FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision.

Freya Geinger

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck
Co-supervisor: Prof. Dr. Griet Roets

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Social Work

Academic year 2016–2017

GHENT
UNIVERSITY

Doctoral Advisory Committee

Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck (supervisor)
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. Dr. Griet Roets (co-supervisor)
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. Dr. Karla Van Leeuwen
University of Leuven, Department of Parenting and Special Education

Prof. Dr. Thomas Block
Ghent University, Department of Political Science

Acknowledgements

…

A long time ago – I was only nine years old – my favourite teacher once left me a note: “I hope that one day you will blossom and become a butterfly”. At that time I did not realise exactly what she meant by that, neither did I know how to do this. I did know, however, that it was a valuable message that should be cherished and kept in mind as I grew older. In the years that followed, I thought that the road ahead was one that was linear, clear, and predictable, as long as I could manage and organise myself and my life well enough. The contrary was true, however. No matter how hard I tried, whenever there were euphoric moments where I had the feeling that I was almost there, life took a turn and offered moments that made me realise that I was not. Life seemed quite unpredictable and not linear at all, there were several bumps and pitfalls, many ups but also many downs. This is also what I experienced over the past four years of doing research. Luckily, I could rely on the support and help of many others.

Regarding this research project, I first of all would like to thank my promoter Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck for picking me up at the end of my Master’s degree, for believing in me, more than I sometimes did, for putting me back on track over and over again, especially halfway the process, for supporting me, but also for challenging me, for clarifying my thoughts and ideas, for many analytical insights along the way and for the small, pop-up encounters at your office when I needed you. I truly mean what I say: without you I would not have been able to do this.

Together with Michel, I also would like to thank my co-promoter Prof. dr. Griet Roets. Thank you for being there, for seeing me, for supporting me and for confirming me that I was doing ok. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and for keeping an eye on me.

There were, however, also many others that helped to bring this PhD project to fruition, including Prof. Dr. Thomas Block and Prof. Dr. Karla Van Leeuwen. Thank you so much for being members of my guidance committee and for your honest and inspiring feedback and suggestions. A special thanks also goes to the ex-miners and the former and current policy makers I spoke with, and to all the families and professionals who participated in my research, although I cannot identify them by name due to confidentiality reasons. But still, thank you so much for letting me in, for the welcome feeling you gave me, for sharing your thoughts and your personal life with me, for your honesty, and for trusting me. Words fail to express how thankful I am for that. Further, I also want to express my gratitude to all the members of the local network child poverty in Limburg, and in particular Mieja Engelen, Wendy Maesen and Tiziana Marini, Ilse Keppers, and Lies Vanheusden, Cindy Serrani and Renilde Nulens, along with their network. Thank you for allowing me to participate and follow-up with the network moments, for sharing local stories and issues with me, for helping me to get acquainted with the local level, and for giving me feedback on my research. I also want to express my appreciation to Kind en Gezin (Child and Family), and to Diederik Vancoppenolle, Ellen Hoefnagels, Tine Sinnaeve and Ilse Coemans in particular, for allowing and supporting me to recruit respondents and for bringing me into contact with the local professionals of the infant consultation schemes of Kind en Gezin in Bilzen, Maasmechelen, and Genk. To these local professionals I also want to express my true gratefulness. Josiane and Mimi, thank you for introducing me and for the organisational back-up. Karima and Fatima, thank you your Arabic translation skills and for bringing me into contact with the families who wanted to participate further. A special thanks also goes to Engin and Hilde. Engin, thank you for your Turkish translation skills, for allowing me to stay at your place while doing research, for showing me around, and for the wonderful dinners and informal talks. Hilde, thank you for letting me stay with your family and for sharing your experiences as a nurse with Kind en Gezin. You guys made my time in Limburg extra special and so wonderful!

Further, I would like to thank my colleagues, and in particular the colleagues with whom I shared an office. Thank you so much for being there to talk and reflect with me during my research process, but also for sharing laughter, for supporting me when I was having a rough time, for the out-of-office time together, for making me forget the stress, for the neck massages, and so on. I truly hope that we stay in touch the following years.

Last but not least, I want to thank my family, my close friends, good acquaintances, and my beloved. Thank you for allowing me to put time and effort in this research, often at the expense of time and energy to meet up, especially during the last couple of months. Thanks for asking how I was doing, for cheering me up or for sending me a nice message. Thanks for encouraging me and for helping me to relax and go dancing. Thank you all so much for being there and for watching over me. I truly appreciate it and consider myself lucky to have such a supportive network to rely on.

…

Freya, June 30th 2017

Table of contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding”

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed -

1.1 Setting the scene

At the beginning of this PhD study, in 2013, the Flemish government had just launched “The Strategic Action programme for Limburg Squared” or short “SALK²”, in response to the looming closure of “Ford Genk” and its (in)direct suppliers. This concerns the main car factory in Limburg, one of the Flemish provinces of Belgium (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b). The closure of this main industrial sector, which was estimated to account for a job loss of approximately 8,200 people in Limburg and 12,000 in Flanders (Peeters & Vancauteren, 2013), was caused by the financial crisis of 2008 that began in the US and gradually spread across Europe and Asia (Verbrugghe, 2011). It is one of many examples of how “the most serious economic recession the European Union (EU) has ever faced” (European Commission, 2012, p. 6) impacts upon a more local level in terms of both economic challenges as well as social challenges in particular. That is, social inequalities tend to increase in times of economic downturn and massive unemployment, which puts more people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Chzhen, 2014; Eurofound, 2014; Goldberg, 2012; Hanan, 2012; Somarriba, Zarzosa, & Pena, 2015). Consequently, not only does the need for social support measures and thus the demand on social protection systems intensify, but so does the demand for austerity in policy (OECD, 2014; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014).

Interestingly, although Farnsworth and Irving (2012) have shown how the economic crisis “is best understood as a variety of crises” (p. 133) because it affected different countries differently due to national characteristics, institutional structures and local policy responses, SALK² precisely seems to emit the (inter)national tendency to put the fight against *child poverty* high on the social policy agenda (see Eurofound, 2014; Karanikolos et al., 2013; Mahon, 2010; Martorano, 2014; OECD, 2014; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014; Vlaamse Regering, 2013b). This policy response is part of a broader *social investment paradigm* which has characterised Western welfare states since the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries due to

new emerging socio-economic, demographic and political challenges (Cantillon, 2011; Giddens, 1998; Lorenz, 2016; Rosanvallon, 1995), and which, especially in European welfare states, has shifted the relationship between the family and the state in terms of care and responsibilities (Williams, 2001). Within such a social investment discourse, the aim is to better target and condition social spending, and increase the efficiency of social protection measures (Cox, 1998; Dwyer, 2004; Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012). In order to do that, *the best way* forward is considered to be investment in human capital, by shifting the focus towards equalising opportunities, instead of equalising outcomes (Allen, 2011; Mahon, 2010; Staab, 2010; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2008). Consequently, education and labour market activation programs, and especially investments in the early years (age 0–3) through integrated early childhood education and care services (ECEC), and parent support programmes (e.g., Sure Start, Triple P) are increasingly considered the most effective way to level the playing field (Allen, 2011; Barnett, 2011; Doherty, 2007; Eurydice, 2009).

According to several studies, there are good reasons to fight (child) poverty by investing in human capital, especially in the early years (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Eurydice, 2009; Shonkoff, 2010). Nevertheless, several scholars have also expressed their worries about conceptualisations of social investment that are being narrowed down to improve parenting and children's development, as these narrow conceptualisations risk overlooking and failing to address the broader, structural conditions where parents and children (have to) live that are not entirely in their control (Clarke, 2006; Gray, 2014; Lee, 2014b; Lister, 2003; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). In so doing, this risks shifting the responsibility to care, away from the welfare state and towards individual parents and children (Featherstone, 2006; Williams, 2001). This is a critique that is, for instance, given with regard to Sanders, Markie-Dads, and Turners (2003), Bockel (2010) or the developers of Sure Start (Department for Education, 2013), as they focus on parenting and parent support only, in order to address problems that are often structural in nature (e.g., poverty) or in order to help parents function better in difficult contexts. Social investment, however,

does not entail a narrow focus on parenting and children per se, as is shown by scholars who have argued for wider, structural family support measures alongside parenting interventions (D'Addato & Williams, 2014; Macvarish, 2014; Martin, 2013; Ostner & Schmitt, 2008). There is even a strand of social work research that holds a similar line of thought, yet aspires for social justice and human dignity (Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012; O'Brien, 2011). All too often, however, the dominant rationale remains a mere economic one; *investing* in the future citizens of tomorrow (Lister, 2003; Tisdall, 2006).

These are, at least, interesting developments, especially with regard to the historical dimension of Western welfare states. Western welfare states – especially in continental Europe (Esping-Andersen, 1990) – were initially focused on social protection and the redistribution of resources in order to address societal problems (e.g., poverty). Recently, in times of socio-economic and political turmoil or, as Lee (2014a, p. 72) claims, when the "wider society offers little possibility for action and intervention", the dominant focus has shifted towards human capital investment strategies (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Lister, 2003, 2004; Platt, 2005; Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2016) that aim to redistribute risks instead of wealth (Beck, 1992) in order to address societal problems (e.g., *child* poverty) (Taylor-Gooby, Dean, Munro, & Parker, 1999).

In sum, critical social work scholars have pointed at tensions between what they consider an increasingly economic and neoliberal tendency to combat societal problems on the one side and social work principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity (IFSW, 2014) on the other side. In what follows, we briefly sketch some of the present-day social investment tendencies in social policies that are subject to these criticisms.

1.1.1 (Child) poverty in times of economic downturn

As already mentioned, a first tendency concerns the (inter)national shift in social policy from *poverty* to *child poverty* in times of change (Clarke, 2006; European Commission, 2013; Lee, 2014b; Mahon, 2010; Martorano, 2014; Richardson, 2010; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014). This shift is often legitimised by – mainly developmental and neuroscientific – research that highlights the negative impact of poverty on the development of children, and that this impact may persist in adulthood through a lower level of educational achievement and health as well as an increased likelihood of unemployment and welfare dependence (Duncan et al., 1998; Eurydice, 2009; Shonkoff, 2010). In this view, it is argued that children's cognitive development increases the most between the age of 0 and 3 years old (Shonkoff, 2010). However, children with a high cognitive development, who grew up in a family with a low socio-economic status (based upon educational level and/or on family income), seem to score worse at a later age than children who initially had a low cognitive development, but grew up in a family with a high socio-economic status (Eurydice, 2009; Feinstein, 2003). This also seems to be true in terms of what is considered to be the broader development of the child, in social and emotional terms (Melhuish et al., 2006; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004).

Critical scholars have asserted that, from a rights-based perspective, it is important to keep in mind that poverty is not only a violation of children's rights, but a violation of the basic social rights of parents too (Dean, 2015; Lister, 2004). It is well-documented that the early years are not shaped only by individual characteristics (e.g., genetic constellation), but rather by a *combination* of individual characteristics with family background characteristics, environmental contexts (e.g., work, school, social network, neighbourhood) and wider social, historical, political and economic contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2001). Yet, the focus in social policy on *child* poverty and the emphasis on children's development, might suggest that

it is only about children (and their future), cutting them loose from their family and the conditions under which that family (has to) live, that may lead to poverty (Mestrum, 2011; Platt, 2005; Schiettecat et al., 2016). Poverty is, first of all, considered a *structural*, societal problem that has its roots in the broader social, political and economic structures of society, and that encompasses a combination of multiple material as well as immaterial problems, resulting in processes of social exclusion within different life domains (Alcock, 1999; Formesyn et al., 2017; Lister, 2004; Mestrum, 2011; Platt, 2005). As such, it is argued that it is socially unjust to reduce anti-poverty policies to policies that focus on children and parents from a mere educational and individual perspective only, for it risks pointing the focus in policy solely at children and parents who need to *improve* (and thus are to be blamed if they do not succeed) (Morabito, Vandenbroeck, & Roose, 2013; Schiettecat, 2016), rather than also addressing the social and structural dimension (e.g., context, stratification patterns) of poverty (Anthony, King, & Austin, 2011; Roets, Roose, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013; Schiettecat, 2016; Vandenbroeck & Van Lancker, 2014). In this vein, for instance, Williams (2001, p. 468) argued that the debate should not be only about paid work, but about a proper work/life balance based upon a "political ethics of care", in order to allow human flourishing. This implies that there needs to be a balance between an "ethic of paid work" that underpins current social investment reforms and appeals for individuals' responsibility to be autonomous, entrepreneurial and self-providing through paid work; often as a condition of being eligible for benefits, and an "ethic of care" that points to the political and public dimension of care, and appeals for the responsibility of the welfare state by providing qualitative social services (including ECEC services) as well as by protective, redistributive measures on different policy levels and in different sectors (e.g., health, housing, work, income, education) (Van Lancker, 2014; Vandenbroeck & Van Lancker, 2014). Such a debate is inherently political in nature, linked with the broader social inequalities in society. In this respect and especially with regard to issues of poverty and unemployment for instance, ECEC services are, in certain European countries, attributed an important social function (European

Commission, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2009). This means that they have an important structural role to play in the fight against processes of marginalisation in the broader society, by opening up for people living in disadvantage and by providing good quality, affordable, universal and flexible services (Vandenbroeck, 2009; Williams, 2001). In so doing, this not only allows parents to go to school again and/or to apply for a job, but also to support parents, to meet other parents or to give parents some space to be at ease.

1.1.2 The meaning of ECEC …

A second tendency includes the finding that, as already mentioned above, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are increasingly considered important in the fight against (child) poverty. Research has indeed confirmed that ECEC services can mitigate negative effects of poverty on children and are a good way to invest in the early years, for ECEC has positive effects on the early development of children that may last until adolescence (Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2013; Melhuish et al., 2015; Melhuish et al., 2006; Sylva et al., 2004). According to some (predominantly US-based) scholars, this is especially true for children with a low socio-economic background (Barnett, 2011; Burchinal & Cryer, 2003; Burger, 2010). Other studies, however, have argued that ECEC only has positive effects on the development of children, *if* it considers accessible high-quality ECEC services (Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014; Melhuish et al., 2006; Sylva et al., 2004; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). In reality however, ECEC services precisely seem to struggle with being accessible for all parents and children (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; Lazzari, 2014; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds (ethnic minority and low-income families) in particular, enrol less often in ECEC, and when they do, they often make use of low-quality services (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Consequently, increasing the quality and the accessibility of ECEC provision has become a growing concern for international governments and organisations (European Commission, 2011, 2013; OECD, 2006; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre,

2008). The European Commission (2014) even defined equal access to ECEC as one of the five key principles for strengthening the quality of ECEC within the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Interestingly, despite the finding that ECEC services are unequally accessible, there seems to be a growing consensus within a number of (inter)national, as well as local, policy documents (e.g., SALK[2]) about the promising *future* benefits of ECEC, such as equalising opportunities, reducing poverty, and preventing future problems in terms of welfare dependence and criminality (Allen, 2011; Bockel, 2010; European Commission, 2011; OECD, 2006; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2008). A central argument hereby is the economic return on investment; investing in the early years far outweighs future public expenditure (Allen, 2011, Barnett, 2011). This, however, is precisely what scholars have criticised, for the meaning of ECEC in relation to the fight against (child) poverty increasingly risks being seen in terms of an economic perspective, rather than in terms of the pursuit of human dignity and social justice (Garrett, 2009; Lazzari, 2014; Tsui & Cheung, 2004). Underpinned by an economic quest, ECEC services risk being conceptualised as an *instrument* for tackling (child) poverty, mainly because it is economically unfavourable. Underpinned by a quest for human dignity and social justice however, ECEC services may be conceptualised as public social services that belong to the *fundamental rights* of every citizen (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Garrett, 2009; Lazzari, 2014). These underlying rationales, in turn, bring particular nuances within the internal organisation of ECEC services; for instance in terms of the quality and accessibility of ECEC services (Garrett, 2009; Lazzari, 2014; Penn, 2011).

The dominant story about quality, includes an increasingly instrumental and economic narrative highlighting the high returns on investment if “only the correct technology (i.e. quality) is applied in the right manner” (Moss, 2016, p. 10). In this view, quality mainly includes a multitude of dimensions related to education and care in terms of a child’s cognitive, emotional and social development that can be *measured* and are often *standardised* (Burchinal &

Cryer, 2003; Burger, 2010; OECD, 2006; Penn, 2011). In this view it is argued that there is nothing wrong with attributing different functions to ECEC as well as to make sure that services are of high-quality, but that it is important to take into account that quality " […] is neither neutral nor self-evident, but saturated with values and assumptions. It is a constructed concept" (Moss, 2016, p. 10). As such, what is considered as *quality* strongly depends on power and the context in which one is situated and thus, might include other (less measurable) dimensions as well. Moreover, what is considered as high-quality, might be measured and scored very differently between countries and within countries (Moss, 2016). In this view, Moss (2016) advocated for opening up to other stories about quality, for ECEC is first of all a political and ethical practice, based on different and sometimes conflicting perspectives, rather than a technical practice (Moss, 2016). Especially with regard to ECEC's social function, this is important (Vandenbroeck, 2009).Taking different perspectives into account as well as the meaning-making of others too – here, parents with young children (age 0 to 3) as well as childcare providers – as to what is considered quality, as well as to the circumstances in which they (have to) live and work (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Moss, 2016; Roets et al., 2013), allow for alternative ways of seeing to complement dominant discourses (Lorenz, 2016). Only this truly reflects democracy, one of the central values of social work (IFSW, 2014), for it opens up debate and stimulates critical reflection about *what works for whom* instead of externally defining *what should work for all* (Vandenbroeck et al., 2012). It is precisely disagreement that forms the essence of democracy (Biesta, 2007; Vandenbroeck, Boonaert, Van der Mespel, & De Brabandere, 2009; Vandenbroeck et al., 2012).

The same is true in regards to what is considered as accessibility. All too often, interventions to improve accessibility in the state of the art literature, are considered to be restricted to clear-cut and often externally defined, dimensions. These include the way in which services are *available* which implies the extent to which there is a reachable, sufficient and differentiated supply of ECEC, the way in which services are *affordable*, which includes the financial and symbolic costs that parents might encounter, as well as the way in

which services are *accessible* in terms of the various obstacles that parents might bump into (e.g., language barriers and procedures) and also in terms of the kinds of relationships that exist between social workers and parents (Bouverne-De Bie, Claeys, De Cock, & Vanhee, 2003; Vandenbroeck, De Visscher, Van Nuffel, & Ferla, 2008; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Often this is realised through organisational adjustments. See in this respect, for instance, the debate about the importance of integrated working (Allen, 2003; Broadhead, Meleady, & Delgado, 2008; European Commission, 2013; Frost, 2005; Warin, 2007) and progressive universalism (Bing et al., 2011; Brady & Burroway, 2012; Doherty, 2007; Warren-Adamson, 2001); two organisational approaches that are applied to create better and more efficient services with regard to the fight against (child) poverty. Less is known, however, in policy and practice, about whether the service and the supply are experienced by parents as *usable* or, in other words, as supportive and matched to their demand, and whether the meaning and function of ECEC is *comprehensible* or attuned to parents' sense-making in terms of beliefs, values and practices (Bouverne-De Bie et al., 2003; Vandenbroeck et al., 2008). These dimensions are also considered crucial in promoting inclusive or accessible ECEC services for *all* (Bouverne-De Bie et al., 2003; Lazzari, 2014; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). In order to do so, it is argued that the point is not to balance demand and supply in a more efficient way, but rather to engage in a continuous, democratic process of negotiation between social services and parents, in order to be able to take account of the sometimes complex and ambiguous lives of families (Roets, Dean, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2016).

1.1.3 Observations and reflections from a lifeworld-oriented perspective

To summarise, it may be clear that, in relation to parents with young children in times of economic downturn, many of the current dominant social investment tendencies are presented as self-evident, yet they are contested and criticised in light of the key principles that underpin social work: social justice, human

rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity (IFSW, 2014). Not only do these tendencies hold a risk to dismiss the broader, structural dimension of societal problems, like unemployment and poverty, which in turn, risks translating these problems into individual problems that must be addressed with individually oriented measures. They also risk overlooking alternative, more democratic ways of seeing, in favour of an external point of view that is underpinned by an economic, neoliberal rationale, which aims for an economic return on investment through more efficiency and investments in human capital.

In this respect and notwithstanding the contested nature of these tendencies, it remains remarkable that while these tendencies and criticisms concern parents and children, they seem to exclude the way in which parents and children differently experience and make meaning of changing contexts in relation to their life and to parenthood, and what they consider supportive (Lister, 2003; Schiettecat, 2016). This is also true in relation to parents who experience involuntary unemployment in harsh economic times (Dyson, Gorin, Hooper, & Cabral, 2008). Thus, while we actually know little about the possible (new) concerns and support needs of parents with children in times of economic downturn, policy documents continue to give the impression that they know what is going on and what the best way to handle it is. In this vein, it is argued that such an external point of view places parents outside the democratic debate and presents the choices that are made as uncontested and self-evident (Schiettecat, 2016; Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2014). As a result, there is little room for the unpredictable, for that which does not fit, or for disagreement (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012; Schiettecat et al., 2016; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009).

Everyday life is inherently complex, ambiguous and relational in nature, intertwined with others as well as the broader systemic forces in society (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Lorenz, 2008, 2016). Socio-political and socio-economic upheavals thus not only challenge policy makers and social work practices, but they also change the conditions in which parents (have to) live,

work and raise their children (Chzhen, 2014; Harper & Marcus, 2003; Somarriba et al., 2015). A thorough understanding of processes of in- and exclusion, thus requires actions on the level of policy, provision ánd parents (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Freire (1970, p. 68) moreover, stated that "one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding". Instead of externally defining what is to be done and what is to be considered as good practice, it is considered important from a rights-based perspective, to take account of the concrete, lived realities of parents. This allows to set people's individual lifeworld in relation to the broader system and, in turn, allows it to be critically assessed according to principles of human dignity and social justice (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013; Wright, 1959). In so doing, it becomes clear which resources (material, social, cultural) are experienced as constraints or opportunities to lead a life in which one can flourish (IFSW, 2014; Roets et al., 2013; Villadsen, 2007). In what follows and given the *raison d'être* of social work in relation to processes of in- and exclusion, it is precisely this quest for lived realities, experiences and concerns in times of economic downturn that forms the core of this dissertation.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the international definition of social work (IFSW, 2014), the raison d'être or the essence of social work lays in its *social* nature or, in other words, in the act of seeing personal issues in relation to the public, that is the broader historical, social, cultural, political and economic context, in order to "affirm social citizenship, ensure rights and promote social equality" (Lorenz, 2016, p. 4). In this respect, and as mentioned above, several research studies have criticised the dominant social investment paradigm that increasingly finds resonance in social work (see Clarke, 2006; Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Richardson, 2010; Tisdall, 2006). Not only holds this paradigm a danger of translating public issues as private issues instead of the other way

around, it also risks overlooking the concrete, lived realities of citizens in favour of an externally defined problem assessment and similar interventions. This, however, tends to overlook social work's social and political role, including ethical questions of justice and equality (Williams, 2001), and consequently, it might exclude even more (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Lister, 2003; Richter & Andresen, 2012; Roets et al., 2013).

In contexts of economic downturn and unemployment, when the issue of poverty and social exclusion is put high on the agenda, these critiques become very salient (Goldberg, 2012; Richardson, 2010; Strier, 2013). Although this context highlights once again how major economic events impact individuals in terms of the conditions in which they (have) to live, work and raise children, and thus, how it is socially unjust to translate the consequences of these broader circumstances into an individual problem of parents, we have illustrated how the latter is still too often overlooked in (inter)national social policy responses. We also know very little about the extent to which parents in the current reorganisation of services and interventions are better listened to.

Nonetheless, it is not so much our intention to say that the current evolutions are bad, but rather, to highlight possible dangers and *other ways of seeing* (Burke, 1965). Just as economic downturn and sudden job loss might shake up one's life, we aim to shake up and question dominant ways of seeing and acting in order to build renewed and more dynamic, multifaceted understandings of the complexities of in- and exclusion processes for parents with young children (from birth to the age of three) in contexts of economic downturn, as well as of the possible levers of support. We aim to do this by taking into account the concrete, lived experiences of parents with young children who live in regions that have been severely hit by economic downturn, including the ways in which social services support the emerging needs of these parents in the wider context of the organisation of the welfare state. Following Notredame (1994), the latter implies that we not only have to take a look at parents, but need to include the standpoints of the government and social services (here, ECEC services), because all three (and the relationships

between them) make up the fundamental actors of a social welfare state. Additionally, we add a fourth dimension, which we call “research”, for it is research that often forms the foundation and legitimation of many interventions in policy and practice. This leads to the following research questions:

- *How are local social policies in Limburg shaped in response to economic downturn and sudden unemployment, and what framing of (child) poverty do they hold?*

- *What does research say about the consequences of economic downturn and sudden unemployment on parents?*

- *What are the consequences of economic downturn and sudden unemployment according to parents with young children (0–3 years old) and what do they think is supportive?*

- *How do ECEC professionals, working in services for parents with young children, handle with policy demands on the one hand and concerns and questions of parents on the other hand?*

Before we turn to the methodological section and the content of this dissertation, we first highlight some of the important characteristics of our research context: the Province of Limburg.

1.3 Research context

LIMBURG

As mentioned in the introduction, Limburg is one of the Flemish provinces of Belgium that was recently hit by economic downturn and unemployment, due to the closure of its main car factory called ‘Ford Genk’ and its (in)direct suppliers, and that consequently developed a particular policy plan to restore the economic and social climate. Limburg’s experience of economic downturn and

unemployment makes it an appropriate research subject, which is made all the more interesting because it is not the first time that the province has experienced this kind of situation and developed a particular policy plan in response.

Figure 1: Limburg in Belgium – Adapted from Province of Limburg (2016a)

In what follows, we first highlight some facts and figures about the Province of Limburg. Second, we look back at its history since many of the province's current strengths and vulnerabilities, including the closure of Ford Genk, are partly rooted in a longer history that goes back to the 20th century, for it was the discovery of the coal mines in 1901 by André Dumont, followed by the rise of the automotive sector in the 1960s, that launched the province on a geographic, demographic, economic, social and international level, and eventually also struck it in a negative way. Such a historical dimension is additionally considered indispensable for developing a good understanding of the role of social work within shifting socio-economic and political contexts (Lorenz, 2007, 2016). We start with a general description of the broader (shifting) societal context during the rise and decline of both industrial sectors. Next, we turn to the socio-political context by digging deeper into the particular policy plans that were developed in response to both closures, as these policy plans were not only economic in nature, but also included several social

measures that shifted over time and held different rationales. This, in turn, tells us something about the nature of *the social* or the *raison d'être* of social work, which is currently being criticised for becoming detached from essential political and ethical questions of justice and equality, resulting in shifting private and public responsibilities in terms of well-being; especially in relation to what concerns families and children (Lorenz, 2016; Richter & Andresen, 2012; Williams, 2001).

1.3.1 Facts and figures

Limburg is inhabited by 863,425 people, which is the lowest demographic density of Flanders (356 inhabitants/ km² compared to 479 inhabitants/km² in the rest of Flanders). It is composed of 44 diverse municipalities that are spread across five areas. The northern area is characterised by the lowest demographic density (247 inhabitants/km²), followed by the south part of Limburg (283 inhabitants/km²). The latter is characterised by a rural landscape consisting of several villages. The east part of Limburg has a higher demographic density (365 inhabitants/km²) than Limburg as a whole, and is characterised by a rural landscape, also including some of the former coal mine municipalities. This is also true for the west part of Limburg, which has an even higher demographic density (430 inhabitants/km²). The fifth area, central Limburg, has the highest demographic density (558 inhabitants/km²) and is the more urban area of the province, which also consists of several former coal mining municipalities (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

Limburg is the second province of Flanders with the fewest number of people younger than 25 years old (229,547 or 26.6%) and children below the age of three (25,555 or 3%), compared to the whole population in 2016 (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Compared to the other provinces of Flanders, Limburg has the lowest birth rate, which has been continuously declining (Kind en Gezin, 2015b). Due to its rich history of migration, especially at the time of the coal mine industry, a quarter of the inhabitants (25.4%) in 2016 are of foreign origin (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). According to the most recent

statistics of 2013, 40.6% of all children below the age of 12 are of foreign origin (Kind en Gezin, 2015b). In 2015, almost a quarter (24.8%) of the newborns had a mother of a non-Belgian nationality and one-fifth (20.3%) of all the children born in 2015, speak no Dutch with his/her mother (Kind en Gezin, 2015b). Most migrants come from the Netherlands, followed by Turkey, Italy, Morocco and Poland (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Furthermore, Limburg has a low percentage of single parents (8.4%) compared to the total number of married (26.9%) and unmarried (6.1%) households with children. Regarding the number of children below the age of 12 living in single parent households, the percentage (10.2%) is also lower than the Flanders average (11.7%) (Kind en Gezin, 2015b).

In 2015, right after the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, the unemployment level in Limburg rose from 8% to 9.1% and in Flanders from 7.8% to 8% (Arvastat, 2016). Amongst the unemployed people, 45.6% were low-educated, 19.9% were minus 25 years old, 53% were male and, according to the most recent statistics of 2014, 38.1% were of non-Belgian origin (Arvastat, 2016; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Moreover, according to the most recent statistics of 2011, Limburg (together with Antwerp) has the highest number of families with children, with a low, gross, taxable annual income of less than €30,000 (23.1%) (Kind en Gezin, 2015b). The child poverty index increased from 11.8% in 2014 to 12.6% in 2015, which is higher than the average in Flanders (12.1%). Only the Flemish province of Antwerp has a higher child poverty index (15.32%). The child poverty index is also higher for children who have a mother of non-Belgian origin (29.9%) compared to children who have a mother of Belgian origin (6.5%) (Kind en Gezin, 2015b). Of the families with children living in poverty, 60.5% have problems related to income, employment or education (Kind en Gezin, 2015a).

1.3.2 Looking back

As mentioned above, many of the current strengths and vulnerabilities of Limburg, including the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, have

their roots in a longer history that goes back to the discovery of the coal mines. In what follows, we briefly elaborate on this and set the broader (shifting) societal context, before turning to its (shifting) socio-political context.

The coal industry

On a geographic level, the Province of Limburg evolved in the beginning of the 20th century from an area that consisted mainly of heather fields and small villages connected with a limited road network, to a more developed area with large mine districts, proper houses, gardens and several terrils (slag heaps), especially in the mine region (Beringen, Houthalen-Helchteren, Maasmechelen, Heusden-Zolder en Genk) (Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012; Voets & Boesmans, 1998). The economy evolved from a rural economy that was based on small-scale agriculture and house labour to a booming coal industry that placed the province on the international market (Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012; Voets & Boesmans, 1998). On a demographic level, the discovery of coal mines led to a rapid increase in the population, due to several migration waves of mainly low-educated people in order to attract a workforce, because there weren't enough local people available or willing to work in the mines. As such the population in the mine region increased from 2,000 people in 1901 to 200,000 people in 1991, and, in the 1930s for instance, more than 40% of the workforce was of foreign origin (Vandekerckhove, 1993). In the beginning, people from the immediate environment (e.g., the Netherlands) were attracted to the area; however, after WWI, East-European people moved to the area, and after WWII, many Italians came. Since the mine disaster of Marcinelle (1956) however, only Spanish and Greek people have come to Belgium. In the 1960s, when the coal mines were already in decline (see below), more Turkish people and, to a lesser extent, Moroccan people, were attracted to the area. Over the years, the wives and children of the miners also followed, which all explains the high number of migrant people living in Limburg; especially in the five coal mining municipalities (Bogaert et al., 1993; Voets & Boesmans, 1998). From a social point of view, the period of the coal mines is to be associated with a broad model of cooperation between the coal managers and the miners

– based upon the English ‘Garden cities’ – that was installed in order to bind miners to the company as well as to prevent social problems similar to the ones that had resulted elsewhere due to industrialisation. As Van Doorslaer and De Rynck (2012, p. 88) stated: “For the coal mine managers it was crucial that miners toed the line and remained faithful to the company. Houses and social services served as powerful instruments to do so”. As such, in exchange for being willing to work in the mine, miners were eligible for several benefits provided by the coal managers, such as cheap houses, education, child allowances and leisure activities. In so doing, the mine provided, but also controlled, every aspect of a man’s life, from cradle to grave (Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012).

Figure 2: Coal miners (Habex, 2013)

In the 1960s however, the coal mines started to decline due to the discovery of oil in the Middle East and the import of cheaper coal from abroad, which made the coal industry in Limburg unprofitable (Bogaert et al., 1993; Lingier, 2011). In 1966, the first coal mine closed down and, notwithstanding a short, but futile revival of the mining industry during the oil crisis in 1973, more closures followed in the 1980s. In 1992, the last coal mine of Limburg closed down (Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012). This period encompassed heavy strikes, not only because the main industrial sector of Limburg was in decline, but also

because 17,000 (often low-educated) miners would lose their job, their home and everything that was linked with it (Nelis & Vanhinsberg, 1989; Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012; Vandekerckhove, 1993). On top of that, the province already struggled with a high level of unemployment that was of a structural nature: there were not enough jobs for all the people due to the rapid increase in the population (e.g., baby boom and migration) which had put extra pressure on the labour market. Because of this, the industry was less diverse and educational enrolment was low (Bogaert et al., 1993). In 1985, the province already had an unemployment rate of 23% (or 75,000 people; miners not included). Women, youngsters, low-educated and migrant people were hit the most (Franssen, 1988).

The automotive industry

The development of several automotive companies in Limburg took place when the coal mines started to be unprofitable (1960s). Gradually the automotive sector, of which Ford Genk evolved as the biggest and main one, started to replace the coal industry and eventually provided a good alternative for several ex-miners.

Figure 3: Ford Genk (De Morgen, 2012)

However, 20 years after the last mine closure, on October 24th of 2012, it was announced that Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers had to close down as

well, due to the financial crisis of 2008 (Verbrugghe, 2011). The automotive sector was hit first as it had an overproduction, while the demand had decreased due to the crisis (Peeters & Vancauteren, 2013; Verbrugghe, 2011). Consequently, several automotive companies needed to fire people and the Ford factory in Genk had to close down, as it only used 48% of its total capacity (De Standaard, 2012). From the announcement of the closure in 2012 until the definite closure in 2014, heavy strikes took place, as for the second time, the main industrial sector of Limburg would collapse, causing 8,200 people in Limburg and 12,000 in Flanders in total to lose their jobs (De Standaard, 2012; Peeters & Vancauteren, 2013). Again this took place at a time when the unemployment level was quite high compared to the overall Flanders' rate (Arvastat, 2016; POM-ERSV Limburg, 2016) and again, the majority of the laid off people included low-educated people, often with a migrant background. In addition, the economic climate is different and less prosperous than it was at the time of the closure of the mines (Peeters & Vancauteren, 2013).

In sum, it is clear that notwithstanding the fact that both industrial sectors were once responsible for the existence of a booming province, they also installed several vulnerabilities in the province. While it has been said that Limburg processed the mine closures well (Bogaert et al., 1993), the fact that the automotive sector expanded the most and became the new main economic sector of the province made Limburg vulnerable again to future recessions. Moreover, although a large number of jobs were created between 1986 and 1991, it was only half of what was needed and the majority provided an uncertain work regime (part-time, 70%; temporary, 15%) (Bogaert et al., 1993). Consequently, the unemployment level in Limburg was consistently high, especially amongst women, migrant (Turkish and Moroccan) and low-educated young people (Bogaert et al., 1993; Lingier, 2011). While in the past, many jobs were created in the automotive sector, which aligned with the training of many ex-mine workers, today the number of open vacancies has increased since the end of 2014, but mainly in wholesale and retail, the service sector and the social sector (SALK Taskforce, 2015). For ex-workers who had worked in the manufacturing industry, this type of employment is often inadequate or at least

challenging to retrain themselves for. As Respondent 5 (personal communication, July 3, 2014) explains: “the industrial employment is decreasing, the service employment is increasing, technological development increases and more baggage is demanded from people; well than you get a group that cannot manage to do so and slips through the net”. Moreover, it seems that the number of jobs available is unequally divided. The eastern part of Limburg, Maasland, for instance, still has a shortage of jobs, a higher unemployment level and less access to neighbouring regions due to mobility problems (SALK Taskforce, 2015).

1.3.3 Local social policy responses

In order to set the (shifting) socio-political context of the Province of Limburg, a document analysis was conducted of the policy plans that were developed in response to the closure of the coal mines, as well as to the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers. These plans also aimed to restore the socio-economic climate. Additional literature was consulted and the data were enriched by exploratory interviews with key actors of each period, in order to gain an understanding of the underlying rationales behind these policy plans and the nature of the social measures that were taken (see **Table 1** for an overview). Interestingly, the resources, as well as the means to intervene, seem to have changed over time, especially in relation to social actions.

Table 1: Analysed materials

The closure of the coal mines (20th century)		
Policy plans:	Plan Gheyselinck (1986)	National reconversion plan; to initiate the closure of the coal mines
	The Future Contract for Limburg (1987-1996)	Flemish reconversion plan; a collaboration between the European, Belgian and Flemish governments as well as the Province of Limburg and the social

		partners; developed to restore the socio-economic climate
	Integrated Action Programme (1988)	Integrated action programme for Limburg (GAPL); the official contribution of Europe within the Future Contract for Limburg during the first five years
	First actualisation of the Future Contract for Limburg (1989)	Developed after the closure of the coal mines in the east; adoption of social measures
	Second actualisation of the Future Contract for Limburg (1992-1997)	All the coal mines were closed, yet the social and economic measures needed to be continued
Additional literature:	Bogaert et al. (1993)	Evaluation report after five years (1987-1991)
	Denolf & Martens (1991)	Research report about the labour market position of the ex-miners
	Donckier (1991)	Newspaper extracts of the 'Belang van Limburg' about the time of the closure of the coal mines
	Herpels (1992)	Extract about the European contribution in the Future Contract for Limburg, during the first five years, by the leading actor
	Lingier (2011)	Book about the history of community work that was initiated in Limburg and played an important role at the time of the mine closures
	Vandekerckhove (1993)	Book about the rise and decline of the coal industry
Key actors:	Respondent 1	former general manager of the Regional Development Organisation Limburg (GOM), responsible for the economic

		reconversion program
	Respondent 2	formerly active in the childcare project at the time of the reconversion
	Respondent 3	formerly active in community work, later also involved in social economy projects
	Respondent 4	director of community work Limburg
	Respondent 5	former governor of Limburg
	Respondent 6	former director of the social reconversion organisation (SIM)
	Respondent 7	former director of BLM

The closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers (21st century)

Policy plans:	SALK² (2013-2017)	Flemish reconversion policy, a collaboration between the Belgian and Flemish government as well as the Province of Limburg and the social partners; developed to restore the socio-economic climate
	Evaluation SALK²	Evaluation of SALK², one year after the closure
Additional literature:	Verbrugghe (2011)	Draft report impulse policy Genk, before SALK² and before the closure
	Peeters & Vancauteren (2013)	Summary of a research report about the impact and the future consequences of the closure
	Brijs (2012)	Newspaper article about the impact of the closure through the eyes of former employees

	De Standaard (2012)	Newspaper article about the announcement of the closure
Key actors:	Respondent 8	Currently employed at the Cabinet of Education; responsible for work and economy. Was also involved in the development of SALK and used to be responsible for education-related matters
	Respondent 9	Centre for support after economic redundancy
	Respondent 10	Currently employed at the economic and social department of the city of Genk (POM-ERSV Limburg); formerly involved in the social reconversion organisation (SIM) matters at the time of the reconversion.
	Respondent 11	Head of the Social Department of the city of Genk
	Respondent 12	Chair of the Public Service for Social Welfare (OCMW) in Genk

1.3.3.1 The closure of the coal mines

- Local policy plan

In response to the closure of the coal mines, two reconversion policies were developed in addition to the social welfare initiatives that were already present in the province. The first one, “Plan Gheyselinck”, was a national policy plan that was developed in 1986 by Thyl Gheyselinck; a crisis manager mandated by the national government, to restructure (but eventually close) the mines in Limburg within a period of ten years (Gheyselinck, 1986; Vandekerckhove, 1993). In order to do that, he received 99 billion Belgian Francs (€2.5 billion). This was used for the debts of the coal sector and for the reconversion;

including departure bonuses for miners. It was also invested in diversification projects, educational, cultural and recreational projects, and also in the creation of the 'Investment company of Limburg' (LIM) mandated to provide extra money to entrepreneurs who wanted to start a business in Limburg.

Parallel with this national plan, the European, Belgian and Flemish government as well as the Province of Limburg, signed in 1987 a second policy called "The Future Contract for Limburg" (1987-1996), which included a collective engagement to restore the social and economic climate of the province in order to work for a better future without the mining industry (Bogaert et al., 1993; Vandekerckhove, 1993; Vlaamse Executieve, 1987). As Gheyselinck managed to close the mines sooner than expected, a lot of money remained. This remaining money was divided amongst the national coal sector and the Flemish government, who each got 13 billion Belgian Francs (€322 million) (Bogaert et al., 1993). The Flemish government invested this money partly in other Flemish at-risk areas, partly in miner pensions and cheap loans that allowed ex-miners to buy a house and partly in the Future Contract for Limburg for the creation of a social reconversion programme (Bogaert et al., 1993). In what follows we will elaborate further on The Future Contract for Limburg.

- Local social policy discourses

The initial Future Contract for Limburg of 1987 (Vlaamse Executieve, 1987), was overly centred on economic topics (see **Annex I**). Its main goal was to reduce the unemployment level in Limburg to that of the average level of Flanders within a period of ten years. In order to do that, they worked to stimulate employment in the private industrial sector as well as in the tertiary and public sectors. Next, they aimed to develop several reconversion initiatives, and finally, they aimed to stimulate the level of participation in education, professional training and counselling (Bogaert et al., 1993; Vandekerckhove, 1993). These general goals resulted in the creation of an "Integrated Action Programme" (GAPL) consisting of more concrete actions that were situated in four different European funds: the European Fund for

Regional Development (EFRO), which concentrated on economic issues (including tourism and scientific research); the European Community for Coal and Steel (EGKS), which focused on the guidance and support of ex-miners; an agricultural fund (EOGFL) and the European Social Fund (ESF), which focused on social issues (read: professional training and education). Every domain, except for the agricultural fund, was led by a committee responsible for the execution of the actions after having had the permission to do so by the Permanent Working Group Limburg (PWL). These committees include: the GOM for EFRO, BLM for EGKS and SIM for ESF (Bogaert et al., 1993; Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, 1988).

Interestingly, it was only in 1989, after the closure of the eastern mines, when the Future Contract for Limburg was actualised and adopted a social reconversion programme with social interventions, owing to the fact that there was some national reconversion money left and also thanks to some key actors (Vlaamse Executieve, 1989). Interestingly, these mainly included policy actors with a sociologic background who initiated and developed this social reconversion program; as Respondent 6 (personal communication, July 2, 2014) states: “It is nice to see how the sociologists played an important role in the game. We all had had such an education and consequently we managed to leave a social mark”. Moreover, it has been said that the matching political parties on the level of the province as well as on the national level (Christian democrats) created a broad support base and enhanced collaboration (Bogaert et al., 1993; Herpels, 1992). Since then, it was the SIM committee that was responsible for the social reconversion programme which consisted of five actions: professional training and counselling, housing, education, well-being and improving the conditions of migrant people (see **Annex I**) (Bogaert et al., 1993; Donckier, 1991). At the time, the adoption of more social actions within the dominant economic way of thinking was considered to be quite unique:

> The SIM was a unique instrument; it did not exist in any other province or in any other country. Nowhere. The investments in social aspects of the

> reconversion and not with peanuts, with a whole strategy, in an integrated way (Respondent 6, personal communication, July 2, 2014).

