

## Exploring Well-being and Gross National Happiness in Sustainable Development Policy Making

Donatella Alessandrini, Suhraiya Jivraj and Asta Zokaityte\*

### ABSTRACT

*In this paper we reflect on the transnational discourse on national Well-Being and Happiness (WBH) which has gained international prominence with the 2012 United Nations Conference. Although for quite some time the studies on WBH have been on the agenda of international bodies, we see the post-2007 proliferation and transnational convergence of well-being initiatives, particularly those aimed at measuring well-being through indicators, as potentially replacing the development discourse of the post-war period in terms of normative force and appeal. Aiming to unpack such normative appeal, we focus on three sites, the UK, Bhutan and Ecuador, and ask what well-being and happiness mean in each context. While a critique of growth as an end in itself appears to be common to these three sites, there are crucial differences in terms of both how Well-Being and Happiness are conceptualised, and the ways in which this understanding is able to affect policy-making and engender socio-economic change. At stake, we argue, is the appreciation of what the co-production between economic and non-economic spheres of life*

---

\* Donatella Alessandrini is Reader in Law at Kent Law School, University of Kent, UK; Suhraiya Jivraj is Senior lecturer in Law at Kent Law School, University of Kent, UK; Asta Zokaityte is PhD candidate in Law at Kent Law School, University of Kent. We would like to thank Davina Cooper for her very helpful feedback on an earlier draft of this article; the GNH Centre Bhutan, in particular Tho Ha Vinh and Saamdu Chetri; and the anonymous reviewers of the *Indian Journal of International Economic Law* for their thoughtful suggestions. We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the British Academy and Leverhulme to undertake research in Bhutan (grant no SG121570)

[2015]	EXPLORING WELL-BEING AND GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY MAKING	53
--------	---	----

*would generate. Our aim is to emphasise that, what the focus on convergence leaves out and what the turn to measurement says about the potential of well-being initiatives.*

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	53
II.	MEASURING WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS: THE UNITED KINGDOM .....	58
III.	GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS AS A NEW DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: BHUTAN .....	68
IV.	BUENVIVIR AND THE CHALLENGE TO DEVELOPMENT: ECUADOR .....	78

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the government of Bhutan convened a UN meeting aimed at ‘defining a new economic paradigm’ based on happiness and well-being. The key aim of the meeting was to emphasise the need for an economic paradigm that takes into account the social and environmental factors, as part of achieving sustainable development. Since then, the UN has asked the Bhutanese government to publish such a model based on their policy of Gross National Happiness which would replace the International Millennium Development Goals, ending in 2015. The Bhutanese New Development Paradigm (NDP) model was published in December 2013.<sup>291</sup> In this paper we start to reflect on the transnational discourse on national Well-Being and Happiness (WBH) which has gained international prominence with the 2012 UN Conference. Although studies on WBH have been on the agenda of international bodies for quite some time, we see the post-2007 proliferation and transnational convergence of well-being initiatives, particularly those aimed at measuring well-being through indicators, as potentially replacing the development discourse of the post-war period in terms of normative force and appeal. WBH discourse is rooted historically in the acknowledgement of the limits of the growth paradigm which was central to the furtherance of the post-

---

291 NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat, *Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm* (Report of the Royal Government of Bhutan 2013).

colonial development enterprise. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a critique of growth as an end of economic policies started to be voiced by the economists,<sup>292</sup> psychologists,<sup>293</sup> environmentalists,<sup>294</sup> and feminists,<sup>295</sup> who exposed GDP's limited ability to capture people's welfare; while dependency, post-colonial and post-development scholars showed how development itself was a construct based on powerful normative assumptions, which produced important material effects on the societies they claimed to merely describe.<sup>296</sup> Attempts to incorporate some of these critiques into international policy making process included the proposition by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of the Basic Needs Approach, the short-lived adoption of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), the adoption of the Human Development Index, the launch of the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment (the precursor to sustainable development) and the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, and the Millennium Development Goals which were established following the Millennium Summit of the UN in 2000.

It is, however, after 2007 that we have witnessed a scaling up of WBH initiatives

- 
- 292 K. William Kapp, *The social costs of private enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Ezra J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (New York and Washington: Staples Press, 1967); Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (OUP, 1976).
- 293 Richard A. Easterlin, "Does economic growth improve the human lot? Some empirical evidence," in P. David (ed), *Nations and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in honor of Moses Abramowitz* (New York: Academic Press 1974); Angus Campbell and others, *The quality of American life: Perceptions, Evaluations, and Satisfaction* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976); Ed Diener, "Subjective Well-Being" (1984) 95(3) *Psychological Bulletin* 542; Daniel Kahneman and others, *Well-being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).
- 294 Laszlo Drechsler, "Problems of recording environmental phenomena in national accounting aggregates" (1976) 22(3) *Review of Income and Wealth* 239-252; Martin Weitzman, "On the welfare significance of national product in a dynamic economy" (1976) 90(1) *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 156; Allen V. Kneese and others, *Economics and the environment: a material balances approach* (Washington: Resources for the future, 1970).
- 295 Marilyn Waring, *If women counted: a new feminist economics* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988); Barbara R. Bergmann, *The Economic Emergence of Women* (New York: Basic Books 1986); Marianne A. Ferber & Bonnie G. Birnbaum, "Housework: priceless or valueless?" (1980) 26(4) *Review of Income and Wealth* 387; Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (London: Allen Lane, 1974); Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970).
- 296 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995).

reminiscent of the post-war development enterprise not only in terms of resources being invested but also of its normative appeal, which, unlike that of the post-war development enterprise, rests on the proposition of a planetary model for 'living together' which transcends the developed or developing lines. At a time when the financial and economic crisis has shown the weaknesses of an economic system that was presented as the harbinger of progress for over six decades, the WBH model refuses the simplistic identification of development with growth and industrialisation. At the same time it extends its focus of analysis beyond the developing world, thereby laying claims to planetary relevance. Thus, in 2011, resolution 65/309 adopted by the UN General Assembly called upon all member countries to formulate well-being measures other than GDP.<sup>297</sup> The *World Happiness Report*,<sup>298</sup> released to coincide with the UN conference, criticises the neo-classical economists' perception of humans as rational actors, suggesting instead a different model of humanity, one in which people are bounded by a complicated interplay of emotions and rational thought, unconscious and conscious decision-making, 'fast' and 'slow' thinking, but whose common aim is to achieve well-being and happiness. According to the Report, happiness is not too subjective to be measured;<sup>299</sup> and although it differs across societies and over time, it does for reasons that are identifiable, and even alterable through the ways in which public policies are designed and delivered.<sup>300</sup>

Given its claim to universal applicability and measurement, as well as the impetus for international and national policy-making efforts it has generated, it is our

---

297 General Assembly Resolution 65/309 Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development [2011]

298 John Helliwell and others, *World Happiness Report* (New York: UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2013).

299 Ibid. "Studies by psychologists, economists, pollsters, sociologists, and others have shown that happiness, though indeed a subjective experience, can be objectively measured, assessed, correlated with observable brain functions, and related to the characteristics of an individual and the society. Asking people whether they are happy, or satisfied with their lives, offers important information about the society. It can signal underlying crises or hidden strengths. *It can suggest the need for change.*"

300 The report is co-edited by Professor Emeritus of Economics John F. Helliwell, Vancouver School of Economics, University of British Columbia, Lord Richard Layard, Director of the Well-Being Programme at the centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

contention that WBH might well substitute itself for the development focus of the international community, or at the very least become its dominant strand in the post-2015 age.<sup>301</sup> In other words, we argue that the normative appeal of WBH agenda needs to be taken seriously so as to engage with its potential as well as with its limitations. Aiming to unpack such normative appeal, we focus on three sites, the UK, Bhutan and Ecuador, and ask what WBH means in each context. While common to the three sites is a critique of growth as an end in itself, we show there are crucial differences in terms of both how well-being and happiness are conceptualised, and the ways in which this understanding in turn affects policy-making and engender social, political, and economic change. At stake, we argue, is the appreciation of what the co-production between economic and non-economic spheres of life would generate. Given the different way this appreciation plays out in the three sites, our aim is to emphasise what the focus on convergence, that is, on seeing these different experiments as part of the same phenomena, leaves out, and ask what the turn to measurement says about the potential of well-being initiatives.

