Indicators and Democracy
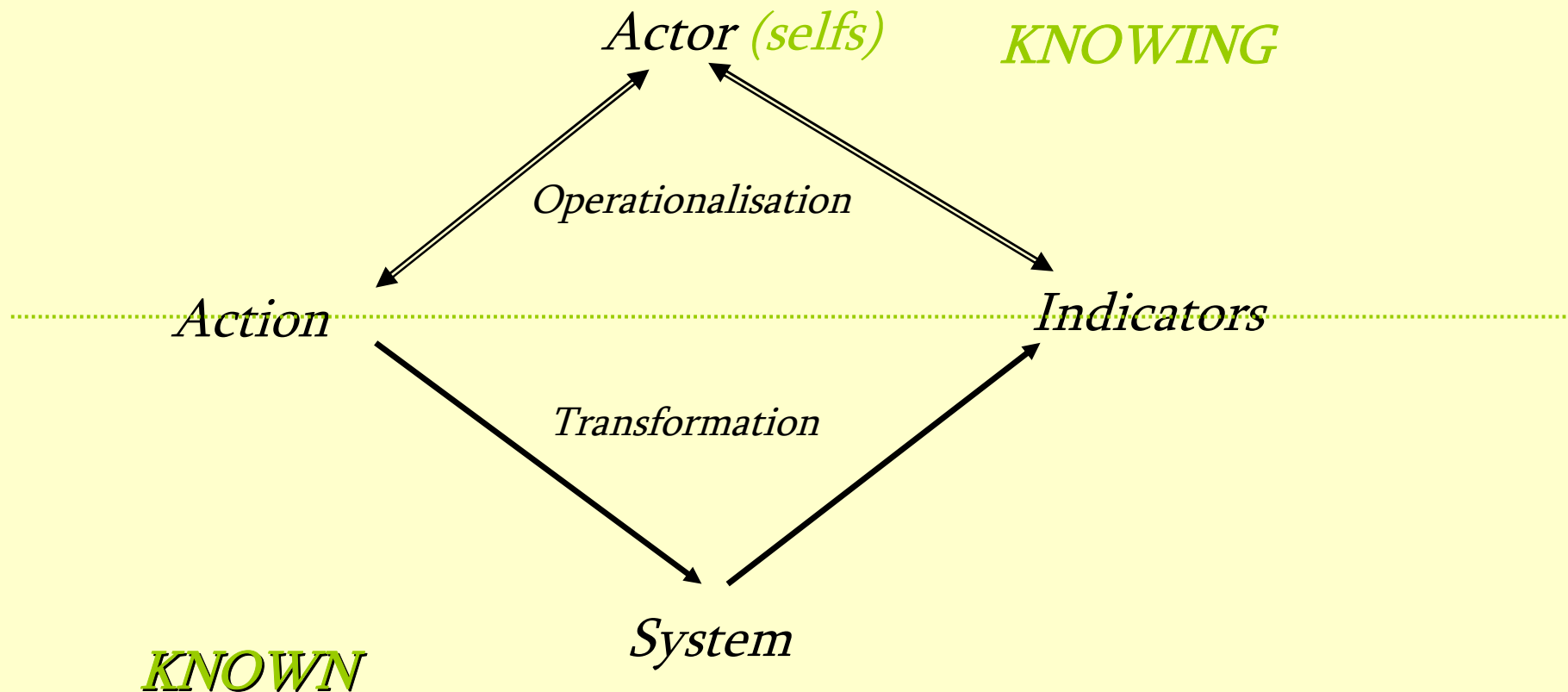# *The Example of Needs Assessment*
DRAFT (subject to possible revisions)

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Problem-solving: a transactional perspective

Actor *(selfs)*   KNOWING

Operationalisation

Action   Indicators

Transformation

System

KNOWN

What is the « self » made from ?

1. *Perspective*: internal language, mapping from set of names to objects, facts, situations, problems.

2. *Heuristics*: rules that, starting from a existing but now unsatisfying solution and in the context of a given perspective lead to one or several new solutions.

