

What are official statistics for anyway?

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Abstract:

In Europe and in most developed countries a vast amount of official statistics are compiled; short-term and structural data covering a broad spectrum of economic, environmental and social activities. The collection and compilation of these data are costly, both to the taxpayers who pays for the collection and to the business communities who shoulder the administrative costs or burden of supplying the data. As recompense, most nations view official statistics as a public good, central to the accountability and transparency necessary for a functioning democracy and disseminate them free of charge.

Yet beyond the halls of academia and policy making these tremendous resources appear to be under-utilised. Why is this and does it matter? For some, official statistics generally and business statistics in particular, are simply part of the supply chain that supports the compilation of the national account and this is justification enough. But there is a growing body of evidence to suggest there is a problem; a problem with the potential to adversely affect the quality of the data being compiled.

This paper outlines some recent research highlighting the link between data quality and perceived usefulness. A number of examples of where data might be useful to business are also illustrated.

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