Child welfare observatories: monitoring, evaluation and governance supports as levers of legitimation?

Observatoires de la protection de l’enfance : supports de pilotage, d’évaluation et de gouvernance, leviers de légitimation ?

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ABSTRACT

By investigating a Child Protection Observatory in France, this article address how its provision of support for monitoring, evaluation and governance, becomes legitimate or not across the three types of legitimacy proposed by Suchman (1995) named instrumental, cognitive or institutional. The findings are based on discourse analyses insights provided by actors in a County Council obtained through both semi-direct interviews and focus groups. This study establishes an observation system in action and highlight levers for changing managerial practices, encouraging specific perceptions of issues and bridging positions among the parties responsible for implementation public policies for the protection and welfare of children.

Key-words
Legitimacy; Monitoring; Evaluation; Governance; Observatory; Territory; Child welfare

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la façon dont un Observatoire de la Protection de l’Enfance, vu comme support de pilotage, d’évaluation et de gouvernance, devient ou non légitime selon trois types en s’inspirant des travaux de Suchman (1995) sur le plan instrumental, cognitif ou institutionnel. Il s’attache à qualifier les différents usages à travers l’analyse du discours des acteurs dans un Conseil Départemental sur la base d’entretiens semi directs et de focus groupes. Il contribue enfin à examiner le système d’observation en action et à mettre en lumière les leviers de nature à changer ou non les pratiques de gestion, les perceptions des enjeux et les positionnements réciproques entre partenaires de la politique publique de prévention et protection de l’enfance.

Mots-clés
Légitimité ; Pilotage ; Évaluation ; Gouvernance ; Observatoire ; Territoire ; Protection de l’enfance
1. INTRODUCTION

France’s decentralization since the 1980s has led to increases in the amount of observations of local public action (Piponnier, 2010; By Sede-Marceau and Moine, 2009). For example, County Councils (CCs), perform social observations that demand they “deal with two languages: that of the arithmetic territorial totalization of a homogeneous variable and that of the comprehensive local totalization of heterogeneous information” (Martin, 1998).

A law from 2007, which reformed welfare considerations, acknowledges in Article 1 its primary goal: to “prevent the difficulties that parents may face in carrying out their educational responsibilities”. Thus the law altered a central public policy paradigm, shifting to support and care systems rather than just preventing child endangerment. The legislation also has been described as “organizing the diversion of child protection by giving primacy to contractualization with the family” (Croff, 2014). A subsequent 2016 law emphasized the need to perform assessments, to ensure continuity in a secure course, defining this goal as a “project for the child” (PFC). It accordingly established county child protection observatories (CCPO) as multi-institutional structures for reporting data about minors who receive child protection benefits, spanning all interventions, including “preventive actions in favour of the child and his parents”, “the organization of the identification and treatment of situations of danger or risk for the child”, “administrative decisions”, and “judicial decisions for protection”.

A law from 2007 which reformed welfare considerations acknowledges reforming child welfare; by stating in its Article 1 that the main thing is to “prevent the difficulties that parents may face in carrying out their educational responsibilities”; substantially modifies the paradigm of this public policy, which was initially based on a set of support and care systems corresponding to situations of child endangerment. This text is also seen as “organizing the diversion of child protection by giving primacy to contractualization with the family” (Croff, 2014). The law of March 14, 2016 has since strengthened the place given to the needs child assessment, for the sake of continuity and securing the course, especially through the “project for the child” (PFC). It also stipulates that the county child protection observatories – CCPO (created in 2007), whose composition is now multi-institutional, are responsible for reporting data relating to minors receiving a child protection benefit or measure, as well as young people benefiting from assistance for young adults, and covering all interventions concerning them: “preventive actions in favour of the child and his parents”, “the organization of the identification and treatment of situations of danger or risk for the child”, “administrative decisions” and finally “judicial decisions” taken “for his protection”.

Then in 2019, data reported by the CCPO were consolidated into a National Child Protection Observatory (NCPO) (previously National Observatory for Children in Danger-NOCD) was initiated on the disparity of protection policies implemented in counties that led to a national strategy designed, among other things, to “ensure a common base of rights for all children in the territory” and to introduce additional support systems for parenthood and better prevent the vulnerabilities of parents, enabling them to respond adequately to the needs of their children and thus avoid activating, due to a lack of early intervention, child protection systems.

This contextual overview raises several questions, including how to use data to represent key issues for consideration (Norman, 1993; Noucher et al., 2008),

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1 In particular, CCs take charge of social assistance for children (SAC) programs, which protect children and families through individual or collective prevention initiatives. This form of administrative protection is governed by the Family Code, while the Civil Code is the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice (State).

2 Beyond the collection of data, and in particular within the framework of the County Child-Family Plan, the CCPO plays a role of foresight, analysis and animation of the partnership network for child welfare in the territory.

3 A 2004 law assigned the NCPO three main missions, later supplemented by the 2007 reforms (CASF, art L 226-6): improve knowledge about the endangerment and protection of minors by gathering quantified data, studies, and research; identify, analyze, and disseminate prevention and intervention practices for child protection; and support actors dedicated to the protection of children.

4 The State Secretariat in charge of Children and Families to the Minister of Solidarity and Health presented on October 14, 2019 a national strategy for the prevention and protection of children, whose vocation is to “improve the situation of children protected and to be protected, and produce a better convergence of responses for their needs in the territories”. A first assessment of this “pact for children” was published on October 14, 2020.
which methods should be used to handle different situations and which effects they produce (Dupuis, 2011, 2014), and how to mobilize stakeholders strategically in observation processes (Moine and Signoret, 2007). With the current study, we review the extent of implementation achieved for the child protection observatory and its various uses, according to an analysis of the discourse and practices of CC actors, on the basis of semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Duchesne and Haegel, 2008; Morgan, 1997). The resulting framework offers insights into how to manage the related public policy, evaluate programs and mechanisms implemented, and ensure governance between the County and relevant stakeholders. We adopt a typology proposed by Suchman (1995) that defines legitimacy as “a generalized perception or presumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, appropriate or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (p.574) and apply it to the CC’s uses of its child protection observatory. Thus, first of all, we will present the object and the conceptual analysis framework of our study. Secondly, we will specify the methodology used in order to point out the results from our investigation. Finally, we will discuss conceptual contributions of our work and proposals for improving the operations of the observation system; and conclude to open up some complementary research perspectives.

2. OBJECT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The object of our study pertains to a local, territorial observatory, which Pornon (2011) defines as “a device implemented by one or more organizations to follow the evolution of a phenomenon, domain or portion of territory in time and space” (p.132). By remaining at this level of data production, certainly intelligible; it forgets its primary purpose, which is to serve the reflection and action of local actors. We supplement this view by integrating the methodological processes detailed by Chebroux (2007), who notes “cognitive issues must be common to certain actors; data are collected from their knowledge, crossed with other extra-local and expert sources; analyzes are disseminated and presented to actors for the purpose of assimilation and reflection for their actions... in short, it is a qualitative-dominated methodology using quantitative data and analysis”. Observation involves choices and interpretations of information, shared among relevant actors, both “upstream in order to feed the observatory, [and] downstream in order to operate it rationally” (de Sede-Marceau and Moine, 2009).

