

Analysis of the Advisory Boards

Introduction

One of the deliverables of this European project is the organization of various Advisory Boards. The objective of these Advisory Boards is to create an extra quality guarantee for the project by way of reflections and supervision.

The organization of the Advisory Boards fits in with the design of the European project. The fact is, it is important to present an interdisciplinary approach to the prevention of domestic burglary. In addition to this, the exchange of good practices and the collaboration between the various links in the safety chain are stimulated. The Advisory Board is a good foundation on which to realize these goals.

Furthermore, the strengthening of the knowledge potential for the purpose of supporting the prevention policy regarding domestic burglary is a pointless exercise if this is solely the work of an isolated project group. Therefore, the decision was made to request the cooperation of persons who are involved with crime and prevention policy in a variety of areas.

In the analysis that follows, the first topic addressed is the methodology of the Advisory Boards. Thereafter, the manner in which the Advisory board were organized will be discussed by way of a step-by-step plan.

Methodology

An Advisory Board is a forum consisting of potential users of the results of the research project and other investigators. It functions as a sounding board for the persons who work on the project by allowing an exchange of opinions between the research team and other colleagues and experts¹.

Qualitative research method

Throughout the entire duration of this project, 4 Advisory Boards were organized. During the Advisory Boards, a presentation was always given of the current status of project-related issues. The participants in the Advisory Boards were then asked for their reflections about each part of the project proceedings. These reflections addressed elements related to the content of the project as well as practical matters. In preparation for the meetings of the Advisory Board, the necessary documents were provided to the members. These documents were then discussed during the Advisory Board. In the area of practical matters, input was requested for the composition of the participant groups for the other deliverables (focus groups, World Café) or about the organization of the various events, among other things.

During the Advisory Boards, the persons participating were asked to share their opinions and visions about the domestic burglary phenomenon. During the meetings, a number of qualitative methods, such as participatory observation, group discussions and consultation moments, were employed. As a result of this, the results cannot be quantified (cannot be expressed numerically)².

¹ BELSPO, *project group*, <http://www.belspo.be/>

² ENCYCLO, *definition*, <http://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/kwalitatief%20onderzoek>

Advantages

Various advantages can be discerned in the methodology of the Advisory Boards. First of all, it is a very flexible and inexpensive method. The Advisory Boards were organized in the offices of the FPS Home Affairs which meant that no budget was needed for the rental of a meeting room. Furthermore, the members of the Advisory Board were primarily national partners who came to the meetings via private means and therefore did not book any travel expenses.

Another advantage was that the composition of the Advisory Board could be self-determined. Of course, when doing this, the objectives of the Advisory Board were taken into account. Here, it was primarily those persons who the organizers knew had sufficient expertise about the domestic burglary phenomenon that were selected. Due to previous projects and collaborations, most of the experts were already known to the organizers. On the basis of this experience, it was easier to make a selection. Their enthusiasm for the project was also an important aspect of this selection. This, in fact, ensured their continuing dedication to the project. Finally, the organizers made sure that all of the services were sufficiently represented within the Advisory Board. This produced the advantage that each theme was considered from several perspectives.

The most important advantage of the Advisory Board however remains the provision of advice. Since the selected members are all experts, the Advisory Boards are a very good medium by which to assess the project. It was very important for the project group to regularly be exposed to new visions and approaches. The Advisory Board ensured that the scope of the project remained on target. Their critical points of view meant that the content of the project became stronger. They made sure that no elements within the project were "forgotten", and they asked the right questions in order to keep the project on the rails. Furthermore, their practical experience was also exceptionally valuable. By means of their networks, the right participants could be found for the other deliverables. But their view of the practical matters was also important, especially for the World Café, since the project group had never used this methodology before.

