



## Wellbeing and health psychology: the difficulty to measure quality of life

*Bienestar y psicología de la salud: singularidades en la medición la Calidad de vida*

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### Abstract

We present a conceptual overview around Wellbeing (WB) and some reflections about the necessity and difficulty of measure it. We start by analyzing the WB concept from the different axis, components, and dimensions (that form part of it. Also, we include and present different theories and conceptions that have been evolving through history, from Hedonism and Eudaimonic to modern psychological WB, Self-Determination Theory, Objective list, or Desires Theories to Authentic Happiness.

Based on this revision, we are going to analyzing critically some of the most influential measure indicators of WB proposed during last two decades. Two are the main conclusions of our work: one is that indicators proposed lacks of integration of multiple WB dimensions that can offer a precise idea of the multidimensionality of the concept; second, an accurate, integrate and rigorous WB concept and measurement is an essential condition for effective and fair public policy.

**Keywords:** Quality of life; Health Psychology; Wellbeing; Happiness

### Resumen

*Se presenta una revisión conceptual del concepto de Bienestar haciendo énfasis en la necesidad y complejidad de medirse. Tras analizar el concepto desde distintos ejes, componentes y dimensiones que forman parte del mismo. También se incluyen las diferentes teorías y concepciones relacionadas con el Bienestar, desde el Hedonismo y Eudaimonico hasta las teorías más modernas de Bienestar Psicológico, teoría de la Auto-Determinación, Lista Objetiva, de Deseos, hasta la Auténtica Felicidad, que han estado evolucionando a lo largo del tiempo.*

*En base a esta revisión del Bienestar, se analizan algunos de los más recientes indicadores que lo monitorizan, reseñando que: se carece de indicadores capaces de integrar las múltiples dimensiones del concepto así como la ausencia de rigurosidad por cuanto a su multidisciplinariedad se refiere; y que se necesita una definición rigurosa e integrativa para facilitar su medida, entendida como elemento esencial para garantizar la efectividad en las políticas públicas.*

**Palabras clave:** Calidad de vida; Psicología de la Salud; Bienestar; Felicidad

## INTRODUCTION

The search for happiness is a human aspiration since antique. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean ethics* stated that there is a general agreement that every human considers happiness as a good to be pursued in life (Aristotle, 1999, NE, Book 1, 4). Since long time ago, men and women have been seeking WB and happiness; and they sought them at an individual and social level. Thousands of years of reflection and research about the topic offered multiple interpretations for understanding WB and happiness, and, in consequence, they give some orientations for how to achieve it. However, there are still many open questions about the WB definition, essential factors that influence it, and how to measure WB.

Happiness and WB are closed terms and related concepts that have been evolving along hundred years. Democritus initiated their study, and relevant philosophers have continued his work. Latterly, economists, sociologists, and psychiatrists also have increased interest in developing modern conceptions about WB, happiness, and fair society. Since the beginning, WB and happiness have presented two differentiated visions, one more spiritual and transcendental and other more related to material aspects. Today both insights are still alive because they are complementary: it is crucial to enhance the self, autonomy, and absence of pain, but also we must acknowledge the role of social context, the relationships with others, and the natural and cultural environment in the WB evaluation.

Moreover, WB has other political implications. It is a meaningful indicator for comparing the human development and quality of life of societies. Recently, in 2019, May 30th, New Zealand's government announced a broader range of WB indicators for measuring the progress of the country (New Zealand's wellbeing Outlook, 2019). This initiative shows the increasing relevance of happiness, wellbeing, and quality of life for public policies. Thus, WB has become a meaningful indicator for societies, and there is a clear tendency to increase its understanding and measurement so that we can intervene and improve it both on an individual and social level.

Our objective in this article is to review and summarize main researches carried on about the WB concept to identify the essential traits of this concept, as a first step for analyzing indicators for its measurement. Because only considering accurately the concept and its essential features would it be possible to evaluate and propose initiatives with an effective impact on society.

Regarding WB, there are numerous definitions within and between disciplines (psychology, economics, philosophy, sociology, ...), and many of papers addressing to happiness, flourishing, income satisfaction, health, autonomy, and capability (de Chavez, Backett-Milburn, Parry & Platt, 2005; Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003; Jackson & Marks, 1999; Kahneman, 2003; Kasser, 2002, Ryff, 2014, 2018; Sen, 1993). For this review, we have considered and accepted one of the most used definitions of WB, where wellbeing is understood as a multidimensional concept that involves many perspectives, sense, and affections (Huppert & So, 2009; Vittersø, Søholt, Hetland, Thoresen & Røysamb, 2010). It is an active and dynamic process that gives individuals a sense of how their lives are going on through the interaction between their circumstances, environments, activities, and psychological resources. Most of psychology literature makes a difference between “subjective well-being” as the evaluation of life satisfaction in a global retrospective and “experienced well-being” based on real-time affect measurements (Kapteyn, Lee, Tassot, Vonkova & Zamarro, 2015).

