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# Social Aspects on Censuses and Official Surveys in Italy

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## Abstract

In opening this overview of the statistics of the last 150 years, aiming at researching the social aspects of census surveys and Italian official research, we can represent this set as a stream born in a small scale, extracted in the early years from administrative tasks, and has been enriched through successive inflows becoming a river of a certain size when ISTAT was established, and then a greater river through the help of international institutions. Today we can finally represent the production of social statistics such as the delta of a river (SISTAN) in which each branch (Institutes, administration . . . ) contribute to the sediment at the mouth mixing with water (data, information) of others. Three great periods linked to the official statistic can be characterized: the period of the Central Bureau of Statistics (from 1861 to 1926); the period of the Central Statistical Institute (from 1926 to the early 1980s); the period since the early 1980s to the present. Within these periods, it is possible to identify the sub-periods related to events, even outside the official statistics system, but significant in addressing the issues and policies.

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## **1 The Period of the Central Bureau of Statistics (From 1861 to 1926)**

The first population census of 1861 in Italy responded to the need to provide politicians with the background elements of the new political reality that was created with the birth of the Kingdom of Italy. The aggregation of many different realities was leading to the birth of a nation and to the characteristics of the people who would go on to create it and highlight the specific needs and the potential success of policy measures and administrative systems that would result in the dismantling of the previous administration. Thus, in the same year as the unification of Italy, 31 December 1861, the first census of the population was carried out, with the aim of “defining the basis for the realization of the Kingdom and of perceiving the people’s sense of belonging to it.” The urgency to know not only the number, but also the natural conditions and civil rights of the people led to critical information in determining many rights and many civic duties, but also the laws governing the most precious of political rights, the electorate. The first census collected personal data such as marital status, age, place of birth from which the electorate could be deduced, and working conditions as well as temporary migration for work. But it also highlighted attention to social issues: religion and spoken languages (in order to identify minorities located in the territory), the level of literacy (in terms of being able to read or write), and the conditions of handicaps (limited to the deaf and blind) (Istat 1957).

A statistical yearbook, edited by Correnti and Maestri, had already been published in Turin by 1858, before the first Census. Such a yearbook presented “the image of Italy as it was in those days, both a servant and divided, but already with an awareness of its unity and full will for a rebirth.” Despite the good intentions of the authors, who set out to achieve an annual publication, we had to wait until 1864 for the Second Italian Statistical Yearbook. This yearbook tended to read data and highlight regional differences. Two chapters titled “Medical Statistics” and “Intellectual Italy” were devoted to social issues. The first bore the subtitle “Hygiene of the army,” and military doctors were the first to realize the regional differences in the spread of disease. The data on intellectual Italy concerned university teaching, secondary teaching, pupils at primary schools, and a first percentage index calculated relating students to the overall population.

The next census of 1871, 1881, 1901, and 1911 followed the approach of the first one with small changes, adding paternity to the demographic data, omitting the spoken language and even religion in 1881, and implementing, between 1871 and 1901, the disabilities detected. A more accurate specification of the work of the householder required the disclosure of the head of the family’s occupation, which drew most of the means of subsistence, and then those of lesser importance is required both in the census of 1881 and in 1911 (Istat 1959). Such specifications foreshadowed the interest in the employment structure in terms of location and economic class and in relation to the possibility of self and family support from segments of income of different importance. Starting from the 1881 census, an interest with respect to foreigners in Italy is shown, and the nationality and the duration of stay in Italy (since 1911) are collected.

