"You don't take anything for granted": the role of anthropology in improving services, policies and parenting practices for adoptive families

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"You don't take anything for granted": the role of anthropology in improving services, policies and parenting practices for adoptive families

Abstract

Until the last quarter of the 20th century, Spain was a place where foreign couples adopted children. However, by 2004 it was the country with the highest number of foreign adoptions, second only to the United States. This article examines the impact of the transnational adoption research of an interdisciplinary group of Catalan researchers (AFIN). Since 2004, AFIN has successfully developed several research projects with the participation of practitioners and adoptive families and their associations. We discuss the difficulty of disseminating AFIN's research results to policymakers and practitioners and strategies for doing so. We also address the research methods that have helped AFIN make an impact on adoptive families. We argue that AFIN's particular ethnographic method and understandings of transnational adoption and political and professional culture in Spain result in both AFIN's marginalization by policymakers and practitioners and simultaneously its successful recognition among adoptive families as an expert group.

Keywords: anthropology, transnational adoption, family services, knowledge producers, knowledge consumers, knowledge transfer, policymaking, practitioners

Introduction

In early 2015, one of Spain's widest circulating newspapers examined the issue of Spain's decreasing natality (Ansede 2015). Spain's total fertility rate has declined since the mid 1970s, when it was 2.8 children per woman. By the mid-1990s it had fallen to 1.14 and by 2012 climbed slightly to 1.32 (INE, 2013), well below the average of the 28 European Union countries of 1.58 (Alvarez, San Román & Marre n.d). The average age of maternity has increased by almost three years since the mid 1970s, growing from 28.5 to 31.5 years old in 2012.

Spain is classified as a country with a *lowest-low fertility rate* (that is, TFR at or below 1.3; Kholer et al. 2002: 643). However, assisted reproductive technologies, including transnational adoption and commercial surrogacy are common in Spain. From 1997 to 2013, 52,158 children were adopted from other countries into Spain, according to data from the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality Policy Management. Indeed, Spain was the European country with the largest number of transnational adoptions between 2000 and 2010: 39,231 (Selman 2012). The latest report of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (Ferraretti *et al.* 2013), which collected data from European centers of assisted reproduction and intrauterine insemination of 2009, confirms a trend toward late age of first pregnancy in Spain, as well as the expansion of assisted reproduction. France had the highest number of assisted reproductions (74,975), followed by Germany (67,349) and Spain (54,266). Despite the fact that traditional and commercial surrogacy are not allowed in Spain, some informal data suggest that in 2014 there were more children born through surrogacy (1,400) than those arriving through international adoptions (1,188) (Arranz 2015).

In 2004 (the year in which the highest number of children arrived in Spain through transnational adoption), the AFIN Research Group was formally founded to perform research on adoptions, families and childhoods. The group was composed of researchers that had been working in the so-called "new" family forms from the social and cultural anthropology perspective from the 1990s in the context of some Spanish research projects and a European university-based team of social anthropologists project lead by J. Edwards (University of Manchester) and J. Bestard (University of Barcelona) and including participation by M. Melhuus and S. Howell (University of Oslo, Norway), A. Cadoret and E. Porqueres (CNRS, Paris) and P. Wade and. B. Campbell (University of Manchester). AFIN emerged with the goal of contributing to a better comprehension and treatment of the "new" family diversity in Spain through research and dissemination. For this reason, the group included not only social anthropologists, but also researchers from other fields (sociology, law, psychology, health sciences), as well as practitioners and representatives of family associations. This was an ambitious project that aimed to bring different worlds into contact—the worlds of researchers, practitioners and users—which, according to Young (2008), connect only rarely.

Between 1997 and 2013, 52,158 children came to Spain through transnational adoption. By 2004, Spain was the country that adopted most children abroad, second only to the US (Selman 2009). The magnitude of adoption in Spain encouraged the founding of numerous civic associations in the span of only a few years. Associations of adoptive families emerged in Spain as the first transnational adoptions were taking place, filling a lacuna left by the absence or incompetence of the state in family policies. As adoptive families explained, these associations assisted, complemented and monitored the state in matters of transnational adoption (Marre 2004).

In the 1990s, as part of a trend that also occured in countries such as the US (Friese & Bogenschneider 2009) and Australia (Butcher & Dalton 2014; Head et al. 2014), the Spanish central state devolved responsibility to its regional administrations on a wide range of family issues and policies. These were defined as "government activities that were designed intentionally to support families, enhance family members' wellbeing, and strengthen family relationships" (Bogenschneider 2006; Robila 2012). They were understood to encompass four functions of families: family creation, economic support, childrearing and caregiving (Ooms 1990; Bogenschneider & Corbet 2010a, 2010b), including transnational adoption. The Spanish state handles family and childhood issues through 23 entities, including seventeen regional administrations and six local councils. In organizing and regulating the practices of a new group of practitioners, services and family policies in the complex and decentralized Spanish state, the authorities attempted to follow two international conventions ratified by Spain: the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by Spain in 1990) and the 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry adoption (ratified by Spain in 1995). The design of family policies emphasized two issues: the "principle of the best interests of the child" and the idea that adoption was a child protection measure rather than a method for providing a family with a child.

