Using well-being indicators for policy making: The US Partnership for Sustainable Communities, United States

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- In international comparisons, American states fare well on economic dimensions of well-being, but less so in some non-economic dimensions such as health, safety and access to services.
- Differences in health, jobs and safety across American states represent among the largest regional disparities in OECD countries.
- In all American states, households spend on average more than 45% of their income on housing and transport combined.

Framework for measuring well-being in the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- In 2009, three US federal bodies – the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency – launched the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) to align federal policies and funding to improve access to affordable housing, provide more transport options and reduce transport costs, and protect the environment. The PSC is a national initiative for jurisdictions of all sizes (regions, counties, municipalities and neighbourhoods) that can have access to federal grants.
- Highlighting an integrated approach to community development, the initiative is grounded on six Liveability Principles that provide thematic guidelines for building more economically and environmentally sustainable communities and regions.

Strengths and opportunities for using well-being metrics in the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- The partnership contributes significantly to national level thinking and planning on sustainable development. It establishes a framework for inter-agency co-ordination at the federal level with regional and local level impact and seeks to remove barriers to sustainable regional and local development, through changes in federal regulations and better integration of national policies and programs.
- The partnership provides a catalogue of indicators for communities to adapt and use when developing their own well-being strategy. The indicators are organised according to specific well-being dimensions, but also allow measurement of cross-dimensional objectives.
- The PSC supports capacity building in local governments participating in the program.

Challenges and constraints for using well-being metrics in the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities

- The lack of integration among the programming partners in the selection criteria and reporting mechanisms of individual projects, and in the source of funding may constraint the effectiveness of the initiative on the ground.
- To address the whole range of well-being dimensions, collaboration with other federal and sub-national bodies should be strengthened.

What's next

- Enlisting federal government support for sub-national levels in establishing and using well-being indicators will be necessary to improve outcomes on the ground.

Introduction[1]

The OECD Regional Well-Being Framework aims to provide policy makers with measurement tools that support inclusive growth at national and sub-national levels (OECD, 2014). Well-being metrics encompass a multi-dimensional concept of development that takes into account both material conditions – such as income, jobs or housing – and quality of life aspects – such as environment, health, education, access to services, safety and civic engagement. Well-being measures can help OECD regions to improve the design and delivery of public policy by: *i)* providing a comprehensive picture of material and non-material conditions of life on the ground; *ii)* raising social awareness; *iii)* highlighting possible areas for policy prioritisation; *iv)* helping to improve coherence across economic, social and environmental policies through more effective co-ordination and citizen engagement (Box 1).

Box 1. **How can the measurement of regional well-being improve policy making?**

Adopting well-being metrics can improve the design and delivery of policies in regions and cities along four directions.

First, they provide a comprehensive picture of material conditions and quality of life in regions, allowing an assessment of whether economic growth translates also into better non-economic outcomes (in terms of health, environmental quality, education, etc.) and whether progress is shared across population groups and places. Spatial concentration of advantages or disadvantages varies strongly at various territorial scales and different sources of inequality can reinforce one another, locking households and communities into circumstances that make it particularly hard for them to improve their life chances.

Second, well-being metrics can raise social awareness on policy objectives or specific issues, promote policy change and increase the accountability of governments.

Third, they can help prioritise policy interventions by recognising where improvements are needed; knowledge of local conditions can also help policy makers to identify potential synergies among different dimensions that can be leveraged by policy and to better understand citizens' preferences.

Fourth, well-being metrics can improve the coherence of policies. Many of the important interactions among sectoral policies are location-specific. For instance, integrating land-use, transport and economic development planning can contribute to outcomes that are greener (increasing reliance on public transport), more equitable (improving access to labour markets for disadvantaged areas) and more efficient (reducing congestion, commuting times, etc.). The complementarities among different strands of policy are likely to be most evident – and the trade-offs among them most readily manageable – in specific places. More coherent policies can be designed and implemented through effective co-ordination across different levels of government and jurisdictions. They also need to engage citizens in the design – to better understand their needs – and in the implementation – to use citizen capacity to bring change – which in turn can increase the legitimacy of policies and support of policy objectives. Designing coherent policies requires policy makers to consider the trade-offs and complementarities involved in both the objectives they aim to target and the channels through which they do so.

Source: OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

From a policy perspective, having an impact on well-being, given its multi-dimensional nature, requires an integrated rather than a sectoral approach to policy interventions (OECD, 2014). Some environments are more oriented to an integrated approach to policy making, and institutional conditions, for example whether the country has a unitary or a federal government system, may be a critical factor in terms of regulations and competencies. What is critical, however, is the capacity for different government bodies to act in a co-ordinated and complementary manner.

This case study illustrates the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC), a US inter-agency initiative focused on improving the built environment at the sub-national level by integrating policies and programs on housing, transport and the environment. Differently from the other case studies presented in *How's Life in Your Region* (OECD, 2014), the partnership is not specific to a region, but provides a national framework for many different sub-national initiatives carried out in jurisdictions of different sizes. One of these initiatives, the New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, is briefly introduced to illustrate the use of well-being indicators as part of the territorial planning and development process. Compared to the other case studies, the PSC offers an example of how different communities can use and adapt a general well-being framework. The case study also identifies the governance conditions necessary for such an adaptation on the ground to be effective.

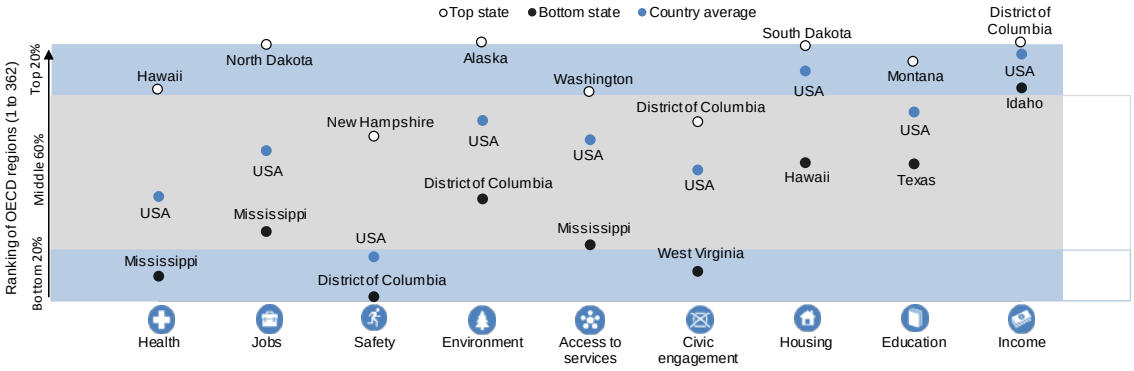
This case study is organised in four sections. First, it offers a synthetic overview of well-being outcomes across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, according to the OECD How's Life in Your Region framework, complemented with further information relative to the three main dimensions targeted by the PSC: housing, transport and the environment. Second, it analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities in providing well-being metrics that can be adapted in different regions. Third, it explores how well-being indicators are being used for policy design and implementation in a regional initiative, the New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor which is supported by one of the federal grant programs associated with the PSC. Finally, it draws some conclusions and provides recommendations for national and sub-national policy makers, particularly those in federal systems, who aim to use well-being indicators as a means to inform policy choices. The study is based on data provided by the United States relating to the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, as well as information obtained online.

