

Editorial

The importance of statistics in public life appears to most of us as obvious nowadays. Statistics are everywhere and they provide a peculiar and authoritative reference to the social dimension and the dynamics of social processes. The origins of empirical social research are themselves closely linked to the 'objectification' of society by statistics, as well as to the official production of statistics and to the formation of a modern conception of government. There is of course an etymological closeness between 'statistics' and 'State', which enhances the image of the former as a science of the State. Drawing authority from these two independent sources (Science and the State), statistics have gained status and reputation; they have been understood and used, over time, as a sort of encyclopedic ordering of reality, an objective account of the phenomena, objects and facts that make up social life. Through the setting up of categories, classes, and 'public spaces', statistics have created a system by which individuals and organizations can picture the world that surrounds them and act upon it.

For the past 40 years, however, this perspective has been challenged. A new field of study has emerged, that takes on statistics as a set of objects and practices that deserve to be examined for themselves, rather than as a reflection of preexisting reality or a set of neutral methodological devices. From this perspective, probability calculus concepts, such as risk and uncertainty, are treated as epistemological categories, and the concepts, classes and modes of measurement developed in the course of statistical activity are envisioned as social constructions, brought about by groups, institutions, circumstances and ideas involved in the day-to-day making of history.

An enormous field of opportunities has therefore opened to research. One may, for instance, pick up any topic in which the production of statistics is involved, using it as a key to examine how a given theme becomes 'social', worthy of discussion, theorization, and public intervention. One may also look at the institutions, from the purely scientific to the more administrative, that have been involved in the making of statistics as technical devices or as numerical series, the know-how they have developed, the socio-political conditions of their emergence, etc.

Designated sometimes as the *history of statistics*, sometimes as the *sociology of quantification*, this field has brought together students from various areas, such as history, demography, sociology, education, anthropology, communication studies, statistics, mathematics, political science, philosophy, etc., who were themselves drawn from a variety of settings, namely universities, statistical offices, research centers, as well as other organizations of the public and private sectors. Many of these students and their work as well are scattered along countries and different languages. The recently-created Association of the Americas for the History of Statistics and the Calculation of Probabilities (AAHECP), which spans across both hemispheres and four languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English), has conceived the electronic journal ***Statistics and Society*** as a locus dedicated on the production, bringing together and dissemination of academic work focused on the analysis of statistics and

probability calculus as social constructs.

Published on an annual basis, ***Statistics and Society*** seeks to present empirical research and theoretical reflection from members of the Association and by other students and thus contribute to the circulation of scientific production, the improvement of analytical tools and the refinement of theoretical and methodological concepts. One of its intents is to minimize as much as possible the language barriers between communities, publish articles in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish and, when feasible, to present some of the content in more than one language.

The journal publishes ***articles, book reviews, biographical profiles and historical documents*** that may be significant with regard to the development of statistics in the Americas. The journal also intends to bring, if possible, thematic *dossiers*, debates, interviews, as well as relevant dissertations and theses abstracts.

This first issue carries papers that were all prepared by scholars directly involved in the formation of AAHECP. This will allow, to a degree, a definition of the contours and characteristics of the scientific community involved, across the Americas, in this field of study. Since most of them have been laboring over these issues for a number of years, this initial publication will offer, may we say, a rough map of their research interests. Far from excluding any enlargement of perspectives, we hope that this will encourage students whose concerns meet or somehow crisscross those interests to also submit their production.

We open the volume some words of presentation on the AAHECP by Jean-Pierre Beaud. A first block of *articles* dedicated to national experiences follows this. In “El concepto de población en el sistema estadístico de Argentina, 1869-2001”, Hernán Otero examines how population was conceptualized in censuses carried out in that country since the 19th century. Then, in “On the Genesis of a New Statistical Regime: the Case of Canada, 1800-2011”, Jean-Pierre Beaud and Jean-Guy Prévost offer an overview of the history of official statistics in Canada and distinguish the four different “statistical regimes” it has gone through. In “As instituições estatísticas como centros de ciência, uma (r)evolução necessária”, Nelson de Castro Senra takes a similar look at Brazil, emphasizing how State statistical institutions progressively became loci of social-scientific production.

