

Editorial

SOEP 2012: The 10th International Socio-Economic Panel User Conference

The tenth anniversary SOEP conference took place in June 2012. Once again, the International Socio-Economic Panel User Conference attracted great interest in the SOEP scientific community and was a great success. In summer 2012, we welcomed over 160 participants from 10 countries to the conference, and we were delighted that these included the first-ever delegation of researchers from Japan. Over two days, we had exciting discussions of 66 papers and 15 posters by economists, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, geographers, and survey methodologists covering a wide range of research topics such as income inequality, well-being and happiness, social mobility, health and family issues, and intergenerational research. The Conference Program Committee, consisting of Janet Gornick, C. Katharina Spiess, Nicolas Ziebarth, and Jürgen Schupp, were responsible for selection and planning of the anniversary program. Many of the papers at this year's conference dealt with the distribution of social resources and its trends, causes, and consequences – a core interest shared by a large number of SOEP researchers. Some of these papers addressed specific questions of access to education and jobs, changes in upward social mobility, but also effects of unemployment and downward social mobility.

When the first International SOEP Conference took place almost 20 years ago, it was the first event of its kind in the world – a forum for discussing findings from a household panel study under academic direction. Since then, the conference has found numerous emulators and has grown into an established conference on the analysis of panel data covering a wide range of themes. The heightened interest in international specialist conferences of these kinds provides clear evidence of the growth and improvement in the data infrastructure for prospective longitudinal studies – or panels – in recent years.

When the SOEP was first started almost 30 years ago, we spoke of it simply as “the panel” because of its singular nature. Today it is one of many long-term longitudinal studies in Germany alone. The SOEP team is proud, despite or indeed because of the enormous competition from similar studies, that we are still able to claim the highest number of publications of any comparative panel study in Germany. The SOEP is now being used more intensively than ever.

Statistical panel analysis has evolved dramatically over the last decades, leading to the incorporation of complex causal econometric modeling techniques into standard software packages. Thanks to the SOEP's user-friendly and internationally oriented data provision policies and its numerous possible uses, our study is among the most important panel databases in the world. The number of SOEP-based publications has even surpassed that of its model, the exemplary American Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). We are proud that we did not simply copy this outstanding study – which was started in the late 1960s at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor – in the German context, but that we developed the idea further by including individual questionnaires and subjective questions, and most recently also psychological concepts.

The SOEP has since become the model for other household panel studies worldwide. Efforts at the study's further development are continually underway in cooperation with the Cross-National Equivalent File (CNEF), the internationally comparative database for which the SOEP provides the longitudinal data for Germany. We eagerly anticipate the upcoming inclusion of new datasets from Asian countries such as Japan and China in the CNEF.

The topics discussed at this conference reflect the substantial evolution in the range of survey themes in the SOEP over recent years. The incorporation of psychological concepts of personality into the SOEP questionnaires is a prime example of this. We are proud that the psychological concepts used in SOEP are already being included as new standard indicators in other empirical studies. Our various age-specific questionnaires for children and adolescents are being used for an increasing number of analyses and are leading to interesting research results.

Recently, we have begun work to create a second sample to run alongside the core SOEP: the new SOEP Innovation Sample. In 2012, the SOEP-IS was opened up to our user community as a new infrastructure incorporating your best, most innovative ideas.

In addition to these very modern developments, the 2012 SOEP conference welcomed two of the SOEP's "founding fathers," Hans-Jürgen Krupp and Wolfgang Zapf, as special guests at the conference. Hans-Jürgen Krupp was the PI of the application for the first funding period, which started – after a round of revise and resubmit – in the year 1983. Even in those early years, the SOEP was already self-confident multidisciplinary corporate spirit, and the SOEP was part of a collaborative research center comprised of both sociologists and economists. These renowned scholars had agreed to come to Berlin for a very special session in which they looked back on the early period of the SOEP 30 years ago and discussed their experiences with SOEP graduates and other staff members, including former SOEP Director Gert G. Wagner, as well as other SOEP users.

There were two keynote speeches at the conference: Shelly Lundberg, Professor of Demography at the University of California, Santa Barbara, delivered

an impressive lecture on “Personality and Educational Inequality”. Janet Gornick, Director of the Luxemburg Income Study (LIS) and Professor at City University New York, held the second keynote speech on “Gender, Work, Family, and Social Policy: A Cross-National Perspective” and provided a fascinating presentation of results based on comparative microdata from the LIS project.

The opening plenary session of the conference was dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and esteemed colleague, Joachim R. Frick. At the end of 2010, Joachim R. Frick – longtime Co-Director of the SOEP and an internationally renowned SOEP networker – was diagnosed with a terrible and ultimately incurable disease, and passed away on December 16, 2011.

For this special issue of Schmollers Jahrbuch, 17 conference papers were selected using a peer review process. This special issue, along with the other papers presented at the SOEP 2012 Conference, demonstrate the wide range of topics addressed by scholars in various disciplines and the diverse methodologies currently being used to study longitudinal survey data. We are very grateful to our sponsors, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), StataCorp, and Dittrich & Partner (DPC), whose generous contributions made this event possible. The success of this conference was due in large part to the commitment of an exceptional team headed by Christine Kurka, and including Christiane Nitsche, Janina Britzke, Patricia Axt, Uta Rahmann, Michaela Engelmann, and many student assistants. They were in charge of the planning and bookings, designing the flyer, managing the conference website, and organizing the catering. We also would like to thank Monika Wimmer for her excellent work communicating the conference program to the media. On site, the entire team took care of the conference participants over the two days and ensured that the conference ran smoothly.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Gabriele Freudenmann for helping to put together this issue and assisting with the editing process as well as Deborah Anne Bowen, Linda Turner and Carla Welch for their linguistic review of the texts and the referees for improving the quality of the papers of this special issue through their suggestions. Our last thank you goes to all the authors of this special volume for their contributions – among them are many young researchers who did an outstanding job in producing – in some cases – their first papers for a conference volume.

Berlin, June 2013

*Jürgen Schupp
Janet Gornick
C. Katharina Spiess
Nicolas Ziebarth*