

PROBLEMS AND COMPLICATIONS IN COMPARATIVE  
ELITE RESEARCH - the Dutch case

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Paper to the international conference on  
"Cross-National Research in the Social Sciences",  
Ann Arbor, 3-8 October 1977.

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Problems and complications in comparative elite research

Elite research has a short tradition in the Netherlands. Professor Hans Daalder called for such research in his inaugural address in 1964. It is worth while to quote Daalder here at length:

"First, there is a need for more systematic elite research; it should be directed to the past as well as to the present in order to show important shiftings in political selection. The elite concept will have to be defined rather broad by including not only ministers, members of parliament, higher civil servants and mayors but also leaders of pressure groups, party officials and party members (...). Except objective data about milieu, education, religion and the like, also data on more subjective political attitudes are desired; for the present these data are partly to be obtained by surveytechniques, for the past one is forced to go back to an analysis of dominant opinions appearing explicitly from ideological pamphlets and implicitly from congressional records and bureaucratic files." (H. Daalder, Politisering en lijdelijkheid in de Nederlandse politiek, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974, p. 44, our translation).

In 1968 and in 1972 Daalder and his associates organized extensive interviews among members of parliament. In 1968 attention was concentrated on social background data of members of the first and second chamber of Dutch parliament. In 1972 attitudinal questions about role perceptions, recruitment patterns, influence patterns in society as well as within parliamentary parties and committees were being focused upon. The second time the study concentrated only on members of the Second Chamber.

One of the methodological purposes of the study was to explore elite attitudes and their mutual relationships. As this kind of research was never done before and certainly not in the Netherlands as to higher civil servants, the study had an exploratory character: this means that the interviews could not be too structured, but would have to be like normal conversations. To emphasize this special character frequent use was being made of open ended questions. All interviews were being tape recorded. These two characteristics caused several other problems in data management, data analysis and reporting. We will also comment upon these complications. The scheme of our paper is as follows: first we will describe in more detail study design and purpose. Then we will say something about the time and setting of the interviews. Third, a description and evaluation is given of the method of sampling, coding and data analysis. Fourth, we will comment upon the use of open ended questions and the use of a tape recorder. Fifth, we will dwell a little upon the obtaining of funds, cooperation between researchers and reporting the findings. Finally, we will draw some conclusions and make some recommendations as to future research in the same field.

#### Time and setting of interviews

Interviews were conducted with 44 members of parliament and 76 higher civil servants. Fieldwork started in March 1973. By the end of June all 120 respondents were interviewed. Most interviews with members of parliament were held in March, most civil servants were interviewed in April and May. This timing of the interview scheme may have influenced the findings. At the time of interviewing the formation of the Den Uyl-cabinet was still going on or just finished. Politicians for instance were mostly talked to in March, when the formation was in full swing. Likewise the civil servants were interviewed in a period when there was no cabinet, but when the composition of the new cabinet was getting clear. (The new cabinet presented itself on May 11th).

It might be useful to scan some of the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing during a time when there is no formal cabinet.

1. One advantage clearly is the extensive and rich discussions we had with the higher civil servants and members of parliament. We think that especially the civil servants had more time available for the interview than they would have had in "normal" times.
2. On the other hand, the formation of the cabinet may have caused some uncertainty as to the composition of the new cabinet. Especially, civil servants are very curious to know who their new minister will be. Members of parliament naturally are in a position of bargaining with other parties about who is to be government party and who is to be the opposition. This may have distracted them from their "normal" legislative functions. Also the answers on the most important problem question was sometimes influenced by the fact that there was no cabinet and one did not know what policy would be followed.
3. Interviews in elite research can not be held at exactly the same time under the same circumstances. This is more so during quickly changing circumstances. In March, when we interviewed the members of parliament, the formation was in a very difficult stage. The new cabinet was installed at the beginning of May. This meant that half of our civil servants were interviewed, while there was no cabinet. The other half being interviewed when there was a new cabinet of different political color than the foregoing.
4. The international character of the study has made this problem of "constant" circumstances more pressing. In the Netherlands the elite was interviewed during a formation, whereas <sup>usually</sup> in other countries the fieldwork was done under "normal" circumstances. This may lead to variance in findings between countries that can not be ascribed to system differences but to the different situation the systems were in.

