

Measuring Attitudes Cross-Nationally

Lessons from the European Social Survey



EDITED BY

Roger Jowell · Caroline Roberts
Rory Fitzgerald · Gillian Eva

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The contributors

Jaak Billiet

Professor of Social Methodology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Centre for Sociological Research

James Davis

Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Chicago and Senior Research Scientist at the National Opinion Research Center

Gillian Eva

Research Fellow at City University and a member of the ESS Central Coordinating Team (CCT)

Rory Fitzgerald

Senior Research Fellow at City University and a member of the ESS CCT

Irmtraud Gallhofer

Member of the ESS CCT and senior researcher at ESADE Business School, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona

Sabine Häder

Senior Statistician at Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA), Mannheim, Germany and a member of the European Social Survey sampling panel

Janet A. Harkness

Senior Research Scientist at ZUMA, Mannheim, Germany and Director of the Survey Research and Methodology Program at the University of Nebraska, USA

Bjørn Henriksen

Director at Norwegian Social Science Data Services

Roger Jowell

Research Professor at City University London and Principal Investigator of the European Social Survey (ESS)

Max Kaase

Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Mannheim, past President of the International Political Science Association, and chair of the ESS Scientific Advisory Board

Achim Koch

Senior Researcher at the European Centre for Comparative Surveys (ECCS) at ZUMA, Mannheim, Germany

Kirstine Kolsrud

Senior Adviser at Norwegian Social Science Data Services

Peter Lynn

Professor of Survey Methodology at the University of Essex, UK and a member of the European Social Survey sampling panel

Peter Mohler

Director of Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA), Mannheim, Germany and Professor at Mannheim University

José Ramón Montero

Professor of Political Science at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and the Instituto Juan March, Madrid

Kenneth Newton

Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Southampton and Visiting Fellow at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin

Pippa Norris

Director of the Democratic Governance Group, United Nations Development Program and the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics, Harvard University

Michel Phillippens

Former research assistant at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Centre for Sociological Research

Willem E. Saris

Member of the ESS CCT and Professor at the ESADE Business School, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona

Shalom H. Schwartz

Sznajderman Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Knut Kalgraff Skjåk

Head of Department at Norwegian Social Science Data Services

Ineke Stoop

Head of the Department of Data Services and IT at the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands

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EDITORS

Roger Jowell,
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Rory Fitzgerald and
Gillian Eva

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Foreword

This book describes the product of a remarkable collaboration across national borders between researchers and funders whose singular purpose has been to build a regular and rigorous means of charting attitudinal and behavioural change in a changing Europe. The project's starting point (and its continual pre-occupation) has been to find ways of tackling the longstanding and seemingly intractable difficulties of achieving equivalence in comparative social surveys. This volume is about the problems facing comparative social research generally and new approaches to finding solutions.

Almost all chapters have been written by one or more of the primary architects and initiators of the European Social Survey (ESS). Each chapter deals with a particular aspect of comparative social surveys – from sampling to translation, response rate enhancement to harmonisation of data, and so on – tracing the difficulties and describing how the ESS attempts to solve them.

Chapter 1 records the origins of the European Social Survey, its underlying philosophy and purpose. It also introduces and summarises its many innovations – both methodological and organisational.

Chapter 2 discusses the obstacles to achieving equivalent random samples within different countries. It documents the ESS's unprecedented approach to achieving a viable solution.

Chapter 3 describes the unusual collection of hoops through which ESS questions have to pass before they are adopted as part of the questionnaire, warning of the hazards of less rigorous approaches.

Chapter 4 documents the unusual procedures and protocols employed in the ESS to obtain equivalent translations from the source questionnaire into well over 20 languages, contrasting ESS methods with alternative approaches.

Chapter 5 reviews the possible impact of major national or international events on attitudinal trend data and describes the methods the ESS has developed to monitor and record such events with the purpose of informing subsequent data analyses.

Chapter 6 is about patterns of declining response rates in surveys, and the particular problem of differential response rates in cross-national surveys. It describes the range of counteractive measures taken in the ESS and assesses their effectiveness.

Chapter 7 tackles the formidable difficulty of producing an equivalent, user-friendly and timely dataset in the same form from over 20 separate countries. It outlines the meticulous procedures and protocols employed by the ESS to achieve this.

Chapter 8 assesses what lessons we are learning from the various ESS innovations in methodology and organisational structure, acknowledging what has already been learned from predecessor cross-national social surveys.

Chapter 9 outlines the origins and development of the ‘human values scale’ employed in the ESS and demonstrates its utility for mapping the structure of values across nations.

Chapter 10 analyses the results of the rotating module in Round 1 of the ESS on citizen involvement and democracy, showing distinctly different national patterns of participation in both voluntary and political activity.

Chapter 11 compares ESS data with data from the US General Social Survey to investigate to what extent the well-documented ‘crisis’ of declining social capital in the US applies to European nations too.

