OVERVIEW ARTICLE

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Indicators and Community Well-Being: Exploring a Relational Framework

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Abstract

Indicators are used in a variety of contexts for exploring community and regional conditions, progress towards goals, and gauging current conditions. We explore the role indicators play in aiding assessment of community well-being, including how they are applied. We consider community well-being to be a comprehensive concept in many dimensions of community life and explore its relations to indicators. Based on ideas around domains and sub-domains as well as relevant indicators, we find that indicators may serve a role in conceptualizing and assessing community well-being. It is a complex undertaking but there exists enough conceptualization and application that a relational framework is proposed with the intent of aiding in tying the use of indicators to assessment of community well-being.

Keywords Quality of life · Community well-being · Indicators · Subjective and objective well-being

Overview

Community indicators can help deepen understanding of complex and interrelated aspects that are inherent in any area where people, nature, economies, politics, and any other dimension of life intersect. Communities are indeed complex by their very nature and represent a full range of interaction and relational effects. Indicators, by their nature, seek to break down these complexities for measurement to foster insight and understanding. This is typically done via subjective and objective data points that

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represent values and goals for the community. It is not an easy task and one that is fraught with difficulties; for example, who decides those values? Are there ways to ensure the values of the majority are represented in the indicators selected to measure progress towards desirable goals and outcomes? Further, "while each of these values or aspects has a vital role in influencing community well-being outcomes and perceptions, there are also many different ways these can combine, depending on the particular characteristics of the place" (Phillips and Wong 2017: xxix).

Likewise, the very concept of community well-being varies depending on whom is asked, community conditions and changes, how community itself is defined, and the nature of well-being -whether it is assumed to be more theoretical or applied. It can be thought of as an over-arching umbrella, bringing together many aspects that can influence well-being of the collective. At the same time, how are these aspects decided upon and are there enough commonalities that guidance can be offered? All the above, and more, complicate the picture for communities and identification and measurement of their well-being.

In this study, we explore a variety of research focusing on well-being and related concepts, including community and social indicators. First, we present some background for well-being in the community context; this includes a review of numerous studies as well as categorizing them by relevant domains and related measures used. We selected these studies based on their focus on community well-being, with most using a place-based assessment. This is followed by a discussion of community indicators, from the perspective of their use, importance, and relevance in terms of application for conceptualizing and measuring. From these analyses, we then provide a framework for exploring the relationships between community indicators and community well-being.

Community Well-Being

We propose that community well-being (CWB) centers on understanding of community and fulfilling the needs and desires of its members. In this context, community well-being embraces a wide range of economic, social, environmental, political, cultural dimensions, and can be thought of as how well functions of community are governed and operating (Chanan 2002; Cox et al. 2010; Haworth and Hart 2007). It is "embedded with multidimensional values including the economic, social and environmental aspects that impact people (Phillips and Wong 2017: xxix). In these and most other definitions, there is a focus on communities of place – settlements, towns, and cities that share space and governance for functioning in those places.

The range of CWB approaches varies depending on local conditions, but there is some commonality around measuring community well-being (CWB). In general, measurements are either categorized as objective, subjective, or sometimes affective. Objective well-being refers to the material and social circumstances which is present at the community or collective level (typically such measures as income, education, presence of facilities, and other similar aspects). Subjective well-being at the community level includes individuals' perceived assessment of their own well-being and cultural value within the community (Allin 2007; Lau et al. 2005; Lee and Kim 2015; Sung 2016; White 2010).

Sirgy et al. (2010) focus more on the subjective parts of community well-being (see Table 2). They contend that the greater residents' satisfaction with community services and conditions, the greater the satisfaction with community life. In addition, the more

satisfied residents are with their community, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their well-being; this positive perception is likely to enhance overall community well-being (Insch and Florek 2008; Theodori 2001). Sirgy's (2011: 331) study stated, "the good society is more than the sum of happiness of its citizens," describing community well-being that embraces social norms and values, and various qualities of community and is greater than the sum of individual well-being. Bramston et al. (2002) state that subjective quality of life could be reflected in community level indices such as neighborhood cohesion and sense of belonging to the community.

