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How a Pan-European Longitudinal Survey Can Improve Policy
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Measuring Youth Well-being

How a Pan-European Longitudinal Survey Can Improve Policy
The research presented throughout this volume was conducted as part of the Measuring Youth Well-Being (MYWeB) project. Financial support for MYWeB was provided by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (Grant Agreement No. 613368). The editors acknowledge the role of the Commission and thank the research programme officer for MYWeB, Monica Menapace, for her support over three years. The research findings, and their interpretation, included in this volume remain the responsibility of individual authors and the MYWeB consortium.

We express our thanks to the authors contributed to this volume for their continued commitment to the collective aspirations of the MYWeB project to develop a European cohort survey. As it turns out we will all be working together to further these aims with a new Horizon 2020 project scheduled to start in January 2018. We acknowledge also the dedicated contribution of many researchers, expert advisors and the project manager, Paula Sergeant, over the course of the project; the collection and analysis of the data underpinning the chapters in this volume would not have been possible without them.

Finally, we thank every one of the children and young people who participated in the various research activities. Without them the research would not have been possible.
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<tr>
<td>ALSPAC</td>
<td>Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHPS</td>
<td>British Household Panel Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Personal Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>CATI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Telephone Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAWI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Web Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Cognitive Interviews</td>
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<td>CYP</td>
<td>Children and Young People</td>
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<td>DE</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRM</td>
<td>Day Reconstruction Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department of Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHP</td>
<td>European Community Household Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELSCYP</td>
<td>European Longitudinal Study of Children and Young People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>Education Resources Information Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESM</td>
<td>Experience Sampling Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESS</td>
<td>European Social Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU-SILC</td>
<td>European Union Survey of Income and Living Conditions</td>
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<td>EVS</td>
<td>European Values Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GGP</td>
<td>Gender and Generations Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSOEP</td>
<td>German Socio Economic Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>GUI</td>
<td>Growing Up in Ireland</td>
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<td>GUS</td>
<td>Growing Up in Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>HBSC</td>
<td>Health Behaviour in School-aged Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRQoL</td>
<td>Health Related Quality of Life</td>
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<td>HU</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISCWeB</td>
<td>International Survey of Children's Well-Being</td>
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<td>ISER</td>
<td>Institute for Social and Economic Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISSP</td>
<td>International Social Survey Programme</td>
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<td>LA</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
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<td>LABC</td>
<td>Locational accelerated birth cohorts</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBC</td>
<td>Local Birth Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>MYWeB</td>
<td>Measuring Youth Well-Being</td>
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<tr>
<td>NABC</td>
<td>National accelerated birth cohorts</td>
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<td>NBC</td>
<td>National Birth Cohort</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not in Education, Employment, or Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEPS</td>
<td>National Educational Panel Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSID</td>
<td>Panel Study of Income Dynamics</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Purchasing Power Parity</td>
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<tr>
<td>PWB</td>
<td>Psychological Well-Being</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDT</td>
<td>Self-Determination Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARE</td>
<td>Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Social Network Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SROI</td>
<td>Social Return On Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWB</td>
<td>Subjective Well-Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAPD</td>
<td>Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pre-testing, and Documentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollars</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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Chapter 1
Notions of Well-Being, the State of Child Well-Being Research and the MYWeB Project

Gary Pollock, Jessica Ozan, and Haridhan Goswami

1.1 Introduction

Children’s well-being is fundamental to that of society as a whole. Promoting children’s well-being is not only vital in order for children to have a good childhood, but also as a firm basis for their future well-being as adults (Rees et al. 2012). How children fare through critical points of development affects their quality of life, their productivity, welfare dependency and the transmission of their later life outcomes to their own children (Richardson 2012). In recent years, child well-being has become a priority for the European political agenda. As part of the European cooperation on social protection and social inclusion, the European Union (EU) has expressed its strong political commitment to promoting well-being among children which is reflected (among others) in the establishment of an EU Task-Force on child poverty and child well-being in 2007 (TARKI 2010). The Europe 2020 Strategy gives a new impetus to efforts addressing child poverty and social exclusion in the EU. A number of Member States have set specific targets or sub-targets relating to child poverty/social exclusion as their contribution to the headline European target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020 (Council of the European Union 2012). Therefore, Euro 2020 has given priority to fighting poverty and social exclusion and improving the well-being of children and young people.

This policy drive in improving children’s well-being, the recognition of children’s and young people’s (CYP) rights to having a good childhood and good future life chances, coupled with the injunction from the New Sociology of Childhood to consult with CYP as active agents have resulted in an increasing number of studies on children’s and young people’s well-being at national and international levels. See
Goswami et al. (2016) for the full review. These surveys provide invaluable policy data for improving children’s lives. However, the design, content, and modes of data collection used in these surveys are influenced by a number of factors including conceptual underpinning of well-being, its measurement and participatory model(s) used by the researchers for children in those surveys. This chapter is divided into four sections to review those aspects. The first section focuses on the conceptual and definitional aspects of well-being. The second section reviews how well-being is measured in surveys highlighting its objective and subjective dimensions. The third section critically reviews key studies on child well-being to reveal the paradigm shift towards child-centric research. Finally, the chapter closes by describing the structure of this book with summaries of each subsequent chapter.

1.2 Well-Being: Definition

Despite substantial academic and policy interest in well-being over the decades, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept. In academic literature, it is used as an over-arching concept to refer to the quality of life of people in society (Rees et al. 2010b).

In defining the concept of well-being, a distinction is also made between the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches (Ryan and Deci 2001). Scholars influenced by the hedonic approach view well-being in terms of subjective happiness and the experience of pleasure versus displeasure broadly construed to include all judgements about the good/bad elements of life. Although there are many ways to evaluate the pleasure/pain continuum in human experience, most research within the new hedonic psychology has used assessment of subjective well-being (SWB) (Diener and Lucas 1999). SWB consists of three components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood, together often summarized as happiness. It should be noted that a high level of subjective well-being is not assumed to develop from the absence of negative mood, but from a positive balance of negative and positive mood (Fredrickson and Losada 2005; Huppert and So 2013).

On the other hand, the eudaimonic approach maintains that not all desires—not all outcomes that a person might value—would yield well-being when achieved (Ryan and Deci 2001). It focuses on meaning and self-realisation and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning. Ryff and Singer (1998, 2000) have explored the question of well-being in the context of developing a lifespan theory of human flourishing. Ryff and Keyes (1995) spoke of psychological well-being (PWB) as distinct from SWB and presented a multidimensional approach to the measurement of PWB that taps six distinct aspects of human actualization: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness.

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci 2000) is another perspective that has both embraced the concept of eudaimonia, or self-realisation, as a central definitional aspect of well-being and attempted to specify both what it means to
actualize the self and how that can be accomplished. Specifically, SDT posits three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and theorizes that fulfilment of these needs is essential for psychological growth (e.g., intrinsic motivation), integrity (e.g., internalisation and assimilation of cultural practices), and well-being (e.g., life satisfaction and psychological health) (Ryan and Deci 2001).

Although there is much debate among the followers of these two approaches, evidence from a number of investigators (e.g., Biswas-Diener et al. 2009; Compton et al. 1996; King and Napa 1998; McGregor and Little 1998; Proctor et al. 2014) has indicated that well-being is probably best conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes both hedonic (SWB) and eudaimonic (PWB) elements.

1.3 Measures of Well-Being: Objective vs. Subjective

In the literature, well-being is measured using both objective and subjective measures. Objective measures of social reality are those which are not filtered by perceptions and are independent from personal evaluations. On the other hand, subjective measures are supposed to explicitly express subjective states, such as perceptions, assessments and preferences for example (Noll 2013).

The use of objective measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), household income, household wealth and the income distribution, the proportion of children in education, educational attainment, life expectancy and crime rates are well established in research with children and young people’s well-being. Although objective measures provide useful information on well-being at the macro-level, there are many criticisms and caveats to be taken into account when confronting such measures (McGillivray 2007). For example, Hicks (2011) terms the approach to using objective well-being measures as ‘paternalistic’. This approach, he argues, assumes that certain things are good or bad for well-being and these are included in any indicator set and although there may be a model underpinning the choice, there is the danger that what is measured becomes what matters rather than what matters being measured. Some researchers (e.g., Pollard and Lee 2003) argue that the growth of ‘developmental perspective’ in analysing childhood well-being has influenced the research on child well-being by objective indicator-based measures.

In order to explain the usefulness of subjective measures in well-being research, Kroll and Delhey (2013) used the famous Thomas theorem (Thomas and Thomas 1928: 572) grounded in Symbolic Interactionism: ‘If men (people) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.’ Thus, the subjective measures draw on human perception the individual themselves decide what is crucial in assessing their lives. In spite of some methodological issues such as the measurement problem, bias problem, and divergence problem (see Veenhoven 2002), they provide important additional information over and above objective measures on the quality of people’s lives (Hicks 2011). There is growing consensus in support for considering
subjective well-being as a necessary complement to objective indicators (Guillén-Royo and Velazco 2006; Veenhoven 2002; Stiglitz et al. 2009) and they together can create a rounded picture of the condition of well-being.

1.4 Review of Key Studies on Child Well-Being

Research on CYP’s well-being has made significant progress over the last decade. Therefore, the relevance of a new longitudinal study to children and young people’s well-being needs to be evaluated in the context of scientific advancement in this area of research. Rees et al. (2010a) developed a typology to describe child and youth well-being studies. We adopt this typology to review three different approaches used in existing well-being studies:

1.4.1 Social Indicators

Influenced by the wider social indicators movement, this approach initially focused on measurement and trends in child well-being primarily using ‘survival indicators’ (Ben-Arieh 2008) such as rates of mortality, disease, and social problems affecting children (e.g., illiteracy, school failure). Major work informed by this approach includes the Child and Youth Well-being Index (Land et al. 2001) in the United States (US), the National Set of Child Well-being Indicators (Hanafin and Brooks 2005) in the Republic of Ireland, the Children and Young People’s Well-being Monitor (Welsh Assembly Government 2008) for Wales, the Local Index of Child Well-being (Bradshaw 2009) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in England, Kids Count, a national and state-by-state effort to track the well-being of children in the US run by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012), OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) research on the comparison of child well-being across its 30 member countries (Chapple and Richardson 2009) and UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) publications (2007; 2010).

These indicator-based measures are useful to understand children and young people’s well-being at the macro level. However, as Moore et al. (2014) argued, these macro indices predominantly focus on describing children’s well-being at the expense of analysing the contexts that may contribute to or undermine their well-being. Using data from the 2007 US National Survey of Children’s Health, Moore et al. (2014) developed micro-level indices (positive and negative) of child well-being by focusing on the three contextual domains of family, neighbourhood, and socio-demographic factors. Their indices significantly contributed to child well-being research as they clearly revealed how the independent variables (environment or context of children) play crucial roles in determining children’s development and well-being. While such indicators are important to begin to redress issues of
inequalities and social exclusion that negatively affect children’s health and well-being, they tend to ignore the potential, attributes and strengths of children. More specifically, this approach can be argued to treat children as ‘passive agents not capable of evaluating their own lives’.

### 1.4.2 Self-Report Surveys

The second approach emphasises measuring child well-being through self-report surveys. A number of instruments have been developed over the last decade to measure young people’s own assessment of their lives. One of the most widely used is Huebner’s Multi-Dimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner 1994) which measures well-being in five domains—family, friends, school, living environment, and self. Similarly, Cummins and Lau (2005) in their work with children and young people in Australia have developed a Personal Well-being Index covering the domains of standard of living, personal health, achievement in life, personal relationships, personal safety, feeling part of the community, and future security.

The international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey covers a number of key areas of young people’s health and well-being. In the UK, several waves of the ‘Tellus’ survey (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills; Department for Children, Schools and Families) have surveyed young people about their well-being and views under the five themes of the Every Child Matters framework - Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being. The survey questionnaire included some questions about happiness and about relationships with family and friends. In addition, some large social surveys have begun to incorporate self-report instruments for young people. Understanding Society, previously known as The British Household Panel Survey, has a youth questionnaire for young people aged 11 to 15 about their happiness, feeling troubled and self-esteem (Rees et al. 2010b).

Outside the UK, the Danish Longitudinal Survey of Children, the Youth component of the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), French Longitudinal Survey of Children, Swiss Survey of Children and Youth, the European Social Survey and the European Quality of Life Survey and some cross-sectional surveys (e.g., Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, Progress for International Student Assessment, Trends in International mathematics Science Study, the European School Project on Alcohol and other Drugs) included some questions on well-being and its various domains for young people in various age groups. For a full review of these surveys, see Richardson (2012), Gabos and Kopasz (2013) and Gabos and Toth (2011).

The main advantage of this approach is that it focuses on self-reported well-being. More specifically, the international surveys among children and young people provide precious comparable data on child well-being covering countries in the EU and beyond. For example, the OECD conducted a comparative analysis on child well-being that provides useful insights on the state of child well-being among 30
OECD countries by focusing on six well-being domains: material well-being; housing and environment; education; health; risk behaviours; and quality of school life (Chapple and Richardson 2009). Moreover, household panel surveys (e.g., Understanding Society) provide new opportunities to explore the effect of changes in young people’s lives on their overall well-being. However, the concepts and domains of well-being used in this work were developed primarily from concepts which originated from the study of adult well-being. Fattore et al. (2007) argue that these concepts are not directly transferable to the measurement of the well-being of children and young people. Moreover, as Bradshaw (2009) argues, most of these studies include only a limited number of well-being domains and therefore do not provide the full picture on the state of well-being for children and young people. These limitations influence the development of the third approach: child and young people centric studies.

1.4.3 Children and Young People Centric Well-Being Studies

The third approach focuses on developing concepts and frameworks which incorporate children’s perspectives. This strand is still at a relatively early stage, but there are a small number of examples of attempts to develop well-being frameworks from children’s perspectives. Consultation exercises with children and young people in the Republic of Ireland (Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2005; Hanafin et al. 2007) and Australia (Fattore et al. 2007) have identified important differences in children and young people’s ideas about well-being.

In this regard, the first large-scale project took place in the UK in 2005, undertaken by The Children’s Society when it included open-ended questions asking young people about their views on well-being and the factors which promoted and hindered it in its national survey of 11,000 young people aged 14 to 16. The thematic and content-based analyses of these responses identified ten key areas (The Children’s Society 2006). These were, roughly in order of their frequency of occurrence in the responses (1) family, (2) friends, (3) leisure, (4) school, education and learning, (5) behaviour, (6) the local environment, (7) community, (8) money, (9) attitudes, and (10) health. Following this child-centric approach, Rees et al. (2010b) developed an index of children’s subjective well-being in England. This ten-domain index includes young people’s satisfaction on family or carer, friends, health, appearance, time use, future, home, money and possessions, school, and amount of choice. A number of similar initiatives are also observed in the mainland European countries. For example, the Danish Youth Survey 2002 (Helweg-Larsen et al. 2004) examined young people’s experiences and views on six themes including family, school, leisure and social networks, health and health behaviour, sexual experiences with peers and adults and violence in immediate surroundings. The DJI (Deutsches Jugendinstitut) Youth Survey in Germany explores adolescents’ trust in social institutions, their political attitudes, interest in politics, value orientation as well as their willingness regarding political activity (DJI 2000).
This third approach has been taken further by an international group of researchers linked to Children’s Worlds, the International Survey of Children’s Well-Being (ISCWeB). The study aims to collect solid and representative data on children’s lives and daily activities, their time use an in particular their own perceptions and evaluations of their well-being. Each of the 14 participating countries around the world collected data from a sample of 3000 children aged 8 to 12 in the first wave of the survey in 2012. The second wave of the survey covering almost 60,000 children from 18 countries across four continents has been completed and the third wave covering more than 30 countries is currently underway (Children’s Worlds 2017). The results of this project are only now being disseminated. For some initial findings of this project, see Rees and Dinisman (2015), Montserrat et al. (2014), Sarriera et al. (2014).

Having the unique position of ‘research with and by children’, this third approach reflects a major paradigm shift in child well-being research (Mason and Danby 2011). Thus, the importance of including children as active agents whose perspectives are heard in matters concerning them especially in child well-being policies is gaining momentum within child indicator research. However, child well-being researchers (e.g., Richardson 2012; Bradshaw 2009; Casas 2011) are increasingly concerned about the shortage of internationally comparable subjective data on children’s and adolescents’ perceptions, evaluations and aspirations which they consider useful for decision-making and evaluating social change.

In this regard, the data from the ISCWeB by the Children’s World (2017) would supply invaluable comparative data on subjective well-being among a number of EU member states and countries beyond Europe. Several waves of data from these countries would also help researchers to examine change over time at the cohort or aggregate level. However, as Howieson et al. (2008) argued, such data appear to have lacking on detecting change at the individual level. Therefore, they do not enable an understanding of an individual’s transition through different activities and statuses that might be linked to their subjective well-being. Since childhood is not static but dynamic, a holistic view taking into account both changes at different stages of children and young people’s development and transitions is required. This explains why there is a growing belief that in order to better understand how these changes and other socio-economic factors related to these changes affect children’s and young people’s well-being a longitudinal survey using a ‘children and young people centric approach’ is necessary (Goswami et al. 2016).

### 1.5 Structure of the Book

This book is a product of the MYWeB project, a feasibility study funded as part of the EU’s Framework 7 research programme which addressed the call: ‘Towards a European longitudinal childhood and youth survey’. The project sought to provide a balanced approach to assessing the feasibility of a European Longitudinal Study for Children and Young People (ELSCYP) through prioritising both scientific and
policy imperatives. This meant that the project contained a range of elements which explored the scientific requirements of undertaking such a survey, the perceived uses and priorities of longitudinal data for child well-being policy development, including a cost benefit analysis, and a robust methodology to guide an options selection process in choosing the most appropriate research design to deliver both scientific and policy requirements.

The MYWeB project comprised of a series of ‘work packages’ (in EU project language), which involved a variety of empirical elements and research methodologies with which to adequately undertake a fully rounded feasibility study. Each of the components of the MYWeB project are represented in this book and together represent a systematic analysis of the need for a Europe-wide longitudinal evidence base with which to understand child well-being and develop suitable policy interventions which will, in a cost effective manner, serve to improve well-being. The first three chapters, including the present chapter, explore the rationale for undertaking the feasibility study for a longitudinal survey of child well-being across Europe, the social and political context within which the current state of affairs exists and the methodology of the MYWeB project.

MYWeB began with an analysis of the broad social and political context across Europe within which child well-being exists. This mapping of the current state of affairs in both policy provision and statistical evidence is detailed in Chap. 2 by Backeberg & Busse. This chapter shows that both policy and evidence coverage is highly uneven and concludes that while there is often broad agreement as to the policy imperatives in relation to the well-being of children and young people that the financial underpinnings of the infrastructure to deliver these policies varies wildly. It is, then, hardly a surprise that the availability of robust evidence to inform policy development is markedly different across Europe.

Many professionals across Europe are actively engaging in the child well-being agenda and it is appropriate for a feasibility study to use this expertise to inform and guide priorities for the future. MYWeB used a so called ‘Delphi’ survey, a survey of experts, in order to benefit from the knowledge and experience of 334 experts drawn from policy, practice and academia across Europe. In Chap. 3 Ozan et al. detail the elaborate methodology that was used to both inform and be informed by this panel of experts using a three-phase questionnaire during the course of the project which allowed us to go into significant depth when asking them about detailed, and often technical, questions ranging from concepts of well-being, relative priorities to appropriate scientific instruments with which to collect data. The material from the Delphi survey was of value throughout the project to both inform and contextualize our understandings of how the policy, practice and scientific communities view the imperatives to improve child well-being.

Chapters 4 and 5 detail the current situation in relation to child well-being in Europe. Using both primary and secondary research, these chapters highlight the social and political context of the availability of child well-being evidence and of social policies. They also broaches the thorny issue of cultural and linguistic differences in the ways in which well-being is understood by young people in different parts of Europe. These chapters represent the necessary underpinnings from
which such things as comparative research designs and instruments can be developed.

The comparative European requirements of a cross-national survey of child well-being necessitate a deep engagement in understandings of well-being rooted in first-hand accounts from children and young people themselves. In order to develop common measurement tools there is first the need to establish where there are continuities and discontinuities in understandings of what contributes to well-being. In Chap. 4 Mihalik et al. report on qualitative research undertaken in Slovakia, Greece, Portugal and Estonia where children and young people expressed their own views on what well-being is within a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This analysis of well-being from a grounded conceptual perspective shows some aspects which are relatively unproblematic in terms of definitions and measurement, most notably when well-being is understood as ‘happiness’. However, important cross-cultural differences are apparent which suggest that there are distinct national-cultural variations in understandings of well-being which make the development of standard measurement tools challenging.

In Chap. 5 Busse & Backeberg undertake a review of both survey-related and administrative data sets across Europe which can be used to inform debates about child well-being. This chapter provides an important analysis of the uneven coverage that currently exists and identifies of gaps. Some countries are very well served with a long tradition of survey data collection, in particular longitudinal studies, while others have few or even no national longitudinal data sources that can contribute to understandings of child well-being. They conclude that while the availability of longitudinal data is increasing, there, nonetheless, is a good argument to develop a Europe-wide survey which would immediately work towards plugging gaps in evidence and contribute to a better basis from which to identify well-being differentials and policy interventions to address these.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on scientific and technical questions to do with survey design and instrument development. A key concern of MYWeB was the extent to which a longitudinal survey of child well-being was technically feasible. To this end it was important to review methodological challenges and assess the extent to which a complex survey design could actually be deployed across Europe. More directly, we needed to address questions of the extent to which it would be possible to collect structured data from children as young as 7 and 8 on their well-being using a common instrument developed in English and translated into other languages. Related to this are the scientific and ethical questions of involving children and young people in the design of research instruments as well as being research subjects.

In Chap. 6 Franc et al. reports on perhaps the most thorough set of cognitive tests undertaken in an international environment to date with regard to how seven- and eight-year-olds understand structured questions which aim to measure their well-being. Almost 200 children from Croatia, Hungary, Hungary, Latvia and the UK were included in a systematic set of tests of question and answer structures. There was particular focus was on ensuring that children were able to understand what a question was asking about and that the response that they gave was a valid representation of their understanding and their feelings. This kind of work is an essential...
pre-cursor to questionnaire development as it shows the limits of understanding and therefore informs the answers to questions to do with the age group to be surveyed as well as the form and content of the instrument with which to collect the data.

Longitudinal surveys are by their very nature complex, given their ongoing data collection requirements. Building in an international comparative angle as well as the inclusion of children renders this a far greater challenge. Chapter 7 by Ozan et al. details the precise challenges that must be adequately met in order to be satisfied that an ELSCYP is scientifically and technically feasible. Covering issues including sampling, fieldwork and attrition rates this chapter shows that while the challenges are immense, that there is sufficient capacity and expertise across Europe to suggest that an ELSCYP would be feasible.

Central to MYWeB was the belief that children should be involved in aspects of the design as far as is possible. This child-centric approach was felt to be merited on the basis that many studies of child well-being have hitherto involved articulating what (adult) researchers view as important without actually incorporating the views of children themselves. In Chap. 8 Nico et al. show that there are distinct advantages to including children and young people in research design, ones which will have a direct benefit to the quality of the data and such things as response and retention rates. Moreover, there can be argued to be an ethical imperative for their inclusion.

This book ends with two chapters which look to the future - placing MYWeB in the context of national policy cycles and cost effectiveness as well as addressing issues relating to an accelerated cohort research design as was ultimately identified by the project as being the most suitable.

Chapter 9 by O’Leary & Fox discusses the policy cycle and raises questions to do with the political priorities which often shape policy debates and which can render evidence-based policy-making an aspiration as opposed to a reality. It also contains a cost-benefit analysis which clearly shows that when compared to the extent of government spending on social policies which include child well-being that, while of significant expense, a 25-year-long European Cohort survey is a tiny proportion of such expenditure and would represent a distinct advantage in being able to develop better and more cost-effective social policies to enhance child well-being.

The final chapter by Pollock et al. draws together the findings from the different parts of MYWeB. It details the way in which the accelerated cohort design was selected as the most suitable research design for an ELSCYP and goes on to describe the necessary next steps in making it happen in terms of both the scientific aspects of the research design as well as the need to convince national governments and research funding bodies that this ought to be a high priority to ensure that we have an adequate evidence base in years to come to be able to understand child well-being and develop suitable policy responses. At the time of writing (November 2017) the European Commission has agreed to extend to the work of MYWeB by funding a project with will specify the design for the accelerated cohort and work to gain political support to ensure that it will have a solid funding base from which to develop.
References


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Chapter 2
Child and Youth Well-Being on the European Political Agenda

Leonie Backeberg and Britta Busse

2.1 Introduction

Child and youth policy-making in the European Union involves a variety of institutional and private actors who operate at the national, regional, and local level as well as at the European level. Due to inherent country characteristics, different policy trends in regard to child and youth well-being can be observed. In Europe, the structure and implementation of policies vary significantly across countries and regions suggesting that the dimensions of well-being taken into account by national policies also diverge.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, well-being is a comprehensive and complex concept that can be interpreted in different ways. In scientific debates, a distinction is made between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches (Ryan and Deci 2001), also referred to as subjective (Diener and Lucas 1999) and psychological well-being (Ryff and Keyes 1995). Subjective well-being is captured by measuring life satisfaction, the presence of positive moods, and the absence of negative moods. Even though this concept can reflect a person’s mood, it does not take account of a person’s personality, abilities, and aims. This is in turn covered by the psychological well-being (or eudaimonic) perspective, which focuses on meaning and self-realisation. In order to capture the level of psychological well-being, the dimensions of autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness are considered. Since the hedonic as well as the eudaimonic approach hold important practical implications, our understanding and usage of the term well-being is based on both approaches.

This chapter explores the status of well-being on the European political agenda by examining child and youth policies from two different angles, a descriptive and...
a critical-analytical one. In the following, an overview of current policy trends within the EU is presented, whereby various aspects, such as national authorities, legislation, strategies and action plans as well as research and monitoring are considered. This is followed by an evaluation of the current state of child and youth policy, which considers institutional obstacles to implementation, content-related gaps in well-being policies, and groups of children and young people that have not yet received enough attention from policy-makers. Based on previous policy mapping\(^1\) and insights from key informant interviews from the MYWeB project, we identify gaps in current policies and identify needs to improve young people’s well-being. The key informant interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via phone with experts engaged in national policy-making (including NGOs) or with influential academics working in the field of child and youth policy. To ensure comparability of information the same semi-structured interview guidelines were applied in all countries. The 83 experts interviewed work for various institutions, as listed in Table 2.1.

### 2.2 Child and Youth Policy in Europe: An Overview

Discussing child and youth policy entails engaging with the age definitions used across countries. Different institutions provide different answers to the question of how to differentiate between childhood, youth and adulthood. Accordingly, there is no consistency in the distinction between children and young people. The European legal framework, for instance, largely adopts the notion of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), which was ratified by all European member states, and defines a child as any human being which has not yet reached the age of 18. However, other than in the legal context, the distinction between children, young people, and adults is not as clear. While the United Nations offer a narrow definition and refer to youth as the age group from 15 to 24 years (UNDP 2014), the EU Youth Strategy targets children and young adults from the age of 13 to 30 (European Commission 2011).

In seeking to give a first impression of the status of different age groups in European societies, Table 2.2 summarises the population distribution of the 28 member states. It further presents the distribution of poverty and social exclusion by age. The data provide initial indications that children and young people are especially prone to poverty and social exclusion, which characterises them as the most vulnerable group within society.

Although the European Union is eager to reduce the number of children and young people living in poverty and to promote child and youth well-being, planning, organisation, and implementation of policies is a national matter. Yet, not only the policies themselves but also the institutional framework, the authorities

\(^1\) For more information on the EU wide policy gathering described in this paper, please refer to the MYWeB report by Hashem-Wangler et al. (2014).
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aNo interviews were provided for Bulgaria
bE England; NI Northern Ireland; S Scotland

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responsible for children and youth, and the policy targets differ across countries. Child and youth policy, respectively, are discussed in the following sections.

2.2.1  Child Policy

In comparison to youth policy, independent child policy is less developed across European member states. A child’s needs are largely responded to by supporting its family. Thus, our policy mapping provides evidence that European policy-making focuses on child care and the support of the child’s parents, ranging from anti-poverty programmes, such as family benefits and support services, to labour market reforms that consolidate flexible working hours and parental leave entitlements. It further shows that the protection of children from violence and sexual abuse, child
health, and access to education are other important dimensions of child policy. Table 2.3 indicates that much effort is put into child protection mechanisms but not into child inclusion and participation.

The fact that a child’s well-being is generally considered to be directly linked to the well-being of its family is also reflected in government structures on the national, regional, or local level. In most European countries, the term ‘child’ or ‘children’ is not present in title of the respective ministry. The institution responsible for any issues regarding child care, child health, or child well-being is predominantly the family ministry. Although the consolidation under a single roof may provide advantages, given that children are always in a relationship of dependence with their families, it might induce a shift in focus away from the child.

European children’s rights are protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Various European treaties, such as the Treaty of Lisbon, explicitly state that the promotion of children’s rights is one of the EU’s core objectives (European Parliament 2012). In a joint report on the rights of the Child in Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe, and the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights state that ‘children are holders of rights, rather than just objects of protection’ (FRA 2015: 17). Although many policies focus on the protection of minors, not only adults but all citizens of Europe are beneficiaries of fundamental human rights. Children’s rights are protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 24 and the Treaty on European Union, Article 3 (3). Furthermore, Article 14 (2), Article 21, and Article 32 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantee the right to receive free compulsory education, the protection from age discrimination, and the prohibition of child labour.
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Source: FRA (2014 a–d)
✓ = existing ● = not existing
As noted by North (1991), institutional frameworks and cultural realities shape a country’s legal landscape. Thus, child policies are implemented differently across member states implying that legislation and cooperation between different governmental levels and departments are structured in various ways. The information provided in Table 2.3 show that only 16 out of the 28 EU member states have national legislation on child protection. In all other countries, children’s rights are an integral part of other laws already in existence.

Strategies and action plans are a popular means in policy-making to pave the way to a comprehensive child policy. They allow political decision-makers to set goals, to agree upon methods, and to define the implementation of policies. The protection of children is the focus of activity in many EU action plans, such as the Child Safety Action Plan (MacKay and Vincenten 2010), the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity (2014), the Action Plan on Nutrition (2014), or the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (European Commission 2010). In contrast, the Strategy on the Rights of the Child aims at promoting the rights of the child in Europe’s internal and external policies (European Commission 2006). Many countries have introduced a national action plan or strategy for children based on the ideas of the EU wide programmes. However, some member states, such as Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium, have a decentralised or federal system, thus transferring responsibilities to the regional or local level (FRA 2014). Yet, the most prominent example of regionalisation is Denmark, where policies relating to children and young people are decentralised and delivered by the 98 municipalities across the country (OECD 2014). Hence, not national but local authorities are often responsible for policy-making and managing initiatives on child protection.

Table 2.3 indicates that every country, except for Cyprus, has internal mechanisms that ensure the monitoring of the child protection system. In most cases, though, the authority responsible for the monitoring processes has a strong link with the ministry or department responsible for child policy or even is an integral part of it. To go beyond these self-monitoring practices, external and independent monitoring mechanisms, such as independent institutes for human and children’s rights, need to be established, which has only been done by a few member states.

In contrast to young people who are often assigned a certain degree of social responsibility, for example by granting them the right to vote, children and their views are easily neglected in policy making. While this seems to be common practice in most EU countries, it is arguably preferable to let children participate in the planning and implementation of policies that affect them. Although a few member states take the participation of children seriously – some even introduced indirect mechanisms of participation and consultation – the majority of countries lack formal structures that allow for such processes. However, it should still be considered that the protection of children, such as the obligation to get the parents’ permission whenever interviewing a child, is also considered a major obstacle for direct consultation with children.
2.2.2 Youth Policy

Youth policy is a collective term for policies that aim at improving the life of young people in different ways. The European Youth Forum points out that such policies need to address the specific realities of youth by including elements relating to various aspects, such as non-formal education, training, legislation, research, and participation. While effective policies might include some of these elements, the list is far from being exhaustive. In fact, the results from the MYWeB policy mapping indicate that European policies predominantly target youth unemployment, education and training, political participation, health, leisure time and crime prevention. In Spain, Poland, Italy, Romania and Cyprus housing plays an important role as well. Within the context of its Youth Strategy, the EU refers to the fact that youth policy cannot work in isolation. Thus, cooperation with other political bodies in the field of employment, culture, and health, are considered essential features of success.

Accordingly, the majority of countries include youth within a wider portfolio and link it with related subject areas, such as sports, education, or seniors, an approach that generates substantial synergy effects. In general, a well-functioning institutional framework is a key prerequisite for an effective youth policy. According to the Youth Policy Press (2014), 98% of the European countries have a national governmental authority (ministries, departments, or offices) responsible for youth. Within most member states, the responsibility for youth issues is distributed among authorities at the national, local, and municipal level.

In recent years, most member states ‘maintained or introduced legislation that specifically refers to youth issues or contains a section which addresses the needs and/or rights of young people’ (European Union 2015: 21). Table 2.4 shows that out of the 28 EU member states nine countries do not have a youth law or national legislation on youth: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. It should be noted that Spain is a special case; a youth law does not exist on the national level as the competences have been transferred to the community level.

The absence of a national youth law, however, does not necessarily imply a lack of youth rights but rather the protection of the latter through general legislation. Specific rights for young people, such as the protection of young workers which is ensured by the EU Directive 94/33/EC (The Council of the European Union 1994), have been transposed into national law in different ways. Some countries have implemented the Directive, which prescribes the prohibition of child employment and minimum requirements for the protection of young people at work, by amending national labour laws already in existence. Other governments have passed a separate law to improve young people’s workplace rights and working conditions.

The framework for youth policies and cooperation across Europe is set by the EU Youth Strategy (The Council of the European Union 2009). The EU Youth Strategy has three major objectives: First, to foster social inclusion, second, to provide opportunities and equality for young people in regard to employment and education,
Table 2.4 Independent youth law, national youth strategies, and youth research across European member states

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Source: European Union (2015)
Note: ✓: existing; •: not existing; N/I: No information provided for this country
and third, to enhance civic and political participation (European Union 2015). Yet, the responsibility for youth policy and its execution remains on the national level. Accordingly, youth strategies vary in scope and nature across countries. However, as displayed by Table 2.4 only Cyprus, Greece, Poland, and Luxembourg do not have a youth strategy. In contrast to the other countries, Poland used to have a youth strategy but restructured its approach to youth issues horizontally (also see European Union 2012).

Another approach towards a successful youth policy is the regular exchange of ideas and findings between the research community and governmental departments. The major aim of monitoring and evaluation processes is to allow for a consistent and well-informed social learning as well as results-driven decision making. Research aiming at improving youth policy-making should therefore not only be reliable and evidence-based, but also enable politicians to incorporate the relevant outcomes. Institutional mechanisms that guarantee the exchange of knowledge ensure a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy. Table 2.4 shows that some countries, among them Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK, have institutionalized a strong and regular cooperation between the youth research communities and the ministries or departments responsible for youth.

### 2.3 Institutional and Structural Obstacles in Policy-Making

While the previous section provides a broad summary of child and youth policies in Europe, the key informant interviews allow us to spot potential weaknesses in these structures and processes. The most fundamental critique stressed by many of the MYWeB key informants is the lack of financial support or the misallocation of financial resources. Interviewees from all countries agreed that comprehensive and long-term well-being programmes need a sound financial base, which is currently not sufficiently met. Moreover, cuts in social expenditure often affect areas that are considered less important. For instance, experts from the Netherlands and from Ireland refer to the fact that it was easy for the government to cut child participation in order to promote child protection, which was assigned more importance to a specific point in time. Similarly, projects against child obesity have been subject to monetary setbacks in Ireland in order to ensure the provision of the most basic rights and services.

