

European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop

Exploring New Methods for Prosopography
in the Humanities and the Social Sciences

EW06-216

Uppsala University, Sweden, May 10th – 11th, 2007

The workshop web: www.skeptron.uu.se/monicalz/esf/

Organised by Sociology of Education and Culture (SEC), Uppsala University
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Executive Summary

Prosopography is the study of characteristics of individuals that have something in common, for example by appearing in the sources from a certain region during a certain period or by belonging to the same social sphere or professional field. Prosopographical methods are used in historical studies of ancient, medieval and modern societies and also in sociologically oriented studies of modern and contemporary societies.

A start in the late 19th Century for modern large-scale prosopographical research were German historians' efforts to assemble data on individuals (or names) found in the sources from the Roman empire. Later on large prosopographies on Byzantium and on the Anglosaxon era has been established. Quite another strand is the prosopographies created by French sociologists from the 1960's and onwards. The latter were primarily interested in recent or present-day matters but more important was that their the main objective was not the collection of data on the individuals per se but to uncover the structure of different fields, for example to use information on all French bishops in order to explore the religious field or information on managing directors in order to understand the structure of the corporate world.

The aim of the workshop was to bring together scholars from different disciplines with a shared interest in prosopographical research. A particular objective was to create an encounter between specialists representing the two kinds of research mentioned, "historical" and "sociological". In addition the participants were given opportunities to share experiences and ideas on methods and tools for the creation and management of prosopographical data, including the uses of up-to-date information technology.

The workshop took place at the Uppsala University campus 10–11 May 2007 (preceded by an informal meeting in the evening May 9th). It started with a welcome on behalf of the convenors and a presentation of all participants, as well as a presentation of the European Science Foundation, its organisation, history, areas and programmes.

The intention for the two days to follow was that the talks and papers should represent the two strands within current prosopographical research, the "historical" and "sociological". Each of those was presented in introductory overviews, historical accounts on the development of the research traditions and papers on ongoing projects and on specific methodological issues.

The first key note speakers, Harold Short and John Bradley, gave an overview of prosopographical databases for historical research developed at King's College London. They called attention to the new methods and tools that enable both new ways of doing old research and new ways of doing new research. The speakers also raised an initial question: are there enough commonalities between the disciplines to allow for an interdisciplinary collaboration and even for a common framework?

The second key note talk was given by Frédéric Lebaron who described the historical development of prosopographical sociologically oriented research in France, inaugurated by Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators. This kind of prosopographical research initially

started as a critique of the methodological positivisms' ways to construct the research objects. One of the main ambitions has been to overcome the gulfs between macro and micro analyses within sociology.

Then three different historical projects were presented. In Thomas Pratsch's talk on the Prosopography of the Middle-Byzantine Period and in his paper *Statistical Data on the Basis of Prosopographical Research* two main topics were addressed: the development of prosopographical exploration of the Byzantine Empire during the years 330 A. D. – 1453, and opportunities for refined statistical analyses based on data stored in modern databases. Next Stephen Baxter and Francesca Tinti presented the development of the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*. Here the construction of the database and related issues were in focus. Thereafter Jean-Michel Carrie gave a talk on a database comprising prosopographical data on ancient Egypt.

The next session was devoted to sociological projects. Antonin Cohen presented recent prosopographical research on agents within trans-national fields and ways of collecting data on the web. Bo G. Ekelund presented a database on US Prose-Fiction Debut Writers 1940 – 1970 and analyses based on this database, for example on the writers' geographical trajectories. Also the third paper, presented by Daan Vandenhoute, dealt with writers, viz. Swedish debut poets and their entrance into the literary field during the 1970's.

Two methodological papers were presented in the last session May 10th. First Matthew Driscoll delivered news on the ongoing work within the Text Encoding Initiative Consortium (TEI) on the encoding of prosopographical data, especially on the markup of places and personal names. The second paper, by Katherine Keats-Rohan, dealt with what prosopography is and is not, with a focus on the differences separating prosopographies from collective biographies.

During the evening May 10th a guided tour through the university museum, *Museum Gustavianum*, was organised, followed by a conference dinner at the restaurant *Domtrappkällaren* situated in the old university prison.

On May 11th the programme started with a session on how to manage and store data from available historical sources. In his talk *Prosopography and the problem of sources* Werner Eck presented the Prosopographia Imperii Romani (PIR). Michael Jeffreys commented the factoid model used in the Prosopography of the Byzantine World.

