

THE “ALIBI–FUNCTION” OF SOCIAL INDICATORS IN  
SOCIAL PLANNING  
— Critical Remarks upon Thresholds in Urban and Regional  
Research —

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*1. Introductory statements*

For many years, only economic indicators (e.g. gross national product, consumer price index etc.) have been available to decision-makers to measure the “progress” or the “health” of a nation, region or community. The failure of these indicators to account for non-economic factors has led to the question “How to measure non-economic factors”? In the last 30 years people became aware of the second-order consequences of a purely economic growth policy. This has led to turning from concern with quantitative growth into concern with qualitative growth, accompanied by a growing need for non-economic data. Since the early 1960’s all activities in modeling, collecting and analyzing non-economic data are summarized by researchers under the term “social indicators”. The more popular these activities became with the general public, politicians and decision-makers, the more the term “social indicators” was replaced by the term “quality-of-life”-indicators.

In the meantime, hundreds of studies in the fields of “social indicators” and “quality of life” have been published. Until so far it has been impossible to draw a clear-cut boundary line between these two concepts; therefore, there are as many definitions of these terms as people asked.

In this article we suggest the use of Stuart Rice’s definition of *social indicators*: “Social indicators are needed to find pathways

through the maze of society's interconnections. They delineate social states, define social problems and trace social trends, which by social engineering may hopefully be guided towards social goals formulated by social planning" (Rice, quoted from Franchette 1974 : 7).

This definition includes three main elements :

- 1) the descriptive function of the indicators (= description of social states and social trends).
- 2) the interconnection of the indicators (system approach),
- (3) the decision-oriented perspective (= social indicators as tools for decision-makers in social planning procedures).

*Quality of life indicators* are used to determinate living conditions (or : quality of life). Social indicators are considered as instruments to measure the quality of life. With respect to the quality-of-life-quantification social indicators are viewed as

- instruments for detecting changes in the quality of life of individuals, groups or societies,
- instruments to monitor progress toward societal goals, thereby reducing the normative implications inherent in the quality of life concept,
- social statistics, particularly emphasizing the reporting of social statistical series that reflect change in time,
- measure of changes in variables that are components in a social system model, thereby focusing objectively on the performance of social systems/groups.

In short, every social indicator that gives any information referring to quality of life is considered as a "quality-of-life-indicator".

The basic ideas of this article are as follows : The concept of quality of life can be seen as an instrument or tool for social planning. However, results of quality of life studies which have been conducted up to now, are not appropriate for social planning. At present, there is a lack of empirical studies in quantifying the quality of life. The main purpose of quality of life research is not only to improve our (theoretical) knowledge in this field of research, but to find ways and means on how to improve people's "quality of life", "living conditions" etc. Therefore, there is a necessity for an applied approach to a system of social indicators which would enable decision-makers to put up a better, more effective social planning. — This does not mean that empirical work is fundamentally more important than

theoretical work in quality of life research. But at present, further empirical studies seem to be much more urgent than further theoretical studies.

One of the main purposes of the social indicators movement is the mobilization of all available statistics for social reporting. "The general objective of most national reports in the broad area of social indicators and reporting is to improve the information base for social policy and planning through a quantification of the elements of social development, social welfare, or the quality of life. ... (This includes among others): "to create a more informed public opinion and debate; to describe social conditions and trends; to monitor progress in achieving social goals; to facilitate the measurement and the understanding of social change; to promote international comparisons of social conditions and levels of development; and to identify data gaps and priorities for the development of social statistics" (United Nations 1975 : 9).

Up to now, planning procedures have been restricted more or less to the "physical" and "economic" areas. But it is necessary to include *social planning*. The quality-of-life-concept (= QOL-concept) is considered as a very useful tool for realistic social planning. Application of the QOL-concept means that social planning must be subdivided into various concerns and sub-concerns. Having done this, it is necessary to operationalize every concern and sub-concern. The operationalization is to be based on social indicators. Social planning can be considered both from the theoretical point of view and from the point of view of applicability (e.g. applicable by decision-makers).

The problems raised in this article will be exemplified in the fields of urban and regional research.

