

The Westeuropadaten-Archiv-Project

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pfennig, W. (1979). The Westeuropadaten-Archiv-Project. *Historical Social Research*, 4(4), 39-42. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.4.1979.4.39-42>

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THE WESTEUROPADATEN-ARCHIV-PROJECT

The WEDA-Project was started to organize a data archive for comparative-historical research on the modernization and recent developmental processes of Western European Societies. It is a joint effort of the HIWED-project and the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung of the University of Cologne. It began in February 1979 and will end in January 1982.

The context of comparative-historical research and the WEDA-Project

Since the beginning of the 1960's quantitative comparative-historical research grew rapidly, and the need for appropriate data bases became more and more urgent. This development is a by-product of the general revival of macro-oriented research that started in the late 1950's with attempts to explain societal development in the so-called developing countries. But academic interest soon turned towards trends and problems of western societies as it became clear that macrosociological research needed a comparative-historical perspective. This academic interest converged with a political interest in knowledge on actual problems of western societies as these showed symptoms of crisis in higher education, in the economy, in institutions of social security, and also in the legitimacy of their political institutions.

Efforts to create appropriate data bases had already been made in the early 1960's. Their first products were comparative collections without an explicit historical perspective e.g. the "Atlas of Economic Development" by Ginsburg (1961), "A Cross Polity Survey" by Banks and Textor (1963), and the first edition of the "World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators" by Russet et al. (1964).

It was only in the second half of the sixties that comparative-historical data collections were completed. Among the most prominent are: the "Correlates of War Project" by Singer and Small, the "Minnesota Political Data Archive" by Flanigan and Fogelman, the Suny-Binghamton "Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive" by Banks, the Project on "Comparative Causes of Societal Stability and Instability" by Hage, the "Nordic Countries Project" by Kuhnle, and the "Quam-Project" by Zapf and Flora (1).

In 1971 Stein Rokkan organized the "ISSC/ECPR Workshop on Indicators of National Development" where all these projects were discussed and new initiatives were developed (2).

This holds true especially for the HIWED-Project (Historical Indicators of Western European Countries) that was initiated by Wolfgang Zapf and Peter Flora in 1973 at the University of Mannheim and continued since 1977 under the direction of Peter Flora (3) at the University of Cologne. It is also financed by the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk and due to be finished in October 1979. One major goal of this project was to compile a historical data-handbook for 15 West European countries over the time period 1815 to 1975 containing political, economic and social indicators compiled from primary materials in official and non-official sources.

During the course of the HIWED-Project, much bibliographical work had to be done, and probably the most extensive collection of statistical sources in Europe was compiled. The bibliography and statistical sources form a research tool leading far beyond the scope of the HIWED-Project. Also, more data have been collected than could be published in a single data handbook.

Primarily to find a way to make all of the data collected available to a broad community of users, the HIWED research group and the Zentralarchiv have since 1977 discussed the possibility of establishing a machine-readable data archive for all HIWED data including those not to be published in the handbook. Finally, it was decided to file an application with the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk for a research grant to serve as a starting aid for the planned archive. We were aware at that time that action should be taken to ensure the long-term financing of the archive. This probably will be realized in the larger context of a network of data archives currently being developed. It is planned that the bibliography and collection of statistical sources mentioned above should then become a part of the archive. WEDA will thus be not only an institution archiving, holding and distributing machine-readable, data, but will also offer assistance in doing empirical research and data collection (4).

Goals of the WEDA-Project

Naturally, the current WEDA-Project has far more limited objectives. Its major goal is to establish the machine-readable data archive. A related objective is to facilitate the dissemination of information on the possibilities for comparative research through a user guide containing information about the contents of the archive, related data, research techniques and computer programs. The project staff will also provide consultation for users who intend to collect and analyze aggregate data.

In the research proposal (5) we defined the character of the archive as follows:

It will be comparative-historical, including complete times series for all West European countries. In acquiring new data, highest priority will be given to comparative studies for the period after World War II. But data for prior years and even national studies will also be archived.

The archive will be at the macro-level. According to the distinction between 4 different types of units of analysis (individuals, organizations, localities and nations) developed by Stein Rokkan (6), here the units clearly are organizations (e.g. political parties, unions) and nations.

It will be interdisciplinary that is, the range of variables archived will be broad enough to allow also research from users other than sociologists, such as economists or historians.

Only data that are based on collection from primary sources with clear documentation of sampling criteria and definitions used to build variables, will be integrated. Thus, a larger number of existing datasets must be precluded from the archive.

Major HIWED datasets being archived in WEDA

Title of dataset	Measuring frequency	Time period	Cases	Variables ¹ (raw data)	Derived measures ² (indicators)
Population Censuses	census-years	1800-1975	220	230	80
Population Movements	yearly	1770-1975	2400	20	20
Social Security	"	1870-1975	150	30	20
State Revenues	"	1850-1975	1700	90	50
Public Expenditures	"	1850-1975	1500	70	100
National Product	"	1880-1975	1500	220	50
Bureaucracy	unregularily	1880-1975	600	20	10
Elections	election years	1870-1975	600	20	10
Trade Unions	yearly	1890-1975	1300	40	20
Strikes	"	1890-1975	1300	20	10
Education	5-year	1840-1975	700	60	30
Income Distribution	yearly/unregularily	1870-1975	1000	200	?

¹Variables are data as found in the statistical sources

²Derived measures are indicators computed from raw data

The archive will have an integrated structure. It will not be a collection of different studies, but variables will be assembled across different studies to form single files for specific topics. This eases retrieval of data from files by subject.

The HIWED data are the core of the archive's holdings (see the table). They are currently in processing. The first datasets will be ready for distribution in 1980 as OSIRIS character files with the associated dictionary and codebook file or optionally as card image data files.

After archiving the HIWED data we intend to extend the collection to variables and countries beyond the HIWED data by integrating existing comparative data collections or comparable collections for single countries.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 All these projects are more thoroughly described in: Peter Flora, Quantitative Historical Sociology, Current Sociology, Vol. XXXII, 1975, No. 2, The Hague, 1977
- 2 Cf. Social Social Science Information 11 (3/4), pp. 287-302
- 3 For detailed description of the HIWED-Project see European Political Data-Newsletter, No. 11 and 29
- 4 Cf. Peter Flora und Winfried Pfenning: Zur Gründung eines Westeuropadatenarchivs (WEDA) im Rahmen eines umfassenden Sozialwissenschaftlichen Datenservicesystems, in: Planungsbericht zu einem Sozialwissenschaftlichen Datenservicesystems für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, (SODASS-Report), Köln, August 1979, pp. 131-144.
- 5 Peter Flora und Erwin K. Scheuch: Antrag an die Stiftung Volkswagenwerk auf Förderung eines Forschungsprojekts zur Erstellung eines Datenarchivs über Wachstumsprozesse und Strukturveränderungen der westeuropäischen Gesellschaften, Köln 1977
- 6 Stein Rokkan (ed): Data Archives for the Social Sciences, Paris 1966, p. 13.

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