



Cross-National Research Papers

Seventh Series:

European Cross-National Research and Policy

## **5. The Impact of Social Science Research on Social Policy: Governance and Management**

Edited by

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**Rachel Herring**

**Ron Iphofen**

**Sandra Williams**



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## Series Editor's Foreword

The seminars on which this new series of *Cross-National Research Papers* is based are a response to the perceived need for a forum at which social scientists can discuss the issues arising in research that crosses national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries, thereby enabling participants to learn from past experience and to plan more effectively for future international work. The seminars maintain and build on the research of existing international teams. They are consolidating links between social science research and wider society. An important aim of the seminars is to provide an informal environment for the exchange of knowledge and ideas with policy actors interested in the lessons that can be drawn from social science research.

The papers address the theoretical, methodological, managerial and practical problems arising in comparative social science research projects across EU member states, with the overall aim of contributing to a better understanding of the research process, improving the quality of international social science, and encouraging dialogue and transfer of knowledge between researchers and policy actors.

Specific methodological objectives of the seminars and ensuing publications are:

- to contribute to methodological advances in cross-national research;
- to develop robust theoretical frameworks for comparative analysis of social systems and policies;
- to offer training opportunities to researchers embarking on international projects;
- to create synergy between researchers from different cultural traditions within the European context;
- to promote mutual understanding of regional diversity within the European Union and Central and Eastern Europe;
- to analyse social constructions of concepts, factors affecting the comparability of quantitative and qualitative data, and indicators in European projects;
- to share and disseminate knowledge and promote dialogue between researchers, policy actors and users;
- to foster good practice in cross-national comparative research;
- to identify the conditions necessary for successful policy transfer and learning.

The six seminars are exploring the central theme of modernisation of the European social model within the context of socio-economic change, European integration and enlargement, and the policy challenges they present for governments.

We are grateful to ESRC for the Seminar Competition Award (RES-451-26-0020, 2003–04) that is funding the seminars and publications. We should also like to thank the Social Research Association for the additional support they provided for the fifth seminar in the series and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for hosting the event.

*Linda Hantrais*

## **1. The Impact of Social Science Research on Social Policy: Governance and Management**

*Susanne MacGregor*

The papers in the fifth issue in the series of *Cross-National Research Papers* pursue a key aim of the series on European Cross-National Research and Policy, which is to consider how cross-national and multi-disciplinary research can improve the links between research, policy and public debate. In doing so, they build on some of the themes that have emerged in previous issues of the papers. These include the observation that research is itself a social act that occurs in a political and economic context. How it is constructed varies in different settings, cultures and traditions, as does how evidence is perceived and utilised.

Another key aim of the series of seminars that led to the production of the papers is to improve networking between researchers in different European countries. Such collaboration can be aided by the development of common practices and shared standards, in particular with regard to governance and ethics. These themes run through the papers in this issue and are taken up especially by Chris Caswill and Ron Iphofen.

Policy actors may be said to function best when they understand the research process either through their own experience or through the involvement of people who act as intermediaries or liaison officers, smoothing the relations between research and policy. Both the discussants at the seminar (Birgit Arve-Parès and Sandra Williams) have had experience of commissioning and managing research. Their contributions comment on the papers through the lens of their own careers in funding research.

Contributors to earlier issues of the papers commented that policy actors want 'good data' and 'good evidence' but also examples of good practice and ideas on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of policy. Rachel Herring's paper is very topical, given the Olympic Games held in August 2004 in Athens and the concurrent bidding process to host a later Games, in which both London and Paris are competing. She discusses how policy actors make use of evidence to support their decisions and also to find examples of good practice that might be transferred across cities. She considers in some detail the values and limitations of the case-study approach.

All the papers in this issue help to answer the questions: What counts as good evidence? How is such evidence best marshalled and presented? Policy makers may take for granted the methods used by researchers, trusting them to know what they are doing. Janet Harkness shows how survey findings, which may appear more 'robust' than results for case studies, are also influenced by cultural factors. She explores the problems of designing and interpreting cross-national surveys.

Like Rachel Herring, Chris Caswill also utilises a case study approach in his paper. He considers how research is funded and describes those who manage research, discussing the pressures on them and how they influence the direction research takes. This is particularly important in the context of moves towards developing a European Research Council and a European Research Area.

Iphofen's paper is also relevant to the same issue, since the development of a European Research Area would require shared standards among researchers. He focuses on the ethical responsibilities of researchers and introduces the question of the

role of professional associations in the process. This is an apposite point, given that the fifth seminar was held in collaboration with the Social Research Association, which was a partner in the RESPECT project that he describes.

The theme of governance runs through the papers in the seminar. Two inter-related aspects of policy are mentioned: policy with regard to the funding and managing of research itself; and wider social policy and the role of research in its development. The papers taken together raise another question: How far could or should researchers be equal partners in developing either research policy or social policy in Europe?

## 2. Turbulent Delegation: the Governance of European Research Councils and Research Policy

Chris Caswill

*This is an uncertain time for European institutions of research funding. After many years of stability, most national research councils have been recently reviewed; there is strong pressure to create a European Research Council, and European agencies face competition and change. The paper begins with a brief review of national and European research funding institutions' activities and governance arrangements. It suggests that this new state of turbulence in funding systems may have roots in changing patterns of governance and of delegation from the state. This hypothesis is located in the context of debates within the governance literature, and about 'hollowing out' and 'filling in'. It also examines the insights provided by principal-agent analysis. The proposition is then further developed by taking a closer look at four national agencies that have been recently reviewed, and by reference to the debates on the European Research Council and European Research Area (ERA). The evidence is used to raise some questions about the general applicability of network theories of governance, and to suggest some gaps that principal-agent theory helps to explain. In conclusion, the paper identifies some policy implications. It considers the contributions that social scientific analysis has made to research policy within and across national boundaries and makes some suggestions for improving the two-way flow of knowledge in this field.*

The capacity of the state to manage its affairs is under great pressure. Its power is being 'hollowed out' by powerful global organisations. New network arrangements are being put in place for governing complex interactive networks of individual and organisational actors with large amounts of autonomy from the centre. Hierarchical control is giving way to negotiation. Many of its institutions are not well designed to cope. In many areas, the state has simply failed, overwhelmed by the excessive load of tasks and responsibilities. Paradoxically, it is even struggling to cope with the multiple interests of the agencies, which it (the state) has created. Its relations with its own agencies are unstable and turbulent ('in a state of commotion or unrest', according to the Oxford English Dictionary). That at least is the message from much of the influential literature on governance (Rhodes *et al.*, 1996; Scharpf, 1997; Pierre, 2000). This literature has drawn heavily for its empirical evidence on politics and public administration within and between central and local government (Rhodes, 1994; Stoker, 1999). It has generally been applied within the nation state and rarely comparatively across national boundaries (Peters, 2000). Nor has much empirical work been done on public sector institutions beyond the core state and institutions of local delegation.

One set of institutions of this kind, which seems *prima facie* to provide an example of turbulent governance is the system of national agencies for the support of scientific research<sup>1</sup> in Europe, often referred to as 'research councils'. By the 1980s, research council agencies of this kind, intermediating between the core state and scientific actors, were to be found in most member states of the European Union (EU). With very few exceptions, these national agencies became the subject of reform and

investigation in the decade from 1993. A study of this parallel turbulence provides an opportunity for comparative testing of the governance thesis outside its normal haunts. As Guy Peters (2000) has argued, the purpose of comparative research in governance is to investigate the capacity of the state to govern by enquiring into geographical variation. This paper seeks to make a modest contribution within that framework.

### **The research council as an institution**

What then do we know about research funding agencies as organisations and institutions of the state? Most were created as part of the postwar construction of European institutions, seemingly drawing on the arguments and structures advocated in the United States (Bush, 1980). Many are known formally as research councils, and that term is used in this paper to refer to the collective of public sector agencies that allocate state resources to high quality academic research in the natural sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. They operate in the intermediary position between the knowledge production system and state policy, between state and academy (Braun, 1993; Caswill, 1998). They are tasked with quality control, allocation decisions and research policy. As intermediary public agencies, they receive public funds and seek to add value to these funds by selective distribution for high quality research. All are concerned to control for quality. All process ideas and money and are national agencies, with national missions, albeit defined in very different ways. All use recognisable forms of academic peer review to guide their selection of projects. Although they have much in common in terms of their intermediary locations and functions, European research councils are also characterised by a notably rich variety of organisational structures and institutional roles (Caswill, 2005). There are large differences, for example, between the seven UK subject-based research councils, with their output-oriented mission statements, and the unitary science-driven organisations in Austria, Germany and Sweden; and between the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), which employs tens of thousands of academic researchers, and the many councils that employ none. The common core has been shaped by national culture and context into very different forms.

The work on research councils has been flowering in the last 10 years (Braun, 1993; Guston, 1996; Van der Meulen, 1998, 2003; Caswill, 2003; Morris, 2003). Much of this work is from a principal-agent rather than a governance perspective, and the salience of these two perspectives is compared later in this paper.

### **The changing European context**

Research councils have been established as national agencies. Nevertheless their primary business, high quality science, is sustained by transnational comparison and exchange. Research policy cannot, therefore, be sensibly confined within national boundaries. This is certainly the case for councils located within the EU, or associated with it. The institutions of the EU have been given considerable jurisdiction and influence over science policy, and some observers have commented on the European Commission's robust attempts to increase that influence in recent years (Kelemen, 2002). The fact is that the size of the EU's own Research and Development (R&D) programme, the Framework Programme (FP), has been increased in real terms from 3.75 billion euros in 1984–87 to 12.3 billion in 1994–98. This has, in turn, led to a large increase in the number of potential research council applicants who have become

clients of supranational research funding and policy. National attention to the content, organisation and effect of EU programmes has inevitably increased (DTI, 2004).

The publication in 2000 of the European Commission's vision of a new European Research Area (ERA) (European Commission, 2000; Banchoff, 2003; Caswill, 2003; Kuhlmann and Edler, 2003) further increased the salience of the European science policy context. The ERA proposals led rapidly to a member state commitment to a significant increase of national expenditures on R&D, to a renewed debate about the European institutions of science and to debate about a new pan-European Research Council (ERC). This idea has been strongly supported (DRA, 2002; DMSTI, 2003; EURAB, 2004; EUROHORCS, 2004), from which we can imply that a wide variety of actors have reservations about the adequacy of existing institutions for the support of European science.

One aspect of the ERA vision that often escapes attention is its radically new emphasis on co-operation between EU institutions and national agencies in pursuit of improved European science policy and outcomes (Caswill, 2003). One result of this new emphasis on co-operation across policy levels has been the inclusion within FP6 of the ERA-NET mechanism for co-operation between councils and other agencies, which has contributed to the notable recent increase in transnational co-operation between councils.

This process can be seen to have gathered pace since 1990. For example, in 1992, the heads of some of the most active and influential research councils set up a 'EUROHORCS' as a collective forum. In the early 1990s, a 'round table' of European social science research councils was formed, leading eventually to the seven-country NORFACE ('New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Co-operation in Europe') partnership of social science councils funded as an ERA-NET. National science policy boundaries have become more permeable.

### **Review and reform: a recent commotion**

Any analysis of national research councils needs to include this European science policy background. The period after the Second World War had been a time of creation, growth and consolidation for national research councils in Europe. The political assault on the UK Social Science Research Council was an exception, which stood out in a period when councils remained stable within their national variety. In 1993, major changes were made to the Norwegian research funding system (Skoie, 2000). The 12 years that followed were considerably more turbulent as almost a dozen national councils in Europe were either subject to public review, or major reform, or both<sup>2</sup>. Several of the reviews and reports have been published, and these have provided new accounts of their organisations, instruments and activities. These documents underline the many differences between national research councils, which still appear highly adapted to their various national contexts.

This paper is based on four of the council reviews that have been published in English: namely in the UK (DTI, 2001), Norway (Arnold *et al.*, 2001), Finland (Opetusministerio, 2004) and Austria (Technopolis, 2004). Although this is less than half the total population, the group includes a good range of country sizes, times, and purposes. Comparisons are made by drawing on two sections of the reports: those describing origins and purposes, and the conclusions.

## ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

All four reviews were commissioned by the responsible state ministries: Trade and Industry in the UK; Education, Research and Church Affairs in Norway; Education in Finland; and Transport, Innovation and Technology in Austria. The Norwegian and Austrian reviews were carried out by the same research consultancy, while the UK process was internal within the state system, and the Finns appointed a small panel of overseas experts to do the work. All four sets of terms of reference emphasise the need to look at the instruments and mechanisms used by the councils, and a strong flavour of performance evaluation is found in all the texts.

All four sets of terms of reference refer to the strategic roles of the councils within the national system. All except Austria enquire into the councils' capacity to provide scientific and policy advice. All except the UK have at least one reference to location within the European or wider international framework, and participation in international co-operation. The reviews also share a concern with co-operation and relationships with other actors in the system. The UK, Finnish and Austrian texts all locate the reviews alongside larger debates, such as modernising government (UK), institutional mergers (Austria) and reviews of national Science and Technology (S&T) policy (Finland).

The terms of reference also contain some interesting variations. Only the UK includes the radical option of alternative organisational models. Conversely, the Finnish Ministry's brief states that 'the purpose of this evaluation is to support further development of the Academy of Finland' (the Finnish Research Council), and makes it clear that the whole evaluation was negotiated between the Academy and the Ministry. It notes that the last review was in 1992, and implies routine repetition. The Norwegian terms of reference refer back to major changes made in 1993, and appropriateness and effectiveness of the reformed organisation; high profile debates took place within Norway at the time about the continuing problems deriving from the 1993 reform. The Austrian review also traces a path back to the founding of the agency in 1967. Only two (UK and Norway) ask about the councils' attention to knowledge dissemination and utilisation.

