BASIC ECONOMIC MATERIALS FOR METROPOLITAN RESEARCH

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The shift in the United States from a predominantly rural to an urban people has been comparatively recent. It was not until the census of 1920 that over half of the population was reported as urban. The increasing urbanization in the last forty years has given rise to three great waves of research activity concerned with urban problems and having as its principal focus the economic aspects of urban growth as contrasted with the purely social or political aspects. The first research wave, which followed the dislocations of World War I, was closely identified with the city planning movement. The economic base studies were largely designed to provide a scientific foundation for planning urban growth. The objective was stated in the monumental Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs, published in the late nineteen twenties, as "How can the American City obtain beauty and order without too much constraint of individual liberty and too much interference with rights of persons and property? How can it obtain these things without impairing, but rather while improving, the quality of the home, the spaciousness of the parks and playgrounds, the efficiency of industry, the relief of traffic congestion and the equitable distribution of advantages and opportunities for all its citizens?" The second research wave was a consequence of the Great Depression and the expansion of the role of the Federal Government in the economic life of the nation. The National Resources Committee in its report on Our Cities, published in 1937, found that "the city has become one of the primary problems of the Nation's economy....it is in the Nation's cities that the shadow of economic insecurity is darkest....Subject to continuing unemployment, lacking the rural reserves of shelter and subsistence, the city worker is seriously handicapped in the struggle for existence." The most recent research wave, and the most massive, has been the proliferation of urban research in the recent past, influenced by the acute problems of central city decay rather than growth, suburbanization, transportation inefficiencies and population group shifts. The post World War II phenomenon of abundant research grants has caused an unprecedented amount of support for urban research on all levels. Much of this current research effort is descriptive and the researchers, while better scientists, are not fired by visions of the "city beautiful" or the "common adventure in pioneering on the frontiers of a new social world" as motivated the urban research of the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties. In his foreward to the New York Metropolitan Region Study, directed by Raymond Vernon, Edward S. Mason wrote "As a study of these underlying currents, this project is neither a blueprint for action nor an analysis of metropolitan government. It has no recommendations to make about the physical structure of the Region or about the form or activities of the governmental bodies there,,..Its end product is an analysis of the Region's probable development, assuming that the economic and demographic forces in sight follow their indicated course and assuming that the role of government is largely limited to existing policies."

Urban research has perennially been beset by the lack of suitable statistical data and much of the resources of researchers has been absorbed by the necessary but yet preliminary task of obtaining data. The study, published in 1927, by the New York Regional Plan, on Major Economic Factors in Metropolitan Growth and Arrangement, remarked that "The unique character and scope of the survey has involved experimentation in methods of collecting and analyzing facts at all stages." The most important single source of information utilized as the records of the factory inspection departments of the three states, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut. Some nine industries were surveyed in detail. No subsequent research project has made use of the factory inspection records. In the National Resources Committee report it is lamented that "the available information regarding cities grows less and less. There has been a sharp decline in the reporting of urban information since 1890, and in consequence we know comparatively little about cities at a time when the need for accurate, complete, and fully analyzed data is most urgent." One of the recommendations of the National Resources Committee was that "the Central Statistical Board should give special consideration to the inadequacies in the existing urban data and the shortcomings in the methods of collecting them, and the possibilities of a program for collecting such important census data as place of work or place of daily activity as well as place of residence, and such important current information as employment and unemployment." While the reports of the New York Metropolitan Region Study, now being published, reflect the substantial progress in basic urban data, the gaps are still evident and a number of key sets of data are estimates prepared on a "one shot" basis by the staff of the study. The amount of reworking of the existing statistical data without any contribution to the improvement of basic data or the originating of new data, raises a fundamental question that must concern the statistical profession. The very growth of metropolitan and urban research projects which replow the same infertile fields and leave no lasting mark upon the quantity or quality of currently available statistical data, serves to raise the question of the optimum allocation of research resources. If the third wave of urban research should recede in the nineteen sixties without a continuing contribution to urban data, a great opportunity will have been lost.

