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**The First Six Waves of SOEP -
The Panel Project in the Years 1983 to 1989**

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THE FIRST SIX WAVES OF SOEP
THE PANEL PROJECT IN THE YEARS 1983 TO 1989

Ute Hanefeld and Jürgen Schupp¹

Abstract

This article describes how the German Socio-Economic Panel longitudinal study project developed over the years 1983 to 1989, a period when practical experience was being gathered with the first six waves and when the further funding for this large-scale project was a constant issue. During this time, a series of basic features were established that have made this panel study an example to others—for example, its governance structure, teamworking capacity, service provision, data quality, and data provision. The article shows that during the early years of building this project in cooperation with the Collaborative Research Center Sfb 3 “Microanalytical Foundations of Social Policy” at the Universities of Frankfurt and Mannheim, the panel study at DIW Berlin developed increasingly close cooperation with non-university social science research institutions as well as with the two universities in West Berlin.

Keywords: SOEP, Panel, Survey

¹ The complete version of this essay appeared in the commemorative publication for Johann Hahlen and Hans-Jürgen Krupp in Rolf-Engel et al. 2008. The authors want to thank Deborah Anne Bowen for translating the manuscript from German into English.

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I. Introduction

In the year 2008, as the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) celebrates its 25th anniversary, it is an internationally renowned longitudinal study used extensively by scholars both within Germany and abroad. SOEP data provide the basis for numerous scientific publications in specialist journals, monographs, policy studies, and media reports.

The SOEP was originally referred to in the academic sphere as the “Socio-Economic Panel,” but in common parlance almost everyone simply used the abbreviated form, calling it the “panel project” or the “panel.” In the 1980s, it was clear what these terms meant, at least in Germany, since the only comparable longitudinal studies that existed were in the US, and the first attempts to establish such studies in Europe were only just getting underway. We, the authors, still like to use this short form and will do so in this paper as well.

The founding father of the panel project, Hans-Jürgen Krupp, has written an account describing how the idea emerged to create a longitudinal study for the Federal Republic of Germany, the planning process, the scholars and institutions that fostered its development, and that difficulties had to be overcome in those early years (see Krupp 2007 and 2008).

In the present article, we will describe the course of the project in the period 1983 to 1989 (for the following phase, see Wagner 2008). It was in this period, during the first six panel waves, that the project members gathered their first practical experiences with the panel. It was a time of constant struggle to survive and secure further funding for this major project. In retrospect, it was during this time that the foundations were established that still provide outstanding examples for similar projects to this day—in particular, with regard to issues of such current relevance as governance, teamwork, service provision, data quality, and data distribution.

This paper ends with 1989, a year when those who initially started the panel project would never have expected a reunification of East and West Germany to take place, dramatically increasing the potential sample population for panels like SOEP. 1989 was also the year when Gert G. Wagner took over leadership of the study, after an interim phase, from Hans-Jürgen Krupp, who moved from research into Hamburg politics in 1988.

This paper also attempts to show that during the early years the panel group at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) in Berlin intensified their cooperation with both non-university social science research institutes and the two West Berlin universities. This solid institutional foundation in Berlin—together with the panel’s growing reputation as a service institution for all disciplines of the social and economic sciences with a microanalytical

focus—are presumably the key reasons for the funding agencies’ confidence, as reflected in their extension of further financial support to the panel project even after the departure of founder Hans-Jürgen Krupp from the DIW and after the parent organization, Sfb 3, had come to an end. Today, the SOEP counts among the most prominent German examples of a successful social and economic research organization outside the university context.

II. The scientific and institutional integration of the panel project

What can be seen as the birth of the Socio-Economic Panel were the concrete preparations for the study that got underway in 1981 under the aegis of the Sfb 3. In the winter of 1982, the Grants Committee of the German Research Foundation (DFG) decided to fund the subproject B-5 “The Socio-Economic Panel”—which would from then on become an independent project—initially for the limited period 1983–1985. At the beginning of 1983, the project followed its project head to DIW Berlin. Hans-Jürgen Krupp had already received the invitation to become President of DIW Berlin in April 1979—up to then, he had served as President of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main. Additional researchers were hired to work for the project in Berlin or worked for the panel project indirectly as part of their basic research activities at the DIW.