Several issues which might seem *a priori* to be important at this time do not get much if any attention, for example improved governance, new public management, the links between science and innovation, globalisation, and the EU. No reference is made to debates on engagement with actors from outside the academy.

## MAIN REVIEW CONCLUSIONS

All the reviews recommended continuation of the councils and their work, although some major changes were also proposed. The Norwegian report recommended radical restructuring, but only in a controversial last few pages, which seem to be only thinly connected to the main body of the report. Although the councils management of the basic processes is generally commended, all four reports contain criticisms and recommendations for change, within which some patterns emerge:

- Stronger strategic research policy roles (Austria, Finland, UK);
- Improved financial support (Austria, Norway);
- Improved governance (Austria, Finland, UK);
- Improved council handling of interdisciplinary, and cross-council research (all);

- Creation of new spaces for the councils to meet other major research policy actors (Finland, UK);
- Improved communication with a range of stakeholders (Austria, UK);
- Changes needed in the 'framework conditions' in which the councils work, for example improved ministry R&D systems, new structures for co-operation, reformed ministry representation of council interests (Finland, Norway, UK);
- Clearer lines for contributions to national innovation capacity (Austria, Norway);
- Improved and enhanced arrangements for directed programmes (Austria, Finland, Norway);
- Business process improvements (Austria, Finland, UK);
- Improved staffing (Austria, UK).

It is notable that only two very modest recommendations are made to improve international outreach. In the Finnish report, the recommendation is couched in terms of improving national internal capacity. The Austrian document is the only one to mention the ERA in a recommendation, but nothing specific is said beyond the need for more staff for international work.

### **Looking for illumination: governance, principals and agents**

As these data are drawn by comparison of published material from four countries, this evidence must be treated with circumspection. Fritz Scharpf's (1997) advice will be followed on working with a small number of cases in policy research, to begin with possible explanations, and to check for disconfirmation of expectations, to see which possible accounts and explanations survive.

It is in that spirit that we turn now to the governance framework for understanding and explanation. Science is important to the modern state. Many of its institutions are powerful actors (Webster, 1991). From a governance perspective, we could expect the origins and terms of reference of the reviews of those institutions to provide evidence of erosion of the state's traditional power, of 'hollowing out', of overload, of shifts of power from the central state, and moves to steering rather than hierarchical control. It would also lead us to expect explicit references to public-private sector interfaces, to the marketisation of science and the introduction of private sector practices. Lastly, we could expect to detect a sense of significant and perhaps drastic change under these multiple pressures.

The information we have offers only rather limited support for these propositions. Both the terms of reference and recommendations emphasise the place of research councils in networks of other funders, stakeholders and policy actors, giving some support to ideas about policy networks (Rhodes *et al.*, 1996). Furthermore, attention is given in several places to improving the 'framework conditions', shorthand for councils' relations with sponsoring ministries. However both terms of reference and recommendations call for more, not less, networking by councils, and pay no attention to the steering of those processes.

Where more radical change is proposed, for example in the call for new arrangements for the support of innovation in Norway, new structures for interdisciplinary working in the UK, and the breaking of the academic monopoly of influence in Austria, these are matched by at least as many arguments for continuity in other key areas. Moreover, the calls for change seem to owe less to the forces

identified in the governance literature than to theories of innovation and knowledge production.

Although the Finnish terms of reference do refer, strikingly, to the negotiated nature of that review, the material otherwise gives little support to the idea of a hollowed, powerless state, forced to rely on negotiation rather than hierarchical control. Indeed, all the reports (and the subsequent responses, as far as they are known<sup>3</sup>) view the councils as closely integrated elements of a functioning system. Similarly, no evidence is provided of state concern about research council operations in a global context. Nor is any significant attention given to marketisation and the private sector.

The overall picture emerging from the origins, conclusions and outcomes of these reviews is not one of a sense of crisis. Nor is there evidence of 'filling in' by creating new structures and networks to restore state co-ordination and power in circumstances where it has been lost (Taylor, 2000). Rather each national case seems to reveal a relatively confident state, ready where thought necessary to strengthen its hold over its science funding agencies, exerting its power, looking for effective control and prepared to act to ensure it. The evidence may not be sufficient to be able to claim disconfirmation of the applicability of the governance thesis to the research policy arena, but we can say that little evidence is to be found of its applicability in these particular cases.

A case can then be argued for looking elsewhere for possible illumination. Reference has already been made to the fruitful use of the principal-agent framework to enquiry into research councils, and this provides an *a priori* case for testing its ability to provide new insights into this period of council turbulence. Principal-agent analysis is built around the specific social relationship of delegation, in which two actors are involved in an exchange of resources. The principal has resources but 'not those of the appropriate kind to realize (her/his) interests (for example has money but not the appropriate skills)' (Coleman, 1990, p. 146). The agent is needed to take forward the principal's interests in exchange for resources. Principal-agent theory can be embedded within a rational choice approach, but here it is used more eclectically, and in terms of the interactive games that both principals and agents play (Van der Meulen, 1998). Principal-agent relations are seen as being affected by the opportunism of the actors, working together but also pursuing their own interests. Agents typically have an information advantage ('asymmetry of information'), and can be expected to 'shirk' their tasks for a variety of reasons. The principal may also not have selected the right or the best agent (the 'adverse selection' problem). The principal-agent literature focuses on delegation arrangements, the strategies adopted by both parties, and their consequences. In this particular case, principal-agency theory suggests that review and reform of research council arrangements would be triggered if the ministries became concerned that the councils were not delivering on the objectives for which resources had been delegated to them: if they were perceived to be 'shirking', or to have adopted the objectives of other institutions (Braun and Guston, 2003, pp. 303–4).

Taking account of the asymmetry of information problem, we could expect to find evidence of these reviews as information gathering exercises. Confronted also with the 'adverse selection' problem, ministry principals could be expected to ask whether they had made the right choice of agent in the semi-autonomous research councils, and to think about alternatives. Another important part of the principal-agent approach is the recognition that agents are purposeful actors with capacities to exert some reverse influence on their principals. Trust and accountability are central to principal-agency

theory, while these are acknowledged gaps in the governance framework (Rhodes, 2000), and it also has a proven place in comparative research (Van der Meulen, 1998).

We can see some significant correspondence between these propositions and the evidence of the reviews. All the terms of reference stress the need to assess the objectives and strategies of the councils, and their appropriateness for their missions. They also emphasise the importance of reviewing council instruments: a check on appropriateness. All collect information about the work of the councils, which will improve ministry information bases and reduce the asymmetry problem. All ask for consideration of the place of the councils in the state system and, in all but the Finnish case, the delegation arrangements from the ministry or ministries is explicitly addressed both in the terms of reference and the recommendations. In two reviews (Austria, UK), the question of whether the right agents have been selected is formally addressed.

The review evidence may provide less disconfirmation of the principal-agent framework but, as yet, no explanation is offered by either set of propositions for the dozen national research councils caught in this flurry of review and reform. No equivalent seems to exist for multi-country reviews of other types of semi-autonomous state institutions. So why is this happening for research councils? And why in this particular period?

In principal-agent terms, the answer would lie in the shared anxiety about research council delegation among responsible ministries. This could have flowed from growing interest in the role of S&T as drivers of economic and social improvement, most clearly shown in the commitments made in the EU to R&D expenditure. From this would come concern to be sure that the engines of state funding of R&D were in good shape. The uncertainties of the changing European science policy landscape would probably add to this sense of concern. In the newly positive climate for exchange of ideas at European level, senior actors in research ministries were exchanging ideas, thereby facilitating transfer of ideas between national ministries. In this scenario, the principals would have become keenly aware of the importance of the resources delegated to their research council agents, and anxious about their capacity to deliver. They were also aware of the practice of review and reform in other countries, and took the opportunity to follow suit. This led to the commotion of reviews – turbulent times – even if the outcomes seem likely to be less dramatic than envisaged.

Explanation for those outcomes with their mix of conservative tweaking and more stretching reforms may perhaps be found in the widely varied circumstances of the councils in their national contexts, and in political interplay of the different significant actors. Here ‘actor centred institutionalism’ (Scharpf, 1997) could provide some new insights, with its emphasis on the shaping of capabilities and preferences by institutional norms.

### **Looking forward to the European Research Council**

Moving between levels, this small wave of national science funding reform may offer lessons for the supra-national funding of research. In particular, late in 2004, it may provide some messages for the European Research Council. Any pan-European research agency will need to address the same tensions and anxieties as have emerged from this brief study of national agencies. It too will have to deal with sponsors and principals, which are likely to be both European and national. All will

need to be clear about what is being delegated, from whom, and with what expectations. Delegation from national to supra-national institutions is in any case frequently fraught with difficulty, as we have seen in many other arenas. There seems already to have been a temptation to fudge some of these important issues and relationships in the rapid progress towards the new agency, which may end up with unrealistic expectations from a diverse group of principals. If so, a high risk exists of it facing an even more turbulent review than those just experienced by national European counterparts.

### **A methodological coda**

This paper has used published material to apply some tests to recent literature on governance and public sector institutions. The analysis of the material has raised some doubts about the applicability of the governance framework to this policy arena. Principal-agent analysis may have something more to offer, but it too falls short of complete explanations, which may well be due to the limitations of using this kind of evidence, however rich, on its own. It is reasonable to expect that interviews with actors involved directly in the review processes would provide valuable additional insights into both intentions and outcomes, though the written material would continue to be an important source of preliminary conclusions. They would provide the basis for interaction with those directly involved in policy and practice. From there, several routes could open up, for example either returning through the same cycle or continuing with the joint production of knowledge in partnership with informed practitioners. In any event, ideas would be exchanged with policy users to improve the quality of the study and to encourage the take up of ideas. This small study could be taken forward in just such a way.

### **Notes**

1. It would have been useful to compare all the downstream outcomes, but the response to the Finnish report is not yet known. Some change have been made to inter-council links in the UK and in Norway, where the three-sector model in the last chapter of the report was implemented by the minister.
2. Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway (a second time), Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, UK.
3. The responses in Norway and the UK are by now clear. The Norwegian council has been reorganised for the second time in 11 years. In the UK, a new Research Councils UK (RCUK) superstructure has been set up. Both the Austrian government and the two councils there seem to have accepted the main report findings. The Academy of Finland will not publish its response but is reported to have set up working groups to discuss implementation of the main recommendations.

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### 3. Governance, Sport and the City: Using Case Studies to Inform Policy

*Rachel Herring*

*Sport is increasingly seen as a central strategy for large cities to promote their image and global position, undertake regeneration and tackle problems of social exclusion. Mega and major sporting events are seen as a key means of city marketing and large-scale regeneration. Competition to host mega and major sporting events is fierce. London, as a global city, is well placed to bid for and host such events, but has staged few and has experienced problems realising major sporting and cultural projects. A qualitative case study approach was adopted to explore the reasons why, using the case of the abandoned Lee Valley National Athletics Centre project and the loss of the World Athletics Championships awarded to London for 2005. Comparisons are made with other cities within the UK and Europe, using secondary sources. A number of single city case studies are available, many focusing on specific events, such as the Olympics, whereas others examine urban sports policy, and some involve comparative studies. This paper considers both the value and limitations of case studies in furthering understanding and informing policy. It shows that methodological and definitional differences complicate and limit the analytical value of comparing single case studies, and comparative case studies are costly and complex to conduct. The paper concludes by looking at the way in which policy actors use the evidence produced by such studies and discusses how the nature of sport impacts on the way in which it is treated in the policy arena.*

Sport is increasingly seen as a central strategy for large cities to promote their image, undertake regeneration and tackle problems of social exclusion. Mega sporting events, in particular, are seen as a key means of city marketing and large-scale regeneration, although the process and outcomes have proved to be deeply controversial. Competition between cities to host mega and major sporting events is fierce. The candidate list for the 2012 Olympics – Paris, London, New York, Moscow and Madrid – is indicative of their importance to global cities. London is well placed to bid for and secure such events, but it has, in fact, staged few and experienced difficulties realising major sporting and cultural projects, as demonstrated by the Millennium Dome and Wembley National Stadium (WNS). This raises questions about the reasons why London has experienced problems in realising such projects. One possible explanation is rooted in the style of network governance that has evolved in London and other European cities. This study sets out to explore this proposition using a qualitative case study approach. Although the focus was primarily on London, and specifically on the abandoned Lee Valley National Athletics Centre (LVNAC), comparison with other cities and nations formed an integral part of the study.

This paper sets aside the detail of the LVNAC study to focus on methodology, in particular the use of case studies to examine mega sporting events. Firstly, the case study approach is outlined, and the rationale for its use in the study is presented. A brief discussion follows of the value of adopting a comparative approach. Secondly, some examples are provided of the way case studies have been used to explore mega sports events. Thirdly, consideration is given to the value and limitations of case

studies of mega sports projects and also of comparisons of individual case studies. Finally, attention turns to the way in which policy actors use the evidence produced by these studies and discussion about the nature of sport and its impact on how sport is treated in the policy arena.

### **Case study research**

A qualitative approach was adopted for the LVNAC study since it is well suited to questions that require exploration, where a detailed, close-up view is needed and where phenomena are to be studied in their natural setting (Creswell, 1998). This approach enabled processes to be explored and linkages between different aspects of governance, levels of governance, sport and governance, and the various interested parties to be teased out. For the LVNAC study, a qualitative case study design was adopted. Like many terms, 'case study' has been used in a variety of ways, although it is generally applied to identify a specific form of inquiry, by contrast with the other two main approaches found in social research: the experiment and the social survey (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). Case study methodology involves the investigation of a small number of naturally occurring social situations or 'cases' and the collection and analysis of a large amount of detailed information about each case (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and data collection occurs over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Case studies are often described as an exploration of a 'bounded system' (for example Creswell, 1998). A case study is a particularly useful strategy 'when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context' (Yin, 1994, p. 1). A good case study gives the reader a sense of 'being there' (Stake, 1995, p. 63), by setting out the context of the case clearly. This involves situating the case within its setting, which may be physical, social, historical and/or economic (Creswell, 1998). When analysing case studies, the aim is to produce a 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973), that is one which provides the information necessary for the reader to understand the findings and also allow informed comparisons to be made about different cases (Lincoln and Guba, 1979).

