

Editorial

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1 Goals, requirements and challenges of scientific social surveys

Scientific social surveys are important data sources for different fields in social sciences, such as sociology, political science, communication studies and so on. They are based on large samples, which are drawn with statistical sampling methods and attempt to get a representative picture of underlying target populations. They use standardized questionnaires that make it possible to determine patterns of social behavior, attitudes and value orientations using multivariate statistical methods. A random sample and face-to-face-interviews are regarded as the “gold standard” of this kind of survey (Bacher et al. 2019; Villar and Fitzgerald 2017) nowadays. Scientific surveys are planned and carried out by social scientists and are used to analyze social phenomena. Many surveys, like the Austrian Social Survey¹ are designed to study trends and enable an understanding of social change. The collected data are available to other scientists for secondary analysis via social sciences data archives. In Austria, the Austrian Social Science Data Archive (AUSSDA 2020) is the responsible organization for data archiving.

Social Surveys pursue two objectives: On the one hand, they contribute to the further development of theories and methods by describing social phenomena, analyzing causal relations and explaining social change. On the other hand, they should have some practical importance. Like science in general, the social surveys and their

¹ <https://aussda.at/sozialer-survey-oesterreich/>.

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results serve as a basis for recommendations that improve living conditions. These two claims are inherent in social surveys. Although these two goals sometimes contradict each other, it is not possible to ignore one of them, as Jürgen Friedrichs, a pioneer of quantitative social research in Germany, noted in the 1970s (Friedrichs 1982 [1973]).

The so-called “Positivismusstreit” of German sociology (Adorno et al. 1972) built the background of Friedrichs’ discussion. The representatives of critical and Marxist theory, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno or Jürgen Habermas, on the one side and the representatives of critical rationalism on the other side formed the two parties to this dispute. Representatives of critical theory claimed that empirical research is just done in order to legitimize the existing political system and misses the opportunity to criticize the existing social order, whereas representatives of critical rationalism such as Hans Albert or Karl Popper, and others claimed that empirical research fulfills the function of enlightenment and can contribute to a rational and free (democratic) society. In order to fulfill those tasks, social sciences and empirical research must try to reach both goals—to contribute to the development of science and to influence social developments.

In our opinion, scientific social surveys should continue to aspire to both goals. Recent developments and discussions in the field, such as in public sociology or civil science, claim that science should at least address its results both to the scientific community and to a broader audience outside universities. With reference to the concept of Michael Burawoy’s public sociology (Burawoy 2005; Aulenbacher et al. 2017) surveys have an instrumental role as far as they follow mainstream research. However, their results can be used by civil society in a reflexive way to refer to existing social problems.

One essential prerequisite for both aims of scientific social surveys is the independence of social sciences. Social scientists should be able to plan and run surveys according to the existing scientific standards and to disseminate the results without barriers. Sufficient financial resources are an important and necessary requirement for this enterprise.

In contrast to previous years, the responsible ministries for research² in Austria have shown a greater interest in empirical social research and have initiated different projects in order to establish a social data infrastructure.

2 Austrian social survey and social data infrastructure

The papers in this volume use data from the Austrian Social Survey (Sozialer Survey Österreichs, SSÖ 2018, see Hadler et al. 2019). The SSÖ started in 1986 and is a multi-topic survey (Höllinger and Haller 2019). It was modelled after the General Social Survey (GSS) in the USA and the ALLBUS in Germany. The first GSS data collection started in 1972, the ALBUS began in 1980. The SSÖ was initiated by Max Haller immediately after he became professor at the University of Graz. In

² Up to 2017: Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft; since 2017: Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung.

contrast to Germany it was not possible to finance the survey every second year. However, the SSÖ was carried out in 1986, 1993, 2003 and 2016, covering a period of 30 years (Bacher et al. 2019). Different sociological institutes at universities and outside research institutes cooperated in the design, analysis and publication of the Austrian Social Survey. In sum, nearly 60 sociologists and scientists from related fields have participated in at least one of the four volumes of publications stemming from the Austrian social surveys. Like the German ALLBUS, the Swiss MOSAiCH and the British Social Attitudes survey (BSA), the SSÖ includes modules from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP 2020) in order to enable international comparison.

