



Research Committee on Social Indicators, RC55

Programme Coordinator:

Mariano ROJAS, La Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Mexico, mariano.rojas.h@gmail.com

CALL for Papers

Session A

Inequality in quality of life and social indicators of deprivation, poverty and income inequality

Organisers

Christian SUTER, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, christian.suter@unine.ch

Jan DELHEY, Jacobs University, Germany, j.delhey@jacobs-university.de

This session calls for papers addressing the definition, construction and using of social Indicators of Deprivation, Poverty and Inequality in Quality of Life.

There is growing international scientific debate on and public awareness of persistent and growing inequalities and its detrimental effects on individual and collective wellbeing. This debate is gaining in importance in light of the recent protracted world-economic crisis with its adverse social effects in many countries and world regions. Social inequalities, material deprivation and poverty are complex and multifaceted phenomena requiring an indicator-based, comprehensive and integrated perspective. New and old measures of social inequality, deprivation and poverty (e.g. on income and wealth inequality, monetary poverty, non-monetary deprivation, precarious living conditions etc.) ought to be considered, as well as issues related to their construction, validation and empirical application. More recent issues which are also welcomed are temporal dynamics and/or comparative analysis.

In addition, there is a growing consensus that quality of life means more than just income and living standards. Hence, new approaches typically either collect a broader array of information on objective living conditions of individuals and households (such as education and longevity), or turn to subjective measures of well-being (SWB), such as life satisfaction. Yet this growing debate has not fully unfolded in the field of inequality research.

Thus, papers addressing the following questions about the study of inequality in quality of life (QOL-inequality) are also welcomed:

- Conceptually: How can/should we conceptualize QOL-inequality? Which are the central domains/resources we should look at? Should we focus on life chances or life results? Is the solution to research objective living conditions, broadly understood? Or is it more advisable to look at inequalities in subjective well-being? Should we focus on QOL gaps between pre-defined categories of people (e.g. gender), or among individuals and households?

- Methodologically: How do concrete measures of QOL-inequality look like? How are measures of QOL-inequality technically done? Is it possible to combine different life domains or resources meaningfully into one single composite index, or is there no simple solution for the “index problem”? For subjective measures: How can ratings of SWB be meaningfully transferred into measures of inequality?

- Substantively: What do we learn from macro-level studies? Which countries are particularly egalitarian in terms of QOL, which are inegalitarian? Which country characteristics drive the extent of QOL-inequality? And how does QOL-inequality change over time? For all these questions, comparisons with income inequality would be particularly interesting in order to find out what difference QOL measures make.

- Substantively: What do we learn from micro-level studies? Which groups/individuals suffer most from low QOL, and which groups/individuals enjoy the highest QOL? What is the overlap with income?

- Politically: What are the public policy implications of QOL-inequality? Are all disparities in QOL relevant, or equally relevant, for policy makers? Which measures can be taken to close gaps in QOL between groups and/or individuals?

Session B

World suffering

Organiser

Ronald ANDERSON, University of Minnesota, United States, rea@umn.edu

Quality of life researchers have focused almost all of their attention on well-being rather than ill-being and happiness rather than unhappiness. Consequently, they have overlooked the wealth of data they have on indicators of suffering. This session solicits re-analysis of social indicator data focusing upon the low end of measures of well-being, quality of life, social progress, and happiness. Also of interest are studies that explicitly measure pain, despair, suffering, or social traumas from either a social or an individual framework.

Both qualitative and quantitative evidence are of interest, particularly if they can be compared. Like quality of life and well-being, suffering is generally examined as an outcome or something to be explained by social dysfunctions like poverty. Consider also that suffering may serve as a precipitating cause of poverty, violence, health risks, and other social traumas. Complex models of suffering as well as empirical analyses of comparative ill-being are most welcome. Comparisons within as well as across countries are of interest. The justification for research on suffering is not just a matter of humanitarian concern, but of strategic planning for social and economic progress.

Session C

Measuring and monitoring social progress

Organisers

Heinz-Herbert NOLL, GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany,
heinz-herbert.noll@gesis.org

Robert BIJL, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, the Netherlands, rvbijl@planet.nl

Social progress has been characterizing the processes of social change in different periods of history, but particularly during the second half of the 20th century. Citizens of many nations around the globe – sooner in some, later in others – enjoyed considerable and more or less continuous betterments of living conditions and quality of life: rising incomes and living standards, substantial reductions of working hours and a massive increase in leisure time, expanding and increasingly inclusive labour markets as well as enormously improved working conditions, advanced health and extended longevity, better education as well as expanded welfare state regulations and benefits. These and other impressive achievements of social progress have been well documented and thoroughly analyzed, not least as part of social indicators research and social reporting activities at national and supranational levels.

