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Paris Statistical Society was born 150 years ago

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The *Société Statistique de Paris* (SSP) was established in 1860 and the *Journal de la Société de Statistique de Paris* (JSSP) began publication in the same year to close only in 1997 when it was replaced by the *Journal de la Société Française de Statistique*. In celebrating the 150th anniversary of the SSP we pay tribute to the longevity of a body which in its time saw the birth and development of a discipline, statistics. The modern discipline of statistics treats the application of mathematics to the description of data and to the inferences based upon data but long before such a discipline existed, statistics provided the methodological basis for the sciences of the state, population and society. The society formed in 1860 survived where earlier ones had failed and it was the achievement of a varied collection of scholars and politicians. Prominent among them were the liberal economists who signed the first free trade treaties and the civil servants whose data and problems would feed the *Journal* but there were also ministers and deputies, writers, doctors, hygienists, and public health officials, demographers, actuaries and insurers, bankers and financiers, mathematicians and probabilists and more!

The SSP was involved both with epistemological debates in different empirical sciences—some old, like political economy, and some new, like sociology—and with all the political and social issues faced by a changing France: the end of Empire and the Franco-Prussian war, the Third Republic and the crisis of the fin de siècle, the traumas of the 1930s, the Occupation and Vichy, Liberation and Reconstruction, the Glorious Thirty ... The SSP would cover all the debates and controversies, developments, innovations and paradigm shifts that the statistics recorded, accompanied or even manufactured. The SSP was a place where the demands for expertise from government, advisory bodies, national or municipal, or financial institutions could meet the skills that had been accumulated by the political and scientific elite. At all times, but especially around the turn of the century, the SSP had had a unique position in this network of expertise and social engineering, embodying the ideal of a republican science, eager to advance knowledge and promote social progress with a respect for order and hierarchy. Its role in the establishment of a welfare state at the height of the class struggle, then of a regulatory state after the 1929 crisis, has taken its influence beyond the borders of the country. Its *Journal* has been read by foreign economists and statisticians, it has engaged

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with the statistical societies of other nations and taken part in the activities first of the International Statistical Congress and then of the International Statistical Institute. This year also marks the 125th anniversary of the latter.

To mark the sesquicentenary of the SSP, a **symposium** had been organised to consider how this learned society achieved its three complementary goals:

- To promote the establishment of a discipline, both theoretical and practical, which gradually freed itself from its original preoccupations of state and population to become the foundation of new sciences of observation.
- To use its expertise and position as a bridge between administration and science to help bring into being successive forms of the “social contract” whether at local or national level.
- To play a major role in international cooperation on economic and social statistics by helping to ensure the production of more useful statistics and by assisting in the creation of the required institutions, of which the ILO is an example.

The celebration took the form of an international scientific conference held in Paris on 24 September 2010. It brought together the work of historians of different disciplines. The contributions reflected the disciplines represented in the SSP, the roles the Society has played within France and its impact on foreign politicians and scholars.

The first four texts proposed in this issue, aimed at delineating the history of the Society are based on historiographical materials which are historical papers, often written at the occasion of previous anniversaries, or on the contents of the *Journal de la Société de Statistique de Paris*. This hitherto neglected material ought to be better known and will surely become so now that the volumes are being scanned. In this French context the aim is also to give an idea of the variety of disciplines for which the Society constituted an important forum, and even a melting pot for some important questions of the discipline. The five texts presented next illustrate the international position of the SSP by showing its role in the statistical concert of nations, or the exchanges between French statisticians with those of other countries as Belgium, United Kingdom, Netherlands or Russia.

Michel Armatte's paper deals with an analysis of the existing historiography [Faure (1909), Damiani (1987, 1988 et 1989), Depoid (1961), Kang (1989) Rosenfeld (1997), Droesbeke (2005)] and his text shows that this historiography teaches us more about the institutional history of the SSP than its scientific history. To study the scientific activity, he proposes to survey the set of 148 volumes of the *Journal de la Société de Statistique de Paris* and to extend Damiani and Kang's studies in order to identify for each period what were the main themes present in the journal, the authors and important papers, with a particular focus on demography and economics.

Antoine Falguerolles scrutinizes Fernand Faure's role in administrative statistics at the end of 19th Century and analyzes his 1909 paper on the precursors with a special emphasis on characters such as Dupin, Lamarck... He draws a picture of the succession of the societies that have anticipated the creation of the SSP, as early as the Napoleonic period. Public statistics is a major component of the disciplinary spectrum covered by the SSP.

Béatrice Touchelay, by concentrating over the period 1930-1970, presents the deep transformation of the public service of statistics begun during the Occupation and the years following the Liberation which allowed changes to the small *Statistique générale de la*

France where only some dozens of persons worked in a service involving thousands of people - first, the *Service National de la Statistique* and then the INSEE. She finds material in papers by Bunle, Huber and Sauvy published in the JSSP which allows us to understand the aims, the importance and the reception of these transformations of the public system.

Laurent Mazliak is interested in the only three mathematicians who became Presidents of the institution before 1950 : Borel in 1922, Darmois in 1938 and Fréchet in 1947. He presents how the first became interested in statistics as early as 1905 when he founded the journal *Revue du Mois* and the role of Institut de Statistique de l'Université de Paris. Darmois and Fréchet became involved in mathematics of randomness after the Great War. The three men used their presidency to promote their vision of mathematical statistics.

Roser Cusso, a specialist in the history of International Organizations of statistics describes the relations between the SSP and the international congresses in the second half of the 19th Century, whose aim was, in principle, to guarantee the compatibility of data and practice. At the time, this aim was rarely adopted, especially at the SSP which remained centered on the links between French state and quantification. One had to wait for 1919 in order to see real comparable statistical data provided by the International Organizations, in particular with the creation of the Société des nations (SDN), and of the Bureau international du travail (BIT)

As an echo to Dickens' short story about Paris and London « A Tale of Two Cities », John Aldrich is interested in the relations between the London Statistical Society and the Paris Society during the period 1860-1940 and emphasizes in both cases the switch of interest from considerations about economy, sociology, health to formal considerations about probability and mathematical statistics. He presents the contacts during the 1930s between Ronald Fisher and the French probabilists Fréchet, Darmois et Dugué.

Jean-Jacques Dreesbeke, analyzing the case of Belgian statistics, shows that Adolphe Quetelet's influence was essential during the 19th Century, not only for Belgium, but also for the development of statistics in all major countries. This is well observed in the Journal of the SSP, where the comments by statisticians impressed by his way of thinking and his actions are numerous.

Ida Stamhuis introduces an essential debate about the status of statistics in the second half of 19th Century with the case of statistics in Holland. Indeed, here statistics has continuously hesitated between two influences : the French one, with its probabilistic and mathematical tendency and the German one closer to the "knowledge of the state's power" (which is in fact the etymology of the word statistics). In 1891, the German tradition took some supremacy in the Dutch statistical society, and mathematical statistics was marginalized.

On the other hand, Martine Mespoulet, analyzing the Russian case, describes a statistics which has been mathematized rather early with the action of statisticians such as A.I.Čuprov and V.I.Orlov. The statistical section of Moscow Law society, created in 1882, tried to homogenize the methods and tools of inquiries organized at a local level. The census and inquiries in foreign countries were presented and discussed during the congresses of this society. The first attempts of inquiries by poll were realized in the statistical sections of the Russian Empire before 1914.

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