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National and International Indices of Well-being: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, increasing effort has been made to develop both national and global indices of well-being. Much like earlier sustainability indices directed at questions of economics and environment, well-being metrics seek to chart the quality of life of citizens in order to (1) support administrative decision making and policy formation, (2) encourage consensus building and public participation in defining what's important, (3) educate and advocate, and (4) facilitate research through data collection and analysis. This paper explores a number of indices of well-being, including the Canadian Index of Well-being, the OECD Your Better Life Index, and the Happy Planet Index, to discuss (1) comparative differences and similarities across the indices, (2) how the indices are used currently, and (3) the importance of understanding judgments of well-being based on notions of place.

KEY WORDS Subjective Well-Being; Indices of Well-Being; Happiness Index; Social Progress Indicator; GDP

In September 2013, the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis released its top growing cities for 2012. Surprisingly that year, the economy of Kokomo, Indiana, grew 8.4 percent, making it the third fastest growing city in the state and eighth fastest growing city in the nation ("Kokomo Ranks" 2013). This rating marked a sharp contrast from the city's third place ranking on *Forbes'* 2008 list of fastest dying towns only four years earlier (Woolsey 2008).

Kokomo Mayor Goodnight soon reacted to the city's rising fortunes. "We're working hard to improve our community and make Kokomo a better place for residents and businesses," Goodnight said. "Our local businesses have noticed our efforts and have invested in their Kokomo facilities and workforce. These investment decisions will positively impact our community for years and decades to come" ("Kokomo Ranks" 2013).

Kokomo's precipitous fall and subsequent rise in fortune help to illustrate the link between public policy, community improvements, and economic growth, but the formula for charting community, national, or global success, progress, or well-being may be

complicated, multifaceted and hard for the public, policy makers, and businesses to incorporate into their strategic planning efforts.

According to Anderson (2013), "Every few months, it seems someone comes up with a new alternative to gross domestic product, the ubiquitous measure of national success that even its inventor never embraced." These efforts to redefine progress seem increasingly relevant today, given that "several highly industrialized countries have shown no significant rise in happiness to correspond with increases in income and purchasing power" (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011). In fact, the Social Progress Indicator, "which uses original research as well as data from organizations such as the World Bank and the World Health Organization, concludes that while greater income does lead to a better standard of living, once it has gone beyond a certain point, people's happiness flat lines and can start to fall away" (Confino 2013).

Adding to the urgency, increasingly, developed economies confront "rapidly changing technology, skills obsolescence, job insecurity and longer hours of work" (OECD 2001:10), suggesting that GDP does not necessarily equate with improved social conditions. Documented evidence might not link "depleted social capital reserves with economic prosperity"; however, the OECD Well-being of Nations report about the role of social and human capital" does suggest a link between "some aspects of economic progress and increased stress or loosening of social ties" (OECD 2001:10). Other deficits have also been noted in the areas of environment and human health.

Initiatives to measure progress or happiness center on the belief that "wealth is more than just money and exchanges. It's also people's ability to thrive in their environments and the promise of a happy and productive future. That means not only access to economic opportunity and markets, but day-to-day satisfaction and a well-protected natural environment" (Mandell 2012).

Some might point to Bhutan as one of the leaders in this drive to identify a new index for measuring national progress. "Since 1971, the country has rejected GDP as the only way to measure progress. In its place, it has championed a new approach to development, which measures prosperity through formal principles of gross national happiness (GNH) and the spiritual, physical, social and environmental health of its citizens and natural environment" (Kelley 2012). To this end, the country adopted a Gross National Happiness scale based on four pillars: equitable and sustainable development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and good governance (Kowalik 2008).

The value of Bhutan's scale has been recognized beyond its borders, motivating comment and even conferences that examine its principles. In 2011, "the UN [officially] adopted Bhutan's call for a holistic approach to development, a move endorsed by 68 countries. A UN panel is now considering ways that Bhutan's GNH model can be replicated across the globe" (Kelley 2012).

Certainly, well-being indicators are not solely confined to the domain of experts. The philosophy behind pursuit of well-being has also been positively received by the

public. A survey of 10 countries in 2007, measuring 1000 respondents, found that three-quarters of those asked "believe their governments should look beyond economics, and include health, social and environmental statistics in measuring national progress" (Globescan 2007).

No one index has yet had the past power of the GDP to be adopted as a standard across nations and diverse communities, however. This paper therefore examines 17 indices of well-being to discuss (1) comparative differences and similarities across the measures, (2) how the indices are used currently, and (3) the importance of understanding well-being as a measure based on place or location. Table 1 provides an overview of the indices, their domains/indicators, and how they differ.

