Measuring Happiness, Satisfaction and Social Well-being in Hong Kong, China: Introducing the Gross National Realisation Measurement

By Dr. Thomas Yuen Wai Kee and Dr. Mark Greene

In addition to being China’s wealthiest city, Hong Kong distinguishes itself as a major international and regional financial service centre. Although the great majority of the population is Chinese, the average citizen’s lifestyle is highly westernized thus providing a mix of traditional Chinese and western cultures. These factors make Hong Kong, China a unique place to study the well-being of a society, especially in light of the accelerating pace of overall globalisation.

The Economic and Well-being Project at Hong Kong Shue Yan University has been conducting telephone surveys to measure various indicators related to Subjective Well-being among the Hong Kong public for the past five years. The Project’s primary objective has been to review the general public’s perception of Hong Kong’s economic progress and has done so by querying residents about their confidence in economic trends, feelings about whether they expect a ‘happy’ Christmas and their hopes for a brighter future. Much like other large Chinese cities, Hong Kong faces an air pollution problem. As public awareness of this issue has increased, we have also undertaken surveys querying respondents as to how much they were willing to pay to protect the environment. Indeed, most of the group’s findings have been parlayed into government policy recommendations and reported widely in the local press.

Designed by Thomas Yuen Wai Kee and Mark Greene, the Project’s most recent survey collected data from 2,790 respondents over the first two weeks of March 2008. By adding a psychological dimension to the existing economic approach, the researchers broadened the definition of ‘happiness’ and opened a discussion as to how to better identify some of the components that make up this commonly used term which regularly eludes a satisfying definition.

A HIERARCHICAL MODEL

To this end, the core module of the Happiness, Satisfaction and Social Well-being survey was devised to rank respondents’ respective positions on a model resembling Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs. We believe using a hierarchical model successfully deepens the definition of happiness for the purpose of measuring the progress of a society. This is done by targeting the extent of the respondent’s self-reported needs met as a microcosmic indicator of a given society’s collective state of self-realisation. Expressed numerically, this is the Gross National Realisation measurement (GNR).

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Highlights

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Presentations and Video from the Conference "Turning Statistics into Knowledge"
WHY ANOTHER SCALE TO MEASURE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING?

Clearly evident in the literature is an abundance of indicators designed to measure life satisfaction and happiness. Kim-Prieto et al (2005) outline three main approaches to this scientific endeavour: global assessment of life, recollection of past emotional experiences and “an aggregation of multiple emotional reactions across time”. What Maslow brings to this discussion is the elegant nucleus of his theory that positions our pursuit of well-being as one need among many others, ranging from basic survival (water, food, shelter, etc…) at the bottom of a pyramid to self-actualization at the top. Here, an individual’s position at one level of needs, such as security and safety, prevents exploration of higher basic or growth needs until those of the current level have been met. Conversely, Maslow postulated that once a certain grouping of needs has been met, a person is naturally motivated to ascend to the next level to address the needs awaiting satisfaction there. These can be categorized into needs for physical survival, security, love/relationship, self-esteem and self-realisation, respectively.

As can be seen in the figure above, questions regarding the respondent’s sense of personal safety and security allow us to gauge what percentage of Hong Kong respondents are certain of those basic needs listed in Maslow’s second level are being met. Determining whether the respondent has someone in their life to care for them in the event of a serious illness allows us to ascertain if love/relationship needs are being met. The last questions of our survey query the respondent’s sense of self-esteem and whether he or she is on track or already realizing his or her full potential.

WHAT IS NEW ABOUT THE GNR MEASUREMENT?

First, we can relegate the term ‘happy’ to the back burner when eliciting measures of subjective well-being. This is helpful as no number of dictionary definitions can aid in a calculation of this term although some have been proposed (e.g., GNH). Second, the GNR measurement opens a vertical dimension of satisfaction that has as its base those necessities required for survival. Clearly, a collective goal of self-realisation implicitly requires the satisfaction of those other needs that are not necessarily linked to income levels. Further, positing and measuring the satisfaction of ‘higher’ needs in a cumulative framework provides a government a clearer picture of its citizens’ collective state of well-being on a needs met basis.

