



Evolution of the National Statistical System of Spain

Taking advantage of the 38th session of the Statistics Commission and the 60th anniversary of its establishment, the United Nations Statistics Commission has prepared several special events to mark this historic occasion. One of the events consists of holding a seminar on the evolution of the national statistical systems of the different member countries. The invitation is aimed especially at those countries that have a national statistical system with features of its own, whose application may prove of interest to the rest of the countries.

Bearing in mind that the Spanish statistical system, configured by way of the regulations contained in the Public Statistical Function Law of 1989 presents differential aspects in respect of the majority of the current statistical systems, it has been considered that, as the body coordinating the National Statistical System, the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) could outline the special features and characteristics of this system in a short report.

This report is going to be developed in the following sections:

- ✓ In an initial point it will offer a condensed account of the evolution of Spanish statistics up to the enactment of the Public Statistical Function Law.
- ✓ A second section will analyse and comment on the special features of the system and the different actions being carried out for public statistical activity in Spain to be undertaken in optimum conditions.

Brief historical account of public statistical activity in Spain

In November last year the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) celebrated the 150th anniversary of the creation of Official Statistics, in conjunction with the National Geographic Institute and the Directorate General of Land Registry and Cadastre. On this occasion, besides rendering homage to those who felt the urge to investigate reality, an attempt was made to revive the principles that inspired their initiative. In the romantic language of the 19th century, it was said that knowledge of reality, of the relationship between the different economic and social events, and of the causes of the evils affecting society would make it possible to legislate and take the appropriate measures to increase the happiness of the peoples. Therefore, there was already an awareness of the importance that information in general and statistical information in particular should have for decision-making in the demographic, economic and social areas.

Ever since the establishment of the Statistics Commission of the Realm in 1856, Spanish official statistics underwent various changes up to 1945, when the first Spanish statistics law was enacted creating the National Institute of Statistics, independent of the Geographic and Cadastral Institute. The system coordinating function is assigned to INE by way of the above-mentioned legal mandate.

As from the Statistics Act of 1945, INE and the institutions making up the national statistical system gradually developed and increased statistical output, both in quantity

and quality, in accordance with the requirements of the different users and especially those stemming from the various Development Plans passed by the different governments.

The qualitative and quantitative change of greatest importance, however, coincided with Spain's accession to the European Community in 1986 and subsequent entry into the European Monetary Union.

INE and all the other official agencies forming part of the National Statistical System (Statistical Services of the Ministries and the Bank of Spain) faced the challenge of assuming in a short period of time the demand for statistical information from the European Union, which was formulated by its statistical body Eurostat.

In the national statistics plans and in the respective annual statistical programmes developing the different plans, new operations and major modifications of already existing ones began to be implemented in order to comply with the different European Union directives and regulations aimed at upgrading the statistical information of the Union in terms of quantity and to ensure that the processes and products obtained were perfectly harmonized, which would permit improved comparison of the statistical data obtained.

Therefore, in the years following accession to the European Union Spain saw a notable increase in the quantity and quality of statistical output, although this increase mainly took place in economic statistics. This obviously made it possible to enlarge the contents of the National, Quarterly and Regional Accounts System, which at that time conformed to the methodologies of the current United Nations and European Union manuals.

These efforts on the part of INE and other the other statistical bodies making up the system have accomplished notable achievements, as recognized in the latest Report of the Council of the European Union reflecting the excellent situation of Spanish statistics with regard to the statistical requirements of the European Monetary Union Plan, public finance statistics and the main European economic indicators.

A start has recently been made at INE on adopting and implementing the principles laid down by the United Nations Statistics Commission and the European Statistics Good Practice Code. This activity will undoubtedly help to improve the statistical output of the Spanish Statistical System.

The National Statistical System: main features

The second event of note in the evolution of Spanish public statistics was the enactment of the Public Statistics Law of 1989 intended to regulate the National Statistical System in the framework of democratic political system stemming from the Spanish Constitution of 1978. This Law, which substantially modified the previous one 1945, took into consideration the new political and administrative situation configured in the Administration, which came to be known as the State of the Autonomous Communities. It also reflected the general principles inspiring public statistical activity and, naturally, the obligations in the field of statistics that stem from belonging to a supranational organization, as is the case of the European Union.

The National Statistical System in Spain is configured in a manner parallel to that of the Administration, so that State Statistics, Autonomous Community Statistics and Local Statistics may be differentiated.



The Spanish Constitution confers on the State sole responsibility for statistics for national purposes. Furthermore, the Statutes of Autonomy of the autonomous communities lay down the principle of sole responsibility in the sphere of statistics of regional interest and with regard to local statistics these are governed by their specific regulations.

The statistical activity of the State Administration is governed by the above-mentioned Law of the Public Statistical Function (PSFL), with the mission of producing, either alone or in conjunction with other authorities, the statistics for state purposes referred to in the Constitution and which, under the PSFL, are contained in the National Statistics Plan.

In the area of the State Administration the public statistical function is performed by INE, the ministerial statistical services, the Bank of Spain (BE) and the General Council of the Judicial Power (CGPJ), with the Higher Statistical Council acting as an consultant body to the state statistical services.

The state statistical organization presents, therefore, considerable sectoral deconcentration in the specialized agencies, both in the design and execution of statistical operations, the National Statistics Plan being the one that distributes responsibilities among them.