2.1. Observatories for child protection, typology and features

Behind the outline presented above, there is in fact a diversity of approaches, objectives, means and actors involved.

Typology of child protection observatories

In the field of child protection in France, observatories by law (renovating social and medical-social action in 2002, and relating to the organisation of social observation in 2011) yet the reality does not always achieve this outcome, which also depends on the societal, economic, and family contexts of the children concerned, as the County’s ability to establish itself as an actor with influence over locally important issues or, as Cadiou and Maubert (2005) refer to it “an intermediate framework for the structuring of territorial power” (p.43).

From the review of 26 situations in 2011-2012; we sought to identify variables that effectively describe the configurations of county child protection observatories.

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5 These observatories had been selected on the basis of a diversity of political, geographical, socio-demographic criteria of the counties, differences in SAC public policy (prevention or protection oriented; maintenance in the natural family, day care or accommodation; administrative measures or judicial, etc.) as well as the particularities of the COs (age, richness of indicators and studies, etc.). The information was collected though a questionnaire survey which was completed by 2 or 3 qualitative interviews with those responsible for COs or studies within county services. Finally, among the 26 CC selected, some of those were for example: 06, 12, 13, 16, 29, 33, 34, 44, 62, 64, 68, 75, 76, 83, 86... (Reminder: according to a survey of NCPO in 2018, only 74 CCPOs were set up for 32 in 2013 and 68 in 2016).
Depending on the level of integration of the parties in the territorial child protection system, it is possible to distinguish three main groupings: those that appear systematically integrated (institutional partners such as the CC, the YJP, the FAF...), those that can be found frequently (managers such as organizations or the CCSA...), and then those that participate only occasionally (e.g. associations...).

A global view of child prevention and protection, reflecting the breadth of the field, distinguishes observatories covering all the issues of the MCP, the EAH, the EAOE, protection support as a part of welcome...; those focusing on a few key issues such as the pathways of children taken in by the SAC, the complex situations of children or young people, the difficulties identified among parents of SAC children and the consequences of fragility of the family context on the situation of children...; and those, showing data and analysis at the sub-county level.

The degree of processing, interpretation, and sharing of results represents the depth of observation. Some observatories manage and disseminate data in summary documents, with maps and graphics. Others rely on specific indicators that reflect the criteria established to steer the objectives of the Child-Family Plan, in the form of dashboards, supplemented with ad hoc studies. Still others try to create platforms for meetings, exchanges, and debate among stakeholders.

The scope of the work carried out by the observatories might suggest their role as data suppliers, as a complement to county services, whereas the responsibility for management decisions remains with the CC. But another view indicates they function like a sounding board, which allows characterizations of various situations to emerge, assesses the content of the answers provided, and questions professional practices to challenge county institutions. Finally, their role may be as resource providers, helping various stakeholders recognize the state of the system (diagnosis), the effects of the measures deployed (evaluation), and changes to be considered (prospective).

On the basis of this review, we propose the typology in Table 1 to situate each observatory. These assignments reflect their dominant status, but they are purposefully not exclusive.

**Characterization of child protection observatories**

The various changes in child protection approaches suggest new goals, including the following: articulate prevention and protection more strategically (beyond only identifying risk situations); develop a framework of action shared among the CC, YJP, and operational actors (e.g. institutions, associations); and establish interventions that involve stronger associations of families, children, and young people within a common law framework and without stigma.

In this context, observatories might offer supports in monitoring, evaluation and governance roles, as summarized in Table 2.

In terms of monitoring, indicators or dashboards might help encourage follow-up actions and measured achievements and results for the direct beneficiaries of these in order to offer quality responses to supported families. For this purpose, the devices used must be effective. As such, these tools contribute to the performatif dimension of observatories by selecting criteria suitable for answering questions such as: “Who are the young people receiving child protection? What are the nature and volume of educational activities at home (EAH and EAOE) and receptions in maternal or parental centers? What are the importance and characteristics of information of concern? How can we achieve the objectives set at the start of the intervention? Can we increase the professionalization and homogenization of interventions?”.

For evaluation, the observatories can go beyond quantitative measures and follow-up assessment, take a broader perspective, and account for reality (Brunod and Savio, 2009). Evaluations also should acknowledge diverse points of view (evaluation charter of the French Evaluation Society, 2006) from various stakeholders (e.g. institutions, financial partners, program managers, beneficiaries, families). With these insights, they can determine the relevance and usefulness of different efforts to address key issues and problems. The evaluations should encompass both cognitive and understanding dimensions (Terrier et al., 2013) and address questions such as, “To what extent is the treatment offered adequate for resolving the problems identified for children and their families? Can societal, educational, and family
characteristics explain the risk to children? With what scope should we target children who suffer significant family deficiencies or else aid all families who might need advice or support? What effects do the early admission of adolescents with severe behavioral problems have?“.

Finally, in their governance efforts, CC can integrate child protection and prevention actors in the CCPO, to establish sites for monitoring and knowledge sharing (e.g. statistical data, policy opinions, evaluative studies, common references). Indeed, “beyond partnership, the challenge is the creation of a common culture of observation which requires the sharing of definitions, methods, tools and analysis (thanks to) the designation of stable and involved interlocutors within each institution” (Hammel and Romeo, 2008). The socio-political dimension is evident in the organization of “specific relations between the public power and its recipients according to the representations and meanings of which it is the bearer” (Lascoumes and Le Gales, 2005, p.13). Thus confrontations, coalitions, and negotiations all reflect the dynamics of prevention, protection, and support, with a view to possible reciprocal commitments (Hamzaoui, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE A</th>
<th>TYPE B</th>
<th>TYPE C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Logic</strong></td>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Reticular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associate actors</strong></td>
<td>Face to face CC / YJP</td>
<td>Openness of institutional actors and involvement of actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Width</strong></td>
<td>Prevention and protection SAC</td>
<td>Prevention and protection at county level and beyond zoom in on some objects such as EAOE, multidisciplinary assessment of actors, tools and grids used within institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth</strong></td>
<td>Information collected “flat”</td>
<td>Production and dissemination of data between partners + evaluation studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Little or no collective concerted decision-making</td>
<td>Collective awareness of issues to be addressed or strategic areas to be consolidated or developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of observatories (dominant)</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Typology of child protection observatories
2.2. Uses of child protection observatories in the service of legitimacy

Forms of legitimacy

The actions of observatories and the uses that result can give rise to forms of legitimization, which are part of a “complex process of a symbolic, cognitive and identity at the same time” (Buisson, 2006, p.157; see also Bédé et al., 2012). The resources mobilized, the actors, and the animation methods all can act on representations of and beliefs about child protection institutions. The quantitative and qualitative data that get produced also can contribute to knowledge production, through consolidation or modifications of stakeholder strategies. Finally, the practices to which the CC is subject likely promote specific identity, professional, or institutional positions. Beyond this general framework, we can address the three types of legitimacy highlighted by Suchman (1995).

