

Call for papers

Well-Being in the North and South: Explorations, Contradictions, Power, and Practices

Institut d'études politiques, Bordeaux

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22–25 October 2019

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Well-being is the subject of a vast number of works; this domain includes a huge contribution from psychology. It has emerged since the beginning of the 2000s as a key category of social and political thought, mainly in the fields of moral and political philosophy, development studies, and economics. It has become a standard currency in economic and political models of welfare and development, and it is used as a proxy for social justice and invoked to telescope the individual into the social.¹ However, it is noteworthy that in spite of the wide range of studies on this subject, the concept is still ambiguous. The aim of this pluridisciplinary symposium is to assemble experts from the social sciences and humanities in order to innovate by providing avenues and alternative routes² into the political, social, economic, cultural, and artistic imaginations of well-being, in a cross-cultural perspective.

Well-being is associated with satisfaction, happiness, and physical health;³ in the preamble of the constitution of WHO, health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity⁴. This text proposes that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health – i.e., complete physical mental and social well-being – is one of the fundamental rights of every human being, without distinction of race, religion, or political belief, or economic or social condition. This is supposed to be fundamental to the attainment of peace and security, and is dependent upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and states. As such, governments have a responsibility for the well-being of their peoples, which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health services and social measures.

¹ Alberto Corsín Jimenèz, ed., *Culture and Well-Being: Anthropological Approaches to Freedom and Political Ethics* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

² Corsín Jimenèz, *Culture and Well-Being: Anthropological Approaches to Freedom and Political Ethics*.

³ B. N. Colby, "Well-Being: A Theoretical Program," *American Anthropologist* 89, no. 4 (1987): 879-895

⁴ <http://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>



The WHO's definition of health as a complete state of well-being encompasses all the dimensions of being a subject and living in the world. It allows an analysis of individual well-being, as well the strategies societies, states, or government engage for the well-being of their population in terms of cultural, economic, political, and social policies. As such, the definition echoes some categories central to social theory: the distribution and entitlements of agencies, responsibilities of the states, and personhood issues. It highlights two common dimensions of well-being: objective and subjective.

The objective dimension includes social well-being and physical health. Physical health can sometimes be assessed using technologies able to scan the body and give a sense of objectivity and independence to the observer without causing pain or offending the patients' sense of modesty.^{5, 6} Social well-being, defined as the social arrangements that need to be in place for people to realise the various things they may value doing or being and the freedom to achieve or to make them realisable,⁷ can be extrapolated by analyses of urban, social, and economic policies, and human development indexes.

Subjective well-being, on the other hand, refers to a cognitive process of contentment, satisfaction, or happiness derived from optimal functioning. This is not an absolute concept; it is in an individual's perception of his or her own aspirations or values, which can change over time and can vary between cultures. Thus, it is not easy to grasp or measure. Cultural and individual differences in the perception of well-being, and social and behavioural contexts, further limit its measurement.

Existing instruments have been developed in Western societies and are not relevant in other contexts for other populations. Moreover, very few instruments address the multidimensional construct of well-being. Added to these issues, social well-being influences subjective well-being and vice versa; economic factors such as wealth or income, social factors such as a person's number of friends, and environmental factors such as one's neighbourhood and the healthfulness of the local environment^{8, 9} all have influence on well-being. Thus, even when deconstructed, the boundaries of the different dimensions of well-being blur. All these perspectives have led some authors to advance the theory that there can't be a global definition of well-being.^{10, 11}

⁵ A.-M. Moulin, *Le médecin du prince. Voyage à travers les cultures* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010).

⁶ A.-M. Moulin, *Islam et révolutions médicales. Le labyrinthe du corps* (Paris: IRD – Karthala, 2013)

⁷ A. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ J. F. Helliwell and R. D. Putnam, "The Science of Well-being: Integrating Neurobiology, Psychology and Social Science," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 359, no. 1449 (2004): 1435-1446.

⁹ I. Vlaev and A. Elliott, "Financial Well-Being Components," *Social Indicators Research* 118, no. 3 (2014): 1103-1123.

¹⁰ M.-J. Linton, P. Dieppe and A. Medina-Lara, "Review of 99 Self-Report Measures for Assessing Well-Being in Adults: Exploring Dimensions of Well-Being and Developments Over Time," *BMJ Open* 6, no. 7 (2016): e010641.

