

Happiness discussed at Nova Scotia sessions

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Happiness, it seems, is something that can be measured.

Hundreds of academics, farmers, environmentalists, business people, entertainers and health professionals are trying to figure just how to do that, and to convince others that it is just as an important indicator of a country's success as its economic well-being.

They will meet in Antigonish, N.S., today for the second International Conference on Gross National Happiness, a movement that is attracting a varied mix of adherents around the world.

"We don't claim to measure well-being directly, but rather what are some of the social, economic and environmental conditions which are likely to produce higher levels of well-being," said Ron Colman of GPI Atlantic, a non-profit research group in Nova Scotia that is organizing the meeting.

"The conventional paradigm that bases progress just on economic growth alone is not satisfactory. It's too narrow, so we know we have to assess our progress in a more comprehensive and accurate way."

Colman and other delegates contend that a better way of determining a person's well-being and the well-being of their surroundings is by looking at several factors – environmental preservation, sustainable economic development, cultural promotion and good governance.

The theory was developed more than 30 years ago in Bhutan, where the king declared gross national happiness to be more important than the small Asian country's gross national product.

Colman went to Bhutan last year to attend the first conference on gross national happiness and discovered a group of people keen on "redirecting global development towards socially and environmentally responsible policy and practices. The goal is to ensure long-term prosperity and equity for all."