THE FIRST RESULTS OF ODIN.RUSSIA PROJECT

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Abstract

The openness and completeness of official statistics very often act as indicators of a democratic society. This is very important for all countries, but this is especially important for Russia, where a democratic civil society is still being formed. The Russian Association of Statisticians (RASt) in cooperation with US non-profit organization Open Data Watch established the joint project ODIN.Russia to get a correct vision of the real position of Russia among rest of the world to understand an actual level of openness and accessibility of statistical data in country.

ODIN.Russia uses the same approach as ODW ODIN (Open Data Inventory) international project, but Russian inventory took into consideration more websites of government agencies. In perspective, Russian inventory will produce the openness ratings not only for country as whole but also for all regions of country. Also, more statistical data will be observed. RASt intends to conduct a special survey of users of statistical data and find out what kind of statistical information is most needed, in what formats information should be published and formulate recommendations for statistical institutions in country how to improve the coverage and openness of their websites.

The project ODIN.Russia successfully started in 2016 and its first results are available to users on a special website www.odinrussia.ru. On this website, the inventory results'2016 for Russia are presented in the detailed breakdown of all indicators by category of openness and coverage and by agency, as well as description of the evaluation methodology, information about the project team and news. English version is available.

These results very well demonstrate its "birthmarks" left over from Soviet statistics. Firstly, Russian statistics traditionally pay more attention to economic indicators rather than social or environmental indicators, because in the planned economy were planned mainly the economic parameters and official statistics should monitor them. In contrast, as the special survey shows, external users are mostly looking for social statistics data in the Rosstat website. Secondly, when statistics work primarily for government, the format of data presentation is not a priority, because the reporting forms are determined by the government itself and statistical agencies do not care about improving them.

ODIN.Russia will be continued and extended in coming years.

Keywords: official statistics; open data; inventory.

1. Introduction

The openness and completeness of official statistics very often act as indicators of a democratic society. This is very important for all countries, but this is especially important for Russia, where a democratic civil society is still being formed. Therefore, the public organization Russian Association of Statisticians (RASt, www.rusasstat.ru) considers its participation in the project on the inventory of the openness of official statistics as its priority task. RASt is established in 2014 individual membership-based, voluntary, self-governing, non-profit association which has one of its basic goal formulates as to bring to the attention of relevant authorities the issues of statistics to propose ways for improving it.

The problem of openness of official statistics remains unresolved in Russia - traditionally Rosstat is focused on satisfying the information needs of the government and, to a much lesser extent, the needs of other sectors of society, such as science and business. It is very important to get a correct vision of the real position of Russia among rest of the world to understand an actual level of openness and accessibility of statistical data in country. It was the reason for RASt to participate in international comparisons of openness of statistical data.

In December 2015, RASt became a member of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), a contact network of governments, international and public organizations, for joining forces to ensure quality statistics. GPSDD supports the development of new principles for data collection and dissemination, increasing the degree of data openness and facilitating access to them, etc. The other member of GPSDD is a non-profit non-governmental organization Open Data Watch (http://opendatawatch.com) which is engaged in the issues of inventory of statistical data, their openness and completeness of coverage. Open Data Watch conducts the international project on inventory of openness of official statistics (so called ODIN - Open Data Inventory), and enhances the capacity of developing countries in this field. Within this project, official statistics of different countries are ranking according to several parameters that characterize the coverage and openness of data. ODIN allows countries to identify shortcomings, improve access to data and promote an open data policy. In addition, the project facilitates the establishment of a dialogue between national statistical services and various users of statistical data. More technical details about ODIN are available in http://odin.opendatawatch.com.