CLASSIFYING INDICES OF WELL-BEING

A useful categorization of indicators was published by Tomáš Hák et al. (2012) in their report on the categorization, intention, and impact of indicators striving to go "beyond GDP." This report sorted indices across six categories: (1) level of impact (international, national, or local), (2) indicator domain (environmental, social, or economic), (3) indicator approache (subjective or objective), (4) indicator type (single indicator, set/dashboard, aggregated list, or composite list), (5) envisaged users (policymakers, area experts, or public), and (6) relationship to GDP (adjusting GDP, replacing GDP, supplementing GDP). Such a framework is a useful first step in examining indices of well-being, with the exception of indicator domains, as well-being indicators may reflect all three domains or partial domain elements at the same time. Hence, many well-being indices would not register these categories as mutually exclusive. In exploring the instruments, it becomes necessary to consider dimensions beyond these six categories.

COMMONALITIES ACROSS INDICES: GENERAL FUNCTION

The overall goals or functions of indices are similar across measures and distinguish the instruments as a group. Generally, well-being indices seek to shift emphasis from an understanding of "how the economy is doing" to better knowing "how people are doing" (Measure of America 2008). In doing so, they propose multifaceted measures of progress or well-being such as health, psychological well-being, environment, social capital, cultural capital, or indicators such as basic needs met, or time use.

"In recent years, work on well-being across the social sciences has accelerated in response to changes in global conditions, new research priorities, more sophisticated concepts and methods, and improved data resources" (Clark and McGillivray 2007:1). At the same time, indices remain a product of, and challenge to, historical, economic, social, and political pressures.

Table 1. Contrasting Indices of Well-Being

	HDI	**Social Progress Index**	**Your Better Life Index**	**Happy Planet Index**	**National Accounts of Wellbeing**
Source	UN Development Program[a] (1990)	Social Progress Imperative (Started 2009–2010 World Economic Forum[b])	OECD (2009)	National Economic Foundation UK (2006)	National Economic Foundation UK (2008)
Level of Domain	187 countries	50 countries	34 countries		22 countries
Education	2 factors	2 factors	3 factors		
Health	1 factor	2 factors	2 factors	1 factor	Psychological health: 4 factors
Subjective Well-being			1 factor	1 factor	Satisfying life: 1 factor Emotional well-being: 2 factors
Environment		2 factors	2 factors	1 factor	
Economy	1 factor		2 factors		
Human Needs Met (shelter, safety, security)		Housing: 1 factor Safety: 1 factor	Housing: 3 factors Safety: 2 factors Jobs: 4 factors		
Social Capital			1 factor		2 factors
Political Capital		1 factor	2 factors		
Opportunity		3 factors: Freedom, Equity, Personal rights			Resilience & self-esteem: 3 factors Well-being at work: 1 factor
Time Use			2 factors		

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Table 1. Contrasting Indices of Well-Being, cont.

	The EIU's Quality of Life Index	**Happy Life Years**	**World Values Survey**	**Measure of America (Modified HDI)**
Source	EIU (2005)	(1990s)	First Wave (1981)	Social Science Research Council US (2008)
Level of Domain	111 countries		Fifth Wave: 2005–2008—across 56 countries	national
Education				2 factors
Health	1 factor	Life expectancy: 1 factor		1 factor
Subjective Well-being		1 factor	Life evaluation overall happiness, Experienced mood, Psychological well-being	
Environment				
Economy	1 factor			1 factor
Human Needs Met (shelter, safety, security)	Job security: 1 factor			
Social Capital	Community life: 1 Union/Church membership: 1 Family: 1 divorce rate			
Political Capital	Political stability & security: 1			
Opportunity	Political freedom: 1 Gender equality: 1 Climate/Geography as latitude: 1			
Time Use				

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Table 1. Contrasting Indices of Well-Being, cont.

