefits in the same package

that were all geared towards encouraging employment. The nation-based study under-emphasises the importance of this benefit because the researcher thinks it is obvious that such a benefit must exist – the comparative study over-emphasises its importance because the researcher is overwhelmed the benefit exists at all.

A few words on my own work…

Before summing up this discussion, I would like to take a few minutes to reflect upon my own work (Skevik 2001). I have undertaken a comparative and historical study, comparing the development of policies toward lone parents in Norway and the UK over a period of about 50 years. My ambition was to understand the differences and changes in policies toward this group. With this starting point, there were two obvious alternatives to the in-dept study of two countries. One, I could have focused only on Norway and deve-loped even further the historical dimension. Second, I could have dropped the historical dimension and included more countries. There were obviously reasons why I chose to combine the historical and the comparative approach and include only two countries. Perhaps the best way of discussing the advantages of this approach is to compare my conclusions to the conclusions in two other studies focusing on policies towards lone parents, both under-taken by PhD-students. Liv Syltevik at the University of Bergen has discus-sed the historical development of the benefit system in Norway without making cross-national comparisons (Syltevik 1996), while Majella Kilkey at the University of York has compared policies in 22 countries without discussing the historical background in any depth (Kilkey 2001, see also Kilkey and Bradshaw 1999). So what insights have they gained, and what added insight springs from my work that they have missed?

Liv Syltevik's story about the development in Norway between 1964 and 1998 bears the title «from relational to individualised lone motherhood». Her main argument is that in the early 1960s, care was seen as a relation between the mother and the child, where the mother was the one to determine the child's need for full-time care. Caring work was seen as relational because it was characterised by mutuality, where the mother's and the child's needs were deeply intertwined. In the 1990s, care work beyond the child's first year was seen as cut loose from the mother-child relationship. The new assumption is that the child's need for full-time care can be easily deducted from its age, and that society provides sufficient public childcare. The mother can therefore make decisions about paid employment without too much

concern for her caring responsibility – caring work can be done in her spare time.

The crux of Liv Syltevik's argument is the changing perception of the mother and child-relationship. On the background of my comparative work, I have argued that there is more to the story of policy developments in Norway, and that Liv Syltevik has missed some crucial distinctions. The way I have read the 1960s Stortings debates, they do not emphasise the relational character of caring work. There is relatively little talk of the mother and child relation; rather, representatives are emphasising the important work that is done in the households. The concept of "caring work" was not commonly used in the 1960s – it was the *housewife* who was to be respected, and the housewife did a lot more than care for children. Moreover, children were recognised as individuals even in the 1960s, in the sense they had certain independent benefit entitlements. I have suggested there was a break in the way policies toward lone parents were discussed between 1960 and 1998, but not primarily in the way the mother-child relationship was viewed. With regard to children, it was the context that changed. It has always been recognised that children need to be looked after, but in the 1960s, there were no alternatives but parental care. In the 1990s, alternatives existed, and so both the mother and the child could go out to work in the morning, as it is, and re-unite in the afternoon. A more radical change happened to the treatment of unpaid domestic work. This was seen as a valuable contribution to society in the 1960s, in the 1990s, it was seen as non-activity. But there is a difference, I have argued, between emphasising unpaid caring work as «the natural way of life» for women, and emphasising unpaid domestic work as a contribution to society. And there is a difference between seeing a child as the embodiment of maternal love, and seeing the child as a person with individual entitlements. I think Liv Syltevik overlooks these rather subtle distinctions – and I think the reason she overlooks them, is because she did not have access to comparative material. If Norwegian 1960s debates are compared to similar debates in the 1990s, the 1960s do seem care-oriented. If these debates are compared to debates in the same period in the UK, it becomes clear that the UK debates are centred on the mother-and-child-relation in a quite different way. In the British debates, we do find these images of motherhood, with the mother and child deeply intertwined as one unit, bound in mutual dependence almost regardless of the child's age. In Norway, the issues are described in much less sentimental terms, even in the 1960s. It has always been a premise for Norwegian debates that mothers should be expected to take up employment unless the domestic workload

made this unreasonable. This illustrates how comparative research allows for a more sophisticated understanding of the home country. As an added bonus, it also provides a fuller understanding of another country.

Majella Kilkey's work is obviously quite different. She included 22 OECD countries in her study, and focused the discussion on variations in employment and poverty rates. By combining the two dimensions, she creates a two-by-three matrix with six possible outcomes. There are countries in which most lone mothers are in employment, and few are poor whether they work or not. This is the situation in the Nordic countries. Then there are countries where most lone mothers work, and where those who do are financially well of while those who do not work tend to be poor. Here we find both France and Germany. Third, there are countries where the majority works, but where working doesn't help: lone mothers are poor whether or not they are in employment. In this group we have Austria and the US. Moving on to the countries where fewer than 50 per cent of the lone mothers work outside the home, we find the same configurations: one country has low employment rates and low poverty rates. This country is Ireland. In the Netherlands, few lone mothers work, and poverty rates are low for those who are in employment but high for the majority who is not. Finally, countries in group six have low employment rates and high poverty rates: this is the UK, together with Australia and Canada.

This is a very sophisticated discussion, and a more creative way of grouping countries than most similar studies that tend to focus only on one dimension. But if we attempt to understand political differences rather than merely create labels to slap on the countries, this approach is insufficient. The problem is the black box-problem, as discussed above. What sort of policies and processes and cultural peculiarities create these outcomes? This is perhaps even more complicated if we attempt to draw conclusions from outcomes to political processes, such as «lone parents in the UK are poor whether they work or not, that must mean that UK politicians hate lone parents». This type of conclusions is a minefield for misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Moreover, even if it were true that UK politicians hate lone parents, I would want to know why they hate them, and how them manage to translate this sentiment into practical policies without looking like ogres and lose political support. If we want to know about national policies, as is often the aim of this type of studies, we have to study the actual policies rather than outcomes. And if we are going to do that, in any depth, we have to reduce the number of countries.

A combination of a historical and a comparative approach has the advantage of allowing the researcher into the black box of national policy making and policy justification, while at the same time being able to draw comparisons that highlights new aspects of policies in the countries under study. The disadvantage of this approach is that it cannot include more than a very few countries. If too many countries are included, we will end up with research projects that take ten years to conclude and 1000 pages to write up.

Summing up advantages and disadvantages

The way I see it, the main advantage of comparative approaches is that it helps us develop and fine-tune analytical concepts, which allows us to grasp ever new aspects of welfare state formation, development and retrenchment. Doing such studies with respect to only one nation always involves the danger of theoretical myopia – we may mistake national irregularities for general tendencies, or general tendencies for national irregularities. Moreover, if we only study our own nation, we sometimes do not understand what we are seeing. We may be looking at something unique and write it off as trivial – as I have illustrated by Tove Stang Dahl's discussion of Norwegian benefit transfers to lone parents. Comparative studies give a broader perspective, and allow us to pinpoint exactly what distinguishes our own nations from others. The main danger I see with comparative research is that it can very easily be superficial and static. We collect a set of data about a country we know fairly little about, and we interpret these data in the light of our own national background. And while we are busy hammering out concepts of welfare state models, regimes or families, the states in question keep changing. A constant dialogue between nation-based and comparative research helps compensate for the inherent weaknesses in both approaches.

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TONE FLØTTEN[1]

Kapittel 4. Some concerns related to cross-national research on children – A commentary to Anne Skevik's lecture

Anne Skevik presented an excellent discussion of important possibilities and obstacles within cross-national research. Furthermore she provided us with some very good examples on how comparative research can contribute to, and sometimes even be a condition for a broader understanding of social phenomena.

In this commentary I will not critically examine Skevik's lecture. I will rather link elements from the general discussions of comparative research, to a discussion more specifically concerned with comparative research *on children*. I will therefore elaborate some of the points already made, and give some examples of why I find certain factors especially important when we focus on children in our comparative research.

The child as unit of analysis

As mentioned, and as all of you who have conducted comparative research are aware of, our first concern is how to get hold of reliable, comparable data. *What* kind of data we need, will depend upon the questions we want to answer. Skevik has already discussed four different types of cross-national research. To make this commentary short, I will concentrate on some of the problems related to employing comparable data at a micro level.

Comparable, micro level databases do exist, but even if we neglect the general discussions on the quality, reliability and comparability of such cross-national datasets, we run into problems. What I have in mind is the fact that these datasets seldom are developed with the study of *children* as their object. Like national data sets, most comparative data sets have adult persons as their unit of study, and even if we have information on the number of children in households etc, we are bound to deduct from the information on grown ups to say something about the situation of children. And when we do so, we slip right into several problems. First, we cannot automatically assume that the situation of the parents reflect the situation of the children. Second, we cannot assume that children growing up in a family with certain

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characteristics experience the same living conditions in different societies. Even if we possess an extensive in-depth knowledge about the societies we study, we cannot take for granted that we are able to picture the situation of children by merely studying the situation of the families in which they live. Let me take an example:

When we study the economic well being of families, we assume that economic resources are equally shared. If the mother or the father is poor, so is the child. This model of equal distribution within the family is contested (Sen 1983, Pahl 1988, Burgoyne 1990), and our knowledge of different societies tells us that this sometimes is an unreasonable assumption. We would for instance find it more reasonable to assume equal distribution within the family in Norway than in China. We would not automatically assume that a Chinese girl enjoyed the same living conditions as a Chinese boy, so in order to understand child poverty in China we would be bound to make gender specific analyses.

This is, of course, an extreme example, but my point is that even if we have in depth or cultural knowledge, both about the general traits of a society and about the position of children in this society, we cannot take for granted that we know the economic situation of children by merely studying the economic situation of their family. The processes in the family will be a black box in this situation. We do not know to what extent the family are able to protect the child from the effects of poverty, and we do not know how this vary within and between nations. Consequently, in order to make good comparative research on children we need to collect data that gives us specific information about the situation of children, and this implies that children more often must be the unit of analysis as well as the subjects of data collection.

The importance of in-depth knowledge

If we assume that we have full information of the distribution within the family, and even if we assume that we have fully comparable data, comparisons are still difficult without extensive use of in-depth knowledge. To take another example from poverty research: Thanks to cross national datasets like the European Household Panel, LIS and LES we have large amounts of data on economic situation, situation in the labor market and on general living conditions of Europeans. To a certain extent these data can be used to tell us something about the situation of children, and they are for instance used to calculate rates of child poverty across Europe

(www.lisweb.ceps.lu/keyfigures/povertytable.htm). In order to assure comparability, the same scales of equivalence are used in all countries when these poverty rates are calculated. This means that we take for granted that the relative cost of a child in Greece is the same as the relative cost of a child in Sweden. There are reasons to question whether or not this actually gives the right picture of poverty among children. As shown in the figure below (figure 1), the child poverty rate is very sensitive for the way we calculate economies of scales. Because of this, it is of great importance to discuss what kind of equivalence scales that would give "the right" comparative picture of child poverty.

Figure 1: The effect of equivalence scales on child poverty.[2]
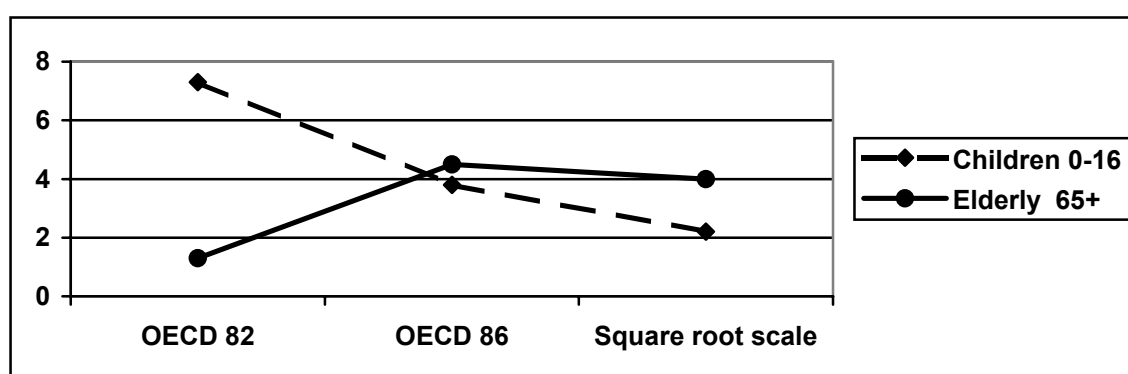
Source: Level of living studies, Norway 1998, the author's calculation.

In my current research-project I compare poverty in Norway and Estonia, countries with quite different welfare levels. The Estonians have rejected the common scales of equivalence as the OECD-scale, because their calculations show that in this country the economies of scales are very small (Kutsar and Trumm 1999). Consequently, the child poverty rates we get when we use the scale the Estonians have calculated are much larger than the rates we get if we use the OECD-scale. This is another example on how comparability not only depends on the availability of comparable data, but also on how we use in depth knowledge about different countries in order to make the «correct» comparisons. The best, and most common way to assure this is, of course, to cooperate with researchers from other countries.

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[2] The OECD82 scale assigns the weights 1 to the first adult, 0.7 to all other adults above 16 years of age and 0.5 to children below 16. The OECD86 scale assigns the weights 1 to the first adult of the household, 0.5 to all other household members above 14 years of age, and 0.3 to children below 14. When employing the square-root scale the total income of the household is divided on the square root of the household size. For further information on scales of equivalence, see Atkinson et.al. 1995.

Subjective or objective data

Our next problem in order to depict the situation of children is to decide whether we shall base our study on subjective or objective data. This is again dependent upon the subject of our study and the questions we want to answer, but let's say that we are interested in a comparison of children's living conditions. We are for instance interested in finding a best practice or to get «lessons from abroad», as Skevik referred to.