Curiously enough, however, while specific local partners such as the Public Agency for Social Welfare (OCMW) or community work also played an important role at that time (Lingier, 2011; Respondent 4, personal communication, July 3, 2014), they are not mentioned in the contract. This probably had something to do with conflicting perspectives. As Respondent 7 (personal communication, July 14, 2014), a former social reconversion actor, states:

> My perspective was different. The perspective of those community workers was a social perspective. But you don't solve it with a bunch of social workers and community workers. You better handle the problem in a structural way […] I told them to also include employment, education, housing, to do something about that too.

Yet according to Lingier (2011), there were also governmental actors whose perspective aligned more with the discourse of community work.

Eventually, the resources for the economic reconversion programme (26.8 billion Belgian Francs or €664 million) were more or less the same as the resources for the social reconversion programme (25.2 billion Belgian Francs or €624 million), at least in relation to the first five years (e.g., 1987-1991). Moreover, the SIM extended the dominant ESF-conceptualisation of social actions by investing in structural actions, such as housing and education: "I noticed that the ESF was a fund that is mainly focused on professional trainings in light of the economy; but not social in the sense of solving social problems in way other than by training and job creation" (Respondent 6, personal communication, July 2, 2014). In this vein, they also created BLM; the Guidance Centre for the Limburg Mining Region. It was created parallel with the public employment service of that time (VDAB) because VDAB did not suffice to meet the needs of all the ex-miners. On the one hand, the VDAB training programs were overly focused on strong miners in terms of education

and language, while often migrants or youngsters did not meet those criteria (Lingier, 2011; Vandekerckhove, 1993). On the other hand, they had insufficient resources to invest in tailor-made programs. For the BLM this was easier: “We were an agile ship […] we were not a bureaucracy, there was a high speed in that agility, so everything went very quickly” (Respondent 7, personal communication, July 14, 2014). As such, on the one hand the BLM aimed to help people, often low-educated ex-miners and migrant youngsters, to find a new job, but on the other hand, it also created tailor-made initiatives that matched the demand, based on a shared responsibility between social services, the government and the people. The training packages that were tailored to the needs of ex-miners and companies included tailor-made guidance, teaching Dutch language, as well as in-service training in close relation with real future job opportunities. They also offered follow-up guidance once a new job was found (Bogaert et al., 1993; Denolf & Martens, 1991). These examples indicate that the social reconversion actions were at least also partly considered important in their own right too.

In practice, however, it seems that this social reconversion program, despite its structural/systemic orientation, served primarily as a means to reach the main (economic) goal. Several sociologic policy actors who were responsible for the social reconversion, for instance, considered helping people to find a new job as the main way forward, as Respondent 6 (personal communication, July 2, 2014) states: “At the time I already believed that the VDAB [the Public Employment Centre] needed to activate everyone. […] You need to put people to work. In worst case you can start with inferior jobs and then they can climb higher”. Also Respondent 7 (personal communication, July 14, 2014) states: “Make sure that they have a good training; some competences that focus on employability and then the rest will follow”. As such, childcare, for instance, was invested in for economic reasons to increase the employment amongst women. As Respondent 2 (personal communication, June 17, 2014) states:

> I cannot remember that at the time [mine closures] that [social function] was one of the arguments. It was about the employability of women, to include

> them in the labour market, but also to give other women the chance to go to work.

In addition, the evaluation report about the mine closures only refers to the unemployment level as a success factor (Bogaert et al., 1993). While it is true that having a job is an important lever for overcoming the difficulties that come along with being unemployed, it is only part of the solution. Equally important is the quality of the job in terms of income, working hours and so on, as well as interventions that also take other life domains into account, such as the importance of social support, high-quality ECEC or geographical location (Eamon & Wu, 2011; Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995; Gowan, 2014; Sigurdsen, Berger, & Heymann, 2011). Strangely enough, the policy document says nothing about the psychological and social well-being of former mine workers, their living conditions, their children, and so on, which are issues that are included in texts about community work (Lingier, 2011).

In 1991, a second actualisation of The Future Contract for Limburg took place in order to continue the investments in the social and economic climate of Limburg (see **Annex I**) (Vlaamse Executieve, 1992). As such, the five social reconversion actions of the SIM were concentrated on three priorities: education and training, housing (including social housing, housing for elder people and the renovation of former mine districts) and actions in the mine region (including the rehabilitation of the former mine terrains, the social consequences of the closure and the integration of migrant people) (Bogaert et al., 1993). It was also a period in which the province got some extra support for the social reconversion programme from Europe, in terms of the “Rechar-programme” and the “Stride-programme” (Bogaert et al., 1993). Shortly afterward, and especially after the discovery of scandals in 1993, the reconversion was put on hold. In the period that followed, several things changed in terms of political forces, financial resources and the different structural committees, such as the end of the LIM and the SIM and the birth of the Reconversion agency of Limburg (LRM). The LRM is the body that manages all the remaining reconversion money, continuing until today: “The

first thing they [government] did was shut down the SIM. Why? It was not an economic instrument, it wouldn't cause damage because it always had been something they had given additionally" (Respondent 6, personal communication, July 2, 2014). In the period that followed (1998-2009), some other plans were developed, yet these were not directly developed in response to the closure of the coal mines, but rather aimed at the further development of Limburg. In 2008, the LRM was revised and consequently a more social domain was (re)created in it, called "LSM" (Limburg Sterk Merk/Limburg Strong Brand). Yet the strength of this domain is limited, as it is financed with dividends from the LRM.

1.3.3.2 The closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers

- Local policy plan

In response to the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, the Flemish government created a taskforce composed of actors of the Flemish government, the Province of Limburg, trade unions, social partners, socio-economic organisations, the Flemish industrial council, the Federal government and the mayor of Genk, in order to develop a new "future plan" (SALK Taskforce, 2015). In addition to the social welfare initiatives that are already present in the province, the "Strategic Action programme for Limburg Squared (2013–2017)" or short "SALK²" (see **Annex II**), adopts short and long term actions as well as side conditions to restore the economic and social climate of the Province of Limburg (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b). To do so, there is a budget of €317.5 million, with contributions from Europe, Flanders, Limburg and the Reconversion Company of Limburg (LRM) (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b). Notwithstanding that several things had changed in relation to financial resources and the different structural committees and the policy plans during the period in between the former Future Contract for Limburg and SALK², SALK² is the only plan that is quite similar in nature to that of the Future Contract for Limburg. At this time the Province of Limburg is governed by a coalition of The Flemish Christian democrats (CD&V), The Socialist Party

Different (sp.a) with Herman Reynders as governor, and The Flemish Liberals Open (Open Vld). The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) is in the opposition, together with the Flemish Republic (VB).

- Local social policy discourses

The initial SALK² plan, as developed by the taskforce, was also mainly of economic nature for it focused on the creation of jobs and a reduction of unemployment. According to Respondent 3 (personal communication, July 1, 2014) the exclusion of social elements had to do with the available financial resources:

> If you read SALK, then the social part was completely not included. At the time they said "we only have limited resources, so we have to choose and we choose purely for the economic"; even the social economy was not included.

Consequently, after some protests, the initial plan was adjusted and adopted more social actions. In this view, Respondent 10 (personal communication, September 30, 2015) stated: "Based on the problems that we knew from the time of the mines, we insisted to do that [include more social elements] and by insisting, they eventually adopted the problem of the educational level". In contrast to the Future Contract for Limburg, SALK² does refer to other welfare actors that are present in society and to the fact that they should be included in an integrated, collaborative way. How this is translated in practice however, is the question, as several respondents criticised the fragmentation of the plan and the fact that everything is organised into projects (Respondent 2, personal communication, June 17, 2014; Respondent 3, personal communication, July 1, 2014; Respondent 7, personal communication, July 14, 2014; Respondent 10, personal communication, September 30, 2015). They indicated that at a certain moment, hundreds of project proposals were submitted, of which several had nothing to do with the closure of Ford Genk. Eventually, it was the Flemish government that decided which projects were accepted and which were not: "And then, well, you got a political game about balancing and dividing" (Respondent 10, personal communication, September 30, 2015).

Eventually, the definite SALK² plan included the following social actions in addition to the economic ones (see **Annex II**): professional training and education to address youth unemployment, social economy and social housing in the short term, and well-being, child poverty and education as important side conditions. Compared to the period of the closure of the coal mines, however, the total amount of money spent on all these actions together is a lot less than (€20.6 million, without taking inflation into account), and the balance between economic and social investments seems to be unequal. From this view Respondent 2 (personal communication, June 17, 2014) said: "I hear that it is very much politically dominated and divided, but also that everything [the money] in SALK is put in bricks and projects. I mean in big construction projects, in technology but not in public social services".

Moreover, it seems that the *social* elements are overly conceptualised as a means to reach the main economic goal: the creation of jobs and a reduction of unemployment. As to what is involved in the action of "social economy", for instance, the plan reflects a particular interest for vulnerable people: youth, over 50s, disabled people and low-educated people, yet the interest seems to be mainly of an economic nature:

> In the next few years, approximately 8,000 jobs will be lost, which will without a doubt, lead to changes in the labour market. There is no doubt that those who are most vulnerable will feel the consequences of that first. The preservation of employment as well as re-employment and job creation for vulnerable groups and people who are disabled is more than necessary in the next few years. The social economy sector in Limburg is a very important partner for accomplishing this (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 20).

This is also shown through the actions of well-being, child poverty and education that are literally captured as "side conditions" or, as Respondent 8 (personal communication, February 26, 2015) explained: "It considers things that ought to be a condition to create jobs". The side condition of "education" for instance, includes three actions: language problems, labour/education and lifelong learning. This is legitimised as "the development of talent and the

improvement of the employability of graduates, [which] will increase the individual opportunities to a place on the labour market and contribute to the development of the region" (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 54). On the one hand this includes preventative actions in preschool and primary education through student-monitoring. On the other hand, it includes actions to fine tune education/training and labour by "investing in the improvement of the general language skills on the one hand and the labour market-oriented language skills on the other hand" (p. 54). This focus on labour, however, is precisely what worried Respondent 10 (personal communication, September 30, 2015), who was previously involved in the social reconversion programme of the Future Contract for Limburg: "society is based upon 'earning money through labour'. If not you are excluded, but the right to labour is not there anymore, while everything is linked with that [solidarity, …]". SALK² legitimates the importance of such side conditions by stating that there is a link between the socio-economic background and school performance in which the educational level of parents is considered as: "the best predictor of the opportunities of youngsters to get their degree. The less advantaged a family is, the higher the chance that youngsters will develop a problematic school career, resulting in early school dropout" (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 52). It is also stated that language is important, as "language problems often result in retardation and early school dropout" (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 52) in addition to the fact that more and more children have a non-Flemish mother tongue, while the instruction language in schools is Flemish. Thirdly, it seems that many children and youngsters who have just arrived in Belgium or Limburg have no or very little experience with schooling. It is said that most of them often end up with lower school qualifications, whatever their interests or capacities (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 52).

The side condition of "child poverty" then, reflects a shift from poverty to child poverty; a shift that never existed before within any former reconversion policy plan of Limburg. This interest in child poverty aligns with the international shift that took place from a social welfare state to a social investment state (Pintelon, Cantillon, Van den Bosch, & Whelan, 2013; Giddens, 1998). In this

vein, out of the 44 municipalities of Limburg, 13 ‘SALK²’ municipalities were selected by the Flemish government, each to be accountable for a four-year subsidy of €50,000 annually, to develop a plan to fight child poverty on a local level (see Figure 4). The selection process was based on seven criteria (see Figure 5): (1) the amount of lone parents compared to the total amount of families, (2) the child poverty-index of Kind en Gezin (Child and Family), the Flemish government agency responsible for preventative health and childcare, (3) the number of people (0–4 years old) getting preferential arrangements compared to the total number of inhabitants (0–4 years old), (4) the number of non-working people that are looking for a job, compared to the total number of inhabitants (+18 years old), (5) the number of people getting a living wage, compared to the total number of inhabitants (+18 years old), (6) the total number of children eligible for “guaranteed family benefits” (GGB), compared to the total number of children (0–18 years old) and (7) the number of pupils with a GOK-indicator (indicator for equal education opportunities). Each criterion was ordered (1= best scoring municipality, so low percentage, while 44 indicates the worst scoring municipality, so high percentage). In the end, the mean score was calculated. In what follows, we present the selected municipalities, including their mean score:

Figure 4: SALK² municipalities – Adapted from Province of Limburg (2016b)

Gebiedsindeling	gemeente	totaal aantal inwoners (2012 - ADSEI)	IND1 - Aantal eenoudergezinnen / aantal huishoudens met kinderen	IND2 - Kansarmoede-index (2011 - Kind en Gezin)	IND3 - Aantal personen (0-4) met voorkeursregeling / aantal inwoners (0-4)	IND4 - Aantal NWWZ / aantal inwoners (18+)	IND5 - Aantal leefloners en equivalent-leefloners / aantal inwoners (18+)	IND6 - Aantal rechtgevende kinderen (ggb) / aantal kinderen (0-18)	IND7 - GOK indicator LLN	Gemiddeld rangordes IND1/2/3/4/5/6/7
kleinstedelijk provinciaal	Leopoldsburg	15.172	20,98%	12,6	9,10%	5,24%	0,65%	0,99%	49,97%	41
kleinstedelijk provinciaal	Maasmechelen	37.369	21,53%	18,1	11,49%	6,91%	0,63%	0,26%	58,27%	41
centrumsteden	Genk	65.264	22,63%	18,1	13,91%	6,79%	0,58%	0,27%	58,07%	41
structuurondersteunende st	Sint-Truiden	39.747	22,77%	11,9	9,13%	4,22%	0,66%	0,19%	38,37%	36
structuurondersteunende st	Tongeren	30.557	24,42%	6,8	8,18%	4,49%	0,62%	0,67%	39,80%	36
kleinstedelijk provinciaal	Bilzen	31.358	19,77%	12	7,12%	4,26%	0,62%	0,42%	33,47%	35
centrumsteden	Hasselt	74.588	24,30%	9,9	8,36%	4,60%	0,76%	0,37%	30,16%	35
overgangsgebied	Heusden-Zolder	32.003	17,15%	22,5	7,38%	4,61%	0,40%	0,29%	48,98%	35
overgangsgebied	Houthalen-Helchteren	30.356	18,29%	27,2	8,90%	5,43%	0,37%	0,14%	54,01%	34
overgangsgebied	Dilsen-Stokkem	19.947	19,74%	8,3	9,28%	4,98%	0,33%	0,16%	44,55%	33
overgangsgebied	Lanaken	25.599	19,60%	10,7	4,85%	4,63%	0,38%	0,22%	33,75%	31
platteland	Heers	7.103	19,33%	11,2	6,67%	3,95%	0,25%	0,21%	44,13%	30
kleinstedelijk provinciaal	Beringen	43.661	15,99%	11,3	7,16%	4,66%	0,35%	0,14%	47,15%	29

Figure 5: SALK² - Selection criteria (Personal communication, 2014)

By the beginning of 2014, the idea to offer structural support to fight child poverty was taken up in the Decree to fight poverty in Flanders, which resulted in a total figure of €4.5 million, which was divided amongst those municipalities in Flanders with the highest level of child poverty. In order to select the municipalities, seven slightly different criteria were used, including the risk on poverty on several life domains (e.g. work, education, income) as well as the presence of certain risk populations per municipality (e.g. lone parents, children living in households without work) (Vlaamse Regering, 2014). In what follows, we present the selected municipalities in Limburg, from a Flemish point of view (see Figure 6). Only those with a score of 4 or more were accountable for extra subsidies. Interestingly, two municipalities, “Borgloon” and “Maaseik” were included while one, “Lanaken”, was excluded.

gemeente	IND1: Verhoogde tegemoetkoming	IND2: eenoudergezin	IND3: kansarmoede index K&G	IND4: OKI kleuteronderwijs	IND5: (equivalent-)LL - cat gezinslast	IND6: HH zonder wer	IND7: HH - niet-EU	Kinderarmoedebarometer
Beringen	6,20%	5,44%	11,42%	0,95	1,92%	13,72%	8,61%	5
Bilzen	6,27%	7,20%	13,56%	0,57	2,60%	16,02%	5,26%	5
Borgloon	6,24%	8,30%	5,19%	0,54	2,05%	13,24%	5,98%	4
Dilsen-Stokkem	7,80%	9,59%	9,77%	0,79	1,59%	22,15%	6,48%	6
Genk	11,58%	8,04%	18,15%	1,59	2,28%	24,26%	16,70%	6
Hasselt	7,57%	9,19%	10,42%	0,74	2,93%	11,68%	9,52%	7
Heers	6,29%	7,51%	10,36%	0,58	1,65%	13,36%	4,28%	4
Heusden-Zolder	6,78%	5,02%	23,08%	1,14	2,02%	16,53%	9,68%	6
Houthalen-Helchteren	8,42%	6,84%	23,80%	1,01	1,61%	15,55%	9,99%	5
Lanaken	4,37%	7,81%	12,16%	0,44	1,50%	35,37%	8,68%	3
Leopoldsburg	7,24%	8,75%	15,05%	1,10	2,94%	17,38%	9,65%	7
Maaseik	7,14%	6,72%	8,94%	0,51	1,17%	21,74%	8,82%	4
Maasmechelen	9,99%	8,46%	16,63%	1,40	2,61%	27,74%	11,94%	7
Sint-Truiden	8,07%	8,92%	12,61%	0,87	2,38%	16,47%	10,31%	7
Tongeren	7,43%	11,95%	6,54%	0,59	2,77%	14,05%	5,85%	5

Figure 6: Selection criteria child poverty - Flanders (Personal communication, 2014)

The last side condition, “well-being”, consists of actions that, in addition to investments in care infrastructure and assistance for people who experienced a company closure and lost their job, aim to support families based on “progressive universalism”:

> The new law on preventative family support is, with the introduction of the Child Centres, a lever in the fight against child poverty. Within this framework, we aim to stimulate the roll out of the Children Centres in Limburg in which we

> provide a supply based on the methods of Instapje and Pedagogische taaltrainers (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b, p. 56).

This also includes the extension of the amount of childcare; not only in terms of its economic function, as was the case at the time of the mine closures, but also in terms of its social function. That is, to stimulate the development of children, to enhance social contact with others and to fight poverty (p. 58).

Notwithstanding that the focus on child poverty might be a political strategy, as Respondent 4 (personal communication, July 3, 2014) explained: "In a political way, I think it is something which sells well. The question of who is to be blamed cannot be posed when it is about child poverty. […] You cannot say that to children", it is important to not reduce it to children and parents, as we already mentioned in the section above. Nonetheless, in relation to SALK², Respondent 11 (personal communication, September 30, 2015) stated:

> It is more about parent education, in terms of how can we better prepare children to finish their school career […]. There are no resources to invest at the end of the journey [output], so they decided to invest at the beginning of the journey [input].

This, however, risks overlooking the fact that poverty "needs to be linked with a broad strategy to fight poverty. It is also about mothers who live in poverty, also about employment, I mean it is about a lot of aspects" (Respondent 4, personal communication, July 3, 2014). In this view, SALK² recommends an integrated strategy, consisting of actions that are to be situated in different policy domains: education and employment for parents, childcare, parent support, education, housing, energy consumption, debts, health, food and participation at cultural and sports activities. At the same time, the responsibility to combat child poverty is given to the local level (e.g., city/municipality); a level that has no full responsibility to address all those policy domains. Moreover, the 13 SALK² municipalities that were selected and which are each eligible for a four-year annual subsidy of €50,000, might not have had enough to make a difference: "With €50,000 you cannot do a lot. Filling the gaps that were already

there. I always ask myself why they did not use it to make a big project of it, instead of fragmenting it" (Respondent 3, personal communication, July 1, 2014). According to some, the political choice to focus on the early years also excludes others:

> Of course it is very important, but at the same time we notice that there is no money for children who follow part-time education, who cannot find a part-time job and actually need another way of support, but there is nothing provided for such trajectories (Respondent 3, personal communication, July 1, 2014).

1.3.3.3 Observations and reflections

The analysis of policy framings and initiatives in times of economic downturn, leads to some interesting observations. That is, ideas about what is considered as problematic and what needs to be done in terms of social actions, seem to be the result of a "process of negotiation out of which emerges a consensus" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 76) and which, together with power, make a discourse dominant (Foucault, as cited in Dryzek, 2005; Fairclough, 2002). This, however, does not mean that a dominant discourse is something stable or fixed: "Hegemony is never stable but changing and incomplete, and consensus is always a matter of degree only – a contradictory and unstable equilibrium" (Fairclough, 2002, p. 76). Indeed, both policies from the period of the closure of the coal mines and the period of the closure of Ford Genk, reflect continuities as well as change within and between discourses about the social actions to be taken.

One continuity, for instance, seems to be that economic actions are given priority over social actions, especially when the sense of urgency is high. Eventually, both policy plans adopted more social actions too, yet the dominant legitimation remained of economic nature and social actions are rather instrumental in light of the main goal: the reduction of unemployment. A significant discontinuity worth remarking on is the fact that SALK² does not explicitly mention a *social* reconversion plan, but instead mentions socially oriented *side conditions.* Another discontinuity in SALK², compared to the

former Future Contract for Limburg, is the fact that *child* poverty is now included and its framing risks creating a shift from the social to the individual.

It needs to be noted however, that these continuities and changes have a lot to do with the socio-economic and political context, which is now quite different compared to the time of the mine closures. This is also true in terms of financial resources, not in the least from Europe. The following two quotes illustrate this:

> When Zwartberg [first coal mine] closed down, there was Ford, something similar to people's competences. What you need now, are much more brains (Respondent 9, personal communication, February 24, 2015).

> At the time of the closure of the mines, there were many resources and the economy improved again. Now … Ford closed down in a period of austerity. Not only for the governments and for the companies, but also for families (Respondent 10, personal communication, September 30, 2015).

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that what we have presented here, first of all aimed to sketch the context in which this dissertation is situated. As this is based upon a selection of texts and respondents, we could not fully capture the entire political debate in all its nuances, contradictions and complexities. Moreover, by discussing local social policy responses and discourses as a way of understanding the historical socio-political context of our research, we gave less attention to discourses and perspectives outside policy, such as the claims by community workers, which are based on a rights-based perspective (e.g., Beyers, 2007; Lingier, 2011; Van Doorslaer & De Rynck, 2012). Yet at the same time, grasping the full picture is impossible, for a discourse is not something that is pre-existing but rather something which is continuously being (de)constructed and re-constructed (Fraser, 2002; Hajer, 2006; Jones & Osgood, 2007). In this view, the least we can say is that there are different ways of seeing and that a dominant discourse silences many other truths that exist within it as well as next to it and thus, should not be taken for granted or as self-evident.

1.4 Methodological section

1.4.1 Multiple case study

As stated earlier, we aimed to search for a multifaceted understanding of the complexities of in- and exclusion processes as well as of the possible levers of support for parents with young children (from birth to the age of three) in Limburg, a region that was severely hit by economic downturn and unemployment due to the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers. In so doing, we aim to complement and nuance current dominant ways of seeing and acting in social work policy and practice, which, in times of socio-economic and political turmoil, increasingly seem to find resonance. Given the nature of our research questions, we engage in qualitative, interpretative research, with a multi-perspective and multiple case study design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Yin, 2011; 2014). This allows us to document and analyse perspectives of research, social work professionals and parents in different settings, including the broader social, political and economic context in which these perspectives are grounded.

In order to do so, we selected three settings in Limburg that were considered to suffer the most from the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, in terms of the issues that policy makers were most concerned about: massive unemployment and an increase in child poverty (Vlaamse Regering, 2013b). Consequently, in 2014, we selected those SALK-municipalities with the highest level of redundancies due to the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers (VDAB, 2014) in combination with the highest level of child deprivation, according to the child deprivation index of the Flemish government agency responsible for preventative health and childcare ‘Kind en Gezin’ (Child and Family) (Kind en Gezin, 2013). As illustrated in Figure 7, Maasmechelen, Bilzen and Genk clearly stand out. These are three municipalities/cities that differ from one another in terms of their socio-economic and political context,

but also in terms of their particular framing of (child) poverty. In the following sections, we elaborate further on these issues.

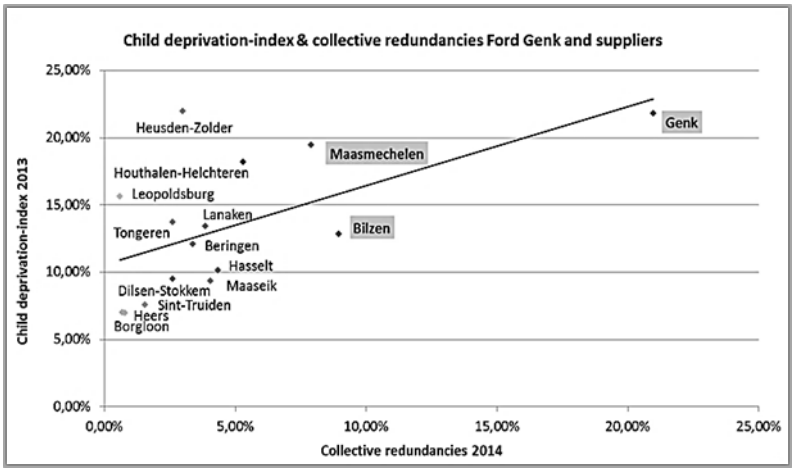


Figure 7: Selected municipalities – based on VDAB (2014); Kind en Gezin (2013)

GENK

Socio-political and economic context

Genk is currently governed by The Flemish Christian democrats (CD&V) together with Pro Genk, it is one of the 13 Flemish centre cities (Stad Genk, 2014-2019) and it is the second biggest city of Limburg. Compared to Limburg (356 inhabitants/km²) and Flanders (479 inhabitants/km²), it has a very high demographic density (748 inhabitants/km²) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). It is inhabited by 65,691 people, which is about 7.5% of the total number of people living in Limburg (Stad Genk, 2014-2019; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). In 2016, 53.4% of the total inhabitants had a non-Belgian origin, which is a lot higher than the overall average in Limburg (25.4%) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). This is due to its rich history of the coal mines as it was used to establish three of the five coal mines. Additionally, the car factory Ford Genk and several (in)direct supplier factories were located there. In declining order, migrants originate from Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Morocco, Greece and Spain.

Genk is quite a young city; almost one-third (28.9%) of the inhabitants are younger than 25 years old, and 3% are under three years old (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Yet the number of young people is declining, while the amount of older people is increasing (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). There were more big households (five people and more, 10%) and lone parents (10.6%) in 2016, compared to Limburg, which had 6.7% big households and 8.4% lone parents (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

In the beginning of 2015, right after the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, the unemployment level in Genk rose from 12.3% to 15.1% (Arvastat, 2016). Amongst these people, more than half (54.8%) were low-educated, 17.8% were younger than 25 years old, 59% were male and according to the most recent statistics of 2014, 61.2% were of non-Belgian origin (Arvastat, 2016; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Genk however, has a high number of job opportunities (93.7% in 2014), yet most jobs are situated in the tertiary and secondary sectors (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). In relation to poverty, the inhabitants of Genk are not rich, as the mean income per inhabitant in 2014 (€16,485), was under the average of Limburg (€17,850) and Flanders (€18,949). Genk also has the highest child poverty index of Limburg (27.31%), compared to Limburg in general (12.6%) and Flanders (12.01%) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). In terms of education, almost one-fifth (19.4%) of the children in Genk in 2013 left school early without any qualification, which is a lot higher than the average in Limburg (11.6%) and Flanders (11.5%) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

The city is composed of several highly diverse neighbourhoods. Interestingly, more than one-fourth of the people live in one of the five ‘at-risk’ neighbourhoods: Winterslag 2–4, Waterschei-Noord and Zwartberg-Noord; three former mine districts, as well as Zuid-Kolderbos and Nieuw Sledderlo; two social housing districts (Stad Genk, 2014-2019). According to the poverty atlas of Kesteloot and Meys (2008), there are two more “at risk” neighbourhoods: Nieuwe Kempen and Vlakveld. On a local level, they recently added Nieuw Texas, Nieuwe Driehoeven and Nieuw Termien (Personal

Communication, February 10th, 2017). These *at-risk* neighbourhoods are, compared to Genk in general, often characterised by a higher demographic density, a higher level of unemployment and lower educated people, more young people and people with a non-Belgian origin and a higher level of child poverty (Stad Genk, 2014-2019).

Local social policy about child poverty

As a result of the consequences of the closure of the coal mines on different life domains, Genk already had developed a long tradition of fighting poverty and inequality in a collaborative and integrated way, well before SALK² was released. Since the fight against (child) poverty was nothing new, their policy plan (coordinated by "OCMW"; the Public Centre for Social Welfare) mainly aims to continue building on what is already there, strengthen it and extend it.

The strategy and vision to fight (child) poverty is based on the definition of Vranken et al. (1998–2009):

> [Poverty is] a network of forms of social exclusion that extends over several areas of individual and collective existence. It separates the poor from the generally accepted modes of existence in society, creating a gap that poor people are unable to bridge on their own (OCMW Genk, 2014, p. 4)

Consequently, based on a rights-based oriented framework, they aim to fight poverty not only in an individual way, but mainly in a structural, systemic way by focussing on a reduction of inequalities in different life domains (e.g., education, housing, work, health, leisure, income). In order to do so, they included several actions. First, they aim to gather a broad poverty network consisting of key actors of every life domain. This includes actors of the city, early childhood education and care, the children's centre, youth work, movements of the poor, community work, the public employment centre, child and family (Kind en Gezin), and so on. Partners in housing and education were invited, though they are considered more difficult to collaborate with. Once a year, they aim to organise a broader network event for as many partners as

possible in order to sensitise, detect and identify problems, evaluate and actualise their child poverty plan. All of this is coordinated and stimulated by one full-time contact person of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. Second, based on the idea that "it takes a whole committed city to raise a child", they aim to develop a strong policy to support families with children (-9 months until 6 years old). This is done through the development of children's centres in the North, South and centre part of Genk, which are coordinated by the city, but with whom they (OCMW) intensively collaborate. The children's centres have five functions: greeting and encountering, providing information and documentation, screening and detection, guidance and support and stimulating the development of talents and language in the following life domains: health, education, development and upbringing. In addition, the plan also adopts initiatives to increase the accessibility of the children's centres as well as of childcare and leisure opportunities. Third, based on the belief that every family needs a material comfort zone in order to be able to flourish and raise children, they aim to increase the accessibility of broader welfare services as well, through the execution of a "mini-children's rights research". That is, a visit by the child poverty coordinator in order to see if all the rights of families with children are fulfilled (e.g., school allowances, child benefits, energy reductions, living wage, housing, education, leisure). Fourth, in line with the idea of "progressive universalism", they also developed trajectories for multi-problem families in addition to the basic supply of the children's centres (OCMW Genk, 2014).

BILZEN

Socio-political and economic context

Bilzen is a small urban city, situated in the rural, southern part of Limburg. It is composed of 13 small villages that are at a distance from each other and which, apart from the city centre, have few or no public services. It is governed by The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), together with Pro Bilzen and The Flemish Liberals Open (Open Vld).

In 2016, Bilzen had a low demographic density (419 inhabitants/km²) compared to Flanders, but a slightly higher one compared to Limburg. It was inhabited by 31,829 people, yet almost 60% of the total inhabitants live in the three biggest villages: Bilzen-centre, Beverst and Munsterbilzen. Compared to Genk, Maasmechelen and Limburg, Bilzen has a lot fewer inhabitants of non-Belgian origin; 17.9% in 2016 (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Unlike Genk and Maasmechelen, there was not a single coal mine located in Bilzen. Most migrants come from the Netherlands and from developing countries such as Africa or from countries in eastern and central Europe.

In Bilzen, 3% of people are younger than three years old and 26.7% of the inhabitants are younger than 25 years old, yet this number is declining, while the amount of older people is increasing (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). There are fewer big households (5 people and more) (6.4%) than the average in Limburg in 2016, but more lone parents (8.6%), compared to Limburg (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

The unemployment level in Bilzen, which is situated close to Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, rose from 7.6% in 2014 to 9.4% in 2015. More than half of these people (58.6%) are male, 15.9% are younger than 25 years old, 45.8% are low-educated and, according to the most recent statistics of 2014, 29.8% are of non-Belgian origin (Arvastat, 2016; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Bilzen additionally has a low number of job opportunities (45.6% in 2014). In contrast to Genk and Maasmechelen, 4.5% of the jobs are still situated in the primary sector, yet most jobs are situated in the tertiary and quaternary sectors (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Compared to Genk, Maasmechelen and Limburg, Bilzen had a higher mean income per inhabitant (€18,227) in 2014, yet it was still lower than the total average in Flanders. Its child poverty index (12.22%) is slightly lower than the average in Limburg and a lot lower compared to Genk and Maasmechelen, but is still higher than the average in Flanders in 2015. Regarding education, in 2013, 10.9% of the children in Bilzen left school early without any qualification, which is less than the average in Limburg and Flanders (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Currently, there are

two at-risk neighbourhoods in Bilzen: Gansbeek, in Bilzen centre and Schoonbeek, in Beverst yet the poverty atlas of Kesteloot and Meys (2008), only included the latter. Both neighbourhoods, however, are characterised by a higher level of unemployment and low-educated people, people with a non-Belgian origin and a higher level of (child) poverty.

Local social policy about child poverty

Notwithstanding that Bilzen had several public social services available at the time when SALK² was released, the fight against (child) poverty in an integrated and collaborative way was something new. Consequently, their policy about child poverty aims to make an inventory of the existing social services and actions as well as of the current gaps and issues, in order to reveal strengths and weaknesses, develop solutions and strengthen the collaboration between services. As in Genk, they also installed a full-time child poverty coordinator of the "OCMW" or, Public Centre for Social Welfare to do so. Of central concern is the reduction of child poverty in a structural, systemic way by focussing on different life domains that are relevant to families with children from 0 to 3 years old. Nine actions were included. First, they aim to spread a clear overview (online and on paper) of the available child and family social work services amongst services as well as amongst families. Second, they aim to improve the coordination, consultation and collaboration between several policy domains on several levels (local, Flemish, national) in order to fine tune services, actors and actions. This includes the creation of a broad network with key actors, coordinated by the child poverty coordinator. Third, they aim to consult and collaborate with poverty organisations in order to gain an understanding of the needs and questions of people living in poverty, as well as to sensitise and train other professionals in order to bridge the gap between people living in poverty and the broader society, including social services. Fourth, they want to invest in preventative family and parent education together with external organisations. This includes guidance at home for at-risk families, investments in language, the creation of a children's centre (coordinated by the city) and stimulating encounters between parents. A fifth

action includes the extension of accessible health care through extending the information about the available services as well as of the possible discounts, the creation of a special healthy grocery store for the poor, social restaurants, and so on. An increase in the amount of qualitative, payable and low energy (social) housing as well as the creation of small neighbourhood playgrounds, is considered a sixth action. Seventh, they aim to increase the job opportunities for people living in poverty. So far, the actions mainly focus on conducting research in order to explore the possibilities. Penultimately, they aim to guarantee equal education and training opportunities. This includes financial actions as well as actions that aim to inform parents about the importance of education in order to increase parent and child participation and homework guidance. A final ninth action includes an increase of the accessibility of leisure activities (e.g., sports, culture, recreation) for at-risk families with children, mainly through informing them, but also through the creation of a new leisure supply (OCMW Bilzen, 2014).

MAASMECHELEN

Socio-political and economic context

Maasmechelen is a small urban municipality situated in the east part of Limburg. It is governed by The Flemish Christian democrats (CD&V), together with The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) and The Flemish Liberals Open (Open Vld).

It has a demographic density of 494 inhabitants/km², which is higher than Limburg and Flanders in general. With 37,696 inhabitants in 2016, it is the fifth biggest municipality of Limburg (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014-2019). Of the total inhabitants, 53.7% were of non-Belgian origin in 2016 (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). This also has to do with the history of the coal mines, as one of the five coal mines was located in Maasmechelen, and more specifically in the neighbourhood of Eisden. In declining order, migrants originate from the

Netherlands, Italy, Turkey, Morocco and Greece (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014-2019).

Maasmechelen is quite a young municipality as it has more people younger than three years old (3.2%) and people younger than 25 years old (27.7%), compared to Limburg (3%) and Flanders (3.1%) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). The number of under 25-year-olds, however, is declining, while the amount of older people is increasing (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). There are more big households (5 people and more, 8.2%) and lone parents (9.9%), compared to Limburg (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014-2019; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

Right after the closure of Ford Genk and its (in)direct suppliers, the unemployment level in Maasmechelen rose from 12.9% to 15.1% in 2015, which is a lot higher than the average in Limburg and Flanders (Arvastat, 2016). In 2015, almost half of these people (49.6%) were low-educated, 16.7% were younger than 25 years old, 58.2% were male and, according to the most recent statistics of 2014, 60.9% were of non-Belgian origin (Arvastat, 2016; Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). Furthermore, it has a low number of job opportunities (46.2% in 2014) and more than 50% of the jobs are situated in the tertiary sector, followed by the quaternary sector (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). It is one of the poorest municipalities in Limburg; in 2014, the mean income per inhabitant was €15,911. Maasmechelen also has the second highest child poverty index of Limburg (26.82%), compared to Limburg in general (12.6%) and Flanders (12.01%) (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016). In terms of education, in 2013, almost one-fifth (18.8%) of the children in Maasmechelen left school early without any qualification, which is higher than the average in Limburg and Flanders (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2016).

The city is composed of several neighbourhoods that are highly diverse from each other in terms of public services, reachability and urbanisation. Amongst these neighbourhoods there are several at-risk neighbourhoods, according to the poverty atlas of Kesteloot and Meys (2008): Opgrimbie (e.g.,

Grimbeyerbroek/Klein Spanje), city centre (e.g., Mariaheide), Eisden (e.g., Tuinwijk, Dorp, Pauwengraaf, Schietskuil, Beremsheuvel) and Vucht Drop. They are all characterised by a higher demographic density, a higher level of unemployment and low-educated people, a higher level of people with a non-Belgian origin and a higher level of (child) poverty and criminality (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014-2019; Stebo vzw, 2012).

Local social policy about child poverty

When SALK² was released, Maasmechelen, a former coal mine municipality, already had some experience in fighting poverty. Unlike Genk, however, there are fewer social services that are equally spread amongst the municipality. As such, their policy plan focuses on making an inventory of the social services that are already present in Maasmechelen, strengthening them and expanding them. Interestingly, whereas in Genk and Bilzen, the local social policy to fight child poverty is coordinated by someone of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, in Maasmechelen this is done by someone in the municipality from the Department of “education and training”, who also coordinates the Children’s centre (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014). Based on the belief that child poverty requires action on different dimensions – intervene early; accessible, qualitative education and childcare; qualitative environment and leisure; family and policy – and needs to be handled with on different levels (e.g., education, upbringing and childcare, leisure time, housing and environment, health and employment), they included two big actions. First, they aim to strengthen the existing supply, reduce overlap and eliminate gaps by assigning a child poverty coordinator, the creation of a network, by making an inventory of all the social services, organising trainings for professionals and by stimulating the automation of reductions for families with children. Second, they aim to strengthen families by working together towards empowerment and parent education. This includes extra family guidance or parent support, easily accessible groups for parents where they can encounter each other and educative opportunities and projects about upbringing and language, in particular for at-risk parents with children from 0 to 3 years old. These actions

take place in addition to what was already there: providing facilities for (at-risk) inhabitants to participate in policy, fine-tuning the leisure policy for at-risk groups and the organisation of preventative family support for parents with children from 0 to 18 years old through the online children's centre (Gemeente Maasmechelen, 2014).

In each of these settings, we subsequently searched for multiple perspectives about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for parents with young children (0–3) in order to build dynamic, multifaceted understandings of the complexities of in- and exclusion processes for parents with young children (from birth to the age of three) in contexts of economic downturn, as well as for the possible levers of support. This was done first by capturing perspectives of research throughout the literature on the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for families and children. Second, we captured perspectives of parents with young children (0–3), including parents of whom at least one parent lost his/her job involuntarily, due to the economic crisis. Third, we captured perspectives of ECEC professionals who indicated that they felt the consequences of the economic crisis.

With regard to reliability and validity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), raw data as well as processed data were described in detail and stored on the research group file server of the department. Furthermore, the combination of a literature analysis with interviews and regular meetings on an academic as well as non-academic level, allowed the triangulation (Yin, 2011; 2014) and strengthening of the findings. On an academic level, this included discussion moments with other social work researchers, which allowed to stay as close as possible to the perspectives of respondents. Moreover, findings were presented at international conferences, which allowed to disseminate and valorise them where possible. On a non-academic level, feedback moments took place in which the analyses of each study were presented and discussed with key actors in policy and practice in order to assess whether the insights matched with reality and with their experiences, and also to openly discuss and reflect

on the findings (Roose et al., 2015). To this extent I also participated at the meetings of the “local network on child poverty in Limburg”, which is composed of several practitioners that were eligible for extra SALK²-support to fight child poverty on a local level.

In what follows, we elaborate on the methodology of each study in detail.

1.4.2 Perspectives of research

Chapter 2 was intended to capture perspectives of research about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment on families with children. For this purpose, it presents a conceptual essay about constructions of parenting throughout research literature about consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for families and children, in four different time junctures. Inspired by the work of Lorenz (2007, 2016), a direct approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was conducted through three literature reviews about job loss from different time spans, that all were written in Q1, high impact journals retrieved from the Web of Science. Additionally, extra literature was consulted through the JSTOR database when the reviews were insufficient in terms of content or of time span, as the Web of Science only goes back to the 1950s. The themes that were extracted were: “the 1930s: the individual father”, “the Second World War: the parent in context”, “the 1970s oil crisis: the parent in the family and the state” and “the 2008 crisis: the individual parent”.

1.4.3 Perspectives of parents

In order to capture perspectives of parents with young children, including parents who indicated they had been hit by the economic downturn and unemployment, two studies were conducted.

First, an exploratory study (Chapter 3) was conducted in order to investigate the ways in which parents in Flanders think of and experience the so-called

dominant parenting discourse in the current neoliberal area. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003, 2010) was conducted of dominant, official parenting advice texts in Flanders (the Flemish community of Belgium) as well as on parents' experiences and talks on the Internet, through a highly popular, online parental discussion board called "Zappy Baby". The latter was chosen because research indicated that the Internet seems to be an important source of informal parent support (Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005; Ellis & Heisler, 2008). This is interesting, as at the time the study was conducted, official parent support policies in Flanders mainly included expert-driven support programmes (e.g., Triple P), while there is no professional input on Zappy Baby. Official parenting advice texts included several governmental advice texts that are targeted at parents of young children (age 0–3), and widely distributed amongst parents. A first text was the brochure "Het ABC van baby tot kleuter "(The ABC from baby to toddler), published by "Kind en Gezin" (Child and Family); the government agency responsible for preventative health and childcare, and distributed to nearly all new parents by preventative health care services. The second text was composed of six Triple P magazines, distributed since 2009 and widely distributed in Flanders, as part of the "Positive Parenting Programme" (Triple P); a multi-level, population-based preventative parenting programme (Sanders et al., 2003). The third text included 23 files retrieved from the parenting advice website www.groeimee.be, the website of EXPOO; the government expertise centre on parenting support. This website provides information and advice for parents with children from birth to 36 months.

