

The Statistical System of Local Level Indicators and the Urban Audit Project

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Abstract

The paper emphasizes the role and the issues of the statistical system of indicators at local level, both for Romania and European Community. The interest shown by the European Commission and Eurostat in collecting relevant information on urban areas within the EU enlargement process led to the launch in 1998 of the Urban Audit Pilot Phase (UAPP). The project proved to be successful, that is why it was decided that it should be aimed at candidate countries as well.

Key words: *urban audit, local level, statistical indicators, urban areas, comparative studies*

Introduction

Conducting comparative studies of the economic and social development of different countries is one of the most important targets of National Statistical Offices. This comparative study aims to emphasize the differences that exist between various countries in point of human development, the possibilities of cooperation, etc.

Eurostat, the official statistical institution of the European Union, has a large experience in collecting and analyzing data on the European countries. Eurostat has recently shown growing interest in collecting statistical data on European cities.

An important step in this direction was the Urban Audit Project. Romania, as EU candidate country, has participated in the second phase of this project, Urban Audit II.

The results of Urban Audit II for Romania have emphasized some problems concerning the incapability of our statistical indicators system at local level to led international comparisons.

Issues of the Romanian System of Statistical Indicators at Local Level

In Romania the system of statistical indicators [2], applied at national level, has been continuously upgraded and aligned to the national and international demands, mostly European.

However, we cannot claim the same thing about the system of indicators used at the level of local communities. Nowadays at local level there is no well-shaped, standardized system of

indicators allowing a perfect description of the cities, both economically and socially, in connection with the local administration's need for information.

At present the National Institute of Statistics leads a system of indicators at local level named BDL - the Local Data Base.

Containing statistical indicators whose way of calculation has been aligned to the European standards, BDL guarantees a social-economic analysis, in conditions comparable from the methodological, territorial and dynamical point of view.

Unfortunately BDL lacks some important information, such as information about the economic potential, the incomes and spending of the local budget, the number of unemployed persons. This was revealed by an enquiry made on local administrations.

The aim of this paper is to emphasize the elements which sustain the necessity of the expansion of the statistical system of indicators at local level (LIS) beginning with BDL.

Firstly, the expanded system of statistical indicators should meet, besides the quantification of classical socio-economic aspects, the need for monitorisation, for sustainable development. It should also focus on aspects like poverty, social discrimination, the frequency of some maladies, which should all be included in this system.

Secondly, the existence of a complex system of statistical indicators is required by the fact that by making the current decisions, by elaborating local development strategies, public territorial administrations request detailed, accurate information.

The elaboration of documentation regarding the criteria of eligibility for the programmes with international financing also represents one of the reasons for expanding LIS.

Taking into account that both European and Romanian investors request detailed information, the need for detailed information is becoming more and more important

The alignment of statistical indicators in Romania at local level at the European and international standards, the need for scientific knowledge, and also some other aspects which will be developed in the paper sustain the expansion of LIS.

Urban Audit – a Statistical Tool for Comparative Information on European Urban Areas

The Urban Audit [3] is a response to the growing demand for the assessment of life quality in European cities, where a significant proportion of European Union citizens live. The Urban Audit is a joint effort made by the Directorate-General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO) and Eurostat to provide reliable and comparative information on selected urban areas in Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU) and the Candidate Countries.

The Urban Audit project represents the contribution made by the Directorate General XVI to the comparative statistical assessment of life quality in European cities. The project was motivated by a growing interest within the EU in urban statistical data satisfying the requirements of international comparability. The interest was fired up by the desire of the Commission to devote more attention to cities in traditional regional and structural policy but also to make it easier to assess the impact of various policy areas on cities [1].

Moreover, the Urban Audit conceived as a pilot project was intended by the EU to help cities establish a stronger basis for comparative studies of transnational cities.

In the mid-nineties, the need for comparable information on European Agglomerations was expressed in the Commission's Communications "Towards an Urban Agenda in the European

Union COM (97) 197" and "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework for Action" COM (98) 605. These led to the implementation of the so-called Urban Audit Pilot Phase (UAPP), targeted to "measure the quality of life in our towns and cities through the use of a simple set of urban indicators and a common methodology", in May 1998. The implementation of the UAPP was entrusted by the Commission to a private consortium. A network of regional or national coordinating assistants supported the central project management of the audit, being responsible for the compilation of necessary data from many different sources such as statistical agencies at national or local level as well as other private or semiprivate organizations.

The European Commission chose 58 cities for the pilot phase of the project (several cities in each EU member state).

Nearly 100 indicators were calculated and published, both in a printed format and on the Internet (http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/urban2/urban/audit/index.html).

The indicators of the Urban Audit cover 5 fields:

- socio-economic aspects;
- participation in civic life;
- education and training;
- environment;
- culture and leisure.

The comparison made between the scores obtained allowed cities to judge their progress and to identify any specific difficulties.

For the first time, the pilot phase of the Urban Audit demonstrated the possibility of obtaining and presenting information for a wide range of indicators in town/cities, as well as in wider urban areas and sub-city areas. The results of the UAPP were presented in September 2000, at an "Urban Audit Day" in Paris to the mayors of the 58 participating towns/cities and the public.

The conclusions that DG REGIO drew about the Urban Audit were:

- The Urban Audit is a useful and required tool for decision-making at European, national, regional and local level;
- The Urban Audit should be continued;
- The methodology regarding comparability of data must be improved;
- Eurostat must be involved in the continuation of the Urban Audit.

