

Barometers of Quality of Life Around the Globe

Social Indicators Research Series

Volume 33

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Barometers of Quality of Life Around the Globe

How Are We Doing?

 Springer

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Preface

The idea for this book came from a special plenary session convened during the meeting of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS) held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, 17–20 July 2006. ISQOLS conferences have always brought together social indicators researchers from around the world. However, the economically advantaged members of the Society based in developed countries tend to outnumber others. We hoped this conference might attract a different audience. The 7th ISQOLS conference was to be held for the first time in Africa and we expected a larger proportion of developing country participants and colleagues from Africa. The conference, we thought, offered a unique opportunity to showcase the various social indicators systems operating in different regions of the world.

In Africa social indicators systems are rarely considered a hot topic although the continent is short of reliable statistical information for social development and good governance. By organising a special plenary session on social barometers and social reporting systems around the world, we wanted to demonstrate to our African audience (and to the next generation of quality-of-life scholars) that social indicators studies are exciting and that researchers in this field are passionate about the importance of monitoring quality of life. With this in mind, we invited colleagues from different parts of the world to present the particular social barometer they rely on to assess quality of life in their region. In the conference programme the panel session went under the heading: “How Are We Doing? Quality of Life Surveys around the Globe”.

The programme introduced the session as follows:

Researchers have come to rely on select regional surveys that assess quality-of-life trends in their part of the world. Some of these instruments have been developed specifically as barometers of quality of life or social welfare and typically they measure well-being, living standards and satisfaction with domains in life. Other regional surveys include key indicators of well-being that serve a monitoring purpose. Many of these regional surveys use internationally comparative measures.

Importantly, regional surveys reflect local culture and development needs. It is often the local nuances that make a difference in capturing the essence of quality of life under very different living conditions and in tune with popular expectations of the good life.

The brief we gave to our panellists was to

... draw a sketch of the survey or surveys that serve as quality-of-life barometers in your part of the world. Please share with conference participants the most fascinating trends you have observed in the survey results in the new millennium.

We invited Alex Michalos to chair the session. He did a marvellous job. Somehow he managed to get our experts to take us on a state-of-the-art tour of social surveys in Europe, the Arctic, Africa, Latin America, the Philippines, and Australia in a record 90 min. In fact, Alex was himself so impressed by this indicator tour de force that he suggested we develop the power-point presentations into a proper book for Springer's Social Indicators Series. What is more, he volunteered to write the introduction and co-edit the volume with us. And these decisions were also taken during the 90-minute session that finished on time before the coffee break on the morning of the second day of the conference.

Word of the session must have travelled because we received further offers post-conference of reports on the newer Asian barometer that we had overlooked. We are delighted to include these unsolicited contributions in this book to round off the global picture.

By bringing together in one volume introductions to social barometers applied in a total of over 100 countries, we hope to give a better overview of the many similarities but also the distinct differences in survey efforts to measure quality of life worldwide.

Grahamstown
Berlin

Valerie Møller
Denis Huschka

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Our sincere thanks go to Alex Michalos for his initial enthusiasm and then for his willingness to see the project through to publication. We could not have wished for a better co-editor! Our colleague Nova de Villiers in the Institute of Social and Economic Research assisted with her thoughtful language-editing. Esther Otten from Springer has been both helpful and patient with us. We are indebted to our peer reviewers: Laura Camfield, Timothy Hinks, Filomena Maggino, Chong-Min Park, Ruut Veenhoven, and Joachim Vogel provided useful feedback on six chapters in the volume. Some of our authors not only produced their own papers for this volume but also agreed to comment on the papers prepared by fellow contributors. This peer review arrangement seemed most appropriate as all our authors are leading international experts in the field. Lastly, we thank all our contributors for sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm to ensure that the social indicator movement continues to thrive in the new millennium. The quality of life of all of us on the planet may depend on it.

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Introduction: An Overview of the Larger View

Alex C. Michalos

As I write this introduction, members of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies are engaged in preparing a fairly large two-volume *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research* under the general editorship of Ken Land. The second volume in that collection will include regional, country and perhaps city-level investigations. Given the relatively huge current interest in social indicators/quality of life research around the world at all levels of political organization, there is much more information available than anyone could put into a single volume or small set of volumes. Nevertheless, members of ISQOLS feel an obligation to try to gather up the disparate pieces from across the globe and to present interested readers with some kind of running jump into the current literature. As Valerie and Denis explained in their Preface, this volume is part of our fulfillment of that obligation. On their journey through the papers in this collection, readers will discover that there is a great deal to be learned about our field of study and a great deal of satisfaction to be obtained from that learning. I am grateful to Valerie and Denis for inviting me to contribute to this interesting and important volume.

