

**SOCIAL INDICATORS AND SOCIAL REPORTING IN NEW ZEALAND,
AND THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF
THE FAMILY WHĀNAU AND WELLBEING PROJECT**

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Abstract

Along with other Western countries, New Zealand began developing a social indicators programme during the 1970s, but this early period of progress was followed by a languishing of interest in their use that lasted until the turn of the century. The recent renewal of interest in the use of social indicators and social reporting has led to the development of a range of indicator and social reporting exercises. As well as providing a greater range of measurements, these more recent developments promise greater time-depth and analytical purchase. This paper reviews earlier developments but is particularly concerned with over-viewing the increased capacities arising from more recent developments and the extent to which these can overcome potential threats to further social monitoring work.

INTRODUCTION

As in many other Western countries, interest in social indicators and social reporting developed in New Zealand during the 1970s. This interest peaked in the early 1980s with the release of the results from the Department of Statistics' Social Indicators Survey (1984). Following this, the use of social indicators became less prominent in research and policy until a renewal of interest occurred in the late 1990s. The outcome of this renewed interest has been the launch of a raft of social indicator and social reporting initiatives. Of primary interest among the recent projects are the Big Cities "Quality of Life" (BCQOL)² project, developed by a consortium of big cities in New Zealand; the Ministry of Social Development's *Social Report*; and The University of Auckland's Family Whānau and Wellbeing Project (FWWP).³

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² Auckland City Council et al. various years

³ COMPASS See: <http://www.compass.auckland.ac.nz/pages/index.php>

This paper⁴ first looks at early developments in the use of social indicators, both overseas and in New Zealand, and then briefly considers the reasons for the decline in use of these indicators. The substantive part of the paper examines the renewed interest in social indicators and social reporting in New Zealand before discussing the range of new initiatives, with a particular focus on the ways in which the newer programmes increase the descriptive and analytical capabilities of social indicator programmes. The paper concludes by discussing the issues facing these current developments in social indicators and social reporting.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL INDICATORS MOVEMENT OVERSEAS

The social indicators literature typically points to the 1960s as the starting point of what is sometimes described as the “social indicators movement”. However, like many developments in the social science arena, the actual starting point is contested, and some commentators argue that there is evidence of the early use of social indicators in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States (Noll and Zapf 1994), and in the 1950s by the United Nations (Davey 2000).

Growth in interest in social indicators was rapid during the 1970s. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had started work on a social indicator programme in 1970 (Noll and Zapf 1994), and in 1974 the *Social Indicators Research* journal was first published. Several European countries had begun publishing social reports (Great Britain in 1970, France in 1973, the Netherlands and Spain in 1974, Denmark in 1976 and Austria in 1977), and the United States produced three social indicator reports during the 1970s. In addition, by the end of the 1970s the social indicators movement held:

regularly scheduled presentations at national and international professional meetings ... and there was continuing debate within a broad implicit agreement regarding many of the life quality concerns that should be represented in a social indicators system. (Andrews 1990:402)

This widespread and growing interest was attributed to a range of factors. These included a realisation that the technological and economic progress of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s had come at a social cost that was not well understood or measured; and a desire on the part of some to “measure” the “social” sector in a manner similar to how the System of National Accounts and other well-institutionalised economic indicators were used to measure the size and performance of national economies.

SOCIAL INDICATORS AND SOCIAL REPORTING IN NEW ZEALAND – THE EARLY YEARS

Paralleling the overseas events, interest in social indicators and social reporting in New Zealand developed through the 1970s (Davey 2000). The Social Development Council was established alongside the Department of Social Welfare in 1971, and it “developed a set of social objectives centred on the goals of increased opportunity, more equality and greater social well-being” (Davey 2000:52). In order to assess the extent to which these goals were being met, the Council recommended that measures be developed. The Department of Statistics established a Social Indicators Unit in 1976 and published *Social Trends in New Zealand* (1977), which, as noted in its introduction, was intended to be a regular publication.

⁴ This paper is an update and extension of Cotterell (2002) and Crothers (2006). We would like to thank the reviewers for assisting us to clarify the paper.

The information was gathered from a wide range of sources and organised into nine areas of interest: demographic patterns, housing and households, education, health and medical services, social welfare and social security, crime and law enforcement, leisure, labour-force participation and incomes.

