

Measurement, Research and Inclusion in Public Policy of Subjective Wellbeing: Latin America

Report by the Commission for the
Study and Promotion of Wellbeing
in Latin America

Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum, Civil Association

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Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum

The Law of Science and Technology, published in June, 2002, proposed some important modifications to the legislation on this matter, such as: the creation of the General Council of Scientific Research and Technological Development, the identification of the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT) as head of the science and technology sector, and the creation of the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum (FCCyT).

The FCCyT is integrated, at the same time, by a Board of Directors that consists of 20 representatives of the academy and the business sector, 17 of them are directors of diverse organizations, and the other three are researches elect of the National System of Research (SNI).

In this sense, the FCCyT is part of the General Council of Scientific Research and Technological Development in charge of governing the grants that the Federal Government is required to give in order to support, strengthen and develop scientific and technological research in general in the country. The FCCyT is in charge of presenting before the General Council of Scientific Research and Technological Development the opinions of the scientific, academic, technological and productive sector communities to make proposals concerning scientific and technological research policies and programs.

The FCCyT has three fundamental functions in accordance with the Law of Science and Technology:

Its first fundamental function is to be an autonomous and permanent consultant organism of the Executive Branch –with the direct collaboration of CONACyT, several State secretariats and the General Council of Scientific Research and Technological Development–, but it also serves the Legislative Branch.

Its second fundamental function is to be an expression and communication organism for the science, technology and innovation system (CTI). Its purpose is to favor the dialogue between the members of the National System of Research and legislators, federal and state authorities, and businessmen, fortifying this way the collaboration relationships between the members of this three-element system –academy-government-business.

It is important to highlight the continuous and permanent work with the legislators of the states of the Republic, particularly with the members of commissions in charge of reviewing education and CTI matters in the different states. This relatively close relationship, positions FCCyT as a pertinent actor to contribute, together with some other elements, to CTI federalization



and financing advancement. In this sense, it is possible to contribute to the work of CONACyT, and to the work of the Ministry of Economy, and Science and Technological state councils to update local laws, in a way they can become more consistent with the Federal Law of Science, Technology and Innovation.

The FCCyT has as well started to work on finding mechanisms to establish international links through diverse multilateral agencies. All of these, oriented to the permanent search of consensus regarding actions and plans proposed in the Special Program of Science, Technology and Innovation (PECiTI).

Regarding the third fundamental function –CTI communication and dissemination– the Forum uses different means, from direct communication through forums, workshops and other work meetings, to the use of mass communication and internet. To provide just an example, our new website offers now a greater diversity of services

to users, including a great variety of mechanisms (summary of CTI news, *Gaceta Innovación* (Innovation Gazette), statistics (section known in Spanish as Acertadístico), CTI evolution data, information about legislative chambers and states of the Republic, blogs, among others) in order to allow a more accurate analysis of our development in this area. An unequivocal sign of advancement is the increasing number of visits to FCCyT website, in more than one order of magnitude.

Summarizing, The FCCyT is an autonomous and impartial authority in charge of examining CTI development in the country. However, our challenge is to increase the social awareness on this matter, always starting from the premise of the social commitment of science, because knowledge *per se* loses part of its value if its utilization and application to improve the conditions and sustainability of the life in the country is not achieved.



Presentation

Since approximately four decades ago, after diverse branches of knowledge such as psychology and sociology emerged, subjective wellbeing has been an object of study. However, it is until recent years that researches related to this topic have had a global boom because they contribute to measure the perceptions of people regarding their situation and the environment where they are developing.

Mariano Rojas and Iván Martínez, coordinators of the book *Medición, Investigación, e Incorporación a la Política Pública del Bienestar Subjetivo: América Latina*, published by the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum (FCCyT), are presenting a report elaborated by the Commission for the Study and Promotion of Wellbeing in Latin America about the best practices for subjective wellbeing research, the most common subjects, and a group of suggestions about how to incorporate this topic to public policies.

One of the central objectives of this publication is that it can be useful to instrument policies able to increase the quality of life of citizens and to promote a better social development throughout the region.

It is said that a subject has a high subjective wellbeing if he/she expresses satisfaction with his/her life and frequent positive emotions, and only rarely, negative emotions. If on the contrary,

the individual expresses dissatisfaction with his/her life experiencing only a few positive emotions and negative ones frequently, his/her subjective wellbeing is considered low.

Subjective wellbeing, pointed out Mariano Rojas some years ago, “constitutes a useful approach to understand and measure what is relevant to people; this point of view substantially enriches the study of this topic that, during centuries, was dominated by imputation and presumption traditions”.

Due to this fact, the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum supports this type of studies which provide a broader explanation to the current situation of Latin America; not only with the publication of this book, but also by organizing forums and round tables in order to make public the most recent points of view of specialists devoted to the study of this topic.

This publication is integrated by five chapters: chapter 1, Taking Wellbeing Seriously: Measuring what is Relevant to People, talks about recognizing an idea beyond the concept of wellbeing as economic success, an idea much closer to persons.

Chapter 2, Subjective Wellbeing, presents a view about what is this concept as an experience and the theories that have emerged to study it.

It explains the need to “emphasize the role and responsibility that the State and the society have in the happiness of citizens”.

Measuring Subjective Wellbeing, which is chapter 3, allows readers to know how to measure wellbeing, as well as the aspects that need to be considered in questionnaires, scales used to measure, and the possibility to use quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to do so.

Subjective wellbeing not only constitutes a more complete measurement of wellbeing, but the person who is evaluating it is also directly involved.

In the same manner, chapter 4, Subjective Wellbeing Research, shows the findings obtained by Latin-American research. Factors that explain subjective wellbeing are also covered stressing the topics and aspects that deserve more research work. On the other hand, different approaches used by the academy to study this topic are covered as well. Here we find

important and dissimilar topics such as health and habitability, human relationships and the national economy, just to mention some of them.

Finally, chapter 5, Incorporating Subjective Wellbeing into Public Policy, talks about usefulness of the research results on this topic and their contribution to the design and application of a public policy, and also about how the impact can be improved and increased regarding people’s wellbeing through already existing public policies.

Although, according to the book coordinators, more work needs to be done on this topic, “policy recommendations proposed by the academy, described in this publication, constitute a very valuable input and a starting point that policy makers can use in their search to increase the wellbeing of their societies inhabitants”.

Medición, Investigación, e Incorporación a la Política Pública del Bienestar Subjetivo: América Latina is a sample of how wellbeing rates can be enriched with this type of studies.

Gabriela Dutrénit

President

Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum



Introduction

After four uninterrupted years dedicated to the study of progress and wellbeing in Latin America, the Initiative *Midiendo el Progreso de las Sociedades: Una Perspectiva desde México* (*Measuring the Progress of Societies: A Perspective from Mexico*)¹, which acts as correspondent for the global project *Measuring the Progress of Societies* sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)², considers it to be essential to focus our attention on the subject of Subjective Wellbeing. The results of academic meetings called by the Initiative and sponsored by the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum, and the publications derived from said activities, indicated the need to dedicate particular attention to the issue of Subjective Wellbeing. This has given rise to the need of preparing a Report on Subjective Wellbeing in Latin America.

With this in view, on January 26th and 27th 2012, the Initiative called together a group of renowned Latin American researchers in the field of subjective wellbeing at the facilities of the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum in Mexico City with the objective of forming a Commission which would outline the general guidelines to be followed to prepare a report for Latin America on the measurement, research and inclusion in public policy of the subjective wellbeing approach and measurements. At the meeting it was agreed that the report would establish the following: 1) the best subjective wellbeing measurement practices

for Latin America, with a proposal of a list of instruments for the measurement of wellbeing; 2) the issues of subjective wellbeing which merit further research on the part of Latin American academy, establishing guidelines on the way of approaching their research so that this may be carried out more adequately by researchers; 3) recommendations on the use of this approach and the information on subjective wellbeing for the design of public policies. The aim is to make this report instrumentally useful for different communities in the region: the statistical offices, researchers and academics, social actors and public officers. The aim is also that this report may have a final utility for all Latin Americans, by helping to measure and understand wellbeing and by contributing to the design of public policies and development strategies that promote the well-being of Latin Americans.

From there, the Initiative worked on the generation of the Report, while consulting with members of the Commission, who reviewed the progress and contributed accordingly. Thus, the Commission Report was prepared, prompting a commitment to providing general guidance and a degree of coherence to the many efforts and interests that, up until now, had been diffuse in the region. It is pertinent to mention that the commitment assumes putting the imposition of approaches aside, in search instead of contributing knowledge on the measurement, research and use of public policy on subjective wellbeing, an aim which this publication attempts to reflect.

¹ <http://www.midiendoelprogreso.org/index.html>

² <http://www.oecd.org>

Mariano Rojas & Iván Martínez

Coordinators

Measuring the Progress of Societies

A Perspective from Mexico





Taking wellbeing seriously: measurement of what is relevant to the people

*Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*
T.S. Eliot

1.1 Latin America Has a Lot to Offer

The information provided by the data on subjective wellbeing is revealed more and more as indispensable to the full understanding of people's wellbeing, as well as the performance of the societies they live in. Acknowledgment of its importance on the part of statistical communities, academics, and social actors, is relatively new; however, there are reasons for which subjective wellbeing is becoming a fundamental approach for the knowledge, understanding of and influence on wellbeing. The "classical" economic indicators (especially income) have proven to be insufficient for the measurement of persons' wellbeing; there is clear evidence that the relationship between economic performance and wellbeing is much weaker than assumed (Rojas, 2011). From here it follows, in second place, that economic growth, or the mere increase of material wealth, does not necessarily result in people's wellbeing, and therefore, it cannot be automatically identified with progress (Lora and Chaparro, 2008).

Subjective wellbeing looks for defining a more complex idea of wellbeing, captured by the elements nearest to people's effective condition, and to the mode in which it is experienced by them. It grants the appropriate importance, which had been ignored up until now, to the evaluation that a person makes of their own wellbeing, being that it is that person who ultimately lives it and experiences it. It involves an effort to redefine the classical bases on which progress has been understood and measured.

Latin Americans report high levels of subjective wellbeing. These levels are not only relatively high globally; they are also atypically high in relation to their average income levels. Therefore, there is great potential in Latin America to learn and understand those other factors, aside from income, relevant to the explanation of subjective wellbeing. Consequently, it may be stated that Latin America has a lot to offer to the global study on subjective wellbeing.

1.2 There is Global Interest

Today, there are many initiatives around the world in search of the measurement and use of data on subjective wellbeing, in order to include this in decision making. The measurement, research and utilization of subjective wellbeing in the preparation of public policies is presented as a priority concern and a task which cannot be postponed in national statistics offices, non governmental organizations (NGO's), governments and international organizations, among others. The following is a concise description of the main initiatives involved in this subject around the world.

There is great potential in Latin America to learn and understand those other factors, aside from income, relevant to the explanation of subjective wellbeing

In the elaboration of the Happy Planet Index (HPI),¹ the *New Economics Foundation (nef)*² stems from the fact that the idea of economic growth equaling progress is a myth. They emphasize the fact that human wellbeing is not necessarily achieved by exploiting scant resources. Therefore, the HPI shows the ecological efficiency with which human wellbeing is attained, measured by way of a subjective wellbeing indicator (life satisfaction) and by life expectancy. "The HPI reflects the average years of happiness produced by a society, nation or group of nations per unit of consumed planetary resources." Therefore, *nef* not only recognizes that income is an incomplete indicator, but also that in its attempt to render accounts on the efficiency of countries in transforming their resources into wellbeing, it considers life satisfaction as the indicator of wellbeing that citizens have.

¹ <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>

² <http://www.neweconomics.org/>

The initiative by the United Kingdom government to make subjective wellbeing a national indicator of the country's wellbeing and performance is exemplary. The UK Office for National Statistics has recently started carrying out surveys on the subjective wellbeing of the English, in order to create a happiness index which, according to David Cameron, British Prime Minister, would help citizens to reconsider their life priorities, as it is clear that the GDP is an incomplete indicator and that the country would improve if wellbeing were to be considered as well as economic growth.³ The objective of this initiative is to create new measures which cover, among other issues, the quality of life of British citizens, and of their environment. Furthermore, the project is developed around an initial public consultation on the meaning of wellbeing. With respect to subjective wellbeing, questions will be asked to a large sample of citizens regarding life satisfaction and happiness.

We also have the Australian initiative for the creation of the Australian National Development Index (ANDI), which also stems from the idea that "progress is more than economic growth"⁴ and that it is equally considered of fundamental importance to attend to citizens' view in order to redefine progress. The initiative searches to revitalize democracy, in accordance with its statutes, and to include all Australians in a national debate. Therefore, one of the objectives of the ANDI is to survey the view on progress of at least 500,000 Australians. Another is to establish 12 areas (domains) of progress for

³ "...it is high time we admitted that, taken on its own, GDP is an incomplete way of measuring a country's progress." "the country would be better off if we thought about well-being as well as economic growth". November 25th, 2010, Plan to measure happiness 'not woolly'-Cameron. BBC News UK Politics, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11833241>.

⁴ Allen Consulting Group (2011: 3).

research. It has been affirmed that progress is multidimensional, and among those dimensions to be considered, we find subjective wellbeing. Therefore, the measurement of subjective wellbeing, among others, is indispensable to the calculation of the progress of a society, according to this initiative.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) has also promoted an ambitious initiative with the purpose of measuring progress. *Measuring the Progress of Societies* is a project which was explicitly created to measure the progress of societies as accurately as possible, in view of the fact that macroeconomic indicators are not sufficient to explain people's situation.⁵ Social progress, according to this initiative, requires attention not only on the operation of the economic system, but also on people's experiences and living conditions, achieved by measuring subjective wellbeing, among other aspects. It is worth noting that three different areas have been observed for the measurement of wellbeing and progress: material living conditions, quality of life and sustainability. As part of the project we have the Better Life Index, composed by 11 subjects which are identified as essential by the initiative, and subjective wellbeing is one of them. Once more, one of the premises of the initiative is the perception that economic indicators are insufficient in explaining the progress of societies, and therefore it proposes subjective wellbeing, among others, and concretely life satisfaction, as one of the necessary indicators needed to explain the progress of societies. Affiliated to

this global initiative, a Mexican initiative stands out in Latin America: *Measuring the Progress of Societies. A Mexican Perspective*.⁶ This initiative is concerned with the way in which progress is to be conceived and measured in Latin America. This initiative bestows particular attention on subjective wellbeing.

Closely linked to the above, the Commission for the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress is an initiative sponsored by the French government and presided by Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize in Economics, with Amartya Sen, also Nobel Prize in Economics, as chief counselor and Jean-Paul Fitoussi as coordinator. Also known as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, this initiative questions the suitability of economic performance as a measure of the wellbeing situation of people in a society, and one of its objectives is to identify the limitations of the GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress. In the search for a complete measurement of social progress, it considers life satisfaction as one of the variables which needs attention: subjective wellbeing is one of the necessary indicators needed to explain the progress of societies.

In Latin America the Quito Group, incorporated by Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela and Ecuador, is developing an initiative with the aim of creating new indicators of wellbeing, starting from the idea that the model of development of the member countries is different from the neoliberal models, and must therefore reflect such a difference. Its objectives include proposing methodologies used to explain living conditions and the effectiveness of public policies, and to build indicators adjusted to the development of countries. Among these indicators is subjective wellbeing, one of the four types of indicators considered by the group as fundamental to explaining wellbeing. Ecuador's proposal of considering "Good Living" or *Sumak Kawsay* as a parameter regarding personal and

⁵ Also focused on progress and launched at the 3rd OECD World Forum, is Wikiprogress (http://www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Main_Page), a virtual platform for social, economic and environmental progress, with the aim "to connect organizations and individuals around the world who wish to develop new and more intelligent measurements of progress." Consulted online: www.wikiprogress.org/index.php/Main_Page. April 21st, 2012.

⁶ <http://www.midiendoelprogreso.org/index.html>

social goals is interesting,⁷ because considering the indigenous vision constitutes a nationally inclusive posture inscribed in the development model, which contrasts with those of the other members of the group.

Also in Latin America, the *Movimiento Más Feliz* (“Happier Movement”), which began as an initiative for the promotion of education in Brazil, has ended in the search of the inclusion in the Constitution of the right to search for happiness. Thus, the document presented by the Movement proposes education, health, work, housing, leisure, security (personal and social), among other social rights, as essential rights in reaching happiness.⁸ Therefore, happiness (or subjective wellbeing) takes on great importance as a parameter of wellbeing, as it is not only seen as a goal in itself, but it is also proposed that it be included in the political Constitution.

