



WELL-BEING OF SOCIETY: HAPPINESS AS A MEASURE OF THE ECONOMY?

A cultural perspective

28 May 2013

Synopsis

There is growing interest around the concept of well-being as a more comprehensive measurement of prosperity and sustainable economic development than GDP. One tool that has been developed to measure well-being is The Happy Planet Index (HPI), a new measurement of human well-being and environmental impact that was introduced by the London-based New Economics Foundation. The HPI is designed to challenge well-established indices of countries' development weighted predominantly towards the measurement of economic production, but which fail to take account of other key issues like the impact of resource use on the planet, or a wider range of social indicators contributing to well-being (such as life expectancy or education).

Since 2006 NEF has published a world ranking of countries based on its HPI. The most recent index was published in June 2012 and gave its highest rating, for the second time in a row, to Costa Rica. The UK, which has been developing its own national well-being project, has risen consistently on the HPI since 2006, and compares well with other developed European countries.

The debate about well-being in general, and the HPI in particular, has generated a great deal of interest, and some controversy (partly based on its name – NEF sustain that the index is not a measurement of the subjective concept of the “happiest” countries in the world, but rather of the environmental efficiency and capacity to support well-being in a given country). There has also been criticism that the HPI fails to give adequate weighting to critical human rights indicators, thus distorting its final figures. At the same time, it has sparked a global debate on the need to find more sustainable and eco-friendly narratives of economic progress in a world of rapid population growth and dwindling natural resources.

The Embassies to the Holy See of Costa Rica and the United Kingdom together with the Pontifical Council for Culture therefore offer this joint high level event to take forward the well-being discussion at the Holy See in its economic, social and cultural context, explore the concept of well-being as a tool for policy makers, and make a contribution to the cross disciplinary well-being public debate in international economic, intellectual and Church circles and raise the question, Can we measure, and promote, happiness?

PROGRAMME

Tuesday 28 May 2013 9 -12 Casa La Salle – Aula Magna Via Aurelia, 472 – 00165 Rome

09.00 - Welcome address Brother Alvaro Rodriguez, Superior General Fratelli de La Salle

09.10 - Introduction by S.E. Fernando Felipe Sánchez, Ambassador of Costa Rica to the Holy See

09.20 - Prolusion by H.Em. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture

Interventions:

9.40 - Presentation of the Happy Planet Index, Dr. Saamah Abdallah, The New Economics Foundation, United Kingdom

10.10 - H.E. Manuel Obregon, Minister for Culture and Youth, Costa Rica

10.30 – Dott. Glenn Everett, National Director of „Well-Being#, United Kingdom

10.50 - Debate

11.50 - Conclusions by S.E. Nigel Baker, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Holy See

