

Towards Partnership for Information Society

- challenges and trap of cooperation between official statistical agencies and mass media

Jozef Olenski

National Bank of Poland

Ul. Swietokrzyska 11/21

00 919 Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: jozef.olenski@nbp.x400.net.pl

1. Deontological and legal basis of sustainable partnership between official statistical agencies and the mass media

- 1.1. *The right to the truth* is the fundamental human right and the prerequisite of real freedom and democracy. The *right to truth as the human right* is expressed *inter alia* in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the world of today, the *human right to the truth* is represented by the laws proclaimed by the governments. The complex of those laws is the *citizens` law to information*.
- 1.2. In democratic society any citizen has *the right to true, verified, understandable, accurate, relevant, pertinent, timely, available and practically accessible information*. The *citizens` law to information* is the basis of democracy.
- 1.3. In modern times official statistical systems are the segment of information infrastructure of the states, the societies and the economies. National and international official statistical information systems are the tools of realization of the citizens` rights to information by the governments. This is fundamental mission of official statistical systems and official statisticians. Statistical information should meet quality criteria: social, economic and political. Production and dissemination of information which does not meet quality standards is the violation of the human right to truth and of the citizens` right to information. The UN *Fundamental principles of official statistics* and the ISI *Declaration on statistical ethics* concisely specify basic rules of statistics as social science and as social service.
- 1.6. In modern times the mass media are also an important segment of information infrastructure of the countries, of the national economies and of global economy. The mass media should be obliged to obey the *human right to the truth* and the *citizens` right to information*. However, the mass media are both the tools of political control and the integral part of market - driven (profit - driven) economy and are. It may happen that the values represented by human rights are in conflict with gaining the profit or with wielding the power.
- 1.7. Official statistics disseminates most of the data to almost all users via *mass media*. Partnership relations between official statistics and mass media are crucial for realization of the mission of official statistics in information society.

2. Specificity of mass media in global information society and information economy

- 2.1. *Instrumental character of mass media*. Mass media are tools in hands of those, who have got or who want to get real power and real control over political, social and economic processes.
- 2.2. In information society, *the mass media* are the dominating source of all kinds of information for kinds of users. They invade the areas traditionally reserved for scientific information systems, for education, for technical, administrative and political information, and for official statistics as well.
- 2.3. *"Invasion" of mass media into professional information systems*. The mass media do not want to be an equal partner of any other information systems. The mass media want to treat all professional information systems, including official statistics, as producers of the "raw material" for them, to produce sensational *news for sale* on information market. The only "quality criteria" of information in the mass media are: circulation and audience. Those are in conflict with the quality criteria of official statistics.

- 2.4. The language, scope of information, forms of dissemination, methods interpretation of mass media influences both end-users. Today large groups of end - users of official statistics "are speaking" the language of mass media and they expect official statistics to be translated into the "language of media".
- 2.5. In information society the *mass media are the filter of information for the public*. People see the world, the economies and the societies "by the eyes" of obedient employees (journalists) paid by the owners of global press agencies and global media. This filter is often put on the production of official statistics.
- 2.6. Production and dissemination of information in global mass media is highly concentrated and monopolized by few global agencies. This concentration reduces the costs of production and dissemination of information. But on the other hand the monopolization of global mass media is a real threat for quality of information. Global manipulation of information by monopolists is not the theoretical abstraction any more. Political and economic practice show, that sometimes the powers controlling global mass media are inclined to use this opportunity to control and to influence social, economic and political life.

3. Functions of information in information society and in information economy

- 3.1. In modern societies and economies (so called "information economies") the information plays the following functions:
 - A) *function of representation of real world*,
 - B) *function of creation of resources of knowledge*
 - C) *decision function*,
 - D) *control function*,
 - E) *consumption function*.
- 3.2. According to the Fundamental principles of official statistics and the ISI Deontological code, the official statistics should be oriented for first two functions: *A. representation of real world* and *B. creation of knowledge*.
- 3.3. In mass media for last two functions: *E. consumption function* and *D. control function* are dominating. So, there is the *fundamental functional conflict* between official statistics and mass media.

4. Gaps between mass media and official statistics

- 4.1. Analyzing functional conflicts between the information in mass media and statistical data, the following gaps could be identified:
 - Linguistic gap
 - Metainformation gap
 - Timeliness gap
 - Forms of presentation gap
 - Context gap
 - Competence gap
 - Deontological gap
 - Activity gap
 - Technical gap
 - Partnership gap
- 4.2. *Linguistic gap*. Statistical data are represented in the scientific and professional language of statistics. Many users, even professional but incidental users, know some limited parts of this very rich and difficult language. They try to interpret statistics in the language of mass media.
- 4.3. *Metainformation gap*. For proper interpretation of statistical data the access to relevant metadata is necessary. In statistics published in mass media almost all metadata are eliminated. End-users reading statistics in journals do not have access to metainformation and often do not know, what kind of "meta-knowledge" are needed.

