

# **WIDER WORKING PAPERS**

**Descriptions of Inequality.  
The Swedish Approach to Welfare Research**

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DESCRIPTIONS OF INEQUALITY

The Swedish approach to welfare research

by

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Already in the 1950s it became clear that, in spite of its widespread use, the per capita gross national product is an insufficient measure of the well-being of citizens. Thus, in 1954, an expert group within the United Nations suggested that one should not rely on monetary measures only - the measurement of well-being should be based upon several different components - together making up the level of living.<sup>1</sup> Partly influenced by the UN expert group, Johansson made level of living, seen as a set of components, the basic concept in the first Swedish level of living survey conducted in 1968.<sup>2</sup> This survey has later been followed by a number of similar studies, both in Sweden and in the other Nordic countries. To exemplify the Swedish approach to welfare research, I will here use the first survey from 1968 and its direct followers, conducted by the Swedish institute for social research in 1974 and 1981. However, apart from minor details, what I say also applies to what has been done by the Swedish central statistical office as well as by other Scandinavian research organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Measurement and description of welfare implies the response to a series of questions. One concerns the basis of welfare measurement - should it be related to the needs or the resources of individuals. Another question is whether she herself or an outside observer should judge the individual's welfare. Furthermore, we must decide which type of indicators to use and how to use them - how should relevant descriptions be made and

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1. United Nations 1954. See also United Nations 1966.

2. See Johansson 1970.

3. Thus, the subtitle of this paper could as well be 'The Scandinavian Approach to Welfare Research', which actually is the title of a paper by Hannu Uusitalo and myself (Erikson and Uusitalo 1987).

how could we give an overall picture of the individual's welfare. I will further on return to these questions and discuss how they have been answered in the Swedish level of living surveys. Before doing so I will present some results from these surveys in the hope to make the issues more clear and concrete.

### The level of living surveys

In 1965 the Swedish Government set up a commission with the task to describe the conditions and problems of low income earners. The commission planned its task in three steps: (i) a study of the distribution of factor income, (ii) a study of the distribution of disposable income and (iii) a study of the distribution of welfare in non-monetary terms. This third-mentioned study was carried out by a group of sociologists who communicated their results to the commission in a series of reports.

For the purpose of the third study, around 6 000 persons in the ages 15 to 75 living in Sweden were interviewed in 1968. In 1974 and in 1981 surviving persons under 76 years of age still living in Sweden were interviewed again. At both these later interviews young persons and recent immigrants were added to the sample in order to make it representative for the adult Swedish population. The interviewees were asked about their living conditions in nine different areas or components of life. A large number of indicators were used for most of the components. The components together with some typical indicators are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Components and some typical indicators in the Swedish level of living surveys.<sup>a</sup>

Components	Indicators
1. Health and access to health care,	Ability to walk a 100 meters, various symptoms of illness, contacts with doctors and nurses
2. Employment and working conditions,	Unemployment experiences, physical demands at work, possibilities to leave the place of work
3. Economic resources,	Income and wealth, property, ability to cover unforeseen expenses up to \$1 000 within a week
4. Education and skills,	Years of education, level of education reached
5. Family and social integration,	Marital status, contacts with friends and relatives
6. Housing,	Number of persons per room, amenities
7. Security of life and property,	Exposure to violence and thefts
8. Recreation and culture	Leisure time pursuits, vacation trips
9. Political resources.	Voting in elections, membership in unions and political parties, ability to file complaints

Note: a/ In the first survey in 1968 no questions were asked about security of life and property, whereas questions were included about diet and nutrition.

In a report from the three surveys which was published in 1984<sup>4</sup> the overarching aim was to answer three questions:

1. Had there been an average change in the level of living from 1968 to 1981?
2. Were there any differences in level of living between different population groups, specifically between men and women, social classes, age groups or regions?
3. Had there been any changes from 1968 to 1981 in differences in level of living between groups?

Our attempts to answer these questions followed several routes. Some examples will illustrate how the results were presented.