3 Austrian social survey 2018 and social cohesion: the focus of this volume

The 2018 Austrian Social Survey has the following research priorities: social capital, religion and social inequality. This volume focuses on social cohesion. Social cohesion is a key concept in sociology that has been used by several grounding fathers, like Durkheim and others, to describe society (Fonseca et al. 2019). According to Anna R. Manca (2014), social cohesion “refers to the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society” (p. 261). With reference to this characterization, this volume covers different aspects of social cohesion. Two papers analyze social relations, the connectedness between the members of Austrian society, using the concept of social capital. Two further papers deal with attitudes towards other social groups that influence solidarity towards them. Finally, two research notes handle consequences of the presence or absence of social cohesion by analyzing social acceptance and expectations toward the future.

The paper by *Bernd Liedl, Nina-Sophie Fritsch, Laura Wiesböck and Roland Verwiebe* explores the relationship between social capital and social origin in contemporary Austria. The authors are interested in the (pre)structured shape of social capital according to social origin. Therefore, they use the network-as-capital approach by following Nan Lin’s (2001) position generator and apply latent class analysis (LCA) and path modelling. In addition to small and large (i.e. diverse) social networks the authors differentiate between blue-collar and white-collar social capital. The findings reveal that social origin has a significant effect on social capital. Respondents with higher self-assessed levels of social origin are associated with a more diverse and more prestigious network structure. The analyses further show that various social characteristics have an influence on the specific access to social capital. Individual educational attainment and occupational status seem to be equally important in terms of their effects on class-specific forms of social capital, whereas gender differences play a less prominent role.

Christoph Glatz and Otto Bodi-Fernandez choose a variable-orientated approach in their analysis. Their paper deals with the amount of social capital (as an umbrella term for social resources) as well as its effect on well-being in Austria. To operationalize social capital, the authors chose the conceptual model developed by Ichirō Kawachi (2008), which differentiates between informal and formal social capital,

social support as well as social and institutional trust. In addition, since social capital is not equally distributed across regions, this study investigates differences in the amount of social capital and its relationship with well-being in rural and urban areas. The results reveal that individuals in rural areas report more contacts with lower-skilled vocations and more family contacts while individuals from urban areas report more social participation and more contact with a close friend. For the Austrian population as a whole, more contacts with people in occupations requiring a higher education level, frequent contact with a close friend, as well as social and institutional trust, foster subjective well-being. Frequent contact with up to three distinct family members fosters subjective well-being when considering the entire Austrian sample as well as for individuals living in rural-, but not in urban areas.

At least since the terrorist attacks on the twin towers in New York, religion has become an important factor in political discourse. It may be assumed that religion has influenced and changed personal attitudes and behavior, too. Based on this background, *Franz Höllinger* examines the extent to which one's own religiosity influences attitudes and views towards other religions. The results reveal that people who are open minded regarding other religions or who believe that religion plays a positive role in society evaluate the religions of others and interreligious relationships more positively, whereas people with a fundamentalist position are less open minded. Members of religious minorities are more open minded than members of the Catholic religious majority. In general, Austrians are tolerant towards other religions as long as they adapt to the Western way of living and do not stand out in the public space.

Austrians often assume that Muslims do not conform to the Western lifestyle. Islamophobic prejudices are widespread in Austria. The question regarding which factors underlie these prejudices, is analyzed by *Wolfgang Aschauer*. The author concentrates on the importance of the religious attitudes and practices of Austrians on their attitude towards Islam. Unfortunately, the results confirm that anti-Muslim sentiments are dominant in Austria. The influences of religious orientations are manifold. While conventional religious practices and superstition increase prejudice, inclusive religious attitudes and practices of spirituality result in more tolerant attitudes towards Muslims. Current challenges to social cohesion in Austria are therefore less concerned with interreligious coexistence but revolve much more around questions of recognition, identity and belonging.

