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Topic - Education and outreach strategies for communicating with hard-to-reach respondents

WHEN CENSUS MEMORIES ARE TIED TO CHRISTMAS EVE ONLY

Submitted by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The coming census in Germany will not be conducted during the holiday season and there won't be any presents from the interviewers. But unlike most other countries, on census day in Germany (May 2011) it will be a quarter of a century since the last census and there are some age groups that have only heard of a census from the Christmas story being read during church service.

2. Obviously it is part of our communication strategy to familiarize as large a part of the population as possible with the concept and necessity of a census. To better understand the specifics of our communication efforts with regards to Census 2011 we need to give a little information on why there hasn't been a census in Germany for so long and what challenges we are hence facing. Additionally we will give a short overview about our census methodology to better understand which target groups we have to address and what education and outreach strategies will be suited best for those.

A. A little bit of census history in Germany

3. As far as East Germany is concerned nothing is out of the ordinary: In 1981, the last census was conducted and, ten years later, there was no East Germany any more. In West Germany, however, the 1980 census was firstly delayed to 1983 because of disagreements on financial responsibility between federal and state government and then later delayed to 1987 due to strong privacy-related protests that also led to new legislation. It is this second delay that had a huge impact on politicians as well as statisticians when it comes to census matters.

4. The 1980s in West Germany were characterized by sociopolitical changes and the gaining momentum of movements like environmentalism, feminism and the general fear of a surveillance state aided by computer technology. There were plans to make the government-issued ID card machine readable; it was the time of the NATO dual track decision and so on. The political climate was tense and the 1980 census was perceived by some groups as another means by which the surveillance state would manifest itself. To this day, it is disputed how much of the protests against the 1983 census in West Germany was really targeted at the census or if those protests were just an outlet for political anger that had been accumulated in other places as well.

5. No matter what the protests inspired, they finally resulted in a Federal Constitutional Court ruling that made informational self-determination a personal right granted by the constitution. Apart from delaying the 1983 census, the court ruling led to several changes in the census methodology for the 1987 census and is still the framework under which we have to conduct the census in 2011. For example we will not be able to even

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keep the geo-coordinates of respondents' data within the statistical offices. It is quite understandable that politicians weren't very keen on having a census again any time soon.

B. **Methodology of the Census 2011 in Germany**

6. On the other hand, by the year 2000 it became increasingly clear that Germany after reunification needed a new basis of high quality statistics. To reduce costs and to reduce the possibility of public resistance against a census, the government asked the statistical offices to come up with a register-based model for a new census. This model was tested in 2001. Based on the findings of that test, the census 2011 was conceptualized.

7. It turned out that the use of population registers was possible but that the accuracy of those registers wasn't up to the task. They were also lacking some important information, e.g., education. Furthermore there are no housing registers in Germany so a more or less traditional housing census has to be added to the mix.

8. The census 2011 in Germany will consist of three parts: (1) The use of population registers of every municipality for every inhabitant. (2) A household sample that serves to correct errors in the registers as well as to add information on subjects that the registers do not cover, namely education but also employment. According to the current draft bill up to 8% of the population will be interviewed in this survey. (3) Finally the housing census will be conducted for every house or dwelling owner (est. 17.5 million). This is a tedious effort as the information on those owners has to be extracted from various sources that are only partly suited for this.

9. These three parts are dependent on each other. In the housing census, we are also asking the owner about the names of up to two inhabitants, information that will help the statistical process of generating households, as we don't have dwelling identifiers in the population registers.

10. In conclusion of this first part, we can summarize that based on past experiences there might still be some discomfort with the census in the general population. Additionally the new census method – although register-based – will still confront maybe a third of the population with questionnaires of some kind and there we need the cooperation of everybody involved.

11. The second part of this paper focuses on the future and what communication methods were developed. As a little spoiler we will reveal the claim of our 2011 campaign as a transition:

II. KNOWING WHAT WILL COUNT TOMORROW

C. **Need for long-term (planning of the) press and public relations work for the Census 2011**

12. It may rightly be asked why the Federal Statistical Office commissioned a professional agency to analyze the need for communication regarding the Census 2011 and to develop a specific communication strategy for the survey. After all, there are no separate communication strategies for the 390 other statistics. Instead, the Federal Statistical Office always uses the "Destatis" trademark in the public to illustrate that, as the producer of numerous statistics, it is one of the biggest information providers in Germany.

