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STUDY MONITORING IN THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAMME (ISSP)

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The article discusses study monitoring from a cross-national perspective. It starts from quality standards required for national surveys and then points out what is special for cross-national quantitative surveys. The article stresses the necessary documentation and disclosure of detailed information on cross-national survey methods as a means to evaluate survey quality and enable decisions on comparability. It does not recommend or decide on what is acceptable in terms of comparable methods. The article describes the current state of study monitoring for three important well known cross-national programmes and then goes into more detail of ISSP study monitoring. Study monitoring in the understanding of the authors does not only mean documentation of fielding practice but also promoting trust in survey data.

Der vorliegende Artikel beschäftigt sich mit *study monitoring* aus der Perspektive der international vergleichenden Umfrageforschung. Ausgehend von einer Beschreibung der Qualitätsstandards für nationale Umfragen und der Besonderheiten für international vergleichende Umfragen betont der Beitrag die Bedeutung detaillierter und öffentlich zugänglicher Informationen zur methodischen Vorgehensweise solcher Umfragen. Erst dadurch kann die Qualität einer Umfrage bewertet werden. Dieser Artikel gibt keine Empfehlungen hinsichtlich dessen, was unter vergleichenden Gesichtspunkten methodisch akzeptabel ist, sondern beschreibt den derzeitigen *state of the art*: wie gehen bekannte international vergleichende Umfrageprogramme in Sachen *study monitoring* vor; insbesondere: was bietet ISSP in dieser Hinsicht an. *Study monitoring* geht dem Verständnis der Autoren nach über eine reine Studiendokumentation hinaus und dient durch die Offenlegung von Vorzügen, aber auch Schwächen dazu, Vertrauen in Umfragen zu fördern.

1. Study Monitoring in National and Cross-National Surveys

Study monitoring means documentation of survey methods but also serves to control the quality of a survey. Meaningful for national surveys, study monitoring is more important for cross-national surveys, where quality is dealing with the cross-national implementation and with the comparability of studies across countries. In the following article we discuss study monitoring from a cross-national point of view. We start from quality standards required for national surveys; then we describe the current state of study monitoring for three important well known cross-national programmes to give a brief overview what usually is done with respect to study monitoring. Finally, we go into more detail of the ISSP study monitoring. We do not fix or recommend on what is acceptable in terms of comparable methods. The aim of this article is to stress the necessity of documentation and disclosure of detailed information on cross-national survey methods as a means to evaluate survey quality and to facilitate decisions on comparability. Study monitoring in our understanding is more than a mere documentation of fielding practice but a means of promoting trust in survey data.

1.1 Quality Standards and Study Monitoring

Quality standards, quality control and improvement of quality is an important subject of the scientific discussion of the last years. The Stockholm conference on quality organised by the Swedish Statistical Office in 2001 and the International Conference on Improving Surveys (ICIS) 2002 in Copenhagen are in a line with meetings on non-response in Portland 1999 or ICIS 2000 in Buffalo. A number of publications on quality research for surveys discuss survey quality in the national context in terms of survey measurement and process quality (e.g., Biemer et al. 1991; Lyberg et al. 1997). The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) e.g. has published standards of "best practices for survey and public opinion research" asking for quality checks for each stage of the survey[1]. AAPOR follows the judgement of the American Statistical Association, and states that the quality of a survey does not depend on size, scope, or prominence of a survey, but on how much attention researchers pay to the problems that can arise at any stage of the survey process including organisation, sampling, questionnaire design, data collection, data processing, and data analysis (ASA 1998).

But defining standards does not automatically result in achieving these standards. Monitoring quality standards in an objective way and reporting the results is therefore important to ensure that these standards are met (Lynn 2001). AAPOR's demand to dis-

1 http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/best_pra.pdf

close all survey methods and permit evaluation and independent examination is therefore as important as the standards themselves. The catalogue of details to be reported corresponds to the required quality checks (see figure 1). It includes more general information on the purpose of the study or the research, funding, and the fielding institution; it asks for details on the definition of the universe, sample design and sample size[2]; dates of interviews or fieldwork should be provided as well as full wording of the questions asked; it considers a description of any special editing or data adjustment or indexing procedures as necessary.

