Exploration of subjective well-being: does people’s life assessment matter?

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Background

• Development: people’s well-beings as its ultimate goal
  – MDGs summit in September 2010: Bhutan’s PM (Jigme Thinley) proposed ‘Happiness’ as the ninth goal.
  – Growing consensus to respect one’s happiness rather than mere pursuit of GDP
Happiness Paradox in Japan

Trends on life satisfaction and per capita GDP

Gap!
In 2010, the Japanese government conducted a survey on SWBs (happiness/life satisfaction) to start some work on measures of well-beings.

- On average, the Japanese happiness is 6.47 (n=2895)
- Women > Men
- Older less happy...
Why not GDP?

- Important to test if indeed GDP is not really effective to reflect social reality.
  ➔ To examine if alternative objective measures could be effective enough to capture people’s well-beings
Correlation tests reveal that:

- GDP–SWB is much weaker than HDI–SWB.
- Changes in HDI and those in social and economic indicators such as unemployment, social misery (suicide rates), and TFR (population growth) are correlated (but not for GDP).
- HDI can be regarded as an indirect measures for assessing societal conditions and may reflect livelihood condition better than GDP.
- Suggest to use alternative measures to assess social progress.
Another practical issue is how one can incorporate SWBs (happiness/life satisfaction) component into local development plan, policy-choice and action.

➔ To examine how people’s life assessment helps to understand life satisfaction.

➔ Let us look into this by focusing on a project in the Hyogo prefecture in Japan.
Another practical issue is how one can incorporate SWBs (happiness/life satisfaction) component into local development plan, policy–choice and action.

- To examine how people’s life assessment helps to understand life satisfaction.

- Let us look into this by focusing on a project in the Hyogo prefecture in Japan.
Hyogo Prefecture

Population: 5.59 million
Area: 8,395 km$^2$
The Hyogo Prefecture’s Vision 21 Project

- Development of the Hyogo Vision project (started 2001):
  - Hyogo’s vision formed by the prefectural government through the vision committee members (focus group, etc.)
  - 2030 as the target year
  - 4 key domains: creative civil society, vital work, diversified interactions, environmental priority were identified by the government in 2001.
The Hyogo Prefecture’s Vision 21 Project

- Need for indicators to monitor the vision’s implementation
  ➔ Survey on people’s life in order to realize “Beautiful Hyogo” (since 2002)
- Can we develop a tool?
  ➔ Essential to learn how people’s life assessment and life satisfaction are related and in what way.
Questionnaire-based sample survey

- People’s Life Feeling and Satisfaction Survey data (2002–2010 annually) in the Hyogo prefecture
- Type of questions (in 2008: 71 questions) included are:
  1. questions asking one’s own behavior, practice and knowledge,
  2. questions asking one’s perspectives on own community, and
  3. questions asking own perception over the society in large.
Creating “Life Assessment Domains”

- Using the data collected by this survey, calculation of scores for the three different groups by factor analysis (varimax rotation, eigenvalue more than 1):

  - **Personal** Life Assessment Domains:
    - 9 domains are identified
  
  - **Community** Life Assessment Domains:
    - 4 domains are identified
  
  - **Societal** Life Assessment Domains:
    - 2 domains are identified
15 principal components

- **PLAD**: Community Action, Environmental consciousness, Modern Culture, Community Pride, Work, Safe Livelihood, Natural Environment, Health, Secure Livelihood

- **CLAD**: Convenience, Social Inclusion, Safe Clean community, Economic Vitality

- **SLAD**: Hope and Challenging, Justice and Safe
• Significant factors for life satisfaction (ordinal logit):
  
  – Controlled individual attributes (age, gender, year of residence, job types, household structure, marital status)
  – Domains affecting life satisfaction include personal, community and society.
15 principal components: significant factors

- **PLAD**: Community Action, Environmental consciousness, Modern Culture, Community Pride, Work, Safe Livelihood, Natural Environment, Health, Secure Livelihood

- **CLAD**: Convenience, Social Inclusion, Safe Clean community, Economic Vitality

- **SLAD**: Hope and Challenging, Justice and Safe
Different levels of life assessment matter to one’s life satisfaction

- **Personal level factors**: Community pride, health, culture, safety, environment
- **Community level factors**: Social inclusion, safe and clean community
- **Societal level factors**: Hope, challenging, justice, and safety

To improve life satisfaction: individual-based improvement is not enough! ➔ more research required.
Objective and subjective

Well-being

Objective

- Various Indicators

Subjective

- Perceptions by domains
- Open-ended Views
Life satisfaction and human development (capability concern)

Life satisfaction (Key domains)

- Personal level factors
- Community level factors
- Societal level factors

Individual attributes, etc.

Subjective life assessment

Capability enhancement and social progress

Objective community/societal measures (HDI or Well-being Index, etc.)
Life Assessment and SWBs

• Use of subjective survey regularly would help us to understand how people assess their life.
• Especially, it would be better to cover different levels (personal, community, and societal) and tracing changes in livelihood, which are influenced by the type of lifestyle.
• Needs to have both objective data and subjective assessment data to carefully examine people’s well-beings (not enough without each other).
• Local well-being data/index? For whom and for what?
  – Local-based feedback system to people and government, which assist “development process.”
• Asking questions own happiness or life satisfaction gives an opportunity to reflect own life)
ขอบคุณ ครับ
Thank you very much
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