In terms of the online discussion board Zappy Baby, we selected those conversations that were finished in the year 2011, were categorised under the heading "13–36 months" and focused, according to the participants, on the topic "opvoeden" (upbringing/parenting). This resulted in 56 conversations involving 489 messages of 180 individual participants. Based on the addressed topics and nicknames used in the selected conversations, it can be assumed that 96% of them were female. According to the anonymised user profiles

collected by Sanoma magazines Belgium NV (2011), the discussion board is mainly used by young, female, employed and highly educated parents.

Based on this exploratory study, a second study (Chapter 4) was conducted with respect to the central research question. This study aimed to get a deeper insight into the relationship between parenthood and the circumstances wherein parents (have to) live, work and raise their children. Therefore, it captured an in-depth understanding of the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for parents with young children (0–3 years old), according to their point of view. Inspired by the interpretative paradigm of lifeworld orientation (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013), the aim was not only to gain insight into parents' lived experiences and meaning-making of changing economic contexts in relation to parenthood, but also on what they think is supportive in such contexts. It was especially the intention to analyse their experiences according to principles of social justice, and consequently, to question dominant ways of seeing and intervening in social work policy and practice.

In order to do so, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted and analysed, with parents from Bilzen, Maasmechelen and Genk, of whom at least one became unemployed and/or experienced difficulties in finding a job due to the economic downturn. Since we strived for maximal diversity rather than representativity, parents were recruited in the infant consultation schemes of "Kind en Gezin" (Child & Family), as previous research showed that this social service reaches a high number of parents in Flanders and Limburg, including ethnic minorities, single parents, parents in poverty and even undocumented parents (Bradt, Vandenbroeck, Lammertyn, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Kind en Gezin, 2014). In order to compose a definite selection of parents for the interview, an exploratory quantitative analysis of user profiles was conducted, which contained questions about socio-economic status (defined as mothers' educational level), origin (defined as the nationality of one's parents at birth), family composition (number of adults in the household), birth order of the child (first child or not), and municipality, as these criteria were defined by previous research as criteria that may influence parents' perspectives on support in

Flanders (Vandenbroeck, Bouverne-De Bie, Bradt, & Crampe, 2010). In contrast to the exploratory study, in this study, the definite sample included parents who differed on all these criteria.

1.4.4 Perspectives of ECEC professionals

Chapter 5 aimed to explore how ECEC professionals in Limburg handle with some of the (new) policy demands on the one hand and possible (new) concerns and questions of parents, on the other hand, in times of socio-economic and political turmoil. In order to do so, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with ECEC professionals who work in Genk, Maasmechelen and Bilzen. The ECEC professionals included childcare professionals (age 0–3) and preschool professionals (age 2–5/6). Inspired by Patton (2002), they were recruited by the researcher through telephonic purposive sampling. Apart from one exclusion criteria – not experiencing any consequences of economic downturn in the service – we strived especially for a diversity of perspectives by including diverse forms of childcare (i.e., crèches and FDC providers) and preschools (i.e., public and private), in different neighbourhoods. In a next step, a direct approach to qualitative content analysis was conducted (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), based upon the analytical framework of Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014). This framework distinguished five structural conditions that are crucial to promote inclusive ECEC services at the level of policy, parents and provision.

1.5 Content

To conclude this introductory chapter, we briefly give an overview of the following chapters in which we highlight and discuss our research findings.

Chapter 2 highlights perspectives of research from different time periods, about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment on families with children. Inspired by the work of Lorenz (2007, 2016), we discovered continuities as well as discontinuities in the way parenting is conceptualised

over time, how these notions influence *the social* in social work research and how certain, rather psychologising and individualising conceptualisations are being re-activated in the context of the present social investment state.

Chapter 3 and 4 present perspectives of parents. Chapter 3 explores parents' experiences and meaning-making in relation to dominant parenting discourses, in order to assess how they speak and think about upbringing. In so doing, we found that parents must not be seen as victims of dominant, individualising parenting discourses, but rather that parents co-construct, consume and de-construct it, depending on the context or the circumstances wherein they find themselves. Chapter 4 focuses on the circumstances in which parents (have to) live, work and raise their children, in relation to parenthood. Given the central research question and inspired by the paradigm of lifeworld orientation, it presents an in-depth understanding of the situations of parents with young children (age 0 to 3) of whom one or both parents lost their job and/or had a hard time finding a job, due to the economic downturn. Findings highlight how parents' lives are characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability due to the circumstances within which they (have to) live, work and raise their children. Notwithstanding the fact that their future is temporarily set on hold, they keep aspiring for a better future and develop several strategies to live in as best a way as possible. Meaningful work, combined with material and immaterial support, formal as well as informal, is very important, yet is not always present or unconditional.

Chapter 5 aims to gain a better understanding of in- and exclusion processes from the point of view of provision. Based upon the analytical framework of Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014), which distinguishes five structural conditions that are crucial for promoting inclusive early childhood education and care services, we conducted and analysed in-depth interviews with ECEC professionals working in childcare or preschool services. Findings indicate that some of the current neoliberal and managerialist ECEC interventions towards more efficiency, risk even more exclusion in times of economic crisis, as there seems to be a higher need with parents for dynamic and flexible services. In

this view, we suggest that public funding matters and should include structural ways to take account of parents' context and their often precarious and unpredictable conditions, as well as their meaning-making.

In the final chapter, *Chapter 6*, we summarise the main findings and reflect upon their implications for social work practice and policy in relation to in- and exclusion processes.

1.6 References

Alcock, P. (1999). *Understanding poverty*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd.

Allen, C. (2003). Desperately seeking fusion: On "joined-up thinking", "holistic practice" and the new economy of welfare professional power. *British Journal of Social Work, 54*(2), 287-306. doi: 10.1080/0007131032000080249

Allen, G. (2011). *Early intervention: Smart investment, massive savings. The second independent report to Her Majesty's Government.* London: HM Government.

Anthony, E., King, B., & Austin, M. (2011). Reducing child poverty by promoting child well-being: Identifying best practices in a time of great need. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1999-2009. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.05.029

Arvastat. (2016). Werkloosheidsgraden Provincie Limburg. Retrieved from www.arvastat.be

Barnett, W. S. (2011). Effectiveness of early educational intervention. *Science, 333*, 975-978. doi: 10.1126/science.1204534

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society. Towards a new modernity.* London: Sage.

Beyers, L. (2007). *Iedereen zwart. Het samenleven van nieuwkomers en gevestigden in de mijncité Zwartberg, 1930-1990*. Amsterdam: Aksant.

Biesta, G. (2007). Why 'what works' won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory, 57*(1), 1-22. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00241.x

Bing, V., Bisset, D., Linssen, H., Melhuish, E., Nicaise, I., Roets, G., . . . Wouters, A. (2011). *Verslag studio kinderarmoede.* Retrieved from http://www4wvg.vlaanderen.be/wvg/armoede/nieuws/Documents/Conclusies_studio_kinderarmoede.pdf

Bockel, J. M. (2010). *La prevention de la délinquance des jeunes. Rapport à monsieur le Président de la République.* Paris: Secrétaire d'Etat à la Justice.

Bogaert, G., De Rynck, F., De Rynck, S., Gos, E., Pacolet, J., Struyven, L., & Vleugels, I. (1993). *Limburg and European policy, 1987-1991. Evaluation report*. Leuven: HIVA.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A., De Cock, A., & Vanhee, J. (2003). *Armoede & participatie*. Gent: Academia Press.

Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek: een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk.* Gent: Academia Press.

Bradt, L., Vandenbroeck, M., Lammertyn, J., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Parental expectations of maternal and child health services. Social Work in Public Health, 30*(2), 197–206. doi:10.1080/19371918.2014.992586

Brady, D., & Burroway, R. (2012). Targeting, universalism, and single-mother poverty: A multilevel analysis across 18 affluent democracies. *Demography, 49*, 719-746. doi: 10.1007/s13524-012-0094-z.

Brijs, S. (2012, October 25). Wij waren Ford. *De Morgen,* p. 4. Retrieved from http://www.demorgen.be/plus/wij-waren-ford-b-1412189414019/

Broadhead, P., Meleady, C., & Delgado, M. (2008). *Children, families and communities: Creating and sustaining integrated services.* United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Burchinal, M., & Cryer, D. (2003). Diversity, child care quality, and developmental outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18*, 401-426. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2003.09.003

Burger, K. (2010). How does early childhood care and education affect cognitive development? An international review of the effects of early interventions for children from different social backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*(2), 140-165. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.11.001

Burke, K. (1965). *Permanence and change*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Cantillon, B. (2011). The paradox of the social investment state: Growth, employment and poverty in the Lisbon era. *Journal of European Social Policy, 21*(5), 432-449. doi:10.1177/0958928711418856

Cantillon, B., & Van Lancker, W. (2013). Three shortcomings of the social investment perspective. *Social Policy and Society, 12*, 553-564. doi:10.1017/S1474746413000080

Chzhen, Y. (2014). *Subjective impact of the economic crisis on households with children in 17 European countries. Innocenti Working Paper No. 2014-09*. Florence: UNICEF Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/725.

Clarke, K. (2006). Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(4), 699-721. doi:10.1177/0261018306068470

Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen. (1988). *Beschikking van de Commissie van 8 juni 1988, houdende de goedkeuring van een geïntegreerd actieprogramma voor de provincie Limburg (België)*. Brussels.

Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, E. (2014). *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe. 2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Cox, R. H. (1998). The consequences of welfare reform: How conceptions of social rights are changing. *Journal of Social Policy, 27*(1), 1-16. doi: 10.1017/S0047279497005163

D'Addato, A., & Williams, A. (2014). Investing in family and parenting support. In R. Fukkink, C. Vink, & N. Bosscher (Eds.), *Think parents: Putting parents at the heart of parenting support.* (pp. 99-106). Amsterdam: B. V. SWP Publishers.

De Standaard. (2012, October 24). Ford Genk sluit in 2014. *De Standaard*.

De Morgen. (2012). Doek valt over Ford Genk: Werknemers verontwaardigd, Peeters schiet op bedrijfstop. *De Morgen.*

Dean, H. (2015). *Social rights and human welfare*. New York: Routledge.

Department for Education. (2013). *Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance. For local authorities, commissioners of local health services and Jobcentres Plus*. Retrieved from www.education.gov.uk.

Denolf, L., & Martens, A. (1991). *Van "mijn"werk naar ander werk. Onderzoeksrapport over de arbeidsmarktpositie van ex-mijnwerkers.* Brussel: Permanente Werkgroep Limburg.

Doherty, G. (2007). Ensuring the best start in life: Targeting versus universality in Early Childhood Development. *IRPP Choices, 13*(8), 1-52. Retrieved from http://on-irpp.org/2eKXj2a

Donckier, E. (1991). *Limburg vier jaar na einde KS: een balans. Een serie artikels verschenen in het Belang van Limburg*. Hasselt: Concentra Uitgeversmaatschappij N.V.

Drentea, P., & Moren-Cross, J. (2005). Social capital and social support on the web: The case of an internet mother site. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 920-943. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9566.2005.00464.x

Dryzek, J. S. (2005). *The politics of the earth: Environmental discourses*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Duncan, G., Brooks-Gunn, J., Yeung, J., & Smith, J. (1998). How much does childhood poverty affect the life chances of children? *American Sociological Review, 63*(3), 406-423. doi: 10.2307/2657556

Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 29*(2), 265-287. doi: 10.1353/cjs.2004.0022

Dyson, C., Gorin, S., Hooper, C.-A., & Cabral, C. (2008). Bangladeshi families living in hardship: Findings from research using a life-history approach. *Child and Family Social Work, 14*, 362-371. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00608.x

Eamon, K., & Wu, C. (2011). Effects of unemployment and underemployment on material hardship in single-mother families. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 233-241. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.006

Elder, G., Eccles, J., Ardelt, M., & Lord, S. (1995). Inner-city parents under economic pressure: Perspectives on the strategies of parenting. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 57*, 771-784. doi:10.2307/353931

Ellis, B., & Heisler, M. (2008). Motherhood and the construction of 'mommy identity': Messages about motherhood and face negotiation. *Communication Quarterly, 56*(4), 445-467. doi:10.1080/01463370802448246

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Eurofound. (2014). *Third European quality of life survey – Quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2011). *Early childhood education and care: Providing all our children the best start for the world of tomorrow.* Brussels.

European Commission. (2012). *The social impact of the economic crisis and ongoing fiscal consolidation. Third report of the Social Protection Committee*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2013). *Commission recommendation. Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage.* Brussels: Official Journal of the european Union. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf.

European Commission. (2014). *Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care*. Brussels: European Commission.

Eurydice. (2009). *Early childhood education and care in Europe: Tackling social and cultural inequalities*. Brussels: European Commission.

Fairclough, N. (2002). Critical discourse analysis. In M. Jorgensen & L. J. Phillips (Eds.), *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (pp. 60-95). London: Sage.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. New York: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Routledge.

Farnsworth, K., & Irving, Z. (2012). Varieties of crisis, varieties of austerity: Social policy in challenging times. *The Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 20*(2), 133-147. doi:10.1332/175982712X652041

Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work, 36*, 5-19. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch226

Feinstein L. (2003). Inequality in the early cognitive development of British children in the 1970 cohort. *Economica, 70*(277), 73-97. doi: 10.1111/1468-0335.t01-1-00272

Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Formesyn, N., Hennion, W., Nachtergaele, S., Reynaert, D., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2017). *Kansarm maar niet kansloos. Een grondrechtenbenadering van kinderarmoedebestrijding*. Leuven: Acco.

Franssen, H. (1988). *De slag om de mijnen. Het syndicale werkboek van Jan Grauwels en Luc Cieters*. Antwerpen: Uitgeverij EPO vzw.

Fraser, H. (2002). Doing narrative research: Analysing personal stories line by line. *Qualitative Social Work, 3*(2), 179-201. doi: 10.1177/1473325004043383

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Frost, N. (2005). *Professionalism, partnership and joined-up thinking: A research review of front-line working with children and families.* Research in Practice. Retrieved from www.rip.org.uk

Garrett, P. M. (2009). *'Transforming' children's services. Social Work, neoliberalism and the 'modern' world*. England: Open university Press.

Gemeente Maasmechelen. (2014) Kinderarmoedebeleidsplan OCMW en gemeente Maasmechelen. Maasmechelen: Gemeente Maasmechelen.

Gemeente Maasmechelen. (2014-2019) Toelichting bij het meerjarenplan 2014-2019. Fier op Maasmechelen. Maasmechelen: Gemeente Maasmechelen.

Gheyselinck, T. (1986). *Voorstel voor de te volgen herstructurering van de K.S.*

Ghysels, J., & Van Lancker, W. (2011). The unequal benefits of activation: An analysis of the social destribution of family policy among families with young children. *Journal of European Social Policy, 21*(5), 472-485. doi:10.1177/0958928711418853

Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way: The renewal of social democracy.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goldberg, G. (2012). Economic inequality and economic crisis: A challenge for social workers. *Social Work, 57*(3), 211-224. doi:10.1093/sw/sws005

Gowan, M. (2014). Moving from job loss to career management: The past, present, and future of involuntary job loss research. *Human Resource Management Review, 24*, 258-270. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2014.03.007

Gray, M. (2014). The swing to early intervention and prevention and its implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 1750-1769. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct037

Gray, M., & Webb, S. A. (2009). The return of the political in social work *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18*(1), 111-115. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00626.x

Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of the 'Lifeworld Orientation' for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 23*(2), 131-146. doi:10.1080/0265053090292343

Habex, J. (2013). *Winterslag uitgeput – Opgegraven beelden.* Genk: Vzw Heemkring Heidebloemke

Hajer, M. (2006). Doing discourse analysis: Coalitions, practices, meaning. In M. van den Brink & T. Metze (Eds.), *Words matter in policy and planning* (pp. 65-74). Utrecht: Netherlands Geographical Studies.

Hanan, R. (2012). The social impact of the economic crisis in Europe. *Working notes, (69),* 16-21. Ireland: EAPN.

Harper, C., & Marcus, R. (2003). Enduring poverty and the conditions of childhood: Lifecourse and Intergenerational Poverty Transmissions. *World Development, 31*(3), 535-554. doi:10.1016/S0305-750X(03)00010-X

Herpels, A. (1992, Oktober 1992). Vijf jaar toekomstcontract voor Limburg - De Europese bijdrage. *Economisch Rapport - GOM Limburg*.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Heath Research, 15*(9), 1277-1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687

IFSW. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Jones, L., & Osgood, J. (2007). Mapping the fabricated identity of childminders: Pride and prejudice. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 8*(4), 289-300. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2007.8.4.289

Karanikolos, M., Mladovsky, P., Cylus, J., Thomson, S., Basu, S., Stuckles, D., . . . McKee, M. (2013). Financial crisis, austerity, and health in Europe. *Health in Europe 7, 381*, 1323-1331. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60102-6

Kesteloot, C., & Meys, S. (2008). *Atlas van achtergestelde buurten in Vlaanderen en Brussel. Project in opdracht van de steunpunten sociale planning van de Vlaamse provincies.* K.U.Leuven: Instituut voor Sociale en Economische Geografie, KULeuven.

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2013). Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken – kansarmoede-index [Municipal child

reports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed March 24, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2014). *Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Preventieve gezinsondersteuning* [Municipal child reports. Preventive family support]. Retrieved from: http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin. (2015a). (Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken - kansarmoede-index [Municipal childreports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed November 25, 2016. http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin. (2015b). *Kind in Vlaanderen*. Brussel: Kind en Gezin.

Lazzari, A. (2014). Early childhood education and care in times of crisis. *European Early Childhood Education Journal, 22*(4), 427-431. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.947829

Lazzari, A., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2013). *The impact of early childhood education and care on cognitive and non-cognitive development. A review of European studies.* Paper presented at the Transatlantic Forum on inclusive early years. Investing in the development of young children from migrant and low-income families, Ghent.

Lee, E. (2014a). Experts and parenting culture. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 51-75). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lee, E. (2014b). Introduction. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies.* (pp. 1-22). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lingier, J. (2011). *De kracht van onderuit. Een geschiedenis van het buurtopbouwwerk in de mijnstreek*. Houthalen-Helchteren: Haletra.

Lister, R. (2003). Investing in the citizen-workers of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour. *Social Policy & Administration, 37*(5), 427-443. doi:10.1111/1467-9515.00350

Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lorenz, W. (2007). Practising history: Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work, 50*, 597-612. doi:10.1177/0020872807079918

Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in a historical context: The case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 625-644. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn025

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 4-17. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

Macvarish, J. (2014). The politics of parenting. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting Culture Studies* (pp. 76-101). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mahon, R. (2010). After Neo-Liberalism? The OECD, the World Bank and the child. *Global Social Policy, 10*(2), 172-192. doi:10.1177/1468018110366615

Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond 'heroic agency' in conceptualising social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 1011-1038. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs062

Martin, C. (2013). *The invention of parenting policy in the French context: Elements for a policy tracing*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Martorano, B. (2014). The consequences of the recent economic crisis and government reactions for children. Innocenti Working Paper, 2014-05. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Melhuish, E., Ereky-Stevens, K., K., P., Ariescu, A., Penderi, E., Rentzou, K., . . Leseman, P. (2015). *CARE: A review of research on the effects of early childhood education and care (ECEC) upon child development.* Brussels: European Commission.

Melhuish, E., Quinn, L., Hanna, K., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Tag-gart, B. (2006). *The effective pre-school provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) project. Summary report.* Belfast: Department of Education, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Social Steering Group.

Mestrum, F. (2011). Child poverty. A critical perspective. *Social Work and Society, 9*(1), 1-4.

Morabito, C., Vandenbroeck, M., & Roose, R. (2013). 'The greatest of equalisers': A critical review of international organisations' views on early childhood care and education. *Journal of Social Policy, 42*, 451-467. doi:10.1017/S0047279413000214

Moss, P. (2016). Why can't we get beyond quality? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 17*(1), 8-15. doi:10.1177/1463949115627895

Nelis, C., & Vanhinsberg, F. (1989). *En toen was er niets meer*. Zonhoven: BOEK bvba.

Notredame, L. (1994). De ijzeren (drie)hoeken. Een analyse-schema voor de beleidsvorming. *Alert, 20*(26), 5-9.

O'Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of social Work, 1*(1), 143-158. doi:10.1177/1468017310386834

OCMW Bilzen. (2014). Subsidiedossier lokale kinderarmoedebestrijding 2014-2019 Bilzen. Bilzen: OCMW Bilzen.

OCMW Genk. (2014). Actieplan Kinderarmoede Genk 2014-2019. Genk: OCMW Genk.

OECD. (2006). *Starting Strong II. Early childhood education and care.* Paris: OECD.

OECD. (2014). *Society at a glance. The crisis and its aftermath.* Paris: OECD.

Ostner, I., & Schmitt, C. (2008). *Family policies in the context of family change. The Nordic countries in comparative perspective*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Peeters, L., & Vancauteren, M. (2013). De economische impact van de sluiting van Ford Genk. Verslag opgesteld in opdracht van de Universiteit Hasselt. *Over-Werk. Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt WSE, 23*(2), 76-83.

Penn, H. (2011). *Quality in early childhood services: An international perspective.* Mc Graw Hill: Open University Press.

Province of Limburg (2016a). Retrieved from http://www.limburg.be/webfiles/gis/kaartenbak/06.pdf

Province of Limburg (2016b). Retrieved from http://www.limburg.be/Limburg/overlimburg/Limburg-int-kort.html

Pinderhughes, E., Nix, R., Foster, E., & Jones, D. (2001). Parenting in context: Impact of neighborhood poverty, residential stability, public services, social networks, and danger on parental behaviors. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*(4), 941-953. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00941.x

Pintelon, O., Cantillon, B., Van den Bosch, K., & Whelan, C. (2013). The social stratification of social risks: The relevance of class for social investment strategies. *Journal of European Social Policy, 23*(52), 52-67. doi:10.1177/0958928712463156

Platt, L. (2005). *Discovering child poverty: The creation of a policy agenda from 1800 to the present.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

POM-ERSV Limburg. (2016). *De Limburgradar. Driemaandelijkse schets van de Limburgse economie. Oktober-November 2016*. POM-ERSV Limburg, Hasselt.

Ramaekers, S., & Suissa, J. (2012). *The Claims of Parenting. Reasons, Responsibility and Society.* Londen and New York: Springer.

Respondent 1 (personal communication, June 17, 2014).

Respondent 2 (personal communication, June 17, 2014).

Respondent 3 (personal communication, July 1, 2014).

Respondent 4 (personal communication, July 3, 2014).

Respondent 5 (personal communication, July 3, 2014).

Respondent 6 (personal communication, July 2, 2014).

Respondent 7 (personal communication, July 14, 2014).

Respondent 8 (personal communication, February 26, 2015).

Respondent 9 (personal communication, February 24, 2015).

Respondent 10 (personal communication, September 30, 2015).

Respondent 11 (personal communication, September 30, 2015).

Respondent 12 (personal communication, September 30, 2015).

Richardson, D. (2010). Child and family policies in a time of economic crisis. *Children & Society, 24*, 495-508. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00334.x

Richter, M., & Andresen, S. (2012). *The politicization of parenthood: Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. London: Springer.

Roets, G., Dean, H., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2016). Disability rights and disability studies in social work: Uncovering different interpretations of rights and needs of people with learning disabilities in social work practice. In F. Kessl, W. Lorenz, & h.-U. Otto; (Eds.), *European Social Work: a compendium.* Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich.

Roets, G., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2013). Researching child poverty: Towards a lifeworld orientation. *Childhood. A Global Journal of Child Research, 20*(4), 535-549. doi:10.1177/0907568212475101

Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., . . . Vandekinderen, C. (2015). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(6), 1021-1034. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1051950

Rosanvallon, P. (1995). *La nouvelle question sociale: repenser l'Etat-providence.* Paris: Seuil.

SALK Taskforce. (2015). *Evaluatie SALK*. Brussel.

Sanders, M., Markie-Dads, C., & Turners, K. (2003). Theoretical, scientific and clinical foundations of the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program: A population approach to the promotion of parenting competence. *Parenting Research and Practice Monograph 1*. Retrieved from http://www29/triplep.net/

Sanoma magazines Belgium N.V. (2011). *Zappybaby*.

Schiettecat, T. (2016). *Trajectories of poor families in child and family social work.* Doctorate in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University.

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2016). What families in poverty consider supportive: Welfare strategies of parents with young children

in relation to (child and family) social work. *Child and Family Social Work, In press*. doi:10.1111/cfs.12285

Shonkoff, J. P. (2010). Building a biodevelopmental framework to guide the future of early childhood policy. *Child Development, 81*(1), 357-367. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01399.x

Sigurdsen, P., Berger, S., & Heymann, J. (2011). The effects of economic crises on families caring for children: Understanding and reducing long-term consequences. *Development Policy Review, 29*(5), 547-564. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7679.2011.00546.x

Somarriba, N., Zarzosa, P., & Pena, B. (2015). The economic crisis and its effects on the quality of life in the European Union. *Social Indicators Research, 120*, 323-343. doi:10.1007/s11205-014-0595-9

Staab, S. (2010). Social investment policies in Chile and Latin America: Towards equal opportunities for women and children? *Journal of Social Policy, 39*(4), 607-626. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279410000243

Stad Genk. (2014-2019). Stad Genk. Meerjarenplan 2014-2019. Genk: Stad Genk.

Stebo vzw. (2012). Woonplan Maasmechelen: omgevingsanalyse. Deel 3: deelfoto's. Maasmechelen: Stebo vzw.

Steunpunt Sociale Planning. (2016). Limburg in kaarten en cijfers. Retrieved from http://www.limburg.be/Limburg/overlimburg/kaartenencijfers.html

Strier, R. (2013). Responding to the global economic crisis: Inclusive social work practice. *National Association of Social Workers, 58*(4), 344-353. doi:10.1093/sw/swt040

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). The effective provision of preschool education (EPPE) project: Final report. Nothingham: DfES Publications - The Institute of Education.

Taylor-Gooby, P., Dean, H., Munro, E., & Parker, G. (1999). Risk and the welfare state. *British Journal of Sociology, 50*(2), 177-194. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.1999.00177.x

Tisdall, E. (2006). Antisocial behaviour legislation meets children's services: Challenging perspectives on children, parents and the state. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(1), 101-120. doi:10.1177/0261018306059767

Tsui, M., & Cheung, F. (2004). Gone with the wind: The impacts of managerialism on human services. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*(3), 437-442. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bch046

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2008). *Report Card 8. The child care transition*. Florence: Unicef.

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2014). *Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries. Innocenti Report Card 12.* Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

Van Doorslaer, B., & De Rynck, P. R. (2012). *Mijnerfgoed in Limburg. Ondergronds verleden, bovengrondse toekomst. Van Beringen tot Eisden.* OKV/Provincie Limburg.

Van Lancker, W. (2014). *Armoedebestrijding: een beleid van structurele herverdeling.* Universiteit Antwerpen: Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck.

Vandekerckhove, I. (1993). *De Miljarden van KS*. Antwerpen: CODA Antwerpen.

Vandenbroeck, M. (2009). *In verzekerde bewaring. Honderd vijftig jaar kinderen, ouders en kinderopvang*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SWP.

Vandenbroeck, M., Boonaert, T., Van der Mespel, S., & De Brabandere, K. (2009). Dialogical spaces to reconceptualize parent support in the social investment state *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 10*(1), 66-77. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2009.10.1.66

Vandenbroeck, M., Bouverne-De Bie, M., Bradt, L., & Crampe, S. (2010). *Onderzoek naar de noden en preferenties inzake preventieve zorg bij gezinnen met jonge kinderen. Onderzoek in opdracht van Kind en Gezin.* Gent-Brussel: Vakgroep Sociale Agogiek UGent - Kind en Gezin.

Vandenbroeck, M., De Visscher, S., Van Nuffel, K., & Ferla, J. (2008). Mothers' search for infant child care: The dynamic relationship between

availability and desirability in a continental European welfare state. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(2), 245-258. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.09.002

Vandenbroeck, M., & Lazzari, A. (2014). Accessibility of early childhood education and care: A state of affairs. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 22*(3), 327-335. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.912895

Vandenbroeck, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2012). Why the evidence-based paradigm in early childhood education and care is anything but evident. *European Journal of Social Work, 20*(4), 537-552. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2012.737238

Vandenbroeck, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2014). Evidence-based support versus thinking parents in participative projects. In R. Fukkink, C. Vink, & N. Bosscher (Eds.), *Think Parents! Putting parents at the heart of parenting support* (pp. 35-43). Amsterdam: SWP Publishers.

Vandenbroeck, M., & Van Lancker, W. (2014). *Een tweesporenbeleid inzake kinderarmoede. VLAS-Studies 14.* Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.

VDAB. (2014). *Collectieve ontslagen Ford en toeleveranciers (eind februari 2014). [Unpublished dataset]*. Brussel: VDAB.

Verbrugghe, B. (2011). *Ontwerpnota impulsbeleid. De versnelde uitbouw van Genk als creatieve maakstad in antwoord op een diepgaande economische, financiële en sociale crisis*. Genk.

Villadsen, K. (2007). The emergence of `Neo-Philanthropy': A new discursive space in welfare policy? *Acta Sociologica, 50*, 309-324. Retrieved from http://asj.sagepub.com/content/50/3/309

Vlaamse Executieve. (1987). *Toekomstcontract*. Brussel.

Vlaamse Executieve. (1989). *Actualisering Limburgs Toekomstcontract*. Brussel: Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

Vlaamse Executieve. (1992). *Toekomstcontract voor Limburg. Interministrieel overleg: een nieuwe dynamiek voor het toekomstcontract in de komende vijf jaar 1992-1997*. Brussels: Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

Vlaamse Regering. (2013a). *Decreet betreffende het Vlaamse integratie- en inburgeringsbeleid*. Brussel: Vlaamse Regering.

Vlaamse Regering. (2013b). *Strategisch actie-programma Limburg² 2013-2019. Ontwerp-uitvoeringsplan.* Brussel.

Vlaamse Regering. (2014). *Omzendbrief Lokale Kinderarmoedebestrijding. WVG 2014/1.* Brussel: Vlaamse regering.

Voets, M., & Boesmans, V. (1998). *Uitgangspunten en structuren van de reconversie in Limburg - n-98-56*. Brussel.

Warin, J. (2007). Joined-up services for young children and their families: Papering over the cracks of re-constructing the foundations. *Children & Society, 21*, 87-97. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00036.x

Warren-Adamson, C. (2001). *Family centres and their international role in social action: Social work as informal education.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Williams, F. (2001). In and beyond New Labour: Towards a new political ethics of care. *Critical Social Policy, 21*(4), 467-493. doi:10.1177/026101830102100405

Wright, M. (1959). *The sociological imagination.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York: Guilford Press.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods (5th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1.7 Annexes

Annex I: Future Contract for Limburg (1987-1992)

1987	New activities of industrial, agricultural and touristic nature	New investment projects and extension of existing activities	Professional training, job creation, income support and guidance
	1. Stimulation and valorisation of applied scientific research	1. Necessary infrastructure and services for KMO-projects	1. Prospection analysis and start of a structure for the management of the labour market
	2. Special research-, development- and demonstration projects (e.g., coal, iron, steal)	2. Stimulation of innovative projects and diversification of coal mines	2. Income support for miners
	3. Coordination of possible investment projects abroad (prospection)	3. Stimulation of supply from other companies in Limburg	3. Education and (re-training actions)
	4.Attraction of new projects in the tourist and recreation sector	4. Exploring sale possibilities abroad for products and production methods of KMO's in Limburg	4. Actions to reallocate in the labour market
		5. Tourism	
		6. Stimulate new activities	
		7. Environmental projects	
		8. Processing and marketing of agricultural products	
		9. Extension of guidance centre infrastructure	

Source: Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen (1988); Vlaamse Executieve (1987)

1989	Migrant Policy	Professional training and labour market	Housing	Education and research	Infrastructure and environment	Social welfare sector	Economic sector
	Integrated in the following actions	1. Guidance centre (BLM & VDAB)	1. Renovation mining districts	1. Scientific research	1. Industrial sites	1. Revalidation / health care	1. New initiatives (e.g., Rechar, Stride)
		2. ESF-projects	2. Social housing	2. Education	2. Mine sites (national and local)	2. Elder care	2. Tourism
		3. Infrastructure	3. Elder people	3. Education for migrant people	3. Protection groundwater area	3. Care for disabled people	
		4. Extra initiatives for women (e.g., project childcare)		4. Higher education	4. Mine districts - infrastructure	4. Migrant care	
					5. Traffic and transport	5. Educational projects	
						6. Social development fund	

Source: Vlaamse Executieve (1989)

1991	Education	Housing	Mine region	Diverse
	1. Primary education O.V.G.B 2. Secondary education: reconversion project BSO TSO 3. Higher education: build a university campus 4. Infrastructure 5. Professional training 6. Language lessons (NT2)	1. Renovation of mine districts 2. Housing for elders 3. Social housing	1. Sanitation of all mine sites 2. Renovation of mine districts 3. Social consequences of the closure (education, employment, combatting drugs, language) 4. Integration of migrants (language, education employment)	1. Partnership with EEG 2. Continue past actions: scientific research, transport, social welfare sector

Source: Vlaamse Executieve (1992)

Annex II: SALK² (2013-2017)

Actions on the short term	Actions on the long term	Side conditions
1. Labour market	1. Business Case Make industry	1. Open up (trade) in a targeted way
2. Reconversion of Ford-site	2. Business Case Logistics & mobility	2. Educating better
3. Speeding up procedures	3. Business Case Leisure economy and leisure experience	3. Better entrepreneurship, broader export, targeted innovation
4. Speeding up already decided decisions of infrastructural nature	4. Business Case Energyville	4. Well-being, child poverty, education
5. Attract new and strengthen existing economic activities in order to create jobs	5. Business Case Creative economy, ICT and digital media	5. Stronger entrepreneurship/LRM
6. On-going investment projects that require an engagement of the Flemish and National government	6. Business Case Agriculture, horticulture and fruit cultivation	
7. Social economics	7. Business Case Construction – Limburg CO^2 neutral	
8. Social housing	8. Business Case Care innovation, Biotech, Medtech	
9. Relating federal initiatives		

Source: Vlaamse Regering (2013b)

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other"

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed -

ABSTRACT *

In times of economic decline and austerity, a growing amount of scientific research currently frames social investment in human capital as an effective strategy to fight child poverty. With reference to what is called a turn to parenting, parents are increasingly held responsible for the development of their child(ren) as future autonomous and entrepreneurial citizens. This conceptual essay examines how this turn to parenting in contexts of economic downturn has been welcomed in social work research. By unravelling continuities as well as discontinuities in research about economic downturn and unemployment from different time junctures, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of current dominant constructions of parenting, inspired by how the social has been constructed and embraced in social work research.

* Based on: Geinger, F., Roets, G., van Gorp, A., Bradt, L., & Vandenbroeck, M. (resubmitted). Constructions of parenting in research about economic downturn and unemployment: a social work perspective. *European Journal of Social Work.*

2.1 Introduction

The current global recession, caused by the financial crisis that erupted in 2008, has a significant impact, both in Europe and beyond, in terms of aggravated economic and social conditions (e.g., job loss, poverty, fiscal consolidation) on a national and family level (Goldberg, 2012; Martorano, 2014; OECD, 2014; Richardson, 2010; Somarriba, Zarzosa, & Pena, 2015). Even though the impact, the challenges as well as the responses to this crisis have varied across countries (Farnsworth & Irving, 2012; Martorano, 2014; OECD, 2014), there seems to be a parallel in social policies across a number of European welfare states, between economic downturn and the increased focus on families and (young) children (see Eurofound, 2014; European Commission, 2013; OECD, 2014; Richardson, 2010).

Such an interest in parents and children is nothing new (Cunningham, 2005; Lee, 2014b), yet over time, constructions of parents and children have shifted due to changing demographic, socio-economic and political evolutions (e.g., scientific developments, changing family structures, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), women entering the labour market) (Cunningham, 2005; Daly, 2007; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012; Vandenbroeck, 2009). From the end of the 20th century onwards, it is argued that constructions of parents and children in terms of the relation between families and the state have changed, due to a shifting conceptualisation of Western welfare states (Featherstone, 2006; Gillies, 2008; Lee, 2014b; Richter & Andresen, 2012). The latter includes a shift towards a discourse of *social investment*; a shift from equalising outcomes to equalising opportunities and as regards social policy, a focus on the fight against child poverty through investments in the early years (Featherstone, 2006; Giddens, 1998; Lister, 2003; Richardson, 2010). This is legitimised by an increasing amount of scientific research that frames investments in human capital, especially concerning the development of children in the early years (ages 0-3), as cost-effective in the long run (Mahon, 2010; OECD, 2006; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart,

2004). How this social investment approach is translated and constructed in policy, practice and research with regard to the relation between families and the state, differs highly both between and within countries (Bäckman, 2009; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ostner & Schmitt, 2008; Richter & Andresen, 2012).
In this respect, several critics have argued that the logic of social investment, often results in an emphasis on the education and activation of children and parents through early childhood education and care (ECEC), parent support (e.g., Triple P, Sure Start) and labour market activation programmes, rather than also taking into account structural redistributive welfare investments that address the broader circumstances wherein parents (must) live, work and raise their children (e.g., neighbourhood, income, housing, job situation, public services) (Dean, 2001; Featherstone, 2006; Gray, 2014; Lister, 2003). In this view, it is stated in a recent contribution to the *European Journal of Social Work* that Western welfare states seem to have returned to "a climate that is characterised by explicit and implicit attempts to control and regulate the conduct of parents, and particularly the conduct of poor parents" (Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2015, p. 651). This is particularly salient in contexts of social, political and economic turmoil, as Lee (2014a, p. 72) claims:

> In an era where wider society offers little possibility for action and intervention, a relatively easier project seems to be that of intervening early in the development of the child through influencing the parent to behave in a particular way.

Within this climate it is assumed that "there is a direct causal link between the quality of parenting and social outcomes" (Furedi, 2014, p. ix). Consequently, parents are held responsible for the development of their child(ren) as future autonomous, self-providing and entrepreneurial citizens, and are thus easily to be blamed if they do not succeed (Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Schiettecat et al., 2015). Moreover, although holding parents responsible for all kinds of societal problems is nothing new (Cunningham, 2005; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012), it does seem to be new that in several European welfare states, responsible, active parenting has currently become a condition

to get governmental support (Dean, 2001; Lister, 2003). This current dominant construction of parenting, which emphasises the individual responsibilities of parents, is referred to as *a turn to parenting* (Gillies, 2008; Lee, 2014b; Martin, 2013; Richter & Andresen, 2012), but is criticised for running the risk of reconceptualising social problems as a matter of inappropriate individual competences of parents (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012; Richter & Andresen, 2012; Schiettecat, 2016).

Nonetheless, there are other possible conceptualisations of parenting. Several scholars, for instance, did recognise the importance of various social, political, economic and cultural conditions of parenting (Belsky, 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2001) and argued for accompanying individual measures addressing children and parents, with broader, structural family support measures (Council of Europe, 2006; D'Addato & Williams, 2014; Martin, 2013). There is even a strand of social work research that stipulated a similar line of thought, yet aspires to social justice and human dignity (rather than investment) (Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012; O' Brien, 2011).

In what follows, and inspired by the analytical insights of Lorenz (2008, 2016), we explore how *parenting* has been conceptualised throughout different periods of economic downturn and what this may mean for *the social* in social work research. After all, certain conceptualisations might, but not necessarily, carry a risk of overlooking broader historical, socio-political, economic and cultural developments in society (Lorenz, 2016). First, the essay starts with an explanation of *the social* before focussing on constructions of parenting in research about economic downturn and unemployment. We end with some concluding reflections about continuities and discontinuities in the ways in which conceptualisations of parenting are constructed throughout time, and reflect on how *the social* in social work research is appearing and disappearing.

2.2 The social

As stated in the international definition of social work (IFSW, 2014), social work "engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing". *The social* thus refers to a relational perspective in social work, in which private issues of citizens are inherently intertwined with public issues in their socio-political, economic and cultural contexts, in order to guarantee the welfare of citizens, based on principles of social justice and human dignity (Lorenz, 2008; Marston & McDonald, 2012). As such, the social is inherently about questions of solidarity and collective responsibility (Lorenz, 2016). In shaping the social, rather than translating social problems into individual problems and responsibilities, social work is aiming for structural, redistributive policies and interventions for the benefit of the well-being of citizens.

Parton (2008) states that social work has always been in search of the social, as it is an essentially ambiguous, complex, uncertain, and often vanishing issue in welfare states. According to Lorenz (2016, p. 6), we currently face the danger that social work "becomes detached from fundamental political and ethical questions of justice and equality and absorbed in a functional or even defeatist mentality of 'there is no alternative' to the privatisation of social responsibilities". How the social is constructed is therefore complex by nature and non-linear, as there is no such thing as historical "continuity without breaks and contradictions" (Lorenz, 2007, p. 599). In this view, Lorenz (2007, 2016) calls for more critical reflection on social work's (including social work research's) historical position within changing socio-political and economic contexts in order to contribute to the profession's critical and political role. Placing dominant lines of thought and methods of intervention in a historical dimension, allows the profession to see the "incredible diversity that characterises the profession" as well as "the discrepancies, the discontinuities and the disharmony" that exist within it (Lorenz, 2007, p. 599). This implies that, in using *the social* as our analytical source of inspiration, we need to analyse dominant contemporary constructions of parenting in social work

research (see for example Allen, 2011; Sanders, Markie-Dads, & Turners, 2003) – which in times of economic downturn and austerity seem to be predominantly situated in discourses that focus one-sidedly on "individual autonomy and responsibility" (Lorenz, 2016, p. 4) – alongside past constructions of parenting in research and historicise them by relating those constructions to the prevailing socio-political, economic and cultural contexts at the time. As Shaw, Briar-Lawson, Orme, and Ruckdeschel (2010, p. 4) assert, contextualised discussions about problem constructions and definitions at stake in social work research "are more likely to engage the mind and promote conversation" about broader social work purposes.

2.3 Research methodology

We rely upon three literature reviews about job loss from different time spans (see Gowan, 2014; Hanisch, 1999; Leana & Ivancevich, 1987). The selected reviews form the foundation of this article, as they are composed of a bulk of literature about economic downturn and unemployment. The study of Leana and Ivancevich (1987) reviews the literature about involuntary job loss from 1967 to 1986 and focusses on the impact of job loss as well as on interventions to counteract the consequences of unemployment. The review of Hanisch (1999) focusses on literature from 1994 to 1998 and gives recommendations for research and practice. The last study by Gowan (2014) incorporates studies from the 1930s as well as more current studies, and highlights evolutions in research about job loss. All three reviews are written in Q1, high impact journals and are retrieved from the Web of Science; a database that covers a wide span of high quality cross-disciplinary scientific research. The study of Gowan (2014) is cited five times, the second study by Hanisch (1999) is cited 84 times and the study of Leana and Ivancevich (1987) is cited 34 times. In a next step, we also consulted additional literature in order to extend or complement the reviews. To access literature before the 1950s, we consulted the JSTOR database; an online database of academic journals, but also of books and primary resources.

Nonetheless, we do not pretend that our study is a systematic literature review, nor do we claim it to be a historical review. Rather it is to be considered as a conceptual essay that aims to deepen our insight into existing, continuous as well as discontinuous research constructions about parenting throughout different periods of economic downturn, set against the background of the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts of that time.