Study monitoring thus means documenting and controlling the quality, the development, and the implementation of standards of best practice. Study monitoring is meaningful for national surveys, but it is even more important for cross-national survey research, where quality and quality monitoring is not only dealing with quality in terms of national implementation, but also with the comparability of studies across countries.

1.2 Study Monitoring in Cross-National Surveys

In contrast to the discussion on survey quality for national surveys, in the cross-national context, the discussion on quality mostly deals with questions of equivalence and comparability (e.g. Johnson 1998; van Deth 1998). But though equivalence and comparability are important aspects, they are only necessary but not sufficient conditions for high quality in cross-national surveys. Respecting cultural norms does not excuse lower standards in cross-national studies (Jowell 1998). Methods appropriate for a national survey might not be acceptable in a cross-national one where the additional requirement of comparability produces serious problems, sometimes hard to solve. Differences in sample design, mode of fielding, or non-response might have effects to survey results (Lynn 2001).

The main difference between national survey monitoring and cross-national survey monitoring therefore, from our point of view, results from the additional dimension of comparability. Additional information is desirable taking into account that countries may differ in factors connected to national surveys and their general framework, as the availability and ability of survey research institutions, the availability and coverage of sampling frames, the geographical dispersal of the study population, but also restrictions by country-specific laws or regulations regarding surveys, cultural norms and the language(s) spoken.

Thus, monitoring cross-national surveys becomes more important than for a national survey without comparative aspects. Only a detailed documentation with information on

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2 Including numbers of non-eligible, not reached, terminations, refusals, and completed interviews.

each individual country's survey methods enable researchers to decide on what they can accept concerning differences between countries (Harkness 1999).

2. Study Monitoring in Practice: The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Eurobarometer, World Values Survey

To give an overview of the usual practice and standards on study monitoring of cross-national surveys, we concentrated on the well known survey programmes of Eurobarometer, World Values Survey, and Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Each programme is concerned with social science research, all are enterprises with large cross-national surveys, and all of them are continuous studies. Of course, this short list is not an all-inclusive one but illustrates the varying level of information and shows how study monitoring is done in present prominent cross-national surveys.

2.1 The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)

CSES is a collaborative programme of cross-national election research from all over the world. CSES collects micro-level, public opinion polls data; meso, district level data on electoral returns, turnout, and the number of candidates; and finally, "macro" level data on aggregate electoral returns, electoral rules, and regime attributes. For the micro level data, a common module of questions is included in each CSES member country's election study. These questions, for example, ask about vote choice, evaluation of candidates and parties, of the present and past economic situation, or evaluation of the electoral system.

For quality control and study monitoring, CSES developed and used a questionnaire to describe sampling and data collection. Country specific information – also including the original survey instrument and naming co-operation partners – is published in the CSES pages[3] and therefore available for the scientific community's critical review. The methods questionnaire asks about *design*, *process*, and *outcomes*. For each individual country, CSES thus reports on fieldwork mode or as part of *design* description on administration aspects. CSES describes the *process* by details on sample units or on selection methods to identify respondents and informs about substitution, age cut-offs, systematic exclusion of regions or persons, or the interviewers. CSES outlines for example outcomes as fieldwork (length and date), response calculation (refusals, non-contacts, response rate), sample weights or a comparison of the sample to the corresponding national population.

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3 For CSES module 1, see http://www.umich.edu/~cses/download/module1/module1.htm

2.2 Eurobarometer

Standard Eurobarometer surveys[4] are the regular representative face-to-face surveys of the European Commission dealing with attitudes towards European integration and the EU of the population of the member countries of the European Union since the 1970s. A report on each individual survey is published, with technical specifications offering some basic information on survey methods annexed[5]. This information includes the names and addresses of co-operating agencies and the responsible research executives, a list of administrative regional units of Europe, and one page on sample specifications. These specifications give short country-specific information on fieldwork (date and length, number of interviews), quasi country-specific information on sampling, and information on weights offered in the data set and used in some published cross-tabulations. Complete question texts for both the basic and the field questionnaires, are available at the pages of the Central Archive at Cologne (ZA)[6].

