



Building methodological excellence across Europe



The seminar brought together methodological specialists in longitudinal comparative analysis with methodologically sophisticated substantive comparative researchers from sociology, political science, psychology, economics and demography. Major surveys like the European Social Survey are now available for repeated cross-sections and open up new opportunities to extend comparative analysis over time, both in terms of addressing substantive questions and in terms of the longitudinal validation of survey instruments, samples, and contextual measures. Further information is available here:

http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/qmss/seminars/2012-04-19/programme.shtml



This summer school was dedicated to the many difficult methodological issues in survey taking with immigrant and minority populations. These groups are not only rare populations but they are not always identified in censuses or population registers. The summer school explored the imaginative sampling strategies that are needed to build representative samples of these populations and also non response rates and weighting procedures may be affected by the characteristics of the population. It also covered issues of language, location of residence, immigration status, and related issues in the design and implementation of such surveys. A detailed programme and full set of presentations are available here:

http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/qmss/summer/Paris%2012/index.shtml

All QMSS2 events have now been completed.

QMSS 2 has made an important contribution to building a network of European social scientists able to conduct the highest quality research to inform pressing policy-relevant questions. In this final Newsletter we have set out an agenda for continuing to build methodological excellence across Europe.

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Introduction

QMSS and QMSS 2 have played a pivotal role in enhancing the breadth and depth of quantitative methods in Europe. The combination of seminars and summer schools has provided a unique opportunity to focus on specific areas of critical importance in quantitative methods.

The seminars have brought together internationally-renowned experts to discuss state-of-the art methods and identify areas for future development. The seminars have also provided an opportunity for junior researchers to interact with experts and, in many cases, to present their own papers. These seminars have thus provided both the vision and the framework for the series of 10 summer schools which provided training to young European researchers in advanced quantitative methods.

Over the four years of QMSS 2, a total of 461 people have participated in the seminars and 300 in the summer schools. Evaluations of both seminars and summer schools have been very positive.

These activities have been important in developing cross-European networks, often resulting in short visits between junior researchers to promote collaboration in developing joint research projects and papers. In earlier newsletters we have reported the outcomes from the seminars and summer schools and a great deal of materials is available on the QMSS 2 web-site - www.ccsr.ac.uk/qmss/. The QMSS 2 programme has also proved very efficient at stimulating cross-European collaboration which has resulted in new (cross-European) research projects, joint publications, and other formal and informal collaboration.

In this final newsletter we have set out an agenda for the future which argues the importance of the kind of methods-related work of QMSS 2 in terms of building a network of European social scientists able to conduct the highest quality research to inform pressing policy-relevant questions.

The importance of advanced quantitative methods in the social sciences

It is fundamentally important that social science research is able to address some of the key policy questions of the twenty-first century. Questions around citizenship, migration and movement of populations continue to have a key role in European policy agendas. Similarly, issues related to life course, health and ageing raise crucial policy issues, with a growing recognition of the value of making linkages between the social and biological sciences. Within Europe there is a steadily growing range of datasets that include cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. administrative records based on registration data, data recorded through social interactions and networking as well as biological data that links genetic information with the demographic and social characteristics of individuals. For many datasets there is a high degree of comparability across countries, which makes crossnational comparisons possible. (The European Social Survey is an important example). As the availability of these quantitative datasets steadily grows, so it becomes increasingly important that Europe has a generation of researchers who are able to assess the quality of key datasets and employ advanced methods of analysis to answer the urgent questions relating to social, economic and demographic change in Europe. The need for cross-country comparisons adds an additional, and very challenging, methodological

The ESF programme, Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences, which has run in two phases (the first from 2003-2007 and the second from 2008-2012), has provided an important vehicle through which these needs have been addressed. Through QMSS/2 European junior researchers have been able to access very high quality workshops, seminars and summer schools, receive practical hands-on training and build networks not just amongst their peers but also with international experts. Although not set up as an infrastructure, QMSS/2 has, in reality, provided an infrastructure for developing advanced quantitative methods in the European area. In the following paragraphs we have set out some suggestions for key areas where work needs to continue. Some of these are fundamental areas but where new challenges arise, new types of data become available and new methods need to be introduced. Others are newly emerging areas where new opportunities (e.g. combining data from different sources) require methodological innovation. In all cases, the continuing flow of junior researchers across Europe need exposure to the methodological developments and training opportunities that QMSS/2 provides and, equally importantly, to the opportunity to interact and build research collaborations with researchers from other countries and other disciplines.



