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The Emergence of Wellbeing in Late Modern Capitalism: Theory, Research and Policy Responses

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Abstract

This article outlines a historical and theoretical framework that traces the historical and discursive emergence of the concept of wellbeing as a consequence of the decline of traditional capitalism and modernity and the subsequent shift to a late modern capitalist economy. On the structural level, this shift precipitates a new type of consumption that not only characterises the productive and physical capacity of the economy and products, but cascades into the social construction of multiple discursive, symbolic and cultural products, images, and forms of information and meanings, from wellbeing emerges. This process has consequences for individuals in late modernity as they navigate through a world where life-worlds, security and relationships are disrupted and require new forms of revising and responding to change. Consequently, wellbeing further establishes a means of responding and adapting to, for instance, changing lives, circumstances, security, and happiness. The emergence of wellbeing as a significant component of social policy discourses has also precipitated debate around the types of research and policy responses relevant to the study of wellbeing. As a result, the article also prescribes an epistemology founded upon a 'cultural' and 'relational' approach that can effectively underpin research and social policies relevant to wellbeing in late modern capitalism.

Keywords: wellbeing, capitalism, late modernity, social policy, epistemology and research

1. Introduction

The concept of wellbeing has assumed global significance with governments developing policy approaches that utilise it as a strategic priority, an outcomes tool, and a new and distinct paradigm in policy discourse (La Placa *et al.,* 2013). For example, the UK government has made a commitment to measure 'individual' and 'psychological' wellbeing, using indicators such as 'satisfaction', 'anxiety' and 'happiness'. It has encouraged local communities to devise health and wellbeing interventions, aligned to local needs in the form of the establishment of local Health and Wellbeing Boards, as a major reform within the UK health and social care sector. Health and Wellbeing Boards will conjoin commissioning of local National Health Services (NHS), social care and health improvement strategies through consultation and partnership with local communities (Dhesi, 2014). France and Bhutan have also incorporated wellbeing into national policy to measure the extent to which it enhances national wellbeing and satisfaction, beyond traditional measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (McNaught, 2011). The use of concepts and discourses such as wellbeing, happiness, and quality of life in wider social policy discourse has pre-empted debates around, for example, the effectiveness of its use in public policies. Debates about wellbeing or happiness were initially precipitated within the philosophy of ethics, particularly morality and how one could use it to judge how 'satisfying' or 'conformist' one's life was in terms of decisions made. Sociologists later developed this by approaching it from an individual perspective, whereby individuals subjectively constructed interpretations around wellness or wellbeing, often with regard to the effects of wider social structures (La Placa *et al.,* 2013). Contemporary debates around wellbeing have progressed to produce an array of literature and policy discourse (McNaught, 2011) that often problematises discourses of wellbeing since initial references were made to it by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1946 as 'health is not the mere absence of diseases but a state of wellbeing' (WHO, 1946).

These debates have focused on, for instance, the complex and contingent nature and domains of wellbeing, its measurement and articulation in policy discourses, through to epistemological literature around, for example, how one knows one is measuring happiness or wellbeing and the psychological, social and cultural milieus in which it is constructed (Diener *et al.,* 2009; Dodge *et al.,* 2012; Larkin, 2013; Hone, Jarden and Schofield, 2014; Knight *et al.,* 2014). As such, the concept of wellbeing is nebulous and contested. It requires analyses within both local and broader contexts as well as how individuals and communities construe and apply it to individual decisions and choices and/or broader policy formulation. This article aims to complement the current development of research and literature into wellbeing by tracing more broadly what we perceive as the historical and discursive emergence of the concept of wellbeing in policy discourse as a late modern invention. It argues that wellbeing has emerged as a consequence of the decline of traditional capitalism and modernity and the subsequent shift to a late modern capitalist economy. It then proceeds to suggest responses to and implications for research and social policy development in wellbeing.