Different reasons are found for focusing on a particular case. It may require study because of its uniqueness, described as an intrinsic case study, or, as in the present study, the case is used instrumentally to illustrate the issues, described as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). In selecting cases, Robert Stake (1995) argues that the first criterion should be to maximise what we can learn and to choose cases that are likely to lead to understandings, assertions and perhaps to modifying generalisations. Practical considerations can also be involved in relation to resources (time, money, researchers), access and how receptive the potential respondents are (Stake, 1995). The case can be single or multiple (or collective). The decision as to whether to do single or multiple cases depends partly on the issue of interest, and each type has its advantages and disadvantages. One key consideration is depth over breadth. Creswell (1998) suggests that study of more than one case dilutes the analysis and, consequently, lacks depth. However, the evidence from multiple cases is often regarded as more convincing and, thus, the overall study might be thought to be more robust (Herriott and Firestone, 1983). Again, practical considerations arise:

multiple cases studies require extensive resources and time, and may be impractical for a single student or a sole researcher (Yin, 1994, p. 45).

John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson (1998), whose work on the sociology of sport includes an in-depth study of the *Fédération Internationale de Football Associations* (FIFA), argue strongly for a comparative approach, suggesting it allows researchers 'to learn more about the "other" both horizontally across space and vertically through history' (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1999, p. 387). Furthermore, in developing a body of work, one aim should be to produce studies that, when taken together, constitute a broader comparative project. For example, a single case study informed by comparative thinking, or a collection of cases that can stand alone or together, can have a cumulative impact. Sugden and Tomlinson (1999) highlight the importance of single cases studies being informed by a broader understanding of how a particular society is located in relation to others, for example in relation to trends towards globalisation. They suggest that 'well developed case studies providing detailed and deeply situated comparative data are essential if abstract theorizations are to be avoided' (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1999, p. 388). This last point is important in relation to producing research that is relevant to policy makers.

### **Using case studies to examine mega sporting projects**

The case study approach has been used to study mega sporting events staged in cities throughout the world, both as single and multiple cases studies, although the cost and complexity of multiple studies mean that fewer instances can be found. Mega sporting events lend themselves well to case studies, as they are 'natural' cases, clearly bound in time and space and allowing a variety of complex issues to be encapsulated and analysed. For example, Matthew Burbank *et al.* (2001, p. 8) examined the impact of hosting the Olympics games on local politics in three American cities – Los Angeles, Atlanta and Salt Lake City – by what they describe as 'focused comparison'. They used a common set of theoretically grounded questions on the role of local government and the impact of mega events to guide the case studies. Despite differences between the cities in size, economic base and political history, they could still make meaningful comparisons.

Single case studies have also been used to look at the bidding for and/or staging of a specific event. The Olympics dominate this literature, which is perhaps not surprising given their scale and scope. These events are of interest to a wide range of disciplines, as reflected in the available studies, which vary in their focus and theoretical approach. For example, Tim Marshall (1996) examined the 1992 Barcelona Olympics as an urban planning strategy within the context of 'glocalisation' (Swyngedouw, 1992) and urban entrepreneurialism. Robert Baade and Victor Matheson (2004) investigated the economic impact of mega sporting events through a case study of the 1994 FIFA Football World Cup hosted by the United States. They found that, for most cities, hosting the World Cup had a negative economic impact. Taken together, these studies provide a wealth of material on differing aspects of mega sporting events.

A considerable body of work, primarily but not exclusively North American, is concerned with the development of stadiums and venues funded by city governments keen to retain lucrative sport franchises (for example Pelissero *et al.*, 1991; Keating, 1997; Bélanger, 2000; Chanayil, 2002; Lee, 2002). The use of public money to subsidise private enterprises has been justified on economic grounds. However, the

evidence is at best inconclusive (Chanayil, 2002), and many authors are sceptical about whether stadiums can deliver their economic promises (for example Baade and Dye, 1988; Crompton, 2001). Calvin Jones (2002a) draws on the American narrative in his case study of the development of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales, to host the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Jones (2002b) draws parallels between the subsidy of US stadiums and the development of stadiums in the UK with a 'national' remit, including the Millennium Stadium, City of Manchester Stadium and WNS, all of which received considerable public funds via the National Lottery, even though they are private, not public, assets.

Other studies have considered urban sports policy and the strategic use of sport by cities. Leo van den Berg *et al.* (2002) conducted case studies of five European cities – Barcelona, Manchester, Rotterdam, Helsinki and Turin – to examine the role of sports in city marketing. These cities were chosen because they were 'sport-minded' (van den Berg *et al.*, 2002, p. 1), having either hosted a mega sporting event and/or been home to a thriving football club. Van den Berg *et al.* (2002) concluded that mega sports events are powerful tools for developing the city as a brand, but require strong creative leadership. They argue that sport is an integral part of urban policy and as such should not, and cannot, be treated separately from other areas of urban policy (van den Berg *et al.*, 2002, p. 103). They have emphasised the pivotal role of actors who are external to the city, operate on an international or global scale, and whose interests, in consequence, are often in conflict with those of the city. This finding echoes that of Burbank *et al.* (2001) in their study of American Olympic cities. Both Sheffield and Manchester in the UK have been studied (for example Foley, 1991; Cochrane *et al.*, 1996; Henry and Paramio-Salcines, 1999), as they have pursued mega event strategies, using sport as a vehicle for regeneration and the re-imagining of the city.

#### USING CASE STUDIES WITHIN A CASE STUDY

The LVNAC study drew on other case studies in a number of ways and at various 'levels'. Firstly, to provide background, identify key issues and assist in the formulation of the research questions. Secondly, by drawing on a number of sources – technical reports from organisers, government reports, press articles, academic papers – more detailed comparative 'cases' were constructed. For example, developments in sport policy in France were examined and compared to Britain. Then, studies of the preparations for and staging of the 1998 FIFA Football World Cup were considered, including the building of the national stadium – the Stade de France – in Paris. Manchester's pursuit of a mega event as a catalyst for regeneration, the troubled preparations and eventual successful hosting of the Manchester Commonwealth Games (MCG) in 2002, provided another point of comparison. In these examples, existing case studies were used as stand-alone pieces, but by pulling together information from a variety of sources, a 'case' was constructed. While not so detailed as the primary case study, it enabled meaningful comparisons to be made both horizontally and vertically. Without any prompting, respondents in the LVNAC study frequently made comparisons with France. First, they argued that, in contrast to the UK, sport was highly valued in France within political and policy circles, and that central government was steadfast in its support of mega and major sporting events. Secondly, they claimed that, in Paris, the governance structures, with a strong mayor, facilitated the construction of the Stade de France, whereas, despite the then newly arrived mayor, London lacked a strong overarching authority, which created problems

for all major projects that require infrastructural improvements. The comparisons made between the LVNAC project and France/Paris and Manchester proved to be very fruitful, as they brought the governance issues into sharp relief and also opened up the whole question of the value and place of sport within different policy systems.

#### THE VALUE AND LIMITATIONS OF USING AND COMPARING CASE STUDIES

Case studies of mega sports projects with their rich, situated descriptions, highlight the importance of contextual and cultural factors in shaping the form and outcome of projects. For example, the 1992 Barcelona Olympics have been upheld as a shining example of the regenerative potential of mega sports events (for example House of Commons, 1999). Although it might be tempting to describe the Barcelona experience as a 'model' that could be imitated by other cities, an examination of the context suggests otherwise. Writers such as Marshall (1992; 1996) and Maria-Dolors Garcia-Ramon and Abel Albet (2000) emphasise the specificity of the Barcelona experience, arguing that history, geography and politics combined to create a unique historical moment, which will not be repeated. Marshall argues that: 'Even Barcelona will not be able to copy its own recent past. No-one else should even dream of copying Barcelona' (Marshall, 1992, p. 80). This is an important cautionary note, particularly for policy actors keen to replicate the 'successes' of other cities and nations.

Great claims have been made about the benefits – economic, social, sporting – of staging mega and major sporting events, but what is evident from case studies is that they are neither guaranteed, nor equally distributed (for example French and Disher, 1997; Whitelegg, 2000). Furthermore, there is evidence that disadvantaged groups have been further disadvantaged, for example Olympic developments for the 1996 Games in Atlanta led to the displacement of homeless people (Whitelegg, 2000). Case studies are able not only to highlight but also to map out the social inequities that have arisen as a result of pursuing a mega-event strategy, and in doing assist in the formulation of strategies to prevent similar scenarios occurring elsewhere.

Bidding for and staging mega and major events is a highly complex process involving a myriad of players with a variety of interests and agendas, from local government through to international sporting bodies such as FIFA. Case studies can promote understanding by disentangling networks, identifying key actors, exploring linkages, processes and questions of power. Comparing case studies can help identify different approaches to mega sporting projects. By linking these approaches with broader factors, such as funding arrangements, governance structures and processes, they can further our understanding of the essential elements required to deliver a mega sporting event. For example, the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics were both deemed 'successful', but they had fundamentally different aims and objectives, and adopted different approaches. Los Angeles set out to deliver a commercially successful event at no cost to the city tax payers, and Barcelona was aiming to regenerate the city and assert its Catalan identity. However, it is clear that both cases were characterised by clarity of purpose, clear lines of accountability and responsibility, organisational structures that were 'fit' for the purpose and political support, albeit in very different forms.

Although making comparisons with single cases studies and also with comparative studies proves to be valuable, it does have its limitations. Firstly, as already noted, these studies are drawn from a variety of disciplines, which means that the questions posed and the focus of the research differ. In some ways, this breadth was very useful,

for example, it meant it was possible to construct a comprehensive 'case' for Manchester and France/Paris. However, it has to be remembered that like is not being compared with like. Secondly, these studies employ different definitions, for example of success, and economic impact studies are infamous for the array of different multipliers and measures they use (Crompton, 2001; Jones, 2002a; Baade and Matheson, 2004). These differences complicate comparison rather than render it impossible, and measures need to be taken to improve comparability. For example, UK Sport (2004) examined the economic impact of 16 major sports events held in the UK since 1997 using the same methodology to enable direct comparisons to be made. These common data provide a resource for policy makers and can be built up over time.

### **The selective use of case study evidence and policy making by policy actors**

The bounded nature of mega sporting events means that the case study method is frequently adopted. Therefore, much of the evidence at the disposal of policy actors is drawn from case studies. Case studies provide rich contextual descriptions but, at the same time, enable the researcher to strip away the detail to reveal the basic building blocks and also the stumbling blocks. What is interesting is the selective way in which policy actors use this information. For example, strong evidence can be found to suggest that mega sports events cannot be justified on economic grounds (Baade and Matheson, 2004). Nonetheless, the primary rationale for cities pursuing these events remains economic, and competition to host them is fierce. It would seem that the evidence is effectively being ignored, or at least being used selectively, with successes such as the Barcelona Olympics being frequently cited. In the UK, the joint Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Strategy Unit's (2002, p. 43) review of sport policy concluded that: 'The benefits of hosting mega sporting events, whether economic, social or cultural are difficult to measure and the available evidence is limited'. Furthermore, they advised central government: 'To adopt a different approach to hosting mega sporting events. They should be seen as an occasional celebration of success rather than a means to achieving other government objectives' (Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Strategy Unit, 2002, p. 15). This report was published during the period in which a decision was being taken about a potential London Olympic bid, and speculation was rife as to what the outcome of this process would be. Most commentators – voicing their opinions primarily in the media – suggested that the government would not support a bid. In fact, central government lent its support to the London Olympic bid on the basis that it would drive through the regeneration of East London, provide employment and boost tourism throughout the UK. In other words, they went counter to advice from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Strategy Unit. What is apparent is that different policy actors interpret and use the evidence in a variety of ways, and at times, draw selectively on it to support their position.

However, the argument can also be found that the 'value' of such events lies elsewhere – the 'feel-good' factor they generate, the sense of civic and/or national pride and identity, health improvements, the promotion of social inclusion, and also of sport itself – are more intangible factors. These intangibles are harder to 'prove' or 'disprove'. Whereas for some policy actors they are important factors, for others they carry little weight, and case studies demonstrate that the importance attached to such

factors varies from country to country. For example, France is willing to bear the costs of '*grand travaux*' that promote the nation. In addition, case studies highlight the fact that the potential benefits do not automatically 'trickle down', and this has major policy implications. In order to harness the benefits associated with mega and major sporting events and also to counter the tendency for social inequities to arise, pro-active steps have to be taken, and these have to be integral to the bid process. Moreover, it is also clear that their impact can, on the one hand, be widespread and sustained, but, on the other, partial and ephemeral. If the opportunities presented by these events are to be maximised, then a co-ordinated response is required, that cuts across government departments and includes other sectors (private, voluntary). Interestingly, in relation to the current London 2012 Olympic bid, it does appear that lessons have been learnt from past events, and attention is being paid to just such questions. For example, think tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and Demos conducted research on creating a sustainable socio-economic legacy and made specific policy recommendations (Vigor *et al.*, 2004). The results highlight the importance of embedding the Olympics within a broader urban strategy that begins before 2012 and continues well after, and incorporates Olympic related developments into existing mainstream programmes and policy agendas. Moreover, Anthony Vigor *et al.* (2004) argue that the UK needs to start planning now on the basis that London has won the bid even though the decision will not be made until July 2005.