Lack of funding in child and youth work is especially daunting in countries that have entered a state of ongoing and severe economic crisis since 2008, such as Greece and Portugal. However, the economic downturn Greece has been suffering for years does not only have a direct effect on child and youth well-being through low public funding of policies. Child and youth well-being is also increasingly at stake if the economic situation of adult family members significantly worsens, which in turn intensifies the need for well-structured and comprehensive child and youth policies.
Moreover, in all European member states, responsibility for and implementation of policies is spread across several levels of government. Highly segmented bureaucracies run the risk of losing track of the overall picture, a phenomenon particularly true for complex topics such as child and youth well-being. In general, the more actors are involved in the process, the more difficult a successful interdepartmental cooperation becomes. According to experts from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, and many other countries, the interaction between the actors involved in European child and youth policy is extremely weak, the coordination of policy instruments in different sectors poor, and the changes of personnel frequent. Additionally, the lack of cooperation leads to a situation where politicians cannot gain an accurate and holistic picture of child and youth well-being anymore. In Luxembourg, for instance, different ministries adopted contradictory youth policies on alcohol usage in the wake of a change in responsibilities. Accordingly, the lack of clarity in regard to responsibility impedes the chances of a comprehensive, targeted, and long-term impact of the policies adopted.

The key informant interviews also demonstrate that problems relating to child well-being, such as poverty, health care, etc., are well-known among policy makers in all EU countries. Nonetheless, many of our experts argue that policies are not only manifold but also vary significantly across countries. Although basic rights and strategies are secured by European legislation, there is no agreement or common understanding of basic concepts relating to child and youth well-being as detailed concepts are elaborated at the national level. On the one hand, such a procedure allows all member states to take country-specific features into account. On the other hand, it induces further content-related divergences within the European Union.

However, regional differences do not only exist between European member states but also between municipalities within each member state. In some countries, child and youth policies are organised at the regional level. The unequal distribution of services and policy priorities across different regions is an important issue in many countries. Austrian experts state that in rural areas, youth work and the promotion of projects often relies on a single regional director’s will. Furthermore, on the European as well as national level, economic disparities between regions are a major driving factor behind an unequal implementation of child and youth well-being policies (e.g., differences between North and South in Italy and Croatia, between East and West in Poland, and between rural and urban areas in many other countries).

### 2.4 Gaps in Policy Content

Shifting the focus from structural to content-related gaps in current EU child and youth policy, the lack of attention given to subjective aspects of child well-being stands out. It is clear that – although stated differently by the EU – children are mostly considered objects of protection and are usually considered passive members of society. In most countries, they are not given the opportunity to participate
in decision making processes and children’s voices are not heard as little importance is attached to their opinion. Latvian experts note that the critical attitude not only of governmental bodies but also of society as a whole negatively affects child participation and well-being. In contrast to children, young people are given more chances of self-realisation and autonomy, in policy as well as society. As a consequence, there is broad agreement among experts for child well-being politics as well as research that child policies are too paternalistic and thus do not to empower children. Governmental actions largely promote child well-being through social welfare programmes and family support, but neither foster their integration into decision making processes, for example in schools, nor encourage young people to take age-appropriate responsibility. Here, the UK and Ireland represent a positive exception by playing a leading role as promoters of child participation. However, the MYWeB key informants point out that if child participation is implemented at all, it is initiated at a high political level and therefore from above. Slovenian experts, for instance, argue that child participation is better to be enhanced using a bottom-up approach starting with the inclusion of children and the recognition of their views at the local level.

One of the most urgent problems mentioned by almost all interviewees is that child and youth well-being policies do not seem to be elaborated in depth, but are too general in structure with only short-term aims. For example, UK experts mention that child care is important, but it is not the key to child well-being in the United Kingdom and thus needs to be supplemented with more targeted activities. In addition, child and youth well-being might be more at stake in countries with a low number of non-governmental organisations that could potentially balance out insufficiently designed governmental approaches.

Overall, the gap between EU policies and the policies of individual countries’ structures is striking. Various inconsistencies can also be found at the national level: In Malta, Croatia, and Slovenia, major differences between political discussions on how to improve child and youth well-being and the features actually implemented in political programmes exist. Some experts argue that policy makers hesitate to make use of promising strategies, which can be explained by the slow process of changing policies and the struggle between old and new models. In general, our experts strongly agree that the field of child and youth policy is pervaded by various tensions, for instance tensions between providing services to young people and with them, between costs and values, between standardization of services and innovation, and between regulation and freedom.

Due to frequent changes in human resources and policies, the majority of countries, among them Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Lithuania, Latvia, and many others, face tremendous obstacles to ensuring a high degree of continuity in political programmes. Taking Hungary as an example, some experts refer to the fact that a new government tends to neglect programmes initiated by the preceding government in order to raise its profile. Also, Lithuanian key informants suggested that the major obstacle in the way of a long-term perspective in child and youth policy is the political establishment itself, whose priorities are subject to regular change. The interviews reveal that above all East European societies suffer from a shortage of concrete and consistent action plans that promote child and youth well-being.
It is worth considering that, particularly in eastern European countries, child and youth policies are financially and ideologically tied to specific political parties or movements. Youth organisations that stand up for young people in Poland, for instance, are associated with the major political parties. Likewise, after the change in government in 2012, a partnership system was established in Hungary that only allows specific organisations close to the government to take part in decision making processes. These are only two examples of how well-being policies are linked to the ideological preferences of political powers.

The last aspect we would like to draw attention to is the lack of evaluation of child and youth well-being policies. Table 2.2 shows that child protection systems are largely monitored; however, this is rather done through internal mechanisms than external institutes. It further does not imply that the overall effect of child policies is being examined. Based on the information in Table 2.3, we can conclude that except for the case of Croatia, European youth policies are largely evaluated and monitored by youth institutes, universities, or research centres. However, according to the key informants, in particular politicians in eastern European countries do not make use of research results, a fact that might be traced back to the unavailability of data.

Although policies and their impact, efficiency, and sustainability are being discussed on various institutional levels, the complexity of the situation also has consequences in assessing the measures and indicators used. While some experts complain that the non-collection or unavailability of data and information on the respective policy is a major constraint in the evaluation process, others suggest that narrative reporting is more common than data-based analysis. Overall, they agree on the fact that research faces a lot of institutional obstacles. Thus, the quality, comprehensiveness, and transferability of the results obtained might be called into question in some cases and is in need of further improvement.

### 2.5 Neglected Groups in Policy-Making

Besides the general gaps in current European child and youth policies, the special needs of some social groups have often been insufficiently addressed. The expert interviews reveal that the exclusion from decision-making processes or even from basic social and health-care provisions does apply to some young people more than it does to others. In consequence, the well-being of some children and young people is compromised. The groups identified by the MYWeB key informants are discussed in the following.

First and foremost, there is strong agreement among the experts that poor children and young people constitute a group that is politically out of reach. In the majority of cases, these children come from low-income families and live in settlements with poverty related problems. The families the children are born into usually have three or more children and a high risk of social exclusion and poverty. Once grown up, these individuals face severe difficulties in becoming a full and active
member of society. Additionally, experts from Italy, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania paint a picture of regional differences: While some families benefit from spatial proximity to welfare institutions, others cannot cover their basic needs because they do not have access to social services.

Since the number of refugees has experienced a sharp increase in Europe, young asylum seekers and migrants as well as the children of refugees have been identified as a socially marginalised group. Evidence from the UK, Malta, Spain, Germany, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Belgium, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, and Luxembourg shows that in the majority of cases the source of the problem can be traced back to the parents’ exclusion from the labour market. Particularly, young people living in refugee homes tend to be excluded from a society they are expected to adapt to. Experts from Malta, Croatia, and Slovenia draw attention to the fact that although some attention has been paid to the problems of these minors, there is still a need for more politically driven support. Furthermore, there are few programmes focusing on children in Roma, gypsy, or traveller families. Yet, they constitute one of the key groups at risk of social exclusion in much of Europe.

In many West European countries, the inclusion of children with disabilities has been on the political agenda for many years. Still, experts from Spain, Austria, Croatia, Lithuania, Sweden, Romania, and Finland pinpoint the inefficient implementation of policies. Programmes are often regarded as ineffective and do not induce a change nor are able to make a fundamental contribution to the well-being of disabled children. Thus, there remains much to be done to address the needs of disabled children and young people.

Another group which is out of scope of many policies are young victims of domestic violence and children of imprisoned parents or parents who are addicted to drugs/alcohol. Even though basic children’s rights should cover cases of children being victims of physical or psychological violence, there is still a need for improvement and practical implementation in Italy, France, Croatia, Belgium, Lithuania, Greece, Cyprus, and Portugal. Moreover, experts from Austria, Croatia, Belgium, and Romania argue that many children whose parents are unable to provide for them and who therefore live in a children’s home or other alternative care institutions are not offered enough support.

In many cases, unemployed young people do not have a sufficient material basis to live a life in accordance with their needs and ideals and thus constitute another exposed group. However, not only the subjective or material but also the psychological well-being of unemployed young people is at risk. The absence of a life-course perspectives for the young goes hand in hand with a poor basis for a successful start into adult life, a process accompanied by increasing demotivation and a feeling of exclusion. This is particularly apparent in Mediterranean countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus, and Greece, but is also mentioned by experts from France, Slovenia, Poland, Finland, and Bulgaria. Additionally, experts often criticised the lack of political support for young people without a school-leaving qualification, something which could contribute to levels of youth unemployment.

In this context, experts from Malta and Italy also stress that no sufficient political actions are adopted to ensure that adequate care is taken of young people detained...
in the criminal justice system. Similarly, Latvian and Romanian interviewees discussed the need for strengthening political programmes for children with behavioural problems. In many cases, problematic behavioural patterns are developed by children growing up in dysfunctional families. In Croatia, for example, experts said that children who are affected by their parents’ divorce process need more support than is currently given. Furthermore, Belgian experts highlight the case of children and young people who are forced to take up the role as a care-giver for seriously ill family members, something which is widely experienced throughout Europe.

In contrast to most groups of children and young people discussed above, children from LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) parents are mostly not at risk of poverty but of social marginalisation. As the acceptance of same-sex couples varies significantly across Europe, the well-being of children growing up in these families does as well. Above all, interviewees from conservative and strongly religious countries, such as Slovenia and Poland, point out that children from LGBT parents constitute an excluded group. This also applies to transgender children, as the Belgian experts note, which is why politicians urgently need to address the needs of these children and young people.

Finally, bullying is another important aspect highlighted by UNICEF in the past. However, it was rarely mentioned by the interviewees nor sufficiently considered in child and youth policies. With the growing impact of social media and the resulting increase in opportunities to harass others seemingly anonymously, cyber-bullying has recently become a more and more daunting issue. As child and youth well-being is seriously at stake in spaces where conflicts and bullying dominate, there is a strong need for further action.

The above themes demonstrate that current policies aim at fostering first and foremost basic needs of children and young people. Based on the key informant interviews, several social groups were identified whose well-being is at risk and who have not or not sufficiently received attention from political actors. As a result, across all EU countries, there is a great demand for the provision of equal rights and opportunities for children and young people.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we reviewed the political landscape in the European Union and in its member states with a focus on child and youth well-being. It came to the fore that although EU wide standards have been set, country-specific legislation, authorities, and strategies dominate the development of child and youth well-being. Thus, the subsidiarity principle substantially shapes European child and youth policy-making.

Experts from many countries bemoan the disparities not only between the EU and the country level but also between regions when it comes to the practical implementation of policies. Such differences can largely be put down to variations in infrastructure and financial resources. However, not only the regional differences
but also the broad allocation of competences and the large group of actors involved induce a lack of clarity in the field of child and youth policy and well-being. Furthermore, the rights of children and young people need to be addressed more specifically than it has been done in the past. In order to do so, it is crucial not only to develop action plans for worst case scenarios (e.g., violence against children), but also to give more attention to the positive aspects of well-being, for example strengthening their participation and positive development.

Across all EU countries, policies have been adopted that aim at improving child well-being by providing better child care opportunities or family support, may it be in form of financial benefits, flexible working hours, parental leave entitlements, or other kinds of family services. However, the consequences arising from the fact that most approaches address the parents and not the children are twofold. For one thing, a practical improvement of well-being largely depends on the will and the ability of the child’s parents to get information on support opportunities and to make use of them. Parents who lack the motivation to do so deny their children benefits from any political programmes in place. For another thing, children are not actively involved in the elaboration of child well-being policies which implies that their subjective perspectives are not taken into account. This may lead to political approaches aiming at aspects that are more important to politicians than to children.

In addition, we identified some topics and specific groups that are largely excluded from programmes. Topics often covered by youth policies are youth unemployment, education and training, participation, health care, housing, and anti-risk behaviour. Leisure time activities, gender issues, and culture are important youth well-being topics addressed by social workers and NGOs, however, they received little attention by government policies. We also presented specific groups of children and young people who are in need of more political support. It should be noted that these groups vary across countries. Nevertheless, the most needy children and young people across all EU member states are children growing up in poor families as well as young migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Finally, we would like to point out two major concerns shared by experts from all EU countries. First, child and youth policies are in general insufficiently funded and often victims of cutbacks. In many countries, a lack of financial resources is the main reason for not having an appropriate monitoring system that has the potential to inform politicians on a regular and reliable basis. Consequently, long-term projects supporting child and youth well-being are a very rare occurrence in Europe. Second, there is a lack of cooperation between different political departments as well as between politicians and researchers involved in child and youth well-being. As a result, policies in EU countries do not consider child and youth well-being from a holistic point of view and thus fail to provide a solid basis to improve child and youth well-being.

In this chapter, we aimed at giving an overview over existing laws and other regulations fostering child and youth well-being. We included literature reviews as well as experts interviews to come to our conclusions. However, the majority of the interviewed experts come from large political organisations or administrative bodies. Therefore, a limitation in our research might be an underrepresentation of
practitioners at a lower level and other experts from small organisations who work directly with vulnerable children and young people. For future research, it would be important to match our findings on existing formal provisions for child and youth well-being with the actual level of child and youth well-being measured in different countries in order to find out about possible links. It would also be important to analyse children’s, young people’s and their parents’ level of awareness of existing regulations as well as their making use of them to demonstrate the regulations’ efficacy.

References


3.1 Introduction

When talking about well-being, childhood and youth present an especially important period of life to study. Due to changes and fragmentation of the transition period young people are facing a growing uncertainty, instability, and an increased number of social risks (Chuprov et al. 2003; Walther and Pohl 2005). Previous studies on well-being have mostly focused on adults, yet research has shown that at various stages of life different factors play the central role in life satisfaction and overall well-being. While children’s well-being predominantly depends on family, for young adults the importance of variables related to the workplace and career increases for their overall satisfaction (Koroleva 2011). Thus, well-being means something different for people of different ages. Another reason to focus on well-being in childhood and youth is its prolonged effect on future life strategies, ability to adapt, satisfaction and so-called base level of happiness. Research in this field has always had a huge practical significance, as the results can be used to directly influence social policies (see Chap. 9).

Longitudinal studies have had a special place and role in the studies on subjective well-being. Only longitudinal data makes it possible to test alternative theories
related to subjective well-being or stability during various life cycles. The number of studies on well-being has increased with a major focus on the comparison of data and achieving equivalent measurements categories. Despite the large amount of literature on the topic, subjective well-being and its components are still a significant research object due to the changes in factors affecting it, which are caused by broader social and personal transformations. At the same time, the attitude towards research instruments and their cognitive components undergoes changes.

In this chapter we draw from the opinions of various experts - specialists with expertise in the fields of survey methodology, children and youth, well-being, and policy - to outline the objective and subjective measures and indicators of well-being in Europe today, as they apply to children and young people. We also consider current policy needs and gaps between data coverage and policy relevance for different dimensions of well-being, as identified by the experts engaged in the survey.

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Well-Being

Research on quality of life and subjective well-being is rooted in the work of Warner Wilson (1967), Ed Diener (1984, 2009), and Ruut Veenhoven (1984a, b), and has been receiving more and more attention since the 1980s. For a long time scientists tried to estimate the quality of life by focusing on objectively measurable indicators (income, education, career, etc.), while at the same time overlooking the personal attitudes and feelings of individuals. Since then, many scholars have demonstrated that, without undermining the importance of the objective indicators of well-being, the behaviour or groups and individuals can be better explained and predicted by using the subjective indicators and subjective evaluations of life of individuals. As regards youth, the process of transition has become much more individualised (Rungule and Kārkliņa 2009), and with that subjectivity plays an increasingly vital role in the fulfilment of life paths (France 2007). Nowadays, not just psychologists, but also economists and sociologists are increasingly using subjective measures to estimate the level of well-being.

One of the most common indicators of subjective well-being is satisfaction with life.

Many authors stress the similarity between concepts such as subjective quality of life, satisfaction with life and different aspects of life (e.g., prosperity, success, achievements, happiness). In fact, scholars often use them as if they were interchangeable (George 1992). However, despite the similarity of these concepts, each of them has its own distinctive specifics and conceptual characteristics. The notion fully refers to individual’s subjective perception of the world. Yet, it is now abundantly clear that subjective well-being is a very complex construct that consists of different components, each of which has its own unique relationship and depends on a variety of endogenous and exogenous factors (external factors, objective indicators and resources). It has a broad cognitive and emotional basis, including the emotional reaction of people, satisfaction in different fields of life, and general

Among the first sociologists to analyse subjective well-being on the basis of full-scale quantitative surveys were George Gallup, Gerald Gurin, and Hedly Cantril (Gallup 1976). Subjective satisfaction and sense of happiness were mainly measured on the basis of one direct question ‘How happy you are?’, asking to give an answer on an ordered nominal scale from ‘very happy’ to ‘not very happy’ or ‘unhappy’. By late 1980s, this and other indicators of subjective well-being (happiness, satisfaction with life and its aspects) had become the object of numerous international comparative studies, revealing statistically significant difference in the perception and assessment of life (Veenhoven 1995). More than two and a half thousand studies in 112 countries have been carried out on the perspectives of subjective satisfaction, life achievement and success in life since 1945\(^1\) leading to greater understanding of human goals, life strategies, personality traits, and role of other factors in shaping well-being (Diener 2009).

Early conceptual explanations of subjective well-being were based on the resource theory assuming that subjective well-being depends on objective quality of life. Based on the resource theory, one would expect that the more opportunities society provides, the higher the living standards of individuals and the better the living conditions. However, such an approach has been shown to be problematic for at least two reasons: (1) economic wealth as the main criteria of the quality of life can be seen as dubious; (2) a wider range of opportunities does not always guarantee a higher quality of life. To avoid these controversies, scholars turned to the concepts of the theory of needs - the opportunities to satisfy needs, in relation to which the living conditions are judged. Even though it is very difficult to demonstrate the ‘real’ needs of people at the theoretical level (at the empirical level one can point to many potential needs), in general this approach allows explaining the previously mentioned issues better. The most popular theory is, of course, Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs that covers a broad spectrum of needs, starting from the very basic, organic needs (hunger, etc.) and continuing to socio-psychological needs (safety, respect, etc.).

According to theoretical paradigms of basic needs and resources, the sense of well-being depends on the objective qualities of life, on the availability of resources, and the absolute satisfaction of needs (Zanna et al. 1981; Diener et al. 1993). In contrast, according to social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), individual evaluations of subjective well-being are based on the relative deprivation of needs - individuals assess their life against certain standards; the social or the desired against the achieved (Suls and Wheeler 2002). The main premise of the social comparison theory was confirmed by Koroleva (2011) who found that self-assessed success

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\(^1\)World Database of Happiness at Erasmus University, Rotterdam gathers many of the results collected since 1980 (under the supervision of Ruut Veenhoven). World Database of Happiness is a continuous register of scientific research on subjective appreciation of life and an inventory of empirical findings on happiness. The data is available to all interested parties and discovered in numerous publications (See http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/).
relative to one’s peers has significant explanatory power for predicting young people’s satisfaction with life. The ideas find further reflection into the multiple-discrepancies theory (Michalos 1991; Abelson et al. 1968), where satisfaction with life is essentially seen as a cognitive judgement (Lazarus 1991) and satisfaction with different aspects of life is not the cause or consequence of the overall satisfaction with life, but rather its compounding element. Overall, it is clear that the subjective evaluation of well-being has not reached its heuristic capacities yet. Researchers continue to explore in more detail the components of subjective well-being, the factors influencing it, as well as the interaction of all these elements.

The literature shows a strong and direct link between economic resources and subjective satisfaction for *adults*. Thus, while the objective resources do not fully explain well-being they do strongly affect it. Koroleva (2011), however, argues that this relationship does not necessarily hold for children and young people. Based on longitudinal data on young people, she found that neither income nor the ownership of real estate or any other indicators of wealth had a significant effect on satisfaction during one’s youth, but the importance of these resources gradually increased as the individual reached adulthood. The only factor that could be considered a material resource and still had a significant effect on satisfaction during the transition period is living conditions. Both logistic regression modelling and tests based on the integral scale formed by cluster analysis showed that young people’s satisfaction with life depends more on the person’s individual traits, subjective attitudes and outlook than they do on available resources and objective circumstances. The single strongest and most significant predictor of overall satisfaction was satisfaction with family life, along with the closely related family structure variables.

The field of well-being studies is truly interdisciplinary, each discipline having a somewhat different take on the concept. The earliest studies of subjective well-being come from the field of psychology. Psychologists link the concept of subjective well-being to subjective senses and subjective wellness, by which they mean the sense of happiness, the prevalence of positive emotions over the negative ones, and the satisfaction with life in general (Diener 1984; Diener et al. 1985). Psychologists also introduced theories that support the idea that happiness can be achieved by reducing stress. In principle, Freud’s pleasure principle, and Maslow’s model of the hierarchy of needs represent this approach. From this perspective, there are no external standards of happiness: if a person thinks that they are happy, they really are happy. Subjective well-being is perceived as a certain state of mind (no matter whether it is expressed in satisfaction, happiness or success) that is temporary and short-lived (Brickman and Campbell 1971; Diener et al. 1999; Lucas et al. 2003; Diener 2009). In comparison, sociologists (Veenhoven 2009), emphasise assessments of life - happy life, satisfaction with life - rather than subjective wellness which is a relatively short-lived phenomenon. An important finding from the previous research is that it is necessary to better understand the processes that underlie adaptation, as people can adapt to good and to bad circumstances and feel ‘happy’ regardless.

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2 Since Aristotle, the Western culture traditionally understands ‘happy life’ as ‘successful life’ - both in the objective (income, career, health, etc.), and subjective (individual evaluation) sense.
3.3 Capturing Experts’ Perspectives Using the Delphi Method

The Delphi method allows for a reliable and creative exploration of ideas or the production of suitable information for decision-making. It is based on a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of specialists through a series of questionnaires combined with controlled opinion feedback (Adler and Ziglio 1996). This approach is particularly appropriate where there is a lack of agreement or an incomplete state of knowledge concerning either the nature of the problem or components which must be included in a successful solution (Delbecq et al. 1975, cited in Adler and Ziglio 1996). The Delphi process facilitates creative and informed decision-making in such circumstances.

The Delphi method is also useful when time and cost considerations make it impractical to bring together a wide range of geographically dispersed professionals for a series of meetings. It allows for a ‘virtual debate’ to take place throughout a series of three questionnaires. The Delphi process has two distinct phases. The ‘exploration phase’ (first questionnaire) allows specialists to explore the key issues presented by the project and present additional information that may be of relevance. The evaluation phase (second and third questionnaires) focuses on refining elements such as well-being indicators and survey options.

3.4 Methodology

The first questionnaire was sent in October 2014, using Bristol Online Surveys, to 334 panellists identified as specialists with expertise in the fields of survey methodology, children and youth, well-being, and policy.

The purpose of the first questionnaire was to introduce the research project and gather experts’ views on children and youth well-being. This questionnaire was quite exhaustive with questions evolving around the concept and domains of well-being, the importance of children and young people’s (CYP) views, the role of evidence about children’s and young people’s well-being in social policy, the gaps in data available, well-being policy challenges, the potential of standardised measures to capture well-being across Europe, target groups for future surveys, as well as the feasibility, desirability and sustainability of an ELSCYP. After each question, experts had the opportunity to make comments. It provided a rich database of information that was analysed and used to probe panellists in order to gain greater insights into an issue or refine a methodological approach. The first questionnaire obtained a 75% response rate that built on the pre-emptive work undertaken by the consortium in identifying and engaging experts in the process.

The second questionnaire was sent in December 2014 to the same panellists. It was accompanied by a series of briefing papers that were prepared for the Delphi survey experts and made available on the MYWeB website (http://fp7-myweb.eu). They presented essential summaries of the project’s work in relation to the following...
themes: Policy in Europe, Recent Research, Survey Methods, Data in Europe, Longitudinal Survey Methodologies, and the Impact of Longitudinal Surveys on Policy. The second questionnaire presented the results from the first questionnaire, investigated issues were experts disagreed and refined questions regarding methodology. Consequently, the second questionnaire had more text and less questions than the first one. Experts had the opportunity to comment on the results from the first questionnaire. The questionnaire obtained a 59% response rate.

The third questionnaire was sent to the 334 panellists in February 2015. Its role was to wrap up the virtual debate through reaching agreement or ironing out disagreements regarding a potential ELSCYP. The questionnaire presented results from the previous round. It was significantly shorter than previous ones and mostly featured open ended questions. Its response rate was 62%, which indicates that some experts who did not take part in the second questionnaire completed the third one.

Delphi respondents (round 1) work in research or academia (n = 109, 44%), policy (n = 67, 27%), NGOs (n = 51, 20%), and other types of organisations (n = 23, 9%) such as hospitals. In the first questionnaire, respondents mostly identified as researchers or experts (n = 84, 34%). Other respondents worked in directorate (n = 24, 10%), senior management (n = 46, 18%), lower management (n = 45, 18%), employee or volunteer (n = 27, 11%), or other types of positions (n = 24, 10%). This distribution indicates that the panel was well-balanced, with a strong input from academics, policy makers at senior and lower management levels, NGO workers from across the spectrum, and other specialists at a directorate level (Table 3.1).

As panel members were recruited by MYWeB project partners, most of them are based in countries where the project took place: Greece (n = 29), Croatia (n = 29), Spain (n = 25), Latvia (n = 22), Georgia (n = 20), Portugal (n = 25), Hungary

Table 3.1 Composition of the Delphi panel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Directorate</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior management</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower management</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
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<td>11.0%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee/ Volunteer</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher or expert</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
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<td>54.1%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% organisation</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(n = 14), United Kingdom (n = 13), Estonia (n = 12), Germany (n = 9), Slovakia (n = 9). European experts were also invited to join the panel, they were based in Cyprus (n = 3), Ireland (n = 3), European Institutions (n = 3), Belgium (n = 3), Czech Republic (n = 1), Italy (n = 1), Luxembourg (n = 1), Austria (n = 1), France (n = 1), and Romania (n = 1).

### 3.4.1 The Concept and Domains of Well-Being

The first Delphi questionnaire was used to clarify the concept of well-being as it applies to children and young people (CYP). Well-being was strongly associated by the participants with notions of health (cited 184 times), financial security and employment (cited 104 times), relationships with friends and family (cited 100 times), material conditions (cited 81 times) and happiness (cited 50 times) and safety (47 times). Table 3.2 identifies the various concepts that the Delphi respondents associated with CYP well-being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-being key words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial security, employment</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and personal network, family</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material conditions</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance, social security</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisures, activities, free time</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness and purpose</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social opportunities</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-fullfillment</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional, Feelings</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love, attachment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 3.2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-being key words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social inclusion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and competences</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected rights</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eudaimonia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress free</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk behaviour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The OECD distinguishes between three pillars of well-being: the material conditions, quality of life and the sustainability of material conditions and quality of life over time. Delphi respondents largely agreed that, as distinguished by the OECD, ‘material conditions’ (76%), quality of life (94%), and sustainability of quality of life (90%) are important pillars of well-being. Qualitative comments indicated that a holistic approach that goes beyond material conditions is required to understand well-being:

I believe that material conditions determine well-being only to a certain extent, as more subjective factors play [a] more important role. (NGO, Latvia)

Respondents largely agreed (98%) that a longitudinal survey should include both objective and subjective measures. Half of the respondents (49%) considered they should have equal weight. Arguments in favour of a greater weight for objective measures (23% of the respondents) include a lack of trust in the accuracy of subjective measures and the fact objective measures would be better suited for transna-
tional comparison. Arguments in favour of a greater weight for subjective measures (27% of respondents) include the notion that well-being is a question of perception and subjective measures can only be captured through children’s participation.

Drawing on the literature, previous surveys and scientific papers, and consortium’s expertise, the concept of well-being used throughout the Delphi survey comprised the following domains:

- Personal well-being (personal satisfaction with life / happiness);
- Relationships with peers;
- Family and home;
- Health;
- Time use;
- Community and neighbourhood;
- Money and possession;
- Personal appearance;
- Education and skills;
- Competence (feeling efficient, effective, and even masterful in one’s behaviour);
- Autonomy (feeling of being in control);
- Purpose in life (the belief that one’s life is meaningful);
- Amount of choice (self-fulfilment).

Some of them rest on objective measures of well-being (e.g., education, money, health) while others draw on subjective feelings both with respect to eudaimonic well-being (e.g., autonomy, purpose) and to one’s group (family, friends, community).

Among other aspects suggested by respondents are sports and leisure (6 respondents), sense of belonging (4), inclusion (3), access and use of technologies (3), attitude to politics (3), disability (3), environment and consumption (2), children’s expectations (2), safety/security (2) and other. While most of the suggestions closely link with the domains originally presented (i.e., sense of belonging and inclusion), sport and leisure are additional domains of children and young people’s well-being that could be distinguished as separate indicators. Moreover, access to technology and information, aspects linked to environment and consumption, and young people’s relation to the political sphere could also be important in their well-being.

3.4.2 Well-Being Data and Policy Needs

Specialists were asked to identify three major well-being policy challenges for children and young people. When considering children, respondents identified education (cited 89 times), poverty (cited 58 times), and health (cited 40 times). When considering young people, education came first again (cited 99 times), followed by employment (cited 97 times), and participation in civic and/or political life (cited 30 times). This result aligns with the theory, as it shows that at different stages in life various domains have a different impact on the overall well-being.
When asked about policy relevance of various well-being domains, on a scale of one to five where five is high policy relevance, the following domains had the highest scores: education and skills (4.6), health (4.6), family and home (4.3), and personal well-being (4.1). Personal appearance is the only domain that was considered not relevant to policy (2.5). Respondents also indicated that those domains have relatively good data coverage except for personal well-being. ‘Family and home’, ‘health’, ‘money and possession’, and ‘education and skills’ are the domains with the best data coverage (i.e., with a mean above 3 on a scale of 1 to 5). Consequently, dimensions of well-being with highest policy relevance tend to be relatively well covered. Yet, other important domains have limited data coverage. Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship between policy relevance and data coverage. The dimensions pertaining to the eudaimonic approach to well-being (i.e., competence, autonomy, purpose in life and amount of choice), which are central to the concept, display an important gap between their data coverage and their policy relevance.

Qualitative comments pointed out that there are differences between European and national coverage of those domains.

Experts involved in the Delphi agreed that the role of evidence is important in social policy, particularly in order to have a better understanding of policy impact.

Fig. 3.1 Data coverage and policy relevance for different domains of well-being (means)
(66%), review the design of social policies (63%), monitor progress (60%) and measure the distribution of policy outcomes across different target groups (56%). There was a strong consensus amongst panel members that the evaluation of children and youth policies can support policy makers in improving policies (85%). In the context of a survey, the majority (63%) considered that member state level policy is more important than regional or local level policies.

The specialists involved in the Delphi overwhelmingly agreed that, in order to acquire better evidence for policy-making, there is a need to deal with ‘the lack of longitudinal perspectives’ (82%), to improve ‘coverage of particular population groups’ (79%), and ‘subjective measures of well-being’ (75%). As Fig. 3.2 suggests, whilst there is a need to improve compatibility and comparability of data (68% and 70% respectively), they do not figure amongst the top priorities. Similarly, while most respondents (67%) feel the need for improved geographic coverage, it usually is not amongst the top priorities.

When considering respondents’ area of expertise, those working in policy indicate less interest in the improvement of comparability across countries than those working in research and NGOs (mean of 3.7 compared to 4.1 and 4.2 retrospectively). Respondents working in research are less interested in the improvement of objective measures of well-being than those working in policy and NGOs (mean of 3.7 compared to 4.0 and 4.2 retrospectively).

In the following pages we elaborate on the three main areas of information need, and explore why such data is important and how research can help to fill these gaps of knowledge.
3.4.3 Longitudinal Data Coverage

Talking about the existing gaps in knowledge on children and young people’s well-being, the experts emphasised longitudinal surveys and their role in evidence-based policy and decision making:

From my experience, the data collected through a longitudinal survey can play a key role in addressing existing gaps in data coverage and therefore can be valuable resource at the policy and decision making level. (Policy, Greece)

Overall, Delphi respondents agreed that a longitudinal survey could address existing gaps in data coverage and therefore inform decision making for all of the policy challenges identified (i.e., on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is very much, no policy challenge has a mean below 3.3). Table 3.3 displays the different (grouped) policy challenges identified by the panel of specialists.

According to the experts’ judgement, the contribution of longitudinal studies could be most useful in better understanding the role of various family factors in children and young people’s well-being. Respondents’ answers indicate that a longitudinal survey could very much help to provide missing information in relation to education (including early years), family support (including fathers), and poverty.

Table 3.3 Policy challenges that can be informed by longitudinal surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/economy</td>
<td>Equality (including regional inequalities, gender, minorities)</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth migration</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-culturalism (ethnicity, religion)</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Countries general context (economy, employment)</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal safety</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Education, including early years</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family support, including fathers</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material conditions</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food, nutrition</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible working for parents</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and young people</td>
<td>Transition from school to work</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young people NEET</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation, empowerment</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disabilities</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media, new technologies</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leisure and sports</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regard to community/economic factors, a longitudinal survey could be particularly relevant to address data coverage gaps in relation to equality (including regional inequalities, gender and minorities), youth migration, and multi-culturalism. At a child/young person level, a longitudinal survey could improve the data coverage on the transition from school to work, mental health, and young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET).

### 3.4.4 Particular Population Groups

When choosing the target group of a survey there is a trade-off between the survey’s cost and data coverage. Covering particular groups adds complexity, which increases the cost but provides better quality of data. Over three quarters of the respondents (79%) acknowledged a need to improve coverage of particular population groups. Data coverage of particular population groups varies strongly. For instance, young carers are a group for which data was considered not to be covered at all by 58% of the respondents. Over a third of the respondents also indicated that data is not covered at all for absent parenting (43%), and children and young people who have suffered significant harm (38%). According to the Delphi experts, data coverage is better for children and young people from single households, children and young people from low-income families, children and young people from a minority background, and children and young people with physical disabilities.

Furthermore, difference across countries can be very significant (e.g., lack of data about number of young people living with a physical disability in Georgia or lack of data on ethnic minorities in France). However, there is a strong consensus among Delphi respondents that a cross European longitudinal survey should gather data from all children and young people rather than focus on specific groups.

### 3.4.5 Measuring Well-Being across Europe

The results from the first questionnaire showed that the majority of respondents (77%) agreed that standardised European measures should be complemented by country specific modules or questions. This was further explored in the second questionnaire during which experts were asked to indicate whether well-being domains can be captured through standardised European measures or if they can only be captured using nationally specific measures. The majority of respondents indicated that standardised European measures are applicable to the different domains of well-being: competence (85%), health (85%), education and skills (82%), time use (70%), and personal well-being (70%), amount of choice (67%), personal appearance (64%), money and possession (63%), relationship with peers (62%), purpose in life (59%) and family and home (55%). However, the majority of respondents (59%) considered community and neighbourhood to be a domain that could only be captured using nationally specific measures as illustrated in Fig. 3.3.
European standardised measures of well-being are key to the establishment of an international longitudinal survey. For data to be comparable, each domain of well-being needs to have standardised measures with cross-cultural validity. Consequently, Delphi respondents indicating that ‘community and neighbourhood’ is a domain that can only be captured by national measures is an issue. This was further explored in the third questionnaire, where 81% of the respondents answered that it is feasible to develop a classification of neighbourhoods based on an index of relative deprivation that is comparable across Europe. Yet, concerns were expressed in relation to the complexity of the task, its cost, different meanings attached in different countries to categories such as homeownership, and how one’s subjective feeling about their neighbourhood impacts their well-being more than objective indicators. Experts suggested that a cross-European well-being survey could be made more sensitive to local variations concerning community and neighbourhood by using additional measurement for each country and/or qualitative measures. It was also suggested that a local expert panel should be appointed in each country to analyse and clean the data.