The DFG originally saw a problem in supporting a Collaborative Research Center based at two locations—the Universities of Frankfurt and Mannheim; they were afraid that the geographic distance might cause difficulties with interdisciplinary cooperation. The panel project’s move to Berlin and thus the addition of a third location were thus viewed with some degree of skepticism. In retrospect, the geographic distance did not play a major role: the Socio-Economic Panel and all those who participated in it profited greatly from its interdisciplinary grounding in the Sfb 3. Microeconomists and macroeconomists, sociologists, political scientists, econometricians, statisticians, and computer scientists were forced to grapple with different perspectives and approaches to find optimal solutions for the panel study. Discussions lasting hours and long travel times may have been a source of irritation to some, but what resulted from this process was a database that for almost 25 years has reflected a broad spectrum of important issues in longitudinal analysis in a highly sophisticated manner. All those involved would undoubtedly agree that they learned a great deal in this period—not only about the scientific subject matter itself but also about teamwork, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the provision of a “public good.” Although the discussions within the team were sometimes heated, there always remained the unspoken

consensus that “we want to build the panel together.” And oddly enough, the geographic situation changed significantly over time: more and more project heads from Frankfurt and Mannheim moved from their universities and non-university research institutes to Berlin. In the fourth and final research phase of the Sfb 3 from 1988–1990, only three Sfb 3 projects were still located in Mannheim, while in Frankfurt there were five and in Berlin four.

Integrating the panel project into DIW Berlin was not altogether easy. The DIW was then almost completely dominated by a macroeconomic orientation, and many colleagues looked at this microeconomic project, which also contained sociological components, with attitudes ranging from skepticism to outright rejection.

The panel project was placed under the responsibility under department head Horst Seidler. Although for Seidler, a macroeconomist and specialist in national accounting, the world of sample surveys and the problems of survey research and microanalytical modeling may have seemed foreign or even somewhat suspect, he was always an inquisitive and interested listener and a highly attentive editor of written work².

For the implementation and further development of the panel project, a cooperation agreement was concluded in 1983 between the DIW and the Universities of Frankfurt and Mannheim, underscoring their common responsibility for the project. The decision-making body for developing the instruments themselves and addressing methodological questions was the Panel Committee, in which representatives of sociological and economic subprojects of Sfb 3, of the DIW, and project head Hans-Jürgen Krupp worked together to reach agreement. A look at the cooperation agreement documents that decisions against the declared will of the DIW would have been possible in principle, but could only have been pushed through with the aid of a three-quarters majority in the Sfb 3 Project Council. This kind of escalation never occurred, however: presumably the mere possibility that such a point could be reached kept the various special interests of the diverse subprojects in check. Conversely, the DIW Berlin representative also refrained from pursuing any “institutional interests” of the DIW in the Panel Committee, given the shared conviction within the group that the costs of the panel were too high to misuse the project as a kind of multi-themed survey. Soon the position emerged that a specific rationale should be provided for each individual survey question and particularly each individual focal theme in terms of the value it would offer in a longitudinal

2 Dr. Horst Seidler died in August 2007 at the age of 81.

perspective. Even the Panel Council urged all those involved to take this as a guideline (see below):

The panel project increasingly formed the main point of intersection within the Sfb 3—for instance, through such publication projects as the “Analysis Report” and “Data Report” series (Krupp, Hanefeld 1987, and Krupp, Schupp 1988). However, in the case of the book series “Socio-Economic Data and Analyses for the Federal Republic of Germany”, the originally high ambition of publishing two issues per survey wave, “Changing Living Conditions: Data for 19..” and “Changing Living Conditions: Analyses for 19..”, was impossible to realize. Furthermore, the international publishing landscape and the publication recommendations of the DFG soon pointed in an entirely different direction. Thus, the DFG grant approval notice of June 5, 1985, already foresaw adapting publishing practices to the “usual standards,” that is, discontinuing the publications exclusively with a specific publisher and instead focusing on publications in prominent specialist scientific journals (with a reviewer system, see Bowen et al. 2008). For the first time the 1987 Data Report, which was published by the Federal Statistical Office with key contributions from the authors involved in the Sfb 3 at that time, contained a series of panel-based articles. Since then, panel data have had a central place in the Data Report, as they do in the forthcoming 2008 issue as well. The centrality of the panel project is recognizable as well when looking at the individual articles that appeared in the two final volumes on the Sfb 3 project (Hauser et al. 1994).

