

Statistics at the Ministry of Culture and Communication: an interview¹

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Courrier des statistiques: How is DEPS organized, and how have its operations and work program changed since the 1970s?

Philippe Chantepie and Jeannine Cardona: At its founding in 1963, our unit was called Studies and Research Office (Service Études et Recherche: SER). It turned into the Department of Studies and Forward-Looking Analysis (Département des Études et de la Prospective: DEP) in 1986 and, later, the Department of Studies, Forward-Looking Analysis, and Statistics (Département des Études, Prospective et des Statistiques: DEPS). In 2004, it became one of the four departments of the new Delegated Office for Development and International Affairs (Délégation au Développement et aux Affaires Internationales: DDAI) at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, after having functioned for over twenty years as a unit reporting to the Ministry's General Administration (Administration Générale).

Since its inception, the Department's mission has been to build up economic and social knowledge of cultural life in France. DEPS does this by (1) compiling statistics on culture, (2) producing analyses on the economics of cultural activities, and (3) preparing studies on the changes



Photo: L. Boullier/MCC

The Ministry of Culture and Communication seen from the Galerie d'Orléans terrace

in cultural participation generated by the evolution in lifestyles. Thanks to these activities, DEPS provides quantitative and qualitative insights for defining the nation's cultural policies, charting their course, and assisting in decision-making.

More specifically, DEPS carries out surveys and studies on French cultural life from two angles. The first is a sectoral approach, i.e., broadly reflecting artistic fields: surveys on museum attendance, art schools, movie audiences, and actors; studies on leveraging cultural assets, the economics of music, and so on. The second comprises approaches of a more cross-sectional nature, such as public funding of culture, tracking of cultural employment, households'

cultural expenditures, and cultural participation of the French.

The mix of these two categories has changed constantly, depending on the shifts in the Ministry's remit and in cultural-policy priorities—and also, of course, because society itself has evolved.

In the past two decades, we have set up new cross-sectional projects aimed at gaining fuller knowledge of cultural industries, artistic and cultural employment and occupations, art education, and other areas.

In 2005, the Department's generalist and cross-sectional mission was reasserted and linked to new priorities such as the analysis of changes in

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1. Originally published in *Courrier des statistiques*, French ed., no. 117-119 (2006), pp. 46-50.

the economics of culture (with special emphasis on cultural industries) and the analysis of the uses of culture, cultural expectations, and cultural behaviors. The 2005/2006 DEPS studies and statistics program is accordingly divided into five chapters: “economics and cultural industries,” “employment and education,” “analysis of policies, public action, and regulation,” “participation, audiences, and consumption,” and “modes of transmission and legitimation; transmission of knowledge.” The program is implemented by some twenty staff members working in three units: studies, statistics, and publications.

The DEPS work program is drawn up every year on a proposal from its staff members (who, by definition, are well placed to have relevant opinions on the issue) and in consultation with the Ministry’s other directorates. A Studies Council, set up in 1986, defines work guidelines, monitors program progress, and makes sure that results are disseminated. The Council, chaired by the Minister or his/her chief of staff (*directeur de cabinet*), comprises the heads of the Ministry’s directorates, a regional director of cultural affairs, and qualified individuals, including a representative of INSEE’s Director-General.

CDS: What are the links between DEPS and official statistics?

PC & JC: The link with INSEE is materialized on a long-term basis by the Institute’s participation in the DEPS Studies Council, as mentioned above, but also by the DEPS’s membership—as a ministerial statistical office and producer of statistics—in the “Demography and Living Conditions” task force of the National Council for Statistical Information (Conseil National de l’Information Statistique: CNIS). Our Department presents its annual work program to the task force as well as descriptions of its planned surveys so that the task force can rule on their usefulness (*avis d’opportunité*).

Also, in its relations with INSEE, DEPS relies very routinely on the

Institute’s Division for Relations with Ministerial Statistical Offices (Division des Relations avec les Services Statistiques des Ministères: DRSSM) and, more generally, with the Statistical Coordination Department. The latter provides DEPS with effective support and facilitates contacts with other INSEE units on specific projects, such as requests for use of survey data files.