13. Why is there nevertheless a separate communication strategy for the Census 2011?

14. Basically, there are four reasons that led to the decision. These are directly related to our experience with the population census in the 1980s in the former Federal Republic and to the new method that will be applied for the first time in Germany in 2011.

15. (1) The Census 2011 is of major importance for official statistics in general as well as for the long hiatus in census taking in Germany.

16. (2) The Census affects more people than any other survey: As mentioned before, despite using register data for the Census 2011, up to one third of the population may have to provide information for the Census

2011 (depending on the overlap between household sample and housing owners). For comparison: One percent of the population participates in the annual "microcensus" of official statistics in Germany, which is the largest household survey in Europe.

17. (3) A communication strategy is needed because the Census 2011 will not be conducted by just one single institution. Apart from the Federal Statistical Office, the 14 statistical offices of the Länder are involved in the Census 2011, including the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the supervisory authorities of the statistical offices of the Länder. In addition, the municipalities in Germany will have to set up the survey offices. So there will not be one mouth but many mouths for communication.

18. (4) The last, and probably the most important reason is the specific German experience with the population census in the 1980s. Noone knows whether groups of the society will protest again in 2011. It may also happen that, in the age of MySpace and Facebook, it will be difficult to reach the population with an issue like the Census. Therefore it is important that official statistics body is prepared to deal with all communication scenarios.

D. **Organisation of press and public relations work for the Census**

19. The Federal Statistical Office and the 14 statistical offices of the Länder are jointly preparing the Census 2011 in Germany. Apart from subject-related groups, a project group on "press and public relations work for the Census" was set up in 2006. The goal to be achieved by that project group is that the many institutions involved in the Census 2011 speak with many mouths, but with one voice in the public.

20. The office of the project group is the Destatis press office, which must also ensure the involvement of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

21. It is that body which also discussed the contract to be awarded to an agency regarding the development of a communication strategy. The Federal Statistical Office then commissioned an agency which had been responsible for many campaigns both for public institutions (including many federal ministries) and for a large number of big private German companies. The agency stands out especially through many references from the political sphere and has good references in crisis communication. Considering the specific German experience with the previous census, that was a decisive advantage.

E. **Communication needs and strategy for the Census 2011**

22. One of the central goals of the communication strategy is to introduce the term "Zensus", which is new in Germany, and to give it a positive connotation. In the past, the German term "Volkszählung" had been used. The second central goal is to recruit those obliged to provide information for actual participation in the census.

23. Consequently, the strategy's central idea is that of a "dialogue campaign" – this means communication on equal footing with the entire population and with specific groups of the society: This is not about announcing a government action; instead, the purpose of the census is explained in a comprehensible way, and the various societal groups are addressed as target groups.

24. For the population census conducted in the former Federal Republic in 1987, communication focused on the population as a whole. The largely register-based Census process raises concerns for many, and also quite different interests or needs. This is why the strategy identifies and analyzes not only target groups, which in part are highly heterogeneous, but also identified points in time and adequate core messages to address those groups in a dialogue-oriented tonality. In the communication strategy, the following target groups have been defined and their role in the Census 2011 has been examined.

25. <u>Municipalities</u>: The municipalities are the major co-operative partners of the official statistics body in preparing and conducting the Census, e.g., in transmitting the population register data and in setting up survey offices.

26. Scientific community: The scientific community will be a major user of the data. Therefore, the scientific community largely supports the Census, although there has been criticism regarding the new method and the fact that the regional breakdown of the results will in part be less detailed. So some scientists have demanded a traditional population census and the coverage of additional variables.

27. The media: The media are important partners in preparing and distributing information on the Census. For that job, they must be provided with the required information in a timely and open manner and in a continuous dialogue. This can avoid, for example, a lack of interest in the issue or potentially negative reporting.

28. Population: What is needed for the Census in the population is, first, a basic good will in the universe from which the sample is drawn and, second, socio-political legitimization. The attitude towards the Census may be characterised by general indifference or by protest, which may be due to doubts concerning the government guarantee of data protection.

29. Owners/managers of dwellings: That target group may be expected to be especially interested in data protection because of the perceived direct government interference with privacy.

