

Sustainable Wellbeing. An alternative paradigm in the era of the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Sustainable Wellbeing (*in Spanish: Bienestar Sustentable*) is an alternative perspective that has been absent so far in other approaches to measuring well-being; to mention a few examples: The Better Life Index of the OECD, SDG Index, Prosperity Index of the Legatum Foundation, as well as the recommendations of the Eurostat to measure the Quality of Life in Europe. As wellbeing is what individuals crave according to their own values, it is essential to expand freedoms, opportunities, and empowerment of capabilities to achieve what each individual value. One way to capture it in a measurement is through the combination of the conditions associated with the capabilities, opportunities, and freedoms of individuals in time and space. On the other hand, sustainability is the basis for guaranteeing wellbeing conditions over time.

Wellbeing lies in reaching a full life according to what the individual values and the conditions that allow it. The conditions are all those that allow the opportunities and freedoms for 'Human Flourishing', where individuals can take advantage of their capabilities. At this point, the central capabilities approach proposed by Martha Nussbaum offers an important theoretical contribution. It expresses that the innate and internal capabilities of individuals, together with external conditions, are what enable combined capabilities to be obtained. In the end, these external conditions are what determine what the individual can freely 'to be' and 'to do'", so it is essential to consider them.

For the operationalization, the research identifies, defines, and justifies 12 dimensions of Sustainable Wellbeing, based on the philosophical approach of the 10 central capabilities proposed by Nussbaum. We carried out an empirical analysis for 19 countries of Latin America. After a technical and thorough review of more than 200 data sources with several indicators associated with the approach. Selected 116 indicators, distributed in the 12 dimensions. Factor analysis techniques are applied (multiple correspondence analysis), which allows connecting the dimensions or combination of the conditions associated with the capabilities, opportunities, and freedoms of its individuals.

Sustainable Wellbeing

Models looking for individual's life improvement had been evolving towards multidimensional perspectives, highlighting ethical elements, respecting values and principles inherent to human condition -development as freedom- and sustainability; emphasizing an inter-generational awareness and responsibility.

Development as freedom invites us to emphasize the relevance of people's capabilities to forge their own development, following their goals and values. Those individual's capabilities are intertwined and enhanced among them, and powered by social opportunities and freedoms, to achieving human flourishing and a greater wellbeing of

people.

One of the main challenges today is to incorporate future conditions of wellbeing while maintaining present and future freedoms. Achieving positive results, considering the cost that this may have for future generations and even for the current generation at a future moment. A development model can be considered as a generator of wellbeing if it is sustainable over time. The question is not only which model generates more wellbeing, but which one generates more wellbeing in a sustainable way over time. This demands to widen the perspective of what is an acceptable present wellbeing.

“Primarily relying on GDP as a metric of progress does not accurately reflect the world as it is – nor the world we want for future generations. By moving beyond GDP, we can measure what we truly value. My proposal to help to develop a universal and comprehensive measurement of progress and sustainable development to complement GDP” 6 June 2023, António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations¹.

Sustainability also invites to include all the dimensions associated with wellbeing: it must be economically sustainable, because otherwise it would generate an unacceptable social debt; it must be politically sustainable, because otherwise it would limit governance; it must be culturally sustainable, because otherwise it would generate tensions that would threaten peace; it must be environmentally sustainable, because otherwise the ecological possibilities would be altered; and naturally, it must be ethically sustainable, because these fundamentals are not negotiable. The dimensions must be equal to guarantee harmony between them, to integrate a temporary vision of sustainability between present and future.

It is also important to replace the vision of measuring by results, with that of capabilities and opportunities that allows obtaining the associated conditions for the sustainability of wellbeing. Amartya Sen argues that sustainability is the promotion of the capabilities of the present, without compromising the capabilities of future generations². So, which conditions generate capabilities? And the answer is that these are multiple and diverse: from institutions, governance, education, family, property rights, or in general, rule of law, freedoms, among others. They are conditions that in themselves empower capabilities and sustainability.

Integrating the capabilities approach and the multidimensional approach to wellbeing lead us to consider the core capabilities proposed by Martha Nussbaum³. The 12 dimensions of Sustainable Wellbeing would then be: Life; Bodily Health; Bodily Integrity; Senses, Imagination and Thoughts; Emotions; Practical Reason; Affiliation: Friendship, Affiliation: Respect; Relations with Other Species, Control over Play and distraction, Political control over one's own environment; and Material control over one's own environment.

