# **Beyond GDP: The Italian Methodology Using BES (Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being)**

#### Emanuele Plata\*

#### Abstract

The concept "Beyond GDP: The Italian methodology using BES" defines a complementary indicator of GDP which is able to point out a better and more complete economic measurement.

This indicator is applicable at a national level, and also at a primary level of geographic area, defined as a homogeneous pedo-geo-climatic and cultural zone.

Since richness and well-being for a nation are the result of a cumulative effect of all units which operate in a certain territory, from single citizen to families, from enterprises to social communities, our assumption is that BES should be a measurement effective not only at a national, regional and territory level, but even at the level of corporate organizations, and ultimately, of a specific company.

**Keywords:** Life Quality; Bes; Beyond GDP; Subjective Well Being; Stakeholders; CSR Report; Global Markets

#### 1. Beyond GDP-Gross Domestic Product

I suppose that the idea of a measurement with a national scope has always existed. Probably in the past it was related to the size of the controlled land, or to the number of available slaves, or even to the army, or to the quantity of gold possessed. For sure, after the second world war the economic criteria to adopt a common national accountant methodology among countries able to evaluate the so called Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was an extraordinary achievement.

Thanks to this success, such a standard system has become in relatively short term a kind of Mito: it is less than one century that people use it everywhere and every day, properly or not.

□ In Italy, Planet Life Economy Foundation (PLEF) - a no profit association engaged in study and promotion of corporate

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<sup>\*</sup> Co-Founder The Planet Life Economy Foundation (emanuele.plata@plef.org)

strategies respecting sustainability bonds in social, environment and economic issues — made in 2018, with the help of Fabio Battaglia (researcher) and Gian Franco Stefanini (market analyst), a research on GDP awareness compared to that one existing for Life Quality index. In this research it appears that Italian citizens for 81% know GDP and speak about it as synthetic reference of national performance in term of richness, competitiveness, value, progress, well being and only 19% recognize the Life Quality index as a true indicator of well-being.

This seems to demonstrate a current mistake since all scientists in economy, sociology, finance, statistics and mathematics know perfectly well that GDP is not an indicator of well-being. Rationally, more than empirically, GDP may be considered able to influence well-being, however not in a linear way: this implies that well-being is much more complex than what is possible to detect from the accountable index. Ultimately, this does not mean that complexity is due to the difficulties to be measured, but rather that different are the factors to be considered.

As a matter of fact, since the new economical view started by Georgescu Roegen with the acknowledgement of entropy concept within the economic theory, or by Robert Kennedy in his famous speech done in 1968, the GDP limits were clearly identified. All this happened more or less in parallel of the "Limit of growth" report edited by the Club di Roma in 1972.

Therefore, since the Seventies, theory and practice had to rethink how mankind progress may be measured on the planet, across continents, nations, regions and provinces, and finally in every community, including corporate organizations.

The purpose of this article is not intellectual, but it is a very concrete one because if we know what we want to measure, our vision, our mission, our objective becomes clear.

Our ambition is to demonstrate that Italy, thanks to:

- the current global shift on sustainability and its mandatory bonds;
- its 17° century background of Neapolitan economic school;
- its entrepreneurial attitude pioneered in the last century by Adriano Olivetti;
- its biodiversity expressed in very different territories and SME's;

is competent to study, promote and apply a new methodology and practice for a complementary indicator able to aggregate the performance of any corporation and community toward a consistent life quality: good for value, good for a true well-being.

# 2. From Global to National Initiatives: Italy's Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being

Italy has a long and established history of well-being measurement resulting from a long-standing interest in happiness and the so-called Civic Humanism (Porta, 2016).

It is thus not surprising that the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) started working with the National Council for Economics and Labour on the creation of the country's official well-being framework, the Equitable and Sustainable Wellbeing (BES, according to the Italian acronym), as early as 2010: well before many other countries showed true interest in the well-being agenda.

A public consultation was undertaken which included the surveying of a 45,000 people representative sample, as well as the gathering of other data through blogs and questionnaires made available through a dedicated website (Giovannini & Rondinella, 2012).

