Towards a Decent Society.

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Why society?

- Focus of research has been on happiness, satisfaction or wellbeing of individuals
- But individuals live in societies so we need to understand the context of wellbeing
- Governments need to construct circumstances in which people can be well to provide that context
Why decent?

- Should be good enough rather than good – any society is a work in progress
- Not only a league table
- Different routes to the same level of “decency”
- Has a balance of different elements, balanced scorecard to achieve what we call decency
What is a decent society?

- Where basic needs are covered across the life course for everyone
- Where people are enabled to live their social lives in safety and peace
- Where people are empowered to lead the lives that they want to lead (if not in the conditions of their choosing)
- Where human rights of all are respected
- Where there is parity of recognition, representation and resources
What lead us to this?

- Started by looking at societies that were problematic: Former Soviet Union, Rwanda
- Trying to understand what had gone wrong and how a better society could be reconstructed
- Lead us to look at different models of wellbeing
- Social quality model seemed to offer best and most comprehensive way forward as a way of studying the society as a whole
- But we were also interested in policies to improve wellbeing
- SQ was mainly interested in describing societies. We were interested in trying to show ways for policies to improve societies = Decent Society
Differences between the Decent Society and Quality of Life

- Quality of life approaches try to go beyond individual happiness to measure a variety of domains
- Subjective and objective measures used
- Way of informing policies
- Domains can be drilled down to indicators

BUT

- Problem with this approach is that it results in a list of indicators with no criteria for choosing one or the other
- Generally a-theoretical or theory has been submerged
- Can it include non-European and poorer countries?

THE DECENT SOCIETY CAN BE APPLIED ACROSS THE WORLD INCLUDING DEVELOPING SOCIETIES
Differences to other Sociological approaches

- Group of scholars developed around “happiness studies” (Cieslik, Bartram, Hyman, Thin)
- Should see happiness as biographical project
- How people reflect on their lives
- Socially constructed
- Qualitative rather than quantitative

BUT

- Sociological alternatives based on individual interviews – social constructionist
- Need for an approach that looks at the quality of society

THE DECENT SOCIETY LOOKS AT THE CONDITIONS OF SOCIETY USING A CRITICAL REALIST MODEL.

THE DECENT SOCIETY CONSIDERS SOCIETY AS A WHOLE
Differences between the Decent Society and Social Quality

- Social quality theorists set up a framework for social policies
- Applied to European Union to correct the economistic bias
- Set up series of objective indicators to measure four quadrants: socio-economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion and social empowerment

BUT

- Mainly relevant to European societies with developed welfare states
- Subjective outcomes not relevant for this approach

THE DECENT SOCIETY CAN BE APPLIED ACROSS THE WORLD
WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENTS DO?
Measuring the Decent Society

- Until now we have used mainly surveys to look at subjective evaluations of each quadrant (ESS, EQLS etc.)
- A way of understanding how people experience society according to different dimensions. Using slightly different variables each time
- But we were criticised for looking at outcomes rather than conditions of Social Quality
- In the book we look at conditions for DS across the world using world statistics.
- Have 121 countries (Out of 250) for which statistics available.
- More objective conditions
Economic security

- Sufficient resources for all individuals & households to procure food, shelter, health care, education for themselves & their children
- Having the resources to have the kind of work life and social activities that will enable them to use any of their capabilities, according to choice.
- National income and the extent to which it is stable or precarious,
- Extent to which a country has food security (is able reliably to feed its population)
- The ‘social wage’ - the extent to which centrally provided services may substitute for / complement the ability to purchase them as private individuals or households and spread risk across the lifespan
- Having enough reserves to cope with shocks & changes (resilience)
Social Cohesion

- Agreement on the rules of the game – even if we do not entirely agree with them!
- Solidarity and group harmony
- Trust – the ability to trust other people to ‘act in role’ rather than pursuing individual advantage,
- Faith that organisations will fulfil the functions assigned to them, and trust in government and in financial institutions. (e.g. low corruption)
Social Inclusion

- The extent to which all inhabitants are full members of the society in terms of the ability to exercise their capacities and to make a contribution.
- Three levels: being part of your society, part of your community, part of social networks and families
- Human Rights for all are accepted and implemented
- Economic inclusion
- Gender is another aspect – are women citizens, or do they have ‘second-class rights’?
- Recognition - identity rights respected (gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality etc) and the intersectionality of these identities
Empowerment

- Enabling the people to acquire the capability to participate fully in the society
- Putting in place the physical and social infrastructure to enable empowerment
- Includes such things as Education, Health and the infrastructure of communication,
- Political freedoms and the opportunity to contribute to political debate
- Socio-psychological inclusion - the extent to which people are aware of having any freedom of choice, and the extent to which they think things can be changed by their own efforts.
How is a Decent Society model different from other models?