In a second block of *articles* centered on thematic issues, we find first Leticia Mayer’s “La corriente moral del probabilismo y su influencia en la génesis de las ideas científicas de probabilidad”, which advocates the centrality of the encounter of Europeans with American and Eastern cultures in the development of probabilism – a moral and philosophical current of Christianity that developed from the 16th century on. Laura Venciday, in turn, has proposed to us a problem of the 21st century in “El papel del conocimiento experto en la gestión de lo social. El caso de la incorporación de los factores de riesgo para el desarrollo psicomotor en la primera infancia en la gestión del Plan de Centros de Atención a la Infancia y la Familia (Plan CAIF) en Uruguay”. In this article, the author discusses the close relationship between the specialized knowledge produced in scientific circles and the forms of management of the social that were developed in a specific context. Referring to another national and historical context, Hernán González Bollo, in “Medir el agro argentino: la Dirección de Economía Rural y Estadística, Ministerio de Agricultura, 1898-1948”, focuses his analysis on the institutional

arrangements, human and technical resources, official measurements and functions of the State organism in charge of managing rural areas in Argentina. Then, in “Sobre a Estatística e a Psicologia na constituição do campo educacional”, Odair Sass seeks to elucidate the relationship established, from the dialectic of Enlightenment, between statistics and psychology. From a different perspective, Claudia Daniel examines the problems and discussions surrounding the figures of criminal activity in “Medir la moral pública: la cuantificación policial del delito en Buenos Aires, 1880-1910”. Finally, in “Escola isolada e grupo escolar: a variação das categorias no discurso oficial do governo brasileiro e de Minas Gerais”, Natalia Gil and Sandra Caldeira intend to highlight the oscillations in the meaning of the words used in educational statistics and the implication of this for the very concept of school.

As a first *biographical profile*, Jean-Guy Prévost has proposed a paper entitled “The Gospel of Statistics and its Prophet: the Legacy of W. E. Deming”. It is important to emphasize here, with regard to the defining characteristics of this section of the journal, the model of analysis that is proposed here. In lieu of a narrative that would simply provide a list of dates and events relevant to the life of an individual, this profile combines a reconstruction of the path followed by a major American statistician with the analysis of concepts and practices that are still relevant today and to which he made a central contribution.

In the section dedicated to *historical documents*, we intend to reproduce official and legal texts that played a significant role in creating and regulating the first official bodies in charge of organizing the collection and publication of statistics in the Americas. This present volume brings together documents from Brazil and Argentina. It is our intention to compile, over the next few years, all the relevant documentation for other countries of the Americas, so as to allow a panorama and thus encourage comparative analysis.

In the *book review* section, Nelson de Castro Senra presents Renato Sergio de Lima’s *Entre palavras e números: violência, democracia e segurança pública no Brasil*.

A year ago, several of the authors mentioned above met in Salvador (Brazil) to discuss the opportunity of creating an association in which they could congregate as a scientific community and a vehicle that would provide an outlet for the work developed about the history of statistics and probability calculus *in the Americas*. Today, we are happy to see these projects take shape and optimistic about their further development. The publication of a first issue of **Statistics and Society** integrates these projects and, at the same time, illustrates their fertility.

It is worth naming here members of the Editorial Committee whose diligence and promptness in communication have made possible this achievement. Nelson de Castro Senra was present all the time, proposing guidelines for the journal, making important reflections and enlightening decision-making. Moreover, he assumed the collection and organization of the Brazilian material for the *historical documents* section. Jean-Guy Prévost gave shape to the *biographical profiles* section, defining it in a way that makes it both useful and interesting. He took care of all requests concerning translation and revision of the French and English versions. Making the journal available in four languages was made possible, in fact, thanks to the commitment of the Associate Editors. Ana Medeles and Fernanda Olmos always replied promptly to requests for helping with the Spanish versions. Ana has also contributed

to defining the graphic design, while Fernanda Olmos has compiled the historical documents on Argentina. Herberth Santos cooperated in decision-making, revisions of the English texts and he wrote an important part of this editorial.

We would like to mention, finally, three people who, although they are not members of the editorial team, have done crucial work and have made valuable suggestions for the success of the project: Alexandre de Paiva Rio Camargo, who has always been available and has brought several interesting ideas for defining the aims of the journal (although we have not yet been able to put all these through); Tiago Tavares, who has created a visual identity for the journal and made the layout of articles; and Ana Gabriela Clipes Ferreira, librarian of UFRGS, who gave advice on how to operate the SEER platform.

We hope that you enjoy this publication, we invite you all to send contributions, and we ask for your collaboration in making known its existence and content. We wish this inaugural issue of ***Statistics and Society*** to be the first of a long series.

Natália Gil e Herberth Santos

November 2011

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