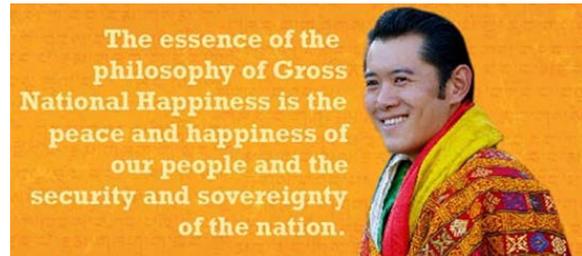


Gross National Happiness Index (GNH) and the Sustainable Society Index (SSI).

Every now and then we are asked why we took all the trouble to develop a completely new index to measure the level of sustainability around the globe, whereas we could easily have adopted the already existing Gross National Happiness Concept. Certainly a good question.

The GNH is inspired by the King of Bhutan. The concept is very remarkable as well as most innovative. It rejects to accept the Gross Domestic Product as a driving factor for a country's wellbeing.



Based on the GNH concept two indexes have been developed. In 2005 the Gross national Happiness Index was published by Med Jones, President of International Institute of Management, and his team (<https://www.iim-edu.org/grossnationalhappiness>)

It distinguished seven domains of wellness:

- Mental Wellness
- Physical Wellness
- Workplace Wellness
- Social Wellness
- Economic Wellness
- Environmental Wellness
- Political Wellness.

The framework very much focuses on Wellness in a wide variety of indicators. We greatly appreciate so, as we have based our design of the SSI on the Brundtland definition of **sustainable development in its broad sense**. Nevertheless important elements like Energy Consumption, CO₂ emissions and Renewable Energy are missing in the GNH Index.

In 2012 the local Bhutan GNH Index was published by The Centre for Bhutan Studies (KarminUra et al., <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Short-GNH-Index-edited.pdf>). The Bhutan GNH Index includes 9 domains, comprising 30 indicators and more than 100 sub-indicators:

- Psychological wellbeing
- Health
- Education
- Cultural diversity and resilience
- Good Governance
- Community vitality
- Ecological diversity and resilience
- Living standards
- Time use.



Collecting of the data for the global as well as the local Bhutan GNH Index is being done partly by surveys and partly by statistical measurements. Such surveys are not available for all countries on a regular basis.

Comparing the two GNH indexes with our Sustainable Society Index, we notice some parallels – above all the broad variety of indicators – and a number of differences – much more indicators in the GNH than the SSI and the use of surveys. We only use public sources and quantitative data, since qualitative data 1) are not available for all countries in the same format and 2) tend to be volatile to a certain extent. It was (and is) our intention to offer an easy tool to measure the level of sustainability for all countries included in the SSI (now 154 countries in which 99% of the world population is living). That requires a limited number of indicators and the use of quantitative data from public sources. That's why we haven't adopted the GNH methodology for our purposes.

As we explained in our article *A comprehensive index for a sustainable society: The SSI – the Sustainable Society Index*, (Ecological Economics 66 (2008) 228-242), we have examined many other already existing indexes. However, we concluded that none of them met our needs completely. In our view the main shortcomings were a limited definition of sustainability, a lack of transparency and an absence of regular updates. And thus we developed a completely new index – the Sustainable Society Index (SSI) – inspired by the work which had already been done by many others. The SSI integrates the most important aspects of sustainability and quality of life of a national society in a simple and transparent way.

The SSI evolved across the years. We had to drop some indicators, others needed to be redefined, due to lack of proper and consistent data. However, we always ensured that data can be compared over time, in order to see the developments of each indicator. Today the SSI consists of only 21 indicators, grouped into 5 categories, and 3 dimensions. In 2012 the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission – JRC in Ispra – audited the SSI and concluded: *The SSI is well suited to assess nations' development towards sustainability in its broad sense: Human, Environmental and Economic Wellbeing.*

The most recent edition of the SSI was published December 2016.

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