Access to official microdata and accreditation of researchers in Europe

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DwB
Data without Boundaries

Outline

European research and data access

- Official microdata as a major resource for science-based policy-making;
- Growing demand for both highly anonymised and detailed datasets;
- Needs of scientific community now often recognised in legal frameworks;
- Ongoing negotiations in the ESS for access to European data;
- Recent national-level improvements in several countries.

However...

- Access arrangements for *national* data still highly heterogeneous;
- Trans-national access difficult or (at best) burdensome;
- Comparative cross-country research particularly penalised.

	1. Public Use Files	2. Scientific Use Files	3. Extracts (subsets)	4. Standard tabulations	5. Bespoke tabulations	6. Secure remote access / execution	7. Safe data labs
a. Census							
b. Social Survey							
c. Person Register							
d. Business Survey							
e. Business Register							
f. Other							

Table 1. Modes of access in European countries (2008).

no country | 1-3 countries | 4-6 countries | 7-9 countries | 10-12 countries | ≥ 13 countries

Researcher accreditation

- Accreditation contributes to enabling safe research access to official data;
- It is the process of:
  - defining eligibility criteria (who is a researcher, what is a research);
  - establishing application procedures (how to request access);
  - designing rules for decision-making (who decides, on what basis) and monitoring.

How researcher accreditation contributes to risk management

- A “fit and proper” person;
- Comparable to official statistics staff;
- Safe data = safe person / safe project / safe place.

Who is a (safe) researcher?

Different answers in different countries:

- qualifications / experience?
- institutional backing?
- employer / employment status?
- country of birth / residence?
- threat of prosecution / assurance that they will bind themselves to a contract?
- and what about....
  - students?
  - foreign researchers?

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What is a (safe) research / research project?

Again, a range of answers:

- for the public good / public dissemination?
- publicly funded?
- and what about....
  - teaching and learning?
  - public policy evaluation?

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How to apply for accreditation?

Various aspects and options:

- Who submits an application —PI, team, institution?
- Whose signatures are needed —PI, team, institution?
- What forms to use —and are they available in different languages?
- What evidence to provide?
- ...

Any other conditions?

Various options:

- Compulsory training?
- External reviews?
- Legally binding contract?
- ....

Who makes decisions?

- The NSI itself, or one of its units?
- A dedicated scientific committee (perhaps also including researchers)?
- A trusted research body?
- ....

An uneven landscape

- Differences across:
  - countries;
  - institutions;
  - types of data;
  - levels of disclosure risk.
- Conditions for trans-national accreditation not always well-defined;
- Gaps in availability of information, even when rules and procedures are in place.

Yet commonalities exist!

- Much of the variation is in practices and processes rather than principles;
- In fact, most of the existing procedures attempt to capture the same information!
- There are similarities in key criteria and application contents, though they often go under different names.

$\Rightarrow$ Is there scope for improvement?

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$\Rightarrow$ Is there scope for improvement?

Possible options

- Harmonisation: adoption of common criteria, conditions and process
  $\Rightarrow$ may be practically unfeasible!

- Integration —perhaps a more viable solution:
  - Accepting one another's decisions;
  - Sharing evidence and outcomes;
  - Necessarily building on mutual trust!

Our task within DwB

- Map current accreditation criteria, rules, procedures and practices across Europe;
- Identify commonalities that may help to design a better integrated future system;
- Also, identify major obstacles to the process, if any.

Today's workshop

- A forum to overview accreditation rules, practices and procedures in Eastern Europe;
- Understand current state, planned changes, and challenges ahead;
- Identify opportunities and threats, and the needs and expectations of all countries represented;
- Discuss how DwB may contribute to improving access under safe conditions in Eastern Europe.

Thank you!

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