

German Data Forum (RatSWD) (Ed.)

Research Report

The German Data Forum (RatSWD) and Research Data Infrastructure: Status Quo and Quality Management

RatSWD Output, No. 1 (6)

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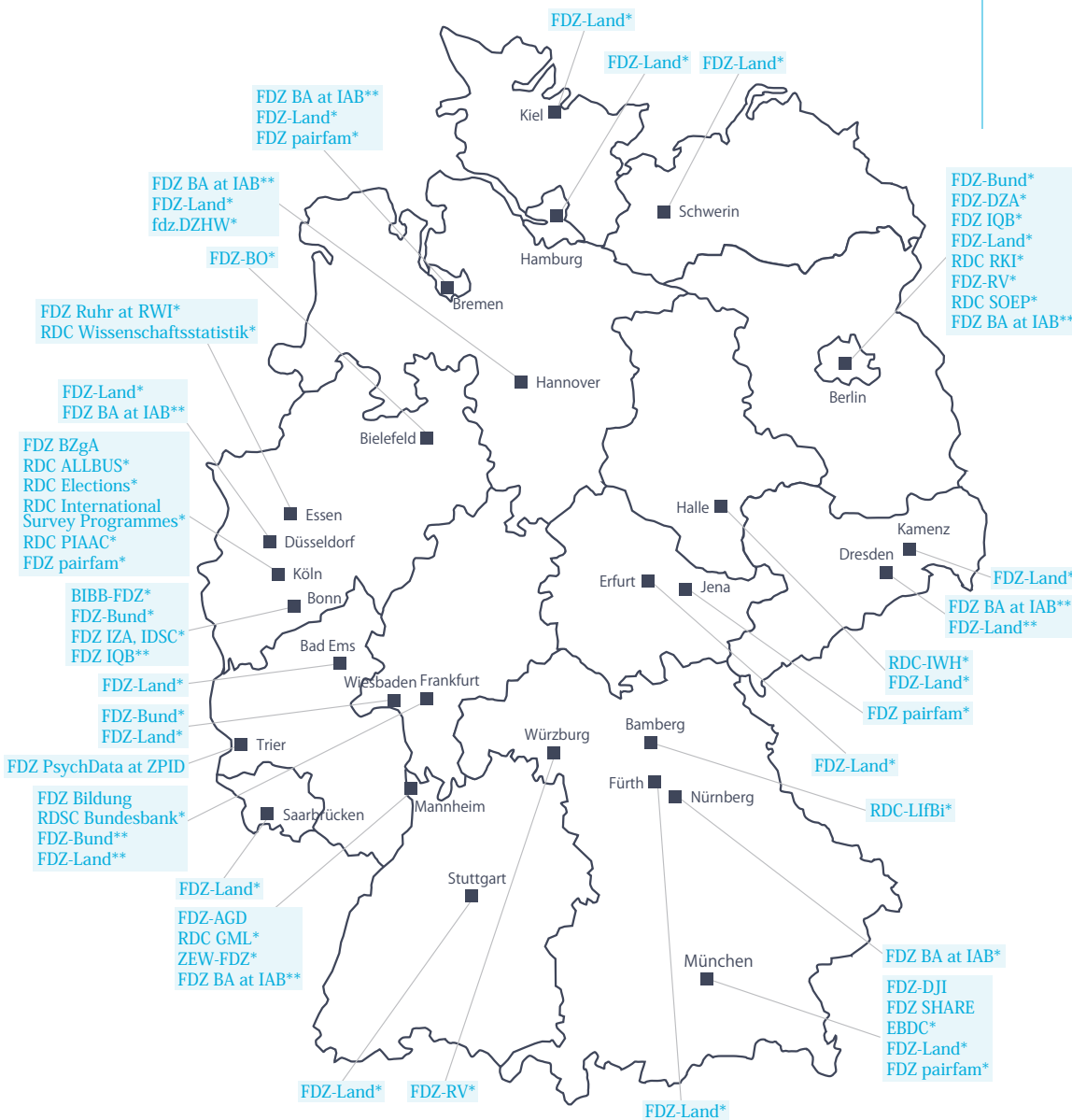
Research Data Infrastructure accredited by the RatSWD

Social, behavioural, and economic research often requires access to sensitive microdata on individuals, households, or businesses. To satisfy the demands of data producers, data users, and data protection, the German Data Forum (RatSWD) - as one of many tasks - accredits research data centres (RDCs). Consequently, a network of 31 German RDCs has developed since the early 2000s.

The RDCs provide researchers with user-oriented, cost-efficient access to a wide range of data. Since 2009, the RDCs have been organised in the FDI Committee to coordinate the research data infrastructure. This bottom-up coordination fosters efficient governance as well as securing the quality of the research data infrastructure through monitoring procedures.

Research Data Centres in 2018

(Most RDCs keep their German acronym FDZ)



Available data

RDCs provide data from the following areas of research:

- Social Data
- Behavioural Data
- Economic Data
- Qualitative Data
- Education Data
- Other Data
- Health Data

