Implementation of the Romanian tracer study

Practical aspects of the project implementation

Preparation of the field phase and First look on the field phase

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Investing in PEOPLE

University Graduates and Labor Market
Romanian Tracer Study

Strategic projects for Romanian Higher Education

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Intro

- The purpose of a survey is gaining information about the participants
- The collected information should be as reliable as possible
  - systematic dropouts should be avoided
  - if systematic dropouts occur, they should be detected and analysed, in order to determine the extent and if applicable the effect of these dropouts
  - a high response rate lowers the possibility of systematic dropouts
  - (additionally, quality properties of measurement, reliability and validity)

Intro

- A high response rate requires:
  - planning
  - preparation
  - structured implementation

- In order to learn from the current survey for future surveys, the following help:
  - detailed documentation of the implemetation and reaction of respondents and non-respondents and external others
  - detailed analysis
  - self-critical reflection

Overview

- Preparation of the field phase
  - Address management
  - Form letters / form email
  - customizing questionnaires
  - Timetable
- Future aspects
  - Tasks of the field phase
  - Methods Report
- Conclusions

One small thing

Communication and Documentation are important ! The whole project is based on **cooperation**!

Be well informed

What your team mate/ partner in other institutions

- ⇨ has done
- ⇨ is doing
- ⇨ will do

Help your team mate/ partner

Tell him / her

- ⇨ what you have done
- ⇨ what you are doing
- ⇨ what you will do

Preparation
to achieve the field phase objectives

Addresses,
address handling
and other information
about the target population

Preparation to achieve the field phase objectives

The objective of the field phase is the collection of **valid data** from an **adequate** (representative) **sample of respondents**.

First Question:
- What is an adequate (representative) **sample of respondents ?**

- **Not every contactet graduate answering the questionnaire.**
  - Find out as much as you can about your target population and its included subgroups before you start developing the questionnaire and before you start to contact the graduates!
  - Check if some special subgroups of the whole target population don‘t answering the questionnaire!

- **Not every graduate can be contacted.**
  - Check if some special subgroups of the whole target population can‘t be contacted!
  - Find alternative ways to contact „uncontactable“ graduates! (e.g. parents, online social networks)

Preparation of the field phase

- **What do you need?**
- **Why do you need it?**
- **When do you need it?**

Preparation of the field phase

What you need:

- Addresses / other options for contacting the graduates (How to get the addresses? Alternatives for contact?)
- Further information about each graduate
- Working questionnaire
- Cover letter
- Timetable

What is helpful:

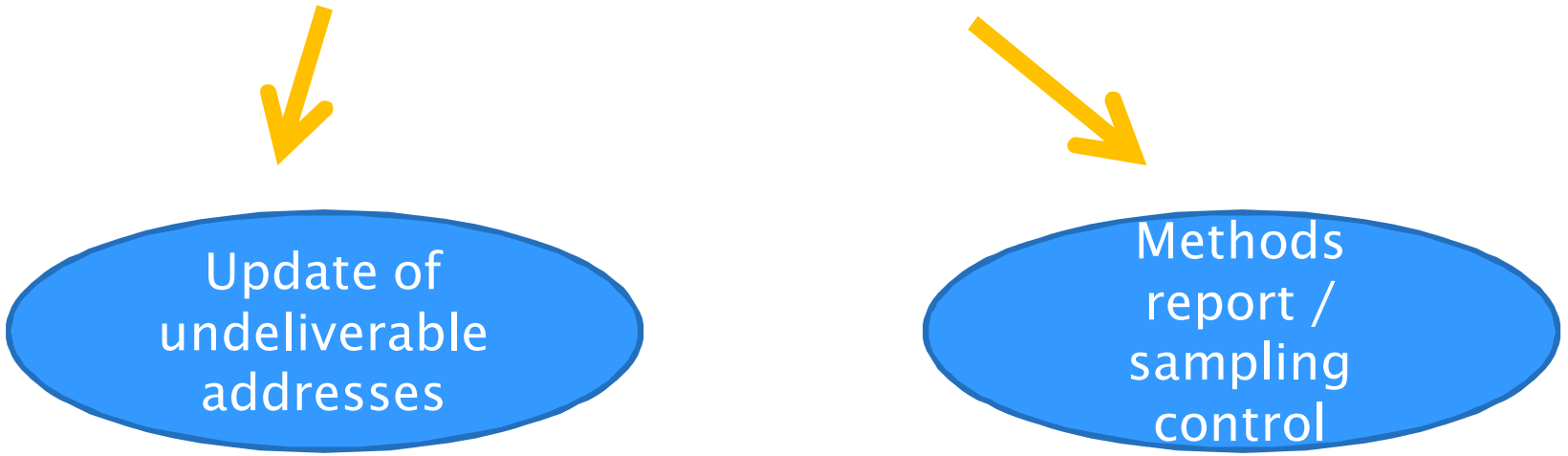
- Division of work / clarify the responsibilities
- Team communication / meetings
- *Control of* work flow
- Keep the timetable

Preparation of the field phase address management

Why do you need personal data and addresses?

