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Statistics, Knowledge and Policy: What Do We Know About What People Know?

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1. Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to present to delegates at the 2006 OECD Workshop on Business and Consumer Tendency Surveys a proposal for a new international survey on what people in the general community know about key economic and social phenomena in their countries. The results of such a survey would be presented and discussed at the second World Forum on “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy” to be held in Istanbul in June 2007.

2. The importance of information in economic and political processes is widely recognised by modern theories. This information, coupled with the advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has changed the way in which markets and societies work. The availability of the Internet and other advanced forms of media have made information more accessible to citizens than ever before. Therefore, the ideal of the “fully informed decision maker” should be a reality. Unfortunately, this is far from the case. As Einstein put it, “information is not knowledge” and although citizens are bombarded by information on a constant basis, this bombardment does not necessarily bring about knowledge.

3. Several studies have analysed the functioning of the knowledge society. Others have studied how the availability of “shared” information among citizens and politicians can improve the functioning of modern democracies. To date, only limited attempts have been made to measure what the general population actually knows about the situation of their country and how such knowledge or ignorance influences public debate and policies.

4. The next Section presents the main results from available literature about the relationship between information, economic theory and political sciences. The third Section is devoted to show how the availability of a limited number of “key indicators” can be useful to improve democratic processes. Section 4 highlights the main results from studies aimed at measuring what people actually know about their country and how this can influence the public debate. Finally, in the context of the preparation of the second OECD Forum on “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy” a proposal to develop an international survey about what people know is presented.

2. Information, Economic Theory and Political Sciences

2.1 Information and Economic Models

5. The relationship between information and economic theory was first analysed by neoclassical economists. In the context of Walrasian equilibrium, economic agents are supposed to not only act in a perfectly rational way, but to also be fully *informed* about relevant economic facts, such as the quality of goods, prices, etc. This assumption has been criticised by more recent theories and models. In particular, since Nash and others developed “Game Theory”, economics has changed quite a bit. The introduction of asymmetric and incomplete information in economic models stimulated new approaches in microeconomic, macroeconomic and public economic analyses. In short, the neoclassical point of view, in which all that is needed for functioning markets and the achievement of social welfare is the presence of a price system, a government that supplies public goods and makes contracts enforceable, is now considered unsustainable.

6. In the general theory, developed by J. Nash, concerning situations generated by a bargaining process with its own rules, where each agent maximizes his utility function and the information set is given, information plays a fundamental role. Nash argued that “the notion of an equilibrium point is the key ingredient in our theory. This notion yields a generalisation of the concept of the solution of a two-person zero-sum game. It turns out that the set of equilibrium points of two-person zero-sum game is simply the set of all opposing good strategies” (Nash, 1951). According to his definition, an equilibrium point (since then called Nash-equilibrium and considered a fundamental tool to determine social consequences of conflicting private interests) is a profile of strategies in which each agent’s strategy is the best response to the strategy of the others. In this situation, the role of the information set available to various players is crucial. In particular, Nash assumed that, if one player is better informed about a game’s characteristics and tries to take advantage of it, the other player should rationally take into account this possibility. Therefore, in equilibrium, only a strategic profile incentive-compatible with the information set would dominate.

7. Information also plays a key role in the formation of expectations. When economic decisions are to be taken under uncertain conditions, expectations on future or uncertain events must be formulated, especially on events that are not completely under the control of the decision maker. In a very general sense, an expectation can be seen as a value coming from the joint probability distribution of the variables concerning the decision process. The economic theory, as well as economic policy, has been largely affected by the development of rational expectation models. Of course, rational expectations represent, in theory, the best way to model expectations, but the problem is that the collection and use of information is costly. Therefore, it is possible that, in practice, economic agents do not act as the theory predicts, for example by only looking at mean values or variance measures. In this case, simpler decision-making procedures (so called *naïve* procedures) can be used in practice.

8. Also in rational expectations models, the cost of acquiring information beyond what can be observed in a specific market can push economic agents to make wrong decisions, at least in the short run. For example, if we consider the macroeconomic model “à la Lucas”, we know that, under certain circumstances, if there is “confusion” among economic agents about the “true” price level, both for specific products and for the whole basket of goods and services, this can bring about suboptimal decisions and produce macroeconomic effects, at least in the short run.