A Steering Committee was created to select the domains of this framework, for which a Scientific Commission identified 130 indicators (until 2020, when they increased to 153).

The first BES Report was released in 2013 with the intention of becoming Italy's "statistical Constitution" (ISTAT, 2013), and has been iterated annually since.

Just a few years after, in 2016 the Italian Parliament reformed the country's Legge di Bilancio (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2016), or Finance Bill, this being the piece of legislation through which the parliament approves the State's budget. As part of the reform, a Committee for Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being Indicators (CIBES) was created and tasked to select a set of well-being indicators, and the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (MEF) was mandated to issue two documents annually:

- First, an Appendix to the Economic Planning Document (DEF) the country's budgetary plan which monitor the trend of the selected indicators over the previous three years and make forecasts about the next three ones to assess and predict the impact of public policies on such indicators. This document has to be presented by April 10 (this being the last day the DEF can be presented to parliament).
- Second, a Report on their trends to be presented to parliament by February 15.

In April 2017, the government provisionally included four indicators in the DEF as an experiment (MEF, 2017). Eventually, the CIBES (2017) selected 12 of them. Since 2018, these 12 indicators are included in the above Appendix and Report.

It is also worth mentioning that in June 2019, the Italian government established Benessere Italia (Well-Being Italy), a steering committee part of the Prime Minister' Office tasked to coordinate and monitor policies of all ministries to promote well-being. Filomena Maggino, Editor-in-Chief of Social Indicators Research and Founder of the Italian Association for Quality-of-Life Studies was appointed President. However, with the formation of a new government in February 2021 led by former President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, Benessere Italia was dismissed.

#### 3. Italian BES Report 2013-2021

ISTAT is regularly publishing since 2013 a report with a yearly frequency about an index related to each life quality dimension selected by the scientific CNEL & ISTAT committee. Field validation lasted 2 years and identified relevant and consistent aspects which are influencing the Italian Life Quality translated into 12 dimensions with 130 indicators (153 in 2020) as follows:

- Health: 14 indicators in 2013, 15 in 2021
- Education & Training: 11 indicators in 2013, 15 in 2021
- Work & Life balance: 12 indicators in 2013, 15 in 2021
- Economic wellbeing: 10 indicators in 2013, 11 in 2021
- Social relations: 11 indicators in 2013, 9 in 2021
- Politics and institutions: 13 indicators in 2013, 12 in 2021
- Security: 11 indicators in 2013, 12 in 2021
- Subjective wellbeing: 3 indicators in 2013, 4 in 2021
- Landscape and Cultural heritage: 12 indicators in 2013, 11 in 2021
- Environment: 13 indicators in 2013, 21 in 2021
- Research & Innovation: 7 indicators in 2013, 12 in 2021
- Services' quality: 13 indicators in 2013, 16 in 2021

Such a report, with historical records and comparison of data for regions/ special provinces, is based on:

- National statistics, which are collected, processed and stored by ISTAT;
- Public administration data sourced by national and local authorities;
- qualitative research carried out by ISTAT for the subjective well-being dimension that has experienced a positive trend in these 8 years of records (with the exception of the item concerning "free time satisfaction" due to the recent COVID constraints).

#### 4. BES Territorial Tests

Other regular analyses are not managed by ISTAT; however the methodology and the database available allow voluntary applications that are increasingly considered necessary. In fact, citizens and political representatives need to have concrete information for addressing choices which are impacting the good management of "common goods".

For this scope Planet Life Economy Foundation with other Italians non-profit association, "AREGAI wellbeing lands" and "AIQUAV- Italian association for quality of life" have committed to Doctor Demetrio Bova an experimental BES report on a specific municipality: Casale Monferrato, in the North-West area of Italy in the Alessandria province - Piemonte. The report has been published in 2019, followed by the book "Guide for a systemic BES report for municipalities".

