

Michalos, Alex (1980). North American Social Report, Holland: Dordrecht.

, 5 vols.

The objective of this monumental work is no less than to compare and contrast the social and economic character of both the United States and Canada. More specifically, it poses the question: "Is there a difference in the quality of life in Canada and the United States, and if so, in which country is it better?" (p. 17). To answer this inquiry, Michalos takes five volumes, and employs a wide range of statistics from the period from 1967 to 1974. His findings are illuminating.

Volume I of Michalos' exhaustive study, which is subtitled Foundations, Population and Health, is divided into three main chapters. In Chapter I, the author makes explicit his assumptions and methodology. He begins this chapter by explaining that such measures as life expectancy, rate of crime, level of education and the like are "social indicators" which "have significance for the quality of life" (p. 1). He proposes to collect and analyze such measures, and then deduce conclusions about the quality of life in each country. But before he can do so, Michalos realizes that he needs some method of weighing comparable sets of data. He settles on a rather wide scheme that depends on a twofold distinction.

First, Michalos makes a distinction between positive and negative indicators. The former, he says, "are such that most people will assume that if their indicator values increase, some facet of the quality of life is improving, e.g., elderly citizens' incomes and minority group education attainment". The latter, Michalos asserts, "are such that most people will assume that if their indicator values increase, some facet of their life is deteriorating, e.g., infant mortality and murder rates" (p. 21). When the change in the indicator is preferable, Michalos scores it one point for every year that it is (p. 22).

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A second distinction on which Michalos' comparative schema rests is to be found in the difference between stock and flow variables. A "flow-value", says the author, denotes its upward or downward movement, while its "stock-value" is only a qualitative measure of an indicator at any point in time. When the stock-value of an indicator for one country is better than that of another, Michalos assigns it one point. By totalling the final scores of all the measures used to assess the quality of life, Michalos explains, it is thus possible to know which country fared better, since "the country with the highest score has the highest quality of life" (p. 23).

In the remaining volumes of his work, Michalos applies this analytical matrix to indicators from 13 issue areas which are encompassed by the term "quality of life". These issue-areas include population, health, housing, crime, recreation, transportation and communication, and education. Also examined are such topics as science and technology, politics, the environment, economics, religion and morality. Volume I, however, is restricted to a discussion of only the first two of these subjects.

Part I of Foundations, Population and Health is devoted, as has been explained, to the clarification of Michalos' assumptions and methodology. It should thus come as no surprise that Parts II and III compare measures for both population and health in the United States and Canada. With respect to population, the author finds that Canada ranks better for population density, crude death rate, and even immigration. She is said, moreover, to be improving across a variety of indicators, while the United States. "With respect to the general area of health", Michalos finds, "the quality of life in Canada is higher than that in the United States" (p. 173). In fact, "when one reflects upon the extraordinarily

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confused and complicated picture that might have emerged from all these statistics", he says, "the results we have obtained are almost unbelievable. Canadians pay less and get more out of their health care system than Americans" (p. 174).

Copies of Michalos' summaries, as well as those of some of his raw data, are attached.

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