First, pragmatic legitimacy reflects an instrumental, strategic perspective. It results from concrete benefits, achieved through exchanges with interested stakeholders and influences exerted on them with regard to practical uses. Second, cognitive legitimacy is part of an institutional register and based on the intelligibility of the facts and figures produced by a tool or instrument, which then inform issues. It also implies that the involved actors can draw common meaning; in Hannan and Carroll’s (1992) argument, it exists when “there is little question in the minds of actors that it serves as the natural way to effect some kind of collective action”. Third, moral or normative legitimacy reflects a neo-institutional perspective that offers a judgment of the adequacy of different forms of support mobilized and the values shared in the field. In cases of divergent interests, it may involves the processes needed for developing consensus (Vaara, Tienari and Laurila, 2006).

For child protection observatories, it seems necessary to adapt the first two forms to this context but to reconsider the third form of legitimacy. Moral legitimacy reflects evaluations of the internal and external consequences of practices, which may be redundant with a pragmatic logic. Furthermore, it implies congruent procedures with those promoted by the social system, which should be extended to the processual logic between stakeholders and to the debate/dispute that may arise between stakeholders.
Adapting the legitimacy analysis framework to child protection observatories

Instrumental legitimacy, for its part, devotes the “monitoring” component underpinned by the determination of data as a representation of key issues to be taken into account (Norman, 1993; Noucher et al., 2008; De Sede-Marceau, Moine and Thiam, 2011; Capgras et al., 2011), and the construction of a repository of indicators (Zapico-Goni and Mayne 1999). Arguably, the observatory becomes legitimate due to what it provides to stakeholders (e.g. suppliers and recipients of information), in terms of concrete knowledge about situations at a particular time and place. It also reflects the changes to professional practices that the observatory initiates (e.g. intervention methods, timing of interventions, articulation of devices and measures). Cognitive legitimacy accounts for evaluation components (Metcalfe,1993) and creates a system that supports a common understanding of the situation, response methods, and any resulting effects (Roux and Feyt, 2011; Dupuis, 2011, 2014). In this view, the observatory becomes legitimate because the collective assessments it produces induce changes in perceptions and expectations among the actors in terms of protection policy for childhood.

Finally, institutional legitimacy highlights the governance aspect (Bagnasco and Le Gales, 1997) structuring the process of association and animation between stakeholders of varying size and depth (Summa, 2002; Theret, 2000). It implies the mobilization of stakeholders around an observation process, which defines issues to be addressed through selected strategies (Barreyre and Marty, 1999; Moine and Signoret, 2007). The observatory becomes legitimate due to its ability to alter the respective positions and actions chosen by the actors who are jointly responsible for the protection of children.

Considering the various facets of legitimacy involved, shared management indicators might enable richer monitoring of actions and situations (instrumental legitimacy). Evaluations of the effects of various methods of intervention can increase collective understanding of the issues and knowledge of the observed realities (cognitive legitimacy). The broad contribution of the various stakeholders to the roadmap and the observatory’s outputs also might enhance their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Type of Legitimacy</th>
<th>Determinants of Legitimacy</th>
<th>Qualifications for Legitimacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>• Determination and choice of data</td>
<td>• Shared knowledge of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Construction of a repository of indicators</td>
<td>• Change practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>• Common appreciation of situations and effects</td>
<td>• Collective understanding of issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>• Stakeholder association and animation</td>
<td>• Improve of observation processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Change in positions and ways of doing things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Types of legitimacy for child protection observatories

recognition of its role for protecting children (institutional legitimacy).

All three forms of legitimacy thus might result from compliance with stakeholders’ values and social constructions (Oliver, 1991), responses to environmental constraints (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1995), and also the concrete, strategic actions of stakeholders, reflecting their own interests by the county council in the field of child protection, on how to build shared representations, to monitor the application of decisions and to make the necessary adjustments. Table 3 summarizes the different facets of legitimacy for child protection observatories, which we test with an empirical study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

To examine the focal CCPO, we treat it as a case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). It represents a singular entity; whose contingent character makes it possible to identify the particular context. With a case study, we can establish its content, operations, and activities by various actors, as well as learn the meanings that the actors assign to it (heuristic aspect). We undertake field observations and inductive reasoning to highlight key properties of the case that pertain to our interpretive hypotheses.

These hypotheses reflect conceptual frameworks in prior literature, which provide hypothetico-deductive insights. We also integrate data from a comparative survey, collected through participant observation methods with the Department of Children and Families and the Monitoring Department of the Deputy Directorate in charge of Solidarities (DDS). In turn, we enrich our predictions with inductive reasoning, as similarly described by Quivy and Van Campenhoudt (1995, p.22): “Our knowledge is being built on the support of explicit, slowly developed, theoretical and methodological frameworks which constitute at least partially structured field, and this knowledge is supported by an observation of concrete facts”. Accordingly, we propose the following predictions:

- **H1**: To what extent do the observatory and the management indicators it uses generate instrumental legitimacy?
- **H2**: To what extent do the observatory’s evaluative approaches generate cognitive legitimacy?
- **H3**: To what extent do the observatory’s observation system and governance efforts generate institutional legitimacy at the system level?

#### 3.1. Study context

The case study refers to a child protection observatory for a county with more than 2 million inhabitants. It has experienced political continuity in recent years, other than changing terms of office. Despite relatively little dynamism in terms of demographics, its youth index is high. The share of single-parent families is higher than the national average, as is the share of large families. The proportion of minors covered by SAC is greater than that in metropolitan France. Finally, education, health, and employment situations are precarious and difficult.

In this context, CC established a family policy with the following features:

- Interventions at home in progress apart from EAHs (intended to provide support to a minor maintained in his family where there are educational or psychological difficulties likely to endanger him) which decrease significantly despite the priority given to prevention and diversion.
- Growing numbers of children affected by ICs, a large part of which was already the subject of an SAC measure such as an EAOE, with consequences shared almost equally between the transmission to the judicial authority, the offer of a new support measure and the continuation of the actions undertaken previously to this identification.
- Steady increases in minors benefiting from at least one child protection measure, more than 90% of which involve judicial efforts, while the rest receive various care methods, such as through alternative forms of home care, full-time placement, day care, and parental support services.
The County Observatory for Child Protection was established in the 2007–2011 plan, bringing together representatives of the CC, YJP, FAF, National Education, child-youth establishments, services, and care structures. The Plan Monitoring Committee oversees the application of guidelines and formulates proposals for action priorities. A Technical Partnership Committee instead comprises professional executives and associations, empowered to participate in defining actions for the new 2012–2015 plan. County Technical Commissions include the heads of the childhood centers and sectors of 8 territorial departments, which monitor, observe, and propose actions at the sub-county levels. In addition, an observatory dedicated solely to monitoring of EAOE falls under the aegis of the County's Child and Family Department. Finally, a Territorial Skills Network, established in 2001, organizes information exchanges and coordinated research on child protection issues. It comprises a Territorial Operational Committee [bringing together permanently under the co-piloting of the Director of Prevention and Social Action of the County Council and the Director of the Territorial Educational Service in the open environment of the YJP, Justice, National Education, RHA, associations, cities/CCSA, FAF; and on an ad hoc basis management of establishments and services (guiding and validating the reflections of specialized technical committees (TC): TC for prevention working for example on the PA, TC EAOE, TC for emergency reception, TC for complex situations...)].

### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

This study is part of an action-research contract (2011–2013) between research professors from IAE Lille and the CC, designed to assess the relevance of the measurement criteria for the family policy, as well as to highlight any changing patterns in institutional and professional practices. The current study focuses more particularly on the meaning assigned to measurement criteria and the uses of observation, monitoring, and evaluation systems.

Considering the complexity of our research object, we adopt mixed methods (Marshall and Rossman, 1995), including exploratory research (documentation of the general functioning of the observatory, various bodies, and a history of their work), descriptive research (interviews to gather actors’ views on quantitative or qualitative productions and practices that have emerged), and explanatory research (focus groups to understand expected or unexpected uses resulting from practices, relationships among stakeholders).

Together with reviewing documents and internal notes produced since 2007, we analyze key actors’ discourses (Philipps et al., 2004), gathered during 60 semi-structured interviews. The interview guide included 21 questions, organized according to the following seven themes: view of the observation system, management, evaluations, governance, and instrumental, cognitive, and institutional legitimacy. The sample also represents six categories of informants, as listed in Table 4, so that we can cross-check different points of views and cover various areas of action.

We also organized focus groups to gain insights into actors’ perceptions of issues with the Plan; the adequacy of available the services; the uses of observation, management, and evaluation tools; and the legitimacy of the observation system. The three focus groups include (1) senior managers of childhood/HCS/family home care/anti-exclusion services; (2) child and medical-social workers; and (3) territorial partners, such as professionals in childcare establishments and services. We organized them in both metropolitan areas and a more remote, mixed rural/urban location. Focus groups help mitigate hierarchical or institutional effects and encourage freer conversations about sensitive subjects, reflecting the participants’ lived experience and concrete practices (Duchesne and Haegel, 2008; Morgan, 1997).

To process these data and define the uses and legitimacy of the observation system, we categorize the input according to elements of speech in our three levers of supports and our three types of legitimacy in order to decontextualize the global corpus, to cross-reference...
these from a codification of the sources of expression (interviews or focus groups) and finally group them into units of meaning (description, assessment of the strengths/weaknesses of the uses, consequences on the nature and content of the legitimacy). Through this process, we confirm that each type of legitimacy is mentioned by all groups of actors, even if they are relatively less evident among the YJP group. Thus, we validate the relevance of the analytical framework. We therefore did not quantify the data collected but selected the discursive excerpts in relation to our themes useful for analysis (Huberman and Miles, 1991) and especially to cross them with the levers of legitimacy advanced in our theoretical framework of reference. Two unordered matrices result, ignoring the intensity of the remarks: a combination of the dimensions “monitoring”, “evaluation”, and “governance” and then a combination of instrumental, cognitive, and institutional legitimacy, for which the columns represent different categories of respondents (defined by links and responsibility). We use verbatim extracts in the following section to highlight the distinctive, salient character of the statements offered by different representatives and their relevance for testing our hypotheses.

Tableau 4 – Categories of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Fields</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>DCF CC central</td>
<td>Childhood prevention and protection</td>
<td>6 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>Childhood centers, Territorial Departments (TD) and Territorial Units for Protection and Social Action (TUPSA)</td>
<td>Childhood prevention and protection in the proximity</td>
<td>12 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Educational support at home</td>
<td>12 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
<td>Medico-social structures and care</td>
<td>Medical-social support</td>
<td>12 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 5</td>
<td>Establishments</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>12 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 6</td>
<td>YJP</td>
<td>Educational action in the criminal context</td>
<td>6 persons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. RESULTS

4.1. Monitoring support in search of instrumental legitimacy

During our investigations in 2012-13, some discrepancies arise among the types of monitoring that different actors prioritize. In particular,

- The county gathers variables likely to influence activities and expenditures, including demographics (birth rate, fertility rate, age, gender structure of the adult population), families (household composition), and socio-economic situation (housing, income, education and training, employment).

- Support and educational development: social and medical-social prevention (pregnancy and birth monitoring, number of MA, SSFE, SMSFE), home intervention (SFIT, EAH, EAOE, financial aid), youth actions, and prevention (MYC, aid for young legal measures).
Endangered children: considerations of the sources of reports of concern, based on ICs and origin; the current situation of the child, including their age, gender, family situation, socioeconomic status, attitude, and behavior; and any subsequent reports (e.g. legal troubles, continued need for monitoring).

Administrative and judicial protection measures for children: decisions and legal framework for minors entrusted to the SAC (number of beneficiaries, age, background), reception sites (establishments, host families, residences, day care, ESAH), characteristics of children placed, and protective measures.

These data relate to relevant indicators, designed to reveal the situations and problems. Comparisons by area support diagnoses for the different territories. But the work of regrouping was insured by the department in charge of management of the DGD Solidarity without real relay at the time at the level of the DCF. The timeliness of information also is a concern, because efforts in 2011 rely on data gathered in 2008. Local efforts to gather similar data take place in certain areas, so these local observatories compete with efforts by the central observatory. No specific regulations or data confrontation practices are in place. The CCPO arguably could serve this function, but it has not met since 2010. The EAOE observatory seized relevant information but produces its own statistics, based on the services managing this service. The divergent views of the informants, as summarized in Table 5, are particularly critical on this point.

These comments highlight a gap between production and use; concrete benefits seem expected but not provided tangibly, so these informants do not recognize the observatory as a space for data co-production, shared analyses, or the development of common interpretations.

On this last point, the findings are disturbing. Any concern transmitted to the CC that a child is at risk should be centralized, through an operational process of collection and evaluation, under the responsibility of the Chair of the CC, who also decides whether to undertake action or report the situation to the judiciary. This process should be able to identify dangerous situations and protect children. The available data include the numbers, sources of the concern, situation characteristics, diagnostic conclusions, and follow-up actions. But ambiguity arises, due to the lack of common reference: An IC is not necessarily a serious and urgent situation, because professionals might raise concerns at the first sign of danger, to help avoid any further deterioration of the situation. This practice corresponds with prevention objectives and reflects stakeholders’ efforts to identify issues as quickly as possible and thus avoid later questioning. Similarly, the judiciary systematically transmits reports, without analysis, on all alerts, even if they have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The county council, the TDs are in information deficit</th>
<th>Category 2, territory manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What they have they don’t use</td>
<td>Category 2, social managers (in charge of prevention and child protection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do they do with our activity reports?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do they do with the information given by our local observatories?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The agents of the county council do not have an observation grid</td>
<td>Category 3, professional socio-educational support at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The observatory is a tool that does not serve us</td>
<td>Category 3, executive manager, home educational support service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child protection observatory, we do not know what is happening there</td>
<td>Category 4, executive manager, medical-social support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 – Verbatims comments: Uses of information from CCPO for monitoring
been dismissed. Thus, we note significant increases in the number of notes received at the peak, reaching approximately 7,000 notes involving 4,000 families (versus the 20,000 children being monitored by SAC), and 20% of these notes lack any follow-up efforts. The notes highlight the challenges of feeding the children sufficiently and efficiently, creating more work for the CC professionals responsible for diagnostic tasks. Nearly 60% of ICs pertain to children taken in by the SAC, which raising questions about the inadequacies of existing prevention and monitoring systems. A lack of consensus and co-construction of common definitions, information, and processing protocols thus creates inefficiency and makes it impossible to resolve the problems effectively.