We agree with this viewpoint and think there are likely many factors, whether explicit or implicit that will influence individual and collective well-being. While many define community well-being as the overall satisfaction of residents regarding the physical, social, and environmental conditions of the community (Forjaz et al. 2011), we also think it is more than an aggregate of individuals' satisfaction. It is more akin to the old adage - the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As Aristotle noted, there is value above the individual contributions to a sum, and we think this is aptly reflected in community well-being.

There are also limitations with this viewpoint. It depends also on how community is defined and used as an aspirational or normative term in the sense that is comprised of a group of people who care about one another and are in some ways dependent upon one another.[1] For our study, we focus on communities of place that are connected through geography, governance, or common characteristics that bind people together, whether implicitly or explicitly. Supporting Young's (1986) argument, it does not mean the ideal community relies on the same desires or goals; rather, community embodies differences especially in modern societies, community has been developed within a plurality of contexts providing a multiplicity of actions and structures. At the same time, we include some studies that focus on communities of interest, those groups with common concerns, irrespective of geography. In both instances, the inclusion of the term community has implications. For example, in a community of place, deep differences may exist between members that impede any individual's ability to relate their own well-being to others of that place.[2] These deep divides or differences that may vary from one neighborhood to the next and even within neighborhoods pose problems for understanding CWB and represents an area that needs further study.

Supporting Sirgy's argument, Insch and Florek (2008) mention that residents' perception of a broad array of living conditions (e.g. community health, the built environment, the natural environment, access and participation, and safety) is integral to residents' level of well-being in the community. Community members' satisfaction is shaped by the quality of the highly interrelated community environment. However, they also mention the limitation of the subjective perspective alone in that residents' perceptions towards community environment can be different, even though they are occupying the same physical space. Their level of well-being may be different based on their perceived satisfaction with the community (again, an old adage comes to mind – some view the glass as half-full and others as half-empty).

On the other hand, across several decades there have been similar conceptions of community, for example, with Christakopoulou et al. (2001) and Proshansky (1978)

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[1] Many thanks to a reviewer who expressed this to us in the review, encouraging a more differentiated conception of community.

[2] Ibid.

stating that community entails physical, social, economic, political, psychological and cultural settings. As a whole, the welfare of community (community well-being) requires interconnection of different community settings and a balance between them. They capture the concept of community well-being using six different characteristics of places. Also, they give importance to not only objective community conditions such as income level and employment but also residents' subjective perceptions and satisfaction towards their community.

Totikidis and Prilleltensky (2006) developed a community wellness model, embedding well-being from a multicultural perspective. They conceive community well-being from a holistic state of affairs, consisting of personal, relational, and collective levels of wellness. Wellness derives from coincident and balanced satisfaction of personal, relational and collective needs of individuals and communities, and needs are from, but not limited to, mental, physical, social, environmental and economic conditions. Community wellness (community well-being) ultimately can then be thought of as the synergy of three levels of wellness.

A wide range of domains are highly linked with each other. In the social well-being context, people who feel close to others in their community (social dimension) also feel that their neighborhood is safe (environmental dimension). Tonon (2017) focuses on community well-being comprising socio-community relationships dimensions (see Table 2). Also, active community involvement results in residents feeling that they may contribute more to their well-being (Keyes, 1998). Anderson (2017) claims that social forces such as social integration and solidarity reifies not only sustainability but also quality of community conditions and, that over the long run, reinforces sustainable overall community well-being.

Moscardo (2007) states that social capital (i.e., relationships that operationalizes collective action) and community capacity (i.e., the skills and mechanisms that support the community change) are essential factors for achieving community well-being. Subsequently, community capacities can result from active relationships between various community dimensions; and to grasp community potential, developing an integrated set of indicators is indispensable. Table 1 presents some of the typical domains and sub-domains used in assessing community well-being. These include human, economic, environmental, and social aspects, or domains, that can be included. This is not an exhaustive list and development of specific indicators are usually based on the particular community's situation and needs.

