

A JOINT EFFORT OF MERCOSUR COUNTRIES – BOLIVIA AND CHILE DURING THE 2000 ROUND OF POPULATION CENSUSES

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Background

Since 1991 the Statistical Institutes of the MERCOSUR countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay) have initiated joint efforts in defining a working methodology to make the Statistical Systems of MERCOSUR compatible. The initiative became official as result of the Meeting of Statistical Directors held in Montevideo (Uruguay) on December 14-15, 1992, and came to include Bolivia and Chile after both countries became associate members of the Agreement.

MERCOSUR countries, plus Bolivia and Chile, share the idea of developing joint activities with the purpose of harmonizing results generated by their respective statistical systems. So far, progress has been achieved homologating macro-economic indicators, procedures and customs statistics, as well as other socio-economic issues.

In the field of the official statistics, especially during the 1997 Population and Housing Censuses, Argentina convened the countries of the MERCOSUR, and later Bolivia and Chile, to consider the Population and Housing Censuses to be executed, with the exception of Uruguay, in 2000.

The purpose of this initiative was to reinforce the National Statistical Systems, formalizing common surveys and generating homogeneous information on population characteristics, homes and households.

In 1997, the first group of meetings of technical personnel from the corresponding Statistical Institutes (INEs) took place, with the objective of studying possible census issues that could be subject to harmonization, starting with wording questions in the most similar manner possible.

Two years later, in 1999, the initiative was made official by an agreement signed on June 15, 1999, in the city of Asunción, Paraguay, by the Presidents of MERCOSUR, agreeing to carry out a Common Census.

Since 1997, the Project has received the support of INE Presidents and Directors, plus the financial support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the International Organization for Migrations (OIM); and, in phase 2000 thru 2004, from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Also, the Project has received specific technical support from INSEE, France, the U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada.

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Phases of the Project

This Project has two well-defined phases:

1. From 1997 to 2000

In the first stage, work was carried out through working groups of professionals and technicians in eight (8) workshops held in different countries, oriented towards the study of demographic variables of populations and households that could be subject to harmonization, considering the common interests of each country.

Also, taking into account the processing experience of the Census of Uruguay, the Project analysed the applicability of optical character reconnaissance (OCR). This technical innovation was later applied to the processing of the censuses in Brazil (2000), Argentina (2001) and Chile (2002). Paraguay and Bolivia were exposed to this experience, but, due to their own reasons, they shifted to manual processing of their censuses.

2. From 2000 to date

During this phase, four (4) workshops were held in which progress was made in terms of methodology developments (Basic Tables, Basic and Specific Social Indicators) in the observance and follow up of census processes, particularly in Argentina (2001) and Chile and Paraguay (2002).

As progress of census processing was achieved, a working group developed a Micro Data Multidimensional Base, representative up to the second level of the political-administrative division of each country. Also, a web page (www.censomercosul.org) was developed by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

During 2003, an evaluation of the censuses was completed, and its results were analysed in a 2004 workshop, where new methodologies for census surveys to be applied in the census round of 2010 were also put under consideration, based on the experiences of France, Spain, the U.S.A. and Canada.

Project Organization

The Project has a unique organization. It emerged from the needs of INE professionals and technicians. In the beginning, the Project had little formal structure and no defined leadership, relying instead on enthusiasm and the strong support of the INE Directors. In fact, during these first phases, most of the workshops were self financed by each Institute. As time went by, it was necessary to develop a steering committee formed by coordinators from each country. Also, working groups were established for specific issues and dissolved upon accomplishment of their goals and the exchange of information.

As soon as subjects were identified, six (6) working groups were created by professionals specializing in each subject: (1) Planning, Supervision and Control; (2) Conceptual and Thematic; (3) Nomenclatures; (4) Training; (5) Technological Aspects; and, (6) Diffusion and Dissemination. These groups performed planning activities,

discussion, exchange of documents, development of proposals and implementation of common actions.

Seminars and Workshops

Topics were discussed under the modality of seminars or workshops lasting 3 to 4 days. Two workshops were held regularly each year in different countries. By the end of 2004, 14 workshops had been held, addressing the following topics:

Housing.

Different manners in collecting information on housing from one country to another were detected. Special attention was paid to private household types, establishing a typology of houses in relation to the quality of construction materials. Argentina elaborated a typology based on the predominant materials used in walls, ceilings and floor. Definitions for occupied and unoccupied houses were also established.

Home and Family.

The concept of home (Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile and Bolivia) was assimilated to family (Brazil). With regards to home inhabitancy conditions, the following topics were analysed: existence of disposal services and number of bedrooms.

