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Official Statistics- A Plaything of Politics?

*On the interaction of politics,
official statistics,
and ethical principles*

This book not only describes official statistics as a tool to hold up a mirror to society, but also as an instrument for those who can manipulate this mirror. It addresses the precarious interaction of politics, official statistics, and ethical principles.

¹ Statistics refers predominantly to official statistics which is seen as an important pillar of statistics. Other

The book is primarily aimed not only at economists and statisticians working in national and international statistical institutions, but also at readers interested in statistics, national accounts, economic and statistics history, and ethical issues.

"Facts are stubborn, but statistics are flexible," *Mark Twain* once wrote. While politicians sometimes succumb to the temptation to gloss over economic policy developments based on statistical data, it should be the task of statistics to collect, process and publish data as objectively as possible - sometimes even against immense resistance and by paying a high price. Ultimately, it is about the interplay between a world of knowledge and a world of power, between description and decision, between a "there is" and a "we must". Statistical work, like all political action, should be based on ethical standards. This statement is certainly true in general - except for times and places in which ethical norms are not observed.

Official statistics-A plaything of politics? The idea of writing a book about this arose from the tension between statistics and state power and the ethical norms underlying this relationship.¹ State power differs according to time and place. It is characterised by the specific design and the use of coercion and allocation, by the political determination of a complex system of goals and instruments of structural and financial policy. State power thus differs markedly from that in the private economy. Indeed, the structure of and procedures in government institutions diverge from those in the private sector in that coercion, rather than voluntarism, is the specific means appropriate to them.

Government power is found in autocratically organised states, in states under the auspices of the Enlightenment or in citizen states. Their common outgrowth is a canon of public expenditure that corresponds to the core of

pillars are academic (or university) statistics and applied statistics.

governance. These include the traditional areas of public activities such as internal and external security, justice, financial administration, provision of social services - and official statistics.

The relationship between government action, official statistics and ethical norms was and remains rather precarious. This leads to three thematic complexes, which are the focus of my considerations: political systems and models, official statistics as the science of the state,² which is closely related to them, and the ethical questions arising from them. Ultimately, the determining factor is the political system that exists in each case.

The book contains twelve sections. The first three ones focus on keywords like: power and morality, statistics and governance, and ethical principles for statistical work. Three further sections deal with episodes that illustrate the misuse of statistics over the last hundred years with "drastic" examples. The first half of the 20th century was an unfortunate period for statistics and its statisticians in the Soviet Union and the Third Reich. They are entitled –“Censuses in the Soviet Union and afterwards”, and “Population statistics and the final solution under National Socialism”. The story closest to us in time is the one in which Greece settles accounts with an honourable statistician.

The following four sections of the book deal with current topics that pose challenges for statistics. These are the phenomena described by digitalisation and a pandemic, globalisation, Ireland’s miraculous growth, and happiness research. Finally, two sections describe the adverse effects of power-driven national policies for official statistics as well as the proposal of a worldview on statistics by comparing and analysing income and wealth, inequality, overpopulation, and climate change.

² Etymologically, the term statistics is closely linked to that (of description and administration) of the state.

1 Political systems and models

The chapter starts by discussing different political systems observed in the past and the guiding principles derived from them. They differ essentially in that the competing political goals such as peace, freedom, justice, security, and prosperity are weighted differently; accordingly, the resulting compromises are regarded as the best possible solutions.³ In my remarks, I will limit myself to a few examples from the history of European ideas and economy, beginning with the model of the “polis” and that of man as a “zoon politicon”.⁴

This model is realised in an Italian city state of the 14th century. The allegorical representation of “good and bad government” serves as the framework for this. We go back to the Renaissance, to the Tuscan city of Siena. Here, the most important virtues of good government and the vices of bad government are described in the masterful frescoes by *Ambrogio Lorenzetti* in the Palazzo Pubblico. The frescoes impressively show the consequences of government action for the common good of the population.

