

DISCUSSION  
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There are two possible ways of reviewing a paper such as the one presented by Dr. Brooks. One would be to give it empathetic review from the viewpoint of its own methodology; the other would be to critically evaluate it from the viewpoint of methodology in economics. The latter may seem unfair, but I gather not any more so than if the evaluation were done by someone in cultural or behavioral sociology, as distinguished from ecological sociology.<sup>1</sup>

First, one cannot help but express admiration for a project that will (and I quote):

"...develop a taxonomy of social conditions related to a general model that can provide an explication of quantifiable categories...

...collect pilot data that can be utilized in initial attempts to build inductively a systems model...

...develop time series through replication studies...

...establish interrelationships between a wide range of variables that will allow the development of models to assess social change (my italics)."

Such development of a universal system of social accounting is far more ambitious in scope than was our national income and product accounts. The latter are related to a half-dozen theoretical constructs developed by Keynes and his followers in the 1930's and 1940's: e.g.--aggregate demand and supply functions; propensities to consume and invest; multipliers and accelerators. The micro and macro sides of economic theory were never well integrated, but the research and policies that emerged from the Keynesian approach were enough to keep economists going; that is, until now.

Today economists' interest in the quality of life (and in social indicators) are related to problems of environmental pollution, discrimination (in access to housing, health, education, and employment) poverty, crime, etc. Economists, somewhat belatedly, admit the inadequacies of theory that excludes social costs from private pricing, and are working to extend existing theory to incorporate these costs. They are also concerned with production functions for various categories of public expenditures related to the problems mentioned above. And they are beginning to find a systems approach helpful, perhaps I should say, necessary in evaluating the side effects (i.e., feedback) from specified private and public behaviors.

What concerns me is the nature of the grand theorizing that implicitly directs the model explicated on page 16. Here the community ecosystem is classified first into (1) Cultural System, (2) Social Organization, (3) Population, and (4) Environment, and then sub-classified into

thirteen sub-categories: values and knowledge under (1); religion, polity, family, economy, and education under (2); institutional and social patterns, physical environmental characteristics, organic characteristics and cultural esthetics under (3); and finally, social and physical under (4). Are these sub-categories of equal levels of abstraction? Do they not themselves require structure as a director to data gathering?

I believe this confusion is reflected in the title of the paper: Toward the Measurement of Social Indicators... Am I wrong in thinking that Social Indicators are themselves "Measures", and that the authors are proposing the creation of a system of community social indicators, i.e. measures, that can be aggregated and disaggregated (as can the national income and product accounts) as required, and used to understand, monitor and hopefully, predict social change under alternative actions? I like the ecological framework but need assurance that meaningful generalizations can be made from the Iowa setting to more industrialized areas of the U.S. I know that rural-urban populations are increasingly similar in their life styles, but would community organization and decision-making in Des Moines be similar to that in other major metropolitan areas? Is a small town in Iowa like a small town in New York State? What does existing sociological knowledge tell us about the rural-urban continuum? Also, where is there provision for system linkage?

Then there is the assumption on page 12 that the ecosystem's purpose is "to benefit humans." Unfortunately, humans, like communities, are not homogeneous. They cannot all be benefited by the same social policy. There will be resistance to change. When I lived in Iowa, there were serious discussions between economists and sociologists as to whether or not certain communities--those not especially amenable to economic development efforts--should be allowed to "wither on the vine". In Philadelphia, where I spent my sabbatical leave, there was resistance to low-cost housing because it meant racial integration, resistance to urban development because it meant displacing persons from their accustomed homes, and everybody was against raising taxes for anything. When one group wins at the polls or through court decisions or by picketing, it is frequently at the expense of other groups. Conflict, not consensus, is the "name of the game".

I like the discussion on pages 12 to 14 on the "interrelationships of community ecosystem elements", but am puzzled by the statement that "social organization is also considered to be the mobilization of both human and physical resources for the delivery of services to the population within the community ecosystem." It is true that "no man is an island unto himself", but also that under our system, man sells his services (is this mobilization?)--in a private or public market--in exchange for money that in turn is used to buy the goods and services of others. True, more and more services are being provided through the public market via taxation, but the exchange

mechanism still remains and affects other elements in the subsystem, Social Organization, as family polity, and religion. Again, not everything is equal, but one must make some tentative decisions regarding the relative importance of dependent and independent variables that recognizes the conflict involved in these changing forms of exchange.

Finally, I must reveal my own bias. Although I think that research based on the ecological approach may contribute more to the understanding of pressing human problems than research based on culture or individual behavior, I personally am skeptical that general knowledge of interrelationships between a wide range of variables will result in the development of models useful for assessing social change. In the first place, I assume sociologists already know a lot about these interrelations, but like economists not enough about discontinuity and novelty. These are not easily recognized nor uniformly interpreted, even in a systems approach. My own

inclination would be to settle for a more modest focus--say on the planning and evaluation of social programs, since that is where the action is these days. For this we need models that are dynamic in character and that trace out the consequence of major new government programs or investments over time, and in considerable social, economic, and geographic detail. To my way of thinking, social indicators would thus emerge from social programs and avoid the limitations that exist in traditional theorizing in both sociology and economics. New theory would evolve from the new social actions that the indicators are supposed to evaluate, and not the other way around, as this proposal suggests.

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<sup>1/</sup> See "Cultural, Behavioral, and Ecological Perspectives in the Study of Social Organization", by Otis Dudley Duncan and Leo F. Schnore, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. LXV, Sept. 1959, pp. 132-146.