The collaboration with the survey institute, Infratest Sozialforschung, Munich, contributed significantly to the success of the panel project—in particular, the 27 years of always supportive and enthusiastic work with Bernhard von Rosenblatt. In 1981, nine survey institutes had been invited to submit a bid, and many of them were taken into consideration. It soon became evident that only Bernhard von Rosenblatt and his team had the necessary enthusiasm for the project—and their passion was both convincing and contagious. They showed an extraordinary level of commitment, always took an active role in conceptual development by contributing new ideas. Furthermore, a crucial factor for the panel study was that the process of data collection was not—and still is not—the usual “black box”: the responsible staff members were always involved in resolving each problem that arose at an early stage and in finding amicable solutions. Only in this way was it possible to accurately evaluate the data quality and to assess the possibilities for practical fieldwork. In the summer of 1983, the first contract was signed with Infratest Sozialforschung to carry out data collection.

The involvement of the German Research Foundation in the panel project should also be underscored here. Particularly Dr. Dieter Funk, the officer responsible for the Collaborative Research Centers, worked hard to promote the project, both publicly and behind the scenes.

The Panel Council also played a very important role in the development of the panel project. It was comprised mainly of top researchers from Germany and abroad but also included representatives of ministries and important institutions as well as representatives of the DFG. The Council meetings that took place at least once per year had the character of intermediate evaluations. On the one hand, these meetings demanded considerable effort because the newest conceptual developments and research reports had to be opened up for discussion. On the other hand, they provided a valuable enrichment to the project through the Council members, who contributed numerous good ideas and suggestions, and simultaneously took on a kind of “multiplier” role by integrating the panel project into the scientific community.

Regarding the involvement of external researchers into the use of panel data, one should recall that—after the data protection issues had been resolved in the year 1985—the first applications for data distribution were approved by the Project Council, allowing external research colleagues within Germany and later also abroad to use the panel data. With the help of a “panel-panel” (later replaced by the panel newsletter), a regular exchange of information with internal and external data users was established in which they were periodically asked to submit their publications based on panel data in order to facilitate the productive exchange of experiences.

III. The survey program, the role of sociology, and selected fieldwork experiences

In June 1983, first a short questionnaire test was conducted, the results of which served in adapting the survey instrument for an already longitudinally designed pretest, which was then distributed to 200 households in fall of 1983³. The overall satisfactory pretest was followed at the end of February 1984 by fieldwork for the first main survey.

The first wave of any panel inevitably establishes the main points that will define the longitudinal study in the future; what follows thereafter is, as many (erroneously) believe, “just stupid replication.” The experiences gathered setting up the SOEP project as a household

panel, and the first few years of work that followed nevertheless prove that designing the structure, launching, and further developing such a study—whose goals included measuring and analyzing social change as well as analyzing the development of social welfare based on longitudinal data—is anything but trivial.

Since the beginning, the content of the panel survey has been determined primarily by scientific questions that revolve around the testing of theories and the foundations of social policy and less by administrative or political questions. Furthermore, the survey stands in the tradition of scientific social reporting, whose goal is to observe social change and the production of wellbeing over the long term (see Schupp et al. 1996).

