

Abstract: The good life index in Southern Denmark

The Good Life is the vision for the Regional Development Plan in the Region of Southern Denmark. The plan sets out policies and initiatives designed to improve the economic as well as the social well-being of people and better the overall opportunities to live the good life. The plan is a development strategy for the region and provides an overarching instrument for defining a holistic, long-term sustainable regional growth. It is thereby broader in scope than a sectorial business development plan. The plan constitutes and coordinates the basis for activities and plans concerning regional growth. Therefore, we do not only measure economic indicators such as GDP and productivity but have also developed an index to measure the overall progress in society.

The Index is inspired by the work of Russian-American psychologist Abraham Maslow, who set up a hierarchy of human needs in the form of a pyramid. The Index consists of five sub-indices which measure residents' health, security, relationships, self-fulfilment and surroundings. Just as the Maslow-pyramid, the index can be illustrated as a pyramid with the most basic needs placed at the bottom. Once this foundation is in place, the other needs further up in the pyramid become important driving forces for the possibility of living The Good Life.

Each of the sub-indices is measured using 5 indicators of perceived individual conditions and 5 socio-economic indicators. Self-fulfilment, however, only consists of individual indicators. The 20 socio-economic indicators are measured using existing data sources. The 25 individual indicators are measured using a panel consisting of up to 4000 citizens and will be repeated annually.

The number of indicators and the use of both individual and socio-economic indicators provide a detailed understanding of people's opportunities to live The Good Life and it allow us to obtain information about the relationship between the residents' perceived conditions and the socio-economic conditions. Our first results clearly illustrate the importance of including both measures. Some areas in the region have poorer social and economic conditions than others. However, when examining the individual indicators, the same areas are often above average. In other words, socio-economic indicators are important but lower scores on these measures do not prevent people from living The Good Life. Therefore it is important to include measures of both aspects of The Good Life.

The index has received attention from political decision-makers and the media. In future the index will provide knowledge of conditions in the individual municipalities, and it will be possible to follow developments over time and monitor the progress/decline of The Good Life. The index is therefore an important development instrument because it gives us new comprehensive understanding and knowledge of strengths and weaknesses and thereby also a starting point for policies. Used this way the index will form the basis for political decisions and initiatives and can be used to follow up on and adjust their effects.