



Hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing.

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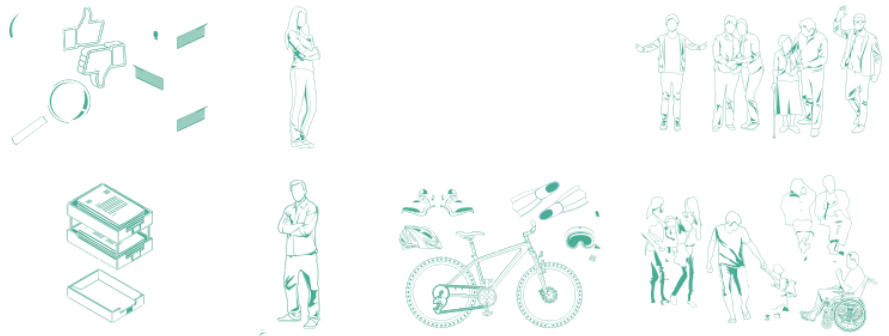
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DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that goes beyond individual feelings of happiness. The three contributions below use ESS data to explore the wide variety of different elements that combine to make up both individual and societal wellbeing. Each contribution demonstrates the importance of taking a multidimensional perspective, showing how different aspects of wellbeing may come to the fore in different countries and be evaluated differently among different social groups.

DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING



HAPPY AND FLOURISHING? HEDONIC AND EUDEMONIC WELLBEING

WELLBEING: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

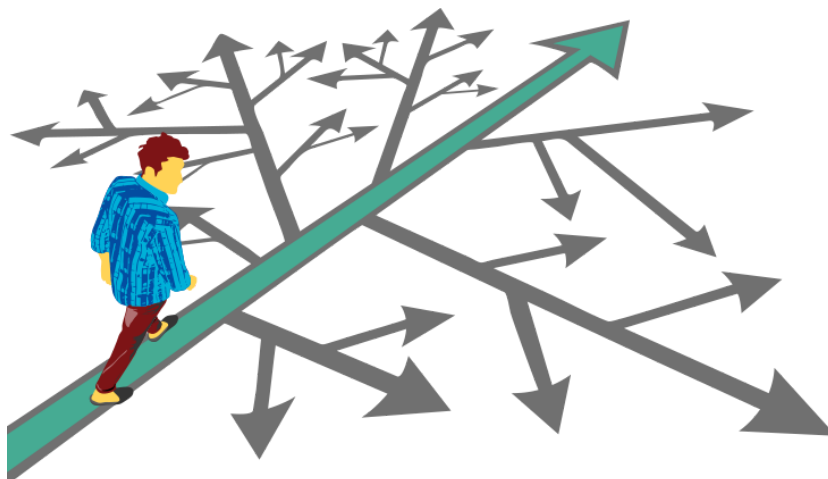
WHAT IS A DECENT SOCIETY? EUROPEANS' SUBJECTIVE EVALUATIONS

HAPPY AND FLOURISHING? HEDONIC AND EUDEMONIC WELLBEING

Hedonism (happiness) and eudemonia (flourishing) are both important components of individual wellbeing. The European Social Survey (ESS) shows how these related but distinct dimensions of wellbeing vary across Europe.

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Introduction

Questions regarding what exactly wellbeing consists of can be traced back to the philosophical debates in ancient Greece (Waterman, 1993). The hedonic school of thought, exemplified by Epicurus, believed a good life to be filled with happiness, and little pain. Aristotle dismissed this narrow conception, and instead proposed eudemonia, or flourishing, living in accordance with your true self, as a way to lead a good life (Keyes and Annas, 2009).

These distinct views on the nature of wellbeing have survived the ages, and still exist in contemporary research on wellbeing. Through economics, Bentham's hedonic calculus, or the idea that the utility of everything can be calculated, has found its way into contemporary policy debates with subjective wellbeing as the ultimate outcome (Dolan and Peasgood, 2008). Hedonic conceptions of wellbeing, such as life satisfaction and happiness, are now well-known ways of investigating wellbeing. Eudemonic wellbeing is closer to current psychological constructs, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which names self-development and autonomy as higher order needs, which emerge after more basic needs such as food, shelter and security are fulfilled (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Another conceptualisation of what eudemonic wellbeing entails can be found in the capabilities approach (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993), which states that wellbeing is about the potential to choose as well as the actual opportunities taken. So while hedonic wellbeing is about feelings and the evaluation of one's situation, eudemonic wellbeing is more about being in control and having a choice. The existence of different forms of wellbeing that are not reducible to one basic form has been recently discussed in academic literature on wellbeing (e.g. Clark and Senik, 2011; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King, 2008; Vanhoutte, 2014).

