Stakeholder Consultation in Well-being Assessment: Theoretical Framework and Experiences at the Local Level from Italy and Israel

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Over the past few years, many countries have developed sets of indicators aimed at measuring well-being and the progress of societies. The validity of these sets depends on their relevance: the fact that indicators reflect issues that people consider important, and are good measures of these issues. Involving all relevant stakeholders (those whom the indicators represent and those who will use or learn from them) in the selection process is a key element in achieving a relevant set. Civil society organizations (CSO) and citizens alike can contribute fundamentally to the formation of legitimate perspectives on progress and social wellbeing, and to the definition of suitable indicators.

This paper begins by drawing from the literature to describe the theoretical framework on stakeholder engagement and well-being indicators, and then examines how some local institutions have carried out these consultation processes. This latter step is done through a review of four relevant case studies at the sub-national level in Italy and Israel.

Through an online questionnaire designed to explore the main features of the selected initiatives, we sought to investigate how these different organizations concretely managed the consultation processes, comparing their choices with the procedural issues identified by the literature.

Despite the adoption of a common framework, some significant differences emerged between the experiences we describe, which can be connected to the specific needs and features (in terms of geographical dimensions, level of government, number of possible stakeholders and time allocated to the project) of different communities. Furthermore, some interesting patterns of weakness and strength emerge, shedding light on specific challenges in citizen engagement.

Key words: stakeholder engagement, well-being indicators, legitimacy, consultation at the local level.

תקציר

בשנים האחרונות החלו מדינות רבות לפתח מדדים להערכת איכות חיים וקידמה. התוקף של המדדים הללו תלוי במידת הרלוונטיות שלהם - בחשיבות של הנושאים בהם עוסקים המדדים וביכולת שלהם למדוד את הנושאים הללו היטב. לכן ישנה חשיבות, במהלך פיתוח מדדים כאלו לערב את כל בעלי העניין (כלומר האנשים שהמדדים מייצגים אותם והאנשים שיעשו שימוש במדדים בעתיד) בתהליך הבחירה.

מסמך זה פותח בסקירת ספרות המתארת את המסגרת התיאורטית לשיתוף בעלי עניין ולקביעת מדדי איכות חיים. הוא ממשיך ומתאר תהליכי שיתוף ציבור בפיתוח מדדי איכות חיים בארבע יוזמות מקומיות באיטליה ובישראל. בעזרת שאלון מקוון אותו מלאו ראשי ארבעת יוזמות, בררנו כיצד כל פרוייקט התמודד עם סוגיית השתתפות הציבור ובחנו את הבחירות הללו לאור הסוגיות שעולות מסקירת הספרות.

מצאנו שלמרות המסגרת המשותפת ישנם מספר הבדלים בולטים בין ארבעת היוזמות. ההבדלים נובעים ממגוון הצרכים והמאפיינים המיוחדים (כמו ממדים גיאוגרפיים, רמת ממשל, מספר בעלי העניין וכמות הזמן שעומדת לרשותו של כל פרויקט ויוזמה) של המקומות והאוכלוסיות בהם נעשתה העבודה. כמו כן, מצאנו כמה דפוסים מעניינים של חוזקות וחולשות שמעידים על היתר על התרומה והקשיים הפוטנציאליים שטמונים בתהליכי השתתפות ציבורית בפיתוח מדדי איכות חיים.

מילות מפתח: מעורבות בעלי עניין, מדדי איכות חיים, לגיטימציה, התייעצות ברמה המקומית

ملخّص

في السنوات الأخيرة، طوّرت العديد من الدول مجموعات مؤشّرات بهدف تقييم حسن حال وتقدّم المجتمعات. فاعلية هذه المجموعات تعتمد على مدى ملاءمتها: حقيقة أنّ المؤشّرات تعكس القضايا التي يعتبرها الناس مهمة وتوفّر تقييمًا جيدًا لهذه القضايا. مشاركة جميع أصحاب الشأن ذوي الصلة (المتمثلين بالمؤشرات والذين سيقومون باستخدام المؤشرات والاستفادة منها) في مسار الاختيار هي عامل مهم جدًا في تحقيق مجموعة المؤشرات ذات الصلة. منظّمات المجتمع المدني والمواطنين على حد سواء يقدّمون مساهمة أساسية لإضفاء الشرعية على وجهات النظر المتعلقة بالتقدم وحسن الحال المجتمعي ولتحديد المؤشّرات المناسبة للتقييم. من حيث تحفيز المشاركة المجتمعية، مناهج أسفل أعلى، تفعيل الموارد المحلية، تبادل المعلومات، المدارك والمعرفة وما إلى ذلك.

