

Measuring well-being in Germany – Communication strategy to raise the awareness of our statistical expertise

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1. Introduction

The strong interest shown in the results of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (SSF Commission) at the highest political levels has attracted great media attention to that issue. As a consequence, the statistical offices in Germany – which have long experience and high competence in that area – now have to face the competition of other actors.

The Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) took early and proactive measures to ensure that people are aware of official statistics in the context of that important issue. The contribution of Destatis will therefore present the competences of official statistics in that area. Also, it will show how Destatis deals with the challenges described and what measures Destatis takes as part of the communication strategy.

2. How did the results of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission get on the political agenda in Germany?

In February 2008, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy set up a high-level international expert commission – the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission – to examine better measurement of economic performance and social progress. After the results of the SSF Commission had been published in September 2009, those recommendations were also on the agenda of the German-French Council of Ministers of 4 February 2010. At that half-yearly meeting of the German and French cabinets, the results of the SSF Commission were included in the “German-French Agenda 2020” then adopted. The two governments requested the French “Conseil d’analyse économique” (CAE) and the German Council of Economic Experts to prepare a joint report on the recommendations of the SSF Commission by the end of 2010.¹ The joint expert report entitled “Economic performance, quality of life and sustainability – a comprehensive system of indicators” was submitted by the CAE and the Council of Economic Experts to the Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel

¹ “German-French Agenda 2020”; <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2010/02/2010-02-04-deutsch-franzoesische-agenda-2020.html>

and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy on 10 December 2010.² Quite early, in a podcast, the Federal Chancellor emphasised the importance of the results of the SSF Commission. Within the scope of the “Europe 2020” EU strategy for growth, not only traditional growth should be examined at the European level, but discussions should also be held on new forms of well-being.³

The recommendations of the SSF Commission are a cross-cutting issue at the political level in Germany and refer to the various fields of responsibility of the ministries (Federal Chancellery, Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, Federal Ministry of Transport, etc.). This is one of the reasons why the German State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development has been dealing with the SSF Commission’s recommendations. Committee members are the State Secretaries of all ministries under the chairmanship of the Head of the Federal Chancellery. The Committee deals with the implementation, review and further development of the national sustainability strategy adopted in 2002.

According to the Committee Chairman, Federal Minister Ronald Pofalla, the update of the sustainability strategy scheduled for 2012 should focus on a new interpretation of economic growth as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis. To safeguard well-being in a sustainable way, major importance is attached also to the quality of life, security, health, and sustainable treatment of raw materials. In that context, the President of the Federal Statistical Office was invited to the Committee meeting on 1 March 2011.⁴ At that meeting, the experience of official statistics made a contribution especially to the discussion on an integrated indicator to measure well-being and quality of life and to assess the indicator system of the sustainability strategy, taking account of the SSF Commission recommendations. In addition, what was of particular interest to the Committee of State Secretaries is the situation and preparedness of official statistics with regard to the new challenges.

An interesting fact in Germany is that not only the Federal Government but also the German Bundestag – that is the parliament – took an initiative to implement the recommendations of the SSF Commission. In November 2010, it set up a Study Commission on “Growth, well-being, quality of life – ways towards sustainable economic activity and societal progress in the social market economy”. Study Commissions of the Bundestag are working groups across parliamentary groups. Their purpose is to find answers to long-term issues where different aspects have to be traded off against each other and to make a contribution to societal consensus.

