

**Reconciling
competitiveness,
happiness
and sustainability.**

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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ABSTRACTS

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Giving and Happiness: Exploring the Relationship Between Prosocial Behavior and Subjective Well-Being

This paper explores the relationship between prosocial giving and human happiness, examining whether acts of donating money, goods, and time contribute to greater subjective well-being. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from psychology, sociology, economics, philanthropy, and nonprofit management, the study investigates the motivations underlying charitable giving and the personal benefits experienced by donors.

Using a comprehensive literature review methodology, the paper synthesizes research on charitable donations, volunteering, altruism, empathy, prosocial behavior, and subjective well-being. Particular attention is given to the psychological and social mechanisms that encourage giving, including altruistic motivations, social norms, empathy, religious beliefs, and the “warm-glow” effect associated with helping others. The findings suggest a consistent positive association between giving behaviors and individual well-being. Evidence from previous studies indicates that individuals who engage in charitable donations and volunteering tend to report higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, social connectedness, and overall health. Research further demonstrates that prosocial actions may contribute to reduced stress, improved physical health, and stronger social relationships. The literature also highlights that the benefits of giving extend beyond recipients, generating meaningful psychological rewards for donors and fostering more cooperative and compassionate communities.

The paper concludes that giving represents not only a mechanism for addressing social needs but also a pathway to personal fulfillment and happiness. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines, this study contributes to a growing body of research supporting the role of generosity as a determinant of individual and collective well-being and suggests implications for philanthropy, fundraising practices, and public policy.

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Co-Production of Public Space as a Catalyst for Quality of Life: Placemaking Strategies in VPUU Projects in Monwabisi Park, South Africa

Building on quality-of-life research that demonstrates how public space and infrastructure provision positively influence residents perceived well-being, this paper draws attention to a dimension that has received comparatively less scholarly focus: the significance of placemaking as a collaborative process in enhancing well-being. This aspect is particularly relevant in resource-scarce environments such as informal settlements. In these dense contexts, public spaces and their basic infrastructure elements facilitate social interaction and function as essential social infrastructure. Targeted interventions to upgrade these spaces can therefore meet basic needs while also contributing to transforming the identity of marginalized settlements through placemaking. These benefits are amplified when upgrading initiatives are embedded within co-productive frameworks and supported by inclusive governance.

Drawing on a qualitative case study in Monwabisi Park, one of Cape Town's informal settlements, this contribution examines how placemaking initiatives—implemented through co-productive approaches—can act as a catalyst for enhancing multiple quality of life domains. Using an integrated, area-based approach, the non-profit organisation Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) applies placemaking strategies to engage community members in hybrid governance models. As part of the EU-funded WISER project (2023–2026), this research investigates the relationships between urban design, community empowerment, and quality of life by employing a contextualized, micro-level qualitative analysis. Findings indicate that co-produced public spaces and amenities not only enhance environmental quality but also positively impact quality-of-life domains such as education, social relations, employment, health, and personal security, thereby supporting various livelihood capitals. The study argues that co-production and placemaking should be central to upgrading strategies in resource-scarce settings, where well-being encompasses more than monetary outcomes. It concludes with recommendations for policies that integrate co-production, placemaking, and hybrid governance to improve quality of life, advocating for a broader conception of well-being beyond monetary measures.

STEFANO BARTOLINI - KEYNOTE SPEECH

University of Siena

Policies for happiness

What policies can reconcile the economy, well-being, and the environment? First, replace GDP as the sole policy compass with dashboards centred on subjective well-being as a headline indicator. Second, invest in social relations through universal public services, inclusive urban design, participatory teaching, and reduced working time, as stronger social relations raise well-being while curbing defensive, resource-intensive consumption. Third, tackle inequality via progressive taxation, fair wages, and social protection, since unequal growth erodes trust and neutralizes well-being gains. Fourth, invest in preventing social and natural negative externalities, and promote resilience by

prioritising ecosystem restoration, clean energy, and health-promoting environments. Fifth, limit advertising that promotes materialism, with negative effects on well-being and social capital. Finally, use productivity gains to buy time, not goods: shorter workweeks and better work quality support happiness, lower emissions, and sustain economic resilience.

STEFANO BARTOLINI

University of Siena

Structural Causes of the Youth Well-being Crisis: A Call for Radical Reforms

Although global data on subjective well-being (SWB) among children and adolescents remain limited, evidence from high-income countries highlights a mounting crisis in youth well-being and mental health. In recent years, there has been growing global interest in the study of children's well-being, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, available time-series evidence suggests that the youth well-being crisis began long before the pandemic. To date, research has primarily concentrated on the intrinsic mechanisms influencing children's well-being, as well as on the family, social, and cultural factors that may shape it (Xu et al., 2024). Despite this, there is limited understanding of how broader structural dynamics affect children's well-being. In this work, first we provide a review of the evidence on the youth well-being and mental health crisis. Second, we argue that youth have experienced a revolution in their time use and living environment in HICs since the 1980s. Children's daily lives have shifted away from unstructured play and peer-based face-to-face interactions, toward home-centered, screen-based and adult-supervised activities. Moreover, over time, kids, and teens have faced more commercial and performance pressure, and have lost autonomy. Third, we review the literature on the impact of these changes on youth's well-being. We then discuss the policy reforms needed to address these structural changes. In particular, we argue that urban planning, education systems, advertising, and the climate crisis play a critical role in shaping children's social experiences and well-being. We conclude by emphasizing the need for ambitious reforms in these areas to restore youth time, expand opportunities for independent experiences, and safeguard its social lives and well-being.

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Decoupling beyond GDP

There is a growing call for countries to move beyond GDP and start measuring what truly counts for societal progress. Yet, most sustainability analyses remain centred on decoupling GDP from environmental pressures, typically operationalised through the IPAT framework, in which affluence (A) is commonly proxied by GDP. Adopting a beyond-GDP perspective, we introduce the IPWET framework, which replaces affluence with wellbeing (W) and economic activity (E), allowing us to distinguish

between the means and ends of achieving societal progress and associated environmental impacts. We apply this framework through an equivalent wellbeing extension of the Kaya identity to assess carbon dioxide decoupling for 119 countries from 1990 to 2020. Our results reveal substantial variation across countries in the economic intensity of wellbeing, and consequently, in the extent to which improvements in wellbeing translate into emissions growth. By comparing the Social Progress Index to Happy Life Expectancy, we further illustrate how distinct conceptualisations and measurements of wellbeing can affect outcomes. Overall, the analysis demonstrates the importance of shifting the decoupling debate from “green growth” towards wellbeing-centric “green prosperity”. Moreover, assessing the economic efficiency of producing wellbeing provides policymakers with a practical tool for aligning social progress with environmental goals.

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Title of the presentation: Beyond GDP: Urban Nature, Well-being Efficiency, and the Value of Local Context

Beyond GDP: Urban Nature, Well-being Efficiency, and the Value of Local Context

M.Bockarjova, N.Rigas, F.Sarraccino, J.Martinez

Gross Domestic Product remains the dominant measure of societal progress, yet it systematically overlooks the environmental, social, and cultural conditions that shape human well-being. This paper examines the role of environmental conditions, and urban nature in particular, in connecting socio-economic contexts to macro-level well-being efficiency indicators, where well-being efficiency refers to the extent to which available resources are transformed into subjective well-being.

Drawing on four complementary strands of evidence, the paper bridges macro-level efficiency metrics with the lived, place-based experience of well-being. We carry out a systematic literature review, a cross-country well-being efficiency analysis, draw on cases from the Urban Nature Atlas, and original field data analysis from Kenya, the Netherlands, and Peru.

