

Obituary for Gert G. Wagner

* The 5th of January 1953 in Kelsterbach – † The 28th of January 2024 in Berlin



Photo Rights: DIW

Prof. Dr. Gert G. Wagner, the long-time director of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), passed away unexpectedly on January 28, 2024. Alongside the founding father of the SOEP, Hans-Jürgen Krupp, Gert G. Wagner was the face and intellectual stimulus for the development of the SOEP for decades, which is celebrating 40 years in 2024.

The central stages of his professional career include the positions of research associate and later director of the DFG Collaborative Research Center 3 “Microanalytical Foundations of Social Policy” at the Universities of Frankfurt am Main and Mannheim (1979 to 1988). From 1989 he took over the management of the SOEP at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin). Gert G. Wagner followed Klaus F. Zimmermann as chairman of the DIW Executive Board (President) in 2011 and successfully led the DIW, as well as the SOEP, through the upcoming evaluation within the Leibniz Association. As a result, the SOEP, now institutionalized as a department, was rated as excellent. Even after transferring the management of the SOEP to Jürgen Schupp, he remained loyal to the SOEP itself – whether as a regular source of ideas or as a tireless advocate for the SOEP.

In addition to his work at DIW Berlin, he accepted a professorship for social policy and public economics at Ruhr University Bochum. This was followed by a professorship for economics, in particular empirical economic research and economic policy, at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, and a professorship at the Technische Universität Berlin from 2002 until his retirement in 2018.

The most important milestones in his work at the SOEP include the expansion of the SOEP infrastructure. Even before the monetary, economic and social union in 1990, an additional representative sample of households in the GDR was drawn and successfully surveyed, creating a unique source of data to describe the transformation process in East Germany. In 1994, the first migration sample laid the foundation for a series of subsequent migration-specific additional samples, which made the SOEP a central data source for research into integration processes. It is also thanks to the initiative of Gert G. Wagner that the SOEP was able to almost double its sample size in 2000 with the first large refreshment sample. As part of the reporting on poverty and wealth, a unique high-income sample was surveyed in 2002 in order to significantly reduce the data gap in the high-income sector at that time. Gert G. Wagner took a decisive step towards securing the SOEP's long-term future with the institutionalization of the SOEP in 2003. He set the final decisive course for the future of the SOEP when SOEP was awarded a specific budget that facilitated the expansion of data collection, with the SOEP innovation sample in addition to the SOEP main sample. Thus SOEP became a scientific beacon, providing an outstanding data infrastructure for the social and economic sciences.

Gert G. Wagner's innovative spirit and scientific curiosity saw far beyond his own specialist area. He always sought to think outside the box. In this way, he opened SOEP to a variety of disciplines, in particular psychological research. His scientific interest also led to a very large network of national and international researchers.

Gert G. Wagner was appointed to a large number of advisory boards and committees: First of all to the German Science and Humanities Council, as founding chairman of the German Data Forum (RatSWD), as a member of the Rürup Commission, the Enquete Commission "Growth, Prosperity, Quality of Life" of the German Bundestag, the Chamber for Social Order of the EKD (as chairman), the Social Advisory Council, as well as the Pension and Census

Commission. Most recently, Gert G. Wagner was a Senior Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin and a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science (APS).

In recognition of his work, Gert G. Wagner was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for his commitment to communicating scientific expertise in politics and society.

Gert G. Wagner can certainly be described as a social science polymath. His work extends far beyond his many years at, and for, the SOEP, which is also reflected in his many contacts in politics. Thanks to him, various German presidents agreed to provide a photo for the SOEP respondents' information brochure, because his heart for data was also wide open to the respondents. Until the end, he was a constant source of inspiration with concrete suggestions for improvement. This included his persistent efforts to establish compulsory insurance against natural hazards in Germany.

In Gert G. Wagner, the SOEP has lost an intellectual pioneer and one of its most important people. We mourn him deeply and our thoughts are with his family. We will honor his memory.

The funeral will take place in a close circle of family and friends. In the spring, DIW Berlin, SOEP and the Max Planck Institute for Human Development will hold a joint memorial event to honor their former DIW Chairman, the former SOEP Director, and their Max Planck Senior Fellow.

On behalf of all current and many former SOEP employees,

Jan Goebel, Markus M. Grabka, Carsten Schröder, Sabine Zinn (SOEP division directors), and Jürgen Schupp (SOEP director from 2011 to 2017 and retired in 2022)