Probably known as the most radical measure taken in favor of a new way of measuring progress, an initiative arose in 1972 by the Bhutanese monarchy, establishing Gross National Happiness (GNH) as an indicator of citizens’ wellbeing, as opposed to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Therefore, the GNH is proposed as a model to guide the country’s development, and it stems from some basic principles, among which we find the preservation

and promotion of cultural values (it is worth mentioning that the Bhutanese culture is Buddhist, a religious doctrine in which spiritual development is raised as a fundamental value, far above consumerism). The GNH is based on the combination of 73 variables which measure wellbeing and life satisfaction of Bhutanese citizens. In this way, subjective wellbeing takes on far greater importance, and it is clarified that not only is income insufficient as an indicator, but also a distorted one, for the measurement of people’s wellbeing.⁹

Recently, and in line with this subject, the United Nations has approved a resolution (*Happiness: Towards a holistic approach to development*) which recognizes the search for happiness as a basic human goal, and invites Member States to promote public policies designed based on the importance of happiness and wellbeing in their bid for development. After recognizing that the GDP does not adequately reflect the happiness and wellbeing of a country’s people, as it was not conceived to do so, the resolution indicates the need to adopt a more inclusive, equitable and balanced focus on economic growth, which promotes sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, happiness and wellbeing of all peoples, and invites the member countries to create new measures.

There are certainly the most relevant initiatives worldwide involved in measuring subjective wellbeing. However, measurements have been taken (or are intended) in other places that are also worth mentioning. In Chile, for example, a National Socio-economic Characterization survey (CASEN), carried out nationally by the

⁷ Ecuador and Bolivia have introduced the terms *Sumak kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña*, respectively, into their political constitutions; from Ecuatorian Quichua in the case of the first, and Bolivian Aymara in the second, and they can be understood as “Good Living”, therefore making “official” the inclusion of the indigenous vision within their national development model.

⁸ It is proposed that Article 6 of the Constitution be modified to read: “Social rights essential to the search for happiness are education, health, work, housing, leisure, security (personal and social), protection of maternity and infancy, and assistance for the underprivileged.” (Sibaja, Marco, “In Brazil, is the search for happiness a constitutional right?”, in *Vanguardia*, Brazil, February 4th, 2011.)

⁹ During the *High Level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness* it has been stated the income constitutes an inefficient way of approaching well-being. For example, it has been “empirically shown that social networks are better predictors for life satisfaction and well-being than income and material gains” (Royal Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2012: 5).

Ministry of Social Development, and already includes the measurement of the happiness of Chileans. We can also mention the intention on the part of the Chinese government to increase happiness, as according to its own statements, this is more important than increasing the GDP.¹⁰ The original concern is in the evident economic growth which is unfairly distributed among the Chinese, and is unsustainable, but above all, has not necessarily been accompanied by greater happiness. Finally, it is important to add, following the World Happiness Report, that “there are reasons enough to believe that we need to rethink the economic sources of wellbeing... (and although) happiness appears too subjective and vague to be included in a country’s objectives, and much less form part of public policy, evidence has rapidly proven that this is not necessarily correct” (Helliwell *et al.*, 2012: 7).

In 1968, Robert Kennedy said:

¹⁰ According to Wen Jiabao, prime minister of China, “everything the government does aims to provide people with happier and more dignified lives and to create a more just and harmonious society. A people-first mode of development would increase happiness, and public policy founded on achieving that aim could become the foundation of China’s harmonious society.” (Hu Angang, “China must measure happiness”, China Dialogue, February 24, 2011: <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/4130>)

“...yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile...”¹¹

Today, over four decades later, it is evident everywhere that current economic and social indicators are insufficient to assess the wellbeing of people and the progress of societies. We require indicators which are less limited and more holistic, which will tell us more of people, and of how they live and experience their lives. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to research and measure subjective wellbeing and attend to the information it implies, so that from there we can formulate public policies which efficiently indicate what the wellbeing of people is and how public policy can increase it.

¹¹ Robert F. Kennedy, at the University of Kansas, March 18th, 1968. (<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Robert-F-Kennedy-at-the-University-of-Kansas-March-18-1968.aspx>)







Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing can be seen as a term which covers many facets, and it is clear that different schools and interpretations can be found within its study. However, a fundamental aspect of subjective wellbeing is that we are looking to understand people's wellbeing understood not as an academic or expert construct, but as an experience of the person, that is, an experience of being well. Therefore, it is acknowledged by this that it is the person who must report her wellbeing, and that it is incorrect for this judgment on wellbeing to be made by a third party.

Therefore, a premise for wellbeing should be advanced: it is an undeniable fact that every person has privileged access to their own subjectivity. This implies that it is not correct, or methodologically sustainable, to bestow attributes "from outside", without consideration of the person's appreciation, that is: the appraisal of one's satisfaction with one's own life.

This premise supposes that there is no better or superior *external point of view*, than the one a person uses to evaluate their life, and over which one can establish a universal parameter which describes the elements that, *a priori*, define a satisfactory personal experience. Therefore, when the knowledge of people's satisfaction with life is required, we must ask the people themselves, and their answers constitute hard data on wellbeing.

Furthermore, that wellbeing which is relevant to people is liable to vary from one context to another and is also associated to the changing variables of a person's life trajectory.

2.1 The Experience of Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a life experience of people which can be understood on three planes: cognitive experience, affective experience and sensory experience (Rojas, 2008). These experiences present themselves with different intensities. The experience of cognitive type wellbeing is manifested by failures and achievements, and involves comparisons between the person's present situation and their life goals and aspirations, as well as a comparison with the situation in groups of reference. Affective experience is manifested by the enjoyment and suffering related with the affection, emotions and moods of the person who experiences it. Sensory experience involves the use of the senses; therefore, it is manifested in terms of pleasure and pain. A fourth experience, which has received little study, is mysticism.

Cognitive, affective and hedonistic experiences are not exclusive, and as a whole, they make up the life experience, and wellbeing, of human beings. People synthesize this life experience in concepts such as happiness or life satisfaction; in such a way that they may make a global evaluation of how well their life is going and it serves to make important decisions.

Subjective wellbeing aims to know the wellbeing experienced by people on the basis of direct questions asked of the person. Research is carried out on global appreciations of people concerning their wellbeing (for example, their concept of life satisfaction, comparison of life with their own standards and of a situation of affective balance), as well as appreciations in different specific environments, such as satisfaction in specific areas of life.

It is clear that the person is being asked about something that is not alien to them: their wellbeing. Therefore, people can respond easily to questions about their happiness, and are broadly identified with the subject.

This wellbeing lived as an experience is the one that is relevant to human beings, who are capable of summarizing this situation into affirmations such as *I am happy, I am satisfied with my life, I am comfortable with myself, and I like the life I have.*

2.2 The Knowledge of Wellbeing

Some approaches have erroneously opted to use objective variables to attain an approximate of people's wellbeing, in an attempt to uniform criteria and avoid the complexity implied in subjectivity. There is no doubt that many factors (whose measurement may be considered as objective) are relevant to the life satisfaction people experience, but these factors are potential sources rather than the wellbeing experienced by a person. Therefore, wellbeing must not be mistaken for its causes.

When studying a person's wellbeing (as the person lives it), it's impossible to avoid subjectivity. The relevance of the explanatory factors must not be evaluated based on the objectivity of their measurement, but rather on the closeness of the relationship between them and people's wellbeing. It is also possible that the relationship between the explanatory factors and the experienced wellbeing is heterogeneous among persons, that is: factors which are relevant to some people, are not so to others, including their degree of importance. Therefore, aiming to approximate wellbeing within the space of objective measurement indicators can result in serious errors of appreciation.

Wellbeing is subjective and one cannot speak of wellbeing if it is not experienced by people. This is why we don't need to speak of subjective happiness, as there is no objective happiness. Subjective wellbeing does not suggest however that people do not have any

connection with "objects" or cultural, social or political dimensions, or that they do not show any association with concrete "spaces" of experiences, or areas of action. Subjectivity lies in the experience obtained from the relationship, and it is assumed that the criteria with which it is carried out are unquestionable and valid in themselves (Millán, 2011).

It is also convenient that subjective wellbeing be analyzed in relation to the person, with: a) their areas of action and experience, such as work or family environment; b) "cultural objects or dimensions", such as religion or mystical practices to form sense, or the exercise of identity; c) "social objects or dimensions", such as the quality of relations with other persons (social networks or relational goods); d) "political objects or dimensions", such as institutional contexts which guarantee belongings, rights: elections, democracy; e) "intimate objects or dimensions", such as hedonistic experiences, recreation, leisure, use of time; and f) their life conditions and quality of the living environment, such as health, quality of the habitation space, services, transportation, institutions, rights, regulations, etc.

The approach on subjective wellbeing is supported by in the six following principles (Rojas, 2007):

1. It is based on the wellbeing reported by the person; information is obtained from the response given by a person to one or more questions on happiness or life satisfaction. The important thing is that the person –and not a third party or expert– is the one who directly evaluates or judges their own life.
2. By asking the person directly, a specific response is given by concrete human beings. Therefore, one does not work with the wellbeing of abstract disciplinary agents, generally defined by an expert.
3. The approach recognizes that wellbeing is essentially subjective due to the fact that it is a separate experience for each person.

This experience is unique for every person, and each person makes it concrete in a synthesis of their own life and experiences in various dimensions and environments. Consequently, it is not possible to speak of objective wellbeing; what is possible is to speak of objective variables which may be used to measure the factors that are relevant to wellbeing.

4. The approach accepts each person as the ultimate authority in judging their own life. Therefore, the approach states that the role of the expert must not be to judge other people's wellbeing, but to try to understand reported wellbeing by way of the formulation of theories and by hypothesis corroboration.
5. Once it is accepted that there is relevant information in the wellbeing report, the approach follows a quantitative methodology to identify the factors which are relevant to the well being of human beings.
6. A trans-disciplinary effort is required, or at least inter-disciplinary, in order to understand happiness as reported by human beings of flesh and bone. It is difficult to understand a person's wellbeing based on theories generated by compartmentalized disciplines. Therefore, the comprehension that happiness exceeds the limitations of academic disciplines by far.

2.3 Generating Theories on Subjective Wellbeing

The theories and indicators of subjective wellbeing have their origin and inspiration in high income countries. However, not all these countries are the happiest: Latin America and the Caribbean appear systematically as a very happy region (Abdallah *et al.*, 2009; Marks *et al.*, 2006; Rojas, 2012). Wanting to understand the happiness of different regions with the use of theories and indicators from the self-

denominated first world may be insufficient (Yamamoto, 2008).

Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007) recommend undertaking the study of subjective wellbeing based on an emic approach, that is: not starting from an established theory, but instead, developing a "methodology which starts from a general description of reality, to then define patterns, and thus arrive at a theoretical plane, comparing results to see if they support any theory of require the establishment of a new theory" (p. 203).

The authors advocate a theory which stems from the identification of emic categories. This is achieved by making open questions where the population under study defines categories and relationships, in their own words, which make up the area or variable under study, instead of letting the researcher guess, invent or dictate it, based on his or her own personal or cultural experience.

The influence of the researcher's culture and values when designing and interpreting the studies entails certain risks: "academic activity can fall into subjective interpretation of the study objects and subjects, more than a trustworthy description and rigorous analysis, and can therefore fall within the limits of a wistful, cartoon like interpretation" (Yamamoto y Feijoo, 2007: 200). The researcher's bias can manifest in the choice of instruments, in the supporting theory, and in the interpretation results, among others.

The Chilean Human Development Report (PNUD 2012) proposes not withdrawing to the private environment and individualizing discourse of happiness, typical of self-help books. On the contrary, it is necessary to place greater emphasis on the public environment regarding the explanatory factors of happiness. In other words, it is necessary to highlight the role and responsibility that the state and society as a whole can fulfill with respect to citizens' happiness.







Measurement of subjective wellbeing

Four decades of research have proven that subjective wellbeing is measurable. Subjective wellbeing, understood mainly in the concepts of *happiness* and *life satisfaction*, can and should be measured.

The experience of *well-being* is a personal experience, and subjective wellbeing is a broad concept which covers a person's total experience of being well, not only in one aspect of life, but in all of them. Measuring this is relevant and proves very useful.

As well as global assessments on life satisfaction, measurements on subjective wellbeing are considered in personal reports on emotional state, their satisfaction in different areas of their lives, and their evaluation on how well their life is going.

The accumulated research has shown that the way to measure subjective wellbeing is by way of the report made by people about their own life, using their own criteria. Thus, the measurement of wellbeing necessarily requires the measurement of the subjective. That which must be measured in attempts to discern, and therefore study that which underlies people's wellbeing, and is found in the subjective.

There are good practices and accumulated experience regarding the way of measuring subjective wellbeing, and these must be learnt and understood; otherwise measurements could gather imprecise information.

This chapter presents the instruments used the most to measure subjective wellbeing, presents the different response scales used, and it covers the main subjects associated with the correct measurement of subjective wellbeing. These subjects have been studied mainly by the US and European academy. Latin American research has boarded the subject with some results which allow us to establish conclusions for the region, but above all, which reinforce the direction of previous results. This chapter also presents such findings.

3.1 Researching Wellbeing

3.1.1 subjective wellbeing measurement approach

The approach of subjective wellbeing studies people's wellbeing such as they live it, that is, that which they experience cognitively, affectively and through the senses. The measurement of subjective wellbeing is made by asking people directly about their degree of wellbeing (Diener *et al.*, 1999; Kim-Prieto *et al.*, 2005). To not do it this way, according to this approach, implies attributing and/or assuming people's wellbeing without corroboration (Rojas, 2008a).

3.1.2 Life satisfaction and happiness

It is necessary to measure cognitive and affective components of subjective wellbeing. There is consensus in the academy on the idea that subjective wellbeing has affective and cognitive

components (Rojas and Veenhoven, 2012; Pavot and Diener, 1993). The studies carried out in Latin America are not the exception (Moyano and Ramos, 2007; Rojas, 2007). Moyano and Ramos (2007), when studying the subjective wellbeing of the inhabitants of the region of Maule, Chile, have made it explicit that the purpose of their work is to evaluate subjective wellbeing through its cognitive component (general satisfaction and by domain), and its affective component (happiness). Rojas (2007), on his part, emphasizes that both life satisfaction and happiness have affective and cognitive charge; however, happiness has a higher affective charge, and life satisfaction has a higher evaluation charge.

We must measure people's happiness and life satisfaction in general, as well as satisfaction with life in the different domains of life

The study of subjective wellbeing should contemplate people's affective states, i.e. emotions, as well as measuring cognitive evaluations, which are more closely associated with the achievement of goals set by the person. Happiness and life satisfaction must be measured in general and within the different domains of life.

3.1.3 questions for the measurement of wellbeing

The questions asked to people in order to investigate their subjective wellbeing inquire about their happiness, their degree of satisfaction with life in general and in specific aspects of life, as well as achievements and failures and on their affective state. The most frequently used questions are:¹²

¹² The *World Database of Happiness* (<http://worlddata.baseofhappiness.eur.nl/>), directed by Ruut Veenhoven, presents a vast collection of the type of questions used to measure subjective wellbeing, as well as specific aspects.

Questions for the measurement of life satisfaction

Questions on Life Satisfaction Globally

1. Generally, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?*
2. Considering everything in your life, how satisfied are you with your life?

* Eurobarometer: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

Scale With Life Satisfaction**

Below you will find five affirmations with which you may agree or disagree with. Read each one and mark the number that corresponds with the answer that best describes your degree of agreement or disagreement.

1. In most aspects, my life tends towards my ideal
2. My life conditions are excellent
3. I am completely satisfied with my life
4. Up until now I have obtained the most important things I want in my life
5. If I could change my life, I would not change a thing

** SWLS (Satisfaction with Life Scale), developed by Diener *et al.* (1985)

Questions for the measurement of happiness

Happy person

1. Speaking generally, are you a happy person...?*

Happy life

2. Taking everything into consideration, how would you say things are going these days? Would you say you are...?***

* Veenhoven (1974), ** Andrews and Withey (1976)

Happiness Scale***

1. Generally, I consider I am...
2. Compared to the majority of people similar to me, I consider I am

3. To what degree do these affirmations describe you?
- Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life independently of what happens, taking advantage of the best of things.
 - Some people are generally not very happy. Even though they are not depressed, they never look as happy as they could be

*** Happiness Scale, developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999)

Questions for measuring affective states

Affective Balance Scale*

In the last few weeks, have you ever felt...

1. Particularly excited or interested in something?
2. So restless that you could not sit still in your seat?
3. Proud because someone congratulated you for something?
4. Very lonely or distanced from other people?
5. Happy about having achieved something?
6. Bored?
7. On top of the world?
8. Depressed or very unhappy?
9. That things have gone your way?
10. Upset because somebody criticized you?

* ABS (Affect Balance Scale) developed by Bradburn (1969)

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule*

Below we present several words which describe different feelings and emotions. Read each one and indicate with the corresponding number the intensity with which you have felt that way during the last week, including today.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Interested | 5. Motivated |
| 2. Tense | 6. Guilty |
| 3. Stimulated | 7. Scared |
| 4. Disgusted | 8. Hostile |

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 9. Enthusiastic | 15. Nervous |
| 10. Proud | 16. Decided |
| 11. Irritable | 17. Attentive |
| 12. Alert | 18. Scared |
| 13. Ashamed | 19. Active |
| 14. Inspired | 20. Terrified |

* PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) developed by Watson *et al.* (1988).

Question about the previous day (affective balance)*

Did you feel any of the following emotions during a large part of the day yesterday?

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Pleasure | 5. Stress |
| 2. Pain | 6. Depression |
| 3. Worry | 7. Anger |
| 4. Sadness | 8. Love |

* Gallup World Poll: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/wellbeing.aspx>

Questions on self esteem

Global average level*

1. How have you felt your mood these days?

Time happy**

1. What percent of the time were you awake today and feeling happy?
2. What percent of the time did you feel unhappy?
3. What percent of the time were you neither happy nor unhappy?

