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Innocence Lost: Care and Control in Dutch Digital Youth Care

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The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 43, Issue 1, 1 February 2013, Pages 41–63,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr169>

Published: 06 December 2011 **Article history** ▼

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Abstract

The Dutch National Reference Index is the political answer to public outcry about a number of well-publicised cases in which the tragic deaths of very

small children were connected with a failing youth care system. The parallel with the tragic UK case of Victoria Climbié in 2003, which catalysed the reform and digitisation of the UK policy system of child and youth care, is striking. Analysing the development of the index in the Netherlands, we perceive a 'double translation': first, how public sentiment is translated into a database tool and, second, how nationally formulated aims and guidelines for the tool are translated into local practices. Where the national system is firmly rooted in the idea and ideal of the *care* for children at risk and uses tools of communication to achieve this, other functions are tagged on in the development of the local systems. The system at the local level enables professionals to monitor each other's decisions; there is a direct surveillance at the managerial level (on professionals) and an increased control of the municipality on the various agencies that constitute the local youth-care system. We conclude that using ICT in social policy is not just a power-neutral digitalisation of existing processes, but that it alters the character of these processes and brings along unforeseen functions and risks. The dominant goal of 'care' for children is supplemented with elements of 'control' within the organisation of local youth care. In this sense, the basic idea of the National Reference Index itself loses some of its innocence, too.

Keywords: [Youth care](#), [ICT](#), [ContactPoint](#), [surveillance](#), [control](#), [National Reference Index](#)

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Online ISSN 1468-263x

Print ISSN 0045-3102

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