One of the goals of the Study Commission on the SSF report is to develop an integrated indicator of well-being and progress. As specified by the Bundestag, the task of the Study Commission is to examine “(...) how the factors of quality of life and societal progress can reasonably be taken into account and be combined to form a common indicator” in order to create a “(...) suitable basis for assessing political decisions by means of economic, ecological and social criteria (...)”.⁵ In particular, the following aspects should be

² German Council of Economic Experts. Press release of 10 December 2010: <http://www.sachverstaendigenrat-wirtschaft.de/?id=6>

³ Federal Government. Podcast of the Federal Chancellor of 6 February 2010: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Podcast/2010/2010-02-06-Video-Podcast/links/2010-02-06-text.property=publicationFile.pdf>

⁴ Federal Government. Press release No. 71: “*Nachhaltigkeit: Schlüssel für Wachstum. Wohlstand, Lebensqualität*“ of 1 March 2011: http://www.bundesregierung.de/nn_1272/Content/DE/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2011/03/2011-03-01-nachhaltigkeit.html

⁵ *Einsetzung einer Enquete-Kommission “Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zur nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft”*; printed paper 17/3853: p. 3.

included:

- the material standard of living;
- access to, and quality of, employment;
- the social distribution of well-being, social inclusion and cohesion;
- an intact environment and availability of limited national resources;
- educational opportunities and levels;
- health and life expectancy;
- the quality of general public services, social security and political participation;
- the quality of life as subjectively perceived by the people, and satisfaction.

On that basis, the Study Commission should “(...) develop a new indicator, if possible, which does include objective measurability and comparability and which complements the GDP.”⁶ In contrast to the expert report of the CAE and the Council of Economic Experts and to the discussions held so far in the Sponsorship Group at the European level, the Study Commission intends to represent well-being and progress by means of an integrated indicator. In addition, the Study Commission should identify information gaps and prepare statistical competence building in those fields. However, the task of the Study Commission – whose mandate lasts until the end of this parliamentary term in autumn 2013 – comprises more than that: It should also explore the possibilities and limits of separating growth, consumption of resources, and technical progress. In addition, it should discuss issues of sustainable and creative economic governance and of exerting influence on consumption and lifestyles.⁷

It has turned out that, since the results of the SSF Commission were published, many different political institutions and political actors in Germany have become strongly interested in how those results might be implemented.

3. Competence of official statistics

The results of the SSF Commission attracted considerable attention not only of German (and, of course, French) politicians, but they also had an impact on the European level. Chaired by the Eurostat Director General, Walter Radermacher, and the Head of the French statistical institute (INSEE), Jean-Philippe Cotis, a high-level Sponsorship Group on “Measuring progress, well-being, and sustainable development” currently deals with the possibilities of implementing the recommendations of the SSF Commission. The German Federal Statistical Office participates in all Task Forces engaged in expert discussions to contribute its experience. The activities of the Task Forces are structured according to the three subject areas of the SSF report. Co-ordination of the cross-department activities has been taken on by the Office’s President or Vice-President, who participate in meetings of the fourth Task Force, which co-ordinates the activities of the other Task Forces.⁸

The Federal Statistical Office had dealt with the content of the SSF Commission report even before the

⁶ *Einsetzung einer Enquete-Kommission “Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zur nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft”*; printed paper 17/3853: p. 3.

⁷ German Bundestag, *Einsetzung einer Enquete-Kommission “Wachstum, Wohlstand, Lebensqualität – Wege zur nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft”*; printed paper 17/3853

⁸ Sponsorship Group “Measuring progress, wellbeing and sustainable development”. Minutes of the first plenary meeting on 19 May 2010.

initiative was taken at the European level. A first assessment of whether the recommendations could be implemented showed that many data are available, for example data on the statistical description of the quality of life. Some proposals of the SSF Commission regarding economic indicators can easily be implemented just by changing the way the results are represented.⁹ Extending the current survey programme and concepts of official statistics could bridge gaps in the statistical data. The Federal Statistical Office is planning another time use survey for 2012/2013, following the surveys conducted in 1991/1992 and 2001/2002. Various federal ministries – such as the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research – are very much interested in getting results of a new time use survey. Consequently, financing the survey has been ensured by those ministries. The survey is a major source of information on activities not offered on the market, such as household activities, voluntary and community work, and domestic care. At the same time, introducing new modules would allow asking the respondents for their subjective assessment of an activity. Due to the scope and the large number of respondents, a survey like the time use survey can only be conducted by official statistics. The Federal Statistical Office has the know-how and experience required for developing the concept and conducting a time use survey.