➔ **Contacting the graduates**

⇨ **But also: other purposes**



Preparation of the field phase address management

What is needed?

1. **Names and addresses of the graduates**
   - If more than one address available
     => take them all

2. **Nationality, date of birth, gender, subject /study course**

   ➔ *For searching new addresses, if the old address is wrong*

3. **Nationality, date of birth, gender, subject /study course, type of degree, final grade, terms of study, terms at university**

   ➔ *for the methods report*

Details on acquiring addresses and other data about the target population

- find and think about sources for finding addresses
- contact them and ask for:

- firstname
- lastname
- academic titel
- address (street)
- address (special address appendix)
- address (ZIP-Code)
- adresse (city)
- address (Country)
- home / parents address (street)
- home / parents address (special address appendix)
- home / parents address (ZIP-Code)
- home / parents adresse (city)
- home / parents address (Country)
- 1st study subject /study course
- 2nd study subject /study course
- other study subjects /study courses
- final grade
- final degree
- nationality
- date of birth
- gender
- type of degree
- terms of study
- terms at university
- other available aspects

- Check and compare number of acquired addresses with number of graduates with available statistics by:
  - general count
  - allocation of study subjects
  - allocation of final grade
  - allocation of final degree
  - allocation of gender
  - allocation of date of birth
  - allocation of nationality
  - allocation of other known aspects

- if your find missing cases try to acquire them too
- try to update contacts before using them in the survey (needs much time)
  - find source for updating addresses (registration offices, online social networks, postal services)

Preparation of the field phase address management

What is needed?

A database system to manage:

a) the process of contacting the graduates

b) to match the sample with the population

Useful tools:

Preferred:
Databases (Access / MySQL / OpenOffice-database)

Also possible:
Tables programmes (Excel / OpenOffice-Calc)

Be well prepared for new data and new variables (e.g. new addresses and response control) **in the managing data system!!!**

Details on
the content of the address management system

- You had acquired the information about your target population:

- firstname
- lastname
- academic titel
- address (street)
- address (special address appendix)
- address (ZIP-Code)
- adresse (city)
- address (Country)
- home / parents address (street)
- home / parents address (special address appendix)
- home / parents address (ZIP-Code)
- home / parents adresse (city)
- home / parents address (Country)
- 1st study subject /study course
- 2nd study subject /study course
- other study subjects /study courses
- final grade
- final degree
- nationality
- date of birth
- gender
- type of degree
- terms of study
- terms at university
- other available aspects

- For control of the survey process:

  - ID-Code
  - last sent contact
  - address of the last sent contact
  - actual status
  - what to do next
  - what was already done in the past

  And in case of an address update:
  - save old address (street)
  - save old address (special address appendix)
  - save old address (ZIP-Code)
  - save old address (city)
  - save old address (Country)
  - save old email address

- For the future (what to do after finishing the field phase):
  - wants an result report (yes / no)
  - will participate in future surveys (yes / no)
  - other aspects (e.g. wants contact to its university alumni club)
  - new addresses

Preparation to achieve the field phase objectives

Contact the target population

Preparation of the field phase form letters / form email

Generalised letters and **personalised** letters

Or:

„Dear **Ladies and Gentlemen**“ vs. „Dear **Mr. Smith**“

- Personalised letters increase respose rates!
  (e.g. see Dillman et.al. 2009:238)

Preparation of the field phase form letters / form email

Generalised letters and **personalised** letters

Other aspects

What about answers of people you don‘t want?

⇨You need to protect your questionnaire
⇨You can do it with an access code

A general access code will probably work

BUT
a personalised code will do a better job:
⇨better control of response behavior
⇨possibility of highly acurate contacts to graduates

Preparation of the field phase form letters / form email

Summary

Generalised letters and **personalised** letters

- personalised letters increase response rates
- a personalised code allows
  - ⇨to protect your questionnaire from others
  - ⇨better control of response behavior
  - ⇨possibility of highly acurate contacts to graduates

⇨**There is a need for personalised mails to the graduates**

⇨ **use a program with form letter or form mail function** **(test it before using it)**

Preparation of the field phase form letters / form email

Email or letter?

What about **non-reachable** contacts?

☐ It‘s important to know which contacts are not reachable.

⇨ for those contacts new addresses should be found

⇨ **Can contacts via email inform you about non-reachable contacts?**

⇨ **What about „dead mailboxes“?**

⇨ **Can contacts via postal letter inform you about non-reachable contacts?**

Preparation of the field phase form letters / form email

Summary

Generalised letters and **personalised** letters

- **The form mail program should be compatible with your address system** (data import / export)
- For postal letters you could use the mail merge function e.g. of MS Word or OpenOffice Writer
  - ⇨ This should be compatible with your address system

Preparation to achieve the field phase objectives

Information material and promotion

Information material

The Website (or other information material) had to comply with some necessary functions

During the survey process:

- direct people to the questionnaire
- present the project to the respondents
- clarify questions of the respondents

⇨ Simple address (must be typewritten)

⇨ What is the project's objective? Who is involved? Who is handling it?