A significant number of Delphi experts (45%) also indicated that ‘family and home’ is a domain that can only be captured by national measures. To ensure that well-being domains are measurable across Europe, this issue was also further explored in the third questionnaire. Figure 3.4 shows that most respondents considered the following measures suitable to measure the family and home situation across Europe: educational attainment of members of the household (94%), employment status of members of the household (93%), household composition (92%), occupational status of members of the household (89%), size of the household (86%), relative household income (86%), accommodation type (83%), marital status (77%).

![Fig. 3.3 Feasibility of having standardised measures for well-being domains](image-url)
3.4.6 Feasibility, Sustainability, and Desirability of an ELSCYP

The first questionnaire established the extent to which Delphi experts thought that an ELSCYP was technically feasible, financially sustainable, and politically desirable. Overall, about half of the respondents (59%) consider the cross-European longitudinal survey to be technically feasible, over a third of respondents (41%) considered the survey to be financially sustainable, and large majority (73%) considered that it is desirable, with 56% considering it to be very desirable (Fig. 3.5).

The following questionnaires further explored issues of feasibility, sustainability and desirability. Regarding technical feasibility, Delphi experts agreed that it was possible to build a longitudinal survey from a pre-existing Europe wide cross sectional survey. A higher percentage of respondents working in research/academia (39%) indicated that this was not feasible than respondents working in policy (28%) or NGOs (32%). There was no strong agreement about the feasibility of linking a longitudinal survey to pre-existing national administrative data. Whilst respondents working in policy or NGOs considered this feasible (64% and 61% respectively), those working in research indicated (54%) that it is not feasible. Delphi experts considered that the following elements of an ELSCYP were feasible, on a scale of one to five where five is very feasible: building child friendly questions that allow adequate comprehension and suitable response modes (4.3), translating the survey into European languages that will result in robustly comparable international data (4.2), to achieve a representative sample survey in each country (4.1), managing a large and complex data set (4.1), and to obtain children and young people’s informed consent (4.2).
consent (3.9). Some items scored slightly lower such as: implementing consistent fieldwork practice (3.8), to keep the sample members in future data collection phases (3.7), and getting parental consent (3.6).

Whilst over a third of respondents (41%) considered the survey to be financially sustainable, a majority of respondents indicated that improving data coverage is somewhat more important than constraining the cost. This is especially the case for respondents working in research (61%) compared to those working in policy (52%) and NGOs (50%). About a third of the respondents consider that improving coverage is top priority. Furthermore, Delphi experts strongly agreed with the following points:

1. The economic benefits of improved well-being far exceed the cost of a longitudinal survey (94%)
2. A longitudinal survey will support policy makers to improve policy design and impact and make policies more efficient (98%)
3. Evidence gathered by such a survey will contribute to improved well-being (96%)

About half of the respondents agreed with the following statement: ‘The economic value of improved well-being far exceeds the cost of implementing the survey. However, these economic benefits are not easy to demonstrate (i.e., they are not ‘cashable’) and therefore cost would be a barrier to implementation.’ This was especially the case for policy makers (58%) compared to researchers (49%) and those working in NGOs (48%).

Fig. 3.5 Feasibility, sustainability, and desirability of an ELSCYP according to Delphi experts
There was a very strong consensus amongst Delphi experts regarding the desirability of an ELSCYP. In subsequent questionnaires, respondents largely agreed with the following statements:

1. It is important that Member State governments are supportive of the survey if it is to be implemented (99% agree)
2. Demonstrating that the survey will have continuing policy relevance for many years to come will be important if the survey is to be implemented (99% agree)
3. It is important that significant research groups in each Member State are supportive if the survey is to be implemented (96% agree)
4. It is important that significant NGOs in each Member State are supportive of the survey if it is to be implemented (90% agree)

The various strategies identified by the experts to demonstrate policy relevance, draw key decision makers in the process and demonstrate the economic benefits of a well-being longitudinal survey to potential funders include the following recommendations: clearly identifying specific policy question the survey will address, demonstrating the need for evidence-based decision making process, involving the media and increasing public awareness, undertaking cost-benefit-analysis (social return on investment, cost of reinsertion vs early intervention, cost of no survey), and providing a sustainability plan.

3.5 Conclusion

Subjective well-being is not a homogenous concept. Each of the components of subjective well-being is associated with and dependent on various endogenous and exogenous factors (external circumstances) in its own unique way. Various methodological, conceptual and practical aspects of subjective measurements (such as measurements of satisfaction with life, quality of life, and happiness) have been explored and elaborated by social scientists representing fields as varied as sociology, social psychology, the psychology of education and development, and economics, and research in this field continues to grow. The Delphi survey conducted as part of the MYWeB project shows that well-being domains have high policy relevance and that there are various information gaps that can be filled by research. Some of the most under-researched themes that have relatively high policy relevance across Europe are those that require survey data: personal well-being, eudaimonic measures (competence, autonomy, amount of choice, purpose in life), as well as ecological data on community and neighbourhood. Among the most urgent steps to address the information needs are (1) adding a longitudinal perspective, (2) improving the coverage of particular population groups, and (3) improving the measures of subjective well-being.

The study reveals that while objective measures can be used for some of the most typical indicators of well-being such as health, financial security and employment and material conditions, the subjective sense of well-being – affected by an
individual’s expectations, social comparisons, needs, and other economic, social or psychological factors - should also be considered. Several of the indicators such as relationships with friends and family, happiness, and safety cannot be fully captured by the official statistical data, and they rely to a large degree on subjective feelings. The personality plays a role too, and eudaimonic dimensions of well-being should also be taken into account.

Harmonisation of measures of well-being presents a particular challenge when considering a cross-national European survey. Many experts believe that community and neighbourhood is a domain that could only be captured using nationally specific measures, and that achieving cross-national comparability of family and home measures could also be problematic.

Further data would be required to verify and improve the reliability and comparability of the indicators reported here, however, the costs associated with the collection of such data are quite high. More opportunities would be opened up by comparative survey projects on the international level and more work needs to be done to elaborate the best methodological practice. Truly fundamental studies would require the development of a specialised methodological framework and repeated measurements not only within a single generation, but also across several generations, ensuring that the study covers sufficient exogenous variation (such as change of the social system, unforeseen socio-economic events, etc.). More attention needs to be paid to the interaction between endogenous factors (e.g., personality traits) and external conditions.

References


Chapter 4
Similarity and Difference in Conceptions of Well-Being Among Children and Young People in Four Contrasting European Countries

Jaroslav Mihálik, Michal Garaj, Alexandros Sakellariou, Alexandra Koronaiou, Giorgos Alexias, Magda Nico, Nuno de Almeida Alves, Marge Unt, and Marti Taru

4.1 Introduction

Despite substantial academic and policy interest in well-being there is, as yet, no universally accepted definition. In the academic literature it is often used as an overarching concept to refer to the quality of life of people within a given society. In defining the concept of well-being, a distinction is also usually made between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches and is measured using both objective - not filtered by perceptions and independent from personal evaluations - and subjective measures, i.e., explicitly express subjective states, such as perceptions, assessments and preferences. A more recent approach to children and young people (CYP) well-being is to incorporate their own perspectives themselves. Children and young people centric well-being studies are at a relatively early stage, but reflect a major paradigm shift, including them as active agents in measuring and monitoring their own well-being (Mason and Danby 2011; Fattore et al. 2012). Articulating the authentic voice of CYP to further the understanding of their well-being has
therefore become more commonplace (Dex and Hollingworth 2012; Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2005; Fattore et al. 2007, 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to enhance our understanding of CYP well-being by focusing on the perspectives of a culturally diverse group of CYP on a range of issues which contribute towards their well-being. It draws on qualitative international comparative material from the MYWeB (Measuring Youth Well-Being) project\(^1\) regarding conceptions of well-being among CYP from four European countries. Knowing how children and young people understand well-being is central to the development of survey instruments such as would be required for a European Longitudinal Study of Children and Young People (ELSCYP). Based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups, with children and young people this chapter addresses the following questions:

- How do children and young people understand the concept of well-being? What do they attribute to well-being? Which are the main factors they consider important for their well-being?
- What are the similarities and differences among the four European countries?
- What are the differences across the early lifespan observed, i.e., between children and young people?

While a longitudinal survey on CYP’s subjective well-being arguably offers the best approach to understanding young people’s transitions and collecting robust data for evaluating child well-being policies at the EU and its member state level, it poses several challenges and raises a variety of issues (see Chap. 8 in this volume). One of these is that in order to develop and conduct a comparative longitudinal survey on CYP’s well-being, knowledge of the range of understandings and perceptions about well-being across Europe are central. Insights from qualitative comparative studies are essential to be able to successfully develop a questionnaire which will facilitate the collection of valid data and the analysis here based on the MYWeB data complements other ongoing projects seeking to do this (for example Fattore et al. 2016).

Chapter 1 of this volume has shown that child well-being research can be divided broadly into two perspectives, the hedonic and the eudaimonic approach. The hedonic approach defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance (Ryan and Deci 2001). By contrast, the eudaimonic approach maintains that not all desires would yield well-being when achieved (Ryan and Deci 2001). It focuses on meaning and self-realisation and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning within society. When collecting and analysing data for this chapter, the researchers articulated both conceptions of well-being. In addition, we also employed the grounded theory approach and aimed to step out from these pre-defined concepts of well-being so that the voice of CYP— their views on well-being and their understandings of factors that contribute to well-being— would be taken into account.

\(^1\)For more details on MYWeB (2014–2016) please visit the project’s official website: \(https://fp7-myweb.eu/\)
4.2 Children and Young People’s Understanding of Well-Being: The Fieldwork

The fieldwork component of the MYWeB project was completed in several locations and consisted of children and young people from eleven EU countries (Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom). The MYWeB fieldwork involved a total of 450 children and young people from the abovementioned European countries (Ferrer-Fons et al. 2015: 3). This chapter focuses on CYP voices from four countries: Slovakia, Portugal, Greece, and Estonia. These comparisons offer a useful insight into two contrasting post-socialist and two contrasting southern European countries. Fieldwork took place between October 2014 and January 2015.

Within each country children were interviewed from two purposively sampled schools. The selection criteria for the schools were based on stated criteria such that the two selected schools in each country should be different in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of the area and therefore of the family background of the children. The methods of data collection used were individual semi-structured interviews – a common tool developed in English and translated into local languages - and focus groups which were conducted either in schools (e.g. classroom, computer room, library, etc.) or in other places (e.g. university facilities). During all the interviews and the focus groups children and young people were informed about the project and its scope and they and their parents signed consent forms prior to taking part. The fieldwork conducted in the four countries, which are the focus of this chapter, included 77 interviews and 16 focus groups with 94 participants, 79 male and 92 female, aged between 10 and 24 years old and is described in more detail below in Table 4.1.

The remainder of this chapter describes the findings from the four countries on children’s and young people’s understanding of well-being. Broad use of quotes from the children and young people studied are used to highlight these findings and to express, in their words, what well-being means to them. As such this chapter is truly child (and youth) centric. In the conclusion, the key findings are put into wider context, in an effort to identify specific areas that need to be addressed in the development of an ELSCYP.

4.3 Exploring the Major Domains of Well-Being Among Children and Young People in Four European Countries

4.3.1 Relationships Among Family, Friends and at School

Supportive relationships have been seen as a positive for all human beings. Therefore, relatedness has been defined as a basic human need which is essential for well-being which should be universal across different contexts (Ryan and Deci...
### Table 4.1 Fieldwork details and socio-demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estonia</strong></td>
<td>5 individual interviews with school pupils aged 10–12 years old</td>
<td>1 focus groups with 5 pupils aged 10–12 years old</td>
<td>21 interviews and 4 focus groups with 21 participants</td>
<td>21 male and 21 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 individual interviews with children aged 15–16 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with 6 children aged 15–16 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 individual interviews with organised young people aged 15–18 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with 5 participants of organised young people aged 15–18 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 interviews with non-organised young people aged 14–22 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with 5 participants of non-organised young people aged 14–22 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slovakia</strong></td>
<td>5 interviews with children from primary schools aged 13–15 years</td>
<td>1 focus group with children from primary schools aged 14 years (6 participants)</td>
<td>17 interviews and 4 Focus Groups with 22 participants</td>
<td>19 male and 20 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 interviews with children from secondary schools aged 17–18 years</td>
<td>1 focus group with children/young people from secondary schools aged 17–20 years (6 participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 interviews with non-organised young people aged 16–20 years</td>
<td>1 focus group with non-organised young people aged 15–19 years (4 participants)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 interviews with organised/actively involved young people aged 18 years</td>
<td>1 focus group with organised/actively involved young people aged 16–18 years (6 participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greece</strong></td>
<td>6 interviews with children, 10–12 years old</td>
<td>1 One focus group with children, 10–12 years old (7 participants)</td>
<td>21 interviews and 4 focus groups with 24 participants</td>
<td>17 male and 28 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 interviews with adolescents, 15–16 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with children, 14–15 years old (7 participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 interviews with young people engaged in some sort of social, political, civic etc. activity, 16–18 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with young people engaged in some sort of social, political, civic etc. activity, 16–18 years old (5 participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 interviews with young people not organised in any kind of social, political, civic etc. activity, 16–18 years old</td>
<td>1 focus group with young people not organised in any kind of social, political, civic etc. activity (5 participants)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
It is, therefore, no surprise that in all countries respondents emphasised the role and importance of good relationships with their family and friends as crucial for their well-being. Interviewees almost unanimously agreed on the invaluable support they receive from their family and claimed that with a steady and healthy familial environment their efforts and struggles for a successful life are made easier. Children tend to refer more emphatically, more frequently and with more detail the familiar relations when compared to young people, who tend to emphasise friends and peer groups more than children. For example, when explaining what well-being means the following were raised:

No conflicts at home, having my friends in a good mood with me, that’s it. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

To be with my family, to have friends. Things that for some people have no meaning, but for others have a lot. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

Relationships within family households are, however, not homogeneous. Children identify and order different members of the family in terms of the frequency of conflict (with siblings being the most problematic). While children were asked to think about a good day when they felt happy, the younger ones tended to talk about non-routine events together with family and friends. Several mentioned that they were very happy on a family day trip, for example:

[a day is great if] we go to a great place or something great happens! It's like I don't have to go somewhere alone. That we [family] all can be together and then we all together go to some place... like into a Water Paradise [a water park]! (male, 10 years old, Estonia)
Children appear, most of the time, to be indirectly referring to their family or to their household. They might refer to their family’s company and/or their love and support. Although this is an emotional feature of well-being, children explicitly focus its cause in exterior settings and characteristics. Their well-being is, then, a consequence of something outside their control, or at least this is how they transmit this idea. When describing what was understood by well-being, the following was mentioned:

It means to feel good, to have love all around me to make feel good. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

It’s when a person is comfortable, when a person likes the way life is. (male, 10 years old, Portugal)

It’s to be good in terms of health, having friends and living with whom we love, I guess. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

Family, friendships and school environments are important centres in holistic understandings of well-being among young people. In connection with family, well-being for young people, through the eyes of a member of the older age group in our research, ‘is at home where I live with my parents and we are happy, without any problems’ (male, 14 years old, Slovakia). He mentions that well-being decreases when parents fight among themselves or they have significant financial problems. For Estonian youngsters, being together with parents and other relatives (e.g. grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters) was associated with enjoying oneself and feeling good, calm and comfortable, illustrated as follows:

When I stay with my relatives, then I feel calm, I feel peace of soul, it is comfortable and merry. But in the company of my friends it is different – it is a kind of groovy and cool. We are just chillin’ out, and that’s it. (female, 17 years old, Estonia)

I am quite happy, I have friends, family, happy family...I have good marks at school, I think I am intelligent, I have many friends, everything that I need. For now I am very happy. So far. Maybe, when I get older and need to earn money, but I will sort it out somehow. (male, 14 years old, Slovakia)

This confirms an attitude of Estonian youth when the company of friends and acquaintances of the interviewee’s own age was associated with having fun together, doing things which excite them, getting involved in activities and situations which were perceived as ‘chill’ or ‘cool.’

For Greek young people, the family dimension of well-being was sometimes associated with tensions they sometimes face with their parents or about not seeing them enough due to their busy daily schedule. ‘I do not want to think my future life because I see that my parents are so stressed and they work so many hours and I don’t like it’ (female, 15 years old, Greece).

Good relations with family and friends were also an important aspect of happy life in the lives of Slovak young people. Having good friends and a close family makes them feel they have less worries and they have more free time. However, they also worried about issues related to family; for example, about the relationship with stepmothers and not having enough freedom from their father. In addition, family
context and the emotional support that the family members are able to give to their children.

Some teenagers may have family problems, in badly structured families, with parents that don’t care about them and are not worried about the course of their lives. (female, 15 years old, Portugal)

Family always helps because it is our safe haven when things are not going well. It’s where we go to find shelter and try to fix our problems. (female, 19 years old, Portugal)

Among these groups of CYP, education seemed to something which often surfaced in different contexts and meanings. School was seen to have several positive meanings. It was associated with friends - with class - and schoolmates that one meets at school. For some, it was associated with the joy and excitement of learning new things, with self-development. It was also associated with preparation for the future: for university studies, choosing a profession, finding a job that earns good money and brings pleasure. In general, school was mentioned as a positive source of well-being for instrumental reasons (having good grades) as for contextual ones (such as friendship emergence). The interviews also showed an important contrast: young people also have worries arising from school. Sometimes, the negative issues arise from laziness at work or final exams but school was also associated with bullying, dullness, and with conflicts with teachers.

Children from the younger age group associated school with spending too much time away from their family, where they would rather spend more time. Many of the Greek children mentioned that when they heard that there was to be a teacher strike and that they were not going to have classes that they were very happy.

No lessons and no school would make a perfect day. (female, 11 years old, Greece)

Greek children often reported being unhappy and stressed when they have a lot of homework or when they have difficult tasks to cope with in school or even when they have a fight with friends. Perceptions of an overloaded everyday program, which includes not only school activities, but also extra school work appear to be a cause of stress. In this regard, free time is of great value and promotes a feeling of satisfaction and content as they have the opportunity to be engaged in other (often outdoor) activities, meet with their friends and clear their minds from everyday pressure. Similarly, children in Estonia talked about the stress of learning/doing homework saying that it is often hard to meet the demands of teachers.

4.3.2 Economic and Material Aspects of Well-Being

In the case of economic and material well-being, two sub-aspects can be distinguished: the comfort of not having to worry about money (objective condition of life) and that some young people boast about their better economic condition. Combining these two components, it can be said that young people recognize the
existence of not only social inequalities (mainly income based) but also the existence of different identities, based on class, consumption and life styles.

Yeah, rich people always have ‘well-being.’ For rich people, well-being is an everyday thing. (transgender, 19 years old, Portugal)

There are people that are much richer than others. So there are people that are much poorer than others, and do not have as many possibilities. Unfortunately, I think having money has an influence on personal well-being. So there are people that have more well-being than others! The causes for the differences are personality and the relation each person has with others. (male, 18 years old, Portugal)

If you do not have money for proper treatment you will not be good. But if you have money and bad health, it is not good either. A person should have enough money for medicine when he gets ill in order to be well. (focus group, Slovakia)

Some young people mentioned material issues but tended to view them from a practical perspective. Importantly, they generally do not equate well-being with luxury – they tended to argue that they are well when they have food, drink, good living conditions, when they have some clothes and maybe a car to commute. There was often an expressed pragmatism such that conspicuous wealth was not always regarded as desirable in itself. An interviewee from Slovakia concurs that to be well ‘you just need a place to live, clothing and food and you are ok’ (male, 15 years old, Slovakia).

In contrast, however, one respondent viewed material aspects as a crucial aspect of well-being. For instance, a 13 year-old Slovak girl considered that well-being should refer to ‘luxury life, better life, when you have money to buy anything you want,’ but she added quickly that ‘having family, friends is also very important’ (interview, female, 13 years old, Slovakia). Another girl from a Slovak focus group explained: ‘at first sight I realise financial issues to be well, money, security. Of course, emotional feelings are also important, but first priority would be money’ (focus group, Slovakia). Hence, while there are associations between material wealth and well-being, these are not definitive.

Responses about living conditions included not having economic problems and not being discriminated against by the ‘popular’ and rich kids at school.

Money is a means for us to be able to do things that make us feel good: having lunch or dinner with friends, going on holiday with our friends, etc. (male, 16 years old, Portugal)

In order to be happy, a number of respondents from Slovakia claimed that it is important to have money, love, good life start or career development. There was a belief in the importance of work but also an awareness that some jobs were more enjoyable than others and that some jobs did not pay well. Young workers in this sample felt that it was important for young people to have sufficient resources to enjoy life. According to them a lot of young people suffer from a lack of money. These young people said that they feel happy mostly among friends; they consider friendships to be the most important factor in this respect:

Friends, you have never enough of them. It is always great to have them to carry you, to help you out. And also it is good to do sports, to be healthy. And learning, we learn throughout life to have a good job and money to enjoy life. We also like listening to music…But educa-
tion itself does not guarantee you the good job, you also need to practice and have contacts… (focus group, secondary school, Slovakia)

4.3.3 Emotional Aspects of Life Satisfaction

The emotions expressed by our CYP were related to their understanding of well-being. For example, in Greece, a feeling of satisfaction was often derived from the fact that they have good and loyal friends, that they like their house and the area they live in, and they have strong and good relations with their family: ‘You can talk with your parents, you can discuss with them the problems you face at school’ (female, 11 years old, Greece). Furthermore, they expressed satisfaction knowing that their parents are employed and thus are able to pay for their leisure activities. Children in Estonia and Slovakia also expressed that the satisfaction with life is derived from a broader social context:

I am very happy to spend my time with horses. I am generally a very positive person and I always try to smile. And I am not happy when people around me frown. (female, 13 years old, Slovakia)

Many children found it hard to point out aspects in their life they do not like at all. Still, the face-to-face individual interviews created more opportunities to express themselves openly and some issues did emerge:

I am satisfied with everything at the moment, except that I eat a lot of sweets and that I, ... sometimes, I get so nervous that I start hitting others. (male, 10 years old, Estonia)

There is also a tendency, visible in a more heterogeneous group of young people in Portugal when it comes to age, to give more structural, situated, concrete answers on the meaning of well-being. It is not clear why this specific group of people mention more than others the relation between well-being and basic needs, for they are socially heterogeneous and not necessarily disadvantaged. For example:

Having a home, food on the table, friends and family. I think that is enough for a person to have well-being. (male, 18 years old, Portugal)

Not having economic struggles. (transgender, 19 years old, Portugal)

Having healthy nutrition and a good home and not having economic struggles. (female, 15 years old, Portugal)

Some children evoked a connection between emotional well-being and tranquility, peace of mind and autonomy of will. Being physically healthy was also a factor that tended to be raised by the majority of the participants:

For me to feel good, I only need my family, my friends, my health, and having people’s love. I don’t need anything else to be happy. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

Living in peace, the way a person wants, I guess. Not being always... I don’t know the word but... Being able to have my own opinions and not living by anyone else’s. (female, 10 years old, Portugal)

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All respondents agreed on the negativity of a lack of free time. It was common to stress that society or some people put too many expectations on them and consequently they feel pressure and stress due to a vast amount of activities they are engaged in. For that reason, almost all the respondents claimed that free time is significant in order to be able to relax, hang out with their friends and entertain themselves. In this regard, the availability of leisure time is taken as an important indicator of happiness, satisfaction and at the end of well-being. Many respondents agreed that freedom and the ability to do what you like the most is important for a good and happy life.

Some young people in Estonia mentioned satisfaction and positive emotions derived from being involved in leisure activities and in some instances, it was related to achieving distinct results. For example, one interviewee described having received a prize from a young musicians’ competition as one of the most pleasant events in her life. Another interviewee described that satisfaction which he gained from reading and analysing pieces of ‘belletrist’ writing, and writing literary criticism as being among the most satisfying things he had experienced in recent times. Also, joy of learning new things at school and studying favourite subjects was mentioned as a source of well-being and satisfaction. Several interviewees mentioned that they derived excitement and satisfaction from learning and getting to know new things and new knowledge. Importantly, they distinguished between the instrumental value of knowledge and skills and then also mentioned separately that learning new things about subjects that they liked was exciting and interesting to them, that this was a value in itself:

Oh, I get so excited and satisfied when I learn new things about chemistry and biology at school! (female, 14 years old, Estonia)

Another girl (15 years old, Estonia) said she was very interested in knowing more about languages and several other subjects and that she studied those subjects with great interest.

These themes were, however, only mentioned by a few. The majority of Estonian interviewees did not mention such experiences or such drive for self-improvement, self-actualisation and self-realisation. Therefore, it would appear as if satisfaction derived from self-actualisation and self-realisation is important for relatively few. Interviewees who considered self-development, self-actualisation and self-realisation to be important, were similar with other interviewees in other respects. This suggests that self-actualisation comes in addition to usual and normal aspects of life that were mentioned by other people. It does not replace more common experiences but it complements them or adds to them, adding details and making the mosaic more varied and more complex.

In the focus groups, our older participants had an opportunity to take a deeper look into their understandings of well-being. The emerging picture was more nuanced and detailed, differentiating between well-being and happiness; especially Portuguese youngsters made this distinction. Well-being is for them the achievement of basic objective and subjective conditions of life, while happiness is at a
higher level, and is usually merely momentary or gradual, or cumulative. This is similar to Maslow’s (1943) hierarchical typology of human needs. In this sense, to these young people well-being is considered as a necessary but not sufficient condition to achieve happiness.

Well-being is a basic characteristic that you have to have in order to reach happiness, but it’s a different thing. (male, 17 years old, Portugal)

It’s like well-being is merely to survive. (female, 18 years old, Portugal)

It’s a mean to an end: happiness. (female, 16 years old, Portugal)

4.4 The Contextual Differences Among Children and Young People in Measuring Well-Being

Our interviews, as expected, showed that asking children about their perception of well-being require child-specific methods (e.g. using concrete wordings instead of abstract questions, asking about their daily experiences rather than general concepts). This issue came up in Portugal where children could easily deal with questions related to the objective of measuring well-being through their opinions, practices and experiences; these questions were answered with a high degree of detail, rationalisation and exemplification. But talking about abstract notions of well-being was clearly a difficult task to deal with. The answers to questions aiming for their definition of well-being, such as what is well-being or what constitutes well-being, had a low degree of precision, detail or complexity. Similarly, the vast majority of children in Greece had difficulties when asked to address the concept of well-being in an abstract manner. Challenging was also the task to deal with another abstract term – quality of life – which some of them did not understand. As Chap. 6 in this volume shows, questions need be designed appropriately so that they can be matched to the level of children’s cognitive ability to comprehend different aspects of well-being.

Nonetheless, Slovak children generally had little trouble when asked to talk about well-being; they did not connect it exclusively to material things such as housing or cars. They tended to associate it with (a concept of) happiness, good health and having opportunities to work. They reacted to the questions about happiness and satisfaction with aspects of life (family relations, community/municipality, school), but tended to skip questions on more general and abstract themes like health and social inequality issues, perhaps because of their young age – they either did not pick up the question at all or said they were not interested.

In Estonia, children’s understanding of well-being in general meant mostly feeling well and happy or having fun. Non-material aspects in general refer to emotions and feelings. These were most often associated with parents and other members of the family, with close relatives but equally so with friends and peers. Interviewees mostly talked about positive emotions, negative reactions were mentioned less
often. Positive emotions referred to feeling secure, happy, feeling cared for and feeling needed by others. A notion closely related to emotions was of having good relationships with other people. Contacts are significant not only in an instrumental sense but also in the sense that interaction with other people influences mood and is valuable in its own right.

Unlike the younger children, young people in Greece were familiar with the concept of well-being but even more so perhaps with the term quality of life, though they did not always define it explicitly clearly. The vast majority of young people agreed that people’s quality of life depends on many factors; amongst them good health is characterised as the most valuable. Almost all interviewees claimed that besides good health, the close, intimate and calm relations with their family members were equally important. Interpersonal relations in general were seen as one of the core aspects of well-being as they deemed both family relations, relations with their friends as well as with other people who did not belong to their circle of closest friends amongst the most important factors for a good life.

…when someone has the ability to cope with his needs, no matter what needs are these, I mean mental, financial. It is difficult to have a good quality of life in our time because we have many obligations and it is difficult to be achieved. (male, 15 years old, Greece)

Although physical and material well-being was also mentioned by the Portuguese youth, this appeared to assume a secondary role in the majority of their statements. Physical well-being is mentioned more frequently by boys, and material well-being is mentioned more frequently by those with a more disadvantaged social background or experiences.

In the group of Estonian youngsters, well-being was perceived in a relatively complex manner, as they used both the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being when talking and analysing the notion. However, such a multidimensional view emerges more easily in group interviews. In focus groups and in individual interviews, a distinction between material and non-material aspects of well-being came to the fore. Material aspects in general referred to services and things that can be obtained through commercial transactions for money (e.g. clothes, food, residence, education, leisure time spending, and travelling). Since the majority of the young people did not earn living themselves (although some of them had a part-time job or had work experience from earlier times), assuring such things was seen contingent on one’s parents.

The Slovak experience with young people shows their well-being is to a higher degree connected to money than in other countries. They didn’t mention other areas or fields spontaneously that would influence their well-being. There was also a notion that well-being is not something related to young people directly. The focus group suggested an individualised meritocratic dimension:

If you study well, you will get a better job and this complements the well-being as well. (focus group, secondary school, Slovakia)
4.5 Conclusion

The qualitative work undertaken in Estonia, Greece, Portugal and Slovakia concerning the conceptions of well-being among children and young people raised a number of significant issues that are crucial to the development of a pan-European longitudinal survey on the well-being of children and young people. However, the reading of these findings must also take into account that they are not an account of all the countries participating in the MYWeB project and more so that they do not cover the full European diversity. The diversity of fieldwork strategies employed in face of the time and process constraints found in field arrangements also adds some limitations to the comparability between countries, and especially uncovering the possible variety across age groups, gender, social class or ethnicity.

Temporality is another issue that must be considered in the reading of this data and findings. The fieldwork was undertaken close to the ending of the deepest world financial and economic crisis since the financial crisis of 2008 – something even more salient in the case of Greece and Portugal –, and that was certainly engraved in the words, thoughts and concerns of at least part of the children and young people that participated in this research.

Children and young people present significant differences of understanding concerning the notion of well-being. The capability to relate with the concept and the multiple dimensions and domains associated with it grows substantially with the progression in the life-course, a factor that must be considered in the development of a longitudinal survey on children’s and young people’s well-being in Europe.

However, children in the four countries managed to resolve this issue with a close association between well-being and happiness, a concept understood in a much clearer fashion. Well-being for children is though the product of a difficult to discern combination of psychological and material elements, involving emotions and states of mind emanating from within themselves or from their immediate surroundings (family) as much as comfort and security. Young people, by contrast, define well-being in a more diverse and complex way. Its content often includes holistic definitions, combining physical, mental, social and material elements in different degrees. Age, gender and social class were the chief contributors to differences within countries. Indeed, these demographic differences were often more import than country specific findings. This is particularly important as it suggests that an ELSCYP is feasible in regard to measuring the well-being of CYP across Europe comparatively.

The major domains of well-being among children and young people add significant depth and complexity to the analysis. Family, friends and school are the major domains of well-being common to both age groups, added by self-esteem, economic conditions and sports in the case of young people. However, these same domains may also simultaneously emerge as potential sources of material and/or psychological discomfort for children and young people, most obviously when there is something problematic about friend or family relations. Family is consistently referred as a domain of well-being but also sometimes described as a locus of
conflict or material deprivation. School is simultaneously a place of learning, of recognition of good performance and interaction with peers, as a place where social inequality emerges and turns visible. The future is envisaged between the potential to accomplish one’s aims and ambitions and the precocious anxiety to find a stable and financial rewarding job. The option made by interviewees to speak about one or the other poles (or even both) of these domains probably relates to the subject’s subjective self-positioning in the social structure and personal experience of different forms of inequality. This necessarily means that measures to ascertain the well-being of children and young people must interact closely with structural factors and symbolic effects in the individual’s and respective parent’s lives: social class, education, ethnicity and its translation into different interpretations and embodiments of well-being.

It emerged that young people see an interaction between material and psychological factors of well-being. It is the combination of good relations with friends, close and supporting family relations together with financial comfort what makes a good life. Furthermore, and apart from the importance of family and friends, education is considered as a crucial component of well-being, despite the difficulties and the pressure they face, since education is seen to provide young people with the necessary skills to achieve their professional goals, as they argue. On the other hand, another opinion expressed was that young people should be close to nature and take care of their physical needs in the same way as their psychological and mental needs.

Differences among the four countries were hard to grasp in a systematic manner. The multidimensional conception of well-being is generally adopted but with rather different weights, either privileging psychological well-being in some countries either referring more to physical and material elements in others. However, it is difficult to ascertain if this is an outcome of different attitudes and representations of children and young people in the four countries or, more probably, if these differences emerge through particularities of each fieldwork process: the short number of participants and diversity of recruitment strategies applied might have some implications on the results obtained.

Cultural and socio-structural differences concerning definitions, conceptions and domains of well-being among children and young people in different European countries, the effect of factors such as gender, education, social class and ethnicity and its potential changes from infancy to young adulthood, are powerful arguments to incorporate children and youth perspectives in developing measurements of well-being. Some of the challenges to develop a longitudinal survey on well-being of children and young people in Europe included the difficulty of young children to deal with abstract notions and preparation of age-adapted questions, the difficulty of comparing these type of questions through several waves of respondents and, of course, the theoretical and methodological challenge of devising measures, procedures and fieldwork strategies sufficiently robust for similarities and differences across countries to emerge in a clear and systematic way. The theoretical, methodological and operational difficulties implicated in such a task are immense, but also would be the scientific and social benefits brought by this endeavour to children and young people across Europe.

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References


5.1 Introduction

The improvement of child and youth well-being can be supported systematically by policy interventions, political programmes and action plans. Yet, to ensure efficient policy-making and to know which aspects of well-being should be addressed, politicians and policy-makers need to have access to an adequate evidence base and a sound and consistent monitoring system on which to base decisions. Such a monitoring system can comprise administrative as well as survey data. However, irrespective of the kind of data used to informing politicians and policy-makers, the needs of children and young people should be adequately reflected. In order to achieve this aim, several methodological aspects have to be taken into account. This chapter highlights some basic difficulties connected with ensuring that a suitable and robust evidence base from which children and young people well-being can be adequately monitored.

The term well-being has been interpreted with respect to different theoretical concepts and thus can be examined using diverse approaches. Two important approaches are considered: the eudaimonic approach, emphasizing psychological well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001) and the hedonic approach, focussed on subjective well-being (Diener and Lucas 1999. Furthermore, since the 1960s there has been a discussion on whether positive or negative affect or the level of (dis)satisfaction, should be considered the decisive factor in assessing subjective well-being (Bradburn 1969; Cantril 1965). The brief description of these debates on the conceptualisation of well-being and its subcategories illustrates the obstacles in measuring well-being: the researcher’s decision on how to generate a precise account of the target popula-
tion’s well-being crucially depends on the underlying concept. Since there is no general agreement on the conceptualisation of child and youth well-being, measurement goals have to be considered carefully for every study. Moreover, the lack of a common basis for conceptualising and measuring child and youth well-being often results in a lack of comparable data.