The huge debts we owe to colleagues throughout Europe are too numerous to itemise here. The organisational structure of the ESS means that in each of 32 countries there are numerous individuals and organisations that have taken on the task of making the ESS a success in their own country. They include, above all, the National Coordinators who orchestrate the work in their country and who generously contribute their ideas and expertise, the survey agencies that carry out the fieldwork and data preparation to remarkably high standards, and, of course, the national funding agencies that have consistently financed successive rounds of fieldwork and coordination in their country. In addition, members of our various advisory boards and committees – the Scientific Advisory Board, the Funders’ Forum, the Methods Group, the Sampling Panel and the Translation Panel – have played an invaluable role in helping to secure and sustain the quality of the project. We greatly appreciate their respective contributions and realise how much we depend on them – individually and collectively – to help us manage such a large and complex multi-national enterprise.

As for the production of the book itself, we have relied heavily on the talents and meticulousness of Sally Widdop, a research assistant at our Centre, who has kept us on track and told us precisely what to do – for all of which we owe her a heartfelt vote of thanks.

Editors

Roger Jowell
Caroline Roberts
Rory Fitzgerald
Gillian Eva

1 The European Social Survey as a measurement model

*Roger Jowell, Max Kaase, Rory Fitzgerald
and Gillian Eva**

Introduction

The importance to social science of rigorous comparative research is incontestable. It helps to reveal not only intriguing differences between countries and cultures, but also aspects of one's own country and culture that would be difficult or impossible to detect from domestic data alone. As Durkheim famously put it: "Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology: it is sociology itself" (Durkheim, 1964, pp.139).

Even so, the strict methodological standards that have long been employed in many national studies have tended to be beyond the reach of many comparative studies (Scheuch, 1966; Teune, 1992). One obvious reason is their expense. But there are other even more compelling reasons, notably that comparative studies have to deal with competing cultural norms and national methodological preferences that single-nation studies do not begin to face. Although these problems are not necessarily insuperable, it seems that national customs and conventions have too often held sway over methodological consistency. As a result, design inconsistencies that would never be tolerated in important national studies have frequently been shrugged off in important comparative studies. Only after the event have the

*Roger Jowell is a Research Professor at City University London and Principal Investigator of the European Social Survey (ESS); Max Kaase is an emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Mannheim, past President of the International Political Science Association, and chair of the ESS Scientific Advisory Board; Rory Fitzgerald is a Senior Research Fellow at City University and a member of the ESS Central Coordinating Team (CCT); Gillian Eva is a Research Fellow at City University and a member of the ESS CCT.

methods of several celebrated comparative studies been shown to be less consistent between nations than they ought to be (see Verba, 1971; Saris and Kaase, 1997; Park and Jowell, 1997).

This was the situation that confronted the team responsible for the 'Beliefs In Government' project which started in 1989, sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF) and led by Max Kaase and Ken Newton (1995). The project was designed to compile and interpret existing data about changes over time in the socio-political orientations of European citizens in different countries. Many sources of data were available to the study – notably time series such as the Eurobarometers, the International Social Survey Programme, the European (and World) Value Surveys, and sets of national election studies. But although these studies formed the essential source material for the study, the scope for rigorous comparative analysis across countries and over time was limited by their discontinuities and internal inconsistencies. This discovery was the inspiration behind the European Social Survey.

A member of the ESF Standing Committee of the Social Sciences (SCSS) at the time, Max Kaase proposed to his colleagues a project to investigate the feasibility of starting a new European Social Survey with a view to mitigating the limitations that the Beliefs in Government project had revealed. The SCSS agreed and set up an eight-person 'Expert Group' to pursue the idea (see Note 1 at the end of this chapter). At the end of its year-long deliberations, it concluded that a new rigorous and meticulously planned pan-European general social survey was both desirable and feasible (ESF, 1996). As importantly, it concluded that, with the aid of the ESF and its member organisations throughout Europe (plus, it was hoped, the European Commission – EC), the project was likely to be fundable.

Thus encouraged, the SCSS set up and financed two new committees: the first – a Steering Group (see Note 2 at the end of this chapter) – representing social scientists selected by each of the ESF's interested member organisations; and the second – a Methodological Committee (see Note 3 at the end of this chapter) – consisting of a smaller number of specialists from a range of European countries. These two groups were jointly charged with turning the idea into a well-honed blueprint for potential action.

After parallel deliberations, though with some overlaps in membership, the chairs of the two committees (Kaase and Jowell), together with the SCSS scientific secretary (John Smith), jointly produced a *Blueprint* document (ESF, 1999), which was duly presented to and endorsed by the SCSS and distributed to all ESF member organisations. Here at last was a document which contained not only a call for regular, rigorous monitoring of changes in values within modern Europe, but also a detailed specification of how such a highly ambitious project might be set up and implemented in an equivalent way across a diverse range of European countries. The *Blueprint* also made

clear that the project could not be a one-shot comparative survey. To achieve its essential aim of monitoring and interpreting change, it had to undertake repeat measurements over an extended period.

The *Blueprint* was soon welcomed by many academics in the field throughout and beyond Europe, but also – and more importantly perhaps – by the many national social science funding agencies that, as ESF members, might be called on to contribute resources to such a project. The proposal had its detractors too, most of whom saw the potential value of the project but believed it might be too ambitious and expensive to get off the ground.

