THE SOCIAL STATE OF THE NETHERLANDS

A Model Based Approach to Describing Living Conditions and Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

The “Social State of the Netherlands” (SSN) provides a systematic overview of the quality of life and living conditions of the Dutch population. The report describes various domains, like income, work, education, health, crime, housing, participation and leisure. In addition there is a domain-crossing chapter describing the living conditions with one comprehensive index: the Living Conditions Index (LCI).

The SSN is a monitor which is based on a causal model centering around the living conditions of the citizen. For realizing good living conditions resources, like income and education, are available: the more resources at a person’s disposal, the greater the chance of good living conditions. In the model attention is also paid to the (physical and social) environment.

The model is not only about the actual situation in which people find themselves, but also provides information about the way that people rate their living conditions and the extent to which people are more or less happy.

A NEW REPORT: SOCIAL STATE OF THE NETHERLANDS

With the “Social State of the Netherlands” (SSN), the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) describes the living conditions and quality of life of the Dutch population. Every two years the SCP will seek to describe and analyze living conditions systematically. A series of fields is covered, namely income, employment, education, health, leisure activities, participation, mobility, crime and safety, housing, and the residential environment. The SSN is a relatively new report, though it is the sequel to the Social and Cultural Outlooks, the final edition of which appeared in 1999.

The most important target groups of the publication are the Lower House and the Cabinet. The report provides them with information on the social situation in the Netherlands. There are other target groups as well. In the case of policy-makers who are already well informed the SSN provides a framework in which the developments in their particular field can be placed. The SCP is also seeking to reach the socially interested public with this publication. The SSN provides information that is expected to be useful for the social debate.

1 Wolfgang Glatzer, Susanne von Below, Matthias Stoffregen (eds.), Challenges for the Quality of Life in Contemporary Societies, ###-###.
Each of the chapters of the report describes the developments in a particular area over the past ten years. The data have been divided into various social categories – like sex, age and education – where possible and relevant. Furthermore the main objectives of government policy are briefly formulated in the introductions to the various chapters, while the concluding remarks contain summary information on the extent to which goals have been achieved. In addition to these domain chapters the SCP presents a summary yardstick, the living conditions index (LCI), with which developments may be followed over time and the situation in various social categories readily compared. A description of the trends in public opinion concerning the welfare state and the action taken by the government completes the SSN.

With the SSN the SCP is reflecting the renewed international interest in social monitoring.

SOCIAL MONITORING

Following changes in political power and the revival of the economy, governments in various European countries have strengthened their input in the social field. Not only the fight against poverty but also combating social exclusion are important topics. The most frequently used instruments for achieving these objectives are improving the level of education of the population and the creation of employment. The governments formulate targets in the various fields, the attainment of which is closely monitored.

In the context of the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty, the European Union has taken a series of initiatives in the social field in relation to such topics as the improvement of living conditions, social security, equal opportunities and social exclusion (or lately social inclusion). In order to monitor the developments in these fields the Commission has also introduced periodic reports. One example is *The Social Situation in the European Union 2003*, a publication by Eurostat and the European Commission (Eurostat and the European Commission, 2003). This is a report with key figures on social developments in the countries of Europe.

The objectives of social monitoring instruments and also of the SSN may be formulated as follows:

- the provision of an overview of the living conditions of the population as a whole on the basis of key figures in a number of socially and politically relevant fields;
- the provision of systematic information on developments among various groups in society and in the various areas of the Netherlands;
- the provision of information on developments over time;
- the identification on the basis of that information of social problems and disadvantage for political/policy purposes;
- the analysis of the backgrounds to and causes and consequences of these problems;
- the provision of information on the extent to which the policy objectives are being attained.
The SSN therefore sets out to be more than a summary of key indicators in a number of selected fields. An added value is achieved by means of the systematic analysis of social developments.

**Theoretical framework**

The SSN is a monitor centering around the living conditions of the citizen. In terms of designating the content, the concept of “living conditions” is neutral. Related terms are living standard, quality of life, welfare, livability, social exclusion and social cohesion. Many countries and international organizations have each developed their own standards and have constructed specific measures in order to objectify these types of concepts (Hagerty et al., 2001). The multitude of monitoring instruments and indicators sets based on them all address the same questions (see Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000):

- is the individual or the collectivity central
- does the monitor record objective or instead subjective phenomena,
- is it concerned with social opportunities or with realized welfare and
- how can the range and level be standardized.

The question of collectivity vs. individual depends primarily on the objective of the monitoring instrument. Living conditions research within countries is usually concerned with individuals or households; and so is the SSN.