There are few examples where CWB is regarded as something beyond individual levels, with Lee et al., defining it as the "that state in which the needs and desires of the community are fulfilled" (2015: 2) and Anderson (2017) positing that CWB refers to attributes of the community rather than an aggregation of individuals. Building on similar ideas, Kim and Ludwigs (2017) argue that existing measures of CWB fail to reflect the relationship between CWB and individual well-being (IWB) and they include inter-subjective community well-being to bridge these gaps. Differing from a conventional concept of CWB measurement, Kim and Ludwigs (2017) stress that existing measures of CWB are more appropriate for public goals focusing on collective needs and desires. However, at the same time, CWB cannot ignore the individual needs and desires which are explicitly or inexplicitly aligned with collective needs and desires. To reflect the relationship between CWB and individual well-being (IWB), they include inter-subjective community well-being in their community well-being atlas (see Fig. 1). Intersubjective well-being aspect is understood as shared knowledge

Table 1 Domains typically used in assessing community well-being

Domains	Sub-domains
Human	Physical Psychological
Economic	Standard of living Finances Housing etc.
Environmental	Infrastructure Safety Geographical conditions Environmental quality etc.
Social	Neighborhood Civic engagement Volunteer etc.

or shared understanding; thus, CWB intersubjective indicators focus on the evaluation of community elements rather than residents' subjective satisfaction. For instance, intersubjective well-being question asks residents to think about how satisfied all other residents of your community are with various community items and acknowledges differences between residents' subjective satisfaction and their intersubjective evaluation.

Tonon (2017) cited Lo Biondo's inter-subjectivity concept that "community implies a situation of inter-subjectivity in which there is a sharing of fields of experience, a shared understanding of such experience, a judgment of fact common to everyone, and a value judgment common to all" (p. 523). This sounds quite aspirational, particularly as related to their definition of community. In reality, there likely does not exist very often shared experience and values common to all. It also depends on how the community defines itself, and it may be that place-based communities recognize themselves very differently from communities of interest. Either way, the idea that inter-subjectivity can yield insights into understanding of well-being is an area that needs further exploration.

As discussed, definitions and components of community well-being might vary depending on research interests and purposes. However, a subjective, objective, or
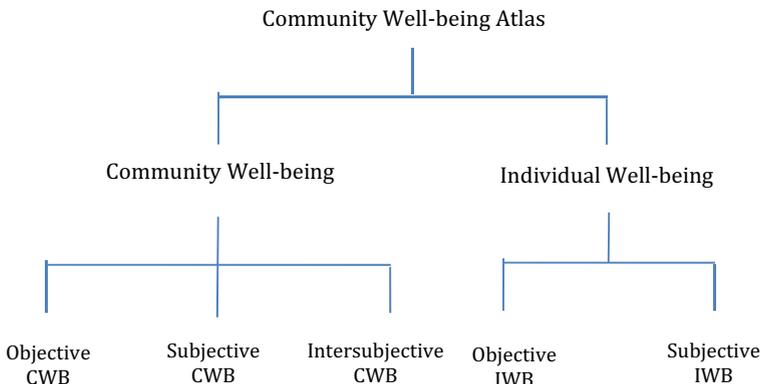
Fig. 1 Structure of the community well-being atlas (Kim and Ludwigs 2017: 427)

intersubjective point of view alone gives us a limited understanding of the concept of community well-being. For example, people living under hard conditions could be satisfied with their community and life, from a subjective perspective. In this case, can we say the community is in a state of well-being? From only the subjective point of view, personal perception takes on an important role in determining quality of life, regardless of the objective standards of community environment. Discrepancies between objective standards and subjective perception demonstrate that both are important to constitute a comprehensive community well-being construct. Langlois and Anderson (2002) claim that both individual and community constructs can have individual and contextual components as well as objective and subjective measures. Further, Cummins' (2000) verifies that objective well-being conditions are highly correlated with subjective well-being conditions, particularly in distressed communities. This brings us back to the idea that there is something greater inherent in community, with advantages accruing because individuals are part of the larger entity (whether explicit or implicit, whether easily measured or identified or not). As discussed previously, the influence of community on an individual's well-being may certainly vary but that it is difficult to fully conceptualize individual well-being without a sense of community well-being.

