

# Eurostat project on harmonisation of Time Use surveys: Pilot survey design and evaluation, some conclusions and recommendations.

Klas Rydenstam  
Statistics Sweden  
Box 24 300  
S-104 51 Stockholm  
Sweden  
klas.rydenstam@scb.se

## 1. Introduction

In the paper, Eurostat project on harmonisation of Time Use surveys contributed by Christina Österberg and Antonio Baigorri, the background and the future of the named project is summarised. This paper deals briefly with the design and outcome of the time use pilot surveys carried out within the project in 12 European countries<sup>1</sup>, and the conclusions and recommendations for the future<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Survey design.

The pilot survey design is characterised by the following properties:

Unit of study: Households, household members 10 years and older were included. Sample size about 200 households.

Information about the household and household members was collected by means of different instruments and activities:

A *Household questionnaire*<sup>3</sup>, face to face interview, information about the household, household composition etc.

An *Individual questionnaire*<sup>4</sup>, interview or left behind to be filled in by household members 10 years or older, information on individuals.

A *Diary*<sup>5</sup>, left behind to be filled in by household members 10 years or older for two randomly selected, designated days, a weekday and a weekend day. The diary records primary and secondary activities, "for whom", "with whom" and location.

A *Week diary*<sup>6</sup>, records a week's working hours for gainfully employed.

A *Coding system*<sup>7</sup> for activities and other information gathered in the diary.

The pilot design was quite prescriptive. It was strongly recommended to apply the common guidelines, questionnaires, diaries, etc., with anything but minor changes. The course of action was to harmonise from the input side rather than from the output side.

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<sup>1</sup> Finland, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, UK, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, and Slovenia

<sup>2</sup> See Eurostat document DOC E2/TUS/5/98 and DOC E2/TU/Pilot/13.1/97

<sup>3</sup> See Eurostat document DOC.E2/TU/PILOT6/96

<sup>4</sup> See Eurostat document DOC.E2/TU/PILOT6/96

<sup>5</sup> See Eurostat document DOC.E2/TU/PILOT5/96

<sup>6</sup> See Eurostat document DOC.E2/TU/PILOT5/96

<sup>7</sup> See Eurostat document DOC.E2/TU/PILOT11+12/96

### 3. Evaluation

The evaluation of the pilots primarily aimed at testing the survey process and searching for indications of various sorts of defects in the diary data.

### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The participating countries carried out the survey without any major or unexpected problems and accepted the survey design, although certain aspects of it met some criticism. Analyses of the data gathered by means of the time diary do not indicate problems of the kind or to the extent that generally questions the design. On the contrary, as far as can be judged from analysing the data, it meets with high demands regarding the most central of the examined aspects. A few need revision.

Collection of time use data by means of self-administered time diaries is associated with difficulties. The burden on the respondents is heavy. The organisation of the data collection is complicated by the fact that the diary days are sampled by some random procedure that the respondents must not influence. These and other difficulties taken together suggest that the risk for non-response is high and need to be minimised. The way to do this is probably not to prescribe a specific survey design and procedures, but to open up for the survey agencies to adapt these to their specific national conditions, particularly in such respects that have less impact on the results and hence affect the international comparability. Consequently, the general recommendation is to shift towards output harmonisation, but still applying the same survey attributes that particularly influences the results.

Starting from the anticipated non-response problem and subject matters to address, the unit of study and what to optimise the survey for, need to be reconsidered. As alternative to precise regulation of sample designs and procedures, it might be sufficient to define and agree on a set of estimates with certain, precise properties and in a priority order. The properties of the estimates influence (among other things) the way diary days are selected and distributed over time.

The diary, including the diary content, basic format and some of the procedures in connection with the data collection, might have to be more precisely modelled and agreed on. Furthermore, it is probably even more important to be precise and prescriptive when it comes to coding, code lists, handling of specific situations, code index, etc.

### FRENCH RÉSUMÉ

*Dans le cadre du projet de la "Harmonisation des études d'utilisation du temps" une série d'études pilote était réalisé en Europe avec une formation commune. L'évaluation indiquait que la formation d'étude en générale a fonctionnée bien. L'étude est exigeant et le risque d'une grande non-réponse est considérable. Pour éliminer cet risque il-y-a en future des raisons de permettre les pays participants d'adapter l'étude à des conditions nationeux, mais garder ces éléments de la formation, que sont supposés d'avoir une grande influence sur les résultates des études et par conséquent à la comparabilité d'international des résultats. Cette concernant la formation principale et la système de la codification. La recommandation est de renoncer à la harmonisation dans la côté de la collection (= "input") en faveur de la côté du rapport (= "output").*