

Preface

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The chapters in this book are based on papers which were originally presented at a symposium on Gender and Well-Being at the University of Modena in Italy in 2006. The symposium formed part of a series of meetings funded by the European Science Foundation under Action 34 of COST. COST is an intergovernmental framework which is designed to promote international collaboration across Europe in areas of scientific and technical research. In 2006, 34 countries were directly affiliated to COST and 23 countries included participating institutions. There was also one country, Israel, which enjoyed the designation of a 'cooperating state'.¹

COST Action 34 is specifically concerned with the study of 'Gender and well-being: interactions between work, family and public policies'. It currently includes individuals from 24 countries and is coordinated by the University of Barcelona. The Action is chaired by Cristina Borderias and the Vice-Chair is Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux. The Modena symposium was organised by Antonella Picchio and Tindara Addabbo, with the assistance of Lina Gálvez, Bernard Harris and Helena Machado.

The Action has two central, but interrelated aims. Its first aim is to explore the impact of economic and social change on the lives of females and males using traditional indicators of well-being, such as income and wages, the allocation of household resources, access to services, and health status. The second aim is to explore the scope for the development of a new concept of well-being, and new social indicators, which reflect the circumstances of both male and female lives. It was hoped that the development of this concept would also contribute to the emergence of a set of new criteria for evaluating the impact of social policies both now and in the future.²

The Modena symposium was specifically concerned with the measurement of well-being in past societies and the development of a new set of welfare indicators for the study of gender differences in the present day. In addition to those sessions which focused directly on the development and application of different welfare indicators, it also included further sessions on the themes of health, the life cycle, access to resources, and the production of well-being in the household, and

1 See www.cost.esf.org/?id=9#faq (accessed on 13 March 2008).

2 The original prospectus for the Action is set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Proposer, Cristina Borderias, and COST, dated 28 April 2005. This can be downloaded from the Action website at <http://www.cost.esf.org/index.php?id=320>.

these sessions were complemented by two specially-convened panel discussions which addressed the questions of interdisciplinary approaches to the definition and measurement of well-being and the development of new statistical sources. The organisers prepared a full report on the proceedings and this was accepted formally by the Action's Management Committee in April 2007 (see <http://www.ub.edu/tig/GWBNet/>).

This book seeks to build on the achievements of the symposium in two main ways. Part I aims to provide a historical introduction to the evaluation of the impact of economic and social change on the well-being of females and males in the European past. The chapters in this section seek to explore these issues by exploring such questions as the impact of gender on incomes and earnings (Wall); the use of height and weight as gender-sensitive indicators of well-being (Baten and Guntupalli; Harris); the role of gender in the formulation of household inheritance strategies in the Pyrenees (Arrizabalaga); the emergence of chlorosis as a 'female' disease (Bernabeu et al.); and the conceptualisation of well-being in the professional campaigns of female trade-unionists (Haggrén). The second part of the book examines the relationship between gender and well-being in a more contemporary perspective. The chapters in this section explore such themes as the impact of fiscal policy on female labour force participation rates (Villota); the relationship between violence and gender inequality in the UK (Anand and Santos); the development of 'non-androcentric' welfare indicators (Carrasco); the evaluation of living and working conditions in present-day Modena (Addabbo and Picchio); attitudes to infertility (Machado and Remoaldo); and the relationship between gender and time-use (Sauvain-Dugerdil).

Many of the contributors to the original COST Action have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Sen (1993: 31) argued that traditional indicators of well-being had failed to take account of what he called 'functionings' and 'capabilities'. 'Functionings' represented 'the various things that [a person] ... manages to do or be in leading a life' and 'capabilities' represented the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person might choose, and which they might achieve'. Although Sen was primarily interested in the well-being of individuals, he has also recognised that 'the conversion of personal resources into functionings is influenced ... by social conditions, including public health care and epidemiology, public educational arrangements, and the prevalence or absence of crime and violence' in a particular location (Sen 2007). Nussbaum (2000; 2003) extended his approach by suggesting that certain capabilities, such as the capability of being able to live to the end of a life of normal human length and enjoying good health and adequate nourishment and shelter, should in fact be regarded as 'central human capabilities' which constitute a fundamental entitlement of all human beings, regardless of their gender. These ideas provide an important starting point for much of what follows.

References

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