As the remainder of this book shows, these fears fortunately proved to be unfounded. Following publication of the *Blueprint*, a small team led by Roger Jowell was assembled (see Note 4 at the end of this chapter) to formulate an application to the EC for core funding of the project that would cover the ESS's detailed design and continuing coordination, but not its fieldwork – which was always to be financed at a national level. Meanwhile, the ESF had begun seeking commitments from its member organisations that – if EC funding was in the event to materialise for the ESS core activities – they would in turn be ready to meet the costs of their own national fieldwork and domestic coordination.

Learning from the experience of other studies, however, no potential funding agency was left in any doubt that the hallmark of the ESS was to be consistency across nations and exacting standards. Thus, familiar but inappropriate national variations in methodology were in this case to be firmly resisted. Rather, the design was to be based on the now publicly available *Blueprint* and determined by a Central Coordinating Team. Although there would, of course, be consultation with all participants and advisers – the ESS was above all to be implemented according to a uniform (or equivalent) set of principles and procedures.

Given the fact that many of the potential participating countries would have to go through complicated funding hoops to secure support for this new venture, the core application to the Commission cautiously assumed that around nine nations would participate in the first round. Others, it was hoped, would follow suit in subsequent rounds. As it turned out, however, not long after the successful outcome of the EC application had been announced, an astonishing 22 countries had opted to join the ESS's first biennial round in 2002/2003, each funding its own share of the study's costs.

All but one of those same nations then also took part – again on a self-funding basis – in the second round in 2004/2005 and were joined by five new nations. Now almost all of these nations are participating in the third round in 2006/2007, again with some important new entrants. Critically, at each new round the EC has also supported applications from the central coordinating team to cover the project's continuing design and coordination.

Apart from its unusual rigour for a comparative attitudinal survey, two further features of the ESS attracted immediate and widespread interest among social scientists. The first was the division of the ESS questionnaire into two halves – one half devoted to its core measures and the other half to two rotating modules, both subject to a Europe-wide competition among multinational teams of social scientists. This arrangement ensures on the one hand that there is appropriate continuity between rounds, but on the other that the central team is not the sole arbiter of the study's content. It also means that many academics in many countries look to the ESS as a potential vehicle for the collection of valuable multinational data in their field.

The second feature of the ESS that has ensured immediate attention is its firm policy of transparency and open access. All its protocols and methods are made immediately available on the ESS website (www.europeansocial-survey.org), and each round of data is also made immediately available on the ESS data website (<http://ess.nsd.uib.no>), giving everyone simultaneous access and allowing no privileged prior access to the principal investigators.

Perhaps it was these features of the ESS that so swiftly alerted social scientists to its existence, particularly those throughout the world who are involved in comparative social measurement. But the interest in the project seemed to expand exponentially when it was announced in 2005 that the ESS team had won the coveted Descartes Prize “for excellence in collaborative scientific research”. As the first social science project ever even to have been short-listed for this top European science prize, it was a welcome sign that the project had met the approval of the wider scientific community in Europe.

Before dealing with the specific components of the ESS model, we wish briefly to rehearse some of the broader motivations behind the enterprise.

In defence of rigour

Good science – whether natural science or social science – should never turn a blind eye to its known imperfections. Nor should those imperfections be concealed from potential users. Some might argue that the social sciences are always an order of magnitude more error-prone than are the natural sciences. That is disputable, but in any case it provides all the more reason for greater rather than less vigilance in social science methodology.

In some respects too, the social sciences are even more complicated than the natural sciences. Although they do not have to explain the complexities of the physical and natural world, they do have to interpret and explain the complexities of people's interactions – whether with one another or with their world. And human interactions are in some ways more complicated than are interactions in the physical and natural world. For one thing, ‘laws of behaviour’ are less in evidence among human populations than among,

say, physical objects, or chemicals, or even creatures. Thus, social scientists cannot as confidently make assumptions about the likely regularities of human interactions as, say, chemists sometimes can about the interactions between certain gases. Not only do cultural variations complicate the measurement of human behaviour and attitudes across nations, but so perhaps do larger and more unpredictable individual variations within the same populations.

Moreover, human beings have their own value systems and are ‘opinionated’ in ways that their counterparts in the natural world are not. They are also all too capable of believing one thing and doing (or saying) quite another. So, the social sciences often have to start off by overcoming barriers which are erected (whether deliberately or intuitively) by the objects of their measurements themselves. Unless they succeed, these barriers may distort or nullify their findings.

All of which makes the general domain of the social scientist particularly tricky. But, as in all fields, some aspects are a great deal trickier than others. Three features of the ESS (and other similar studies) place it near the extreme of this notional spectrum of difficulty:

- Measuring social attitudes and values is for many reasons more risky and error-prone than measuring validatable facts and behaviour patterns, because they tend to be even more fluid and context-dependent.
- Measuring change over time adds a level of complexity to the analysis and interpretation of findings that rarely applies to studies that are able to rely on one-off measurements.
- Measuring cross-national differences and similarities is made infinitely more difficult by simultaneous variations in social structure, legal systems, language, politics, economics and culture that would be rare indeed in a single-country study.

