

informed user community to extend the analytical strength of available data and has often led advances in the organization, management and design of statistical sources." (UNECE and Statistics Sweden 2003, p. 7).

This paper aims to describe the efforts by the Population Activities Unit (PAU) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to provide access to anonymized and harmonized census micro- and meta- data for research purposes. First, we review briefly the work done in that field by other institutions over the past decades. Then, in the second section of the paper, we describe the project carried out by the PAU with the 1990 round of censuses. The third section is devoted to the plans to develop and make accessible to researchers an integrated micro- and meta- data infrastructure, based on multiple rounds of population and housing censuses in interested European and North American countries.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE EFFORTS TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO ANONYMIZED CENSUS MICRODATA

The first efforts to provide access on a larger scale basis to census microdata for research purposes date from the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE) of United Nations Economic

Commission for Latin America began a project to collect microdata samples from the population and housing censuses in Latin America, and the United States Bureau of the Census started releasing public-use microdata samples (PUMS) from the decennial US censuses. Naturally, the early efforts were limited by the high computing and distribution costs at that time, and by the lack of sufficient experience with the anonymization and harmonization of microdata. They clearly demonstrated, however, the viability of such an undertaking and its importance for the research community.

CELADE began its project in 1959. During the 1960 census round, sixteen countries participated in it with samples where the densities were between one and ten percent. For the next round (1970s) nineteen countries submitted samples, most of which were with higher densities (for more details on that project see McCaa and Jaspers-Faijer 2000). Unfortunately, due to funding constraints, the project was terminated before the 1980 round of enumeration were completed. As McCaa and Ruggles point out the project "proved the feasibility of the idea of harmonizing census microdata, but it also demonstrated that widespread usage would only become practical with a massive drop in computing and distribution costs" (McCaa and Ruggles 2001).

In 1964 the United States Bureau of the Census released its first public-use microdata sample (PUMS) from the 1960 census, with a density of 1 in 1 000. Later, in conjunction with the 1970 public use samples, the Census Bureau released a new version of the 1960 sample where the sample density was increased to 1-in-