9. Of course, statistics have been developed to go beyond what individuals can observe at a reasonable cost and nowadays statistics produced by public institutions according to high quality standards, developed in an impartial way, disseminated to all agents at the same time are considered a “public good”. Some international organisations have a role of watch-dog to verify that key statistics produced at national level are produced according to internationally agreed standards, especially as far as economic statistics are concerned. The key role of economic statistics in influencing the functioning of markets is widely recognised and media daily inform the public about the evolution of economic indicators. There is a wide consensus that the importance of official statistics for the functioning of markets is higher than ever and that their production and dissemination contribute to the improvement of social welfare.

10. However, this role cannot be taken for granted and the recent case of the euro changeover can be used to demonstrate *a contrario,* the impact on economic behaviours of a loss of confidence in official statistics. In that case, in several countries a large majority of people believed that that actual inflation rate was between 50% and 100%, while official estimates indicated growth rates between 2% and 3%. More generally, if economic agents are confused in correctly evaluating price prevailing in existing markets or the average level of

prices because they do not trust available statistics, the economic system can suffer because of this uncertainty.

2.2. Information and Political Sciences

11. The connection between the credibility of official statistics and the functioning of economic markets is extremely important in modern societies, where media play a key role in influencing public opinion and expectations about future economic developments. Information plays a great role not only in modern micro and macro-economic models, but also in "public choice" models, in the so called "positive political theory", based on rational choice modelling and on analytical conclusions reached by the economic theory. Downs (1957) first introduced rational models for the political choice of individuals, considering the election mechanism as a "market" in which politicians supply different political platforms which are demanded by voters, who have to decide whether and how to vote. To do that, the generic voter estimates a "party differential", i.e. the difference between the expected utility derived from the choice between various (normally two) parties' candidates. A voter whose differential between parties is non-zero subsequently takes into consideration the cost of voting: to vote, the cost of voting must be lower that the "discounted utility" of voting, calculated using the likelihood that his vote will make a difference in the election.

12. What is extremely important here is that one of the components of the voting cost is the cost of collecting information: acquiring information about candidates and policies can be very expensive and the value derived from this search must be discounted by the fact that the individual has little impact on the final outcome of the elections. Thus, the citizen is viewed as a "rational ignorant" and the obvious impact of missing or limited information on political issues is that the percentage of informed voters in elections could be very little - not a good thing for democracy.

13. The sticks and carrots (i.e. the sanction of no re-election, the premium of being re-elected) mechanism only works if there is a proper measure of outputs/outcomes delivered by a certain policy. Of course, information plays a great role in this process: in fact, in a world of costly information, rational citizens will spend more time informing themselves about their own private purchases than about public policies, for which their efforts will have little effect. Therefore, voters, like shareholders of a large firm, face the difficult task of monitoring the activities of large hierarchies staffed by people who have information and expertise that is unavailable to the average voter.

14. Swank and Visser (2003) have analysed the role of information both in the political process and in elections. Comparing various alternatives, the main findings can be summarised as follows:

- a higher probability of observing the policy outcomes narrows welfare losses needed to give the right incentives to the incumbent politicians for examining projects and enlarges the range of examined policies. This suggests that it is in the interest of the citizens to improve the likelihood of observation.
- Elections are not an appropriate "stick and carrots" mechanism to enforce an effective political process. Information, instead, plays the main role. As long as indicators about concrete actions and achieved results are a right measure of policy and properly publicised, they may help society to achieve better goals with less resources.

3. How to Measure the Progress of a Society?

15. The results both of the economic and political models described above underline the importance that better information plays in increasing social welfare. Of course, to obtain this result, information needs to be turned into knowledge and concrete behaviour. If this happens, knowledge can improve the functioning of today's economies and societies, as well as the relationships between citizens and policy makers.

16. Information is assumed as a space of data (and related metadata) correctly structured and communicated. Knowledge, on the other hand, is a 0-1 affair: you either know (at least roughly) something, or you do not. To reach this state of mind, each person has to process, distil, digest and internalise available information and transform it into an idea or principle, subsequently used to take decisions. Our society/economy is often defined as "knowledge" based, i.e. a system where knowledge has become the most important factor of production and the basic form of capital. Of course, information is produced as a pre-requisite for knowledge, but today we are "bombarded" and almost buried by such a great amount of data and information that it is difficult to focus our attention on the information we really need. Nowadays, attaining information can be done at a low cost but selecting the "right" information and turning it into knowledge comes at a rather high cost.

