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Topic (ii): Sketching out the future of statistical publications

OUTLINING A FUTURE STATISTICAL PUBLICATION: FEWER NUMBERS, MORE ANALYSIS

Supporting Paper

Submitted by Statistics Finland, Finland¹

I. INTRODUCTION

This presentation aims to enlighten Statistics Finland's new product development procedure and its first results by presenting one 'pilot case' of this new procedure; namely revising the concept of the *Ten-Year Review* (in Finnish: Kymmenvuotiskatsaus), a printed compendium-type publication that is currently under the product development process. I will focus on the following points:

- (1) First, how Statistics Finland's new product development model has worked as a driving force in developing the concept of the *Ten-Year Review* but also in improving its overall production process, and
- (2) Second, how this product development procedure was the starting point for the overall reassessment of the concept of the *Ten-Year Review* and consequently inspired our team into the innovative process of outlining the picture of a future statistical (print) publication.

Therefore one idea of the presentation is to reassess the role and task of the printed statistical publication in the Internet age. As the latest statistical data are most conveniently accessible via the web site, it is difficult to see that the key idea of a print publication, particularly of compendium type, would be publishing plain statistical data. On the contrary, the focus of the future statistical print publication would rather be in the field of analysing the trends and causal connections shown by the statistical data – along with a user-friendly and illustrative graphic presentation.

II. CHANGES IN OPERATING ENVIRONMENT OF STATISTICS PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION

Changes in the operating environment bring such new challenges to statistics production as:

- ?? Structural changes in society and the economy
- ?? Increasing statistical needs of the EU and regulation changes
- ?? Information technology, electronic transactions, network services

¹ Prepared by Maija Metsä-Pauri, Statistics Finland (maija.metsa-pauri@stat.fi).

- ?? Information overflow and visibility of official statistics
- ?? Tougher competition on information markets
- ?? Diversification of customers' information needs

These challenges are also encountered in publishing and disseminating statistical data. First of all, profound structural socio-economic changes require more in-depth analysis and interpretation. This is a challenge especially for the print statistical publication of compendium type as well as for statistical periodicals and magazines.

Secondly, the development in the ever-changing field of information technology, particularly electronic transactions and network services, mean great challenges – as the competition on information markets inevitably gets tougher – but also bring substantial opportunities for dissemination via network services. The information overflow as well as tougher competition on information markets create big challenges for the visibility of official statistics.

Finally, diversification of customers' information needs is, besides a challenge, also a big opportunity for statistical dissemination. Turning this into an advantage requires sounding carefully different customers' information needs based on segmentation of customers. Furthermore, making the most of it necessitates a highly developed product development and marketing strategy.

While these considerable changes in the operating environment constitute challenges to dissemination of statistics, they also offer new opportunities for developing new publication formulas.

III. THE PRODUCTS ARE CHANGING – OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW PUBLICATION FORMULAS

Before the Internet, the primary method for statistical offices to provide data was through printed publications (some statistical offices also supplied data on CD-ROMs), whereas nowadays products can be electronic versions of paper documents, electronic-only documents, tables, databases, spreadsheets, and so on.

In 2003 new strategies were established for communication and network services of Statistics Finland. According to these new strategies the web site – or network services – is seen as the primary dissemination medium of Statistics Finland. The share of electronic dissemination is expected to increase quite rapidly at the expense of print publications. Particularly monthly and quarterly produced publications, above all mainly table publications, will most likely be replaced by electronic publications.

However, such compendium-type statistical – or statistics-based – publications as the *Statistical Yearbook*, the *Ten-Year Review* (see Section 5) and magazines/periodicals – containing analysis and interpretation of trends and topical questions – are predicted to survive as print publications, although they will probably be linked to the web via their own web-based services.

Today, as focus is shifting from just presenting numbers to providing words and text to explain the numbers and to contain more context and analysis of the numbers, data are simply no longer enough: customers want information. More and more customers also expect, in addition to analysis and context, tools for understanding these socio-economic changes and trends shown by statistical time series.

