

# The role and function of regional and local statistical offices

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**"Selected good practices in the organization and management  
of statistical offices"**

**Session 1**

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# Introduction

**Organisation of official statistics differs widely,  
reflecting the political and administrative structures**

- **Functional centralisation or decentralisation:**
  - official statistics are the task of statistical offices or
  - statistical services are part of the various ministries
  
- **Regional decentralisation:**
  - regional statistical offices because of the size of the country or
  - because of the type of state

# Contents of the presentation

- **The statistical system in Germany**
  - ≡ roles and functions of the Federal and the regional offices
  - ≡ how to come to common solutions
  - ≡ advantages and disadvantages of the system
  
- **Analysis of the German system: Does it fulfill the requirements of an effective and efficient system ?**
  
- **Conclusion: Which lessons could be learnt ?**

# The system of official statistics in Germany

- The Federation and the Länder share the statistical tasks
  - ⇒ the Federation is entitled to initiate and adopt laws in the field of statistics
  - ⇒ the Federation was given the power to set up an independent federal authority for statistics
  - ⇒ Uniform and timely data collection and processing up to the level of Länder results is the task of the Länder offices
  - ⇒ statistical offices of the Länder perform Land statistics

# Tasks assigned to the Federal Statistical Office

Tasks are mainly of such a type that they can only be properly fulfilled by a central agency:

- Methodological and technical preparation of federal statistics
- Coordination of the complex cooperation processes
- Compilation and dissemination of federal data
- Cooperation with international and supranational institutions and with statistical institutes abroad

# The particular feature of the German system

There is a strong decentralisation not only of tasks but also of competences and decision-taking powers

- The statistical offices of the Länder are not agencies subordinate to the Federal Statistical Office
- They are Land authorities entirely independent from the Federation in terms of organisation and funding
- No federal institution has any authority to give instructions to these Land authorities
- Many similarities to the European Statistical System

# What coordination mechanisms make it possible to obtain uniform results for all of Germany ?

- The Länder and their authorities must implement federal laws
- Specific laws are required for each statistical survey
- Statistics laws contain in general very detailed specifications
- Close cooperation between the Federal Statistical Office and the Länder offices

# The process of developing a new statistics

**Close cooperation of all the various bodies involved during the process of preparing new statistics**

- **The Federal Statistical Office is consulted by the Federal Ministry in charge of the subject matter to receive advice on all questions which are essential for the drafting of the law**
- **Methodological and technical preparations in permanent contact between the Federal Statistical Office and the Länder offices**
  - Preparations are aimed at securing uniform federal data suitable to be integrated into an overall statistical picture
  - Care is being taken to limit the volume of the surveys
  - Taking into account the interests of the Länder as users and as producers of statistics
- **Passing of the new law through both chambers of the German Parliament**

# Implementation of a new statistics law

**After a legal basis has been passed the statistical offices are authorized and obliged to implement the survey**

- **Methodological and technical details, which are not defined by law, are discussed and agreed upon at joint expert meetings**
- **Issues of fundamental importance and conflicts are settled at meetings of the heads of the statistical offices**
- **Collection and processing of data up to the Länder level by the Länder statistical offices**
  - **"One for all" in the field of data processing**
- **Compilation of federal results by the Federal Statistical Office**

# Division of work in the field of data dissemination

- **Federal Statistical Office publishes data for the Federation.  
Geographical breakdown is limited to the Länder level.**
- **Publication of regional data is the task of the Länder statistical offices**

# Statistical committees in the regionally decentralised system I

Establishment of several statistical committees because of the multiplicity of statistical tasks, their distribution among several institutions and the necessity of coordination

- **Advisory Committee: Giving advice in questions of principle and selected problems of individual statistics**
- **Expert committees set up by the Advisory Committee: Detailed deliberations on individual statistics and discussions of special methodological and technical questions**

# Statistical committees in the regionally decentralised system II

- **Conferences of the Heads of Statistical Offices: Discussion of questions of principle concerning in particular the statistical offices**
- **Committees of the Conference of the Heads of Offices:**
  - "Organisation of work"
  - "Programme of federal statistics"
  - "Statistical Questions of the European Communities"
  - "Marketing"
- **Working groups of experts of the Federal Statistical Office and the Länder offices: Discussion of and decision on common methodo-logical and technical questions**
- **Inter-Ministerial Committee for Coordination and Rationalization of Statistics: Constituted to adjust and coordinate the requests of the initiators of federal statistics**

# The role of local administrations

- In some cases entrusted with the distribution and collection of the questionnaires and with the checking work required
- Main task of communal statistical offices is to compile their own separate statistics and to perform analysis for purposes of urban planning and research

# Does the German system fulfill the requirements of an effective and efficient system ?

- **Statistical systems strongly depend on the specific political and administrative circumstances**
- **The objective of a statistical system should be to provide all groups of users with statistics of high quality**
- **The system should work efficiently with a clear aim to limit the burden of respondents and to provide value for money**

# Key elements of a decentralised statistical system

- Allocation of roles
- Joint programme planning
- Uniform standards and a common set of fundamental methodological rules
- Coordinated data dissemination
- Common reputation for credibility and professionalism

# Allocation of roles I

- In a decentralised system the roles, responsibilities and competences of all parties must be clearly defined and their funding arranged
- The distribution of roles and tasks should reflect the special abilities and strengths of the institutions involved