17. As we have seen, in the relationship between voters and politicians, especially with those who have been in charge of the government for a certain time, one of the key issues is to provide citizens with accurate information about the result of past policies (i.e. economic and social outcomes) or the expected results of the policies foreseen by the opposition before the elections. Of course, there are various ways to measure economic and social outcomes and it is quite common that the various parties participating in elections make reference to different data. Therefore, the question is: is it possible to have all parties agree on a "shared information set", i.e. a shared space of data and metadata referring to the overall progress of a nation, delivered to citizens and used by all parties involved in the policy debate? If such a data space existed, the political game would change from a game with imperfect information to one with perfect information, resulting in unprecedented improvements in social welfare. But what should the "data space" contain, how should it be defined and by whom?

18. The most commonly used indicator of economic performance is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, measured in both absolute and per-capita terms. However, collective decision making is a multi-dimensional process, with multiple objectives: if it were known that the GDP growth over several years was obtained through the disruption of the environment, large social inequalities, reduction in available assets, etc. citizens would probably punish the government responsible for these outcomes. This is just one example to demonstrate that, in modern societies, economic wealth is only one dimension of well-being and available literature shows that as a country reaches higher levels of income, the more it cares about other life satisfaction dimensions (leisure, environmental status, health, etc.).

19. Looking at the behaviour of OECD countries, it is quite clear that citizens want to reach a higher and sustainable level of well-being. In several countries, this aspiration has been turned into concrete policies: for example, more and more countries have designed their policies to achieve so-called "sustainable development" (SD), i.e. the capacity to satisfy the current generation's needs without affecting the capacity of future generations to satisfy their needs. These developments have served as an impetus for national statistical authorities and other data providers to design new theoretical frameworks to measure the overall progress of a country, as well as to enlarge the coverage of statistics, mainly on social and environmental phenomena.

20. The OECD has recently published a review of various approaches to the measurement of well-being/progress. In a nutshell, the following approaches are envisaged:

- the extension of the basic national accounts schemes to cover social and environmental dimensions;
- the use of a wide range of indicators referring to economic, social and environmental dimensions. The use of composite indicators to summarise them in a single number is also possible;
- the use of "subjective" measures of well-being, life-satisfaction or happiness.

The first two approaches make reference to an "objective" way of defining the well-being, while the third is linked to the "subjective" one.

21. The *extension of national accounts* is, of course, a very attractive approach, but it requires a large investment, both in terms of data collected and of resources necessary to make them coherent. Notwithstanding the most recent developments (especially, the System of Environmental and Economic Accounts and Social Accounting Matrices), it still encounters theoretical and practical difficulties in expressing some aggregates in monetary terms, such as environmental resources. And while this approach may be very powerful analytically, for example to simulate economic, social and environmental effects of various policy alternatives and evaluate trade-offs, it is hard to see how such an approach could be used by citizens.

22. To provide an overview of the progress of a country that includes non-monetary aspects of well-being, *sets of indicators* have been developed in several countries. In recent years improvements in statistical systems have made possible the implementation of "key indicators" which involve economic, social and environmental goals. They are statistical measures that reflect people's objective circumstances in a given cultural or geographic unit. The hallmark of these indicators is that they are based on objective, quantitative statistics rather than on individuals' subjective perceptions of their social environment. As a result, it is very easy to make comparisons over time and/or countries, using them as "benchmarks". ". On the other hand, key indicators can suffer from several weaknesses: first, they are only as good as the data that underpins them and so mislead (for example, it is known that rape incidents are underreported to the police and therefore crime indicators based on administrative data can be misleading). Second, they are difficult to disentangle. Looking at a multiplicity of indicators it is not easy to derive a synthetic view about the overall progress of a country (normally, some indicators improve, other worsen).

23. *Composite indicators* aggregate "sectoral" indicators using weights and aim to provide a comprehensive picture of a country, comparable over time and between countries. They allow the ranking of countries as well (very appreciated by the media), making it possible for the public to evaluate overall policy results. However, composite indicators suffer from important weaknesses and can be misleading for policy evaluations, pushing people to draw simplistic conclusions. For example, the construction of a composite indicator involves stages where judgments have to be made (especially concerning the weights structure, the selection of sub-indicators, the aggregation method, etc.). Thus uncertainty and sensitivity analysis are needed to test the robustness of results, but this complicates their presentation to non experts. In addition, in order to be representative of society's point of view, the choice of the weights structure cannot be delegated to statisticians or to politicians. Therefore, the use of composite indicators for measuring the overall progress is largely criticised.

