

The Big Flourishing Society

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Community Wellbeing C.I.C.
Promoting Flourishing Communities



Science based
Wellbeing Education
Programmes

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1. Introduction

A flourishing society is made up of flourishing people, flourishing communities and a flourishing environment. Wellbeing science has made great progress in understanding what makes people flourish (e.g. Diener et al 2009; Huppert et al 2005; Seligman 2002) but less is known about what makes communities and environments flourish, and new knowledge is needed (see below). Fundamental to the acquisition of new knowledge is good measures of flourishing.

The unifying theme of the Stiglitz Commission report (2009) is that:

“the time is ripe for our measurement system to *shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s wellbeing*. And measures of wellbeing should be put in a context of sustainability. ... But emphasising wellbeing is important because there appears to be an increasing gap between the information contained in aggregate GDP data and what counts for common people’s wellbeing. This means working towards the development of a statistical system that complements measures of market activity by measures centred on people’s wellbeing and by measures that capture sustainability (p.12).”

DEFRA in its GES Review of the Economics of Sustainable Development (2010) makes the point that sustainable development includes social capital as well as environmental and ‘produced’ capital but that “robust measures of social capital do not exist and are probably some way off”, and that “the assessment of social impacts of policy should be more systematic and consistent across government” (p13). Further, that the definition of sustainable development... be refined to make it more ‘operational’ (p15). Accordingly, to create a Big Flourishing Society we need a systematic approach to measuring and promoting individual flourishing, community flourishing and environmental flourishing.

2. Individual flourishing

The wellbeing of individuals is pre-eminently about how they experience their lives rather than the objective facts of their lives (external circumstances such as income, housing, education). This point has been underlined in recent documents such as the Foresight report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (2008) and nef’s Happy Planet Index (2009). The objective facts of people’s lives certainly play a role, but there is evidence that simply improving these facts does not generate wellbeing. For example, the increasing GDP per capita and ever-increasing welfare expenditure over recent decades in the U.K. and the US has not led to increases in happiness or life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Layard 2005).

The importance of using subjective wellbeing as a measure of a nation’s progress or success is now widely recognised (e.g. OECD, 2007; Stiglitz, 2009). Wellbeing science has played an important role in establishing why wellbeing matters. It has been shown that people with high levels of subjective wellbeing learn effectively, work productively and creatively, form good relationships, and have better health and life expectancy (Diener 2000; Foresight Report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, 2008; Fredrickson, 2004). Increasing wellbeing for the majority of the population will therefore benefit individuals and society as a whole.

Measuring subjective wellbeing

Economists have tended to measure subjective wellbeing using single items about happiness or life satisfaction. For example, Layard (2005) and Stiglitz (2009) promote reliance on such measures. However such measures imply that wellbeing is about feelings or global evaluations, i.e. a hedonic concept. But sustainable wellbeing or ‘flourishing’ goes well beyond this – it is also

about how well people function (e.g. Seligman 2002; Sen 1993). This is sometimes called eudaimonic wellbeing and it includes concepts such as interest or engagement, a sense of meaning or purpose, and being competent and resilient. Eudaimonic wellbeing is less strongly linked to income or GDP than is hedonic wellbeing (Diener et al 2010). An adequate measure of subjective wellbeing needs to incorporate these important elements.

There are other reasons why life satisfaction, currently the most popular measure of subjective wellbeing, is inadequate. It is strongly influenced by how the person is feeling at the moment, shows remarkably little variation between groups and nations, and is relatively insensitive to change (Veenhoven, 2010). But the strongest critique is that a person's evaluation of how satisfied they are with their life combines experience and expectations. A high score can be obtained either if the person's experience is very positive or if their experience is not good but their expectations are low. A fine public policy might lead to no change on a life satisfaction measure because it has raised expectations relative to experience.

