

IN MEMORIAM: KEES OOMENS (1917–2005)

A SELF-MADE MAN AND A GREAT VISIONARY STATISTICIAN

On November 2, 2005, Kees Oomens, former chairman (1961–63) of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, passed away. Within Statistics Netherlands (CBS), Kees Oomens is considered to be one of the most important Dutch statisticians since the Second World War. For more than half a century, he was one of the leading figures who guided CBS towards its present position. Kees Oomens was also highly respected internationally, being one of the persons who helped to develop the international standards for the system of national accounts in its early stages.

After secondary school, Kees Oomens started to work at CBS in 1936. Soon after, he became an assistant of later Nobel Prize economist Jan Tinbergen, one of the persons whom Kees most admired and a major source of inspiration to him. During the Second World War, Leontief developed his famous input–output modeling techniques in the United States. During the same period, Kees Oomens, unfamiliar with the work of Leontief, developed similar types of tables as a tool for the compilation of a consistent set of national accounts data. For years, the Netherlands, together with Norway, were unique in the application of these techniques. Now, one can hardly imagine compiling national accounts without these kinds of tools and models for integrating data.

After the Second World War, the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) was created, and Jan Tinbergen left CBS to manage this new organization. Kees Oomens stayed at CBS to work on the further development of the Dutch system of national accounts, as an indispensable source of data for the builders of econometric models for economic policy at the CPB. It was the time of the Marshall Plan, and countries were obliged to compile national accounts estimates to receive the related funds. International discussions on the way to compile these estimates started, and Kees Oomens was the person representing the Netherlands. From then on he collaborated with Richard Stone, another major source of inspiration, and other well-known economists. Kees was well respected and considered a great and very inspirational expert.

In 1957, Kees Oomens was appointed as Head of National Accounts at the CBS. In the 1960s, he was directly involved in the discussions and the finalization of the first, more detailed, set of international standards for the compilation of national accounts, the System of National Accounts (SNA) 1968. The list of persons who were involved in the elaboration of these standards looks extremely impressive. During this period, he conducted research on productivity measurement, among other topics. He also was an advisor for the United Nations, and served as a consultant to a number of countries, including Mexico, where he

supervised the set-up of a complete system of source statistics and the first compilation of an input–output table.

Kees Oomens was very creative and a man of vision. He considered economic statistics as parts of one large consistent system. From business registers on the left hand up to and including national accounts on the right hand, Kees Oomens believed statistics should be approached in a coordinated way, including price statistics and links with social statistics. This dream of coordination and integration of statistics was his “hobbyhorse.” In the 1970s, he obtained the opportunity to put his dream into practice, as the person responsible for all economic statistics within CBS. In many articles (unfortunately mainly in Dutch only), he has laid down his ideas of coordination and integration.

A milestone in the career of Kees Oomens was the granting of the title of “doctor honoris causa” by Erasmus University in Rotterdam in 1978, for his invaluable contributions to economic science. This was a very exceptional event for someone not having an academic degree. Kees Oomens was given this special honor for his thorough thinking about the concepts of economic theory, and the development of practical solutions for measuring these concepts. In addition, he had been able to put these ideas into practice, with a great care for the consistency of the results. The following quote is very appropriate for a man such as Kees Oomens: “Statisticians should look ahead many years. They should be visionary people, pioneers who feel what will be needed in the future.”

Kees Oomens was a remarkable, powerful personality. He was very enthusiastic, quite strict but righteous, modest and unassuming, and a source of inspiration for many people. There was no greater joy for him than when people adopted his ideas and put them into practice. On the other hand, he could be deeply hurt, when his environment did not understand him. In 1982, Kees Oomens retired. It was typical for him to keep on working until the late 1990s. In this period, he carried out a number of historical statistical studies on the population and the labor force in the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th centuries. These studies turned out to be an essential input for the construction of historical time series of national accounts data. His last scientific contribution was a review of Richard Stone’s publication, *Some British Empiricists in the Social Sciences, 1650–1900*.

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SOME ARTICLES (IN ENGLISH) BY KEES OOMENS

“Statistics on the Distribution of Income in the Netherlands,” paper presented to the 4th Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, Hindsgaol, September 6–13, 1955.

“Productivity Measurement in the Netherlands,” OECD, *Productivity Measurement Review*, no. 27, November 1961.

“Population Movements in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century,” *Netherlands Official Statistics*, 3(2), 1988.

“The Dutch Labour Force, 1849–1990,” *Netherlands Official Statistics*, 9, Autumn 1994.

“Dutch Historical Statistics: 19th Century Population Censuses,” *Netherlands Official Statistics*, 12, Winter 1997.