Then there is the question about subjective and objective indicators. The subjective approach is based on people’s needs, especially satisfaction and people’s happiness in general and/or satisfactions concerning the various aspects of the living conditions (like family and friends, health, work and education). In this view these types of factors determine the extent to which a life situation can be designated as ‘good’. As against this is the objectifying approach which is based on the concept of living standard. This is defined as access to resources that are capable of influencing one’s own living conditions. Examples include income and education, which can be employed in the various domains of life in order to make social progress. At issue therefore are indicators for objectively determining factors that are decisive for a person’s living conditions. This approach is heavily oriented towards monitoring in the interests of social policy. The Scandinavian countries in particular follow this approach (Vogel, 2002).

The preference for objectively determinable living conditions is prompted by the policy-oriented nature of the monitoring system: the provision of information on phenomena that can be influenced by means of policy and feeding the public debate on social progress. As such the SSN largely presents primary output or situational indicators. Until recently most of government policy was formulated in terms of objective aims. However, since September 11th and some national tragedies (like the murder of a Dutch politician) may be not in policy but at least in politics there is more attention for perceptions and subjective opinions.

The answer to another question – social opportunities or realized quality of life – calls for a discussion concerning the question as to whether social policy is concerned with equal opportunities or actual social equality or inequality. In most welfare states social policy is no longer confined to the provision of opportunities for
people but goals are also formulated in terms of realized life-chances. In the Netherlands the government not only wants to provide citizens with equal opportunities to (for example) appropriate housing but also ensures that all citizens are in principle able to occupy good quality and affordable housing. In doing so the government regulates the supply of (affordable) housing and provides additional financial resources in the form of individual rent relief.

The final important questions concern the scope of the monitor and the way in which a particular outcome is labeled good or bad. Living conditions is a multidimensional concept. Most monitoring systems include indicators for a number of life domains (see Hagerty et al., 2001). The choice of domains is prompted by policy considerations or is based on empirical research. In practice this is dealt with pragmatically but prevailing political and policy considerations must be discounted in the system of indicators if the SSN is to fulfil an identifying and policy-evaluating function. The level problem – i.e. where does the boundary between positive and negative values lie – may also be approached in various ways. Generally, however, minimum norms, that have been determined politically or in policy terms, apply in certain domains. These may then be taken as the starting point.

As for the time-horizon of the report a period of 10 years is selected. This period is long enough for there to be various points of measurement in the different fields and for changes to be observable.

The Social Model

It is against the background of these considerations that the SCP has set up the SSN, thereby fleshing out the concept of living conditions. A broad approach has been adopted, under which the various types of data have been presented as an interrelated whole. The SSN is based on the causal model shown in figure 1.
Citizens dispose over individual resources in order to achieve a good living conditions. In present-day society this primarily concerns education, employment and income. As we use a sociological approach, the resources are about social goods instead of mental constitution or other psychological factors. The model is based on a causal relationship between resources and living conditions: the more resources at a person’s disposal, the greater the chance of good living conditions. The government, which tries to create as much equal opportunities as possible, exercises influence over the availability of such resources. It redistributes income and helps citizens to acquire social resources through public provision. The government therefore plays a supporting role in helping prevent social disadvantage. Where the social process and personal choices according to the norms of the community result in disadvantage, the government will compensate for this as far as possible. This is shown in the ‘social amenities’ part of the model at the left corner.

The physical and especially the social environments are also important conditions for the living conditions of the individual citizen. In the SSN attention is paid to a number of physical characteristics of the residential environment and the correlations between the physical quality and social characteristics, such as crime and population structure. With social environment a wide variety of social networks is meant, like family, friends, neighbors, but also being a member of church or social organizations.
Something different from the actual situation in which people find themselves is the way that people rate their living conditions and the extent to which people are more or less happy. Where the data are available, within each domain the relationship between the (objectively measured) living conditions and the subjective assessments of it is established.

Although the social model provides a certain frame of reference for ordering and selecting from the numerous possible topics, it does not help greatly in the practical choice of domains and associated indicators that best represent the social state.

Choice of indicators

With regard to selecting the indicators empirical research, drawing as it does on public opinion concerning what is important for the welfare and standard of living of citizens, provides a guide for determining what is usable and for making a selection. The SCP has a solid tradition in reporting on social trends and living conditions. The choice of concrete indicators for the SSN is accordingly based to a significant extent on previously conducted empirical research. In addition the SCP has been guided by the report Kerngegevens leefsituatie (Key life situation data) of Statistics Netherlands (CBS), which, with the aid of experts, surveys key indicators of the life situation in the Netherlands (CBS, 2000).