Beginning in 1980, the Department of Statistics conducted a Social Indicators Survey. This was a substantial stand-alone survey with a sample of nearly 7,000, and data were collected in eight domains or areas of interest: health, education and learning, employment and quality of working life, time and leisure, command over goods and resources, physical environment, social environment, and personal safety. The survey was based closely on work being carried out by the OECD and was intended to fill gaps in officially collected data (Davey 2000).

The second major development in New Zealand in this early phase was the work of the New Zealand Planning Council's Social Monitoring Group. This group published a feasibility study for social monitoring, which included advice on indicator selection before its first report, *From Birth to Death*, was published in 1985. This was intended to be "a broad overview of current and emergent social trends, documenting change over time and differences between groups in society" (New Zealand Planning Council 1985:5). As the title intimates, the report used a "life event approach" to structure information and data from a wide range of sources, including the five-yearly Department of Statistics Census of Population and Dwellings, the Social Indicators survey and the Department of Statistics Household Survey.

The Social Monitoring Group published a second report in 1989 using a more rigorous statistical basis, with Census data from 1976, 1981 and 1986, analysed by age ranges, which formed the structure of the report. Despite the abolishment of the Planning Council in 1992, a third report was published in 1993, a fourth in 1998 and the fifth in the series in 2003 (Davey 1993, 1998, 2003).

There were other uses of social indicators in the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand, primarily "from geographers who were then interested in urban and also rural indicators of social well-being" (Crothers 2006), and in several social impact assessment exercises.

THE DECLINE AND LATER REVIVAL IN INTEREST

Towards the end of the 1980s there was a downturn in interest in social indicators and social reporting, with "a levelling off of the social indicator movement [and] in some countries, as well as for the OECD, statistical programs were terminated" (Vogel 1994:249). The decline in interest is ascribed to a variety of reasons, including methodological and theoretical issues, and a change in the political climate in most Western countries. Bulmer identified three primary theoretical and methodological difficulties at the heart of deficiencies in the development of social indicators. The first, Bulmer argues, is that:

There are no general theories, in sociology, political science or social psychology, which provide the basis on which a set of social indicators could possibly begin to be constructed. (Bulmer 1990:408)

This lack of a theoretical basis did not preclude indicator development, but it did mean that those indicators that were constructed often had no clear conceptual justification. The second issue lay in the lack of a common system of measurement, because, unlike economic

indicators, many of which used money as their system of measurement, the social indicators arena lacked a clear measure due to the complexity and variety of subject areas being measured, and the need to disaggregate social effects for sub-groupings. The final area of difficulty lay in the question of values; that is, the difficulty in achieving agreement on what constitutes good and bad indicators, and therefore the provision of rationales for the direction of indicator measurements. Andrews adds a fourth issue: the perceived inability of the developers of social indicators to demonstrate the usefulness of their product to policy makers (Andrews 1990:403).

Also significant in the downturn in interest was the changed political and economic environment of the late 1970s and the 1980s. The onset of economic downturns in most Western countries heralded the end of the Keynesian era, with its focus on an enhanced role for the state, and consequential planning and monitoring. In many countries the election to power of right-wing governments signalled the beginning of a period of economic reform. During the extensive economic restructurings that followed, concern with the measurement of the social impacts of the changes via social indicators was neglected in many countries, though one could well argue that this was when it was most needed. In New Zealand there was some development of local-level social impact and poverty monitoring studies, but nothing systematic at the national level (Crothers 2006).

However, despite the decline in interest in the indicators area, publication of the international journal *Social Indicators Research* continued, along with the production of a quarterly newsletter *Social Indicator Research News* (Andrews 1990). In addition, some countries, such as the United Kingdom, continued to publish information on social trends, and in Europe, especially in the Nordic countries, there was ongoing collection of both objective and subjective social indicators.