2.3 World Values Survey (WVS)

The World Values Survey is a collaborative global programme of socio-cultural and political research. Basic values and beliefs of now almost 80 percent of the world's population are investigated in representative national surveys. In addition to the little information published at the WVS-homepage on methods, sampling, and fieldwork[7], the codebooks[8] give some more information.

Details on study monitoring of the three international survey programmes are presented in figure 1. AAPOR's requirements are taken as a guideline to judge the quality of study monitoring, expanded by the additional requirements for cross-national survey monitoring mentioned above. The last column gives the information for ISSP whose approach to monitor its national members' survey methods will be described in the next chapter.

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4 There are additional surveys by the European Commission on special topics, for example the perception of the EURO; candidate countries Eurobarometer (former Central and Eastern Eurobarometer), and flash Eurobarometer on ad hoc themes.

5 Publicly available as: European Commission: Eurobarometer. Public Opinion in the European Union. Report Number ##; also at http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion for the surveys of the last five years.

6 http://193.196.10.16/en/data_service/eurobarometer/standard_eb_profiles/indexframe_profiles.htm

7 http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/index.html

8 Available at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR): http://www.icpsr.umich.edu

Figure 1: Study Monitoring in Practice

REQUIREMENTS	*CROSS-NATIONAL SURVEY PROGRAMMES*			
	CSES	*EB*	*WVS*	*ISSP*
General Information				
Funding, research, fielding institution	●	●	●	●
Purpose of the study	●	●	●	●
Design				
Full wording of the questions asked	●	●	●	●
Definition of the universe	●	●	●	●
Sample design	●	general, not country specific	basic, not country specific	●
Sampling selection procedure	●	general, not country specific	basic, not country specific	●
Outcome of Sample Implementation				
Sample size	●	n of interviews	n of interviews	●
Response rates or number of refusals	●			●
Special data editing				
Interviews				
Dates of interviews or fieldwork	●	●	●	●
Interviewer characteristics	●	included in data set		
Interviewer instructions, codebooks etc.	●	●	●	●
Factors Connected to Nation				
Availability and coverage of sampling frames				
Restrictions by country-specific laws				
Availability and ability of survey research institutions				
Geographical distribution of the study population				
Language(s)	●	included in data set	●	●
Cultural norms				

Source:
CSES on Module 1 with 39 (survey archived for 31) countries: 1996-2000 (required information asked in the original study monitoring questionnaire used by Norway; information from CSES pages);
Eurobarometer 52.0 / 1999 with 15 countries (information from EU and ZA pages);
WVS third wave with 66 countries: 1995-1998 (from WVS pages and ICPSR codebook);
ISSP 1999 with 31 (survey archived for 24) countries: study monitoring published at http://www.gesis.org/Publikationen/Berichte/ZUMA_Methodenberichte/documents/pdfs/tb03_03.pdf

A brief look at figure 1 shows that none of the programmes offers all details of possible interest. Another outcome is that the level and the kind of information on study monitoring for various survey programmes is different: CSES is one of the few cross-national programmes offering open and detailed information on its own survey methods to the public, though the programme does not present a common report to enable an easy view on individual member countries' fielding procedures.

