**Our Children’s Europe: RQs and Research Design**

The success of the project depends on ensuring a reasonable measure of comparability between qualitative work carried out in a number of countries with different institutions and facing different challenges in relation to welfare. This will not be easy to achieve. This note reviews our research design in the light of these interests, seeks to identify choices that we have to make and makes some suggestions. **The projects will each prepare a National Politics and Attitudes Paper to provide background information for their country for the next conference, and we will also prepare a European level companion paper. A draft list of areas to be covered in the national paper, filled in in draft for the UK to illustrate how this might be done, is attached in Appendix**.

We are all of us less familiar with Deliberative Forums (DF) than with other aspects of the methods we will use and DF design and choices are discussed in more detail in a separate companion paper.

**The original proposal**

The original project proposal set out three research questions:

* ***RQ1:*** What are the aspirations of ordinary citizens when they look to the future of state welfare in their children’s Europe, what are their priorities and how strongly are they held? How are preferences justified?
* ***RQ2:*** What assumptions and values underlie the pattern of aspirations? How do people understand the factors driving change?How do fiscal and other constraints enter into people’s views on the welfare state?
* ***RQ3:*** How does the changing social, political and economic context of welfare policy interact with people’s expectations and attitudes? What cleavages and solidarities are emerging?

To summarise the discussion of the RQs, we argue that RQ1 is about what people want from the welfare state, RQ2 considers underlying factors that shape aspirations and priorities, and that ‘Answers to these two RQs will enable us to chart solidarities and cleavages between different social groups in relation to welfare state issues and analyse the underlying values and assumptions in varying national contexts. These answers will be developed in relation to RQ3, dealing with the changing social, political and economic context of welfare to examine how attitudes and with them the potential for solidarities and cleavages is likely to develop under different scenarios of welfare state development.’

We also state that:

‘The value of the work lies in four areas:

* The generation of new knowledge about the aspirations and priorities of people in different social groups for state welfare looking a generation ahead, and the assumptions and values on which they are based;
* The identification of existing and potential solidarities and cleavages;
* The application of this knowledge to theoretical debates about factors likely to influence welfare state futures in Europe, and to practical policy-making;
* The innovative qualitative work on the cross-national comparison of attitudes; production of new data.’

In addition to the contribution to knowledge and method, our interest is in likely developments in cleavages and solidarities and more generally in theoretical debates.

**A. Cleavages, solidarities and theoretical debates.**

There are a number of theoretical debates in relation to state welfare and potential dimensions for cleavage and solidarity. We will need to identify particular areas in order to provide some direction to the DFs and FGs. In the discussion of the FGs we identified six possible areas of cleavage of interest, and these directed the choice of participants for the various FGs:

- Social class (2 groups)

- Gender, family and new social risks (1 group)

- Labour market insecurity and new social risks (1 group)

- High income and advantage (1 group)

- Age-stage and family (3 groups)

- Ethnicity (1 group)

These areas cross-cut, most obviously between the social class and the income and labour market insecurity themes, and the family and the age-station and gender themes.

In the discussion of the theoretical background we referred to a number of issues at a general level. The first five correspond to the above list:

* Class issues: future of middle class; inequality; dualisation (overlapping with labour market issues); (Note: the interests of the advantaged high income group correspond to class cleavage theories);
* Gender issues: child care; social care; opportunities (overlapping with labour market issues)
* Labour market issues: employment, equal opportunities; child care; education and training; wage levels; (overlap with class and gender/family);
* The impact of population ageing and associated issues on the welfare state: pensions; social care; health care; disability;
* Ethnicity: discrimination and equal opportunities; closely related to religious issues and the increasing importance of Islam in some countries; (some overlap with migration issues).

In addition there are a further three areas of debate that apply across all groups and do not lead to the identification of any particular interests for representation or investigation:

* Globalisation issues: migration; competitiveness
* EU issues: future of EU (EU governance; two-tier membership; role of ECB); EU migration
* Governance and state issues: equal rights; taxation; role of state, private, community sectors.

**Suggestions:**

1. The above topics should provide the general framework for the national papers – see **Appendix**.
2. Research teams may wish to signal interests in relation to specific areas at this stage and to propose taking responsibility for developing and analysing them.
3. There may be other areas which we should include: please suggest them if this seems appropriate.
4. We will seek roughly to represent the relevant groups in the DFs, and will ask moderators to pursue the list of eight issues identified above.

**B. The relationship between DFs, FG and the before/after surveys of participants.**

In addition to background scoping papers and secondary analysis of existing quantitative surveys (including the new round of ESS which will be fielded in 2016 and available at the end of our project), we proposed DFs, FGs and a simple survey to measure change in the FGs. The comparative cross-national work is the real interest of our project.

