

Publication

Measuring well-being across Europe : description of the ESS well-being module and preliminary findings

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It has become customary to judge the success of a society through the use of objective indicators, predominantly economic and social ones. Yet in most developed nations, increases in income, education and health have arguably not produced comparable increases in happiness or life satisfaction. While much has been learned from the introduction of subjective measures of global happiness or life satisfaction into surveys, significant recent progress in the development of high-quality subjective measures of personal and social well-being has not been fully exploited. This article describes the development of a set of well-being indicators which were included in Round 3 of the European Social Survey. This Well-being Module seeks to evaluate the success of European countries in promoting the personal and social well-being of their citizens. In addition to providing a better understanding of domain-specific measures, such as those relating to family, work and income, the design of the Well-being Module recognises that advancement in the field requires us to look beyond measures which focus on how people feel (happiness, pleasure, satisfaction) to measures which are more concerned with how well they function. This also shifts the emphasis from relatively transient states of well-being to measures of more sustainable well-being. The ESS Well-being Module represents one of the first systematic attempts to create a set of policy-relevant national well-being accounts.

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