Disadvantages

Of course, in addition to the advantages, there were also disadvantages associated with the Advisory Board methodology. First of all, care had to be taken to ensure that some members of the Advisory Board were not able to dictate the tone of the project too much. The Advisory Council Board has an advisory role and no decision-making power. Yet, it is possible that some of the participants had a hidden agenda. In other words, they wanted their own department, institution or project to be addressed in greater depth. It is also possible that they wanted to use the project to impose their own vision of the policy. Luckily, this was not the experience within this project; the participants had positive attitudes and wanted to help the project advance.

Another disadvantage is that it was not easy to gather all of the participants for an Advisory Board meeting. Given the different schedules of the participants, the target attendance of 20 persons per Advisory Board was seldom reached. There was a select base group who was always in attendance at the various meetings of the Advisory Board. These participants were also the most active when it came to the formulation of feedback relating to substantive documents. In contrast to this, there was a group of participants who seldom or even never were present at the Advisory Board. It was also very difficult to involve these participants in the project. Attempts were made to do this, for example, by personally contacting them by telephone for the purpose of obtaining some input.

At the onset of the Advisory Board, it was agreed that each participant would speak his or her own language (French or Dutch). No interpreters were provided in the budget for this deliverable. In practice, this was not that obvious, given that most of the experts and most of the members of the project group are Dutch-speaking. In order to sufficiently involve the French-speaking experts during the meetings, the PowerPoint presentations were projected in French. A brief summary was also regularly provided in French. The e-mail traffic and the reports were, of course, always submitted to the experts in the two national languages.

Finally, it may be a disadvantage that the project group itself composed the Advisory Board. As already stated above, this can be an advantage, but it also has a downside. When the group was composed, the preference usually went to experts who were already well-known and with whom the organizers had already worked. This creates the risk that new information and visions are not introduced.

Analysis of the methodology

The Advisory Boards were a valuable supplement to the project. The various reflections regarding the content and the practical considerations helped the project to advance. It also ensured that the project was interdisciplinary. The fact that the potential users of the project had already worked on it, ensured that most of the experts were highly enthusiastic. Naturally, there are several disadvantages associated with an Advisory Board, but if the project group looks out for these disadvantages, they will not outweigh the advantages of this methodology.

Step-by-step plan

Composition of the Advisory Board

The Advisory Board was charged with representing the integral safety chain for the purpose of being able to provide sufficient support for the project. This also meant that sufficient bridges could be built between the various actors and levels.

Therefore the project group wanted the supervision committee to be made up of representatives from the Federal level, including more specifically the FPS Justice (Service of Penal Policy), the FPS Home Affairs (Immigration Office) and the Federal Police.

The Immigration Office however indicated that they did not want to participate in this Advisory Board; they did not consider participation in this consultation platform to be expedient. Although they did communicate that they, as a Federal Service, will make every effort to take all of the appropriate administrative measures possible in regard to foreigners who perpetrate domestic burglaries in Belgian territory. The other two actors did agree with the offer; namely they were also part of the official national group of partners within the project. They had already entered into a partnership declaration prior to their participation.

The supraregional level was also invited to join the Advisory Board. Included in this category are the liaison officers from the Provinces of Antwerp and Namur as well as the District Commissioner of the Province of Limburg. These partners had primarily a structural collaboration with the Province of Antwerp. Prior to the project, a partnership declaration was also made with them.

The following organizations were asked for information: Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen [Flemish Society for Social Housing], Département Aménagement du territoire, urbanisme et patrimoine en l'Administration de l'Aménagement du Territoire et du Logement

(AATL) [Urban Planning and Housing Administration], la Direction du Logement [Housing Directorate]. However, there were no representatives from the regional level present in the various Advisory Boards. The project group regretted this, given that this level would have been able to provide additional points of view in regard to this project.

In addition, an appeal to the Union of Cities and Municipalities was launched. A representative of the Union of Flemish Cities and Municipalities participated in the Advisory Board on several occasions. Unfortunately, there was no participation from the Brussels (Association de la Ville et des Communes de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale [Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital]) nor from the Walloon (Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie [Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia]) sides.