Besides studying child-oriented policy, taxes and benefits we need information on a diversity of factors important to understand children's living conditions. This could be demographic factors, information about the educational system, the health care system, about labor supply, about the labor force participation of parents, and about the resources available in the family and so on. The question is to what extent such objective fact gives sufficient information on children's living conditions. In addition we might like to know *how children actually experience their own situation*. Children and their parents could very well experience the same objective fact differently, and children in different countries could very well experience it differently, too.

The question is then whether we should rely our analyses and understanding on the objective facts or the subjective perceptions, especially if we for instance want to learn lessons from abroad in order to respond to children's poor living conditions.

I do not have any examples from comparative research on children to substantiate this argument, but let me illustrate how we can get very different picture of one living condition-indicator in two countries, dependent upon the type of indicator we chose to use. The example is how Estonians and Norwegians subjectively evaluate their space of living, compared with objective calculations on how spacious their dwellings actually are. If we rely on subjective reports the difference in those reporting to live in close quarters are quite small in the two countries (figure 2). If we, on the other hand look at how people actually live, the picture is completely different. And the relation between the subjective and the objective variable is very interesting. While only half as many as those who report to live in close quarters in Norway actually do so, the situation is the other way around in Estonia. Twice as many as those who report to live in close quarters are calculated to do so.

This example is not child specific, but it clearly illustrates how subjective and objective information can give divergent results, and how the results can diverge in different settings.

Figure 2: Share of people in Norway (1998) and Estonia (1999) who report to live in close quarters compared to share of people who are calculated to live in close quarters.
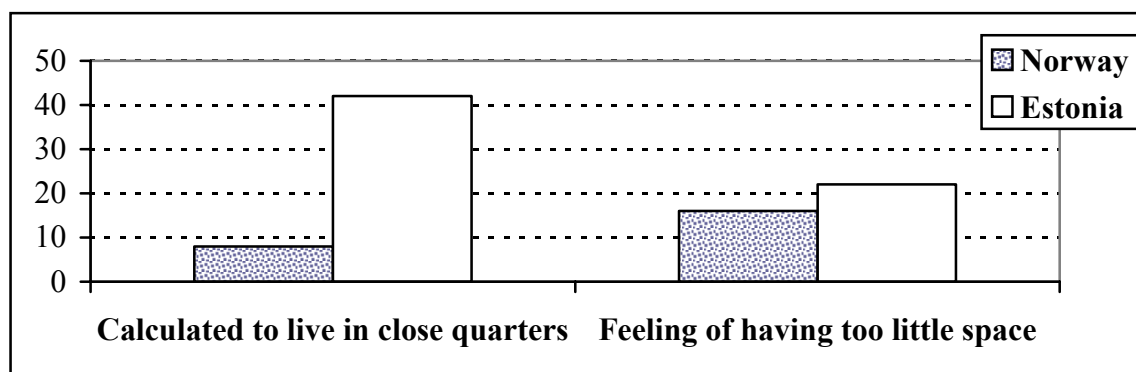
Source: Level of living study of Norway 1998 and level of living study from Estonia 1999 (Norbalt), author's calculations.

Combination of micro and macro data and the need for dynamic designs

The final remark I will make is also a variant of the black box problem. A few years ago I did a minor analysis of child poverty in Norway (Fløtten 1999). I did only have general surveys of living conditions to rely on in this analysis, and they only gave information about the objective living conditions of the families in which the children lived. Since I in addition wanted to discuss what it *meant* for a child to live in a poor family, I had to look to international research. Studies from abroad could for instance tell that poor children were more likely to die within their first year of living, due to poorer medical support for poor mothers. Furthermore, poor children were more likely to be depressed, to have deviant behavior, to perform poorly at school (if they went to school at all), to reproduce poverty and so on. The problem was that these findings and conclusions were not transferable to Norway. The studies I referred to were mainly American, and there are good reasons to assume that the extensive Norwegian welfare arrangements will counteract many of these negative consequences of poverty.

Again, the importance of in-depth knowledge is obvious, and the need to combine micro and macro data in order to understand the consequences of child poverty in different nations. We do have analyses as the one made by Katja Forssen (figure 3) that indicates the importance of public transfers on

child well-being, but as Skevik said, we do not know how the inputs and outputs are linked, or in what way social benefits influence behavior and outcome. I do, however, hope that when Skevik stressed that we are at risk of loosing sight of processes in comparative research she did not mean that comparative research are bound to be static. If so was the case, this would be very unfortunate for our research on children. Very often we want to study what effect certain childhood experiences have for the grown up person, and if we were unable to do dynamic comparative research we would loose important sources of information. Luckily, the possibility to conduct longi-tudinal comparative research is increasing, as comparable panel sets are developed.

Figure 3: Child poverty in selected countries before and after public transfers.
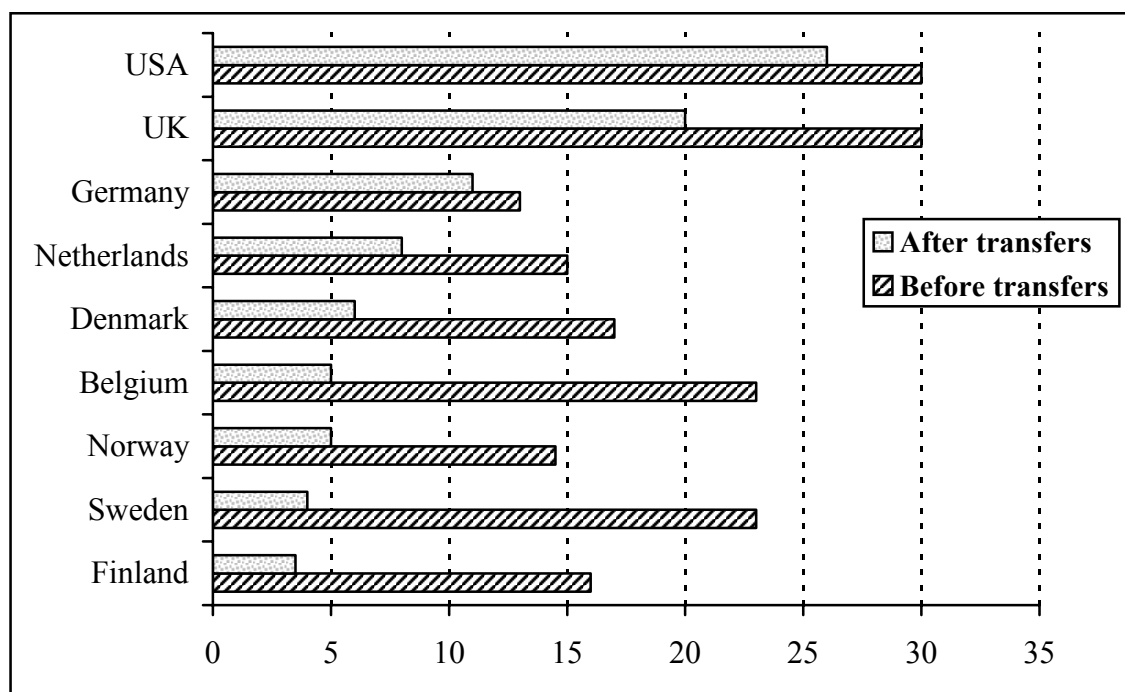
Source: Forssén 1998

Conclusion

To sum up, I believe that in order to conduct cross national research on children, we need to assure that we do not only have in-depth or cultural knowledge about general traits of a society, but that we in addition possess *in depth knowledge of the situation of children in the societies we study.* What is their position in the society, within the family, in different geographical areas, and in different classes or ethnic groups? This knowledge is probably not available unless we collect data with the children as a unit, unless we get hold of both subjective and objective data about the child, and unless we

combine micro and macro information. In addition, the construction of comparable panel data sets makes it possible to look into the black box between inputs from social policy and outputs as children's living conditions, and will hopefully be an important tool in future cross national research on children.

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KOEN VLEMINCKX[1]

Kapittel 5. Eliminating poverty and social exclusion among children in Europe: The need to set up a specific monitoring program

Introduction

The issue of child poverty has recently been put on the agenda by policy makers in several European countries. In some countries, the renewed interest of policy makers for the subject can be explained by the fact that child poverty levels had reached intolerable levels. This was clearly the case in Britain, where child poverty had soared in the recent decades and had reached a level where one child out of three grows up in poverty. But in recent years there was also increasing scientific evidence that children who grow up in poverty have significantly less chance to successfully complete their education and enter a stable professional career, which would allow them to escape poverty and social exclusion. Such processes explain how poverty and social exclusion can be reproduced from generation to generation.

Addressing child poverty and its consequences is therefore an effective way of preventing a wide array of social problems and assuring that children in our societies can grow up to become creative and productive individuals that can function well in our knowledge societies. Therefore, the fight against child poverty is a key element in any efficient anti-poverty strategy. As more and more European policy makers are becoming aware of this fact, the issue of child poverty is being put on national and European policy agendas.

Still, the challenge is considerable. Children in the European Union run an above average income poverty risk compared to adults. According to Eurostat figures for 1996, 21 % of all children in the European Union lived in a low-income household, whereas only 16 % of adults were in the same position (Mejer, 2000). However, there is considerable variation among member states. Still according to Eurostat, child poverty rates within the EU range from 25 % in the UK to less than 5 % in Denmark.

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In this paper, we will describe recent European policy developments on the subject of child poverty and will focus on the issue of monitoring and mapping the extent and characteristics of poverty and social exclusion among children in Europe.

Targeting child poverty in Europe: recent developments

National governments

> Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty, and it will take a generation. It is a 20-year mission, but I believe it can be done...

With these words, made during a keynote speech in March 1999, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair set out a mission to halve child poverty by 2010 and to end it by 2020. At first the reactions were mixed, as many activists had heard sweeping promises before and many feared that the deadline was an excuse for not doing more immediately. However, before the end of that year, the British government unveiled a package of measures aiming to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2004.

The British government may have been inspired by a similar declaration made by the Canadian House of Commons in 1989, which pledged to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. However, the main source of inspiration was probably the fact that Britain's child poverty rate had tripled over the last two decades, while it remained stable in other industrial nations. Currently Britain has more children living in poverty than any other country in the European Union, according to Gordon Brown, chancellor of the British government, a «scar on the soul of Britain».

In contrast to the Canadian case, which failed to reach its target, the British government immediately recognised the necessity of identifying clear indicators in order to be able to track the progress made by their policies on poverty and social exclusion among children. Furthermore, clear policy targets were identified on the basis of the selected indicators.

Other European governments also put the issue of child poverty on their policy agendas. In 1997, the Irish government adopted a National Anti-Poverty Strategy, including a global poverty reduction target to be achieved by 2007. This target was modified in 1999 to aim at a greater reduction than initially envisaged, while at the same time child poverty was recognised as a major challenge. Portugal is the only other European Union Member State that has even been more ambitious than the United Kingdom, by committing itself to eradicating child poverty before 2010.

The European Union

These developments seem to have created the momentum needed to make real progress on a European level. In February 2000, the European Commission proposed its contribution to the Lisbon European Council, *An agenda of economic and social renewal for Europe*. In this document the Commission suggested to introduce a set of anti-poverty targets on a European level. They proposed a European commitment to «to reduce the number of people living below the poverty line from 18 % today to 15 % in 2005 and 10% in 2010 and halve child poverty by 2010» (DOC/OO/7, 28/02/2000). Around the same time, the Belgian and British Prime Ministers issued a joint appeal in preparation of the Lisbon European Council, requesting other EU governments to consider the establishment of «benchmarks and procedures» for the objective of «tackling the complex causes of social exclusion and poverty based on member states' co-operation in comparing policies and learning lessons from each other» (United Kingdom-Belgium Joint Statement on the Preparation for the Lisbon Special European Council, 23 February 2000).

A month later the Lisbon Council did indeed call for steps to make «a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by setting adequate targets to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year 2000». Thus, the Lisbon Council set in motion a process that entails great promises for the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Although the conclusions of the Lisbon Council do not mention a child poverty reduction target, or any other poverty reduction target, it mentions that children are one of the specific groups «singled out for concern».

In December 2000, the Nice Council specified that the Open Method of Coordination was the best instrument to fight poverty and social exclusion. The Open method of Coordination tries to establish common objectives, while recognising that the relevant policies remain the responsibility of the member states. The Council had clearly been inspired by the success of the so-called Luxembourg process on employment, which also relies on the Open Method of Coordination. The Luxembourg process managed to create a strong momentum for the implementation of a European Employment Strategy by forcing the EU governments to make their own employment strategies public and to subject them to a formal evaluation by European agencies. The discussion of these National Action Plans on Employment and the elaboration of European Guidelines for Employment Policies played an important role in improving both the quantity and the quality of employment.

The Nice Council decided that the member states should implement similar two-year action plans for combating poverty and social exclusion. The member states will present these National Action Plans on Social Inclusion to the Commission and will report on the progress made. The Council also recognised that the Open Method of Coordination required the development of commonly agreed and defined benchmarks on poverty and social exclusion for the EU.

National Action Plans on Social Inclusion

After the Nice Council, governments set out to prepare National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, which were submitted to the European Commission by June 2001. In these reports, each government assessed both the level and characteristics of poverty and social exclusion in their country, described the policies they had implemented so far in order to deal with these problems, as well as their aspirations and policies for the future. On the basis of these National Action Plans and a bilateral meeting with member states, the Commission drafted a draft report, which constituted the basis for the *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* of the Council and the Commission, which was adopted by the Employment and Social Affairs Council on December 3rd and submitted to the Laeken Council on December 14th 2001. It was the first time that the European Union endorses a policy document on poverty and social exclusion.

Since children were mentioned in the Lisbon declaration as one of the specific group at risk, several National Action Plans on Social Inclusion submitted in 2001 addressed the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children. The British, Irish and Portuguese governments made child poverty into a key focus of their National Action Plans, while the Belgian and the French government specifically mentioned children from low-income families as a group of particular concern. Most other European governments addressed children's needs to some extent in their National Action Plans, usually highlighting categories of children that are particularly at risk, such as disabled children or children from ethnic minorities.