Our focus on social barometers picks up a metaphor often used in the field. In their contribution to this volume, Mangahas and Guerrero remarked that they called their social monitoring system in 1981 the Social Weather Stations Project “on the idea that surveys can serve like observation posts to monitor social conditions, much as meteorological stations monitor weather conditions”. In Noll’s contribution, one reads about the development of the Eurobarometer since its first survey in 1974, perhaps the first usage of the metaphor. (Some readers may recall that the first issue of *Social Indicators Research* appeared in May 1974.)

In over 30 years of publication of *Social Indicators Research*, many authors have illustrated a great variety of ways to represent the multidimensional space of diverse concepts of quality of life with some kind of unidimensional scale. Such reductions are designed to simplify complicated

collections of statistical time series and are practically bound to oversimplification. Nevertheless, as Saltelli (2007) and others have explained, for purposes of communication in the popular press, simplicity is very important, even simplicity at the risk of oversimplification (Michalos et al., 2007).

ISQOLS formed a Committee for Societal QOL Indexes in 2000, under the chairmanship of Michael Hagerty, with the aim of evaluating 22 well-known indexes against a set of 14 generally accepted adequacy criteria. The report of the committee was published in Hagerty et al. (2001). Of the 22 indexes examined in that report, only two are discussed in this volume, namely, the Eurobarometer and the UNDP's Human Development Index. So, that report provides a good supplement to the papers in this volume.

A more substantial supplement was published by Sirgy et al. (2006) with the somewhat grand title of "The quality-of-life (QOL) research movement: past, present and future". While the authors of this overview intended to provide a world-wide perspective, close examination of its contents reveals an Anglo-Saxon-North American bias. The bias can be adjusted to some extent with the help of reviews by Noll (2002), Berger-Schmitt and Jankowitsch (1999), several papers in Glatzer, Von Below and Stoffregen (2004), and the present volume. More importantly, perhaps, given the relatively lengthy but biased report contained in Sirgy et al. the absence of a review in the present volume of North American developments may be excused. Interested readers may consult the papers and books cited above and below to round out their picture of what has been happening around the globe.

Noll's contribution to this volume is properly subtitled "Rich sources for quality of life research" because the diverse cultures, regions and great number of research centres and research instruments available in Europe have combined to produce a magnificent mine of social indicators research. In the concluding section of his paper, granting that there are problems with "cross-country comparability", Noll celebrates the diversity of approaches used in the European surveys as providing "an experimental setting, enhancing the research potential by providing additional opportunities to study the implications of using the one or the other measurement approach".

Beginning after the Eurobarometer that included nine nations, the first European Values Study (EVS) survey occurred in 1981 covering ten Western European countries. In 1990 more European countries, Canada and the USA were added, and by 1999–2000 there were 33 countries. While the EVS is run relatively infrequently, the Eurobarometer surveys occur in the spring and fall of every year, giving a database covering over 30 years. The European Community Household Panel Study (ECHP) was a longitudinal annual survey running for eight years, 1994–2001. The European Social Survey began in 2002/2003, and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS)

in 2003. One of the most attractive features of the European Social Survey, in Noll's view (which I share), is that it is based on a eudaimonic rather than a hedonic concept of wellbeing. While hedonists emphasize "positive feelings" following the historic tradition of Protagoras, eudaimonists emphasize "being well and doing well" in Aristotle's phrase or "positive doings and functionings" in Amartya Sen's phrase. The several barometers of conditions and changes in European countries reveal "a remarkable agreement among Europeans across all the EU-member states that the state of health, income and family life are the most important determinants of a 'good life'". In fact, these core components may be traced as far back as the Greek poet Hesiod in the late seventh century BCE (Michalos, 2009).

Concluding his contribution, Noll wrote that "if one expects that quality of life research faces a bright future in Europe it is not only due to the richness of data, but also due to the fact that enhancing quality of life in all member states is among the major policy goals of the European Union". Good supplements to this paper may be found in Hagerty et al. (2002) and Vogel (2003).