Three key findings emerge. First, urban nature is an overlooked yet meaningful factor in explaining well-being efficiency patterns: access to green and blue spaces helps account for how and why countries cluster differently in their capacity to convert available resources into subjective well-being, across diverse cultural and socio-economic settings. Second, well-being efficiency depends critically on the alignment between intervention design and locally salient value pathways: instrumental, relational, and intrinsic values of urban nature vary across contexts, and the most effective interventions are those that respond to local needs and meanings rather than scale alone. Third, integrating micro-level, place-based evidence with macro-level indicators produces a richer and more policy-relevant understanding of well-being efficiency, revealing how similar levels of well-being may be achieved through different

pathways, and why some contexts convert available resources into subjective well-being more effectively than others.

Our findings therefore call for a reconceptualisation of well-being efficiency that considers overall environmental quality and local environments as an important pillar of sustainable, equitable, and resilient societies. In particular, as we seek to understand the underpinnings of well-being of nations, urban nature in cities and its meaning to citizens helps capture what actually matters to people.

MARTIJN BURGER

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Can rising incomes support sustainable well-being? No evidence for a “double dividend” in the United Kingdom

The double dividend hypothesis suggests that acting in more pro-environmental ways will not only benefit the environment but also carries a subjective well-being premium for those who do so, hence paying off doubly. We test the well-being pay-off part of this hypothesis using a two-way fixed effects estimator with high-quality panel data for the United Kingdom during the period 2009-2019. Examining the link between pro-environmental behavior and subjective well-being (measured as life satisfaction), we find no evidence for even a small relationship between the two, despite a large sample size. In addition, we examine a precondition for the double dividend narrative, namely the relationship between rising incomes and pro-environmental behavior. Here we find that, in the UK, increasing incomes translate into slightly less pro-environmental behavior for the period in question. Both findings cast some doubt on the practicability of a double dividend narrative: improving material conditions may lead to a deterioration in pro-environmental behaviors, but even if one could transition to more pro-environmental behaviors, a double dividend may not materialize.

JACKLINE BWIRE ACHAN

Kyambogo University

Early Childhood Care and Education as a Foundation for Sustainable Well-Being: A Policy Analysis of Uganda's ECCE Policy

The growing global interest in happiness and sustainability has renewed attention to policies that promote human well-being while supporting sustainable societal development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is increasingly recognized as a critical investment in lifelong well-being, yet policy discussions often emphasize school readiness and economic returns rather than broader dimensions of sustainable well-being. This paper asks: To what extent does Uganda's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy provide a framework for promoting sustainable well-being among young children? The study employs a qualitative policy analysis of Uganda's 2024 ECCE Policy and its accompanying implementation standards and guidelines. Drawing on the Capability Approach and sustainable well-being perspectives, the analysis examines the policy's vision, objectives, principles, implementation strategies, and institutional arrangements. Particular attention is given to how the policy

addresses child well-being, family and community engagement, equity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and long-term human development.

The analysis finds that the policy adopts a holistic approach to child development by promoting child welfare, integrated service delivery, parental and community involvement, equitable access to services, health and nutrition, child protection, and environmental education. These provisions position ECCE as a key institutional foundation for sustainable well-being. However, the policy gives limited attention to children's participation and agency and lacks explicit indicators for measuring well-being outcomes beyond educational access and service provision.

The paper argues that ECCE should be understood not merely as preparation for formal schooling but as a strategic investment in sustainable well-being across the life course. It concludes by proposing directions for strengthening ECCE policies in Africa through a stronger integration of well-being, sustainability, and children's rights perspectives.

DAVID CANO / SIMONE D'ALESSANDRO / ANGELA PARENTI / CRISTIANO GIANGIONI

University of Pisa

How Social and Structural Wellbeing Drivers Shape Household Demand: Evidence from Italy

Growing attention has been devoted to the role of social and structural determinants of wellbeing, including social capital, access to public services, environmental quality and inequality. While these factors are known to influence subjective wellbeing, much less is understood about how they affect household demand. Existing studies have largely focused on the level of consumption, whereas the composition of demand and households' resilience to economic shocks remain comparatively unexplored.

This paper investigates how Social and Structural Wellbeing Drivers (SSWD) shape household demand using a novel matched microdataset for Italy that combines household income (SHIW), detailed consumption expenditure (HBS) and wellbeing indicators (AVQ). We estimate total expenditure regressions together with a Quadratic Almost Ideal Demand System (QUAIDS) to analyse both the level and the composition of household demand. We then use the estimated demand system to evaluate households' welfare losses during the 2021–2022 energy price shock through compensating variation.

Three main findings emerge. First, once income is controlled for, SSWD have only limited effects on total household expenditure. Second, they significantly influence the composition of household demand, shifting expenditure across consumption categories in ways consistent with higher social and environmental wellbeing. Third, households characterised by stronger social capital, better access to public services and lower perceived inequality experience smaller welfare losses following the energy price shock, suggesting that SSWD contribute to household resilience.

These results suggest that the role of wellbeing drivers lies less in reducing aggregate consumption than in shaping consumption patterns and increasing resilience to adverse shocks. Beyond their implications for wellbeing research, they provide new empirical foundations for integrating non-monetary wellbeing drivers into macroeconomic models of the ecological transition.

MARTIN J. CHEGERE / WINNIE C. MUANGI

School of Economics, University of Dar es Salaam

High Affect, Low Satisfaction: Social Capital's Role in Tanzanian Well-Being

This study examines the relationships between positive affect, life satisfaction, and social capital in Tanzanian communities, drawing on survey data from 397 respondents across ten districts in five regions. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative analyses with qualitative insights from focus group discussions to capture the complexity of well-being in diverse socio-cultural settings. Descriptive results indicate that respondents report relatively high levels of positive emotions but consistently low evaluations of life satisfaction, revealing a divergence between affective vitality and cognitive life assessments. Regression analyses further highlight the paradoxical role of social capital: trust and reciprocity significantly enhance life satisfaction, while support networks and communal engagement, though beneficial for emotional well-being, are associated with lower life satisfaction due to reciprocal obligations and social pressures. Trust emerges as a central factor shaping life satisfaction and moderating how positive affect relates to cognitive evaluations of life quality. These findings suggest that while emotional positivity is common, life satisfaction remains constrained by structural challenges and the burdens of social obligations. Policy efforts should therefore focus on strengthening trust-based social capital while reducing the economic and psychological costs of community participation.

SIMONE D'ALESSANDRO - KEYNOTE SPEECH

University of Pisa

Prioritising Wellbeing in the Ecological Transition: Scenario Analysis with the WISER EUROGREEN Model

The ecological transition is often portrayed as a trilemma between three competing objectives: achieving net-zero emissions, maintaining material prosperity, and ensuring fairness. While technological innovation can ease these trade-offs, their severity ultimately depends on how societies generate and sustain human wellbeing. If wellbeing relies primarily on material consumption, reconciling environmental sustainability with social justice becomes considerably more difficult. Conversely, policies that strengthen the non-material drivers of wellbeing may reduce the dependence of quality of life on economic growth, opening new pathways for a just ecological transition.

This keynote presents the WISER EUROGREEN model, a new macro-simulation framework developed within the WISER project to analyse these interactions. Building on an integrated database combining household income, consumption and wellbeing information, the model incorporates non-monetary wellbeing drivers—including social relationships, trust, environmental conditions, access to public services, personal time and perceived inequality—into household behaviour and long-run macroeconomic dynamics.

