



Research & Methods
ISSN 1234-9224 Vol. 20 (1, 2011): 59–80
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw
www.ifispan.waw.pl
e-mail: publish@ifispan.waw.pl

Developing Attitudinal Indicators of Societal Progress

Eric Harrison

City University London, UK

Roger Jowell

City University London, UK

Elissa Sibley

University of Essex, UK

A previous version of this paper was presented at the 58th World Statistics Conference, Dublin, August 2011. We are grateful to the session discussant Lars Thygesen, and also Peggy Schyns, Jeroen Boelhouwer and Ineke Stoop for their comments on earlier drafts.

This paper reports progress on a project to develop a set of ‘attitudinal indicators of societal progress’, as part of the wider methodological research agenda associated with the European Social Survey. It recognises the recent contribution of ‘happiness economics’ in moving the debate about the progress of societies ‘beyond GDP’, but seeks to move the agenda on in two ways. Firstly it focuses more on cognitive evaluations of society’s functioning than measures of affect like happiness. Secondly it is less concerned with the psychological wellbeing of individuals and more with the social wellbeing of aggregates, whether these are neighbourhoods, regions or nations.

While the study of data relating to overall measures of individuals’ life satisfaction has a long history, the recent Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report called for recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing. In examining the feasibility of such an indicator set, we were constrained by two considerations: a) it must comprise items that represented a comprehensive set of domains, in order to provide a full picture of the experiences that constitute societal progress; and b) it must initially be drawn from existing cross-national surveys.

Unfortunately it is currently the case that while comparative data exist for most of the key domains, these are often scattered across many different general social surveys, meaning that they can only be analysed at the aggregate level. This makes it difficult to implement another of the Stiglitz recommendations, namely that surveys should ‘assess the links between various quality-of-life domains for each person, and this information

should be used when designing policies in various fields'. With this in mind, we present a prototype set of indicators that could be used to measure citizens' perceptions of the quality of their society. The eventual aim is to field all the items together in one survey, in order to examine their inter-correlations, as well as their relationships with measures of individual life satisfaction and with socio-demographic characteristics.

Key words: wellbeing; social indicators; societal progress; social attitudes.

The good life, as we conceive it, demands a multitude of social conditions and cannot be realized without them. The good life, we said, is a life inspired by love and guided by knowledge. The knowledge required can only exist where governments or millionaires devote themselves to its discovery and diffusion... To live a good life in the fullest sense a man must have a good education, friends, love, children (if he desires them), a sufficient income to keep him from want and grave anxiety, good health, and work which is not uninteresting. All these things, in varying degrees, depend upon the community and are helped or hindered by political events. The good life must be lived in a good society and is not fully possible otherwise.

Bertrand Russell, 1925

The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning. The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community... It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods. But most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbour, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvellous products of our labour.

Lyndon Johnson, 1965

...for a society to be good, much of the social conduct must be regulated by reliance on the moral voice rather than on the law, and the scope of the law itself must be limited largely to that which is supported by the moral voice. This is the case because the moral voice can be made more compatible with a high level of respect for self, with autonomy, and, hence, with a good society. Here again, the good society is defined as one that balances two values, social order and autonomy, rather than maximizing one.

Amitai Etzioni, 2002

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports progress on a project to develop a set of ‘attitudinal indicators of societal progress’, as part of a wider methodological research agenda associated with the European Social Survey. One of the strategic aims of the ESS has been to champion the cause of attitudinal indicators as a complement to economic and social measures that are already well established. The overall aim of this work package was to develop and propose a set of attitudinal indicators of societal wellbeing¹ that can be adopted across the European Research Area. The project began in 2007 by undertaking a lengthy period of desk research, designed to identify the key problems in the field and the domains that were most measured in the literature (Jowell and Eva 2009). The second stage of the project, from 2008 onwards, involved extensive consultations with international experts in the field, through individual meetings and attendance at conferences. On the basis of these discussions the third stage was to produce a ‘first pass’ at a list of items that could be refined and eventually used in cross-national research. It was agreed to restrict the scope of the search to questions drawn from existing cross-national surveys (and which therefore would have achieved some degree of equivalence) or other questions available in English (the language of the ESS source questionnaire). The resulting compendium (Harrison et al. 2011b) contained 118 items covering 13 domains, constituting a long list that could be discussed, refined and ultimately edited down into a module on major international surveys.