Three questions were asked about physical mobility referring to whether the respondent could briskly walk 100 meters without problems, whether he/she could climb and descend stairs without difficulty and whether he/she could run a hundred meters without difficulty. In Figure 1 we show results regarding the proportion saying that they had problems in at least two of these three respects, which in nearly all cases included those who said that they had problems to run and to climb stairs. The figure is a diagrammatic representation of the outcome of a logarithmic regression analysis.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Erikson och Åberg (red) 1984. This book was later published in English in a slightly abridged version: Erikson and Åberg (eds) 1987.

5. The regression analysis and the diagrammatic technique are described in Selén 1985 and 1987.

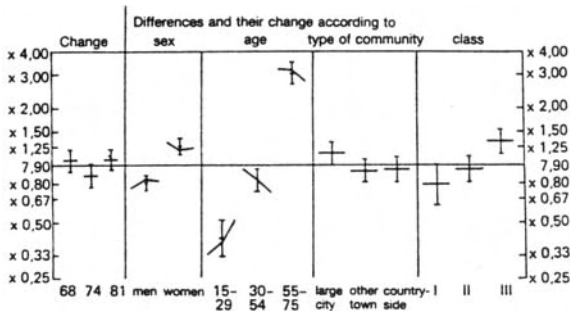


Fig. 1. Regression diagram of proportions of disabled people

The diagram is an attempt in a simple form to present a complicated reality, analysed by a fairly sophisticated statistical technique. Technically, the horizontal lines within each subfield represent regression coefficients and their possible slopes give information on the interaction between the factor in question (sex, age, community and class) and year of investigation. The vertical lines indicate the approximate length of 95% confidence intervals. Our hope, of course, is that also the statistically untrained reader through such diagrams could get a grasp of the variation and change in level of living. The interpretation of Figure 1 would be as follows: The signs in the leftmost field all appear on about the same level, thereby indicating that there has been no overall change from 1968 to 1981 in the proportion of disabled. The next field to the right shows that women tend to be disabled more often than men, net of the other factors. That the horizontal lines converge slightly (read from left to right) suggests that this difference has decreased slightly during the period. The field thereafter indicates what we could expect - that older persons are disabled more often than younger but also that this

difference has diminished from 1968 to 1981. The following field shows that there are no clear differences in this respect between cities, towns and the countryside and the rightmost shows that members of the working class (III) are disabled more often (net of age etc.) than members of the upper middle class (I) with the lower middle class (II) in between.

In figure 2 we show the corresponding results for political resources, in the sense of having taken part in opinion forming activities.<sup>6</sup>

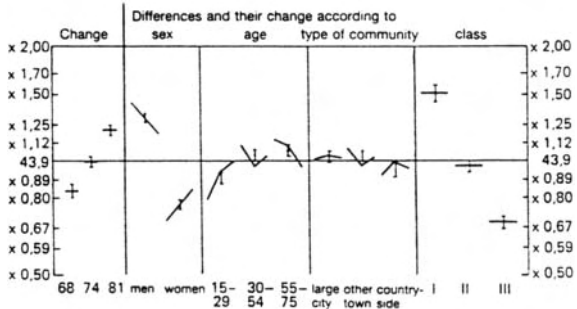


Fig. 2 Regression diagram of proportions of participants in public activities

Figure 2 indicates that the proportion active in opinion forming activities has increased from 1968 to 1981, that men are more active than women but that this difference has diminished, that age differences have disappeared from 1968 to 1981, that there are no differences between different types of communities and that there are great and nonchanging differences between the social classes.

6. Opinion forming activity is defined as having spoken at a meeting, written in a newspaper or participated in a demonstration. See further Szulkin 1987.



Table 2 shows, in a more conventional fashion, the inequality in income from employment between different classes and occupational groups. The overall income inequality decreased over the period from 1967 to 1980. This decrease was partly the result of diminishing differences between occupational classes, but partly also of lesser inequality within classes. Especially, wages in occupations mainly employing women increased considerably during the period.

