



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

ABSTRACTS

Researching Institutional Contexts

RE-InVEST and RESCuE. Translating qualitative research funded under EU FP7 and H2020 into national policy learning processes: two Irish case studies.

Dr. Jane Gray and Dr. Mary P. Murphy

Maynooth University Department of Sociology and Social Sciences Institute

The paper has three objectives: (i) to consider how European Union funded research, especially FP7 and H2020, can be more centrally utilised by policy makers and civil society; (ii) to consider the particular challenges of translating qualitative research findings into policy analysis; (iii) to explore the distinctive contribution that qualitative research can make to ensuring that diverse perspectives, particularly those of marginalised communities and social groups, find a voice in policy processes.

The paper's starting presumption is that high quality social science research undertaken in Ireland can be better mobilised to design an improved, stronger recovery and to generate policy learning to enable structural changes that increase the likelihood of avoiding future crisis. Two reinforcing obstacles to achieving these goals are evident. First, research is only partially integrated into the policy development process and second, research findings are not always effectively policy oriented.

The paper first briefly outlines the European research frameworks showing how they both enable and disable national level policy relevant research and engagement. We then comment on the challenges associated with developing qualitative research strategies that can generate policy relevant research findings, while also meeting the core qualitative objectives of incorporating diverse perspectives and translating voice into policy processes.

We proceed by offering two cases studies - RE-InVEST and RESCuE - to illustrate how contemporary European qualitative research projects, focused on citizens' experiences of the crisis, offer learning for policy and illustrate the challenges of translating such learning into conventional policy processes. The two projects have in common the use of qualitative methodologies to develop rich and complex understandings of how individuals and families coped with the crisis, one using a human rights and capability theoretical framework, the other a theoretical framework centred on the concept of resilience.

- RE-InVEST: Rebuilding an Inclusive, Value-based Europe of Solidarity and Trust through Social Investments, is funded €2.49m from 2015-2019 under H2020 Euro 3, 'European Societies after the Crisis.' It aims to provide a stronger intellectual human rights and capability foundation to the European Union Social Investment Package. It generates qualitative and quantitative empirical analysis of various impacts of crisis on rights and capabilities particularly in areas of labour market activation, social protection, regulating for minimum social service standards and fiscal/funding and governance of social investment. The consortium includes 12 countries representing at least four different European welfare regimes.
- RESCuE: Patterns of Resilience during Socioeconomic Crises among Households in Europe, is an FP7 funded project (€2.43m) that includes partners from nine European member and neighbour states. Using innovative qualitative methods RESCuE analyses the impact of the current crisis on households and examine every-day practices for coping with those impacts contexts. RESCuE began in 2014 and will conclude in 2017.

The Effectiveness of a Second-Chance Education Scheme as an Unemployment Activation Measure: Evidence from Ireland

Elish Kelly, Seamus McGuinness

The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

Department of Economics, Trinity College Dublin.

National Institute for Labour Studies (NILS), Flinders University.

Institute of Labour Studies (IZA), Bonn.

Using a matching framework and high quality administrative longitudinal data, we evaluate the effectiveness of a second-chance education opportunity scheme, the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) programme, in assisting its participants to find employment on completion of their course. The BTEA scheme is one of the main activation measures used by Ireland's public employment service (PES) to enhance the employability of jobseekers so that he/she can progress from unemployment to employment. We found that, relative to a control group of unemployed individuals that did not participate in the BTEA scheme (or any other activation programme), 2008 BTEA scheme participants were between 23 and 38 percentage points less likely to have exited unemployment to a job by June 2012, and between 14 and 29 percentage points less likely at the same time in 2014. These results hold when tested against the influences of both sample selection and unobserved heterogeneity bias. Ireland appears to be atypical in the use of a second-chance education opportunity scheme as one of its main labour market activation programmes as most other OECD countries active labour market programmes tend to predominantly focus on schemes in the areas of specific skills training and wage subsidies (Card et al., 2010).

Developing an Agri-Food Policy for Ireland: Social science, advocacy and action research

Dr Colin Sage

Department of Geography & ISS21, UCC

Attention to policy debates both before and since the 'crash' reveals how the imperative of economic growth served to trump all other policy considerations. It will be argued in this paper that nowhere is this assertion more evident than in the realm of 'agri-food'. In 2009 an industry-led working group devised a strategy exclusively focussed on output growth for the agricultural sector – that was adopted as de facto government policy. Framed as a contribution to 'feeding the world' Food Harvest 2020 set clear production targets for dairy, meat, seafood, etc and was heralded as a programme designed to lead economic recovery.

