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# The Role of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office In Providing Social Science Data

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The Central Statistical Office of Hungary - established more than 120 years ago - functions on the basis of two major considerations, or objectives:

-detailed data are collected on a regular basis in physical and monetary terms on the national economy and the social structures and trends.

These data are disseminated in yearbooks, special series and tapes or disks. The Office informs the government and the general public as well as the scientific community both at home and abroad.

The data collected originate partly from the Office's own data collection system and, on the other hand, from the authorities, ministries many of which have their own statistical system for administrative purposes. It is, of course, the Central Statistical Office only which is in the possession of the most important statistical information on all branches of the national economy, which calculates national accounts, national input-output tables, and also has an overview on the most important social trends, the social structure of the nation and the functioning of the social infrastructure.

-Based on the relative richness of information, the Office is preparing scientific, statistical analyses on issues on main interest in the economic and social field.

Most publications do contain such analyses, and the experts working with the Office also publish their papers in different periodicals. The analysis of the data is considered as an important part of the Office's activities. In some cases analyses are made at the special request of the government for decision making purposes.

Social statistics, data on social trends, social phenomena and the social infrastructure are collected in three departments of the Statistical Office:

- the Department of Social Statistics
- the Department for Population Statistics
- the Department of Statistics, on the level of living the latter conducts surveys on household income and expenditure and calculates consumption price indexes.

The Department of Social Statistics is responsible for the information on the social infrastructure (health, education, culture, social security, etc.), for data on different issues of special interest, e.g. crime, alcoholism, accidents, suicides. It is also engaged in data gatherings on the environment focusing also to its human and societal aspects. Another field of its activity is the conducting of sample surveys on special social issues, such as social mobility, time budget and time use, social aspects of housing, lifestyles, the health status of the population, the status of young people, and many others.

The Population Statistics Department is responsible for vital statistics and the census and microcensuses. These data also provide a good deal of information on different social issues.

Social statistics had been rapidly developing during the last fifteen years, and more pronouncedly since 1980.

This was mainly so because many social problems originating from the poor achievement of the economy started to manifest themselves in the midseventies. Until then most existing social anomalies have been latent, hidden behind a growing economy and level of living. However, once the economy began to falter, these problems had started to emerge, became visible and caused ever growing concern in the public and among social scientists.

The government's standpoint had been rather ambiguous at that time: it admitted occasionally the existence of some social problems, like housing shortage but refused to realize the ever growing deepness of social anomalies and behaved rather optimistically concerning the future developments. Several issues, such as the growing poverty, the dysfunction of several social services, the decrease of the living standard, the situation of the old people having minor incomes or pensions, the crisis of the family, were considered as issues of temporary importance, or were not considered at all.

The Statistical Office and some research institutes as well as individual scholars attempted to draw the attention of those responsible for social policies to the unfavourable changes, and these efforts finally resulted in an increasing acceptance of the difficulties, by different Government departments.

Thus the attitude of the official bodies started to change slowly after 1980. The changing atmosphere helped the Social Statistics Department to enlarge the scope of its activities concerning social statistics surveys. A Standardized System of Population Surveys has been set up, consisting of a 2% sample and its subsamples, the latter were used for the surveys themselves. The sampling system is based on the 1980 population census and is being kept up to date by including newly built dwellings. The sampling unit is the household living in the selected dwelling unit.

The setting up of the Standardized System of Population Surveys contributed much to the extension of our scope of activities in special social science fields. It made us possible to conduct a series of surveys which helped scholars and policy makers to discover some burning social problems and to develop a better knowledge of the society and its actual functioning.

It has been clear at the beginning of the eighties that there was a growing need of a deeper analysis of several social phenomena, like the changing way of life, the appearance of the second economy, social mobility, the housing situation, the problems of young people as well as that of the elderly, the causes and consequences of the low fertility, the unfavourable health situation and mortality of the population, the changes in the income distribution, and many others. The surveys provided a great amount of data and analyses and the new findings sooner or later found their way into the general and political public opinion.

From among the surveys which have been carried out during the last years, the most recent one is the time budget and way of life survey taken place in 1986-87. The survey revealed new facts about the growth of the time spent at work in several social groups of the population.

Another important undertaking of the Social Statistical Department has been the morbidity survey carried out in 1986 partly on the same sample as the time budget survey. This provides an opportunity for the analysers for a linkage of the two surveys studying thus the impact of different aspects of life circumstances, social habits, working conditions on the health of the population.

When the plans for the morbidity survey had been worked out we considered the extremely unfavourable mortality conditions of the country and wanted to provide some insight into the mechanism of the causes of deteriorating morbidity. It seems to be more or less proved that overwork, and dietary habits as well as high alcohol consumption are among the causes of the high morbidity and mortality.

The analysis of these interrelations by means of multiple regression is still under way and some of the results will be made available to the public by the end of this year.

The data of the social statistical surveys are regularly stocked in the data bank of TÁRKI (Social Science Informatic Centre) and made thus available to the

scientific community at home and abroad. Details of the organization of the Social Science Informatic Centre are being discussed at this conference in another paper, we shall therefore not review it here.

Additional forms of dissemination of social science data collected by CSO are the publications and the work done in several scientific committees where sociologists, statisticians and other scholars convene.

In the last ten years several international comparisons were made in the field of time budget-time use, and different types of social indicators. The Hungarian CSO participated and is participating at present at such undertakings with the statistical services of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Poland, Lettonia and Yugoslavia. □

<sup>1</sup>Presented at the IFDO/IASSIST 89 Conference held in Jerusalem, Israel, May 15-18, 1989.