A renewed international interest developed in the late 1990s (discussed by Reed 2000 and Cobb and Rixford 1998). Reasons for this interest stemmed from long-term concerns, aggravated by the social damage caused by the partial abandonment of the public sphere under the neo-liberalism of the 1980s and 1990s. There has been a realisation of the growing complexity and the inter-relationships between various sectors of economic and social life. Alongside this has been a concern about the slippage of some of the master economic indicators and the reality they purport to measure. For example, growing overall prosperity seems associated with growing deprivation in some pockets, and is not associated with growing happiness. There has also been a rising interest in concerns about sustainability. These various concerns have had particular effects on indicator development, beyond a very aggressive broad renaissance. One has been a wider range of developments, often focused at the community level, such as those indicator developments shaped by quality of life, the “healthy cities” programme and the environment. Another outcome has been the development of “hybrid” measures with more sensitivity to the complexities and subjectivities.

THE LATE 1990S – THE SOCIAL INDICATOR REVIVAL IN NEW ZEALAND

There was a renewal of interest in social indicators and social reporting in New Zealand in the early 2000s. During the middle-to-late 1990s there had been increasing awareness that the social costs of the economic reforms were high and that these costs had not been well monitored, along with the publication of a number of studies that noted the increased levels of poverty occurring. In addition, the newly elected Labour Government signalled its

preference for evidence-based policy, which indicated that enhanced monitoring of social outcomes was needed. Crothers further suggests the renewed interest was due to the:

confluence of influence between government ideology, contemporary public administrative practice and with some support from the social science community. (Crothers 2006:1)

The renewed interest triggered a number of social indicator and social reporting projects. First was a paper by Crothers titled “Monitoring the changing social conditions of New Zealanders”, in which he advanced “An agenda for developing a systematic, comprehensive and coherent set of annual social indicators using available statistics” (Crothers 2000:102). Crothers constructed a set of 65 indicators based on existing data available on an annual basis, which allowed for regular monitoring of any change. Indicators were chosen on the basis of their potential for being disaggregated into population subgroups of policy interest. To enhance the theorisation of the model, Crothers mapped the potential relationships between the domains, noting the potential for “reciprocating influences, joint effects and, of course, feedback loops” (Crothers 2000:109). He also correlated data in the indicators time series “against several key variables (using Pearson’s product-moment correlation): year, political party in power, economic growth and CPI change” (Crothers 2000:111).

Crothers’s study makes a significant contribution to the development of the social indicator field in New Zealand because he:

- examines the conceptual issues involved, thus setting up a strong base for his work
- investigates the potential relationships between the domains of interest that underpin his framework
- attempts to measure the strength of the relationships between each of the indicators and selected key variables
- uses data that allow (in most cases) changes over a time period of approximately 20 years to be examined.

On the other hand, perhaps the main limitation is the lack of indicators in some areas of concern (noted by the author), such as cultural outcomes and political conditions, and the presence of too many indicators in other areas, such as economic conditions. Furthermore, the large number of indicators overall, means that monitoring change would be laborious.

The Social Report

The most significant and prominent of the new developments is the publication by the Ministry of Social Development of its annual *Social Report*, with the first being published in 2001. The report was originally commissioned by the Minister of Social Services and Employment, the Hon. Steve Maharey, and was published by the Ministry of Social Development. The inspiration for the report came, according to Crothers (2006), after Maharey visited Britain in 2000 and was impressed by the systems of indicators being developed there.

In the foreword to the first report, Maharey noted it was “a first step to establishing a regular reporting programme to assess the social state of the nation” (Ministry of Social Development 2001:3). The report has four main purposes:

- to provide and monitor over time measures of wellbeing and quality of life that complement existing economic indicators and environmental indicators
- to compare New Zealand with other countries on measures of wellbeing
- to provide greater transparency in government and to contribute to better informed public debate
- to help identify key issues and areas where we need to take action, which can in turn help with planning and decision-making. (Ministry of Social Development 2008)

The report uses a definition of social indicators from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: “measures of social well-being which provide a contemporary view of social conditions and monitor trends in a range of areas of social concern over time” (Ministry of Social Development 2001:10). Indicators for the report were chosen on the basis that it:

should always be possible to interpret changes in indicators quite clearly as an improvement or deterioration in the quality of life ... [and] ... should focus on the outcomes of social processes or policies, rather than inputs. (Ministry of Social Development 2001:10)

Over the lifespan of the report the indicators and data have been expanded, where possible, although a key feature of successive editions of the report has been to restrict the number of indicators to about 40 to encourage focused attention. The 2001 report contained data on 36 indicators organised into nine domains or areas of interest: health, knowledge and skills, safety and security, paid work, human rights, culture and identity, economic standard of living, social connectedness, and the environment. By the 2006 report this had expanded to 42 indicators in 10 domains of interest, with the additional domain being leisure and recreation, which was added in 2004. In 2008 there were 41 indicators (30 of which had been updated to the current time period). Where the data permit, a time series for each indicator from earlier periods to the present is shown,⁵ broken down by the limited set of standard social background variables: age, ethnicity, gender and region. Change of indicators occurs when more robust suitable measures become available.