The Emergence of Wellbeing as a Late Modern Category and New Policy Phenomenon

The emergence of wellbeing as a central concept in public policy, particularly in the Western World, around, for instance, health, housing, life-span, work, leisure, quality of life, and environmental sustainability is linked to an economic and discursive process, namely the shift from traditional capitalism to late capitalism and modernity. This process has witnessed the concept of wellbeing 'breaking' in to policy discourse as a discreet idea in its own right and as a new public policy concern (La Placa and Knight, 2014a; La Placa and Knight, 2014b) as opposed to traditional ones around, for instance welfare and economic growth. It has emerged as a late Twentieth Century/early Twenty First Century discourse as a result of changes in the structures of western capitalism and the qualitative organisation of processes of consumption, cultures and discourses that assume new routes to constructing and actualising, for example, the life-course, happiness, and security, and emerging policies and research as responses.

Traditional Modern Capitalism and Economism

From the early Twentieth Century onwards, wellbeing, if articulated at all, was used primarily within the context of 'traditional' or 'rational' modernity, which constructed ideas and categories around rational and institutionalised knowledge This knowledge and information was geared around progress towards rationally and universally organised practices which enabled technical mastery of and control of nature and the human condition (Toulmin, 1990; Scott, 2006). The process encouraged imposition of rational and expert based knowledge and practices, particularly, in encouraging and sustaining economic systems in the form of, for example, free market economics. This was organised around a set of technical rules and systems, linking production and exchange of products, and therefore, profit, to rational and predictable relationships with, for instance, investment choices and collective purchasing power. Institutionalised and rationalised systems of knowledge and exchange were also organised around impersonal and calculative arrangements, to maximise exchange, and attain a rational basis for embedding an economic system of exchange, based around factories and corporate enterprises. Wellbeing was perceived as linked to, for instance, economic growth, materialism, and enhanced levels of income and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its effects on national prosperity (Kavanagh, 1990; Bauman, 1991). It was an economic and collective concept that focused upon materialism and how the economy could consistently enhance material prosperity. Economic development and enhancement of living standards were perceived as the core ethical concept in ensuring happiness and advancement of national wellbeing. Keynesian demand management, full employment, and economic inclusion were the paramount precepts in ensuring a higher standard of living and therefore enhanced wellbeing for all economic groups (Kavanagh, 1990).

In a rationalised economic system, relations between the owners of the means of production and workers were mediated through the labour market, in which labour power was purchased by employers and freely sold by employees (Scott, 2006). As a result, economic and material identities and practices became entwined with labour mobility and employees' ability to re-locate for work and develop specialised technical skills and ability to compete within the labour market, itself, a modern commodity (Scott, 2006; Wagner, 2012). Individual wellbeing, if articulated at all, was narrowly articulated and commodified through, for example, ability to requisition enhanced pay and material conditions through acquisition of higher levels of skills and technical knowledge and capacities. Collective wellbeing was more significant in traditional capitalism because industrialism and factory-based enterprise capitalism accorded economic activity a collective organisation. For example, collectively organised work assumed the foundation for solidarity through, for instance, trade unions, concentrated in ever increasing larger factories, offices and corporate enterprises. Furthermore, collective economic activity gave rise to the traditionally modern social, economic and technological experience as contrasted with pre-modernity, which is typically organised around agriculture and nature.

Linked to this was the belief that expertise and technically organised knowledge (Kavanagh, 1990; Skocpol and Finegold, 1982) could not only be applied to economic growth and material wellbeing, but that state intervention could

manage both capitalist modes of production and social policy to enhance growth and consequently collective wellbeing. This was often accompanied by the belief that society could be organised around collective social structures, universal health and welfare policies and bureaucracies, particularly through logical positivist modes of inquiry, knowledge and policy (Ritzer and Goodman, 2007) The social world was viewed as empirical and the discovery of invariant societal laws and relations would lead the way to the progressive and universal organisation of society and the economy. For example, healthcare and welfare services were effectively provided through regulative and all-encompassing services that proceeded to embrace individuals and families and assume increased control over personal, social, cultural and family life 'from the cradle to the grave' (Kavanagh, 1990) (often as part of social democratic government strategy which aimed at ironing out inequalities through state intervention in the economy). Once this was in progress, it was believed that this would be reflected in enhanced individual and collective material satisfaction and wellbeing. The shift to positivism and biomedicine in health sciences enabled limited articulation of wellbeing as a category, but was perceived as effectively captured and improved through the lens of universal empiricism and narrow biomedical concepts of, for example, pain and physiology (La Placa *et al.,* 2013). Social and health sciences sought to understand the totality of human action and relations, restricting it to empirical observation and universal explanations that would advance the population's happiness and wellbeing through regulative medicine and specialised and expert health and welfare. Both the physical and social worlds could be controlled for the betterment and enhanced satisfaction of society. Wellbeing (if acknowledged at all) was not conceptualised as a specific framework for policy within its own right in traditional capitalism.