Although evidence is sometimes used selectively, clear examples can be found of its use. The legacy problems experienced by Sydney following the 2000 Olympics and also those associated with the Millennium Dome were reflected in the priority given by Manchester to the legacy use of the stadium post-MCG (it has become home to Manchester City Football Club). They are also evident in the London Olympic bid. Indeed, the mega sporting event process involves constant comparison with previous host cities and rival bid cities, in an attempt to secure events and deliver them successfully.

Having conducted a case study of a mega sporting projects and having examined other case studies from a variety of countries, it seems there is something 'particular' about sport that makes it different from other areas of policy, and perhaps more open to interpretation. Firstly, sport is infused with emotion, and this does not sit easily with notions of 'rational' policy making. This may partly explain why policy actors often put forward 'rational' economic arguments to justify expenditure on sports projects. Secondly, the 'value' and legitimacy of sport as an area of policy are contested, and vary from place to place and over time. The tendency in some quarters is not to regard sport as a 'serious' subject of study or policy, partly because people think they 'know' about sport and have nothing to learn, or because they think sport does not 'matter'. For some policy actors sport has an intrinsic value of its own, but most governments – at national, regional and city level – value sport for what it can do, in terms of regeneration, health and tourism, although as noted earlier these arguments are not universally accepted.

Thirdly, it is evident from case studies of sports events and also from analysis of sports policy that individuals play a key role in driving forward projects, putting sport on the political and policy agenda or, conversely, keeping it off (Cochrane *et al.* 1996; Houlihan and White, 2002). For example, in the UK, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was not interested in sport and, during her time in office (1979–90), it was pushed to the margins of policy (Houlihan and White, 2002). Her successor John Major was a

sport enthusiast and, in 1995, *Sport: Raising the Game* (DNH, 1995) was published, which was the first national government policy for sport in 20 years (Houlihan and White, 2002, p. 66). Several respondents in the LVNAC study argued that, in sport, more than other areas of policy, ministers tended to follow their own personal agendas, which means that little continuity can be found between ministers, even those from the same political party. This all leads to a lack of a strategic approach that has been evident in the difficulties encountered by major sporting projects in the UK.

Pierre Bourdieu (1999, p. 15) argues that: 'Talking about sport scientifically is difficult because in one sense it is too easy: everyone has their own ideas on the subject, and feels able to say something intelligent about it'. This view has an impact on both the policy and research process: at times, it seems difficult to get policy makers to attend to evidence, especially if it challenges strongly held notions about sport.

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## 4. Measurement and Comparability in Cross-National Health Surveys Used to Inform Policy Decisions

Janet A. Harkness

*Health data collected in surveys are an important source of information for policy makers in different fields, and at national and international levels. A number of factors often make it difficult to compare the information available at national level across countries. These include differences in data sources, in populations, in the kind, detail and date of information available, in forms of data collection, in what respondents, if this is the basis of data collection, are asked and in what they understand and answer. Cross-national health surveys often try to avoid issues of comparability by setting out to keep as much the same as possible, for example by asking comparable populations the same questions in the same mode(s) of data collection. However, the great majority of health instruments in use around the world are Western, even Anglo-American, in origin and are based on culturally anchored conceptions of health, illness, and treatment. They reflect the frame(s) of reference of the researchers responsible for the substantive content of the questionnaires and the question formulations and formats. As a result, instruments often fail to accommodate respondents' frames of reference, threatening the accuracy and appropriateness of assessment. Against the background of an 'ask the same question' and 'keep things the same' model, the paper outlines core issues of questionnaire design and adaptation for health surveys across different cultures and languages. It demonstrates how 'culture' complicates data collection, diagnosis and policy decisions.*

Survey data of various kinds are used to collect key information on a range of topics of relevance for health research and policy decision making. General population surveys with probability samples provide epidemiological data covering reported health status, access to care, health-related behaviours and socio-economic status. Bio-physical measurements from the same populations make it possible to calibrate reports with tested results, providing not only more accurate information on the prevalence of conditions such as diabetes, but also on respondent reporting behaviours. Caleb Finch *et al.* (2001) provide a good outline of the potential and potential risks involved in collecting bio-physical data in general population surveys. Data from these measurements can also lead to changes in measurement techniques. For a research project on smokers, for example, the University of Nebraska is using significant transitional life events as a cognitive aid to help respondents remember their smoking careers better.

In recent years, the trend towards evidence-based research has gained momentum in many disciplines and programmes, for example the British Mental Health Research Network established in 2004. Survey data are often an important source of such 'evidence'. Survey data collected at national levels need to be valid and reliable for the populations from which they were gathered. At cross-national levels, data also need to be able to be compared with data collected in other locations, from different populations and under different circumstances. Space restrictions mean that the present paper can look only at some of the many cultural obstacles that arise in comparing health data across cultures and languages.

The great majority of health instruments in use around the world are Western in origin and are based on Western conceptions of health, illness, and treatment. They reflect the Western frame(s) of reference of those involved in deciding the substantive content of the instruments (questionnaires), and question formulations and formats. Not surprisingly, therefore, when respondents do not share this frame of reference, the accuracy and appropriateness of assessment are threatened. Assessments of health needs in the United States, for example, have been found to be uncertain because of (culturally) misguided sampling designs, uncertainty about how to define groups (race, ethnicity, language, socio-economic standing, location all being problematic), and a variety of factors affecting respondent disclosure and clinician perceptions. Roy Car-Hill and Paul Chalmers-Dixon (2002) report on difficulties encountered in the British context in evaluating measures when the criteria for inclusion of measures and their suitability for the given purpose are not always clear. Their remarks apply equally to other contexts.

### **How culture complicates health assessment**

Rather than presenting a review of how culture complicates survey research *per se*, this section focuses on eight key aspects for health research.

#### LANGUAGE

Lee Sechrest *et al.* (1972) recognised early that adjustments in an instrument might need to be made to accommodate cultural and language differences within groups using the same language. Richard Warnecke *et al.* (1997) identified numerous difficulties encountered in administering instruments in English to Black Americans not fully explained by low socio-economic status (SES). Francis Guillemin *et al.* (1993) suggest that assessment of the degree of acculturation of immigrants and their proficiency in a given language should decide which instrument to administer. International research, by contrast, seems to assume that, if a country is basically monolingual, language adjustments will not be needed.

#### DISCLOSURE AND TRUST

Culturally anchored disclosure norms and patterns of trust will affect respondent interactions with interviewers and clinicians. Western medical care values the notion of keeping patients informed to allow them choice. Asian populations, in contrast, may feel it is better not to tell patients very bad news since this might reduce their chances of recovery. Cultures view decision making and decision makers differently. As a result, survey questions on preferred treatments, for example, may not offer appropriate options for certain groups or include options respondents feel to be so obvious as not to need asking.

#### SURVEY FAMILIARITY

It cannot be assumed that every community will be familiar with the kind of information exchange involved in surveys. Unfamiliarity makes it more likely that respondents will have difficulty using answer scales, following instructions or simply providing answers (Sechrest *et al.*, 1973; Canales *et al.*, 1995; Warnecke *et al.*, 1997). Many different groups across and within countries may not be familiar with the technical terminology (references to diseases, medication, or symptoms) used in health instruments that is

learnt with access to health care and education. Lack of knowledge and non-Western explanations for disorders lead to under-reporting. Respondents may also under-report illnesses that do not interfere with daily life or that are very common among the community, for example malaria in developing countries.

#### ACCULTURATION

Immigrants 'acculturate' to the degree that they adopt the world views and living patterns of a new culture. Acculturation can be vitally important in understanding symptom expressions, rates of illness, and use of services by immigrants and refugees (Guillemin *et al.*, 1993; Surgeon General' Supplement, 2001).

#### COMPLAINTS AND SYMPTOMS

Accurate data on prevalence depend on the extent to which instruments capture symptoms and the degree to which analysis or diagnosis interprets them correctly. In a standardised diagnostic interview, the presence or absence of clinically significant symptoms is investigated according to diagnostic criteria, such as DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) or ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 1992). However, symptoms differ in prevalence across time and culture, in particular for psychological disorders. Lena Andary *et al.* (2003), and Peter Guarnaccia and Lloyd Rogler (1999) discuss misdiagnoses resulting from attempts to interpret culture-bound syndromes (see below) in terms of disorders recognised in Western allopathic nosologies. Darrel Regier *et al.* (1998) argue that self-reported symptoms are insufficient for case identification and that information on severity, duration, functional impairment and comorbidity are needed.

#### SOMATISATION

Somatisation is an idiom of distress in which those afflicted report symptoms of physical illness not well explained in bio-medical terms. It has been found to be a characteristic feature of depression among numerous populations (Cheng, 2001). Female Turkish immigrants in Germany, for example, tend to experience depression first and foremost as physical pain.

#### CULTURE-BOUND SYNDROMES (CBS)

Culture-bound syndromes are described in the DSM-IV (844, 1994) as 'recurrent locality-specific patterns of aberrant behaviour and troubling experience that may or may not be linked to a particular DSM-IV diagnostic category. Many of these patterns are indigenously considered to be illnesses or at least afflictions, and most have local names. CBS have been seen as a major impediment in endeavouring to establish an international classification of psychiatric disorders (for example Prince and Tcheng-Laroche, 1987). Andrew Cheng (2001) is one of a number of researchers who argue that cross-cultural differences in the prevalence of these disorders derive mainly from culture-specific illness behaviour and not from differences in the basic psychopathology.

#### EXPLANATORY MODELS OF ILLNESS OR DISEASE

The explanations provided for illness or disability also differ across cultures. Naturalistic explanations see illness as due to causes that can be potentially

understood and cured through a scientific method of discovery. Personalistic explanatory models relate illness or injury to supernatural forces or beings, or the intentional or unintentional acts or wishes of other people. Perceived aetiology impacts on many features relevant for health assessment, including expectations for treatment, compliance with treatment prescribed, satisfaction with care, and disclosure of complaints. Patients in a Western setting who attribute an illness or injury to black magic, the evil eye, or a lack of life balance, for example, are likely to have their explanations either discounted in the process of diagnosis and treatment or interpreted as signs of a mental disorder.

Various researchers have noted the need to include religion and spirituality in conceptions and definitions of health and, in doing so, to move beyond the cultural horizon of Judeo-Christian traditions. In the US, indigenous American Indian and Alaska Native populations provide ready examples of very different spiritual and religious traditions, as do the Maori in New Zealand.

#### BIOPHYSICAL DIFFERENCES:

Differences in drug metabolism across racial or ethnic groups are useful examples of a thin line to be negotiated between being aware of possible cultural or ethnicity related distinctions and engaging in misconstrued stereotyping of difference. Since rates of metabolism vary considerably within any one (socio-)cultural group, it is misplaced to adjust dosage on the basis of a person's skin colour or assumed ethnic identity.

#### CULTURAL BIAS OF CLINICIANS, INTERVIEWERS, AND RESPONDENTS

The Surgeon General's Supplement (2001, p. 67) reports that clinicians in the US prescribe more and higher doses of oral and injectable antipsychotic medications to African Americans than they do to whites. One explanation suggested for these findings is clinician bias. Clinicians could be predisposed to perceive African Americans as schizophrenic rather than as patients with affective disorders.

Professional and lay interviewers have been found to be sources of bias in cross-cultural measurement, either due to unprofessional administration of instruments (experienced interviewers not always being available), over-automatic stereotyped administration and diagnosis (by experienced and inexperienced staff alike), or through conscious or unconscious filtering of information presented.

#### RESPONDENT BIAS

Respondent bias is often reflected in under-reporting. Various socio-cultural factors can contribute to this, a frequently cited example being the strong stigma associated with mental disorders in some communities. Under-reporting or over-reporting can also be related to perceptions about the goals of a project, lack of trust in anything official, unfamiliarity with the general nature of surveys, and culturally anchored needs in terms of face management.

#### **How culture frames instrument design and processing**

Cultural anchoring is often an automatic part of the conceptual framework, design, language and world view behind and within an instrument. Text directionality (the direction in which a language is written and read), for example, would automatically,

and necessarily, determine certain aspects of instrument design. Cultural bias arises when the socio-cultural frame of reference appropriate for one context is imposed as the frame of reference for a different socio-cultural context. Janet Harkness (2004) discusses three forms of change or adaptation necessary for importing or exporting instruments. Language-driven change, which is part of translation, adaptation, changing, for example measurement systems or country-specific demographic questions, and tailoring changes, that is alterations needed to make a question culturally appropriate. Tailoring involves a deliberate optimising or adaptation of design, content and wording of an instrument for use with a given socio-cultural group. Examples include accommodating pronominal distinctions and gender distinctions (Canales *et al.*, 1995; Harkness, 2003; Harkness *et al.*, 2004).

Respondents, like instruments and researchers, are rooted in their individual socio-cultural context. Michael Braun (2003) demonstrates how this, rather than language, determines how respondents read and interpret questions. Questions discussed in Frank Kortmann (1987) from the World Health Organization Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ) translated into Amharic, an Ethiopian language, illustrate how frames of reference are culture bound. Some of the questions seem obviously inappropriate for the Ethiopian context. 'Is your appetite poor?', for example, may be problematic for a population more familiar with famine. Respondents, indeed, made 'sense' of the item by interpreting it as one about the availability of food. Responses to the question 'Do you cry more than usual?', on the other hand, revealed that respondents thought the question was referring to ritualised crying – socially required weeping – at funerals.

### **Questionnaire design and equivalence across cultural groups**

One of the most frequently mentioned obstacles to cross-cultural comparison is that instrument content and/or presentation do not allow for proper comparison across socio-cultural groups and countries. Even when instruments are designed with cross-cultural implementation in mind, design procedures and outcomes are not always particularly successful for multiple reasons. Cross-cultural design procedures lack the intensive methodological research characteristic of (assumed) mono-cultural survey research. Testing instruments across groups before the questionnaire is finalised is not common. Insights from cognitive research have shaped monocultural instrument development; this is rarely the case in cross-national development. In adapting and translating instruments, efforts have focused on keeping things as similar as possible. In doing so, cross-cultural research stands in contrast to mono-cultural research on the advantages of adaptation and tailoring (Harkness, 2003; Harkness *et al.*, 2003).