Table 3. Earned incomes for full-time year-round workers in same occupational groups 1967, 1973, and 1980 (in 1,000s SEK computed to 1980 money values)

	Earned incomes			Per cent of average wage			Coefficients of variation		
	1967	1973	1980	1967	1973	1980	1967	1973	1980
All employees	74.6	87.8	89.6	100	100	100	49	41	37
Prof., exec. in private empl.	135.4	161.3	153.7	182	184	172	36	32	34
Prof. in public employment	140.7	141.2	131.7	189	161	147	32	34	32
Foremen	78.4	92.8	93.2	105	106	104	16	19	20
Private technical and clerical	65.0	82.9	90.7	87	94	101	31	27	24
Public salaried	68.5	79.3	84.4	92	90	94	30	19	17
Metal workers	59.4	71.7	70.1	78	82	78	25	16	15
Other manufacturing workers	55.9	67.3	68.8	75	77	77	25	20	20
Construction workers	63.8	73.9	79.7	86	84	89	37	15	18
Workers in local government	59.1	74.0	76.1	79	84	85	26	19	10
Workers in state government	63.9	74.7	78.0	86	85	87	18	13	9

In an attempt to get a more complete picture of variation and change in welfare problems on individual level we counted the number of components - out of five - for which we had recorded problematic conditions for the individual respondent. The

components were: health, economic resources, political resources, social relations and housing.<sup>7</sup> Figure 3 shows variation and change in the proportion showing three or more of these problematic states.

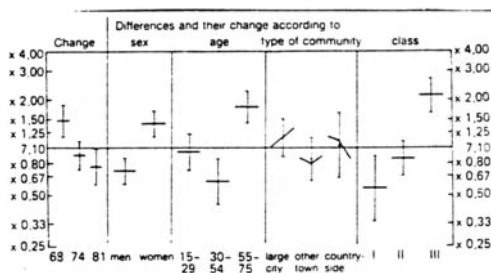


Fig. 3 Regression model for proportions with three or more problems in the population as a whole

Figure 3 shows that the proportion with many problems have decreased slightly over time, that women more often are exposed to many problems than men, that many problems are relatively common among old people, that there are small and unsystematic differences between different types of communities and that problems are more common in the working class than in other classes. Generally, the relative differences between groups seem to be stable over time.

Over all, the results regarding change in the years 1968 to 1981 point to a slight improvement of the average level of living, especially in the areas of housing and education.

7. The other components were not included because in some cases it was dubious to delimit a problematic state (education, leisure) or because the component was not included in all surveys (security). Employment and working conditions were treated in a separate analysis only including the labour force. The delimitation of problematic states on the five included components involved a large number of indicators. See further Erikson and Tånlin 1987.

Women's position relative to men improved considerably in most areas. The relative differences between age groups decreased slightly in terms of economic resources as the positions of young and old persons improved compared to those in the intermediate ages. Differences between the social classes decreased slightly.

These are some examples of how variation and change in the level of living in Sweden have been described. Which, then, is the theoretical rationale behind this approach? I will first discuss the concept, continue with some of the problems of operationalisation and then consider some aspects of its presentation. In doing this I will return to the questions previously mentioned.

#### The concept

'The individual's command over resources in the form of money, possessions, knowledge, mental and physical energy, social relations, security and so on, through which the individual can control and consciously direct his living conditions." This was the definition of level of living given in the first discussion of the concept in connection to the 1968 survey.<sup>8</sup> The central element is the individual's 'command over resources', which was extracted from Richard Titmuss' writings on welfare,<sup>9</sup> but a discussion of command over resources can be found within economics, as well.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on several

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3. Johansson 1970, p. 25. Italics in the original.