Later, the basic features of an economic policy system were developed that played a special role in the politics of the young national and territorial states of the 16th to 18th centuries, that of mercantilism. The primary goal of this system was to strengthen government power. Economic prosperity as a goal, in contrast, was in most countries only a means of strengthening state power in the context of an expansive and aggressive foreign policy.

Mercantilism was criticised by the physiocrats and the English and Scottish philosophers and social economists, who formulated the economic policy model of liberalism as a positive response. It was based on individualistic and utilitarian ideas of norms. They provided

³ Herbert Giersch (1961).

⁴ Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner (2016).

the goal and the standard of value: the happiness and welfare of individuals in society.

The system of economic freedom for which they thus provided the justification had its harshest critic in *Karl Marx*, a student of *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel* who had emigrated to England. *Marx*, who knew the teachings of *Henri de Saint-Simon* as well as those of the English classics, refrained from developing a model of the order that would follow the collapse of capitalism he prophesied, but the system of the Soviet planned economy was one of the possible expressions of a Marxist model in the tradition of *Hegel* and *Saint-Simon*.

While the Soviet Union chose the path of central planning, policies in Germany and some other countries took on mercantilist features after the world economic crisis in 1929. In response to this neo-mercantilism and the selective interventionism that preceded it and that is still relevant today as dirigism, the model of neoliberalism emerged. One variant of neoliberalism, which was seen as a model for state policy in Western Germany after 1948, is the idea of the social market economy.

2 *Statistics and government action*

Let us turn to the concept of statistics. What are the goals of statistics and which of them are relevant to statistical work? For this purpose, it is necessary to refer to some definitions. One of the main tasks of statistics is to collect data on an issue of interest, to make regional,

⁵ Horst Rinne (1981) and Alain Desrosières (2001). Desrosières distinguishes three models on which associated measurement theories are based. First, the model of natural sciences, in which measurement appears as a reflection of prior and observable reality. Second, the model of life sciences, in which latent variables are added, which are intended to depict facts that are not directly observable. Third, the model of social (legal and political) sciences sees their variables as conventionally based and, therefore, open to criticism.

factual or temporal comparisons based on these data and thus to prepare decisions. The way in which this task is carried out varies depending on the area of investigation. It essentially depends on whether the data collection can be done in controlled experiments, in which all influencing factors interfering with the intended comparison can be eliminated by appropriate experimental design, or whether the statistician only has the role of a chronicler who registers the data without being able to intervene in their development process. In demographic, social and economic science - to name but a few fields - it is almost always the latter case.⁵

If we restrict ourselves to official statistics (as a public good), their character becomes particularly apparent in the form of this registration. As already reflected in the term, statistics are closely related to the state (it is about describing the state of the state) and are thus subject to the special features of state structures and state action.⁶ Those in power have always been interested in controlling their understanding of reality.

It is not for nothing that statistics got its name as the science of the state. The objective was and is the collection and provision of complete, comprehensive, consistent and timely information on the situation and the development of a state.⁷

One characteristic of good governance is that political decisions are evidence-based.

⁶ Statistics as a methodology and field of application in scientific and technical areas.

⁷ "The concept of statistics in the oldest sense of the word goes back to the 18th century and implies a description of the state by it and for it [...]. At the beginning of the 19th century, in France, England and Prussia, an administrative practice crystallised around the word statistics and formalisation techniques were developed in which numbers were central." Alain Desrosières (2005), p. 165.

Facts and figures, with their scientific and technical nature, appear to be outside the political realm and thus immune to any infection by political interests. On the other hand, it is important to make political decisions in a knowledge-based and democratic way. In what way can this be achieved without succumbing to either populist or expertocratic tendencies?⁸

At the same time, it is precisely this form of governance, based on expert knowledge and facts, that has recently developed into a deep-seated mistrust, which has led to an influx of those forces in politics that consciously and deliberately cast doubt on the existence of neutral facts. If, in this way, everything is put into perspective and citizens' confidence in institutions and numbers is reversed, then who can be trusted?"⁹