According to the Hague Convention (Hague Conference on Private International Law 1993), member states should each designate a central authority to handle transnational adoption. The central authorities acting in the country of origin of the children are responsible for ensuring that a child is adoptable, "after possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin have been given due consideration, (...) that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests" (art.

4b) and that the necessary consent for adoption of those persons, institutions and authorities involved has been properly and freely given (art. 4c). In the receiving countries, the central authority is responsible for ensuring that "the prospective adoptive parents are eligible and suited to adopt" (art. 5a).

Because Spain's political organization is highly decentralized, 23 central authorities are responsible for overseeing this process. Each central authority authorizes its own "accredited bodies" to handle the evaluation and selection of adoptive families and the processing of applications.

This article examines the relationship of AFIN with adoptive families and their associations, and also with administrations, policymakers and practitioners involved in adoption in Spain. These practitioners, who include clinicians, therapists, educators, social workers and social service professionals, may apply scientific knowledge in their practice with families in general and adoptive families in particular. The article draws on the experiences of the three authors and conversations with eight other AFIN researchers, representing a dialogue across different agents involved in the field. It additionally draws on the fieldwork carried out by the AFIN researchers since the late 1990s.

AFIN has never officially been consulted by the Spanish administrations nor has it been able to exert a direct influence on family policies and practices surrounding transnational adoption in Spain. Other social science research groups in Spain are similarly excluded from policy debates. This pattern appears common in other countries as well. Bogenschneider et al. (2000: 327) conclude that "with a couple of notable exceptions, the history of the utilization of social science knowledge in the past 50 years yields few examples of research being used to inform policymaking." The case of this research group is nonetheless interesting because a

significant number of Spanish adoptive families and their associations have taken an interest in and benefited from AFIN's expertise.

Why are Spanish adoptive families and their associations interested in the expertise of social science experts with an anthropological background? Why are these social scientists nonetheless not consulted by practitioners or policymakers working in matters related to the family and adoption in Spain? How does AFIN manage to bridge the gap between researchers and final users, even if practitioners and policymakers apparently don't?

The article is organized as follows: First, we discuss the relationships among research, policy and practice in the context of AFIN work. Next, we discuss the context where AFIN develops its work, emphasizing that an anthropological perspective permits an open and demystifying view of the phenomenon of adoption. Next, we outline the strategies that AFIN employs with the aim of creating a network of production and application of knowledge that involves researchers, practitioners and final users (that is, adoptive families). Then, we analyze the uneven results among different actors and the possible reasons that account for these differences. Finally, we conclude with an explanation of possible reasons why AFIN has achieved better communication with final users (adoptive families) than with practitioners and policy makers in Spain.

Relationships among research, policy and practice

In this paper, "research" is understood as the knowledge and scientific theories derived from studies using accepted scientific methods. "Practice," on the other hand, is the application of knowledge by professionals or para-professionals to effect change "on behalf of particular individuals or groups" (Small 2005: 321).

As Bogenschneider and Corbett (2010b) point out, "family plays a pervasive role in policy, but it is surprisingly absent from mainstream research in American politics" (Bogenschneider and Corbett 2010b: 784), probably because family policy is a young field. Nevertheless, since its inception in the 1970s, some major issues have emerged: controversies regarding its definition, the dilemma regarding "partisan ownership of family policy," the legitimacy of government's role in family functioning, the debate over the need for family policy and the role of research in social policy and social interventions (Bogenschneider 1995; Bogenschneider et al 2000; Small 2005; Friese and Bogenschneider 2009; Bogenschneider and Corbett 2010a, 2010b; Head et al 2014). In Spain, from the end of the civil war (1936-1939), through to the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and until the passage of the 1978 Constitution, most practices related to the family were, in one way or another, in the hands of the Catholic Church. This long and intense relationship has meant that the majority of Spain's constitutional governments—and especially the social-democratic ones influenced by the feminist movement—have not been interested or active in the development of family policy, an area traditionally linked to the Catholic Church or to conservative, authoritarian or right-wing governments.

Page and Jenkins (2005) signal that there are few studies on how governmental policies are established. In general, how policies are designed, supported or justified is little known beyond what is communicated through political discourse. In the case of the United States, mainly since the 2000s, the development of social policy has tended to incorporate non-governmental actors and academics (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003; Page & Jenkins 2005). For example, Tom Corbet, a known academic, worked on welfare reform during the early Clinton administration as a

senior policy adviser in the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Bogenschneider and Corbet himself have explained that currently:

> Most academics scan the real world for ideas about what to look at and how to formulate research questions. Thus, many academics find themselves doing policy in one way or another. They consult with government, serve on commissions, and accept public positions […] (Bogenschneider and Corbet 2010a: 94-95).

