

INFORMATIVE SOCIETY IN DETERMINATION OF REGRESS OF PUBLIC STATISTICS

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Summary

The article focuses on the strategic approach to the realization of the restructurization of public statistics. The need for the fundamental rebuilding of a public statistic system include the implementation of a new approach to the organization of primary data resources and hiring outsourcing for translocation of primary data to a statistical system. Hence the need for such a change is justified by a force of influence of public statistics upon the shaping of informative society, service function of public statistics for society, a citizen and a tax-payer and also it is justified by the right of a citizen, understood also as a citizen-businessman, to high quality informative public statistics. The author points out a destructive influence of transformation regress of the national informative sector upon the shaping of an information society. The article discusses very current problems that are very crucial from the social point of view and from the perspective of conditioning of effective managing, which is a priority for some managing subjects in general and, in the conditions of crises of co-economy and a global economy, it becomes an issue of great importance.

Keywords: informative society, restructurization of system of public statistics, citizen, tax-payer, regress, system of statistic information, quality level of economic information, information market, outsourcing of primary data, automated measuring systems

1. Introduction

The ability to perform in the global market and a competitive environment is essential for successful business activities in terms of domestic and European operations.

Globalization and the extraordinary development of information technologies, including the Internet, have caused an increased demand for information and facilitated the exchange of socio-economic information typical for local business environments. The rapid progress of IT and the Internet is bringing individuals and companies closer, improving cooperation, development, and work efficiency. Although it was created in the non-product competition era, information is seen as the priority in modern management. It is required especially by entrepreneurs, policy makers and research centres. It is the foundation for effective management, correct analysis and inference, accurate forecasting and making appropriate decisions. Today, consumers expect high quality statistical information, which is:

- based on exhaustive and professional surveys,

- used for the comparison of similar socio-economic phenomena occurring in different locations,
- relevant,
- possible to use by multiple interdisciplinary users,
- free from human impact either on raw data or the final product,
- widely available,
- desired by its recipient.

The current economic and research situation, viewed also from the EU members states' economic perspective, has defined new goals for statistical information, whose fulfilment will guarantee the usefulness of public statistics and account for its funding.

The capital for producing statistical information is provided by the government, i.e. taxpayers are its sponsors and beneficiaries. However, using public money is only justified when the information meets high new standards set by its target users.

In any other case investing public money for production of irrelevant statistical information is not justified, and creates a socially and economically useless product.

The development of information technology, together with the growing popularity of the Internet in society, has helped to create the notion of the information society.

Typically, information society citizens are well-informed and aware of their rights, including the right for reliable information about the country's economy, living conditions, etc. The citizens, taxpayers, entrepreneurs and other vocational groups base their business and research activities on national and European statistics. There is a constant and rapid development of information technology, and the resulting possibilities for obtaining source data, transforming it into useful information and applicable knowledge, fluent transfer of the knowledge using voice, text or image, safe data storage and its availability through the Internet result in reliance of today's economies and not only on relevant information. [4]

The official statistics present the socio-economic situation through numbers. It is an important element of the information society, which becomes more important in light of the integrated management of EU member states.

Public statistics is perceived as the enterprise producing the strategic means for making decisions in European business and research. Thus, discussing the function and the scope of its restructurization is particularly required by management and research centres, which need access to high quality, reliable statistical information. The information is vital for decision-making processes and is essential for lowering the risk of managerial decisions and forecasts.

Thus, anywhere in the article where public statistics are mentioned, we are supposed to understand it as a public institution which is a state factory of statistical information, a monopoly realizing some processes of production of statistics whose aim is to copy the real social and economic situation of a country and its regions; the product of this monopoly has a public character and a high authority status according to which some decisions and some processes directly shaping the living conditions of citizens of our country and its tax- payers are made.

2. The notion of “information society” in professional literature

Official statistics can be seen as a producer providing information. This product is treated in professional literature in different ways, depending on the information type and its economics. [8] Other areas regarding information, widely discussed in the professional literature of information, are information systems and systems for management support (also the integrated ones), information infrastructure [7], information tools and the role of computerization in supporting companies' business activities.

Unfortunately, the idea of an “information society” is barely addressed in professional literature. This can lead to the misuse and free interpretation of the concept [1] and allows individuals understand it in different ways. Academics argue whether certain societies, including Poland, should or should not be described as "information". The ongoing discussion and the number of different opinions provoke further discussion of the subject.