### **Translation**

Varied in character as health instruments may be, the basic translation problems faced are those met in translating other survey instruments. Numerous protocols, guidelines, recommendations and descriptions of differing quality are available on how to go about conducting (health) survey translations. A number of these and other matters omitted here are discussed elsewhere (Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998; Harkness 2003; Harkness *et al.*, 2004). We focus below on one general topic directly connected with equivalence – close translation – and on the vocabulary and complexity of health assessment instruments.

#### CLOSE TRANSLATION

Source questionnaire items are often replications, and survey research prefers to see these closely translated. Various researchers have pointed to related drawbacks and misconceptions (Sechrest *et al.*, 1973; Guyatt, 1993; Canales *et al.*, 1995). Close translation can, for example, result in stilted items, increased burden for respondents, the questions being understood differently from the reading intended or not being understood at all (Harkness *et al.*, 2004).

Because close translation is often expected, researchers discussing, or doing, translations may wrongly focus more on words than on item meaning. For example, Andary *et al.* (2003) suggest that 'feeling blue' is difficult to translate because the colour signifies different things in different cultures and languages. However, it is not necessary to include a colour word for 'blue' in translation, and the British-English version of this item from the SF-36 has in fact 'feeling low'. Finding an appropriate corresponding level of 'down-ness' across languages could be a real challenge. Authors also sometimes discuss the difficulty of matching English grammatical structures in translations (for example Guillemin *et al.*, 1993; McGorry, 2000). The grammatical structures of languages do not match, and it is not clear what would be gained in trying to make them do so. However, the fact that handy little features of English carry a lot of information, for example gerunds; the progressive -ing form in verbs; elliptical phrases such as 'if any', can be a problem for translation.

#### PARTICULAR PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING HEALTH INSTRUMENTS

Arguably, culture is not more central to health research instruments than it is to other survey research instruments. However, health survey translations may call for more discipline-related technical knowledge than is needed to translate opinion polls, for instance. Since health instruments often cover a wide range of topics, multiple subject fields may be involved, calling for specialised knowledge on the part of translators. It is unlikely in such contexts that one translator would have sufficient expertise to deal confidently with all the topics: from finance, care provision, retirement plans, cognitive and physical impairment tests to physical and mental health. A team approach using consistency checks would seem ideal for such instruments. Translators and fielding staff may well need to co-operate to ensure that the final version is also one that respondents will understand and identify with.

#### VOCABULARY OF HEALTH, ILLNESS, EMOTIONS, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL STATES

Many instruments elicit information about physical and psychological conditions, emotions and feelings. Cultures have different taxonomies of emotions and thus languages and cultures differ in the delineation and expression of emotions and psychological states (Sundberg *et al.*, 1991; Mesquita and Fridja, 1992; Lu *et al.*, 2001). Concepts associated with words such as 'depressed' and 'anxious', for example, find no easy match in some American Indian and Alaska Native cultures and languages, while various notions of shame that seem to occupy a prominent place in Japanese culture (Mesquita and Fridja, 1992) would be difficult to match in the British context. Even equivalent identification of bodily parts can be problematic. For example, in everyday (Southern) German, distinctions between 'stomach' and 'abdomen' and 'foot' and 'leg' do not match the distinctions understood in Northern Standard German.

#### CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND EQUIVALENCE

Two examples from the MOT Short Form 36 (SF-36) illustrate how adjustments are currently made across different versions of instruments. An SF-36 question measuring moderate activity asks if people have difficulty 'walking several blocks'. Measuring distances in terms of street blocks is a North American, presumably urban, convention, embedded in a certain common concept of town planning. In Great Britain, with a different concept of town planning, reference is made to 'streets', not 'blocks'. In the British version of the SF-36, the 'blocks' unit of measurement was replaced with a unit of measurement appropriate for Britain (McDowell and Newell, 1996). Respondents were asked whether they had difficulty 'walking 100 yards'. Subjective (cultural) factors doubtless determined for the US that walking a measure of 'several blocks' was an appropriate indicator for moderate activity. Other cultural factors presumably led British researchers to decide, firstly, that they knew what was intended in the US item and, secondly, that this would correspond to '100 yards' for the British. However, the Swedish translation of this item was rendered by '200 metres', about double the distance in the British version. Does this imply that Swedes are generally capable of walking further, and the ceiling for 100 yards would be too high? We currently lack standard procedures and guidelines for calibrating such matters. How should researchers best compare the two, or the three? A further SF-36 moderate activity item asks whether respondents have difficulty 'moving a table, pushing a vacuum cleaner, bowling, or playing golf'. However, the scenarios taken for granted in formulating these items may not be salient across cultures, or a given scenario may be structured differently. In each case, measurement and comparability are potentially affected, as can be illustrated for the moderate activity of playing golf.

Golf is not a salient pastime for the Chinese in China, and even in Germany golf courses are uncommon and a new phenomenon. Other outdoor activities would be more salient for Germans and would avoid the distracting expense issue. Golf-playing in Scotland, by contrast, is both salient and accessible to a broader section of the population. However, in picturing golf-playing in the US in terms of a 'moderate activity', a motorised vehicle for players and equipment may be part of the scene. In Scotland, playing golf is more like a hike in windy weather affording the occasional hit at a ball. Considerations of this sort are perhaps why the Swedish version of the SF-36 replaced 'playing golf' with 'picking berries'. At the same time, considerable local cultural information is needed to begin to appreciate in what way berry-picking activities might correspond to 'playing golf', depending on one's view, in a Scottish or a US setting.

#### **Outlook on improving the design of cross-cultural questionnaires**

Discussions of methodology reflect that accepted procedures for design and testing for cross-cultural instruments differ considerably from the high standards required in (presumed) mono-cultural research (Harkness *et al.*, 2004). Limited pre-testing and extensive *ex post* statistical analysis are, as others suggest, insufficient. Discarding items that prove to be biased may be a viable option in a two-country study with enough common items. Discarding one item in a 10-country study may be fatal if each country needs to discard a different item. At the end of their presentation of guidelines on adapting instruments, Guillemin *et al.* (1993) were frank about the provisional nature of the recommendations they made and the need for methodological research

on strategies and protocols for adapting instruments for cross-cultural implementation. Ten years later, suggest that

a primary requirement for cross-cultural questionnaires must be their proven suitability for all the cultural groups to be studied. However, a clearer understanding of the requirements for cross-cultural instrument design and crafting has still to be sought. (Harkness *et al.*, 2003, p. 34)

The possible disadvantages for policy-making are more obvious than the solutions. At the same time, health research is one of a few disciplines beginning to focus properly on the fact that past practice is not best practice and that more information and research are needed on cross-cultural design, adaptation, and calibration. In recognising and addressing inadequacies in instruments, health research may point the way for changes in other areas of survey research.

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## **5. Ethical Issues in Cross-National Research: the RESPECT Project in Context**

*Ron Iphofen with Sally Dench and Ursula Huws*

*The paper outlines the RESPECT project (Professional and Ethical Codes for Technology-Related Socio-Economic Research) and discusses some of the difficulties associated with setting cross-national research standards. RESPECT was a European Commission project funded through DG Information Society under Framework Programme 5, and ran for two years from 2002–04 with partners from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary and the UK. The partner teams included both legal and social science expertise. The project brief was to develop a voluntary code of practice covering research ethics, intellectual property rights, data protection and confidentiality, professional competencies and skills, and professional standards. In the absence of rigorous research governance procedures in the social sciences, and due to variations in the quality of research practice throughout Europe, the European Commission was convinced of the need to set standards in anticipation of the European Research Area and the influx of a large number of accession states. A voluntary code was seen as a means of raising ethical awareness throughout the research community and may be adopted, amended and enforced by professional associations lacking such a code of their own. Where associations already operate their own codes or guidelines, RESPECT may be seen as a vehicle for anticipating and managing international variations in practice. The methodology adopted was consultative, seeking key informants across Europe via telephone, e-mail and face-to-face interview to guide the drafting of the codes and to respond in workshops and conferences to the difficulties of meeting cross-national regulations and principles. Initially, separate codes were developed on ethics, intellectual property, data protection and professional standards. They were then combined and cross-referenced in a final overall code. The paper addresses some of the issues raised during this process and in preparing a user guide to socio-economic research, aimed at those who commission research, evaluate proposals and review the results.*

In the absence of rigorous research governance procedures in the social sciences and variations in the quality of research practice throughout Europe, the European Commission became convinced of the need for the setting of standards in anticipation of the European Research Area and the influx of a large number of accession states. The major professional associations in the social and behavioural sciences, principal funding bodies, government departments, and some independent research agencies have recently been reviewing their policies and practice on research ethics. This is partly a consequence of legislative change in human rights, intellectual property and data protection. The combination of globalisation and new information and communications technologies (ICTs) has created a situation in which technological innovation may have unforeseen consequences for diverse social groups, and policy decisions have many non-local ramifications. Concerns over access to and control of information have been heightened. Concern has also been increasing about accountability in both the public and the private sector, which has led to the

establishment of governance systems in health, social care and education and not just in research.

The development of a global information society and the knowledge-based economy has presented a challenge to researchers attempting to meet the information needs of a range of public and private stakeholders. While different national traditions have to be acknowledged, the need for international standards of excellence is recognised by the European Union. As the research field is becoming larger and more anonymous, the situation is more complicated by the impact of ICT. New ICT-based research tools have multiplied the information sources available and facilitated major changes in research methodology (Hewson and Yule, 2002). The Internet offers powerful means of global knowledge-sharing and research dissemination with an immediacy that was previously impossible. It also poses new risks. The digitisation of information facilitates plagiarism and blurs the boundaries between 'published' and non-published research. It also makes it difficult to verify the status and source of information. The ready availability of these new technologies has opened up new research opportunities for people who lack formal training in research methods. In spite of the democratic gains from ready access to information, a risk exists of falling standards if unqualified individuals are able to present the results of random Internet searches as bona fide socio-economic research.

### **The RESPECT project**

This is the context in which the RESPECT project was funded by the European Commission's Information Society Technologies (IST) Programme with partners from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary and the UK. The project ran from 2002–04 to develop voluntary professional and ethical codes of practice for the conduct of socio-economic research in the information society. The partner teams included both legal and social science expertise in research ethics, intellectual property rights, data protection and confidentiality, professional competencies and skills, and professional standards.

The project partly involved analysing existing professional and ethical codes, identifying the common ground between them, and putting this together with legal interpretations of the new data protection and intellectual property directives to produce a summary code of practice. The methodology adopted was consultative: seeking key informants across Europe via telephone, e-mail and face-to-face interview to guide the drafting of the codes and to respond in workshop and conference to the difficulties of meeting cross-national regulations and principles. The resulting synthesis was then circulated throughout the European socio-economic research community in a wider consultation exercise.

A user guide is available, designed to introduce socio-economic research to a broader community of research users: funders, evaluators and reviewers, legal professionals providing advice to researchers, employers and managers and those involved in research training, as well as researchers themselves<sup>1</sup>.

### **RESPECT Policy**

The code of practice is voluntary and the guidelines designed to be applicable across the range of research methods. For this reason, the provisions are fairly broadly drawn and cannot be exhaustive. A voluntary code was seen as a means of raising ethical

awareness throughout the research community and may be adopted, amended and enforced by professional associations lacking such a code of their own. Where associations already operate their own codes or guidelines, RESPECT may be seen as a vehicle for anticipating and managing international variations in practice (Dench *et al.*, 2004).

Dissemination opportunities in seminar, publication and conference have been, and will continue to be, sought, but the effectiveness of the project will depend upon well-targeted dissemination. Even within the EU, it would help if the project's work could be spread to, and have influence in, other Directorates-General: DG Research and DG Employment and Social Affairs are cases in point. Institutional politics can get in the way. It is by raising the difficulties of addressing ethical dilemmas and maintaining research standards, and by showing how these are linked to funding, management, politics and culture, that policy makers can be better informed about how particular results are achieved and what the research findings actually represent. The success of a voluntary code depends very much on practitioners, funders and policy makers knowing about it and advocating its use. However, many methodological issues and dilemmas have to be addressed in implementing sets of professional standards in this field.

### **Inter- and multidisciplinary**

In a globalised and ICT-driven world, social researchers are expected to explain the interactions of a large number of different variables upon each other, each of which is in a rapid process of transformation. In making sense of these interconnections, the boundaries between different research disciplines are dissolved. While the need still exists for specialist understanding and analysis, these specialists must work together in multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary teams. Not only do they have to learn to work with others with different types of academic training, and adapt their theories and methods to fit, they also have to collaborate with researchers from different national backgrounds with their own distinctive scholarly traditions. In the past, most researchers were based in small national communities whose members were known to each other through professional associations or simply by reputation. Standards were often set informally, but were nevertheless quite easily enforced; getting a bad reputation among your peers was a serious handicap in a research career. This made it relatively easy to find an expert to carry out any particular piece of research and evaluate the results.

With the rise of cross-disciplinary, international research teams, this is much more difficult. The numbers of people involved, the disparity between their backgrounds and the enlarged geographical scope mean that, increasingly, both funders and researchers themselves are 'working with strangers'. No one person can hope to have a comprehensive knowledge of all the related fields involved, so reliance is increasingly on independent reviewers or on the use of secondary information, such as publications or citation ratings, for evaluating research.