The presentation will discuss how wellbeing-oriented policies can be represented within a macroeconomic framework and illustrate their implications through a set of scenario analyses. The results suggest that policies strengthening social cohesion and

other non-material determinants of wellbeing can improve life satisfaction while simultaneously supporting climate objectives and reducing inequality. More broadly, the keynote argues that prioritising wellbeing should not be seen simply as an additional policy objective, but as a way of reshaping the trade-offs that characterise the ecological transition.

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Objectives: Wellbeing is increasingly considered an important outcome measure for policy evaluation. Although several wellbeing instruments have been developed for this purpose, their application remains challenging. This is due to the multidimensional nature of wellbeing, the different conceptual focus of wellbeing instruments, the heterogeneity of target populations and the limited information provided by global scores. A person-centered approach would address these limitations by effectively tailoring interventions to the needs of the end users. This paper adopts such approach by investigating which wellbeing profiles are identified across four wellbeing instruments, what predicts membership to each profile and what wellbeing patterns can be identified with each instrument.

Methods: Data from 7,155 participants was collected via online panels in the Netherlands and the United States. Latent profile analysis was used to identify profiles using indicators from four multi-dimensional wellbeing instruments: EQ-HWB-9, ICECAP-A, SWB-5D, and WiX. Analysis was conducted separately in an exploratory and confirmatory sample. Multinomial logistic regression was applied in the full sample to explore demographic predictors of profile membership.

Results: Seven distinct wellbeing profiles were identified: 1) “Extremely poor wellbeing” (6.9%), 2) “Poor wellbeing” (14.8%), 3) “Poor health-related, good broader quality of life” (5.4%), 4) “Good mental health, poor physical health” (9.9%), 5) “Good physical health, poor mental health” (12.9%), 6) “High wellbeing” (27.8%), 7) “Extremely high wellbeing” (22.3%). Being male, having a higher age, education level and financial means consistently predicted higher levels of wellbeing, while being a social care user was a strong predictor of poor wellbeing. Social relationships were an important buffer of mental health, even in cases of poor physical health.

Discussion: This study highlights the importance of a personalized approach in interventions targeting wellbeing as primary outcome. Considering the specific needs of the target users and using instruments conceptually covering those needs may enhance interventions’ efficiency.

**SARA FRANCO DA SILVA / MARIA DO CARMO BOTELHO / ROSÁRIO MAURITTI /
CRISTINA DE SOUSA**

Presenter's affiliation: Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon, Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte)

Social Inequalities, Well-Being and Social Sustainability in Europe

In a context where the intensification of social inequalities increasingly undermines social sustainability and collective well-being, this paper examines the relationship between social inequalities and well-being in Europe from a comparative and diachronic perspective, using microdata from the 2016 and 2023 rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS). The study is situated within contemporary debates on development, sustainability, and social justice, in which social inequalities are understood as a central dimension of societies' capacity to generate durable forms of collective well-being. From this perspective, inequalities are not limited to distributive differences but also encompass unequal conditions of social participation, recognition, and access to resources and opportunities.

The paper builds on a previous analysis conducted with ESS 2016 data and seeks to replicate the analytical model for 2023, making it possible to identify continuities and changes in the relationship between inequalities and well-being across European countries. The analysis focuses on multiple axes of social differentiation (gender, age, education, social class, income, and territory) and draws on a multidimensional conceptualisation of well-being inspired by OECD frameworks, with particular emphasis on the subjective well-being, namely life satisfaction and happiness. Methodologically, the study combines comparative descriptive procedures and multivariate statistical techniques to examine how different configurations of inequality across European countries shape perceptions of well-being. The comparison between 2016 and 2023 also enables an assessment of the evolution of these relationships in a context marked by economic crises, the pandemic, political transformations, and challenges associated with the ecological and digital transitions. Preliminary findings point to a consistent association between lower levels of social inequality and higher levels of subjective well-being. At the same time, persistent territorial asymmetries across Europe are observed, reinforcing the idea that reducing inequalities constitutes a central condition for social sustainability and for more durable forms of collective well-being.

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Water and sanitation (in)security, and implications on perceived well-being and productivity growth in informal and formal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya

Access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) remains a major global challenge, disproportionately affecting residents of informal settlements, where insecure tenure, unsafe housing, limited WASH access, and socio-economic marginalisation exacerbate water insecurity, undermining health and well-being. Our mixed-methods study explores the effect of water (in)security on human well-being and productivity growth in urban populations, comparing formal and informal settlements. It integrates a map-based survey (n=545) capturing subjective well-being (SWB), Household Water Insecurity (HWISE), sanitation-related quality of life (SanQoL-5), and individual productivity and focus group discussions (n=65 participants) (male versus female, older versus younger residents). The normative contents of the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation (HRtWS) were used as analytical framing. The HRtW remains unrealised across settlement types, with frequent interruptions, unreliable supply, uneven access, long collection times, high costs, and poor water quality, especially after service disruptions and during the rainy season. Conflicts over water access are widespread, undermining trust, and deepening social and gendered stress. Water collection causes illness, emotional strain, and fatigue across settlements. Water insecurity is deeply gendered, with women, particularly in informal settlements, bearing the greatest burden. Residents of informal settlements have a clear preference for improved drinking water supply at kiosk in terms of frequency, water quality and water pressure over the current situation, even if this involves additional costs. Substantial sanitation inequalities persist across settlements. Nearly all households in formal settlements had private sanitation with hygienic separation from human waste, whereas most households in informal settlements used shared facilities with limited hygienic separation. SanQoL-5 index values, SWB, and self-reported energy and concentration were substantially lower in informal settlements. Higher SanQoL-5 was strongly associated with higher SWB and improved productivity outcomes. Water and sanitation insecurities and inequalities extend beyond infrastructure to lived experiences, with important implications for well-being and daily functioning. With urbanisation and informal settlements increasing in Kenya and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, and global environmental change and increased risk of flooding turning informal settlements into health risk traps, addressing the combined challenge of water and sanitation insecurity, well-being and productivity growth to better understand not only the challenges, but also identify possible solutions on moving forward, is vital.

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Making lived neighbourhood experiences visible: A mixed-methods, community-based approach to informing inclusive urban planning for well-being

Residential neighbourhoods, including built and natural environments, play an important role in shaping health, well-being, and quality of life. Whereas urban

planning has traditionally focused on objective and quantifiable indicators such as infrastructure provision and environmental metrics, these measures only partially capture how people experience their surroundings. Growing evidence suggests that everyday, lived experiences of place are key to understanding neighbourhood quality and its relationship to well-being, yet they remain underrepresented in planning practice and research, leading to missed opportunities to improve well-being for all.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how diverse residents – including residents of deprived neighbourhoods, individuals facing economic hardship, individuals with limited mobility, older adults, women, and people with migration background – perceive their neighbourhood, identifying key resources, types of places, and place qualities that support or hinder their subjective well-being. Using the city of Enschede, the Netherlands, as a case study, it adopts a mixed-methods design combining go-along interviews, map-based and questionnaire surveys to capture spatial and non-spatial, individual and collective, qualitative and quantitative data that foreground residents' narratives.

The questionnaire survey addressed who and what, revealing general patterns in neighbourhood perceptions. The map-based survey addressed where well-being resources are located or missing. Go-along interviews addressed how, capturing embodied, place-based experiences and narratives of how people experience their surroundings while moving through them. Focusing on the neighbourhood scale and directly talking to residents clarified what drives or hinders well-being on the ground and what counts for people. This grounding makes policy recommendations more actionable and inclusive as it pinpoints who is most affected, how, where, and why.