## Allocation of roles II

**The German system of official statistics meets the first key element quite well**

- **The law on federal statistics defines the tasks of the Federal Statistical Office and of the regional statistical offices of the Länder**
- **Concerning the funding of official statistics every level pays for the tasks it is entrusted with**
- **Conclusion: In a decentralised statistical system it appears indispensable to have legal provisions regulating the roles of all actors and their funding**

# Joint programme planning I

- In a decentralised system coordinated or joint programme planning, based on a large-scale discussion with users, is necessary
- Programme planning needs priorities to be set
- For conflicts arising here, the system should offer ways to find solutions
- The setting of priorities must take into account that all levels will benefit from the statistics produced

## Joint programme planning II

**The lack of a systematic and comprehensive programme planning is a shortcoming of the German statistical system**

- **The programme of the German statistical system is only a list of all statistical surveys, but not the total of information to be provided to the users**
- **The shortcomings in the German system are not inherent to the system**
- **Another shortcoming of the statistical programme in Germany is that all statistical surveys must be ordered by law resulting in a lack of flexibility**
- **Conclusion: A mechanism that ensures successful cooperation and the achievement of the common goal should be a strict coordination of all measures and not a legal order for every single measure**

# Uniform standards and a common set of fundamental methodological rules I

- In a decentralised system it is necessary that uniform classifications and standards are used and that fundamental methodological rules are followed
- It must be guaranteed, that the individual results for the regions are comparable with each other
- The system should include regular quality assessments and comparisons between procedures
- Participation in international discussions on standards and methods is important to further develop the system

# Uniform standards and a common set of fundamental methodological rules II

Basically the German statistical system is designed in a way to guarantee the production of comparable results in the regions

- Important prerequisites are the methodological and technical preparation of all statistics by the Federal Statistical Office and its coordinating role
- However: The German statistical law has set very narrow limits to exerting influence. In case of conflict there is no clear mechanism of decision-making
- Assessing the quality of products and comparing the procedures followed can be done only if there is agreement
- Conclusion: It is not sufficient to entrust a central authority with the tasks of developing the concepts of statistics and coordinating the joint activities, unless that institution is also granted a strong role in decision-making

# Coordinated data dissemination I

- A key element of official statistics is the way data are disseminated
- The user expects the provision of comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date statistical information and easy access
- In a decentralised system users should have access to all products of the system through any of the participating offices, following the "one face to the customer" principle
- A common identification mark makes it easy for users to identify the products of the whole system

## Coordinated data dissemination II

Close cooperation between the Federal Statistical Office and the statistical offices of the Länder in the sphere of dissemination has been recognised as essential

- A joint marketing concept has been developed with common principles of dissemination and a common pricing and licensing policy
- The Federal and the Länder offices have defined a minimum publication programme for regional data
- A common Internet portal is currently being developed
- With its research data centres, official statistics deals with the scientific community as an entity
- Conclusion: A common dissemination policy can be implemented in any decentralised statistical system. A regionally decentralised system has considerable advantages: the regional offices are "close to their customers" and the range of data in the field of regional statistics will generally be better developed than in a centralised system

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# Common reputation for credibility and professionalism I

- Professionalism and scientific independence in data production
- Objectivity and neutrality of the institutions, in particular with regard to data dissemination
- Safeguarding the interests of the respondents, both regarding the limitation of burdens placed on them and the strict adherence to the principle of statistical confidentiality
- Strict application of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
- In a decentralised system all system components have to observe those principles

# Common reputation for credibility and professionalism II

**In Germany, objectivity, neutrality and scientific independence of the Federal and the Länder offices are laid down in the statistics law, together with detailed rules for statistical confidentiality**

- **Legal provisions are a good precondition for an application of the principles, but they are not at all sufficient**
- **It is essential to fill the principles with life in everyday practice and to defend the principles where necessary**
- **Conclusion: The major principles of official statistics should be laid down in a statistics law which is applicable to the system as a whole. Independence should be emphasised and should include**
  - **the selection of adequate methods**
  - **the independence from political interference as regards data publication**

# Conclusion I

## A regionally decentralised system as it exists in Germany can work effectively

- In large countries decentralisation has advantages
  - Statistics are produced in close contact of the regional offices with the respondents
  - specific regional features and framework conditions of the regions can be considered in preparing the concepts
  - specific data requirements of the regions are taken into account
- Shortcomings of a regionally decentralised system
  - planning and coordination of work and the processes of decision making are complex and time-consuming
  - delays may occur in providing results for the country as a whole. The regional office with the longest processing time determines the up-to-dateness of the national data

## Conclusion II

### Weak points of the German decentralised statistical system

- **The Länder offices are entirely independent in terms of organisation and funding and the Federal Statistical Office has no decision-making powers in methodological questions**
  - this means that decisions can be taken only in consensus, often after long discussions and not always with the best solutions
  - that lack of a mechanism for solving conflicts is a weak point which should be avoided when setting up a statistical system
  
- **Because of the division of tasks but also of competences and decision-making powers uniform results can be guaranteed only by the fact that statistics are ordered by laws regulating a large number of details**
  - this results in a lack of flexibility of the system
  - solving this problem will be possible only by granting to the central institution more decision power

Thank you for your  
attention !