

Coding

Coding

Documents chosen for the sample were entered into an online database containing the full text of the documents as well as codes describing various aspects of the document, including its context (date, occasion, audience) and its content. The content of the documents was recorded through the help of qualitative coding following a coding scheme prepared on the basis of so-called sensitising questions.

List of documents in the QUING software

During the coding we used a combination of data-driven (open) and concept-driven (closed) coding (see Gibbs 2008: 44-45). This enabled us to answer a limited number of simple questions about the documents (such as if the document used gendered categories, made reference to consultation with civil society actors or called for a particular type of policy action, etc.), as well as providing us with a detailed, structured overview of the argumentation used in the document (such as the list of objectives and policy actions, the way problem descriptions refer to social groups creating and suffering from the given problem, etc.)

In order to strike a balance between the openness of coding and the need to standardise the coding for the purpose of comparison, a syntactic coding scheme was used. Syntactic coding (Roberts 1989, Franzosi 1989) is a coding method in which statements in documents are coded as structured sets of simpler codes following a pre-given structure (story grammar).

POLICYACTION3 {

responsible: Government

activity: give legal right to for weeks paid bonding leave

targetgroup: one of the adoptive parents

motivation: child and family must bond | takes time to arrange adoption

}

POLICYACTION4 {

responsible: Government

activity: give right to maximum of ten days unpaid care leave

targetgroup: employer

qualifier: in addition to calamity leave | possible exception with severe business interest

}

Codeitems describing policy action statements (Netherlands)

Based on the characteristic statements found in texts belonging to the genre of policy documents and the sensitising questions, ten story grammars were defined to record information found in documents. These are: voice, reference, problem, past policy action, causality, diagnostic dimension, objective, policy action, mechanism, and prognostic

dimension. Each of these story grammars (similar to the one above on policy actions) contains several fields that are relevant for that type of statement.

Dialogue window to enter syntactic codes

Some of the fields in the story grammars were more interpretive than others, using more abstract categories than found in the documents (such as for the causality/mechanism dimension, gender dimension, intersectionality dimension). For these fields, a closed list of values was used that researchers were to choose from. The guidelines contained detailed descriptions of what each of the codes meant. Researchers were asked to code each substantive statement in the documents with the help of a corresponding story grammar.