In addition, peoples' understanding of, priorities of, and competencies in pursuing well-being are different based on the cultural contexts of the community (Lau et al. 2005; White 2010). Lau et al. (2005) identify differences in terms of life satisfaction and happiness between Chinese and Western cultures. Also, rural residents are more satisfied with their community than urban residents even though the objective standards of rural areas are lower than those of urban areas. Further, rural residents place priority on social connectedness to build community well-being (Maybery et al. 2009).

Many previous studies rooted in CWB regard the concept as a multidimensional concept, and this concept is divided into several dimensions (domains) as listed in Table 2. In the literature, several variables (both individual and collective level, and/or subjective and objective level) have been utilized to embody community well-being. Through a literature review, we wanted to identify the variety and type of studies around community well-being (the majority have been discussed in this article) and their variables most frequently associated with community well-being. To select primary sources, the following key words were used: community well-being; community indicators; community index; social well-being; communal wellness; collective well-being; and life satisfaction. We have divided the studies into domains expressed or evident in their approaches, as well as measurements used. As mentioned earlier, the previous studies listed in Table 2 illustrate many different ways of constructing CWB domains and how to measure them depending on the characteristics of the place; however, at the same time, it shows enough commonalities that could help with gauging well-being of the collective.

The Role of Indicators

Simply put, community indicators are small pieces of information that upon combining with other pieces of information conveys a picture of the situation in a local area. In other words, these bits of information paint a picture of the current direction of a

Table 2 Community well-being domains and measurement

Authors	CWB Domains	Subsequent Measurement
Whorton and Moore (1984)	• Concern for crime • Availability of jobs • Concern for health care • Concern for housing • Satisfaction with public education • Satisfaction with community	Subjective • Total 24 items to present six core factors, with each factor comprising four items
Sirgy et al. (2000); Sirgy and Cornwell (2001)	Global life satisfaction • Community life • Individual life (e.g. job, family, finances, health)	Subjective • Satisfaction with government, business, nonprofit services • Satisfaction with job, family life, finances, personal health, education, friendships, leisure life, neighborhood, spiritual life, the environment, housing, cultural life, social status
Chistakopoulou et al. (2001)	• Place to live a) Satisfaction with built environment b) Service and facilities c) Environmental quality d) Personal safety • Social community a) Community spirit b) Informal interaction • Economic community a) Income sufficiency • Political community a) Decision making process • Personal space a) Place attachment Part of the city	Subjective and objective • Total 45 items to present nine sub-domains
Theodori (2001)	Community satisfaction • Place to raise a family • Medical and health care services • Local schools • Opportunity to earn an income • Senior citizens' programs • Youth programs • Local shopping facilities • Recreation facilities and programs • Overall physical appearance of the community	Subjective • Multi-item domain-specific satisfaction scale and a single item of general satisfaction
Wills (2001)	• Social/physical well-being • Economic well-being • Environmental well-being	• Economic development • Environmental sustainability • Public/environmental health • Community safety • Housing • Physical, emotional social and spiritual development • Social determinants of health
Cuthill (2004)	• Social capital • Human capital • Physical capital • Financial capital • Natural capital	• The cohesiveness of people and societies • The status of individuals • Local infrastructure including education, housing, and health services • Stocks of money, savings, and pensions • Nature's goods and services
Wiseman et al. (2006); Cox et al. (2010);	Community Indicator Victoria	Subjective and objective