Official statistics is a tool to hold up a mirror to society - but also an instrument for those who can manipulate this mirror. For if the mirror does not show what it is supposed to show, different strategies can be chosen. Accordingly, official statistics has been and continues to be misused by many autocrats to exercise their power. From communist East Germany to present-day China, rulers who were or are interested in monitoring their populations usually used and still use different methods of collecting data than independent statistical offices in modern democracies. In any case, history shows that dictators often either have negligible interest in collecting sound statistics or have little ability to collect them accurately.¹⁰

This instrumental character of official statistics has often been its undoing, especially in the context of the censuses that have been conducted at regular intervals for a long time. As an instrument of power, these censuses have long served not only to count people but also to register their moral behaviour. Their history is often marked by mistrust. A recent example

is the postponement of the census in the Federal Republic of Germany scheduled for 27 April 1983 due to an injunction by the Federal Constitutional Court, which was finally conducted on 25 May 1987.

3 *Official statistics and ethics*

Today, official statistics are regarded as an essential component of a functioning democracy in many countries. As a result, ethical issues play a significant role at the national and international level. This implies that many managers and employees in statistical agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the common ethical guidelines and aspects of statistical action. It is obvious that ethical action in statistics cannot be considered in isolation but is closely related to the institutional circumstances of a country. It is therefore a question of determining which ethical norms are decisive in the context of statistical work and how they have changed over time.

Of particular importance in this context is the professional independence related to the data, the methods used to compile it and its publication. It is expected to provide a reliable report on the situation and development of a country, which requires the building of reputation and credibility. Under no circumstances should statistical data be kept under lock and key. Moreover, official statistics sometimes must resist the interests of government authorities that find certain news inconvenient.

Today, these norms are undisputed within the statistical community. However, there are always developments that questioned these standards. These interrelationships will not be dealt with theoretically in the following but illustrated by means of episodes.

⁸ Laura Münkler (2020), p.4.

⁹ Walter J. Radermacher (2020), p. v.

¹⁰ Tim Harford (2021), p. 153.

4 *Censuses in the Soviet Union and afterwards*

Official statistics have been and continue to be abused by many autocrats to exercise their power. Rulers interested in monitoring their populations generally use different methods for data collection and presentation than independent statistical offices in modern democracies.

Control and propaganda with the help of statistical data is the focus in totalitarian states. Those responsible in government and administration want to know the truth and are therefore interested in correct figures. The propaganda aspect consists of the statements made by those in power at party congresses and in the state-controlled media. They do not shy away from falsification to steer their subjects onto the supposedly right path. Data is knowledge of the rulers, and it should be made available to their subjects only to the extent that it serves the interests of a supposedly better society.

A chilling example of abuse of power illustrates the fate of *Stalin's* leading statisticians, who were doomed by the results of the 1937 census in the Soviet Union. It describes the fate of *Ivan A. Kraval* and *Olimpy Kvitkin*, two of *Stalin's* leading statisticians. Both met with terrible misfortune in the totalitarian system of the USSR. They were arrested and shot because their "misconduct" was to calculate a lower population figure in the 1937 census than had been previously announced by *Joseph Stalin*. Another disturbing example describes the recent case of the indictment and conviction of several statisticians in Kazakhstan for alleged misappropriation of state funds in connection with the 2009 census.

Population statistics and the final solution under National Socialism

Friedrich August von Hayek wrote in his famous book *The Road to Serfdom*: "The assiduity with which German scholars and scientists, almost without exception, placed themselves at the disposal of the new rulers is one of the most shocking and shameful spectacles in the entire history of the rise of National Socialism."¹¹ The development lamented by *von Hajek* could also be observed among statisticians when the National Socialists came to power in Germany. In the early years, statisticians still tactically preserved old structures, at least temporarily, but then submitted unconditionally to the regime. The general motto was: "Statistics only has the task of ascertaining the objective facts and providing the building blocks with which the administration is to work. In general, it is not up to them to criticise or judge. We leave that to practice".¹²

National Socialist rulers in Germany used census results for the planning and implementation of the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945. The Holocaust has been defined as the deliberate extermination of up to six million European Jews by the Nazis before and during the Second World War. In a broader sense, the Holocaust can be interpreted as the intention to exterminate all European Jewry. Only occasional reference is made to the activities closely linked to the Holocaust of eliminating other "undesirable" population groups such as Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and mentally and physically disabled people.

