

Appendix

Methodological Remarks on Social Reporting about Well-Being in Historical and International Context

Abstract There is a widespread need for the long-term historical reconstruction of societal developments. In this study, the history of European's well-being is on the proof. Well-being is a recognized goal since ancient times. In the Roman Empire, people spoke of peace, prosperity and satisfaction these goals were partly transformed but are still alive in modern time. Explicit measurement of well-being developed in the past decades to a task of social sciences and international organizations. Modern data production was institutionalized all over the world and representative survey became a key instrument for the diagnosis of the structural changes of nations, continents and the world. Social indicators and quality-of-life research were combined with an interest in social reporting. Monitoring social change is a recognized instrument which is used to receive knowledge about the societies and their development and to be responsible to the needs of people.

This comprehensive socio-historic and international report concerns well-being developments in Europe. Thanks to the intellectual support from historical personalities, like "Marcus Tullius Cicero" from Rome and "Johann Wolfgang Goethe" from Frankfurt, who are cited at the beginning of the book, the long-term approach adapted in this article received friendly encouragement. Both personalities expressed an extraordinary support for the socio-historical time span of this article regarding 3000 years of human development.

If well-being was always a recognized goal in historical and modern societies is in doubt, clearly there were authoritarian political regimes which ignored the well-being of people. But as it seems most people of modern Europe would prefer for their life "peace, prosperity and satisfaction" if it is adapted to modern conditions. It is the burden of human development that there were always mighty people and groups which brought destruction, sorrow and dissatisfaction over Europe and the world. Well-being has sometimes been a master goal and also often a by-product of societal tendencies, and sometimes, it has been neglected. Well-being in its emphatic sense was never realized. People live always between hopes for

well-being and fears that they could lose peace, miss prosperity and diminish satisfaction.

The stimulating idea of postulating quality of life came from welfare theorists (Pigou 1909/1920) and the interest in social indicators for measuring well-being was early shared between social sciences and supranational institutions (Bauer 1966; OECD 1974, 1976). In recent years, the conceptual and practical knowledge about well-being and social reporting were summarized through overviews in the EU context. Social scientists recommend social indicators to the European Union (Atkinson et al. 2001). Measuring progress in a changing world was the topic of a European Commission (Commission of the European Community 2009). The limits of economic measurement and the direction for social progress were content of another European study (Stiglitz et al. 2009) and the proposal about the goal of “Well-being for All” profited especially from the engagement of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2008, 2011). Well-being became a central goal of mankind which enriched traditional debates about the pursuit of human well-being and their advances (Estes and Sirgy 2018).

The historical analysis of well-being is confronted with the main problem to find within an endless number of historical events and processes which ones are important and which one can be neglected for the given task. Selective decisions have to be made all the time about the relevance of topics and it is nearly impossible to go into details. There is no chance to explain in a short study for all the 28 EU countries how they attained their special position in Europe. And it would be impossible to look for all the 28 countries which subgroups of their population had some progress for their well-being and which one lost partly their well-being. Readers have to accept that it is not European Commission possible to have both, the broad overview and the detailed exploration. This study is concentrated on events and structures which are most significant for the constitution of well-being in the history of Europe.

A basic decision in well-being and quality-of-life research is to look on social and historical processes from two views: namely, first how people perceive themselves their lives and their society, and second, how is the awareness of social events and social processes from the eyes of other people especially from experts or interested people. What the experts describe is often designed as “objective” and what ordinary people report is called their “subjective” reality. Well-being developments cannot be traced without being perceived and assessed either in the view of experts or in the eyes of the people who participate in the events. Since centuries in many publications, historical or philosophical experts tell how they evaluate from their perspective historical processes and societies. In recent decades, an increasing number of survey studies asked how people see their society and their lives.¹ Knowledge about this topic could be important for supporting cohesion and peace in Europe. Often we find social reports in which objective living conditions are

¹In an early study, an interesting perspective was implemented by the question “how nations see each other” (Buchanan and Cantril 1953).

diagnosed in combination with the subjective perception of the people. Among the critical topics, the problem of inequality within and between European societies attains much attention.

In social reporting, the idea is emphasized to publish not only for scientific experts but also for intelligent readers who are interested in the subject. The intention of social reporting in this study is to present adequate information for European people, who may be interested in their own well-being history, and to people from abroad, who want to be informed about the well-being history of their European neighbours. Of course, the two groups will have more or less pre-knowledge and different expectations, which cannot be met all the time. Complex methodological approaches and elaborations, which are difficult to follow, are here avoided. Social reporting emphasizes the point that people who are subject of social research should be able to understand the research results.