The following weighted average formula can easily be applied to calculate the GNR:

\[
GNR = \sum_{i=1}^{4} WiCi
\]

where \( Ci \) represents the percentage of certainty of the four ‘needs’ questions; \( C1 = \text{Need for Security}, \) \( C2 = \text{Love/Relationship}, \) \( C3 = \text{Self-Esteem} \) and \( C4 = \text{Self-Realisation}. \) \( Wi \) is the distributed weighting; \( W1=0.1, W2=0.2, W3=0.3, W4=0.4 \)
Our survey assigned the numerical weighting indicated above after taking into account only those positive responses of which the respondent was certain: Security = 1; Love/Relationship = 2; Self-Esteem = 3 and Self-Realisation = 4. Applying the formula above to our data (n = 2,790) allows us to determine that 0.328 is Hong Kong’s baseline GNR out of a maximum possible value of 1.

DISPARITY MOST PROMINENT ACROSS INCOME LEVELS

The research revealed that respondents from low-income families consistently fell short of their high-income counterparts in fulfilling most of these needs. The table below summarizes these results across low and high household income levels.

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<th>Monthly Household income in HK$</th>
<th>Distribution of GNR of Hong Kong Population</th>
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<td>Abject income</td>
<td>Below 4,000</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>4,000 to 7,999</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Median income</td>
<td>8,000 to 14,999</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td>15,000 to 29,999</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
<td>Above 29,999</td>
<td>27%</td>
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(Note: monthly household income above is expressed in Hong Kong dollars, where HK$4,000 equals approximately US$512 and HK$30,000 roughly equals US$3,850).

From the GNR analysis, low-income family members appear unable to fulfil higher needs. Considering such factors as the recent decline in the stock market, the commensurate loss of investment value and rising inflation, low-income families may not see as much happiness as their high-income counterparts any time soon. Although the Hong Kong government is engaged in developing commercial interests, which offer a modicum of benefits for all, some citizens will undoubtedly be left behind thus increasing the number of people whose needs will remain unmet.

HOW IS THIS IMPORTANT?

In proposing a new scale, we hope to provide governments a greater understanding of their constituents’ frustrations, needs and accomplishments. The GNR provides a rounded picture of human experience and, it is hoped, an accurate measure of any given society’s progress. We assigned self-realisation the greatest weight in our index because we believe that satisfaction of such a need represents a worthy objective for any individual, or society as a whole, and thus constitutes an appropriate measure of progress. We say this without losing sight of the fact that the need to self-actualise cannot be addressed until other more basic needs have been met. This is made poignantly obvious by the fact that millions of people in the world are unable to consistently meet basic survival needs.

On a parting note, we would greatly appreciate your participation in the international version of this survey as we launch our pilot programme to test the validity of this index across many countries. Please click the following link; we would greatly appreciate 2-3 minutes of your time in filling out the survey: [http://wellbeing.hksyu.edu/quest](http://wellbeing.hksyu.edu/quest). We hope the GNR will provide insight into our collective endeavour to measure the progress of societies. Please take our survey:

**Economic and Well-being Project (English):** [http://wellbeing.hksyu.edu/](http://wellbeing.hksyu.edu/)


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What makes a successful set of progress indicators?

By Ms. Kate Scrivens, Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies

There is an old philosophical problem which asks whether a tree falling in an empty forest can make a sound if there is no one around to hear. In a way, a similar question can be asked of indicators: how can we be sure an indicator set has an impact if we do not know how it is used and by whom? A current OECD research project aims to shed some light on the role of indicator sets as catalysts for change, asking the question: What makes a successful set of indicators? The research will include selected case studies of high-profile key indicator sets and interviews with indicators experts from around the world. A report with findings and recommendations will be completed in December 2008.

Recent years have seen an explosion of interest around the world in the development of new, more comprehensive indicators of social progress. Projects are being run by all kinds of organisations – governmental agencies, charitable foundations, community groups – and covering a range of geographic areas, from the international to the neighbourhood level. Despite the diversity of aims and approaches of all these indicator initiatives, they each share a common goal: to encourage positive social change. Yet, how can we ensure that this goal is reached? What makes a successful set of progress indicators?

Answering this question is not a straightforward exercise. Firstly, successful outcomes can be defined in a number of ways. These can range from something as concrete as a policy change resulting directly from an indicator set being used in decision-making, to less tangible yet arguably as important achievements, such as media coverage of the data raising public awareness of a particular issue. Secondly, it is impossible to scientifically measure the contribution of any one single factor to sophisticated and highly complex processes such as policy development or public opinion formation. How can we be sure that in the absence of the indicator or indicators in question, the same outcome would not have been brought about by other influences such as interest group pressure, qualitative research or political ideology? Finally, given the heterogeneous nature of the different projects working on social progress indicators, we cannot be sure that lessons derived from one experience can be translated into generalised recommendations.

