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The experience with activity reporting in the Time Use Survey in Italy *

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1. What is the genesis of Time Use Survey in Italy? The Time Use Survey began in Italy in 1988 in the context of Multipurpose Surveys, a system of social surveys. The Multipurpose Survey System now includes two surveys each year: an annual survey of quality of life and a more in-depth that has one of four themes: health conditions, leisure time and culture, family and social, victimization (Crime Survey) and a periodic Time Use Survey. The Time Use Survey began in Italy as a social survey. It is an important source of gender statistics and of the studies on quality of life. We decided to carry out the Time Use Survey when the National Statistical Institute understood that social statistics were important and not residual and when the gender point of view in the world of official statistics began to develop. While The Time Use Survey is an important source for economic studies, in Italy it has been developed to date only in the social context. We collected 40,000 diaries for households members aged 3 years and over. Each person was requested to compile a diary for one day. Diary information refers to the main activity, location, persons present during the activity, other activities performed at the same time. The description of these items was written in their own word by the respondents and information was coded afterwards. An open interval approach was adopted covering 24 hours, midnight to midnight, with the starting and ending times of each activity provided by the respondents. For the youngest children the diaries were compiled by the parents. The survey was carried out for three types of day -- weekday, Saturday, Sunday. Each respondent was requested to compile his/her own diary for one day only.

2. We used a list of 150 codes. I don't want to describe this list, because now we are working with Eurostat and are using the Eurostat classification. Rather the purpose of this note is to underline some reflections based on our experience in the first Time Use Survey and in the Pretest carried out with Sweden for Eurostat and in the Pilot Study.

3. I think that we need a standard classification on time use activities, and this expert group is very important in this sense. But we need to analyze the experiences using codes. When we use a classification, we choose a certain level of detail of the activities. Are we sure that respondents will give us this level of detail? Which activities are underestimated and what methodology can we choose to obtain better results? Can respondents give the true picture of their life or is something missing? We can start with some examples from our experience.

4. The first problem which emerged from our experience is a lack of 'small' and intermediate activities which precede and are associated with other major activities. For example, it is not unusual to see diaries filled as follows: 'from 9 to 10 p.m. 'eating' from 10 pm to 6 am sleeping'. On these occasions the diaries seem to cover only the most common and typical activities. This view was based on the feelings reported by coders, and also on analysis of diary data..

5. Let's for example, concentrate on personal care, consisting of washing, dressing, combing, and so on: 36% of the diaries have less than three episodes dedicated to personal care and in 26% of the diaries less than half an hour a day is devoted to personal care, while the mean value is 1 hour and 15 minutes. It is evident that such activities tend to be under-reported. They belong to the private sphere and are usually omitted in social life and conversation.

Moreover those activities last often less than 10 minutes (for example washing hands before eating) and are ancillary to principal activities.

6. Additional evidence of the problem in reporting activities is found in the reporting of snacks, drinks, breaks or short rest breaks (60% of the diaries don't report any snack or drink between main meals, while in Italy this is a common habit). With reference to this phenomenon, an 'alarm bell' is represented by the 5% diaries reporting time spent in filling the diary itself, while half of the respondents declared to have filled it at the end of the diary day.

7. Another problem in reporting, concerns a set of activities that are reported as a single activity or event. Common language sometimes describes as only a short activity a set of interrelated actions. For example, the sentence (translated from Italian) 'I take the car' stands clearly for 'I prepare myself to get out, take the car and start travelling'. On other occasions, respondents mark only the beginning or the end of a longer activity. Sometimes, on the contrary, some very short events, but relevant to the respondents, are reported. In such cases it seems natural to think that an 'open diary' without prefixed minimum time periods could be more efficient.

8. Moreover very often the days seem completely covered by basic activities (sleep, eating, washing and dressing, work, study, food preparation, house upkeep, purchase). For 7 or 8 diaries out of 10, basic activities cover more than 90% of daily time. Is this a true picture or is something missing?

9. There appears to be a contradictory tendency in the respondents' reports: on one hand there is a tendency to compile the diaries in a very imprecise manner, but on the other hand it is difficult to extrapolate and separate activities which fall into a generic category. For example: child care, care of textiles or household management often are mixed and intertwined with main categories of cleaning, washing or cooking. This phenomenon is represented by the sentences used in the diaries to describe those situations. Long sentences describing more than one activity or generic sentences often don't provide the basis for specific codes and delimiting precise time interval. Thus it may appear that household work includes only cleaning, washing, ironing, and cooking activities, while the management of the household life (e.g. access to health, bank or other public services) tends to be diluted in more common activities such as house upkeep or shopping, depending on whether it is done inside or outside the house. Child care is underestimated for the particular characteristic of the activity: the mother often thinks that it is not care but affectivity, playing, socialization.

10. Another example concerns the activities of socialization and conversation which are completely unknown in 44% of the diaries, while 25% report only one such episode. The activity travel also raises problems since travel and other activities are often intertwined. The main difficulty lies in distinguishing the duration of movements and activities which are commonly expressed by a couple of verbs (e.g. 'to go and buy', 'to come and see', 'going shopping'). In the Italian language the verb 'to go' is often coupled with another verb which describes an action and then, when using common language there is the habit of describing simultaneously the travel and its purpose. Despite the instructions enclosed in the diary, respondents wrote in the diary sentences which are used in common conversation. In these

cases, it is impossible to separate the three episodes: 1.'travel to go', 2.'activity', 3.'travel to come back' and to attribute a definite duration to each separate activity.

11. These are only some examples from the Italian experience. We are working on these problems because we want to carry out the European Time Use Survey. I think that it is important to discuss the classification and after the possibility to apply the classification and the survey methodology. Can respondents write on their own the activities at the level of detail that we need or is it better interview them? What is the best technique? Can we use open interval or is better to use closed interval? I think that we need a classification not only as a framework but also as a tool to measure the duration of each activity. This expert group is very important because we can begin to discuss time use classification and time use survey-methodology at the same time.