

Social Quality: Strategies to Measurement

La Qualità Sociale: Strategie per la Misurazione

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Riassunto: Questo lavoro propone una metodologia per la rappresentazione grafica di alcune componenti della qualità sociale attraverso griglie di posizionamento. Le griglie possono servire per allocare gli item che concorrono ad individuare una medesima componente di qualità sociale o le unità statistiche che condividono lo stesso profilo di qualità sociale. L'attenzione è qui focalizzata sul modo alternativo di approcciare lo studio della qualità sociale nelle sue componenti di relazioni con la realtà locale e con la società in senso più ampio e sulla possibilità di ottenere raggruppamenti interpretabili di item e unità statistiche.

Keywords: social quality, indicators, graphical representation

1. On the Definition and the Measurement of the Social Quality

The literature of the last decade has witnessed a re-birth of social indicators. Primary attention is devoted to themes such as poverty, quality of life, well-being, social inclusion, and human rights. They sometimes overlap each other and are not necessarily well defined. Social quality (S.Q.) is the comprehensive “hat” that encompasses all the themes above mentioned and it primarily focuses on relational issues: inadequate social participation, lack of social integration, individualism, inadequate education levels, *etc.*. Therefore this paper does not deal with the definition of S.Q., which is difficult and not unanimously shared (see for instance Vogel, 1994). A recent paper by Berman and Phillips (2000) proposes to split S.Q. into four components: social-economic security/insecurity, social inclusion/exclusion, social cohesion/anomie and empowerment/disempowerment. These components are then decomposed into twenty simple indicators drawn on a grid identifying four quadrants. The quadrants are delimited by two oriented axes along which a couple of polarized concepts can be represented.

“It is not only measurement but also conceptual issues that are affected by positioning the elements of the social quality quadrant more fluidly [...] this complicates the analysis of social quality but more accurately represents the dynamics of the relationship among its four elements” (Berman and Phillips, 2000).

This simple instrument has been used by Berman and Phillips (*ibid.*) to place S.Q. components. In this paper we in addition suggest the possibility to allocate statistical units (families or individuals) with the same instrument. Obviously, two orthogonal

¹ This paper is the result of the common work of the authors. Nevertheless V. Capursi wrote section 1, O. Giambalvo wrote section 2 and 4, D. Mendola section 3.

axes provide only four quadrants and it is difficult to reduce S.Q. items to four homogeneous sets. Very often the complexity of the phenomenon needs several grids to record all recognized components and a further logical scheme appears necessary to reveal those links that can lead to the unique latent variable: S.Q. Because of the complexity of the matter in this paper only two grids are proposed without considering logical links between them.

2. A Case Study

Data used for this analysis were collected during a sample survey in 2000 in a historic district of Palermo (Sicily). The aim of sample survey was to analyze the living conditions of families (Allegro *et al.*, 2005) to provide an effective instrument for policy makers to improve the standard of life of the residents. The research approach is multidisciplinary involving in fact sociologists, jurists, architects, economists and statisticians. The area investigated, an historical district of Palermo, is characterized by urban and social decay, but also by historical and environmental richness and a great potential to social enhancement (Cannarozzo, 1990 and 1996).

Sampling data were collected by a face to face interview using a questionnaire divided in sections according to investigated issues: housing, social relationships, leisure, religion, health, mobility, employment, education, women's and teenagers conditions (see Boscaino, 2002). The general response rate has been 80.5%. The questionnaire was built to gather also information about all the members of the family (individuals: 395 Italians and 46 strangers). As a whole, the questionnaire consists of 187 questions submitted to 150 families.

In this paper, as a first attempt to allocate families in some grids using four components, only few questions included in the questionnaire are been used, particularly those related to the relationship between interviewee and the institutions, neighbourhood and society. For the first relationship, questions concern the participation to vote, religious practices or attendance at political/cultural associations. Related to the second relationship, questions concerning the quality of the relationships with relatives and or friends, living on good terms with their neighbours, and so on. The last relationship is investigated using questions such as judgements on police, justice, church, and so on. Furthermore others questions are used, such as living conditions, the judgements on other people, the trust more in people rather than in the institutions, both for a better placement of families in the grids and for a wider interpretation of the results.

3. The Social Quality Grids

As one grid is not enough, choosing couples of polarized concepts to define a quadrant of S.Q. is hard work, but gives anyway partial results.

The grids proposed are only two of those useful to describe one or more components of S.Q. This paper highlights an alternative way to approach the study of S.Q., which despite of its partial point of view is able to position items and statistical units (e.g. families) in meaningful quadrants according to the given answers.