However, current processes of social changes seem to be less clearly directed towards a continuous improvement of individual and societal well-being than they used to be in the recent past. While postmodernism has fundamentally questioned the notion of social progress in the sense of an incremental attainment of generally accepted goals of development, the processes of globalization have markedly changed market positions and terms of trade and have confronted western societies with new limitations concerning their ability to further improve the well-being of their citizens: stagnating real incomes, persisting high levels of unemployment, increasing inequalities, growth of poverty and ‘the working poor’, expansion of precarious jobs and working conditions, threats of environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources, cutbacks in welfare state benefits and dismantling of welfare state institutions are some of the tendencies which recently have been characterizing the processes of social change and which seem to have even been reinforced by the recent economic crisis.

The issue of measuring progress ‘beyond GDP’ has not only been taken up recently by the so-called ‘Stiglitz - Commission’ (on the measurement of economic performance and social progress), but is also subject of the OECD’s ‘Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies’. These initiatives receive immense attention worldwide, politically and scientifically, and have stimulated various research activities.

This session aims to provide an opportunity to present and discuss results of recent research on issues related to the measurement and monitoring of societal progress. It particularly welcomes contributions on approaches of measuring progress and related methodological issues, papers addressing policy-related topics regarding the conceptualisation of social progress, as well as empirical analyses and theoretical reflections on recent social changes within and across societies from a social progress point of view.

Session D

Keynote speaker session: Ruut Veenhoven: Quality of life: Its past and its future

Organiser

Mariano ROJAS, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Mexico,
mariano.rojas.h@gmail.com

This session will present the reflections of the keynote speaker about the quality-of-life field of study. We will know from one of the pioneers his own experience during the early years of quality-of-life research, his pioneer work in the field, the obstacles faced and how they were addressed, what was expected then and what has been achieved up to now. The presentation is expected to combine introspection with a review of the evolution of the field. It is expected to be a very personal talk which allows the auditorium to get familiar with the person behind the papers and theories and which simultaneously puts into perspective the field of quality of life and elaborates on the future agenda of research and action in quality of life.

Session E

Methodological issues in constructing complex social indicators

Organiser

Filomena MAGGINO, University of Florence, Italy, filomena.maggino@unifi.it

One of the most critical issues to be faced in social indicators field is represented by the methodological difficulties in constructing complex indicators. Complex indicators' goal is that to summarize information in order to describe in a synthetic way the observed reality, which is and remains complex.

That is why, the construction of complex indicators is currently being deeply criticized as inappropriate approach in conveying into unidimensional measures all the relevant information pertaining to phenomena which are complex, dynamic, multidimensional, full of ambiguities and nuances, and which are represented by data being sensitive and qualitative (even when quantitatively measured) and containing errors and approximations.

In other words, complex indicators are hardly able to reflect the complexity of a socio-economic phenomenon and to capture the complexity of the variables' relationships. This incapacity is related to the comprehensiveness and complexity of the phenomenon that should be covered by the complex indicators. In this perspective, researchers are currently urged to reconsider old strategies and/or find new ones by identifying empirical, theoretic, methodological approaches in dealing with complexity.

The session aims at encouraging scholars to share their experiences and reflections in managing the complexity issue by presenting methodological and empirical solutions (scaling techniques, aggregation approaches, weighting procedures, presentation issues, ...) able to transform statistical information (even though, synthetic) into a comprehensive knowledge, with particular attention to the use of indicators in policy context.

Session F

Translating research on subjective well-being into public policies

Organiser

Esteban CALVO, Diego Portales University, Chile, esteban-calvo@gmail.com

The role of public policy as a factor in hindering or maximizing subjective well-being has been the object of vast and growing empirical literature. Yet this intellectual endeavor remains incomplete and contentious: little is known about translating empirical findings into policymaking and disagreements persist about the role that public policy has to play in improving subjective well-being. This session will contribute to the debate about whether and how policymakers can use research findings to promote greater subjective well-being.

Session G

Assessing quality of life and social development: Notions, approaches and indicators

Organisers

Graciela TONON, National University of Lomas de Zamora, Argentina,
gracielatonon@hotmail.com

Agustín SALVIA, University of Buenos Aires and Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, Argentina, agustin_salvia@uca.edu.ar

This session calls for papers addressing notions, approaches and indicators about quality of life and social development.

Quality of life has been defined as a concept that involves objective and subjective dimensions. The notion of quality of life emphasizes people's potentialities rather than their weaknesses and incorporates psychological, social, political, and community considerations. Some approaches emphasize the using of domains of life and aggregation techniques to measure quality of life while others follow a single-dimensional approach. Some psychometric techniques are commonly applied while different validation criteria are considered.