Measuring what matters

Huppert and So (2009) have devised an objective way of defining subjective wellbeing, which includes both feeling and functioning. Their starting point is that high subjective wellbeing or flourishing is more than the absence of disorder, and that it lies at the opposite end of a wellbeing spectrum to the common mental disorders (depression, anxiety). Accordingly they examined the internationally agreed criteria for the common mental disorders (APA, 1994; WHO, 1993) and identified their opposite (e.g. engagement rather than lack of interest, optimism rather than pessimism). This resulted in an operational definition containing 9 elements which could be used to establish the prevalence of flourishing. They selected questions from the European Social Survey (Round 3) which corresponded to these elements, and estimated the prevalence of flourishing in 43,000 people across 23 countries. Denmark led the field with 33.1% of the population flourishing, Russia came last with 6.2%, and the UK was intermediate at 18.8%, indicating great scope for improvement.

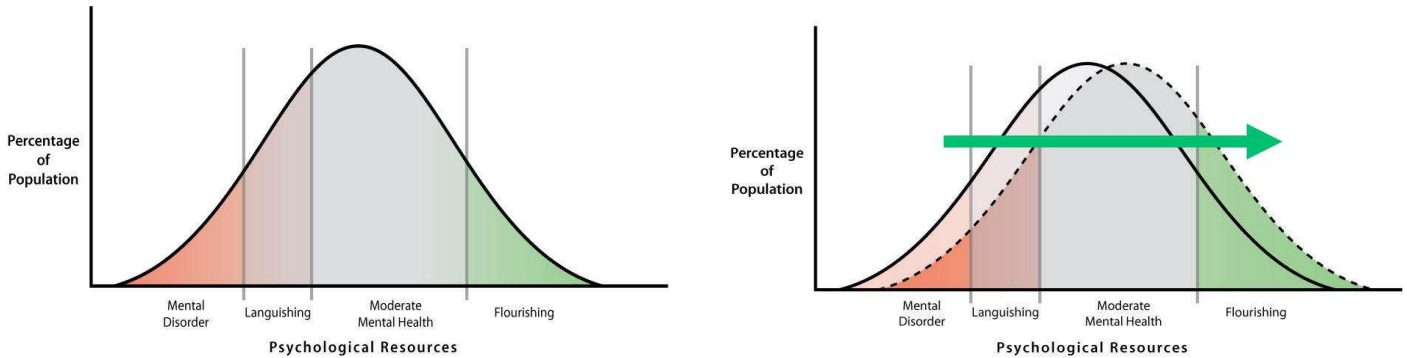
In further analyses, Huppert and So have shown strong links between flourishing and socio-demographic factors (particularly employment and marriage), social capital, and people's stated values. They found that valuing creativity and helping others are positively related to flourishing, while valuing money and status are negatively related to flourishing (Huppert and So in preparation).

In a masterful summary of over 80 state-of-the science reviews of wellbeing commissioned for the Foresight Report (2008), we have identified five actions which have the strongest association with individual wellbeing. These are: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give. We are currently developing reliable survey measures of these key actions.

3. Shifting the population towards flourishing

Wellbeing can be described as a bell-shaped spectrum from very low (common mental and behavioural disorders) to very high (flourishing). Health and welfare services target those at the low end of the distribution and may alleviate their symptoms, but may not increase their flourishing. To increase the wellbeing of the population, we need to shift the whole bell curve towards flourishing. Evidence from epidemiology tells us that a very small shift in the average level of functioning in the population can lead to a very large improvement in the tail of the distribution (Rose, 1992; 2008). Indeed, a small shift in the average level of functioning may do more to alleviate or prevent misery than expensive targeted approaches (e.g. Friedli & Parsonage, 2007).

Shifting the Wellbeing Bell Curve of a Population



How can the population be shifted towards flourishing? Based on the scientific evidence, the Foresight Report on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (2008) identified key leverage points throughout the life course where psycho-education and skills training could be used to increase wellbeing, and also identified some essential changes needed in work place culture.