However, we are inclined to conclude that in the Netherlands we profited by the special circumstances we interviewed under. The atmosphere of the interviews was described as good, many discussions taking more than one hour.

The average duration of the interviews with bureaucrats was 135 minutes, which is two hours and a quarter. The spread around the mean is considerable: the shortest interview lasted one hour, the longest four hours and three quarters of an hour. This at least suggests a very willing attitude of the Dutch civil servants towards this kind of interviewing.

Meetings with the members of parliament took less time, because the questionnaire was shorter (134 questions versus 178 for the bureaucrats).

The average duration of the interview with a member of parliament was 88 minutes, or about one hour and a half. The shortest discussion here took three quarters of an hour, the longest three hours and a quarter. These numbers also indicate a very easy accessibility of Dutch political and bureaucratic elite for political research. Future researchers should be aware of these relative openness of Dutch elites, but warned that there is some scepticism among them about the purposes of these studies and final reports. Also the easy access to Dutch politicians and higher civil servants may have had something to do with the formation of the cabinet-Den Uyl, which was taking place at the time. Formations always give higher civil servants more time, the pressure on them to produce notes is not that high.

Our suggestions may be supported by the finding that the interviewing in the United States took less time. The average interview time of civil servants was 66 minutes, of Congressmen 43 minutes. The interviews with the Dutch elite lasted twice as long! (for American data, see Aberbach et al, p. 10).

We asked our

interviewers to comment upon the general atmosphere of the discussions. With the civil servants we noted only nine negative comments in total, with the members of parliament this number is somewhat higher: thirteen. One comment about a politician:

"Did make a very arrogant impression, quite blasé and not interested."

The mainstream of comments however consisted of remarks like the following:

"R. did make some troubles in making an appointment, but during the interview he was extremely nice. I had some difficulty in keeping him to the question. R. dwelt upon the subject."

Especially civil servants were careful to ascertain that they would not run into troubles within the department:

"R. asked at the beginning whether he could not come into difficulties with the interview and asked how frank he could be. He told that the Secretary-General of his department had ordered him to say as little as possible. He reported to have difficulties with the S-G, also because of his own political

color. Sometimes, he asked me to stop the tape to ventilate some personal grudges. All in all, it was more a conspiracy than an interview."

Or:

"R. values anonymity very much, notably because the small size of his department."

In spite of these first hesitations our data reveal that our respondents were very frank. Some of their doubts and hesitations are caused by a distrust against scholars. One interviewer put it as follows:

"Prior to the interview R. asks for an explanation of the research purpose. R. refers to an interview he had as chairman of a national party with an American professor in the cadre of the parliamentary survey. He never heard anything about that, therefore he is somewhat sceptical about interviews like these."

About a civil servant we note the following remark:

"Nasty man. Got very angry at question number 67. Did not get the purpose of scientific research very clear."

On the whole civil servants and (less) members of parliament were very interested in the project and in the final results. Their willingness to answer all sorts of questions to which they were not prepared, made our research possible.

As we had opportunity to note before, our respondents made a very frank and nice impression upon our interviewers. Politicians were thought to be somewhat less interested than our bureaucrats, but this may be accounted for by the fact that the formation period is a very crucial one for parliamentarians. Also, to some of them it was the second time within two years that he or she was interviewed extensively. The fieldwork of the parliamentary survey conducted by professor Daalder and his associates took place in February/March 1972. This also may account for some weariness among politicians.

It is interesting to note that the Second Chamber has developed an official policy towards scholars. Every member that is being approached for research or an interview, is to inform the Chairman of the Chamber. The Chairman then looks into the credibility and research purpose of the scholar(s). When more than one parliamentary party is to be involved in the research, the Chairman gives an advisory opinion whether to cooperate or not. If only one party is approached, the executive committee gives a general advice to its members.

Frankness

Our interviewers found the discussions with members of parliament somewhat more frank than those with the civil servants.

Table 1 Frankness by position

	M.P.	C.S.	total all countries
very frank	43	39	27
basically frank	52	45	47
undecided/unclear	3	17	20
basically reserved	0	8	5
very reserved	23	1	1
	N=44	N=76	N=1624

Dutch politicians were thought to be more frank than their bureaucratic counterparts. Internationally, however the Dutch elite is thought more frank than the elites in the countries where this study also was organized.

