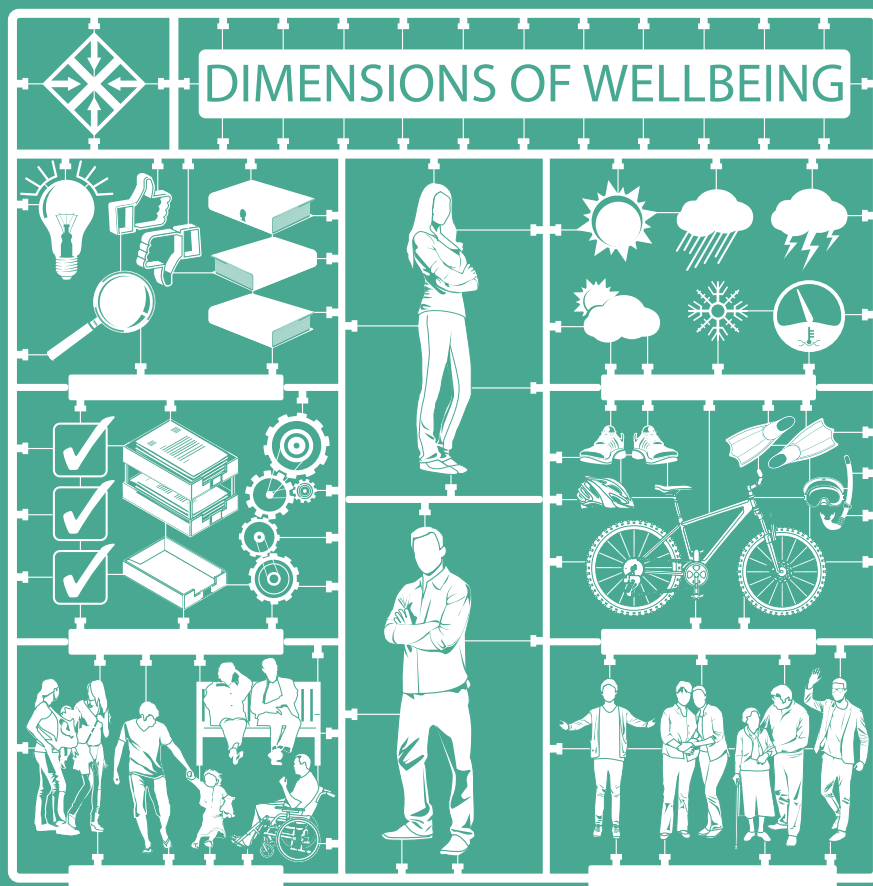


DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING

HAPPY AND FLOURISHING?

Bram Vanhoutte
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Hedonism (happiness) and eudemonia (flourishing) are both important components of individual wellbeing and are present to varying degrees across Europe



Questions regarding what exactly wellbeing consists of can be traced back to philosophical debates in ancient Greece. The hedonic school of thought, exemplified by Epicurus, believed a good life to be filled with happiness. 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. This same distinction between happiness and flourishing is present in debates about wellbeing today.

Although these philosophical conceptions of wellbeing may come from two different perspectives, there is a lot to be gained from thinking about them alongside one another. Large scale surveys such as the ESS which measure different aspects of wellbeing allow us to do this. We can evaluate empirically 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.

Factor analysis of the data from the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' confirms that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are two distinct concepts.

However, there is a strong correlation between both factors – meaning that people with a high score in terms of hedonic wellbeing also tend to have high scores on eudemonic wellbeing. Cross-national comparison further suggests that in nearly all countries both forms of wellbeing go in the same direction of the overall ESS mean, i.e. countries that score above average in terms of hedonic wellbeing also score above average on eudemonic wellbeing.