9. See especially Titmuss 1958.

10. See Lebergott, Stanley 1968/1972.

different components of welfare was taken from the writings by the United Nations' expert group, referred to above. To judge the level of living of an individual or of a group we have to know their resources and conditions in several respects, which are not transferable between each other. To have knowledge about e.g. economic conditions is thus not enough, we also have to know about health, knowledge and skills, social relations, conditions at work etc. in order account for the level of living. There is no common yardstick through which the different dimensions could be compared or put on par. No objective or impartial way exists by which it would be possible to decide which of two men is better off if one of them has e.g. worse health but better economic conditions than the other.

Welfare or level of living seems, at least in the European tradition, to be based either on people's needs or on their resources.<sup>11</sup> If needs are made central, then the concern is with 'the degree of need-satisfaction'.<sup>12</sup> If resources are made central then the concern is rather with man's capacity to satisfy those needs or, more generally, to 'control and consciously direct his living conditions', i.e. the individual's level of living will be an expression of his "scope of action"<sup>13</sup>. Resources, as understood here, seem to be very close to Sen's concept of capabilities. And, as Sen points out, well-being freedom, i. e. a capability to achieve satisfaction in many respects or, as termed here, a large scope of action, is

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11. In the discussion of quality of life, mainly of American provenance, happiness has also been suggested as central element cf. Michalos 1987 or Campbell et. al. 1976. There are, however, a number of objections which make happiness questionable as a central element of level of living. See Sen 1985 and 1984.

12. Allardt 1977. Compare also Drewnowski 1974. p. 7.

13. Erikson 1974.

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not only a means to achieve a high level of satisfaction, it is a value in itself.<sup>14</sup>

To base the concept of level of living on resources rather than on needs has some advantages. We then look upon man as an active being who uses his resources to pursue and satisfy his basic interests and needs. We do not necessarily have to decide on which these needs are, the individual is assumed to use them for the best of his interest. On the other hand, we have to decide which the most important resources are and, in so doing, we have to consider for what purpose they can be used. Thus, one way or another, we must take a stand on which the most central areas of human life are, the areas where it is most essential that the individual can direct his living conditions.

However, it does not seem sufficient to restrict the level of living to resources only. Some conditions, especially a good health, certainly are important resources, but this does not exhaust their significance. Rather their most important aspect may be as ends in themselves. Furthermore, some circumstances, like the quality of the work environment or the amenities and space of the dwelling, are quite important for the individual's well-being, but can only be regarded as resources in a very remote sense. Thus the level of living concept would be too restrictive if we based it on resources only without adding essential conditions. Moreover, the same set of resources is not of equivalent value regardless of the context. A certain education, say in law, may be of high value on the labour market in the country where it was acquired, but may be of very limited

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14. Sen 1984 p. 201.

value in another country. We therefore must consider the arenas on which the resources are to be used.<sup>15</sup> Individuals' resources and the characteristics of the arenas where they are to be used together determine the scope of individuals for directing their own lives.<sup>16</sup>

In essence then, the position taken in Swedish welfare research is that the individual's resources, given the arenas, together with his most essential living conditions make up his level of living. This position, although independently arrived at, seems to be very close to Sen's, as he writes that "the central feature of well-being is the ability to achieve valuable functionings".<sup>17</sup>

There is no universal theory which could guide us when we shall decide which the most important resources and conditions are. We therefore have to base our choice on rather general considerations. The nine components referred to above do not constitute an evident choice, but similar lists of the essential areas of the level of living look very much the same the world over, a fact that at least would suggest that the considerations made in different countries in recent years lead to about the same result (possibly to some extent because of communication and mutual influence). The list is to some extent influenced by the situation and culture of Sweden, in a developing country

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15. The arena concept was taken from Coleman 1971 and was introduced to Scandinavian welfare research by the Norwegian level of living survey. See Levekårsundersökelsen 1976. Compare also Erikson 1974.

16. The arena concept seems quite important in theory, but has never been much used in actual research. Often the outcome of the use of resources on an arena is taken as indicator e.g. the quality of the job rather than the relation of education and skill to the surrounding labour market.