Gathering them into four large macro-capabilities, we would have: (1) Body: as an element that physically connects us with the world, which must be maintained with health and integrity until its natural death if possible; (2) Mind: to be able to think, feel emotions and

¹ António, Guterres. 2023. “Valuing What Counts: Framework to Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product”.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/valuing-what-counts-progress-beyond-gross-domestic-product-guterres%3FtrackingId=hpvISx5rQnaRgNoo2rrNlw%253D%253D/?trackingId=hpvISx5rQnaRgNoo2rrNlw%3D%3D>

² Sen, Amartya. 2013. “The ends and means of sustainability”. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 14 (1), 6-20. UK.

³ Nussbaum, Martha. 2011. “Creating capabilities: the human development approach”. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

specify the reasoning of the good life and the virtues in which we must to be and do; (3) Relation: and (4) Control that allows us to contact society and nature, to put into practice the virtues and our freedoms. See Figure 1.

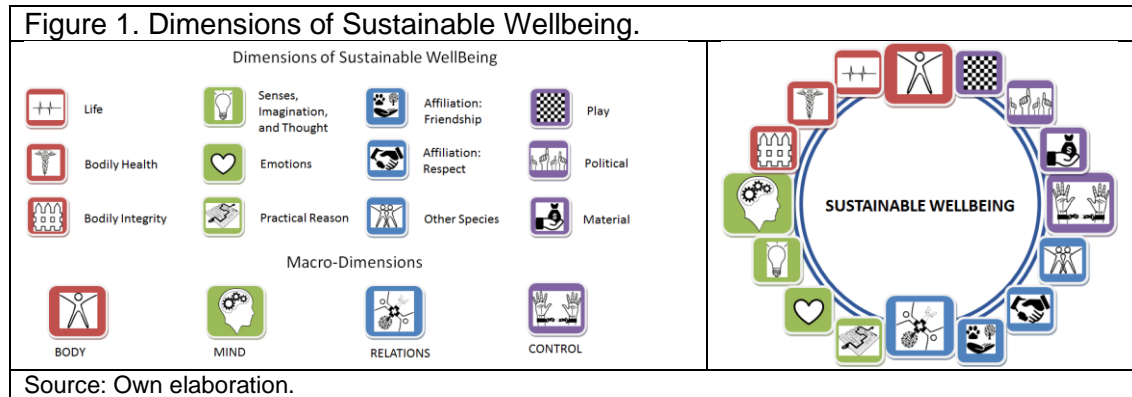


Figure 2. Results of Sustainable Wellbeing, Macro-dimensions and Dimensions

Countries	Sustainable Wellbeing	Body	Life	Health	Integrity	Mind	Senses	Emotions	Reason	Relations	Friendship	Respect	Species	Control	Play	Political	Material
Uruguay	9.12	9.50	9.66	9.97	8.88	9.91	10.00	10.00	9.73	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	7.06	5.00	10.00	6.18
Chile	7.85	8.30	5.82	10.00	9.06	7.31	7.90	8.33	5.69	5.98	5.73	5.80	6.42	9.81	10.00	9.42	10.00
Costa Rica	7.23	7.59	10.00	8.12	4.66	7.29	5.63	6.22	10.00	7.09	8.29	6.29	6.70	6.97	7.50	9.66	3.75
Argentina	6.68	8.75	7.33	8.93	10.00	5.15	6.44	2.71	6.30	6.10	2.11	7.41	8.77	6.74	10.00	6.41	3.81
Panama	6.18	6.58	9.69	5.90	4.15	6.02	4.33	8.88	4.85	5.38	9.59	1.47	5.08	6.73	10.00	4.52	5.68
Brazil	4.94	7.41	5.16	8.33	8.74	2.12	2.24	1.49	2.64	4.86	0.93	4.86	8.80	5.36	10.00	4.55	1.55
Dominican rep	3.84	2.27	1.97	1.96	2.89	3.48	5.38	1.21	3.85	5.49	8.23	5.11	3.14	4.10	7.50	3.52	1.30
Colombia	3.35	2.29	1.71	3.89	1.26	1.94	2.26	1.46	2.09	4.27	2.24	1.47	9.11	4.92	5.00	2.65	7.11
Mexico	3.02	3.55	0.55	6.87	3.24	1.97	2.42	1.43	2.07	2.94	2.84	0.59	5.41	3.60	5.00	1.27	4.52
Paraguay	2.85	3.89	0.63	2.45	8.57	1.07	2.11	1.01	0.10	5.64	2.13	6.89	7.90	0.79	0.00	2.37	0.00
Peru	2.76	3.09	1.33	5.05	2.91	2.42	4.60	1.02	1.64	1.72	1.53	1.14	2.48	3.82	5.00	3.40	3.05
Bolivia	2.50	1.82	0.00	2.44	3.02	1.50	0.00	3.44	1.08	2.06	0.70	1.98	3.50	4.61	10.00	1.64	2.19
Venezuela	2.49	1.84	1.40	2.61	1.50	2.03	2.71	0.74	2.64	3.48	1.45	3.29	5.71	2.63	5.00	2.52	0.37
Ecuador	2.22	1.66	0.75	3.68	0.53	2.38	0.41	4.47	2.25	2.54	0.00	3.71	3.93	2.29	5.00	0.24	1.63
El Salvador	1.96	2.04	4.78	1.32	0.04	1.46	2.13	0.00	2.24	2.01	3.57	0.00	2.46	2.32	5.00	1.90	0.07
Nicaragua	1.53	1.38	3.08	1.06	0.00	2.19	1.96	3.04	1.55	1.34	1.88	1.15	1.00	1.20	2.50	0.97	0.14
Guatemala	1.42	0.44	0.66	0.36	0.29	1.32	1.66	2.29	0.00	1.50	2.09	0.58	1.85	2.43	5.00	1.96	0.33
Honduras	1.29	0.74	0.46	0.00	1.76	2.72	1.23	5.15	1.78	0.69	1.74	0.32	0.00	1.03	2.50	0.00	0.59