JOHANN FREDERICK KIRSTEN 1/ TALITA GREYLING 2

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The Well-Being Cost of Climate Disasters: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa Johann Frederick Kirsten

Achieving sustainable development requires not only protecting ecosystems but also safeguarding human well-being from the growing risks associated with climate change. While climate-related disasters are becoming increasingly frequent across Sub-Saharan Africa, relatively little is known about their consequences for subjective well-being and the factors that shape societal resilience to such shocks. This study examines the relationship between climate disasters and national life evaluation, and whether institutional quality moderates this relationship.

Using an annual panel of 43 Sub-Saharan African countries from 2006 to 2024, the study combines life-evaluation data from the Gallup World Poll with climate-disaster records from EM-DAT and measures of institutional quality from the Worldwide Governance Indicators. Employing fixed-effects panel estimation and robust wild-cluster bootstrap inference, we assess both the direct effect of climate disasters on well-being and the extent to which institutional quality mitigates their impact. The results indicate that climate-related disasters are associated with significantly lower levels of national life evaluation. Disaggregated analyses reveal that this

relationship is driven primarily by the occurrence of disasters rather than their recorded magnitude. Importantly, institutional quality plays a critical moderating role. The negative association between climate disasters and well-being is substantially stronger in countries with weaker institutions, suggesting that effective governance enhances societal resilience to environmental shocks.

The findings contribute to the growing literature linking happiness and sustainability by demonstrating that the well-being consequences of climate change depend not only on environmental exposure but also on institutional capacity. For policymakers, the results highlight that strengthening institutions and disaster-risk governance may be as important as climate adaptation policies themselves in protecting human well-being in a changing climate.

TALITA GREYLING 1 / STEPHANIE ROSSOUW 2

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Beyond Attendance: Which Religious Variables Matter for Subjective Well-Being? Evidence from the Global Flourishing Study.

This study examines whether the most commonly used religious variables in existing subjective well-being (SWB) research adequately captures the broader religion–SWB relationship, which religious variables matter most once a wider set of indicators is considered, whether these differ among religious and spiritual respondents, and whether conclusions vary across SWB outcomes. Using Wave 1 of the Global Flourishing Study, comprising nationally representative samples from 23 countries, we first replicate the standard empirical approach using ordinary least squares (OLS) in the full sample using a religious variable commonly employed in prior SWB research, religious service attendance (we also add being religious or not and religious importance). We then extend the analysis by jointly examining a broader set of religious variables using eXtreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) and SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) to determine the most important religious variables related to SWB. Guided by the SHAP results, we subsequently revisit the literature-style OLS specification to examine whether the most important religious variable identified by SHAP outperforms religious service attendance. Finally, we restrict the analysis to respondents who identify as religious, spiritual, or both to assess whether the order of religious predictors differs from that in the full sample. The analysis is conducted across four SWB outcomes: three evaluative well-being measures (life satisfaction, the Cantril ladder, and happiness) and one eudaimonic measure (life worthwhile).

For the full sample, attendance, religious importance and religious/not remain positively associated with all four outcomes. However, all of these variables adds little explanatory power. Instead, connectedness to God, religion, or spirituality emerges as the strongest religion variable in both the full and restricted samples (SHAP results) and substantially outperforms attendance (or then other) in terms of explanatory power, even in literature-style OLS models. Perceived divine punishment consistently ranks second most important among religious and spiritual respondents. SHAP analysis further reveals a nonlinear association for attendance (and other ordered religious variables), with positive associations concentrated at weekly and more-than-weekly participation.

Finally, findings differ across life satisfaction, happiness, life worthwhile, and especially the Cantril ladder, which behaves differently in both the full and restricted samples, indicating that outcome choice is not methodologically neutral. These findings suggest that prior research may have captured only part of the religion–SWB relationship, and that its conclusions have been shaped by measurement availability, sample definition, modelling strategy, and outcome choice.

SAKARI KAINULAINEN

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How well do people's experiences of well-being reflect the living conditions of their neighborhood?

Human life satisfaction is influenced by a wide range of factors, spanning from genetic, psychological, and socioeconomic elements. According to the socio-ecological perspective, the individual is in constant interaction with their environment, and it is within this interaction that an individual's experience of their own well-being is constructed. However, relying solely on self-reported information from individuals poses a challenge, as individuals evaluate things and experiences from their own perspective. This perspective can subsequently reflect on both the assessment of one's own well-being and on external, objective factors (de Jong et al., 2011). While register data makes it possible to evaluate human well-being, this approach lacks the aspects of a good life that leave no trace in official registers (Ballas & Dorling, 2007).

The study investigated the correlation between objective well-being (register data) and subjective well-being (survey results) at the municipal and postal code levels. The study utilized a nationally representative survey dataset of 16-to-29-year-olds (N = 1,000) alongside official register statistics on social problems and deprivation.

The findings indicate that regional social problems—such as youth unemployment, long-term reliance on social assistance, and general deprivation—are statistically significantly associated with lower life satisfaction among residents. Subjective experience correlates strongly with register-based data: residents in the most disadvantaged areas reported lower satisfaction with, among other things, their health, self-esteem, financial situation, and social relationships.

The study confirms that people's subjective experiences reliably reflect regional living conditions. Perceived well-being is highest in areas with the fewest social problems. Consequently, life satisfaction and experiential knowledge serve as valuable and valid metrics for describing regional well-being and life circumstances.

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Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Behavioural Public Policies for Sustainability Using Subjective Wellbeing Insights

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) measures and data offer underexploited insights for behavioural public policy (BPP) aimed at sustainability. We argue that embedding SWB in BPP can advance how policies are designed, implemented, and evaluated. At the design stage, evidence on anticipated, immediate, and collective emotions can inform

interventions that work with, rather than against, the affective dynamics underlying private and public-sphere sustainable behaviours. At the implementation stage, mapping and tracking emotional responses to environmental issues and specific policies can support more effective communication and adjustment over time. At the evaluation stage, experiential measures can serve as proofs-of-principle in lab and online experiments, while life satisfaction, monetised through the Wellbeing-Year (WELLBY), can provide proofs-of-practice in the field and a convenient tool for ex-post policy appraisal and value-for-money assessments. Three worked examples, including cycling promotion, congestion charging, and recycling, illustrate how this SWB-informed approach can yield more effective, acceptable, and wellbeing-enhancing sustainability interventions.

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The combined economic burden of heat exposure, pregnancy and the postnatal period among women in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Extreme heat events are increasing in frequency and intensity globally, with disproportionate impacts in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). Pregnant and postnatal women are particularly vulnerable to heat exposure, facing increased healthcare expenditures and productivity losses. Yet, these economic consequences remain poorly understood. This study estimates the combined economic burden of heat, pregnancy and postnatal care among women in South Africa and Zimbabwe, evaluating socioeconomic differences and impacts on women's wellbeing.

We used cross-sectional data from the HIGH Horizons study (Gauteng province, South Africa, n=201 and Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe, n=228). We applied a cost-of-illness approach from a societal perspective to estimate combined economic burden over a four-week recall period, comprising direct medical, non-medical, and indirect costs. A multidimensional wellbeing index was constructed across five domains (physical strength, inner wellbeing, household wellbeing, community relations, economic security). Multivariable regressions evaluated the associations between economic burden, perceived heat strain, wellbeing, and socioeconomic characteristics.

Over half of the participants (54.3%, 235/429) reported at least one economic cost due to heat, pregnancy or postnatal care. Mean monthly burden was USD 52.1 (SD 48.3) and USD 51.7 (SD 85.0) among South African and Zimbabwean participants, respectively. Catastrophic health expenditure (economic burden $\geq$ 40% of monthly household expenditure) affected 12.1% and 39.4% of the study population in South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively. Higher economic burden was associated with younger age

(25-29 vs 18-24 years $\beta = 0.7$, 95%CI 0.1,1.3), higher education (tertiary vs primary $\beta = 0.9$, 95%CI 0.0,1.8), and higher socioeconomic status (high vs low $\beta = 0.8$, 95%CI: 0.2,1.3), suggesting that poorer women may be unable to access or afford care. Perceived heat strain was associated with lower wellbeing ($\beta = -0.10$, 95%CI: -0.2, -0.04).