According to Bogenschneider and Corbett (2010a), social knowledge originates in the intersection of three contexts that produce different degrees of research about the social: university-based settings, intermediary organizations and government settings. An example of how these three actors have interacted is the United Kingdom, where Thatcher's mercantilist, neoliberal *New Public Management* gave way to the *New Public Governance* (NPG) proposed by Blair. This approach implemented "the direct engagement of state and non-state actors in a deliberative and consensus-oriented process for the purpose of developing policy and/or managing resources" (Robertson & Choi 2012: 85). This model abandoned the mercantilist conception of public administration and instead privatized services and distributed them through horizontal collaborations. Authors such as Pollitt and Boukaert (2000) have suggested that Blair's NPG was inspired by the system adopted by the United States under the Clinton administration. Colebatch (2006) suggests that the major consequence of the horizontal nature of the NPG was the inclusion of actors who had traditionally been excluded from the design and implementation of public policies, such as universities, users' associations and NGOs.

In the Spanish case, research about social welfare and the family originates exclusively in universities, which, as in other countries, have difficulties communicating with administrative bureaucracies and practitioners. This difficulty resonates with Head et al (2014)'s distinction between advanced public bureaucracies

and traditional public bureaucracies. In the former, it is assumed that civil servants try to acquire the best and most complete knowledge and that many of them are experts at analyzing this information. In traditional public bureaucracies (such as in Spain), "public servants had close controls over relevant information and a near-monopoly on provision of policy advice" (Head et al 2014: 90). Adoptive families and their associations in Spain have complained about the lack of expertise among public servants and administration with regard to transnational adoption. The president of an association of adoptive parents told one of the authors of this paper, "You went to the administration and the administration had no idea what you had to do to adopt a child in another country" (Marre 2004: 61).

In their analysis on the relationships among government agencies and university social research in Australia, Head et al (2014), following the works of Weiss (1979; 1991), propose that researchers consider different ways in which social research might contribute to the work of practitioners. The use can be *instrumental*, *conceptual* or *symbolic*. The *instrumental* use of research refers to direct influence "such as when expert recommendations are adopted to some extent" (Head et al 2014: 91) in practitioners' processes. In *conceptual* influence, on the other hand, the "ways of thinking about an issue are changed over a long period of time" (idem). When "research findings are 'cherry picked' for partisan purposes" (idem) in policy debates, their influence is considered *symbolic*.

It is clear that social science research can generate knowledge that has applicability outside academia (Small 2005). Nevertheless, over the last couple of decades there has been a growing concern in the behavioral and social sciences, including social anthropology, about the lack of connection between researchers and practitioners (Small 1995; Bogenschneider et al 2000; Shonkoff 2000; Small 2005;

Friese & Bogenschneider 2009; Bogenschneider et al 2012; Bogenschneider et al 2013; Head et al 2014).

The main theories about this lack of connection are those known as the "two communities theory" (Caplan 1979), the "three professional cultures" (Shonkoff 2000), the "boundaries of professional, scholarly circles" (Boyer 1990; Small 2005) and the "different goals, demand and problems addressed" (Kanfer 1990; Small 2005). Caplan (1979) defines a "two communities theory" according to which social scientists are more concerned with science "for its own sake and for what it can contribute to the knowledge base of their field" (Small 2005: 321). Practitioners, on the other hand, are basically interested in more practical and immediate issues usually requiring some kind of action (Bogenschneider et al 2000; Small 2005; Friese and Bogenschneider 2009; Bogenschneider and Corbett 2010a, 2010b). Shonkoff (2000) argues that the lack of connection is due to the co-existence of three professional cultures focused on different activities: research on children and their families, the design of social policies and the delivery of services.

Some scholars (Boyer 1990; Small 1996, 2005; Scott, Mason & Chapman 1999) claim that research findings usually do not reach those who could benefit from them due to the boundaries of professional, scholarly circles. They point out that the problem of making research findings accessible is often exacerbated by the fact that scientific journals are not a useful source of knowledge for many practitioners. Kanfer (1990) explains that academic researchers and practitioners have different goals, demands and problems. For Small (2005), while academic researchers want to contribute to the scientific knowledge base and need to publish in scientific journals, practitioners are usually interested in answering practical problems because their

questions are usually not determined by them but rather by clients, stakeholders, users or patients.

Anthropologists and practitioners seem to have different ways of conceiving research. In many cases, anthropological research tends to be individual (Gottlieb 1995) while practitioners working on family issues conceive research as the result of a team effort and mistrust single-authored research instead. Moreno-Black and Homchampa (2008) argue that the lack of collaboration causes a disconnect not only among anthropologists and practitioners but also among anthropologists themselves. Thompson (2001) has argued that authority and claims of ownership in research are also key to understanding the difficulties of collaboration among anthropologists and other scientists. In the concrete case of Spain, an added difficulty is the scant professional recognition and academic interest in applied anthropology.