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	CWB Domains	Subsequent Measurement
Davern et al. (2011)	• Healthy, safe, and inclusive communities • Dynamic, resilient and fair economies • Sustainable built and natural environments • Culturally rich and vibrant communities • Democratic and active citizenship	• Multi-item scales in terms of 23 sub-domains and 72 indicators
Miles et al. (2008)	• Wealth and Affordability • Safety and Public Heath • Personal health and Fitness • Diversity and Learning • Community and Governance • Environment and Infrastructure	Subjective and objective • Total 36 items to present six core factors, with each factor comprising six items
Gallup-Healthways (2009)	Well-being Index (emphasis on health) • Life evaluation • Emotional health • Physical health • Healthy behavior • Work environment • Basic access	Subjective and objective Domain specific multi-item ranging from 2 to 13 items
Maybery et al. (2009)	• Social assets • Service agency assets • Neighborhood and economic resources • Community risks	Subjective • Total 20 items-17 asset typed items and 3 items of common risk types of community
Finlay et al. (2010)	Emphasis on northern First Nations in Canada • Social determinants of health • Factors with respect to the northern context, including First Nations cultural perspectives	Subjective • 13 sub-domains of social determinants of health (e.g., education, employment, food security, health care services, social safety, etc.) • 8 factors regarding First Nations context (e.g., colonization, territory, poverty, cultural continuity, etc.)
Sirgy et al. (2010)	• Social well-being • Leisure well-being • Health well-being • Safety well-being • Family and home well-being • Political well-being • Spiritual well-being • Neighborhood well-being • Environmental well-being • Transportation well-being • Education well-being • Work well-being • Financial well-being Consumer well-being	Subjective 87 multi-items based on 14 domains
Van Assche et al. (2010)	The City Monitor 1) Eight activity domains • Living • Learning and education • Care and welfare • Culture and leisure • Working and enterprise	• 200 indicators from statistics, registrations, surveys, and other data sources

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	CWB Domains	Subsequent Measurement
	• Safety and protection • Transportation and mobility • Nature and environment 2) Four sustainable principles • Economic principles • Social principles • Physical-ecological principles • Institutional principles	
Sirgy et al. (2010)	• Social well-being • Leisure well-being • Health well-being • Safety well-being • Family and home well-being • Political well-being • Spiritual well-being • Neighborhood well-being • Environmental well-being • Transportation well-being • Education well-being • Work well-being • Financial well-being • Consumer well-being	Subjective • 87 multi-items based on 14 domains
White (2010)	Collective well-being • The material • The social • The human	Subjective and objective • Practical welfare and standards of living • Social relations and public goods • Capabilities, values and attitudes
Forjaz et al. (2011)	Community services Community attachment Physical and social environment	Subjective • Support to families • Social services • Leisure • Health services • Security • Belonging • Trust in people • Social conditions • Economic situation • Environment

Michalos et al. (2011)	Canadian Index of Well-being
	1) Personal resources
	• Healthy populations
	• Time use
	• Education
	2) Public resources
	• Living standards
	• Community vitality
	• Democratic engagement
	• Leisure and culture
	3) Ecosystem resources
	• Environment
		• Total 64 items to present eight core
		  factors, with each factor comprising
		  eight items

Community Well-being Institute (2014)	• Health, environment and
	  infrastructure
	• Culture, education and welfare
	• Public administration, services,
	  safety, and community
	• Labor, public finance, and economy
		• Total 36 items to present four main
		  domains, with each domain comprising
		  nine items

Kee et al. (2015)	1) Human asset	

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	CWB Domains	Subsequent Measurement
	• Human capital • Economic capital 2) Natural asset • Natural capital • Ingra capital 3) Social asset • Social capital • Political capital	• Three assets and six capitals with 18 domains affecting community conditions and individual life (e.g., education, leisure, trust, volunteer, air pollution, infrastructure, social support, etc.)
Prilleltensky et al. (2015)	• Community well-being as one of well-being components of interpersonal, community, occupational, physical, psychological, economic (ICOPPE) scale	Subjective • Satisfaction with ones' community
Anderson (2017)	• Community well-being as a subset of social well-being	• Processes and Outcomes (e.g., social integration, social cohesion, mutual trust, caring capita and etc.) • Sustaining actions such as empathy and resilience practice • Deteriorating actions such as parochialism and hoarding traditions
Kim and Ludwigs (2017)	• Cultural capital • Social capital • Human capital • Political capital • Economic capital • Physical capital	Subjective, Objective and Intersubjective • 12 categories of objective indicators • 28 items of subjective measurement • 28 items of intersubjective measurement
Shultz et al. (2017)	Community well-being as transitory two constructs, vulnerability and resiliency • Micro factors • Institutions • Marketing systems • Goods and services • Citizen-consumers	• Total 23 community well-being indicators under the five components to facilitate the systemic CWB
Tonon (2017)	• Satisfaction with life • Satisfaction with neighbors • Participation in community organizations • Mutual help among neighbors • The organization of the neighbors • Existence of public spaces	• 18 dimensions (e.g., education, healthcare, cultural participation, and etc.), including the scale satisfaction with life the country (ESCVP)
County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (n.d.)	• Health outcomes • Health behaviors • Clinical care • Social and economic factors • Physical environment	• Total 36 items under the 16 sub-domains of determinants of community health (e.g., education, employment, diet and exercise, safety, social support, etc.)

