

Preface

As in previous volumes of *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Practices*, the involvement of citizens and residents – community participation – in identification and use of community indicator systems is of paramount concern. This is supported by the belief that by involving those who stand the most to gain or lose from the impacts of public policy, the indicators developed and hopefully used will be more valid. Some researchers propose that such an approach to community indicator development supports the democratic process. Some argue that locally developed indicators of quality of life provide citizens the opportunity to define quality of life, and this is advantageous over experts, administrators, or politicians making those decisions (Rapley 2003).

This emphasis on community participation has been recognized for quite a while as indicator efforts and projects have evolved and matured. Over a decade ago, Salvaris (2000) described five features of locally developed and community-based indicator projects supporting community participation. These projects include:

1. Attempts to integrate economic, social, and environmental goals around some overall vision of progress or well-being, and a vision for the future
2. Development of goals or benchmarks for monitoring progress; some of these are expressed in conventional policy and statistical categories while others related to social capital are more unconventional
3. Initiation, development, and monitoring of the indicators via a community participation process often involving the entire community and/or through specialist panels with citizen participation
4. A long-term view, usually 5 years or longer as well as an iterative process
5. Relationships to formal processes of governance in their community, varying from government support or even government initiation to *de facto* acceptance as legitimate policy, or, at the least, become a political obstacle that politicians and bureaucrats have to confront (Salvaris 2000)

The recognition of the importance of community participation continues to grow as discussion, research, and awareness of issues around quality of life and well-being become increasingly important. For example, it could be proposed that

community indicator projects with participation rely on or help build social capacities, and this in turn reflects well-being. Haworth and Graham (2007, 128) explain that “many of the capabilities for well-being inhere in social relations and social organization, not in the individual, and still less in individually owned resources...*Well-being is something that we do together, not something that we each possess.*” We interpret this to imply that *community* indicator projects can represent ways to influence community well-being. Further, we agree with Rapley (2003, 45) that by “assuming the meaning of quality of life is a local and political matter – rather than an universal, abstract and apolitical or academic one – may enhance the quality of people’s lives.”

It is interesting to note the variations with which indicator projects approach community participation, whether directly with a community focused effort or more diffuse with targeted participation elicited by larger regional governments. All types recognize the value of citizen/resident involvement and may focus on awareness instead of direct widespread participation. Issues around well-being are a common thread throughout many projects, regardless of whether government initiated or more community inclusive in nature. These varying approaches are seen in this volume of ten chapters along four themes – the first is that of community well-being with two cases, one from a local perspective and one from a larger, country-level focus. Next, three chapters are provided centering on the issue of fostering public awareness in the use and further development of indicator systems, one at a state level and two at the city level. The next three chapters provide exploration of regional-level efforts, and the final two chapters present more technical applications at the country and city levels.

The first chapter is a best practices example illustrating citizen involvement in the process of developing indicators. Heidi Elaine Atwood provides how a participatory action research process can be used for fostering a deeper understanding of local quality of life in “The Influence of Quality-of-Life Research on Quality-of-Life: CLIQ Case Studies from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.” This chapter is very appropriate for illustrating conceptualizations of community quality of life and the linkages between indicators and goals and means. It concludes that a subjective, participatory approach to both research and projects for community indicators conveys benefits for researchers and participants alike. Further, findings suggest that the participatory action process itself can help spur improvements in participants’ quality of life.

Chapter 2, provides a “big picture” look at well-being indicators with Florence Jany-Catrice’s “Regional Indicators of Well-Being: The Case of France.” As well-being and quality-of-life concerns are increasingly considered, this case presents ways of quantifying social well-being indicators on a regional basis within the country. Spurred by the need to include less conventional indicators as well as being able to account for heterogeneity among regions, the case promotes the use of a variety of indicators beyond economic to reflect these differences.

In the following three chapters, indicator projects are described that strive for increasing public awareness. Motivations for this include the belief that by disseminating valuable information about community and regional conditions, citizens and

residents can encourage positive policy responses. In Chap. 3, Bruce Whyte and Andrew Lyon develop a framework based on a socio-ecological perspective for gauging health and well-being both individually and at a larger community level. In “Understanding Glasgow: Developing a New Set of Health and Well-Being Indicators for Use Within a City,” seminars and small group interaction helped spur the development of a “holistic” set of indicators describing health and well-being within the city and allowing for both external and internal comparisons across neighborhoods and overall socio-economic levels.