تستعرض هذه الورقة أولا، واستنادًا إلى الأدبيات، الإطار النظري حول مشاركة ذوي الشأن ومؤشّرات حسن الحال. ومن ثم تتدارس كيفية خوض بعض المؤسّسات المحلية لهذه المسارات التشاورية. وقد تمت هذه الخطوة الأخيرة من خلال الاطلاع على دراسات حالة ذات صلة على المستوى دون الوطني في إيطاليا وإسرائيل.

من خلال استبيان الكتروني معد لاستكشاف الميزات الرئيسية للمبادرات المختارة، نهدف إلى تدارس كيفية إدارة المؤسّسات المختلفة للمسارات التشاورية، ومقارنة خياراتها بالقضايا الإجرائية التي شخصّتها الأدبيات.

رغم تبني إطار مشترك، وجدت اختلافات بارزة بين التجارب المعروضة والتي ترتبط بالاحتياجات والميزات المحدّدة للمجتمعات المختلفة (من حيث الأبعاد الجغرافية، مستوى الحكم، عدد أصحاب الشأن المحتملين والمدة الزمنية المخصصة للمشروع). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، برزت نماذج مثيرة للاهتمام فيما يخص نقاط القوة والضعف، ممّا يعزز الوعي حول بعض التحديات التي تنطوي عليها مشاركة المواطنين.

مصطلحات رئيسية: مشاركة أصحاب الشأن، مؤشّرات حسن الحال، شرعية، التشاور على الصعيد المحلي.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder engagement and/or participatory practices are increasingly assuming a central role in business practice and public policy decision-making and delivery. They are being used as a means to improve communication, obtain wider community support or buy-in for projects, gather useful data and ideas, enhance public sector or corporate reputation, and provide for more sustainable decision-making. The literature on issues of participation and citizen engagement has grown extensive, reflecting the need to respond to the crisis of the mechanisms of representation in contemporary democracies and to the increasing demand by citizens to be directly involved in policy decisions that affect their interests. The potential innovation and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement techniques and approaches have been widely investigated, and the limitations of methodologies based on a traditional consultative framework have been taken into account (see e.g. Raddel and Woolcock, 2004). The modern environmental management literature emphasizes the need for community involvement in the identification of indicators to monitor progress towards sustainable development and environmental management goals (Fraser et al., 2005).

Public consultation and engagement are also gaining recognition as core principles of 'Beyond GDP' initiatives. This is because a set of statistical indicators able to take into account all the aspects related to the idea of a country's progress should, in the first place, embody and represent an idea of progress that is nationally shared. This purpose can be achieved through a process of democratic deliberation on the values and priorities that our societies intend to pursue (Rondinella, Segre and Zola, 2012). Civil society can make a fundamental contribution to this – in terms of social participation, grass-roots contacts, mobilization of resources, and processing of information and knowledge – to problematise and legitimate the perspectives of progress and social wellbeing and to define the indicators that can measure them.

Until a few years ago, efforts to integrate various aspects of economic progress, environmental sustainability and social welfare into an aggregate measure of well-being shared one major weakness - their identification of key aspects of well-being and of weights to aggregate these dimensions suffered from lack of legitimacy (Segre, Rondinella, Mascherini, 2011). It is this limitation that recent innovative and well tested approaches are attempting to overcome, granting legitimacy through a broad consultation of stakeholders in general and civil society organizations in particular This means that practices for engaging stakeholders in the selection of well-being statistics are a relatively new area to explore. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework and to explore several instances of its implementation, comparing choices and efforts from two different countries, Italy and Israel, at a local level.

The paper is structured as follows: First, the theoretical framework on the importance of involving stakeholders in the definition of indicators of progress is presented. Then the main aspects of the procedural issue are described, considering the challenge that must be addressed and the possible practices that can be employed. This is followed by a specific focus on four local and regional instances of stakeholder involvement and some final remarks to conclude.

2. Theoretical framework: stakeholder engagement and well-being indicators

The limits of GDP are now well known, and numerous studies have shown how it fails to provide a comprehensive view of societal performance, emphasizing the necessity of combining it with additional indicators able to reflect the citizens' quality of life, such as social inclusion, inequality, environmental conditions etc. (Noll, 2002; Gadrey et al. 2005; Goossens 2007; Stiglitz et al. 2008; Segre et al. 2010). This stream of research seeks to measure society's progress[1] and its final goal is to develop a so-called "beyond GDP" framework. Some of these initiatives are being developed by governments and national statistical offices. These administrators are increasingly recognising that finding ways to get citizens and communities more involved in the development and use of well-being statistics is an important objective, if they wish to maximise their policy's impact and the relevance of the improved measures.

