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PROFIT PROJECT: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The existence of intergenerational inheritance of inequalities is assumed to constrain the achievement of the societal objectives of the EU, namely: sustainable development, social and territorial cohesion and improved quality of life. The persistence of Ilofl means the violation of key values accepted in the European Union, particularly the principle of equal opportunity and of solidarity. Therefore, the European Parliament and the Council decided to include to commonly agreed indicators a module of 'intergenerational transmission of poverty' to monitor progress in counteracting it in the member states, starting from 2005 [Commission Regulation (EC) No 16/2004 of 6 January 2004] and inspired research on intergenerational inheritance of inequalities.

The PROFIT project team undertook a multidisciplinary comparative study of the intergenerational transmission of inequalities/poverty and of policies and practices aimed at overcoming it. The research was conducted in eight EU member states, representing different socio-economic, political and cultural environments. The sides participating in the project were selected deliberately to cover Western and Eastern countries, i.e. countries which were developed according to the capitalist mode of industrialism and those which were industrialised under the conditions of state socialism but which, after political upheavals at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, have been trying to find their way to market economy and democratic capitalism. The United Kingdom, Germany, Finland and Italy, being capitalist industrial societies, differ in regard to the type of social welfare regime (liberal, continental, Nordic and Latin-Rim – respectively). Post-socialist countries were selected to represent those which belonged to the Soviet Union (Estonia, Lithuania) and those which operated as separate states with national

central administration and government (Bulgaria, Poland). Despite the similarities, there were important differences in social policy between these countries, for example in the educational systems, which could affect intergenerational mobility opportunities. Such a collection of countries was assumed to provide findings that can contribute to widening knowledge about similarities and dissimilarities in the studied area among countries belonging to the enlarged European Union.

The project was designed to extend the scope of previous research done in the field, especially that initiated by the European Union, like those reported in Joint Reports on Social Inclusion [2002, 2004], Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion [2005, 2006, 2007], etc., as well as those presented in the reports within the Targeted Socio-Economic Research Programme and the 5th FP within priority 'Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base'. It undertook cross-national comparisons and involved new empirical work with local policy-makers, people implementing policy at local level and end-users to explore the measures and methods used to counteract the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities and thus overcome its consequences.

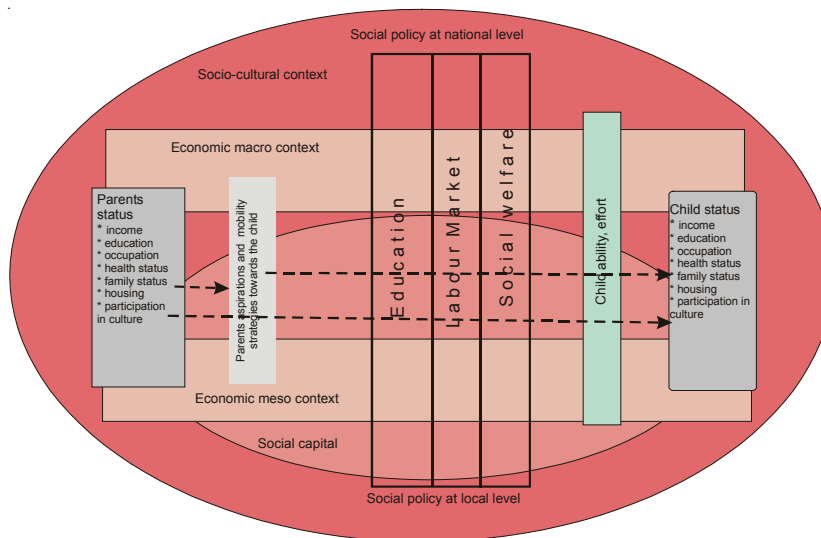
The theoretical foundation for the undertaken study built on results of research mentioned in the above paragraph. In the project the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities (Ilofi) has been conceptualized as a process of transmission of different disadvantages (material, social, cultural, etc.) from one generation to another resulting in restricted social and economic mobility of people born in low-status families. Its most severe form and indicator is the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