There is, fortunately, some evidence that statistical data for states, cities and metropolitan regions are being assembled and published on a more systematic basis than ever before. It is particularly important that these developments are taking place under local sponsorship rather than as an outgrowth of Federal Government programs. On this basis local interest is more likely to be sustained. In fact pressures for continued support of local statistics, which are a by-product of national programs, are likely to be politically most effective when expressed by local interests. The vigorously expressed demands for continued publication of certain area data for the New York Metropolitan Region in con-

nection with the 1960 Census produced desired results. The economist of the New York City Department of Commerce and Public Events recently noted critically the fact that the Economic Report of the President, prepared by the Council of Economic Advisors, presented almost no facts on regional and metropolitan centers. Such a policy in respect to metropolitan statistics "complicates the efforts of mayors and governors to enlist public support for a policy of determined self-help where communities are threatened with industrial emigration" said Martin W. Wilmington. Another interesting example of the expression of local support for the publication on a continuing basis of local statistics is the criticism of the policy of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York to emphasize international and national data in its Monthly Review. The success of the Bureau of Labor Statistics - State employment statistics program is no doubt a consequence of the use of cooperating state agencies in the program. This BLS - State program now originates much of the fundamental economic statistics for metropolitan areas and cities. A number of statistical abstracts are being published by state agencies, among which may be mentioned the Pennsylvania Statistical Abstract, which contains 105 tables and 22 charts. Many European cities have long issued statistical yearbooks, which are comparable in the number of tables and in the variety of subject matter to those included in the Statistical Abstract of the United States. The City of Birmingham, England, publishes an Abstract of Statistics which contains 182 tables. Three years ago New York City began the publication of a Statistical Guide which brings together assorted statistical information ranging from the number of specimens in the New York Aquarium to the number of telephone calls made to WEather 6-1212. This publication should develop into a statistical abstract.

The publication of an increasing variety of urban data on a continuing monthly basis has a great impact because, once a series is established and widely disseminated in an area, its continuance is reasonably assured. In terms of impact upon metropolitan research, resources allocated to a program which will develop and publish continuing series, probably have greater value at this stage than any other form of statistical program. Since so much that is important in economic analysis is necessarily possessed of the time dimension, adequate monthly data for cities and metropolitan regions are essential. Of course, the research bureaus of many universities throughout the country as well as the Federal Reserve Banks and commercial banks have long issued valuable regional and local indexes and other statistical series. The Pittsburgh Business Review and the Monthly Summary issued by the Security First National Bank of Los Angeles are excellent examples. Arthur H. Cole in his guide to business indexes lists 150 regional and local measures of change. No doubt, since 1952, more have been published. However, the assembling and systematic publication of monthly statistics for states or cities extends beyond the preparation of a business index and ultimately would result in the publication of a local counterpart to the Survey of Current Business. In fact, the New York State Department of Commerce at Albany has published since 1945 Current Business Statistics. The latest issue of this publication includes: general business indicators, production statistics, domestic trade, foreign trade, employment, hours and earnings, construction and real estate, income, savings and finance, price levels, and miscellaneous measures. This monthly publication contains more than 250 statistical series obtained from 31 different sources, both public and private.

Organized efforts to develop current publication of city and metropolitan area economic data are proceeding in many parts of the United States. The sponsorship of such efforts frequently involves local chapters of the American Statistical Association. In the New York Area Chapter an active Committee on Metropolitan Area Statistics has long been functioning in this field. This committee publishes a monthly table of New York Metropolitan Area Economic Indicators, which shows 18 statistical series. Because of the complexity of the New York Metropolitan Area these series, where available, are shown for New York City, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, Northeast New Jersey, Westchester, Rockland and Fairfield Counties. This monthly table is set up by Waite S. Brush of the Consolidated Edison Company. It contains a number of series which, without the activity of the local committee, would not be available for general publication. Such series include total originating telephone calls and construction data from the F. W. Dodge Corp. This table is received monthly by about 200 organizations interested in metropolitan area statistical data. The committee of the American Statistical Association Chapter has prepared the draft of a factbook for the New York Metropolitan Area and plans for publication are under discussion. As is true in most major cities, the local public utilities are a strong support for the New York publication. Special analyses have been circulated showing possible uses of the electric energy sales figures as a measure of change in industrial and business activity. It would appear that, as the monthly bulletin of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago indicated in its March 1960 issue, a series on production worker man-hours and kilowatt hours utilized by manufacturing firms may together dependably measure short-term changes in manufacturing activity in local areas. In addition to the development and distribution of the monthly table of Economic Indicators, the Chapter of the American Statistical Association was instrumental in the creation of a statistical program for the City of New York which, although now inactive in the developmental sense, led to a re-examination of procedures for estimating the current population of the city and the establishment of a new continuing quarterly series of reports based on sales tax data.

