

## ■ Life and work of Isaac Kerstenetzky



Isaac Kerstenetzky was a Brazilian economist, pioneer of the modern statistical system in the country, and of its integration with the activities of monitoring and economic planning. FGV, by choosing his name for the Award to be granted for the best studies presented at the CIRET Conferences, seeks to honor his legacy, which is related to that of many researchers who biennially gather to share their ideas and experiences in this forum.

Born in 1926 in Rio de Janeiro, Isaac Kerstenetzky graduated in Economics at the age of 20, from the University of Rio de Janeiro. Between 1952 and 1960 he complemented his academic background with a Masters degree at McGill University (Canada), and a specialization in Economic Planning at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague (Netherlands), where he was supervised by Jan Tinbergen (1903-1994), winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize in Economics.

Mr. Kerstenetzky was linked professionally to the FGV since 1946. There he helped creating the Brazilian National Accounts, published the Brazilian Journal of Economics, and became Director of Statistics and Research. He also created the first Tendency Survey in Latin America, the Manufacturing Survey, in 1966.

In 1970, he became President of the Brazilian Institute of Statistics and Geography (IBGE), where, over nearly a decade, he expanded and refined the official system of

economic statistics. Up to that point, the IBGE focused its efforts on statistics related to geology and demographics. Meanwhile, the FGV had already implemented the standard Brazilian economic statistics since the 40s. Since then, FGV's economic statistics have played a complementary role to the official IBGE's system of statistics.

Isaac Kerstenetzky held a view that statistics and economic studies must provide the nation indispensable tools to be used by economic policy makers, with an eye on reducing social inequalities, among other goals. This multidisciplinary approach, implemented in the country between the years 1950 and 1970, mixing quantitative and qualitative methods, is responsible for what scholars know objectively about Brazil to this date.

Like Victor Zarnowitz, Isaac Kerstenetzky rejected economic controversies devoid of empirical evidence. Aiming to discover statistically the Brazilian reality, he appeared little publicly, and kept a low-profile. Every time someone asked him for a new academic work, he alleged to have nothing **new to say**

about what others had just published. In his professional life, he applied what he considered to be essential in the formation of an economist: the diversity of knowledge.

Isaac Kerstenetzky, at the height of his intellectual production, died at the age of 65, in Rio de Janeiro. To this day, we reaffirm the great values and legacy we inherited from his school of research. May his inspiration, and above all, the ability to reflect, continue to influence the current and future generations, by fostering the development of social and economic research in Brazil and worldwide.

## Biography

1926: August 14, born in Rio de Janeiro

1946: Graduates in Economics and enters the Brazilian Institute of Economics (IBRE) from the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV), where he heads the Center for National Accounts (1954-59), becomes Director of Research (1964-70) and directs the Journal of Economics (1965-70)

1953: Completes Masters in Economics at McGill University (Canada)

1960: Specialization in Economic Planning at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague (Netherlands)

1963-64: Serves as a visiting professor at Yale University (USA)

1966: Starts the FGV's Manufacturing Survey, the first Economic Survey in Latin America

1970-79: chairman of the IBGE, where he promotes deep reforms at the institution and in the official national statistics system

1979: left the IBGE and became the director of Education of the Graduate School of Economics of the FGV

1980-85: becomes Dean of the Center for Social Sciences at the Catholic University (PUC) of Rio de Janeiro, where he was already a History Professor

1988: Teaches as a visiting professor in the Department of Economics, University of Illinois (USA)

1991: July 20, dies at the age of 65, in Rio de Janeiro