

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

For discussion and  
recommendations

Second Meeting of the 2013/2014 Bureau  
Geneva (Switzerland), 21-22 October 2013

Item 8(c) of the Provisional  
Agenda

**PROPOSED OUTLINE FOR THE CES 2014 SEMINAR “WHAT IS THE VALUE OF  
OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE THAT VALUE?”**

**Prepared by the United Kingdom**

The outline of the seminar to be held during the CES 2014 plenary session has been drafted by the seminar organiser, United Kingdom in consultation with the session organizers, Sweden and Eurostat. The Bureau is invited to discuss the outline and provide recommendations on the organization of the seminar.

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. At its June 2013 plenary session, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) selected the topic “What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?” for one of the 2014 CES seminars. The organisation of the seminar will be coordinated by the United Kingdom. Sweden and Eurostat offered to organise the sessions.
2. This topic will be discussed in the context of the data age: official statistics are increasingly finding themselves competing against other sources, new challenges and new opportunities. How do we redefine and communicate the value of official statistics in the increasingly competitive data industry? Why are official statistics important/unique/of public value and how do we persuade others of that?
3. The following countries and organisations offered to contribute papers to the seminar: Australia, Denmark, France, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States (possibly) and Eurostat. The abstracts of currently received contributions are provided in Annex 1.

**II. STRUCTURE OF THE SEMINAR**

4. United Kingdom will organise the seminar. Sweden and Eurostat will organise the sessions. The seminar will be chaired by Jil Matheson.
5. The seminar will open with an introduction from the Chair followed by a keynote speech from a prominent figure involved in working with and understanding the value of both official statistics and other data sources. The keynote speaker will provide an overview of the evolving context in which official statistics are used and the challenges and opportunities this can present in terms of communicating their value. Suggestions for the keynote speaker include:

- Nigel Shadbolt or Tim Berners-Lee from the Open Data Institute

- Other suggestions are welcome

6. The seminar will consist of two sessions: the first one focusing on identifying and understanding the value of official statistics, and the second one on communicating that value.

#### **A. Session 1: Understanding the value of official statistics**

Session Chair: Eurostat

7. The session should discuss approaches to defining and understanding the value of official statistics. This can be from a number of perspectives, for example, in contrast to other types of data and statistics, or from a user perspective. The session could further discuss the following aspects:

- (a) How do we define the value and benefits of official statistics in the increasingly competitive data industry? What is the value of other types of data?
- (b) Who do we think needs to understand this value?
- (c) How do our users see us? What do they value? To what extent can we rely on notions of quality of official statistics to keep the loyalty of our users?
- (d) What do we have to do in terms of e.g. user research to identify possible measures to increase the public's interest in our statistics?
- (e) What can National Statistical Institutes learn from the private sector on defining and understanding the value of data?

Contributions offered (abstracts of papers are provided in the Annex):

*Invited papers:*

- Australia – Paper on a framework to identify and articulate the value and benefits of official statistics. The framework focuses on what the unique offering is for official statistics, what gives them a competitive advantage and what this means for users of official statistics.
- UK – Understanding ‘public value’. Abstract to follow.

*Supporting papers:* TBC

#### **B. Session 2: Strategies for communicating the value of official statistics**

Session Chair: Sweden

8. This session should focus on strategies for communicating the role and importance of official statistics, in order to demonstrate and realise their value. This could include an exploration of communication tools, such as media events and user councils. The session could also include the impact of opening up data and how this can be used to increase the value of statistics. The session could discuss the following issues:

- (a) Which communication tools and cooperative arrangements can help us to better reach current and potential users?
- (b) How can we use communication strategies to increase the perceived quality of official statistics and the trust users, and the public at large, place in them?
- (c) What impact can opening up data have on the value of official statistics? How can the re-use of data affect value and quality?
- (d) What are the benefits to National Statistical Institutes of communicating the value of statistics? Could this help to boost participation in surveys?
- (e) Should we form partnerships with data disseminators outside official statistics to help get our message across? Which could be the strategic partnerships with other data providers?

Contributions offered (abstracts of papers are provided in the Annex):

*Invited papers:*

- Italy – (a) Communicating innovation in National Statistical Institutes.
- France – (b) Sustaining trust in public statistics requires a constant effort.
- Eurostat – (c) Impact of the Open Data initiatives and the availability of big data on the way the value of official statistics is communicated.

*Supporting papers: TBC*

- Sweden – (b and d) Ways to motivate respondents through communication of the value of official statistics.
- Poland – (a) Which communication tools can help us better to reach current and potential users?

## ANNEX 1

### ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS

#### Session 1: Understanding the value of official statistics

##### Proposed invited papers

*Australia: How do we define the value and benefits of official statistics in the increasingly competitive data industry?*

9. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is currently working on a project to articulate the value and benefits of official statistics in Population, Labour and Social statistics. In so doing, they are developing a framework for use both within ABS and with the external user/stakeholder environment in Australia.

