The Marine Environment, Human Well-Being and Environmental Valuation

Supervisors

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Project description

Imagine yourself walking along a beach, you can hear waves breaking gently and seabirds circling overhead, you see dolphins leaping in the distance. How do you think you would feel? Evidence is suggesting that such coastal experiences are extremely important for peoples feelings of subjective well-being but also their physical health. We are only beginning to understand how to assess andvalue these experiences, but this is vital if we are to persuade policy-makers to protect these vulnerable environments. This PhD aims to significantlyadvance our understanding of the importance and value of coasts for human health and well-being, and to make steps towards turning this understanding into metrics policy-makers can use to ensure the benefits are available for currentand future generations to enjoy.

Environmental valuation(e.g. hedonic pricing, contingent valuation) is commonly promoted as a method for capturing the environments effects on well-being in support of decision-making. Such approaches assume well-being can be inferred from peoples choices (actual or hypothetical) and the extent to which theirpreferences are satisfied. However, evidence indicates a disconnect between what people think will promote their well-being (their preferences) and what actually makes them happier (their experienced well-being). Consequently a novelmethod based on experiences, i.e. subjective well-being (SWB), has emerged asan alternative to infer such monetary values (e.g. Frey et al. 2010). Themethod compares gains to SWB, from say, living near or visiting the coast, with the amount of income needed to produce similar gains in SWB. Its application,however, has been limited and there are no marine examples.

The successful PhD candidate will undertake an original piece of research to explore how different aspects of the marine environment (e.g. biodiversity, tidal patterns, vistas) contribute to well-being. Changes in selected benefits obtained from the marine environment will be valued by a sample of the public using a SWB approach (following Dolan and Metcalfe, 2008) and a standard economic approach (e.g. contingent valuation). The values obtained will be compared, and the advantages and disadvantages of each method assessed.

This interdisciplinary project will allow the student to develop skills in environmental economics, environmental psychology, survey methods, and quantitative and qualitativedata analysis. S/he will have opportunities to interact with academic and non-academic audiences through participation in stakeholder forums and nationaland international conferences. The student should have a background in environmental management, agricultural or environmental economics,environmental psychology or a related field. Experience with marine topics would be

beneficial but not essential.

Frey,S.B., Luechinger, S. and Stutzer, A. (2010) The life satisfaction approach to environmental valuation. Annual Review of Resource Economics 2:139-160

Dolan, P. and Metcalfe, R. (2008) Comparing Willingness-To-Pay and Subjective Well-being in the Context of Non-Market Goods. CEP Discussion Paper No.890.Available from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28504/