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Of Number and Narratives: Evidence for Policy-Making in the 21st Century

Keynote Speech

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Three Observations

- Statistics and Politics
- Evidence-based/-informed Policy-Making
- Challenges for Statistics and Data Providers

*“Statistics and all forms of quantification in general .. change the world through their very existence, their circulation and their theoretical usage in science, politics or journalism.”
(Desrosières 2015:333-4)*

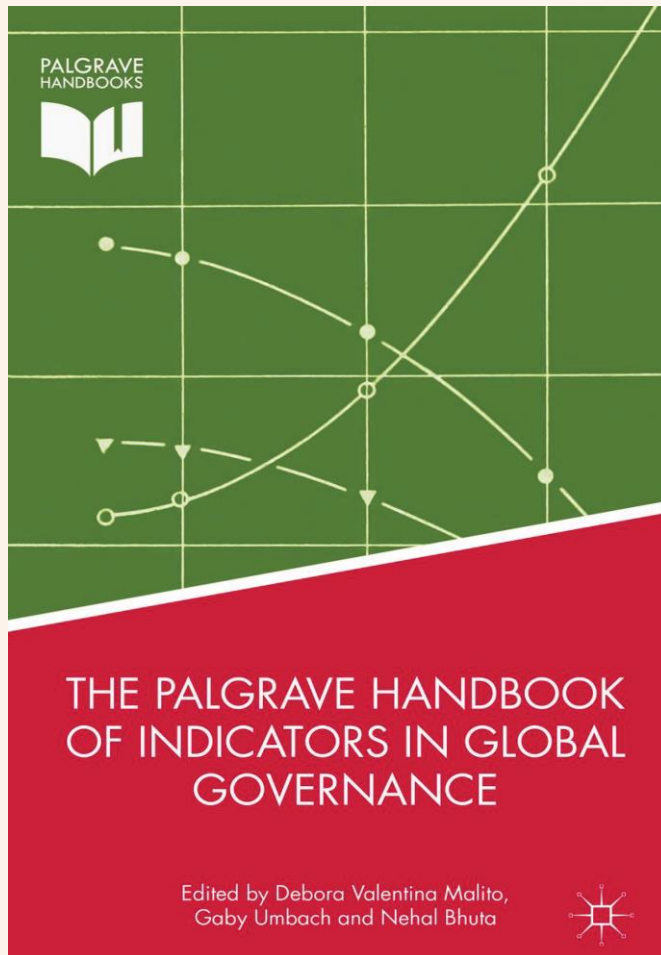


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Research base

EUI research project



JRC Enlightenment 2.0



Statistics and Politics

- **The connection between knowing and governing links statistics and politics.**
 - *Statistics are key instruments to quantify, qualify & compare complex processes, structures and situations; as such they are essential for collective political action.*
- **Quantifying and categorising are neither merely neutral nor technical.**
 - *Statistics ‘stand in for’ abstract concepts & realities and make them measurable.*
- **The normativity of measuring defines normalcy and deviancy; it creates social reality.**
 - *Statistics create reality & impact on behaviour. They define and change paradigms, ideas, and relationships between actors.*



Evidence-based/-informed Policy-Making

- **Statistics take over different functions in EB/IPM**
- **Both statistics and EB/IPM have ‘knowledge and governance effects’**
- **New characteristics arise:**
 - Systemic conditions alter (*participation, network governance*)
 - ‘Data cultures’ emerge (*new avalanche of indicators*)
 - New forms of knowledge become relevant (*‘post-metrological trends’*)
 - Statistics can become advocacy / policy tools
 - New qualitative functions (*evaluation, performance, monitoring, benchmarks*)
 - New linkage between knowledge and power



Challenges for Statistics and Data Providers

- **Openness to public scrutiny & contestation** (*Normative character & implications: What narratives & power structures emerge from production and use of statistics*)
- **Participatory structures in political systems** (*Tendency of epistemic community-building: Statistics as opportunity structure; Framing potential; Participation; Co-creation*)
- **Institutional capacity to select, evaluate & process data** (*Difficulty of common understandings / Oversimplification of complexity: Statistics are part of knowledge production process; Discourse & deliberation in evidence-based processes*)
- **Institutional requirements to guarantee neutrality of / access to data** (*Who defines what at which stage; Responsiveness statistics creation–policy context; Multiple/strategic/value-based use to support interests & aims; knowledge brokers*)
- **Instrumental limits** (*‘Rhetoric-Reality Gap’; ‘Means-Ends Dilemma’; Difficulty of common understandings; Oversimplification of complexity; Life-cycles of paradigms: ‘Ecology of indicators’; ‘Data cultures’; One-size-fits-all; Politicisation*)