Countering educational disadvantage was a concern expressed in most National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, as children from poor back-grounds and vulnerable groups are often particularly at risk of missing out in this regard. Several governments emphasized the development of more universal high quality early childhood education and support systems with particular emphasis on issues of access, adequacy and affordability for

children from disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups. The Netherlands' emphasis on better identification of disadvantage and the offer of intensive language and general development programmes at playschool and during the first two years of primary school for these children is part of a comprehensive approach to educational disadvantage. There is also an emphasis in several member states, for example Greece, Netherlands and the UK, on the early identification of children with particular learning, speech and development difficulties and the development of tailor made supports.

Portugal announced that it will try to ensure that all socially excluded children and youths will be individually approached by the local social services within three months with a view to their re-integration in school, while it affirmed its aim to eradicate child poverty by the end of the decade. The UK also reconfirmed its target of eradicating child poverty within twenty years.

Commonly Agreed Indicators for Social Inclusion

A second major result of the so-called Lisbon process is the development of a Common set of EU indicators on poverty and social exclusion. In order to monitor the policies set out in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, EU member states had already been invited to develop, at national level, indicators and other monitoring mechanisms capable of measuring progress in regard to each of the specified objectives. In March 2001, the Stockholm Council received a mandate to improve the follow-up in this domain by reaching an agreement on a system of indicators on social inclusion by the end of 2001. The indicators should enable a better description of the situation in the various Member States and a better understanding of the monitored trends.

The proposal for a system of 18 Commonly Agreed Indicators for Social Inclusion was drafted by the Social Protection Committee and its technical Sub-Group on Social Indicators and submitted to the Employment and Social Affairs Council in December 2001. The Social Affairs Council agreed that these indicators would be included in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion starting in 2003.

The Commonly Agreed System of EU Indicators for Social Inclusion (see annex 1) consists of indicators that address social outcomes rather than the means by which they are achieved. They do not represent an attempt to operationalise the concept of 'social inclusion', but instead reflect a «range of concerns considered to be important in setting the European Social

Agenda» (Atkinson, 2002). The system of indicators covers four domains: financial poverty, employment, health and education. Although there no proposal for commonly agreed indicators on housing, the member states have been requested to use their own indicators to report on adequate housing, housing costs and homelessness in their National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. Although there was broad agreement about the list of concerns to be covered, the portfolio of indicators needed to be balanced. Therefore the Sub-Group on Social Indicators underlined in its proposal the importance of treating them as a whole and not merely a collection of individual indicators.

The selected indicators were prioritised by the identification of three separate indicator levels. This was mainly done in order to avoid the loss of transparency by including too many indicators (Atkinson, 2002). 'Level 1' indicators are considered to be lead indicators for the principal dimensions. 'Level 2' indicators are indicators that support these lead indicators and that describe other dimensions of the challenge. 'Level 3' indicators can be selected by the member states and can reflect the specific situation in their country and the importance they give to certain domains. These 'level 3' indicators can provide an opportunity for the development of new indicators and can become a source for future 'level 1' and 'level 2' indicators (Atkinson et al, 2002).

There are no specific indicators on child poverty, although it is suggested to disaggregate the «low income rate after transfers» for various age groups, including those younger than 18. Furthermore, some indicators, such as the ones on «early school leavers not in further education or training» and on «persons with low educational attainment» can help governments focus on educational disadvantages related to poverty. Otherwise the issue of child poverty is completely absent from this commonly agreed system of indicators. The Sub-Group on Social Indicators only suggested that «indicators of family distress, such as single parenthood or placements of children should be considered as valuable additions to the current set of indicators at a later stage.» A group of academics consulted by the Belgian presidency during the preparation of the commonly agreed system, also suggested in their report that countries that attach national importance to the reduction of child poverty might consider adding relevant 'level 3' indicators (Atkinson et al., 2002).

Some of the first National Action Plans on Social Inclusion already include indicators on child poverty and well-being. France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the U.K. included a low-income rate for children, and France, Ireland, Italy, and the U.K. referred to the percentage of children in jobless

households. The Finnish National Action Plan had included the percentage of children subject to child protection.

The main reason why specific child poverty indicators are not part of the Common System of EU Indicators on Social Inclusion is probably the fact that the Sub-Group on Social Indicators tried to limit the total number of indicators to be included in the system. Furthermore the selection of these indicators was of course to a large extent a political balancing act. The selected indicators had to receive the general support of the various member states as a balanced presentation of European interests. There are indications that the issue of child poverty might have been sufficiently controversial to prevent relevant indicators from being included in the system of indicators.

Programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion

That the issue of child poverty was controversial can be concluded from the Co-decision Procedure for the establishment of the *Programme of Community Action to Encourage Cooperation Between Member States to Combat Social Exclusion* (COM(2000) 368–2000/0157(COD)). Although child poverty was not specifically referred to in the original proposal, the European Parliament tried to insert a deadline for halving child poverty within the European Union, as well as various other child-related issues, as an amendment in its position at first reading on the proposal accepted in November 2000. However, the Council did not accept these amendments and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament no longer mentioned the target in its recommendation for the second reading presented in April 2001 (PE 300.483). The European Parliament gave priority to adopting the programme as fast as possible, so it could be implemented before the end of 2001 (Euronet, 2002).

The programme started on 1 January 2002 and ends on 31 December 2005. It is expected to encourage the policy-oriented cooperation between policy makers, social partners, social ngo's, scientists and the socially excluded. In particular the programme is intended to contribute in three ways. These are: first, by improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators; secondly, by organizing exchanges on policies which are implemented and promoting mutual learning in the context of national action plans; and, thirdly, by developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively, and to promote innovative approaches.

Future developments

There are no clear plans for further establishing the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children on the European agenda. However, there is clear room for improvement.

One of the most important problems is the fact that the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion do not systematically address children, although children were one of the specific groups singled out for concern. It is therefore clear that the Commission should issue clearer instructions on the incorporation of children into the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion in the future.

Furthermore, a monitoring programme should be started on the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. Such a monitoring programme has already been implemented in the United Kingdom within the context of the British government's commitment to eradicate poverty by 2020. Indicators of child poverty and social exclusion figure prominently in the yearly report produced by the British Department for Work and Pensions in its annual report *Opportunity for All* and in its annual report on *Households Below Average Income*. Since a couple of years the United States government has a similar monitoring process. Every year the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics publishes key national indicators on the well-being of children in the United States.

The implementation of a European monitoring programme can make the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children visible to both policy makers and the general public. Such a monitoring programme should allow those involved to identify both the extent and the characteristics of poverty and the social exclusion among children in the European Union. For instance, the publication of an annual report on child well-being in the member states, which compares member states' records and their progress over time would be an important step forward (UNICEF-ICDC, 2000).

In the future, such a monitoring report would allow governments to set out targets for policies against child poverty and the exclusion of children. However, a monitoring programme in itself would already be beneficial, as it would profoundly improve our knowledge about poverty and social exclusion among children within the European Union and inform governments about needs and policy gaps that need to be addressed.

Monitoring Child Poverty and Social Exclusion

As poverty and exclusion of children are to a large extent linked to the poverty and exclusion of their parents, one might question the need for setting up a separate monitoring programme on the subject of poverty and social exclusion among children. It is true that in the current conceptions and operationalisations of poverty and social exclusion, the majority of its components are tied to the socio-economic and cultural status of adults. However, there are some clear arguments to pay particular attention to poverty and social exclusion among children. First of all, children are a group that is particularly vulnerable for poverty and social exclusion. Since they largely depend on adults for their care, many of the causes of poverty and social exclusion are completely beyond the control of children and rarely alterable by children. At the same time they are especially vulnerable to the effects of poverty and social exclusion because their physical, mental, emotional and social capacities are still evolving.

Although children have little effect on whether they or their families are poor or socially excluded, the experience of poverty and social exclusion can have important effects on how children interact with their peers and how children perceive themselves relative to their peers (Aber et al. 2002). Central to the experiences of children facing poverty and social exclusion is a sense of stigma and shame (Euronet, 2002). Children tend to describe their feelings at being set apart from others as «sad», «unhappy», «embarrassed» or «ashamed». Such feelings can be reinforced in a range of direct and indirect ways, for instance by subtle dress codes, fostered by advertisers, which mark out children unable to wear fashionable items. By parents, who may have low aspirations for their children, or may even be tempted to blame their poverty on their children. By schools, who may pay less attention to children who are seen as less deserving or less likely to achieve (Euronet, 2002).

Indicators for poverty and social exclusion among children

Indicators of poverty and social exclusion should be developed further at EU and Member State level, in order to focus more clearly on the position of children. In this section we will try to establish what kind of indicators should be considered for inclusion in such a monitoring programme. An important example for the construction of a system for the monitoring of poverty and social exclusion among children is the British system, which was set up as a result of the commitment made by the British government.

The British government published the first annual *Opportunity for All* report in 1999. At that time the report identified 30 indicators, including 13 specific indicators for children and young people. Two more indicators on children and young people were added at a later stage and currently the British government tracks its progress against 15 indicators (see annex 2). These indicators are linked to policy targets, such as the eradication of child poverty by 2002.

Low Income

The number of children living in household with a low income is generally considered to be a key indicator for child poverty and well-being. A wide range of studies in various countries, have shown that low income is associated with low performance of children for wide range of indicators on child well-being. Children that grow up in low-income families are more likely to have difficulties at school, are more likely to become teen parents, and as adults, are more likely to earn less and be unemployed more frequently.

One of the main indicators selected for the British system is the number of children living in household with a low income, defined as 60 per cent of the median. This low-income rate serves as the basis for the main policy target to reduce child poverty by at least a quarter by 2004. Sixty per cent of the median equivalent household income is currently also the relative income poverty line used by Eurostat, the statistical agency of the European Union. However, there are two important differences. First of all, the British low-income indicator is measured after housing costs (the poverty figures after housing costs are higher than before housing costs in Britain). Secondly, the British measure uses a different equivalence scale than Eurostat.

Equivalence scales are weights given to various family members, in particular children, in order to correct household income levels for economies of scale while calculating low-income indicators. Eurostat currently uses the modified OECD scale, which is widely used for cross-national comparisons on low-income. The modified OECD scale gives a weight of 1.0 to the first adult in the household, 0.5 to each subsequent adult and 0.3 to every child in the household. The *Opportunities for All* report uses the McClements scales, which are mainly used in Britain and are more complex because they take various family and individual characteristics into account. The selection of equivalence scales is of particular importance for the low-income rates for children. A lower weight assigned to children will produce lower low-income rates for children.

In the second *Opportunities For All Report* (2001) three «headline indicators» were selected, which all referred to low-income. As the 60% cut-off is essentially arbitrary, the report also presented the proportion of children living in households with relative low incomes at 50% and 70% of the median. There was now also a focus on the proportion of children living in households with low incomes in an absolute sense. An 'absolute' low-income line was introduced, which is basically a low-income line held fixed in real terms, which provides a more constant benchmark line. The relative income poverty line is often experienced as a «moving target» as economic growth and even policies themselves can cause the median income to rise, which will increase the relative poverty line as well. An 'absolute' low-income benchmark allows policy makers to identify the situation where the incomes of the poor are rising in real terms but lagging behind the average in society.

An additional indicator selected in the second annual report (2001) was the proportion of children living in households with persistent low incomes. This measures the proportion of children living in households with relative low incomes over a period of several years. Some consider this measure to be more robust. Berthoud (2001), for instance, suggests that «some of the short-term poverty recorded by surveys may actually be measurement error. If recorded income was lower one year than the years before and after, it is possible that one of the household members failed to mention a source of income that was recorded in other interviews.» It is true that the repeated collection of information from individuals can increase the reliability of the results, although there is no reliable evidence of the scale of this problem. However, the measurement of persistent low-income rates might also persuade policy makers to shift their concern toward those that are on low-income during several consecutive years and to pay less attention to helping those that are on low-income for a shorter period of time. The long-term effects of a relatively short experience of low income might be under-estimated, especially with regard to children. Yet, this is an issue of the interpretation of indicators and their policy implications. A longitudinal low-income rate is beyond doubt a valuable asset for any comprehensive set of indicators on poverty and social exclusion among children.

Recently, the British set of indicators on low income has received some further relevant critique. Osberg (2002) noticed that the current set of indicators fails to reflect the depth of poverty or 'poverty intensity'. This is usually measured by the so-called «poverty gap», this is the shortfall of income below the poverty line. The poverty gap captures all changes in income in poor households and, thus, gives a clearer picture of the effects of

policies than the «head-count» rate. The head-count rate might also lead policy makers to focus on groups whose income is situated just above the poverty line, as an easy way to reduce the poverty rate. Campaign 2000 in Canada is currently calling on their government to lay the foundation for a National Plan of Action for Children by committing, among other priorities, to a 50 % reduction in the level as well as the depth of child poverty over the next five years.

Non-monetary indicators

Poverty and social exclusion are complex phenomena that cannot be captured in a single measure. What is of concern for the quality of children's lives and opportunities is not low family incomes in themselves, but their consequences (Piachaud, 2001). The British *Opportunity for All* reports refer to various non-monetary indicators (see annex 2). These indicators cover four principal dimensions:

1. Economic security;
2. Educational attainment;
3. Quality of life (housing, health), and
4. Young adults;

An indicator referring to the number of children in workless households provides additional information on economic insecurity, next to the low-income rates mentioned in the previous sections. One indicator measures housing standards of families with children. Furthermore, the number of teenage conceptions and the number of teenage parents in education and employment are tracked. No less than 7 indicators track various aspects of educational quality and attainment, while another 4 indicators track the health status of children and young people.

