

Statisticians of the Centuries
WILHELM WINKLER



b. 29 June 1884 d. 3 September 1984

[Alexander Pinwinkler](#)

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 Konigreiches 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 Osterreichisches Bundesamt für Statistik (Austrian Federal Statistics Office). In 1925 he was

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appointed director of its department of population statistics. At that time he also began teaching at the University. In 1921 he became Privat-Dozent (Assistant Professor) at the juridical faculty of the University.

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 Facultät 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 Interna-

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