

# Soziale Arbeit

# Processes leading to breakdown of foster care placements

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## Agenda

- 1. Foster Care in Switzerland**
- 2. Research Project «Foster Care Placement Breakdown»**
- 3. Working definition «breakdown»**
  
- 4. Insights research in Switzerland**
  1. Case file analysis
  2. Interviews
  
- 5. Considerations and country specific cases of «breakdown»**
  1. England
  2. Germany



## Foster Care in Switzerland

### Out-of-home care

- Increase: number of foster care
- kinship-care is common
- no data / statistics available

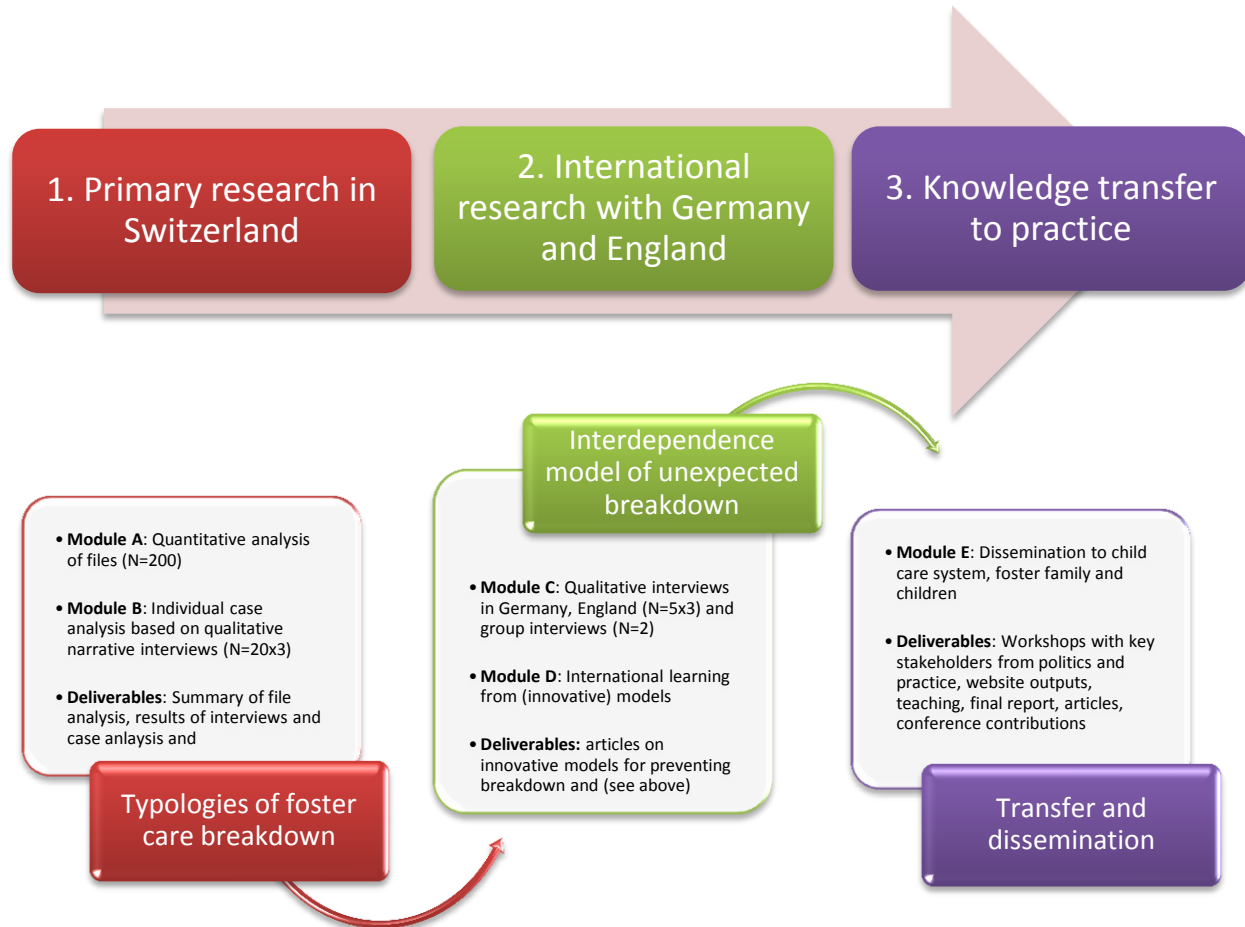
### Legal basis

- Ordinance on the Placement of Children in Foster Care (*Pflegekinderverordnung, PAVO*)

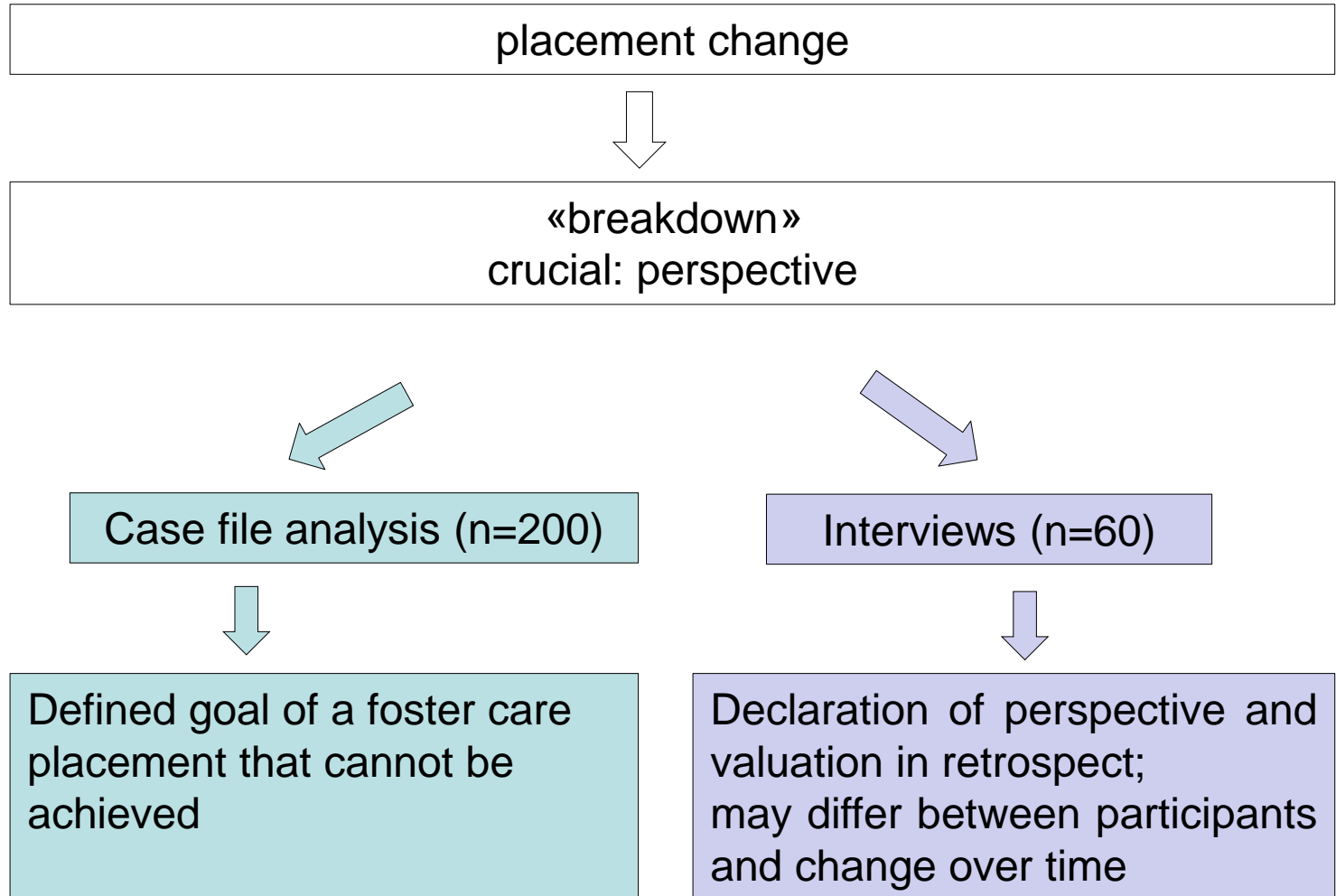
### Federalism: 26 systems of foster care