A further problem of this type of socio-historical and international comparable study is the data which are available for describing the socio-historical and international processes (Sirgy et al. 2017). Most often we find in the quality-of-life literature single country or population group studies which came up early and went ahead of comparative studies. One of the first studies in Europe on quality of life and well-being was published in 1984 under the title “Lebensqualität in Deutschland” (Glatzer and Zapf 1984). From the preference for structural information stems the support for representative survey data. Only with the help of representative data, a complex and differentiated unit as Europe can be characterized without getting lost in details. For modern times, it is no problem to find structural data because data production has attained a high level.

Most important structural, historical and international comparable data for the EU are produced and collected at the following statistical and data units.

Overview of Country Indicators for the 28 EU Member States and the most World Countries

European Union/Eurofound (2017). European Quality of Life Survey, 2016. Nearly 37,000 interviews with 1000–2000 per country in 28 European member states and 5 EU-candidates. Carried through earlier in 2003, 2007 and 2011.

European Union/Eurostat (2015). Quality of Life—Facts and Views. The European statistical agency with its first quality of life survey in 2015. Includes EU with 28 countries and some additional ones.

European Union/Eurostat (2015). Quality of Life—Facts and Views. The European statistical agency with its first quality of life survey in 2015. Includes EU with 28 countries and some additional ones.

OECD (2014). Van Zanden et al. (eds.) (2014). How Was Life? Global Wellbeing Since 1820. OECD Publishing. “Trends are charted for 25 countries, 8 world regions and the world economy as a whole.” This Report gives a summary of own and official data sources.

(continued)

(continued)

OECD (2016). *Society at a Glance. OECD Social Indicators. Overview of Social Trends in 35 OECD-Countries and selected Partner Countries.*

OECD (2017). *How's Life 2017? Measuring well-being.* OEC. D Publishing. This is a statistical report, released every two years, that describes some of the essential aspects of life that shape people's well-being in OECD and partner countries.

United Nations (2016). *Human Development Report—Human Development for Everyone* (2016). Includes the Human Development Index (HDI), which is defined as a welfare measure of the United Nations including the components of health, education and level of living since 1990. It is available for most countries of the world.

World Happiness Report (2018). ed. by Helliwell J, Layard R & Sachs J (2018). The survey 2017 is concerned with global happiness and includes 156 countries (containing the EU-countries) in respect to their happiness levels and 117 countries by the happiness levels of their immigrants. World Happiness reports are available since 2012.

World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 1995). Research findings on subjective enjoyment of life for most countries of the world including Europe. This data archive is a collection of all quality of life related survey data.

European Union/Eurofound (2017). *European Quality of Life Survey, 2016.* Nearly 37,000 interviews with 1000–2000 per country in 28 European member states and 5 EU-candidates. Carried through earlier in 2003, 2007 and 2011.

European Union/Eurostat (2015). *Quality of Life—Facts and Views.* The European statistical agency with its first quality of life survey in 2015. Includes EU with 28 countries and some additional ones.

OECD (2014). Van Zanden et al. (eds.) (2014). *How Was Life? Global Wellbeing Since 1820.* OECD Publishing. “Trends are charted for 25 countries, 8 world regions and the world economy as a whole.” This Report gives a summary of own and official data sources.

OECD (2016). *Society at a Glance. OECD Social Indicators. Overview of Social Trends in 35 OECD-Countries and selected Partner Countries.*

OECD (2017). *How's Life 2017? Measuring well-being.* OEC. D Publishing. This is a statistical report, released every two years, that describes some of the essential aspects of life that shape people's well-being in OECD and partner countries.

United Nations (2016). *Human Development Report—Human Development for Everyone* (2016). Includes the Human Development Index (HDI), which is defined as a welfare measure of the United Nations including the components of health, education and level of living since 1990. It is available for most countries of the world.

²In the quality-of-life literature, different scales are used from three steps to one hundred steps, which makes comparisons sometimes impossible. In this summary, mostly scales from 0 to 10 and 1 to 10 are in use.

World Happiness Report (2018). ed. by Helliwell J, Layard R & Sachs J (2018). The survey 2017 is concerned with global happiness and includes 156 countries (containing the EU-countries) in respect to their happiness levels and 117 countries by the happiness levels of their immigrants. World Happiness reports are available since 2012.

