Gross National Happiness as a Framework for Impact Assessment

Mike and Martha Pennock
HIA 2010
Dunedin NZ
November 2010
Population Health Approach

- Working collaboratively with other sectors to increase the health status of the population through affecting the determinants of health—income, employment, social supports, early childhood development, environment, culture, education
- Official framework in Canada for 15 to 20 years
- Failure to implement
Not Just in Canada

- Review of 19 international case-studies on intersectoral collaboration for the WHO’s Commission on the Determinants of Health
- Very few successful examples
- Why—health imperialism
- We want to collaborate so that you can support our agenda
- We get most of the $—now we want your soul
Come play in our sandbox so we can steal your toys.
Why won’t anybody play with us?

Humans are, by nature, a social bunch. It hurts to eat lunch alone or be left off a classmate’s birthday list. Even if the child insists it doesn’t matter, you know it does.
Silo-based Planning

- Each sector plans independently—economic, social, physical, environmental, health, educational, etc.
- Producing unintended consequences for other sectors.
- Reinforcing inter-sectoral rivalries for scarce resources.
- Working at cross-purposes.
The Holy Grail of Planning

- An integrated model which incorporates all of the silos
- Intersectoral planning
- Holistic planning
- “Whole of government”
Is There a Unifying Framework?
The Last Shangrila

“Progress in Gross National Happiness is more important than progress in Gross National Product”
Mike and Martha’s Bhutanese Adventure

- Fall of 2006
- Three months at the Centre for Bhutan Studies
- Development of GNH Survey
- Five to eight hour interview
- Commitment to develop a shorter international version
Conceptual Framework

- Articulated through five international conferences which brought together Buddhist scholars and empirical scientists to identify the primary determinants of happiness.
- Evidence-based framework.
- Two in Bhutan, one in Canada, Thailand and Brazil.
- Most recent conferences focusing on implementation.
Westernization of GNH

Happiness

Buddhist ↔ Western

Wellbeing

How Do We Measure?

Satisfaction With Life
The Contributors

- Physical, mental and spiritual health
- Time use (Balance Among Productive Activities)
- Community Vitality and Social Support
- Cultural Vitality
- Education (Self-development)
- Living Standards
- Good Governance
- Ecological Vitality
Happiness Index Partners
Next Steps: Policy Tools

- What is the potential impact of specific public policies on GNH/Wellbeing
- We need methodologies for doing GNH Impact Assessments
- Policy lens under development- initially developed for Bhutan
- Westernized in collaboration with Gabriola Island Health Society
- New Zealand- Peer Review
- Finalize Scales and Manual
Applications

- Initial Screening Tool
- Identify potential inter-sectoral impacts
- Identify where a consensus already exists about impacts
- Identify “Don’t Knows”
  - Indepth assessment required
  - Monitoring and mitigation
- Identify where mitigation planning is needed
### REDUCING INEQUALITIES

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Least Desirable  Most Desirable
## Reducing Inequalities

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**Least Desirable**

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Thirty-nine Scales

- Physical, mental and spiritual health
- Time use (Balance Among Productive Activities)
- Community Vitality and Social Support
- Cultural Vitality
- Education (Self-development)
- Living Standards
- Good Governance
- Ecological Vitality
Why does this matter?
Standard of Living has been increasing!

GDP Per Head in Constant US Dollars

Canada vs United States
Life Expectancy is Increasing

So has our sense of wellbeing - right?
WRONG!

SO- Growth in wellbeing has not been linked to growth in our standard-of-living or health status
What have we learned?

- Past a certain point, in many developed nations, increases in prosperity do not bring increases in happiness and wellbeing.
- Seems to correspond with decreases in social capital.
- And involve substantial ecological consequences.

WE NEED TO RETHINK OUR BASIC NOTIONS OF PROGRESS.
Istanbul World Forum - June 2007

- Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies
  - OECD
  - European Commission
  - Organization of the Islamic Conference
  - United Nations
  - World Bank
“We urge statistical offices, public and private organizations, and academic experts to work alongside representatives of their communities to produce high-quality facts-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time. We invite both public and private organizations to contribute to this ambitious effort to foster the world’s progress and we welcome initiatives at the local, regional, national and international level.”
Be Happy.
IT'S ONE WAY OF BEING WISE