



Circular models Leveraging Investments in Cultural heritage adaptive reuse

The Composition of Wellbeing Indexes from the Perspective of Basic Human Values



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The opportunity to behave according to personal values is one of many determinants of individual wellbeing. Despite studies showing that people who can act on their personal values report higher wellbeing, this factor remains underrepresented in widely recognized wellbeing indexes.

In our research, we investigated the composition of most cited wellbeing indexes to assess which basic values they reflect. Our study shows that the existing measures of wellbeing concentrate mainly on two personal values: **security** and **universalism**, and marginalize other basic values like tradition, benevolence or achievement.

Data shows a significant disproportion between values people find important in their lives and values represented in wellbeing indexes. This indicates an important gap between indexes and the real wellbeing of diverse members of our communities.

THEORY

Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) introduced a new understanding of wellbeing: they argued that wellbeing depends on people's possibility of enacting their personal values. The rationale behind this approach is that values are one of the key drivers of human performance – they motivate actions and set standards for evaluation of own and others' behavior (Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Therefore, it can be predicted that the environment promoting only one type of value, e.g. tradition, will marginalize people who cherish other, non-dominant values, like universalism or freedom. Schwart (2012) found that countless list of values that people may refer to in their behavior can be reduced to just ten basic personal values.

Values	Definition
universalism	social justice, equality, tolerance, protection of the environment, and wisdom
benevolence	helpfulness, honesty, or forgiveness, regulate the behavior toward close ones
power	obtaining a dominant position, prestige, and control over others
achievement	ensuring personal success by demonstrating skills and competencies
hedonism	experiencing pleasure and self-indulgence
self-direction	self-improvement, excellence, creativity, independence
stimulation	exploration, novelty, and variety
conformity	self-restraint, politeness, and obedience
tradition	group solidarity, humility, and acceptance which ensures the group's survival
security	for harmony, safety and security at individual as well as national level

We claim that the quality of life indexes, in order to be representative for a society of community as a whole, should be composed of indicators that reflect each of the basic human values. Otherwise the index measures only some dimensions of wellbeing, but ignores important aspects of individual quality of life resulting from diversity of values.

METHOD

We applied an expert panel approach to describe the components of each wellbeing index in terms of represented values. We asked independent experts in the field of social scientists and humanities to assess which value is represented by each of the indicators of the evaluated indexes.

Each indication was taken into account in calculation of the general saturation level of indexes with different basic values. To juxtapose the level of values in wellbeing indexes with actual importance of values in behavior of people we extracted data regarding Schwartz basic values from World Value Survey wave 6 (2010-2014).

RESULTS

Our analysis shows significant discrepancies between values reported as important by general population and the values represented in wellbeing indexes. The discrepancies are particularly visible in case of tradition, benevolence and conformity. Among values reported as most relevant to general population only security and universalism are adequately represented among studied wellbeing indicators.

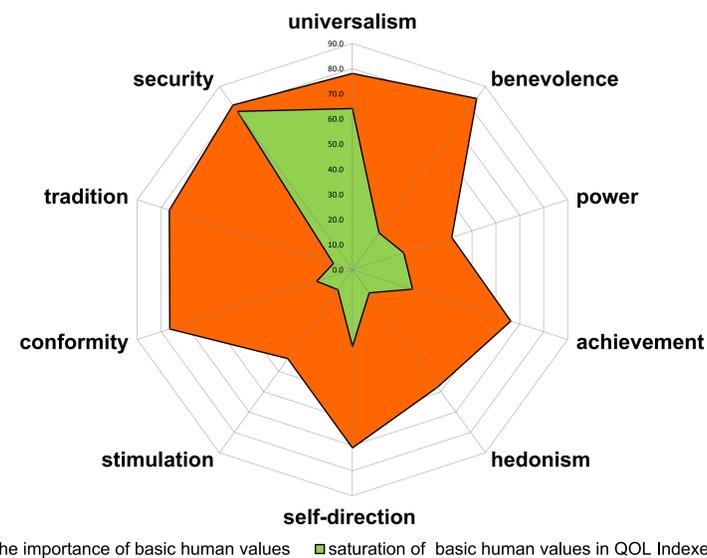


Figure 1. The comparison between the mean saturation of basic human values in wellbeing indexes and importance of values in general population based on WVS data.

