Faculty of Management and Governance

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TOWARDS SOCIAL QUALITY IN EUROPE

BY INTEGRATING ITS CENTRAL ELEMENTS INTO THE PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

Analyzing Family Group Conferences with an Inclusive Mindset

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Abstract

The Social Quality concept promises to lead the way towards greater well-being of citizens in Europe, at least in theory. But how can Social Quality be realized in social practice and in concrete terms? The purpose of this thesis is twofold. For one the author sheds light on how Social Quality (SQ) can be realized for individuals by focusing on Family Group Conferences (FGCs). Secondly, the author argues that to grasp the value of SQ theory in this regard the scientist has to develop an inclusive mindset himself which respects the underlying philosophy of Social Quality. In this sense he calls for greater self reflection and sensitivity in the scientific field in particular to safeguard the defragmented nature of SQ theory. To answer the research questions a multimethod approach will be applied to the analysis of two FGC facilitating initiatives from the UK and the Netherlands. The use of open ended and semi-structured interviews, and grounded theory inspired analytical techniques allows to link up the practice of conferencing with the abstract terms of Social Quality theory. Results incorporate a three dimensional understanding on how FGCs can contribute to the Social Quality of participants. This includes the positive contribution of the plan resulting from such conferences and of the process of conferencing itself. In addition four central elements are identified that allow for such an approach. Findings are seen most relevant as they might pave the way to a new understanding of how to prepare individuals to face multilayered social risks and problems in European societies.

Keywords: Social Quality, inclusion, empowerment, active citizenship, cohesion, reflexivity

Abbreviations

EFSQ - European Foundation on Social Quality

FGCs - Family Group Conferences

NL - Netherlands

SQ - Social Quality

UK - United Kingdom

List of Figures

Appendix

Table of Content

I. Introduction

In recent years the need for an appropriate perspective to better picture the general well being in Europe was recognized. This would enable decision makers to grasp the complexity and interrelatedness of social and economic issues and the relation of the individual and society in particular (Beck, Van der Maesen & Walker, 1997a, 1997b). As a consequence the concept of Social Quality emerged, grasping a wider picture of social reality that goes beyond narrow, economic measurements of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to assess the quality of life of European citizens and their role within society. The research initiative at hand seeks to develop more insight in how Social Quality can be realized in practice. This is done by applying Social Quality theory to the analysis of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in the Netherlands and the UK. More specifically it will be looked at in how far Family Group Conferences can contribute to the Social Quality of participants. At the same time it will be argued that to analyze such a complex concept, the researcher has to be respondent to its underlying philosophy as well. This requires him to develop an inclusive mindset which manifests itself throughout the research process as a whole.

In the context of existing scientific work considerable progress has been made in theorizing and operationalizing Social Quality to make it applicable to European societies. As an example the complex theory underlying Social Quality has been clarified in great depth by several authors including Beck, Van der Maesen, & Walker (2001) and Ward & Meyer (2009). Other initiatives aimed at identifying and reducing meaningful indicators to make the concept more manageable (Abbott & Wallace, 2012; Meyer, Luong, Ward & Tsourtos, 2010). Besides concentrating on conceptual and operational issues, the need to make the Social Quality approach more applicable to social reality also paved the way for projects and initiatives concentrating on different levels of analysis. In this regard it was applied to urban projects (Van der Maesen & Herrmann, 2012), the field of employment (Nectoux & Van der Maesen, 2003), and the comparative analysis of elderly care systems in the Netherlands and Japan (Uchiyama, 2010).

In the context of contemporary society increasing Social Quality is of central importance since it is seen as the way to address the general wellbeing of the European citizen by strengthening empowerment, reducing exclusion, increasing social cohesion and socio-economic security (Ferriss, 2006). Besides its significance, the utility of Social Quality theory across different socially relevant themes still is to be further elaborated upon. As pointed out by Ward (2007) "the Theory of Social Quality can make sense of theory, policy and practice" (pp.1-2). In this sense it is striven towards developing insights in what sort of initiatives can contribute to Social Quality and how this can be realized in social practice.

The need for an initiative being able to integrate central elements of Social Quality theory directed the attention towards Family Group Conferences (FGCs). Particularly in the child welfare context such initiatives are seen as most innovative (Helland, 2005; Merkel-Holguin, 2003; Quinn Aziz, 2011). In recent years FGCs have been brought into focus of policy makers and scholars alike. In general FGCs can be understood as formal meetings bringing together families, their surrounding social network and professionals to solve a given problem. These

decision-making initiatives are facilitated by an independent that helps the parties to reach a consensus based outcome (Hayes & Houston, 2007). The method originated in New Zealand and is applied to a variety of problems and focus groups including youth & children, the unemployed, the elderly or others and has been seen as relevant in relation to participatory decision making (Healy & Darlington, 2009). Moreover, it proofs effective in a variety of cases as with mobilizing family involvement, child welfare or reducing repeat offending (Helland, 2005; Huntsman, 2006). Authors further suggest that individuals as well as families are empowered and make agencies and families better work together (Holland, Scourfield, O'Neill & Pithouse, 2005; Kiley, 2005), which supports the impression that FGCs might have a meaningful role in contributing to the overall well being and thus Social Quality of citizens in Europe.

In this sense Social Quality theory can picture the role and workings of these initiatives within a wider social policy and social governance related context. As put by Beck et al. (2001) Social Quality theory "would take better account of the social and societal impact of policies and projects" (p.346). What the societal role of FGCs is in terms of Social Quality and how this is achieved will be the focus of this work. Therefore, it will be looked at in how far Social Quality is contributed to in this procedure and what central elements do allow for such an approach. Since these two dimensions are seen as overlapping the author argues that a thorough description of the workings of FGCs will simultaneously deliver insights into the contribution to Social Quality as well as identify underlying principles. This is in accordance with Lin, Ward & Van der Maesen (2009) emphasizing the both descriptive and explanatory character of Social Quality theory. Taking the above mentioned interrelations into account this work aims at answering the following main research question:

In how far can Family Group Conferences contribute to the Social Quality of participants?

For the purpose of this work contributing to Social Quality means to be able to improve the conditional factors of Social Quality for participants in the context of two central tensions between the individual and its' social environment, and between the systems (the formal world) and the lifeworld (the informal world). Since the author argues that the tensions are integrated in the process of conferencing from the outset the so called conditional factors of Social Quality theory will stand central in formulating relevant sub-questions. These consist of participants' *socio-economic security*, *social cohesion*, *social inclusion*, and *social empowerment* (Beck, et al. 2001). Taking these elaborations as a basis the author answers four sub-questions which deal with one of the conditional factors each:

In how far can Family Group Conferences contribute to the socio-economic security/ the social cohesion/ the social inclusion/ the social empowerment of participants?

Yet, it is argued that in order to correctly apply Social Quality theory to the analysis of FGCs, the author has to be aware of the philosophy underlying Social Quality theory as well. This is the case since Social Quality not only is a concept in itself but it can also be understood as a "normative guideline" (Lin, Ward & Van der Maesen, 2009,p. 201). In this sense authors stipulate that "the concept has a comprehensive character, since it attempts to encompass […] processes […] and understand them in a defragmented way" (Beck et al., 1997b, p. 282). Further, Social Quality provides for "a theoretical and practical lens through which academics,

policy makers and practitioners can understand and conceptualize their 'lifeworlds" (Lin et al, 2009, p.202). In this sense it can "narrow the gap between social science research and the decision making process [understood as between theory and practice]" (Beck et al., 1997b, p. 296). Lastly, in relation to Social Quality, "[s]ocial scientists have a duty to communicate their research to a wide body of citizens" (Beck et al., 1997a, p.12). Thus, its philosophical dimension can be summarized in that it firstly seeks to be understood in its comprehensive and defragmented meaning. Secondly, it is meant to bridge policy and practice and thirdly it aims to be communicated to and thus to be made accessible to a wide audience including practitioners and non-scientists. Therefore, it is argued that to work with and communicate such an integrative approach the scientist has to develop an inclusive mindset himself. Inclusive in this sense means to be responsive to and thus to include the philosophical considerations of Social Quality into the research process. Keeping this in mind the author seeks to bridge theory and practice by applying the abstract theory of Social Quality to concrete phenomena in the form of FGCs. Further, he attempts to communicate this research initiative to a wide audience which means to make the material accessible to non-scientists as well. This is achieved by making his reasoning, choices and argumentation explicit throughout the work. Lastly, the defragmented and comprehensive character of Social Quality is safeguarded by striving to grasp the whole picture as often as possible and by seeking to unify the elements of Social Quality rather than to isolate them. In order to stress the importance of this point the author will engage in a fictive dialogue with other scholars. In particular the voices of Baars, Knipscheer, Thomèse & Walker (1997), and Beck, Van der Maesen & Walker (1997a, 1997b) will represent the philosophical dimensions of Social Quality. In contrast to that the voices of Hermann (2006) and Ward & Meyer (2009) are framed as isolating individual elements of Social Quality theory which endangers the comprehensive character of this concept.

In order to answer the research questions, the author integrates inductive and deductive research methods which results in multimethod research. The main reason behind that is that extensive theoretical material on Social Quality is available, however not directly applicable to the analysis of FGCs. To face this dilemma mulitmethod research is seen an appropriate tool (Ali & Birley, 1998; Alaranta, 2006). Further, the need to gain in-depth insights and identify ways of increasing Social Quality leads to the use of a case study approach. In this respect it will be looked at two cases, meaning two conference facilitating initiatives which are originating from the Netherlands (NL) and the United Kingdom (UK). These make use of the same conference model known as Family Group Conferencing (FGC) or "Eigenkracht conferenties" in the Netherlands (Straub, 2012, p.30). In order to deliver knowledge on the general model of Family Group Conferencing, cases will be selected that are based on the model from New Zealand which is verified throughout the analytical process by utilizing secondary literature. The data collection method of choice consists of semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. Data has been analyzed by transcribing the interviews and extracting data relevant to the contribution of conferences to Social Quality. For this purpose a coding scheme as applied in grounded theory approaches has been opted for. This approach results in the identification of relevant categories and themes which are subsequently related to central constructs as found in Social Quality literature and the work of the European Foundation on Social Quality (EFSQ) in particular (Van der Maesen, Keizer, Verklij & Duiveman, 2009). The interlinkage of interview findings and established Social Quality concepts is realized by comparing identified categories with the dimensions of Social Quality established by the EFSQ. Further, it is provided for reasoned arguments on their

interrelatedness which are supported by secondary scientific literature. Due to the need to re-interpret Social Quality theory to fit the analysis of FGCs the author sees general adherence to the constructivist paradigm as more appropriate. As a result his research approach is based on scientific criteria as for example proposed by Bowen (2006). Therefore, instead of adhering to positivist criteria like internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity more constructivist criteria are applied. In this sense the author aims to provide for detailed and thorough descriptions of his research approach throughout the work to make his reasoning visible and subject to review. In the end it is striven towards a plausible and coherent explanation of the phenomena at hand.

In order to deliver an answer to the research questions the following structure will be followed. First of all, the theoretical part will elaborate upon and clarify central theories and concepts. Simultaneously this means to discuss why all central Social Quality elements need to be integrated to arrive at an understanding on how Social Quality can be contributed to in the first place. To illustrate his point the author will discuss the voices of Baars et al. (1997), Beck et al. (1997a, 1997b), Hermann (2006), and Ward & Meyer (2009) in particular. This is followed by the methodological part which will make explicit how the research question is to be answered. The key theme of this section will be to point out why mulitmethod research is deemed necessary to link theory and practice and how deductive and inductive methods can be integrated. After that the analytical section will present the analysis and interpretation of interview data on the two FGC initiatives at hand which simultaneously answers the four sub-questions. Central point of departure will be to show that the contribution to Social Quality is multidimensional and that identifying individual elements as "The Core of Social Quality" is inadequate in this respect (Hermann, 2006, p.292). After that, the concluding section will be directed at answering the main research question and will discuss why the contribution to Social Quality needs to be understood as the result of a variety of elements rather than singling out "*the central value* [emphasis added] in FGCs" (Helland 2005, p.29). A reflective section will then discuss the relevance of and critically engage with the research findings. In a final step it will be reflected upon what it means and why it is necessary to develop an integrative mindset to adequately deal with the concept of Social Quality as demonstrated in this work.

Delivering insights in the applicability of Social Quality theory and how Social Quality can be realized in practice is deemed of high relevance. Social Quality is seen as the way to assess and increase the social wellbeing of European citizens. These face multiple problems of poverty, exclusion, disintegration, alienation and powerlessness - all elements which are addressed by the overarching concept of Social Quality (Beck et al., 1997a). Analyzing FGCs through the theoretical lens of Social Quality is therefore seen as shedding light on how overall Social Quality can be improved in social practice. Therefore, this work seeks to deliver its' contribution towards greater Social Quality in Europe by emphasizing the comprehensive character of this concept and creating knowledge relevant for practitioners, decision makers and scientists alike.

II. The Concept of Social Quality

In order to answer the research questions it has to be discussed what is meant by contributing to Social Quality in the first place which will be the topic of this section. The central point of the

author will be that it can only be contributed to Social Quality when all its central elements are taken into account. His reasoning is strengthened by referring to the work of Beck et al. (1997b) who imagined such an inclusive character in the first publications on Social Quality already. In this sense it will be clarified why the author refrains from imposing more important roles for individual elements of Social Quality as has for example been done by Hermann (2006) by producing an article named: "Social Empowerment – The Core of Social Quality" (p.292). Or by Ward & Meyer (2009) explicating "the centrality of 'trust' for the development and maintenance of 'social quality'"(p.339). In terms of structure, Social Quality theory and the concept of Family Group Conferencing will be introduced separately. After that it will be outlined how the two concepts can be related to each other in particular with regard to the contribution to Social Quality. Finally a concluding paragraph will summarize the key findings.

Identification of the key elements of Social Quality

The theoretical construct standing most central to this research initiative is named Social Quality. Introducing its' underlying model and key aspects is of central importance since the ability of FGCs to improve Social Quality will be described and interpreted in the terms of Social Quality theory. As already mentioned in the introduction the concept of Social Quality is understood as an integrative approach, and is defined as "the extent to which people are able to participate in the social and economic life under conditions which enhance their well-being, capacity and individual potential" (Beck et al., 1997a, p.2).

First of all the theoretical basis of Social Quality is found in the theory of the social. In fact," 'the social' may be interpreted as the outcome of the interaction and dialectic between people and their constructed and natural environment" (Hermann & Van der Maesen, 2008, p.5). Thus, it stipulates that individuals should be perceived "as social beings and not as atomized or isolated entities" (Beck et al. 2001, p.310). This understanding of the social is represented by two main dialectic tensions incorporated in the theory: On the one hand there is the horizontal tension between the formal world of systems and the informal world of families, groups and communities (Walker & Van der Maesen, 2003). On the other hand there is the vertical tension between the biographical/individual development and the societal development (Gasper, Van der Maesen, Truong & Walker, 2008). In the end these two tensions represent the dynamic between self-realization and the formation of collective identities which together determine the specific quality of the social and produce the social world (Gasper et al., 2008; Van der Maesen & Walker, 2002). For analyzing the resulting societal processes the Social Quality approach refers to three interrelated sets of factors: constitutional factors, conditional factors and normative factors (Hermann & Van der Maesen, 2008). The constitutional factors relate to social actors and can be understood as subjective factors. These are to be separated from objective factors which are grasped by the *conditional factors* (Herrmann, 2005). The *normative factors* then indicate the appropriate degree of Social Quality (Beck et al., 1997). As a matter of fact conditional factors can be seen as "rendering the normative factors reachable" (Ward, Meyer, Verity, Gill & Luong, 2011, p.3). Therefore to grasp social reality these factors will stand central in the subsequent analysis as has also been done in previous research initiatives as seen in the work of Uchiyama (2010). Another reason to opt for this set of factors is that the focus of analysis are the FGC initiatives themselves which are following a standardized model to a certain extend. Therefore, more objective terms are seen to be more readily relatable to the case of FGCs. As a result it is more appropriate to base the analysis on more objectified terms instead of

relying on purely subjective concepts which might be more appropriate when analyzing individuals.

Basically, the conditional factors of Social Quality theory can be understood as forming the conditions for Social Quality. In this light, it is theorized that four basic conditions have to be fulfilled in order to enable social relations to develop. First of all, individuals must have access to basic material and non-material resources over time that allow for interaction. This idea is grasped by the notion of *socio-economic security*. Relevant dimensions include financial resources, housing and environment, health and care, work and education. Secondly, *social inclusion* grasps in how far individuals are integrated in social relations of everyday life. In this regard the access to and the quality of various dimensions is included. These refer to citizenship rights, the labour market, services and social networks. Thirdly, community building is based on shared norms and values which is dependent on the strength of social relations between people. This is grasped by the term *social cohesion* that represents the next factor. Dimensions include trust, other integrative norms and values, social networks and identity. Lastly, the notion of *social empowerment* grasps in how far individuals have the necessary means to control their own lives and to influence their environment. Dimensions of this concept include knowledge base, labour market, openness and supportiveness of institutions, public space and personal relationships (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). Due to the sheer number and complexity of the individual dimensions it is not possible to discuss them in detail in this volume. It is rather opted for elaborating further on only those dimensions particularly relevant for the specific research initiative at hand as will be clarified in the analytical part.

The following figure visualizes the interrelations of the mentioned concepts. It further pictures the key elements that stand central in the subsequent analysis which will be addressed when elaborating on the contribution of FGCs to the Social Quality of participants. As a consequence this figure will also proof relevant when picturing the findings drawn from the analysis. The figure is inspired by the work of Beck et al. (2001) and Gasper et al. (2008).

Figure 1: The Social Quality Model and Conditional Factors
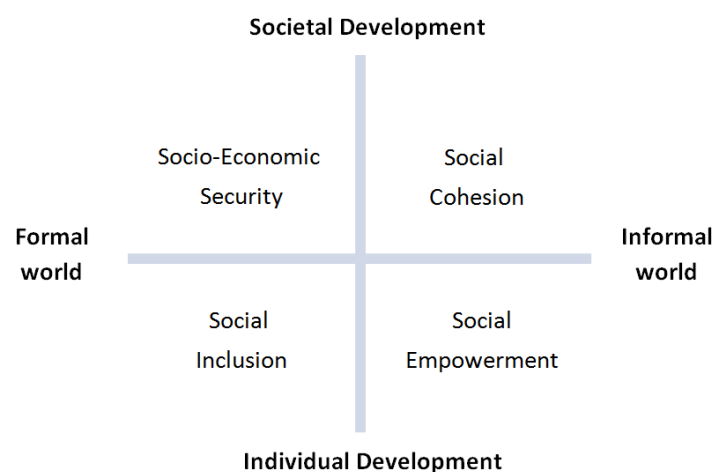
The model of Family Group Conferencing

The second step to grasp the theoretical considerations underlying this work is to introduce the concept of Family Group Conferences (FGCs). Originally FGCs emerged in New Zealand and were meant as a method to address and possibly resolve family issues related to child protection (Straub, 2012). Over, the last decade the model spread to Australia, the US, Canada and many European countries. Although, some variation of FGC models has been found throughout different countries and regions some basic principles are seen to remain constant over time and place. In this sense it is designed as consisting of three main stages. Firstly, relevant individuals are invited by an independent in the preparation phase. Relevant participants consist of all people directly affected by the problem and significant others who also proof valuable for the decision making process. Thus, during this phase formal as well as informal actors are notified and invited who can contribute to the purpose of the conference. Further, an independent facilitator usually engages in preparatory work as well and enlightens the participants on the structure and aim of the conference. In the second phase the conference itself is being held which again consists of three stages. In stage one the independent facilitator will introduce the participants to the problem and will give the word to the professional agent who shares his thoughts and information with the group. Further, support as offered by professionals and the social network of the family is identified and all participants are encouraged to ask questions and gather information. In stage two the family and significant others are left alone so that they are given the possibility to develop a plan on how to solve the problem at hand. Finally, in stage three the plan is discussed by the independent and the formal representatives which re-enter the conference. If deemed sufficient the plan will be ratified and documented and a summary is forwarded to all participants (Huntsman, 2006).

Since conferences are applied to a variety of cases nowadays, the author opts for understanding them in the original sense as related to family issues. These involve youth and child related problems which are not dealt with in a separated manner in this work. Besides, limiting the focus towards this type of conferences is deemed beneficial for the analysis and the interpretation of the findings. For one it allows the researcher to clearly identify the different parties involved in the process. Secondly, the increasing specialization and experimentation with different focus groups and problems might lead to modifications of the original family conferencing model which might greatly vary across different conference facilitating organizations. Therefore, their multitude might be difficult to grasp and to merge into a coherent interpretation. Thus, concentrating on the well known application towards family related issues greatly simplifies the identification of relevant organizations and of essential elements. As a result the concept of FGCs shall be understood as related to the ideal model of conferencing as originated in New Zealand and being applied to family related issues. Adherence to this model will be further assured by including secondary literature during the analysis.

