

## **Advocacy, analysis and quality. The Bermuda triangle of Statistics**

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Composite indicators are objects populating a multidimensional space whose main axes are advocacy, analysis and quality. **Advocacy** refers to the use of composite indicator in the context of what Boulanger calls elsewhere in this session the “discursive-interpretive model” for the use of statistics in the public discourse, whereby statistics contribute to a process of framing of and focusing on an issue among the many competing for public’s attention. **Analysis** refers to the fact that composite indicators, in their unique capacity to capture elusive multidimensional phenomena, can be irreplaceable tools to measure e.g. country level progress along dimensions such as the Rule of Law, Corruption, Human Development, Innovation, Competitiveness and many others. For these complex phenomena one cannot easily use either ‘Headline Indicators’, while the use of Scoreboards, formally correct, may lack the necessary synthesis. **Quality** refers to the observation that the quality of these measures is often wanting. According to the authors of the Stiglitz report the main flaw of these measures is in the “*arbitrary character of the procedures used to weight their various components*” and the fact that the “*normative implications [of these procedures] are seldom made explicit or justified*”. We also believe that each indicator should be analyzed in its individual merit. An example of such an analysis for the Ecological Footprint is presented elsewhere in this session, while general methodologies to monitor ex post the quality of a construct are available elsewhere. These three dimensions (advocacy, analysis and quality) are not independent from one another. To make an example, most developers adopt for transparency and simplicity linear aggregation procedures to build composite indicators which are fraught with considerable difficulties. In this case quality may suffer at the expenses of advocacy. We review these issues and try to offer some elements of an epistemology of composite indicators. In the tradition of post-modernity we suggest to tackle composite indicators in the context of a stance called ‘Post-normal Science’, described elsewhere in this session. Here ‘quality’ becomes the new organizing principle which “*enables us to manage the irreducible uncertainties and ethical complexities*”. This stance has direct links to a democratization of knowledge and allows the consideration of the multiplicity of legitimate perspectives and commitments which one may expect to see in development, use and critique of composite indicators. We call this approach a ‘sensitivity auditing’ of composite indicators.

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