

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 33
Title of case study: Capabilities, Children and Global Foster Care
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Between 2009 and 2012 Clemens Sedmak was lead coordinator of a research project in collaboration with the international development NGO 'SOS Children's Villages International'. Founded in 1949, this organisation is a service provider in the areas of care, education and health for children, as well as a child rights actor advocating for vulnerable children's rights. It runs 2,407 programmes in 133 countries and territories, providing over 80,000 children and youth with family-based care worldwide. It has been nominated 16 times for the Nobel Peace Prize and is recipient of numerous highly esteemed international awards (see 5.2.4 below). In 2011, total income was €886.8 million (see 5.2.1). Sedmak's research underpinned the design and implementation initially of a pilot project to improve quality of foster care in SOS Children's Villages in Namibia and Nicaragua. Specifically, the research applied Sedmak's own reworkings of the 'capability approach' (discussed below) to children aged 8-13 and youths aged 14-18 who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it. The beneficiaries of Sedmak's research are the NGO and also foster children and their families. The final report, published in February 2012, identified major challenges and opportunities for programme planning and evaluation. It also developed a theoretical framework based on primary data for subsequent application across the SOS Children's Villages globally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Sedmak is the current holder of the prestigious and endowed FD Maurice Professorship of Moral and Social Theology at King's and a Category A member of staff since 2005. One of the three primary areas of Sedmak's research is social ethics with special emphasis on poverty research, theories of justice and aspects of social exclusion. Among the key elements informing this aspect of his work since 2005 have been Sedmak's innovatively focused reworkings and applications of what is known as the 'capability approach' (CA, also known as the 'capabilities approach').</p> <p>Originally pioneered by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen in the 1990's, CA was explicitly meant as an alternative to neo-liberal and utilitarian policy prescriptions in the field of human development. It suggests that the evaluation of social states of affairs should be based on the real options people have to live the life they have reason to value, and not – as often practiced – on the growth of individual incomes, the availability of commodities or on happiness. In other words, CA puts a focus rather on what people are effectively able to do and to be – that is, on their capabilities – instead of what they have or feel. The CA has been significantly developed by many scholars across the humanities and social sciences (notably Martha Nussbaum), and is seen as one of the most promising normative theories to address questions of justice, development policies and poverty reduction. It has been incorporated into many international surveys and official reports and has formed a conceptual base for the UN Human Development Index.</p> <p>Sedmak's own work on CA since 2005 – which falls into two periods: his theoretical work on CA from 2005-08 (see '3a' below), and also the further development of this work from 2008-13, fed by empirical research with the NGO (see '3b&c' below) – goes importantly beyond what others have done in this field. As a basic grounding for what Sedmak would eventually come to call a 'Co-Capability Approach' (which is specifically developed as a 'theory' for foster-care, although it also has ramifications well beyond that), Sedmak's work has been earmarked by particular considerations for CA of: (i) social context and its intangible infrastructure; (ii) human interiority as a key element of the being human; and (iii) its identification of key capabilities (such as decision making, imagination, friendship). Sedmak's approach as such has come to serve as the basic theoretical underpinning for the revised policy documents of the NGO for foster-care delivery.</p> <p>As implied above, Sedmak's underpinning research falls into two categories:</p> <p>1) Research 2005-08 – In 2008, on the basis of his familiarity with Sedmak's previous published work (see '3a' in section 3), Christian Posch, SOS Children's Villages International Director, approached Sedmak initially to be an academic advisor to the NGO as it was then seeking to re-evaluate its approaches to foster care. After an initial seminar led by Sedmak, however, in which he put forward his vision, based on his own research, for a fundamental reorientation of approach for the NGO, he was asked to become the lead coordinator of a research project, incorporating two pilot studies in Namibia and Nicaragua, which under Sedmak's leadership would come to be titled 'Capabilities Approach and Foster Care'.</p>

2) Research 2008-13 – This initiative undertaken together with the NGO (funded in part by the IFZ in Salzburg [see 5.2.5] and by SOS Kinderdorf eV in Munich), and importantly based on Sedmak’s earlier work, then yielded further underpinning research (published 2011-13), which initially served as the basis for designing and implementing the pilot projects in Namibia and Nicaragua, but which in its published forms is also in part the product of findings generated by these pilot projects. It is on this basis that the underpinning theoretical framework has been formulated, which, after the successes in the above two countries is now in the process of being rolled out by this NGO as a basic policy document for its International SOS Children’s Villages programme worldwide.