Similarly, Habermas (1981) described the 'colonisation' of cultures, discourses, practices and life-worlds by traditional capitalism and modernity; the process through which the latter become moulded through and regulated by collective practices and commodification. The potential ability of individuals and communities to shape their life-worlds and cultural spaces evaporated as they become integrated into rationalised systems and procedures. Collective and technically organised systems of economic growth and welfare tended to organise concepts of wellbeing, happiness and quality of life, around unitary discourses and practices, linked to economism and collective provision. Cultural judgements and meanings became homogenised and reified (Berger, 1969). Rational calculation and procedure organise subjectivity, life-worlds, cultures and definitions of satisfaction and quality of life into collective mentalities and definitional frameworks (Carrier, 1994; La Placa and Knight, 2014a). As Riesman et al. (2001) noted the emergence of structured procedures of rational capitalism and free markets also accords development of structures of secularism and individual success, whereby individuals critically examined their actions and performance with reference to the definitions and anticipated outcomes of rational capitalism and the individual's economic and cultural location within these structures. Aesthetic discourses and cultural practices were homogenised by this approach, produced through a mass media and production orientated society. As Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) and Gitlin (1991) argued, the space and procedures to construct differentiated and alternative life-worlds, based around subjectivity and individuals' needs and identities is curtailed by the requirements of modern productive capitalism and mass commodified articulations of, for instance, national happiness and wellbeing (La Placa and Knight, 2014a).

2. The Shift to Late Capitalism and Modernity

The contemporary emergence of wellbeing, we believe, is linked to structural changes within the economy and the development of late capitalism and the late modern experience of individuals, which occurs simultaneously. Structural changes in capitalism precipitate what Giddens (1990, 1991; Joerges *et al.*, 2005) refers to as the emergence of 'late modernity'. In late modernity, individuals construct new and complex relationships between the self and society and in response to changed cultural and economic conditions. Individuals become more reflexive as they consistently reconstruct their lives through re-examination of new forms of knowledge, information and ways of living life. The abatement of one dimensional thought and standardised modes of social consciousness recede and the late modern self and experience emerge (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944; Habermas, 1973; Marcuse, 1964; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Lash, 1993; Meiksins Wood, 1996, 1999). In traditional capitalism and modernity, consumption is organised around national and collective production, occupational employment and standard consumption of material products. However, the shift to late modern capitalism precipitates a major structural change in capitalism in the form of a new type of consumption. This consumption not only characterises the productive and physical capacity of the economy, but cascades into the social construction of discursive and symbolic cultural products, images and meanings through new technologies and information (Baudrillard 1968, 1970, 1972) (and that often challenges and overtakes the bureaucratic and rationalised procedures of traditional capitalism). Consumption is overhauled to include physical consumption which co-exists with a consumer culture of ever increasing and malleable signs, symbols and discourses and less governed by traditional structured thought and rationalisation. It enables individuals to challenge and alter the structures of traditional modernity through 'autonomy of expression' (Giddens 1990, 1991; Castells, 1996). New methods, signs and discourses are produced, which have their origins, less in traditional productive capitalism, but a new consumerism, in forms of

knowledge, images, information and changing relationships, characteristic of late modernity (Giddens, 1990, 1991). As Jameson (1984) asserts, knowledge and meaning becomes freer and less singular, untied to any clear material reality.