Cross-national studies of attitude change simultaneously incorporate all three of these daunting aspects of quantitative social measurement. But the ESS was fortunate in coming late to the scene, by which time many distinguished comparative studies had already laid the groundwork, such as Almond and Verba (1963), Barnes *et al*, (1979) and, more recently, a series of comparative surveys of attitude and value change, including the Eurobarometers, the International Social Survey Programme and the European (and World) Value Surveys. The ESS was determined not only to learn from these studies, but also, wherever possible, to mitigate the methodological difficulties they had encountered, just as other present and future projects will doubtless build on the ESS model.

The initiators of the ESS also found themselves with an enviable remit. Their role was not just to determine the structure and style of a new improved time series on European attitude change, but to do so without compromising the highest standards of scientific rigour. The enthusiastic and widespread support they received for this goal was as surprising as it was inspiring. It came not just from individual members of numerous specialist advisory groups, but also from the officials (and ultimately the referees) who deal with EC Framework Programmes, as well as from a range of funding councils throughout Europe (well beyond the borders of the EU itself). The time was clearly ripe for a brave new initiative which would not only monitor value change in a changing Europe according to the highest technical standards, but also meticulously (and openly) document the process for the benefit of others in the field. At last rigour, as opposed to speed and cost alone, was firmly back on the agenda.

The pursuit of equivalence

All quantitative research depends for its reliability on what may be called a “principle of equivalence” (Jowell, 1998). For instance, even in national surveys the probability of an individual citizen’s selection in a sample should be equal (or at least known and non-zero) to satisfy the demands of representativeness. Similarly, co-operation or response rates should not vary greatly between different subgroups within a nation if the pursuit of equal representation is to be sustained. Questions should have a broadly equivalent meaning to all respondents to ensure that variations in the data derive from differences in their answers rather than in their interpretation of the questions. Coding schemas must be devised to ensure that it is the codes rather than the coders that account for differences in the distribution of answers. And so on. A great deal of work in national surveys therefore goes into the sheer process of ensuring that different voices in the population are appropriately represented and taken equally into consideration. Only to the extent that a national survey succeeds in that objective are its findings likely to approximate to some sort of social reality.

But to the extent that these problems of achieving equivalence affect national surveys – since no nation is homogeneous with respect to vocabulary, first-language, modes of expression, levels of education, and so on – they are, of course, greatly magnified when it comes to multi-national surveys. For a range of well-documented reasons, most comparative surveys have not entirely succeeded in coming to grips with them. Cultural, technical, organisational and financial barriers have undermined equivalence in comparative studies for at least three decades – from the ‘courtesy bias’ first discovered in South East Asian studies (Jones, 1963), to the recognition that ‘spurious lexical equivalence’ often disguises major differences in meaning (Deutscher, 1968; Rokkan, 1968;

Cseh-Szombathy, 1985). Hantrais and Ager (1985) have argued for more effective cooperation between linguists and social scientists, but – to the extent that this has happened at all – it has not improved things markedly. The fact remains that different languages are not necessarily equivalent means of defining and communicating the same ideas and concepts; they are also reflections of different thought processes, institutional frameworks and underlying values (Lisle, 1985; Harding, 1996; Harkness, 2003).

From the start, comparative researchers were also frustrated by country-specific differences in methodological and procedural habits – such as in their preferred modes of interviewing, their deeply ingrained preferences for different sampling models and procedures, major differences in how they defined ‘acceptable’ response rates, the different ways in which they employed visual aids, variations in their training of interviewers and coders, and their often tailor-made socio-demographic classifications (see, for instance, Mitchell, 1965). Comparative social scientists also soon discovered that certain ‘standard’ conceptualisations of cleavages within one country (such as the left–right continuum, or the liberal–conservative one) had no direct counterpart in another, and that seemingly identical questions about concepts such as strong leadership or strong government, or nationalism or religiosity, tended to be interpreted quite differently in different countries according to their different cultural, social structural and political conditions (Miller *et al*, 1981; Scherpenzeel and Saris, 1997; Saris and Kaase, 1997).

Many impressive attempts have been made to mitigate these problems, but with patchy results. For instance, having heeded the problems faced by predecessor’s comparative studies, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) started off with strict standardisation in mind (Davis and Jowell, 1989). Although the ISSP did in fact make large strides towards consistency, it was thwarted by an absence of any available central coordinating budget with which to help enhance its equivalence across nations. Each of the (now) 39 national institutions in the ISSP has to find its own annual funds to carry out the survey and although they all ‘agree’ to follow the project’s clearly laid-out methods and procedures, some of them have found themselves unable to comply without stretching the meaning of concepts such as ‘probability sampling’ or ‘no substitution of refusals’. Moreover, unlike the ESS which has the resources to identify such problems in advance and to monitor the implementation of agreed standards, embarrassing variations in the ISSP were discovered only after the event. And despite the heroic efforts by the ISSP secretariat to remedy these problems in subsequent rounds of the survey, some have proved difficult to shift.