24. Finally, *subjective indicators* are based on the assumption that well-being depends on the degree of utility that individuals perceive in their social environment, i.e. how people react to and experience the events and situations in their lives. Several studies recognise that there is little correlation between objective measures of well-being and subjective ones and this may be due to several factors: for example, people can adapt themselves to their living standards, or can adjust their cognitive attention and expectations to external circumstances in ways that are advantageous for themselves (they make the best of things). When the prospects of social comparison are not favourable individuals often rearrange their scale of satisfaction, redirecting their attention to tasks and situations that are better for them. This concept has to be underlined if subjective indicators are used in political processes: if they are "endogenous" they lack the necessary link to actual outcomes and politicians could be tempted to spend more resources to try to change citizens' perceptions using propaganda rather than to change the social well-being itself.

4. Statistics, Knowledge and Policy

25. As we have seen in the previous sections, reliable statistics are fundamental to modern democracies. Citizens, as well as politicians, need data on which to base their decisions. Every day, millions of individual and collective decisions are taken on the basis of statistics. Without a comprehensive and articulated knowledge-base founded on robust evidence and agreed by the various components of society, many of those decisions will inevitably be flawed. But in the "information age", the availability of information can no longer automatically be equated with increased knowledge. Disinformation spreads rapidly via the Internet. Data based on shaky methodology can be quoted in public debate as "fact". Even correct information can be incorrectly reported, resulting in what some in the trade call "mutant statistics".

26. In democratic countries, policy decisions are taken by political authorities, although the decisions of political authorities are influenced by public opinions. In the recent literature on the relationships between public opinion, political choices and the functioning of modern democracies it is argued that there are big differences in the way of thinking between the general public and specialists, for example economists. Blendon et. al. (1997) argue that a substantial body of research has emerged showing that public opinion has a major influence on many public policy decisions, including those taken in the area of economic policy. But, they also argue that, although citizens' views are important for elected policy makers, they often make their decisions following suggestions and advice of economists working for them.

27. Using the results of national surveys to compare the public's and professional economists' evaluations of current and past economic performance, expectations for the economic future and perceptions of why the economy is not doing better, Blendon et. al. (1997) find that a large part of citizens (especially those who do not have a college degree) believe that the economy is performing worse than official government data indicate. Moreover, the results of the Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard survey indicate a substantial gap between how the public and economists see the economy. Six possible explanations are proposed:

- The experiences of individuals may not reflect official data;
- When people assess the performance of the economy, government statistics are only one of several other information sources they use;
- A large number of Americans do not believe that government economic statistics are accurate;

- The media tend to show the condition of the economy as being worse than it actually is, leaving the public excessively pessimistic about the nation's economic situation;
- Economists are more optimistic about the economic future than the general public;
- Americans do not have a strong knowledge about how the economy operates; hence they may be having difficulties in making accurate evaluations about how the economy is performing.

28. These results have been criticised by some analysts, while others have conducted statistical analyses to test different explanations of the results provided by Blendon et al. For example, Caplan (2002), analysing the results of the Survey of Americans and Economists on the Economy, argues that electorates have systematically biased beliefs about economics, while Kirchgassner (2005), looking at data referred to various countries, concludes that a gap between the economic elite and the rest of the society is wider in Continental Europe than in Anglo-Saxon countries.

29. In Caplan (2002) education was found as the strongest predictor of whether a non-economist would have the views consistent with an economist. However, Caplan and Miller (2006), using the data from the General Social Survey (which measures economic beliefs, education and other standard predictors of economic beliefs, and IQ) show that the estimated effect of education falls after controlling for IQ. In other words, IQ replaces education and it is found as the most important variable that makes people "think like economists".

30. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) showed that well-informed citizens are much more able to link their objective conditions to larger social and political circumstances and policies compared to the less-informed citizens. Furthermore, as many studies have proved that people's economic concerns influence the vote, they found evidence that personal financial conditions were significantly associated with the vote for the lowest information quartile, but perceptions of the national economy were not. In higher information quartiles, the impact of personal circumstances had become insignificant, while national economic perceptions are significant.

