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The PaD, the first longitudinal survey of Catalonia

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Abstract

Initiatives of regional panels have been launched already in different OECD countries and proved to be useful for policy evaluation, especially if countries are strongly decentralised, or for global policy evaluation in much centralised countries. An example of the former is the PaD, a Catalan panel that has been running now for 5 annual waves by a team of very young professionals with limited, yet extremely efficient, resources. This Catalan panel is currently in the process of a big methodological revision and transformation for the better, and also in the process of being transferred to a newly created regional agency for policy evaluation. In this session, the characteristics of the panel and the future of the PaD survey will be presented.

Key words: social structure, inequalities, policy evaluation, sub national panel survey.

The PaD, first longitudinal survey of Catalonia

1. Background to the Catalan context: understanding how the PaD came about

1.1. The Catalan context: a weak tradition of social sciences

The Panel Survey on Inequalities in Catalonia (PaD) can only be understood with a brief look at the context from which it arose. Traditionally, southern Europe has always been a region where the social sciences have been less strongly developed than in central and northern Europe. Catalonia is no exception.

Some examples may serve to highlight this situation. Let us take, for example, the case of sociology. In Catalonia, sociology as a four-year degree course only appeared in 1991. Until then it could only be studied as a further degree, a specialisation founded on another social sciences degree. The same can be said for statistics or political sciences. This explains why many of the most notable sociologists in Catalonia were trained in central or northern Europe, mostly in the universities of France and Belgium (due to geographical proximity and better knowledge of the language).

A look at the facts also shows the lack of sociological tradition in Catalonia. The first journal of sociology dates from 1972 and the first Catalan sociology association was only founded in 1979. The first Catalan sociology congress was

held in 1981 and we had to wait thirteen years to see the second one (1994). The college of sociologists and political scientists, as a symbol of the consolidation of the profession outside the academic sphere, was not founded until 1989 and only then in rather unstable conditions. Fortunately, today we can talk of the consolidation of all these spheres of activity –publications, conferences and corporate organisations working in the social sciences– but they all have a short history.

This late development of the discipline and its institutions and training academics in countries with a weak tradition of longitudinal research goes some way to explaining the non-existence of longitudinal surveys in Catalonia and the lack of methodological know-how for analysing these sources of statistics.

1.2. Lack of political will and governmental support for sub-national surveys

The governments of southern Europe have always appeared to show less interest in social science degrees than in other branches of science. Even today, we see under-funded social science departments in universities. The chance to study for a degree in Catalonia is an option that is open to very few students and many of those who wish to pursue social research must opt to go abroad.

Paradoxically, Catalonia, as an autonomous region within the Spanish state, has significant levels of self-government and responsibility for designing and implementing all kinds of social policy including healthcare, education, housing, employment, the labour market and social work. Given that policy design and

implementation cannot be done in isolation from an in-depth knowledge of the reality it intends to transform, it is essential that Catalonia acquires powerful tools with which to analyse its social reality.

1.3. Lack of representativeness for the Catalan area

While it cannot be said that no social surveys are conducted in Catalonia, one cannot ignore the significant deficit of statistical and sociological sources. The absence of microdata on the Catalan population and the impossibility of getting longitudinal data, for example, has prevented us from conducting certain analyses that are common in the UK, Scandinavia and, albeit introduced at a later date, in continental Europe. They are also frequent in Australia, the United States and Canada.

Although it is true to say that Catalonia has formed part of the sample of some nationwide surveys conducted by the *Institut Nacional d'Estadística* (INE) of Spain, such as for example the Continuous Survey on Family Budgets¹, the Survey on Physical and Mental Disabilities², and the Survey on Wage Structures³, the limitation of the samples have never allowed for an in-depth observation of the differences of the Catalan context or for studies on smaller geographical areas (provinces, counties, municipalities or specific geographical zones).

¹ Years of publication of the Continuous Survey on Family Budget: from 1997, the survey has been providing data on the nature and destination of consumption expenditure, as well as the standard of living in Spanish households, on a quarterly and annual basis.

² Years of publication of the Survey on Physical and Mental Disabilities: 1986, 1999.

³ Years of publication of the Survey on Wage Structures: 1995, 2002. This survey lies within the European Union framework. Its purpose is to provide the EU with data comparable to those of other EU member states.

