Documenting the question design process on the European Social Survey

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Outline

- Background and overview of ESS questionnaire design process

- Overview of question design template & assessment of it

- Aims under DASISH program

- Progress so far and next steps

ESS Questionnaire

- **Core section**

  - around 150 questions covering a range of topics

  - same questions fielded in each round

  - enables comparisons to be made and changes over time to be monitored

- **Rotating Modules**

  - 30 items; focusing on a specific topic

  - modules sometimes repeated in later rounds

  - designed by teams of academics in collaboration with ESS researchers

  - subject to extensive pre-testing during development process

Rotating module topics

European Social Survey

- Round 1
  - Immigration
  - Citizenship, involvement and democracy

- Round 2
  - Family, work & well-being
  - Economic morality in Europe
  - Health and care seeking

- Round 3
  - Personal and social well-being
  - The Timing of Life

- Round 4
  - Welfare
  - Ageism

- Round 5
  - Trust in Justice
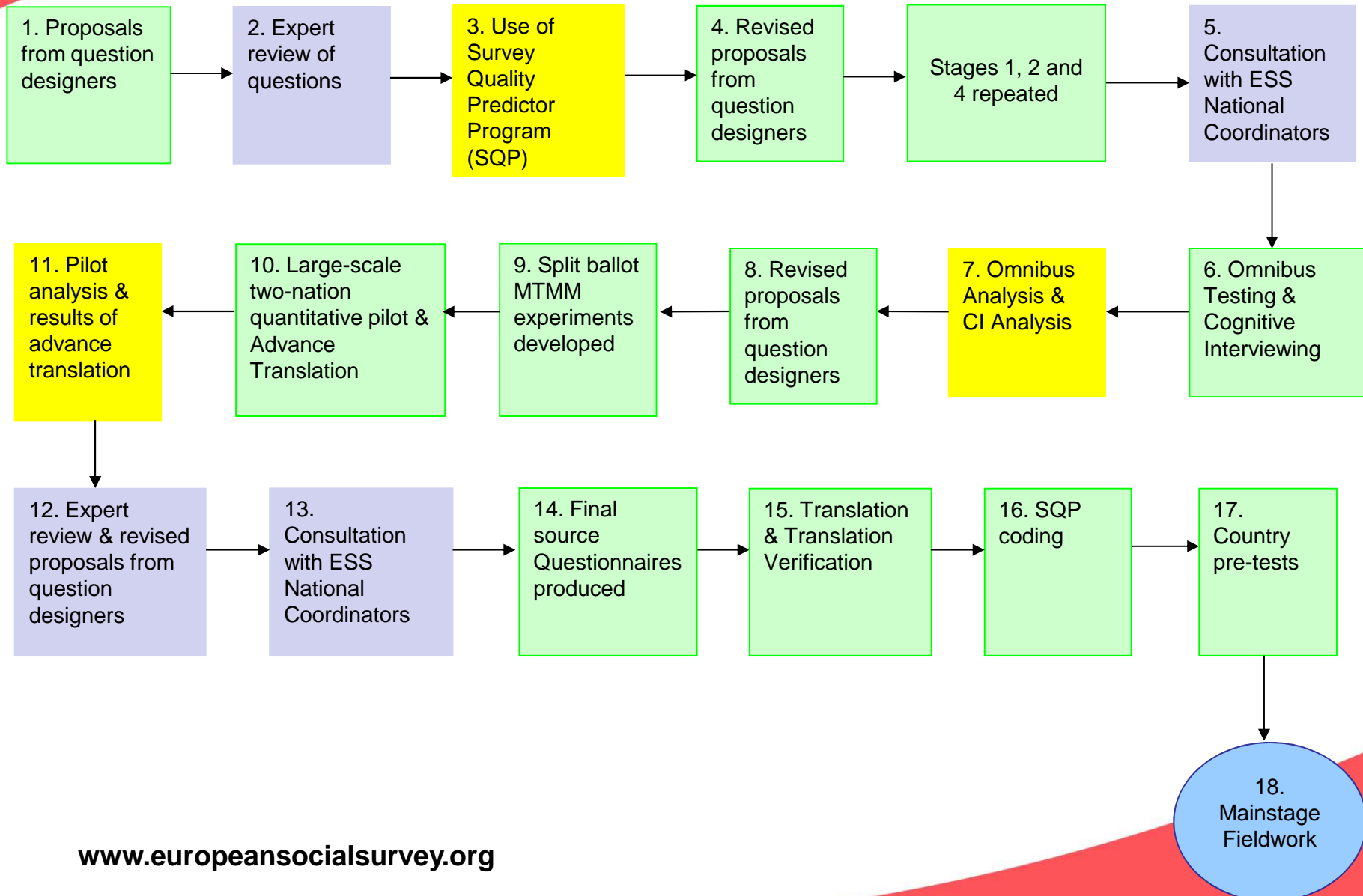 - Work, family & well-being (repeat from R2)