In the first round of ODIN, conducted in 2015, national statistical offices of 125 countries including Russia were ranked. Russian Federation in 2015 received the following ranking:

Table 1. Russian Federation ODIN'15 results (points)

Data category	Coverage	Openness	Total
Social statistics	54	44	49
Economic and financial statistics	74	56	64
Environmental statistics	56	46	51
Total	60	49	54

In the ODIN'2015 round, a limited number of mainly developing countries, including countries of Eastern Europe and the former USSR participated. In ODIN'2015 among the countries of Eastern Europe, Russia, by the final index, took the 2nd place (2nd in terms of coverage and 2nd in terms of openness). Among all the countries Russia was 7th (7th in terms of coverage and 9th in openness).

In general, these results look reasonable. But we would like to receive more information in order to formulate and submit to Rosstat concrete proposals to improve the openness of official statistics. For that, on June 8, 2016 RASt concluded an agreement on cooperation with ODW. On line with this agreement, both NPOs launched preparation and implementation of the joint project "ODIN. RUSSIA - Inventory of the Coverage and Openness of Official Statistics".

2. ODIN.Russia

The first step of the ODIN.Russia project was a training seminar for Russian volunteers, which was held on June 22-24, 2016 in Higher School of Economics, Moscow. During the seminar, ODW experts explained the principles and methodology of the assessment, conducted practical exercises. Russian team included mostly the students and young professors of statistics from several Russian cities including Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Rostov, Saransk, as well as several potential participants from Armenia and Belarus.

At the second step of the project was conducted the inventory of the openness and completeness of official statistical data in Russia. During the inventory ODIN'2016 RASt and ODW worked in parallel. ODW published its assessment of openness of Russian statistics on its website in early 2017. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Russian Federation ODIN'16 results, ODIN version (points)

Data category	Coverage	Openness	Total
Social statistics	37	36	37
Economic and financial statistics	68	48	58
Environmental statistics	50	46	48
Total	51	43	47

These results were significantly different from the results obtained by RASt. In our opinion, this is due to the following reasons.

1. Official statistics in Russia consist of two part: Federal Statistical Agency (Rosstat) which is a core part of national statistical system and statistical departments of other agencies of the Russian government, including Central Bank, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Science, etc.

   During the inventory RASt team took into account data of many different government agencies, which was not done by American colleagues in most of the countries studied.

2. The inventory of official statistics for most countries was carried out by English-speaking ODW volunteers. This gave rise to problems of the language barrier, since the national statistical services were mainly represent data in the national languages, and, it can lead to inaccuracies in assessments and ratings. To inventory Russian-language sites, as far as we know, ODW found a Russian-speaking volunteer, but she had no experience in statistics.

   In Russia, students of statistical programs of universities and their teachers, relatively experienced in statistics, for whom the Russian language is native, were engaged in the inventory.

The RASt team collected additional data and gave it to their American counterparts. As a result of a long and painstaking work to reconcile the results, ODW experts revised their initial assessment as follows:

Table 3. Russian Federation ODIN'16 results, final version (points)

Data category	Coverage	Openness	Total
Social statistics	43	39	41
Economic and financial statistics	70	60	65
Environmental statistics	62	52	57
Total	57	50	54

After the revision of inventory results of 2016 among the countries of Eastern Europe, Russia ranks sixth by the general indicator (6th in terms of coverage and 6th in terms of openness) out of 10 possible, and among all the countries surveyed it ranks 38th (23rd in terms of coverage and 45th in terms of openness) from 173. As a result of the reassessment carried out with the help of the RASt, Russia's position in the overall rating has risen by 9 positions.

The results of the inventory of Russian statistics very well demonstrate its "birthmarks" left over from Soviet statistics. Firstly, Russian statistics traditionally pay more attention to economic indicators rather than social or environmental indicators, because in the planned economy were planned mainly the economic parameters and official statistics should monitor them. In contrast, as the special survey shows, external users are mostly looking for social statistics data in the Rosstat website. Secondly, when statistics work primarily for government, the format of data presentation is not a priority, because the reporting forms are determined by the government itself and statistical agencies do not care about improving them. The task is to provide all data in established format to the government on time. The remaining parameters are insignificant. Inventory results show that the situation does not change quickly. It means that for all categories the ranking of the availability (coverage) of data is much higher than the ranking of their openness. In other words, the data are available on the agency's website, but

their format may not be convenient enough, the usage rules are not clearly defined, so the data are not comfortable to use. For example, Russian rank in coverage for category of economic indicators is 70 and it means that by this indicator Russian statistics is very close to be among the leaders. In contrast, openness for the social indicators is valuated only as 39 and this is a level of not very advanced African countries.