The basic evidence achieved in this applied research in social statistics was:

- The Framework is like a sailing approach: The Boat is its own territory, the Sailor is the Municipality's Major, and the Sea is our national context
- The Focus is on responsibility:

a) For ourselves: Well-being

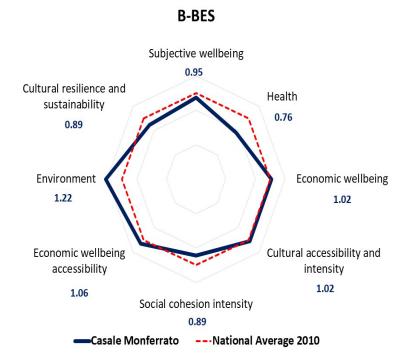
b) For others: Equity

c) For future generations and planet: Sustainability

- Hierarchy (eight dimension compared to the twelve listed for the national report):
- Final aim: Subjective wellness and lasting health
- First requirement: Hospitable environment
- Second requirement: Economic well-being
- Third requirement: Cultural intensity
- Fourth requirement: Social aggregation
- Fifth requirement: AccessibilitySixth requirement: Resilience

These eight dimensions have been built with 37 elementary indicators and are ultimately able to represent the BES status comparable with the national one as shown (Table 1).

Table 1: B-BES



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These results show a critical point connected to HEALTH due to the asbestos production plant operating in the last century and not yet overcome, also related to a gap in social aggregation and resilience. Despite the performance of other dimensions in line with the national situation there is an even higher score for those related to the future in terms of environmental responsibility.

Among the indicators in line with the national ones, it is interesting to notice that subjective wellness performs better nowadays than in the past.

Still in relations to the subjective wellness, the same team has decided in 2020 to further investigate the contribution to the BES measurement commissioning a special survey in another part of Italy - Agrigento in Sicily - to the University of Palermo, led by Professor Gaetano Gucciardo.

This survey brought out a surprising but significantly higher life satisfaction in Agrigento compared to the average Italian level (score 8.03 vs. 6.29), underlined how the BES methodology follows Veenhoven criteria integrating objective data (life chances, life goals and human capabilities), with subjective data (satisfaction about one own life, free time, and positive or negative judgement about the future).

Thanks to this insight it is possible to state that in a well-being plan the subjective dimensions represent the necessary condition to a successful plan. In other words, without self-satisfaction, positive judgement for the future and realization of a common purpose, every target of the other eleven dimensions of BES may not be achieved. In any case specific targets on all dimensions should be defined before implementing any activity, therefore requiring an initial survey able to set the starting point.

#### 5. BES Corporate Assumptions

In the concept "Beyond GDP: The Italian methodology using BES" it is expressed the mean of a complementary indicator to GDP which is able to point out a better and more complete way of economic standards measurement.

A way that is applicable not only at a national level, but also at a primary level of geographic area, defined as a homogeneous pedo-geo-climatic and cultural zone, consisting also of a single community or, for urban-metropolitan area, evens a neighbourhood.

Since richness and well-being for a nation are the result of a cumulative effect of all units which operate in a certain territory, from single citizen to families, from enterprises to social communities, our assumption is that BES should be a measurement effective not only at a national, regional and territory level, but even at the level of corporate organizations, and ultimately, of a specific company. This assumption is due to the fact that, if we have a BES report in a certain territory, the comparison between that report and the one edited by a specific corporate organization may highlight how each one can solve vulnerabilities for both, or address opportunities for both.

The consequence of such assumption is that economy becomes a social science not only in terms of creating added value useful for profit and rentability of the capital employed, but in a comprehensive way that satisfies all the corporate stakeholders including workers, suppliers, clients, and territories in a combined way.

This type of corporate profile, scope and responsibility is currently classified in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or, as an integrated approach for sustainability, even with specific statutory forms - like Benefit Companies - supported by voluntary certifications. In Italy, Benefit Companies can even profit on a special juridical attribute.

In reality, social responsibility was the choice to take responsibility to execute an innovation into a market since the origin of entrepreneurial culture, and it was always referred to all the internal and external conditions.

The challenge is how to apply and perform BES methodology in corporate organizations achieving the possibility of editing a Company's Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being report (BES report).