If we take a look at the European surveys, Catalonia has only ever contributed as a subsample of surveys conducted on a national level. This is the case for the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the European Social Survey (ESS). This is one of the limitations of the European surveys in terms of sub-national realities, such as that of Catalonia, where policy-makers need to know the reality of their area with statistical data that is representative of that area. Although in some cases there is always the possibility of increasing samples in order to achieve the desired geographical representativeness, regional governments have not always provided the necessary funding.

In terms of home-grown surveys, such as the Survey of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (ERMB)⁴ or the Health Survey of Catalonia (ESCA)⁵, despite their importance to our knowledge of the country, they have also come across limitations regarding geographical area or scope of research. The former because it refers only to a part of the region (the metropolitan area of Barcelona), which means it gives a good picture of urban life but does not portray the reality of other areas of Catalonia⁶; the latter because, while it does encompass the whole geographical area of Catalonia, it only covers health-related topics, i.e., a complete picture of the society is not possible on the basis of this survey alone. Neither of them contains longitudinal data.

⁴ Years of publication of the Survey of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona: 1990, 1995, 2005-6.

⁵ Years of publication of the Health Survey of Catalonia (ESCA): 1994, 2002, 2005-6.

⁶ In pro of the Survey of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona it must be said that in its latest edition (2005-2006) the scope of the survey encompasses the whole of Catalonia.

Knowing this context, characterised by the scarcity of sufficiently representative statistical data on Catalonia and by the responsibilities of self-government that require in-depth knowledge of the Catalan social reality, is the key to understanding how the PaD survey came about.

1.4. Start-up of the PaD within the Fundació Jaume Bofill

The Fundació Jaume Bofill is a private, non-profit organisation working to promote initiatives that spread knowledge of Catalan society and activities that contribute to its betterment by eradicating inequalities of all kinds, between people, groups and communities. The Foundation is also particularly interested in extending education and culture to those who, due to their social situation, find it lacking.

Aware of the lack of up-to-date and accessible data on Catalan social reality, in 2001 the Fundació Jaume Bofill decided to conduct a survey to correct this dearth of social data. The background details that we have outlined above are key to understanding why a survey of these characteristics has been undertaken by a private foundation, without any element of institutional support.

2. What makes the Catalan panel survey unique?

Undertaking a panel survey in Catalonia, and not just as a subsample of another survey, has had a primary importance, making this survey unique. It must be said, however, that despite the unique features of this project, our lack of experience has meant that we have inevitably mirrored other European experiences, particularly the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), from which we have received support

and advice at all times. Amongst the unique features of the PaD, we would like to highlight the following:

2.1. The PaD is the first panel experience in Catalonia and as such involves the acquisition of know-how

For the first time, **know-how** on panel surveys is being developed in Catalonia and made accessible to the research community. The PaD is the first sub-national survey **providing longitudinal microdata on the household and individual level**. The initial approach was that, given that the statistical sources were already scarce, new information had to be gathered in a format that was also new: that of longitudinal microdata. However there is still a long way to go. This is why a recent international seminar with European experts was so important, in that they were able to direct us on very specific methodological issues and could guarantee that the survey will take the right direction in the future⁷.

2.2. The PaD is a survey with a representative sample on a provincial level

Given all of the above, ensuring high geographical representativeness became a key issue for this survey. In this sense and for the first time, the PaD allows us to work with a **representative sample of the Catalan region on the level of the four administrative zones into which it is divided (the four provinces)**. On the basis of three segmentation criteria (geographical area, size of municipality and social ranking of the individuals), right from the beginning there was a disproportionate distribution of households to guarantee representativeness on

⁷ On the 24th of March this year (2006) an International Seminar on the PaD was held. Various methodological questions were posed to the invited lecturers, Jonathan Gershuny, Director of the BHPS and the ISER of Great Britain, and Hans Bay, Director of the SFI-Survey in Denmark, to consolidate some of the processes, clear up some doubts and better shape the future of the survey.

the level of the four Catalan provinces: Lleida, Girona, Tarragona and Barcelona. The margins of sampling error with which we have worked are ± 2.78 for Catalonia, ± 3.54 for the province of Barcelona and ± 5.00 for the provinces of Tarragona, Lleida and Girona.

In its first wave, the PaD managed to recruit 1,991 households of the 2,000 planned, which resulted in 1,991 household surveys and 4,589 individual surveys. After four waves (conducted annually from 2001 to 2005), the sample now lies at 1,633 households giving rise to a total of 3,793 individual surveys. We are currently working on a possible broadening of the sample to over 2,000 households. This would allow us to conduct much more ambitious social studies and to introduce parametric analysis methodologies that the current sample does not allow us to use.