⇨ How does the survey data flow? Clarification! Tell them what happen!

Beyond the survey process:

- present the project to university staff
- present the project to external parties
- present the results (when available)

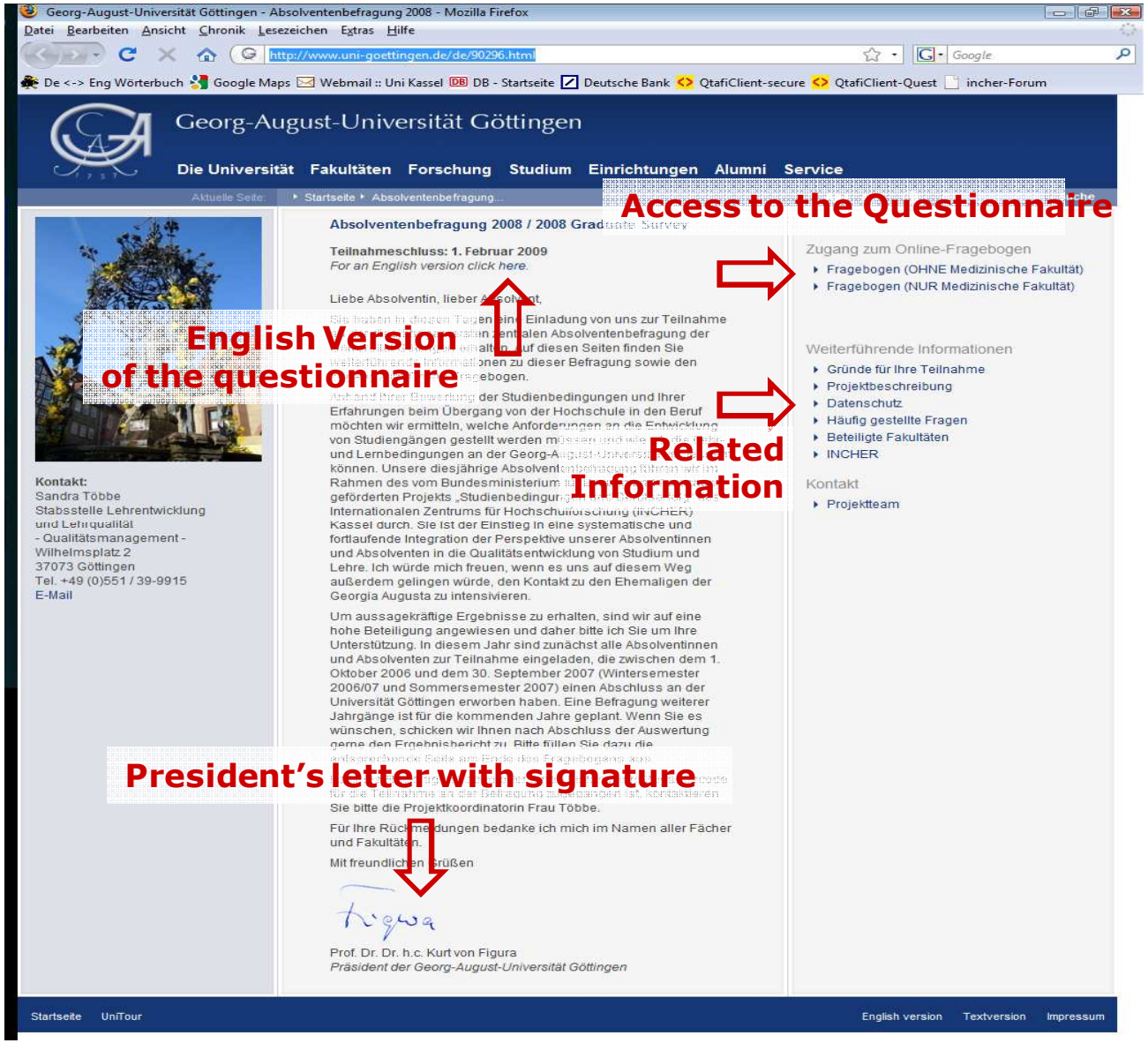
⇨ What happens in the project?

⇨ Why does the university need it?