In a way the difference between civil servants and bureaucrats was to be expected. Civil servants are not accustomed to public interviews nor to political interviews. M.P.'s on the other hand are much more accustomed to publicity, they even actively seek this publicity for their own and party's sake.

This is supported by the fact that four higher civil servants made objections to the political character of some of our questions. Refusals to be tape-recorded (only three) were all to be found within the bureaucracy. This may also have something to do with the civil servant's fear of internal misuse of the data.

Table 2 Frankness of respondents by country (in percentages)

	Neth.	USA	France	Sweden	Italy	Britain	Germany
very frank	40	55	33	22	13	32	23
basically frank	40	26	51	66	57	48	50
pro/con							
basically reserved	12	8	10	9	20	13	20
very reserved	6	9	4	2	8	6	7
very reserved	2	2	2	1	2	1	0
	N= 109	N= 193	N= 204	N= 357	N= 168	N= 219	N= 239



Table 3 Frankness of respondent by position per country (in percentages)

	Netherlands		USA		France		Sweden		Italy		Britain		Germany	
	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.
very frank	39	43	51	61	18	52	24	11	10	21	21	41	26	20
basically frank	35	52	31	19	61	38	64	80	48	65	57	41	49	52
pro/con	17	3	10	6	15	6	9	9	22	14	16	9	16	22
reserved														
basically	8	0	7	11	5	2	3	0	15	0	5	7	8	7
very reserved	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	0	5	0	1	1	1	0

C.S. = civil servants

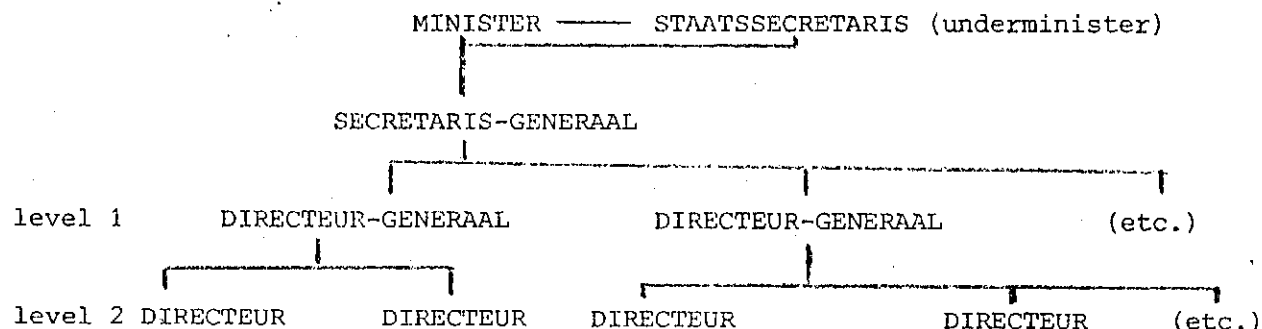
M.P. = members of parliament

The Dutch elite is not very reserved in elite research compared with elites from other countries. One would have expected the Dutch to be on the less frank<sup>end</sup> of the continuum, because consociational theory has as one of its characteristics the secrecy of elites, secrecy of political bargaining at the apex of the system. Secrecy among the elite is one of Lijpharts rules of the game (The Politics of Accommodation). Internationally, the Dutch elite is as frank as other Western civil servants and politicians alike. The Italians and Germans seem to be more reserved towards scholars of political science.

More important than differences between countries are the differences between bureaucrats and politicians. In nearly all countries civil servants are thought to be less frank than members of parliament. This is particularly the case in France and Italy. Sweden seems to be the exception: there politicians are thought to be less frank than the politicians. The differences however are marginal.

Sample, coding and data analysis

The hierarchical structure of Dutch departments may be depicted as follows:



The minister is the head of the department, responsible to Parliament. Mostly he is supported by one or more staatssecretarissen, who are responsible for part of the ministerial task. Staatssecretarissen are also responsible to parliament, and to their minister. They come and go with the cabinet. The highest civil servant is the secretaris-generaal. He is responsible for nearly all that is going on in the department. Sometimes he is described as the most powerful man in the department, including the minister. He is no specialist, but a general manager, varying in power from department to department.

