

STATISTICS – PROJECTION AND INVOLVEMENT IN ROMANIA’S REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

The present paper approaches a very topical issue in general and particularly for statistics, especially at time when regional development policies have become one of the priorities of the mid-term and long-term development strategies of the European Union and of the EU Candidate Countries.

Although it is not a completely new issue for Romanian official statistics, the approach of regional development topics requires, based on the analysis of the concrete situation, the development of new concepts, superior in terms of quality, able to meet the data needs at territorial level, in accordance with the *acquis communautaire* practice in this field. A primary aim is an increase in the capacity of the statistical institution to provide the decision-makers, economic units and other users – both at central and territorial level – with reliable and useful statistical indicators. Thus, the paper presents the concerns of the National Institute of Statistics, as the co-ordinator of the national statistical system in Romania, the results achieved in recent years, as well as the objectives and the main courses of action in terms of strategy for the 2004-2006 period, when the projects related to the country’s accession to the European Union will be finalised.

As a matter of fact, this requirement is a follow-up to the need for the preparation process of our EU accession to provide the conditions which are necessary in order to have access to the Structural type Funds and then to the Structural Funds.

An important issue, emphasised as such in the paper, concerns the perspective from which Romania’s regional development is considered, as a component which is decisively important for sustainable development, based on the proper use of resources, while also ensuring the conservation of environmental assets – related to environment, economy, society, culture.

Thus conceived, regional development foreshadows new collaboration premises within the European area, our objectives being, on the one hand, the full turn to account of the development factors – knowledge, information, high technologies, material and human potential – and, on the other hand, to take the necessary actions for the revival of the regions which didn’t keep the pace, in the name of solidarity, of economic and social cohesion, with a view to diminishing the disparities that exist between different areas.

The substantial contribution of Romanian official statistics to this course of action is even more valuable if we consider that the new type of approach of regional development issues, based on the principles of decentralisation, meeting efforts, partnership and planning, allows the authorities and local and regional staff to constantly increase their involvement in promoting their own interests with the help of the information fund made available to them, by initiating local development projects and programmes, including cross-border ones.

Hence the necessity, which is given priority, of carrying out an efficient regional statistics in Romania, in compliance with the European Union's methodologies, while also developing a strategy for the use of different administrative resources or files so as to obtain as much information as possible at regional and local level, consisting in highly reliable social-economic indicators.

As a conclusion, also by means of the unitary and coherent activity of statistics, by developing its efficiency in terms of collecting and processing information and by constantly enhancing its data fund, the premises for an efficient co-operation at all decision levels-locality, county, region, country are created, all parties involved being provided with the same statistical data and information, which have a certain accuracy and value, whose precision can be counted on.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the first tabloids of antiquity censuses, statistics has been and still is a primordial concern of countries, a crucial instrument for results measurement, but also a decisive factor in decision making. Not only at the level of authorities, but of the society as a whole, as all the economic and social categories of a country are interested in the knowledge about the welfare of a nation, its natural and economic resources, including the human ones. This was the sense of creating, over time, the public statistics, meaning official statistics. As an instrument ensuring the necessary knowledge for adequately governing a country, it has to provide more and more information in view to prepare, to evaluate and to substantiate the various measures taken by the state. It was created as such, building up methodologies and systems able to investigate the economic and social reality, structured within a veritable “industry” producing and disseminating statistical data and information.

Adapted over time in view to efficiently answer to this aim, today statistics learns it has to face new challenges, as the dynamics of contemporary world led to modern and more effective ways and concepts of modern and more efficient development, among which the most important ones could be gathered under the complex sintagma such as: high technology, information society, as well as sustainable development, grounded on a regional cohesion without discrepancies. The future foreseen by sociologists is to be at the junction point of these factors and actions, foreshadowed by their interconnection.

At the beginning of this millennium sharply marked by the findings of science and technology and by the more and more accentuated globalisation, the topic of sustainable economic and social development gets new meanings and features of all its components. **A superior turning into account of all development factors** and, at the same time, the alleviation and removal of differences existing in the process of development between the countries, but also between regions are foreseen, in the spirit of solidarity and economic and social cohesion.