In addition, there is the conception that social development constitutes a multidimensional field based on the progress of civilization, which emerges from better knowledge about the human condition and from the advance of human rights. However, the adequate appreciation of social development faces crucial methodological and theoretical challenges associated to the measurement, comparison and evaluation of different societies and cultures. A recent trend in the understanding of social development takes advantage of a human-rights approach to define those dimensions and indicators that allows us to appreciate social development and quality of life.

Session H

Crime and victimization

Francisca DUISAILLANT, University for Development, Chile, frandussa@gmail.com

Violence and the resulting victimization have a serious impact on individuals and societies. The result of the experience of violence, whether at home, in the community or as a result of personal assault or abuse, has a devastating effect. Politicians around the world have been expressing concern for decades about the extent to which rising crime rates can affect the lives of individuals in the society. The growing distress over the effects of crime on individuals in rich and poor countries alike is thought to have been fueled by the perception that crime victims suffer greatly in terms of financial loss and psychological trauma from their experiences. These exposures to crime can have long lasting impacts on the victims and those close to them. Therefore, crime and the perception of personal safety are important factors in any assessment of social well-being and an individual's happiness levels.

There are many facets of the crime/victimization subject that may be discussed in the session, such as: Measurement issues (Data availability, Classification criteria, Reporting problems, Construction of indicators, Successful measurement examples), Legal issues (Boundaries to criminal typologies, Cross-border (cross-national) phenomena, Theoretical and empirical research), Origins of crime, Psychological effects of victimization, Sociological effects of crime, Economic analysis of crime, Empirical measurement of the extent to which different victimization or crime typologies impact the well being of individuals and society, Empirical measurement of the extent to which the perception of personal safety impacts the well being of individuals and society

Session I

Comparative quality of life in East Asia

Organiser

Ming-Chang TSAI, National Taipei University, Taiwan, mtsai@mail.ntpu.edu.tw

East Asia has experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades. In what patterns and through what mechanism various populations in this region have achieved desirable quality of life or are deprived of a decent life remain largely unexplored. Comparative study of quality of life within East Asian countries has been made possible by the recent project of East Asian Social Survey (EASS). This session is devoted to using EASS data to explore the current experiences, conditions and influences of quality of life in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China. Cultural and structural factors specific to this regions are highlighted to achieve a fuller understanding of wellbeing, life satisfaction, and happiness of East Asian people.

Session J

Human relations and its importance for the well-being of Latin Americans: Conceptualization, measurement and public-policy considerations

Organisers

Emilio MOYANO, Universidad de Talca, Chile, emoyano@utalca.cl

Mariano ROJAS, La Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Mexico, mariano.rojas.h@gmail.com

Latin Americans report relatively high life satisfaction levels, in particular with respect to their income levels. Some countries such as Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico and Venezuela show a life-satisfaction performance that place them in the top tier of the world according to recent Gallup and World Value surveys. In addition, most Latin American countries show social and economic problems such as: high income-poverty rates, very unequal income distribution, high rates of crime and violence, moderate to high corruption rates, and fragile democracies. Given these problems, the obliged question is: How can large segments of the Latin American population be highly satisfied with their lives under these problematic circumstances? One of the most commonly cited answers to this question refers to the importance and intensity that Latin Americans place on their human relations. Hence, this session addresses the important issue of the adequate measurement and study of the nature and quality of human relations and of their role in explaining well-being, as well as addressing related concepts such as social cohesion, social affiliation networks and social and cultural capital.

Of particular interest is also the study of how some economic development strategies may generate social trends that deteriorate the human-relations space. Examples of this are the decline of membership in labor unions and political parties as well as in the participation in traditional social groups. From a well-being perspective, this deterioration extends to the decline in relations based on affect and trust and threatens mental and physical health. It may also lead to the instrumentalization of human relations (using relations with a personal-benefit purpose and placing competition above cooperation), to obstacles to the nurturing of friendship, neighborhood and community relations, to the deterioration of family life and the threat to the work-family life balance and to the decline of leisure time, as well as to manifestations of loneliness, anxiety, depression and even suicide.

Session K

Migration and the quality of life

Joint session of RC31 Sociology of Migration and RC55 Social Indicators [host committee]

Session L

RC55 Business Meeting

ISA has a standard online procedure for submission of abstracts. The platform for submitting abstracts will be open from August 25 to December 15, 2011, and you can access this platform through the call-for-papers webpage.

For more information see: <http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/rc/rc.php?n=RC55>