CITIZENSHIP AND PROGRESS

Mike Salvaris
Senior Research Fellow
Centre for Urban and Social Research
Swinburne University of Technology

P. O. Box 218, Hawthorn 3122
phone: 03 9214 8837
e-mail: msalvaris@swin.edu.au

CITIZENSHIP AND PROGRESS[1]

This paper examines some key problems—political, social and methodological—in systems to measure national progress. They include: the democratic legitimacy of such systems; the meaning and adequacy of the concept of "progress" adopted; the standards against which progress is claimed; and the neglect of important measures of social, civic and environmental well-being traditionally considered vague or controversial.

The paper traces the historic development of ideas about progress, their use to further particular political interests and the way state-based statistical systems often reflect these influences. It argues that the present time is an especially appropriate time for Australia to develop a new system of indicators or "social audit" reflecting broader answers to the question "what kind of society should Australia be?" Such a system would integrate economic, social and environmental notions of "progress" and its development could be linked to other social change processes such as constitutional reform and the renewal of citizenship.

Finally, it examines briefly the National Citizenship Project, a collaborative project between universities and the community, aimed to develop a new national system of indicators and benchmarks of citizenship and well-being.

I: Perspectives

To begin with, some different perspectives on the problem of "measuring national progress". The United Nations Development Program opened its 1996 report with these words:

> Human advance is conditioned by our conception of progress ... (It is time to end) the mismeasure of human progress by economic growth alone. The paradigm shift in favour of sustainable human development is still in the making. But more and more policy makers in many countries are reaching the unavoidable conclusion that, to be *valuable* and *legitimate*, development progress—both nationally and internationally—must be people centred, equitably distributed, and environmentally and socially sustainable. (UNDP, 1996: iii, emphasis added.)

In an era of 'post-nationalism', when we no longer share a common ethnic ancestry, what might be the value base for a new and legitimate Australian concept of progress that is people centred, equitable and socially and environmentally sustainable? One answer suggested by Laksiri Jayasuriya in his book *Australian Civilisation,* is that:

> Citizenship provides an attractive and powerful base for constructing a 'democratic pluralism' to enshrine the social values and moral ideas of contemporary Australia.

Here Jayasuriya evokes an earlier and famous passage from T. H. Marshall (1950) linking the idea of citizenship to the setting of standards of progress. In Marshall's view, "societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal of citizenship against which achievements can be measured and towards which aspirations can be directed". An ideal citizenship, we might say, comprises not just a legal status with rights and duties, and a practical

---

[1] I should like especially to acknowledge the contribution to this paper by my colleagues Jacques Boulet, Roberta Ryan and Terry Burke, and my debt to Jacques' earlier draft paper "Measuring national progress: debates about ethics, meanings and method".

emphasis on social inclusion and community membership; it is also strongly grounded in the ethical values of the good society and the democratic values of the republic.

Twenty years after Marshall and before the UN report, American sociologist Kenneth Land (1974) pointed out an obvious but often overlooked practical pre-condition for measuring national progress: we cannot measure something properly unless we can first describe it. To develop an effective system to evaluate the health or well-being of society, we must first have a working plan of a good society in our head. To design social indicators, said Land, "one is faced with the necessity of spelling out some more or less explicit model of society".

Problems

These reflections highlight four key problems in the idea of measuring national progress, and its realisation. There is, first, an issue of democratic legitimacy. This is a consequence of the undoubted impact that this central, powerful idea of progress, and the indicators that describe it, have on public policy and understanding, and so on the lives of all citizens. When progress is universally assumed as a national priority, and those who 'stand in its way' are depicted as fools and Luddites, or, in Michael Pusey's phrase, 'a kind of stubbornly resisting sludge' through whom 'reforms' must be 'driven' (Pusey, 1992), then it becomes a matter of some democratic importance to ask questions such as: what do we mean by progress? in what spheres? progress for whom? and most importantly, who should decide this?

This leads us to a second problem, the intrinsic questions of meaning, and balance which arise from the many-sided nature of progress itself. Progress in one sphere can retard progress in another, as we know from the environmental impact of economic growth. Should we not be seeking, as the UNDP suggests, a broader measure of human progress and well-being, a more holistic, more organic and integrated notion, especially as between its economic, social and environmental dimensions, but also between material and ethical or spiritual criteria of progress—with perhaps more stress on "gross national welfare" than gross national production? (Ikeda and Toynbee, 1989)

Next, there is the problem raised by Land, the problem of calibration or reference points implicit in the idea of measurement. To measure national progress, we need both a map (a model of progress) and a compass (indicators of progress). The most effective system of national progress measurement will be one that is as far as possible directly linked to a set of clear benchmarks or standards that properly describe what progress or well-being is in practice. This is something we plainly lack in Australia.

And finally, there is the important technical problem of measurability. A fully rounded account of progress or well-being will require us to measure and give due weight to qualities and values which, however important, are essentially intangible, or at least hard to quantify, and often controversial. For that reason, they have often been avoided or underestimated by politicians and statisticians alike, and therefore over time have simply failed to register as significant components in our national accounts of progress. Here I mean criteria such as citizenship, social justice, community health and the vitality of democracy, as well as a wide array of environmental indicators. This problem has been admirably summarised by Fallowfield (1990) who warns us not to confuse the measurable with the important:

Man does not inhabit a social vacuum; thus failure to set those aspects of quality of life that we can measure in a wider framework will be a futile exercise. To discuss only the measurable components would be analogous to the old joke about the drunk looking for his lost keys under a lamp post, although he had dropped them elsewhere, because the light was better under the lamp.