In what follows, we distinguish in line with Farnsworth and Irving (2012) four key historical moments as our scope of study: the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, the 1970s oil crisis and the recent crisis of 2008. This classification is obviously artificial, as in reality welfare states are to a various extent affected by economic collapse (Farnsworth & Irving, 2012) and have different welfare models (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Thus, what kind of research finds resonance and how it is translated, differs highly from one country to another. Moreover, different constructions of parenting might occur together at the same time (Boddy et al., 2009; Daly, 2007). Rather than postulating facts or claiming universality, this classification only serves as a reference point to think about continuities as well as discontinuities in social work research (Lorenz, 2007; Villadsen, 2007). In the next section, we explore how parenting has been constructed through research in the past, in relation to the prevailing contexts of the aforementioned key historical moments.

2.4 Constructions of parenting in research about economic downturn and unemployment

2.4.1 The 1930s: the individual father

Research about economic downturn and unemployment expanded shortly after the Great Depression of the 1930s, especially in the US. The focus was on the deterioration of material conditions (e.g., financial problems) that resulted in a diminished food supply, lower health and several psychological problems (Baarda, Frowijn, De Goede, & Postma, 1983; Haber, 1938). The family unit

was already a topic of interest, yet instead of social conditions being to blame, it was believed that the father was to blame since he had failed to meet his responsibilities (Bakke, 1933; Haber, 1938). Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938, p. 363) state that this "is not surprising in the light of the structure of our society where the job one holds is the prime indicator of a man's status and prestige". Children were also a topic of research. On the one hand, scholars worried about them due to the decline of the nuclear family, as more women entered into the labour market because of "economic insecurity and insufficient family income" (Haber, 1938, p. 42). On the other hand, they worried about children's education, as it was believed that there was a causal relationship between the unemployment of the father and the deterioration of schoolwork, truancy, the loss of hope and ambition (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938). While this was explained by external conditions such as "the lowering of the standards of living" (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938, p. 381), interventions overly focussed upon mothers and fathers (Haber, 1938). Interventions (e.g., parent education, marriage counselling) were temporal, conditional and selective and aimed at civilising so-called maladapted and immoral citizens to the norms of the broader society (Briar, 1983; Colcord, 1932). At that time, the norm was centred around the nuclear family, wherein the father was supposed to work and the mother was held responsible for the upbringing of children (Vandenbroeck, 2009).

As such, these – overly US-based – studies seem to present a quite narrow construction of *parenting* and of *the social*, as external forces were translated as individual problems that were attributed to the father, who was to be blamed and could only be helped through re-employment. Moreover, interventions were private, selective and aimed at addressing mothers and fathers, rather than taking structural measures too. However, even within a liberal welfare regime, some voices did call for more public responsibility of the government through structural measures (Taylor, 1937).

2.4.2 The Second World War: the parent in context

In the years that followed, we continue to find studies that recommended practices of parent education and stressed the importance of the family as cultivating the roots for democracy, which would promise a better world (see Gruenberg, 1940; Zucker, 1944). However, it was increasingly recognised that the family (and the problems it faced) could not be seen apart from the social conditions in which it was situated. As Goldstein (1940, p. 10) stated:

> If the family is to cultivate its own creative powers, if it is to make its own peculiar contribution to the development of personality and to social progress the family must be freed from the conditions that now seriously hamper it in the economic field.

In order to take account of these constraining conditions, researchers pointed to the role of the government instead of only private actors, yet when it comes down to concrete interventions, they kept focussing on the nuclear, male breadwinner model as the dominant norm. In the US for instance, “a national program for the protection of marriage and the conservation of the family” was developed (Goldstein, 1940, p. 10). Those who deviated from the norm were seen as *at risk* of disturbing the social order and the development of children.
After the Second World War, and especially in Europe, a shift in focus can be noticed under the development of the social welfare state. Since it was generally accepted that the market also produced social inequalities, social work services in these welfare states were no longer based on charity and philanthropy but were seen as a welfare right of citizens in order to be able to live a life in human dignity and social justice (Goldberg, 2012; Schiettecat et al., 2015). Instead of the idea that social problems (e.g., poverty, unemployment) were to be blamed on deviant, immoral citizens that needed to be dealt with by intervening in the family, the insight grew that social problems also had a socio-political and economic dimension that appeals to the responsibilities of governments. As such, private initiatives were largely replaced by public social services. These services (e.g., childcare, education, health care,

unemployment assistance) grew exponentially between the 1960s and the 1970s, and not only material needs but also psychological needs and social well-being were taken into consideration (Leana & Ivancevich, 1987). In relation to unemployment, it became clear that in order to flourish, the quality of a job mattered more than simply being in work (Gowan, 2014). Moreover, research studies highlighted the importance of unemployment assistance that aimed at gradually combatting the negative effects of economic downturn and poverty in general, through retraining programmes, education and re-employment counselling (Briar, 1983; Leana & Ivancevich, 1987; McLaughlin, 1991).

As such, within this period, and especially after the Second World War, more studies can be found that argued for a broader construction of *parenting* and *the social*, not by coincidence in a climate wherein parents' problems (e.g., unemployment, poverty) were related to public issues and more public, universal social services were developed. However, in the following years and depending on the prevailing context, different interpretations and constructions of parenting and, in turn, about *the social* can be noticed, especially in research from the late 20th century. In what follows, we further elaborate on this insight.

2.4.3 The 1970s oil crisis: the parent in the family and the state

Similar to the Great Depression, research about economic downturn and unemployment extended due to the oil crisis in the 1970s. Two lines of thought can be distinguished.

First, a model that was found to be of great importance in research literature prior to the 1980s, was the deprivation model of Marie Jahoda, which was based on an earlier study in the 1930s, and later work that confirmed her findings (Gowan, 2014). According to Jahoda (1981) the absence of work implies not only a loss of manifest functions such as the provision of money

which is necessary in order to live and to maintain the family's economic well-being, but also a loss of several latent, not purposefully planned or non-obvious, by-products of work which make employment psychologically supportive, such as: time structure; shared experiences and contact with people outside the family; higher goals and purposes; personal status and identity and activity. However, against the background of cutbacks in social services (Briar, 1983), the dominant belief in research prior to the 1980s was still that any job was better than no job (Gowan, 2014; Jahoda, 1981).

In what concerns the family, attention on the socio-psychological and relational aspect of the family unit increased (Elder, 1974; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardelt, 1992; Moen, 1980). Scholars studied the influence of the mother and father's psychological distress on other family members and documented a diminished quality of marital interaction due to more inter-spousal hostility and less warm, supportive interactions (Elder et al., 1992; McLoyd, 1989). This in turn, negatively affected parenting in terms of involvement, warmth, discipline and supportiveness towards children (Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995). These indirect effects were again considered to be problematic in the context of children's education. It was argued that economic uncertainty within the family decreases children's performance in school, which in turn would impede their future life prospects as adults (Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987). While previous research attributed this to a lower standard of living (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938), research in this period attributed it to the pessimistic feelings of parents (Elchardus, Glorieux, Derks, & Pelleriaux, 1996; Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987): "feelings of decreased confidence about helping their children prepare for future work roles" and "more negative changes in educational plans for their children" (McLoyd, 1989, p. 299). In turn, "these parental dispositions and behaviours appear to dampen children's aspirations and expectations" (McLoyd, 1989, p. 299). As such, rather than also emphasising broader, systemic conditions that might influence parents' and children's aspirations, the focus in the above-mentioned studies from the 20th century is mainly on parents. They are considered to be responsible (and if not, to be blamed) for

influencing their children's aspirations in a *good* way. Studies did acknowledge the different degree to which unemployment might impact upon families and children, due to the context in which families live (Elder et al., 1992). Yet, *the social* was mainly interpreted in terms of interactions between family members, as studies overly discussed the micro level consequences and coping strategies of family members individually and relationally, rather than focussing on economic downturn and unemployment as such, on a macro level (Gowan, 2014).

Second, we can distinguish another yet smaller strand of literature, in which the scope of research extended to connecting economic downturn, unemployment and its consequences on families with broader, macro level cultural and institutional developments in society (Elchardus et al., 1996; Gowan, 2014; Hanisch, 1999). Jahoda's (1981) research, for instance, was partially criticised and extended. It was argued that the model did not take into account that "the sufferings consequent on the loss of paid work might be social constructs", that is, "outcomes of an historically-contingent construction of (male) identities in relation to a particular form of paid work" (Cole, 2007, p. 1135). In this respect, it is argued that being employed can also be experienced as a stressful event (Gowan, 2014; Warr, 1987). Likewise unemployment can be experienced as positive too (Hanisch, 1999). Moreover, Leana and Feldman (1988) pointed to the influence of social support and labour conditions, together with personality characteristics on the coping behaviour of individuals. Also the absence of government assistance (Strandh, 2001) and community support (Eamon & Wu, 2011), neighbourhood characteristics (Elder et al., 1995), social networks (Nordenmark, 1999), early childhood education and care services (ECEC) (Sigurdsen, Berger, & Heymann, 2011), the quality of work available (Eamon & Wu, 2011; Gowan, 2014) and geographical location (Meece, Askew, Agger, Hutchins, & Byun, 2014), are considered important structural dimensions.

Furthermore, in what concerns children, recent research still focusses on children's aspirations in the context of education, but incorporates a broader conceptualisation of aspirations. Aspirations not only reflect family-related

influences, such as family income and parental expectations, but also broader socio-economic circumstances, such as economic and geographic factors (Meece et al., 2014) as well as influences of peers, school, religion, social relationships, opportunities for participation, and the community (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). Aspirations are formed "in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67) and should thus not be seen to be solely constructed as an individual feature. Moreover, Appadurai (2004, p. 69) states, "the capacity to aspire […] is not evenly distributed in any society". As such, children's aspirations are not merely determined by the aspirations their parents hold for them, as was previously thought. What matters are the opportunities to navigate or to get a sense of "the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 70). In this respect, we argue that these research studies embrace a more *social* conceptualisation in the true sense of the word, as they go beyond a one-to-one relationship between parent and child, by incorporating socio-political, economic and cultural processes, evolutions and contexts in which this relationship is situated (Lorenz, 2008, 2016). In so doing, they do not tend to individualise the consequences of major economic events to an individual problem, nor do they reduce structural inequalities to an individual responsibility of parents.

2.4.4 The 2008 crisis: the individual parent

At the beginning of the 21st century, however, scholars still worry about the dominant focus on micro-level consequences of unemployment. Strandh (2001, p. 58), for instance, stated: "Along with this focus on the micro-level consequences of unemployment, researchers have largely forgotten about the role of state intervention in relieving unemployment". Brand (2015, p. 370), moreover, argued that "future work should attend more fully to the impact of displacement beyond workers themselves". This seems to support the critique that most research studies were primarily concerned with the individual and psychological consequences of economic downturn and unemployment (Cole,

2007) and interventions of a similar nature, oriented at the improvement of parenting (Goldberg, 2012; Strier, 2013). In so doing, the social dimensions of well-being, including the ways in which the welfare state is supposed to provide social services and resources in redistributive ways and to compensate for the failures of the (labour) market, risk being ignored (Morabito & Vandenbroeck, 2014). Consequently, research that initially aimed to look at the influence of a wider social issue, such as economic downturn and unemployment on parents and children, paradoxically might have contributed to the framing of problems that stem from wider socio-economic circumstances as problems of parenting (see introduction). This might in turn suggest that social policy and social work practice, first and foremost, need to intervene in the family rather than also advocating structural, redistributive measures.

Not by coincidence, this critique was launched at a time when the traditional conceptualisation of social welfare systems in Europe and beyond changed to a social investment state (Giddens, 1998; Schiettecat, 2016). In this view, Strier (2013, p. 344) pointed to new concerns and challenges for social workers due to the recent global crisis to which governments had responded with several austerity policies: "the further socioeconomic decline and marginalization of excluded populations". He therefore called for a reassessment of social work practices towards "a much more engaged, egalitarian, social rights-based and reflexive social work practice" (p.351). Goldberg (2012) stated that in times of economic crisis, social work needs to regain its political role. Other scholars pointed to the changed relationship between parents and the state in social work, as the focus is shifting again towards a radicalisation of parental responsibility with parents held responsible for the future success of their children (Featherstone, 2006). As Mitchell and Campbell (2011, p. 431) stated:

> Despite complex demands, workers often focus narrowly on parenting […]. This approach fails to assess the immediately surrounding informal world which impacts so strongly on families and fails to tackle systematically material, social and cultural impoverishment.

As mentioned in the introduction, this is not necessarily or always the case. There is a strand of social work research that aims to realise its social justice aspirations by advocating structural, redistributive measures too, in order to tackle the root causes of societal problems. In that vein, Evans and Harris (2004) showed how social work develops multiple discretionary strategies to do so, which implies that social work is not unconsciously taking up a neoliberal discourse, but rather actively co- and deconstructs it.

2.5 Concluding reflections

Inspired by the work of Lorenz (2007, 2008, 2016), we aimed to contribute to the debate on a more comprehensive understanding of the current dominant, but rather narrow constructions of parenting, that increasingly hold parents responsible for public issues, and seem to have emerged in contexts of socio-economic and political turmoil (Gillies, 2008; Lee, 2014b; Schiettecat et al., 2015). By exploring how parenting has been constructed in research about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment on families with children, in different prevailing historical contexts, this essay unravelled continuities as well as discontinuities in the way parenting is conceptualised and how these conceptualisations influenced *the social* in social work research. Nonetheless, it was not our aim to make generalisations about constructions of parenting, but rather, to contribute to a critical reconsideration of social work's (including social work research's) historical position within changing socio-political and economic contexts (Lorenz, 2007).

We found that the interest in parents and children in times of economic downturn and unemployment is a continuity throughout the research studies we consulted. The same is true as regards the individualising and decontextualising nature of most of the research (see Bakke, 1933; Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938; Elder, 1974; Goldstein, 1940; Haber, 1938; McLoyd, 1989; Moen, 1980; Warr, 1987), as consequences of wider socio-economic circumstances were often framed as individual, psychological problems of

parents, that were dealt with by similar (i.e. individual, psychological) interventions. Such a process of individualisation, however, might serve the social regulation of individuals and families, while glossing over the structural inequalities that hamper personal and social development through a redistribution of resources and power (Schiettecat, 2016). In so doing, we argued that this might give rise to a narrow conceptualisation of the social, as structural causes of social problems (e.g., unemployment, poverty and rising inequalities) and structural interventions that take account of the conditions wherein children and parents live, risk being ignored (Lister, 2003). Throughout each period, however, we also found examples of studies that pointed to the importance of a more structural perspective. Especially the shift towards a more systemic conceptualisation of the social in research and practice, under the development of Western social welfare states, can be considered a discontinuity. Instead of emphasising the individual responsibilities of parents, it became clear that social problems also had a public character (Lister, 2003). Consequently, governments unconditionally took up their responsibility, based on a framework of human rights and social justice (e.g., through redistributive resources such as child allowances). Nevertheless, the recent interest in investing in parents and children (e.g., through the focus on *child* poverty and parent support), as well as reactive unemployment policies, again runs the risk of re-activating (Villadsen, 2007) an individually-oriented approach to the social. Not only are parents increasingly held responsible to equip themselves and their children to respond to wider socio-economic circumstances, it has also become a condition to get governmental support (Lister, 2003).

Therefore, we conclude with Lorenz (2016) that *the social* or the very essence of social work and social work research needs to be further revitalised and extended in the bulk of research about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for families with children. Rather than looking at ‘parenting’ in a narrow way, as the main responsibility of parents, embracing the social enables broadening constructions of parenting, fully including its socio-political dimension (the socio-economic and socio-political context), as

well as its relational dimension (as a *shared* responsibility between the private and the public realm). In this view, the recent, but limited, tendency towards opening up or criticising the rather narrow approaches to parenting in research about economic downturn and unemployment (see Elchardus et al., 1996; Gowan, 2014; Hanisch, 1999; Sigurdsen et al., 2011; Strier, 2013), can be considered as a hopeful sign for social work and social work research in maintaining its social integrity.

2.6 References

Allen, G. (2011). *Early intervention: Smart investment, massive savings. The second independent report to Her Majesty's Government.* London: HM Government.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds.), *Culture and Public Action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Baarda, D., Frowijn, A., De Goede, M., & Postma, M. (1983). Schoolprestaties van kinderen van werkloze vaders [Schoolperformance of unemployed fathers' children]. *Pedagogische Studiën, 60*, 473-484.

Bäckman, O. (2009). Institutions, structures and poverty: A comparative study of 16 countries. *European Sociological Review, 25*(2), 251-264. doi:10.1093/esr/jcn038

Bakke, W. (1933). *The unemployed man: A social study.* London: Nisbet.

Belsky, J. (1984). The determinants of parenting: A process model. *Child Development, 55*(1), 83-96. doi: 10.2307/1129836

Boddy, J., Statham, J., Smith, M., Ghate, D., Wigfall, V., & Hauari, H. (2009). *International perspectives on parenting support.* London: Institute of Education.

Brand, J. E. (2015). The far-reaching impact of job loss and unemployment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 41*, 359-375. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043237

Briar, K. H. (1983). Unemployment – towards a social work agenda. *Social Work, 28*(3), 211-215. doi: 10.1093/sw/28.3.211

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Colcord, J. C. (1932). Remedial agencies dealing with the American Family. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 160, 124-134. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1018524

Cole, M. (2007). Re-thinking unemployment: A challenge to the legacy of Jahoda et al. *Sociology, 41*(6), 1133-1149. doi:10.1177/0038038507082319

Council of Europe. (2006). *Recommendation 19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting.* Retrieved from https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d6dc5

Cunningham, H. (2005). *Children and childhood in Western society since 1500.* UK: Pearson Education.

D'Addato, A., & Williams, A. (2014). Investing in family and parenting support. In R. Fukkink, C. Vink, & N. Bosscher (Eds.), *Think parents: Putting parents at the heart of parenting support.* (pp. 99-106). Amsterdam: B. V. SWP Publishers.

Daly, M. (2007). *Parenting in contemporary Europe: A positive approach*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Dean, H. (2001). Working parenthood and parental obligation. *Critical Social Policy, 21*(3), 267-289. doi:10.1177/026101830102100302

Eamon, K., & Wu, C. (2011). Effects of unemployment and underemployment on material hardship in single-mother families. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 233-241. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.006

Eisenberg, P., & Lazarsfeld, P. (1938). The psychological effects of unemployment. *Psychological Bulletin, 35*(6), 358-390. doi: 10.1037/h0063426

Elchardus, M., Glorieux, I., Derks, A., & Pelleriaux, K. (1996). *Voorspelbaar ongeluk: over letsels die werkloosheid achterlaat bij mannen en hun kinderen* [Predictable accident: About the injuries unemployment brings to men and their children]. Brussel: VUB Press.

Elder, G. (1974). *Children of the Great Depression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elder, G., Conger, R., Foster, M., & Ardelt, M. (1992). Families under economic pressure. *Journal of Family Issues, 13*(5), 5-37. doi:10.1177/019251392013001002

Elder, G., Eccles, J., Ardelt, M., & Lord, S. (1995). Inner-city parents under economic pressure: Perspectives on the strategies of parenting. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 57*, 771-784. doi: 10.2307/353931

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Eurofound. (2014). *Third European quality of life survey - quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2013). *Commission recommendation. Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage.* Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf.

Evans, T., & Harris, J. (2004). Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (exaggerated) death of discretion. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*, 871-895. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch106

Farnsworth, K., & Irving, Z. (2012). Varieties of crisis, varieties of austerity: Social policy in challenging times. *The Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 20*(2), 133-147. doi: 10.1332/175982712X652041

Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work, 36*, 5-19. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch226

Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Furedi, F. (2014). Foreword. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting Culture Studies* (pp. viii-x). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Galambos, N., & Silbereisen, R. (1987). Income change, parental life outlook, and adolescent expectations for job success. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49*, 141-149.

Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way: The renewal of social democracy.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gillies, V. (2008). Perspectives on parenting responsibility: Contextualizing values and practices. *Journal of Law and Society, 35*, 95-112. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6478.2008.00416.x

Goldberg, G. (2012). Economic inequality and economic crisis: A challenge for social workers. *Social Work, 57*(3), 211-224. doi:10.1093/sw/sws005

Goldstein, S. E. (1940). The family as a dynamic actor in American society. *Living, 2*(1), 8-11. doi: 10.2307/346503

Gowan, M. (2014). Moving from job loss to career management: The past, present, and future of involuntary job loss research. *Human Resource Management Review, 24*, 258-270. doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2014.03.007

Gray, M. (2014). The swing to early intervention and prevention and its implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 1750-1769. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct037

Gray, M., & Webb, S. A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18*(1), 111-115. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00626.x

Gruenberg, S. M. (1940). Parent Education. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 212*, 81-87. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1024427

Gutman, L. M., & Akerman, R. (2008). Research report. Determinants of aspirations. (pp. i-30). London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education.

Haber, W. (1938). The effects of insecurity on family life. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 196*(1), 35-44. doi: 10.1177/000271623819600107

Hanisch, K. A. (1999). Job loss and unemployment research from 1994 to 1998: A review and recommendations for research and intervention. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 55*, 188-220. doi:10.1006/jvbe.1999.1722

IFSW. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Jahoda, M. (1981). Work, employment, and unemployment: Values, theories, and approaches in social research. *American Psychologist, 36*(2), 184-191. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.36.2.184

Leana, C., & Feldman, D. (1988). Individual responses to job loss: Perceptions, reactions and coping behaviour. *Journal of Management, 14*(3), 375-389. doi: 10.1177/014920638801400302

Leana, C., & Ivancevich, J. (1987). Involuntary job loss: Institutional interventions and a research agenda. *The Academy of Management Review, 12*(2), 301-312. doi:10.5465/AMR.1987.4307847

Lee, E. (2014a). Experts and parenting culture. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting Culture Studies* (pp. 51-75). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lee, E. (2014b). Introduction. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies.* (pp. 1-22). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lister, R. (2003). Investing in the citizen-workers of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour. *Social Policy & Administration, 37*(5), 427-443. doi:10.1111/1467-9515.00350

Lorenz, W. (2007). Practising history: Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work, 50*, 597-612. doi:10.1177/0020872807079918

Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in a historical context: The case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 625-644. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn025

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 4-17. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

Mahon, R. (2010). After Neo-Liberalism? The OECD, the World Bank and the child. *Global Social Policy, 10*(2), 172-192. doi:10.1177/1468018110366615

Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond 'heroic agency' in conceptualising social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 1011-1038. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs062

Martin, C. (2013). *The invention of parenting policy in the French context: Elements for a policy tracing*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Martorano, B. (2014). The consequences of the recent economic crisis and government reactions for children. Innocenti Working Paper, 2014-05. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

McLaughlin, E. (1991). Work and welfare benefits – social security, employment and unemployment in the 1990s. *Journal of Social Policy, 20*, 485-508. doi: 10.1017/S0047279400019772

McLoyd, V. (1989). Socialization and development in a changing economy. The effects of paternal job and income loss on children. *American Psychologist, 44*(2), 293-302. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.44.2.293

Meece, J., Askew, K., Agger, C., Hutchins, B., & Byun, S.-J. (2014). Familial and economic influences on the gender-related educational and occupational aspirations of rural adolescents. *Journal of Educational and Development Psychology, 4*(1), 238-257. doi:10.5539/jedp.v4n1p238

Mitchell, G., & Campbell, L. (2011). The social economy of excluded families. *Child and Family Social Work, 16*, 422-433. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2011.00757.x

Moen, P. (1980). Measuring unemployment: Family considerations. *Human Relations, 33*(3), 183-193. doi: 10.1177/001872678003300303

Morabito, C., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). Equality of opportunities, divergent conceptualisations and their implications for early childhood care and educations policies. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 1-17. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.12112

Nordenmark, M. (1999). The concentration of unemployment within families and social networks. *European Sociological Review, 15*(1), 49-59. doi:10.1093/oxfordjournals.esr.a018254

O' Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work, 1*(1), 143-158. doi:10.1177/1468017310386834

OECD. (2006). *Starting strong II. Early childhood education and care.* Paris: OECD.

OECD. (2014). *Society at a glance. The crisis and its aftermath.* Paris: OECD.

Ostner, I., & Schmitt, C. (2008). *Family policies in the context of family change. The Nordic countries in comparative perspective*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Parton, N. (2008). Changes in the form of knowledge in social work: From the 'social' to the 'informational'? *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 253-269. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl337

Pinderhughes, E., Nix, R., Foster, E., & Jones, D. (2001). Parenting in context: Impact of neighborhood poverty, residential stability, public services, social networks, and danger on parental behaviors. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*(4), 941-953.

Ramaekers, S., & Suissa, J. (2012). *The claims of parenting. Reasons, responsibility and society.* London and New York: Springer.

Richardson, D. (2010). Child and family policies in a time of economic crisis. *Children & Society, 24*, 495-508. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00334.x

Richter, M., & Andresen, S. (2012). *The politicization of parenthood: Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. London: Springer.

Sanders, M., Markie-Dads, C., & Turners, K. (2003). Theoretical, scientific and clinical foundations of the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program: A population approach to the promotion of parenting competence. *Parenting Research and Practice Monograph 1*. Retrieved from http://www29/triplep.net/

Schiettecat, T. (2016). *Trajectories of poor families in child and family social work.* (Doctor in Social Work), Ghent University, Ghent.

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Do families in poverty need child and family social work? *European Journal of Social Work, 18*(5), 647-660. doi:10.1080/13691457.2014.953916

Shaw, I., Briar-Lawson, K., Orme, J., & Ruckdeschel, R. (2010). Editorial essay. Mapping social work research: Pasts, presents and futures. In I. Shaw, K. Briar-Lawson, J. Orme, & R. Ruckdeschel (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Work Research* (pp. 1-600). London: Sage Publications.

Sigurdsen, P., Berger, S., & Heymann, J. (2011). The effects of economic crises on families caring for children: Understanding and reducing long-term consequences. *Development Policy Review, 29*(5), 547-564. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7679.2011.00546.x

Somarriba, N., Zarzosa, P., & Pena, B. (2015). The economic crisis and its effects on the quality of life in the European Union. *Social Indicators Research, 120*, 323-343. doi:10.1007/s11205-014-0595-9

Strandh, M. (2001). State intervention and mental well-being among the unemployed. *Journal of Social Policy, 30*(1), 57-80. Retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy

Strier, R. (2013). Responding to the global economic crisis: Inclusive social work practice. *National Association of Social Workers, 58*(4), 344-353. doi:10.1093/sw/swt040

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). *The effective provision of preschool education (EPPE) project: Final report.* Nottingham: DfES Publications – The Institute of Education.

Taylor, M. (1937). The responsibility of the social worker in the changing social order. *Social Forces, 15*(3), 371-377. doi: 10.2307/2570604.

Vandenbroeck, M. (2009). *In verzekerde bewaring. Honderd vijftig jaar kinderen, ouders en kinderopvang* [In custody. One hundred and fifty years of children, parents and childcare]. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SWP.

Villadsen, K. (2007). The emergence of 'Neo-Philanthropy': A new discursive space in welfare policy? *Acta Sociologica, 50*, 309-324. doi: http://asj.sagepub.com/content/50/3/309

Warr, P. (1987). The psychological impact of continuing unemployment: Some longitudinal data and a general model. In D. Schwefel, P. Svensson, & H. Zöllner (Eds.), *Unemployment, social vulnerability and health in Europe.* (pp. 267-280). London: Springer Verlag.

Zucker, H. L. (1944). Working parents and latchkey children. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 236*, 43-50. doi: 10.1177/000271624423600107

CHAPTER 3

PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS: DISCOURSES

The object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed -

ABSTRACT *

The existing critical literature on constructions of childhood and parenthood is only beginning to listen to what parents have to say. As a result, parents may paradoxically be viewed as passive victims and therefore reduced to be the spectators of what is supposed to be their 'problem'. The present study analyses dominant parent advice texts in the Flemish community of Belgium, as well as the voices of parents on the Internet. The study confirms the tendencies noticed in critical literature: the tendency to individualise responsibilities and the focus on autonomy in the neoliberal era. In addition it unveils the double bind nature of autonomy in expert discourse. It also illustrates the performative agency of parents, as co-constructors of dominant discourse as well as contesting this discourse. In so doing, the study complements the existing vein of literature with the way in which parents think of and experience the dominant parenting discourse.

* Based on: Geinger, F., Vandenbroeck, M., & Roets, R. (2014). Parenting as a performance: parents as consumers and (de)constructors of mythic parenting and childhood ideals. *Childhood-a global journal of child research, 21*(4): 488-501.

3.1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the constructions of childhood and – to a lesser extent – the interrelated constructions of parenthood and childhood in policy and practice. In relation to the latter, growing attention is being paid to what we term 'the parenting turn' in European welfare states: the tendency in policy to look at parenting as the solution to social problems (Jensen, 2010; Martin, 2010; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). Researchers have critically analysed this increasing attention to the relationship between children, parents and the welfare state in the context of changing welfare state regimes (Murphy, 2007; Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). They analyse how today's western societies are marked by changing relations between children, parents and governments, concurrent with a shift of the welfare state to a social investment state, characterised by neoliberal policies regarding children and families (Featherstone, 2006; Parton, 2006; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). Children, their development and the prevention of risks become priorities since children are considered as "the future citizens of tomorrow" (Tisdall, 2006, p. 115), being "typically constructed in instrumentalist terms as profitable investments" (Lister, 2007, p. 697). In the paradigm of social investment, childhood is considered as a period of socialisation in which children grow towards autonomy as self-providing and responsible individuals who can and must participate in society (Moran-Ellis and Sunker, 2008). Parents, as a consequence, are expected to be 'entrepreneurial individual[s]', who are 'responsible' for helping their children develop as 'good' citizens (Jensen, 2010). In this light, seeking help and support in parenting is considered the act of a 'good' and 'responsible' citizen (Gillies, 2005).

One of the critiques on standards and constructions of 'the good child' and 'the good and ideal parent' implies the risk of losing "sight of the contextuality of the institutionalisation of a cultural model of child rearing in certain kinds of texts and of its actual use in specific everyday life practices" (Campos, 2004, p. 286). Significant here is the finding that this decontextualisation is in sharp contrast

with studies showing that characteristics of the neighbourhood, such as poverty, public services, residential instability, limited social networks and danger, tend to undermine positive parental behaviours and affect the act of parenting more than the culture and mode of parenting (Pinderhughes et al., 2001). Childhood cannot be understood without relating this issue to parenthood, and in order to understand parenthood we need to explore "the conditions, the spaces in which it is possible for woman and men to think and embody their parenting practice" (Loveridge 1990, cited in Nichols et al., 2009, p. 66). Decontextualisation induces a process of blaming parents who cannot fulfil the prevailing norms and marginalises specific groups of children and their parents (Edwards and Gillies, 2004; Featherstone, 2006; Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). Decontextualisation is part of a process of transforming social problems into individual and educational problems, what we term 'the parenting turn', reducing parents and children to objects of intervention (Gillies, 2005).

An important contribution to the discussions on constructions of childhood and parenthood is made by discourse analysis, which unveils these dominant discursive regimes on parenting advice and support. Discursive regimes on parenting have been criticised for producing "idealized and mythic parenting requirements" (Blackford, 2004: 239), an "ideology of motherhood" (Choi et al., 2005: 173), "a symbolic world of parents" (Nichols et al., 2009: 72) and "dominant mothering ideologies" (Johnston and Swanson, 2006: 510). Researchers have stressed that statements about childhood and parenthood appear as objective facts in these discursive regimes in which parents function as passive objects of intervention, yet in reality they reflect the prevailing western social and political conditions (Edwards and Gillies, 2004; Murphy, 2007; Perrier, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a small but growing body of innovative work that, rather than constructing parents as passive victims of dominant discourses on childhood and parenthood, explores the ways in which parents think of and position themselves through these dominant parenting discourses and perform parenthood (see Faircloth, 2009; Jensen, 2010; Perrier, 2012). As Foucault (1998) argues, the processes by which a discourse

becomes (more) dominant are diffuse and diagonal. Power is everywhere and is always accompanied by resistance. Moreover, Althusser (1984, cited in Johnston and Swanson, 2006: 509) reminds us that "people are both producers and consumers of ideology". This means that discourses can be constructed and produced as well as deconstructed, and that parents are not passive victims, but also actors or 'agents' in ruling discourses (Moss et al., 2000; Murphy, 2007). In line with Butler's (1990) framing of gender, one needs to consider parenting as a form of 'performativity' and therefore *a doing,* a *becoming,* rather than a being. Being a parent is not just a status, but also a performance.

As a contribution to the recently developing field of studies where parents are listened to, we analyse a discussion board on a parental website in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium) which seems to be an important place where parents exchange information about their children and their childrearing practices as a site of support (Drentea and Moren-Cross, 2005; Ley, 2007).

3.2 Research methodology

We used critical discourse analysis to examine official parenting advice texts as well as parents' everyday experiences and talks (Fairclough, 2003). Since discourses are discernible in everyday talk (Moss et al., 2000; Murphy, 2007), parents' talk about parenthood and childhood can offer an interesting source of data to complement the existing vein of critical literature. Discourse, in a Foucauldian sense, is "never just linguistic since it organises a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000, cited in Jackson, 2004, p. 688). Consequently, an in-depth analysis of parents' everyday talk and discourse can contribute to our understanding of how parents actively consume, (de) construct and possibly also resist dominant discourses on parenting in their performance of parenthood. Since deconstruction "has the power to show how every social order rests on a forgetting of the exclusion practices through which one set of meanings has been institutionalized and

various other possibilities have been marginalized" (Shapiro, 2001, cited in Jones and Osgood, 2007, p. 295), this research method is useful to question taken for granted and naturalised categories (Thorne, 2007). The applied discourse analysis allows us to look at complex relations between people's talk and the broader societal contexts, and how these are interwoven with notions of power, ideology and other social practices (Foucault, 1988, cited in Moss et al., 2000: 236). Focusing on the relations between everyday talks and more global discourses, we engaged in a qualitative content analysis of the dominant literature on parenting advice towards parents of young children (from the prenatal period to approximately 3-year-olds) in Flanders and discussions among parents on the Internet.

3.2.1 Capturing discourses of parenting advice

In order to analyse the dominant discourse in Flanders, we selected a corpus of governmental parenting advice texts that are targeted at parents of young children (during the prenatal period to approximately 3-year-olds) and widely distributed among parents. The first text was the brochure *Het ABC van baby tot kleuter* (The ABC from baby to toddler), published by the government agency responsible for preventative health and childcare *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family) and distributed to nearly all new parents by preventative health care services. Kind en Gezin's brochures reach 95.8% of mothers (Kind en Gezin, 2011). The second text consisted of six *Triple P* magazines, distributed since 2009. These magazines were part of the 'Positive Parenting Programme' (Triple P), a multi-level, population-based preventative parenting programme (Sanders et al., 2003) that was introduced on a large scale in Flanders. Sixty thousand copies were distributed (Glazemakers and Deboutte, n.d.). The third text consisted of 23 files retrieved from the parenting advice website www.groeimee.be, which provides information and advice for parents with children from birth to 36 months. The website belongs to EXPOO, the government expertise centre on parenting support. In 2011, the website was visited 98,014 times by 73,162 individual visitors (Kind en Gezin, 2011).

3.2.2 Capturing discourses of parents: Zappy Baby

In order to capture discourses of parents, we explored the discussion board on a parental website in Flanders, www.zappybaby.be. Zappy Baby is the largest online community targeted at parents of young children (from the prenatal period to approximately 3-year olds) in Belgium. At the time of the study, the discussion board had 116,067 members, most of them not registered (and thus anonymous). It contained 294,261 subjects and 2,910,841 messages (19 March 2012). It is owned by Sanoma magazines Belgium NV, editor of popular magazines and websites (Sanoma magazines Belgium NV, 2011). More than two-thirds of the visitors were younger than 34 years, around 70% were employed, 60% were female and most of them were highly educated (cs.sanomamedia.be). Zappy Baby contains both official advice texts and parents' virtual dialogues; most of them about very young children. While the Internet seems to be an important source of informal parenting support (Drentea and Moren-Cross, 2005; Ellis and Heisler, 2008), interestingly, Zappy Baby is not considered by parent support policies as a tool for parenting support in Flanders. Indeed, the discussion board of this website does not include any professional input, which created an opportunity to analyse the everyday informal talk of parents. We selected conversations that were finished in the year 2011, categorised under the heading '13–36 months' and the topic 'opvoeden' (parenting). The latter was chosen because it was the parents who categorised their items under this topic, thus this represents a reflection of their interpretation of what is considered as 'parenting'. During 2011, this resulted in 64 conversations. Eight of these were omitted from the analysis because the conversations did not originate from parents (e.g. calls from students or commercials), leaving 56 conversations involving 489 messages of 180 individual participants. Based on the addressed topics and nicknames used in the selected conversations, it can be assumed that 96% of them were female. Nevertheless, the more gender-neutral term 'parent' was used, to do justice to the four fathers.

3.2.3 A directed approach to qualitative content analysis

The data were analysed by engaging in a qualitative content analysis, implying a research method that concentrates on “the subjective interpretation of the content of text data” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), as a “sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). We applied a directed approach to content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), defined as a deductive or theory-driven coding that also includes newly emerging themes that are inductively identified. This directed approach to content analysis was elaborated using empirically based ‘feedback loops’ (Mayring, 2000), which enabled us to support, question or expand our theoretical frame of reference. The three texts were thematically labelled and axially coded, inspired by the scholarly literature on the changing relations between children, parents and the welfare state and the ways in which children as well as parenting advice are constructed, as briefly outlined in the introduction section. The coding system resulted in the clustering of parenting advice into subthemes and the consequent elaboration of a codebook. Subsequently, the coding system that was elaborated on the basis of theory and the analysis of parenting advice texts was applied to analyse the discussions among parents on the website www.zappbaby.be, where the performative agency of parents proved to be a central theme throughout the findings.

3.3 Results

We frame the findings around three central subthemes: (1) becoming autonomous; (2) individual responsibility; and (3) trial, error and confession. The performative agency runs as a common theme across all three subthemes. All quotes from parenting advice texts and parents’ dialogues in this section are authors’ translations of the original quotes. Titles of the topics mentioned and

nicknames used by parents are literally taken from Zappy Baby and translated by us, and respect the anonymity of the parents.

3.3.1 Becoming autonomous

Our study confirms previous analyses of dominant discourses on parenting, in line with the ideal of the autonomous, entrepreneurial individual ready to function in a globalised, marketised and competitive world (Featherstone, 2006; Gillies, 2005; Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). The goal of parenting, as stated in Kind en Gezin's *ABC* brochure (2012: 1), is 'the gradual growth to autonomy'. The importance of the growth to autonomy is also reflected in the different developmental topics, such as 'toddler puberty', 'toilet-training', 'play' and 'fears' (see Groeimee, 2012b, 2012d, 2012e, 2012f, 2012g; Kind en Gezin, 2012). Autonomy as the goal of parenting shows close resemblances to the construction of the child as 'autonomous' rather than a fragile being in need of protection (Depaepe, 1998; Vandenbroeck, 2009; Wyness, 1999). The advice in mainstream documents refers to choices and skills that are believed to be necessary for today's society. Concerning punishment and rewards, Groeimee (2012e, p. 1) states:

> Punishing and rewarding cannot be seen apart from upbringing as a whole. They are an important part of parenting. Your child learns what it can and cannot do. You guide your child in a specific direction. You teach it to respect your rules. You also teach it to respect the rules in our society. For example, you will tell your child that it is appropriate to say 'thank you' when it receives something.

The assumption is that a society is something that can and must be developed by humans and that the quality of this creation can be reduced to the people acting in it. This, however, can be criticised (Heyting, 1998), since it determines in advance what is considered as 'good' practice, without looking at actual practices in everyday life and without considering people's meaning-making. As criticised in the literature (Mayall, 2002) this expert discourse entails a focus on the child's alleged future rather than on the here and now. All advice is

preceded or followed by an argument that is related to an alleged cognitive, social, emotional or physical developmental future. Concerning 'nutrition' for example, Kind en Gezin (2012, p. 72) states that feeding your child is an excellent opportunity to "build a good relationship with your child". The advice is regularly legitimated by a child-centred perspective: "a child wants to be protected and be surrounded with love in a caring and loving family" (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 1). This assigns a great deal of responsibility to parents, who have to 'help and support' their children in a "safe environment" in order to enable them to become good and level-headed future citizens (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 8).

Our analysis shows that parents often prefer lay advice to expert advice. Indeed, many parents explicitly state that the support and recognition of peers is more valuable to them than expert advice: "Ladies, thanks for your reactions. It feels good to hear that we are doing it right". A frequently recurring statement is: "Your feelings are completely normal, I felt the same", or "Oh, it's good to see that there are other people with children like mine".

Yet it is clear that the advice parents give to their peers remains strongly related to the expert advice in the official advice texts and shows close resemblance to the characteristics of today's society. This is the case with advice like 'explaining', 'teaching your child to choose', 'talking with your child and your partner', or 'becoming independent'. For example, Miet states: "Your daughter is at a difficult age. She is in toddler puberty and she is exploring her limits". Another parent argues: "Through this piece of mischief, your daughter is trying to become autonomous. Unfortunately she does this against the persons she loves and trust the most, you!" The advice of this parent is clearly copied from the official brochure stating: "Your toddler is becoming an autonomous person. Toddlers often behave in a stubborn way towards persons with whom they have a safe relationship. That's just a compliment for you" (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 40). Parental advice in Zappy Baby is often a popular version of mainstream developmental psychology. For example: "There are indeed children who bite out of tenderness because they are still in the oral phase".

The importance of science and experts becomes clear in: “Everything will be fine, it is a well-studied and approved method to deal with sleeping problems with toddlers”. Parents also explicitly refer to the expert text: “Maybe Kind en Gezin can give you some advice about Triple P. They also offer courses which may help your parenting. There is also a magazine. http//www.triplepmagazine.be/”.

In addition, contention with experts and peers often worries parents. Shima states: “The teacher says that she can’t sit still in class. At home I see this only at dinner time. But now I’m concerned, would she have a problem? Maybe ADHD?” Supermom89 states: “I really thought that I was an exception = an abnormality = a bad mother”. Niels2000 – who says that he allows his children to come into his bed when they wake up at night – presents an eloquent discussion on the ambivalent position (Perrier, 2012) between reproducing and contesting the autonomy discourse among peers. Most parents on the forum disagree with him and have recourse to expert advice and the autonomy discourse. Fun states, for instance: “Sorry, but children belong in their own bed, during the week as well as at the weekend”. In contrast, Niels2000 considers the fact that his three children want to sleep in his bed as something temporary, perhaps because of a nightmare or the start of school. He does not consider this to be problematic. The examples show that peers are not necessarily a solution to the uncertainty caused by experts, but can also be a cause of uncertainty, especially when they reproduce the expert discourse. This suggests that parental uncertainty is not so much a problematic aspect of parenting, and that expert advice is not the remedy, as Triple P suggests (Tiggelovend, 2009). It rather suggests that parental worries are to a large extent provoked by the expert discourse that aims to solve it.