During these years the perspective from which we look at the statistics also changes. The “1890 Yearbook of Statistics,” published by Brunialti, helps to understand the cognitive interests developed in the meantime in the absence of the 1891 census. The Yearbook is largely set out according to the administrative reorganization of the Kingdom and the events that happened in that year, although the author stated that “1890 will be remembered as a very average year.” However, the statistical information section is extended to the Italian press, education, charity, and justice, to which each a chapter is devoted. An appendix to statistics of religions appears, although it refers to the distribution of religions in the world and not to Italy. A brief statement of six pages also appears, describing the economic and social progress of Italy from 1861 to 1889. It summarizes the trends within the above mentioned social fields that are all expressed in absolute values. Interesting to note is the care with which they looked at the press. The growth in the printed media is matched by the increase in literacy and schooling. The result of the enrolled members of the age group of reference highlights one’s attention to the use of more appropriate indicators than in the past, so the difference in schooling at the regional level is put in evidence. The interest in public charities highlighted in the yearbook derives from the approval by the Parliament of the relative Law in the same year. However, statistically it could not provide any information yet. The Yearbook provides, however, the condition of the charities present on the territory and the availability in the budget of municipalities and provinces to offer, in the future, a comparative tool with the effects of the new law reforming the sector. Thus one can see a beginning of the use of statistics to assess the success of public policies. The civil and criminal justice data contained are understood as evidence of the moral movement of the country with great detail on the types of cases and proceedings foreshadowing what will from then on be the judicial statistics, all guided by the procedural aspects of administrative provenance. The statistics for criminal justice give an account of the more limited articulation of the offences at the time. Brunialti concludes: “The condition of the city worker has certainly become better. Rents are more expensive but the houses are far better. The price of clothes has diminished, but not that of meat, but that of other foods has decreased. In short, whatever one may say, the economic conditions of workers have come to improve a bit more than the moral conditions.” The conclusion would seem a first attempt at analyzing the quality of life.

The 1921 census did not record any significant change in the survey pattern and the information of a social nature that derived from it, as one might have expected as a result of the social changes associated with World War I just finished.

The use of administrative data from the education system allowed for the editing of a volume of “summary of data on the middle and normal school institutes from 1909–10 to 1911–12,” whose attention to gender is interesting as an entire chapter is devoted to women present in those institutions.

## 2 From the Establishment of the Central Institute of Statistics to the Small 1936 Census

A shock to the organization of statistical production in Italy derived from the 16th session of the International Institute of Statistics held in Rome in 1925. Until that time statistical production had been limited to the information needed by individual ministries and government departments. However at that time, the scientific community stepped forward with a strong need for coordination of statistical production that led to the establishment of the Central Statistical Institute, reporting to the Head of Government and replacing the Central Bureau of Statistics that was anchored to the Directorate General of Labour Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce. This new collocation that emphasized its role as an instrument for decision making (*numerus rei publicae fundamentum*) exceeds the purely advisory role of the former Superior Council of Statistics.

However, the Census of 1931 and the small census of 1936 follow the establishment of the previous censuses, but show some signs of the kind of information the political power required with more attention. In fact, in 1931 questions were introduced on the age of women at the time of marriage, on any second marriages, on the number of children born, and on the number of children living. This was clearly related to the population policy of the regime. From the perspective of work, the field of economic activity was introduced, and it would be kept in all subsequent censuses. In both censuses, a strong focus was placed on the flows of migration to the colonies or to foreign countries. Such information was of great interest to politicians who were aiming at the colonization of the countries of the empire and strengthening the Italian population numbers seen as a representation of power.

Throughout the period the propensity to systematize the availability of data in education is consolidating. A monograph devoted to the statistics of some Italian cultural events in the period 1931–1935 contains information about libraries, book production, archives, intellectual property, museums and institutions of art, film, radio, and freelance professions. Data reading started using the advanced methods of statistics, and the frequency data is replaced by historical or indices of composition data and data derived from (i.e. pupils studied in relation to sex and type of institutes per compartment). In 1936 a monograph dedicated to students enrolled in universities and high schools in the academic year 1931–1932 was also published perpetuating and expanding on a similar survey conducted in the academic year 1926–1927. The survey presented was very innovative introducing two new dimensions of the study: the spatial mobility of university students according to the attractiveness of the premises and the social class according to their father's occupation and their willingness to follow their father's education or career. Official statistics illustrate the attempts to search for an autonomous role, but serves primarily the function of producing data for the management of public affairs and government policies. The confirmation is in a paragraph dedicated to the students belonging to the "Gioventù Italiana del Littorio" within the statistical data on middle school education for the school year 1936–1937 which included the statistics data from 1932–1933 to 1935–1936.