For a better understanding of the process of the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities the following stylization seems to be useful:

The departure point of the project was an assumption that the Ilofi is a result of intersecting influences coming from the family of origin, community and society. As noticed by Bowles [2005:6], *Extensive studies (...) have found that there are surprisingly high correlations between the consumption, wealth, income and wages of succeeding generations in the US – despite its stereotypical presentation as the land of 'rags to riches' stories. There is clearly both a poverty trap, from which it is difficult if not impossible to emerge, and an 'affluence trap' that is only slightly less durable.* Thus, there is no doubt that family plays dominant role in a process of the intergenerational transmission of inequalities, mostly from parents to children. According to Esping-Andersen, *"The mainspring of people's life chances lie in the family conditions in their childhood. And, once adult, it is the household that gives meaning to the unfolding individual life course. It is here that social advantage and disadvantage are transmitted and activated; it is*

here that social risks and needs find primary expression; and it is also here that the primary social safety net is found [Esping-Andersen 2002: 29]. His opinion corresponds with Cohen's and McCartney's [2003] distinction of four types of relations between family and inequality. These types are as follows:

FIGURE 1. Stylization of the process of intergenerational inheritance of inequalities



1. *Family forms reflect inequalities* in that low income increases likelihood of living in extended families while high income enables nuclear family form.

2. *Families contain and reproduce inequalities* in that division of labour and resources may privilege some family members and underprivilege others.

3. *Family relationships offer responses to inequality and hardship*. Family members actively deal with problems one may encounter and constitute social support networks helping in hard times.

4. *Unequal outcomes result from different families and family forms*. One-parent families and families with numerous children are more frequently affected by poverty than couples without and with one or two children. In terms of intergenerational effects families remain perhaps the most important mechanism for transmission of unequal chances.

The 'silver spoon, plastic spoon' hypothesis, as formulated by Yaqub [2001] has been positively verified in many quantitative studies. Prevailing majority of them omit external influences (structural factors), which are hardly measurable.

Harriss [2007] refers to studies like these as to ones depoliticizing the problem. It is because they locate the crux of the poverty/inequality problem in the characteristics of people/families leaving aside the question why it is that resources are distributed through a society in the manner that people are poor. He claims that it is contemporary capitalism and cultural politics which are decisive for inequality/poverty maintaining and persistence.

The PROFIT project approaches in some way this fundamental question taking into account countries representing different types of capitalism and their political manifestations in form of different social welfare regimes [see article by W. Woźniak and by Warzywoda-Kruszynska in this volume]. The large body of studies provide evidence that there are differences in both objective (income inequality, poverty, unemployment) and subjective (like perception of individuals' own quality of life) dimensions between countries belonging to specific social welfare regimes. Up till now less is known about impact of social welfare regimes emerging in former socialist countries. They are said to be hybrids in that they continue some measures introduced in the past and implement some new in response to changing economic and political forces.

The project tries to contextualize the problem of inequality/poverty inheritance taking into account that the process of transmission proceeds in the wider social environment constituted by community (meso level) and society (macro level), which are considered important 'players'. Both community and society (national state) may intervene in some way to prevent the continuation of disadvantages across generations using resources, measures, and capitals at their disposal. They also constitute the context for transmission of different kinds of capitals between generations. It is commonly shared knowledge that state intervention in income redistribution correlates with social welfare regime and that structural conditions of societies differ.

The socio-economic-cultural context for inequality/poverty transmission is composed of structural and cultural factors that have been operationalized in the PROFIT project as follows - Figure 2.