Information material
example for an website

http://www.uni-goettingen.de/absolventenbefragung

Example: University of Göttingen



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Additional information material

To increase response rates:

- flyer / leaflet of the project
- information about data privacy / FAQ
- incentives (e.g. pens, vouchers for books, lottery)
- support letters by president / dean / professors
- flyer / leaflet of the ALUMNI-club

Preparation to achieve the field phase objectives

Customize the questionnaire

Preparation and customizing the questionnaire to achieve the field phase objectives

The objective of the field phase is the collection of **valid data** from an **adequate** (representative) **sample of respondents**.

Second Question:
- What data is valid?

- **Not every graduate did its way like the mainstream did!**
  - Find out as much as you can about your target population and its included subgroups before you start developing the questionnaire and before you start to contact the graduates!
  - Find out what the mainstream is!
  - Different study subjects could have different standards.
  - Think about alternative ways beside the mainstream!

  - **Answering options** in the **questionnaire should match for both**: the mainstream and the alternative ways)

Preparation and customizing the questionnaire to achieve the field phase objectives

The objective of the field phase is the collection of **valid data** from an **adequate** (representative) **sample of respondents**.

Second Question:
- What data is valid?

- **Communication is limited: It is highly unlikely that the recipient of an message understands the message in all its meanings as intended by the sender.**
  - Communication is always interpreted by its context
  - Questions too!

- Use a simple and clear diction as possible!
- Be careful with examples!
- Take care for the context of the question: Could the context change the understanding of that questions?
- Provide a complete as possible set of answers (for everyone, not only the mainstream)
- Be flexible with open text answering options

Preparation
to achieve the field phase objectives

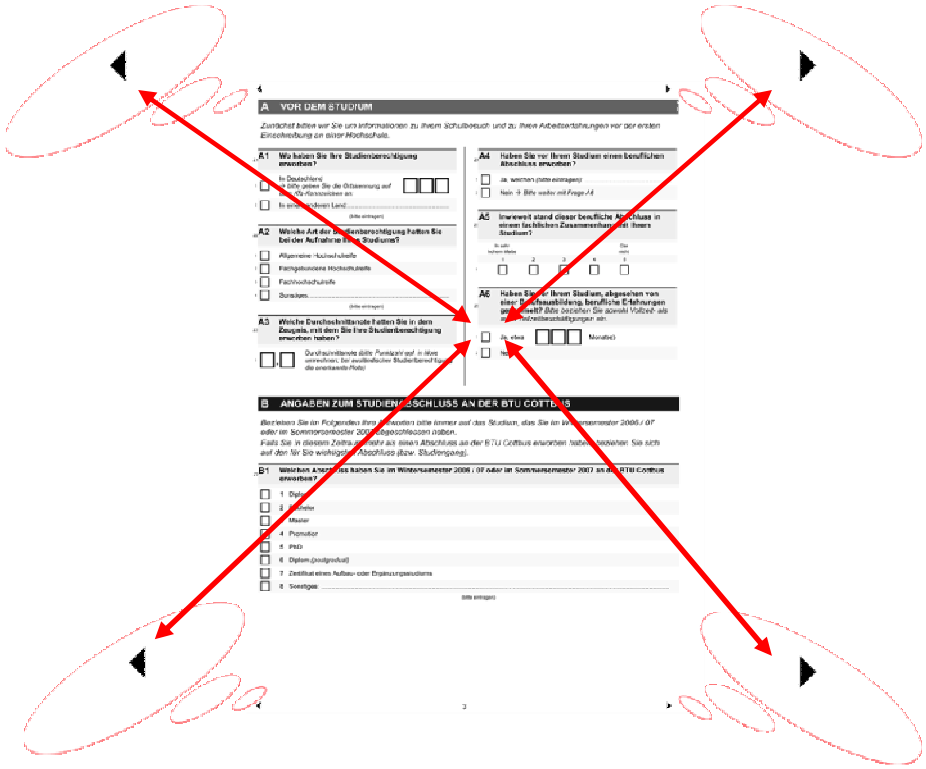
Print the paper-questionnaire

Technical acquirements for printing the paper-questionnaires

the paper-questionnaires will be scanned by an machine

⇩

for that the mismatch inside the print has to be smaller than 2mm (offest printing is necessary)