Summer school on 'surveying immigrants and minorities', Paris, 27 June – 4 July, 2012

The importance of migration and integration

Nico Keilman, Patrick Simon, Han Entzinger, Phil Rees and Frank Kalter set out an argument, below, for the importance of promoting methodological excellence in the area of migration and integration:

Migration and integration (and related issues such as discrimination, xenophobia and the position of minorities) will continue to be major issues with serious impacts on Europe's demographic, social, economic and cultural development and, for that reason, will also arouse a great deal of political interest in the years to come. From a scientific and methodological viewpoint this research area poses important challenges for researchers. Among these are:

- How do we best conceptualize the main notions: (integration, assimilation, minority, ethnicity, etc.)?
- How do we evaluate and use data from official and other sources? The data are often scarce and patchy, and not comparable.
- How do we bridge cultural and linguistic barriers when approaching survey respondents?
- When studying processes of the intergenerational integration of immigrants and their children, how can we take into account the interactions between the minority population and the host population?

Longitudinal network data and implementing methods and developments from the current QMSS 2 theme 'social interactions and social networks' (like Tom Snijders' SIENA) is one very promising direction to close current research gaps.

 How can we improve existing methods for modelling and forecasting population sub-groups that are difficult to delineate? How can such modelled and forecast results, inherently uncertain as they are, be used to inform other domains (health, housing, labour market, social welfare etc.)?

Finally, the last few years have seen an unprecedented growth in the number of comparative survey studies carried out simultaneously in several European countries – in some cases even in all EU Member States. Given the wide range in definitions, in migration flows and in migrant communities studied, in traditions of conceptualising major issues concerning integration, and in available data there is a continued need for scholarship in this field, to be able to look beyond borders and establish links between the many different national traditions in survey research.

Because of its focus on quantitative methods, the activities of QMSS 2 have tended to be oriented on methodological issues. We would like to suggest that more concern should be given to comparability between data and to epistemological issues raised by collecting sensitive data. By epistemological issues, we mean not only the ethics of data collection, but also the political and social desirability of gathering information, the difficulties of doing so, and the debates on collecting certain type of data.

The final summer school, held in July 2012 on the topic of 'surveying immigrants and minorities' ended with a request from participants for the opportunity to hold a follow up meeting to take further the work they had started in the summer school.

Analysing the lifecourse

'Methods for understanding the lifecourse' has been an important strand in QMSS 2, with very popular summer schools and seminars. Seminars have covered topics such as understanding advances in family and fertility research, analysing education, family, work and welfare, labour market changes and social exclusion and a pioneering seminar that brought together social and behavioural scientists, geneticists, neuroscientists and other life scientists to evaluate the usefulness of new biological knowledge for social scientists and

assess the reliability and predication of sociological and behavioural models. Two summer schools, focusing on multilevel modelling, structural equation modelling and latent class analysis were very heavily over-subscribed.

Views on future needs in this area are set out, below, by Louis-André Vallet:

In the field of longitudinal and life course research across Europe and elsewhere, both in the scientific community and the public statistical system (see, for instance, the EU-SILC study), there is growing interest for detailed information collected in either long-term studies of individuals or long-term panel studies of households. Such an interest is shared by scientists across a large spectrum of social and life sciences, but also by policy analysts and it is encouraged by the relatively recent development of multi-disciplinary models of processes of physical and mental development and ageing, as well as processes of family dynamics, employment dynamics and income dynamics. Likewise, there is rising concern about the impact of changes in the physical, economic and social environments on the development of individuals as well as the lives of families and households

As a consequence, there are new demands that are addressed to longitudinal and panel studies as the requirements and possibilities for innovative research become increasingly clear. New research ideas are favoured by the enrichment of social science data sets with biological data and by the increased possibility to match these data sets with detailed and fine-grained environmental information. As the international and recently established Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies emphasises, the growing interest in the bio-social ecology of development is reflected in the expanded use of area study, multilevel longitudinal survey designs and social biographical as well as ethnographic investigations alongside national probability samples.