3. *Interpretations*: particular structured categorizations of the real inside a given perspective, linked to a given position in the world (one -> many)

4. *Predictions :* expectations and predictions

5. *Preferences*
   1. Fundamental (ends)
   2. Instrumentals(means)

(Source: Scott E Page)

Multiple selfs, multiples perspectives

- Subjectivity

- Positional objectivity: a judgment about an object is positionnally objective if anyone in that position would accept the same judgment.

- Transpositional objectivity: a judgment about an object is transpositionnally objective if anyone in different position would accept the same judgment.

Democracy as cooperative inquiry

- Democracy is…« A dynamic institution for collectively experimenting with different public policies that enables citizens to learn what joint goals make sense for them and how best to achieve them. …the institutional embodiment of practical reason for a collective agency composed of equal citizens » (Anderson,2003:250).

- => Democracy must be more scientific (hence indicators)

- => Science must be more democratic (notably with respect to indicators as the failure of the movement of social indicators shows)

Indicator: definition

- C is a property of a class of objects O we are interested in (example: O is the population of a country and C is their income)

- I is an indicator for C iif from the observation of I we get a value for C which enable us to categorize O on basis of this value. Example: the brand of car (I) enables us to categorise the population O as rich or poor (C).

Classification of indicators

- *Internal or definitional*: the indicator I participates in the definition of the concept C. It contributes to its meaning. I can be more or less appropriate, but cannot be false.

- *External or empirical:* I is empirically, factually related to C.

  - Observational: I is a « proxy » for C, which is therefore observable. I is easier or cheaper to observe than C.

  - Inferential: C is unobservable. It must be shown that the occurrence of I follows logically (inference) from the occurrence of C.

Source: S. Nowak (1976)

Democracy, well-being and indicators

- Participation and freedom are important components of well-being => **intrinsic** value of democracy
- There is a need of political incentives for keeping governments responsible and accountable= **instrumental** value of democracy and of indicators.
- Well-being bears upon collective formation of values and common understanding of needs, rights and duties=> **constructive** and **epistemological** value of democracy and of indicators.

(Source: Sen, « Democracy as a Universal Value », Journal of Democracy 10.3, 1999, 3-17)

Indicators of well-being: *definitional, observational, inferential* ?

- Definitional: a matter of public reasoning
  - Needs ? Functionings ? Capabilities ? The problem of the list and why Sen resists providing one.
  - Urgency, basic, fundamental ?
- Observational : observability (science) and meaning (politics) => positional objectivity
- Inferential: a matter of scientific inquiry (ex: the social gradient in health) => trans-positional objectivity

Different perspectives on well-being

- Existing discourses
  - Preferences-commodities-utility
  - Stress-coping-adaptation
  - Capability-functionings
  - Needs-satisfiers-satisfaction
  - …
- Two Questions
  - Specificity of a local assessment of well-being ? (what local responsibility ?)
  - What influence on the choice of a discourse

The need-satisfiers theory: basic elements (Soran Reader)

- *A distinction between:*
  - *Dispositional* need: a need one has simply by virtue of being what one is.
  - *Occurrent* need: a need one has by being in a state of lack (needing water when being dehydrated)
- *Satisfier*: the object of the need
- The non-needy *state* achieved when the need is met.

Hierarchy of dispositional needs ?

- U*niversal* : needs that are constitutive of man as a member of the human kind. These are the biological and psychological needs coming from human nature, i.e. its genetic make-up as shaped by evolution (including psychological needs coming from its special state of immaturity at birth). Needs having to be met in *any* society.

- *Particular* : culturally, historically and geographically contingent manifestations of universal needs + inescapable vital and agency needs resulting from the social identity (status and roles) given by society. As examples of particular needs, one could mention pensions and insurances entitlements, computer and internet connection, banking account, transport systems, etc.

- **Singular** : needs that arise from the singular circumstances that some individuals are facing temporarily or not, for special biological (being ill, pregnant, disables) or social (special requirements of some jobs or social roles) reasons.

