

Activities and Plans

Cees Middendorp suggests that the work of this Action Group could perhaps be linked to the older inventories by Robinson, et al. of the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. He notes the difficulties in solving the problems and implementing the recommendations, that standards can only be developed on the basis of research-evidence, and suggests that revisions will be necessary on the basis of either new theoretical insights or new empirical evidence.

At the Steering Committee meeting in Edinburgh, Erwin K. Scheuch of the Institute for Applied Social Research and the Zentralarchiv presented a description of face sheet problems. He described his analysis of 19 studies in which he looked for comparability of demographic characteristics across studies. His findings indicated that the broad collapsing of categories masked various life cycle and income changes which have occurred over time. On the basis of his preliminary results, he suggested that IASSIST focus on the need for standardizing demographic variables. He also suggested that further study could be carried out by IASSIST members and the results be communicated to survey agencies. IASSIST recommendations could be used by these agencies to perfect their survey techniques and would provide IASSIST with an excellent opportunity for impact in the area of standardization of demographic variables.

This Action Group has begun reviewing already available material in the field, which includes the work carried out by Scheuch and Van Dusen and Zill at the Center for Coordination of Research on Social Indicators in Washington, D.C. This work will form the basis for a project which will test the value of these independent variables in actual research and provide a basic list of such items with recommended coding schemes. In time, this should lead to the development of general recommendations for the design of codes.

CLASSIFICATION

Canada- not yet activated

Europe- Ekkehard Mochmann, Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, Bachemer Strasse 40, 5 Köln 41, Federal Republic of Germany

United States- Sue Dodd, Data Library, Institute for Research in Social Sciences, Manning Hall, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Mandate

Existing classification schemes for both studies as a whole and variables within studies would be examined. The results of such a review and recommendations would be published. Additionally, information required for the cataloguing of machine-readable data in libraries would be researched and concrete guidelines for such catalogues would be formulated. Required classification schemes for the production of indicator source books and variable level retrieval systems will be investigated. The necessary components of an adequate Study Description will be identified.

[Editor's Note: Underlined phrase indicates addition to mandate based on Steering Committee discussion. Another section dealing with teaching materials and modules... for data comparable across nations or within nations has been deleted.]

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Ekkehard Mochmann distributed a status report describing the present situation regarding Study Description and Classification Schemes for social science data as a first step toward problems to be addressed and priorities to be established for various projects. He briefly described the development of standards for Study Description Schemes based on efforts of the Danish Data Archives, Steinmetzarchief and Zentralarchiv, whereby the study description would serve as a data abstract base, mapping and methodological research base, information retrieval base, data (re)analysis prerequisite, intra-archival log and inter-institutional exchange instrument. Routines are underway at Steinmetz and Zentralarchiv for linking Study Description with the individual file retrieval. He suggested that priority should be assigned to implementing a structure which supports efficient information exchange about data between archives and then between archives and potential users. He noted that although classification schemes had been developed, joint efforts in the application and further development of these schemes are still lacking. He recommended that a basis for implementing a scheme could be the "Alphabetic subject classification of data holdings of the Data Library at North Carolina, the "Item Index File" of the Roper Center, and the Zentralarchiv "Classification scheme for contents, form and function of survey questions," and his approaches to indicator retrieval from survey archive data bases.

In the United States, this Action Group has focussed on several related issues, but the emphasis has been primarily on the library cataloguing of machine-readable data files in public multi-media catalogues. Sue Dodd has used the rules recommended by the American Library Association's Subcommittee on the Cataloguing of Machine-Readable Data Files to prepare a draft version of a Working Manual for Cataloguing Machine-readable Data Files which will be tested by members of the US Action Group. She will chair this committee. Howard D. White will chair a committee to address the possible structure of and necessary steps involved in the establishment of a national union listing of catalogued MRDF. The other two committees being organized will investigate the MARC II Record Format for the purpose of storing and retrieving study level information and will prepare a bibliography and critical review of existing thesauri and controlled vocabularies for use in information retrieval systems. It is this latter committee which will initially interact most closely with the European Classification Action Group.