The research questions and their operationalization described in the application for the panel project in 1985 (see Sfb 3 1985, pp. 49 – 76 and Hanefeld 1987) show a strong overlap with the structural classification scheme of the “System of Social Indicators” (see Zapf 1977). Here the following thematic areas can be distinguished, which can be counted as the core elements of the standard Socio-Economic Panel survey program and that simultaneously reflect the diverse research interests of the economically and sociologically oriented subprojects within the Sfb 3:

- *Household composition*: gender, age structure, births, deaths, immigration and emigration, marital status, family structure, position within the household, nationality.
- *Socio-economic structure*: by earning status and professional position as well as prestige scales.
- *Labor market and employment conditions*: unemployment, labor market participation, occupational mobility, firm characteristics and quality of employment conditions, occupational qualifications.
- *Educational characteristics*: highest attained formal educational and occupational qualifications, current enrolment in educational institutions, attainment of educational degrees/qualifications, further education, and parental education.
- *Income types and levels, household transfers, social security* (retirement and health insurance), *taxes and inheritances* (in rudimentary form in the ongoing surveys; a focal point in 1988 as well as in 2002 and 2007).
- *Income use, expenditures, consumption*: for living expenses, savings, as well as consumer durables for the household.
- *Time and activity budgets as well as do-it-yourself work within private households*: through rough average time-use indicators.

3 From April 1983 to the end of 1984, Christoph F. Büchtemann was the project member responsible for the development of the pretest questionnaire, the first main survey wave, and preparations for the second survey wave. Unfortunately, he died in December 2001 much too young at the age of 48.

- *Living*: living status and quality, living expenses, geographic mobility, living environment.
- *Health*: self-reported indicators on health condition.
- *Traffic*: only rough indicators on choice of means of transportation and on commuting to work (but only since 1998 and focus of special questions on choice of means of transportation in 2003).
- *(Political) participation and networks*: only rough indicators; networks have been the subject of survey questions only since 1991 at an interval of several years.

The analysis of integration processes of foreign households should be added as an entirely independent content area; today this would be referred to more generally as households with a migration background.

As the foregoing summary clearly reveals, the area of income use and consumption in particular has only been surveyed rudimentarily in the panel project as part of the ongoing collection of data on living costs and savings. This necessary limitation—which has been found internationally in all of the household panels since—was also affirmed by the Panel Council due both to the limited amount of time available to administer the survey and to the general availability of these data from official statistical sources (household budget survey).

Along with objective indicators, the panel also collects an array of subjective data. This information relates, on the one hand, to feelings about specific aspects of life at particular points in time, but also to “prospective” appraisals and expectations. With a panel design, repeatedly surveying prospective indicators makes it possible to determine probabilities of these expectations being realized⁴; an analytical perspective that was only “discovered” in panel data comparatively recently.

In the SOEP, surveying all household members in multiperson households ages 16 and up multiplies the list of objective informations. With each successive survey wave, the complete data from the previous periods are thus also available as explanatory variables.

In addition to the standard survey program, about one-sixth of the total time spent completing the questionnaire is devoted to a focal theme determined through discussions within the governing bodies of the panel project. These survey focal points change from one year to the next and are repeated at extended intervals.

4 For a systematic discussion on this subject, see Holst et al. (1994) and Schramm (1992).

Overview: Survey focal themes of the Socio-Economic Panel

Year	Theme
1984	Employment biography in yearly increments, beginning at the age of 15
1985	Marital status biography, questions on childhood, growing up and moving out of the parental home, for women ⁵ , details on their children
1986	Living environment, social background, childhood, and entry into professional life
1987	Social security, transition to retirement
1988	Financial statement
1989	Further education and qualification

The survey program designed for the panel project was also well suited to creating an empirical foundation for a new paradigm of social structural analysis in both a cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective (see, for a more detailed description, Schupp 1995). Thus individualization as the “central trend in modern societies” defined the scientific debate in the 1980s (Zapf 1992, p. 190). Conceptually it leads to an increased range of choices at the individual level, made possible especially by the new forms of welfare state security. What was lacking, however, were empirical studies on this concept that attempted to systematically investigate whether the longitudinal differentiation in the life course actually corresponded to the cross-sectional “pluralization of lifestyles” (Zapf 1992, p. 191).