In addition prevailing political and policy considerations have played a role in the selection. These must be discounted in the system of indicators if the SSN is to fulfil an identifying and policy-evaluating function. Also there are long-term goals in the various policy areas. These have also acted as a guide in the selection of indicators. The main objectives of government policy have therefore been briefly formulated in the introductions to the various chapters, while the concluding remarks contain summary information on the extent to which goals have been achieved.

The third consideration in the selection of indicators relates to the agreements reached on social policy in the context of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties. The European Union (EU) and the member states have undertaken to promote employment, to improve working and living conditions, to offer social security, to develop human capital and to combat social exclusion. By virtue of the decision taken at the EU summit on employment in November 1997, Eurostat (the European Bureau of Statistics) has developed a set of indicators in collaboration with the statistical bureaus of the European countries in order to monitor developments in these fields (Eurostat, 1998). The domains in question and the indicators that have been developed have wherever possible been taken into consideration when deciding upon the arrangement of the SSN.

Finally a number of practical considerations have played a role in the determination of the domains and indicators. Needless to say the availability of relevant research data is of decisive importance. In particular there need to be databases with information on a large number of aspects of the living conditions.

The (causal) relationships presented in the model are not all identified for each domain. Sometimes that is because the relations are not relevant and sometimes there simply are no data available to do the analysis.
At the core of the model, however, is the living conditions index. This index provides a means of exploring the relations more systematically. Before turning to the living conditions index, we will present some other results of the 2003 report.

The social state of the Netherlands, 1990-2002

As said, in the first part of the report various domains are described separately. In this part nine domains are covered: income, employment, education, health, leisure activities, participation, mobility, crime and safety, and housing. We will now describe the main results of each chapter briefly, starting off with the resources.

The level of education has risen, more people found work and income improved. The economic growth at the end of the nineties has even reached traditional deprived groups like the elderly and ethnic minorities: their living conditions improved.

In the second part of the nineties average purchasing power increased with 8%. Since 1990 labor market participation grew from 59% to 68%. The labor market participation of women grew from 44% to 57% and of people aged 55-64 from 27% to 38%. Besides, there were more double-income couples and less persons on relief.

So, due to the economic growth the material aspects of the living conditions improved. Next to the above described developments, car ownership grew in the nineties (75% of the households nowadays owns at least one car) and housing conditions improved (bigger houses and more homeownership).

The other domains are more about the social dimension. This dimension shows however a less clear picture. Though the level of education has risen, still too many people drop out of school and education arrears disappear very slow.

Between 1990 and 2002 life expectancy increased for women with 0.5 years (to 80.6) and for men with 1.7 years (to 75.6). But on the other hand socio-economic health difference increased, though slightly.

In the nineties more people are sporting, but societal and cultural participation remains on the same level. That is only because of the growing participation of the elderly: the youth shows a lack of interest. And even more: the diversity of the participation lessens.

And last but not least, the still increasing crime is alarming.

In short, one could say that developments of the Social State are positive, but that the worries grow at the same time. Even more with the economic recession which nowadays urges government to cut down expenses to a great extent.

The expected decline of purchasing power is 1% in 2003. Unemployment grew with 40% between spring 2002 and spring 2003. Unemployment is particularly high amongst the youth, women, less educated people and ethnic minorities. These are the groups that profited the most in the last decade. Earlier research has shown that these groups will most likely suffer the most of the economic recession: They showed the greatest decline in living conditions during the crisis of the eighties.

That the living conditions improved in the nineties can be shown by summing up the developments in all included domains, as we just did (and as we do in the report), but that is just one way to describe the overall social state of the Netherlands. Another way is by means of the Living Conditions Index (LCI).
Summarizing the Social State: The Living Conditions Index

With the living conditions index we can explore the relations of the social model (between the domains of living conditions and with other individual characteristics) more systematically, because all data stems from one source. We can analyze for example that improvement in one domain together with decline in another can lead to better living conditions all together (or, indeed, to worse living conditions).

The index combines indicators on eight domains. Most of the domains are covered in separate chapters of the SSN as well:
- housing
- health
- social participation
- leisure activity
- sport activity
- mobility
- vacation and
- consumer durables.