The involvement of stakeholders has become more and more crucial to addressing the new challenges we face, given the rapid changes taking place at the societal level as well as in public debate (Beck 2000; Bobbio 2002; Passerin d'Entrevès 2002; Arena 2008). As pointed out in Rondinella at al. (2014), civil society is playing an increasingly important role in the creation of an informed public, a public able to make relevant demands of democratic institutions (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 2000; Edwards 2004). Indeed, civil society has been acknowledged as the specific context within which democratic ideals may be practically realized (Dryzek 2000; Fraser 1992; Benhabib 1996) since decisions there can be made on the basis of the democratic principles of autonomy, equality and participation. This means that public consultation among experts, civil society and individual citizens is a fundamentally important means of gathering input with which to design appropriate well-being indicators. Many national

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1 Or in the definition proposed by IISD and OECD in the Bellagio STAMP (SusTainability Assessment and Measurement Principles) (Hardy and Zdan 1997) following the Brudtland commission's approach, the ability of a society to supply its members with sustainable wellbeing, without threatening the wellbeing of future generations (see Rondinella, Segre and Zola, 2011).

and local initiatives have already implemented processes for consultation with the public when developing measurement frameworks and selecting indicators.

Despite the now widespread acknowledgement that GDP is not, on its own, a sufficient indicator for well-being, the debate on the measurement of well-being amongst individuals and societies remains problematic. It is complicated by the fact that it must consider multiple values, priorities and social objectives, and because there is no such thing as a universal definition of wellbeing from which a universally acceptable measurement may be derived. Consequently, one of the main challenges in defining a set of indicators for representing societal progress is the issue of that set's legitimacy in the eyes of "the intended users", meaning that it highlights issues that they deem to be important and that the indicators chosen "provide meaningful measures of those issues" (Scrivens and Iasiello, 2010). Furthermore, as discussed in Rondinella et al. (2014), the selection of these indicators is a crucial step, in the sense that "what we measure affects what we do". If the tools we use are flawed or unable to encompass all key aspects of the object of study, this can lead to ineffective and distorted decision-making (Stiglitz et al. 2009).

Up to now, the process of identifying indicators of well-being has generally followed one of three very general approaches: top-down, bottom-up and the so-called "bi-directional methodology" (Michalos et al. 2010). While the top down approach cannot claim democratic legitimacy (Innes 1990), the purely bottom up ones, which involve the citizenship at large in the identification process, may provide some sort of legitimacy to the selection of progress indicators, yet with some limitations. The two most prominent limitations are the difficulty of engaging in a broad dialogue beyond the local level and the distorted or limited information that often guides citizens. With regards to the former obstacle, it is important to help focus the debate by clearly defining its goals. This means, for instance, distinguishing between consultative processes (i.e. listening to different actors and taking their opinions into account as far as possible) and deliberative ones , (i.e. letting stakeholders discuss and converge towards a common decision). In order to grant democratic legitimacy to progress measures, we consider consultation to be useful, and deliberation to be necessary. The second major difficulty stems from the fact that citizens are considered as bound to unsustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns because they are not completely informed and not fully aware of the implications of their preferred behaviors. In this context the "guiding role" taken up by experts is of great help. The pragmatic methodology, the bi-directional one mentioned above, seems to be the most appropriate for guaranteeing both the legitimacy and the coherence of sustainable wellbeing initiatives.

This was underscored by the final report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report), which, in addition to setting out a number of highly influential methodological and conceptual recommendations for improving the measurement of well-being, also pointed out that "If we want Government to be more ambitious and focus on delivery of well-being, wider open and public discussion will be crucial" (Stiglitz et al. 2009). More recently, citizen engagement has been identified as a key issue for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of new well-being measures in order to overcome political barriers and increase the political impact of alternative indicators (Whitby et al. 2014; see also the final report of the FP7-funded BRAINPOoL project).

We may sum up this discussion by saying that consultation and participatory processes need to be carried out in indicator development for at least three reasons (Trewin and Hall, 2010). Firstly, they can help ensure that the indicators are legitimate. Since there are many ways of considering progress, a framework for societal progress should be developed "in a way that respects the insights and aspirations of women and men of all races, classes, and political orientations" (Alkire, 2002). Secondly, consultation and participation can build a broader ownership of the indicators themselves, to better ensure they are used, supported and promoted (Hall, 2005). Last but not least, from the point of view of those managing the initiative, Hall (2005) considers the benefits from collaboration with experts, which "can include tapping into some of a nation's leading thinkers." He notes that "collaborating with them provides access to their skills, knowledge and resources" and that "understanding the opinions of civil society organisations can help ensure that the indicators do not reflect the potentially narrow viewpoint of the statistician or bureaucrat."

Indicators of well-being are being developed around the world with the aid of a wide range of research and practice. In the next sections we will offer a collection and a systematization of recent practices that involve stakeholders in the measurement of progress and sustainable development.