¹¹ J. A. Vaingankar, M. Subramaniam, Y. W. Lim, C. Sherbourne, N. Luo, G. Ryan, A. Phua, S. Shahwan, K. W. Kwok, J. Brown, M. Bradley, M. O. Edelen and S. A. Chong. "From Well-Being to Positive Mental Health: Conceptualization and Qualitative Development of an Instrument in Singapore." *Qual Life Res* 21, no. 10 (2012): 1785-1794.

However, despite its ambiguousness, well-being is more and more often used in law as an objective for society, the environment, education, urbanism, health, economic policy-making, gender relations, human rights, and empowerment;¹² well-being is used to describe a flourishing worker who benefits from a safe, supportive workplace, engages in satisfying work, and enjoys a fulfilling work life. It is perceived as a criterion of social cohesion and considered to be one way to address workforce functioning and productivity.¹³ Religious and spiritual groups place well-being at the centre of their practices. If religion takes charge of the torments of their members, often connected to diseases that were not properly diagnosed or for which the diagnosis given was unsatisfactory, once they are healed, these members and others seek something that goes beyond the restoration of health – the consolidation of a state of absence of disease or a state of well-being that they define in different ways.^{14, 15} Different practices are also advertised for those seeking well-being; these range from personal development books to soft medicine and massages, etc., all of which are connected to economic and, sometimes, political interests.

This tarnishing of the concept seems to be an obstacle to its appropriation as an object of social theory; it also seems to erase the fact that well-being is a value-laden concept.¹⁶ As such, the aim of this multidisciplinary symposium is to assemble experts from the social sciences and humanities in order to provide avenues and alternative routes¹⁷ into the political, social, economic, cultural, and artistic imagination of well-being, in a cross-cultural perspective. Accordingly, we welcome innovative approaches, grounded in strong empirical data, to exploring and addressing the following issues in the North and/or the South:

- Meanings and values associated with well-being, and cross-cultural limitations and contradictions;
- Approaches to well-being in art, biomedical sciences, social sciences, and humanities;
- Empirical studies of people's perceptions of well-being as a project and as an achievement;
- Landscape, urban planning, architecture, and well-being;
- Well-being, the state, and social justice;
- Discursive landscapes and their practical implications in terms of policies, power, and exclusion;
- Critical approaches to the politics and policies of well-being;
- Ethnographic studies of practices of well-being;

¹² Corsín Jimenèz, *Culture and Well-Being: Anthropological Approaches to Freedom and Political Ethics*.

¹³ P. A. Schulte, R. J. Guerin, A. Schill, A. Bhattacharya, T. Cunningham, S. Pandalai, D. Eggerth and C. Stephenson. "Considerations for Incorporating 'Well-Being' in Public Policy for Workers and Workplaces," *Am J Public Health* 105, no. 8(2015): 31-44.

¹⁴ F. Louveau, *Un prophétisme japonais en Afrique de l'Ouest. Anthropologie religieuse de Sukyo Mahikari (Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Sénégal, France)*. (Paris, Karthala, 2012). Préface de Georges Balandier et Postface de Jean-Pierre Dozon.

¹⁵ F. Louveau, "Sukyo Mahikari et la quête du bonheur : un mouvement religieux japonais en Afrique de l'Ouest et en France" *Cahier de l'Institut Religioscope* 10 (2013): http://religion.info/french/articles/article_632.shtml.

¹⁶ Alexandrova, A. (2012). "Well-Being as an Object of Science." *Philosophy of Science* 79(5): 678-668.

¹⁷ Corsín Jimenèz, *Culture and Well-Being: Anthropological Approaches to Freedom and Political Ethics*.

- Technologies and measuring the scale of well-being;
- Economy and the economics of well-being.

The symposium, organised by UMR 5115, Les Afriques dans le Monde (LAM), Gaston Berger University (Senegal) and Bordeaux University, will take place from 22–25 October, 2019, at the *Institut d'Études Politiques de Bordeaux*. Keynote lectures, oral presentations in parallel sessions, as well as an exhibition are scheduled during these three days.

We invite participants to submit their productions (pictures, designs, music, etc.). Selected productions will be exhibited throughout the symposium and commented on by the authors during the opening ceremony.

Abstracts of 300 words to be sent to wbeing.symposium2019@gmail.com

Abstract deadline: 15 December 2018

Registration fees:

- Ph.D. students: Free
- Others: 75€

Symposium Languages: English and French.

Bibliography

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