

# WEIGHTS AND MEASURING FOR COMPLEX WHOLES

## Speaker:

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## Abstract

Measurements of the socio-economic world as a whole are often constructed out of a set of parts, and usually rely on classification systems for those parts, which may come from theory or from observation in careful empirical work. The critical element comes in deciding how the parts are to be combined in order to create a measure of the whole. Three strategies are discussed. One relies on classification of the individual elements prior to measurement, adding up the observations by class and simply weighting them by the number in that class. A second uses a theoretical account to provide a typology of the parts and their relationships, which is then matched (via a 'field guide') with a taxonomy of already measured parts, all kinds of parts being in the same units and the recipe for combining coming from the theory. A third provides an array of many different indicators of the whole, each of which can provide rankings along that dimension, but they are not defined as parts in a whole, either by observation/measuring strategies or in a theoretical analysis; they lack a weighting system that could combine them in measuring the whole. Three projects, designed to measure the overall 'well-being' in an economy - the Booth poverty project of the 1890s, national income accounting in the 1950s, and the sustainable development goal (SDG) numbers in the current time - are analysed to explore these difficulties and differences.

## Conference

Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021  
Zoom platform, h. 17.00



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