One could question if they should all be considered as solid 'benchmark' indicators for the eradication of poverty, but they do provide additional information on the characteristics of poverty and social exclusion among children. Furthermore, they can directly capture changing societal living standards and convey the implications in concrete terms, for what is seen as poverty, to a broader audience.

An interesting possibility is the combination of a low-income rate with indicators for material deprivation. Such a measure has already been implemented in Ireland, where 'consistent poverty', which combines 60% of average income and indicators of material deprivation, is the main bench-

mark for the Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Harker (2001) currently suggests that the British government adopts such a 'consistent poverty' benchmark, which would combine relative income poverty and whether people can afford essentials.

Non-European examples for monitoring poverty and social exclusion among children

A good source of inspiration for non-monetary indicators on poverty and social exclusion among children is the US Government's report *America's Children Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, which is the result of a collaborative effort by 20 federal agencies (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002). It is a compendium of indicators covering various domains: economic security, health, education and behavioural and social environment (see annex 3). Each year the report presents «special feature» indicators that highlight a particular issue related to child poverty and well-being. In 2000, an indicator on the knowledge and skills of beginning kindergartners was included, as well as the number of children involved in volunteer activities. In 2001, the number of children with asthma and an indicator of youth employment while in school were presented.

In 2002, Aber, Thompson and Brooks-Gunn (2002) drafted a study on possible indicators for the exclusion of children in the United States. They consulted European and US sources on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of social exclusion, as well as US sources with nationally representative data on child well-being, in order to derive a list of potential indicators on the social exclusion of children (see annex 4). They focussed on indicators that reflect what is valued as necessary, normative for, or desirable for positive child development. They identified eight domains that would encompass these indicators of children's social exclusion (Aber et al, 2002):

1. *Basic Living*: Indicators on the ability of families with children for the consumption of goods and services that are viewed by the "majority culture" as necessary for participation in the essential activities of these societies.

2. *Family Economic Participation*: Indicators that are considered crucial indicators of family disadvantage.

3. *Housing*: Indicators on the housing situation of families with children.

4. *Health*: Indicators on the ability of families with children to procure adequate physical, dental, and mental care.

5. *Education*: Indicators on both the active and passive exclusion of children from education.

6. *Public Space*: Indicators of social exclusion at the neighbourhood level.

7. *Social Participation*: Indicators on the quality of children's interactions with significant others, their neighbourhoods, and society as a whole.

8. *Subjective Expression of Exclusion*: Indicators focusing on children's experience of social exclusion.

Interestingly, Aber et al. (2002) also sorted the potential indicators into sub-domains, which represent a kind of hierarchy of indicators: «those that refer to necessary components of exclusion/inclusion, those that are normative for this society, and those that are desirable for members of this society» (Aber et al., 2001). This can be clarified with the example of the basic living domain. Food security represents a 'necessary' component of economic security, new clothing a 'normative' component, and having a colour TV is presented as a 'desirable' component of economic security.

The selected indicators on children's social exclusion were presented at a conference on the subject of «Social Exclusion and Children», convened by the Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy in May 2001. During the conference they received some interesting comments. Robert Haveman suggested distinguishing between 'supply' indicators and 'demand' indicators. 'Supply' indicators would refer to 'what society needs to do', while 'demand' indicators refer to 'involuntary and voluntary sources of exclusion'. Supply indicators would for instance refer to the prevalence of child mental health services or the availability of adequate housing, while demand indicators would to physical disability or mental illness (involuntary) and truancy from school (voluntary). This suggestion is quite relevant, especially within the context of current endeavours to set policy targets on the basis of indicators. Supply indicators are clearly suitable for a direct approach to policy benchmarking, while demand indicators are more indirect.

During the same conference John Hills' suggested to distinguish between two domains instead of eight: 'material needs of children' and indicators related to 'children's future flourishing'. This latter domain would encompass social interaction, the development of self-determination, and barriers to flourishing, e.g. those derived from safety or health concerns.

Data quality and availability

A key issue is, however, the availability and quality of data on which one which to base our indicators and benchmarks. The Sub-Group on Social Indicators concluded that "despite clear improvements in the EU data bases over recent years, there is still too little comparable data available, and much of it is not timely. In order to ensure the monitoring of the social inclusion process in its multi-dimensionality the development of the statistical capacity is crucial, while making full use of the data currently available" (Indicators Sub-Group, 2000).

Most of the Common EU Indicators on Social Inclusion are based on the European Community Household Panel (10) and the European Labour Force Survey (7), both coordinated by Eurostat, the Statistical Agency of the European Commission. Many of the indicators (18) suggested by Aber et al. (2002) can also be calculated on the basis of the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). However, in 2003 a new statistical instrument will replace the ECHP: the European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). The EU-SILC will provide a wide range of information concerning the living conditions of European citizens and information for monitoring social exclusion. The EU-SILC will combine a new survey with data coming from various national sources, both registers and surveys. The EU-SILC will both have cross-sectional part as well as a longitudinal part, but as the EU-SILC will be in full operation as from 2003 and the final round of the ECHP was conducted in 2001, there will be a long period during which no recent longitudinal data will be available for the EU member states.

The main priority of the EU-SILC is to improve the timeliness with which the data are presented. Time lags are an important aspect of the monitoring process and are even more crucial for policy benchmarking. A lesson to be learned from the recent British benchmarking experience is that there is often a significant time lag effect between policy announcement, implementation and demonstrable impact in statistical terms (Hills, 2001). According to Harker (2001) few indicators were up-to-date when the British Government first published its «Opportunities for all» report in 1999.

> Only three of the 32 indicators contained in the report were based on up-to-date data. One in four of the indicators relied on data that was three or more years out-of-date. Some of the data was entirely absent- for five of the indicators there was no existing baseline data. (Harker, 2001).

This is bound to be even more problematic in a European or any other cross-national perspective. The ECHP is affected by particularly long time-lags. For instance, the ECHP wave that became available in June 2001 refers to the year 1997. The most recent data made available by the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), an international survey collection created by an international academic network, refers to 1999, but only for a limited number of countries. The previous LIS wave of data, which covers most OECD countries, also refers to 1997. Most international surveys and survey collections are affected by similar time-lags. That these time-lags can be problematic can be easily illustrated. In June 2000, UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre published a report card on *Child Poverty in Rich Nations*, which showed that Britain had the highest child poverty rate in the European Union. The British government quickly replied that «the figures are outdated and measures are already in place to tackle the problem». They were correct, as there was a time-gap of three years, which is in fact not so bad for a major international study, because the report published in 2000, used indicators based on LIS data for 1997.

Except for the problem of time-lags, there is a real challenge to Eurostat and other statistical agencies to improve their statistical capacity so that critical data gaps can be closed. In its conclusions, the Laeken Council stressed "the need to reinforce the statistical machinery" with regard to the monitoring of poverty and social exclusion in general. But there is also specific need to provide more comprehensive and consistent information on the condition and progress of children. The EU-SILC has a very strong potential to achieve this. Especially its ability to integrate data from best national sources will improve our capacity to create European indicators on poverty and social exclusion among children. Other data sources collected or coordinated by Eurostat are already an important potential source of information on children. Another promising development is the fact that time use surveys, which are also a useful source for information on the quality of children' lives, will soon become available for approximately two thirds of EU member states. However, there are also some clear data gaps, such as precarious housing. Furthermore, investments should be made to include collect data on the situation of hard-to-reach groups (such as the homeless, travellers, and those living in institutions).

Conclusions

In recent years some real progress has been made in putting against poverty and social exclusion on the political agenda. Since the Lisbon process was

set in motion in 1999, it has already resulted in some major, path-breaking policy results. All the EU Member States had to develop a national strategy against poverty and social inclusion, which were presented to the European Commission and other Member States for peer review and which are available to the general public. On the basis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion the EU made a Joint Report on Social Inclusion. It was the first time that the European Union endorses a policy document on poverty and social exclusion.

Another promising result of the Lisbon process was the development of a Common set of EU indicators on poverty and social exclusion. In the future these indicators will be incorporated by each Member State in their National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and in the European Union's Joint Report on Social Inclusion. They will serve as a basis for comparing the progress made by EU Member States in their fight against poverty and social exclusion. They will not only provide an good tool for policy makers to develop their policies, but will also provide anti-poverty activists with a formal basis to confront governments with their shortcomings in this important policy domain.

Unfortunately, the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion lack a systematic approach to the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children, even though children were one of the groups singled out for concern. The Common System of EU Indicators on Social Inclusion lack specific indicators on poverty and social exclusion among children. We hope that governments will introduce indicators on child poverty and social exclusion as 'level 3' indicators in their National Action Plans, which could in time be promoted to a 'level 2' or even 'level 1', so that will have to be produced by all the EU Member States.

However, it would be a good idea to set up a Eurostat task force for the measurement of the well-being of children, so that the various sources currently available can be evaluated for this purpose and for data gaps at both the national and European level to be identified. Within such a task force the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children should receive particular attention. This task force could set up a system to monitor poverty and social exclusion among children in the EU member states. Such a monitoring system would enhance our knowledge about the well-being of children in the European Union and could serve as a basis for developing formal EU indicators and policy targets.

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Appendix 1. Commonly Agreed System of EU Indicators for Social Inclusion.

Primary Indicators

1. Low income rate after transfers with low-income threshold set at 60% of median income (with breakdowns by gender, age, most frequent activity status, household type and tenure status; as illustrative examples, the values for typical households);

2. Distribution of income (income quintile ratio)

3. Persistence of low income

4. Median low-income gap

5. Regional cohesion

6. Long term unemployment rate

7. People living in jobless households (0-65)

8. Early school leavers not in further education or training

9. Life expectancy at birth

10. Self perceived health status

Secondary Indicators

11. Dispersion around the 60% median low-income threshold

12. Low income rate anchored at a point in time

13. Low income rate before transfers

14. Distribution of income (Gini coefficient)

15. Persistence of low income (based on 50% of median income)

16. Long term unemployment share

17. Very long-term unemployment rate.

18. Persons with low educational attainment

Appendix 2. Opportunity for All Indicators

Improving family incomes by tackling worklessness and increasing financial support for families

1. Children in Workless Households
2. Low Income (relative, absolute and persistent low income

Investing in the crucial early years and education to break the cycle of disadvantage

3. Key Stage 1 (7-year-olds) attainment in Sure Start areas
4. Key Stage 2 (11-year-olds) attainment
5. 16-year-olds with at least one GCSE
6. 19-year olds with at least a Level 2 qualification
7. Truancies and exclusions
8. Educational attainment of children looked after by local authorities

Improving the quality of the lives of children and young people

9. Housing standards
10. Infant mortality
11. Smoking rates for pregnant women and children aged 11-15
12. Serious unintentional injury
13. Re-registrations on the Child Protection register

Supporting young people in the transition to adult life

14. Teenage conceptions and teenage parents in education and employment
15. 16-18-year-olds in learning

Appendix 3: America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being

Economic security

1. low income
2. parental employment
3. housing
4. food security
5. access to health care

Health

6. general health of children
7. activity limitation because of chronic conditions
8. immunization coverage,
9. birthweight
10. infant mortality
11. child mortality
12. adolescent mortality
13. Adolescent births

Behaviour and social environment

14. cigarette smoking
15. alcohol use
16. illicit drug use
17. violent crimes

Education

18. family reading
19. childcare enrolment
20. mathematics and reading achievement
21. high school academic course taking
22. youth neither enrolled in school nor working
23. high school completion, higher education

Special features

Appendix 4. Indicators of Social Exclusion of Children in the US

DOMAINS	SUBDOMAINS		
	Necessary	**Normative**	**Desirable**
Basic Living	Food insecurity	Poor quality of diet	Poor nutrition
	Cannot afford heating	Cannot afford new clothes	No computer
	Cannot afford clothes		Cannot afford visitors
	Cannot afford telephone		Cannot afford week vacation from home
	Cannot afford car (if 15 minutes from public transport		Cannot afford color TV
			Cannot afford VCR
			Cannot afford microwave
			Cannot afford dishwasher
Economic Participation	Not have one parent in the workforce	Family receives cash and near-cash transfers	Family has no monetary assets (savings, stocks, etc.)
	Not have one parent with an income	Family receives in-kind benefits	Household not able to save
	Family income below poverty line	Family main source of income is benefit	
		Family difficulty make ends meet	
		Family unable to pay bills for last 12 moths	
		Parents not completed high school	
		Low occupational prestige of parents' job	
		Parents have not completed job training	
Housing	No permanent residence (not homeless)	No place to sit outside	Unable to get mortgage to buy home
	Housing physically inadequate	Housing damp floors, walls	Does not own home
	Housing is crowded (< 1 room/person)	Housing has rot in windows, walls	Family faced with limited supply homes in neighbourhood
	Housing cost burden exceeds 50%	Family does not feel secure in home	Family not committed to invest in the home
		Residential instability (several moves/year)	
Health	Not covered by health insurance	Did not have healthy birth	
	No physical exam by professional in a year	Born with low birth weight	
	No dental exam by professional in a year	No access to mental health services	
	Mother not received prenatal care	Physical limitation that restricts activity	
	Does not have recom-mended immunizations	Emotional or physical problem that causes missing school or activity	
	Exposed to lead	Permanent health problems	
	Exposed to bad air quality	Adolescent no access to drug or alcohol treatment	
		Adolescent no access to family planning services	

(...)

(...)