Furthermore, we must note that WB is not an isolated concept. WB refers the majority to a personal evaluation, and depending on the mood and experience of the interviewed person, “Subjective Well-Being” (SWB) is a closely related term. SWB emphasizes the subjectivity on the evaluation people do and how they, based on their own experience, value how happy or satisfied with the life they are overall. Edward Diener, one of the most prestigious researchers in this field, defined SWB as: “a phenomenon that includes people's emotional response, levels of satisfaction in various domains and global judgments of life satisfaction” (Diener & Lucas, 1999, p. 277). Thus, SWB is not just the absence of mental illness; in fact, it includes “flourishing” (Keyes, 2005). “Flourishing is a multi-

component construct that represents the state of complete mental health” (Kottke, Stiefel and Pronk, 2016, p. 3). As Felicia Huppert and Timothy So, from the Well-being Institute stated: “Flourishing is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively” (Huppert & So, 2009, p. 1)

Life Satisfaction and Happiness meaning and definitions are also closed to WB (Argyle, 2013; Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels & Conway, 2009; Pavot & Diener, 2009; Seligman, 2012, 2017; Veenhoven, 2013; Welsch, 2006). Here, we define “Life satisfaction” as the informed and cognitive judgment of one’s life in which the criteria of evaluation are up to the person. It relates to experiencing good feelings and making favorable judgments about how life is going (Pavot & Diener, 1993). While, we consider “*happiness*” as a mental or emotional state of WB, which can be defined by, among others, positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy (Seligman, 2004). Indeed, like life satisfaction is close to happiness, and as happiness is a widely presumed component of life satisfaction, often both are used as a synonym (Abdallah & Mahony, 2012).

Once we have presented the most accepted definitions of well-being, subjective well-being, flourishing, and happiness, we are going to explain the methodology we used to carry on this work that will examine and present different axis (objective and subjective ones), components (affective and cognitive one), dimensions (economic, philosophy, psychology and sociology ones) that form part of WB.

A last, we will emphasize the importance of measurement and monitor WB and introduce various initiatives governments and institutions have carried on this way.

## METHODOLOGY

The aim of our paper is to review and summarize main researches carried on about the WB concept to identify the essential traits of this concept as a first step for proposing indicators for its measurement. To achieve this objective we develop a research methodology focused on literature research in Google scholar and University electronic library. In this research we used eight keywords: “well-being”, “well-being”, “subjective wellbeing”,

“objective wellbeing”, “happiness”, “life satisfaction”, “affective wellbeing” and “cognitive wellbeing”. We did several different searches, including combinations of different keywords and research with each keyword individually.

Google Scholar procedure searches defined words on title and whole-text available. It is a crucial point because, sometimes, it is accessible to the full body of the paper; however, in other cases, only abstracts or resumes are available. Thus, results include papers that present defined terms on the title and whole text of available documents. Even though we only considered the literature on the English language, on that first search, we did not limit any time frame or geographical criteria.

We found millions of results, including scientific papers, books, book chapters, and reports that contain those terms. Each term displayed a large number of results: wellbeing – 1,29 million; well-being – 4,32 million; subjective wellbeing – 243.000; objective wellbeing – 420.000; happiness – 2,97 million; life-satisfaction – 1,06 million; affective wellbeing – 107.000; and cognitive wellbeing – 307.000. Results were presented attending the relevance criteria of Google Scholar, that although it is not clear and ultimately identified that order procedure, we know, among others, that algorithm takes into consideration: the number of different versions of each paper has, and its number of citations, its year of publication, and related articles.

With these criteria, we examined the first 150 displayed results for each keyword. Our first selection was identified the overlapping articles; the second was to determine the articles that were too general and too specific for our research objective. After this first selection process we have 350 references left (mainly papers and eventually any book chapter) that included or referred to those terms by the general overview we were examining. After reading those abstracts, we carried on a thoughtful review, analyzing dominant ideas and concepts from the most cited articles and authors that evaluate each topic. Criteria for select literature were relevance (the most cited works, not being any threshold to accept or dismiss them, it depends on each term and results), accuracy (the closer ones to the WB concept we study in the present article, that are global framework, evolution,

theories, and no specific studies to contrast hypothesis), and the most critical conceptual (those that tend to clarify and discuss the ideas more consistent and understanding). During that process, we rejected around 230 works attending those criteria, and maintain the references that we listed in the literature section.

During our revision of the selected articles, we found some common wellbeing theories (eudaimonic, hedonisms, flourishing...) and principal authors who were cited repeatedly. We added around 15 "classical works"; authors and theories that were quoted in many articles from different perspectives.

Keeping in main that the objective of our paper is to identify to essential traits of wellbeing theories as the first step for measure it, we classified the literature attending the whole-text information into different inductive categories: 1) the evolutionary perspective (those that review how happiness or wellbeing concepts have been evolving); 2) The dimension it addresses related to their components (objective or subjective axes); 3) economic perspective (those that include the economic aspect of the concept); 4) psychological dimension (those that refer to the individual but enhancing the internal vision or oneself dimension); 5) sociological dimension (those that relate to the individual but enhancing the outside vision or interaction with others dimension); and finally 6) empirical analysis (those that are focused on the measurement of the concept) to organize information and ideas.

