

# MEASURE THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON WELLBEING

A DEFINITION SHAPED BY A DESIRE FOR THE  
FUTURE

*We need to know how fair our society and lives are*

*We need to know if we are proceeding in the right direction*

*At what speed*

*We need to know if the path we have chosen to get there is the right  
one.*

*This is why we need measures, new measures:*

*Measures that point to where we want to go*

*Measures that indicate how far we are from the target*

*Measures that tell us how we are changing and at what speed.*

*What if wrong indicators guided us? Shouldn't we also need new  
indicators and symbols of societal progress to enhance the care for  
culture in the public opinion?*

*'In the words of Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz: "Our metrics  
are important not just because they tell us how we are doing but  
because they serve as guides in policy-making".*

Despite relevant differences based on gender, age, social condition,  
income, education, people in Europe share a vision of a better society  
and a better life based upon:

Curiosity Awareness  
Cooperation  
Participation Empathy  
Belonging  
Community  
Self-esteem  
Engagement  
Hope Trust

With a special thank you to Annalisa Cicerchia from ISTAT

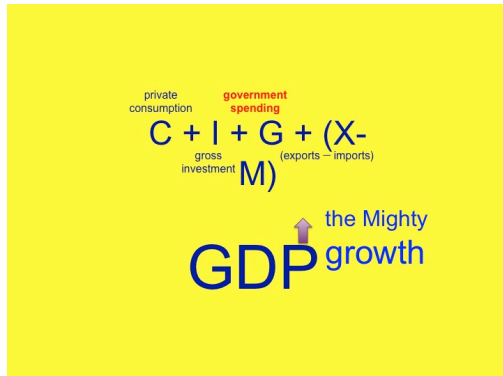
**culture**  
**ACTION**  
**europe**



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## THE DECEIVING REIGN OF GROWTH AND MEASURABLE ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE



For too long, our judgment and decision-making have been defined by the magic combination of two words: *economic growth*. In fact, it is still a common belief that an increase in the percentage of the GDP (or the GDP *per capita*) represents the wealth of a society even though evidence indicate that this is a false assumption.

Indeed, through decades increasing concerns have been raised on the adequacy of current measures of economic performance.

In 1968 Robert F. Kennedy ([listen the original audio track here](#)) said “*Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product [...] if we should judge America by that - counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage [...] Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.*”



Under the impulse of the French Government in 2008, Professors [Joseph Stiglitz](#) and [Amartya Sen](#) chaired a high level international [commission](#) to ‘*identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress, to consider additional information required for the production of a more relevant picture, to discuss how to present this information in the most appropriate way, and to check the feasibility of measurement tools proposed by the Commission*’. The work and final [report](#) of the Commission coordinated by [Prof. Jean Paul Fitoussi](#) put the basis for today’s global debate on alternative measures to GDP.

Since then the European Commission launched an initiative called [Beyond GDP](#) that has been silent for a while and is not regaining vitality, and the OECD ([Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)) took the lead of the global debate with the so called Better life [initiative](#) and [index](#).

One year ago, on 16-19 October 2012, about a thousand [statisticians and policy makers](#) gathered in Delhi at the 4<sup>th</sup> OECD forum to debate around **Measuring Well-Being for Development and Policy Making** and [stated](#) that: ‘*people in developed and developing countries alike aspire to a society that allows them to thrive and prosper, a society that is more inclusive and that secures, rather than undermines, opportunities for future generations to live a good life. People are concerned about their living **conditions** and reducing poverty still remains an imperative in many countries. But beyond material conditions, people are also concerned about the quality of their life: their jobs and working conditions, their health and skills, the time they devote to their families and friends, their ties with other people in their community, their capacity to act as informed citizens, the quality and security of the environment where they live. They are concerned about the sustainability of natural resources, and have expectations for better governance and more responsive institutions. This requires a new vision that places the imperative of fostering economic growth within the broader context of societal progress. The notions of well-being and*

*progress thereof are universal and relevant to everyone, everywhere, notwithstanding different cultures, contexts, and levels of economic and social development. Well-being is about meeting people's needs and enhancing their abilities to pursue their own goals, to thrive and feel satisfied'.*

The ineffectiveness in fighting the social unrest, unemployment and inequality of the strategies only based on economic growth (measured by a + in front of the compared GDP in a region), is boosting the debate in favour of the adoption of different objectives and therefore different measures. Last but not least, the OECD itself **called on the governments** to put at the core of their objectives the citizens' wellbeing.