Adapted and modified from Sung, Table 17 (2016: 94); with more studies added

community. Is it progressing towards goals, losing ground, or staying the same on various points of interest? As the Smart Communities Network explains, the role of an indicator is to help make complex systems understandable or perceptible, and indicators

can aid a community's understanding of how far it is from achieving its chosen goals or to just check the conditions regardless if goals are measured or not. Another way to think about what community indicators are is to consider a balance sheet - just as businesses consider the point in time to assess where they stand financially, communities can assess where they stand on economic, social and environmental fronts by monitoring conditions via indicators (Phillips 2003, 2005).

In this respect, community indicators can aid by providing relevant information for governing a community and making decisions informed by data. While some indicators are used to provide data to support policy and decision making by government, there also exists community indicators work that is separate from government. Groups of people and organizations, such as those in nonprofit or non-governmental work use indicators to assist in defining their own ideas of community, to create alternative possibilities and choices, to resist changes, and to foster understanding of issues, challenges, and opportunities facing these groups. There are many examples of this, including situations where groups of people band together to advocate for something they feel strongly about and bring in data in the form of indicators to help support their position.

Often selected as part of a group or community visioning process or other means to elicit wide-spread input from group members, residents and stakeholders, indicators "indicate" conditions of community well-being. Most communities consider input by its residents and others to be vital; it builds support for the use of indicators as well as help vest those most impacted by subsequent actions in decision-making processes. It is important to note what indicators are not – they do not provide a model of how a community works. They also are not the answer to ensuring best outcomes in decision-making as there are many complexities and points of influence in the process of decision-making. Rather, they provide support information to aid in decision-making.

While policymakers have used sets of data and information for many years to assist the decision-making process, local community indicators are a bit different when connected to local governance (Phillips 2005). Typically, they are used to look at communities' short- and long-term conditions on any or all dimensions – economic, environmental, and equity (social, cultural and political aspects). Many examples abound of specific indicators within these major dimensions, including educational achievement, quality of health services, transportation access, voter participation and so on. Some communities limit their indicator set to several dozen while others have hundreds of data points they monitor, often on an annual basis. While it seems that the potential to influence governance in the realms of decision-making and policymaking, the reality is that the data represented in indicators is only as good as its use. In other words, if indicators are not used to inform and connect to governance, then they will not have much influence. As noted earlier, in some cases, the intent may be different from using indicators in governance and instead will be used to foster understanding or aid in people defining their own ideas around their groups and communities.

Why Are They Important?

There are two major reasons why local community indicators have been considered important – sustainability and improving quality of life. The World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, first

presented a definition of sustainable development in 1987 widely adopted throughout the world: *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. Why did sustainability concerns emerge and continue to be of importance, from the perspective of community indicators? A basic answer is that world leaders place too much validity on economic measures of performance and these do not adequately represent other aspects that impact well-being such as environmental and equity/social dimensions. For example, the gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP) are indicators commonly used for measuring growth. GDP is defined as the output of labor and property within a country; GNP adds net income from abroad to this figure. Policies and decision-making has been guided by the desire to continually grow and is measured by increases in GDP and GNP. Issues and problems arise when the goal is continuous growth, because no system (economic or otherwise) can support unlimited growth. This places policy and outcomes directly in conflict then with the ideals and concepts of sustainable development.