At the local level, the project group wanted to assign a seat on the Advisory Board to a mix of various positions to ensure that both the administrative and the policing components were represented. It is for that reason that Prevention Officers, Police Chiefs, Domestic burglary Prevention consultants and one BIN coordinator from various municipalities/Police Zones were asked to participate in this consultation platform. One Domestic burglary Prevention Consultant was structurally present during the various Advisory Boards.

There was no budget provided from the project itself to pay the travel expenses of international partners. The international dimension was therefore not represented in the first three consultation meetings. The exception to this was the final consultation, where there was one participant from The Netherlands who made the trip using private resources. On the other hand, this international dimension was well represented in the focus groups.

Given the importance of departing from a theoretical framework in order to realize the various steps within this project, the project group also found it necessary to assign seats in the consultation platform to participants from the scientific community. This goal was achieved. A member of the academic community participated in the majority of the Advisory Boards. In addition to that, the project group also received via e-mail a great deal of scientific feedback related to the documents that were already developed.

And finally, the private partners were also essential. Various organizations were summoned, but during the Advisory Boards, only ALIA Security (Belgian professional association for electronic security systems) and Assuralia (professional association for insurance companies) were present.

Meeting preparation via the formulation of an accompanying question list

The project group thoroughly prepared each meeting of the Advisory Board. Included in this preparation was the determination of which substantive documents could be sent out in advance for the purpose of receiving feedback related to them and which practical questions should be asked. The deliverables which had to be implemented in the near future were always taken into account when doing this work.

So, for example, the cost-benefit analysis was submitted to the members of the Advisory Board several times so that its progress could be discussed during the meetings. The members were then asked for their remarks. It also regularly happened that a partner from the Advisory Board was sent a part of the cost-benefit analysis which covered his or her institution or service. When this occurred, additional information and/or numerical data were also requested.

Concerning practical matters, the members' knowledge of good practices that could be visited was assessed. The members were also asked to help with the search for participants for the various deliverables (focus group, World Café, ...). The extensive networks of the Advisory Board members meant that the different services were always represented in the various deliverables.

Reserving the meeting room

When deciding upon a meeting location, the reservation of a meeting room in the buildings of the FPS Home Affairs was repeatedly chosen. In light of various factors, this was an obvious choice. The location and its facilities were familiar to the project group, no rental fees had to be provided for in the budget, ...

In addition, it was also the best choice for the participants. Since the partners are located throughout the whole of Belgium, Brussels is the most accessible location to organize a meeting. The meeting rooms at the FPS Home Affairs are easily accessible with public transportation, and there is also parking available for any participants who came by car.

Writing and sending invitations

The first Advisory Board took place in November 2013. According to the project timetable, the first Advisory Board had been planned for January 2014, but since it is the job of the Advisory Board to counsel and to provide support, the project group found it expedient to move up the first Advisory Board so that consultations could begin right from the start. The date of the first Advisory Board was set by the project group. One month before the meeting, the invitations were sent to the participants. In addition to an overview of the context of this European project, this invitation also included the meeting's agenda points so the participants could prepare for the meeting. Each invitation also included a request for confirmation of attendance.

During the first Advisory Board, the dates for the following Advisory Boards were set. It is important to note that an additional meeting took place before the fourth Advisory Board. The date of this meeting was pushed back to September 2014 since the project had been extended by 3 months. As a result of the fact that the dates of all of the Advisory Boards had been communicated from the start, the invitations for the following Advisory Boards were sent out not later than 2 weeks before the following meeting. Agenda points were always added to these invitations. The project group also ensured that all of the participants were in possession of the substantive documents to be discussed at the latest 2 weeks before the meeting.

Invitation follow-up

All of the invitations included a request for confirmation of attendance by a certain date. If not enough people sent confirmations, the relevant partners were personally called to inform them of the meeting. This ensured that there were always as many participants as possible at the meetings.