Although the philosophical conceptions of wellbeing may come from different angles, there is a lot to be gained from thinking about them alongside one another. Large scale surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS) which measure different aspects of wellbeing allow us to do this. We can empirically evaluate the extent to which there is in fact a distinction between hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as experienced by individuals in society today. We can also look at whether and how levels of these two types of wellbeing vary across countries and between different sub-groups of the population within a country. Having reliable data that can distinguish between different conceptions of wellbeing in this way is beneficial to policymakers seeking to understand and address differences in wellbeing within society. Cross-national data such as the ESS are particularly useful in providing a comparative European perspective for policy.

Combining the theoretical insights discussed above with data from the rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' fielded in Round 6 (2012/2013) of the ESS, this contribution aims to construct a multidimensional measure of wellbeing that reflects both eudemonic and hedonic aspects. It will go on to investigate differences in these two forms of wellbeing across 29 European countries and between men and women.

Using the ESS to investigate different forms of wellbeing

Round 3 and Round 6 of the ESS fielded a module of questions on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' capturing both hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing using multiple items. This allows researchers, analysts and policymakers to distinguish between happiness and flourishing (Huppert et al., 2009; Huppert and So, 2013). Here, we use the latest data from Round 6 of the ESS that was fielded in 29 countries.¹¹ We focus on seven items which together capture aspects of both hedonic and eudemonic personal wellbeing. These are described in Figure 1. The module also contains a number of other measures of wellbeing including measures of affective wellbeing, psychological resources such as optimism and social wellbeing – some of which are discussed in other contributions on this site – but these are beyond the scope of this particular analysis.

▼ FIGURE 1 : ESS Round 6 (2012/2013) questions included in the analysis

Since wellbeing is a latent, unobserved characteristic, measured indirectly through multiple items, we use factor analysis to construct the measures of wellbeing to be used in analysis. As we explicitly want to test if we can meaningfully speak about hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as different forms of wellbeing, we use a technique known as confirmatory factor analysis (see Brown, 2006) to test if our data fit better into our assumed two-dimensional model instead of a one-dimensional model.

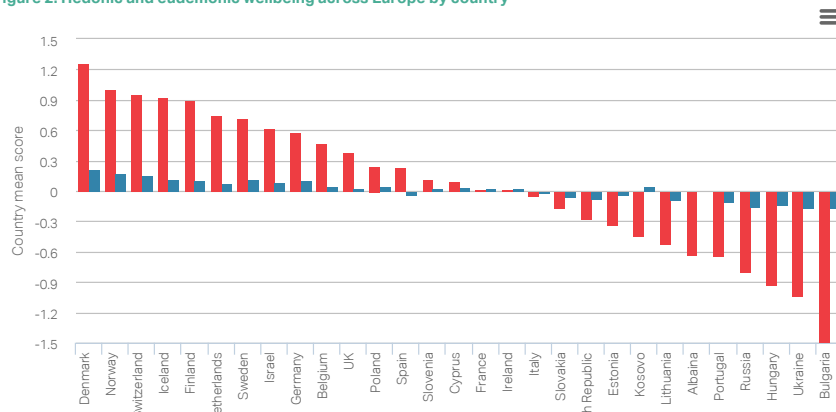
Findings

Firstly we test to see if the data confirm the dual nature of wellbeing implied by theory, i.e. whether we can meaningfully distinguish between two different dimensions of wellbeing. We do this by comparing the fit of a two-factor model (which assumes that the data are measuring two distinct concepts) vs. a one-factor model (which assumes that all our measures of wellbeing are capturing the same underlying theoretical concept). Comparing how well the two models fit the data suggests a very good fit between our theoretical model and the ESS Round 6 data.¹² In our two-factor model, the items referring to happiness and satisfaction load on (i.e. relate to) a hedonic dimension, while all other items load on a eudemonic dimension. The correlation between both factors is high ($\rho=0.65$) – meaning that people with a good score in terms of hedonic wellbeing also tend to score high on eudemonic wellbeing – but the two concepts are distinct from one another (see also e.g. Clark and Senik, 2011).

Having demonstrated that there is an important distinction between hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing we next investigate differences in individuals' levels of both forms of wellbeing across countries. Figure 2 depicts the country mean for both types of wellbeing. The factor scores used to measure the two wellbeing dimensions are calculated over all respondents in ESS Round 6, with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one; some countries have lower than average wellbeing compared to others (indicated by negative scores) whilst others have higher than average wellbeing (indicated by positive scores). It is clear from Figure 2 that wellbeing, especially hedonic wellbeing, does vary across countries. Hedonic wellbeing tends to be higher than average in Scandinavia and lower than average in parts of southern and eastern Europe. Second, although as shown above there is a distinction between the two types of wellbeing, in nearly all countries both forms of wellbeing seem to go in the same direction of the mean at the country level; countries that do well in terms of hedonic wellbeing also do well on eudemonic wellbeing.