One of the major current projects at the Ministry of Culture is the creation of a “cultural register” aimed at establishing a sampling frame of all units engaged in the production of cultural goods and services. DEPS receives methodological support from INSEE’s Business Statistics Directorate under the terms of reference of a project group comprising the Directorate’s “Register and Demography of Enterprises and Local Units” Unit, which manages the national SIRENE business register.

DEPS is asked by INSEE to participate in large-scale official-statistics projects such as the inter-departmental mission on the economics of membership organizations or, more recently, the revision of the French classification of economic activities (Nomenclature d’Activités Française: NAF) and the European Union classification of economic activities (NACE). For the cultural sector, the revision will notably offer a better coverage of artistic activities, which have now been divided into three sub-classes.

Agreements with INSEE allow DEPS to use national surveys such as the Family-Budget Survey. DEPS works regularly with the Institute’s Directorate for Demographic and Social Statistics on the changes in the variable sections of the Continuous Survey on Living Conditions (Enquête Permanente sur les Conditions de Vie: EPCV), and on the definition-in-progress of the content of the future Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (Statistiques sur les Revenus et les Conditions de Vie: SRCV [the French transposition of SILC]). This cooperation has given DEPS opportunities to work with statistical offices in other ministries as

well: the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for the 2004 survey on cultural and sports participation; the Ministries of Employment and Solidarity, of Youth Affairs and Sports, of Education, and others for the 2002 survey on participation in associational life.

Lastly, we can mention our cooperation with the Directorate for Assessment, Forward-Looking Analysis, and Performance (Direction de l’Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance: DEPP²), which, under the terms of an agreement, allowed DEPS to use the panel of children entering first grade in 1997 for a longitudinal observation of cultural participation of children and adolescents.

Since 1995, when DEPS launched an initiative to promote EU cooperation in culture statistics, our Department has developed ties with Eurostat—first as part of a Leadership Group (LEG), then as a member of a European experts group on culture statistics. The work undertaken has led to the definition of a methodology using NACE and ISCO³ for measuring cultural employment in the EU and a methodology for measuring cultural participation. Eurostat is expected to publish the first available results in 2007.⁴

CDS: Reading the 1977 article by Augustin Girard and Odile Timbart,⁵ the striking fact is that, about thirty years ago, culture statistics had to be built from scratch, starting with the very definition of the cultural field. Do DEPS researchers and statisticians still need to ask such questions today, or is there now a consensus on what “culture” is?

2. A unit comprising the ministerial statistical office of the Ministry of School Education, Higher Education, and Research.

3. International Standard Classification of Occupations.

4. DEPS won a Eurostat tender to prepare the first statistical yearbook on culture in the European Union, which Eurostat will publish in November 2007.

5. “Les dépenses culturelles des administrations publiques: administrations centrales et collectivités locales,” originally published in *Courrier des statistiques*, French ed., no. 4 (1977), reprinted in no. 117-119 (2006), pp. 43-45.

PC & JC: We've come a long way from the construction period. Thanks to a series of statistical projects, DEPS has achieved a vital legitimacy and role in the advancement of knowledge on the cultural environment. In our now well-established publication series—*Notes et études statistiques*, *Notes et études sur l'emploi culturel*—our recurrent statistical studies on funding by local government, the cultural participation of the French, employment in the performing arts, the activities of music schools, and other subjects have contributed a corpus of essential knowledge to the Ministry of Culture and Communication and, beyond, to cultural actors in the public and private sectors alike.

As noted earlier, a large section of our area of study concerns short-term phenomena such as public-policy initiatives—i.e., financial intervention in favor of culture—or particularly sensitive fields such as cultural employment (which, in the performing

arts, owes its singular profile to a specific unemployment-benefits system). Concerning our work on modes of consumption, household spending on culture and the media, and the cultural participation of the French, these are objects of social analysis tied to structural factors such as demographics, educational attainment, and income levels. Because they are structural, these factors change slowly, which is sometimes disappointing for public decision-makers who learn about our work!

