

PUBLIC SERVICE ALLOCATION MECHANISMS AND FAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS IN
CHILD DAY CARE¹

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This is work in progress for discussion purposes only, and the empirical section is based on a limited number of preliminary interviews. Please do not cite.

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Introduction: Fairness in allocating scarce child day care places

Parents want good child day care facilities for their toddlers. A child day care facility can only accept a limited number of children, resulting in waiting lists and competition for places. How now does a child day care facility decide which child to allow and which one to refuse when demand for places is higher than supply? Child day care facilities use selection and allocation criteria to cope with the high demand. Parents and employees of child day care facilities may regard these criteria and strategies as fair and justified, or may see them as discriminatory and unfair.

Issues of just distribution have received considerable attention (Elster, 1992; Fisher, 1998; Rawls, 1971). ‘Who gets what, when, and how’ is a, if not the classic question in political science (Lasswell, 1936). Demand for many specific public services is higher than the supply. As a result, some citizens have to make do without this service or with a service that does not entirely correspond to their preferences. In practice, this means they have to travel further to enjoy the service, wait longer, and use the service during less convenient hours or pay more. Parents want to send their child to a good school in the vicinity; businesses want to profit from a government subsidy to support innovation and research; patients want to be admitted to an excellent hospital; elderly citizens want to get an affordable room in the care home where several of their friends reside as well.

To regulate demand and supply, organisations need mechanisms. Not only to determine who gets access to the service and who doesn’t, but also to regulate which specific user can use which specific service. Such mechanisms determine not only whether a patient is eligible to receive a certain treatment at public expense, but also at which hospital the patient will receive this treatment. Such mechanisms determine whether a child will be admitted to a certain type of school, but also to which specific school the child can go.

Scarce goods and services are allocated using quite different principles (Elster, 1992: 11). While we all ‘agree that the cake should be divided equally’ (Stone, 2002: 39), there are many different ways to divide it equally. In a pure market environment, price is the principal allocation mechanism. In the public sector, we see a wide range of mechanisms and criteria: place of residence (e.g. in school catchment areas); need (e.g. social services); capacity-to-pay; first-come first-serve (e.g. receiving a subsidy); merit (e.g. quality of a research proposal); random allocation (e.g. certain immigrant visa); auctions; previous use criteria

(where previous use excludes from new use, or where previous use makes one eligible, e.g. in the case of preferential treatment of siblings in school admissions).

Some of these mechanisms are seen as more fair and just than others. Using an auction mechanism for determining list order on a donor organ list would probably generate quite some discomfort. Many researchers would likewise probably not tolerate a first-come first-serve distribution mechanism for academic research funding, and would find a selection based on a list of selection criteria such as quality of the proposal or of the proposer much fairer. We know relatively little about what determines these fairness evaluations.

In this paper, we present the first findings of a study analysing the mechanisms child day care facilities use for allocating a vacant place in the Netherlands, and the attitudes of child day care facility staff towards such allocation mechanisms.

Dealing with excess demand for public services

For many public services, there is a quantitative shortage: Demand is high and supply is simply insufficient. This is especially the case in areas where demand has been growing strongly, where demand is almost unlimited (e.g. health care), where supply is limited (e.g. donor organs), or where the supply has been limited on purpose (e.g. subsidies).

In other situations, there is a qualitative shortage: The good or service is not scarce in a quantitative way, but demand for high quality services is very high. Here, users want to use the best available public service, and not just any public service. In other cases, qualitative differences in service provision (real or imagined) create demand inequalities across these services and result in heavy pressure on some providers, but not on others. This may for instance be the case for parents who want to send their children to the best available local school, and where the school cannot cater for this demand, or at least not in the short term. Likewise, many patients will want to see a specific GP with an excellent reputation while another still has many vacancies. The system as a whole can cater for all users, but mechanisms have to be developed for distributing the demand. This may mean that some users will have to travel further to use the public service, or that some will have to use their second choice service.