Almost all authors of QOL studies start conceptually from the following underlying concept : people's QOL depend on physical factors (e.g. infrastructure facilities) and psychological factors (e.g. satisfaction degrees). This can be expressed in the following formula :

$$(1) \text{ QOL} = f(\text{ph}, \text{ps}).$$

The difference of opinion becomes obvious when the authors go into detail. If it is intended to measure the infrastructure disparities on the basis of the so-called "objective" urban, social indi-

cators, the above given formula (1) can be specified for the *physical* factors as follows :

- (2)  $QOL (ph) = f (E, A, P)$   
 E = equipment with infrastructural facilities  
 A = accessibility to infrastructural facilities  
 P = physical environment (natural and man-made environment).

The quality of infrastructures equipment can be subdivided into quality of life categories, e.g.

- (3)  $QOL (E) = f (e, h, s, p, i, r, \dots)$   
 e = education            p = employment  
 h = health                i = income  
 s = social affairs        r = recreation

Furthermore the quality of life categories can be subdivided into elements. This can be illustrated with the category "social affairs" :

- (4)  $QOL (s) = f (y, a, w)$   
 y = facilities for the youth  
 a = facilities for the aged  
 w = social welfare.

Finally, every quality of life element must be subdivided into indicators  $i_1, i_2, \dots$  :

- (5)  $QOL (a) = f (i_1, i_2, i_3, \dots i_n)$ .

If the user of a quality of life study based on objective indicators is aware of the limited reliability of the findings, these results are a possible tool for decision-makers in the decision-making process. — In a similar way *subjective* indicators are to be developed.

Generally speaking, quality of life studies should be based on both objective and subjective data. Neither the pure subjective indicators approach nor the pure objective indicators approach will give satisfying results. If quality of life studies are based on objective indicators, it is possible to combine objective data with a subjective element by weighting the objective indicators involved. This combined objective/subjective approach may be called a "weighted objective indicators" approach (Gehrmann 1978).

Up to now manifold efforts have been undertaken in proposing systems of social indicators for social planning. All systems are unsatisfactory because of the lack of statistical data. Many researchers and decision-makers have objected that the applicability of social indicators is mainly determined by statistical data. Therefore they require "rationally" defined social indicators.

However the problem is one of finding "rational" definitions. It is impossible to develop a generally accepted "rational" system of social indicators. Every selection of social indicators is influenced by values, attitudes, exceptions, priorities etc. of the author (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1974).

## *2. On Measuring the Dynamics of Social Change and Social Development.*

The quality of life concept includes a severe danger in so far as the concept may lead to more or less status-quo-oriented results. This danger exists particularly when objective indicators are employed. These data can only provide information on the status-quo. To avoid this disadvantage, some attempts have been made to investigate changes in the period from 1950 to 1975; the data employed were, of course, objective indicators. However, retrospective research does not necessarily give valid information on what will happen in the future (United Nations 1972). Thus it is relatively easy to demonstrate and measure the dynamics of social change and social development for the past. However, up to now there is no general agreement on how to investigate, quantify or measure the dynamics for future social change and social development (Rothman 1974, Schutz and Blakely 1980).

Obviously, the increase of various infrastructural facilities of about 20 % within the period 1950 - 1975 does not necessarily mean that the degree of satisfaction among the people in 1975 with the infrastructure equipment is 20 % higher in comparison to 1950.

Therefore, we need information on people's needs, wants, values, expectations, priorities, standards etc. with respect to the manifold quality of life concerns. This will give us some insight into what citizens would like to have improved and this information will enable decision-makers to take into consideration such information in planning social change and social development. Among others, it

will be possible to get information on the direction, speed etc. of the dynamic process. Furthermore, the expectations, priorities, standards, etc. of experts and decision-makers must be analysed and taken into account. The purpose of such a study could be :

- (1) to develop a system of quality of life concerns and sub-concerns
- (2) to investigate the priorities and weights of the quality of life concerns and sub-concerns
- (3) to investigate the differences in the priorities and weights given by various socio-demographic groups
- (4) to apply of the various investigated weights (e.g. by weighting objective indicators).

Altogether, on the one hand these informations are the basis for a better understanding of the dynamics, while on the other hand they are the basis to refine, i.e. to monitor social planning (For further details with respect to the handling of information : see Michalos 1974).

