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Adaptability of Polish Official Statistics information system in terms of crisis

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1. Functioning of information market

1. In the real economy, entities of market, public as well as non-governmental sectors take decisions in a situation of uncertainty, what remains in relation to incomplete information on economic environment, and to asymmetric information in particular. If we assume time to be the main classification criterion, we can enumerate several kinds of uncertainty, namely uncertainty of the future, but also of the present, which can be further subdivided into uncertainty of market conditions and uncertainty of behaviours. It is apparent for each entity which acts in a rational manner that collecting information can be of notable benefit to them. In other words, entities on the market can make a demand for information, which as a good becomes a subject of transaction. Of course, a precondition for information markets to exist is the expectation that benefits from collecting information will exceed the costs incurred while collecting it, but, on the other hand, that the costs will be too high to collect information independently.

2. Crisis phenomena observed in the world economy deepen the above mentioned areas of uncertainty to a large extent, causing the need for more and more information among entities belonging to all sectors. In terms of collected information, public statistics occupies a dominant position in Poland, similarly as in other countries. Throughout nearly all the period of economic transformation, one could observe insufficient use of the Polish Official Statistics potential in satisfying different kinds of needs on the dynamically developing information market, little flexibility of institutions in reacting to market's needs and unsatisfactory quality of statistical analyses. At the same time, a growing competition from various kinds of agencies, associations and specialized firms was causing a slow process of marginalization of public statistics on the information market.

3. One of the most significant aim of public statistics is to constantly enhance the supply of information to entities of public, business and non-governmental sectors in order to reduce their information asymmetry. In this sense, one should regard information as a public good provided by the state in its autonomous activity in socio-economic field. Nowadays, in

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modern societies the borders between private, public, tariff and common goods are blurred. The main reason of the above is that the social costs of producing public goods are very high. One of the methods to reduce social costs of functioning of public institutions, which provide such goods, is commercialisation, public and private partnership, as well as privatization of the entire or just the part of activity. The decision on taking active part in information market will undoubtedly force Polish Public Statistics to make use of this form of activity or transformation in a higher degree. It is worth stressing that during the crisis the role of the state and public goods is becoming more significant, and this also concerns reliable information. Consequently, the activity of public statistics on a widely understood information market appears to be very interesting issue.

2. Information system of Polish Official Statistics in the time of dynamic socio-economic changes.

4. In the last two years, several innovative actions in information infrastructure have been taken not only within the organization itself, but they were also aimed at ensuring integrity of the information system in the whole country. Such aspirations to entirely coordinate the system is particularly important when statistical information produced by different institution is dispersed. A natural consequence of such actions should be a common policy of dissemination for all institutions. A tool used for carrying out this policy would be an online information portal, administered by CSO as unit coordination the whole system. It will enable public statistics to strengthen its position on the information market not only by offering standard products, but also new ones that will match the customers' needs in rapidly changing conditions.

5. Economic crisis is the reason for a greater need for statistical data on a wide range of socio-economic phenomena, especially in the field of short-term statistics. Government and self-government institutions, both in the national and regional level, request public statistics for preparing more detailed data that will go far beyond the established system of disseminating information. Representatives of statistical offices are being appointed for various kinds of teams which mainly focus on monitoring socio-economic phenomena.

6. A slowdown in the economy pushes also business sector to become more interested in data of statistical institutions. Firms running different kinds of economic activity, especially in tough economic conditions, require a greater number of detailed information on their competition environment and turn directly to statistical offices more frequently.

7. Expectations towards statistics concern mainly two aspects. Firstly, information should be "fast", and, secondly, statistical data should refer to possibly the lowest levels of aggregation in classification and spatial breakdown. Essential precondition for accomplishing these undertakings is to shorten the process of collecting, handling and disseminating data by public statistics, as well as using preliminary and estimated data more frequently. It should be emphasised here that in Poland the time lag between collecting data and making them available is one of the shortest in Europe. What should be always remembered, though, is that the short time lag cannot reduce any of the quality dimensions: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability and coherence.

8. Public statistics should pay more attention to the quality on every stage of data collecting and processing, especially in the time of crisis. A low completeness in collecting information can distort the image of dynamically changing reality to a high degree.

9. In the time of increased need for information from statistical offices, they are expected not only to provide information, but also to analyse and interpret them in a detailed way. Selection of survey methods that require more than usual expert knowledge is of particular importance. The example quoted here can be the use of different of seasonal adjustment methods in national accounts, which, in case of lack of thorough analysis, can show contradictory results in the time of great changes – a slight or no rise in GDP. It can greatly undermine trust in public statistics. Therefore, what appears to be necessary is to institutionally strengthen this organization in a way that will enable it to create new and develop existing methods for more advanced analyses of socio-economic processes.