- 4.4. *Timeliness gap*. The fundamental principle of the mass media is to publish information "as quick as possible", the "live" information - if possible, or "one minute after the event" at latest. The mass media are always in a hurry. Quality of information is the victim of this hurry.
- 4.5. *Forms of presentation gap*. Basic form of presentation of statistical data is a statistical table. This form is hated by mass media. They would like to present the results of rich surveys with hundreds of tables, thousands of indicators, graphs and rich textual analysis, in 10 seconds in TV, in 2 minutes in the radio, putting 20 seconds of advertisements in between, and in 30 lines in the newspaper.
- 4.6. *Context gap*. Most of the mass media deliver the mixture of different information. The criteria of selection and structuring of information in the media are subordinated to the principle "give more blood on the first page. The context, in which statistical data are published, is not neutral for the reception of information.
- 4.7. *Competence gap*. Statisticians are competent in subject matter areas covered by surveys and in relevant statistical methodology. To the contrary, the journalists cooperating with statisticians should not be expected to have equivalent statistical and subject matter competencies. Their profession is dissemination of any kind of information.
- Competences of statisticians and journalists are complementary. This complementarity should be the platform for partnership and good cooperation of statisticians and journalists, for the benefit of official statistics, of the media for the end users of data.
- 4.8. *Deontological gap*. The deontology of statistics is coded in two fundamental documents: the ISI Deontological Code and the UN Fundamental Principles of Official statistics. The mass media have also their deontological codes and the press law. However these rules are often not obeyed in practice. There is a fundamental deontological conflict between official statistics and mass media. Statistics can not accept violation of its deontological rules by the media. According to the Amendment 4 of the Fundamental principles the official statistical agencies should react firmly on any cases of breaking the
- 4.9. *Technological gap*. Modern mass media have high technical predominance over official statistics in the field of dissemination of information. Official statistics has the supremacy in the access to some information sources, methodology and technology of production of professional statistical information.
- 4.10. *Activity gap*. The mass media are very active, both in the collection, processing and in the dissemination of information, but not in the quality control. To the contrary official statisticians are active in the phase data capture, in quality control and in production of basic compilations. The whole statistical methodology is oriented for quality control and production of tables. Official statistical institutes should be more active in the field of dissemination of their production. This activity will help to develop the partnership and cooperation with the mass media and will help to make good of the complementarity in the field of activity gap.
- 4.11. *Partnership gap*. The mass media have the instrumental approach to any information systems and sources. They treat official statistics like any other source of information used by journalists to write sensational news. Mutual understanding of specificity and complementarity of each part is necessary.. Establishing proper partnership relations between the media and the official statistics is the task, which should be undertaken both by national, supranational and international statistical organizations.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. *Strategic partnership of official statistics and mass media* is the chance for statistics to play its role in the development of democratic society and in the realization of human right to truth and the citizens` right to information. The mass media are for official statistics the important instruments active information policy of official statistics and the "shop-window" through which the users of information see the statistics. In modern IT environment active information policy of the NSI's should be based on:
- (a) storing of statistical data in database systems accessible for end-users

- (b) providing direct access of users to the resources of statistics via internet,
 - (c) dissemination of statistics via the with the mass media, which are obeying the deontological principles of official statistics..
- 5.2. *Co-operation of official statisticians with journalists* is the prerequisite of proper partnership of official statistics and the media. Official statistics should invest in creating the groups of journalists specialized in the presentation of statistics. Those journalists should be taught statistical methodology. They should feel, that they are statisticians themselves.
- 5.3. *Co-operation of official statisticians with the professional media.* The priority should be given to the cooperation of official statistics with professional media (professional journals and programs in TV and radio):
- (a) by delivering data to professional journalists,
 - (b) by teaching journalists, how statistics to disseminate statistics professionally.
- Special attention and care should be given to the cooperation with international and national press agencies and institutes).
- 5.4. *Statistical products ready-to-use by the mass media.* To facilitate the cooperation with mass media and to keep better control on the presentation statistical production in the media, official statistics should deliver to the journalists the "pre-cooked", almost "ready-to use" information, structured in "chunks" structured tailored to the need of the press.
- 5.5. *Modern information technologies,* in particular the internet and database technology. The internet is the tool for the statisticians to *speak our own voice*. The web sites of the official statistical agency should be the tool of direct dialogue between the end-users and the statisticians, the way of direct dissemination of statistical production to large groups of users.
- 5.6. *Active information policy of official statistics.* Official statistical agencies may realize their duties in information society conducting *active information policy*. They may learn from the mass media, which tools, methods and techniques should be used for effective active information policy. Passive approach, which is still dominant in many official statistical agencies, should be changed, if official statisticians would not like to be the producers of the "raw material" for the media. The mass media, through which official statistics "speaks its own voice", should be carefully selected.
- 5.7. *The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the ISI Deontological Code* are the document, which contain many statements important for the media. Those documents are good guidelines how to use the chances and how to avoid the threats in the sensitive road of establishing new relations and new partnership between the official statistics and the mass media in global information society and in modern IT environment.

REFERENCE

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RESUME

In global information society the end-users of official statistics are accessing statistical data via the mass media. Forms, scope, content, language, quality of statistical data presented by mass media is decisive for the perception of statistics by all classes of users. The quality of statistics in mass media is decisive for the image, appreciation and prestige of official statistics and statisticians in the society. Because of that, the relations between official statistics and the mass media need proper, methods and forms of cooperation, utilizing the complementarity and understanding the gaps between mass media and official statistics.

The dissemination of official statistics via mass media is great advantage for statistics to contribute to the development of information society. Using modern IT, the official statistical agencies may and should conduct active information policy, influencing contents, scope, forms and language, in which statistical data are presented in mass media.