The meaning of "contributing to" Social Quality

Having elaborated and identified the central concepts and theories of this work it is now to point out how Social Quality can be contributed to. Although, developing insight in how FGCs can do so is deemed a task for the research project as a whole, this paragraph is seen as a necessary step to clarify the basic assumptions this work is built on. In addition it has to be elaborated on why it is refrained from granting one of above mentioned elements a special meaning from the outset as

implied by the work of Hermann (2006) and Ward & Meyer (2009). Although, these authors do acknowledge the interrelationship of the conditional factors they seek to impose a special meaning to individual elements of Social Quality. Yet, here it is argued that overemphasizing the importance of individual elements from the outset might jeopardize the inclusive character of Social Quality which stands most central in its underlying philosophy. In this light Beck et al. (1997b) argue that "the concept has a comprehensive character, since it attempts to encompass the outcomes of complex processes of modernization and understand them in a defragmented way" (p.282). Therefore, this work strives at grasping and safeguarding this comprehensive and "defragmented" character of the concept by claiming that to contribute to Social Quality all central elements have to be considered equally. Thus, all conditional factors have to be improved by a given initiative when it is sought to contribute to Social Quality as a whole.

Yet, as stipulated above the conditional factors find themselves in and are realized in the context of two tension fields. For the idea of contributing to Social Quality this means that the interaction of the tensions needs to be included as well. Otherwise the conditional factors could not be looked at in the terms of Social Quality which rests on the interaction of the individual, other individuals and their environment (Hermann, 2005). For the sake of any initiative or process this would mean to let the tensions somehow manifest themselves. Applied to FGCs it is argued that the tensions fields manifest themselves in that actors that represent these tensions are actually present during the process itself and allow the different spheres to interact in this way. Why this is the case will be outlined in the following lines and is applied to the focus on FGCs dealing with family related issued involving youth and child wellbeing. In this sense the youth or child that usually stands central in such conferences can be interpreted as the individual which is surrounded by its' immediate social environment. The ladder is represented by the extended family which consists of the whole network that is supporting the individual. As a consequence this integrates the vertical tension of the biographical and societal development. Moreover, the horizontal tension manifests itself in that the professional who represents the systems and the informal world interact. In this sense, the informal world is represented by the extended family. The notion of extended family includes the child, its family, relatives, friends and any other person that is present to help solve the problem. Therefore, the role of the professional is twofold. On the one hand, he can be interpreted as representative of the systems as stipulated by (Huntsmann, 2006). On the other hand he constitutes a part of the group that aims at solving a given problem, thus can become part of the personal network surrounding the child at the same time. At this point though, it needs to be clarified that the facilitator of the conference is not understood as actor in the same sense. He rather is representing the process itself and it is assumed that ideally he has no interest in the actual outcome of the conference as also noted by Helland (2005).

In order to summarize it may be stipulated that for the purpose of this work contributing to Social Quality shall mean to in any way positively influence the status quo of participants with regard to the conditional factors and in the context of the two central tensions. In this light contributing to Social Quality shall mean to contribute to the *socio-economic security*, *social cohesion*, *social inclusion* and *social empowerment* of participants in the context of the interaction of the formal and the informal world, and the individual and its' social environment. Further, "contributing to" shall be understood broadly as improving, generally furthering, positively influencing or strengthening issues related to the aforementioned conditional factors.

In this section it has been elaborated upon on how the author developed his perspective on assessing the role of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) with regard to contributing to the Social Quality of participants. The point of view and the focus of the author has been explicated by elaborating on the theoretical basis of the Social Quality approach and by engaging with valuable scientific work of well known scholars. In this light it is refrained from focussing on individual factors of Social Quality theory as possibly implied by the work of Ward & Meyer (2009) who seek "to demonstrate the centrality of trust within the Social Quality theory" (p.340). As a matter of fact it is perceived that this might jeopardize the inclusive and defragmented character of the Social Quality concept. Therefore, theoretical elaborations are directed at studying "interventions that enhance social quality in its comprehensive meaning" (Baars et al, 1997, p.305).

III. Methodological Considerations

In this part it will be described how it is sought to arrive at relevant findings that identify the contribution of FGCs to the Social Quality of participants and how this is achieved. The central theme throughout this section will be to point out how the author strives to find a proper balance between deductive and inductive research methods to arrive at scientifically valuable findings. This means that a combination of these approaches is opted for. At the same time however, it will become apparent that the author generally adheres to scientific criteria more located within the constructive paradigm. In terms of structure, it will be shortly pointed out that in order to respect the practical relevance of the research initiative and the defragmented nature of the Social Quality concept, different and partly conflicting scientific paradigms need to be integrated. These elaborations are deemed necessary as the possibility of combining these paradigms are often seen as "two separate and contrary schools of research" (Casebeer & Verhoef, 1997, Describing Approaches section para. 3). After that the method of data collection and method of data analysis will be introduced and elaborated upon. At the end of this chapter the reader will have detailed insights in the underlying methodology on how the research questions are to be answered.

Multimethod research: The balancing act between inductive and deductive methods

To answer the research questions the author builds on existing theoretical material offered by Social Quality theory. As a matter of fact extensive scientific work on Social Quality indicators has been done already, however not applied to the particular issue at hand. As already pointed out by Ali & Birley (1998) this creates a dilemma for the researcher who recognizes that it is not appropriate to create an entirely new theory but that available theory does not fit the research purpose at the same time. In such cases the combination of deductive and inductive methods can be useful (Alaranta, 2006). Related to the case of Social Quality as applied to FGCs this is perceived to be the most suitable way to integrate their contribution into a coherent whole. In addition, it has to be assured that this defragmented "picture of the whole" is clearly relatable to the theory of Social Quality and that it is sensitive to the workings of FGCs at the same time. Clearly, an extensive operationalization of the underlying conditional factors can be drawn from the EFSQ working paper on Social Quality indicators (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). However, these concepts have not been developed for the purpose of analyzing FGCs which results in a number of conceptual difficulties. As a matter of fact it is not clear from the outset how concepts can be interpreted in the context of FGCs or decision-making initiatives in general. In this sense neither is it obvious what concepts are relevant in the first place nor how they can manifest themselves when related to FGCs. All in all, this results in the perception that a purely positivist

approach would be barely realizable or manageable. At the same time however, a purely constructivist approach based on deductive methods might make the integration of a number of different factors into a coherent whole evenly demanding. As a result adopting a flexible approach that utilizes existing scientific work and enables to picture Social Quality as related to FGCs can only be provided by combining deductive and inductive methods resulting in multimethod research. In this light, the author sides with Ali & Birley (1998) in stating that the legitimacy of following such an approach rests on the particular circumstances at hand and that this will guide where the balance between the methods is to be found.

Data collection

Keeping the above mentioned methodological background into account it is opted for conducting case study research. This choice is made since case studies are generally seen appropriate to deliver in depth insights into a given phenomenon (Marvasti, 2004). Therefore, they are especially useful in relation to the deductive stages of this research initiative. In this sense the selection of cases is guided by theoretical as well as practical considerations. Theory wise it is to be clarified that chosen conferences make use of the FGC model as originated from New Zealand. In this way it is assured that the findings of these exemplary cases are relevant for the FGC initiative as a whole. To assure that this indeed is the case FGC facilitating organizations are selected that explicitly state as being based on the aforementioned model or that are involved in a network which explicitly adheres to that one. Additionally, countries are chosen that show a certain standardization of the process. Apart, from that adherence to general FGC elements is assessed as well by integrating secondary literature into the analysis. Practical considerations guiding the case selection are related to the mastery of national languages which is necessary to facilitate interaction with regional organizations. Further, the availability of contact details and the actual willingness to participate in the project are elementary. Lastly, the number of cases to be selected depends on the availability of time and resources. Taking these elaborations into account, two regional FGC facilitating initiatives from the UK and the Netherlands are chosen which apply the FGC model as based on the example of New Zealand (Quinn Aziz, 2011; Straub, 2012). Another question to solve is the method of data collection most appropriate for the initiative at hand. In this sense the method to conduct semi-structured and open ended interviews is seen as most fruitful. This method seems most feasible to identify relevant categories and to directly put information in the context of Social Quality themes. In this sense individuals close to the practice and thus close to social reality can make sense of and interpret Social Quality constructs applied to FGCs. This has the benefit of pre-selecting data relevant for the application of FGCs so that the researcher does not have to speculate on what information might be relevant for drawing conclusions. This approach simultaneously allows for findings to be grounded in reality as interpreted by practitioners which positively contributes to the practical significance of the findings (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). Thus, when taking the limitation on available resources into account it is felt that this data collection method better reflects social reality applied to this research goal than any other approach.

The need to bridge social practice with theory impacts the choice on the appropriate individual to interview as well. Ideally, the interview has to be directed towards all the parties present at such conferences. However, with regard to practical hurdles it is opted for conducting the interviews with regional managers and coordinators of conferences. Thus on the one hand individuals are included that are expected to be able to see the conferences in the context of broader socially

relevant themes and thus to show some familiarity with abstract constructs. On the other hand they also provide for significant insights into the practical workings of and happenings during the conferences. So respondents themselves can be seen to show some capability of bridging theoretical constructs with social reality, which is ideal for the research purposes at hand. Also in terms of question design a compromise between the two partially conflicting methodological needs of deductive and inductive research is to be found. First of all, it is opted for conducting semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. This allows for a certain degree of control by simultaneously allowing for identifying additional and unexpected information as well (Williams, 2006; Yin, 2009). When collecting and analysing data in multimethod research, Ali & Birley (1998) argue that questions and tabulation of data should be atheoretical. Although striving for being as atheoretical as possible there is a need for integrating some constructs into the questions to assure compatibility with Social Quality theory. Without, offering any hints on which concepts or dimensions are relevant, being able to interpret interview data in terms of Social Quality theory is perceived as being extremely unlikely. As an example the concept of social inclusion itself consists of four dimensions and 15 sub-dimensions for which 27 indicators have been identified (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). For one, this approach is seen as legitimate since the alternative to reduce the number of concepts is considered not an option. As related to the philosophical discussion introduced before, the whole idea of Social Quality rests on integrating and interrelating different elements of the social world and will be completely lost by not being sensitive to all elements. Moreover, the perceived danger to guide respondents' thinking so much as to refrain from adding unexpected elements is mitigated by mentioning sub-dimensions as possible examples only. After that respondents are encouraged to tell everything they can think of and to not feel distracted by terms they might not be completely familiar with. The questions are subject to review in Appendix 2.

Data analysis

Naturally, the approach of conducting multimethod research guides decisions relating to the data analysis as well. As has become apparent the data collection method of choice consists of semi-structured interviews. In order to analyse them, they are recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 4). In general the analysis of the interviews can be subdivided into deductive and inductive methods which however are not strictly separated during the analytical process. First of all, a coding scheme helps to identify categories or themes related to the contribution of FGCs to the Social Quality of participants. The coding scheme will make use of three levels of abstraction while the 3rd level reflects the Social Quality concept under consideration which is displayed in Appendix 3. This strategy is inspired by the work of Marvasti (2004) who presents this method in the context of grounded theory approaches. It is simultaneously utilized to explicate which indicators are associated with what concept which also allows the reader to review the interpretations of the author Appendix 5. The appropriate unit for the indicator are whole sentences as to provide for interpreting the findings in some context by also meaningfully explicating the choices the author made. Clearly, this element will represent the deductive part of the analysis. At this point it has to be noted though that the aim is not to arrive at a full grown theory in the end, which is provided by Social Quality theory already. Therefore, choices are made on how many levels of abstraction are needed for the extractions of categories and themes. Keeping this in mind the choice is made to limit the coding scheme to three levels of abstraction which realize the link to the concepts of Social Quality. Due to these restrictions extracted concepts and themes might seem immature in some instances. As a consequence the notions of

categories and themes are used interchangeably throughout this work. This is seen as legitimate since the purpose of the analysis is to only utilize as many levels of abstractions and refinements of categories and themes as are needed to link up the interview findings with the already established conceptualizations. These are provided by the work of the EFSQ as is displayed in Appendix 1. Keeping in mind the existing dimensions these will then be fit to the categories or themes that have been deductively extracted through comparative practices. To link the deductively excavated categories with the already established dimensions it will be made use of several techniques and interpretations. For one the link is established by the author's own interpretation throughout the process. Secondly, respondents interpret the central concepts and as such link provided concepts with social reality as well. Thirdly, the operationalization as provided for by the EFSQ and presented by Van der Maesen et al. (2009) will embody a main guiding tool to relate dimension to the proper categories. Lastly, secondary literature will be utilized to legitimize the final categorizations as deployed by the author and to link interview data with established concepts. For this purpose only scientific sources will be used. As was the case when designing the interviews it is important to reduce the presence of theory when tabulating the data as well (Ali & Birley, 1998). In this work the actual use of theory is reduced to the greatest extent possible. However, as has become apparent above, central constructs of Social Quality influence the actual coding of data meaning that deductive and inductive stages are overlapping and are performed simultaneously at some stages of the analysis.

Reflection on the research criteria

Although it may be stipulated that this work integrates research methods associated with positivist as well as constructivist paradigms the author generally adheres to the constructivist one to a greater extent. As a matter of fact this work builds on the subjective interpretations of reality from the outset in stating that subjective interpretations of Social Quality are necessary to make it adaptable to a variety of social phenomena and social practice in particular. Clearly, this would stand in contrast to positive principles in that it negates the universal applicability of established Social Quality concepts. Instead, they have to be re-interpreted depending on the phenomenon at hand. Keeping this in mind it is largely adhered to constructivist assessment criteria as well. In this sense it is aimed at presenting a plausible and coherent argument to the reader as was also suggested by Bowen (2006). This is sought to be realized by providing thorough descriptions of the authors' theoretical considerations, methods, analysis and conclusions. This is meant to explicate the underlying assumptions and reasoning to allow the reader to critically engage with the work at hand. Furthermore, the arguments are strengthened by integrating secondary literature throughout the analysis which is also meant to link findings to the general model underlying FGCs. Naturally, this is deemed a necessary step as to assure that the findings are relatable to other initiatives that facilitate such conferences. How applicable the findings are towards other initiatives will however depend on in how far they are based on the model of FGCs as originated in New Zealand as introduced above and clarified in the analytical part.

This section has made clear that the multimethod approach stands central to the research initiative at hand. It is reasoned on why this method is deemed appropriate when seeking to resolve the central research questions in accordance with the defragmented character of Social Quality theory. It further related the implications of multimethod research to the topics of data collection and data analysis and made clear that the author generally adheres to constructivist

approaches in terms of applied research criteria. Taking the above elaborations into account the author sites with Alaranta (2006) by stating that for the purpose at hand "multimethod research is necessary to deal effectively with the full richness of the real world" (p.5).

IV. Analysis

Having been guided through the theoretical and methodological parts of this work it is now to consider the analysis of the interview findings. The central theme of this section will be to show the interrelatedness of the conditional factors when it comes to the contribution of FGCs to the Social Quality of participants. In this sense it will become apparent that FGCs can indeed contribute to the individual factors of Social Quality and how they do so. At the same time however, it is stressed that the factors seem mutually influential which supports the philosophical discussion on the relevance of grasping the defragmented character of Social Quality theory. In terms of structure the four conditional factors of Social Quality theory will be presented separately resulting in four central paragraphs. Each paragraph will present key data from the interviews and relate them to the conceptual frame as provided by Social Quality literature. This frame will be delivered by the EFSQ as for example presented in the work of Van der Maesen et al. (2009). The paragraphs will then conclude with a summarizing figure which displays the contribution of FGCs to the respective factor. Thus it provides for the direct link towards the theoretical frame as introduced before. In the figures this interrelation will be visualized by red lines. After that a final paragraph will interpret the findings and deliver an answer to the four sub-questions as formulated in the introductory part.

Contributing to Socio-Economic Security: The final plan

The first conditional factor to look at is called *socio-economic security*. As a consequence the leading question to extract relevant categories is to ask the question in how far conferences support participants in acquiring basic material and immaterial needs that allow for social interaction over time (Hermann, 2004; Van der Maesen et al., 2009). The interpretation of interview data related to the first conditional factor is highly difficult since no proper organization of the findings seems apparent from the outset. When taking into account reference material from Social Quality theory it is suggested to group such needs under the dimensions of financial resources, housing and environment, health and care, work, and education (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). However, when analyzing respondents' answers it soon becomes clear that such a differentiation seems not appropriate when applied to FGCs as made clear by the following statement.

"Conferences do not really deal with the topics people have problems with. So if there are multiple problems we do not single out a specific field."

Although respondents refer to issues of housing, financial security and the other dimensions this is most probable due to mentioning these dimensions in the interview. This was meant to give the respondents a reference point but seems to have put their attention too extensively on these examples. In general, it becomes apparent that the precise contribution of conferences seems to rest on the specific problems individuals are faced with which vary from case to case. Therefore, rendering the contribution as only being relevant to specific fields of individual wellbeing does not make sense. Rather, issues addressed can be rallied under the idea of individual problems

which are assumed to negatively affect the socio-economic wellbeing of participants. Additionally, respondents refer to the whole process of solving that problem and rather associate the whole process and the plan which comes out of the conferences as contributing to the wellbeing of participants. This idea is reoccurring throughout the interviews and also manifests itself for example in the following extract.

"We are there to support organizing the conference, enlarging the network, enable people to make their plan they come up with and to make it workable and smart."

In this sense "their plan" is seen as the way to contribute to the socio-economic security of participants which is the product of a number of different processes like "organizing conferences" "enlarging the network", "enable" individuals and helping them to make it "workable and smart" which means that there is some kind of support offered to them. In addition it is noted that people are enabled to make their own plan which implies that at least to a certain extent participants indeed have to develop a plan themselves which in fact is typical for the workings of FGCs (Harris, 2008). All in all, it is made use of different processes that are rather of a general kind and directed towards all sorts of unspecified problems than being clearly relatable to individual dimensions of socio-economic security. As a matter of fact the process seems to have effects on all conditional factors of Social Quality as is stipulated in the following extract.

"So to say in which way we contribute to socio-economic security I think it is more like a long-term investment. Those children if they have been in a conference, have a bigger network, which is also in difficult times supporting them and make it possible for them to be more self-reliant"

Clearly, this answer integrates the elements of "bigger network[s]" that is associated with social inclusion and which is "supporting" and therefore related to the cohesive elements between participants. In addition it is made "possible for them to be more self-reliant" which reminds of enabling individuals associated with the issue of empowerment. Yet, at the same time the respondents include the condition that these elements are apparent "if they have been in a conference". At this point it has to be noted that all these elements will be clarified in depth in the following paragraphs. However, for now it is essential to summarize that first of all, respondent's answers are not clearly to categorize but resolve around the whole process of conferencing. Secondly, even when considering the conceptualization of the EFSQ as presented by Van der Maersen et al. (2009) it becomes obvious that the articulated elements can be rather associated with all four conditional factors than with one. Thirdly, respondents associated the idea to improve the socio-economic situation of participants with the problem to be solved which stands central in the conference. Thus the problem is perceived to be *socio-economic security* related and is solved by the plan that comes out of the conference. Taking these aspects together it is decided to interpret the actual plan as the manifestation of the attempt to increase the socio-economic security of participants which itself integrates elements of all conditional factors. Besides being based on the interview observations this interpretation is in accordance with Social Quality literature in that the conditional factor of socio-economic security indeed interrelates with the other conditional factors (Keizer, 2004). Moreover, it is stipulated that the precise interrelations of the conditional factors might vary depending on the issue they are utilized for (Beck et al., 2001), and that "relevant indicators of social quality should be very flexible and should be connected with the context under discussion" (Beck et al., 2001, p.352).

All in all, conferences do not contribute to specific elements as envisaged by Social Quality literature. The contribution seems to be more of a general kind by creating a plan that ideally solves a problem which negatively affects the Social Quality of participants. Therefore, the actual contribution to the *socio-economic security* and thus also to Social Quality rests on the whole process of conferencing that develops such a plan. The plan is based on the nature of the problem and is therefore tailor-made and fit to the individual circumstances. This is also supported by the fact that participants are meant to develop the plan themselves. In the forthcoming sections it will be clarified that this inherits elements related to the other three conditional factors as well. Thus, keeping in mind the above discussion and relation to Social Quality theory, the finding is that FGCs can contribute to the *socio-economic security* of participants by letting them develop a plan on how to solve a related problem. The plan seems to be the product of elements related to *social inclusion*, *social cohesion* and *social empowerment* which needs further specification in the following paragraphs. What is remarkable though is that the actual plan is not ready made but actually formulated by the participants themselves. The above mentioned findings related to Social Quality theory can be summarized by the following figure to deliver a first overview.

