



50 Years of Keeping Survey Statisticians of the World Informed: *The Survey Statistician*

Eric Rancourt¹

¹ Statistics Canada, eric.rancourt@statcan.gc.ca

Abstract

Since its inception, the International Association of Survey Statisticians (IASS) has regularly produced a biannual newsletter called *The Survey Statistician (TSS)* to inform its members. *TSS* is now conceptualized as the IASS sponsored journal. This article provides a summary of the history of *TSS*, from its format and content to the list of editors and important sections such as Ask the Experts, Country Reports, New and Emerging Methods and Book/Software Reviews. The paper provides some counts and facts related to the development of *TSS* without pretending to be an exhaustive account of all that surrounds its history and extensive devotion of its numerous contributors.

Keywords: Ask the Experts, Book/Software Reviews, Country reports, Editors, New and Emerging Methods.

1 Introduction

The Survey Statistician has been one of the primary tools to maintain IASS members' connections and inform them about the varied activities of the association. Since its modest debut in 1974, *TSS* has constantly evolved, enriching its content with news, articles on new and emerging methods, book and software reviews, survey activities in countries and questions from members being answered by experts. Through the years, in addition to format and style changes, *TSS* changed content to address the preference and demands of members thanks to dynamic editors.

The role of *TSS* was modified since the first version which was more of an account of the meetings that took place. Nowadays, it is a solid newsletter that provides information on recent survey statistics developments, activities with news on some members as well as forthcoming conferences, events and activities of the IASS. Linking with other developments, it also includes tables of content of leading journals relevant to survey statistics. Since the first issue of *TSS*, 96 issues (including the current one - #88) of *TSS* have been produced during its 50-year existence. This corresponds to producing two issues per year, except for one occasion in each of the 70s, 80s, 90s and 2000s.

2 The Early Days

When the IASS started, its newsletter was simply called Newsletter and was produced eight times from 1974 to 1978. Information on this can be found in the 25 years history book of the IASS (IASS, 1999). These provided a summary of the invited papers at the IASS meetings as well as a few other information items. In the first issue, IASS President Morris H. Hansen, made a strong call to members

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to provide information for the bulletin and be active in the association. The issue also provided the list of executives and the list of sessions of the first meeting in Vienna. Some details can be found in Rao (2023). Issue #1 of the Newsletter contained an announcement about the new *Sankhya C* which would publish articles on survey sampling. Finally, it included the 1975 program for the Warsaw ISI meeting and a questionnaire about IASS members.

As the Newsletter improved, it was decided that it would be revamped into a more comprehensive and informative product. For this purpose, issue #8 contained a first version (called issue #0) of what became *The Survey Statistician*, with issue #1 in 1979. From that point on, the sections of the newsletter became almost permanently set to include News, information on the Annual General Meeting, Country information, Question/Answers, paper summaries and some articles.

3 Editors and Structure

3.1 Editors

Many people contributed to the success of *TSS*. We present below a table of all the editors to date. Other members have contributed as specific Section Editors. Some will be presented later, but it is not possible to be exhaustive in a short article such as this one.

Table 1. Editors of *The Survey Statistician*

1979-1985	Jacques Desabie
1985-1990	Gildas Roy
1990-1992	Anne-Marie Vespa-Leyder
1992-1995	Denise Lievesley
1995-1999	Mike Brick
1999-2000	Mike Brick and Leyla Mohadjer
2000-2003	Leyla Mohadjer and Jairo Arrow
2003-2008	Steve Heeringa
2008-2010	Dan Hedlin
2010-2014	Natalie Shlomo and Frank Yu
2015-2018	Natalie Shlomo and Eric Rancourt
2018-2023	Danutė Krapavickaitė and Eric Rancourt

Today, the *TSS* editorial board consists of two editors, three section editors and a technical editor. Also, the IASS scientific secretary serves as an editor of the section *New and Emerging Methods*.