These findings quantify the cost of climate inaction. When governments defer emission reductions and neglect targeted adaptation measures, the economic burden falls on the households least able to bear it at a cost that will exceed the investment required to act.

MEINRAD LEMBUKA

The Open University of Tanzania

Repositioning the Capacity of Ubuntu Models in Supporting the Cultural and institutional determinants of sustainable well-being - Lessons from the Ujamaa Intersections model in Tanzania

The qualitative study engaged a literature review method guided by the Ubuntu theoretical framework, assessing the capacity of Ubuntu Models to support the cultural and institutional determinants of sustainable well-being, drawing on lessons from post-colonial Tanzania. The Ujamaa Intersections model is a profound application of the Ubuntu philosophy, transforming abstract humanistic values into concrete institutional and cultural determinants of well-being.

Ujamaa represents other Ubuntu Models that prioritise the collective over individual gain. This model reconfigures the fundamental architecture of social and economic life to ensure that sustainability is not merely an environmental goal but a social necessity. Findings have shown that Ujamaa became a policy framework and political ideology in Tanzania. For decades, the Ujamaa Intersections model supported sustainable well-being by integrating indigenous ecology with modern governance, with true development rooted in the people's culture. As a result, institutional structures reflected the local environment and history. This created "institutional resilience," as the sustainable quality of life is not an alien imposition but an extension of the community's own values. The model fosters a sense of shared ownership and mitigates the alienation common in bureaucratic systems, leading to greater psychological and social stability.

Furthermore, the emphasis on self-reliance ensures that communities are not dependent on volatile external markets, thereby stabilising their economic well-being through local production and communal sharing. Together, these principles dictated how people made decisions, resolved conflicts, and organised their daily lives.

Furthermore, the institutionalisation of Ubuntu through Ujamaa also addresses the "epistemic injustice" often found in modern organisations. By validating indigenous knowledge systems alongside formal education, institutions create a more inclusive environment where diverse voices contribute to decision-making. Therefore, the Ujamaa developmental model fundamentally reshaped Tanzania's society by institutionalising the indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu (familyhood). It created a centralised, single-party democracy and fostered deep cultural shifts towards communalism, self-reliance, and universal social welfare, leaving a lasting legacy on the nation's civic and social framework. For decades, Ujamaa has been linked to European

Socialism rather than to the Ubuntu insight, thereby distorting its cultural and institutional capacity to reflect sustainable quality of life.

JAVIER MARTINEZ AND SHAHARIN ANNISA -KEYNOTE SPEECH

Faculty of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

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Advancing People-Centered Well-Being: Cross-cutting Insights from Neighbourhood-Level Research

This keynote presents cross-cutting insights from WISER project on the non-economic drivers of well-being across diverse contexts in the Global South and North. It particularly emphasis the neighbourhood level as a key local scale for understanding lived experience, inequality and opportunities for action. It examines what matters for well-being for all; how well-being can be grounded in lived experience; who can benefit most; where to act; what to prioritise; whom to involve; and how to sustain impact over time. The synthesis highlights that non-economic drivers are critical but do not substitute economic and material improvements; that context matters; and that people-centred, intersectional and neighbourhood-level approaches are essential for addressing unequal conditions and opportunities. The neighbourhood level and the need to contextualise the wellbeing assessment is presented in greater depth through Monwabisi Park, an informal settlement in Cape Town, where co-production, placemaking and supportive hybrid governance connect material improvements with social cohesion, community agency, trust, belonging and inclusion. Building on these insights, the keynote concludes by considering how cities and neighbourhoods can be redesigned for well-being through proximity, safe and accessible walking and cycling routes, social infrastructure, inclusive public and blue-green spaces, meaningful co-design and co-management, and long-term maintenance and governance. Together, these approaches can support stronger social relations and more equitable quality of life and well-being.

PAUL MCNAMEE, TEKIN KOSE, KATHRYN R. MARTIN

Health Economics Research Unit, Institute of Applied Health Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK.

Bringing nature to life: An outdoor walking programme for people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions improves life satisfaction.

Background

Physical activity offers health, well-being and economic benefits. However, across developed countries, many people do not regularly undertake physical activity; for example, in the UK, almost two-thirds of adults are physically inactive. Physical inactivity is also highly prevalent in populations with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions (MSK). However, moderate intensity physical activity can reduce pain, fatigue, stiffness, and disability for people with MSK conditions. Despite these benefits, increasing physical activity remains challenging, especially those older with comorbid

health conditions (e.g., diabetes, cardiovascular disease). There is therefore a need to find acceptable and cost-effective interventions to improve participation.

Research Question

Does a novel outdoor walking intervention (Walk with Ease) amongst 149 people with arthritis or other MSK conditions improve health, well-being and life satisfaction?

Methods

Participants were randomised to receive an instructor led group-based programme, a self-directed programme or usual care (physical activity booklet). We tested effects on health, well-being and life satisfaction using the EQ-5D-5L (Mobility, Self-Care, Usual Activities, Pain/Discomfort and Anxiety/Depression), ICECAP (Autonomy, Achievement, Stability, Attachment, Enjoyment) and Life Satisfaction (0-7 rating scale, where 0=extremely dissatisfied and 7=extremely satisfied with life).

Findings

Over 6 weeks and 18 weeks follow-up, participants in the instructor-led group-based programme achieved statistically significant gains in life satisfaction: mean change=0.55 (95% confidence interval= 0.03,1.06) at 6 weeks and =0.39 (0.04,0.74) at 18 weeks. Participants in the self-directed programme and usual care groups did not achieve gains in life satisfaction. Participants in both walking programmes also achieved gains in quality of life (EQ-5D-5L) at 6 weeks, but these were not maintained at 18 weeks. No statistically significant improvements in ICECAP scores were found.

Conclusion

An instructor-led group-based outdoor walking programme improved life satisfaction. Walking programmes provide benefits beyond health, and researchers should measure life satisfaction as well as health in future evaluations.

FRANCIS MUNIER

University of Strasbourg, France

Narrative Economics and the WISER Agenda: How the Stories Shape Happiness and Sustainability

Research question. Do the narratives through which governments and the media frame economic policy have measurable, causal effects on subjective well-being, and can this narrative reinforce, or undermine, a reorientation of economic systems toward both happiness and sustainability?

The WISER project shows that beyond a certain threshold, income and consumption yield diminishing well-being gains while imposing heavy ecological costs, and that the very patterns generating growth have eroded social connection, trust, and meaning. Yet whether societies can reorient toward well-being depends not only on the substance of policy but on the stories that make such a transition feel possible, threatening, or hopeless. Narrative economics (Shiller, 2017, 2020 ; Akerlof and Shiller, 2009) shows that stories animate economic life and shape collective emotion, a literature that has rarely engaged with the economics of happiness.

The paper (i) proposes a typology of narratives (alarmist, technical, political, solution-oriented, comparative), (ii) traces how framing operates through the mediators of life satisfaction (anxiety, perceived control, and confidence in the future) and (iii) connects these dynamics to the WISER claim that well-being and sustainability can be jointly pursued.

We combine large-scale NLP (sentiment analysis, topic modelling, and metaphor detection using national-language transformer models) to build a narrative-intensity index, correlated with anxiety, perceived control, and confidence in the future. Communicating the happiness– sustainability transition is itself a determinant of whether it succeeds.

