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METODI QUANTITATIVI AL SERVIZIO DELLA QUALITÀ

Numbers

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Abstract

Sometimes meditating on the use of one's work is healthy, both for the job and for oneself. In this paper I propose a few thoughts on how many people like you and me have devoted, devote or are about to devote their lives to the organization of data in support of scientific research in the social sciences. To some extent what follows is also an protest by a person who is fond of data and sees them mistreated, camouflaged, abused, ironed out, pumped up, deflated, slimmed down, lost. It may also be that this protest may also be dictated only by requirements that are geographically located - I work in Italy - or by personal inclinations that it is not possible to generalise and therefore that cannot interest anyone besides myself. If you have this suspicion, if you think that these things do not regard you, then address your attention to something else, to the magnificent "sorti e progressive" (progressive destiny) of data analysis and scientific discovery.

The first section compares numbers to text data as a representation of reality; the second and third sections underline some difficulties that one may encounter in communicating numbers and introduce the problem of the institutionalisation of number processing production as a system of guarantee; the fourth section sees numbers as a part of a model; the fifth and seventh sections track a two way path between numbers and society, while the sixth mentions the problem of the representation of numbers. The conclusive section recognises as one of the most urgent problems the need for an alert system on the uses and on the production processes of numbers.