

ESDS now on the Access Grid

ESDS is pleased to announce that it now has an Access Grid Node (AGN) gained as part of a programme funded by ESRC and National Centre for e-Social Science (NCeSS). These AGNs enable advanced communication and collaborative technology for social science departments and research centres across the UK.

The AGN is an Internet Protocol (IP) based video conference collaboration tool and it will be used to support and promote ESDS, NCeSS and other projects based at ESDS. The system



comprises four cameras and three screen projectors allowing up to five local members of ESDS staff to communicate and collaborate with remote centres at multiple locations. In 2007, ESDS will move into its new purpose-built building and the AGN will be relocated into a specialised conference area offering a potential local audience of up to 50 people.

With over 500 nodes installed worldwide, the Access Grid is quickly becoming an essential resource for national and international academic collaboration.

A series of online training conferences have been arranged through NCeSS and Louise Corti of ESDS will be giving a talk entitled 'About the Economic and Social Data Service' on 11 May 2006.

www.ncess.ac.uk/events/AGN/
www.accessgrid.org ■

Focus on 100 Families

Families, Social Mobility and Ageing, an Intergenerational Approach, 1900-1988, held at the UKDA under SN 4938 and known as '100 Families', is a study based on 170 in-depth, life history, semi-structured interviews carried out with British respondents from three generations. The middle generation of respondents was born between 1930 and 1955.

Participants talked about their life including family, work, education, politics, housing and leisure; interviews averaged 54 pages in length.

The data were deposited in an electronic format, but required anonymisation, proofing and reformatting to create consistent documents. Documentation supporting the data was enhanced. Summary information was extracted from the in-depth interviews to produce a data listing for the study. A PDF user guide was created by collating original ESRC funding applications, correspondence between the researchers over the sampling frame, response rates and other contextual information.

The result is an enhanced collection, available for download as MS Word and RTF files. The entire collection also has basic levels of

eXtensible Markup Language (XML) added and this fully browseable and searchable collection of XML files has been published in ESDS Qualidata Online.

The 100 Families collection offers an incredibly rich resource on its own merits. Another related collection, Edwardians (held at the UKDA under SN 2000), includes interviews with over 400 British people born between 1870 and 1908. While the questionnaires are not identical, they contain many similar questions, enabling longitudinal analysis across a wide range of subjects. Currently, the Edwardians collection is available as PDFs, with six interviews searchable on ESDS Qualidata Online. Funding has just been secured to fully digitise this collection and ESDS look forward to providing full electronic access to over 600 interviews covering many aspects of social history spanning the late 19th and 20th centuries.



These data are attracting users and have contributed to the significant increase in usage, some 2000% since January 2003, of the ESDS Qualidata collection.

www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/online/data/ ■

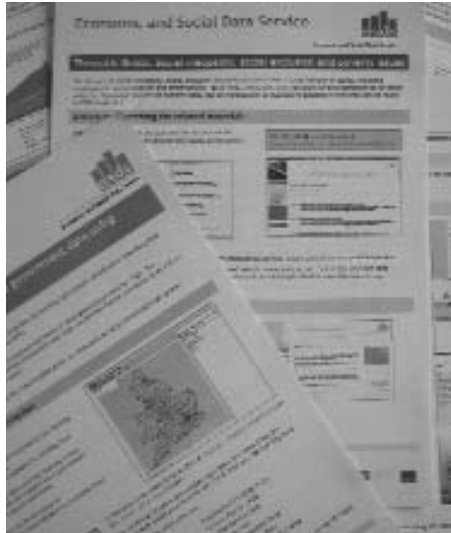
New series of thematic guides

ESDS has a remit to promote data and data resources. Resource discovery is an important part of this. While users can search and browse across the significant collection of over 5000 datasets, thematic approaches to finding data are always very popular. The past quarter has seen the development and launch of a new series of thematic guides. These complement the ESDS introductory and 'hands-on' introductions to a range of ESDS services offered in an easy to follow step-by-step manner (examples include guides to using Nesstar, finding and accessing data, and navigating the ESDS web site).

Seven new topic-based thematic guides to qualitative data have been now launched covering themes of:

- social class and social change
- crime and social control
- later life studies

- health studies
- gender studies
- family studies
- institutional studies



These guides provide an overview of the subject, examples of key datasets held or catalogued by ESDS, and links to UK centres of research expertise in that area.

ESDS International have already produced a thematic guide on educational outcomes. This guide offers advice on finding both macro and micro international data sources, information about the cross country comparability of these data and also some additional sources of education data.