The strengths of *The Social Report* include its specification of a framework for the compilation of indicators, its provision of definitions of and methodological commentary on each indicator, the inclusion of a time series where data are available, and the easily understandable manner in which the data are presented. A further strength is the ongoing work to update and improve indicators (including an early extensive review with users, see Gray 2001) and the increased links between this work and the Big Cities project (considered below), which improves comparability and consistency of the chosen indicators and enhances the availability of sub-national data. The availability of the work on an annual basis provides opportunities for assessing social outcomes and enhances public debate about these. Finally, the extent of change in the key indicators, the differences among groups, and international comparisons are easily assessed due to the manner in which the data are presented in compelling visual summary diagrams (spider charts).

The major limitation of the report is that a few of the indicators chosen are available only on a one-off basis (albeit with the intention to update when further information becomes

⁵ The starts of time series vary: life expectancy (1950/52), participation in early childhood education (1986), unemployment and employment (1986), voter turnout (1984), representation of women in government (1984), local content on New Zealand television (1988), assault mortality (1980), and road injuries and deaths (1986).

available⁶), and data for some of the indicators are somewhat dated. This is shown in the 2006 report, where only 25 of the 42 indicators were updated with more recent information, and data for some indicators were becoming dated. For example, the information used in the social connectedness domain for the indicator of “contact between young people and their parents” was obtained in 2001. Similarly, the “perceptions of safety” indicator was based on 2001 data. For a range of other indicators, data from the Census are used. Another weakness is the lack of indicators in some desired outcome areas, such as civic and political rights, and the environment.

The Big Cities Quality of Life Project

Regular regional social reporting has been provided by the councils of the six largest cities in New Zealand, which began a project to measure the quality of life in their respective cities in 1999. The group has since expanded to include 12 territorial authorities. (Some additional assistance from the Ministry of Social Development has ensured that “the rest of New Zealand” has been covered in some related survey and then indicator work.) The project was a response to the growing pressures on these urban communities, and to concerns about the impacts of urbanisation and its effects.

The framework for selecting indicators incorporated aspects of three models: goal-based, sector-based and pressure-state-response. The terms “quality of life” and “wellbeing” were used to describe the concepts underlying the project. The groupings used to organise the indicators were: demographics, housing, health, education, employment and economy, safety, urban environment, community cohesion, and democracy. The development team took around two years to identify the relevant mix of subjective and objective indicators and “began with the objective of selecting a set of key indicators to measure change in social conditions” (Six Cities Project 2001:3).

Problems with the unavailability of data impinged on the indicators selected, including data being unavailable for the geographic regions specified, issues with different agencies having different regional boundaries, the lack of consistent definitions between councils, and problems with the timeliness of data. These issues combined to result in a considerable reliance on data from each five-yearly Census. However, the project now uses a survey of residents to obtain data that are not available elsewhere. Reports were published in 2001, 2003 and 2007. The residents’ survey was conducted in 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2008, with the survey results included in the full *Quality of Life Report* and also made available separately.⁷

The Big Cities project uses a mix of subjective and objective indicators to paint a comprehensive picture of the state of each of the cities. The predominant limitation in the project is its use of a large number of indicators, which will preclude any easy analysis of changes and also limits disaggregation other than in spatial terms. Examining differences across so many cities is another analytical challenge.

⁶ In particular, information sourced from some irregular surveys is not so readily updateable; for example, on voluntary organisation activity, “Contact between young people and their parents” (updated in the 2009 report) and “Participation in cultural and arts activities”.

⁷ To see the results from the project, visit <http://www.bigcities.govt.nz/index.htm>.