Price is generally absent as an allocation mechanism in the public sector. Other allocation mechanisms are used (consciously or unconsciously) in a wide array of public services, and indeed everywhere where there is qualitatively or quantitatively limited supply: art subsidies, school admissions, parking spots for residents in inner cities, flats in council housing, places at child day care facilities, immigration visa, etc. The examples can be more extreme as well:

uneducated parents desperately trying to get a place for their brilliant daughter in the best available school; or patients on a waiting list for donor organs. In such extreme cases, allocation and selection mechanisms are procedures devised by societies to support making tragic choices (Calabresi & Bobbit, 1978).

There is a wide variety of selection and allocation mechanisms in daily use. Even mechanisms that receive less attention in the theoretical literature do occur quite frequently in public allocation decisions. Random allocation through lotteries does for instance happen in some systems for jury selections, or for the allocation of social housing, immigrant visa, or even fishing rights (Elster, 1992; Taylor, Tsui, & Zhu, 2003). Auctions, in many variations, are used in some tendering procedures, e.g. for the granting of telecom licenses (Janssen 2004). First-come first-served mechanisms are very common in many administrative offices, and the use of waiting lists is likewise a very popular procedure to cope with excess demand.

First and second order decisions: justice vs. local justice

The literature on allocation distinguishes between first and second order mechanisms. First order mechanisms outline the global setting, reflecting the relative priorities of a society, for instance reflecting the total amount of goods to be distributed, and society's opinion that a particular good is considered priceless. Second order mechanisms allocate resources, and are often used by relatively autonomous institutions (Elster, 1992). They operate at a more decentralised and technical level, where discretionary interpretation is needed, and where specific operational rules are set (Conley, 1996). These operational rules, while generally based on the first order mechanisms, always in some way 'mar some distributional ideals of the society' (Calabresi & Bobbit, 1978: 20).

In this paper, we focus on these second-order mechanisms, and more specifically the work pioneered by Calabresi & Bobbit, and Elster (Calabresi & Bobbit, 1978; Elster, 1992). Unlike philosophers such as Rawls and Nozick (Nozick, 1974; Rawls, 1971), their work does not search for universal principles of allocation and distribution, and thus justice. Instead, it heavily emphasises local context in the selection of such rules (Sabbagh, Resh, Mor, & Vanhuyse, 2006). Much path-breaking research into the decentralized allocation of scarce goods has been done by Jon Elster, who looked at lay-offs, the granting of immigration visa, access to higher education institutions etc., and the use of criteria and mechanisms in doing so (need, merit, seniority etc). He was specifically interested in 'local justice', or in how allocation is done in the real world. Such systems show great variation across services, and across jurisdictions. He talks about local justice, because there is a degree of autonomy for institutions to design their own rules (Elster, 1992). There is an endless variety of

mechanisms. Most systems blend different mechanisms and organisations often use different operating principles at the same time (Conley, 1996), formally, and informally.

The issue of efficient and fair allocation of public goods has long fascinated researchers. Yet, much of their work has focused on general principles, or political philosophy. There is also a remarkable absence of research looking across disciplinary borders. Economists have studied market-based mechanisms, while political scientists have given a great deal of attention to representative allocation mechanisms. Empirically, research mainly used case-studies or experiments, each with implications for resp. internal and external validity. In public administration research, there exists a considerable tradition of looking at how street-level bureaucrats make allocation decisions, yet much of this research has looked at substantive criteria rather than procedural ones.

Fairness of selection and allocation mechanisms

When a ship is sinking, many would be hesitant to describe ‘first-come, first-served’ as an acceptable mechanism to fill slots on the rescue boats. ‘Women and children first’ would be seen as much more appropriate and fair, while not necessarily as more cost-effective (Messick, 1995). The appropriate allocation mechanism in a particular situation is not always easy to determine, and we often see that quite different mechanisms are used for the allocation or distribution of similar resources. While equality appears as a very fair and just mechanism for allocating public services, it is not always easy to implement in concrete situations (Yaari & Bar-Hillel, 1984)(Van de Walle, 2008). In real-life allocation procedures, we often see a mix of motives, contingency, and arbitrariness (Fassin, 2003).

