Connecting with the Community

Assessing models of stakeholder participation for the development and acceptance of the Australian Qualitative Archive (AQuA)

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The development of AQuA

- ASSDA developed in 1981 at the Australian National University to archive quantitative datasets

- Development of a qualitative archive has been ongoing since 2007

- AQuA forms part of a distributed ASSDA network that includes
  - The Policing and Security sub-archive (UQ)
  - The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Archive (ATSDA) (UTS)
  - An Australian Government and Politics Database (UWA)
  - An Economics, Business and Finance node (UniMelb)
Researcher ambivalence towards qualitative data archiving

- Qualitative research is underpinned by an interpretivist methodology that makes it unsuitable for sharing with others.

- It is more difficult to maintain participant confidentiality when data are shared, especially if participants are easily identifiable and/or the topic is sensitive.

- Archiving is seen to be associated with a managerialist culture that has come to pervade higher education.
Encouraging Research Use: Compliance

The ESRC requires all grant-holders to offer for deposit copies of both machine-readable and non-machine-readable qualitative data to the ESDS Qualidata unit at the UKDA within three months of the end of the grant. This relates not only to datasets arising as a result of primary data collection, but also to derived datasets resulting from ESRC-funded work. ...The ESRC will withhold the final payment of a grant if any machine-readable dataset has not been deposited to the required standard at the UKDA within three months of the end of the grant, except where a modification or waiver of deposit requirements has been agreed in advance (ESRC Research Funding Guide, 2010:38).
For any Material produced under this Agreement, the Administering Organisation shall ensure that all Specified Personnel...

- make arrangements acceptable to the ARC for lodgement with an appropriate museum or archive in Australia of data or specimens or samples collected during, or resulting from, their Project; and
- include details of the lodgement or reasons for non-lodgement in the Progress Reports and the Final Report for the Project.

The Administering Organisation shall consider the benefits of depositing the data and any publications arising from each Project in an appropriate subject and/or institutional repository wherever such a repository is available. If the Administering Organisation is not intending to deposit the data from a Project in a repository either before, or within six months after, the completion of the Project the reasons for not doing so must be detailed in the Project’s Final Report (ARC Funding Agreements for Discovery Projects, 2010).
Researchers should note that all primary data, including both qualitative and quantitative data collected as part of AHURI research must be deposited in the Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA). This is to ensure long-term security of the data, replicability of research, and access for use by other researchers. This requirement must be taken into account when seeking ethics committee approval. The secure storage and future accessibility of data sets, as well as the privacy of research participants is assured through the storage of primary data with the ASSDA. From 2010 all research contracts will include the implementation of a data management plan. The final 10% of funds will be withheld until all data are deposited with the ASSDA and AHURI has received confirmation that this has occurred.
Assessing the compliance model

1. The need for incentives or penalties for encouraging compliance

2. Compliance needs to be monitored

3. AQuA presently has no mechanism to link funding to archiving

4. Researchers can circumvent the process with ethical concerns:

   “There is a certain irony in that ethics review processes (resented by qualitative researchers ...) have been successful because they can impose sanctions on researchers; whereas the archive cannot, at the moment, force researchers to overcome their ethical objections” (Travers, 2009: 275).
5. If archiving is to be mandated, it must be accompanied by other support structures, including effective consultation.

... there are clear indications of a desire to impose archiving on researchers through conditions of grant funding. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, which has funded some of our research, has already included this as a condition of funding, without consultation with qualitative researchers and notwithstanding considerable opposition from researchers like ourselves. This places qualitative researchers in very difficult position. Early career researchers, in particular, may feel pressure to acquiesce to practices that they consider unethical and unworkable in order to secure the research funding on which their careers depend (written response from AHURI group of researchers, 2010).
6. Mandatory archiving may create resentment and accusations of research becoming bureaucratised

“... if there is something new about all of this, it is not the re-use of qualitative data *per se*, rather it is the injunction to archive and the bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of this process” (Moore, 2007)

“...the archive, along with the current system of funding social science, promotes a narrow, empiricist understanding of collecting and analysing qualitative data” (Travers, 2009: 274).
A Voluntary Model

Working from the ground up:

1. ASSDA and AQuA are researcher-driven (gives us credibility among the research community and overcomes criticisms archiving has been imposed)

2. As qualitative researchers ourselves, we are aware of the distinctiveness of qualitative research and can engage in conversation with researchers

3. The top-down approach will not work without the institutional support (and funding) of the ARC.

Implemented a national consultation process to get researchers on board involving:
• Focus group interviews
• Release of a Discussion Paper
• Conference presentations, workshops, plenary addresses
• Development of an AQuA website (in process)
• Expressions of interest for a qualitative reference group
Challenges with the voluntary approach

1. Difficulty getting researchers to engage

2. Legitimacy called into question because we are not attached to peak research bodies

- AQuA is “UQ-centric and run by quantitative researchers”

- “The [Discussion] document appears to have been produced by a group with a strong interest in being the repository. It would be important to obtain wider input and a more balanced and representative account. ... Engagement with peak bodies and groups responsible for management of research and oversight of research ethics matters is strongly recommended” (Response to the AQuA Discussion Paper, 2010).
3. Consultation is too late. The decision to archive has already been made

“The [discussion] paper is written from the perspective that there will be archiving of qualitative social science research data in Australia and that the discussion is about how to implement it. Those of us who have worked in government are familiar with this type of approach. This is concerning in terms of the development of a managerial research culture in Australia” (Response to AQuA Discussion Paper, 2010).

4. Researchers can ignore the archive until they are forced to do otherwise

5. Without the institutional backing of the ARC, funding for the archive is limited.
Conclusion: What can be learnt from this?

1. Even if researchers don’t engage, they must feel they have been consulted

2. The most beneficial forums for consultation are collective and deliberative (i.e. plenary sessions, workshops)

3. It is important to believe in the project otherwise the antipathy may wear you down

4. Use sympathetic researchers as ‘champions’ of the cause, especially those who are senior

5. Archiving requires a cultural shift among the qualitative community, which takes time

6. Engage with specialist sectors and methodologies so they don’t feel excluded
8. Some mix of voluntarism and compliance is useful

“We understand that our concerns are not new; they are clearly reflected in the paper by Cheshire (2009). We are strongly of the view that any archiving of qualitative data should not be coercive, in particular, that inclusion of a requirement to archive should not be a condition of funding of qualitative research. Rather, each case should be considered on its merits. In some cases, there may be an argument for data archiving provided that participants fully understand what is involved and want their information and views to be available to other, unknown researchers in the future. In other cases, particularly those involving vulnerable people and sensitive topics, the risks are simply too great. The best person to make this call is usually the researcher, using established processes of ethical review (Response to AQuA Discussion Paper, 2010).