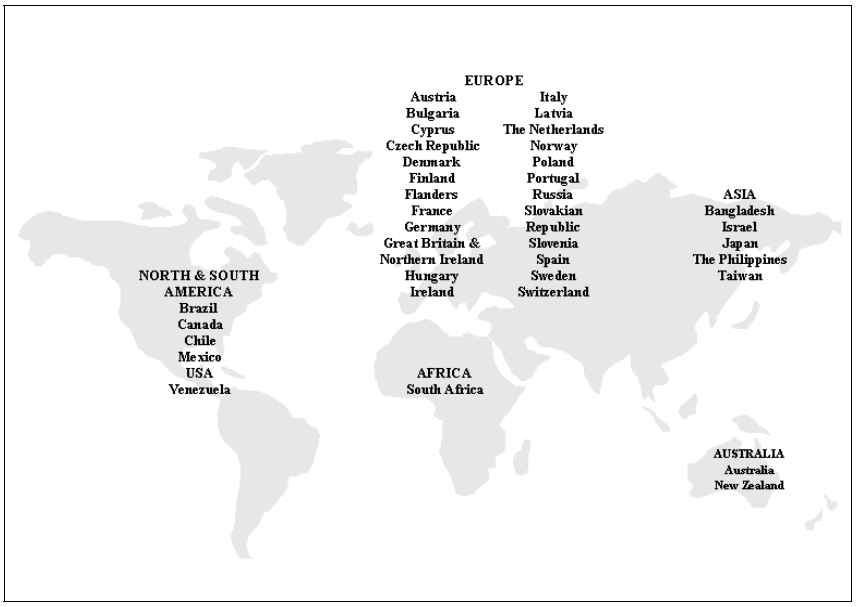
Eurobarometer offers some, rather general information on how the survey is fielded.

Information on methods for WVS is far from being detailed and not persistently country-specific. The level on methodological information offered by and for WVS is rather scant.

3. Study Monitoring in the ISSP

The ISSP is a collaborative programme of social science survey research all over the world. In figure 2, the member countries are listed to give an idea of the different cultural contexts ISSP covers nowadays.

Figure 2: ISSP Member Countries 2002



A module on a topic important for social sciences, such as 'role of government' or 'national identity' is finalised for fielding annually. Modules are implemented and archived in accordance with the ISSP Working Principles and the Central Archive requirements for data sets and background variables. Both of them provide guidelines for individual countries fielding annual modules. These require, for example, national full probability samples and hereby outlaw quota sampling. Members are obliged to comply with these quality standards consistently. Regular control of survey implementation in all ISSP member countries is therefore done by study monitoring in the ISSP. Conducting special surveys for quality monitoring of the ISSP was first agreed on at the 1996 general assembly of the ISSP. In 1999, the general ISSP assembly decided on satisfactory completion of the study monitoring questionnaire as obligatory condition for including a national data set into the merged ISSP data file. Starting with the 1995 monitoring study by Park and Jowell (1997) and continued by ZUMA from then on, the monitoring reports are supplemented to the ISSP codebooks and are published at the German Central Archive's web site[9], which also is the ISSP archive. The ISSP hereby offers detailed information on its methods not only for researchers inside the ISSP itself but also for any interested researcher and user. Study monitoring surveys collect information on *design*, *process*, and *outcome* of individual implementations of ISSP modules. The resulting reports are quite short and neutral, do not judge but mainly chart important aspects at the national survey level. For the time being, the study monitoring report is available on ISSP 1995 (National Identity), ISSP 1996 (Role of Government), ISSP 1997 (Work Orientations), ISSP 1998 (Religion), and ISSP 1999 (Social Inequality). Study monitoring is currently in work for ISSP 2000 (Environment), ISSP 2001 (Social Networks), and ISSP 2002 (Family and Changing Gender Roles).

Study monitoring in the ISSP serves several aims: The first one is to establish quality monitoring on a systematic basis. A second one is to monitor and evaluate the extent to which individual members adhere to ISSP implementation requirements. A third aim is to expand and improve the documentation available for all working with ISSP data. Based on the internal ISSP monitoring information, users of ISSP data are able to decide on the quality and the comparability of given components across countries. For cross-national surveys, such a detailed information is missing too often. Collecting and publishing this information, the ISSP becomes one of the few cross-national survey programmes with transparency on methods.

The monitoring questionnaire developed originally by the National Centre for Social Research (formerly SCPR) asks more detailed questions than the study description sheet

9 http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/data/list_cdbk_pdf.htm

already used from the beginning of the ISSP. In the following years the questionnaire was modified continuously. One of these modifications was the development of two specially tailored questionnaires, one for face-to-face (and self-completion) surveys and one for mail surveys.

