

SLAS Conference in Nottingham, 31 March to 2 April, 2006

Panel report (two sessions)

Individual, local and global perceptions of well-being in Peru and beyond.

The panel presented initial findings arising from collaboration between economists, anthropologists and psychologists at the *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú* and at the University of Bath, who are all members of the ESRC “Wellbeing in Developing Countries” (WeD) research group.¹

How usefully does talk of well-being add to existing discourse about development? James Copestake introduced the first session with an overview of work to date. He argued that the concept of well-being provides conceptual space within which the contested ontologies and priorities underpinning *income first*, *basic needs first* and *human rights first* perspectives on development can be analysed. He illustrated the point by showing the weak statistical correlation between different well-being indicators across seven research sites along a geographical corridor in central Peru. Jorge Yamamoto described how WeD is measuring subjective well-being psychometrically as a product of perceived values, goals, resources and goal-satisfaction, with scales for each derived through an *emic* process of qualitative research in each site. Principal components analysis reveals two distinct factors underpinning goals within the Peru corridor:

- (a) having a good place to live, and
- (b) “neo-traditionalism”

Satisfaction with achievement of these goals was *not* found to vary in a consistent way with degree of urbanisation.

Jose Luis Alvarez then used case studies from along the corridor to argue that collective action (including *fiestas*) affects both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in ways that have been neglected by literatures based more narrowly on *homo economicus* or *homo sociologicus* ontology. This was further illustrated by findings on the multiple and diverse well-being outcomes of the *Vaso de Leche* programme in the same research sites.

The second session started with a paper by Becky Lockley that explored motivations for migrating along the corridor and compared this with respondents’ reflections on the outcomes of migration. Teo Altamirano presented an ethnographic account of the experience of Peruvians working as shepherds in the USA, and Katie Wright-Revolledo described ongoing research into livelihoods, well-being and identity of Peruvian migrants in London and Madrid.

Taken together the papers highlighted the importance of understanding how people themselves understand their own well-being, both as a goal in its own right and as a means to understanding how they respond to development problems, opportunities and interventions. The psychometric work suggests scope for constructing more universal theories of well-being (and thereby avoiding cultural relativism) through formal statistical analysis of such data, rather than through imposition of external categories or ideology.

¹ See www.welldev.org.uk for more information about WeD, or e-mail j.g.copestake@bath.ac.uk