2.3. Scope of the PaD survey: social structure and inequalities

The second criteria guiding this survey related to the scope of the research. The PaD questionnaire attempts to encompass every sphere of social structure with enough depth, although there has been a specific focus on bringing to light the mechanisms that generate or reinforce social inequalities, above and beyond their economic dimensions. The PaD questionnaires have been centred on compiling socio-demographic data, data on education, housing, health, the labour market, domestic and family work, income, social positioning and relations and political orientation. Sporadically, it has also been able to cover topics such as the media, leisure, or household facilities.

As well as all the descriptive points that data analysis can highlight on the opportunities and limitations faced by people living in Catalonia (such as finding a job, having a home, reaching the desired level of education, getting healthcare enjoying good health, having enough income to live on, being able to provide care for ones children and family, etc.), the data must allow us to understand much more complex issues, for which longitudinal data is vital. With the PaD data, it is hoped that we can research issues such as functional illiteracy, educational failure, the transition between the parental home and one's own, intermittent and permanent unemployment, temporary and permanent over-qualification and under-qualification in the workplace, temporary employment, dependence on public institutions, hardship, poverty and exclusion. .

2.4. The PaD is a survey to be used by the scientific community

At the start of the project, ***Catalan researchers were invited to give their opinion and contribute to the content of the survey.*** When the survey content was defined, special care was taken to make sure that the information gathered was always complementary to and did not coincide with other surveys conducted here⁸. Furthermore, to bring it into line with the service objective pursued by the Fundació Jaume Bofill, we stipulated that ***access to the PaD data must be free of charge*** for any researchers that request it. In this way, we aim to foster use of the data and advance social research in Catalonia. The lack of experience in using longitudinal data is one of the challenges our research teams must face.

⁸ The need for the PaD to complement surveys such as the ERMB or the ESCA has been mentioned above.

2.5. The PaD aims to exemplify efficiency; to show the potential of information technology for social science

The PaD also aims to exemplify efficiency, demonstrating that with good resource management, social science can be taken forward without excessive cost. For this reason, from the outset the PaD has placed a strong emphasis on **information technology**. Every wave of the survey have been conducted with laptops and the **CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview)** survey system. Moreover, all the survey management was computerised with databases from the outset in order to distribute all the information by e-mail. By using information technology and computerising all the information systems, we have been able to streamline all the interviewing processes and guarantee the yearly frequency of the survey. The project's efficiency has been a key element in the later involvement of the public authorities in this survey.

2.6. The PaD fieldwork has been carried out internally

One of the features that most differentiates the PaD from other surveys conducted in Catalonia, Spain or in Europe is probably the fact that the fieldwork has not been subcontracted to an external partner. This has given us **the utmost control over interview and data quality**. It has also given us enough flexibility to introduce modifications to the project when we considered them to be necessary. We have developed a model of dealing with interviewers based on proximity and individualisation. We have also sought a type of interviewer close to the social sciences who shows a particular interest in being involved in the PaD (in this regard it should be pointed out that in the last edition of the survey, 80% of PaD interviewers were graduates, 20% are close to their graduation, and 95% had

studied social science related subjects). We believe firmly that the quality of our interviewers' academic training has resulted in high quality fieldwork.

2.7. The purpose of the PaD is two-fold: to gain knowledge of the social reality and to convince the authorities of the need to support the survey

The primary purpose of the PaD was to *provide the research community with the social data they need* to conduct an analysis of Catalan society; but secondly, and just as important, was *to influence the authorities, particularly the Catalan government, by means of the facts brought to light by sociological studies, so that they would realise the usefulness of this kind of tool* for tracking and measuring the Catalan social reality. As shall be explained in the section on the future of the PaD, there have been significant advances in both the first and the second of these objectives.

3. The future of the PaD

3.1. Continuity of the survey: getting the necessary institutional support

At the beginning of this paper, it was explained why a survey like the PaD was started by a private foundation and not on the initiative of the Catalan authorities. However, it is not the intention of the Foundation to perpetuate this somewhat anomalous situation. On the contrary, and as has been outlined above, the ultimate goal of the Fundació Jaume Bofill is to prove the need for analytical tools such as the PaD so that it is the Catalan administration that ensures its continuity.

The implementation of social policies to fight social inequalities are the responsibility of the government and that is why, above and beyond the financial support that a project like this deserves to receive from the region's political institutions, the PaD also needs recognition, as a necessary tool for properly guiding political actions.

