

# Illustration of Open-Systems Analysis in the Context of Case Study Research

Wendy Olsen, Durham, 2005

[wendy.olsen@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:wendy.olsen@manchester.ac.uk)

*Please cite as:*

*Olsen W. 2005 Illustration of Open-Systems Analysis in the context of Case Study Research. Paper presented as part of the Focusing on the Case Workshop series, January, 2005*

# A Case Study and its Cases

- Case study of ‘poverty and problems in Salford’ - It began as a study of poverty in Salford.

The title and topic were revised in the light of sensitivities among both respondents, and audiences.

A participatory stage led to considerable change in the research design

# Open Systems are Self-Transforming

- The case study of Salford had pressures and inputs from various groups:  
The sponsors, 'Community Network', part of the Local Strategic Partnership and the local regeneration group, across 88 Local Authorities, called the Community Empowerment Network.  
The participants, firstly 'Community Organisers' who are staff of the Community Network.  
The audiences at two midterm presentations.

# Changes in the Research Design

- The RQ was changed from ‘voices of poor people and those experiencing multiple disadvantage’

...to...

Analysis of problems faced in Salford including deprivation (something which exists at an aggregate level, or meso level), poverty (relative), social exclusion and the experience of loss of dignity

# A self-transforming system changes how it describes itself

- The interesting thing about the change in the research question, and hence its focus and techniques, is that it belies the traditional notion of scientific value-neutrality.

As a person I could try to be impartial in listening with open ears to these pressure groups.

Not much point being rigidly attached to the original research question, though.

Retaining the original techniques, which included interviewing, cluster analysis, studying numerical survey data, and using photos of the area, allowed the transformations of foci to occur around this 'hub'.

# Different Research Design

- Scientific Method:
  - theory
  - research question
  - hypotheses
  - data
  - tests
  - conclusions - with reference to the original RQ and H's
- PAR Method:
  - problem
  - enquiry
  - focusing
  - enquiry and data gathering
  - data-shaping
    - qualitative analysis;
    - clustering;
    - descriptive statistics
  - conclusions

# Further Changes in Research Technique Details

- The interview data-sheet was changed to remove all income details, occupations, names and addresses  
This was to protect identities and sensitivities  
The photos taken by participating activists (community organisers) were never matched with those who took the snaps – the photo takers did not have a stake in the research outputs  
The analysis of IMDs was carried out at the Ward level but Wards (of respondent and of the interviewer) were not identified during the interviews.

# Mistakes or PAR?

- A 'mistakes' interpretation blames the researcher for not controlling the process. On 'control' in the research process, see J. Heron's book on science.
- PAR approach recognises the need for a mutually agreeable, changeable research agenda which entails a flexible research design.



# Topics in the Research Outputs

- Public space and publicly visible places – who cares, who manages them?  
Housing – who gains and who loses from price changes?  
Ward-wise differentials in changing neighbourhood qualities
- Personal feelings of dignity, pride, self-esteem – these are important for further research  
A policy angle at person-level and family-level could arise from the dignity aspects  
Insufficient data as yet.

# Is there any space for causal analysis?

- This research project was not set up as a causal analysis

Further research could look at it this way:

What causes neighbourhoods to rise in public esteem? Does personal self-esteem rise with residence in a mixed neighbourhood or ward? (*cases = neighbourhoods*)

What factors can cause personal progress out of poverty, and are they differentiated by whether the poverty is **relative or absolute** poverty? (*cases = individuals*)

See Rowntree Foundation, poverty documents.

Also new participatory stream of poverty research

# How open systems are illustrated here

- The ward-level data are actually based upon detailed neighbourhood realities, and neighbourhoods are much smaller and more cohesive than Wards  
The IMD data have improved by allowing small scale area data.  
The persons are also nested within households, and income is at household level.,  
So is benefit means-testing.  
Then the households lie within wards, in a nested multi-level structure.

# Qualitative Research Summary Diagrams

# A multi-level research question

- Does health in homes across different wards and neighbourhoods get affected by regeneration activity,
  - A) affecting that household directly; and
  - B) affecting that household only indirectly?
- Health can include mental health, stress levels, happiness levels ie general satisfaction with each aspect of life, and physical health.

# Cluster Analysis Contribution

- The Wards are already clustered into two main groups
- The small output areas can also be clustered, and studies in connection with health information
- The associations can be examined closely
- Local level data from interviews, household histories and case studies can be linked to these meso and macro data.

# Ward Cluster Analysis Results

- **INPUTS:**
  - 2001 ward level index of multiple deprivation (9 items)
  - 2004 IMD
  - House price rise 2002-3
  - House price levels 2004
  - Thus mainly economic and resource aspects
- **OUTPUTS**
  - Similarities of all the wards
  - Difference of 4 wards from the rest ('non-poor'?)
  - Level of inequality of experience across neighbourhoods within Wards is also examined but kept out of the clustering.

# Next Steps

- Applying for further funding for research on experiences of poverty and social exclusion.
- Holding an evening conference for discussion of the results and data, during Feb. 2005.
- Final report to be agreed by April 2005.



# Conclusions

- The world has a multi-level structure, which is non-nested, complex and includes structure-agency dialectical relations.

Analytical statistical techniques can contribute to our knowledge of our world.

Counter-phenomenal discoveries can occur.