Overview of well-being outcomes in the United States

By international comparisons, American states perform quite well in the material conditions indicators of well-being. According to the nine well-being dimensions and associated indicators of the OECD Regional Well-Being Framework (OECD, 2014), all American states are among the top 20% of the 362 OECD regions in terms of income and most of them are in the top half distribution for jobs. However, with respect to the latter, inter-states disparities are large: North Dakota is in the top 1% of OECD regions while Mississippi in the bottom 30% (Figure 1).

Quality of life indicators in the United States are comparatively lower than those for material conditions. In particular in the health, safety and civic engagement dimensions, the low-performing states are among the bottom 20% of OECD regions. The largest inter-state disparities are found in the health dimension, the third largest among OECD countries. Life expectancy, a common outcome indicator of health, is 81 years in Hawaii, 6 years longer than in Mississippi, a difference similar to that found nationally between the United States and Turkey (Figure 1).

Figure 1. **Relative performance of American states by well-being dimension, 2013**



Note: Relative ranking of the US states with the best and worst outcomes in the 9 well-being dimensions, with respect to all 362 OECD regions. The nine dimensions are ordered by decreasing regional disparities in the country. Each well-being dimension is measured by one or the average of two indicators. Indicators are normalised to range between 10 (best) and 0 according to the following formula: (indicator value – minimum value across all OECD regions)/(maximum value across all OECD regions – minimum value across all OECD regions) multiplied by 10. In the cases where high values of an indicator mean worse well-being (for example unemployment), the indicator is normalised with the same formula subtracted from 10.

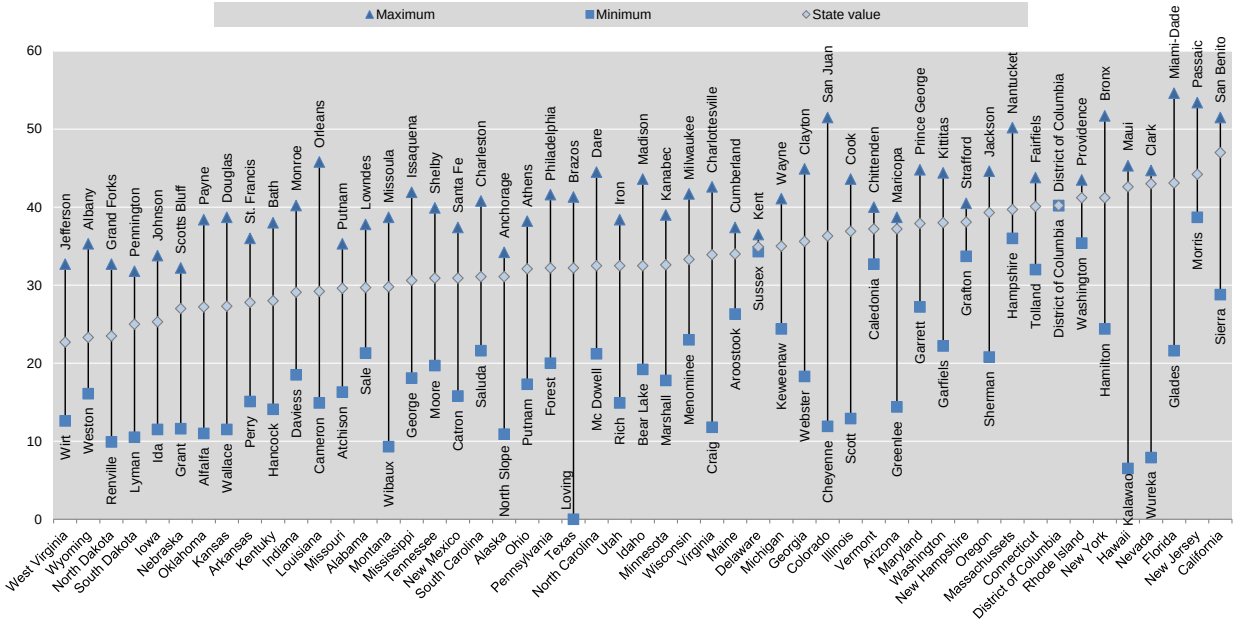
Source: OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

In measuring well-being, housing is an important dimension and strongly connected with other dimensions such as income, health and life satisfaction (OECD, 2011). The only internationally comparable indicator on housing currently available at sub-national level is the number of rooms per person. This indicator does not consider other important aspects such as housing prices, population density, the overall cost of life in a region or the potential benefits of trading space for location. Usually, housing costs are assumed to be affordable if they are below 30% of household disposable income, allowing families to satisfy their basic needs while investing in other dimensions of well-being, such as education, health, leisure and so on.

According to this measure, on average 47% of households in California spend more than 30% of their income on housing, compared with only 23% of households in West Virginia. Intra-state differences can be even larger: in the counties of Loving and Borden, Texas only 1% of households spend more than 30% on housing, while in Brazos, Texas, for more than 40% households housing costs are higher than 30% of their income. Large differences in housing burden costs among counties are also found in Colorado, Hawaii and Nevada. In Delaware, New Hampshire, Vermont and Rhode Island, instead, the difference in the share of households with housing costs higher than 30% is lower than 10 percentage points; in these four states, however, on average in all counties at least one-third of households spend more than 30% on housing (Figure 2). North Dakota combines a high number of rooms per person together with housing affordability, but occupies an intermediate position in the ranking of states according to variability between counties.