Setting to one side the shortcomings of 'foot-to-the-floor' productivism as a means to address the diverse needs of the farming sector, as well as huge consequences for the environment – not least in crashing through our international obligations to lower greenhouse gas emissions – this paper will outline the urgent need for Ireland to develop a more coherent and broadly conceived agri-food policy. The justification for this is that while much has been made of Ireland's success in cornering 15 percent of the global infant formula market, one in ten households here are unable to afford a healthy diet. Since 2008 food poverty and food inequality have grown rapidly – a symptom of spreading precarity across society – and demonstrated by the opening of food banks across the country, several performed by the previous Tanaiste and Minister for Social Protection.

While the volunteers that staff food banks and emergency food distribution charities are to be applauded for their work, the growing numbers of people making use of their services highlights the failure of a band-aid approach that risks further institutionalising food poverty. At the same time those who appear to be tackling the crisis are the large supermarkets philanthropically 'donating' food products that are surplus to their operations (and otherwise costly to dispose of to land-fill). This reinforces the hegemonic position of corporate retailers in the Irish food system – a system that delivers cheap food largely responsible for high levels of overweight and obesity and the resulting epidemic of non-communicable diseases that is putting extra strain on an already stretched health service. Unfortunately, health policy is driven by prioritisation of treatment for sick people over efforts to create the conditions for good health.

This paper will first outline the urgent necessity of developing greater horizontal coherence across a number of discrete policy domains (agriculture, health, education, environment, social protection) at national level and the real opportunities that arise by doing so. Secondly, it will argue for greater ‘policy space’ at local level whereby initiatives are encouraged to devise responses to their particular circumstances with the objective of achieving higher levels of civic engagement. As an illustration of the latter issue, the paper will conclude with observations drawn from the author’s experience as chair of the Cork Food Policy Council, a city–regional initiative working with public bodies to develop a healthier, more sustainable and fairer food system.

Direct Engagement

Austerity, Local Government Change and Competitive Tendering: Implications for Communities, Social Inclusion and Social Policy in Ireland

Dr. Catherine Forde and Dr. Feilim O hAdhmaill, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork and Deirdre O’Byrne, Centre for Adult Continuing Education, University College Cork.

Since 2008 an ‘austerity agenda’ in Ireland has had a significant impact on the funding of organisations engaged in community development and social inclusion activities (Considine and Dukelow, 2012; Harvey 2012). Cuts in funding have severely affected the voluntary and community sector, which plays a significant role in the provision of welfare services and promotion of social inclusion in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2000; NES, 2005; Equality Authority 2009; Considine and Dukelow, 2012). The Wheel (2013) suggested that there had been annual cuts to the sector of between 8% and 10% between 2008 and 2013.

In addition to austerity, over the last twenty years there has been a policy of increasing central and local Government engagement in the operation, funding and work of community sector organisations in Ireland, as outlined initially in the White Paper Better Local Government (1996) and the more recent Local Government Reform Act 2014. These policies aim to achieve greater ‘alignment’ between local government and local development systems and agencies, including local and community development agencies. Public procurement was introduced by the Government as a reform measure in successive Public Service Reform Plans (2011 and 2014-16) and in recent years local and community development organisations have been required to competitively tender for contracts to provide state-designed service packages at local and community level. Evidence from the UK suggests that competitive tendering has had a detrimental impact on the work and independence of the sector there (MacMillan, 2010; Independence Panel, 2015; NCIA, 2015), and there is a risk that competitive tendering, allied to greater government involvement, may lead to competition, commercialisation and privatisation of many voluntary and community sector activities in Ireland.

This paper is based on original primary research which was conducted between 2014 and 2015 by researchers from University College Cork on the combined effects of governance changes, competitive tendering and austerity as they pertain to community sector agencies involved in community development and social inclusion activities at local level. The research used quantitative and qualitative approaches, including a large-scale national survey and interviews and focus groups with managers, workers and other stake-holders from a range of community sector organisations. The research highlights some of the impacts of current policy developments on the independence of third sector organisations and groups; on inter-agency co-operation and agencies’ engagement with the communities they serve; on their capacity to continue to engage in community development and social inclusion work as it has hitherto been undertaken; and on the implications for democracy at local level. The paper will critically assess the implications for policy in the following areas:

- Changing forms of decision-making and their effects on communities and community engagement.