Some allocation mechanisms encounter more resistance than others. In allocation procedures, people often have to cope with competing fairness norms (Bolton, Brandts, & Ockenfels, 2005). Ubel’s research on the distribution of livers for transplantation suggested that cost-effectiveness considerations may conflict with the public’s moral values (Ubel & Loewenstein, 1996). Frey and Pommerehne (1993), partly replicating classic research by Kahneman et al. (1986) found that almost four out of five respondents found a pricing mechanism unfair in excess demand situations. They studied the sale of snow shovels before and after heavy snow, and the fairness of a higher price in the second situation. They studied the same attitudes towards the pricing in the sale of water bottles to hikers on hot and cold days. First-come first-served was seen as the fairest mechanism, while a price mechanism and a random assignment were seen as unfair. Erez studied prisoners’ attitudes towards four selection procedures for participation in a programme: random assignment, need, merit, and first-come first-served. Random assignment was seen as the least fair of these selection

methods (Erez, 1985). Attitudes towards different types of allocation mechanisms have also been studied in medical research and especially medical ethics (Green, Fong, Mauger, & Ubel, 2001; Ubel & Loewenstein, 1996). Berman et al. (1985) experimentally studied cross-cultural differences in allocation principle preferences and social justice, through asking Americans and Indians to distribute 200\$ according to need, equality, or equity (or merit). It emerged that Indians tended to prefer need-based distribution, while Americans preferred merit-based distribution.

Through studying the mechanisms used for allocating services and the way how choices are made, we can study the moral values of a society. Such choices reflect the conceptions people hold about equal opportunities, where some would see a market price-based system as more egalitarian and others consider first-come first-serve as more egalitarian (Kirchgässner, 2005). Preferred mechanisms, or mechanisms seen as just, are often seen as such because they provide the proponent of the mechanism with more of the resource (Messick, 1995). In other cases, mechanisms are preferred because the procedure appears as fair, even when the outcome distribution is perhaps not substantially fair. People not only value outcomes but also the procedures that lead to outcomes (Bolton et al., 2005; Frey, Benz, & Stutzer, 2002; Frey & Stutzer, 2005; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Yet, a fair procedure may lead to outcomes that are considered unfair (e.g. an especially needy person not being allocated a flat in a lottery).

Theoretically, random allocation is often seen as a desirable mechanism because of its unbiased selection (Bolton et al., 2005). Lotteries, or random allocation ‘embody the naïve or simple conception of equality’ (Calabresi & Bobbit, 1978: 145). In fact they may lead to suboptimal allocations or absurd solutions, and a loss of belief in equal treatment. Yet, they are able to maintain the fiction of an incorruptible decision process (1978: 41-4). Likewise, first-come, first-served mechanisms confer an advantage to first movers, or may privilege people with abundant time or superior information over those without these resources; previous use rules advantage established interests; certain price and auction mechanisms privilege the wealthy, etc. The core of the issue is that ‘allocation is, by its very nature, an act signifying inequality’ (1978: 143). Surprisingly, relatively few researchers have looked at individual determinants of fairness evaluations (Allison & Messick, 1990; Olausson, 2001). Innate characteristics of the allocation mechanisms, as listed above, suggest that individuals’ resources in terms of time, knowledge or money may determine fairness perceptions.

Focus of the research: Allocating child care places

Affordable and convenient child day care is a scarce good. The shortage is both quantitative (cf. waiting list, and a national shortage), and qualitative, because parents prefer facilities that are located conveniently and which offer places during their preferred times. When several parents apply for a single place at a child day care facility, common allocation mechanisms are the use of waiting lists, decisions based on the place of residence or employment of the parents, preferential treatment for children who already have a sibling at that facility etc. Some other mechanisms appear to be considerably less common, or even totally absent. Theoretically, places at a child day care facility could be distributed through a lottery, the place could be sold at an auction, etc.