17. Sen 1984. p. 200.

such a list would e.g. probably include access to food and nutrition. It is also obvious that such lists have a political character. they only include items which at least in principle are possible to influence - thus for instance talent and climate are excluded in spite of being quite important for the individual's action potential. The components refer to conditions and problems which we all meet during our lives and which are of such importance that there are collectively organized attempts to cope with them in all societies.<sup>18</sup>

One consequence of the multidimensionality of the level of living concept and of the incommensurability between dimensions is that no simple ordered indicator of level of living can be constructed, neither on individual nor on aggregate level. Differences and changes in the level of living must be described for each component. A total picture of variation and change will thus with necessity be rather complicated and no satisfactory solution has yet been found for how to present such a picture. The indicator based on the number of components for which problems were registered, shown in Figure 3, was used as part of an attempt to describe coexistence and accumulation of welfare problems. The total number of measured 'problems' is a crude indicator of the total situation of an individual which gives each different type of problem an equal weight. This is of course quite problematic and loads the indicator with implicit value judgments.

I believe that empirical research in this area is not possible if we do not take such decisions, based on explicit or

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18. Johansson 1979 p. 139.

implicit value judgments.<sup>19</sup> Descriptions necessitate choice of indicators and parsimonious description often also necessitates the amalgamation of indicators into indices.<sup>20</sup> Such decisions have to be taken already on component level. Within the health component it is done when we decide which symptoms we should consider and how they should be put together in constructing one or several indicators on health. In a similar way we make such judgments when we decide which aspects of a total work situation we should measure and corresponding decisions must be made for other components.

It then seems as if the question is not whether we should make value judgments or not but rather when we should make them and when we should leave them open. No general answer has been given to this question, but some principles have, over all, been followed. First of all, indicators regarding different components have not been merged into common indices - except for the single case in Figure 3 here. Within areas, indicators have in some cases been put together to indices, often only for subareas and in many cases after some type of dimensionality test like factor analysis. On the whole, indicators relating to clearly different areas of the level of living have not been merged into summary measures but kept apart.

The drawback of this approach is that the total number of indices needed for a complete description of the level of living becomes quite large. It is thus difficult to get an over all

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19. This should not be read that I make any claims for the simple indicator in Figure 3 - it was a provisional solution which seemed to be feasible for the concluding chapter in a book on variation and change of welfare in Sweden.

20. Compare Sen 1980.



picture of the level of living, although it is possible to see how conditions on different components are related to one another. Can we then do nothing more than take our large number of indicators and present them one at a time?

I think that within components, so to say, we can in many cases order conditions in such a way that we get a small number of ordered scales, or in some cases even only one, which everybody, or nearly everybody, would accept. This would especially be the case if we work with very broad classes of problems, or perhaps only with dichotomies, distinguishing problematic conditions from other.

But even so we will end up with a fairly large number of incommensurable indicators, say at best with a scale or dichotomy of problematic/not problematic conditions for each of the nine components mentioned before. It will still not be possible to construct a summary ordered measure of welfare but it would be possible to distinguish between different types of total welfare and to find out how frequent these types are. Even if we cannot order all types in relation to each other, we can find orders within subsets of types. A type which includes all problematic conditions of another type, but which as well includes some additional ones clearly could be regarded as more problematic than the other according to a common Pareto criterion.

We of course still would face quite serious problems. If we dichotomise each of nine components into problematic/non-problematic conditions - which in itself is a questionable solution, we loose a lot of information by the dichotomisation

and will have to put very different conditions into the same category - we will get 512 possible combinations. Thus, we have by that operation not come very far towards a manageable empirical concept, which is feasible for purposes of analysis and presentation.

But it should be possible to reduce such a property space. Welfare components are correlated with each other so some combinations would probably be very rare indeed. In the Swedish level of living study we for example found a tendency for problems with health, few social contacts and low activity in the leisure time to go together. These were problems which were especially common among older people. In a similar way economic problems and housing problems went together, especially within the working class and among the old and the young, and small political resources, which are strongly related to educational level, appeared as a problem most common among women. Because of such correlations we probably could reduce the number of welfare types and we would furthermore probably find that different problem types are differently located within the social and demographic structure.