The new consumption is constructed by and represented through, for instance, new forms of media representations, entertainment, information technologies discourse and information, represented in culture and aesthetics (Jameson, 1991; Harvey, 1991; Kaya, 2004). This is in stark contrast to the narrow collective and economic structures that governed individuals' lives previously. As Brinkmann (2008) argues, the new consumerism relies upon the concept of 'networks' whereby experience is constructed through relational networks formed by individuals and groups; and which navigate the signs, symbols, and discourses of the consumptive economy. A new 'social imaginary' is developed around a plethora of shared practices and identities, contingent upon relations and interactions, rather than the structured processes of rationalisation of industrial capitalism. There is a shift to an emphasis upon 'experience' of social life and the qualitative and contextual networks, interactions, and policy discourses, which enable experiences to emerge. Structural changes feed into the individual experiences of change. The tendency of late capitalism towards the dissolution of traditional economic and unitary external referents encourages its replacement by the construction of meaning as self-referential. Meaning is individually chosen from a plethora of modes of cultural discourses, thoughts, and potential for action, which can be used to enhance individual experiences and activities and negotiate the life-course, but which can also generate degrees of insecurity, risk and anxiety (Kemshall, 2002). Giddens (1990, 1991) refers to the 'radical reflexivity' that emerges as late capitalism and modernity evolves. This invokes the opportunities afforded to individuals as they consistently re-examine all aspects of their lives and relations, responding to new ways of constructing the self, and negotiating new relations and circumstances outside of tradition bound contexts.

Traditional and rationalised forms of thought erode and individuals become more aware of a plethora of information, choices and identities in meeting needs (Brubaker, 1984; Puttfarken, 2000). The self and modes of thought are less embedded in traditional and institutional groups or class bound relationships that define behaviour or pre-determine needs. Rather through the 'reflexive project' of the self, individuals are freer to define and determine their own needs, identities and lifestyles. They are no longer reliant upon traditional strategies to enhance happiness, stability and security. As Brinkmann (2008) asserts, for example, this is partly reflected in the emergence of discourses of psychology which embody the fluidity and reflexivity of consumerism. In traditional capitalism, psychology emphasised behaviourism and psycho-analyses and focused upon an authentic unchanging inner-self and identity. Consumerism, however, transformed psychology into a humanistic and reflexive orientated practice which focused upon the social and contextual construction of happiness, quality of life, and wellbeing. Emphasis is upon how such categories are experienced around fluid identities and means of attaining wellbeing in terms of emotions, relationships and desire, co-created by consumer capitalism. The emergence of the discourse of wellbeing in social policy and research   is intrinsic to this process as structural changes alter how individuals live their lives and construct new modes of thought, relationships and strategies, to manage, for example, insecurity and the risk that change precipitates. The decline of traditional ways of doing things and the emergence of new issues around wellbeing, security, happiness and quality of life, further enables the emergence of new ways of constructing and managing social and economic change (La Placa and Knight, 2014a).

As a result, policy makers and practitioners also have more opportunities to engage with new ideas and discourses around wellbeing and policy responses, specific to the late modern experience. For example, Mehmet and Stacey (2014) have focused upon the need to consider the importance of 'green space' to community wellbeing within the planning of built environments. They argue that modern urban environments often foster individualised and isolated experiences, cutting people off from wider communities. Their evaluations of local environmental community activities within built up environments (such as environmental regeneration and growing food on allotments) suggests that participants experienced enhanced wellbeing in terms of nurturing community relations and acquisition of increased social capital. As a result, they advocate policies which create synergies between people and their environments to strengthen communities. Dhesi (2014), in her analyses of the activities of Health and Wellbeing Boards, argues that focus upon wellbeing in terms of, for example, environments and community risks and responses, can assist in developing multi-layered policies to reduce health inequalities that transcend the traditional emphasis on economics and bio-medicine. Taken together, these examples reflect new and emerging domains, relevant to wellbeing, and new ways of articulating and responding to it beyond economism and bio-medical discourses, characteristic of traditional modernity.