In any case, INE retains the execution of large-scale statistical operations requiring the cooperation of the public or business in general, as well as the integrated systems of economic accounts and demographic and social statistics, whereas the ministerial departments undertake the compilation of statistics based on the utilisation of administrative records or files set up for administrative management in their area of responsibility, and the Bank of Spain takes charge of formulating the financial accounts and the Balance of Payments.

In addition, it falls to INE to undertake the general coordination of the statistical services of the State Administration and surveillance, control and supervision of the responsibilities of a technical nature exercised by the ministerial statistics services and any other institution coming under the State Administration.

This model of organization requires a horizontal coordination of the system by means of the instruments specified in the PSFL and which, in essence, are the concluding of agreements, conventions and contracts between the state statistical services and the participation of all of them in the Interministerial Statistics Commission, a collegiate body presided over by the INE Chairman, whose main functions are those of strengthening cooperation between the different agents, integrating the statistics information systems relating to the different sectoral and subject-matter fields, unifying and standardizing conceptual and methodological aspects, and facilitating cooperation in the preparation of the National Statistics Plan. The role that the PSFL grants to INE as the general coordinator of the state statistical services facilitates the fulfilment of this obligation.

The statistical activity of the Autonomic or Regional Administration is performed by the central statistics bodies of the Autonomous Communities and by the Secretariats, which in the Autonomic Administration are equivalent to Ministerial Departments in the State Administration.

Practically all the Autonomous Communities have a Statistics Law and Autonomic Statistics Council on the lines of the Higher Statistics Council and some of them have autonomic statistics plans. Observation of these autonomic plans and their comparison with the National Statistics Plan leads to the conclusion that state and autonomic statistics are practically the same, except for financial statistics concerning the Bank of Spain, those referring to the public function, which is only performed by the State Administration, and



those others that are only carried out in one or two autonomous communities through being localised phenomena.

In Spain, therefore, statistical activity is distributed by fields of application, which means that a single set of statistics may be of interest at the same time both to the State and to any Autonomous Community, in their respective spheres, with the sole difference that the information needs in the case of the communities generally require more disaggregated results both in geographical and in conceptual terms.

The statistical relations between the State and the Autonomic Public Administrations are governed by the PSFL, respecting the principle of *sole responsibility in the field of statistics* which the Constitution and the Statutes of Autonomy confer on the State and on the Autonomous Communities in their respective spheres, so that these relations rest on the possibility of entering into cooperation agreements or conventions for the development of certain statistical operations when this is beneficial for their final development and efficacy or to prevent duplications and expenses. It is, therefore, a possibility that calls for the voluntary acceptance of the parties making the agreement.

As an instrument of encounter for the state and autonomic services, the Law sets up the Interterritorial Statistics Committee, a parity body intended to promote the adoption of agreements, stimulate exchanges of information and methodological experiences and facilitate the coordination of their systems of statistical information, but which has no executive capacity.

However, despite the complexity of the system increasingly greater advances have been achieved in this field fomented by INE. It has entered into *Framework and Information Exchange Agreements* with practically all the autonomous communities in order to systematize the transfer of statistical information between the parties in accordance with the criteria of proportionality and commitment to proper use, as well as the exchange of directories, cooperation in the field of bilingualism and the use of common conceptual frameworks.

Similarly, a large number of bilateral cooperation agreements have been concluded, some of them for a limited and others for indefinite term, for the preparation of specific statistical operations in which state and autonomic interests coincide. Besides assuming the same project in all the development phases of the operation, their purpose is to carry out a distribution of tasks or to meet the need for an enlarged sample on the part of a particular autonomous community.

This effort to coordinate the public statistical activity of the State Administration and the 17 Autonomous Communities is aimed at preventing duplications, achieving a better use of resources, lowering expenses and reducing the load for the informer.



As regards the relations between the State and the Local Administration, the PSFL only specifies period meetings with nationwide Associations of Local Corporations. Therefore, coordination with the Municipalities, which are also producers of statistics, above all based on data of an administrative nature, such as the registration of buildings, dwellings, business premises and people, is not resolved in legal terms, although it may be facilitated by way of the bodies representing these Municipalities.

From the foregoing it may be deduced that the National Statistical System in Spain is highly complex inasmuch as it involves a large number of agents who are producers of public or official statistics belonging to different administrative areas and with whom relations have to be established in a different way on the basis of current legislation.

If the cornerstones of the public statistical function are the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* adopted in April 1994 by the United Nations Statistics Commission, the European Union *Community Statistics Regulations* and the precepts of the *Public Statistical Function Law*, we may conclude that for a National Statistical System to be properly structured it is essential that there should be a coordinated statistical system in which all available sources of information are utilised, the cost-efficiency ratio is taken into account, and use is made of perfectly harmonised concepts and variables.

The achievement of this aim with the features of the Spanish National Statistical System requires a great effort of coordination, which could be carried out with greater effectiveness and efficiency if the working rules for the set of agents involved in public statistical activity were laid down in a precise manner in the statistical regulations and these specified that the direction of this activity should rest on a single entity, be it an institution or a collegiate body.

ANNEX I: SCHEME OF THE SPANISH STATISTICAL ORGANISATION

