Planning Census Content

Griffith Feeney

Planning the *Use* of Census Data and Planning it's *Content*

- Obviously we can't talk about use of the census data without talking about it's content

- On the other hand, intended uses should, to a point, determine content decisions

- Is this a contradiction? Where do we begin? What is the resolution? How to proceed?

The Resolution in Principle: 1

- Information needs can't dictate census content because the census is not the right instrument for all needs

- Census capabilities can't define content because the mission is not to "take a census", but to meet information needs

- Census content should be the intersection of *information needs* and *census capabilities*

The Resolution in Principle: 2

- National Statistical Office planning should assess *all* information needs and …

- The capabilities of *all* available data collection instruments and …

- Allocate needs to the instruments best suited to meet them

- Even a rough approximation to this ideal will improve on past performance

Time Horizon

- The 2000 round census data will be in use until data from the next census becomes available; the next 15 years, for most of us

- Planning should anticipate information needs and information processing technology this far into the future

- How will user needs and capabilities evolve over the next 15 years?

Needs or Value?

- Is *needs* the right word? Data once created may be disseminated very inexpensively, but *creating data is very costly*

- Data should be converted into knowledge that *creates value* sufficient to cover the cost of collection

- If this does not happen, the creation of the data represents *a net loss to society*

Listening to Users

- The NSO exists and censuses are taken *solely to serve the users*, but …

- Users may be ignorant both of the cost of data collection and of the cost and means for *using data to create economic value*

- The NSO must listen to users, but it must also take responsibility for *educating* them

Users and Markets

- Some users are in a position to *demand* data; others are able to *pay* for data
- Learn to distinguish *users* in the traditional sense and *markets* for census products
- To learn about markets, look outside the NSO to markets for related information
- Selling data to markets requires *innovation* and *entrepreneurship*

What to Include on the Questionnaire?

- There will be few if any radical innovations
- Most questions will be standard and familiar as regards general thrust, perhaps with innovation in detail
- But there will be more such candidates for inclusion than can be accommodated
- The main decisions will thus be *which more or less standard items to include*

Textbook Principles and Census Reality

- Every statistics text says that data collection should begin with assessment of information needs and work from them

- Census work rarely follows this injunction, being strongly conservative and inclined to the "tried and true"

- Is this conservatism justified? Probably.

Post-Questionnaire Content Planning

- Questionnaire content defines potential information output, but actual output is inevitably a very small fraction of this

- Once the questionnaire content is settled, there remain major decisions about what census "products" should be produced

- What kinds of outputs should be considered and what should be their disposition?

Major Output Categories 1

- Complete count microdata (usually NSO use only)
- Sample microdata for entire population
- Sample microdata for special population subgroups
- Tabulations for large administrative units
- Tabulations for small administrative units

Major Output Categories 2

- Tabulations for specific cities
- Tabulations for other geographic regions
- "Value added" products: tables *vs* tabulations; subject reports; data visualizations
- Products for GIS analysis: very small areas, suitable format, probably digital only

Review of Key Points

- The inclusive nature of census planning

- The long time horizon of census planning

- Data collection should create economic value in excess of its costs

- The necessity of educating users

- Users *versus* markets

- Post-questionnaire content planning

Questions?
Comments?
Discussion?