Figure 2: The contribution to Socio-Economic Security related to Social Quality theory
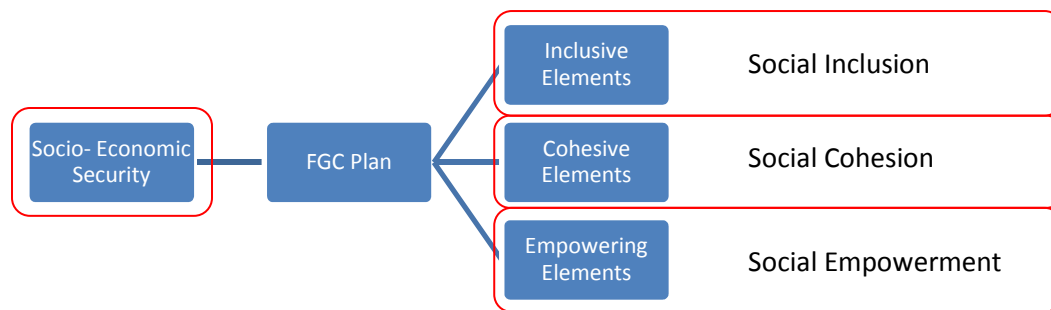
Contributing to Social Inclusion: Not only including in but also creating networks

Secondly, it shall be elaborated on the concept of *social inclusion* which is associated with in how far FGCs impact on the integration of participants in social relations of everyday life. In particular this relates to the access to networks, institutions and services as inspired by the work of the EFSQ (Van der Maesen et al., 2009; Walker & Wigfield, 2004). When analyzing the collected material it becomes apparent that the information provided can best be summarized by dividing the idea of inclusion into the separate categories of *access to informal networks* and *access to formal networks*. As elaborated upon in the theoretical part of this work the formal world is associated with the world of the systems and organizations while the informal world concentrates on the unorganized lifeworld including networks of friends and family. Building on this differentiation it is found that conferences and the coordinator in particular grant the individual access to informal networks by essentially enlarging them which is a subject stressed by respondents clearly:

"We involve the extensive family so that maternal and paternal family are put together. We involve friends, natives, the church-anyone that could help support the family."

"Then we come to people, persons who would never have been invited by the initial person you start with. So [...] you make the group bigger."

As becomes apparent in the above extracts the coordinator builds a network around the individual and includes actors that go beyond the initial family of the individual or child that faces a certain problem. First of all, what triggers attention is the high degree of flexibility regarding the constellation of this network by inviting anyone "that could help support the family", as noted by respondents. Secondly, this amounts to significantly enlarging the existing and thus giving access to a bigger informal network if needed. So in a way this means creating a new network which consists of actors that have not been involved before. This principle can also be confirmed by academic literature as in the work of Velen & Devine (2005). Another point is that access to the formal network, thus to the systems is provided by *involving professionals* which are also seen as representatives of services and the formal world in general. In this sense they are interpreted to fulfil a dual role in that they can be part of the informal network as a social actor that supports in solving a problem. At the same time however they represent and act in the interest of a certain organization.

Naturally, the access of public services is a complex concept in itself as for example explicated by Rosenheck & Stolar (1998), and Claessens (2006). Although possibly not sufficient, the interaction of individuals and services is seen as a helpful element in gaining access to services which legitimizes this interpretation of the findings. Thus, for the purpose of this work the inclusion of professionals into the conferences is interpreted as letting services directly interact with the participants. Naturally, the inclusion of the precise service the professional is associated with is highly flexible as well. In this sense respondents refrain from limiting their answer to involving certain services but rather keep on providing examples on who could be involved in principle. As an example it is stated that housing professionals would be involved if there was a problem on housing related issues or that child protection services could be involved in the case of child abuse as also noted by Pannell & Burford (2000). When it comes to the issue of *providing information,* the issues of information on rights and entitlements and how to access services also are re-occurring themes as mentioned by respondents. As a consequence the method of *providing information* appears relevant for the issue of *social inclusion* as well since general information on access, rights and entitlements clearly is associated with this factor when taking into account the categorization as provided for by the EFSQ (Van der Maesen et al.,2009).

All in all, *social inclusion* is contributed to by granting the individual access to informal and formal networks. *Access to informal networks* is considered by enlarging the network of the individual which creates new, bigger networks consisting of more actors. *Access to formal networks* is achieved by *providing information* on rights and entitlements and on how to access services in general. In addition to that *involving professionals* offers access in that they directly interact with the participants. The constellation of the network is flexible and tailor-made to the problem at hand. Thus, main findings can be attributed to the inclusion in private family networks and to services which are included under the terms of services and social networks according to the EFSQ. However, besides *providing information* no direct contribution could be identified relating to citizenship rights and labor market related issues which are named in the work of the EFSQ. Yet again the provision of information is rather associated with the general theme of *furthering knowledge* which is understood as an aspect of *social empowerment* (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). Thus, according to the findings it is suggested that conferences

contribute to the *social inclusion* of participants by actually creating and mobilizing a network around problem holders. In addition they grant knowledge on formal access by giving information which is an aspect of *social empowerment*. The network embraces all actors that are expected to contribute to a possible solution of the problem at hand, including actors of the formal network which furthers access to the systems. Thus, the surprising insight is that conferences not only integrate individuals by facilitating access to existing networks but also seem to create new ones at the same time. The above findings can be summarized by the following figure.

Figure 3: The contribution to Social Inclusion related to Social Quality theory
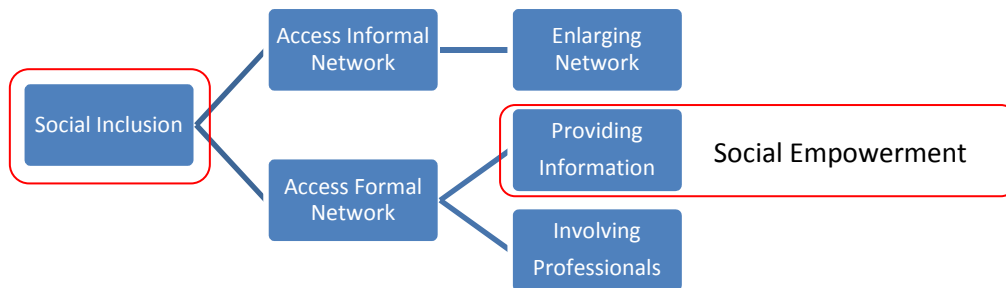
Contributing to Social Cohesion: The central role of communicative interaction

Thirdly, conferences are found to also contribute to the *social cohesion* of participants which is generally associated with issues related to community building (Berman & Philips, 2004; Van der Maesen et al., 2009). Thus, in this work *social cohesion* as applied to the topic at hand is interpreted as in how far FGCs contribute to developing the strength of social relations among participants. To this end the information deducted from the interviews can best be summarized by building on the communicative basis between participants. As a consequence the contribution of FGCs can be described by distinguishing between the practices of *preparing interaction* and *promoting interaction* and are facilitated by the coordinator of the conferences. The term *preparing interaction* shall reflect that the appropriate conditions for interaction are set so that participants can interact with each other in a positive sense. For the remainder of this work the idea of positive interaction shall be generally understood as engaging in a peaceful dialogue that represents a form of interaction that involved parties are comfortable with. Another point is that the term of *preparing interaction* considers the situation before the actual discussion on a given problem starts. The relevance of preparatory work to ensure good dialogue is also identified by other authors like Helland (2005). Central to this stand the methods of *restoring relations*, thus resolving past conflicts and *providing information* on how the process works and what is expected of participants. Another, step to prepare for interaction is *enabling interaction* itself. Thus, to allow individuals to participate which simultaneously means *responding to individual needs*. Further, the right conditions for interaction from the perspective of the whole group are created in the form of *responding to collective needs*.

 First of all, the category of *responding to individual needs* centers around the individual and aims at enabling the individual to participate in the conferences. This very central element has been deemed elementary by other authors as well who state that FGCs utilize various methods to enable full participation of all individuals (Quinn Aziz, 2011). Indeed individuals perceived themselves as enabled and having a voice in such conferences as well (Holland et al., 2005). An

exemplary extract of the interviews is presented in the following which is related to enabling small children and others with limited capacities to participate:

"When they cannot do it on their own we always look for somebody who can support them in telling what they want. If they can't tell it they can write it down and it can be read for them. If someone has a real problem being in that group we use a video conference. So there are different ways of bringing their ideas and opinions but everybody has a voice and is heard in that conference."

Thus, there are different methods to enable individuals to participate. As suggested by respondents these are highly flexible and adapted to the individuals' needs. Even when it comes to collective needs the same principle of flexibility applies in exploring what works best for the participants. Therefore, examples offered by respondents ranged from cultural to linguistic needs and from providing the right environment for conferencing to letting families simply interact with their own methods. This general tendency to satisfy collective needs to enable participation was also identified by Helland (2005) and thus stands central to the principles of FGCs. This was also perceived by families engaged in the process (Thomas, Cohen and Berrick, 2003). As expressed during the interviews the key message with regard to the families as well as individuals seems to be that "they understand quite clearly that we take into account what their needs are".

The category of *promoting interaction* can also be divided into several sub-categories. It distinguishes itself from the preparation of interaction in that the interaction of the individuals themselves are influenced and directed by forces inherent in the conferences. These can be for example attributable to the role of the coordinator or general principles of the process itself. In addition it describes the interaction of individuals during the main phase of the conference that discusses the central problem and not preparatory issues. Again the category is value laden since it is strived for promoting positive interaction which has been touched upon above already. This relates to promoting basic communicative principles that create a common baseline on which to build interaction. The principle of consent and other collaborative norms are included as well which are inherent in the general model and philosophy underlying FGCs (Quinn Aziz, 2011). In addition respondents claimed that other norms and values that generally aim at assuring that people do not speak over one another, that there is no shouting or blaming and that there is respect for each other are included. These values steering interaction are sometimes referred to as ground rules or basic rules which are set by the participants and the coordinator and may therefore also vary from occasion to occasion according to the respondents. These ground rules thus create a common normative set for the participants to act upon.

When relating the findings to the conceptualization of *social cohesion* as found in the work of the EFSQ it becomes apparent that the elements of *enabling participation* and *providing information* are rather attributable to the factor of *social empowerment* since they center around increasing the capabilities of individuals. In addition the notions of *trust*, *identity* and *other integrative norms and values* also play a central part in the conceptualization of the ESFQ which need to be related to the interview findings as well (Van der Maesen et al., 2009). Further, the concept of *social networks* is mentioned, which will not be further dealt with since it was included under the idea of *access to networks* under *social inclusion* already. The notion of *integrative norms and values* in the form of basic rules are directly integrated by the conference

coordinator and the family which has been discussed above and is thus directly observable in the interview data. The complex of *trust* and *identity* however is integrated into the findings as set out in the following lines. First of all, both terms will not be dealt with separately since interview data provided for no detailed clues on if these issues are addressed or promoted differently. As a matter of fact both concepts can be promoted by creating a sense of belonging, togetherness and common purpose (Deaux, 2001; Gausdal, 2007; Tanis & Postmes, 2005). This was also expressed during the interviews:

 "When there is a situation where you need help and you need help for the child in this case, there are a lot of people that want to help. And that is a binding thing between this group. That is the starting point to meet and to be a group because there is a shared interest."

These elements are grouped under the theme of *sense of unity* in this work and where also found as typical for FGCs as articulated by other authors. Some explicated a "sense of belonging" and "being connected", or "increased family unity" (Helland, 2005, pp.35-39). As a matter of fact *identity* and *trust* greatly influence communicative practices between individuals which makes it appropriate to relate these concepts to furthering communication and general interaction among participants (Webster & Wong, 2008) Although, a sense of *identity* and *trust* can be promoted by the above mentioned methods it has to be notified that these are extraordinary complex concepts in itself that cannot be discussed extensively in this volume. In terms of *trust* indicators identified roughly relate to "interpersonal trust" between participants as for example formulated by Webster & Wong (2008, p.45). Considering *identity* it has to be noted that it is focused on the idea of "social identity" understood as group identity as for example used by Webster & Wong (2008, p.43). To gain more detailed insights it is referred to the authors mentioned before and others like Fiol (2002) and Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer (1998) that extensively elaborate on these topics. Other, ways to further *trust* are deemed to rest on "connections", "communication" and "direction" as proposed by Gausdal (2012, pp.13-14). As expressed through the foregoing elaborations on *social cohesion* and *social inclusion* people are indeed connected to a certain extent. They also have common communicative principles and a common goal which gives them direction. Therefore, *trust* creating processes could for example also be related to the creation of networks around the individual which however was discussed under the topic of *social inclusion*. In addition, *trust* and communication seem to be mutually influential which further complicates the issue (Webster & Wong, 2008). To prevent misinterpretations readers shall be aware of these complexities. The choice to elaborate on *trust* under the umbrella of *social cohesion* has been made on grounds of the guidelines as provided by the conceptualization of conditional factors of the EFSQ (Van der Maesen et al., 2009).

As a result it may be summarized that conferences contribute to *social cohesion* by creating conditions for involving participants into a communicative dialogue. This is achieved by preparing the conferences and empowering individuals to participate. Further, flexibility is provided as to adapt to collective and individual needs. Lastly, basic rules, *trust* and a sense of *identity* is promoted to further positive interaction. In this regard the central finding is that conferences act as facilitating initiatives that provide for the right conditions for interaction. However, the whole practice of communicating and working together on the collective aim is done by the participants themselves which in turn seems to develop cohesion. So when given the right conditions, cohesion seems to develop by itself. The above findings can be summarized by the following figure.

Figure 4: The contribution to Social Cohesion related to Social Quality theory
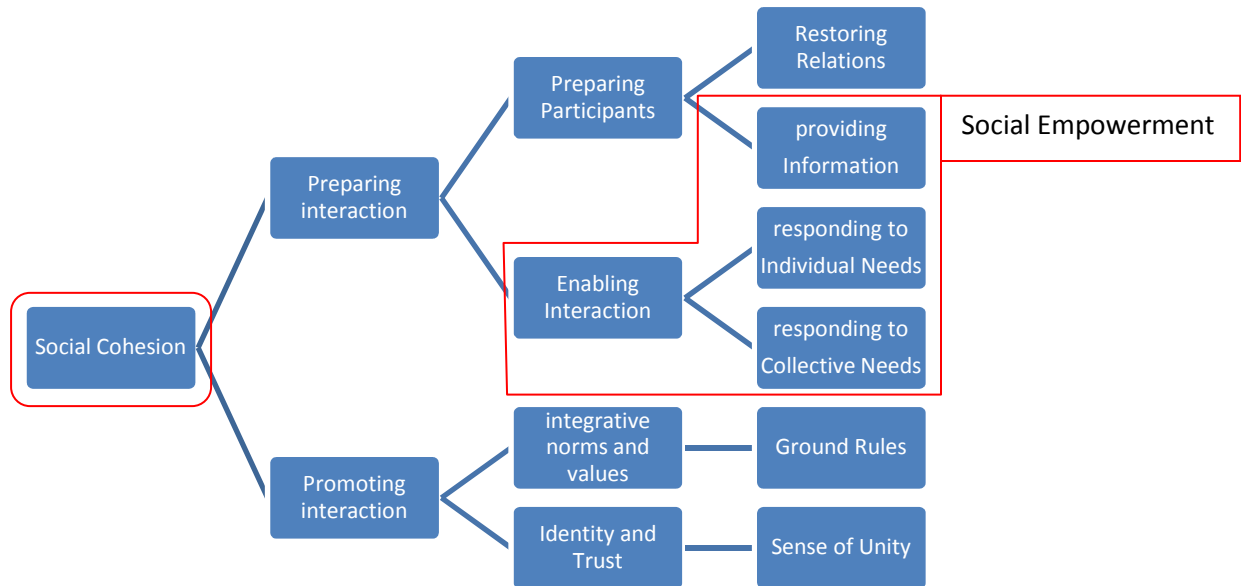
Contributing to Social Empowerment: Enabling individuals and reducing power differences

Fourthly, conferences are seen to have a role in contributing to the *social empowerment* of participants which is understood as in how far the capability of participants to act is enhanced by FGCs (Hermann, 2006; Van der Maesen, 2009). Taking into account interview responses it seems as if contribution can best be summarized by concentrating on the two categories of *empowering individuals*, and *empowering the informal world* as a whole. For one, participants are empowered by *increasing capabilities*. This means that the conferences themselves or processes within the conferences increase what the individual is able of. Relevant contributions can be subdivided into the categories of *furthering knowledge* and *providing assistance* understood as all sorts of general support. *Furthering knowledge* relates to the general *provision of information* and to letting participants gain experience through participation in the conferences. Especially the method to offer information to participants is found to be a reoccurring theme that proofs relevant throughout the interviews and with relation to several conditional factors. The centrality of *providing information* to family members was recognized by Quinn Aziz (2011) as well and stands central to the process of conducting FGCs. However, respondents do not specify what kind of information is given. Instead the provision of information seems flexible and may include general information, information on access, information on rights and entitlements and preparatory information as seen in the sections above. Beyond that the issue of *giving experience* is identified as another method to further knowledge of participants. In this light the actual process of conducting a conference seems to offer individuals a certain degree of experience which was also found by Holland et al. (2005) when addressing democratic principles. Respondents confirmed this basic idea of having a learning effect as pointed out in the interview:

"*It is going to be easier for them to recognize the situation they have had problems with and to recognize the situation where they need assistance from their network. In that way I think the*

chance for them to avoid dropping back into a problematic situation is bigger. So one side is that you give them experience and you brace them for the future to face their problems."

Yet, again when considering the remaining material of the interview it seems as if the mere experience of conferencing is impacting on individuals in a variety of ways and at the same time hardly relatable to a specific theme or idea. In this sense it is framed by the respondents as teaching individuals a sense of taking responsibility of their own problems, learning to be self-reliant to tackle their problems and learning and becoming aware of their own and their networks' strength. These elements surrounding the problem solving capabilities of individuals have also been found by Helland (2005). In addition participants are even known for actually feeling capable of taking more responsibility over their own life (Quinn Aziz, 2011). The second theme relevant for individual empowerment is the theme of *individual assistance* which appears to overlap with the issue of *responding to individual needs* as introduced in the former paragraph and may been seen as sufficiently addressed. To recall, this category revolves around supportive measure that allow the individual to participate and is adapted to the individuals' needs.

However, when it comes to *empowering the informal world* as a whole more elaboration is needed. Before diving into further analysis it has to be noted that the actual decision or plan that comes out of the conference will be regarded as the central symbol of power because it is this plan that defines what will happen to the individuals and how the problem is being solved. Therefore, elaborating on the theme of empowerment means to also focus on who actually has control over the plan. When further analyzing the interview data it becomes apparent that relevant indicators circle around the issues of shielding the informal world from formal dominance, which can be sub-divided into *functional separation* and *spatial separation*. First of all the idea of *shielding against dominance* is relevant for *social empowerment* since the author sides with Holland et al. (2005) stating that the informal world is threatened to be dominated by the systems by nature. Therefore, any processes countering this domination would simultaneously mean that the possibilities to control individuals' own lives is enhanced thus people are empowered. Keeping this in mind the idea of *functional separation* shall reflect the clear division of responsibilities when it comes to the formulation of the final plan. Throughout the interviews it is repeatedly emphasized that "ultimately it is their [the extended family] plan and they need to own it and to work with it". In addition to that it is made clear that the actual plan should be the product of the families, that responsibilities are clearly divided and that it is the view of the families that are expressed through the plan. These elements come up in the following extract of the interviews:

"The plan which comes out of the conference is really the plan of the family. There has no professional been involved in making the plan. Yes they have been involved in informing beforehand and to share their concerns-maybe to set some boundaries. But it is really clear what is and what should not be the responsibility of professionals."

These elements stressing the responsibility or control of the extended family over the process have been confirmed by other authors as well (Harris, 2008). Thus, although professionals have a high decision making power over the acceptance of the plan it is argued that families are empowered as they are involved in decisions that would normally have been made by professionals alone. As a matter of fact this is also felt by participating families (Schmid & Goranson, 2003). In addition it is argued that the *spatial separation* of granting the family

private time also safeguards from professional influence. Another method to empower the informal world is to actually connect the two worlds which reduces their typically hierarchical relationship and is grasped under the label *connecting worlds*. In the end this mitigates the prevalent power differential (Quinn Aziz, 2011), and gives extended families more opportunity to negotiate and compromise over the outcomes. This is done by *promoting interaction* between the professionals representing the formal and the extended families representing the informal worlds as also notified in the interviews:

"It is very important that it is also a plan by the professionals. Not being made by the professionals but the professionals are agreeing. There should be this dialogue."