* Levy and Guttman (1975) ** Fordyce (1972)

Questions for measuring satisfaction through achievements

Best-Worst Possible Life*

Here is a drawing of a ladder. Let's say that the top of the ladder represents the best life possible for you, and the lower part represents the worst life possible, what part of the ladder do you feel you are on today?

** Life Self-Evaluation Ladder, developed by Cantril (1965)

Questions on Realization

Aspirations

1. How do you feel about what you are achieving in life?*
2. With respect to obtaining the things one wants in life, how would you say you find yourself now...?***

Goals

1. How would you grade yourself regarding how successful you have been in achieving your life goals and purposes? Consider that the top of the ladder means total success, and the lower part means total failure.***

* Buttel and Martinson (1977), ** Bradburn (1969),
*** Bortner and Hultsch (1970)

Questions for measuring satisfaction with different domains of life

Scale of Life Domain Satisfaction*

How satisfied are you with...

- ...your home?
- ...your health?
- ...your means of transportation?
- ...your family life?
- ...your education?
- ...your social life?
- ...your work?
- ...your sex life?

*Scale of Life Domain Satisfaction, Campbell *et al.* (1976)

Satisfaction in Domains of Life**

How satisfied are you with...

- ...Your health?
- ...Your relationship with your parents?
- ...Your economic situation?
- ...Your relationship with the rest of the family?
- ...Your work or occupation situation?
- ...Your relationship with your friends?
- ...Your relationship with your partner?
- ...Your availability of free time?

- ...Your relationship with your children?
- ...Services and safety in your community?

**Rojas (2006a)

Personal Wellbeing Index***

How satisfied are you with...

- ... your (economic) level of life?
- ... your health?
- ... your achievements in life?
- ... your personal relationships?
- ... how secure you feel?
- ... your feeling towards forming part of the community you live in?
- ... your security in the future?
- ... your spiritual life and religious beliefs?

***Personal Well-Being Index (PWI). The domains of life considered are not arbitrary, they are the 8 relevant domains as identified by the creators of the index (International Wellbeing Group, 2006).

3.1.4 Response scales

The scales of responses to the questions about subjective wellbeing are presented in different ways. They are differentiated by their intrinsic characteristics, but also by their format. The following presents some of the main distinctions which characterize these scales.

3.1.4a. Categorical Scales vs Continuous Scales

Some scales present categories as answer options, while others present a numerical vector limited by an upper and lower category. The question about best-worst life possible, developed by Cantril (1959), is an example of the second case: the best life possible is indicated by the number 10, and the worst is indicated by 0. The question on a happy life, developed by Andrews and Withey (1976), would constitute an example of the first case: the person selects one out of three category references: not very happy, quite happy or very happy.

Categorical scales vs continuous scales

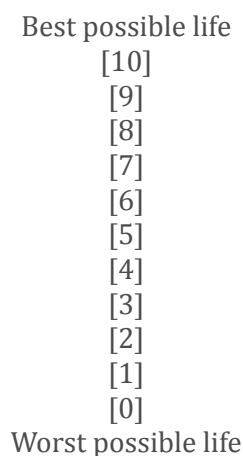
Categorical Scale

Taking everything into consideration, how would you say things are going these days? Would you say you are...?*

1. very happy
2. quite happy
3. not very happy

Continuous Numerical Scale

Here is a drawing of a ladder. Let's say that the top of the ladder represents the best life possible for you, and the lower part represents the worst life possible, what part of the ladder do you feel you are on today?***



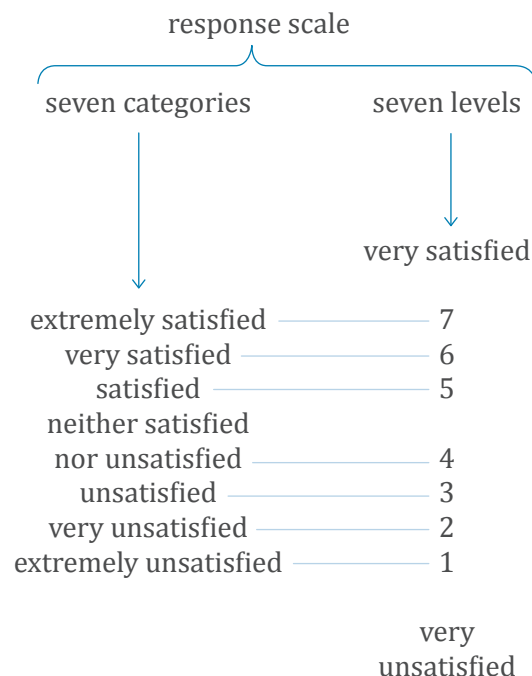
* Andrews and Withey (1976), ** Cantril (1959)

3.1.4b. Scale Ranges

One same question can permit different response scales. The questions on life satisfaction in general and per domain, for example, may use four response options in some surveys, and other surveys broaden the response options to seven. In some cases, the scale is presented with two extreme categories and intermediate values, and on other occasions, the scale presents all the response categories.

Response scale sizes

Generally, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?*



* Eurobarómetro: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

3.1.4c Scales which Translate the Responses into Numerical Results

Some instruments state several questions pondered to obtain a single numerical response. For example, the Affective Balance Scale (ABS) developed by Bradburn (1969), asks ten questions on the positive and negative effects, each with the option of a dichotomic response: Yes=1 or No=0. One obtains the final numerical result with a simple algorithm.

The Life Satisfaction Scale by Diener *et al.* (1985) is another example. It asks the person to evaluate five affirmations, selecting one out of seven possible gradings for each affirmation. The sum of the evaluations permits the establishment of the degree of the person's satisfaction with life.

Scales that translate response into numerical results	
Affective Balance Scale (ABS)*	
In the last few weeks, have you ever felt...	Response scales
a. Particularly excited or interested in something?	Yes=1 No=0
b. So restless that you could not sit still in your seat?	
c. Proud because someone congratulated you for something?	Positive Affections (PA): a,c,e,g,i
d. Very lonely or distanced from other people?	Negative Affections (NA): b,d,f,h,j;
e. Happy about having achieved something?	
f. Bored?	Affective Balance Grade: PA-NA
g. On top of the world?	
h. Depressed or very unhappy?	Range: [-5, 5]**
i. That things have gone your way?	
j. Upset because somebody criticized you?	
* Bradburn (1969)	
** As the Affective Balance is the result of subtracting the negative values from the positive affective values, the minimum possible value is -5, and the maximum is 5.	
Scale With Life Satisfaction (SWLS)*	
Below you will find five affirmations with which you may agree or disagree. Read each one and mark the number that corresponds with the answer that best describes your degree of agreement or disagreement.	

Response scales
1. In strong disagreement
2. In disagreement
3. In slight disagreement
4. Nether agreement or disagreement
5. In slight disagreement
6. In agreement
7. In strong agreement
A. In most aspects, my life tends towards my ideal
B. My life conditions are excellent
C. I am completely satisfied with my life
D. Up until now I have obtained the most important things I want in my life
E. If I could change my life, I would not change a thing
SWLS = A + B + C + D + E
* Diener <i>et al.</i> (1985)
Note: The sum of the evaluations follows the classification presented below for degree of satisfaction with life:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 - 9 Extremely unsatisfied • 10 - 14 Unsatisfied • 15 - 19 Slightly unsatisfied • 20 Neutral • 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied • 26 - 30 Satisfied • 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied

3.1.4d Response Scale Format

The format in which the scales are presented is the most evident difference. There are scales which are presented vertically, but there are also horizontal scales. There are scales that remit to the concept of ladders and present different ladder figures. Some instruments used to measure affective states even allow a selection from among a set of drawings of faces which range from happiness to sadness.¹³

¹³ An example is the Satisfaction for Life Domains Scale of Baker and Intagliata (1982).

Response Scale Format

Vertical scale

Speaking generally, are you a happy person...?*

- 1 very unhappy
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 very happy

* Veenhoven (1974)

Horizontal scale

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)**

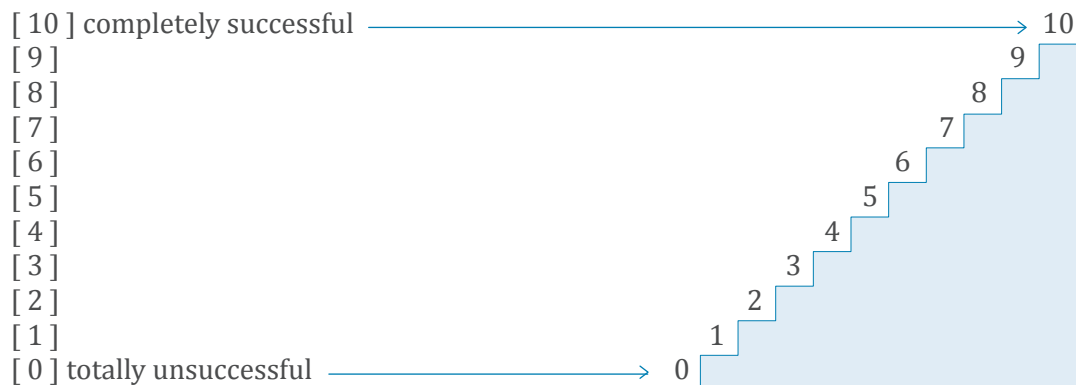
Below we present several words which describe different feelings and emotions. Read each one and indicate with the corresponding number the intensity with which you have felt that way during the last week, including today.

Response scales				
1	2	3	4	5
<i>Nothing</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Considerably</i>	<i>Extremely</i>
Interested	Guilty	Irritable	Decided	Tense
Scared	Alert	Attentive	Stimulated	Hostile
Ashamed	Scared	Disgusted	Enthusiastic	Inspired
Active	Motivated	Proud	Nervous	Terrified

** PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule), Watson *et al.* (1988).

Stairs

How would you grade yourself regarding how successful you have been in achieving your life goals and purposes? Consider that the top of the ladder means total success, and the lower part means total failure.***



*** Bortner and Hultsch (1970)

3.1.5 Findings for latin america

Latin Americans are happy and satisfied with their lives. In Latin America, happiness and life satisfaction have been studied at a sub-continental and national level, and even with national sub-groups. The results show generally that Latin Americans experience a relatively high level of subjective wellbeing, that is, they are happy and satisfied with their lives. We present some results below, for the region as a whole and at a national level.

Out of 16 countries studied by Rojas, the average satisfaction with life in all of them is above level seven, on an 11 level scale

The work of Fuentes and Rojas (2001) on subjective wellbeing and income is based on a representative sample of two urban areas in Mexico. They measure subjective wellbeing by inquiring about happiness, with a question with nine possible answers, ranging from very unhappy to extremely happy. 65% of the density is found in the three upper categories: happy, very happy and extremely happy, with 31, 25 and 9% respectively. The two lowest categories, very unhappy and unhappy, cover merely 1% together.

The measurement of subjective wellbeing that Rossi *et al.* (2008a) recur to in order to carry out their study in Argentina and Uruguay is a different one. Initially, they are based on a four level scale of responses; however, in order to operationalize the degree of wellbeing, they build a dichotomic variable which takes on the value of 1 if the person is satisfied or quite satisfied with their life and 0 if they report being not very satisfied or unsatisfied. They obtained a measurement of 0.64 in Uruguay and 0.72 in Argentina.¹⁴

¹⁴ This can also be understood with percentages: in Uruguay, 64% stated they were satisfied with their life (either very satisfied or quite satisfied), whereas in Argentina it was 72%.

The study carried out by Florenzano and Dussailant (2011) for the Chilean population is based on a similar exercise. The scale used by them also has four answers, but the question asks about happiness, not satisfaction. They build a dichotomic variable which takes the value 1 if the surveyed person considers they are very happy or quite happy and 0 if they consider they are not very happy or not happy at all. The average of this variable was 0.82; that is, 82% of Chileans stated that they are very happy or quite happy.

The Human Development Report from Chile (PNUD, 2012) reports similar levels for happiness: on the four point scale, 79% of Chileans reported that they were quite happy or very happy. With respect to the satisfaction with life of Chileans, the average was 7.27, on a scale where 1 is completely unsatisfied and 10 is completely satisfied. On the best-worst life possible ladder, where 0 is the worst life possible and 10 is the best life possible, the average for Chile was 6.95. Finally, the average of positive affections, measured on a scale of 0 to 20, was 14.

The Martínez-Bravo (2012) study provides a very complete image of the region as a whole. Based in the information presented by the *Latinobarometer* on 18 countries in Latin America, from 1995 to 2010, the author finds that the average satisfaction with life of Latin Americans is high. On a four level scale (1=Not at all satisfied, 4=Very satisfied), it analyzes: a) the average satisfaction with life of countries in which presidential elections were won by an opposition party between 1995 and 2010, and 2) the average satisfaction with life in countries in which the official party won the elections, during the same period. It finds that the countries where the official party won had a clearly higher average than those where the opposition party won. However, both averages were relatively high: 3.06 for the cases in which the official party won, and 2.90 for those where the opposition won.

The Rojas (2012) study, based on the information revealed by the Gallup survey of 2007, also provides a clear image of the region, as it considers 16 Latin American countries. If the countries are ordered based on their satisfaction with life (with the scale of the answers for this survey ranging from 0 to 10), we find that Costa Rica is in the first place, with 8.5, followed by Guatemala, with 7.9 and Panama and Mexico, both with 7.8, Peru is last, with a measurement of 6. Chileans report relatively low levels for their economic situation.

Considering 18 countries, Melgar and Rossi (2011) study happiness in Latin America, based on the information provided by the *Latinobarometer* databases for 2008. The question used inquires about the degree of happiness and has a scale of four possible answers: very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy. A reported 29.5% of Latin Americans say they are very happy, 41.1% are quite happy, 25.1 % are not very happy and 3.8% are not at all happy¹⁵; that is, more than two thirds of Latin Americans are happy.

3.1.6 Measurement of satisfaction in domains of life in latin america

It is fundamental to measure satisfaction with different domains of life. Based on a large group of questions on satisfaction with aspects of life, and applying a factorial analysis, Rojas (2007) finds seven domains of life in this empirical study for the case of Mexico. The seven relevant dimensions of life may be cataloged as: Health Dimension, Economic Dimension, Work Dimension, Family Dimension, Friendship Dimension, Dimension of Availability and Use of Free Time, and the Dimension of Community. The domains of life with most weight in the explanation of satisfaction with life of people, who are married, have jobs, and a family, were health and availability and gratifying use of free time.

¹⁵ The remaining 0.5% did not respond.

3.1.6a Measuring satisfaction with spirituality and religiousness

Wills (2009) studies satisfaction with spirituality and religiousness of Colombian people, concretely in Bogotá, and its relationship with life satisfaction. Satisfaction with spirituality and religiousness is measured by the author by asking people directly how satisfied they are with their spirituality or religiousness. According to Wills (2009), the spiritual dimension contributes to the explanation of Colombian people's satisfaction with life.

It is not enough to measure people's satisfaction with their life in general; one must also register the degree of satisfaction with the different dimensions of life

3.1.6b Measure leisure

We must measure leisure as completely as possible in order to understand its influence on subjective wellbeing. In studying micro-entrepreneurs and university students in Talca, Chile, Soto and Moyano (2010) found that leisure, widely measured, i.e. considering the many aspects it includes, is positively correlated with subjective wellbeing.

We must measure leisure completely in order to recognize its influence on subjective wellbeing

The measurement of leisure made by the authors is based on a large survey, with 33 items, grouped into three scales: behaviors of leisure, beliefs on leisure and obstacles to leisure. Likewise, the time in hours dedicated every week to leisure and perception of the level of leisure, are investigated. In this study, the measurement of leisure was not limited to measuring the time of rest, it is more elaborate and includes from the time dedicated to surfing the internet to the time spent practicing a sport, including activities such as listening to music,

sharing time with family and friends, and others. It is important to measure leisure completely in order to recognize its influence on subjective wellbeing more precisely.¹⁶

3.1.7 alternative proposals for the measurement of subjective wellbeing

The measurement of subjective wellbeing does not necessarily have to resort to quantitative techniques, it can also be carried out by way of qualitative studies.¹⁷

Biomarkers, along with subjective measurements, have the potential to create a revolution in the measurement of wellbeing, according to Yamamoto

Qualitative studies are especially useful for capturing the meanings that concepts such as wellbeing, happiness, satisfaction, family, leisure, and others have for people. They are often the starting point for future development of quantitative instruments (Soto and Moyano 2010; Moyano, forthcoming).

Other significant studies are those based on the use of biomarkers, which stem from the approximation to a guided psychological basis for the measurement of pleasure and pain. According to Yamamoto (2011), the measurement of subjective wellbeing by way of biomarkers is one of the more promising options for the future.

¹⁶ This, it may be said, allows us to know how much time people have for renovation and pleasure in societies with emerging economies, who appear to consume a lot of time in work activities as well as transportation to and from work, demeriting leisure and family activities (Soto and Moyano, 2010).