In the next session Donald Broady discussed the sociological prosopographical research to which geometric data analysis (GDA) bestows important methods. He suggested the label *Geometric Prosopography* to designate this tradition, and examples were given in the presentations to follow. Mikael Madsen discussed research design for studies of agents in the ongoing internationalisation of law. Ole Hammerslev presented a study on significant agents contributing to the process of the extension of EU towards Eastern Europe. Mikael Börjesson's talk was on the analyses of large datasets comprising prosopographical information on all Swedish school pupils and university students 1960 – 2005. Finally Ida Lidegran presented new results from her construction of educational spaces based on GDA of datasets from Statistics Sweden.

Other sociological papers were presented after lunch, by Martin Gustavsson on the construction of a the database with information on, i.a., social origin, education and careers of art students and art producers, and by Esbjörn Larsson and Monica Langerth Zetterman on how to use professional titles in prosopographical studies as indicators for individuals' social status.

After the paper sessions four demonstrations followed. Mikael Börjesson and Ida Lidegran showed the practical management of GDA. Thomas Pratsch demonstrated possible uses of the Prosopography of the Middle-Byzantine Period database, Francesca Tinti the uses of the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database, and John Bradley and Harold Short the uses of The Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCEd) database.

The workshop was closed on the afternoon May 11th with a summing up discussion and an exchange of ideas and preliminary plans on how to proceed with the common methodological issues and a prosopographical research network.

The papers and slides presented at the workshop together with information on the participants, their research fields and contact information are available at the workshop web www.skeptron.uu.se/monicalz/esf/

The workshop will also result in a publication presenting the full papers.

Scientific Content of the Event

During the workshop it became obvious that scholars in the "historical" and the "sociological" strand of prosopographical research know very little or nothing about each others work, despite that they have many methodological issues in common, not the least when it comes to collecting, describing and encoding the data. To explore some of these communalities was an important aspect of the workshop.

Just as important was to understand the differences. In short, "historical" prosopography might be characterised as a set of source driven approaches. The focus is on the quality of the sources and the critical interpretation of the information found therein. "Sociological" prosopography on the other hand is question driven. While "historical" prosopography is confined to fetch as much information as possible out of the sources, in many cases by using all available relevant sources (since they are limited in number), the "sociological" prosopography in the vein of Bourdieu comprises a fastidious selection of variables that might be supposed to be relevant to the sociological analyses: typically on social origin, educational trajectory, different species of inherited and acquired resources (*capital*), obtained positions in the professional and social world, and maybe indicators of lifestyles and taste. This fundamental difference seems to explain much of the variation in the research practices.

The main topics discussed during the workshop could be summarised as follows.

Are there enough commonalities between the two strands to allow for a common framework? Which are the main differences?

Another reappearing issue was the quality of the sources: What is in the sources? What might be accomplished on the basis of the source material at hand? It is preferable that the data are uniform and as far as possible exhaustive in order to be represented in a structured way or used in statistical analyses, for example in GDA? Historians seldom have that ideal kind of data at their disposal.

Yet other important issues concerned methods and tools for description and storage of prosopographical data. How to ensure consistency in data collection when several researchers are involved in the collection, categorisation and description of data, or when datasets are shared between projects? What new methods for describing persons and documenting evidence are being developed? An important innovation is the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) module *Names and Dates* that timely became available at the moment when the workshop took place.¹

Also methods and tools for analysing and representing prosopographical data were discussed. How to create multiple entry points through a structured material? How to add interpretative layers on top of the recorded sources? How to visualise analyses of trajectories and networks?

Different opportunities for synergy effects were discussed: Should a prosopographical database be reusable or disposable? Considering that a prosopographical dataset consists of information on connected individuals that have things in common, how are relations between more than two people to be represented? And how to describe and store data in formats that might be migrated between different projects?

One over-all conclusion is that future co-operation encompassing the “historical” and “sociological” strands would be especially valuable when it comes to methodological and technical issues, on database design, categorisation and classification problems, data collection techniques, methods for data storage and data modelling, as well as questions on available software tools and platforms. When it comes to interpretations and explanations the considerable distances between the strands seem to prevent fruitful co-laboration, except of course within the framework on rather narrow joint research endeavours.

¹ <http://www.tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/html/ND.html>

Assessment and Future Directions

Many of the participants testified that the workshop had been most rewarding, especially in terms of the exploration of commonalities between different disciplines and research traditions, but also in clarifying the diversities between especially the historical and the sociological approaches.

The concluding discussion at the end of the workshop ended in the decision to prepare for the creation of a European Prosopography Research Network and to start the planning of three pilot projects:

1. The development of tools and methods for migrating data between different projects.
2. Exploration of geometric data analyses on different kinds of prosopographical data.
3. Exploration of tools for career modelling.

Each of these pilot projects will comprise the work with one historical and one contemporary data set.