However, little is known about current top policy-makers' conceptualizing of intergenerational inheritance of inequalities and policies accepted by them to overcome it, particularly in new member states. At the European Union level policy is focused on increasing of social integration and thus counteracting transmission of poverty and inequality across generations. But it is member states' accountability to implement the European objectives. Thus, it is essential for political leaders to commit themselves to ensuring the well-being of next generation. In this respect it is crucial to acquire knowledge on how members of parliaments and other important actors operating at the national level perceive the obligation respecting prevention of poverty/inequality

perpetuation and which measures/policies they consider key instruments to break up the process of the intergenerational transmission of inequalities.

FIGURE 2. Structural and cultural factors for inequality/poverty transmission

Administrative level	Structural factors	Cultural factors
National (society)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social welfare regime • National social structure composition • Socio-economic standing • Poverty patterns and social problems' composition • Division of responsibility between central and local government 	Top-level policy-makers' and - executives' ways of thinking about inequality reproduction and its overcoming
Local (municipality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic situation • Town's social structure composition • Social infrastructure and resources • Programmes, projects implemented 	Local politicians' and other stakeholders' ways of thinking about inequality reproduction and its overcoming; Social trust potential

With reference to community level, even less, if anything, is known about local level actors' perception of inequality transmission and how much keen they are to prevent or overcome the IIofI. But it is they who implement policies and decide about break-down of community budget and prioritizing of objectives to achieve. What is more, communities are social services providers and quality of services can impact inequality transmission both positively and negatively. Thus, in each country one medium-sized town was selected to carry out field work encompassing local stakeholders and social policy end-users (young adults 25-29 year old).

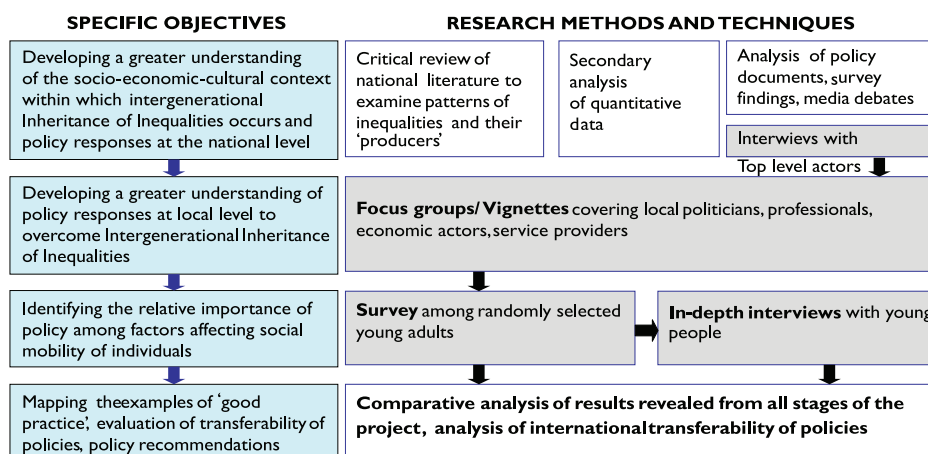
Profit project homed in on combined qualitative and quantitative research to get better understanding of intergenerational transmission of inequalities/poverty. Unlike majority of intergenerational social mobility studies that are quantitative ones aimed at detection of statistical correlations between variables, PROFIT project is centered on information achieved using 'soft methods' (focus group interviews, in-depth interviews) complimented by small scale survey data. PROFIT project enabled people involved in interactive process of breaking of inequality/poverty reproduction to talk. These people were: end-users of policies, being young people originating from low status families; top politicians, being policy designers; and local stakeholders who implement policy in a given community.

The project focused on interrelations between policies and practices exercised at national (society) and local (community) level in the process of overcoming the IIofI.

Project Methodology

The specific project objectives and methodology used are presented in Figure 3. Secondary analysis of existing data as well as field work designed for the project was conducted in each country under study.

