

BES INDICATORS AT LOCAL LEVEL: APPLICATION TO POLICY CYCLE AND EVALUATION

Stefania Taralli¹, Paola D'Andrea²

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1. *The project*

This paper is a "work in progress" concerning advances and intermediate results of the "Provinces' BES" project³, launched by the Province of Pesaro e Urbino (PU) as a technical-support action to implement its own strategic plan "Provincia 2020".

The project is promoted and managed by PU Province's Statistics Office in partnership with Italian Statistical Institute - Istat, that provides scientific supervision and technical support; it is a pilot project of data analysis and statistical research directed to assess equitable and sustainable wellbeing of Provinces, and it is about to be replied and extended together with other Italian Provinces starting in June 2013. It is included as a planning study in the current National Statistical Program (PSN 2011-2013) and it is expected to evolve into an Information System (IS) in the next PSN cycle (2014-2016). The project aims at:

- Setting the standard for a common logical and methodological framework concerning connections within local governance and the local community well-being;
- Identifying, implementing, assessing and selecting a dashboard of statistical indicators that are relevant to specific information needs at local level;
- Designing a Statistical IS suitable to support the policy-cycle at local level.

Documents and intermediate results are available at www.besdelleprovincia.it

1.2. *Information and evaluation needs*

Measuring Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being (BES) at local level means to make available statistical data and indicators that meet the needs of the local "political community" and accurately and reliably portray reality concerning "the place" where policies are decided and implemented.

EU Committee of the Regions strongly recommend local authorities to define their

¹ Istat, Sede per le Marche, Via Castelfidardo 4, 60121 Ancona (IT), taralli@istat.it

² Provincia di Pesaro e Urbino, Ufficio statistica, Viale Gramsci 4, 61121 Pesaro (IT), p.dandrea@provincia.ps.it

³ "Analisi e ricerche per la valutazione del Benessere equo e sostenibile (BES) delle Province": studio progettuale, Programma Statistico Nazionale 2011-2013 (PSU-00003).

own “2020 vision”, based on a territorial SWOT analysis and develop key-performance indicators to ensure policy monitoring, reporting and evaluation (EU-COR 2012). Moreover, local public authorities have a variety of different responsibilities in terms of designing and delivering specific policy responses to economic, environmental and social needs at local level. In addition, they also often have other powers which can have a significant impact on setting the framework conditions to enhance societal well-being.

According to the Italian set of rules, Provinces play a role in planning, coordination and cooperation at local level in connection with municipalities and other local bodies; the Provinces also function as providers of statistical, technical and administrative services towards local authorities.

Considering the possible evaluative application of BES indicators, we can refer to those steps of the policy-making cycle at Provinces’ level that mainly can be enhanced by applying a participatory approach (La Spina *et al.*, 2011):

1. Agenda setting stage: stakeholders indicate and prioritize problems to face;
2. Policy design: goals have to be agreed and actions to be choose; a decision about how to allocate resources is made;
3. Accountability: stakeholders are informed about outputs and outcomes;
4. Lessons from experience: changes are assessed in itself and compared to expected results.

2. FRAMEWORK AND ISSUES

2.1. Concepts and framework

To set a dashboard of well-being indicators suitable to assess inequalities both between Provinces and within any single Province it is requested to balance the “top-down approach” and the “bottom-up” one: disaggregation of national statistics and indicators must be complemented by local indicators because information is required at both national and focused territorial level (Fig. 1).

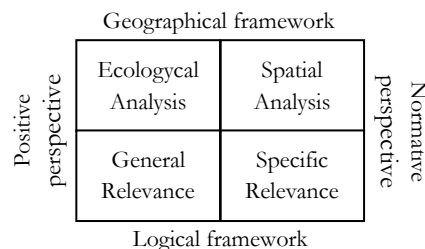


Fig. 1. Provinces’ BES Information System: grid of analysis and indicators relevance

Therefore we attempted to detail a logical framework consistent with the “SSF Report” (Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009) and with the Istat-Cnel Leading Committee resolutions (Istat-Cnel, 2012) and also able to inform about how the Provinces’ policies can affect societal wellbeing. By this side, it was primarily required to identify specific BES indi-

icators, i.e. indicators directly connected to the Provinces' functions, services, and projects and related to one or more BES dimensions: for this purpose it was carried out a taxonomical evaluation (Scettri, 2009), and a large and accurate census of the PU Province's archives in order to assess statistical-exploitable information.

