

18 June 2012

ENGLISH ONLY

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR  
EUROPE (UNECE)  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

**Work Session on Communication of Statistics**  
(Geneva, Switzerland, 27-29 June 2012)

Session 3: New Way of Engaging Audiences

**Indicator.fi - Society at Large. An Example of Co-operative Service Development**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In 2009, a new web-service called **Indicator (www.indicator.fi)** was launched in Finland. Its aim was to provide users with up-to-date, relevant information on the development of society. The service has been set up together with users and information providers and it brings together statistics and indicators that are already available in different formats.
2. The service was developed jointly by Statistics Finland (SF) and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). During the development, new technologies and information architectures were applied and user needs were studied in detail. The second generation of the user interface, and a mobile version of the service, were opened in 2012. In this paper, the development of and the experiences from the service will be briefly presented.

**II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERVICE 2008-2012**

3. In 2008, discussions about evidence-based policy making and the role of high-quality information in decision making were quite topical in Finland as well. Simultaneously, users of the information indicated that it was not easy to find information due to the large number of different portals, web services, collections of indicators and a diverse number of other information sources.
  4. In 2008, the PMO carried out a feasibility study in order to find out the expectations of potential users of indicator-type information. The study indicated that users wanted to have a wide range of information from one channel, they were looking for high-quality and relevant information, and wanted the information in a re-usable format – both in ready-made high-quality graphs and in table format. They also emphasised the importance of analyses and metadata. These requirements were not met with the existing services.
  5. In 2009, based on the feasibility study, Statistics Finland and the PMO agreed upon a joint project aiming to build a new kind of an indicator service. This resulted in a new web service Findicator.fi ([www.findicator.fi](http://www.findicator.fi)) that was introduced in October 2009.
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6. The service includes about 100 indicators reflecting the development of society, and currently nearly twenty information producers are providing data to the service. Most of these indicators are official statistics produced by either Statistics Finland or other agencies producing statistics in Finland, but the information producers also include other agencies such as the Advisory Board for Defence Information, the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The indicators have been selected in consultation with user groups and data providers, and the set of indicators will be updated as appropriate.
7. For each of the indicators, a time series as a high-quality graph and table – both in downloadable format – are provided. A short analysing text, a description of the indicator, the date of the next update and links to other relevant information sources are also given.
8. The Findicator service has proved to be a success. The service is targeted to everyone needing up-to-date, reliable information on social progress in their work or other activities: decision makers, public servants, specialists, teachers, journalists and citizens. The main target audiences have found the service: positive feedback and comments have been continuously received from all user groups. The service was promoted by the developers in various channels as well as in different seminars, but also by the users in various occasions. It has also been acknowledged internationally, as it was awarded the recognition for Best Use of New Technology in the 3rd OECD World Forum “Measuring the Progress of Societies” in Korea, 2009.
9. Encouraged by the positive feedback, SF and the PMO started a new project in 2011 aiming to expand Findicator into a multilingual service, to renew the user interface and to develop the technical solutions further. In March 2012, the renewed service was launched with a new visual design, new user interface, share tools for social media and in three languages. The users met the changes with satisfaction: the number of users was quadrupled to nearly 15,000 a month.

### **III. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE AND TECHNOLOGY**

10. The main idea when planning the service was to rely as far as possible upon the existing databases and solutions. The information architecture of the service (Figure 1) is based on the XML publishing system of Statistics Finland and the StatFin output database. A specific Verti publishing system was integrated to the PX Web database StatFin. In practice, a set of information is identified in StatFin and presented with the help of Verti as a table (PcAxis and Excel) and a high-quality graph in the Findicator user interface. The graph and tables are updated simultaneously with StatFin. The short analysing text derives directly from statistical releases and it is also updated automatically. The more permanent pieces of information are input into the system via a special maintenance form.
11. For the other information producers, some special arrangements were made. A specific web form was designed for delivering the data and other information to the Findicator publishing system. Currently, there are 18 different data producers who provide their data via the web form (Figure 2). To get the information as smoothly as possible into StatFin, the producers were trained and informed about the technical requirements of the PX data format.



#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

12. For Statistics Finland, Findicator has been a possibility to learn about user needs, to learn about cooperation with users, to strengthen cooperation with other information producers and to develop new technologies. It has been a challenge, but also an opportunity that has realised its potentials.

13. One of the key factors in the process has been the close cooperation with the various stakeholders. From the very first start of the development, the potential users of the service have been included in the process. It has also been important that the roles of the key partners, Statistics Finland and the Prime Minister's Office, have been clearly specified and agreed. In addition to continuous cooperation and contacts during the process, a specific co-operative network was set up with the information producers and users to support communication. A joint steering committee appointed by Statistics Finland has been responsible for supervising the further development of the service.

14. The challenges met during the process include those related to technology, those related to harmonising data from a number of various producers and – last but not least – those related to the contents of the service, such as selection and decisions about the indicators. As mentioned above, the indicators have been selected in consultation with user groups and data providers. Apart from describing important phenomena in society, the indicators selected to the service had to meet other criteria, too. For example, they had to be reliable and relevant and a continuity of information production was required.

15. One of the critical discussions, especially within SF, dealt with the issues of impartiality and objectivity of a statistical office. Is it acceptable to do co-operation like this? These remarks were considered carefully from various perspectives. One of the questions was the selection of the indicators as described above. To further guarantee the independency and objectivity of Statistics Finland, it was agreed already at the very beginning that the service was only to provide information about the changes in society, not to assess in any way whether the changes have been positive, negative, politically correct or in some ways unwanted or desired.

16. The technical solutions developed during the process have been applied in other service production after the launch of the Findicator. The information architecture – production of automatically updating services based on information in StatFin – has been used, for example, in tailored customer services and in thematic services on the web. With the stage of automation, the manual work does not disappear totally (if it never will) as the definitions for each service have to be specified and coded, and the functions monitored regularly, but the amount of maintenance and upkeeping work decreases considerably.

17. Currently, the Findicator has found its place among the various sources of indicator-type information: it includes high-quality information on the national level on key issues. As natural, discussions about its future development and relations to other services are continuing. One of the topics is whether Findicator might in future be the portal from where information about the different aspects of wellbeing in society could be found. Referring to the discussions described earlier, the critical point is to define the indicators of wellbeing first; this we are very willing to leave to the GDP and beyond process.

18. Another issue is the scope of the service. Currently, the reasonably restricted scope with national, not regional information and a limited number of indicators has proved to be one of the strengths of Findicator. But we are listening to the users – and linking with other services.