	Gallup– Healthways Wellbeing Index	The Wellbeing of Nations (Combines HWI & EWI)	World Happiness Report	Canadian Index of Well-being[c]
Source	Gallup & Healthways Corporations (2008)	World Conservation Union & IDRC (2001)	2010	University of Waterloo (Applied Health Sciences) (2011)
Level of Domain	national	180 countries	156 countries	national
Education		(HWI) Education: 3 factors		8 factors
Health	Emotional health: 10 Health: 9 Healthy behavior: 4 items	(HWI) Health: 1 Stability of family size: 1	1 factor	8 factors
Subjective Well-being	Life evaluation		Positive affect Negative affect	
Environment		(EWI) Land: 5 factors Water: 18 factors Air: 11 factors Species & genes: 4 factors Resource use: 11 factors		7 factors
Economy		(HWI) Size & condition of economy: 8 factors	1 factor	8 factors
Human Needs Met (shelter, safety, security)	Work environment: 4 items Access: 13 items (doctor, etc.)	(HWI) Basic needs met: 6 factors Violent crime rates: 4		Safety: 4 factors
Social Capital			Social support, Generosity	5 factors
Political Capital		(HWI) Government: 1	Perception of corruption	8 factors
Opportunity		(HWI) Communication: 6 factors Freedom: 3 factors Peacefulness: 2 Equity: 1 Gender equity: 3	Freedom to make life choices	Leisure & culture: 8 factors
Time Use				8 factors

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Table 1. Contrasting Indices of Well-Being, cont.

	Atlantic GPI	**Australian Unity Wellbeing Index**	**Gross National Happiness**	**EMQLI**
Source	3 Californian researchers first developed GPI in 1995 (developed 1997)	Australian Unity (company) with Deakin U.— use Personal Wellbeing Index (2001)	The Centre for Bhutan Studies (1971)	Formerly The Calvert–Henderson Quality of Life Indicators
Level of Domain	regional	national and Macau	national	national[d]
Education	Attainment: 1 factor		4 factors including values	X
Health	1 factor	1 factor	4 factors	X
Subjective Well-being			3 factors including spirituality	
Environment	National capital: 6 factors Human impact on environment: 4 factors		Diversity & resilience: 4 factors	X
Economy	Living standards: 3 factors	Standard of living: 1 factor	Living standards: 3 factors	Income
Human Needs Met (shelter, safety, security)	Costs of crime: 1 factor	Safety: 1 factor Achieving in life: 1 factor Future security: 1 factor	Victim of crime: 1 factor	Human rights, Employment, National security, Infastructure, Public safety, Shelter, Energy
Social Capital		Personal relationships: 1 factor Community connections: 1 factor	Community vitality: 3 factors	
Political Capital			4 factors	
Opportunity		Spirituality or religion: 1 factor	Culture: 4 factors	Re-creation (Self-actualization)
Time Use	4 factors		2 factors	

(concl. next page)

Table 1. Contrasting Indices of Well-Being, concl.

Notes: CIW=Canadian Index of Well-being; EIU=Economist Intelligence Unit; EMQLI=Ethical Market Quality of Life Indicators; EWI=Ecosystem Well-being Index; GPI=Genuine Progress Indicator; HDI=Human Development Index; HWI=Human Well-being Index; IDRC= International Development Research Center; MIT=Massachusetts Institute of Technology; OECD=Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development; UK=United Kingdom; UN=United Nations; US=United States.

[a] The HDI involves three components and four factors but is also adjusted in separate measurements for gender, inequality, and multidimensional poverty.

[b] At Global Agenda Council on Philanthropy & Social Investing, taken up by Harvard & MIT faculty & Fundacion Latinoamerica Posible of Costa Rica.

[c] CIW grew out of Federal Round Table discussions, regional efforts to current program and emphasis.

[d] The EMQLI is quite complicated -and involves multiple components and structuring elements for the 12 factors identified; hence, categories below the factor level were too complicated to chart.

Advocates such as those endorsing the United Kingdom's National Accounts of Wellbeing, see the changing definition of well-being as both cause and support for their proposed instrument. They posit that the National Accounts is an effort to "reclaim the true purpose of national accounts as initially conceived and shift towards more meaningful measures of progress and policy effectiveness which capture the real wealth of people's lived experience" (NEF 2008:2). More specifically, in a report, the NEF commented:

> [S]eventy-five years ago the original architects of systems of national accounts were clear that welfare could not be inferred from measures of national income alone. They were careful to document the range of factors national accounts failed to capture such as the unpaid work of households, the distribution of income and the depletion of resources. Yet initial hopes for the development of better indicators of welfare were fast derailed. The demands of wartime prioritized maximizing the productive capacity of the economy over other considerations, at just the time when the accounting frameworks themselves were being refined and improved. The size of the economy—as defined by Gross Domestic Product—was quickly seized on as a convenient measure of national achievement. In the aftermath of the Second World War, overall productivity became firmly entrenched as the key hallmark of a country's overall success and widely interpreted as a proxy for societal progress, with damaging consequences for people and the planet. (NEF 2008:2)

Well-being indices, by realigning measurements to earlier policy priorities, legitimize new conceptions of well-being, in contrast to GDP. In so doing, the indices appear to recapture the original purpose of national accounts measurements, even as they respond to today's "'triple crunch' [policy challenges] of financial crisis, climate change and oil price shocks" (NEF 2008:3). While some policy makers see the triple threats as impetus for change, however, conversely, others see these threats as potential reasons for caution.