"So the system is much more working together; the professional system and the private system, there is a bridge"

This idea of making professionals and families cooperate and improving their relation was also found by Helland (2005) and Quinn Aziz (2011). Simultaneously, as was outlined above the issue of communication and collaboration also creates *trust* between the parties engaged, including professionals. This would mean that *trust* in the professionals present at the conferences could translate into *trust* into the system as a whole (Ward, 2007). Finally, it may be stipulated that the informal world is empowered by materializing their work into a plan that actually is transferred and is dispersed among involved organizations. In this respect respondents even stated that "[i]f there is a good plan then it can be accepted by a judge if there is a judge involved". Yet at this point it has to be argued that the general acceptance or the precise legal impact of these decisions still varies among national and even sub-national authorities in Europe to a large extent (Straub, 2012). Clearly, this topic would require further research on individual legal frameworks which exceeds the capacities of this work and cannot be discussed in depth.

When relating above findings to the conceptualization of *social empowerment* it becomes apparent that most dimensions are not directly integrated into the above picture. As a matter of fact the work by (Hermann, 2004) stipulated that empowerment consists of dimensions related to "access", "participation" and "control" (p.28). However it is argued that access and participation has been sufficiently dealt with when elaborating on *social inclusion* already. Therefore, it is referred to Berman & Phillips (2004) who acknowledge the interrelationships of factors but opt to choose the most appropriate location for the purpose at hand. Thus it is concentrated on individual control as related to individual capabilities to influence one's existence. Apart from that, it becomes apparent that elements attributed to *social cohesion* seem to build a bridge between formal and informal worlds by letting them engage in collaborative communication and interaction and also building *trust* in this respect. In order to summarize, *social empowerment* is mainly contributed to by focusing on two levels: The individual and the collective level of the informal world. When it comes to the empowerment of the individual, conferences increase the knowledge base of individuals and enable them to participate. Related to the informal world however, conferences' contribution seems to centre around counterbalancing the natural dominance of the formal system by clearly separating professional from informal responsibilities and by connecting both worlds in a cooperative sense. This is achieved by promoting cohesiveness through collaborative interaction and by actually transferring the families' plan into the professional world. In this light it seems remarkable that FGCs being promoted by an organizational initiative they themselves seem to actively acknowledge and counter-balance the

power differential between the formal and informal worlds. The above findings can be summarized by the following figure. Due to spatial considerations the themes of *providing information* and *giving experience* as aspects of *furthering knowledge* were not visualized.

Figure 5: The contribution to Social Empowerment related to Social Quality theory
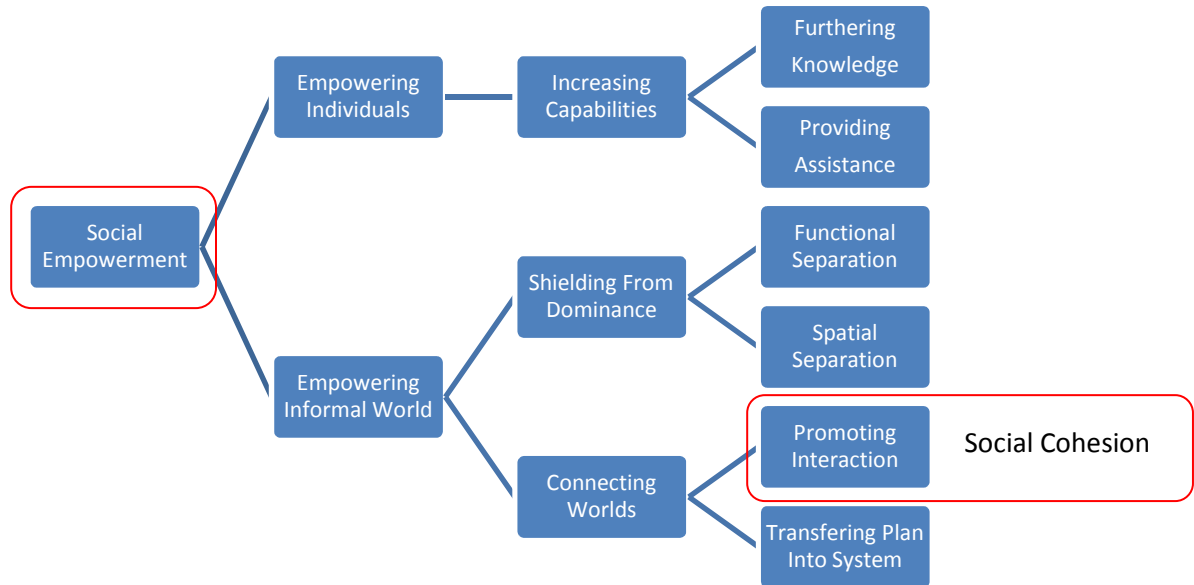
Conclusion

This section sought to elaborate on how FGCs contribute to the Social Quality of participants by focusing on the four conditional factors. The information will now be summarized to deliver an answer to the related sub-questions as mentioned in the introductory section. The main research question however, will be answered in the next section. Keeping this in mind, *socio-economic security* is furthered by creating a plan that deals with the specific problems individuals are faced with. *Social inclusion* is contributed to by providing access to formal as well as informal networks. This is done by creating a network around the individual and the problem that stands central. In addition participants are provided with information on access which increases their capabilities to act, thus it empowers them at the same time. *Social cohesion* is furthered by providing conditions needed for positive interaction which has been associated with a collaborative and peaceful dialogue between participants. Given this frame participants can develop interpersonal bonds, *identity* and mutual *trust* throughout the whole process which includes the professionals involved. Lastly, *social empowerment* is furthered by letting participants formulate a plan that reflects them taking a decision on their own fate. To make this possible individuals are enabled to take part in the process and to make informed decisions. Further, informal actors (the extended family) are shielded against formal dominance. At the same time both worlds are combined by letting them collaborate, transfer and communicate the plan to formal actors; resulting in the transaction of the families' words into formal reality (ideally).

As has become apparent so far the concepts seem interrelated which has been identified and put forward by other authors as well (Berman & Philips, 2004; Van der Maesen et al., 2009; Walker & Wigfield, 2004). When reflecting on the discussion as introduced before this means that the

authors' position of refraining to grant most important or highlighted roles to individual factors is supported in the analysis. Yet the contrary appears to be implied by the work of Hermann (2006) and Ward & Meyer (2009). Admittedly, it was found that in quantitative terms most themes can be identified for empowerment. Yet it is argued that although this factor appears to be most prevalent in this regard this does not reflect importance or centrality at the same time. As visualized in the figures, the factors are interrelated and seem mutually depended. As an example the full potential of *social empowerment* is not reached without satisfying elements related to *social cohesion*; at least when it comes to the analysis of FGCs. The need to understand Social Quality as a comprehensive, defragmented concept and as being promoted by following evenly comprehensive approaches will be further clarified in the following section.

## V. The Contribution of FGCs to Social Quality: Three Dimensions

The purpose of this section is to deliver an answer to the main research question as introduced in the beginning of this work. It will be answered by elaborating on in how far FGCs are found to contribute to Social Quality of participants which will build on the findings elaborated upon in the foregoing analytical part. With relation to the aforementioned philosophical discussion it will be further shown why it is sensible to not overtly emphasize individual elements. In this section however the central discussion partner does not argue from the perspective of Social Quality but FGC related literature and claims that "participation is perhaps the central value in FGCs" (Helland 2005, p.29). In the following lines it will be clarified that such notions can fragmentize the comprehensive character of the contribution of FGCs to Social Quality which limits the understanding of this phenomenon. In order to improve the understandability of the findings it is looked at the contribution of FGCs from two slightly different perspectives. First of all, the respective contribution of FGCs is grasped by looking at the final plan that emerges out of the conference as the way to solve a given problem. Secondly, the actual process of producing that plan is interpreted as central mechanism to produce Social Quality for the participants. Subsequently, it will be elaborated on central elements or principles that cut across the contribution of each of the *conditional factors* as identified in the analysis. In that sense they are elementary in realizing Social Quality for participants. These three pars together are then integrated and seen to answer the central question in how far FGCs can contribute to the Social Quality of participants.

How the final plan can contribute to the Social Quality of participants

As has been found in the previous steps, conferences result in a plan on how to solve a given problem which is interpreted as being related the *socio-economic security* of the individual(s) in most cases. Thus, it is seen as being a problem that is related to the individuals' basic material and immaterial needs that allow for social interaction. Conferences thus contribute to overall Social Quality by improving the individuals' socio-economic situation and solving a related problem. Therefore and keeping in mind the discussion in the previous section the author interpreted the decision-making process of FGCs as a problem solving initiative directed at the *socio-economic security* of individuals. To solve the given problem a network is created around the problem and the individual(s) directly affected by that problem (*social inclusion*). The network is then given the task to collectively create a plan on how to solve that problem. To

make this possible people are enabled to participate in the conference and are given necessary information to make an informed decision (*social empowerment*). Collaborative interaction itself is then promoted to arrive at a collective outcome based on everybody's consent (*social cohesion*). The complex of *social integration*, *social cohesion* and *social empowerment* thus ultimately results in a plan improving the *socio-economic situation* of the individual(s) and satisfying the interests of all parties involved. In order to summarize this idea the findings can be pictured in figure 6. It has to be noted though that the *conditional factors* are complex, multidirectional and interrelated and that the following figure only represents a greatly simplified picture in order to make the findings more comprehensible.

Figure 6.: The contribution of FGCs to Social Quality by producing a plan
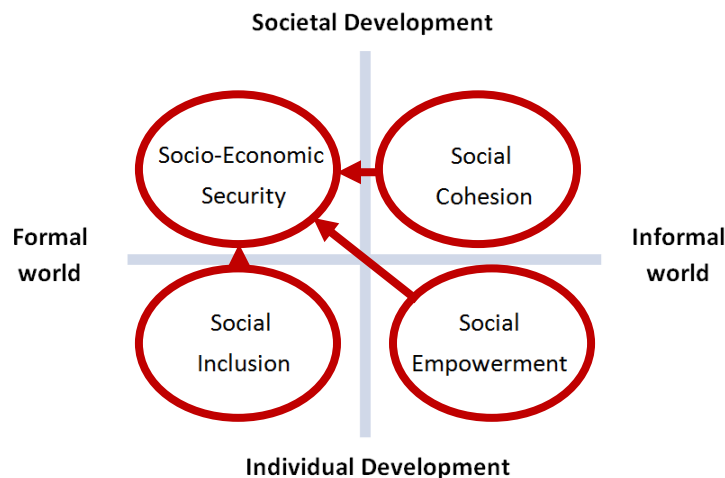
How the process of conferencing contributes to the Social Quality of participants

Although, the above figure pictures the way how conferences can increase Social Quality by producing a plan this section will focus on the process which is the act of reaching a common decision. Thus, it is the whole process of problem solving itself including proper interaction, information exchange and deliberation of all involved parties that can result in improved overall Social Quality. For one it is argued that the network which is created around the central problem is not necessarily dissolved after the conference which has positive consequences for *social inclusion* as elaborated in the analysis. In addition subsequent interaction and communication further facilitates the cohesiveness of the group present at such conferences which was found when elaborating on the issues of *identity* and *trust* in the analytical part. In this regard the fact that representatives of both worlds are involved in the process has more implications for the issue of *trust* still. *Trust* is deemed to be a highly important element for overall Social Quality by some authors. In this light it is argued that trust provides for a central element in all four conditional factors of Social Quality and is critical in linking agents and structure (Ward & Meyer, 2009), or to put it differently, to link the formal and informal worlds. Although, *trust* is not accepted as the most central element, it is acknowledged that is plays a very important role for a well functioning society (Sabel, 1993). Keeping this in mind *trust* has to be won in form of direct, face-to-face encounters with representatives of the formal and informal world (Ward, 2007). Individual trust towards the respective expert then directly induces trust in the formal world as a whole. (Ward, 2007; Ward & Meyer, 2009). As became apparent this is found true for the process inherent in FGCs as well. Another point is that the whole process itself educates

involved individuals to a certain extent. For one it demonstrates how they can deal with and solve problems on their own and with support of their network as outlined in the analysis of *social empowerment*. Secondly, what is most surprising though is that they might even learn practicing active citizenship in general. As pointed out by Jansen, Chioncel & Dekkers (2006) citizenship can be learned by practicing different central competencies. For one this includes "participatory competencies", which can be furthered by "providing access" to relevant initiatives, and by "promoting participation" and "promoting communicative interaction" of involved individuals (Jansen et al., 2006, pp.198-199). As elaborated upon in the analytical part these elements are clearly inherent in the processes as found in FGCs. Moreover, Jansen et al. (2006) argue that critical competencies can be acquired by providing for relevant information and knowledge which is inherent in the principle workings of FGCs as well. As a matter of fact both issues of education and information have been grouped under the theme of *furthering knowledge* as an aspect of *social empowerment*. As additionally pointed out by other authors active citizenship is essential in improving *social cohesion* and *social inclusion* and therefore has extensive consequences for overall Social Quality of participants (Biesta, 2009; Zgaga, 2009). As a consequence the process of conferencing has positive implications towards *social inclusion*, social *cohesion*, social *empowerment* and *socio-economic security*.

Exploring elements standing central to this way of contributing to Social Quality

Throughout the analysis a number of principles can be identified that cut across all conditional factors and therefore seem essential in realizing such an approach. Thus, contributing to overall Social Quality through a final plan and through the processes inherent in coming to that plan.

First of all, the whole process is centered around a collective cause. In this case the *socio-economic security* related problem fulfills this role which implies the collective aim of solving it as well. In terms of *social inclusion*, the network which is created consists of all actors that are somehow affected by that problem and seen to play a role in finding a solution. In terms of *social cohesion* the problem is the thing that is unifying the group and their interaction and deliberation is solely circling around this central issue. This also creates the necessity to peacefully interact, leave old disputes behind, restore relations and fully concentrate on the way ahead. In terms of *social empowerment* the capacities of individuals are increased to meaningfully contribute to finding a solution to the problem. For example by enabling participation or delivering essential information.

Secondly, the idea of involving parties into a dialogue is evenly elementary. As a matter of fact this seems to be the primary tool to solve the problem at hand and identify a way on how to improve *socio-economic security*. Therefore, and in terms of *social inclusion* the network is extended until as many viewpoints are represented as possible which includes formal actors as well. However, with the intent to involve parties into a dialogue which is facilitated by communicative and collaborative principles allowing for *social cohesion*. Moreover, individuals are not empowered in a very general sense but for the purpose to meaningfully take part in the discussion and dialogue. Moreover, this includes supporting otherwise disadvantaged parties to participate which can be related to enabling individuals or balancing power differentials when it comes to formal or informal actors.

Thirdly, the issue of flexibility is seen as central element being highly relevant in the analysis of all conditional factors. It seems especially relevant when including individuals and promoting the

unique constellation of the network drawn together to work on the problem. Moreover, when setting the proper framework to provide for positive interaction and formulating ground rules, that allow the specific group at hand to act in a cohesive sense. Also in terms of empowerment the process is flexible as it seeks to deliver all the information that is asked for and is respondent to individual and collective needs that enable participation. In the end this flexibility ideally leads to a plan or decision that is tailor-made to a given socio-economic problem. Moreover the process is adaptable to a variety of issues and not confined to a certain area from the outset.

Fourthly, the initiative large builds on existing resources and stimulates and furthers them to ultimately increase Social Quality. Needless to say, the thing standing central to the conference is the already existent problem which has been interpreted as being *socio-economic security* related in this work. At the same time this problem unifies the group already. So although conferences include individuals in a network which is centered around the problem and which also makes them feel belonging together (*social cohesion*), this connection is there from the start already, although not visible to all participants from the outset. Moreover, people are integrated in family relations most of the time. This network is seen as a basis to construct a larger one that furthers *social inclusion*. Lastly, it is assumed that participants already have some capacities to communicate and take part in the process (*social empowerment*). However conferences further build on them to enable meaningful participation in adding things like essential information or being respondent to individual needs that better enable them to find a decision. The next paragraph will answer the main research question.

Integrating the three dimensions to answer the research question

Depending on the viewpoint and approach the researcher takes there might be significantly more or less elements that seem central in the workings of FGCs. However, the aforementioned were found as being the four most prevalent and cross-cutting elements when looking at conferences through the lens of Social Quality theory. In order to deliver a final answer to the main research question the three dimensions of the answer are integrated into a coherent whole. However, the reader shall take note of the fact that due to the complexity of the issue it is not possible to formulate an all-embracing answer within a view lines. The main question to be answered is:

In how far can Family Group Conferences contribute to the Social Quality of Participants?

When keeping the focus on the problem solving character of FGCs they contribute to the Social Quality of participants by creating a plan directed at improving their *socio-economic security*. This in turn is achieved by integrating, empowering and promoting cohesion among participants and facilitating the problem solving process in this way. They also contribute to overall Social Quality in that the actual process of conferencing has more implications still. This includes the integration of the two central tensions as stipulated by Social Quality theory. As a consequence the process can lead to the development of further cohesion especially with regard to identity and general trust between the systems and the lifeworld and between participants in general. Moreover, it gives experience and can educate individuals in increasing their problem solving capabilities and in educating active citizenship. Especially the ladder can deliver extensive positive contributions to the Social Quality of participants by itself. To enable such an approach FGCs are extensively building on existing resources, are problem centered, based on dialogue, and highly flexible and adaptable to the unique circumstances as dictated by the problem at hand. Conferences thus utilize a given individual or collective problem and the problem solving

process itself to further overall Social Quality. Keeping above considerations and the focus on Social Quality theory into account the author of this volume thus does not side with claims such as "participation is perhaps the central value in FGCs" (Helland 2005, p.29) but rather that the integration of multiple dimensions and their interaction as related to *social cohesion*, *social inclusion* and *social empowerment* is most significant for their role. So it is participation as a matter of inclusion, but it is also meaningful and collaborative participation as a matter of cohesion, and it is enabling participation as a matter of empowerment. Of course participation is essential but utilizing Social Quality theory in accordance with its underlying philosophy enables us to get a more inclusive picture and possibly better understanding of what role such an initiative plays in our society.

VI. Reflections

This section will discuss the relevance of the research findings in the light of contemporary societal challenges. Which needs to be pointed out since it is this area where the theory of Social Quality seems of particular value and because it is the responsibility of scientists themselves "to make sense of their own work" (Ossewaarde, 2012a, p.364). After that it will be critically reflected on the meaningfulness of the findings in order to raise awareness of the shortcomings of this work. Finally, the author will reflect on the need to develop an integrative mindset in order to gain knowledge in the field of Social Quality.

Identifying the relevance of the findings in the context of societal challenges in Europe

European societies have been identified to face a multitude of challenges in form of risks and social problems that partly resulted from modernization and globalization processes. As a result scholars like Anthony Giddens perceived individuals as living in a runaway world where modern institutions are seen as not being able to deliver a sense of control and security any more (Allen, 1997). Nowadays social problems and risks are perceived as increasingly complex and not collectively manageable on the side of the welfares state (Van Gerven & Ossewaarde, 2012). At the same time this demands that the management of social risks has become a task of the individual leading to a greater need for self-responsibility (Giddens, 2006). Thus not only are European welfare states and involved governance actors faced with demanding challenges but the individual: the European citizen as well. In this work it was found that FGCs and underlying principles indeed proof valuable in that they offer ways to deal with individual social problems and risks in the above mentioned environment by simultaneously increasing the Social Quality of participants.

Keeping these problems in mind the idea of reflexive interaction and dialogue are deemed essential elements to survive in contemporary society (Hoogenboom & Ossewaarde, 2005; Ossewaarde 2012a). Indeed FGCs are institutions that seem to provide for elementary aspects as they involve various actors in a reflexive dialogue to create a tailor made solution to a given problem. First of all, the idea of facilitating friendly dialogue and dispute has been identified as most fundamental for the idea of reflexivity as remarked by Ossewaarde (2012a). Secondly, a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness to the particular needs of the cases are found. Thus there are barely strict approaches but the way how to solve a given problem is de-fixated,

variable and tailor made to the specific circumstances at hand. This ad hoc character of the conferences is embraced by reflexivity as well as stipulated by Beck (as cited in Hoogenboom & Ossewaarde, 2005).Thirdly, the whole process and discussion is problem centered. Thus individuals rally around a collective problem which is facilitated by creating a network around the central problematic. When related to scientific literature, being reflexive in this context then means to critically engage and collectively interact with these uncertainties and risks and form a reaction towards these (Ward & Meyer, 2009). Surely the interrelation with the concept of reflexivity can be discussed far more in depth which is not possible in this volume and thus recommended for future research.

Also when it comes to current government objectives in Europe to induce more active citizenship and self-responsibility (Jansen et al., 2006), the way how FGCs approach problem solving has been found valuable in this respect. As a consequence the model of FGCs and underlying principles maybe of high relevance in helping to solve contemporary problems and governmental challenges of European member states. Keeping the focus on FGCs into account findings might be particularly valuable for issues on the micro and meso level. Also in the light of ever increasing budgetary constraints and the European economic crisis the findings seem highly relevant. In this light conferences are found to mobilize and utilize as many existing resources as possible rather than seeking to create or involve more and more experts and analysts to get hold of the problem. In that sense the author of this volume sides with Tett (2010) in that those being affected by the problem are the most expert at the same time and argues that these resources should not be wasted. Thus more bottom-up policies in Europe, directed at furthering such initiatives that utilize the capacities of the citizens might be the way to go. Also, in the context of above elaborations it seems an interesting thought that the family bonds once eroded by the modern welfare state (Ossewaarde, 2012b), are now to be revitalized in order to face post-modern risks the European welfare state can no longer adequately deal with.

