



WILHELM WINKLER



b. 29 June 1884

d. 3 September 1984

Summary. As an organizer of statistics, and equally as a university teacher and social researcher, Winkler united theoretical and applied approaches to statistics. As a leading statistician of ethnic minorities in the time between the World Wars, he was also known as an advocate of the use of mathematical methods in the social sciences.

Personal Background

Winkler was born in Prague, the fifth of eight children of a music teacher. He died in Vienna. He grew up in Prague, finished his studies at the *Humanistisches Gymnasium* (branch of secondary school) followed by the study of jurisprudence at the Karl-University in Prague, and joined the *Statistisches Landes-Bureau des Königreiches Böhmen* (Statistical Bureau of Bohemia) as the sole German speaking statistician. Severely wounded in World War I as a highly decorated reserve officer, he was appointed in 1916 to serve in Vienna, together with distinguished economists of the Austrian School of Economics, as a member of the Austro-Hungarian Scientific Committee on the War Economy. In 1919 he published "Casualties of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy," a detailed statistical study of the war losses of each ethnic group of this multi-ethnic state. In that year he also participated in the peace negotiations as the statistical adviser to the Austrian peace delegation in St. Germain. In 1920 he became second in command of the newly formed *Österreichisches Bundesamt für Statistik* (Austrian Federal Statistics Office). In 1925 he was appointed director of its department of population statistics. At that time he also began teaching at the

tional Population Congress of 1959 in Vienna. In 1973 he was the driving force behind the ISI Congress in Vienna. During his last years of life W. Winkler received numerous national and international honours in recognition of his role for the advancement of statistics. In 1952 he was elected Corresponding Member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and in 1961 he became an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society. In 1966 he was elected Honorary Member of ISI. He also received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Munich and Vienna.

Contributions to the Development of Statistics

Wilhelm Winkler's early interest in the statistics of ethnic minorities stemmed from his personal experience with the tensions between Czech and German population groups in Prague. His career as a statistician emerged from a background of the multiethnic and multilingual structure of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In the 19th century the Austrian government, requiring extensive data on the different nationalities living in its empire, had to develop specific statistical methods to provide that information. W. Winkler began in that tradition. As a result of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918, the rise of the succession states, and the decline of the German hegemony, he developed new concepts for the research of ethnic minorities beyond the concepts then in use. He also developed new demographic methods, among them the matching of population- and economic census data with data from other statistical sources. The most important result of these studies was his "Statistical Handbook of the German Populations" financed by the *Stiftung für Deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung*, the leading organization for German *Volksforschung* in the Weimar Republic. The handbook used the new paradigm of statistics of ethnic minorities acknowledging the fact that ethnic groups often cross the borders of nations. W. Winkler can be regarded as one of the most influential demographers of his time, not only of Austria but also of the German-speaking countries in general. Among German statisticians he was well-known for his efforts to introduce the mathematical methods developed in the Anglo-American world, for socio-economic statistics, at a time when these new developments were hardly known on the European continent. It was his persistent, hard work of many years to convince his German colleagues of the need to open up academic statistics, as taught in the social sciences, to British and American developments in statistics.

The main concern of demographers in the period between the two World Wars was the assumption of a precipitous decline of births threatening the quantity and quality of the population, presaging a loss of power and influence of Europe, and of the German speaking population in particular. W. Winkler

University. In 1921 he became *Privat-Dozent* (Assistant Professor) at the juridical faculty of the University of Vienna. In 1929 he was promoted to the rank of *Ausserordentlicher Professor für Statistik* (equivalent to the status of an Associate Professor). W. Winkler then established the *Institut für Statistik der Minderheitsvölker* (Institute of Statistics of Ethnic Minorities) at the University of Vienna where he pursued research on the demographic and socio-economic structure of the widely scattered German-speaking populations in the succession states of the Habsburg Monarchy. At this Institute he produced a stream of research publications about the demographic, social and economic situation of these ethnic minorities in Europe. His research had an impact on the political struggle to find solutions for these minorities in the new European successor states after World War I.

W. Winkler also established contacts with the international statistical community. As a result, his work, especially his studies in statistical theory for the social sciences, became recognized beyond the German speaking realm. After his election as a member of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) in 1926 he participated actively in most bi-annual Congresses of the ISI, establishing a reputation as a strong advocate and debater in favour of mathematical formulations in statistics instead of the wordy and vague formulations that then prevailed in continental Europe.

The *Anschluss* of Austria to the German Third Reich in 1938 interrupted his career. He was dismissed as director of the population census, expelled from the University and banned from giving the invited lecture that had been scheduled for the ISI Congress in Prague. The reason was his public opposition to Nazism and his marriage to a spouse of Jewish descent. In 1945, after seven years of severe deprivations, difficulties and the persecution of his family by the Nazi party, W. Winkler was rehabilitated and rewarded with the upgrading of Statistics to a fully recognized academic discipline, required for the study of economics, management and jurisprudence. He was appointed as the first *Ordinarius* of Statistics—Full Professor—at the University of Vienna since 1883, when the last Full Professor of this field retired. In 1950/51 he was honored by election as Dean of the *Rechts- und Staatswissenschaftliche Fakultät* of that University. He continued his efforts for the further improvement and recognition of Statistics in Austria as an academic discipline in its own right, and as a recognized field of study. He had to overcome stiff resistance by the faculty who opposed Statistics on philosophic grounds, an opposition that is difficult to understand today.

After his retirement at age 71, in 1955, he continued to work vigorously for the progress and recognition of statistics. As Vice President of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) he organized the Intern-

proposed to reverse these demographic trends through specific tax policies to encourage the formation of new families by taxing unmarried adults. His fertility index, based on the results of the Austrian population census of 1934, became the basis on which population politics was widely discussed in the late 1930s, though never acted on.

After World War II W. Winkler turned away from his earlier research on ethnic minorities to intensify his efforts to develop and disseminate new methods in statistics. By publishing his works on Econometrics (1952) and on Demometrics (1969) he rejoined the international statistical discussion, although the backwardness of German and Austrian statistical research relative to the statistical advances in the West made it increasingly more difficult to contribute successfully to international debates.

W. Winkler was the leading government statistician and organizer of statistics as a science during the years of the First Republic of Austria (1925–1938), and after World War II (1945–1955). In that time he occupied the most important positions in statistics at the University and in Government in Austria. W. Winkler was the founder of the Austrian Statistical Journal, *Statistische Vierteljahresschrift*, whose first volume appeared in 1948, and the Co-Editor of *Metrika*. He also founded the Austrian Statistical Society and created, *praeter legem*, a graduate program for statisticians from which the nucleus of the junior staff of Austrian and also some German statisticians emerged in the 1950s and 1960s.

— ALEXANDER PINWINKLER

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