Opportunities

These are difficult questions, but now is exactly the right time for Australians to be asking them: not just what we mean by national progress and how we should measure it, but the broader and logically prior question: what kind of a society do we want to be? The two questions are intimately linked, as good public policy should be linked to public values.

Why is it timely? Perhaps above all, because over the past twenty years "we have been plunged into a period of unprecedented social, cultural, political, economic and technological change, in which the Australian way of life is being rapidly redefined" (Mackay, 1993). There have been changes in gender relations and family life. There has been a revolution in the economy and in the labour market. We have become a multicultural society. We have learned to tolerate high unemployment and the privatisation of public utilities and services, but not happily. We have begun to understand the scale of problems like global warming and the destruction of major ecosystems. There has been an historic shift in trade and foreign relations. Globalisation is making us more competitive and more interdependent, we are told, but it has also made us less confident in our ability to shape our future and our environment. We have yet to come to terms with native title and the need for reconciliation. And in the past decade there have been growing signs of a decline in democracy, and of a less compassionate, more unequal and more stressed society. (Salvaris, 1995). This may be partly because some of the most traumatic economic and public sector changes Australians experienced in this time were imposed without popular support or understanding, by what Hugh Stretton has called "a leaders' coup". (Stretton, 1993)

We are clearly facing some critical choices about our identity, our society and our future; but at the same time, we have an extraordinary opportunity to do this openly and thoughtfully, in ways that might strengthen our democracy and social fabric. This opportunity is born of both necessity and history, since we are simultaneously at the brink of the centenary of our federal system, a new constitution and a new millennium. At such critical moments in their lives, nations, like people, should stop and take stock.

In this challenging context, rather than immediately immersing ourselves in narrow technical questions, or the comforting familiarity of our own discipline or professional field, we should be prepared to take a few risks: to step back and question the larger underlying issues implicit in our theme, rather than assuming them. One starting point might be to think about national progress and how we measure it, in the kind of broader and more integrated way suggested.

In this respect, we have a distinct advantage in this conference: unusually, it brings together three major disciplinary fields—economics, social policy and the environment—and different operational spheres: research, government and community. These three disciplines generally use different languages and different criteria to describe progress or well-being, and don't often speak to each other. Yet clearly no sensible version of a future framework of 'progress' or 'national well-being' can evolve without some synthesis between these three elemental components.

But first we need to examine more carefully the present 'framework' of progress, and how it relates to measurement and public policy.

II: Progress and political power

Since the Industrial Revolution, the idea of 'progress' or 'development' has occupied a central position in Western society, conferring legitimacy on political power and providing a positive unifying theme for national policy. And it is potent not least because it conveys a sense of destiny: it has become the 'meta narrative of history' and human evolution (McLintock, 1992) that

> occupies the centre of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation. There is nothing in modern mentality comparable to it as a force guiding thought and behaviour ... It converted history into a programme: a necessary and inevitable destiny... (Esteva, 1992: 8-9)

Defining progress

Yet for all its all powerful and positive aura, the meaning of progress is strangely empty, neither scientifically nor semantically self-evident. On its face it is a qualified and conditional term, that means literally nothing more than 'movement towards a destination or goal'. What meaning it has, and whether it is good or bad to progress, depends entirely on how we define the destination. At the level of nations, how do we say what is our destination, what is the desirable end of human societies? What are Australia's agreed national goals? These are obviously highly contestable questions. History, geography and culture show us many different versions of national goals. For one nation, progress or success may be to become militarily or economically strong, or to have the highest standards of technology and industrial development; for others, it may be to become a nation in which wealth and opportunities are fairly shared, or that is conducted on the most democratic possible lines; for still others, the ideal may be a nation strongly united around a single culture, religion or ethnicity.

Perhaps it is precisely because 'progress' has such powerful associations, and yet at the same time is so vacant and contestable, that it has been a kind of prize waiting to be taken by those with power to harness it and fill its meaning. Thus for 150 years there has been a political struggle to capture the meaning of progress, to become its prophet and interpreter, and to link it to particular national or sectional interests.

This is much in accord with a wider tendency of political power, observed in a long line from Ancient Athens to the present day. In Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus comments that "'just' or 'right' means nothing but what is in the interest of the stronger party". (Cornford, 1941) Thomas Hobbes believed "the most powerful instrument of political authority is the power to give names and to enforce definitions". (Chorover, 1979) Karl Marx observed the same relationship two centuries later in his famous statement that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force". And we can assume that Lewis Carroll was making this point whimsically in *Through the Looking Glass*, when Humpty Dumpty says "in a rather scornful tone"

> "When I use a word … it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." "The question is", said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all".

"The world belongs to those who can explain it simply", said Ortega y Gasset (1931); control the meaning of words and "you can control the people who must use the words" (Dick, 1987). In our times, Noam Chomsky (1989) adopted the term 'necessary illusions' to describe the process by which the meaning and boundaries of public debate in democratic states are controlled, in the interests of preserving present power.