Figure 2. **Share of households with housing costs higher than 30% of income, US counties and states, 2011**

Minimum and maximum value by county in each state, five-year estimates, 2007-11



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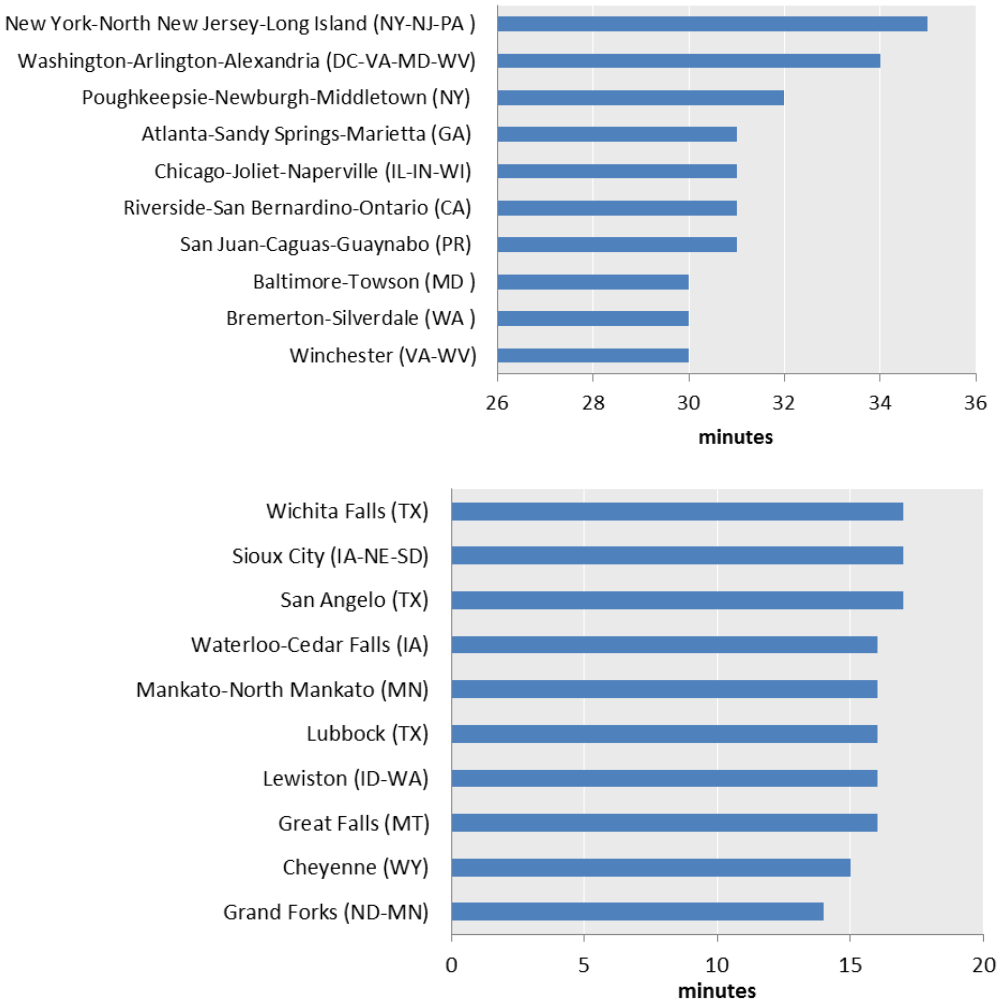
Note: US states are ranked by increasing average share of households with housing costs above 30% of household income.

Source: Authors' tabulation from the "Sustainable Communities HotReport", available at: http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/TheDataWeb_HotReport2/EPA2/EPA_HomePage2.hrml, (accessed 5 September 2014).

There are important feedback mechanisms between the spatial structure of the built environment, transport, land use and housing characteristics. A better connection to workplaces implies less time spent commuting, which, in turn, directly and indirectly affects individual well-being: it increases people's location choices and time availability, and has a positive impact on environment and health. Among the 381 US metropolitan areas, the average commuting time varies between 14 minutes in Grand Forks (ND- MN) to 35 minutes in the New York metro area. Not surprisingly, bigger cities tend to have longer commuting times; however, the average time spent travelling in Lubbock (Texas) is half the time in the metro area of Bremerton-Silverdale (Washington) although both cities have around 250 000 people (Figure 3).

Figure 3. **Average minutes spent travelling to work in the US metropolitan areas, 2011**

Top and bottom 10 metropolitan areas by commuting time, five-year estimates, 2007-11



StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933151241

Note: Data refer to 374 out of the 381 US Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Metropolitan areas are ranked by increasing average time for commuting.

Source: Authors' tabulation from the "American Community Survey 2007-2011 - 5 year estimates", available at: http://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2011_5yr/R10796414, (accessed 30 September 2014).

The transport option chosen to commute is as important as the time spent commuting in promoting sustainability and well-being. The higher the share of car-pooling or the use of public transport, for example, the lower the level of emissions. Also, going to work by biking or walking can have positive returns to individual health status. The percentage of commuters who report using transport different from a car ranges from 3-16% (HotReport's elaborations on data from the American Community Survey). Two exceptions emerge, New York and the District of Columbia, where the percentages reach 35% and 53%, respectively.

Interaction among well-being indicators

Using a regional well-being framework allows policy makers to identify the links between policy objectives and how intervention and success in one priority area can support actions and success in another (see Box 2). A better understanding of the synergies among environment, housing and transport objectives and an improved policy co-ordination among these priority areas are among the objectives of the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities reviewed in this case study.

Box 2. **Exploiting complementarities across well-being dimensions in Morelos, Mexico**

The Mexican state of Morelos has been implementing several initiatives to tackle the major well-being challenges of its residents. These challenges include, among others, the need to improve the level of safety by reducing crime and the increase of the female participation in the labour market. In order to achieve these objectives, the development strategy of Morelos elaborated in the State Development Plan (*Plan Estatal de Desarollo*) takes into account many of the complementarities that exist among well-being dimensions. One of the most important initiatives was the introduction of the *beca salario*, a universal scholarship programme that directly benefits students in public schools. It applies to students between the third year of junior high school and the fourth year of higher education (university). This initiative has both direct and indirect effects through the exploitation of complementarities across well-being dimensions. Direct effects consist in improving people's level of education, since the programme acts as an individual incentive to attend school and improve one's skills and opportunities for the future. The expected indirect effects of the *beca salario* programme include the improvement of safety, health and civic engagement in the state. By reducing the number of school dropouts and inequalities of access to education, the state aims to advance in making streets safer and reconstructing the social fabric, especially in the most disadvantaged areas. The *beca salario* initiative is the result of the co-ordinated efforts of the State Governor, the Secretary of Education, as well as the participation of the other secretaries of state working in collaboration (networked government approach).

Another example is the initiative carried out by the state to improve income and employment outcomes, through strategies such as the Morelos Women Businesses Programme (*Empresa de la Mujer Morelense*). This programme helps groups of head of household women to fund entrepreneurial projects. It focuses on women coming from disadvantaged communities within the state and aims at improving income opportunities and social cohesion in the state. Of course, the inter-relationships among well-being dimensions are complex and public policy can be more effective in some dimensions than in others. In this respect, the government's priorities and the extent to which these priorities are actionable given the state's competences are important factors to consider when selecting the indicators to be used.

Source: OECD (2014), "Using well-being indicators for policy making: State of Morelos, Mexico", in OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

To better inform policy design and people's choices on where to live, two of the federal agencies involved in the Partnership for Sustainable Communities have developed the Location Affordability Index (LAI), which collects data on households' expenditure on housing and transportation, as well as other information (such as the number of cars per household or the annual vehicle miles travelled separately) for eight types of households (see Box 3).