The project has been very timely. While the study of data relating to overall measures of individuals’ life satisfaction has a long history, the recent Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report explicitly recognised that wellbeing is multi-dimensional in nature, and emphasised the need to monitor change in all measures over time to assess countries’ social progress. Our own contribution to this field recognises the recent contribution of ‘happiness economics’ (Layard 2005) in influencing the debate about the progress of societies ‘beyond GDP’, but seeks to move the agenda on in two ways. Firstly, it focuses more on cognitive evaluations of society’s functioning than measures of affect such as happiness. Secondly it is less concerned with the psychological wellbeing of individuals and more with the social wellbeing of aggregates, whether these are neighbourhoods, regions or, as in this case, nations.

In examining the feasibility of such an indicator set, we were constrained by two considerations: a) it must comprise items that represented a comprehensive set of domains, in order to provide a full picture of the experiences that constitute societal progress; and b) it must initially be drawn from existing cross-national surveys. Unfortunately it is currently the case that while comparative data exist for most of the key domains, these are often scattered across many different general

social surveys, meaning that they can only be analysed at the aggregate level. This makes it difficult to implement another of the Stiglitz recommendations, namely that surveys should ‘assess the links between various quality-of-life domains for each person, and this information should be used when designing policies in various fields’.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section briefly sketches the academic and policy background that has informed this work. The next section gives the reader a flavour of the theoretical and methodological issues that are at stake in the measurement of societal wellbeing. In section three we discuss some of the considerations that have informed our choice of domains and we place our own plans in the context of some past and present attempts to construct sets of indicators. The fourth section presents a set of prototype indicators that could measure attitudes to societal progress. The concluding section addresses the obstacles that still remain and the steps that need to be taken towards a set of attitudinal indicators of wellbeing that can be adopted Europe-wide.

BACKGROUND

The main impetus behind this project, as with so many in the field in recent times, is the exhortation to ‘go beyond GDP’, in other words to supplement the measurement of countries’ aggregate national economic output with appropriate parallel indicators of societies’ social wellbeing. This is not just about the here and now, nor simply about putting a number or series of numbers against social wellbeing. Just as watchers of the economy worry about whether there will continue to be economic growth (as measured by an increase in GDP), so those concerned with the health of society wish to pursue the progress of social goals. Hence there is a need for indicators of social wellbeing that are comparable over time and across national borders.

The desire to go beyond GDP is as old as GDP itself. Kuznets, the architect of the measure, recognised in 1934 that the welfare of a nation ‘could scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income’ (Kuznets 1934). Considerable progress has been made in the intervening years. From the 1960s the ‘social indicators movement’ became influential in its aim of establishing measures of societal development that could parallel the established economic ones (for a comprehensive review see Noll 2002). Although in policy terms this movement foundered in the 1980s, its academic legacy remains in the form of the journal *Social Indicators Research* and in research networks such as the International Society for the Study of Quality of Life (ISQOLS).

Since the 1990s there have been two developments that have reinvigorated debates about social wellbeing. Firstly, the European Union’s pursuit of

‘convergence’ between its member states has led to an upsurge of interest in social inclusion and the adoption of an officially sanctioned set of indicators against which to measure progress in this area (Atkinson et al 2002). Secondly, and somewhat ironically, the rise of behavioural economics, positive psychology and their merger into the new (or rather rediscovered) ‘science of happiness’ (Layard 2005; Oswald 2006) has led to a renewed focus on the concept of wellbeing. This actually has its roots in the United States of the 1960s when the earliest studies on happiness (Bradburn and Caplovitz 1965) and life satisfaction first appeared (Cantril 1965; Campbell et al 1976).

In the United Kingdom the debate recently became an urgent policy concern when the Prime Minister announced his intention to add measurements of wellbeing to official statistics. A consultation process on the selection and measurement of indicators began in late 2010. To an extent this is simply an extension of the culture of performance indicators for central government departments and local authorities that has become deeply embedded. For instance the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (*Measuring Progress* 2010) has no fewer than 68 indicators of sustainable development even though it admits that not all can be measured (either because there is a lack of data or because the indicators themselves are still under development). In the Netherlands, which has a long-running *Index of Life Situation*, the number of components has varied, but since 2004 it has measured 19 indicators via a total of 52 survey questions (Boelhouwer 2010).