In Australia and many other western countries, it is therefore not surprising to find that the dominant conception of progress is strongly associated with economic progress and technological change. There is a widespread assumption that other forms of progress are inseparably linked to a steady and continuous increase in the material output and competitive efficiency of a market economy. This, of course, is not the only concept of progress that prevails, but it is the most powerful, judging by at least three criteria: (a) the role of economic indicators such as the GDP, as the definitive official measures of progress (social as well as economic) and the success of government;[2] (b) the prominence, quantity, and generally uncritical nature of economic reportage, a fact lamented even by the governor of the Reserve Bank, who said recently that "no country in the world ... is so obsessed with economic issues as Australia" (McFarlane, 1994); (c) and thirdly, the dominance of a fairly narrow brand of market economics in public policy, to the point where it has "so completely … become the language of political discourse that questions that cannot be translated into its terms lie like runes, unspoken for want of decryption".[3]

The hegemony of economic language and values in public life has democratic as well as policy consequences: "economists were never elected to pass these weighty social value judgments on the rest of society under the guise of 'science'". (Henderson, 1996).

From paradigm to pathology

As a master framework for measuring human progress, this concept is unsatisfactory at a number of levels. It has, first, some profoundly unattractive ethical implications for the broader ideal of citizenship discussed earlier: as Paul Ormerod (1994) has said "the promotion of the concept that the untrammelled, self-sufficient competitive individual will maximise human welfare damages deeply the possibility of ever creating a truly cohesive society in which everyone can participate".

Second, the equation of production with progress confuses means with ends—or in our earlier metaphor, the vehicle with the destination. At least, it does unless we accept one of two fallacies:

---

[2] For example, the Australian Parliament publishes a "Monthly economic and social indicators index" consisting of 36 indicators in 8 key groups. Seven groups are economic (labour, wages and prices, national accounts, business conditions, finance, external (finance and trade) transactions, international (economic) comparisons. The one 'social statistics' group consists of three indicators: population; job searches etc; and overseas visitors. Source: Australia, Parliament, Department of the Parliamentary Library *Monthly Economic and Social Indicators Index*

[3] Haupt, 1996. For a more recent judgment, 'The Hawke and Keating Governments had become so obsessed with the economic bottom line that they lost sight of the social consequences of their policies … Australians have now endured more than a decade of both federal and state governments seeing themselves solely as economic managers - pulling out of providing services, selling off public assets and consistently refusing to place social and environmental goals on at least an equal footing with economic ones'. (Kernot, C. in *The Age*, 24/10/97)

the self-referential claim that human progress in effect *means* an increase in competitive economic production; or some theory of an inevitable causal link (or "trickle down" effect) which makes other forms of human progress follow automatically from this one.

The last claim seems increasingly hard to accept, especially from a discipline famous for bad predictions (a recent headline in *The Economist* proclaimed, "Economists know surprisingly little about the causes of economic growth"[4]). As the UNDP (1996) points out, we appear to be witnessing a new international phenomenon, perhaps a new phase in global market economies: economic growth is no longer producing automatic improvement in human development, but a series of "economic pathologies" (Max-Neef, 1992): 'jobless growth' (where increased economic output brings a decline in employment due to technology or labour export); 'ruthless growth' (benefiting mostly the rich); 'voiceless growth' (accompanied by the repression of democracy); 'rootless growth' (damaging people's cultural identity); and 'futureless growth' (squandering future environmental resources).

And it seems that the giant is beginning to devour its children: the 'collateral damage' is often now economic as much as social or environmental. Last year, industrial pollution damage to forests caused worldwide economic losses of about US$35 billion, equivalent to the entire GDP of Hungary. (UNDP, 1996) In advanced industrial countries, this paradox is increasingly evident in headlines like "If the GDP is up, why is America down?" (Cobb et al., 1995) or, in Australia, "Economy booms as jobless surge" or "Health, education cuts bring better credit rating, says Treasurer" (see, e.g., Probert, 1992).

Yet economic growth continues as a universal panacea, even for these new problems, and even though it seems increasingly illogical and counter-intuitive. At a global level, the primary problem is now not one of shortfall in aggregate production, but a problem of the quality, sustainability and fair distribution of the production: in Gandhi's words, 'earth has enough for every man's need but not for every man's greed'. And if we do take the earth as our model, with its cycles of birth, growth, maturity and death, we might observe that in nature, continuous growth is a pathological condition often known as cancer.

Seeking a balance

In the last resort, the dominant western notion of progress fails because it is an unbalanced account of the nature and potential of human life, and the social and environmental context in which it is lived.

Norwegian humanist Asbjorne Eide expressed this as a problem of human rights : "It is this low road of regarding humanity as an instrument of production—rather than the high road of acknowledging the universality of life claims—that fits well with the reputation of economics as the dismal science". (Eide, 1995). R. H. Tawney (1926) in typically ironic Edwardian language pointed to the spiritual deficit: "Since even quite common men have souls, no increase in material wealth will compensate them for arrangements which insult their self-respect and impair their freedom". Ecologist Arne Naess (1988) mounts a wider critique, arguing that our ruling notions of life quality and progress have been predominantly anthropocentric: they take an

---

[4]   September 30, 1995: cited in Henderson, 1996.

instrumentalist view of non-human life, so that its value and right to exist depend primarily on its usefulness to humans. It is this, says Naess, that leads to excessive human interference with the non-human world. As well as policy changes, an ideological change is needed, he argues, based on a new concept of 'life quality'—rather than a continuously increasing material standard of human life, one that includes recognising inherent value and the importance of a rich and diverse non-human life, and valuing the experience of the inter-connectedness of all things.