Mangahas and Guerrero trace the origins of the Philippine Social Weather Stations to a social indicators project of 1973 whose aim was to measure progress toward the "achievement of the important goals of Philippine society as a whole". Anticipating the goals of the Brundtland Commission by over a decade, the Philippine project focused its attention on "(a) the fairness of sharing among people of today and (b) the adequacy of provision for people of the future". Unlike the European reports that were routinely published as planned, the first "Social Weather Report" was suppressed early in 1983 because it revealed "mostly unfavorable opinions on inflation, crime, corruption and the burden of taxation". Shortly thereafter, the project was terminated, but in 1985 a new NGO was born, calling itself the Social Weather Stations (SWS) and sponsored by the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development. As of August 30, 2007, the SWS Survey Data Bank of Philippine surveys "includes 321 datasets . . . containing 37,789 items . . . based on 330,146 interviews". In a wonderfully moving passage, Mangahas and Guerrero wrote that

The SWS mission statement is phrased in a definite order: data should be generated, firstly, to stimulate the eye; secondly, to influence the heart; and finally to guide the mind . . . Interestingly enough, most criticisms of the Social Weather Reports come from government officials, whose seeming function is to do the opposite: to send non-signals to the general public, and to put sensitive topics away from public debate as much as possible . . . Generating and publicizing alternative statistics is an activity that helps to put its subject matter higher on the agenda of public and private policy makers . . . If SWS polling becomes controversial, we accept it as part of the trade.

We are fortunate that these authors remind us that social indicators research is not only an interesting academic exercise but a politically sensitive and necessary exercise with profound implications for improving democratic discussions and debates, and finally, the real quality of life of people.

The contribution by Shin in this volume is a fine follow-up to the comprehensive collection published in *Social Indicators Research*, i.e., *The Quality of Life in Korea: Comparative and Dynamic Perspective*, by Shin et al. (2003). Theoretically called a Special Issue, it filled two full volumes (62 & 63) of the journal. The Korea Barometer Surveys described by Shin here began in 1988 “with the installation of the democratic Sixth Republic”. With ten national surveys running from October 1988 to July 2004, the Korea Barometer provides an extraordinary record of changes in the quality of life of a country in transition “from a low-income country into an economic powerhouse . . . from a repressive military dictatorship into a maturing democracy . . . from a nation of mostly rural people into one of urbanites . . . [and] from a nation with a predominately traditional Confucian culture into a multi-cultural nation . . .”. Summarizing his findings, Shin remarked that “Koreans neither interpret nor value democracy in the same way as Westerners do”, and that, unfortunately, “democratization, globalization, industrialization, urbanization, and many other changes that have taken place in Korea during the past two decades have not contributed to the building of a nation of greater well-being. Instead, those changes have transformed the country into a nation of lesser well-being”.

Graham’s contribution to the volume compared results from the 2001 Latinobarometro with pooled data from the U.S. General Social Survey from 1973 to 1998 and the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey of 2000. She provided a fine illustration of how attitudinal surveys from diverse parts of the globe could reveal new insights and provoke new research questions and problems for policy makers. In the last sentence of the first paragraph of her conclusion she captured several of the unresolved problems for both policy makers and researchers who are interested in attitudinal surveys, and urged caution all around. In particular, she mentioned problems related to “the happy peasant, adaptations and set points, hyperbolic discounting, and the absence of clarity on a definition of happiness”. In the earlier parts of the same paragraph, she used the terms “happiness”, “quality of life”, “well being” and “welfare” as names of dependent variables of interest in this kind of research. More precision in our usage of all these terms will be required if we are to make and measure progress in this field. Among her most interesting findings from the Latin American data, she discovered that

the non-linear relationship between income and happiness holds for countries that are at very low levels of GDP per capita, like Honduras and Guatemala. Earlier literature on the developed economies posited that non-linearities set in well after basic needs were met, at roughly \$10,000 per capita. The Latin America results suggest that the level is much lower . . . [and as others have found] Average country income levels had no significant effects on happiness in any of the countries we studied, even the very poor ones, while relative income differences dominated.

The Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA) reported by Kruse and Poppel and their colleagues represents another collaborative initiative involving eight countries and many more indigenous people and communities. Quite modestly the authors remark that “What may be distinct about SLiCA is its intent that a multi-disciplinary group of social scientists and indigenous people work together to redefine and measure living conditions in a region spanning 30 degrees of latitude around the globe”. It took them about three years and eleven workshops to craft their questionnaire, which included “950 variables per respondent” and “7,200 observations”, and it took about six years (2001–2006) to collect data. Respondents were divided into approximately 76% Inuit from Canada, Greenland and Alaska, and 24% Chukchi, Evan, Chuvan and Yukagir from Chukotka in Russia. As reported in other regions of the world concerning other people, in this collection and elsewhere, “Inuit adults who receive a poverty level personal income (60 percent or less of the median income in their indigenous settlement region) are less likely to be very satisfied with their life as a whole than adults who receive higher personal incomes (32 versus 43 percent). But at higher levels of personal income, the level of income is not always associated with a higher likelihood of being very satisfied with life as a whole”. Results from the SLiCA will be essential building blocks for an “Arctic Social Indicators system”.

