

European Data Watch

This section will offer descriptions as well as discussions of data sources that may be of interest to social scientists engaged in empirical research or teaching courses that include empirical investigations performed by students. The purpose is to describe the information in the data source, to give examples of questions tackled with the data and to tell how to access the data for research and teaching. We will start with data from German speaking countries that allow international comparative research. While most of the data will be at the micro level (individuals, households, or firms), more aggregate data and meta data (for regions, industries, or nations) will be included, too. Suggestions for data sources to be described in future columns (or comments on past columns) should be sent to: Joachim Wagner, University of Lueneburg, Institute of Economics, Campus 4.210, 21332 Lueneburg, Germany, or e-mailed to (wagner@uni-lueneburg.de).

The 14th “Shell Jugendstudie”

By Mathias Albert, Ingo Leven, Klaus Hurrelmann,
and Ulrich Schneekloth

Introduction

The “Shell Jugendstudie” represents the most prestigious study of youth and young adults in Germany. Based upon a representative survey, it seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of attitudes, values, and opinions of the age group between 14 and 25 years (12 to 25 years starting with the most recent study). The Shell Jugendstudie is funded by the German subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell yet research is conducted independently by a team of researchers. First launched in 1952, the 14th study was published in August 2002. As with previous studies, the most recent one focused on a number of specific issues without giving up on the idea of providing a picture of young people in Germany as broad and comprehensive as possible.

The present contribution will first of all provide an overview over the data collected in the most recent study, briefly highlight some of its findings, and,

before offering some concluding remarks, outline data availability and modes of access.

1. Information on the data

The Shell Jugendstudie is based on a quota sample of youth in Germany aged 12 to 25. The quota arrangement includes age, social standing (e.g. pupil, student, trainee, employed, unemployed), federal state and settlement structure. To represent former East Germany with enough cases to allow detailed comparisons between the larger regions of Germany, a disproportional sample had to be chosen. Based on these basic principles 2.515 youth and young adults were interviewed by 413 interviewers of Infratest Sozialforschung, Munich, in March and April 2002. 1.754 of those interviews were conducted in former West Germany and 761 in former East Germany. The interviews were based on a CAPI questionnaire and lasted 37 minutes on average. The main topics of the 14th Shell Jugendstudie were: value orientation, political interest and political self-conception, social circumstances and expectations of youth about their personal as well as society's future. Most of the parts of the questionnaire were either part of previous "Shell Jugendstudie" surveys or had been assigned from other established surveys, allowing comparisons either with other Shell Jugendstudien over a longer period of time, or with the total population (or even both for some parts of the questionnaire).

The data covered by the 14th Shell Jugendstudie includes:

- Socio-demographical information

Besides standard information on age, sex, nationality etc., categories like religious affiliation and information about the parents, like marital status, were included.
- Politics
 - Political interest
 - Political orientation and associated political parties
 - Trust in social institutions
 - Concept of democracy and political participation
 - Discrimination experiences
 - Dissociation from disadvantaged groups
 - Political topics (e.g. the right to vote with 16, attitudes about globalisation and the EU, ban of the right-wing party NPD)
- Social commitment

Organisations and areas of social commitment
- Value orientation
- Life style
 - "Ins" and "Outs"
 - Leisure activities

- Social fears
- Use of new means of communication (cell phones and internet)

The full questionnaire can be found in the appendix of the printed version of the study. In addition to the quantitative survey, the study also includes five longer and fifteen shorter interview-based portraits of young people somehow politically active over the internet.

2. Results from the 14th “Shell Jugendstudie”

The most recent study pointed out a further decrease of young people’s interest in politics. Only 34 % claimed to be interested in politics (compared to 57 % in 1991). Upon closer inspection, however, this declining interest primarily reflected the already well-known trend of a distrust primarily directed towards politicians and political parties, and less against politics in general. This particularly also holds true for more active forms of political participation. Here a general willingness to engage oneself in community matters, in specific projects and initiatives, contrasts with people becoming more and more disinclined to tie themselves to fixed organizational forms over longer periods of time. It might thus be concluded that it is less politics as such which poses problems for young people in Germany, but available forms of participation.

On more general issues, the study highlighted that young people in Germany generally share a more optimistic view particularly on their personal future than they did only a few years ago. However, an orientation towards a successful performance in a social environment characterised by increasing competitiveness is less and less met by the adoption of egoistic strategies. Rather, a re-orientation towards more “traditional” values like duty and family provides the background against which strategies for coping with external demands are formulated. This must not be seen as “return” to more conservative value systems among young people, however. Rather, the mixing of values deemed suitable for individual coping strategies leads to a decreasing attractiveness of more comprehensive value and belief systems (such as religion, ideologies etc.). Nonetheless, the study identifies four generalised value types among young people, with “self-conscious doers” and “pragmatic idealists” being able to cope well with competitive demands and “robust materialists” and the “reluctant inconspicuous” being less able to prevail in such an environment.

3. Data availability and access/uses in teaching

Traditionally the data of the Shell Jugendstudie is used frequently for research and teaching at German universities. In particular, it is often applied in

the teaching of evaluation and research methods. With qualitative and quantitative methods the Shell Jugendstudie represents one of the few surveys which combine both methodological approaches. There are only few limitations on access to the data and the questionnaire. The data in SPSS format with German labels, a German codebook and the German questionnaire can either be ordered at the Central Archive for Empirical Research¹, University of Cologne, or directly at Infratest Sozialforschung.² The data and the questionnaire are available only for academic research and teaching. The results of the study were published in German.³

4. Concluding remarks

The Shell Jugendstudie represents one of the most important surveys in the field of youth research, looking back to an experience of more than five decades. The 14th Shell Jugendstudie continues this tradition. Most notably, it shows a continuing decrease in political interest among young people in Germany since the reunification, while the willingness to engage in social projects remains on the same level throughout the last decade. A revitalisation of traditional values, which are no longer antitheses to modern values, underlines a trend in which “post-materialist” values are no longer a prime point of orientation.

The provenly successful concept underlying the Shell Jugendstudie will certainly be continued with the next surveys. In so doing, the instruments and kind of data collected will continue to change to some degree. However, this evolutionary process is not only guided by deliberations of the researchers involved in the study, but particularly also results from the feedback gathered during presentations of and discussions on the study in various academic and non-academic circles. This reflects the study’s self-understanding of not providing comprehensive answers about the situation of young people in Germany, but rather to highlight questions which young generations pose to German society as a whole.

¹ Internet: <http://www.gesis.org/en/order/index.htm>. The study title in the database is “Jugend 2002”, the study number is 3694.

² Contact: ingo.leven@nfoeurope.com.

³ Deutsche Shell (Hg.): Jugend 2002. Zwischen pragmatischem Idealismus und robustem Materialismus. Die 14. Shell Jugendstudie (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002).