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## Summaries

### **Retrospective bias in survey-interviews. An empirical study of the use of survey-interviews in tracking down recent policy processes**

by L. Deliens and H. van Goor

In a great many longitudinal studies data are collected by retrospective interview-methods: respondents are asked to describe their past attitudes and behavior. The reliability and validity of data, obtained in this way, are severely threatened by 'retrospective bias', for example as a consequence of the omission of forgotten or suppressed events by the respondents. Thus the mentioning of recent policy processes by local policy makers may be influenced by characteristics of the policy process. To investigate this, we compared the policy preferences in the preceding years of local policy makers, as stated in retrospective interviews, with the local policy processes tracked down by us using a combination of data-gathering methods (interviews, informants, documentary evidence). 252 policy processes in 44 dutch municipalities over the years 1968-74, covering three different policy areas, were used. We found systematic biases, e.g. more recently terminated, lengthy, major or succesful policy processes were more frequently mentioned as policy preferences by the local policy makers than less recently terminated, short-lived, minor or unsuccessful policy processes. In addition, great differences were found between the three policy areas in the number of policy processes mentioned as preferences by the local policy makers. We concluded that differences in the prestige attached to these policy areas (as indicated by support or resistance of the local population) were responsible for these differences.

### **Social support systems**

by J. A. I. Coolen and H. J. Kruse

This article concerns the study of social support systems; special attention is given to the mutual support between clients of a social service department (namely a local government agency implementing the Public Assistance Act). The researchproblem was to determine to what extent the functions of formal support, delivered by the social service department, could also be performed by way of informal support, given by clients to each other. This was analyzed with regard to the functions of non-financial aid (personal social services) for women who are divorced from their husbands and are dependent upon financial benefits in the realm of public assistance.

Three dimensions were taken into consideration:

- the necessity of additional support (in view of problems clients could not solve by themselves),
- the value-orientations towards support out of relationships with other clients (indicating

- whether mutual support will be acceptable to them),
- the consequences of relationships between clients in terms of the received informal support.

From the results of the empirical investigation it was concluded, that mutual aid will be necessary, acceptable and effective. Rather than as a substitute, it can be complementary to the formal support given by the social service department.

### **The chinese community in crisis**

by Frank N. Pieke

The last few years a crisis in the chinese catering trade in the Netherlands has become apparent. The possibilities to open new restaurants have been all but exhausted, and as to yet alternative economic opportunities have not been found.

This article goes into the background and causes of this crisis. A sketch of the development of the chinese community and its restaurants after World War II is presented, together with an analysis of the economy of the chinese catering trade, the social structure of the chinese community, and the pattern of the chinese migration to the Netherlands.

### **Rationality and irrationality in organizations: the case of vicious circles**

by Michael Masuch

Not infrequently, the term 'vicious circle' has been used as a concept when dealing with organizations or with action structures in general. The paper attempts to analyze the concept in a systematic and thorough manner. Taking some basic notions from cybernetics as a point of departure, it examines: 1) how vicious circles originate in organizations; 2) how they are related to perceptual biases; 3) what their dynamic properties are; 4) how they appear in combination. The literature on organizations is scanned with regard to the use of the concept. Suggestions for further research are offered.