

## Wolfgang Zapf—Pioneer of Social Indicators- and Quality of Life-Research

Wolfgang Glatzer

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Wolfgang Zapf is the founder of social indicators research in Germany and he conceives it as the combination of monitoring of social change and measurement of

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A note to the reader: This biography was written with the consultation and approval of Wolfgang Zapf.

W. Glatzer (✉)

Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Im Rothkopf 8, 61440 Oberursel, Germany

e-mail: glatzer@soz.uni-frankfurt.de



quality of life. Early in the 1970's when he first became interested in social reporting and quality of life research, Zapf invented the German welfare surveys, he promoted welfare research and contributed significantly to the promising sociological approach of social monitoring. One of his colleagues remarked to Wolfgang Zapf - and many would agree: "We are grateful to you, a person with an unusual mixture of clearness, modesty and irony". In recognition for his groundbreaking and pioneering work in the field of social indicators and quality of life research, Wolfgang Zapf received the highest honor of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies in 2004, the Distinguished Quality of Life Researcher Award. What follows is a brief biography of this great and influential man.

Wolfgang Zapf grew up in Frankfurt, Germany's most scientifically advanced city at the time. This is where Goethe-University first introduced a diploma in sociology. This program was well ahead of its time and was one of the few such university programs in the world at the time of its inauguration in 1956.

After attending the university, Zapf received a grant from Cusanuswerk to study sociology at the Goethe-University and the Institut für Sozialforschung with a specialty concentration in Critical Theory; this study took place between 1957 and 1961. Theodor W. Adorno, the famous philosophical sociologist, was Zapf's teacher and adviser during this time. Adorno supervised Zapf's diploma work on amateur theatre.

After finishing his studies in Frankfurt, Hamburg and Köln, Zapf started his career in Tübingen as assistant to Ralf Dahrendorf from 1962 through 1966, following Dahrendorf to assume a position at the newly established University of Konstanz. Very quickly Zapf made career strides with two important books and monographs: one with his dissertation in 1963 about "German Elites 1919–1961" and a second work, his habilitation in 1967 about "Theories and Indicators of Modernization". In recognition of his work, Zapf was one of the first German academics to be named a Kennedy Fellow at Harvard University in 1968. His most significant early publications were "Wandlungen der deutschen Elite/Changes in the German Elite" (1965) and "Beiträge zur Analyse der deutschen Oberschicht/Contributions to the Analysis of the German Upper Class" (1965).

Zapf began his career at a rather young age. He became professor at Frankfurt University in 1968, where he taught until 1972. His seminars and classes had titles like Theories of Modernization, Sociology of Elections, Conflict Research, Constructing Social Theories and, not at least, Social Indicators. Social change and modernization were the topics which brought his work international recognition. This work is exemplified in the book, "Theorien des sozialen Wandels", which he edited in 1968.

Most influential with respect to his future work and impact was a seminar which Zapf team-taught with Karl Ulrich Mayer on "Social indicators". This seminar was a starting point for his lifelong engagement with social indicators, social reporting and quality of life research. Many students, the author of this text included, were inspired by Zapf's example and work, and, in the process, helped to found the new and dynamic disciplines of social indicators and quality of life research.

Parallel to his professional career, Wolfgang Zapf began his family with the marriage of Katrin Raschig in 1966. Katrin, a renowned sociologist in her own right, had two children with Wolfgang: Peter (born 1969) and Johanna (born 1972). Johanna is the mother of Zapf's three grandchildren.

The goal of monitoring of social change to support societal reforms is what motivated Wolfgang Zapf and his senior colleague Hans Jürgen Krupp, a professor of social policy at the Goethe University, to develop the research group entitled, “SPES” (Social Political Decision and Indicator System for the Federal Republic of Germany). In reaction to the student protests of this time at Goethe University, Wolfgang Zapf took a position at the University of Mannheim, where he settled from 1972 to 1987. He nevertheless continued his close research collaboration with the “SPES” Frankfurt team. This collaboration developed further to the formation of the Special Research Department 3 (“Microanalytical Foundation of Societal Policy”) in 1978 and constituted the framework for the cooperation of social science teams at Frankfurt and Mannheim universities until 1990 and partly above. The work which ended 1990 had begun in 1971 in Frankfurt and were the biggest social science project financed by the German Research Foundation in its history. A network of social scientists developed from there, which offered a longterm support for broad stream of social indicator and quality of life researcher.

As early as 1972 Wolfgang Zapf had introduced the term “Lebensqualität” or “Quality of Life” in one of his articles, which at this time was nearly unknown in Germany and spread successfully from then on as a societal goal of high awareness in Germanys politics and public opinion. In 1975 he promoted the “Soziologischer Almanach” or “Sociological Almanac”, which he modeled upon the American Sociological Almanac. This edited handbook of societal data and social indicators was written primarily by two young sociologists Eike Ballerstedt and Wolfgang Glatzer. It was a success and published in three editions. It is an example of the way how Zapf inspired many other researchers to take up the program of social indicators research. Karl Ulrich Mayer was also a collaborator in the production of the Sociological Almanac. Zapf’s chapter in the Almanac dealt with social elites.