### **3 From the Post-War Reconstruction to the Financial Boom: Sample Surveys, Special Surveys**

The war resulted in the failure to conduct the census of 1941 and thus led to, in September 1944, the realization of the “Census and Surveys for national reconstruction,” carried out in 38 provinces of liberated Italy (in accordance with the commitments made between the Allied Commission and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers). In 2 months were conducted four general censuses (population, agriculture, industry, and merchant marine) and 30 surveys on all major aspects of national life (Istat 1945). Within the Social environment surveys were carried out on living conditions, food, clothing, housing, public health, primary and secondary education, and public services. Implementation difficulties imposed the use of estimates, and the whole experience was a turning point in the approach to produce official statistics as expressed by the ISTAT General Director Molinari, “The usefulness of official statistics is now greater, the more pronounced is its nature of ‘topicality’ in comparison to those predominantly ‘historical’: especially when the preparation of ‘plans’—which must forcibly be rooted in statistics—occupies a prominent place in the activities of the state.”

The first real post-war census of 1951 is confronted with the need to determine what the demographic, economic and social base on which the country’s recovery had to be based. The new national territory, involved new borders and a flow of refugees from territories no longer administered by Italy, and the return of refugees from former colonies in Africa, demanded that the survey should include even a question on “Refugees.” There were new types of people whose needs and demands the political power had to provide answers and assistance to. In addition, questions on housing and services available that detect the persistence of poor housing, both in relation to crowded conditions and cohabitation and the lack of services were introduced (Cortese 1978).

The Official statistic in this period was aware of its own potentialities and requires going beyond the mere certification of the state of the population. This was also described at intervals which allowed the detection of changes in the long-term without giving an immediate response to any short-term phenomena. In 1952, according to the methodological developments of the discipline and techniques of sample collection, the first sample survey on the Labour Force took place, followed by three more completed (1954, 1956, 1957) and reaching, in 1959, a quarterly survey for a project that would become routine. Such a methodological boost is significantly attributable to the role played by the president of ISTAT Maroi, who designed and created also the dissemination of statistical data according to a new set of systematically issued monothematic directories, mostly on the social field: Yearbook of judiciary Statistics (1949), Yearbook of Italian Education Statistics (1950), Directory Statistics Assistance and Social Security (1951), Yearbook of Health Statistics (1955), Yearbook of Statistics of Emigration (1955, become Yearbook of Labour Statistics and Emigration in 1960). All these could benefit from systematic and comprehensive information from public administrations which helped to strengthen the role of the Central Institute of Statistics.

The experience gained from sample techniques with the aim to study the labor force and the labor market, provided methodological tools and impetus for the use of such techniques for the acquisition of information in other social areas. In presenting the supplement of the Italian Education Statistical Yearbook of 1955, dedicated to the “special survey on college students and graduates of high schools,” Maroi wrote: “I am confident that the present research, which corresponds to the Institute’s aim of broadening and deepening evermore every field of inquiry, is able to meet the expectations of scholars,” with the explicit vision of what he envisioned, which introduced the concept of several users of statistics apart from the political decision-makers.

Combined with the labor force survey of 1957, special research was also completed, published in 1958, “on some aspects of living conditions of the population.” The survey indicates how the perspective of the social factor of official statistics was expanding. Furthermore, the focus on the education system and labor force, a priority until then, outlined the potentialities on which the political powers could count on in order to define development policies. Surveys that touched on individual choices and lifestyles outlined a first approach to the study of quality of life by looking into what people read, the use of new technologies of the time—radio, television, cinema—smoking habits, changes, and aspirations of working fathers and sons, the prospects for social mobility for themselves, and for future generations. The respondent was the householder, who provided the information for all other components, and so the variables used were only referred to the head of the family. Such variables were interpreted as different variables of the behavior related to reading without taking into account how the higher education in the younger generations could also modify the social habits of the whole family. Yet combined with the labor force surveys of 1965 and 1973, the next two surveys were carried out specifically focused on the reading habits of individual members of the family in relation to newspapers, periodicals, and books not read for purposes of study and work. The three surveys, repeated 7 or 8 years apart, foretell a new direction to build on in areas more closely related to social issues, not just demographic or economic, of the longitudinal paths, with reading being able to highlight and monitor the resulting changes of behaviors and lifestyles.