These guides complement the thematic materials already produced by ESDS Government for example on: health, the labour market and social capital.

More guides will be added over the coming months. As always, feedback and additional suggestions are welcomed.

www.esds.ac.uk/support/guides.asp ●

Surveys, social capital and social networks

ESDS Government and the ESRC Research Methods Programme organised a meeting on 'Surveys, social capital and social networks' in Belfast on 31 January 2006. The meeting was divided into two half-day seminars. In the morning sessions Vanessa Higgins and Jo Wathan from ESDS Government presented an introduction to the surveys supported by ESDS Government and an overview of how social capital is measured within the surveys. Mike Savage and Gindo Tampubolon from the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester presented the afternoon sessions which

gave an introduction to the use of social network analysis. Network approaches to social capital and new perspectives on measuring social capital were discussed.

This was the first ESDS Government seminar to be held in Northern Ireland and it was very well received with participants from a variety of sectors, including academia, local government and charitable organisations.

www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/2006-01-31/index.html ●

ESRC Research Methods Festival

The second ESRC Research Methods Festival will be held at St. Catherine's College, Oxford from 17-20 July 2006 and is organised by the Research Methods Programme in collaboration with the National Centre for Research Methods and the National Centre for e-Social Science. The Festival aims to engage social scientists from a wide variety of disciplines at various points in their careers, from academic and government researchers to PhD students.

The Festival aims to stimulate interest, highlight issues and opportunities and showcase new developments in research

methods. The programme includes cutting-edge statistical developments, developments in visual methods, interdisciplinary sessions on 'place', 'the family' and 'ethnicity', as well as quick introductory guides for newcomers and practical sessions for new researchers and PhD students. A theme running throughout the Festival will be resources for researchers with many demonstrations and stalls to provide information and expert advice.

Booking for the Festival will begin online mid-March 2006.

www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/festival/ ●

ESDS and Question Bank: working together

In the past few months, meetings have taken place to create closer working practices between ESDS and Question Bank (QB), based at Surrey. Discussions initially focused on how the reporting processes of both services could be harmonised, as requested by the ESRC. ESDS and QB will now report to the same (ESDS) Advisory Committee, with a new member invited on board to reflect QB interests.

The Surrey, Manchester and Essex teams are investigating a range of operational issues exploring potential areas of synergy and collaboration between the two sister services. ESDS welcome the opportunity to work closer with QB to enhance provision of user documentation for surveys, linked resource discovery - searching questions and data, and training and promotion.

qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk ●



Visitors from South Korea

The UKDA was recently visited by a group of scholars and professionals who are planning a national data archive in the humanities and social sciences in South Korea.

The visitors are in the process of collecting and digitising data - both qualitative and quantitative - and came to the Archive for advice and guidance on the acquisition, preservation, dissemination and promotion of data.



They commented, "as a young organization, we are eager to learn from the experienced such as the UK Data Archive. We have been utterly impressed by the size and diversity of data collection held at UKDA as well as for its superb organization and service. As the data we collect come from both qualitative and quantitative sources, UKDA provides the best model for our purpose."

The UKDA has recently given advice to other groups starting archives including Russian, French, Romanian and South African professionals. ●

Inside the data factory

Preservation

The preservation system, housed within the UK Data Archive, and used by ESDS, AHDS History and others, is often referred to as the unseen hub of the archive. Without it, dissemination of the data would not be possible. The UKDA preservation system currently holds 266,000 files in 56,000 directories, going back 34 years, and occupying around 650 Gigabytes, with the capacity for more than 3 Terabytes.

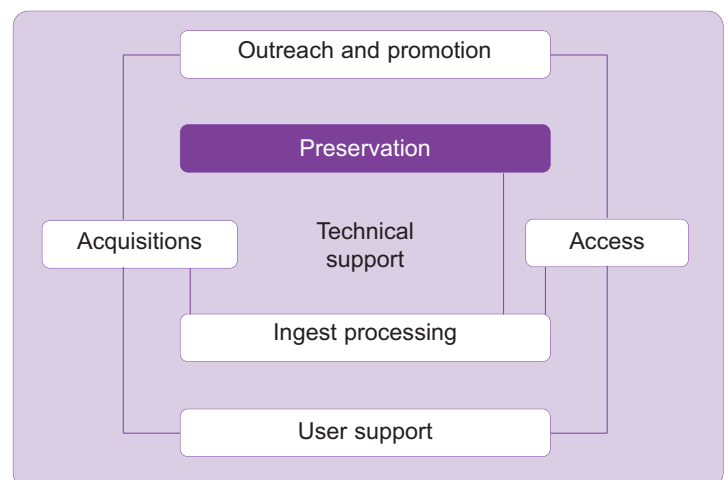
The preservation system has several elements: procedures, policies and processes; hardware; and standards. These are fully documented in the UK Data Archive Preservation Policy. All data in the UKDA are preserved using a standard directory structure. Both data and documentation are stored in portable formats, ensuring that they can be read via many different platforms, and also can be converted to the required format easily.