The aim of our research is to develop a set of *attitudinal* indicators, which could in principle be adopted by European and national governments as official measures of societal progress. The intention is to supplement the sorts of ‘objective’ social indicators of the type developed by Atkinson et al with well-founded measures of people’s assessments of their own societies. Such indicators might provide a more nuanced picture of people’s quality of life than making inferences from their behaviour or circumstances. Rather than affective notions of individual well-being (such as happiness), our focus is on the cognitive judgements people make about the quality of their societies – the extent to which they judge them to be fair or unfair, how much major national institutions are trusted or not, whether they see their system of criminal justice as even-handed or biased, whether their neighbourhoods feel safe or dangerous (Jowell and Eva 2009). To the extent that our approach is multi-dimensional rather than making use of a single summary notion of wellbeing, and that it targets not the wellbeing of individuals but the ‘overall’ quality of life in a society, it is very in tune with the messages coming out of the Stiglitz report, and is much broader than the current science of happiness defined as ‘life satisfaction + positive affect – negative affect’ in the Bradburn/Cantril tradition. The next section offers some more developed justifications for both of these aspects of our work.

MEASURING SOCIETAL WELLBEING

Much of the recent literature on subjective wellbeing (SWB) assumes, whether explicitly or implicitly, that the primary unit of analysis is the individual. The definition of overall wellbeing is simply the sum (or in practice the mean) of the wellbeing of all the individuals concerned. This reflects the measure's theoretical basis in the notion of utilitarianism, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. This equation is much less obvious when applied to the term 'quality of life', a term often associated with communities, cities or whole countries (Sirgy 2010; Ferriss 2010). Society is a collective enterprise, and is often praised or criticised as such. Commentators refer to society being 'sick', 'broken' or 'dysfunctional'. More positive accounts have talked of the 'good society', the Big Society or even the Great Society. In both cases societal wellbeing is defined normatively.

There are two approaches to defining wellbeing at the societal level. One is to establish what features of society are deemed by citizens to be most important or most strongly associated with satisfaction. This could be done directly through survey instruments or inductively by measuring a wide portfolio of potential domains. The second approach is to decide *a priori* what would constitute a society high in wellbeing (Waldron 2010). Most politicians, think tanks and lobbyists do this normatively but it could be done with recourse to sociological theory.

One way towards a theory of 'quality of society' (Noll 2002), is to borrow some of the arguments from the psychological theory underpinning individual wellbeing. The high-level concepts in this area can be summarised as effective functioning and positive feelings. Faced with adverse circumstances, or challenges from other actors to which they are unable to adapt, individuals can experience a reduction in wellbeing. The consequences of this can be that they no longer perceive themselves and their activities as worthwhile; they can find their functioning is impaired and, in extreme circumstances, they may act self-destructively.

This taps into a well-established strand of social theory concerned with social change and development. From the industrial revolution onwards commentators have noted the transition from traditional society, which was marked by social interaction in person, to modern society, which is marked by a complex division of labour and the stretching of social relations over time and space. Durkheim's explanation was that the 'mechanical solidarity' that held things together in the countryside gave way to 'organic solidarity' based on the interdependence of the division of labour. This became the first of many answers to what Parsons (1937) later called 'the problem of order'. Given the enormous complexities inherent in social organisation, why does society continue to hold up rather than fall apart? Or in Hirschman's (1970) terms, why, when times are bad, do citizens show loyalty, or give voice, rather than heading for the exit?

Competing explanations have emerged from different theoretical schools. Marxian approaches, rooted in the belief that capitalist societies are antagonistic and exploitative, lay much emphasis on the use of coercive power. Because sole reliance on the repressive force of the state is rarely feasible over extended periods, ruling groups also seek to elicit the compliance or consent of the population. This ranges from the vigorous imposition of a single worldview (the dominant ideology thesis) to more subtle approaches to ensuring widespread acceptance ('hegemony') of the key values and practices of the regime (but c.f. Mann (1970) on the more pragmatic 'role acceptance'). In the second half of the twentieth century social theorists returned to the problem by questioning how social systems successfully achieve and maintain integration (for which read stability and cohesion). In structural-functional approaches associated with Parsons, the defining characteristic of modern social systems is that they have become increasingly complex and differentiated, and the challenge is to reintegrate all the parts of the system.