In a nutshell, it is notable that the lay advice (from peers) often explicitly reproduces the expert advice. The finding that parents use notions such as ‘right’, ‘abnormality, ‘bad mother’ refers to an alleged standard of experts (Blackford, 2004). One conclusion could be that parents faithfully follow what is prescribed in advisory textbooks. In that sense, however, the expert discourse

on ‘becoming autonomous’ is inherently paradoxical. Whereas the ultimate focus lies on parents needing to be autonomous and independent, the expert cannot but assume that parents are depending on their advice, for ideally the autonomous parent would of course neglect the advisory textbooks. Paradoxically, ‘autonomous’ individuals will always be dependent on experts, making autonomy into an idealised and mythic parenting requirement (Blackford, 2004). In this context, Zappy Baby can be considered as a locus for experimenting with ‘good citizenship’ for parents, meaning both conforming with and contesting expert advice. We come back to this example of performative agency in the third theme.

3.3.2 Individual responsibility

All parent advice texts in this study acknowledge the importance of contexts. Yet every concrete piece of advice remains focused on the individual parent, rather than addressing the parenting context. They seem to agree that: “Most of the context factors cannot be influenced by parents, the only thing that can be done is to control the way you raise your child” (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, a behaviourist model is advocated, characterised by emphasis on punishment, rewards, ignoring deviant behaviour, time-out and modelling. The focus is on problems that can and must be solved in a positive, conscious and stepwise way by the parent (see Groeimee, 2012a, 2012c; Tiggelovend, 2010a). All texts state that parenting cannot be learned from a cookbook, yet they present *positive parenting* as the panacea. Considering for instance the development of anxieties in children, they state: “If a child panics, it is important that you teach it to say “STOP”. To help your child overcome its fears, it is important to support and reward it when it is confronted with a fearful situation” (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 38). Also, the importance of negotiating and talking with children is stressed (see Tiggelovend, 2009, 2010b). This shows close resemblances to today’s ‘authoritative’ (or negotiating) mode of parenting (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). In short, parenting is reduced to a technical activity to govern or control problems, independently of the context.

In the dialogues on Zappy Baby, we find similar results. Often, parents refer to behaviourist principles:

> Normally, we ignore such behaviour. When she calms down, I tell her that this behaviour is not done. And I offer her an alternative. Sometimes she goes over the top and then I put her in timeout for two minutes.

Sometimes, however, parents do refer to contexts, such as Skym, responding to Supermom83, who doubts herself because of problems with her 2-year-old daughter:

> I am almost never alone with my daughter, so that is an important difference. I think that you may not underestimate the influence of your pregnancy and the recent death of your father. This may have made you less strong in difficult situations.

Usually, however, parents feel personally responsible for problems that arise with their child: 'Maybe it's just me' or 'I thought it was my fault'. Although context is considered important, when parents share advice, this is most often limited to the individual parent's responsibility to initiate change. Unsurprisingly some parents show resistance, when the advice does not match their context. For example, the parenting guidebooks say: "If the baby or toddler doesn't get to sleep, try not to react" (Kind en Gezin, 2012, p. 103) and "ignore (gradually) the protesting and the shouting" (Tiggelovend, 2011a, p. 8). Yet, on the Internet, Niels2000 responds: "I've already tried to put them just to bed, but this is not an option for the little one, since he starts to shout, so that everybody else is awake". With regard to toilet training and the formal advice not to force the child, Lena1984 responds:

> @Helena72 , I don't want to force my daughter … but she starts school in November and they want children to be clean. If not, they forbid the children to spend all day at school. So yes, in that case I put some extra pressure, because I work full-time, so I can't take care of her during the afternoon.

In this context, some parents resist elements of the expert discourse, when contexts are not taken into account. They use a specific piece of advice, not because it is in the books or because it is important for today's society, but because they personally experienced it as appropriate. Other parents follow professional advice, but question it in actual childrearing practices:

> Last night we let him scream … hoping that he will stop waking us up at 3.15 a.m. … but I feel such a bad mother!!! I would like to have your opinions about this approach. Are we doing it right, do you have some more tips, will this take a long time (because this is very heartbreaking, isn't it?)

3.3.3 Trial, error and confession

In its first edition *Triple P* magazine states that parenting is something fascinating that you don't want to miss. It also says: 'Raising children is an adventure. A parent has to learn it by doing, by trial and error. Every parent has some questions about their child's behaviour or development. Therefore, there is Triple P' (Tiggelovend, 2009). A similar message is conveyed in the other advice texts. This advice functions as a 'double bind': although it is *normal* to make mistakes, these mistakes are problematic and need to be addressed with expert advice. One example of a 'normal failure' is 'parental uncertainty'. As Kind en Gezin (2012, p. 14) states: "It is normal to have doubts or to have a tough time. Maybe it is a sign that you need some support. Talk with those around you, your doctor or your district nurse". It is assumed that 'talking' is the best remedy, and as Beck and Beck (1995) argue, the dominant discourse today is that we continuously need to scrutinise ourselves and openly discuss our feelings, thoughts, plans, desires and failures. Talking about problems is considered to be a good thing: a proof of commitment by parents (Gillies, 2005). As *Triple P* magazine (Tiggelovend, 2011b, p. 3) advocates: "and by trial and error, it is important to use the golden rules as well as possible: … and to confess that you make mistakes, regularly". Foucault (1998) explains how this form of 'pastoral' power functions in subtle ways. The expert, like a shepherd, cares for the well-being and the survival of the flock. To be

successful in this role, the shepherd needs to know what is going on in each individual's mind and thus every individual needs to engage in introspection and confession. Only then is it possible for the shepherd to 'govern' and to care of the flock and of each individual member. The necessity for 'self-examination' and 'guidance of conscience' is not something that can be forced, but is seen as a status that is fed by a personal and mutual bond: without a shepherd, there is no flock, and vice versa (Foucault, 1998, p. 69). 'Talking' and 'negotiating' are important competences of autonomous, self-regulating, individuals. Yet, as we explained, reaching autonomy would imply complying with the expert advice and therefore is inherently contradictory. The desired autonomy is a status that paradoxically demands expert advice and thus parents are doomed to fail.

The act of making failures, questions and worries public is also present in the parenting section of Zappy Baby. Almost every conversation begins with a question or problem that a parent (usually a mother) raises about his/her child. This is most obvious in titles such as "I doubt myself as a mother', 'Am I doing it right?', 'Is this normal?' These confessions are considered to be an indication of committed parenthood. As Nathalie7175 responds to Supermom83: "Don't … You are a good mother!!!!! (a bad mother, would not question this)". Another mother also applauds a performance: "Hurray for those parents of a child that bites, who dare to put their question on this discussion board". These public 'confessions' are illustrations of governmentality and therefore constitute ways in which parents concur with the dominant ideals, norms and standards. Or better still, considering their performativity (Butler, 1990), their statements may be ways in which they perform ideal parenthood. It is interesting to note that the mother who is very uncertain about her parenting capacities and feels guilty of being a bad mother adopts the nickname 'Supermom83'. One interpretation is that parents realise the subtle distinction to be made about 'us' (the good parents) and 'them' (the others) and actively participate in the construction of this distinction. Another interpretation is that parents may feel a certain control that goes along with consulting experts or making something public, yet they

also resist these subtle forms of disciplinary power by explicitly approving each other's behaviour. As one parent realises:

> I haven't got a clue where or whom I can consult, without making things worse! I would like to find a solution that helps my girlfriend as well as my son, without someone giving her the label of a 'bad mother'!!!!!!.

This may help to explain why parents prefer the support of other parents (Miller and Sambell, 2003; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). There are also parents who show more explicit resistance to the dominant norm in today's society. Whereas Ilona78 thinks that one should explain to a child why biting is not allowed, Zinzia replies: "It doesn't fit the development of a child. Your suggestion considers children as little adults who are able to understand the explanation of their mum why they aren't allowed to do something". Considering the dominant norm that children need to learn to sleep alone (and the many behaviourist tricks that circulate as advice to achieve this), one mother states: "There are cultures where it is "normal" to sleep all together in one bed, so why should children really belong in their own bed?"

3.4 Discussion and concluding reflections

In today's neoliberal western society, notions about the 'good' child cannot be seen apart from notions about the ones held responsible for these young future citizens: parents (Jensen, 2010). This study looked at dominant discourses of childhood and parenthood, and at how parents experience dominant assumptions of their parenting. Our study is limited in several ways. It lacks background information on the parents who participated in the discussion forum, but one can reasonably assume that middle-class and ethnic majority mothers are overrepresented. Therefore our findings cannot be generalised. Moreover, as it was impossible to ask for feedback from the parents, interpretations of their discussions could not be checked.

Despite these limitations, there are some interesting findings that may enrich the critical debates on constructions of childhood, parenthood and parenting.

We made a modest attempt to contribute to a recent vein of research, in which parents are subjects, rather than objects of study, by 'listening' to their conversations on the Internet and comparing these with parenting advice texts. Both expert advice (in the formal texts) and lay advice (by parents themselves) concur on the responsibility of the individual parent, despite the contexts, and thus on a similar mythic ideal of the good parent and the good child. The ideal parent controls the behaviour of her/his child and otherwise confesses her/his problems. Parents and experts also concur in their striving for both autonomous children and autonomous parents. Consequently, we can confirm that, as many scholars have argued, this dominant discourse is contingent with the social investment state and neoliberal thought (Featherstone, 2006). The focus of parenting is on the child becoming a future *good citizen* (Pykett et al., 2010). Importantly, when parents copy (or co-construct and reproduce for that matter) the expert advice on parenting, this also means that they copy a mythic attitude to parenting as modelling the ideal child, involving a more passive construction of both the ideal parent and the ideal child. Indeed, the child may then be reduced to the recipient and the mere product of their parents' education, and thus paradoxically be denied a proper agency in the name of autonomy.

Our study also suggests that parents actively participate in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant discourses on parenting. We found that parents are active in the performance of good parenthood and reproduce (and therefore undergo) disciplining mechanisms by adopting the public confession as a normative feature of parenting, even among peers. The quest for autonomy and the imperative of the self-examination and the confession create a paradox or a double bind: the good parent needs to be self-sufficient, yet at the same time aware of his or her eternal mistakes and ready to scrutinise her/himself and confess these inevitable mistakes, either to peers or to experts.

This confirms that discourse is not something that drips down from above but rather is diagonal in nature and related to mutual and pastoral rather than

disciplinary power relations (Foucault, 1998). Parents are not passive recipients, but actors of change and agentic beings, both contesting and complying with dominant discourses. Whereas experts tend to look at parents' uncertainty and their worries as problems that should be addressed by advisory textbooks, our analysis suggests that these textbooks may produce the very problems they claim to solve. When parents prefer to turn to peers, as they do in Zappy Baby, it may very well be to escape from expert advice. This does not mean that expert advice is systematically neglected or contradicted by lay advice. Parents do refer to experts, but they also tend to contextualise their advice and they offer space for disagreement and recognition.

Lay advice seems to be particularly important in these virtual encounters on Zappy Baby: the mutual recognition confirms that parenting is not just a being but also a becoming, a performance. The doubts and worries that parents share on the Internet are described in terms of a lack of self-sufficiency or lack of autonomy ('Help', 'Am I doing well?'). Yet, our analysis shows that they are also the opposite: a demonstration of good parenthood, through scrutiny of the self and confession of doubts and fears. It is clear that utterances of doubts are recognised by other parents as characteristics of the good parent. In this sense, we can paradoxically consider the very act of consulting a discussion board such as Zappy Baby both as a way of escaping the expert gaze and as a place where the expert gaze is reproduced. Parents are – often unconsciously – part of a subtle form of governmentality. Despite the examples of resistance, it is remarkable that parents overwhelmingly concur with the dominant idea of individual responsibility, indicating that this is probably the most dominant aspect of present-day discourses on parenthood. Those who do not meet the dominant norms and standards have two options, adapt or fail, and adapting in this sense may mean confessing on Zappy Baby (Foucault, 1993; Vandenbroeck, 2009). It needs to be noticed that the omnipresent gaze (as a bio-power, to use the Foucauldian term) also entails that other adults look at the child over its own parent's shoulder. While the parents may 'choose' to share their confessions on the Internet, the child has not chosen to be in the public confessional box.

It is important to acknowledge that we live in a society where fundamental inequalities persist, and therefore we cannot separate parenting from the actual childrearing conditions and the context (Heyting, 1998; Vandenbroeck et al., 2009). Considering professional parent support and advice, our findings suggest that it is important to develop places where contexts are taken into account and where parents can interact, recognise and resist. Actual support practices can be enriched by taking into account the meaning that parents as well as children construct *hic et nunc,* rather than only focusing on an alleged future in decontextualised ways. This seems important to avoid the risk of excluding those who already live in very difficult situations as well as to avoid conceptualizing parenting as a technical activity of control of children's behaviour, denying the meaning-making of children. Yet our study also suggests that listening to parents' voices may not be sufficient to overcome the individualisation of responsibility in the neoliberal era, as parents may also be the – often unconscious – *(re-)producers* of individualizing discourse. In addition, parent support may induce the same parental uncertainty it claims to address and reinforce reductionist constructions of childhood. The intervention is therefore part of the problem rather than the solution.

When we wish to consider parenting as a social issue and therefore a shared responsibility between private and public domains (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009), this will imply more structural and political interventions. Such interventions will necessarily have to do with problem posing (Freire, 1970): or questioning how the problems relating to parenting are posed. What is considered as problematic, by whom and why? What 'counts' as a 'real' problem? And when do we consider a problem as social, as economic or as educational in nature? These discussions could lead to more explicit legitimations and therefore to a focus on what parenting can be in a given situation rather than on what parenting *should* be as a decontextualised, ideal norm. We should also ask more critically what this means for the 'good' child as a future citizen: can we adequately meet the needs of children by predefining the features of 'good' parenthood?

3.5 References

Beck, U., & Beck, E. (1995). *The Normal chaos of love.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blackford, H. (2004). Playground panopticism. Ring-around-the-children, a pocketful of women. *Childhood 11*(2), 227–249. doi: 10.1177/0907568204043059

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble.* London: Routledge.

Campos, G. (2004). What are cultural models for? Child-rearing practices in historical perspective. *Culture and Psychology 10*(3), 279–291. doi: 10.1177/1354067X04042889

Choi, P.; Hensaw, C.; Baker, S. et al. (2005). Supermum, superwife, supereverything: Performing femininity in the transition to motherhood. *Journal of Reproduction and Infant Psychology 23*(2), 167–180. doi: 10.1080/02646830500129487

Depaepe, M. (1998). *De pedagogisering achterna. Aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar.* Leuven: Uitgeverij Acco.

Drentea, P., & Moren-Cross, J. (2005). Social capital and social support on the web: The case of an internet mother site. *Sociology of Health and Illness 27*(7), 920–943. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2005.00464.x

Edwards. R., & Gillies, V. (2004). Support in parenting: Values and consensus concerning who to turn to. *Journal of Social Policy 33*(4), 627–647. doi: 10.1017/S0047279404008037

Ellis, B., & Heisler, M. (2008). Motherhood and the construction of 'mommy identity': Messages about motherhood and face negotiation. *Communication Quarterly 56*(4), 445–467. doi: 10.1080/01463370802448246

Faircloth, C. (2009). Mothering as identity-work: Long-term breastfeeding and intensive motherhood. *Anthropology News 50*(2), 15–17.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research.* New York: Routledge.

Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work 36*(1), 5–19. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch226

Foucault, M. (1993). About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self: Two lectures at Dartmouth. *Political Theory 21*(2), 198–227.

Foucault, M. (1998). *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977–1984.* New York: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder.

Gillies, V. (2005). Meeting parents' needs? Discourses of 'support' and 'inclusion' in family policy. *Critical Social Policy 25*, 70–90. doi:10.1177/0261018305048968

Glazemakers, I., & Deboutte, D. (n.d.). *Evaluatierapport implementatie Triple P in de provincie Antwerpen.* Antwerp: Collaborative Antwerp Psychiatric Research Institute, Department Youth Mental Health.

Groeimee. (2012a). Bijtende peuters. Available at: www.groeimee.be/dossiers/bijten.

Groeimee. (2012b). Huilen en huilbaby's. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/huilen-enhuilbabys.

Groeimee. (2012c). Meertalig opvoeden. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/meertalig-opvoeden.

Groeimee. (2012d). Slapen bij jonge kinderen. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/slapengaan-bij-jonge-kinderen.

Groeimee. (2012e). Straffen en belonen. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/straffen-enbelonen.

Groeimee. (2012f). Voorlezen, plezier voor twee. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/voorlezen-plezier-voor-twee.

Groeimee. (2012g). Zindelijkheid. Retrieved from www.groeimee.be/dossiers/zindelijkheid.

Heyting, F. (1998). Opvoeden tot samenleven. Afscheid van moraal en deugd als voorwaarden voor maatschappelijke integratie. *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Opvoeding, Vorming en Onderwijs 14*(1), 35–49.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research 15*(9), 1277–1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687

Jackson, A. (2004). Performativity identified. *Qualitative Inquiry 10*(5), 673–690. doi:10.1177/1077800403257673

Jensen, T. (2010). Warmth and wealth: Re-imagining social class in taxonomies of good parenting. *Studies in the Maternal 2*(1), 1–13. doi: 10.16995/sim.86

Johnston, D., & Swanson, D. (2006). Constructing the 'good mother': The experience of mothering ideologies by work status. *Sex Roles 54*(7–8), 509–519. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9021-3

Jones, L., & Osgood, J. (2007). Mapping the fabricated identity of childminders: Pride and prejudice. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 8*(4), 289–300. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2007.8.4.289

Kind en Gezin. (2011). *Jaarverslag 2011.* Brussels: Kind en Gezin.

Kind en Gezin. (2012). *Het ABC van baby tot kleuter*. Brussels: Kind en Gezin.

Ley, B. (2007). Vive les roses! The architecture of commitment in an online pregnancy and mothering group. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 12*(4), 1388–1408. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00378.

Lister, R. (2007). Why citizenship: Where, when and how children? *Theoretical Inquiries in Law 8*(2), 693–718.

Martin, C. (2010). The reframing of family policies in France: Processes and actors. *Journal of European Social Policy 20*(5), 410–421.

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards a sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Miller, S., & Sambell, K. (2003). What do parents feel they need? Implications of parents' perspectives for the facilitation of parenting programmes. *Children and Society 17*(1), 32–45. doi: 10.1002/CHI.726

Moran-Ellis, J. & Sunker, H. (2008). *Giving children a voice: Childhood, power and culture.* In: Houtsonen H and Antikainen A (eds) Symbolic Power

in Cultural Contexts: Uncovering Social Reality. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing, pp. 75–92.

Moss, P.; Dillon, J. and Statham, J. (2000). The 'child in need' and 'the rich child': Discourses, constructions and practice. *Critical Social Policy 20*(2), 233–254. doi:10.1177/026101830002000203

Murphy, E. (2007). Images of childhood in mothers' accounts of contemporary childrearing. *Childhood 14*(1), 105–127. doi: 10.1177/0907568207072534

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum Qualitative Social Research 1*(2), 1–10. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089/2385#gcit

Nichols, S.; Nixon, H. and Rowsell, J. (2009). The 'good' parent in relation to early childhood literacy: Symbolic terrain and lived practice. *Literacy 43*(2), 65–74. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4369.2009.00519.x

Parton, N. (2006). Every Child Matters: The shift to prevention whilst strengthening protection in children's services in England. *Children and Youth Services Review 28*(8), 796–992. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2005.10.002

Patton, MQ. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Perrier, M. (2012). Middle-class mothers' moralities and 'concerted cultivation': Class others, ambivalence and excess. *Sociology.* Epub ahead of print. doi: 10.1177/0038038512453789.

Pinderhughes, E.; Nix, R.; Foster, E. et al. (2001). Parenting in context: Impact of neighbourhood poverty, residential stability, public services, social networks, and danger on parental behaviours. *Journal of Marriage and Family 63*(4), 941–953. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00941.x

Pykett, J.; Saward, M. and Schaefer, A. (2010). Framing the good citizen. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations 12*(4), 523–538. doi:10.1111/j.1467-856X.2010.00424.x

Sanders, M.; Markie-Dads, C. and Turners, K. (2003). Theoretical, scientific and clinical foundations of the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program: A

population approach to the promotion of parenting competence. *Parenting Research and Practice Monograph 1*, 1–25. Retrieved from http://www29/triplep.net/

Sanoma magazines Belgium NV. (2011)/ Zappy Baby. Available at: www.zappybaby.be/nl/forum/index.html.

Thorne, B. (2007). Editorial: Crafting the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. *Childhood 14*(2), 147–152. doi: 10.1177/0907568207078324

Tiggelovend, I. (2009). Positief opvoeden werkt. *Triple P magazine nr. 1.* Retrieved from www.triplepmagazine.be/.

Tiggelovend, I. (2010a). Positief opvoeden werkt. *Triple P magazine nr. 4.* Retrieved from www.triplepmagazine.be/.

Tiggelovend, I. (2010b). Positief opvoeden werkt. *Triple P magazine nr. 2.* Retrieved from www.triplepmagazine.be/.

Tiggelovend, I. (2011a). Positief opvoeden werkt. *Triple P magazine nr. 6.* Retrieved from www.triplepmagazine.be/.

Tiggelovend, I. (2011b). Positief opvoeden werkt. *Triple P magazine nr. 5.* Retrieved from www.triplepmagazine.be/.

Tisdall, E. (2006). Antisocial behaviour legislation meets children's services: Challenging perspectives on children, parents and the state. *Critical Social Policy 26*(1), 101–120. doi:10.1177/0261018306059767

Vandenbroeck, M. (2009). *In verzekerde bewaring. Honderd vijftig jaar kinderen, ouders en kinderopvang.* Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SWP.

Vandenbroeck, M., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2006). Children's agency and educational norms: A tensed negotiation. *Childhood 13*(1), 127–143. doi: 10.1177/0907568206059977

Vandenbroeck, M.; Boonaert, T.; Van der Mespel, S. et al. (2009). Dialogical spaces to reconceptualise parent support in the social investment state *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 10*(1), 66–77. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2009.10.1.66

Wyness, M.G. (1999). Childhood, agency and education reform. *Childhood 6*(3), 353–368. doi: 10.1177/0907568299006003004

CHAPTER 4

PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS: CIRCUMSTANCES

We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of "banking" or of preaching in the desert.

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed -

ABSTRACT *

In response to the global financial crisis, social policies in Europe and beyond incorporated a logic of social investment to reduce (child) poverty and social inequality. Several critiques however, have been raised against the narrowness of this discourse. In order to introduce another possible way of seeing, an interview study was conducted inspired by the interpretative paradigm of lifeworld orientation. This allowed to generate a critical, in-depth understanding of the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for families with young children (0–3 years old), from their point of view. Findings highlight the importance of listening to parents here and now, in order to be able to take account of their concrete, lived realities within the context of the broader society, and critically assess these realities according to principles of human dignity and social justice. Implications for social work practice are discussed.

* Based on: Geinger, F., Vandenbroeck, M., & Roets, R. (resubmitted). Families with young children in times of economic downturn: implications for social work practice . *International Journal of Social Welfare.*

4.1 Introduction

The global financial crisis that erupted in 2008 had, and still has, serious consequences on the economic growth and the unemployment levels worldwide (Crettaz, 2015; Hanan, 2012; Hujo & Gaia, 2011; Karanikolos et al., 2013; OECD, 2014). Together with other previous and ongoing profound demographic, social, and economic changes since the 1980s, scholars observed the emergence of a *social investment paradigm* in several European welfare states (Anthony, King, & Austin, 2011; Cantillon, 1999; Dwyer, 2004; Gray, 2014; Hujo & Gaia, 2011; Lorenz, 2016; Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2015). Within this paradigm, human capital investment strategies and the objective of full labour market participation are considered as a way to ensure social justice and economic efficiency rather than focusing on social protection, and the redistribution of resources and power (Hanan, 2012; Pentaraki, 2016; van Hooren, Kaasch, & Starke, 2014). In other words, in order to reduce social inequality, the idea is that opportunities, instead of outcomes, must be equalised (Lister, 2003; Morabito & Vandenbroeck, 2014; Pintelon, Cantillon, Van den Bosch, & Whelan, 2013). In addition, as can be observed in the recent Eurofound report called "Quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis" (2014, p.7), an explicit link is made between economic downturn and the investment in families and children at risk of poverty:

> The economic crisis has led to a deterioration of living and working conditions in many Member States and has increased inequalities between countries and groups of people. Those already vulnerable are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. Growing inequality is also apparent between families: whether a child lives in poverty depends, in part, on the type of family in which it grows up. It is against this background that the EU's Social Investment Package calls for Member States to focus on simple, targeted and conditional social investment.

In this view, a range of parent support services, activation, and high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are believed to play a crucial role in levelling the playing field according to international policy

organisations (European Commission, 2013; Mahon, 2010; OECD, 2012). Although this social investment paradigm has been implemented in a diversity of European welfare states in diverse and heterogeneous ways (see for example Ostner & Schmitt, 2008), several critiques have nonetheless been raised against it. It is argued that social investment strategies appear as the only way of seeing (Lorenz, 2016), and therefore, the rather dominant, neoliberal problem constructions and interventions about parenthood in times of economic downturn should be challenged (De Mey, Coussée, Vandenbroeck, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2009; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). As Gray (2014, p. 1751–1752) asserted: "while social investment promises to build human and social capital to make people full contributors to the economy (…), 'investing in children' and developing 'responsible parents' have become core features of the political landscape". Critical voices thus plea for caution since the practice of parenting risks to be seen independently from the broader social, economic, and political circumstances in which parents live, work**,** and raise their children (Clarke, 2006; Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2003; Mitchell & Campbell, 2011) and the inherent complex, uncertain**,** and ambiguous nature of social problems risk being overlooked (Lorenz, 2008; Parton, 2014; Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2016). Moreover, as observed in a recent editorial of **'**The International Journal of Social Welfare**'** (Hujo & Gaia, 2011, p. 230), "we observe increasing inequalities in and between countries, (…) and an increase in precarious and informal employment", due to the dominance of neoliberal growth models in policy responses.

In order to contribute to this debate, this article introduces another possible way of seeing, inspired by the interpretative paradigm of lifeworld orientation, to generate a critical, in-depth understanding of the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment according to families with young children (0–3 years old), of whom at least one parent became unemployed and/or had a hard time finding a job due to economic downturn. In what follows, we elaborate first on this paradigm.

4.1.1 Lifeworld orientation

The theoretical framework of lifeworld orientation allows for understanding the complex relation between the private and the public, or the everyday life and the system (Wright, 1959), through an "understanding of the everyday with reference to its obstinacy, its alienation, its self-assertion and its aspirations" (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009, p. 132). By gaining insight into the way parents differentially experience and make meaning of changing economic contexts in relation to parenthood, as well as how they experience the way in which social services (may) support them, one is able to identify "political processes, issues of injustice, and equality" (Lorenz, 2008, p. 639), which in turn allows for critically challenging taken for granted problem constructions and interventions (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). According to Grunwald and Thiersch (2009**,** p. 136–137), while reconstructing the lifeworld:

> … it can always be asked whether things have to be as they are, whether they could not be different. People are driven by a hunger, (…) for sufficient resources, creative freedom, acceptance**,** and meaning (…). It is exactly these alternatives that are needed.

Engaging in lifeworld orientation as a critical approach is therefore inherently linked with a social justice project (Roets, Roose, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013). In that vein, it focuses on the individual's lifeworld in its interactional context, and explores dynamic, complex**,** and interpretable ways in which material, social**,** and cultural resources as well as discourses are viewed as constraints, opportunities**,** and limitations for human subjects. As such, parents' lived and contextualised experiences are taken as reference points and analysed according to principles of human dignity and social justice, in search of other ways of seeing and in search of how a more equal possibility to lead a life in which they can flourish, can be supported (IFSW, 2014; Roets et al., 2013).

4.2 Research methodology

4.2.1 Research context

An interview study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Kvale, 1996) was conducted in Limburg, one of the provinces in the Flemish Region of Belgium, which was, by the end of 2014, severely hit by economic downturn due to the closure of several firms, including one of the main important car factories, *Ford Genk and suppliers*, which accounted for a loss of approximately 8,200 jobs in Limburg and 12,000 in Flanders in total (Peeters & Vancauteren, 2013). Limburg, in particular, is a very relevant case study in relation to the international trends, since for the first time, the fight against *child poverty* through integrated ECEC services is included and seen as an important side condition in their policy to restore the social and economic climate (Vlaamse Regering, 2013).

We selected three municipalities/cities (Bilzen, Genk, and Maasmechelen) in Limburg, with the highest level of redundancies due to the closure of Ford Genk and suppliers (VDAB, 2014), in combination with the highest level of child deprivation, according to the child deprivation index of the Flemish government agency responsible for preventative health and childcare *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family). The child deprivation index is based upon six life domains: monthly family income, parents' education, level of child stimulation, parents' work situation, housing, and health. When a family is deprived on three or more criteria, one speaks of a family living in poverty (Kind en Gezin, 2013).

The study is part of a broader research project that studies the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment in Limburg from different perspectives, in order to better understand processes of in- and exclusion in services for families with young children in times of crisis.

4.2.2 Capturing lifeworlds of parents experiencing unemployment

Previous research indicates that knowledge about the (diverse) everyday lived and contextualised experiences of parents is limited (Schiettecat et al., 2015; 2016). This is also a concern in research about parents experiencing unemployment (Dyson, Gorin, Hooper, & Cabral, 2008). If the perspectives and lived experiences of parents (i.e. mothers) in general are taken into account, they are often ignored or not understood by professionals (Humbert & Roberts, 2009). Moreover, the existing research on the impact of economic downturn on parents is often research *on parents*, looking at the psychological and individual dimensions of unemployment (Brand, 2015; Cole, 2007; Goldberg, 2012; Strandh, 2001; Strier, 2013).

To avoid selection bias, parents were recruited through the infant consultation schemes of Kind en Gezin, as previous research indicated that this social service reaches 92,4% parents in Flanders and 96% in Limburg, including ethnic minorities, single parents, parents in poverty and even undocumented parents (Bradt, Vandenbroeck, Lammertyn, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Kind en Gezin, 2014). Parents were recruited and selected purposefully. Inclusion criteria were: living in one of the three selected municipalities, having at least one child under three years of age, having experienced involuntary unemployment and/or a hard time finding a job in the last two years, and being willing to cooperate. Within that group, we strived for maximal diversity, rather than representativity. This was based upon criteria that may influence parents' perspectives on support services in Flanders (Vandenbroeck, Bouverne-De Bie, Bradt, & Crampe, 2010): socio-economic status (defined as mothers' educational level), origin (defined as the nationality of one's parents at birth), family composition (number of adults in the household), birth order of the child (first child or not), and municipality. Therefore, a quantitative analysis of user profiles preceded the definite selection of parents.

Eventually, 47 parents with young children filled out a questionnaire. Out of this sample, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Rather than sample size, this was obtained by making use of an appropriate research study design and data collection method. As mentioned above, the first included a mixed-method design through the combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The latter included the use of interviews, preceded by a recruitment phase that aimed to avoid selection bias and strived for diversity. In so doing, this resulted in what is called 'rich' (i.e. quality) and 'thick' (i.e. quantity) data (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Interviews were semi-structured. They were based upon previous research about the consequences of unemployment, but they also left room for topics that concerned the families involved. Parents were free to participate alone or together with their partner. As such, we interviewed eight mothers, three fathers, and three couples. Most parents were born in Belgium, but only one family was of Belgian origin (the nationality of one's parents at birth). The others had origins in the Netherlands, Morocco, Turkey or Italy. Four interviews took place in Bilzen, five in Maasmechelen, and five in Genk. Parents were informed verbally, agreed to have the interview recorded, and participated voluntarily. The interviews lasted between an hour and a half and three hours, and took place in a location that was chosen by the participants themselves, such as the parents' home (11) or a pub (3). In order to guarantee anonymity, parents' names were changed (see **Annex I**).

4.2.3 A directed approach to qualitative content analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, thematically labelled, and axially coded. Data were analysed by engaging in a direct approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This implies that the coding is based upon our theoretical framework of lifeworld orientation (see Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Hämaläinen, 2003; Lorenz, 2008; Roets et al., 2013), but also includes newly emerging themes that are inductively identified. Empirically-

based feedback loops allowed to sustain, question or expand the data and the theoretical frame of reference (Mayring, 2000).

In what follows, we report the findings according to three selected themes. First, we elaborate on parents' experiences of parenthood in relation to economic downturn and unemployment, which is captured by the theme *meaningful parent(hood).* Second, we relate those experiences with the conditions under which they (have to) live, work, and raise their children, defined as *circumstances*. Finally, we elaborate on parents' parenting experiences and circumstances related to support resources, which fit the theme of *the (ab)sense of support*.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Meaningful parent(hood)

Job loss turned most of the parents' lives upside down, especially when they always used to have a job. Notwithstanding some negative experiences associated with being in paid labour, such as "being treated as a number" (Father~2, personal communication, October 26, 2015), or the work being "boring" (Mother~8, personal communication, November 12, 2015) or "physically exhausting" (Mother~3, personal communication, October 27, 2015), the negative consequences of losing a job predominated. Unemployment was experienced as a multiple stress situation, implying several difficulties in different life domains, such as financial difficulties, social difficulties (e.g., on networks, relationship, children), and psychological difficulties (e.g., time structure):

> The problem is actually…well you lose your job, which gives you financial pressure and this financial pressure puts pressure on your relationship and this … Yes, everything is linked in a family and I also noticed that H. [child] suffered from it … . (Father~2, personal communication, October 26, 2015; made redundant while having a mortgage)

This corresponds with earlier research about unemployment in general (Crettaz, 2015; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardelt, 1992; Engbergsen & Van der Veen, 1987; Leinonen, Solantaus, & Punamäki, 2002).

The aspiration to work

All interviewed parents reported a clear aspiration for a new job. Aspiring for a new job however, in addition to the financial advantage, predominantly had to do with the meaning a job had for parents. This includes "having a job that contributes something to society" (Mother~13, personal communication, December 3, 2015), "just having fun" (Mother~1, personal communication, October 26, 2015) or:

> […] meeting other adult people and having a time-out. Going to work means having a time-out, being socially involved with older people, with other people, with your work… Your head…this [situation at home] is totally gone … . (Mother~5, personal communication, October 28, 2015; experienced a divorce, lost her job and was a single mother for a while)

Having a job was considered by the respondents as something positive for children too, since it allows children to see their parents working, which was believed to stimulate them to work as adults too. Moreover, parents indicate that they feel happier, spend more qualitative time with their children, and think they are better mothers, by being *more* than just a mother.

> I think that only taking care of him or playing can sometimes be just very boring. If I can do something in which I can use my creativity, it makes me happy and I think that I emit that feeling towards him [child]. In a way, I also want him to be proud of who I am and what I do. That I can be a role model for him … . (Mother~13, personal communication, December 3, 2015; dreams of having her own company)

The aspiration to raise children

Beside parents' aspiration to work, for their own was well as for their children's well-being, parents held a strong aspiration to raise their children in a good way, too. What was considered as *good* differed from one parent to another, yet all parents wanted to give their children important tools to participate in society, such as going to school, reading, speaking Dutch, and teaching them certain norms, values, and discipline. According to the interviewed parents however, raising children in a good way also included taking care of their children by being there. In this view, parents experienced tension between their aspiration to work and their aspiration to raise their children, which sometimes made unemployment paradoxically experienced as a condition of being able to *be there*.

> That... if something is wrong with him [child], that I can stay at home, without feeling guilty that he is sick. Or like tomorrow, there is a party for grandparents at school where I can just go to, which wouldn't have been possible when I had a job. (Mother~13, personal communication, December 3, 2015; single mother and unemployed)

This is not always easy, as Mother~4 (personal communication, October 27, 2015) states: "…but the disadvantage is that you sometimes really become crazy by sitting here all the time between those four walls". Several parents really struggled to puzzle together (i.e. combine) both aspirations and sometimes felt guilty if they were not able to. Their success in doing so depended on several systemic circumstances.

4.3.2 Circumstances

Parents often referred to several systemic circumstances that were out of their control, but that seemed to play an important role in the way unemployment was differently experienced. These include, for instance, economic downturn which caused a decrease in the number of jobs, the dismantling of the primary

and secondary sectors in Belgium in favour of the knowledge economy, but also the type of welfare regime.

> In Turkey, they do not have child benefits, which they pay you here every month, and neither do they have unemployment benefits. Life is very different there. (Mother~1, personal communication, October 26, 2015; born in Belgium, but of Turkish origin)

Some circumstances enabled parents in the search for a new job or in the combination of both aspirations, while others hindered them. Especially when things happened unexpectedly, like for instance being called to go to work as part of being in a flexible and often temporary work regime or the sudden loss of informal childcare, parents were hindered and expressed the feeling of being stuck. Often, the uncertainty and unpredictability that has become part of their lives impinge with certain systemic rules and regulations, for instance the capacity to plan in advance if you need childcare.

> And then, suddenly, he got the job and he had to work the day after. And then we had a problem, because he used to be the day care for our child. (Mother~14, personal communication, December 12, 2015; living in Maasmechelen)

A shared responsibility?

Social welfare states are characterised by a shared responsibility between the private and the public to raise children (Vandenbroeck & Van Lancker, 2014). This means that in order to fulfil the responsibility to raise children, the state has to provide the necessary conditions to do so (e.g., universal basic services). Our results, however, indicate that, notwithstanding the systemic nature of circumstances, parents often had the feeling that they individually had to cope with it or do something about it. As Mother~14 says:

> On Friday, they [child-minders] only work until 5 PM, and on Wednesday, they only work for half a day, so it was impossible to find someone who was

> available, who worked from 7 AM until 7 PM or who just could take care of children every day of the week. (Mother~14, personal communication, December 12, 2015; living in Maasmechelen and telling about her search for full-time day care when her husband also found a job)

This was also observed according to what are considered to be broader societal norms, such as being active or gender and cultural issues, which were turned upside down due to job loss.

> They said 'Oh my God, what are you doing?' [And I said] 'This is how it is, you can't do anything about it'. [And they said] 'Yes, but a woman has to stay at home with her child'! (Mother~5, personal communication, October 28, 2015; about her time being a working, single mother of Turkish origin)

This, however, had repercussions on one's well-being, as Mother~4, for instance, expresses. Since she could not find full-time day care in her municipality, she applied for a job that she dislikes in order to be able to work and care for her children. This made her feel as if she does not count anymore.

> I would most prefer to do another job because I know, well once I was a manager … I can do more than being a cleaning lady and it makes me feel as if I mean nothing… as a mother I don't count anymore. (Mother~4, personal communication, October 27, 2015; living in Maasmechelen and working part-time now)

When circumstances turned out positive on an individual level, parents talked in terms of *being lucky*. For Mothers~7 (personal communication, November 11, 2015) and 9 (personal communication, November 12, 2015), for instance, the unemployment of their husband was experienced as a welcome "gift" since it took place at the time they became parents for the first time. Father~2 (personal communication, October 26, 2015) "luckily" had a degree in a rare profession, which allowed him to find a new job relatively quickly. From a lifeworld-oriented perspective however, it is important to keep in mind that parents' personal experiences are always related and intertwined with public

issues or systemic forces, which might not always contribute to human dignity and social justice (Wright, 1959).

What mattered a lot in order to combine the aspiration to work and the aspiration to raise children, and/or in order to cope with unexpected systemic circumstances, was the kind of formal and/or informal support, which will be discussed below.

4.3.3 The (ab)sense of support

All interviewed parents made use of support resources in one way or another. These resources were of informal nature, offered by one's partner, friends, family or colleagues and/or were of a formal nature. The latter consists of several social services (e.g., childcare, education, health care, unemployment guidance) that are universally available for citizens in Western welfare states. Support for the respondents ranged from informative support, to practical support to emotional support. This aligns with previous research (Cheng, 2007; Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Our findings indicate that support was highly conditional as to its quantity, its nature, and its quality.

Support if …

Regarding informal support, almost all parents fell back on their partner, their own parents or relatives. They were offered support in raising their children (e.g., day care, emotional support, advice), as well as support with broader circumstances, such as unemployment (e.g., access to a new job, financial support) or housing issues (e.g., moving in with parents). For Mother~6 however, invoking her parents in helping with day care was not an option since her parents live in Morocco. In addition, Mother~4 stopped invoking her parents in day care since they were taking over her role as a mother and started to interfere in the education of the children. This confirms that support is not always experienced as a *good* or positive thing (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012)

Friends or relatives were also considered supportive as they allowed parents to break out of their role as a parent. This, however, depended on their work situation too (e.g., having regular hours, having a job or not) and their circumstances (e.g., having children themselves or not). Most of the time, breaking out also costs money, which formed a barrier for several parents in times of unemployment.

> We had to quit his swimming lessons while the others kept on doing it, or athletics or whatever. They [other parents] have something in common with each other, but we have nothing in common with them. (Mother~4, personal communication, October 27, 2015; experiencing financial difficulties at the time when she and her husband lost their job while having three children and a mortgage to pay)

Occasional contact with people whom the parents are not intimately related to, such as neighbours, colleagues or unknown passengers, was considered important as well. These contacts made parents feel like they belong or made them feel in limbo when they lose them due to job loss.

> Now what? You lose your friends [colleagues], you lose your second father [boss]. My boss was like a second father for me, really, he did more for me than my own father. (Mother~8, personal communication, November 12, 2015; made redundant after seven years)

Formal support resources also mattered, especially for parents who could invoke less support from people with whom they have a close relationship. Mother~13, for instance, is a single mother who really misses the loss of social contact due to unemployment. She found a parent support group for lone mothers where she can bring her child with her too, since they provide childcare. It was precisely the combination of this type of material and immaterial support that made her visits to this group really meaningful and supportive. This was also the case for formal day care. On the one hand, it was considered supportive since it offered an opportunity for parents to be able to find/keep a job. Moreover, it is not only a place where they look after your child;

it is also a place where they love your child and where they stimulate children's cognitive and social development by, for instance, learning to play with others, learning Dutch, and learning certain norms and values. Sometimes this was more than a parent himself was able to do or offer.

> If my son is surrounded by other Dutch-speaking children, then maybe he will become smart. He will learn to play with blocks, she [caretaker] can play with the children, reading books instead of us, because we don't always have the time so sometimes we put him in his maxi-cosi or in front of the television (Father~11, personal communication, November 16, 2015; three children, sick wife and made redundant after 15 years).

> Day care is very important for me. I really believe in it. Children learn to be social, learn to share, learn to catch bacteria. Children learn to be patient […], toys everywhere. I don't want my home to be a playground, so it is good that it is there (Mother~8, personal communication, November 12, 2015; living in an apartment in Bilzen).

On the other hand, parents often felt reluctant to make use of formal day care. Some experienced it as expensive (Father~3, Mother~3, 4), especially when you do not have a job (even though they made use of formal childcare provisions, which charged according to parents' income). Some just wanted to take care of their child themselves (Father~2, Mother~6). Some did not trust strangers to take care of their child and preferred close relatives (Mother~9, 5, 1).

Mother~5, however, did make use of formal day care with her second child, while previously she was anxious about it. She realised that making use of formal day care was the only way to move forward. Apart from having had time to think about it, several other little things made her gain trust, such as positive blogs on the Internet, being welcome in the day care centre, and being able to go there together with her child to get used to it, something to which she referred to as *coddle days.*

> One, it is only one street away from me. Two, the fact that I heard really good reviews from other people, through research. And also the fact that I went there and that they reassured me by telling me how things go there. […] It is also a completely renovated place, it is much bigger now. […] And I'm very happy that I made the decision (Mother~5, personal communication, October 28, 2015; having her second child and made up with her ex-husband).

For Mother~8, the fact that she saw happy staff made the difference.