3.2 Structure

TSS has been produced twice a year since 1974 except for a few years (only 4) where there was only 1 produced. The main reason was that originally, the issues normally came out in June and December, but a few late issues created some drifting. Eventually, the change of reference period to January and July helped stabilize production and became permanent.

In terms of language, the bulletins have been produced in English with a French version added after a few issues. This continued with *TSS*, and Spanish was also added at some point. Spanish versions were produced until late 1990s and French versions until 2012. INSEE and Statistics Canada took care of the French versions and the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* in Spain the Spanish version.

In terms of distribution, thanks go to INSEE, the US Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labour Statistics, Statistics Canada, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia and Poznań University of Economics and Business who have in turn been involved and responsible for production and circulation.

As far as the appearance of the newsletter is concerned, the cover displayed the Table of contents from the first issue until issue #15. That is also when country reports started, and sections became more regular. Then issue #32 in July 1995 was the first one with the IASS logo and 5 years later, issue #45 introduced the design of the world map overlaid by people, equations, and a chart. This cover has stood the test of time as it still constitutes today's cover of *TSS*.

4 Major Sections

Over the years, *TSS* has presented several interesting sections. From the President's letter and the Letter from the Editors (published in the early days, then stopped for a long time and reinstated in 2010) to the News and Conference listings and many other sections, these have provided much needed and interesting inputs to members. The core of *TSS* has been made of the following sections: Ask the Experts; Articles (New and Emerging Methods since July 2010); Book & Software Review; Country Reports; and In other Journals. This structure has remained unchanged since issue #62, July 2010.

4.1 Ask the Experts

The Question-and-Answer section later becoming the Ask-the-Experts section was created and coordinated by Leslie Kish from 1978 to 1994. During that time, 42 questions were published. Eventually they were republished as a stand-alone booklet (Kish, 1995). Kish took his questions from people he met during conferences and also included a fair number himself, thanks to his acute awareness and understanding of member needs. In 1995, Vijay Verma took it over until 2001 at which point there was a pause. Then in 2004, Anders Christianson re-birthed the series and with Steven Heeringa as *TSS* editor and I looking after the Web site, we worked as a team to help each other with our three responsibilities. During that time, other special guests (e.g., Bill Winkler and Phil Kott) were invited by Anders to contribute answers on specific topics. Following another pause, Robert Clark revived the section from 2010 to 2014. From 2015 to 2018, Kennon Copeland handled it, and I continued it in 2019 and 2020. Since 2021, Ton de Waal has been coordinating the section.

Over the years, a wide array of topics covering all aspects of the work of survey statisticians was covered. These dealt with questionnaires, coverage, designs, editing and imputation, estimation, confidentiality and more recently on-line surveys, non-sampling error, bias, and the use of non-probability samples just to name a few. In total, about 95 questions were posed and answered, an average of about one per issue overall but closer to two per issue when taking into account the years without them. The Ask the Experts Section also has a bespoke tab on the IASS website given its importance on communicating survey statistics: <http://isi-iass.org/home/ask-the-experts/>.

4.2 Articles – New and Emerging Methods

The presence of articles in *TSS* varied greatly depending on objectives of the executive and editors but also on the active offers of scientific journals as options to publish articles. In the first Newsletters from 1974 to 1978, IASS session structures with a summary of papers presented were included, and authors were encouraged to use the then-existing *Sankhya C* for their complete paper. It was later decided not to include articles in *TSS* and rather use *Survey Methodology* journal from Statistics Canada as the prime vehicle for papers. At that time, it was made available at a preferential rate to IASS members (see Beaumont, 2023 for more details on the history of *Survey Methodology*). Then from issue #30 to #53, short papers came back to *TSS*, and this was stopped again from #54 to #61. Since issue #62, *TSS* has featured at least one article per issue. Of note is the fact that in recent years (since issue #81 in 2020), people have been encouraged by the editors to submit articles that undergo a review. The goal is not to create a refereed journal but rather to elevate the rigor in presentations of new and emerging topics. Only a very small number of articles which are not in line with the direction are rejected. At the same time, *TSS* constitutes a medium for announcements, short communications, questions, experience sharing. The *News and announcements* section is devoted to this.