In the United States, the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) was founded 75 years ago. It holds an annual conference, publishes two journals and has been led by distinguished presidents such as Eliot Chapple, Margaret Mead and William F. Whyte. Guerrón-Montero (2008) has explained that increasingly in the United States, anthropologists are expected to be academically prepared to practice anthropology both outside and inside the academy. Borofsky (1999) has shown that anthropologists' engagement with the public sector beyond the academy has become more common in traditional academic programs. This has not been true in Spain, except for in isolated cases. Lassiter (2005) goes further and advocates for what he called a "proactive anthropology," where trained practical and academic anthropologists become indistinguishable as they co-research and work with practitioners. In Spain, there is no association equivalent to the SfAA. There is no systematic practice linking anthropologists to public or private organizations.

Anthropologists in Spain do not receive training regarding the functioning of bureaucracies, decision-making processes in institutions, or the inner workings of businesses, state agencies or administrations. In fact, organizational anthropology is absent from university curricula. In spite of this, as we point out in the next section, major areas of anthropological analysis—such as kinship, personhood, the body and/or race—come into play in transnational adoption.

AFIN and transnational adoption in Spain: from individual normativity to social diversity

In general, the practices of transnational adoption in Spain follow those of domestic adoption, which applies an "as if" model (Modell 2002; Howell & Marre 2006): adoptive families are expected to function exactly as if they were "non-adoptive families," which becomes the model that guides most decisions taken before and after the adoption. Thus, family belonging is considered exclusive (there is no space to include the first family in the family constellation or the family biography/narrative), and an adopted child must be younger than his or her siblings at the time of adoption (as happens when a child is born in a family). Relatedly, adoptions of siblings are considered special adoptions.

The normalizing effort of new procreative practices–demanded by adoptive families themselves–entail the negation, erasure or minimization of the complexities of adoption. The young age of arrival of the majority of adopted children also contribute to these phenomena. According to data published by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport in 2008, 71% of children adopted in 2007 were between zero and two years old at the time of their adoption. Nineteen percent were between three and five years old and only nine percent were six years or older at the

time of adoption. In the first period of transnational adoption in Spain, the expectation was that after the paperwork was complete and after a short period of mutual adaptation had taken place, adoptive families would function just like any other family, both inside and outside the home. For example, irrespective of the age at the time of arrival in Spain and of children's personal histories, children entered the school system according to their chronological age. An AFIN researcher working on children adopted from Eastern Europe suspected of suffering Fetal Alcohol Syndrome remarked, "It is pure science fiction to think that a child can arrive in Spain from Russia at age six, without knowing the language and without ever having been in school, and follow a first grade class like his or her classmates."

This normalizing (and disciplinary) effort derived, in many cases, from unrealistic expectations for adopted children and their ability to achieve a rapid "normalization." Definitions of and responses to difficulties (in relationships, in school, etc.) have focused on the search for diagnoses for adopted children. Such diagnoses are generally linked to presuppositions about pre-adoptive experiences or early deprivation. As signaled by Stryker (2011) in her study among US adoptive families in risk of disruption, locating problems in the child leads caregivers to seek biomedical solutions, while ignoring social, cultural and contextual factors related to the receiving family and society. As a consequence, many families and professionals (such as teachers, psychologists and learning specialists) perceive (many) adopted children as children "with problems" (San Román 2013a). This perception translates into a demand for post-adoption services generally in the hands of psychologists and therapists, who are supposed to support the "therapeutic work" of the adoptive families (San Román 2013a).

Pre- and post-adoption services in Spain often fail to take into account the characteristics of each family and the needs of each child. Also absent from consideration are the sociocultural characteristics of the sending or receiving region or country. These factors are of particular importance, for example, in the case of transracial adoptions that unite "white" parents with "non-white" children (San Román 2013b). Dialogue among practitioners and families in pre-adoption center on adoption rules. Much less attention is given to the needs of adopted children and the challenges to their integration (Jociles and Charro, 2008).

Building bridges to produce knowledge (and wellbeing)

It is undeniable that some adopted children arrive in Spain after having lived through difficult experiences, such as long periods of institutionalization, abuse and neglect, which affect their development. Nonetheless, as our previous work has pointed out (Marre 2009, Abrines et al. 2012, San Román 2013a and 2013b), in many cases the overlooking of the social context and the idiosyncrasies of each child and each family often results in the pathologization of any hurdles. In this sense, AFIN has provided families with an alternative to the viewpoint offered by the health sciences (including psychology), a demystifying and non-pathologizing understanding of the growth and enculturation of adopted children.

