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Topic I: Application of web technology to integrate statistics

STANDARDIZED STATISTICAL REPORTS ON THE INTERNET

Contributed paper

Submitted by Statistics Sweden¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Statistical reports on the Internet are an important item in Statistics Sweden's publication policy. The traditional reporting of basic statistics in the printed series Statistical Reports (hereinafter abbreviated to SR) has changed. The reports are now more adapted to the Internet, with a standardized content structure and a new layout. The SRs are presented on the Internet in two formats: one for reading on-screen (html) and one for printing out (pdf). It is still also possible to order SRs in printed form.
2. The production process has been standardized. The authors use specially developed templates and tools during production. The switch-over has not been problem-free.
3. Studies indicate that users are very satisfied with the change, but at the same time there has been a number of viewpoints and suggestions for improvements of the new SR concept.

II. STATISTICS SWEDEN'S PUBLICATION POLICY

4. Statistics Sweden has formulated a policy for publication of official statistics. The policy emphasizes electronic publication, especially that found on Statistics Sweden's website on the Internet.

✍ The official statistics for which Statistics Sweden is responsible are to be presented and made public in Sweden's Statistical Databases. These databases are to be available on

¹ Prepared by Tommy Wallster.

Statistics Sweden's Internet website. Exemptions from database publication may be granted by special decision.

✍ The official statistics for which Statistics Sweden is responsible and which are currently issued in printed *Statistical Reports (SRs)* are to be presented in SRs on Statistics Sweden's website. SRs are to be standardized in terms of content structure and design. They are to be available in two formats: one for reading on-screen (html) and one for printing out (pdf). It will also be possible to order SRs from Statistics Sweden in printed form.

✍ Statistics Sweden's website is also to show all press releases, together with a selection of the statistics for which there is most demand, product by product. In these cases too, the official statistics for which Statistics Sweden is responsible are involved. Information will be shown in a standardized form.

✍ The official statistics for which Statistics Sweden is responsible may also be presented in other ways, e.g. in publications on special topics and yearbooks, provided that publication on the website has been carried out as specified above. Starting 1 April 2002, these publications will also be published on the website, mainly in pdf-format.

5. Other public organizations with statistical responsibilities are invited to make their statistics available in Statistics Sweden's Statistical Databases and in the Statistical Reports. They are also welcome to use the aids in the form of templates and tools for presenting statistics that are now available for Statistics Sweden's programmes under the same conditions that apply for Statistics Sweden.

6. This paper describes the second point in Statistics Sweden's publication policy regarding Statistical Reports (SRs).

III. SRs – BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT WORK

7. Statistics Sweden has carried out an extensive development project to adapt the traditionally printed Statistical Reports to the Internet.

8. The project was governed by a steering committee with representatives from the different subject matter departments of the organization, and the Deputy Director General of Statistics Sweden chaired the committee. At least two statistical products from each of the four subject matter departments have been selected to act as test pilots. Contrary to many other projects, this publishing project has been met with great enthusiasm, and the new techniques have been well accepted.

9. When the dissemination of statistics was mostly confined to publications of different sorts, it was not so evident that layout, structure and contents might differ from each other. However, such differences become very clear on the Internet. Therefore, what is to be published on the Internet must be substantially standardized. Such standardization does not mean that the resulting product has to be dull, but rather that the user should be able to find his way about in different documents. Further, conversion to the html-format (for the time being) will be greatly facilitated.

10. The Statistical Reports have undergone a complete revision regarding layout and content structure. Fonts and size of characters are predefined. It has been decided how tables, figures and graphs should appear in order to be readable on screen and to fit the pre-press format as well as the web-format.

IV. A STANDARD CONTENT STRUCTURE FOR ALL SRs

11. The contents of SRs are structured in a number of standard sections with matching titles. An underlying thought is that the user searches for information on different levels: from overview to details. The sections are as follows:

A. Summary

12. In this section the reader is given the most important results of the report.

B. Statistics and commentaries

13. Under this heading, the results are described in more detail with comments and explanations. The text can sometimes be combined with smaller summary tables and diagrams.

C. Tables, Diagrams, Charts

14. In these sections, larger amounts of data and the detailed results of the report are found here.

D. Facts about the statistics

15. All additional information about the statistics that is not in the form of results or figures is found under this heading. Our ambition is to give readers sufficient information to study the statistics in a correct manner. The section shall give readers the most important information about quality and methods in a concentrated form. A link to more detailed information about the study (at another place on Statistics Sweden's website) is at the end of this section.