In the 25 largest American metropolitan areas, the combined cost for housing and transport for the median household rose 44% between 2000 and 2010, about 1.8 times the growth of income over the same period (Hickey et al., 2012). This trend

disproportionately affects lower income households: while on average the housing and transport costs combined accounted for 59% of the moderate-income households (defined as the households whose income is between 50% and 100% of each metro area's median income), it was 33% in the above-median income households in 2006-10 (Hickey et al., 2012).

The combined cost for housing and transport in American states in the most recent five years varies between 45% in Alaska and 67% in Mississippi. In all states the combined cost for housing and transport is above 45% of the household income, the threshold set as affordable expenditure according to the LAI. In the District of Columbia the combined cost of housing and transport is 40.1%.

Box 3. **Measuring complementarities among well-being dimensions: The Location Affordability Index**

Recognising that transport costs for households increased steadily in the past 70 years and that American households can spend up to half of their budget on housing and transport, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) developed the Location Affordability Index (LAI) to provide a standardised measure on households' transport and housing expenses. The tool allows policy makers, planners and citizens to account for the cost of living in a particular city or neighbourhood.

The LAI uses data from different sources to provide estimates of the percentage of a family's income dedicated to the combined cost of housing and transport in a given location. The LAI takes into account differences in affordability due to households' characteristics and provides the combined cost for eight family profiles that differ in terms of income, size and number of workers and commuters. The values are estimated at the geographical level of the combined base statistical areas (CBSAs) which is a collective term for both micro and metro areas defined by the Office for Management and Budget and used by federal statistical agencies in collecting, tabulating and publishing US national statistics. Data are then aggregated at neighbourhood, city and regional levels. The provision of estimations means that the LAI does not measure actual housing and transport costs, but rather a prediction of what households with certain characteristics would have paid for housing and transport costs in a four-year period (2008-12, which is the one covered by the most recent American Community Survey data release).

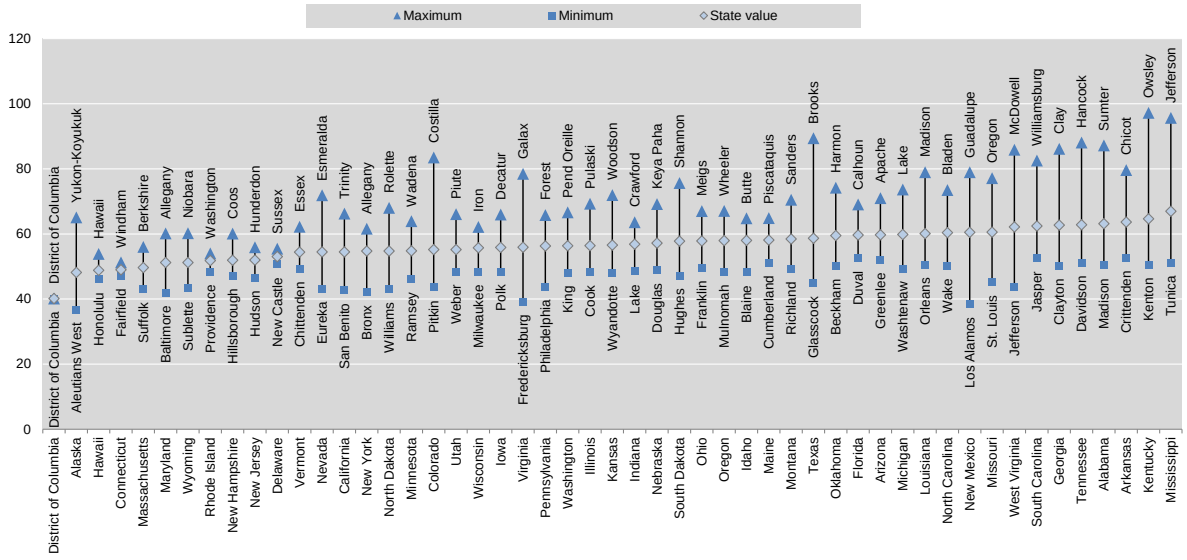
The LAI is targeted to a large audience as it provides synthetic measures of the combined cost per family profile according to the location chosen by the user on a map. The combined cost for housing and transport can be further customised through the "My Transportation Cost Calculator".

Source: The Location Affordability Portal: www.locationaffordability.info/default.aspx.

The variability in the combined cost for housing and transport between counties is particularly high in New Mexico, West Virginia, Mississippi, Texas and Kentucky (Figure 4). In all of these states, the difference between the highest and the lowest performing counties is above 40 percentage points, twice the variability observed at state level. There is not always accordance in the states' ranking between the average combined cost and the intra-state variability. For example, both in Florida and Missouri the combined average cost is 60% of household income, but in the latter, the variability of cost among counties twice that in Florida (Figure 4).

Figure 4. **Combined housing and transport costs as a percent of median households' income, US counties and states, 2012**

Minimum and maximum value by county in each state, five-year estimates 2008-12



StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933151253

Note: Data on Kalawo (Hawaii) are not available. States are sorted by increasing average cost of combined housing and transport. The data refer to "type 1" family, defined as the median income family formed by four individuals; of the four individuals it is assumed that only two of them commute.

Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the Location Affordability Portal, www.locationaffordability.info/default.aspx.

Framework for measuring well-being in the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities

In 2009, three US federal bodies – the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – launched the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC). The Partnership aims to make neighbourhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution. In practical terms, this means a co-ordinated effort to improve access to affordable housing, provide more transport options and reduce transport costs, and protect the environment, by aligning national policy objectives and leveraging funds (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, n.d.). It also means that communities striving to improve their sustainability with projects in these areas have a new channel for accessing federal funds.

The analytical framework of the initiative is grounded on six "Liveability Principles", or thematic guidelines for building more economically and environmentally sustainable communities that are incorporated into the programmes and policies associated with the partnership. The liveability principles are:

1. provide more transport choices
2. promote equitable, affordable housing
3. enhance economic competitiveness
4. support existing communities
5. co-ordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
6. value communities and neighbourhoods.

The six Liveability Principles underpin integrated solutions to environmental, economic and social challenges through a better co-ordination of federal policies and a community-driven approach that adapts the objectives and well-being dimensions to the different contexts.

Compared to the OECD Regional Well-Being approach (OECD, 2014) the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) is focused on fewer well-being dimensions, essentially the built environment (housing, land use and transport), which are direct competences of the participating federal agencies. However, the approach also takes into consideration other dimensions of well-being, notably jobs, education, health or social cohesion, in order to meet the overarching objective of enhancing economic competitiveness and ensuring sustainable communities. Better housing and more affordable and networked transport, for example, can have a positive impact on physical and mental health, child development, access to schools and jobs, social behaviour, etc. Moreover, the PSC provides a framework for many regional and local development initiatives that may have broader scope and objectives.