> There were two ladies, aunts actually, who were preparing fruit for the children and they were singing while making it. The kitchen there is one where you can see through and we saw them singing! And then I thought, if staff is happy, then children will be happy too (Mother~8, personal communication, November 12, 2015; about her search for day care).

Parents also mentioned several other formal public services from which they sought out support. Their experiences, positive or negative, depended on the extent to which those services did or did not take their current life situation into account, gave or gave no derogatory reactions, did or did not made mistakes or apply strange rules.

> We didn't get any help from anybody; for instance, I wanted to apply for VDAB [the Flemish public employment service] training but then they told me that I could not make use of the free training vouchers because those were reserved for working people (Mother~4, personal communication, October 27, 2015; when she was unemployed).

Finally, our findings indicate that the boundary between formal and informal support is not very strict, nor is it a question of private or public affairs. For some parents, formal social services played a role in their informal network. Father~2, for instance, kept contact with his outplacement mentor afterwards. She was very helpful, not only by giving employment guidance, but mainly by listening to him and what he was going through. The same was true for Mother~5 (personal communication, October 28, 2015), who went to the

Flemish public employment service to find a job, but "luckily" got into contact with a social worker who, just by listening, helped the mother to clear her head. Mother~8 sometimes felt supported by the small talk she had with other mothers in the day care centre.

> And in the hallway when you want to collect his jacket and his bag, you sometimes hear them saying 'this week he has this, did you experience that too?' It is something that gives you a lot of confidence yes, in the hallways, by having very short one-minute meetings. (Mother~8, personal communication, November 12, 2015; making use of a formal day care centre)

The sense of support

Our findings indicate that one's surrounding circumstances and the availability of qualitative support do matter when parents suddenly lose their job. Both do make a difference in terms of the pathways parents can see (and follow) towards their aspirations. Although parents looked towards the future in a more careful way when being unemployed, they kept looking at the future, especially the future of their child(ren).

It may also be clear that everything is linked with each other: circumstances, support, working conditions, personal well-being, educational possibilities, aspirations, and neighbourhood. When something changed in one domain, this had consequences on the other domains as well. For Mother~13, for instance, flexible day care made it possible to apply for jobs and have time for herself, which in turn made her feel good, and which, according to her, was reflected onto her child (see earlier).

> I was allowed to bring him to day care full-time, even though I was unemployed. In the beginning, he only went three days in the week and then I got the job so I needed him to go full-time. And luckily that was possible, because that is not always a given (Mother~13, personal communication, December 3, 2015; made use of formal family day care).

In particular, when professionals are willing to step out of their comfort zone, parents especially experienced support:

> His [child] speech therapist managed to deceive the agency...with a letter from the paediatrician. She made sure that we were eligible for financial assistance. Otherwise, we had to pay for it [speech therapy] ourselves (Mother~4, personal communication, October 27, 2015; when both parents were unemployed).

The absence of support

When there is no way out, our findings indicate that parents looked for alternatives and developed strategies to cope. These included, for instance, making cuts in recreational activities that cost money (Mother~4, Father~2), getting groceries cheaper in another country (Mother~3, Father~3) or doing illegal work (Father~12, Mother~1). Also, with regard to children, strategies were sought. For some parents, the availability of universally accessible public services, such as a playground, a swimming pool or a library, were experienced as a welcome support resource.

> Nothing, I had completely nothing and continually tried to do crazy stuff with my daughter, like for instance jumping on the bed or on the couch. It is my fault if my daughter does that now, but I didn't have the money to afford luxuries, for instance going to an indoor playground. At school you hear, 'oh mommy, are we going too?'. 'Ok, fine' I said, but then I went to a park. […] I said, 'come, we go to the park of the pirates!' and oh she was really happy. I couldn't bring her to an indoor playground. This costs money and going outdoors doesn't. You realise that you can better use those 50 euros for buying milk, fruit and vegetables, so they [children] are safe for a whole week. (Mother~5, personal communication, October 28, 2015; at the time she was divorced)

4.4 Discussion

This study looked at the contextualised experiences of families with young children (0–3 years old), of whom at least one parent became involuntary

unemployed and/or had a hard time finding a job due to economic downturn. Our study is limited in several ways. First, its cross-sectional nature does not allow us to make any statement about patterns or causes. It does not account for the fact that people's lives are dynamic. Second, our findings cannot be generalised due to the study's qualitative stance. Rather than the pursuit of representativity, we aimed to disclose a variety of contextualised perspectives, meanings, and experiences. Third, due to the research scope, we did not include parents with, for example, teenagers, even though this is also an important scope.

Despite these limitations, we did find some interesting results that may enrich the existing *usual* or taken for granted problem constructions and interventions about parenthood in times of economic downturn, which in turn has some important consequences for social work practice. By *listening* to parents' stories, we were able to see that unemployment is experienced in a heterogeneous way. Unemployment indeed leads to financial difficulties, social difficulties (e.g., on networks, relationship, children), and psychological difficulties (e.g., time structure), as previous research indicates, but this is not necessarily always the case. The extent to which unemployment shakes up one's life has a lot to do with systemic circumstances that impact parents differently. Moreover, being hindered on one life domain has consequences on other life domains too. Concerning social work practice, this might indicate that there is something to say for the current interest about more collaboration between services and/or services that take into account a broad perspective, in order to support families to lead a life in human dignity in which they can flourish (Hujo & Gaia, 2011).

Parents in this study kept aspiring and valuing a working parenthood (Dean, 2001), even though they experience(d) involuntary job loss and/or had a hard time finding a job. However, their motivation to pursue this precisely had to do with the meaning a job has/had for them and the quality of work. Concerning social work practice, this might suggest that job loss is about more than being

excluded from the labour market, and the idea that a return to *any kind* of paid labour will solve the problem will not suffice (Atkinson & Hills, 1998; Gowan, 2014).

What matters in the experience of unemployment is the type of (in)formal support parents can or cannot turn to. In this view, a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty could be noticed throughout parents' lives, which sometimes conflicted with the *usual* way of how support was offered by social services. This was especially the case regarding the combination of the aspiration to work and the aspiration to raise children. Instead of flexible social services, parents were confronted with several barriers, such as waiting lists, non-flexible hours or financial worries in, for instance, formal childcare. Some indicated that their contribution immediately adapted to their income when their work situation changed, but for others it did not. Some could make use of flexible day care, while others could not. Parents also differently experienced formal support resources. Some services did manage to look at parents in a broad way, while others did not. It thus seems that the type of support one can turn to is very different from one city, municipality or neighbourhood to another. Moreover, when confronted with unemployment, parents consider services that combine immaterial and material support as being highly supportive. These findings might contribute to a better understanding and more appropriate provision of social support in social work practice.

To conclude, our results indicate that parents who are living in uncertainty or who are experiencing unpredictability, are concerned with situations *here and now* in order to be able to look towards the future. What matters is not so much what parenthood should be as an ideal norm, but rather, what it can be in a given situation. This means that parenthood, circumstances and resources cannot be separated from each other, but are instead inherently interwoven. In this view, *listening* to parents, from a lifeworld oriented perspective, is crucial for social work practice in order to be supportive. Not only does it allow to take account of people's contextualised and lived realities and experiences, but it also allows to critically assess these realities according to principles of human

dignity and social justice (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013; Wright, 1959). Such a commitment would in turn contribute to a more democratic policy and practice, as providing multiple ways of seeing allows social workers to engage in a public debate about taken for granted problem constructions and interventions, and to develop strategies to support families who experience the economic crisis (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Dominelli, 1999; Lorenz, 2008).

For further research, it might be interesting to examine what kind of social work services we have today, knowing that, on the one hand, social work professionals might be confronted with a social investment discourse, but on the other hand, they might also be confronted with more uncertainty and unpredictability, as our findings indicate. Is there a place for parents' meaning-making where their actual childrearing conditions and circumstances are taken into account too, in order to be supportive? Or is support mainly provided based on external efficiency criteria?

4.5 References

Anthony, E., King, B., & Austin, M. (2011). Reducing child poverty by promoting child well-being: identifying best practices in a time of great need. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*, 1999-2009. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.05.029

Atkinson, A. B. & Hills, J. (1998). *Exclusion, employment and opportunity.* LSE STICERD Research Paper No. CASE 004. Retrieved from http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/Paper4.PDF

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bradt, L., Vandenbroeck, M., Lammertyn, J., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). Parental expectations of maternal and child health services. *Social Work in Public Health, 30*(2), 197–206. doi:10.1080/19371918.2014.992586

Brand, J. E. (2015). The far-reaching impact of job loss and unemployment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 41*, 359–375. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043237

Cantillon, B. (1999). *De Welvaartsstaat in de kering* [The Welfare state in transition]. Kapellen: Pelckmans.

Cheng, T. (2007). How is 'welfare-to-work' shaped by contingencies of economy, welfare policy and human capital? *International Journal of Social Welfare, 16*, 212–219. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2397.2006.00458.x

Clarke, K. (2006). Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(4), 699–721. doi:10.1177/0261018306068470

Cole, M. (2007). Re-Thinking Unemployment: A challenge to the Legacy of Jahoda et al. Sociology, 41(6), 1133-1149. doi:10.1177/0038038507082319

Crettaz, E. (2015). Poverty and material deprivation among European workers in times of crisis. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 24*, 312–323. doi:10.1111/ijsw.12132

De Mey, W., Coussée, F., Vandenbroeck, M., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2009). Social work and parents support in reaction to children's antisocial behaviour: constructions and effects. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18,* 299–306. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00609.x

Dean, H. (2001). Working parenthood and parental obligation. *Critical Social Policy, 21*(3), 267–289. doi:10.1177/026101830102100302

Dominelli, L. (1999). Neo-liberalism, social exclusion and welfare clients in a global economy. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *8,* 14–22. doi: 10.1111/1468-2397.00058

Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: from welfare rights to conditional entitlements. Canadian Journal of Sociology, 29(2), 265–287. doi: 10.1353/cjs.2004.0022

Dyson, C., Gorin, S., Hooper, C.-A., & Cabral, C. (2008). Bangladeshi families living in hardship: Findings from research using a life-history approach.

Child and Family Social Work, 14, 362–371. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00608.x

Elder, G., Conger, R., Foster, M., & Ardelt, M. (1992). Families under economic pressure. *Journal of Family Issues, 13*(5), 5–37. doi:10.1177/019251392013001002

Engbergsen, G. & Van der Veen, R. (1987). *Moderne armoede: overleven op het sociaal minimum [Modern poverty: surviving on a living].* Leiden/ Antwerpen: Stenferd Kroese.

Eurofound. (2014). *Third European quality of life survey – quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2013). *Commission recommendation. Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage.* Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf.

Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work, 36*, 5–19. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch226

Fusch, P. I. & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408–1416. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss9/3

Geens, N. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2012). The (ab)sense of a concept of social support in parenting research: a social work perspective. *Child and Family Social Work, 19*, 491–500. doi:10.1111/cfs.12048

Goldberg, G. (2012). Economic inequality and economic crisis: A challenge for social workers. Social Work, 57(3), 211-224. doi:10.1093/sw/sws005

Gowan, M. (2014). Moving from job loss to career management: The past, present, and future of involuntary job loss research. *Human Resource Management Review, 24*, 258-270. Retrieved from doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2014.03.007

Gray, M. (2014). The swing to early intervention and prevention and its implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 1750–1769. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct037

Grunwald, K. & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of the 'Lifeworld Orientation' for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 23*(2), 131–146. doi:10.1080/0265053090292343

Hämaläinen, J. (2003). The concept of social pedagogy in the field of social work. *Journal of social Work, 3*(1), 69–80. doi:10.1177/1468017303003001005

Hanan, R. (2012). The social impact of the economic crisis in Europe. *Working Notes, 69*, 16–21. Retrieved from http://www.workingnotes.ie/index.php/item/the-social-impact-of-the-economic-crisis-in-europe

Hsieh, H. & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Heath Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687

Hujo, K. & Gaia, E. (2011). Guest Editorial. Social policy and poverty: An introduction. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 20*, 230–239. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2397.2011.00786.x

Humbert, L. & Roberts, T. L. (2009). The value of a learner's stance: lessons learned from pregnant and parenting woman. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 13*, 588–596. doi:10.1007/s10995-008-0373-x

IFSW. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Karanikolos, M., Mladovsky, P., Cylus, J., Thomson, S., Basu, S., Stuckles, D., …, & McKee, M. (2013). Financial crisis, austerity, and health in Europe. *Health in Europe 7, 381*, 1323–1331. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60102-6

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2013). Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken – kansarmoede-index [Municipal child reports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed March 24, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2014). *Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Preventieve gezinsondersteuning* [Municipal child reports. Preventive family support]. Retrieved from: http://www.kindengezin.be

Kvale, S. (1996). Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

Leinonen, J., Solantaus, T., & Punamäki, R. (2002). The specific mediating paths between economic hardship and the quality of parenting. *International Journal of Behavioural Development, 26*(5), 423–435. doi:10.1080/01650250143000364

Lister, R. (2003). Investing in the future citizens of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour. *Social Policy & Administration, 37*(5), 427–443. doi:10.1111/1467-9515.00350

Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in a historical context: the case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 625–644. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn025

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 4–17. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

Mahon, R. (2010). After neo-liberalism? The OECD, the World Bank and the child. *Global Social Policy, 10*(2), 172–192. doi:10.1177/1468018110366615

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum Qualitative Social Research, 1*(2), 1–10. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1089/2385#gcit

Mitchell, G. & Campbell, L. (2011). The social economy of excluded families. *Child and Family Social Work, 16*, 422–433. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2011.00757.x

Morabito, C. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). Equality of opportunities, divergent conceptualisations and their implications for early childhood care and education policies. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 1–17. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.12112

OECD. (2012). *Starting strong III: A quality toolbox for early childhood education and care.* Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2014). *Society at a glance. The crisis and its aftermath.* Paris: OECD.

Ostner, I., & Schmitt, C. (2008). *Family Policies in the Context of Family Change. The Nordic Countries in Comparative Perspective*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Parton, N. (2014). Critical commentary. Work, child protection and politics: Some critical and constructive reflections. *British Journal of Social Work, 44,* 2042–2056. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcu091

Peeters, L. & Vancauteren, M. (2013). De economische impact van de sluiting van Ford Genk. Verslag opgesteld in opdracht van de Universiteit Hasselt [The economic impact of the closure of Ford Genk. Report commissioned by the University of Hasselt]. *Over-Werk. Tijdschrift van het Steunpunt WSE, 23*(2), 76–83. Retrieved from https://doclib.uhasselt.be/dspace/handle/1942/15364

Pentaraki, M. (2016). 'I am in a constant state of insecurity trying to make ends meet, like our service users': Shared austerity reality between social workers and service users: Towards a preliminary conceptualisation. *British Journal of Social Work, 0*, 1–17. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcw099

Pintelon, O., Cantillon, B., Van den Bosch, K., & Whelan, C. (2013). The social stratification of social risks: The relevance of class for social investment strategies. *Journal of European Social Policy, 23*(52), 52–67. doi:10.1177/0958928712463156

Ramaekers, S. & Suissa, J. (2012). *The claims of parenting. Reasons, responsibility and society.* London and New York: Springer.

Roets, G., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2013). Researching child poverty: Towards a lifeworld orientation. *Childhood. A Global Journal of Child Research, 20*(4), 535–549. doi:10.1177/0907568212475101

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Do families in poverty need child and family social work? *European Journal of Social Work*, *18*(5), 647–660. doi:10.1080/13691457.2014.953916

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2016, in press). What families in poverty consider supportive: Welfare strategies of parents with young children in relation to (child and family) social work. *Child and Family Social Work.* doi: 10.1111/cfs.12285

Strandh, M. (2001). State intervention and mental well-being among the unemployed. *Journal of Social Policy, 30*(1), 57–80. Retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy

Strier, R. (2013). Responding to the Global Economic Crisis: Inclusive Social Work Practice. National Association of Social Workers, 58(4), 344-353. doi:10.1093/sw/swt040

van Hooren, F., Kaasch, A., & Starke, P. (2014). The shock routine: Economic crisis and the nature of social policy responses. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(4), 605–623. doi: 10.1080/13501763.2014.887757

Vandenbroeck, M., Bouverne-De Bie, M., Bradt, L., & Crampe, S. (2010). *Onderzoek naar de noden en preferenties inzake preventieve zorg bij gezinnen met jonge kinderen. Onderzoek in opdracht van Kind en Gezin.* [Study about the needs and preferences in preventive care for families with young children. Study commissioned by Child and Family]. Gent-Brussel: Vakgroep Sociale Agogiek UGent – Kind en Gezin.

Vandenbroeck, M. & Van Lancker, W. (2014). *Een tweesporenbeleid inzake kinderarmoede. VLAS-Studies 14* [A dual policy for child poverty. VLAS studies 14]. Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.

VDAB. (2014). *Collectieve ontslagen Ford en toeleveranciers (eind februari 2014)* [Collective redundancies Ford and suppliers (end of February 2014)] [Unpublished dataset]. Brussel: VDAB

Vlaamse Regering. (2013). *Strategisch actie-programma Limburg² 2013–2019. Ontwerp-uitvoeringsplan* [Strategic Action Program Limburg Squared. Draft-implementation plan]. *Ontwerp-uitvoeringsplan.* Brussel.

Wright, M. (1959). *The sociological imagination.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

4.6 Annexes

Annex I: background characteristics

Respondent	Family background	SES	Municipality	Work situation	Support resources
1	Mother (age 23) Married First child (7 months old) Origin: Turkey	Secondary education (both)	Genk Social tenant	Father: quit his job due to distance + trusted on a job with FORD, still unemployed Mother: working full-time	- VDAB (the Flemish public employment service) - OCMW (the Flemish public centre for social welfare) - Social network: family, partner, friends
2	Father (age 26) Divorced Two children (age 2,5 and newborn) Origin: the Netherlands	Secondary education Primary education (ex-wife)	Bilzen Owner (mortgage)	Father: lost his job due to redundancy, now working full-time again	- Outplacement - Social network: family, friends, new partner, ex-colleagues
3	Mother (age 45) & father (age 47) Living together First child (age 2) Origin: the Netherlands (mother) & Italy (father)	Secondary education (father) Primary education (mother)	Bilzen Tenant	Father: lost his job due to health problems Mother: lost her job due to factory closure & health problems	- Social network: family, friends, partner
4	Mother (age 28) & father (age 29) Married Three children (age 6, 3 and 1 Origin: The Netherlands (mother) & Belgium (father)	Secondary education (both)	Maasmechelen Owner (mortgage)	Father: lost his job due to company closure, now working full-time again Mother: lost her job due to pregnancy, now working part-time	- VDAB - Psychologist - OCMW - Speech therapist - Family day care - Social network: family, few friends, partner

Respondent	Family background	SES	Municipality	Work situation	Support resources
5	Mother (age 31) Divorced, living together Two children (age 6 and 18 months old) Origin: Turkey (both)	Secondary education (father) Primary education (mother)	Genk Tenant	Mother: lost her job due to company closure Father: working full-time	- VDAB - OCMW - Childcare (crèche) - Parent support programme - Social network: family, partner, friends
6	Mother (age 36) Married Three children (age 5, 4 and 1) Origin: Morocco (both)	Secondary education (mother) Higher education obtained in Morocco (father)	Maasmechelen Social tenant	Mother: takes care for the children Father: unemployed after factory closure, now working part-time in a temporary work regime	- VDAB - OCMW - Social network: niece, partner, few friends, family in Morocco
7	Mother (age 37) Married First child (19 months old) Origin: Belgium (both)	Higher education (mother) Secondary education (father)	Bilzen Owner	Mother: working full-time Father: lost his job due to factory closure, now working full-time again	- Outplacement - Family day care - Social network: family, friends, partner, colleagues mother
8	Mother (age 35) Living together First child (10 months old) Origin: the Netherlands (mother) & Belgium (mother)	Secondary education (mother) Higher education (mother)	Bilzen Owner	Mother: lost her job after redundancy Mother: working full-time	- VDAB - Childcare (crèche) - Social network: family, friends, partner
9	Mother (age 25) Living together First child (16 months old) Origin: Italy (both)	Secondary education (mother) Secondary education (father)	Genk Living with grandmother	Father: lost his job in a factory Mother: working full-time	- VDAB - Social network: family, friends, colleagues

Respondent	Family background	SES	Municipality	Work situation	Support resources
10	Mother (age 20) Lone mother First child (age 2) Origin: half Turkish (mother) & unknown (father)	Primary education (mother)	Genk Living with parents	Mother: was denied work due to a lack of a degree and due to her child, now working in a temporary work regime	- OCMW - Social network: family and colleagues
11	Father (age 37) Married Three children (age 10, 6 and 7 months) Origin: Turkey (both)	Secondary education (both)	Maasmechelen Living with parents	Father: lost his job due to redundancy, now working in a temporary work regime Mother: stopped working due to health problems	- VDAB - RVA - ACV - Social network: partner, family, friends, neighbours
12	Father (age 33) Married First child (10 months old) Origin: Turkey (both)	Secondary education (both)	Genk Tenant	Father: asylum procedure made it difficult to find a job. Worked independently, but went bankrupt. Now starting all over Mother: takes care for the children	- Municipality - OCMW - Social network: partner, family and friends in other cities
13	Mother (age 35) Lone mother First child (age 2,5) Origin: Belgium (mother) & The Netherlands (father)	Higher education (mother)	Maasmechelen Tenant	Mother: uncertain and temporary work regime	- VDAB - Food bank - Family day care - School - Social network: friends, talk group lone mothers, godfather
14	Mother (age 31) Married First child (age 2) Origin: Turkey (both)	Higher education (both)	Maasmechelen Tenant	Mother: working full-time Father: uncertain and temporary work regime	- VDAB - Family daycare - Social network: family, colleagues

CHAPTER 5

PERSPECTIVES OF ECEC PROFESSIONALS

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle”

- Martin Luther King -

ABSTRACT *

Inspired by a rights based perspective, this study aims for a better understanding of in- and exclusion processes in early childhood education and care (ECEC), in times of economic downturn and austerity, from the point of view of provision in Limburg (Flanders-Belgium). Based upon the analytical framework of Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014), which distinguishes five structural conditions that are crucial to promote inclusive ECEC services on the level of policy, parents and provision, we found that some of the current neoliberal and managerialist ECEC interventions towards more efficiency, risk further exclusion. Implications for social work policy and practice are discussed.

*Based on: Geinger, F., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (submitted). Processes of in- and exclusion in early childhood education and care in times of economic downturn and austerity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.*

5.1 Introduction

In 2014, the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) defined 'access' to ECEC as one of the five key principles to strengthen the quality of ECEC (European Commission, 2014). Also on an international level, the importance of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) from a social, economic and educational point of view, has increasingly been emphasised (Unicef Innocenti Research Centre 2008, Mahon 2010, OECD 2012). Based upon a growing body of international research (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014), it is assumed that accessible high quality ECEC has the potential to equalise opportunities, to prevent (child) poverty and consequently, to promote social inclusion and future well-being.

In times of economic downturn and austerity, together with social, demographic and political evolutions, international governments and organisations are increasingly concerned about unequal access to ECEC provision; especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, economic downturn increases inequality (European Commission, 2012; Eurofound, 2014; OECD 2014; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014) and children from disadvantaged backgrounds, are less often enrolled in (high quality) childcare and preschool (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Scholars have, however, criticised the social investment based rationale on improving access to ECEC (Tsui & Cheung, 2004; Garrett, 2009; Lazzari, 2014). It is argued that instead of a rights based foundation of ECEC, the meaning and function of ECEC risks being defined purely from an economic point of view. As such, the standpoint of service users on the role of ECEC in contributing to a life in human dignity, risks being overlooked, in favour of a particular, market-led view about knowledge, learning and childhood (Bouverne-De Bie et al., 2003; Campbell-Barr & Nygard, 2014; Lazzari, 2014). In this respect, Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014) have stressed the importance of getting a grip on the contextualised, complex interplay between parents, provision and policy, in order to understand processes of in- and exclusion in ECEC services.

Moreover, they stated that each level should take account of five structural conditions that – based upon earlier research (Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2003) – are crucial to promote inclusive services. These five conditions, however, do not serve as standards that prescribe what needs to be done. Rather, they should be considered as "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1969, p. 148) to stimulate 'reflection' about the way in which services can contribute to an equal possibility to live a life in human dignity and social justice. As such, the first condition 'availability', invites to reflect on whether there is a reachable, sufficient and differentiated supply of ECEC. 'Affordability' considers the financial and symbolic costs that families and children might encounter. 'Accessibility' is about the multiple obstacles that families and children might encounter, such as language barriers and procedures, and also considers the relation between the social worker and the service user. 'Usability' questions whether the service and the supply is experienced by families and children as supportive and matched to their demand. Finally, 'comprehensibility' demands whether the meaning and function of ECEC is attuned to families' sense making. Are values, beliefs and educational practices of ECEC provision open to debate with families (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014)?

This study aims to explore these concepts from the standpoint of ECEC provision, in times of economic downturn, in order to better understand processes of in- and exclusion. The intermediate position of provision between policy and parents provides an interesting 'site' to gain insight into how practitioners constantly move back and forth between policy demands and contextualised, everyday realities of service users (Penna, Paylor, & Washington, 2010; Welbourne, 2011; Evans, 2011).

5.2 Research methodology

5.2.1 Research context

The study presented here took place in Genk, Maasmechelen and Bilzen, three municipalities/cities in the province of Limburg (Flanders – Belgium) that were

hit the hardest by the closure of their main employers: the Ford factory and its suppliers (VDAB, 2014), and face higher levels of child deprivation than average (Kind en Gezin, 2013) (**see Annex I**). It needs to be noted that Belgium is one of the few that "reached the Barcelona Targets with 99% enrolment in pre-primary and nearly 40% in childcare" (Peeters, 2013, p. 44), and that continues to invest in the quality and access of ECEC in times of crisis and austerity (Peeters, 2013). Childcare (0–3) is predominantly publicly funded and parents usually pay a fee in accordance with their income. Preschool (2–5/6) is free of charge and is universally provided (with additional resources towards disadvantaged families with children) (Peeters, 2013).

- Local policies in times of economic downturn

Within this context of economic downturn, several policy changes took place on a local level. First, the province Limburg, where the three municipalities are situated, explicitly included the fight against child poverty through ECEC services in its policy, as an important side condition to overcome the consequences of the factories' closures. Therefore, the province invested in 210 extra childcare places and received an additional budget to fight child poverty in those municipalities that need it the most (Vlaamse Regering, 2013). Second, the Flemish government paradoxically installed new rules and regulations in order to improve the cost-efficiency of childcare (Vlaamse Regering, 2012; Huylebroek & Vastmans, 2016; Kind en Gezin, 2016). First, the minimum fee per day increased from €1.56 to €5.02 and a reduction can only be obtained after consulting the Public Social Welfare Centre. In case of significant changes in the families' income (e.g. through unemployment), it now takes six months to reduce the fee. Furthermore, attendance days need to be booked in advance and when parents' booked days are not used, they still need to be paid for. The childcare centre has some room for discretion on when and how to calculate no show fees. A final change is that a child can only attend childcare if he or she has a 'child code' which has to be obtained through an online database where parents need to register as well as provide information about their family status and income.

5.2.2 Data-collection and data-analysis

In the following pages, we present the findings from 20 semi-structured interviews with ECEC professionals in Genk (7), Maasmechelen (7) and Bilzen (6). Professionals include childcare professionals as well as preschool professionals **(see Annex II)** and were recruited by the researchers through telephonic purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Rather than statistical representativity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), we strived for a diversity of perspectives by including diverse forms of childcare and preschool, in different neighbourhoods. There was only one exclusion criteria: not experiencing any consequences of economic downturn in the service. Of the eleven childcare professionals that were called, only three did not participate as they reported experiencing no consequences of economic downturn. Of the 18 preschools that were called, nine preschools did not participate for the same reason. The project was approved by the Ethical Commission of the Faculty and professionals' written and signed informal consent was obtained. The interviews took place approximately one year and a half after the closure of Ford and its suppliers, lasted between one hour and a half and two hours, and took place in the service centre of the professional. Interviews were transcribed, thematically labelled and axially coded. Data were analysed by engaging in a direct approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This was based upon the framework of Vandenbroeck and Lazzari (2014), which distinguishes five structural conditions that are crucial to promote inclusive ECEC services at the level of policy, parents and provision.

In what follows, we illustrate the challenges the ECEC professionals were confronted with in contexts of economic downturn and austerity. Second, we zoom in on the strategies professionals used to handle these challenges and on the new concerns these strategies bring. Finally, we give some concluding reflections and recommendations for policy and practice.

5.3 Results

ECEC professionals felt the economic crisis, especially in terms of policy changes and in terms of concerns and challenges on the level of parents, due to poverty and (involuntary) job loss in general.

5.3.1 Availability

Challenges

Genk is the only one of the three selected municipalities that received extra money to invest in childcare places. It was invested in 36 extra subsidised childcare places, in already existing centres. Genk reaches the Barcelona-norm (33.52%) with more places in centre based services than in family day care (FDC) (**see Annex I)**. Professionals reported a decrease in their waiting lists, due to a diminished and/or changed demand (see usability). Bilzen has a low coverage of 27.94% and has more places in FDC than in centre based services. Professionals indicated that there was enough childcare. This, however, contradicts with one of the professionals in Genk, who noticed parents from Bilzen coming to Genk for childcare (G-DO1). Maasmechelen has an even lower coverage (24.43%) including slightly more places in FDC compared to centre based services. Over the last year, they have noticed an increased demand for childcare and have full occupancy again.

Being a rural province, Limburg has mobility issues as public transport is poorly developed, especially in Maasmechelen and Bilzen. In addition, professionals indicated that more parents experienced financial distress and that the cost of public transport was sometimes too high.

> You can take the bus [to FDC], but you would have to throw your child off the bus [at the destination] in order to stay on the bus [to return back home], because otherwise you have to wait one hour until the next bus (M-DO1).

> That [occasional childcare for immigrants who need to follow a training programme] is not the biggest problem, if they had transport. […] The chance that we have a suitable place, is very small (B-DO1).

Notwithstanding that public transport is under Flemish authority, professionals tried several strategies to make sure that parents could reach them.

Strategies … and concerns

Public preschools welcomed subsidies to organise their own public transport, yet private preschools do not benefit from these funds. Some preschools or childcare services organised extramural activities, such as Dutch classes for parents, sports for children, or breakfast time.

> One day some mothers came by and said 'we want to learn Dutch' […] and then I thought, well there seem to be Dutch lessons that don't seem to reach these people. So I thought yes ok […] And two weeks later we started with it (G-S1).

On the one hand, this provides opportunities for parents, yet on the other hand it might also limit their choice:

> We try to create a lot of supply outside school. […] For parents this is a gain yes, they reason 'ok, we can't afford a sports club or we can't reach the city centre or the academy, but this at least is close by' (G-S2).

According to the professionals, this often demands extra room, extra resources and extra energy, which is difficult in times of austerity.

5.3.2 Affordability

Challenges

In terms of affordability, ECEC professionals reported an increase in the number of parents who could not pay their invoices. Professionals also noticed that more parents paid lower fees and faced increasing difficulties to pay even

the (increased) lowest fee. Moreover, when parents suddenly became unemployed, the new childcare law seemed to cause extra affordability problems. First, parental fees can only be recalculated after six months of unemployment, but according to the interviewees, this is far too slow.

> Before, we were able to recalculate the fee immediately, but now the system has changed […] That's why I think people quit or reduce day care, because it takes more time until they get a reduction (M-DO1).

Second, the new legislation states that booked attendance days always need to be paid for, but for parents who are confronted with uncertainty and unpredictability due to job loss, planning in advance was experienced as much harder, despite the possibility of having some 'respite' days that one does not have to pay for when the child is unexpectedly absent.

> …because what do parents think: 'March is a good month, I keep my child at home and I don't want to use my respite days, I want to pay for that [booked] day. Instead I want to use my respite days in June because then it is financially more difficult'. Parents cannot choose to do that. They always need to use their respite days first. I think it is a pity (M-KO1).

In childcare, these affordability problems sometimes resulted in a reduction in the amount of days that childcare was asked for, which in turn impacted upon the income of professionals working in FDC, as these are paid according to the number of children per day.

> Yes, for instance the twins … at the moment they only come for two half days, so I lose half of what I earned before. So the less they come, the less ... [I earn]. You get a small amount in compensation, but that is insignificant (G-OO1).

Affordability also consists of symbolic costs. ECEC professionals indicated that for some parents it mattered that the caregiver of their child could not access information about their financial situation, because they feared their child would be treated differently. Also a referral to the Public Centre for Social Welfare (in

order to reduce the minimal fee) was often experienced as a symbolic cost owing to its labelling of parents as ‘poor’.

Strategies … and concerns

ECEC professionals developed personal strategies to cope with these challenges. Several professionals delayed payment of the invoice or discussed a payment plan. Some professionals granted a ‘reduction’ or paid it themselves. Some preschools even used a secret account for this, called ‘the black account’ or ‘the friends account’, referring to the private cash reserve of the school, which actually could not be used for such matters.

> I paid a part with the black account of the school. And yes, actually it is not allowed, but if you have a good chat with parents, then I believe them (M-S2).

> Some FDC providers care for the children during the weekend, for free, in order to help the parents. Mostly we only hear this after they did it. They are very committed (G-DO1).

Some professionals let parents pay in cash and in small amounts, rather than everything at once, or helped parents to apply for a grant.

> Here, there is not a single bank, nor a post office, nothing, so people pay their invoice in cash (G-S2).

> We applied for an allowance for all the parents. […] Because we felt that precisely those families who need that money in order to survive, could not find the way to apply for a grant (B-S2).

Others decided to use paper invoices instead of digital ones and gave them personally to parents. This served as a strategy to make sure that parents received the invoice as well as to notice problems in time (M-KO1).

Strategies were also developed regarding the symbolic costs to lower the threshold to the Public Centre for Social Welfare. Some professionals made a private telephone call to the social welfare centre together with parents to make

sure that they receive help. Or for instance, the decision that a social worker from the public social welfare centre is present once a fortnight in the Children's centre.

5.3.3 Usability

Challenges

Childcare professionals experienced that most parents who lost their job, wanted to keep their place in childcare. Some parents were afraid there would be no space left when they found a new job, considering the waiting lists in many centres. Moreover, childcare was sometimes considered by parents to be the only stable and certain thing in times of uncertainty. It is a place that offers material support in terms of care (shelter, food, drinks), but also a place that offers immaterial support in terms of 'taking care' (affection, toys and warmth):

> The father said 'I can't pay for it [1.56 euros/day]. I went bankrupt and I can't pay for it, but this is the only thing of which I'm sure, that my son is warm, gets food and can play. I cannot pay for it …' and he didn't pay the invoice (M-KO1).

The childcare professionals were frequently asked to reduce the amount of attendance days and/or to attend half days instead of full days. They also noticed an increase in the need for immediate and flexible childcare, because more parents had temporary work regimes or suddenly found or lost a job.

> Most of them ... they call in the evening at 10 PM 'can my child come tomorrow, because the interim office called me that I can go to work'. In the morning they call again 'well, it seems that I don't have the job after all'. […] Once I had parents who changed their booking four times in the afternoon. (M-OO1).

ECEC professionals indicated that parents often 'came too late' or 'too early' to pick up their child, which in both cases was experienced as a problem. Professionals explain this by referring to externally defined structures and rules. For instance, coming late to preschool was considered a problem as

children missed circle time which 'has to' take place at the beginning of the day. In childcare, coming late gave rise to logistic issues, such as the provision of food or personnel. While some professionals explained this in terms of 'indifferent' or 'lax' parents, others took into consideration the structural conditions wherein these parents and children (had to) live.

> They [unemployed parents] are lax, very lax […] They even say so, 'oh it doesn't matter, it is only preschool. […] They also often stay talking at the gate because they always have tons of time (G-S2).

> They have a principle 'if I don't have to work, I don't bring the child, I will bring him when I am awake'. And here, that is possible. I don't think that you should force someone who is unemployed to bring a child before 9 AM (B-OO1).

Strategies … and concerns

In childcare, some professionals readily adapted the attendance plan of a child, even when the new law prescribes that this can only be done one month after the parents' request. Yet, professionals indicated that it is financially unfavourable to have too many children attending half days. Indeed, the fuller their occupation, the more subsidy they get. Professionals continuously balanced between what is best for parents and what is best for the organisation from a social, educational or financial point of view. As such, some professionals preferred working parents or demanded – allegedly in the best interests of the child – that they attend a minimum number of days. This minimum, however, seemed to be quite variable from one professional to another. The increase in demand for half days also often resulted in more children attending, in order to reach full occupancy. This, however, increased the workload of professionals for they had to get to know and care for more children. In turn, this was considered to negatively affect children who needed special care, as these children and parents were considered to demand more energy and time.

In terms of opening hours, different strategies could be noted. While some FDC providers worked seven days per week, worked for free or worked extra during the weekend, others held on to a nine to five work regime or worked only three or four days a week, despite the experience of the more uncertain work regimes of parents.

> I think childcare needs to adapt to the economy. […] In reality, parents are forced to work at impossible hours, especially those who are poorly educated or who don't have the 'right' qualification. And then what? (M-OO1).

In this view, some professionals tried to share responsibility for the upbringing of a child, while others divided it:

> You know, I also have things to do and if parents have to work, then I don't mind [that children are staying longer]. But if they are at home, why don't they come and pick up their child? (B-OO2).

> If she is here until four PM or until six PM, financially that doesn't make a difference […] but at least it gives her mommy some time to recover. […] I may say 'do you have time later on? You are not feeling well, huh? Come and pick him up a bit later, I will make you some coffee (M-OO2).

Also regarding coming 'too late', ECEC professionals seemed to balance between the organisations' and the parents' best interests. Some claimed allegiance to norms and values that were considered important such as coming on time and respecting appointments. Some pointed to educational motives: children have to learn these values and parents have to set a good example. Consequently, these professionals expressed anger and frustration. Others reacted in an understanding way, and for instance in the case of the educational circle time, remembered to ensure, for example, that the next day the child who had been late could begin first during circle time. Some even changed the starting hour of the school and provided time for parents to come inside, to give them an opportunity to chat and to help to take off their child's jacket.

5.3.4 Accessibility

Challenges

Several of the above-mentioned procedures not only conflicted with what parents could use, but often also hindered their accessibility (e.g., opening hours, minimum attendance days, booking). In addition, the new childcare law states that a child can only attend if the child has a 'child code'. This, however, sometimes conflicted with the need for sudden and flexible childcare.

> In the past we could arrange that [crisis childcare] immediately, while the registration took place afterwards. But that is not allowed anymore. You need a 'child code'. Which fades away the crisis situation [because it takes too long] or which forces parents to look for another solution … or maybe a worse solution (G-DO1).

Also the fact that a 'child code' needs to be obtained through an online, Dutch only website was considered problematic for parents who speak hardly or no Dutch.

Furthermore, accessibility concerns the relation between professionals and parents. Professionals noticed that more parents had non-ECEC related questions about their finances, their (un)employment situation, the education of their children, their marital situation, etc.

Strategies … and concerns

Some professionals admitted that, despite the 'child code' rule, they have enrolled children without a child code. This, however, was considered a risky business, as services do not get subsidised in these cases.

Moreover, professionals indicated that they often felt as if they were 'a social worker'. This was the case when parents entered for a chat and brought a bag full of invoices and letters that they did not understand (M-KO1). Or in the case

where a professional helped 75% of the families to renew their child code, because they didn't understand the system due to language issues and because not all people were familiar with computers and the Internet (M-DO1). Several professionals however, often did good 'by stealth' as they were afraid of hurting the feelings of parents living in precarious situations:

> Clothes that are too small for my son go to a child that attended in the past, because I know that they have little money. […] Or, I cooked something and told the mother 'Actually I made too much, take it for the children' (G-OO1).

> It is so terrible. The baby boy comes here in the morning, covered in dirty clothes, starved […] So we washed him,[…] No, we never got a reaction [from dad]. Maybe it was because he was ashamed or because he thinks it is not a priority? (M-KO1).

Regarding relational accessibility, some professionals structurally established coffee time in preschools or gave parents access to the preschool and/or classroom.

> If you see parents after school, you can chat with them, you can easily keep abreast, they feel safe if anything happens. Because, it is not always as easy as it should be at home and sometimes school is a place where parents have the possibility to say 'it is not my day'. Then you also understand the child better (M-S2).

Sometimes blurred practices could be noticed. In Bilzen, for instance, there seemed to be no waiting lists, which could be a sign that they have enough accessible and available childcare. On the other hand, it could also be a sign that exclusionary practices exist, as this quote suggests:

> Um, 90% are working people. Not people who are looking for a job, because you must have the prospect to work in terms of days and hours [that you need childcare] (B-DO1).

5.3.5 Comprehensibility

Challenges

In addition to the known comprehensibility problems (e.g. language), ECEC professionals indicated that it was not always clear for parents why certain rules and regulations were established and enforced. Several professionals had trouble understanding the 'unusual' behaviour of parents. As a strategy, providing room for dialogue in one way or another seemed to be key, yet not all professionals could or were willing to do that.

Strategies … and concerns

Regarding rules and regulations, professionals introduced a coaching-plan to teach parents to understand and familiarise themselves with them. Other professionals ignored rules (e.g., the rule on 'no show fees') because they estimated that precisely those parents who are already having a hard time, are most punished.
When confronted with 'unusual' behaviour of parents, professionals indicated that they often got frustrated, yet they seldom discussed their frustrations with parents.

> I mean, people quickly gossip about it but no one asks 'why', 'why didn't you bring the child?' […] Because, if you don't talk, then you get frustrated you know (B-001).

Nevertheless, starting a dialogue often framed the 'unusual' in another perspective contributing to a genuine understanding by taking into account the context of the parents.

> One day I asked 'Mommy, why do you drive your car so much? You like driving a car?' [And she said] 'No X, I want to get away, I don't like being at home.' And I said 'why?' [And she said] Well X, at home I have nothing, I can tell you that huh, but if I come to you … you have a cosy living room, your kitchen… also cosy, but I, I don't have all of that (B-OO1).

Some expressed the need to be informed in advance, after having been confronted with difficult or dangerous situations (e.g., ex-prisoners, drugs). This may serve as a strategy to exclude parents or as a strategy to better understand and support parents.

> But if I had known it in advance, then maybe I could have made the situation a bit lighter for her, plus for myself I would have been able to understand […] instead of becoming angry or frustrated, because they lied to you (M-OO2).

Nevertheless, in this case, it was precisely time and trust that enabled a dialogue that eventually led to minor structural adjustments that made a major difference for the mother and child: … it is because of her that I started doing breakfast … here everyone eats the same sandwich. And this way, she doesn't stand out that much (M-OO2).

Several preschool professionals showed resistance to the schoolification trend, for its decontextualizing vision, as the curriculum focusses merely on cognitive development, but risks overlooking well-being as well as the social context:

> … if you have a thick file, it is almost good, while yes, they [inspection] seldom consider the home situation, well-being, involvement. We invest a lot in that, but it is harder to 'measure' and they prefer measurable things that can be showed on paper (G-S2).

Two childcare professionals indicated that the focus of the inspection and of training was restricted to the quality of childcare the children received in terms of developmental, educational matters, instead of more social matters including how to talk about parents' behaviour (B-OO1) or how to handle dangerous or difficult situations. (M-OO2).

5.4 Concluding reflections

This study aimed for a better understanding of in- and exclusion in ECEC in times of economic downturn and austerity, from the provision's standpoint.