The following attempts to define an information society have been suggested in professional literature:

According to Krzysztofiak and Szczepanski, an information society is the one in which "information is used in the economic, social, cultural and political life. It is a society which has extensive means for communication and processing of information, which in turn form the basis for GDP and guarantee the source of income for most citizens." [5]

Another source defines the information society as "the overall activity for the production, use, preservation, collection, storage and transmission of information." [3]

A case study by J. Nowak introduces the concept of the information society following the report from the First Congress of Polish Information Technology: "A revolution, an information-based technological development, which now allows us to process, store, retrieve and transmit information in any form – spoken, written and visual, regardless of time, distance and size, (...) the revolution that offers new, huge opportunities and (...) is changing the way we live and work." [6]

Goban-Klas and Sienkiewicz, describe the information society as a society which "has not only developed means for communication of information, but these measures are the basis of national income and the provision of maintenance for the majority of society." [6]

It can be concluded from the above definitions that the information society is a system created by people who deal with:

- **production of information** (research centres, education, researchers and specialists of various professions and industries such as statisticians, economists, financiers, etc.),
- **information application** (youth and students, analysts, scientists, entrepreneurs and employees of enterprises, public administrations, ordinary citizens),
- **information transfer** (media, libraries, publishing, the internet, printing, public statistics)
- **information infrastructure**, i.e.:
 - a) producers of measuring devices recording economic and social phenomena, which are treated as a source database used to deliver information and business knowledge handled by many different users;
 - b) providers of computer equipment, tools and technology;

- c) system designers, engineers, meteorologists, automation specialists, technologists, etc.

Thus, the building of the information society is a process based on the collective effort of its participants, and its success depends on:

- the intensity of this effort,
- the financial capacity of a society allowing for its transformation and development.

In the light of the above, it can be concluded that the process of shaping the new type of society defined by the word "information" is a strategy which involves collective effort and investment of funds. These elements are essential for reaching the strategic goal in a balanced and harmonious way. Any disharmony in the order of creating the information society should be avoided. The successful creation of the information society cannot be based upon only one variable, which appears to be the most advanced. On the contrary, all elements of the process have to be taken into consideration. Science in Poland can serve as a good example. It was described by J. Nowak as "well aware of the problems of the information society and sharing this knowledge with the Polish society since the 1980s." [6]

It is difficult however, when one looks at few scientific advances in this field, to treat Poland as the information society.

If a country's information infrastructure does not develop accordingly, i.e. some elements remain underdeveloped with respect to the others then we can talk about development disharmony of the information society. The research carried out in 2006 by the Central Statistical Office indicates that merely 1 percent of those polled confirm they use the Internet to buy medical services. This proves that the information society cannot function without a proper IT infrastructure. It is necessary for:

- e-administration, which facilitates direct contact between public officers and citizens,
- e-health system, which facilitates direct access to medical services (telemedicine) and meets society's needs in securing access to basic treatment,
- e-statistics and other electronic areas created as a part of the information society framework, allowing its users to access systems, process information remotely, and function in the network.

After studying professional literature on the subject, one can draw the following conclusion: the information society applies information technology to process data and to collect and deliver information in order to support making decisions in economy and research. Such an activity provides national income, is essential for a country's socio-economic development, and improves the living conditions of citizens.

In the light of the above, the role of public statistics appears critical. It is the basis for decision-making processes by the public administration and local governments, which in turn influence living conditions and development of the society, its taxpayers, entrepreneurs and other members of the information society. Improving the quality and production methods of statistical information is crucial for its users and beneficiaries as they are the recipients of decisions based upon these statistics.

3. Low quality information and the dominance of information market

The information market is shaped by several factors. According to professor J. Oleński, competition is not the only phenomenon responsible for crowding-out high quality information by low quality information. In practice, low quality, inferior and untrue information, which is also "superficial, generic, based on unknown methods and raw data sources, not available in regular cycles" becomes more popular and marginalizes the high-quality information, which is more expensive and takes longer to produce.

The real problem then, is not to obtain the information as such, but to obtain the high quality information which is rich in the actual information content. The desired information should meet the expectations of entrepreneurs and promote effective decision-making processes, reducing the risk of managers' operations, which perform in highly competitive global markets.

Socio-economic information delivered by "GUS" (the Central Statistical Office in Poland) seems to be superior because of its production, which:

- is based on the scientific approach and methods,
- happens in regular time intervals, which enable monitoring of developments such as the extrapolation of trends in socio-economic phenomena over time, etc.,
- is more trustworthy as it is prepared by a reliable institution.

However, due to the reasons below, statistical information has been losing its value and authority over time, and is no longer seen as trustworthy by society:

- statistical information is not varied enough and it does not reflect the actual expectations of its users, especially the local ones;
- production of statistical information is delayed with regards to its demand,
- the final product can be erroneous or incomplete due to the human factor.

