

Introduction

Demographic Censuses are the largest project a country's statistical office has to undertake periodically.

The designation *Demographic Censuses* comprises three different censuses: the Population Census, the Housing Census and the Building Census. Another census, with an economic nature, is carried out in the light of the latter: the Commercial Premises Census.

Of all three Demographic Censuses, the Population census is unquestionably the most important and the one with the most longstanding tradition. **The first modern population census, considering the person as the unit for analysis, was performed in Spain in 1768 by the Count of Aranda under the rule of Charles III.**

Other notable operations were the 1787 Census carried out by Floridablanca and the census performed ten years later by Godoy in times of Charles IV.

However, the first series of *official* censuses commenced in 1857 with the first operation performed by the Kingdom's General Statistics Commission, which was followed shortly by the 1860 census. The following operations were performed in 1877, 1887 and 1897. As of the year 1900, Population Censuses have been performed every ten years without exception.

In all, the Population Census performed taking November 1st 2001 as the reference date is the **sixteenth** official Census operation performed in Spain.

The successive population censuses performed in each country depend on their census tradition and the historical moment in which the operation is carried out. The census project for 2001 was developed over a very long period, which commenced just after concluding the dissemination of the results of the previous Census. In June 1996, the INE prepared a document entitled "*Reflections on the Demographic Census for 2001*", presenting general considerations regarding the approach that would be used in the main stages of the next Census, in view of the experience obtained from the previous 1990-91 Census.

The **Draft** is another important landmark in the preparation of the future Censuses, it was published in December 1998 and was disseminated widely among the Autonomous Communities Statistics Institutes (with which previous agreements had been established, at least as regards the essential aspects), a great number of Organisations of the Administration, as well as a wide selection of experts in this matter. The originality of this Draft, compared to previous Censuses, lied in the open approach, based on the study of all the variables that could be included in the Census, analysing their usefulness in detail, as well as the different arguments for and against their inclusion, the collection method, the formulation proposed, the variant options.

Both documents were widely accepted and stimulated the dispatch of a great number of comments and suggestions, which have improved this census project and have, specifically, ensured it reflects the genuine needs for information of the contemporary Spanish society. Unfortunately, we have not been able to consider all the interesting suggestions, although we would have liked to. The resulting global content has been sifted in terms of the basic principles that are the basis of these Censuses: on the one hand, to maintain the work load in acceptable limits (particularly by not including questions that could cause social rejection) and, on the other, to reduce the time the numerous users of the census have to wait to access the results.

The main methodological particularity that characterises these censuses is probably the fact that, compared to previous Censuses, **administrative records have been exploited to the most possible extent**, specifically the Municipal Register of Inhabitants and the Urban Cadastre database. In fact, the combination of both directories allows a single census itinerary (and implies enormous economic savings), since the preparation process that was traditionally performed in years ending in 0 (called *Censuses of Buildings and Commercial Premises*) will be replaced by crossing both computerised databases, thus resulting in great advantages.

The characteristics of buildings and premises are also contained in the *Itinerary Notebooks* (also known as *Agent Notebooks*), in which the directories generated by the crossing of information are printed beforehand. The advantages of knowing the existing postal addresses beforehand and simply verifying them are many and varied, but the most important is the improved census coverage (as regards buildings, dwellings and persons) that results from this simplification of the operation.

Population and housing censuses also take advantage of the available administrative information, so as to **bother citizens as little as possible, without asking them for data that we are already in possession of**. Thus, the register data for each person will be printed on a separate page (to emphasise its special nature), so that respondents simply have to verify them or, if necessary, modify them. These data no longer appear in the census questionnaires themselves, thus reducing the time each household has to dedicate to the census operation.

It is necessary to point out that until the recent legislative reform, the content of the Register was not as useful for the Census as previous information to work with, given the duplicate entries it contained as a consequence of the fact that each Municipal register was managed with absolute autonomy with regard to the other registers. Currently, municipal registers are managed using computer resources and the National Statistics Institute has to coordinate all operations, thus detecting duplicate or incorrect inscriptions and performing the necessary operations to control the precision of the registers.

In all, the 2001 Spanish Censuses combine the traditional method, i.e. a thorough analysis of the territory carried out by visiting the area to collect information from all census units, with strong support from administrative records. As occurred with the 1990-91 Censuses, **data will be exploited exhaustively**, as this will allow us to answer the growing demand for information for small geographical areas, with no other limit than the confidentiality of the information, thus recouping the economic cost of the census operation.