- Based on the social quality model developed in Europe and elsewhere
- Emphasises governance issues (internationally and nationally)
- World wide relevance including developing societies
- Not measuring outcomes (as in other models) but where possible rather with providing the conditions
Sources and measurements

- DSI score ➔ Quadrants ➔ Domains ➔ Indicators

- **Economic Security**: National income & its stability, food security, social wage

- **Social Cohesion**: Group harmony, trust (general & institutional), perception of fairness, good governance, acceptance of immigration

- **Social Inclusion**: Human rights, absence of poverty, inequality, gender inclusion, financial inclusion, work inclusion, friends and family support, active involvement, feeling of safety

- **Empowerment**: Education & health, entrepreneurship, political freedom, communications, work, efficacy of work, awareness of choice
Calculation of quadrants, domains and indicators

- Indicators, measured comparably: averaged and then standardised
- Indicators with different measurement scales: standardised and then averaged
- **Domains**: averages of primary indicators, restandardised
- **Quadrants**: averages of domain scores, restandardised
- **DSI Score**: average of quadrant scores, restandardised
### Some country scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>DSI Score</th>
<th>DSI Rank</th>
<th>Rank Econ</th>
<th>Rank SC</th>
<th>Rank SI</th>
<th>Rank Emp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
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Can drill down: Quadrant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DSI Score</th>
<th>Quadrant Empowerment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>70.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>77.81</td>
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# Domain Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DPolitic</th>
<th>DHealth</th>
<th>DEduc</th>
<th>DInfra</th>
<th>Dwork Availabl</th>
<th>DChoice</th>
<th>DBelief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>68.55</td>
<td>65.74</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>59.98</td>
<td>46.52</td>
<td>66.50</td>
<td>53.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>67.70</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>64.73</td>
<td>64.68</td>
<td>53.38</td>
<td>76.86</td>
<td>56.25</td>
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## Variables and sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pol</strong></td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>Freedom of Expression (FH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmFreeAs</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Freedom of association (FH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmPP</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>Political pluralism (FH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>REmVoiceWGI</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>Voice and Accountability (WGI)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Infra</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmElec</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>Electricity (% of population with access)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmNet</td>
<td>78.20</td>
<td>89.80</td>
<td>Internet users (% of population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmMPhone</td>
<td>103.00</td>
<td>125.00</td>
<td>Mobile cellular subscriptions (% pop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jobs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmBusGWP</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>Good place to set up a business (GWP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmBusWB</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>Ease of Doing Business Index (WB)</td>
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<td>REmJobs</td>
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<td>43.00</td>
<td>Good time to find a job (GWP)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Choice</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REmAut</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>43.00</td>
<td>Personal autonomy (FH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>REmChoiceGWP</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>Freedom to live how like (GWP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>REmChoiceHDI</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>Freedom of choice (HDI)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Belief</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>REBelief</td>
<td>53.47</td>
<td>56.25</td>
<td>If you work hard you can get on (GWP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ways of applying the Decent Society (1) Collapse of welfare states

- Began by looking at former Soviet Union & Eastern Europe in 1990s & early 2000s (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan)
- Retreat of state, removal of economic security, existential uncertainty, collapse or retreat of state institutions
- Mass emigration (in Moldova and Georgia) resulted in changed family relationships (parents-children, men-women)
- A good model of society from which to understand what was going wrong
- People no longer understood the rules of the game.
- Health consequences also a result of social and system collapse
- Not due so much to life style factors (smoking, drinking and diet) but to sense of disorientation and dislocation (anomie).
- Survival strategies on a micro level
Ways of understanding The Decent Society (2) Improving societies

- Compare improvement in Accession States between 2003 & 2007
- Economic factors less important in 2007 than 2003
- Empowerment more important – feeling able to control life and not feeling left out
- Social cohesion more important and inclusion still important
- Look at China – (WVS 2012). Shifts in population and rising prosperity. Only saving money important out of economic factors
- Empowerment most important – having choice & control over life
- Social harmony seen by Chinese government as a way of tempering effects of economic change
Ways of understanding the Decent Society (3) European Social Survey 2012

- Offered a far wider range of variables
- Module on wellbeing 2012
- Did not measure against life satisfaction but rather tried to construct quadrants from range of relevant domains
- Social quality index
- Predictable results (Norway on the top and Ukraine on the bottom) but composition of SQ differed – countries scored higher or lower on different quadrants
Conclusions

- Way of measuring conditions of a decent society rather than the outcomes
- Need to understand that all quadrants are equally important—how different factors are balanced
- They interact and contribute to one another
- Way of pointing out what can be done
- Way of showing what has been done elsewhere as examples (some societies low or high on one quadrant)
- Understanding way in which societies can be built and rebuilt
- The SQ model can apply to both quantitative and qualitative studies