World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 1995). Research findings on subjective enjoyment of life for most countries of the world including Europe. This data archive is a collection of all quality of life related survey data.

In most of these data sources, a new scale-type is adapted, which was not in use some decades ago. A main construct is directed towards satisfaction, towards satisfaction with life and towards satisfaction in different life domains. It was measured most often with a scale running from 0 to 10,² which means from “not at all satisfied” to “fully satisfied”. This scale was used in hundreds of surveys and well-being researcher trust in the measurement method. It is helpful to remember some of the various scales which are broadly accepted, e.g., the medical pain scale (from 0 to 10), the Parker wine scale (from 50 to 100), the Beaufort wind strength scale (from 0 to 12) or the earthquake Richter magnitude scale from (1 to 9). Many people are adapted to this style of thinking and they know that value on a scale is high and what is low. For the interpretation of satisfaction scales, it is recommended to give attention to the results of the many available studies. Values of 9 and 10 are extremely seldom. Values below the scale middle point of “5” are extremely low scores and they are results only in few cases. Small changes in the average on the satisfaction ladder indicate big steps in reality.

It is of general interest to monitor social change and some studies do this explicitly and repeat their surveys in short or long distance. For a profound analysis of recent change of well-being in Europe, it would be necessary to compare all available surveys and to proof, if the changes in time are consistent. Most supra-national studies have a small section what is going on in recent times. For a deeper understanding, one should know what groups in the society were the agents of change. The satisfaction with the living standard could increase for the higher strata or for the lower-income strata, which makes a lot of difference for society. Also, it is important if an increase of well-being is a short-term result or a longer-trend phenomenon, which is stable over time. In general, well-being should be monitored how it is attained, sustained and improved over many years. Everybody should be aware that it is a difficult task to identify, to protect and to reproduce well-being in the course of times.

² In the quality-of-life literature, different scales are used from three steps to one hundred steps, which makes comparisons sometimes impossible. In this summary, mostly scales from 0 to 10 and 1 to 10 are in use.

References

- Atkinson, T., Cantillon, B., Marlier, E., & Nolan, B. (2001). *The EU and social indicators*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buchanan, W., & Cantril, H. (1953). *How Nations see each other*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers.
- Council of Europe. (2008). *Well-being for all. Concepts and tools for social cohesion*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Commission of the European Community. (2009). *GDP and beyond. Measuring progress in a changing World*. Brussels: COM.
- Eurostat. (2015). *Quality of life—Facts and views. Statistical books*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.
- Eurofound. (2017). *European quality of life survey 2016. Quality of life, quality of public services and quality of society*. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union.
- Estes, R., & Sirgy, J. (2017). *The Pursuit of human well-being*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Glatzer, W., & Zapf, W. (1984). *Lebensqualität in der Bundesrepublik*. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Glatzer, W., & Kohl, J. (2017). The History of Well-being in Europe. In R. Estes & J. Sirgy (Eds.), *The Pursuit of human well-being*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, H., & Sachs J. D. (2018). *World Happiness Report 2018*.
- Michalos, A. (2014). *Encyclopedia of Well-being and quality of life research*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- OECD. (2016). *Society at a glance. OECD social indicators*.
- OECD. (2017). *How's life? Measuring well-being*. OECD Publishing.
- Olson, M. (1985). *The rise and decline of nations. Economic growth, stagflation and social rigidities*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Pigou, C. E. (1920/2009). *Welfare economics*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publisher
- Sirgy, M. J., Estes, R. J., & Selian, A. N. (2017). How we measure well-being: The data: Behind the history of well-being. In R. Estes & J. Sirgy (Eds.), *The pursuit of human well-being*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Stiglitz, J., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. P. (2009). *Report of the commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress*. www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr
- United Nations. (2016). *Human development report—human development for everyone*. UNDP: hdr.undp.org/en/2016.report
- Van Zanden, J. L. (2014). *How was life? Global well-being since 1820*. Luxembourg: OECD Publishing.
- Veenhoven, R. (1995). World database of happiness. In *Social indicators research* (Nr. 34 Vol. 3, pp. 299–313).
- Weizsäcker E. U., & Wijkman, A. (2018). *Wir sind dran*. Club of Rome: Der große Bericht. Gütersloher Verlagshaus.