Technical acquirements for printing the paper-questionnaires

the paper-questionnaires will be scanned by an machine

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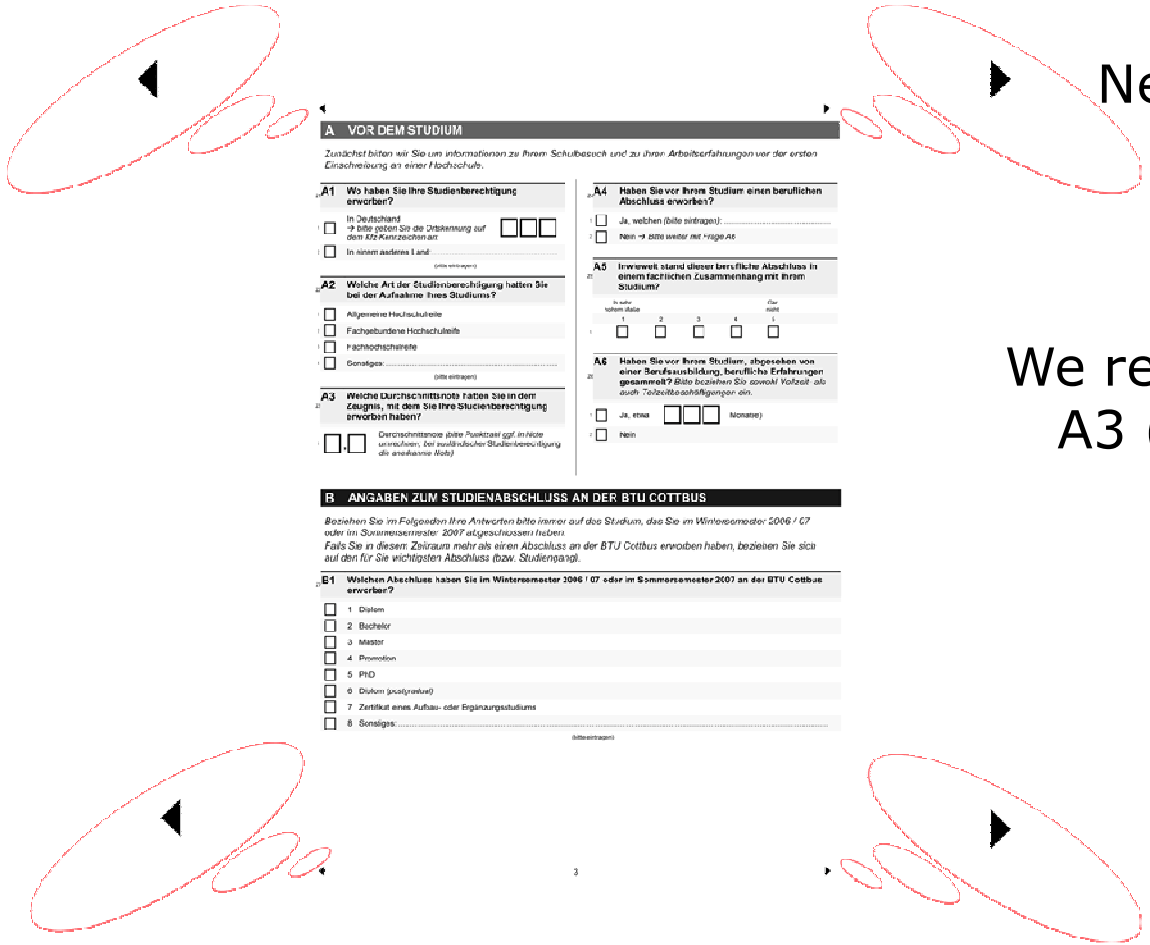

Near the corner marks is no sewing allowed

⇩

We recommend printing on A3 (folded) and sewing the back

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Preparation to achieve the field phase objectives

Timetable

Preparation of the field phase
Timetable ⇨ Countdown to the launch

3 months to zero*

- ☐ Ask important / relevant people for **support letters** to the graduates
- ☐ Start searching for **statistical information** about the target population
- ☐ **Fix the content and Prepare** your **questionnaire**
- ☐ You should have all **addresses** of the target population
  ⇨ if possible: start **verifying** the addresses

- ☐ **Create** a **website** for the project with some information:
  - what is the project / survey about
  - who is conducting the survey
  - name a contact person (incl. telephone number and email address)
  - who belongs to the target population
  - data privacy
  - include also a link to the questionnaire

* zero = start of the questionnaire

Preparation of the field phase
Timetable ⇨ Countdown to the launch

2 months to zero*

- look for a form mail program and **test it** or test the form letter function of your text-program
- **continue verifying** the addresses
- test your questionnaire, **bug-fixing**
- Get necessary materials (paper, envelops, etc.)

* zero = start of the questionnaire

Preparation of the field phase
Timetable ⇨ Countdown to the launch

1 month to zero*

- ☐ import the personal codes into the system (questionnaire system and address system) and **test them**
- ☐ **test everything, bug-fixing**
- ☐ **train** your employees / team mates and other relevant people / partners how to run the field phase
- ☐ **print paper-questionnaires**

(according to the technical acquirement guideline of UEFISCU, more details to come)

* zero = start of the questionnaire

Preparation of the field phase
Timetable ⇨ Countdown to the launch

at last

Preparation
to achieve the field phase objectives

The Future:

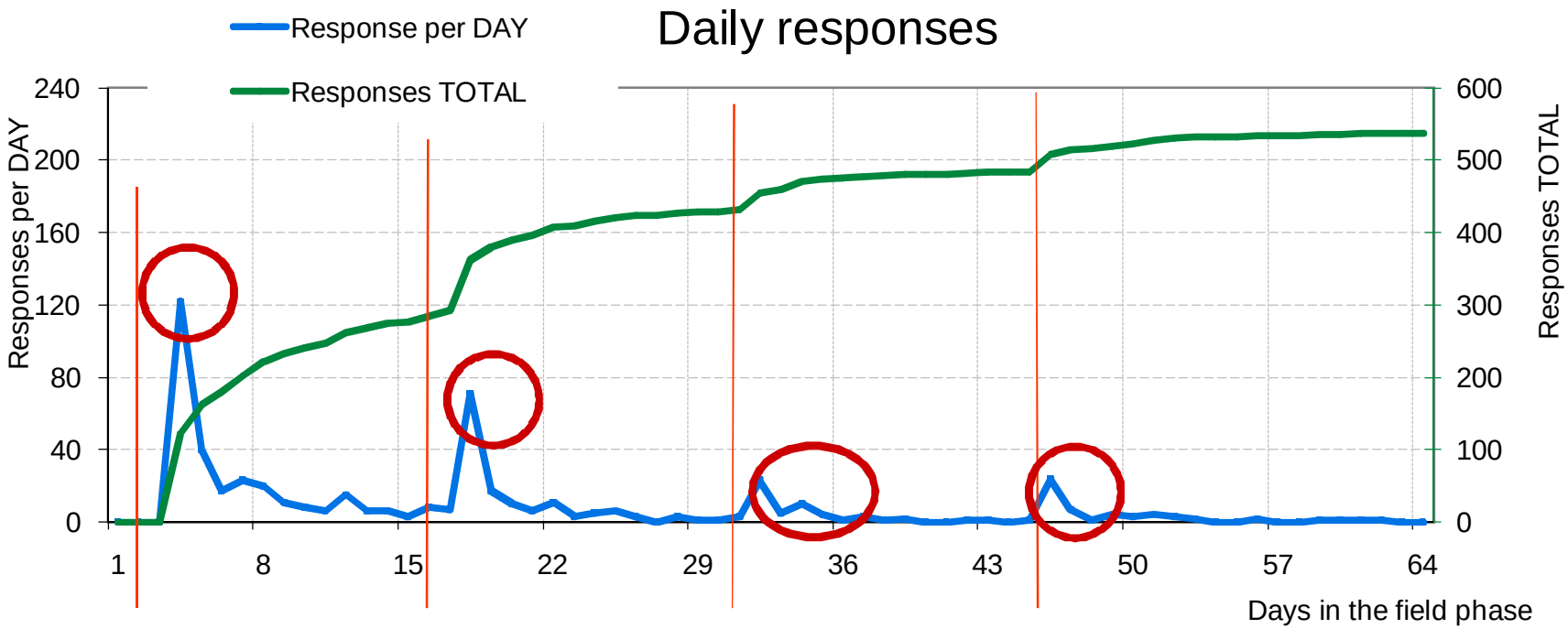
Outlook to the field phase

Field phase

- What needs to be done?
- Why does it need to be done?
- When does it need to be done?