"(...) EUROSTAT shows that the public debt figure is 57.5 percent, and there is no rug for it to be swept under (...), you heard the MPs (...) saying that the reason for replacing the Managing Director of GUS was so that the figure would be more than 54.9 percent – just like in a supermarket. This is where the recovery threshold starts and anything more than that is abolished by the constitution." [10]

This phenomenon is quite worrying, and it becomes even more so from the global crisis perspective, the economic problems of the European Union member states, and the general slowdown in the world's economy.

Today's local and global environment is shaped by dynamic socio-economic changes caused by changing possibilities, new preferences and goals set by local communities. This is why the statistics of the European Union member states should become more integrated. The new environment and the scope of research call for creation of the new integrated statistical system, which would reflect local socio-economic phenomena in the best possible way. It should be the foundation, the source of high-quality information, upon which citizens could base their business choices and management processes, integrate their business activities with local and remote partners, lower the risk of operation, and generally speaking, function in the system.

Nowadays, managers in Poland and the European Union expect statistical information to meet higher standards as far as information precision, accuracy and transparency are concerned. Mostly, the information has to be 100 percent credible and trustworthy. What is more, they demand quick

access to statistical information without any concern for the time required to produce it. The pace at which new phenomena occur is faster than the information production process, which renders it inadequate. Also, users expect to use statistical information to compare similar phenomena occurring in different, often remote areas. This means that contemporary socio-economic information expressed in numbers and in Esperanto has to be communicative, more than marginally clearly understood and interpreted, and its information value free from the influence of any interest groups. The information has to be precise and up-to-date in order to be used as a support tool. Otherwise, it might only be valuable for economic historians.

Thus, information producer has to meet the following criteria:

- flexible operation,
- understanding current market requirements and its participants,
- applying changes to the operation system in order to satisfy the needs of information users, not just its producer who assigns public funds to produce statistical information.

Similarly to other types of clients who buy certain products, recipients of statistical information expect a reliable service that fully meets their requirements. The society, in turn, expects statistics to truthfully reflect a country's economy, living conditions and other important information. Citizens, who pay for production of statistics, have the right to trust it, and it is a country's duty to fulfil this expectation.

4. Modernizing statistics production

Users of statistical information have different expectations. One of them is the integration of the existing European statistical systems, which presents new business opportunities. In order to meet such requirements, producing statistical information has to be modernized, and a different approach to organization of source data has to be implemented. The new organization should be based on the coordinated transfer of outsourced data, which constitutes the raw material for different statistical software.

Producers of statistical information face new challenges which force them to adjust their activities to clients' needs and seek more efficient methods of satisfying demands of multiple users. [12] This can be achieved by organizing the ever-changing source data in advance. After years of stagnation, producing and distributing high quality information has to be restructured and undergo a fundamental change.

Such a revolutionary change means no longer depending on expensive and inefficient mechanisms of producing statistical information solely by one entity.

The new way of delivering statistical information should employ new organizational solutions, i.e. outsource electronic data and transfer it from its source to the statistical system. "Outsourcing source data" means obtaining it from measuring devices installed on a source data storage unit, whose purpose is other than recording statistical information. The equipment in question has been set up for entirely different purposes, for example, monitoring and managing of particular machines and processes in a particular industry.

This method involves making use of records obtained by automated controlling systems which were installed and meant for something other than statistical purposes and, more importantly, funded from resources other than those assigned for production of statistical information. Naturally, gathering data which could be used for statistical purposes is not the primary role of the

equipment but only its extra capacity. It should be stressed that such activity is clearly beneficial for owners of the equipment as the recorded information can be used by a larger number of potential users and thus help to cover the cost of using the equipment.

As far as the public statistics are concerned, outsourcing and using data gathered by such systems means a constant, direct and expense-free access to high quality raw data source. The road construction industry can serve as a good example. The following parameters are recorded by automated traffic surveillance systems:

- average speed of vehicles;
- traffic density (the number of vehicles on a particular road stretch);
- traffic flow (the number of vehicles in a time unit);
- lane occupancy;
- vehicle type/category;
- peak hour ratio;
- vehicle weight;
- the road network efficiency ;
- the number and gender of passengers in a vehicle.

The above information, registered permanently by the surveillance equipment installed on roads, can be used to create and arrange statistical information required by many different users (the police, health services, insurance companies, the automotive industry, and bodies responsible for road investment, civil engineers and many others).