2.1 Wellbeing as a New Repository of Knowledge and Theoretical Information

Also linked to this quest for a new means of responding to and negotiating social change and relationships is the emergence of the concept of 'theoretical information' (Webster, 2014). Theoretical information assumes new forms of knowledge and information, which assist individuals to construct new experiences and relationships and afford meaning to their lives. It transcends, for instance, traditional and rationalised means of making sense of knowledge and guidance

in the form of, for example, quantitative and measureable data (often associated with the industrial revolution and economic rationalisation). Instead, it approaches late modern information as more theoretically orientated i.e. disparate and multiple theories and explanations that enable individuals to pursue and apply less traditional and more qualitative changes in their lives, often under new social circumstances, where traditional relationships and modes of thought have waned. Individuals and societies organise around theoretical information that explains complex phenomena, how they are experienced, and provide qualitative and aesthetic solutions to the negotiation of relations and construction of self-identity across time and space (Giddens, 1984; Webster, 2014) as opposed to quantifying empirical knowledge that only informs what is or was occurring at any one given time. The category of wellbeing constitutes a repository of new late modern theoretical knowledge in the form of contested definitions, discourses and qualitative knowledge, applicable to, for example, new subjective self-evaluations of what is 'good' (and conducive to happiness under new circumstances, constructions of 'pride and self-determination', and interpersonal relations within families and communities, through to wider contexts, such as economic and physical security, and fairness, equity and social justice in society (McNaught, 2011).

2.2 Trust, Risk and Security

Another consequence of change is that individuals are confronted by new and enhanced issues around, for example, 'trust' and 'risk' (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck *et al,*. 1994; Mythen, 2013). Late modern capitalism generates a distinctive risk profile as a result of the changes it brings about as regards consumption, individuals' experiences and radical reflexivity (Beck, 2008). Risk also becomes global in intensity as individuals experience the growth of contingent events that affect large numbers of people globally. Recognition of these risks increases a sense of insecurity and the requirement to re-adjust need, security enhancement and happiness. Individuals search for a greater sense of trust and connection with themselves and the external world to achieve 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1990, 1991). The search for trust, stability and security is predicated upon recognition that what occurs globally has immense influence upon how we construct personal needs, identities and sense of self (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernshein, 1995; Lupton, 1999). Giddens (1991) refers to this as 'life-politics', a process whereby individuals construct inner 'authenticity' and a sense of the 'grounded self', so as to diminish the effects of social change and personal disruption. Hence, social and public policy evolve to represent and enable solutions, that traditional concepts of social policy, no longer provide answers to. The 'breaking' in of the concept of wellbeing in modern policy discourse is another aspect of this and seeks to provide interventions and policy solutions relevant to, for instance, security, adjustment of risk and life-politics (La Placa and Knight, 2014b). Once again, enhanced choice, renewed interest in concepts of lifestyle, consumerism and risk, and developments in global technologies, enable lay individuals, healthcare and wellbeing practitioners and policy makers to revise previous traditional concepts of wellbeing, conducive to ontological security and the grounding of the self.

2.3 The 'Unfinished Project' of Modernity

Habermas (1990, 1992) contends that the enhanced complexity and differentiation that characterises current late capitalist societies effectuates many wellbeing benefits in terms of, for example, science and technology. For instance, new knowledge around health, disease and lifestyle, enables individuals to live healthily and survive diseases that would have ended their lives in the early Twentieth Century. Nevertheless, he also surmises that whilst increased choices in modes of thought, changing relations, and technological advances can precipitate security and healthier lives, it can also precipitate insecurity and lack of trust in individuals' subjective life-worlds as they construct complex biographies and relationships that are constantly in flux. This can prevent individuals and communities from flourishing and creating the happiness and satisfaction in their personal lives that they perceive as relevant to their wellbeing. Habermas (1990, 1992) suggests that the solution is to devise policies and strategies which appreciate the social, physical and psychological impact that change brings upon people and how anxiety and insecurity might be mitigated as a result.