**More than ever today the necessity of different indicators is clear.**

**This is an important opportunity to bring back at the core of the public opinion debate and decision making the fact that culture with its intangible assets – first and foremost arts and science – plays an important role in building and consolidating the basis for social cohesion, peace, wellbeing and accumulation of social capital that are pre-requisite for a healthy society as well as a flourishing economy.**

With the opportunity comes the challenge. What wellbeing is made of? What fosters or prevents the development of social capital? How cultural factors impact on that and how to measure them?

## KEY CHALLENGES 1: DEFINE AND MEASURE

How to define well-being (WB)? Are quality of life or life satisfaction synonyms to WB? Is this all related to happiness?

Buthan, the only country in the world that has done it by now, has adopted a new index, the '[Gross national happiness](#)'. Happiness is defined as a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure or joy. Happiness is subjective – it depends on everyone's perception of their life – and it is hard to measure it, should you wish to.

However, in order to provide conditions for the individual happiness to flourish, governments need to know how to assess it. Citizens need it as well to better assess their government's action and actively participate in the decision-making. Quality of life is a concept used for the purpose of this assessment while WB is the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy, and quality of life impacts on this state. Life satisfaction is also one of several indicators used in combination with others to assess the WB.

The [Gallup](#) researchers have developed a series of further indicators in order to set up a WB index. They define five broad categories of essential conditions for most people to have a satisfactory life:

1. Career Well-being: how you occupy your time or simply like what you do every day
2. Social Well-being: about having strong relationships and love in your life
3. Financial Well-being: about effectively managing your economic life
4. Physical Well-being: about having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis
5. Community Well-being: about the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live

Despite the approaches that clearly aim at assessing the contribution given to the quality of life through intangible and qualitative factors, until now culture (e.g. participation to cultural life) is not explicitly included in any of the mainstream systems.

## KEY CHALLENGES 2: WHAT'S THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF CULTURE ON PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE WELLBEING?

UNESCO defines culture in a simplified, twofold dimension:

—> **The constitutive definition:** as a way-of-life, values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, individual and collective beliefs

—> **The functional definition:** as an organised sector of activity

Traditionally, the first dimension of culture is related to identity, social cohesion and integration, sense of belonging to communities and places, and refers mainly to the protection and enhancement of cultural diversity. The second is generally related to access to public goods, services and practices, and refers mainly to the concrete opportunities open to citizens for reaching, using and enjoying them. Both are strongly relevant for a comprehensive notion of active citizenship rights, and both are strategically crucial for the achievement of sustainability. Therefore the role of culture in well-being could be assessed with reference to these two dimensions.

For example, the International Institute for Sustainable Development developed an [indicator](#) to measure the progress of the WINNIPEG community that includes the participation in art in the assessment of social vitality.

In order to stimulate reflections, two perspectives are summarised in the following FOOD FOR THOUGHT 1 & 2. It is important to take into account that they are not incompatible and that they are resulting from reflections that are yet at their initial stage.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT 1

The role of culture in well-being could be assessed with reference to the following fields:

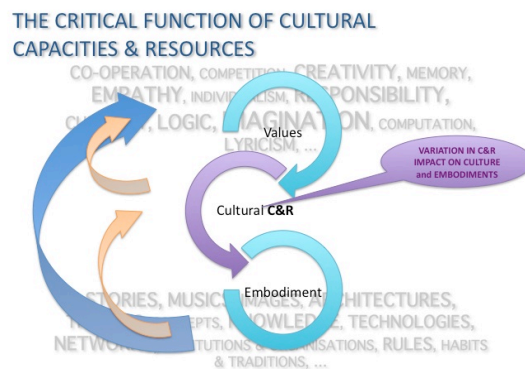
1. Culture is a huge repository of past adaptive solutions and present solution-making tools. Its protection, transmission, communication, nurture and care are therefore crucial for the development and maintenance of a rich, healthy and self-renewing social capital.
2. Individual skills and competences of young people, adults and the elderly alike – including linguistic and technological abilities – greatly benefit from exposure to arts, heritage and the practice of amateurial artistic and creative activities. They equally benefit from the exposure to practical and theoretical scientific knowledge and experiences.
3. Amateurial practice of cultural activities is directly correlated to higher levels of life satisfaction and self esteem. Cultural professions of all kinds, despite their commonly poor economic performance and frequent precarious nature, yield higher job satisfaction than any other occupation.
4. Inequality based on income, gender, disability and age can be overcome at lesser costs and with longer lasting effects than conventional policies thanks to approaches based on cultural participation and creativity.
5. Social integration of minorities and fragile citizens (long time unemployed, single mothers, hospital inmates, drug addicts, convicts, etc.) greatly benefits from approaches and policies based on the use of culture, arts and creativity.
6. Effective and low cost strategies of urban renewal, focused on activity of artists and formal and informal cultural centres.

