

stukken gaan door middel van case-studies van de invoering van de Wet Werk en Bijstand (WWB) en van de Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning (WMO) (uitgevaardigd in respectievelijk 2004 en 2007) en van de gevolgen daarvan dieper in op de vraag of er daadwerkelijk sprake is van 'local crafting practices.' Andere belangrijke hervormingen die onderdeel zijn van de decentralisatietrend worden zo goed als volledig buiten beschouwing gelaten. De kern van het boek bestaat verder voornamelijk uit relatief korte hoofdstukken waarin verschillende auteurs elk een specifiek dilemma aanstippen waar lokale beleidsmakers mee te maken krijgen. Deze dilemma's zijn weliswaar interessant, maar worden niet toegepast op specifieke situaties waardoor ze enigszins abstract van aard blijven.

Dit neemt overigens niet weg dat het boek zeker de moeite van het lezen waard is. Zo biedt Deborah Rice, in een hoofdstuk waarvoor gedeeltelijk gebruik is gemaakt van interviews met hulpverleners, een interessant micro-institutionalistisch perspectief waarin ze laat zien dat de complexe aard van lokale uitvoering veel ruimte biedt aan 'agency' voor zowel beleidsmakers als uitvoerders. De hoofdstukken over de invoering van de WWB en WMO zijn ook uitstekend. Dit laatste hoofdstuk is geschreven door Judith van der Veer en kan gezien worden als een zeer beknopte versie van haar net verschenen proefschrift *Weg uit het verleden* dat kijkt naar de manier waarop drie middelgrote gemeenten uitwerking aan de WMO hebben gegeven.

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Jan Luiten Van Zanden, *et al.* (eds), *How Was Life? Global Well-Being since 1820* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014), 269 p. ISBN: 978-92-64-21406-4, doi: 10.1787/9789264214262-en

In 2011 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) started a biennial series, *How's Life*, presenting the state of the world (books are to be found at http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life_23089679). In 2014 two related books appeared: *How's Life in Your Region?*, and *How was Life? Global Well-Being since 1820*. The latter leans on OECD's interest in historical statistics, which emerged with Angus Maddison's efforts in attempting to grab economic growth and standards of living in as many countries as possible during the past two millennia. *How was Life?* is a sequel of this research, focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As was the case with Maddison's *World Economy* in 2001, *How was Life?* left me astounded. What an awesome work it is. It comes in time to be part of the present-

day huge interest in inequality between and within nations. One of its great assets is that a general audience will find answers to many questions about the history of global wellbeing, and that specialists will learn about today's state of the art through the many tables, graphs, bibliographic references, and Internet links. With regard to the latter, each of the 54 graphs and 63 tables has a *StatLink* to an Excel file containing the data: this direct access is immensely valuable. I take the opportunity to highlight the impressive and enthusing databank that is behind *How was Life?*, <https://www.clio-infra.eu/>, containing 58 indicators about wellbeing in some 200 countries: overwhelming!

How was Life? is a collection of 13 chapters written by a team of international experts who followed well-defined guidelines. The latter involves an identical structure of the chapters: brief introduction, presentation of sources, assessment of data quality, main highlights, correlation with gross domestic product (GDP), further research, notes, and references. This systematic structure provides unity to the book and allows for its efficient use. Unity also appears in chapters 1 and 13, where the (hastened) reader may find a superb introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 provides a quick view on global wellbeing since 1820 that highlights the methodology and themes, and gives a survey of the findings of the book. Chapter 13 contributes to the measurement of wellbeing with a new composite index. The utility of such composite indexes is discussed and various possibilities are assessed, to eventually present a new index. Finally, unity is also achieved by granting GDP a central role in measuring wellbeing, which leads to examining the correlation between GDP and each indicator of wellbeing.

Indicators of wellbeing make yet another strength of the book. Familiar indicators (population, GDP, real wages, life expectancy, human height, income inequality) appear along with more recent measurements (education, political institutions, gender) and with new ones (personal security, environmental quality). Bringing together old and new indicators into one volume is a genuine asset in terms of methodology, theory and findings. Surely, some indicators are common, but when evaluated, brought up to date and put within a larger frame they gain relevance. Some new indicators could have been more comprehensive, like for example personal security that considers homicide rates and war incidence, but that may have included data on suicide, robbery or rape (the authors mention terrorism, environmental hazards, and work accidents, about which insufficient data are available, page 140). I welcome this opening toward a broader view of wellbeing, but cannot but note that cultural aspects are still overlooked. Aren't these significant for interpreting wellbeing? This may be caused by lack of data (as is the case with regard to dwelling). However, comfort (safe water; sewage system; household appliances), food (kilocalories per person and day; per capita meat consumption; hunger [threats]), or transport (number of cars; length of [rail]

roads) may prove to be very relevant. Needless to say that consumption of goods and services matters greatly, not just in terms of the social, economic and political, but particularly in terms of the cultural (understood as assigning meaning that materialises into countable items). Having said this, other indicators, both old and new, may be thought of, such as unemployment, poverty, loans, the number of libraries, the ownership of TV-sets, or the attendance of theatre performances (and yes, this comment is unfair with regard to the already astonishing work).

How was Life? considers national borders, which is perfectly justifiable, but it surprised me that an alternative is not mentioned: B. Milanovic proposes to neglect state borders and to use household surveys to learn about global inequality.⁴ Would this be a viable approach for assessing *actual* wellbeing in the world, particularly in view of the rising inequality within countries? *How was Life?* focuses on 25 countries from all over the world, on 8 world regions, and on the world as a whole. The “world regions” and the “world” contain all countries (e.g., Belgium or Chile are not part of the 25 countries, but are present in “Western Europe” or “Latin America”, and “world”). These 25 countries include the big players. An alternative might have been to select countries from the 8 world regions, representing very diverse developments, so to accentuate differences on the level of the nation. Obviously, quality of the data differs with regard to time and place, and the authors of the book evaluate this quality according to four categories (High, Moderate, Low, and Estimates), which appears in each chapter (not surprisingly, Estimates and Low quality are quite common up to the 1900s).

Finally, two minor comments: a register (names, places, and, especially, themes) is badly missing, and a general bibliography that includes more than just work that has been directly referred to in the book, would have been useful.

Summarising the book's content is impossible because of its contribution to various important debates and its relevance with regard to so many domains of historiography. The Executive Summary (pages 19-21) attempts to do this, and, running the risk of oversimplifying, I may finish this review by rewording the conclusion with regard to the composite indicator of wellbeing (page 21): 1) wellbeing has progressed since the early twentieth century, except in Sub-Sahara Africa; and 2) the overall wellbeing since the 1970s has shown a more modest growth than the one expressed by GDP per capita, which differs from the previous period.

This book is the tip of the iceberg: it heralds a new era of passionate research with regard to the history of wellbeing, economic performance and inequality in the world.

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4 B. Milanovic, *Worlds Apart. Measuring International and Global Inequality*, (Princeton 2005).