The emergence of an effective civil society in the form of, for instance, voluntary organisations, social movements or interest groups, can vocalise causes in the hope that the public sphere and government might respond and take action (Habermas, 1990, 1992). Civil society enables enhanced equality, social justice, development of social capital, and critical thinking around how to effectively attend to the needs of individuals, as well as the production of new and competing discourses to frame these strategies within, referred to as 'communicative (Habermas, 1990, 1992; Albrow, 1996). Clearly, we argue, the emergence of wellbeing has significant weight in developing social and public policy around individual, community and global requirements, expressed through communicative action. We argue that wellbeing is central to what Habermas (1990, 1992) refers to as the 'unfinished project' of modernity, the wellbeing of social systems on the structural and individual levels. Wellbeing is a reflexive form of analyses that can harmonise both levels and produce effective results for individuals. It is a new language in which to articulate and provide policy solutions where traditional ones are no longer applicable in constructing happiness, security, and quality of life in a

changing world.

3. Research, Cultures, Exchanges and Relationships

The decline of traditionally organised economies, societies and positivist methods of empiricism that accompanies the emergence of late modern societies is important for wellbeing policy, practice and research. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) argue that the scientific and positivist method of social science and social development stifles and devalues human knowledge, emotion and sensibilities as it is often forms the basis for social control. Populations can eventually be targeted and controlled in the narrow interests of the nation state (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972). Rather, the emergence of pluralism and individuals' ability to manage time and space, interpret their surroundings, and challenge traditional modes of thinking, has the potential to enable 'self-actualisation'(the process of realising one's identities and needs and reflexively working towards the realisation of goals) and the capacity to negotiate with and alter systems of regulation and control.

The language of wellbeing, we believe, is intrinsic to self-actualisation, encompassing a plurality of issues that affect our lives from, for instance, sexual practices (Giddens, 1991), management of emotions, resilience, positive psychology, mechanisms for coping with personal and social change, through to traditional public health policy concerns, such as smoking, drinking, and bodily weight. Wellbeing also has relevance to the management of security and self-actualisation in regards to family relations, employment opportunities, economic status and acquisition of skills and information in a knowledge based informational economy (Castells, 1998; Baumann, 2000, 2001). Wellbeing, we surmise, has emerged as a discourse which individuals utilise to make sense of their society, mind and body, in the absence of traditionally ascribed identities and rationalised systems of regulating behaviour and 'constituting' the self (Bauman, 2000, 2001). As a result, the emergence of wellbeing as a significant component of social and public policy discourses raises questions around the types of epistemology and research relevant to studying wellbeing and its relevance to policy development (Jordan, 2006, 2008, 2010). Jordan (2008) suggests an appropriate response to research into wellbeing and policy given the decline of empiricism and the traditional economic model of assessing wellbeing which is founded upon a 'cultural' and 'relational' approach that reflects the social and economic changes articulated in this article.

3.1 A Cultural and Relational Epistemology

Jordan (2008) suggests an epistemological approach whereby human relations, knowledge and meanings are founded upon socially constructed 'bonds' and 'practices' between individuals and groups. These assume the forms of, for instance, activities, networks, and exchanges which transform human and material resources into personally and socially valued goods through interpretation, negotiation and connections. Much of this occurs within different organisational and cultural institutions throughout civil society which transcend traditional and narrow patterns of productive consumption and economic modes of organisation. Interactions produce, prescribe and distribute symbolic social value, knowledge and meaning (Demetry, 2013). These are constructed through cultural practices that not only bond individuals together, but which also transform institutional cultures and practice. Cultural transformation in the late modern age is intrinsically bound up with the emergence of wellbeing knowledge and practice. Wellbeing discourses and policies are bound up with multiple collective and cultural institutions and exchanges in as much as material and economic exchange in the market place (Jordan 2008). We advocate that a research approach based upon this epistemological stance is applicable to the study of wellbeing, the meanings attached to it, and the solutions to increasingly complex social changes and policy solutions. For example, Desmond (2014) has discussed 'relational ethnography' which gives primacy, not only to individuals and groups within given locations, but to configurations of relations, discovering connections, associations, and putative relationships between one another. Networks of groups and individuals often assume different positions within the local social and cultural space that they occupy.

