

ROMANIAN STATISTICS – CURRENT CHALLENGES

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In the last decades, theoretical research and managerial practice have intensified and permitted the crystallization of some concepts, methods and new instruments for analysis and prediction of the status and evolution of a national statistical system.

This paper presents the presently major identified tendencies of a statistical agency, its impact over the national statistical system's evolution, as well as a series of strategic elements of perspective.

Key words: The legal frame of official statistics, The national statistical system, Centralized and decentralized statistical systems

JEL Classification: K2

1. Preliminary considerations

The official Romanian statistics had to recover, after 1989, at least two essential handicaps: independence and credibility, both severely shaken in the 80's. The statisticsman's task was more difficult, as the economic, political and social environment in those years were unfavorable: economic downfall, social movements, syndical withdrawals and political disputes. With all the inherent difficulties, the actions were aimed toward change, for promoting the modern methods of statistical research, for processing and dissemination.

A new legal frame was adopted, where the fundamental principles of the workings of statistics would be found, wholly copied from the Governmental Ordinance nr. 9/1992 (with all the upcoming modifications and completions) and became the value set for the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), through which regaining the respect of different categories of suppliers were sought, as well as benefitting from statistical information and data of the public opinion.

The objectives, measures and actions enterprise were conjugated, concentrated and covered all these aspects:

- the change of concepts, instrument inventory and statistical research methods;
- the professional forming of statistical personnel and the management of human resources;
- the equipment of high performance and the administration of information technology;
- internal and international cooperation.

As a result, we're assisting to – presently – to the creation of a new image of official statistics, a slow, very difficult and sometimes contradictory process, through which statistical information is published through media and is accessible to all users, whatever their revealed tendencies.

Romanian statistics has engaged itself in the process of readapting to the European standards, through the harmonization and progressive integration in the European Statistics System (ESS). Thus, since January 1st, 2007, the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in Romania is the beneficiary of ESS membership, actively participating in the European legislative process and statistics management.

2. The actual general context

In the last decades, theoretical research and managerial practice have intensified and permitted the crystallization of some concepts, methods and new instruments for analysis and prediction of the status and evolution of a national statistical system.

The starting point, in the present case, is the outlining of the three *major tendencies* identified for every public entity, but that much more for a statistical agency.

A. *The first tendency* consists of shifting from focusing managerial preoccupations almost exclusively on the internal situation of the agency, to subordinating the majority of activities to a considerable opening to the exterior, to the environmental factors with important impact.

In our crosshairs we have at least two elements that, presently, can become both opportunities and threats:

1. On one hand, *the satisfaction of the users' necessities* for statistical information (The government, ministries, local authorities, the academic environment and scientific research,

- the business environment, the press, the overall public, national institutions); their necessities

- must be identified and studied differentially, for each category separately, then the types of

- future demands must be anticipated, and the observations made be included in the

- formulation of priorities in the plans of action; From this point of view, Romanian statistics

- has to act in more directions:

- satisfaction with the priority of European demands, in the context of a simultaneous

- increase of the satisfaction degree of statistics data needs of the internal users;

- the implementation of the statistics System of regional development in unison

- with the adopted administrative, territorial and statistics structures;

- the development of a high quality integrated simultaneous dissemination System,

- comparative to the best systems;

- the implementation of an opinion surveillance System, of positive or negative comments

- addressed to the statistic, through research about the opinion and trust that data users

- invoke in rapport with a series of statistics indicators;

- contracting one of the acute risks, that of the apparition of imbalances between research and new statistical data (more and more numerous) and human and financial resources

- available, through prioritizing activities in statistics and the optimal allocation of resources.

2. On the other hand, *the policy toward respondent targets* avoiding the useless delay of data

- suppliers, through the reduction of "the burden of statistical reports"; Not excluded, should be

- the possibility that, in the near future, *primary data collection will become the primary threat,*

- *if it hasn't become already.* The more and more frequently met phenomenon of the growth of

- the non-response rate, especially in the case of small enterprises and of the populations'

- farms, it must be contracted through the improvement and diversification of data sources,

- through identification and attraction in the international circuit, in greater measure, of

- administrative complementary data sources.

B. *The second tendency* identified is derived from the characteristics of the period we live in, when continuity records inflexion points, discontinuities, movements more numerous and accelerated, of changes that know amplitudes and depths previously unreached (from an economic, political and social standpoint). From here results the obligation to raise the decisional reaction time, simultaneously with increasing the flexibility of actions, indispensable in case of unforeseen changes. The reactions of a national statistics system can be very different. The successful passing through a sometimes "turbulent" environment, most of the times "changing" and rarely "stable" are decisively influenced by the general characteristics of the statistic system: Coherence and force, or, oppositely, frailty and continuous pressure.