With all data and information, we wrote an initial critical draft focusing on more relevant issues of the concept of evolution and characteristic. That draft was discussed by the authors, and we add some additional information and searches that completed the work.

### **WELL-BEING THEORIES**

As we stated above, WB has enormous relevance and impact for individuals and governments, and that is the reason why the study of this concept is not a new tendency. Histor-

ically, the concepts of SWB, life satisfaction, and happiness as the goal of human existence have been studied by philosophers from ancient times, many influential writers, psychologists, whether on religious, ethical, or political issues, providing lots of works (David, Boniwell & Ayers, 2013).

From the Ancient Greek (Democritus, Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus) through Middle Ages (St. Thomas Aquinas) and Illustration (Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Adam Smith, Kant, Bentham, Mill); to Contemporary (Freud, Frankl) and Modern Ages (Easterlin, Sen, Griffin, Kahneman, Inglehart, John Hellwell, Putnam, Seligman, Diener Ryff, Jahoda, and Keyes) the question about happiness and how to live full life has been a central point for many authors.

We make an overview presentation of the main wellbeing theories in Table 1. We would like to show the seven most relevant wellbeing theories, who are the central authors, and what are the main characteristics of Hedonism, Eudaimonics, Psychological WB, Self Determination Theory, Desires Theories, Objective List Theory, and Authentic Happiness.

Once examined how WB has been observed over time, and different theories and considerations principal authors made, we would remark the chronological evolution of WB and happiness concepts. Moving from the more abstract metaphysical conceptions to the most concrete psychological and analytical approach (looking for the elements that make up happiness).

Furthermore, regarding its evolution, it is evident that the concept has evolved, although not in a linear way throughout history. However, the study of happiness has had a growing interest in the twentieth century. We also can remark how the contributions and classic visions of happiness (based on Aristotle) continue influencing. Besides, mention also the latest theories of WB are trying to identify and measure the essential components of the concept of happiness.

Thus, next, we will deepen into the WB dimensions and essentials characteristics.

Theory /Author	Contribution	Relation with other researchers and Comments
Hedonism (Plato initiates Epicurus developed)	<p>For hedonists, happiness is merely the sum of many pleasurable moments (feeling good and comfort, global life satisfaction), versus displeasure, including all judgments about the good/bad elements of life.</p> <p>Hedonists argue happy people smile a lot, are ebullient, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed; and that their pleasures are intense and many, while their pains are few and far.</p>	<p>It dates from ancient Greek (Plato, Epicurus) -<i>Etymology pleasure (hedone)</i></p> <p>Hedonists tend to emphasize more positive affect, less negative affect, and higher life satisfaction, maximizing feelings of pleasure over pain (Diener &amp; Lucas, 1999; Kahneman, Diener &amp; Schwarz, 1999).</p> <p>By this theory, it has been defined the “hedonic treadmill” (Kahneman et al. 1999), also known as “hedonic adaptation” (Brickman, 1971/2013; Frederick &amp; Loewenstein, 1999). It represents evidence people adapt very quickly to external changes, both good and bad, and to achieve the same level of improvement in happiness or satisfaction on a subsequent occasion, the external change (e.g., the magnitude of the pay rise) must be greater than before. The hedonic treadmill is discouraging for instance in a political context because when policymakers try to improve social conditions of citizens after a crisis, they need to invest more significant resources in achieving the same level of satisfaction they had before).</p>
Eudaemonic (Aristotle)	<p>For eudaemonics, happiness relates to both the presence of pleasure and absence of pain, but furthermore refers to the human desire for overall fulfillment covering such them as self. It is related to meaningful pursuits and virtuous life.</p>	<p>Dated from ancient Greek too (Aristotle) - eudaemonics -<i>Etymology "well-being" (eu-esto) and "feeling good" (eu-thumie)-</i></p> <p>Eudaimonic WB reflects positive functioning psychological WB, and personal expressiveness. It considers the need for self-actualization in Abraham Maslow's (1968) need hierarchy.</p> <p>A difference with hedonism theory, the eudaimonic approach has better implications for policy, because, rather than trying to maximize happiness or satisfaction, which may be transient, the policy should aim to maximize opportunities for people to utilize their full potential which is likely to lead to sustainable happiness and contentment.</p> <p>Comparing hedonism and eudaimonic theories of WB and happiness conceptions, we realized although they are distinct, they maintain intriguing relations that facilitate people to optimize their WB independently, which approaches follow (Keyes, Shmotkin &amp; Ryff, 2002). Happiness in hedonism (short term) is likely to influence the level of life satisfaction in the eudaimonic sense, while the term eudaimonia refers to WB as distinct from happiness per se. Moreover, eudaimonic theories maintain that not all desires produce pleasure and would yield WB when achieved because some outcomes are not suitable for people and would not promote wellness. Thus, from the eudaimonic perspective, subjective happiness cannot be equated with WB (Ryan &amp; Deci, 2001).</p>
Psychological Well-being (PWB) (Ryff)	<p>PWB, as distinct from WB, presents a multidimensional approach to the measurement of six different aspects of human actualization: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness</p>	<p>This theory was developed by Carol Ryff (Ryff &amp; Keyes, 1995).</p> <p>PWB determines to contribute to an individual's psychological WB, contentment, and happiness. It consists of reaching a state of balance affected by both challenging and rewarding life events (Dodge, Daly, Huyton &amp; Sanders, 2012).</p>
Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci)	<p>SDT remarks three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.</p> <p>Need fulfillment is viewed as a fundamental aim of human life that delineates many of the meanings and purposes underlying human actions (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2010).</p>	<p>SDT is a theory of motivation developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (Ryan &amp; Deci, 2000).</p> <p>SDT theorizes that fulfillment of these needs is essential for psychological growth (e.g., intrinsic motivation), integrity (e.g., internalization and assimilation of cultural practices), and WB (e.g., life satisfaction and psychological health), as well as the experiences of vitality (Ryan &amp; Frederick, 1997) and self-congruence (Sheldon &amp; Elliot, 1999).</p> <p>SDT represents a broad context for improving the knowledge of human motivation and personality, defining its intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources. It focuses on how social and cultural factors facilitate people's sense of wish and initiative, in addition to their WB and the quality of their performance. Conditions supporting the individual's basic psychological needs defined (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are argued to foster the most high-quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity.</p>
Desire theories (Griffin)	<p>It considers pleasure and pain are inside heads of people. As it is hard to measure, assumes WB consists in the satisfaction of desires or the content of wishes and choices of their possessors.</p>	<p>This theory was developed by James Griffin (Griffin, 1986).</p> <p>Desire Theories hold that fulfillment of a desire contributes to one's happiness regardless of the amount of pleasure (or displeasure). That made possible the ranking of preferences, the development of 'utility functions' for individuals, and methods for assessing the value of preference-satisfaction. According to it, a person's WB is the overall level of desire-satisfaction in their life. This theory tries to objectivate hedonism one; by the way, it replaces pleasure that is more abstract to a fulfillment of a specific desire that is more concrete.</p>

