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

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1. Introduction

The MYWeB Project provides important information about the challenges of involving children and young people in longitudinal research based mainly on repeated quantitatively-driven data collection.[1] This material was gathered from different sources within the project, such as the Delphi Survey (see Chap. 3) and interviews with 440 children and young people from a variety of social backgrounds. Combining these data allows us to develop three interrelated arguments. Firstly, that the problem of attrition in quantitative surveys should be understood and tackled qualitatively. The question should also be one of *why people drop out of a study*, complemented with the question of *who most often drops out of it (and what characterises them)*. Focusing more on what drives people to continue to participate in a survey and what pushes them away from it makes it possible to develop strategies

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

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

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

2. Thinking Attrition Qualitatively: Tackling Long-Term Participation

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

A multi-dimensional approach entails using a limited number of qualitative interviews with active participants who share similar socio-demographic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Researching Children and Young People from All Social *Milieus*

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

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

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

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

3.1. 'Hard-to-Reach' Participants and the Middle Class

Representativeness is the key element underlying the validity of survey-based research. The value of survey analysis relies on the capacity of the samples to accurately estimate the characteristics of the human group they are intended to represent. In social research, when certain social groups are underrepresented in a survey sample, their problems, world views, interests or demands are likely to be overlooked. This is one of the major concerns in survey research, particularly because certain groups are systematically underrepresented in surveys in that they are more difficult to reach (Bonevski et al. 2014; Shaghaghi et al. 2011; Hanafin et al. 2014).

In order to address the issue of representativeness, survey research has devoted much effort to improving both sampling – the strategy for selecting individuals who represent the whole population – and response rates – strategies designed to achieve the effective participation of this theoretically-selected sample. However, in longitudinal surveys there is another element that can greatly alter representativeness: attrition, and in particular the systematic loss of a certain respondent profile. Attrition is one of the main challenges in longitudinal research, not only because it reduces sample sizes, but above all because it leads to the reiteration of this bias, which progressively damages data representativeness (Fitzgerald et al. 1998). The problem of attrition thus has to be faced from day one. This is particularly relevant in the case of longitudinal surveys designed to study children and young people's trajectories, which focus on years in the lifecycle that are particularly prone to change. In order to tackle this problem, we not only have to answer the question of *who* drops out (i.e., identify and characterise the social groups that are more prone to abandoning longitudinal surveys), but also the question of *why* they do so.

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

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

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

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

> Well, I'm not sure about the details, but I heard that this is an EU project, so this must be something important. I also heard that many children are asked [to participate] from all over Europe and I think that's also a good thing. Because it's not only my opinion, but also other children's. And if so many children's opinions are asked and analysed, that must be an important thing, because it must serve some purpose. (Péter, male, 13 years old, Hungary)

The perception of the capacity to be heard is not equally distributed among different social *milieus*. The MYWeB project showed that young people from lower social classes were often more sceptical about their chances of playing a significant role in society, and think that voicing their needs is just not worth it. The perception of the usefulness of participating in a research process is thus related with the position each social group takes in society. Bourdieu's notion of social space (Bourdieu 1985) is crucial to underline how positions in society are shaped by a system of economic, social, cultural and symbolic relationships that partially determines how different social groups occupy more central, important or powerful places. Different positions in social space are a key element in understanding how young people perceive their capacity to be influential in society, and how this shapes their political participation strategies (Soler-i-Martí and Ferrer-Fons 2015). The same logic seems to apply to participation in social research: if the central motivation for children and young people to take part in survey studies is their perception of those studies' impact, then children and young people from marginal or disadvantaged social *milieus* are likely to see their participation as less relevant than counterparts with more privileged social backgrounds.

3.2. The Importance of the Meso: Social Environment and the 'Domestic Equation'

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

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

> I think it can be very positive to collaborate in a longitudinal survey as you can see the points of view of young people, which are often different to the views from older people. On many things we are very different. This young people's perspective can help to change

> many things, so it is really important to do the studies on well-being. When you talk about well-being, in fact, you are analysing many dimensions of someone's life. This is very rich and useful. (Sol, female, 18 years old, Spain)

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

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

In practical terms, a strategy for involving families in this particular type of research will be needed from the start, in order to stimulate both initial and continuous commitment to the survey by the participants. This first relates to parents who will have to answer the initial questionnaires, and then by the children and young people themselves in the following rounds. If initial consent and continuous participation are, as we have said, curvilinear[2] – i.e., ensuring the continuous participation of all social classes is an important challenge – then this calls for different approaches according to families' social backgrounds. Children and young people from underprivileged *milieus*, such as ethnic or religious minorities, Roma or Traveller communities, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or even children with special needs, are some of the groups for which information in general and about opinions and attitudes to well-being in particular is simultaneously most needed and hardest to obtain. Gaining consent to the first approach and ensuring continuous engagement thereafter are highly dependent on the information provided to parents and young participants, and are a task in which close contact with the institutions and professionals that usually work with these families and children is certainly useful.

[2] People with very high and very low SES show fewer propensities to participate in longitudinal studies (Groves and Couper 1998).