These experiences confirmed to the architects of the ESS that, in the absence of appropriate budgetary or executive sway, too many participants in multi-national surveys will inevitably take decisions into their own hands with potentially serious consequences for equivalence and reliability.

One key aspect of the ESF *Blueprint* was to prove critical in mitigating this problem. A two-pronged approach was devised to help ensure compliance to the ESS's centrally-determined specification. In the first place, the ever-present Central Coordinating Team is responsible for designing, specifying and monitoring the use of equivalent methods in all nations. Equally, all national funding organisations make their own separate commitments (via the ESF) that they too will ensure compliance on behalf of their selected national teams. It is probably this dual arrangement, above all, that sustains the extent of methodological equivalence which has come to define the ESS.

Inevitably, however, plenty of national deviations still manage to arise. True, most but not all are minor, and most but not all are inadvertent. But in keeping with the project's spirit of transparency, *all* such deviations are identified and published at the conclusion of each round of the survey. This practice is by no means designed to 'name and shame' those responsible for the deviations. It has two quite different motives. First, it shows to all participants what can go wrong with a view to preventing similar breaches in future rounds; and secondly, potential users of the data have a right to have early knowledge of such deviations in case it affects their analyses, or even their choice of which nations to include in their comparisons.

There is, of course, an almost endless list of potential hazards that can crop up in one corner or another of a large cross-national study – from subtle translation discrepancies to uncharted sampling differences, from esoteric variations in coding conventions to differential context effects, from major response rate variations to more straightforward transcription errors, from variations in 'standard' definitions to mundane timetable slippages, and so on. All these hazards can be reduced to a greater or lesser extent, but they cannot, of course, ever be eliminated. All the ESS protocols, which are published on its website, go into meticulous detail to help ensure that these risks are minimised. Practical steps are also taken, such as setting up a standing sampling panel, a methods group and a translation panel to give detailed help on a range of technical issues.

As with all multi-national studies, one of the most difficult tasks is to achieve functionally equivalent translations of questionnaires and other documents. In the case of the ESS, the *Blueprint* argued for English as the project's official language – for its meetings as well as all its central documentation. This proposal prevailed. Thus, all original ESS protocols, questionnaires and field materials are formulated in English and subsequently translated by national teams as necessary into their own languages (well over 20 in all) – see chapter 4. Although this practice has a strong whiff of hegemony about it, it is nonetheless a massive administrative convenience for a unified project such as the ESS. But it also has its hazards because certain English phrases (and especially idioms) have no equivalent counterpart in many other languages. On balance, however, operating in a single widely spoken language is surely preferable to the potentially chaotic alternative. And we are fortunate in having

the help of a group of admirably bilingual National Coordinators and their colleagues to prevent the most obvious errors.

We stress these issues to illustrate the numerous inherent obstacles to equivalence that a multi-national survey covering such a large number of heterogeneous countries inevitably faces. Issues of taxonomy, technique, human error, lapses in communication, cultural and political circumstances, and a host of other factors all get in the way of equivalence to a greater or lesser extent. And these difficulties increase with the number and heterogeneity of the countries involved.

Nonetheless, we should not exaggerate the rigidity with which the ESS pursues absolute methodological consistency come what may. Its goal is to achieve *equivalent* methods and measures, not *identical* ones. It would, for instance, be wholly unrealistic to require all countries to use precisely the *same* sampling procedures. Some countries – notably the Nordic countries – have publicly available registers of all individuals which contain details of their demographic and economic characteristics of a sort that would infringe the privacy laws of other countries. Alas, most countries do not constitute such a ‘sampling heaven’, and some have no reliable publicly available list of individuals or addresses at all. To select equivalent probability samples in these very different circumstances necessitates different approaches to the same end.

So although the ESS specifications do rigidly require each national sample to be based on random (probability) methods designed to give every resident of that country (not just citizens) an equal (non-zero) chance of selection, each country has to achieve that overall objective taking due account of its particular set of opportunities and obstacles. Working closely with the central sampling panel, this process may involve quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing before an optimal solution is reached, but in no case has the goal of sampling equivalence been breached (see chapter 2).

The ESS model in practice

The ESS’s three main aims are:

- to produce rigorous data about trends over time in people’s underlying values within and between European nations
- to rectify longstanding deficits in the rigour and equivalence of comparative quantitative research, especially in attitude studies
- to develop and gain acceptance for *social* indicators, including attitudinal measures, that are able to stand alongside the more familiar economic indicators of societal progress.

If we were ever remotely to fulfil these aims, we required not only a well-formulated model, as provided by the *Blueprint* document, but also a detailed *modus operandi* that was demonstrably capable of delivering that model on the ground. This issue loomed large in the initial application to the European Commission for Round 1 funding, submitted in June 2000, which – we reasoned – was not aimed solely at the Commission but also at the many national funding agencies that might soon be called on to fund their own fieldwork and national coordination for the first round. Our plans thus had to stand up to the detailed scrutiny not only of the European Commission's officers and referees, but also of more than 20 separate national funders. The plans also had to persuade the wider academic community from among whom National Coordinators would subsequently be appointed that it was not only doable but worth doing. And they had to be acceptable to the various national field agencies that would ultimately be asked to implement the plans on the ground. In summary, our initial task was to persuade an unusually large number of knowledgeable and habitually sceptical observers that the ESS was capable of becoming an especially authoritative and influential study, both substantively and methodologically.