¹⁷ Examples of this are the studies on subjective wellbeing carried out at WeD (Wellbeing in Developing Countries), a multidisciplinary group from the University of Bath dedicated to studying the quality of life in developing countries.

Although research still needs to be deepened in Latin America, as there are few related studies (Arbulú and Yamamoto, 2011; Yamamoto, unpublished), biomarkers, along with subjective measurements, significantly contribute to the measurement of wellbeing (Yamamoto, 2011).¹⁸

On their part, Yamamoto and Feijoó (2007) propose the application of an emic approach in the development of scales. The items of these scales result from the characterization of responses of a population under study to an open question, in contrast with the surveys in which the researcher estimates the appropriate form and content for a defined population. This does not mean the assumption of the impossibility of attaining a universal measurement: developing multiple emic scales, valid in different regions, can establish the appropriate and common items for a larger regional environment.

3.2 Methodological Considerations

3.2.1 Ways of reporting subjective wellbeing

The statistically significant differences in happiness are important. Azar and Calvo (2012) place emphasis on the need to report the differences in mean national happiness which are statistically significant. According to them, it is incorrect to assume that the mean national happiness is sufficient to establish differences between countries, the way many global happiness ranking do. A country can present a higher happiness average than another in one ranking, but that does not necessarily mean that, on average, inhabitants of the first country are happier than those of the second, as the average comes from a sample. Therefore, attention must be paid to the differences which are statistically significant.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Yamamoto (2011) for a more detailed explanation.

¹⁹ "Differences in happiness between two countries with different ranking are statistically significant when their respective confidence intervals do not overlap" (Azar and Calvo, 2012: 2).

3.2.2 subjective wellbeing inequality indicators

The standard deviation is a good indicator of inequality in happiness level. Kalmijn and Veenhoven (2005) study nine different inequality indicators. When putting them to the test,²⁰ only four dispersion statistics were satisfactory: 1) standard deviation, 2) average absolute difference, 3) average distance between pairs, and 4) interpercentile range. The five which did not pass the tests, established by them, and therefore rejected as inadequate for the measurement of happiness inequality in the countries, are: 1) variation coefficient, 2) the Gini index, 3) the Theil entropy measure, 4) percentage outside of the trend, and 5) range. The authors highlight that the standard deviation, the measurement which is most used to explain inequality in the happiness of countries, is a satisfactory inequality indicator for the case of subjective wellbeing indicators.

3.2.3 Population to be interviewed

The measurement of subjective wellbeing is normally carried out on adults. According to Yamamoto and Feijoó (2007), values, which are an important component of wellbeing, only become stable in adulthood, and therefore measurements on this segment of the population include people's stable values. However, special instruments have also been developed to measure the subjective wellbeing of different populations, such as children, people with mental retardation, the elderly, among others.²¹

²⁰ The tests applied to the statistics are amply explained by Kalmijn and Veenhoven (2005).

²¹ *The International Wellbeing Group* (2006) presents a very ample review of the instruments used to measure the subjective wellbeing of different population groups.

²² Section based largely on the work of Diener *et al.* (2012)

²³ Reliability is understood as the same results being obtained if the measurement scales are applied under the same conditions.

Let us use the standard deviation to show the inequality in the happiness level of different countries: it is proven to be the best

3.3 Robustness of the Measurement of Subjective Wellbeing²²

3.3.1 Reliability of subjective wellbeing measurements

The reliability of the subjective wellbeing measurement scales has been widely proven. There are several ways to put the reliability of subjective wellbeing measurements to the test.²³ First, there has been convergence (considerable correlations) between different measurement instruments and scales, which indicates that people respond consistently (Pavot *et al.*, 1991; Diener *et al.*, 1985). Additionally, the factorial analyses of the multi-item scales of life satisfaction normally reveal a single dimension (Diener *et al.*, 1985; Slocum-Gori *et al.*, 2009).

There are consistent psychological processes to which people resort when reporting their level of happiness and satisfaction, and therefore the information captures in the subjective wellbeing scales

On the other hand, the stability of results on the long term (Diener *et al.*, 1985) and in different situations, such as work or leisure environments (Diener and Larsen, 1985) suggests that there are conscious psychological processes involved and that people use similar information when reporting their results. Appreciations of satisfaction with life present notable stability when there are short periods involved, which logically decreases (appreciations vary more) as the time span between evaluations increases (Fujita and Diener, 2005).

There is also a high consistency in the life satisfaction averages at national levels (Diener

et al., 1995). As occurs at a personal level, the average satisfaction with life tends to become stable at short periods of time, and is much less stable as the time intervals increase.

3.3.2 Validity of subjective wellbeing measurements

The validity of the subjective wellbeing reports has been proven. An evident example of their validity is found in the response rate of questions on subjective wellbeing. According to Diener *et al.* (2102), around 98% of the people who were asked about their degree of happiness have a response. Empirical studies for Latin America have provided the same results: the empirical studies by Rojas in Mexico and Costa Rica find that between 98 and 99% of those asked questions about subjective wellbeing provide an answer. Such high response rates indicate that people understand the questions about subjective wellbeing and can answer them with ease.

The ages at which the greatest happiness is reported are those at which the lowest use of antidepressants are also reported

Another important indicator of the validity of the scales is that reports on satisfaction with life are correlated with the measurement of wellbeing that is not based on the interviewee report, such as reports made by family or friends regarding a person's satisfaction (Sandvik *et al.*, 1993).

People easily understand questions about subjective wellbeing and can answer them without problems, a fact that is reflected in response rates above 98%

It has been proven that the results on life satisfaction are significantly correlated with the psychological variables that measure positive states of mind, as well as with good and bad life experiences which people may remember and with reports on state of mind. Generally, negative relationships of subjective wellbeing

with measurements of disease, and their positive relationship with other measurements of wellbeing, constitute further proof of their validity. Thus, in their study on Chile, Moyano *et al.* (2011) has found that happiness is positively correlated with satisfaction with life, and negatively with depression.

The pattern presented by satisfaction with life, in the form of a "U" along the adult life cycle is reflected by an inverted "U" pattern for the use of antidepressants (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2012): the ages at which the greatest happiness is reported are those at which the lowest use of antidepressants are also reported. This is another proof of the validity of subjective wellbeing measurements.

Further evidence is the difference in subjective wellbeing presented between groups with "unfortunate" life experiences and groups without them, such as prisoners, mental patients or prostitutes compared with healthy persons. At a national level, the fact that there are different levels of wellbeing in different societies constitutes evidence of the validity of these measurements: satisfaction with life is closely associated with circumstances in life at a social level.²⁴

Genetic studies also prove the validity of the life satisfaction scales: it has been proven that satisfaction with life of monozygotic (identical) twins separately can be positively correlated (Lykken and Tellegen, 1996). Likewise, satisfaction with life helps to predict relevant behaviors, such a suicide, marriage, paternity and conserving a job.

Regarding the validity of variance, many studies have shown that between 60 and 80% of the variability in life satisfaction across persons is

²⁴ It has been found that national life satisfaction averages correlate with freedom and political rights, levels of corruption, and democracy (Diener *et al.*, 2012).

associated with structural factors, which change little over the short term; the rest (20 to 40%) is explained by more momentary factors (short term) and by measurement errors.²⁵

3.3.3 Trustworthiness of subjective wellbeing measurements

Measurements of subjective wellbeing developed in other parts are reliable in Latin America. Moyano (2010) explores the reliability of three instruments for the measurement of subjective wellbeing in a sample of Chilean students: the scale of satisfaction with life,²⁶ of happiness and of health. The first demands the interviewee to “indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement (with answers that range from 1 = I am in great disagreement, to 7 = I am in strong agreement) with: “a) in many respects, my life approximates my ideal; b) the conditions of my life are excellent; c) I am completely satisfied with my life; d) up until now I have achieved the most important things I want in life; e) if I could live my life again, I wouldn’t change anything about it” (p. 468).

The survey asks the interviewee to respond to different questions, such as a) “generally, I consider I am...” or b) “compared with most of my equals (friends, work colleagues or neighbors) I consider I am...” (Moyano, 2010: 458), by selecting a number within a scale ranging from 1 = not very happy, to 7 = very happy.

The quality-of-health asks the interviewee to respond to questions about their health by selecting one of the following options: excellent, very good, good, regular and bad. The empirical results by Moyano (2010), obtained through a sample of 133 Chilean undergraduate students, indicate that these measurements of subjective wellbeing are consistent and reliable.

²⁵ Diener *et al.* (2012) broadly present the subject of the validity of the reports on life satisfaction.

²⁶ Scale developed by Diener *et al.* (1985)

Gallardo and Moyano (2012) also adopted the Ryff subjective wellbeing scale for an adolescent population in Chile, and also obtained good results. Generally, studies which make use of the measurement of subjective wellbeing in Latin America recognize these measurements as robust.

Between 60 and 80% of the variability in life satisfaction across persons is associated with structural factors; the rest is explained by more momentary factors and by measurement errors

3.4 Aspects to Consider for the Research of Wellbeing

3.4.1 Response bias

When measuring subjective wellbeing, there is always the risk of creating response bias. There are at least two biases which may be caused when measuring subjective wellbeing:

1) Appreciation bias. Veenhoven (1994) assures that this bias is caused by the use of *heuristics* at the time of the self-evaluation of subjective wellbeing. *Heuristics* are mental simplifications to which people recur in order to report their level of subjective wellbeing, a mechanism which may cause errors.

For example: the interviewer is in a wheelchair. In this case, the “*heuristics* of availability” is operating, which implies a mental simplification based on the information available at the time. When seeing the interviewer in a wheelchair, the interviewee highlights the importance of health and values his or her satisfaction with life more highly, as well as the fact that the correlation between it and the health variables becomes more pronounced.

2) Bias in the interviewee’s response. There may be several sources. One is in semantics: the fact that interviewees interpret the words of the questions differently. Another is in the considerations of self-representation and social

desirability: that which the interviewee wishes to represent of herself, and what she believes others expect of herself.

These biases are random and dissipate in large sample sizes (Veenhoven, 1994). There are other aspects which may influence the presence of these biases, and of which one must be careful, such as the place where the interview takes place, the interviewer's characteristics, question sequence, and precise verbalization of the key instrument.

In surveys on wellbeing, the question on satisfaction with life in general should precede any questions on satisfaction with different domains of life, in order to avoid satisfaction with different domains affecting the global response

3.4.2 Location of questions on subjective wellbeing in the surveys

The location of questions on subjective wellbeing within the questionnaire has an influence on the response. In public opinion surveys, the answers to survey questions may be affected by the order in which the questions are presented (Bradburn, 1983; Smith, 1982). McClendon and O'Brien (1988) find that the effect on satisfaction with different domains of life over satisfaction with life in general is different when the questions on satisfaction with the domains are asked before the question on satisfaction with life or after it. At the *International Wellbeing Group* (2006) they place emphasis on the question on satisfaction with life in general preceding the questions on satisfaction with different domains of life, with the aim of making sure that "the domains do not influence the global response" (p. 13).²⁷

We must also pay attention to the location of questions on subjective wellbeing when they are accompanied by questions on other subjects. In some studies the question on subjective wellbeing is asked twice, at the beginning and at the end of the questionnaire, in order to learn the effect of the rest of the questions on the respondents answer (Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2002).²⁸

A central issue for the measurement of subjective wellbeing is whether it requires a specific survey for its measurement or if the block of questions on subjective wellbeing may be included in an already existing survey. The proposal is the application of specific surveys on subjective wellbeing, that is, independently from other surveys, such as economic surveys or surveys on violence. Given that subjective wellbeing is not subordinated to other subjects, the questions that investigate subjective wellbeing should not be appended to other questionnaires as additional questions. Subjective wellbeing is explained by multiple factors, and in any case, it should be these which are subordinated to subjective wellbeing. The proposal is to

²⁷ In contrast, Veenhoven (2011) proposes that the question on general (global) satisfaction with life should be preceded by questions on satisfaction with different domains of life.

²⁸ As part of their proposal for the measurement of wellbeing, Yamamoto and Feijoó (2007) sustain that by combining a survey with open alternatives at a qualitative stage, followed by an emic scale with closed alternatives at a quantitative stage, produces the least biased method which also provides richness of qualitative data, with the precision of quantitative approaches.

generate and apply specific subjective wellbeing questionnaires independently, unless a specific research is at hand.

3.5 Final Consideration

It is indispensable to attend to the subjectivity of people in order to understand and measure their wellbeing as completely as possible. Research on subjective wellbeing shows that it is possible to obtain relevant information on people's wellbeing based on self-reporting, that is: by asking people about their wellbeing it is possible to obtain useful and complete information, which cannot be obtained by way of other commonly used indicators. Subjective wellbeing implies more information than

indicators as widely measured and used as income the Human Development Index (HDI). Rojas (2012) shows that the correlation between the HDI and the GDP in Latin America is almost 0.91; that is, the HDI adds little additional information to the situation of countries to what is already considered in the GDP. Also, the correlation in Latin America between the HDI and GDP and indicators of satisfaction with life is very low: 0.22 and 0.24, respectively. This tells us that subjective wellbeing indicators provide new and relevant information, which we are not systematically measuring in the region. Subjective wellbeing does not only constitute a more complete measurement of wellbeing, but it directly involves a person in the evaluation in their own wellbeing.







Research of subjective wellbeing

The research carried out in Latin America provides understanding on subjective wellbeing. The relatively high levels of satisfaction with life in Latin America make the research carried out in the region globally relevant for the study and the comprehension of human wellbeing. Research in Latin America corroborates the findings of previous regions (Europe and USA) and also provides material in the study of new factors relevant to wellbeing. Thus, it is corroborated that income is clearly insufficient in explaining people's wellbeing. Likewise, it points towards the importance of not monetary factors, such as values and human relations.

This chapter presents the findings of the research in Latin America. In some subjects it has been fructiferous (there is no doubt that family is an important factor for the subjective wellbeing of Latin Americans). In many other subjects, conclusions are fragile or non-existent, and further research is required (the case of public participation and subjective wellbeing is an example).

The purpose of this chapter is multiple. On one hand, it presents the factors which explain subjective wellbeing, presenting the results of the research which supports this. Likewise, it indicates the subjects and aspects which require further investigation. It also presents different approaches to which the academy recurs in order to board the issue. This all constitutes the

evidence that the study on subjective wellbeing necessarily requires a multidisciplinary approach, as disciplinary theories propose incomplete explanations and guides for the study of wellbeing; a posture which, based on the results presented herein, this chapter attempts to support.

4.1 Domains of Life

A person's global wellbeing may be understood based on his or her wellbeing in different aspects of their life. There are many areas of a person's life, and their satisfaction with each of these contributes to explaining their global wellbeing. Rojas (2007) distinguishes seven domains of life based on 24 questions on satisfaction with different aspects of everyday life (such as living conditions, work conditions, health, health services, financial solvency, income, neighbor relations, safety, public transport, family relationships, among others) asked to the interviewees of the study sample. He finds that of these seven dimensions, family relationships, health, and availability and gratifying use of free time are the ones which have the highest impact on the wellbeing of married and employed persons. Economic and occupational dimensions are also important to these people.

These results are congruent with the findings reached by academics in other parts of the world. Cummins *et al.* (2003), when developing a subjective wellbeing index for Australia, find

eight relevant domains. Together, they explain approximately 60% of the variance in general satisfaction with life in Australia and other countries.²⁹

There are many dimensions to a person's life... and their satisfaction with each dimension contributes to explaining their global wellbeing

4.1.1 Money Is Not All that Matters

Multiple studies carried out in Latin America reinforce the findings of other countries, and show that although income is a fundamental factor for wellbeing, it is not sufficient to explain it (Fuentes and Rojas, 2001; Melgar and Rossi, 2011; Rojas, 2007, 2009).³⁰ Concretely, it has been proven that income is an important variable in the economic domain, one of various domains which explain subjective wellbeing, but not necessarily the most important (Rojas, 2011).

In their study of Mexico, Fuentes and Rojas (2001) find that the relationship between income and subjective wellbeing is extremely weak, if not non-existent, as it does not explain even 5%.³¹ The proposed explanation confirms the one established by previously formulated

²⁹ The domains are: (economic) level of life, health, life achievements, personal relationships, security, degree of belonging to the community, security in the future, and spirituality/religiousness. See the table on the Personal Wellbeing Index in the table on QUESTIONS FOR MEASURING SATISFACTION WITH DIFFERENT DOMAINS OF LIFE, sub-section 3.1.3.

³⁰ The play on words used by Rojas (2005b) to present this idea is very illustrational: "in life there is more than just standard of living" (p. 4).

³¹ If we run a simple regression of happiness against income, the explanatory capacity of income (R²) is only 4.2%. That is, only 4.2% of the variability of the happiness of Mexicans explained by income, according to the results of this study.

theories and findings reached in other places (Easterlin, 1974; Layard *et al.*, 2009; Graham, 2004). According to them, an increase in income is associated with an increase in aspirations; something that people do not count on when estimating the impact additional income would have on their happiness. People overestimate the impact of a higher income on their happiness (Rojas, 2009a).

