

## Editorial: Methodology in our Madness

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It is a great pleasure to present the first issue of a new journal. However, the more sceptical reader might wonder whether yet another new journal is really needed. In this editorial we attempt to justify our self-indulgence and to set out our vision for *Survey Research Methods*. We would warmly welcome feedback on any of the issues we raise.

The European Survey Research Association (ESRA) was created in the Autumn of 2004, an initiative of Professor Willem Saris. The objectives of ESRA, as stated in its constitution, are to promote (1) communication between survey researchers in Europe without excluding communication with survey researchers elsewhere in the world, (2) communication between substantive researchers in the social sciences and survey methodologists in order to improve the quality of the research in both fields, (3) the study of old and new survey procedures with respect to the conditions under which they can provide good quality data.

The first main activity of ESRA (<http://esra.spp.nl>) was to organise a conference in Barcelona in July 2005. During the course of this successful conference, attended by over 300 delegates, the first General Assembly of ESRA formally elected officers of the Association and made some decisions about principles and future activities. One of those decisions was to set up this journal as the journal of the Association. It is intended that the journal should contribute to the objectives of ESRA stated above.

It is our experience that articles on survey methods topics tend to be scattered throughout a broad set of journals, often being on the periphery of the topics covered by any particular journal. Many survey methods papers appear in journals that are primarily concerned with a substantive area of study (e.g. alcohol, travel behaviour) while others appear in journals of a broad discipline (e.g. sociology, psychology). And many of these journals are national ones rather than international. The very small number of journals that carry substantial concentrations of survey methods papers tend to be statistical journals and therefore publish only (or mainly) papers on what might be deemed 'statistical' aspects of survey methods. There is no journal that both focusses exclusively on survey methods and encompasses all aspects of survey aspects, from the conceptual through the psychological to the statistical.

Additionally, we believe passionately in the advantages of free access and rapid publication. By free access we mean both open to all and free from costs to the reader. To achieve

this, while also minimising the necessary administration, we have chosen to publish *Survey Research Methods* exclusively on the internet. In due course, the entire process of submission, review and publication will be online. We hope that the open access policy will facilitate use of the journal by users who may not have access to a relevant library, such as many researchers employed in government, other public sector or private organisations. This should help us to achieve the ESRA objectives of communication well beyond the boundaries of academia. Online publication also makes it easier to reach across national boundaries. Many – perhaps most – aspects of survey methods have at least some degree of generalisation beyond the country in which the research was carried out and we therefore hope that papers which may be of relevance to researchers in other countries might get published in *Survey Research Methods* rather than in national journals where they may get little exposure outside of their country of origin. A further advantage of internet publication is that authors can include data, programs, survey documents, pictures, videos or pretty much any kind of electronic material that can be hosted on the journal website and linked to the text of an article.

At the same time, free access and the absence of a print version of the journal does not mean that we are lowering the standards of the content. Far from it. We have recruited a panel of 28 respected Associate Editors who are responsible for obtaining reviews of submitted manuscripts and synthesising the reviewers' reports into a recommendation. We will only publish papers that are clear, original, use appropriate methods, and that are likely to be of broad interest to those involved in designing, carrying out and using surveys in academic, government, private and other organisations. In the ten months since the first call for papers was issued on 27 February 2006, 36 submissions were received and decisions were made of 17 of these, of which only four were accepted. Hopefully this indicates that our acceptance criteria have not been too lax, though of course the early days of a new journal may not be strongly indicative of what will follow once the journal becomes established and better-known. We hope that both the quantity and the quality of submissions will improve. We will also endeavour to improve the speed and efficiency of the review process: any new venture has a tendency for teething troubles and *Survey Research Methods* has been no exception.

In summary, we see some important distinguishing features of this journal which, in combination, we hope will

make it a valuable and useful resource for everyone interested in survey practice:

- Coverage of all aspects of survey methodology;
- Exclusion of topics not relevant to survey methodology;
- High quality;
- Practical orientation;
- International outlook;
- Fast review and publication;
- Flexibility in the type of material that can be published;
- Unrestricted access, free of charge.

We would urge all readers to consider *Survey Research Methods* as an outlet for their own methodological research and to encourage their colleagues, students and other contacts to have a look at the contents. We hope that you will enjoy this first issue. It has taken a lot of effort to get this far and we are extremely grateful to everyone who has helped us in this endeavour, especially the authors of submitted papers, the Associate Editors and those who have given their valuable time to serve as reviewers.