The Family Whānau and Wellbeing Project (FWWP)

FWWP was part of a five-year research programme supported by the Social Science funding pool of the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.⁸ The principal goal was to develop ways to use Census data to examine and monitor the social and economic determinants of family and whānau wellbeing and how these changed over the period 1981–2006. Indicators of family wellbeing were constructed using information from the Census (see Milligan et al. 2006, Cotterell et al. 2007). This focus on the family level contrasts with most other indicator work, which focuses on the individual level, partly because consistent retrieval of family data is methodologically more difficult to achieve.

The use of Census data to construct indicators of wellbeing has three main advantages (see Milligan et al. 2006:21–38, 168). First, using the Census allows for an assessment of societal patterns over a long segment of time (20–25 years), in contrast with previous New Zealand research using wellbeing indicators, which has generally examined much shorter time periods. (The project was constrained in pushing back historically by the lack of availability of unit-record data from New Zealand Censuses prior to 1981.)

Second, information obtained from the Census covers (almost) all members of the population (rather than just a small sample of the population, as in most other indicator work), which allows for the examination of the wellbeing of all New Zealanders, and provides information down to highly disaggregated small population groupings at the family and household levels. In fact, the whole range of other Census variables is available for disaggregation. A further fillip is that with the control over the data possible in this project, cohort analysis is possible, not at an individual level but in terms of following the populations in various five-year age groups through successive Censuses to ascertain their changing fates in terms of wellbeing.

Third, although the Census does not collect information on the subjective elements of wellbeing, many of the core outcomes (good jobs, adequate income, education and health) identified by New Zealanders are (largely) based on objective living conditions, which are in turn intrinsically related to people's command over resources, and so to their quality of life. Thus, in many instances, a strong link exists between the objective measures of wellbeing and the subjective measures of wellbeing (see Crothers 2007, which reports correlation coefficients of the order of .3 to .4 on average). Therefore, although the Census provides little direct information on the subjective intangible aspects of wellbeing, it can nonetheless provide some indirect insights into these.

The limitations of using Census data to construct indicators and measure family wellbeing are the trade-offs among broad coverage, consistency of information and the depth or richness of detail the information provides, and the frequency of Census data collection at five-yearly intervals. First, the selection of indicators is constrained by the information available through Census data. Family and household wellbeing may be influenced by other factors (e.g. the perceived quality of family/household relationships), for which no Census data are available.

Second, a lack of data availability may constrain time-series analysis, as some Census questions that may be relevant to family/household wellbeing are no longer asked (e.g. housing insulation), while other Census questions (e.g. smoking) are not asked in every Census, and therefore cannot be used in monitoring.

⁸ See: <http://www.compass.auckland.ac.nz/pages/viewproject.php?projectid=103>

Third, a lack of in-depth information may place limits on interpreting change in some indicators: for example, because income data are collected in bands rather than discrete amounts, indicator construction requires some estimation.

Fourth, the Census definition of “family” has limitations: for example, it only incorporates those family members that live within one household. Thus Census wellbeing measures may be particularly poor indicators for families whose members do not all reside within the one household: in particular, parents who usually share custody of their children, and children who live across two households.

Relations among Indicator Projects

Table 1 summarises the key characteristics of the three indicator programmes discussed above. Further discussion about the relationships among these projects takes place below.

Table 1 Key Characteristics of Social Indicator Projects in New Zealand

Project	Objective indicators	Subjective indicators	Concepts used	Time-depth	Extent of disaggregation	Frequency of publication	Number of indicators
Monitoring Social Conditions	Yes	No	Quality of life	Long	None	One-off	66
Big Cities Quality of Life	Yes	Yes	Quality of life, social wellbeing	Short	Spatial	5-yearly	Approx. 95
The Social Report	Yes	Yes	Quality of life, wellbeing	Short to medium	Standard disaggregations	Annual	Approx. 40
Family Whānau & Wellbeing Project	Yes	No	Wellbeing	Long	Multiple disaggregations	5-yearly	17

Other Indicator Exercises in New Zealand

In addition, a range of government departments, local authorities and other groups also began work on developing sets of indicators. These supplement – and are often linked to – one of the main indicator efforts, and especially *The Social Report*. For 2003, the Statistics New Zealand website lists 24 central government indicator projects (some of which are economic indicators) and eight local government indicator initiatives.⁹ Many of these are only broadly indicator projects and few have become institutionalised.