Recall that community indicators may consider a full range of dimensions – not only economic, but also environmental and equity. These dimensions should sound familiar, as they are usually described as the "3 E's" of sustainability. As opposed to traditional growth indicators like GDP and GNP, community indicators represent a more effective means of measuring progress toward sustainability. Community indicators generally are consistent with the principles of sustainability and can assess community well-being more fully. This especially holds true if assuming both sustainability and quality of life are important dimensions of community well-being.

Indeed, the connection between community indicators and sustainability can be strong in some cases, with some observers directly attributing indicators' recent rise in popularity to the concurrent emergence of sustainable development interest and application (Meadows 1998). Most community indicator projects or systems incorporate elements of sustainable development or are driven by the principles of it. The importance of sustainability cannot be over-stated and community indicators help policymakers, residents and other stakeholders gauge their communities' responses and situations to critical issues and conditions – again, aspects that influence overall community well-being.

Quality of life concerns the general well-being of individuals and societies, or communities. Community indicators and quality of life are inherently related; this is due to the assumption that the latter reflects values inherent and important to a community. Indicators then are measurements of what a community values the most, and as Donella Meadows described in 1998, indicators can shift, reinforce, or promote a particular set of values. It should be noted that Donella Meadows' influence on conceptions and design of indicators is still being felt today. Her seminal work in systems thinking and sustainability set the stage for much subsequent action, research and debate on indicators' use and application. The Donella Meadows Institute, housed in the US state of Vermont, continues her legacy and provides links to publications and other helpful information. Their often cited 1998 report, *Indicators and Information Systems for Sustainable Development*, can be found at the website and is highly recommended as a foundational reading for linking indicators and sustainability concepts.

By identifying, designing, and integrating indicators into overall planning, policy and development activities, a community makes a statement that quality of life matters

to them as defined by its residents and stakeholders. At the same time, as Phillips explained in 2003, measuring quality of life can be tedious, conflicted, and uncertain - this is due to the realization that discussing and determining such values is a political process involving competing ideologies defining what constitutes a good life. Those quality-of-life and indicators projects that try to remain above the political fray by excluding ideology or underlying philosophical premises are often not effective because these are conversations that people and communities as a whole need to have. This leads to important questions such as: what is most important to them and why? How do they translate this into measurable indicators?

As Bauer (1966) noted over fifty years ago, the purpose of an indicator is to enable people to gauge where they are situated and where they are heading. Furthermore, indicators of community well-being support local government planning. Wiseman et al. (2006) explain benefits of indicator systems with respect to the governing dynamics. For example, community well-being indicators focus on the engagement of local residents and community strengthening; support for council decision-making; and, provide comprehensive and useful information such as community priorities and real-world results of community circumstances (Cox et al. 2010; Wiseman et al. 2006). Schultz and colleagues (Shultz et al. 2017) argue that in considering community well-being, that of flourishing communities are different from those of distressed communities. Indicators for a distressed community focus more on their basic and survival needs to alleviate negative states or occurrences in the community, while indicators for a flourishing community could focus on sustained growth and resilience that embodies higher-level demands such as actualization of ideal goals. Therefore, community well-being indicators assume a multifaceted form based on the characteristics of community as well as embracing a broader spectrum of human needs. For example, in a distressed community, poverty, alcoholism, and drug use could be central indicators to measure community well-being (Finlay et al. 2010), while in an affluent community, people may place more value on indicators related to culture, leisure and community engagement.

Community indicators can help support efforts to gauge levels of community well-being, to identify their goals and needs, track progress towards those goals, and to aid in strengthening community capabilities. This latter aspect can be crucial for areas to do, as it implies that a community has ability to recover from difficulties and move forward towards goals via strong social capital and social networks. It is what Phillips (2015:300) terms "social community capacity," and can be reflected in choice of indicators to assess it (or the lack thereof), such as the types and strengths of relationships, networks, and talents in a community. As seen, there are myriad considerations, dimensions and challenges in crafting community indicators to reflect community well-being. The following section attempts to bring together aspects of CWB and community indicators into a framework that is proposed as a flexible way to consider connections.