- Relationships between voluntary and community sector organisations and between organisations and communities: cooperation, social capital and competition.
- Independence and autonomy of third sector organisations: transparency, creativity and innovation.
- Local government: enhancement of local democracy or consolidation of local administration?

‘Hoping for a better tomorrow’: Narratives of Coping, Resilience and Family Support arising from a study of Early Years services and the experience of parents, including those resident in Direct Provision, in the West of Ireland.

Dr Lisa Moran, Dr Sheila Garrity, Dr Carmel Devanney, Prof Caroline McGregor
 UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, Institute for Life Course and Society, School of Political Science and Sociology, National university of Ireland, Galway.

This paper presents empirical findings from an evaluation of the ‘Greater Tomorrow’ Crèche and Ballyhaunis Community Preschool facilities, which are accessed by members of asylum seeking communities in Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo, as well as families in the broader local community. This paper shares narratives of resilience and coping of parents living in a Direct Provision centre: Direct provision is defined as a system which provides for the welfare of persons (i.e. full board and ancillary services) whilst they await decisions on their asylum applications (Reception and Integration Agency 2010; Nasc 2015). Despite the substantial population of children and families living in Direct Provision centres across Ireland, research underlines that Direct Provision contribute significantly to economic deprivation and exacerbates the social and cultural marginalisation of children and families (Ogbu et al. 2014). A Direct Provision Centre has existed in Ballyhaunis since 2000 and is inhabited by 204 children and adults at present. Ballyhaunis is a unique case-study site due to its substantial migrant population who relocated here in the 1970s and 80s, principally for economic and religious reasons (McGarry 2012) along with a more recent wave of migration following the EU expansion and the attractive economic opportunities during the early 2000s. Drawing upon qualitative materials from participant-observations, focus groups and in-depth interviews with parents, key informants, and staff members at the preschool and crèche, we argue that participant’s narratives about Direct Provision (DP) are interlinked with concepts of freedom, insider/outsider distinctions, control and resilience that shape and reflect lived experiences of DP in the study area. In addition, we highlight the importance of informal social supports in the lives of all families, in particular, those residing in in DP. The significance of the crèche and preschool as providers of crucial emotional and material supports for parents and children is highlighted.

Overall, results presented in this paper highlight the significance of ‘informal’ social networks for supporting children and families living in Direct Provision as well as for newer, migrant families, living in smaller, rural communities. This study highlights the unique role that early years services play in the lives of families and children across the socio-economic spectrum, supporting inclusion as well as recognising and respecting diversity. A clear ‘family support’ ethos permeates the approach to practice within these settings: findings offer lessons for the broader Early Childhood Education and Care sector in terms of adapting to the changing demography within the Irish State, presenting a broader understanding of the role of ECEC in contemporary Irish society.

Policy implications arising from this paper include: the recommendation that greater consideration be accorded to people’s lived experiences of DP; in particular, how parents and children (re)-construct discourses, knowledge and emotions that shape and reflect their everyday lived realities; the significant role community childcare services play in supporting children and families in areas of disadvantage cannot be overlooked; greater recognition and enhanced resourcing of community based services should be considered in light of these and international research findings.

ITS and CYPSC Sligo/Leitrim: Perspectives on the Collaborative Process toward the Construction of the Children and Young Peoples Plan (2014-2017)

Dr Susanne Colleary, IT Sligo

The Children and Young People's Services Committees are responsible for securing better outcomes for children and young people in Ireland. The Committees are responsible for improving the lives of children, young people and families at local and community level by improving provision and delivery of key and inter-agency services. To that end, Sligo/Leitrim CYPSC were tasked with the creation of a three year needs-led Work Plan which is underscored by the necessity of interagency working across existing provision.

The CRISP research office (ITS) began working with Sligo/Leitrim CYPSC in March 2015. The Work Plan builds as an audit of services; socio-economics statistics and needs analysis structures in order to identify priority needs and objectives as aligned with National Policy Framework outlined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. The CYPSC plan was submitted to the Centre for Effective Services in February 2016. This paper represents the Institute's active collaboration with CYPSC toward the creation of a series of need-led actions for children and young people for the region and over the life time of the plan (2014-2017). The paper will be presented collaboratively; that is with those CRISP researchers involved throughout the process and the CYPSC Co-ordinator for Sligo/Leitrim. This collaboration reflects the voice of research and its dialectical relationship with the core aims and objectives of the CYPSC for the region.