These developments are especially relevant in Europe because new and large longitudinal and panel studies are being set up in several European countries, with a strong emphasis on the health and well-being of individuals, and the response to environmental as well as economic and social change. These new studies make use of innovative ideas in the biological, behavioural and social sciences, about what can be measured and how it can be done in the context of large scale data collections. There is also related interest in ways of linking information about the same individuals from different data sources, including administrative and official registers. Such developments present new challenges in handling the on-going problems of attrition, non response and weighting, as well as measurement error in longitudinal data.

Finally, the quasi simultaneous development of life course studies in different European countries raises the question of how best to exploit the potential scientific and policy value of comparing their findings and results across societies, which opens new avenues for cross-national comparative research.

Developments in social network analysis

The study of social interactions, or social networks, is central to understanding the dynamics of the relations between social actors, as well as their behaviour and performance. Throughout QMSS and QMSS 2 this has been a central area of interest with Anuška Ferligoj and Tom Snijders leading the organisation of seminars and summer schools and making an enormous contribution to the training and development of junior researchers.

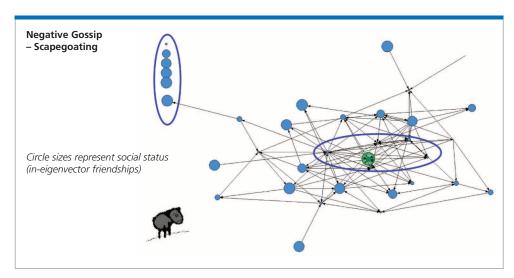
Tom and Anuška have set out, below, their view of the needs for future work in this area and how it might be situated:

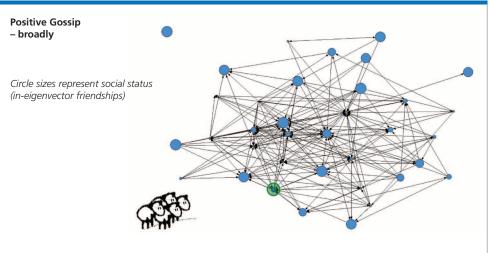
European scholars working in social network topics have in recent years become more visible and competitive with established research centres elsewhere, notably the USA and Australia. Many young researchers from the ESF participating countries profited from the QMSS 2 programme and obtained knowledge and skills in using cutting-edge social network methods to solve their substantive research problems. Therefore, this type of activity has been shown to be of considerable value. However, as social network analysis is a relatively small scientific topic, a joint effort would be very desirable for established European research centres in the field of network analysis to collaborate in PhD programmes about social network analysis; a joint programme, such as an Erasmus Mundus programme, would be desirable. It is also important to give the opportunity of studying social network analysis to young researchers from institutions that currently do not specialize in this topic. The QMSS 2 goal of bringing together methodologists and substantive researchers was also very fruitful in view of the disciplinary fragmentation in social network analysis. Continued attention has also to be given in the future to collaboration between methodologists and substantive researchers in educational programmes about social network analysis.

Several new topics in social network analysis emerged during the QMSS 2 summer schools and especially during the workshops. Some of them are:

- Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to measure and analyse networks.
- Connecting theory and cutting-edge social network methods.
- Dynamic (longitudinal) social network analysis.
- Multilevel network analysis (links between different types of levels, as actors, ties, and groups; joint incorporation of networks between different types of actors, such as individuals and organizations).

These and other topics in the social network field have to receive continued attention in the near future.





A Social Network Perspective on Workplace Gossip, from a presentation by Lea Ellwardt, Joe Labianca and Rafael Wittek, Networks, markets and organisations seminar, Groningen, August 2009.

Cross-national comparative analysis

The importance of cross-national comparative analysis has been central to the QMSS/2 programme. The theme has been led by Jaak Billiet with seminars organised around five topics:

- 1. bridging the gap between theories, hypotheses and empirical data analysis;
- 2. the quality of measures for constructs in comparative research;
- 3. multilevel analysis and multi-group comparison in cross-nation research:
- combining repeated measurements (panel data) or cross-sectional data within a cross-nation (or multilevel) perspective.
- 5. a seminar organized on non-response bias in cross-nation research in cooperation with the 'Measurement and data quality' team.

The Summer schools focused on the quality of measures and constructs and multilevel analysis and multi-group comparison.