Chapter 4 by Luis Delfim Santos and Isabel Martins, “The Monitoring System on Quality of Life of the City of Porto,” describes a decade-long project designed to foster informed public awareness and political choices. It is founded on a collaborative model of over 30 public and private institutions participating to provide objective data to the city. Given this history, further work has been undertaken to generate quality-of-life conceptualizations, including at the neighborhood level for encouraging dialogue and input about quality of life. The goal of encouraging dialogue among different urban actors has helped encourage a greater collective awareness and led to strategic guidelines for guiding urban development.

Chapter 5, “State Level Applications: Developing a Policy Support and Public Awareness Indicator Project,” by Rhonda Phillips, HeeKyung Sung, and Andrea Whitsett provides a case of an indicators system developed as a public awareness mechanism. It uses the case of Arizona Indicators begun in 2007 and used to bring data and issues to the public forefront so that reactions and responses can be addressed in a policy format. It is presented as a support system for policy and public awareness.

The next three chapters coalesce around the theme of regional indicator projects. All illustrate the value of partnerships for striving for collective outcomes. Simon Weffer, James Mullooly, Dari Sylvester, Robin DeLugan, and Marcia Hernandez provide a case of the value of partnerships in Chap. 6, “Partnerships Across Campuses and Throughout Communities: Community Engaged Research in California’s Central San Joaquin Valley.” The Central Valley of California is noted for its ethnic and economic diversity, and range of community types (both rural and urban with varying levels of development). The Partnership for the Assessment of Community (PAC) serves to model the changes occurring in the Valley and incorporates the use of researchers and students from different universities to conduct community-based work.

Chapter 7, “Measuring Quality of Life in Border Cities: The Border Observatory Project in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region,” by Devon McAslan, Mihir Prakash, David Pijawka, Subhrajit Guhathakurta, and Edward Sadalla is a major project aimed at collecting data for gauging quality of life in the challenging context of a bi-national project. Using both subjective and objective measures, four pairs of sister cities along the border are examined. Using a comprehensive approach, this project yields insight into longitudinal changes as well as an index based on economic, social, and environmental indicators. Further, a social well-being measure of happiness is measured for each city.

Chapter 8, “The Fox River Region Leading Indicator for Excellence: The Benefits and Challenges of Regional Collaboration,” by Lora Warner and Ashley

Heath presents a partnership effort to develop indicators across three metropolitan areas in northeast Wisconsin. The Leading Indicators for Excellence (LEAD) project uses secondary data, public opinion, and qualitative data to calibrate a dashboard of leading indicators. The project also triangulates data along themes of community strengths and issues or areas of concern to develop insight into quality of life at the regional level. Among the partners are philanthropic organizations interested in spurring quality-of-life outcomes.

The final two chapters in this volume provide examples of researcher and technical approaches to gauging quality of life. One is a city level analysis and the other is a country-wide effort. Chapter 9, “Bridging Environmental Sustainability and Quality of Life in Metropolitan Atlanta’s Urban Communities,” by Susannah Lee and Subhrajit Guhathakurta explains development of a multi-attribute Quality of Urban Life (QoUL) Index for comparing and tracking place-based amenities and conditions of public welfare in cities throughout the Atlanta metropolitan area. This case also provides insight into relations with sustainability and how an index of urban environmental sustainability contributes to urban quality of life.

Chapter 10, “Building a ‘Quality in Work’ Index in Spain,” by Jordi Lopez-Tamayo, Vicente Royuela, and Jordi Surinach presents a quantitative approach to measuring job quality. It is a country-level project to quantify the quality in work from the period 2001–2009, applying a methodology to estimate a composite index considering European Commission guidelines. Given the issue of types of jobs (“bad” jobs replacing good jobs) with the economic difficulties, this project provides information for macro-level policy considerations.

As seen in this collection of cases, community indicators and quality-of-life considerations are applied in a variety of contexts from the neighborhood to country level. They incorporate aspects important in project development such as community participation, public awareness, partnership and collaboration, and new approaches to methodology. We hope you will find the collection useful in your own efforts.

Blacksburg, VA
Phoenix, AZ
Williamsburg, VA

M. Joseph Sirgy
Rhonda Phillips
Don Rahtz

References

- Haworth, J. & Graham, H. (Eds.). (2007). *Well-being, individual, community and social perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rapley, M. (2003). *Quality of life research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Salvaris, M. (2000). *Community and social indicators: How citizens can measure progress, an overview of social and community indicator projects in Australia and Internationally*. Hawthorn: Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology. (Cited in Rapley (2003)).

Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases VI

Sirgy, M.J.; Phillips, R.; Rahtz, D.R. (Eds.)

2013, XXX, 264 p.,

ISBN: 978-94-007-6501-6