Furthermore, different well-being aspects and dimensions have to be taken into account when designing a survey. The aspects to be considered are grouped into two broad categories, objective (e.g., household income) and subjective (e.g., personal assessment of whether or not having enough money). While the operationalization of objective aspects is relatively straightforward and can often be achieved with administrative data, subjective aspects, taking regard of individual perceptions, generally require more effort and are best achieved through survey measurements. Therefore, subjective well-being measurements are more complex constructs compared to objective ones. Yet, several instruments exist that have demonstrated their effectiveness and validity in measuring well-being (Abdel-Khalek 2006; Fattore et al. 2009). In particular, when surveying children and young people, the consideration of subjective well-being is of importance. Young respondents might have a completely different point of view and therefore also a different perception of their situation compared to adults interpreting the survey data (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014; Mason and Danby 2011; Scott 2008). Also, diverse dimensions of well-being (e.g., education, social networks, environment etc.) have to be considered from the point of view of the target population, in this case children and young people. Such a procedure ensures that the most important components, which can possibly be used in politics and policy making to improve the population’s well-being, are captured.

Therefore, the question we seek to answer in this chapter is: ‘What kind of data can provide the best monitoring results for policy making and research into child and youth well-being?’ We examine this question from a survey methodology perspective and first take a look at results from interdisciplinary research. In order to identify the needs that have been revealed and the benefits that several approaches have brought in the past, we refer to diverse studies pointing out issues which are particularly important in regard to child and youth well-being. Within the scope of the MYWeB project, the possibility of setting up of an EU wide longitudinal survey on children’s and young people’s well-being was assessed. For this reason, this chapter puts particular emphasis on various aspects connected to longitudinal studies.

The following section provides an overview of recent data sets covering core dimensions of child and youth well-being in EU countries. We present what has already been covered well and which aspects have been neglected so far in the data. This chapter closes with a summarising discussion pointing out the most urgent needs in regard to the representation of children’s and young people’s well-being in EU data sets.
5.2 Learning from Interdisciplinary Research

5.2.1 The Importance of Child and Youth Well-Being for the Future

When considering the effects of child and youth well-being on society, two perspectives should be taken into account. First and foremost, the young generation is an important part of society whose current well-being should be taken regard of by research as well as by policy makers. While this approach is known as the ‘child rights perspective’, the alternative concept is referred to as the ‘developmentalist perspective’ (OECD 2009). The latter puts the emphasis on the fact that children’s and young people’s status, comprising health, academic success, social network integration etc., has a decisive impact on their targets and trajectories and thus on their future position in society. The studies discussed below demonstrate the long-term consequences of family composition, parenting styles, maltreatment, socio-economic status and social change on the individual’s development.

Amato and Booth (1991) as well as Chase-Lansdale et al. (1995), for instance, give evidence of a link between parents’ divorce and the development of psychological and social disorders of the child in later life stages. Maier and Lachman (2000) detected differences between women and men who experienced their parent’s divorce before they turned 17 years old. While respondents from both genders had problems with their physical health (mediated by low income, education, higher propensity of substance abuse and less family support), men additionally had fewer positive relationships and less self-acceptance, lower environmental mastery and depression. Also, parental styles adolescents experienced appeared to have long-term effects on substance abuse and well-being levels in their early adulthood (Aquilino and Supple 2001).

The benefits of longitudinal studies concerned with the development of children and young people are shown by a Canadian study on physical aggression which was conducted in an accelerated cohort design. Over the course of 6 years, children between the age of 2 and 11 years were surveyed in order to find out about the development of aggression levels and in particular the underlying reasons for the patterns observed. Results indicate that boys from low income families with a poor educational background had a high risk of belonging to this group, showing the highest and most stable levels of aggression. Also, high aggression levels are fostered by hostile or ineffective parenting strategies (Côté et al. 2006). The authors emphasize that the identification of aggression development patterns and risk factors was only possible in the course of a longitudinal study. Also, they note that a survey including younger children would be able to provide insight into the emergence of first physical aggressions and thus contribute additional understanding.

Witnessing or experiencing abuse in early childhood influences the brain’s development in the areas of fear response, mood, emotional and cognitive responses, stress response as well as learning and memory (Anda et al. 2006). In the long term these developmental changes will have crucial impact on well-being dimensions at
every life stage. Anderson et al. (2003) point out that early childhood development can have effects over the whole life course. The cumulative experiences of buffers and burdens influence not only well-being in young years but also future trajectories. Accordingly, they argue that it is the interaction between biology and the social environment that has a significant impact on children’s well-being as well as on their well-being in adolescence and adulthood. In line with this, Hertzman and Power (2004) come to the conclusion that the development of language and cognitive skills, the socio-emotional behaviour and physics have decisive long-term effects on well-being. They refer to the development of resilience and vulnerabilities over the life-course when they emphasize that policies that aim at improving well-being often overlook the sources for its improvement or impairment if they neglect a long-term perspective.

Elder (1998) emphasizes that the selection of pathways is not a choice that is made in a social vacuum, but determined by given opportunity structures. Which opportunities a specific person has, however, depends on the individual’s cultural, historical, and social background. To demonstrate the link between society and child well-being, Elder refers to the Great Depression the US suffered from between the late 1920s and early 1940s. The general economic decline in this time had various consequences for the population. Parents were confronted with a high level of stress, marital problems and episodes of depression. Due to financial pressure, parenting was often neglected (Elder 1998). According to the Oakland Growth Study the children of this time later turned out to have increased troubles with emotional distress, their academic performance and general behaviour (Elder 1998). Elder (1998) concludes that human development can only be captured by longitudinal approaches as opportunity structures change and therefore the choice of trajectories in subsequent life passages also changes.

Similarly, Hertzman and Wiens (1996) emphasize that well-being, health and competencies can be improved by appropriate programmes in the long run if they support the cognitive and social-emotional development of children. They give the example of eastern Europe in the 1990s, when severe political changes affected the population’s living conditions. Cross-sectional studies showed that the general health status in some eastern European countries rather worsened than improved, but Hertzman and Wiens (1996) doubt this development applied to every age group equally. They point out that only a longitudinal study could reveal whether or not certain subgroups have developed particular vulnerabilities or resilience due to life cycle determinants.

The studies referred to are examples of research done in medicine, public health and social sciences, which demonstrate that child and youth well-being has long-term effects that need to be assessed by longitudinal studies. Thus, making use of cross-sectional designs only results in neglecting the developmentalist perspective of children’s and young people’s well-being. Solely on the basis of information from long-term studies, factors impeding a positive or negative development of well-being can be identified and thus actively conveyed or prevented by political and policy programmes, an aspect discussed in the following section.

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5.2.2 Examples for Political Programmes on Child and Youth Well-Being

According to the OECD (2011), the majority of policies that aim to improve child and youth well-being set in at late childhood or early adolescence in the form of support in the context of education. Yet, the OECD recommends to invest in programmes focused on early childhood interventions as these are considered more efficient with regard to two aspects. First, the development of resilience and prevention of vulnerabilities is most effective in early life stages. Second, educational programmes for older children or adolescents usually support those who are on a good track already and thus deepen existing inequalities (OECD 2011). In the following, some political interventions and monitoring systems are presented that relate to different life stages and contexts.

One example of an evaluation of a political programme that demonstrates the need for a longitudinal perspective is the 1990s reform of the US welfare system which aimed to attract more mothers into the labour market. Experts expected negative consequences for child well-being due to a decrease in family time and an increase in parental stress levels. The results, however, did not point towards any negative consequences for pre-schoolers’ (2 to 4 years old) well-being and even showed a slight improvements for adolescents’ (10 to 14 years old) mental health. Additionally, the study revealed that the mother’s exit from the labour market was correlated with an increase in adolescents’ behaviour problems (Chase-Lansdale et al. 2003). This example demonstrates that reliable conclusions on children’s and young people’s well-being cannot be drawn on basis of observations made in one point in time since effects of single events can turn into one or another direction in later life stages.

The ‘Child-Parent Center Education Program’ in Chicago is a political intervention affecting well-being domains. Its efficacy in the long run has been supported by a research design that allowed for accompanying the programme’s participants for up to 25 years after the intervention. This close monitoring showed that the participants had higher educational achievements, higher incomes, a higher socio-economic status, better health insurance coverage as well as lower rates of justice system involvement and substance abuse (Reynolds et al. 2011). This example demonstrates that reliable conclusions on children’s and young people’s well-being cannot be drawn on basis of observations made in one point in time since effects of single events can turn into one or another direction in later life stages.

In regard to political programmes and policy interventions that aim to increase life satisfaction levels, Park (2004) addresses in particular societies that are characterised by increasing diversity. She stresses that effective programmes should not only focus on fighting negative aspects in life or disorders, but rather support young people in building cognitive, psychological and social qualities that prepare them for difficult stages and trajectories in their lives (see also Lippman et al. 2011).
In this context, a longitudinal study helps to identify the underlying mechanisms that have a positive effect on the (well-being) development of several subgroups.

### 5.2.3 Longitudinal Studies Measuring Child and Youth Well-Being: Some Best Practice Examples

In the remainder of this section we introduce recent surveys covering child and youth well-being, or at least core dimensions of it, that have attracted attention as best practice examples. Based on these examples, we stress the additional value a longitudinal design offers in addition (or contrast) to a cross-sectional one. We chose the *British Household Panel Survey* (which has developed into the *Understanding Society* survey) as an example of a longitudinal survey producing new perspectives on core well-being domains that have an impact on politician’s strategies. Furthermore, the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* study adds the value of an international comparative design and a focus on children and young people. Finally, *Children’s Worlds* has the unique characteristic of putting an emphasis on the children’s subjective well-being and includes them already at the stage of planning the survey. Additionally, we briefly discuss an approach by the OECD to combine administrative and survey data on child and youth well-being.

In 1991, the *British Household Panel Survey* (BHPS) was launched. Since then, approximately 10,000 panel members and their children have been interviewed every year and contributed to a massive data base providing empirical evidence for social change and its consequences (Berthoud and Burton 2008). Diverse dimensions contributing to child and youth well-being are covered by the BHPS, such as the household’s economic situation, health aspects, participation, risk behaviour and subjective well-being. Concerning interventions focused on poverty and inequality it was as a result of analysis based on the BHPS that the views of policy makers were changed. Results from cross-sectional studies suggested a halt in increases in poverty and inequality that had begun in the late 1970s. However, long-term results from the BHPS revealed that there was, in fact no, individual stability (as assumed after the review of cross-sectional results), but rather a fluctuation over the course of several years. This observation can be compared with a rubber band effect, which is explained by a person’s income fluctuating within a certain range. Short-term observations not taking this into account are affected by measurement errors and thus point to findings that do not reflect the actual situation (Jenkins 2008). In order to address the problem of poverty efficiently by policy interventions, it is important to identify sub-populations whose risk of poverty remains high over time. This, Jenkins argues, can only be done through a long-term longitudinal monitoring design, such as the BHPS.

Moreover, the BHPS introduces a new perspective on the relationship between social class and mental health. It illustrates that a person’s employment and mental health status in the year before a survey was conducted have a crucial impact on the
mental health status as measured in the survey (Bartley 2008). Thus, in the context of health, BHPS data are used to disentangle intervening effects that could not have been identified with cross-sectional data. Furthermore, Scott (2008) reveals long-term effects of within-family interactions on young people’s development of resilience and risk factors. She identifies frequent family meals in childhood and adolescence as a factor that decreases the chance of getting involved in vandalism and school related difficulties. Several aspects of subjective well-being are implemented in the BHPS. Analysing these over the course of several years, Clark (2008) contributes to the validity and reliability of these measurements and emphasizes that longitudinal data usage also provides the chance to identify potential chains of cause and effect. Finally, Gershuny (2008) points out that only the longitudinal design of the BHPS allows for tracking individual changes of any kind over the life course and thus highlighting key aspects of life trajectories.

An international longitudinal study which is focussed on child and youth well-being is the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* survey (HBSC). Organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), this cohort study was started in the early 1980s and has since been conducted on a 4 year cycle in more than 40 American and European countries. The interviewees are between 11 and 15 years old.1 The HBSC provides the basis for numerous analyses which detected patterns in the development of resilience (e.g., Boniel-Nissim et al. 2015) as well as risk factors (e.g., Hublet et al. 2015; Ottová-Jordan et al. 2015; Walsh et al. 2016) in the context of child and youth well-being. In contrast to some previous studies suggesting that electronic media communication leads to social isolation, Boniel-Nissim et al. (2015) find that it actually helps teenagers to get in contact with peers and thus eliminates obstacles, in particular regarding the contact with the opposite sex. Since strengthening social contacts contributes significantly to young people’s well-being, Boniel-Nissim et al. (2015) shows how electronic media communication can be used for developing resilience. They also find an outlier (in 2004) in the stable frequency of electronic media communication over the years observed (2002 to 2010), which can be explained by the introduction of social networks such as Facebook.

An example of finding out more about risk factors using the HBSC is the study by Hublet et al. (2015). They provide evidence for a correlation between tobacco and cannabis use among 15-year-olds. From 2002 to 2010 they observe a general decrease in tobacco as well as in cannabis usage, which can be explained by economic factors (increasing prices) and social ones (adolescents went out less often with their friends). Moreover, the use of the HBSC data set allows for determining differences across countries. Meanwhile, there are numerous studies conducted with HBSC data that contribute to a better understanding of children’s and young people’s well-being that also take account of different cultures and socio-economic structures (for a brief summary of important results see Kuntsche and Ravens-Sieberer 2015).

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1 For more detailed information on the methodology see Roberts et al. 2009.
Children’s Worlds, funded by the Jacobs Foundation is an international repeated cross-section survey of children’s well-being with longitudinal elements (ISCWeB²). The first wave was conducted in 2012 in 14 countries with interviewees of different age cohorts (the youngest were 8 years old). The most outstanding characteristic of ISCWeB is the inclusive approach during the development of the survey. Children are asked about their subjective well-being in order to take regard of their views from the very beginning. This survey has also shown the needs for a longitudinal approach to child well-being. González-Carrasco et al. (2016a), for instance, analyse the Spanish sample and trace changes in the respondents’ overall life satisfaction as well as in overall happiness over the course of one year. They find a progressive decline in subjective well-being over the time measured, which coincides with a change in the Spanish school system. Interestingly, both measures depend on gender and age and are influenced by diverse factors. Perhaps more importantly, a factor contributing to an increase in subjective well-being does not necessarily result in a decrease in it when it is missing. Similarly, aspects that decrease the subjective well-being do not automatically result in a positive change when missing. Thus, González-Carrasco et al. (2016a) conclude that it is necessary to monitor changes in well-being using a longitudinal design in order to detect decisive aspects that can be used for political programmes and policy interventions aiming at either counteracting a decrease and/or supporting an increase in well-being. They also emphasise that their results depend on sub populations (e.g., gender), which have to be taken into account in both surveying and analysing child well-being. Having shown that well-being is not linear, but is associated with changes in early adolescence, González-Carrasco et al. (2016b) point out that further research is needed to show at which stages in life subjective well-being is highest or lowest for specific sub populations or individuals. Additionally, there is more to find out about child and youth well-being in detail, for instance, whether or not the relative importance of specific aspects stays the same over the life-course or across different cultures (González-Carrasco et al. 2016b). They also highlight that the focus of longitudinal studies on adolescents does not usually lie on their current well-being. This constitutes a major research gap, which cannot be closed by analysing cross-sectional surveys due to the inability of the latter to distinguish between developmental and cohort effects.

Casas (2016) also uses data from the ISCWeB in a comparative approach showing different patterns across 15 countries and an overall declining trend in subjective well-being, which is interrupted at around the age of 15 years or older. Additionally, Casas (2016) provides evidence that a high share of respondents did not show any significant decrease in only a one year phase but over a longer period. These results underpin the need for international longitudinal survey data on child and youth well-being.

Since administrative data are updated regularly and usually quickly available, the OECD uses these data to analyse child and youth well-being for its member states. One disadvantage of administrative data, however, is that they do not cover all

²International Survey of Children’s Well-Being
dimensions of child and youth well-being; in particular they cannot provide any information on subjective well-being. Therefore, the OECD opts for an analytical approach that combines available administrative and survey data (Bradshaw et al. 2007; OECD 2009). Even though there is a rich database accessible via this approach, there are still some restrictions that have to be taken into account. First, well-being indicators given in the exiting data sets are not derived from a theoretical conceptualisation of child and youth well-being, but rather from the availability of data. Furthermore, the data at hand only reflect specific dimensions of well-being, which makes it impossible to develop an overall picture of child and youth well-being (OECD 2009). This is likely to lead to inconsistencies in the interpretation of child and youth well-being and would lead to different policy responses. Moreover, there are only little data available for children younger than 9 years and it is not always possible to distinguish between different sub-populations (e.g., migrants) and life-cycle stages (since these might not always be the same for the same age groups across countries) (OECD 2009).

The coverage of the data available differs considerably across countries and is not always gathered to the same point in time in each country. Thus, for some countries the data available might already be outdated and not comparable with more recent data (OECD 2009). Richardson and Ali (2012) also warns of relying on the possibility of linking existing data sets because of methodological concerns. Within a survey diverse error sources might be introduced resulting in biases (e.g., response biases on key indicators, nonresponse biases, measurement biases etc.). When combining different surveys, different errors are combined which should be taken into account, for instance by using different sample weights. Building on Richardson and Ali’s data mapping for the OECD countries, we used a similar approach to map an overview over the existing child and youth well-being data sources in the EU countries. The following section describes the key findings from the MYWeB data collection.

5.3 What Is (not) Covered in EU Countries?

5.3.1 Data Collection for the MYWeB Project

Within the MYWeB project we prepared a comprehensive review of existing data sets covering child and youth well-being in the EU countries in order to see which aspects of measuring child and youth well-being have already been covered well.  

3 We focussed on surveys as well as administrative data that were gathered in 2009 or later and covered respondents younger than 26 years. We decided to include studies that were designed for the target population of 18 years and older (unless there were

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3For more information on the EU wide policy gathering described in this paper, please refer to the MYWeB report by Busse et al. (2014).
only respondents older than 25 years), because we expected these studies to deliver valuable information for our data overview, in particular with respect to survey methods used when targeting adolescents. For the same reason we also included cross-sectional surveys. From all EU countries, 457 sources for administrative data and 370⁴ surveys covering core dimensions of well-being were gathered. For the majority of these data sets the geographical focus was national (78% for the surveys and 95% for the administrative data).

Administrative data derived from sources that were delivered by ministries, public statistical offices and other institutions working with registries, such as hospital records and crime statistics. In the following sections we present the results of our analysis by stressing the benefits derived from the existing data sets and identifying their weaknesses as well as determining their value as source of information for EU member states’ politics.

5.4 What Is Already Covered Well?

The review of studies on children’s and young people’s well-being demonstrates that there is a large range of studies that cover aspects contributing to an overall concept of well-being. Quantitative surveys, in particular, have been dedicated to this topic in recent years. Above all, these have been conducted in classical survey modes such as Paper-and-Pencil (sometimes carried out in school classes) and Face-to-Face (often combined with CAPI⁵ support). In most cases, cross-sectional studies were conducted (see Fig. 5.1⁶).

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⁴ In the case of longitudinal surveys each wave conducted after 2008 was captured as one survey since longitudinal surveys usually include specific modules in each wave that bring additional value to questions repeated. If counting every longitudinal survey only once (despite of several waves conducted), the total number of surveys gathered is 340.

⁵ Computer Assisted Personal Interview

⁶ For Fig. 5.1 each longitudinal study was counted only once, including every wave that was conducted.
In regard to qualitative surveys, it is important to note that almost all of them depend on in-depth interviews and focus groups. However, the clear majority of the surveys collected here are quantitative in nature (see Table 5.1). Even in the context of pre-testing, qualitative methods were rarely applied.

### Table 5.1 Number of data sets gathered including core dimensions of child and youth well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative surveys N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>26 (9 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>20 (7 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7 (2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>11 (4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>16 (6 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>31 (11 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>8 (3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12 (4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>7 (2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1 (0 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>18 (6 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>8 (3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>6 (2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6 (2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>4 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>13 (5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>11 (4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3 (1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>14 (5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>36 (13 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n (%)</td>
<td>284 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: International surveys were gathered under the label “Europe”. Administrative data sets were gathered on national level only since these are the sources for international administrative data sets.
According to Barth et al. (2011), administrative data provide valuable information for long-term perspectives since they are updated on a regular basis. However, in connection with using administrative data, problems of various kind may arise, for instance restricted access, data protection issues, problems with international comparisons and technical difficulties in regard to the merging of data sets (Barth et al. 2011). In our review, we found that administrative data contributing to illustrations of children’s and young people’s well-being are important supplements to quantitative or qualitative studies. Administrative data are in most cases updated annually and are usually representative of a country’s population. Additionally, most administrative data sets allow for the distinction between age groups in order to analyse the well-being of children and young people separately. Administrative data particularly contribute statistics on objective well-being aspects that are related to the state (e.g., figures on taxes, social benefits, unemployment, health statistics, school achievements and enrolment rates as well as crime statistics).

Turning to the content of the data sets collected, socio-demographics, economic aspects, education and health are included in many survey and administrative data. Additionally, relationships to peers and parents are covered well in quantitative and qualitative studies. About one third of the studies contained the well-being dimensions environment and housing, risk behaviour, civic and political participation, safety issues, cultural aspects and integration (see Table 5.2). The advice for combining objective and subjective measurements of well-being as it was for instance suggested by Stiglitz et al. (2009) is followed by 63% of the current studies. Also, abstract concepts like happiness that are more difficult to capture, and therefore represent a barrier in survey planning processes, are often included in studies (52%).

5.4.1 What Are the Gaps?

Concerning the coverage of surveys on children’s and young people’s well-being, we ascertained that recent studies have been conducted in all EU countries except in Cyprus and Luxembourg. However, eastern European (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Poland) and smaller (Denmark, Ireland, Malta) countries are underrepresented compared to other European countries. Interestingly, also the Netherlands and Sweden stand out in this regard. The lowest numbers of administrative data sets were reported for the eastern European countries mentioned above as well as Slovakia. Thus, it is of particular importance to include eastern European countries in surveys on child and youth well-being to receive an overall European picture.

The vast majority of the surveys examined here include respondents of 18 years and older. Although, adolescents can be surveyed by studies designed for adults, these studies usually suffer from a lack of focus on adolescents. Children and their parents are surveyed only rarely: we found only 18 surveys covering this target
Table 5.2  Overview over the coverage of well-being dimensions in surveys and administrative data sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Domains</th>
<th>Socio-demographic</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>Risk Behaviour</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Housing/Environment</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL N (%)</strong></td>
<td>370 (100 %)</td>
<td>209 (57 %)</td>
<td>208 (57 %)</td>
<td>112 (32 %)</td>
<td>228 (64 %)</td>
<td>200 (56 %)</td>
<td>184 (52 %)</td>
<td>151 (42 %)</td>
<td>149 (42 %)</td>
<td>151 (43 %)</td>
<td>111 (32 %)</td>
<td>128 (36 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing cases N</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Administrative data             |                   |          |        |        |           |        |       |                |               |                      |          |             |
| **TOTAL N (%)**                 | 309 (69 %)        | 167 (37 %) | 190 (42 %) | 51 (11 %) | 134 (30 %) | N/I   | N/I   | 87 (19 %)      | 27 (6 %)      | 102 (23 %)            | 92 (20 %) | N/I         |
| **Missing cases N**             | 11                | 10       | 1      | 7      | 9         | N/I   | N/I   | 6              | 3             | 6                     | 5        | N/I         |

Note: N/I: No information provided for this domain
In case of not having any reliable information about the usage of psychological dimensions a missing case was marked for the respective survey. These were excluded from the frequency analyses.
group. There were even some countries that did not provide any survey focusing only on children or adolescents younger than 18 years (Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands and Poland). This might lead to difficulties connected with surveying children. In order to take regard of legal and ethical constraints, surveys conducted with children generally require, for instance, the parents’ and school authority’s approval. Moreover, when designing the survey, the cognitive abilities of the target population have to be taken into account. This is particularly difficult in child research as the cognitive development of young children progresses fast, which implies that respondents whose age varies only by a few months can be at different developmental stages. Thus, a study designed for surveying young children has to accommodate such variation.

Recent examples of well-being surveys also consider children’s and young people’s views on well-being (Ben-Arieh 2005; Casas 2016; Mason and Danby 2011). To ensure the inclusion of this aspect, it is necessary to include qualitative studies in well-being research in order to have a basis for the development of well-being concepts used in quantitative surveys. Apart from very few exceptions, such as Children’s Worlds (see above), this has not yet been taken into account adequately across Europe. Also, comprehensive qualitative approaches like ethnographic observations or Delphi studies have only rarely been included in well-being studies so far. Instead, in the majority of cases quantitative surveys relying on adults’ conceptualisation of well-being have been conducted.

The possibilities some survey modes offer to appeal to young people, such as implementing video sequences, avatars or other web implementations, have not been routinely used thus far. The main reason for this is the preference of classical survey modes (Paper-and-Pencil, Face-to-Face) instead of online or mobile web surveys. However, progressive survey modes should be considered in studies of well-being as they hold several unique possibilities for surveying young people. When it comes to surveying children younger than 8 years, it can be advisable to use a combination of surveying parents, teachers and other care takers with the classic mode methods and surveying the children with child appropriate methods, such as observations in play situations. So far, the latter have not been used in surveys across Europe.

Additionally, it is important to monitor young people and their well-being over time as it can vary considerably across different life-stages (e.g., due to enter school, changing school, moving, puberty, entering the labour market). Literature also suggests that early childhood experiences are a decisive factor regarding the development of resilience or vulnerabilities. Thus, when conducting longitudinal studies, such as panel and cohort studies, it is essential to map young people’s well-being and to learn about the underlying mechanisms that cause it to change. Furthermore, to receive a complete picture of children’s development, studies should begin in early childhood or even prior to birth. Thus far, this age cohort has only been covered sufficiently by administrative data in a comparative sense.

In survey as well as administrative data, environmental topics, risk behaviour, safety, culture, gender issues and participation are not generally reflected sufficiently. Although these topics are covered to some extent, existing data sets fail to
deliver detailed insights. Especially administrative data sources lack information on indirect measurements such as the provision of free school meals or other basic needs, ICT devices in school and at home (economic), immunisation, doing sports, weight information, nutrition, breastfeeding (health), (il)literacy, learning difficulties, bullying (education), overcrowding, noise pollution and park availability (environment). For culture and participation even broader categories are not covered well by existing data. Moreover, the surveys examined here reveal that psychological aspects of well-being, that need to be taken regard of (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2001; Ryff and Keyes 1995), have not been adequately taken into consideration. Table 5.3 shows that only the psychological well-being aspects of autonomy, self-acceptance and personality were covered by approximately one third of the studies. Considering that, particularly in adolescence, psychological development and stability play a decisive role in regard to overall well-being, this result indicates a major gap in the existing surveys.

Finally, for politics and policy making it is important to take account of vulnerable groups, for example, children from migrant families, refugees or disabled children. Only few of the existing surveys cover hard to reach target populations adequately.

### 5.5 Discussion

The literature reveals that child and youth well-being has a tremendous impact on society (from a developmentalist view as well as a child rights perspective) and should therefore be high on political agendas. Moreover, we saw that cross-sectional studies are not always capable of providing answers in this context and might lead to investments in ineffective political programmes and policy interventions. Even though, cross-sectional surveys are easier to administer, less expensive and the results are available faster than for longitudinal surveys, these cannot highlight aspects such as long-term outcomes of policy interventions or mechanisms having different effects at different life-stages. Thus, in order to establish a robust evidence base and monitoring system on child and youth well-being a longitudinal design is required.

When it comes to longitudinal data, there are a few best practice examples also covering EU countries which focus on core dimensions of child and youth well-

### Table 5.3 Total number of child and youth well-being surveys including psychological dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Dimension</th>
<th>Total N (%)</th>
<th>Missing cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>107 (32%)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>86 (25%)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Acceptance</td>
<td>100 (30%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>115 (34%)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>80 (24%)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Purpose</td>
<td>87 (26%)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>65 (19%)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>80 (24%)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>98 (29%)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In case of not having any reliable information about the usage of psychological dimensions a missing case was marked for the respective survey. These were excluded from the frequency analyses.
being. Additionally, a growing body of administrative data is available. However, there is no data set covering all well-being dimensions that seem important to contribute to the overall child and youth well-being in depth. Some surveys cover many dimensions, but on a rather superficial level and some studies provide more detailed data, but are restricted to only one or two core dimensions of well-being (e.g., health in the HBSC). When combining several data sources, methodological problems arise and some gaps are neither covered in existing longitudinal survey nor in administrative data.

The most apparent gaps refer to well-being topics, age coverage and, connected with this, data collection modes. While some topics (e.g., socio-demographics, material aspects or health) are in general covered well in surveys and administrative data, other aspects have not been included in many surveys so far. Examples of neglected topics are gender issues, integration and cultural aspects. Already today, the EU member states face the problems connected with the refugee flows which started in 2015. In the future, aspects related to growing diversity (with respect to culture, religion, prosperity etc.) will increasingly be of crucial importance in the study of well-being. Therefore, these topics ought to be included in child and youth well-being surveys. Additionally, children’s subjective points of view should be incorporated in surveys when aiming to fully capture children’s well-being. In particular for adolescents, psychological aspects are of major importance for overall well-being and have been neglected by the majority of the surveys conducted so far. Furthermore, well-being studies have to begin in early childhood in order to get detailed information on the most relevant points in life concerning the enhancement of child and youth well-being as well as well-being over the whole life course. Getting closer to this aim requires going beyond classic survey modes, such as Paper-and-Pencil or Face-to-Face. Thus, more child appropriate methods should be applied that take into account the different stages in children’s cognitive development.

Finally, the review of existing data indicates a strong need to establish a EU-wide longitudinal study. The definition of child and youth well-being varies considerably across different life stages and cultures, which is why well-being can only be analysed on the basis of a data set enabling comparative research. Additionally, some EU countries are not covered to a satisfactory level when it comes to child and youth well-being data sets. Therefore, the evidence base and monitoring system taking regard of the latest challenges and changes in all EU countries should provide a sound basis for informing politicians and policy makers about the development of child and youth well-being across countries. With its significant effect on informed policy-making, it would contribute considerably to the promotion of equal opportunities for children across the EU.

References


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Chapter 6
How to Develop Well-Being Survey Questions for Young Children: Lessons Learned from Cross-Cultural Cognitive Interviews

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6.1 Introduction

Responding to survey questions is a complex process, which requires that respondents are able and willing to implement several cognitive tasks. A common model of the survey response (Tourangeau 1984; Tourangeau et al. 2000) breaks this process into four phases: comprehension, retrieval, judgement and response. Thus, responding to survey questions requires that respondents are able and willing to understand the question, to accurately recall relevant information and to provide an answer by forming a judgment to fit the response alternatives (Miller and Willis 2016).

Since all elements of questionnaire design (e.g., question wording and syntax, visual design, response alternatives) can impact the respondents’ understanding throughout that process, one of the aims of developing survey questions is ‘to make each step of the response process as easy as possible so that respondents can provide accurate answers with minimal burden’ (Smyth 2016: 221). Such well-designed questionnaires enable accurate measurement of intended constructs by maximizing the respondent’s ability to give correct answers. Despite existing findings about the cognitive processes involved in survey responding and the effects of different aspects of questionnaire design, ‘the knowledge is still incomplete and many decisions need to be made without empirical evidence’ (Smyth 2016: 231). Besides, each questionnaire is different and sets a different context for individual questions. Because of that, many professional associations and experts in questionnaire design recommend pretesting the questionnaire as a standard procedure before actual surveying, especially in planned cross-cultural studies. The aim of different pretesting
methods is detecting questionnaire design problems (Willis 2016). One of the methods for pretesting survey questionnaires is the cognitive interview, which consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a small number of respondents similar to those targeted in the survey. Cognitive interviews enable researchers ‘to study the manner in which targeted audiences understand, mentally process, and respond to the materials we present – with a special emphasis on potential breakdowns in this process’ (Willis 2005: 3). Thus, cognitive interviews enable the detection of problems at all stages of the response process (Willis 2016). Beyond being a method for pretesting survey questions, cognitive interviews are also important to understand the complexity of the question-response process, as well the role of socio-cultural influences on those processes (Miller and Willis 2016). This is especially relevant in cross-cultural or international studies (Fitzgerald et al. 2009).

The importance of pretesting is even greater with children as survey respondents (Bell 2007). Children are still developing abilities and skills required for responding to survey questions such as reading, knowledge of conversational rules, vocabulary, and syntax, reasoning ability, memory and attention, perspective-taking skills and self-understanding (Saywitz and Camparo 2014). In order to give valid and reliable survey answers children must read and interpret the item, hold the concepts in their mind, search their memory for relevant information, read and interpret the response options, evaluate the item in the context of the response options, and then choose the option that best represents their answer (Woolley et al. 2004). Because of different levels of cognitive development, communicative competence and socio-emotional maturity between adults (as survey designers) and children (as survey respondents), childrens’ understanding of the questionnaire could be quite different to that of the researchers (Saywitz and Camparo 2014; Scott 2000). A child-centred perspective in developing survey questions entails considering how children will experience the question, what design features will help them answer accurately, and what design features will cause problems. Today, there is still no complete consensus about whether young school children (aged six to twelve) are able to give valid and reliable survey answers (see Ben-Arie 2005; Scott 2000; Smyth 2016). At the same time a review of the main international surveys of children show that children’s participation in international surveys is missing before the age of nine (Richardson and Ali 2014), although the time period for that review precedes some international studies which survey children from eight years of age, such as Children’s Worlds study (Rees and Bradshaw 2016) and the European KIDSCREEN survey (Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2014a). In fact, several studies show that young children are able to give valid responses if instruments and questions are developmentally appropriate, valid and relevant to their experiences and knowledge (Borgers et al. 2004; Dworsky 2014; Scott 2000; Varni et al. 2007; Woolley et al. 2004).

Recommendations for developing survey questions for children or adolescents primarily stress that the whole survey and specific items should be short, simple in terms of vocabulary and structure, and as concrete as possible, while avoiding ambiguous terms and formulations (Bowen 2008; Irwin et al. 2009; Lippman et al. 2014). At the same time, there are not enough consistent recommendations around issues such as which response scales (including type of scale, number of scale
points, and types of response categories) are most developmentally valid and appropriate to use with children. Another unresolved issue concerns whether children are able to correctly recall exact time periods or contexts such as a concrete place when prompted by survey questions.

Regarding the response scales in surveys and questionnaires for children, frequency scales, Likert type scales, and emoticon scales are most often used. The number and types of response options vary greatly. In the context of measuring children’s subjective well-being some instruments use frequency or intensity scales with up to five points, with general responses (e.g., Multidimensional Students’ Life Scale by Huebner (1994) use four response options; ‘Never’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Often’, ‘Almost Always’). Some use seven-point scales such as the Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale for children and adolescents aged eight to eighteen (Seligson et al. 2003) and some even 11-point scales with partially labelled scale points such as the Personal Well-being Index-School Children Version PWI-SC Scale (Cummins and Lau 2005). Although recent evidence suggest that partially labelled scales can work well with children (Casas 2017), previous work recommended to avoid vague quantifiers and partially labelled options (Borgers and Hox 2001; Borgers et al. 2004; Borgers et al. 2000). Regarding the optimal number of response categories there is no consensus in the literature. According to some researchers (Bowen 2008; Borgers et al. 2004) using more than five response categories is arguably not advisable, even with older children, and response options should match the underlying constructs (Lippman et al. 2012).

Additionally, there is no consensus regarding children’s ability for comprehension, retrieval and judgment in specified time frames (periods) and context. Some authors recommend avoiding time references in survey questions or at least use them with caution (Bowen 2008; Lippman et al. 2014). Whereas the findings based on the cognitive interview with children aged eight to 11 for the PROMIS (The Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System) project speak in favour of children’s capacity to use the seven-day and four-week recall period (Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2014b; Irwin, et al. 2009; Rebok et al. 2001).

To summarise, the knowledge about children’s ability to respond to survey questions, how they experience specific types of survey questions, which design features help them answer accurately and which ones cause problems, is still very limited and fragmented as well as based on data from only a few countries.