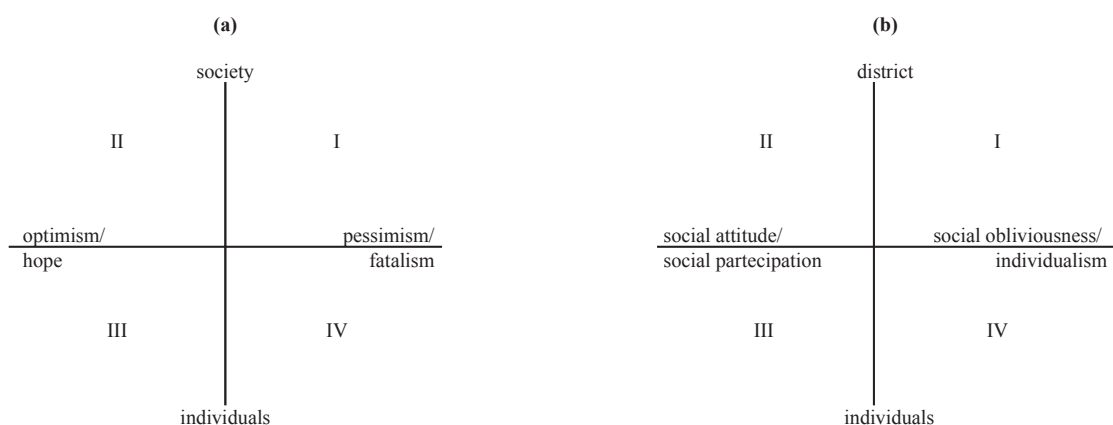
For example, the first grid (fig. 1a) opposes in the vertical axis individuals to collective, intended as the whole society, and put on the horizontal axis optimism and hope

opposed to pessimism and fatalism. The second grid (fig. 1b) places on the vertical axis individuals and community, the latter standing for the district where they live, and along the horizontal axis social participation and attitude versus individualism and unawareness of the surrounding social environment.

On the axes of the grid we can position the questions of the interview form and the related answers. Questions (items) can be positioned on the upper or lower quadrants (with respect to the horizontal axis) according to their semantic content: micro-level (individuals) or macro-level (district or society) of items can be in fact determined *a priori*, so that it is possible to identify different profiles underlying S.Q. components. While statistical units can be positioned, according to their answers, on the right or left side (with respect to the vertical axis) of the grid only *a posteriori*.

So in quadrants number I and II of the first grid we placed those items that concern attitude towards law and order enforcement, opinions on their activity, judgement on the importance of education for their offspring, usefulness of job centres, level of self-satisfaction, importance given to economic success vs. family values, trust in someone.

Figure 1: Social quality grids: two examples



In the lower quadrants (number III and IV) we can position items referring to the individual: social relationships among relatives, friends, or known people resident in the same district, effect of superstition and fate on life events, presence in the district of people recognized as trustworthy advisors.

In the second grid (fig. 1b) we put in the upper quadrants items referring to voting participation, attendance to religious practices, level of interest in national political matters, gender discrimination of offspring. In the lower quadrants we find items related to the quality of relationship with relatives, and the frequency of attendance to sporting events and associative events. Items in the upper quadrants relate to that component of S.Q. dealing with relationship and attitude toward surrounding social environment. Items in the lower quadrants concur to measure personal components of S.Q.

The answers to the items, properly allocated in the quadrant system, provides a family profile. If composite indicators of S.Q. to synthesize all dimensions in two measures were built, it would be possible to position geometrically all respondents in a grid, as in a Cartesian plane, and obtain something similar to a dispersion diagram. However this is still an ongoing project. Although, at this stage of our work we can perform a non

metric positioning of families in the grid, that gives a general visualization of the disposition of the families on the grid.

According to the given answers, in the first grid about the 60% of families are allocated both near to the pessimism/fatalism side (extreme) of the horizontal axis (their judgements on police, justice, on other people, are quite negative; they passively accept their bad living conditions, and so on) and near to the individuals side (extreme) of the vertical one (they live alone; they prefer to trust in other people rather than in the institutions). Considering the second grid, many families are both near to the “individualisms” side (extreme) of the horizontal axis (only about the 60% of householders voted last time; few people, about 23%, participate to the religious practices or attend political-cultural associations), and in the upper side, the district, (about the 90% of families have good relationships with relatives living in the district and they are on good terms with their neighbours).

4. Final Remarks

Knowledge of different and specific family S.Q. profiles can be an essential support to the development of policies for social promotion of degraded urban areas, especially for the development of those policies aimed at fighting social marginality and exclusion and hence improve the quality of life of the individuals and through that also the S.Q. of the community. So this analysis carried out as a result of this survey will be useful to develop new studies and reflections for S.Q. assessment.

This paper may be used as a starting point for further studies and remarks, despite the fact that there are many restrictions due to few grids considered just for example and the absence of a metric. Our intention is to go on in the direction to individuate a metric for an allocation of statistic units in the grids.

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