It is clearly a long journey from the starting point of even a splendid design to its simultaneous implementation in over 20 countries. In this chapter we briefly summarise not only the range of design characteristics and innovations that we believe have been critical to the success of the ESS, but also the set of structural arrangements that have contributed most to their implementation. Subsequent chapters deal in more detail with many of these topics.

But we should re-emphasise that the detailed design specification for the ESS is not followed in all cases with quite the same precision as it is in others. As noted, some of the inherent difficulties of cross-national studies have proved extremely difficult to solve, and there have been errors of omission and commission en route. The deviations that have occurred are discussed later in this chapter.

Thankfully, however, the compliance rate on most of the ESS's demanding list of requirements is impressive. And for this, a great deal of credit goes to the National Coordinators. So, as noted, we believe we have achieved more than expected in terms of sampling equivalence between countries. But in aspects of fieldwork, we still have some way to go. Granted that face-to-face interviewing is universally applied in the ESS, as are many other key fieldwork requirements, but the reality is that fieldwork organisations tend to have their own preferred procedures, which even the most well-monitored survey cannot easily influence. For instance, although we specify a maximum number of

respondents per interviewer in order to reduce the impact of interviewer variability on the results, this requirement is often unilaterally abandoned (perhaps appropriately) when it is seen to conflict with the achievement of high response rates. The same reasoning sometimes applies to the stretching of fieldwork deadlines, resulting in a wider than hoped for range of national fieldwork periods.

Continuity

Any multinational time series such as the ESS depends above all not just on a consistent methodology but also on continuity of participation by the nations involved and, of course, on uninterrupted funding. Although in these respects the ESS has been particularly fortunate so far, it has not yet achieved any real security. Instead, it still has to rely on the round by round success of applications for funding both of its coordination and of each country's participation in the enterprise. So every biennial round of the ESS involves over 25 independent funding decisions – each of which, if negative, could inflict damage on the project as a whole. We hope this may change in EC Framework 7, but we will have to wait and see. Meanwhile, the continuity of national participation and funding throughout the first three rounds of the ESS has admittedly been remarkably smooth. Table 1.1 shows the pattern of national participation over the first three biennial rounds of the ESS by the 32 countries that have funded and fielded at least one round.

Table 1.1 The 32 ESS participating countries to date

Country	R1	R2	R3	Country	R1	R2	R3
Austria	✓	✓	✓	Latvia			✓
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	Luxembourg	✓	✓	
Bulgaria			✓	Netherlands	✓	✓	✓
Cyprus			✓	Norway	✓	✓	✓
Czech Republic	✓	✓		Poland	✓	✓	✓
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	Portugal	✓	✓	✓
Estonia		✓	✓	Romania			✓
Finland	✓	✓	✓	Russia			✓
France	✓	✓	✓	Slovakia		✓	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓	Slovenia	✓	✓	✓
Greece	✓	✓		Spain	✓	✓	✓
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	Sweden	✓	✓	✓
Iceland		✓	?	Switzerland	✓	✓	✓
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	Turkey		✓	?
Israel	✓			UK	✓	✓	✓
Italy	✓	✓	?	Ukraine		✓	✓

Notes: Number of countries in Round 1: 22; number of countries in Round 2: 26; number of countries in Round 3: 25–28

In sum, 18 European countries may be described as perennial ESS participants, having taken part in all three rounds to date.¹ Four further countries who joined at Round 2 are also participating in Round 3.² Five further Round 3 joiners will, we hope, sustain their participation into future rounds. And the five remaining participants that failed to obtain funding for Round 2 and/or Round 3 are all determined to remain in the fold and to rectify their funding gap in Round 4 and beyond.

So although results suggest that we ought perhaps to be confident about the longer-term stability of the ESS, the persistence of the present funding regime – with its multiplicity of independent decision trees – is simply not conducive to a strong sense of security. On a more positive note, some countries have recently managed to secure a longer-term commitment to ESS participation (usually up to two rounds ahead), on condition that the EC's core-funding of the project – itself subject to a round by round competition – continues to flow. We are delighted to report that an early decision by the Commission to core-fund ESS Round 4 (in 2008/2009) has recently been secured.

The continuity of funding and national participation that the project has enjoyed so far has undoubtedly been a key factor in attracting analysts to its dataset. Not only does the relatively stable range of countries within each round enable cross-national comparisons to be validated, but the repeated participation of over 20 countries enables all-important analyses to be made of changes within and between nations.

