

# WELLBEBE

## Towards theoretically sound and democratically legitimate indicators of well-being in Belgium

### DURATION OF THE PROJECT

Phase 1: 15/12/2006 – 31/01/2009  
Phase 2: 01/02/2009 – 31/01/2011

### BUDGET

721.668 €

### KEYWORDS

Sustainable well-being, indicators, capabilities-functionings, spheres of existence, focus groups, Q-methodology

### CONTEXT

Sustainable development will not be achieved without some fundamental changes in our patterns of living. Therefore, it will be necessary to rely less on material commodities and more on immaterial goods to realise our conception of a good, valuable life while maintaining or even improving our overall well-being. However, in order to trigger a democratic and participative transition towards sustainable development, it is necessary, first to know what are the shared conceptions of a good, valuable life and second, what criteria citizens use to assess social arrangements in terms of quality of life. On the other hand, improved indicators of well-being have become indispensable to guide public policies as it is widely acknowledged that increasing production and consumption has ceased to induce more well-being and happiness.

- Identify the best indicators for each component of well-being and collect the corresponding available data at the collective level;
- Subject the basic indicators to a sample of citizens in order to collect statistically significant weights for their aggregation;
- Aggregate the data in one or at most a handful of synthetic indices;
- Analysis of the behaviour of the indices during the recent past and its correlation with other indicators (GDP, unemployment rate, poverty rate...)
- Explore by (qualitative) simulation the implications in terms of well-being of hypothetical sustainable development policies.

### Methodology

New to analysis and synthesis of the philosophical, sociological, economical and psychological literature, four different methods will be used:

- Focus group methods for collecting reflexive opinions on well-being, quality of life, happiness and human flourishing;
- Q-Methodology for uncovering communalities in social discourses and to get a first estimate of the weights of the different dimensions;
- Large sample survey and multi-variate statistical analysis for collecting statistically significant weightings for the components of well-being, exploring the socio-demographic correlates of the subjective assessments of well-being and their relationship with objective facts about respondents conditions of living;
- Policy simulation for exploring the likely impact of hypothetical sustainable development policies on well-being.

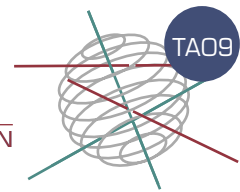
### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### Objectives

The project aims at working out an index of well-being in Belgium which would be altogether internally consistent, democratically legitimate and suitable for guiding and assessing sustainable development policies. This general goal can be subdivided in the following intermediate objectives:

- Identify the different conceptions of the "good life" and their distribution in the population. More precisely: what does well-being mean for people, what makes a life valuable for them, what are its main dimensions and what importance do they attach to each of them.
- Analyse how people assess social arrangements in terms of well-being





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## INTERACTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT PARTNERS

The partners will cooperate closely in all tasks of the project but with a varying emphasis depending on the nature of the task. For instance:

- IDD will take the lead in animating the work on the conceptualisation of well-being, quality of life, happiness and human flourishing. It will also coordinate the statistical analysis of Q-sorts.
- The statistical analysis of the large sample survey will be coordinated by HIVA-KUL.
- ULB-CEDD will take the lead in the organization and conduct of the focus groups and Q-Methodology in French. KUL-HIVA will do the same for the Dutch speaking community. ULB-CEDD will also play a central role in the execution of the policy simulations.

## LINK TO INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

The project is in line with several national programs on the measurement of well-being, notably in Australia, Canada, Finland, Korea, Netherlands, New-Zealand, Norway, UK and Switzerland.

An important source of inspiration for the project will come from the research program carried out by "Well-being in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group" based at the University of Bath.

Also at the international level but concerning developed countries, the OECD has launched a World Forum on "Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies".

The Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) is fostering cooperation between scholars all around the world in order to measure capabilities and make operational the "capability-functioning" theory of well-being. The network intends to participate at some events organised in these contexts and interact with other scholars participating in them.

## EXPECTED RESULTS AND/OR PRODUCT

The expected results consist of four kinds of products:

- Working papers, publications in peer reviewed scientific journals and communications at international conferences;
- Two books on "Sustainable development and well-being" (one in French, one in Dutch) to be published in popular scientific vulgarisation collections targeted at a wider audience;
- The well-being indices themselves,
- General recommendation for sustainable development policies, especially with respect to consumption patterns.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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### Follow-up Committee

For the complete and most up-to-date composition of the Follow-up Committee, please consult our Federal Research Actions Database (FEDRA) by visiting <http://www.belspo.be/fedra> or <http://www.belspo.be/ssd>