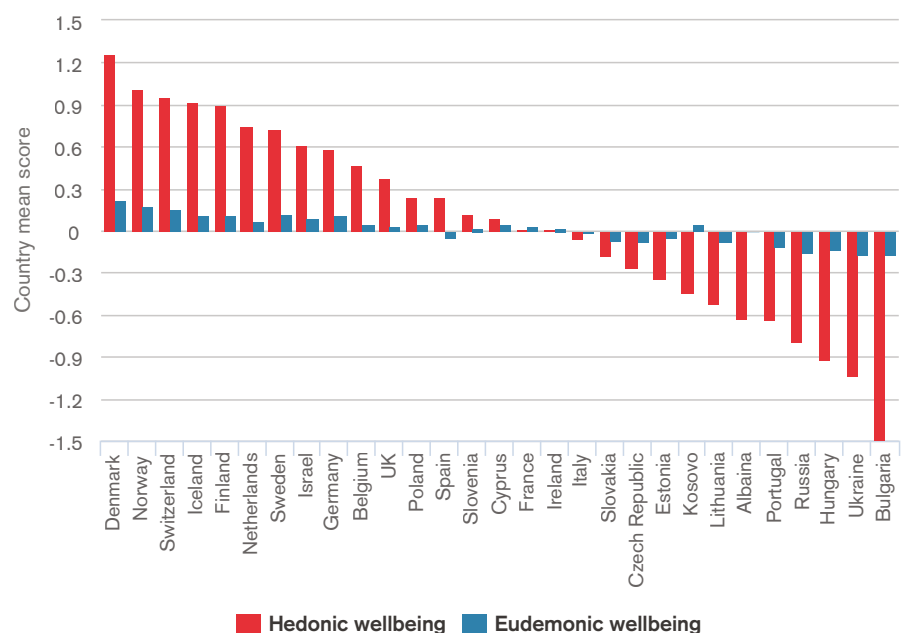
Wellbeing, especially hedonic wellbeing, varies across countries. For example, hedonic wellbeing tends to be higher than average in

Scandinavia and lower than average in parts of southern and eastern Europe. However, it is important to keep in mind that these country-level findings hide a significant amount of within-country variation. Analysis shows that only 15% of the variation in hedonic and 7% of the variation in eudemonic wellbeing can be explained at the country level with the remainder explained by differences between individuals. Exploring how socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age and education are related to both the hedonic and eudemonic dimensions of wellbeing may provide useful insights for policymakers seeking to understand and address differences in wellbeing within society. ➔

DID YOU KNOW?

Data analysis of the ESS Round 6 rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' confirms that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are two distinct concepts

Hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing across Europe by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.

WELLBEING: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

Karen Jeffrey and Saamah Abdallah
New Economics Foundation, UK

Taking a nuanced, multidimensional approach to wellbeing can tell us much about how experiences of wellbeing vary across and within countries

Collecting robust data on wellbeing, i.e. how people evaluate and experience their lives, is essential if we are to begin to understand which features are most likely to contribute to higher wellbeing, and to identify groups within society which might benefit most from interventions designed to increase wellbeing. But how can such a complex concept as wellbeing be measured systematically?

A common approach is to ask people to evaluate their experience in terms of how happy or satisfied with life they are overall. However, whilst offering a fairly good overview of wellbeing, a single, catch-all measure might also hide interesting details that a more multidimensional approach can reveal.

Using data from the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' it is possible to identify six distinct dimensions of subjective wellbeing and conduct a nuanced analysis of how wellbeing varies both within and across countries. These six dimensions are: evaluative wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, functioning, vitality, community wellbeing and supportive relationships.



We see that where respondents within a country report high scores on one wellbeing dimension, they tend to also report high scores on the other wellbeing dimensions (e.g. Switzerland) and vice versa. However, this is not always the case. For example, in Hungary, whilst people report quite low wellbeing across most of the dimensions, they report a much higher score for the community wellbeing dimension. In Russia, the average score for the functioning dimension is much lower than the scores for each of the other five dimensions.

It is also important to consider how wellbeing is distributed across the population and whether there are notable inequalities in wellbeing between different groups. Again, this can depend on the specific dimension

DID YOU KNOW?

Where respondents within a country report high scores on one wellbeing dimension, they tend to report high scores on the other wellbeing dimensions, but not always