An edited volume on cross-cultural analysis (Davidov, Schmidt and Billiet, 2011), inspired by these seminars, has identified areas where future developments are needed. Jaak Billiet summarises them, below:

A gap was observed between very advanced statistical analysis and under-developed theoretical reflection. Future theoretical reflection should pay serious attention to problems of modelling micro-macro relationships and the so-called bathtub (Coleman) model for thinking about multi-level issues in social science research. The logical status of the bridge assumptions in micro-macro research needs to be analysed, and questions about the validity of the theory of rational action and the explanatory power and sociological relevance need further attention. Another core problem relates to sometimes hidden causality claims of macro propositions. What methods and statistical procedures should be used in order to grasp the idea of causal heterogeneity in a longitudinal and multi country perspective? The often weak explanatory power of macro-propositions is not so much related



to the availability of proper statistical analysis tools but to the development of theoretical relevant macro measures and the link with the available micro data.

In last decennium, large cross-country datasets have become much more widely available. However, the lack of equivalence in the obtained samples is still a serious problem because of differences in sampling error and non-response bias across countries. Methods that are both effective and practically applicable need further attention in the future – and the European Social Survey provides some valuable directions in this respect. The combination of a model based approach with additional individual and aggregate (contextual) measures among the missing sampling units is one of the developments. New approaches are proposed with more attention to reducing bias than reducing non-response.

Methods to reduce or estimate measurement error in a cross-nation context, with a focus on the measurement equivalence of the measured concepts, received major attention in some of the seminars (see Davidov et al., 2011). It is generally accepted that cross-national comparisons are affected by measurement error. Several ways for coping with this problem were discussed in the seminars but these are not widely applied in current substantive research. Even the well known tests on measurement equivalence of the measured concepts are not widely applied outside the world of methodologists. When measurement equivalence is not present, the interesting question which emerges is why this is the case. There could be both methodological and theoretical reasons for non equivalence in cross-national research. Closer cooperation between methodologists and substantive researchers is a crucial item on the agenda of future research.

References:

Davidov, E., Schmidt, P. & Billiet, J. (2011). *Cross-Cultural Analysis: Methods and Applications*. NY: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group). 492 pp + 11.

Data quality and measurement

The topic of data quality is one of fundamental importance in social science research and Dominique Joye and Peter Mohler have led this theme. Seminars have been held on practical measures to address non-response in sample surveys from a design as well as from an analysis point of view; on answer scales or response scales as they are currently used in comparative research; and the total survey design approach to enhancing the quality of surveys. Survey quality formed the topic of an important summer school run within this theme.

In the paragraphs, below, Dominique Joye explains how this is fundamentally important to social science research:

The value of discovery in science is always a function of the precision and quality of the measurement. That means that, for social science, the quality of the data is absolutely central. For example, this is one of the reasons for the success of the ESS and the fact that it received the Descartes prize. This is even more important in a context of comparative research where the control of the field and the implementation of the tools is much more difficult to do in different settings, as well as to describe meaningfully for the users.

The question of data quality is also important for another reason: surveys are anchored in social reality and transformed according to social context. For example the arrival of the internet and the transformation of methods of communication - for example, the decline of fixed line telephones - requires new tools in order to obtain data of a good quality.

There is also a growing trend in the social sciences to combine different kinds of data from different sources in the analysis. This poses a great challenge in order to evaluate the quality of data that is no longer defined by a unique survey but by the combination of data from diverse data sources, with different levels of quality.

The education of young researchers is nowadays more oriented to data analysis than to thinking about the quality of data, which is problematic as only a very partial interpretation can be done if there is not enough knowledge about the condition of production of the data. The debate on non-response bias is a very important element in this regard but only one among others that can question the data quality and the scientific interpretations of the data. This is a very important issue in the training of young scientists in Europe.

In many areas there is a very clear demand for more seminars and summer schools. Next, Geert Molenberghs gives his views on the importance of efforts to minimise non-response; the importance of training in state-of-the art methods to treat non-response and the need for agreed guidelines on dealing with non-response:

Non-response in social surveys

The two-day seminar on non-response, December 2011, Leuven, Belgium, was a resounding success. Not only was it well attended by a large number of highly motivated and knowledgeable social scientists from all over the participating countries, the seminar also fostered cross-fertilization between social science methodology for incomplete data and non-response on the one hand, and researchers from contiguous quantitative fields, such as human biostatistics and medical statistics, on the other hand. The workshop capitalized on two major themes, organized around a number of sessions: (a) the prevention of nonresponse, in the sense of maximizing the response with all scientific and legal means available; (b) the proper treatment of data bases ridden with non-response, using state of the art analysis tools and sensitivity analysis methods. It was clear from the seminar and its participants that the seminar ought not to be the end of the matter. Rather, a summer school, conference, or other follow-up event is desperately needed to ensure the development and adoption of state-of-the-art methodology for the prevention and treatment of non-response and incomplete data. There are several routes to be considered. First, as stated above, a summer school or conference ought to be organized. Second, similar to the endeavours in the field of incomplete data in clinical trials, where a US National Research Council Report was released on incomplete data, an official working party ought to be summoned to prepare the publication of a white paper/quideline in the area of non-response. Such a committee should cover the slate of member states and should combine established éminences grises, as well as young researchers who conduct state-of-the-art methodological research in this field.

The role of open-source software

An important aspect of all the QMSS/2 summer schools has been the centrality of hands-on analysis of real data. A wide range of software packages, appropriate to the particular structure of data and analysis requirements, has been introduced to students. However, it is apparent that there is very great variation in the commercial software packages that are supported by home institutions.

Because of this, QMSS 2 ran an additional summer school, led by Adrian Duşa, which focused on the open-source package 'R' and introduced the range of statistical analyses that it supports. In the section below, Adrian considers the role of 'R' in social science research:

In the quantitative methods world of the social sciences, there seems to be an abundance of software available to the user. From SAS to Stata to the well known SPSS, there are also new software packages available for both work stations and the web, some focusing on data management, others on data visualisation. Some of them are commercial software, while others are free and/or open-source.

Among the latter, R is rapidly becoming the main software in statistical computing, with an exponential increase of its user base for the past decade or so. Compared to a traditional GUI (Graphical User Interface), at a first sight R doesn't seem very spectacular. Its CLI (Command Line Interface) nature is generally perceived as having a very steep learning curve, thus discouraging many first time users.

However, the benefits for the users having passed this learning curve are enormous compared to other software. For a start, the open-source R is free for all (including commercial) users, which is an important advantage over other, sometimes very expensive, commercial software.

Another advantage is its inherent flexibility, R is more than a simple statistical package, it is actually a fully-fledged programming language, allowing the use of existing commands and (more important) the ability to extend those commands for any type of need. R's range of functionality is phenomenal, with over 3,500 contributed packages on CRAN (R's main repository), each offering tens of different functions. Most likely, R contains over 99% of any regular user needs, and even if a particular need is not covered, R allows for programming extensions. Testimony to the explosion of R usage is the dozens of books published in recent past years for various scientific fields.

Social scientists don't have to be expert programmers to use R: as a high level vectorized language, much of its programming inners are already hidden inside friendly functions, leaving the users to think less in term of programming and more about the overall perspective of the problem to be solved. Much like a foreign language, once the user acquires some vocabulary and a bit of grammar, communication becomes easier.

GUI based software is generally perceived as userfriendly (with a smooth and easy learning curve), but on the other hand it offers very limited flexibility: the users are bounded to what the software displays in its menus. Another big disadvantage for such software is their propensity for human error, especially in repetitive tasks which are usually extremely slow in a GUI

In this landscape, teachers in the quantitative methods are usually free to choose their own preferred software, and various summer schools use different, sometimes even multiple statistical analysis software. Some of the summer schools' outcomes include the teaching materials which are usually made available over the web, but this is hardly a benefit for external users, precisely because they are expected to have knowledge of each and every statistical software package used. The ideal would be to reach a common platform for exchanging data analysis tools and procedures for the benefit of both teachers and students alike. For this reason alone, among many, teaching R to social scientists is certainly a positive process.

New areas in the social sciences

There are a number of areas where the QMSS 2 Steering Committee feels that there is a need for further development and training. In the section below, Frans Willekens makes the case for agent-based models to address complexity and Diane Payne argues the need for agent-based models to develop social policy.

Modelling complexity, Frans Willekens, NIDI, The Hague

Complexity science is the mathematical study of interacting agents (actors) and the collective consequences of actions and interactions. Agents are individuals and organizations. Because of the interactions, agents operate collectively as a system. Interactions generally involve transactions: exchanges of information, opinions, ideas, goods, services, etc. As a result, preferential attachments, co-operations and coalitions emerge and some values, interests and norms are shared. That may lead to groups of agents with a collective (shared) identity in addition to an individual identity. The interactions trigger processes of assortative mixing, diffusion and other phenomena that produce patterns at the system level, such as social networks, social differentiation, concentration of influence, inequality and exclusion.