AFIN ensures that its research findings move quickly from the strictly academic realm in order to contribute to the wellbeing of adopted children and their families. In order to reach a larger number of users, practitioners, researchers and, as much as possible, policymakers, in March of 2009 AFIN launched a free monthly newsletter in Spanish, Catalan and (when possible) English. Each issue is dedicated to a single topic and features an author and illustrator. The newsletter is written in a

colloquial tone, rather than a scholarly register, so that can be accessible to a broad audience. It reaches more than 30,000 subscribers by email. The archive of the nearly 70 issues published is available through open access in the online library of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, AFIN's home institution. Views and downloads have doubled yearly since the publication's incorporation into the library (http://ddd.uab.cat/record/78757/usage).

Another example of how AFIN contributes to the wellbeing of adopted children and their families is related to the challenges of transracial adoptions. One of the findings that emerged from the research projects developed by the group between 2009 and 2013 was that racism was highly downplayed by families, teachers and adoption practitioners. AFIN devoted three issues (September 2010, November 2012, March 2013) of its monthly newsletter to this concern, offering strategies for families and professionals. AFIN co-organized workshops on the subject with ten adoptive family associations and developed materials for teachers distributed in special sessions in schools of education. In 2014, the federation of adoptive families association commissioned AFIN to write a handbook entitled "How to talk about adoption, even when it´s difficult" (San Román, Grau y Barcons, 2014) and requested that AFIN include a section about difference and racism.

Another important space for outreach has been AFIN´s international conference. The group that would later become AFIN held its first international conference in 2004. Since 2006, AFIN has held one annually. Designed as a space for joint reflection and collaboration among researchers, practitioners and final users, the AFIN conferences have from their inception shared several of the qualities of the events analyzed by Bogenschneider et al. (2000). These events are designed as a nonpolitical forum for discussion, where there is room for different perspectives and

foci. Speakers are chosen carefully, and include a range of international speakers with different backgrounds and areas of expertise. This makes it possible to reach a diversity of voices, such as the findings of countries with greater experience and a longer research tradition in transnational adoption and family policy in general. The topics covered in the various sessions are selected in accordance with issues emerging from fieldwork carried out by AFIN researchers.

Since 2007, AFIN fieldwork findings have signaled changes in transnational adoption in Spain. As in the rest of receiving countries, the number of available children in the sending countries decreased, and therefore, wait times began to lengthen, as did the anxiety surrounding the possible opening of new sending countries. At the same time, many internationally adopted children were entering adolescence. This is a period considered highly problematic in *psychological* discourse (Howell 2006) and in *media* discourse, and therefore by Spanish society in general. Some adoptive families faced new challenges, such as the risk of rupture (including the end of cohabitation and the transfer of guardianship to the state) or struggles over their children's interest in their birth families. Between 2007 and 2011, AFIN carried out 36 working and discussion groups, organized according to the needs detected in fieldwork with families and practitioners: adoptive families awaiting the designation of a child; families with adolescent children; families with children who were older than average when adopted; families in risk of rupture; educators; and adoptive grandparents.

Critical assessment of AFIN's impact efforts

AFIN, policymakers and practitioners

AFIN confirmed early on that researchers were "not a salient stakeholder for policymakers" (Friese & Bogenschneider 2009: 240). In spite of AFIN's interest in using its findings to inform public policies (Head *et al.* 2014; Weiss 1979, 1991), there is no evidence that policymakers have used AFIN's results instrumentally. In fact, we have never been among the "experts" consulted for policies or law changes. However, some of the issues that were first discussed in Spain in AFIN's conferences and workshops seem to have made their way into policy debates; for example, the challenges of transracial adoption and the necessity of talking about birth families within the adoptive families.

AFIN has emphasized face-to-face interaction, a strategy well supported in the literature as the best for reaching policymakers (Mellman & Munger 2003; Nutley et al. 2007; Walter, Nutley & Davies 2005). AFIN has met and offered collaboration with all directors (four in the last decade) of the Catalan Institute of Adoption and Fostering (*Institut Català de l'Adopció i l'Acolliment,* or ICAA*)*, the Catalan regional body that oversees adoption and fosterage in Catalonia. This region, whose capital is Barcelona, is the region of Spain with the highest number of transnational adoptions per inhabitant. In 2004 and 2005 it was the region with the highest number of transnational adoptions per inhabitant in the world. AFIN has also met with the Catalan government's Department of Social Wellbeing and the Family. In each meeting, AFIN has confirmed its willingness to collaborate in the design and/or implementation of studies. AFIN has also expressed its concern about some issues detected in fieldwork, the lack of adequate resources for families in danger of rupture and the evidence of ongoing violations of human rights in adoption. In spite of AFINs attempt to communicate its concerns, the authorities have not made any review of adoption policies or processes. Two examples illustrate this point.