In addition, the county observatory fails to function well as a place for the production of informative knowledge that capitalizes on existing data resources to develop insights about which situations should be considered priorities and identify relevant topics to explore further. This situation also hinders any changes to professional practices, such as shifting the balance between prevention and protection, encouraging more fluid information transmissions by stakeholders, or articulating the adopted measures more clearly. To ensure its instrumental legitimacy, the Child Protection Observatory thus must account analytical and heuristic expertise for all concrete benefits required by the participants. Such efforts must include assignments of responsibility, whether to each partnering organization [as a form of “intra-organizational legitimacy” in Buisson’s (2008, 2009) terminology, such that it determines whether the key indicators and their measures are sufficiently reliable and pertinent to constitute resources] or to the collective [or “influence legitimacy”, such that the findings can be shared, because they have been established by a stable measurement apparatus, as described by Beaulieu (2001)].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s issues are more and more complex; we place children who encounter difficulties linked to mental illnesses and delinquency; We need to better understand these aspects to avoid the default orientation of these young people in foster care, while establishments with trained professionals and technical facilities put an end to welcoming “difficult” young people or even refuse admission</th>
<th>Category 1, top manager of the central DCF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The public is changing, today 74% of children followed in EAOE no longer live with one of their parents, what consequences for our support, our service offer?</td>
<td>Category 4, manager of a medical-social support structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do we have so many kids coming from other departments when our needs are not being met?</td>
<td>Category 1, top manager of the central DCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are the places dedicated to SAAMAD not all used, why the places offered in foster care remain vacant?</td>
<td>Category 3, child care center professional in TUPSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the increase in home measurements have an impact on the number of placements?</td>
<td>Category 1, top manager of the central DCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reception of toddlers is increasing in terms of measurements and placement, we would like to know why</td>
<td>Category 2, professional in charge of prevention and protection of children in TD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The observation and evaluation service is a little-known device, how to explain it?</td>
<td>Category 2, senior manager of a TD childhood center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 – Verbatims evaluative questions to be asked by CCPO
4.2. Evaluation support, as a lever of cognitive legitimacy

The county observatory actually represents an observation system, performing its functions in a multiplicity of places. From this perspective, we identify greater correspondence regarding evaluation support, expressed in questions from the informants that aim at understanding the effectiveness of existing protocols and the results of the actions taken. The remarks in Table 6 highlight expectations of needs analyses, calls to match supply with demand, and concerns that some professional practices are overused, compared with others that are underused.

Some informants also appear unaware of any evaluation work, as detailed in Tables 7 and 8.

A 2008 survey, conducted among 1,000 children and based on a similar survey of 3,000 children in 1998, sought answers to key evaluative questions, including the following: “What paths do children and their communities take? How do these paths get reinforced, modified, or eliminated by existing systems? How are the systems confronted, adapted, or abandoned through consideration of these paths?” The results provide three major conclusions.

The paths taken by children who enter the system feature fewer declines in their status, less frequent requirements for provisional placement, an increase of “double measures”, a younger average age at for their first intervention (4 years, 8 months, with two-thirds of them admitted to SAC before they reach 6 years of age), and a longer duration in the system (5 years and 7 months, with one-quarter of them receiving interventions for more than 10 years).

If children have been assigned at an early age to a stable place, where they remain for some time, it can create important ties for them. In contrast, children who experience more chaotic changes in their family or residence also lack stable school connections and personal interactions, which represent sources of their fragile status [similar to the “placed children”, “displaced children”, and “returned children” described by Potin (2013)].

Finally, greater complexity results when children experience repeated educational deficiencies or are in
homes with parents addicted to drugs or alcohol; notably, more than 40% of the parents of the children in the study sample were being monitored by SAC, as a result of their addiction histories. The professionals also seek to avoid disruptive prevention measures for sleeping children and those who have been living in a stable place for an extended period, particularly in EAOE. The goal is to help families beyond immediate measures and to devote more resources and time to IEDS rather than placement efforts.

This illustration is revealing, because in addition to clarify certain phenomena, it highlights the divided stakes, among protection, children’s rights, and parents’ rights; between views of the family as victims or guilty parties; and across representations over time (e.g. adapting measures to dynamic situations, breaking versus protecting family bonds). The mobilization of the observation system thus aims to translate the findings and analyses to make them intelligible to stakeholders, so that those interested parties can develop their own assessments and identify action priorities.

Although these evaluations of the children’s paths through the child protection system might benefit from the “legitimacy of comprehensibility” (based on valid, robust interactions across the profiles and measures), other approaches are possible too. For example, studies should address the long-term effects of trauma experienced during childhood. Moreover, the Observatory we investigate represents only one such site, and we cannot automatically generalize its “patterns of behaviour and thinking” (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Changes in public policies, strategies, and expectations also are inevitable. Stakeholders might prioritize evaluations of program effectiveness and efficiency (instrumental dimension) rather than assessing inter-institutional projects in terms of relevance. Alternatively, they might struggle to capitalize on methods applied to achieve one form of “empowerment legitimacy” or ensure balanced considerations of monitoring and evaluations.

The cognitive legitimacy of the observation system thus appears to be emerging, such that real support for evaluation is gradually emerging. It produces a representation of key issues, which produce challenges (i.e., evaluative questions) and a stable framework for encouraging joint work by heterogeneous actors.

4.3. Governance tensions and the search for institutional legitimacy

The description of different observation spaces suggests the need for an in-depth examination of the mechanisms of association and animation of the actors involved in child protection at each level and how they ensure successful collaboration. On the basis of our review of the productions of each body, the first observation we can make is the existence of a fragmented and unclear system from which various legitimacies arise.

In the institutional setting of the CCPO, each participant has the right to raise strategic concerns (the CC: the quality of support and reception in response to the diversity of situations of minors; the YJP: the reconciliation of parental function and the protection of minors; the FAF: prevention; National Education: the adaptation of schooling to “difficult” children of SAC; establishments: the management of places and the maintenance of the homogeneity of the profiles received). From then on, this body acts more as an agora than a partnership place of shared observation and analysis.

The Plan Monitoring Committee is internal to the CC, which is paradoxical, because a participatory approach underlies its development. By focusing on the achievements of the action sheets without really turning to the results of the objectives put forward; it confines itself to an instrumental logic without particular depth.