The two sociologists Berger and Sopp, both then in Bamberg, summarized this new social science paradigm in an empirical study of the differentiation of employment history patterns that was based on panel data⁶, in the following words: “Unstable or discontinuous employment careers, insofar as they are not caused by unemployment, then appear not only as infractions against standards of normality or assumptions about continuity. They also may represent, under the preconditions of a socio-politically stabilized welfare society, both insecurities resulting from the labor market and also opportunities for learning and self-

5 In the mid-80s, questions regarding the birth of children were directed solely to women. Only in the biography questionnaire for the new SOEP sample F of 2001 were men surveyed on this important biographical indicator as well.

6 This was based on analyses carried out in the framework of the DFG project under leadership of Prof. Dr. Ulrich Beck (then in Bamberg) “Development of Social Inequality over Time.” The 26th data provision contract for this study was concluded with Prof. Beck in 1988.

fulfillment that are consciously sought after and maintained for the future.” (Berger, Sopp 1992, p. 181).

In the first few years of the panel project, a second sociological approach in the longitudinal investigation of social inequality as well as of welfare processes—a position prominently represented in the Sfb 3—remained somewhat distant from practical panel use. This was the life course approach put forward by Karl Ulrich Mayer and applied in the West German cohort studies of the early 1980s, which were based on retrospective longitudinal data collected one time only, instead of the prospective panel data, which demand more patience. His paradigm also gradually adopted a more longitudinal approach to the social influences that shape the life course over the course of generations. “Social structure is no longer conceptualized as a cross-sectional distribution of statistical aggregates or as a static framework of positions but as the result of the activity of socially defined groups of actors under specifiable, changing social framework conditions.” (Mayer 1990, p. 10). This took place on the one hand due to the increased focus on age as a source of inequality and social conflicts in scientific research, and on the other hand through a closer study of socio-structural connections as well as their constitution from the biographical perspective. Particularly this tension between macro and micro relationships has since crucially determined the program of life course research. “Life courses are the result of a multitude of influences: economically and politically determined opportunity structures, culturally determined ideas, legal age norms, institutionalized position sequences and transitions, individual decisions, socialization processes and selection mechanisms” (Mayer 1990, p. 9).

The tradition of life course analysis established by Mayer had its origins many years earlier in the Sfb 3 subproject A-4 “Life Courses and Welfare Development,” whose goal was the following: “The object of research is the total, socially determined life course from birth into middle age (...). It starts from the premise that individual resources for action and social opportunity structures are interlinked with each other at isolated points, but that starting conditions further back in the life course exert delayed, long-term impacts and real age effects, making the life course an endogenous causal system that cannot be subdivided arbitrarily (Sfb 3 1981, p. 142).

This kind of comprehensive analytical perspective on the analysis of panel data, encompassing the entire life course “from the cradle to the grave”, as well as the inclusion of information from parents and grandparents is key to increasing the conceptual potential of the panel, with soon to be 25 waves of the panel and an increasing number of multi-generational households (see Wagner et al. 2007).

Turning to look at survey methodology, the panel was planned very thoroughly together with Infratest Sozialforschung. Nevertheless, several problems arose that no one expected. In retrospect, the following selected examples might seem quaintly amusing, but in the situation at that time, most of them—after the initial bewilderment had been overcome—created significant additional work.

- Normally in survey research, one assumes sex to be a time-invariable characteristic. For this reason, it is also used in plausibility tests. It took only three or four waves before the first sex change appeared in the Socio-Economic Panel data. Telephone inquiries regarding “possible data errors” were worded much more carefully thereafter.
- For the Socio-Economic Panel, a fairly complicated follow-up concept was developed, whereby it was decided at the outset which household members would be surveyed after a household move. Correspondingly, a system of household and individual numbers was developed that would make it apparent at all times which original panel household a person had come from. But no one expected that—already with the first survey waves—a person in one panel household might marry a person in another panel household and thus form a new household. The originally planned household and individual numbering system had to be revised, which required a monumental effort in the 1980s, particularly in software programming and computer capabilities .
- Household size is absolutely not the unambiguous characteristic one might think it to be. It depends crucially on which household member is interviewed and when. Particularly in the case of almost grown or grown children in the household, opinions often differ widely. Young people who attend college in a different city and only come home on weekends often think they have moved out of the household and created a new one. Mothers, on the other hand—and sometimes fathers as well—often assume that their children still live mainly at home in the parental household. The following year, the various assumptions often depend on whether the young person’s “move” turned out to be only temporary or whether it actually did mark the beginning of his or her independence. From a cross-sectional perspective, this problem is not easy to solve, but in a panel it is much more serious when one wants to separate “real” from “erroneous” household mobility.

