

**ISI World Statistics Congress, Dublin, August 21-26 2011**

**Special Topic Session – Nr. 45**

***Obtaining weights: from objective to subjective approaches in view of more participative methods in the construction of composite indicators of well-being***

The methodology defining the whole process aimed at constructing indicators is very often presented in terms of “technology”, by asserting the need to have specialist training in order to apply the procedure in a scientific and objective way. Actually the construction procedure, even though scientifically defined, is far from being objective and aseptic.

**Organizer and chair**

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**Discussant**

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## Speakers

### ***Statistical properties of equal-weights estimators of composite quality-of-life indices***

**Kenneth C. Land**

John Franklin Crowell Professor of Demography and Sociology  
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**Michael R. Hagerty**

Professor of Marketing – Graduate School of Management –  
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### ***Composite indicators of well-being: the relative importance of weights?***

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**Elena Giachin Ricca**

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### ***Constructing composite indicator of wellbeing for Chinese people***

**Zhanjun Xing**

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### ***Visual Aggregation of a Sustainable Development Indicators System (MONET)***

**Anne Boesch**

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### ***The Weighting Issue in Composite Indicators: The Experience of the Index of Economic Well-being.***

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**ISI Section or Committee:** IASS

**Collaborating Societies, Sections or Committees:** *Social Indicators Research Committee (RC55) of the International Sociological Association* (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/rc55.htm>)

### **Interest of the session for ISI attendees**

As known, the consolidated methodology aimed at the construction of composite indicators states particular approaches allowing differential *importance* weights to be determined and to be assigned to the indicators composing the synthesis. In this ambit, it is always asserted that the choice of weights should be preferably derived from objective principle.

In recent works (Hagerty & Land, 2007) further views were introduced about weighting in the context of composite indicators construction, which should take into account the agreement among citizens concerning the importance to be assigned to each indicator. The final composite should maximize this agreement.

Even though some decisions to be taken in composite indicators construction are strictly technical, it is quite difficult to make these decisions objective since they may involve different kind of concerns. Generally they are taken through a process accepted and shared by the scientific community. However, in certain cases, the choice and decision may be shared by a larger community. One of the ways to obtain this is that to involving individuals in the process of social indicators construction.

In other words, indicators construction is not simply a technical problem but should become part of a larger debate concerning how to construct indicators obtaining a larger *legitimacy*. Seen in this perspective, this topic can be placed in the ambit of an improvement of democratic participation to decisions ("res publica").

In indicator construction, weights aim at assigning differential *importance* weights to be determined and to be assigned to the indicators composing the synthesis. In this ambit, it is always asserted that the choice of weights should be preferably derived from objective principle (Nardo et al., 2005; Ray, 2008; Sharpe, 2004).

However, since developing and defining weights can be always interpreted in terms of **values judgment**, the procedure should include and involve individuals' contributions in attributing importance to different domains.

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