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Regional Information Needs

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REGIONAL INFORMATION NEEDS

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REGIONAL INFORMATION NEEDS

Regions are widely different entities in Europe. If we consider regions that are simple administrative sections of the state, regional statistics present no more of a problem than breaking down of state-wide statistical data. If we consider regions that have the political desire to maintain a collective identity, and with politically competent institutions, the information needs are a lot more similar to those of a state.

Such is the case of Catalonia. Catalonia is a European region of six million inhabitants, with its own history of over a thousand years and a desire for political self-assertion. In the institutional frame of the Spanish Constitution, that establishes the devolution of political power, Catalonia has mechanisms of self-government and its own jurisdiction in many fields of political decision-making; it has a directly elected parliament, and a government responsible to that parliament.

The Catalans think of Catalonia as a nation, because it has its own culture, language, traditions and history.

So for a region such as Catalonia, the problem of information needs is the problem of the information needed by different types of bodies or individuals: the regional government, local entities, business corporations, unions, mass media, universities, associations, citizens, etc. These information needs, are spread across all spheres of social and economic life. In other words, the regional information needs in Catalonia are not so very different from those of any European state.

The Catalan Parliament passed a law on statistics (1987) similar in contents to statistics laws in other countries that established technical and juridical guarantees in statistics:

citizen collaboration, secrecy (of statistics), public interest. It also stipulated that statistics had to be planned and that an official Board of Statistics had to be created to apply the law. In 1989 the Government of Catalonia set up the Institute of Statistics of Catalonia; this was a transformation of an institution that had already existed for 20 years and dealt in compilation of regional information of Catalonia. The Catalan Parliament has also passed two laws on Statistic Plan (1992-1995 and 1997-2000) and it has passed recently a new law on statistics (1998).

The Catalan Statute stipulates that we have the right of political decision-making on statistics of interest to Catalonia. On the other hand the Spanish Constitution establishes that the Spanish Government must carry out the production of statistics that are of interest to it.

In this regard, experience of institutional collaboration between the Catalan Institute of Statistics and the National Institute of Statistics has been noteworthy.

We consider all Catalan statistical activity as a system, an ordered and harmonious whole of methods, procedures and statistical results from different institutional agents.

We define the Catalan statistical system not as a limited system, but one which integrates statistical systems of state or European scope, striving for maximum homogeneity and comparability of the data.

Within the process of thinking about statistical activity, in Catalonia we asked ourselves what the role of the Catalan Statistics Institute should be in our statistical system.

The statistical body must produce the statistics which the Parliament and the government gives it responsibility for, through the Plans and Annual Programmmes for statistical activity, but it also has the responsibility of managing the statistical system.

In order to improve statistical activity, the statistical body must help policy makers to take involved decisions about statistics.

Policy makers have to take part in a thinking process in order to identify their

information needs. Official policy statistical bodies cannot replace policy-makers. A policy-maker has to define the information he needs.

Official statistical institutes have to promote the use of statistics by policy makers and other social agents.

The fact that the statistical plan has to be approved by Parliament demonstrates Catalonia's desire to create a statistical system capable of satisfying our country's needs and ordering and harmonizing the statistical activities of Catalan institutions.

The main objective of our plan is:

"to achieve a coherent, reliable and up-to-date ensemble of statistical data at the least possible cost, taking advantage of existing sources to the greatest extent, which will make Catalonia comparable to advanced countries at the level of understanding its economic, demographic and social reality, and which will be useful to the decision-making processes of the public institutions and social agents, minimizing any inconvenience to citizens and guaranteeing statistical secrecy"

Regional information needs, depend on the level of political, social and administrative development. If the regions have their own political structures, a statistical system of their own is generated, which is not incompatible with the National or the European Statistical System.

The Catalan Statistical System is formed by a wide variety of social agents who always need and occasionally produce statistics: parliament, government, public administration, representatives of business corporations, unions, universities, mass media, etc. From this point of view, the complexity of the Regional Statistical System is no different from that of the National Statistical System or the European Statistical System, which also have similar relationships with this kinds of agents.

The Government of Catalonia presented the two laws of Statistic Plan 1992-1995 and

1997-2000. in Parliament. This considers the objectives in statistic matters. The Statistic Plan Law 2001-2004 is in the process of deliberation.

Once the Plan Act is approved, each Annual Programme of statistical action will precisely describe the statistical activities which will comply with these objectives.

The process of elaboration of the Statistics Plan Act has been a process of technical statistical help and of interaction with dozens of professionals from different ministries of the Catalan government and local administration entities, to detect and critically analyze together the statistical activities underway, as well as the statistical needs formulated by the different ministries.

With the Planning Act we also faced another question: in order to put the legal guarantees and technical correction requirements into operation, the Statistics Institute had to carry out a series of activities of methodological, technical and organizational character which were very expensive. So the activities and resources for these functions had to be planned.

We call instrumental statistical activities those that are legally required, or technically necessary to be able to comply with the requisites which the statistics legislation establishes. For instance training, research and technical methodological and normative development in the field of statistics.

Instrumental statistical activities consume important resources in official statistical bodies, and it is therefore appropriate to be able to identify them when planning statistical activity and to allocate resources to them, allowing for the planning and systematizing of the activities of research, development and training in statistical methodology.

Through identifying instrumental statistics activity in the Statistics Plan the policy

makers become aware of the importance and complexity of statistics works.

It is necessary to think carefully about the relationships between different areas of public administration in statistical matter. Essentially, this issue presupposes the collaboration of different administrative areas as a means of strengthening the rationality and the efficiency of the public statistical system. This way of thinking must allow for a more efficient use of the resources invested in statistical activity, guarantees the compatibility of the data, and positively influences the public's response.

In the case of Catalonia, different types of institutional collaboration have been carried out between the Catalan Statistics Institute and the National Statistics Institute. In each one of these collaborations the cost benefit relationship has been analyzed, and those complementary aspects which allow for the better use of economies of scale have been identified.

This has allowed us to obtain a more complete product, and of higher quality, which benefits both the administrations involved at the same time.

To conclude, I will emphasize that the National Statistical System is not incompatible with either the Regional Statistical System, which actually is one of its parts, or with the European Statistical System, of which both form a part.

Those responsible for the respective statistical systems are interested in the same things. We are interested in statistical production being usable to the greatest extent on the part of all possible users. We are interested in official statistics being produced by Institutes and professional services, which assure the reliability of their results. And we are interested in the instruments of planning, co-ordination and technical homogenization of all the statistics in our respective statistical systems not entering into conflict with each other. In the case of Catalonia, this has been possible and in the future we must continue to deepen this process.