These few selected examples allowed the initial staff members of the project to gain the following important insight: “The actually observed world is still much more colorful than what a group of researchers might think up at their desks.”

The experiences gained with the so-called “foreigner samples” have been of particular importance as well. At the beginning of the 1980s, it was very unusual that such a population was to be integrated overproportionally into the representative household sample. Since the foreigner samples required particularly extensive resources, with translated and back-translated questionnaires and special fieldwork procedures (e.g., deployment of additional persons with language skills to accompany German interviewers, see Hanefeld 1987), major efforts were needed to convince the German Research Association evaluators of the usefulness of these supplementary samples. Today, these foreigner samples, which were

expanded around the middle of the 1990s to include a sample of immigrants, constitute one of the great strengths of the Socio-Economic Panel (see Frick, Söhn 2005). What remains incomprehensible is that after 25 years, with only a few exceptions, the explicit inclusion of foreigners in German population surveys is still not the norm—not even in the official statistics—although the differences in the behavior of individuals with and without migration backgrounds has been a matter of public discussion for many years.

In other areas as well, the panel project gathered experiences that can provide exemplary models today. Perhaps one of the most important conditions for the project was that all project members knew from the start that the only chance of getting funding for this very expensive project—expensive at least by social science standards—was if the data could be provided quickly, and in high quality, to all interested researchers. This automatically made all members of the panel staff service providers. If the service had not been good enough and if the data users had been dissatisfied, the panel would have been endangered as an infrastructural project for the social and economic sciences. Consequently, attention was paid from the start to documenting the fieldwork carefully and providing this documentation to everyone. Longitudinal and cross-sectional data quality was and still is tested extensively, documented, and published (see, e.g., Frick, Grabka 2007). For all data users, a user handbook was conceptualized as a loose-leaf notebook, updated annually. This has been available online for several years and continues to be regularly updated.

It should also be mentioned that the panel project had to break new ground in the area of data protection. For one, procedures had to be implemented in data collection for how participants were to be informed and how it could be insured that both Infratest and also—if necessary—selected members of the panel group could access the original data. For another thing, it was necessary to determine what measures had to be taken to pass on the data to external users in Germany and abroad. In 1983, when the discussion with data protection officers began at the state level, this was a particularly volatile topic since the census planned for 1983 had been cancelled after an extensive data protection discussion. The panel survey of 1987 required major efforts since it had to be carried out alongside debates surrounding the 1987 census.

Among the further innovations inspired by the panel project or developed together with the Sfb 3 are the following, mentioned only briefly in passing:

- Progressive differentiation of the method mix used in data collection.
- Differentiation of the survey instruments (household and individual questionnaire) for first-time and follow-up respondents.

- Surveying first-time respondents additionally on the focal themes from the first three survey waves.
- Development of a “fill-in-the blank” questionnaire for individuals without an interview in t-1.
- Further development of the data distribution concept for panel data to encompass regional supplementary indicators as a two-phase procedure, which was initially put into effect exclusively within subprojects in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, but then also made available to external data users with whom additional contractual agreements had been signed—and under the condition that corresponding data protection procedures had been implemented.
- Since 1986, first efforts got underway to create an internationally comparative panel data file in the framework of the so-called PACK project at CEPS/INSTEAD in Luxembourg (Sfb 3 1988, p. 93). The first step was to study the existing studies in the US and Europe for comparability and possible integration into a common databank.
- Integration of the data of the panel project into the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS).
- Establishment of a forward-looking and sustainable databank structure at the DIW that would prove effective for the diverse tasks of editing and testing each wave of panel data, which increase in complexity with each subsequent year. It offered user-friendly interfaces to the statistical software packages commonly used at that time for the purposes of panel analysis and distribution. The databank selected at that time, SIR, is still being used after 25 years⁷ and there are currently no plans to switch to another platform.
- The weighting concept conceptualized in the Sfb 3 for households and individuals in the longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives (Galler 1987) were used in the panel project and developed further. Thus decisions had to be made as to how splits within households would be dealt with in weighting and how temporary missings would be treated, to cite only two examples.

