

Social Reporting in Europe 2011:

"Measuring and Monitoring Social Progress
in European Societies – Is Life Still Getting Better?"

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Introduction

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➤ Issue of Societal Progress is Back at the Agenda

⇒ Renewed Interest in Progress and its Measurement in Europe and Beyond

Examples:

- Stiglitz/Sen/Fitoussi - Commission
- OECD – Global Project
- In Germany the Social Democratic Party – SPD published in January draft of a new “Progress – Program” aiming to ‘give societal development a direction’
- Many More Initiatives in Various Countries

Long Tradition of Conceptualizing and Measuring Progress

- Series of articles on progress in the 1920s/1930s in ‚Social Forces‘,

e.g. James H.S. Bossard (1931/32: 14):

„**Progress** is a term which is used to indicate a **consciousness of movement in a given direction, considered at the time to be desirable**. There are involved ..not one, but **three ideas in the modern concept of progress**: the **idea of change**, ...the **idea of valuation**, and ...the **idea of control**“ (Bossard 1931/32: 14).

- Various early approaches to develop indices of progress:

e.g. Alfredo Niceforo (

Paris 1921; deutsch: Kultur und Fortschritt im Spiegel der Zahlen)

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⇒ Progress = improvement of the total of living conditions across time

Concepts of ...

- Welfare
- Well-Being
- Quality of Life

= conceptualizations of the ‚good‘ life and society

⇒ Provide normative criteria to assess social change

Progress: Is life and society getting better or worse across time?

Emergence of Social Indicators Movement in the 1960s and 1970s:

- Doubts about material wealth and economic growth as the major goals and indicators (GDP) of societal progress
 - Focus on downsides of economic growth ("social costs", e.g. Mishan) and private wealth ("public poverty", Galbraith) in policy debates.
 - Observation of diminishing marginal utility of material wealth and doubts whether more economic wealth would make live really better (more ≠ better); thus call for ‚quality‘ rather than ‚quantity‘!
 - structural and value changes towards ‚post-materialism‘ and the postindustrial society.
 - quality of life emerged as the new, multidimensional development goal of affluent, postindustrial societies
- ⇒ Social Indicators considered as measures of quality of life and progress, ‚beyond GDP‘!

Early Definitions of Social Indicators Adhere to the Idea of Progress...

- "Statistics ...and other forms of evidence - that enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals."
(Raymond Bauer 1966)

- "a statistic of direct normative interest which facilitates concise, comprehensive and balanced judgements about the condition of major aspects of a society. ...It is a direct measure of welfare and is subject to the interpretation that if it changes in the 'right' direction ...things have gotten better, or people are 'better off'". (Mancur Olson 1969)

Particularly in the second half of the 20th century citizens of many European nations enjoyed unprecedented betterments of living conditions and quality of life:

- substantial reductions of working hours and increase in leisure time
- improved working conditions
- expanded welfare state regulations and benefits
- better education for large parts of the population
- rising incomes and living standards
- advanced health and extended longevity

Video showing **Hans Rosling** (Karolinska Institute, Stockholm) **illustrating global development and progress over the last 200 years:**

<http://www.flixxy.com/200-countries-200-years-4-minutes.htm>

More Recently Increased Skepticism Towards the Notion of Progress

- Postmodernism has fundamentally questioned the idea of social progress

See e.g.

