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TAKE CARE OF THE META, AND THE META WILL TAKE CARE OF THE DATA

Abstract

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Statistical offices are faced with the challenge of producing the same statistics as in the past in less time, with less response burden and with less staff. Electronic dissemination media has also moved the data from paper to the end-user's desktop, leading them to expect to be able to combine data from various sources in a meaningful way. This last point is not only problematic for individual offices, facing the need to co-ordinate and standardise concepts and data over different projects and over time: it is also a challenge for the statistics producing community worldwide. By publishing our data on the same medium – the Internet – we are creating the expectation that data from different countries are consistent and can be combined in one document.

Metadata standards have been proposed as a solution to the interrelatability issue. Standards, however, are hardly a response to the quality issue, and the extra effort needed to support them is an obstacle to the implementation of the efficiency issue. The efficiency issue is being addressed by Statistics Netherlands through products such as Blaise and a Metadata Server. The idea is that if the metadata is available in machine-readable form, then it should be possible to automate most or all of the statistical process.

These two approaches (“Standard metadata” and “Active metadata”) have emerged independently in the course of the last two decades. They propose different solutions to problems that only partly overlap. This contribution tries to find ways of bringing them together.

Literature

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