Population.

Age, sex and relatives did not show difficulties of comparison.

Migration.

This was another topic where concepts such as permanent residence, permanent residence 5 years ago, place of birth and date of entrance into the country (for expatriates) were homologated.

Education.

The topics analysed were: school attendance, level of studies and degree attained or year of attainment, for those attending an educational institution.

Economic Activity.

Concepts analysed were: activity, condition, occupation, industry branch and educational level.

Nomenclatures.

This subject was widely discussed by experts in classification, obtaining as result a "Classification of Economic Activities for Demographic Surveys in MERCOSUR (CAES-MERCOSUR)" composed of three levels, in which the first two are identical to the CIU. The third level defines 123 classes, which correspond to classes or groups of

categories of the CIIU, maintaining international comparison and another national sources.

The classification of occupations was the most difficult part because Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile work with categories similar to the International Classification CIUO, while Argentina has its own classification system and that of Brazil is not comparable with the rest. The result was the definition of 26 categories or convergence aggregations of the national classifications to these categories.

Pilot Tests

One of the most interesting activities achieved by the Project was the execution of joint pilot tests in bordering countries. Pilot tests were carried out between Argentina (Posada) and Paraguay (Asunción), Argentina (Port Iguazú) and Brazil (Foz de Iguazú), Bolivia (Port Quijarro) and Brazil (Corumbá). The tests had numerous objectives, such as testing the common questionnaire, as well as matters of organization and field survey.

Country-to-Country Cooperation

During this project, it was possible to achieve significant country-to-country cooperation, e.g., the scanners from Brazil were used by Bolivia to test the optical character reconnaissance; personnel from INDEC Argentina and IBGE Brazil assisted technical personnel from Paraguay in census issues; and Brazil printed questionnaires for the census tests of Bolivia.

Methodological Documents

Throughout the duration of the Project, an interchange of various documents took place, and many documents were elaborated, such as: Education (Paraguay); Household and Housing Situation (Argentina); Localities (Bolivia, Argentina); Urban and Rural Population (Argentina, Paraguay); Basic Tables (Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina); Indicators (Brazil); Optical Recognition (Bolivia); Understanding Census Information (Argentina, Brazil); Vulnerability (Argentina); Base Common Information (Brazil); Cartography and GIS (Chile); and Diffusion of Census Information (Uruguay).

Project Results

Among the main Project results, it is worthwhile to mention:

- 1) The original and unusual modality of organization
- 2) Common thematic contents: census approved variables
- 3) A common nomenclature for classification
- 4) Two joint pilot tests
- 5) Methodological documents
- 6) Common basic tables
- 7) Design of a Common Data Base
- 8) Design of a web page

Future Perspectives

During the last workshop held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Project focused on an evaluation of the entire process, and special attention was given to the achievement of harmonization and homologation. Also, applicability of new technologies was discussed, such as optical character reconnaissance, as well as outsourcing experiences of census processes, such as the printing of questionnaires, publicity, operative activities and data processing. Another important issue discussed in this workshop was related to the new Round of Censuses 2010, including topics such as new technologies to be applied, e.g., the use of handheld; new issues related to the introduction or discarding of pertinent and non-pertinent questions in the questionnaire; what to do regarding new approaches and alternative methods to survey census information from experiences in the U.S.A., France, Spain, and Peru, Colombia and Uruguay in Latin America. All of these issues will be matters for discussion in future workshops of the new Common Census Project of MERCOSUR – Bolivia and Chile, Round 2010.

Final Remarks

This project emerged as an initiative of technical personnel from the INEs of the MERCOSUR countries. Further on, as achievements were made, the Project received strong support from INE Directors and Presidents of the Sub-Region. The initiative was reinforced by financial support from international organizations.

The working groups in different topics were highly motivated due to that by their work it was possible to establish dialogues, exchange ideas, learn one from another, and transmit and receive experiences in a working environment with a high sense of unity and friendship, overcoming the language barrier of Spanish and Portuguese in a variant language known by all of us as *portuñol*

This project, together with other initiatives in the statistical field in the Sub-Region, has allowed a mutual understanding between technical personnel from INEs working in the field of statistical population, allowing us to know who is who and in which areas the expertise of each group rests. Furthermore, the Project throughout its existence has been a working forum for a better understanding among INE Directors and Presidents. This project is considered the first stage of a joint effort towards the integration of census statistics in the Sub-Region, hoping to become an example for other Sub-Regions in the Americas, looking forward to the Round of Censuses for the year 2010.