

Responses and Catalyzing Concepts

Jewish Peoplehood Indicators

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An indicator can be defined as a visible and, as much as possible, quantifiable sign or symptom of a situation or dynamics. Indicators are widely used in economics and social sciences to describe and evaluate reality and its dynamics. One of the best known examples is the Annual Human Development Report prepared by the United Nations Development Program², which includes a set of indicators on the state of development in all countries such as education, health, and income, and combines them into an integrated Human Development Index which is widely accepted as a reliable basis for rating countries and pinpointing improvement needs.

Indicators are also not only for evaluating realities and their dynamics but for evidence-based policy-making directed at increasing desirable indicators and reducing undesirable ones. A case in point is the wide use of macro-economic indicators as a basis for economic and fiscal policies.

However this case also pinpoints one of the major inadequacies of indicators: they usually cannot predict radical shifts, such as the 2008 economic crisis. No Jewish Peoplehood indicators would have provided clear warning of the Shoah. Therefore, nomatter how important indicators are for dealing with continuous processes, gearing for turning points requires other approaches.

Given their limitations, indicators are essential for clearly describing situations and mapping dynamics as a basis for understanding and policy making alike. Therefore, if we want to know the situation of Jewish Peoplehood and craft policies to improve it, we need quantitative indicators, in addition to qualitative assessments such as those published annually by the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute.³

However, indicator research faces a number of problems which require great care. These include, first of all, the need for a reliable theory from which a series of significant indicators can be derived. Then there are all the problems of empiric research, such as the importance of qualitative variables – hard to conceptualize and impossible to quantify – as well as difficulties of data collection, the high costs of valid survey methods, and finally the difficulty, and often impossibility, of aggregating sets of indicators dealing with different facets of reality into a single or a few numbers which can sum up the situation.

These are problems that can be overcome, at least in part; and they must be overcome as we urgently need Jewish Peoplehood indicators to understand what is happening, identify trends and craft policies. An important beginning has been made in preparing

² Accessible at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

³ Accessible at www.jpppi.org.il.

Jewish Peoplehood indicators, as described in the papers included in this volume of *Peoplehood Papers*. However, this is only a first, though important, step which requires further efforts with a lot of professionalism, patience, and resources.

An essential next step is much more attention to Jewish Peoplehood theories. However, pending development of such theories, indicators can be less ambitious and still be very useful. We can ask ourselves on the basis of tacit understanding and available part-theories what are the, say, five most important features of Jewish Peoplehood shaping its future and focus on them. My own answer would probably include: (1) the number and ages of people who regards themselves as Jews; (2) the number of Jews expressing their belonging to the Jewish People in actual behavior, classified by types and intensity of activity; (3) the number of Jews actively trying to have their children and grand-children continue belonging to the Jewish People and their actions to strengthen this belonging; (4) the extent to which people have a sense of identification with the Jewish People as a whole and readiness to make efforts to help Jews in distress wherever they are; (5) the extent of people's readiness, if necessary, to kill and be killed to prevent another Holocaust, including the destruction of Israel.

Obviously, others will have different lists of critical indicators, such as keeping *halakha*. However, diversity of views can be handled by using a variety of variables which can be processed differently, as long as we are reasonably sure to include core indicators which adequately reflect main features of Jewish Peoplehood and its dynamics.

Having a relatively reliable set of indicators is essential. However, it leads to the next and no less difficult issue, namely, research methods that provide valid information on the actual situation in terms of the indicators. Although this is not the place to go into quantitative research methodology, three observations will serve to bring out critical issues: One, the sample which is studied must reflect the whole population of Jews as explicitly defined. Two, "flat" yes-or-no answers are often useless, making intensity scaling of responses essential (such as, "how much time do you devote to community activities" rather than "are you active in the community"). Three, data collection must be done in ways leading to reliable findings. Thus, short telephone conversations are inadequate, and at least a sub-set of the population sample should be interviewed at length.

An additional critical requirement is to assure maximum objectivity by keeping indicator research strictly separate from policy recommendations. Otherwise, policy thinking may easily bias the indicator study. However, policy planners should be involved in action-oriented indicator studies so as to focus attention on what may be relevant for policy crafting.

All of this requires sophisticated research designs and a lot of money.

This leads to the practical question what can and should be done. To provide a tentative answer, let me return to the Human Development Report. It took years of hard work by many professionals to develop a somewhat reliable set of indicators. The same applies to Jewish Peoplehood indicators.

We need such indicators in order to better know and understand realities and dynamics, and to craft policies to improve them. Therefore, indicator work on Jewish Peoplehood is important and should be supported – subject to careful professional guidance and prudence in interpretation of its findings – hand-in-hand with advancement of comprehensive theories of Jewish Peoplehood.

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