Despite these challenges, it is nevertheless important that efforts are made to reach a deeper understanding of the factors which can contribute to, or hinder, the successful development, communication and use of key progress indicators. Building sets of indicators requires an investment of significant time and resources. Such costs can only be justified if there is a reasonable expectation of future benefits. Research into the circumstances under which different indicator projects have been successful can add to our understanding of this important issue. With this in mind, the OECD is currently running a research project with the aim of preparing a report on 'Lessons for Successful Indicators'. The report will study a few examples of successful indicator sets in detail, and will present the testimonies of a large variety of experts. Given the difficulties listed above, the aim of the research is not to provide a definitive 'how to' for indicator projects. However, it is expected that by exploring the perspectives of a wide range of producers, users and advocates of progress indicators, common themes and best practices will emerge.

In order to organise the investigation, the research will take a ‘before-during-after’ approach, with a focus on asking questions which are linked to distinct steps in the indicator development process. The ‘before’ questions examine the specific circumstances leading to the emergence of the indicator project. They aim to identify the problem or need that was the impetus for the development of the indicator set and to assess what relevant data already existed.

The ‘during’ questions explore three separate aspects:
1) the design / development process (Who chose the indicators? Based on what objectives/methodology? Was the process open and participative or closed and expert-driven?);
2) the final product (How many indicators and topics does it

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cover? What is the quality level of the data? What is the geographic and time coverage? How frequently is it updated?) and the responsible organisation (How many people are on the staff? How is it funded? Does it have influential connections in politics or the media?); and
3) the communication / application process (Who are the main users of the indicators? How do they access/receive the data? What is the communications strategy?).

“Our experience has given us renewed determination and vision in pursuing our ideals. We intend to continue to share what we have learned with other youth, to empower youth to make change, to support our friends abroad, and to work on the issues we are passionate about, particularly alternative measures of progress and happiness ...” (A GPI Youth, at 16 years of age)

The ‘after’ questions focus on the outcomes which can be said to have arisen as a result of the indicator project, backed up by evidence where possible. The purpose of this part of the research is to evaluate how such outcomes measure against the stated objectives of the project, and to attempt to deduce the main contributing factors to success or failure of the enterprise.

We decided to pick examples which could provide insight into a wide variety of situations and the projects were chosen to be representative of different levels of geographic coverage: multinational, national and sub-national. In line with the ‘Measuring Progress’ philosophy, the research focuses on indicator sets which aim to give a comprehensive view of society, rather than being issue-specific.

The research will look at the EU structural indicators underpinning the Lisbon agenda for growth and innovation, and also at EU sustainable development indicators as examples of multinational indicators. It is generally felt that the Lisbon indicators were driven mainly by political considerations, while sustainable development indicators were shaped by more technical expertise. It will be interesting to compare these two projects, and to see how indicators are developed in a regional forum such as the European Union. National case studies were chosen from Ireland, the UK, Australia and Switzerland. Each of these countries has attempted to create accessible key indicators on cross-cutting issues such as progress, quality of life and sustainable development. Finally, a chapter will look in detail at community indicator projects in the United States, as it is the country where the community indicators movement has been particularly dynamic and long-lived. Community indicator projects also provide useful illustrations of non-governmental initiatives as they are often run by independent community groups or foundations.

The final report will be completed by the end of 2008. If you are an expert or practitioner in the field of indicator development, the research team would be particularly interested in hearing from you. For more information, contact Kate Scrivens; katherine.scrivens@oecd.org

International Youth-Adult Research Partnership to Study Indicators of Youth Well-being

By Nora Didkowsky, GPI Atlantic

Over the past 12 years, GPI Atlantic (www.gpiatlantic.org) has worked to develop better measures of progress that give explicit value to a wide range of social, cultural, environmental and economic variables, in order to shift the public discourse on well-being. GPI Atlantic's interest in promoting a more comprehensive understanding of progress and well-being led it to sponsor a large youth delegation to the 2nd International Conference on Gross National Happiness in 2005, where the concept of the GPI Youth Program was born. The youth were so profoundly inspired by their experiences that they decided to continue working together on environmental and social justice issues. GPI Atlantic has now partnered with the Resilience Research Center at Dalhousie University (www.resilienceresearch.org), to develop a ground-breaking International Youth-Adult research program to study indicators of youth well-being.