Education	Not enrolled in school	Eligible but not enrolled in subsidized childcare	Family has access to quality childcare
	Under 18 neither in school nor working	Suspended from school	Family has access to quality public schools
	Under 18 and dropped out of school	Excluded from mainstream schools	
	Repeated a grade	Truant from school	
	Received special education for mental retardation or learning disability		
Public Space	No neighbourhood access to public transportation	Neighbourhood with high poverty	
	No neighbourhood access to various essential services (health, education, grocery stores, financial, …)	Neighbourhood with high crime and vandalism	
	Child exposed to observed violence	Neighbourhood social disorganization	
	Child's level of victimization (aggravated assault, rape, robbery, homicide)		
	Neighbourhood infrastructure		
Social Participation	No positive relationship with parents	No people to turn when problems	Does not participate in community or volunteer work
	No relationship with people at school	Does not attend religious services	Child does not newspaper/watches local and national news
	No relationship with friends	Does not participate in extracurricular activities	Child does not participate in politics (votes, works on campaign, demonstrates, write to officials)
	Engages in delinquent behaviors	Does not participate in sport activities	Child does not hold part-time job
	Gets in physical fights		
	Carries a weapon		
	Has been arrested		
	Belongs to a gang		
Subjective Experience			Satisfaction with housing situation
			Satisfaction with school
			Satisfaction with leisure time
			Overall happiness
			Self-satisfaction
			Locus of control
			Self-concept

Source: Aber et al. (2002)

GERALDINE MACDONALD[1]

Kapittel 6. Systematic reviews: strengths and weaknesses

Systematic reviews

In this paper I want to introduce the concept and methodology of the systematic review, and explore its potential strengths and weaknesses in relation to comparative child research. Systematic reviews have come to prominence primarily in relation to outcome research, that is research concerned with the effects of our helping endeavours (see Macdonald 2001). Such reviews address interventions at the level of policy (e.g. welfare to work, or income support) as well as interventions at the level of practice (e.g. family support, counselling, delinquency prevention programmes). As a methodological approach, however, it has relevance to other kinds of literature review. A systematic approach to research synthesis is relevant to reviews of qualitative studies, where the aim is primarily with understanding process and subjectivity. It is also relevant to reviews of studies concerned with understanding how problems arise and develop. We begin by locating systematic reviews in the wider context of literature reviews more generally.

Types of review

There are, broadly speaking, three categories of review to be found in the literature. The first are best described as 'scoping' reviews. There is often a need to know how the land lies in a particular research area. It is often important to know what has being done, to whom, by whom, where and in what ways, before deciding on policy changes or practice initiatives. For example, one review recently undertaken involved what was essentially a mapping exercise of what treatments or interventions, if any, mentally disordered women offenders received in secure settings (see Lart et al. 2000). It became quickly transparent that there was a dearth of basic information such as what women were in these prisons and secure hospitals, how had they come there, what were the problems they faced or presented, and what therapeutic regimes were on offer, if any? Given that some women in these institutions are mothers, whilst others are teenagers (and sometimes both) this is a major information gap for policy makers in child welfare as well as

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crime and criminal justice and forensic psychiatry. Research in some other areas of child care reveal similar gaps in our knowledge. Without this kind of material, *policy* makers are working in the dark.

Secondly, there are overviews of research into certain kinds of problems. Reviews of what is known about a given social problem, its origins, what exacerbates it, what protects individuals or groups that are otherwise at risk. There are literature reviews which seek to synthesise what we know of the consequences of particular experiences, such as child abuse or child sexual abuse. Indeed, one has only to look to child abuse to identify rich seams of both kinds of research reviews and to recognise their importance in our decision-making. We need to know what combinations and interactions of factors lead to high risk situations, what developmental trajectories lead to problems in later life, what enables some children to weather apparently dreadful circumstances with only minimal damage? Why are some children traumatised by certain experiences of sexual abuse, when other children with similar experiences seem to cope and leave it behind? Do they leave it behind, or do we need to follow larger groups of children into adulthood to see whether certain life-events trigger adverse consequences? These reviews entail bringing together sometimes quite large literatures and 'making sense' of them in ways that provide reliable guidance to policy makers and planners. It is here that the significance of being 'systematic' make its appearance as a critical issue. Here is one example from child care.

People generally have firm views about the benefits – or otherwise – of looked-after or adopted children having contact with their parents, siblings and other members of the their families of origin. Large claims are made about the importance of contact, based on unsophisticated and unsystematic reviews of the literature. Quinton and his colleagues undertook a systematic review to answer the following question:

> Has contact been demonstrated to have the beneficial effects that are claimed for it in circumstances where stable, nurturing relationships with birth parents have usually not been part of the child's experience? (Quinton et al. 1997)

A careful documentation of the methodological problems in the available studies, and an equally careful and transparent handling of the available data led the reviewers to conclude that we in fact *know* very little in this area. This is very frustrating for those needing to make decisions, as they acknowledge, at the same time highlighting the dangers of going beyond the evidence:

> Those charged with the onerous responsibility of placing children and deciding on the advisability of contact may well be frustrated by this

discussion. It may seem to reflect the overcautious cavilling of researchers preoccupied with the minutiae of method. Why pour over the mechanisms inside the watch when we simply want to know the time? Unfortunately, if the mechanism is faulty, the time we read off the dial will only be right by chance. (Quinton et al. 1997)

So what characterises systematic reviews, and what distinguishes them from more traditional or so-called 'narrative' reviews? It is to this that we now turn.

Problems with narrative reviews

The traditional approach to meeting the need for summaries of research has been to undertake what is now referred to as a narrative review. In this approach one lone Samurai author (and sometimes a company of friends) takes on the task of bringing together all known research reports in a given area, reading them carefully, making a judgement about their quality, and pulling out key themes or messages across all identified studies, typically on the basis of perceived quantitative commonalties e.g. a majority of studies show x. Sometimes problems with particular studies are raised, and attention is sometimes drawn to issues which pervade research in a given area e.g. a predominance of studies with samples which may not be representative of the clinical population. On the whole, though, this rarely introduces more than a note of caution and one whose implications are not necessarily obvious to the reader. Sometimes, despite registering serious misgivings, the authors draw very strong and sometimes erroneous conclusions (see Simpson 1994 for an example).

What reviewers have generally failed to appreciate is that the review process is itself prone to bias and error, and that these can, and do, undermine the validity and reliability of the conclusions reached in narrative reviews. These sources of bias and error have been well documented in health care research, and are increasingly evidence in other welfare spheres too. Bias, or systematic error, can invalidate attempts to synthesise research studies in a number of ways, including failure to identify all relevant studies and failure to consider the methodological quality of studies when drawing conclusions. A number of factors can give rise to this problem. Technical competence (e.g. language abilities, searching skills) and available resources (e.g. time and available 'pairs of hands') can bias the process of study identification, by failing to identify all relevant studies. Publication bias is now well established i.e. studies with significant results are more likely to get published than studies without such results, or with negative findings (see

Egger and Davey-Smith 1998 for an overview). Reasons for this can include the *selective* submission of papers; the selective *acceptance* of papers (see, for example, Manuscript Guidance, *Diabetologia* 1999); database bias and citation bias, both of which can lead to a failure to locate relevant studies (see Egger and Davey-Smith 1998). Thus, a strict reliance on electronic searching can result in the non-identification of large numbers of relevant studies (Dickersin *et. al.* 1995). In particular, a reliance on English language sources can bias the entire review process (see Egger et al. 1997). The failure to identify all relevant studies can seriously threaten the validity of a review since unlocated studies might well push the evidence in a completely different direction.

A desire to produce something that includes firm conclusions and recommendations can unduly influence decisions regarding which studies to include and which to exclude. Inclusion/exclusion criteria for studies are seldom explicitly mentioned in narrative reviews. It is therefore very difficult for a reader to know whether or not the reviewers have been successful in identifying all relevant studies: this is an example of a failure to 'show one's working out'. It is tempting to relax any inclusion/exclusion criteria that one might have settled on at the outset when faced with a dearth of qualifying studies unknown to the readers of the review. More subtly, where inclusion criteria are stated, it is also possible that prior knowledge of the results of studies may influence the inclusion criteria settled upon by reviewers (Egger and Davey-Smith 1998).

Cognitive and perceptual bias can distort the perceived methodological adequacy and weight afforded to individual studies. It is not unusual for students (or practitioners) to be methodologically 'fine-mouthed' when it comes to scrutinising studies that come to conclusions they do not much care for, and methodological very forgiving when the findings favour cherished beliefs of preferences. Relying on experts in a particular area is not necessarily the answer to such problems. Experts, and their disciples, may be less objective than non-experts and may, for example, overweight research they themselves have undertaken relative to research done by others. As with primary research, errors made in the process of research synthesis can seriously undermine the validity of any conclusions reached.

These problems beset research synthesis in any area, and in any discipline. Here is Heffer (1999) writing about a field a thousand miles from comparative child research – classical Greek. He is pointing out the folly of reviewing only a subset of the available evidence, this time as a result of what might technically be referred to as complacency (if not idleness).

Following in the footsteps of his mentor, A.E. Housman, 'denouncing in savage footnotes' sloppy scholarship (Auden 1967), Powell observes:

> The way in which Lockwood, the previous year, had addressed the manuscripts of Aristophanes in the British Museum, would be futile, even if treated intelligently; for it assumes that 6 manuscripts out of 240 are likely to have individual importance or to be closely related among themselves from the simple circumstance of their being conveniently accessible together in the British Museum. (Heffer 1998: 45)

So, a generic challenge to intellectual endeavour. Although a relatively recent development, methods are now available which enable reviewers to apply scientific principles to the synthesis of research, whatever their field. Reviews produced in this way are generically referred to as systematic reviews. When augmented with statistical analyses, they are typically referred to as meta-analyses.

Systematic reviews

A systematic approach to research synthesis requires two things: first, a declaration of intent and second, transparency. A 'declaration of intent' means that reviewers take key methodological decisions about how the review will be conducted *before* going to the literature. Clearly, given that most reviews will be conducted by those familiar with a particular field, it is unlikely that reviewers will not be familiar with the literature. Pinning one's methodological colours to the mast in this way makes it less likely that reviewers will be swayed by the reality of the available literature, rather than adhering to adequate standards of evidence and synthesis. For example, having stated publicly that one is intending only to include controlled trials, it is less likely that when these are found to be all-but-absent (very likely in much child care research), that one will simply encompass what *is* available, even if not 'good enough' in terms of evidential quality.

Transparency means making explicit to potential readers the reasoning underpinning decisions, or 'showing one's working out'. Such explicitness is a key strategy for minimising random error, and enabling errors (whether random or otherwise) and sources of bias to be detected. It also enables a reader to come to an informed opinion as to whether or not the review has – in his or her view – been appropriately conducted. Transparency allows readers to draw their own conclusions about the relevance of a particular review to their working circumstances, as it spells out, for example, the kinds

of participants covered by the review, the precise nature of the intervention, and so on.

The end result of a transparent 'declaration of intent' is usually referred to as a protocol. Figure 1 highlights the decision-points that are typically required in a review of outcome studies:

Figure 1: Decision-points in a protocol

- Objectives

- Criteria for considering studies for this review
  - Types of studies
  - Types of participants
  - Types of intervention
  - Types of outcome measures

- Search strategy for the identification of studies

- Methods of the review
  - Selection of studies
  - Assessment of methodological quality
  - Data management
  - Data synthesis, e.g.:
    - how to deal with incomplete data
    - how to analyse binary data
    - how to analyse continuous data
    - whether and when to undertake a meta-analysis, and if so, what kind

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At any point in the decision-making process (see below) different reviewers will make different choices. Some decisions will comprise sources of error, for example, choosing a statistical approach that is not appropriate for the task in hand. Sometimes, however, decisions require 'judgement calls' i.e. are not matters of right or wrong. For example, often we need to make choices when there is no consensus on the most appropriate choice e.g. how best to assess methodological adequacy (see Juni et al. 1999; Moher et al. 1998), or what statistical approach to use, if appropriate. Developing a protocol affords both reviewers and consumers of the (potential) review an opportunity to consider the issues and reach an opinion as to what is most appropriate. If a consumer decides that a review is misguided, or not relevant to his or her situation, he or she could, in principle, decide to undertake a

differently configured review. If the reader agrees with the decisions made by the reviewer, but distrusts the results, then, in principle, the transparency of a protocol affords him or her the opportunity to re-run the review themselves. Thus, a systematic approach to research synthesis does not guarantee accuracy, nor does it remove subjectivity from the review process (points too often ignored by ardent fans). What well-conducted systematic reviews can do, however, is minimise common sources of bias and error, and provide, to those with sufficient technical skill, the information needed to assess its value. The Cochrane and Campbell Collaborations seek to produce 'quality controlled' reviewers relevant to health care and social interventions respectively (http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/cochrane/ and http://campbell.gse.upenn.edu/).

Meta-analyses

This is not something I wish to dwell on. For reasons that will perhaps become clear, if not already apparent, meta-analysis is uncommon in the many social science fields. This is because there are often good reasons for not seeking to combine the results of studies in a statistical way. The point I would wish to emphasise, however, it that meta-analysis is secondary to systematic reviews. It is an approach that can be used within a systematic review, and – when appropriate – has particular advantages when we are seeking to make cumulative sense of a series of individual studies. However, they are not synonymous, and simply because a meta-analysis is not possible it does not mean that a systematic approach to research synthesis is also off the agenda. It invariably is not.

Why should we be interested?

Comparative child research is undertaken for a variety of reasons, and encompasses a wide range of issues. One of its underpinning principles must be that we have things to learn from comparing, and perhaps contrasting, the findings of studies conducted in one country with studies examining similar issues elsewhere. Such comparisons can stimulate debate and ideas, and help to develop policy and practice. But in order to do so reliably and validly, we need to employ the same degree of rigour to the comparisons we make, whether in primary research or in research synthesis. When considering literature reviews, the same questions of bias and error arise and need to be dealt with. The essential methodology of systematic reviews has much to offer here.