Another competence of the Federal Statistical Office lies in the compilation and communication of indicators in the field of sustainability and the environment, which is the third core area of the SSF Commission report. Every two years since 2006, the Federal Statistical Office has published an indicator report on sustainable development in Germany, based on the German sustainability strategy. The purpose of the indicators selected on that basis is to measure the effectiveness of the strategy. Altogether, the report comprises a limited number of indicators, most of which include a measurable target. The report gets rather close to the recommendations of the SSF Commission regarding sustainability issues. For a third of the indicators, the Federal Statistical Office uses data from environmental-economic accounting and from national accounting. That core competence of official statistics allows not only monitoring trends and causes, but also showing interactions between the environment and the economy. The wide experience of the Federal Statistical Office is, however, not limited to compiling the indicators but it includes communicating them in a clear and easy way. Since the indicator report was published for the first time, the Federal Statistical Office has presented the results in an easily intelligible manner. To show the status of the various indicators on the implementation of the sustainability strategy, each indicator is accompanied by one of four weather symbols and a descriptive text.¹⁰

Also, for 25 years already, the Federal Statistical Office has published the “Data Report – a social report on the Federal Republic of Germany” jointly with the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) and the German Social Science Infrastructure Services Association (GESIS). By combining official statistical data with data from social science research, the Data Report gives a comprehensive presentation of the social and economic development in Germany and Europe. As early as in 2008, the Data Report provided detailed information on the objective living conditions of the people and on how they subjectively perceive and assess their quality of life.

The Data Report is a very good example of how to link official statistical data on the living conditions in

⁹ Destatis. “Annual Report 2010”:

<http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Service/UeberUns/Jahresbericht2010,property=file.pdf>

¹⁰ Destatis. “Sustainable Development in Germany – Indicator Report 2010”:

<http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/EN/Content/Publikationen/SpecializedPublications/EnvironmentEconomicAccounting/Indicators2010,property=file.pdf>

Germany with the results of social science research.¹¹

In addition to the potential of the Federal Statistical Office regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the SSF Commission, Destatis has long experience in the dialogue-oriented communication of complex and politically sensitive issues. It acquired that experience, for example, through the census communication or the presentation of consumer prices. That experience should be made use of when communicating new (well-being) indicators, so that they are presented in a clear and intelligible way.

4. The communication strategy of Destatis

Rather early after the publication of the SSF report, the Federal Statistical Office realised the potential of German official statistics in that field. As a first step, Destatis determined an internal organisation structure to cover all subject areas of the SSF report, made an initial assessment as to the feasibility of the SSF Commission recommendations for Germany and took stock of the data available.

Through various events the Federal Statistical Office then got into contact with its partners from politics and the scientific community in order to disseminate the results of the SSF Commission further in the political sphere and also to communicate the potential of German official statistics. For instance, there was the Destatis symposium entitled “What is the impact of policies, how relevant are statistics?“, which was held on the occasion of the World Statistics Day in Berlin on 20 October 2010. One thematic block of that symposium dealt with the measurement of progress, well-being and sustainable development. High-level representatives from politics, business and official statistics – among them Eckart von Klaeden, Minister of State of the Federal Chancellery, – presented their ideas and requirements regarding welfare measurement to the participants, who came from political institutions, the German Statistical Advisory Committee and the media.

The results of the SSF Commission were discussed in more detail at the 19th Scientific Colloquium of the Federal Statistical Office and the German Statistical Society in 2010. That colloquium exclusively dealt with “welfare measurement“. Specialist presentations from the scientific community and official statistics offered a range of perspectives on the SSF Commission recommendations. They contributed to the discussion at political and scientific level, taking the viewpoint of statistics. The presentations are now public available in the Scientific Forum on the website of Destatis.