- Round 6
  - Personal and social well-being (repeat from R3)
  - Democracy

- Round 7
  - Immigration (repeat from R1)
  - Health

Question design process

European Social Survey

| 1. Proposals from question designers | → | 2. Expert review of questions | → | 3. Use of Survey Quality Predictor Program (SQP) | → | 4. Revised proposals from question designers | → | Stages 1, 2 and 4 repeated | → | 5. Consultation with ESS National Coordinators |

| 11. Pilot analysis & results of advance translation | ← | 10. Large-scale two-nation quantitative pilot & Advance Translation | ← | 9. Split ballot MTMM experiments developed | ← | 8. Revised proposals from question designers | ← | 7. Omnibus Analysis & CI Analysis | ← | 6. Omnibus Testing & Cognitive Interviewing |

| 12. Expert review & revised proposals from question designers | → | 13. Consultation with ESS National Coordinators | → | 14. Final source Questionnaires produced | → | 15. Translation & Translation Verification | → | 16. SQP coding | → | 17. Country pre-tests |

18. Mainstage Fieldwork

www.europeansocialsurvey.org

Question design template

- Paper based document; used in four rounds to date

- Documents entire process from first proposal through to final module

- Allows question design team (QDT) and ESS researchers to work to a clearly defined structure

- Ensures data users can follow development of structure and content of module

- Ensures data users understand the rationale behind asking particular questions & why certain areas not covered

Template content

- Theoretical background, aims and objectives

- Description of all concepts to be measured in the module and their expected relationships

- Complex concepts – detailed description and specification of sub-concepts (as necessary) & question wording for specific items

- Simple Concepts – detailed description & question wording for specific items

- Items not to be repeated (only applies to repeat modules)

SUB CONCEPT NAME: Growth to Resilience

Describe the sub concept in detail outlining any further sub concepts or specifying that it can be measured directly
REFER TO P7 IN OCTOBER 2011 (PRE PILOT) TEMPLATE FOR FURTHER DETAILS (NEW ITEM PROPOSED BY QDT)

Final item to test in pilot:

	Does not apply at all										Applies completely	(Don't know)
B24 I have learnt that I can overcome most of life's difficulties	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88

Pilot analysis:

Frequency distribution and descriptive statistics (B24)

	UK	RU
Does not apply at all	1.0	1.0
1	.5	.5
2	1.5	1.7
3	3.3	4.1
4	1.3	2.4
5	6.0	17.2
6	8.3	8.4
7	19.8	16.2
8	29.3	18.6
9	12.8	15.3
Applies completely	16.5	14.8
Item non response	.2 (DK)	.7 (DK)
Mean	7.50	7.10
Mode	8	8
Skewness	-1.205	-.672

Comments from UK survey agency:

Cognitive interviewing revealed that respondents tended to not focus on specific events here but thought about this in a more generic/vague sense; sometimes they were unable to cite any specific difficulties but gave an answer anyway based on their general attitude.