In this paper we present the first findings of a project aimed at mapping second-order allocation mechanisms used to allocate child day care places in the Netherlands and at explaining the ideas of fairness held by child daycare staff (and, in a later stage, parents). We focus on selection criteria and perceptions of fairness in child day care facilities in the Netherlands, more specifically facilities for 0-4 year olds. Most of these facilities have formal or informal admission policies. In practice, this means waiting lists are combined with a number of priority rules. By focusing on child care facilities many external factors are excluded from the research, because few merit-based criteria can be used for selecting toddlers (but they can be developed for selecting parents). Studying child day care is highly relevant because of the mismatch between supply and demand, and the associated public debate. Absence of sufficient places in turn has an impact on mothers' and fathers' labour market participation and their work-life balance, and is therefore highly socially relevant.

Child day care is a topic that has received considerable attention in psychological and pedagogical research. The focus of such research has mainly been on the effect of day care on the child's well-being, and on the quality of care, the latter especially after the Dutch 2005 law on child day care. Policy research on day care has focused on the affordability of care, or on the impact of the provision of child day care on mothers' labour market participation (Plantenga, 2006). On the administrative side, we know a great deal already on the localisation of facilities, on parents' search processes (MAS Market Analysis and Synthesis, 2007) and their preferences. Managerial and organisational issues of child day care have received less attention.

Elster, in his theoretical work on local justice and allocation, also referred to the allocation of places and priority systems in municipal kindergartens in Norway, and found a wide variety of approaches at the municipal level. The only central allocation rule was that of priority to

disabled children. Some imposed upper time limits on children's stays in kindergarten, others gave priority to children of municipal employees, others looked at the family or work situation of parents, or at the needs of the children, or were concerned with a balanced composition of the kindergarten population (Elster, 1992: 51-2). Elsewhere, he gave the example of admission to the nursery school run by the Student's Union at the University of Oslo (Elster, 1991: 283-4). His approach was mainly theoretical, and based on an extensive use of examples, yet he did not do large N empirical research. Therefore, there are good reasons to conduct such an empirical study focusing on child day care.

When we look at Elster's three egalitarian principles (absolute equality, lottery, rotation), it becomes obvious how they might be used in child care and how some procedures are perhaps more appropriate than others. Rotation would e.g. make it impossible to have both your children at the same day care facility, probably something parents value highly. Absolute equality often results in all-or-none solutions, with high costs associated to both the all (expanding facilities) and none options (parents looking for own provision).

Formal child care allocation criteria exist centrally in some countries (see e.g. the Norwegian example above). In Flanders, available places first need to go to children whose parents work, children whose family situation is such that for social and education reasons a day care place outside the own home is preferable, low income parents, and single parents. Research in 247 child day care facilities in Flanders showed that most facilities receive more applications for places than there normally are vacancies, and that these facilities therefore create rules of precedence. The most commonly used rules were whether parents already had a child in that facility, whether one of the parents worked in the facility, first-come first-served, and a crisis situation in the family (e.g. hospitalisation). There was a great deal of similarity in the use of such criteria across the facilities, suggesting a quasi-consensus on the most appropriate allocation mechanism. Another worthwhile finding was that, although compulsory, several of these criteria mentioned are not codified and transparent, that no strict protocols are followed, and that staff at the facilities did not always agree with the formal – centrally defined – criteria (MAS Market Analysis and Synthesis, 2007).

Research findings part 1: Waiting lists and allocation/selection mechanisms

There is a massive number of child care facilities in the Netherlands. A national register developed by the Ministry of OCW was not yet available when data was analysed. In this research project, we focus on facilities in the Greater Rotterdam area, a region of around 1 million inhabitants consisting of the city of Rotterdam and 19 surrounding municipalities.

The local register of child care facilities (0-4 years old) maintained by GGD Rotterdam-Rijnmond (Register Kinderopvang) lists 202 facilities in the greater Rotterdam area, accounting for 8985 child places, at the time of writing.