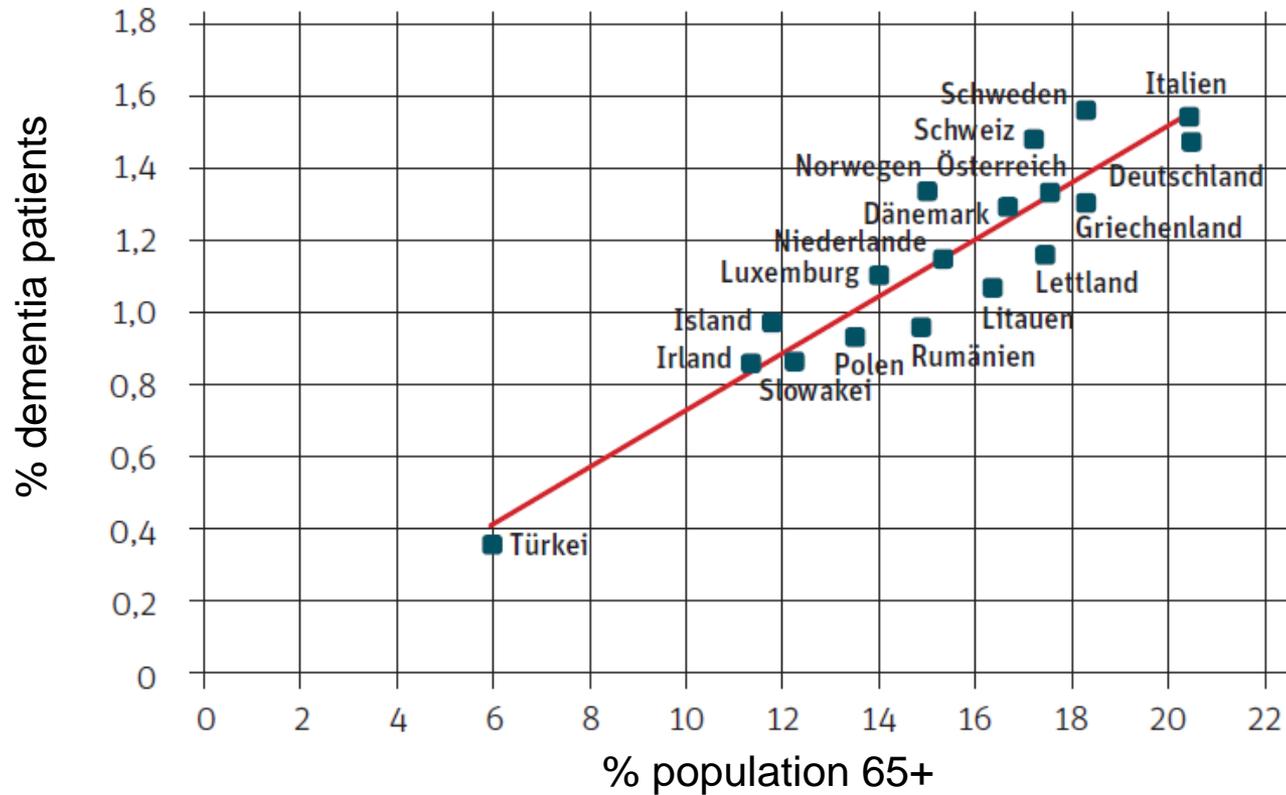
Anthony Giddens (1993: 665): “Modern societies, it is claimed, took their inspiration from the idea that history has a ‘shape’ – it ‘goes somewhere’, and leads to ‘progress’. ...The advocates of the idea of postmodernity suggest today that this notion has collapsed. ...

Gordon Marshall (1994: 420): For most of the twentieth century, theories of progress followed the pattern of the nineteenth – optimistic, rationalistic, materialistic. ... At the century’s end, however, the **idea of progress seems to be in eclipse.**”

- Recent Societal Developments in European Nations Tend to Undermine the Notion of Progress, e.g.
 - stagnating real incomes
 - increasing inequalities, growth of poverty and 'the working poor'
 - expansion of precarious jobs and working conditions
 - dismantling of welfare state institutions and cutbacks in welfare state benefits