There are several possibilities to integrate the indicators into one single index, like consulting experts or use political priorities. One other method is counting the trends in a relative simple way, using pluses and minuses in each domain or take the sum of changes in percentages for each indicator. For example, in a certain year, 25% of the people own a car and 30% participate in an organization. In the next year of measurement, 50% owns a car and 35% participates in an organization. A combined index will rise from 100 to 115 [that is: 100 + ((50-25) + (35-30)/2)]).

Yet another way is to start off with defining minimum needs. The extent to which these are met is then a percentage of the minimum. This method is used for example by the UNDP for their Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 1998).

As there is no all-embracing theory available for combining the indicators, we opted for a different solution to do so. The starting point is the common dimension of the indicators, which all contribute positively or negatively to the living conditions. This is not a measured notion, so we cannot use regression coefficient for example.

Because we are interested in good and bad, in deprivation and well-being, a single indicator which correlates better with the others should get a greater weight. Furthermore, the result has to be an individually based index as we are not only interested in developments of the country as a whole, but for different groups in society as well. We decided to statistically construct the index and let the statistical program weight the indicators. We use nonlinear canonical correlation analysis for constructing the index. This in fact is a variation on principal component analysis and calculates the weights so as to maximize the sum of the item-total correlations. Other advantages are that we can define the clusters not only theoretically, but in the analysis as well; it even does not matter if the one cluster has much more indicators than another. Second not only indicators, but also categories of the indicators gets weights, enabling us to compare them too and indicators do not have to be measured at interval level.

What then does the composite index on living conditions tells us about the social state of the Netherlands?
The social state measured by the living conditions index

Overall the living conditions improved from 1990 till 2002 (see figure 2). In the last 5 years the living conditions improved more than average for deprived groups which before stayed behind, like elderly, people with low income or who are unemployed, ethnic minorities and people living in biggest cities (the last two groups are not in the figure).

Figure 2: Development of the Living Conditions of the Dutch Population and some Groups


Between 1999 and 2002 the material domains improved the most; due to the economic growth more people were able to buy more durable goods, cars and houses (see table 1). Besides more people went away on holiday trips. On the other hand there was a decline in sport- and leisure activities.
Table 1: Changes in Domains of the Living Conditions (1997=100 for each Domain)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Activities</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Participation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Durables</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Living Conditions Index</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Looking more into depth at the three groups that profited the most, reveals that their development is not equal with respect to the different domains (see figure 3):

- For people living in the four biggest cities the situation improved on all domains, and on all domains more than national average.
- For people aged between 65 and 74 social isolation decreased and they were more active in volunteer work.
- For the lowest income group health get worse, which is in line with the increased socio-economic health differences.

Figure 3: Development of Domains of Living Conditions for the 3 Groups that Profited the Most between 1997 and 2002

Because government tries to create equal opportunities and chances for everyone in society an important question is whether inequality increased or decreased. Inequality in terms of living conditions increased in the nineties when we look at the resources. The gap between low and high education became wider, as did the gap between working versus non working people (see table 2). The gap between the lowest and highest income groups became smaller. This has to do with developments on the labor market together with the growing economy. More people found jobs and thus got higher income. Especially the lower educated were the left-overs of the labor market and are still jobless.

However: for all three groups inequality decreased between 1999 and 2002.

Table 2: Inequality in terms of living conditions for some groups (index scores 1990-2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Income</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Income</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low education</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Education</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As said, a causal relationship between resources and the living conditions is posited. Multivariate analysis reveals this holds true: having a high level of education, a paid job and a good income causes better living conditions (see table 3). Age also plays an important role in the level of living conditions. The shown individual background characteristics together explain for about 55 % of the variance in living conditions.
Table 3: Influence of Resources and other Background Characteristics on the Living Conditions, 1993-2002 (Anova-analysis, β-Coefficients)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Un)Employed</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Composition</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Income</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained Variance</td>
<td>48 %</td>
<td>57 %</td>
<td>55 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This brings us back to the social model we use. Another part of that model is the relationship between the environment and the living conditions. The environment has a social and a physical component. The social environment relates to the social network people belong to and the social contacts they have. Two indications of the social networks are in the index itself. These are a scale of social isolation and voluntary work. These indicators tell us something, but not all about the social contacts people actually have. That is why we relate the living conditions to the frequency of contacts with family, friends and neighbors. The relationship is clear: the more contact people have, the better the living conditions are. This holds true not only for the network indicators within the index, but for all domains of living conditions.