Below the secretaris-generaal is the directeur-generaal. He is responsible for some part of the department's task. For instance in the department of health and environment, there are two directors-general, one for health, another one for environmental affairs. These general directories are further subdivided into "directories": the head of these "directories" are called directors. The actual number of these higher civil servants may vary from department to department. In 1972 for example the Finance department consisted of five directors-general and 24 directors. The agriculture department on the other hand consisted of two directors-general and nineteen (19) directors. These two levels form the population of our study: higher civil servants, excluding those of the state department and the Defense department.

From the Government Directory we calculated the actual number of directeuren-generaal and directeuren in the Dutch civil service: 42 director-generals and 179 directors (State dpt. and Defense not included). Of these bureaucrats 15 directeuren-generaal and 85 directeuren were randomly selected. This sample

Table 3 Frankness of respondent by position per country (in percentages)

	Netherlands		USA		France		Sweden		Italy		Britain		Germany	
	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.	C.S.	M.P.
frank	39	43	51	61	18	52	24	11	10	21	21	41	26	20
fully frank	35	52	31	19	61	38	64	80	48	65	57	41	49	52
reserved	17	3	10	6	15	6	9	9	22	14	16	9	16	22
reserved basically	8	0	7	11	5	2	3	0	15	0	5	7	8	7
reserved	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	0	5	0	1	1	1	0

C.S. = civil servants

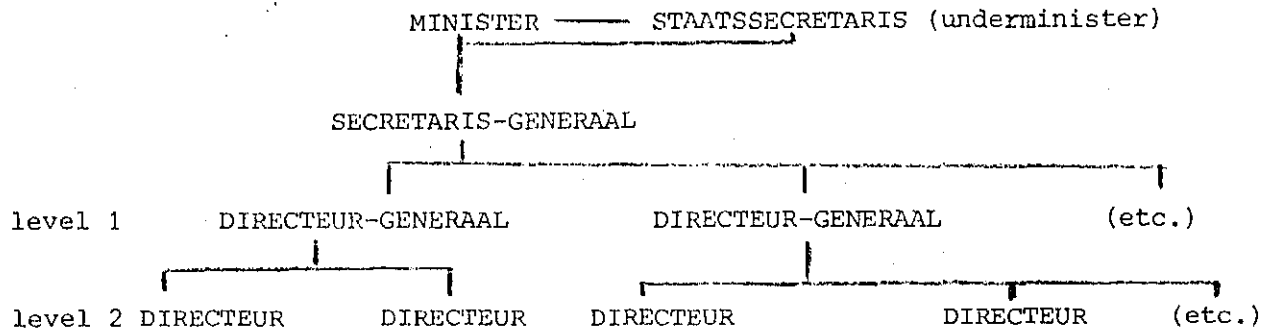
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had to be diminished because of budget reasons: the final sample consisted of 87 higher civil servants of who 87 percent participated in the survey.

Of the 150 members of the Dutch Second Chamber 53 politicians were randomly selected. Fortyfour finally cooperated so that our sample covers about 30 percent of the original population. Half of these parliamentarians did already participate in the parliamentary survey conducted by Daalder and his associates. Background data and some questions of the same format were copied from the parliamentary study into our study. This goes especially for questions using a nine point scale: this format proved to be useful in the parliamentary study so that it was applied also in the bureaucrat-politician study. Unfortunately the studies in the other countries are not using the same format. What we gain here in comparison between higher civil servants and all members of parliament we lose in comparing Dutch elites with other western elites.

#### Coding

Coding was done by three coders. One of them did all the closed questions, which is relatively easy. This work was finished within one month after the interviewing. The coding of the open ended questions took a lot more time. The structure of the study required that all conversations be typed out: this took until about November. After that a very long session with the coders was necessary to inform them about the purpose of the codes. The two coders who finally did the open ended questions, also interviewed half of the respondents. We looked to it that they coded their own interviews.

The two coders kept in close contact with our fieldwork supervisor, Ms. Sonja Hubée. Together they solved problems arising with the codebook. This codebook was largely derived from the American, British and Italian counterparts of the study. So in The Netherlands we had to work with a given framework for coding open ended questions. In some cases this gave difficulties.

Check coding for the closed questions was done by the coder and the fieldwork supervisor. They selected 20 questionnaires to code all the closed questions again but no special problems came up. More and especially financial difficulties met the check coding of the open ended questions. Finally it was decided that one fresh coder would do the coding all over for 17 interviews. This checking revealed 30 percent of differences in coding. More than half of these concerned a difference between "not important" and "not mentioned". We decided that when the respondent did not mention a certain trait, it had to be coded as not important.