Agents react to the generated higher-level structures and processes. The reactions are commonly identified as feedback mechanisms, i.e. system characteristics influencing the behaviour of agents. Feedback mechanisms are important drivers of collective continuity and change. Negative feedback is necessary for maintaining the characteristics and stability of the system. Positive feedback leads to change but may also lead to system disintegration and collapse.

Complexity science found that interactions usually follow simple rules although the collective behaviour they generate may be very complex. One rule could be



A word cloud from the QMSS/2 participant survey, 2010

that an agent is more likely to interact with agents that are near and similar than with distant and dissimilar agents. Whether an interaction occurs depends on chance. Modelling chance is the subject of probability theory. Modelling rule-based social interaction is a subject of social and behavioural sciences. Some behavioural theories are particularly suited for modelling. They include the theory of planned behaviour, bonding (attachment) theories, game theory and diffusion theories. Complexity models use theories to describe the emergence and evolution of systems from interactions that occur by chance. Since an agent is the unit of analysis, the models are known as agent-based models (ABM). ABMs are micro-simulation models in which events in the agent's life course and interactions between agents occur as outcomes of substantive and random processes.

Complexity science and ABM are able to capture real-world processes of behavioural and social change. They are particularly valuable for (a) the discovery of mechanisms and processes that link causes and effects, and (b) the assessment of how policy interventions impact on the lives of individuals and the dynamics of populations. ABMs provide an ideal platform to effectively integrate different behavioural and social theories and data from different sources.

Policy Modelling, Social Simulation and ICT, Diane Payne, Dynamics Lab, University College Dublin

Understanding and advising for credible policy intervention in complex socio-economic systems presents one of the most serious challenges for academic researchers and policy practitioners alike. Facing up to this challenge means that effecting policy change in social systems cannot be understood as a linear 'cause and effect' process but rather a process of contingency, uncertainty and complexity. In particular, policy modellers are trying to understand the role of dynamic and complex social interaction (e.g. reputation, influence) for individual agent behaviour

and emergent (self) organising processes at the macro levels. Complexity Science is a new interdisciplinary field which brings together the social sciences and computational sciences and promises through agent based social simulation, to provide more realistic and powerful approaches for capturing and understanding individual behaviour and interactions in complex policy processes. Recent applications of agent based simulation models (ABM) in policy modelling are very promising and demonstrate methodological progress in interpreting models' processes and results. Another very recent and interesting development in this field is the improved ICT capacity to access and use, in real time, multiple stakeholder views 'on the ground' to directly feed into the policy process, providing opportunities to bypass traditional 'top-down' slow modelling processes. Future research in this field will strengthen the theoretical elaboration underpinning ABMs of collective interaction scenarios for policy making, such as collective decision making processes. A growing interest in the field of policy modelling through social simulation presents an opportunity to test more widely the empirical application of ABM for policy modelling as well as improving the reliability of validation procedures for ABMs.

The challenges of combining data from different sources

There is an increasing amount of data becoming available from administrative records of different kinds (e.g. health, education), and, whilst widely used in many European countries to provide longitudinal studies, these data are now being linked to traditional survey data, sometimes with the addition of aggregate data relating to geographical location. Tracking records are also becoming more widely available (e.g. mobile phone records or vehicle movement sensors) as well as transactional data such as sales records, all of which are referenced by both time and place. The scope for linkage across these different kinds of data is steadily increasing. However, standard tests of quality used in surveys cannot be applied to combined datasets. There is a growing research literature on quality measures that can be applied to 'hybrid' data and it is important that best practice is promoted in the research community.

Evaluation methods

Evaluation of policy is increasingly important and presents a range of issues that include the design of interventions (e.g. randomisation bias, substitution effects) as well as methods to evaluate the outcomes of experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Interest in propensity score matching has been steadily growing and is often argued as the best available method for selecting a matched comparison group which 'looks like' the treatment group of interest. Evaluation methods thus represent a further area where there is a need for assessing the range of methods available and providing training in the most appropriate methods in relation to the specific substantive topic of evaluation.