6.2 Methods: MYWeB Cognitive Interviews

The general aim of the MYWeB cognitive interviews (CI) was to study how children from different countries understand, interpret and process the questions in order to propose a set of well-being questions that are age appropriate and processed similarly across the tested countries. Specific tasks of MYWeB CI were to test the applicability of selected new or adapted measures of well-being, different time frames and different response scales for survey questions with young children.
Thus, the focus of the testing was on comprehension, appropriateness and exact wording of items, recall and judgment in given time frames, recall and judgment in using given response formats for children aged eight and seven.

The CI study employed **concurrent verbal probing** with a combination of scripted and spontaneous probes. After each question/item, the interviewer used scripted probes for each testing objective. Conditional probes were asked if a child showed difficulties in understanding or answering a specific format, and/or time frame, and/or specific phrase or word in the previous question.

The CI study was conducted over three rounds (R1, R2 and R3) in six countries: Croatia (HR), Germany (DE), Hungaria (HU), Latvia (LA), Spain (ES), and United Kingdom (UK), with a total sample of N = 195 children aged seven and eight years old (48% female). The original (English) questionnaire for the first round, and all modifications after each round, were translated into five languages (Catalan, Croatian, German, Hungarian and Latvian) by using the Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting and Documentation method (Harkness 2003; Serracant et al. 2015).

The intention was to undertake cognitive interviews with children aged eight in R1 and R2 in order to refine the questions and ensure their age appropriateness. The R3 would then test whether children aged seven could also provide valid answers to those questions. This approach was designed to gauge the minimum age at which children are capable of answering a questionnaire about their well-being. Due to several reasons (e.g., a number of children of mixed ages within a single class, some children had their birthday between first contact with school and actual fieldwork) the planned age composition of samples was not completely met. Nonetheless, the majority of children interviewed (87 to 88%) belonged to the intended age group. More information about the sample is presented in Table 6.1. Before the main fieldwork started, a pilot testing with seven children aged eight years old (four female and three male) was conducted in the UK.

In each country, children were selected from two schools, mostly located in urban areas, near or in the city centre (expect in Germany where a more convenient sample selection strategy was used and in two countries where children were recruited from only one school in R1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1 Sample structure thought three rounds of MYWeB CI study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing rounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to any vulnerable group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N per country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In the context of this study vulnerable children are those who came from single-parent households, from low-income families, with minority (ethnic / racial) background, with physical disabilities, with learning difficulties, and children and young people in dysfunctional families*
The interviews in schools were always conducted in separate rooms by two interviewers. One interviewer asked questions and probes, whilst the other took notes, audio-recorded the interview and observed the whole process. All interviewers underwent local training sessions based on the same materials to ensure that differences encountered in responses were due to cross-national variances rather than different interviewing techniques. Training consisted of introducing the aims and procedures of MYWeB, a detailed study of the research tools and a simulation of the interview process.

On average, interviews lasted 45.5 min in R1 (maximum 80 min). In R2 and R3, the number of questions and probes was reduced (Table 6.2). Consequently, the duration of interviews decreased and lasted on average 36 min in R2 and 30 min in R3. Some children needed breaks during the interviews and these were facilitated in Germany, Latvia and Spain, mainly in R1. In each country, with the exception of Spain, children received small gifts as a token of appreciation for their cooperation. In Croatia and Latvia a small gift was also given to the teachers for their help.

Interviews were carried out in accordance with the Ethical Standards for Research with Children (Society for Research in Child Development) in all countries and received ethical approval from Manchester Metropolitan University’s Ethics Committee and from national boards and/or relevant institutions. Parents signed informed consent forms before the interviews were conducted. Additional assent was asked from children at the beginning of the interview such that both parents and children gave consent. In case of disclosure of child protection issues during the interview, the interviewers had the responsibility to communicate relevant information to the school authorities.

Table 6.2 Main constructs (measurements aims) in each round of cognitive interviews by number of questions/items in interviewing rounds (R1, R2, R3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interviewing rounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of satisfaction with some aspects of children’s well-being</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived level of autonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting the child’s voice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with parents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about money and material possessions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of children’s positive and negative affect</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of positive and negative affect</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of items</td>
<td>27 (+1)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of questions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²There was an additional question without reference to any well-being construct. It’s main measurement objective was related to understanding Likert Type scale and children were asked a question to which natural answer was to disagree.
6.3 Key Findings

Questionnaire design has an impact on children’s comprehension, recall and judgement when answering questions. This section presents some general findings regarding question design and children’s comprehension of questions related to their well-being. See Table 6.2 for the main constructs measured in each of the rounds.

6.3.1 Designing Questions for Children

6.3.1.1 Instructions and Layouts

The questionnaire in R1 consisted of 12 single-item questions, and three multi-item questions (in total 28 items). Single-item questions were presented on a separate page. Instructions to respond included ‘Please circle one of the faces’ or ‘Please circle one of the answers’, and ‘Please write your response on line below’ in the case of two open-ended questions. In the case of multi-item questions, all items that belonged to the question were presented on the same page in the form of a table. For each item, the child had to select one answer and mark this answer by putting a check mark in the appropriate cell (e.g., ‘For each line choose one answer and please mark with √’).

In all countries, the single question per page was much easier and more understandable for children than a multi-item question layout in the form of table. Besides, circling an answer was much easier for children than making a check mark within a table grid. Nonetheless, the majority of children learnt how to use this layout relatively easily and quickly.

6.3.1.2 Response Scales

In total, three main types of scales were tested throughout three rounds of cognitive interviews: ‘smileys’, Likert-type and frequency scales. A short review of tested scales and their variations with the main findings are presented in summarised form in Table 6.3.

Smileys

The five-point scale with smileys (emoticons) was used in a question relating to the level of satisfaction with physical appearance. In all countries, this scale was well understood and children were generally able to distinguish and correctly explain the difference between two smileys. However, there were problems associated with understanding this scale within the context of a specific question in some countries.

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### Table 6.3 Summary of CI findings with regard to testing the response scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of scale</th>
<th>Number of scale points</th>
<th>Response categories</th>
<th>Detected problems</th>
<th>Conclusion – recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smileys</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nonverbal (faces)</td>
<td>The smileys scale is interpreted out of the question context, referring to general happiness.</td>
<td>Should be avoided and substituted with a frequency scale with response categories that match the question formulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert type (agreement)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I agree a lot, I agree a little, I disagree a little, I disagree a lot</td>
<td>Mismatch between the question and the answers.</td>
<td>Should be avoided and replaced with a frequency scale with response categories that match the question formulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency scales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Always, Sometimes, Never</td>
<td>No problem identified.</td>
<td>Applicable for surveys with eight- and seven-year-old children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Always, Often, Rarely</td>
<td>Some difficulties in understanding the differences between ‘rarely’ and ‘often’ among seven years old children.</td>
<td>Could be used among eight-year-olds, while it can be replaced with a three-point frequency scale for children aged seven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Specific problem with reading and understanding the word ‘rarely’ in the UK, especially with seven-year-old children.</td>
<td>In English, replace the word ‘rarely’ with ‘sometimes’ or a similar word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Every day, Most days, Once or twice, Never</td>
<td>Some problems in understanding the response scale occurred because two points of the scale referring to days (every day, most days) and other two points that are part of a general time frame (once or twice, never).</td>
<td>The scale should be consistent, using all scale points in the same context or time frame (e.g. number of days in the week or month).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Every day, Most days, Sometimes, Never</td>
<td>Minor problems and confusion in differentiating the terms ‘most days’ and ‘sometimes’ among seven years old children.</td>
<td>Appropriate for eight-year-olds and can also be used with seven-year-olds without major difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Four or more times, Two or three times, Once, Never</td>
<td>Minor problems occurred in differentiating between scale points.</td>
<td>To simplify the scale and to change response categories into: every day, most days, sometimes, never.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(HR, HU, ES, LV). Many children’s responses referred to their general level of happiness (smileys) rather than their satisfaction with physical appearance (question). For example, in Hungary children explained that they chose a particular smiley ‘because I like smiling’, or ‘because the face laughs’. The additional question used in R2 to further check the adequacy of this scale (‘I have lots of friends’) confirmed this problem. For example, in Spain children explained that they chose a specific face because ‘I am happy, although sometimes I get angry with my friends’; ‘Because I feel very well’. These findings suggest that the use of the smileys scale is quite problematic if the content of the question is not directly related to general satisfaction or happiness. Thus, smileys should be avoided as a general response scale in cross-cultural or multinational studies and should be substituted with written responses.

Likert Type Scales (Agreement)

The majority of children understood the Likert type scale correctly, differentiating between scale points and offering congruent explanations as to why they chose their answers. However, some children spontaneously answered by using frequencies (e.g., sometimes) instead of agreement (e.g., I agree a lot). Consequently, the agreement scale was substituted with frequency scale.

Frequency Scales

The three-point frequency scale - ‘Always’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Never’ - was easily understood by children in all participating countries. They understood the difference between scale points and were able to explain differences by giving adequate examples. The four point scale - ‘Always’, ‘Often’, ‘Rarely’, ‘Never’- generally worked well among eight-year-old children. Children understood the difference between response categories. However, some children, especially seven-year-olds, had difficulties explaining what ‘Often’ and ‘Rarely’ meant in their own words or providing appropriate examples. Thus, it was not always possible to conclude what children actually meant when they selected specific responses. Therefore, although this four-point frequency scale definitely worked better than the Likert type scale, it cannot be universally recommended for use when surveying young children. Additionally, in the UK approximately one third of the seven-year-old respondents had issues with reading and understanding the word ‘Rarely’. Thus, irrespective of the number of scale points for English-speaking children, the word ‘Rarely’ should be replaced by a word with a similar meaning (e.g., not that often). Overall, it can be concluded that the four-point general frequency scale may be suitable for eight-year-old children, although not universally. Conversely, it may be too complex for seven-year-olds and should be replaced by a three-point frequency scale.

Different and more specific response categories related to the number of days (‘Every day’, ‘Most days’, ‘Once or twice’, ‘Never’) were also tested. The differences
between scale points were generally well understood and correctly explained. Common explanations for differences between ‘Every day’ and ‘Most days’ were: ‘Every day means each day and most days means lots of days’; ‘Every day I laugh, and most days means the same but less’. The difference between ‘Most days’ and ‘Once or twice’ was understood as ‘Most days means that most of the days you can, and once or twice is almost never’; ‘Most is sometimes and once or twice is very few’. A minor problem was detected in two countries (LV, HR). Children’s confusion could be attributed to the fact that the first two response categories of the scale explicitly referred to days (‘Every day’, ‘Most days’) whilst the third response contained a number (‘Once or twice’). A way to overcome this challenge would be to use days to describe this third point (e.g., ‘One or two days’ instead ‘Once or twice’). Overall, it can be concluded that children understood this response scale despite the fact that they gave responses that did not fully take into account a specified time frame (see section Time frames). Furthermore, if the question does not necessarily need to relate to a constrained time frame (e.g., two days per week/month), it can be set in a more general way (e.g., every day, most days, sometimes, never).

The majority of children understood the four-point scale combining reference to days and general frequency (i.e., ‘Every day’, ‘Most days’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Never’) correctly and gave a congruent explanation to the chosen answer. Thus, it can generally be concluded that this four-point scale is appropriate for eight-year-olds and can also be used among seven-year-olds, without major difficulties.

Generally, children did not have difficulty using the frequency scale with response categories related to number of times (i.e., ‘Four or more times’, ‘Two or three times’, ‘Once’, ‘Never’). Almost all of the children understood and interpreted the different response options correctly. For example, children explained the difference between ‘Four or more times’ and ‘Two or three times’ as ‘four or more is each day and two is sometimes yes and sometimes no’. However, explanations were not always congruent and it was not clear whether this is due to children being unable to verbalize the differences between response categories, or to difficulties understanding those differences. Additionally, in some countries children often responded with an exact number of incidents (e.g., twice) instead of an interval (two to three times), provided incongruent explanations, or suggested the use of a different frequency scale (i.e., every day/often/sometimes/never or a lot/a few times/never). The same scale was applied without a specific time frame in R2. Again a similar problem was detected. It is therefore recommended to use scales such as ‘Every day - Never’ or a scale with exact numbers instead of intervals.

6.3.1.3 Time Frames

The CI study used two time frames: ‘during the last week’ and ‘since you joined this class’. The time frame ‘last week’ was used for items related to the frequency of positive and negative affect, and different activities with parents. Findings from the pilot in the UK showed that the formulation ‘during the last week’ was confusing...
for many children and their recall was not limited to their experiences from the week preceding the interview. Thus, ‘from Monday to Sunday’ was added as explanation that would facilitate recalling in a specified time frame. However, despite this added explanation, children did not refer to ‘last week’ when they responded. Instead they indicated thinking about life in general, a day, or this week instead of last week. Consequently, the time frame ‘last week (from Monday to Sunday)’ was not used in the R2 and R3.

The time frame ‘since you joined this class’ was used in a question referring to bullying in R1. This expression was used because pilot findings from the UK showed problems with the expression ‘during this school year’. However, when explaining the expression ‘since you joined this class’, some children talked about the beginning of their schooling, either in elementary school or pre-school, while others thought about the beginning of that school year. Thus, eight-year-old children are not able to correctly recall their experiences within this time frame. In R2 and R3 children were asked about bullying without a specific time frame. However, findings did not support this decision univocally. Indeed, when asked about bullying without a specific time frame, some children referred to a whole lifetime, some to days, and some to weeks.

6.3.1.4 Contexts

Regarding recalling and judgement in a specific context, ‘at school’ was tested within the question related to bullying. The vast majority of children understood the concept of ‘at school’ and overall thought about the school context when answering questions on bullying. However, in several cases children referred to a combination of school and other places such as ‘In the school, at home, at my friend’s place’ or ‘at the sport club, at school, at home… all’. Such recalling, not limited to the school context only, was even more obvious among seven-year-olds. These results should be kept in mind when measuring the prevalence of bullying in schools since answers in this regard are not always context-specific enough.

6.3.2 Children’s Understanding of Well-Being Questions

In this section, key findings are organised by main constructs of well-being as outlined in Table 6.2. For each construct, we identify the question(s) tested through the CI study and draw conclusions regarding their validity.

6.3.2.1 Level of Satisfaction

One of the common set of questions in surveys of children well-being are those which measure the child’s level of satisfaction with some aspect of well-being. A common introduction to a question is ‘how happy are you with…?’ The
understanding of this question was specifically tested with regards to the level of satisfaction with the child’s physical appearance (i.e., ‘How happy do you feel with the way you look?’).

CI findings showed that in countries where the term ‘happy’ is not a common expression of satisfaction (HR, LV, ES, DE), the question’s validity is enhanced if the translation uses another word that relates more directly to ‘satisfaction’. Thus, the phrase ‘to be happy with’, which denotes the level of satisfaction, should be used cautiously in cross-cultural studies for items not directly related to general happiness. It is advisable to use equivalent phrase or words, even if this means moving away from a literal translation. The term ‘happy’ can be replaced by ‘how often are you satisfied with...’ or ‘do you like...’. Additionally, most eight-year-olds correctly interpreted the key phrase ‘the way you look’ (face, hair, appearance but also to the way they dress or their clothes), but it was relatively ambiguous for seven-year-olds. Hence, specific examples should be added to the question. The recommended formulation is ‘How often do you feel happy with the way you look (for example, your face, your hair, your weight)?’.

6.3.2.2 Perceived Level of Autonomy

In order to measure the level of child autonomy, four questions were tested: ‘Do your parents allow you to bring friends home at the weekend’; ‘Can you bring friends home at the weekend’; ‘Can you choose what you eat at home?’; and ‘Can you decide what you do with your spare time?’.

The general formulation ‘do your parents allow you’ was too complex for eight-year-olds as children often overlooked this part of the question and only responded to the second half (i.e., ‘bring friends home’). In R2 this formulation was replaced by ‘can you’, but children still did not interpret the question in terms of their autonomy. When ‘can you choose’ or ‘can you decide’ were used, children generally interpreted them in terms of autonomy and ability to choose ‘food’ or ‘what they do when they are not in school’. However, for some children the questions were still too complex, ambiguous and a bit confusing. For example, in the UK several children discarded ‘can you decide’ and interpreted the whole question as being about having or not having free time. In the Latvia, three main interpretations were observed among children - a focus on the decision process, a focus on the out-of-school-time, and focus on what children like to do. Thus, none of the questions that aimed to capture children’s level of autonomy were ideal. However, the formulation ‘can you choose’ is recommended as more appropriate than ‘can you’ or ‘can you decide’, and is definitely more preferable than the more complex formulation: ‘your parents allow you’.

For the questions related to perceived level of autonomy, we also tested the understanding of several specific phrases (e.g., ‘what you eat at home’, ‘what you do with your spare time’/when you are not in school’). The phrase ‘what you eat’ was too abstract for some children in the UK (e.g., one child thought about snacks rather than meals), so it is recommended to specify a context. The expression ‘spare time’ was relatively ambiguous for some children as they struggled to differentiate
between hobbies and (real) free/leisure/spare time. Some tried to work out whether free time was the school holidays, Saturday, Sunday, or something else. In the R2, it was replaced with the phrase ‘when you are not in school’. However, this phrase was too broad and needed an additional explanation for some children in a few countries.

The problems detected with these questions indicate that it is difficult to capture the concept of autonomy among children at such a young age. It was difficult to formulate simple questions that seized the concept. Indeed, such questions include and imply conditionality, leading to longer and more complex formulations. When answering them, children need to grasp several conditions simultaneously: degree of autonomy (‘can you choose’), a type of activity (‘what you do’) and a context (‘when you are not in school’). Due to the questions’ complexity and length, children were not able to compute all the information given to them. They frequently interpreted these questions in terms of how often they do activities rather than in relation to the level of their autonomy. Thus, we did not successfully design questions that adequately measure the level of children’s autonomy at such a young age.

6.3.2.3 Respecting Children’s Voice

In order to capture the extent to which children felt that their voice was respected, two questions were asked: ‘Do your parents listen to what you think when they make a decision about you?’ and ‘Do teachers at your school listen to pupils’ complaints?’ Both questions were frequently misunderstood. The first question caused problems for about half of the children in all participating countries, especially regarding the understanding of ‘make a decision’ and ‘parents listen to you’. Additionally, children had major problems understanding the sentence ‘teachers (…) listen to pupils’ complaints’. The word ‘complaints’ was particularly problematic. For instance, children thought it meant ‘question’ in UK and ‘complaining about others’ behaviour’ in HU and HR. Additionally, the word ‘pupils’ was not always understood in the UK, while in Croatia the verb ‘listen to’ was interpreted literally as teachers hearing and paying attention to children while they talk to them. For R2, a simplified version was used: ‘Do teachers at your school accept pupils’ suggestions?’ However, these changes did not improve the understanding of the question. Thus, as in the case of questions related to autonomy, findings demonstrate that questions comprising several parts are too complex and should be avoided.

6.3.2.4 Relationship with Parents

To capture the children’s relationship with their parent(s), several questions were tested. One started with ‘During the last week (from Monday to Sunday) how often did the following things happen…’ followed by different activities with parents (i.e., ‘my parents hugged me or kissed me’; ‘my parents checked if I finished my homework’; ‘I talked about my friends with my parents’; ‘I talked about my hobbies with my parents’).
‘How often’ was well understood and can be recommended as the most appropriate general question formulation for young children. Regarding specific activities with parents, the only difficulty revealed by the CIs was the understanding of the term ‘hobbies’ in several countries. In R2, the term ‘hobbies’ was replaced with the phrase ‘things you like to do’. This term was still relatively ambiguous for some children aged seven. Some talked about how frequently they discuss different daily activities or school marks with parents, while others referred to activities they would like to do rather than their daily activities.

The question ‘When you are at home is there an adult who looks after you?’ aimed at capturing parental caring responsibilities. It was well understood and seemed suitable for eight-year-olds. Children interpreted the concept ‘who looks after you’ without any problem defining it as ‘who is responsible for you’, ‘who prepares food, watches over what I do’ or ‘someone who takes care’. However, the term ‘adult’ was too broad as it was not clear whether it included older siblings. The question was rephrased into ‘How often are you alone at home?’. This worked generally well and children gave congruent explanations for their answers. For example: ‘they never leave me alone. I’m always with my mother, father or grandmother’; ‘I never stay home alone. I’m always with my mom and cat’. However, being home alone captures children’s maturity, autonomy and independence and can reflect differences in praxis between urban/rural neighbourhoods rather than differences in parenting. Consequently, this question does not enable valid measurement of the intended construct.

6.3.2.5 Worries About Money and Material Possessions

To measure the level of children’s worries with money and material possessions, we asked ‘Does your family normally have enough money?’ In general, children understood the question and interpreted it in line with its intended meaning. Congruent explanations include ‘when you can eat everything, buy everything, pay for a house’ and ‘to have enough money to buy food and clothes’. However, the adverb ‘normally’ was confusing for some children, and so was the term ‘enough money’ (e.g., how much is ‘enough’ and ‘enough for what?’). The shortened version used in R2 ‘Does your family have enough money?’ was easier to understand. Yet, findings from two countries (ES, UK) showed that children would prefer a more specific question. In R3 the term ‘enough money’ was complemented by ‘to buy foods and clothes’. However, some children could not decide between an answer for ‘having enough money for clothes’ and ‘having enough money for food’ denoting that the question became double-barrelled.1 Besides, different interpretations of the word ‘family’ were observed. Thus, the recommended question is ‘Do your parents have enough money to buy you food?’

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1A double-barrelled question asks about more than one construct in a single survey question. (Lavrakas 2008: 210).
6.3.2.6 Positive and Negative Affect

To measure children’s positive and negative affect we tested children’s understanding of several words (i.e., ‘laugh’, ‘feel scared’, ‘feel happy’, ‘get worried’, ‘feel sad’, ‘get angry’). The words denoting specific affect were generally well understood. For example, in explaining the term ‘scared’ children frequently mentioned: being in the dark (e.g., ‘I am scared in the dark’; ‘At night, you are in bed, not sleeping and no light’), or being alone (e.g., ‘When you are alone you are scared’; ‘When I’m alone in my room, shadows scare me’). The term ‘get worried’ was often explained in relation to others; mostly parents, siblings and pets. Being ‘scared’ and ‘worried’ were sometimes interpreted in the light of the child’s own competence or tasks to be completed (e.g., ‘When you haven’t done your homework, then you feel scared whether you will get a note or not’; ‘When I write a difficult assignment at school, then I worry’). In the UK, ‘worried’ and ‘scared’ appeared to refer to a similar concept, ‘scared’ being of higher intensity and ‘worried’ being more related to the future (e.g., ‘Something is going to happen, but it doesn’t.’)

6.3.2.7 Sources of Positive and Negative Affect

To capture the sources of children’s positive and negative affect open-ended questions were tested: ‘Can you please tell me one thing that makes you very happy?’ and ‘Can you please tell me one thing that worries you?’ Children did not have any major problem with the understanding and interpretation of these questions. However, the phrase ‘one thing’ was sometimes interpreted literally and children comprehended that they needed to name one specific object. Thus, in R2, ‘one thing’ was deleted from the question. Besides, the results of R1 showed that shorter questions were more adapted to self–complete surveys. Overall, CI revealed that such open-ended questions are appropriate, although some difficulties related to spelling were found in the UK among seven-year-olds.

6.3.2.8 Bullying

The bullying question encompassed six common bullying items (See Olweus 1996): ‘I was made fun of or called names’, ‘I was left out of games or activities by other children’, ‘Someone told lies about me’, ‘Something was stolen from me’, ‘I was hit or hurt by other children (for example, shoving, hitting, kicking)’, ‘I was made to do things I didn’t want to do by other children’. Throughout participating countries, eight-year-old children did not have problems understanding the vocabulary and expressions used. Children were generally aware that these items refer to the concept of bullying. But they were not always able to articulate this term, and instead usually repeated words/terms related to bullying used in the question. For example, children usually said that we were trying to find out if ‘anyone did anything bad
to me or hurt me’ in this question. They also referred to social relations among children: ‘what kind of class I attend’ or ‘what have children been doing’.

However, children aged seven struggled a bit more with the sentence ‘I was left out of games or activities by other children’. Some explained that they were left out of games but not from other activities. Others were uncertain about which ‘activities’ were being referred to in this question. This suggests that the question is double-barrelled (referring to games and activities). It is recommended to shortened it by only using the term ‘games’ since this is the most important children activity at that age.

6.4 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Regarding the question layouts, and type of answers MYWeB CI study supports previous recommendations such as that questionnaire for children should be as short as possible, with simple common everyday expressions and words that are directly related to children’s experiences. It confirms that questions for children should always refer to concrete behaviours and their personal experiences (Lippman et al. 2012). Focus of the question should refer to only one experience or type of action while the use of conditional (‘if – then’) should be avoided. In line with this, children understood questions enquiring about frequencies of specific activities with parents, behaviours (bullying), or positive and negative affect, without major difficulties. Children had a harder time understanding complex questions featuring several parts or conditional formulations. In such cases, children often overlooked some elements and only responded to the simpler, specific part of the question. Thus, a first step in future efforts to develop questions to measure concepts such as autonomy can be to identify what they entail in terms in activities and behaviours. Once these activities and behaviour are identified they can be used to develop more appropriate questions. Some of the questions tested for this study (e.g., ‘How frequently do you choose what you eat for breakfast?’) could be a good starting point.

The CI findings also point towards some words being ambiguous (e.g., adult, normally, enough), not age appropriate (e.g., decide, complaint), used in figurative expressions (e.g., one thing), or not embedded in a specific culture (e.g., hobby, being happy with). Additionally, findings outline the difficulty of striking the right balance between keeping the question short enough whilst providing a sufficient amount of information. Indeed, adding contextual explanations makes a question become less prone to different interpretations and easier to comprehend. However, questions can easily become too specific, too long and complex, or double-barrelled.

Regarding the general introduction to a question, findings from this study indicate that the formulation ‘How often...’ is the most appropriate if it is supplemented with frequency response scales. Overall, findings confirmed that the introduction should mirror the response scale. More specifically, if a question starts with the general questions such as ‘Do you...’, ‘Have you...', ‘Can you...’
children spontaneously expect and respond with dichotomous answers, (e.g., ‘yes / no’ or ‘I can / I cannot’). Thus, if a frequency scale is used the recommended introductory formulation is ‘How often do you…?’

It was also confirmed that only one type of instruction for selecting and marking the answer (e.g., circling) should be used throughout the whole questionnaire, while additional introductory sentences, instructions, or contextual information that are not crucial should be avoided. Moreover, a simple layout in the form of one question per page is recommended whereas questions should be written using a simple font of a larger size without graphical solutions (e.g., bold type) for emphasising.

Despite the popularity of smileys, findings demonstrate that smileys should be avoided as a general response scale. Children interpreted the smiley-scale out of the question’s context and their responses took into account their general level of happiness. Regarding the Likert type scale, although children correctly understood the meaning of response categories, recalling and judgement was more complex for children than in the case of the frequency scale. With reference to the frequency scales tested in this study, simple frequency scales with general responses are the best for children aged seven and eight. The simplest three-point scale (“Always”, “Sometimes”, “Never”) can be recommended as the most adapted to their cognitive capacity as some seven-year-olds pinpointed some difficulties in understanding the four-point frequency scale. The four-point frequency scale referring to days (“Every day”, “Most days”, “Sometimes”, “Never”) was appropriate for eight-year-old children and can also be used with seven-year-old children without major difficulties. Open-ended questions, in general, can be used among seven- and eight—year-olds, especially if they require short and simple answers. However, they cannot be recommended as a preferred option for the questionnaire in the UK since seven-year-olds could have issues with spelling.

Findings related to specific time frames and contexts suggest that seven- and eight-year-old children were not entirely capable of recalling their experiences in an exact period of time and space. Such results are in line with Bowens’ (2008) recommendation that time references should be avoided. On the contrary, Irwin et al. (2009) and Rebok et al. (2001) found that children aged eight were able to report accurate information using specific recall periods (seven day or four week). The results of this study showed that time frames such as ‘last week’, and ‘since you joined the class’ were not appropriate. Children do not always take into account the period mentioned and/or do not understand the concept of a specific period uniformly. However, not including any time frame in the question meant that children recalled different periods when answering the same question. Thus, it is hard to give a final recommendation about the use of time frames in survey questions for seven- and eight-year-olds. General advice would be to either use general formulations not including any time frame or to use very short time frames such as yesterday and today. In the case of slightly longer time periods (e.g., last week), researchers need to ensure that the time-frame reference is explained in detail and unified throughout the questionnaire. This advice applies to general questions related to frequencies of affect or everyday activities. When considering bullying, it seems best to avoid time frames, although more research is needed on this issue. Additionally, this study
showed that although children understand the relevant words such as ‘at school’, their answers sometimes refer to their experiences in other places. Thus, the general recommendation would be to avoid specifying exact contexts if this is not necessary.

In all the participating countries, seven-year-old children had more difficulties with understanding, recalling, and judgement than eight-year-olds. Some also had difficulties to engage with the survey. However, there were variations within both group of children. Thus, it seems that the grade of the children (duration of school experience) and their individual abilities and skills are stronger determinants of their ability to complete the survey than age per se.

Finally, this CI study supports the conclusion that a simplified questionnaire on subjective well-being could be carried out with seven- and eight-year-old children in school. However, in countries where a significant proportion of seven-year-olds attend first grade, reading skills and vocabulary might not always advanced enough for a successful self-completion of the survey. More work is required to develop a suitable strategy in these cases. Besides, the results and experience of applying cognitive interviewing, as a tool for pre-testing questionnaires for children, convinced us that the cognitive interviewing method is of great help to researchers in developing more valid questions and survey instruments for children. Using this method greatly improved our understanding of sources of measurement errors questions, and thus should be one of the core researcher’s methods for assessing questionnaire validity (Collins 2003). Accordingly, we strongly advocate that cognitive interviewing should become a standard procedure in designing and developing self-report assessments for young children.

References


Chapter 7
Challenges in Conducting a New Longitudinal Study on Children and Young People Well-Being in the European Union

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7.1 Introduction
Implementing a pan European longitudinal survey measuring the well-being of children and young people (CYP) comprises four specific sets of challenges linked to the characteristics of the survey. First, the longitudinal nature of the survey involves design considerations (e.g., population and sampling, sample size, timing), measurement (e.g., panel conditioning, measurement error), and data collection (modes of data, refusals, sample attrition) related issues. Second, as the survey is pan-European it requires consideration of data comparability issues such as linguistic and conceptual equivalence, sampling equivalence and response rates, question design, and sample coverage. Third, as the survey focuses on children and young people there are important ethical as well as cognitive considerations to take into account. Working with children and young people involves methodological issues related to accessibility and inclusion, challenges associated with the level of participation required for the study, and restrictions due to ethics and national regulations. Fourth, Delphi respondents noted that resources would be the strongest challenge to the implementation of a European Longitudinal Survey for Children and Young People (ELSCYP). Indeed, all the considerations previously mentioned have cost and time implications. This chapter considers the various challenges that would be associated with an ELSCYP, as they are summarised in Fig. 7.1.
7.2 Challenges for the Study Because of Its Longitudinal Nature

7.2.1 Sampling

Key design issues for any survey include defining the population to be studied, how to sample from the population, and what sample size to select. In the case of a longitudinal survey each of these design issues has specific considerations arising from the longitudinal design.

7.2.1.1 Population and Sampling

Unlike cross-sectional surveys, longitudinal surveys must explicitly recognise that populations are dynamic (Lynn 2012). Longitudinal populations can be defined in different ways, depending on how the dynamics are taken in account. The most appropriate definition will depend on the survey objectives and the nature of the phenomena to be studied. Lynn (2009) discussed three broad approaches: (a) a static population based on the population at the time the first wave sample is selected, (b) the population is defined as the intersection of the cross-sectional populations at each wave, and (c) the population is defined as the union of the cross-sectional
populations at each wave. Lynn (2009) outlined limitations and advantages of each of these approaches. For an ELSCYP, approach (c) could be considered the most appropriate, as it would provide the most comprehensive picture of well-being in each country, including first-generation immigrants and CYP who emigrate before adulthood. However, some key analysis and policy objectives could only be addressed by a sample of (b), which is of course a subset of (c), so limiting the survey to a sample of population (b) may be an appropriate compromise. Ultimately, a decision regarding population definition must take into account the likely key analysis objectives. Furthermore, the population definition adopted should subsequently be clearly communicated to data users to ensure that inferences from study sample to population and interpretations are appropriate. The choice of population definition will also determine whether and how new entrants to the national population should be included. This would be necessary under definition (c) and would require an additional sampling exercise prior to each wave of data collection to identify immigrants in each age cohort since the previous wave.

7.2.1.2 Sample Size (Including Over Sampling)

When implementing a longitudinal survey, it is necessary to plan for the eventual sample size required for longitudinal analysis by taking into account any population births and deaths that are reflected in the sample, but also specifically considering the expected attrition during the life of the survey (Smith et al. 2009). This makes it particularly important to develop realistic estimates of attrition rates before embarking on a major longitudinal survey. Initial national sample sizes were around 6000 households for the British Household Panel Survey and the German Socio-Economic Panel and around 4000 households for the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). Buck et al. (1995) argue that the appropriate sample size is dependent on the proposed use of the longitudinal survey. The key issue is to have adequate numbers of observations on each event or persons in population sub-groups of interest. It is possible to estimate the minimum sample size that would be required to detect a statistically significant association, difference, or change. One strategy for dealing with small population subgroups that are of particular policy relevance is to oversample them (Buck et al. 1995). However, in the longitudinal context it can be problematic and inefficient to oversample based on time-variant characteristics (e.g., poverty, deprivation, performance at school). Some other longitudinal surveys have oversampled subgroups defined by time-invariant characteristics such as country of birth, date of birth, or ethnicity.

7.2.2 Measurement

The challenges associated with measurement are discussed below. They include panel conditioning/effect and measurement error/stability of measures.
7.2.2.1 Panel Conditioning/Effect

Panel conditioning refers to the possibility that survey responses given by a person who has already taken part in the survey previously may differ from the responses that the person would have given if they were taking part for the first time (Lynn 2009). Buck et al. (1995) argue that the problems are likely to be greatest where the intervals between waves are relatively short, and where the subject matter is highly specialised. However, it is necessary to be sensitive to the issue in questionnaire design. One particular problem to which it is necessary to be sensitive is introducing too many questions which open long sequences of follow-up questions. These are difficult to avoid, but respondents may learn over time to trim their answers to the first question to avoid the follow-up (Eckman et al. 2014). Another option to minimize the effect is to change the order of questions, although this also has disadvantages as subjective well-being questions can be sensitive to placement and ordering (Lee et al. 2016). Lynn (2009) argued that not all the effects of panel conditioning are negative. In some cases, participants may gather certain documents in advance such as pay slips, utility bills, examination results, which help to improve data quality, or response quality may improve due to increased understanding of the questions or increased trust of the survey organization (Fisher 2016).

7.2.2.2 Measurement Error/Stability of Measures

Measurement error refers to the possibility that any individual survey observation might differ from the value that would be observed by a perfect measurement of the concept that the survey item was intended to measure (Lynn 2009). Given that the main focus of panel studies is on the measurement of change, the avoidance of problematic measurement error is important. Random errors in a cross-sectional survey do not bias population estimates, but random errors in two repeated measurements will give rise to over-estimates of the extent of change. Errors in the recall of dates may give rise to incorrect chronological ordering of events, and therefore perhaps misplaced inferences about causal ordering. Measurement error is probably the most serious problem confronting the collection and analysis of data about change, and one for which no solutions are wholly satisfactory. The two main approaches to overcome the problem are to avoid it through instrument design or to measure its extent (Buck et al. 1995). The first is clearly preferable and suggests that suitable investment in the development and testing of instruments is likely to be warranted. Nevertheless, it is not possible to completely avoid measurement error. The stability of measures used in the study can be examined by applying a range of statistical techniques.\(^1\) Statistical modeling techniques can also be considered for estimating measurement error (Buck et al. 1995).

\(^1\)Such as intra-class correlation coefficients (for interval level measures), Kappa coefficient (for nominal level measures) and weighted Kappa (for ordinal level measures)
7.2.3 Data Collection

The data collection issues that would need to be addressed when implementing a longitudinal survey are discussed below. They include modes of data collection, refusals, and sample attrition.