FGCs as the all-in-one solution to further Social Quality?

Although, the contribution of FGCs to the Social Quality of participants might appear to be pictured positively throughout the work it should be kept in mind that it was not striven towards assessing in how far the model actually is able to deliver improved Social Quality. In that sense it was identified how FGCs can contribute to Social Quality given they work as intended which does not necessarily mean that they actually do so in every respect. Although, secondary literature showed that this might be true to a certain extent it is stressed that Social Quality implies a large subjective dimension (Beck et al., 2001; Van der Maesen et al., 2009). Therefore an assessment on in how far possible contributions actually are delivered to the individual would imply to observe the effect of the process on the individual level as well. In that sense it was focused on the ideal type of FGCs in order to make it feasible for scientific research. As a matter of fact the devil lies in the details as so often is the case. For example Helland (2005) stated that professionals often tend to lead the process even though unintentionally which might result in an imperfect balance of the needs of involved parties. So the whole process is very sensitive to all kinds of possible disturbing factors that cannot be discussed in this volume. However these would have to be considered when seeking to deploy similar Social Quality increasing initiatives in practice. Thus, it is important to note that the reader shall remain cognizant of the scientific and practical choices the author made and the possible implications and limitations of these. What has further been found is that the extensive building on existent resources has some

negative implications in that a certain level of Social Quality needs to be present already so that it can be built on that during conferences. In that sense, individuals need to be socially included to a certain extent as to get access to the conferences themselves or they might need financial resources in case conferences are not financed by other bodies. So although FGCs are found to be extraordinarily useful initiatives they would need to be supplemented by other measures to assure Social Quality for the European citizen.

Producing innovative knowledge on Social Quality requires an inclusive mindset

Besides striving to answer the central research question at hand this work can be simultaneously seen as seeking to produce innovative knowledge on how Social Quality can be realized in social practice and more particularly in specific initiatives. According to Baars et al. (1997) innovative knowledge means to gain insights in how Social Quality can be furthered in its comprehensive meaning. The author did so by proposing a way on how Social Quality theory can be utilized to fit the analysis of FGCs. Most central to this idea was to safeguard the underlying philosophy of the concept throughout the research process which has been voiced by referring to Baars et al. (1997), and Beck et al. (1997a, 1997b). At the same time the argument of the author was accompanied by referring to other authors including Hermann (2006) and Ward & Meyer (2009). In this sense it has to be clarified that it was not meant to render their work as wrong or less relevant in any sense. Rather it was aimed at stressing that notions implicating most important or central roles for individual parts of the idea of Social Quality should be deployed with great caution. In fact Hermann (2006), and Ward & Meyer (2009) do acknowledge the comprehensive character of Social Quality in principle. However, in this work it is argued that this central idea shall not be hidden somewhere in the respective work. Rather, it shall be made explicit and accessible to a wider audience. Thus, if individual elements are focused upon the work needs to be accompanied by showing greater self-reflection and sensitivity towards the underlying philosophy of Social Quality. This means to safeguard the defragmented and inclusive character of the concept as well as considering the communicative function of Social Quality and the need to bridge science and practice.

 In this work the comprehensive character of Social Quality has been respected by analyzing and keeping in mind the broad picture as often as possible: Seeking to unify rather than to fragmentize. Developing knowledge on in how Social Quality can be realized in practice and in concrete terms was meant to bridge science and practice. Finally, the communicative character has been addressed by constantly reflecting on the authors' choices and reasoning to make the material accessible to a broad audience, including non-scientists. As put in the terms of Baars et al. (1997) there is the need "to further the dialogue between scientists and policy makers", which in the end leads to "a creative dialogue on social quality in Europe" (pp. 303-304). The author of this work engages in such a "creative dialogue" by not producing a value-free and de-personalized scientific paper but by acknowledging its utility as an artifact of communication and dialogue. He further argues that in order to properly address Social Quality the author needs to develop an inclusive mindset himself. Inclusive in this sense means to be flexible and respondent to the underlying philosophy of Social Quality. In contrast to that it is argued that value free science made for the sake of objectivity and methodological pureness is likely to prevent parties from engaging into such a creative dialogue. Yet this creative dialogue is most essential in that it does not close but stimulate the mind, paving the way towards innovative knowledge on Social Quality in Europe.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: SQ Domains and Indicators from the EFSQ

8.1 : *Socio-economic security*

Domains	Sub-domains	Indicators	Remark	Data source
Financial resources	Income sufficiency	1. Part of household income spent on health, clothing, food and housing (in the lower and median household incomes)	a. 'lower' refers to everyone with income below 60% of the national median income. b. part of household income or part of household expenditures	National data
	Income security	2. How do certain biographical events affect the *risk of poverty* on household level.	a. at household level b. a qualitative description on eligibility and duration of transfer should be incorporated. c. biographical events: - health – illness/ disability, - employment-unemployment, - employment-retirement, - dual parent-single parent family, - child birth	National data and ECHP
		3. Proportion of total population living in households receiving entitlement transfers (means-tested, cash and in-kind transfers) that allow them to live above EU poverty level	a. look at income situation *before & after* the entitlement transfers b. if data is available look at means-tested, cash and in-kind transfers. The in-kind transfers from the government are interesting as they are often larger than cash transfers (benefits, pensions, etc.) to poor households. c. EU poverty level = 60 % of national mean income	Eurostat
Housing and environment	Housing security	4. Proportion of people who have certainty of keeping their home	a. measured by housing affordability methodology* b. add qualitative description of national housing security situation	National data (and see suggestions below *)
		5. Proportion of hidden families (i.e. several families within the same household)	a. new presentation of the indicator on living with family or friends in case of emergency. b. using Eurostat's definition of a family and a household	National Census and/or survey micro data
	Housing conditions	6. Number of square meters per household member		Eurostat
		7. proportion of population living in houses with lack of functioning basic amenities (water, sanitation and energy)		Eurostat
	Environmental conditions (social and natural)	8. people affected by criminal offences per 10.000 inhabitants	a. if possible differentiate between rural/urban & types of criminal offence	National/ regional data
		9. Proportion living in households that are situated in neighbourhoods with above average pollution rate (water, air and noise)	a. pollution data mostly available on national level	UN sustainable development, Eurobarometer, EU structural indicators
Health and care	Security of health	10. Proportion of people covered by	a. qualitative description of the	National data

	provisions	compulsory/ voluntary health insurance (including qualitative exploration of what is and what is not covered by insurance system)	national health insurance system	
	Health services	11. Number of medical doctors per 10.000 inhabitants		Eurostat
		12. Average distance to hospital, measure in minutes, not in meters		National data
		13. Average response time of medical ambulance		National data
	Care services	14. Average number of hours spent on care differentiated by paid and unpaid	care for four specific groups: disabled, children from 0-3, children from 3-6, and care for the elderly	National data
Work	Employment security	15. Length of notice before employer can change terms and conditions of labour relation/contract		National data
		16. Length of notice before termination of labour contract		National data
		17. proportion employed workforce with temporary, non permanent, job contract		Eurostat
		18. Proportion of workforce that is illegal	a. estimations	OECD
	Working conditions	19. Number of employees that reduced work time because of interruption (parental leave, medical assistance of relative, palliative leave) as a proportion of the employees who are entitled to these kinds of work time reductions		national data
		20. Number of accidents (fatal / non-fatal) at work per 100.000 employed persons (if possible: per sector)		Eurostat
		21. Number of hours a full-time employee typically works a week (actual working week)		National data

36

Education	Security of education	22. Proportion of pupils leaving education without finishing compulsory education (early school leavers)		Eurostat
		23. Study fees as proportion of national mean net wage	a. Besides fees also subsidies should be taken into account b. all levels of education	National data
	Quality of education	24. Proportion of students who, within a year of leaving school with or without certificate, are able to find employment	a. in context of general labour market conditions b. the relation between the level of education and the level of wage is of importance	OECD / PISA

8.2   Social cohesion

I – Institutional (political) – macro
C – Community – meso
F – Family and neighbourhood – micro

Domains	Sub-domains	Indicators	Remark	Data source
Trust	Generalised trust	25. Extent to which 'most people can be trusted' I, C, F		EVS - Question 8
	Specific trust	26. Trust in: government; elected representatives; political parties; armed forces; legal system; the media; trade unions, police;		Eurobarometer (?); EVS - Question 58

		religious institutions; civil service; economic transactions I		
		27. Number of cases being referred to European Court of law		Eurobarometer
		28. Importance of: family; friends; leisure; politics; respecting parents. parents' duty to children F		EVS; Question 1, 47 & 48
Other integrative norms and values	Altruism	29. Volunteering: number of hours per week I, C		EVS; Question 5 & 6 and ECHP
		30. Blood donation I		Eurobarometer
	Tolerance	31. Views on immigration, pluralism and multiculturalism I, C		EVS; Question 74 & 75 and Eurobarometer
		32. Tolerance of other people's self-identity, beliefs, behaviour and lifestyle preferences C, F		EVS; Question 7 & 65 and Eurobarometer special edition on Migration
	Social contract	33. Beliefs on causes of poverty: individual or structural I, C		EVS; Question 11 & 12
		34. Willingness to pay more taxes if you were sure that it would improve the situation of the poor		Eurobarometer
		35. Intergenerational: willingness to pay 1% more taxes in order to improve the situation of elderly people in your country I, C		??, maybe Eurobarometer

		36. Willingness to actually do something practical for the people in your community/ neighbourhood, like:
		  - picking up litter,
		  - doing some shopping for elderly/ disabled/ sick people in your neighbourhood,
		  - assisting neighbours/ community members with filling out (tax/ municipal/ etc) forms,
		  - cleaning the street/ porch/ doorway,
		  - etc.
			Not based on existing survey questions	??

		37. Division of household tasks between men and women: Do you have an understanding with your husband/ spouse about the division of household tasks, raising of the children, and gaining household income?	Not based on existing survey questions	??
Social networks	Networks	38. Membership (active or inactive) of political, voluntary, charitable organisations or sport clubs		EVS; question 5. Eurobarometer
		39. Support received from family, neighbours and friends F		UNDP on grand-parents care for grand-children and Medical outcome study social support survey
		40. Frequency of contact with friends and colleagues		EVS Question 6
Identity	National/ European identity	41. Sense of national pride I		Eurobarometer & EVS Question 71
		42. Identification with national symbols and European symbols I		Eurobarometer
	Regional/ community/ local identity	43. Sense of regional / community / local identity C, F		Eurobarometer and EVS Question 67
	Interpersonal identity	44. Sense of belonging to family and kinship network C, F		Eurobarometer

Domains	Sub-domains	Indicators	Remark	Data source
Citizenship rights (Ma)	Constitutional/ political rights	45. Proportion of residents with citizenship	Formal citizenship means the right to carry a passport for the country a person is living in (which should also give them the right to vote in national elections)	??
		46. Proportion having right to vote in local elections and proportion exercising it	both right to vote and voting turn out	??
	Social rights	47. Proportion with right to a public pension (i.e. a pension organised or regulated by the government)	should be the right to a pension as non-receipt may not be due to exclusion	??
		48. Women's pay as a proportion of men's		Eurostat Pega
	Civil rights	49. Proportion with right to free legal advice	a. about the rights b. legal advice = both consultation and representation	??
		50. Proportion experiencing discrimination		discrimination on labour market – OECD/ ILO. Discrimination in general – try to find national data
	Economic and political networks	51. Proportion of ethnic minority groups elected or appointed to parliament, boards of private companies and foundations	ethnicity is not the same as nationality but pertains to 'race'. Therefore each country will have minority ethnic groups with nationality status (and of course migrant groups without such status	??
		52. Proportion of women elected or appointed to parliament, boards of private companies and foundations		www.db-decision.de
Labour market (Me)	Access to paid employment	53. Long-term unemployment (12+ months)		Eurostat
		54. Involuntary part-time or temporary unemployment		ILO
Services (Me)	Health services	55. Proportions with entitlement to and using public primary health care	a. both: entitlement and actual use i.e. how inclusive is the health care system. b. Ideally the proportions would be ratios of the whole population and then sub-groups: social class, gender, ethnicity	National data
	Housing	56. Proportion homeless, sleeping rough	Estimations	FEANTSA
		57. Average waiting time for social housing		??
	Education	58. school participation rates and higher education participation rates	Suggestions for better measures of inclusiveness in educational system are welcome	??
	Social care	59. Proportion of people in need receiving care services	a. care is defined as assistance in kind by formal agencies to families and individuals as a result of frailty, disability or other need. b. Definition of 'in need' ?	Eurostat/ ECHP
		60. Average waiting time for care services (including child care)		national data
	Financial services	61. Proportion denied credit differentiated by income groups	Access to credit is a major problem for the poor.	
		62. Access to financial assistance / advice in case of need	this would be a qualitative description of national services	National data
			to people who need financial assistance	
	Transport	63. Proportion of population who has access to public transport system		National data
		64. Density of public transport system and road density	Add also road density, otherwise to focussed on public transport only	National data
	Civic / cultural services	65. Number of public sport facilities per 10.000 inhabitants	a. including swimming baths	National data
		66. Number of public and private civic & cultural facilities (e.g. cinema, theatre, concerts) per 10.000 inhabitants		National data
Social networks (Mi)	Neighbourhood participation	67. Proportion in regular contact with neighbours		ECHP and Eurostat
	Friendships	68. Proportion in regular contact with friends	Also in cohesion	ECHP (Friends and relatives), EVS (question 6)
	Family life	69. Proportion feeling lonely/isolated		Eurobarometer
		70. Duration of contact with relatives (cohabiting and non-cohabiting)	From a SQ perspective duration (as a proxy for quality) is important. If the data do not exist we should argue for their collection!	Eurostat
		71. Informal (non-monetary) assistance received by different types of family	intended as an inclusion indicator of particular relevance to southern states. Its focus is an inclusion in the family	??

Domains	Sub-domains	Indicators	Remark	Data source
Knowledge base	Application of knowledge	72. Extent to which social mobility is knowledge-based (formal qualifications)	Measured by: a. relation between educational level and socio-economic group (based on income). b. adding data to above indicator in relation to socio-economic group of parents	National data
	Availability of information	73. Per cent of population literate and numerate	This indicator stays in this sub-domain.	IALS
		74. availability of free media	this would be a description on national processes regarding the media. For example such as the monopolisation of media in Italy	National data
		75. access to internet	Survey based data: 'can freely make use of internet for personal reasons'	EU survey (ISPO) http://europa.eu.int/ ISPO/ esis/default.htm
	User friendliness of information	76. provision of information in multiple languages on social services	a. preferably quantitative, but if data is not available mention this and provide some qualitative information. b. use the Social Platform definition of social services (see added document).	National data
		77. availability of free advocacy, advice and guidance centres	a. Preferably quantitative, but if data is not available mention this and provide some qualitative information on policy examples on national specific types of free assistance. b. add info on the availability of a translator in court	National data (from welfare associations)
Labour market	Control over employment contract	78. % of labour force that is member of a trade union (differentiated to public and	a. the term 'labour force' is used to capture both those employed and unemployed	OECD, ILO and national for description of
		private employees)	b. this indicator should be accompanied by a description of the national context including the aspect of the rights to join a trade union. In the Netherlands for example trade union membership is very low, because of tripartite system of consultation and collective agreements of labour contracts	national context
		79. % of labour force covered by a collective agreement (differentiated by public and private employees)	This indicator should be accompanied by a description of the national context about the process of collective agreement. In the Netherlands for example this is by tri-partite agreement (trade union, government and employers' organisation).	National data
	Prospects of job mobility	80. % of employed labour force receiving work based training	If possible we should specify type of training and differentiate between those that enhance skills and those that are part of course e.g. introduction training	National data
		81. % of labour force availing of publicly provided training (not only skills based). (Please outline costs of such training if any)	This could be defined as training provided by the state or a state agency that enhances an individual's employability e.g. general knowledge, computer skills, languages, interview skills, and measures to raise «awareness and self-esteem».	National data
		82. % of labour force participating in any "back to work scheme"	Any scheme provided by the state or a state agency that connects the unemployed with the labour market through work placements, work allowances etc. This could incorporate early school leavers to the long term unemployed.	National data
	Reconciliation of work and family life (work/ life balance)	83. % of organisations operating work life balance policies.	This incorporates policies such as: - reduced working week - term working - alternative working hours - teleworking/ working from home - sabbaticals - job sharing - career breaks	National data
		84. % of employed labour force actually making use of work/life balance measures (see indicator above)	See measured mentioned by indicator above	National data
Openness and supportiveness of institutions	Openness and supportiveness of political system	85. existence of processes of consultation and direct democracy (eg. referenda)	this indicator is a qualitative description of policy change, interesting examples of projects on direct democracy etc.	National data and European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (Dublin)
	Openness of economic system	86. number of instances of public involvement in major economic decision making (e.g. public hearings about company relocation, inward investment and plant closure)	a. To measure level of community involvement in economic decision making. b. quantitative information is probably difficult to find. This is however seen as an important indicator of social empowerment.	National data
	Openness of organisations	87. % of organisations/ institutions with work councils		European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (Dublin)
Public space	Support for collective action	88. % of the national & local public budget that is reserved for voluntary, not-for-profit citizenship		National data

		initiatives		
		89. marches and demonstrations banned in the past 12 months as proportion of total marched and demonstrations (held and banned).	Give information about actually held marches and demonstrations and about planned marches and demonstrations that were banned.	National data
	Cultural enrichment	90. Proportion of local and national budget allocated to all cultural activities		National data
		91. Number of self-organised cultural groups and events		National data
		92. proportion of people experiencing different forms of personal enrichment on a regular basis	a. Measured by: average number of attendance of cultural activities (e.g. theatre, ballet, concerts, cinema etc.) each month. b. Survey based information	Maybe Eurostat, national data
Personal relationships	Provision of services supporting physical and social independence	93. percentage of national and local budgets devoted to disabled people (physical and mental)		National data
	Personal support services	94. level of pre-and-post-school child care	a. Measured by: total number of places for children on pre- and post-school child care services (public and private) b. Overlaps with inclusion and socio-economic security	National data
	Support for social interaction	95. extent of inclusiveness of housing and environmental design (e.g. meeting places, lighting, layout)	Measured by: a. average number of meeting places, community centres, etc. per city in relation to population b. extent of consultation of residents by major reforms in housing and environmental design (local and national) (e.g. infrastructural projects, neighbourhood reform projects, housing projects).	National data

Source: Van der Maesen et al. (2009), pp. 46-52.

Appendix 2: The Main Interview Questions

This questionnaire aims at finding out how Family Group Conferences can increase Social Quality for participants. It is important to keep in mind that questions refer to conferences that involve issues on child or youth care.

1. **Could you describe how your conferences are initiated?**
   Include for example who and when conferences are initiated.

2. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve the socio-economic security of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**
   Socio-economic security relates to basic material and non-material needs, necessary to participate in social life. Examples could be financial resources, housing, work or education.

3. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social cohesion of participants?**
   Social cohesion relates to the strength of social relations between people. Examples could be shared norms and values, trust or a sense of identity.

4. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social inclusion of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**
   Social inclusion relates to in how far individuals are integrated in social relations of everyday life. Examples could include the access to social networks like neighborhoods, families and friends, or to public services like healthcare, housing, education, or others.

5. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social empowerment of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**
   Social empowerment related to in how far individuals can control their own lives and influence their environment. Examples could include notions of rights, personal capability or the accessibility of the institutional system.

6. **How would you evaluate your conferences in terms of strengths or points for improvement with regard to the above mentioned dimensions and what could be underlying reasons?**

7. **In general, Family Group Conferences are known for bringing together different actors with different viewpoints. In your conferences how exactly do participants deal with conflicting viewpoints?**

8. **Could you say something about the impact of the decisions reached during the conferences?**
   Think for example on to whom the decision is communicated to and what effect this might have.

9. **Could you explain how the decisions of your conferences are being enforced or monitored?**

10. **Do you have any more information you would like to share?**
    This might also relate to certain challenges or potential problems that were not mentioned in the previous questions

Appendix 3: Presentation of the Coding scheme

Levels of Abstraction			Transcribed Interview		Comments
3rd level of abstraction	**2nd level of abstraction**	**1st level of abstraction**	**Summary**	**4. Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social inclusion of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**	
Social inclusion	Access private network	Being Part of a group	People realize they are part of a group, a system that wants to help.	I think one important thing is that at the starting of the conference people <u>realize that they are part of a group, of a system who want to help them</u> who are willing to put an effort for them, they experience that not only it is organized with them but also they <u>have a voice.</u> And also small children we include in the conference. <u>And when they cannot do it on their own, we always look for somebody who can support them in telling what they want</u> . If they can't tell it, they <u>can write it down. It can be read</u> there. If somebody has a <u>real problem of being in that group we use video conference</u>. Of course they need to	Maybe also relevant for the theme of Identity
Empower-ment	Power over decision	Having a voice [as form of control]	They experience that they have a voice.		Empowering, giving control over own situation
Empower-ment	increasing capacities	Providing assistance	Also small children are given a voice by looking for someone who can support them.		Giving a voice to children. Enabling, empowering children to articulate what they want
Empower-ment	Increasing individual capacities	Providing assistance	It can be read for them.		
Empower-ment	Increasing individual capacities	Enabling participation	They can also join through video conference.		