The County Technical Commissions are truly local observatories with an instrumental vocation at the service almost exclusively of the professionals of the territorialized CC. Their efforts gradually have shifted though, from analyses of territorial data to exchanges of professional practices, reflecting the individual situations they face. Thus, they gradually have halted any observations based on comparisons of quantitative and qualitative information. Without an institutional role for this dimension, these commissions possess more procedural and cognitive legitimacy than instrumental legitimacy.

The observatory dedicated solely to the monitoring of EAOE, is very sectoral but the quality and regularity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>County Childhood Observatory</strong></th>
<th><strong>Expected productions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligence, collection and dissemination of statistics; Indicators; Studies and research; Exchanges, debates and forums</td>
<td>Childhood prevention and protection</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Instrumental Agora</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Childhood Plan Monitoring Committee</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected productions</strong></td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Instrumental without depth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>County Technical Committees</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Instrumental, procedural and cognitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EAOE Observatory</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EAOE</td>
<td>Biannual</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Instrumental and cognitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Territorial Network of Skills TOC</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Infra County</td>
<td>Instrumental, cognitive and institutional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TC</strong></th>
<th><strong>Covered Fields</strong></th>
<th><strong>Meeting Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Territorial Scale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contribution to Legitimacy</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>Infra County</td>
<td>Instrumental, cognitive and institutional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9 – Components of child protection observation system and legitimacy*
of the productions, their wide dissemination beyond its members gives a strong instrumental and cognitive legitimacy to this body.

Finally, the Territorial Skills Networks (TSN), together with the specialized TOCs and TCs, have a key role in the multi-partnership observation system at the sub-county level, working on the roots of issues and promoting intersecting views across various stakeholders. But poor external dissemination of their efforts produces, despite strong instrumental legitimacy, relatively weak institutional legitimacy. Table 9 summarizes these forms of legitimacy.

According to remarks shared by the study informants, such as those in Table 10, we also determine that the concrete functioning of the observation system generates interwoven usage regimes, some of which appear to be dynamic, whereas others function as barriers.

The lack of mutual trust among DCF departments, headquarters and TD, CCs and establishments limits cooperation in the observation system. This barricade in turn becomes an issue of power, and actors rely on strategies that combine avoidance, distance, and withdrawal into “territories”. The size of this CC reinforces such logic, in that it favors local arrangements that can absorb these tensions at different levels of management.

However, the multiplicity of bodies, the vagueness of their purposes, the dispersion of the work, and the autonomy and expertise exhibited by both professional

| Observations or statistical studies are compartmentalized, compartmentalized so as not to get a clear idea of the issues | Category 1, executive manager of the central DCF |
| The DCF does not take into account studies and field expertise to bring them to the attention of the departmental observatory | Category 2, professional in charge of child protection in TD |
| The priorities are not supported by the issues that are ours in the field due to voluntary or involuntary ignorance of the headquarters | Category 2, executive manager of a child care center |
| The EAOE observatory takes its own initiative without a specific mandate from the top management or the territories | Category 1, executive manager of the central DCF |
| TUPSA managers are powerless when it comes to identifying partnership resources, common data suitable for enabling appropriate thinking or developing the animation of the territory | Category 2, executive managers of a child care center in TUPSA |
| Information on situations, activities that come to us through hierarchical channels, through technical channels or through partners are not the same | Category 3, top manager of educational support service |
| There is a lot of reluctance to work together between institutional partners | Category 4, manager for the medico-social support structure |
| We feel reluctance to say things to each other between partners about the systems, the follow-ups | Category 6, YJP professional in charge of educational action |
| Only individual and interpersonal relationships allow one to get an idea of reality | Category 1, executive manager of the central DCF |

Table 10 – Verbatims descriptions of uses of the observation system
practices and the systems create substantial freedom, which can produce innovations at different levels. The DGD Solidarities can stimulate quantitative and qualitative analyses short-circuiting the DCF and establishing direct relations with the TDs by relying on its Monitoring department whose instrumental and cognitive legitimacy is recognized; D’Ts can animate their TSNs to meet their own assessment needs and partnership relationships by animating their TCs...

Thus, the system regulates itself through interactions among institutions, interests, and ideas (Heclo, 1993; Hall, 1997; Théret, 2000). Observation mainly takes place in the territories; the production of quantitative data is more centralized; and confrontations appear intermittent, such that existing bodies can complete their missions and establish various legitimacies. In terms of institutional legitimacy, the dispersion and complexity of the observation system is a source of confusion and opacity, rather than revealing governance tensions. Field professionals function as more than projects managers, such that they initiate their observation agendas by investing the fields and themes that they regard at relevant for their level of activity. In short, they institutionalize these issues or have them institutionalized in observatories, which in turn helps evoke changes in ways of doing things, without much publicity or real capitalization. County executives instead appear like followers or relays, which appropriate the work and adjust it to their rhythms and challenges. Each person in charge of the proceedings organizes meetings without informing others or reciprocal dissemination. This scenario borders on a total absence of “procedural legitimacy” for the CCPO. The lack of links across observation sites, such as in regular meetings, also creates uncertainty regarding the “legitimacy of exchange”. Table 11 summarizes some salient points of this discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observatory purpose / Form of legitimacy</th>
<th>Global Appreciation</th>
<th>Levers</th>
<th>Qualification of levers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring / Instrumental</td>
<td>Data identification and sharing: In the process of stabilization Changing practices: In the making</td>
<td>Intra-organizational legitimacy Influence Legitimacy</td>
<td>In construction Weakly present or withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation / Cognitive</td>
<td>Appreciation and intelligibility of situations and issues: Emerging Changing Perceptions: In the Making</td>
<td>Legitimacy of understandability Authorization legitimacy</td>
<td>In practice Weakly present or withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance / Institutionnal</td>
<td>Association and animation of stakeholders: In question Change of positionings: In to become</td>
<td>Procedural legitimacy Legitimacy of exchange</td>
<td>Weakly present or withdrawn In uncertainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 – Different forms of legitimacy in the studied CCPO
5. DISCUSSION

We organize this discussion into conceptual and operational insights.

5.1. Observations of several legitimacies

Our empirical study reveals that the observatory and its actions contribute to several types of legitimacy (Table 9). First, instrumental legitimacy (“pragmatic” in Suchman, 1995) is based on an ability to generate concrete, practical uses for the stakeholders, through exchanges established to build repositories, wide integration of actors, and confidence in their reliability. This approach implies the need for managers to activate the required levers, using mechanisms such as indicator co-production, dashboards, and dissemination protocols for gathered knowledge. In turn, the conditions for the emergence of this form of legitimacy imply a prescriptive logic, so actors at all territorial levels appropriate the tools designed within the observation system for learning, measuring, and exerting control.