In the proposal, we present DFs as ‘designed to facilitate an open discussion on future policy directions and providing insight into the underlying assumptions and expectations of different groups’ and the FGs as ‘exploring how specific social groups understand issues salient in policy debate’. Having examined some of the relevant literature I’m not convinced this is the best use of these methods.

Both the DFs and FGs rest on an approach that sees attitudes as not simply originating with individuals as pre-existing well-formed contents of people’s consciousness but as essentially constructed and developing through expression and interaction. Both are concerned with the meanings that are understood to lie behind the attitudes expressed and which are seen to influence priorities and the potential for solidarities and cleavages. Both give participants more autonomy in developing the discussion than do structured surveys, but both require some framing by moderators/facilitators in order to generate output that bears on the topic in which we are interested and which is comparable between our projects.

The real value of DFs is that they provide opportunities for deliberative, reasoned debate and learning, so that the outcome is more likely to be what people might arrive at if they thought carefully about an issue and reflected on it in discussion with others. In this sense they provide what might be seen as an ideal rational parameter to the range of attitudes that people are likely to express. This is not to say that DFs take place behind a Rawlsian ‘veil of ignorance’. Participants will still have and be influenced by their real world interests and impressions, but they will have an opportunity to think about them.

In contrast, FGs, with which, I think, we are all much more familiar, allow people the opportunity to express and develop their attitudes in interaction with others, but have much less opportunity for deliberation, reflection and learning. Our FGs are designed to allow us to examine the attitudes of particular groups with particular interests separately, to see how whether and how they differ. They offer a perspective on attitudes that is much more immediate and unreflective than that offered by the DFs.

We also proposed before and after surveys of FG participants to “provide baseline data on the positions of individuals in the groups to show how far and in what areas attitudes and priorities are susceptible to change in interaction” and decided not to survey DF participants: “to avoid injecting a constraint on the range of views through pre-structured questions.” However, before-after surveys are typically in used in relation to DFs rather than FGs and in practice we may not encounter much attitude change in FGs, since these are relatively short activities and are more concerned with exploring attitudes and the meanings behind them than in developing and changing attitudes through discussion. I am not convinced that the reason for not including surveys with DFs is compelling.

**Suggestions:**

1. We retain the DF/FG structure but make sure we include the same range of issues as have guided the choice of FG participants in DF moderation so that the topics covered bear some similarity.

2. We include the before/after survey but use it in relation to the DFs where we might expect more attitude change and extend it on the basis of the ESS questions in relation to the areas identified earlier. ESS includes a number of questions on welfare attitudes covering the following topics:

Ideas about fairness in relation to gender and inequality; the scope and responsibilities of the state; the impact of the welfare state on the economy, on poverty, on family issues and on social values; and how immigrants should be treated:

***ESS Questions***

* Large differences in income acceptable to reward talents and efforts
* Woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for sake of family
* *For fair society, differences in standard of living should be small*
* Men should have more right to job than women when jobs are scarce
* Job for everyone, governments' responsibility
* Health care for the sick, governments' responsibility
* Standard of living for the old, governments' responsibility
* Standard of living for the unemployed, governments' responsibility
* Child care services for working parents, governments' responsibility
* Paid leave from work to care for sick family, governments' responsibility
* *Social benefits/services place too great strain on economy*
* *Social benefits/services prevent widespread poverty*
* *Social benefits/services lead to a more equal society*
* *Social benefits/services encourage people other countries to come live here*
* *Social benefits/services cost businesses too much in taxes/charges*
* *Social benefits/services make it easier to combine work and family*
* *Social benefits/services make people lazy*
* *Social benefits/services make people less willing care for one another*
* *Social benefits/services make people less willing look after themselves/family*
* Government decrease/increase taxes and social spending
* Taxation for higher versus lower earners
* Higher or lower earners should get larger old age pensions
* *Higher or lower earners should get larger unemployment benefits*
* When should immigrants obtain rights to social benefits/services?
* Immigrants receive more or less than they contribute
* Level of public health care affordable 10 years from now

Level of old age pension affordable 10 years from now

3. The above list includes 26 questions. It may be necessary to shorten it for practical purposes. If so it is suggested that the questions in italics are omitted, since these overlap with the topics of other questions and the corresponding other questions are more concrete and more likely to get clear answers.

4. The areas which are not obviously addressed by this list of questions are:

EU issues and global competitiveness and the welfare state, which are not really dealt with by ESS. I suggest we leave them out of the surveys.

**C. Analysis**

The original proposal stated:

“The democratic forums will focus much more on practical policy directions and provide indications of the expectations and aspirations which support them. They will seek to provide an overview, based on the aspirations and priorities that a broadly representative group of people from the country identify for themselves and their children as feasible welfare futures. The focus group design will enable within-group, and between-group comparisons to be made. It will provide further data on aspirations and priorities, but will be particularly useful in examining underlying assumptions and the way different ideas are related to each other in detail, through within-group analysis of the way participants conduct arguments and the considerations that influence others in the group. Between-group comparisons will provide evidence of the role of shared interests in influencing attitudes. For both elements, between-country comparisons will show the importance of national context.”