4.1.2 Is Fundamental to the Subjective Wellbeing of Latin Americans

In his empirical study of Mexico, Rojas (2007) finds that the family dimension is the one that contributes most to the generation of wellbeing. Identifies five relevant dimensions that explain satisfaction with life of Mexicans, of which the family dimension is the one with the highest impact. This dimension refers to satisfaction with the relationship with partners and children, and to a lesser degree the rest of the family. Because it has the most weight on subjective wellbeing, Rojas (2007) does not doubt in qualifying the family domain as crucial.³² If the person has a very satisfactory family relationship, it's likely they are highly satisfied with life; if the family relationship is very unsatisfactory, then it is likely that satisfaction with life is low.

Studying subjective wellbeing through happiness, satisfaction with life in general, and satisfaction with different domains of life in the region of Maule in Chile, Moyano and Ramos (2007) also find that family is the domain of life which contributes most to subjective wellbeing. Their results assure that both men and women, independently of there are and occupational group, find their main source of happiness in the family, followed by work.

Within the subject of family as a domain of life, it is noteworthy that married people always present higher levels of subjective wellbeing. The results of the Moyano and Ramos (2007)

³² "...it was found that satisfaction with the family domain is crucial to satisfaction with life" (Rojas, 2007: 20).

study confirm this idea. According to them, the condition of “married” is associated with greater happiness, compared to “single” people; the same occurs with life satisfaction: married people present greater satisfaction with life than single people.

Florenzano and Dussailant (2011) obtain equivalent results. The empirical findings of their quantitative analysis of happiness determinants, made also for Chile, permits them to affirm that married people are the happiest, followed by those who have a living relationship. By skating it in terms of the probabilities, the study shows that people who are separated, divorced or have annulled marriages have the lowest probability of being happy.³³

According to the findings in the study by Rossi *et al.* (2008a), made for the region of Rio de la Plata (Uruguay and Argentina) based on data from 2004, happiness correlates positively with people being married or in free union, which, they affirm, may be capturing social capital, that is, support, the self-sufficiency network, confidence in others or social integration.

These results are also found for the population above 60 in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. Based on the data from 1999 and 2000, the study by Rossi *et al.* (2008b) allows for the assurance that marriage increases happiness, as according to the results from their statistical methods for the analysis of causality, there is evidence that marriage exerts a positive influence on happiness.

Empirical studies for Monterrey, Mexico, have also revealed this relationship. Happiness, according to the results of the analysis carried out by García *et al.* (2008), correlates positively and significantly with marriage. The study shows

³³ “...married people are happiest, followed by those who have a live-in relationship. People with the lowest probability of being happy are those who are separated, divorced, or have an annulment” (Florenzano and Dussailant, 2011: 253).

that by comparing married people to single or widowed people, the first are happier on average; and they are even more so when compared to divorced or separated people. But there are also important differences in level of happiness between those who find marriage very happy and those who describe it as not very happy.³⁴

Family is the principal source of happiness of Latin Americans

Happiness increases with marriage. Married people present a higher average happiness level than single, widowed or divorced people. Likewise, it has been found that the probability of happiness increases with marriage

4.1.3 The Importance of Employment for Subjective Wellbeing

The findings on the relationship between employment and subjective wellbeing in Latin America are very diverse. Employment has been studied in global terms: as a dimension of wellbeing;³⁵ formal and informal employment have also been studied, and their relationship with subjective wellbeing. Likewise, addiction to work has been studied, and its relation to work satisfaction, to mention a few.

The results of the Vega and Moyano (2010) study, based on a sample of academics at a Chilean university, show that work satisfaction

³⁴ “...compared to single people or widows, and especially compared to divorced or single people, married people are happier on average” (García *et al.*, 2008: 413). There are also significant differences between the happiness of “those who describe their marriage as very happy and those who describe it as not very happy” (García *et al.*, 2008: 414).

³⁵ Rojas (2007) found five dimensions which significantly explain the subjective wellbeing of those who are married and have children and jobs, one of these dimensions is the work dimension.

is correlated with addiction to work: with greater addiction to work come lower levels of work satisfaction. Two components of work satisfaction stand out, i) the intrinsically satisfaction with work, and ii) satisfaction with supervision. An increase in addiction to work is accompanied by a decrease in levels of both dimensions of work satisfaction. According to Vega and Moyano (2010), these results are consistent with those from other authors, and confirm the low satisfaction level of work as one of the characteristics of addiction to work, which is explained because those who have an addiction to work, do so due to a strong impulse or compulsion for work, and not because they enjoy their tasks.

Happiness, as well as satisfaction, has a positive relationship with informal work in Chile. This is due to the fact that work flexibility is highly valued by Chileans

In his comparative study of the determinants of happiness in Latin America, Western Europe and United States, carried out based on different waves of data from the World Values Survey,³⁶ Beytía (2011) finds that working independently, as opposed to having a dependent employment, has a positive impact on the happiness of Latin American women aged between 30 and 39, which does not occur in Europe or United States, according to the results by Beytía (2011). The author proposes that dependent employment generates less happiness, and therefore both unemployment and independent work are comparatively more satisfactory.³⁷

When analyzing the relationship of subjective wellbeing and the work of informal workers in

street commerce in Chile, Moyano *et al.* (2010) found that workers are happy firstly with their families, but also with their jobs, and these constitute the two main sources of happiness. This is understood, according to Moyano *et al.* (2010), because the freedom to work on the days and amount of time desired, receiving money for it every day, is an advantage of informal work compared to formal employment, according to statements by workers themselves.

Based on a representative sample from Latin America, which includes 40,000 people in 24 countries, Pagés and Madrigal (2008) also identify this apparent paradox (positive relationship between satisfaction and informal employment). According to the authors, this is due to the fact that, more than conventional conditions for defining employment as good quality, that which most people value is flexibility, development of personal interests and recognition. For its part, the European Academy (Blanchflower, 2000; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998; Frey and Benz, 2004) found that independent work or self employment (not necessarily informal) has a positive impact on subjective wellbeing, above dependent work, that is, higher than being employed.

4.1.4 Leisure Time and Wellbeing Go Hand in Hand

Soto and Moyano (2010) carried out a study in Talca, Chile, with a sample made up of micro-entrepreneurs and university students, in which they find that leisure is positively correlated

women is against the idea of mothers working...; b) working... may generate anxiety and guilt in women, because of abandonment of children; c) women's work is largely associated with conjugal and family problems, based on Latin American machismo; and d) these women have few incentives to become incorporated into the economic activity: for them wealth is less important and, since they do not have university or technical studies, they have access to less attractive jobs" (Beytía, 2011: 88).

³⁶ <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>. The author makes use of the 3 survey versions used between 1995 and 2008, based especially on the last one.

³⁷ "dependent employment would be related to a lower level of happiness because a) a larger part of these

with subjective wellbeing, even though the correlation is not very strong. It is important to mention that leisure, according to the study results, is a personal and subjective experience, described by way of several concepts, but presenting common elements, such as perceived freedom, intrinsical motivation, orientation of objectives and relationship with work.

Velásquez (2011), when studying the relationship there is between the urban population of Manizales, Colombia, between subjective wellbeing and relational goods, includes in these relational leisure, understood as the realization, in free time, of activities which imply sharing with others. Among their findings, there are several levels of happiness between those who share with their family and friends and those who don't.

4.1.5 Health Has an Impact on Subjective Wellbeing

In their analysis on happiness determinants, Florenzano and Dussailant (2011: 253) find that "health is one of the most potent predictors of happiness." Their study is about the relationship between variables maintained with subjective wellbeing in Chile. Highlights the role the health domain plays on the determination of happiness: a person who reports very bad health has a probability of almost 30 percent points less of being happy than a person who reports very good health.

Rossi *et al.* (2008a) study the relationship between happiness and different variables, such as the perception people have of their state of health. Their study is for Uruguay and Argentina, and is also based on models which calculate the probability of being happy starting from these variables. Their results are equivalent: the state of health appears as the main determinant of happiness. They study not only the relationship between happiness and the perception of health, but also, making use of statistical techniques, the causal sense which defines it, and find that having good health considerably increases the probability of happiness in the region, especially Uruguay.³⁸

A study with data from 1999 and 2000 of adults older than 60 in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, also shows that health is an explicative factor of subjective wellbeing. Concretely, Rossi *et al.* (2008b) find that those who are healthier and those who do not have problems of their nervous system, have a higher tendency to achieve higher levels of subjective wellbeing.

Likewise, the results of the study for Monterrey, Mexico, carried out by García *et al.* (2006), show that health is positively correlated with subjective wellbeing indicators. Thus, "the results clearly indicate that people who report having excellent health are happier on average" (García *et al.*, 2006: 413). Not only that, but health, along with other factors, "can help one to be happier, even if money is not in high levels..." (p. 425).³⁹

Health is one of the most potent predictors of happiness. It has been found in different countries in Latin America that the probability of happiness increased with health, and that average happiness is higher in healthy people and those who report better health

4.1.6 Religiousness and Spirituality Are Related to Subjective Wellbeing

In his empirical study for Bogotá, Wills (2009) finds that satisfaction with spirituality and religiousness constitutes a significant dimension

³⁸ "having good health increases the probability of happiness from 31 to 46 percent points in Uruguay, from 15 to 27 percent points in Argentina, and from 17 to 27 percent points for regionally grouped data" (Rossi *et al.*, 2008a: 76).

³⁹ All these findings converge with those from worldwide research. The positive relationship between health, measured objectively and subjectively, and subjective wellbeing has been amply proven (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell *et al.*, 1976; Okun *et al.*, 1984; Tiliouine, 2009)

(or domain) of subjective wellbeing. Spirituality understood as a person's internal resources, Wills (2009) proposes, will probably confer a feeling of strength which constitutes a guide to give meaning to life. Among the findings, stands out the fact that satisfaction with spirituality increases with age.

Average happiness and the probability of being happy increase with the frequency of religious practice. Also, those who understand their religion as a place of refuge and moral support, and not as an entity to place blame on, are more satisfied with themselves

Palomar and Victorio (2010) find that the degree of satisfaction depends, among other factors, on having a higher positive religiousness. Positive or negative religiousness is understood as the use of religion as a positive or negative coping. According to Palomar and Victorio (2010: 131), "Those who have a closer approach to religion as refuge and moral support, and less as an entity to place blame on, feel more satisfied with themselves."⁴⁰ These results converge with the positive effect of religiousness on the subjective wellbeing of people who live in difficult conditions, observed in different countries and religions (Diener *et al.*, 2011).

Religiousness understood as the frequency of religious practices has also shown a positive relationship with subjective wellbeing. For the case of the Chilean population, Florenzano and Dussailant (2011) find a positive relationship between religiousness and happiness. According to their findings, those who say they practice religion actively have a higher probability of

⁴⁰ Thus, an attitude prone towards religiousness, highlight the authors, is positively related to personal satisfaction; while a behavior of religious abandonment is related to lower personal satisfaction.

being happier; concretely, they have a higher probability of being happy of four percent points above those who do not practice.⁴¹

García *et al.* (2008) reach similar findings for the population of Monterrey, Mexico, as it is also the frequency of religious practice which is correlated with subjective wellbeing. According to their findings, there is a statistically significant difference between the average happiness of those who assist religious services more than once a week and those who never assist. This converges with findings in other regions (Gauthier *et al.*, 2006).⁴²

There are several domains of life which influence the subjective wellbeing of Latin Americans. The consistency of health and family stand out: It seems undeniable that satisfaction in the family environment has a significant positive impact on subjective wellbeing, as well as health, and availability of free time. Other domains of life present fertile ground for continued research. It is also convenient to deepen the study on subjects that have already been studied, such as researching the causality of some of the studied relationships.

4.2 Education

Subjective wellbeing responds to changes in education. It has been found that education is a variable which correlates with happiness. In their empirical study of the Chilean population, Florenzano and Dussailant (2011) find that the probability of being happy of those who have a

⁴¹ "those who say they actively practice their religion also have a higher probability of being happy (4 percent points compared to those who do not practice, although only marginally significant)" Florenzano and Dussailant (2011: 253).

⁴² Gauthier *et al.* (2006) carried out an experimental analysis of the relationship between religiousness, religious doubts and happiness, finding a negative and significant difference between maintaining religious doubts and satisfaction with life.

higher education, either complete or incomplete, is significantly higher than those who only reached school level education.

The results of the study by García *et al.* (2006) go in the same direction. They analyze the determinants of happiness in Monterrey, Mexico, with data from 2002. Among their findings, is the fact that an index composed of several questions on happiness is correlated with education: people who do not have an education are unhappier on average. Research carried out in other countries has also presented these results (Argyle, 1999; Sandvik *et al.*, 1993).⁴³

Rojas (2007) finds a positive effect of the years of education on life satisfaction, and specifically in satisfaction with domains such as partnership, with children, free time, and health. This is a net effect, as long as it is controlled by the person's income and socio-demographical characteristics.

The findings of Yamamoto *et al.* (2008) seem to go in the opposite direction. Having found initially that subjective wellbeing is positively related to collectivism and negatively related to individualism, the study findings reveal that education has a negative relationship with collectivism and positive relationship with individualism.⁴⁴ As opposed to the above mentioned studies, the work of Yamamoto and colleagues is based on a sample of the rural, peri-urban and marginal urban population (from the Peruvian Andes). The authors consider that modern education is based on a competition system which breaks with the sense of cooperation.

⁴³ It has been found that the level of education is positively related to subjective wellbeing; however, according to the results of these studies, the relationship should be explored in greater depth as there seem to be paths, such as income, along which education exerts its influence.

⁴⁴ They found that the education level significantly decreases an attitude of sharing and mutual support and increases envy and egotism.

It has been found that subjective wellbeing responds to changes in education in Latin America. Findings show that education has a positive effect on both happiness and satisfaction with life

4.3 Livability

Making a distinction between four different types of quality of life, Veenhoven (2000) presents a four quadrant matrix,⁴⁵ two of which are highly relevant to the understanding of the issues presented in this section: the one related to Livability of the Environment, i.e. an environment propitious for living in, and the one related to the person's Life-ability, that is, their ability to live well in its environment. The issues discussed here are included in one of these two quadrants, and therefore help to clarify their understanding.

4.3.1 Living in a good location

The conditions of the location where one lives have effects on your wellbeing. In their empirical study of traditional communities, peri-urban populations and marginal urban settlements in Peru, Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007) find that one

⁴⁵ Veenhoven (2000) makes a useful distinction between four types of quality of life. He begins by indicating that there are different terms, such as happiness, quality of life or wellbeing, used to indicate how well we are doing in life. However, these terms have different meanings. Therefore, he proposes a classification of quality of life based on two partitions: one related to the opportunities for having a good life, on one hand, and a good life in itself, on the other; and the other is related to external qualities and internal qualities. Both pairs form a four quadrant matrix which results from the intersection of both partitions. The quadrants are: habitability of the environment, personal skills, appreciation of life, and usefulness of life.

of the determinants (or needs) of wellbeing is a place to live, concretely, a “place to live better”. In turn, this is composed of three indicators: a clean and pretty neighborhood, tranquility (without delinquency or violence), and improvement. Clearly, the work by Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007) is an issue which makes reference to the Livability of the Environment (Veenhoven, 2000). the “place to live better” (Yamamoto and Feijoo, 2007) alludes explicitly to an environment propitious to living, to a “characteristic of the environment which does not [necessarily] have a connotation limited by its material conditions” (Veenhoven, 2000: 5).

The neighborhood and quality of housing and public services available to Latin Americans have a significant influence on their lives

Florenzano y Dussaillant (2011) find, based on the empirical study of Chile, that “those who live in a rural area have a higher probability of happiness, by 4 percent point above those who live in urban areas. At the same time, those who live in the metropolitan region have a probability of being happier 5 percent points below that of people living in other regions of the country” (p. 252). Once more, these findings are circumscribed in the subject of an environment propitious to people’s living (Livability of the Environment).

4.3.2 Housing, neighborhood and urban life

The characteristics of housing and neighborhood have an impact on satisfaction. Studying the satisfaction of Latin Americans with their homes and their cities, based on the Gallup 2007 surveys, Lora et al. (2008) find that satisfaction with housing is determined, to a great extent, by water availability, access to telephone service, and possession of the property rights. Regarding satisfaction with the city, there is emphasis on the high incidence that public safety has on it, above all, but also the state of sidewalks, pedestrian zones and parks, and the quality of public transportation.

Powell and Sanguinetti (2010) study the impact of housing and neighborhood characteristics on satisfaction with life in six Latin American cities.⁴⁶ They find that in all of them, at least one indicator of the quality of housing construction (being three: quality of the floor, quality of the walls, and number of rooms), is significant. Regarding neighborhood characteristics, safety is the most important, although access to services such as water and drainage, garbage collection, electricity and telephone services, also have an impact on levels of satisfaction with life.

4.3.3 Safety

Safety generates subjective wellbeing. Safety has frequently presented itself as a determinant of subjective wellbeing, according to the research findings. In their study on safety and subjective wellbeing in the rural areas of conflict in Colombia, Wills *et al.* (2011) obtained, among others, two important findings: 1) the perception of insecurity presents a negative (and significant) correlation with subjective wellbeing; and 2) the perception of insecurity does not correlate significantly with objective indicators of safety .