Two questions are to be examined in more detail: First, the collection and use of population statistics data during the Third Reich for the purpose of the Holocaust. The presentation of the "unconcern" and thus the misuse of official statistics and the population statistics data

¹¹ Friedrich August von Hayek (1976), p. 194.

¹² Excerpt from a speech by Wilhelm Böhmert, Director of the Bremen Statistical Office, in 1933; in: Jürgen Wilke (2011).

the Nazis provided in the service of the Holocaust leads to depressing results. The 1939 census in Germany and the statisticians associated with it are thus exemplary for the misuse of official statistics by a totalitarian regime. Official statistics also supported the National Socialist rulers in their preparations for the deportation and killing of the Jewish population without any major scruples. Ethical conflicts did not seem to play a major role in their activities and decisions. Second, the use of this data in the Nuremberg war crimes trials is examined. This research shows that the goal of estimating the number of Holocaust victims with some degree of accuracy largely failed due to the incompleteness of the data.

After the Second World War, the experiences of the Third Reich had a significant influence on the development of ethical standards in the political environment and in the field of statistics. In politics, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in 1950. A legal regulation of the professional independence of statistics was only achieved in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1953 with the introduction of the Federal Statistics Act. When the German Bundestag passed this law, it was the first time that the framework conditions in procedural, organisational and substantive law for German official statistics were comprehensively defined. A self-commitment to the professional independence of official statistics vis-à-vis political authorities and administrative bodies was not adopted until 2005 with the European Statistics Code of Practice.

6 *Greece's reckoning with an honourable statistician*

The discussion about the professional independence of official statistics was given new impetus by the events surrounding the sovereign debt crisis in Greece. Particularly serious

was the discrepancy between the obligation of government agencies to provide reliable financial statistical data and the observed practice of manipulating data prior to their dissemination and publication. These problems in Greek fiscal statistics have existed for a long time, but only became public knowledge in 2009, when it became clear that Greek government deficits and debt levels had been miscalculated for years. In fact, the resources of EYSE, the former Statistical Office of Greece, which was under strong political influence, were rather limited to avoid certain manipulations of the data.

There is the story of *Andreas V. Georgiou*, who was mistreated in recent years as head of ELSTAT, the Greek Statistical Office established in July 2010. The Greek judiciary put him on trial for exposing the extent of the Greek financial crisis. The judges convicted him, but the reasoning was poor. The conclusion that should be drawn from his story is not to undermine official statistics. After all, reliable official statistics are the information that the public trusts. They are fundamental to democracy, democratic accountability, checks and balances, economic and social well-being, and progress in general.

The example of Greece and the fate of *Andreas V. Georgiou* shows how important it is for statistical work to follow basic ethical principles. These are, above all, the principles of political independence, impartiality and objectivity in the collection, processing, and publication of statistical data. Deviations from these principles should be made public and corrected as soon as possible. In addition, operational criteria such as relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, and comparability and coherence of data should be ensured in accordance with the quality standards developed by the international organisations and the European authorities. Much of this was not in order in Greece for a long time.

7 *Digitalisation and a pandemic*

The topic on “digitalisation and a pandemic” deals with the increasing importance of digitalisation, its influence on official statistics and political action. The ethical conflicts are considered that arise in connection with the methods used to collect and disseminate statistical data on the Corona pandemic.

Depending on governmental influence, trends up to and including total surveillance can be observed. Contact tracing with the help of smartphone apps has played a specific role since the outbreak of the pandemic. For some years now, technological developments, whether less important (video-on-demand, contactless payment) or essential (remote work, internet shopping, social networks), have had the effect of reducing physical contact.