The regional development policies are nowadays components of medium and long term development strategies, both at national level and within the European Union.

In our country, **the need for drawing up and implementing new concepts, of higher quality, related to regions development policy** has sharpened. Major steps were taken in setting up the legal and institutional framework and the specific working mechanisms, aiming

to support their economic and social development, based on the financial support coming both from Government and from the European Commission, obviously influencing statistics.

At present, **new approaches of regional development** are promoted, comprising decision-making decentralisation, efforts concentration, partnership and planning widening, thus allowing for a more active involvement of local and regional authorities and communities, depending on the real necessities and possibilities.

Though the statistical information necessary for supporting sustainable development generally meets requirements, the data needed for regional development have for the time being a less comprehensive field of production and turning into account.

Therefore, it is necessary to further develop, within and beyond national statistics, a strong regional statistics, whose methodological coherence would confer its compatibility at inter-regional level and give it an increased usefulness at national level.

It is important that the “table board” of statistical information, designed for regional statistics based on the necessary information for regions, should comprise well justified selected indicators, meeting clear criteria: **reliability, effectiveness, visibility and percussive reception, but also complementary, avoiding overlapping**. Their system should be designed as to serve the interests of territorial development, bearing always in mind the interest shown by the users of statistical data for various indicators, removing with no hesitation those proving useless and estimating new indicators meeting current requirements.

Romanian official statistics was and is still asked to support with the necessary data and information the drawing up of documents meant to substantiate the regional development policies and to follow up their implementation.

2 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT – CONCEPTS, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The first step in setting up the basis for a sustainable policy of regional development was taken during 1996 – 1998, when under a Phare Programme an important document was issued – “Green Paper on Regional Development”. This accounted for the general framework under which Romania’s Government initiated and followed up the actions foreseen in the regional development programme. By accepting the recommendations included in the Green Paper of Romania’s Government, the European Union expressed its commitment to support their implementation and to grant financial support in the field of regional development.

Thus, due to Phare financing, a strategic approach of regional development was achieved, through a series of inter-connected projects (1997 – the Programme on Institutional Building for Regional Development, 1998 – the Project on Supporting Regional Development, 1998 – Project on Training Strategy and Structures).

The Phare Programme on Institutional Building for Regional Development was designed in order to assist Romanian authorities in the activity of setting up the necessary structures for regional development and, to this end, the National Council for Regional Development (NCRD) and the National Agency for Regional Development (NARD) were considered as

crucially important. Thus, NARD was created at the end of December 1998, based on a Government Decision.

Law no. 151/1998 on regions' development in Romania was the first law where the specific objectives, competencies and instruments necessary for the promotion of regional development policy were set up, together with the structure of the eight regions. This law was amended by Law no. 315/2004 on regional development in Romania, which included new regulations in this field; however, the regions structure was unchanged.

Observing the provisions of the two above-mentioned laws, eight Agencies of Regional Development (ARD) were created in each "capital" of the eight development regions (1 – North - East; 2 – South – East; 3 – South – Muntenia; 4 – South – West – Oltenia; 5 – West; 6 – North - West; 7 – Central; 8 – Bucharest).

Referring to the eight development regions, certain remarks are necessary. These were established on voluntary basis, they do not have the status of administrative – territorial units and legal personality, but account for territorial units sufficiently large for representing an adequate basis for the drawing up and implementation of regional development strategies, allowing for the efficient use of financial and human resources.

The regions, counties and/or localities of counties belonging to different regions could set up associations in view to achieve common interest inter-regional and/or inter-county objectives.

Within each development region an Agency for Regional Development is functioning, representing a non-governmental, non-lucrative body, of public utility, with legal status, that is functioning in the field of regional development.

In each component county of the development region, except the residence county of the agency, an office for regional development is functioning.

3 ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF REGIONAL STATISTICS

Like any applied science, statistics permanently re-evaluates and improves its methodologies and working procedures, in close relation with the evolution of social and economic phenomena that it reflects.