But fundamental to the success of any intervention is collaboration and empowerment. When people are able to increase their effective contribution to their own wellbeing and that of others, wellbeing becomes self-sustaining. It is absolutely not about delivering more or different services to passive recipients, but about people working individually and collectively to effect positive change - to flourish.

4. Community Flourishing

A flourishing community functions as a self-organising wellbeing system. A wellbeing system contains two essential structures. The first is a collective consciousness, whereby people act collectively as elders, caring about the wellbeing of the whole and creating a source of moral authority. The second is the generation of organised events and activities which bring people together, creating the places in which relationships and social capital are initiated and developed.

Community leaders and elders emerge naturally from the families and organisations in the community, and this process can be supported and facilitated. As more people come to care about their community, not out of a sense of duty but out of a sense of affection and connection, the community begins to function as a wellbeing system, able to originate, inspire and care for itself and its residents.

DEFRA (2010) has identified the need for an operational definition of social capital, which in our view must include community flourishing. We have derived an operational definition of community flourishing which comprises community structures, community values, community cohesion, collective efficacy, community participation. We are currently testing the first 'Community Flourishing Questionnaire' on several communities around the UK.

5. Environmental Flourishing

Governments, corporations and communities are coming to recognise the pressing need to protect, nurture and restore the eco-systems they occupy and use, consciously and systematically. A flourishing ecosystem is one in which natural populations of different species are flourishing and habitats and biodiversity are maintained. How we restore, protect and nurture flourishing ecosystems is one of the biggest challenges facing government, corporations and communities. We are currently destroying species, habitats and ecosystems at the fastest rate ever recorded, over 1000 times the normal rate. Around 100 entire species become extinct every 24 hours. Global ecosystems are responsible for maintaining climate systems, providing oxygen for the planet, and maintaining the web of life on which societies depend.

For most of human history we have taken ecosystems for granted. The fundamental economic activity has been to take eco-capital -- naturally occurring energy and resources -- and turn it into economic capital. Progress as measured by GDP is still very largely a measure of the rate of extraction of energy and resources from ecosystems, and the pumping out of entropy in the form of heat, pollutants and carbon dioxide etc., into local and global ecosystems.

The opportunity within the big flourishing society is to pioneer new ways of generating human wellbeing, and at the same time deliberately nurture ecosystems, bringing communities, corporations and governments together to plan and carry out this work.

6. Towards a Big Flourishing Society

The three key strands of the Big Society agenda which David Cameron put forward in July 2010 are (1) social action, (2) public service reform and (3) community empowerment. The techniques he advocates for implementation are (1) decentralization (2) transparency (giving people the information they need so they can act effectively) and (3) providing finance (payment by results). He issued an invitation to local communities and community minded people to come forward with ideas, to participate in a phase of experimentation. *'If you've got an idea to make life better, if you want to improve your local area . . . tell us what you want to do and we will try and give you the tools to make this happen.'* (Cameron, Liverpool 19 July 2010).

Cameron is in fact describing a big *flourishing* society, one which is able to freely organise and sustain itself with high levels of wellbeing. We propose 3 principles to guide the creation of a Big Flourishing Society.

1. That integrated sustainable wellbeing becomes the core organizing principle of government at every level.
2. That participatory democracy at the community level is established as the right and responsibility of all citizens, with devolved powers.
3. That capability exchange replaces disability benefit as the organizing principle of welfare.

These key propositions enable national and local governments to change the relationship between the citizen and the state from one of increasing dependence, to one of collaboration.

Integrated Wellbeing

Integrated wellbeing refers to the interplay of individual, community and ecological wellbeing. Integrated wellbeing should become the organising principle for Government at every level, but they cannot do it alone. It will require citizens, including children, to understand, engage and take responsibility for participating and collaborating fully. Our individual wellbeing will ultimately be

dependent on global eco wellbeing, and communities need the skills and structures to sustain wellbeing at all levels.