Empower-ment	Increasing individual capacities	Enabling participation	Everybody has a voice and is integrated into the conference	have the qualities of using skype. <u>So there is different ways of bringing their ideas and opinions but everybody has a voice and is heard in that conference</u>. So that is very important […]	Empowering by responding to individual needs [seems flexible].

Appendix 4: The Transcribed Interviews

Transcribed Interview NL

Interview partner: Jitske Tuimaka, Regional Manager

Organization: Eigen Kracht Centrale, Friesland

Duration of the interview: 90 minutes

1. **Could you describe how your conferences are initiated?**

   There are different ways for that to be initiated. One way is, there is a website and civilians, people who have problems, they can contact us straight away through the website and then they'll be directed to the manager in that specific region, from the manager to the coordinator to organize the conferences. So that would be the direct way. The thing is that the conference has to be financed and when there is no financial agreement yet in that specific area where that person is living and finances are not met by the family themselves then we have to contact the "gemeente" and the municipal authority or different bodies to look at the finances. So only in the areas in the different regions where we have contracts already about financing the conference then we can just go from a push on the button on the website straight away to the conference. Otherwise, it's done through the "maatschappelijk werk", through "jeugdzorg" or through social teams. Mostly in any municipal authority there are social teams where people from different bodies come together to discuss families with multiple problems, and then they will contact us. They say we have the feeling this might be a situation where we can have a conference. We discuss if the possibilities are there, if the people want to cooperate if they feel like starting a conference and if there is a network we can start working with. So then it is through the professionals so that means that we have to start getting good contacts, a good network with all those professionals so they can find us.

   So there is two roads for us to get into contact with people, to start a conference. And in some situations like in Amsterdam where there is situations where people are dealing

with youth problems then they have the agreement that in those situations they always have to contact us to see the possibilities of having a conference. So that is a little bit more like the way they have it in New Zealand.

So sometimes its part of the regulated process. Sometimes we'll have a conference already in that area so civilians, people they can contact us straight away. In other situations we just have to keep relying on our network. And through that network we start conferences. If we don't have contacts yet and people contact us themselves. We still have to go to the municipal authority to see if we can get it financed or not.

2. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve the socio-economic security of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**

Yes, you are specifying the socio economic situation of the youth or children. I find it a difficult question to answer because you are focusing on one field and … maybe as you know eigen kracht conferences they not ... we don't really deal with the topics or the different fields people have problems. So if there are multiple problems we do not single out a specific field. We are there to support organizing the conference, enlarging the network, enable people to make their plan they come up with, to make it workable to make it smart. So those are the steps we take and the professionals are the ones which are dealing beforehand and afterwards with the specific questions the family deals with and they need professional help. So to say in which way we contribute to socio-economic security wise I think the thing is that ... it is probably more like an long-term investment that those children if they have been in a conference, they have a bigger network which is also in difficult perhaps supported them and make it possible for them to be more self-reliant…maybe with some aid if necessary they are not letting themselves go back into a situation where they have problems. It is gonna be easier for them to recognize the situation they have problems, they recognize the situation where they need assistance in their network or maybe professionals. In that way I think the chance for them to avoid dropping into a problematic situation again is bigger so that it is more like prevention in the future to go back into economic problems.

Still on this point could you say that maybe these conferences, they do not directly address financial problems or issues on housing or education or health care but are there certain mechanisms to communicate information on these issues or are the participants informed on these issues? Or are they addressed by professional bodies?

The way you ask it now I realize maybe there is actually ... one side is that you give them an experience and you brace them for the future to face their problems that is one because you ... the response we get to our conferences is also that even if their problems have not been solved they still gained from the experience of having had a conference.

The other thing, because you also mentioned the health and the educational part...we have special conferences which are helping children which are not in education. So we have

four different conferences. One of them is relating to family issues, so a lot of time youth is involved. One of them is more like restorative justice. One of them is with problems in the neighborhood and the forth one is related to problems with education and children. For instance children who want to combine top sports with education that could be a topic for a conference, how do we organize it? But also if children have specific problems or if they have specific problems and one of them starts living on their own os in that way it makes them look for assistance to have their own plan to try to follow what they want to do and if that is what they want to do or what they have to face because of course when you want to do something, so when you have a plan that is far more positive than when you have a problem and you have to face and to solve it. But in both ways you can use a conference that is especially for youth and education. Then the school is involved, the network of the child is involved and in that way they combine the educational obstacles they see with the social situation of the child and the plans that the child has or the possibilities or the personal obstacles they have, that might be a small handicap or whatever-so all different things are combined together and the child is the centre of it. So it is not just the education or it is not just the social situation-it's all combined. So in that way it is the full picture I think which helps them to take a step which otherwise wouldn't be able to take.

3. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social cohesion of participants?**

I think one big thing is that people realize that there is more than just one or two who are interested in their well being. So most of the time it is a big step for them, since they have to overcome this feeling of shame to let others share in their problems. That is something where our coordinator helps them in ... and actually to ask somebody are you willing to offer time to sit down and to help make a plan for me how to answer the question, so the question I am dealing with. That is an important step and a lot of times they are surprised that there is much more than this one or two cause we have an average of something like 13 people who come to our conference and they are quite surprised that so many people are willing to help. In this situation what we also do is that our coordinator is firstly contacting the main person with the question and from there he goes on to ask on who do you want there to find out what kind of plan we can make to enlarge the network. But from there those people are asked again who do you think could help. And then we come to people, persons who would never have been invited by the initial person you start with. And also you have a different group of people then when you just look at the professional workers. When they have a problem with a child they might ask the mum, they might ask the dad, who do we need? And they might say oh...they might come up with a few names but they might leave others aside as well. Because they don't want them so close to the family of they always criticize them. But if some other mentions that he would like to have those people involved too, then those people are gonna be invited. So it is not only the people you like to have there but it is the people who we think can be of help. And that is already well that is a little bit.., sometimes you have family internal problems, or certain things you only talk about with certain people and other things with other people, but in this case you bring them together. You make the group bigger and then there is the surprise that … if there is a child with a problem and if mum and dad are divorced and

live divided they will be there even if both of them doesn't like it. Then we gonna find out who does that need to be able to be there without the mum feeling threatened. Who does that need to calm down that moments to talk to him because both of them they still want the best for the child. So that is how we work. That means that there is a bigger group and do not need to be friends all the way but when there is a situation where you need help, you need help for the child in this case there are a lot of people that want to help. And that is a binding thing between this group and so it makes the idea of the network and the help there is more available than you could find on your own.

Do you think that this group, within the conference that they develop a certain sense of shared norms and values and how they interact? Do they have the same level there?

Well, what you see is that a lot of times they are already. And maybe that is even the reason why professionals think they can't be of any help. Because they, maybe they use foul language, maybe they work or walk around in overalls. Because this is actually what we hear from people: Well there was this group of people and they just come there with their wooden shoes and how can they be of any help? That is a perception still with some of the professionals in the field. Well those people speak the language and they have the values but they already share most of them. So they can use harsh words or they can tell somebody that this is gonna be the last time when whatever, what you wanna use ...They can really trigger the points they know each other they know what are the weak points, what are the places they can get in touch. So a lot of the values are there beforehand already. They are not created in the conference. The only thing we bring in the conference is that there is respect for each other, that everybody is allowed to talk and think what they want, to share. We look forward and do not look at all the things that happened in the past. So there is a few things we them before the conference, but at the conference itself there is no professional around. So our coordinator is not gonna be with them in the conference. The moment the conference starts, door closes and they are on their own. Sometimes it's what you see that somebody comes out after 20 minutes and says nobody is saying anything. But still in the end they gonna find a modus which is the way how these people start communicating with each other.

Do you think this could also further a sense of identity between the participants?

Well this, I do not know this from research but what I think, what I feel is that… they come up with a certain question, with a certain problem and that question is the starting point to meet, to be a group because there is a shared interest, they want it to be better for one of them or for all of them. I do not know if that is gonna be part of the identity but at least it's ... what is happening is that people realize that they are not on their own. Maybe the group is not gonna be the same group for different situations but at least they are not on their own. If there is a situation and if you ask for help, for advice there are people there.

Do you think that these conferences contribute then to a certain development of trust?

Yeah, I think it is ... lots of times we see that conferences they start out with a question, a certain topic, a certain question which has to be solved, a problem which has to be solved, but before dealing with it there has to be a restorative part. We have special conferences on that one a lot of times there are professionals assisting, also within the conference but even in these family conferences you see that before you can start discussing the question which is placed in the middle, you have to take a few steps to improve the relationships. People have to tell why they are there. Everybody is there to also tell in what kind of relationship they are standing to the one who's asking the question. So what is their feeling of being there. So that is always how the conferences start. But sometimes it is necessary that if there is a situation when people haven't been talking for a long time it might be necessary to split it in two, to first have a part where you work on this restorative part, before you can actually start with the actual conference.

Do you think that trust can also develop between the families, let's say the informal world and the professionals?

Yeah, what you see is that one thing that is really in the system of the conference is also for the professionals they have to be very clear beforehand what they worry about. What kind of information is asked of them. Like if a family wants to discuss a certain issue, a certain problem they need information that they share this information. They share what is worrying them and sometimes they also share the restrictions they have for the plan for instance when there is the safety of the child. So beforehand that one has to be very clear. So that when afterwards there is a plan and the plan is smart and has been presented to our coordinator but also to the professionals involved. That when people tell them this is our plan this is what we want to do. This is what we can do ourselves and this is where we need your assistance to get this plan working. Then we know beforehand that they gonna say yes. So it is not that afterwards they cat judge if the plan is okay. Beforehand they say, if this is in the plan then it is okay. So that makes them, it really goes back to the people themselves, that they are in charge, that they decide what is going to happen. And that it is not going to be a little bit corrected a little bit shaped into the molds of organizations. So I think if that works and that is both ways that is from the professionals to the individuals and from the individuals to the professionals if that works you can see that you regain trust in organizations. Yeah, and I think the really big thing is right now that there is a lot of people working with organizations they do not really trust that those people with their wooden shoes and their overalls can solve their own problems. Because you can hear them saying…but their trust is so important to start with – if you do not have that one, it is the starting of a failure actually.
Yeah, maybe it is good to add, because that is what we see also is that when we talk to organizations or introduce them to the eigen kracht conferences and inform them about the ideas behind that ... the civil rights more or less we see as base... and if they see it as just another method and it has not o do with the rights of the people and the capability of people of making their own plan then we can also talk to about that problem. They also like to see some proof; they want to experience a conference before they start believing it.

So you see people who have been involved with two or three conferences. They are the ones telling the story, the other ones who help us convince people in organizations that this is the way. So that is, the trust is not only by leaving the ideas and the mission but it is also the experience they have to see. That is one of the reasons why we have a lot of research material.

4. Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social inclusion of participants or the youth/child more particularly?

I think on important thing is that at the starting of the conference people realize that they are part of a group, of a system who want to help them who are willing to put an effort for them. I think in the conference itself it is especially….they experience that not only its organized with them but also they have a voice. And also small children we include in the conference. And when they cannot do it on their own, we always look for somebody who can support them in telling what they want. If they can't tell it, they can write it down. It can be read there. If somebody has a real problem of being in that group we use video conference. Of course they need to have the qualities of using Skype. So there is different ways of bringing their ideas and opinions but everybody has a voice and is heard in that conferences. So that is very important. Then afterwards what you see is like…when you have a plan and when you have let's say 10 or 20 "afspraken", points in that plan which people make a deal like this is gonna happen. Like you're not gonna use drugs when the children are around when you have them in the weekend or whatever. If that is the deal then there is also the deal like, what if it happens? Who is gonna be notified, who is gonna take actions? And maybe your sister is saying ok if this is happening again and I am not in light about it, we have a deal now that those children are not gonna be with you in the weekend any more, they will be at our house. You could come and visit them if you like, if you not they are not gonna live with you. So they take part of taking the deal they made in their own hands. What we see is when we have all the deals on a list it's gonna be that 80% is done by the families themselves and only 20% is done by the professional organizations. Also what has been asked, service from professional organizations, is much … what do you call it? It is not the hard difficult part ... assistance any more than it was before. It is a lighter version. And because you make deals with peoples themselves it is gonna be part of the system. There is gonna be contacts after the conference. There is ... we have two moments after the conference, where they can get in touch and where they see if the plan is working. If it is not working it's gonna be asked is it necessary to have another conference? Why isn't it working? Sometimes you make a deal already that if it's not working it is gonna be taken over by professionals, that is part of the deal they make. So the system is much more working together. The professional system and the private system, there is a bridge. Each moves from one to the other and people stay part of each others' life.

You said something about the realization of civil rights or personal rights could you again state how this is strengthened or made possible through the conferences?

Yeah, well the thing is that people have a right of living their own life, given their opinion and what we see is , and luckily we are moving away from that is that in 99% of

the situations people can deal with the problems themselves in a few percentage you need assistance from others. If it was really difficult it was used to being taken over completely by the professionals. Now what we start to do is, we move away from that and professionals, professional organizations, they start to work together much better than they did before and they start to include families in their plans. What we say is, we have to take one step more because it is not that you help people to make a plan, but people have to make their own plan. It is not only a right but maybe even a duty that we help them to make it possible not only to make a plan but also take the decisions and to keep the decisions in your own hands. So that is actually the civil right part that it is not taken away from you and nobody is going to decided where you child is going to live if you don't take care of it, if you can't take care of it, you still gonna take a decision yourself. Maybe you ask your family, your neighbors or others to help you to decide. But you had a say in it on what is gonna happening with the child. It is not suddenly completely out of your hands even if you can't so it yourself.

Would you say that these conference also help in gaining access to let's say public services, like health care or education housing or access to the labor market?

Yes, we have different types of conferences we are actually specializing more on that field, too. Like when you talk about housing. For instance in Amsterdam if people have a problem with the housing authority where they are renting a house. They have a deal now that before they are being sent out of the house or they do not pay the rent or they have problems in the neighborhood...then the housing authority nowadays they offer the possibility of taking it in your own hands first. They make a few conditions upfront, like we do not allow you to get more behind with paying the rent. But when you come up with a plan...and a lot of times it has to do with people that have lost their job or ended up in divorce so they ask the families, the colleagues, the work to join together to see what is possible, to make it possible for those people to stay in their house. What is needed and how to prevent them from going back into a problematic situation. Maybe they have gambling problems. So when the problems are clear then in the conference they can also get professionals bring in information who might help them in the future, so to get them access for instance to the systems and fighting an addiction. If you talk about Income, we have a special conference now in Rotterdam next year there are gonna be 500, especially related to people who have no job and to get them back into the workforce. So the "gemeente" decided that they want to offer 500 conferences next year in Rotterdam. So the people are helped through a conference to get back to work. I do not know if it is gonna work. We also have contacts to UVV. We also have projects with them to help people who are enlisted in their system and see if we can get them back on their feet. We have just a project with people who have psychiatric problems who do not want to be bothered with professional help. So that are difficult cases with not many people left who want to help them. So we just had a project in Groningen initiated by the university there and then you see that 50% of them are able to solve the problem. And this is a group where professionals they don't feel that they can do much.

5. Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social empowerment of participants or the youth/child more particularly?

What I am now particularly thinking of is that here in the Netherlands we have started off with family and child issues. What we see nowadays and I think this social empowerment is a big part is that we have the "maatschappelijke ondersteuning" where a lot of older people are getting into situations which makes it difficult for them to live that life like they would like to have it. They are alone, they have practical problems...well the government has just changed the possibilities for them to move into "verzorgingshuizen" so they have to stay at home and when they need care not all the care is paid any more maybe they live in villages where because of the demographic decline some of the services have been disappearing, it is difficult for them to live in those villages, at the same time it is difficult for them to move because no one wants to buy their house. And also they do not need so much care as to have the right to move into this nursing house. And I feel that this is a field where we have to do a lot of work in the upcoming years to help especially the elderly to organize a life in a way they'd like to have it. And this is gonna be a combination of voluntary aid, family assistance. They help themselves completed with a smaller quantity of professional aid. So that's gonna make it possible for them to stay stronger in society where they are forced to stay and live there. Maybe they did not want to live there, maybe they would like to. Whatever the situation they gonna face some difficulties and with the conferences we had situations already with people who felt lonely and through a conference they got new contacts, maybe they find a small job to do. So it is a new group a new target group [the elderly].

Still concerning empowerment of children and youth towards the family; are they empowered in relation to the family or parents?

Well I think what's gonna help is that within the conference they are gonna be assisted in forcing out what they need. And they do not have to hide away from problems which their parents have or they do not have to be scared of the consequences of telling what they think or asking what they need. Because through the conference they find a network that is far bigger than the small family group and they can rely on to achieve what is necessary for them at a certain moment. I do not know if that is social empowerment but it is a major step if you can do that one. It is the same when you have to face bullying at school. If you have that type of situation you can teach them through the conference what is the way out of it. How to deal with it. I think that is in their basic attitude something that helps them for life.

In how far are the families empowered toward the professional bodies?

I think we have got that one already in the sense that the family they now see that they themselves through their network, they are capable of making their own plan, they do not need to leave it to the professionals to come up with their own solution. But they learn that they are capable of more than what they learned before. They also know that they do not have to do everything on their own. It is maybe not only that it is a surprise to them that they can do more than they think but maybe also they are learning that you can ask from them that there are more then we used to ask from them. That they take their own responsibility to take part in the problem. It is their problem. They cannot push the

problem to someone else and now you solve it for me. You still are, can be in control, people can ask. Actually the goal of the solution is also yours. Well that is the way of getting a solution that fits you. And I think that that's a major thing to change in you attitude. That being in control, even if you can't do it on your own, you can be in control for the parts you are able of. And you can claim that right.

So the family being in control of their own issues is also accepted by the professional bodies?

Yes. Well not yet not everywhere but it is growing.

But at least within those conferences and in relation to the professionals that take part in those conferences?

Yes. Because I think that is the big thing also that they…the plan which comes out of the conference is really the plan from the family. There has been no professional involved in making the plan. Yes they have been involved in informing beforehand and to share the concerns. Maybe to have set some boundaries or restrictions. But it is really clear what is the responsibility and what shouldn't be the responsibility of professionals.

Do they also take a look at the end product, the end decision and they say like okay the elements I wanted to have are there?

Yes, but they have to be also totally clear upfront that it would be really strange that in the end they have to say, this is not gonna work. But for instance if there is a situation in the family, maybe there has been incest or whatever. Then the children are only gonna stay there if they have their own bed. We do not want to have the possibility of them sharing the bedrooms. That could be a strict condition because it is a safety of the child problem. If in the end there is a plan and it didn't provide for that one, they say it is not there, we do not see it. So now we cannot accept it. So that is set very clearly.

6. **How would you evaluate your conferences in terms of strengths or points for improvement with regard to the above mentioned dimensions and what could be underlying reasons?**

Yes, I think the big discussion with us at the moment is that we have for a long time been saying, it's the plan of the family. And it is very important that it is also a plan by the professionals. Not being made by the professionals but the professional are agreeing that you can have you restrictions upfront but beforehand there should be in the opinion of the professionals there should be the ...We have to avoid the feeling that they give it out of their hands and that they just wait and watch what comes out of it. There should be this dialogue and how to do it that is a discussion in our organization of how do we get them more involved. Not to get those professionals inside the conference where there is only a place for families and friends but how do we get them before the conference and after the conference, so that the conference is just part of a bigger system and a logic part which is helping the professionals too. So that is something which is not...in some places we can see that it started to work like that but maybe it needs more time.