A prerequisite for measuring the dynamics of social change and social development is the existence of a concrete standard, i.e. a threshold. Up to now we have only discovered some of these thresholds. The reason for this gap is to be found in the difficulties of proposing and operationalizing such thresholds. Citizens are highly interested in thresholds, e.g. in urban and regional research. However, decision-makers come into conflict with citizens aspirations. Only if there are generally accepted thresholds and in the case a government promises to meet these standards within a given number of years is there a possibility to control the success or the failure of a government. Bearing this in mind, it can easily be understood why decision-makers prefer to promise "a substantial improvement as soon as possible". However, within the last 5 — 10 years there is a growing understanding of the necessity of setting thresholds.

Two questions are to be distinguished with respect to the setting of standards :

— Which informations and assumptions are to be made for purposes of *determining* thresholds ?

— How can one make these threshold operational ?

It is impossible to give generally accepted answers to these questions. The determination and operationalization differs from case to case, from community to community, from infrastructure equipment to infrastructure equipment, etc. There is a plurality of factors which

influence the thresholds. Five aspects should be emphasized :

(1) To a great part the final decision for a determination of thresholds is based on political and societal goals/aspirations. There are no "objective", "real", or "scientifically investigated thresholds".

(2) The level of thresholds is influenced by financial, economical, technical, societal etc. conceptions and restrictions.

(3) Thresholds are affected by offer and demand.

(4) There are fluctuations of norms and thresholds.

(5) In general, experts and commissions propose standards. The higher the reputation of experts and commissions, the greater the probability that the proposed thresholds will be accepted in an uncritical way.

In practice, urban and regional research applies several thresholds. However, it is impossible to say to what extent the above mentioned five aspects have influenced the norms. Every determination and operationalization of standards includes subjective elements. Ironically, three rules of setting thresholds can be distinguished (at least for the German sphere) :

— *Thumb rule* : The variable "thumb" is employed in conformity with experts's (or : commissions') attitudes, needs, wants, political and societal aspirations. About 80 % of the existent norms are based on this rule.

— *Hessian rule* : This rule starts from the principle "Hessians always count first". This means for a certain indicator : If, for instance, the norm is 6,2 for the FRG and 7,0 for Sweden, the threshold in Hesse has to be fixed at least at 7,2 !

— *Slesvig Holstein Rule* : Here we start from a contradictory principle : "Slesvig Holstein is a poor state; therefore the thresholds are to be set below the values for FRG". Thus, the threshold for the indicator could be 6,0 or less !

The tragical or tragi-comedical aspect of these statements lies in their ironical way of illustrating the determination of thresholds.

This short presentation makes evident what sort of problems arise in determining operationalizing and quantifying thresholds *at a given moment*. Furthermore, the above mentioned problems and measuring the dynamics of social change and social development exemplify the difficulties of setting valid and reliable thresholds *for a period of time* (cf. Young and Maccannell 1979).

This explains the restrictive attitudes of decision-makers in

applying social indicators in social planning procedures. Decision-makers refer to social indicators if and in so far social indicators support their ideologies, expectations, needs, wants, etc. In other words : social indicators are merely used as an "alibi".

### *3. Towards a System of Applicable Social Indicators*

This chapter advances two basic questions : What sort of information do decision-makers need in order to apply the quality of life concept ? Do the available data allow an adequate operationalization of the information wanted ? (cf. Caplan and Barton 1978).

The quality of life concept seems to be a very useful tool for decision-makers, on condition it is used as shown through the following example. The Ministry of Regional Planning, Construction and Urban Affairs of the F.R. of Germany has set the goal of establishing "equal living conditions" and the same degree of "quality of life" in all German regions. For this purpose, the infrastructure equipment — being one of the main aspects of measurable quality of life — is to be assessed and compared in all German regions. The aim of this programme is to eliminate regional disparities. One of the basic assumptions of this programme can be explained as follows : Within the country, every region has a specific task for the whole nation. For instance, one region is highly developed industrially, with high incomes but unhealthy environmental conditions; another is for the greater part agricultural and has lower incomes but good environmental conditions. Of course, it is impossible at present to quantify or to measure the manifold trade-offs and to determine the weights of the various concerns and indicators etc. Further improvements and refinements have to be done in the future. Yet, this approach seems to be a pragmatic attempt of an application of the quality of life concept. This application requires, among other things, the measurement of infrastructure disparities in German regions. Therefore, it is necessary to operationalize all quality of life subconcerns on the basis of the available data.

