

Minutes of the Constituent Meeting of the International
Federation of Data Organizations (IFDO), Louvain - 1a -
Neuve, May 21-22, 1977

The Committee of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA) established several European working parties in 1976/77. At its meeting in Paris on January 22, 1977 it was agreed that an international federation of institutions would be established which could serve as a working and communications forum.

Another development leading to the conclusion that a federation of institutions would be desirable was the experience of the Standing Committee on Social Science Data of the ISSC. This Committee had found it hard to mount continuous international activities without a specific financial base just having to rely on the ad hoc cooperation of individuals especially in transatlantic and East West Cooperation. While in any case it is individuals to contribute, in the absence of finances for a continuous international operations it is institutions that make it possible for individuals to travel, cooperate and enlist significant resources. Thus, the Standing Committee would sometime in the near future cease its existence and would see in the proposed federation a suitable format for carrying out its former work in the international sphere. In order to establish the federation between data organizations, a number of data archives were invited to a meeting at the BASS (Louvain-la-Neuve) on May 21-22, 1977. (List of participants: Appendix 1).

1. Discussion and Agreement on the Charter

The first session on May 21 was chaired by Guido Martinotti. Stein Rokkan gave a resumé of the events which led to this meeting and briefly commented on his draft statutes which had been circulated in advance.

Discussion concentrated in particular on the criteria for membership in the federation. On the one hand there was the question of not restricting the federation to a particular circle of data archives, and on the other not to transform this

federation into an organization which might be too large to be manageable. It also seemed necessary to anticipate the possible participation of organizations from Eastern Europe and the third World.

It was agreed that smaller institutions which might be excluded for the formal reason of being too small might be able nevertheless to make a decisive contribution in a special field. Furthermore they should be entitled to profit from the co-operation in the federation. Whenever the appropriate situation would arise, some other form of liaison would have to be developed. There finally was agreement on opening of the federation to those organizations which have the capacity and expertise to significantly and continuously promote the projects and procedures for enhancing exchange of data and technologies among data organizations. At the same time members are expected to stimulate the development and use of these procedures throughout the world.

Participants similarly underlined the necessity of establishing close relations with IASSIST, although it was decided not to include this in the statutes. It was also stressed that the new Federation should contact UNESCO and the International Social Science Council in order to achieve Standing Committee status under the ISSC partially replacing the Standing Committee on Social Science Data and later pursue the possibility of a regular membership.

Discussion turned to the organization of a board of IFDO and resulted in proposing the election of a board of seven members who would choose a president from among themselves, and the formation of a secretariat which should be taken over usually for one year by the organization responsible for the next annual meeting.

A working group (P. Nielsen, D. Handley and E. Avedon) was set up to incorporate the modifications which emerged in this session into the draft statutes.

2. The Work Program of IFDO

The second session was chaired by Erwin K. Scheuch. He emphasized the importance of well defined working projects and commented on his proposal for "Possible Joint Tasks for the IFDO", the purpose of which was to outline several projects that could be developed in the new federation. There is a specific problem with those countries not yet possessing an advanced methodological and technical capacity. It was agreed that nevertheless special efforts should be made to take them into account in carrying out projects. The importance of training programs, and the encouragement of new ones and the use of those already available were underlined.

Stein Rokkan suggested that the activities of IFDO should essentially be based on special projects for which at least two or three of the members could form a core working group, and that it should develop cooperative activities with a scientific content, and not restrict itself to organizational contacts. Since survey data will probably not retain their current predominance, other data types should receive more attention (e.g. historical data, data for computer cartography) than they have in the past.

All participants unanimously supported the working program as outlined in subsequent paragraphs:

A. Plans for Activity

1) A seminar for data personnel in technologically weak countries

Most of the IFDO members have a long experience in the field and they have gone through different stages of development in computing applied to the social science data archiving. This means that they have had experiences with different data handling technologies, and in turn with different methodologies applicable to the different levels, as well as with different institutional arrangements for data handling. This knowledge could be transferred to situations which are both technologically and institutionally weaker,

in order to help colleagues who are now going through more or less the same experience, to avoid the more obvious and wasteful pitfalls. This activity seems to be very important especially in view of the pressure that the computer marketing for large machines exerts, leading to decisions that are not necessarily always appropriate for a given level of development. On the other hand the danger of imminently obsolete technologies or software should be avoided in all the cases where more sophisticated and easier to use technologies and methodologies are available. In order to tap the experience and skills available in the major existing data centers, IFDO proposes to organize a seminar for personnel in data services coming from situations where the technology has not yet developed. The seminar (which could become a major feature of IFDO and be organized either in one of the existing centers or as a travelling team) should address itself not only to academic personnel, but also administrators. It was proposed to present this project to UNESCO, and if it is met with interest, to draft a more detailed project for rapid realization.

2) Comparative studies

When the data archive movement started, one of its major contributions was expected to be in the field of comparative research. By now the various archives have accumulated a sufficiently large number of relevant studies to make further steps towards compiling "ex post facto comparative studies" a worthwhile field of development.

As an initial step each data repository would compile a list of existing cross national studies in their holdings. Second, those one-nation studies which have earned much attention in the science community would be listed. On this basis one would check cross-nationally for one-nation studies that include similar indicators. Formats of the compilation and presentation of the results would be developed by a working group. The inventorying task would be at the initiative of each archive and could be coordinated by the

working group. While this was approved as a work area, no immediate action was proposed.

3) Levels of processing raw data

The major archives have developed data handling routines (checking, cleaning, recoding) relying partly on program packages (Utility Coder, OSIRIS, etc.) and partly on inhouse routines. The various stages of processing are only roughly comparable across institutions, although the same problems tend to exist (and persist) in each.