It is worth taking a closer look at the development of digitalisation and its relationship to the Corona pandemic. There seem to be at least two reasons to link these experiences: First, the Corona pandemic is likely to accelerate the transformation to a “perfect” digital world that has already begun, and second, the similarity with digitalisation in terms of the complexity of processes and structures is striking. Ethical issues emerge about their adequate treatment in politics and official statistics.

One of the tasks for improving and deepening reporting on the Corona pandemic would be to set up and maintain a central system of comprehensive registers in cooperation with the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis). Those who see central registers as the gateway to the surveillance state need to prove this point using Austria as an example. Statistics Austria has, among other things, a central tax register, a central population register and a central vaccination register, which enables a comparison of data on the pandemic.

8 *Globalisation and official statistics*

Questions of globalisation in connection with official statistics are discussed both from a methodological and empirical point of view. The increase in cross-border interactions and the growing openness of national economies pose major challenges for ‘national’ statistics. This is particularly evident in the difficulties in recording value chains to produce goods and services across many countries. Often, parts of the production no longer take place in the headquarters country of a group of companies, but in countries where the group expects to gain economic advantages through lower labour costs, environmental regulations, or taxes.

From an economic perspective, there are several positive aspects of value chains. For example, companies can use their comparative advantages to focus on specific production stages instead of having to provide capacity for the entire production process. Moreover, additional jobs are usually created for the enterprises involved in a value chain. Finally value chains offer the possibility of direct technology transfer to emerging and developing countries.

Globalisation was one of the driving forces behind the update of the *System of National Accounts (2008 SNA)*, the internationally agreed statistical standard for compiling national accounts. The same applied to the *European System of Accounts (ESA 2010)*. Looking at the consultation process currently underway for the update of these statistical standards, this situation still appears to be valid. Accordingly, the “Joint Globalization Task Team” has been established for the project “Towards the 2025 SNA” to deal with globalisation and the treatment of multinational enterprises and special purpose entities arising in the context of the revision.

In contrast to the “SNA approach” of delineating institutional units by geographic affiliation and grouping them into domestic sectors,

the “corporate group approach” also assembles institutional units but based on the concept of control. An enterprise group consists of interrelated controlling and controlled entities, with all positions of and transactions and other flows between the units within a group being consolidated. Each individual corporation in an enterprise group is considered an (independent) institutional unit according to the *SNA*. This also applies to fully controlled subsidiaries if they have their own accounting.

Whether the Corona pandemic and the Ukrainian war will turn back the clock on globalisation is an open question. But it shows with unusual clarity how fragile global value chains are, how quickly borders can be closed and freedom of travel restricted, and how reflexively several countries issued export bans on goods and services. Ideas like self-sufficiency, bringing back value chains or nationalising economic policy have broader support than they did some time ago. International cooperation has a bad reputation. The fear of being dependent on trading partners is growing. In Western countries and in Japan, ways are being sought to circumvent China as a supplier.

Criticism of globalisation has been around for a long time. The first anti-globalisation wave of recent times emerged in 1999 in Seattle, when trade unionists and environmentalists united in a fierce protest trade talk at the then Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In recent years, left-wing globalisation critics have been joined by right-wing isolationist ideologues.

9 *Ireland’s miraculous economic growth*

The reason for the description of Ireland’s miraculous economic growth in 2015 was the astonishment of many observers that a statistical office such as the one in Dublin dared to present completely “absurd” figures on Ireland’s economic development to the public. This situation could only be explained by the

fact that the statistics were not sufficiently prepared for the challenge of digitalisation and globalisation and still do not offer satisfactory solutions. Although the inconsistencies in the Irish figures have been illuminated to some extent in the course of the work of a commission and the many explanations provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland, there remains a certain unease that the statistical methods chosen so far do not do justice to the problem.