The remaining differences we solved by going back to the original transcript and decide upon the appropriate code. Two variables were left out of the analysis because too many differences were detected.

We are confident that the corrected file contains a good data collection given the framework of the codebook.

#### Data analysis

Data analysis of our elite survey has been hindered by three factors:

1. the small number of cases
2. the missing data problem
3. frequent use of open ended questions.

1. Elite surveys necessarily give small samples, although in our study, almost one third of the population was interviewed. To generalize from these data to the total population one may make use of statistical analysis. However, most of these techniques are especially meant for mass surveys of large populations. Whether a statistically significant relationship is discovered, largely depends upon the number of cases. The larger the number of cases, the larger the likelihood of finding a statistically significant relationship.

Therefore, in our analysis we not only looked at statistical significance, but also at logical significance. Logical in this connection means conforms to expectations of a theoretical model. The following example may illustrate our procedure:

Table 4 Emphasis on loyalty and on technical considerations by party affiliation of Dutch higher civil servants in percentages (N= 76)

	Left	Confessional	Right	No affiliation
Emphasis on loyalty	25	35	43	44
Emphasis on technical considerations	10	29	33	22

Although statistically there is no significant relationship between these characteristics of civil servants and political party affiliation, there is however consistency and logic displayed in the data. We conclude in this instance that left oriented civil servants do put less emphasis on these two classical characteristics of bureaucrats than do right oriented civil servants.

Another problem connected with the small sample size is the number of code categories. Subtleness and quantitative requirements do not go hand in hand in here. Subtleness, especially supposed to be important in elite surveys, calls for many nuances in code categories ranging for instance from "totally opposed" to "totally in favor" and five categories in between. In making crosstabulations between two of these variables one ends up with many cells with less than five cases. This more or less forces the researcher to collapse the seven categories into three. He thereby loses information, especially when the code categories are set up as a continuum. He is also in a way destroying the subtleness which was essential to elite research. Much may be regained there by complementing the quantitative presentation with qualitative data: that is insert quotations from the transcripts into the final report. In fact, this is what we have done frequently.

2. The second problem is the missing data. This problem is enormous in the kind of research we have done. Aberbach et al note:

"The interview procedure and questionnaire used in this study have led to unusually high proportions of missing data in both the usual sense of non-response and in more unusual senses as well." (p. 20)

As the data consist not only of variables based on questions to the interviewee, but also based on interpretations of the coder of the transcript, certain elements coders are asked for to look at may not be present. When one asks

for instance the coder to look at the question about the tasks and characteristics of higher civil servants and see whether respondent emphasizes loyalty, it is highly likely that you have a high percentage in the category "no". In stead of putting the researcher's frame of reference upon the respondent you force it on the coder. The thing you are looking for may just not be present in the transcript.

3. The third problem in data analysis: the frequent use of open ended questions is closely connected with the missing data problem. The number of answers to open ended questions may vary from respondent to respondent. Again we may cite Aberbach et al:

"This non-uniformity makes it difficult to employ data reduction techniques dependent upon multiple correlations. As a corrective, attributes mentioned in multi-mention code were sometimes generalized, with each generalized attribute dichotomized for its presence or absence allowing some further data structuring capability. At the same time, it should be recognized that the generalized dichotomies (sometimes trichotomies) are the product of a priori decisions rather than decisions based upon empirical structure." (p. 24)

Aberbach et al are referring here to the use of so-called role traits: these are questions to the coder whether a respondent was emphasizing a certain characteristic. It is also possible to dichotomize a characteristic just by coding "mentioned" or "not mentioned". If a variable has 72 categories this is a very tenuous procedure. In normal surveys one would base oneself on the empirical structure: in the Dutch case however we were working with a given codebook, so here (for reasons of comparability) we again worked with a priori decisions.

In our analysis of role perceptions of civil servants and politicians we also met difficulties in data reduction. As we have noted missing data and number of cases hinder analysis. This is even more so when one tries to construct typologies of civil servants and members of parliament. Because the question of task and characteristic did not aim at a rank order of different tasks, one has no idea of the relative importance of various mentioned tasks. The fact that some tasks and characteristics are mentioned or not mentioned does not give an indication of their relative importance to the respondent. Some tasks come out as being frequently mentioned, but it is nearly impossible to detect a considerable number of respondents who are "pure types". This is quite understandable because role is not an unidimensional phenomenon. In future research one



should take care that this analysis will be possible. The second parliamentary survey in The Netherlands enabled both Daalder and Kooiman to detect some clusters of tasks of members of parliament. Future researchers may take advantage of the exploring character of this study and proceed in probing into the mentioned tasks of higher civil servants.