Objective List Theories (Nussbaum)	It identifies a list of capabilities that constitute WB. Some examples or pursuits listed are career accomplishments, friendship, freedom from disease and pain, material comforts, civic spirit, beauty, education, love, knowledge, and a good conscience (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).	This theory was developed by Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). Nussbaum worked closely with Sen, who never offered a closed or specific list that could apply to everybody. Sen argues that everyone should find its list. Nussbaum offered an objective list filled by exogenous and endogenous factors, related to real capabilities for doing things. By this theory, once achieved everything is listed, people should be happy (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).
Authentic Happiness (Seligman)	It holds that there are three distinct kinds of happiness: The Pleasant Life (pleasures), The Good Life (engagement), and the Meaningful Life. The first two are subjective, while the third one is at least partly objective and relies on belonging to and serving what is broader and more worthwhile than just the self's pleasures and desires (Seligman, 2002).	This theory was developed by Martin Seligman (Seligman, 2002). Authentic Happiness mixes and synthesizes several theories: The Pleasant Life regarding happiness in Hedonism's sense, the Good Life about happiness in Desire's sense, and the Meaningful Life about happiness in the Objective List's sense

**Table 1.** Main theories on WB research

### Well-Being dimensions

A common understanding of WB includes a dual dimension: the objective and subjective evaluations of human life (Lane, 2000).

- The *objective axis* assesses observable characteristics such as economic development (employment opportunities, income and wealth, the availability of health care), or living conditions (standard of housing), access to education, freedom, and justice, among others. All these characteristics are external and independent of the person's will. They are objectively valuable within a defined scale.
- The *subjective axis* relates to a person's experience of the quality of his/her life and emotional responses (affects, emotions), satisfaction with different aspects of life (relationships with partners, family relations, leisure, hobbies, job, among others) and global satisfaction. Less empirical, subjective axis also includes positive-negative feelings (positive day-to-day feelings such as happiness and enjoyment of life, and lack of negative emotions such as anxiety and depression); satisfying life and vitality (self-esteem, optimism and resilience); and feelings of autonomy and positive functioning (which covers autonomy, competence, engagement, and meaning and purpose).

By this way, *within the subjective axis*, there are two components: the affective and cognitive ones, whose relationship is still being studied (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999; Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996; Schimmack, 2008). Metaphorically, cognitive refers to the rational 'from-the-head' aspects of a person's response, while affective refers to the emotional 'from-the-heart' components.

- *Affective well-being (AWB)* is the component of WB that balances pleasure and displeasure in people's lives, and it could be referred to as short-term or more recent events. It relates to the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions and mood, including the presence or lack of feelings of happiness, anxiety, depression, or stress and satisfaction with life as a whole (Luhmann, Lucas, Eid & Diener, 2013; Schimmack, Schupp & Wagner, 2008). AWB is the most critical component of psychological WB (Van Horn, Schaufeli & Taris, 2001; Warr, 1990) because it refers to how people assess and judge their life satisfaction; including the relationship of what the person desires out of life in comparison to what they have achieved (Andrews & Robinson, 1991). Moreover, it is the basis of many other constructs, such as work-family conflict, job satisfaction, occupational success, and income (Hofmann, Luhmann, Fisher, Vohs

& Baumeister, 2014; Ilies, Aw & Pluut, 2015). However, it is not an easily comparable concept, due to its weight varies across individuals and cultures (Eid & Larsen, 2008; Suh, Diener, Oishi & Triandis, 1998).