Individuals and communities bind together in a relationship of mutual dependence or struggle, with different local interests and goals, an approach that Fox (1991) termed 'substantive rationality'. Substantive rationality involves rejecting traditional positivist orientated rationality, which is centred on the production of singular and unitary narratives, and replacing it with a standpoint that emphasises the social construction and contingency of social and cultural discourses and actions (Fox 1991). The approach seeks to acknowledge the intermediaries and processes that constitute the construction of wellbeing through resistance to reification of the concept in natural or social science. Through this lens, one is able to postulate how wellbeing is contingent upon how individuals relate to one another and how meaning is constructed and understood within cultures and institutions. It lends particular attention to how power structures are articulated, decisions are produced, and the inter-play of wider cultural signs, symbols and discourses, as individuals and groups draw upon available rules and resources to construct and reproduce social interactions (Giddens, 1984). It recognises the existence of physical commodities and products, but differs from logical positivism in that it also perceives that physical consumption also carries markers of social identities and potential discursive processes that

constitute interaction and the construction of culture, signs and symbols (Fox, 1991).

It is located within the epistemological approach of 'methodological holism' (May, 1996; Atkinson, *et al.*, 2008; Kumar Yadavendu, 2013). The central idea is that the significance of any behavioural action can only be discerned by relating a response to other individuals and actions, embedded within a set of social relations and institutions that create opportunities and costs for them (Smedley and Syme, 2000). The individual's values, commitments, emotions, identities, repertoires of action, scripts of behaviour, and strategies for interpreting social life are themselves the products of local social experiences, linked to networks of individuals and communities. Whilst this is not the only epistemology and/or methodology applicable to the study of wellbeing, the ability to locate its construction at the centre of rich, in-depth and detailed relational processes, which account for the complexity of late modernity and cultural consumerism, will enhance understanding of it. It affords opportunities to be used in conjunction with other strategies of approaching wellbeing research and policy, for instance, McNaught's (2011) definitional framework of wellbeing. This proceeds beyond psychological and methodological individualism to focus upon how wellbeing is constructed on the individual, family, community and distal levels through inter-subjective and cultural exchange and the relevant policy solutions.

4. Discussion and Recommendations

The study of how wellbeing is influenced through interactions, relationships, exchanges and processes also assumes a central focus for development and implementations of policies directed at, for example, quality of life and self-actualisation. We recommend that policy focus shifts to how social groups compete for resources and compare their requirements to those of others. This can provide for collective solutions where possible, but recognise increased complexity and differentiation in forms of exchange, information, and competition for resources and security. As such, policy makers and practitioners are required to rethink traditional responses of, for instance, the planning and redistribution of resources and focus upon new and effective responses (Walker and John, 2012). We advocate that discussion around important social and policy discourses and responses, relevant to wellbeing, such as social and economic inequalities, are often grounded within traditional unitary and economic ideas. These often bypass, for example, how individuals and groups construct discourses around needs, happiness, competition and processes of exchange of economic resources. They underplay how, for example, different individuals and groups perceive one another within a process of cultural and symbolic exchange. This is often as significant as the distribution of material resources and its impact upon economic inequalities. This shifts public policy attention to the competing needs of different groups and relationships, and to changes in responses, as they reflexively alter their circumstances and relationships with one another. The approach focuses on the parts played by both material economics and culture in the construction of wellbeing. As Castells (1998) notes in late modernity, there is no mass produced culture. Rather, the shift towards multiple interaction, choices, and information, entertainment and education, entails a highly differentiated symbolic environment (Ewart, 2013; Bache and Reardon, 2016).