In some areas, research synthesis offers a route to overcoming a number of problems such as (i) blight of a paucity of studies conducted in one country, (ii) the bias resulting in excluding relevant studies, and/or (iii) the inevitable weaknesses of single studies, by synthesising the results of studies examining similar populations, or conditions, or interventions. This last is a common rationale for undertaking systematic reviews of interventions, and – where appropriate – for undertaking meta-analyses. But in this a number of issues present themselves.

Issues for comparative child research synthesis

It is not evident that issues in this field are essentially different from other areas of research synthesis, but they may be issues worn more 'on the sleeve' so to speak. The essential issue is 'how comparable is comparable'? To what extent are studies from different policy contexts sufficiently homogeneous to be combined in a review seeking to answer a particular question? They may all be 'fruit' but are they really apples and oranges which should not really be pooled or treated as the 'same'?

Take foster care, for example. On the surface of it, it is tempting to regard foster care as 'international currency' and, in terms of its legal standing, arrangements for placement, and so on, it may well appear to be so. But dig a little deeper, and problems surface that *might* serve to undermine the quality of a review in this area that makes such an assumption and does not look beneath the surface. There are complexities around research participants, for example. Why do children come into the position that they require fostering? Are the routes to fostering the same in the countries from which the studies we might be seeking to 'synthesise' come from, or are there significant differences? How would we decide what a significant difference was? Then take the foster placements. Can we be sure that foster carers come into this role with the same motivations? Do they enjoy the same support, whether financial, organisational, therapeutic or in some other sense? Are the policies underpinning placement finding the same? What about the laws governing contact and so on? When does evidence that differences exist matter – always, irrespective of the question being posed, or just sometimes? How would we decide? To some extent, the insistence on transparency could go someway to addressing these concerns, as long as the transparency encompasses *depth* as well as *breadth* i.e. the reviewers take care to appraise not only the methodological content of studies, but the international currency of key aspects of each study. This is true of health reviews too, of course, and is one reason why Cochrane Reviews do not

contain sections on 'implications for practice or policy' and only 'reviewers' recommendations'. A subtle, but important difference. Policy makers, practitioners, users must each make their own decision about relevance or implications. It is the reviewers responsibility to ensure that they provide enough information to allow such decisions to be made, and made well.

Perhaps more problematic are the issues raised for reviewers wishing to assess the impact of policy initiatives. Here, it is tempting to take initiatives such as differential approaches to child care policy, and to examine apparent effects across countries. What is seldom investigated, or taken into account, is the heterogeneity of policy implementation, at the regional, local and agency level, and indeed at the level of the individual practitioner. To some extent this is an issue of 'treatment integrity' – are the practitioners and other operational staff doing what the policy makers intended, or something sufficiently different to account for apparent failures, or indeed successes? Worse, does the lack of attention to these aspects mislead people into taking at face value the results of a meta-analysis or the considered summary of quality assessed studies not dealt with in this statistical fashion? This is a problem that besets more than systematic reviews of comparative child research of course. In the UK government departments are being required to make evidence-based cases for the funding requests they are making to the Treasury. Their policies must be clearly linked to evidence of effectiveness or potential effectiveness. Unfortunately this is 'worlds away' from being able to guarantee what goes on at the grass roots, when funds have been secured for allegedly evidence-based initiatives. This remains the case even when, as in the UK, there has been an explicit focus on delivery during the last three years. Of course, behaviour change has always been more challenging than rocket science.

Here is an interesting paradox. The higher that a systematic review scores on internal validity i.e. the confidence that we can place in its findings (having controlled for as many sources of bias as possible), the more problematic become issues of transferability. After all, the more that we control for, both in primary studies and in the review process, the less certain we can be that a particular finding (for example, the demonstrated efficacy of an intervention) will hold true when applied in a 'real world' setting, with users who are perhaps slightly different, or in circumstances that are not quite the same (for example fewer resources, or a somewhat less skilled or less well supported workforce), or in a different policy context.

There are, in fact, ways of handling what – at first sight – might appear to be inherent weaknesses in such systematic reviews. The protocol itself requires that we give these questions detailed consideration *in advance,* and

make in principle decisions about what things are sufficiently similar to treat as members of the same 'family' and what characteristics should preclude this. Similarly, one can decide, in advance, how one is going to handle statistical or 'clinical' heterogeneity amongst included studies. One can identify in advance the kinds of differences between 'otherwise similar' studies that are thought to arise from different countries of origin, and that one has reason to think will influence the findings. Separate, or additional analyses, of these can then be planned in order to address these concerns. In much child research, there are particular concerns about the dominance of American studies, not least of all because America is often the only or dominant source of the more rigorous research designs when it comes to intervention studies. It would therefore be misleading, and careless, to conduct a meta-analysis of some twenty studies, of which fourteen were American, without taking steps to do a sub-group analysis to check whether or not the overall findings held true for non-American studies. Careful scrutiny of different patterns of results can also help us to begin to unpack possibly reasons, even if we have not factored these in to our protocol (although one must be cognisant of the dangers of post-hoc rationalisations/investigations). These might be due to differences in methodological quality, to differences in any measures used, or to underpinning differences in the political and social contexts that might explain different patterns of outcome, and help us in making decisions about the transferability of findings to our own contexts. These problems become possibly more acute when one is undertaking research synthesis of studies other than outcome research e.g. of the consequences of particular experiences, or of studies seeking better to understand a particular social phenomenon. Nonetheless, the ways of managing these will require similar treatment.

In conclusion

My conclusion would be that the comparative child research needs to give close attention to the quality of its reviews. As in other areas, such reviews are – or should be – an essential part of any primary research activity, highlighting what we know and don't know, the quality of existing studies and what we should perhaps attend to in future research. They are, however, as susceptible to those factors that have been shown to undermine review activity in other areas of research, and these need to be explicitly addressed if we are to achieve high quality reviews. Systematic reviews are essentially comparative, but reviews in comparative child research highlight some challenges that might perhaps go un-noticed elsewhere. The methodology of

systematic reviews might develop in the hands of those interested in this particular area. Review activity in this area might well benefit from the existing technology of systematic reviews. Who can lose?

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JENS QVORTRUP¹

Kapittel 7. Comparing Childhoods: Appropriate Comparisons in Childhood Research

Introduction

Comparative research on childhood is a crucial topic, which has not been given the attention it deserves. It is not least important for international networks and international projects, since underlying such networks and project there is the assumption that researchers in childhood must have something to talk with each other about, despite the obvious differences between, nominally, the same research object. As for instance Research Committee 53, Sociology of Childhood commenced its work in the late 1980s, it was with the clear intention to bring together social scientists studying childhood and there was the assumption that we had a common research issue, one that had so much in *common* that it made sense to exchange views about its *variability*. At least we took it for granted that there was such a thing called 'childhood' in all countries. Anyone has the right, of course, to ask, if this is a sufficient requirement for making comparisons.

Comparative social research in its conventional meaning is cross-culture research or cross-national or cross-country research, i.e. an approach, which avails itself of culture, nation or country as a contextual variable vis-à-vis a given phenomenon (see also for history, Bloch, 1967, pp. 45-46). Fundamentally, however, comparisons are indispensably perspectives that any research must necessarily relate to, implicitly or explicitly. Any research is about difference and similarity. It does not give meaning to deal with differences of a phenomenon without an idea of the limits or boundaries within which this phenomenon is situated, either conceptually or empirically. Likewise, any notion of similarity presupposes some difference between phenomena that are deemed similar. Even the postulate of uniqueness of a research object is preceded by an idea of or the reality of how a unique object is unique, and thus invoking, at least implicitly, a comparison.

Research in childhood is no exception from these basic tenets, and I have found it worthwhile to use this opportunity to remind ourselves about some of the fundamental comparative issues, which have not been

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sufficiently borne out, despite the remarkable growth of childhood research during the last two decades. What is it we are comparing if we announce that we do comparative childhood research? Indeed, we aim at comparing childhoods in general terms or merely aspects or dimensions of childhoods. As to how we are doing it, I shall take my point of departure in two statements by the great French comparative historian, Marc Bloch.

The first one – more or less a definition – says that, historically speaking, «two conditions are necessary to make a comparison possible …: there must be a certain similarity between the facts observed … and a certain dissimilarity between the situations in which they have arisen» (Bloch, 1967, p. 45). Bloch talks, on the one hand, about facts and on the other, about situations.

By facts he has in mind the phenomenon to be observed and his experiences tell him that between facts or phenomena to be observed there must be a certain similarity. Please note that he is not demanding sameness or identity; this would effectively hamper comparative studies, since one never in different situations find identity between the phenomenon under observation.

By situations Bloch thinks of what we would call context, and it is his requirement that between the contexts within which our facts or phenomena have arisen a certain dissimilarity must be found. This requirement is based on the comparativist's desire to trace some causality, and unless a certain variation is found between the contexts one would not be able to make statements about different outcomes. Again, Bloch cautiously talks about a certain dissimilarity, because an accept of any, not to speak of dramatic differences between contexts, might jeopardise commensurability between facts or phenomena[2].

Dealing with childhood, thus, a paraphrase of Bloch might go like this: «two conditions are necessary to make comparison in childhood research possible: there must be a certain similarity between facts of childhood, and a certain dissimilarity between the contexts in which they have arisen or are

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[2] Bloch's cautious language is a warning against being too absolute in one's demands as it is the case with the so-called 'Galton's problem', which is well-known to all comparative scholars. The British statistician, Galton, required for comparisons to be valid, mutually independent and isolated cases. He would not allow for cultural diffusion, contact or clash leading necessarily to borrowing, imitation etc. because that would make invalid the results of comparative studies. He was thus advocating a logic of quasi-experimentation, which in a social world in general – and in a globalised world as ours in particular – would make comparisons impossible (see Sztompka, 1990). An absolute demand to keep factors or variables constant is therefore neither necessary nor desirable.

found». I believe these conditions are basically sound, but it is a recipe that is relevant first of all for so-called parallel comparative research, to which I shall come back.

Comparing societies with and without childhood

It is tempting in the meantime to begin with a famous example, which apparently doesn't obey this first rule by Bloch, but rather another one which he succinctly formulated as follows: *«The unity of place is disorder. Only the unity of a problem makes a centre»* (Bloch, 1934; Skocpol and Somers, 1980). The example is from Ariès – the French historian, who in our circles is much better known than Bloch[3]. Now, as we all know, it was one of Ariès' memorable statements that

> The idea of childhood corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult … In medieval society this awareness was lacking. (Ariès, 1962, p. 128).

I know quite well that this statement has been contested by other historians, but it is not important for my argument. What Ariès does is to implicitly compare a situation, a context, in which childhood did not exist with one in which it did exist. Is this permissible?[4] Does it inform us about childhood – or merely about the contexts, i.e. a pre-childhood society compared with a childhood-society?

The case is at least theoretically interesting, because Ariès did not say that children did not exist before childhood was invented, in fact he was indicating that children, or if you like, persons of young age, were living in a society without childhood, i.e. in a society in which there was no awareness among adults about childhood. This amounts to saying that *age or generational boundaries* in these pre-childhood societies were blurred, and it was a sign or proof of childhood being invented that it eventually acquired certain distinctive features as a category or as a group. Its separateness from other age groups, first of all from adults, became more and more visible (see also Benedict, 1955). Therefore, while Ariès implicitly compared two

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[3] I don't think the two of them knew each other or even met. Bloch was killed during the 2nd World War, long time before Ariès' seminal book appeared; besides, Bloch was a respected member of the College Francaise, while Ariès was a librarian in a tropical fruit company, because he never passed his final examination as an historian.

[4] In fact, this 'method of difference' was used by Max Weber in his famous study of the origin of capitalism in which he asked why, under similar conditions, capitalism did arise in Europe, but not in the Far East (Weber, 1904-05).

historical periods, one distinctive difference between which was the pheno-menon of childhood – one did not have a childhood, the other did – he also introduced another comparative dimensions, namely a *comparison between generations*. *Relationships* between persons, irrespective of age, were eventually substituted by *relations* between generations and within them, by *relationships* between children and parents[5]. Childhood as a concept had itself become an institution and, mediated through this institution, its reality assumed new qualities.

Now, Ariès did not suggest that this important historical transformation came about by chance. He was, one might argue, a social constructionist in the sense that he saw the changing *awareness* in adults as a result of a moral rearmament of mankind prompted by the Church, the nobility or the state (Ariès, 1982, p. 7). At the same time his focus was on institutionalisation, in particular schooling, as the embodiment of children's separation from other generations and thus, as an alternative explanation, it was a changing society's demands for a better educated population that eventually caused their segregation. Whatever the salience of one or another explanation of the historical genesis of childhood, *the significant point is that particular circumstances must be available for childhood to become part of adult populations' awareness*. Or in other words: when there is a need for it, people begin to produce concepts for new appearances and phenomena. Such concepts are societal concepts, which are constitutive components of social reality. In turn, they are the basis for sociological and sociologists' conceptualisation and theorising (see Sztompka, 1990, pp. 48ff).

You might argue that this example represents an inappropriate comparison, since childhood is compared with non-childhood. Yet, its use-fulness lies in its ability to show (an example of) what is (at least) one condition for having childhood *at all*. It took in this case a *new awareness and an incipient scolarisation for childhood to come about as a separate category and phenomenon*. Logically, thus, one would infer from this that without an awareness of or an idea about childhood's separateness from adulthood, there will be no childhood, and this condition that constituted it as a common problem must hold as a general rule and therefore also for all subsequent contexts in which childhood is claimed to be found.

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[5] I am here alluding to and translating Honig's terms 'Beziehungen' and 'Verhältnisse' with relationships and relations, respectively (Honig, 1999).