7.2.3.1 Modes of Data Collection

A number of modes e.g., face-to-face interview, telephone interview, paper version questionnaire, online questionnaire, are available for collecting survey data from children and young people. In a cross-national longitudinal survey, choices of mode depend on country-specific factors as well as the participants’ needs. Telephone interviewing lowers the cost. However, in a country with substantially less than 100% telephone coverage it is unlikely to be an acceptable mode for wave one. The use of telephone interviewing can be seriously considered from wave two onwards for that part of the sample where it may be acceptable, or even preferable. There are two strategies here, the approach followed by the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), where the great majority of the panel is interviewed by telephone, with face-to-face interviewing only for that part of the panel for whom telephone interviewing is difficult or impossible, or the approach of GSOEP (German Socio-Economic Panel) and BHPS (British Household Panel Survey), where face-to-face is the principal mode, but telephone interviewing is available as an alternative. In the first case the main purpose is to lower overall costs, while in the latter case it is to raise response rates. The use of telephone interviewing has major instrument design implications. In particular, it reduces the acceptable interview length, with a maximum of perhaps 30 min, and it rules out the use of visual stimuli such as images, prompt cards or visual response scales. There are major advantages in using online modes of data collection in a longitudinal study, quite apart from their probable data quality advantages, savings in processing costs and more rapid delivery of final data, which would apply to all surveys. The more rapid delivery of data is itself an advantage, since it allows more complete data cleaning and validation for each wave before the next wave begins. It also permits a relatively sophisticated feeding forward of data from the last wave, which may reduce spurious apparent change, and with some designs reduce interview lengths. Although online modes are gaining popularity among children and young people these days, two issues need to be addressed: safety of the young people while being on-line and access to on-line services. The major challenge with online data collection is obtaining good response rates. It is also possible to change modes of data collection at each wave in order to make the survey less monotonous and predictable. However, different modes of questionnaire administration have different potential bias. For instance, question order effects tend to be low in a face-to-face interview, but higher in a self-administrated questionnaire, whereas social desirability bias tends to be high in former and lower in the latter (Bowling 2005).
7.2.3.2 Refusals

Refusal from participants can take place at any stage of a longitudinal survey. This section focuses on refusal at the initial approach/recruitment stage, whilst attrition will be discussed in the next section. Refusal at this stage is important as it will result in a complete absence of data for sample members, and incomplete baseline data against which to measure subsequent changes. In addition to the universal causes of refusals that affect all surveys (Lynn 2008), there is a special feature of importance with longitudinal surveys. Participation requires a considerable commitment on the part of sample members – not just a single interview, but several, over a period of time. Lynn (2012) described it as high respondent burden.

Recruitment to a survey can be promoted with publicity (e.g., via YouTube, press releases, media appearances, posters). The wording of cover letters and e-mail introductions and the first words spoken during an in-person or phone interview are critical (Bauer 2004). In some cases, special incentives or motivation may be needed to compensate. Typically (but not always), longitudinal surveys offer sample members a small incentive or payment for each interview, or some other form of gift, as well as putting particular effort into making the sample member feel like an important, irreplaceable, component of the study and persuading them that the study itself is valuable. Survey ‘branding’ can play an important role in fostering loyalty to the survey on the part of respondents. Promotional advertising appears more intense when longitudinal surveys are regional rather than national. For instance, ALSPAC (Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, UK) had considerable local and national coverage in the press, radio and television. Alternatively, it can be achieved through running recruitment events, and/or consultation exercises with communities and institutions that host potential respondents. Recruitment also works better when contact is made before the actual stage of recruitment (e.g., by letter between a month and two weeks in advance). Where participation is by self-completion, reminders can be sent after the initial approach (e.g., after two weeks) by post or email. Where potential recruits are reluctant to participate a research team member can productively be dedicated to the task of enrolling such individuals. As some refusals are potentially down to temporary reasons, it is good practice to try and enrol un-enrolled individuals/institutions approximately 2 months after first refusal. Recruitment approaches are most likely well-received when they reduce burden and appear organised. Such approaches attract goodwill that can lead to less attrition at a later date.

It is to be noted here that since access to young people involves negotiation with a number of gatekeepers (school, local authority, parents or carers), refusal can take place from those gatekeepers (even before making direct contact with actual participants of the study). Therefore, the success of recruitment will depend on negotiation with both gatekeepers and actual participants of the study.
7.2.3.3 Sample Attrition

Sample attrition (also referred to as panel attrition) refers to the continued loss of respondents from the sample due to non-response at each wave of a longitudinal survey (Lynn 2009). Attrition happens because of a refusal to continue, or because contact is lost with a sample member (for example, if they move home between waves and the survey organisation is unable to obtain their new contact details). Sample members may also be lost through death and emigration (Ruspini 2002), though this constitutes leaving the study population rather than non-response. The loss of respondents through attrition can bias the measurement of change if those respondents who are lost differ from those who are retained in some systematic way. It is not only the magnitude of attrition, as Menard (1991) argued, but also the pattern of attrition with respect to critical variables in the study that may be problematic. Menard (1991) discussed a number of statistical techniques (e.g., binomial test), which can be used to ascertain the impact of panel attrition. Other strategies to mitigate panel attrition have orientated around attempts to increase response rates. They include incentives (monetary, vouchers, small gifts), flexible data collection, high volumes of quality communication with participants (birthday cards, emails, newsletters, Youtube videos or social media such as Facebook pages), keeping respondents’ contact details up-to-date, sending invites in advance of surveys, and implementing quality control protocols. Best practice in attrition strategy also includes pre-emptive actions such as piloting the survey to ensure it is easy to understand and not too lengthy. Attrition strategies are further discussed in Chap. 8.

7.2.4 Further Practical Issues

7.2.4.1 Managing Large Scale Data

The management of large-scale micro-data from a longitudinal survey is challenging and the design of the database to hold them is an important step. At the core of the database should be a system of identifiers that must be used consistently to associate instruments within waves (e.g., a teacher questionnaire and a pupil questionnaire) and sample members across waves. The quality control of field procedures to ensure that correct identifiers are always used is crucial. Different panel studies have come up with rather different solutions to the database design problem, and there would need to be some review of the options and consultation with final data users. Cross-wave data checking, the various procedures for identification and removal of data errors – data cleansing, consistency tests – require meticulous planning. This process should also incorporate detailed non-response analyses. Normally, this is also the stage at which missing values on core variables are imputed. All stages of data editing must be done systematically and documented accordingly. For this purpose, precise standard guidelines need to be laid down at the planning stage regulating procedures for all phases of editing.
This issue corroborates challenges identified by some Delphi experts regarding the possible lack of capacity to deliver a longitudinal survey in some European countries. Indeed, some respondents to the survey noted that a longitudinal survey requires important institutional capacity, from trained fieldworkers, to data analysts, to buildings available to host the research team.

7.3 Challenges for the Study Due to Its Cross-European Nature

In addition to those longitudinal survey challenges mentioned in the previous section, an ELSCYP would feature a number of challenges which are unique to this study due to its cross-national nature. Delphi experts often pointed towards obstacles linked to the international nature of the survey (cited by 88 respondents). For instance, European countries have different policies, educational systems, cultures and history, languages, laws, living conditions, and survey practices. Consequently, agreeing on common concepts, measures, methodology, and target groups could prove challenging. Indeed, variability exists among European nations on a number of factors. According to Lynn (2003), the factors include availability and coverage of sampling frames, laws and regulations that restrict aspects of survey practice, availability and abilities of survey research organisations, cultural and behavioural norms, geographical dispersal of the study populations. Major cross-national surveys in Europe, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), Eurostat, Eurobarometer, and European Values Study (EVS), and other regions, for example the Afrobarometer, Latinobarometer, World Values Surveys, International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), and the International Survey Children’s Well-being (ISCWeB), have dealt with these factors and produced comparable data.

7.3.1 Comparability and Equivalence

In cross-national research, as Harkness (2008) stated, the pursuit of data quality is simultaneously the pursuit of data comparability. Comparability is often judged in terms of equivalence. O’Shea et al. (n.d.) observed a persistent problem in the pursuit of functional equivalence in cross-national surveys is that the wholesale adoption of precisely the same methods or procedures in all countries does not necessarily achieve it. On the contrary, they argued, it is often preferable to tolerate variation in certain procedures precisely in order to achieve the same common goal.
7.3.1.1 Linguistic and Conceptual Equivalence

Linguistic idiosyncrasies are considered to be the most common barriers to optimal comparability between fieldwork in different countries. Even seemingly simple translations of single words give problems that arise from different cultural meanings. Furthermore, translation occurs in both international and national surveys where versions are made available in minority languages.

Translation takes place through a wide range of practices across Europe and the world, ranging from informal translation made by bi-lingual researchers to formal professional agencies. Errors appear to occur in both instances. Until recently, the most commonly-used form of translation for questionnaires was iterative back-translation. A number of robust methods are now used to translate questions whilst ensuring functional equivalence at both a conceptual and linguistic level. For example, the five-step iterative process of translation called TRAPD (Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pre-testing, and Documentation) was successfully used in MYWeB. The ESS went through a very comprehensive translation process where two additional steps were added for a selection of items (i.e., verification and Survey Quality Predictor coding) and adopted an On-line Translation Platform (Harkness 2008).

There are international guidelines for the translation of instruments, some are specifically directed towards health-related quality of life questionnaires (Acquadro, et al. 2008). The OECD (2010) offers a comprehensive guidance based on PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which used a double translation and reconciliation procedure. The World Values Survey, which runs in over 100 countries worldwide, used a standard translation protocol, with some differences between countries. In most countries, a pre-test is used on translated questionnaires in order to identify (and potentially omit) questions for which the translation is problematic. Surveys such as Children’s World (2012) and SPARCLE use a process of ‘deep translation’, which pays careful attention to the cultural context in addition to the language. For example, cultural adjustments were made regarding sporting activities, school types, and parental socio-economic status (Coliver and the SPARCLE group 2006).

7.3.1.2 Sampling Equivalence and Response Rates

Comparability in cross-national surveys requires various considerations regarding samples. There are considered to be two key elements of sampling equivalence (O’Shea et al. nd). At its simplest, each national sample should represent an equivalent population however defined, for example by age, and should be based on an equivalent objective sample unit selection mechanism. Furthermore, to maximise the precision of between-country comparisons it is efficient to aim for similar precision in each country. This requirement is sometimes operationalised as having the same sample size in each country. However, in a cross-national survey, this is not enough to guarantee the same precision in each country in the survey because of
possible design effects. The selection of samples using the same type of probability sampling (e.g., simple random) may be impossible to achieve because of the variation in availability of sampling frames among the European countries as noted by Lynn (2003). Therefore, even within the strict principle of applying probability sampling, different types of sampling design (e.g., simple random, stratified, cluster) might be allowed although it affects the precision of estimate due to its design effect. In such a situation, one solution, as Lynn (2003) suggested, is to prescribe sample size in terms of the ‘effective sample size’ (the size of a simple random sample that would achieve the same precision as the actual sample in question). This technique is used in the ESS (Stoop et al. 2002; Lynn et al. 2007). Another challenging issue related to sampling that needs attention in cross-national survey is whether to permit substitution of sampling units (individuals or addresses) who have proved difficult to locate or unwilling to grant an interview. There is variation in practices adopted in this regard among cross-national surveys. For example, 19 of the 32 participating countries in the EVS permitted substitution either during the selection process or during fieldwork (Halman 2001). Similarly, in about one half of the ISSP countries, substitution occurs at some stage of the selection process (Park and Jowell 1996). In contrast, the Eurobarometer, ECHP and ESS do not permit substitution. There are three reasons for which substitution is not encouraged in some cross-national surveys such as ESS (Lynn 2004). Firstly, it encourages giving up too early on trying to recruit ‘difficult’ cases into the sample. Secondly, the precise level of response rates – an important measure of a survey’s success – becomes more difficult to calculate. The ‘true’ response rate in such circumstances tends to be elusive and often artificially high. The third and most important disadvantage of permitting substitution is that it can lead to ‘availability biases’ in the overall sample composition. Research has shown that difficult to locate or reluctant respondents (who are under-represented when substitution is permitted) tend to differ in material ways from more available respondents (Jowell et al. 1993). The consequence can be a skewed sample which is very difficult to remedy by normal weighting procedures. A related issue is the need to reduce variation in response rates. For instance, recorded response rates in the ISSP survey varied from 56% (Latvia) to 94% (Bulgaria), almost certainly because Bulgaria employed substitution and Latvia did not. Presumably partly for the same reason, but also because of widely differing levels of rigour in fieldwork procedures, recorded response rates in the EVS survey varied even more - from a low of 13% (Spain) to a high of 95% (Slovakia). It is partly for this reason that the ESS has set a ‘target’ response rate in all countries of 70%. The target will not, of course, be uniformly achieved in all countries, but because it is pre-specified to competing survey agencies, it at least becomes a contractual obligation for all fieldwork agencies to strive for and, more importantly, to budget for (O’Shea et al. nd). In a cross-national longitudinal study as proposed here, each country adds more complexity because a common sampling strategy to represent the population in each member state is unlikely to be possible. There are a number of factors such as availability of national level administrative data to prepare the sampling frame (e.g., list of schools, post code to identify households), costs, modes of data collection, geographical size and population distribution, study
objectives in capturing sub-groups variations (e.g., ethnicity, economic backgrounds) which might influence the sampling approach in each country. It is important that the sampling approaches are equivalent in the sense of providing a representative sample of a standardly-defined population, but it is not essential that the method is identical in each country (Lynn et al. 2007).

### 7.3.2 Designing Questions

In cross-national surveys, designing questions becomes challenging because they may be affected by cultural issues, from response scale design, to layout and visual aids, to wording, ambiguity, and social desirability (Smith 2003). Culture can determine whether information is considered relevant. Differences across culture exist in response to the same response scale stimuli (Schwarz 2003). Tanzer (2005) described how comparative design needs to consider visual aspects of instrument design. Even for the so-called background variables such as income, education, religion, occupation, and ethnicity, there exist a number of design and comparability issues as Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Harkness (2005) identified in their study. Pre-testing of questions is considered to be an important option for the researchers to identify those cultural issues and undertake remedial measures for them (Blair and Piccinino 2005; Fitzgerald et al. 2009). Recent advances in cognitive pre-tests, involving ‘web-probing’ ensure that the internal validity of the questions is secured alongside translation procedures and done so in a resource efficient manner (Behr et al. 2012a, b; Braun et al. 2012). A key feature of successful question design for cross-national surveys is that the question development itself should be a cross-national activity, informed by knowledge of the relevant cross-national variation in culture, language, knowledge, and experiences. Usually this is best achieved by having a cross-national design team, with expert representatives from a heterogeneous set of countries.

### 7.3.3 Sample Coverage

Lynn (2003) discusses at length the issue of sample coverage as an issue to be considered in cross-national surveys. He has observed many differences between European nations in the definition of the population that is usually included in ‘general population’ surveys. He noted that some of these are caused by differences in sampling frames, some by cultural differences, and some by differences in survey practice. Although he discussed the issues in reference to ESS and adult population, they can be applicable to cross-national surveys on CYP as well. For example, in the case of surveys on adults, a common practice in many countries is to exclude persons resident in certain types of institutions such as hospitals and military bases. This practice can be observed in some surveys among children as well. For
example, the national survey on children’s subjective well-being in England run by
The Children’s Society and the international survey on school children’s well-being
by Children’s Worlds did not include children in special schools. Other school-
based cross-national surveys e.g., TIMSS, PISA, also excluded certain categories of
children (e.g., home-schoolers). However, the nature of such categories and the chil-
dren they account for can vary greatly between countries depending on education
policies. Another type of exclusion observed in an adult survey which can be the
case for survey among children is the elimination of remote or sparsely-populated
areas of the country. As Lynn (2003) identified, some countries typically exclude
some or all outlying islands or remote areas from national general population sur-
veys involving face-to-face interview (e.g., the highlands and islands of Scotland
north of the Caledonian Canal in the UK, Ceuta and Melilla in Spain). Although
geographical exclusion can be avoided if the survey is conducted by telephone, this
introduces different coverage problems (households without a telephone or other-
wise not covered by the sampling method employed).

7.4  Challenges for the Study Because of Its Involvement
with Children and Young People

This section of the chapter explores the various challenges an ELSCYP would
encounter due to the involvement of children and young people. It focuses on meth-
odological issues such as accessibility and inclusion of participants, different mod-
els of CYP involvement, and ethical issues.

7.4.1  Methodological Issues Related to Studying Well-Being
of Children and Adolescents

7.4.1.1  Accessibility and Inclusion

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) was the first legally
binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—
civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. One of the core principals of the
Convention is respect for the views of children. The views and opinions of the chil-
dren have to be taken into account in a public policy addressed to them. At the same
time, promoting youth participation is central to EU youth policy. It is incorporated
into the Treaty of Lisbon, where Article 165 TFEU stipulates that ‘Union action’
shall be aimed at […] encouraging the participation of young people in democratic
life in Europe. The right of young people to participate in decision-making is also
underlined in the Council of Europe’s Conclusion on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s Rights. In addition, Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU stipulates that children may express their views freely and their views on matters which concern them must be considered in accordance with their age and maturity. This growing recognition of CYP’s right to participate was reinforced by the injunction from the New Sociology of Childhood (Prout and James 1997) to consult with children and young people as active agents. Nevertheless, depending on the age of the children, several gatekeepers can interfere with their right to participate. Refusals from schools, local authorities, or parents / carers can prevent young people from deciding for themselves whether they want to participate. Such regulations can impede children’s rights to participate and are not necessarily aligned with children’s cognitive ability to take such decision.

There are methodological challenges in involving children and young people in a study. In addition to considering the aim of the study, time and budget constraints, an ELSCYP also needs to choose an appropriate research method that is meaningful and accessible for the children and young people in the study. In this regard, the following two aspects require special attention:

• Diversity and inclusion: The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified a number of groups of children and young people as being amongst the least likely to be able to access their rights (Shaw et al. 2011). These groups include those who are (a) very young, (b) young parents, (c) 16–18 year olds, (d) black and minority ethnic, (e) disabled, (f) in public care, (g) refugees and asylum seekers, (h) in trouble with the law, (i) living in poverty, (j) affected by violence, abuse and neglect, (k) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, (l) travellers. Sampling strategies should be put in place to ensure that children and young people from these or other (e.g., young runaways) groups are not systematically excluded from an ELSCYP.

• Respondents’ age: There is a growing consensus among researchers that there is no lower age limit at which the children can participate in research, assuming the methodology is appropriate to the age group in question (Borgers et al. 2000; Shaw et al. 2011). However, the age of the children does a major impact on the method to be chosen and the design of research tools. There is empirical evidence on the impact of age groups on the length and contents of the survey questionnaire. For example, after conducting pilot and cognitive tests on children in both Primary and Secondary Schools in England, Rees et al. (2010, 2012) observed that long questionnaires and some multiple-item scales on well-being and its domains are not suitable for the young people in Primary School because of their short attention span and cognitive ability. See Chap. 6 for MYWeB’s work on cognitive interviews and children’s ability to answer questionnaires below the age of 9.
7.4.2 Different Models of CYP’s Involvement

There are a number of models of how the children and young people can/should be involved in a study. Shaw et al. (2011) identified four models and discussed them with their unique features. The models are (1) CYP are sources of research data, (2) CYP are consulted about the research, (3) CYPs are collaborators in the study, and (4) CYP have ownership of the research. There is an order among the models in terms of the degree of control and participation that the CYP may have in a study—from the lowest level in model 1 to the highest level in model 4. Hart (1992) also developed a ladder called ‘Ladder of Participation’ to describe the level of children and young people’s participation, going from rung 1 where young people are manipulated to rung 8 where young people and adults share decision-making (see Fig. 7.2). Current best practice for involving young people in research focuses on a stronger and more active involvement, one that empowers them. Manuals are now available on how to involve youth as young researchers (Dolan et al. 2015). Some researchers advocate for children to be involved in conference in order to make their contribution meaningful (Jelicic et al. 2013).

In any study involving children and young people, the first challenge for the researcher is to make a decision on the level they want or are willing to allow the children and young people to participate. The level of their participation (whether just as respondents, consultants, collaborators or owners) will guide how the whole study needs to be designed and resource allocated. According to Lyford Jones (2010: 10) it is important to acknowledge at the onset the level of participation anticipated. Indeed, this supports an honest relationship with the children, where researchers can clearly indicate how much involvement and influence they may have. It is also important for researchers to reflect on the reasons underpinning a low level of participation and potentially identify solutions that would improve participation. This supports better collaboration between children and researchers. Finally, it is important that researchers are aware that participatory work with children can be ‘tokenistic’ or ‘manipulative’ if not well managed.

Fig. 7.2 Adapted from Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation (1992)
7.4.3 Ethical Issues

Ethics play an important role in the implementation of a new survey. Ethical guidelines are required at the very early stages, whilst defining sampling criteria and recruiting participants. Consent to take part in the research needs to consider various elements such as the recording of an interview, the photographing of research subjects, the granting of the right to contact parents / carers / dependants of a participant, and the sharing of data. In the case of longitudinal studies, separate consent is requested for each stage. Consent can be delivered verbally if circumstances dictate, but ordinarily (and often legally) it needs to be obtained in writing. Different formats of data collection (e.g., interviews, online surveys, telephone surveys) will require different formats of consent. The majority of ethical issues that apply to adults may also apply to children, though there are some additional specific concerns that arise in research with children and young people.

7.4.3.1 Consent

Parental consent must be sought for young people under a certain age in most European countries. The national regulations vary across Europe. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights\(^2\) (2014), EU Member States have different rules when it comes to involving children in research. In some countries, parental consent is always required for children up to 18 years old (e.g., Portugal, Malta). Other countries request parental consent for children up to 16 (e.g., Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, UK), 15 (e.g., Finland, Slovenia, Sweden), 14 (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Luxembourg), or 13 (e.g., Poland). In some Member States, children participation is not regulated by law, or the regulation is unclear (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, France, Romania, Slovakia, Spain). For example, France has no specific regulation or guidelines for involving children in research, except in the medical field. In Ireland, general practice dictates to get parental consent for children under 18, but this is not supported by regulation and can depend on the ethics committee granting permission for research. Some countries (e.g., Estonia) only request oral consent from parents. In Germany, the legislation varies strongly between Federal States, with parental consent required up to the age of 14 or 18 years old, depending on the State. Greek regulation recognises different levels of responsibility for children aged 10, 14, and 15 years old. Parental consent is compulsory for children with disabilities, regardless of age. Malta request specific ethical improvement for research with children under care.

When children (up to the age of 14) are respondents, some countries (e.g., Germany) require that they have their guardians present during research (in the

\(^2\) The data available on the website reflects the situation up to the 1st January 2014. The FRA then updates new developments as soon as they are aware of a change.
room if this doesn’t impede the research, and in the building if the presence of the guardian during an interview may prejudices a child’s answers).

Overall there are significant national differences in regulations concerning the participation of children in research. Moreover, national guidelines can vary based on if the research takes place in or out of school, if personal data will be processed, etc. In some countries it is obligatory to obtain the consent of children taking part in a school research (e.g., Greece). Whilst this is not the case across Europe, it is nevertheless considered best practice to do so. MYWeB designed child friendly consent forms and information sheets for children involved in the research, some of which were aged 7.

Those who will be involved in collecting data need to ensure that the children know what they are being asked to do, and that they have the right to say no to anything at any stage of data collection. Since there is an inherent power relationship between adult researchers and children, the challenge is to ensure that the children do not feel nervous or threatened to say either yes or no to participate in a study. Since multiple agencies or layers of groups of people (e.g., gatekeepers, survey agencies, and data collectors) are involved in the whole process, overcoming or at least minimizing this aspect of power imbalance is considered to be a difficult challenge for a study which includes children and young people. Obtaining informed consent from children to participate in longitudinal research has additional features as consent should be required from children for the following:

- Consent to participate in the study in principle (and to continue, in principle)
- Consent at the start of each data collection episode
- Ongoing consent throughout specific data collection episodes (e.g., to continue with an interview or focus group)
- Consent to use data

### 7.4.3.2 Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity

Arrangements need to be made to ensure that children can provide data (either completing questionnaire or other means) with complete privacy. This aspect can be challenging because gatekeepers also need to be informed and agree to this ethical aspect of the study. In this regard, the setting around the children who are answering questionnaires (e.g., in front of teachers in school; in front of parents at home) is important to consider for ensuring their privacy. Engagement with children and young people should be conducted on the basis that they have the right to confidentiality. However, there are limits to this, for example in cases where information is disclosed in open-ended questions about safety in relation to themselves or others the researcher has a duty to take steps to protect the participant or other child or young person (Stafford and Smith 2009). These limits should be agreed in advance by those responsible for undertaking the engagement. It is important that, before giving informed consent to participate, children and young people know how far they have the right to confidentiality. Unlike a cross-sectional survey in which the
questionnaire remains anonymous, longitudinal surveys collect identifiable information for matching data from each child in every wave. Children and their parents/carers need to be informed about this. However, the researchers will need to think about a detailed plan for data protection and anonymity. There needs to be a system in place preventing the publication or sharing of information which could lead to the identification of an individual child, household etc.

7.4.3.3 Child Protection

Working with young people is becoming increasingly tightly regulated. However, there may be different child protection policies in participating countries. For example, everybody working directly with young people in England and Wales is required to have their criminal records checked through Disclosure and Barring Service. Research involving children also requires that all researchers are trained to identify safeguarding and child protection issues. Researchers need to be able to identify signs of child abuse/neglect and be aware of the procedures to follow when a respondent makes disclosures during interviews which raise child protection concerns. Certain modes of data collections (e.g., face to face interviews) are more likely to trigger disclosures than others (e.g., self-completed questionnaires, online surveys). This can be a consideration when designing a study.

This may be particularly relevant for research considering children’s well-being. As noted by Morrow and Boyd (2014), such research has the potential to be distressing for some participants. Nevertheless, several surveys have successfully included positively-framed questions to study children and young people’s well-being at national and international levels (Ben-Arieh 2005, 2006, 2008; Casas 2011; Bradshaw 2011; Goswami, et al. 2016).

7.5 Challenges: Views from the Delphi Participants

The Delphi survey (presented in Chap. 3) supported an open enquiry to a panel of 334 European experts about the key obstacles to the implementation of an ELSCYP. The qualitative answers pointed to numerous challenges that were organised under overarching themes. There is a strong overlap between the themes identified in the Delphi and those explored in this chapter and illustrated in Fig. 7.1. It is nevertheless interesting to note that the Delphi experts indicated that the strongest anticipated challenge to an ELSCYP is resources (cited by 95 respondents). Delphi experts also raised the issue that the EU and national governments might not be interested in such a survey, or at least not sufficiently interested to decide to invest in it (cited by 50 respondents). The various challenges identified and discussed in this chapter so far contribute to increasing the cost and time required to implement an international longitudinal survey measuring children and youth well-being. Because of the personnel costs, the techniques needed to maintain contact with
subjects over time, the costs of incentives, and the need for detailed documentation of data, the time and funding required for longitudinal studies are much greater than those required for cross-sectional designs. Therefore, continuity of funding, maintaining stability in work by recruiting full-time permanent staff and helping them to uphold their morale throughout the lifetime of the project are crucial to have for a longitudinal study to be successful. Cost and benefits of such a study are further explored in Chap. 9.

7.6 Conclusion

The implementation of an ELSCYP would encounter several challenges associated with its longitudinal nature, international component, and involvement of children and young people. Such challenges have strong implications in terms of cost and time, making resources the greatest issue identified by the expert involved in the Delphi survey. However, as argued throughout this chapter, it is possible to overcome those challenges through meticulous survey design, rigorous piloting and robust processes that support children and young people’s participation through the different stages of a longitudinal survey.

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Chapter 8
Methodological Challenges When Involving Children and Young People in Survey Research on Well-Being

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8.1  Introduction

The MYWeB Project provides important information about the challenges of involving children and young people in longitudinal research based mainly on repeated quantitatively-driven data collection. This material was gathered from different sources within the project, such as the Delphi Survey (see Chap. 3) and interviews with 440 children and young people from a variety of social backgrounds. Combining these data allows us to develop three interrelated arguments. Firstly, that the problem of attrition in quantitative surveys should be understood and tackled qualitatively. The question should also be one of why people drop out of a study, complemented with the question of who most often drops out of it (and what characterises them). Focusing more on what drives people to continue to participate in a survey and what pushes them away from it makes it possible to develop strategies

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centred more on prevention, participation, follow-up, transparency and information. We can shift our understanding of the participants from one of respondents to a survey to one of members of a project community. This is particularly important if we want to expand the participation of children and young people in research activities (Bagnoli and Clark 2014).

Secondly, the problem of attrition in longitudinal quantitative studies is not just that the sample gets smaller. It is also that the people who drop out possess specific characteristics such that the sample becomes less representative. Survey drop outs are often those of greatest interest and who characterise the group for which the survey itself was developed. MYWeB highlighted this issue, in that it was a project whose goal was to study the feasibility of a Pan-European Longitudinal Survey of Children and Young People. Children and young people affected by accumulated disadvantages are those who are more likely to: (1) not be reached in extensive surveys in the first place; (2) abandon participation in the survey, or (3) become unreachable during the course of the project (Plewis 2007; Cumming and Goldstein 2015).

Thirdly, one of the project’s premises was that children and young people can and should participate in research as subjects of analysis, but also as agents whose voice must be heard. ‘Children have a consistent perspective about the world around them and therefore constitute competent interlocutors and credible informers in studies about contemporary societies’ (Wall et al. 2015: 105). This premise should be taken seriously and applied to the design and implementation of projects concerning children and young people. As such, we must both bridge and bond with respondents, and ensure that advisory boards of children and young people are efficient and dedicated.

8.2 Thinking Attrition Qualitatively: Tackling Long-Term Participation

We contrast two approaches to qualitatively tackle attrition in longitudinal surveys. Firstly, those achieved using a mixed-methods. Secondly those which involve the need for respondents to reflect on their own participation. Even though data-collection methods are quantitative and based on an extensive sample, part of the data – especially those concerning the motivation and reasons for continued participation in a longitudinal study – should be addressed by using a ‘multi-dimensional logic’ to ‘ask distinctive but intersecting questions’ (Mason 2006, 9). The question of who drops out of a survey might be answered by the socio-demographic characterisation of the non-respondents retrieved from the survey data itself. On the other hand, the question of why these groups of people drop out must necessarily entail a qualitative understanding of the causes of attrition.

A multi-dimensional approach entails using a limited number of qualitative interviews with active participants who share similar socio-demographic
characteristics with the participants who dropped out. These have two interrelated goals: to understand what might have led their peers to drop out; and, using a research-action approach, to prevent participants who are at risk of dropping out from doing so by turning the interview into an ‘intervention’. Extra questions and follow-up contact are needed in order to address these goals. In addition, it also entails a section of the survey that captures levels of motivation and reasons for continuing or dropping out, the willingness and availability to be interviewed in the future, and the degree of satisfaction with the interview process (e.g., interviewer, context of the interview, questions). This strategy must be implemented cautiously, however, because asking individuals who are already taking part in a series of questionnaires to undergo additional interviews and satisfaction surveys may overburden them and cause a backlash that defeats the original goal.

Long-term survey participants need to feel their contribution is useful, welcomed, and consequential. In fact, most young people interviewed for MYWeb felt that their voice does not carry any weight in society. Consequently, having their voices heard and seriously taken into consideration is probably the most important positive effect of participating in a longitudinal survey. Several results from the interviews corroborate this idea:

I believe that our voices aren’t heard, and if they are heard they’re not actually taken under consideration. That is why as a country we are in this situation nowadays [i.e., the crisis]. They should help us make our voices heard. (Olga, female, 15 years old, Greece).

Even when the policies for young people are the focus, nobody asks young people about that. You can imagine how it is with other matters. (Jula, female, 18 years old, Croatia).

The ability to compare answers from different moments in time is also one of the potential reasons for continued participation, as it allows the participants to observe the course of their lives. This produces a sensitising effect that would require careful thought in order to avoid compromising the validity of responses. Indeed, the young interviewees indicated that they would happily take part in this exercise of being re-interviewed about the same topics over time, especially if they could compare their own results across time:

Yes, it would be fun to compare surveys. Maybe from the first one to the last one you can say: ‘Oh, my god, how I have changed! Have I been able to reach my goals?’ (Marta, female, 18 years old, Spain)

In some countries, children and young people have expressed a lack of confidence in the impact research can have on their lives; but there is a consensus that highlighting the research’s potential ability to improve their situation is a key element in getting them involved.

Taking part in a survey. It would be fun, maybe something changes in the future when I answer questions in a survey. (Duza, female, 9 years old, Croatia)

The potentially entertaining side of a longitudinal survey could be used as a mechanism for enhancing the motivation for and sense of purpose involved in participating in the survey and thus sustaining response rates. Furthermore, communicating findings appears to be important to encourage long-term involvement.
8.3 Researching Children and Young People from All Social Milieus

The work done within MYWeB draws on the premise that participants’ social conditions and background should be taken into account in every phase of a longitudinal survey. The effort to include all social classes, and not just those most easily sampled is fundamental to the success of the survey, its findings and the design of policies that may eventually be based on its results. Sample representativeness is discussed more fully in Chap. 7 in this volume and in detail in Smith et al. (2009).

A variety of social milieus are mentioned in fieldwork reports. This variability significantly affects answers and must therefore be considered from the earliest stages of a survey, including the sampling and the survey design. In the MYWeB interviews there was a considerable variability in the answers children and young people gave concerning the importance of material things and economic and financial prosperity in the definition of well-being. Young people who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or have experienced more difficult economic situations were more likely to say that money is important to well-being and survival. For these respondents, money was the variable that mostly differentiates well-being among children and young people. On the other hand, young people from middle-class backgrounds and/or with higher educational levels tended to talk about economic aspects of well-being as being related to the result of their effort and professional success, their concerns about their economic autonomy and stability in the long term, and the fact that they will attach more value to the money they expect to earn in the future (Alves and Nico 2015, 21).

Yeah, rich people are always in the ‘well-being’. For rich people, well-being is an everyday thing. (Diana, transgender, 19 years old, Portugal)

There are people who are much richer than others. So there are people who are much poorer than others and don’t have as many possibilities. Unfortunately, I think having money has an influence on personal well-being. (Gil, male, 18 years old, Portugal).

8.3.1 ‘Hard-to-Reach’ Participants and the Middle Class

Representativeness is the key element underlying the validity of survey-based research. The value of survey analysis relies on the capacity of the samples to accurately estimate the characteristics of the human group they are intended to represent. In social research, when certain social groups are underrepresented in a survey sample, their problems, world views, interests or demands are likely to be overlooked. This is one of the major concerns in survey research, particularly because certain groups are systematically underrepresented in surveys in that they are more difficult to reach (Bonevski et al. 2014; Shaghaghi et al. 2011; Hanafin et al. 2014).
In order to address the issue of representativeness, survey research has devoted much effort to improving both sampling – the strategy for selecting individuals who represent the whole population – and response rates – strategies designed to achieve the effective participation of this theoretically-selected sample. However, in longitudinal surveys there is another element that can greatly alter representativeness: attrition, and in particular the systematic loss of a certain respondent profile. Attrition is one of the main challenges in longitudinal research, not only because it reduces sample sizes, but above all because it leads to the reiteration of this bias, which progressively damages data representativeness (Fitzgerald et al. 1998). The problem of attrition thus has to be faced from day one. This is particularly relevant in the case of longitudinal surveys designed to study children and young people’s trajectories, which focus on years in the lifecycle that are particularly prone to change. In order to tackle this problem, we not only have to answer the question of who drops out (i.e., identify and characterise the social groups that are more prone to abandoning longitudinal surveys), but also the question of why they do so.

Research using longitudinal surveys has made progress with the who question by identifying some of the factors that influence participation and attrition in such surveys. A first group of factors is linked to the difficulty of contacting certain people at home, which is often where the survey interview takes place. There are people who are more difficult to find at home because they are geographically mobile, such as students and certain kinds of workers, or because they have a low level of presence at home as they are employed full-time (Watson 2003; Uhrig 2008). A second group is associated with socioeconomic status (SES). In general, SES indicators, such as level of education, income or labour stability, are positively related with non-response and attrition (Fitzgerald et al. 1998; Groves and Couper 1998; Lepkowski and Couper 2002; Nicoletti and Peracchi 2002; Watson 2003).