Lockwood (1964) successfully bridged these two perspectives by introducing the distinction between *social* and *system* integration as different levels of analysis. Social integration is the formation by individuals of 'collectivities' (families, voluntary associations, political parties, etc) which are clusters of roles defined by varying degrees of solidarity and cohesion. This type of integration is brought about by agreement on key values during the socialisation process, and is conducted through face-to-face interactions (what Giddens has called 'conditions of co-presence'). System integration involves the formation of 'institutions' – clusters of independent roles that perform certain functions but are not units of action. These institutions are fundamental 'parts' of a social system, and its stability depends on the degree of integration among them. System integration can be viewed as the ability of the state and the market to 'deliver the goods'. A breakdown in either type of integration may provoke a crisis in that society. If we were to view a society's wellbeing in the same way as we do that of an individual – namely as a combination of effective functioning and internal harmony – then we have two overarching concepts, within which there will be several dimensions.

However, while this may be a theoretical basis for constructing indicators of societal wellbeing, many would argue that no theory is needed in order to form a system of social indicators. The construction of GDP too was an iterative process. 'Theories were developed, but simultaneously, and in parallel, series were selected for improved measurement, relationships between them and others were investigated and formalized, models were gradually built up, theories were improved in turn, and so forth' (Moser 1973: 137). Almost forty years on, Rojas (2010) made a similar observation in relation to the Stiglitz report (Stiglitz et al. 2009). Noting the rather eclectic set of theoretical approaches within the report,

he concludes that ‘it seems that rather than waiting until academic circles reach a general consensus the best way to do it is by requesting statistical offices to keep track of relevant variables on the basis of the main wellbeing approaches’ (Rojas 2010).

This quote is actually an apt description of the broad area in which this project is located. We do not have the luxury of designing a new set of indicators from first principles; at least initially we were limited to collating existing measures with some relation to domains that have salience within the quality of life debate. The next section discusses the issues relating to item selection and to the measurement of societal wellbeing.

IDENTIFYING WHAT TO MEASURE AND HOW

The first problem is how to handle the multi-dimensional nature of societal wellbeing. One of the reasons that measures such as SWB (whether operationalised as happiness or life satisfaction) have gained broad acceptance is that they have the merit of simplicity, which eases questionnaire design, data collection and data analysis. Overall life satisfaction is the outcome, the consequence, the dependent variable; every other potential measure put forward for consideration becomes at best a covariate.

Many proponents of the wellbeing agenda have advocated the use of a single measure that can become an equivalent of GDP. But in fact GDP is not a single measure – it is an aggregate figure acting as a summation for a very detailed and complex system of national accounts. Its raw value is rarely reported; it is usually discussed relative to a previous time period or in terms of its position on an international scale. Within countries there is as much debate about the contribution of different elements (manufacturing, services, construction) as there is about the overall quarterly figure. More crucially, we look at the nature and size of its determinants. The short-term effect of a spell of harsh weather is a good example of this. We might also expect different elements of GDP to be particularly affected by particular drivers (e.g. construction by a foot of snow). So ‘GDP’ is shorthand for the entire economic output.

Although as we have noted, it is tricky to find a single overarching theory to underpin the measurement of societal wellbeing, this does not mean that there are no convincing arguments for the inclusion of individual domains. To quote Lord Moser again: ‘There are no sociological theories about society in general on which a structure of indicators can at present be based, nor is this a major drawback. There are, however, a number of “middle-range” theories relating to specific fields or sectors – e.g., to occupational mobility, education, migration, mental health etc., and more of these are needed so that quantitative relationships and models can gradually be built up’ (Moser 1973: 137).

Table 1 Domains covered by existing sets of indicators

Source	Domains
Campbell et al (1976)	Marriage, family life, health, neighbourhood, friendships, housework, job, life in the US, city/county, non-work, housing, usefulness of education, standard of living, amount of education, savings, your religion, our national govt, organisations belong to
European System of Social Indicators: EUSI (Noll 2002)	Population, household and family, housing, transport, leisure, media and culture, social participation and integration, education and training, labour market and work, standard of living, health, environment, social security, public safety, total life situation
OECD Society at a Glance (2006 to date)	General context, self-sufficiency, equity, health, social cohesion
UK Audit commission (2005)	People and place, community cohesion and involvement, community safety, culture and leisure, economic wellbeing, education and lifelong learning, environment, health and social wellbeing, housing, transport and access, other indicators
Gallup World Path: Micro-economics (since 2005)	Law and order, food and shelter, institutions and infrastructure, good jobs, wellbeing, brain gain, quality GDP growth.
SCP life situation index (Boelhouwer 2010)	Health, housing, mobility, holidays, ownership of durable consumer goods, socio-cultural leisure activities, social participation, sports
Ferriss (2010)	Survival of the species, social acceptance, mastery, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, harmony, conservatism, hierarchy, egalitarian commitment, health
Gallup-Healthways Wellbeing Index (2011)	Life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behaviour, work environment, basic access
OECD Better Lives index (2011)	housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, governance, health, life satisfaction, safety and work-life balance.
ESS Compendium of Attitudinal Indicators (2011)	Trust in Institutions, wellbeing and happiness, tolerance (attitudes towards immigration), social trust, fear of crime, neighbourhood cohesion, social inclusion, environment, economic insecurity, attitude to the future of society, quality of public services, perception of conflict

