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(Geneva, 17-19 May 2004)

Topic (iv): Annual review of the website on IT practices in national statistical offices

REVIEW OF THE *WEBSITE ON IT PRACTICES IN NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES*

Invited Paper

Submitted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[1]

Summary and questions for discussion

The site is up and running. Functionality is reasonable but could be improved, and should if we carry on with it Problem no. 1: Very little activity; limited contents; little use.

1. How to gain critical mass and momentum? Merge with other sites, e.g. AMRADS?
2. If so, where could the site be hosted? OECD, JCR/AMRADS, EU/CIRCA?
3. Where could resources for transfer and development come from?
4. Which management structure could be conductive to promoting activity: Theme managers? Overall management?
5. If no solution, it is suggested to close the site down.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Website on IT Practices in National Statistical Offices was set up in the summer of 2002, following a decision of the Joint UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Integrated Statistical Information Systems and Related Matters (ISIS) held in Geneva in 2002 and with strong support from the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and its Bureau. The purpose of the site is to enhance the exchange of good practices, methods and tools among statistical offices.

2. OECD volunteered to develop and maintain the site as a low budget activity. It was reviewed for the first time at the Joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on the management of statistical information systems (MSIS) in 2003. The main recommendation from that review was “getting more content on the website”.

[1] Prepared by Lars Thygesen (lars.thygesen@oecd.org).

II. STATUS

3. The site http://cs3-hq.oecd.org/scripts/stats/itp/ has been active since mid-2002 and has not been changed much since then. It is integrated into the OECD Statistics Portal but is not one of the most publicized features of that portal.

4. It presents itself as a matrix, the Zachman Framework, into which information suppliers should fit their contributions. Contributors deliver a short description with links to relevant material, and this is uploaded by a moderator at OECD.

5. The site contains a search machine that offers full text search of the whole site. At present, the search engine has a small functionality problem <maybe we should remove that before May?> The site further contains a functioning Discussion Forum.

III. PROBLEMS

A. Critical mass and momentum

6. So far, the content of the site is limited. Not very many offices have contributed their good practices, and the activity has dropped to about zero since early 2003. The site has not been used very much either. This can be seen from the Forum, which only has 3 entries from outside. The contents and the use are mutually interdependent. It is an “evil circle”.

B. Usability and functionality

7. The site looks neat and is well functioning within its limits. But a number of improvements could be made. There is a need for more ways of presenting the contents, e.g. browsing through a hierarchy of subjects or searching through a filter. There is a need for an upload mechanism for documents. The forum should be enhanced with a mail-back facility to the one who originally posted a question or participated in a discussion. Performance should be strengthened.

C. How can we make it a (*the*) place where experts and managers from statistical offices will go and look for good references?

8. It is our belief that the problem is not in the technical matters but in the content and the use. We need to find a way to create a broader basis which would make it worthwhile going to the site when in need of knowledge on best practices.

9. One measure could be to broaden the scope of the site, e.g., to best practices in official statistics, not limiting ourselves to IT (which is anyway a strange limitation since IT goes together with methods and management).

10. Another measure would be actively working for publicity, making the site well known by statisticians. This could take place in conferences and meetings (CES, ISI, IAOS, etc.), and on websites.

D. How can we get resources

11. It is a problem that the activity so far has to go on without any organization supporting it financially. This poses serious limits to the commitment, especially in the long run. Medium or major investment in, e.g., enhanced usability can hardly be done.

E. How should the management structure be set up?

12. It seems appropriate to have Theme managers to create and monitor activity within their theme (e.g. time series analysis, editing methods and tools, dissemination databases). Managers would be appointed on the basis of their knowledge, contact network, and willingness to put an effort into it.

13. There is a need for an overall kind of management, too, overseeing the whole activity, encouraging theme managers, especially if themes are dying, and if necessary propose a shift of theme managers. This could be organized in connection with an existing international forum (which one?). Managers would benefit from tools in the site, offering statistics on activities and alerting, if activity levels drop.

IV. OPTIONS WITH SOME PROS AND CONS

14. It is obvious that in order for a website of this type to be successful and thus be seen as a value for money to suppliers as well as recipients of practices, a special effort has to be made to generate momentum.

A. Continue as before, develop missing functionality

15. Development resources would have to be spent. This would not be enough to generate momentum. Publicity activities would have to be undertaken (e.g. the MSIS Road Show?)

B. Merge with other best practices website(s)

16. **AMRADS** - It has been proposed to merge the site with the website on statistical practices established under the AMRADS project, a 5th Framework Programme European research project. These projects stopped at the end of 2003 but their site, containing some 300 useful documents on practices still exists, maintained by JRC in Milan. This site has had similar problems to the MSIS one, finding it difficult to gather momentum. Perhaps merging would help.

17. **Others -** There may be other best practices sites, probably suffering more or less from the same weakness. On the EU repository CIRCA it can be seen that there exists a “Good Practices Group (GPG) of Eurostat” with “the task to identify, disseminate and promote current good practices in Eurostat”

18. If it is decided to merge the site, it should be agreed where to host the joint site, and based on which system. One could envisage at least 3 alternatives:

> **OECD,** building on the present platform, which would then have to be amended to avoid the problems mentioned above;
> **AMRADS**, maybe hosted by JRC, building on the system built for AMRADS which would also have to be improved (http://amrads.jrc.cec.eu.int);
> **CIRCA**, the EU document repository. (http://forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/dsis/Home/main), a robust site with good functionality and much activity.

19. No matter which solution is chosen, resources would have to be provided to adjust the site and transmit documents from one site to another. Also, publicity activities would have to be undertaken.

C. Close down the site

20. If the necessary momentum cannot be generated, the site should be closed down.

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