- different structure and practise of foster care
- no obligation for care planning

# Foster Care Placement Breakdown (2014-2017)



## Working definition «Breakdown»



## Insights: Case file analysis

### Description of sample (state September 1st 2015)

- Gender: female (61%) and male (39%), (n=44)
- Resident place before placement: family of origin: 76%, other foster family: 13%; residential care: 11% (n=54, multiple answers)
- Placement changes (pc): range 0 – 21 pc; *0 pc (54%, n=26)*, often unknown
- Duration of placement before breakdown: range: 0-15 years; *12 months (30%, n=44)*

## Insights: Case file analysis

### History of the child (prior to placement)

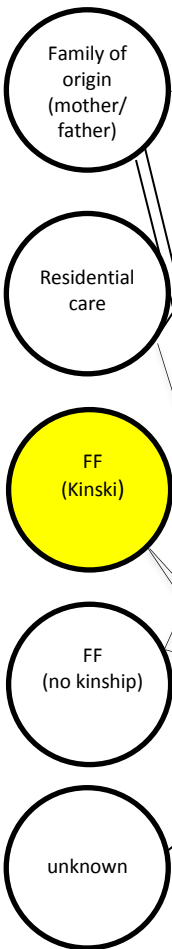
- Rarely known, not available or incomplete
- Focus family of origin: problematic situation / behaviour, interpretations

### Matching foster family and foster child

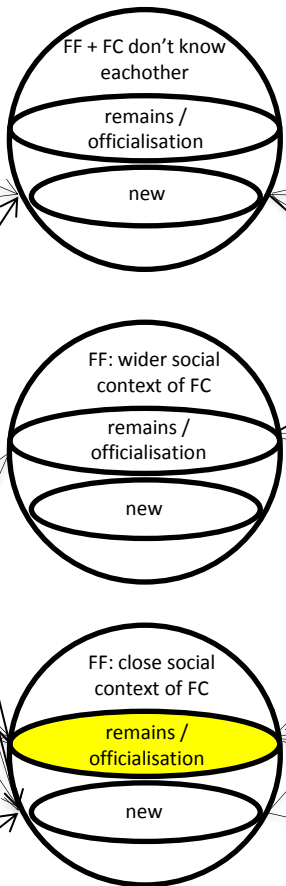
- Justification of matching rarely available
- Concerns of the professional supporters (also during stay)
- Subsequent formalisation common
- Little significant information about foster family
- Agreement / disapproval concerning the placement often unavailable (different perspective)