For this reason most social indicators also come in sets, sometimes very large sets. Table 1 shows some of the main national and international attempts to produce indicators of wellbeing and/or quality of life. In each case the source of the original work is provided so that the reader can examine in detail the thinking behind the selection of domains. There are two features which apply to most if not all of the indicator sets on the list. Firstly, they mix different measurement levels: they combine both measures at the individual level and aggregate scores at the level of society. Secondly, they mix the nature of the measurement: they combine measures of people’s attitudes and perceptions with reported measures

of experience or behaviour. For example, Campbell's original work on quality of life covers a range of domains, ranging from housing conditions and amount of savings to views about the national government. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's *Society at a Glance* website carries five different categories of social data: each is measured by five further indicators, most of which are aggregate outcome data gathered by governments. At a more overarching level still, the *European System of Social Indicators* (Noll 2002) covers the current EU-27 member states and draws on both international aggregate official statistics as well as micro data from various government and academic cross-national surveys. Time-series data are available for around 650 separate indicators

As the table shows, there is nothing very novel about the idea of social indicators, whether they are couched in the language of quality of life or well-being. It is at the implementation stage where they have tended to founder. The problem faced by all projects of this type is that they need to be clear about what is being measured and why. Without such a clear theoretical rationale the exercise can degenerate into an attempt to be comprehensive (too many indicators) or – and in a way worse – simply casting around for measures that already exist (a muddle of different measurement types and levels).

The initial compendium we produced for the project (Harrison et al 2011b) committed both these errors to differing degrees. Upon further reflection – and critical feedback from colleagues – it became clear that in casting our net wide for potential items we had produced a list that was empirically comprehensive without being theoretically coherent. Having set out to capture attitudinal measures of societal wellbeing we had included questions about individual wellbeing and we had included behavioural measures. Some questions asked respondents to evaluate aspects of their life, some to assess features of their neighbourhood, others to judge their society overall. In particular we were insufficiently clear about how measures of individual wellbeing might sum to measures of societal wellbeing or whether they ought to be conceptually distinct.

To give some specific examples: Even where sets of items have been fielded grouped together and/or their measurement qualities evaluated (such as those taken from the third round of the European Social Survey), there is a mixture of focus. 'Trust in institutions' involves attitudes towards part of the social structure, whereas 'tolerance towards migrants' is a blend of two items on the respondent's normative position on migration policy, and two items evaluating the effects of migrants' arrival on society. 'Fear of crime' asks about perception of threat based on a respondents' individual situation, and 'neighbourhood cohesion' is rooted in the experience of a locality largely defined in the respondent's mind. The questions on 'civic participation' by definition tend to measure reported behaviour rather than a respondent's attitude.

The relationship between attitudinal and factual-behavioural measures is problematic. Where a domain can adequately be measured by official statistics (such as with poverty, unemployment, housing conditions) we initially discounted it to avoid unnecessary repetition. However, there may be a mismatch between a situation as defined by official data and the respondents' perception of the situation, and this is interesting in itself. Whether the eventual set of indicators should attempt to be a comprehensive collection *in one place* or should concentrate on the novel and neglected in order to supplement the existing stock of indicators has remained a bone of contention throughout the project. Moreover, an individual's evaluation of the nature of his or her society, or its level of performance, depends to some degree on their prior value-position. Harrison et al (2011a) drew upon a range of cross-national surveys to produce an assessment of the main values, attitudes and preferences relating to social policy topics across the European Union. If policy makers are concerned to improve the wellbeing of citizens, and it is assumed that the social environment has an influence on this, then it is important to know what the picture of a 'good society' looks like in the minds of the public. In its purest form, a multi-dimensional index of wellbeing would be constructed by weighting each indicator according to its relative importance in the preferences of each respondent, but this is clearly both theoretically simplistic and analytically complex.