COUNTRIES THAT DO WELL IN TERMS OF HEDONIC WELLBEING ALSO DO WELL ON EUDEMONIC WELLBEING

Figure 2: Hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing across Europe by country



■ Hedonic wellbeing ■ Eudemonic wellbeing

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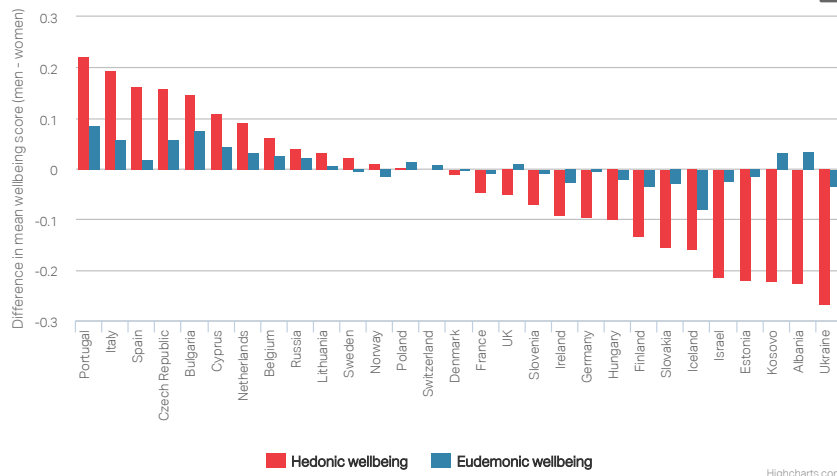
Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/2013). Design weights applied.

It is important to keep in mind that these country level findings hide a significant amount of within-country variation. Analysis shows that that only 15% of the variation in hedonic and 7% of the variation in eudemonic wellbeing can be explained by the country with the remainder being explained at the individual level.¹⁴ Looking at variation in wellbeing by a range of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age, education, employment, marital status etc.) both within and between countries can provide further insights into the distribution of wellbeing across populations. Here we examine if there is a gender gap in hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing and whether the size of this gap varies across countries.

Figure 3 shows the gender gap in hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing across countries. A positive value indicates that men score higher on wellbeing, while a negative value indicates that on average women have a higher wellbeing score than men. There is a statistically significant gender gap in wellbeing in five countries (Czech Republic, Portugal, Estonia, Israel and Ukraine) for hedonic wellbeing and in two countries (Portugal and Iceland) for eudemonic wellbeing. The gender differences are, however, relatively small in most countries. Interestingly, the gender gap goes in different directions for different countries. While men in the Czech Republic and Portugal have significantly higher hedonic wellbeing than women, hedonic wellbeing is higher for women in Estonia, Israel and Ukraine. Eudemonic wellbeing is higher for men in Portugal, but higher for women in Iceland. Interpreting the gender gap in wellbeing at the country level is not straightforward: gendered expectations are culturally sensitive, and at the same time there are large differences across countries in the gender distribution of resources that produce wellbeing. For example, having a job might be a more important determinant of wellbeing for men than women in one country, while it might carry similar importance for both sexes in another. Further analysis of the gender gap in different types of wellbeing can be found in the "Drivers of wellbeing" section of this site.

COUNTRY LEVEL FINDINGS HIDE A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF WITHIN-COUNTRY VARIATION

Figure 3: Gender gap in hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/2013). Design weights applied.

Conclusion

Analysis of data from Round 6 of the ESS reveals that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are two distinct concepts reflecting different theoretical aspects of subjective wellbeing. These two distinct concepts are, however, highly correlated and cross-national comparison shows that most countries reporting high hedonic wellbeing also report high levels of eudemonic wellbeing. There is more variation at the country level in hedonic wellbeing than in eudemonic wellbeing, but the large majority of variation in both forms of wellbeing is at the individual level. Our analysis, for example, demonstrates that there are gender differences in both types of wellbeing in a number of countries. Analysing how individual socio-demographic characteristics are related to different levels of hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing can provide useful insights for policymakers seeking to understand and address differences in wellbeing within society.

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WELLBEING: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

The wide range of wellbeing measures included in Round 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS) provides a nuanced picture of the different dimensions of personal and social wellbeing. The data allow for a detailed consideration of how experiences of wellbeing vary both across countries and between different subgroups of the population within countries.

Introduction

Improving our overall experience of life, i.e. improving our wellbeing, is an aim that will appeal to most people – especially when wellbeing is understood to refer to something more than happiness alone. Many would argue that government has a duty to prioritise creating the societal conditions which enable citizens to achieve high wellbeing (Diener and Seligman, 2004). If individuals and policymakers are interested in understanding what those conditions

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