Preparation of the meeting room

Since our own meeting rooms were used, there was not much preparation needed for the meeting room. Only the ICT materials had to be set up. Standard beverages are present for meeting participants. Furthermore, the reception desk had to be notified about the meeting. An attendance list was provided which all of the participants had to sign.

The Advisory Board meets the project group

The meetings always took place from 10:00 until 13:00.

At the start of each Advisory Board meeting, the members were welcomed by the project leader. Thereafter, the approval of the report of the previous meeting was requested, and then the general affairs were announced.

The most important agenda point of the meetings is the status of the various project deliverables. A reading of each deliverable was given by the person responsible for that deliverable within the project group. The reflections and comments from the Advisory Board members were also collected and discussed. For clarification purposes, a PowerPoint presentation was given at each meeting.

All Advisory Boards were concluded with a miscellaneous round, with conclusions and with a summary of the agreements and appointments made.

Writing and sending the report

During the Advisory Board, all members of the project group take notes. These notes are then compiled into a report. All members of the project group work on this report. Following this, the report is translated and sent to the members of the Advisory Board.

Requesting reflections on the report

When the reports are sent, the members of the Advisory Board are always asked to formulate feedback to the report. If the participants still have additional points of particular interest or information for the content of the project, then this can always be stated in the discussion of the report.

Sending thank you notes to the Advisory Board

After each Advisory Board, the members were thanked for their attendance and for their input. When the reports were sent, this was emphasized once again. Furthermore, the members of the Advisory Board will be thanked again at the conference. Finally, the members of the Advisory Board and those of the focus groups will come together for a dinner as a way of thanking them for their participation.

Regularity of the meetings

It is advisable to only call meetings of the Advisory Board members when something substantial is on the agenda. In any case, the following meetings are recommended:

- a meeting at the beginning of the research project to discuss the commencement report,
- a meeting at the end to discuss the final report and
- one or more meetings to monitor the evolution of the project.³

These guidelines were followed during the European research study. The first Advisory Board was organized on 25 November 2013. During this meeting, the project was presented and its objectives were listed. On 20 February and 28 April 2014 there were two more Advisory Boards during which the evolution of the investigation was discussed. In preparation for these meetings, several substantive documents were sent to the participants. The fourth and final Advisory Board took place on 4 September 2014. Each one of the investigated

³ Project group, <http://www.belspo.be/>

methodologies was discussed during this Advisory Board. Final reflections were shared, and the Advisory Board was warmly thanked.

Recurring reflections and feedback

As was mentioned above, the Advisory Board was concerned, especially at the beginning, with the cost-benefit analysis. In particular, they argued that it would not be possible to compile a purely scientific cost-benefit analysis because doing so would require too much time. However, they did state that the project group should attempt to delineate the costs and the benefits as well as they could. As the project progressed, and therefore the content of the cost-benefit analysis also became more substantial, constructive criticism was also given for the purpose of improving the content. The members of the Advisory Board also provided as much numerical data and content-related elements as possible for the purpose of improving the cost-benefit analysis.

The members of the Advisory Board also repeatedly expressed their concern about the results of the project. At the first meeting, the participants were wondering what in fact would end up being delivered and whether this would result in 'something new'. However, the project has proven that the methodologies used, in and of themselves, are an innovation. The content of the investigation will not disappear in the filing cabinet either. As early as the last Advisory Board, it had already been made known that the results of this European project would be included in a new ISEC project that is being initiated in The Netherlands and in an EMPACT project. The recommendations will also be used to further chart out policy for the coming years.

Concerning practical matters, the Advisory Board was involved, in particular, in the formulation of the participants' lists for the various events. Their networks were very important in accomplishing this; especially so for the circulation of the invitations for the World Café. The reason for this is that the World Café's target public were the people in the field. The Advisory Board, however, also gave tips related to the methodologies to be used.



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