The CSO pointed out that the data revision was caused by a small number of companies - moving assets to Ireland. This was due to a variety of factors in the Irish economy:

(a) The term ‘tax inversion’ describes a strategy of moving a company’s headquarters to another country. For example, a large US corporation buys a smaller Irish company in a merger. Ireland is chosen as the headquarters of the resulting corporation, but without moving the central corporate administration there. The assets (mainly in the form of intellectual property) of the newly created company can now be in Ireland and are consequently attributed to Irish capital stock.

(b) Patents of multinational companies are transferred to Ireland so that royalties are accounted for as Irish exports. Profits can also be shifted, in the form of transfer pricing, from own branches abroad to Ireland through appropriate pricing of royalties.

(c) Aircraft used world-wide are officially based in Ireland and lent to airlines for a fee. Leasing fees, depreciation and replacement investments are therefore charged to the Irish economy without the aircraft ever having to land in Ireland.

(d) A multinational company based in Ireland awards manufacturing contracts to formally independent companies abroad. The goods produced abroad are then often resold

directly abroad. These deals inflate Irish imports and exports without Irish workers ever having to meet the products. However, the profits are taxed in Ireland. These methods of taxation affect a wide range of macroeconomic variables, the balance of payments, the international investment position, investment, property income, and profits.

Ultimately, the official figure of 25,2 percent increase on the development of real gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015 did not reflect the economic momentum in Ireland. The income of the Irish population did not rise "overnight" in this order of magnitude. Rather, on the expenditure side of GDP, gross fixed capital formation was the main contributor to the exorbitantly high increase in GDP, with growth of around 20 percent.

Critics complain that this measure is distorted due to special statistical effects. They argue that GDP is not very meaningful for Ireland because it includes income generated domestically, most of which benefits recipients based abroad - for example, the shareholders of numerous US corporations that operate branches in Ireland for tax or other reasons to transfer their profits abroad. Therefore, the CSO began to make certain modifications to the calculation of gross domestic product and to remove significant influences of globalisation from this figure. The CSO published for the first time in 2017 this new measure it had developed, GNI*, a modified gross national income, to improve the international comparability of Ireland's economic development in view of the diverse activities of multinational companies.

Alternatives to the GNI* measure can be easily found from the variety of macroeconomic variables available. It is certainly worth considering using net concepts, although it is repeatedly claimed that there is no internationally comparable data for depreciation. However,

one may wonder whether this reason still applies today.¹³ Moreover, it is important to keep reminding users that gross domestic product (GDP) is not a suitable measure of household welfare. For this, the 2008 SNA provides much better indicators than the GDP such as disposable income or household consumption expenditure - as the Irish case shows.

10 *Happiness and happiness researchers*

Questions of happiness and unhappiness are at the centre of discussion in national accounts and statistics. Can happiness be measured? It is about the connection between prosperity and personal satisfaction. Both the adequate measurement of human welfare and that of an economy have long been the focus of discussion. Happiness researchers have noted a seldom-seen contradiction. Most people want more money and do a great deal to achieve this goal. But although people in industrialised countries have been getting richer for decades, they have by no means become happier.

Amartya K. Sen argued that although income per capita was important, it was not as complete a measure of people's welfare as their "capabilities". Capabilities in that sense are the abilities and opportunities of a person to "realise" himself. This would include income or command over resources but also variables such as health, education, women's freedom, and access to key technologies such as electricity and roads. Inequality and living standards can now be related in a new way to the concept of capabilities instead of only to that of the utility of possessed goods. Poverty is thus a lack of opportunities for realisation. *Sen* assigned a central role for the economy to the question of values, which take the place of "utility functions". *Sen* proposed constructing indicators that also include non-economic aspects such as abilities and opportunities for realisation as is the case with the Human Development Index

¹³ Brent R. Moulton and Peter van de Ven (2018).

