NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NKR

OBJECTIVE REASONS OF THE LACK OF TRUST IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS*

**** Developed on the basis of the summary discussions at international conferences, taking into account comments by Mr. Lars Thygesen, Statistics Denmark.***

OBJECTIVE

- The problem of the lack of trust is typical of all the fields of human activity. In this regard the statistics is not an exception
- The objective of this presentation is to make users of statistical information aware of the necessity of the official statistical producers' independence. This is the essence of the first principle of the European Statistics Code of Practice which stresses that national statistical offices should not serve specific political or economic interests

Objective reasons of the lack of trust in official statistics are:

1. **Users' different perspectives**
2. Different interests of users
3. **Stakeholders' attitudes**
4. Multilayered methodology,
5. **General lack of trust in state institutions**

1. **Users' different perspectives**

Statistical information can conflict with the user's experience. A statistical average may often deviate from the individually experienced. Furthermore, as long as individuals have different perspectives, and are not physically identical, the quality of the statistics may be evaluated differently. The difference in perspective depends on gender, age, nationality, religion etc. as well as more personal characteristics

2. Different interests of users

Statistical users belong to different classes in society, and are thus carriers of different political, economic and other interests. Therefore, their expectations to statistics vary. This way, statistics that is conceived as “good news” for one user can be “bad news” for another user and irrelevant to a third user

3. **Stakeholders' attitudes ****

Three groups of stakeholders in official statistics are: respondents, statistical information users and tax payers. They have divergent attitudes with respect to statistics:

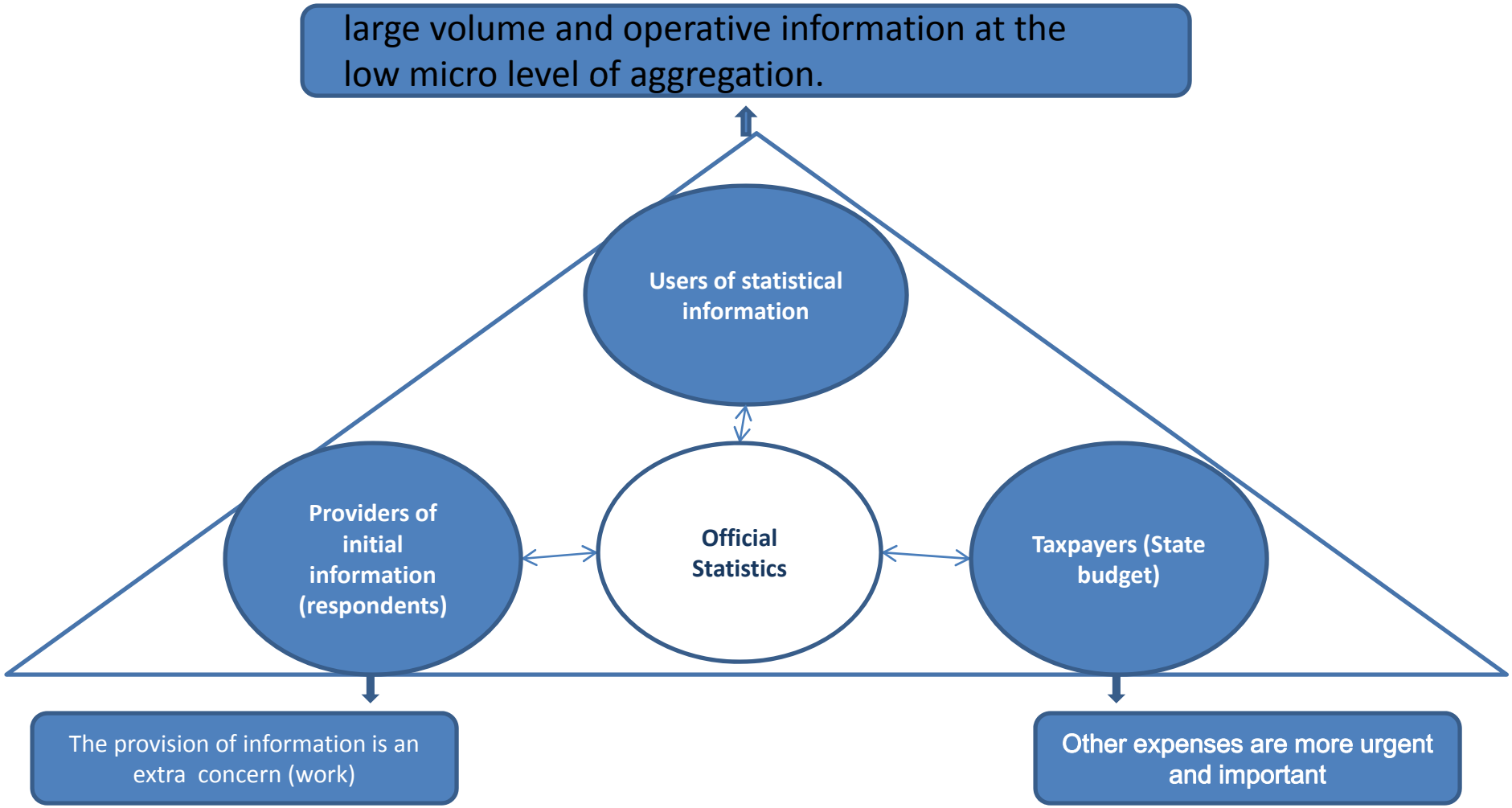
Respondents tend to think that provision of information is an additional work burden