One of the operational principles of Statistics Finland's communication strategy in all dissemination – in electronic dissemination as well as in print publications, is *readability and clarity*. The aim is to avoid statistical (professional) terms and rather to explain the "picture" shown by statistics so that users are able to interpret the data as well as make their own conclusions. All product development, in the field of statistical dissemination and publishing, moving to this direction is therefore on the right track.

The product development of the *Ten-Year Review* (see Section 5) meets this principle as it aims to promote the use of statistics by providing, besides numbers, also words and text to explain them, and furthermore more context and analysis of them.

IV. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURE OF STATISTICS FINLAND

The new product development procedure of Statistics Finland was initiated last year by Statistics Finland's Information Services Unit. The development process of the *Ten-Year Review* served as a "pilot case" while testing this new product development process recently adopted by Statistics Finland.

Key definitions and ideas of the product development procedure (adopted at Statistics Finland):

Product development, as we see it, covers all stages of product development: from developing the product (idea, concept) to launching it as well as following closely the first steps of its life cycle (following marketing, customer feedback, etc.)

Products and services can be printed or electronic publications, databases made for dissemination, CD-ROMs or comparable electronic products or distinct entities of web sites or service systems (in case they are not directly requested by a customer or more than ten customers are expected for them).

A *new product* refers to a product that is new to Statistics Finland either in terms of content or its technical solution.

The recently approved product development procedure

- ?? aims to support the product development process by providing a specified assessment form and procedure to help gathering quite rapidly views, representing different perspectives, on the potential of carrying out the product plan;
- ?? is expected to help to communicate the product plan to a larger audience (inside the organisation) and to encourage extensive and diverse discussion around the target group (inside the organisation) in order to find the best co-operation teams and to support the co-ordination between different but closely related projects;
- ?? aims to assure that the plans for marketing, allocation of resources and technical solutions, closely related to the product plan, are made carefully.

The traditional *Ten-Year Review* was a statistical compilation covering Finland's economic and social development during the past ten years. A printed publication contained tables with time series statistics, graphs and brief overviews or summaries on each topic. A printed publication was accompanied by a CD-ROM containing all the statistics. It was published by Statistics Finland in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. Over the years the *Ten-Year Review* has been, together with the *Statistical Yearbook of Finland*, either the best-seller or one of the best-selling products published by Statistics Finland.

When comparing the concept of the traditional *Ten-Year Review* to similar print publications produced by statistical institutes of different countries, the closest "relative product" is found in Statistics Denmark's portfolio, namely "*Statistisk Tiåroversigt*".

The traditional *Ten-Year Review* was also related to the *Statistical Yearbook of Finland*: they are both printed publications aimed at a large audience. Even though they are still related, due to the product development of the *Ten-Year Review* their concepts and profiles will actually be quite different. As the

Statistical Yearbook of Finland represents a table print publication with a long history and firm position in Statistics Finland's publishing strategy, the focus of developing the *Ten-Year Review* is moving to a different direction: increasing text commenting and analysing the ten-year trends.

V. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT OF THE *TEN-YEAR REVIEW* AS A PILOT CASE

The development and production process of the *Ten-Year Review* was launched last year by "testing" the new concept via the new product development procedure created at Statistics Finland's Information Services Unit. The new concept plan was approached from different angles closely related to the product plan (such as the target group and marketing perspective as well from the standpoint of resources and technical solutions). As the product development plan of the *Ten-Year Review* was shown green light at the end of the procedure, the product development project was initiated in September 2004. The project is currently underway and the renewed *Ten-Year Review* is planned to be issued in September 2005.

The driving force of this product development has been to improve the quality of the *Ten-Year Review*. Profound socio-economic changes have taken place during the last ten years; consequently the aim of the renewed *Ten-Year Review* is to look into all the key areas of the economy and society by increasing the amount of more detailed analysis and interpretation of the time series data. Therefore the leading idea of this new concept is to provide the customer value added in the form of in-depth – but readable, close to 'journalistic style' – articles contributed by specialists on different statistical topics. The editing work – the revision of the articles and, if necessary, even rewriting them – aims to make sure that the aspired understandable 'journalistic style' is carried out throughout the text.

