

## Discussion

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I find the Perle and Tunstall papers interesting for somewhat different reasons. In order to elucidate my reactions, I would like to characterize the development of the interest in social indicators. In a recent survey of the literature on social indicators over the years 1964-1969, I found three recurring themes or claims for social indicators. That is to say, there occurs repeatedly the claims that social indicators can help (1) set goals and priorities, (2) evaluate specific programs, and (3) establish a system of social accounts. Suffice it to say that these are rather grandiose claims for social indicators and that they are rather easy to criticize. In fact, they have come under attack recently as noted in the Perle paper and we now realize that social indicators are more likely to contribute to improved descriptive reporting and social analysis.

Against this weak historical foundation, one particular problem seems to have emerged and come to the fore: how can we stimulate a commitment of professional social scientists to the creation and maintenance of a system of social indicators? For, without such a commitment, social indicators are certain to be unbearably subject to changing political pressures and circumstances.

One possible approach to the creation of a professional social science commitment to social indicators is to appeal to their ongoing interests in the theoretical and empirical analysis of social processes. Of these, two model building interests of social scientists seem to be particularly relevant to social indicators. First, social scientists are interested in models which relate various aggregate indices of social activity. For example, a social scientist might construct a model relating measures of the aggregate social mobility and the aggregate divorce rates of marriage cohorts. A second class of models which are of interest to social indicators focuses on the individual rather than the aggregate level. These seek to determine the distribution of various social activities among individuals. In brief, these models could be called models of social inequality. As an example, consider the various

sociological models of the relation of achieved status characteristics to ascribed statuses.

From this model building perspective, the contributions of these two papers may be specified. First, with respect to Perle's paper, I must concur with the comment that not only is it necessary to suggest apparently brilliant conceptual models but it is also necessary to verify them empirically. Moreover, I am pleased with the brief reports on specific projects at the Center for Urban Studies which are oriented towards the specification of theoretical models for various social processes and their estimation from data for a specific metropolitan area. However, without more detail, it is impossible to comment further on these efforts except to say that this is indeed the direction for future work if we are to achieve a commitment of professional social scientists to social indicators.

On the other hand, the Tunstall paper is a revealing report on the progress of the Office of Statistical Policy of the Federal Government on the development of a publication of social statistics. It appears to me that the development of the kinds of models (aggregate and distributional) described above is crucial to a clear understanding of what is happening in each of the nine areas of social concern which the publication will cover. Consider, for example, the topic of health care. If we had possessed well-specified models of the distribution of health care facilities, and if we had possessed the data requisite to the estimation of such models, then I am sure that we would have observed some very interesting changes in the parameters of the models during the last decade. As it is now, we can do little more than speculate about the changes which have created a crisis in health care. Thus, I find the work reported in the Tunstall paper useful because it will facilitate the development of models of social processes by social scientists. Perhaps, in the process, we will be able to specify other indicators which should be made available. At this point, I can only suggest that these may include (1) indicators on institutions, and (2) social psychological indicators.