FIGURE 3. Project objectives and methods



To achieve project objectives the following sources of information were explored at the national level:

1. Reviews of scientific literature elaborated by national PROFIT research teams.
2. In-depth interviews with political, economic and social actors, conducted and analyzed by national research teams (field work specifically designed for PROFIT purposes).
3. National official policy documents like National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs) 2003, 2005; Joint Memoranda 2002 (in the case of Central European States); Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2006, 2007.
4. Synthetic reports elaborated by independent international research teams aimed at international comparisons, based on NAPs and other documents.

At the local (municipality) level research team used following data gathered during fieldwork specifically designed for PROFIT purposes:

5. Focus group interviews with local stakeholders like local politicians (members of municipality councils and local political parties leaders), social services workers (front-liners: social workers, teachers, probation officers, priests, policemen, NGO staff, etc.) and executives in municipality social departments.

6. Survey study ‘Young Adults at Risk. Opportunities and Constraints on Social Mobility’ conducted among young adults (25-29 year old) being permanent residents of selected towns.

7. In-depth interviews with selected young adults living in a given town.

Such a diversification of information sources is very useful because of the complementary information provided by each of them. Multi-method approach was considered as the most effective way to gain as much knowledge as possible on the same subject. As stated by Gallie [1978: 46, quoted by: Kunz 2004: 35]: *Most methods, if used in isolation, have substantial and well known pitfalls. The best chance of grasping the reality of the situation is to bring as many types of data as possible to bear on the same problem.*

Scientific literature is not concerned with programmes and schemes implemented by national official bodies while official political documents are rather rarely based on scientific publications. Both national scientific literature and official documents are focused on national data and are not particularly interested in international comparisons. Alternatively, synthetic reports based on commonly agreed indicators offer a good opportunity to position countries in the study in the wider context of the European Union. Interviews with policy-makers and stakeholders enable researchers to confront opinions from both sides involved in a policy process aimed at overcoming the inheritance of inequality. Survey and in-depth interviews with young adults from towns in the study give the feedback from the end-users of the social policy.

The usage of multiple methods and sources of information should be considered as the particular strength of the project.

In the course of the project more than 2100 people altogether were interviewed as shown in Table 1.

The approach used in the PROFIT project should be considered as case-oriented research in at least two meanings:

1. First of all, it was focused on particular social phenomenon (inheritance of inequalities) and its interrelations with various aspects of social reality (how it is addressed by policy and institutions, what are the perceptions and attitudes towards the existence of the IIofI, what is the extent of the IIofI).

2. Secondly, large part of the fieldwork has been conducted in purposely selected towns being specific cases analyzed in multidimensional way (via group interviews with stakeholders, survey study among young inhabitants, in-depth interviews with some of them, analyses of the third sector activities in each of the town as well as available statistical data).

TABLE 1. Numbers of respondents participating at various stages in the PROFIT research (number of female respondents in brackets)

Countries/ towns under study	Interviews with top-level political and social actors	Focus group interviews with local stakeholders from given town	Survey with young adults from given town	In-depth interviews with young from given town
Finland/ Pori	14 (8)	19 (13)	258 (164)	25 (13)
Italy/ Rovigo	15 (8)	16 (7)	251 (121)	29 (9)
Estonia/ Pärnu	15 (7)	20 (11)	163 (98)	15 (6)
Poland/ Tomaszów Maz.	15 (8)	30 (23)	250 (121)	30 (15)
United Kingdom/ Loughborough	11 (3)	27 (14)	133 (54)	15 (6)
Germany/ Giessen	13 (8)	19 (8)	241 (104)	15 (4)
Lithuania/ Jonava	15 (9)	21 (16)	134 (75)	20 (12)
Bulgaria/ Pernik	14 (4)	40 (22)	250 (125)	12 (6)
Total:	112 (55)	198 (114)	1680 (862)	161 (71)