With specific reference to art and heritage:

- a. They contribute substantially in improving the visual and aesthetic quality of the daily life landscape and increase the attractiveness of territories.
- b. Any kind of art, experienced in both active and passive ways, sustains and enriches individual self-awareness, self-expression and communicative skills.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT 2

The role of culture in well-being could be also assessed with reference to an even more complex system based on the interrelations between different Cultural Factors - *resources* and *capacities* or *competences* (see definition below) - and their impact on the individual and collective potential to act in everyday life for the benefit of communities and individuals.



#### **Cultural resources (CR)**

##### **CRI: Cultural background (CB)**

CB: inherited or emerging conditions that make collective and individual behaviour socially acceptable or not. These conditions can be based on:

- a. Values, traditions, social norms, religion, etc.

- b. Hazard mitigation such as a threat to public health (e.g. HIV) or threat to individual freedom/life (e.g. STASI/Mafia – extended control on private life from public or private powers), ect.
- c. Available knowledge

All the following CR are sensitive to the cultural background. Their relevance in influencing each other and the overall state of the society varies with the variation of the CB. Finding recurrences in the balance of other following factors and/or in their correlation may lead to the definition of CB typologies. Detailing and quantifying *a priori* the CB may not be necessary, nonetheless initial analysis and tests over other factors should be done with reference to somehow homogeneous CB.

**CR2: Cultural drivers (CD)**

CD are human activities impacting on the development of the Cultural Capacities (CC) as defined in the following. Major CD are education and learning, research, art and heritage activities, architecture, urban and land shaping, information and entertainment, structured occasions for social interactions, regulations of social behaviours such as marriage/civil unions/birth/death..., etc

Some CD can be quantified directly or through indicators. Their impact should be also measured in relation to the cultural capacities created or destroyed, may be through sampling (eg. urban ‘shape’ impact on the global empathy, openness to diversity, etc...)

**CR3: Cultural infrastructures (CI)**

CI are both physical and virtual places dedicated (partially or fully) to elements necessary for Cultural Drivers to functions according to different Cultural Backgrounds: schools, squares, theatres, places of worship, museums, historical and natural sites, landscapes and landmarks, human networks in real or virtual, communities of any kind, communication networks, media.

*NOTE: A good public space (together with an equal access to it) is essential to a democracy.* Some CI are already subject to quantitative or performance measurement. Their impact should be also measured in relation to the development of other factors.

**CR4: Cultural embodiments (CE)**

CE are expressions and transformations of the Cultural Background (values, traditions, ...) as well as crystallized Cultural Capacities necessary for cultural drivers to function. CE are things such as; knowledge, theories, epistemology, technology, drugs and foods, laws and rules, institutions, architectural works, stories and legends, music, visual expressions (visual arts,...)

With reference to the CE, it is relevant to measure: the accessibility, the real use, conservation and increment, ... in present time and regarding its future trends. Specific CE could be picked as indicators.

**Cultural capacities or competences (CC)**

Cultural capacities are those capacities enabling humans to understand and transform the external world like the capacity to: co-operate/compete, associate/deduce, visualise/describe, learn/teach, compute/do poetry, curiosity/indifference, empathize/selfishness, analyse/synthesize, trust/scepticism/low trust, establish relations/... etc.