### **Governance and professional accountability**

Attempts are being made in the major funding organisations in the UK to formalise ethical review. The ESRC in the UK are likely to be setting up their own governance procedure for the projects they fund. They are attempting to establish something that

will operate across the social science professions, but a good deal of professional tribalism still exists that would have to be challenged to produce a UK-wide system that researchers in all disciplines would recognise as applying to them. Similar debates have been going on for some time about ethical review in social care and social policy research, with recommendations that it should be subsumed within local and regional committees that operate for the NHS. But the UK Department of Health governance system cannot be imported wholesale into other ethical review contexts, nor can it be simply used to cover socio-economic research as well as health. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the 'model' is transferable and has been through initial trial periods in which some lessons have been learned.

In any case, given the need to prioritise research goals in different ways at different times in the course of a research project, it may be that only researchers in the field know the detail about what is going on and where the research is taking them. They will be the first to notice if harm is being done, or if a potential for harm to be done appears as the research progresses. Moral dilemmas and legal concerns may arise at any point during the research process, and such decisions cannot always be passed on to a supervisor or manager. This places a great deal of responsibility upon the field researcher. Divided loyalties obligate the researcher to balance their responsibilities to funder, employer, profession and subject/respondent. Governance and lines of accountability, therefore, may have to run through both professional associations and research organisations (Dench and Iphofen, 2003). It helps if they are both abiding by the same sets of principles. For cross-national research the problem may be eased by the existence of internationalised professional associations.

### **Ethical decision making**

No simple 'decision tree' exists that one can follow for help in making ethical research decisions, because moral views are not 'factual'. They are judgements that change over time and, more importantly, in cross-national research, they can differ greatly between cultures and communities (Thompson, 2000). Some things deemed acceptable behaviour in one society may not be acceptable elsewhere. This means that no single solution exists to resolve ethical problems. No set of guidelines could be devised to produce the best of all possible outcomes for all stakeholders. The potential for harm must always be considered and balanced against the potential for benefit, and that may vary between communities (La Follette, 2002). The researcher's problem is to estimate whether the correct balance of harm and benefit is being achieved.

In fact, that judgement of the balance of harm and benefit frequently has to be taken in a dynamic situation (Iphofen, 2004a). Social life is not a static phenomenon, but the rate of change varies between societies. What may have seemed straightforward and morally uncomplicated at the outset may turn out to be fraught with difficulty once a project is underway. Unanticipated changes may have taken place in the research site, necessitating ongoing ethical and legal considerations. The availability of detailed formal ethical guidelines and professional standards can aid decision making. However, the apparently systematic process of institutional ethical review that precedes some research fields (health being an obvious case in point) can be beguiling, implying that no ongoing ethical review is required.

Inevitably then, this produces a pragmatic ethical pluralism, with which the more 'purist' moral philosopher would not be content. Conducting ethical socio-economic

research requires a balancing between deontological and teleological (or consequentialist) principles. Deontologists emphasise principles of rightness and wrongness of an action independent of consequences, such as natural rights and personal dignity, while consequentialists take the goodness or badness of the consequences of an action as fundamental in determining whether it is morally right or wrong. Thus, for example, an action is considered to be morally right if it produces at least as much good as any alternative.

What one has to do as an ethical researcher is to attempt to apply these general principles to the specifics of social research, while recognising that some are inevitably contradictory, and cost/benefit judgements frequently have to be made. This might entail a distinction between the 'practice' of social research and the 'outcomes' of social research. All of this will have consequences for how the profession of social research is perceived and conducted.

### **Developing a European code**

RESPECT was funded to aim at technology-related socio-economic research. Given that the main ethical, professional and legal principles are relevant to all types of socio-economic research, the project has addressed a much wider range of literature, existing codes and guidelines as well as other sources of information. It is not aiming to create new requirements or restrictions, but rather to spread existing good practice and enable the development of common standards that are transparent and universally agreed within the European Research Area. This is a mammoth task, and the RESPECT team can only start the process through establishing guidelines and publicising them.

EU expansion will mean that researchers from a greater number of countries will be working together on large EU-funded projects. Furthermore, Framework Programme 6 is encouraging large collaborative networks, which bring together researchers from disparate backgrounds and traditions. Teams and networks will, increasingly, be multidisciplinary and cross-national; frameworks and codes of practice are needed to help them work together.

The RESPECT code aims to be broadly applicable to all social researchers whatever their disciplinary background or nationality, and whether they conduct research directly or commission and manage research. It is also relevant to the users of research findings and research subjects. The code is, therefore, based on a synthesis of existing documents, literature and law. However, much of the material collected came from Northern Europe and North America. Relatively few codes exist in Southern Europe, although market research is more widely governed by various codes of practice.

A number of challenges had to be addressed in developing a European-wide code, and the form the final code has taken is partly a way of reconciling these. A danger remains that disclosed adherence to ethical codes can '...provide a false sense of security for the researcher, and dull the researcher's sensibilities to developing a deep awareness of the complex nature of research with service users' (Higham, 2003, p. 5). Consensus is growing that having a code or guidelines is not enough. For example, Iain Hay (1998, pp. 77–8) discusses how it is important for researchers to possess a 'moral imagination' based on '...sets of prompts intended to encourage informed thought about ethical practice'. Codes or guidelines on standards only provide a

starting point for researchers. They can also be drawn to the attention of a wider range of actors and stakeholders involved in the research process, showing that research does have an ethical context, which is relevant to all involved. The stakeholders we have in mind include public policy makers, commerce and industry, special interest and voluntary groups, and, even, a general public that increasingly demands more readable, easily accessible information on which to base life-style, economic and electoral choices.

In the national as well as the international context, there have been times when the overall purpose of the social scientific endeavour has been questioned. Something of an overly economic focus exists on the notion of 'added-valued' and, while EU and national governmental agencies will necessarily have to evaluate outcomes in these terms, it is still vital for the research community (in the public and private sectors) to maintain a concern for the higher goal of adding value to 'the sum total of human knowledge'. The worthiness of the enterprise depends upon accomplishing that level of scientific progress.

RESPECT is certainly aiming to set standards and promote discussion about standards among a very disparate group of researchers and research users. Some are from disciplines, countries or backgrounds where a focus has already developed on sound ethical practice. Others are not. This does not mean that the latter group are all working unethically, but rather that not much attention has previously been paid to what it means to be an ethical researcher. It is hoped that RESPECT will promote discussion on ethical research and professional standards and raise awareness across the ERA.

### **Morality and the law**

One issue that has been frequently addressed by the RESPECT partners is the possibility of conflict between ethical and legal principles. For example, under data protection law all research participants should be fully informed about any study for which they are providing information. At one level, no conflict arises with the ethical principle of informed consent. However, some types of research, most notably covert ethnographies, involve researchers being less than honest with participants. Another example relates to confidentiality: ethically, all researchers should be open with respondents at the beginning of a study as to whether the information provided will be treated in confidence or not. Conflicts arise when researchers are studying illegal activities or uncover activities such as abuse or self-harm. This can put them in a difficult position in relation to the law, and such conflicts need to be addressed in any code of practice.

Although the code covers two main areas of recent EU legislation in detail (data protection and intellectual property rights), it was impossible to address every legal and cultural issue in each EU country. What it does do, however, is try to raise awareness of legal and cultural differences and ensure that these are taken into account by researchers working outside their own country, or with groups with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. As with many ethical principles, the exhortations to maintain multicultural awareness and ensure social inclusion are not solely matters of morality or sensitivity to the rights of excluded minorities. They raise methodological concerns too: over respondent commitment, response error and non-response rates. Systematic

distortion of findings would be a consequence of neglecting or failing to encourage participation from self-excluding or routinely excluded population categories.

The wide-ranging ethical code includes all the elements commonly found in codes, such as responsibilities to respondents, responsibilities to colleagues and to the profession. It also includes broader issues of good practice, for example placing a greater emphasis on respecting differences in gender, race, ethnicity and culture. In some cultures, this is stating the obvious, emphasising something, which is taken for granted by most researchers, but not by all. The code tries to take into account the varying starting points of different communities of researchers and risks criticism of being too basic or too bland.

### **Accessibility and user-‘friendliness’**

For a code to be accurate and comprehensive requires attention to detail. However, this leads to complexity and is a potential disincentive to users. Some are looking for short codes, which state general principles leaving the researcher to decide how these might be applied. Others want to engage with the wider debates, to be fully informed and anticipate all eventualities. A further problem for RESPECT is that, in addition to ethical and professional issues, it addresses two large and complex legal areas.

To be quickly and easily disseminated, catch the attention of a wide audience and be as comprehensive as possible has required that the RESPECT guidelines operate at a number of levels. The code starts with three overarching principles: upholding scientific standards, compliance with the law, and avoidance of social and personal harm. It then details how these principles may be met by following more specific, if still general, principles. Varying degrees of prescription are attached to these principles and linked to legal, moral and/or professional standard requirements. Detailed explanations, references and discussion papers can then be found through links for those interested in pursuing issues in further depth.

While allowing for the voluntary nature of this code, a tension exists between the legal principles and the ethical and professional principles. For cross-national purposes, the legal principles may need to be followed more strictly, while other principles set parameters for behaviour in which more scope can be found for variation.

As one commentator at the seminar recognised, this paper has a sub-text that relates to a concern over the ‘contamination of the field’. Part of the benefit from upholding and being seen to uphold standards and behave with responsible awareness toward research subjects is to encourage their increasing participation. As both topic and resource in our socio-economic research projects, their compliance to the whole endeavour is vital. Poor quality research, which is poorly conducted, undermines the value and the goals of social research. Enough has already been done to damage the professional reputation of socio-economic research: projects like RESPECT are part of a response to rebuilding relationships with the site inhabitants. Consequently, we could have done more to address how the research findings might be ‘given back’ to the research subjects and how such subjects might be given a full and effective voice within the research process. Concerns like these arise and are reasonably well met in health, social care and social policy research in particular, where user groups, interest and issue groups can be more frequently found. For social science in general, it is much harder to identify the ‘subject’ constituency and then even harder to find a way to incorporate the ‘general public’ in a representative

manner. RESPECT partners wrestled with how best to phrase this problem in the final code and, once again, recognised the dilemma of balancing the maintenance of scientific standards with lay representation.

### **Ensuring high ethical standards**

Researchers have an obligation to ensure that they are informed about the appropriate legislation of the country in which they are conducting research and how that legislation might affect the conduct of their research. In most contemporary European societies, legislation intended to protect the rights of individuals poses threats to the scope of social enquiry. Such legislation may lead to diluted research activity as a consequence of the fear of litigation. In the course of time, case law is likely to resolve legal uncertainties about acceptable practice, but waiting for test cases can halt progress and limit the assumed benefits to society of social research activity (Iphofen, 2004b).

Unfortunately, any dilemmas arising from the contradictions of data protection, human rights and scientific research legislation can only be resolved by the judgements of individual members of the research community in the short term. It should be considered responsible professional practice for social researchers to balance a concern for individual rights with the greater benefits to society (or societies) from their research activity.

High quality research demands high qualities in ethical standards and a concern to ensure that procedures agreed to at the design stage are maintained throughout a project. Seeking mentorship from experienced researchers should be a *sine qua non* of research practice; so should ethical review, whether in-house or independent. More training courses are needed, centrally validated by a national professional body and offered regularly for new researchers with CPD/update sessions for the experienced people. In the last analysis, a move might be made toward professional registration and licensing, with explicit sanctions against unethical behaviour. A lot depends upon the emergence of any problematic cases in social research in the future.

If researchers refuse to accept the general tenets of research governance, then society or specific groups within it may obstruct any attempt to engage the practice, and the profession will thereby be constrained. It is far better for the profession that it regulates itself properly before regulation is imposed by external, namely governmental, agencies. The consideration of ethical dilemmas in research is an exercise in professional integrity. Behaving responsibly as a researcher requires the sustained consideration of the ethical implications of one's activities: not to engage in such considerations is, in itself, unethical (Mauthner *et al.*, 2002). The principle of researcher reflexivity has methodological as well as ethical import. The knowledge produced as a consequence of research cannot be seen as somehow detached from the many purposes for which the research was engaged in, from the multiple professional and organisational loyalties to which the researcher is tied, and from the precise ways in which the researcher engaged with the people they were studying.

The RESPECT project does not claim to have developed the definitive code of practice. Consideration of ethical, legal and professional issues develops over time. Many existing codes have recently been updated, to take into account new legislation and new thinking on various ethical principles. It is hoped that a project like this in its execution and dissemination raises ethical awareness, and assists all those involved in

achieving the greatest benefit to the greatest numbers, while minimising the harm done to any sector of the population.

### Note

1. Further information can be obtained from the RESPECT website ([www.respectproject.org](http://www.respectproject.org)), which includes a database of professional research associations throughout Europe, background information on data protection and intellectual property law, information on professional and ethical issues, including a comprehensive review of the literature and further links, and the results of a detailed analysis of the knowledge, skills and competences involved in carrying out a multidisciplinary international research project. This functional map of a typical European research project is also intended to guide those who have to manage, appraise and appoint staff to such projects or decide on their organisations' capacity to engage in them.

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## 6. Observations Based on Experience of Managing Research

*Sandra Williams*

The comments that follow are made through the lens of a career in managing research, which provides the context for my observations. They are primarily from the managerial and practical perspective, rather than focusing upon theory or methods. The cue for the paper came from the fact that the fifth seminar in the series concentrated on the link between social science research and policy developments and looked at the ways in which academic researchers can ensure the knowledge they generate is relevant to policy users and wider society. In particular, the question posed by Susanne MacGregor in her introduction about how cross-national and multi-disciplinary research can improve the links between research, policy and public debate offered a useful starting point. She suggests that policy actors function best when they understand the research process, either through their own experience or through the involvement of people who act as intermediaries or liaison officers smoothing the relations between research and policy. This is precisely where my current role is located: helping researchers to understand the needs of policy makers, and helping policy makers gain a better understanding of how research can be used both to inform and evaluate policy decisions.