Park and Jowell (1997) on ISSP 1995 and then Harkness et al. (2001, 2003) on the following ISSP surveys starting with 1996 called attention to several aspects and differences in the ISSP studies in the three main areas of *design*, *process*, and *outcomes*. Some, of course, are more important and critical than others. Some problems on comparability can or will be solved, others will probably remain: Quota sampling being not best practice may be substituted by a full probability sample if severe efforts are undertaken. The problem of non-response increases with variation between countries (Svallfors 1999) and therefore, ISSP study monitoring surveys gather as much information as possible about the respective non-respondents or refusals to tackle the problem. Other country-specific procedures may result from legal restrictions or financial constraints. Full homogeneity in the enterprise of cross-national survey research is hardly available.

ISSP study monitoring questionnaires ask for the following:

3.1 Design

By *design,* we refer to all aspects of implementation of the annual ISSP module itself, such as translation, mode(s) and context of administration, and questions.

- *Translation* – One of the major concerns in international comparative surveys is the aspect of translation. Apart from the general requirement of translating the British source questionnaire, several countries have to deal with multiple translation for the cultural and linguistic composition of their countries. Several countries have to translate into two or even more languages, such as Israel into Hebrew and Arab, or Switzerland where a German, French, and an Italian field questionnaires are used. Information is needed on who actually did the translation(s). It can, for example, be done in-house (within the institution responsible for the national ISSP), by outside experts or by a combination of both. Other questions deal with the topics of evaluation and pre-testing of the translated questionnaires. Both of them are voluntary, but in terms of quality highly recommendable.
- *Mode of administration* – there are several options how to field the module. One can opt for face-to-face, self-completion with some interviewer involvement, or self-completion by mail. Closely connected to this is the context in which the module is

fielded, either as a survey on its own or part of a larger survey. (With the latter, self-completion with some interviewer involvement is frequently met.)

Depending on the respective mode, the questionnaire asks about the interviewer performance, management, and control or mail survey procedures (actual number of mailings and material that is sent out in each mailing).
Most of the countries of ISSP conduct face-to-face interviews. In 1999, it was more than the half of the 24 archiving countries[10]. About the same proportion uses either self-completion with some interviewer involvement or self-completion by mail. The distribution shown in figure 3 indicates a slight bias on self-completion for the Western world whereas most of the Eastern European countries decided to proceed a face-to-face survey.

Figure 3: Different Modes in the ISSP-Module on 'Social Inequality' (1999)

Self-Completion	*Self-Completion by Mail*	*Face-to-Face*	
Germany	Australia	Austria	Latvia
Great Britain*	Canada	Bulgaria	Portugal
Japan	France	Chile	The Philippines
Poland	Norway	Cyprus	Russia
USA	New Zealand	Czech Republic	Slovenia
	Sweden	Hungary	Spain
		Israel	

* including Northern Ireland

- *Questions* – ISSP modules have a prescribed question order for all substantive questions, most of these (called core items) are obligatory. The study monitoring questionnaires ask whether member countries' questionnaires comply with the prescribed order and whether all the core items are included.

3.2 Process

Since the sampling standards differ from country to country, a major part of the questionnaire is dedicated to sampling. Information is asked on the respective target population (e.g., whether foreigners are part of it), the sampling procedures (e.g., multistage; stratified), the sampled population (e.g., whether anyone is excluded), and finally the sampled unit (individual, address, household). Depending on the sampled unit, another selection

10 From the 31 ISSP member countries in 1999, 24 countries having archived their data successfully.

criterion has to be identified, such as Kish grid or the birthday method. Other questions deal with the use of quota and substitution procedures.

Which groups of persons are part of the population sampled varies between countries. For the 1999 module of ISSP, e.g., Austria, Chile, Poland, Russia, and Slovenia included only citizens of their countries while all others also included adults of any other nationality. If the proportion of minorities is very low, this aspect might be of minor relevance. However, for Austria EUROSTAT reports about 9 percent foreigners of the total population in 1998, with an overwhelming majority not originating from EU countries (EUROSTAT 2001, 30f.).