The physical environment relates to the neighborhood people live in. This is one of the newest additions to our analysis of the living conditions index. There is a relationship between the individual living conditions and (social and physical) neighborhood characteristics. People with relative bad living conditions live in neighborhoods with more rented apartments, lower rents, more elder people and more people with low income than in neighborhoods were people with good living conditions live. All together: people with good living conditions live in a better off environment than people with bad living conditions do.

To look at the broader physical environment of people we constructed an index for residential environment quality. In this index indicators are combined about rubbish on the streets, annoyance about noise and smells, crowding and level of daily-used services. There is a relationship with the living conditions: The better the residential environment quality, the better the living conditions are (see figure 4).
This relationship does not answer the question which is more important for the living conditions: do individual characteristics add more to the living conditions than neighborhood characteristics do? We analyzed this question using multi-level techniques. The results show very clear that the individual characteristics like income and education are much more determining for the living conditions than neighborhood characteristics are. In fact, there is only a very limited influence of socio-economic deprivation of the neighborhood on the living conditions. I.e., in deprived areas the living conditions are slightly worse than one would expect on the basis of individual characteristics.

The Objective Social State versus Subjective Evaluations

The last part of the social model we studied is the relationship between the objective living conditions with subjective evaluations and happiness. This analysis shows that the happier someone finds himself, the better the living conditions are (see table 4). We did a first and rough analysis about a causal relationship between the living conditions index and happiness. The analysis showed that the very small influence of the index on happiness that we found at first sight disappeared almost completely when other subjective satisfactions were added to the model. By far the best explaining variable for happiness is subjective health.

This is hardly surprising, as indicators of ‘the same kind’, like subjective indicators as happiness and subjective health, can explain more of each other than a mix of (subjective and objective) indicators does.

Still, the results tell us something about the usefulness of subjective indicators for policy purposes. That is: because of the lack of knowledge about what influences the subjective evaluations (other than personal characteristics, of which government
has nothing to say) they cannot be used in a meaningful sense for changing policy. The best they can do is help us to get some clue about the evaluations people make of the policy.

Table 4: Some Figures about the Relationship between Subjective Evaluations and the Living Conditions Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Living Conditions</th>
<th>Mean Report Grade (1-10)</th>
<th>Mean Living Conditions, 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and Acquaintances</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Environment</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Society</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% 1999</th>
<th>% 2002</th>
<th>Mean Living Conditions, 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Very) Happy</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Very Unhappy)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Very) Good</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Very) Bad</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Looking at satisfactions with domains of the living conditions shows the same relationship: the more satisfied someone is, the better the living conditions are (see table 4). Over the years there is hardly any change in these relationships. Not even after the tumultuous periods of the last years. For example: September 11th did not effect the happiness of the Dutch people in the long run. We have no data for the period short after 9-11, but looking at 2002 compared to 1999 shows the same amount of unhappy and very happy people.

In the Netherlands too, there were a couple of tumultuous events, of which the most important one was the murder of a Dutch politician (Pim Fortuyn), who was winning the election polls. The elections afterwards (in the year 2000), shook our political landscape to a great extent. Still, comparing the opinion of the Dutch in 2002 with 1999, these events did not seem to have influenced the satisfactions with their personal environment. Figures of satisfaction with the dwelling, residential environment, friends, education or financial possibilities did not alter. The one thing that has changed is satisfaction with society as a whole and with the administration,
which decreased a lot. In 2000 77% of the population was satisfied with the administration; in 2002 this was only 59%. Satisfaction with the performing of government decreased from 65% in 2000 to 35% in 2002.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In a new Dutch report on quality of life (called the social state of the Netherlands) a social model is used. The model is centering around the living conditions of Dutch citizens. Each chapter of the report describes a separate domain of the living conditions. Furthermore: In every chapter we try to include all relations described by the model. In addition to these domain-chapters the living conditions are monitored by means of a composite index. With this index the relations of the social model can be analyzed in a more systematic way.

Looking at the conclusions of the domain chapters showed a very diverse picture of the quality of life in the Netherlands. There have been improvement in some domains (particularly the more material or economic domains) whereas in other domains the situation was declining (crime and social participation). The index proved to be very helpful to describe the overall development of the living conditions. The conclusions of the report were easier drawn after the conclusion on developments of the index were known. The domain chapters showed a diverse picture that it was very difficult to see the leading thread.

One of the things that has to be improved in the next version of the report is the link between social policy and social outcomes. There is nowadays a shift in Dutch government from input oriented evaluation to output and outcome evaluation of policy. With this goes the call for measurable policy aims. The better these aims can be measured, the better we can tell in the report whether the policy has been successful.

REFERENCES


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