The Descartes Prize for Research has been awarded yearly, since 2000, to transnational research teams which have achieved outstanding scientific or technological results through collaborative research in any field of science, including economics, social sciences and humanities. In 2005 the European Social Survey was one of five winners sharing more than a million euros. The CCT decided to direct the funds towards two major projects:

1. Non-response book

High response rates are accepted widely as a key criterion of survey quality. Obtaining high response rates, however, is often difficult and expensive. Not surprisingly, non-response in interview surveys is a widely studied subject. Recently, the main focus of non-response studies has not been on the response rate, but on non-response bias. This will occur when factors that determine survey participation are related to the topic of a survey.

Non-response in comparative surveys has received scarce attention until now. Differences in response rates, in the composition of non-response (non-contacts versus refusals) and different sizes of non-response bias across countries can be a serious threat to comparability. This book aims to fill this gap. It will show why high response rates are important and how they relate to other important variables of interest. It will also give guidance on how declining response rates may be stopped. Practical examples from a wide range of countries will be presented. The book should be a help both to those who undertake surveys and those who commission them, distinguishing between increasing response rates per se and reducing non-response bias. It will also help to demonstrate how non-response bias should ideally be tackled when it occurs.

Improving Survey Response Lessons from the European Social Survey written by Ineke Stoop, Jaak Billiet, Achim Koch and Rory Fitzgerald was published by Wiley in 2010.

2. Context dataset framework

The aim of this project is to build a European-wide information framework where background

contextual data are linked with data from the ESS. The framework will facilitate integration of relevant information from scattered sources throughout Europe, generating added value to the ESS. The ESS individual data and the contextual data will be available online from the same data dissemination tool, and will be linked to data at European regional level, enabling mouse-over data browsing and cartographical and graphical presentations. The aim is to include documentation of structural differences at the national and regional level, such as electoral and educational systems.