Second, cognitive legitimacy puts evaluations at the heart of the observation system. Stakeholders construct questions, conduct investigations, and perform analyses of the quality of achievements, such as monitoring care for children (Brunod and Savio, 2009). It requires an interest in the results for beneficiaries, perhaps by implementing experimental protocols that integrate a clinical dimension (Debove, d’Hennezel and Rouzeau, 2010). In association with direct beneficiaries, children and young people as well as families, appropriate methods can be established, which in turn makes it possible to test various devices proposed without ignoring the difficulty of dual relationships between children placed and teams of professionals that can make it problematic to take distance. The key to this form of legitimacy is an ability to clarify the contributions of evaluations to adopted strategies, as well as improve day-to-day interventions by affirming the interpretive logic (Chopart, 1997).

Third, institutional legitimacy is reflected in coherent cooperation among stakeholders, which can foster collective intelligence between the sector and the territory. The observation system in place may or may not mediate (Piponnier, 2010; Roux and Feyt, 2011) among actors, which can influence their ability to work together or shift positions within the partnership. This legitimacy is based on strong governance; elected officials use observation to display their leadership of the institution, their commitment to public policy, and their desire to work together with partners in their communities.

Finally, the different types of legitimacy often appear disjointed, leaving the instrument at the heart of conflicts of interpretation and use between stakeholders, are mutually enriched. Instrumental legitimacy can constitute a basis for cognitive legitimacy, which then feeds institutional legitimacy, which might enhance instrumental and cognitive legitimacy over time. Thus, a project of instrumented, intelligible, cooperative observation becomes a managerial and governance project, in which “the challenge is to reconcile different expectations from partners with diversified models for judging actions; [it] is to reconstruct a global system of legitimacy, that is to say a set of conventional or formal standards recognized by any actor whatever his nature” (Gabriel and Cadiou, 2005, p.137).

5.2. Improving the operations of the observation system

This study highlights the need to provide organized, coherent, dynamic information in response to institutional requests, which then can inform evaluations and support efforts. The information framework should include conditions for entry into and exit from systems, the trajectories and paths of the public, the service offer and its uses, collaborations, and working modes in a network.

Accordingly, we recommend homogenizing and structuring available databases (distinguishing static data, such as the number of active measures, from those in flux, such as the number of children in care). Specifications should reveal which data support comparisons across beneficiaries (e.g. family context, preventive interventions, socio-educational support and their characteristics; activities to identify, treat and assess children at risk; provision and use of childcare facilities entrusted to SAC) and those that allow for comparisons of the system itself (e.g. strategic
objectives of the County plan, application in the territories such as “deploy a plural reception system” or “ensure a balance in the supply of services in the territories”). Another goal should be to gain greater insights into problematic situations, to move beyond a monitoring function to establish alarms in the observation system (Barreyre and Marty, 1999) assessing the variables likely to influence their emergence and the relevance of the responses provided by service providers (children who do not find a place in existing devices, children who are oriented by default, multi-measures, children who remain in establishments for a long time, the precociousness of children in fragility...).

Finally, additional ways and means are need to mobiles actors to participate in the observation process and better articulate the bodies, coordinate the rhythms of production with the essential aim of putting observation at the service of the necessary changes in the responses made to beneficiaries, children and their families. Decompartmentalization and enhanced links across observation spaces9, together with mutual enrichments of quantitative and qualitative data and active participation by professionals, can promote shared analyses, as well as strengthen the actors’ “reciprocal commitments to beneficiaries to whom no single actor can provide satisfactory assistance” (Barreyre et Marty, 1999, p.109).

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides three main theoretical contributions.

▪ First, we establish that the observatory and the monitoring indicators it produces and shares can generate instrumental legitimacy, as long as the data obtained from the county software gets complemented by insights from other actors (FAF, YJP...), as well as consolidated with information from the NCPO. In addition, it requires a situation in which the expected measurable and quantifiable results achieved over time guide the service objectives of the teams and encourage professional practices.

▪ Second, the evaluative approaches expected and/ or carried out can be levers of cognitive legitimacy if longitudinal analyses [about the trajectories of children under protection, the studies on children’s situations and needs (health, education...) or parental abandonment], produce stable common representations of the key issues and thus can evoke changes in public policy (e.g. distinction of mistreatment, deprivation, suffering, or danger; assessments of who holds parental authority).

▪ Third, the observation system implemented and its governance features can achieve institutional legitimacy if they adopt an institutionally defined framework that reflects logics of coordination and regulation (e.g. single strategic body, organized and articulated thematic working groups, users committee forum), so that changes in postures and positions are possible by actors focused on children and their families.

Thus, the proposed conceptual framework is validated, even if further research could continue to perfect it. With this case study, we demonstrate that instrumentation is not an end in itself; it also induces interpersonal, interorganizational practices and relationships. The approaches identified (monitoring, evaluation, governance; indicators, dashboards, procedure manuals, situation analyses, support grids, benchmarks) and deployed by the relevant stakeholders are likely

9 See Appendix 3.
to be “interpreted, adapted, distorted or reformed according to the representations of the actors... and the context” (Mériade and Mainetti, 2013, p.13), as well as according to “the understanding of cognitive mechanisms both from an individual and collective point of view” (De Sede-Marceau et al., 2011, p.125). According to the typology we introduced in Section 2.1, the characteristics of the CCPO reveal:

- For associated actors, it represents type C, but type A is more indicative of its actual practices.
- In terms of width, the combination of types A, B, and C arises at first glance, but its practices indicate disjunction, due to the site of the EAOE observatory and the importance assigned to sub-territorial observation bodies of the TSN.
- For depth, the CCPO represents types A and B with regard to the production of synthetic indicators and dashboards to monitor the Plan, but the lack of regular meetings limits exchanges among stakeholders.
- With regard to scope, it is a sounding board and supplier of only partial data, so it has no real impact on professional practices or the formalization of objectives, and very few resources to ensure coordination and foresight.

Beyond the specific case of child protection observatories, our study enriches insights into legitimacy in the public sphere (Durat and Bollecker, 2012). Leadership is the main source of legitimacy. We do not consider political leadership (and did not interview any elected officials), but “management” or “technical leadership” (Favoreu, 2001) can promote diverse expressions, for the purpose of comparing expertise, supporting convergence, or even encouraging collective learning effects. Whereas Durat and Bollecker (2012) refer to “invisible leadership”, we instead propose leadership with variable geometry, depending on where the leaders are positioned within the observation system. We cannot identify aggregation mechanisms suitable for ensuring unique leadership, as a source of institutional legitimacy. The ability to design, implement, and use management tools and related know-how constitutes a source of legitimacy too (Durat and Bollecker, 2012), but we note competition among standards used and actors adopting them, which creates room for influence games and limited or divergent uses, thereby undermining instrumental legitimacy to some degree. The representations of the realities observed in the public sector create opportunities to highlight public values, in the sense of Bozeman (2007), which function as guides and legitimizing drivers of public action. Here again though, the lack of consensus limits cognitive legitimacy. The three legitimation perspectives entail a “macro-management” perspective, in Laufer and Burlaud’s (1980) terminology, based on “the construction of internal and external legitimacy” (Durat and Bollecker). That is, we propose combining information processes in common frameworks; cognitive processes through shared representations; and influence processes, according to the stakeholder relationships that get articulated through negotiated institutional frameworks.