Another aspect with regard to the target population is whether to include persons living in institutional accommodation, such as old age homes or prisons. In the 2000 ISSP, there are only four countries including persons living in institutional accommodations into their population sampled, namely Denmark, Norway, New Zealand, and Sweden. For Germany, surveying only the private household population, the estimated proportion of elderly in institutional accommodation is about 3 percent to 4 percent (Schneider 1998).

In this context, another question of importance arises: did countries adopt an upper age cut-off or not? Undoubtedly population is growing older and older; and consequently the proportion of the elderly in a country's total population is ever increasing. Countries using an upper age cut-off in the ISSP 2000 are Denmark (upper age cut-off 74), Norway (upper age cut-off 79) and Sweden (upper age cut-off 79). The share of the adult population older than the age cut-off is 5.5 percent for Norway, 6.2 percent for Sweden and 8.8 percent for Denmark (source IDB)[11]. Figure 4 shows the percentages of respondents in selected countries following the age cut-offs used by Denmark and Norway or Sweden. As could be seen, the share of elderly in the national population differs cross-nationally. For some but not many, the share is quite low but for most of the ISSP countries, old-age persons are not a negligible part of countries' total populations.

Though ISSP working rules do not include restrictions on an upper age cut-off, it is already one of the items of the working list of the ISSP methodology committee.

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11 The International Data Base (IDB) is a publicly accessible and computerized source of demographic and socio-economic statistics for 227 countries and areas of the world; IDB estimations and statistics are based on the data of the U.S. Bureau of Census, National Statistical Offices, and UN agencies, especially censuses and surveys.

Figure 4: ISSP Respondents (ISSP 2000) of Selected Countries without Upper Age Cut-Off in Respective Age Categories and Proportion of Total Population (IDB)

	Age 75 plus (%)		*Age 80 plus (%)*	
	ISSP	IDB	ISSP	IDB
Austria	11.6	8.5	6.5	4.1
Canada	11.4	7.2	8.3	3.9
Spain	11.9	8.4	6.1	4.3
Czech Republic	2.7	6.6	0.4	2.8
Latvia	2.6	6.9	0.8	3.5
The Philippines	1.7	1.8	0.7	0.8

Source: data on ISSP 2000 based on own calculation; for proportion of total population, see International Data base

3.3 Outcomes

- *Response and Outcome Figures* – Ever increasing attention focuses on response or outcome figures. Thus, detailed documentation of response and non-response is necessary to allow for assessment of survey quality. Here we ask for all available figures relating to the issued sample, refusals, non-respondents, and completed interviews or returned questionnaires; for example the number of selected respondents too sick or incapacitated to participate, the number of selected respondents with inadequate understanding of language of survey, the number of refusals at the selected address, the number of proxy refusals (meaning the number of refusals on behalf of the selected respondent) or the number of personal refusals by the selected respondent him/herself.
- *Date and length of fieldwork* – an annual ISSP module is to be fielded within a specified and limited period of time. Since the length of fieldwork does vary, we ask for it.
- *Data checking* – This part of the questionnaire deals with establishing the extent to which the respective data was checked. The ISSP study monitoring questionnaires ask, for example, whether data are checked for consistency, whether data are checked to ensure they fell within permitted ranges, whether filter instructions were followed correctly, whether errors were corrected individually or automatically.

4. Conclusion

When designing a survey or when analysing survey data, various drawbacks or traps need to be taken into account, such as effects resulting from (the quality of) sampling procedures, question wording, or the appropriateness of the mode used. True for a national survey, it is all the more true for a comparative survey in a cross-national context. Here the need for a proper survey documentation and detailed information is even more conspicuous, as there might be effects, e.g., from the translation of questions or varying sampling procedures between countries. This is what study monitoring in cross-national surveys is about, collecting and documenting information about any relevant aspect of each national part of the survey. Study monitoring hereby is not only a means to support and inform data users but it may also serve as a starting point for quality control as well. And, finally, provided with such information, researchers have the chance to decide on comparability. Study monitoring in the end means promoting trust in the use of survey data.

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