

CESSDA and the Preparatory Phase Project (PPP)

CESSDA has reached a critical stage in its development. Since the 1970s it has promoted the acquisition, archiving and distribution of electronic data for social science teaching and research. The current CESSDA network extends across 20 European countries.

Collectively, CESSDA holds over 25,000 data collections. Its Data Portal provides a seamless, bilingual interface to datasets held by member organisations. These collections include the European Social Survey, Eurobarometers, and the International Social Survey Programme.

The Data Portal and multi-lingual thesaurus build on the work of earlier EU-funded projects Multilingual Access to Data Infrastructures of the European Research Area (MADIERA) and Language Independent Metadata Browsing of European Resources (LIMBER). CESSDA's website also provides comprehensive guidelines for sharing and accessing data.

Following its identification by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) as a Social Science Research Infrastructure (RI) of excellence in 2006, CESSDA received FP7 funding from the European Commission in January 2008. A 2-year Preparatory Phase Project (PPP) commenced, its aim: to facilitate CESSDA's transition to a fully integrated and formally constituted legal entity.

The benefits of an enhanced CESSDA RI

The upgraded infrastructure will ensure:

- Contributions to cross-national data harmonisation & 'question bank';
- National agreement and adherence to open access to publicly-funded research data, and where possible access to national government microdata;
- Adoption and application of a common single sign-on user authentication system;
- Adherence to OAIS reference model and approved certification of operational procedures and processes;
- Compliance with interoperable metadata standards;
- Harvesting all catalogue records by the data portal;
- Downloadable data through common data gateways;
- 'Local' language in the multi-lingual thesaurus;
- Sharing of data archiving/preservation tools.

CESSDA's move from an informal network to a legal entity will benefit three

main stakeholder groups: Data Producers, the Social Science and Humanities Research and Learning Community and Data Archivists.

Which countries are involved in the PPP?

Seventeen of the twenty members of CESSDA are partners to the PPP:

Slovenia	Spain	The Netherlands
France	Denmark	Switzerland
Italy	Finland	Germany
Greece	Norway	UK
Romania	Czech Republic	Sweden
Hungary	Austria	



The project also includes associates from the following countries:

Poland; Russia; Luxembourg; Estonia; Portugal; USA; Canada; Croatia; Ireland; Ukraine; Latvia; Bulgaria; Slovakia; Serbia; Macedonia; Belarus; Lithuania.

CESSDA is well placed to collaborate with international data sharing organisations and initiatives, having links with organisations across the world, including: ISSC, IFDO, IASSIST, ICPSR and ASSDA.



Governance of the new legal entity

The planned legal entity that will replace CESSDA will *not* create a big new European Data Archive. It will offer a portal service for data discovery and access – providing a gateway (with common authentication) to a **distributed**, and increasingly diverse, set of data collections.

It will also be a co-ordinator, a facilitator and a broker. It will play a role in developing and implementing standards and common tools, and aims to ensure adherence to ‘good practice’ through the provision of strategic guidance.

The CESSDA of tomorrow

The PPP team is confident that it now has a workable blueprint for a sustainable, professionally run and managed organisation. This blueprint enshrines in its Statutes and agreements the long-established principles that have sustained and directed CESSDA since its earliest days:

- Intellectual Collaboration;
- Information sharing;
- Free and open exchange of knowledge;
- Shared goals for the benefit of the social science research community.

These goals will be achieved through:

- Governance: equal voting rights for all Full members, with a multi-level membership to encourage and facilitate inclusivity;
- Funding: fees will be proportional and fair;
- Expertise: existing expertise will be recognised through specialist clusters;
- Intellectual Property (IP): individual partner IP acknowledged but shared by all partners;
- Operation: Strategy and workplan discussed by all partners;
- Cross border data exchange: a common, yet flexible, licence which will preserve cultural and national differences whilst facilitating data exchange between partners.

The preferred form of legal entity for the new organisation is an ERIC (European Research Infrastructures Consortium), which would benefit from the “community legal framework” agreed by the European Commission in May 2009. However, whatever form the new legal entity takes, it should be based on a one member, one vote system and be a distributed transparent, open and accountable network, based and drawing upon a “clusters of expertise” approach.

In order to maximise inclusivity the proposed legal entity should widen its membership beyond the current CESSDA network. Membership should also be multi-levelled, with a number of impartial mechanisms and committees both within and without the new organisation, which will independently assess resource providers to ensure they meet the new organisation’s membership obligations.

The new legal entity will significantly improve the availability of, and access to, data for the benefit of policy makers and researchers across the European Research Area.

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