A key step is to develop operationalised measurement tools to measure integrated wellbeing scores for different communities and organisations. These measures would be used in action research to explore different ways to increase individual and community flourishing without increasing energy and resource use or damaging the wider environment. This will involve engaging corporations and organisations to collaborate to develop new nonmaterial wellbeing technologies and new econurture activities. One of the lessons from Copenhagen is that communities, towns and governments need to work together to develop and evaluate effective new integrated Wellbeing strategies.

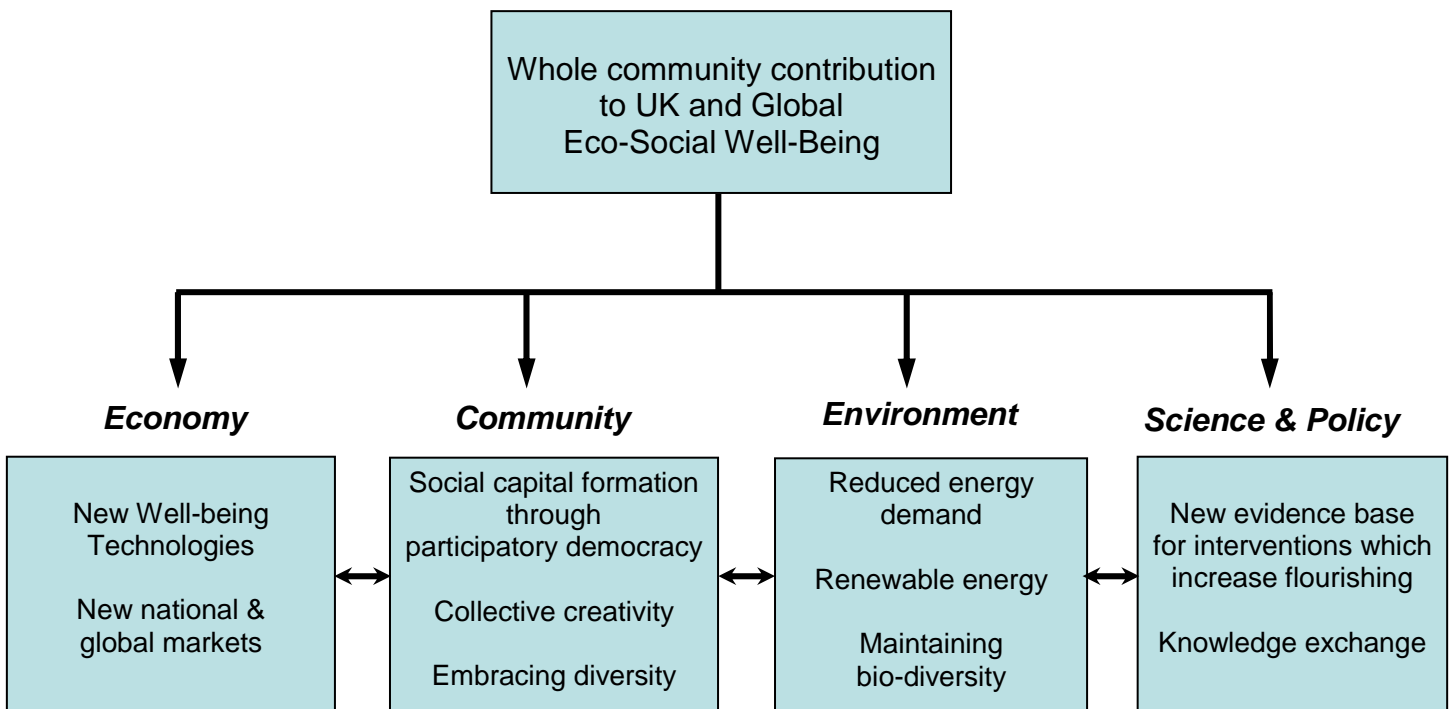
Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy structures can be combined with social entrepreneurship in local communities. This will transfer a sense of responsibility and institutionalise the devolution of power, giving citizens the autonomy to be the creators of their wellbeing. This will also service to renew a local spirit of economic and social self-reliance and possibility.