31. A lack of information leads to citizens to misperceive what the government does or does not do. On the 1988 US National Election Study, respondents were asked what the federal government had done during the past eight years. The survey questions were about federal spending on assistance to the poor, federal spending on public schools, government spending on defense, and federal efforts to improve and protect environment. Eighty percent of voters correctly perceived that defense spending increased during the Reagan years, but only a quarter to a third of voters could know that federal efforts on behalf of the environment, the poor, and public schools declined during this period. Even among respondents in poor economic conditions the majority fell into the misperceiving group and voted for Bush.

32. Blinder and Krueger (2004) present interesting and more recent evidence about the actual knowledge of key economic facts among US citizens, showing that a significant part of Americans do not know very much about the actual economic situation of the country. Blinder and Krueger also find that ideology is the most important determinant in shaping the public opinion, self-interest is the least important, and economic knowledge is in between. Therefore, their findings seem consistent with an idea expressed in the political science literature: that people often use ideology as a short-cut heuristic for deciding what position to take, when properly informing oneself is difficult. They conclude that "there is room for hope that greater knowledge will improve decision making, even though it appears from our survey that efforts in this direction have shown less than impressive results to date".

33. In the context of the analysis of consumer and business opinion surveys there is a huge literature on the relationships between the assessments made by people and macroeconomic variables. Although the results are quite heterogeneous over time and across countries, there is a quite good correlation between opinions on the current economic situation and key variables such as GDP, inflation rate, unemployment rate, etc. However, in very few cases has analyses been conducted to understand how socio-economic factors influence people's ability to correctly indicate how the economy is going. Moreover, business and consumer opinion surveys do not try to evaluate the actual knowledge of key economic facts, but focus on the historical evolution of assessments, for example looking at simple comparisons (higher, lower, etc.) between the situation in the reference month and one year before.

5. Towards the OECD World Forum on "Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies"

34. What can we conclude from this review? The first conclusion is that, notwithstanding the efforts made by statisticians to produce reliable statistics, by media to disseminate them to citizens and the general improvement of education, the chain "statistics, knowledge and policy" is far from being well established in most countries. On the contrary, ideology, preconceptions, biased or partial information seem to be crucial factors in determining what people think and how they evaluate the behaviour of policy makers. The second conclusion is that, if the "chain" is not working in practice, something has to be done to reinforce the links between statistical evidence, its use by the whole society and democratic decision making processes. In particular, something has to be done to create more reliable "common knowledge" about the situation of each country (region, community, etc.), to better inform the public debate about alternative policies and reforms.

35. Looking at OECD countries it is fair to say that there is an increasing awareness of the importance of these issues. For example, the development of sets of "key indicators" covering economic, social and environmental issues, chosen through democratic consultations and widely disseminated to citizens is becoming quite usual in several countries, where commissions are established by governments involving various components of the society to select the list of key indicators: once the selection is made, the statistical office is then put in charge of producing a periodic report, widely disseminated to citizens. From the available experiences it is clear that the strength of key indicators lies in their capability to address three fundamental issues: present a simplified, but reliable, view of society; contribute to a shared knowledge among citizens, and make politicians accountable for their actions.

36. One of the first countries involved in developing "key indicators" was Australia. In 2002, a publication of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Measuring Australia's Progress* presented a comprehensive framework for the measurement of well-being and a rich set of key indicators. In ABS's view, progress is closely related to these three concepts: well-being (or welfare), quality of life and sustainability. The domains of progress were chosen during initial phases of the project and after consulting government, civil society, experts, academics, business councils, community organisations and individuals. The choices were tested through several further rounds of consultation, to make the final selection taking into account of the full spectrum of views. External advisors were present in an expert reference group, comprised of academics, scientists, and the heads of two prominent civil society organisations, one who seek to combat poverty and inequality, and the other an independent public policy research institute. This suggests that the focal point was not the policy making process or international benchmarking, but primarily the expectations and opinions of citizens.

37. The Australian experience is just of the several initiatives that are underway in OECD countries and beyond. To analyse and compare them, the OECD organised in 2004 the first World Forum on Key Indicators "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy". The Forum, held in Palermo (Italy) and attended by over 540 participants from 43 countries (see www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum), confirmed that various approaches are possible to develop "key indicators" and that each country should choose the best approach taking into account differences in cultural and institutional environments.