In any event, all of these projects concern an “established” cultural field, which is that of public cultural action—in the broad sense—undertaken by a ministry that, when you think of it, is very young. Yet the cultural field necessarily remains an open, problematic issue, which raises many questions.

To begin with, we cannot neglect a more anthropological (and hence more encompassing) approach to culture: many social phenomena are actually cultural phenomena—or are, at the very least, informed by cultural factors.

Let us give you a few examples at random from recent years: audiovisual and digital usages, particularly the exchange of content; the importance of interpersonal communications; the lifestyle of the young, who are entering the workplace at an ever later age; intergenerational relationships; and the expansion of amateur cultural and sports participation.

These usages are not the easiest to measure statistically. This is a challenge that should be taken up through a sharing of insights among public players: the Ministry's Directorate for Media Development, the National Film Center (Centre National de la Cinématographie: CNC), the National Audiovisual Institute (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel: INA), the Ministry of the Economy, Finance, and Industry,⁶ and, of course, INSEE and the ministerial statistical offices concerned. That is a potential horizon for our Department's statistical function: DEPS will then need to rely on tools of a more cross-sectional nature (possibly developed by third parties), as it does already, for instance, in the longitudinal analysis of children's panels conducted in cooperation with DEPP.

6. Since May 2007: Ministry of the Economy, Finance, and Employment.



Digest of key French culture statistics, 2007 edition

Another possible initiative is the study of technical change, which surely has powerful consequences on the modes of access to culture. This will lead DEPS to overhaul its investigations of cultural participation. They should be largely extended to media and digital usages, particularly Internet access; they should also take account of the time scale of consumption (the fact that consumption times vary according to usage), and the dynamics of complementarity, substitution, and renewal of cultural participation.

The cultural field is changing not only on the demand side, i.e., among the audience for cultural offerings. It is also changing on the supply side itself, chiefly in regard to the commercial offering, which has become central to cultural access. A second statistical horizon should therefore open up here: the exploration of the economic field of public- and private-sector cultural activities. Here as well, we need to develop suitable tools. That is why one of the major undertakings of DEPS consists, as we have seen, in compiling a cultural register, structured along the same lines as INSEE's SIRENE business register, but using identifiers specific to the cultural sectors concerned. This is obviously a "heavyweight" project, which

relies on the full range of information systems at the Ministry of Culture and Communication and will take time to complete. Ultimately, the tool's content will shape the development of relevant statistical surveys on the economic world of culture.

We have already taken a first step by preparing analyses of cultural industries—using data from the Annual Enterprise Surveys (*Enquêtes Annuelles d'Entreprise: EAE*)—published in an initial *Aperçu statistique des industries culturelles* (*Statistical Overview of Cultural Industries*) in early 2006. These studies, as well, will provide an indispensable base for preparing deeper examinations of individual sectors and themes. Beyond this, a better coverage of cultural industries by DEPS ties in with a reappraisal of the cultural field. Several countries—in North America, Asia, and even Europe—have committed their culture, or at least their "cultural industries," to an approach based on international competitiveness. This comes at a time when cultural diversity has been internationally recognized at UNESCO.⁷ The measurement of a cultural field rebuilt around the notion of creativity could therefore become a novel and highly complex statistical

object. The U.N.,⁸ OECD,⁹ UNESCO, and the European Commission are weighing this possibility. Without passing judgment for the moment on whether such changes are justified, DEPS will, in the coming years, be involved in the review: as one of the world founders of culture statistics, our Department has a part to play in their evolution.

Therefore, and to answer your initial question, yes, the consensus on the cultural field is already being reappraised, at the very time when entire sectors of culture—such as the performing arts—are not yet sufficiently well known in statistical terms.

Nevertheless, our work now rests on a sufficiently solid foundation to keep our statistical system moving in the right direction, preparing tools and studies with greater explanatory power. This will give us a better grasp of new objects or even a new field. ■

7. United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture.

8. United Nations Organization.

9. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

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