

12th Conference ACN, June 2008, Session 2, (Wednesday June 4 afternoon)

- Session 2: The 2008 update of the SNA 1993

Comment

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In the updating of the 1993 SNA/ESA 1995, the accounting framework was not discussed again.

Welcomed adaptations to economic changes firstly dealt with the issue of intangible assets, particularly R & D expenditures. Conceptually, a distinction should be drawn between expenditures aiming at the creation of original intangible assets and the actual value of the possibly resulting assets. Also financial issues, widely understood, were positively elaborated.

Unfortunately certain very important issues were not dealt with : interest and inflation, the extraction of non-renewable natural resources, the apparently free services provided in the context of market activities, and the concept of changes in the general price level.

Certain decisions are judged regrettable (the inclusion of military durables expenditures in GFCF) or superficially analysed (the decline in the emphasis given to technical aspects of production versus financial or property rights characteristics, in relation with globalization and the need for a thorough re-examination of the whole issue of input-output tables).

The updating/revision strategy is questioned and some alternative suggestions are presented.

Finally, the paper briefly recalls the debates to which national accountants participated during the seventies on the measurement of welfare and since the last eighties on the relationship between the economy and the natural environment. In this context, efforts necessary in order to describe a rapidly changing economic reality, more difficult to observe and measure than some decades earlier, did not lose their relevance. This is true even when people are mainly interested in going "beyond GDP". In this connection, the relationship between observation, national accounting and economic theory deserves special scrutiny.