

## DISCUSSION

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The quest for improved and more scholarly methods of studying, describing, and analyzing the quality of life has, for a long time engaged the energy of social scientists. Intuitively, we all have similar thoughts in everyday conversations on the quality of life, and we meet with fair success in conveying the idea, when we say that certain people or peoples live "better" or "worse" than others. But, as Brooks and Wilcox have driven it home this morning, the accurate description and comparative analysis of the quality of life with the sophistication and scholarly rigor befitting a social scientist, presents a formidable, and as yet unsurmounted problem.

To paraphrase Brooks and Wilcox, each student of the quality of life has his own perspectives and orientation and each tends to visualize a unique role for indicators used in the description of the quality of life and their relevance to social planning, social development or in the social sciences.

Some two hundred years ago, Jeremy Bentham introduced utilitarianism into the body of social thought of his day. This concept was rapidly picked up by the then budding discipline of economics, and to this day, appropriately or inappropriately, economists employ a calculus of utility vs. disutility as a gauge of the quality of life. With this, I am afraid that I have revealed myself as an economist, but I hope that the rest of my discussion will not be too slanted in favor of my discipline.

For reasons that are well known to many in this group, utility vs. disutility is no answer to the types of questions raised by Brooks and Wilcox. Yet, these are the questions that society is also raising today not only because it is the current fad, but also because social scientists and students of society in the past, have not been successful in devising relevant methods of analysis. Hence, the present quest for social indicators.

Social indicators address, or perhaps I should say will, at some future date, address what Brooks and Wilcox call "transeconomic" issues. I would like to argue with that designation a little bit, because in my view those issues are every bit as "economic" as issues surrounding say, productivity or employment. After all, if we define economic topics as those having to do with the allocation of scarce resources among competing ends, very few topics in the social sciences would be left out of that designation. The relevant point here is that traditional economic theory for the largest part is not well suited for the study of the economic issues that Brooks and Wilcox prefer to label "transeconomic." But if and when viable social indicators as discussed by Brooks and Wilcox are developed, they will also serve as novel and highly useful economic indicators. I will come back to this shortly; right now, let me point out what I found particularly significant in the papers of Brooks and Wilcox and of Bixhorn, in the present context.

Throughout their paper, Brooks and Wilcox show an awareness of the importance of reality,

i.e., of a de facto set of norms, customs and practices of a community, in the construction of social indicators. This is brought out in the discussion of the systems model, and it is brought out in such phrases as, "... any meaningful measure of life conditions should reflect, in part, the preconception of people living in a community." I take this to mean that any achievements and accomplishments should be evaluated in reference to a going set of quests. These quests are defined in terms of de facto reality rather than on the basis of a preconceived set of normative conditions. What we are saying here is that it makes little sense to judge the performance of one community in terms of the value and goal structure of another community. If this is what Brooks and Wilcox had in mind, I couldn't agree more. If not, perhaps they will consider the point in their future work.

Without the presence of a relevant and realistic set of standards, the level of performance, although accurately observed and described, holds limited meaning. This is my chief concern about the otherwise fine work being done at the UN in Geneva, as quoted by Brooks and Wilcox. What social or economic significance can be attached to the level of newspaper distribution or caloric intake or nutritional balance, if the members of a given community or society don't care to read newspapers, don't wish to maximize (or minimize) caloric intake, and patently ignore norms of nutritional balance? I admit, I have not seen the latest work done at the UN, but a couple of years ago, my observations held true.

There is a small world of economists in which I claim membership, and in which primary interest is focused on the quality of life in reference to living standards and living levels. In that small world, there has been a long-standing debate concerning the proper meaning and definition of living standards vs. living levels. The substance of the debate is immaterial right now; suffice it to say that standards are usually thought of as something aspired, levels are something achieved.

This distinction sounds reasonable, but the measurement-oriented social analyst soon discovers that the distinction is largely anecdotal and will not readily lend itself to rigorous analytical treatment, either in inductive or deductive terms. My present research in the field is designed to sharpen the analytical rigor and widen the empirical content of the concepts of living standards and living levels. This, too, is social indicators research.

In case I have created the impression that this is a brand new approach to social indicators research, let me hasten to point out that there exists a wealth of analytical and empirical material in the field, much of it contributed by our chairman, Helen Lamale and by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. My own concept of living standards vs. living levels differs somewhat from that of Lamale and the BLS, inasmuch as I conceive of standards in terms of the de facto within a group--this can be an income group or a community--and of levels as the attainment of

individual consuming and home producing units in reaching those standards.

The standards, of course, can pertain to any type of undertaking that may be of interest to the sociologist, economist, political scientist, and of course, the statistician. The levels are measured strictly in relation to the given standard.

The pertinence of the living standards and living levels concept to the work of Brooks and Wilcox should be obvious, although I will return to it in a moment. Right now, I would like to observe that the method of cluster analysis, as proposed by Bixhorn, if I understand it correctly, appears to be an eminently well suited tool in the identification of living standard classes as well as in the study of living levels within a standard class. And if the levels of living within a standard class show sufficient clustering in certain patterns of consumption, home production, or other forms of social behavior, this may well warrant a reconsideration and redefinition of the living standard class using, of course, cluster analysis. As society changes, so does the structure and composition of living standard classes; hence the need for continuing surveillance and redefinition.

In conclusion and summary, the present day search for social indicators is hamstrung by the insistence on generally applicable and objective

standards of evaluation. This approach is replete with arbitrary value judgments and constantly seeks to apply the standards of one society in evaluating the performance of another. Some of these generally applied standards or norms lay a claim to scientific objectivity; this may be justified but of what real interest is that to the social scientist studying the quality of life? I am most pleased to see that Brooks and Wilcox do not subscribe to this approach, although, from time to time, they do appear to throw wistful glances in the direction of universally applicable social indicators. I do not mean to be totally cynical on this topic. Objective norms have their proper place, but before attempting to develop universally applicable, scientific, and objective social indicators, I believe we would do well in paying a great deal more attention to relevant standards observed by a community and the relevant levels of attainment.

This is an inductive approach, and as such, it is in absolute need of workable statistical tools, such as the Bixhorn-type cluster analysis. And even if this method of approaching the problem of social indicators does not offer instant normative appraisal of the quality of life, it will give us a useful illustration of the goal structure and attainment structure of a given standard group or community.