Despite Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum to the contrary, there are such things as communities and societies, and most of us live in them by choice; we do not live in economies. We do have moral and ethical responsibilities to others within our own society and internationally, as well as to future generations, and we must respect and uphold them. We do have spiritual and cultural needs that must be met, as well as material ones. And finally, we live within, and ultimately depend on, larger eco-systems.

The Western concept of progress that has dominated much of the world for a century and a half is still powerful; but it is increasingly resisted, not only in many 'developing' nations, but within industrial countries also. In the latter, "the belief in progress has crumbled, the arrow of time is broken. The future doesn't hold much promise any more; it has become a repository of fears rather than of hopes". (Sachs, 1992: 113). In the former, it is resented as much for its social and cultural as for its material effects: not only legitimating economic and political imperialism on a grand scale but also giving "global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, (and) robbing peoples of different culture of the opportunity to define the forms of their social life". (Esteva in Sachs, 1992)

Even in industrialised countries where progress and standards of living are so often spoken of in quantitative and material terms, we are apt to forget that there are other and older ways to conceive and define human progress, ways of 'well-being' rather than 'well having'. "The objective of a 'good life' can manifest itself in a whole host of forms" says Latouche "from the warrior's heroism to asceticism, from Epicurean enjoyment to aesthetic toil". The notion of 'the public good', for example, has a much longer pedigree—this "age-old Aristotelian and Thomist term (which) evokes the ideal of the just and responsible city-state, rather than a rich and individualist society". (Latouche in Sachs, 1992).

In Australia today, it would be unsafe to infer a clear public consensus for the material ideal of progress, despite its official popularity. In part this is because the benefits for ordinary Australians are much less clear then they were. Beyond the official figures like GDP (in any case, rarely understood by most people: Quadrant Research, 1992); beyond the vague promises of a better life when the right 'economic settings' are finally 'in place'; beyond the upbeat appeals to modernity and the excitements of a global society, this model is increasingly seen, in Australia and elsewhere, as hollow and unsatisfactory, contradicting the lived experience and the unmet needs of many ordinary people, and ushering in a more polarised society. (Martin and Schumann, 1997; UNDP, 1997: 82-93).

Some of the ostensible support for this model of progress may really reflect the lack of alternatives: that is, clear and meaningful national statements about goals, priorities and standards intended to embody a broader notion of national progress. These cannot be found in our Constitution or in any transparent and widely understood policy framework, and have become even harder to locate in an era of 'policy free' elections. We must instead rely on a mixed and uneven collection of generalised assumptions, implicit standards and historic beliefs (such as the 'fair go') about the kind of society Australia should be.

In these circumstances it is genuinely difficult to give a satisfactory answer to the question "are we making progress as a nation?" If, for example, we were to conduct a survey on national priorities for progress or a good society, it would be difficult to speculate on how the following possible models right rank:

- a society that is politically and militarily strong

- a society that is rich and economically powerful

- a society that maximises the material well-being of all its citizens (ie, in health, welfare, education, employment etc)

- a diverse, multicultural and tolerant society that values difference and creativity

- a society in which there is a high degree of sense of community, harmony, mutual support, social solidarity

- a socially just society, characterised by fairness and equality, in which all members have equal opportunities to fully develop their potential

- a strongly democratic and free society

- a society which respects, preserves and enhances its natural resources and environment to the maximum degree consistent with reasonable levels of social and economic progress.

But none of this denies the possibility of a deeper underlying consensus. The pluralist forms of society, and the fragmented, departmental style of government decision-making, with its "multiple and conflicting aims", can have the effect of obscuring agreement about social ideals:

> (D)espite this conflict of intentions and apparent absence of an explicit consensus and social purpose, those who hold an integrative view of society may after all be correct in believing that there is an elusive consensus on a deeper level. Superficially we see a discordance of belief systems and ideals; the underlying agreement and integration in society are hidden, and it may require some effort to identify them. So the social ideals that underpin them need to be discovered. This is the first task of the researcher as critic. (Rein, 1976: 127)

And the first task of the communitarian citizen, Amitai Etzioni might add, is to promote a participatory debate, mindful that "divergent moral positions need not lead to cacophony. Out of genuine dialogue clear voices can arise, and shared aspirations can be identified and advanced". (Etzioni, 1994: 255)

We may concede, with the UNDP, that we do not yet have an agreed new paradigm of 'progress' but we can at least begin to sketch an outline of its core components: democratic legitimacy; a consistent and transparent value base; 'people centredness'; equity in distribution; environmental sustainability; social sustainability. Emmerij (1997) suggests a similar list as the basis for a new international model of human progress: social justice; economic efficiency; environmental sustainability; political democracy, and cultural diversity.

To this list we might add the idea of citizenship as a guiding value, recognising that "the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its 'basic structure' but also on the quality and attitudes of its citizens". (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994).

Taken together, it would be hard to deny that each of these elements has a legitimate claim to be part of a more balanced and integrated ideal of human progress, and a better description of "shared aspirations".

III: Democratising Progress, Renewing Citizenship

Where then is the starting point if we were to think about "redefining progress"? The idea of legitimacy—democratic and civic legitimacy—is a strong contender, since it implies both transparency and the common good. This is at least a useful corrective to the many historical examples where some supposedly higher national imperative of 'progress' has been invoked to justify the sacrifice by ordinary people of their well-being and often their lives, whether the cry is 'manifest national destiny', 'holy war' or 'the burden of Empire'. (In our day, calls for sacrifices to 'the Economy' sometimes have a familiar ring). But perhaps the simple point is that in modern democracies, especially those in the civic republican mould, citizens have some reason to be sceptical about notions of progress and national priority which appear to stand above, or detached from, the well-being of most of the citizens.