TOWARDS A SET OF ATTITUDINAL INDICATORS OF SOCIETAL PROGRESS

In the later stages of our work, we have traded coverage for coherence, and have narrowed our focus somewhat. This is for both theoretical and practical reasons. The first reason is quite straightforward: while all the domains we examined clearly contribute in differing degrees to produce a concept called the 'good society', they are not all measuring the same dimensions of this concept. Although it is interesting to examine the relationships between individuals' views of their own life, their experience of their neighbourhood, their behaviours, their perceptions of their society, and some objective measures of that society, they do not sum to the same thing. The second reason is equally straightforward but more practical: surveys are expensive and space is at a premium. A short set of indicators has better prospects for widespread adoption than a long one.

The prototype index set out below measures citizens' perceptions of the quality of their societies, where a 'good society' is defined as one that is considered to be legitimate and effective. These correspond to Lockwood's categories of social and system integration. The current selection of items is organised under twelve headings. Nine of these correspond to domains within the two concepts 'perceived social integration' and 'perceived system integration'. The other three are attempts

to measure the perception of the good society directly through an overarching evaluation. For each we suggest items that might measure these domains, drawing upon a range of international surveys. In the large majority of cases they are part of publicly available data sets and in most cases they have been fielded as part of repeat cross-sections. The detailed wording of the questions and their response categories are in the appendix to the paper.

Table 2 Prototype Attitudinal Indicators of Societal Progress

1. Overall perceptions of society

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
Satisfaction with society	1	Eurobarometer 2001
Intention to emigrate/remain	1	Gallup World Poll since 2005
Situation of society now and in the future (absolute and relative)	4	Eurobarometer 72.1

2. Perception of Social Integration

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
Social trust	3	ESS since 2002
Perception of societal tolerance	3	Gallup World Poll (diversity index)
Absence/presence of social conflict	3 from 6	EQLS
Perception of distributive justice	2	ISSP, ESS
Anomie	3	Eurobarometer 47.1

3. System Integration

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
Trust/Confidence in institutions	4	ESS or EVS
Evaluation of national performance	3	ESS since 2002
Responsiveness of political system	2	EVS
Quality of public services	3 from 6	EQLS

Discussion

Those familiar with the debates over wellbeing and quality of life will notice some notable omissions. Firstly there are no measures of social capital. This is because it is not accessible to attitudinal measurement at the national level. Respondents can be expected to be capable of reporting what they do in their own lives, and how they assess the sense of reciprocity within a small neighbourhood. How far these

sum adequately to the overall social cohesion of a society will depend greatly on the sampling design of the survey in terms of representing urban and rural districts, and whether the possession of and/or attitudes to social capital are correlated with unit non-response. In our indicator set social cohesion is measured by perception of social conflict and the degree of generalised trust.

Also absent from the prototype are any measures of individual life satisfaction or aspects of life such as health, relationships, feelings of insecurity or personal safety. These are already measured frequently in surveys and are attracting increasing attention from, among others, the Gallup Wellbeing Index and the OECD's Better Life Index. It is not meaningful to ask respondents to speculate on the health, safety or security of 'most people' – they will tend to operationalise the question at the local level or thinking of family and friends.

The indicators to be normative are designed: they have a clear positive and negative direction and are straightforward to interpret. We have made a priori decisions that good societies are ones where the population perceives them to be tolerant and to be fair. This does not imply any absolute position in terms of the legal framework of civil rights, no any particular income distribution. These are contextual data that can be used to analyse the difference between countries, but they are independent of the overall perception. Nor does it imply any level of support by individuals for political, religious or sexual tolerance. It is possible for a xenophobe to believe that their country is a welcoming place for immigrants; it is the evaluation of the society, not the evaluation of immigration which is being measured. This can of course be placed alongside information about respondents' own attitudes, and be viewed in the broader context of aggregate opinion in that society.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the limitations of GDP were apparent from the start, noted by Kuznets himself. The search for parallel indicators of social progress dates back at least to the 1960s, and in the last ten years there has been a string of initiatives promoting the widespread adoption of indicators and/or indexes of social progress and quality of life, culminating in the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report. While this is widely cited in political circles its contents have had a more lukewarm reception from academics in the field (Maggino and Ruviglioni 2010; Noll 2010), who see within it little novelty other than the successful transfer of the quality of life agenda from the academic to the policy arena. Given this fact and given that, as we have seen, there have been multiple attempts to construct indexes to measure quality of life at the societal level, it seems curious that we do not yet have a well established set of indicators. Up to this point the prospect of a cross-nationally equivalent

set of indicators of societal wellbeing has remained elusive, due to a series of substantial obstacles.