Table 1: Legal status of child day care facilities in Rotterdam Rijnmond

<i>Legal status</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Publiekrechtelijk	2	1,0
V.O.F.	4	2,0
Unknown	13	6,4
Particulier	22	10,9
Stichting	55	27,2
BV	106	52,5

Waiting lists

Several reports analysing waiting lists allow us to get an overall picture of the number of parents/children waiting for a child day care place (Aitikne, 2010). National research commissioned by the Ministry of OCW in 41 municipalities revealed a 6.6% capacity shortage in child day care. While waiting lists were lower than in the previous year (minus 4000), average waiting time was around 70 days (de Weerd & Dekker, 2009). The relative size of waiting lists was the highest in large municipalities. Research by the City of Rotterdam in 2009 estimated the number of children on waiting lists for child day care to be between 1472 and 1646 (Jagmohansingh, 2009). For over half of these children, waiting times were below 3 months.

Table 2: Waiting times for child day care n Rotterdam

<i>Waiting period</i>	<i>%</i>
< 1 month	20
1 - 3 months	39
4 – 6 months	27
7 – 12 months	11
13- 18 months	3
> 18 months	0
Total	100

Source: Jagmohansingh 2009

Selection and allocation criteria

We first mapped the selection criteria officially used by the 202 child care facilities, through consulting webpages of the facilities, and through reading and coding policy and governance documents ('aannemebeleid' or 'reglement'), and through contacting facilities by telephone and by email. We eventually managed to contact and get information from 98 facilities. In 73 cases, the policy was posted on a website. The other policies were obtained by telephone and email. The information was coded – results are presented in the table

Table 3: Official selection criteria in child day care facilities in Rotterdam Rijnmond

<i>Plaatsingscriterium</i>	<i>Aantal keer voorgekomen in het beleid van KO</i>
Broertjes en zusjes van reeds geplaatste kinderen	95
Kinderen van eigen personeel	61
Kinderen met sociaal-medische indicatie (GGD) ²	41
Wisseling/uitbreiding van dagen van reeds geplaatste kinderen	37
Doelgroepen zoals omschreven in de Wet basisvoorziening Kinderopvang ³	28
Keuze van de dagen	22
Leeftijd van kinderen (evenwichtige opbouw groepen)	19
Bijzondere omstandigheden / extra zorg	8
Kinderen van personeel met wie de opvang een contract heeft	3
Kinderen van ouders die in de buurt wonen of werken	3
Kinderen van ouders met een baan	1

While we intended to purely focus on selection policies, it appeared that many facilities did not have official criteria, and that planners had considerable discretion in making decisions. Day care facilities are also very different, in that some specialised in attracting certain types of children. Selection and specialisation was in many case motivated by financial criteria: planners wanted to be certain that their places were used in an optimal way, and that clients were able to pay for the child day care. Security about payment could however also be reached by having purchase agreements regarding specific target groups. The focus of decisions was mainly on the needs of the child day care facility and exiting clients, and less or not on the needs of prospective clients. Hence the attention for brothers and sisters, changes in

² Op basis van het advies van een indicator (GGD, JGZ-arts of RIO) geeft het college van B&W een sociaal-medische indicatie die is van toepassing als aan een van de twee onderstaande criteria is voldaan:

- Kinderen waarbij is vastgesteld dat zij een (dreigende) beperking/belemmering hebben die de gezonde en evenwichtige ontwikkeling in de weg staan en waarbij kinderopvang noodzakelijk is. (vastgesteld door JGZ-arts)
- Ouders die aanspraak maken op de zorg ingevolge de AWBZ (Algemene Wet Bijzondere Ziektekosten) en waarbij is aangetoond dat kinderopvang noodzakelijk is. (vastgesteld door Regionale Indicatie Organen)

³ ** Doelgroepen zoals omschreven in de 'Wet basisvoorziening Kinderopvang' zijn:

- Bijstandsgerechtigden (Wwb, IOAW, IOAZ, WIK) die een reïntegratietraject moeten volgen.
- Anw-ers die een reïntegratietraject volgen
- herintreders die een reïntegratietraject volgen
- nieuwkomers die een inburgeringstraject moeten volgen
- tienermoeders
- studenten met recht op WSF

placement of existing clients, and staff's children in the placement policies. Many institutions described themselves as organisations having to find means to keep their staff happy, and satisfying and keeping their existing customers.