This second level of research was undertaken by Sedmak in cooperation with Christian Posch, Bernhard Babic and Silvia Exenberger from SOS Children’s Villages International. The research took place between 2009-2012 and consisted of four parts: (i) operationalization of the CA in SOS Children’s Villages settings; (ii) two field studies carried out in Namibia (Gunter Graf, 2010) and Nicaragua (Oscar Germes-Castro, 2010) to test the operationalization and to generate primary data (this field work was carried out in cooperation with local universities and was based on interviews with both children and educators); (iii) a systematic analysis of the findings into a theory framework; and (iv) a translation of the findings for the programme policy level.

The final policy paper ‘Creating Co-Capabilities’ – written by Sedmak and based on both the 2009-12 research and on several other related publications from 2011-13 – was published in May 2013. With an eye especially to both the social context and the inner resources of children, this ‘Co-Capabilities’ approach views children as ‘vulnerable co-agents’ and bases their realization of capabilities on two main concepts, ‘robust identity’ and ‘intangible infrastructure’. It identifies seven key principles for the work of SOS: **(i)** a principle of inclusive particularity (each child counts); **(ii)** a principle of source recognition (child as source of joy); **(iii)** a principle of primacy of childhood (children as children); **(iv)** a principle of 2nd opportunities (real and repeated chances); **(v)** a principle of primacy of family (intangible infrastructure – key element: trust); **(vi)** a principle of promises (accountability and commitment); and **(vii)** a principle of transformation (development encompassing the whole person).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3a) From a wide range of Sedmak’s initial underpinning research (2005-08) which provided the broader theoretical basis for the further specific research for the NGO, we submit two:

- 1) C. Sedmak, 'Opportunities and Capabilities: Poverty and Conflicts' in C. Sedmak, Th. Böhler (eds.), *Perspectives in Poverty Alleviation* (Münster: LIT 2007) pp 185-196
This peer-reviewed paper explores the relation of ‘capability’ to ‘opportunity’.
- 2) C. Sedmak, *Die politische Kraft der Liebe* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia 2007)
This peer-reviewed book develops the idea of ‘inner factors’ such as concerns and ‘community factors’ such as commitments as decisive in political transformations.

3b) For the underpinning research specific to this project, and generating both (a) the initial impacts on the care experience of children in Namibia and Nicaragua; and (b) the basic policy document for International SOS Children’s Villages programme worldwide, we submit two`:

- 3) C. Sedmak et al (eds.), *Der Capability-Approach in sozialwissenschaftlichen Kontexten* (Wiesbaden: VS & Springer 2011) (including Sedmak, 'Fähigkeiten und Fundamentalfähigkeiten' pp 29-52)
Sedmak’s essay develops the idea of ‘fundamental capabilities’ in this peer-reviewed volume which he edited, discussing the relevance of CA for working with children.
- 4) C. Sedmak et al (eds.), *Der Capability Approach und seine Anwendung. Fähigkeiten von Kindern und Jugendlichen erkennen und fördern* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2013) (including C. Sedmak, 'Zu "Enactment“ und Inkulturation des Fähigkeitenansatzes', pp 13-22); an English volume/translation is in preparation: (London: Bloomsbury 2013)

3c) The research was also published in a series of reports and published policy papers for SOS Children’s Villages International, authored by Sedmak, among which are:

- 5) C Sedmak et al, ‘Approaching Capabilities with children in Care. Final Report’ (Innsbruck: February 2012)
This is the final report of the research pilot project in Nicaragua and Namibia containing the results and recommendations that have since then been discussed with the end-users.
- 6) C. Sedmak, “‘SOS: Support our skills“: Capabilities and children’ Policy Paper for SOS Children’s Villages’ (Innsbruck: April 2012)

7) Both '5) and '6) served as the basis for the final Policy Paper 'Creating Co-Capabilities', May 2013, authored by Sedmak. The insights articulated here have also shaped Sedmak's 350 pp monograph on poverty alleviation (*Armutsbekämpfung*. Wien: Böhlau 2013).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Sedmak's research, through the pilot studies: **(A)** impacted on the care experience of hundreds of children in Namibia and Nicaragua; and **(B)** subsequently, through the framework these studies yielded, impacted on the approach and policies of SOS Children's Villages International worldwide.

Impact A: The research changed the lives of hundreds of children through the significant changes it has engendered in the working culture of SOS Children's Villages in Namibia and Nicaragua.

1. According to Greg Clayton and Benito Rivas, SOS National Directors for Namibia and Nicaragua (5.1.2 & 5.1.5) respectively, Sedmak's CA research has had a 'significant impact' and has 'changed the way we deal with concepts of the good life for children'. In corroborating letters to us, they report that the capabilities approach developed by Sedmak has been used to build capacity in numerous ways on the ground, resulting in an improvement in both the culture and quality of care.

- In general, the whole focus of the Villages (each with schools for their children) has shifted from 'unified school-success criterion' to the individual capabilities of children and their individual development paths. On specifics, they report that as a result of this shift:
- Children are now exposed to a wider range of professional career possibilities, and have access to more computers and computer literacy programmes.
- They are provided with improved life plans, long-term perspectives and decision-making skills.
- SOS children are benefitting from Sedmak's recommendation that the institutional profile of SOS is reduced in the community (where identification as a foster child often carries with it a certain stigma) and that the children are integrated into wider society.
- Children are now encouraged to meet with their biological families and to bring friends into the village, and SOS logos have been removed from vehicles used by children.
- There is now also an organised effort to discuss issues of cultural pluralism and gender, and to challenge traditional gender roles, with the initial result of the appointment of a woman as Child and Youth Development coordinator in the SOS village, Windhoek.

2. SOS children who participated in the workshops and interviews during the evaluation field trip to villages of Windhoek and Tsumeb, Namibia (undertaken by Sedmak and three SOS International and National Directors between 25-31 August 2013) were overwhelmingly positive. The repeatedly recurring theme of responses from recorded interviews with children in these villages were that the pilot project had been 'life-changing'. Specifically, they testified, for example, that the project has provided them with 'a sense of direction' (workshop 2, children); had 'changed my life' (workshop 2, children); 'changed a lot of things in my life' (SOS youth, interview); 'changed my life in many ways' (SOS child, interview); and 'helped me think about the future' (SOS child, interview).

3. According to (5.1.3) Reinhold Bauer, former Managing Director of SOS Germany and currently a consultant to the organisation, the version of the capabilities approach presented in Sedmak's research has 'changed greatly' the way in which SOS now approaches its Family Strengthening Programme (FSP). He reports that this vital programme, which goes beyond foster care in supporting vulnerable children and their families in the communities, is now more focused on capacity building and fostering self-efficacy and a sense of autonomy. Specific examples are:

- In Tsumeb, a community of 200 families & 400 children, and in the 'One Nation' District of Windhoek, home to 240 families and 580 children, income-generating activities such as sewing, gardening, and bread-baking that help to develop a sense of responsibility have been introduced.
- Sedmak's CA has been used in two new projects in Tsumeb – a counselling project with children in the SOS village and a capacity-building project led by volunteers. This includes projects such as 'making a movie', established as a direct response to a recommendation by Sedmak that children should be challenged in their spare time and that creativity should be fostered.

Impact B: The research changed the programme policy of the international programme department of the headquarters of SOS Children's Villages.