The first of these obstacles has been the lack of high quality cross-national empirical data. Unlike GDP and most of the systems of social indicators referred to in this report, *attitudinal* data about societal wellbeing is not routinely monitored by national statistical offices. Even in the major international governmental and academic surveys, the approach is piecemeal, and often driven by specific concerns rather than any overall rationale. The second obstacle has been that much of the better analysis focuses on individual domains, for instance in the field of social cohesion. Until its recent cancellation the UK government funded an entire survey, *The Citizenship Survey*, to measure this concept. There is a large body of literature relating to each of a series of elements of societal wellbeing, for instance social capital, satisfaction with public services, political participation or trust in institutions. Academics tend to be more concerned with explaining phenomena in particular fields and it is easier to gather data about a large number of potential predictors if the dependent variable is sharply defined and measured by relatively few items. Similarly, many of the most illuminating studies of quality of life have taken place in small neighbourhoods or in municipalities where there is access to administrative records and the research is funded by and related to some policy initiative on the part of the local state.

The third obstacle is that given limited survey resources, a compromise between scope and precision remains necessary. We have elected to adhere rigidly to the notion of *attitudinal* indicators of *societal* wellbeing. If the intention is to measure this literally, then all items have to target attitudes, not measures of behaviour or other factually based responses (which would effectively act as independent or contextual variables in the analysis). Equally all items should ask respondents to address the national level; they should relate to society overall.

The final reason that the social indicators approach remains only part-developed is that it has been eclipsed over the years by the happiness movement, and the deceptive simplicity of its measurement. In this approach wellbeing and happiness become largely synonymous, and national wellbeing is the sum (or average) of a multitude of individual wellbeings. While this is doubtless a phenomenon worth monitoring, it is rooted in a different paradigm, one of methodological individualism, where the primary unit for identifying outcomes is the individual. The wider social environment, in its many constituent parts, is seen as a ‘driver of wellbeing’ (nef 2011), an intermediate objective seen as a condition required to achieve individual wellbeing. The quality of that society has largely been measured by aggregate output measures, for example Atkinson et al’s (2002) indicators of social inclusion. Our approach adds another dimension to the literature on wellbeing. In addition to the objective conditions of individuals’ lives, their perceptions of them, and

the objective conditions of whole societies, we add a fourth component, citizens' perceptions of their societies. Bertrand Russell believed that individual fulfilment was at the core of living a good life, but that this could only be achieved within a good society. The construction and maintenance of a good society is a collective endeavour. To prosper and endure it needs not only to function effectively and operate according to shared values, but also to be seen to do so.

NOTES

- 1 In general we consider the term *societal progress* to refer to a measure of change, and *societal wellbeing* to refer to a measure of a situation at one point in time. However, they are used fairly interchangeably in the literature.'

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Dr Eric Harrison

Presently: Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at City University, London. Member of the Core Scientific Team of the European Social Survey. Member of the Technical Advisory Group for the UK Measuring National Well-being Programme. Previously: Research student and lecturer at Nuffield College, Oxford (2000–2004), Senior Research Officer at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex (2004–2006). Current Research Areas: Comparative research methodology, societal wellbeing, social stratification.

Correspondence: eric.harrison.1@city.ac.uk

Professor Sir Roger Jowell

Presently: Research Professor and Director of Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at City University, London. Principal Investigator of the European Social Survey since its inception in 2001. Previously: Founder-Director of the National Centre for Social Research, Britain's largest social research institute, from 1969 to 2000. Author and editor of numerous

books and articles on survey methods, political and social change and comparative research. Knighted in 2008 for 'services to social science'. Descartes Prize laureate 2006 'for excellence in collaborative scientific research'.

Ms Elissa Sibley

Presently: Research student at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex. Previously: Research Assistant at the University of Essex (2011), in the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at City University, London (2009–2011) and at University College London (2009). Current research areas: Wellbeing, survey methodology and quantitative methods.