Research on Policy Issues:

Social Risk and Social Class trends in Social Exclusion in Ireland : Boom, Recession and Beyond

Dorothy Watson, Bertrand Maître, Christopher T. Whelan and Helen Russell, ESRI

There has been a debate in the literature regarding the significance of social class and social risks for social exclusion, with social risks largely distinguished based on life-cycle stage and social classes distinguished in terms of labour market position (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Whelan, Nolan, and Maître, 2008; Russell, Maître and Nolan, 2010). Broadly, social risks could be understood as involving constraints on labour market participation – the principal means by which most individuals and families acquire material resources in advanced capitalist economies. We expand the conceptual understanding of social risks to include lone parenthood and disability as well as life-cycle stage. The focus of this paper is on the changing interplay between social risks and social class in their influence on social exclusion in a period of dramatic economic upheaval in Ireland. Drawing on the SILC data, we examine trends in poverty and deprivation by social risk and social class between 2004 and 2013.

We draw out the implications of the findings for social and economic policy. Given the emphasis in policy on 'making work pay', variations in the risk of poverty and deprivation by social class raise the question of whether work pays enough and pays it consistently. This includes considerations of job security and pension entitlements as well as hourly earnings. Variations by social risk group, on the other hand, point to the importance of either addressing the particular barriers to labour supply faced by the social risk groups or to the need to examine pension adequacy in the case of people who are retired or unable to work.

Implications for education policy: A comparative study of women's experiences in engineering and physics education in Ireland and Poland

Lead Researcher: Prof./Dr. Shannon Chance, Dublin Institute of Technology

Policy Consultant: Prof./Dr. Pamela Eddy, The College of William and Mary

Research Supervisor: Prof./Dr. Brian Bowe, Dublin Institute of Technology

Having a vibrant workforce of scientists and engineers can aid economic recovery and stability. Yet Engineers Ireland membership is just 9% women. The UK has the lowest gender-diversity rates in Europe, with women comprising just 7% of professional engineers and less than 4% of engineering technologists. By age 12, most girls in Britain have started on paths that, by the time they reach 16, will prevent them from studying engineering as undergraduates. Other countries have accrued better results. Argentina, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia have achieved at least 33% participation by women in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. Research suggests reaching 30-35% women is a crucial threshold for shifting a profession's culture from being male-dominated¹.

Changing Gender Roles: Implications for Women's Labour Force Participation, Family Formation and Well-Being

Dr. Margret Fine-Davis

Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin

The last several decades have witnessed major changes in gender roles and family patterns, as well as a falling birth rate in Ireland and the rest of Europe. This paper reports selected results of the first major study to examine people's attitudes to family formation and childbearing in Ireland and the effect of new family forms on well-being. The research, supported by the Family Support Agency, was multi-method, beginning with an in-depth qualitative study of 48 men and women in the childbearing age group, followed by a survey of a representative nationwide sample of 1,404 men and women. One of the prime questions which the study addressed was whether or not changes in gender role attitudes and behaviour were affecting family formation. With insights from the qualitative study, several new sets of measures were developed using factor analysis. The results showed that while women's progress in the workplace has been welcomed, there is also a perceived threat of women's advancement, as well as some ambiguity in the male role. Attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation were both found to be positive and cohabitation is seen as a step in the progression towards marriage. Attitudes towards being single were also positive, though in some cases ambivalent, but single women, particularly older and better educated ones are finding it more difficult to find a partner and this is impeding family formation on their part. Discrepancies were found between people's ideal and expected number of children, demonstrating that people expect to have fewer children than they would ideally like to have. It is clear that choices regarding family size are being influenced by child care costs and the data suggest that if these were more affordable people would be inclined to have more children than they are presently having. Another important factor which impinges on fertility decisions is that the workplace as currently constructed is not viewed as conducive to work-life balance and flexible working policies are perceived as relevant to childbearing decisions.

The increasing education of women and their greater role in the labour force is leading to postponement of couple formation and childbearing. In addition the increasing value placed on autonomy, freedom and independence is also contributing to changes in family formation. This delay has little effect on men, but disproportionately affects women, who are caught between their biological clocks and their wish to continue actively in the labour market. This is exacerbated by the high cost of childcare and the lack of flexible working arrangements. As a result, young men and women who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development, are facing dilemmas. A price is being paid in terms of the lesser well-being of single people, relative to married and cohabiting people, and older, well-educated women are particularly affected. The findings underscore the need for social policy to address the dilemmas faced by young people who want to start families, while at the same time fulfilling their own needs for autonomy and development.