Several limitations of this study also arise, related to our focus on a single child protection observatory. Further research should supplement this investigation with other applications of the typology we propose. The conclusions we draw also might vary over time. Our study, conducted five years ago, should be renewed with every new Plan (2012–2015, 2016–2019), as well as following shifts in the political context (e.g. change of majority party in 2015). From a methodological point of view, similar to Merriam (1988), we use data triangulation (documents, interviews, focus groups), but our approach also might benefit from other efforts to confirm the validity of the results, such as “the revision of the data by the actors involved in the case studied, the long-term observation of the same place, the involvement of the participants at all stages of the research and the declaration of the subjectivity and preconceptions of the researcher”.

The options for further research also include extensions of the field of analysis to other countries, as well as more in-depth examinations of the links between patterns and observatories in a dialectical relationship between strategies and knowledge/interpretation/animation. Another research objective might be to test to what extent our recommendations can revise the understanding of realities and the ability to interrogate the knowledge thus produced.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


GLOSSARY

EAH: Educational Action at Home
EAOE: Educational Action in Open Environment (administrative)
AF: Family Home
HYA: Help for Young Adults
MA: Maternal Assistants
PH: Provisional Home
RHA: Regional Health Agency
SAC: Social Assistance for Children
PSAC: Precocious Social Action Center
CSAF: Code of Social Action and Families
CCSD: County Center for Sensorial Disabilities
MPC: Medical-Psychological Center
MPPC: Medical-Psycho-Pedagogical Center
CPFE: Center for Planning & Family Education
CCCAPCI: County Unit for Collection, Assessment and processing of Concerning Information
CDSCPP: County Directorate of Social Cohesion and Population Protection
DCF: Department of Children and Families
ISD: Individual Support Document
ECCF: Early Childhood Care Facility
IME: Institute for Motor Education
IC: Information of Concern
MEI: Medical-Educative Institute
TEI: Therapeutic and Educational Institute
HCP: Home for Children Parents
PLH: Place of Life and Home
SMSFE: Support Measure in Social and Family Economy
CHCF: County Home of Children and Family
SCH: Social Children’s Home
ASM: Agricultural Social Mutuality
CCPO: County Child Protection Observatory
NCPO: National Child Protection Observatory
YLRP: Youth Listening Reception Point
CP: Child Protection
YJP: Youth Judicial Protection
MCP: Maternal and Child Protection
PFC: Project For the Child
LSSP: Listening, Supporting and Support for Parents
ESAH: Educational Service At Home
SEHCS: Specialized Education and Home Care Service
SFIT: Social and Family Intervention Technician
HC: High Court
AMPU: Adolescent Medico-Psychological Unit
CUFA: County Union of Family Associations
APPENDIX 1
Actors likely to be associated with a County Child Protection Observatory

Prevention and Protection of Childhood

- **Institutional** (CD, Nat. Educ, CDSCPP, RHA, FAF, ASM...) and associative (CUFA...)
- **Actors in support of parenthood** (social centers, LSSP, HCP, CCSA...)
- **Actors of parental support** (maternities, midwives CPFE...)
- **Integration actors** (Local missions, YLRP...)
- **Judicial authorities** (High Court, Juvenile Court, Juvenile Prosecutor, Family Court...)
- **Screening actors** (PSAC, doctors, pediatricians...)
- **Care actors** (hospitals, pedopsychiatric services MPC, AMPU...)
- **Early childhood care** (ECCF, leisure facilities...)
- **Childcare** (CHCF, SCH, PLH...)
- **Medical-social actors** (CCSD, MPPC, IME TEI, SEHCS...)
APPENDIX 2
Members of the observation system
APPENDIX 3
Proposals to link members in the observation system

- County Child Protection Observatory
  - Intelligence and construction of benchmarks and forums
- Territorialized indicators
  - Device evaluation
  - Supply/demand analysis

TC Themes including professional practices

TC Prevention
TC EAOE
TC Emergency reception
TC Early childhood

Think tanks about support
Think tanks about adolescents

TC Complex situations

TC Children

TOC

TSN

Dir. Monitoring
Deputy General Manager Solidarités

Management referent in charge of monitoring

What services and benefits? Who to expect them from?

DCF
APPENDIX 4
Interview guide

Theme 1: Vision on the Observation System
Q1: What are the missions of the CCPO for you (give an example of concrete achievement for each of them)?
Q2: What is its place among other existing observation bodies (specify)?
Q3: What is your overall assessment of the CCPO and more generally of the child protection (CP) observation system?

Theme 2: Uses of the CCPO for monitoring
Q4: What are the concrete uses in terms of effectiveness of child protective measures and devices, how do you assess them (from which productions, for which recipients, at what frequency...)?
Q5: What are the concrete uses in terms of efficiency of CP measures and devices, how do you assess them (from which productions, for which recipients, at what frequency...)?
Q6: What are the contributions to the evolution or improvement of professional practices, and how do you assess them (examples)?

Theme 3: Uses of CCPO for evaluation
Q7: What are the concrete uses, in terms of relevance, of child protective measures and devices, and how do you assess them? (from which productions, for which recipients, at what frequency...)?
Q8: What are the concrete uses in terms of usefulness of CP measures and devices, how do you assess them (from which productions, for which recipients, at what rate...)?
Q9: What contributions does the CCPO make to clarify expectations and perceptions about child protective policy, and how do you assess them (examples)?

Theme 4: Uses of CCPO for governance
Q10: What are the concrete uses of the institutional framework involving stakeholders, how do you assess them (give a few examples)?
Q11: What contributions does the CCPO make to confrontations and debates between stakeholders on PE guidelines and arrangements, and how do you assess them (examples)?
Q12: What contributions does the CCPO make to knowledge sharing and stakeholder dialogue, and how do you assess them (examples)?

Theme 5: Forms of legitimacy, instrumental dimension
Q13: What is the scope of the data mobilized, of the repositories built in terms of knowledge of the situations, how do you assess them (examples)?
Q14: What is the scope of the data mobilized, of the repositories built in terms of rationalization and optimization of child protective activities and actions, how do you assess them (examples)?
Q15: Quelle est la portée des données mobilisées, des référentiels construits en termes de diffusion en son sein et à l’extérieur quelle appréciation en faites-vous (donnez quelques exemples)?

Theme 6: Forms of legitimacy, cognitive dimension
Q16: What is the scope of evaluative studies in terms of understanding the effects of the child protective devices implemented, how do you assess them (examples)?
Q17: What is the scope of evaluative studies in terms of understanding the issues of child protective policy, how do you assess them (examples)?

Q18: What is the scope of evaluative studies in terms of capitalization of approaches conducted, how do you assess them (examples)?

Theme 7: Forms of legitimacy, institutional dimension

Q19: What is the scope of the concrete functioning of this body in terms of the partnership process between actors, how do you assess them (examples)?

Q20: What is the scope of the concrete functioning of this body in terms of coordination between actors, how do you assess them (examples)?

Q21: What is the scope of the concrete functioning of this body in terms of the positioning of the CC in the design and implementation of the child protective policy, how do you assess them it (examples)?