Once we know who, we can advance some hypotheses about why these specific profiles tend to be more affected by attrition. However, as Groves and Couper (1998) warn, most of these factors do not have a direct causal effect on participation in surveys, but are proxies of certain social psychological constructs. This is why we believe attrition should be tackled qualitatively.

In the MYWeB fieldwork, children and young people were asked about their reasons for taking part in a longitudinal survey. The results displayed a consensus around the idea that they are more prone to participate if they perceive that the process is transparent in terms of what is demanded of them, and, as described above, how these results can be translated, in concrete terms, to consequences in real life. The reasons to be involved must be clear and well explained.

On the one hand, it would help to make it clear what use a project like this has, for instance for you as collaborator. And what potential it has, which approach it uses, what demands it has for itself and what aims it has. (Zackary, male, 18 years old, Germany)

Well, I’m not sure about the details, but I heard that this is an EU project, so this must be something important. I also heard that many children are asked [to participate] from all over Europe and I think that’s also a good thing. Because it’s not only my opinion, but also other children’s. And if so many children’s opinions are asked and analysed, that must be an important thing, because it must serve some purpose. (Péter, male, 13 years old, Hungary)
The perception of the capacity to be heard is not equally distributed among different social milieus. The MYWeB project showed that young people from lower social classes were often more sceptical about their chances of playing a significant role in society, and think that voicing their needs is just not worth it. The perception of the usefulness of participating in a research process is thus related with the position each social group takes in society. Bourdieu’s notion of social space (Bourdieu 1985) is crucial to underline how positions in society are shaped by a system of economic, social, cultural and symbolic relationships that partially determines how different social groups occupy more central, important or powerful places. Different positions in social space are a key element in understanding how young people perceive their capacity to be influential in society, and how this shapes their political participation strategies (Soler-i-Martí and Ferrer-Fons 2015). The same logic seems to apply to participation in social research: if the central motivation for children and young people to take part in survey studies is their perception of those studies’ impact, then children and young people from marginal or disadvantaged social milieus are likely to see their participation as less relevant than counterparts with more privileged social backgrounds.

8.3.2 The Importance of the Meso: Social Environment and the ‘Domestic Equation’

So far we have dealt with elements that facilitate or hinder initial and ongoing participation in longitudinal research at an individual level. However, the immediate social environment is crucial to an explanation of response rates and attrition, particularly in the case of children and young people. Previous experience has shown that the effects of household structure on attrition are especially relevant in a longitudinal survey of children and young people. The presence of children, for example, appears to be a sign of stability and social integration, and this is positively associated with higher levels of participation in research and lower attrition. Single-person households, on the other hand, are less likely to be contacted, and have higher attrition probabilities (Uhrig 2008).

MYWeB identified that social participation has a positive effect on the willingness of children and young people to participate in research. Young people who take part in social organisations and those who have been involved in associations during childhood tend to express their disaffection about the fact that even some actions society devotes to them are planned and developed without their participation. However, this position does not necessarily result in sceptical opinions about the potential of participating in a study. High levels of social participation seem to be associated with a better predisposition to collaborate in research and to value its impact. An interviewee who was very active in social and political groups in Spain said:

I think it can be very positive to collaborate in a longitudinal survey as you can see the points of view of young people, which are often different to the views from older people. On many things we are very different. This young people’s perspective can help to change
many things, so it is really important to do the studies on well-being. When you talk about well-being, in fact, you are analysing many dimensions of someone’s life. This is very rich and useful. (Sol, female, 18 years old, Spain)

Here, again, the meso-level factors affecting predisposition towards involvement in research are related with the level of integration and social and symbolic capital. We see how social status helps explain the ways in which individuals perceive themselves in society and how this shapes their visions of the impact and usefulness of their intervention in a research project.

Notwithstanding all of this, when talking about children and young people’s involvement in research there is a crucial ‘intervening variable’ that affects all the elements we have talked about thus far: ‘the domestic equation’ (Derosas 2004). The role of family is decisive in the case of children for legal, ethical and behavioural reasons (Hanafin et al. 2014; Lessof 2009). Despite the legal differences across countries, parental consent is always a first indispensable step when including children in research. This is an obvious reason why, in the case of surveys oriented towards children, the problem of non-response and attrition should be addressed within the context of family. In the case of research with children, ethical issues have to be treated from the double perspective of the child as an individual and their legal guardian. Above all, family also determines individual predisposition to participate in research. In the MYWeB project, the social status of the family has proved to be an important factor in explain the variation in children and young peoples’ well-being levels and, more than that, definitions. This influence evolves along life trajectories from childhood to adolescence and adult life, and a longitudinal survey must take serious account of this dynamic dialogue between the individual and their family.

In practical terms, a strategy for involving families in this particular type of research will be needed from the start, in order to stimulate both initial and continuous commitment to the survey by the participants. This first relates to parents who will have to answer the initial questionnaires, and then by the children and young people themselves in the following rounds. If initial consent and continuous participation are, as we have said, curvilinear – i.e., ensuring the continuous participation of all social classes is an important challenge – then this calls for different approaches according to families’ social backgrounds. Children and young people from underprivileged milieus, such as ethnic or religious minorities, Roma or Traveller communities, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or even children with special needs, are some of the groups for which information in general and about opinions and attitudes to well-being in particular is simultaneously most needed and hardest to obtain. Gaining consent to the first approach and ensuring continuous engagement thereafter are highly dependent on the information provided to parents and young participants, and are a task in which close contact with the institutions and professionals that usually work with these families and children is certainly useful.

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2 People with very high and very low SES show fewer propensities to participate in longitudinal studies (Groves and Couper 1998).
More advantaged families are often less easily persuaded by these strategies. Previous research reveals that higher income families and even some segments of the middle classes tend to live in gated communities, with their children being enrolled in private educational institutions that are hard to approach by research (Groves and Couper 1998). These children and young people generally also have more concentrated daily curricular and extracurricular activities and thus less time (and willingness) to cooperate with activities such as longitudinal surveys. In addition, their parents tend to be more alert and raise more concerns with regard to their children’s participation in surveys in general and with regard to sensitive topics such as are covered in well-being surveys, in that they may think their parenting skills are being assessed by strangers (Almeida et al. 2012; Almeida et al. 2017). In this specific case, there are not many institutions that could potentially bridge the gaps with these more inaccessible or unknown, or less likely collaborative over time. Even when access is granted and consent is obtained, there can be situations that are difficult to manage with higher social-class families. Some parents insist on being present during the interview or even try to interfere, correct or complement their children’s answers, generating situations that are uncomfortable for the interviewer and damaging the interview’s content. Supplementary training on how to manage these situations is thus advisable.

8.4 Strategies for Involving Children and Young People in Longitudinal Research

Involving participants is important to guaranteeing a balanced participation by every social group, a high level of first-round participation and low attrition. Achieving participant involvement is a challenge for any longitudinal research, but especially so when dealing with quantitative longitudinal research directed at children and young people.

8.4.1 Survey Design

There is a growing consensus that children and young people should be involved in the design of research tools that are aimed at them. This is not only a strategic, but also an ethical issue (Ben-Arieh 2014). This consensus can be grasped in the Delphi results: respondents largely agreed that children (85% of respondents) and young people’s (94% of respondents) views are an important input for research-instrument design. This was particularly the case for young people (68% of the experts strongly agreed), compared to children (45% strongly agreed). This view was reinforced by the interviews and focus groups with young people, which indicated that factors contributing to well-being evolve with different life-stages (i.e., childhood,
adolescence, early adulthood). This is true of activities, attitudes, values and relationships, notwithstanding the fact that in many respects there is continuity between these life phases and it is thus difficult to draw a clear age-based line between them.

However, the MYWeB results suggest a need to discuss this issue in depth when designing the questionnaire in such a way as to adopt a developmental approach. In addition, the pilot survey clearly showed that children (especially those aged 7 or 8) may experience more serious difficulties in answering surveys than young people. This only reinforces the need for children to be involved in the survey design and piloting, so that these difficulties are tackled prior to finalising the questionnaire. Ultimate success lies, in part, in the degree to which children are involved and provide their critical opinion on the earlier versions. This issue is specifically addressed in Chap. 6 of this volume where cross-cultural cognitive interviews with children are examined.

Finally, the MYWeB fieldwork made it clear that children and young people enjoy being asked about their lives and concerns, but mostly prefer talking about them to answering surveys. Many interviewed children and young people from different countries said they would prefer to be interviewed or participate in a focus group rather than answer a questionnaire. In order to address this, we suggest the survey be complemented with qualitative tools such as standard interviews, focus groups, or longitudinal qualitative research, with rotational participation in order to save costs. This will not only lessen the costs of attrition (assuming it will be reduced by these strategies), but will also provide the research with an analytical framework for understanding the survey results. Delphi participants considered this information, and presented a very strong consensus (93%) that complementary qualitative interviews should be included in a longitudinal survey in order to enhance participation and the understanding of results.

### 8.4.2 Material Incentives

This was one of the main issues discussed with children and young people during MYWeB interviews and focus groups. The majority of them in most countries said that such incentives would not be important to them personally, but thought that they could be very important for others, especially people who are generally difficult to persuade to participate in activities. Both older children (12–15 years old) and young people suggested that the profile in question was that of disadvantaged groups. Offering material incentives can thus be a major strategy with which to achieve a representative sample that includes disadvantaged social segments. It is, however, important to understand that there are both positive and negative effects when using incentives (Laurie and Lynn 2009).

Young people have a unique opinion about themselves, they think they are special, so that is probably why they would like to participate in a survey, because they think their opinion is important. That is why I think that an incentive is important, but not crucial for participation. (Mapa, male, 16 years old, Croatia)
You said we’ll get a USB stick, so that’s nice... If there was no reward, I think that some children would participate, and that some would not. (Eva, female, 10 years old, Croatia)

Some children and young people suggested a strategy that has already tested positive in some research projects. Olsen (2005: 68) concludes that ‘small gifts that are tailored explicitly to the interests and situation of the respondent’ can be very effective – they say in a tangible way that we care about the respondent’. This raises the ethical issue of who should receive these material incentives, as selecting particular groups could be stigmatising. However, Olsen found that giving material incentives to the entire sample can be cost-effective, as material incentives significantly reduce field costs, simply because a higher response rate means lower field costs. The Delphi respondents also largely agreed (67%) that incentives should be introduced in order to enhance participation.

8.4.3 Non-material Incentives

Another key element for reducing non-response and achieving greater involvement of children and young people in longitudinal surveys are non-material incentives. This issue appeared constantly in the youth interviews and focus groups regarding young peoples’ views about how the adult world takes their opinions and needs into account. The age division is important to understanding their opinions on how society sees them and the extent to which society takes them into consideration: children tend to relate to their immediate circle and it is with regard to these relationships that they tend to consider their voices heard or unheard. There is no consensus here: some children believe that their views and opinions are taken into account, especially in their immediate relationships or environment whereas others consider that there is a lack of interest on the part of the adult world. Young people, on the other hand, have wider relationships and a broader understanding of their place in society. Although some young interviewees considered that their opinions and needs are taken into account, most of them tended to believe that they are generally not listened to.

Society does not pay attention to young people. (Laura, female, 17 years old, Portugal).

Young people from lower social backgrounds and/or who are non-organised\(^3\) are often sceptical about their chances of playing a larger role, and some of them consider that it is not worth voicing their needs. Despite the fact that the involvement of organised young people usually makes them capable of collectively expressing their views, they tend to have a critical view about the position young people in general occupy in society and their influence.

\(^3\)That is, young people that are not involved with any political, environmental, social or voluntary organization, association, activity or cause in a systematic way or through formal membership.
They should take what the children believe under consideration before taking a political decision, but this is fantasy. For example, when the Prime Minister passes a law to augment the curriculum at school, he should ask the children if they are satisfied with the educational system ( Odysseas, male, 15 years old, Greece).

Broadly speaking, a three-step process has been outlined by young people involved in MYWeB: research would allow young people to express themselves and voice their views; this would lead to a better understanding of their needs; and this could lead to a change in their situation and position in society. For example:

In a case where there are some particular findings resulting from a study, one could learn that more support is needed in a certain field. I think society can only be developed when there is enough information as a basis for making decisions. [...] That’s why I think it is important to participate ( Stefan, male, 24 years old, Germany)

Additionally, some interviewees liked the idea of comparing studies internationally:

Well, I think that many people don’t pay attention to their everyday lives. [...] Everybody abroad, say in Poland, assumes that in Germany everyone has a better life and everybody is feeling well. We’ll see if this is really the case or not ( Susanne, female, 19 years old, Germany)

Proper feedback on the way research is progressing thus appears to be a relevant tool with which to stimulate the long-term involvement of children and young people. This is consistent with the analysis of strategies to tackle attrition we mentioned earlier. Olsen (2005: 70) states that longitudinal studies must be ‘sold’: ‘They must be sold to the interviewers who face the job of convincing the respondent that the survey is important, and they must be sold to the respondent who, in the majority of cases, will offer their cooperation so long as the study engages their attention and they are confident that they are providing their time for a worthy endeavour’.

One strategy that goes beyond providing feedback and aims to build up a private community around the participating cohort, thereby boosting generational identity, is the use of Social Network Sites (SNS) like Facebook. McGinley et al. (2015, 895) say that ‘researchers have suggested that SNS may not increase the number of strong ties a person may have; however, they increase a person’s weak ties because the technology is suited to maintaining these links cheaply and easily’. In their experimental research, which included a two-round survey of young people, half of those who answered the first round through Facebook were asked to become friends with the principal researcher and were asked to participate in the second round through a private message sent via the platform; the other half were asked to participate via e-mail. They found that ‘the Facebook group had a response rate of 51%, while the e-mail group had a response rate of 15%’ ( McGinley et al. 2015: 896). SNS allow for photo and video-sharing, the presentation of preliminary results, a private password, changes to biographical details, a permanent contact with the research and researchers, etc. The Delphi experts also recommended the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) such as social media and multimedia products such as videos, podcasts and apps. Using these technologies would, of course, raise a great many ethical issues.
8.5 Fieldwork Suggestions

MYWeB fieldwork and subsequent data analysis helped to identify several potential fieldwork procedures that may help reduce both refusal to participate in the first place and attrition. Some of these suggestions are directly made by young people, others are more a result of the analysis.

- Distance between rounds. Not having to respond to different waves of a survey too close to one another is a basic rule for any panel survey. The MYWeB project proposed a minimum of one year between rounds, so as not to increase attrition; and a two-year gap was considered the optimum compromise between scientific rigour and cost for the purposes of this particular type of research.

- Flexibility. In this case, some children and young people involved in MYWeB said that being able to change the interview location from one wave to the next and being flexible with the date and time of the interview were also things that would facilitate their engagement.

- Having the same interviewer in each wave. This was pointed out by many children and young people in multiple countries. However, in his study on attrition in the US *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*, which began in 1979, Olsen (2005: 69) indicates that ‘interviewer continuity is not a major factor [for reducing attrition]. There is a net advantage to interviewer continuity after the respondent has been interviewed twice by the same interviewer, and after that, having the same interviewer decreases attrition by about 0.7% for each additional round’.

- Having a backup contact person outside the family available for necessary future contacts is something that could be worth considering, after analysing the ethical issues involved. Several types of disruptive household events can suddenly lead to loss of contact with the participant. Someone who is a stable presence in the participant’s daily life could be asked to be a backup contact person in order to avoid this eventuality. This person would have authorisation from the participant and her/his family to provide new contact details in order to reconnect with the participant.

- Mixed- data collection modes. This element appeared only marginally in our interviews, but has been pointed to as an increasingly effective strategy, particularly with regard to young people. Olsen (2005: 70) argues that allowing respondents to choose the interview mode (CAPI4 CATI,5 or CAWI6) makes a difference, as their preferences may vary greatly in this respect. Hoogendoorn et al. (2013) concluded that the resulting reduction in attrition is a significant

4 Computer Assisted Personal Interview.
5 Computer Assisted Telephone Interview.
6 Computer Assisted Web Interview.
improvement. This may be particularly relevant for children and young people, where other technologies may also be introduced – the CAWI mode of collection is increasingly used in surveys, and young people tend to prefer it. Moreover, even within the CAPI mode, the use of ICT can be helpful.

### 8.5.1 Filling the Gaps

In addition to adopting strategies for reducing refusal and attrition, a longitudinal survey of children and young people must consider such obstacles and implement strategies for dealing with them ex-post. Mostafa and Wiggins (2015) and Goldstein (2009) explain the advantages (and risks) of using weightings (for unit non-response) and multiple imputations (for missing items) once the fieldwork is completed. Olsen (2005) explains two other strategies for having respondents fill in gaps ex-post themselves: firstly, respondents who refuse to participate in a round should not be dismissed, but included in the next round, as in about half of cases they accept the new interview (while a quarter of those who refuse to participate in two consecutive waves nevertheless agree to take part in the next one); and secondly, once an individual has agreed to participate in a round after skipping the previous one(s), the interview should be used to recover data not collected in the missing rounds. It is thus possible to deploy both statistical tools and fieldwork strategies to counter missingness.

### 8.6 Conclusions

The design of a European longitudinal survey on children and young people’s well-being concentrates a vast array of challenges related to the involvement of children and young people that must be taken into account from day one of the project if we are to maximise the chances of success in collecting high quality data. These difficulties are conceptual, methodological and ethical and involve every phase of the project, from the design of the questionnaire through the fieldwork to the analysis.

The main problem with attrition in a longitudinal study is the potentially progressive loss of representativeness of the sample. As we have seen, this problem is more acute in specific social segments, such as socially excluded communities on the one hand and the very well-off on the other, leaving – in this case – the paradoxically named ‘missing middle’ (Roberts 2011) as the most guaranteed continuous presence within the overall sample. Although this is an important challenge, it is not the only one posed by this socially biased attrition: the silenced voice of the most fragile groups and the ensuing loss of information concerning their notions and domains...
of well-being are clearly particularly damaging for the objectives of projects like this. Awareness of this problem calls for the provision of more information and the use of systematic engagement mechanisms in relation to both interviewees and parents, with the goal of building a community around the participating cohort. However, these strategies may not suffice on their own, and the question of the over-representation of these segments in the sample may arise, albeit responding to it may in turn generate further challenges.

In this chapter we discussed different strategies for involving children and young people in a longitudinal study. Firstly, children and young people must be involved in the design of the research tools directed at their life situation and well-being from the very beginning. Through the MYWeB project, we asked them about the type of research and their motivation for potentially engaging in a longitudinal study on well-being, and were able to capture ways in which issues such as research ethics, fieldwork and asking about sensitive topics are understood by potential participants. In addition, we have seen that a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods are needed in order to complement the quantitative survey approach taken in longitudinal studies on well-being.

Secondly, several issues have to be taken into consideration during fieldwork. These include the distance between rounds (our evidence shows the ideal is a two-year gap), the need for flexibility in determining the time and place of interviews, and the selection of a comfortable survey location for children and young people. Other considerations include having the same interviewer in each wave, a backup contact person outside the family in order to deal with disruptive life events in the household, and a combination of mixed modes of data collection modes. Last but not least, following the example of recent experiences with participatory approaches to the design of research involving children and young people (e.g., Bagnoli and Clark 2014), if we want to engage with young people’s views and maintain their interest and agreement to be re-contacted in a long-term study, we need to think more creatively about both our methods and the project’s dissemination dimension.

We need to successfully develop a research project which is relevant to children and young people and which they can partly ‘own’ (Bagnoli and Clark 2014, 116).

References


Chapter 9
Understanding the Potential Policy Impact of a European Longitudinal Survey for Children and Young People

Chris O’Leary and Chris Fox

‘When people ask me, “does social science ever change policy?” a particular incident springs to mind. In the context of a broad-ranging discussion on education and skills, with a thick set of analytical material in front of us, one of the Ministers present tore out one of the Strategy Unit’s slides and – leaning forward to put it in front of the Prime Minister declared ‘…but what are we going to do about this?’. The slide – now well-known and based on longitudinal data – showed how the cognitive ability of bright children from poor backgrounds appeared to be overtaken by that of much less able children from affluent backgrounds long before they had even entered school. Within a year more than £500k was assigned to build a programme of pre-school provision for the UK.’ (Halpern 2008).

Halpern’s assertion of the direct and observable effect of longitudinal survey data on policy decisions could be used to make a compelling case for a European Longitudinal Survey for Children and Young People (ELSCYP). But this claim, set out in a report on the achievements of the British Household Panel Survey raises a number of important questions. How were such data available in the analytical material being considered by Ministers in the example given? What data were not considered? What other factors – political, emotional, contextual – might have also had an effect on the policy decision? How and why was a budget of £500k determined? What link, if any, was there between the research findings and the policy decisions to invest in pre-school provision? What other policy options were considered and rejected? On what basis were they rejected? Was that programme successful, and what contribution did the survey findings make to that success? These questions go to the heart of our understanding of whether, how, and to what extent survey data might be used in the policy process, and whether such use might have

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an effect on children and young people’s well-being. But to begin to answer such questions, either in terms of analysing the policy decisions discussed by Halpern, or in relation to the potential benefits of a European longitudinal survey on children’s well-being, requires an understanding of the policy process and the use of evidence in policy making, about the nature and types of knowledge mobilisation observed and how this might be evidenced, and about the likely effectiveness of policy decisions resulting from such a survey.

This chapter examines the potential policy use, effect and cost effectiveness of the European Longitudinal Survey for Children and Young People. In order to identify and estimate such benefits, it is necessary to demonstrate: firstly, that such data are/would be used by policy makers in the policy process; secondly, to identify what policy change has occurred or is likely to occur; thirdly, to attribute any policy change to the use of these data; and, finally, to estimate the impact of any such attributable policy change. The chapter is structured as follows. First, we examine the nature of the policy process, and the role that evidence more generally plays in this process. The focus here is on the UK policy process, where there is both an established narrative around the use of evidence in policy making, and which has a considerable history of investing in longitudinal surveys (Diamond 2008). The UK might therefore be considered an extreme case (Flyvbjerg 2006) from which to illustrate or examine the potential effect of a ELSCYP on policy. It is highly likely that other European members states will have less experience of, or capacity for, using such evidence to inform social policy development.

Secondly, while an exploration of the policy process might enable an understanding of when and how evidence might inform policy, it is also important to consider the different ways and different forms in which such evidence might be used; to understand how knowledge mobilisation might occur. We draw on the typology of different forms of knowledge mobilisation developed by Nutley et al. (2002) – instrumental, conceptual, mobilisation of support, wider influence – to explore the different ways in which a ELSCYP might affect the policy process, and the implications of this on measuring such an effect, and on estimating the social and economic benefit of such a policy impact.

Thirdly, we draw on empirical evidence and published secondary data to estimate the potential economic benefits of a children’s well-being survey, again drawing significantly on UK research. Here, empirical insights from the MYWeB project are used to understand whether and how survey data might be used. We set out the method used to estimate the benefits of such a survey, and the important caveats that must be borne in mind by politicians, policy makers, and other stakeholders when considering the likely benefits of such a survey. Finally, we draw a series of conclusions around the desirability and usefulness, in terms of policy, of the proposed European Longitudinal Survey for Children and Young People.
9.1 Understanding the Role of Evidence in the Policy Process

For over sixty years, political scientists have been describing, modelling, analysing, and evaluating the policy process in advanced democratic states. Since the 1950s, policy making has been examined as a process (De Marchi et al. 2016), most commonly as a sequential process (John 2012). Such a sequential approach to understanding the policy process is often described as a policy-cycle (Lasswell 1956). This cycle is seen as an instrumental and linear sequence of interrelated processes by which problems are made known, policy options are identified, assessed and compared, and policy changes evaluated (Jann and Wegrich 2007). It is process orientated; a logically ordered sequence of steps which ‘comprehensively canvassed, assessed, and compared all the options’ (Everett 2003). It is a conceptual framework that sees the policy process as ‘sequential, cyclical, phases, or stages of government problem-solving’ (Howlett et al. 2015). Policy is thus understood as a process rather than an outcome, as a set of decisions, a process by a course of action or inaction is decided upon (Heclo 1972), or decisions/actions that allocate resources (Jenkins 1978). It is a long-term decision process, which in advanced democratic systems requires legitimation, accountability, and deliberation (De Marchi et al. 2016).

There are a number of different models or typologies of the policy cycle, developed by authors including Easton (1965), Dror (1968), Jenkins (1978), Brewer and Leon (1983), Hogwood and Gun (1983), Hill (1997), and most recently by Jann and Wegrich (2007). These typologies vary in terms of the number and description of steps or stages of the policy process described. Harold Lasswell is often credited with being the first major, and one of the most influential, to develop a cyclical/staged approach to understanding the policy process (Parsons 1995). In his short book, *The Decision Process: Seven Categories of Functional Analysis* (1956), Lasswell establishes what he calls a ‘conceptual map’ (Lasswell 1971) for understanding the policy process. Lasswell identifies seven components or functions in the policy process, namely: intelligence; promotion, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal, and termination. For Lasswell, the intelligence component involves collecting, assessing, and evaluating information, making decisions around which data should be used to inform decision making, and which data should be excluded from this process. The promotion function involves outlining the choices between policy options, lobbying by interested parties and the policy community. In the prescription stage, ‘decision makers actually prescribe a course of action’ (Badie et al. 2011): that is, this is the point at which a solution is arrived at, through consultation with relevant agencies, organisations and individuals (Marvick 1977). The invocation and application functions involve the implementation of policy options. The final two functions, appraisal and termination, are perhaps more straightforward to understand. The appraisal function involves the assessment of ‘the various successes and failures. It is important to specify who are tasked with carrying out the appraisal function and examine the work of the agencies endowed with application. Usually these achievements will be measured against the prescriptions,
and reasons for successes and failures must be studied carefully’ (Ronit and Porter 2015). The termination function might involve ending the policy or programme, or making changes and restarting the policy process.

Lasswell’s approach provides a number of different points or stages in the policy cycle where longitudinal survey data might be of use. The Intelligence and Appraisal stages provide the most obvious and direct opportunity for the utilisation of survey data. But it is also the case that the kind of comparative examination of children and young people’s well-being provided by a proposed ELSCYP would be beneficial during the Promotion stage. Such data would provide insight on the likely effect of different policy and programme approaches, both over time and between countries, enabling the rationalist, economic analysis of the different policy options available that Lasswell expected to see during this stage of the policy cycle.

While one of the first and most influential approaches to describing the policy cycle, Lasswell’s seven categories model is not the only one available. Other available models range in level of specification and number of stages provided. The simplest, in terms of number of stages, is an early model developed by Herbert Simon in his 1947 book, Administrative Man (Simon 1947 1997) and involves three stages: intelligence, design, and choice. The Hogwood and Gunn model includes nine stages, starting with ‘deciding to decide’ and ‘deciding how to decide’ and working through to ‘evaluation and review’ and ‘maintenance, succession and termination’ (Hogwood and Gunn 1983). Peters and Pierre (2015) identify Dror’s model as the most complex iteration to date. Dror’s model has three over-arching stages, each of which is sub-divided to create a total of eighteen elements. Given the number of such approaches, it is perhaps not surprising that numerous authors have attempted to draw out commonalities and provide synthesis models. For example, in The Public Policy Process (1997), Michael Hill provides a simply, more ubiquitous formulation, including agenda setting, policy formation, decision making, implementation, and evaluation. Wayne Parsons, in his Public Policy: An introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis (1995) also provides a useful synopsis of the available models. Parsons sets out a policy life-cycle, involving (like Lasswell’s conceptual map) seven stages or functions, namely: problem; problem definition; identifying alternative responses/solutions; evaluation of options; selection of policy option; implementation; and, evaluation.

Both Hill and Parsons recognise and share many of the concerns in the wider literature around attempts to describe the policy process as a cycle or a series of stages. Understanding the policy process as a sequence of stages has been described as the ‘textbook approach’ (Nakamura 1987, as cited in Parsons 1995) and is still very much the dominant paradigm (Colebatch 2005). Although such approaches fell out of fashion in the 1970s and 1980s, in the past two decades there has what Sophie Everett has described as a ‘revival of rationalism’ (Everett 2003) and increased focus on process-orientated, rationalist approaches to understanding the policy process. This revival has coincided with the renewed focus on evidence-based policy making, whose re-emergence is often associated with 1997 election of the UK’s New Labour government (Bartlett 2013; De Marchi et al. 2016; Nutley et al. 2002). Nevertheless, there are significant criticisms of the conception of the policy process
in this way (Howlett et al. 2015): that the process is too complex to be examined in such simple models (Lindbolm 1959 1979); that it presents an idealised image of policy making that is rarely encountered in practice (Sabatier 1991; Howlett et al. 2015); and that it ignores the roles played in policy making by context, emotions, politics, and interests.

Despite these criticisms, and the availability of alternative approaches to understanding the policy process (Howlett et al. 2015), the stages model is nevertheless a useful mechanism both to understand where and how evidence from a ELSCYP and for identifying the difficulties of understanding the use, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of such data in the policy process. Drawing on stages identified in Parsons’ policy cycle, Table 9.1 illustrates the opportunities for such survey data in the policy process.

In each of the examples outlined in Table 9.1, the potential impacts of an ELSCYP are direct and observable impacts on the policy process, similar to the example given by David Halpern (2008) set out at the beginning of this chapter. And while such direct forms of policy impact are both desirable and likely, they are not the only means by which data and evidence generated from such a survey might have an impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Example policy opportunities for using data from a European longitudinal survey on children and young people’s wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem identification</td>
<td>• Illustrate the nature and extent of issues with wellbeing in specific European countries, or comparatively across Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide comparative evidence on the nature and scale of differences in wellbeing between European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide complementary evidence on the nature and scale of issues with wellbeing in those European countries with other existing survey/secondary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide primary evidence on the nature and scale of issues with wellbeing in European countries without/with limited existing survey/secondary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide data used in empirical studies that feed into problem identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of options</td>
<td>• Provide data for analysis and comparison of the impact of different policy interventions/programmes within specific European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide data for analysis of the impact of policy interventions/programmes within specific European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Combine survey data with existing survey/secondary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide data used in empirical studies that identify, compare or evaluate different policy options for improving children and young people’s wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>• Provide data for analysis and comparison of the impact of different policy interventions/programmes between European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide data for analysis of the impact of policy interventions/programmes within specific European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Combine survey data with existing survey/secondary data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide evidence of impact for cost effectiveness or cost benefit analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide data used in empirical studies that evaluate policy interventions or programmes aimed at improving children and young people’s wellbeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.2 Knowledge Mobilisation: Understanding the Forms That Policy Impact Might take

The type of direct policy impact identified by Halpern (2008) and illustrated in Table 9.1 might be understood as a form of *instrumental* use of evidence. In a highly influential Economic and Social Research Council funded working paper published in 2002 entitled *Evidence-based policy and practice: Cross sector lessons from the UK*, Nutley et al. identify four different ways in which knowledge may be mobilised. Over and above instrumental use of knowledge, Nutley et al. (2002) suggest that research and data (such as those they might be generated by a ELSCYP) might change the broader understanding of the situation; that it might provide new or different ways of thinking about the policy problem or context being considered. They describe this as conceptual use of knowledge, and recognise that such conceptual understandings might be used instrumentally.

Nutley et al. (2002) also recognise that research might be used to promote a certain policy option or as an ‘instrument of persuasion’. That research findings, or simply the process of research, can be used politically to legitimize a policy decision (the kind of mobilisation, we would suggest, that is illustrated in the quote by David Halpern at the beginning of this chapter). Finally, Nutley et al. recognise that research and data might have a wider influence, beyond its direct policy domain, recognising that such influence is both rare and difficult to achieve. It is also not the only form of direct impact that survey data may have on the policy process; research findings may be mobilised to ‘make the case’ for government action in general, or for specific policy interventions or programmes. Indeed, survey data and empirical research based on those data (and indeed other evidence) may be used post hoc to justify policy proposals.

The challenge and complexity of understanding and mapping the form of utilisation of survey data in the policy process is raised here to highlight some of the difficulties in undertaking a cost benefit analysis for the introduction of a ELSCYP. Would the data be used by policy makers, and, if so, how would these data be used? Longitudinal survey data can be used to identify and quantify a public policy problem, but there is a need to establish a link between the survey evidence and a policy change. If policies are not influenced as a result of survey evidence then the value of such data in the policy process remains open to question. Precisely how the weight of any survey data related influence can be understood in forming opinions that affect policy is, perhaps, impossible to determine. There is, however, a widespread acceptance of the need for policies to be made on the basis of sound evidence.

Where longitudinal data are used to select and evaluate policy options, such analyses face a well-documented dependent variable problem when it comes to identifying policy change (Howlett and Cashore 2009). Policy is rarely unilayered; rather, it is a nested, multi-level phenomenon that, in relation to children and young people’s well-being, is examined in a number of different domains (health, social services, and education, for example) through to specific interventions (measles vaccinations,
free school meals, or publicly funded child care, for example). Identifying that a policy (or group of policies) has changed is a significant task; attributing that change to the use of longitudinal survey data is even more complex. There is a need to assess the relative importance of other data, evidence, political priorities, interests or information that were available or influenced policy makers. We then need to ask how the effect of these other factors can be disentangled from the impact of the data from the longitudinal survey. In addition, there are a range of other considerations, such as the politics of the policy process and legal and financial considerations. Across the EU, policy makers in member states have different levels of information and evidence available to them – Germany, the UK and Ireland, for example, commission a plethora of longitudinal surveys between them and also have access to a range of other data and evidence; other member states do not currently have access to such a wide range of data. Indeed, even within a member state, there may be differences between government departments and agencies around access to, and use of, longitudinal surveys in the policy process. Evidence from the UK government suggests that different research and policy cultures may exist between departments (Boa et al. 2010) and there may also be different approaches to policy making which affect whether and, if so, when survey data may be used.

Estimating the benefits of a longitudinal survey necessitates understanding the impact of any new policy or policy change on children and young people’s well-being. The literature identifies a number of conceptual, methodological and practical issues in such impact analysis. Given the issues highlighted above, we do not attempt to identify and quantify the likely benefits of a ELSCYP on future children and young people’s well-being. Rather, we address three key questions about the potential benefits of a ELSCYP:

1. Is it likely to affect the policy process?
2. How might it be used?
3. What level of change would be necessary for the investment to be worthwhile?

### 9.3 Would a Longitudinal Survey Affect the Policy Process?

Given the challenges identified above of attributing policy changes to the availability of longitudinal survey data, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a dearth of empirical cost-benefit evidence in this field. There is some evidence around the usefulness and impact of evidence generally, and longitudinal survey data specifically, in the policy process. Indeed, both the UK and Scottish governments have commissioned research to consider this impact. The UK is used here because it is an extreme case (Flyvbjerg 2006) from which to illustrate or examine the potential effect of a ELSCYP on policy. It is an extreme case both because there is both an established narrative around the use of evidence in policy making, and because the UK has considerable history of investing in longitudinal surveys (Diamond 2008).
Three of these reports suggest that longitudinal survey data may affect the policy process.

Boa et al. (2010) were commissioned by the UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to examine the effectiveness of department-commissioned research and, specifically, whether and how this research was used in the policy process. Using a case study approach that examined four areas of policy that had experienced considerable changed during 2008–9, the report highlights a number of areas where policy makers identified the impact of research on policy decisions. The examples given in the report were wider than longitudinal surveys and included evaluations and policy reviews. The authors stress that research is not the only factor affecting policy decisions, but the report identifies that the DWP had a more positive and active culture of using research to inform the policy process compared to other UK government departments. The authors also stress that a significant barrier to the use of research in the policy process is the mismatch between policy and research tim­escales. They highlight that policy questions often need to be answered before research can be commissioned or research findings are available. A distinct advantage of an accelerated cohort survey such as that being proposed for the ELSCYP is, therefore, that there is an ongoing data collection, which can be used to address a range of policy areas as outlined in Chap. 10. This reduces the need to commission new data collection and ensures that there is an observatory of experiences that can document unanticipated and contingent events. While a longitudinal survey takes some time to reach maturity in terms of identifying change at the individual level, the inclusion of parallel cohorts facilitates a comparative analysis which should provide benefits much sooner.