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Social capital as a predictor of well-being among urban informal female workers in Ghana

A central claim in the happiness-and-sustainability debate is that relational goods such as trust, and social connection generate well-being at a far lower ecological cost than income and consumption. This claim is typically tested in affluent settings, where it can be read simply as a post-materialist preference. This study tests it from the opposite direction: among people well below any consumption threshold, does social capital still do independent welfare work? Using cross-sectional survey data from 704 informal female traders in Ghana's Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area, the study builds composite indices of social capital and subjective well-being and estimates their relationship through hierarchical regression, with bootstrapped mediation and moderation tests. Social capital is a significant positive predictor of well-being ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and remains robust after controlling for daily income and other socio-economic factors. Income matters, but relational resources contribute to life satisfaction over and above material earnings. Mediation analysis shows that social capital also operates indirectly by reducing exposure to livelihood and environmental risk. These findings support the premise that well-being need not scale with consumption: in a low-income, high-risk informal economy, trust, networks, and reciprocity generate welfare that income alone does not. The case extends the relational-goods argument beyond its usual affluent context and suggests that reorienting economic systems toward social connection may sustain well-being across very different levels of material development. The results point to policy that protects and strengthens the relational infrastructure of informal urban economies as a low-footprint pathway to human flourishing.

SVETLANA NESTEROVA

RAM Academy, Italy

Nature-Aligned Psychology: Human–Nature Relationship as a Psychological Foundation for Well-Being and Sustainability

Contemporary approaches to sustainability increasingly recognize that environmental transformation cannot be achieved through technological and economic change alone. It also depends on human perception, values, behaviour, well-being, and the ways in which individuals understand their relationship with the natural world. This paper asks whether the human–nature relationship can be conceptualized not merely

as an external environmental factor, but as a constituent dimension of psychological organization relevant to both well-being and sustainable development.

The paper introduces Nature-Aligned Psychology, developed by Svetlana Nesterova, as an integrative theoretical framework that conceptualizes the human psyche as an open, dynamically organized system developing through continuous interaction with natural, social, cultural, and informational environments.

The study employs theoretical-methodological analysis and interdisciplinary synthesis, integrating systems thinking with research in environmental and ecological psychology, human–nature connectedness, developmental psychology, and well-being studies. The analysis distinguishes established empirical evidence concerning the psychological benefits and correlates of human–nature interaction from the novel theoretical propositions of Nature-Aligned Psychology.

The resulting framework proposes that sustainable well-being may depend not only on external living conditions or environmentally responsible behaviour, but also on the organization of perception, awareness, meaning-making, and the experienced relationship between the individual and the natural environment. From this perspective, human well-being and ecological sustainability need not be treated as competing objectives: both may be investigated as partially interconnected outcomes of more coherent person–environment relationships.

The paper concludes by formulating a research agenda for empirically testing these propositions, including relationships among nature connectedness, psychological coherence, well-being, perception, and sustainable behaviour.

KELSEY J. O'CONNOR¹ / MARTIJN BURGER² / FRANCESCO SARRACINO¹

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Trade is beneficial for well-being, but not in every country.

Economic theory posits international trade increases well-being by improving aggregate economic outcomes, but at the same time, critics warn that trade may cause more harm than good (e.g., by displacing local workers). We put this to a test using a comprehensive measure of subjective well-being (SWB) for 1.6 million people in 120 countries over the period 2005 to 2023 (from the Gallup World Poll) and find increasing trade openness overtime increases well-being but only in certain countries – those with high quality of government, low-income inequality, and high social expenditures. Moreover, the benefits of trade partially operate through unemployment – increasing trade lowers unemployment, which in turn increases well-being. The regression analyses exploit within-country variation over time and instrumental variable methods. In an era of international conflict and limited recipes to lastingly increase SWB, the results offer a positive narrative: greater international cooperation through trade can contribute to better lives in thriving economies. However, trade does not benefit everyone, everywhere – institutional conditions matter.

ELLI PAPASTERGIOU

School of Spatial Planning and Development, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

A novel comprehensive framework for studying the relationship between urban green spaces and subjective well-being: Empirical evaluation in the Urban Agglomeration of Thessaloniki

With urbanization accelerating across the globe, understanding how the quality of urban environments shapes residents' subjective well-being is a growing priority. Research heavily focuses on the role of urban greenery, indicating a positive association with all dimensions of subjective well-being. Nonetheless, the nuances of this relationship remain still quite unclear. Studies frequently rely only on large-scale objective data, treating green space as "abstractly green" without accounting for quality, actual use, and human behavior. As a result, prior research does not explicitly address the complex and multidimensional nature of this relationship, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of how urban greenery can be fully leveraged to enhance subjective well-being. To address this gap, the present study demonstrates the first empirical test of a novel, comprehensive framework that conceptualizes the relationship between urban green spaces and subjective well-being, mapping the involved constructs and proposing mechanisms to account for diverse processes, spatial contexts, and human agency. To investigate the extent to which the proposed mechanisms are supported in a real-world setting, the study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), utilizing primary and secondary data for the Urban Agglomeration of Thessaloniki, where the provision of urban greenery is scarce and fragmented. Overall, the PLS-SEM model strongly supports the framework's structural architecture, though the strength and consistency of the hypothesized pathways varied.

These empirical findings confirm the multidimensional nature of the UGS-SWB nexus and validate several of the hypothesized mechanisms. Ultimately, this study establishes the framework as a viable analytical tool that holds promise in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and enabling more intentional research designs in UGS-SWB research.

Consequently, the framework is expected to significantly inform decision-making across both research and practice contexts.

JHONER PERDOMO

Central University of Venezuela. Institute of Economic and Social Research.
Venezuela

Sustainable Wellbeing Index – Latam. Alternative indicator of progress beyond GDP.

The Sustainable Wellbeing Index, with the aim of going beyond GDP, is based on the consolidation of a new way of conceiving wellbeing; that is, a redefinition of the concept of wellbeing and progress. In this conception, it is first essential to merge the wellbeing of the present and future generations into one, to understand it as Sustainable Wellbeing. Second, measurement must make a methodological leap between results indicators, more associated with GDP and the short term, towards

capacity indicators, much more associated with the future, the long term, risk, and personal growth.

To consolidate this, Nussbaum's capabilities approach provides a special starting point. These 10 core capabilities correspond to the conditions and the basis for guaranteeing sustainable well-being over time, so identifying them allows us to steer the present towards the future. In the Sustainable Well-being Index test (which serves as an example), applied to Latin America (Latam), 116 indicators were selected, which are distributed in each of its 12 dimensions.

The Sustainable Wellbeing proposal has been developed since 2012 at the Central University of Venezuela. Nowadays, it is more common to find perspectives that seek to combine wellbeing and sustainability, for example: Monitoring inclusive and sustainable well-being in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek); New Metrics for Sustainable Prosperity: Options for GDP+3 (European Commission); Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing, the road forward (European Commission). We also find an important assessment of wellbeing and sustainability in the UN Pact for the Future 2024 and the Future Generations Declaration 2024, followed by the proposal for the System of National Accounts for 2025.

Aspects that will serve to contrast and highlight the importance of combining well-being and sustainability, as a guarantee of a better present and future for all.

