

## INTRODUCTION

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Social indicators research originated some fifteen years ago in a cultural context (“advanced” western capitalist societies) characterized by a growing awareness of various kinds of drawbacks of unrestricted and unqualified economic growth: ecological disasters, consumer’s frustration, social and cultural alienation or even *anomie*, etc. As an interdisciplinary endeavour aimed at supplementing and eventually substituting traditional economic accounting procedures, the social indicators movement has gathered considerable momentum since. Moreover, the search for adequate measures of people’s life quality — a notion more comprehensive than the traditional concepts of “welfare” or “well-being” — is no longer restricted to western nations. The movement nowadays has many adherents in developing nations too, and there is a growing concern among social scientists in the “socialist” world with matters closely related to quality of life research.

We think the time has come to assess what has (and what has not) been accomplished hitherto from an encompassing, philosophical perspective. “Philosophical” indeed, for many of the issues at stake are to be labeled just so. To mention but a few: conceptual issues (e.g., what do we mean exactly when we speak of the “quality of life”? when we say of something that it is an “indicator” of life quality?), methodological issues (e.g., how do we detect a person’s needs?), epistemological issues (e.g., empiricism vs. deductivism as research strategies; can quality of life assessment be value-free?), ethico-political and anthropological issues (e.g., is a growth-oriented society desirable? and if the answer is affirmative, which kind of growth is desirable?).

The papers published in this first issue of *PHILOSOPHICA* devoted to social indicators and quality of life research are attempts to answer one or some of these, or related, questions. As we will have the opportunity to discuss them (together with a number of other papers) systematically in the forthcoming issue of this journal, we refrain from presenting in detail the views expressed here. Most of the papers indicate directions for future research (sometimes, a reorientation of existing research practice). The philosopher Storrs McCall argues that quality of life should be defined in terms of the objective general happiness requirements all people — in all societies — share, thus challenging the “mainstream” view within the social indicators movement that correlates QOL with *perceived* life quality. Jan Drewnowski and Karl Fox — both distinguished workers in the field — elaborate positive proposals for building social accounting systems, meanwhile raising a number of interesting methodological and epistemological questions. Friedhelm Gehrman challenges rather convincingly the received view as to the instrumental neutrality of social indicators research, while Gilbert Rist provocatively questions — and dismisses altogether — the growth imperative and the anthropocentrism allegedly inherent in it. Finally, Ephraim Ben-Baruch discusses certain methodological problems related to classification, ranking and measurement in the social sciences in general.