Another benefit of using traffic measuring equipment for obtaining statistical information is that money invested in the infrastructure by non-statistical entities can serve multiple users of different backgrounds.

As a result:

- investing in demand-based systems for gathering statistical information to satisfy the needs of only one user is no longer necessary;
- creating similar demand-based systems for gathering statistical information but with different recording algorithms, producing inconsistent and incompatible results is no longer necessary;
- regional funds are reassigned to other projects and put into better use;
- the information content of the data used by different professions improves considerably, making it suitable for the local and national government. Therefore, making strategic decisions based on the new type of quality information becomes less risky. This is especially true in the case of the management and investment of public funds.

Following the road construction example, it is common knowledge that most information storage devices today are electronic and automated. As a result, they are also a good source of economic and socio-economic information. Consequently, paying for gathering and processing data for different professions becomes more transparent. Another advantage of using the automated data gathering systems is eliminating the risk of producing inconsistent information, which may be dangerous. What is more, the amount of low quality information decreases. Using the automated data gathering systems to restructure the production of statistical information and as the new raw data source proves their undeniable potential and usefulness.

The most important advantages for statistical processes and the quality of information:

- (a) constant data recording in a particular area – impossible to achieve using traditional methods due to high cost,
- (b) recording, classification and publishing data according to pre-programmed criteria,
- (c) raw data is complete, up-to-date and available all the time, allowing for regular updates of statistical information, creation of detailed knowledge databases about a particular area, and identification of new trends,
- (d) the system records store accurate and flawless technical and socio-economic information,
- (e) data recording process is more systematic and secure when compared with the traditional approach; the information is easy to transfer electronically.

5. The advantages of outsourcing the production of statistics and the new approach to organizing source data

Outsourcing is an advanced form of work organization and management involving certain risk. The risk can be minimized if:

- only the work not involving the competence of the ordering institution is outsourced,
- the outsourced work is not directly connected to the economic process which is the subject of the study, nor can it jeopardize the process in any way,
- the outsourcer accepts full responsibility for their product,
- the laws regulating the outsourcing cooperation are fully observed by both parties. [12] [13]

In spite of the above, one should realize that outsourcing work in order to produce statistical information and obtain the source data has immense potential and numerous advantages:

1. The producer of statistics has access to the external recording infrastructure without covering the cost of its purchase, monitoring and maintenance.
2. The producer of statistics has access to a massive amount of recorded information fed continuously from the monitoring equipment, and thus providing complete data for the research being carried out (which would otherwise be impossible due to labour costs).
3. Recording, filing, segregation and classification of data are performed automatically without the need of supervision.
4. The collected electronic data is unbiased and free from any human influence (which might be the case when data is gathered from fieldwork or by tele-pollsters). Such reliable source data can be then processed in order to deliver high-quality and complete statistical information.
5. Unlike data obtained from fieldwork, the outsourced information produced by electronic recording equipment has a precisely defined margin of error.
6. Considerable savings on labour costs and quality control of pollsters working in a particular area, e.g. measuring traffic intensity in border zones for the purposes of training, health and safety, insurance, allowance, absence, and holiday. The same is true for tele-pollsters researching other phenomena.
7. Since the electronic recording equipment is fully automated, the collected data is available without any delay, allowing its user to have instantaneous access and processing.
8. Since the recording equipment is installed in many different locations, it provides a considerable amount of data, which in turn can be used for making comparisons. Measuring parameters such as traffic intensity, the number of passenger cars, the number of large goods

vehicles according to load capacity can be analyzed, hourly, weekly, quarterly, monthly, annually, or compared between seasons of the year, public holidays etc.

9. The cost of outsourcing statistical information can be expressed as a lump sum, which considerably simplifies budget planning and lowers fixed costs such as employing pollsters whose work is no longer required.
10. The scope of the outsourced information has no negative impact on the interest of the institution providing the statistical information as it cannot make use of its key competence. Its sole purpose is to assist in supplying the superior quality source data which is impossible to obtain using existing tools.

Using outsourced raw data by an institution providing statistical information can be compared to using software provided by an external organization. The producer of statistics is responsible for the content, research methodology, and the appropriate data coding of the statistical information. This is a guarantee that the source of the information remains anonymous and confidential – according to the laws regulating public statistics. [15] [16]

This type of information outsourcing is particularly appropriate for administration, obliged to provide society and taxpayers with reliable and professional information. It is the undeniable duty of institutions producing statistical information to produce statistics of the highest quality and to rationalize the cost of its production.

6. Conclusion

Restructuring the statistics production process is necessary so that:

- current expectations of its domestic and European recipients are fulfilled,
- public administration decisions are concise, and there is synergy between the results of these decisions and their efficiency in terms of meeting the needs of society and solving problems of its citizens,
- the development of the information society is actively supported.