From Welfare to Wellbeing

The real challenge for government now is to move its citizens from focusing on needs and disabilities, and their still rising expectations of welfare, to focus on collaborating, by using their strengths and exchanging their capabilities, in order to contribute to the wellbeing of the whole. It is about moving from the welfare state to the wellbeing state. There is a need to create new knowledge. The welfare state created knowledge about treating illness, solving problems and supporting people with disabilities or special needs. This knowledge is very important, but only part of the knowledge we require to build a self-sustaining, big, flourishing society. The wellbeing state needs new knowledge about using people's available capabilities, interests and opportunities, to move people directly towards flourishing, from every point on the spectrum of wellbeing. This new knowledge will increase wellbeing efficiency and reduce the drain on financial and ecological resources. Central government admits they do not have all the answers and they are asking for collaborative creativity. Action research across populations allows everyone to learn from each other's best ideas about nurturing wellbeing.

Big Flourishing Society Outputs



7. Norfolk National Pilot Project

Action research framework

The aim of the Norfolk project is to provide a county-wide model of engaging, inspiring and empowering organisations, district councils, communities and individuals to create sustainable “wellbeing” and to shift the county’s population towards flourishing. The project uses action research methodology to develop and define interventions in a collaborative way – learning through doing. The project team will encourage individuals, communities and authorities to come together around self-identified, common purposes and form collaborative clusters. Using this approach, the objectives are:

- Facilitating community education and community participation
- Implementing “agreed upon” intervention designed to shift the population towards “wellbeing”
- Measuring a representative sample at baseline, then measuring the immediate and long-term impact of the interventions over a four year period
- Analysing the outcomes and feeding them back to Norfolk citizens, so they all can share and make use of the knowledge generated.

Foundational Work

- Two community interest companies have been established to manage the programme, coordinate around 60 action research projects over four years, provide wellbeing community development and to deliver wellbeing skills training across the county.
- Three pilot wellbeing skills programmes have been run in schools in the last year
- The project has been introduced to a wide range of agencies and organisations across the county, inviting feedback, collaboration, participation, endorsement, and support. Many organisations have indicated their willingness to participate, subject to funding. Responses include:
 - University of East Anglia is collaborating in the project
 - Broadland District Council has provided ongoing strategic support.
 - The County LSP Board has given in principle support and endorsement.
 - NHS Norfolk has indicated its willingness to participate and endorse the project.
 - DEFRA has offered to provide scientific advice
 - Meetings have been held with politicians including Norman Lamb, MP for North Norfolk, special Parliamentary advisor to Nick Clegg, and with Jo Swinson MP, chair of the all-party Parliamentary group on wellbeing economics.

Creating Incentives for Participation

Having reliable measurement tools to assess the impact of any community initiative gives opportunities for providing financial rewards based on results. This would enable communities and organisations to earn money which they can choose how to invest to further increase community “wellbeing”.

Funding mechanism

The project is conceived as a population shift collaboration across Norfolk, engaging as many authorities, agencies, organisations and communities as possible. The budget costs can therefore be distributed across agencies and authorities according to their degree of participation, the value of the collaboration to their particular objectives, and their ability to pay. It will be necessary to develop a strategy for funding the project which takes these considerations into account, while securing CSR buy-in, and National Government funding to support the research infrastructure. An immediate aim is to secure initial stage budget to enable countywide baseline measurement to be taken and population shift projects to be commenced.

8. Conclusions

1. National statistics need to include a subjective measure of flourishing to supplement objective measures of progress.
2. We need to move from a model of welfare provision to a model of wellbeing creation.
3. Wellbeing creation is a dynamic, interactive process requiring the engagement and creativity of individuals and communities, producing a self-sustaining system.
4. This can be achieved through population shift collaborations, of which our Norfolk project is a pioneer.
5. A collaborative funding mechanism is required which involves contributions from participating agencies and organisations, including CSR funding and government infrastructure support.

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