The first section of the paper examines the emergence of WBH research and policy making in the UK. The reason for focusing on the UK is two-fold: firstly, the UK has only recently started measuring well-being. This is a post-2007 initiative that came out of the UN recommendation in 2012 and the Sarkozy tasked commission, which illustrates how well-being is conceived of and operationalised in a country which has been crucial for the furtherance of both the development

---

301 In this paper, we use the terms ‘happiness’ and ‘wellbeing’ interchangeably. These are obviously different approaches and the weaknesses of considering them together have been noted by MacKerron.. George MacKerron, “Happiness economics from 35,000 feet” (2011) 26(4) *Journal of Economic Surveys* 705-735. A useful typology, he points out, is offered by Dolan and others, provide for five accounts of WBH, which are: “(1) preference satisfaction, in which wellbeing consists in the freedom and resources to meet one’s own wants and desires; (2) objective lists (or basic needs), in which wellbeing is the fulfilment of a fixed set of material, psychological and social needs, which are identified exogenously; (3) flourishing (or eudaimonic), in which well-being means the realisation of one’s potential, along dimensions such as autonomy, personal growth, or positive relatedness... (4) hedonic (or affective), in which wellbeing is synonymous with positive affect balance, a relative predominance of positive moods and feelings; and (5) evaluative (or cognitive), in which wellbeing is the individual’s own assessment of his or her life according to some positive criterion”. Paul Dolan and others, *Review of research on the influence of personal well-being and application to policy making* (Defra, 2006).

project of the post-war period and the model of financialised growth that the current crisis has called into question.<sup>302</sup> The other reason concerns the fact that these initiatives are being taken at a time when austerity, with its iron laws, has been deployed as the main conceptual framework for thinking about what it means to live together in a very specific way. Keeping the tension between the well-being and austerity frameworks open is what interests us in teasing out possibilities and limitations of the WBH agenda in the UK.

The second section focuses on Bhutan where we conducted research in February 2014. We originally envisaged comparing the experience of the UK with that of the Bhutan to understand what we could learn from a country which, already in the 1970s, had rejected GDP as a measure of ‘*progress*’ and where, particularly after 2007, Gross National Happiness (GNH) has guided policy-making, making Bhutan the focus of international attention and the GNH laboratory for the world. However, what we have come across is a much more complex reality, where the rejection of GDP and furtherance of GNH as a new development model needs to be appreciated in light of the country’s unique history, and assumptions about the transferability of this experience are therefore problematic. While conscious of the fact that the various connections that make up Bhutan’s place in the world need to be taken into account and any simple translations be warded off, we thought it would be worthwhile to reflect on the potential as well as limitations of the new paradigm in its own right, and to show how different this is from the way WBH are understood and operationalised in the UK.

The third section focuses on Ecuador where Wellbeing (*Buen Vivir*) has a different flavour, being presented as an alternative to development. Ecuador’s engagement with well-being policies can also be brought back to the post-2007 era when the Correa administration was elected on a broadly anti-neoliberal mandate. The administration has since attempted to formulate a conceptual framework which

---

302 See also Penny Griffin, “Gendering Global Finance: Crisis, Masculinity, and Responsibility” (2013) 16(1) *Men and Masculinities* 9-34; Shaunet French and others, “Financialising Space, Spacing Financialisation” (2011) 35(6) *Progress in Human Geography* 798-819; Peter Gowan, “Crisis in the Heartland: Consequences of the New Wall Street System” (2009) 55 *New Left Review* 49-72 (January); David Harvey, “The Crisis and the Consolidation of Class Power: Is this really the end of Neoliberalism,” (2009) *Counterpunch* <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2009/03/13/is-this-really-the-end-of-neoliberalism>> accessed 10 March 2014).

rejects the ‘modernist’ and ‘colonial’ assumptions underlying the development enterprise of the post-war period. What is interesting about Ecuador is that, even though it has undertaken efforts comparable to those of Bhutan, in terms of socio-economic legal transformations, it has not received much international attention.. We explore what well-being means from the perspective of *Buen Vivir* and trace the commonalities and discontinuities with both the WBH agenda of the UK and Bhutan’s GNH policy.

## II. MEASURING WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS: THE UNITED KINGDOM

*Social Trends* was first published over 40 years ago in the UK, with the understanding that ‘economic progress must be measured, in part at least, in terms of social benefits’ and the fact that ‘it is just as important to have good statistics on various aspects of social policy [than it is economic statistics]’...This interest in supplementing economic statistics with social statistics to gain a fuller picture of the quality of life has not diminished with time. There have been a number of recent international initiatives to measure the quality of life in a better way and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is looking again at how best to measure the quality of life and well-being of UK citizens.<sup>303</sup>

In November 2010, the UK Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would start measuring the ‘progress’ of the country, not just in terms of economic growth, but also in terms of how peoples’ lives were improving through standard of living and also quality of life.<sup>304</sup> He stated that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) would soon start measuring subjective well-being and work towards constructing a national well-being index. The index would be devised based on extensive public and expert consultation. He also announced that the ONS would start using subjective well-being measures in its national survey and hold a national debate on what constitutes well-being so as to arrive to a new measure of national progress.

As the opening quote illustrates, however, Cameron’s announcement did not happen in a historic vacuum but can be seen as the continuation of a project of thinking about and measuring a nation’s well-being, which can be traced back to

---

<sup>303</sup> Stephen Hicks, *New approaches to the measurement of Quality of Life* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 1.

at least the 1960s. The emergence of the social indicators movement, to which the quote refers, was indeed a reaction to the so-called preference satisfaction approach of the post-war period which, associated with the neo-classical economics, predicated that more income would allow individuals to satisfy more of their preferences, thus resulting in increased well-being. This understanding of well-being, together with the fact that GDP started to be measured on a consistent basis across countries after the Second World War, led to its widespread adoption and use of it as a proxy measure for quality of life. Social indicators research pointed to the inadequacy of exclusively relying on economic data and particularly on GDP as a measure of ‘progress’, that is, as a measure of how a society is doing.<sup>305</sup> The reliance on a new set of indicators such as health, education, and infant mortality introduced the so-called objective list approach to well-being, which focuses on monitoring the basic needs and rights of the citizens which are essential to enable them to build their capabilities and flourish as individuals. The formulation of the Human Development Index for instance can be seen in this context.

The third approach, which Cameron’s announcement signals, points to the formal inclusion in national statistics of subjective alongside objective indicators, in an attempt to ‘provide wider measures of the nation’s progress’.<sup>306</sup> To be sure, subjective well-being and happiness research is not new either. Richard Easterlin’s paper, which argued that an increase in economic growth for a country (as well as for individuals) does not translate into a rise in average levels of happiness, is considered to be responsible for the steady generation of new WBH research in economics from the 1990s onwards.<sup>307</sup> Policy makers’ interest in subjective wellbeing

---

304 David Cameron, “PM speech on wellbeing” (Cabinet Office and Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-wellbeing>> accessed 11 March 2014.

305 GDP measures the size of the market economy, which says very little about quality of life. For instance, it does not take into account of the goods and services produced by the household or by communities; it does not say anything about income distribution; and instead counts as ‘productive’ events such as forest fires, landslides, coal mining, war, prisons, and sickness because money is spent on weapons.

306 Stephen Hicks, *New approaches to the measurement of Quality of Life* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 2.

307 Richard A. Easterlin, “Does economic growth improve the human lot? Some empirical evidence” in P. David (ed), *Nations and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in honer of Moses Abramowitz* (New York: Academic Press 1974).

had been already voiced under the New Labour Government (.<sup>308</sup> Drawing from the work of behavioural economics and social psychology, it was suggested that there was a case for state intervention in order to boost life satisfaction.<sup>309</sup> As a result, New Labour Government established an Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies programme, which made Cognitive Behavioural Therapy widely available through the National Health Service.<sup>310</sup> The UK Local Government Act 2000, which gave local authorities in England and Wales the power to ‘promote the economic, social and environmental well-being’, is another example of policy-making informed by WBH research.<sup>311</sup> Though conscious that the claims about the newness of WBH research and policy-making are problematic, we see 2007 as a defining moment in the international furtherance of the WBH agenda.

Certainly for the UK, but also for the UN, this defining moment comes with the launch by French president Nicolas Sarkozy of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress led by Nobel prize winners Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (Stiglitz et al. 2010).

---

308 Ian Bache, & Louise Reardon, “An Idea Whose Time has Come? Explaining the Rise of Well-being in British Politics” (2013) 61(4) *Political Studies* 898-914.

309 Nick Donovan, & David Halpern, *Life Satisfaction: the state of knowledge and implications for government* (The Strategy Unit 2002).

The New Labour’s policy focus on well-being can be viewed as a part of a somewhat larger regulatory project that ‘re-imagined’ ways for state intervention. It was argued that the processes of globalisation had fundamentally transformed the relationship between the state and the individual, therefore, traditional legal techniques, such as regulation or financial incentives were no longer seen as capable of effectively and adequately ordering political economies. The emergent focus on the individual as a ‘self-regulatory’ subject was accompanied with novel forms of state interventions that were directed at changing individual behaviour and attitudes through public campaigns and educational initiatives. See also Toni Williams, “Empowerment of Whom and for What? Financial Literacy Education and the New Regulation of Consumer Financial Services” (2007) 29(2) *Law and Policy* 226-256; Janet Newman, “Towards a pedagogical state? Summoning the ‘empowered’ citizen” (2010) 14(6) *Citizenship Studies* 711-723; Jessica Pykett, “Introduction: the pedagogical state: education, citizenship, governing” (2010) 14(6) *Citizenship Studies* 617-619.