The data are stored in multiple copies including: on a main preservation server; within a front-end server; within a nearsite front-end server; and on a server in a remote location. Tapes, SCSI disks, CD-ROMs and DVDs are all used. The Archive also maintains multiple copies of the data: as they arrived in their original format;

as they appeared in previously revised versions; as well as the final dataset which is made available for dissemination.

The hardware on which the data are stored internally are located within a secure environment containing monitoring devices which highlight potential environmental issues before they become real problems. The UKDA follows best practices in information security management and in security and preservation, such as those specified within BS7799. A disaster recovery policy is also in place.

All these efforts are undertaken to ensure that the data are stored as securely as possible. Users can confidently download them, knowing that they are receiving exactly what has been specified in the catalogue. The good news is that this process has proven highly successful as no data have been lost so far during the life of the Archive! ●



Workshop at Mass-Observation in Brighton

The University of Sussex Library recently hosted a workshop organised by the Mass-Observation Archive and ESDS Qualidata. The event entitled 'Exploring the potential: examining archived data at Mass-Observation and ESDS Qualidata' was well attended by an interesting mix of researchers and allowed an exchange of ideas about effective access and usage of the collections held by both archives.

Dorothy Sheridan of the University of Sussex Library outlined the history of the Mass-Observation Archive and described the material collected during its present phase of research which began in 1982. Her colleague, Sandra Koa Wing,

discussed the issues surrounding the maintenance of a network of contributors, writers and diarists.

John Southall, from ESDS Qualidata, spoke about the role digital data archives can play alongside traditional paper archives such as the Mass-Observation. He discussed the steps involved in developing a plan of digitisation and outlined the differences, from the perspective of researchers, between using paper and digital repositories.

Tanya Evans, Nick Hubble and Bill Bytheway detailed their own ongoing research projects and all stressed the

importance of both accessible data and accompanying metadata - the supporting documentation that provides context and insight when re-using data.

www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/news/eventdetail.asp?ID=1474 ●



Photograph courtesy of Mass-Observation Archive

AHDS History News

Punched-card reader at Essex

As part of the preparation for B.D. Henning (ed.), *History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1660-1690*, published in 1983, records relating to the appointment and dismissal of Justices of the Peace were computerised and stored on 80-column punch cards. The data were used towards creating biographical articles on members of the House of Commons during this period. The punch cards were stored at the History of Parliament Trust, but the ability to extract the data from the cards was lost, and until recently the data recorded on these cards were accessible only in a few surviving print-outs.

However AHDS History, along with the UK Data Archive, at the University of Essex has recently purchased a Cardmation CF300 punched-card reader, and successfully read the surviving punch cards. Once the cards

had been fed through the reader, Cardmation's Winread software transferred the data into a simple text file with each line representing the data of a single card.

Most varieties of 80-column punch cards can now be read, and AHDS History are willing to undertake, for a small fee, reading of cards containing data of interest to historians and social scientists. For further details email: info@ahds.ac.uk. ●



Forthcoming Events

21-23 April 2006: BSA Annual Conference 2006 - Sociology, Social Order(s) and Disorder(s), Harrogate International Conference Centre

26 April 2006 - 11 May 2006: C21st Curation: access and service delivery, Gower Street, London

11 May 2006: Access Grid Seminar Series, Virtual

23-26 May 2006: IASSIST 2006, Ann Arbor, Michigan

28-30 June 2006: Second International Conference on e-Social Science, Manchester

6-7 July 2006: Envisioning future challenges in networked information, York

8 July 2006 - 18 August 2006: 39th Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis and Collection, University of Essex

12-14 July 2006: Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys (MOLS 2006), University of Essex

17-20 July 2006: ESRC Research Methods Festival, St Catherine's College, Oxford

12-14 September 2006: International Conference on Child Cohort Studies, St. Catherine's College, Oxford

14-16 September 2006: British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Group Annual Conference 2006, Edinburgh

Further details of events and training courses can be found on the ESDS web site.

News Byte

The number of students recorded using data (excluding international macro data) in the classroom last year was just under 7,500.

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