

Learning by Doing. Making Interdisciplinarity Work

Brussels

15 January 2013



John Doling

University of Birmingham, UK

DEMHOW

Demographic change and housing wealth

33 month study, March 2008 – December 2010.

Funded by EU under FP7

Commission Project Officer: Dominik Sobczak

Advisory Group: EMF, OECD, RICS Europe

12 partners: B,DE,DK,F,HU,NE,PT,SF,SL,UK



Project funded under the
Socio-economic
Sciences and Humanities

So, what was DEMHOW about?

- Across member states demographic ageing has coincided with the expansion of home ownership sectors – a “union of older, home owners”
- the intriguing question of the extent to which these trends are connected: does home ownership provide a potential cure for some of the consequences of ageing populations, as well as contribute to the causes.
- The overall aim of DEMHOW is to investigate the ways in which, across member states, demographic change and housing wealth are linked, and to use those investigations in order to contribute to policy making.



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What studies were involved?

- **WP1. Quantitative studies** Econometric investigations of the composition of wealth in different countries and over time, with respect to changes in population, housing systems, state pension arrangements, and financial institutions.
- **WP2. Qualitative studies** Household interviews investigating attitudes to housing as a financial asset and the use of those assets.



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In what sense can this be described as interdisciplinary?

“Mixed methods”

Combines two or more methods of collecting and analysing data – in DEMHOW case quantitative and qualitative.

But that, in itself, doesn't make it interdisciplinary



Requires two or more disciplines to be brought together, but this can be done in different ways:

Multi-disciplinary: Each discipline attempts to explain the same phenomena from its own viewpoint. Independent stories.

Interdisciplinary: Looks at same phenomena from different viewpoints but tries to integrate the explanations. Connected stories.

Trans-disciplinary: draws together theories and approaches to form a shared conceptual and analytical framework – a new discipline. Integrated story.



Why is it difficult?

- Getting funded in the first place (policy v reviewing).
- It's only (potentially) difficult if seeking to connect or integrate – and, then, making connections across disciplinary boundaries is most difficult where disciplines have fundamentally different views of the world.(eg Positivism v constructivism)
- Individual researchers may be ignorant of, and devalue, other disciplines.
- Career advancement may be discipline-specific.

Strategies for success in interdisciplinary research I

Get a team with good interdisciplinary researching skills

In addition to being “good” at home discipline:

- Open mind to ideas from other disciplines
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Good listening and communication skills
- Good team worker

Selection strategies (blind dates v ex-partners)

(multi-discipline departments)



Strategies for success in interdisciplinary research II

- Consider partners with policy/practice orientation
- Involve at least key members in devising questions, objectives, methodology, publication strategy (coherence)
- Frequent meetings (many face-to-face) with space for all disciplines (money/time)
- Strong leadership (if required)