310 Programmes designed to help unemployed people to find work in the UK now offer Cognitive Behavioural Therapy courses. William Davies, “The Political Economy of Unhappiness” (2011) 71 *New Left Review* 65-80; Siobhan Lennon-Patience, “Measuring a Nation’s Well-being: A Psycho-Cultural Investigation” (2013) 64 *Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups Politics* 14-36. ]

311 Laura Stolla and others, *Well-being evidence for policy: A review* (London: New Economic Foundation 2012).

The starting point of the report is the increasing concern about both ‘the adequacy of current measures of economic performance...[and] the relevance of these figures as measures of societal well-being’.<sup>312</sup> Acknowledging the limitations of current measures is important as ‘We are now living one of the worst financial, economic and social crises in post-war history’.<sup>313</sup> The reforms recommended by the Commission would be important even in the absence of a crisis, but as the report goes on to argue, ‘some members of the Commission believe that the crisis provides heightened urgency to these reforms’.<sup>314</sup> Therefore, the recommendation is to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s well-being.<sup>315</sup> The Commission makes clear that ‘changing emphasis does not mean dismissing GDP and production measures’.<sup>316</sup> However, it points out that ‘emphasizing well-being is important because there appears to be an increasing gap between the information contained in aggregate GDP data and what counts for common people’s well-being’.<sup>317</sup>

The report does two things: it acknowledges there are limits to what GDP can say about a nation’s quality of life, as it is supposed to measure only the size of the market economy, and argues that well-being is something which matters to the people and that which nations should be measuring, alongside the GDP. Indeed, the report explicitly recommends that subjective measures of the quality of life be collected by governments, a recommendation which has been quickly taken up by statistics offices around Europe as setting the agenda to which they need to respond. This argument has therefore provided the impetus for much of the work

---

312 Joseph Stiglitz and others, *Mismeasuring our lives: why GDP doesn’t add up* (New York: The New Press 2010) 3.

313 Ibid 4.

314 Joseph Stiglitz and others, *Mismeasuring our lives: why GDP doesn’t add up* (New York: The New Press 2010) 4.

315 Joseph Stiglitz and others, *Mismeasuring our lives: why GDP doesn’t add up* (New York: The New Press 2010).

316 Joseph Stiglitz and others, *Mismeasuring our lives: why GDP doesn’t add up* (New York: The New Press 2010) 10.

317 Joseph Stiglitz and others, *Mismeasuring our lives: why GDP doesn’t add up* (New York: The New Press 2010) 11.

318 For examples of initiatives in Germany, Italy, and Canada, See Christian Kroll, *Measuring Progress and Well-Being: Achievements and Challenges of a New Global Movement* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2011).

that has been carried out since 2010 across and beyond Europe.<sup>318</sup> The call for measuring subjective well-being has also been taken up by the UN in 2011, with the resolution by the General Assembly inviting member states, ‘to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies’.<sup>319</sup>

Hence, Cameron’s announcement and the work the ONS has undertaken so far can be seen as part of this agenda. The questions we are interested in exploring in the attempt to look at commonalities and discontinuities across the three sites are: first, how well-being and happiness are being conceptualised under the UK agenda; second, how such an understanding is impacting on policy making and third, the extent to which it is engendering desirable socio-economic change. The latter being the claim made by both the Stiglitz commission and the World Happiness report. Thus, following Cameron’s invitation to carry out “a re-appraisal of what matters” to people that would, ‘lead to government policy that is more focused not just on the bottom line, but on all those things that make life worthwhile’,<sup>320</sup> the ONS launched a national debate on ‘what matters to you?’ between 26 November 2010 to 15 April 2011.<sup>321</sup> The report summarising the findings starts with the acknowledgement that

The term ‘well-being’ is often taken to mean ‘happiness’. Happiness is one aspect of the well-being of individuals and can be measured by asking them

---

319 Ibid 8.

320 David Cameron, “PM speech on wellbeing” (Cabinet Office and Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-wellbeing>> accessed 11 March 2014.

321 According to the ONS, “[it] held 175 events, involving around 7,250 people. In total the debate generated 34,000 responses, some of which were from organisations and groups representing thousands more”. The most common answers were from a pre-defined list (health; good connections with friends and family; job satisfaction and economic security; present and future conditions of the environment; education and training). The ONS also scrutinised free text responses which emphasised “the importance of our health to our well-being; the importance of having adequate income or wealth to cover basic needs; the environment around us, and the need to connect with other people – whether partners, children, wider family, the community (local, national, faith and online, or work colleagues” . Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician’s reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 5-6.

about their feelings – subjective well-being. As we define it, well-being includes both subjective and objective measures. It includes feelings of happiness and other aspects of subjective well-being, such as feeling that one’s activities are worthwhile, or being satisfied with family relationships. It also includes aspects of well-being which can be measured by more objective approaches, such as life expectancy and educational achievements. These issues can also be looked at for population groups – within a local area, or region, or the UK as a whole.<sup>322</sup>

Recognising that well-being is a complex, multidimensional concept whose meaning cannot be easily encapsulated in one single definition,<sup>323</sup> the report then goes on to point out that the areas which emerged from the national debate as those which matter the most to people are health, relationships, work and the environment, with education and training having been added by people when asked which of the things that mattered to them should be reflected in measures of national well-being. These have since been identified by the ONS as the ‘domains’ that will need to be established as part of the national well-being framework to, ‘help capture the individual measures which together determine national well-being’, and which will eventually be expressed through a national Well Being Index. According to the ONS, this framework should be able to reflect the important finding of the national debate that individual well-being is central to the understanding of national well-being. This includes, ‘objective circumstances, for example an individual’s employment status; and subjective well-being, which includes the individual’s experiences and feelings’.<sup>324</sup> The framework, the report continues, should also reflect the fact, ‘that national well-being is affected by how these circumstances, experiences and feelings are distributed across society, and how well current levels of well-being can be sustained into the future or between generations...’.<sup>325</sup>

There are a number of issues regarding the report, principally those concerning

---

322 Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician’s reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 2.

323 Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician’s reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 7.

324 Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician’s reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 8.

325 Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician’s reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011) 8.

measuring and quantifying, to which we will return at the end of the article. However there are two aspects that are of interest to us in thinking about the potential of the UK WBH agenda: first, the attempt to conceive of the economic and non-economic spheres of life as equally important for, indeed constitutive of, well-being. The second interrelated point concerns the recognition that well-being and happiness cannot be defined *ex ante* but should be considered instead as a process of making sense, and acting upon, what matters to people. Now, thinking about a nation's well-being in terms of the interaction between economic and non-economic factors is an issue that goes back to at least the classical political economy of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the links between WBH research and Aristotle's concept of eudemonics have not gone unnoticed.<sup>326</sup>

Hirschman, for instance, has detailed the process through which, after Adam Smith, the passions and interests which formed a crucial part of previous social enquiry were reduced to one, the maximisation of material wealth, which would have allowed for the satisfaction of all others<sup>327</sup> There is a similarity here between what Hirschman calls the 'splendid generalisation' with which Smith accomplishes this move and the preference based approach to well-being of neo-classical economics. But there are also profound differences between the two approaches. Scholars have pointed to the tensions emerging from the complex relationship between the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*: for instance, Smith's notion of 'sympathy' (i.e. the ability to place ourselves in the situation of other people), which he considered the source of all sentiments informing human activity, cannot be easily reconciled with accounts about the primacy of self-interest. The problem, as Hirschman has noticed, is that scholarly and policy debate, after Smith, has reduced this complex thinking to the proposition that 'The general (material) welfare is best served by letting each member of society

---

326 Namely, as living a good, meaningful and virtuous life, Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2010). George MacKerron, "Happiness economics from 35,000 feet" (2011) 26(4) *Journal of Economic Surveys* 705-735.

327 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

328 *Ibid* 112.

pursue his own (material) self-interest'.<sup>328</sup> Thus neo-classical economics was purged of subjective well-being accounts,<sup>329</sup> and GDP eventually became the measure of a nation's well-being.

