

ABSTRACT

Italian well-being indices, purposes, limitations, and evolutions

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The identification of well-being measures is a matter that has been facing for a long time. In the past, the most commonly employed index was the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but its adequacy has been questioned for quite all the 20th century, concluding that its use can lead to misleading conclusions (Fleurbaey, 2009). To overcome GDP, have been developed alternative approaches that are still nowadays a core topic. Following the capability approach proposed by Sen (2003), the European Commission, European Parliament, Club of Rome, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and WWF, in 2007 hosted the conference titled "Beyond GDP". In August 2009, the European Commission released its road map, the Communication "GDP and beyond: Measuring progress in a changing world", when the so-called Stiglitz Commission (Stiglitz et al., 2009) suggested to build a complementary statistical system, focused on social well-being and suitable for measuring sustainability. The advice is to develop indicators that are as clear and appealing as GDP, but more inclusive of environmental and social aspects of progress (OECD, 2013). The proposed measure accounts a set of indicators representing both objective and subjective assessment, and including also people's perception of quality of life. Following the Commission's prompts a huge number of well-being indices have been developed, with different structures, considering a great variety of dimensions and for many purposes. International examples are: the Human Development Index, the Better Life Index, the Happy Planet Index, the Canadian Index of Well-being and the Gross National Happiness Index. In the field of subjective well-being, new measures have been recently proposed using big data, Facebook or Twitter data, to predict life satisfaction based on lexical and topical features (Schwartz et al., 2016, Dodds et al., 2011, Abdullah et al., 2015). In Italy, Iacus et al. (2017) developed the Social Well-being Index (SWBI), a multidimensional well-being composite indicator relying on Twitter data but derived from a new human supervised technique of sentiment analysis. All these new proposals try to overcome the lack in official statistics, however, for this kind of measures, the methodological challenges are still many and open.

This work proposes a review of the traditional indices used to measure well-being in Italy, introducing their purposes, limitations, and their progressive evolution. The aim is to provide a detailed image, also to policy-makers, describing the accuracy, timeliness and territorial coverage. All these characteristics are a challenge for a good planning, for a correct international comparison or to integrate well-being indices with new data, represented, as example, by big data.

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