The starting-point of the infrastructure measurement — e.g., in cities with a population over 100.000 can be (1) the average value of all cities involved or (2) different thresholds. Thus, it is possible to compute the infrastructure disparities in physical terms, e.g. the city X has a deficit of 80 hospital beds. On the other side, the following statement can be made : If one hospital bed costs 50.000 and if city X should meet the average infrastructure level (or : a



certain threshold), this means : city X needs  $80 \times 50.000 = 4.000.000$  in order to provide the population with the "average number" of hospital beds. In other words : In order to establish "equal living conditions" within the subconcern "hospital beds" city X needs 4.000.000. When summing up the deficits and surplus of all quality of life subconcerns in monetary terms, decision-makers have a comprehensive picture of the disparities of the quality of life in both physical monetary terms. This makes possible to see in how far the aim of "equal living conditions" or of "equal quality of life" has been fulfilled. Such an analysis is of direct interest for decision-makers.

The above given example shows the usefulness of the quality of life concept for decision-makers. This example is based on objective indicators only. However, it must be possible, without doubt, to measure the spatial infrastructure disparities on the basis of subjective data, e.g., by investigating to what extent people are satisfied with infrastructure equipment in various spheres of lives, which views and conceptions they have on what it should be like and what reasons they give for this. This would require an inquiry of a representative number of people living in various regions. As mentioned above it is desirable to measure the quality of life on the basis of objective and subjective indicators. It is important to realize the shortcomings of measurement experiments based solely on objective indicators. Of course, the pure number of hospital beds for instance does not say anything about the quality of the medical care in that hospital. However, until the subjective data are not available in a sufficient way, from the pragmatic point of view, at present only objective indicators can be employed and tested. If the necessary subjective data are available, further tests and refinements have to be executed.

On the basis of these general remarks, social planning shall be considered from the point of view of applicable social indicators. Up to now, planning procedures have been restricted to the "physical" and "economic" areas. But it is necessary to include *social planning* (cf. several proposals in : Unesco 1975, United Nations 1972 and 1975, Gehrman 1975). Social planning seems to be a requisite for improving quality of life; in other words : social planning is centered to *man's* well-being and welfare.

For purposes of proposing social indicators for social planning one must start with specific applicable terms. Until now, almost

all systems of social indicators have been derived from a traditional analysis of government's functions. This has led to quality of life categories such as health, education, social affairs etc. It is obvious that such quality of life categories and indicators are not directly applicable for decision-makers (Gehrman 1976).

On the other side, it has to be emphasized that the concept of "applicable" social indicators needs to be developed in connection with theoretical frameworks. Generally frameworks are not based on terms such as "hospital beds per 1.000 population", "kindergarten places per 100 children aged 3-5" etc. More or less the frameworks are constructed on the basis of broader concepts.

Therefore it seems to be very important to propose applicable social indicators on the level of such concepts. On the one hand, this would be useful for researchers with respect to modelling and conceptualizing social indicators and on the other side for decision-makers as a direct help in the decision-making process.

Applicable social indicators can be more or less oriented at sociological, economical, psychological etc. concepts such as

- attractivity of a city
- centralization of a city
- cultural level of a city
- informed citizenry
- level of communicative interactions
- dwelling conditions in a city
- locational value of flats & apartments
- susceptibility of a city to unemployment
- financial power of a city
- development potential of a city
- environmental quality of a city etc. (Gehrmann 1976).

All of these concepts can be related to the urban as well as to other levels, such as regional or national level.

In order to demonstrate what kind of applicable social indicators should be employed, the following concentrates on "dwelling conditions". This concepts is directly related to the quality of life. The following assumption can be made: The better the dwelling conditions, the better the infrastructure level of a city (for that field), i.e. the better the quality of life is. The concept of dwelling conditions is of direct interest to researchers as well as to decision-makers. It is used in many theoretical essays as well as in the prac-

tical decision-making process. The task for researchers is (1) to provide decision-makers with several definitions (i.e. operationalizations) and (2) to advise them with respect to the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. This necessitates a close co-operation between decision-makers and researchers.