Despite its limited range in terms of respondents and other social services, it does provide some interesting analytical insights.

Our findings indicate that ECEC professionals are confronted with (new) challenges and concerns. These often have to do with increased uncertainty, unpredictability and the need for flexibility in times of economic downturn. Yet, this often conflicts with new standardised and managerialist rules and regulations on the level of policy and provision that were precisely installed to enhance efficiency in times of austerity. As such, what is supposed to include, paradoxically risks further exclusion. Based upon our study, it seems that several of the new rules and regulations may not be responsive enough to what parents need, given their circumstances.

Our findings furthermore show that ECEC provision occupies a meaningful position to challenge and problematise certain dominant rationales that impact upon ECEC today. Moving back and forth between demands and expectations on a governmental level and contextualised, everyday realities and concerns of service users, caused ECEC professionals to break, bend or obey the rules. This depended on the discretionary space they were able to, were willing to or were allowed to take (Evans & Harris, 2004; Schiettecat, 2016). In our study several ECEC professionals felt like ‘a social worker’, yet often missed the systemic support to be able to take up this function on an organisational or political level. As a result, making a difference overly depended on the ‘goodwill’ of the professional, rather than on structural or systemic elements. Consequently, either the professional, the service or the parents had to pay a price for this flexibility from a social, educational or financial point of view.

To conclude, our study suggests that accessible ECEC necessarily needs to include principles of human rights and social justice, rather than concerns of efficient, market-led managerialism, that risk curtailing professionals’ discretionary space only. This implies that the debate about access to ECEC services, must necessarily consider all five structural conditions to promote

inclusive services on the level of policy, provision and parents (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). In view of this, our study suggests that public funding matters and should include structural ways to take account of parents' context and their often precarious and unpredictable conditions, as well as their meaning making. For future research it might be interesting then, to zoom in further on the way in which these conditions, especially usability and comprehensibility, are being (re)shaped in daily practice.

5.5 References

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism, perspective and method.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bogdan, R., & S.K. Biklen. (1998). *Qualitative research for education. An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A. De Cock, A. and Vanhee, J. (2003). *Armoede & Participatie* [Poverty and Participation]. Gent: Academia Press.

Campbell-Barr, V., & Nygard, M. (2014). Losing sight of the child? Human capital theory and its role for Early Childhood Education and Care policies in Finland and England since the mid-1990s. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 15 (4):346-359. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2014.15.4.346.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat. (2014). *Key data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*. *2014 edition*. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2014). *Third European quality of life survey - Quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2012). *The social impact of the economic crisis and ongoing fiscal consolidation. Third report of the Social Protection Committee*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2014). *Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Brussels: European Commission.

Evans, T. (2011). Professionals, managers and discretion: Critiquing street-level bureaucracy. *British Journal of Social Work* 41: 368-386. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcq074.

Evans, T., & Harris, J. (2004). Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (Exaggerated) death of discretion. *British Journal of Social Work* 34: 871-895. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bch106.

Garrett, P.M. (2009). *Transforming children's services. Social work, Neoliberalism and the 'modern' world*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Huylebroek, K., and Vastmans, S. (2016). *Onderzoek in opdracht van Kind en Gezin naar de evaluatie van de maatregel 'Opvang bestellen = opvang betalen'*. Gent: Arteveldehogeschool Gent.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 15 (9): 1277-1288. doi: 10.1177/1049732305276687

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2013). Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken – kansarmoede-index [Municipal child reports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed March 24, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin. (2015a). (Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken - kansarmoede-index [Municipal childreports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed November 25, 2016. http://www.kindengezin.be

Kind en Gezin. (2015b). (Kinderopvangcijfers op maat. Opvang baby's en peuters - 4de kwartaal [Childcare data. Childcare babies and toddlers – 4th quarter]; accessed November 25, 2016. http://www.kindengezin.be.

Kind en Gezin. (2016). *Brochure inkomenstarief voor ouders* [Brochure income rate for parents]. Brussel: Kind en Gezin.

Lazzari, A. (2014). Early childhood education and care in times of crisis. *European Early Childhood Education Journal* 22 (4):427-431. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2014.947829.

Mahon, R. (2010). After Neo-Liberalism? The OECD, the World Bank and the child. *Global Social Policy* 10 (2):172-192. doi: 10.1177/1468018110366615.

OECD. (2012). *Starting Strong III: A quality toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2014). *Society at a glance. The crisis and its aftermath*. Paris: OECD.

Peeters, J. (2013). Public services in the European Union: the model of Belgium. In *Barcelona Targets Revisited*, 44-56. Brussels: European Parliament.

Penna, S., Paylor, I. and Washington, J. (2010). Globalization, social exclusion and the possibilities for global social work and welfare. *European Journal of Social Work* 3 (2):109-122. doi: 10.1080/714052818.

Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2003). From participative research to participative practice: a study in youth care. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 13:475-485. doi: 10.1002/casp.752

Schiettecat, T. (2016). Trajectories of poor families in child and family social work. Doctorate in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University.

Steunpunt Sociale Planning. (2016) (Limburg in kaarten en cijfers; accessed November 25, 2016). http://www.limburg.be/Limburg/overlimburg/kaartenencijfers.html.

Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A Typology with Examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1 (1):77-100. doi: 10.1177/2345678906292430.

Tsui, M., & Cheung, F. (2004). Gone with the wind: The impact of managerialism on human services. *British Journal of Social Work* 34 (3):437-442. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bch046

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2008). *Report Card 8. The child care transition*. Florence: Unicef

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2014). *Children of the recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries. Innocenti Report Card 12*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

Vandenbroeck, M., & Lazzari, A. (2014). Accessibility of Early Childhood Education and Care: A state of affairs. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 22 (3):327-335. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2014.912895

VDAB. (2014). *Collectieve ontslagen Ford en toeleveranciers (eind februari 2014)* [Collective redundancies Ford and suppliers (end of february 2014)]. Limburg: VDAB.

Vlaamse Regering. (2012). Decreet van 20 april 2012 (BS 15 juni 2012) houdende de organisatie van kinderopvang van baby's en peuters [Decree concerning the organisation of childcare for babies and toddlers]. Brussel: Vlaamse Regering.

Vlaamse Regering. (2013). *Strategisch actie-programma Limburg² 2013-2019. Ontwerp-uitvoeringsplan* [Strategic action programme for Limburg squared 2013-2019. Draft-implementation plan]. Brussels: Vlaamse Regering 2013.

Welbourne, P. (2011). Twenty-first century social work: The influence of political context on public service provision in social work education and service delivery. *European Journal of Social Work* 14 (3):403-420. doi: 10.1080/13691451003706670.

5.6 Annexes

Annex I: Background characteristics – Genk, Maasmechelen, Bilzen

	Genk	Bilzen	Maasmechelen	Limburg	Flanders
Total amount of young children (age 0-2; 2016)	1.995	939	1.190	25.555	203.139
Total amount of young children (age 3-5; 2016)	2.166	1.065	1.298	27.789	216.817
Barcelona-percentage (2015)	33.52%	27.94%	24.43%	37.33%	42.27%
Total amount of places in family day care (2015)	36.15% (244)	75.86% (198)	55.41% (164)	48.87% (4.707)	35.33% (30.526)
Total amount of family day care organisations (2015)	83.33%	91.84%	84.85%	82.50%	71.56
Total amount of places in crèche based services (2015)	63.85%	24.13%	44.59%	51.13%	64.67%
Total amount of crèche based services (2015)	16.66%	8.16%	15.15%	17.50%	28.44%
Child poverty-index (2015)	27.3%	12.2%	26.8%	12.6%	12%
% collective redundancies of ex-Ford and ex-supplier employees (End of 2014)	20.96%	8.94%	7.88%		

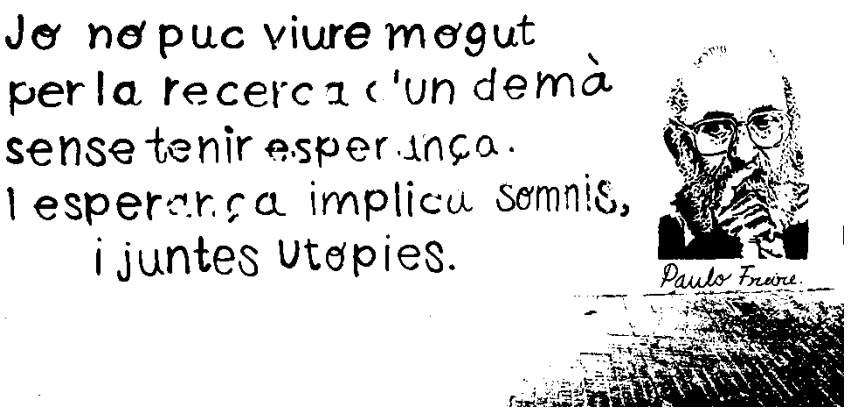
Source: Kind en Gezin (2015a, 2015b), Steunpunt Sociale Planning (2016), VDAB (2014)

Annex II: Background characteristics ECEC professionals

Municipality/city	Resp. code	ECEC	Interviewee
Maasmechelen	M-S1	Preschool	Principal
	M-S2	Preschool	Principal
	M-S3	Preschool	Principal
	M-KO1	Crèche	Manager
	M-DO1	FDC providers organisation	Manager
	M-OO1	FDC provider	FDC provider
	M-OO2	FDC provider	FDC provider
Genk	G-S1	Preschool	Principal
	G-S2	Preschool	Principal
	G-S3	Preschool	Principal
	G-KO1	Crèche	Manager
	G-KO2	Crèche	Manager
	G-DO1	FDC providers organisation	Manager team
	G-OO1	FDC provider	FDC provider
Bilzen	B-S1	Preschool	Principal
	B-S2	Preschool	Principal
	B-S3	Preschool	Principal + Care coordinator
	B-DO1	FDC providers organisation	Manager
	B-OO1	FDC provider	FDC provider
	B-OO2	FDC provider	FDC provider

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS



- Paulo Freire, Conference Barcelona (2015)[1] –

[1] "I cannot live driven by the search for a future without hope. Hope implies dreams and utopias together"

6.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this doctoral dissertation was to build renewed and more dynamic, multifaceted understandings of the complexities of in- and exclusion processes for parents with young children (from birth to the age of three) in contexts of economic downturn, as well as of the possible levers of support. As highlighted in the beginning of this dissertation, this central objective arose from the finding that in times of economic downturn and austerity, social policies internationally continue to focus on human capital investment strategies that are being criticised for running the risk of translating public issues into private issues instead of the other way round, and for dismissing the concrete, lived realities of citizens in favour of an external point of view. Central to this is the pursuit of economic (cost) efficiency through investments in the early years, and through standardising and pre-structuring supply (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Clarke, 2006; Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Platt, 2005; Richardson, 2010; Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2016). Underpinned by a strand of social work research that aspires for social justice and human dignity (Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012; O'Brien, 2011), we have argued, in line with others (see Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Lister, 2003; Richter & Andresen, 2012; Roets, Roose, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013), that the current dominant, but rather narrow conceptualisations of "social investment", run the risk of overlooking the raison d'être of social work and therefore might risk further exclusion of families with young children.

The interpretative paradigm of lifeworld orientation (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013) inspired us to explore the concrete, day-to-day realities, experiences and meaning-making of parents with young children, of whom at least one parent in the family became unemployed and/or experienced difficulties in finding a job due to economic downturn. This allowed us not only to gain insight into the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment for parents, from their point of view, and to examine what they

considered supportive in such contexts, but additionally allowed us to set their experiences and meaning-making against a background of social justice and human dignity; two principles that underpin social work practice (IFSW, 2014). Additionally, we explored the realities and experiences of ECEC professionals working in childcare or preschool, and who indicated that they had experienced consequences of economic downturn in the service. This allowed us to examine how these professionals handled policy demands aiming for more efficiency, on the one hand, and concerns and questions of parents, on the other hand, in times of economic downturn. Additionally, we dug into research and we explored the local context of Limburg, including local social policy responses. In so doing, we managed to gather a diversity of perspectives from various actors within the welfare state, including the relationships between them (Notredame, 1994), which nuanced and questioned dominant ways of seeing and intervening in social work policy and practice.

The research took place in Limburg (one of the Flemish provinces of Belgium), which was chosen because it had recently processed the closure of its main car factory 'Ford Genk' and its (in)direct suppliers, due to the economic downturn. As a consequence, Limburg developed SALK², which is a specific policy plan to improve the social and economic consequences of the crisis. Not only is this a good example of how the global economic crisis of 2008 impacts people on a local level, it also highlights the international trend towards "social investment" on a social policy level, through the fight against child poverty by means of integrated ECEC services. Given Limburgs' previous experiences with economic downturn, this particular human capital investment focus was rather new. Within this context, we selected three diverse SALK²-municipalities that faced the highest amount of collective redundancies, due to the closure of the Ford factory and its (in)direct suppliers (VDAB, 2014), and which also faced higher levels of child deprivation than average in Limburg and Flanders (Kind en Gezin, 2013).

In what follows, we aim to give a general overview of the main findings of this dissertation. We start by elaborating on the lessons learned, followed by the

implications of these lessons for social work policy and practice. Subsequently, we list some important limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for further research.

6.2 Lessons learned

6.2.1 Multiple perspectives and contexts

Throughout this dissertation we showed how a social investment paradigm, continues to find resonance throughout social work policy (see Chapter 1), practice (see Chapter 5) and research (see Chapter 2), in times of socio-economic and political turmoil. Even parents seemed to subscribe to and thus, co-construct such a discourse (see Chapter 3, 4). Notwithstanding the existence of other, broader conceptualisations of this paradigm that aspire for social justice and human dignity, it is worrying that the dominant conceptualisation is one that is increasingly driven by a quest for economic efficiency. Rather than addressing the broader, social, political, economic and cultural conditions under which parents (have to) live, work and raise children, through structural, redistributive measures (output), the main aim is to invest in human capital, through measures that address parenting and child development (input) in favour of an economic return on investment.

This, however, is not to say that all interventions that focus on the individual, rather than on the structural level are bad; on the contrary. In many cases it is very important and necessary to do so, even on a long term, yet only if the structural roots of a problem remain visible and will eventually be addressed. This, however, is precisely what is worrying, since a narrow conceptualisation of social investment is presented as self-evident and uncontested, and thereby risks overlooking the connection between parents' lifeworld (private) and the broader system (public). Consequently, instead of engaging "people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (IFSW, 2014), the focus is mainly on addressing people, which runs the risk of translating public issues as private troubles (Biesta, 2014; Wright, 1959).

Taking account of a diversity of perspectives and contexts here and now, in times of economic downturn and massive unemployment, precisely allow the discernment of many other stories too. These are stories that emerged from professionals' and parents' concrete, day-to-day realities and breathed of complexity, ambiguity, resistance, doubt, disagreement, uncertainty and unpredictability, rather than straightforwardness. All throughout the research and policy we could trace other, but more silenced, perspectives. In their otherness, each of these contextualised stories helped to question and nuance dominant ways of seeing and intervening, as different perspectives not only seemed to exist between discourses, but also within discourses. This aligns with previous research that has stressed the relational nature of discourses and that discourses are continuously being co-constructed, rather than imposed in a top-down way (Fairclough, 2003, 2010; Goswami, 2014; Hajer, 2006). As such, the point is not that one discourse is better than the other, but rather, that it is precisely the openness for and the dialogue between different, contextualised perspectives that matters, in order to reflect upon and question that which seems self-evident. After all, "every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (Burke, 1965, p. 49).

6.2.2 Circumstances do matter!

The inclusion of a variety of perspectives and contexts here and now also underlined the importance of taking into account the circumstances or the conditions within which parents (have to) live, work and raise children, in the context of the present social investment state. We discussed how circumstances have made parents question dominant discourses about parenting. We also discussed how unemployment often turned lives upside down, not only in terms of work, but in terms of several life domains, as everything is linked with each other. Moreover, not only were the lives of people who experience(d) poverty turned upside down, but also the lives of those who had never before experienced unemployment or hardship. Yet, not everyone who experiences unemployment falls into poverty. In addition, we

showed that activating and educating parents through labour market activation programmes or parent support programmes – which are currently being emphasised in social investment policies – were often not the first concerns of parents. All parents expressed the aspiration and the meaning of a job, for themselves and for their children, and had a strong aspiration to take care of their children as well. What did concern parents was the search for a good, qualitative and meaningful job that could be combined with the care of their children (e.g., work-life), the search for someone that could be trusted to care for their children while they are away, the need to be listened to and understood, rather than being told what to do, first and second. They were also concerned about housing and income issues, well-being, health or the need for authentic, unconditional support. Also in terms of professionals, we found that circumstances matter. Several ECEC professionals indicated that they were confronted with issues that were not officially included in their job description, and that they often lacked structural support (e.g., resources, organisational support, training) to address them. As such, these findings indicate that private issues are inherently intertwined with public issues that cannot be addressed through investments in child domains only. Children cannot be seen as being separate from the family in which they grow up, and thus from the conditions wherein that family lives (Dean, 2015; Lister, 2004). In order to be able to take care of children, we also need to take care of parents and the circumstances in which they live.

6.2.3 Strategies and meaningful support

Taking account of professionals' and parents' perspectives, experiences and meaning-making here and now, in times of economic downturn and massive unemployment, also revealed tensions between what parents are concerned about and what is advocated in policy (Chapter 4 & 5). While several policy measures were installed towards creating more efficiency (see Chapter 5), parents' sometimes very uncertain and unpredictable situations precisely led to a need for more flexible services and services that combined material support

(e.g., childcare, food, income) with immaterial support (e.g., listening, being there, caring). Consequently, several respondents did not use or stopped using formal social services and decided to solve things on their own, due to, for instance, issues of conditionality or bizarre rules. The strategies parents consequently developed, were not always legal (e.g., undeclared work), yet most importantly, they reflected how parents must not be seen as passive objects, but instead as agents who actively construct meaning in order to survive and do as best as possible, given certain circumstances. Moreover, those parents who did feel supported by formal services, indicated that it was precisely the fact that those services bent the rules now and then that made a difference.

With regard to professionals (Chapter 5), we found that they often found themselves in a position where they were confronted with governmental demands on the one hand, and concerns of parents on the other hand, which sometimes conflicted with each other, especially when confronted with unpredictability, complexity and uncertainty. This, in turn, made them use their discretionary space where they were allowed to, were able to, or were willing to bend, break or obey the rules (Evans & Harris, 2004; Schiettecat, 2016). Often this concerned very small things that really helped parents to move on, such as listening to parents, reassuring them that their child was being well taken care of, helping them translate official letters, making a phone call to another service, being flexible in terms of opening hours, and so on. At the same time however, professionals indicated that they lacked structural support (e.g., resources, organisational support, training) to do so, which caused quite some variations in the way they tried to make a difference for parents, and which caused some professionals to hide their strategies from colleagues. In so doing, there was always someone who had to pay the price from a social, educational or financial point of view.

6.2.4 The social

Finally, this dissertation highlighted some interesting findings in regards to *the social*, or the space between the private and the public sphere wherein social work is positioned, in order to ensure human rights and social equality based on collective responsibility and solidarity (Lorenz, 2008; 2016; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). In line with others (see Clarke, 2006; Featherstone, 2006; Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Richardson, 2010), we argued that this core identity of social work is currently under pressure in the present context of the social investment state. A discourse of individual autonomy and responsibility through activation and education, risks overshadowing collective responsibilities for well-being, and public responsibilities are being reduced to measures of control and regulation (Lorenz, 2016). This is also the case in times of economic downturn, especially when public resources are scarce (Lee, 2014).

Throughout this dissertation however, we found no evidence for the idea that people can or want to overcome their problems by themselves, through personal effort only. We did find that few parents claimed social work services and instead invoked informal support from their partner, family or friends. Yet often this was the result of several barriers and tensions that were experienced between parents' uncertain and unpredictable circumstances and formal supply. Moreover, some parents indicated that the availability and usability of an informal support network was taken for granted by professionals, for instance in the search for a new job. This is worrying, since our findings confirmed that informal support is not always present or positive (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Moreover, unemployment sometimes decreased parents' informal network. Consequently, some parents were forced to develop several individual strategies at their own risk, as there was no other choice. This confirms the critique that instead of the redistribution of wealth, risks are being redistributed in order to address societal problems (Beck, 1992). It overlooks the fact that even though opportunities are equalised, people have

different circumstances and thus unequal possibilities for grasping or fulfilling the offered opportunities (Morabito & Vandenbroeck, 2014).

Also throughout research about economic downturn and unemployment we found that social work services were seldom claimed and that when they were, they served as a means to legitimate the existing social order. Consequently, we argued that research might have played a role in reframing the social towards the privatisation and individualisation of care and solidarity (Lorenz, 2016). Within such a discourse, social work services risk being redefined from a technocratic logic (Tsui & Cheung 2004, Garrett 2009). That is, as an instrument to address social problems in the personal sphere only, based on an external, economic and neoliberal-oriented perspective on citizens (Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012). This, however, is at odds with the unique mandate of social work which is:

> … the necessity to raise the 'social question' anew in changing circumstances. It is the question of how to relate the right to individual freedom and hence diversity in identities to the necessities of a social order and coherence based on principles of justice and equality (Lorenz, 2016, p. 13).

This implies autonomy and dependency at the same time, rather than one or the other. In order to work with this inherent tension, a continuous process of negotiation between all actors in society is key (see 6.3.4). Not only does it allow the opening up of various "alternative stories" including people's meaning-making and contexts, it also allows to critically consider and address the structural, socio-political circumstances that impinge on people and on the choices they can make, in light of social justice and human dignity (Biesta, 2014; Lorenz, 2016).

6.3 Implications for social work practice

Now that we have almost come to the end of this doctoral dissertation, the question of "where to go from here" arises. The inclusion of various perspectives embedded in different circumstances made us question, nuance

and de-construct that what seems self-evident throughout social policies. At the same time we also, in a way, legitimated and helped to construct the dominant discourse, by discussing it on the one hand, and by presenting perspectives of professionals, policy makers, researchers and parents that underline it, on the other hand. Hence, one could ask: what is the right thing to do?

Given our research findings however, the answer to that question lies not only in “doing things right”, as every solution is inherently incomplete, temporary, uncertain, ambiguous and criticisable, but also, in the question itself: “doing the right things”, which implies a continuous process of reflection and negotiation with each other, about day-to-day realities in relation to the broader context and in relation to the way we intervene, set against a background of social justice and the right to live a life in human dignity (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Schiettecat, 2016). In this respect, several implications for social work practice and policy can be derived from our findings, which might inspire and accompany those who engage in this quest.

6.3.1 Embracing ambiguity and complexity…

A first implication results from the finding that life is not something stable or predictable, but rather uncertain and unpredictable, and thus inherently ambivalent and complex. As such, interventions that aim to master this inherent complexity and ambiguity by making services more efficient through better management, pre-structured and standardised supply (e.g., the rule “booked attendance days always need to be paid for”), risk overlooking and doing injustice to the day-to-day, continuously changing realities of parents (see also Huylebroek & Vastmans, 2016). They also do not account for the fact that people are different, live in different circumstances, have different concerns and find different things supportive.

In this respect, we were able to find inspiring examples of professionals (Chapter 5) who embraced this ambiguity and complexity by opening up towards and by moving back and forth between that which is expected on a

governmental level and that which concerned parents, including their circumstances. This, in turn, appealed to their discretionary space wherein they developed creative strategies to bend or break the rules in order to be able to make a difference for parents. This aligns with previous research that indicated that more rules do not necessarily lead to less discretionary space (Evans & Harris, 2004; Schiettecat, 2016). At the same time, however, our findings also highlighted variations into the way support was offered, due to a lack of structural support (e.g., organisational support, training, resources). This caused some professionals to go underground (Aronson & Smith, 2010), for instance by doing extra things for parents and children without telling the organisation, such as offering childcare for free, buying clothes, offering breakfast or to fine tune with other services. Others preferred to obey and underline the rules, even if this was at the expense of parents. In so doing, making a difference depended overly on the goodwill of the professional. Moreover, going underground caused professionals to not discuss or address problems on a higher and more collective level, thereby impeding initiatives to collectively challenge processes of injustice and inequality (Biesta, 2014; Schiettecat, 2016). These findings confirm that discretion is not always used nor is it necessarily positive (Evans & Harris, 2004), but more importantly, they reflect the danger that social work may become reduced to the relationship between service users (here: parents) and professionals, which in turn risks depoliticising social problems. Such a depoliticisation is at odds with the raison d'être of social work that, based on collective responsibility and solidarity, aims to contribute to a more equal possibility to flourish on an individual, social and cultural level. This appeals to social workers' mediating role between the private and the public sphere with regard to the realisation of human rights and social justice (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Lorenz, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012). In order to take up this role, we argued in Chapter 5 that public funding matters and must include structural ways (e.g., more time with parents, team meetings, public forums, training, network moments) to be able to take account of parents' context and their often precarious and unpredictable conditions, as

well as their meaning-making, in order to eventually signal concerns on a higher level.

6.3.2 … driven by a quest for social justice and human dignity

A second implication concerns the finding that the economic rationale that currently underpins social work practice and policy is not always the most evident rationale to embrace ambiguity and complexity. Inspired by a lifeworld-oriented paradigm, we showed how parents faced several barriers in terms of formal support and how they were concerned with a broad range of circumstances on different, intertwined life domains, rather than with issues of education and activation only. Professionals, moreover, faced barriers as well in being able to make a difference for parents. They indicated that they were confronted with issues that extended beyond their official job description and that sometimes were at odds with the pre-structured supply. Nonetheless, as shown throughout our exploratory analysis of local social policies, an economic rationale does not necessarily have to impede a social one, and both can co-exist together. The creation of a social reconversion plan next to an economic one at the time of the closure of the coal mines for instance, reflects this. In particular, this was because the social reconversion plan emitted a clear public responsibility of the state to address private problems that resulted from the closure. This included structural interventions in work-related domains and education, but also in other domains such as housing and income. In the current plan, these domains are named as “side conditions” and the focus seems to have shifted towards the promotion of interventions that focus on the development of individual skills, in particular those of families and children, in order to be self-sufficient and to eventually solve problems that have a public nature. This, however, denies social work’s social nature, or, the collective responsibility to address life challenges and enhance well-being, based on solidarity (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; IFSW, 2014; Lorenz, 2008; 2016). In this respect, we come back to Williams’ (2001) “political ethics of care” that might

serve as an interesting frame of reference with regard to social works' rights-based and socio-political orientation, as it aims for a continuous search to balance an ethic of paid work with an ethic of care. This means that it is not only about the entrance into any kind of paid work, but also about the kinds of jobs available, about the quality of these jobs and about the kinds of (ECEC) services available that may serve as a lever to overcome or avoid exclusion (e.g., flexible services, services that allow unemployed parents). As such, this frame of reference allows the revitalisation of the public dimension of societal problems such as unemployment or poverty, which in turn allows revealing and addressing possible social inequalities in terms of resources or in terms of the realisation of human rights. It also truly appeals for a shared responsibility between citizens and the state to move towards a more equal possibility to lead a life in which people can flourish (IFSW, 2014; Roets et al., 2013).

6.3.3 … in the world, with the world and with each other

A third implication, which is in our opinion crucial for social work practices that aim to embrace ambivalence and complexity, and which are underpinned by a quest for social justice and human dignity, is the need to pursue knowledge and interventions "in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1970, p. 46). That is, to acknowledge that people do not stand outside society or outside a dominant discourse and thus must be involved. This roughly includes three dimensions. First, knowledge and interventions need to be developed *in* the world, which implies taking account of the specific context wherein people are situated here and now, in order to get insight into the concrete circumstances or the conditions in which they (have to) live. In order to do so, knowledge and interventions must also be developed *with* the world, or, in other words, in close relation with people's meaning-making and relationships to the world. In this respect, the five dimensions mentioned in Chapter 5, "accessibility", "availability", "affordability" and, in particular, "usability" and "comprehensibility", might provide a useful frame of reference to

get a picture of people's circumstances, experiences and meaning-making. In this view, our findings repeatedly underlined that several life domains were interwoven, which is at odds with how formal support is being organised in Western societies. Therefore, a final dimension includes the need to develop knowledge and interventions *with each other*. That is, not in "isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity" (Freire, 1970, p.58). Following Notredame (1994), this includes actors on a governmental level, but also professionals and, in particular, parents and children. With each other also means the opposite of about or for each other, but implies a mutual learning process based on equity. In terms of social work practices, the current tendency to stimulate integrated services might serve as a lever to do so. Based on a holistic perspective, the idea is that it is better to address, for instance, a complex and multidimensional problem such as poverty, by working in an integrated way through collaborating and networking, rather than by fragmenting services according to age, sector, group or policy level (Allen, 2003; Anthony et al., 2011; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Provan & Sebastian, 1998). At the same time, however, we should be humble. Integrated working must not be seen as the instrument for addressing problems, or as an end in itself. Integrated working demands responsiveness or, an engagement in a continuous process of negotiation and dialogue between practitioners' and parents' concerns, in order to search together for strategies to deal with problems (Roets, Roose, Schiettecat, & Vandenbroeck, 2016). This searching together inherently implies that it is an uncertain, non-linear and ambiguous process, as perspectives, interests, contexts and so on might differ and clash. This occurs not only between parents and professionals, but also between professionals within and between organisations due to different visions, rules, the loss of autonomy, and so on. Dismissing this responsive dimension of integrated working holds the risk that it remains a hollow shell, being more concerned with how it looks from the outside, than with what is going on the inside (Frost, 2005; Roets et al., 2016; Warin, 2007). In addition, we should also be careful to avoid too much integration. Notredame (2002), for instance,

stated that there can be so much integration that it becomes no longer possible for people to escape and find their own way.

6.3.4 … through democratic dialogue

In order to be able to develop knowledge and interventions “in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 1970, p. 46), a fourth implication lays in the need to engage in a democratic dialogue, in close relation to the concrete circumstances wherein one (has to) live, work and raise children, as well as in relation to people’s agency, meaning-making and concerns (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). Dismissing this in favour of an economic, neoliberal and managerialist rationale, not only does injustice to the raison d’être of social work, but also excludes more, especially in regards to those confronted with life’s unpredictable and uncertain side.

Such a dialogue however, is not intended to balance demand and supply in a more efficient way, as this may fade out those concerns that do not fit with the supply. Nor does it mean that parents’ concerns or wishes should be blindly followed or supported, as parents – often unconsciously – may (re)produce individualising discourses (see Chapter 3). What matters in the engagement in a contextualised and mutual process of communication and negotiation (Roets, Dean, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2016), is – in line with Freire (1970) – the combination of reflection and action upon the world, which together form praxis. This means, to develop *with* each other a deeper understanding of people’s concrete situation “that conditions their consciousness of the world, and that […] conditions their attitudes and their ways of dealing with reality (p. 100), in order to eventually change the world. Such a praxis, however, cannot take place through “revolutionary leadership, but [is] the result of their own conscientization” (p. 100). This conscientization or critical awareness implies that there is a certain degree of equity in terms of recognising that people teach and learn from and with each other at the same time. As such, dialogue not only opens an opportunity for parents as well as professionals to understand each other as well as each other’s circumstances, but also to bring problem

definitions and interventions, including their socio-political dimension (Freire, 1970), into discussion, which makes it possible to agree, disagree, resist and search together for alternative ways of doing and thinking. Engaging in dialogue thus implies a collective learning process wherein private issues are made public, and must be addressed through a shared instead of a divided responsibility (Biesta, 2014).

Also as to what concerns professionals and policy makers, this may be an interesting thing to do. We showed how professionals, in their daily contact with parents, including the circumstances in which parents live, sometimes felt cornered by policy demands that standardised or pre-structured supply, although this does not mean that professionals' perspectives were homogenous in nature. Based on our findings, we may assume that there is no such thing as the bad government, as we showed how there exist different, sometimes conflicting perspectives within policy in terms of ideas about what is the problem and how it needs to be addressed. This aligns with previous research (Devlieghere, 2017) that indicated that policy makers, managers and social workers do not differ that much from each other regarding their main goal, namely helping service users. It is also stated that managers can play and want to play a role in embracing ambiguities and also align with professional values, rather than with managerial ones (Devlieghere, 2017). This confirms that opening up and engaging in a dialogue between professionals and policy makers is a useful thing to do and may allow initiation of a continuous debate about what is considered a problem, why, when and for whom? And thus, about what is the most just thing to do. This, in turn, contributes and revitalises social work's political role (Marston & McDonald, 2012).

To conclude, the quest for "doing the *right things*", is not an easy job. It demands, to our opinion, a continuous state of "wandering" and "being indignant" at the same time. It also demands – as Martin Luther King once stated – a continuous struggle. Not only to engage in a dialogue, but also to signal problems on a higher level and demand structural supportive measures

on the level of service users, organisations and professionals. In line with a quote of Freire, which I discovered during a conference in Barcelona, we must never give up this struggle and always believe that there is hope.

6.4 Limitations and further research

Notwithstanding that this doctoral dissertation provides interesting results that contribute to the existing knowledge base of the complexities of in- and exclusion processes for parents with young children (from birth to the age of three) in contexts of economic downturn, as well as of the possible levers of support, it is also limited in several ways.

A first limitation, as already mentioned in Chapter 4, lays in its cross-sectional nature, or in the fact that data was collected at one point in time. Thereby we were not able to see evolutions in parents' experiences, circumstances and meaning-making and thus, could not take into account the dynamics within parents' lives in relation to processes of in- and exclusion (Alcock, 2004; Millar, 2007). For future research it would be interesting to collect longitudinal data, preferably through a qualitative research design that is inspired by a lifeworld - oriented paradigm. This would allow us to "explore social dynamics, and in particular the decisions and actions which have shaped people's lives" (Alcock, 2004, p. 404), which would contribute to a more thorough understanding of those processes that exclude, protect and support people in the long run.

A second limitation lays in the kinds of ECEC services that were included. Based on the European quality framework (European Commission, 2014, p. 69), ECEC is defined as:

> Any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age – regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content – and includes centre and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision.

Given the amount of time, this study only included childcare services and preschool services. Including other ECEC services in future research as well (e.g., family centres), might help to get a more complete picture of what is going on in ECEC services in relation to parents' day-to-day realities. Adding social work services that are mandated to work on more structural issues, such as income, work, housing, and so on, would additionally allow the exploration of processes of collaboration and integration between and within services more fully.

A third limitation concerns the interviewed parents. First, as we aimed to explore consequences of changing circumstances on parents and their parenthood, we included perspectives of parents with young children (age 0 to 3), including parents of whom at least one parent lost his/her job involuntarily, due to the economic crisis. Although this focus on parents with young children is aligned with the focus in social policy, which precisely allowed us to explore underlying, self-evident rationales and statements, it also in a way risks contributing to the dominant discourse in social policy that focuses on parents and young children below the age of three. In that vein, we overlooked the experiences and concerns of, for instance, (unemployed) adolescents. Nonetheless, we got some indications throughout the research process, that this would be an interesting scope for future research, especially in relation to processes of identity (Schöb, 2013). What about, for instance, the relationship between work and identity? Is there evidence for the assumption that nationality becomes more important in times of unemployment, to identify oneself with? And what does this mean for social services? Second, although we noticed that sudden unemployment not only impacted parents, but also children, other family members and social networks, we did not explore these other perspectives to a full extent. For future research it would be interesting to examine this further, including the question of how networks evolve in terms of "bonding" or "bridging social capital" (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2013; Putnam, 2007) and what possible role social work services can play in this by, for instance, creating opportunities for social leverage. Third, in order to avoid selection bias, we selected parents through the infant consultation schemes of

Kind en Gezin. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to also interview parents who attend, or would like to attend the ECEC services that were included in this research in order to explore to a deeper extent whether and if the approach of these services is experienced as supportive. Fourth, in order to strive for maximal diversity, a quantitative analysis of user profiles followed the recruiting phase in order to select a definite sample of parents. This was filled out by a diverse, but limited number of parents, which might have biased the results towards those parents who were not living in hardship before the crisis. At the same time, however, this was also a strength of the research, because it highlighted how people who miss out on the so-called "opportunities" (e.g., quality work, good care, participation in leisure activities, good child care), and who are thus at risk of being marginalised often had no other choice due to the circumstances they found themselves in and/or due to the barriers they experienced with regard to social services. In this vein, the question of "How much worse does it have to be, before I get some help?" often came to the fore.

A fourth limitation results from our position as researcher. Based on a lifeworld-oriented perspective, we talked with parents instead of about them (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). Throughout the whole research process, however, it became clear that this was not a neutral position, and that it did not mean that "power" was absent (Roose et al., 2015; Schiettecat, 2016). First, the motivation to research parents' voices was grounded in a social work perspective, aimed at researching the relationship between the private and the public, in light of social justice and human rights. Other frames of reference, would undoubtedly have led to different research questions and interests. Second, in the aim to let parents speak, we simultaneously pre-structured what they should speak about, by defining our research questions in advance. In this respect one could say that we used parents for our own goal (Butt, 2002). However, we precisely used semi-structured interviews in order to provide a certain degree of freedom for parents in terms of the subjects they wanted to talk about, as well as included respondents' literal verbatim quotations to present the findings in a way that did justice to their points of view. Still, our

findings underwent a process of interpretation and of selection, based on what researchers “wanted to represent and for whom” (Fassin, 2014, p. 49). This process inherently reflects the power we have as researchers to highlight certain things more than others, to tell secrets or to silence things (Ellis, 2007). One of the things we noticed throughout this research project, but that we paid less attention to in relation to processes of in- and exclusion, was the interplay of processes of gender, culture or migration that may also play a role in the (non-) experience of formal support. Several respondents indicated, for instance, that they experienced barriers in terms of language, for example in the search for a new job, in terms of culture, for example the (non-) allowance of wearing a headscarf at work, or in terms of migration, for example parents who sought asylum or recently moved to Belgium. Additionally, we also noticed how certain cultural “norms”, such as the belief that women are supposed to stay at home to take care of the children, while men are supposed to work, are turned upside down due to sudden unemployment caused by economic downturn. While some respondents kept holding on to the norm, and indicated that this was especially hard for men in relation to their status, others admitted that they actually did not like the norm. On the one hand, they indicated that they themselves have to take care of their children instead of others, but on the other hand, they indicated that they are “more” than a mother and also felt the urge to do other things, such as working, going away, meeting others, and so on. For future research it might be interesting to further examine the interplay between these processes in relation to the (non-) experience of support. Another thing we paid less attention to in this research project were the types of accountability that are being formed (Porter, 1996). As was made clear throughout the findings, revitalising the social especially included non-measurable things. This does not mean that it is not important to measure things, nor that measurable things impede the social, but rather that it is about more than what can be measured. In this respect, several respondents indicated that their job was about more than educating or taking care of children in the right way, but deplored that this was not always recognised in assessment procedures, as these overly focus on objective facts. In this vein,

Porter (1996, p. ix) states: “reliance on numbers and quantitative manipulation minimises the need for intimate knowledge and personal trust”. This is important to acknowledge, especially in today’s climate of financial cutbacks and the aim to control, manage, standardise and prevent bad outcomes. For future research it might be interesting to explore what types of accountability are being constructed in policy and practice, how practitioners develop creative strategies in order to be heard and get subsidised, how dialogue between policy makers and practitioners takes place, and how dialogue and reflection can be supported on a more structural level, in order to move towards a more reflexive form of accountability (Devlieghere, 2017).

6.5 References

Alcock, P. (2004). The influence of dynamic perspectives on poverty analysis and anti-poverty policy in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy, 33*(3), 395-416. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279404007731

Allen, C. (2003). Desperately seeking fusion: On "joined-up thinking", "holistic practice" and the new economy of welfare professional power. *British Journal of Social Work, 54*(2), 287-306. doi: 10.1080/0007131032000080249

Anthony, E., King, B., & Austin, M. (2011). Reducing child poverty by promoting child well-being: Identifying best practices in a time of great need. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1999-2009. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.05.029

Aronson, J., & Smith, K. (2010). Managing restructured social services: Expanding the social? *British Journal of Social Work, 40*(2), 530-547. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcp002

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society. Towards a new modernity.* London: Sage.

Biesta, G. (2014). *Learning in public places: Civic learning for the twenty-first century.* In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere (pp. 1-11). London: Springer.

Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek: een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk.* Gent: Academia Press.

Butt, L. (2002). The suffering stranger: Medical anthropology and international morality. *Medical Anthropology, 21*, 1-24. doi: 10.1080/01459740210619

Burke, K. (1965). *Permanence and change*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Cantillon, B., & Van Lancker, W. (2013). Three shortcomings of the Social Investment perspective. *Social Policy and Society, 12*, 553-564. doi:10.1017/S1474746413000080

Clarke, K. (2006). Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(4), 699-721. doi:10.1177/0261018306068470

Dean, H. (2015). *Social rights and human welfare*. New York: Routledge.

Devlieghere, J. (2017). *The logic of the database: In search of responsive social work.* Doctorate in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University.

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(1), 3-29. doi: 10.1177/1077800406294947

European Commission. (2014). *Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Brussels: European Commission.

Evans, T., & Harris, J. (2004). Street-level bureaucracy, social work and the (exaggerated) death of discretion. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*, 871-895. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch106

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. New York: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Routledge.

Fassin, D. (2014). True lives, real lives: Revisiting the boundaries between ethnography and fiction. *American Ethnologist, 41*(1), 40-55. doi:10.1111/amet.12059

Featherstone, B. (2006). Rethinking family support in the current policy context. *British Journal of Social Work, 36*, 5-19. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bch226

Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Frost, N. (2005). *Professionalism, partnership and joined-up thinking: A research review of front-line working with children and families.* Research in Practice. Retrieved from www.rip.org.uk

Garrett, P. M. (2009). *'Transforming' children's services. Social Work, neoliberalism and the 'modern' world*. England: Open University Press.

Geens, N. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2012). The (ab)sense of a concept of social support in parenting research: A social work perspective. *Child and Family Social Work, 19*, 491-500. doi:10.1111/cfs.12048

Geens, N. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2013). Early childhood education and care as a space for social support in urban contexts of diversity. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 21, 407-419. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2013.814361

Goswami, S. (2014). Michel Foucault: Structures of truth and power. *European Journal of Philosophical Research, 1*(1), 8-20. doi:10.13187/ejpr.2014.1.8

Gray, M., & Webb, S. A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18*(1), 111-115. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00626.x

Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of the 'Lifeworld Orientation' for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 23*(2), 131-146. doi:10.1080/0265053090292343

Hajer, M. (2006). Doing discourse analysis: Coalitions, practices, meaning. In M. van den Brink & T. Metze (Eds.), *Words matter in policy and planning* (pp. 65-74). Utrecht: Netherlands Geographical Studies.

Huylebroek, K., and Vastmans, S. (2016). *Onderzoek in opdracht van Kind en Gezin naar de evaluatie van de maatregel 'Opvang bestellen = opvang betalen'.* Gent: Arteveldehogeschool Gent.

IFSW. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Kind en Gezin. (2015). *Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken - kansarmoede-index.* Retrieved from: http://www.kindengezin.be

Lee, E. (2014a). Experts and parenting culture. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 51-75). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lister, R. (2003). Investing in the citizen-workers of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour. *Social Policy & Administration, 37*(5), 427-443. doi:10.1111/1467-9515.00350

Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in a historical context: The case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*, 625-644. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn025

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 4-17. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond 'heroic agency' in conceptualising social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 1011-1038. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs062

Millar, J. (2007). The dynamics of poverty and unemployment: The contribution of qualitative longitudinal research to understanding transitions, adaptations and trajectories. *Social Policy and Society, 6*(4), 533-544. doi:10.1017/S1474746407003879

Morabito, C., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). Equality of opportunities, divergent conceptualisations and their implications for early childhood care and education policies. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 1-17. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.12112

Notredame, L. (1994). De ijzeren (drie)hoeken. Een analyse-schema voor de beleidsvorming. *Alert, 20*(26), 5-9.