In this context, it should be emphasised that policy makers not only want 'good evidence' and examples of 'good practice', but they want it on a timely basis and have a keen eye for cost-effectiveness. In the current climate – particularly in the field of public health research – it is important not just to build the evidence base for public health interventions, but to ensure that it gets translated into practice and brings about real changes in health behaviour and outcomes. This raises issues about research capacity and strengthening links between academia and services, and not just about the body of research evidence.

It also raises a number of issues – apparent in all four seminar papers – about how research is funded and managed, the applicability of different research methodologies, and the development of shared standards for all stakeholders in the research process. As Susanne MacGregor also signals in her introduction, research governance is central to all of these processes.

Although the papers are considered in turn, often the points made are themes that run across them. Two general observations sparked off by the papers can be made that are relevant to my own experience. Firstly, many of the issues (about variety and diversity), which are played out in the four papers at a cross-national level between countries, have resonance in terms of working across government departments and, with devolution, across countries within the UK. Secondly, my comments about research governance are shaped by the fact that the Department of Health has worked with a Research Governance Framework since March 2001 (see Department of Health website <http://www.dh.gov.uk>).

### **Turbulent delegation**

The focus in Chris Caswill's paper is on the governance of research councils and research policy. Two theories of governance are explored: network theories of

governance, and principal-agent theory. Viewed from my own career experience, the principal-agent theory holds more resonance. However, whereas the paper uses this to describe the relationship between research councils and sponsoring ministries, for me, it is recognised more in terms of the relationship between government department (procuring and using research) and research contractor (providing research). It is also a concept that is apparent in the UK Department of Health's Research Government Framework.

Networking is also central to the way the Department of Health works with the UK research councils. For example, with the Medical Research Council (MRC), we have a common interest in promoting research into all areas of medical and related science, and with the aims of improving the health and quality of life of the UK public, and contributing to the wealth of the nation. The UK Health Departments and the MRC have a concordat (partnership arrangement), which provides a framework for an effective and workable partnership, not just within the two organisations, but also with the other research funders of medical and health services. Similarly, the Department of Health also has a concordat with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Taking the concordat with the MRC as an example, the strategic purpose is to ensure that Health Department and MRC research activities are complementary and cover the UK's needs without duplication. It is designed to allow each of the parties to concentrate on their strengths and to achieve a distribution of research funds that provides the best value for money, recognising that this requires a joint interest in some areas, where Health Departments' interests are primarily concerned with improving health and meeting the health service needs, and MRC is more concerned with exploiting scientific opportunities.

Chris Caswill's paper is looking outwards to the possibility of a pan-Europe research agency. In contrast, my experience has been in trying to secure a national evidence base for policy making, particularly that which will inform the identification of effective and cost-effective public health interventions, and thereby bring about real changes in health behaviour and health outcomes in the UK. The Department of Health takes opportunities to influence the European research agenda (for example through consultation on the development of EU Framework Programmes), and it contributes funding to European-wide projects, but much remains to be achieved on home ground, as the second report on the subject from Derek Wanless (2004) has highlighted.

However, this is not to underplay the value of engaging in research at the European level or the potential for learning lessons. It is also relevant to bear in mind that the UK will be taking up the EU Presidency in 2005, and will probably be highlighting the issues of inequalities in health and patient safety during this period.

### **Governance, sport and the city**

Sport is currently a highly topical issue, with greater physical activity being one lever to help tackle the growing obesity problem in the UK population. The Department of Health is working closely with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and other government departments and agencies to develop a strategy for promoting greater physical activity, in which a cross-government research strategy will play an integral part. This is taking place within the broader strategic context of consultation on the forthcoming government Public Health White Paper.

That said, my expertise does not lie in the field of sporting events, and in listening to Rachel Herring's paper, my interest was more on the value and limitations of case studies in furthering understanding and informing policy. As a research commissioner at the national level, case studies have been used to aid in-depth understanding of issues and processes, but this approach requires due care for all the reasons that Rachel Herring has given. The difficulties she has summarised are widely recognised.

With regard to methodology, contextual and cultural factors frequently complicate comparisons. This is also a problem for undertaking systematic reviews to inform policy-making, where research (particularly that evaluating interventions) is more likely to have been done outside of the UK context. Selective use of the evidence to support a particular point of view is a risk that applies not just to those who use case studies to make a point, but also to researchers in assembling and interpreting the data collected during in-depth case studies

Subsequent general discussion on this paper raised the important point for policy making about learning from failures. It also stimulated reflection about the interplay between 'mega' events and policy making; for example, the extent to which the current Olympic bid offers (marketing) opportunities for promoting physical activity for all.

### **Measurement and comparability in cross-national health surveys used to inform policy decisions**

Within the Department of Health, the majority of large-scale surveys are managed through the Surveys and Statistics Division, which is separate from the R&D Directorate. Some of these surveys are managed by the Department of Health only, and some jointly with others, for example the Food Standards Agency or the Home Office.

However, many of the projects or programmes that we manage within R&D do have a survey element, and many other designs (for example prospective cohort studies) involve questionnaires, which are potentially subject to all of the cultural obstacles that Janet Harkness has so cogently highlighted. Again, systematic reviews need to be drawn into this discussion, particularly where they are synthesising evidence across different disciplines, types of evidence and countries.

The paper provided constant reminders of a key aspect of the Department of Health Research Governance Framework: the need for user involvement throughout the whole of the research process, including research design and selection of data collection tools. Where users are involved in the very early stages of research design, some of the problems described in the paper can be identified and dealt with before they have a serious effect on the integrity of the research. However, it is also important to recognise that this approach is likely to increase the overall cost of the study.

The point is well made that, whereas insights from cognitive research have shaped mono-cultural instrument development; this is less common in cross-national development. The need is for more information on cross-cultural design, adaptation and calibration. Whereas Janet Harkness has raised these issues of measurement and comparability within the context of using survey instruments across countries, they also need further consideration within the context of work that we are doing on health inequalities and health literacy within the UK.

### **Ethical issues in cross-national research**

The closing paper by Ron Iphofen describes the RESPECT project and, in so doing, provides a framework for many of the key issues that discussed at the seminar. It cogently sets out the need for, and the difficulties associated with, setting cross-national research standards.

Ron Iphofen notes that government departments, as well as major professional associations in the social and behavioural sciences and funding bodies have been reviewing their policies and practice on research ethics. The Department of Health has already been through the process of developing a Research Governance Framework, and the document issued in 2001 reflects wide consultation within the field and with all the Department of Health's partners in health and social care research, including local authorities.

Essentially the Department of Health Research Governance Framework sets standards, defines mechanisms to deliver standards and describes monitoring and assessment arrangements. It is designed to improve research quality and safeguard the public by enhancing ethical and scientific quality, promoting good practice, reducing adverse incidents and ensuring lessons are learned, and preventing poor performance and misconduct. It is for all those who participate in research, host research in their organisation, fund research proposals or infrastructure, manage research or undertake research.

Proper governance of research is essential to ensure that the public can have confidence in, and benefit from, quality research. The public has a right to expect high scientific, ethical and financial standards, transparent decision-making processes, clear allocation of responsibilities and robust monitoring arrangements. This is just as applicable at a pan-European level as it is at a national level.

It is also important to recognise the voice of those who have concerns that the regulatory and governance environment is now presenting unwitting barriers to carrying out research. In the public health context, such concerns have been raised, for example, in the report of the Working Group on the Public Health Sciences convened by the Wellcome Trust (2004). Getting the balance right is clearly important to the conduct of research of public value.

The voluntary code of practice emerging from the RESPECT project not surprisingly covers similar territory to the Department of Health Research Governance Framework. Taking a cross-national approach, it applies a similar principle in terms of being targeted at the continuous improvement of standards and the reduction of unacceptable variations in research practice. Importantly, both documents recognise that professional judgement is involved in the interpretation of many aspects of guidance. Quality in research, therefore, depends on those responsible being appropriately qualified with the relevant skills and experience to use their professional judgement effectively in the delivery of dependable research. This applies to researchers and to research funders, both of whom have a key role to play in ensuring that knowledge generated is relevant to policy users and wider society.

### **Acknowledgement**

The comments in this paper are made in a personal capacity and not as a representative of the Department of Health.

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## **5. Assessing Policy Relevance in Cross-National Social Science Research**

*Birgit Arve-Parès*

The papers contained in this volume all deal with issues related to the construction and use of policy-relevant evidence in cross-national research and policy debate, and together they bring out important theoretical and methodological implications for the cross-national use of culturally embedded concepts designed to ensure policy relevance.

Chris Caswill raises the question of whether it is possible to conceive of the national variations observed in the procedures of European research councils in terms of cultural variations of a more generic model, accounting for some of the common features in European research policy systems. In a period where the future design of a European Research Area and the project of a European Research Council are being negotiated between European ministers of research, it is evident that the cross-national study he is proposing is acutely relevant to policy.

Rachel Herring deals with the specific challenges raised by the existence of politically and culturally embedded frames of reference in the construction of evidence and the interpretation of the policy relevance of practices found in cross-national comparative studies, where the prime interest is policy learning, and the methods used are qualitative case studies.

As a counterpart to the issues at stake in case studies and in the use of qualitative research methods, Janet Harkness demonstrates forcefully that, unless sufficient time and resources are allocated to the translation and transmission of well defined concepts in cross-national surveys and quantitative research, concepts assumed to provide hard facts may turn out not to be at all hard. In addressing some of the linguistic problems in the construction of comparative data, she pleads for an increased awareness of some of the pitfalls in the use of survey data for comparative cross-national analysis, which impede both the political relevance and the theoretical value of any scientific endeavour.

The contribution of Ron Iphofen raises very basic questions about cultural differences in the approach to ethical issues and deontology, all too often neglected at the outset in cross-national research. The action undertaken by the EU-funded RESPECT project goes beyond a straightforward demonstration of cultural variations of practice and proceeds to deal with existing disparities within Europe by developing a strategy for implementing a common code of conduct by means of an open method of co-ordination.

All four papers thus address issues that are topical for the design of cross-national research and that call for increased awareness and specific competences in the management and governance of policy research. They raise a number of general methodological questions about how to traverse cultural boundaries in the construction and interpretation of social data, questions that are in fact central to all research in the social sciences. In cross-national research, however, the valid use and communication of concepts, assumed to have a common meaning in the collection of data, in the assessment of outcomes and in the communication of research findings to end users,

be they peers, policy makers, civil servants or citizens, is a prerequisite that is all too often overlooked, both by researchers and by policy research funders.

The insights given by the papers, thus, provide a common core of lessons for ensuring scientific and political relevance that require further attention, both by policy researchers and policy makers. The more detailed comments below draw on many years of experience as a social scientist involved in social policy research, as an intermediary actor at the interface of policy and science within the research funding system in Sweden, and as expert and national liaison officer at international forums.

### **Exploring European research funding systems**

In his paper, Chris Caswill sets out to test the basic assumptions of two alternative models to account for recent developments in European national research funding systems. His focus is new modes of governance and monitoring of scientific research, where national research councils have an intermediary function between policy and science. The assumptions to be tested are that new policy networks have replaced former modes of governance and policy implementation, and that this could be perceived as an expression of a weakening state authority. The authority of the national state is assumed to have been hollowed out, and the appearance of turbulent reforms of research funding systems is attributed to the development of new policy networks. The alternative model is based on the assumption that the relationship between governments and researchers can be perceived as a principal-agent relationship in a multilevel system, where mutual interests are being negotiated, and where research councils intervene as intermediary actors between the government and the scientific community. State control is thus being mediated by funding agencies, dealing with those carrying out the research through procedures that are regulated by contracts between the funding agency and individual researchers.

A small pilot study of four national research councils seems to provide little support for the hollowing-out thesis in the field of research policy, but indicates both basic similarities and variations between national research councils with reference to the assumptions of the principal-agent model. Caswill, therefore, suggests that the applicability of the principal-agent model in the field of research policy could be tested further in a more extensive multiple case study, taking the interplay of significant actors and institutional arrangements into account.

Recent reviews and policy options in the field of science policy can best be seen as efforts to find new instruments in response to economic and geopolitical change, where science and scientific research are conceived and valued as a strategic and instrumental investment for capacity building and international competition in a new world order. Caswill refers to two features in the reviews and turbulent reforms of European national research funding systems: the questioning and simultaneous appearance of national reviews and reforms of such systems and the delegation of research funding from government to research councils, acting as intermediary agencies.

Caswill raises the question of whether this could be seen as the outcome of the diminishing strength of governments, according to the assumptions made in the literature on governance, which attributes the erosion of state authority in modern society partly to the institutional embeddedness of different policy networks. In the information that can be extracted from recent reviews of national research councils, he

finds little support for the assumption of a weakening government involvement. He then asks whether the principal-agent model, which would describe the relationship between the state (the principal) and the research council (the agent) in terms of rational choice and a negotiated exchange of mutual benefits, might shed some light on what is happening. He finds, however, that the data from his sample of research councils only give limited support to these assumptions. A final suggestion, also expressed in principal-agent terms, is the possible impact of the EU interface, where ministers and government officials meet, all advocating a growing concern for science and technology as a lever for economic growth, both at national and EU level. The reviews and turbulent situations to which the research councils have been exposed in recent years might, therefore, to some extent, be an effect of ideas travelling via networks of government officials at EU level.