Our national history includes many examples in this sense – Romanian official statistics being undoubtedly not only one of the oldest in the world, but also one of those which praiseworthy earned a solid reputation. And, at the same time, especially during recent decades, there are not few the examples given by statistics of Western Europe countries, where the unprecedented dynamics, in terms of pace and propensity, of social and economic changes was not without effects in the field of statistics. On the contrary, I could say that this science was obliged – a much honoured obligation – to be the one that also foreshadowed certain evolutions, ensuring the quantity and quality of the statistical information needed for drawing up and implementing all the major decisions of the European Community.

This category of innovations imposed by real life also includes those related to **regional development from the perspective of sustainable development**.

In view to answer the information requirements necessary for drawing up, implementing and evaluating the regional development policies, as well as those related to specific statistical data collection, according to the regulations of the Acquis Communautaire, the implementation of a statistical system at regional level was needed. The setting up of this statistical system mainly envisaged:

- setting up solid structures necessary for compiling regional statistics, within a coherent and co-ordinated institutional framework that involves, on one side, the National Institute of Statistics (NSI) and the Agencies of Regional Development (ARD) on the other side;
- improving the capability to provide adequate statistics to decision makers (central government and regional agencies, private operators), by setting up a statistical system able to meet the necessities in this field through accurate and timely data, in the context of accession negotiations;
- observing the requirements of compliance with the statistical norms and standards of the European Union, for the whole range of the main statistical fields;
- setting up the basis for regional statistics compliant with the statistical system of the European Community.

Real regional statistical activities, oriented towards defining regional indicators and setting up the framework for data collection, for aggregation and dissemination of regional statistics in accordance with the legally set up regions, were carried out within a Phare project under the programme RO – 9703 – STATISTICS, that granted assistance in view to harmonise Romanian statistics with the Acquis Communautaire for a great number of extremely important statistical fields, such as social statistics, national accounts, industry statistics, etc.

The Government Decision no. 1340/2000 ensured the organisational structure necessary for the implementation of the statistical system at regional level. Through this legal act, eight Regional Directions of Statistics were created within the National Institute of Statistics, organised at the level of counties – centres of development regions, established based on the provisions of Law no. 151/1998 on regional development in Romania (NUTS 2). The setting up of these regional directions ensured the organisational structure for the development of regional statistics.

It should be pointed out that, at territorial level, eight Regional Directions of Statistics (NUTS 2), sub-ordinated to the National Institute of Statistics, are functioning in the centres of development regions; likewise, 34 County Directions of Statistics are functioning at the level of all the other counties (NUTS 3), as deconcentrated public services with legal status.

Unlike the organisational structure of County Directions of Statistics, the organisational structure of Regional Directions of Statistics comprise services/departments of regional statistics, whose main tasks are the following:

- ensuring the permanent co-operation with the Agencies of Regional Development (ARD), in view to draw up methods and practical ways of regional statistical data collection, processing and dissemination, that are necessary for political decisions related to regional development, under partnership relations;

- managing the statistical indicators needed in view to reflect the evolution of economic and social phenomena at regional level, based both on the regional data validated by NSI and on those obtained from the economic units within the development region, in accordance with national norms and methodologies;
- carrying out syntheses aiming at characterising the evolution of economic and social phenomena in the region;
- drawing up publications that present the main economic and social indicators at regional level.

4 DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL STATISTICS

As far as territorial – county or regional – development is concerned, the National Institute of Statistics substantiated and keeps of developing a strategy envisaging the diversification of statistical indicators, either by introducing new statistical surveys at territorial level, or by developing and using administrative sources. The purpose of all these actions is to obtain maximum statistical information, both pertinent and useful.

Referring to the statistical surveys with representativeness at regional level, it is worth mentioning that over 85% of them are structured in view to ensure information at regional level (NUTS 2) and more than half of the surveys conducted by NSI ensure representativeness at county level (NUTS 3).

Out of the whole statistical surveys designed in order to provide information at NUTS 3 level, more than 40% are carried out in social field, 38% in the economic field and 20% in the agricultural one. Referring to the statistical surveys designed in view to supply information at NUTS 2 level, the economic field holds a share of about 43%, the social field accounts for 35%, while the agricultural one represents 22%.