- *Cognitive well-being (CWB)* represents judgments of one's life or reflect one's relative dominance of positive versus negative affect people make about their lives, and it is influenced by intra and inter-individual comparisons (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman et al., 1999; Schwarz & Strack, 1999; Veenhoven, 2013). It refers to domain-specific (e.g., job satisfaction, marital status) and global life evaluation people do, with a more long-term conception, based on a comparison of a subjectively constructed ideal with their actual life (Luhmann, Hawkley, Eid & Cacioppo, 2012). CWB includes several concepts ranging from shifting moods to global judgments of life satisfaction, from depression to euphoria.

AWB could be equated with the more emotional and CWB with the more rational perception of WB. Indeed, AWB and CWB are intrinsically related, but separable constructs that differ in their temporal stability, and that can generate different wellbeing evaluations (e.g., Eid & Diener, 2004; Luhmann et al., 2013). It means, for some events, the effects on AWB and CWB are in the same direc-

tion but differed in their strength. For instance, the impact from circumstances such as income, job status, or recent life events affect both AWB and CWB but tend to have stronger effects on CWB (Luhmann et al., 2012; 2013; Schimmack, 2008). Other life events such as bereavement, have first adverse effects on both AWB and CWB, but they are stronger for CWB, while childbirth may lead to increase AWB and the time frame do not moderate the associations (Luhmann et al., 2013).

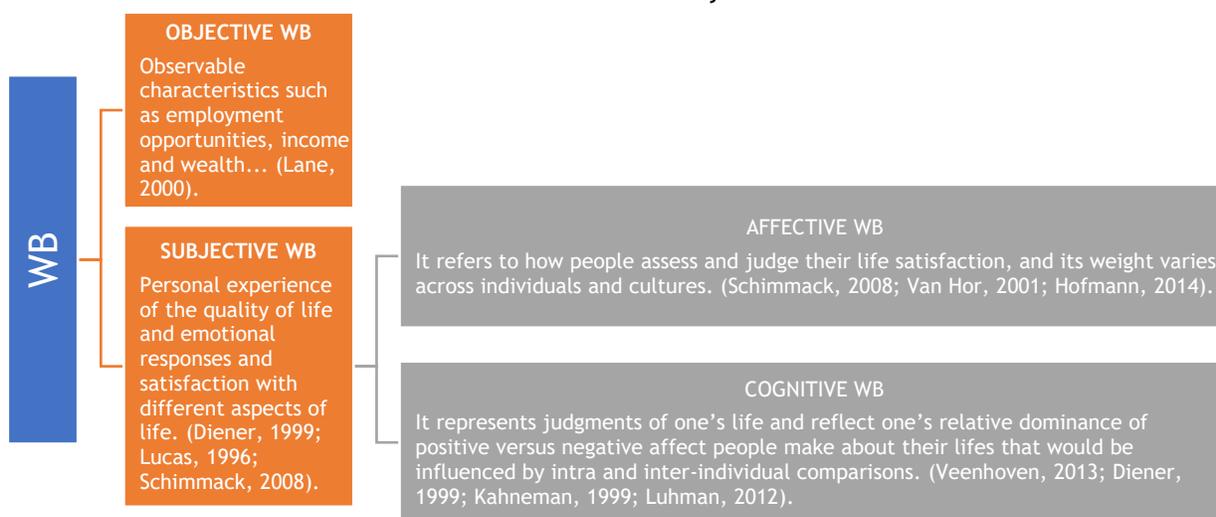
By contrast, correlations to personality characteristics such as emotional stability and extraversion are typically stronger for AWB (Jovanovic, 2011; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto & Ahadi, 2002; Schimmack et al., 2008; Steel, Schmidt & Shultz, 2008).

Figure 1 summarizes previous concepts.

Additionally, WB has been studied from different perspectives (philosophy, psychology, economy, and sociology), in the following epigraphs, we are going to present the most relevant conclusions from each different approach.

#### *Economical dimension*

Economic dimension refers to observable characteristics such as employment opportunities, income, wealth, and the availability of health care. It also applies to the standard of housing, access to education an individual or society has.



**Figure 1.** Different components of WB

It offers essential outcomes and data for government and institutions because it is associated with numerous health-, job-, family-, and economically- related benefits (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). Over this dimension, WB causes better health and longevity and leads to higher income, better job performance, more creativity, and productivity (Diener & Chan, 2011).