3. Procedural issues

All of the processes undertaken by national and local institutions with the aim of involve stakeholders and the general public carry significant costs in terms of time and financial resources. Different strategies to manage this process have been applied, ranging from consultation with a few experts or community leaders up to large scale public involvement. In addition to such variations in scale, different levels of participation can also be introduced. Information, consultation and active participation can be considered as part of a "community engagement continuum," with increasing levels of engagement and influence towards the "active participation" end of the spectrum[2]. Revit (2007) broadly divides public participation into five levels, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Levels of participation in terms of the participant's goals

Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information that helps them understand the problem, as well as any alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
Consult	To obtain public feedback for decision-makers on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered in decision making processes.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Source: Revit (2007)

Every approach comes with its own pros and cons, and the costs and benefits of each should be assessed. But as pointed out in the previous section, consultation and participation in some form are a crucial element in the development process of progress indicators. As Jackson (2004) claims, emphasizing the role of civil society in measuring and monitoring economic and social well-being, "the selection and privileging of social indicators are inevitably a political process informed by interests and values". Nevertheless, whichever approach is taken, some general aspects need to be considered. In particular it is important to consider who to engage, as well as when and how to manage this interactive process. At the end of the public engagement

2   see the report Engaging Queenslanders, A guide to community engagement methods and techniques, available at http://www.qld.gov.au/

stage of the process, engagement evaluation strategies should be implemented, since evaluation is an integral part of the planning and management of stakeholder engagement activities.

3.1 Identifying stakeholders for consultation

Since anyone in society, expert or otherwise, is entitled to have a legitimate view about what progress means, it is important to point out that the process of selection and definition of indicators should involve a much wider group than technical experts and members of institutions. The term "stakeholder", carries various definitions, but following the pioneering work of Freeman (1984), we can define it as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives". More specifically, "stakeholders are persons or groups who are directly or indirectly affected by a project, as well as those who may have interests in a project and/or the ability to influence its outcome, either positively or negatively" (IFC, 2007). Consequently, if the right stakeholders are not engaged, this will ultimately undermine what the organisation is trying to achieve.

In the specific context of initiatives aiming to develop indicators of progress and well-being, stakeholders can be identified with those "who will use and learn from them" (Innes and Booher, 2000). As reported in the deliverable 7.3 of the e-Frame Project "Guidelines of action for Stakeholders Inclusion and Activation of Deliberative Process" (cited as Ebid and Self, 2014), potential stakeholders must be identified from among those who:

- can positively influence the issue being considered (well-being, progress, sustainable development)

- may use the indicators, have researched the issues, are considered experts in this field or understand measurement issues in this area

- are impacted by decisions made based on these indicators, and are ultimately those who will use the indicators.

However, the selection of these people can be very difficult. On the one hand, stakeholders may include locally affected communities or individuals and their formal and informal representatives, national or local government authorities, politicians, religious leaders, civil society organizations and groups with special interests, the academic community, or other businesses. On the other hand, there is a significant trade-off between the time, resources and effort required to reach a wide range of stakeholders

and to obtain a consensus within a wider group, and the benefit of doing so in terms of legitimacy (IFC, 2007). As stated by Trewin and Hall (2010), over-consultation has to be avoided, since it is expensive and can slow down the whole project.

There are various ways to carry out the identification process, depending on the breadth of the audience the initiative aims to embrace. At a minimum, a reference or consultative group should be identified that it is reasonably representative of the community and their views. At the other extreme, the entire community can be directly involved. Reasonably, this also depends on the territorial scale to which the indicators refer. For public consultations on a national scale, the logistics of ensuring the representativeness of contributions is an even greater challenge than at the community or regional level.

It is difficult at the national level to report and unify the different contributions of local and regional communities, but the inclusion of these stakeholders is widely recognised as fundamental (Corburn, 2005; Negev and Teschner, 2013). Hence, according to Trewin and Hall (2010) in their practical guidance offered in an OECD working paper, the involvement of public is significant only if it seeks "the views of a broad range of stakeholders", even if not truly *public*. An open invitation, for example, is not a useful way to attract a particularly diverse audience and can lead to sample selection bias. Furthermore, to ensure that a range of opinions and different population groups are considered, some specific groups that are in general not well represented can be engaged, such as the elderly, disabled or those with young children. Ultimately, the identification of very different groups of stakeholders will require the use of different engagement approaches that must be tailored to suit the needs of the audience, taking into account potential stakeholders' potentially differing motivations for participating.

Past examples of successful initiatives suggest that once stakeholder groups have been identified it is best to develop a clear engagement and communication plan that specifies the aims and objectives of the engagement initiative and presents the detailed stages of the engagement activity. Indeed, as reported in the existing literature on civic engagement[3], the contribution of citizens to well-being data and statistics is likely to affect the project outcomes only if the audience have a clear notion of the final scope of the initiative, of how the information will be used and where the information will be published. This means that some efforts must be made to develop processes through which citizens can form opinions that are informed and responsible.

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3   See "The engagement planning workbook2005) "), State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment.