It is intended to involve the users of official statistics even more in the discussion process. To this end, Roderich Egeler, President of Destatis, announced that a proposal shall be made to the German Statistical Advisory Committee at its next meeting in June 2011 to establish a working group on the subject. Considering existing expert opinions and trends at European level, that working group will shortly have to provide suggestions to the political sphere in Germany as to how welfare measurement can be developed further.

Intensive preparatory work and the contacts established early with the political level and the users have paid off for official statistics. Thanks to prompt action, Destatis was not overrun by the political events and is in a position to deploy its expertise at an early stage in spite of its competitors. As an important actor, Destatis

¹¹ Destatis, GESIS-ZUMA, WZB. *Datenreport 2008 – Ein Sozialbericht für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung:

http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Navigation/Publikationen/Querschnittsveroeffentlichungen/Datenreport,templateId=renderPrint,psml_nnn=true

participates in the development of a factual basis for political decisions and is regarded as an independent expert by the political level. The President of the Federal Statistical Office was invited to a discussion about ways to measure progress and well-being by the parliamentary groups of the SPD and the “Grüne“ and by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology. Thanks to its expertise, Destatis has also been appointed member of one of the Study Commission’s project groups.

The success of the communication strategy was owing also to the linking function of the Federal Statistical Office’s Berlin Information Point and its representative office in the German Bundestag, which supports the Reference and Research Services of Parliament. Being located in the capital, they served to establish contacts with the political level and to establish a network involving the relevant political actors.

With the help of its communication strategy, Destatis managed to present its potential and participate actively in the implementation the SSF report in all subject areas at both national and European level. In a next step, Destatis will set up an information portal on its website, on which the activities and results of official statistics concerning the measurement of well-being are communicated to the public at large.

5. Résumé

The Federal Statistical Office identified at an early stage the highly sensitive political nature of the SSF report and its great impact on the media. Through its proactive communication strategy, the Federal Statistical Office has been perceived by the political level as an important actor with considerable specialist expertise.

In a first step, the Federal Statistical Office identified the potential of official statistics by taking stock of the data available. Then the Federal Statistical Office took the initiative to establish contact with the other actors from politics, the scientific community and at European level. As a consequence, Destatis was well-prepared when the issue became a big deal politically. Destatis was in a position to contribute actively to the work of the political bodies with its potential and to help develop a factual decision-making basis for politics. After having established itself as an independent expert, Destatis now focuses its communication strategy on another goal: on making the potential of official statistics better known to the public at large.

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RÉSUMÉ (ABSTRACT) — optional

As a result of the strong interest shown at the highest political level, the outcome of the work done by the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (SSF Commission) has received a great deal of attention in the media in Germany. At its meeting in February 2010, the Franco-German Ministerial Council chaired by the Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy discussed the report of the SSF Commission and commissioned the German Council of Economic Experts and the French Conseil d'Analyse Économique to jointly prepare an associated expert report. In addition, the German Bundestag established a Study Commission on this theme. Due to the great interest subsequently shown by the media, official statistics has faced competition from other data providers in this area.

To make sure that official statistics will be heard on the subject, the Federal Statistical Office must pursue an offensive policy in the context of its communication strategy. Organising a colloquium with high-ranking participants on the occasion of the World Statistics Day, providing the ministries with specific information and bringing the subject up for discussion in the German Statistical Advisory Committee have been just some of the measure taken to reach this objective.

Because of the long-term experience of German official statistics, for instance, in conducting time use surveys to measure the quality of life and providing indicators in the sustainability report, its involvement in putting the results of the SSF Commission into practice is of great importance. The same applies to the experience it has gained in presenting, in a transparent way and using state-of-the-art communication tools, politically sensitive issues such as the population census.

The Federal Statistical Office's paper will describe both the way in which the above challenges have been addressed and the strategy aimed at providing adequate communication.