Concepts of wellbeing and its place in individuals' life-worlds and subjective experiences are mediated and defined through this relational and interactive environment. For example, Smith and Greenfields (2014) have focused upon how the individual and collective wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers is affected by locally based social networks and nomadic relationships that are used to construct identities and security in the light of potential discrimination from mainstream society. Through these networks and relationships, concepts of recreation, housing and settlements, are used in defining and devising perceived routes to the enhancement of wellbeing, social and community capital (Rostilla, 2013). By analysing these networks, Smith and Greenfields (2014) have questioned the logic of housing policies which force individuals into an overstretched supply of social housing when many Gypsies and Travellers are prepared to provide their own forms of accommodation. Similarly, they argue for more effective policies around social support in settled housing and how they can be developed around assisting Gypsies and Travellers to adapt and enhance community resilience. We also believe that an approach that focuses upon 'network capital' (Legh-Jones and Moore, 2012; Smith and Greenfields, 2014) i.e. the informational and instrumental support, resources and belonging, built up within a community, is an important focus within wider population based health and wellbeing policy. The approach has potential to generate more data around how social and symbolic networks are intermediaries in constructing wider social structures that influence individual health and wellbeing and policy responses (Fook, 2013). Housing and health policies move into the domains of, for example, assets, resources and social and community capital, rather than solely those of disease and material influences.

Jordan (2006, 2010) suggests that community and grassroots activities and services, which place value upon and accentuate social interactions, connections, relationships and the processes that may or may not bond individuals, constitute a means of designing and delivering effective wellbeing policies and interventions. For instance, the economy may enhance consumer choice and perceived efficient allocation of resources on the economic and material level, but individuals and groups qualitatively experience this more positively when 'cultures of wellbeing' are encouraged simultaneously. Wellbeing policy is most effectively developed quantitatively and qualitatively in the forms of

economic and social value. Social and community enterprises around, for instance, sport and music, foster both, in that they produce economic and cultural resources that cascade across individuals and communities and enhance wellbeing (Jordan 2006, 2010). Experts, professionals and lay people form professional and personal bonds around exchange of resources, knowledge and backgrounds, which invigorate communities, and bolsters individuals' abilities to participate in leisure activities and/or acquire new economic and educational skills and knowledge simultaneously.

We recommend that researchers further develop cultural and relational epistemologies to underpin research that uncovers the social and relational construction of wellbeing and the wider processes that shape it and produce meaningful policy responses and interventions. The key challenge is to design wellbeing research, policies and interventions that make wellbeing appear 'real' and 'relevant' to lay individuals (Delle Fave and Massimini, 2007; La Placa and Knight, 2014a). They should comprise a two-way relationship between research and practice and the meanings and events of individuals' lives and the cultures and communities which they are embedded within. It needs grounding within a 'double hermeneutics' (Giddens, 1993) that is comprehended by professional and lay individuals. We believe that cultural and relational epistemologies and related methodologies go some way in explaining and adapting the concept of wellbeing to enhance the experience of individuals in an increasingly complex late modern environment. Focus upon wellbeing in policy and practice would subsequently provide for a broader and less traditionally disease focused perspective (McNaught, 2011); and as Walker and John (2012) also argue, it would enhance the ability to engage local authorities, partnerships and other non-health related disciplines and the public. It would also enhance engagement with sustainable development and wider inequalities policies on a local and global level.

5. Conclusion

This article has outlined a theoretical framework that has traced the historical and discursive emergence of the concept of wellbeing as a consequence of the decline of traditional capitalism and modernity and the subsequent shift to a late modern capitalist economy. On the structural level, this shift precipitates a new type of consumption that not only characterises the productive and physical capacity of the economy and products, but cascades into the social construction of multiple discursive, symbolic and cultural products, images, and new forms of information and meanings, from which discourses of wellbeing emerge. This process has consequences for individuals in late modernity as they navigate through a world where life-worlds, security and relationships are disrupted and subsequently require new forms of revising and responding to change. Consequently, wellbeing further establishes a means of responding and adapting to, for instance, changing lives, circumstances and happiness. The emergence of wellbeing as a significant component of social and public policy discourses has also precipitated debate around types of epistemology and research relevant to the study of wellbeing. As a result, the article posited that an epistemology founded upon a 'cultural' and 'relational' approach can effectively underpin research and policies relevant to wellbeing in late modernity.

Acknowledgements

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