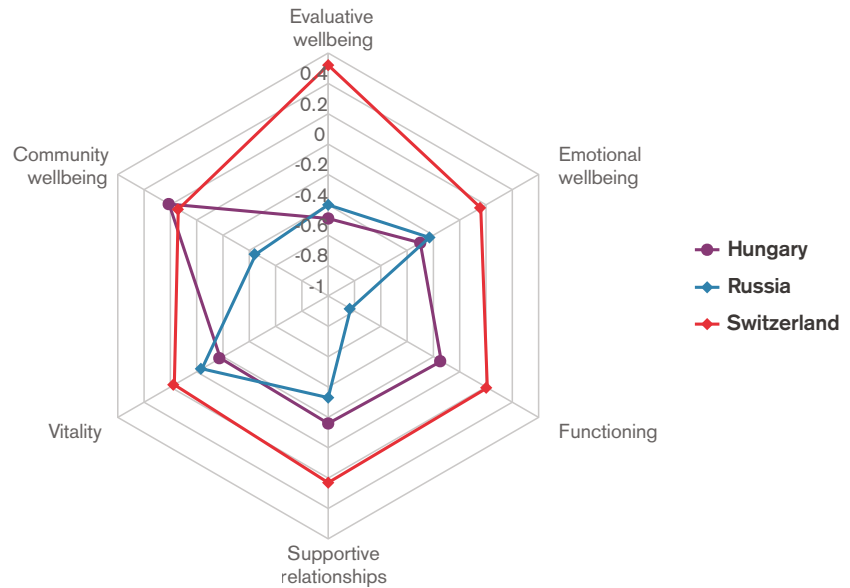


of wellbeing being considered. For example, analysis of ESS data shows that whilst vitality and emotional wellbeing decline steadily with age, supportive relationships and evaluative wellbeing scores are both at their lowest amongst the middle age group.

Household income is generally positively correlated with all dimensions of wellbeing though more so for some dimensions (evaluative wellbeing) than others (vitality). However, the relationship between community wellbeing and income varies across Europe. In Scandinavia and western Europe community wellbeing is positively associated with household income. However, in southern Europe there is a significant negative association between income and community wellbeing.

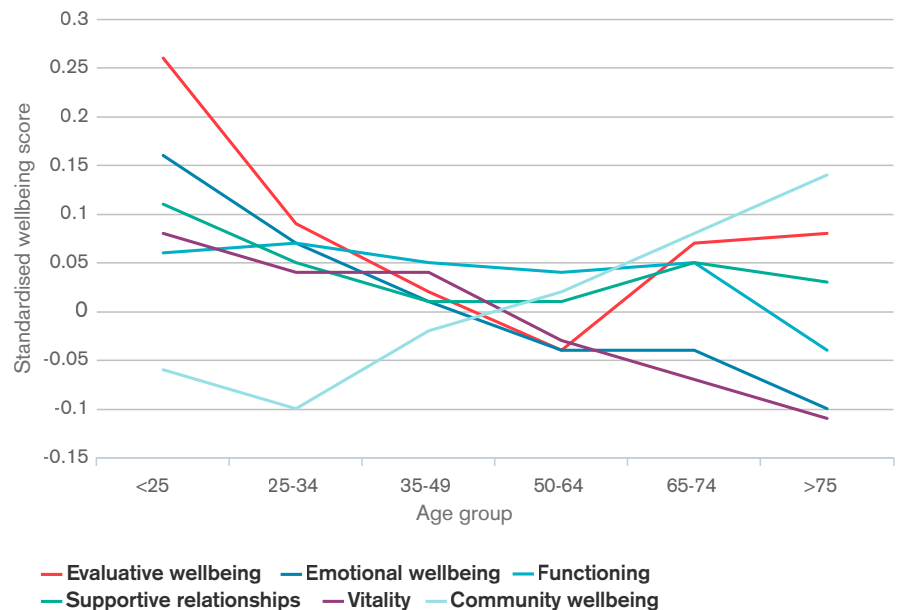
These varied findings demonstrate the importance of being able to differentiate between related but distinct dimensions of wellbeing. The insights provided by such in-depth analysis of wellbeing can help policymakers seeking to target resources effectively in order to increase the wellbeing of the population. ➔

Average score on different dimensions of wellbeing by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.

Average score on different dimensions of wellbeing by age group



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification and population weights applied.

WHAT IS A DECENT SOCIETY?

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Europeans vary in the extent to which they think they live in a 'decent society', i.e. one that promotes the wellbeing of its citizens

As well as being interested in individual wellbeing, researchers and policymakers are concerned with wider societal wellbeing. Whether a country can be considered a 'decent society' will depend of course on the objective conditions in that country. However, it is also relevant to ask whether countries are perceived by their residents as fit for purpose. The ESS is a rich source of data on people's experiences and beliefs, helping us understand the extent to which Europeans think they live in a 'decent society'.