We intend not only to explore youth indicators of well-being, but also to engage youth in the development, application, and assessment of the research, by providing research training programs, community engagement opportunities, internships and international exchanges. As a first step in the development of a research methodology on youth well-being we will undertake a systematic
assessment in which youth are asked what matters to them. In this way, we also intend to redefine the role of youth in community-building. The things we measure tell us what we value as a society and determine the policy agendas of governments, but all too often what actually matters to youth has been disregarded in this process. For example, surveys aimed at youth often focus on risks and negative behaviours, like teen pregnancies and drop-outs, instead of on youth abilities and values. A pervasive underlying assumption is that young people are either problems to be fixed or adults-in-waiting (Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth).

Last fall the GPI Youth spent a weekend together camping on an island, talking about what well-being means to us. We subsequently discovered that many of the things that matter most to us are not adequately reflected in existing measures of progress. For example, in many Western measures of well-being, independence and autonomy are considered essential to teen development. And yet, in our group, we talked more about connections between people and with nature. We discussed the importance of space and architecture, local wisdom, and relationships between generations. Transportation is an item rarely included on youth surveys of well-being; however, many of us are from rural areas, and because our transportation system is so poor, it is difficult for us to meet with friends or be involved in after-school activities without negotiating with parents. We feel that well-being not only involves individual factors, but equality, social justice, and a clean environment.

Looking at what matters to youth may lead us to recognize critically important resources and processes that are different from those of adults, or from those processes that adults understand. This Youth-Adult partnership supports the changing trend to include youth ideas, strengths and agencies in collaborative work, instead of just assessing youth problems and needs.

The GPI Youth Program announced the commencement of this Youth Index of Well-being project at the 3rd International Gross National Happiness Conference in Thailand in November 2007, which was attended by 220 youth from 16 countries. The passionate and unqualified participation of the youth delegation shows the genuine commitment of young people to have their opinions and ideas taken seriously in a world forum dedicated to reconsidering what development, progress and well-being really mean. The strength of the partnerships we forged with youth leaders and youth organizations at the conference bolstered our desire to explore, assess, and measure youth well-being from the perspectives of youth, globally. Since then, the development of the project has blossomed to include several
elements we feel are very exciting and unique in indicator work. We intend:

1. To build youth capacity and well-being by training youth as researchers and offering internship programs and international exchanges.

2. To develop and refine research methods that identifies both homogenous and heterogeneous well-being indicators for youth populations in diverse cultures and contexts. The project will incorporate youth-designed research methodologies, including both deeper methods of appreciative inquiry and also a quantitative survey, to assess what matters to youth. Trained youth researchers will be tasked with applying and testing the collaborative methodologies with other youth in their communities and with analyzing the data, with the support of our partnered research and youth organizations. The anticipated research outcomes include by-country sets of youth well-being indicators, micro-tools to assess youth well-being at the individual level, and a macro Index of Youth Well-being.

3. To facilitate community-based public engagement and feedback with a local wisdom, story-telling, and intergenerational component. This phase of iterative project development will also ensure the project is done in ways that fit well with each community rather than being imposed on communities from outside.

4. To disseminate research findings and feedback to communities with the goal of impacting policy development. The project will provide both electronic and face-to-face means for youth and their communities to share what they have learned across international borders in order to mobilize a global movement to improve youth well-being based on the evidence.

A vital strength of our intended program will be its ability to truly inform programming and policy. Guided by the understanding of the importance of organizational process, the project employs multiple strategies to ensure it is positioned to make valuable theoretical, practical and policy contributions, including: the establishment of collaborative networks among diverse players; data gathered through multiple methodologies (including both quantitative and qualitative research) to inform policy recommendations; and providing training, internship and exchange opportunities for youth researchers. The partnerships will be multi-sectoral, interdisciplinary and multilateral; in order to create research-to-action work that truly impacts policy development.

At each site, partnerships will include:
- an academic research body,
- youth policy makers/organizations
- on-the-ground community health initiatives / service providers,
- youth community organizations/youth training organizations,
- an Advisory Committee, and very importantly,
- youth - as equal partners.