The mean saturation of basic human values was calculated based on the answers obtained from experts, who examined 9 different indexes (133 items altogether). The importance of values in general population was calculated based on the N = 74 044 respondents, who took part in the 6th wave of World Value Survey worldwide. The importance represents the percentage of respondents who indicated that they are somehow to very much alike to someone behaving on the basis of a specific human value.

	universalism	benevolence	power	achievement	hedonism	self-direction	stimulation	conformity	tradition	security
Human Development Index	61,9	9,5	23,8	52,4	0	38,1	4,8	0	0	71,4
UN Sustainable Development Goals	81,0	14,3	33,3	20,4	3,4	25,2	8,8	10,2	4,1	83,0
Genuine Progress Indicator	51,4	13,7	21,7	10,3	9,7	9,7	6,3	15,4	5,7	71,4
Better Life Indicator	57,1	26,0	15,6	28,6	14,3	33,8	10,4	13,0	6,5	75,3
Happy Planet Index	67,9	21,4	21,4	35,7	28,6	25,0	17,9	10,7	10,7	78,6
Social Progress Imperative	75,0	16,7	29,8	17,9	4,8	50,0	10,7	13,1	8,3	83,3
Canadian Index Of Wellbeing	55,8	24,6	17,9	13,8	8,5	25,0	8,5	15,6	8,0	70,1
Japan For Sustainability	75,0	14,3	10,7	21,4	17,9	25,0	10,7	39,3	17,9	89,3
Quality Of Life (Eurostat)	51,7	21,8	19,0	25,9	15,6	43,5	10,9	17,0	10,2	77,6

Table 1. Saturation level of quality of life indexes with basic human values. The saturation level was calculated based on the assessments of independent experts.

According to our expert panel, in both global and national indexes **security** (78%) and **universalism** (64%) are most represented values.

Self-direction (31%), **achievement** (25%) and **power** (21%) are three values that are second most commonly represented in wellbeing indexes.

Tradition (8%) is the most underrepresented value in all studied indexes. Only Japan for Sustainability Index (18%) and Happy Planet Index (11%) take tradition into account as important part of wellbeing measure.

Other underrepresented values are **stimulation** (10%) and **hedonism** (11%). Only Happy Planet Index includes hedonism (29%) somewhat stronger.

The values that regulate social aspects of community functioning – **benevolence** (15%) and **conformity** (15%) – are only mildly reflected in indexes. The benevolence is more visible in Japan for Sustainability Index, while conformity is mostly represented in Better Life Index, Canadian Index and Eurostat Index.

National indexes reflect local specificity, e.g. tradition in case of Japan, benevolence in case of Canada. Moreover, in Japan conformity is the third most important value represented after security and universalism. This probably reflects the self-restraint as important part of Japanese culture.

Genuine Progress Indicator underrepresents self-direction and achievement much more than other indexes.

HDI is the least diverse of the studied indexes; it doesn't include hedonism, stimulation nor tradition. We could argue that it reflects how development is defined.

CONCLUSIONS

We discovered that global indexes have a strong focus on values such as **security and universalism**. To a much lesser degree they also address values such as self-direction, achievement, power and benevolence.

This means that most indexes remain blind to the diversity of values present within studied communities and project an oversimplified vision of wellbeing that reflects the political (rather than social) goals.

The most underrepresented values in indexes are tradition, stimulation, conformity and hedonism. However, some national indexes manage to capture values neglected by global indexes (e.g. tradition in Japan, benevolence in Canada).

We argue that both local and international wellbeing measures need to be expanded to include a whole range of basic human values. The theory of basic human values could be used as a framework for re-evaluation of wellbeing indexes.

This new inclusive approach to the creation of wellbeing indexes would require the selection of indicators corresponding to each basic human value. Only then the wellbeing indexes would reflect the wellbeing of different groups and individuals, not just the preferred majority.



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