### Open ended questions

As said before, open ended questions were a main feature of this elite study. However, they are thought to be less appropriate in mass surveys. The Dutch election study of 1972, for instance, contained more than 300 questions. Of these 30 were open ended. Our elite study, that is the Dutch part of it, contained 178 questions for the higher civil servants, of which 42 were open ended. For the members of parliament these numbers were respectively 134 and 30. Thus, the proportion of open ended questions is much higher in our elite study than in the Dutch election study that was held one year before.

The main reason why this is the case, is that elites are thought to have more complex and subtle ways of thinking and talking. Researchers are afraid that elites will get irritated if they are forced in a very narrow and strict scheme (see also Aberbach et al, p. 4). Some of our respondents indeed said that a question was very simple or one-sided. Sometime<sup>s</sup> they refused to answer agree-disagree items. On the other hand some of our open ended questions were found to be vague or too broad. But even in the case of precoded questions there are ways to differentiate between elites and mass: in the parliamentary study Daalder held in 1972 MP's were asked to estimate the influence of certain groups on a nine-point scale. The parallel study among a mass public the same question had the format of a seven point scale. Even in these kinds of scales elites are thought to be more subtle than "normal" respondents. Irwin and Thomassen took great pains to combine the two scales into one scale again (p. 392 ).

A second, more pragmatic reason why open ended questions are more frequently used in elite studies is that the number of respondents in elite samples is generally smaller than in mass surveys. We interviewed 120 persons, samples in mass surveys are 2000 persons in size. Given equal <sup>costs</sup>, one has less time per respondent in a mass survey than in an elite survey. Moreover, a mass questionnaire is not to take longer than an hour, whereas elite interviews may vary from half an hour to three hours in length.

Aberbach et al state three other reasons why many open ended questions are being used in this study (p.4-8): the exploratory character of the study, response validity and respondents' receptivity .

These aspects are rightly mentioned

7 15 - as the decisive reasons of using these kinds of questions. Apart from problems in data analysis we would like to <sup>point to</sup> other practical drawbacks of open ended questions.

Open ended questions are very time consuming. Not only takes the actual interview longer than with precoded questions, also the coding procedure takes longer. As said before in the Dutch part of the elite study use was being made of the American codebook. Extensive instruction and guiding was necessary to explain the American codebook to the Dutch coders. The Dutch coders had to be very skillful in translating Dutch answers into the American code categories. Problems with the quantitative analysis of these data make it all the more necessary to complement the study with qualitative analysis.

In comparative research this means that the researcher has to have the transcripts of the interviews from the other countries as well. Although we have available quantitative data on roles, these data are not felt to be hard enough to do comparative research. The solution to our opinion has to be found by presenting quantitative as well as qualitative analysis alongside. Comparative analysis is only possible after the country by country analysis is finished. On the basis of quantitative and qualitative analysis a real comparison is possible. This, however, is costly and time consuming.

#### The use of a tape recorder

To maintain a conversation-like discussion with our respondents use was being made of a tape recorder in interviewing. This made also available the exact answers of our respondents to certain questions: transcripts were necessary to make implicit coding possible. Various variables were made by asking the coder questions about how the respondent dealt with certain issues.

The use of the tape recorder has proven to be useful. It also gives the researcher the possibility to quote at length from the interview. This is a requirement if one has to supplement the quantitative analysis with qualitative data.

There are some major drawbacks in taping interviews Aberbach et al do not mention in their article. First, some people do not feel free to talk when the machine is running (fortunately only three civil servants refused to be taped.) This comes out when the respondent is going to say something interesting and the machine is put off. Some remarks of our interviewers:

"Sometimes he asked me to stop the tape to ventilate some personal grudges."

Or:

"Objections against the tape. Refused to answer all questions he thought to be 'political'".