We therefore believe the ONS report by the National Statistician is to be welcomed for having started the process of rethinking the economy-society nexus, and for having done so with the question of what matters to people. One important issue is whether and to what extent this will reflect in changes to policy-making. Let us remember that one promise of the WBH discourse, a point made by both the World Happiness Report and the Stiglitz Commission, is the potential to effect desirable change. It is too early to assess the UK WBH agenda. However, having emphasised the potential of the work undertaken by the ONS, we also want to point to some serious concerns we have regarding the relationship between the WBH and the austerity agenda. As the ONS has pointed out, their objective is to develop well-being data and measures that can be used as tools by policy-makers, and the Cabinet Office in particular, in the design and evaluation of policy.<sup>330</sup> In July 2011, the Green Book, which provides formal guidance from the Treasury of the United Kingdom to other UK government agencies on how to appraise and evaluate policy proposals, was updated to reflect the results of a review of valuation techniques for social cost-benefit analysis jointly commissioned by the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions. The review specifically focused on the contribution that can be played by measures of subjective well-being. The Green book makes clear that:

At the moment, subjective well-being measurement remains an evolving methodology and existing valuations are not sufficiently accepted as robust enough for direct use in Social Cost Benefit Analysis. The technique is under development, however, and may soon be developed to the point where it can provide *a reliable and accepted complement to the market based approaches* outlined above. In the meantime, the technique will be important in ensuring that the full range of impacts of proposed policies are considered, and may

---

329 George MacKerron, "Happiness economics from 35,000 feet" (2011) 26(4) *Journal of Economic Surveys* 705-735.

330 Jil Matheson, *Measuring what matters: National statistician's reflections on the national debate on measuring national well-being* (UK: Office for National Statistics 2011).

provide added information about the relative value of non-market goods compared with each other, if not yet with market goods. A second approach, where a direct assessment of the value of a benefit or cost is particularly uncertain, is to make reference to the costs of preventing the loss of, or replacing, a non-marketed good (such as a natural habitat or recreational facility). This does not provide a measure of its value but can provide a figure to focus discussion upon whether the good is worth as much as this expenditure.<sup>331</sup> (emphasis added).

What is of concern to us is not just the fact that it is only eventually, once well-being measurement has been accepted as ‘robust’ enough, that it can ‘complement’ market based approaches to valuation. The very idea that these measures will complement (or supplement, as in the ONS opening quote) rather than challenge market based approaches is problematic. As the New Economics Foundation (NEF) has pointed out, governments have always had a wide set of objectives. However, they argue, ‘much of current policy debates are biased towards one indicator, GDP growth’. The BIS website, for example, currently states that ‘every part of government is focused on growth’.<sup>332</sup> And indeed, since the well-being agenda was launched in 2010, we have witnessed growth and the imperative of deficit reduction figuring prominently in austerity led policy making.<sup>333</sup>

As Cameron’s words below illustrate, it could even be argued that the Coalition government’s well-being agenda can be employed to think in a very specific way about the country’s ‘progress’ in times of austerity, circumventing the very need to look at the circulation and distribution of public monies altogether:

[T]here’s one question in politics at the moment above all others, and it’s this one: how do we make things better without spending more money? Because there isn’t going to be a lot of money to improve public services, or to improve government, or to improve so many of the things that politicians talk about. So what follows from that is that if you think it’s all about

---

331 Treasury, *The Green Book* (London: Stationery Office Books, 2011) 58.

332 The New Economics Foundation, *Well-being and the role of Government*, (2012) <<http://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/4bffe52d926439f0334im6bntl8.pdf>> accessed 2 February 2014.

333 See Gender Impact Assessment of the 2010 Spending Review (London, Women’s Budget Group)

money—you can only measure success in public services, in health care and education and policing by spending more money...But if you think a whole lot of other things matter that lead up to well being—things like your family relationships, friendship, community, values...That if we combine the right political philosophy, the right political thinking, with the incredible information revolution that has taken place, and that all of you know so much more about than I do, I think there's an incredible opportunity to actually remake politics, remake government, remake public services, and achieve ... a big increase in our well-being .<sup>334</sup>

This 'remaking' of public services and increase in people's well-being is imagined through an expected change of people's behaviour and attitudes.<sup>335</sup> Increased responsabilisation of, and reliance on, individuals to improve overall well-being in the UK is presented as leading to progress at the same time as the Coalition government is implementing a wide programme of public spending cuts. Thus, as far as the UK 'development' model is concerned, the potential for desirable transformation which the WBH agenda promises does not seem to have materialised. Instead, we see the separation between the productive and reproductive sphere as having been strengthened, with the latter having been further squeezed for the benefit of the former.

We turn now to the Bhutanese context to see how the WBH agenda has been conceptualised and operationalised through the Gross National Happiness prism.

---

334 David Cameron, 'The next age of government' (TEDTalks 2010) <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tedtalks/david-cameron-the-next-ag\\_b\\_573218.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tedtalks/david-cameron-the-next-ag_b_573218.html)> accessed 10 March 2014.

335 David Cameron, "PM speech on wellbeing" (Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-wellbeing>> accessed 11 March 2014.

According to Cameron, the wellbeing agenda will be achieved by changing the way people act. Referring to the energy saving issue, for instance, he explained: "We want to get people to be more energy efficient. Why? It cuts fuel poverty, it cuts their bills, and it cuts carbon emissions at the same time. How do you do it? Well, we've had government information campaigns over the years when they tell you to switch off the lights when you leave the home... The best way to get someone to cut their electricity bill is to show them their own spending, to show them what their neighbours are spending, and then show what an energy conscious neighbour is spending. That sort of behavioural economics can transform people's behaviour in a way that all the bullying and all the informational and all the badgering from a government cannot possibly achieve."

### III. GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS AS A NEW DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: BHUTAN

Much of the UN/OECD/EU WBH agenda of the last two decades can be attributed to Bhutan's internationalising of its GNH policy stemming from a widespread perception of Bhutan as a 'real life Shangri-La',<sup>336</sup> and as one of the worlds' happiest countries (One World Education). The foregrounding of 'happiness' in Bhutan is not recent however; it was declared in 1675 to be 'A Buddhist equivalent of a 'Social Contract"' and the 1729 legal code states: 'The purpose of governance is happiness of man and sentient beings'.<sup>337</sup> Indeed, it declares that 'If the government cannot create happiness (*dekidk*) for its people there is no purpose for the government to exist'.<sup>338</sup> This sentiment continued to prevail with the monarch rulers established in Bhutan in 1907. The third king, for example, stated the importance of happiness *alongside prosperity*, as a governing objective, during his speech for Bhutan's admission to the UN in 1971.<sup>339</sup> The more recent and internationally well-known articulation of GNH was made by the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuckin 1979 when he stated that Bhutan was more interested in Gross National Happiness than in Gross National Product. This statement emphasising gross national happiness - as opposed to happiness alongside prosperity - was meant to be an expression of the Bhutanese unease with 'the means and objectives' of the dominant growth-based economic development model; particularly, as the country sought to transition from its previous concerted policy of isolation up until the 1960s to one of modernisation (with limits).<sup>340</sup> GNH was then developed and formulated into a government policy (five-year plans) from 1982 and over the next few decades, until it became enshrined in the new constitution that accompanied the shift from absolute monarchy to constitutional

---

336 Annie Kelly, "Gross national happiness in Bhutan: the big idea from a tiny state that could change the world" *The Observer*, (1 December 2012).

337 Lham Dorji, *Bhutan's pursuit of creating balanced GNH Accounts* (Bangkok: National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2011); Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index* (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 6.

338 Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index* (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 6.

339 Stefan Priesner, *Gross National Happiness – Bhutan's Vision of Development and its Challenges* (United Nations Development Programme: UN 1999) 28.

340 *Ibid* 2.

monarchy and democracy in 2008 (with the current fifth king taking over after his father's abdication).<sup>341</sup> From that moment GNH became operationalized within Bhutanese governing policy as:

A holistic and sustainable approach to development which balances between material and non-material values with the conviction that humans want to search for happiness. The objective of GNH is to achieve a balanced development in all facets of life which is essential to our happiness.<sup>342</sup>

GNH does not in and of itself equate to happiness but rather operates as a policy that underscores sustainability as part of achieving happiness, understood as a common 'public good' that is viewed not only through the 'lens of economics but also from spiritual, social, cultural and ecological perspectives'.<sup>343</sup> The first Prime Minister elected under the new Constitution of Bhutan Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley differentiates this kind of wide reaching and 'complex' multi-layered happiness underpinning GNH from "the fleeting, pleasurable, 'feel good' moods' associated with the term particularly elsewhere.<sup>344</sup> As the authors of '*Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm – Report of the Kingdom of Bhutan*' (NDP) put it:

Bhutan's path is founded on a clear understanding and acceptance of a *higher and reasoned purpose* for development that goes beyond the short-term economics and material well being of human beings and that takes into account the interdependent nature of life on Earth. It is guided by the belief that development or societal progress must achieve physical, mental,

---

341 Article 9(2) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan states, "the State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the successful pursuit of Gross National Happiness".