38. The Palermo Forum was just one of the initiatives taken by the OECD to foster the use of "key indicators" to analyse overall countries' performances. Extremely important in this respect has been the creation of the *OECD Factbook: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*. The *OECD Factbook* (see www.sourceoecd.org/factbook) presents, in an integrated way, a carefully selected range of 150 indicators covering broad thematic areas: Population and migration, Macroeconomic trends, Economic globalisation, Energy, Prices, Labour market, Science and technology, Environment, Education, Public policies and Quality of life. In addition, every year, the *OECD Factbook* includes a special section focusing on a current "hot topic".

39. The success of the first OECD World Forum on key indicators has confirmed the importance of these issues and convinced the OECD to establish an ongoing World Forum project built around a series of bi- or triennial world conferences. In particular, the mission of the OECD "*Statistics, Knowledge and Policy"* World Forum is to foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators and their use to inform and promote evidence-based decision-making within and across the public, private and citizen sectors, at sub-national, national and international levels. The Forum is open to all sectors of society, building both on good practices and innovative research work, organised by the OECD in co-operation with national and international organisations.

40. The second World Forum will take place in June 2007 in Istanbul and will be prepared through "regional" Forums in Latin America, Asia, Middle-East and Africa. This Forum will seek to be perceived as credible, transparent and inclusive and will rely on the quality of both existing and any more recent statistical and analytical work carried out by the OECD and other organisations supporting the Forum, such as the European Commission, the United Nations and the World Bank. It will bring together a range of stakeholder groups who too often work in isolation of one another.

41. The World Forum events will be true "knowledge experiences", using innovative communication and visual tools, to engage people both inside and outside the conferences to increase their knowledge about the progress of different world regions and countries, and to interact through electronic means. In this way, we hope to foster a global conversation about what progress actually means and bring statisticians at the centre of this discussion, which will not only benefit anyone seeking to measure progress at the sub-national or national level, but will also be an important contribution to the international conversation in the run up to 2015 when a replacement set of Millennium Development Goals will be introduced.

6. Proposals for a new international survey on "what people know"

42. The importance of statistical literacy and the use of available information for decision making at all levels is growing everywhere. Just to mention a recent case, the OECD has recently established a far-reaching project to study financial education programmes in OECD Member countries and selected non-member countries. The main objective of this project,

which was recently supported by the G8 Ministers of Finance, is to assist policymakers and providers of financial education on how to efficiently address the problem of raising awareness about the importance of financial education and to provide guidance in designing and implementing effective and targeted programmes for improving the financial literacy of individuals. Furthermore, the OECD has launched a project to develop an international survey on adults' competencies, following the very successful example of the PISA study on 15-year old students' performances.

43. In the context of the preparation of the second World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy" in June 2007, the OECD would like to explore in discussion with delegates at the Rome Workshop on Business and Consumer Tendency Surveys, the possibility of launching an international survey on what the general population knows about key economic and social phenomena in their countries. The survey could be done in co-operation with research institutes that already run opinion surveys on businesses and households. The survey could be done through the inclusion of not more than 10 supplementary questions to existing questionnaires (in particular, in those used for consumer opinion surveys) on what people know about key economic and social indicators (GDP, inflation, unemployment, etc.). Questions could range from knowledge about the growth rate of GDP, the level and trends in unemployment, inflation, tax rate, public deficit, life expectancy, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.

44. Questions of course would have to be properly defined and set up and this will require considerable thought, benefiting from the experience of research institutes running consumer opinion surveys, who would be free to add questions for national purposes. An illustration of the style of questions we might ask could be:

(i) Did the economy grow last year? Can you indicate what was the growth rate of GDP in real terms?

(ii) Life expectancy - how long a baby can expect to live - is one measure of how healthy we are. In (country) what is the life expectancy for total population?

(iii) Have the amount of greenhouse gas released in (country) increased or decreased over the past 5 years?

(iv) The number of people murdered each year is an important indication of crime in this country. Has that number increased or decreased over the past 3 years?

45. The results would be transmitted to the OECD, who would prepare a special publication showing comparative results, while national data could be used by research institutes for their own purposes.

46. The OECD is ready to discuss with interested countries the possible organisation of an international survey on what people know. Sponsors could be approached to support the initiative.

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