Singularity or plurality of childhoods

Ariès' famous statement and analysis is, in other words, a testament of the significance of a particular context as a precondition for childhood to arise as a fact or a phenomenon with certain distinctiveness. Children or young persons do not alone make a childhood. In our contemporary world, we take it for granted that childhood exists as a separate category; we do not doubt that there is, in any nation and culture, such a category as childhood. Its separate status has become a naturalised, trivial insight, whereby the most important facts of its genesis are in danger of disappearing. We should, from time to time remind ourselves that this Arièsian awareness established childhood as an issue or, with Bloch, as a common problem; indeed the fact that this commonness has become universal does not make it less significant, on the contrary, and the fact that we now experience it as highly diversified does not contradict the insight that childhood is a distinct generational form – or if you like: it is one crucial task of comparative analysis to identify what is common to childhoods.

The question, nevertheless, arises if and to which extent these childhoods are comparable. In Bloch's vocabulary, there is between situations or contexts or nations or cultures, within which childhood exists, a certain dissimilarity – but is this dissimilarity so moderate as Bloch's notion suggests? This question is likely to be even more acute in relation to the fact or phenomenon of childhood: how can we be sure that childhoods in different parts of the world merely exhibit a certain similarity, so as to make comparisons possible? Do childhoods all over the world belong to the same category? Are the relationships and relations to parents and adults of the same kind or nature so as to convince us that we are talking about the same phenomenon?

This is a thorny problem, and there are different responses to it. On the one hand we do find researchers, who are – to say the least – uneasy about accepting the notion of one childhood even in their own country. In the radical version they are advocates of notions and realities of the 'plurality of childhoods', leading at the end of the day to perceiving each child's childhood as a unique childhood and thus failing to see childhood as a common analytical problem, e.g. in terms of its separateness from adulthood. On the other hand there is the opposite radical version suggesting that we have to acknowledge childhood in its singularity, i.e. that all childhoods are in principle comparable. I don't know if anyone would subscribe to any of the radical versions, but as principled positions in the topical discourse about childhood they have become manifest. Nobody knows what Ariès' answer

would have been. Yet, a corollary of his analysis is that *common* to all childhoods is that there is an awareness about its distinctiveness – both in children and adults, by the way. In an abstract sense that would be enough for a comparison.

There is in fact in concrete and practical terms an important document which can be seen as an embodiment of the notion of childhood in its singularity. I am thinking of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). This document, which – barring Somalia and the United States of America – is ratified by all nations in the world, is supposed to have legal validity for all the world's children. It thus presupposes comparability between all children and all childhoods, irrespective of context and situation. Is this warranted? One is at least not surprised that objections to its claim to be a world wide valid document has been aired (Nieuwenhuis, 1998; se also Zuckerman, 1976). It is for many childhood protagonists and researchers in the Third World taken to be a westernised document, which in many of its articles is far away from the reality of poor children in Asia, Africa and Latin America. I believe much of this criticism is valid (see Scheuch 1967).

Logically, advocates of the extreme position of the notion of the plurality of childhood would similarly raise severe reservations against the CRC. How can one possibly rule (i.e. apply the articles) equally for children living in so dramatic different circumstances?

However, one thing is to object to the applicability of each and every article to each and every child in the world[6], another thing is by that to suggest that very different childhoods cannot be compared. One has to remember that looking for appropriate, i.e. valid and meaningful comparisons is not the same as to assume identity or equality of conditions. Important is to avail oneself of instruments that accounts for childhoods in different contexts in a way that gives meaning to children and adults in these different contexts, and to make the necessary interpretations so as to produce *equivalence of meaning*, or functional equivalence, as others call it. It may, for sure, be difficult to establish equivalence of meaning among the diversity of conditions of the world's children, but one should not rule out the possibility to find some meaningful common denominators.

One must bear in mind, that comparative research demands of its practitioners to make abstractions. To make abstractions is to lose information about the phenomenon under investigation, but it is at the same time

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[6] Application in the narrower sense of the word is likely to run counter to a comparative methodology, see Bloch, 1967, p. 75; Scheuch, 1967, p. 13.

to gain information from another perspective. The renowned British sociologist and social policy expert, Richard M. Titmuss made this observation about comparisons of social policies in different countries:

> In so far as these [diversities of different economic, political and social systems, cultural patterns, and ways of life] are reflected in national social policies they represent difficulties for anyone who is expected to discuss programmes and policies with an international audience. None of us know enough of – or can remember – all the facts. We must, therefore, treat the subject, *not by discussing the details* for this or that country, but with the aid of *concepts* and *models*, *principles* and *goals*, and in terms of *categories* of benefits, contributions and users. We have to think of *classes* of benefits, *kinds* of entitlement, *patterns* of utilisation, and *differences* in goals and objectives. This, it is suggested, is the only way in which an attempt can be made to handle comparatively and intelligently the problems of change (Titmuss, 1967, p. 57, my italics).

This is, *mutatis mutandis*, the recipe for comparative analysis. This was in fact also the gist of Bloch's statement, which I quote once again: "The unity of place is disorder. Only the unity of a problem makes a centre". These quotations may provoke some hard working empirical sociologists and ethnographers, who see their rich details threatened. However, there is hardly no other way than leaving at home the detailed accounts of your meticulously collected data before meeting at the working tables for comparative negotiations. You have to kill your baby, i.e. to abstract from the details. Yet, two remarks of consolation are in place: firstly, the detailed knowledge is not made superfluous but is in fact the basis for preparing oneself for their translation into appropriate concepts, principles, goals, categories, classes, kinds, patterns and differences – the vocabulary of Titmuss – so as to be ready for a fruitful dialogue with colleagues from other countries. Secondly, the encounter with childhoods in other contexts is likely to enrich your analysis of the local issue about which you are a specialist.

Equivalence of meaning

The very wording of this notion, equivalence of meaning, suggests the significance of interpretation as an instrument. We are not looking for results of anything like natural experiments, because it is impossible to control our variables to an extent that would meet the requirements of this method. We are in other words supposed to ask about the meaning of certain facts, phenomena or practices. The problem is aptly phrased by the German comparative sociologist, Erwin Scheuch:

> Similar indicators in different countries may be interpreted as functionally different, while different indicators may be interpreted as functionally equivalent (Scheuch, 1969, p. 173, my translation).

Let me illustrate the problem with an example from my own research. I have in a few articles attempted to give meaning to children's school work in modern society, given the fact that it is not generally recognised by adult society as constructive or useful work (Qvortrup, 2001). On the other hand, most observers seem to agree that children's obligatory work in terms of manual functions previously in history was in fact a useful activity, indeed to an extent that even to day merely those activities of children that are manual appear to be understood as useful – for instance gainful work after school hours. Now the question is if it is theoretically meaningful, to use Scheuch's terminology, to understand a similar indicator (manual work) – found in two different societal circumstances – as functionally equivalent? I have reached a different conclusion, while suggesting that manual work in pre-modernity is rather comparable with school work in modernity, because both are obligatory functions, which are imposed on children and because both are embedded in and carrying similar rationales in prevailing economies. Whereas schooling in pre-modernity was germane, manual work in modernity is gradually more and more outmoded. So to paraphrase Scheuch: Similar indicators – manual work – in societies with different socio-economic development – may be interpreted as functionally different, while different indicators – manual work and school work – may be interpreted as functionally equivalent.

In a sense this example again seems to violate Bloch's demands to both the facts observed and the situations in which they have arisen. Both are indeed very different from each other. Yet, in an abstract sense they gain similarity: the *facts* of manual and school work are equivalent – both are obligatory and system immanent in their respective, but different economies. On their side, these different economies are equivalent *situations*, because they are dominant or hegemonic in their respective contexts. As such my example accords fully with Bloch's contention of the centrality of the unity of a problem. We do in fact encounter unity of a problem, namely the relation between children's most important practice and the prevailing economy in which it is embedded.

'Unity of a problem'

Let me spend another few remarks on this question: what does it mean, when Bloch as one device for comparative analysis requires unity of a problem? Let me first mention a few examples, which may be well known to you. Margaret Mead (1978) wrote in her book Culture and Commitment about changing relations between generations. She made the observations that these relations underwent profound transformations from post-figurative over con-figurative to pre-figurative forms. In the post-figurative form she suggested a continued validity for children of parents' insight and experiences, because the rapidity of change was slow. In the con-figurative mode a growing tension between adults' transmissions of knowledge and children's own ideas and experiences came to the fore, and this was seen as a transitional form on its way to the most recent one, the pre-figurative mode in which the rapidity of change has become so fast so as to obliterate adults' experiences and knowledge. Topical examples of the latter mode is computerisation, where youth is often in command of knowledge that their parents do not master because they were born too early for having internalised it effectively; an extreme, but quite well known, example is immigrant families whose children without difficulties acquire the language of the host country and thus will be the guides of their parents, who on the one hand do not master the language or only very badly and on the other hand perceive their children's competence as a threat to their culturally anchored authority.

We must not necessarily accept Mead's theory for acknowledging her identification of a common problem in societies of quite different levels of development, namely the problem of 'relations between generations', and that she has translated this common problem into an abstract conceptualisation which situates *generational relations* within a common framework, allowing us to understand them as equivalent phenomena, i.e. as «specifically different but generically alike» (Bloch, 1967, p. 46). The contexts are certainly different, the expressions of the facts as well, but they are nevertheless made intelligible as a common problem.

A similar case was made by John Hood-Williams (1990; 2001). He suggested that one of the continued characteristics of children's relationships with their parents was an age-patriarchal authority. This idea may run counter to Mead, who saw an erosion rather than a persistence of authority relations, but what counts in my argument here is the courage to suggest a continuity of a problem in the midst of seemingly blatant discontinuity of circumstances.

The problem, thus, that will not go away, is that of *relations respectively relationships between generations*. It assumes many forms historically

and interculturally, but in Bloch's view it would be a mistake to hide and eventually to sacrifice this unity of a problem on the altar of faithfulness towards unity of place (cf. Skocpol & Somers, p. 195).

Parallel comparative research

What I have said so far shows a high degree of tolerance on my side as to the opportunities to make comparisons between childhoods. Provided that we are careful in conceptualising our phenomena and our contexts so as to make them functionally equivalent, I do not see why comparisons should be excluded. This principle remains with us, however, also if we are lowering our levels of abstraction – but some degree of abstractions is unavoidable. The extreme version of the plurality of childhood thesis is irreconcilable with comparative analysis, because it cannot resist the temptation to 'discuss the details', as Titmuss said, of this or that childhood and therefore never comes to deal with 'classes, kinds, patterns' and therefore run the risk to end up in what Skocpol and Somers call 'descriptive holism' (pp. 192-193). In turn, the extreme version of the singularity of childhood thesis will in particular encounter problems in empirically based comparative studies because a common problem will not always be easy to identify in all countries of the world. Therefore, for practical reasons, one will typically be operating at only one of the levels in a hierarchy, where – at each level (and we are now coming back to Bloch's first rule or definition) – clusters of contexts with a 'certain dissimilarity' are identified, while assuming at the same time that a 'certain similarity' are found among the facts or phenomena. Such a hierarchy is moving from a global to a local level with decreasing levels of abstractions and allows one at each level to conduct what is called 'parallel comparative research'. Let me mention examples of such levels:

- Level 1: All countries or contexts that all have an awareness of childhood (excluding the Arièsian non-childhood contexts).

- Level 2: Childhood countries, divided into for instance developed and developing countries clustering around clearly different levels of socio-economic indicators.

- Level 3: Division of for instance developed countries clustering around for example religion, a particular region (e.g. Nordic countries) or political organisation (e.g. European Union).

- Level 4: Within-country differences using discriminatory variables such as class, gender, ethnicity, space, time and generation.

The expectation, given indicators with a 'certain similarity', is to envisage decreasing abstraction from level 1 downwards – each of them exhibiting as contexts merely a 'certain dissimilarity' – and logically more concrete information about both context and phenomena, but in this quasi-hierarchical structure it is a requirement that new information from lower level does not contradict insight from higher levels. If this is not so, we will be suggesting the absurd hypothesis that some childhoods are generically different from others.

Table 1. UNICEF basic indices for children grouped according to level of development.

1995	Under-5 mortality rate (annual deaths per 1000 live births	Infant mortality rate (annual deaths under one year per 1000 live births	Life expectancy at birth (years)	% of population below absolute poverty rate (urban/rural)
Industrial countries	8	7	77	no data
Developing countries	99	67	62	27/31
Least developed countries	173	109	52	55/70

Source: UNICEF: The State of the World's Children, 1997, p. 98-99.

A very familiar way of making 'comparisons' – at level 2 – is to set up socio-economic or health indicators as it is done by international organisations such as UN, OECD and EU for instance. For our purpose, UNICEF is publishing in its yearly State of the World's Children quite a number of tables that are very useful as indicators for children's well-being in the world's countries. An example of selected indicators is brought in table 1.

In the first place it is an obvious requirement that the indicators are actually telling us something about of the observed facts or phenomena, i.e. children or childhood. This means in a table like this one, that children must be the unit of observation and not any other unit such as the family, for instance. This is, I believe, an already received knowledge among childhood researchers. But this is only the beginning of the analysis, and many comparativists would most likely be reluctant to qualify such indicators as strictly speaking comparative indicators. Although they do nominally speak about the same facts and doubtless also use the same definition of the facts observed, the perennial problem in comparative studies is the question of meaning. Does the indicator actually mean the same thing in the different contexts? There is no guarantee of that, but the likelihood that this will be the case increases, the more similar the contexts are. This idea was at least the rationale behind the selection of countries to the Childhood as a Social

Phenomenon project, 1987-1992 (Qvortrup, 1991, see also Qvortrup, 2001), which consisted merely of so-called developed countries.

Take for example indicators of infant mortality. It is well known from both history and anthropological studies of today's poor countries, mainly in their rural districts, that the loss of a child is received with fatalistic and phlegmatic feelings. The high number of child deaths is itself a fact which prepares parents for the event, that always causes grief, but hardly to the same extent as it is the case in developed countries, where much fewer children are born partly in the expectation that they survive and therefore much more is invested in them in terms of both emotions and money. In addition, we also know from many poor countries that there is difference in the loss felt, if it is a girl death rather than a boy death.