# Pattern 1

## History prior to placement

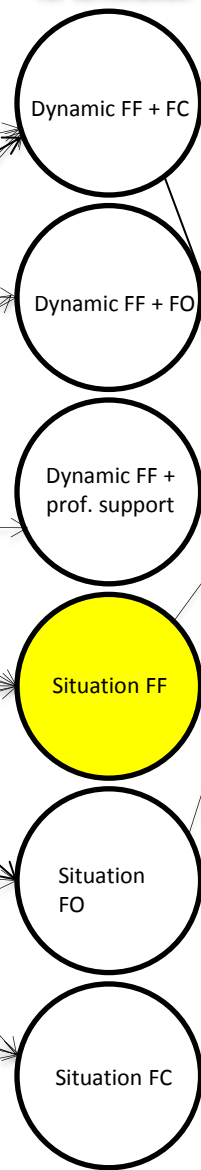


## Characterisation of foster care

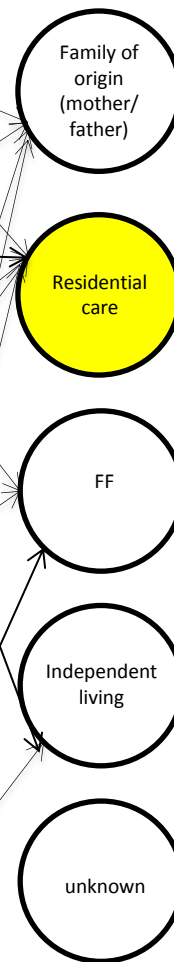


## Process foster care

## Documented reason for termination



## Connection







## Insights: Interviews

### Foster parents

- Need and willingness to participate and talk about «taboo»
- Networks
- Breakdowns recent: 2012-2015
- Feeling of regret and having failed as a foster parent (mother)

### Example: Family X (breakdown 2012, female, aged 14)

- Confrontation with decision, too little information
- Duration decision (short) vs. duration process (long, extended)



## Insights Module B: Interviews

### Foster children

- Need and willingness to participate and talk about experience
- Less networks

### Example: Jacqueline (age: 9-16)

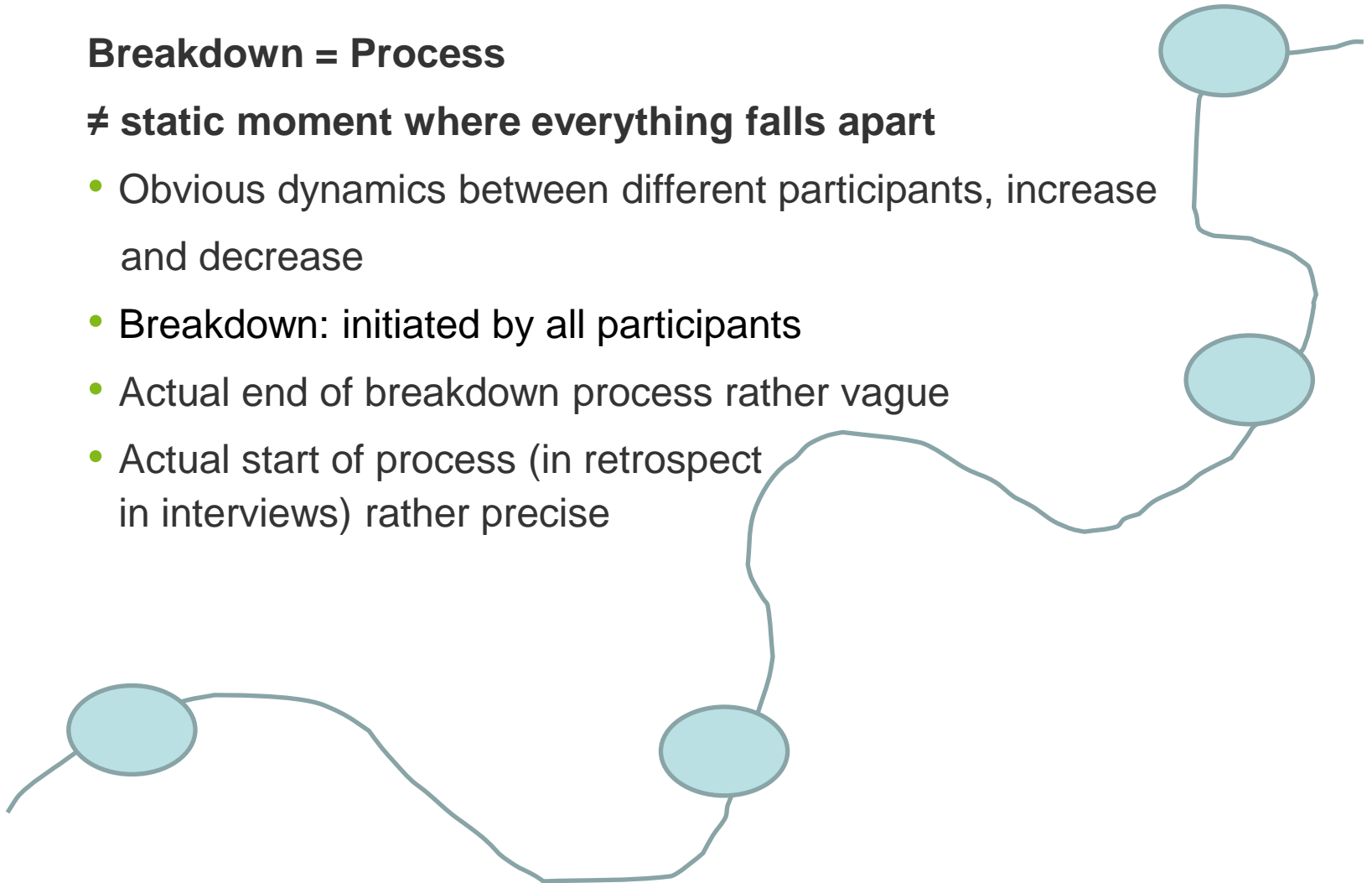
- Dynamic between different participants
- Own wish to leave the foster family, for different reasons
- Change of responsible legal guardian
- Decisions postponed, Jacqueline not asked
- Traumatic event although breakdown relief
- Unanswered questions