The first relates to the absence of guarantees in the processes of transnational adoption, what Smolin (2005) has called "child laundering." That is, the acquisition of children through monetary arrangements, deceit and/or force in order to make them available for adoption (for more information see Marre and San Román 2012, where one of these cases is described in detail). The response of the ICAA was silence, inaction, denial of responsibility and a lack of interest in preventing future "irregularities." A former head of the Catalan Department of Social Wellbeing and the Family, whose rank is on par with the secretariat level, remarked to two parents denouncing irregularities in their adoption dossiers: "That's their problem," – referring to the countries of origin of children adopted to Catalonia–. "In the end, those kids are better off here." She used the same sentence in a later meeting with author 3.

The second example took place in 2007, when AFIN acquired funding to study foster families in Catalonia. The Catalan Institute of Adoption and Fostering (ICAA) and the Catalan General Direction of Attention to Childhood and Adolescence (DGAIA) refused to provide access to archives and contact with birth families, foster families and foster children. Given this lack of cooperation, the study could not be performed and AFIN returned the research funds.

Over the last decade, AFIN researchers have tried to elucidate the factors limiting the impact and transfer of research findings to practitioners in the broad sense. In addition to the four theories developed in studies carried out in other contexts, we add that Spain's various regions have remained in what Head et al. (2014) have called traditional public bureaucracies. The idea of research-based evidence and/or shared decision-making are either unknown or denied. At the same time, critical perspectives generate suspicion. In Spain, opening an investigation of

the possible weaknesses in professional and administrative practices always suggests questioning practitioners, the administration and its directors, who are civil servants with guaranteed life-long jobs. Discussion of and decisions about the social do not include self-critique because there is no institutionalized assessment of administrative practices. Perhaps this has something to do with Spain's 40 years of dictatorial authoritarian rule, the relative youth of the Spanish democratic system and the lack of assessment of civil servants' work.

As was pointed out by Hahn (1987) and Marre and Gaggiotti (2008) in the Spanish case, policymakers seem to rely more on information from lobbyists and special interest groups than information emerging from social science research. An example of this was the SCIAS (Special Commission on Intercountry Adoption of the Spanish Senate) between 2002 and 2003. It was formed by 34 "experts and authorities," of which only three—a jurist, a psychologist and an educator–came from the university realm. None of them came from anthropology. Years later, between 2008 and 2011 when a new Special Commission on Intercountry Adoption and Fosterage of the Senate was formed, the same thing occurred. Of the 38 "experts" consulted, 17 were *funcionario*s (civil servants) or technicians of the administration, nine represented associations and three came from the justice system. Again, the representation of the university, that is to say, research, was limited to three people: two psychologists and one educator. No anthropologists or sociologists were included.

Psychology and education, disciplines that in Spain are overwhelmingly biomedical, enjoy credibility as the fields that orient and legitimize family policies and professional practices, while anthropology and other social sciences are systematically excluded. Therefore, decisions and interpretations are made from a

perspective that stresses individual –and/or biologist and developmental– views of children and family. For example, at the beginning of the 2000s, an AFIN member met with several preschool teachers (with students ages three to five). The teachers pointed out that many of their students adopted from China at age two or higher had poor fine motor skills, resulting in difficulties when they used silverware. The AFIN member suggested ironically that three-year-old Catalan children might encounter a very similar problem if suddenly asked to eat with chopsticks! This is just one example of the ways that a biologist and developmental perspective dominates, thus erasing cultural differences that affect adopted children's integration. The contributions of anthropologists could add a sociocultural perspective to policy and practice, especially regarding the diversity of personhood, family and kinship systems.

Two groups of practitioners have interacted with AFIN. Three researchers joined AFIN's projects as Ph.D. candidates in clinical or social psychology with shared supervision by social anthropology. Another group of five psychologists with longer-term experience in professional practice became interested in AFIN through a combination of curiosity and mistrust. The first group was more willing to rethink its practices from a social perspective, paying attention to diversity and to research findings. The second group participated regularly in AFIN conferences and workshops but had difficulty in seeing their utility. As one practitioner working in the public services related to pre- and post-adoption and child protection remarked, "I don't understand why the anthropologists have to come and look at adoption." An AFIN researcher, offered the following analysis of this reaction:

> While within AFIN, psychologists and anthropologists have listened to each other, for the most part we have not managed to have a joint, complementary vision. I would say that we [the anthropologists] have listened more, in the sense that they have shown us new paths and new problems. But in general,

psychologists tend to focus on the individual, on "each case is its own case," and on the issue of the child with a "developmental" perspective that aspires to universality and does not correspond to the results of anthropological research.

The presence of practitioners at AFIN conferences and workshops has always been paltry, in spite of low registration fees, flexible schedules and convenient locations. This becomes especially remarkable when we compare it to the massive attendance of adoptive parents and adoptive family associations.