Obviously, it is impossible to give a balanced judgement of the "dwelling conditions" in a city when using only one or two traditional indicator(s) such as "number of rooms per person" and/or "housing space in m<sup>2</sup> per person". Therefore, the operationalization requires more than one or two indicator(s). In other words, the operationalization of this concept requires the construction of a "comprised" indicator on the basis of a "set of traditional social indicators".

Depending on the scope of an applicable social indicator (such as : dwelling conditions) a subdivision of the concept into several subterms is necessary. In the case of "dwelling conditions" the following subdivision could be thought of :

- (a) density
- (b) equipment of houses and dwellings
- (c) accessibility to infrastructure facilities
- (d) environment
- (e) ownership
- (f) rent.

Up to now, there is no general agreement on how to define the applicable social indicator "dwelling conditions" or its subterms. Possible operationalizations of the subterms are shown in Table I. The proposed indicators depend strongly upon the availability of the data.

On the basis of the indicators listed in the table it is possible to measure first the subterms and afterwards the applicable social indicator "dwelling conditions". For that purpose it is necessary (1) to give different weights to every indicator, (2) to propose thresholds (maximum and minimum values) for every indicator, (3) to aggregate the various indicators to subterms, (4) to aggregate the various subterms to the applicable social indicator "dwelling conditions".

TABLE I: *Operationalizations of the applicable social indicator  
"dwelling conditions"*

(a) *density*

- (1) number of population per km<sup>2</sup>
- (2) number of persons per dwelling house
- (3) number of rooms per dwelling
- (4) number of rooms per person
- (5) housing space in m<sup>2</sup> per person

(b) *equipment of houses and dwellings*

- (6) number of dwelling in "houses built later than 1948" per 1.000 dwellings
- (7) number of "dwellings with bath, WC, and central heating" per 1.000 dwellings
- (8) number of "dwellings with coal, wood, or turf furnace in one or several rooms" per 1.000 dwellings
- (9) number of people living in "temporary houses" per 10.000 population

(c) *accessibility to infrastructure facilities*

- (percentage or population with access to ... within 2, 5, 10, 15, ... minutes walking)
- (10) playgrounds
  - (11) kindergarten
  - (12) primary school)
  - (13) bus stop
  - (14) shop or shopping centre (for daily shopping)

(d) *environment*

- (15) number of hectar "green spaces" per 100 population
- (16) percentage of "non-built-up area" of the total municipal area
- (17) number of private garages per 100 households
- (18) total number of parking places per 1.000 passenger vehicle

(e) *ownership*

- (19) number of "dwelling houses with 1 or 2 dwelling units" per 10.000 population
- (20) number of dwelling-owners per 1.000 tenants

(f) *rent*

- (21) average residential rent in \$ per m<sup>2</sup> in apartments of new buildings (built later than 1948)

- (22) average residential rent in \$ per m<sup>2</sup> in apartments of old buildings (built before 1949).

In this way, decision-makers have concrete information. After having computed the values for the indicators, subterms and the total applicable social indicator, decision-makers are able to contrast the equipment level of dwelling conditions in their own city compared with the equipment level of other cities.

Similar information has to be given to decision-makers for all concerns of the quality of life, or "social planning". On the basis of these informations in the first place, they have to set priorities on the level of the main concerns, afterwards on the level of the subconcerns (i.e. subterms). It is a well-known fact that the setting of priorities within social planning is to a certain extent a political question. For purposes of reducing the pure political decision-making process to a more "rational" decision-making process, researchers are urged to present as much information to the decision-makers as possible (for further details with respect to the transformation and application of the data for the decision-making process, see e.g. Steinhausen 1975).

If, for example, a city gives first priority to the housing and dwelling concern, decision-makers would like to know in which subconcerns (or : subterms) help is most urgent. In that case decision-makers like to have "problem-oriented" "policy-oriented", or "applicable" social indicators. The advantage of such an indicator is that a lot of different information is already comprised to one subterm, such "equipment of houses and dwellings". This facilitates the decision-making process. Taking into consideration the politically influenced priorities in social planning on the one hand and the computed findings of the six comprised subterms of the dwelling conditions on the other hand, this may for instance cause the following : efforts in social planning are to be concentrated to the subterm "equipment of houses and dwellings". This may lead to a new or modified "housing renewal program".