342 Gross National Happiness Centre of Bhutan, 'What is Gross National Happiness?' (*GNH Bhutan*) <<http://www.gnhcentrebhutan.org/what-is-gnh/>> accessed 16 March 2014.

343 Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index*, (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 7.

344 Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index* (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 8, quoting Lyonchhen Jigmi Y Thinley, *Educating for Gross National Happiness* (Thimphu 2009).

For a comprehensive overview and critical reading of 'Western' literature on happiness, See Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2010).

emotional and spiritual well-being as a condition for the fulfilment of human potential and for genuine happiness in harmony with nature.<sup>345</sup>

Although there are of course similarities in how happiness has become operationalised through well-being policies and measures for the purpose of government policy making in both Bhutan (see below) and the UK, it is important to note the differences. As Priesner argues, in Bhutan the political impetus for happiness policy making has come from its specific Buddhist culture and spiritual beliefs and customary practices.<sup>346</sup> Thus, as we see in NDP Report,<sup>347</sup> the Bhutanese conceptualisations of happiness orientate<sup>348</sup> development towards a different interaction of objectives by emphasising the inter-dependence of spheres of life that go beyond the material concepts and also focus, for example, on the spiritual concepts. Although current GNH policy making is not explicitly linked to Buddhism, it is clear that the normative values stemming from Buddhist beliefs give rise to the idea of a 'higher and reasoned purpose' that places importance on spiritual well-being, environmental protection as well as on economics and, indeed, highlights their interdependence in achieving happiness; particularly, in achieving a form of happiness that is not 'fleeting' as former Prime Minister Thinley puts it. The importance of the inter-dependence of these factors is shown in the diagram below from the NDP report,<sup>349</sup> where spheres of life are not perceived as parallel, existing neatly side by side, but rather are viewed as co-produced, intertwined and even fractal, seeping into one another.

---

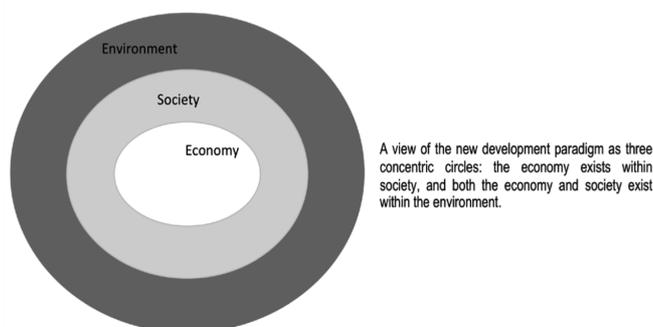
345 Gross National Happiness Centre (n.d.), "What is Gross National Happiness?" Gross National Happiness Centre <<http://www.gnhbhutan.org/about>> accessed 16 March 2014 (emphasis added).

346 Stefan Priesner, *Gross National Happiness – Bhutan's Vision of Development and its Challenges* (United Nations Development Programme: UN 1999). A detailed analysis of the ways in which happiness might be understood in Bhutan is beyond the scope of this article. However, see Third Person (forthcoming) for more discussion in relation to specific 'GNH in action' case studies.

347 NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat (2013) *Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*. Royal Government of Bhutan.

348 Here we draw on the work of Sarah Ahmed's 'The Promise of Happiness' where she discusses how happiness can also be understood as a process that 'orientates' us towards certain 'objects'. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2010).

349 NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat (2013) *Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*. Royal Government of Bhutan.



This conceptualisation of the economy-society nexus is therefore very different from that articulated through the UK WBH agenda. Assessing what GHN has meant in practice so far, which is what we do next, will enable us to better delineate the differences between the two contexts. The GNH ‘philosophy’ developed within Bhutan in the 1970s has been operationalized since 2008 into a ‘multidimensional’ concept including ‘core objectives’ in four key strategic areas known as ‘pillars’. These are 1) fair socio-economic development (better education and health), 2) conservation and promotion of a vibrant culture, 3) environmental protection and 4) good governance. These four pillars have been further subdivided into nine ‘domains’ or dimensions, which were selected on normative grounds that have also become the basis of a GNH index (discussed below). The nine domains include psychological well-being, time use, community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience alongside ecological diversity and good governance; with the latter two being taken up by other countries more recently. The domains also include other standard strategic government areas such as health, education, and living standards with the Bhutanese government providing free education and health to all its citizens.<sup>350</sup>

From the mid-2000s the Centre for Bhutanese Studies (CBS),<sup>351</sup> have been constructing and revising a GNH index which is supposed to act as a ‘more

350 See Third Person (forthcoming) on ‘GNH in action’ projects by private and civil society initiatives and on the concept of happiness, what it means to people in these specific.

351 The Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, “GNH Policy and Project Screening Tools” The Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research (2014) <<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/gnh-policy-and-project-screening-tools>> accessed 24 February 2014.

The CBS is the primary body that began all the initial research for developing the GNH philosophy. It also constructs the GNH index, carries out the GNH surveys and analyses them before the results are actioned by the GNH Commission which is the government planning body.

profound' way 'to capture human wellbeing' than traditional socio-economic measures of economic, human or social development. The 2010 Index includes a further set of 33 indicators and 124 sub indicators or variables under each domain.<sup>352</sup> A full analysis of the Index is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to emphasise that both the indicators and the Index are not conceived of as measuring happiness 'as it really is'. As mentioned above the domains and indicators were the result of a normative process conducted within the CBS during which the parameters for thinking of, and measuring, happiness were elaborated. Once these parameters have been set and indicators subsequently formulated, the GNH Index can be used to analyse the journey of Bhutanese people towards achieving GNH through surveys that are carried out every three years.<sup>353</sup> This is why as Dr. Saamdu Chetri, the executive director of the GNH Centre, put it to us, that GNH is better conceived of as a tool of policy-making which creates the conditions for happiness, bearing in mind these conditions are the outcome of a political process. We will address the implications this has for thinking about the relationship between WBH measurement and the reality it is supposed to describe, in conclusion.

For the time being it is interesting to note that, given the fact that well-being measurement can be deployed in very problematic ways, as discussed above in relation to the UK context, the CBS report does raise caution about an index being 'limited and insufficient'.<sup>354</sup> However, it also asserts that GNH, 'measures the quality of a country in a more holistic way than GNP'; that it can do what, 'no other single tool can do' namely: 'sketch roughly how GNH is evolving across Bhutan as a whole over time, as well as for different groups, regions and people. It can also convey *how* people are happier – or unhappier – than previously, and thus informal practical action.'<sup>355</sup>

There is clearly a need to account for the implementation of GNH policy. Whilst undoubtedly part of this is practical in terms of, for example, making decisions about resource allocation, there is also a wider implicit agenda at play whose objective is to engender a shift in the way we value different aspects of life. This is evident in the words of Dr. Chetri who, asked by us about the limitations of quantifying incommensurable realms of life, is adamant to point out that 'if we shift what we measure, there can be a system shift'.<sup>356</sup> This is a sentiment shared by Dr. Tho, Programme Director of the GNH Centre, for whom 'what we measure

is what we become aware of'. Whilst they both acknowledge that attributing economic value to every aspects of life is not desirable, they see measurement as a way to bring consciousness to areas that have not mattered, whether that be the environment, unrecognised labour, etc.,<sup>357</sup> although this process needs to be accompanied with a simultaneous problematizing of the language being used, such as 'capital' or indeed economic value.<sup>358</sup> Clearly, there is an audience beyond Bhutan's borders, indeed a co-constituent part of the measuring being undertaken in Bhutan's GNH policy and the model it is presenting to the international community, evident most clearly in the NDP report.<sup>359</sup>

However, it is worth noting that whether as part of an instrumental approach for planning and resource allocation (with the Index orienting policy making towards

---

352 The number of sub indicators and variables are under constant review. Figures given here relate to the 2010 GNH Index. The index adopts the Alkire-Foster methodology for measuring poverty. See Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index* (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 28 for more information on this methodology, the GNH index itself and how it has come to be formulated by the authors including Sabine Alkire, Director of the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative based at Oxford University, UK.

353 For a discussion of the last survey carried out in 2010 and the results See Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index*, (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012).. The next survey will be conducted in 2015.

354 Karma Ura and others, *An Extensive Analysis of GNH Index*, (Thimphu: Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2012) 8.

355 Ibid. The Index has also been used as the basis to develop GNH policy screening tools (PST). Prospective public policies are screened by the GNH Commission for their perceived impacts on 22 variables linked to the 9 domains. They are scored 1 to 4 depending upon the perceived impact of the policy on the variable. A score of 3 is set as the threshold to be considered as favorably impacting the variables and a score of 66 is set as the threshold for the policy to be GNH favorable. See Lham Dorji, *Bhutan's pursuit of creating balanced GNH Accounts* (Bangkok: National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2011). See also, The Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 'GNH Policy and Project Screening Tools' (*Gross National Happiness*, 2014) <<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/gnh-policy-and-project-screening-tools>> accessed 24 February 2014.