A full and democratic account of citizenship implies an entitlement to a clear, concrete and detailed statement of the national objectives to be pursued in the citizens' names by their common vehicle of government, as well as a regular and honest account of progress towards those goals (just as a genuinely democratic election necessarily implies clear and detailed policy statements by candidates, rather than ex post facto "mandates"). And before this, it implies that these objectives, and the indicators that officially measure them, should primarily reflect those aspects of 'progress' that are most valued by the citizens (just as a democratic constitution should primarily protect the basic rights of the people).

In his influential essay *The Unconscious Civilization*, John Ralston Saul argues that new measures of progress should be part of a larger process of civic renewal. Saul traces the growth of corporatism, and the gradual metamorphosis of citizens into customers. Somewhere along this path, says Saul, and despite the increase in our material well-being, modern civilization has lost its reflective capacity, the ability to ask the Socratic question "What is the way we ought to live?". It is by asking this question, and by making specific claims for the standards of a decent society against the dominant corporate goals, he says, that we can re-assert the lost legitimacy of a democracy of citizens.

Indicators, science and values

Saul is not the first to link indicators of 'progress' with democratic citizenship. American environmental economist Hazel Henderson identifies the pivotal influence of statistical indicators in reflecting "societies' values and goals"—she describes them as "structural DNA codes that become the key drives of economies and technological choices". This means that the "democratising" of such powerful tools as "indicators of human progress and sustainable development" is "essential to empowering citizens" (Henderson, 1996).

Swedish sociologist and former government statistician Sten Johansson (1991) has argued that the provision of truthful, comprehensive and balanced statistics about their society is a democratic right of citizens and a duty of government, on three counts: so that citizens can make informed political choices and decisions, and governments can maintain accountability; and as part of a broader right of freedom of information.

To meet this democratic requirement will involve some re-thinking of the links between government and 'official' indicators, and perhaps a greater willingness to fund independent and alternative measures of 'progress', as Peter Townsend suggests:

> Official statistics (do) not always cover subjects which arouse controversy or conflict and are very sparing about social inequality. Bureaucracies and governments have a vested interest in demonstrating social progress. The politician presents those statistics about his government's course which put that course in the most favourable light. Because the civil servant has to play a compliant role and has little interest in demonstrating needs which imply administrative upheaval he will offer indirect support to the politician in the presentation of information. So the statistics we use to assess trends may differ at different points in time in their relevance to reality. … The upshot of this argument, then, is not merely that shrewd technical definitions or measures of change need to be invented but that such definitions or measures have to be established independently of bureaucratic control. (Townsend, 1975: 19)

Since the early 1960s, there has been a long and interesting international struggle to broaden and democratise the official statistical measurements or 'indicators' of progress and well-being. Part of the conflict stems from the nearly universal links between government and official statistics, usually through a state central statistical office. The word 'statistic' itself reflects this ambivalence, since its Latin root 'status' came to mean both status (ie, condition) and State (ie, government). Townsend (above) suggests the nature of some of these conflicts.

Much of the initial impetus was a simple concern for better tools. Reviewing the origins of its program to develop an international program of social indicators in the 1970s, the OECD recalled that "considerable dissatisfaction developed because conventional indicators (primarily, economic output measures) were being used for a role they were not designed to fulfil" and that it was necessary to develop measures of "non-market activity, intangible capital, changes to the natural and man-made environment, and other aspects of the quality of life". (OECD, 1986)

Some of the problem derives from what is in effect a disciplinary conflict about the proper role of indicators (whether primarily summative and descriptive, or formative and change-oriented) and what is the place of values and norms in their design, as opposed to more positivist, or 'scientific' criteria. On these questions, the man often regarded as the founder of modern social indicators, was unambiguous: Raymond Bauer defined social indicators as "statistics, statistical series and all other forms of evidence that enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals, and to evaluate specific programs and determine their impact". (Bauer, 1966: 1).

Questions of bias and values in the selection and design of those social indicators eventually presented as evidence of 'progress' take a number of forms. In a larger sense they are innate to the field, for "work in social science has always been accompanied by problems of evaluation" (Mills, 1959: 87). It is also a product of the tendency of social scientists to work within organisations:

> Social science has always had an ambivalent - if not contradictory - relationship with its object of study. Major ethical and political dilemmas arise as social scientists seek to define the broader concerns of mankind and orient their research in these directions, while at the same time accepting support from specific social organisations. (Sjoberg, 1967: 160)

The nature of 'indicators' makes this an inevitable problem: an indicator is essentially different from a statistic precisely because it is intended to signify something of value or importance. Indicators do not spring fully formed from scientific experiments, just as "facts do not organise themselves into concepts and theories just by being looked at". (Myrdal, 1970) Those who construct indicators are therefore unavoidably involved in making value judgments, and are already influenced by implicit values. Rather than pretending this is not the case, it would be better practice to make the values and standards explicit:

> The scientists in any particular institutional and political setting move as a flock, reserving their controversies and particular originalities for matters that do not call into question the fundamental system of biases they share … 'objectivity' can be understood only in the sense that however elaborately a framework of fact is developed the underlying set of value premises must also be made explicit. 'This represents an advance towards the goals of honesty, clarity and effectiveness in research … It should overcome the inhibitions against drawing practical conclusions openly, systematically and logically. This method would consequently render social research a much more powerful instrument for guiding rational policy information.' (Myrdal, in Townsend, 1975)