In order to avoid any misunderstanding it should be emphasized that the construction and presentation of comprised and applicable social indicators by researchers is to be seen merely as a *help* in the decision-making process. The final decision rests with the politicians. The activities of researchers in that field can be considered as contributions for a more rational decision-making process.

#### 4. "Alibi — Function" of Social Indicators ?

How useful has the approach of the social indicators movement for social planning procedure been hitherto ? A sincere answer to this question will be negative. The reasons for this answer may be the following :

- (1) A goal-oriented social planning cannot do without the existence of concrete goals. Thresholds are a first prerequisite. However, thresholds are not existent and available. Furthermore it is impossible to measure the dynamics on social change and social development.
- (2) Most social indicators are not applicable for decision-makers.

It was therefore more or less impossible for decision-makers to employ social indicators in social planning procedures. This leads to the question : When did decision-makers use social indicators ? Some experts suspect that social indicators have merely had the function of a dummy or an alibi. Therefore two questions arise :

- (1) Is a "valid" empirical measurement of quality of life — based on social indicators possible ?
- (2) Do social indicators contribute to a more rational decision-making process ?

##### (1) "valid" empirical measurement

An analysis of about 50 attempts at quantifying and measuring quality of life on different spatial levels (such as national, state, regional, urban, city-district, neighbourhood level) makes clear that the results are highly influenced by

- the selection of indicators,
- the aggregation of indicators to one 'element',
- the weighting or non-weighting of the indicators,
- using various measurement techniques.

This means that the results of quantifying quality of life are to a certain extent influenced by the researcher. In order to verify this allegation, tests have been made on the data basis of the 60 largest cities (i.e. cities with a population of 100.000 and over) of F.R. of Germany. A small part of the results will be discussed below. (For further details see Gehrman 1978).

The allegation can be well demonstrated for the aspect "aggregation of indicators to one element". It can be shown that the various combinations of indicators into one element strongly

influence the results of measurement experiments. Such a combination of various indicators is called a 'set of indicators'.

Again, this was tested for the 60 largest cities in F.R.G. on the basis of objective indicators. In order to exclude the subjective influence of one single author with respect to the selection of the proposed indicators, 90 citizens, 80 experts and 50 decision-makers were asked for their judgement. For the element 'facilities for the aged', for example, these 220 persons were asked to select from a list of about 35 indicators those which according to their judgement would be most valid for an evaluation of such facilities. It was said that they would be allowed to select 5 different sets of indicators. The first, second, third, fourth and fifth set of indicators should consist of 1, 3, 5, 7 and 'as many as meaningful' indicators. Afterwards the respondents were asked : 'What do you think : Which is the best (= most reliable and most valid) indicator for purposes of determining the provision of facilities for the aged (= set of indicators number I) ? ... Which are the best 3 indicators ... (= set of indicators number II) ... Which are the best 7 indicators ... (= set of indicators number III), etc. (For further details see Gehrman 1978).

The sample of respondents asked is not representative. The consultation with the people asked has only been done for purposes of demonstrating a way of selection indicators in a more 'generalized' or 'objective' fashion (in the sense of 'reduction of the subjective influence of the author of an indicator system').

The following table shows that for some cities the assessment is quite similar whereas for other cities large differences appear by using different sets of indicators. This can be nicely shown by comparing the rank order on the basis of the set of indicators I and on the basis of the set of indicators V, which can be as much as 45 ranks, as in the extreme case of the city of Regensburg :

City	Rank number for set I	Rank number for set V	Ranking differ- ence between set I and set V
Essen	53	52	1
Frankfurt	35	35	1
Heidelberg	21	22	1
Duisburg	60	58	2

...			
Stuttgart	40	13	27
Bonn	11	41	30
Salzgitter	52	18	34
Regensburg	51	6	45

This empirical example shows that the results are strongly influenced by the combination of indicators which are selected for assessing one specific subconcern of various indicators to different sets of indicators). Similar results are presented for the other five aspects/factors mentioned above.