Sustainable Wellbeing:
 High (Green)
 Medium (Yellow)
 Low (Red)

Source: Own elaboration.

Proposing Sustainable Wellbeing based on the capabilities approach, hypothesize that the greater the capabilities, opportunities and freedoms, there more possibilities to generate sustainability⁴. Thus, in time, people will have the guarantees to be and do what

⁴ Perdomo, Jhoner, Mauricio Phélan Casanova, and Sary Levy-Carciente. 2021. "Sustainable Wellbeing Operationalization

they value, increasing their freedoms and wellbeing. So, for a Sustainable Wellbeing, the risks towards the future must be considered through the existing conditions so that the wellbeing is sustainable over time.

From these theoretical frameworks, a statistical test was carried out for 18 Latin American countries, using information of several databases: Latinobarómetro, LAPOP, World Economic Forum, World Bank, various United Nations bodies, CATO, HERITAGE and FRASER, as well as international companies such as GALLUP and Google, among others. A total of 116 indicators distributed among the 12 dimensions were selected and a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was applied.

The countries of the region with the best results and therefore with Sustainable Wellbeing conditions are Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica (see Fig. 2). These are countries where people have, in the present and will in the future, the best guarantees and greater opportunities to be and do what they value. In the case of Uruguay, a harmonic situation is shown among the dimensions, being a country-model to study and extract positive lessons to be adapted for other countries of the region.

Concluding remarks

The Sustainable Wellbeing model offers a comprehensive development approach, considering ethical and sustainability values (multidimensional, temporal, and environmental), favoring the awareness of a free and responsible citizenry. An alternative paradigm in the era of the Anthropocene. Even an alternative for a post-SDG 2030 era.

This research also shows a way of measuring a wide and abstract philosophical perspective, to guide both public and private decision-making.

Reference

* António, Guterres. 2023. "Valuing What Counts: Framework to Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product".

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/valuing-what-counts-progress-beyond-gross-domestic-product-guterres%3FtrackingId=hpvISx5rQnaRgNoo2rrNIw%253D%253D/?trackingId=hpvISx5rQnaRgNoo2rrNIw%3D%3D>

* Nussbaum, Martha. 2011. "Creating capabilities: the human development approach". Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

* Perdomo, Jhoner, Mauricio Phélan Casanova, and Sary Levy-Carciente. 2021. "Sustainable Wellbeing Operationalization and Measurement Based on the Capabilities Approach: The Case of Latin America" *Sustainability* 13, no. 21: 12202. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132112202>

* Sen, Amartya. 2013. "The ends and means of sustainability". *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 14 (1), 6-20. UK.