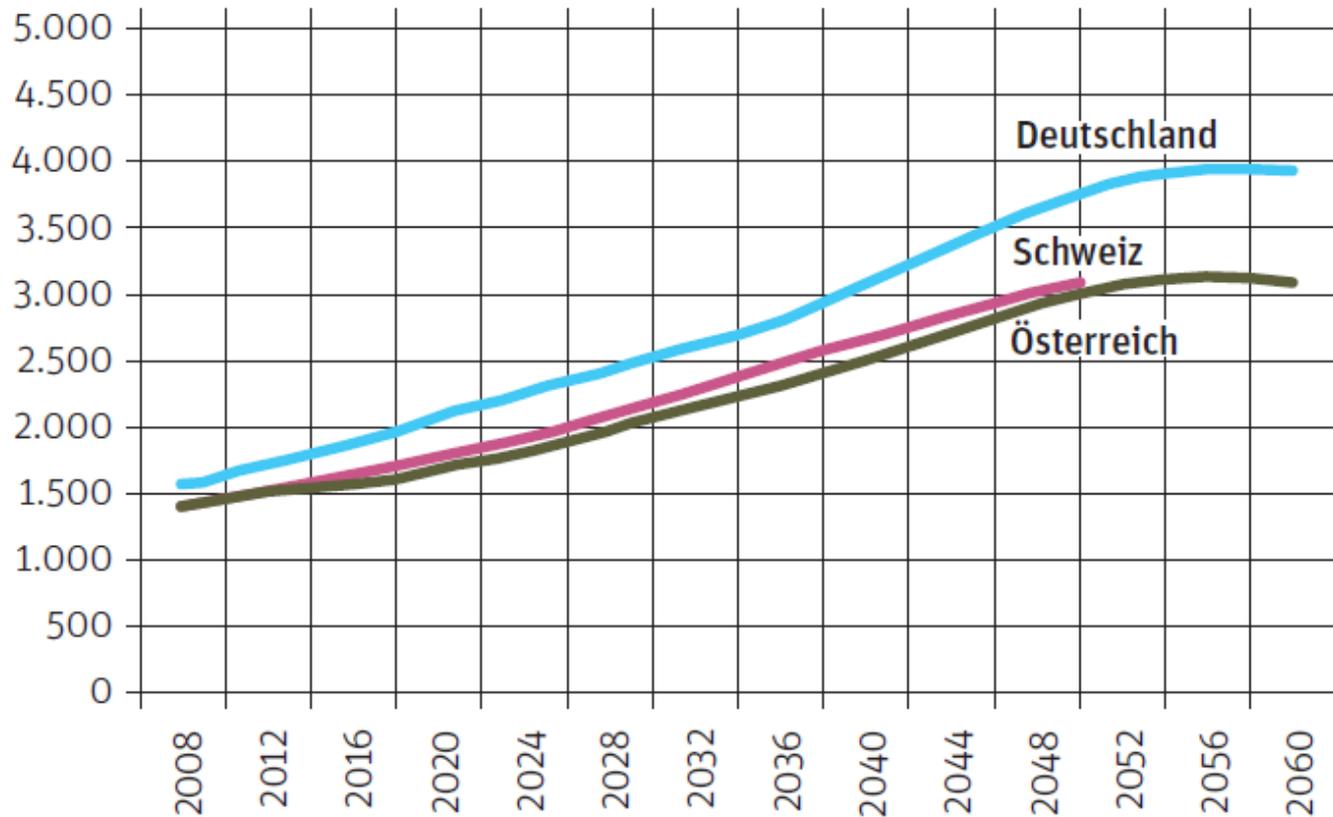
- Even if there seems to be progress...life is not always getting better:

e.g. debate about the quality of the additional life years resulting from extended longevity



Source: Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung: Demenz-Report, Berlin 2011.

Number of dementia patients per 100.000 population



Source: Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung: Demenz-Report, Berlin 2011.

⇒ Current social changes seem to be less clearly directed towards continuous improvements of individual and societal well-being than they used to be

Conference will basically focus on 3 topics:

- Meaning of progress in today's European societies
- Selected approaches to measure and monitor progress
- Assessment of recent social developments in European societies from a progress point of view