3.2 Stages of consultation

One of the challenges for stakeholder engagement is deciding at what stage in the development process stakeholders should be consulted. Trewin and Hall (2010) claim that, "some initiatives have foundered because consultation and collaboration was initiated too late or undertaken too quickly. That said, consultation on a prototype version can provide a more focused discussion than something more open-ended". Consequently, an engagement strategy is effective when the timetable for engaging with stakeholders allows sufficient time to analyse feedback, reflect on it and report back to users and stakeholders (Ebid and Self, 2014). The time to engage may depend upon the reason for engagement. In our case - of initiatives aimed to measure well-being - citizens can be involved in any of the following phases: i) determining frameworks for measurement; ii) indicator selection; iii) indicator presentation; iv) throughout the development process.

The first step in developing indicators of progress, well-being or sustainable development involves developing a framework that is able to define what is it you are trying to measure and what are the key dimensions that need to be investigated (Trewin and Hall, 2010). According to literature, two different approaches can be adopted: the conceptual approach, in which the framework is derived from a particular view of what progress means, and the consultative approach, in which the domains and dimensions are determined through discussion and agreement (Trewin and Hall, 2010; Ebid and Self, 2014). The choice between the two depends on the final aims of the initiative. In general one may say that adopting the consultative approach implies a wider stakeholder consultation, as the definition of progress has to be developed "in a way that respects the insights and aspirations of women and men of all races, classes, and political orientations" (Alkire, 2002). On the other hand, the conceptual approach is based on an already defined taxonomy of well-being that can requires relatively minor efforts to adapt.

Another stage at which stakeholders can be involved is the identification of indicators that are more suitable for measuring trends in the domains/dimensions of the framework. This more "technical" stage of consultation can be restricted to experts from academia, government departments, national statistics institutes and other organisations involved in research or data production. However, a wider public can be involved as well, since as pointed out by Trewin and Hall (2010) people from outside the statistical community can provide an interesting view on the indicators and their presentation.

After the identification of the indicators, different choices are available for presenting the well-being assessment. Options range from the presentation of a composite

indicator to an indicator set, and different decisions on how to weight the indicators can be taken. Feedback from stakeholder consultation can help to determine which is the most appropriate methodology to apply.

However, since, as Radermacher (2004) notes, "indicator construction cannot be linear but has to be an iterative decision-making process", employing consultation throughout the development process represents the best practice. Moreover, the importance of an ongoing collaboration is highlighted by the fact that indicator initiatives change over time, and only a continued collaboration can ensure that important issues are recognised and measured as they arise. Before any engagement, it is important to establish a clear framework, terminology, and definitions to ensure that the stakeholders have a clear understanding of the underlying assumptions about why the program or initiative is taking place, and that they share a common language.

3.3 Consultation tools

There are several methods and techniques for citizen engagement, ranging from innovative online tools to traditional face-to-face methods. The appropriateness, strengths and weaknesses of each are widely discussed in various handbooks that aim to provide a valuable list of tools to assist governments, institutions and organizations in the planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities[4].

One of the main points emphasized by the literature is that adequate time must be allowed for the engagement process, taking into account the resources that are available and the information that needs to be collected. The development of Web 2.0 and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is revolutionizing the manner in which information is produced and shared, significantly cutting the cost of reaching a wide audience that can now be more easily involved. To sum up, the most suitable method of engagement depends on the geographical level, the time available and types of stakeholders with whom one wishes to engage.

Local, national and international institutions and organizations have applied a significant array of tools and processes to involve citizens in measuring progress towards well-being through indicators. According to the classification by Ebid and Self (2014), these can be grouped into the following categories:

- formal consultations
- surveys
- online and social media

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4   See for example Queensland Government, Department of Communities, (2011); United Nation (2007); International Finance Corporation (IFC), (2007); State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment (2005), OECD (2001).

- public meetings

- roundtables and focus groups

- advisory and technical advisory groups

- presentation tools

- other engagement tools (i.e. tools that allow individuals to rate their own life satisfaction or happiness)

Formal consultations are a very effective way to engage with significant stakeholders when developing progress indicators. They can provide an open and transparent approach to learning the views of stakeholders who are directly invited to be interviewed. They generally carry a significant cost, since interviews need to be very well designed and require skilled specialists who are able to use the time effectively and elicit relevant and specific information.

The involvement of a wider audience can be achieved through the use of survey. This tool is capable of obtaining more considered responses than an interview, since participants have time to reflect on the questions before answering. The costs of using surveys are variable, depending on whether one uses a formal statistical survey (with sample selection etc.) or a simple online survey open to anyone who is interested in (this can lead to problems of selection bias).

