

# Conference in Florence



Quality of Life. Reflections, Studies and Researches in Italy

Firenze, 9-10 Settembre 2010

<b>NUMERO SESSIONE</b>	5
<b>TITOLO SESSIONE</b>	Qualità della vita, pubblica amministrazione e società civile: strategie di analisi e intervento

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<b>TITOLO</b>	Does income inequality really hurt?

## ABSTRACT

The fact that within countries the wealthy report greater happiness than the poor has provided strong support for the relative income argument through the mechanism of social comparisons. (Easterlin, 1974; Hirsch, 1976; Scitovsky, 1976; Layard, 1980 and 2005, among others). This belief is quite widespread in social science, inequality is seen as undesirable and the cause of human misery but, is it that simple?

Psychologists have shown that social comparisons do not work as simply as many social scientists often assume, and that its use is in fact strongly influenced by personality. If so, in order to draw any conclusions about the effects of inequality on subjective well-being (SWB) through the mechanism of social comparisons, personality needs to be taken into account. I hypothesise that when personality is controlled for, the causality between inequality and SWB will weaken if not disappear. In other words, inequality matters only through the channel of a personality with tendencies towards negative comparisons. I test this hypothesis using the 15th wave of the British Household Panel Survey where information on personality is included.

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