In order to reach such objective, we take in consideration two different approaches, giving to each of them a simplified description:

- Corporate Community BES report considering the company like a "municipality" collecting and explaining all the twelve dimensions relevant to its community
- Corporate BES Strategy report. In this approach we try to link the key factors identified in the corporate sustainable "competitive positioning" with the twelve BES dimension, therefore creating a business model able to enhance the overall corporate strategic approach to the market implemented on both internal and external practices.

#### 6. Corporate BES Community Report

Following this approach, potentially every company - be it small or big - is considered as a community and is asked to process on a yearly base a global report about its own Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being condition. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop a complete data system parallel to the traditional accounting system, defining for each BES dimension the relative data across the company functions (accounting, marketing, production, organization, logistic, selling, quality, HR). This data system will use the already available data and existing sources, however integrated with new sources or specific surveys useful to complete the possible lack of information.

All data are collected inside the organization through all involved stakeholders in the company, from the owner to the external collaborators: they are all member of the same "Business Community".

The data always refer to the company community either for "objective" data connected to the business activity or for "subjective" data expressed by the business community members

Using as reference the indicators selected for the Italian BES report, we could face many different data source situations inside the company:

 Already available data because they are part of the accounting systems or because they are for sure measurable: they only require to be classified.

- Collectable data through interviews and surveys to the employees: lifestyle, skills, subjective information.
- Data to be authorized because involving some privacy issues.
- Data to evaluate because not included in the list of national BES, however relevant and collectable.

An example of this approach can be summarised in the following special "community matrix" which indicate for all eleven BES dimensions the kind of source employed (Table 2). Of course each organization will select all appropriate indexes which are considered more suitable to own needs and will implement any coherent activity both on short term, as well as long term planning.

**Table 2**: The BES Corporate Community Cross Matrix

BES DIMENSIONS		BES Corporate Community Cross Matrix – Source Examples				
		Available Data	Collectable Data	Privacy issues	Other relevant Data	
1	Health	Absence rate	Lifestyle behaviour	Psycho-Physical chronicity	Staff age distribution	
2	Education/Training	Training hours	Skills & Cultural Inventory	Readership attitude and frequency	Language knowledge	
3	Work-Life balance	Smart working	Lifestyle behaviour	Lifestyle behaviour (food&drink habit, hobbies)	Territorial sport, cultural, social attraction	
4	Economic well-being	Yearly salary, family composition	Family intensity needs	Family income, house deprivation	Fringe benefit and intangible remuneration	
5	Social Relations	Social voluntary hours	Company climate satisfaction	Civil, political activities, family relationship	Team working and communication skills	
6	Institutions & Politics	Corporate legal disputes	Social involvement survey	Trust In police or local	Local administration relationship	
7	Security	Reports on theft, robbery, sexual harassment	Risk on crime on site, or on business activity	Private house and location risks	Not legal infiltration	
8	Subjective well-being	Loyalty & Motivation rate	Own life satisfaction	Own family satisfaction	Company's future worries	
9	Landscape & Cultural Heritage	Contribute to local natural, historical, cultural activities	Inventory on territorial distinctive appropriations	Own landscape dissatisfaction	Worries about landscape deterioration	
10	Environment	Air, Land and water pollution, scarce resources utilization	Cost comparison on polluting or sustainable materials	Climate change worries	Biodiversity loss worries	
11	Research & Innovation	Research intensity rate of investment, existing patents	New sustainable material search and tests	Intolerance reaction to own products and materials	Staff creativity rate, digital and web skills	
12	Services' quality	Client satisfaction & loyalty	Staff family services integration when necessary	Quality on local services (education, health, mobility)	Health, mobility, family assistance	

#### 7. Corporate Strategy BES Report

In this second approach the aim is to consider the company's perimeter not limited to the walls of factories and offices but expanded to all people and units externally involved in the value chain, from suppliers to consumers and other corporate stakeholders. Such intention is achievable by an integrated view between the Equitable and Sustainable Well-being dimensions (i.e., BES) and the Corporate Strategic Positioning issues, shaped by a similar cross matrix right above mentioned. The twelve BES dimensions are in this case crossed with few critical factors which describe the sustainable "Corporate Strategic Positioning" defined by any company, therefore indicating in a very concrete way which is are the specific issues to be planned on short and long term.