7. **In general, Family Group Conferences are known for bringing together different actors with different viewpoints. In your conferences how exactly do participants deal with conflicting viewpoints?**

There are a few basic rules during the conferences that have to do with respect, that everybody can have his say. So that is an important thing to start with so that there is no attacking. Sometimes they use the talking stick method but that is up to the coordinator and what he or she prefers. But they try to bring it back all the time to the focus of why are we gonna be in a conference? What is our goal? What is the question and what do we try to achieve? And not to keep looking back but to keep looking forward to a plan that is gonna work. So it has a lot to do to start with the focus and looking forward to what can we do for each other? If necessary there are time outs. People can stop for a moment and can say I have to rethink it, or I have to get away for a moment. Also, time is gonna be taken as much time as needed. In the end there is gonna be a plan. There is always a plan in the end. And one family is doing it different from the other family, they have their own methods in the end. We are not there. So there is no professional at that moment, there is no coordinator form our organization. They do it themselves. There is always somebody in that group ,and that is also part having the trust and the process in that group, they find a way of dealing with it and some situations maybe someone is pushing it more than the other, sometimes they are just maybe getting tired. I do not know what dynamic there is all the time. The interesting thing is I have [lined?] with eigen kracht centrale and I started working in May this year, I have never heard of it before and during that whole procedure of interviews, I suddenly realized that I experienced a family group conference back in 1990. Because my husband is from the pacific he is Polynesian just like the Maori in New Zealand and their family is doing it in the same way. So there was this conference which was just taking two nights in a row, outside under a big tree. My brother in law he divorced his wife and left her with the children, they had no land or housing or education of the kids. And there was nights and nights talking people, sitting together in the dark talking. Still they came to a solution, how we are gonna deal with it in the future. And actually that is I think how it goes. And there are always stronger characters and in the end...the thing is that … The plan which comes out of it, everybody has to be able to put a signature on it.

Okay, and what happens if the viewpoints of the family and the professionals clash? Do they also kind of negotiate a common outcome or is the professional the more dominant part of the decision finding process?

We deal with that beforehand. Because how they come to the plan, the professional is not part of it because he does not know what is happening, he does not know the viewpoints before hand, he just knows the plan beforehand. What are we gonna do? And we make very clear beforehand that it is a plan made by the network, made by this family. This has to be accepted as a starting point. If it is not working in the end than that will come out in the future but it is like cycling: Nobody gets on a bicycle and cycles away you always have to have some humbles and bumps on the road and you might drop a couple of times. That is part of the understanding. So the difficulty is mostly more before than afterwards.

Afterwards there is a plan and that plan is gonna be leading for what is asked of the professionals, of professional service and assistance. And only if it has to do with the real restrictions they made beforehand, but that is only in a few cases. Only then they can so no, we do not accept the plan. That is very limited, that is in situations where there is the "kinderbescherming" is involved or the judge is involved or with the housing authority but that are certain situations. Otherwise, if it doesn't work out, if you plan is not gonna be successful well actually we are ending up in court.

Do you think there are differences in influence and power over the outcome between the families and the professional world? I mean if he can kind of formulate his basic points, the key elements at the beginning and the family has to apply those, doesn't this imply a certain imbalance of power? Or is the family then able to confront the social worker with an opposing view?

No, on those ones they are really clear. Well, we do not allow a lot of restrictions beforehand. Still in a few cases they are possible and they have to be very clear the way they put them and also if people do not put in the plan they also know what is gonna be the consequence. So it is not possible that there is gonna be a discussion afterwards if it is yes or not meeting their requirements. On those points the professionals almost have something like a legal decision, like this is what we ask so that is what we want to see.

8. **Could you say something about the impact of the decisions reached during the conferences?**

When the conference is done, there is a big flip over with the plan on it with all the decisions which have been taken. Within two days it is reworked into a nice paper which is presented to our coordinator. And that is what people look at and say during the flip-over, is this you plan, yes that is our plan. Then for us that plan is gonna be in a file, just for research purposes there is gonna be no names in it. So we cannot trace anything back, we do not keep the records on that one, we just have it for research purposes. The presentation with the flip-over with the decision of the plan directed towards our coordinator who helps them make it smart if necessary or who asks a couple of questions to make it more specific. And there might be, not always, one or two professionals there who are also gonna be presenting their results because they might have been part of the people who the requirements beforehand. So they have to give their ideas about it. So it is not gonna be a big presentation to whomever. When the plan is there are conclusions what they want to do and where they want professional assistance. From there they are gonna ask the professional assistance. But mostly those are families where there are professionals involved already. So they are just gonna be contacted again and say, ok we came up with a plan what we want to do and this is what we ask you are you willing to help us with it? So that is how it's communicated for the parts where they need assistance.

9. **Could you explain how the decisions of your conferences are being enforced or monitored?**

When the plan is there, as I said, all the decisions that have been made, have been made smart. So it is clear what they gonna do, who is gonna do it and what happens if they are not doing it. Who is gonna take action and what action this is gonna be. Those things are being talked through, the moment the conference is ending. Part of the decisions can be that at certain points they want to ask a professional to take the lead in it- that is their decision to ask that. Or they can give somebody the possibility to be in charge and to communicate for instance with involved professionals. Or to talk to the family if there is a problem they can say that they give them the power or certain power to intervene if there is something there. That is gonna be in their plan. What we have is, during the conference there is gonna be a website especially for everybody who was in that conference. They are deciding themselves who is going to maintain that one. But also our coordinator is not going to be a part of it. That is their specific space on our website where they have the possibility of sharing information: Contacting each other, helping each other. So that is one way of helping themselves to monitor what is happening.

And we have, I am not sure about the time, but I think it is something like after two month and after six month there is a moment that we get in touch to see how things are. One thing is also for research purposes and also the question is there, is the plan going as you wanted or do we have to look at it again? Is it necessary to reset the plan? And if that is the case then this "hulpgroup" has to decide on it and everybody is to be contacted again: Okay the plan is changed, it's going to change we will talk about it again but this decision is the decision of the whole group who was there. And on specific parts of it they can give the right of monitoring and to and put in charge this professional organization. So there is no one specific way. You always have the possibility of the website, you always have this after two month and after six month being contacted if the decisions have been made smart but otherwise there is not one way of doing it.

10. **Do you have any more information you would like to share?**

Well, one big question which is always in our organization is that there is a couple of things which are important to us. That is enlarging this group who share the ideas of a problem and coming to a plan, that people take their own decisions. But also that there is someone organizing it - people can't do it themselves. They need assistance in organizing conferences because the best thing would be if we are not needed at all. But if they need assistance, it cannot be somebody from professional organizations. Because they are part of the system, they are not fully independent and we noticed that it really works that there is a coordinator from eigen kracht who is independent, who can also tell people like during the week I am computer specialist and this is something I am especially trained for, to help people. To assist, but I do not care at all what your decision in the end is going to be. And that is the big difference, that when you are from an organization. Because that is a question we get a lot from professional organizations if we train their people in organizing conferences. And that is something they are out of. No, that should

be independent. So that's a discussion all the time which is put forward to us, like we would like to do it ourselves. We say, yes we can help you in changing your attitude we can train your people. In the end the real assistance of the people of enlarging that network of bringing them to a moment where they have plan we need somebody who is totally not involved and not interested in that plan so that the professionals can really do what their profession is. They can stick to their role so that the people can stick to their own role [reminds me of the colonization of the life world by the systems].

And in how far do your conferences have legal power or legal consequences?

Sometimes like in Overijssel they have projects where there is also the "kinderbescherming", it is part of the system and the judges they sometimes ask people to come up with a plan before other steps are taken. To give them the opportunity. And actually I do not know if you follow politics but there is this discussion on two laws which are in the "eerste kamer" about how do we get more power to the people themselves. Now in that discussion you can also see that there are looking to make it part of ...that doesn't necessarily have to be the eigen kracht centrale, but at least the way we think is part of that... the changing of the role in that way. And that means that in certain situations that can be part, can be a legal plan almost and that sense that the step to make the plan is accepted. If there is a good plan then it can be accepted by a judge if there is a judge involved. But there is different situations, I mean we have been doing in jail to. Although we work together with restorative justice and they like much more cases to be solved in the way eigen kracht does. So to avoid everything, to go into heavy legal processes.

Transcribed Interview UK

Interview partner: Diane Sanderson, FGC Coordinator

Organization: Children Services, Surrey

Duration of the interview: 45 minutes

1. **Could you describe how your conferences are initiated?**

   Yes, there is the Child Protection Team, the Look After the Child Team. We have the Children Stability Team and also the Youth Support Service. So that is how we get all children service related referrals. We kind of recognized the need to do some preventative work and try get in there early, particular when children services are involved. So we have something called the CAF, which is the common assessment framework and we can now take referrals by and after and that enables schools, police health any other involved profession to refer to our services. So this is where our referrals come from.

   In terms of our criteria we have Prevention and Accommodation, so that is when families are kind of at the point of breaking down, when they are struggling, they can't manage,

they are not going to school, they are not coming in on time there are some boundaries this is not working basically so we would take referrals to kind of get in on there to help them get support to keep the family together and if that's not possible to look at the extended family who could have that child or young person for kind of a short period of time. Once the work is completed with the family. So that is Prevention and Accommodation.

We also got rehabilitation. Now generally if there is a child that looks after a child for a short period of time let's say 3 month. We are looking to get that child back home so that would also trigger referrals to us.

The other what we have is the PLO which is the Public Law Outline and that enables us to work with families that are in or about to start court proceedings. So the Public Law Outline involves the letter of intent and what we would say at that point is that the letter of intent is being written and they have their public speech in there. Then a referral to family group conference should have been made before that and if they happen then that kind of legal family meeting would serve as a trigger for referral.

And then our final criterion which is new which just came recently and that is for vulnerable child or young person and that is because of trying to do some more preventative work. So before they can reach the point of Preventions and Accommodation they just start in having completed that people who want to be involved as well.

2. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve the socio-economic security of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**

Okay so our [missing data] received enable us to capture long and short term care options for the child also enable us to so some permanency planning. We can look at things like education, so nursery school, college we can work with families where they have not access and that helps young people or children when they have difficulties in getting to school or college. We can look at different things that are available for them so like in the Alternative Value Program the OUT Program which helps find information for family. We can help them support parents to enable them to return to work by looking at things like child care, benefits they might be entitled to. Education really, course information as well. So to make sure that they are aware of what benefits they are entitled to and how they can access them. And we can also explore the financial support which is available within the extended family.

And in terms of housing what can do is we can help find accommodation unfortunately but can some processes to aged people who can help. A lot of our families have searched private preventative accommodation. What we have is a thing called NAPAG that can help to find the initial [missing data] so that is helping a lot of our families at the moment. We can also ask children services that involve professionals who are supporting. And we are actively involving housing professionals in the family group conferences at the beginning in the information round so that families can get all the information that they need and can ask any questions they have got.

3. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social cohesion of participants?**

Okay, so we involve the extensive family from both sides of the family so that maternal and paternal family are put together. We involve friends, natives church - anyone that could help support the family and the aim of that is to improve and strengthen relationships and assure that the child or the young person has got support around them. And what we do more on supporting families is rebuilding their kind of fractured relationship and looking at who is available to support them in doing that. We of course work with families from various cultural backgrounds and we use different talks to enable them to participate fully. So we can access interpreters for them. When we are working with families from different cultures we are really careful that we work within their values and cultural needs. Thinks like if they want us to remove our shoes when entering the conference room we would do that. We would also create the right environment for them, so they would like to meet in a church hall we would do that. So that they understand quite clearly that we take into account what their needs are.

Would you also say that this strengthens a certain sense of identity among participants?

I think so and I think by involving churches and youth groups that helps as well, it helps them to get to know what is available and to link to link them up with people. So our children service groups are all around different groups. It's about making sure that they know that those groups are available for them and enable them

4. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social inclusion of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**

Okay, I think we kind of touched on that in question three really in terms of looking on what kind of support is available to them. What we is when we find families that are isolated maybe because they moved to a new area and that they need that kind of extra support and they might have quite limited friends and family that they want to involve in a family group conference. We can explore on the scene what is available for them. Thinks like the church, the police the [woke up] and youth groups and what we want to do is to find families to look at resources that are available to offer their help, well they've got their family support as well but also they got the support from different cultural children centers, groups or maybe young parents or fathers.

Do you think this also furthers how they can realize their personal rights?

Yes you have a lot about that. I think not everybody is kind of aware what they are entitled to and what they are able to access. So it is about making it clear, and making them aware of that. I mean we have all the information so we can find other people who can explain that very clear for them. So we have a group called the Family Rights Group and they are working on family group conferences and they are great because they are impartial so we can kind of refer people to them for advice so they are really helpful.

5. **Could you explain how your conferences contribute to or help improve social empowerment of participants or the youth/child more particularly?**

So family group conferencing is about empowering families to find their own solution by ensuring that they are kind of fully aware of all the concerns and what is expected of them. So I would say that we empower all family members including children and young people by giving them the opportunity to ask questions and access information to ensure that they fully understand their concerns. We explain [missing data] we can offer advocates for children and young people as well you kind of side posting, listening and supporting them. Want we want to do and ensure is that everyone is heard and even if everything they are asking for cannot be answered. For example you might have a young person that is asking for a particular place scheme and we cannot get funding for that we could try to find an alternative for them. We are also part of surrey children service and so we follow what surrey authorities' procedures are but we also work with developing kind of a legal framework so we are aware of things like rights of the child and every child matters.

Okay so to make it clear would you say that also the child is empowered with relation to its family?

Absolutely, what we do beforehand, before the conference proceedings we go out and meet with the child or young person and make sure that they fully understand the process, what will be happening during the conference, so that they get a chance to share their views, what they want to happen. Sometimes you have a child or young person is happy to come to the meeting and can talk for themselves. Others want to attend but are worried that they become problems when they say what they want. We can explore things like do they need an advocate do they want to write things down, something that can be read out during the beginning of the conference. So they can write it down and I can read it out for them so they don't have to. So it all is all about exploring what works for them really and what they are comfortable with. And what we'll do if we have children or young person who do not want to come to the conference itself they can write down their views beforehand and someone can speak on their behalf and after the conference we go back to the children and make sure to tell how the conference went and inform on the content of the conference.

6. **How would you evaluate your conferences in terms of strengths or points for improvement with regard to the above mentioned dimensions and what could be underlying reasons?**

So what we have is evaluation forms that we put together and we either give them out at the end of the conference or we set it out with the family plan and letting the family and child share their views. They also give the feedback to independent services. And these information are also send to surrey children services. Surrey also does feedback on a quarterly basis so that is a type of evaluation form. All the information that we get back, all the feedback is recorded on an evaluation spread sheet and that is kind of used to

shape our services. We encourage families to tell what went well but also what can be improved so we can share that information during team meetings to improve our practices. When we come across families who wishes to share feedback not regarding our services in particular but on another team in surrey then we can make sure that we provide them with leaflets, numbers, web addresses that enable them to do that.

Do you yourself perceive that there is room for improvement?

Yeah, in terms of the feedback that comes directly to us that can be really helpful because they said they needed more information before the meeting, they were not clear on these. And then that some people we would like to kind of talk about ... [missing data].

Do you yourself have any comments on if your service could be improved regarding socio economic security?

We would like to have more funding to meet the needs of more families. I think you often reach a crisis level and I think it would be really good to kind of get in there and do some preventative work and that is something we are trying to explore. But yes this is limited by funding. And a lot of children services that we are contacting for providing health support are struggling with their own funding so this means that they are able to give limited support as well.

Is there more potential for empowerment?

I think we do well in terms of empowering people because that is what we are all about. We are about empowering all the families that we are working with. So there are things that we could perhaps prepare in a bit more detail particular with young people it could be tricky to get young person to engage with you. So I guess its funding that we continue to try to improve.

And is there more potential for social cohesion or inclusion?

I think that is about relative trust and shared norms and values and understanding how our families work really. I think that family group conferences is something social workers get more of an idea about really. Because, a family group conference is something very different in relation to their very formal meetings so they get a chance to see the child within the extended family, see why people have things that way-often they also ask questions what the family expects of them. And this gives the family a chance to say what they want which would maybe have no place in a formal meeting. Because do not want to say since they might be worried to say cause they are a lot of professionals around. A family group conference kind of turns the table for them really because it is family that outnumbers professionals. I mean grandparents normally do not get to see the social worker perhaps and know they have that chance, too.

7. **In general, Family Group Conferences are known for bringing together different actors with different viewpoints. In your conferences how exactly do participants deal with conflicting viewpoints?**

In everything we do, people come together with very different viewpoints, What you are going to do with the family is you are going to get an understanding on what some of the issues are and can do a little bit of work on that before they meet so that people are kind of aware on what is expected of them. Then on the day itself before we start anything we assure that everybody knows everybody and then we set some ground rules. And we want to assure is that the family sets those ground rules. We can help them setting those ground rules like listening to people, not speaking over one another, shouting or blaming not being accusing and that it is about the child. It is quite helpful to picture the child especially if it is a quite young child you state that this is the person we are focusing on we have to kind of leave that dispute behind. So having set those ground rules we can start working. Then in the first part of the meeting which is the information round we'll talk about kind of the concerns then they get information. At that point everybody is actually able to have their say. Generally beforehand we get an idea on who is going to struggle to say what they want to say. Because more often than not there are quite a few voices that overpower everyone. You have to assure that you are aware of that and to give those people the chance to have their say and to kind of support them in doing that. You are kind of encouraging them say what they need to say. What we will do if get enough quarrel we will give them some time out like let's get a break, a tea, drink something to move away from the group. It is very very rare but if the people get very aggressive and very hostile and threatening to hurt each other and then not responding when you are telling them that they are breaking the ground rules then you have to ask them to leave the conference. I have been doing this for 7 years two of my colleges found themselves in such a situation one time. But generally you are aware of that and notice when it is developing towards aggressive situation so that it is not building up until this stage is reached. And what we will have is then we have got rooms available and when people feel threatened or panic they could sit near the door and leave the room whenever they want. It's all about protecting to them, listening to them and then protecting them.

Could you again state how child in relation to the parents, how they negotiate and interact?

Young people have difficulties in saying what they want to say due to different reasons like the situation at home. To a certain degree they have to have that moment they have to have this outburst really so that they can say what they want to say. Then we remind them of the ground rules and kind of bring them back. Then the word is given to the parents, how they feel about that and it about letting them have that moment of saying what they want to say. I guess it is looking for compromises really to enable the persons to kind of meet in the middle. Having an independent person, almost like having a mediator there enables you to do that.

Okay and what is the situation between the family and the professionals?

What we would do initially is to explain the ground rules and to explain the professionals that the family all going have the chance to ask questions and yes they may be angry and they may be upset. What we are trying to do beforehand is getting an idea of the questions the family can be asking so we can give that to the social worker before she comes because there is nothing that frustrates the family more than them not being able to get an answer to the questions on that day. Cause they often have to talk to their manager and have to check this so what we are trying is to pick that up early giving that to them so they can cover that information basically. And again it is about letting that family acknowledge that they are angry and that they are upset and they want the job quickly [missing data] but allowing the worker to not influence that date by not [missing data]. So it's balancing, balancing the protected information that don't feel sort of [missing data] and make each other and the family able to say what they want to say.

Are there differences in terms of power over influence of outcome?

I think they feel kind of powerful having their family meeting because the family plan is about saying...what we would say to a family is as long as you are aware of what children services concerns are and understand the basic lines and agree to kind of work within them. Basically when they answer the questions, that is how they write their family plan and they answer the questions they have to be aware of that basic lines. So as long as they are working within them they are able to say what they want to and it is their..., it is not mine or the social worker's interpretation of what they are saying. They are forging that plan themselves so it's their work going on to that paper. They are able to say exactly what they want to say and not their information typed up. So it feels very different for the family than the more formal plan does.

So you would say that the professional accepts his position in the family meetings?

Yes, yeah they understand that they are there to talk about what their concerns are and to answer questions but yeah it's ultimately gonna be about the family having an opportunity to put that plan forward. And it is about the social worker making sure that the bottom lines are tight and as clear as they need to be so that the families do not come up with a plan where they say oh...but we can't approve that. As long as it fits with the bottom line there is no reason why it should not be approved.

8. **Could you say something about the impact of the decisions reached during the conferences?**

Okay...basically what will happen is they'll have the information giving stage where they are giving all the information to. They have their private family time where they actually write the plan and then in the third part of the meeting which is the feedback session professionals come back in – kind of hearing what the families have written really. It will vary sometimes they come back in and it is very detailed other times only few lines on a

piece of paper. So what we will then do is use that third session to kind of talk about what they have written. Questioning and expanding the plan by asking have thought about this; do you include this? So basically at the end of the meeting we want them to have a detailed plan on what is needed. What we then do is, I take that plan on the way with me. I'll type it up, send it to all the family members, they can either get it in the post or they can have it emailed to them. If it is emailed they will make a password on it to make sure that only they can read it. That plan is also send to children services and it is kept on their ICS which is some kind of an electronic record everyone from children services is able to access. If they are in court proceedings, the Surrey's legal team will get a copy of it and also the parents will get two copies so they can pass it on. If there are.. .if [missing data] or health is involved they will also get a copy of the plan. If there is a child protection plan then the CPTer will get a copy of the plan, if there are looks after issues the look after review officer will get a plan basically everyone you can think of and is involved gets a plan.

And what is the actual impact of the plan?