We call this effect "statistics-in-itself".

More or less similar situation is typical for many of post-Soviet countries with the exception of EU neophytes and countries strongly oriented to Eurostat standards (such as Moldova). The last category of countries has very open official statistics in terms of both coverage and openness and their rankings are much higher than even rankings of "traditional" European countries like UK and France.

3. Plans for development

The participation of the RASt in ODIN.Russia does not end only with monitoring of openness. The Association will prepare recommendations to government agencies on what has to be done to improve the data coverage and openness and, thereby, improve the country's rating. In particular, the RASt will point out the following shortcomings of the websites of Rosstat and other agencies involved in the preparation and publication of official statistics that has to be eliminated.

1. Insufficient disaggregation of statistical data. A number of published indicators, especially in health and education statistics, have no the necessary level of disaggregation.
2. Insufficient duration of time series. For some indicators of social statistics not only the ten-year, but even the five-year time series are not presented.
3. The problem of data representation at the regional and municipal levels. Some data, for example, data on the number of teachers, are not available in the regional context. There is lack of most statistics at the municipal level.
4. Some statistical databases are not technically perfect. Unfortunately, the Central Statistical Database (CSDB) and the Database of Municipal Formations (DBMS) of Rosstat do not meet modern requirements. Due to technical reasons, documents from the CSDB and DBMS cannot be taken into account for rating by the ODW method due to the absence of a permanent reference to documents or files. With regard to the Unified Inter-Agency Information and Statistical System (EMISS), it was taken into account for the evaluation, but it does not have an adequate data listing, and it has an ill-conceived search system.
5. Absence of cross-references to other statistical data sets of government agencies on Rosstat's website. ODW experts in their estimates took into account only those statistical data of other agencies that were directly referred to on the Rosstat website.

RASt will continue to cooperate with ODW. RASt is, of course, ready to participate in an international project, but the association does not intend to dwell on this. This is in its plans to include to the inventory more indicators, more sites of Russian government agencies, in line with the interests of our country.

The results of ODIN.Russia will continue to be comparable with the results of ODIN and could be taken into account for determining Russia's rating. However, we hope that Russian data will be broader than international ones, and recommendations for improving of openness can be useful for Russian government agencies.

Project ODIN.Russia will be extended to evaluate openness of statistical data in all regions of Russia, taking into account the specific of regional statistics. We intend to conduct a special survey of users of statistical data and find out what kind of statistical information is most needed, in what formats information should be published. Thus, we are confident that we will be able to expand ODIN.Russia and make its results even more useful for colleagues primarily in our country, but also abroad.

4. Conclusions

The project ODIN.Russia successfully started in 2016 and its first results are available to users on a special website www.odinrussia.ru. On this website, the inventory results'2016 for Russia are presented in the detailed breakdown of all indicators by category of openness and coverage and by agency, as well

as description of the evaluation methodology, information about the project team and news. Of course, there is also link to ODW website. English version is available.

ODIN.Russia will be continued and extended in coming years.

The RASt team would be grateful for comments and suggestions. We are ready to cooperate with all interested parties. We are ready to share our experience with those who could use it, especially in Russian-speaking countries. But we also think that our experience could be useful in any country, because any national statistics uses its own language for its communication with users. In addition, with full respect for existing international standards, specific sets of statistical data may be in demand in any country and it should be taken into consideration.

References
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