The two censuses that fall in this period testify to the improvement in living conditions. In fact, the questions on housing conditions in 1951 are extended to also consider the presence of a heating system and, in 1961, also the type of system be it centralized or autonomous as well as specifying between services inside or outside the home (1951) and between the toilet and bathroom (1961): this ranges from measuring the satisfaction of needs to the level of comfort. In this light, beginning from 1971, the time taken to travel to the place of study or work, and the means of transport are collected. In the 1961 and 1971 censuses, there is a section dedicated to the marital and reproductive life of women, which subsequently will not be replicated.

## 4 The Push Toward International Comparable Statistics and Social Indicators

Once again, a shock to the implementation and modernization of statistics comes from the cultural movements and international institutional arrangements of new supranational institutions. Social statistics in particular hold a new and stronger standing along with attention to which countries look to social inequality, belonging to social classes, lifestyle, and marginality. The social indicator movement, born in the US, had attracted the interest of all other Western countries, including Italy. In 1971 the XXVII Scientific meeting of the Italian Society of Statistics dedicated its work to social indicators. The scholars of the SIS, then as now, were mostly academics but the presence of members of ISTAT and central government, whose contributions would change the perspective of the production of official statistics in the social field, was significant. The birth of the OCSE in 1960 intensifies the pressure to produce statistics suitable to compare the political experience and living conditions of the member countries.

The quarterly surveys on labor force had become fully operational. The yearbook of statistics on education was systematically published using administrative data implemented from time to time by special surveys. From a thematic dimension other social issues present in the Italian Yearbook of Statistics become more detailed. The systematic production is increasingly complemented by occasional surveys, and referenced to specific social issues (the survey conducted on holidays every year since 1959, and the survey on sport).

But a more systematic reflection on social statistics appeared in the Second Conference on Information Statistics held in 1981 (Golini 1981, Rey 1981), where an entire session was devoted to social statistics and which formed the basis for the publication of the second volume of social statistics—the first had appeared in 1975 (Istat 1975, Moser 1983). In the next volume of 1993 the title would change to “Statistics and social indicators.” In the presentation Rey, the ISTAT president at the time clarified the choice, “Without neglecting the absolute values, special attention was devoted to the preparation of reports and indices, which allow an immediate comparison between the configurations that individuals take in the various phenomena regions. To this end were used, where possible, coded and characteristic ratios now commonly used, while in other cases less common solutions have been proposed, notwithstanding the immediate preservation of the need for comprehensibility and relevance of the developed measures (Istat 1993).” This approach represents a significant change in the role of official statistics in the direction of facilitating the interpretation of the information produced (Fiocco 2009).

## 5 Household Surveys

From this gradual growth of attention to social issues comes the “Survey on family structures and behavior (Istat 2009).” This was completed for the first time in 1983 in order to deepen the study of the family structure along with family relations and the system of free assistance. This survey is a prerequisite to the Multipurpose Survey on families which kicks off the project in its earliest form in 1987 to complete the planned cycles (excluding the final that would never be realized) in 1991. In the first round the survey collected information on new family forms (such as free unions) and the life-cycle of women, with an emphasis on increased fertility and marriage histories. The IMF is a fixed point and totally innovative for social statistics in Italy. Firstly it was intended with the declared aim of summarizing in a single design, in order to detect all of the social issues of interest so as to be able to compare, both transverse and longitudinal, the social dimensions of people’s living conditions and their transformation over time. This was achieved by monitoring changes themselves and in relation to changes that were occurring in other dimensions or within the family structure. It also extends many areas of interest defined in the 1981 volume of the Social Statistics through the introduction, from time to time and in different cycles, of: the victimization by crime, home accidents, conditions of disability, use of time, short and long-term travel, school activities and conditions of childhood, the condition of the elderly, family networks, use of social and health services and hospital use of medications, chronic diseases, and smoking habits. All these issues are now dealt with by the individual and not on the part of the institutions. Hence by the demand rather than by the offer, completing the information of an administrative nature might come from the school system, the health system, the social security system, the justice system, and so on. In this way, comparisons and differences were highlighted between statistics from administrative sources and the information provided by individuals. This is especially relevant when considering the uncertain number of unreported crimes, domestic accidents that result in hospitalization or absence from work in health statistics, school dropouts not due to official withdrawal from courses, living conditions, and care of the disabled, assistance and welfare statistics.