Building indicators

To establish progress measurements for the Liveability Principles, the PSC worked with the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Institute for Urban Research (IUR) to identify a set of sustainability indicators. Initial research indicated that in the absence of a national sustainable development agenda with associated evaluation mechanisms, a plethora of programmes and assessment models were being developed at the sub-national level by

governments, civil society and even the private sector (Birch et al., 2011). An indicator set for the PSC's Liveability Principles was thus seen as an opportunity to provide a national level set of sustainable development indicators.

The approach adopted by the Penn Institute for Urban Research was to convene various expert meetings to identify existing indicators that measure the set of values underlying the Liveability Principles and then provide a catalogue of indicators (Sustainable Communities Indicator Catalogue, SCIC) from which communities would select those they wished to use to benchmark and measure progress over time. Such an approach makes use of existing information and provides communities with examples of sound indicators used in places with similar characteristics, leaving communities the choice of the indicators most suitable for their needs. The Penn Institute for Urban Research undertook an extensive survey of indicator sets, identifying over 60 different indicator initiatives at the regional, municipal and community levels, and almost 500 instances of indicator use. The catalogue of indicators showed, for example, that while there were many instances of using indicators for access to public transport, measures of transport affordability were limited. The indicators were then grouped into three thematic areas: housing, land use and transport, and associated with six qualities: access/equity, health, economic competitiveness, affordability, environment and sense of community. Finally, a subset of 23 headline indicators was identified, with the help of focus groups and governmental agencies, according to mixed criteria of statistical robustness and policy relevance (Box 4). The PSC launched the SCIC in September 2014 on its interactive website.

To increase the communication of statistics at different territorial levels, the PSC, together with the US Census Bureau's Data Web, also created the "Sustainable Communities HotReport", a nation-wide comparable indicator set that uses public databases from the US Census Bureau, the American Community Survey, the Department of Labour and others. The results are online for policy makers and citizens to compare their county's performance in the various sustainability dimensions against the performance of their state and the country as a whole. It does not, however, offer an easy and automatic, built-in feature to compare performance against neighbouring counties or counties in other states (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, n.d.). Table 1 uses San Francisco County, California as an example of what can be found online, and compares it to the OECD Regional Well-Being dimensions.

Providing funds for sustainable communities

The partnership's three members offer funding for development initiatives, as well as manage on-going funding programmes. PSC-associated funds are targeted to projects dedicated to building more liveable, walkable and environmentally sustainable regions or communities, as well as those that improve the quality of development while also protecting health and the environment. As of February 2014, the partnership had funded around 1 000 projects for approximately USD 4.6 billion, representing just over 10% of the funding requests received (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, 2014).

Noticeably, however, there is no dedicated fund within the partnership. In other words, the grantee does not apply to a PSC fund for its projects, but rather to a number of existing funds belonging to each partner agency (e.g. EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant, the DOT TIGER II Planning Grant, HUD Challenge Planning Grants) (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, n.d.*b*). This can increase competition for funds, since communities presenting projects with a sustainability angle are bidding for

resources against those who are not taking a sustainability angle. It is unclear, however, if a measurable sustainability angle increases the bidder's possibility to obtain funds.

Box 4. Criteria to identify indicators in the Sustainable Communities Indicator Catalog

The University of Pennsylvania built a crowd-sourcing catalogue of indicators for the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities by gathering indicators already in use in different communities.

The instances of indicators were then checked to align with the criteria the six Livability Principles represent and with a set of six goals (access/equity, health, economic competitiveness, affordability, environment and sense of community). A subset of 23 headline indicators was identified with the help of focus groups and governmental agencies, for communities to select a benchmark over time. Headline indicators must meet the following SMART criteria:

- specific: what is measured is clearly stated and has the appropriate level of disaggregation
- measurable: the indicator shows desirable change and changes are objectively verifiable
- attainable: the results are realistic given available resources
- relevant: the indicator captures the essence of the desired result and is relevant to the intended outcome
- time-related: that is, specify when the results can be achieved.

The University of Pennsylvania set up an Expert Advisory Group, comprising federal and local policy makers, to discuss criteria for indicators selection. The group recommended that indicators:

- be informed by international research and understandings, but tailored to domestic needs
- adhere largely to political jurisdictions and apply broadly to American cities of all sizes and locales
- relate primarily to data that jurisdictions already collect and/or are interested in and motivated to collect over the long term
- are simple, few and succinct, but supplemented with contextual information.

The process of indicators selection highlighted the importance of creating a framework for identifying indicators that measure how the built environment impacts the sustainability of communities with a clearer environment-economy-society balance. It also showed the need to identify cross-dimensional indicators in order to take into account the multi-dimensionality of sustainable development and to integrate flexibility into the process to allow also communities with limited experience in building sustainable metrics to participate.

Source: Authors' elaborations based on Birch, E.L., et al. (2011), "Measuring US sustainable development", *Penn IUR White Paper Series of Sustainable Urban Development*, Penn Institute for Urban Research, Department of City and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and preparatory documents for the Experts Convening *Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) Sustainable Communities Indicators Catalog* in Washington, DC on 28 March 2013.

Table 1. **Sustainable Communities HotReport: Summary of measures for San Francisco County (California)**

Sustainability		County value	State value	National value	OECD *How's Life in Your Region?*	
Dimension	Indicator	San Francisco	California		Dimension	Indicator
Transport	Commute mode share (%, non-single occupant vehicle)	47.7%	10.2%	9.5%	Access to services	– Share of population with access to public transport
	Mean travel time to work (minutes)	30	27	25		
Housing	Households with housing costs greater than 30% of income (%)	41.6%	47.0%	36.1%	Housing	– Number of rooms per person
Equity	Poverty rate	12.3%	14.4%	14.3%	Income (distribution)	– Relative poverty rate
	Share of income held by top 5% of households	24.0%	22.2%	22.3%		– Gini Index of household disposable income
						– Quintile share ratio for household disposable income
Economic development	Unemployment	7.5%	10%	8.6%	Jobs	– Unemployment rate
	Share of population with a college degree	51.4%	32.2%	28.2%	Education	– Labour force with at least a secondary degree
Income	Median household income	USD 72 974	USD 61 632	USD 52 762	Income (level)	– Median household disposable income

Source: Adapted from Partnership for Sustainable Communities (n.d.*a*), "Sustainable Communities HotReport" available at: http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/TheDataWeb_HotReport2/EPA2/EPA_Overview_Page2.hrml?STATE=6&COUNTY=274 (accessed 22 June 2014); OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, Table 2.1, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

Finally, it is not clear whether the eligibility of projects to federal funding is associated with having established a set of indicators to benchmark and measure progress.

Building capacity at the sub-national level

In addition to providing funds, the partnership supports sub-national capacity-building efforts with technical assistance and training, for example via the US Department of Agriculture's Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities' Program, the EPA's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program and the DOT's Alternatives Analysis Program (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, n.d.*b*). Technical assistance on regulations to grantees for federal funds is also provided. At the same time, the PSC has worked to identify barriers to local housing and transport investments due to poor co-ordination at federal level, calling for changes in the national regulations and federal policies (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, 2011).

