

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion

Third meeting of the 2007/2008 Bureau
Geneva, 12-13 February 2008

Item 2b of the Provisional
Agenda

COMMENTS ON RAPPORTEUR REPORT FOR CULTURAL STATISTICS

Note prepared by UNESCO

INTRODUCTION

1. The ECE/CES secretariat has kindly offered to let UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) share some of its views on the topic of culture statistics to complement those expressed in the paper ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/3.
2. UIS wholeheartedly supports the paper and thanks its authors, Statistics Finland, and other ECE/CES members for the interest shown in this topic. Our comments here should be seen as some ideas to add more weight to the recommendations of the report and not as any form of criticism.

UNESCO'S APPROACH TO CULTURAL STATISTICS

3. The UNESCO Division of Statistics used to collect a wide range of cultural data, but both developing countries and donors questioned the credibility of this data. UIS was created to address this fundamental issue. A major international meeting on culture statistics was organised by UIS in late 2002, but given the known difficulties in conceptualising and measuring culture it took until 2005 for a new culture statistics programme to be launched at UIS. While there are many different views on culture it is clear that a way forward had to be found.

4. There are a number of global drivers for renewed interest in culture and cultural statistics. They include:
- globalisation;
 - the digital revolution;
 - the debate on 'cultural diversity';
 - a growing consciousness of the link between development, poverty alleviation and culture;
 - increased recognition of indigenous rights, 'traditional knowledge' and the 'intangible heritage'.

UNESCO is currently revising its Framework for cultural statistics that was developed in 1986 to take into account aspects of these developments that can be measured.

5. Since renewing its cultural statistics programme, UIS has conducted the following international surveys:
- 2005 Newspapers;

- 2006 Broadcast (Radio and TV);
- 2007 Cinema;
- 2007 Libraries (Latin America and the Caribbean).

6. In addition to its survey activities, UIS has pursued analysis of others' data. In 2000 and 2005 UIS published a report on international flows of cultural goods. UIS has contributed analysis to the UNESCO 2007 report 'World Heritage; challenges for the Millennium' and published a report on 'Measuring Linguistic Diversity on the Internet' for the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in 2005.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF MEASURING CULTURE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

7. The new cultural statistics framework will be non-proscriptive, flexible, extensible and pragmatic. The framework will not ask that every country present data for every cultural domain, but where a country does collect data it will ensure that it will be internationally comparable. It is built upon the international classifications used most widely within national statistical offices in developing countries – the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) and the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), together with the more rarely used Central Product Classification (CPC). This maximises the potential for using existing surveys to collect cultural statistics, while keeping costs low.

8. The framework aims to cover both economic and social views of culture. Though it begins with industrial classifications, it will emphasise 'participation', education, traditional knowledge and other social dimensions of culture. It will be extensible in that it will allow countries with few resources to adopt a basic set of statistics while indicating how countries with more resources can pursue priority areas in more depth.

9. In the EU, cultural statistics, though still suffering from a lack of resources and long term strategic development, are much more advanced than in developing countries. Many developing country approaches to cultural statistics are dominated by received views on the nature of culture. It is one of UIS' major priorities to obtain a more direct view from developing countries as to what they see as the key dimensions of culture which need to be measured.

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION OF CULTURAL STATISTICS

10. A number of international organizations are working on different aspects of cultural statistics as set out in the report including WIPO, UNCTAD, UNEP, and UNESCO. At the regional level one might mention the EU, Convenio Andres Bello, MERCOSUR, and most recently OECD in a one year project. UIS agrees that this work has not always been well coordinated or communicated. Inevitably each organization concerned approaches the subject from its own particular point of view either in how it defines 'culture' or the statistical method it uses to measure it.

11. The most significant recommendation of the report is for an international coordination meeting. Given the disparate nature of the cultural statistics, we believe a truly 'universal' meeting would take massive resources and planning.

12. Perhaps the breadth of the problem is best expressed in two dimensions; interest groups and regions. Interest groups would include ministries of culture (where they exist), NSOs, and industry/professional bodies such as IFACCA (Arts), IFLA (Libraries), IPA (Publishers), IDA (Design), etc. Different interests of different countries or different regions must be included, ensuring that smaller countries with the least resources have the opportunity to be heard.

13. UIS has tried to coordinate views and inform the wide range of interested intergovernmental, regional, professional and national bodies. In February 2008, UIS has just launched a formal global consultation of all interested parties on the Framework for Cultural Statistics, and encourages all members of ECE/CES to take part.

14. Incorporating all these different voices into one conference seems a huge challenge to avoid creating confusion and to structure it in such a way that everyone can be heard. In our experience regional conferences offer the best way to bring together a unified voice, especially perhaps in the area of culture where regional identities are one dimension of a rich tapestry of identities and practices.

15. UIS is intending to present the completed Framework for Culture Statistics to UNESCO bodies in 2009. The Framework as constituted will require much further specification to derive statistical indicators, and as indicated above has intentionally been designed to be as flexible as possible. In view of the major resources required to mount a global coordination meeting, the need to encourage developing countries, and the further specification required for the Framework of Cultural Statistics, UIS suggests consideration of the Framework for Cultural Statistics at an initial regional European meeting in 2008 and prolonged discussion of implementation issues at future EU meetings in 2009 and later.

16. UIS is very conscious of a European approach to culture statistics and the extent to which many ECE countries have critical experience in their development. UIS can always be relied upon to help support initiatives in culture statistics in the various European-wide institutions and at OECD. As the paper presented here makes clear, there are so few people working on cultural statistics that it is impossible for any one agency to do all the work and partnership is the only way forward.

17. UIS would therefore propose a series of regional conferences to be held over the coming years which would serve to clarify both conceptions of culture and associated measurement issues within countries' policy constraints and priorities. With few resources and manpower to work on culture statistics, it is only by staying close to countries' priorities that we will obtain the support of governments and be seen to be meeting their needs.

THE UN STATISTICS COMMISSION

18. UIS envisages National Statistics Offices having a large role in the implementation of the new Framework of Culture Statistics, especially as it seeks to take advantage of existing statistical instruments. The UN Statistical Commission would thus be an important arena for discussion of the Framework. This discussion should take place in parallel to that in UNESCO itself where normative instruments are considered by UNESCO's Member States at the General Conference and Executive Board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

19. UIS thanks ECE/CES for its interest in this area and suggests the following observations. ECE/CES should:

- invite UIS to present the draft culture framework at a plenary session at its conference in June to allow further discussion;
- encourage member states to read the UIS Framework for Cultural Statistics and send their comments to UIS;
- support a set of regional conferences to discuss the UIS Framework of Cultural Statistics both by directly holding a regional EU meeting and by appealing to EU Member States to provide financial support for such meeting in other regions;
- pass a report of decisions on this matter to the UN Statistics Commission.

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