What would say is, a family plan is not legally binding. So it is kind of an agreed contract, they can't use it in court against each other. So what we would say is that if it is compact and quite often the court will not direct family group conferences a copy of that is going to the judge and when he is making decisions ...so let me look at this in another way. If we look at a family who have been in a month a baby children services may be saying that their plan actually is long term adoption, that the family is saying that they want to explore this within the family. The judge will look at that plan along with everything that children services is saying and that will be used to kind of shape the decision. So if he is thinking about contact he'll look at what children services are recommending on contact , they will also look at what the family has said what they think would work in terms of contact. And then he'll kind of look at finding a compromise and balance between that. And quite often what we find is that at the end of court proceedings the family has more contact then children services where planning them to have because the judge is listening to and respondent to what they have written in their family plan. And what we would certainly be looking at is that the family plan should be shaping child protection plans as well ...it kind of supports it , it backs it up in the same way it would back up a looks after child review meeting as well as looking after a child going home. A lot of that decision making is based on what the families have proposed in their family plan really.
Okay that's like a significant informal role of the decision. It is very powerful since it is the families' work I think and it is like them talking to these different people. And in the majority of cases it is accepted as long as the bottom line is adhered to and the family have done a detailed plan in relation to that then generally the decisions they have made are accepted at the kind of child protection level and the looked after review level and they have huge impact on court. Really big impact.

9. **Could you explain how the decisions of your conferences are being enforced or monitored?**

Okay. So what we would say is that it is the families plan. They have put it in place, so they need to own it and make it work for them really. So it would be about families that are kind of enforcing the plan and monitoring it. Children services will always be aware of it they are there for when they are having child protection reviews or looks after child reviews it is reviewed/resumed at those meetings as well because they will ask what is your family plan, are you following that are you sticking to it. And then we will offer them review meetings. So generally we say about three month then they can have a review meeting if they want to. And the purpose of that review meeting is really to kind get everyone back together and say okay, is this working , are you following it, if you're not following it why are you not following it, want needs to change really. And it is about putting that own respect on them really. Their family plan is supported by the professionals who are involved with them but ultimately it is their plan and they need to own it and work with it. Because the long term aim would be that children services are ending their involvement and it is the family that is looking after and protecting this child. So it is down to them really to take responsibility to kind of own the plan and follow what they suggest they can follow.

10. **Do you have any more information you would like to share?**

I think one of things we haven't spoken about is that it is a voluntary process and that families don't have to have a family group conference if they do not want to. What we would try to do is make sure that they understand that it is turn to state if it make sense that they can make an informed decision rather than them just to kind of go on what he says and I do not want anyone else to bother. What we would be looking at would be speaking to the family seeing if we can get an initial visit out to see them, just saying to them you do no not have to take it any further …so we can do that initial visit to tell what it is all about. If it wouldn't be that at least some information with the post, what the questions would gonna be and what the process would gonna be so that they can kind of make an informed decision. They hear conference and sometimes it can make them panic. They think about child protection conferences so it is about making them understand what the difference is really. What we will do if a family does not engage with us where there is evidence of kind of what we tried. It is not literally one phone call and they are not interested that's fine-it will be a number of phone calls, text messages if they are not respondent to them or write them, let's say we are coming around at that day if it's not convenient please give us a call. So it is kind of an announced visit as well, unannounced visits. And we are trying it out really by calling another time just if we can see if we can catch them another time. So we have kind of exhausted every possible way. So if they end up in court and the court will ask on why a family group conference did not happen we are able to evidence that yes children services have made that referral and family did not engage for whatever reason. If the family at that point then says actually we will have one now, it is never too late. If they say no, they can have another chance later on [missing data].

Then I want to say something about conducting family group conferences early before it gets to court proceedings. Right at the very early stages. This enables us to make sure that assessments are taking place cause it's about people tracking and we will be exploring extensive family members as soon as possible really I guess that is at the letter of intent stage if they haven't had that they should definitely wish to have one so that we can prevent the way to court as well if people have been able to be assessed early.

And I guess it is about ensuring that it's not just the views of mums and dads, it is the views of everyone so it is giving kind of all family members the chance to have their say as well.

Oh, and the only other challenge I would say we come across is people coming in urgent issues. And it is about making them understand that it is a family led process. Generally the frame work we work in is 6 weeks so don't want them ringing up and saying oh the baby is due next week , so that is to say that the referral should be made timely/tightly and not kind of expecting it to happen quickly. Yeah I guess one of the things is making the professional aware that this is not working, making them understand that we are not an emergency response service and it will take as long as we would need. So sometimes it takes even longer than 6 weeks because you are trying to unpick all of that issues they are complex and you working with them. So that they are at the right point of having a family group conference.

So in this light regarding the cooperation with the professionals and the professional world are there other points for improvement? Would you wish to have more influence? Maybe even more legal power?

I think it would be good and it is something that we are working to that those decisions carry more weight. We have certainly moved on a lot in the time I have been working with family group conferences and the families are…what they are saying is having more of an impact now..I think the laws have changed as well which has helped that – certainly in terms of the court process and the judges you know directly asking for family group conferences. I think that has helped a lot. I think it is kind of having the time – it would be lovely to have the time to get out and get around everyone and to make sure that they fully understand the service and the process and that it kind of takes about 6 weeks.

And I think a big thing for us would be to do more preventative work. We'd love to get in at those early stages before they have reached the crisis point. And we are trying to do that, that is why we added our last objective about preventative work…sorry vulnerable children and young people. So we are trying to do that but ultimately those referrals, the court referrals, the child protection referrals will always have to take priority, so I guess yes, that is a challenge for us really. Doing what we want to do is that early preventative, unjungleing that kind of stuff as well.

Appendix 5: Indicators on the Contribution of FGCs to Social Quality

In the following exemplary indicators are presented that have built the basis for the analysis. The final interpretation is presented in the analytical part of the thesis. Therefore, some modifications have been made to integrate the findings into a coherent whole. Nevertheless, the following pages will present an overview of which indicators have been considered. Since the units of the indicators are whole sentences they might be relatable to more than one theme or category. For further clarification please consult the analytical part of the thesis. Indicators from the interview in the UK are presented in black while indicators from the interview in the Netherlands are presented in red.

Indicators on the interrelatedness of the conditional factors

Indicator	Elements
We are there to support organizing the conference, enlarging the network, enable people to make their plan they come up with and to make it workable and smart.	- Support organizing as empowerment - Enlarging network as inclusion - Enabling plan making as empowerment through network/inclusion - Making it workable as general support
Those children if they have been in a conference, have a bigger network which is also in difficult times supporting them and make it possible for them to be more self-reliant.	- Network as tool for empowerment: - Providing support - Improving skills in form of self-reliance
Then we are going to find out who does that need to be able to be there without the mum feeling threatened.	- Enlarging network to allow for participation - To enable participation (as a form of empowerment)
Maybe you ask your family, your neighbors or others to help you to decide but you had a say in it on what is going to happen with the child. It is not suddenly taken out of your hands even if you can't do it yourself.	- Network as enabling individual to form a decision and gain influence on this decision.
They [the individual] help themselves completed with a smaller quantity of professional aid. So that's going to make it possible for them to stay stronger in a society where they are forced to stay and live there.	- General indicator on self-help through network and empowerment in form of staying stronger in society.
They [the individual] do not have to be scared of the consequences of telling what they think or asking what they need… …because through the conference they find a network that is far bigger than the small familygroup… …they can rely on to achieve what is necessary for them at a certain moment	- Indicator of independence, self reliance, empowerment - By making use of inclusion and access to wider network - Implies trust and strong cohesion network - to achieve what is necessary for them Interpreted as including basic needs in form of socio-economic security.
We involve friends, natives, church and anyone that could help support the family and the aim of that is to improve and strengthen relationships and assure that the child or the young person has got support around them.	- Enlarging network with focus on support, cohesion - To support, assist the family - And in this way improve and strengthen relationships within family and participants - This network then creates support, empowers the child to possible improve socio-economic

	conditions
It is about making sure that they [the children] know that those groups are available for them and enable them.	- The groups enable the individual. - So inclusion probably plus a certain amount of cohesion empower individual to increase to better its socio economic situation.
So I would say that we empower all family members including children and young people by giving them the opportunity to ask questions and to access information.	- Indicator Empowerment – information - This justifies putting information rather into empowerment dimension than the others since this relationship is suggested by the respondents as well as by SQ literature.

Indicators on Social Inclusion

Enlarging Network	Then we come to people, persons who would never have been invited by the initial person you start with. So it is not only the people you like to have there but it is the people who we think can be of help. In this case you bring them together. You [the coordinator] make the group bigger. That means that there is a bigger group and you do not need to be friends all the way. They [coordinator] ask the families, the colleagues, the work to join together to see what is possible [indicator Access services as well]. We had situations already with people who felt lonely and through a conference they got new contacts. What we have is there is going to be a website especially for everybody who was in the conference. That is their specific space on our website where they have the possibility of sharing information, contacting each other and helping each other. In the end the real assistance of the people [coordinator] is enlarging the network and bringing them to a moment where they have a plan. We involve the extensive family so that maternal and paternal family are put together. We involve friends, natives, the church-anyone that could help support the family. I think by involving churches and youth groups that helps as well. It helps them to get to know what is available and to link them up with people. "What we see is when we find families that are isolated maybe because they moved to a new area and that they need that kind of extra support and they might have quite limited friends and family that they want to involve in a Family Group Conference, we can explore on the scene what is available for them: Thinks like the church, the police and youth groups."
Involving Professionals	They [coordinator] ask the families, the colleagues, the work to join together to see what is possible [indicator enlarging network as well]. We can also ask children services that involve professionals who are supporting and we are actively supporting housing professionals in the Family Group Conferences [Indicator S.E.S. and inclusion] We have all the information so we can find other people who can explain that [benefits and entitlements] very clear for them. In both ways you can use a conference that is especially for youth and education. Then the school is involved and the network of the child is involved. They can also get professionals bring in information who might help them in the future, so to get them access for instance to the systems and fighting an addiction. That is in situations where the child protection is involved, or the judge is involved or with the housing authority. We are actively involving housing professionals in the family group conferences. We can also ask children services that involve professionals who are supporting. I think by involving churches and youth groups that helps as well because it helps them to get to know what is available and to link them up with people.
Providing Information (As an aspect of Social Empowerment)	"When we come across families who wishes to share feedback not regarding our services in particular but on another team in surrey the we can make sure that we provide them with leaflets, numbers, web addresses that enable them to do that." [Information on Access] We can help support parents to enable them to go back to work by looking at things like child care and benefits they might be entitled to [indicator for access services and information on rights].

	So to make sure that they are aware of what benefits they are entitled to and how they can access them. I think not everybody is kind of aware of what they are entitled to and they are able to access. So it is making it clear and making them aware of that. [Information on rights and entitlements]

Indicators on Social Cohesion

Ground Rules	The only thing we bring into the conference is that there is respect for each other, that everybody is allowed to talk and share what they want. There are a few basic rules during the conferences that have to do with respect, that everybody can have his say. We can help them setting those <u>ground rules</u> like listening to people, not speaking over one another, shouting or blaming, not being accusing.
Responding individual needs (Element of Social Empowerment)	When they [small children] cannot do it on their own we always look for somebody who can support them in telling what they want. If they can't tell it they can write it down and it can be read for them. If someone has a real problem being in that group we use a video conference. So there are different ways of bringing their ideas [of participants] and opinions but everybody has a voice and is heard in that conference. We can offer advocates for children and young people that are kind of side posting, listening to them and supporting them. What we want to do and ensure is that everyone is heard. We can explore things like do they need an advocate or do they want to write things down; something that can be read during the beginning of the conference. So it is all about exploring what works for them really and what they are comfortable with. If we have children or a young person who do not want to come to the conference itself they can write down their views beforehand and someone can speak on their behalf. In everything we do people come together with different viewpoints. At this point everybody is actually able to have their say. More often than not there are quite a few voices that overpower everyone. You [the coordinator] have to assure that you are aware of that and to give those people the chance to have their say and to kind of support them in doing that. You are kind of encouraging them to say what they need to say. What we will have is then we have got rooms available and when people feel threatened of panic they could sit near the door and leave the room. It is all about protecting them, listening to them and then protecting them. And I guess it is about ensuring that its not just the views of mums and dads, it is the views of everyone. It is giving kind of all family members the chance to have their say as well.
Responding collective needs (Element of Social Empowerment)	We of course work with families from different cultural backgrounds and we use different methods to <u>enable them</u> to participate fully-so we can access interpreters for them. If people get very aggressive and very hostile and threatening to hurt each other and then not responding when you are telling them that they are breaking the ground rules then you have to ask them to leave the conference. If necessary there are timeouts. Also time is going to be taken as much as needed. And one family is doing it different from the other family; they have their own methods in the end. When we are working with families from different cultures we area really careful that we work within their values and cultural needs. If we get enough quarrel we will give them some time out like lets get a break, a tea, drink something to move away from the group. We would also create the right environment for them, so if they would like to meet in a church hall we would do that. So that they understand quite clearly that we take into account what their needs are.
Promoting Identity and Trust	Most of the time it is a big step for them since they have to overcome this feeling of shame to let others share their problems. That is something the coordinator helps them in. So what is their feeling of being there? We assure that everybody knows everybody. They share what is worrying them and sometimes they also share the restrictions they have for the plan (the professional).

	If that [the process] works you can see that you regain trust in organizations. And because you make deals with the peoples themselves [the professionals] it is going to be part of the system. So the system is much more working together; the professional system and the private system-there is a bridge. They [professionals] get a chance to see the child within the extended family, see why people have things that way. I mean grandparents normally do not get to see the social worker perhaps and now they have that chance, too. All different things are combined together and the child is the centre of it. When there is a situation where you need help and you need help for the child in this case, there are a lot of people that want to help. And that is a binding thing between this group. That is the starting point to meet and to be a group because there is a shared interest. Everybody is there to also tell in what kind of relationship they are standing to the one who is asking the question. At the start of the conference people realize that they are part of a group, of a system who want to help them and who are willing to put an effort for them. It is about the child. It is quite helpful to picture the child especially if it is quite young children you state [the coordinator] that this is the person we are focusing on. They try [the coordinators] to bring it back all the time to the focus of why are we in a conference? What is the goal and what is the question and what do we want to achieve? So it has a lot to do with the focus and looking forward to what can we do for each other. What is happening is that people realize that they are not on their own.
Providing Information (Element of Social Empowerment)	What you are going to do with the family is you are going to get an understanding on what some of the issues are and can do a little bit of work on that before they meet so that people are kind of aware on what is expected of them [Preparatory information] What we would do initially is to explain the ground rules and to explain the professionals that the family all going to have the chance to ask questions and yes they may be angry and upset. We are trying to pick this up early [the Questions the family might pose] giving that to them so they can cover that information basically. What we do before the conference proceedings is we go out and meet with the child or young person and make sure that they fully understand the process and what will be happening during the conference so that they get a chance to share their views.
Restoring relations	But before dealing with it there has to be a restorative part. But even in these Family Group Conferences you see that before you can start, you have to take a few steps to improve relationships. We look forward and do not look at all the things that happened in the past. And not to keep looking back but to keep looking forward to a plan that is gonna work. We have to kind of leave that dispute behind.

Indicators on Social Empowerment

Giving Experience (Aspect of Furthering Knowledge)	It is going to be easier for them to recognize the situation they have has problems with and to recognize the situation where they need assistance from their network or maybe professionals (in SES as well? In that way I think the chance to for them to avoid dropping into a problematic situation again is bigger so that it is more like prevention in the future to not to go back into economic problems. So one side is that you give them experience and you brace them for the future to face their problems. The response we get to our conferences is also that even if their problems have not been solved they still gained from the experience of having had a conference. In that way it makes them look for assistance to have their own plan to try to follow what they want to do. I think one big thing is that people realize that there is more than just one or two who are interested in their well being. If you have that type of situation you can teach them through the conference what is the way out of it and how to deal with it. I think that is in their basic attitude something that helps them for life. They learn that they are capable of more than what they learned before. They also know that they do not have to do everything on their own.	

| | | It is maybe not only a surprise to them that they can do more than they think but maybe also they are learning that […] they take their own responsibility to take part in the problem. It is their problem they cannot push the problem to someone else to solve it for me.
And I think that that is a major thing to change in your attitude: That being in control even if you cannot do it on your own, you can be in control for the parts you are able of.
Also that there is someone organizing it [the conference], people can't do it themselves. They need assistance in organizing conferences.
So it is down to them really to take responsibility to kind of own the plan and follow what they suggest they can follow [taking responsibility educates them indirectly, think of the link to educating active citizenship] | | |
| **Providing Information** (Aspect of Furthering Knowledge) | We can look at things like education, school or college.
We can look at different things available for them which helps find information for the family.
We can help support parents to enable them to return to work by looking at things like child care, benefits they might be entitled to and education.
So to make sure that they are aware of what benefits they are entitled to and how they can access them.
We can also explore the financial support which is available within the extended family.
Families can get all the information they need and can ask any questions they have got.
Basically, what will happen is they will have the information giving stage where they are given all the information.
Then in the first part of the meeting which is the information round we'll talk about kind of the concerns and then they get information. |
| **Providing Assistance** | So in that way it is the full picture I think which helps them to take a step which otherwise they wouldn't be able to take.
It makes the ideas that of the network and the help and that there is more available than you could find on your own.
The presentation with the flip-over with the decision of the plan is directed towards our coordinator who helps them make it smart if necessary. |

| **Functional Separation** | So it really goes back to the people themselves that they are in charge, that they decide what is going to happen, and that it is not going to be a little bit corrected, a little bit shaped into the molds of organizations.
What we say is, we have to take one step more because it is not that you help people to make a plan, but people have to make their own plan.
It is not only a right but maybe even a duty to that we help them to make it possible not only to make a plan but also to take the decision and to keep the decision in your own hands.
The family they now see that they themselves through their network, are capable of making their own plan.[I] They do not leave it to the professionals to come up with their solution.
The plan which comes out of the conference is really the plan of the family. There has no professional been involved in making the plan. Yes they have been involved in informing beforehand and to share |

	their concerns. Maybe to set some boundaries, but it is really clear what is and what should not be the responsibility of professionals.	
	How they come to the plan the professional is not part of it because he does not know viewpoints beforehand.	
	We make very clear beforehand that it is a plan made by the network, made by this family. This has to be accepted as a starting point.	
	Part of the decisions can be that at certain points they [the family] want to ask a professional to take the lead in it [enforcement of the plan], that is their decision to ask that.	
	[relating to organization of conferences]: It cannot be somebody from professional organizations because they are part of the system and are not fully independent.	
	[relating to coordinating conferences]: We need somebody who is totally not involved and not interested in that plan so that the professionals can really so what their profession is. They can stick to their role so that the people can stick to their own role.	
	It is not mine or the social workers interpretation of what they are saying but they are forging that plan themselves, so it is their work going on to that paper.	
	They have their private family time where they actually write the plan.	
	What we would say is that it is the families' plan. They put it in place, so they need to own it and make it work for them.	
	So it would be about families that are kind of enforcing the plan and monitoring it.	
	Their family plan is supported by the professionals who are involved with them but ultimately ir is their plan and they need to own it and work with it.	
	And it is about making them [the professionals] understand that it is a family led process.	
	The professionals they have to be very clear beforehand what they worry about.	
	So it is not that afterwards they can judge if the plan is okay. Beforehand they say, if this is in the plan, then it is okay.	
	We do not allow a lot of restrictions beforehand. Still in a few cases they are possible and they have to be very clear the way they put them.	
	A Family Groups Conference kind of turns the table for them really because it is family that outnumbers professionals.	
	They have to be aware of that basic lines. So as long as they are working within them they are able to say what they want to say.	
	Allowing them to set boundaries.	
	It is about the social worker making sure that the bottom lines are tight and as clear as they need to be so that the family does not come up with a plan where they say, oh but we cannot approve that. As long as it fits with the bottom lines there is no reason why it should not be approved.	
	So it is not possible that there is going to be a discussion afterwards if it is yes or not meeting their requirements. On those points the professionals almost have something like a legal decision.	
	So it is down to them really to take responsibility to kind of own the plan and follow what they suggest they can follow.	
Spatial Separation	So there is no professional at that moment [private family time], there is no coordinator from our organization. They do it themselves.	
Transferring Plan into the System	If there is a good plan then it can be accepted by a judge if there is a judge involved.	
	The judge will look at that plan along with everything that children services is saying and that will be used to kind of shape the decision.	
	Ans then he'll kind of look at finding a compromise and balance between that. And quite often what we find is that at the end of court proceedings that family has more contact then children services was planning them to have because the judge is listening and is respondent to what they have written in their family plan.	
Connecting worlds and Promoting Interaction (Aspect of Social Cohesion)	It is very important that it is also a plan by the professionals. Not being made by the professionals but the professionals are agreeing. There should be this diologue	
	So the system is much more working together; the professional system and the private system, there is a bridge.	
	I guess it is looking for compromises really to enable the persons to kind of meet in the middle. Having an independent person, almost like a mediator there enables you to do that.	
	The thing is that the plan which comes out of it, everybody has to be able to put a signature on it.	