In a report for the Scottish Government on the policy value of longitudinal surveys in relation to well-being, Schuller et al. (2012) highlight a number of different ways in which longitudinal survey data may be of use in the policy process, and provide a number of examples of how such data may have affected individual policy decisions. Bynner and Joshi (2007) suggest the value of such surveys principally lies in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policy. Their assertion that longitudinal survey data may be used differently depending on the stage (problem identification, options identification, options assessment, and evaluation) or nature of the policy decision is one that is echoed in several theoretical and empirical works on the subject. Finally, drawing on interviews with senior government analysts, Bynner and Bradshaw (2008) identified the Scottish policy context within which longitudinal surveys are useful.

9.4 How Might an ELSCYP be Used by Policy Makers?

The Delphi study described in Chap. 3 posed a number of questions and generated group discussion around questions on the conceptualisation and measurement of well-being, as well as the technical and other challenges associated with a proposed
ELSCYP. Across the three rounds, several questions were relevant to discussions around the cost and benefits of an ELSCYP. The first questionnaire asked about the policy challenges involved in children and young people’s well-being. In response to this question, respondents commonly identified meta-policy areas, such as education, health, poverty, mental health, and access to services. This questionnaire also asked respondents to rate the importance (on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 was very important) of evidence at various stages of the policy process. These include: (1) understanding the impact of policy; (2) monitoring progress; (3) reviewing the design of social policies over time, considering social, economic and cultural change; (4) policy and programme appraisal; (5) to measure societal trends over time; (6) to measure the distribution of policy outcomes across different target groups; and (7) to measure the distribution of outcomes across regions.

A clear majority of respondents answered that evidence was very important or important at each of the policy stages identified above. In round 2, there was a specific question on the likely impact of an ELSCYP on the policy process. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with three statements, namely:

1. Evidence from a longitudinal well-being survey of children and young people will contribute to improved well-being.
2. Longitudinal data will allow policy-makers to improve policy design and impact and make policies aimed at improving child well-being more effective and efficient. At a national level, effective policy and improved child and youth well-being has considerable economic benefits.
3. It is reasonable to assume that the economic benefits of improved child and youth well-being far exceed the cost of implementing a longitudinal survey.

Table 9.2 presents the responses to this question. Again, respondents commented that a European Longitudinal Survey on Children and Young People’s well-being could have a number of benefits in terms of improving well-being and improved policy-making. Significantly, a clear majority of respondents believed that the benefits of such a survey would far exceed the costs of undertaking it.

Table 9.2  Responses to question on the usefulness of an ELSCYP on social policy (Delphi round 2, question 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Improve wellbeing</th>
<th>Improve policy making</th>
<th>Benefits outweigh costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.5 What Level of Change Would be Necessary for the Investment to be Worthwhile?

It is estimated that an ELSCYP will cost over €700 million over twenty five years to commission (at 2015 prices) (Pollock et al. 2016). Assuming data from this survey are used to affect changes in member state government expenditure in this area, what level of change would be necessary for this investment to be considered worthwhile? To address this question, it is important to first consider member state expenditure on children and young people’s well-being and then to compare the cost of the survey to this expenditure. Such a comparison will give an indication of the scale of change necessary for the investment to be considered valuable.

There is no single, straightforward or commonly agreed method for estimating government expenditure on children and young people’s well-being. This reflects both the debates on the nature and conceptualisation of well-being and the challenges of cross-country comparison of government social spending. It is beyond the remit of this chapter to address the methodological and empirical debate in this area. Rather, we draw on the substantive work undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and data from Eurostat to provide a high level estimate of social expenditure in several EU member states.

Drawing on published data and analysis from the OECD and Eurostat, data on current spending across EU member states on children and young people’s well-being is presented in two ways, namely per capita and total expenditure. Figure 9.1 below gives an estimate of government expenditure on children by age group in twenty EU member states in 2011. This is the most recent year for which data are available. Figure 9.1 draws on analysis published by the OECD and therefore only covers those EU member states that are also members of the OECD. It provides
aggregate, national government expenditure on education, childcare, cash benefits and tax breaks, and other benefits in kind. To enable comparison, the OECD analysis is given in per capita spend in US dollars at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP1).

Presenting data on total spend on children and young people’s well-being is less straightforward. To do this, the OECD per capita spend by age group data for 2011, Fig. 9.2 has been combined with Eurostat population data (aggregated to the relevant age group, for 2011). This provides a broad estimate of the scale of national spending by several EU member states on public children and young people’s services. The spending included in this analysis relates to welfare spending (cash benefits, tax breaks, and other benefits in kind) and education spending (child-care and compulsory schooling). It should be stressed that the underlying spending data are aggregated by OECD from the individual national budgets and there are a number of significant limitations around these data (the limitations of this approach are presented in the OECD publication, Doing Better for Children (OECD 2009)). Table 9.3 presents the underlying estimate spend (nearest billion2, USD PPP) and relevant population figures.

The estimates presented in Fig. 9.2 and Table 9.3 suggest a combined expenditure of around $1 trillion3 in 2011 in US dollars (PPP) for the twenty EU member states that are also members of the OECD. The likely cost of a ELSCYP is estimated to be

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1 PPP is a method used since the 1990s by OECD and Eurostat to provide a ‘common currency’ that enables relative comparison between countries, taking account of differences in the purchasing power of their national currencies. By providing a ‘common currency’, PPPs are a means of comparing the relative purchasing power by eliminating prices differences between countries. Typically, PPP comparisons use the US dollar as the base currency.

2 1 billion equals 1,000,000,000

3 trillion = 1,000,000,000,000
over €700 million over a twenty five year period. The cost of the survey is therefore an extremely small fraction of overall expenditure in this field (in the order of 0.003%). This suggests that only very small improvements in the effectiveness of member state expenditure on child well-being would need to be affected by the availability of longitudinal survey data for the benefits of such a survey to outweigh the costs. Figure 9.3 below provides data on the anticipated cost of the survey by member state, in year 1, as a percentage of spend on child welfare services. This

4To calculate these costs, it has been assumed that the first year of the survey will be 2017. The 2011 spend data presented in Table 9.3 have been adjusted to 2017 prices, using GDP deflators published by OECD (to 2015) and 2% thereafter. The estimated spend therefore represents spending levels as of 2011, in 2017 prices (and do not assume any changes in levels of government expenditure over and above changes in GDP). The member state survey costs use the costs given in Fig. 9.3. These costs have been converted to US dollars using an assumed exchange rate of 1.16 (and assuming no changes in the PPP between those EU member states included in this analysis and the US dollar).
Although the cost of the survey, at member state level, is a very small share of the overall spend on child well-being services in year 1 (assumed 2017) and across the whole life of the survey (25 years), this in itself does not give a precise picture of the level of efficiencies that would be necessary for the benefits of the survey to outweigh the costs. The potential for such efficiencies is not evenly spread between member states; some (notably the UK and Germany) already commission several longitudinal and other surveys, which provide data on child and youth well-being, while others do not currently have access to such data. An ELSCYP would complement existing data sources in those countries with a history of investment in this area whilst providing opportunities for those member states that have yet to make such an investment. In addition, the potential benefits of direct member state comparisons through the use of a common research instrument and fieldwork time frame suggests that there are further benefits that cannot yet be anticipated or quantified.

### 9.6 Conclusion

Undertaking a cost-benefit-analysis of a proposed ELSCYP and young people’s well-being is a complex and challenging task. To undertake such analysis, it is necessary: firstly, to demonstrate that that such data are/would be used by policy makers in the policy process; secondly, to identify what policy change has occurred or is likely to occur; thirdly, to attribute any policy change to the use of these data; and, finally, to estimate the impact of any such attributable policy change. The
extant evidence on the use of longitudinal surveys in the policy process is such that it is not possible to address the issues outlined above. This chapter therefore examines three questions about the potential benefits of a ELSCYP, namely (1) is it likely to affect the policy process (2) how might it be used; and (3) what level of change would be necessary for the investment to be worthwhile?

The analysis set out here identifies evidence that longitudinal survey data are useful to, and used by, policy makers in the UK. The UK is used as an example here because it is a member state with a long history of commissioning longitudinal surveys. We also draw on findings from the MYWeB research project, which strongly suggests that policy makers, academics, practitioners, and others involved in child well-being across the EU believe that such a survey would be useful, would be used by policy makers, and would improve the quality and efficiency of public expenditure on well-being. We have suggested that the costs of an ELSCYP would be a small fraction of the overall expenditure in child well-being services, suggesting that very small increases in the cost effectiveness of such programmes and services would be necessary for the investment in the survey to be worthwhile.

References


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10.1 Introduction

At present, within Europe, no data source is available to scientists to systematically and comparatively analyse the well-being of children as they grow up. Despite growing interest in seeking to make improvements to the lives of children and young people, and vast expenditure on policies which aim to secure and improve their experiences, the evidence upon which such developments are based is limited (Goswami et al. 2016). The availability of high quality data is uneven to the extent that in some countries it is not possible to show the ways in which national policies have made impacts or where policy interventions can make significant improvements. In those countries which are well served with data resources, researchers are not able to learn from the lived experiences of children and young people growing up in the diverse countries of Europe. The central argument of this volume has been that Europe needs a common longitudinal survey of child well-being. This survey needs to be longitudinal for only this design can serve as the foundation of powerful causal explanations which policy interventions require (Glenn 1977; Plewis 1985; Menard 1991; Elder et al. 1993; Blossfeld and Rohwer 1995; Singer and Willett 2003; Lynn 2009; Yang and Land 2013). The data must be comparative because, despite its inherent diversity, Europe has, over the past 70 years, become a region where cooperation has become ever closer and where there is an increasing convergence of social policy imperatives if not the policies themselves. There is much potential to learn from experiences, and policy interventions in a variety of
countries. A common European longitudinal survey would represent a powerful tool in being able to separate the effects of demographic explanations from national policy contexts. It would provide a natural observatory that would facilitate understandings of growing up like never before. As a historical document across the whole of Europe, the unfolding lives of the children included would, be a living experiment able to test the effects of events not yet anticipated. The potential impact on society is vast in that the analyses would directly influence the development and targeting of social policy interventions. Such a survey would be able to inform future social innovations where there are needs to improve public service outcomes at the same time as having the potential to contribute towards significant savings to public expenditure.

There is an acknowledged need to address Grand Challenges, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in relation to children (UNICEF 2017), and an associated need for high-quality data to assess progress in relation to such goals and to inform policy-making aimed at securing them. The European Union has highlighted the importance of securing the future of children and young people. It has become accepted that inequalities must be thought of longitudinally and not regarded as static events unrelated to prior events and future likelihoods. In this regard, it is incumbent upon policy-makers to ensure that they base their policy interventions and adjustments on the best evidence available. On the basis of the results from the MYWeB project, this must include longitudinal survey data.

The EU already recognises the importance of high-quality survey data through its investment in the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) (Börch-Supan et al. 2015), the European Social Survey (ESS) and the Gender and Generations Programme (Gauthier and Emery 2016). These surveys already generate comparative data and in the case of SHARE are regularly used to highlight similarities and difference among Member States. In addition to the requirement that EU Member States undertake a Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) the existence of complementary socio-economic surveys strengthens the evidence base for future policy-making. There is, however, a gap as there are no prospective data collected from children or young people. Current surveys may contain retrospective life history data collection that allows some analysis of the effects of early-life experiences on subsequent outcomes, but there are significant questions as to the robustness of such data (Pollock 1997).

The work of the MYWeB project concluded that an accelerated cohort survey was the most suitable design for an ELSCYP. This choice was made after an exhaustive selection process which involved the Delphi Panel (described in Chap. 3) and a criteria-based, systematic options selection exercise within the project consortium. This concluding chapter focuses on how the MYWeB project came to recommend a national accelerated survey design with a view to suggest a way forwards for a pan-European longitudinal study. It describes, how different potential methodologies were evaluated in the options selection, and the challenges involved in taking forward an ELSCYP using an accelerated design.

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10.2 Longitudinal Insights for Policy-Making

Longitudinal well-being surveys can help us understand transitions in young people’s lives, for instance the step from education to the labour market (Ashton and Bynner 2011; McCulloch 2011), interruptions and trauma such as family break-up, as well as turning points that might contribute to the understanding of well-being. In this regard, Howieson et al. (2008) argue that transitions are inherently a longitudinal process and so longitudinal data are necessary to analyse and understand the lives of individuals over time and answer questions about the impact of policy interventions on young people’s outcomes. In the UK, cohort surveys have been shown to have been crucial in understanding family and health dynamics and have been central to policy development (Clarke and Roberts 2011; Wadsworth 2011). In addition, such surveys allow for the measure of stability or instability and the identification of plausible causal relationships. Individual-level change can only be understood in the context of changes taking place over a considerable amount of time. This type of analysis enables researchers to identify patterns of change (e.g., steady growth, fluctuation around a low level, sudden decline followed by stability) (Lynn 2009). For example, if the aggregate proportion of children and young people satisfied with their life is relatively stable over time this is likely to include a variety of types of experiences. While a certain proportion of children and young people might be satisfied with their lives on a continuous basis, the majority are likely to show variations over time with increases and decreases at different points. Longitudinal insight provides greater information about the dynamics and the factors associated with children and young people being satisfied with their lives.

Longitudinal studies can be viewed as a form of quasi-experimental evaluation design (ISER 2002). They involve the construction of a ‘time series’, which, in some contexts provides an evaluation design able to withstand some of the key threats to internal validity that ‘quasi-experimental’ evaluations are designed for (Cook and Campbell 1979). As compared to the use of administrative data, a key advantage of longitudinal survey data is the potential to overcome the threat of ‘instrumentation’. If a time series is constructed using administrative data there is a risk that changes to the way the variable is defined or the way the data is collected will undermine the internal validity of the design (Shadish et al. 2002). However, in a survey, where consistent survey instruments are used, this threat posed by inconsistent instrumentation is avoided. As ISER (2002) note, we can at least say with certainty from the statistical analysis of biographies what events preceded others, even though we still have problems in deciding which event in relation to another event was the underlying cause. This application of longitudinal data for establishing causal relationships is evident in policy evaluation where the success of policies on returns to qualifications and education are more generally understood using birth cohort survey data (ISER 2002). In this regard, outcomes in adulthood such as occupation and earnings are set against qualifications, taking account of ability as tested in childhood and numerous other circumstances and experiences earlier in life that might be confounded with them. ISER (2002) concludes that ‘Statistical modeling...
of this kind, is not a perfect substitute for the controls offered in randomized experiments, but goes some of the way to producing the most plausible accounts of microeconomic processes.’ For more examples of programme evaluation using longitudinal quasi-experimental design, see Esbensen et al. 2001; Humphrey et al. 2010).

While insights from longitudinal surveys have much to offer to policy it is worth noting that different designs will be associated with answering different research and policy questions. Birth cohort studies allow researchers to chart the development of the human life course. As ISER (2002) notes, the data collected for any single birth cohort confounds age, period and cohort effects at any particular point in time. In addition, comparison of more than one cohort enables the researcher to hold constant one of these three ‘extrinsic’ factors, for example, comparing cohorts at a given age to establish a cohort effect or cohorts at the same age at different times to establish a period effect. The data can then be used prospectively to make predictions about the outcomes of particular circumstances and experiences in life occurring at particular points in time or retrospectively to identify the circumstances and experiences in earlier life that underpin a given outcome later (ISER 2002).

In a briefing In Praise of Panel Surveys, Berthoud and Burton (2008) bring together a number of case studies that demonstrate the impact findings from longitudinal surveys (specifically panel surveys) can have on policy. For example, Jenkins (2008) recounts how, in the 1990s, inequality and poverty rates flattened off and it appeared that there was little or no change in the income distribution from one year to the next. However, the British Household Panel Survey revealed that apparent cross-sectional stability hid longitudinal flux—households’ incomes fluctuate between one year and the next, and there was substantial turnover in the membership of the low-income population. Jenkins goes on to demonstrate how these findings influenced policy including much of the emphasis in the UK government’s welfare reforms from the late 1990s that reflected a dynamic perspective with a focus on moving people into work and ensuring that paid employment was more desirable than state benefits.

Further, Ermisch (2008) demonstrates how longitudinal data has helped researchers and policy-makers better understand family dynamics. Thus, in 1975, 9% of births in Britain were outside marriage and by 2006, this had risen to 44%. However, three-quarters of births outside marriage are jointly registered by both parents and mostly to parents living at the same address. It therefore appeared that just over a quarter of recent births were in cohabiting unions. The question raised was therefore ‘does this mean that the rise in extra-marital births should be less cause for concern?’. Ermisch’s analysis reveals how longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey showed that the duration of cohabiting relationships was shorter than married partnerships and that women from failed cohabiting partnerships took a relatively long time to find another live-in partner.
10.3 The Delphi Survey and Research Design for an ELSCYP

The selection of an accelerated cohort design as the most appropriate survey to take forward was made after a lengthy engagement with a range of 334 experts across Europe during which we informed them of different options, detailing the advantages and disadvantages of each. While some were experts in the field of survey data design, many were not and we drafted detailed explanations in the form of briefing reports so that the answers all our experts gave to our questions were fully informed. The Delphi survey broached questions related to certain technical features of an ELSCYP. Going into depth regarding sample coverage, instrument development, frequency of data collection, age range to be surveyed, as well as the appropriate content of the questions the survey gives an important expert view on how an ELSCYP could and should be put to use. The Delphi survey is more fully described in Chap. 3 as it was used to contribute to many aspects of the MYWeB project, in this chapter we focus on those aspects which informed the central question: ‘which type of survey design is the most suitable to take forward?’

From the outset of the MYWeB project we explored a broad range of options which included:

- Do nothing
- A new European repeated cross-sectional survey
- Using Member State administrative records
- Developing a longitudinal component as part of an existing survey, such as the European Social Survey
- A new European longitudinal survey

In this regard, our starting premise was to consider all possible methodological alternatives and not just those with a longitudinal dimension.

10.3.1 Against ‘Do Nothing’ and Non-longitudinal Designs

It quickly became apparent from the results of the first Delphi survey that ‘doing nothing’ and the other non-longitudinal designs were regarded as inappropriate. There was a clear preference for a robust, comparable evidence base in relation to material and subjective well-being without which a better understanding of life cycle changes and hence European and national policy impact and policy evaluation would be impeded. Our Delphi respondents felt that longitudinal data was important for policy development (84%), monitoring (86%), and impact analysis (86%). Lack of comparable evidence will make it difficult to understand what policies work best in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency as well as in what context in terms of targeted child and young people well-being policies. Without adequate evidence, macro and micro-level welfare adjustments (overall policy effort, effort in specific
policy areas) and recommendations taking into consideration the specifics of national welfare regimes and/or regional contexts will only be partial. By doing nothing, the technical, political and financial challenges of launching a new pan-European survey are, of course, avoided. However, this results in limited possibilities to compare and benchmark national policies, evaluate the impact of policy implementation and therefore, cannot deliver potential cost savings through effective policy designs. In addition, by doing nothing the voice of children and young people in the policy process is absent. Participating in a longitudinal study would empower them and give them an opportunity to voice their opinions. A new type of survey with a strong focus on dissemination could also support CYP in feeling that their voice is heard.

10.4 Options for an ELSCYP

The only options which were able to deliver the requirements identified by the Delphi participants as important were some form of longitudinal survey and these were explored in relation to their advantages and disadvantages in narrowing the list further, ultimately choosing the national accelerated birth cohort. The four survey-based options can be shown as follows in Table 10.1 as they are the logical outcomes of national versus local design and single birth cohort versus accelerated cohort design. The advantages and disadvantages of these designs are likely to map onto these two dimensions: geography and respondent age range.

10.4.1 Option 1: National Birth Cohort (NBC)

A new, pan-European longitudinal birth cohort survey from birth to 25 based on nationally representative samples in each Member State would be able to facilitate the measure of change at the individual level and national comparisons. Initial measures of parental background and infant health progress to school development, social and psychological indicators. School attainment, career trajectory, family formation and housing history all follow. The resulting data set from the mature cohort

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>National survey</th>
<th>Local survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single birth cohort</td>
<td>Option 1: NBC – National Birth Cohort</td>
<td>Option 2: LBC – Local Birth Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated birth cohort</td>
<td>Option 3: NABC - National Accelerated Birth Cohort</td>
<td>Option 4: LABC - Local Accelerated Birth Cohort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
members allows a retrospective analysis of life-histories which can be analysed using dedicated longitudinal measures. The effects of social policies can be examined through measuring conditions prior and subsequent to policy enactment, with a suitable time lag. By their nature, cohort studies are fixed to the sampled cohort. This means that the benefits of the longitudinal aspects of the data take time to develop. A related disadvantage relates to the historical context that the cohort is fixed to, this cohort effect means that it is not possible to compare the sampled cohort with the lives of earlier or later cohorts. It can be a challenge to establish the extent to which an effect is a result of respondents getting older or due to having been born at a particular point in history.

Nationally representative longitudinal data improves the understanding of changes to well-being over time, the impact of life cycle changes (transitions) and transformative turning points. Longitudinal evidence will support the evaluation of macro-level societal changes (economy, cultural and social) and micro-level changes (mobility, family situation, skills etc.) on well-being. It helps to identify important periods for effective policy intervention in an individual’s life cycle. A longitudinal survey enables policymakers to identify policy areas with the greatest transformative potential. Longitudinal evidence therefore helps to design targeted high-impact policies and offers substantial cost benefits in the long-term. A nationally representative survey can be compared across EU member states and will allow policymakers to identify what works best in what national context.

10.4.2 **Option 2: Locational Birth Cohort (LBC)**

A new, pan-European longitudinal birth cohort survey from birth to 25 based on targeted locations across Europe would facilitate elements of the above but without the ability for a full national comparison. A locational birth cohort (LBC) is a single-sample survey or census of children born in a specific, often narrowly defined, time period, representative of a well-defined, sub-national regional geography. The analytic potential of the LBC is the same as for the NBC albeit that the inferences drawn are representative of the sample geography. The main advantage of an LBC is the ability to have greater precision in the geographical and local aspects of the analysis. This may be useful where local policies are thought to have important effects and where the socio-economic character of local areas within the sampled area are diverse. The LBC suffers from the same cohort specificity problems as the NBC as described above. The main additional disadvantage is that it is not possible to draw an inference to the country as a whole, this is the sacrifice for the richness of local context. While it is possible to analyse the effects of national social policies, it is not possible to generalise to the rest of the country. Since this option is not nationally representative it is not be possible to draw policy relevant conclusions from cross-national comparisons of the data.
This option highlights European diversity beyond the nation state. Rather than exploring national impact of macro level policies it would bring to the fore what works best in locally specific contexts. A local focus is innovative because it departs from the normative national level perspective on governance in a multi-level governance EU. If tailored to specific local contexts policy may be more effective and efficient. From an EU perspective, this option is suitable to identify regions across the EU which ‘behave’ in a similar way (may face similar societal challenges) and thus may have identical policy needs. However, the nation remains the dominant level of policy development and implementation and it is an important framework for local context.

10.4.3 Option 3: National Accelerated Birth Cohorts (NABC)

A new, pan-European ‘accelerated’ birth cohort survey with a series of age specific cohorts from birth to 25 based on nationally representative samples in each Member State is a significant variation on the previous two options. The NABC option is, in essence, at least two NBCs rolled out in parallel on different age cohorts. In this sense, they are independent surveys as there are different sampling designs and different survey instruments. What unites them is a common purpose – to study a single set of phenomena for a range of age cohorts as each cohort gets older. This structure has the advantage of being able to compare different cohorts from the outset contributes to early analysis of age effects.

The NABC option introduces operational complexity much of which is front-loaded. A range of survey instruments need to be developed and tested. It is likely that there will be multiple modes of data collection in relation to the different ages of the respondent groups. The administrative and management requirements of an NABC are higher than for an NBC. This is a direct consequence of the need to roll out a series of surveys in parallel. A larger team is needed in order to work on each aspect of the survey design, instrument development. Testing, data processing, documentation and analysis.

The NABC structure produces policy relevant information across several cohorts of young people and enables policy makers to compare life cycle changes and policy impact across different cohorts within waves and, as time progresses, same age cohorts across time. The survey helps to identify transition and intervention points and may make policy design more efficient and interventions more effective. The wealth and complexity of data allows researchers to make multidimensional comparisons and enables macro-level programme process evaluation and policy adjustment for subsequent waves. Overall policy effort and effort in specific policy areas (education, child care provision, family welfare etc.) can be compared across different regions in EU member states.
10.4.4 Option 4: Locational Accelerated Birth Cohorts (LABC)

The LABC option is the same as the NABC methodology except the sample are representative of a well-defined, sub-national regional geography. Other aspects of the LABC methodology are the same as for the NABC. The LABC benefits from the same advantages as the LBC in that it has the ability to provide more detailed geographic analysis, and can provide more detailed locally specific contextual data. Similarly, the effects of local social policies are more effectively analysed than with a national sample. As with the LBC the main disadvantage of the LABC is that it is not possible to draw an inference to the country as a whole, this is the sacrifice for the richness of local context. While it is possible to analyse the effects of national social policies, it is not possible to generalise to the rest of the country.

The administrative and management implications of an LABC are similar to that of an NABC, such that a larger team will be needed compared to an LBC in order to support each of the different surveys that comprise the accelerated design. As with option 3 the LABC produces policy relevant information across several cohorts of young people and enables policy makers to compare life cycle changes and policy impact across different cohorts within waves and, as time progresses, same age cohorts across time.

10.4.5 Which Sort of Longitudinal Design Did the Delphi Respondents Prefer?

A majority (73%) of Delphi respondents considered that a cross-European longitudinal survey was desirable, with 56% considering it to be very desirable. While the first Delphi questionnaire did not arrive at a clear consensus amongst the experts about the most appropriate survey design, there was a sufficiently strong preference for some form of cohort survey, with 57% indicating preference for a cohort survey while 43% chose a household panel design, to warrant taking this forward in the future rounds of the process. When asked about further options in the second round, respondents indicated a preference for an accelerated cohort design where data collection would start simultaneously with different age cohorts, each covering a specific life span. This contrasts with both a single narrow age based cohort design which traces a single age cohort as they grow up and a wide age sample which does not differentiate specific age cohorts. The accelerated cohort design was particularly popular for respondents working in policy as illustrated in Fig. 10.1.

When asked about the geographical area that a survey should represent there was a clear preference among researchers and NGOs for national country coverage as opposed to something more localised such as a sub-national region (Table 10.2). That policy makers see the benefit of a more direct geographic link between evidence and policy is to be expected and suggests that for national
survey samples, they ought to be large enough to be able to accommodate a sub national geographical analysis.

### 10.4.6 Finalising the Choice

At a specially convened meeting of the MYWeB project the results of the Delphi surveys plus a detailed exposition of the financial, technical and political feasibility and scientific value of the different options were discussed. At the end of this meeting each team scored the four options in relation to the criteria below:

#### 10.4.6.1 Technical Feasibility

- Have key elements of the methodology been used successfully before?
- Can the methodology be used with equal success in all European Member States?
- Can the methodology overcome the problem of cumulative attrition?
- Will new research infrastructure be required to deliver the survey?

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**Table 10.2 Desired survey coverage by respondents’ background**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>NGO/other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/regional</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 10.1 Survey design preference by respondents’ background**

Research Policy NGO/other

A narrow age based cohort study 3.26 3.54 3.56
An accelerated cohort design 4.01 4.40 3.70 3.64 3.82
A wide age sample

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10.4.6.2 Political Feasibility

• Can the option deliver results that fill significant gaps in current knowledge?
• Can the option deliver timely results?
• Can the option achieve continuity in funding and research direction over its lifetime?

10.4.6.3 Scientific Value

• Does the option identify policy needs?
• Can the option be used to evaluate policy effects?
• Can the option help to monitor policy outcomes?

10.4.6.4 Financial Feasibility

• What is the scale of cost relative to ‘do nothing’?

Each option was scored on a scale of 1–10 against the criteria set out above. Based on the Delphi survey we assume that technical, political and financial feasibility should have equal weight. Therefore, where there was more than one criteria defined for a domain the average of the scores were used to arrive at a single score for each of the three domains.

At the end of the scoring, option 3, the National Accelerated Birth Cohort was the clear preference, scoring a weighted average of 6.92, with the NBC in second place with 6.04. Both versions of the local cohort surveys scored less than 6. The accelerated cohort survey design appears to have the edge over others because, as well as being able to deliver nationally representative prospective cohort data, it would start meeting policy needs within the policy cycle through cohort comparisons from the onset of data collection.

10.5 Moving Forward with an ELSCYP

It is all very well for a pan European project to have determined that an accelerated cohort survey ought to be developed, but quite a different thing to actually bring it into being. The MYWeB project highlighted the technical challenges, which are substantial, but the findings suggest that it is feasible. Perhaps of primary importance, however, is to further develop the case for such an ELSCYP along with the bodies that are central to securing the next steps in the process. Feasibility in itself is no guarantee of moving forward. The next steps require that the work of MYWeB is built upon and arguments are made in national and pan-European fora where those who take decisions about science and policy funding are made aware of the views of g.pollock@mmu.ac.uk
international experts on the importance of an ELSCYP as a basis for a better understanding of child well-being and policies which can underpin and enhance it. The need to convince national, let alone international, funding bodies to provide substantial backing for longitudinal surveys requires more than rational scientific arguments. Success is likely also to depend on the ability of scientists to build the case in a broad political context by lobbying different layers and sectors of governing structures. The development of longitudinal surveys takes time, not just because they are complex in a technical sense but also because they require a complex set of negotiations with funding stakeholders in a range of government departments (Wall and Williams 1970; Pearson 2017). Coordinating this in each Member State of the EU would be impossible but for the research Framework Programmes and their focus on mid to long term research infrastructural requirements (European Commission 2017).

We partially addressed this in the Delphi where we asked questions about political considerations which need to be addressed in regards to securing the support of governments and national research organisations who, in all likelihood, would be central to providing the finance. When considering the political feasibility of a longitudinal child and youth well-being survey, respondents largely agreed that it is important that Member State governments are supportive of the survey if it is to be implemented (99% agree). Similar results were obtained in relation to the need to demonstrate that the survey will have continuing policy relevance for many years to come (99% agree). The importance of support from national research organisations and NGOs followed a similar pattern (96% and 90% agreeing respectively).

Chapter 9 provided a cost benefit analysis that shows that it is tenable to assert that an ELSCYP would be at least cost-neutral in terms of the likelihood of policy interventions being based on good evidence and therefore better able to result in effective policies which are also more efficient. While only 41% of our panel of experts considered an ELSCYP to be financially sustainable, much higher proportions saw improvements in well-being as more important, potentially offsetting such concerns. For example, the majority of respondents indicated that improving data coverage is more important than constraining the cost. This is especially the case for respondents working in research (61%) compared to those working in policy (52%) and NGOs (50%). Furthermore, experts agreed that the economic benefits of improved well-being far exceed the cost of a longitudinal survey (94%) and that a longitudinal survey would support policy makers to improve policy design and impact and make policies more efficient (98%). Finally, 96% felt that evidence gathered by such a survey would contribute to improved well-being.

A longitudinal cohort development analysis allows the differentiation of age, period and cohort (Collins 2006; Miyazaki and Raudenbush 2000). Parallel cohorts allow a comparison of different cohorts from the outset. Comparing different cohorts drawn at the same or at a similar point in time is not a longitudinal analysis, rather it is an age structured cross-sectional comparison. It does, however, contribute to early analysis of potential age effects. Using two cohorts, moreover, has the advantage of not fixing the survey to a single point in history, which gives partial control over acute period effects. In addition, it creates policy-relevant data for both cohorts starting from the first wave. The accelerated cohort design enables policy
impact evaluation as well as macro and micro level programme process evaluation. The on-going nature of the survey means that policy adjustments can be made and impact evaluations undertaken for subsequent cohorts. As with all longitudinal designs, it enables the identification of transition periods and turning points relevant to policy and helps to detect important periods for policy intervention. Moreover, it helps to identify important issues in high impact policy areas (for instance, education, family unit etc.). The accelerated cohort design is becoming more common as a choice for national survey infrastructures. The National Educational Panel Survey in Germany (Blossfeld et al. 2016; Von Maurice et al. 2016) Growing Up in Ireland (Watson et al. 2014) Growing Up Scotland (GUS 2012).

10.6 Conclusion: Taking Forward a Europe Wide National Accelerated Birth Cohort

This volume, based on the work of the MYWeB project, has demonstrated that there is a strong case to develop a longitudinal Europe-wide survey of children and young people’s well-being. The chapters have shown that there are a multitude of compelling reasons to take forward this vision premised upon a desire in Member States and the EU as a whole to promote child well-being. We have revealed that there are significant gaps in evidence across Europe from which assessments can be made about child well-being and that stakeholder groups represented in the Delphi survey have argued that it is both desirable and feasible to improve the evidence base of child well-being with a view towards improving policy development using data from a longitudinal survey.

While much progress has been made in developing adequate measures of surveying child well-being there remains much to do but we have demonstrated that it is technically possible to develop an international comparative questionnaire survey of young children. There are many challenges in developing a longitudinal survey of child well-being but there is a belief that these can be met and that part of the solution is to include, as far as is possible, the children and young people themselves in central aspects of the design and delivery of such a survey. Perhaps of greatest importance is that the potential policy benefits in terms of improving the well-being of children and young people, weighed against the infrastructural costs suggest that a longitudinal survey would be cost effective.

The key recommendations of the MYWeB project call for a new pan-European accelerated birth cohort to fill existing gaps in comparative data collected systematically over time on subjective well-being defined by solid theoretical and conceptual grounds by taking into account the views of children and young people. The Delphi survey of experts completed for the MYWeB project suggested this survey design with two age specific cohorts from birth to 25 based on nationally representative samples in each member state to be the most useful option for monitoring child well-being in the EU (Ozan et al. 2016). Other strands of work on MYWeB, as dis-
cussed throughout this volume, including a major review of existing surveys and survey methodology confirm this conclusion.

Few EU-based surveys come close to being an accelerated birth cohort survey of child well-being. The Growing up in Scotland (GUS) survey is conducted only in the devolved nation, so is not even conducted at the scale of a single EU member state. This well-established survey involves two cohorts of children and youth separated by 6 years (GUS 2012). Growing Up in Ireland, on the other hand, is a national longitudinal survey with parallel cohorts of infants and children. In Germany, the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) has multiple parallel age cohorts which track the progress of children and young people through the German education system. An ELSCYP as suggested here would, therefore, involve the setting up of ‘accelerated’ birth cohort surveys in each EU member state, with each national survey contributing to a comparable and complete pan-European dataset. The option favoured by the experts answering the MYWeB survey was for the cohorts to be followed from 0 to 25 years. With 2 to 3 years between cohorts seen as preferable.

Figure 10.2 shows one potential cohort structure for a Europe wide cohort survey with a birth cohort (age 0–1) and an infant cohort (aged 7–8) running in parallel.

This survey design would also contribute to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard in society. Children and young people are interested in being involved and hearing about how research influences policy. Critiques of surveys like the EU SILC assert that they perform poorly when it comes to surveying hard-to-reach groups (TARKI Social Research Institute 2010). A survey that com-

![Fig. 10.2 Two-cohort accelerated design](image-url)
prehensively captures the longitudinal well-being insights of children and young people across a culturally diverse region would be a European first.

Cohort surveys have long existed in national and sub-national contexts. Their importance in identification of problems and policy interventions is widely accepted. While some countries have been well served with a series of cohort surveys (in particular the UK and Germany), many others have had no such tradition. The MYWeB project has demonstrated the desire for and the technical feasibility of a Europe-wide cohort survey. A central challenge is to translate these findings into reality through firstly convincing key policy-makers and funders of the need for such a survey, secondly by developing a plan for the operational aspects of the infra-structural requirements and finally by developing the scientific tools required to mount such a survey.

References


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