## Synthesis: General remarks

### Breakdown = Process

≠ static moment where everything falls apart

- Obvious dynamics between different participants, increase and decrease
- Breakdown: initiated by all participants
- Actual end of breakdown process rather vague
- Actual start of process (in retrospect in interviews) rather precise



## Synthesis: General remarks

### Support system

- Responsibilities of support system seem unclear

### Age and duration of stay

- Age seems relevant for the placement process leading to breakdown
- The first year of placement seems to be crucial

### Case files

- Case file keeping / managing (what is done but not documented?)

## Synthesis: General remarks

### Child's perspective

- Integration of child's perspective marginal

### Female foster parent

- «Active» carer
- Reporting in case files and interviews

### Connection solution

- Often residential care (part of a placement policy?)
- Agreement / disapproval concerning the placement often unavailable (different perspectives)
- Case is closed after breakdown (informations are (not) transferred?) but definitely not closed for the individuals involved



## ‘Typical’ placement disruption in England

- Policy context: Planning, permanence and keeping children out of care
- Care placements: 75% in foster care; 9% in children’s homes
- Age at entry to care: 37% aged 10-15; 22% aged 0 – 5.
- Multiple placements: 33% two or more in one year
- Causes of disruption: 85% within care system; 21% at carers request; 11% initiated by young people (Ward 2009)
- Two localities: one inner London; one rural/suburban
- Selection: contrasting characteristics of young people/foster carers with experience of placement disruption



## ‘Typical’ placement disruption in Germany

- Foster Care Placements (§33 SGB VIII) 53% to 47% residential care (§34 SGB VIII) (West Germany)
- Children of younger ages (45% are younger than 9 years)
- Placements in foster families (§33) consists in a prevailing manner of long term foster care
  - 1/3 of foster children lived with their foster family for more than 10 years (Rock/Moos/Müller, 2008; Erzberger, 2003)
  - 40% of the foster care placements even only end upon reaching adulthood or after (ebd.)
  - Even in a case of a „breakdown/disruption/placement change“, on average the child is about 5½ years within the foster family



## ‘Typical’ placement disruption in Germany

- an “ending ahead of time” will therefore be interpreted as a failure
- break downs have a more critical profile/meaning for the foster families
- Depending on the study or statistic 20-40% of all placements ends with breakdown
- Case selection:
  - cooperation with 4 foster care services (2 municipal, 2 private agencies)
  - contrasting characteristics of young people/foster carers with experience of placement disruption







- For further information see [webpage](#).