The alternative is the kind of "empirical data-mongering (which) in political studies has also served to stifle ethical reflexes and the construction (or reconstruction) of the civic-moral philosophies which the times demand." (Selbourne, 1994)

In North America and Britain in the late 1960s, as in the United Nations and the OECD, a combination of democratic and policy concerns (i.e., about the inadequacy of economic indicators) drove the search for better measures of social progress. Following a national inquiry to investigate the feasibility of a 'system of social accounts', Senator Walter Mondale in 1967 introduced a Full Opportunity and Social Accounting Act, aimed "to provide a clear and concise picture of whether such conditions ... as will give every American the opportunity to live in decency and dignity ... are promoted and encouraged in such areas as health, education and training (etc.)". Here too, the idea of a 'social audit' was seen as a necessary correction to an overly economic view of progress that "would give us a broader and more balanced reckoning of the meaning of social and economic progress ... not only the gains ... but the costs as well." (Land, 1974). In Britain in 1970, releasing its first 'Social Trends' report, the government stressed the democratic importance of 'statistics for enlightenment ... needed not only by administrators and policy makers at all levels but also by the general public, particularly in its role as final arbiter of the success or failure of government policies'. (Giles, 1987: 10)

Within the United Nations, the search for better indicators has been driven by several forces: the initial focus on a uniform 'system of national accounts'; then, by the dissatisfactions and special problems of developing countries confronting the most fundamental issues of priority and policy direction, and needing more balanced planning and evaluation tools. Over time this has led to a wide range of new and interesting indicators, in fields such as human development, culture, gender, 'poverty capability:', 'social fabric', 'human capital formation' (see, eg, UNDP 1992-1997; UNRISD-UNESCO, 1997). A third stream has been the important, ongoing task of implement-

ing the many generalised human rights conventions agreed over the past three decades: in this process, indicators have become a routine component, as in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on Human Rights, which resolved:

> To strengthen the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, additional approaches should be examined, such as a system of indicators to measure progress in the realisation of the rights set forth in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (United Nations, 1993)

In Australia there has been recognition for nearly a decade of the need for new systems of auditing well-being, triggered by the OECD project, the environmental movement and the work of women like Marilyn Waring (1988) on the inadequacies of our national accounts system. Mike Giles, a former senior statistician with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, presented the case for a new and more integrated approach:

> (The movement towards the greening of the national accounts) ... is only indicative of an even wider revolution to which statistics will have to respond. This is the emergence of new holistic ways of looking at social change. We are beginning to realise the extent to which we are all connected to each other. It is no longer enough to look merely at health and to produce a few summary health indicators. The health of individuals is connected to other factors such as the nature of their work, the stability of their families, their education levels and the nature of their physical environment. (Giles, 1989:12)

Constituting a new model of progress

The development of a new framework of national standards reflecting a broad notion of human progress and well-being, could help generate a process of civic renewal in Australia. Given substance in detailed indicators, it can at the least provide a concrete, meaningful and public description of the kind of society we are, and might want to be. It is also a logical complement to the task of drawing up a fuller, more democratic Australian constitution, perhaps based on principles of civic republicanism. The process itself is likely to "foster new debates about goals and values based on a broader, longer term bottom line that measures results and thus hold politicians accountable" (Henderson, 1996); and it may be more productive than another four years debate about our head of state. (Salvaris, 1996)

This is not, after all, a new, nor an especially difficult, idea. As Saul explains, the problem is more a failure to assert civic will, a "slippage of democratic power". At a time when far reaching global economic regulations and standards have been enacted with alarming speed and minimal public debate by most national governments (for example, in Australia, the GATT, the Hilmer Report, and the current Multilateral Agreement on Investment); and when we are endlessly urged to adopt 'international best practice standards' in the economic and industrial spheres, the citizenry have been largely silent. Consigned to the role of "customers", they "have made few efforts to push a more balanced agenda into their national arenas let alone onto the international level". (Saul, 1997)

The solution that Saul proposes is the use of international standards and benchmarks for civil society and community well being, such as detailed United Nations or European Union conventions in fields such as civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Modern technology actually makes it easier to enforce these standards, he says, if there is the same will to do so as

there is plainly is in enforcing complex and detailed international trade agreements. "Instead of haggling over local, complex and expensive punishment and reward systems, we could easily use our sophistication to develop simple, all-inclusive methods for guaranteeing standards of living." But, he warns, "this is not something technocrats can take the lead on. It is a matter of pure politics, that is, of citizens participating …" (Saul 1997: 152). Interestingly, it is in Saul's own country, Canada, that a major community-based project has emerged to develop new and broader national indicators of well-being. (CCSD, 1996).

IV: The National Citizenship Project

Finally, a brief outline of the National Citizenship Project (NCP) , a practical attempt to address some of the problems of measuring progress identified above (on this project, see generally: Burke, 1997; Salvaris, 1995)

The NCP is a collaborative research project, with a strong focus on applied policy and community participation. The university partners are drawn from my own university (Swinburne), Monash and Deakin universities and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), and most recently, the University of New South Wales. Our community partner is the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS); and we appreciate the cooperation of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Social Security. The project is funded principally by the Australian Research Council and a major national philanthropic body, the Myer Foundation.

