

Measuring wellbeing: the new yardstick of progress?

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Outline

- Why research and measure societal wellbeing?
- Approaches and potential sources
- Challenges

What is societal wellbeing?

- A (probably multi-dimensional) approach to measuring the progress of a country (discuss what 'progress' means)
- Attempt to take account of economic, environment and social wellbeing (or outcomes) (and their distributions)
- Difficult to theorise, define and measure
- More than GDP (per head)
- More than aggregate subjective wellbeing
- More than social capital
- Best approaches are multi-disciplinary

Why measure societal wellbeing?

- Widespread acknowledgement that GDP is not ideal measure of wellbeing (HMT, 2010)
- Perhaps more awareness of limitations of standard metrics -> less euphoria over economic performance in years prior to crisis
- Changes in distributions
- Interconnections between GDP, quality of life and environment (eg traffic jams) (CMEPSP, 2009)

Budget 2010 Report

- Government committed to developing broader indicators of wellbeing and sustainability
- Work currently underway to review how CMEPSP report should affect sustainability and wellbeing indicators collected by Defra
- ONS and Cabinet Office leading work on taking forward CMEPSP report's agenda across the UK

[Box 1.2, page 10]

How to measure societal wellbeing

- Subjective measures (happiness surveys)
- Objective quality of life measures
- Improve existing measures of economic performance
- Assess sustainability (well identified dashboard of indicators) and environmental pressures

What's available? – Classical GDP - eg

- Wealth in GB
- Consumer Trends
- UK Time Use Survey
- DCMS Taking Part Survey
- Experimental household accounts
- Alternative measures of national income
- Article on distribution of income, taxes and benefits
- Family Resources Survey (and low income household analyses), EU-SILC

What's available? – Quality of life - eg

- 'Local wellbeing: can we measure it?'
- Social capital development work
- Cohort and longitudinal surveys
- Equalities data review
- Workless households
- Social indicators
- Social Trends
- NEP Report

What's available? – Sustainability - eg

- UK Sustainable Development Indicators
- UK Environmental Accounts

UK Surveys of subject wellbeing - eg

- Defra Omnibus
- Well? What do you think?
- Families and Children Study
- TellUs Survey
- British Crime Survey
- Citizenship Survey
- Taking Part Survey
- Health Survey for England
- Understanding Society
- British Social Attitudes Survey
- Opinions Survey
- 1970 Cohort Study
- National Child Development Study
- Longitudinal Study of Young People in England
- English Longitudinal Study of Aging
- Understanding Children's Wellbeing

Challenges

- Defining progress/wellbeing, or giving people the tools to define progress themselves?
- Interpreting wellbeing, value judgments and the single number problem
- ‘Subsidiarity’
- Gaining benefits from multi-disciplinary working
- Doing more with less!

Concluding remarks

- We're not short of relevant data and research studies.
- Are we clear on the requirement and what we need to do?
- Do we need to answer 'so what does it all add up to?'
- Making the case for new research.
- Welcome your comments!