The other indicator projects tend to take one of three directions:

- extending indicators in terms of the four-level set of environmental, economic, social and cultural reporting (which meshes nicely with the triple or quadruple “bottom-line” approach now favoured generally in government circles)
- covering particular population subgroups
- endeavouring to provide community-level indicators.

⁹ For the full list, see <http://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/analytical-reports/govt-indicator-report.aspx>

Among the first-listed type of development is work by the Ministry for the Environment to develop appropriate indicators to monitor environmental trends and track progress towards stated objectives and policy goals (see Ministry for the Environment 2007, 2009). Other government efforts include work by:

- the Ministry for Economic Development on economic development indicators and regional economic growth indicators (Ministry for Economic Development 2007, New Zealand Institute of Economic Research 2005)
- Statistics New Zealand housing indicators (n.d.a)
- the Ministry of Education with schooling indicators
- the Ministry of Health (2007) on a key set of health indicators
- the Ministry of Culture and Heritage (in association with Statistics New Zealand) on cultural indicators (Statistics New Zealand 2006).

Perhaps the largest gap, ironically (given that the earliest development of indicators was for the economic realm), is still in the area of economic indicators, although both Treasury and the Parliamentary Library issue monthly reviews, and other information can be found on the Ministry for Economic Development and Reserve Bank websites.

Various agencies responsible for policy in relation to particular population subgroups have made attempts to develop indicator frameworks, including:

- the Ministry of Social Development in relation to youth, the elderly and the poor (respectively Ministry of Social Development 2008, 2007, Perry 2005¹⁰)
- the Ministry of Women's Affairs (2008)
- Te Puni Kōkiri (2007; also Durie et al. 2002)
- youth issues (Hill, 2003).

In relation to subpopulations, particular care needs to be taken to ensure the indicators deployed are appropriate.

Especially given local authority reform and the legislated need to carry out community-level planning and monitoring, there has been a considerable impetus to develop lower-level indicators, with Statistics New Zealand setting up a dedicated exercise to encourage this: Statistics New Zealand (2007). Experience in this aspect of indicator work has recently been reviewed by Memon and Johnston (2008). Indicator work has also been attractive to community groups, and Anew NZ (n.d.) has endeavoured to harvest this interest and extend it in useful directions. However, this area of indicator work has yet to be adequately consolidated (for an attempt to develop a “one-stop shop” see Economic and Social Statistics Unit AUT n.d.). Table 2 documents part of this difficulty in relation to the “linked indicator” data set that was developed: the proportion of indicators available sub-nationally is much lower than that available nationally.

In a bid to assist with the production of meaningful, high-quality indicators, Statistics New Zealand has produced a set of guidelines for selecting and working with indicators.¹¹ It has also worked on a broader “sustainable” framework, which would house the full array of different domains of indicators, drawing on more focused indicator exercises as appropriate.

¹⁰ See also other more academic studies such as Podder and Chatterjee (2002).

¹¹ See http://www.stats.govt.nz/methods_and_services/user-guides/indicator-guidelines.aspx

Table 2 Coverage of Linked Indicators

Wellbeing domain	Total number of indicators	Percentage available nationally	Percentage available sub-nationally
Culture	5	80	60
Economy	14	100	50
Environment	11	45	27
Society	13	100	100

Source: Statistics New Zealand 2005

ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS

The recent social indicator and social reporting initiatives in New Zealand face similar issues, the most important of which are those of data availability and timeliness. In addition, there are the interlinked issues of indicator proliferation and threats to the long-term viability of such initiatives, but there is still the promise of explanatory analyses that will pin down the “drivers” or causes of changes in indicator results (cf. New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2004).

The issue of availability refers to having data available so that valid indicators of change can be constructed. In comparison with other countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and most European countries, official social statistics in New Zealand are underdeveloped. The statistics are fragmented and there are significant gaps in the existing bodies of data. As a result, the available statistics do not provide a firm basis for institutionalising a set of social indicators in New Zealand, and report writers have mentioned this.

The issue of data timeliness relates to the availability of up-to-date information. For example, the 2006 *Social Report* notes that “Twenty-five of the 42 indicators in the report have been updated this year” (Ministry of Social Development 2006); the remaining 17 indicators (approximately 40%) were not being updated due to lack of new data to do so. For the indicators projects output to be useful to the analyses of outcomes, data need to be as up-to-date as possible.