IV. Hans-Jürgen Krupp leaves the DIW

The last application submitted under the project leadership of Hans-Jürgen Krupp for funding of the Socio-Economic Panel was only for the year 1989 and was submitted in May 1988, that is, shortly before Hans-Jürgen Krupp’s move to Hamburg in June to take political office as Senator for Finance (see Galler, Wagner 1998). The application, submitted again to the German Research Foundation as part of the still existent Sfb 3, was required not only to ensure financing for personnel but even more importantly, to be able to sign a contract supplement for the preparation and implementation of the sixth survey wave. The evaluation of July 7 and 8, 1988, was a great success. The survey funds were approved without any

reductions. Although the funds requested for staff promotions were not approved, the decision was made to provide funds for visiting researchers—as is done in large-scale natural science facilities—on recommendation from an evaluator from a different research field, Stefan Hüfner. As a result, the project has had funds at its disposal since 1989 allowing the SOEP project to invite guest researchers from abroad to come to Berlin for research stays at DIW Berlin. This idea has recently been taken up again in the research data centers that are being established in Germany since 2001.

The “training” of guests at the same time increased the attraction for social and economic researchers outside the Sfb 3 to use the panel data for their own research purposes, and simultaneously demanded a high degree of team spirit and interdisciplinary cooperation from the panel staff; a service model that acted as the model, many years later, for the establishment of research data centers in Germany.

The actual written approval notice for the panel project was finally received on December 2, 1988, which implied that the contract addendum between DIW Berlin and Infratest could only be signed after this date.⁸ The definitive final application for the panel project submitted to the German Research Foundation within the framework of the Sfb 3, which was set to end in 1990, already took into account the increasingly difficult financial situation. Thus after negotiations with the survey institute and a search for additional ways of reducing the financial burden, Infratest submitted a bid that was lower in total financial volume (see Sfb 3 1988, p. 216ff.) than for the preceding waves, despite rising costs.

Already at the seventh meeting of the Panel Council on December 5, 1986, Hans-Jürgen Krupp emphatically asserted the need for follow-up financing for the panel project after 1988. The following possible alternative scenarios were under discussion at that time:

- Attempting to integrate the project into the DIW budget, which could, however come at disadvantage to the sociological component of the panel and cause severe reductions in the scope of the questionnaire.
- Integration of the panel project into GESIS, whereby this would have had to be put on hold until GESIS took shape.

7 SIR is also still used by the British panel BHPS (started in 1991) and the Australian panel HILDA (started in 2001). The technology for data production has since changed significantly in the case of the German panel. The data, which were originally exchanged “exclusively” on magnetic data tapes between mainframe computer facilities in Munich and Berlin, as well as the Universities of Frankfurt and Mannheim, gradually found their way—in their entirety—onto PCs, resulting in a higher need for storage capacity. Today, the annual transfer of the SOEP Scientific Use Files to over 500 research groups takes place via DVD.

⁸ The work processes for carrying out the follow-up surveys around 12 months after the previous survey required that Infratest start work at their own entrepreneurial risk before a legally binding contract had been signed (see also Rosenblatt 2008).

- Direct financing by the BMFT (Federal Ministry for Research and Technology).

The deputy chairman of the council and then director of ZUMA, Hartmut Esser, went on record with the opinion that integrating the Socio-Economic Panel into GESIS was certainly possible, but he advised waiting to see until GESIS had constituted itself (see also his personal recollections in Esser 2008). Also Dr. Leitersdorf, then department head within the BMFT, saw numerous open questions regarding intensified involvement on the part of the BMFT.

