

## Editorial

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This is the fourth and last 2013 Issue of the Statistical Journal of the International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS). The year 2013 had many changes, which the Journal seems to have weathered well: Some of these were major: (1) Sadly, after the untimely death of an editor Frank Nolan (from the UK), Stephen Penneck (also from England) stepped in as interim editor and helped complete the first 2013 IAOS Statistical Journal issue. Then, in the spring of 2013 a “Newbie” editor, Fritz Scheuren (from the USA) was chosen. Fritz coordinated the remaining three issues (including this one).

On top of all that *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress), there has also been an ongoing effort this year to examine the current publication process, looking towards a new contract in the next year or so. The new contract should offer new features that will benefit Journal users. More on this later.

As has been the case in the earlier editorial introductions in 2013, we again describe, in summary fashion, each of the papers in the issue. This time we also feature, and this is new, one of the articles that will be available for free online. If there is interest, that feature will become regular.

In this issue we have chosen the submission by Catherine Michalopoulou, Associate Professor, Department of Social Policy, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece. It seemed only appropriate to discuss Greece because its Official Statistics Sector has been particularly hard hit by the worldwide economic downturn.

Finally, in this editorial, we have to mention the changeover of IAOS Presidents from Stephen Pennick, who had double duty this year, as an interim Chief Editor and IAOS President; and Shigeru Kawasaki, just invested as IAOS President in Hong Kong. Their remarks on the turnover end this issue. They may be of particular interest to those IAOS members who did not get to the World Statistical Congress this summer in Hong Kong.

### Highlights of articles in the present issue

The Catherine Michalopoulou Paper (just mentioned) is entitled *A Historical Appraisal of Greek Survey Sampling Practices*. This paper highlights some of the distinguished episodes in the history of survey sampling in Greece. There are many themes common to other National Statistics Offices (NSOs). Greek efforts are fully in line with those of many government in the European Union (EU) and elsewhere in the developed world.

Per Nymand-Andersen Paper: *Communicating central banking statistics: Making useful sense of statistics in a dynamic world* This paper highlights the challenges faced by statisticians in communicating statistics in today’s increasingly complex and interconnected society. As was always true, but now only more so, the statistician must render the information easily understandable, presentable and user friendly to quite disparate user groups – thereby proactively guiding both laymen and experts through an ever-increasing supply of publicly available statistics and concepts, and ensuring the necessary contribution to sound decision making in today’s dynamic society. *Are statisticians all destined to become meta-analysts?*

Elena Zarova Paper: *Spatial harmonization of economic cycles: statistical confirmation of European–Russian interaction in real sectors of the economy* In this paper, the author examines the cyclic nature of different branches of economic activity in the Russian Federation and the statistical effect of interaction between Russian and European medium-term business cycles. The results of this statistical research are of interest in correlating forecasts to strengthen European–Russian economic interactions, as a consequence of Russia joining the World Trade Organization.

Felix Ritchie Paper: *International access to restricted data – a principles-based standards approach* Cross-border access to restricted government micro-data for research has made relatively little progress. One way forward, this paper argues, is to decouple implementation from strategic principles. A principles-based, risk-assessment framework is needed. The pa-

per uses examples from the UK, USA, and cross-European projects to show how such principles-based standards have worked to resolve immediate practical issues.

Lars Thygesen and Mogens Nielsen Paper: *How to fulfill user needs – from industrial production of statistics to production of knowledge* Statistical organizations disseminate statistics to an extent never seen before. Even so, we may not take different users' situation sufficiently into account. Now, is this just a question of improving our services towards users or are we facing more fundamental problems – due to political, social and technological changes? The paper's hypothesis is that the growing political, social and technological complexities around us should be reflected in the way we work and in the choices of the statistics we produce, in order to fulfill our growingly diverse worldwide "knowledge-thirsty" society.

Miroslav Hudec Paper: *Fuzzy database queries in official statistics: perspective of using linguistic terms in query conditions* Institutes of official statistics work with mountains of data, mainly stored in relational databases. Fuzzy sets and fuzzy logic have advantages in developing data queries in such settings. For one thing, they can provide a better representation of the user requirements for data using linguistic terms. For another, they allow examination of records that clearly (or nearly) meet given criteria. In order to illustrate advantages of fuzzy queries, examples have been developed, using real data from Official Statistics.

