



# GROWING TOGETHER

## *Newsletter of the Department of Public Policy*

*Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy University of Malta*

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# Lessons for Research and Policy - a UK experience

by **Maria Brown**

During the recent workshop Longitudinal studies: lessons for research and policy held in May 2011 at the British Library (London) I had exposure to cutting-edge methodological outlooks concurrently employed in policy and census research in the UK. Speaker John Hobcraft from the University of York described 'well-being' as one of the priority areas in contemporary British policy-research. Researching 'well-being' implies researching perceptions of people, amongst other aspects. Indeed, this was followed on by Nick Buck from the UK Longitudinal Studies Centre of the University of Essex; also the principal investigator of 'Understanding Society' – the UK Household Longitudinal Survey. Buck exposed the benefits of consulting innovation panels composed of contributors who feed-in fresh blood during the research process, particularly in the case of longitudinal and census research since these entail an element of repetitiveness. In this way, one can minimise the risks of reinventing the wheel. Albeit both speakers criticised a top-down research approach, I was surprised by the absence of direct reference to a dialogical approach, as well as by the absence of evidence of community input in the research process.

Another interesting proceeding gained from the workshop experience was exposure to the use of boost samples in policy research to ensure a representative presence of minorities amongst research participants. From a critical stance, my

reserves lie in the obvious risk of making the sample less representative of the whole population. However, in my opinion, the benefit of employing boost samples lies in the opportunity to inspire or recommend a no-one-size-fits-all research-based policy strategy. To explain better, if the benefits of using a representative sample lie in the possibility of making research-based generalisations, conversely, the intended bias of a boost sample might yield to research findings that shed light on traditionally voiceless social groups. In the past decades this approach was advocated by Freire and critical education researchers, amongst other schools, but less so employed in census research.

Thus, whereas traditionally a representative sample inferred a cross-section of the population obtained through scientifically sophisticated sampling techniques, today this may be replaced by or (paradoxically) combined with an element of unrepresentativeness.

Further information about this event is available at <http://www.esds.ac.uk/news/eventdetail.asp?id=2770>

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