Governance

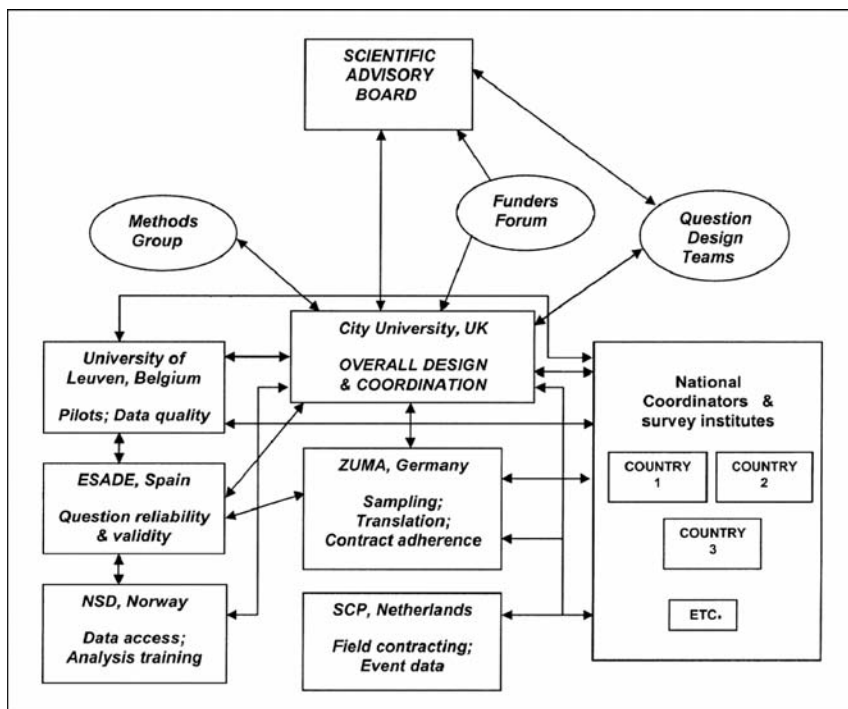
The origins of the unusual governance arrangements of the ESS may be found in its initial *Blueprint*, though they have been adjusted as necessary to fit the circumstances of a larger and potentially more cumbersome enterprise than had been envisaged.

Figure 1.1 summarises the overall organisational structure of the ESS. At the heart of the governance arrangements are the six institutions listed at the centre and centre-left of Figure 1.1. They constitute the ESS *Central Coordinating Team (CCT)* (see Note 4 at the end of this chapter), which collectively holds the various grants for the project and takes overall responsibility for the programme of work (see 'Division of tasks' in this chapter). But the successful execution of the project at a national level relies equally on the country teams on the right of the Figure (National Coordinators and

¹ Italy is included in this figure though their funding for Round 3 is still uncertain.

² Iceland and Turkey are included in this figure though their funding for Round 3 is still uncertain.

Figure 1.1 ESS organisational structure



survey institutes) which ensure that the project is faithfully adapted, translated and carried out to the same exacting standards in all nations.

The four bodies at or near the top of Figure 1.1 collectively ensure that the project adheres to or exceeds its ambitious ideals.

Chaired by Max Kaase, the *Scientific Advisory Board* (see Note 5 at the end of this chapter) meets twice a year and has been remarkably stable in its membership. Board members are eminent social scientists from all ESS participating countries, each nominated by their main academic Funding Council. Individually and collectively, they help to steer the ESS in virtuous directions, influencing its key decisions. Moreover, the Board also plays the sole executive role in the selection of specialist Question Module Design Teams, the bodies which help to design one half of the questionnaire at each round.

The *Funders' Forum* (see Note 6 at the end of this chapter) consists of senior staff members from each of the national funding bodies (plus the EC and the ESF). It meets less frequently – usually about once a year – and its key role is to monitor the progress of the project and, in particular, its role as a large, long-term multinational investment. It attempts to foresee and prevent unintended funding discontinuities.

The smaller *Methods Group* (see Note 7 at the end of this chapter) is chaired by Denise Lievesley and consists of four other eminent survey methodologists. It also meets about once a year to tackle the knotty technical and statistical issues that a project of this size and complexity inevitably throws up. They respond admirably to the numerous technical conundrums that are put to them, guiding the CCT towards appropriate solutions. And they advise on the ESS's methodological programme, injecting new ideas and helping to produce elegant solutions.

As noted, new *Question Module Design Teams* (see Note 8 at the end of this chapter) are selected at each round to help formulate the rotating elements of the questionnaire, which form nearly one half of its content. This procedure is designed to ensure that the ESS's content is determined not only by the need for continuity but also by a dynamic 'bottom-up' process. An advertisement is placed in the 'Official Journal' well before each round starts and it is publicised through National Coordinators within their own countries. It invites multi-national teams of scholars to apply for the chance to help design a (now) 50-item module of questions on a subject of their choosing for the following round of the survey. In general, two such teams are selected by the project's Scientific Advisory Board, having considered the suitability of the subject and the experience of the prospective team. The successful teams then work closely with the CCT to develop suitable rotating modules for pilot and subsequent fielding in the next round of fieldwork (refer to the Questionnaire section of the ESS website). Seven rotating modules have been fielded to date in one or other of Rounds 1 to 3, and their data are widely quarried by analysts (see the description of Workpackages 8 and 9 later in this chapter). There were concerns at the start about whether this procedure for designing rotating modules would work. But thanks largely to the quality of the teams selected at each round, and to the astute comments and suggestions we receive from National Coordinators, it has worked very well, extending both the depth and breadth of the project as a whole.