The partnership also held regional roundtable discussions around the country to share lessons, evaluate the efficacy of the programme and engage stakeholders to shape future partnership initiatives. Participants to the roundtables emphasised, among other aspects: the value of collaborative, inter-agency approaches to local development; the importance of harmonising federal agencies' requirements and regulations; and the communities' need for better data and analytical tools (Partnership for Sustainable Communities, 2014).

Using well-being measures for policy making in the US Partnership for Sustainable Communities

Co-ordinating and leveraging national policies

Well-being indicators represent a strategic tool for regions that want to assess and improve policy results. By highlighting synergies and trade-offs among different policy sectors, well-being indicators can help design more coherent policies through effective co-ordination across different levels of government and jurisdictions. Moreover, mobilising citizens in identifying the well-being dimensions that matter most to the community can increase the legitimacy of policies and public support of policy objectives (OECD, 2014).

The PSC's three agencies seek to promote a more comprehensive and integrated perspective on community development; the co-ordination among federal agencies and the identification of policy levers at federal level are the core objectives of the partnership. The three federal agencies have worked together to remove barriers and facilitate access to the agencies by different communities: for example, to harmonise the planning grants requirements so that a grantee can meet the requirements of the different agencies with just one submission; but also to support regulatory changes to ease investments. Yet only a limited number of well-being dimensions are considered and there does not appear to be an incentive for communities to ensure the integration of the sustainability dimension in their projects when requesting funds. The partnership associates only the three federal bodies that have a direct impact on environment, housing and transport. It does not include formally other government bodies that contribute to well-being and sustainability of communities, such as the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of Labor even though collaboration with other federal agencies has put in place. In addition, the three federal partners themselves are not always integrated in their approach. The PSC, for example, does not have its own budgeting and funding capacity or governance structure. Funding is obtained from each individual agency, and reporting is according to agency requirements and not to common criteria established by the PSC. Finally, other stakeholders, including sub-national entities or the associations representing them have been engaged throughout the process, although with no formal commitments.

At the same time, what the PSC can actually create or implement is constrained by at least two forces. The first is a federal system with distinct and autonomous levels and layers of government (e.g. states, counties, municipalities, school districts, water districts, etc.). The United States federal government is limited in what it can demand or require from sub-national governments in terms of applying specific policies, gathering data and reporting outcomes: it can only require reporting for a federally funded initiative. It also means that there are many actors that require co-ordination to promote a comprehensive approach to a community's well-being. Managing this co-ordination at the federal level is not only extraordinarily challenging in the US context, but can meet resistance due to the second constraining force: a culture that tends to be wary of federal initiatives and action, and more comfortable with regional or local level activity. This cultural dimension may, in part, explain why a national agenda for well-being has yet to be created, why evaluation mechanisms are incomplete at the national level and, most importantly, why multi-dimensional and integrated indicators of well-being have developed more strongly at the regional and local levels. The next section looks briefly at a regional initiative included in the PSC.

National governments can play a major enabling role in supporting regional well-being measurement initiatives and trigger change but they cannot act in isolation from local policies. Sub-national governments can modulate tariff policies or seek inter-municipal co-operation on fiscal arrangements to share costs of public services to fight against social and territorial inequalities. They can contribute to the affordability of the housing stock, mobility and service provision in several ways, for example implementing inclusion housing policies, revising zoning regulations, linking urban development to transport planning and investment, complementing capital investments with investment in human capital, among others.

Other countries' experiences show that national governments can give impetus by providing a general framework for action, contribute to information gathering and provide governance instruments to strengthen delivery of results. Better co-operation between national and sub-national authorities can also help evaluate past experiences of regional well-being metrics and share good practices among regional authorities and other stakeholders (Box 5).

Box 5. **The role of national governments in regional well-being measurement: Some international examples**

In Italy, the Department for Economic Development and Cohesion – the national authority in charge of Cohesion Policy – has not only helped to define the framework for a more result-oriented regional policy for the period 2014-20, but also to identify instruments to improve the efficiency of public investment, for example through the partnership agreements between national and regional governments, action plans (*piani d'azione coesione*) and performance frameworks implemented in the previous programming periods.

In Mexico, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografíca*, INEGI) provides a wide range of indicators at state level, and is involved in capacity-building programmes with state and local policy makers to make use of this information.

In the United Kingdom, the 2012 Health and Social Care Act and the establishment of local health and well-being boards gave the general framework for realising Newcastle's Well-Being for Life Strategy. The national government established guidelines and requirements for local councils to follow (e.g. establish a well-being board, undertake a future needs assessment and establish a health and well-being strategy). It did not, however, specify what should be included, measured or monitored by the board or in the strategy, leaving this to be tailored to the local context.

Source: OECD (2014), "Region of Sardinia, Italy"; OECD (2014), "State of Morelos, Mexico"; OECD (2014), "Newcastle, United Kingdom"; in OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

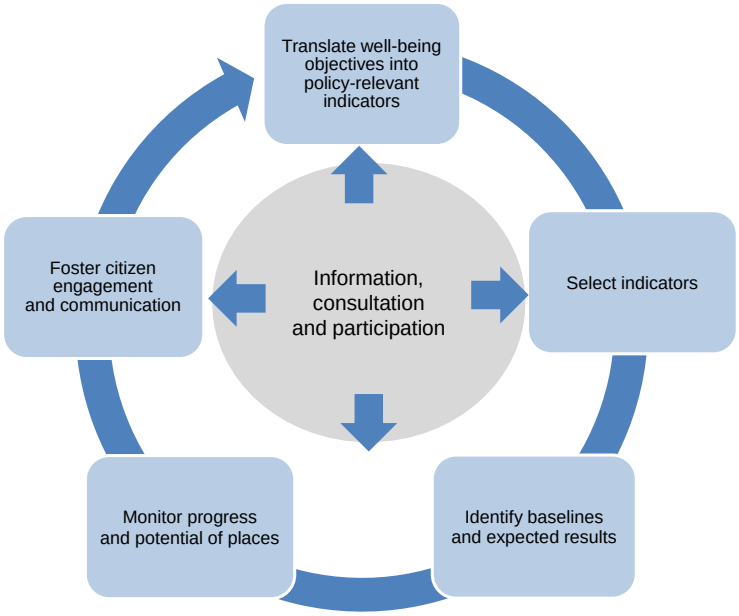
The New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Initiative

The New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor is an example of how PSC funds and its Liveability Principles have been used and expanded upon in order to ensure greater sustainability, economic competitiveness and equity at a regional level. The New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor is an inter-state initiative covering more than 80 communities and 1.6 million people in central Connecticut and western Massachusetts (Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, 2011). Local policy makers in both states realised that their territory formed a single economic unit with a broad set of regional assets, including strong transport networks, a concentration of population and jobs, a well-educated workforce, a shared labour market, a strong academic and research community, stable businesses in existing and new sectors, and significant natural resources.

