

THE DUCTH LIFE SITUATION INDEX

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Abstract

In the Netherlands, the Social and Cultural Planning Office uses a composite index to describe and monitor developments in the quality of life of the Dutch population. Since 1974 this Life Situation Index (LSI) is used to measure objective aspects of individual living conditions. Every two years the results are published in a report called "The social state of the Netherlands".

In constructing the index, we depart from the view that quality of life is a multi-dimensional concept. Therefore the LSI is composed of indicators from eight life domains: housing, health, leisure activity, consumer durables, sport activity, vacation, social participation and mobility. Education, income and paid employment are considered as "resources". They are not part of the index itself, but are used to describe the backgrounds of the life situation.

We use non linear canonical correlation analysis to combine the indicators into the index.

The LSI is based on micro-data, stemming from survey research. As a result of this we are able to give a summarizing insight in the different domains of the life situation at the individual level. Moreover: we can break down the index for all the social groups one is interested in; not only on demographic grounds, but on economic or geographical grounds as well. Using micro-data also provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between the objective situation people are in (as measured by the index) and how they evaluate this situation.

This paper / presentation, concentrates on two of the major issues we come across:

1. The choice of domains and indicators.

Does it really matter what domains are chosen? And does it matter which indicators are chosen within the domains?

2. How to combine the indicators.

The LSI is nowadays constructed statistically, using nonlinear canonical correlation analysis (OVERALS in SPSS). But is this necessary to use such a rather difficult-to-explain technique: why can't we just add simply up the indicators? And why should weights be used at all?

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