Web based tools have grown increasingly popular, since they allow users to design, collect, and analyse responses in real time. Similarly, use of online social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and blogging forums) is also on the rise. As reported by Ebid and Self (2014), it must be recognised that social networks and blogs are "a relatively new phenomenon to the world of statistics, but hugely important for connecting with new and existing stakeholder groups, in a fast and far reaching way". It must be added, however, that though new technologies are powerful tools for citizen engagement, they also exclude part of the population. Some effort is therefore required to combat digital exclusion and to build up capacity in marginalised groups (e.g. the young, the elderly, the poor, and low-skilled).

Other tools for consultation are the public meetings designed to establish a dialogue between experts and citizens. They are often open to the public and the media and are a very accessible engagement method. Negative aspects are the high costs of organizing such meetings, recruiting participants and staging the event. Furthermore, the process of panellist selection can be difficult and great care must be taken to ensure that all relevant groups are represented.

Similarly and on a smaller scale, roundtables and focus groups are a suitable way to include experts with a range of views and backgrounds (Trewin and Hall, 2010). Advisory and technical advisory groups are another option, which is more formal and structured. In general, they consist of a group of representatives from a particular community or set of interests that is appointed to provide comments and advice on the selected issue. Generally, relevant community groups and agencies are invited to nominate members of the committee, though people with specific skills may also be asked. The members meet regularly to provide ongoing input and advice over the duration of the project. This tool can provide opportunities for cross-government collaborations, since members can come from a wide range of backgrounds.

Finally, an important aspect of stakeholder engagement is communicating with users and stakeholders after a consultation. Stakeholders are likely to be interested in knowing how an organisation has used the information they provided. Consultation can be designed as an ongoing process to keep up with stakeholder needs, in which case an effective presentational tool will help keep stakeholders engaged and may attract new previously unengaged stakeholders. In this field, the opportunities provided by digital technology are very valuable, providing information on well-being and societal progress initiatives in a much more innovative and interactive manner.

4. Consultation at the local level: case studies from Italy and Israel

This part of the paper examines four sub-national/local level initiatives in Italy and Israel that have been selected5 to explore in greater detail how different initiatives conducted stakeholder consultation processes to help design and promote indicators of well-being. This investigation was carried out through an online questionnaire designed to explore the main features of the selected experiences. Its main concerns were: (a) what the aims of the initiative were regarding civic engagement and how the related activities were carried out; (b) what the respondents believed to be the weaknesses and strengths of this process. The questionnaire was addressed to the general and field coordinator of each initiative. In the following paragraphs, after a

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5   The research for this section was carried out within Project WEALTH - Promoting Local Sustainable Economic Development (LSED) - an EU funded project that is working to develop an innovative systemic approach to local and regional development which places the emphasis first and foremost on the needs, rights and assets of local communities and their environments. Co-funded by the European Union, the project aims at facilitating the exchange of knowledge and the development of a theoretical and applicable knowledge base using the LSED paradigm. The project includes partners from the Negev region in Israel, the Bethlehem region in the Palestinian Authority, the Algarve region in Portugal, and the Puglia region and the NGO Lunaria in Italy. Within the project, the exchange between Italian and Israeli partners has been particularly fruitful in the research and implementation of well-being indicators, and we with therefore focus on some of the experiences from these two countries.

short description of the main features of each project, we discuss the results of the survey that investigated the management of each initiative's consultation process. We collected this qualitative information to advance our common understanding of existing practices, relying on the fact that quality and usefulness of well-being indicators at the local level are strictly related to effective stakeholder engagement.

4.1 Brief description of the initiatives

Israel's Progress Index ("Erech")

Israel's Progress Index ("Erech"), is the leading project of the Israeli Society for Sustainable Economics, a non-profit organization that aims to establish an index for progress and quality of life (QOL), promoting it as a central tool for decision making in Israel (Itay, 2008). The project was conducted between 2008 and 2013 with the involvement of different subjects, such as the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry for Environmental Protection, JDC Israel and other environmental and social NGOs. It was committed to the process of defining, measuring and fostering the progress and QOL of Israeli society as a whole. Subsequently the calculated Index at the national level was further developed at the community level, adopting a bottom up approach capable of involving all the relevant stakeholders. To achieve these objectives a strong cooperation has been forged between the Israeli public, the government, individual municipalities and NGOs.

New indicators of well-being - Province of Rome

The project "New indicators of well-being - monitor the quality of development in the Province of Rome" was conducted in collaboration between the administrative structure Province of Rome and the Italian civil society campaign Sbilanciamoci!, a group of 46 civil society organisations dedicated to building a society that considers the needs of its citizens and the environment. The initiative started in 2011, when the provincial government of Rome decided to adopt a set of well-being indicators to support the Strategic Plan of the Province of Rome, a strategy designed to gear political and policy action toward a new territorial development model. After a long phase of research and consultation, which involved a large number of stakeholders, the project led to the identification in 2012 of a set of indicators of societal progress, people's wellbeing, inequality and sustainability. The 49 indicators, collected at the municipal level and then re-aggregated for the six areas of the Province of Rome, have been used both as an information tool for citizens and as a guide for setting goals in public policy.