In particular, while strict experimental methods are sometimes presented as the gold standard in the evaluation toolkit, more methodological and comparative work is needed to assess the relative merits and pitfalls of experimentation per se and non experimental methods such as, for instance, the different forms of matching (exact matching, propensity score matching) and regression discontinuity design.

Conclusions

QMSS 2 and its predecessor, QMSS, have demonstrated the high demand for seminars and summer schools that enhance the methodological capacity of European social scientists and that promote dialogue between disciplines and networking between individual researchers. Evaluations of each summer school and an evaluation survey of all QMSS/QMSS 2 participants, conducted in 2010, provide strong evidence of the quality of the events and also demonstrate how researchers have benefited in very practical terms from their participation. The Steering Committee (listed on p.8) which has been responsible for the programme has provided an extremely enthusiastic and hard-working organisational framework, supported by the ESF office and the co-ordinator, Ruth Durrell at the University of Manchester.

We would also like to record a special note of thanks for the very important contribution made by Janet Harkness who sadly died in May 2012. Janet was a member of the core team concerned with data quality and played a key part in teaching in the 2010 Summer School in Lausanne. She will be deeply missed not only by colleagues in QMSS/2 but by survey methodologists around the world.

Almost by default, QMSS/2 has taken on the role of a European infrastructure for promoting advanced quantitative methods amongst European social scientists. In this newsletter we have outlined some of the specific methodological issues that continue to be of importance across the social science, particularly in making cross-country comparisons. The Steering Committee unanimously feels that there is an urgent need to ensure that continuing cohorts of junior researchers across Europe have access to the methodological developments and training opportunities that QMSS/2 has provided and, equally importantly, to the opportunity to interact and build research collaborations with researchers from other countries and other disciplines.

The QMSS 2 programme

The QMSS programme is funded on an à la carte basis with the support of Member Organisations in 19 countries. Each member organisation has a representative on the Steering Committee:

Professor Sylvia Kritzinger **AUSTRIA** University of Vienna Professor Geert Molenberghs **BELGIUM** Hasselt University Professor Blazenka Divjak **CROATIA** University of Zagreb Dr. Leonidas Kyriakides **CYPRUS** University of Cyprus Dr. Anu Realo **ESTONIA** University of Tartu Professor Mervi Eerola **FINLAND** University of Jyväskylä Professor Louis-André Vallet FRANCE **CNRS** Professor Hans-Peter Blossfeld **GERMANY** Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg Dr. Diane Payne **IRELAND** UCD Geary Institute Dr. Philippe Poirier LUXEMBOURG University of Luxembourg Professor Nico Keilman **NORWAY** University of Oslo Professor Henryk Domański Institute of Philosophy and **POLAND** Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences Professor Pedro Magalhães **PORTUGAL** Universidade de Lisboa Dr. Adrian Dușa **ROMANIA** University of Bucharest Professor Anuška Ferligoj **SLOVENIA** University of Ljubljana Professor Robert Erikson **SWEDEN** University of Stockholm Professor Dominique Joye **SWITZERLAND** Université de Lausanne Professor Frans J. Willekens THE Netherlands Interdisciplinary **NETHERLANDS** Demographic Institute (NIDI) UNITED Professor Angela Dale **KINGDOM** University of Manchester (Chair) Professor Jaak Billiet **Advisory Expert** University of Leuven

Table listing core members within each topic

Theme	Core members
Social interactions and social networks	Leaders Anuška Ferligoj, University of Ljubljana Tom Snijders, University of Oxford and University of Groningen Members Vladimir Batagelj, University of Ljubljana Antonio Chiesi, University of Milano Statale Blazenka Divjak, University of Zagreb Wouter de Nooy, University of Amsterdam Christofer Edling, Jacobs University Bremen Emmanuel Lazega, University of Paris Dauphine Diane Payne, University College Dublin Gregor Petrič , University of Ljubljana Beate Völker, University of Utrecht Rafael Wittek, University of Groningen
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Cross-national comparisons	Leader Jaak Billiet, University of Leuven Members Eldad Davidov, University of Zurich Henryck Domański, Polish Academy of Sciences Adrian Duşa, University of Bucharest Sylvia Kritzinger, University of Vienna Karen Phalet, University of Leuven Anu Realo, University of Tartu Willem Saris, ESADE, Barcelona Peer Scheepers, Radboud University Peter Schmidt, University of Giesen Fons Van de Vijver, Tilburg University
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