356 Saamdu Chetri, "Deepening out Understanding of GNH" (Presented at GNH Centre workshop on Experience GNH in Bhutan - From contemplation to Action 2014).

357 These areas are outlined in the NDP Report (NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat 2013: 12-18).

358 Isabelle Cassiers, *Redefining Prosperity* (Routledge, 2014).

359 Through for example the use of the Alkire-Foster methodology to formulate Bhutan's GNH index and the formulation of the Independent expert working group for the development of the NDP.

areas in need of intervention) or indeed as part of awareness shifting to areas of life that have gone undervalued, the impulse to measure is being taken even further. In 2010, Bhutan initiated a movement from a conventional GDP-based accounting system and economic paradigm to a holistic model, accounting for environmental, social and cultural values in accordance with GNH principles. In a report entitled 'Valuing Bhutan's True Wealth',<sup>360</sup> there is an outline of how a new set of National Accounts for Bhutan might potentially look like. The report shows how Bhutan's wealth could be practically measured, including not only traditional material capital but also natural, social, cultural, and human capital.<sup>361</sup> To do so, ecological economists developed full-cost accounting methods, and developed valuations and methodologies, including those assessing non-market values that can be translated into the Bhutanese context. A number of these experts have also volunteered to work with Bhutan in the next few years to help develop and integrate these measures into the new National Accounts, and they have already developed preliminary estimates of the economic value of Bhutan's ecosystem services and voluntary work as key examples of natural and social capital. They suggest measuring not only progress (i.e. how policy-makers address changes in happiness over time) but also the economic value of different forms of capital against which they can assess more accurately the costs and benefits of newly proposed economic activities. They claim that both forms of measurement are essential in policy formation, and it is this dual approach that distinguishes Bhutan's GNH Index and new National Accounts from other measurement systems that rely on indicators alone. It is also suggested that this approach could be adopted in other countries' official national accounts.

With both the Index and the new accounting system acting as a model for other countries joining the WBH agenda, we also want to explore whether there might be other reasons that have led to what is now almost a contemporary international industry serving the production of nationalised forms of happiness. As Priesner argues,<sup>362</sup> it is important to understand the *geo-political* conditions which have

---

360 Karen Hayward and others, *Valuing Bhutan's True Wealth* (GPI Atlantic, 2012).

361 Ibid.

362 Stefan Priesner, *Gross National Happiness – Bhutan's Vision of Development and its Challenges* (United Nations Development Programme: UN 1999).



the immense benefits of science and technology'.<sup>365</sup> He also articulated Bhutan's vision of development:

'In addition to the conventional notion of development that focuses on quantifiable indicators of economic prosperity, Bhutan's vision of development stresses *non-quantifiable goals* such as spiritual well being and gross national happiness. We do this through a concerted policy of cultural promotion and the provision of free education, health and other social services'.<sup>366</sup>

He expressed criticism of the mainstream economics' concern with efficiency of production and distribution and, instead, suggested focusing on 'ethics, ideologies, faiths and institutions, which favour sustainable lifestyles at a collective level'.<sup>367</sup> In his view, the pursuit of self-interest is not only non-productive but actually counter-productive, as it threatens the rich bonding of individuals as members of extended families and communities.

Our aim is not to challenge the merits and objectives of the NDP but rather to suggest that it can be viewed as an outward movement or internationalisation of Bhutan's philosophy and policy-making. What we find interesting is the way in which Bhutan has moved, in a relatively short space of time, from an isolationist position, fending off the 'blizzard' - various forms of what might be viewed as being colonized - to now being at the forefront of and leading an international WBH agenda. Bhutan's approach has not been one that has espoused the language of anti-colonial resistance like other countries such as Ecuador (see below). Indeed their approach is quite the opposite, at least internationally, in espousing the language of global co-operation. There is nevertheless a sense of fear and threat from the outside world, both in terms of its superpower neighbours and the growth-led development model (the 'blizzard'), that is somewhat masked by the

---

365 Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley, 'Keynote Speech on Values and Development: "Gross National Happiness"' (Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, Seoul, October 1998) 15.

366 Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley, 'Keynote Speech on Values and Development: "Gross National Happiness"' (Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, Seoul, October 1998) 16.

Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley, 'Keynote Speech on Values and Development: "Gross National Happiness"' (Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, Seoul, October 1998) 20.

367 NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat (2013) *Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*. Royal Government of Bhutan.

conciliatory tones of co-operation and interconnectedness.<sup>368</sup> This raises questions about whether we can view Bhutan's leading the post-2015 development agenda and forging ahead with measurement and value indexes not just as the contribution of a 'happy country', but rather also as incorporating a deeply felt 'anti-colonial' stance, similar to other instances where a refutation of growth economics through well-being policy-making has been much more explicitly articulated in the language of resistance.<sup>369</sup> After all, as the words of former Prime Minister Thinley indicate, when he states that: "Bhutan's vision of development stresses *non-quantifiable goals* such as spiritual well being and gross national happiness',<sup>370</sup> it is clear that there is a definite ambiguity or tension in the use of quantification for measuring, particularly in relation to immaterial factors that are considered as important, if not more so, than the material ones. This goes at the heart of the measurement through quantification issue which we will address in the conclusion.

In the meanwhile, it is clear then that there is a different conceptualisation and understanding of the interaction between social, economic and other spheres of life in the Bhutanese context from that of the UK. There is also therefore a difference in commitment, if not application, to the use of quantification of these factors in measuring national well-being. This is also evident in a second significant difference in the two contexts, in that Bhutan's emphasis on structural transformation – as part of modernisation and development – is very much predicated on the idea of 'inner' transformation. Whilst we are not able to elaborate on the detail of this aspect of GNH here, it comes back to the importance of the immaterial, to the spiritual as Thinley states. As the NDP outlines,<sup>371</sup> these inner

---

368 Katherine Marshall, "Fes Forum, Day Two: Are Solidarity and Harmony Possible Through the World of Finance?" (2013) Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, <<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/fes-forum-day-two-are-solidarity-and-harmony-possible-through-the-world-of-finance>> accessed 26 May 2011; Faouzi Skali, "Fes Forum. Giving Soul to Globalization - A New Andalusia: local solutions for global disorder" (2013) Conference of the Birds, <[http://www.fesfestival.com/2013/en/fes.php?id\\_rub=39](http://www.fesfestival.com/2013/en/fes.php?id_rub=39)> accessed 26 May 2014.

369 Lyonnnchen Jigmi Y. Thinley, "Keynote Speech on Values and Development: "Gross National Happiness"" (Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, Seoul 30 October. -1 November, 1998) 16.

370 NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat (2013)*Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*. Royal Government of Bhutan. (8-9).

371 It was the current King of Bhutan who stated: "We must value life... over acquisitiveness and profit. We must also recognise the difference between needs and wants, and value *needs* over wants" NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat (2013)*Happiness: Towards a New Development Paradigm*. Royal Government of Bhutan.

values are linked to the ideas of giving, service to others and thinking of ‘needs rather than wants’.<sup>372</sup> This language is obviously referring to the need for self-sufficiency, clearly an important policy imperative, and therefore intended as a way to stem the desire for material goods that comes with globalising influences upon Bhutan. However, it is also simultaneously seeking to catalyse a shift in consciousness amongst the rest of the world towards thinking more deeply about an alternative development model. We now turn to another context, that of Ecuador, in which well-being has emerged and developed not only as a fundamental guiding principle of policy making but also as a challenge to the global development agenda.

#### IV. *BUEN VIVIR* AND THE CHALLENGE TO DEVELOPMENT: ECUADOR

The emergence of well-being policies in Ecuador has to be seen in the context of the broader political, socio-economic and cultural transformations that have swept the Latin American region in the last two decades in response to the ‘shock therapies’ forced on the continent: not only the neo-liberal ones of most recent memory but also the colonial one which goes back to the time of conquest with the concurrent introduction of both European modernity and capitalism.<sup>373</sup> Escobar for instance has seen the recently forged nexus between the social movements and the state in Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela, as representative of a historic conjuncture brought about by the crisis of the neo-liberal project and that of euro-modernity, of which development thinking is an integral part.<sup>374</sup> Although Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia are not the only states in South America experimenting with alternative socio-economic, political and cultural models, they are certainly those reacting most explicitly to what they see as a failing neo-liberal project which has produced extreme inequality and violence.