10. The framework, which is still very much a work in progress, defines the value and benefits of official statistics in terms of our unique offerings and our competitive advantage, (i.e. what sets ABS apart from our competitors) and what that means for users (i.e. what's in it for them). The different dimensions of the competitive advantage are illustrated below. It is recognised that the advantages of some of these dimensions may be more readily recognisable to us, and may need further clarification for use in the external environment.

*UK: Understanding 'public value'.*  
[Abstract needed]

##### Proposed supporting papers (TBC)

#### Session 2: Strategies for communicating the value of official statistics

##### Proposed invited papers

*Italy: Communicating innovation in National Statistical Institutes*  
[Abstract needed]

*France: Sustaining trust in public statistics requires a constant effort*

11. The status of public statistics is fragile because of the growing complexity of our economies and societies, the increasing demands of our users and the pressure that besieges them from all sides, plus the cloud of distrust hanging over all official communication. The voice of public statistics has trouble making itself heard.

12. Insee has come up with a many-pronged plan to advocate for public statistics. Some actions are one off while others are long-term. They are aimed at decision makers, researchers and the general public. The paper will present these actions and show how they work toward securing the status of public statistics in our society. The plan can be divided into four parts:

- Actions aimed at traditional, formally-structured networks such as institutions representing political, economic or social actors of society that represent a wide range of users. These actions are carried out in cooperation with the French Council for

Statistical Information around consultation of its members and new thinking of public statistics for the middle term.

- Actions aimed at the general public. There will be a wide-ranging conversation on the theme "public statistics and democracy - what do such figures actually mean?" and actions to educate this general public with the support of the education community.
- Actions aimed at listening to and interacting with online social networks and other internet users, internet watch, and satisfaction surveys.
- Actions aimed at the media so as to take into account the discrepancy between their very short focus of news and the medium and long-term focus of public statistics.

*Eurostat: Impact of the Open Data initiatives and the availability of big data on the way the value of official statistics is communicated*

[Abstract needed]

### **Proposed supporting papers**

*Sweden: Ways to motivate respondents through communication of the value of official statistics*

13. To tackle the problem of non-response we are trying new ways to communicate the value of statistics at Statistics Sweden. One example of this is a new cross-departmental network, formed to generate suggestions on how to improve how we communicate with the respondents in our surveys.

14. The network consists of key persons involved in text creation who are not trained in communication and communication professionals: a web strategist and a plain language specialist. This is a very welcome new opportunity since text creation and editing is a decentralized, complex process involving writers and editors as well as other stakeholders within Statistics Sweden. One of the network's most important tasks is to evaluate the communication with respondents: phone, email, paper letters as well as the web contents. This is a new approach at Statistics Sweden, to study the whole communication chain, every point in the communication chain in its context.

15. Guided by the web strategist and the plain language specialist, the members draw on their own experience to find the answers to questions like, What is our core message to the respondents with this particular text? What do we want to achieve with our web contents? What are the visitors' attitude towards us and what we want them to do? The aim is to inspire the members to find their own drive to change how Statistics Sweden communicates.

16. A very encouraging finding of the discussions in the network is that those who are in direct contact with respondents share the same experience: When the respondents understand their role in the official statistics system they are quite willing to participate. Today, this successful dialogue often takes place on the phone when a respondent calls us to complain or we call them to remind and persuade them to respond to our surveys. Through close collaboration between those directly involved in the communication with the respondents and communication experts, Statistics Sweden is now exploring ways of using what we already know about the respondents to use our communication channels (the web site, emails, letters, brochures etc.) more efficiently to motivate respondents to take part in our surveys'.

*Poland: Which communication tools can help us better to reach current and potential users?*

17. The main tool to facilitate communication, cooperation and the acquisition of new recipients of statistical information is the development and modernization of information portal, as the most important tool for popularizing statistical information. As a part of this tool the following tasks are planned:

- Creation of the Public Data Warehouse (PDW) – repository of aggregated statistical data that are to be made public preserving the principle of statistical confidentiality.
- Creation of the Statistical Metadata System, (SMS) - a tool to public statistics to enable managing metadata appearing during planning and implementation of statistical research.
- Creation of the Information Presentation System (IPS) – makes it possible to provide access to data which are public in nature including the upgrade and modernization of the GUS information website – enriched by new functionalities.
- Creation of an Educational System – it would promote knowledge in public statistical facilities and support statistical education of the society.
- Launching a geo-statistic website – IT platform of spatial data and analyses' results presentation.
- Launching the Outside User Application – mechanism of a fully electronic management of requests directed to the census data.
- Internet transmission of press conferences of the GUS's President – to all users.
- Adjust the abovementioned action tools on other platforms including mobile devices.
- Expansion of library collections and digital library and electronic directories.
- Development and modernization of informants to a wide customer service on the spot.
- Use social media to promote statistical knowledge – for example the Twitter.

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