NIKOS RIGAS / KELSEY J. O'CONNOR / FRANCESCO SARRACINO

STATEC Research, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (STATEC)

Analyzing countries ability to transform their resources into well-being using World Happiness Report data

In a resource-constrained world, improving well-being productivity that is a country's ability to convert resources into well-being could be key to sustainably improving well-being. Well-being productivity captures changes over time in both efficiency and technology in how well-being is achieved. We first estimate relative efficiency across 121 countries using data envelopment analysis (DEA) applied to data primarily from the Gallup World Poll for the period 2006-2023. The outcome variable and set of resources is based on the World Happiness Report framework to explain subjective well-being. Results indicate that countries reporting high subjective well-being tend to have high relative efficiency, but there are important exceptions. Indeed, countries where well-being is already high could achieve higher levels still without increasing their resources, while some low well-being countries are surprisingly efficient. Well-being productivity estimated based on DEA and Malmquist Productivity methods generally declined up until the COVID-19 Pandemic, after which it stabilized. However, the average conceals substantial heterogeneity. Productivity improved in Latin America by more than 5 percent over the period, while it declined by more than 10 percent in Central and South Asia. Exploratory regression analysis reveals three plausible variables can explain the evolution of well-being productivity over time unemployment, government health expenditures, and CO2 emissions. Well-being productivity is a useful tool to track country's progress in converting available resources into subjective well-being.

SAMIRA RUBAYET

University Of Chittagong, Chattogram, Bangladesh

Does Social Trust Buffer the Well-Being Cost of Climate Worry? A Moderated Regression Analysis of WVS Bangladesh.

The WISER Project calls into question the notion that doing something for the environment and for oneself are incompatible. However, most of the psychological evidence regarding the cost of climate concern ends with the documentation of the cost without asking an open question of what (if anything) outweighs it? This divide is strongest in climate vulnerable developing economies where the levels of climate risk exposure are the highest and social protection systems are typically the lowest. This study examines whether generalized social trust buffers the relationship between climate worry and life satisfaction - that is, whether social capital acts as a buffer against a new type of psychological stress.

To estimate the moderated regression, we use a nationally representative sample from the Bangladesh 2018 wave of the World Values Survey and predict life satisfaction .

Block 1 enters sex , age , and income . Block 2 introduces worry about climate . There is an inclusion of a generalized social trust in Block 3. Block 4 examines the interaction between trust and climate worry, testing whether climate worry well-being relationship is significantly moderated by trust.

We anticipate that life satisfaction will be negatively associated with climate worry in Block 2, which will be dampened by those who have more social trust in Block 4. If such a result is found, the main tenet of WISER is reinforced: communities can take up ecological pressure through a real social mechanism and thus investment in social resilience could be a low-cost policy option for policy makers throughout the Global South in order to adapt to climate change.

FRANCESCO SARRACINO - KEYNOTE SPEECH

STATEC Research, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (STATEC)

Our common future: Social capital and the well-being benefits of economic growth

In this presentation I provide updated evidence on the possibility of a virtuous cycle that, by prioritizing subjective well-being in decision making, would lead to socially and environmentally sustainable economies where individuals can thrive. I argue that economic growth benefits subjective well-being when it preserves public goods, such as social capital. Adopting a neo-humanist framework, I argue that social capital may simultaneously improve well-being, reduce defensive and status-oriented consumption, facilitate cooperation in addressing collective challenges, and support environmental sustainability. Finally, I review the key evidence linking social capital, sustainability, and economic performance, and provide new evidence on defensive consumption, introduce a new measure of performance – well-being productivity – and provide some examples of policies to promote well-being directly. The central implication is that public policy should prioritize well-being in decision making, rather than focusing on maximizing growth in the hope that its benefits will eventually trickle down onto people.

JESSICA SHERWOOD / DR. TADHG O'MAHONY / ANTONELLA DELLE FAVE

University College Dublin, Architecture Planning and Environmental Policy

From Income Growth to Alternative Flourishing: Characterizing Well-Being Across Life Domains as a Foundation for Sustainability Transformation

While conceptual, empirical and policy literatures recognize commonalities in what constitutes “living well” across cultures, there are no real visions of wellbeing for the twenty-first century. It remains abstract and ill-defined, revealing a critical gap in wellbeing debates. This paper develops a characterisation of wellbeing grounded in 11 life domains recurring across contemporary wellbeing research, drawing on objective-list approaches and Antonella Delle Fave et al.'s cross-cultural work on lay definitions of happiness to move beyond narrow hedonic metrics to capture the multidimensional, relational character of wellbeing. These domains are interpreted through wellbeing literature along with major global models including multidimensional measurement frameworks, capability and poverty-based approaches, and sustainability and relational perspectives. The analysis reveals a consistent pattern: wellbeing is fundamentally relational and ecologically embedded, yet dominant policy frameworks systematically narrow and individualise these dimensions. This conceptual framework paper demonstrates that sustainable wellbeing requires decoupling flourishing from material accumulations and reframing freedom within ecological bounds. This domain characterization will underpin using techniques from futures studies to explore visions of wellbeing for the future. The aim is not to settle normative disputes but to explore a deeper characterization of wellbeing that could support policy redesign for enabling futures incorporating high levels of wellbeing across cultures while enabling sustainability.

GIULIA SLATER / FRANCESCO SARRACINO

STATEC Research, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (STATEC)

The costs of social and environmental degradation in affluent economies

Individuals' attempts to defend from the deterioration of common goods, such as natural and social capital, are a source of defensive growth, that is new economic activity driven by private and public consumption in response to collective problems. We use a compensating differential approach to compute the value of social and environmental degradation. To do so, we conduct a regression analysis of life satisfaction on aggregate consumption levels and various social and environmental externalities (which we refer to as "bads"). Our findings indicate that the welfare equivalent consumption to defend against collective problems is substantial. One standard deviation increase in each bad is worth about \$21800 per capita, which corresponds to 65% of the observed yearly consumption per capita in our sample. Ceteris paribus, if bads could be avoided, consumption would be smaller, the economy would grow less, and individuals would be better-off. In so far as part of economic growth is defensive, only a portion of its expansion reflects true progress.

The Integrated Waste Management and Sustainable Landfilling

Waste management, being one of the most important aspects of urban development, is gaining importance among developing nations. Landfills, which were initiated for hazardous waste management and subsequently transformed into sanitary landfills, have been the most widely adapted practice for municipal solid waste management worldwide. The research were conducted over a 9 months period in 3 years on the operational strategy of the larger of the only two sanitary landfills and leachate treatment ponds in NIGERIA and sub-Sahara Africa. The purpose was to examine and evaluate the sanitary landfill and leachate stabilization ponds against the backdrop of technically sound and sustainable management options. However, the conventional design of landfills not only fails to fulfill the needs of waste management but also fails to target optimal resource recovery and energy generation. In the present study, modified design was proposed for partially engineered landfill system based on theoretical considerations based on integrated and sustainable principles that can deliver environmental, social and economic stability in the nation. Furthermore, it was found that the system with modified design could yield 2.157 million tons of landfill gas (2.145 million tons of coal equivalent) out of one year of solid waste. Further, this could recover resource valued at US\$16.49 million per year.

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Emotions at Work: The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Job Satisfaction

This paper analyzes the influence of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction within the organizational context. In a dynamic and demanding workplace environment, emotional skills play a vital role in promoting well-being, motivation, and professional efficiency, while mitigating organizational challenges.

The study adopts a quantitative approach. Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire distributed to workers in Portugal, using adapted scales to measure job satisfaction and four core dimensions of emotional intelligence: emotional self-control, understanding one's own emotions, understanding others' emotions, and empathy. Socio-demographic and professional indicators (gender, age, job seniority, and hierarchical position) were also included. The final sample comprised 171 valid responses, which were statistically analyzed.

The empirical findings reveal a robust, positive, and statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. Specifically, core competencies such as emotional regulation, empathy, and motivation directly enhance employees'

organizational engagement, sense of personal accomplishment, and emotional stability under workplace pressure.