By this dimension, perhaps we could assert that “more is better” and conclude richer countries have higher levels of wellbeing than developing countries (Diener, Tay & Oishi, 2013). However, the relationship between the increase of GDP per capita and experienced WB has broken down. Moreover, this positive relationship between economic growth and self-reported WB is small or insignificant beyond a modest level of affluence (Bartolini & Bilancini, 2010; Easterlin, 2013; Layard, 2011). Nevertheless, we cannot ignore other authors (Sacks, Stevenson & Wolfers, 2012; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008) defend that wellbeing and income are not related.

Economic dimension also refers to and influences on the marginal utility of income concept. It means the value of an increase in consumption *ex-ante* turns out to be less than the expected *ex-post*. The reason for that is that individuals adapt to the new standard of living because the values of others also improve correspondingly (Easterlin, 2005; 2006; Easterlin, McVey, Switek, Sawangfa & Zweig, 2010).

Additionally, from this economic dimension, we could refer to increasing levels of wellbeing that may improve productivity, satisfaction, and creativity at work (Ali et al., 2013). Therefore, not surprisingly, policymakers and society have been increasingly interested in promoting happiness (Bok, 2010).

At last, linking to different components explained before, we could consider the economic dimension offers essential information majority objectively or closed to objective WB component.

#### *Psychological dimension*

The psychological perspectives that study wellbeing focus on individual self-assessment. It refers to personality, sense, emotions, goal-directed behavior, social cognition, lifespan development, and cross-cultural diversity,

among other dimensions (Kahneman et al. 1999; Pervin & John, 2008; Shmotkin, 2005; Strack, Argyle & Schwarz, 1991). It includes both positive and negative moods and emotions associated with daily life and global satisfaction.

This dimension is centered on studying the characteristics of happy people, because the ability to be satisfied with life represents, to many scientists, a fundamental criterion of adaptation and mental health (Wessman & Ricks, 1966). Happy people are likely to function better in life than less content one (Diener et al., 2013), and moreover, they live longer, are typically healthier, more socially engaged, more productive, and tend to have higher incomes (Diener et al., 1999; Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002; Diener & Chan, 2011; Judge, Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Additionally, happiness brings greater self-control, more pro-social behaviors, and higher-quality social relationships (De Neve, Diener, Tay & Xuereb, 2013). Although extreme happiness – understood as excessive levels of positive emotions, every time and everywhere, within an affective conception – could be detrimental to one’s income, education, and political participation (Diener et al., 2013).

Other experimental studies carried on over this psychology dimension confirm that exists a virtuous circle; positive emotions lead to positive cognitions, pro-social behaviors, and increased motivation and cognitive capability. Positive cognitions, actions, motivation, and skills, in turn, spur positive emotions (Forgas, 2012; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Moreover, although it is evidenced material consumption ultimately cannot satisfy these deep-seated social needs, people who have strong materialistic values have lower WB than those who are less materialistic (Inglehart, 2018; Kasser, 2002). Therefore, successful interventions encourage intrinsic/self-transcendent values, increase personal security feeling, or block materialistic messages from the environment have been carried on (Kasser, 2016).

#### *Sociological dimension*

The sociological dimension also focusses on the individual, but contrasting the psycholog-

ical one that enhances intern vision, this one looks outside and refers to the way an individual interacts with others.

The sociological dimension is related to social cognition, cross-cultural diversity, trust, family relations, intimacy, or social connection. In other words, it analyses relationships and behaviors people have when interacting with others, confidence in other people, companionship, appreciation with whom confidential matters can be discussed and belonging. Moreover, it examines how networks and links can be utilized to contribute to positive outcomes for the individual, group, and community alike.

The crucial role of this dimension in evaluating WB may be linked to an evolutionary perspective that englobes how people interact and socialize. People have never been used to live alone- from survival and reproduction issues at prehistory, to consumer society or human need for a sense of belonging in the later period.

This dimension sometimes is termed social capital in literature. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined “social capital”: “*networks together with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups*” (OECD, 2001, p. 41, italics in original).

Social capital is generally considered to be the characteristics of social relationships rather than individuals ones (Coleman, 1988), and it is positively related to WB (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995, 2000). In this way, active participation in social activities and involvement in one’s community is associated with high levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Putnam, 2001; Helliwell, 2003; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Subsequently, the social dimension influences WB, and because of its dynamic nature, it creates a virtuous circle. High levels of WB bring people more capacity to respond to adverse circumstances, innovate, and fruitfully engage with other people and the world around them. However, this is not a stable process; some compelling events (wars, child-births, bereavement) can change people’s emotional set points (Diener, Lucas & Scollon, 2009).

Furthermore, this dimension varies beyond nations. Different communities have different grades of tolerance, openness, helpful. Thus WB may differ across cultures (Diener & Tov, 2007; Diener, Diener & Diener, 2009; Diener et al., 2013; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Moreover, religion, other beliefs that enhance more sacrifice or more enjoyment (Diener & Chan, 2011), including other extraordinary events occurred within the community as wars, natural disasters, among others (Kahneman et al., 1999; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis & Diener, 2004) that also affect and influence people WB perception.