These assumptions and the proposed design of the study might be tested by applying them to the Swedish research policy system and by examining the driving forces behind recent developments in the research funding system in Sweden. The introduction of reviews as policy instruments and as a means of government control is not new in Sweden. They were in place well before the recent changes in the research funding system and were an integral part of the new public management introduced in the late 1980s. This approach was adopted to ensure greater efficiency, flexibility and cost containment, long before the Internet paved the way for new forms of networking, and before Swedish government officials started to travel to Brussels. Influential ideas came mainly from the United States and were translated into a policy for increased autonomy and decentralised management of universities in the early 1990s, but they did not affect the status of the existing national research councils at that time. Rather, it seems more likely that the Lisbon Summit in 1996 and the EU commitment to a knowledge society provided a forceful impetus for the reform of the funding system that took place in 2001. The reform meant that the five former research councils devoted to basic research were merged into one: the Vetenskapsrådet (VR, Swedish Research Council). Two new mission-oriented councils were established: Forskningsrådet för arbetsliv och socialvetenskap (FAS, Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research) and Forskningsrådet för miljö, areella näringar och samhällsbyggande (FORMAS, Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning). They took over the missions of several research funding agencies. An important new agency for research and technological innovation, Verket för innovationssystem (VINNOVA, Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems), was also created, to take over other parts of the former research funding system.

The basic assumptions in the governance literature, which relate mainly to developments in the field of local government do not, therefore, seem to apply to Swedish research policy. The change implemented by the recent reform was not the result of negotiations between a weak ministry and strong intermediary actors. The government wanted to endorse forceful action and called for strong agents to carry out the necessary measures to enforce structural change and develop new infrastructures, better adapted to societal needs and priorities. It is possible, however, to see the reorganised research funding system as an outcome of negotiations between the government and the scientific community as a whole, since academia has quite a strong position in the new institutional arrangements. This might give some support to the principal-agent model in very general terms. Stated in such terms, however, the model becomes trivial and does not tell us anything about the driving forces behind the

changes that have taken place, nor about remaining tensions and conflicts of interest in the existing research funding system. In Sweden, it is inconsequential to assume that a principal-agent relationship exists between the ministries and central agencies, since the Swedish constitution prescribes the separation of powers: executive power does not lie with the ministries, but with national administrations that are separated from the ministries. In other words, ministries do not have much executive power to delegate and, to the extent that delegation has occurred, it is not funding that has been delegated, but policy analysis and co-ordination between different actors, which was handed over to the research councils.

The principal-agent model also seems inappropriate for the analysis of public research funding systems because, firstly, it is a model based on assumptions from business management, where profit is the main driving force and, secondly, it is static in its general approach, focusing on commonalities and prescriptions for rational choice. It does not tell us anything about the driving forces and dynamic elements of the institutional arrangements at play at a particular time, nor about path dependencies and conflicting interests that are involved at different levels of the research policy system.

During the reform of research councils in Sweden, little attention was paid to the impact of institutional arrangements and path dependencies. The research councils were left with the task of coping with two conflicting logics: one stressing scientific autonomy and bottom-up procedures, and the other encompassing a more proactive logic of management and accountability. In an attempt not to lose the momentum, staff were transferred directly into the new organisation before any analysis had been made of the requirements needed for carrying out the council's new missions. The new central council for basic research, in particular, was fraught with serious recruitment problems and a lack of professional competence for its new missions. The transaction costs in some parts of the system have, therefore, been high.

With this in mind, Caswill's warning is well taken against rushing into the establishment of a European Research Council before having a clear idea of what delegation is to be carried out, in what directions, for what purposes and how conflicting interests should be dealt with.

A final word about methodology: from what has been said above, it should be clear that neither the governance framework nor the principal-agent model provides a satisfactory explanation of what has happened in Sweden. They may provide general concepts for describing the nature of relations and mode of governance involved in research policy, but they cannot account for the dynamics at play at different levels of the research policy system. Nor can they explain the driving forces involved. If these aspects are to be illuminated, an appropriate methodological approach would be to apply multilevel analysis and gather multilevel evidence to disentangle the impact of different institutional arrangements. Those who subscribe to the hypothesis of path dependency would have to assess further major institutional changes over time, with regard to aims, strategies and performance, taking political contexts into account. Alternatively, they would need to make sure that the cases selected for cross-national analysis are comparable with regard to their missions and status in the research funding system. This would probably be a labour-intensive project, but would also be fascinating and relevant to policy.

### **Exploring practice: challenges for policy learning**

The paper on 'Governance, sport and the city' by Rachel Herring, addresses important methodological issues for the use of case studies for policy advice. Her study on mega sports events was set up to inquire about the impact of governance style for attracting major sports events by large cities. In testing the hypothesis that the style of network governance, characteristic of London and other European cities, plays an important part in attracting such events, Herring draws on a comparative analysis of cases, focusing on the processes and linkages between different aspects and levels of governance and on the political use of the scientific evidence provided by researchers.

Herring argues for the secondary analysis and comparative use of case studies as an important device for understanding the mechanisms at play in different cultural, economic and political contexts, even when cases do not altogether address the same issues. Despite differences in approach, they may highlight common elements across different cultural and historical settings and, thus, generate new hypotheses and contribute to theoretical advancement. To the extent that they are guided by theoretically grounded questions, it is often possible, as Herring points out, to construct comparable cases by drawing on a variety of supplementary sources to acquire sufficient and adequate information on the cases involved.

For theoretical purposes, even when specific in design and focus, case studies may, therefore, contribute to theoretical advancement by shedding light on social facts and patterns of governance in different cultural and political settings and by generating new hypotheses on the mechanisms at play. The question is, however, what impact they may have on policy. What is their potential use and relevance for policy making?

Herring discusses this issue with regard to the nature and political use of the evidence provided in her study. She points to the fact that the rich and detailed provision of information in case studies may leave room for policy makers to make selective use of empirical findings, omitting the scientific assessment of these findings and the conclusions from research. In the case of sporting events, as stated by Herring, studies reveal that policy makers tend to neglect the existing evidence from research regarding economic impacts. Herring suggests that, although economic arguments are advanced, they often neglect evidence from other studies, indicating that policy decisions might, in the case of sporting events, be influenced by strong personal attitudes and convictions about social value and other intangibles that may have a stronger hold than economic considerations. Another aspect might be the perceived expectations and trust of the electorate. Politicians may at times have more immediate priorities than long-term economic impacts.

In her discussion on the use of case studies for policy, Herring is referring essentially to their use as a basis for political decision. It should be pointed out, however, that they may also serve other policy purposes, namely that of policy learning, offering models for good practice – or failure – to be considered in the implementation of political goals. Case studies may, as noted, not always have the expected outreach for priority setting and policy decisions, particularly in areas where strong personal values are involved, but they may bring impetus and guidance for the adoption of new solutions both at national and local levels.

The potential of cross-national comparative case studies for policy relevance is, thus, two-fold: to provide information for political decisions and priority setting, and to provide models for policy learning in the implementation of the goals adopted.

In both cases, a major challenge is to assess the cross-national comparability of social facts and experiences, which provokes a comment on the selection and number of cases. The impact of case studies does not, in the first place, relate to the number of cases, but to the efficient selection and comparability of cases with regard to the issues at stake. Even bilateral national case studies may have a strong impact, for both political and scientific purposes, insofar as they succeed in bringing about new insights and perspectives regarding present conditions and the linkages at play. Such linkages may be taken for granted within a path-dependent national context. They may, however, also be blurred by multinational approaches, where information on each particular case is necessarily more difficult to come by. This is an aspect that is seldom discussed, but that might merit some consideration in the context of multinational research programmes and pan-European research strategies.

### **Assessing cross-national validity**

The third paper for the seminar, 'Measurement and comparability in cross-national research', presented by Janet Harkness, gives a broad review of the scientific fallacies in the production and cross-national use of survey data on health as a source for policy making. It offers an extensive overview of the methodological issues at stake in cross-national surveys and analysis of quantitative data, where congruent cross-national perceptions and use of questions and answers are assumed to exist.

The paper makes a very thought-provoking demonstration of the impact of cultural factors in the formulation and interpretation of questions and answers that are seemingly objective and transparent. Harkness demonstrates forcefully the bias that such studies, usually conceived in Western societies, may convey when implemented in non-Western contexts, where different belief systems enter into play and distort the outcome and comparative relevance of the data provided.

Harkness draws on examples from health surveys to illustrate how differences in culture call for particular consideration with regard to the design and cross-national use of survey questionnaires. The area of health and health issues is one where cultural differences and belief systems between cultures have a particularly strong impact, allowing her to present a number of illuminating examples. Most of the methodological problems and recommendations presented in the paper have an equally strong relevance for other areas, where cultural differences are just as important. A high level of cultural and linguistic competence are necessary to ensure the validity and assumed comparability of data, as in all cross-national research.

The recommendations to give more serious consideration to the risks of cultural bias, to secure the appropriate and congruent use of concepts, and to pay increased attention to the tailoring of questions and questionnaires with respect to targeted populations all have relevance for cross-national surveys or statistical analysis in other areas. The instruments used must be able to demonstrate both cross-national validity and discriminating power with regard to central concepts, if they are to provide valid causal interpretations, either for theoretical or political use.

Scientific researchers are, increasingly, expected to engage in international collaboration. An important driver for international collaboration in the social sciences is the potential for theoretical advancement offered by cross-national comparisons. Cross-national comparative research in the social sciences is the counterpart to experiments in the natural sciences. But, whereas the need for infrastructures to

support experimental research in the natural sciences is largely recognised, little attention is usually paid to the investment needed to ensure the cultural validity and scientific quality of cross-national data in the social sciences.

Internationalisation is also an overall priority in science policy, strongly valued for its potential in promoting European research and competence building. The particular costs and necessary investments to ensure the validity of scientific evidence in cross-national research in the social science is, however, often neglected both by funding agencies and policy makers. The paper by Harkness demonstrates clearly, however, that, in addition to travel expenses, important investments need to be made to ensure high quality scientific translation, cross-cultural competence building and close scientific exchange in the definition of common concepts and research design. These activities must, therefore, be adequately funded and conceived of as instruments for international collaboration with the same status as large infrastructures in the natural sciences.

### **The importance of being earnest: on codes of conduct and good practice in cross-national research**

The RESPECT-project, described in the paper by Ron Iphofen, Sally Dench and Ursula Huws, is a cross-national action to promote the adoption of a common code of conduct for the social sciences all over Europe. Stressing the importance of clear standards for the smooth running of multidisciplinary and international collaboration, the authors have elaborated a general code of conduct for the social sciences, based on a broad investigation of existing practices and consultations with actors with a wide variety of standpoints. They also stress the importance of accountability for establishing trust, with reference to the fact that codes of conduct can be nothing but recommendations and guidelines. The final responsibility for what is done in a particular project always lies with the individual researcher, who should, therefore, be capable of coping with new dilemmas as they appear in the research process and of giving a full account on what has been done.

The code, which is proposed to cover a wide range of situations, refers in essence to three basic principles: upholding scientific standards, compliance with the law and avoidance of social and personal harm. The method for implementing the code is described as one of pragmatic pluralism. The authors insist on the fact that the basic principles have to be adopted and integrated by individual researchers. It is, in the last resort, only researchers themselves who can strike the balance when new dilemmas arise, or when new means of investigation come into conflict with existing practices.

It is not necessary here to present arguments for the code as such, nor to comment on specific points, and it would be difficult to disagree with most of what is said in the paper. However, it is worth adding that the method of implementation seems to be a good example of the open method of co-ordination, in that it offers a long-term strategy for consensus about policy, in a situation where no pre-set institutional framework exists, and where different parties may have different preconceptions.

The Swedish experience is also relevant in this case. From a Swedish standpoint, the general state of affairs as described in the paper is surprising, since we are fortunate enough to have subscribed to high ethical standards in social science for a number of years. These issues are, as Iphofen and his colleagues point out, much easier to deal with in a fairly limited scientific community, where informal control

remains quite strong, where advice and practice are more easily passed on to newcomers, and where local status and reputation continue to have an impact.

Ethics usually come to the foreground when technology provides new instruments for scientific research. This was the case in Sweden when the Swedish research councils in charge of the social sciences first established their committees on ethics, some 20 or more years ago. The main issue at that time was the protection of personal integrity, in the face of the threat of scientific abuse of computerised information from public registers and large surveys. The principles adopted were inspired by those existing for the medical profession, stressing human integrity, informed consent, independence, confidentiality and the absence of harm. The method of implementation, however, was different from the one applied in medicine, where regional committees imposed formal control before granting permission to carry out the research. In the social sciences, the two main research councils at that time have established special committees to examine all applications, from an ethical point of view. However, this examination takes the form of a dialogue between the individual researcher and the committee. Researchers are asked to include in their application a written statement on the ethical issues that they perceive and on how they intend to handle them in their study. This allows the committee to assess the ethical awareness of the researcher in each particular case. The committee can also ask for more detailed information, enter into a dialogue, or make specific recommendations. The main procedure is, thus, one of a dialogue, where experience and new dilemmas are constantly brought to the foreground, and may also be explored further in other forums or conferences. The basic policy of the Swedish research councils in social science is to foster awareness of ethical issues and strategies to deal with them, without diminishing the responsibility of the individual researcher.

However, this is not the whole picture. Advances in technology have recently led to new legislation to reinforce the legal control of research ethics in certain areas to enhance public trust in scientific research. A new law came into force on 1 January 2004, stating the responsibility of all heads of scientific institutions to apply for formal permission to undertake certain kinds of research. This is the case where the research is expected to have physical or psychic effects on human beings, or where human tissue or information touching upon personal integrity is to be used without informed consent. In these cases, all projects have to pass before one of six regional boards that have been established for this purpose, with a possibility of appealing to a central board, hosted by the Swedish Research Council. These boards are thus legal arrangements, invested with formal control over the new legislation, defining the limits not to be exceeded in terms of personal integrity, physical impairment and human dignity. They do not, however, change the basic educational and professional functions of the existing research council committees for ethics in the social sciences.

### **Concluding remarks**

While addressing issues that are topical for the design of cross-national research, the four papers to this seminar have all raised a number of general methodological questions relating to cultural boundaries, and which are in fact central to all research in the social sciences. The literature on the design, management and governance of cross-national research is, however, still sparse. The questions treated in this volume,

therefore, make an important contribution to filling this gap, and will, hopefully, also stimulate others to proceed into this scientifically challenging field.

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