NORDSTAT - comparable city statistics in the Nordic countries

Per Gullström, Åse Löset

Many attempts to make international city statistic surveys have failed because the figures have lacked in comparability. The variables that give a statistic picture of the cities often seem to be comparable. But many times a closer analysis shows that apparently similar variables are defined in different ways in different countries. Such problems are common in accounting e.g. the number of employed and unemployed persons, income situation, dwelling standard, statistics on environment, length of road systems (what is a road?) etc.

The Nordic countries have cooperated in more than 60 years and one important task has been to produce similarly defined statistics for the capitals. An expression for that is the Nordic surveys, published in the year-books of the capitals. The purpose then was to get an opportunity to compare the structure and the development of these cities in a correct way.

In 1990 the cooperation expanded to cover 16 large cities and their regions. The first obvious result of this was the book "Major City Regions of Scandinavia - facts and figures", issued in Nordic and English versions.

This book implied a new way of presenting city statistics and later we have noticed with satisfaction the structural similarity between our book and the voluminous EUROSTAT publications on European regions. In our book each of the 16 Nordic regions and their "core-cities" is described on six pages with text and illustrations and the same structure of the contents. A number of basic statistical figures are reviewed in a direct comparable form in an intelligible collection of tables. This publication became the ground document on which the database NORDSTAT was built.

Thus NORDSTAT is a database with figures on the above mentioned 16 regions, their "core cities" and where it is meaningful - on each country. The figures are collected from the official statistics in each country and have been broken down to regional and local level. The base consists of around 30 tables in Excel form and a "handbook" where the variables and their definitions are described. The material is updated every year. The work is organized so that the statistical office in one of the capitals is provided with all the figures and completes the database. This task circulates between the capitals.

NORDSTAT is also available on CD-ROM together with other types of Nordic statistic surveys, disseminated even outside the Nordic countries. In order to increase the accessibility of the NORDSTAT the Stockholm Office of Research an Statistics yearly produces a publication in English an Swedish, which contains most of the figures in the database.

One reason why NORDSTAT is of interest even outside the borders of the Nordic countries is that it so closely follows the common EU definitions for different statistical variables. The delineation of the functional urban regions have been worked out by NUREC (Network on Urban Research in the European Community) and EUROSTAT. Furthermore, the NORDSTAT project has carefully followed up the work of the Large Cities Statistics Project. Finally, the database contains only such variables that are comparable without giving misleading results. Figures that demand local knowledge and/or extra analysis are provided from the statistical authorities in each region. Knowing that only very few statistic comparisons are perfect we are constantly working on making our material even better.

The project NORDSTAT can be seen as an example of a practical way of creating comparable city statistics - regardless if the cities are located in the Nordic countries or somewhere else.

Per Gullström
Stockholm Office of Research and Statistics
Box 8320
S-104 20 Stockholm
Sweden
Tel +46 8 675 5000
Fax +46 8 675 5099

Åse Löset
Office of Statistics
Rådhustet
0037 OSLO
Norway
Tel +47 22 824541
Fax +47 22 824542