SardegnaBenessere

The Regional Planning Centre (CRP) of the Italian region Sardinia, which is part of the regional administration and acts as the coordinating authority of the EU Cohesion Policy in Sardinia, promoted this initiative for measuring well-being at the regional level to bring well-being to the centre of Cohesion Policy and orient local development towards shared objectives of improved quality of life. Its additional aim was to make better use of the available statistical information, including the recently developed Index of Multi-Deprivation for Municipalities of Sardinia. The initiative began in April 2013, when the Administration decided to translate the policy objectives into well-being dimensions, choosing indicators to measure progress towards the expected results by means of consultations with other regional stakeholders (OECD, 2014). While some steps have already been carried out, others are in progress, including the indicator selection and the evaluation and communication of results.

The regional well-being indicators initiative in Israel

Since January 2014, three Israeli organizations (Shatil, Heschel Center for Sustainability, JDC Institute for Leadership and Governance) have been working together to develop a framework for a set of regional and local indicators for well-being in Israel. The project aims to establish a link between local indicators and national indicators for well-being, translating the framework into a working set of indicators (including objective and subjective indicators) and assessing the set of indicators through at least 1 pilot project in the Negev. The basic assumption is that the definition of the sub-national level is varied in Israel: region, state, municipality, ecosystem and statistical division combine to make up a complex scenario, which can be compiled through several methods (e.g. top-down, ecological continuity, local definition, functional definition, etc.). The goal of the initiative is therefore to identify local/regional indicators that are flexible in their definition of locality, so they can be utilized on any sub-national level. This means that the objective of the sub-national indicators is twofold: on the one hand they must encourage and facilitate local discussion and development, and on the other they must empower the region to engage in meaningful dialogue with the national level and leading government processes.

4.2 Consultation processes

Consultations carried out by the four initiatives show overall similarities, but also several very relevant differences.

All of the initiative sought to include relevant stakeholders in the different phases of the project, but only Erech and Provincia di Roma developed an online questionnaire to involve citizens at large. In both cases we are talking about informal online surveys on non significative samples, which can of course provide useful and inspiring information and promote awareness of the initiative in society, but which do not offer statistically valid results. Erech collected 331 answers (from different communities and different languages) to its questionnaire, and Provincia di Roma collected around 600 answers. The former focussed on needs and the definition of well-being indicators, and the latter on the ranking of the different domains already identified as relevant to well-being. In the first case, people answering the questionnaire were asked to mark the indicator they found most important within each domain, out of a selection that was based on experts' choices and best practices; in the second case, at the Provincia di Roma, the use of this tool had the aim of building consensus around strategic choices and enforcing citizen involvement. In both cases the survey was conducted by an active web tool that allowed citizens to choose the well-being dimensions that were the most significant to them personally, helping the administration understand citizens' priorities. Furthermore, this tool was designed as a means to communicate progress and results, and further engage citizens by stimulating their curiosity.

A central element in all four initiatives was the institution of roundtables with experts and selected stakeholders and the organization of public workshops. This shared practice, however, was implemented with very different amounts of people, ranging from 40 in the Sardinian case to 400 in Erech's case. This discrepancy was also reflected in structural differences in the composition of participants. While in Sardinia the participation was very structured around organised groups, with 20 organizations engaged in the process, the regional initiative in Israel engaged 10 organizations and Erech just 3 out of 400, focusing primarily on citizens at large. Here the project cooperated with community leaders across the country, who assembled participants in their local communities to attend the workshops. In Sardinia, on the other hand, "most stakeholders belonged to an already existing group" (Institutional and socio-economic Partnership for the ERFD OP 2007-2013 – linked to the European structural funds) which the organizers chose to enlarge with some civil society representatives. In the case of the Provincia di Roma, the partnership with Sbilanciamoci! simplified this process, since it brought together 46 major Italian non-profit, peace, human rights, environment, fair trade, ethical finance

organisations to develop and monitor well-being indicators. The regional initiative in Israel selected the stakeholders based on "their being an inherent and embedded part of the region by activity, living, or by their institutional and formal role. National or professional stakeholders were selected for their direct formal involvement in well-being assessment, or professional/academic knowledge".

These structural differences led to more specific differences in the categories of citizens engaged. All initiatives included members of civil society organisations (however broad this definition might be) and public officers. The two Italian initiatives, more based on organised groups, focused on the inclusion of social partners (trade unions and trade associations) while the Israeli ones focused on specific groups like young people, senior citizens, immigrants, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc..

