SOCIAL INDICATORS FOR NEW YORK LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Cornell University

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INTRODUCTION

• With fiscal stress, local governments must be careful that efforts to cut budgets to ensure fiscal solvency do not cause a decline in services

• Social indicators are tools to assess economic and social impacts of budget and service decisions

• Contents of this presentation:
  • history
  • cases
  • components
  • uses
  • limitations
Social Indicators:
Quantitative or qualitative wellbeing measures of individuals or communities in social, economic, and environmental terms.
**Brief History of Social Indicators**

- Historical dichotomy between economic and social indicators
- Today, they are complements: social indicators help promote economic development

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social Indicators</th>
<th>U.S. Bureau of Labor Establishment (Early Systematic Collection of Social Statistics)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>First social indicators: religious leaders, social reformers</td>
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<td>1820</td>
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<td>1840</td>
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<td>1900</td>
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### Brief History (continued)

**Hoover administration**
- Great Depression
- WWII

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<th>1920</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<td><strong>National-level social indicators</strong></td>
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<td>economic over social indicators</td>
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<td>renewal interest</td>
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<td>inductive vs. descriptive approaches</td>
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<td>subjective indicators</td>
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<td><strong>Enrichment and expansion of wellbeing and sustainability concepts</strong></td>
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Research and findings under the direction of Dr. Mildred Warner, Department of City and Regional Planning

Cornell University
**Key Elements in Case Studies**

- **Triple Bottom Line**: social, economic, environmental factors that affect people’s wellbeing
- **Promote citizen engagement, community planning, policymaking**
- **Each community develops a framework that reflects its unique needs and community aims**
**Design Process**

1. Decide **what** to measure and **why**
2. Identify **sources of information**: administrative data or survey data
3. Draw up **possible indicators**
4. **Narrow** the list
5. Decide **how and when** to ask questions for a survey
6. **Pilot-test indicators** to ensure data is not too difficult to collect or disadvantageous for analysis
7. Ensure **findings** can be **correlated** with other sources of information
8. Make the most of the indicators for **social performance management**: **integrate** them into an ongoing assessment process
**DESIGN CRITERIA**

1. **Valid** — well-grounded in data
2. **Appropriate** to priority issues
3. **Consistent and reliable**
4. **Cost-effective**
5. **Understandable** by a diverse audience
6. **Represents many aspects** of an issue
7. **Comparable** to other communities
8. **Attractive** to the media
INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDY: AUSTRALIA

Community Indicators Queensland (CIQ)

Community Indicators Victoria (CIV)

http://www.communityindicators.net.au

- One of **the first** community indicator projects in Australia
- Includes **social, economic, environmental, democratic and cultural wellbeing factors**
- Ballarat City Council made budget and investment decisions in health using CIV

Ballarat, Victoria, Australia
http://www.communityindicatorsqld.org.au

- Addresses **resilience domains** and **community wellbeing**
- Aims to identify a link between recovery efforts and available resources to help disadvantaged communities
- Currently being piloted in 3 communities
- Innovations from CIQ can be borrowed to promote community resilience in NY towns affected by disasters

Southeast Queensland flood in January 2011
Source: http://www.theaustralian.com.au
http://bniajfi.org/

- BNIA is a partner of the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP)
- Identified a tipping point: found that neighborhoods with four percent or greater vacancy rates experienced population declines from 2000 to 2010
- City now has ten-year plan to demolish ~4,000 distressed structures and push for increased code enforcement and receivership efforts
Two block groups have high poverty and little investment
- 2014: launched public web GIS application
- Tracks quality of life and provision of services
- Both government and the public can use the data
- Won award: Technology Service Award

Source: http://compass.durhamnc.gov/
ACT ROCHESTER

http://www.actrochester.org/

- Focuses on the greater Rochester, NY, region
- Interactive and open source data website
- Indicators selected by a nonprofit research group in collaboration with citizen focus groups
- Recent report on poverty: Rochester has 3rd highest concentration of extremely poor neighborhoods among major US cities
- Highlighted policies to address problem: invest in the urban core and disperse the poor by expanding low-income housing in the suburbs
USEFUL TOOLS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

NYS Comptroller Environmental Indicators

http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/fiscalmonitoring/
- Indicators measured: demographics, property, fiscal data
- Scoring Mechanism
- Fiscal Stress Monitoring System

National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP)

http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/
- Shares administrative data
- Organizes indicators by domain: arts and culture, health, affordable housing, etc.
- Mission: democratize information
CONCLUSION

● Social indicators are useful tools to:
  ○ Aid policy making
  ○ Identify community needs
  ○ Measure quality of life
● They can assess impacts of budget and service delivery decisions in New York
● Local governments, unions and citizen groups can partner to design a social indicator survey for local governments in New York
see our full report at:

www.mildredwarner.org/restructuring/fiscal-stress
What are the most feasible methods for gathering survey indicators in NYS?
What are the expected social impacts of the property tax cap? What indicators could measure these?
Which NYS cities/communities have the best volunteer base to help with the creation and collection of indicators?
Which NYS cities/communities are in most need of indicators?
How can we get citizens involved in the design process to identify community needs?
Which domains are priorities?