Nancy Fraser against « thin » theories of needs

- Such theories assume that the politics of needs concerns only whether various predefined needs will or will not be provided for. …
  - They take the interpretation of people's needs as simply given and unproblematic; they thus occlude the interpretive dimension of needs politics-the fact that not just satisfactions but need interpretations are politically contested.
  - They assume that it is unproblematic who interprets the needs in question and from what perspective and in the light of what interests; they thus occlude the fact that who gets to establish authoritative, thick definitions of people's needs is itself a political stake.
  - They take for granted that the socially authorized forms of public discourse available for interpreting people's needs are adequate and fair; they thus occlude the question whether these forms of public discourse are skewed in favor of the self-interpretations and interests of dominant social groups and, so, work to the disadvantage of subordinate or oppositional groups; they occlude, in other words, the fact that the means of public discourse themselves may be at issue in needs politics.
  - Such theories fail to focalize the social and institutional logic of processes of need interpretation; they thus occlude such important political questions as where in society, in what institutions, are authoritative need interpretations developed, and what sorts of social relations are in force among the interlocutors or co- interpreters? »

The struggle over needs…

- Claimants: « politization » of needs. « Our needs are (must be) a public concern ». « In oppositional discourses, needs-talk is a moment in the self-constitution of new collective agents or socoal movements » (Fraser, p.303)

- Dominant groups: re-*privatization* of needs as « domestic » (family matter), « economic » (firms and business concern), etc. Not a public (political) concern.

- The social is the site where needs which have become politicized in the discursive sense become candidates for state-organized provision => experts

- Experts needs discourses translate politicized needs into objects of potential state intervention. They consists in re-writing operations, *translating politicized needs in adminis-trative needs.* => individualization., passivity, etc..

Beyond thin conceptions: Max-Neef's participatory approach

Fundamental Human Needs	Satisfiers			
	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
subsistence	physical and mental health	food, shelter work	feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
protection	care, adaptability autonomy	social security, health systems, work	co-operate, plan, take care of, help	social environment, dwelling
affection	respect, sense of humour, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
understanding	critical capacity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, policies educational	analyse, study, meditate investigate,	schools, families universities, communities,
participation	receptiveness, dedication, sense of humour	responsibilities, duties, work, rights	cooperate, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighbourhoods
leisure	imagination, tranquillity spontaneity	games, parties, peace of mind	day-dream, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone
creation	imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, work, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
identity	sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	places one belongs to, everyday settings
freedom	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	anywhere

Beyond thin conceptions: Max-Neef's participatory approach

You are going to live in Amsterdam for three years and your satisfiers are .....

Fundamental Human Needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
Subsistence	myself, health	food, house	sex	sex
Protection	humor	rights		
Affection	humor	friendship	sex, work	sex
Understanding	self reflection, humor		(voluntary) work	
Participation	humor, sex		sex, work	sex, games
Leisure	humor		sex, (voluntary) work	sex, games
Creation	humor		work, making art, exploring	
Identity	self reflection		work	friends, work
Freedom		rights	work	Myself

*Source: Innovaders:www.innovaders.nl/images/nb/basic.human.**needs**.pdf*

A thick theory of needs

- Needs and identity: needs articulation as building of *selfs.*
    - Universal selfs: human beings
    - Particular selfs: women, gays, artists, etc.
    - Singular selfs.
- What do We need:
    - What satisfiers ?
    - What minimum (and maximum) level of provision for the satisfiers ?
    - What process by which satisfiers are provided
    - What indicators of poverty (occurent needs).
    - What process of needs articulation ?

Conclusions and interrogations

- The design of indicators is only one stage in a larger democratic process of problem-solving.
- The choice of definitional and observational indicators of well-being cannot be left to experts only.
- QUESTIONS:
  - How far is – or should be - well-being (progress, happiness, …) a local « public » problem ?
  - What implications for local and non-local institutions ?