(HDI) instead of indicators that only take economic aspects into account (as is the case of the GDP).¹⁴ The HDI was developed by the United Nations to measure the various countries' levels of social and economic developments. Other measures of economic welfare are also described like the Measure of Economic Welfare proposed by *William Nordhaus* and *James Tobin*.¹⁵

Politicians had taken note of these developments - and in 2008, the then French President *Nicolas Sarkozy* appointed a commission, peppered with Nobel Prize winners, to supplement gross domestic product with gross national happiness under the motto "Beyond SNA - a broader approach to well-being?" The report of the *Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (SSFC)*, published in Paris in September 2009, contained various recommendations, with a focus not only on GDP but also on the disposable income of private households, the distribution of income, consumption and wealth, and the services that are to be supplemented by unpaid household activities.¹⁶ The publication of the report triggered a global discussion on how to measure social progress more comprehensively and how to advance the development of welfare indicators. Important contributions to the development of indicator systems were the OECD's "How's Life" initiative and Eurostat's set of indicators on quality of life.

Is it possible to measure the development of the prosperity or quality of life of an individual private household or an economy based on a bundle of indicators? Is there some kind of structural relationship within this bundle of indicators? No such structural relationship is evident in the indicator systems proposed over the years. Rather, they are a combination of indicators of different types - some based on qualitative characteristics. This leads to the danger that only the results of individual

indicators, such as the assessment of life satisfaction, are discussed in public. Particularly problematic, however, is the weighting and merging of the individual indicators into a single variable. The dream of measuring the happiness of an individual or even an entire nation with the help of a single indicator always -fails miserably.

11 *National egoism or international cooperation*

National egoism or international cooperation? This is the crucial question in today's world. It is also of immense importance for statistical work. National egoism will get us nowhere when it comes to the most pressing issues of our time - demographic development, migration, and climate change. International cooperation is needed - both in policy and in statistical work.

Despite increasing international cooperation, shortcomings in the field of statistics can still be observed. Several examples illustrate this. The first relates to Argentina's problems with price statistics, the second to the misuse of data at the World Bank. In a recent investigative report, IMF Managing Director *Kristalina Georgieva* was accused of manipulating the influential 2018 Doing Business report in favour of China. *Georgieva* was managing director of the World Bank Group from 2017 to 2019 and served as acting president of that institution from 1 February to 8 April 2019, following the resignation of *Jim Yong Kim*. The other two examples are cases in which economic policy makers are solely focused on achieving the highest possible economic growth and therefore believe they can manipulate the rate of change in real gross domestic product (GDP) used as a target. This could be observed recently in the world's two most populous economies - India and China. The step from the responsible use of official statistical data to its

¹⁴ Amartya K. Sen (2002), S. 30-53.

¹⁵ William Nordhaus and James Tobin (1972).

¹⁶ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2009).

falsification and misuse is small. To prevent this, the independence of international and national statistical offices is an important requirement for successful statistical work worldwide and nationally. But even in countries with the best reputation, serious conflicts can arise between politicians and statisticians - for example, in Canada.

basis for cross-national population development or climate policy decisions to avert disasters and set the course for a happier future.

But times are not so rosy.

12 *World-view statistics*

Today, the role of official statistics as a science of the state and that of the statistician is viewed rather critically due to the many negative experiences. In addition, current developments - for example, digitalisation, globalisation and climate change - are increasingly calling into question traditional concepts and procedures of statistical work and their interaction with politics. However, it would be necessary to find ways to improve these concepts and the relationship between statistics and political action so that reliable and high-quality statistical data can be presented on current developments.

Comprehensive internationally comparable data make it possible to conduct broad statistical studies in many areas. The best examples of this are population statistics, but also income and wealth statistics - thanks to intensive cooperation between national and international institutions. Cross-national statistics are also available for the global assessment of climate and its changes.

With demographic development, migration and climate change, the most pressing problems of our time are summarized. High population growth in many regions of the world, the unequal distribution of income and wealth, and climate change all contribute to poverty and increasing migration. A wide range of comparable statistical data is available to measure these phenomena. The data are harmonised and compiled in close cooperation between national and international organisations. It is up to policymakers to use these data sets as the

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