In their empirical study Powell and Sanguinetti (2010) find that safety is considered a very important characteristic in Latin American cities. In San José, the presence of gangs negatively affects satisfaction with life. In Bogotá, Lima and Montevideo, safety is regarded as an important characteristic of a neighborhood.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Medellín, San José, Lima and Montevideo.

⁴⁷ In order to analyze perceptions of insecurity (or subjective insecurity), the authors studied political, economic and community insecurity. They highlight that among these, perception of political insecurity contributes mostly to subjective insecurity. Regarding the second finding, Wills *et al.* (2011) find that there are generally no significant correlations between the hard data on violent events and subjective insecurity, such that perceptions of insecurity are not necessarily related to violent events.

The findings of Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007) indicate that tranquility, understood as the absence of delinquency and violence (that is, safety), is one of the components of “a better place to live”, which in turn is a necessity of wellbeing, according to the empirical study of traditional communities, peri-urban towns and marginal urban settlements in Peru, carried out by these authors.

4.3.4 Coping skills and resources

The capacity to cope contributes towards wellbeing. The human capacity to cope is essential for wellbeing, as it is achieved necessarily within a context and it is convenient that people have the skills to live within this context. In their study of the conflicting zones of Colombia, Wills *et al.* (2011) find that people manage to react under adverse living conditions, showing a resilience to overcome conflictive situations.⁴⁸ These findings are circumscribed in the subject of people’s skills for living in their environment: *life-ability of the person* (Veenhoven, 2000).

According to Yamamoto, under an evolutionist look at happiness, also indicates that people dispose of resources to adapt to their environment. In this way, happiness is an indicator of a person’s correct functioning in his or her environment (Yamamoto, 2008a; Yamamoto *et al.*, 2008).

4.3.5 Social institutions and regulations

The impact of actions and decisions of people on their subjective wellbeing is influenced by regulations and ruling institutions. Regulations, understood as the rules to which conduct and activities are adjusted, that is, that which the

Safety nourishes subjective wellbeing. In Latin American, the perception of lack of security presents a negative (and significant) correlation with subjective wellbeing

majority does (a reference point), have an influence on the impact that people’s actions and decisions have on subjective wellbeing. Therefore, the modification of a regulation produces transitory impacts (which disappear when a new reference point is socially adopted) on subjective wellbeing which must be looked at. An illustration of this is seen in the empirical study carried out by Calvo *et al.* (2011) on the relationship between retirement age and subjective wellbeing. The authors find that the greatest positive impact of retirement on subjective wellbeing is obtained when the person at the age as of which the social security allows them to (the social regulation in the country); that is, the degree of subjective wellbeing attained is higher than if the person retires before or after the ages established as the social norm.⁴⁹ Thus, any change in retirement age, that is, a new norm or regulation, becomes the new point of reference based on which the deviations will have a negative effect.

Standards constitute the reference points for people’s actions and decisions. Decisions which deviate from the standards may have negative effects on subjective wellbeing. Therefore, when a new standard is adopted, it becomes the new point of reference from which deviations affect subjective wellbeing negatively

⁴⁸ “people adapt their minds to objective data which indicate potential insecurities, and develop survival strategies” (Wills *et al.*, 2011: 95).

⁴⁹ “...retirement is more beneficial if it occurs within the culturally and institutionally expected period” (Calvo *et al.*, 2011: 16).

The results constitute evidence in favor of the cultural-institutional theory, which highlights the role of norms, expectations and institutions on the effects of retirement. Adhering to the retirement age guidelines established by social policies and regulations, affirm Calvo *et al.* (2011), decrease the negative effects of passing into a new stage of life on subjective wellbeing.

4.4 Factors of Upbringing

4.4.1 Childhood and parenting styles

We must study upbringing practices and subjective wellbeing of children. Schwartzmann (2011) defends the need to measure upbringing styles or practices, with the objective of understanding the ways in which factors of infancy and psychological characteristics of the family environment have an incidence on children's development.⁵⁰ He proposes the creation of indicators of child development, psycho-social and self-perception of quality of life, which include positive and negative aspects (subjective wellbeing of children); among others: "... indicators of upbringing styles and practices, evaluation of infant quality of life, including the direct evaluation of wellbeing from the children themselves, as early as possible" (Schwartzmann, 2011: 313).

People's values do not only affect the degree of happiness, but also their very conception of happiness

4.4.2 Resilience

The factors which determine the capacity of persons to overcome adverse situations increase with subjective wellbeing. Palomar and Victorio (2010) find that the degree of resilience of people contributes to their subjective wellbeing. In their empirical study on Mexico, they analyze the determining psychological factors of resilience which have the greatest impact on the satisfaction of people with very low economic resources. These are: 1) The search for moral support as a coping capacity for problems and

⁵⁰ According to Schwartzmann (2011), the evidence of the consequences of childhood poverty on adulthood is vast, but especially that which demonstrates that an altered psycho-affective environment may lead to disorders in children.

evasive-impulsive style for solving problems; 2) optimism; 3) sense of humor as a social recourse; 4) self-concept.⁵¹

4.4.3 Values

Values have an incidence on people's happiness. In their study on the population of Monterrey, Mexico, García et al. (2008) find that happiness (operationalized with an index formed by several questions) is associated with a set of personal values. Concretely, "... those who consider as very important values: being fair, respectful, honest, serviceable and sincere with others, are happier on average; the same occurs with values such as being a hard worker, enjoying leisure time, being involved in national politics and environmental protection" (García et al., 2008: 416).

The largest difference in happiness is found by García et al. (2008) to be among those who consider that being serviceable is a very important value and those who don't consider it important at all. According to the authors, values, as well as health, can help a person to be happier, even if income is not high.

⁵¹ 1) The search for moral support as a strategy for problem confrontation and an evasive-impulsive style for solving problems: "...when one does not solve one's problems, and instead evades them or attempts non-reflexive responses, and when in order to confront difficulties there is a tendency to search for moral support which can be an emotional palliative, but which do not necessarily help to efficiently overcome the difficulty, one is unsatisfied" (p. 132). 2) Optimism: those who are more optimistic tend to be more satisfied. 3) Sense of humor as a social recourse: "...people who make use of humor to manipulate their social environment by entertaining others also feel more satisfied" (p. 132). 3) Self-conception: "...tendency towards feeling more satisfied if one sees oneself as a person with more good qualities than defects." (p. 133).

In the study of what a person values when it comes to the estimation of happiness, Rojas (2005a) proposes the theory of the *Conceptual Referent for Happiness*, which establishes that a person has a conceptual reference of what a happy life is, and that this reference has an influence at the time of evaluating one's life and happiness. An important fact is that people's values play a role in their own appreciation of their happiness: they act as filters in the relationship between life conditions and happiness.

In order to understand values, a fundamental component of wellbeing according to Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007), we must remit to the collectivism-individualism dichotomy. According to the measurements used in the empirical study carried out in traditional communities, the peri-urban populations and marginal urban settlements of Peru, collectivism is formed of three indicators: i) counsel and support; ii) sharing; and iii) neighborhood organization and personal progress. Individualism is formed of two indicators: i) envy and ii) egotism. According to the authors, individualism "may be linked to economic development, but at the same time reduce the support network and social interaction, and be linked to wellbeing, individualism may contribute to the reduction of wellbeing and collectivism leads to its increase" (Yamamoto and Feijoo, 2007: 223-224). Similar findings are obtained by Rego and Cunha (2007) in other countries.

In the Western, urban world, characterized by strong competition and anonymous and massive relations, state Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007), a collectivist strategy may not have the same logic which operates in a rural community.

4.5 Consequences of Subjective Wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing is an ultimate objective, and end in itself: the goal is to increase the wellbeing of people. It is not an input or means to achieve something more. However, subjective wellbeing also has favorable consequences

regarding other aspects of human behavior which are worth mentioning. The following may be understood as ulterior "positive aspects" of subjective wellbeing.

The people who are happiest and most satisfied with their lives incur in more voluntary and altruistic activities than those with lower levels of happiness or satisfaction with life

4.5.1 Voter turnout

Is there greater turnout from happy people? The results of the empirical study on happiness and political participation in Latin America carried out by Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008) signals towards the influence of happiness on the vote. The models prepared by the authors indicate that the positive and statistically significant relationship between happiness and voting is due to the fact that happy people tend to vote more than unhappy people, and not to the fact that voting produces happiness.⁵² This indicates that voter turnout is a positive externality of happiness.

4.5.2 Pro-social behavior

Subjective wellbeing promotes pro-social behavior. The academy has found that subjective wellbeing produces different types of pro-social behavior. A very clear positive relationship has been discovered, for example, between involvement in voluntary activities and subjective wellbeing: the people who are happiest and most satisfied with their lives incur in more voluntary and altruistic activities than those with lower levels of happiness or satisfaction with life (Thoits

⁵² The authors, however, indicate the need to extend the research and present their conclusions as tentative.

and Hewitt, 2001; Meier and Stutzer, 2004). The evidence suggests that subjective wellbeing generates pro-social behavior in people, although this does not rule out that the causal direction may be of pro-social and pro-voluntary behavior towards happiness.

The findings also clarify that happiness increases the probability and amount of help a person provides, as well as generosity and kindness, either by donating money for charity causes (Cunningham *et al.*, 1980; Rosenhan *et al.*, 1974), donating blood (O'Malley and Andrews, 1983) or voluntarily participating in experiments (Aderman, 1972). It is urgent for Latin American research to draw attention to this issue, as according to the findings in European and North American literature, pro-social behavior is revealed as one of the consequences and positive results of subjective wellbeing.

There are people who are not poor in terms of wellbeing, but are classified as such, and there are those who are classified as rich and are not

4.5.3 Health and life expectancy

Subjective wellbeing is a trigger of health and longevity. Research on the association between health and subjective wellbeing is conclusive: satisfaction with life and happiness are positively correlated with health. Although most studies indicate that health provides happiness, findings show that happiness and satisfaction with life are triggers of good health (Cohen and Pressman, 2006; Diener and Chan, 2011). It has been found, for example, that subjective wellbeing generates cardiovascular health (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008) and even improves hypertension and diabetes (Sapolsky, 2005).

Likewise, studies reveal a positive and clear relationship between subjective wellbeing and life expectancy. Findings indicate that happiness contributes to a higher life expectancy (Danner *et al.*, 2011; Diener and Chan, 2011). These

results urge the Latin American academy to research the issues, as there could be significant results, considering that the region presents high levels of subjective wellbeing.

4.6 Basic Needs

4.6.1 Income poverty

There are poor people who are not so and rich people who aren't either. It has been observed that the classification criteria of people as poor, based on income indicators, provide a very bad approximation to people's situation of subjective wellbeing. Attention must be paid to the fact that the relationship between income poverty and happiness is not tight, but above all, to the presence of dissonance in the classification of people as poor: there are people who are not poor in terms of wellbeing, but are classified as such, and there are those who are classified as rich and are not (Rojas, 2008a).

Based on the population data of two departments of Guatemala, the findings of the study by Guardiola and García-Muñoz (2009) allowed them to conclude that the measurement of poverty based on income overestimate the number of poor homes.⁵³ In contrast, "the subjective poverty of basic goods seems to be a better measurement of income poverty, as the first covers all life domains relevant to the person, as well as cultural, geographical and psychological factors" (Guardiola and García-Muñoz, 2009: 23).

The prior signals towards a redefinition of the concept of poverty, understood originally based on income or consumption, and defined now in terms of the perception a person has of the degree to which the basic needs of their home have been satisfied (Guardiola and García-Muñoz,

⁵³ "...measurements based on income, compared to subjective indicators, tend to over-estimate those who are in extreme poverty" (p. 23).

2009). The results of this work show that the home's income does not play an important role in defining subjectively perceived basic needs.

In his empirical study for Mexico, Rojas (2008a) assures that poverty, as people experience or live it, differs a lot from poverty of income, that is, that the latter is not a good representative of it. Poverty, as lived by people, is a much broader concept than poverty of income, a fact which causes great dissonance in the classification of people as poor (Rojas, 2008a). The economic dimension is only one, and does not have a lot of weight in the calculation of life satisfaction, i.e. of poverty lived by a person (Rojas 2008a, 2006b). Economic variables such as income or expenses are important in explaining economic satisfaction; however, economic satisfaction, although it contributes to life satisfaction, does not define it.

4.6.2 Nutrition

Does malnutrition damage subjective wellbeing? Rossi *et al.* (2008b) study the degree of malnutrition, among other variables, of adults over 60 in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, and its relationship with subjective wellbeing. They found that nutrition (measured from the recall the person makes of their nutritional conditions before age 15) is negatively associated with happiness indicators: “those who declared having lived malnutrition show a clear negative impact on subjective wellbeing” (Rossi *et al.*, 2008b: 7).

4.6.3 Access to services

Access to water contributes to subjective wellbeing. Guardiola *et al.* (2011), in their empirical study on access to water in Yucatan, Mexico, found that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between water access and subjective wellbeing. Authors encourage research which includes water satisfaction and other variables related to water in the analysis of wellbeing.

At a regional level, Lora *et al.* (2008) find that water availability is one of the most important

determinants of housing satisfaction in Latin America, as “the availability of running water increases the probability of people's housing satisfaction to 34%” (p. 199). According to Powell and Sanguinetti (2010: 41), “access to basic services such as... water... are very important” in explaining satisfaction with life in urban neighborhoods in Latin America.

4.6.4 Autonomy and competition

Autonomy is not a universal need for wellbeing. Yamamoto and Feijoo (2007) found that autonomy is not a basic need in rural, peri-urban and marginal urban communities in Peru. This finding shows that the need for autonomy is not universal, as affirmed by the theory of self-determination, which proposes that autonomy, competition and relations are universal needs.

Findings in Latin America reveal that autonomy does not constitute a universal need

4.7 Human Relations

4.7.1 Social networks

Social networks generate social wellbeing. According to the results of the study by Wills *et al.* (2011) on the relationship between social capital and subjective wellbeing in rural areas in conflict in Colombia, the existence of social networks, trust and reciprocity in the community where one lives has a positive and significant influence on subjective wellbeing. Additionally, the study shows that social capital (understood as interpersonal trust and degree of participation in voluntary associations) has a moderating effect on the relationship between insecurity and subjective wellbeing: when perception of insecurity is low, subjective wellbeing is high, but if there is social capital, it is even higher (Wills *et al.*, 2011). The European academy has had similar findings (Bjornskov, 2003; Winkelmann, 2009), thereby supporting the results.

4.7.2 Relational goods

Relational goods produce happiness. Starting from a database with information on the urban population of Manizales, Velásquez (2011) found that relational goods are fundamental determinants of subjective wellbeing.⁵⁴ Family relationships constitute a type of relational good, measured by way of the perceived quality of relationships between members of the household, shows of affection between family members and family satisfaction, are related positively and significantly to subjective wellbeing. Family is presented as “... the most significant relational good that city inhabitants count on” (Velásquez, 2011: 9).⁵⁵

In the happiness approach, “a developed society is one in which most people are satisfied with their lives, and progress means increasing happiness generally within societies”

Velásquez (2011) finds that other relational goods such as the capacity to relate to people, and satisfaction in social relationships, also present a clear and positive association with the reported happiness levels. Social support is analyzed, measured as the amount of non-family members to whom one may resort in case of need of economic resources, and it was found that happiness increases in the measure this number increases. Likewise, a positive association was presented between happiness and political participation, on one hand, and with community activities on the other. Availability, access or satisfaction with all the above mentioned

relational goods affect the probability of having high levels of happiness.⁵⁶ These results have been backed by findings in European countries and Japan, where a clear positive relationship has been found between relational goods and subjective wellbeing (Sarracino, 2009).

4.8 Development Strategies

4.8.1 Concept of development

We must understand development and progress in terms of achievement of subjective wellbeing, and not economic growth. Rojas (forthcoming) proposes the redefinition of the concepts of development and progress, based on subjective wellbeing, and not on income. From the happiness approach, “a developed society is one in which most people are satisfied with their lives, and progress means increasing happiness generally within societies” (Rojas, forthcoming: 15).⁵⁷

Analyzing information on subjective wellbeing and economic performance in Latin America, Rojas (2012) found that Chile had the highest economic growth rate in Latin America during the 90’s and 2000’s, but the satisfaction with life of Chileans is one of the lowest in the region. In contrast, Costa Rica has the best performance in terms of life satisfaction, while the growth of GDP per capita is not even half that of the Chilean, for the same period. This has important implications in terms of what is understood by progress and development and how to achieve them. From the approach of subjective wellbeing, Costa Rica is a more developed and progressive country than Chile, and therefore, formulas such as the ones followed in Costa Rica (and not the

⁵⁴ In a first stage, Velásquez (2011) analyzes the crossing points between the happiness levels of interviewees and the answers to questions on relational goods. This analysis reveals a clear relationship between the different relational goods analyzed and subjective wellbeing.

⁵⁵ This result is obtained by way of quantitative analysis, as well as qualitative methods.

⁵⁶ This is corroborated by Velásquez (2011) with a probabilistic econometric model.

⁵⁷ Understanding progress and development starting from a concept of wellbeing based on income is deficient, as this is too limited to capture the multiplicity of sources of wellbeing in life, according to the author.

Chilean) should be imitated in the rest of the countries of the region.