---

372 Arturo Escobar, “Latin America at a crossroads” (2010) 24(1) Cultural Studies 1.

373 Ibid 11. This dual crisis has for him opened the way to two competing projects: “(a) alternative modernizations, based on an anti-neo-liberal development model, in the direction of a post-capitalist economy and an alternative form of modernity ...; [and] (b) decolonial projects, based on a different set of practices (e.g. communal, indigenous, hybrid, and above all, pluriversal and intercultural), leading to a post-liberal society (an alternative to euro-modernity)” The question he pursues is which of these two kinds of project is taking shape in Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela.

374 Constitución de la Republica del Ecuador, 2008.

In Ecuador in particular, *Buen Vivir* has emerged as a paradigm encapsulating the experimental quality of such policies with the 2008 Constitution explicitly recognising the decision ‘to build a new form of co-existence ... to achieve the good life [*Buen Vivir*], the *Sumak Kawsay*’.<sup>375</sup> The *Buen Vivir* paradigm owes much to ‘the social, political, and epistemic agency of the indigenous movement’ which has responded to the shock of development policies.<sup>376</sup> As Acosta has pointed out, the experience of collective life of indigenous peoples has formed ‘an essential element for thinking differently about society, a society that valorises popular knowledge and technologies, that organises itself in solidarity and devices endogenous responses’ (Acosta 2009). And the experience of the indigenous movement has come to converge with the analyses and proposals advanced by feminist and environmental economics who have for decades questioned the notion of the economy as separate from other realms of life,<sup>377</sup> and with the critique of post-development scholars who have challenged the idea that ‘development’ is both necessary and desirable.<sup>378</sup>

The conceptual shift from development to *Buen Vivir* informed by the philosophy of *Sumak Kawsay* is explicitly articulated under the *National Plan para el Buen Vivir* (National Plan for Well-Being) where the government acknowledges that ‘underlying the idea of development, progress and modernisation is the conceptualisation of a linear time in which history has only one meaning and direction: developed countries are ahead, positing the model for all societies to follow’.<sup>379</sup> This world-mentality has produced prominent ontological assumptions such as the separation of humans from non-humans, and of certain humans from others, and the separation of ‘the economy’ from other realms of life.<sup>380</sup> This is in contrast with the ‘full life’ or *vida plena* to which *Sumak Kawsay* refers and

---

375 Catherine Walsh, “Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements” (2010) 53(1) *Development* 15-21.

376 Christina Carrasco, “Mujeres y trabajo: entre la invisibilidad y la precariedad” in *Mujeres y trabajo: entre la precariedad y la desigualdad*, (Madrid: Consejo General del Poder Judicial 2008).

377 Arturo Escobar, “Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

378 Republica del Ecuador, *Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural* (Quito: SENPLADES, 2009).

379 Arturo Escobar, “Latin America at a crossroads” (2010) 24(1) *Cultural Studies* 1, 9.

380 Republica del Ecuador (2009) *Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural*. Quito: SENPLADES.

according to which ‘the world above, the world below, the world outside and this world are connected to each other and are part of a whole within a spiral, and not a linear perspective of time’,<sup>381</sup> a perspective that emphasises ‘relationality and reciprocity; the continuity between the natural, the human and the supernatural...and the embeddedness of the economy in social life’,<sup>382</sup> or put in other terms, the interconnectedness of the productive and reproductive spheres.

*Buen Vivir* has therefore been presented by the government as a project that rejects the development paradigm of the post-war period with its colonial legacy. As Madgalena Leon has argued, moving away from the ideological orbit of ‘development’ means thinking of other ways of producing and consuming as well as organising and sharing life.<sup>383</sup> In this respect, the Plan aims to promote the transition from an extractivist model of colonial origins to a ‘bio-pluralist’ economy that recognises and valorises different forms of life, different forms of economy, and different property relations.<sup>384</sup> This, the Plan continues, requires an active investment in the production and reproduction of life, with investments in areas ranging from food, housing, health and education, to energy, technology, environmental and bio-services as well as wide-ranging agrarian reforms.<sup>385</sup>

---

381 Escobar, Arturo (2010) “Latin America at a crossroads,” 24(1) *Cultural Studies* 1, 9.

382 Republica del Ecuador (2009)*Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural*. Quito: SENPLADES.

383 Republica del Ecuador (2009)*Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural*. Quito: SENPLADES.

384 Republica del Ecuador (2009)*Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural*. Quito: SENPLADES.

385 This is not only because of the difference between stated objectives and actions, particularly with respect to the disenchantment by the indigenous movement with the Correa administration with respect to the realization of the plurinational state which has come to be more about recognition of diversity rather than real decentralization of power). There are for him tensions between the post-development orientation of these programmes and the permanence of deeply rooted developmentalist conceptions such as growth and competitiveness Arturo Escobar, “Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World” (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995) 23. Growth (although based on the tertiary sector rather than on the extraction of petroleum) and competitiveness (although based on cooperation rather than competition) are concepts that run alongside the recognition that all living beings (humans and non humans) are above capital. Thus oil extraction continues to take place in order to pay for the policies of re-distribution. Indeed when we visited Ecuador the then finance minister Elsa Viteri, stressed the need to still rely on the extractivist sector, although in a more sustainable way, so to accomplish these objectives and facilitate the transition towards an economy less reliant on petroleum.

The extent to which the Plan and subsequent government action have managed to inaugurate a post-development and de-colonial era, remains an open question. Escobar's view is very cautious while pointing towards the continuities and discontinuities with both the developmental and the colonial projects.<sup>386</sup> Catherine Walsh has also argued that although Ecuador's well-being paradigm is based on a distinct Andean philosophy, it presents many similarities to the European welfare state.<sup>387</sup> A cursory look at the key principles of *Buen Vivir* adopted by the 2008 Constitution would seem to point in this direction, with the promise of a national education system 'designed to develop the abilities and improve potentiality among individuals and the collective society based upon knowledge of technology, the arts, and an understanding of culture';<sup>388</sup> a national health care system 'based on the development, protection, and revitalization of the potential for a healthy, integral lifestyle for both individuals and the collective community based upon a recognition of social and cultural diversity';<sup>389</sup> and a social security system which 'is public and universal, and not privatized'.<sup>390</sup>

However, the re-conceptualisation of the society-economy nexus is important in both analytical and political terms. Although, unlike the *Plan Nacional*, the Constitution retains the term 'development', this is seen as being 'constituted by the organized, sustainable and dynamic ensemble (*conjunto*) of the economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental systems, coming together to ensure the realization of the good life, *Sumak Kawsay*'.<sup>391</sup> As Leon notes the relocation of the economic system as one component of this ensemble traversed by a commitment to *Buen Vivir* entails the widening of the objective of the economy,<sup>392</sup> this is no longer attached to a normative ideal of accumulation but is defined as social and solidarity (Art 283). As with the NDP put forward by the Bhutanese government, this widening entails not only rejecting the idea of the economic axis as running parallel to the societal and the environmental axes, as neo-classical economics would have it. It would also mean doing away with the axes altogether

---

386 Catherine Walsh, "Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements" (2010) 53(1) *Development* 15, 19.

387 Art 343,

388 Art 358

389 Art 367

390 Art 283

391 Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010).

and recognising the co-production of these different spheres, something we have seen what Bhutan's NDP also does.

According to Leon this analytical focus has already engendered outstanding political innovations: the concepts of food and economic sovereignty and the subsequent agrarian reforms;<sup>393</sup> the reconceptualization of work and recognition in all of its forms, including care work and the extension of social security to all labourers,<sup>394</sup> the acknowledgement of the diversity of forms of production,<sup>395</sup>

---

392 Access to land is recognised on basis other than through private property (Art 57). This has provided the legal basis for the new agrarian reforms. The National Assembly adopted, in February 2009, the Food Sovereignty Law, which mandates the immediate development of: a policy of redistribution of land and means of production; Preferential financing mechanisms for small and medium producers; measures for the preservation and recovery of agrobiodiversity and ancestral knowledge; and the preservation and free exchange of seeds. Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010) 148.

393 Right to Work: Unlike the 1998 Constitution which stated that "Work is a both a right and a social duty", the new constitution provides that: "All modalities of work are recognised, whether working as employees or independent, including the work of self sustenance and human care, and as productive social actors to all workers" (art 325). According to Leon, recognizing all forms of work and their productive nature (with particular emphasis on care work) and extending protection and social security does historical justice to people and communities that had been stripped of their economic status and correlative rights. Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010). 117

294 Right to Work: Unlike the 1998 Constitution which stated that "Work is a both a right and a social duty", the new constitution provides that: "All modalities of work are recognised, whether working as employees or independent, including the work of self sustenance and human care, and as productive social actors to all workers" (art 325). According to Leon, recognizing all forms of work and their productive nature (with particular emphasis on care work) and extending protection and social security does historical justice to people and communities that had been stripped of their economic status and correlative rights. Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010). 117

295 Right to Economic Activities: Unlike the 1998 Constitution which enshrined the 'freedom of the enterprise' (Art 25), the new constitution refers to the right to engage in economic activities, individually or collectively, according to the principles of solidarity and social and environmental responsibility" (Art 66). Economic activity is here understood as including all the ways of doing economy, not just those who have the capital base and purpose (ie companies). This is complemented by the substitution of the term 'company', running through the text of 1998 Constitution, with the more general and inclusive 'economic unit'. Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010) 116. This means that protection and financing by the state extends to all activities.

economic exchanges and property, the latter in its associative, community, cooperative, and popular dimensions in addition to its private forms and all receiving support from the state,<sup>396</sup> are among the most important innovations.