#### A descriptive or an evaluative approach?

The question about who should judge the level of living - the individual or the observer - is partly connected to the one about needs or resources. If the concept of welfare (or well-being) is based on needs it seems quite natural to measure its level by asking people whether they are satisfied or not while

this seems less obvious if the concept is based on resources. The problem with an approach based on people's own assessment of their degree of satisfaction is that it partly is determined by their level of aspiration, that is by what they consider to be their rightful due.<sup>21</sup> This means that to measure how satisfied people are to a large extent is equal to measuring how well they have adapted to their present conditions. People who for a long period have experienced menial conditions may turn out to be more satisfied and thus with such a definition to show a higher level of living than a person who are used to a very high standard but who recently have experienced a minor lowering of it, an outcome which seems unacceptable. We therefore try to assess the individual level of living in a way which makes it as little influenced as possible by the individual's evaluation of his situation. This is all the more natural as the individual's level of living to a large extent is based on his 'command over resources', resources which can be used for the ends which he himself finds most satisfactory.

The empirical question related to whether we should put emphasis on people's conditions or on their satisfaction with these conditions is whether we should use 'objective' or 'subjective' indicators, a question which was much discussed within the so called social indicators movement. Actually, the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' are slightly misleading, it seems preferable to use the terms descriptive and evaluative indicators. With descriptive indicators, the individual is asked to describe his resources and conditions. "How much do you

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21. For a more thorough discussion of these matters, see Tählin 1989. See also Sen 1984 and Campbell et. al. 1976.

receive as monthly salary?", "What temperature do you normally have indoors in the winter?" would be typical questions. When we use evaluative indicators the individual is asked to evaluate his conditions. "Are you satisfied with your salary?" or "How good is the heating in the winter" would be typical questions used. However, the difference between the two types of indicators should not be exaggerated, descriptive indicators certainly contain evaluative elements and the indicators used by spokesmen for the different approaches often are quite similar.<sup>22</sup>

To put the emphasis on descriptive indicators does not mean that whether people are satisfied or not is judged to be of no interest. On the contrary, I would say that it is of very great interest to find out how people's resources influence their satisfactions and, of course, how resources and conditions are influenced by them. But, I suggest that welfare - or level of living - should be defined in terms of resources and conditions and is best measured by the use of descriptive indicators. And to the extent that welfare research is coupled to societal planning - which, in Scandinavia, is part of its historical legacy but not necessarily of its future constraints - I find it quite essential that descriptive indicators should be used. The data for planning should refer to factual conditions and planning goals should be formulated in terms of such conditions. People's opinions and preferences should influence societal planning through their activities as citizens in the democratic political process, not through survey questions and opinion

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22. Compare the indicators used in the Swedish level of living surveys with those used by Allardt 1975.

polls. That is, goals for planning should be set up in terms of factual conditions, not in terms of people's satisfaction with these conditions. It is the assumption that the planning and executive organs of the state act directly to influence people's satisfaction and happiness which is the base for many of the futuristic hells suggested to us in literary works.

A high level of living, as it is conceptualized here, is not equal to enjoying all the good things in life. This is no drawback, as I see it. There are other good or bad aspects of life and if we want to study them they must be conceptualized and measured in their own right. A concept which is meant to include everything desirable/undesirable would probably be of questionable value. Moreover, those who enjoy a high level of living are not necessarily satisfied and happy. It is well known that the association between conditions and satisfactions is rather weak.<sup>23</sup> Conditions and satisfactions are two different aspects of the good in life. A person, who has better amenities at home than another one, is better off in this respect regardless of whether he is more or less satisfied with them. However, if his situation changed so he only had the amenities of the other, he would probably become even less satisfied and vice versa. In a cross-sectional sample we would anyway expect to get an association between conditions and satisfactions.<sup>24</sup> Over time, however, it is even questionable whether we should

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23. Compare Allardt 1975 or Campbell et. al. 1976. This low association is actually one of the reasons why those who emphasize conditions do not want to use evaluative indicators and why those who put the emphasis on satisfactions do not want to use descriptive.