As far as the *National Coordinators and survey institutes* (see Note 9 at the end of this chapter) are concerned, we are fortunate in having a skilled and committed body of people and organisations who are in all cases appointed and financed by their national academic funding agencies. They collectively represent the leading edge of social survey research practice in Europe. Although their official role is country-specific, they also lend considerable expertise to the project as a whole through a series of National Coordinator meetings and regular email and telephone contact. Their task above all is to ensure that what happens on the ground in their country matches as closely as possible the requirements and expectations of the ESS specification – whether in respect of sampling, translation, fieldwork or coding. As the essential link between the CCT at the

centre and what happens in each nation, they take legitimate credit for bolstering the consistent standards to which the ESS tries to adhere.

Division of tasks

In common with most Commission-funded projects, the ESS work programme is divided in advance into distinct but overlapping ‘workpackages’, each the responsibility of one or more of the CCT institutions. The 11 workpackages are:

Workpackages 1 and 2: Overall project design and coordination

The City University team in London³ is contractually responsible for the design and subsequent delivery of the whole programme of work according to budget and timetable, for initiating and convening team meetings, and for liaison with funders, advisers, National Coordinators and the wider social science community.

Although CCT meetings are regular events, most of the coordination and communication naturally takes place outside these meetings. So City acts as the hub of the project and is at the centre of communication and discourse with CCT members, national teams, the project’s many influential advisers, the growing number of scholars in the wider social science community who have an interest in ESS methods and outputs, the project’s core funders (the EC and the ESF), and the many national funding bodies that collectively supply the bulk of the overall budget for the project. The City team is also responsible for framing the ‘Specification for Participating Countries’, updated at every round, which lays out in meticulous detail the procedures, standards and outputs required for each aspect of the survey’s implementation (see Project Specification section of the ESS website).

But City also has the lead role in questionnaire design at each round of the ESS. While the core questionnaire – which accounts for about one half of the total interview duration—remains as stable as possible from round to round, it is nonetheless continually under review by both the CCT and the Scientific Advisory Board. Limited changes have been introduced at each round, some

³Roger Jowell, PI and ESS Coordinator; Rory Fitzgerald; Caroline Roberts; Gillian Eva and Mary Keane. Recent additions to the City team are Daniella Hawkins, Eric Harrison, Sally Widdop and Lynda Sones. In addition, Rounds 1 and 2 would never have got off the ground so smoothly and efficiently in the absence of three former members of staff – Caroline Bryson, Ruth O’Shea and Natalie Aye Maung.

to remove or amend demonstrably ‘bad’ items, others to introduce new items on emerging issues. But the very purpose of the core – to measure long-term value changes – requires that we should avoid being fidgety with its content.

The main round by round task of the City team in respect of questionnaire design is to work closely with the respective Question Module Design Teams (QDTs) on the shape and content of the rotating modules for each round – a protracted process involving face-to-face meetings, several drafts of questions, and two pilot studies (in separate countries) to iron out problems. Only after a detailed analysis of the pilot studies, followed by extensive consultations with the QDTs and National Coordinators, is the module eventually ‘put to bed’ and sent out for translation into multiple languages. The whole questionnaire design process, including its various interim ‘conclusions’, is documented as it takes place and made available on the web immediately so that National Coordinators and others can join the discussions ‘in real time’ and have their say.

Workpackage 3: Sampling

The Sampling Panel (see Note 10 at the end of this chapter) is convened by Sabine Häder at ZUMA⁴ and has three other specialist members. The ESS has an unusual and innovative sampling specification which requires among other things each country to aim for the same ‘effective sample size’, not necessarily the same nominal sample size (see chapter 2). So it is not just the anticipated response rate that a National Coordinator and the Sampling Panel have to take into account in determining the starting number of individuals (or addresses) to select, but also the ‘design effects’ that their chosen design will generate – a function of its extent of clustering. The greater the degree of clustering in the sample design, so the larger must be the starting sample size. It is the Sampling Panel’s role to ensure that these ‘rules’ are closely adhered to.

To help achieve this, the Panel allocates each of its individual members to work with a particular set of countries, ensuring that each country has a single named adviser to consult with as necessary. Where the situation requires it, this adviser will travel to the country concerned to investigate possibilities and help find solutions. In any event, each national sample design has in the end to be ‘signed off’ by the Sampling Panel before it is adopted and implemented.

We are confident that by these means the ESS achieves equivalent random samples of an unusually high standard. Each national sample is designed to be a probability sample of all residents in that country (not just of its citizens) who are

⁴The ZUMA team as a whole consists of Peter Mohler, Janet Harkness, Sabine Häder, Achim Koch and Sigfried Gabler. Recent additions to the team are Annelies Blom, Matthias Ganninger and Dorothée Behr.