Fortunately, four years of survey and the support of the analysts who have already made use of the data as a basis for their social research have given us the necessary institutional recognition and financial support to ensure that this survey is not just an idea hatched by the Fundació Jaume Bofill, but a reality. In the near future, the PaD will be managed by a Consortium made up of the Catalan administration through its *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya* (IDESCAT) and the *Diputació de Barcelona* (County Council), various Catalan universities including the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) and the Fundació Jaume Bofill. Among the ultimate goals of this Consortium are to guarantee the accessibility of the data (through the PaD and another statistical sources) and to produce assessment studies of Catalan public policies.

3.2. A few necessary adjustments to the PaD

The first four waves of the PaD survey have allowed us to now consider the survey to be consolidated. For this reason, we can now also consider extending the sample, although this does solely depend on availability of funding. The Fundació Jaume Bofill is working to make this extension a reality for the 6th wave of the survey (January 2007), with a sample surpassing 2000 households.

Another key element for ensuring the future of the survey is making sure that the PaD data is extensively used by the Catalan scientific community or, parallel to this, outside Catalonia. Data collection is only a part of the process and, although necessary, it is not sufficient. The ultimate legitimacy of the PaD can only rest on the use of the data and the acquisition of useful knowledge with which to guide social policy in Catalonia.

Moreover, this “useful knowledge” requires the commitment of two social players: on the one hand, the scientific community that must be able to contribute their knowledge of the reality and propose specific actions, and on the other, the experts in the public authorities who are responsible for integrating the research conclusions and proposals into their specific regional political actions.

Finally, actions undertaken must be critically reviewed by means of assessment procedures. Should the assessment conclusions so dictate, policies which do not meet the objectives for which they were designed must be redirected.

3.3. Links with European surveys: a challenge for the future

Some EU agencies have invested considerable efforts in coordinating the national panels by creating comparative data files across the different EU member states. With this purpose in mind, the Consortium of Household Panels for European Socio-economic Research (CHER) was set up in 2000. The CHER was also an important impetus of processes to facilitate and encourage the research community to use the longitudinal data of existing European panels, and was particularly interested in the use of the ECHP.

The PaD is a panel survey that has been conducted on a sub-national level in order to respond to the need for knowledge of the region of Catalonia. Links between its data and many of those gathered across Europe is one of its challenges. In this sense, EPUNet provides an ideal framework for linking up with Europe and creating bridges that may help, perhaps in the not too distant future, to harmonise its data with those of other European panels and to join forces in comparative research.

From the Catalan context, we see Europe as a kaleidoscope of very different realities and true construction of Europe means anchoring its foundations in respect for and welcoming of this diversity. The state framework is a valid research framework but one cannot ignore the fact that, at least in the case of some states, it is too broad to accurately portray the social diversity it holds.

Spain is one of those states made up of very diverse social realities. In Catalonia, for example, there is a total of 7,092,019 inhabitants⁹, a population equivalent to that of Denmark or Finland and consequently a population size that deserves to be researched in detail. However the ultimate justification lies not so much in the size of the Catalan population as in the fact that, as an autonomous region with its own government structure and a high degree of devolved political powers (including most social policies), Catalonia needs all the tools for knowledge and action required to carry out political initiatives that suit its social reality.

⁹ Data from 2005 Residential registration records.

Ultimately, panel surveys (whether they be state level or sub-state level) exist not only for the areas covered in the survey but also to give better understanding what Europe is.

3.4. What interest may the PaD data hold for European analysts?

This is a question that is difficult to answer, but it is up to the analysts to determine whether the data gathered by the PaD are of use to them or not according to the type of research they are conducting. However, we believe that the data on Catalonia can provide highly relevant information for socially characterising Mediterranean Europe.

We are aware of the limitations of the PaD sample and we know that with the first five waves of the survey, it will be difficult to conduct parametric analysis. At this point in time, analysis focuses on contingency matrices, regression analysis, transition matrices and multivariate analysis.

We must also bear in mind that the extension of the sample is still a project that is yet to be specified. However, since the conference was being held in Barcelona, we thought it would be interesting to publicise a panel survey conducted in this region and including many households in this very city.

If the PaD does manage to broaden its sample of households and individuals in the near future, it may soon provide interesting data for European analysts. It goes without saying that the PaD data is available to anybody who may be interested¹⁰.

¹⁰ For further information on the PaD visit the website: www.obdesigualtats.org. If there are language barriers, please contact the PaD team members directly: Laia Pineda : lpineda@fbofill.org or Laura Puerto: lpuerto@fbofill.org