Counteracting the possible negative effects is done *by creating and actualizing a unified and uncontradictory systematic legal frame* of organization and function of a national statistical system that clarifies a series of problems and permits the overtaking of some disfunctionalities and the elimination of voids:

1. The subordination/autonomy of the institution demands the existence of an independent statistical leadership (at a central and local level), uninfluenced by political groups;

2. The duration of an agency leadership mandate should not be similar to that of the executive;

Thus, in some EU member states and in the USA, a limited (a number of years time) mandate is practiced, that can be renewed, not affecting the continuity of statistical programs;

3. The national statistical system components, the mechanisms and functional relationships between the primary actors of the system, as well as its slope of coordination and communication between different structures (interinstitutional committees and collaboration conventions); Thus appears the necessity of creating statistical compartments within public institutions' administrations, central and local, as well as other public authorities.

The adoption of a new statistics law, in concordance with the actual state of Romania as a Member State of the European Union consequentially appears as justified, with standards, mission, vision and functions that Romanian statistics proposes to exercise in the context of full integration in the European Statistical System.

As well, in this cadre, statistics will succeed in offering the adequate answers to challenges and ample changes present and in society's perspective, in the context of the economic and financial crisis, globalization, the competitively growing in intensity, the affirmation and development of international society.

C. Finally, *the third identified tendency* is that of *institutionalizing innovation*, finalized through the realization of new statistical research, as well as perfecting the existent research. This tendency must be encouraged through custom (specific) coordination instruments such as: methodologies, classifications and nomenclatures, statistical registries, information technology, the recruitment and professional personnel training. The crucial instrument for the increase of the innovation capacity is the budget of the agency (including the external unrefundable funds). In this context we mention the quantification efforts through statistical indicators of problems regarding durable development, rural development, globalization, regional development, competitively, the interaction of economic development – social development, the environment, etc.

The infusion of technical support, methodological and operational, has given Romanian statistics the possibility of making significant progress and touching, in more domains, the quality and comparability of the solicited data, compatible with that of the other EU member states, data aligned to the international standards.

In the future, actions must be made in the direction of totally implementing the European Code of Good Practice in Statistics and of all the elements of the Management of Total Quality.

3. The typology of national statistical systems

There's a diversity of statistical systems in the world.

- at one extremity there's the *centralized system*, where a single institution (usually an *autonomous* governmental agency) is responsible to the majority of official statistics (Australia, Canada, Mexico); even in this situation, the collection of some statistics lies within the responsibility of other institutions (the agricultural statistics, work statistics, environmental statistics, financial statistics, etc.);

- at the other extremity we meet the *decentralized system*, in which numerous statistical agencies are annexed on certain domains (USA). This is *institutional decentralization*, that demands the existence other profiled institutions, outside the agency, for example: demography and population counts, social statistics, external commercial statistics, price statistics, education and health statistics, etc., distinct institutions, that usually don't need the existence of a coordinating authority.

- there is, as well, *a territorial (regional) decentralization*, that needs coordination and control from the central statistical agency.

Regarding the role of regional offices, more possible functioning choices:

1. *decentralization*, that presumes a total subordination toward the central agency, the regional office taking on routine duties in the aspect of collecting primary data and eventually disseminating results;

2. *deconcentration*, which is met in at least two situations:
- in the conditions of a risen autonomy of regional offices, a case where *national centers (poles)* can be created, that tend to processing and dissemination of statistics regarding a certain domain, taking on the responsibilities of coordination and control of the central agency.
 - in the conditions that the regional offices are in the *subordination of local authorities*; this situation must be avoided, the double subordination not being recommended; domains of local interest can be developed based on partnerships between regional offices of statistics, the local authorities and the economic agents.

4. Conclusions

1. No country in the world contains a single institution responsible for collecting and disseminating all official statistics.
2. Usually, national statistical systems aren't entirely centralized or decentralized, mixed statistical systems being often met, with asymmetry toward one or the other extreme alternatives.
3. There is no unique recipe, the final objective being the growth of a complete national statistical system, tight and coherent, comparable with similar systems in the countries of the European Union (with the exception of those in federal government systems).
4. A series of statistical system modifications are presently imposed on the national statistical system, based on a coherent strategy, with clear objectives on a medium and long term, targeting the total integration of Romanian statistics under methodological and quality aspect in the European Statistical System. The massive transfer of good practice in statistics will lead to the creation of a modern statistical system, organized on scientific bases and capable of offering efficiency, quality, promptitude and transparency to the official statistic.

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