There are, however, other lessons to be learned from the list of indicators in table 1. As far as context is concerned it is obvious, not only as a hypothesis, that there is a correlation between the indicators and therefore any of them is likely to have a high predictive value as to the expressed value of the others. The are a few insights to be gained from this:

First: It is both plausible and defendable to think in terms of a larger, and more inclusive contexts than that of 'country as context'. This larger context is of course vaguer and much less bounded, and we do not have a very good term for it: in political and media parlance it is couched in terms such as 'developing/third world/poor countries' on the one hand, and on the other 'developed/first world/rich countries'. Such units are not likely to produce variables that are easy to manipulate, nor do they constitute handy variables in themselves. But the figures in the table clearly demonstrate identifiable clusters of countries that allow us cautiously to think in terms of a similar context. The context seems therefore sufficient to meet Bloch's requirement, namely that the situations, i.e. here countries within each cluster of macro-units, exhibit a certain dissimilarity.

Second: The table also suggest the hypothesis that there is a convergence of childhood conditions in the wake of socio-economic development or modernisation. This is in quantitative terms obvious, given the figures, which could be amplified with historical time series. Qualitatively, this would be an extension of the Ariès (1962) and Mead (1978) examples given above, but many other examples could be quoted, such as deMause (1974) and Margaret Wolfenstein (1955).

Third: These observations do not, of course, warrant the conclusion that the countries in any of the clusters are all the same. The point is that they arguably belong to a category of countries exhibiting similar indicators, but

as soon as comparisons are attempted within each of the clusters, new features will come to the fore as explanatory or contextual variables, be they in terms of culture, religion, climate and soil, place in the international division of labour, objects of structural adjustment measures, or the role of the state, for instance.

Another example is from a new book, which pretends to compare the phenomenon of street children in three countries, Brazil, Cuba and the United States of America. A set of nominally similar indicators, mainly dealing with education, is presented as a contextual background in the three countries, and although the editor does level caution towards using the indicators as comparative indices, she believes some patterns are suggesting themselves (Mickelson, 2000, p. 30). Given the assumption that educational achievements is a precaution against street childhood, the indicators show that – relative to economic capacity – much more effort is done in terms of investments in education in Cuba than in the USA and Brazil. The fact that there are such differences is, it is said, «at least partly the result of ideological preferences, not merely the result of the objective economic consequences of globalization» (pp. 31-32).

Street childhood is likely to be a very good example of a concept and a phenomenon that would adopt a number of meanings for both children involved, their parents and others in the locality, the police and other authorities, including the executive and political level. This question of equivalence of meaning therefore needs to be invoked as an interpretative measure.

Table 2. Indicators of income and health in Brazil, Cuba and the USA

Indicator (circa 1995)	Brazil	Cuba	USA
Per capita GDP (US$ 1970 purchase power prices)	$809	$480	$7.742
% 10-14 aged in labour force	16	0	0
Prevalence of child malnutrition (%)	7	8	0
Infant mortality	36	8	7
% enrolled secondary education	19	59	96
% GNP for education	4.6	6.6	5.3

Source: Adapted from tables 1.4., 1.5., 1.6., and 1.7. in Mickelson, 2000.

At face value, 'street childhood' might in Bloch's terms represent a fact or a phenomenon that exhibits a certain similarity. But since the USA belongs to another socio-economic cluster than Brazil and Cuba, there is reason to believe that street-childhood may have a different meaning than the phenomenon from third world countries. Alternatively, one might suspect that

since Brazil and the USA belongs to the capitalist world, their street child phenomenon might have a different quality than that of socialist Cuba. If we to this add, finally, street childhoods in previous historical eras where it is not seldom taken as a positive context for children's self-socialisation, street childhood as an example proves to be a good case to warn us against homonyms, i.e. the same words with different meanings.

Within-country comparisons

As I have said before, conventional comparative research and its theory and methodology deals mainly with cross-cultural or cross-national analysis, but there is no reason why within-country comparison should not in itself be legitimate. Methodologically it does not in principle differ from cross-country comparisons. It is, basically, the contexts that change, both qualitatively and in scale. So, instead of comparing childhood welfare in general terms between countries, it would be as legitimate to compare the life worlds of rich children in one country with similarly positioned children in other countries, for instance.

While, therefore, in cross-country research one will typically be availing oneself of nation or country as a context and a variable, this is obviously not possible within a given country. In most cases one will be assuming the national context as exhibiting approximately the same influence on its children – in terms of for instance culture and largely also a legislation that is valid for all its citizens. One will therefore have to look for other contextual variables with explanatory power. Let me as illustrations briefly allude to five of such contextual variables: social class, gender, ethnicity, space and time. The first three of them is qualitatively different from the last two of them in that the former are potentially putting in jeopardy the very concept of childhood or children as units of observation.

If we compare different class childhoods we are defining our variables in terms of a class concept the dimensions of which pertain to adults' class characteristics, such as occupation, income, and education. We will therefore be making one of many possible specifications of class hegemony, but we will not be adding to our insight about childhood. We will be making the argument that class has an impact on children as it has an impact on other age groups or generations, and in this sense we will have managed to split up the child population according to variables that children do not hold themselves.

A similar argument holds for gender and ethnicity. Of course one can make comparisons between girls and boys and between children of different

ethnicity, but as with class, neither gender nor ethnicity are categorical characteristics of childhood. They are in fact likewise splitting up the childhood population and is therefore likewise jeopardising the very notion of childhood, while indicating that girls and boys have less in common with each other than with for instance their corresponding adult gender-mates, whether women or men, or with their corresponding adult ethnic parts.

Ideally, therefore, any class, gender or ethnic comparison of children should be preceded by a clarification of children's categorical status, for instance in terms of their generational status.

It is a different matter if we consider space and time. The dimensions of these variables have in principle bearings in the same way for both adulthood and childhood and it is therefore methodologically justified to compare childhoods that exhibit variance in terms of space and time. They include the further advantage that an intergenerational comparison is imminent: since the spatial and temporal contexts are by and large common for different generations, it is possible to look for outcomes in terms of differences and similarities between adults and children. Space and time variables, furthermore, allow us to proceed to understanding their differential impact on girls and boys, for instance; on the other hand one cannot generalise from girl- or boy-childhood to childhood in general.

As you will have noticed, we have been moving gradually towards more and more narrow contexts, and as already said, it is not the format of the context that decides if a comparison is appropriate, even if the macro context has always been prominent[7]. Let us therefore, finally, just mention an issue, which has gained some popularity in the new social studies of childhood, namely studies of children in some kind of institutions, such as

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[7] Are there additional levels or contexts below this micro-level including children's locality and family? In an article from 1995, James and Prout have argued 1) that something must be held constant for comparative analysis to be viable, and 2) that cultural contexts cannot be held constant. This leaves them with the unorthodox, as they admit themselves, proposal to keep children constant, as were they an independent variable. Now, some constancy is typically assumed for comparative analysis to be viable; at the same time the very point is that contexts do vary – only the limits of its variation is under discussion. As Bloch said: a certain dissimilarity must be envisaged between contexts or situations. The idea to keep children constant was implicitly attempted in a recent study, which followed the same children from one institution to another. It was found that the same children behaved differently in a school class and in an after school arrangement. What could be concluded from this observation? That the context changed due to different child behaviour while turning children into quasi-independent variables or into contexts themselves while the facts observed are the institutions? Or would one rather prefer, according to a conventional thinking, that the very same children behaved differently because of a different context? In fact the study suggested the latter, more old-fashioned interpretation (see Højlund, 2001), and I believe it did right.

kindergartens and schools. I believe it is an important and fruitful strand of research to make comparisons between childhoods in different institutions. We have to do with a context that is small in scale, but exhibiting sufficient dissimilarities to assume variability of outcomes in the facts observed, i.e. for instance children's behaviour, their interaction, their games or the like. These phenomena all pertain exclusively to children, since children are the only inmates of kindergartens and in this sense genuinely represent the population of this age group of children.

Although this kind of comparisons of children's lives in institutions such as kindergartens and schools are in themselves sufficient to make an appropriate comparison, I believe one should also from time to time make reflections on institutionalisation as such as one of the most important embodiments of the distinctiveness of childhood – that distinctiveness, which Ariés discovered as a general feature of modern childhood, when he talked about «a long process of segregation of children (…) which has continued into our own day, and which is called schooling» (Ariès, 1962, p. 7). This reflection would enhance our understanding of childhood as an historical phenomenon in terms of a common problem, and deprive it of an exclusive particularity that a local example would easily furnish it with.

Conclusion

What are, then, appropriate comparisons in childhood research? Comparative research is nothing mysterious, not is it a panacea to solve all problems. It is useful in illuminating a national or local research issue and thus for preventing risks of home-blindness, and it helps us to understand similar problems in other contexts, but it is not of immediate relevance for policy makers.

Comparative research can be widely used, irrespective of scale of context. I have been using two of Marc Bloch's advices. In so-called parallel research his definition is helpful: it suggests that the context must exhibit some, but not too much variance, while the fact or phenomenon must show some similarity. Already here one must be prepared to abstract from many details, but reducing scale and scope of context helps one to minimise the loss of details. This goes, however, at the cost of one's opportunity to make further generalisations. You can't have everything!

Bloch's second advice – that only unity of a problem makes a centre – on the one hand underlines his first definition, at the same time it opens up for further explorations in the meaning of childhood or of aspects of childhood. Does 'childhood' mean the same thing historically and

interculturally, can one discuss, for instance, 'socialisation' meaningfully despite its dramatic different expressions, historically and globally? The thesis is that this is fully possible, provided that one is careful in selecting problems or issues that are generically of the same order, despite the fact that they differ specifically. In any case, one has to be careful to safeguard the principle of equivalence of meaning. From this it also follows that comparative research is very much an exercise in interpretation.

Childhood is a phenomenon, which may not have been found always, according to Ariès, but there is hardly any country nowadays without childhood. This certainly makes a good case for looking for at least something 'common' to all these childhoods. I have not specifically dealt with, but only alluded to the question of generation. I would argue (if I had more time!) that Ariès' thesis about the discovery of childhood amounts to no more, no less than the discovery of generational relations or relationships. Implicitly or explicitly, this commonness must logically follow or presupposes all further studies of children or childhood in the sense that no result is allowed to contradict this general insight.

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Program

International, comparative child research: seminar 10.-11.4.2002 at Soria Moria Conference Centre, Oslo

Wednesday, April 10th

10-11.30	Opening and welcome **Magnus Rindal**, Director, Norwegian Social Research (NOVA)
	The advantages and problems of nation-based comparative approaches to social welfare, with particular reference to the male breadwinner policy and lone parenthood. **Anne Skevik**, Senior Researcher, NOVA
	Commentary **Tone Fløtten**, Senior Researcher, Institute for Labour and Social Research (Fafo)
12-13	Social indicators, policy benchmarking and the "Open method of coordination" in the European Union **Koen Vleminckx**, Professor, Katolisches Universitdt, Leuven, Belgia
	Commentary **Axel West Pedersen,** Senior Researcher, NOVA
14-15	Group discussions
15.30-16.30	Systematic reviews: Strengths and weaknesses **Geraldine Macdonald**, Professor of Social Work, University of Bristol, England
	Commentary **Elisabeth Backe-Hansen**, Senior Researcher, NOVA
16.30-17.30	Group discussions
17.30-18	Plenary discussion

Thursday, April 11th

9-10.30	(In Norwegian) Ytre blikk på det velkjente. Om komparasjon i kvalitativ bameforskning. (Looking at the well-known from the outside. On comparison in qualitative childhood research). **Hilde Liden**, Senior Researcher, Institute for Social Research (ISF) Plenary discussion
11-12.30	Comparing childhoods: Appropriate comparisons in childhood research. **Jens Qvortrup**, Professor, Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) Plenary discussion
12.30–13	Summing up the seminar

Deltakerliste

**Deltakere på seminar om internasjonal, komparativ barneforskning
Soria Moria 10.-11. april 2002**

Navn	Institusjon
Andenæs, Agnes	NOVA
Backe-Hansen, Elisabeth	NOVA, *seminaransvarlig*
Bjordal, Jorunn	Allforsk/NTNU
Brusdal, Ragnhild	SIFO
Christiansen, Øivin	Barnevernets utv.senter Vestlandet
Dahl, Espen	Fafo
Engebretsen, Eivind	Institutt for Kulturstudier, UiO
Epland, Jon	SSB
Falck, Sturla	NOVA
Fløtten, Tone	Fafo
Grinde, Turid Vogt	NOVA
Grue, Lars	NOVA
Hennum, Nicole	NOVA
Hjelmtveit, Vidar	HiO avd. ØKS
Hyggen, Christer	NOVA
Knudsen, Christin	NOVA
Kristofersen, Lars	NIBR
Lidén, Hilde	ISF, *foredragsholder*
Lyngstad, Jan	SSB
Macdonald, Geraldine	University of Bristol, *foredragsholder*
Markussen, Ingrid	Institutt for kulturstudier UiO
Mathiesen, Kristin Schjelderup	R-BUP, Oslo
Melberg, Kjersti	Rogalandsforskning
Moldestad, Bente	Barnevernets utv. senter Vestlandet
Nilsen, Randi Dyblie	NOSEB
Pastoor, Lutine	Psykologisk Institutt, UiO
Pedersen, Axel West	NOVA
Qvortrup, Jens	NOSEB, *foredragsholder*
Skevik, Anne	NOVA, *foredragsholder*
Saus, Merete	Barnevernets utv. senter Nord-Norge
Sæther, Inger Lise	R-BUP Oslo
Toverud, Ruth	R-BUP Oslo
Vleminckx, Koen	Katholisches Universität, Leuven, *foredragsholder*