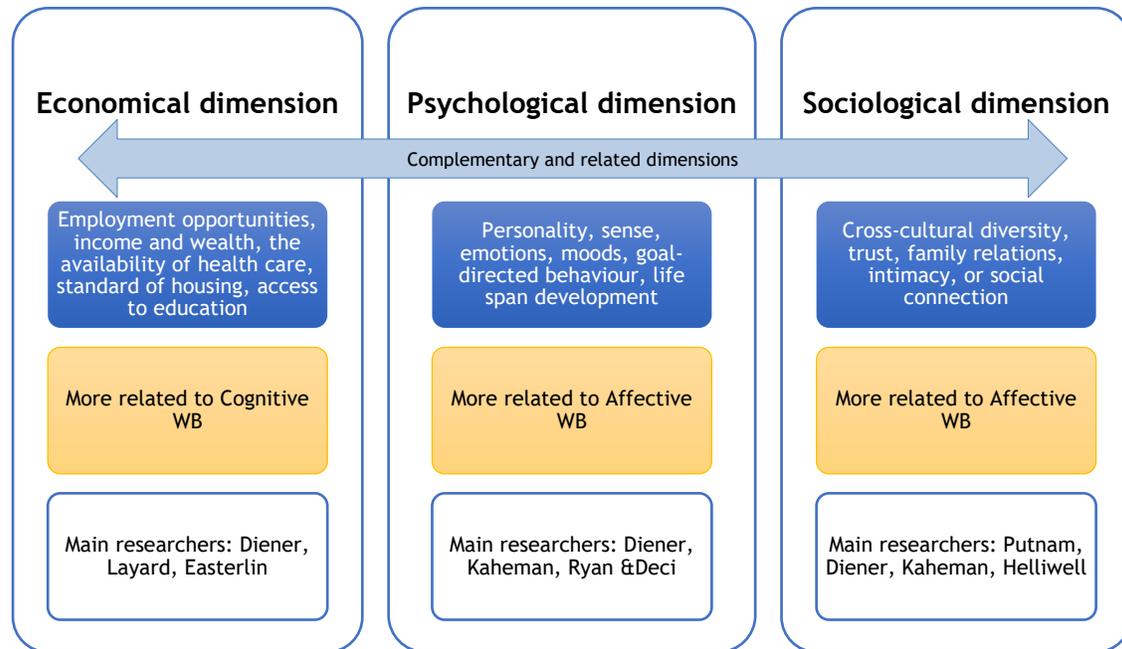
At last, linking to different components explained before, we could consider the sociological dimension offers essential information majority subjectively or closed to affective WB component.

Once examined those three dimensions explained before (economic, psychological, and sociological ones), we can conclude they are not isolated. They are complementary between them. For instance, the sociological perspective could be linked to the economic dimension through material consumption concerning symbolic identity values (Jackson & Marks, 1999). Figure 2 offers a complete view and resume of different concepts explained before.

### The Measurement of Wellbeing

After the general overview of the main wellbeing theories and the identification of essential traits of different approaches to WB, now we would like to pay attention to the criteria and indicators to measure it.

WB measurement is a relevant task because it is a basis for designing public policies that aim to increase de individual and social wellbeing. It is a meaningful outcome to the public not only because it is related to personal life satisfaction and mental health, but also because it include pro-social behavior and social capital (Diener et al., 2002; Diener et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Judge et al., 2001). Furthermore, WB gives direct status on people’s lives, and it fills the gap between standard macroeconomic data (as GPD- Gross Domestic Product) and perception of people’s welfare.



**Figure 2.** Different dimensions of WB

Thus, governments around the world have increasingly considered the need to look beyond economic indicators and discuss measures for enhancing the WB of their citizens. However, as it has been present in the previous paragraphs, WB is a complex concept that includes many dimensions and perspectives and where the individual and subjective self-assessment is the primary source of evaluation. Moreover, the use of both objective and subjective measures, when available, are desirable for public policy purposes (Diener, Lucas, Helliwell, Helliwell & Schimmack, 2009). Furthermore, it has been documented the importance of understanding the concept, with multidimensional components, correctly, because, considering a sole dimension, could provide partial results and conclusions that lead to ineffective or unjust public policies.

Therefore, it is essential to create a set of internationally comparable 'well-being accounts' that complement existing socioeconomic indicators of success, and that can be shared by different cultures and traditions (Abdallah & Marks, 2014). Thereby provide higher quality data is critical to deepening on the theoretical understanding of WB constructs and how they relate among; to understand what contributes to people's WB and

how it varies across countries, and to assess the impact of different social and political policies on people's personal and social WB. Wellbeing could be measured with self-reports (Eid & Larsen, 2008) and objective measures (e.g., household income, unemployment levels, neighborhood crime). Thus, a combination of objective and subjective factors is essential for assessing WB.

In 2005 after thinking much about it, the International Institute of Management in the United States launched a Gross National Well-being (GNW). It is a fact, they were inspired by the Gross National Happiness (GNH) introduced by the former King of Bhutan in 1972, but even so, it was a challenge. GNW that still exists today was launched as socioeconomic development and measurement framework that evaluates seven dimensions: economic, environmental, physical, mental, work, social, and political, with no religious measurement components. It was carried on via survey and included subjective results complemented with objective data.