30. Managers/residents of special buildings: For legal and empirical reasons, the managers and residents of special buildings must be questioned separately. Special buildings include, among other things, shelters for the homeless, institutional households, and residential homes. As for the previous two target groups, the two extreme attitudes of general indifference and protest may be expected here, too.

31. Sample participants: The feeling of “Why me and not my neighbour?” must be counteracted in a meaningful way by explaining the principles of the survey. Also, major data protection concerns about the perceived direct government interference with privacy must be dispelled.

32. A core element of the communication strategy is the principle that the Census in Germany should be communicated primarily as a specific statistical issue, rather than as part of the political process. From an international point of view, this seems to be evident because censuses all over the world are centralised surveys of the relevant official statistical system. However, in the context of the discussions about the population census in West Germany in the 1980s, the issue of the population census was closely connected with various other issues such as the NATO dual track decision, the computer-aided profiling and search, and other public safety actions. Therefore it is crucial in Germany to communicate the Census as a statistical process -- and to do so, it is important that the Census is communicated in the general public mainly by the statistical offices rather than by politicians.

33. Another lesson drawn from the specific German experience with the population census in the 1980s is that communication measures should be well timed. Contrary to the communication measures used for the population census of 1987, which, due to their length, were an easy target for opponents, the measures of the press and public relations activities of the Census 2011 will be well focused. For each target group, three phases are distinguished, each of which will be used specifically for that target group:

34. (1) Attention/awareness: The goal in that phase is to attract sufficiently wide attention. This means that 100% awareness in the population or in the target groups must be achieved – the Census issue must be placed.

35. (2) Positivisation/information: The communication goal in that phase is to provide information that is useful for the target group. This means, for example, that it must be explained to the owners of houses and dwellings why their data are important for long-term planning in housing policy.

36. (3) Activation/co-operation: In that phase, implementation-oriented support is offered. In concrete terms this means, for example, that it is explained how the information can be supplied or how data protection is ensured.

37. As explained before, an important function of the communication strategy is to give a common frame of communication to all institutions involved, so that they may speak with several mouths but with one voice. Therefore, five central maxims of communication have been agreed upon for the strategy. They have the function of “rules” to be complied with by everyone in press and public relations work:

38. (1) Transparent dialogue at any time: The basic idea here is that in the media landscape there is nothing that cannot be researched and – at the appropriate time – be published. Following that basic idea, the recommended communication format is one in which no relevant information is denied to the public in a generally transparent dialogue – not even in critical situations such as data leaks or other difficult situations.

39. (2) Serious tonality for all communication measures: All studies performed recently on the image of official statistics in general or of the Federal Statistical Office in Germany have shown that both users and citizens consider the “official” character of the results of “official” statistics as a clearly positive quality and that this is of central importance for its positive image. What is directly linked to that official character is the perception of the statistical offices as serious, credible and trustworthy information providers which are scientifically independent.

40. (3) Communication on equal footing in each target group: The maxim of “equal footing” underlines the intention to talk to each target group on the basis of the legal requirements and to take seriously their needs and proposals, to deal with them, not to “relativise” them, and to take them into account where possible.

41. (4) Tactical intelligence in all political and communicative decisions: Depending on the occasion and the focus of possible public discussions, it must be checked when, and how, which target group should be addressed by which actor to achieve the defined communication goals. The specialised and political actors must be given advice in terms of tactics and goals.

42. (5) Innovative ways of addressing the target groups: Addressing the target groups should have an innovative character to attract, in a comprehensible and easy way, attention for the subject-related topic – the largely unknown method of the register-based Census – and for the term “Zensus” – which is largely unknown to the general public. As a practical consequence, for example, surprising topics from everyday life could be taken and used to open up new or unusual communication channels.

F. **Outlook: What comes next?**

43. Based on the communication strategy, the communication concepts are currently being developed for the specialised and political actors. While the communication strategy focused on the question of HOW the Census 2011 should be communicated, the communication concepts for the specialised and political actors will show in detail WHAT, that is which measures of press and public relations activities and advertising, should be used to achieve the goals defined in the strategy.

44. The communication concept for specialised actors includes the development of a logo and a corporate design for the Census 2011. That development has already been completed.

45. With its logo and corporate design, the Census in Germany will have a uniform visual appearance despite the different institutions involved. For the development, the commissioned agency took account of the communication strategy maxims. Critical elements to be visually implemented in the selected draft include “transparent dialogue” and “serious tonality.”