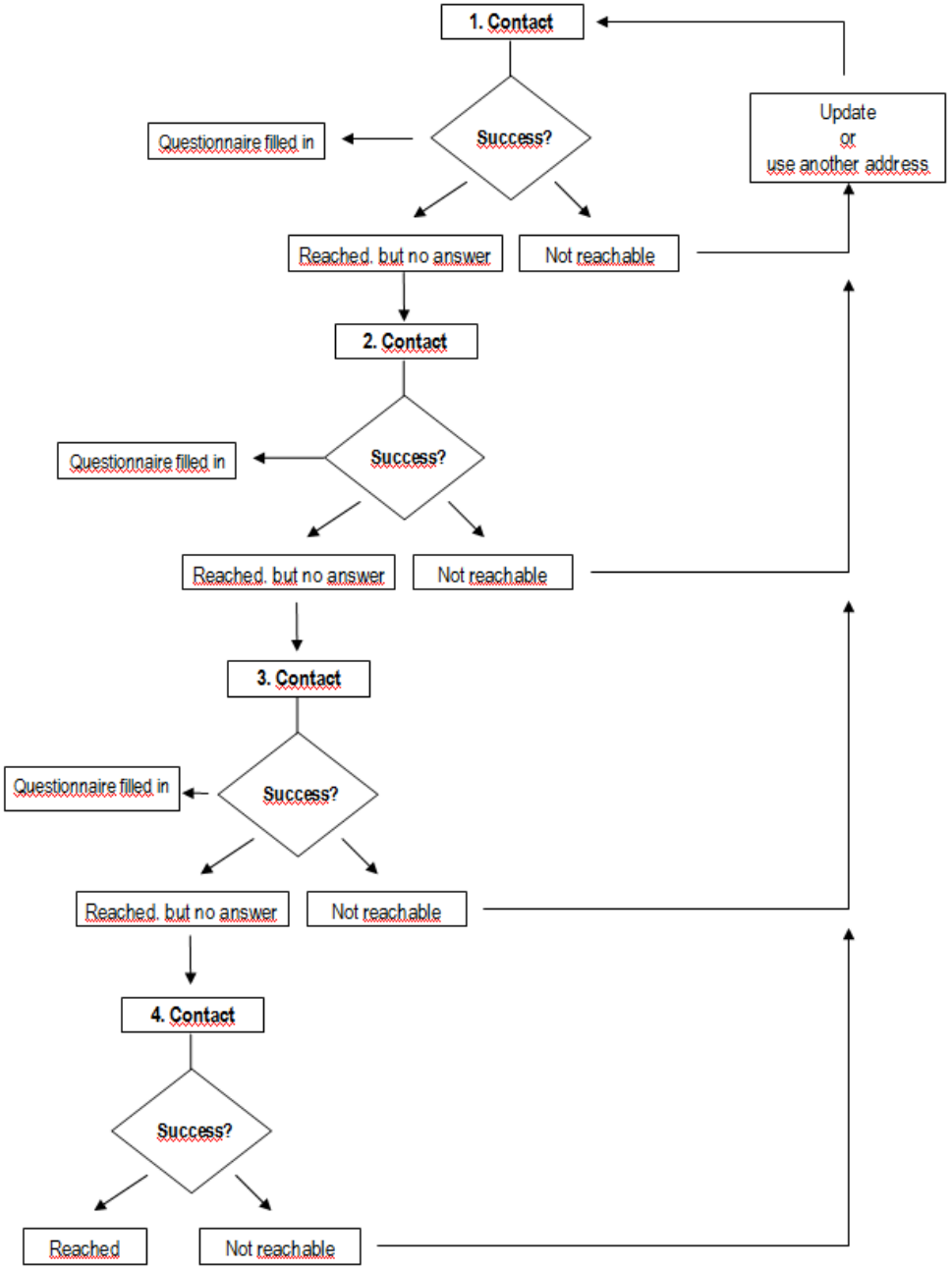
Field phase

- You'll better ask them twice …
- … or thrice…
- … but to play it safe, you can ask **four times**



1. Contact **2.** Contact **3.** Contact **4.** Contact

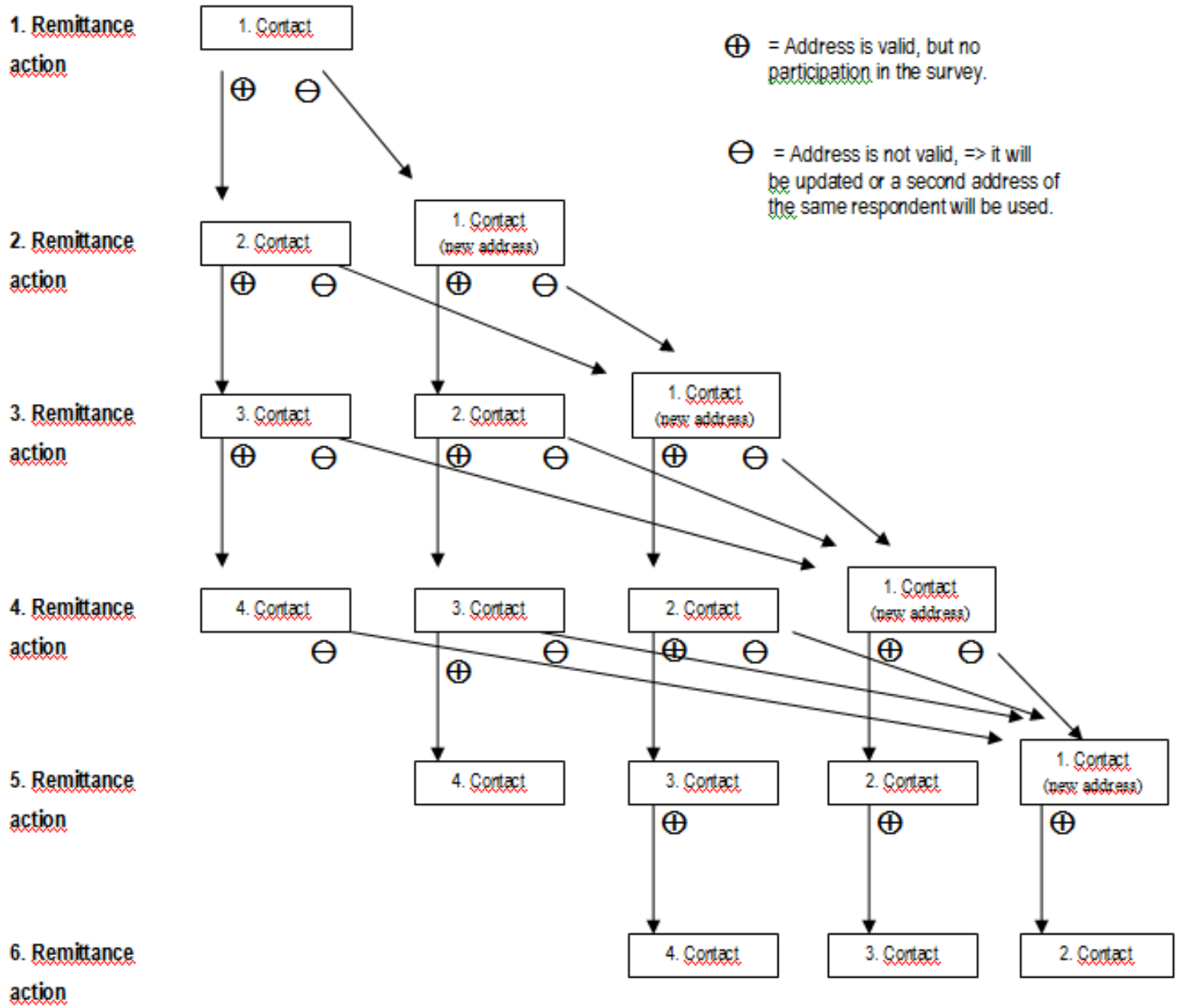
Field phase
Process of contacting one graduate