### More on highlighted 2013 Greek Paper

Michalopoulou's historical appraisal of Greek survey sampling practices is well highlighted in this IAOS Statistical Journal Issue. She sets out quite convincingly many of the distinguished episodes in the history of survey sampling in Greece. Professor Michalopoulou wrote this paper, it seems, to counter the canard that Greek Official Statistics were not to be considered credible. Her picture is found opposite.

Most countries in Europe, and elsewhere, have been hard hit as a result of the continuing worldwide economic crisis—arguably Greece, perhaps most of all! Still, there are many themes common to other National Statistics Offices (NSOs). There is a special *Journal of Economic and Social Measurement* (JESM) issue on Greek Statistics that says it better. The link to the full issue is at – <http://iospress.metapress.com/content/t56663221053/?p=674cc0348ba64f1d99cca1cbcd623dd&pi=1>.



Because the Michalopoulou article is considered to be of wide interest beyond the usual IAOS readership, it is freely accessible online at [dx.doi.org/10.3233/sji-130790](http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/sji-130790).

A further comment on the attack on Greek Official Statistics is excerpted from a letter by the then President of the International Statistical Institute (ISI), dated February 2013. The IAOS, of course, is a section of the ISI. As such the IAOS is also worldwide and has a network that includes numerous government statistical agencies, international organizations, statistical associations and related groups around the world. The ISI website is <http://www.isi-web.org/special-topics/professional-ethics>.

For a related view of the Michalopoulou (2013) paper, here are comments from Professor Dr. Clive Richardson, who also lectures at Panteion University.

His letter is quoted below.

- *Every country needs statistical data; probably no country is satisfied with what it gets. Re-reading Deming [1] reminds us of the large number of sources of error in survey data, something which non-specialists may find hard to understand but all too easy to exploit in criticism. But if it is inevitable that an inherently uncertain product such as statistical data should sometimes come under attack, it is sad when accusations of deliberate manipulation are added. This is what has happened in Greece regarding the output of Greece's official statistics agency (formerly the National Statistical Service of Greece, NSSG, but since 2010 ELSTAT, the Hellenic Statistical Authority). The derisory reference to "Greek statistics" – so easily bandied about nowadays by people who know nothing of the issues involved – may contain to some extent a reference to the widely asserted general incompetence of the Greek public*

sector, but above all refers to the generally held belief that Greek financial data leading up to the nation's entry into the Eurozone were misleading, and to the more recent accusation of inflation of the budget-deficit figures. The latter issue is now before the courts and therefore for me remains beyond comment.

- My colleague Kate Michalopoulou's absorbing historical research, part of which is presented in her article in this issue, increases one's regret over the present state of affairs by showing how much better things were for a while. It is unreasonable to expect that Greece could have been a major player in survey methodology, another Statistics Canada perhaps. But did there have to be so much of a decline that NSSG lost its scientific pretensions and became just another public sector agency sharing the common problems of crippling bureaucracy, the absence of specialized personnel, lack of continuity (promotions and demotions of staff when governments changed) and lack of innovation? The effort to change things around by setting up ELSTAT as an independent agency seems not to have borne fruit yet. A two-year delay in producing such basic data from the 2011 Census as the full geographical breakdown of the resident population by age and gender is inexplicable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Under the present economic situation in Greece, with every service hit by major cuts in budgets and staff, it is hard to be optimistic that ELSTAT will be able to advance over the next few years.
- As a university-based statistician [myself], I find it very regrettable that Professor Michalopoulou is able to apportion some blame to the Greek aca-

demical community for its lack of engagement with the NSSG and the relative lack of importance that it gives to survey methodology. But is this particularly a Greek problem? Kalton [2], in a review of the development of the survey research profession, bemoaned the lack of well-trained survey statisticians and methodologists worldwide, and commented on the difficulty of ensuring that instruction in graduate training programmes be provided by professionals with practical survey experience. However, the gulf between academicians and practitioners does seem particularly large in Greece, where the NSSG/ELSTAT has next to no history of collaboration with the universities, and individuals on the staff of these agencies have never played a significant role in the academically-oriented Greek Statistical Institute (founded in 1981). The benefits that would derive to both sides by working together from now on are too obvious to need to be written down here, and the inheritance of Raj and others could yet be built upon.

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## References

- [1] W.E. Deming, On errors in surveys (an excerpt), *American Statistician* **60** (2006), 34–38.
- [2] G. Kalton, Developments in survey research in the past 25 years, *Survey Methodology* **26** (2000), 3–10.