Overall, 133 articles have been published in *TSS* on current topics of interest to IASS members. This does not include the 36 book and software reviews (see next section) that were published. So, in all, *TSS* has produced close to 170 articles, an average of well over 3 per year during the existence of the IASS. This is very good given that a much larger number of articles have been published by members in numerous journals.

Since issue #81 in January 2020, open access reviewed articles started to be published. This has allowed access to and possibility to download single articles at a time (rather than the complete *TSS*). Also concerning articles, a new *TSS* invited session was organized at the World Statistics Congress in 2021 on *Issues with big amounts of data for survey statistics*.

4.3 Book & Software Review

The Book and Software Review section started (as Software Review) in issue #35 in 1996 with a review paper by Jim Lepkowski and Judy Bowles on Sampling Error Software for Personal Computers. For seven years this section covered the most well-known survey software and tools such as SAS, SPSS, STATA, SUDAAN, and WesVar to name a few. Then, until 2011, the section was left out except once to present *R*.

With issue #64, the section was renamed and enhanced to include book reviews as well as approaches, guidelines, checklists that are useful to survey statisticians. Since then, almost all issues presented either a book, a software or a survey tool. Books covered a wide variety of modern and classic parts of survey sampling theory and methods such as disclosure, designs, treatment of nonresponse, registers, record linkage, Small Area Estimation, and web surveys. Software presented included *R*, *RShiny*, *Python's samplics* and the *R* package *survey*. In total, 16 software, 15 books and 5 other tools have been reviewed.

4.4 Country Reports

Informing members on survey activities that are taking place in other countries has been a very popular section of *TSS*. In the 50 years of the IASS, over 600 country reports have been produced by more than 70 countries. Moreover, some of the reports often covered more than one survey and have highlighted interesting implementations of survey methods and approaches. Early editions of *TSS* had countries providing articles which sometimes were in the form of reports and sometimes more in the form of an article. This could happen thanks to a network of country representatives established in 1976. Country reports as we know them today really started in 1989 with issue #21. By 1993, the tasks had become in need of a coordinator and Gordon Brackstone (Statistics Canada) managed the section from 1993 to 2001. Ever since, Canada looked after this, the responsibility being passed on to John Kovar (2002-2009), Pierre Lavallée (2010-2016) and Peter Wright (2016-2023).

Contributions by countries were many. Through the years, seven countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, The Philippines, Poland, Spain, and US) provided over 25 reports with Australia and New Zealand each providing over 40 and Canada more than 65. Twelve countries provided between 10 and 25 reports (Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Malaysia, and UK), while 31 countries did between 2 and 9 reports and 23 other countries provided one.

4.5 In other Journals

Immediately with *TSS* issue #1, people started listing articles related to survey methodology. At that time, it was simply in the form of a bibliography. Then, starting with issue #15, abstracts were produced and listed. It is with issue #34 in 1996 that the section *In other journals* was created to present the table of contents of some of the main journals publishing articles in survey methodology. The main journals in this section have been *Survey Methodology*, the *Journal of Official Statistics* and the *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*. Today the section continues to inform on recently published articles of interest.

5 Conclusions

The Survey Statistician has been a strong presence uniting the members of the IASS. From its modest origin as a few-page leaflet to a solid almost magazine-style paper newsletter, *TSS* has been available on-line since 2000 and exclusively in this format since 2021 when the last paper issue was published in July of that year. It has also been officially registered with an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN 2521-991X) for the world periodicals since issue #67 in 2014. This has made *TSS* an official periodical, a higher status than a manuscript.

Under the leadership of many editors, *TSS* has thrived and hopefully will continue to keep many survey statisticians informed and interested in the IASS. Further, many other members of the associations have contributed to make it what it is today. With continued participation by many members and the new generation of statisticians writing, asking, submitting, congratulating, recognizing, sorrowing and reading, it will continue to succeed.

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