The proposal went on to discuss the use of ‘framework analysis’ which is essentially systematised reading and re-reading of the material, leading to an iterative coding of themes. It emphasizes the importance of gaining a high degree of familiarity with the material

**Suggestions**

1. We follow this method, which allows some flexibility within an overall framework, with national teams taking responsibility for initial analysis and coding of their own material.

2. Teams may wish to write up aspects of the material within a national context and should be free to pursue this.

3. The value of the work is that it permits cross-national comparisons and these are extremely helpful in pursuing the theoretical issues in welfare state debate. We therefore need to use the conferences once each activity (DFs and FGs) is concluded and initial analysis frames constructed (the month 17 and month 28 conferences), in order to agree common cross-national analysis frames with list of themes that we can pursue.

4. Particular national teams may wish to pursue particular themes and to take responsibility for writing them up as part of our overall analysis and presentation of findings.

**APPENDIX**

**NATIONAL ATTITUDES AND POLITICS REVIEW PAPERS**

**NOTE:** This is a listing of areas to be covered. It has been filled in (in a rather vague draft) for the UK to illustrate the kinds of specific topics to be covered, but these will obviously vary from country to country and will require much more detail and reference to evidence.

**MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ATTITUDES TO WELFARE**

* ***Areas to be included (from Research Design paper***):
  + Class issues: future of middle class; inequality; dualisation (overlapping with labour market issues); (Note: the interests of the advantaged high income group correspond to class cleavage theories);
  + Gender issues: child care; social care; opportunities (overlapping with labour market issues)
  + Labour market issues: employment, equal opportunities; child care; education and training; wage levels; (overlap with class and gender/family);
  + The impact of population ageing and associated issues on the welfare state: pensions; social care; health care; disability;
  + Ethnicity: discrimination and equal opportunities; closely related to religious issues and the increasing importance of Islam in some countries; (some overlap with migration issues).
  + Globalisation issues: migration; competitiveness
  + EU issues: future of EU (EU governance; two-tier membership; role of ECB); EU migration
  + Governance and state issues: equal rights; taxation; role of state, private, community sectors.
* ***Salient topics*** ***in current attitude research*** filled in for UK (e.g. British Social Attitudes survey)
  + Immigration
  + Working age welfare/ undeserving poor
  + Health/ social care
  + Funding
  + Ageing population
* ***Main patterns in attitudes during past 5 years*** (UK)
  + Fear of immigration: major issue both for traditional left voters in de-industrialising areas and for traditional right voters, especially those who feel they are losing ground
  + Costs of welfare and tax implications: high profile for most groups
  + Concerns about undeserving claimers: major issue across all groups of citizens
  + Living Standards and ‘squeezed middle’: promoted as an issue by the centre-left, but failing to achieve much impact
* ***Main anticipated attitudinal factors in next 25 years*** (UK)
  + Ageing population
  + Costs and ‘rationing’ of welfare
  + Fear of immigration

**POLITICS OF WELFARE**

* ***Main political issues in welfare***
  + Current policy debates
    - Population ageing/ rising cost of provision
    - International competitiveness and skill-level
    - State vs. private provision
  + Next 25 years
    - As above
    - Climate change/sustainability issues to the extent that they are relevant
* ***Main political actors (parties; social partners; NGOs; supra-national bodies; etc.)***
  + Conservative (centre right)
  + Labour (centre-left)
  + Liberal Democrats (left on state + right on economy; in decline after participation in 2010 Coalition)
  + UKIP: rapidly growing right anti EU, anti-immigration
  + Green Party: left of Labour, growing from small base
  + SNP: Scottish Independence; left of Labour on social issues, but also tax-cutting esp. for business
  + Small regional parties in N. Ireland and Wales
* ***Institutional framework and position of political actors: power resources***
  + Majoritarian polity; Highly-centralised policy making (N Ireland separate in many areas) now facing possibility of devolution to Scotland and to some extent Wales and major cities of some powers; strong party discipline; powerful Prime Ministerial government; Business has some influence and includes strong financial as well as industrial capital; Trade Unions have little influence; NGOs involved in welfare policy delivery typically under contract to local government or to commercial agencies holding contracts for specific services (Work Programme; Work Capacity Testing of people with disabilities etc.); limited engagement with EU; more policy learning from Anglo-Saxon world.
* ***Main policy directions***
  + Liberalism (cutting state spending; privatisation; use of internal markets; happy to permit high and increasing income and regional inequalities. Extensive means-testing. Centre-left promotes Minimum Wage and top up benefits for low paid workers)
* ***Likely future developments***
  + Further cutbacks, especially in working age welfare state, details depend on election results;
  + Explicit rationing of health and social care
  + Stronger work tests
  + Stronger immigration controls