4.8.2 Pro-market reforms

Pro-market reforms have not produced greater subjective wellbeing. Studying the relationship between pro-market reforms introduced in Latin America from the late 80's and the subjective economic situation of poor people in the region, the empirical results of Rojas (2008b) show that the perception that poor Latin Americans have of their economic situation has been negatively affected by the pro-market reforms: thorough pro-market reforms implemented in Latin America corresponded to higher levels of dissatisfaction in its inhabitants.⁵⁸

It is imperative to rethink the purposes and redefine the notions of development and progress from levels of subjective wellbeing, according to Rojas (he will be mentioned later on). If development and progress are understood from happiness levels, Rojas' study (to be mentioned later on) on Latin America shows that pro-market reforms are not the strategy for achieving development.

Graham and Sukhtankar (2004) analyzed the impact that economic crises have had in Latin American countries, measured by negative growth of GDP per capita from 2001 to 2002. They found that for countries where crises were observed, average happiness also fell in those periods. His findings show that the countries that suffered crises also experienced a decrease

⁵⁸ The argument that the market undermines subjective wellbeing has also been studied by the United States academy; Lane (2000) has developed a detailed explanation which converges with these results.

⁵⁹ "In Latin America... inequality appears to be a signal or persistent advantage of the rich and persistent disadvantage of the poor, instead of an indication of future opportunities." (Graham and Felton, 2005: 14).

The likelihood of a person presenting high levels of happiness increases with his or her relational goods

in their satisfaction with the market policies, mostly felt by middle-income people.

Moyano and Barria (2006) found that the model of free market economic development has brought many uncertainties, reflected by a gradual increase in suicide rates. There is a subjective distress in the population mainly as a consequence of the unequal growth that free market has generated. Therefore, they predict that if Chile's economic growth continues in that direction, more suicides will occur. These findings converge with those of the American literature, which also found that market intensification has negative effects on subjective wellbeing (Radcliff, 2001; Lane, 2000).

In Latin America, inequality is a sign of persistent injustice and not of future opportunities, thus it affects subjective wellbeing negatively

4.8.3 Inequality

Inequality in any country affects the subjective wellbeing of its inhabitants. Melgar and Rossi (2011) show that inequality in Latin America, "... although it does not act directly on individual happiness as in other regions, its indirect effect through the subjective income scale is significant" (Melgar and Rossi, 2011: 165): people who are higher up on the subjective income scale report higher levels of happiness.

Graham and Felton (2005) found that inequality does have negative effects on subjective wellbeing in Latin America, a region where, unlike the U.S. or Europe, inequality is not a sign of future opportunities but only of persistent injustice.⁵⁹ Their findings show that the relative differences in the perception of status and opportunities

are more important in the determination of wellbeing than the differences based on income. These results are equivalent to those obtained for European countries (Alesina *et al.*, 2004) and OECD (Fischer, 2009).

Pro-market reforms are a mistaken strategy for development in Latin America, as a deepening of pro-marketing reforms has corresponded to higher levels of dissatisfaction in Latin Americans

4.8.4 Globalization

Globalization increases the flow of information and this has an effect on subjective wellbeing. By studying the impact of globalization on poverty and inequality in Peru and Russia, Graham (2004) found that people's wellbeing does not match their economic performance, measured by their income growth rate. The author points out that a major reason that economic performance (based on income) differs from what people report (subjective wellbeing), is that globalization increases the flow of information about the living standards of others (domestically and abroad), which can lead to a change in the reference standards and increasing frustration with relative income differences, even among those who improved their income.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Graham (2004) assures that resorting only to measurements of wellbeing based on income may be hiding enormous social dissatisfaction. In the case of his study, measurements based on income would not have permitted him to capture the frustrations which underlie in people who experiment an ascending social mobility (Graham, 2004).

4.9 Political Participation

4.9.1 Voting

Political participation favors subjective wellbeing. A positive association has been found between voting and life satisfaction. It has been pointed out that political participation *per se* has effects on subjective wellbeing; however, the causal sense of the relationship is not entirely clear. According to Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008), political participation, specially voting, increases subjective wellbeing because it encourages the feelings of autonomy, competence and belonging of the person.⁶¹ In their empirical study of Latin America (by means of two databases: LAPOP and *Latinobarometer*) they found a positive and statistically significant association (in one of the databases) between voting and life satisfaction.⁶²

The research of Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008) also reveals a negative constant –not theorized yet– between compulsory voting and happiness: in countries where voting is compulsory, people are less happy. The authors emphasize the importance to further study of these associations.

⁶¹ Voting, independently of the election's results, makes people feel more autonomous and independent, according to Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008). It also confirms their loyalty to the political system, and with it provides a sense of belonging. Likewise, it increases a sense of competition: the person is informed and becomes involved in political discussion in order to decide on a vote.

⁶² European literature has studied the relationship between the opportunity of political participation (and not political participation *per se*) and subjective wellbeing, finding that people who have greater opportunities of participating in direct democracy have higher subjective wellbeing than those who do not have such opportunities (Frey and Stutzer, 2005; Frey and Stutzer, 2000).

In his empirical study of the urban population of Manizales, Colombia, Velasquez (2011) examines the relationship between subjective wellbeing and political participation, operationalized through voting. His findings also reveal a positive relationship between voting and subjective wellbeing, as the results of the study indicate that the people who voted were relatively happier.⁶³

4.9.2 Other kinds of political participation

Political participation is not limited to voter turnout, it is a broader issue.⁶⁴ However, research on the relationship between subjective wellbeing and other types of political participation is very low. In their empirical analysis, Weitz-Shapiro and Winters (2008) analyze the relationship between the subjective wellbeing of Latin Americans and their participation in protests, their attendance at community meetings and whether they have signed petitions or not. The authors found no significant relationships between these types of political participation and satisfaction with life, except that people who attended community meetings were consistently more satisfied with their lives than those who did not attend.

The limited worldwide research on the subject leads to no conclusive findings. Barnes *et al.* (1979) found that higher levels of life satisfaction are associated with a slight tendency to participate in protests and strikes aimed at

achieving political goals. Oishi *et al.* (2007), in contrast, found that those with slightly lower happiness levels are more likely to engage in political participation. It is important to study the relationship between subjective wellbeing and political participation, as it remains an unresolved issue to both, Latin American and worldwide academics.

Voting, independently of the results of the election, increases people's subjective wellbeing, as it makes them feel autonomous and independent; it reaffirms their feeling of belonging and increases their feeling of competence

4.9.3 Election results

Subjective wellbeing helps in predicting election results. By means of the *Latinobarometer* databases from 1995 to 2009, Martínez-Bravo (2012) empirically studied the relationship between voting and subjective wellbeing in Latin America. The results of this analysis show that life satisfaction data allow for better predictions of electoral results. These findings indicate that satisfaction with life has a strong negative relationship with the probability of voting for the opposition in presidential elections.⁶⁵

According to Martínez-Bravo (2012), subjective wellbeing data are better electoral predictors about voting for the ruling party or the opposition, than economic performance data. Although

⁶³ "Happiness levels are slightly higher in this citizen group [those who voted], compared to those who did not vote" (Velásquez, 2011: 14).

⁶⁴ Participation in protests, participation in political party campaigns and petition signing, for example, are other types of political participation. Teorell *et al.* (2006) suggest a typology of political participation which covers 5 dimensions: electoral participation, consumer participation, political party activity, activity in protests, and contact activity.

⁶⁵ "...higher levels in average satisfaction with life of Latin Americans make it more likely that the official party (the governing party on election day) wins the presidential elections again; lower levels make it more likely for the opposition party to win the following elections" (Martínez-Bravo, 2012: 135).

literature claims that “favorable changes in economic conditions increase the likelihood of voting for the ruling party on election day” (Martinez-Bravo, 2012: 117), the results of the study show that “fluctuations in GDP per capita... predict to a lesser degree [regarding subjective wellbeing] who comes to power... compared to subjective wellbeing, the impact that economic performance has on the victory of the ruling party or the opposition, is significantly smaller” (p. 118).⁶⁶

The victory of the ruling party of the opposition in the presidential elections is better explained through subjective wellbeing than economic performance. This is due to the fact that subjective wellbeing considers a person’s complete wellbeing, and not only wellbeing in one area of his or her life (economic), allowing for a more complete appraisal of wellbeing, translatable into a consequent punishment or prize to the party in power

4.10 Research Agenda

Research findings show two things. First, there are significant findings that were systematically discovered in both Latin America and the rest of the world; however, it is always desirable to refine and clarify relevant research. Second, there are many issues that need further research

⁶⁶ According to the author, this would be explained by the fact that subjective wellbeing “contemplates a person’s complete wellbeing and not only wellbeing in one area of their life (economic), permitting a more complete judgment on one’s wellbeing, which are translated into a consequent prize or punishment to the party in power, and therefore helping to better explain electoral results more adequately” (Martínez-Bravo, 2012: 138).

as these have not been addressed enough (if not completely unattended). As research agenda and aiming not to exhaust all possibilities, we present some issues which should be further investigated.

4.10.1 refinement of research in previously explored areas

Refinement should be understood as the possibility of acquiring more knowledge (through expansion and comparative studies) about the behavior of variables that seem to be associated with subjective wellbeing and, above all, developing more complex analytical models. This would allow a conceptual hierarchy in the variables, and increasing knowledge of the elements which, directly or not, determine subjective wellbeing. This would also facilitate finding areas of intervention in public policy making.

Family

We must explore the modes of communication and affection that influence family satisfaction, whether these are independent family arrangements (types of cohabitation) and its formalization as well as legal guarantees that grant free cohabitation. Research is needed in order to find out if the density of ties –type of social capital– formed within the family environment is important. There is also a need to study whether the perceived and assumed freedom of getting divorced, has any influence on the assessment of family happiness. We should also study if the social appreciation of a married or a single person has any influence. Finally, it is important to find out if all these aspects have the same influence in different social contexts and regardless of the cycles of life and family.

Upbringing and Parenting Styles

We have to keep in mind that parenting styles influence the development of the skills necessary

to carry out successfully pro-social behaviors. It is important to know whether “social competence”, understood as being able to perform adequately in the context of belongingness, is a variable that influences happiness or not. If so, it is important to know which parenting model is most associated with it.

Leisure and Free Time

There are three types of leisure: mere relaxation (watching TV, going to shows, parks, sports), sociability (friends, relatives, developing relational goods, etc.) and creativity (culture, hobbies, reading clubs, etc). There is the need to verify if these have the same degree of relevance in relation to subjective wellbeing.

Resilience

There is a need to corroborate whether the mere ability to cope has more of an effect of restraint or containment of frustrations than of increased happiness.

Collectivism-Individualism

It is important to conduct research to measure the significance of these two aspects or the possibility of experiencing both in subjective wellbeing. We must explore concepts that depart from a dichotomy where each element excludes the other, in order to observe areas of interaction between collectivism and individualism.

Values

Values are not only moral systems, but also guidance systems. Taken as behavioral guidelines (selfishly oriented, socially oriented, instrumentally oriented, professionally oriented) it is important to conduct research to define a typology of values-orientation and observe its effects on subjective wellbeing. Moreover, it is worth studying whether people who better assume the official “values scheme”

are happier than those who take some distance from it.

Religiousness

Comparative studies would be extremely useful in order to verify if strong horizons of meaning, religious or not, are the category associated with subjective wellbeing. There is not enough knowledge to ascertain if all religions generate the same level of happiness, whether or not linked to communal forms of religious rituals, and therefore to spaces of belonging, social interaction and development of relational goods. What is determined by satisfaction with one’s religiousness? Research is needed to find out if the same variable applies to all contexts and age cycles.

4.10.2 Relatively new subjects

Social Capital

It would be useful to conduct studies that correlate comparatively, social capital indexes, cooperative attitudes, support of networks and exchanges, levels of social trust and reciprocity, with levels of subjective wellbeing. The following questions arise: Does the quality of the social bonds that people develop have a positive impact on their subjective wellbeing? Does living in cooperative contexts affect subjective wellbeing?

Rights and Institutions

We must study if there is a positive connection between rights, institutional efficiency and satisfaction with life. Do contexts of low institutionalism of rights and freedoms facilitate positive social ties for subjective wellbeing?

Equality-Inequality

Disparity in income does not constitute the only social asymmetry. We must encourage research

that correlates subjective wellbeing with institutional, legal, social and cultural patterns that reproduce inequality in areas beyond the economic one.

Risks and Security

It is important to determine which institutional, family, social and legal factors (insurance, well established schools, labor standards and organizations) help people planning for a future with less uncertainty, and evaluate whether these constitute an explanatory factor for subjective wellbeing or not.

Identity and Lifestyles

Lifestyle is usually considered as an exercise of the identity. It is important to determine if the possibility to choose a “lifestyle” represents a significant variable in explaining high levels of subjective wellbeing.

Participation and Civic Involvement

It has not been studied whether people who behave in accordance with the so-called “civic virtues” (participation, voluntary association, interest in public life, civic involvement, democratic coexistence patterns) are more

satisfied with their lives than those who behave according to other political cultures or isolate themselves from public life.

Inhibitory Factors and Subjective Wellbeing Enhancers

Generally, there is research on the variables that affect peoples’ wellbeing. However, it is of great interest to know of –more structural- factors that inhibit or enhance the impact of these variables on the subjective wellbeing of people.

Causality

There is abundant literature of studies carried out by associations that considered numerous variables and their relationship with subjective wellbeing. However, it is important to note that an association does not necessarily imply causation. The study of causality relations requires a good combination of theoretical models and data bases that allow looking for the precedence in the succession of events as well as experimental or quasi-experimental analytical designs. Causality research would benefit from the existence of longitudinal data bases, the use of more sophisticated analytical methods, and more theoretical developments on the relationship between variables.

4.11 Final Considerations

To understand and explain subjective wellbeing there are many factors to consider. Issues as diverse as health and habitability are relevant, and these are associated with human relations and domestic economy, just to name a few. This necessarily requires a multidisciplinary, or in the best case, an interdisciplinary approach to the study. The partitioning in the study of humans has caused theories originated by different academic disciplines to fail to adjust in order to fully understand the phenomenon of wellbeing. The abstract academic agents that these disciplines have created are far from a perfect or fair representation of humans, so wellbeing theories arising from partitioned disciplines lack the capacity to address the complexity of the concept.

Clearly, subjective wellbeing research in Latin America has much to offer, as it does not only confirm previous findings but it generates specific knowledge for the region. It also opens the field to research on urgent issues that need to be investigated thoroughly. Not only there are many study boundaries to be expanded, but there is also a need to further research those areas that have already been studied. As Neri has pointed out (2002: 71), “We believe that it is socially and theoretically relevant to dedicate efforts in the systematic research of the characteristics of subjective wellbeing...”







Inclusion of subjective wellbeing in public policy

Both, measurement and research of subjective wellbeing are means that look to contribute in the design and implementation of a public policy that has the greatest impact on people's wellbeing. All public policies ultimately affect the wellbeing of citizens, directly or indirectly. Thus, measurement and research on subjective wellbeing should be used to: 1) determine the status of subjective wellbeing in society, 2) better understand and define the public problems that governments, public administrations and public policies look to respond, 3) develop analytical tools and approaches to propose solutions to the problems met, and 4) designing public policies that favorably impact the wellbeing of people. It is also important to improve and expand the impact of existing public policies on people's wellbeing.

Existing research shows that subjective wellbeing is important for people, and that they reward the ruling party with their vote when their subjective wellbeing has increased during government administration (Martinez-Bravo, 2012). In other words, citizens associate the situation of their subjective wellbeing, at least partially, to public policies, and are willing to recognize their governments for their work in increasing subjective wellbeing. Consequently, there is also a political incentive for governments to be concerned about making public policy aimed at increasing citizens' subjective wellbeing: Those politicians who implement public policies that increase the wellbeing of citizens increase their chance to remain in power.

The findings of studies on subjective wellbeing in Latin America have led some authors to draw conclusions concerning the development of public policy. This chapter presents the main implications of research on subjective wellbeing for the development of public policies in Latin America, stressing the importance of subjective wellbeing as an essential aspect in public policy objectives for the region. It acknowledges the value of these findings for the type of demands, tasks and duties that governments and public figures face as well as the design and implementation of public policies they are involved in.

Those politicians who implement public policies that increase the wellbeing of citizens increase their chance of remaining in power

Research findings (both in Latin America and around the world) show that the impact of public policy on subjective wellbeing is achieved –sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly– through various means, such as health, economy, human relations and the availability and rewarding use of free time, among others. It is imperative that those responsible for the design and implementation of public policies make use of the subjective wellbeing diagnosis as well as the knowledge provided by research studies, in order to achieve a positive effect on people's wellbeing.

5.1 Subjective Wellbeing as the Objective of Public Action

A comprehensive development strategy should include the increase of subjective wellbeing as one of its objectives. Development strategies that do not address happiness indicators and only focus on income generation carry the risk of ending up with millions of people less satisfied with their lives, even when economic growth indicators are positive. For example, Rojas (he will be mentioned later on) shows that the adoption and strengthening of pro-market reforms adopted by several Latin American countries during the 80's has had a negative impact, or at best no impact at all, in subjective wellbeing. According to the author, this result is explained, among other reasons, due to the mental and physical stress that a market economy oriented to competition inflicts on people, who end up immersed in a race to attain social status through material goods as well as aspirations that always seem to be distant and growing.

