

IN MEMORIAM: RICHARD RUGGLES—A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS
(1916–2001)

Richard Ruggles was best known as a National Income accountant, based on his great contributions to the development of the SNA. But at heart, Richard Ruggles was really a “data guy” who built integrative bridges from macroeconomic accounts to microeconomic household data and back again. Together with his wife Nancy, he blazed trails that were only much later followed by the profession and by social and economic accountants everywhere. Prices (wholesale, retail, administered), wages, national and international accounts, employer costs, revenue and profits, time use, employment and unemployment, and many, many other areas of economic and social measurement were explored in his long and distinguished career.

Richard mined all kinds of data: macro and micro; cross-section data; time series data; household survey data; administrative data; employer data and finally even “meso” data which combined both micro and macro data in an accessible format. Richard did them all with great foresight and knowledge. Richard benefited from the freedom of an academic position to question and experiment with economic data in ways not always open to those working in the public service. Many notable economists use the freedom of academia to retreat into abstractions, but Richard kept his feet firmly on the grounds of practical issues and his hands full of data issues. It is notable that most of his publications were in the sort of journals most widely read by those in public service, articles in the *Survey of Current Business*, UN journals and the various U.S. and international income and wealth journals and books. It should be remembered that it was the Ruggleses who first made data sets easily available to IARIW members by including floppy disks with the journal, e.g. see below.

It was typical of Richard’s interest in national accounting that he should have been vigorously engaged in the discussion leading up to the revision of the SNA which culminated in 1993. He wrote that hardly was the ink dry on the 1968 SNA when proposals were made for its revision. He regarded this not as apostasy but a very welcome sign that this was a living subject of ongoing importance and fascination. Just as he queried long established orthodoxy so he encouraged others, and especially newcomers, to look at his own work with a critical eye. He disparaged an attitude which dismissed a problem in advance as too difficult to resolve and set about trying to find out whether this really was the case or not. And he usually found it was not.

Many will forget or never realize the ways that Richard also made the IARIW a pleasant place for micro-oriented distributional economists to participate and flourish. From the August 1983 IARIW Conference in Luxembourg, where Richard openly embraced the idea of the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) data base which was just beginning, to his many papers on distributional issues

(e.g. Ruggles and Ruggles, 1985; Ruggles, 1970, 1977; Ruggles, Ruggles, and Wolff, 1977) and on integration of micro and macro data for households (Ruggles and Ruggles, 1967, 1974, 1975, 1986; Ruggles, 1969), Richard fully understood how this integration could work and offered continuous insights and ideas. He was a most gracious and willing host, making countless introductions and always welcoming those interested in measurement issues to the IARIW with open arms. In the early 1970s he introduced many of us to his Yale crony, Edward (Ed) Budd, and Ed's good friend, Dan Radner—the first two “micro” guys that distribution-oriented macroeconomists and like-minded social statisticians got to know in the IARIW. Richard's emphasis on all of this was not just size distribution, nor just national accounts, but how distribution and national accounts data could be merged and understood as part of a complete system of economic and social measurement.

Richard offered several opportunities for us personally to participate in seminars, organize workshops and contribute to the field. In 1988, he “commissioned” perhaps Smeeding's most quoted RIW article, on equivalence scales (Buhmann, Rainwater, Schmaus, and Smeeding, 1988). Richard also included in the rear of this June 1988 issue of RIW, a diskette with the “meso” data from the Luxembourg Income Study database, on which the article was based, so that others could experiment with the intricacies of household size adjustment. Both LIS and the issue thrived in part due to this wonderful “introduction” which he fostered. Later in Smeeding's book on income distribution in the OECD, with Rainwater and Atkinson (1995), and even later in the work of Harrison and Smeeding for the Canberra Report (2001), the ideas of linking microeconomic data on household incomes with macroeconomic data from the National Accounts, pioneered by Richard, can be clearly found.

In closing, we can truly say that Richard Ruggles was a man for all seasons. For over 50 years he helped lead and strengthen the IARIW and to make it a common meeting ground for all persons interested in economic and social measurement, regardless of their orientation or the way that they approached the topic. It is this great legacy which he has left as his greatest contribution to the IARIW.

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