In 1978 Wolfgang Zapf initiated a large-scale, social indicators project that continues to this day and has been influential in the understanding of the German society and its political leaders. The project’s first report was entitled, “Lebensbedingungen in Deutschland” or “Living Conditions in Germany” covered important social topics and was written by a team of promising young scientists. For example, some of the topics and authors included: Demography (Almut Steger), Social Inequality and Mobility (Karl Ulrich Mayer), Working Conditions (Heinz-Herbert Noll), Income Distribution, Housing Conditions (both Wolfgang Glatzer), Income Spending, Traffic, (both Eike Ballerstedt with Erich Wiegand), Health (Christof Helberger), Education (Rainer Ruge), Participation (Roswitha Sehringer). The social indicator system upon which this first report was based is still in use today and is available at ZUMA/Gesis in an updated and enlarged edition. The report received much publicity and was featured on German television, raising public awareness about the need to track social indicators and social reform efforts.

It is in the context of Zapf’s early work on social indicators in Germany, that so-called “Wohlfahrtssurveys” or “Welfare Surveys” were developed and carried out in 1978, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1998. The surveys consisted of representative samples of 2400 German citizens. Subjective wellbeing indicators were emphasized in the surveys, including items or questions on life satisfaction and happiness, worries and concerns and also hopes and fears. Because objective

indicators were also assessed, it was possible to show the relationship between objective and subjective components of life. The summarizing book about the first two welfare surveys was published 1984 under the title “Lebensqualität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” or “Quality of Life in Germany” (edited together with Wolfgang Glatzer). If the dozens of media reports about this book are taken into account it was again very successful. The basic idea, of combining objective and subjective social indicators became popular and guided the social welfare research which followed.

Two side paths to research were inspired by Zapf in addition to the primary approach just discussed: One was the historical approach which took long-term developments into account; this line of research is reflected in the book, “Wandel der Lebensbedingungen in Deutschland—Wohlfahrtsentwicklung seit der Industrialisierung” respectively “Changes of Living conditions in Germany—Welfare Development since Industrialization” (co-authored by Erich Wiegand). The second additional research program centered upon the growing use of technology in private households and in everyday life, which was investigated by a new team of young social scientists inspired by Zapf’s work.

Wolfgang Zapf’s next professional step led him to the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung first as the institute’s president (1987–1994), and then as director of the research unit “Social Structure and Social Reporting” (1994–2002). He was, at the same time, professor at the Freie Universität Berlin. In Berlin, the work on welfare surveys was continued by Zapf, especially in cooperation with Roland Habich. Together they published the book, “Wohlfahrtsentwicklung im Vereinten Deutschland” or “Welfare Development in Unified Germany.”

Another important achievement of Zapf was his contribution as a sociologist to the development of the Socio Economic Panel (SOEP) under the leadership of the economist Hans Jürgen Krupp. This panel grew in the course of time to a main infrastructure project of the empirical social and economic research in Germany. At the beginning the SOEP covered 5000 households in West Germany and this number was increased after the unification of Germany (reports exist from Hanefeld, Wagner, Schupp). One methodological innovation of this data set was to investigate the relationship between objective and subjective social indicators over the course of time. The SOEP has reached the age of 25 and has generated a plethora of useful data and research studies.

In addition to his academic appointments, Wolfgang Zapf took many other influential positions in the profession, including: member of the Frankfurt University Senate (1969–1970), Chairman of the Social Science Faculty at Mannheim University (1974/75 and 1982/83), Chairman and Vice-chairman of Sonderforschungsbereich 3 Frankfurt-Mannheim (1979–1990), Member of the Board of the German Sociological Association (DGS) (1983–1986), President of the German Sociological Association (1987–1990), Founder of the section Social Indicators within the DGS (1973–1976), Member of the Steering Committee, Center for Social Indicators, Social Science Research Council, Washington, D.C. (1972–1977), 1976–1985 Member of the Commission on Empirical Social Research of the German Research Council (DFG) (1976–1985). Finally after its foundation he became chairman of German Social Science Infrastructure Services (GESIS) (1993–1998). Zapf assumed visiting professor positions in Comparative European Studies at

Stanford University (1980) and at the Vienna Institute of Advanced Studies (several times between 1976 and 1996), and also as Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford (1986).

When Wolfgang Zapf retired in 2002, he could reflect on the many positive changes in the field of sociology in Germany and around the world. He could reflect upon a consolidated discipline of sociology in Germany whose professionalization he helped to bring about. He pioneered a scientific program of social reporting including the monitoring of social change and welfare research. The development of an adequate statistical infrastructure was another of his many achievements. He interpreted the transformation of the DDR-society as “Nachholende Modernisierung” respectively “Catch-up Modernization”, which renewed old discussions about the modernization theory. And finally, he inspired and encouraged countless other researchers and sociologists in Germany and around the world.

At present, Wolfgang Zapf lives in Berlin close to the Schlachtensee and likes to get visits from old friends, who love to walk with him, reflect on their work together, and take pride in ways that a scholarly project of the 1970’s is still alive and influential today.

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