Notredame, L. (2002). Het magische getal 3 en de integrale jeugdhulp. In R. Roose (Ed.), *Contactcomité van Organisaties voor Jeugdzorg. Jaarboek 2000-2001* (pp. 25-46). Gent: Academia Press.

O'Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of social Work, 1*(1), 143-158. doi:10.1177/1468017310386834

Platt, L. (2005). *Discovering child poverty: The creation of a policy agenda from 1800 to the present.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Porter, T. (1996). Trust in Numbers. *The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. Retrieved 3 June 2017 from http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/458869

Provan, K. G., & Kenis, P. (2008). Models of network governance: Structure, management, and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 18*(2), 229-252. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum015

Provan, K. G., & Sebastian, J. G. (1998). Networks within networks: Service link overlap, organizational cliques, and network effectiveness. *Academy of Management Journal, 41*(4), 453-463. doi:10.2307/257084

Putnam, R. D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century – The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 30*, 137-174.

Richardson, D. (2010). Child and family policies in a time of economic crisis. *Children & Society, 24*, 495-508. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00334.x

Richter, M., & Andresen, S. (2012). *The politicization of parenthood: Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. London: Springer.

Roets, G., Dean, H., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2016). Disability rights and disability studies in social work: Uncovering different interpretations of rights and needs of people with learning disabilities in social work

practice. In F. Kessl, W. Lorenz, & h.-U. Otto (Eds.), *European Social Work: a compendium.* Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich.

Roets, G., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2013). Researching child poverty: Towards a lifeworld orientation. *Childhood. A Global Journal of Child Research, 20*(4), 535-549. doi:10.1177/0907568212475101

Roets, G., Roose, R., Schiettecat, S., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2016). Reconstructing the foundations of joined-up working: From organisational reform towards a joint engagement of child and family services. *British Journal of Social Work, 46*(2), 306-322. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcu121

Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., . . . Vandekinderen, C. (2015). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(6), 1021-1034. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1051950

Schiettecat, T. (2016). *Trajectories of poor families in child and family social work.* Doctorate in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University.

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2016). What families in poverty consider supportive: Welfare strategies of parents with young children in relation to (child and family) social work. *Child and Family Social Work, In press*. doi:10.1111/cfs.12285

Schöb, R. (2013). Unemployment and identity. *CESifo Economic Studies, 59*(1), 149-180. doi:10.1093/cesifo/ifs040

Tsui, M., & Cheung, F. (2004). Gone with the wind: The impact of managerialism on human services. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*(3), 437-442. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bch046

Vandenbroeck, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2012). Why the evidence-based paradigm in early childhood education and care is anything but evident. *European Journal of Social Work, 20*(4), 537-552. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2012.737238

VDAB. (2014). *Collectieve ontslagen Ford en toeleveranciers (eind februari 2014). [Unpublished dataset]*. VDAB. Brussel.

Warin, J. (2007). Joined-up services for young children and their families: papering over the cracks of re-constructing the foundations. *Children & Society, 21*, 87-97. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00036.x

Williams, F. (2001). In and beyond New Labour: Towards a new political ethics of care. *Critical Social Policy, 21*(4), 467-493. doi:10.1177/026101830102100405

Wright, M. (1959). *The sociological imagination.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nederlandstalige samenvatting

1. Inleiding

Voorliggend onderzoek schrijft zich in de economische crisis van 2008 in; een globale crisis die ook nationaal en lokaal voelbaar was en is op economisch vlak, maar vooral ook op sociaal vlak (Europese Commissie, 2012; Verbrugghe, 2011). Onderzoek toont namelijk aan dat sociale ongelijkheden dreigen te vergroten in tijden van economische crisis, en meer mensen het risico lopen om in armoede te verzeilen (Chzhen, 2014; Eurofound, 2014; Goldberg, 2012; Hanan, 2012; Somarriba, Zarzosa, & Pena, 2015). De druk op het systeem van de sociale zekerheid kan hierdoor toenemen, net als de vraag naar besparingen (OECD, 2014; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014).

Hoewel de gevolgen van de crisis, alsook de antwoorden erop erg verschillen van land tot land ten gevolge van diverse nationale contexten en beleidsstrategieën, institutionele structuren en lokale beleidsmaatregelen (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Farnsworth & Irving, 2012; Martorano, 2014; OECD, 2014), is er internationaal een gelijkaardige trend in het beleid merkbaar waarbij ingezet wordt op de bestrijding van *kinderarmoede* om ongelijkheden weg te werken (zie bvb. Eurofound, 2014; Karanikolos et al., 2013; Mahon, 2010; Martorano, 2014; OECD, 2014; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2014; Vlaamse Regering, 2013). Dit houdt in dat interventies in de vroege levensjaren (0–3 jaar) worden onderstreept, om de negatieve effecten van armoede op de ontwikkeling van kinderen, alsook op hun latere leven als volwassene, te mediëren. Wat sociaal werk betreft, gaat dit samen met een verhoogde inzet op voorschoolse voorzieningen (Allen, 2011; Barnett, 2011; Doherty, 2007; Eurydice, 2009). Deze tendens tot 'kinder'armoedebestrijding, sluit aan bij een *sociaal investeringsdenken* dat kenmerkend is voor Westerse verzorgingsstaten sinds het einde van de 20ste en het begin van de 21ste eeuw (Cantillon, 2011; Giddens, 1998; Lorenz, 2016). Ten gevolge van nieuwe socio-economische, demografische en politieke uitdagingen (Rosanvallon, 1995), proberen beleidsmakers uitgaven te beperken en efficiënter te besteden, via de

inzet op menselijk kapitaal (Cox, 1998; Dwyer, 2004; Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012). Dat wil zeggen dat, eerder dan in te zetten op gelijke uitkomsten via het herverdelen van de middelen, men ervoor kiest om meer in te zetten op gelijke kansen of startposities, en dit zo vroeg mogelijk. Dit wordt beschouwd als een efficiëntere (lees: goedkopere) werkwijze, gezien het een grote 'return on investment' oplevert later (Allen, 2011; Barnett, 2011; Mahon, 2010; Staab, 2010; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2008). Tegelijk betekent die focus op de eerste levensjaren ook een responsabilisering van de ouders. Lee (2014a, p. 72) stelt in dit verband:

> In an era where wider society offers little possibility for action and intervention, a relatively easier project seems to be that of intervening early in the development of the child through influencing the parent to behave in a particular way.

Deze accentverschuiving van een verzorgingsstaat naar een sociale investeringsstaat, houdt daarom een verandering in van de relatie tussen de overheid en haar burgers in Europese verzorgingsstaten (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Lister, 2003; Platt, 2005; Schiettecat, Roets, & Vandenbroeck, 2016; Williams, 2001).

2. Probleemstelling

Hoewel er goede redenen zijn om kinderarmoede te bestrijden via de inzet op jonge kinderen in het bijzonder (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Eurydice, 2009; Shonkoff, 2010), rijzen er vanuit een sociaal werkperspectief (Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lister, 2003; Lorenz, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012; O' Brien, 2011), ook heel wat vragen en bezorgdheden over de risico's en de evidentie waarmee deze zienswijze wordt aangenomen en weerklank krijgt in praktijk en beleid.

Zo wordt geargumenteerd (1) dat armoede verengd dreigt te worden tot 'kinder'armoede, gericht op het stimuleren van de ontwikkeling van kinderen en op de activering en het verbeteren van (opvoedings)vaardigheden van ouders,

maar los van de context en de condities waaronder die gezinnen (moeten) leven (Clarke, 2006; Gray, 2014; Lee, 2014b; Lister, 2003; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012). Hierdoor dreigt een sociaal probleem zoals armoede of werkloosheid, verengd te worden tot een individueel probleem dat opgelost dient te worden via de activering van ouders, en via praktijken van opvoeding en onderwijs van kinderen, vanuit een individuele verantwoordelijkheid, eerder dan dat er ook structurele, herverdelende maatregelen worden genomen die inwerken op de wortels van sociale problemen (Anthony, King, & Austin, 2011; Roets, Roose, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013; Schiettecat, 2016; Vandenbroeck & Van Lancker, 2014). Ook blijkt (2) dat voorschoolse voorzieningen (op voorwaarde dat ze van hoge kwaliteit zijn en toegankelijk zijn), de negatieve effecten van armoede op kinderen wel kunnen mediëren, doch de armoede zelf niet kunnen oplossen. Onderzoek stelt evenwel vast dat de toegankelijkheid van kwalitatief hoogstaande voorzieningen net erg ongelijk is (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; Lazzari, 2014; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Desondanks worden er beleidsmatig reeds allerlei positieve effecten toegeschreven aan de bestaande voorschoolse voorzieningen: een reductie van armoede, het gelijkmaken van kansen en de preventie van toekomstige problemen als volwassene. Op die manier echter, zo stelt men, dreigen voorschoolse voorzieningen geconceptualiseerd te worden als *instrument* om economisch onwenselijke problemen te bestrijden (Garrett, 2009; Tsui & Cheung, 2004), eerder dan als een fundamenteel *recht* van iedere burger, teneinde tot een grotere gelijkheid te komen in de mogelijkheden een leven te leiden dat beantwoordt aan menselijke waardigheid en sociale rechtvaardigheid (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Lazzari, 2014). Dat laatste houdt in dat de betekenis van voorschoolse voorzieningen bepaald wordt samen mét ouders, in relatie tot de condities waaronder zij (moeten) leven, werken en opvoeden, via dialoog, eerder dan dat dit extern aan ouders gebeurt. Alleen op die manier kunnen deze voorzieningen een hefboom zijn tot structurele armoedebestrijding. Aanvullend blijkt (3) dat de dominante benadering van ‘social investment,’ alsook de kritieken die erop geuit worden, nog grotendeels voorbij gaan aan de diverse betekenisverleningen en bezorgdheden van ouders en kinderen zelf

(Lister, 2003; Schiettecat, 2016). Dit werd ook vastgesteld in onderzoek over werkloosheid (Dyson, Gorin, Hooper, & Cabral, 2008). Met andere woorden, hoewel men bijzonder weinig weet over de concrete realiteit, de bezorgdheden en betekenisverleningen van ouders met jonge kinderen in tijden van economische crisis, ontstaat de indruk dat men weet wat het probleem is en hoe dit probleem het best wordt aangepakt. Dergelijke externe visie is niet alleen ondemocratisch, maar druist ook in tegen de essentie of de raison d'être van het sociaal werk; hier begrepen als voorschoolse voorzieningen. In navolging van Lorenz (2016) ligt die essentie in *het sociale;* de ruimte tussen het private en het publieke, waarbinnen sociaal werk een mediërende rol opneemt tussen diverse belangen van individuen en die van de ruimere samenleving, getoetst aan principes van sociale rechtvaardigheid, mensenrechten, collectieve verantwoordelijkheid en respect voor diversiteit (IFSW, 2014). Bovendien vergt een gefundeerd begrip van in- en uitsluitingsprocessen voor gezinnen met jonge kinderen, acties op het niveau van het beleid, voorzieningen én ouders (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Zoniet, dan dreigt een plan van aanpak te falen: "one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (Freire, 1970, p. 68).

3. Onderzoeksvraag

Geïnspireerd op het paradigma van leefwereldonderzoek (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013; Wright, 1959) analyseren we de concrete realiteiten, betekenisverleningen en bezorgdheden van gezinnen met jonge kinderen die getroffen werden door de economische crisis, alsook wat zij ondersteunend vinden in relatie tot werkloosheid en ouderschap. Zo brengen we een perspectief in de discussie dat het dominante perspectief kan aanvullen en komen we tot een meer dynamisch en veelzijdig begrip van complexe processen van in- en uitsluiting voor deze gezinnen in tijden van economische crisis.

Geïnspireerd door Notredame (1994) hechten we niet alleen aandacht aan de perspectieven van ouders, maar kijken we ook naar andere fundamentele actoren van de verzorgingsstaat: het beleid en de sociale voorzieningen. Aanvullend voegen we een vierde perspectief toe, namelijk de visie van onderzoek, gezien onderzoek vaak gebruikt wordt ter legitimering van interventies. Dit leidt tot onderstaande deelvragen:

- Op welke manier krijgt het lokaal sociaal beleid in Limburg vorm in relatie tot de economische crisis en plotse werkloosheid en welke framing van 'kinder'armoede hanteert men?
- Wat vertelt onderzoek ons over de gevolgen van de economische crisis en plotse werkloosheid voor gezinnen met kinderen?
- Wat zijn de gevolgen van de economische crisis en plotse werkloosheid volgens gezinnen met jonge kinderen (0-3 jaar) zelf? En wat vinden zij zelf steunend?
- Hoe gaan ECEC professionals om met de bezorgdheden en vragen van gezinnen met jonge kinderen enerzijds, en met de vragen van het beleid anderzijds?

Het onderzoek vindt plaats in Limburg, een provincie die recent getroffen werd door de sluiting van haar belangrijkste werkgever: de autofabriek Ford Genk en de toeleveranciers, ten gevolge van de economische crisis van 2008. Om de gevolgen hiervan op te vangen werd het 'Strategisch Actieplan Limburg in het Kwadraat' (SALK²) ontwikkeld (Vlaamse Regering, 2013). Op die manier vormt Limburg niet alleen een belangrijke case van de manier waarop de crisis inslaat op het lokale niveau, maar vooral ook van de manier waarop sociaal werk tussenkomt in de relatie tussen het private en het publieke. Wat dit betreft valt op dat, hoewel Limburg in het verleden al geconfronteerd werd met een crisis ten tijde van de sluiting van de mijnen en al eerder toekomstplannen ontwikkelde, men nu voor het eerst de bestrijding van *kinderarmoede* via geïntegreerde voorschoolse voorzieningen opneemt. Hiertoe werd een jaarlijks bedrag van 50.000 euro toegekend aan elk van de 13 Limburgse gemeenten die het meest getroffen zijn door kinderarmoede, voor een periode van vier

jaar. Op die manier vormt Limburg ook een lokale case van het beleid inzake ‘social invesment’.

4. Onderzoeksmethode

We selecteerden drie SALK²-gemeenten die bijzonder hard getroffen werden door de sluiting van Ford Genk en toeleveranciers (VDAB, 2014) enerzijds, en anderzijds ook hoog scoren op de kinderarmoede-index van Kind en Gezin (2013): Bilzen, Genk en Maasmechelen. De drie gemeenten verschillen onderling in termen van hun socio-economische en politieke context en houden er ook verschillende benaderingen van (kinder)armoede op na.

Om op de eerste deelvraag te beantwoorden, werd een exploratieve studie uitgevoerd ter verkenning van de Limburgse context, inclusief het lokaal kinderarmoedebeleid (provinciaal en gemeentelijk). Hiertoe werd enerzijds een documentenanalyse uitgevoerd van het huidige SALK²-plan, de drie gemeentelijke kinderarmoedeplannen, en van het voormalige toekomstcontract dat opgesteld werd naar aanleiding van de sluiting van de mijnen. Ook werden er exploratieve interviews afgenomen van sleutelfiguren uit het beleid van iedere periode, aangevuld met extra literatuur. Zo kregen we een ruimer beeld van de onderliggende ideeën en visies van deze beleidsplannen en de aard van de sociale acties die erin genomen werden.

Vervolgens analyseerden we de perspectieven uit onderzoek over de gevolgen van de economische crisis en plotse werkloosheid voor gezinnen met kinderen. Geïnspireerd op het werk van Lorenz (2007; 2016), werd een conceptueel essay geschreven dat teruggaat tot de crisis van de jaren ’30 en continuïteiten en discontinuïteiten blootlegt wat constructies van ouderschap in tijden van economische crisis betreft.

Nadien kwamen de ouders aan het woord, aan de hand van twee studies. De eerste studie was exploratief van aard, en ging na op welke manier ouders met jonge kinderen in Vlaanderen denken over ouderschap in relatie tot dominante discours inzake opvoeding en ouderschap. Hiertoe werd een kritische

discoursanalyse (Fairclough, 2003, 2010) uitgevoerd van dominante, officiële adviesteksten aan ouders in Vlaanderen enerzijds en van online gesprekken van ouders op het populaire forum Zappybaby, anderzijds. Op basis hiervan werd een tweede studie uitgevoerd die een beter begrip trachtte te krijgen van de relatie tussen ouderschap en de omstandigheden en condities waarin ouders met jonge kinderen (moeten) leven, werken en kinderen opvoeden. Geïnspireerd op het paradigma van het leefwereldonderzoek (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009; Roets et al., 2013), werden 14 semi-gestructureerde diepte-interviews afgenomen van gezinnen met jonge kinderen (0-3 jaar) uit Genk, Maasmechelen en Bilzen, waarvan minstens een van beide partners plots werkloos was en/of moeilijkheden ondervond om een nieuwe job te vinden ten gevolge van de economische crisis.

Tot slot onderzochten we hoe professionals van voorschoolse voorzieningen omgaan met nieuwe vragen en ontwikkelingen in het beleid en met mogelijke (nieuwe) bezorgdheden en vragen van gezinnen met jonge kinderen, in tijden van economische crisis. Hiertoe werden 20 semi-gestructureerde diepte-interviews afgenomen van professionals in de kinderopvang en de kleuterschool in Maasmechelen, Genk en Bilzen. De bevindingen werden geanalyseerd op basis van het analytisch raamwerk van Vandenbroeck en Lazzari (2014) dat vijf structurele condities onderscheidt die cruciaal zijn teneinde de toegankelijkheid en kwaliteit van voorzieningen te bevorderen, op het niveau van beleid, praktijk en ouders.

5. Conclusie

Belangrijkste bevindingen

De bevindingen uit dit onderzoek tonen hoe belangrijk het is om diverse, gecontextualiseerde perspectieven en betekenisverleningen in rekening te brengen als men sociale problemen (cf. werkloosheid, armoede) wil aanpakken. Ze leren ons namelijk – of herinneren ons eraan – dat het leven niet rechtlijnig of voorspelbaar is, maar gekenmerkt wordt door onzekerheid,

onvoorspelbaarheid en complexiteit. Dit uit zich niet enkel op het vlak van werk, maar op diverse, met elkaar verbonden levensdomeinen. Plots jobverlies kan iedereen overkomen, doch leidt niet noodzakelijk tot armoede. Het treft niet alleen kinderen, maar ook ouders en hun bredere netwerk. De ouders in dit onderzoek hebben een duidelijke aspiratie om nieuw werk te vinden en om hun kinderen goed op te voeden. Eerder dus dan een vraag tot activering, uiten zij bezorgdheden over hun 'work/life' balans die extra onder druk komt te staan, over de omstandigheden waarin zij (moeten) leven (cf. huisvesting, werk, gezondheid, opleiding, buurt, provincie) over het belang en de aanwezigheid van flexibele kinderopvang (cf. procedures, onthaal, openingsuren), over de meerwaarde van de combinatie van materiële en immateriële steun, maar ook over de diverse muren en spanningsvelden waarop zij botsen bij het vragen of aanvaarden van hulp. Veelal wordt de vraag gesteld "hoe moeilijk moet je het eigenlijk hebben, om hulp te krijgen?". Wanneer professionals de grenzen van hun opdracht/mandaat lichtjes buigen of breken, voelen ouders zich bijzonder gesteund.

Ook bij professionals merken we een spanning op tussen datgene wat beleidsmatig wordt vooropgesteld en datgene wat men op de werkvloer ervaart in de concrete contacten met ouders van jonge kinderen, die getroffen zijn door plotse werkloosheid. Wat dit betreft, stellen we vrij veel variatie vast in de manier waarop professionals omgaan met deze spanningen. Sommigen wenden hun discretionaire ruimte aan om strategieën te ontwikkelen waarbij ze de grenzen van hun opdracht/mandaat lichtjes buigen of breken, om ouders zo goed mogelijk te kunnen helpen. Professionals geven daarentegen aan dat structurele ondersteuning (cf. organisatiecultuur, middelen, …) om dergelijke grenzen te buigen of te breken, vrijwel afwezig is, waardoor men eerder 'ondergronds' gaat. Dit houdt in dat men stiekem bepaalde dingen doet die strikt gezien niet toegelaten zijn. Er zijn bijgevolg ook professionals die ervoor kiezen om hun grenzen niet te verleggen, omdat ze de prijs die ze ervoor dienen te betalen op financieel, sociaal of pedagogisch vlak te hoog vinden. Dergelijke variatie in het bieden van steun, is enigszins zorgwekkend, omdat de dienstverlening aan ouders dan grotendeels afhankelijk dreigt te worden

van de goodwill van de professionals, en dus dat sociaal werk gereduceerd dreigt te worden tot de relatie tussen gebruikers (hier: ouders) en professionals, los van de socio-politieke dimensie van sociaal werk.

Wat de rol van sociaal werk betreft, onderlijnt dit onderzoek dat 'het sociale' verdwijnt en verschijnt doorheen tijd en ruimte, doch momenteel terug dreigt te individualiseren en te depolitiseren. Solidariteit en collectieve verantwoordelijkheid voor welzijn, gestoeld op principes van sociale rechtvaardigheid en menselijke waardigheid, lijken in te boeten voor autonomie en individuele verantwoordelijkheid voor het eigen welzijn (Lorenz, 2016, IFSW, 2014). We tonen aan hoe een dergelijk discours zowel mee geconstrueerd als gedeconstrueerd wordt door ouders en professionals. Deconstructie of weerstand vindt in het bijzonder plaats wanneer condities en levensomstandigheden veranderen en niet meer voldaan kan worden aan wat verwacht wordt. Tevens blijkt dat de bevinding dat slechts een beperkt aantal ouders beroep doet op formele voorzieningen, niet noodzakelijk betekent dat zij de moeilijkheden die zij ondervinden i.t.v. werkloosheid, alleen willen of kunnen overkomen. Het op zichzelf aangewezen zijn en/of het beroepen op informele steun van vrienden, familie of partner, blijkt vaak het resultaat te zijn van allerlei drempels en van de spanning die ouders ervaren tussen enerzijds de onvoorspelbare en onzekere condities van ouders en anderzijds, de rigide regels van het aanbod in formele voorzieningen. Zo blijkt bijvoorbeeld dat wat respijtdagen betreffen, ouders er niet voor kunnen kiezen om hun respijtdagen op te sparen voor financieel moeilijkere periodes. Ook blijkt dat ouders hun bijdrage in de kinderopvang bij plotse werkloosheid, pas kunnen laten herberekenen na zes maanden en dat men een kindcode enkel kan aanvragen via een Nederlandstalige website (zie ook: Huylebroek & Vastmans, 2016). Verder kan men enkel aanspraak maken op opleidingscheques, indien men werkt, en dient men facturen overwegend online te betalen. Bovendien hebben ouders het gevoel dat informele steun door professionals soms als iets vanzelfsprekends wordt gezien, bijvoorbeeld bij de zoektocht naar werk. Dit is zorgwekkend, omdat informele steun niet altijd aanwezig, noch positief is (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Tevens stellen we vast dat werkloosheid ook

kan leiden tot een inkrimping van het sociaal netwerk. Dat ouders bijgevolg zelf diverse strategieën ontwikkelen om verder te kunnen, is dus eerder een noodzaak dan een wens. Boeiend om te zien is hoe men in die situaties soms beroep doet op universeel toegankelijke, publieke voorzieningen, zoals een openbare speeltuin, bibliotheek of zwembad.

Beleidsmatig echter, zien we – wat sociaal beleid betreft – dat de gevolgen van de crisis en van plotse werkloosheid, overwegend beantwoord worden met een roep naar meer (kosten) efficiëntie. Het belang van vroeg ingrijpen, door in te zetten op jonge kinderen en hun ouders in het bijzonder, via voorschoolse voorzieningen, wordt daarbij benadrukt. Activering naar de arbeidsmarkt en educatie (incl. opvoedingsondersteuning), maar ook standaardisering en managerialism, worden eveneens als belangrijke 'instrumenten' beschouwd. Op basis van de bevindingen uit dit onderzoek stellen we dat sociaal werkpraktijken die ingezet worden vanuit een enge social investment-benadering, in extremis dreigen voorbij te gaan aan de reële bezorgdheden van ouders en professionals, alsook aan de condities waaronder ouders (moeten) leven, werken en hun kinderen opvoeden. Dit doet niet alleen afbreuk aan de essentie van het sociaal werk, maar dreigt ook uitsluiting te vergroten (IFSW, 2014; Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014).

Implicaties voor beleid en praktijk

Een goed begrip van processen van in- en uitsluiting voor gezinnen die getroffen worden door plotse werkloosheid, kan niet plaatsvinden los van deze gezinnen. Dit betekent dat (1) men oog dient te hebben voor de context of de condities waaronder gezinnen (moeten) leven, werken en kinderen grootbrengen, dat (2) het belangrijk is om oog te hebben voor de ervaringen en betekenisverleningen die mensen in relatie tot deze context ontwikkelen en ontwikkeld hebben en (3) dat dit samen gebeurt. Dit laatste slaat op het ontwikkelen van begrip en interventies mét gezinnen in kwestie, maar ook mét professionals en beleidsmakers. Een goed begrip van in- en uitsluitingsprocessen vergt namelijk acties op het niveau van beleid,

voorzieningen en gebruikers (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). Een belangrijke hefboom om dit te initiëren, is het voeren van een gezamelijke dialoog. Het dient echter om meer te gaan dan 'praten'. Geïnspireerd op Freire (1970), houdt dialoog 'actie' en 'reflectie' in op de wereld, teneinde te komen tot een verandering van de oorzaken van sociale problemen. Centraal daarbij staat een gezamenlijk leerproces op basis van gelijkwaardigheid, eerder dan vanuit een hiërarchische, machtsgeladen, top-down relatie. Essentieel, is de eigen bewustwording over onderdrukkende structuren. Netwerkvorming en geïntegreerd werken bijvoorbeeld (cf. 'lerende netwerken kinderarmoede Limburg'), vormen hier mogelijks een interessante hefboom toe, mits dit niet gezien wordt als dé oplossing voor alle problemen en mits dit niet beperkt blijft tot iets louter organisatorisch.

Het in acht nemen van diverse, gecontextualiseerde perspectieven houdt verder in dat men het aanbod niet al te rigide voorstructureert en standaardiseert vanuit een beleidsmatig beheersprincipe (cf. bestellen is betalen) (zie ook: Huylebroek & Vastmans, 2016). Eerder zal men ambiguïteit en onvoorspelbaarheid moeten blijven omarmen om met de onzekerheid en de onvoorspelbaarheid (cf. plots jobverlies) van het leven van de gezinnen in snel veranderende economische en sociale contexten om te kunnen gaan. Alleen zo doet men recht aan de realiteit waarin gezinnen verkeren. Voorbeelden zijn onder meer: het flexibeler omspringen met intakeprocedures, regelgeving, openingsuren en de betaling van facturen, alsook de combinatie van materiële en immateriële steun. In de vraag "hoe moeilijk moet je het eigenlijk hebben, om hulp te krijgen", ligt bovendien een kans om de diverse drempels en muren die ervaren worden door gezinnen die voordien geen problemen hadden, zo goed mogelijk weg te werken. De 5 B's of te, de vraag naar hoe beschikbaar, bereikbaar, betaalbaar, bruikbaar en begrijpbaar voorzieningen en hun aanbod zijn (Roose and Bouverne-De Bie 2003), kunnen hierbij een handige leidraad vormen. Omgaan met ambiguïteit en complexiteit, is echter niet louter de verantwoordelijkheid van professionals. Belangrijk is om de nodige structurele ondersteuning (cf. middelen, visie, opleiding) te voorzien. Zoniet, dan vergroot de kans dat professionals vooral 'ondergronds' te werk gaan. Hierdoor echter,

dreigt de socio-politieke dimensie van sociale problemen en van het sociaal werk ondergesneeuwd te raken. Sociaal werk dreigt op die manier gereduceerd te worden tot iets relationeels, waarbij de gebruiker afhankelijk dreigt te worden van de goodwill van de professional en er altijd iemand de prijs zal moeten betalen op sociaal, financieel of pedagogisch vlak.

Tot slot, is het belangrijk om het recht op een sociaal rechtvaardig en menswaardig leven, als referentiekader mee te blijven nemen, eerder dan het uitsluitend nastreven van economische (kosten)efficiëntie. In navolging van Williams (2001) betekent dit dat er een balans dient gezocht te worden tussen een ethiek van betaald werk en alles wat hiervan afhankelijk is, en een zorgethiek. Anders gezegd, het dient niet enkel te gaan over de intrede in om het even welke job, of om activering alleen, maar tevens over de kwaliteit en het aanbod van de beschikbare jobs, over herverdeling, over de mogelijkheid om jobs te combineren met het gezin, of over de toegankelijkheid van voorschoolse voorzieningen die kunnen fungeren als een belangrijke hefboom tot welzijn en tot het vermijden van uitsluiting. Dit houdt in se een hertaling in van private problemen als publieke problemen, eerder dan andersom, teneinde hun sociaal-politieke dimensie (cf. bredere sociale ongelijkheden in de maatschappij) te belichten en aan te pakken. Het appelleert bovendien op een gedeelde, in plaats van een verdeelde verantwoordelijkheid tussen burgers en de staat.

Dergelijke implicaties zijn, zeker in tijden van economische maar ook sociale en politieke omwentelingen, belangrijk in relatie tot de essentie van het sociaal werk, alsook in relatie tot in- en uitsluitingsprocessen voor gezinnen met jonge kinderen.

6. Referenties

Allen, C. (2003). Desperately seeking fusion: On "joined-up thinking", "holistic practice" and the new economy of welfare professional power. *British Journal of Social Work, 54*(2), 287-306. doi: 10.1080/0007131032000080249

Anthony, E., King, B., & Austin, M. (2011). Reducing child poverty by promoting child well-being: Identifying best practices in a time of great need. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 1999-2009. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.05.029

Barnett, W. S. (2011). Effectiveness of early educational intervention. *Science, 333*, 975-978. doi: 10.1126/science.1204534

Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek: een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk.* Gent: Academia Press.

Cantillon, B. (2011). The paradox of the social investment state: Growth, employment and poverty in the Lisbon era. *Journal of European Social Policy, 21*(5), 432-449. doi:10.1177/0958928711418856

Chzhen, Y. (2014). *Subjective impact of the economic crisis on households with children in 17 European countries. Innocenti Working Paper No. 2014-09*. Florence: UNICEF Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/725.

Clarke, K. (2006). Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme. *Critical Social Policy, 26*(4), 699-721. doi:10.1177/0261018306068470

Cox, R. H. (1998). The consequences of welfare reform: How conceptions of social rights are changing. *Journal of Social Policy, 27*(1), 1-16. doi: 10.1017/S0047279497005163

Duncan, G., Brooks-Gunn, J., Yeung, J., & Smith, J. (1998). How much does childhood poverty affect the life chances of children? *American Sociological Review, 63*(3), 406-423. doi: 10.2307/2657556

Doherty, G. (2007). Ensuring the best start in life: Targeting versus universality in Early Childhood Development. *IRPP Choices, 13*(8), 1-52. Retrieved from http://on-irpp.org/2eKXj2a

Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 29*(2), 265-287. doi: 10.1353/cjs.2004.0022

Dyson, C., Gorin, S., Hooper, C.-A., & Cabral, C. (2008). Bangladeshi families living in hardship: Findings from research using a life-history approach.

Child and Family Social Work, 14, 362–371. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00608.x

European Commission. (2012). *The social impact of the economic crisis and ongoing fiscal consolidation. Third report of the Social Protection Committee*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Eurofound. (2014). *Third European quality of life survey – Quality of life in Europe: Families in the economic crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurydice. (2009). *Early childhood education and care in Europe: Tackling social and cultural inequalities*. Brussels: European Commission.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. New York: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Routledge.

Farnsworth, K., & Irving, Z. (2012). Varieties of crisis, varieties of austerity: Social policy in challenging times. *The Journal of Poverty and Social Justice, 20*(2), 133-147. doi:10.1332/175982712X652041

Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Garrett, P. M. (2009). *'Transforming' children's services. Social Work, neoliberalism and the 'modern' world*. England: Open university Press.

Geens, N. & Vandenbroeck, M. (2012). The (ab)sense of a concept of social support in parenting research: a social work perspective. *Child and Family Social Work, 19*, 491–500. doi:10.1111/cfs.12048

Ghysels, J., & Van Lancker, W. (2011). The unequal benefits of activation: An analysis of the social destribution of family policy among families with young children. *Journal of European Social Policy, 21*(5), 472-485. doi:10.1177/0958928711418853

Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way: The renewal of social democracy.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goldberg, G. (2012). Economic inequality and economic crisis: A challenge for social workers. *Social Work, 57*(3), 211-224. doi:10.1093/sw/sws005

Gray, M. (2014). The swing to early intervention and prevention and its implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 1750-1769. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct037

Gray, M., & Webb, S. A. (2009). The return of the political in social work *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18*(1), 111-115. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2008.00626.x

Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of the 'Lifeworld Orientation' for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 23*(2), 131-146. doi:10.1080/0265053090292343

Hanan, R. (2012). The social impact of the economic crisis in Europe. *Working notes, (69),* 16-21. Ireland: EAPN.

Huylebroek, K., and Vastmans, S. (2016). *Onderzoek in opdracht van Kind en Gezin naar de evaluatie van de maatregel 'Opvang bestellen = opvang betalen'.* Gent: Arteveldehogeschool Gent.

IFSW. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Karanikolos, M., Mladovsky, P., Cylus, J., Thomson, S., Basu, S., Stuckles, D., . . . McKee, M. (2013). Financial crisis, austerity, and health in Europe. *Health in Europe 7, 381*, 1323-1331. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60102-6

Kind en Gezin [Child and Family]. (2013). Gemeentelijke kindrapporten. Moeder en kind kenmerken – kansarmoede-index [Municipal child reports. Mother and child characteristics – child poverty index]; accessed March 24, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.kindengezin.be

Lazzari, A. (2014). Early childhood education and care in times of crisis. *European Early Childhood Education Journal, 22*(4), 427-431. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.947829

Lee, E. (2014a). Experts and parenting culture. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 51-75). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lee, E. (2014b). Introduction. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies.* (pp. 1-22). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lister, R. (2003). Investing in the citizen-workers of the future: Transformations in citizenship and the state under New Labour. *Social Policy & Administration, 37*(5), 427-443. doi:10.1111/1467-9515.00350

Lorenz, W. (2007). Practising history: Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work, 50*, 597-612. doi:10.1177/0020872807079918

Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(1), 4-17. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1082984

O'Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of social Work, 1*(1), 143-158. doi:10.1177/1468017310386834

OECD. (2014). *Society at a glance. The crisis and its aftermath.* Paris: OECD.

Platt, L. (2005). *Discovering child poverty: The creation of a policy agenda from 1800 to the present.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Mahon, R. (2010). After Neo-Liberalism? The OECD, the World Bank and the child. *Global Social Policy, 10*(2), 172-192. doi:10.1177/1468018110366615

Martorano, B. (2014). The consequences of the recent economic crisis and government reactions for children. Innocenti Working Paper, 2014-05. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond 'heroic agency' in conceptualising social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 1011-1038. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs062

Notredame, L. (1994). De ijzeren (drie)hoeken. Een analyse-schema voor de beleidsvorming. *Alert, 20*(26), 5-9.

Ramaekers, S., & Suissa, J. (2012). *The Claims of Parenting. Reasons, Responsibility and Society.* Londen and New York: Springer.

Roets, G., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2013). Researching child poverty: Towards a lifeworld orientation. *Childhood. A Global Journal of Child Research, 20*(4), 535-549. doi:10.1177/0907568212475101

Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2003). From participative research to participative practice: a study in youth care. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 13:475-485. doi: 10.1002/casp.752

Rosanvallon, P. (1995). *La nouvelle question sociale: repenser l'Etat-providence.* Paris: Seuil.

Schiettecat, T. (2016). *Trajectories of poor families in child and family social work.* Doctorate in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University.

Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2016). What families in poverty consider supportive: Welfare strategies of parents with young children in relation to (child and family) social work. *Child and Family Social Work, In press*. doi:10.1111/cfs.12285

Shonkoff, J. P. (2010). Building a biodevelopmental framework to guide the future of early childhood policy. *Child Development, 81*(1), 357-367. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01399.x

Somarriba, N., Zarzosa, P., & Pena, B. (2015). The economic crisis and its effects on the quality of life in the European Union. *Social Indicators Research, 120*, 323-343. doi:10.1007/s11205-014-0595-9

Staab, S. (2010). Social investment policies in Chile and Latin America: Towards equal opportunities for women and children? *Journal of Social Policy, 39*(4), 607-626. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279410000243

Tsui, M., & Cheung, F. (2004). Gone with the wind: The impacts of managerialism on human services. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*(3), 437-442. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bch046

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2014). *Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries. Innocenti Report Card 12.* Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. (2008). *Report Card 8. The child care transition*. Florence: Unicef.

Vandenbroeck, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2012). Why the evidence-based paradigm in early childhood education and care is anything but evident. *European Journal of Social Work, 20*(4), 537-552. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2012.737238

Vandenbroeck, M., & Lazzari, A. (2014). Accessibility of early childhood education and care: A state of affairs. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 22*(3), 327-335. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.912895

Vandenbroeck, M., & Van Lancker, W. (2014). *Een tweesporenbeleid inzake kinderarmoede. VLAS-Studies 14.* Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.

VDAB. (2014). *Collectieve ontslagen Ford en toeleveranciers (eind februari 2014). [Unpublished dataset]*. Brussel: VDAB.

Verbrugghe, B. (2011). *Ontwerpnota impulsbeleid. De versnelde uitbouw van Genk als creatieve maakstad in antwoord op een diepgaande economische, financiële en sociale crisis*. Genk.

Vlaamse Regering. (2013). *Strategisch actie-programma Limburg² 2013-2019. Ontwerp-uitvoeringsplan.* Brussel.

Williams, F. (2001). In and beyond New Labour: Towards a new political ethics of care. *Critical Social Policy, 21*(4), 467-493. doi:10.1177/026101830102100405

Wright, M. (1959). *The sociological imagination.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Data storage fact sheets

Study 1

% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study Policy perspectives

% Author: Freya Geinger

% Date:08/02/2017

1. Contact details

==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Freya Geinger

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Freya.Geinger@Ugent.be or freya.geinger@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@Ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

==========

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Geinger, F. (2017). Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision. (Doctoral dissertation)

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: Semi-structured interviews with former and current policy makers in Limburg and Flanders.

3. Information about the files that have been stored

==========

3a. Raw data

----

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [x] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:
* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [x] researcher PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...
* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): ...

3b. Other files

---

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: ...
  - [x] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: Transcriptions of interview recordings, files containing contact information.
  - [x] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Coding trees (manual) and files reporting results
  - [x] files(s) containing information about informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...
    * On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [x] other: google drive
* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the department

```
4. Reproduction
============================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO
* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:
   v0.2
```

Study 2

% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study Research perspectives

% Author: Freya Geinger

% Date:08/02/2017

1. Contact details

==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Freya Geinger

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Freya.Geinger@Ugent.be or freya.geinger@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@Ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

==========

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Geinger, F. (2017). Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision. (Doctoral dissertation)

Geinger, F., Roets, G., Van Gorp, A., Bradt, L. and Vandenbroeck, M. (accepted). Constructions of parenting in research about economic downturn and unemployment: a social work perspective. *European Journal of Social Work*.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: Literature about the consequences of economic downturn and unemployment on families and children.

3. Information about the files that have been stored

==========

3a. Raw data

```
------------------------------------------------------------
* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher?
[x] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:
* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [x] researcher PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...
* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without
intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): ...
   3b. Other files
------------------------------------------------------------
* Which other files have been stored?
  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to
reported results. Specify: ...
  - [x] file(s) containing processed data. Specify:
Literature
  - [ ] file(s) containing analyses. Specify:
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about informed
consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored
files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify:
...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...
    * On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [x] other: google drive
* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the
department
4. Reproduction
```

```
============================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO
* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:
v0.2
```

Study 3

% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study Recruitment and questionnaire of parents with young children

% Author: Freya Geinger

% Date:08/02/2017

1. Contact details

==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Freya Geinger

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Freya.Geinger@Ugent.be or freya.geinger@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@Ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

==========

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Geinger, F. (2017). Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision. (Doctoral dissertation)

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: None

3. Information about the files that have been stored

==========

3a. Raw data

---

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [x] YES / [ ] NO

If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [x] researcher PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...
* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the department

3b. Other files

---

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: ...
  - [x] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: files containing contact information, overview of the recruited parents in Limburg, a selection of the recruited parents living in Bilzen, Genk or Maasmechelen, questionnaire in four different languages; French, Dutch, English and Turkish
  - [x] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: text file reporting the results of the recruitment data and excel file reporting the results of the questionnaire
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...
    * On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [x] other: google drive
* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent

```
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the
department
4. Reproduction
============================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO
* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:
v0.2
```

Study 4

% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study Perspectives of parents with young children

% Author: Freya Geinger

% Date:08/02/2017

1. Contact details

==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Freya Geinger

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Freya.Geinger@Ugent.be or freya.geinger@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@Ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

==========

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Geinger, F. (2017). Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision. (Doctoral dissertation)

Geinger, F., Roets, G. and Vandenbroeck, M. (accepted). Families with young children in times of economic downturn: Implications for social work practice. *International Journal of Social Welfare.*

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: Semi-structured interviews with parents of young children in Genk, Bilzen and Maasmechelen (Limburg).

3. Information about the files that have been stored

==========

3a. Raw data

---

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [x] YES / [ ] NO

If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?

  - [x] researcher PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): ...

3b. Other files

---

* Which other files have been stored?

  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: ...
  - [x] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: Transcriptions of interview recordings, files containing contact information.
  - [x] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Coding trees (manual) and files reporting results
  - [x] files(s) containing information about informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...

    * On which platform are these other files stored?

  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [x] other: google drive

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent

```
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the
department
4. Reproduction
=============================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO
* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:
v0.2
```

Study 5

% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study Perspectives of ECEC professionals

% Author: Freya Geinger

% Date:08/02/2017

1. Contact details

==========

1a. Main researcher

- name: Freya Geinger

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Freya.Geinger@Ugent.be or freya.geinger@gmail.com

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Michel Vandenbroeck

- address: FPPW, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Henri-Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent

- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@Ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

==========

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Geinger, F. (2017). Processes of in- and exclusion for families with young children in times of economic downturn. Perspectives of research, parents and provision. (Doctoral dissertation)

Geinger, F., Roets, G. and Vandenbroeck, M. (accepted). Processes of in- and exclusion in early childhood education and care in times of economic downturn and austerity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.*

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: Semi-structured interviews with ECEC professionals in Genk, Bilzen and Maasmechelen (Limburg).

3. Information about the files that have been stored

==========

3a. Raw data

---

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher? [x] YES / [ ] NO

If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?

  - [x] researcher PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): ...

3b. Other files

---

* Which other files have been stored?

  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: ...
  - [x] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: Transcriptions of interview recordings, files containing contact information.
  - [x] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Coding trees (manual) and files reporting results
  - [x] files(s) containing information about informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...
    * On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [x] other: google drive

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent

```
  - [x] other (specify): Service administrator of the
department
4. Reproduction
============================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO
* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:
v0.2
```