At regional level, but also at county level, demographic statistics holds a top position from the standpoint of available indicators number. In this field, data series exist beginning with 1970 for the indicators related to population and vital statistics. An important domain of social statistics is represented by labour force and unemployment, regional indicators being available in relation with employment (by age group and activity sector), active population and unemployed.

In the economic field, business statistics at regional level was strongly developed during recent years. One could state that in this field the indicators comply with the European methodology and databases are regularly transmitted to Eurostat. Concerning tourism and transport, data at regional level are also available since 1999.

The statistical surveys related to agriculture were designed in view to ensure information at regional level referring to land use, crop production, livestock, structure of agricultural holdings, etc.

The National Institute of Statistics took major steps in compiling regional accounts; beginning with 1998 the gross domestic product, the value added for 17 branches according to NACE Rev. 1 – A – 17, as well as population households accounts are computed at regional level.

We could therefore ascertain that the Romanian official statistics put at decision makers disposal detailed information on the economic and social state at territorial level, thus allowing for a scientific substantiation of development policies and for evaluating the effects of their implementation.

The current stage of territorial statistics development was reached after making significant efforts during recent years, both from financial and human point of view.

The National Phare Programme 2000, finalised in the beginning of this year, was really helpful, as it was particularly focused on the development of regional statistics. This project objectives were represented by carrying out new surveys in the economic and social fields, with representativeness at regional level and by improving the skills of territorial staff related to the specific activities of statistical data collection and processing and of indicators dissemination.

4.1 Statistical data dissemination

The National Institute of Statistics is permanently concerned about increasing, diversifying and upgrading the dissemination ways, in view to promptly inform public authorities about the economic and social state of the country, in order to take decisions in keeping with Romanian society evolution, as well as to supply accurate information to public opinion, media and other users.

The access to statistical information is ensured through the publication system (printed and on magnetic support) issued by the National Institute of Statistics, offered for consultation in the dissemination room, in the library and data shop existing at the NSI headquarters, through the dissemination services functioning at central and local level, as well as on line through the web site of our institution (www.insse.ro). All these publications present core elements on the economic and social dynamics to all those who want to analyse the situation in one or another region.

In view to achieve the desideratum of ensuring a unitary and rigorous system of compiling and disseminating information of interest at territorial level, **the Monthly statistical bulletin of the county** is issued, in order to reflect the evolution of main economic and social indicators at the level of each county. Thus, the following are envisaged: **industry** (industrial production indices, turnover volume indices for industry, output of main industrial products); **agriculture** (livestock); **foreign and domestic trade** (exports and imports of goods, turnover volume indices for retail, turnover volume indices for market services rendered to population); **tourism** (arrivals to the structures of tourists accommodation, staying overnight in the structures of tourists accommodation, index of net using accommodation places); **labour force** (number of employees in economy, number of registered unemployed, registered unemployment rate); **social protection** (average number of pensioners and average state social insurance pension); **investments – construction** (achieved investments, building licenses released for buildings, finished dwellings and under construction); other indicators (development of public utilities networks, urban transport of passengers).

Moreover, the preparation of necessary norms and layouts is ongoing, so that all counties and regions would issue on permanent basis **Statistical yearbooks** and **Annual statistical abstracts**, drawn up based on the same methodology and with the same structure.

Likewise, the web site of territorial directions of statistics will be soon finalised. Its functioning will ensure a much better dissemination of statistical data, under a standard format and a faster access to statistical data drawn up based on the same methodology and with the same structure will be ensured.

As consequence, making systematically available such working tools, decision makers from the territory, both those from administration and those from private and state economy, could adopt the best managerial measures, depending on resources, possibilities and recorded trends. Thus, new social and economic solutions could be found and feasible development projects, needing the taking over of wider material and human resources, could be launched.

As result of these actions – and I mentioned only few of them -, the information processed according to a common and comparable methodology, the same for all the territorial structures and harmonised with the one practised by European countries statistics, comes back to its local users, thus ensuring not only the precise knowledge on the dynamics of local economic and social evolution, but also a criterion for substantiating decisions at territorial level.