24. Compare the association between income and general sense of well-being in Campbell et. al. 1976 p. 55 ff. See also Easterlin 1974.

expect any relation at all on aggregate level. at least not if basic needs for food and shelter are covered. People will on average not become more satisfied when the general level of living rises if their relative advantage is the aspect of their conditions that influences their satisfaction and this seems to a large extent be the case. Similarly, we cannot with certainty expect any association between conditions and satisfactions among different nations.<sup>25</sup>

### Presentation

As described in the introduction, several indicators have been used to describe change over time and differences between various socio-demographic groups in their level of living. This has partly been the consequence of the indicators in most cases being on ordinal level only - meaning that it is not possible to interpret an indicator value without making some form of comparison - but partly also the result of regarding inequality as a problematic societal condition and, thus, equality as an important political goal.

Inequality has in these studies mostly been treated as the variation among socio-demographic groups rather than as the variation of the condition in question over the population at large and, accordingly, measured more through differences and relative rates than through, say, Gini indices or Lawrence curves. This is again a result of the ordinal indicators but is also based on the assumption that the socio-demographic groups

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25. Compare Esterlin 1974.

are delimited in such a way that people in many cases can identify them in society and, therefore, that such a description of conditions in society will be meaningful to a large part of the population. To tie the description of inequality to a social structure, which is recognized in society, will make the description more pertinent to the political discussion. Moreover, it is a way to try to get around part of the problem of preferential choices in interindividual comparisons. If we compare two persons and find that one goes on to higher education while the other does not, this could well be because the first one prefers a higher consumption later in life while the other one is more interested in earning money immediately. Or, if we find one person to be unemployed while another one, with the same education etc. is not, the first one may well prefer to work as little as possible and consequently to consume less while the other has other preferences. However, it is more difficult to make these explanations plausible if we find that persons of the same intellectual abilities but of different social origins systematically make different educational choices or if we find systematic differences in unemployment between persons with similar human capital living in different regions. We can not, of course, rule out the possibility that the differences in these cases still are due to different distributions of preferences, but those who claim so would have to make plausible that preferences for consumption now as compared to later in life vary with social class or that preferences for consumption versus not to work vary with region.<sup>26</sup>

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26. This does obviously not mean that such explanations are impossible or not tried. An example is the well-known hypothesis

The study of inequality in non-distributive conditions - like health or knowledge and skills, for which it is not possible to transfer units between persons - also becomes more meaningful when we study inequality between groups rather than between individuals. For example, to study the distribution of handicap over the population at large is of rather limited interest, it could be supposed only to show some 'natural' variation in health. If, on the other hand, we as in Figure 1 show that physical mobility on average and net of age differences varies between social classes, more substantial explanations must be sought, explanations which in one way or another relate health to the conditions, experiences and ways of life of people in different classes.

#### Poverty versus inequality

So far I have not discussed poverty. This is no oversight. As implied by the discussion above, inequality rather than poverty has been the important concept in Swedish welfare research which, given that poverty refers to economic resources, partly follows from the emphasis on non-monetary aspects of welfare.<sup>27</sup> But partly, it is also the consequence of an interest in variation over the whole range of a condition and not only over a poverty line. On the other hand Johansson, in his first discussion of the level of living concept, suggested a concentration on 'bad conditions',<sup>28</sup> and some indicators are

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that middle class children accept to defer gratification to a greater extent than working class children do.

27. Compare, however, Ringen 1985.

28. Johansson 1970, p. 29f.



just dichotomies, by which presumed bad conditions are delimited. Many other indicators, however, as mentioned have the form of ordinal scales. Furthermore, for most dichotomous indicators the dividing line is too arbitrary to be given any other meaning than just being a dividing line. In constructing scales it was regarded as preferable to consider the whole distribution and not to restrict interest to a dichotomy. A desirable result of these considerations is that the intellectually rather empty discussion of whether the poverty line should be drawn here or there has been avoided.