The Social Quality Model identifies four broad requirements for a 'decent society':

- Economic Security
- Social Cohesion
- Social Inclusion
- Empowerment

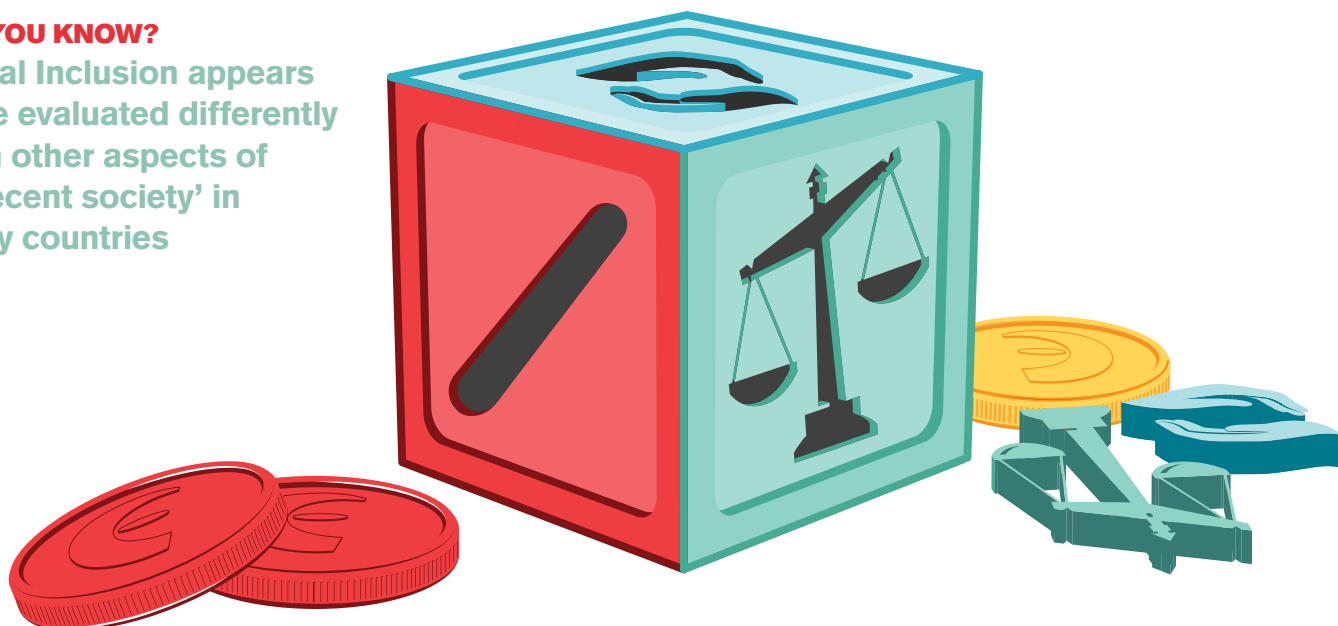
Using data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) measuring aspects of society including economic evaluations, trust in institutions, attitudes towards minority groups and social and political participation, we can construct a Subjective Index of how people perceive their

society across these four 'quadrants'. On the basis of this Subjective Index, Norway is the country where people have the most positive views of their society, closely followed by the other Scandinavian countries together with Switzerland. At the bottom lies Ukraine, together with most of the other former socialist states of central and eastern Europe.

There is a strong element of 'general approval' across different aspects of society – scores on one quadrant are fairly predictive of scores on the others at the country level. However, Social Inclusion appears to be evaluated differently (sometimes better, sometimes worse) from other aspects of a 'decent society' in many countries. For example, Switzerland and Finland perform well in terms of Economic Security and Social Cohesion in comparison to most other countries but score relatively low in terms of Social Inclusion. Iceland, on the other hand, scores relatively low on Economic Security and Empowerment but high on Social Inclusion.

DID YOU KNOW?