Different possibilities for funding of those endeavours will be sought for. Donald Broady, Harold Short, and Monica Langerth Zetterman will write a draft proposal to be circulated among and discussed by the workshop participants.

Statistical Information on the Participants

The final 23 participants represented eight countries: Belgium (1), Denmark (3), England (5), France (3), Germany (2), Italy (1), Norway (1) and Sweden (7).

14 participants were senior scholars and 9 junior scholars (i.e. holders of a permanent position for less than five years or doctoral students).

Despite the organisers' efforts to level the male/female representation there were only four women among the participants. This gender ratio does probably reflect the situation in the relevant research fields.

Final Programme

Thursday May 10

10.00 - 10.45	Harold Short & Donald Broady	Welcome and short presentation of participants
10.45 - 12.00	Monica Langerth Zetterman <i>Prosopography in the humanities and the social sciences</i> Harold Short & John Bradley <i>Plausible Tales: Structure, interpretation and narrative in new prosopography</i> Frédéric Lebaron <i>Prosopography in sociology, contemporary history and political science in France : introductory remarks</i>	Presentation of ESF Chair: Donald Broady
12.00 - 13.00	Lunch	
13.00 - 14.30	<i>Prosopography in the humanities</i> Thomas Pratsch <i>Statistical Data on the Basis of Prosopographical Research (Prosopography of the Middle-Byzantine Period)</i> Stephen Baxter & Francesca Tinti <i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England: Phases 1 and 2</i> Jean-Michel Carrie <i>Egyptian database</i>	Chair: Harold Short
14.30 - 15.00	Coffee break	
15.00 - 16.30	<i>Prosopography in the social sciences</i> Antonin Cohen <i>La Constitution européenne. Elites, mobilisations, votes</i> Bo G Ekelund, <i>Literary Generations and Access to Authorship: A Study of US Prose-Fiction Debut Writers 1940-1970</i> Daan Vandenhaute <i>Entering and surviving. The early careers of first-time poets in the Swedish literary field of the 1970s</i>	Chair: Mikael Madsen
16.30 - 16.45	Break & refreshments	
16.45 - 17.45	<i>Prosopography in the humanities</i> Matthew Driscoll <i>XML markup of prosopographical data</i> Katharine Keats-Rohan <i>Biography and Prosopography – Telling the Difference</i>	Chair: Monica Langerth Zetterman
18.30 - 19.45	<i>Guided Tour</i> to Museum Gustavianum	
20.00 -	Conference Dinner	

Friday May 11

- 9.00 - 10.30 **Prosopography in the humanities** Chair: Harold Short
Werner Eck
Prosopographie und das Problem der Quellen -Prosopography and the problem of sources
Michael Jeffreys
Personal threads from an underdeveloped historical fleece: the Prosopography of the Byzantine World project
Prosopography in the social sciences
Donald Broady
Geometric Prosopography
- 10.30 - 11.00 *Coffee break*
- 11.00 - 12.30 **Prosopography in the social sciences** Chair: Donald Broady
Mikael Madsen
Identifying the Indefinable and Researching the Unreachable: Transnational Research Design in the Study of the Internationalisation of Law
Ole Hammerslev
Studying transnational fields: the case of the EU-enlargement towards Eastern Europe
Mikael Börjesson
Studying Educational Fields and Social Structures on a National Level. The SEC Datasets on Individual Based Information from Statistics Sweden, 1960-2005
Ida Lidegran
How to Construct Educational Spaces with Data from Statistics Sweden
- 12.30 - 13.30 *Lunch*
- 13.30 - 14.15 **Prosopography in the social sciences** Chair: Ida Lidegran
Martin Gustavsson
Swedish Art Students and Art Producers, 1945-2005. Constructing a Database for Prosopographical Studies of Social Origin, Education and Career
Esbjörn Larsson & Monica Langerth Zetterman
Titles as capital
- 14.15-14.30 *Break (coffee & beverages)*
- 14.30 - 15.30 **Demos**
Mikael Börjesson & Ida Lidegran
Geometric Data Analysis (GDA) in Practice
Thomas Pratsch
The Prosopography of the Middle-Byzantine Period database
pom.bbaw.de/pmbz/
Francesca Tinti
Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database
www.pase.ac.uk/
John Bradley & Harold Short
The Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCEd) database
www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/
- 15.30 - 16.00 *Coffee break*
- 16.00 - 17.00 **Looking ahead**
Network proposal and closing of workshop
Donald Broady & Harold Short

Final List of Participants

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Unfortunately one of the invited participants was not able to attend.

Marie Ols, research secretary at SEC, Uppsala University, took care of all travel arrangements, lodging, meals and conference venue.