The value of working with young leaders is that they are committed to achieving community development goals, are genuinely optimistic about their potential, and are willing to work extremely hard and energetically to effect real change. We believe that when young people's voices are heard in their communities, they grow more capable and powerful. By including young people as equal partners in the study of youth indicators of well-being, we aim to promote responsible citizenship and inspire youth to make meaningful decisions based on good evidence as well as appreciation of other cultures. This knowledge, in turn, can contribute toward sustained social change for positive global development.

In May 2008, the Statistics Sweden and the OECD jointly organised a Seminar on “Innovative Approaches to Turning Statistics into Knowledge”.

The program was highly intensive and comprised around 30 presentations of extraordinary quality. Over 160 attendees from various communities (statisticians, communications specialists, IT technicians, academia) came together to create a multi-disciplinary interactive audience. Review the presentations and video of the ICT tools and interactive discussions on the website www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum/statknowledge
Over the past few decades researchers, data users, child advocates, and policymakers have made considerable advances in developing and using indicators. Social indicators of child and youth well-being have now become indispensable tools of policy and planning the world over. From Canada to Chile and from South Africa to Norway, countries are developing and using a rich and expanding set of child well-being indicators. These advances have been made possible by improvements in data collection and use, and collaborative efforts at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

However, until recently these important efforts have largely been undertaken without the benefit of an organizing structure to support and foster collaboration, integrate findings, and coordinate and disseminate research. In short, the field has reached critical mass and needs an organized professional home. The International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) offers that home.

ISCI provides an organizational framework which allows members to share resources, research, perspectives, and practices on social indicators with other professionals around the globe. ISCI was founded in the fall of 2005, and members come from many walks of life including academics and researchers, government officials, data collectors, policymakers, child advocates, data users, funders, practitioners, and journalists. Members come from dozens of countries around the world. The global character of the Society offers unique opportunities for studying and sharing knowledge as well as for seeking new partnerships and initiating studies and projects beyond the national or smaller regional networks.

ISCI brings together experts in the field worldwide to:

- Contribute to the well-being of all children
- Share knowledge and experience
- Develop standards
- Improve data resources
- Foster collaborative research and projects
- Foster diversity in methodological approaches
- Enhance dissemination of information on the status of children
- Help organizations apply the findings to policy and practice
- Enhance the capacity of the field in countries that are in the initial stages of producing child well-being indicators

Membership of ISCI

Coming together under the banner of an international society to study and use child well-being indicators offers an invaluable opportunity for collaboration, shared resources, problem-solving, support, and education. We hope you will consider joining this important society of scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders. Dues range from $20 to $50 per year, depending on the country of origin, and $15 to $30 for students. An application form can be found on the ISCI website (www.childindicators.org).

Members get information and discounts for ISCI conferences; receive an annual free subscription to The Child Indicators Research Journal and special discount rates for other Springer publications, and a copy of the ISCI newsletter.

Conferences

The first ISCI conference was held June 25-27, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. It also expects to organize regional conferences, and to edit special issues of journals focusing on social indicators research, data collection, and application. Conference papers are available on the ISCI website at www.childindicators.org.

The second ISCI international conference will be held November 4 and 5, 2009, at the University of Western Sydney, Parramatta, Sydney Australia.

Child Indicator Research Journal

ISCI members also receive a free subscription to the new journal called Child Indicator Research, published by Springer. The first issue was published in March 2008, and the second issue has recently become available. The journal is available online at http://www.springer.com/12187
Newsletter

isci publishes a regular newsletter to provide ready access to recent developments, research protocols, evolving data sources, and other information in the field. Recent copies can be seen on the ISCI website (www.childindicators.org). The newsletter editor is William O’Hare, at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. If you have information you would like to have placed in the newsletter, please send it to him at wohare@aecf.org.

Summary

As the field of child indicators continues to grow and mature, we expect the membership of ISCI to increase and we expect the organization to provide even more opportunities for members to work together to use social indicators to improve the lives of the world’s children.

For more information, or to join, please visit http://www.childindicators.org

Or, contact Asher Ben-Arieh (benarieh@cc.huji.ac.il) or Robert Goerge bobg@uchicago.edu

A Naturalistic Approach to the Narrative of Progress

By Mattia Gallotti, University of California at Berkeley, USA

Social change is a challenging issue in modern democracies. Few theorists agree on how to account for its nature and main causes, this often results in wrongheaded and ineffective policies. A longstanding area of debate surrounds defining the goal of collective change, namely progress.