COMMONALITIES ACROSS INDICES: BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Beyond sensitivity to situational demands, all indices also face many of the same obstacles. "Ideology and vested interests are noted barriers with subjective well-being and composite indicators, [inciting] strong resistance from those with libertarian or right of centre political views" (Green 2013). Additionally, policy makers may question whether indices have "real relevance," measuring something that "policymakers believe they can influence," aligning with their existing preference for low-cost or money-saving policies (Green 2013).

DIFFERENCES ACROSS INDICES: LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY

Interestingly, the complexity of indices may vary drastically. The initial Gross National Happiness index was revised from four pillars to nine domains of equal importance, which were then refined to include 72 indicators. Such a complex instrument contrasts sharply with the Measure of America, which identifies three domains and four indicators. Both national indices, these metrics illustrate that complexity is not necessarily indicative of domain, level of impact, envisaged user, or relation to GDP.

In like vein, global indices may be highly complex or relatively simple. The Well-being of Nations combines seven domains and 88 indicators in two scales, which ultimately results in four measures. In contrast, the Happy Planet index is extremely simple. Founder Nic Marks suggests that the indicator looks at citizen well-being and the amount of resources they use. "It creates what we would call an efficiency measure. It says how much well-being do you get for your resources? It is like a miles per gallon, bang for your buck indicator" (Marks N.d.).

DIFFERENCES ACROSS INDICES: DEFINITION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF WELL-BEING

Another difference between indices is their selection and characterization of well-being: "There is no single concept or measure of poverty, inequality, or well-being that is generally accepted above all others . . . the notion of well-being is often employed alongside allied concepts, such as the quality of life, living standards, social welfare, needs fulfillment, capability, life satisfaction, and happiness (among many others)" (Clark and McGillivray 2007:1). For example, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

employs "life satisfaction" in contrast to "happiness," adopted by Bhutan. The EIU claims that

> [L]ife satisfaction is simple to measure; prompts quick responses and low non-response rates proving it measures "how they feel rather than how they are expected to feel"; correlates highly with more sophisticated tests; is less socially and culturally specific, given responses of immigrants in a country are much closer to the level of the local population than to responses in their motherland; and are less likely to reveal linguistic bias than might occur with the term "happiness." (The Economist 2005:1–2)

The challenge is that other instruments may seek to identify different cultural aspects of happiness.

Additionally, because "well-being is inherently multidimensional and depends on a range of human capabilities and achievements," it may be both measured and missed in multiple ways (Clark and McGillivray 2007:6).

There have also been significant changes in how some terms, such as happiness, have been understood and measured over the years. Initially, researchers employed relatively simplistic measures, such as

> the General Social Survey (GSS) of the US, which began in 1972 and still today asks randomly sampled individuals: "taken altogether how would you say that things are these days? Do you think of yourself as very happy, pretty happy or not too happy?" [However, improvements noted] in the past 10 to 20 years . . . have moved on to other indicators that are closer to measures of psychological health or mental strain. . . . [One example] "is the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) score. . . . It is a string of questions: 'How well have you been sleeping?'; 'Have you been worrying?'; 'Have you been thinking of yourself as depressed . . . or not contributing?', and so on." The latest work blends subjective scores such as these with physiological measures and other objective indicators. (Oswald and Powdthavee, 2011)

Others have complained that well-being cannot be additive or used to supplement GDP because, once they are combined, well-being will suffer a loss of priority or emphasis. Porter, a force behind the Social Progress Index, is "critical of previous work that seeks to integrate well-being and happiness into the economic agenda. . . . His Social Progress Index only looks at social and environmental considerations and therefore gives them authority in their own right" (Confino 2013).

DIFFERENCES ACROSS INDICES: PUBLICIZING RESEARCH AND STUDY FINDINGS

In addition to measurement differences, a variety of factors may influence how or why different indices are discussed, picked up, or adopted. Delhy (2009) suggests that "scholars gain public attention easiest when they produce league tables of nations, ranking places from 'good' to 'bad'" (p. 30). Admittedly, mainstream media annually report winners and losers from such rankings, rather than considering more complex or philosophical questions related to their use. This reduction may largely reflect the complexity and depth of material surrounding indices, as well as their development and policy implications.