A wide spectrum should be explored, however limited set should be eventually chosen as relevant. A cultural capacities index could be developed. Many cultural capacities are currently taken into account to assess the performances of educational system/processes and/or in human resources selection/training processes.

**However, with reference to this approach, the following questions require answers:**

- What type of relations connect the different cultural factors with each other?
- What role can the cultural factors play in improving or worsening the *health* of a social eco-system? When changing the balance between the cultural factors do the *health* conditions change? Which are relevant to the *health* of the system?
- What elements impact on the Cultural Factors and their connections? Could we simulate what would happen when confronted to changes?
- Can a CULTURAL impact assessment be developed and introduced into policy-making processes (similarly to the environmental one)?

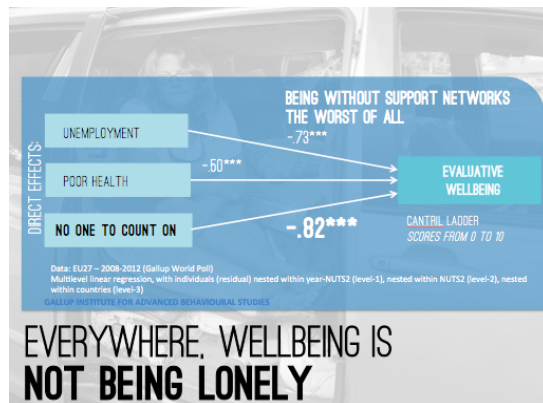
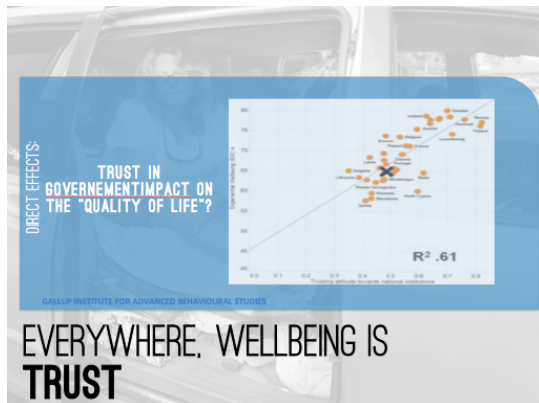
### FOOD FOR THOUGHT 3. AN UNDENIABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND PERCEPTIONS BRINGS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

#### 1. Well-being is culture sensitive

Well-being is perceived. The only definition of the words well-being, quality of life or happiness does not come to a consensus. They are complex and hard to handle. If well-being is a culturally sensitive notion, then it will be difficult to obtain comparable data.

#### 2. Common elements

Yet, two common elements seem to be shared in all European countries when describing well-being (GALLUP INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED BEHAVIOURAL STUDIES): the strong correlation existing between the trust of citizens in their governments and their perception of well-being, as well as not being alone in society as a shared common condition of wellbeing.



#### 3. Recurrent elements

Cultural participation fosters higher level of wellbeing. Moreover the accumulation of social capital - the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively – seems to depend on the experiences we live and on their quality.

Therefore experiences that foster the development of the following list of 'cultural capacities' strongly contribute to the accumulation of social capital: Curiosity/ Awareness/ Cooperation/ Participation /Empathy/ Belonging/ Community/ Self-esteem / Engagement /Hope/Trust.

### A NEW ROLE FOR GOVERNMENTS IS COMPELLING, NEW SENSORS OF TRENDS ARE ESSENTIALS

For decades in Europe, the governments have been redistributing wealth to their citizens to mitigate inequalities, support them and better fulfil their needs through public services and a growing private consumption. Nevertheless, over the last two decades, inequalities

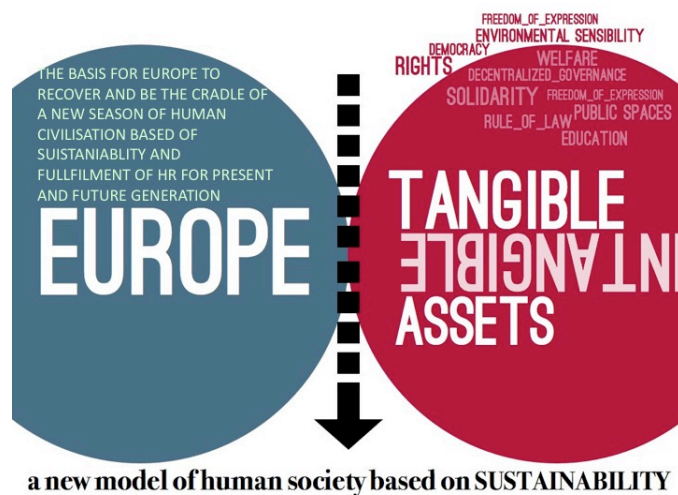


have kept growing in most European countries as the gap between the very few wealthy and the many whose standard of living slides progressively towards poverty, has been widening.