Between June 1988 and May 1989, the first national survey on the use of time took place, indicating the different life styles and behavior in time management between different social subjects according to gender, age, family structure, and so on. Taking the side of the individual also means following the path of detecting the subjective dimension. Thus a subjective and satisfaction approach will increasingly be used in subsequent surveys by the IMF survey system. The “pillar” survey of the current IMF is on “Aspects of Daily Life,” conducted annually since 1993, when the system had been redesigned. It collects, in fact, all the phenomena which are then detailed in thematic research (Gazzelloni 2004).

The survey “Citizens and leisure” was founded in 1995 as an attempt by ISTAT to systematically describe a sector which is very tied to choices and subjective perceptions, such as leisure and relationships between the latter and cultural participation.



The survey on public safety, also called on the victimization survey and carried out for the first time in 1997, takes the side of those who have suffered a crime, even if not reported. The characteristics of the victims are put in evidence and the types of weaker subjects or those more easily attacked by specific crimes emerge. In addition it is the first survey in 2006 on violence against women in a framework of collaboration with the Department for equal opportunities.

Another international boost comes in relation to time use surveys that were conducted in several countries with different methodologies. In Italy the first survey along the lines proposed by the Statistical Program Committee was carried out in 2002/2003 and the second survey in 2008/2009. The time use surveys provide a comprehensive and effective tool for delineating the lifestyles, conditioning, and behavioral choices of individuals with regard to age, gender, and family structure. Furthermore in 1998 the first survey “Family, social subjects and conditions of childhood” was conducted and repeated in 2003 with the same structure but with renovated and expanded content. In this survey, emergent phenomena such as prolonged permanence at home by young people in the family of origin and the postponement of marriage and reproductive projects by women would be studied.

An important social survey, created under an agreement between ISTAT and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, is on social integration of persons with disabilities through which the factors that hinder the full participation to economic life and social development of the country are analyzed. The survey, conducted between January and March 2004, was addressed to persons who were disabled or impaired in activity at the time of the survey “Health status and use of health services” in 1999/2000 and is therefore a further concrete example of integration and synergy between the various surveys of the system.

Another important survey to define the living conditions of households is on consumption: this survey, although falling within conceptual economic statistics, highlights the different lifestyles and monitors changes in dietary and spending behavior according to family structure and class. The information on household consumption over time becomes an information base for the work of the commission of inquiry on poverty and to define the poverty line in Italy in both absolute and relative terms. This approach marks the final introduction of complex indicators into official social statistics (Facioni 2004).

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## **6 The Role of the Birth of SISTAN Within the Change in Approach to Social Statistics**

The IMF experience finds its final structure during another event that led to a radical review of the Italian statistical system: the establishment of SISTAN in 1989. This event defines the process of transformation of ISTAT into a research institution and this step will bring about a number of consequences including the effort to provide users not only with data but also methods of analysis. From the new structure deriving from SISTAN, a set of tools and activities which reorganize the production of official statistics in the field of social statistics took

place. The direct involvement and accountability of government institutions and activities in SISTAN release ISTAT from the burden of a systematic series of surveys deriving from administrative tasks and assigned, from time to time to the competent institutions that take responsibility for making available and publishing objective data related to their institutional activities. Alongside the above mentioned, also specific research interests which produce further statistic information that is fully available to the users and interacting with those produced by other actors within the system, emerge. In particular, the surveys carried out in collaboration between ISTAT and ISFOL deepen social issues on work, on inequality in general, and on unemployment. The survey of the BI on Italian household budgets, carried out since the 1960s, is completely redesigned to provide data integrity with the ISTAT survey on consumption.