Indices also use different communication strategies to disseminate findings. Some appeal to specialized audiences, such as planners and other experts, exploring how metrics might be used by different stakeholders. For example, the Social Progress Index (SPI) appeals to business stakeholders who have not traditionally sought to participate in development. Heather Hancock, managing partner of talent and brand at Deloitte, claims that the SPI "would be useful in the business world" (Schwartz 2013). She contends that the SPI might help business to "collectively shape, influence and be a co-collaborator in some of the bigger social policy issues. . . . In this way, the SPI framework could help businesses articulate exactly how their services benefit society—and in the process, gain some credibility among social impact-minded customers" (Schwartz 2013).

To share indices and their measures, sponsors participate in public forums, publish periodic reports and journal articles, and share data through Web sites. At other times, they are nursed and supported in conveying their instruments and data through global agencies such as the UN or the OECD.

Proponents sometimes take indices directly to broader public audiences. For example, indices such as the Measure of Progress, the Happy Planet Index, and National Accounts of Well-being invite Web site visitors to complete surveys to gauge their own happiness levels or relative senses of well-being. Others, such as the OECD Better Life Index, allow users to contrast the finding of one indicator against another—to gauge influence and impact. Frequently, users are invited to leave feedback or comments on Web sites.

Some indices may generate a lot of media—by explaining or exploring variations between subgroups (Measure of America) or reporting results in specific domains such as time use, social capital, or political capital (Canadian Index of Well-being). According to Green, when it comes to publicly reporting results, "salience for a broader audience is crucial and entails the elements of simplicity, understandability and good communication. Initiatives are effective when they allow one to produce a simple and attractive message that relates a meaningful concept. Using communications experts and avoiding taboo words were identified as being important" (Green 2013).

A number of indices are shared on Web sites that also feature regular updates and research results. As the Australian Well-being Index boasts,

> [A]ll of their research is available in the public domain, through Deakin University's Australian Centre on Quality of Life. This resource rich Centre receives about 2,000 hits each day and is accessed at no cost to the user. The index has been referenced in more than 75 academic publications written by authors throughout the world, and the tool is also used to monitor the wellbeing of the population of Macau. (Australian Unity 2013)

Given that Australian Unity is an insurance company, it wisely partners with an academic institution in an effort to access required technical skills and to build the instrument's credibility.

Hak et al. (2012) find credibility and legitimacy important when creators or sponsors seek to establish different well-being indicators. Aside from quality data, the appearance of neutrality was seen as the best route to achieve credibility. When questioned, some users compared advocacy organizations' data unfavorably with data published in national statistical offices, but savvy proponents, like Australian Unity, take advantage of independence, on the one hand, while they promote and associate their brand with the well-being index and its storehouse of national and cultural values, on the other. In a similar vein, the American Gallup-Healthways site reinforces the polling organization's expertise and credibility in hosting the national instrument yet promises an objective stance separate from government reports.

Not all Web sites regularly update their information or data. Others do so consistently, improving accessibility for different constituencies even as they update and distribute new information. The Canadian Index of Well-being (CIW) suggests that it is both a "tool" and an "idea," to heighten its appeal. As a tool, the CIW makes available "products," which are offered to locales for strategic planning. Cities such as Guelph, Ontario, have used the CIW survey to develop strategic plans, as have regions such as Simcoe. Central to the communication strategies of such organizations is that different groups get involved—whether private sector, public sector, communities, or individuals. To reinforce this option, they suggest possible actions that groups can take to make a difference.

Some sites invite specific commitments. The Happy Planet Index (HPI) developed a charter inviting individuals and organizations, such as the Friends of the Earth, to sign on to three missions, including (1) "calling on governments to adopt measures" making sustainable well-being central to all social and economic policy making; (2) building the "political will needed to establish better measures of human progress"; and (3) calling on the UN to develop an indicator similar to the HPI "as part of the post 2015 framework" (Happy Planet Charter N.d.).