The narrative of progress is built upon powerful symbolic representations in various debates: from the scientific image of man to ethical questions, policy-making, culture, wars and political races. Historically, Western culture has assigned great value to economic development and the improvement of material conditions of life. This fostered a narrative laden with ideological implications that left the analysis of progress to the social sciences. I argue that the so-called naturalistic stance offers a more compelling explanation of why the myth of progress is so deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of modern democracies.

"To restore the human subject at the centre – the suffering, afflicted, fighting human subject - we must deepen a case history to a narrative or tale". Quoted: Oliver Sacks

Naturalism is the view that fundamental issues concerning human life should be explored with the methods of empirical research. The approach is essentially multi-disciplinary and integrative, and applies equally to issues in the natural sciences and humanities. Through the lens of naturalism, these disciplines are no longer seen as opposing “cultures”. Instead, their methods deal with similar subjects from complementary perspectives. But how can naturalism help understand progress and social change?

A good starting point is to clarify what we mean by a narrative of progress. The idea of progress is based on key representations and shared meanings concerning well-being and human development. It should not be surprising after all that this narrative is so entrenched that it appears natural to us. The human mind is not a blank slate in fact, and narratives are not just symbolic devices emerging from scratch. Instead, social processes depend upon the biological endowment of built-in cognitive capacities that people possess at birth. Here is the missing link that ties social discourse to the scientific worldview: narrative structures are written down in the biology of the brain.

The last thirty years have seen an impressive development in the use of technologies to map the mind. Public awareness of achievements in the cognitive and brain sciences has also increased. What is more remarkable, however, is that this trend has already caused a shift of priorities in the way research programs are carried out in various disciplines.

As several neuroscientists have shown, the mind works differently from the way it has been traditionally depicted. It is less the logical and fully rational “calculator” processing decisions in predictable ways than we might have thought of. Rather, emotions gut feelings and long-held views play a decisive role in the making of choices. In the book The Political Mind, cognitive linguist George Lakoff argues that “most of what we understand in public discourse is not in the words themselves, but in the unconscious understanding that we bring to the words” (2008, p.43). It follows that the understanding of the ‘unconscious’ may give important insights into the structure of narratives upon which public discourse is built. So, one of the most striking achievements in the study of the biology of the mind (brain) is to have provided explanatory frameworks to
address classical challenges in the social sciences. For example, how would research on human cognition contribute to the development of statistical methods?

Understanding the workings of the brain can help explain the way we think about progress. It can also shed light on the way people process statistical information to assess whether progress is being made.

A key question of the second OECD World Forum on “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy” concerned the role official statistics - as opposed to bias, habit and prejudice - play in affecting policies targeted at progress. And access to data was seen as a necessary condition to assess life conditions. But progress is not just a number after all, it is rather a complex story based on symbols and meanings. Thus, understanding the mind is crucial to shedding light on the cognitive mechanisms which process data. In fact, even when people are fully aware of facts and figures, still they do not seem to reason to the “right” conclusions. Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman has the assumptions of perfect rationality postulated by mainstream economists. They are contradicted in many respects by empirical evidence. Furthermore, cognitive psychologist Drew Westen has recently argued in *The Political Brain* (2007) that minds are massively emotional and empathetic at the unconscious level.

These achievements have driven a good deal of research into the biological foundation of numerical activity. The following example points out the kind of implications that this body of knowledge can produce on public policy. A recent issue of *The New Yorker* (March 3, 2008) brought the idea of “number sense” to the front page. As a pioneer figure in the field, French cognitive scientist Stanislas Dehaene has been engaged for fifteen years in using imaging technologies to test the hypothesis that human beings come equipped with a natural ability to process numbers. His evidence shows that our brain is wired for mathematics. Dehaene’s work is important because it shows us how to approach a question of social impact by exploring biological causes from a naturalistic perspective. Public actors have yet to come to terms with the implications of the cognitive revolution in the political arena. At stake is a new narrative of what it means to be human in a post-ideological era. Issues which have played a prominent role in the past like social classes and material conditions as well as race and gender, are doomed to lose much of their historical relevance. The mind is already shaping the new battlefield here challenges and divides will thrive for years to come.

**REFERENCES**


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