Today governments are called to ensure the individual and collective well-being of the citizens that is not only resulting from the indispensable redistribution of economic wealth but also by ensuring the necessary condition for social cohesion, human rights fulfilment, personal and, in short, individual and collective well-being. That implies a complete new approach, not only based on economic resources. It is a possible future for which Europe has the needed assets, tangible and intangible (democracy, rights, rule of law, freedom of expression, welfare/solidarity, education, environmental sensitivity, public spaces, etc.) As important, Europe has developed a potentially suited culture to bring it to life. We need to build on our society's shared assets -tangible and intangible- and invest in adequate skills and mindsets to think and act creatively and to negotiate our way through this transition.

**Cultural assets and future European societies**

Enhancing people's cultural capacities such as co-operation and creativity, openness to diversity and curiosity, lyricism as much as logical thinking is essential to develop a fully sustainable society where human rights, civil liberty and shared well-being can be achieved. Art and science powerfully contribute to the enhancement of such capacities as well as cultural life, education and research do from another angle.



It is time for all decision-makers as well as for all of us to be aware of the fact that a broader discourse around the **development of the societal cultural assets** is needed and concerns each and everyone of us as well as most of the policy which impacts on the public sphere.

**In the words of Nobel Prize Laureate Joseph Stiglitz: “Our metrics are important not just because they tell us how we are doing but because they serve as guides in policy-making”. Moreover, in our current “information society” and with improvements in the levels of education across the population, people look to indicators and measurements to help them to make better informed decisions.**

**That’s why it is so critical to strive for the introduction of new measurement of societal progress in decision-making processes as well as in the formation of the public opinion, and to secure within these new measures the right place for the contribution of arts and science to the cultural development of our societies and ultimately the development of the citizens’ (not only these owing a passport but also these living here) wellbeing.**

## FURTHER READING- PREVIOUS OR ONGOING ATTEMPTS TO GO BEYOND GDP

### The Sixties

Birth of the Social Indicators Movement

### The Seventies

The OECD works on a list of shared social concerns for social measurement

### 2001

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) states that cultural diversity is not only a common heritage of humanity but also a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence, and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) explicitly considers that culture is not only a source of enrichment of humankind but also contributes to poverty reduction and the sustainable development of local communities, people and nations, especially through its article 13 (sustainable development).

### 2009

**The report from the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, also known as the “ Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi report”**

This report has been asked by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy to Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi in 2009 to to identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress, including the problems with its measurement.

The report lists the objectives features shaping quality of life. It defines quality of life with three indicators:

-The subjective well-being starts from the presumption that *‘enabling people to be “happy” and “satisfied” with their life is a universal goal’*. It is connecting to psychological researches and considers that people are best judges of their own conditions.

-The notion of capabilities is based on people abilities to pursue and realize their goals. A life is a combination of various ‘doing and being’. An individual is free to choose between different functionings, ‘capabilities’, and focuses on its ends.

-The notion of fair allocations is a choice in a weighting of all non-monetary aspects of quality of life that respects people’s preferences. It insists on equality between all members of a society.

The Stiglitz’s Commission underlines that the way societies are organized can be a direct consequence on people’s well-being. It defines the following objectives to measure people well-being trough societal organization:

- Health
- Education
- Personal activities
- Political voices and governance
- Social connections
- Environmental conditions
- Personal insecurity
- Economic insecurity

Those objectives are to be evaluated in a comprehensive way in the social background. The context in which people live is important to define their well-being. Different factors are to be taken into account to evaluate people’s quality of life because they can interfere with each other.