I believe that there is also an ideological ground for this difference in emphasis in welfare research between Sweden and many of the other western nations. I would suggest that poverty is the main welfare problem to social liberalism while inequality is the main problem to social democracy. To classical liberalism, the market is the 'natural' mechanism for distributing economic resources. To social liberalism, this is still true, but we have to correct the outcome of the market mechanism in one respect - we must for humanitarian reasons take care of those who end up in destitution, that is to say, we must take the poor out of poverty. This can be made through what Titmuss called the residual welfare model of social policy, the pursuit of which results in a marginal welfare state,<sup>29</sup> in which we through governmental activities correct the deficiencies of the market by money transfers to people below the poverty line. To social democracy state activities are not only a supplementary mechanism, but one on par with the market. In a

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29. Titmuss 1974. Compare Wilensky and Lebaux 1958 and also Korpi 1983.

institutional welfare state a redistributive model of social policy should cover the basic needs of all citizens. Thereby the variation in essential conditions - between different groups in the population and over the life cycle - should also be diminished. Various social provisions are seen as the rights of citizens in this perspective. Therefore, the state should provide health care and education to all - the quality of these services should in principle be such that no demand for private hospitals or schools appears - and it should be possible to have a good housing standard regardless of income and family size. Those who can be expected to be in need should be given support as part of normal procedure. Therefore, child allowances and pensions should be provided to all.

In different political climates differently formulated questions appear as most relevant. In this perspective it, thus, seems natural that poverty becomes the central socio-political issue where social liberalism dominates the political climate whereas inequality becomes the main problem of welfare where social democracy is dominating.

#### A political theory for social reporting

In an attempt to formulate a political theory for social reporting, Johansson suggested that political decisions require answers to three questions.<sup>30</sup> They are: (i) Which are the conditions?, (ii) Which goals do we have? and (iii) Which means should be used? The second question can only be answered in

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30. Johansson 1979 p. 112.

political discussion, it has a purely normative character. The answer to the third question should involve the best expert knowledge: given the goal, which is the best way to get there? The first question is of still another character. It can not be answered in discussion - although this is often tried. Whether people's health, on average, is becoming better or worse, whether unemployment goes up or down, whether social selection in schools increase or not are questions on which people often have views and opinions, but reliable answers can not be given on the basis of personal experience or found in the mass media - where they would be based on the methods of journalism and, moreover, probably influenced by the interests of editors and owners.<sup>31</sup> Unemployment or health problems may not necessarily be increasing even if more people in our neighbourhood fall ill or become unemployed and crime rates may not be rising even if newspapers start to write more about crime. Reliable answers to such questions can only be found if people in different relevant conditions are counted by help of established scientific methods. When we started to determine the rate of unemployment through counting the unemployed in representative samples of the population, political discussion could move from issues that cannot be resolved in it - how many are the unemployed - to questions which, at least in principle, can be answered in it - what should we do about unemployment. To give answers to questions about levels and trends of welfare, of how conditions are and of how they change, then, is the task for social reporting. That a mechanism for answering the first question is

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31. When the results from the 1968 survey were published in 1970 and 1971 the standard reaction in the mass media was astonishment over exposed problems - the general expectation was that most welfare problems had already been overcome.

not discussed in the theory of the democratic process can be seen as a lacuna in it, Johansson suggests.<sup>32</sup>

To write social reports seems to be the task for statistical offices rather than for social research institutes and the major task of social reporting has in Sweden also been given to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The task for welfare research is to develop theories, models and methods in the field. This would include both to develop a theory for social reporting and to develop models of how the level of living components hang together, their determinants, causal connections and interrelations. Welfare research in Sweden seems to have come quite far in developing ideas and methods for the description of individual welfare, it has a long way to go to explain its variation and change.

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<sup>32</sup>. Johansson 1979. p. 121.

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