Positional, moral and emotional recognition are seen as important factors influencing social integration in contemporary sociology. A lack of perceived recognition is regarded as one factor that fosters negative attitudes towards foreign groups and strengthens tendencies towards right-wing positions. To what extent Austrians feel recognized and how strongly these perceptions depend on sociodemographic characteristics and positional indicators, are the key questions of the research note by *Anja Eder, Markus Hadler and Robert Moosbrugger*. The analyses show that the overall level of perceived recognition is rather high among Austrians, especially concerning perceived economic and cultural integration. In comparison, a sense of political integration is more at risk. Structures of opportunities influence the chances for recognition. According to the analysis, less-educated individuals, people feeling

financially deprived, people with a migration background as well as urban dwellers exhibit the most signs of social disintegration.

In a final research note, *Dimitri Prandner, Wolfgang Aschauer and Robert Moosbrugger* analyze Austrian expectations for the future. They differentiate between future expectations for one's private individual life and for the Austrian society as a whole. People see their own future in a (slightly) better light when compared to the future of Austria. Furthermore, different aspects seem to affect those perceptions. Feelings of social belongingness and trust primarily determine the individual situation, whereas the perception of Austria's future is mainly influenced by experienced deprivation. People who feel deprived are more pessimistic about the future of Austria. A further predictor is the feeling that one lives in an equal society. Respondents who share this sentiment express a more positive view of Austria's future. Next to these material aspects, institutional trust influences the evaluation of Austrian future.

4 Summary, conclusions and acknowledgement

The papers provide an insight into some important aspects of social cohesion patterns. They analyze social interactions, social relations and acceptance of different groups in Austrian society as well as the consequences of social cohesion. In general, a positive picture evolves. Austrians report a high degree of well-being, they feel recognized and have high social capital. Social and institutional trust is still high.

However, there are some shadows. Austrians do not think that positive changes will dominate their personal future and the future of Austria. They feel they have little influence on politics, and some feel poorly recognized in several dimensions. And a relatively high percentage of Austrians have negative attitudes toward Islam.

In our opinion the great challenge is to take these less desirable results seriously and to use them productively so that these negative perceptions will not increase. Can we deduce some guidelines or strategies from the results of the 2018 Austrian Social Survey to achieve this? We will demonstrate that the answer is yes, by giving some examples:

- The results reveal an influence of the social position of a person. Unemployment and low income in particular have strong negative effects in some analyses. Hence, to guarantee employment and an adequate income are great challenges of social policy. One could deduce from the results, that the introduction of a basic income is not sufficient. A basic income may guarantee a sufficient income, but not employment.
- The results reveal that social and institutional trust is high and has a strong influence. Hence, take measures to keep the level high. The municipalities and cities are challenged with regard to social trust, whereas all levels of administration, politics and government can contribute to institutional trust.
- The results show a low level of political efficacy. Hence, a conclusion might be that the influence of people in politics should be increased. In this context, initiatives of direct democracy have to be discussed.

- The results confirm that strong anti-Muslim attitudes exist in Austria. According to the results, one way to overcome them is to promote a positive image of religions and to show that every religion could play an important social role. Of course, this also requires that fundamentalist positions (from all religious sides) be avoided. Structural integration on the one hand and interethnic social contacts on the other hand can contribute to this.

The COVID-pandemic raises the question, whether these suggestions will still hold. Until now, the effects of the COVID-pandemic are difficult to estimate. They heavily depend on how Austria manages the pandemic and the negative economic effects. If Austrian politics, government and administration are able to overcome the pandemic without a breakdown of the health system and of the economy, institutional trust in politics, government and administration may increase. Austrians may become more optimistic. In addition, it is not impossible that certain women's occupations, which were central to maintaining supply in the health, care and food sector, will increase in status and wages.

However, it is more likely that old behavior patterns and attitudes will return and those groups that have more power and influence will dominate politics after the coronavirus pandemic. This implies that the above-mentioned problems will remain, and additional problems will arise. We see the questions of sufficient income and employment, the motivation for political participation, and increasing nationalistic attitudes as particularly great challenges.

It will be our job as social scientists to refer to these problems, to analyze them and contribute to productive solutions. Therefore, in the next Austria Social Survey we will include items about people's experience of the COVID-pandemic and evaluate the ethical, economic, social and political consequences of the pandemic.

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