More serious however is the interviewers' inclination to rely too heavily on the taperecorder: he or she is getting lazy and does not make notes of herself. After listening to the tape, some parts are not understandable, because someone came in with coffee, because the respondent was murmuring or because traffic around the place of interviewing was very heavy. It is very difficult to remember exactly what respondent said in that particular instance. If the interviewer is not making use of a taperecorder he is forced to understand the respondent very well, because he may notice blank spots in his notes and ask for clarification. The use of a tape recorder may also lead to too lengthy conversation without adding much information to the interview. Forgetfulness of the interviewer in some instances led to a loss of information, when the tape was already ended for some minutes while the interview was going on.

In the two parliamentary studies Daalder conducted among members of parliament in 1968 and 1972 the interviewers had to take notes. The major focus of these studies was more <sup>social</sup> on background information and role aspects of the job. The experiences with these studies are also mixed.

The drawbacks of taping interviews really comes to the fore in the stage after the fieldwork is done, notably in working out the data. The tapes, if they are going to be used efficiently, have to be typed out completely. This is very costly and timeconsuming. Two persons have to check the transcript on dubious places <sup>when</sup> something was not understandable. Here a loss of information may occur, because the typist understands the respondent differently from the interviewer or coder. The costs and time involved are very serious: the average length of the transcripts is about 22 pages. It takes half an hour to listen to the tape and type it out for one page. That means 11 hours for one interview. As we had 120 respondents, this means 1320 hours of typing and listening to the tapes at a cost of estimated f 6600.

An additional cost aspect is the following. With the transcripts one has the data organized per respondent. Very often it is necessary to have your information per question. If you have only transcripts, you have to go through all the transcripts again. You have to spend again some <sup>time</sup> in gathering the qualitative data per question.

The last stage of normal research is the reporting stage. As we have said before it is essential that you find a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis: you must use quotation from the transcripts. Some answers are very hard to read, so you have to edit the answers into readable English or Dutch.

Sometimes a respondent is still formulating his answers: do you report repetitions, hesitations or do you clean your quotations from all these "errors"? Although the advantages of taped interviews are considerable in this respect, one should not go by these drawbacks too quickly.

The last point to make in this respect is: it is very difficult to make the quotations available to foreign researchers. You have to translate the transcripts into English or another language in order to make them useful for comparative research. In the process of translating, apart from costs and time, there is inevitably some loss of information. In every interview there are instances where respondent is using a very special expression or maybe an intonation. This is very hard to translate to give the foreign reader an insight into the special flavour of the national study.

Nevertheless, the use of taperecorders in this particular study has provided for rich and amusing data. Researchers should be very much aware of the difficulties connected with the use of this device.

### Summary

In this paper we have discussed some of the problems and complications we met in interviewing Dutch senior civil servants and members of the Second Chamber. The problems we dealt with primarily stemmed from the international character of the study, its exploratory nature and its design.

1. The international character of the study compelled us to use standard questions and answer categories, also for open ended questions. As the Dutch part of the study also leaned on a survey held one year earlier among all members of the Second Chamber some items were copied from that study: this meant we had to weigh the national and international comparability.
2. In practice the exploratory character of the study meant use of many broad open ended questions: as the researchers had little hunch as to what their respondents would answer to certain questions, they did not want to press their frame of reference upon the interviewees. This however caused problems in the field of data analysis and the coding of the answers. On the other hand the use of open ended questions made rich and interesting discussions possible.
3. The design of the study was to explore the political and bureaucratic attitudes of politicians and civil servants in depth. Therefore, use was being made of coding of implicit and latent elements. This required that we had available real conversations with the respondent. To that end the interviews were taperecorded. The major drawback of the use of a taperecorder is the cost in time and money in gathering the data systematically: the interviews have to be typed out completely. The advantage of this system is that rich and insightful quotations may illustrate the final report.

Our major position in interpreting the data is that quantitative analysis should be supplemented by qualitative analysis.

As to the moment the elites were interviewed, we concluded that we profited by the circumstance that the formation of the cabinet-Den Uyl was still going on. Especially the higher civil servants were very open: the average duration of the interview being more than two hours. Although our interviewers had some difficulty in making an appointment with the civil servants and members of parliament, the discussions were felt to be nice and open.

Our interviewers, however, noted some doubt among these Dutch elites as to the scholarly purpose and design of the study. The Dutch Second Chamber has already agreed upon a common policy of all members towards future researchers. One may notice a degree of "over-interviewing", a weariness among politicians with surveys.

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