It is necessary to consider a new approach for development that gives priority to people's satisfaction with life and not only to their income growth. That does not mean taking economic growth out of the agenda, but to think of it as the means to addressing the most relevant issues for humans

The Human Development Report for Chile (UNDP, 2012) demonstrates the existence of structural conditions for subjective wellbeing that can be operated by public policies. The report found that subjective wellbeing depends on both, the characteristics of the person, and the characteristics of the countries in which they live, including health and education, unemployment rates, information transparency about granted credits and other variables that have been normally considered as issues of public action.

According to Rojas (forthcoming), public policy should not have such a limited approach, based solely on the accumulation of wealth. According to the author, there are other relevant aspects in the quality of life of people that should be considered, for example: How does the creation of relational goods change? What happens with peoples emotional states? How does satisfaction in different domains of life change? What happens with the availability of free time? Among other issues. The challenge of contemporary societies resides in promoting a comprehensive development, and those in charge of policy design must consider this seriously. That does not mean to take economic growth out of the agenda, but to think of it as the means to addressing the most relevant issues for humans.

Rojas argues that it is necessary to consider a new approach for development that gives priority to people's satisfaction with life and not only to their income growth. This new notion of development demands rethinking the concepts of physical capital, human capital and social capital, which have been defined within a development idea rooted in economic growth. The concept of physical capital weighs up infrastructure spending in terms of its contribution to production; Rojas argues that a new concept of development privileges the environment habitability generated by such spending in benefit of the people. The concept of human capital weighs up education in terms of its contribution to income; under the new approach, education would be estimated by the knowledge, skills and values obtained in order to lead fulfilling lives. Similarly, under the new concept of development we should abandon the instrumental approach to human relationships –where their fundamental function is to minimize costs in market transactions– in order to rescue their inherent value, recognizing that they are a direct source of wellbeing.

5.2 Social Programs and Social Policy

Towards a comprehensive design and assessment of social programs. Among the findings that research on subjective wellbeing has provided, two are particularly relevant for public policy: 1) the overall wellbeing of a person is determined by factors that go beyond the economic aspect, and 2) income poverty does not have a close relationship with the wellbeing experienced by people. Following this idea, Rojas (2008a) points out the risk of public policies that concentrate in mitigating income poverty having no impact, or even a negative one, on the wellbeing as lived and perceived by people. According to the author, the strategies aimed at reducing income poverty should consider their impact in the domains of life that go beyond the economic sphere, since that is where most people get much of their satisfaction with life.

According to Rojas (2008a), public policy should recognize that life satisfaction, as experienced by people, is a matter of social and public concern.⁶⁷ “Public policy should not only be concerned with helping people out of poverty, but also with placing them in a situation that promotes their satisfaction with life” (Rojas, 2008a: 13). The design of social programs, which is a fundamental task for policy makers, should be comprehensive according to these results in order to have a full impact on the wellbeing of people.

⁶⁷ According to the author, just as public policy assumes that people’s income generation is not only a private interest, but should assume that satisfaction with life is a matter of social interest, as it depends on social and institutional contracts, such as the type of education provided, the promoted values, the way in which public expenditure and direct transfers are assigned, tax structure, social trends which affect family and interpersonal relationships, and other issues.

5.3 In Search of Equality in the Distribution of Income

A more equal distribution of income increases happiness. In their study for Latin America, Melgar and Rossi (2011) found that income per capita and income distribution have an effect in the happiness of Latin Americans. According to the authors this has implications for public policy as well as the potential to improve the wellbeing of the population. We must develop policies that have the objective of creating a more equal income distribution, because these “not only directly improve the wellbeing of the underprivileged, but that of the entire population due to their indirect effect on happiness” (p. 167). This information is key to public discussion and the orientation of development objectives, as well as useful for the design of economic and social policy: it reinforces the idea that reducing inequality, and not only poverty, is a key component of prosperous societies

Public policy should not be preoccupied only with getting people out of poverty, but also with placing them in a situation which promotes their satisfaction with life

5.4 The Importance of Human Relations

5.4.1 Social networks

Policies that promote the strengthening of social networks increase subjective wellbeing. Academic research has found that social networks and community cohesion contribute positively to subjective wellbeing. Wills *et al.* (2011) point out the need to develop public policies that strengthen community networks as mechanisms to relieve violence; policies that strengthen confidence in partnerships through better education and training, and policies that strengthen production networks as a strategy for survival in conflictive environments.

In contexts similar to many Latin American countries, where social and support networks are essential to fighting crises (economic, mainly), social networks replace the State's ability to support families and the most vulnerable social sectors. Therefore, the State must take special interest in public policies and development strategies that encourage –and do not obstruct– social networks and community cohesion.

We must design policies which reduce economic inequality, as in this way we promote the happiness of the population as a whole

5.4.2 Interpersonal relationships

Strengthen family and social relationships to increase subjective wellbeing. Velasquez (2011) points out that while interpersonal relationships are an area in which governments usually cannot, or should not, intervene, making policies that strengthen family cohesion as well as creating or promoting strong community networks is possible, and this would have a positive effect on subjective wellbeing.⁶⁸

The issue about the scope of State intervention (or the definition of the public objectives of the State) is a public policy that must be addressed. For relational goods and social networks in general, policymakers should develop policies

⁶⁸ The author proposes policies that strengthen family cohesion and creating strong community networks after finding that “the probability of wellbeing in an average inhabitant of the urban area of Manizales increases as a result of: (i) a better quality of the relationships between household members, (ii) a higher frequency of the displays of affection between them, (iii) a higher level of satisfaction with their family and their social relationships, (iv) a greater availability of support from family and people outside the family, (v) more ability to integrate with other people, (vi) higher participation in community spheres, (vii) greater political engagement” (Velasquez, 2011: 19).

knowing the impact that these have on interpersonal relationships and helping these do not deteriorate. Similarly, any policy that seeks to promote the emerging and strengthening of social networks and of interpersonal relationships must be careful not to interfere negatively in the private sphere..

5.5 Towards Mental Health in Work and Education

Educational institutions and work environments are favorable spaces for the promotion of mental health. Moyano and Barria (2006) propose that educational institutions, which concentrate a young population, are appropriate places to preventively intervene and promote mental health, as these environments are more protective than others and involve people at an age group in which early depressive episodes frequently occur.

Work environments are also good places to take action in order to reduce unfavorable mental health conditions. According to the authors, work environments that make people unhappy have very strong effects on mood, much more than the unhappiness generated by other factors such as the lack of income. This information is useful as it alerts the policy maker about the importance of designing programs that encourage people to maintain a balance between work and family or household responsibilities, as well as to promote positive labor relations that encourage people to feel that their work contributes to a larger purpose.

The results of their study for Chile, allowed Florenzano and Dussailant (2011) to assure that health policies that advocate for good mental health (in relation to psychological disorders such as depression) have extraordinary impacts on subjective wellbeing. To illustrate the importance of the implementation of mental health policies, the authors assert that “healing a person with a mental illness is giving a far greater happiness to that person than college education to someone with only basic education” (p 254). Two public policy issues become very

important in the wake of these findings. On the one hand, an important decision that the policy maker must take is the allocation of public spending. Within the spending provision for healthcare, mental health should occupy an important position, considering its great impact on subjective wellbeing. On the other hand, it is clear that mental health has been relatively neglected by traditional health systems, and should be part of a comprehensive healthcare system in countries that are traditionally focused on physical diseases and ailments, given their wellbeing implications.⁶⁹

5.6 Appraisal of Public Goods and Services

5.6.1 Appraisal of urban infrastructure and housing

A reliable appraisal of urban goods, services and housing can improve the efficiency and impact of public spending. Powell and Sanguinetti (2010) point out the need of appropriate appraisals for public services available in neighborhoods, urban public goods and household characteristics that affect the wellbeing of people, so that policy makers have reliable information to decide where to allocate public resources, which are usually limited. They advocate for the use of a life satisfaction approach to appraise these goods and services.

The life satisfaction approach allows defining what services and neighborhood characteristics have value for the people, and even appraising goods and services for which there is no market price (Powell and Sanguinetti, 2010). Through this approach it is possible to establish monetary appraisals for specific characteristics in the quality of housing, access to various goods and services, public infrastructure (such as parks) and negative incidences in the neighborhood (such as crime). This approach allows “making decisions about the value of

⁶⁹ In addition to its known effects on productivity, social relations, violence and addictions, among other issues.

Public policies and development strategies which favor social networks and community cohesion also favor subjective wellbeing

providing different services... improvements in the quality of housing, urban services and public goods...” (Powell and Sanguinetti, 2010: 32), and “answering the important question related to policy about how to finance the provision of public goods” (p. 61).

After finding that the quality of housing impacts life satisfaction in Latin America, Lora *et al.* (2008) proposed that local governments must establish information systems to keep track of the variables that have an effect on the quality of life in urban neighborhoods. These variables must be objective (observable) and subjective (satisfaction with housing characteristics, quality of basic public services and life in general) in order to measure consistency between both.

Within the spending provision for healthcare, mental health should be a priority, considering its great impact on subjective wellbeing

The comparison of both types of variables would allow guidance for interventions and public policy decisions, such as those related to the fate of public spending. Once the information obtained from the comparison of both types of data is available, the prioritization in terms of public investment and/or compensation schemes could be done for those issues in which data converges: issues that both, facts and people’s perceptions point out as priorities (Lora *et al.*, 2008, Powell and Sanguinetti, 2010).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Thus, for example, there would be bases to support a public program which covers a given environmental or housing problem such as lack of access to potable water or pollution.

5.6.2 Appraisal of other public services

Appraising health based on subjective wellbeing allows for the creation of effective policies. Rojas (2009b) proposes the use of the subjective wellbeing approach as an alternative to the appraisal based on market prices.⁷¹ For example, this approach may be used to evaluate the impact of disease prevention policies, and therefore, to make a cost-benefit analysis which will guide decisions of investment in health services. The author found that health troubles are expensive when they are appraised from the subjective wellbeing approach: “income should increase around 500% to compensate cancer conditions, 160% for cardiovascular diseases and 17% for infectious diseases” (p. 9).⁷²

The focus on subjective wellbeing is an alternative to the appraisal based on market prices, and it permits a better cost-analysis for use in decision making and resource assignment

This information, according to Rojas (2009b), is useful for healthcare policy making, specifically when making decisions about resource allocation and compensations as well as for public income generation schemes.

⁷¹ A measurement based on this approach, assures the author, is better and closer to the theory of economic valuation, as it is based on the experienced wellbeing caused by an event, whereas valuation by market price and payment availability are based on the expectation of wellbeing through a hypothetical or future event.

⁷² Lora (2008) reaches results going the same sense. Based on a large sample, representative of Latin America (40,000 people from 24 countries), he finds that the income of a Latin American who loses his health, in general terms, must increase 3.6 times in order to maintain their satisfaction level unaltered.

5.7 Subjective Wellbeing in Public Policy

The wellbeing topic involves all public policy. Although any public policy can and should be created focusing directly on increasing life satisfaction of people, it is necessary to note that subjective wellbeing is an issue that involves all public policies; all public policies, even those that pursue other objectives, have consequences in the subjective wellbeing of the population, so it cannot be neglected. Therefore, the impact of subjective wellbeing must be a criteria incorporated into the analysis, design and evaluation of all public policies.

Any public policy reaches areas in the life of people that go beyond those for which it explicitly is looking to serve. For example, given the great importance that human relationships—especially family—have for the wellbeing of people in Latin America, when designing any type of public policy it is important to be careful that it does not harm satisfaction with family relationships (Florenzano and Dussailant, 2011). Generally, it is convenient to have a comprehensive view of the human being when designing, implementing and evaluating public policy; an approach that considers the different life domains of a person, allows addressing the impact that policies have on all areas of a person’s life and it should be applied even when the purpose of a policy is to influence only one aspect of life. For example, Rojas (2010) shows how an approach that considers the different life domains of a person could help to increase the impact of social wellbeing for programs designed to combat poverty.

It should not be forgotten that values and beliefs are part of the identity of a person and that these contribute to his/her subjective wellbeing. The design of public policy must also consider its potential impact on identity. For example, Wills (2009) suggests that the impact of public policy in the religious and spiritual life of people should not be a matter excluded from

public consideration. While the areas of State intervention do not include spiritual/religious aspects, this does not imply that those aspects are not affected unintentionally as a consequence of applied policies.

5.8 Pertinent Clarifications on the Incorporation of Subjective Wellbeing in Public Policy

- a. The subjective wellbeing approach and the findings achieved do not suggest that subjective wellbeing indicators are necessarily the only measures to guide future public policies. These should be part of the method that we use to measure progress and wellbeing, and not necessarily the only way to measure it. Subjective wellbeing contributes to the information already available on people's quality of life, allowing better design of public policies.
- b. Public policies already in force, even when intended to have more limited objectives, inevitably affect wellbeing and other life domains different from those they were designed to address. With this in mind, it is essential to address subjective wellbeing measures as these let us know the impact of these policies on people's wellbeing and channel this impact to promote a better life for people (expanding technical and political instruments and encouraging public capabilities and governmental decisions). The State can and should have an impact promoting conditions for the wellbeing of citizens and for that reason the information contained in subjective wellbeing data results very useful.
- c. Assuming that public policies originating from an approach of subjective wellbeing promote hedonism is incorrect. The literature shows that the wellbeing reported by people includes evaluative, affective and hedonic experiences. Therefore, this

approach promotes a public policy that influences all the experiences of people's wellbeing according to their values. What this approach proposes is taking into account people's values –and not the values of a small group of experts and philosophers– when making public policies.

Given that public policies often have implications in areas of life other than those they are explicitly aimed at addressing, it is convenient to have a comprehensive view of human beings (like the one provided by the subjective wellbeing approach) when designing, implementing and evaluating public policies

- d. Happiness and life satisfaction do not result from wellbeing, they are wellbeing. Public policies aimed to combat social issues like economic inequality or security, directly address the wellbeing of citizens as these are determinants for wellbeing, along with many others. The idea of prioritizing policies that address social issues over policies directed to increase happiness is incorrect, since both are essentially the same.
- e. It is wrong to think that there is an inconsistency in the design of public policies based on the information that people report about their wellbeing; i.e. based on subjective wellbeing data and its application to directly influence variables or objective indicators. Policy design does not fall in contradiction or incongruence by using subjective data. The appreciation that everyone has of his/her own happiness or wellbeing is the most reliable information for the design public policies aimed at having a favorable impact on the wellbeing of the population. Tests of reliability and validity of subjective wellbeing information, which had been discussed in previous sections of this

document, recognize the relevance of life satisfaction and happiness measurements for public policy. As mentioned above, in the case of wellbeing, the report made by each person constitutes the 'hard data' to be taken into account when designing and evaluating public policy. Subjectivity of data is not a disadvantage and does not diminish the formality of public policies based on it. Quite the contrary, it is extremely necessary for the design and implementation of public policies, as these are validated and legitimized by the life experience of citizens themselves.

- f. Wellbeing is a personal experience: wellbeing is experienced by the subject. Therefore, the ability (and hence the responsibility) of the State is not "granting" wellbeing to citizens, its main function is to design public policies that provide and/or promote the conditions that give rise to the experience of *well-being*.
- g. There are still many issues to study and understand about subjective wellbeing. Measurement inaccuracies, the fact that we cannot fully understand its explanatory structure and the fact that we cannot predict it with accuracy, does not mean that making public policies aimed at increasing subjective wellbeing are not possible. This has happened before with other indicators, such as GDP, education or crime, among

others. Its understanding will grow once systematic measurement takes place and more information for research is available, as it happened with GDP, for example, of which measurement is still very vague and which understanding was not clear when it was adopted –and is not yet fully understood today.

- h. Public policies that are designed based on subjective data are democratic, and this is a remarkable attribute considering that policy makers face the decision of what is best for society. Subjective wellbeing data reveals the values of citizens with more precision, and contributes to the design of policies with a democratic foundation, as it reflects what people believe and feel that is important to them.

5.9 Final Considerations

It has been said that all public policy somehow affects the wellbeing of citizens. This raises two alternatives that should be considered when developing policies. The first is that wellbeing should be considered for all existing policies; that is, policies that are already in operation could be improved by taking into account all knowledge about wellbeing. The other is to design and implement new public policies, aimed specifically at increasing the wellbeing of the population.

Latin American empirical research on subjective wellbeing yields useful information for the improvement of public policies. In some cases, the generated knowledge is likely to be new for policy makers, which is helpful as it offers grounds for creating better policies that have favorable impacts on the wellbeing of Latin Americans. It must be noted that governments have always affected the wellbeing of citizens as all public policy impacts wellbeing, so taking into account the generated knowledge and not postponing the possibility of contributing more significantly in the wellbeing of citizens from public policy is worthwhile.

While work is needed to generate more information on subjective wellbeing in the region —divided by states and even localities and susceptible to its analysis over time- the knowledge needed to make policy decisions that increase wellbeing is already available and ready to be taken into account. The recommendations for public policies proposed by the academic studies described in this publication constitute a very valuable input and a starting point that policy makers could use in their quest to increase the wellbeing of people in their societies.







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