While no major efforts were made by the DIW to pursue the first of the three options, after its institutionalization, GESIS did express serious interest in adopting the panel at the meetings of its Board of Trustees on December 14, 1987, and May 6, 1988 (documented in Sfb 3 1988, p. 215). At the same time, representatives of the BMFT on the GESIS Board of Trustees stated that they did not believe a quick decision on the planned institutional support would be possible and thus considered a more promising option bilateral project funding by the federal government and the state of Berlin, also providing Berlin with the option to obtain refinancing from the other states. Thus the issue in the short term was to secure adequate funding, and the issue of the project's organizational affiliation could only be decided as a second step.

In January 1988, the state of Berlin made it clear in a letter from then Senator for Science and Research, Prof. Turner, to the parliamentary Undersecretary of State in the BMFT, Dr. Probst, that the state considered the scientific and political value of the panel project to be very high and wanted to participate in the long-term continuation of the project, although without making any commitments as to an actual amount. The idea emerged during these months that the state of Berlin could use the Committee for Research Funding of the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Funding (BLK) to clarify whether, and to what extent the other states would be willing to participate in refinancing: this can be viewed as a breakthrough in the search for a workable long-term solution.

V. The panel under the temporary leadership of Wolfgang Zapf

After Hans-Jürgen Krupp left the panel to take on political responsibilities as Senator of Finance in Hamburg, sociologist Wolfgang Zapf replaced him temporarily as chair of the panel project from mid-1988 to June 30, 1989, driven by a sense of responsibility for the project and a desire to support his colleagues. Zapf had come to Berlin from Mannheim to

accept a position as President of the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB). He was among the most active supporters of the panel, was a member of the Panel Committee, and simultaneously as head of the subproject A-1 “Welfare production,” still a well-known and highly respected longtime member of the Sfb 3 Project Council. Furthermore, he understood the process of founding GESIS well and knew those in the Berlin Senate Administration for Science responsible for allotting funding. Dr. Horst Seidler, however, took responsibility for operational internal relations within the DIW, as the department head “responsible” for the panel project on the commission of DIW department heads.

When Wolfgang Zapf, the temporary chair of research, spoke about the panel project with others, he liked to describe it as the “most evaluated project in the social and economic sciences,” and in a meeting at the DIW in late 1988 or early 1989 coined the term “publishing public-service scholar” to refer to those who worked on the panel project. This term described precisely the kind of researchers that had been emerging over the preceding years—all those who had, on the one hand, been doing research for the longitudinal project, become specialists in their fields, and whose findings had been published. On the other hand, however, it captured their role as producers of a public good. Wolfgang Zapf’s term “published public-service scholar” also reveals that the ambivalent relation of 50% research to 50% service in research staff should be considered a constructive individual norm guaranteeing both reliable and innovative service while maintaining an understanding of the research perspective in the data produced.

Together, Horst Seidler and Wolfgang Zapf worked to ensure that the duration of their temporary leadership of the panel project lasted just one year, ending with Gert G. Wagner’s appointment as head of the panel on July 1, 1989.

VI. Renewed application to the DFG in July 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall

In July 1989, another application was submitted to the DFG, since the decision of the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Funding of April 20, 1989, stipulated that technical, organizational, and financial oversight of the project was to remain—up to the end of 1995—with the DFG. The DFG agreed and from then on, carried out biannual evaluations of the panel project as part of the normal DFG procedure. The application of July 1989 was thus, in the framework of the normal procedure, a new application that applied to budget year 1990/91.

Without discussing the details of the application as regards the intensified integration of external colleagues into the panel project or going into the methodological or content innovations, in retrospect we must be permitted to admit our historic naiveté and socio-political blindness, as seen in the fact that not even a single phrase of the research application for the 1990-91 research phase expressed an inkling of the sweeping social changes that would take place with the fall of the Berlin Wall just months later, and the economic, currency, and social union with the former GDR (German Democratic Republik) that was already forged exactly 12 months later. The fact, however, that the exceptionally complex panel project was the first representative German study that managed to begin a first wave in the former GDR as early as June 1990 (see Schupp, Wagner 1990 as well as Wagner 2008) provides evidence that the founders of the study had succeeded in creating the nucleus for an innovative, flexible and extremely successful longitudinal project in Germany.

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