Field phase
to-do-list for contacting one graduate

- Defining the status(-es) of the graduate during the whole process
- Sending an email or letter to the graduate
- Documentation of the response behavior
- Answering questions from the graduate
- If the address is incorrect ⇨ find a new address
- Communication to other departments, universities, partners and employees

Field phase
Process of contacting many graduates



Field phase
To-do-list for contacting many graduates

- Managing the different statuses of the graduates during the of process
- Sending the appropriate emails or letters to the graduates
- Documentation of the response behavior
- Answering questions and fixing problems coming from the graduates
- If addresses are incorrect ⇨ find new addresses
- Communication to other departments, universities, partners and employees

Field phase
Why so complicated?

- If the objective is called *„representative data"*, any missing response could cause an erratic sampling error, that, at the end could cause the distortion of data.

- High response rates often facilitate high credibility in political discussions

Field phase Timetable

Schedule of contacts

(example: 2 weeks)

Day 1 ⇨ 1st Contact

Day 15 ⇨ 2nd Contact

Day 29 ⇨ 3rd Contact

Day 44 ⇨ 4th Contact

During the whole field phase

- ☐ Managing the process
- ☐ Documentation of the response behavior
- ☐ Answering questions and fix problems
- ☐ Finding new addresses
- ☐ Communication to others

Methods report

- **Objectives of a methods report**
- **Need of a methods report**

Contents of a methods report:

- **What have you done?**
- **When did you do it?**
- **How did you do it?**
- **Why did you do it that way with that specific timing ?**
- **Results (quotas, differences between population and sample)**

Methods report
Objective: Describe the study !

Descriptive metadata of a study

1	Type	Cross-sectional or panel
2	Data collection 1	Written questionnaire or interview
3	Data collection 2	Online or paper
4	Standardisation	High - low
5	Target population	Which cohort? Which degree? Which country?
6	Sample	Census? Sample size; sampling strategy
7	Time of field phase	When was the survey conducted?
8	Inside the field phase	Description of the field phase
9	Response	Number of cases; response rate
10	Representativity	Criteria?

Methods report
Objective: Think about the Representativity!

- **"representativity" in scientific reading is not provable** (this would be a longer story)
- "representativity" in everyday life means
  - "not too much error" in the data, and
  - the matching of sample and target population based on reviewable data / facts
- Reviewable data / facts are needed from both, sample (asked in the questionnaire) and target population (statistical information and with the addresses)
- Reviewable data / facts could be nationality, date of birth, gender, subject /study course, type of degree, final grade, terms of study, terms at university

Methods report
Why is it needed?

- The description of the study and the field phase make it reviewable and criticisable to others
- The critical view on "representativity" makes it reviewable and criticisable to others
- **To make a study reviewable and criticisable is one point that separates *science* from *journalism***

Preparation
to achieve the field phase objectives

Conclusions

Conclusions

- Communication and Documentation are important! All the project is based on cooperation!
- The objective of the field phase is the collection of valid data from an adequate (representative) sample of respondents
- Find out as much as you can about your target population and its included subgroups before you start developing the questionnaire and before you start to contact the graduates!
- Develop and print support letters and other support materials (e.g. flyer)!
- Test the questionnaire(s) very intensive before starting the survey!
- Test other programs that you want to use before starting the survey!
- A good preparation of the field phase can make the field phase itself easier
- Keeping a good timetable helps to avoid high pressure times
- Documentation of everything is important
- A methodological reflection separates science from journalism

That's it…

Thank you for your attention.

Do you have any questions?