The contribution of Cummins et al. briefly describes the construction and application of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI), which is composed of a Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and a National Wellbeing Index (NWI). The PWI is based on an average of respondents’ reported levels of personal satisfaction with 7 domains of their own lives (e.g., health, personal relationships) and the NWI is based on an average of respondents’ reported levels of personal satisfaction with 6 domains of national life (e.g., the economy, the environment). The PWI and NWI are not aggregated. The first application of the AUWI occurred in a national survey in April 2001 and the current report covers results of 17 such surveys. The AUWI is grounded in Cummins’ Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis and supporting evidence for the theory is reported in this contribution as well as in several other publications by Cummins and his colleagues. One of the most interesting findings here concerns the rise in the PWI following the *bad news* of the

disaster at the Twin Towers in New York in Sept 2001 and the *good news* of the performance of the Australian Olympic team in Athens in August 2004. For these curious results, the authors offer the following possible explanation.

While both threat and enhancement events appear to have caused wellbeing to rise, the reason for each rise should be different. From a sociobiological perspective, a rise in population satisfaction through social bonding would be an adaptive response to threat. The rise in wellbeing due to nationally enhancing events, however, has no such adaptive links and is more simply explained in the personal pride of association with a winning team.

At a minimum, the existence of such interesting and somewhat anomalous results remind us that social indicators researchers must be prepared to draw upon more than one theory to account for the variety of responses obtained following diverse kinds of events.

In his contribution to this volume, Mattes described the Afrobarometer as “a systematic, cross-national survey of public attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa”. The main scale used in the survey is called the Lived Poverty Index (LPI) and it is constructed by averaging five possible responses to five items formatted in the same way, i.e., “Over the past year, how often, if ever have you or your family gone without . . .?” (e.g., enough food to eat, enough clean water for home use). The possible responses are “never” (= 0), “just once or twice” (= 1), “several times” (= 2), “many times” (= 3) and “always” (= 4). Results of three rounds of national surveys are discussed, including 12 countries in 1999–2001, 16 countries in 2002–2003 and 18 countries in 2005–2006 (with 25,359 responses in the third round). One of the most interesting findings related to the LPI is that “while lived poverty has weak if not perverse linkages with GDP growth, it has moderately strong and predictable linkages with democratization . . . the more a country expanded political liberties and political rights between 2003 and 2005, the lower its level of lived poverty in 2005 ($r = -.625^{**}$)”. Møller (1997) would be a good supplement to this paper.

In the last paper of the collection, Inoguchi and Fujii describe the AsiaBarometer as “a regional opinion survey project regularly conducted in a broader East Asia encompassing East, Southeast, South and Central Asia with a focus on daily lives of ordinary people”. The project included national surveys in 10 countries of Asia in 2003, 13 countries in East and Southeast Asia in 2004, 14 countries in South and Central Asia in 2005, 7 countries in East Asia in 2006 and 6 countries in Southeast Asia in 2007. Two of the countries surveyed in 2005 (Turkmenistan and Bhutan) had never had any opinion surveys before. The first wave of surveys were funded by “donations from some dozen business firms”, and quite generally the AsiaBarometer

has been marketed as an instrument for creating regional free trade. “To facilitate and accelerate the generation of such a regional space,” the authors wrote, “one must become truly regional, continuously monitoring regional market and non-market forces. Such monitoring exercises must include the monitoring of hearts and minds of people on the street. Not only economic and financial but also social, psychological and political forces unfolding in each country must be grasped systematically on a regional scale”. Sensitivity to local cultures, issues, aspirations and languages are emphasized at every step of the development of the surveys, from questionnaire construction to analysis and dissemination of results. As reported by others in this collection, Inoguchi and Fujii remark that “Economic development brings about the improvement of income level, but it does not enhance social stability and sense of security”. Good supplements to this paper may be found in Bowles and Woods (2000), Tang (2000), Shin et al. (2003), and Shek et al. (2005).

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