According to the direction of each of these influencing factors with respect to the cities' assessment a cumulative effect may or may not arise. Empirical tests proved that for almost each of the 60 German cities a rank difference of at least 23 ranks can be 'constructed' deliberately ! This can easily be done by saying : Employ the set of indicators number 'x1'. Apply the indicators weight of the group 'y1', test the measurement technique 'z1', etc. If the rank difference is not sufficient, try to 'measure' in the following way : Employ the set of indicators number 'x5', apply the indicator weights of the group 'y3', test the measurement technique 'z2', etc.

*(2) Contribution of social indicators to a more rational decision-making process.*

The following statements are related to the regional development of EEC and the political and institutional frame. To a certain degree the following remarks are based on studies by Klaus Mueller (Mueller 1980). The starting-point of these considerations was an EEC statement in 1975 : The development of standards for regional problems depends to a remarkable extent upon valid, reliable and standardized information systems which are applicable for EEC as a whole; at present such information systems are not available.

The basic ideas of the EEC initiative can be summarized as follows : among the various institutional bodies within the member countries of the EEC there is no agreement with respect to the goal-orientation of social indicators. This leads to problems in international comparability. Furthermore the problem arises that there are no general accepted *rational* reasons for funding and financing the various national bodies.



Within the EEC there are common and uniform global criteria on how to fund regions. The purpose of these criteria is the concentration and allocation of funds to the most indigent regions. However, up to now, the funds have been distributed dispersely. This was criticized spitefully by those member countries which are the so-called "paymasters" of EEC. Especially the average values for large regions as a normative measure have been censured. Furthermore the guess global (and partly arbitrary) criteria (e.g. gross domestic product) have been criticized.

Therefore politicians ask for concrete criteria to be able to determine whether or not to fund a region. However there is a paradox : On the one hand these criteria should be concrete, but on the other hand they should be general enough as to be applicable to various and different regions within the EEC.

Special rules have been developed in order to determine on how to fund the regions. The main target was to concentrate the funds to the most indigent regions. The results of these activities are that entitlement for receiving funds is given to

- about a quarter of the gross national product,
- about a third of the population,
- nearly half of EEC's area !

The underlying concept for the selection of the criteria and thresholds was : (1) common and uniform criteria are to be used, (2) there must be a possibility for all member countries of the EEC in participating in the funds. This "political" requisite was, among others, decisive for the fact that the values for the indicator "gross domestic product per ... population" was not based on the average value of the EEC. The consequence would have been a sharp reduction of the number of regions funded in France and Denmark. Furthermore the selection of the unemployment rate was a delicate political question too. An increase of the thresholds for the unemployment rate would have caused an important reduction of regions in Great Britain which had as far been funded by the EEC.

This is a very doubtful procedure. The average values have received a normative character. Nevertheless they are neither goal-oriented nor specific for different regions. At present the proposed average values are merely fictitious. They do not represent a pre-tension or a norm for a region. Thus an identification of the most

indigent regions -- based on rational defined thresholds and social indicators -- is impossible.

Generally, any attempt in setting and proposing thresholds, standards, norms etc. should be supported. Yet the above mentioned norms cannot fulfill this function because they do not take into consideration the specific and concrete conditions of each region. Preliminary conditions for norms are :

- (1) unequivocal decisions with respect to the goals of regional development,
- (2) specification of thresholds for the various regions within EEC,
- (3) specification of months, years etc. when the proposed standards are to be met.

What was the chief snag for the reluctance of the European nations in employing rational defined thresholds and social indicators ? The most important four reasons may be summarized as follows :

- Thinking is predominantly influenced by nationalist consideration
- There is an urgent need for a common coordination of national goals in regional development,
- The unanimity rule is one of the most important obstacles in the decision-making process. This rule enforces a policy of the smallest common denominator,
- Therefore a common system of goals — based on national norms — for purposes of evaluating regions is an unrealistic effort.

As long as these obstacles are existent, it will be impossible to establish a "rational" defined system of social indicators based on thresholds. The efforts, done in this field hitherto, may be characterized as preparatory endeavours. Some experts spitefully criticize these efforts as an "illusion", "make-believe" or "appearance" of rationally defined social indicators and thresholds. In short, up to now, social indicators merely have an alibi-function in the decision-making process.

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