4.2 Databases

Another major action undertaken by the National Institute of Statistics was to set up and manage a series of databases, able to provide useful information at territorial level. At this moment, two databases at territorial level exist, respectively a database at locality level (NUTS 5) – DBL and another one at county level (NUTS 3) – DBC, while the works for TEMPO database are under the final stage, so that by the end of 2004 it will become operational at territorial level (Regional Direction of Statistics and County Directions of Statistics).

DBL – the database at locality level

The database at locality level was created in view to disseminate annual statistical data, comprising information at national, county (NUTS 3) and locality (NUTS 5) level.

The main variables available within this database are those concerning population, labour force, agriculture, dwellings, technical – urban endowment of localities, education, health, culture and arts, post and telephony services, tourism. The time horizon of the database at locality level consists of the years 1970, 1975 and 1980 up to present.

The statistical indicators included in this database result from specialised statistical surveys or from administrative sources, validated at central and territorial level.

DBC – the database at county level

This database was created in view to disseminate annual statistical data, its purpose being to characterise the economic and social state of counties.

The statistical indicators comprised refer to population, labour force, industrial physical production, dwellings, agriculture, education, culture and arts, post and telephony and tourism. The number of active indicators at this moment is 2387. The time horizon for which

data series could be found in DBC starts with 1938, while beginning with 1975 up to present, data are available for each and every year.

TEMPO database

The central database with time series was created in order to allow for the unitary structuring of the main statistical data and meta-data, integrating DBL and DBC databases; the design of its structure also took into account the structure, the content and the detailed local indicators. So far, 346 indicators were inserted.

TEMPO includes macroeconomic aggregated indicators, achieved by processing works carried out at central level and covers all the fields of statistical research, with a significant importance for characterising the economic and social state of Romania. The stored data make up time data series, characterised by continuity and comparability over time in terms of coverage, methodology and representativeness. Based on the statistical data existing in TEMPO, starting with primary elements, related indicators could be derived, statistical analyses, studies and publications could be drawn up and the meeting of data requirements is ensured.

4.3 Strategy of the statistical system

In accordance not only with the economic and social requirements of the country, but also with that of counties and regions, the National Institute of Statistics has drawn up the **Strategy of the National Statistical System 2004 – 2006**, approved by Government Decision at the beginning of this year.

The values promoted through this document, comprising guidelines for the future activity of Romanian official statistics, refer to: co-operation, impartiality, reliability of statistical information, quality and competency, professionalism, independence to any type of inferences, activity orientation towards users and services, effectiveness.

Continuing the integration of Romanian statistical system into the European one, transposition of the Acquis Communautaire in all statistical fields, particularly focusing on the quality of statistical data, their transparency and the observance of deadlines for disseminating the information were among the objectives based on which this strategy was built up.

In such context, a core objective is to meet, at a larger extent, the requirements of users of statistical data and information relevant at county and development regions level. Besides, in the perspective of our development, regional statistics will hold a top position.

The restructuring of territorial statistical directions holds a special place within the strategy, with the following main objectives:

- managing the statistical data necessary for reflecting the evolution of economic and social phenomena at regional level, based both on the data compiled by the National Institute of Statistics and on those obtained from the economic units from the development region, in accordance with the norms and methodologies submitted by NSI;

- setting up, validation and redressing the samples for statistical surveys organised at regional level;
- implementing the IT applications designed by NSI for the specific works of regional statistics;
- drawing up analyses referring to the characterisation and evolution of economic and social phenomena in the regions;
- issuing periodicals of synthetic and analytic nature on the main economic and social indicators compiled at regional level.

As consequence, during next years measures are to be taken in view to clearly identify the tasks and responsibilities of Regional Directions of Statistics and to restructure territorial directions of statistics, taking into account the available financial resources and the activity volume.

The strategy aiming at the development of statistical system at regional level envisages:

Significantly widening the system of indicators

At county and regional level, widening the system of indicators according to the requirements of territorial development policy allow, due to decision making decentralisation, a more active involvement of local communities, as well as ensuring the necessary information, based on the standards provided in the Acquis Communautaire, under comparability and quality conditions, for the future management of structural funds and instruments. The increased volume of statistical information at territorial level will be ensured by introducing new statistical surveys, by widening the samples of already existing surveys, so that to ensure the data representativeness at regional, or even at county level and, not least, by using at a larger extent data taken over from administrative sources;

Upgrading the dissemination of statistical information

The upgrade of the statistical information dissemination system has as main objectives: an increased capability of the National Institute of Statistics to promptly and accurately inform public opinion and authorities, by diversifying the channels of dissemination; meeting the needs of statistical data for all user categories and implementing the international principles and practices of disseminating statistical data. The achievement of these objectives will finally lead to a consolidated picture of our institution, as official source of statistical information and to an increased trust of users in the accuracy of statistical data.