The exchange of data management programs is essential since many organizations are still lacking the most appropriate instruments for meeting their processing requirements. Moreover the IFDO Board should exercise influence on the software package developers to further develop the data handling options in their systems.

As a first step, the specific routines now in use would be listed. Then it would be specified what the various "quality categories" or "status classes" for data sets mean in different archives. On this basis an international "Standard Data Quality Description" would be defined.

This point is of particular importance, given that the different archives cannot immediately clean all the data they have. Therefore a standardized frame of reference for status classes should be developed in the very near future.

4) Study description and standardization of data documentation

A standardization of descriptors and descriptions for data would be a significant contribution to the international exchange of data.

Earlier workshops - in particular the Copenhagen workshop on Study Description and Classification - have shown what might be achieved in this field. The actual implementation of the agreed upon formats in international exchange should be promoted. Standards for codebook formats could be re-

commended not only for archives but also to primary researchers.

Interested organizations would be invited to fill in the accompanying Study Description Form for several test studies. On this basis a final discussion will be organized for including modifications in the scheme. It shall then be used as an instrument for interarchival exchange of information on holdings. This probably will be organized as a magnetic tape exchange service.

Parallel to this, examples of codebook documentation shall be examined from each archive and standards of documentation shall be developed, probably in an additional workshop. It should be remembered that IASSIST already has a working group concerned with that topic. A guideline should be written on how to prepare and describe the data. This task could be undertaken jointly by IASSIST or by IFDO.

5) Workbooks, training seminars and related teaching aids

Training seminars and workbooks relying on archival data have proved to be good instruments for promoting the use of archive holdings. Several initiatives in this field are already underway (ICPSR, ZA). Several data analysis Seminars are by now almost "institutions". A work group could concentrate on systematic comparisons of experiences and come up with suggestions for further development. Training services should be offered to countries which are interested in starting or reinforcing social research.

6) Privacy legislation and research

The privacy legislation in Western industrial societies has put considerable constraints on data access in social research. Data protection laws and their effects on research should be reviewed, and measures for assuring needed access should be discussed. Since this point is of particular importance, a workshop on "Privacy Legislation and Research: Emerging Data Protection and Social Sciences Need for Access

to Data" is planned in conjunction with the next CESSDA/IFDO conference in August 9-11, 1978 in Cologne, prior to the ISA Congress. (For further details see the proposal which was distributed in the meeting).*)

A report on the IFDO meeting in Cologne will then be given at the IASSIST meeting on privacy at Uppsala. The board will establish the necessary contacts with IASSIST in order to avoid overlaps.

7) Computer cartography

In this field a CESSDA joint project is in the starting phase with participation by ADPSS, NDS, and BASS. A meeting on computer cartography is planned for the beginning of September in Bergen (now postponed to November) 1977. Several members of IFDO are interested and active in the field.

B. Working commitments

Those present at the initial meeting agreed to commit themselves to the following projects between now and the next meeting. Additional volunteers are welcome, especially in those areas where no sufficient commitments have been made as yet. Inquiries should be addressed to Guido Martinotti.

- a) A seminar for data personnel in technologically less advanced settings and countries.

Guido Martinotti has taken over responsibility for drafting a proposal.

- b) Comparative studies
- c) Levels of processing raw data
- d) Study description and standardization of Data Documentation.
Ekkehard Mochmann and Per Nielsen will promote activities in this field.
- e) Work books and related teaching aids.

Sharon Henry, David Handley, Warren Miller and Maria Wicken

*) Zie de rubriek 'Mededelingen' in dit nummer (red.)

form a working group and will define the program for further activities.

f) Privacy legislation and research.

Along the lines of the proposal distributed in the meeting Ekkehard Mochmann, Paul Müller and Erwin Scheuch will organize the conference at Cologne in 1978.

g) Computer cartography.

The initiative here lies with Stein Rokkan and Björn Henrichsen.

3. Approval of the statutes and election of the board

Finally, the session examined the statutes as they were edited by a working group. On their recommendation the word "limited" was adopted in article 2. It was also established that the members of the board will resign if they leave the member organization.

The statutes were approved by the representatives of the following organizations serving as founding members: ADPSS, BASS, Canadian Social Sciences Data Clearing House, DDA, DPLS, ICPSR, IRSS, Leisure Studies Data Bank, NDS, SSRC, Steinmetz Archives, Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung. The membership becomes effective upon confirming letters to the president-elect.

For the first election only six members will definitely be elected, then an attempt shall be made to recruit one additional board member from Eastern Europe. If this is not successful, the candidate receiving the seventh largest vote will be the seventh Board member.

As secret ballot was taken to determine the members of the Board, having the following results:

Martinotti	11	votes
Scheuch	10	"
Clubb	9	"
Crewe	8	"
Henrichsen	7	"
Robbin	7	"
Henry	6	"

Four other candidates received fewer votes. Thus, the first Board is composed of those receiving at least seven votes. In case our attempts to recruit an additional Board member from Eastern Europe are unsuccessful, Sharon Henry will be the seventh Board member.

According to the statutes, article V, there is a rotating membership. Although ordinary membership is for a period of two years, the article specifies that for the first Board four of the seven members will serve two years, three other only one year. According to the election results, Martinotti, Scheuch, Clubb and Crewe will serve two years.

Cologne, September 30, 1977



(Ekkehard Mochmann)



(Erwin K. Scheuch)

(Ekkehard Mochmann and Erwin K. Scheuch,
on the basis of notes by Phillip Laurent
and Guido Martinotti)

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