Research findings part 2: Staff attitudes towards alternative mechanisms

In part 1 we mapped the allocation criteria currently being used. In part 2 we conducted a number of informative in-depth interviews to get insight into the actual selection and allocation process, and discretionary dilemmas in acceptance or non-acceptance of applicants. Interviewees included the section leader *technische hygiënezorg* at GGD Rotterdam, responsible for the inspection of child day care facilities, and 6 childcare facility planners. These planners are either the administrative manager or owner of the facility in the case of small facilities, or a dedicated administrative person in case of child care facilities belonging to a larger consortium. Interviews took place as part of a FSW honours student research internship and were conducted on site in June and July 2010 and took approximately 45min each.

We used these interviews to uncover 'unofficial' selection criteria used by the child care facilities and to map the administrative and logistic practice of selection. Secondly we used them to study the feasibility of having child day care planners evaluate the justice of alternative allocation and selection mechanisms, using abstract scenarios.

Practices of selection

Interviewees confirmed the existence of long waiting lists, estimated at about one year. The length of waiting lists appears to be mainly determined by the socio-demographic profile of the clients: working parents mainly living on the North side were less flexible, while parents belonging to specific groups (*inburgeraars, doelgroepen*) were much more flexible, leaving less unused capacity on certain days. Certain days are busier than others, which confirms we should not just study selection for entry into specific facilities, but also allocation of children to vacant places across all facilities. Because of the waiting lists and the complicated demand patterns, even smaller organizations have an employee dedicated to planning. In larger organizations, planning is a full-time job. Such planning uses one of a number of available computer systems.

Actual selection and allocation appears to diverge quite considerably from official rules (where such rules are available). The overarching allocation principle is first come, first serve, based on a waiting list: parents who were first to enrol their child are the first to be allocated a

place. Yet most actual allocations follow a series of preferential treatment rules: children on the waiting list who already have a sibling at the facility, or whose parents work at the facility have priority, as do clients requesting an extension of current care days. Child day care workers motivate such preferences by explicitly referring to customer relations management. Generally, staff considers waiting lists to be the fairest system. By using waiting lists, they want to reward parents who actually bother to start thinking early about child day care. Late applications are not seen in a very favourable way – parents applying late are seen as parents who don't really need the day care for their child, or as parents who don't try hard enough. Such reasoning was also visible in the answers obtained from one child day care centre where no waiting lists were used. In this facility, the responsible person just checked and decided about allocation whenever a parent called. Parents who repeatedly check for places have thus a higher possibility of actually getting a place. The person we interviewed considered this to be a fair process, because it rewarded people who actually invested time and effort in the search process. Evidence from this and other interviews also revealed a preference for 'organised' parents – parents who return forms in time etc. Such parents often receive preferential treatment.

Opinions about allocation mechanisms

In the second part of the pilot interviews, we presented interviewees with a number of alternative scenarios for allocating places, based on the international literature about the topic. The purpose was to test the feasibility of using quite abstract concepts and scenarios in future research among this group. We used ten scenarios, and introduced them as follows: 'Suppose the government/The Hague were to decide to change the entire system of child day care, and to introduce a new system to determine who gets priority in the allocation of child day care places. What do you think about the following options?'

First come, first serve

How just would you consider it to be if the first person to report, or the one ranked highest on the waiting list, gets the first choice?

All respondents considered this to be a fair system, but commented there had to be a possibility to diverge from a first come first serve logic in specific cases.

Price

Suppose two parents want the same child day care place. How would think about a decision to give the place to those parents willing to pay most?

Price was unanimously considered to be unfair, mainly because respondents saw hard work and long hours, as different from earning a lot. People working long hours but earning little

have as much need for child day care as others, and have as much right to a place as others. A price-based system was for this reason seen to be unfair. This is not an unexpected finding, but it still stands in contrast to the continuing introduction of market forces to the sector.

Lottery

How fair would you consider a lottery to be: we draw lots, and the person whose name is drawn receives the place?