BES Dimensions	Functions (national or regional law)	Services (budget allocation)	Projects (strategical planning)	Archives (statistical, administrative)
Material living standards	1	4	8	4
Health	1	1	2	-
Education , training and knowledge	1	2	6	4
Work, personal activities	2	6	9	3
Political voice and governance	2	5	21	3
Social connections	1	4	5	5
Environment	5	5	11	3
Security	3	6	9	3
Subjective wellbeing	1	1	2	2
Research and Innovation	3	6	4	<i>assessment in process</i>
Landscape and cultural heritage	3	3	5	
Quality of Public Services	6	9	11	

Tab 1. PU Province's functions, services, projects and archives: a breakdown by BES dimension (*num.*)

Each single match reported in table 1 suggest that one or more specific PU Province's BES indicator may be requested and/or supplied in addition to general ones.

The final IS structure seems to comply most of local information needs, including the evaluation one, regarding to any participatory step of the policy cycle:

1. Agenda setting can be oriented by differences between Provinces, and between a single Province and the regional average or the national average. We will prefer this last approach, in order to avoid spatial autocorrelation effects (Pintaldi, 2003);
2. Policy design: goals, actions and budget-allocation decision can be supported by assessing statistical differences within the Province, inequalities and multiple disadvantage in territorial distribution;
3. The accounting-for exercise can be made by monitoring specific indicators;
4. Lessons from experience could be find out by comparing in space and time both single local measures and geographical differences.

2.2. Statistical and evaluative issues

According to the fundamental requirements of the Provinces' Bes IS, we gave high priority to relevant, reliable, and comparable data and indicators as stated by the principles of official statistics (Signore et al., 2012). Moreover we selected mostly data sources and collection methods able to be kept forward in terms of workflows and financial feasibility.

The first issue we had to face was data availability, of course. *Proxy* measures and alternative indicators of general relevance are our test solution.

Second issue: indicators performance at local scale is the. Sometimes national surveys or archives provide local statistics but those are not enough robust or complete

and no comparison in space or time can be done confidently⁴. In addition, sometimes national indicators don't fit to local scale simply because of a lack of information (few cases observed and high variance in time and space), or due to the presence of relevant cases or outliers⁵.

Third: sometimes replying national indicators at local scale with no adjustment produce a change of meaning or reduce relevance. This can happen, for example, as a result of different geographical encoding criteria applied to data or because numerator and denominator pertain to different territorial units⁶.

Fourth: in recent times relevant territorial and administrative changes took place in Marche⁷. This especially means additional work to check geographical encoding errors in datasets, and sometimes, not a chance to finally obtain comparable series.

Fifth: trade-off between relevant information supplied and unknown quality is the main problem affecting local statistical sources and administrative archives at any level. Applying the methodology of the "provinces' archives census"⁸ we accurately assessed the quality of PU Province's archives, collecting a sound structural and reference metadata database. Metadata collection will be further implemented in other Provinces to appraise if additional or specific indicators can be repeated elsewhere.

And last: the BES indicators are required to be legitimate and social accepted to be applied to the policy cycle governance. Stakeholders consultation at local level is usually acknowledged as adequate (Bezzi *et al.*, 2010), but this is not enough if you aim at support both self-assessment and comparative evaluation. That's why we are about to start a joint feasibility study in cooperation with other Italian Provinces, in order to test and validate our methodology, and to refine and extend our intermediate results.

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⁴ I.e. time series of employment or unemployment rates at provincial level (Istat- labor force survey).

⁵ I.e. mortality rates by specific death cause or age-group; number of non-profit units for inhabitant.

⁶ I.e. comparing enrolled in secondary school and resident population of the correspondent age-group; urban waste production in conjunction with garbage dumping in the same territorial unit.

⁷ In 2009 a new Province was created (Fermo) and 7 commons were separated from Pesaro e Urbino Province and Marche Region and aggregated to Rimini Province and Emilia-Romagna Region.

⁸ Censimento degli Archivi Amministrativi delle Province, Rilevazione, PSN 2011-2013 (PRO0001).