The development of the set of indicators happened mainly through the organization of focus groups and workshops. In some cases different thematic meetings were used to interact with different actors. The regional initiative in Israel organized public workshops and focus groups with local citizens living in the region and other workshops with specific groups: local and regional CSOs working in the area, local entrepreneurs and SME owners, public officers and people with special needs. Additional workshops are yet to be conducted with academic and professional leadership. Erech, on the other hand, used different tools for different stages of the project:

1. Informal surveys to assemble the main indicators for the preliminary well-being report card. For this stage, the involvement of experts was essential, including the national Bureau of Statistics.

2. An in-depth workshop for the process of public consultation (which involved over 400 people from across Israel), in which participants were asked to think about their quality of life and offer relevant indicators.

Sardegna Benessere also organized two meetings according to the different stages of the process: "the first to inform/brainstorm, the second to elicit/share point of views and priorities".

After the end of the participative processes, all four initiatives contacted the stakeholders again to inform them about the final results and how the information they provided had been used. Additionally, both the regional initiative in Israel and Provincia di Roma relied on some of them to better disseminate the results through society. In the Roman case additional channels designed to communicate results included public meetings, traditional media (i.e. print and television) and other methods such as written reports and workshops. An open data portal was also available for the first year, but due to budget limitations, it is Moreno longer operational.

5. Conclusion

Interviewed representatives from the four case studies highlighted a number of strengths and weaknesses in the consultation process. Among the strengths, the managers of the initiatives were impressed by the authentic and local views on well-being and the diverse dimensions and attributes of well-being that emerged from discussions at the local and regional level. Most of the stakeholders involved were aware of the theme's importance and had much to say. Since this kind of debate had never been attempted before in those territories, organizers received a substantial bank of possible indicators regarding the quality of life of these citizens and their communities.

The different situations in which the initiatives were developed also revealed different strengths. The regional initiative in Israel referred to the diverse types of knowledge that were being developed and analysed as an important contribution to better understanding the heterogeneous context of the Negev region. SardegnaBenessere, on the other hand, stressed the fact that many people involved in the project already knew each other and were used to working together, so that the work was conducted quite smoothly. A final positive result of the consultative process was noted by Erech, which made the entire set of tools and information accessible to the people and communities involved in the process. In some this resulted in specific places starting to use the indicators for the needs of the community, independently of the project itself.

At the same time, five major difficulties also emerged from the interviews:

1. It was difficult to create a diverse and balanced list of participants for the workshops.

2. It was difficult to convince people to take part in the public workshops; the idea of indicators was not always easy to explain and there was some confusion between the idea of completing survey on needs and the definition of new indicators of well-being.

3. Participants sometimes preferred to focus on individual dimensions of well-being rather than structural ones.

4. In some cases the people who participated understood the workshop as a way to criticize municipalities and national government.

5. It was not easy to convert all of the suggestions and hints provided by the stakeholders in the meetings into a format suitable for setting up an indicator system.

6. For both online surveys and workshops, it was impossible to present statistically valid results. However solid and coherent the method, participation was voluntary and therefore cannot be said to be a full and accurate representation of society.

In general we can observe that the structure of the participating population influences the strategies set up by local initiatives. A more homogenous context, like the one in Sardinia, could more easily benefit from the simple consultation of major organized civil society groups, while more complex societies like the Israeli ones need a deeper involvement of minorities to be able to provide a community view of well-being.

Finally, another aspect that emerges from the case studies is the potential problems that arise from the role that political authorities play within the initiatives. On the one hand, initiatives promoted by civil society may be seen as tools to criticize the government or local administration rather than a means of productively promoting change. On the other hand, if the initiative is promoted by a public authority people may not trust it, believing it may become a way to promote the government's agenda at the expense of their own. This phenomenon appears to become more prominent as the scale of action get smaller, where local problems are seen as a direct consequence of political action. Nevertheless, as the level of the administration the closest to citizens, local governments are the best placed to engage citizens in an open debate and find solutions to improve service delivery. Doing so may even serve to increase their social capital and foster public trust in local institutions.

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About Project Wealth

Project WEALTH: Promoting Local Sustainable Economic Development (LSED), is implemented with the support of the European Union's ENPI CBC-MED Program. By fostering an alternative economic paradigm whereby wealth is defined by the well-being of people and the planet, the project encourages new approaches of local and regional sustainable economic development. The project collaboration that includes partners from Israel, Italy, Portugal and the Palestinian Authority facilitates a range of knowledge exchange and networking platforms that enable the sharing of best practices, as well as the development of local initiatives

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Statement about the Programme

The Project Wealth: Promoting Local Sustainable Economic Development is implemented under the 2007-2013 ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Programme objective is to promote the sustainable and harmonious cooperation process at the Mediterranean Basin level by dealing with the common challenges and enhancing its endogenous potential. It finances cooperation projects as a contribution to the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of the Mediterranean region. The following 14 countries participate in the Programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Syria (participation currently suspended) and Tunisia. The Joint Managing Authority (JMA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French (www.enpicbcmed.eu).