A lottery was unanimously considered to be unfair, mainly because it penalizes parents who start early searching a place for their child and who are willing to invest a lot of time and energy in finding a place for their child. A lottery would allocate scarce places to parents who couldn't actually be bothered to invest time in finding a place. Furthermore, some respondents worried about parents having to place their children in two or three different facilities.

Need/merit 1

What if it was decided to give priority to children of parents working full time, or children of a single working parent?

Answers to this scenario mainly focused on the distinction between full- and part-time work. While there was agreement that working parents should generally get priority, interviewees considered it wrong to give parents with a full time job priority over parents with part-time jobs, because they had as much need for child day care as others. With regard to single parents, opinions were mixed. Interviewees realised single parents had a tough job and that their job depended on the availability of child day care. At the same time, they noted single parents' situation was not all that different from a situation in which two parents (have to) work fulltime.

Need/merit 2

What if it was decided to give priority to children with a social-medical indication (GGD) or who have been referred by *bureau jeugdzorg*?

Interviewees clearly distinguished between social-medical indication (GGD) and *jeugdzorg*, mainly because they felt not all of them were equipped to dealing with children with a social-medical indication. In general, interviewees agreed that priority should go to these groups if this is in the interest of the child. This is especially the case for children referred by *bureau jeugdzorg*. There is an urgent need in these cases, and interviewees indicated already doing their utmost to find a place for such children.

Need/merit 3

What if it was decided to give priority to children whose parents are *doelgroepouders*?

Here, interviewees thought one should not make a distinction between working mothers and mothers in a *traject*. Giving priority to this group was seen as unfair towards working parents. At the same time, being in a *traject* does not mean this group should have a lower priority in allocations.

Previous use 1

How fair would you consider it to be if priority was given to children who already have a sibling in the day care facility (follow-up question: and how fair would that be towards parents who just had their first child?)

Answers to this scenario were mixed.

Previous use 2

How just would you consider it to be if priority was given to children of child day care employees?

This scenario was generally considered to be fair, yet the motivation was mainly a pragmatic one: when you don't offer a day care place to children of your own employees, then you lose employees, and the result of this is even fewer places overall. Some interviewees even explicitly named providing a place in child day care to one's employees as a duty of a good employer in the day care sector.

Catchment area

How fair would you consider it to be if priority was given to children of those parents living the nearest to the child day care facility?

Catchment areas were not considered to be a relevant criterion in making allocation decisions, because it was seen as up to the parents to opt for day care close to home or close to work.

Vote

How just would you consider it to be if the parents already having children at the child day care facility voted about new admissions?

Voting was unanimously considered to be unfair and unpractical. Unfair, because it was feared to lead to abuse and favouritism; and unpractical because they thought it was not the parents' job to be a planner, because parents have different interests than planners, and because such a scenario was seen as slow and difficult.

Some preliminary conclusions and further research

In this draft paper we looked at the allocation of scarce places in child day care. We outlined the theoretical debate, and made a preliminary inventory of selection and allocations used in

child day care in the Greater Rotterdam area. We also organised a small number of informational pilot interviews to find out how allocation and selection really work, and to test a set of abstract scenarios about allocating child day care places. Reactions to the scenarios were remarkably similar, but there was more variation in the explanations used for why interviewees considered something as fair. As we have seen in a previous section, the selection criteria and allocation mechanisms used in child day care are quite similar across the sector, and this was also revealed in the interviews. Interviewees displayed a very strong adherence to established practice, and tended to reject many alternatives outright (even when such alternatives are very common in other sectors). Only when the interviewer insisted, interviewees started to reflect about their answers and started to motivate their answers. In most cases, it took some effort to have the interviewees think in general and abstract terms, because they constantly referred to their daily practice.

Finances permitting, these preliminary findings will be used to develop an extended database of selection and allocation policies of child day care facilities, with an aim to discover and explain differences in the policies used by child day care facilities. Secondly, we hope to get more insight into how child day care planners, as street-level bureaucrats, make selection and allocation decisions. Lastly, we will use the scenarios for experimental research using vignettes among a number of groups.

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