The project has both research and social change or process goals. It is attempting to develop a set of national benchmarks and indicators around the theme of citizenship and social well-being, as a policy tool; but it is also examining the discourse of citizenship in the wider community and developing a national network of research and community collaboration around this theme. Here, a central theme is: how far does the idea of citizenship takes us in answering the wider question "What constitutes a good society"?

In 1993 the Australian Senate (Legal and Constitutional Committee) set up an inquiry into the feasibility and possible form of a national system of indicators of citizenship and well-being, which proceeded from the premise that Australian democracy and public policy would benefit from a more integrated and balanced process of auditing well-being against some clear and defensible benchmarks. The inquiry conducted hearings in various States and received many submissions. In its final report the Senate committee supported the NCP, endorsed the feasibility of such a system and recommended its further development as a matter of national priority. (Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, 1996)

The project has addressed the 'calibration' issue from the beginning, by attempting to first identify a clear set of benchmarks or 'ideal standards' of well-being and then devising indicators to measure them. It recognises the need for a strong and transparent normative base, that offers a clear 'working model'. To ensure that this base is as solid and defensible as possible, we have drawn on three different but related sources: the social theory of citizenship; human rights as a set of concrete and near-universal benchmarks; and a series of focus groups and studies aimed to identify public attitudes and values regarding citizenship and standards of well-being in Australia.

The project has involved the examination and analysis of many different models of 'measuring progress' at different levels, international, national and local.

In selecting the idea of citizenship as the broad umbrella for indicators and benchmarks, the partners are consciously trying to address some important components of a wider model of 'human progress' which have been neglected in conventional and official accounts. They believe that greater weight should be given to standards and measures of social and community health, and not simply or mainly those aspects of the material and physical well-being of individuals (such as poverty, education, health, housing and so on) which, while undoubtedly important, have been much better described in social indicators.

The underlying argument here is that the strength and health of communities, of social relations and social capital, of social inclusion and civic participation, and of the ethic of citizenship and democracy, are as important as some of the more immediate material aspects of individual well-being and probably better predictors of national well-being in the long term. The strength of the "wider civic culture" is especially critical for it is largely upon this that "a properly functioning liberal democracy depend … not just the civic rights that Marshall so ably analysed". (Giddens, 1996).

Can we measure a healthy democracy?

The issue of measuring the health of democracy is a case in point. A strong and healthy democracy, most people might concede, is a crucially important component of national progress and well-being, but measures of its actual health are rarely found in national indicators, especially those produced by government. This is partly because such measures are controversial and may embarrass government; and partly because it is an inherently difficult concept to measure, at least by conventional means.

How would one develop a set of national indicators to audit the health of democracy in Australia? Conventionally one might do this simply by looking at formal institutional factors: whether there are elections, an independent judiciary, etc. However a more careful analysis of democracy as an idea and practice, and in a broader social context, might suggest that there are in fact four levels or dimensions which are all important for a full answer to the question : do we have a healthy democracy?

There is first, the institutional level (the existence of parliaments, courts and democratic structures etc); secondly, the actual effectiveness in practice of democratic rights (do all people have equal access to them?); next, are the informal or non-institutional levels at which a healthy democracy can and should operate: local communities, workplaces, schools and so on; last and not least important is the culture of democracy—the extent to which democracy is understood, discussed and supported as an important ethical and political value, and as "a dynamic process in which the public at large actively participate … (rather than being) viewed as an artefact (of governmental agencies) or a set of cultural rituals (i.e., passively observing elections or voting". (Goodman in Hattam, 1995)

All of these make up a comprehensive view of the health of democracy and all suggest different kinds of standards and indicators. (See, for similar models: Klug et al., 1996; and generally on auditing democracy: Beetham, 1994)

There are a number of lessons from this example for the broader project of this conference. To create a full and honest picture of national progress requires first an integrated and multi-dimensional description of progress. It necessarily requires the development of new and different indicators to measure the different levels and aspects of that concept. Some of these will surely offend government (and therefore fail to attract new funding). Others will initially be attacked by some social scientists and statisticians as too vague, intangible or subjective to measure 'rigorously'.

Most of these problems are innate, in one way or another: to the elusive nature of the phenomenon (of 'progress' or 'well-being'); and to the kind of institutions entrusted to measure it. In the quest for new measures of national progress, we will certainly re-discover the principle enunciated by Townsend (1975) twenty years ago: "the more contentious and far-reaching a social problem appears to be, the more difficult it is to obtain unambiguous statistical evidence about that problem." But unambiguous evidence is not the end goal, and in many cases may not be possible; nor is science the only or the best guide for such a task.

Marilyn Waring, a true pioneer of new measures of progress, began her book (1988) with words from Albert Einstein, which are an equally apt conclusion to this paper's theme:

> We should be on our guard not to overestimate science and scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organisation of society.

Bibliography

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992) *A Guide to Australian Social Statistics,* Canberra: AGPS

Bauer, R. (ed) (1966) *Social Indicators*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Beetham, David (ed) (1994) *Defining and Measuring Democracy*, London: Sage

Burke T (ed) (1997) *Benchmarking Citizenship*, Melbourne: Swinburne University of Techology

Burke, T and M. Salvaris (1997) "Measuring civil society: citizenship, benchmarks and indicators" in Burke, T. (ed.)

Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) (1996) *Measuring Well-being: Proceedings from a Symposium on Social Indicators*, Ottawa: CCSD

Carroll, Lewis (1968) *Through the Looking Glass*, London: Gollancz, pp 106 and 109 (cited in Herb Thompson, Australian Quarterly, Autumn 1990)

Chomsky, N (1989) *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, London: Pluto Press: 48

Chorover S (1979) *From Genesis To Genocide: The Meaning Of Human Nature And The Power Of Behaviour Control*, Massachusetts, MIT Press)

Cobb, C., Halstead, T. and Rowe, J. (1995) "If the GDP is up, why is America down?", *Atlantic Monthly*, (October) 59-78

Cornford, F. M., (1941) *The Republic of Plato*, Oxford: Clarendon

Dick, P. (1987) *I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon*, New York: Saint Martin's Press

Diesendorf, M. and Hamilton, C. (eds) (1997) *Human Ecology, Human Economy*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin

Eide, A. (1995) "Economic. Social and Cultural Rights as Human Rights" in Eide, A, Krause, C and Rosas, A. *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff

Emmerij, L. (1997) "The paradox of competition" in *UNRISD News*, no 16

Etzioni, A. (1994) *The Spirit of Community*, New York: Touchstone

Fallowfield, L. (1990) *The Quality of Life* London: Souvenir

Giddens A. (1996) "T. H. Marshall, the state and democracy" in Bulmer M. and Rees A. (eds) *Citizenship Today*, London: UCL

Giles, M. (1989) "A History of Social Reporting", Workshop Paper, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra

Hattam, R. (1995) "Auditing democracy in the arena of teachers' work", *Newsletter*, Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching, Flinders University, Adelaide

Haupt, R. (1966) "Economics is dead: the pundits are redundant", *Australian Financial Review*, 8/2/96

Henderson, H. (1996) "What's new in the great debate about measuring wealth and progress?", *Challenge*, vol. 39, no. 6: 50-56

Horne D. (ed) (1992) *The Trouble with Economic Rationalism*, Melbourne: Scribe

Ikeda, D (1989) "GNP or Gross National Welfare" in Gage R. (ed.) *Choose Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Jayasuriya, L. (1994) "Citizens" in Nile R. (ed.) *Australian Civilisation*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press

Johansson, S. (1991) "Statistics in the Epistemology of the Democratic Process", Proceedings of the TES International Seminar "Strategic Issues in Statistical Policy", Dublin, 18-20 November.

Klug, F., Starmer, K. and Weir, S. (1996) *The Three Pillars of Liberty*, London: Routledge

Kymlicka, W. and Norman, W. (1994) "Return of the Citizen", *Ethics*, vol. 104,2: 352-381

Land K. (1974) *Social Indicator Models: An Overview,* Columbia University

Marshall, T. H. (1950) *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, Cambridge

Martin, H-P. and Schumann, H. (1997) *The Global Trap: An Attack on Democracy and Prosperity*, London: Zed Books

Marx, Karl and Engels, F. (1846) *The German Ideology,* pt. 1, sect. B, "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas"

Max-Neef, M. (1992) "Development and human needs" in Ekins, P. and Max-Neef, M. (eds.) *Real-Life Economics*, London: Routledge

Mills, C. Wright (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press

Myrdal, G. (1970) *Objectivity in Social Research*, UK: Duckworth

Naess, Arne (1988) 'Deep ecology and ultimate premises', *The Ecologist*, vol. 18, nos. 4-5, pp. 128-131, cited in Diesendorf and Hamilton, 1997

OECD (1986) *The OECD List of Social Indicators*, Paris: OECD

Ortega y Gasset, Jose (1931) *The Revolt of the Masses*

Probert, Belinda (1992) "Whose Economy is it" in Horne D. (1992)

Pusey, M. (1992) "What's wrong with economic rationalism?" in Horne D. (1992)

Quadrant Research Services (1992) "What do the Words Mean?" in Horne, D. (1992)

Rein, M. (1976) *Social Science and Public Policy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Sachs, W. (ed.) (1992) *The Development Dictionary*, London: Zed Books

Salvaris, M. (1995) *Discussion Paper on a System of National Citizenship Indicators*, Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Salvaris, M. (1996) "A Just Republic? Or Just a Republic?" in Davis, S. R. (ed.) *Citizenship in Australia: Democracy, Law and Society*, Carlton: Constitutional Centenary Foundation

Saul, J. R. (1997) *The Unconscious Civilization*, Ringwood: Penguin.

Saul, J. R. (1993) *Voltaire's Bastards*, Ontario: Penguin

Selbourne, D. (1994) *The Principle of Duty*, London, Sinclair-Stevenson

Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee (1996) *National Well-being: a System of National Citizenship Indicators and Benchmarks*, Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Sjoberg, G. (1967) "Project Camelot: Selected Reactions and Personal Reflections" in Sjoberg, G. (ed) *Ethics, Politics and Social Research* Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman

Stretton, Hugh (1993) "Whodunnit to Social Democracy?" (The Stephen Murray Smith Memorial Lecture), *Overland* 132, 50-64: 56

Tawney, R. H. (1926) *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*

Townsend, P. (1975) *Sociology and Social Policy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

UNRISD-UNESCO (1996) *Towards a World Report on Culture and Development: Constructing Cultural Statistics and Indicators*, Paris: UNESCO

United Nations (1993) *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, New York: United Nations

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1992-1997) *Human Development Report* (annual) New York: Oxford University Press

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1996) *Human Development Report 1996*, New York: Oxford University Press

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997) *Human Development Report 1997*, New York: Oxford University Press

Waring, M. (1988) *Counting for Nothing*, Wellington: Bridget Williams