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

4. Strategies for Involving Children and Young People in Longitudinal Research

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

4.1. Survey Design

There is a growing consensus that children and young people should be involved in the design of research tools that are aimed at them. This is not only a strategic, but also an ethical issue (Ben-Arieh 2014). This consensus can be grasped in the Delphi results: respondents largely agreed that children (85% of respondents) and young people's (94% of respondents) views are an important input for research-instrument design. This was particularly the case for young people (68% of the experts strongly agreed), compared to children (45% strongly agreed). This view was reinforced by the interviews and focus groups with young people, which indicated that factors contributing to well-being evolve with different life-stages (i.e., childhood,

adolescence, early adulthood). This is true of activities, attitudes, values and relationships, notwithstanding the fact that in many respects there is continuity between these life phases and it is thus difficult to draw a clear age-based line between them. However, the MYWeB results suggest a need to discuss this issue in depth when designing the questionnaire in such a way as to adopt a developmental approach. In addition, the pilot survey clearly showed that children (especially those aged 7 or 8) may experience more serious difficulties in answering surveys than young people. This only reinforces the need for children to be involved in the survey design and piloting, so that that these difficulties are tackled prior to finalising the questionnaire. Ultimate success lies, in part, in the degree to which children are involved and provide their critical opinion on the earlier versions. This issue is specifically addressed in Chap. 6 of this volume where cross-cultural cognitive interviews with children are examined.

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

4.2. Material Incentives

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

> Young people have a unique opinion about themselves, they think they are special, so that is probably why they would like to participate in a survey, because they think their opinion is important. That is why I think that an incentive is important, but not crucial for participation. (Mapa, male, 16 years old, Croatia)

> You said we'll get a USB stick, so that's nice... If there was no reward, I think that some children would participate, and that some would not. (Eva, female, 10 years old, Croatia)

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

4.3. Non-material Incentives

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

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

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

[3] That is, young people that are not involved with any political, environmental, social or voluntary organization, association, activity or cause in a systematic way or through formal membership.

> They should take what the children believe under consideration before taking a political decision, but this is fantasy. For example, when the Prime Minister passes a law to augment the curriculum at school, he should ask the children if they are satisfied with the educational system (Odysseas, male, 15 years old, Greece).

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Fieldwork Suggestions

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

- Distance between rounds. Not having to respond to different waves of a survey too close to one another is a basic rule for any panel survey. The MYWeB project proposed a minimum of one year between rounds, so as not to increase attrition; and a two-year gap was considered the optimum compromise between scientific rigour and cost for the purposes of this particular type of research.
- Flexibility. In this case, some children and young people involved in MYWeB said that being able to change the interview location from one wave to the next and being flexible with the date and time of the interview were also things that would facilitate their engagement.
- Having the same interviewer in each wave. This was pointed out by many children and young people in multiple countries. However, in his study on attrition in the US *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth*, which began in 1979, Olsen (2005: 69) indicates that 'interviewer continuity is not a major factor [for reducing attrition]. There is a net advantage to interviewer continuity after the respondent has been interviewed twice by the same interviewer, and after that, having the same interviewer decreases attrition by about 0.7% for each additional round'.
- Having a backup contact person outside the family available for necessary future contacts is something that could be worth considering, after analysing the ethical issues involved. Several types of disruptive household events can suddenly lead to loss of contact with the participant. Someone who is a stable presence in the participant's daily life could be asked to be a backup contact person in order to avoid this eventuality. This person would have authorisation from the participant and her/his family to provide new contact details in order to reconnect with the participant.
- Mixed- data collection modes. This element appeared only marginally in our interviews, but has been pointed to as an increasingly effective strategy, particularly with regard to young people. Olsen (2005: 70) argues that allowing respondents to choose the interview mode (CAPI[4] CATI,[5] or CAWI[6]) makes a difference, as their preferences may vary greatly in this respect. Hoogendoorn et al. (2013) concluded that the resulting reduction in attrition is a significant

[4] Computer Assisted Personal Interview.

[5] Computer Assisted Telephone Interview.

[6] Computer Assisted Web Interview.

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

5.1. Filling the Gaps

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

6. Conclusions

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

The main problem with attrition in a longitudinal study is the potentially progressive loss of representativeness of the sample. As we have seen, this problem is more acute in specific social segments, such as socially excluded communities on the one hand and the very well-off on the other, leaving – in this case – the paradoxically named 'missing middle' (Roberts 2011) as the most guaranteed continuous presence within the overall sample. Although this is an important challenge, it is not the only one posed by this socially biased attrition: the silenced voice of the most fragile groups and the ensuing loss of information concerning their notions and domains

of well-being are clearly particularly damaging for the objectives of projects like this. Awareness of this problem calls for the provision of more information and the use of systematic engagement mechanisms in relation to both interviewees and parents, with the goal of building a community around the participating cohort. However, these strategies may not suffice on their own, and the question of the over-representation of these segments in the sample may arise, albeit responding to it may in turn generate further challenges.

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

Secondly, several issues have to be taken into consideration during fieldwork. These include the distance between rounds (our evidence shows the ideal is a two-year gap), the need for flexibility in determining the time and place of interviews, and the selection of a comfortable survey location for children and young people. Other considerations include having the same interviewer in each wave, a backup contact person outside the family in order to deal with disruptive life events in the household, and a combination of mixed modes of data collection modes. Last but not least, following the example of recent experiences with participatory approaches to the design of research involving children and young people (e.g., Bagnoli and Clark 2014), if we want to engage with young people's views and maintain their interest and agreement to be re-contacted in a long-term study, we need to think more creatively about both our methods and the project's dissemination dimension. We need to successfully develop a research project which is relevant to children and young people and which they can partly 'own' (Bagnoli and Clark 2014, 116).

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