16. The section has a number of standard headings:

- ~~///~~ Scope of statistics
- ~~///~~ Definitions and explanations
- ~~///~~ Statistics production
- ~~///~~ Reliability
- ~~///~~ Helpful information

E. In English

17. Information to English language readers is found here with the following headings:

- ~~///~~ Summary
- ~~///~~ List of tables (with links to each table)
- ~~///~~ List of terms (Swedish-English)

V. AIDS FOR SR PRODUCTION

18. To facilitate and streamline the production of the Statistical Reports (the actual production is the responsibility of the subject matter divisions) special software has been developed, as well as guidelines and tools. The basic part of this software, developed by Statistics Denmark, has been transformed and rewritten to fit the environment and needs of Statistics Sweden. This software is intended for the actual writing of the text, and it more or less automatically results in the desired format. It incorporates facilities from the software PC-AXIS, which obtains data dynamically from an SQL database.

19. SRs are produced in the standard programmes of Word and Excel. The following have been incorporated to facilitate SR production:

- ~~///~~ a template in Word for the production of the report
- ~~///~~ a tool to produce diagrams from Excel
- ~~///~~ a tool to easily transfer Excel tables to Word documents
- ~~///~~ a guide, manual describing in detail the various steps of SR production

VI. SR PRODUCTION PROCESS

20. To produce a Statistical Report, a template in Word is opened. The user is prompted to write the ID number of the report and can choose what sections are to be incorporated. A dot-file is then opened with a special tool bar for creating the report. There are buttons for putting the text and tables in narrow or broad format, different designs of tables, adding foot-notes, downloading data from the SQL database and so on.

21. When the Word document is ready, it is converted to Acrobat format (pdf). This ensures that the document is printed in the same way, regardless of printer. It is also converted to html-format for Internet publishing. This conversion has been a great challenge to accomplish.

22. The pdf file is stored in the electronic archive and can be reached from Statistics Sweden's website on the Internet (and via intranet). It (or a version in PostScript format) can also be used for printing pre-subscribed copies. If tables are too big for the ordinary page format, XLS files may be produced, and PX-files produced by PC-AXIS can also be stored in the electronic archive.

23. The new method to produce SRs is not problem-free. Sometimes the new aids have been used before they were fully developed. There is also quite a lot of technology involved in the process, and as a producer it is necessary to be well-read and capable of handling the software involved. Many producers have found it difficult to convert their traditional tables to fit the new SR layout.

VII. CONSEQUENCES FOR USERS

24. A user may access the statistical information in many different ways:

- ~~///~~ The user looks and reads at the website (in html)
- ~~///~~ The user downloads the corresponding pdf file and prints it out as a whole or in parts
- ~~///~~ There may be tables in XLS or PX format that the user can download and process according to his/her own needs
- ~~///~~ There will be links to the statistical databases where the user can dig deeper in related data and metadata
- ~~///~~ The user can phone or send an e-mail to someone at Statistics Sweden, who prints the pdf-file on a local printer or at a central function for "print on demand"
- ~~///~~ The user wants a customized product and turns to Statistics Sweden
- ~~///~~ The user may also subscribe to printed copies.

25. Obviously, there are costs for Statistics Sweden in making the Statistical Reports available on the Internet. These marginal costs are, though, comparatively low. Therefore, the Statistical Reports are available free of charge on the Internet. However, there is a charge for printed copies that are sent to the user.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

What do users think about SRs on the internet?

26. Studies have been made regarding user reactions of SRs on the Internet. The method used is called “the focus group” and is primarily intended to obtain views and suggestions for improvement from the users.

27. A focus group consists of a small group of hand-picked participants. In this case, the group is free to browse through Statistics Sweden’s website, and then requested to find certain SRs on the Internet and study them. In a final group discussion that is recorded on tape, views on the SRs are expressed.

28. The participants in the focus group were clearly positive to SRs on the Internet. The new content structure was highly commended, and the group appreciated having access to SRs in both html and pdf format. Several participants were considering to stop their subscription to the printed SRs (a definite decrease in demand for printed SRs has been noted).

29. There were numerous viewpoints on structure, search function, and related links, many of which have been taken into consideration.

Study SRs on Statistics Sweden’s website!

30. SRs can be studied on Statistics Sweden’s website: www.scb.se/eng/publkat/sm/smindex.asp

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