The lack of timely data is being addressed in two ways. First, the Big Cities project and the Ministry of Social Development’s *Social Report* have jointly commissioned further surveys to gather needed data and are working together to produce common survey data sets. Second, Statistics New Zealand recently conducted a review of the social statistics collected in New Zealand and has published the results from its General Social Survey (GSS),¹² which will provide much-needed data to insert into indicator frameworks.

¹² Statistics New Zealand intends to carry out the GSS every two years using face-to-face interviewing with a large sample of people. In particular, it will provide subjective and objective data related to the domains covered in the main New Zealand indicator projects. These include the following modules:

- overall life satisfaction
- health
- knowledge and skills
- paid work
- economic standard of living
- housing
- physical environment
- safety and security
- social connectedness
- support across households.
- leisure and recreation
- culture and identity
- human rights

The issue of the long-run viability of various social indicator and social reporting initiatives has two aspects. The first relates to the question of potential political interference in their production. For example, an incoming government may not be keen to measure outcomes in some areas, especially if they are reporting the negative effects of policy introduced by that government, and may cease their publication. For example, Crothers (2006:5) notes the existence of disquiet among the opposition National Party when the Labour Government used material from the 2005 *Social Report* prior to the general election to promote its policy choices. In turn, political and other support are required to ensure an adequate flow of funding.

The second aspect refers to the proliferation of indicator and reporting projects. As indicated earlier, there are multiple social indicator and social reporting initiatives underway in New Zealand, which calls into question the financial viability of such projects, which tend to be resource intensive.

A third concern involves the extent to which indicator projects overlap and reinforce each other while jointly ensuring that the fullest range of areas of concern is covered. Table 3 details the domains of interest covered by each of the major studies, while Appendix 1 lists the domains and specific indicators of each of the reports covered. (Crothers 2000 provides a useful indication of the array of available data in New Zealand. See also Woodley 2006 and an AUT University website developed to guide community-level social monitoring: Social and Economic Statistics Unit, n.d.)

Table 3 Comparison of Domains

Domains	Social Report	Big Cities Quality of Life	Family Whānau and Wellbeing Project
Context: people	*	X	*
Health	X	X	X
Knowledge and skills	X	X	X
Paid work	X	X	X
Economic development		X	
Economic standard of living	X	X	X
Housing	X	X	X
Civil and political rights	X	X	
Cultural identity	X		
Leisure and recreation	X	X	
Physical environment	X		
Natural environment		X	
Built environment		X	
Safety	X	X	
Social connectedness	X	X	X

Key: X = coverage of that domain. * = included, although external to the indicator framework.

So far New Zealand indicator work has been tipped in the direction of the objective rather than subjective indicators, in part because subjective indicators require specially collected survey data. One published study by Morrison (2007) explored the relationship between happiness and the city people live in, drawing on Big City QOL data, and controlling for other influences on feelings of wellbeing. In a more wide-ranging paper, Crothers (2007)

explored various New Zealand survey sources for subjective data and carried out analyses of how closely paired subjective/objective variables are correlated.

Analysis of the causes or drivers of changes in indicators or their social distributions is not far advanced. A Ministry of Social Development commissioned unpublished paper by New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (2004) attempted to develop some analyses, but this was a preliminary effort. Given its academic context, FWWP is better able to adduce comments from the literature, overseas studies and cognate New Zealand studies, but these remain hypotheses rather than being empirically tested.

In turn, especially if some causal mechanisms can be identified, there is a key policy implication of indicators. Beyond alerting policy makers and the public to social problems that might be arising from deleterious trends, there is some possibility of social forecasting.

Of the 12 domains to be covered, *The Social Report* and the Big Cities QOL cover each, whereas FWWP covers only half the range. The 17 indicators deployed by FWWP contrast with the 40–45 or so in *The Social Report* and the very wide array of indicators mobilised by the Big Cities QOL.