The evaluation of the pilot phase led to the conclusion that National Statistical Offices should be integrated into the process of data collection/compilation and quality assurance. The variable review resulted in a changed structure of the statistical fields and domains and in a substantial reduction in the number of variables from about 500 in the pilot phase to 336. The indicators of the Urban Audit cover 9 fields and 25 domains:

1. Demography

1.1 Population

1.2 Nationality

1.3 Household structure

2. Social aspects

2.1 Housing

2.2 Health

2.3 Crime

3. Economic aspects

3.1 Labour market

3.2 Economic activity

3.3 Income disparities and poverty

4. Civic involvement

4.1 Civic involvement

4.2 Local administration

5. Training and education

5.1 Education and training provision

5.2 Educational qualifications

6. Environment

6.1 Climate / geography

6.2 Air quality and noise

6.3 Water

6.4 Waste management

6.5 Land use

6.6 Energy use

7. Travel & Transport

7.1 Travel patterns

8. Information society

8.1 Users & infrastructure

8.2 Local e-Government

8.3 ICT sector

9. Culture and recreation

9.1 Culture and recreation

9.2 Tourism

After the evaluation of the Urban Audit Pilot Phase, Eurostat started the organizational structure for a second data collection. The decision to launch the Urban Audit was taken in 2001 and during 2002 there were evaluated the variable list, the selection of the sampling method for the participating cities, the definition of spatial units in collaboration with the National Urban Audit Coordinators, etc.

Data compilation and collection by the National Urban Audit Coordinators started at the beginning of 2003. At the end of June 2003 data on 86 “Key Variables” were made available. The analyses of these data were integrated into DG REGIO’s 3rd cohesion report. The rest of the data (standard variables) were submitted to Eurostat until the end of 2003.

This time the Urban Audit was based on 258 participating “cities”, out of which 189 were from the 15 EU Member States (57 of these being kept from the UAPP) and 69 from the 12 Candidate Countries (among them, Romania).

The indicators were calculated from the Eurostat Urban Audit database and can be accessed through Eurostat’s NewCronos database (from May 2004 onwards). NewCronos is the public accessible database of Eurostat. Here data is stored in the Eurostat Urban Audit database that has been developed in Oracle Express. It contains the UAPP data that were transferred across from Excel sheets and the newly collected data compiled in 2003.

The analyses of the Urban Audit data were published too, in the form of a paper publication in September 2004, named “Urban Audit 2004”. There are 2 pages for each city, in a standard format, with chapters on context information about the city itself and key results with diagrams. The book has about 400 pages in total.

Romania’s Participation in the Urban Audit Project

In the framework of the enlargement process, the Candidate Countries have been invited to participate in the Urban Audit data collection. All of the National Statistical Offices of the 12 countries recognized the importance of the Urban Audit and were willing to join the project.

Among the 258 participating “cities”, Romania had 14 cities (București, Cluj Napoca, Timișoara, Craiova, Brăila, Oradea, Bacău, Arad, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Piatra Neamț, Călărași, Giurgiu, Alba Iulia).

The Urban Audit Project in Romania was coordinated by National Statistical Institute.

The selection of cities was made after taking into consideration Eurostat’s demands:

- including country capital;
- including regions’ capitals;
- the size of cities (large cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants and medium cities having a population between 50,000 and 250,000 inhabitants);
- the economic development, there being selected both developed and less developed cities;
- a city from the frontier (Giurgiu, for comparison with a Bulgarian city, Ruse).

In Romania, like in the other European countries, the indicators’ list was divided into three groups, taking into consideration the degree of availability of the data at INS level:

Group A - existent data

Group B - data that can be estimated on the basis of existent information

Group C - data that require a new enquiry

The situation presented by Romania had a lot of gaps caused by the issues of our statistical system at local level, as we mentioned above. In the first phase of the Urban Audit Project Romania had collected and presented data for:

- 86 variables out of 336 for core city;
- 69 variables out of 175 for larger urban Zone;
- 10 variables out of 34 for Sub-City District.

Among the variables and indicators for which Romania did not present data was: the number of recorded crimes per 1,000 population, the median disposable annual household income(€), the percentage of households receiving less than half of the national average household income, the number of children aged 0-4 in day care per 1000 children 0-4, the amount of solid waste collected (domestic and commercial) - tones per capita per annum, the percentage of solid waste processed by landfill, the percentage of journeys to work by car, the average time of journey to work etc..

Conclusions

Now, more than ever, especially taking into consideration the enlargement of EU, there is a growing demand for an assessment of life quality in European cities.

The Urban Audit was a response to this demand and is only one amongst many pieces of work that have compared aspects of life quality across cities or considered these in depth within particular cities. This project aimed to show the quality of life, the disparities between European cities, and to permit insight into internal disparities in cities.

The participating cities hastened to point out that any comparison between them should not to lead to additional discrimination of derivate areas, especially at sub-city level.

Romania, that has even had many gaps in the Urban Audit indicators, is making considerable effort to eliminate this situation and improve the system of statistical indicators at local level, this issues being an important target of the National Statistical Institute.

However, the Urban Audit must be continued because its results were extremely useful for the decisional process at European, national, regional and local level.

References

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Sistemul statistic de indicatori la nivel local și Proiectul de Audit Urban

Rezumat

Articolul reliefează importanța și problemele sistemului de indicatori statistici la nivel local atât pentru România cât și pentru întreaga comunitate europeană. Interesul tot mai crescut al Comisiei Europene și al Eurostat pentru informații relevante și comparabile la nivel urban în special, în contextul procesului de lărgire a Uniunii Europene, a condus în anul 1998 la lansarea Fazei Pilot a Proiectului de Audit Urban. Rezultatele obținute au fost dintre cele mai bune, fiind decisă continuarea și extinderea proiectului și asupra țărilor candidate.