With the birth of SISTAN, the real activities of ISTAT research with *ad hoc* surveys carried out on their own, or in conjunction with other ongoing activities of other institutions, expand. The integrated system of surveys on the education-work transition, which began as early as 1989 and aimed at the analysis of subsequent pathways to achieving the graduation of young people, who successfully conclude a course of post-compulsory study, is carried out every 3 years and after the third year after graduation and is part of the first type of research. The survey on separation and divorce, conducted yearly by ISTAT in the civil courts since 1969 for separations and divorces (from 1971 for divorces and the survey on child custody) belongs to the second type. But today the substantial legislative changes, both in marriage break ups and child custody, make these surveys strongly explanatory of change in behaviors and attitudes toward value-pairs of the traditional family. Another type of social investigation that relies on the collaboration with administrative tasks is related to applications for adoption. The Invalsi activity, whose statistics on the learning of children at various levels of education should also be mentioned.

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## **7 The Surveys on Living Conditions of Families in Europe: EU-SILC and the New ISTAT Social Surveys Recently Implemented or Being Planned**

Since 2004, Eurostat and the NSI of Europe made available to scholars and policy-makers a broad range of information on living conditions of European households drawn from sample surveys and administrative sources. But the most comprehensive survey of European social content is the EU-SILC survey carried out under the European regulation in order to allow comparability between the data collected from member countries. This survey is particularly interesting since it is fully designed to meet the needs of monitoring of the Lisbon strategy and already provides as output the Laeken indicators, calculated and compared.

In the same year the new Labour Force Survey started; the change was undertaken in line with European Union regulations. A significant feature of the survey is the establishment of new criteria for identifying employed and unemployed individuals, as well as a far-reaching reorganization of the data collection and production process.

In 2006 a new survey for the first time was entirely devoted to the phenomenon of physical and sexual violence against women while surveys on sexual harassment and violence were conducted in 1997 and again in 2002 as part of the Multipurpose Survey “Safety of citizens.”

The current interest in ISTAT social activities is further evidenced by the new special surveys recently completed (the first survey on “Income and living conditions of the foreign population resident in Italy” conducted on a sample of 6,000 families with at least one foreign member), or soon to be realized (statistics of homeless people and those who do not occupy a house, that once completed, will highlight the emerging and upcoming phenomena such as new types of poverty and marginalization and the Adult Education Survey that aims to detect the involvement of adults in training).

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## 8 Conclusions

The widening scope of social statistics that occurred in the production process does not seem destined to stop. Indeed, two forces of different nature, in our opinion, will mark the future of social statistics: the local system of public management, partly as a result of orientation to federalism, is burdened with tasks that will require statistics at a greater level of disaggregation in terms of both territorial and individuals and social groups’ segmentation. On the other hand, compared to local requirements, there are many pressures that come from supranational institutions toward methodological and informational solutions with the purposes of knowledge of social conditions of countries as a whole. *In primis*:

- The OECD project “Measuring the Progress of Society” (to support national initiatives for the definition of well-being and progress).
- Communication from the European Union Commission to the Council and the European Parliament “GDP: measuring progress in a changing world” (the EU guidelines to complement GDP with social and environmental indicators).
- The final report of the Stiglitz Commission (with recommendations to improve the measurement of economic performance, quality of life, and environmental sustainability).
- The “Sofia memorandum,” signed September 30, 2010 during the 96th Conference of Presidents and General Managers of NSI in Europe (the issue of measuring progress, prosperity, and sustainable development is a key element of official statistics).

From these new forms of measurement of progress and prosperity will come certainly the need for social statistics information more disaggregated and richer than those available today.

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