Three regional planning agencies[2] joined together to apply for a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from HUD. With support from the HUD grant, they built the Knowledge Corridor Consortium, a partnership of more than 30 organisations, including local government agencies, academia, for-profit and non-profit local organisations,[3] dedicated to achieving regional sustainability objectives. The Sustainable Knowledge Corridor benefits from funds associated with the PSC, as well as Consortium pledges to provide cash matches and leveraged contributions. In addition, several state agencies[4] formally agreed to support the project and act in an advisory capacity (Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, 2011).

Building a well-being strategy at the regional level requires several steps, including a continuous engagement of stakeholders through consultation, co-decision and deliberation. The remaining part of this section will present the way the Knowledge Corridor Consortium has addressed these steps, using, as a way of illustration, the OECD regional well-being measurement cycle is used (Figure 5).

Figure 5. **Regional well-being measurement cycle: A possible sequencing of steps**



Source: OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

Translating well-being dimensions into policy-relevant indicators

The Sustainable Knowledge Corridor upholds the PSC's six Liveability Principles throughout the various projects it supports, using the principles to frame project objectives. At the same time, it has adapted the definition of sustainability to its own regional challenges by including such topics as food security, climate action and green infrastructure. Thus, the indicators selected were not only aligned with the federal level's six Liveability Principles, but also promoted the region's own interpretation of what makes a community sustainable. Each well-being dimension (i.e. transport, land use, housing, food and agriculture, energy and environment, economy, climate and natural hazard) has been incorporated, together with the relevant indicators, into the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Regional Action Plan that provides the road map for the sustainable development strategy of the region (Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, 2011).

Choosing indicators and identifying baselines

The Sustainable Knowledge Corridor engaged diverse partners to identify indicators to measure the selected dimensions, creating an active Consortium that helped articulate and provide support to development objectives. The well-being dimensions in the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor expanded those included in the PSC (notably housing, transport and environment), to include the economy, public process and healthy living. Table 2 shows the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor's dimensions and indicators and how they align with the dimensions and indicators in the OECD Regional Well-Being framework.

Table 2. **Measuring well-being in the New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor**

New England Knowledge Corridor		OECD *How's Life in Your Region?*	
Dimension	Indicator	Dimension	Indicator
Economy	– Total number of jobs	Jobs	– Employment rate
	– Average weekly wage earned by workers		– Unemployment rate
	– Total number of business establishments	Income	– Household disposable income
	– Unemployment rate	Education	– Labour force with at least a secondary education
	– Median age of the workforce (ages 16-64)		
	– Total private sector payroll		
Public process	– Voter registration per capita	Civic engagement	– Voter turnout
Housing	– Foreclosure rate	Housing	– Number of rooms per person
	– High concentration of poverty and minority segregation		
	– Housing cost burden		
Regional mobility and access	– Average commute time	Access to services	– Households with a broadband connection
	– Environmentally friendly commuters		– Access to public transport in cities
	– Transit riders		– Distance to hospitals
	– Early education enrolment		
	– Poverty rate	Income	– Poverty rate
Transport and land use	– Brownfield sites cleaned for redevelopment		
Natural environment	– Land protected	Environment	– Air pollution ($PM_{2.5}$ levels)
	– Vehicle miles travelled per capita		– Access to green areas
	– Healthy air quality days		
	– Land consumption – % of land developed		
	– Combined sewer overflows on rivers		
	– CO_2 emissions		
	– Recycling rate		
Workforce	– Workforce training completed	Education	– Labour force with at least a secondary education
	– Workforce training resulting in job		
	– Educational attainment	Jobs	– Employment rate
	– Third grade reading proficiency		– Unemployment rate
Healthy living	– Miles of bike/pedestrian infrastructure	Health	– Life expectancy
	– Percentage of population affected by food deserts		– Mortality rate

Source: Adapted from Sustainable Knowledge Corridor (2011), "How are we doing?", available at: http://sustainableknowledgecorridor.org/site/content/how-are-we-doing (accessed 4 September 2014); OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

The Sustainable Knowledge Corridor has taken a strong approach to consultation to develop the well-being metrics. However, it is unclear if baselines and expected results have been identified. It is also not clear how trends are evaluated. Finally, qualitative information appears to be missing, which can be helpful to complement quantitative data

in the measurement and evaluation process. Baselines and targets help trace the impact of specific policy actions and the need for adjustment (Box 6).

Box 6. **Policy outcomes, baselines, targets and a few notes of caution**

Defining clear and precise desired outcomes – i.e. the desired result of a policy intervention – requires establishing baseline data and identifying targets.

The existence of baseline data is a critical precondition for the evaluation of policy impact. A baseline is defined as the value of a result indicator at the beginning of the programming period before a given policy intervention is undertaken (e.g. the share of school drop-outs in a region). Realistic baselines can be difficult to pinpoint, but may be readily available from statistical or administrative data. In some cases, typically in the case of subjective perception indicators, it needs to be generated, for example by surveys. Baselines should be selected for a specific point in time, based on the data gathered to inform the policy orientation, and/or as close as possible to the implementation date of the policy.

Similarly, identifying targets provides powerful impetus for encouraging improvement, but it remains a challenging exercise. Targets can be defined as a concrete goal that states the degree of achievement that is expected with respect to an associated policy intervention. While an ideal measurement cycle would involve choosing a target within a determined time horizon, the characteristics of the policy cycle make it difficult to identify when results will be detectible. Typically, results might materialise only after the specific policy cycle has been completed. Setting precise values to be achieved for each indicator requires, at a minimum, an overall assessment of the current situation and of the feasibility of the objectives, the involvement of the scientific community, and extensive consultation with citizens and other stakeholders from civil society.

There is certainly a debate regarding targets. Target setting may promote perverse incentives or system gaming (e.g. teaching to the test), while it may also assist in policy measurement and adjustment (e.g. identifying if students are learning the skills necessary). Fundamentally, however, the issue is not whether baselines and targets are bad or distorting. Rather, it is a matter of how targets or other measurements are set and utilised.

Drawing on the experience of OECD regions, the following insights can help orient the debate on setting targets:

- decide whether to define a range of target values or a single target value for each indicator
- consider the possibility of setting intermediate targets to encourage initial action and build confidence
- combine quantitative and qualitative targets
- establish a realistic timeframe informed by comparable historical benchmarks
- determine whether to link targets with budgetary incentives or not.

Source: Adapted from OECD (2014), *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-Being for Policy Making*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264217416-en.

Expected results are also essential for communicating progress, making citizens more easily aware of trends towards the desired outcomes, and can hold decision makers accountable. The MetroHartford Progress Points project located within the region of the New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, for example, has used quantitative evidence on the well-being performance of the Hartford metro area, to engage a variety of stakeholders to identify concrete actions to improve well-being in the Hartford area (Box 7).