The study concludes that investing in the development of emotional intelligence is a key strategic leverage for organizations. It effectively enhances individual well-being, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and maximizes collective performance. These findings offer valuable insights for human resource managers to design healthier and more humanized organizational cultures.

PAULINE THUKU

Karatina University

Assessment of Socio-Economic Predictors of Wellbeing among Marginalized Populations: A case of Persons Recovering from Substance Use Disorder in Kenya

Purpose: To assesses the social and economic factors that predict wellbeing among Persons Recovering from Substance Use Disorder (PReSUDs) in Kenya.

Research Question: How do social support and income levels influence wellbeing among Persons Recovering from Substance Use Disorder (PReSUDs) in Kenya.

Research Methodology: The study was cross-sectional and utilized a mixed-methods approach. The Central Kenya region was purposive selected as a study site due to high prevalence of substance use. Due to inadequate records of Persons Recovering from Substance Use Disorder, snowball sampling was used to identify potential respondents in the study region until saturation level was reached. Social support was measured using 'The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)', while Wellbeing was measured using the 'Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)', both of which have demonstrated good psychometric performance in terms of reliability, validity and sensitivity across cultures. A pilot study established good reliability ($\alpha=0.854$ for social support; $\alpha=0.861$ for wellbeing). Correlation and regression analysis established the socio-economic predictors of wellbeing, while thematic analysis of qualitative data provided deeper subjective insights for triangulation with quantitative findings.

Findings: The study established that age, marital status, education, family support and social support from special persons were significantly related to wellbeing. In this case, being married, more advanced in age, having higher levels of education, supportive family and adequate support from special persons predicted enhanced wellbeing. However, income level was not a significant predictor of wellbeing.

PAULINE THUKU

Karatina University

Determinants of Wellbeing and Productivity in Education Institutions: A case of Karatina University, Kenya

Purpose: To assess the factors that influence workplace wellbeing and productivity at Karatina university.

Research Question: How does wellbeing influence productivity at Karatina University, Kenya?

Research Methodology: All staff at Karatina University were targeted. Staff Wellbeing was measured using a slightly modified scale which combined the one developed by Zheng et al. (2015) and the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). Productivity Scale was

derived from selected aspects in university's vision, mission and strategic plan. Data was collected from respondents using structured questionnaires via corporate emails, and from key informants using interview guides. A pilot study established high reliability ($\alpha=0.96$) and acceptable validity (EFA values of >0.5) of the data collection tools. Quantitative data was analyzed using correlations and regression analysis. Qualitative data was organized thematically and triangulated with quantitative findings.

Findings: The study found personal safety, health and social support to be the three significant determinants of workplace wellbeing. Only social support significantly predicted staff productivity. Considering the clear link between social support, wellbeing and productivity, the study recommends the institutionalization of a holistic, data-driven wellbeing support ecosystem where staff feel healthy, safe and socially connected thus enhancing their wellbeing and productivity.

ARKAITZ USUBIAGA-LIAÑO

Basque Centre for Climate Change

SESI: A 'Beyond GDP' index of environmental sustainability

Despite frameworks such as Planetary Boundaries and the Sustainable Development Goals, countries still lack adequate metrics to monitor environmental sustainability across a range of environmental and resource issues at the national level. The Environmental Sustainability Gap (ESGAP) framework responds to this gap by providing a theoretical framework built on ecological economics concepts such as strong sustainability, (critical) natural capital, environmental functions, and science-based targets that can be used to formulate metrics of strong sustainability. The Strong Environmental Sustainability Index (SESI), developed as part of the ESGAP framework, provides a single score representing the extent to which science-based environmental sustainability targets are met across a wide range of topics. The gap between 100 and the index score shows the environmental sustainability gap. SESI uses 21 indicators grouped into four environmental function categories: source (provision of natural resources), sink (regulation of pollution), life support (maintenance of biodiversity and ecosystem health), and human health and welfare.

According to preliminary results, EU27 scores 40 points in SESI, suggesting that several functions of natural capital are threatened. Country scores range between 20 and 60, showing substantial geographical differences.

The general messages from SESI contrast with the overoptimistic view provided by weak sustainability metrics such as Comprehensive Wealth and Inclusive Wealth Index, which underplay widespread environmental degradation. The same holds for other environmental and sustainability indices, as shown through a novel method of pairwise index comparison. Thus, SESI and the ESGAP framework cover a space in sustainability science that none of the most widely known environmental (sustainability) indices covers. The main novelty is the use of science-based environmental standards to measure the absolute environmental sustainability performance of countries.

Overall, SESI contributes to 'Beyond GDP' efforts as a complement to GDP that places the environmental dimension of sustainability more prominently within the sustainable development narrative.

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Social Capital as a Buffer Against Adverse Life Events: Evidence from Australian Panel Data

A large literature has documented that adverse life circumstances reduce individual subjective well-being, while a growing body of research shows that social capital can exert positive effects. However, relatively few studies examine whether social capital can buffer the negative consequences of challenging life conditions. Using panel data from the 2002–2023 waves of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, we investigate the extent to which social capital—measured by multiple forms of social support (practical, emotional, and low loneliness) and active membership—mitigates the adverse effects of eight challenging life events across five life domains: health, bereavement, employment and economic conditions, intimate relationships, and security. Our results indicate that serious personal injury or illness to oneself is the life challenge most consistently buffered by social capital. Its negative association with life satisfaction is significantly mitigated by all forms of social support, as well as by active membership. In contrast, the detrimental effect of serious injury or illness affecting a close family member can be significantly buffered only by practical support. Within the employment and economic domain, the negative associations of major financial worsening and job loss with life satisfaction are significantly attenuated by practical support and reduced loneliness, while active membership additionally moderates the impact of financial deterioration. In the security domain, the adverse relationship between exposure to property crime and life satisfaction is significantly buffered by both emotional and practical support. By contrast, bereavement-related events and separation from a spouse or long-term partner—which are directly related to the loss of close relationships—are, at best, only marginally mitigated by a small subset of the social capital measures considered. Overall, among the dimensions of social capital examined, practical support emerges as the most effective buffer against the negative well-being consequences of challenging life circumstances.

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Choosing Green Energy Over Time: Solar Adoption, Household Satisfaction, and Dynamic Energy Decisions

Energy choices and 'green energy' initiatives uptake are an increasingly important topic in the sphere of energy policy. This study explores the conditions under which homeowners are willing to switch from conventional household energy to greener energy options, with particular focus on solar-based energy options and the satisfaction associated with these choices. We employ a repeated-period simulation game in which participants make energy decisions over seven sequential periods, approximating a seven-year household decision horizon. Unlike standard (static) discrete choice experiments, this method generates panel-like repeated observations for the same individual, allowing us to examine how preferences, switching behaviour, and post-choice satisfaction interact.

The experiment seeks to target homeowners (rather than students or renters), who face real residential energy decisions involving tariffs, investment costs, and long-term household constraints. Across the seven periods, participants encounter changing decision environments, including economic shocks and variations in standard and green energy tariffs. This affords the chance to test concepts of income and price elasticity, as well as simulate possible policy interventions. After each choice, they report their satisfaction with the selected option on a 1–10 scale. This structure allows the study to distinguish initial willingness to adopt green energy from the durability of that choice under changing economic conditions.

By combining a choice modeling framework with repeated within-subject observations and post-choice well-being measures, the study links green energy adoption to household welfare in a dynamic setting. The contribution is not only to estimate stated preferences for solar energy, but also to assess whether green energy choices remain satisfactory when households (and policy-makers) face uncertainty over time. In doing so, the paper speaks to a central question regarding well-being in a sustainable economy: whether environmental transitions can be designed in ways that are both acceptable and subjectively welfare-enhancing for households.