APPENDIX: A SHORTLIST OF ITEMS FOR A SET OF ATTITUDINAL INDICATORS OF SOCIETAL PROGRESS

1. Overall Perceptions of Society

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
A. Satisfaction with society	1	Eurobarometer 2001
B. Intention to emigrate/remain	1	Gallup World Poll since 2005
C. Situation of society relative to time and place	3	Eurobarometer 72.1

2. Perception of Social Integration

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
D. Trust within society	3	ESS since 2002
E. Perception of societal tolerance	3	Gallup World Poll (diversity index)
F. Absence/presence of social conflict	3	EQLS
G. Perception of distributive justice	3	ISSP, ESS
H. Anomie	2	Eurobarometer 47.1

3. System Integration

Short name of domain	Number of items	Source
I. Trust/Confidence in institutions	5	ESS or EVS
J. Evaluation of national performance	3	ESS since 2002
K. Provision of public services	2	ESS
L. Quality of public services	6	EQLS

1. Overall Perceptions of Society

A. Would you say you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with each of the following things?

With the kind of society we live in [1–4 DK=5]

[EB 56.1, 2001: Q46]

B. Ideally if you could afford it, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?

move; stay; DK

[Gallup World Poll since 2005]

C1. For each of the following domains, would you say that the situation in (OUR COUNTRY) is better or less good than the average of the European Union countries?

(SHOW CARD WITH SCALE – ONE ANSWER PER LINE)

The quality of life in (our country)

Much Better; Somewhat better; Somewhat less good; Definitely less good; DK
[EB71.3 QA3a]

C2. What are your expectations for the next twelve months: will the next twelve months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to...

The situation in our country?

Better; worse; same;DK

[EB 72.4: QA4a]

C3. Generally speaking, do you think that the life of those who are children today will be easier, more difficult or neither easier nor more difficult than the life of those from your own generation?

Easier, more difficult; neither; DK

[EB71.1 QA14]

2. Perception of Social Integration

D1. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (0–10 with ends labelled as in the question)

D2. Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? (0–10 with ends labelled)

D3. Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? (0–10 but scale labelled in opposite order to the way alternatives posed in the question)

E1. Is [our country] a good place or not a good place to live for racial and ethnic minorities?

E2. Is [our country] a good place or not a good place to live for gay or lesbian people?

E3. Is [our country] a good place or not a good place to live for immigrants from other countries?

[adapted from Gallup World Poll Diversity Index: since 2005]

F. In all countries there sometimes exists tension between social groups. In your opinion, how much tension is there between each of the following groups in this country?

INT.: READ OUT AND SHOW CARD Q25 (answer codes) – ONE ANSWER ONLY PER STATEMENT

Poor and rich people

Different racial and ethnic groups

Different religious groups

A lot of tension, some tension, no tension, DK

[EQLS]

G1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(Please tick one box on each line)

Differences in income in country are too large

Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree;
Can't choose

[ISSP 2009]

G2. Using this card, please tell me whether you think doctors and nurses in [country] give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally?

Choose your answer from this card where 0 means you think they give special advantages to certain people and 10 means you think they deal with everyone equally.

G3. And using the same card, please tell me whether you think the tax authorities in [country] give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally?

H1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(Please tick one box on each line)

The people who run the country are not really concerned with what happens to (people like) me

H2. There is nothing one can do to change things in our society

Tend to agree; tend to disagree; DK

[EB 30; 47.1]

3. Perception of System Integration

I. Please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions [read out]

OR

Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? (1–4)

[Country]’s Parliament?

The legal system?

The police?

The press?

Political parties?

[ESS/EVS]

J1. On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]? Use this card. (0=extremely dissatisfied, 10 = extremely satisfied)

J2. Now thinking about the [country] government¹², how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job? Use this card.

J3. And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?

[ESS 1-4]

K1. Thinking about the provision of social benefits and services, please tell me how efficient you think the provision of health care in [country] is. Choose your answer from this card where 0 means extremely inefficient and 10 means extremely efficient.

K2. And how efficient do you think the tax authorities are at things like handling queries on time, avoiding mistakes and preventing fraud? Please use this card where 0 means they are extremely inefficient in doing their job and 10 means they are extremely efficient.

[ESS1-4]

L. In general, how would you rate the quality of each of the following PUBLIC services in [OUR COUNTRY]?

- a. Health services _____
- b. Education system _____
- c. Public transport _____
- d. Child care services _____
- e. Care services for elderly _____
- f. State pension system _____

[EQLS 2007]