Also, while some respondents reflected on past experiences, other respondents were looking ahead in terms of how they felt they would be able to cope with current difficulties.

Two younger respondents found this question difficult as they considered themselves too young to have

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experienced *life's difficulties* and therefore focussed on what they realised were probably more trivial school/homework issues.

There was however no evidence that respondents were more likely than in other items in this battery to select DK, or opt for a scale midpoint.

RECOMMENDATION: The question wording could be simplified to *I can overcome most of life's difficulties* which avoids the past/present ambiguity.

Comments from Russian survey agency:

ISSUES RAISED BY RESPONDENTS	Some respondents were confused which part of the statement they should answer - "I have learnt or not" or "I can overcome or not". Some respondents referred to proves by time - "Life showed me that yes, according to my experience, all previous events", some respondents say "I am strong, I can do a lot", some respondents discussed what is "most of difficulties" and why kind of difficulties they can overcome. Respondents meant very different types of difficulties - from particular everyday difficulties (get up early to go to school), bad habits (stop drinking alcohol or smoking), health in general (overcome physical disability, illnesses, weakness) to moral (betrayal, loss of close people, etc.).
SUGGESTIONS / COMMENTS OF ESS RUSSIAN TEAM	We could concentrate on only one clear statement, for example "I can overcome most of life's difficulties". It could be agree-disagree statement or applied-not applied to me (then the statement "I feel as a person who can overcome most of life's difficulties). If feelings are important we can say "I am convinced that I can overcome most of life's difficulties". But maybe we should reconsider the whole statement - it is very differently perceived by different respondents and it will be difficult to interpret it.

NC Comments:

SE: is the item asking about if respondents have learnt this or if they actually can overcome the difficulties? I.e. do not know if this is a learning question or capacity question.

Advance translation comments: None of the countries had particular difficulties, but suggest 'overcome' in the sense of 'handle/ manage successfully' to 'pre-empt' queries.

nef suggest re-wording to 'I feel I can overcome most of life's difficulties'. **Carmelo** highlights that this item was not aimed at covering feelings of control, but the sense that one learns from coping with adversity.

City recommendations post-pilot:

This sub-concept ('growth to...' particularly) is very abstract and complex. It is complicated to translate and even with this simplification below is by nature double barrelled (what about people who have always felt resilient?).

	Does not apply at all										Applies completely	(Don't know)
Over time I have become better at dealing with life's difficulties	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	88

There is a suggestion by the UK survey agency and nef to re-word as 'I can overcome life's difficulties', but this is no longer distinct from other resilience items.

We suggest dropping this sub-concept.

Assessment of template

- **Pros**

  - Valuable source of documentation of the development of rotating modules

  - Useful for data analysts to see what a question intends to measure & how can be combined with other questions

  - Transparent documentation of the design process

- **Cons**

  - Volume of comments / suggestions is often large

  - Not easy to easily identify source of comments/suggestions

  - Not easy to 'track' the development of questions

Goal of DASISH

- Create a multi-language questionnaire development tool – to develop, translate and document the concepts & questions used in cross-national surveys

- Produce searchable meta data for the whole question design process

- Three compatible databanks:
- - Question design documentation databank
- - Translation tool and databank
- - Question databank

Question design documentation databank

- Primarily developed for the ESS but needs of other cross-national surveys (e.g. SHARE, ISSP) will also be considered

- The new tool will save time and effort during the design process
  - converting the paper-based template into an online database
  - producing outputs that can be used during the design process

- Will feed directly into the translation and question databanks
  - enabling users to search for concepts or specific questions
  - find information about design, pre-testing, translation and question quality in one place

Progress & next steps

Stage 1 = convert paper-based template to database format

- **First specification produced outlining:**
  - access levels & editing rights
  - need for tool to handle text, numerical data & figures / graphics
  - outputs required - for use during the design stages & potentially for public release later on

- **Next steps:**
  - consult other cross-national survey teams
  - revise / expand on initial specification
  - explore existing tools for questionnaire design documentation
  - start work on beta version of tool