Using this special methodology, it is possible to enhance own competitive approach to the market, granting to be truly effective in achieving any corporate, social and environment objective as well as an overall well-being and life quality condition. Of course, each corporation will decide which are those few critical factors which are part of own Strategic Positioning in order to assess the right "Impact Indicator" for any cross activity. An example on how this cross matrix could be concretely implemented is below described.

 Table 3: The BES Strategic Cross Impact Matrix

BES DIMENSIONS		Corporate Sustainable Strategic Positioning – Impact indicators example on key factors			
		Target	Benefit	Usage habits	
		All supply chain and corporate stakeholders	Tangible & Intangible distinguished offer	Recognized clients'' value	
1	Health	N° labour injuries, clients' complains	Consumers' heath & toxicity rates	Clients Satisfaction rate	
2	Education/Training	N° of labour training hours	Corp. cultural heritage & know how	Corp. shared welfare services	
3	Work-Life balance	Labour contract terms	Intangible remuneration & welfare	Corp. shared welfare services	
4	Economic well-being	Labour contract terms, Suppliers' right margin	Merit appraisal, carrier planning	Corp. internal climate appraisal	
5	Social Relations	Local suppliers synergies & integration	Two ways communications, intergenerational integration	Internal climate development	
6	Institutions & Politics	Institutions & Politics  Identification of common values for all corp.  stakeholder		Sharing services and common benefits	
7	Security	All stakeholders injuries development	Total quality processes and practices	Corp. collaboration, respect & responsibility	
8	Subjective well-being	Total supply chain employment rate	Individual dignity, respect, reputation	Training and motivating plans	
9	Landscape & Cultural Heritage  All stakeholder social and cultural responsibility involvement		Bio-inspiration for a full local eco-system balance	Local school on specific cultural heritage and natural resources	
10	Environment	All stakeholder environmental responsibility involvement	Sustainable economy approach and circular economy implementation	0 co2 emission, 0 garbage produced,0 environment impact	
11	Research & Innovation	Stakeholders' Common interest researches & synergies	Sustainable product and process development	Corp. copyright and licenses	

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12	Services' quality	Use of efficiencies & effectiveness index	Client satisfaction survey	Sharing services and synergies
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Of course, each corporation will decide which are the critical factor on own Sustainable Strategic Positioning as well as any specific impact indicator.

# 8. Emerging Issues: Corporate and Community Life Quality for a Global Competitiveness

The two analysed assumptions for a life quality corporate measurement surely don't represent an exhaustive review of market approaches, but they give the opportunity to evaluate their feasibility and their different impact on competitiveness.

The first assumption, which considers a company as a specific community, is probably the simplest to pursue: it requires a complementary report within the company devoted to the BES dimensions focused on the internal organization. Transparency and full involvement of every member of the company is a pre-requirement in this approach, both for motivation and to allow collecting and processing data not only related to the individual company operations but also to employees' life style information's. The guidelines to select elementary indicators come from the ISTAT report but, in many cases, it is necessary to define new ones coming from the company's operations and procedures.

The attractiveness of this first approach is the implementation of a specific report, complementary to the balance sheet and income statement, to evaluate the company yearly performance in terms of their internal community life quality. In this way it is possible to boost the company's pride for its capacity to establish the best possible place to work, even obtaining a positive reputation in the local challenge for a better life quality.

The second approach, which aims at defining criteria for a Company BES Strategy report, proposes to link the positioning factors, to the possible impact on BES dimensions. In this way the life quality generated in the company is not just the result of the operations but represent itself the business model pursued through the operations.

The attractiveness of this second approach is that involves non only the internal company's member but also all corporate stakeholders, as well as all other implications related to environment, landscape or culture. In this way it is possible to detect new impact indicators useful for the implementation of an effective corporate strategic planning, as well as to enhance both company's pride and competitive strength.

It is time to direct the competitive effort not only towards innovation, efficiency and up scaling but towards a positive idea of market effectiveness thanks to a renewed attention to humanity and the ecosystem around it.

Equitable And Sustainable Well-Being dimensions may represent the star to be followed or, at least, a reference it's worth to be tried.

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