Faced with the difficulty of encouraging practitioners to make instrumental or conceptual use (Weiss 1979; 1991; Heat et al 2014) of research findings, AFIN has developed other strategies. One strategy has been to publish in the official journal of the Professional Association of Psychologists, which all members receive in open access via the Internet. The article (San Román 2013a) questions the dominant theory in psychology, according to which an adopted child is an abandoned child whose brain suffers consequences as a result of this experience. San Román decries the logic by which a child's early "abandonment" is used to account for practically any emotional difficulty in the child's life. Although one of the reviewers suggested that the article should be published in "a more specialized journal in sociology or social anthropology," the editors accepted the article for publication. The author was contacted by several psychologists who thanked her for this alternative to the hegemonic narrative in Spain. As one of them pointed out, "We have already seen in the clinic that it doesn't work well." In spite of this reaction, AFIN's subsequent field work among psychologists suggests that psychologists continue to refer to all adopted children as "abandoned;" thus far, the impact of AFIN research seems limited.

A second strategy consists of collaborating with the administration to organize workshops addressed to teachers and school psychologists. With the goal of narrowing the gap between research and practice highlighted by the two communities

theory (Small 2005), the workshops combine theoretical questions with practical recommendations, many of which have been recognized as good practices in fieldwork. This approach, although time-consuming, has been well received among attendees. As one attendee explained, "The workshop has provided me with a new set of lenses for looking at what happens in the classroom and on the playground."

AFIN, adoptive families and their associations

On the other hand, AFIN has enjoyed a much more fluid exchange of ideas with family associations, even with ones that are geographically quite far from Barcelona, the city where AFIN is based. This relationship has crystallized in innumerable joint activities—such as film screenings or discussions—and invitations to present talks and workshops. Beginning in 2011, when AFIN saw a substantial reduction in its public funding for investigation and dissemination, the annual conference has only been possible thanks to the support of family associations.

Adoptive parents explain that AFIN offers a "wider and more open" viewpoint than the one they encounter in post-adoption services, which are run primarily by therapists trained in clinical psychology. This claim jibes with fieldwork observations about the difficulty of practitioners in empathizing with, communicating with and supporting those who do not fit neatly into the normativizing and homogenizing principles that characterize family policies and practices in Spain, including those related to adoption. In contrast to what happens in the relationships with practitioners or researchers with other approaches, the families do not feel judged or evaluated by AFIN. Rather, they feel heard and even supported. AFIN has developed a research methodology that could be defined as "participant listening by shadowing," which combines elements of traditional ethnographic shadowing and participant listening

(described below). Unlike in traditional shadowing (Sclavi 1989; Czarniawska 2007) AFIN shadows participants selectively based on particular adoption situations or problems, new trends in the literature or requests for help from families or associations. The result is a network of academic researchers, adoptive families and adoptees, informed by anthropological literature about adoption, family and kinship. This approach reduces the traditional gap between researcher and researched. Nonetheless, as we show below, what stands out most to participants, in particular adoptive families, is what Forsey (2010) calls "participant listening," a technique that for some anthropologists is inseparable from "ethnographic learning" (Tsing 2005). AFIN establishes for its researchers strict guidelines with respect to participant listening. They should pay attention to narratives and discourses of families, practitioners, policymakers and even the media, following what Cohen & Rapport (1995) suggest as the essential part of the ethnographic method: listening, more than observing or asking.

We illustrate this point with an extended extract from AZT (pseudonym), the president of an association of adoptive parents located more than 1,000 km from AFIN's headquarters in Barcelona:

> I discovered a long time ago that that's the secret: people don't want answers [...] because usually the answers have nothing to do with you. What you want are questions, because [...] they let you find *your* answer [...], for better or for worse, depending on where you're coming from. [...] If you have an idea about adoption, no matter what other people say about what it should be like, if it doesn't match what you-...it's really hard. But on the other hand if someone questions things, you can find new answers. And that's what AFIN is for me at least [...]. What it offers me, and what I think it offers the association, is that you ask a lot of questions...and you don't take anything for granted. You don't say, "That's the way it is." No... You say, "This works like this, but maybe it could work in other ways." And this opens up the field so much that it allows a lot of people to become part of those answers. I think that's the key.

Other discourses are a lot more closed. Like that of the psychologists. When there's just a single discourse, when a doubt appears, the discourse falls apart. But if you create a discourse where there's room for doubt... "Things are like this, but we are finding that there are other issues...." Then there's room for more; progress can be made. It's not A, B, C. It's not math. […]. It's not, "This is like this, period" [...]. The same thing doesn't work for everyone, because kids are different, we're different, the contexts are different... You all leave everything like more...open. There is more a discourse about searching than about finding. You don't take anything for granted. You ask a lot of questions. And when you find that "this is like this," then you ask why. Maybe it's like this because of this other thing that hasn't been looked at or hasn't been studied. That's what I think has brought you close to the families, because, among other things, this discourse includes a lot of people.