1. The research developed a basic theory for the work of the entire SOS Children's Villages worldwide, in the process impacting on the organisation's effectiveness and efficiency as a global civil society actor. According to Christian Posch (5.1.1), the International Director of SOS Children's Villages International), Sedmak's research has not only made a 'significant impact for

our international programme building' but has been 'policy defining at every stage'.

- This can be demonstrated in relation to the impact of Sedmak's research on the SOS Child Development Plan (CDP). This sets out the interaction between caregiver and child to assess the child's future aspirations and is a standard procedure across all 133 countries and territories. According to (5.1.3), Sedmak's research had a 'significant impact and brought changes', to how CDP is used. This view has been endorsed by SOS care workers who participated in the August 2013 workshops and interviews in Tsumeb and Windhoek. These practitioners expressed the view that Sedmak's research project had 'changed CDP', had made it 'less superficial' (Workshop 1, care givers), and had made 'child participation very important' (Workshop 4, care givers).
- Sedmak's research has also led SOS to introduce a new stage of 'rethinking institutionalization', fostering a culture of decreasing institutional features that gives more voice to care givers and embraces the 'children first' approach of Sedmak's research. It has even led the organisation as a whole to consider how best to facilitate the promotion of individuals, not least by introducing a culture of self-evaluation and exchange at all levels of the organisation.
- His research project has also served as a focus for the NGO's interaction with government and authorities in implementing strategy. In 2010, SOS staff met in Nicaragua with the Nicaraguan minister of children to discuss in detail the possible implementation of Sedmak's research. In Namibia, findings of the project evaluation trip showed that Sedmak's research has led to the establishment of new links with national organisations such as the Namibia Institute of Mining Technology and has improved the culture of cooperation with the University of Namibia.
- It has also forged a new relationship between SOS and the Namibian Ministries of Family, Health and Social Service. As a social worker (5.3.2) employed in the latter reports, noted, Sedmak's research 'has been influencing me in my work...especially in the analysis of capabilities and in applying tools for making minors participate in decision-making processes'. According to Greg Clayton (5.1.2), National Development Coordinator, Namibia, this has strengthened SOS' position as a 'theory-based' and 'reflective NGO'; and Reinhold Bauer (5.1.3) reports the cumulative impact of the project has led SOS to be taken more seriously at an official level in Namibia.

2. In view of these successes, with their highly positive impacts, the NGO is now in the process of implementing the basic policy document yielded by Sedmak's research across its International SOS Children's Villages programme worldwide. As Dr. Barbara Schratz (5.1.4) programme director and scientific advisor for SOS has remarked, Sedmak's research 'will influence programme planning and programme evaluation in all 2,407 programmes in more than 100 countries'. And Greg Clayton (5.1.2) likewise comments: 'I am quite proud that Namibia has become a pilot country since the approach tested here will be taken to other countries and an international level.'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Main corroborating statements (uploaded)

1. International Director, SOS Children's Villages
2. National Programme Development Coordinator, SOS Children's Villages Namibia
3. Former SOS Managing Director, Germany and currently SOS consultant
4. SOS Programme Development, Scientific Advisor
5. National Director, SOS Children's Villages, Nicaragua

5.2 Web links and other internet sources

1. SOS International – <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/what-we-do>
2. SOS Namibia – <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/where-we-help/africa/namibia>
3. SOS Nicaragua – <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/where-we-help/americas/nicaragua>
4. SOS awards and recognition
<http://www.sos-usa.org/about-sos/what-we-do/awards-recognition/pages/default.aspx>
<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/about-us/recognition>
<http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/about-our-charity/archive/2011/10/sos-children-nominated-for-2011-nobel-peace-prize>
5. IFZ (Research partner institution for SOS Villages International headquarters in Salzburg)
<http://www.ifz-salzburg.at/schwerpunkte/gesundheitsethik-und-generationen/approaching-capabilities-with-children-in-care/>

5.3 Further corroborating statements held at King's

1. Fieldwork researcher for project
2. Social Worker, Ministry of Health and Social Service, Namibia