In January 2009, in Britain, the New Economics Foundation (nef) launched the National Accounts of Well-Being (NAWB). NAWB is essential to compare and contrast the effects of

distinct political and social policies and circumstances on the levels of WB experienced by citizens. These (predominantly subjective) WB indicators would complement existing objective measures such as socioeconomic indicators, which currently provide the most common method.

However, they are not isolated records, several initiatives were also launched into other different communities: Thailand released Green and Happiness Index (GHI) in 2007; and in 2011, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launches "Better Life Index" (BLI) that establish and measure WB as an indicator of progress and development. In the same year, General Assembly of United Nations signs the resolution 65/309, titled "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development," and as well as Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network (CIW Network) has been created. In 2012, South Korea launched Happiness Index citing the GNH Index framework, and both, the Government of Goa (India) and the city of Seattle in Washington, launched their happiness index initiative using the GNH Index as a model for measuring happiness. In 2013, Singapore focused on building up its "social reserves," a concept that appears to have parallels to GNH; and in 2014, Dubai launched its Localized Happiness Index to measure the public's contentment and satisfaction with different government services, and United Kingdom launched its own WB and happiness statistics.

Hence, we found lots of indexes, indicators, and measures by the public or institutional side and lots of information and separate data about it. Unfortunately, they are non-comparable because each country and institution tend to look more inside than outside, and there did not exist any coordination or leadership. That makes challenging to have a comprehensive, rigorous and global wellbeing index. Figure 3 displays different existing in-

dexes we found over time – lots of information and separate data, seldom comparable.

However, not only institutions or governments have been interested in measure WB by the academic side. Also, many scientists were and are still interested in studying WB, itself, its measurement (it could), and its causes – with empirical methods. This data will permit understand better the factors that contribute to WB and provide a metric for evaluating the real impact on people of the societal context and social policies.

When researchers make cross-national comparisons, the most common approach is using a single measure of happiness or life satisfaction as a sole indicator (Abdallah & Mahony, 2012). However, such summary measures only provide a limited perspective on whether people declare experiencing life satisfaction or state of happiness they report. For instance, when the employment perspective has been evaluated from the WB perspective, questions are focused on measuring job satisfaction, satisfaction with work-life balance, the emotional experience of work, and assessment of work conditions. Moreover, in different circumstances, for some comparisons, global WB indicators show little or no difference; this may obscure significant differences in selected life domains, which has important implications for policy (Easterlin, 2004).

## CONCLUSIONS

It is a fact that there is an increasing interest for governments and societies to improve WB. That is because WB is related to positive outcomes at the global and individual levels (better life-expectancy, lower public costs, higher productivity, among others...). Here we have presented a complete overview of WB theories and approaches, analyzing its composition, dimensions, and conditions. We consider

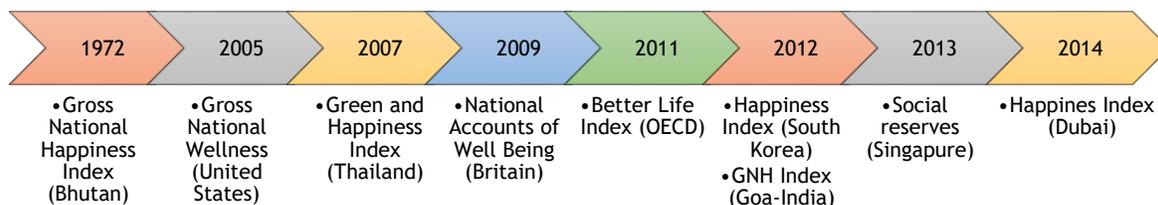


Figure 3. Measurement Happiness indexes

the knowledge of evolutionary aspects, and related theories are *a condition sine qua non* for understanding the intricacies of the concept. In this way, we have presented principal authors and theories around it and how they have been evolving over time, from a more philosophical and metaphysical perspective to the most recent and concrete psychological and analytical approach. We have presented the three essential dimensions that influence WB: economic, psychological, and sociological; and how they are interrelated and complementary because WB is a multidisciplinary concept that involves lots of senses and perspectives. Knowledge of components and dimensions is compulsory to analyze the concept correctly and monitor its evolution. Furthermore, there are some objective aspects related to WB; however, subjectivity and mood of the person who responds to the individual evaluation play an essential role in its measurement. So, all aspects should be taken into consideration when WB is being evaluated; otherwise results could provide wrong conclusions.

We have presented several indexes and measurement initiatives existing all over the world. Such variety inevitably raises enormous questions and data that latterly can neither be shared or compared utterly. Some of them offer a good overview of WB, but a single, catch-all measure might also hide interesting details that a more multidimensional approach can reveal. Further research should focus intensely on comparability and complementarities among data or results when it is possible. Governments and researchers around the world are focused on WB, and merging criteria and parameters are needed. Societies are evolving, and for instance, the digital revolution, among others, are changing or model of life, however, we cannot determine if it improves or declines WB. Thus, it is crucial to identify and monitor how different life events and life evolution influence our WB, and if the case, if modern progress brings up a better or worse WB state.

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