### Inequalities in quality of life

These activities must be assessed in a comprehensive way, by looking at differences in quality of life across people, groups, and generations.

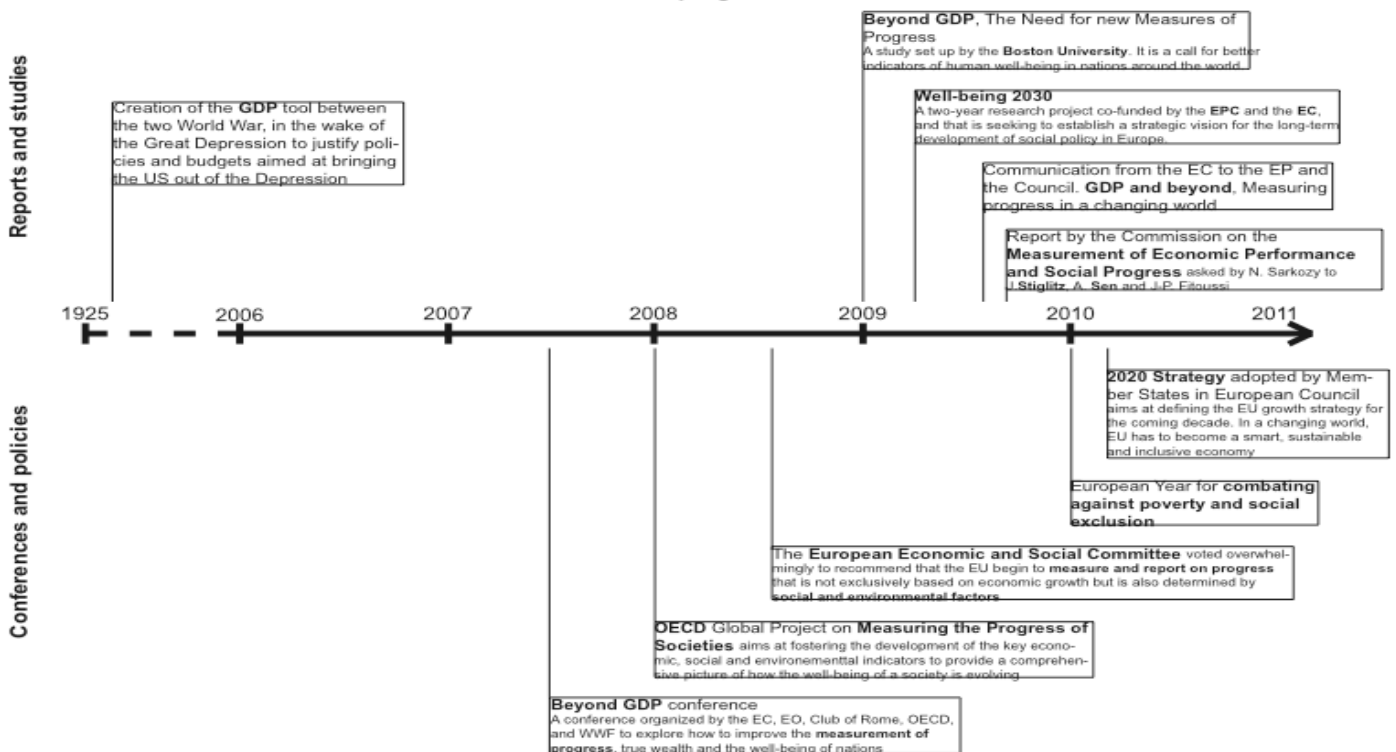
### Assessing links across quality-of-life dimensions

To better assess the relationship between the various dimensions of quality of life. Some of these relationships, in particular at the individual level, are poorly measured and inadequately understood, ignoring the cumulative effects.

### Aggregating across quality of life dimensions

The challenge to measure quality of life is to aggregate the rich array of measures in a parsimonious way. The issue of aggregation is both specific to each feature of quality of life and more general, requiring the valuation and aggregation of the achievements in various domains of life, both for each person and for society as a whole.

## Main studies and conferences on the alternative measures of progress than GDP



### **Beyond GDP at the EU level:**

*It was once suggested to Winston Churchill that he cuts funding from the arts to pay for Britain's war, to which he responded "Then what would we be fighting for?"*

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