The statistical information users tend to require more statistics and more detailed statistics

Tax payers (State budget) are convinced that other expenses are more urgent and important than the expenses for statistics. The paradox is that any person at the same time could act as a respondent, as a statistical information user and as a taxpayer. Therefore, the attitude to the statistics depends on which of the three particular roles the individual is playing in the specific situation status he/she will be acting at the moment of communication,

** See the next diagram

Different environments *(continuation)*



↔ Bilateral obligatory relations with entities related to the official statistics.

↓ The interests of entities related to the official statistics.

4. Multilayered methodology

- Statistics have too often been used to mislead people, and there are examples of non-scientific and false statistical methodologies that have been deliberately used to fit specific political, economic or other interests
- To overcome this, the international society has agreed on standards and methodologies beginning with the formation of the United Nations' Statistical Commission in 1947
- Fundamentally, statistical methodology consists of six elements:
  - A theoretical layer
    - Definitions
    - Classifications
    - Mathematical theory and models
  - A practical layer
    - Data sources, e.g. surveys and administrative registers
    - Toolkit for data collection, processing
    - Dissemination policy, including release calendar and revision policy
- For the statistics to be trusted, methodologies and policies have to be transparent, i.e. documented and published for all to see and question it

4. Multilayered methodology *(continuation)*

Each of the above mentioned elements contains scientific abstraction, which is one of the reasons for the deficit of confidence

The most evident of them is sampling: Many users do not understand the power of well-designed representative samples, but tend to only believe in micro-level data

Another important reason is related to the built-in conflict between timeliness, quality, completeness and usefulness of statistics (see next slide).

High quality statistics with complete data, which ensures the usefulness of the indicator, requires a long-term work that makes it less up-to-date compared to the indicator produced based on rather incomplete, but very operatively collected data.

Description of the coherence of the timeliness, quality, completeness and usefulness of statistics

Time / **Timeliness**	**Quality**	**Completeness**	**Usefulness[1] (applicable significance)**
Short / *super operative*	*low*	*Non-complete*	*For operative decisions based on trends only*
Medium / *operative*	*medium*	*medium*	*For decisions*
Long / *less up-to-date*	*high*	*complete*	*For analysis*

Statistical data are coherent or reconcilable over a reasonable period of time according to the Principle 14 : Coherence and Comparability of European Statistics Code of Practice (adopted on 24 February 2005 at the meeting of Statistical Program Committee and approved by the Commission of the European Communities (Brussels 25May 2005 COM(2005) 217)).

4. Multilayered methodology *(continuation)*

Other but not less important reasons for lack of trust are classifications and sources of information.

- **Different levels within classifications** are used in order to respect the underlying data quality and the specifics of the object for the statistics. This can give rise to misunderstandings when users compare with other data or try to derive certain conclusions from the statistics
- **Data sources** are often imperfect and not totally consistent with the requirements of the international statistical standards and methodologies. Administrative registers, being one of the most important sources of information, sometimes are not only incomplete, but the administrative information may need to be transformed according to transparent, well-documented methods to be applicable statistical variables

5. General lack of confidence in state institutions

The whole history of civilization, unfortunately, is dominated by a low dose of public trust in state institutions.

Therefore, the national statistical services all over the world suffer from lack of public trust to a greater or lesser degree

This also pertains to statistics within the member states of the European Union and the OECD, although they were set up according to principles aiming to serve the public at large – because these national statistical offices are seen as monopolies, with no alternative or competing information for the public to compare with.