Case study in sociological meaning is not a unified and consistent scheme or method of conducting interviews and analyzing data. It is rather an ‘approach’ which enables deeper insight into some concrete and narrowly defined research problem. Usage of different research methods and techniques is treated as an important advantage of the case study [Stark, Torrance 2005: 33–35]. The aim of the research here is deep and rich idiographic analysis of the given social phenomenon and not generalizing the results for a wider population. Case studies are frequently used in the applied research on institutions, reforms, small communes. They tend to pay special attention to ‘insider’s perspective’. Unlike quantitative studies (focused on a limited number of variables), case-oriented projects are more sensitive to complexity, heterogeneity and particularity of individual cases. Qualitative oriented researchers examine few cases at the same time, but the analysis may be intensive (taking into account various aspects of the case) and integrative – checking how different parts of a case fit together (contextually and historically), which could mean concentrating on just a few cases at once, in order to answer even complex cases.

Research project presented here could be also classified as an ‘action research’, as the final outcome of the project is not just a knowledge produced and deep insight into the nature of the social phenomenon, but also elaborating recommendations [Noffke, Somekh 2005: 89–96].

Research findings were presented to local authorities and stakeholders in each town to get feedback and discuss examples of best practices of locally based

actions to choose one example to be presented to an international audience during the project dissemination conference. The purpose of the exchange of examples of good practice was to inspire other towns to make use of projects which work elsewhere. Discussion with councillors and other local stakeholders was aimed at increasing their interest in the topic and providing them with reliable knowledge about the problem in their towns.

Summarizing information about methodology applied in the PROFIT project following characteristics are to be underlined:

- It implies a holistic approach, i.e. it covers national and local levels of policy making and implementation as well as policy evaluation by end-users.
- It tries, in contrast to cross-national comparisons, to compare endeavours to counteract IIofI practiced in medium-sized towns across Europe, serving as case studies. Thus, it provides the possibility of contextualizing the problems in the study.
- It combines different methods of gathering information and elaborating data: semi-structured interview, focus group interview, survey, in-depth interview.
- It covers different groups of people, with the purpose of gaining an understanding of the process rather than precisely estimating the incidence of inequality transmission from one generation to another in the towns in the study.
- It is focused on a specific age group of potential end-users being in their late twenties (25–29). While tracing their life course the project tries to detect the relative importance of different structures (family, peers, school) and policies (educational, labour market, welfare) for creating opportunities and constraints to their social mobility as well as peoples' efforts to be socially mobile. This age cohort experienced the transition to adulthood at the time of radical social changes (system transformation in post-socialist countries, development of global capitalism and the knowledge society in western countries) which contributed to substantial alterations to both opportunities and constraints as compared with their parents' generation. At this point in their life cycle, nothing is definite but, with caution, it is possible to predict their future achievements. Of particular interest are those young people who, having originated from low status families became socially mobile and those who are not able to manage it.
- It applies action research and mutual learning approach in terms of the engagement of stakeholders as key informants and reviewers of the research results. Seminars in each town gathering researchers and practitioners were aimed at getting feedback on results so that practitioners may think about solutions to social problems in their town as requiring scientific approach and support from the academic community.

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PROFIT PROJECT: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In this article objectives and premises of the PROFIT project are discussed, along with theoretical and practical inspirations to the formulation of the research topic, followed by indicators of the selection of participant countries. The authors also describe project's methodological approach, related to application of specific methods and techniques of data collection, used in respective stages of project's realization.

PROJEKT PROFIT: ZAŁOŻENIA I METODOLOGIA

Artykuł prezentuje cele i założenia leżące u podstaw projektu badawczego PROFIT. Przedstawione są tutaj krótko inspiracje teoretyczne oraz praktyczne leżące u podstaw sformułowania tematu badania, a także kwestie związane z doborem uczestniczących w nim krajów. Autorki prezentują również metodologiczne założenia badań, związane z zastosowaniem konkretnych metod i technik zbierania danych, wykorzystanych podczas realizacji poszczególnych etapów projektu.