Conclusions

In this special issue dedicated to the role of anthropology in improving services for children and families, our analysis of the case of the AFIN group suggests that unlike what might be predicted, families in Spain are more receptive to the contributions of this discipline than are policymakers and practitioners.

As has already been shown by Caplan (1979), Shonkoff (2000), Bogenschneider et al (2000), Bogenschneider & Corbett 2010a and Friese & Bogenschneider (2009) with respect to the family sciences in general, there is an important communication gap between researchers and policy makers and practitioners, which appears to be more pronounced in anthropology. Psychology, medicine and education seem to claim authority based on evidence derived from practice. On the other hand, anthropological analysis operates from a viewpoint that is more social and more sensitive to diversity and comparison and a methodology that is essentially qualitative. As a result, anthropology is perceived as less "mature" (Small 2005) and, therefore, less reliable, scientific, or even, useful. Social anthropology did not become a subject of university study in Spain until the late 1970s and from that

time until the mid-2000s it was a two-year advanced degree, accessible only after students had completed a prior degree. At the same time, in the Spanish popular imagination, anthropology continues to be a field dedicated to the study of "primitives" in far-away villages. In Spain, anthropologists are not considered equipped for direct intervention with families and children. At the same time, critical analysis of "disciplinary" discourses is often perceived as an attack on these disciplines and/or on professional practice, which hinders communication even further.

From the point of view of families, a perspective that is more social than individual is not perceived as a threat. On the contrary, in adoptive families' feedback about the AFIN newsletters and research as presented at its conferences, adoptive parents value the contribution of "new angles" or "new ways of thinking," a more "open" perspective than the one they encounter in professional services. In recent months, AFIN has itself begun to consider offering individual and family support and advising services, at the request of the families themselves. With increasing frequency, AFIN receives requests from individuals who seek advice about situations that range from difficulties at school to the search for and reconnection with families of origin. Many of them do so after having consulted various specialists, giving as a reason AFIN's "less conventional, less dogmatic focus" and their disagreement with the "dogmas of the post-adoption services."

Several factors have contributed to the relationship between AFIN and the final users. The first is that it emerges from continuous specialized work. Despite changes in AFIN's composition over time, the families consider AFIN to be a reliable expert group that is constant in its scientific production. AFIN has been conducting research on these topics for more than 10 years. During this period, some group

members have left the country and/or the research group due to the restrictions of AFIN as a research group to provide professional services, the scarce job offers and the scarcity of research funding. At the beginning of 2015, the Autonomous University of Barcelona approved the creation of the AFIN Outreach Center, which we hope will provide the opportunity not only to provide some income to maintain the group staff but also to directly impact in the wellbeing of adoptive families. Another point identified as a weakness from inside the group is its difficulty in attracting and maintaining male researchers. This challenge may be related to the group´s research topics, which may seem "feminine." We know from experience that male researchers are able to access different ethnographic information than female researchers. For this reason, we will make a special effort to recruit male members in order to capture a fuller picture of the family in Spain.

The second factor relates to how families understand AFIN's scientific production. As previously said, families refer to AFINs' researchers as a group of experts that are "not dogmatic" and open to diversity. AFIN's relationship with its participants is sustained by a sincere interest in their problems that goes beyond accomplishing academic goals oriented toward the production of books and articles. Without jeopardizing academic and ethnographic data, AFIN's monthly newsletter brings research to a broad public. It is a space recognized by the participants as attractive, useful and provocative. The joint organization of activities with family associations and the many invitations by these groups to AFIN researchers to develop workshops and other training activities have contributed to creating a shared space of dialogue and reflection. More than 20 years ago, anthropologist Roy Rappaport called this "engaged research in the center of anthropological inquiry" (1993: 295)

The third factor that the families suggest is that AFIN benefits them because it manages to create a space for the analysis of complexity, such as the "abandonment" of the adoptive child, the "as-if" construction of parenthood or the attribution of a psychological or medical cause to any social issue an adoptive child might experience. The anthropological emphasis of AFIN in scrutinizing the sociocultural context of the research participants is what contributes to AFIN´s distinctiveness and strength. It seems that, as Young (2008) suggests, anthropological training does make a difference. The families, without defining it as "anthropological," acknowledge AFIN's unique perspective, its effort to problematize and its strong emphasis on the sociocultural.

As explained above, disseminating research results to practitioners and policymakers continues to be a challenge for AFIN, despite the newsletter and the annual conference. Although AFIN´s research is financed by public funds originating with tax-payers, political bodies, local and national administrators exclude AFIN–-and the social sciences in general–-from policymaking or public decision making. Convincing practitioners and policymakers to make an instrumental use of AFIN findings remains a hurdle. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this task is precisely through families and their associations, in a common front that may, little by little, bridge this gap.

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