The measures that are to be taken in view to reach the objectives envisaged at the level of development regions are:

- developing new statistical products and services, as well as their dissemination channels, in a coherent manner, in each region and county;
- more closely co-operating with specialised media and involved institutions, employing them in building up a positive and accurate statistical picture, based on reliability;

- co-ordinating the electronic presentation of information, as well as the printed one, balancing and defining the proportion between the electronic products and the classic ones (printed), focusing on issuing customer oriented products, differing from one region to another;
- improving the publications' content, focusing on graphic presentations, accessible for users;
- building up the statistical culture for the public, training potential users of statistics, preparing the statistical "ABC" for specialised user groups at territorial level by organising debates, seminars and courses on various topics.

Strategic planning of human resources

The strategic objective in this field is the significant improvement in the management of human resources, professional training and ensuring new flexible organisational structures at territorial directions level, as well as the stability of leadership nuclei, able to ensure coherence and continuity in view to reach the foreseen objectives, to increase the functionality and yield of statistical institution.

In view to reach this objective, the NSI strategy includes the following measures:

- organising and carrying out the annual plans of vocational training aiming at the improvement of staff skills, through the National Centre for Training in Statistics or international institutions;
- career planning, by identifying the positions of staff at a certain moment and planning their upper hierarchical positions;
- developing a flexible system of internal communication, in view to assist the staff in assimilating advanced statistical norms, techniques and methodologies;
- setting up an efficient system to evaluate individual professional performance, thus entailing a better management of own resources and preserving valuable staff;
- integrating the vocational training programmes with the evolution of individual career;
- organising a performing database, in view to support the observance of employees careers;
- priority promoting the vocational training programmes in the statistical fields closely related to the objective of integrating the national statistical system into the European one.

4 CONCLUSION

The policy promoted by the European Union conferred legitimacy both to regions and to the institutions standing for their interests or which are involved in supporting their approaches, among which statistical institutions hold a top position.

The Romanian authorities are concerned about the improvement of regional development policy, pursuing the setting up of real partnership relations at regional level, that should include beside local bodies, economic and social partners, as well as other relevant institutions.

The institutional framework necessary for efficiently use the structural tools is to be finalised by the end of 2005, so that at the accession moment Romania will have at its disposal the functional administrative and legal mechanisms necessary for implementing the assistance granted through these instruments.

One of the crucial problems that should be extremely careful examined in the future is the relation between the general concepts and requirements of the European Union on regionalisation, the reality of inter-connections that we are facing and the peculiarities entailed by national interests and by the specificity of national measures, complying with our strategic options, of each candidate state to the integration into the European Community.

“A nation is entitled to be conducted according to its interests, in the spirit of ethics, whose lack would represent a real derogation from humanity” – stated half century ago the well known Romanian historian and pensive Nicolae Iorga, a statement that, over time, is more actual than ever.

Naturally, it cannot be left aside **that development and transition are not taking place either autarchic or “insular”**, being inevitably in reversible relation with the economic and political international and regional realities, with the challenges of **contemporary world**.

One could state that regionalisation is the most important innovation of the territorial administrative systems in the last decades, this being a dynamic and evolutive process, with large perspectives in the future. That is why we considered as well-timed to bring to your attention, within this distinguished meeting, certain co-ordinates and trends of regionalisation, both from conceptual and pragmatic point of view, in whose context statistics play a well defined role.

We are sure that the colloquial debates in which we are participating, the opinions already expressed and those that will be expressed further on will bring a remarkable contribution to the theoretical and practical development of statistics, to its future and will crystallise new orientations for our actions, in the benefit of our joint efforts to achieve progress and welfare.