A Community Well-being Relational Framework

As noted, indicators can play a role in helping communities identify, gauge, and track their selected measures and benchmarks, but do not provide all the answers. Because of the spectrum of domains and considerations around CWB, it seems applicable that

community well-being indicators need to include not only objective living conditions but also subjective, cognitive, and affective perceptions of residents towards their community, and possibly inter-subjective indicators as well. We propose a flexible community well-being framework where indicators are focused to reflect on community conditions and needs, as well as providing feasible ways to measure.

A framework for conceptualizing the relationships between indicators and community well-being is shown in Fig. 2. If one thinks of community well-being as residing in the pinnacle of a pyramid of needs and goals, then the bases supporting it are the domains, sub-domains, and indicators. In other words, community well-being is influenced by community domains (e.g., economic, human, environmental, and social). These domains are composed of sub-domains, and in turn, are influenced by specific events or experiences with those domains. Objective and subjective indicators at the bottom of the triangle are a tool for measurement, as well as a reflection of multi-faceted human needs. That is, community well-being is constructed from individual concerns with each domain as well as community circumstances; thus, the priorities and sub measurement items can be varied based on the residents' needs, community environment, and their governance (i.e., a distressed community versus a flourishing community).

Consequently, the greater the fulfillment with specific indices, the greater the actualization of community well-being. Being able to conceptualize the relationships between identifying and measuring both subjective and objective indicators with multi-faceted needs of residents in communities can be valuable. It may help in analyzing and implementing public policy that can positively influence overall community well-being. An example of this could include monitoring environmental well-being as desired goal of a community's populace, and identifying indicators that measure outdoor engagement (parks, recreation, healthy lifestyles, urban agriculture, etc.). Indicators then become a way to gauge and assess progress towards goals for the community, and at the same time can also be reflective of individuals' actions that influence their well-being.

Fig. 2 Community well-being and indicator relational framework. Source: (Sung and Phillips 2016, p. 7)

Conclusion

While defining community well-being is complicated, this study describes a community well-being framework based on four significant community characteristics in the literature. Community well-being is informed from individual levels of well-being of people who belong to the community, as well as the benefits that accrue from the synergy of a community (whether implicit or explicit). Community well-being can be considered both a critical determinant and consequence of individual well-being, or quality of life.

Second, community well-being is conceived as multidimensional values including economic, social, environmental, and human factors. However, even though each of these factors or domains takes on an important role in the construct of community well-being respectively, the priorities and sub-measurement items can be variously based on the residents' needs, community environment, and their governance. This is a flexible framework including a multifaceted way of thinking. Depending on community circumstances, an integrated set of indicators can be developed.

Community-well-being indicators can aid in diagnosing community circumstances, help identify residents' desired outcomes and provide insight for developing a tool to gauge community well-being. While not a panacea for solving community issues, valid and representative community indicators may help bring attention to current and long-term community issues. Indicators include not only objective living conditions but also subjective cognitive and affective perceptions of residents toward their community. The combination of objective and subjective indicators (and possibly intersubjective and/or affective indicators) can aid in supporting a comprehensive community well-being measurement. If considered within a flexible community well-being framework, indicators may focus on reflecting community conditions and needs, as well as measuring them in ways that are valuable to the people involved.

Community well-being indicators can be used to support people in gauging levels of community well-being, to identify their goals and needs within the community and to identify community capabilities that may need strengthening. In addition, as Sirgy's (2011, p. 331) study stated, "the good society is more than the sum of happiness of its citizens," community well-being that seeks to embrace social norms and values, and various qualities of community may be greater than the sum of individual well-being. To support this framework, developing and finding more reliable data are important; further, an enquiry into more extended and various fields of community well-being are necessary in future studies (e.g., the role of deep differences in communities of place, exploring intersubjective indicators, definition of community and the role of sense of community and of social groups, CWB in arts and culture, CWB in tourism).

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