10. In the time of fluctuating economy, public statistics should include new phenomena, such as depreciation of national currency, which has caused higher economic activity in the cross-border areas, in their survey programme. It should be also noticed that crisis phenomena in countries that Poles emigrated most frequently to, increase returns to our country. Since such a situation influences numerous aspects of life, they should be included into more detailed surveys and analyses in a possibly short time.

11. Functioning of a consistent survey system for cross-border areas will enable information on local, regional, nationwide and international level to be used extremely effectively. Effectiveness of such system requires support from standardized sources of information (official registers, bank registers, traffic automatic measure, etc.) and creation of projects that will cover not only surveys on borders, but will primarily concentrate on processes observed in the border area. In order to create a uniform survey system one should establish cooperation between countries in setting survey areas covering the most current socio-economic issues present in border areas (taking into consideration its unique character) and also standardization of methods and phenomena monitoring forms, as well as conducting joint surveys on these areas.

12. A key issue is constant improvement of computer infrastructure, especially in terms of visualization of data, and more particularly in terms of users' interfaces in data banks available on websites. Its significant role is to facilitate, whenever it is necessary, quick analysis of a great number of data in a short period of time. Another major element of system improvement is greater automation of processing and disseminating of data.

3. Innovative actions of Polish Official Statistics in information system

13. In response to changing demand in the time of dynamic changes in economy, the Central Statistical Office implements deep transformations in the field of collecting, processing and dissemination of information.

3.1. Internal changes of the organization:

- involving all entities in on-line reporting causes improvement of data quality and shortening of the time of data processing;
 - establishing thematic data basis, which will constitute a consistent set of information from any available sources, concerning individual socio-economic phenomena. It will ensure integrity of the country's information system and, through the system of meta-information, correct interpretation as well as the use of statistical data;
 - specialization contributes to establishing analytical and expert groups in particular research areas of statistics;
 - identification of the most important endogenous and exogenous factors effecting economy and regional development in order to include them in the process of designing and carrying out surveys, as well as disseminating information;
 - inventory of information resources of statistics as well as designing new and modification of some surveys so as to adapting public statistics to changing socio-economic situation;
 - works aiming at establishing a consistent survey system for cross-border areas in coordination with statistical offices from other countries:
- launching surveys on external and internal borders of the European Union (survey of goods and services turnover in border traffic on Polish-Ukrainian border , pilot survey of the volume of vehicle traffic on Schengen borders).
 - households surveys - a module concerning changes occurring on the labour market with a particular focus on nonregistered employment, shopping and migration;
 - survey of entities in the cross-border areas, with a module concerning grey zone as the main one;
 - survey of foreign passengers in tourist accommodation establishments;
 - surveys on the result of introduction of euro in cooperation with Statistical Office in Slovakia;
- improvement of methods of communication with receivers of information (FAQ, Newsletter, RSS; user satisfaction questionnaire), using electronic and traditional forms of exchanging of data.

3.2. Statistics and government and self-government institutions:

- establishing and publishing on websites a uniform set of indexes for monitoring socio-economic phenomena;
- preparing advanced analytical tools for comparing data in spatial breakdown (e.g. NUTS-4 level compared to the NUTS-2 and NUTS-0 levels) and providing them in electronic form to order;
- greater participation of representative of statistics in expert teams working on monitoring and analysing socio-economic processes.

3.3. Statistics and business:

- benchmarking of economic enterprises situation - functioning of the reporting portal enables feedback, which facilitates comparisons especially in terms of financial results for a group of enterprises with similar scope as well as for competitive environment, to be delivered to firms;
- developing a generator (software) of information package with an analytical part which will serve for making a socio-economic diagnosis needed for specifying conditions for running activity in a given area, especially useful while taking investment decisions;
- optimizing entrepreneurs' reporting burden;
- cross-border data banks using registers of entities of the national economy, which will penetrate neighbouring country market in order to launch activity or find markets abroad;
- strengthening potential of organizational sections responsible for information dissemination in order to meet growing needs for information in the business sector so as to identify the needs of individual customer (*personalization*), as well as customize the products to individual user's requirements (*customization*);

3.4. Statistics and media

- developing information materials well edited for mass media;
- providing a special tab for mass media on the website;
- more frequent briefings and meeting with journalists aiming at:
 - systematic access to statistical information for society;
 - proper interpretation of transferred information, especially in time of crisis, when information "noise" is becoming higher.

4. Conclusion

14. Due to crisis phenomena, which can be observed in the world and Polish economy, the demand for reliable and most current information has increased. Monitoring of socio-economic processes has become fundamentally important to government and self-government institutions, business sector and public opinion on the micro, mezo and macroeconomic level. Thus, paradoxically, owing to the current economic crisis, the role of official statistics in the information market is becoming more and more significant. On the one hand, it offers a chance, on the other, it is a challenge and necessity for modernization and creation of various elements of information system that would flexibly fulfil the consumers' demands. For this reason, Polish Official Statistics, in the process of adaptation to new circumstances, is introducing numerous innovations with the purpose of improving quality and availability of possessed data.