The increasing of analysis will take place at the expense of publishing mainly numbers. Instead of presenting detailed statistics in a print publication, the idea is to show – along with the text – ten-year trends via intelligible graphs. However, the paper publication will be supplemented with a bigger volume of more detailed time series data on a CD-ROM.

Based on customer surveys, carried out in 2001, the readers of the *Ten-Year Review* are mainly interested in statistics on macro-economic development and data related to the business environment and entrepreneurship in general. The customer feedback, the deep global changes in the business environment and the marketing standpoint were the key factors that led, over the product development process, to include in the print publication also a special theme on *entrepreneurship*. Therefore some statistical topics, more or less closely related to the theme, will be consciously somewhat "over-represented".

The revised *Ten-Year Review* will contain the following (statistical) topics:

- ?? **Demographic statistics:** population projection, ageing, foreigners in Finland, etc.
- ?? **Economic statistics:** economic indicators, economic structures, regional development, productivity and competitiveness, consumer prices, etc.
- ?? **Statistics on government finance:** taxation, etc.
- ?? **Statistics on enterprises and entrepreneurship:** forms of entrepreneurship, profitability, investments, the role of SMEs, business environment, etc.
- ?? **Statistics on business trends by economic activity:** manufacturing; trade, transport and travel; services; construction, farm economy and forest industry; foreign trade, etc.
- ?? **Statistics on enterprises, social capital and society:** education ("*Measuring social capital*"); research, science and technology; information society; innovations ("*The promise of biotechnology*"); labour market, working conditions and wages; consumption and salaries; financing and insurance business; energy and the environment, etc.
- ?? **Justice:** loan arrangements, bankruptcies ("*The least corrupted country in the world*"), etc.

Furthermore, the *Ten-Year Review* will take a look at Finland's journey during the last ten years in the European Union by presenting an overview on the socio-economic impacts of Finland's EU membership and offering comparable data on Finland and other EU countries (EU-15).

Finally, one key factor leading to the product development was to improve and rationalise the overall production process of the publication. Previously the whole production – including planning the contents, collecting data on the chosen statistical themes, producing tables containing time series data and graphs, writing the overviews or summaries on each topic – was carried out by one full-time employee based at the Information Services Unit, whereas today the production of this renewed concept is based on co-operation between the Project Manager of the product development project for the *Ten-Year Review* (based also at the Information Services Unit) and representatives from different statistical units.

This new concept aims to reach for the ideal end product containing contributions from the most competent specialists on each topic from Statistics Finland as well as from different research institutes and universities in Finland, based on a long history for this kind of close and for both co-partners beneficial co-operation between Statistics Finland and various institutes.

If the output of this co-operation, in the form of the end product, is promising from both the customer and producer perspectives, we look forward to publishing *Ten-Year Review* every second year with a new theme.

For more details about the product development and production process of the *Ten-Year Review*, please contact Project Manager **Jaakko Autio** (jaakko.autio@stat.fi).

VI. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the field of developing statistical print publications and outlining their future, the leading idea is to try to answer to the demand of customers and to improve the usefulness of a statistical publication. However, when the focus is on improving a **print** publication, even more important is to offer customers value added in comparison with what can be offered via the web service of Statistics Finland.

Furthermore, the changes in the operating environment indicating growing need for more analysis and interpretation of the data and the positive feedback from customers inspire and encourage us to improve also our statistical *magazines* (statistical magazine "*Tietoaika*" and *Economic Trends* periodical) based on the same leading idea: providing customers value added in comparison with what is more easily available via the web service: in brief, fewer numbers and more analysis.

Therefore in the near future we will improve the content of our statistical magazines by combining the editor resources and focusing on producing one high-quality magazine instead of those two magazines referred above. The new print magazine (to be issued 7–8 times per year) – containing web-based service providing statistics – will be launched in October 2005.

Finally, one aspect when looking to the future, is the aim to "teach the users of statistics to read and understand the figures". However, implementing the idea of improving the quality of a statistical compendium – or statistical magazine – by providing the customers with more in-depth, but at the same time journalistic style and readable, articles contributed by specialists calls for good storytelling skills besides willingness and motivation for co-operation by competent specialists on different statistical topics.