Box 7. **MetroHartford Progress Points**

Hartford, Connecticut is one of the urban areas in the New England Sustainable Knowledge Corridor. It is home to 750 000 people living in an urban core and its hinterlands (inner and outer suburbs as well as rural towns). In 2013, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving brought together a wide range of regional stakeholders (including some of those involved in the Knowledge Corridor) to evaluate performance in a number of well-being dimensions including demographics, voter turnout, crime, job opportunities, employment, poverty and educational attainment. The result is a brief document – MetroHartford Progress Points – that paints a data-based picture of MetroHartford, and through this, intentionally or not, establishes baselines. It is intended as an instrument to launch dialogue and action among regional policy makers and other stakeholders and to spur co-operative effort and concrete action to improve well-being in greater Hartford (MetroHartford, 2014). This initiative draws on some of the PSC Livability Principles and indicators, but it does not appear to be constrained by them in its focus.

Source: Authors'elaborations based on MetroHartford (2014), "MetroHartford Progress Points: A snapshot of our communities", available at: www.metrohartfordprogresspoints.org/downloads/Metro_Hartford_Progress_Points_2014.pdf.

Foster citizen engagement and communication

Mobilising citizens upfront on a well-being strategy is an essential prerequisite to create a sense of ownership, monitor whether the region is moving in the desired direction and improve policy effectiveness. In addition, active stakeholder contribution to political choices helps avoid the risk of technocratic undertakings that only marginally impact people's lives. In practice, mechanisms to promote citizen engagement and facilitate the communication of well-being data often come late in regional initiatives (OECD, 2014).

With respect to communicating, the leaders of the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor Initiative have done a significant amount of work to highlight performance at a regional, urban and community level through the interactive web tool "How are we doing?". In addition, they have developed a "Rank Your Priorities" web tool that allows users to rank their priority areas (e.g. access to jobs and housing, better schools, cultural diversity) and then see how these priorities and regional growth are affected by the user's transport-related choices. To underscore the importance of the initiative's sustainability objectives and their impact on the region, a series of two-page communication pieces are available online that highlight each characteristic of sustainability, how progress can be measured, and actions that individual communities can take to support change. A short list of references for more information is also included (Sustainable Knowledge Corridor, 2011). Civic engagement is encouraged through citizen involvement in the planning process (e.g. ranking priorities), sharing stories and participating in events.

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities has incorporated different data tools and interactive maps on its website for citizens and local policy makers to visualise the performance of their area on specific topics (for example the EPA's *Smart Location Database* or the HUD's "Sustainable Communities HotReport"), but also to encourage users to use this evidence to think about public choices and use of resources (for example, the USDA's "Know your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass", or the "Location Affordability Portal"). These data tools are complemented with guidelines for the use of federal grants and evaluation reports of previous programmes.

Conclusions and steps forward

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities has provided guidance and resources in support of communities dedicated to a higher quality of life and greater well-being for their residents. It has also established and helped move forward a national level agenda on sustainable communities. The guiding principles of the partnership underline the need for a balance among the economic, social and environmental policy objectives of local development, and for an integrated approach to policy making that exploits cross-sectoral synergies. The partnership has also helped territories to develop their own well-being metrics, providing examples and clarifying selection criteria rather than establishing a set of federal level indicators.

However, the initiative faces some constraints that should be addressed to strengthen an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to well-being. These constraints include: *i)* that it is a federal initiative and therefore constrained in its scope of action at the local level; *ii)* a culture that tends to be wary of federal initiatives and more comfortable with action at a state or local level; *iii)* fragmentation in the programme's execution as funds and reporting are not directly linked to the partnership but to the individual partners; *iv)* the lack of a formal broader partnership at the federal level to pursue an integrated approach and remove barriers to local development; *v)* limited participation of state and local governments in the setting of the well-being measurements.

At the same time, the state, regional and metropolitan levels are proactively taking a broader perspective and more inclusive approach to defining well-being and its measurement. Sub-national decision makers and stakeholders are identifying where their communities stand with respect to growth and well-being, and what is needed to enhance it in a sustainable fashion. They have easier access to community leaders and citizens to build support and buy-in, they can tap into local and national level data sources, and in many cases have established ties with peers in other communities, facilitating an exchange of information and a co-operative process. The experiences in OECD countries show that the alignment of policy objectives among all levels of government and the engagement of private stakeholders and civil society organisations are critical elements to the success of the different initiatives.

Future steps to strengthen this initiative both at the federal and local levels could include the following actions:

- Involve in a formal collaboration a broader base of partners at the federal level. A broad coalition of federal agencies is critical to the success of programmes aimed at building community well-being or sustainability.
- Improve the institutional, regulatory and policy arrangements to ease local investment in sustainable communities and consider the revision of funding mechanisms of the partnership, for example establishing a unique source of funding for the programme.
- Use federal knowledge and resources to help the sub-national entities build strong well-being metrics, and incorporate well-being dimensions into their regional development policies. The co-ordination of federal agencies may be challenging. Yet, given their scope, perspective and territorial reach, federal bodies, working collaboratively, are in a unique position to support sub-national policy makers and other stakeholders wishing to take a well-being approach to territorial growth.

Such a support can be envisioned in multiple ways, including building capacity for:

- Developing outcome indicators and ensuring they are actionable. Providing guidance on how indicators can be integrated into a regional development plan.
- Promoting practitioner networks and sharing best practices, so that decision makers, policy designers and communities learn from each other.
- Leveraging policy complementarities in order to ensure successful policy outcomes.
- Supporting civic leadership and citizen engagement, not only to help identify well-being priorities, but also as a monitoring mechanism, and means to obtain qualitative data to measure success.
- Identifying funding sources and improving the capacity of small communities to access grants, especially for private sector funding opportunities.
- Incorporate OECD Regional Well-Being indicators as appropriate. This can help ensure the presence of outcome indictors and build capacity for international comparability, at least in some well-being dimensions.

Notes

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2. The three agencies are: Capitol Region Council of Governments, Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission and Central Connecticut Planning Agency.

3. For a complete list of the participating organisations, please see: http://sustainableknowledgecorridor.org/about/consortium-members.

4. These state agencies are: the Connecticut Departments of Economic & Community Development, Transportation, Energy and Environmental Protection; the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority; the Massachusetts Executive Offices of Housing & Economic Development, and Energy & Environmental Affairs; the Massachusetts Department of Transport.

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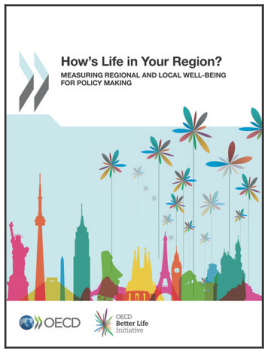

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