The City of New York, through its Department of Commerce and Public Events, began the publication of New York City Monthly Statistics in March 1958. This publication now contains information on employment and earnings, construction and real estate, retail business activity, general business activity, transportation, Port of New York, and miscellaneous series, cost of living, population trends, weather summary, and activity of city government agencies. There are over 200 individual series assembled in this monthly publication. Clearly this effort is a significant contribution of basic economic materials in respect to the New

York City economy. A great proportion of the data usually published by cities and countries consists solely of "workload" statistics, which are not of general interest. Since 1932 the Cleveland Real Property Inventory has conducted an annual census of dwelling units and other buildings by census tracts. Various commercial interests, often in cooperation with local city planning agencies, conduct property inventories but the results are usually not on a continuing basis. In the search for more city and regional economic indicators, some new series have been developed. For example, help-wanted ads in five New York newspapers, is one of the series published in New York City Monthly Statistics. The help-wanted series shows considerable sensitivity to the business cycle, and to labor market conditions. The B. K. Davis & Bro. Advertising Service of Philadelphia publishes a monthly report called the Help-Wanted Trend.

In order to obtain the data necessary for continuing publication of basic economic data for cities and metropolitan areas, changes will be needed in existing statistical procedures and the coordination of much that is now done by distinct public and private agencies. There is little doubt that for most metropolitan areas, given suitable coordination, monthly reports, similar to those which have been discussed, could be assembled and published. In the staff study prepared for the Joint Committee on Washington Metropolitan Problems, Stuart A. Rice and his associates in the consulting firm Survays & Research Corp., proposed the establishment of a statistical agency to have the following functions: (a) responsibility for the continuing development of a statistical program for the area; (b) coordination of relevant area data now collected by Federal, State and local agencies of government and by private firms and organizations; and (c) maintenance of a central repository and index of statistical information relating to the area. Such an agency would no doubt be appropriate in those metropolitan areas which do not have any recognized focal point for such centralized statistical work. The emphasis in the study of a metropolitan statistical program for Washington was, quite properly, upon the need to have a continuing statistical unit, not just another research project. This study identified the particular problems of transportation and highways, water supply and pollution, and economic development. The statistical unit, however, would function as a central data clearing house.

A careful inventory of immediately evident as well as hidden statistical data will frequently reveal that the statistical gaps are not as large as sometimes thought. Since the development of new statistical series to fill gaps is usually a very costly procedure, inquiry should be made to determine the possible existence of data which may serve to answer the research questions. Perhaps the questions which may be answered by new data may be trivial and not worth answering in light of total available data. Ingenuity in solving problems by discovering data and using previously unexploited sources of data is as necessary a qualification for the metropolitan research worker as the knowledge of specific statistical techniques. Unfortunately, statistical detectives are scarcer than statisticians. Hidden data, in certain areas, have been successfully exploited. For example, in the making of population estimates between census dates, much experience has been gained in using such indirect sources of information as school enrollment figures, residential electric meters, rapid transit turnstile counts and the like. Alfred F. Parrott's analysis of the slackening flight to the suburbs is an example of the use of data from a variety of sources to detect a significant new trend. While considerable resources could be expended in the development of direct evidence in respect to his hypothesis, it is probable that the conclusions he reaches would not be substantially altered. Frequently data can be developed in respect to characteristics of an area which for a combination of reasons can not be determined directly, thus a recent study of the estimated Jewish population of the New York area, used the Yom Kippur method for estimating the size of the Jewish population. This involves measuring the drop-off in school attendance between a normal school day and on the Jewish holyday. Other types of ethnic data may be developed from information on burial certificates. In some cities, while crime data are not classified by race, statistics on prisoners in jails will provide this information. In a study of the completion of new residential buildings, where completion dates could not be determined without expensive field studies, it was found that the city department of water supply dept a daily record book showing water connections which were made only when the builder reported completion of the structure. Unless a trained statistician saw these data in the context of the problem, these records would have remained a purely administrative record. The statistician or economist may not possess, as part of his professional equipment, the ability to know where to look, to recognize what he has found and to place the newly discovered data in the proper relationship to other basic materials. If the research staffs working on metropolitan research projects throughout the United States gain this type of knowledge, then it will no longer be possible to say, as did Jervis J. Babb, of the Committee for Economic Development, that "we do not know very much about the economies of our 'little economies'. Facts are inadequate, statistics obscure or incomplete, the framework fuzzy."

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