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Topic (iv): How to integrate statistics from different sources and subject-matter areas to produce analysis that would be of interest to a wide audience

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF LUXEMBOURG –
A SYMBIOSIS FOR PROMOTIONAL AND PEDAGOGIC PURPOSES**

Contributed Paper

Submitted by STATEC, Luxembourg¹

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1. Introduction

In 1995, Statec was asked by the Government to contribute to the event “Luxembourg, cultural capital of Europe”.

As the financing was provided by the government, we decided to launch an ambitious project in order to create a high quality product. Thus, the idea for the “Economic Portrait of Luxembourg” was born, a publication that provided a systematic presentation of the demography, the labour market and the economy of Luxembourg.

In 2002, we decided to issue a new edition, increasing the description and analysis of the social aspects of our country.

The economic and social portrait of Luxembourg (hereafter referred to as “portrait”) is a co-production between three organisms. It has certainly been an initiative of STATEC, but very soon perceived as a collective ambition, especially by senior staff members of the government press and information service and the ministry of foreign affairs.

Therefore, the common aim of the project was to create a tool that would satisfy a twofold need:

Presenting on one hand a realistic picture of our country’s economy and social system, and on the other hand, producing an instrument for promotional purposes.

2. A pure promotional tool?

Although the publication was co-financed by two government bodies, the editorial work as well as the selection of data and indicators was completely under the responsibility of Statec.

¹ Prepared by Guy Zacharias, Head of Information STATEC (guy.zacharias@statec.etat.lu).

The editorial board assiduously followed the rules of neutrality and objectivity, and did not hesitate to show the one or other more shady side of a generally very positive picture.

3. What level of analysis in a publication intended for the general public?

One main challenge was to produce a comprehensive publication for the public at large, also respecting scientific strictness.

STATEC, the Central Bank, the University and the public research centres edit regularly publications intended for specialists.

This portrait however is intended for non-specialists. It would be overdone to pretend that a statistical, an economic publication aims at the “man in the street”. The portrait is definitely a synthetic document for skilled users, providing a complete overview of the structural development of the economy and society of Luxembourg during the last years.

This aim was achieved by the following means:

4. The ways and means

a) The Chief editor

A chief editor (head of library – a historian) was nominated to chair the editorial board. He was also the main author of the publication, he developed the concept, selected the main indicators, he integrated the different written contributions and supervised the contents and the translation of the text.

b) The Editorial board

was formed by senior statisticians of the economic department, the social statistics division, the external economic relations statistics division and the head of the information department. The task of the members of the board was to edit the chapters relating to their subject area and to contribute to the general analysis and explanation of indicators and concepts used in the publication.

c) Collecting and comparing indicators

It was not our intention to publish a statistical compendium on Luxembourg, but to focus on specific topics such as factors of growth, competitiveness, productivity, living conditions... Instead of adopting a systematic approach, we highlighted essentially the most significant mutations in the fields of demography, employment, productive structures, and focussed on outstanding evolutions, the most dynamic sectors and those in decline.

It was clear from the start, that the indicators for a thorough presentation of Luxembourg’s economy and society would not all be available inhouse. Thus, we were partly dependent on the cooperation of external bodies, including mainly the Ministries (environment, finance, social security, economy), the Central Bank and public research centres. This cooperation was excellent, mainly because our requests were short and very specific, rather than submerging them with large questionnaires.

Another challenge was to examine and analyse the indicators published by international organisations (UNO, Eurostat, European Commission, ILO etc.), to put them in the right context and to explain their concept to our readers. This was an unprecedented task for us, and I believe, a very valuable contribution to the project.

d) Analysis and discussion

The comments and conclusions of the different authors were discussed in the meetings of the editorial board, trying to find a consensus between various perspectives including that of the economist, the sociologist and the disseminator. This was the most interesting and fruitful part of the job, where everybody learned from one another.

e) Benchmarking

The main concern of the editor was to put the indicators in an international context. The best information is useless if you can’t compare it. Moreover, if you want to have a benchmark, you need comparable and harmonized information of your “counterparts”.

On the one hand, we tried to provide objective and comparable information on wealth, living conditions, competitiveness so to rebut some common prejudices and clichés about Luxembourg (small but rich, a fiscal paradise, no social conflicts etc.). On the other hand, as the publication was also intended for economic prospecting (especially for Luxembourg's board of economic development), we were eager to emphasise the strengths and the attractiveness of Luxembourg to new enterprises and investors.

f) Explaining the concepts

Besides these more illustrative and promotional objectives, we also wanted to create a pedagogic publication, that would bring our information closer to the public at large and serve for educational purposes.

Thus, we provided concise explanations of basic concepts, custom rules and routines in statistics, correlation of phenomena.

We also took care to advise our audience against the traps of “ranking” and “benchmarking”, especially concerning the fancy use of performance and human development indicators.

5. Final remark

The “Economic and social portrait of Luxembourg” is neither a real “story”, nor written in a journalistic style. However, it already satisfied our most “holy” striving: Bringing our information to the user!

Some technical information:

Four linguistic versions: French, German, English, Spanish

Number of pages: 196

Number of copies printed: 9000 (of which: 3200 FR; 2700 EN; 2200 D; 900 ES)

Number of copies disseminated (11 November 2003): 4100

Production time: 18 month

Direct costs (lay out, translation, printing): 100 000 EUR