Key figures of the accredited RDCs in 2017


357
 New datasets
 out of 3,571 available datasets


21,467
 Active data users


69,083
 Downloads
 of openly available datasets


2,042
 Publications
 based on the available data


264
 Full-time staff

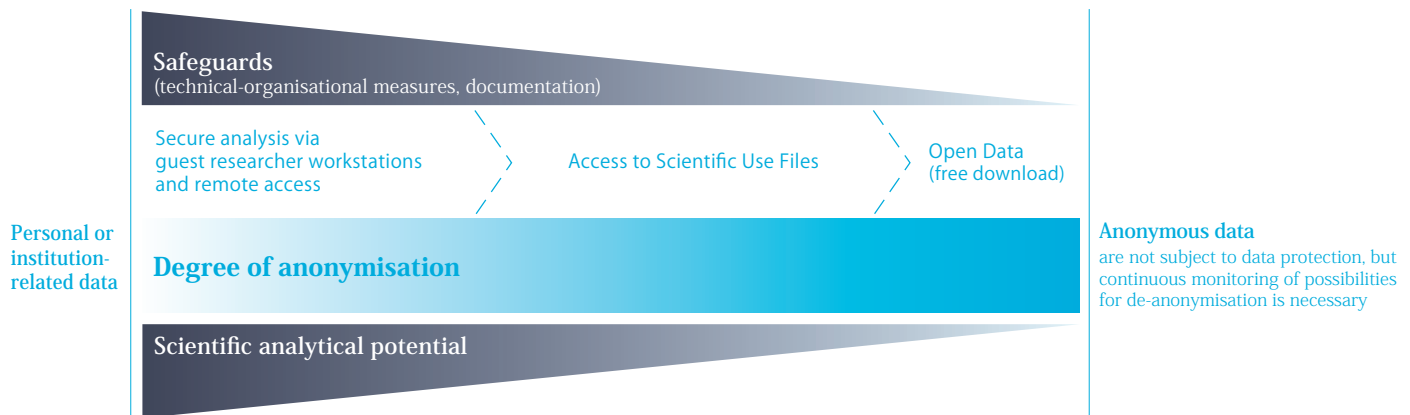

459
 Scientific publications
 by RDC personnel

* RDCs with guest researcher workstations
 ** External RDC guest researcher workstation

Anonymisation and the analytical potential of data

In research, data protection and the preservation of the data's analytical potential need to be put in balance. As a rule, the more anonymised data is, the lower is its analysis potential for research. The RDCs therefore pursue a variety of approaches regarding the degree of data anonymisation and data access.

Depending on the sensitivity of the data, the RDCs provide a wide range of access paths to their datasets (see figure below). For weakly anonymised data, many RDCs provide guest researcher workstations for on-site data access. Several RDCs also offer (controlled) remote access. For less sensitive but not completely anonymous data, a large majority of RDCs facilitate off-site use through scientific use files. Only completely anonymised data are available for free download.



Source: RatSWD Tätigkeitsbericht 2017
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Bottom-up governance to secure the quality of the research data infrastructure

The German Data Forum (RatSWD) is an advisory board made up of elected representatives from the data-using scientific community in the social sciences and appointed representatives of major German data producers. The FDI Committee consists of representatives from all accredited research data centres (RDCs). It complements the German Data Forum's strategic focus with a focus on day-to-day challenges and quality assurance.

Accreditation

The German Data Forum (RatSWD) has developed standards and criteria for the accreditation of RDCs. Fully operational RDCs need to meet three mandatory criteria (in addition to further information criteria):

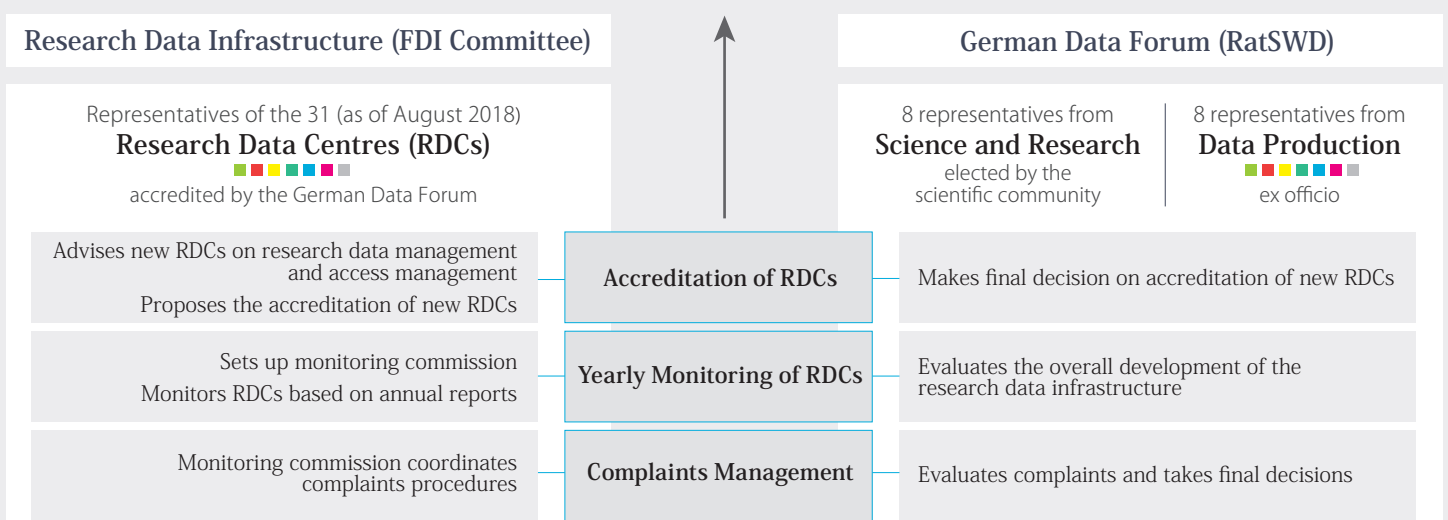
- provide at least one data access path
- provide sufficient data documentation
- ensure the long-term availability of the data

Monitoring and Complaints Management

The FDI Committee elects a monitoring commission which manages:

- the annual monitoring of all accredited RDCs
- complaints from the research community about data access policies in RDCs

The cooperation between the FDI Committee and the RatSWD: Developing and optimising the research data infrastructure



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