If communication varies by index and sponsor, however, review of the indices suggests that perhaps one of the most important relationships between user and index is the range of impact of the instrument and whether the index should be universally applied or more context-specific.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS INDICES: THE IMPORTANCE OF A SENSE OF PLACE

Some indices, such as the OECD Better Life Index, cover "dimensions of well-being that are universal and relevant for all human beings. [Other indices] add context-specific information on what constitutes a good life" (OECD 2013). Although the OECD suggests that these two approaches need not be mutually exclusive, they reflect an important dichotomy. Clark and McGillivray (2007) explain that "some commentators insist there are universal dimensions of well-being that are fundamental to human life and are in fact knowable, while others argue that such lists should [and perhaps may only] be made explicit through public debate and [therefore] may be context dependent" (p. 2).

This process of making lists "explicit" for a particular location seems comparable to the rhetorical notion of establishing "place." According to Gieryn (2000), place requires a distinct geographic location, a material reality, and meaning. On the one hand, places are carved out or constructed; on the other hand, they are interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, or imagined.

> Basso would argue that space can be transformed into place through "place-making," a discursive metamorphosis imbuing physical space with symbolic meaning. The newly made "place" functions as a rhetorical symbol invested with mnemonic value and the capacity to inform identity construction . . . place-making involves a kind of "retrospective world-building," combining remembering with imagination. (Donofrio 2010:152)

In turn, ideologies, reflected in the symbolic creation of place, are apparent in the subject positions and collective identities promoted by such places.

To illustrate this reciprocal relationship, one may turn to a film discussing the foundation and background of one context-dependent instrument, Gross National Happiness. In the film, the narrator suggests that the index reflects "both commonsense thinking and philosophy, acting as our [Bhutan's] national conscience" (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011). Contextualized dimensions and indicators of well-being, made explicit through public debate or participation, go beyond outlining potential scales of life satisfaction or happiness. They define place, as understood and imagined, becoming prescriptions for how the location "naturally" is or must be. All well-being indices are normative statements about what ought to be, but context-dependent indices also involve a discursive transformation from "space" to "place."

Context-dependent indices also possess a second and more practical advantage. They are better able to measure subgroup differences and better clarify what is going on within nations, regions, or cities. For example, the South Korean statistics office sought to address a localized problem in "adopting a new quality of life index, based on over 100 objective and subjective indicators of wellbeing, because GDP was incapable of

explaining why an 'economic miracle' like Korea had the highest suicide rate and the lowest birth rate in the OECD" (Green 2013).

Furthermore, Hak et al. (2012) explain that "the most prolific successes were achieved by local level indicators, perhaps because the distance between producer and user of the indicators is much smaller, making it easier to achieve a better 'fit' while also achieving legitimacy and relevance." They point to the reduction in infant mortality rates, recidivism, and water pollution in Jacksonville, Florida. As Porter argues,

> Social progress depends on the policy choices, investments, and implementation capabilities of multiple stakeholders—government, civil society, and business. Action needs to be catalyzed at country level. By informing and motivating those stakeholders to work together and develop a more holistic approach to development, I am confident that social progress will accelerate. (as quoted in Confino 2013)

Ultimately, then, there are several differences between indices, including their complexity, their definition and measure of key terms, and how they share the index and data, but perhaps the most important difference related to the success, penetration, and relevance of an index is whether it measures universals or is more context-dependent, with domains and indicators made explicit through public participation and debate.

According to Oswald and Powdthavee (2011),

> The first conference on the topic of the economics of happiness was held in London in the autumn of 1993. It is no secret that it was a failure. Only eight people attended, despite the 100 chairs and the posters we put out on the day; nevertheless, it was a start. Scholars such as Andrew Clark and David Blanchflower made important intellectual contributions to the field early on when it was unfashionable to work on the topic. Things have not greatly looked back, although of course there will be swings in sentiment to come. I imagine we will see a retrenchment, a turning-against, in this field, followed some years later by a revival, and ever onwards and upwards, in the usual cycle traced out by the warfare of ideas.

In a more local variation of Oswald and Powdthavee's observations, an international studies instructor from Indiana University Kokomo was forced to change her classroom presentation of indices of well-being. Initially, students were assigned to develop a five-decade plan, requiring them to speculate about how different indicators of happiness might be important for their future lives and communities. They were to prioritize components most essential for the future; however, the project was abandoned when

students claimed the ideas were too abstract and distant, making the assignment too hard to complete.

Some theorists might now suggest, however, that the public must become involved in this very process, establishing or tweaking indicators of well-being for their communities and "places," in combination with experts and other stakeholders. It would seem that the "discursive transformation from space to place" has important benefits for all indices of well-being, in analysis of a context-dependent situation, greater rhetorical significance, and pragmatic benefits.

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