Social Inclusion appears to be evaluated differently from other aspects of a 'decent society' in many countries



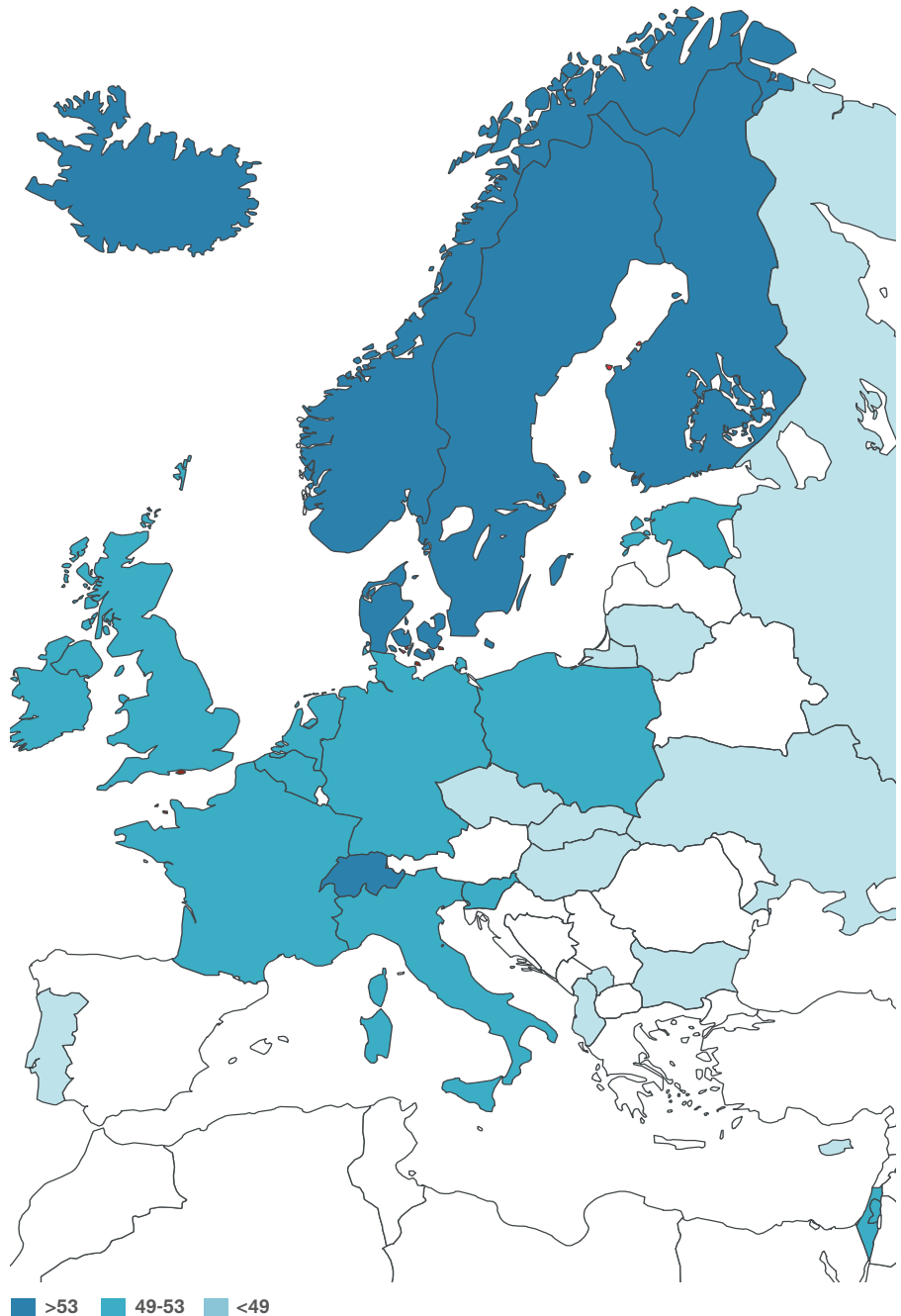
Many of the countries which rank lower on Social Inclusion than we might expect given their overall ranking (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, France, UK) have relatively low rates of self-reported church attendance, whilst other countries which perform relatively well in terms of Social Inclusion compared with their overall ranking (Ukraine, Bulgaria) are distinguished by relatively high rates of church attendance. This suggests an interesting area for further research – can the church perhaps promote social inclusion and welfare where this function is not taken on by governments?

ESS data provide valuable insights into how people perceive their society and how this varies across countries. In combination with more objective indicators on how far the conditions in a country meet the requirements for a 'decent society', such insights can offer potentially useful guidance to policymakers seeking to identify what aspects of their political and social regime may be in need of reform in order to promote citizens' wellbeing. ➔

DID YOU KNOW?

The country with the highest Subjective Index score, i.e. where people have the most positive views of their society, is Norway

Overall Subjective Index scores across Europe



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.