

The Use of Comprehensive Indicators in Local Government

-- Social Indicators, Happiness Indicators, and Sustainability Indicators --

Shun Sato

Key Words: *Local Government, Social Indicators, Happiness Indicators, Sustainability Indicators, POINT.*

1. BACKGROUND

In recent years, administrative organisations have been trying to develop and use happiness or well-being indicators based on a surge of interest on Beyond GDP all around the world. In Japan, a commission to study well-being studies was established in the Cabinet office on the basis of the New Growth Strategy (June 2010) and the commission presented a well-being indicators proposal in December 2011. At the municipal level, development of happiness or hope indicators were conducted earlier by Arakawa ward, Kumamoto prefecture and Fukui prefecture among others. In November 2011, well-being indicators gathered media attention because of the related events such as the visit of King of Bhutan who proposed the Gross National Happiness and the release of the Happiness ranking of 47 prefectures in Japan by a professor from Hosei University. Thereafter, more and more local governments started thinking of using happiness indicators as a goal of their policy. These actions are expected to be a hopeful approach to adopt subjective well-being knowledge which has been developing rapidly in economics and psychology into policy processes.

2. PURPOSE AND APPROACHES

The purpose of the research is to overview the latest actions about well-being indicators in Japanese local governments. The study focused on the actors who have interests, the processes of development and use, and the role of indicators in general. The main source of the research is information available in local governments' websites (e.g. city master plan, administrative assessments results, and congress record). Some interviews were also conducted to generate more detailed information. Previous works in the area of social indicators and administration evaluations such as the analytical framework of POINT (policy influenced of indicators) research project in EU were used as reference for the analysis.

3. RESULTS

There are at least 30 cases related to the well-being indicators in Japan at the local level. In the case initiated by the leader of the local government, happiness concept is often proposed as a vision or a goal of the community and then reflected in the master plan, where conceptual or political roles of indicators are seen in the development process. Upon introduction of the subjective indicators, new questions are added to the public opinion research questionnaire. But, sometimes there are problems in the methods of the research, therefore some advice by experts are needed. The cases of indicators which consist mainly of the objective indicators resemble the forms of community benchmarking.

Developing indicators of well-being concepts encourages the vigorous debates because well-being or happiness is a critical concepts in our lives which can be interpreted in various meanings. Of course understanding the causality of happiness in the science of economics and psychology is surely important which can improve the instrumental role of the indicators, but also we should recognize producing well-being indicators has another role in their process such as the discussion about the desirable condition of the city and the individual life among the administrative staff and citizens. Diversity of our values and lifestyles are increasing. Well-being indicators can be useful tools when we consider and share the values and create the common desirable autonomy proactively.

REFERENCES

- 1) POINT (2011). *A Synthesis of the Findings of the POINT Project*. Deliverable Report 15, The Bayswater Institute.