Access to official microdata and accreditation of researchers in Europe

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Outline

1. Background

2. Accreditation
   - Eligibility
   - Applications
   - Decision-making

3. Similarities, differences, and a way forward

4. DwB and today’s workshop
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.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Modes of Access in European Countries (2008)</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Census</td>
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<td>b. Social Survey</td>
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<td>c. Person Register</td>
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<td>d. Business Survey</td>
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<td>e. Business Register</td>
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<td>f. Other</td>
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**Table 1**
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.

⇒ Is there scope for improvement?
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⇒ Is there scope for improvement?
Possible options

- **Harmonisation**: adoption of common criteria, conditions and process
  ⇒ 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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