Outsourcing information in order to create the new source of raw data and restructuring the statistics production process are necessary for providing the new quality expected from statistical information. As a result, producers of statistical information must cooperate with external units, which:

- have access to automated archives of raw data obtained through the use of a recording infrastructure, and
- administrators of the national electronic registers.

The existing system of statistics production, which limits the role of local statistical offices to the mere execution of the decisions made by the Central Statistical Office is continually lowering the quality of the information. Its further functioning can be seen as negative, affecting entrepreneurs, the country's economy, public finance, and society, including the information society.

The first stage of modernization of the public statistics was successful. Paper documents were substituted with electronic media, local statistical offices became more specialized, and the Agricultural Census and the National Census were effectively performed. The next stage, however,

was the regression. Thus, it has become apparent, that the modernization of the public statistics system performed so far is still insufficient and cannot meet the requirements set by its users.

Further efficient restructuring and modernization of the statistic production process should involve the external electronic raw data filing mechanisms, including automated recording, storing and processing solutions. The example of the road construction industry proves that outsourcing information from their automated data recording systems can be successfully and rationally used to assist the production of official statistics.

Contemporary process of production of reliable statistics is determined by the engagement of automatic control systems as recorders and generators of original data directly from the sources of their origin which high efficiency and essential utility for these processes can be shown on the example of only one among many existing systems of automatic control of road transport. Limited publishing abilities of this publication do not allow us to present any analogical utility on examples of some other automatic control systems. Considering these facts, the author used an example of a measuring system of road transport which, according to her, seems to present in a particularly clear and picturesque way a high utility of automatic control functioning as a generator of new quality of original data for the process of production of statistics and in the function of restructurization of the very process of statistics production which, in a crucial way, opens this process for its rationalization through activity supported by outsourcing.

Independently of some indubitable values of automatic control systems and outsourcing transfer of data from these systems to the process of production of statistics, we have to consider some drawbacks, among others risk of implementation of substantial solutions.

To this sphere of interest contribute:

- level of innovation and lack of national implementation experience of these kinds of technological and organizational activities, also outsourcing,

- necessity of creating informative systems, compatible, equipped with some requested by law protections which are able to transfer individual, protected, original data and take them over through equally compatible system of data processing and production of statistics,

- necessity of financing of subject innovation together with allowing constant compatibility of programs with non-problematic functioning with accompanying constant safety and protection of individual original data, -etc. Specification of some examples of drawbacks only of new systems of functioning of public statistics cannot state an argument to not to take this kind of challenge. The aim of this specification is to stimulation of awareness of the fact that the whole venture has systemic character not an event activity. It requires a priority tusk status for its effectiveness in the field of distribution of public money, adequate to high role of statistic information played in decisive processes resulting in level of living of citizens of a country and its tax- payers.

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"SPOŁECZEŃSTWO INFORMACYJNE W DETERMINACJI REGRESU STATYSTYKI PUBLICZNEJ"

Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na strategicznym podejściu do realizacji restrukturyzacji statystyki publicznej.

Potrzebę fundamentalnej przebudowy systemu statystyki publicznej w tym implementacji nowego podejścia do organizacji źródeł danych pierwotnych oraz zaangażowania outsourcingu do translokacji danych pierwotnych do systemów statystycznych autorka uzasadnia siłą wpływu statystyki publicznej na kształtowanie społeczeństwa informacyjnego, usługową funkcją statystyki publicznej wobec społeczeństwa, obywatela i podatnika, a także prawem obywatela rozumianego również jako obywatela – przedsiębiorcy do dostępu do wysokiej jakości informacyjnej publicznych statystyk.

Autorka zwraca uwagę na destrukcyjny wpływ regresu transformacyjnego sektora informacyjnego państwa na kształtowanie społeczeństwa informacyjnego.

Artykuł dyskutuje bardzo aktualną problematykę. Istotną z punktu widzenia społecznego oraz z perspektywy uwarunkowań skutecznego gospodarowania która to skuteczność jest priorytetem dla gospodarujących podmiotów w ogóle, a w warunkach kryzysu gospodarki wspólnotowej i globalnej staje się zagadnieniem ważkim w szczególności.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczeństwo informacyjne, restrukturyzacja systemu statystyki publicznej, obywatel, podatnik, regres, system informacji statystycznej, informacja, jakość informacji gospodarczej, rynek informacyjny, outsourcing danych pierwotnych, automatyczne systemy pomiarowe

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