Similar to what has happened in Bhutan with the NDP, Ecuador's adoption of *Buen Vivir* has comported a conceptual shift consisting of both the rejection of the normative assumptions of the post-war development enterprise, including the idea that the economy can be isolated from other domains of life, and the embracing of alternative principles, such as those of complementarity and relationism derived from *Sumak Kawsay*, to guide policy making. As Leon puts it, the reconceptualization of the economy as an integral part of life requires '... changes in the productive matrix, in the visions and policies about who and what constitutes the economy, what and how to produce, what and how to eat, and ultimately of how to reproduce life'.<sup>397</sup> As already mentioned, whether such changes point in the direction of a post-development and post-colonial project is an open question. What is clear, however, is that the convergence of the indigenous, environmental, left and women's movements since 2007 has brought about various attempts, including in the policy making arena, to experiment with alternative visions of living together, actually existing or not.

Therefore, this focus on well-being is very different from that adopted by the UK, not only because of the critique *Buen Vivir* brings to neo-liberalism and development, which is absent in the UK, but also in terms of its potential for

---

396 Unlike the 1998 Constitution which supported various forms of property (art 30-34) but did not name them, the new text acknowledges: "The right to property in all its forms, with social and environmental roles and responsibilities (Art 66, 26). Private property is recognised alongside public, communal, state and associative. The Constitution recognises the inalienable, imprescriptible and indefeasible character of non renewable natural resources, which is state property, as well as the property of indigenous peoples to their territories. It also speaks of the need to democratize access to the factors of production, through the promotion of equitable access policies that "avoid concentration or hoarding...promote redistribution and delete privileges or inequalities..." (Art 334,1). The same focus on redistribution is to be found in relation to food sovereignty, which is assigned the responsibility of the State to "promote redistributive policies allowing access of peasants to land, water and other productive resources" (art 281,4). This has provided the basis for the agrarian reforms Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010) 118.

397 Magdalena Leon, "El 'buen vivir': objetivo y camino para otro modelo," in I. Leon (ed), *Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir y cambios civilizatorios* (Quito: FEDAEPS 2010).

transformation. As the Plan adds, what today is presented as ‘the horizon of post-neo liberalism might become in a few years a more integrated proposal for a better life for all people... therefore pointing to the possibility of something else in the future’.<sup>398</sup> It is the potential for this ‘something else’ we see missing in the case of the UK where not only growth continues to have the last word on policy-making decisions, despite the proliferation of WBH initiatives, but also cuts to social spending and the heightened pressure on individuals to provide safety nets for themselves and their ‘communities’ in the face of a receding welfare state point in the direction of a further separation between the productive and reproductive spheres.

We have discussed the difference in the way in which well-being is understood and actualized in both Ecuador and Bhutan compared with the UK. Being aware of its own ambition to foster internationally an NDP, Bhutan has adopted a less explicit condemnation of the normative assumptions underlying the international development agenda. The reconceptualisation of the economy-society nexus as envisaged in the NDP, however, is no less challenging than the Ecuadorian one, as it also brings to the fore the interconnectedness between the productive and reproductive spheres of life. Thus, the first conclusion we draw is that despite sharing a critique of GDP as a measure of national well-being, these are three different contexts where well-being is understood and actualized in very distinct ways. Thus, we argue that emphasizing the transnational dimension of the WBH agenda without paying attention to its very different manifestations is not only analytically inaccurate, it also dilutes its potential for socio-economic transformation.

There is however a second interrelated conclusion we would like to tentatively make as a way to open up questions for future research. It concerns the WBH’s focus on quantification and measurement. Although Rene’ Ramirez, the Secretary of the Ecuadorian Commission on Planning and Development, announced in 2010 that Ecuador would soon start to measure individual happiness levels,<sup>399</sup> this has up to now meant utilising the data provided by the office for national statistics (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos*) to look at life satisfaction levels across regions in terms of employment, health, education, time use, social relations,

---

398 Republica del Ecuador (2009) *Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir, 2009–2013: Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural*. Quito: SENPLADES.

political participation, governance, and the environment. So Ecuador has so far employed the widely used social indicators or objective list approach we have referred to earlier. In a subsequent article Ramirez recognises that measuring ‘relational goods’ is neither entirely feasible nor desirable, echoing the concern also expressed by Thinley; yet, he sees measurement as a necessary tool to guide policy-making.<sup>400</sup> It remains to be seen, whether Ecuador will invest more resources in producing and utilising subjective well-being data in the future. This however appears to be a growing international trend, of which the UK and Bhutan are two clear examples, particularly after the UN’s call for member states ‘to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies’.<sup>401</sup>

While we appreciate that measuring well-being, as in the case of the GNH Index, might provide a useful compass for policy making, we want to conclude by reflecting on the relationship between WBH measurement and the reality it is supposed to describe. In noticing the disjuncture between the ONS report, its findings and the UK austerity led policy-making, we are not making an argument about the need for the government to base its policies on subjective well-being data, assuming the latter reveals incontrovertible facts about well-being and happiness. We are rather seeking to open up questions about the WBH reality that is being created through such measurement. By emphasising the difficulty about quantifying the ‘unquantifiable’ and measuring ‘relational goods’, which both Thinley and Ramirez highlight, we are neither saying that measurement is an impossible task nor that it is a new phenomenon.

Indeed, as Mary Poovey has shown in her analysis of the epistemological shifts characterising the science of wealth and society in Britain between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it took a long time, and the unfolding of a non-linear series of

---

399 René Ramírez, *La Felicidad como Medida del Buen Vivir en Ecuador: entre la materliadad y la subjectividad*. (Quito: SENPLADES 2010).

400 Indeed he suggests that the most appropriate ‘proxy variable’ for WBH is the time each one of us can devote to these relational goods. René Ramírez, *La Felicidad como Medida del Buen Vivir en Ecuador: entre la materliadad y la subjectividad*. (Quito: SENPLADES 2010) 248.

401 General Assembly of the United Nations (2011) *Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 August 2011, General Assembly, United Nations.

philosophical developments, for measurement to be linked to counting and numerical representation.<sup>402</sup> Before moral philosophy gave the way to political economy, that is at the time when liberal governmentality took the place of absolutism and at stake was knowledge about self-governing subjects rather than coercive rule, counting was still neglected. Ethical and theological consideration were the measure so that 'Insofar as the 'value' of some action could be measured, 'measurement' had less to do with quantification than with determining the 'fit' between the action and God's laws'. And when Adam Smith followed Petty's call for numbers to be taken into account by legislators, he deemed numbers descriptive in a particular way: instead of being accurate as in reflecting the reality they were representing, they were meant to describe the reality that could emerge once his economic theory was applied. McCulloch however was soon to introduce a taxonomy of knowledge which separated 'the collection of data from the production of general, that is theoretical, knowledge' by making a distinction between 'the descriptive and theoretical functions of what Smith... had represented as a single endeavour'.<sup>403</sup>

These different approaches to numerical representation informed the debates about the nascent science of statistics in the 1830s. Thus, the Statistical Society of London, which was established as a section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS), made clear in its statement of purpose that statistics 'does not discuss causes, nor reason upon probable effects; it seeks only to collect, arrange and compare, the class of facts which alone can form the basis of correct conclusion with respect to social and political government'.<sup>404</sup> This position was fiercely attacked in 1838 by Robertson, the sub-editor of the *London and Westminster Review*, who argued that facts could not be distinguished from theories and that anyone who tried to make this distinction deprived statistics of any epistemological power.<sup>405</sup> Eventually, it was the Society's agenda which prevailed as the equation

---

402 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998).

403 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998) 304-6.

404 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998) 311, quoting the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 'Introduction' (1838) 1 *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 1.

405 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998) 316.



translation into the GNH index raises important methodological questions about how WBH and its promise for the inter-connectedness between the productive and re-productive spheres of life can be conceived of through different, even potentially conflicting modes of thinking. If, as Shapin and Shaffer argue,<sup>409</sup> 'questions of epistemology are also questions of social order' then asking what order is being created through WBH and its measurement seems a very important question.

---

409 Steven Shapin & Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985).