The promise of the developing capacities of the social indicator projects is that they are increasingly able to provide, if not explanatory analyses, at least very detailed descriptions of change over time. The increasing use of survey (and Census) data greatly increases the ability of analyses to examine relationships among indicators (in particular, the extent to which particular people or families suffer multiple deprivations). As a result, levels and cumulations of deprivation can be examined. Survey (and Census) data also include a range of social background variables (in practice the set in the Census is very wide), which allow the characteristics of the people/families suffering deprivation to be quite precisely described. Once the characteristics of the more deprived people/families have been pinpointed, informed speculation can point to some of the causes of the deprivation. It is particularly the over-time (relative) consistency of the Census-based project that allows the most detailed examination of the changing fates of subgroups, because particular cohorts can be traced through time.

CONCLUSIONS

Although earlier indicator work in New Zealand foundered on a plethora of difficulties, the raft of social indicator and social reporting initiatives currently underway suggests that the future of such projects is assured. However, these projects face the issues of data availability, data quality and the uncertainty of long-term funding. Several developments are helping to reduce these risks and to consolidate the resources needed for continued work. In particular, the analytical capability of social indicator work has been enhanced. This allows the social indicators not only to measure change but also to ascertain, in great detail, where it is occurring and from this foundation to point to the drivers of the change. In turn, such closely calibrated indicators should allow the development of policy and programmes to overcome the deprivations found.

APPENDIX 1: COMPARISON OF INDICATORS

Note: X = An Indicator is available for this Cell of the Table

Domains	Social Report	Big Cities QOL	FWWP
<i>Contextual</i>			
Population growth		X	
Ethnicity		X	X
Age		X	X
Family and households		X	X
<i>Health</i>		Mental health & wellbeing Modifiable risk factors Low birth weights Teenaged parents Infant mortality Access to GPs Health status Diseases	
Health expectancy	X		
Life expectancy	X	X	
Suicide	X		
Cigarette smoking	X		Current cigarette smoking status
Obesity	X		
<i>Education</i>		Suspensions & stand-downs School decile ratings Community education	
Participation in early childhood education	X	X	
School leavers with higher qualifications	X		
Participation in tertiary education	X		
Educational attainment of the adult population	X	X	Secondary educational attainment Post-secondary educational attainment
Adult literacy skills in English	X		
<i>Economic development</i>		Growth in businesses Building consents Economic growth Retail sales Tourism	
Unemployment	X		Unemployment
Employment	X	X	

Social Indicators and Social Reporting in NZ,
and the Potential Contribution of the Family Whānau and Wellbeing Project

Domains	Social Report	Big Cities QOL	FWWP
			Hours worked
Median hourly earnings	X		
Workplace injury claims	X		
Satisfaction with work–life balance	X		
		Household expenditure Social deprivation Income Costs	
Market income per person	X		
			Equivalised family income (CPI-adjusted) Income source
Income inequality	X		Income inequality
Population with low incomes	X		Proportion of families with low equivalised incomes
Population with low living standards	X		
<i>Housing</i>		Government housing provision Urban housing intensification	
Household tenure		X	Tenure
Housing affordability	X	X	Rental affordability
Household crowding	X	X	X
Habitability			Dwelling type Fuels used to heat the dwelling
<i>Civic/political rights</i>		Involvement in decision making	
Voter turnout	X	X	
Representation of women in government	X	X	
Perceived discrimination	X		
Perceived corruption	X		
Local content programming on New Zealand television	X		
Māori-language speakers	X		
Language retention	X		
Satisfaction with leisure time	X		
Participation in sport and active leisure	X		
Participation in cultural and arts activities	X		

Domains	Social Report	Big Cities QOL	FWWP
<i>Natural environment</i>		Waste management and recycling Beach, stream & lake water Biodiversity	
<i>City/built environment</i>		Look and feel of the city Traffic and transport City green space Public transport Noise pollution Graffiti	
Air quality	X	X	
Drinking-water quality	X	X	
<i>Safety</i>		Child safety Crime levels	
Intentional injury child mortality	X		
Criminal victimisation	X		
Perceptions of safety	X	X	
Road casualties	X	X	
<i>Social connectedness</i>		Community strength & spirit Quality of life Diversity	
Telephone and internet access in the home	X	X	Motor vehicle access Telephone access Internet access
Regular contact with family/friends	X	X	
Trust in others	X	X	
Loneliness	X	X	
Contact between young people and their parents	X		

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