Quality of life, well-being and social policies in European countries

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Abstract
The study, assessment and design of social policies related to welfare have always focused on material indicators. However, some recent studies argue for the inclusion of subjective indicators to cater for aspects traditionally relegated to families' private lives, such as care and the perception of happiness. Taking into account this background, this paper deals with the need to go beyond welfare to well-being and aims a critical review of the scientific literature on subjective well-being and quality of life in social policies, and also of the indicators usually managed to its operationalization carried out by cross-national surveys and studies. This article deals with the need to go beyond welfare to well-being. To do this we propose a comparative study of different variables used by the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014 and the OECD family policy database (2013) with a view to analysing i) possible variations in family and social policy in European countries, ii) links between well-being and the other indicator traditionally linked to life satisfaction and subjective perception of life satisfaction, iii) the extent to which traditional indicators can measure the development of well-being and iv) ways in which these indicators could be improved.

As the main result, this research remarks the need to include social policies in analyses of well-being as a key element in people’s satisfaction, recognising the perception of subjective well-being an quality of life as a political and public issue, not just a private matter. Also, as a point of discussion and further research, this paper points to the need of including the territorial factor in further research on well-being and quality of life, as it seems to be necessary for social policies to pay attention to geographic and spatial particularities on which citizens integrate and inhabit.

Keywords Welfare - Well-being - Care - Social Change – Life satisfaction- Social and Family Policy.
Approaches to the study of care, family policies and well-being

There is today considerable discussion in social sciences on the indicators that best measure subjective well-being in relation to the public policies enacted, almost always from the economic point of view (Prescott-Allen 2001; Stiglitz et al., 2009; OECD, 2011b). However these types of studies are somewhat sceptical when it comes to integrating the new indicators into explanations of social and political change, in spite of the significant advances that have been made in a range of disciplines (sociology, geography, anthropology, economics, bioeconomics). For example, some recent studies (Pfau-Effinger and Geissler, 2005; Gauthier, 1996, Held, 2006; Daly and Lewis, 2000) argue for the inclusion of subjective indicators to cater for aspects traditionally relegated to families’ private lives, such a care or the perception of life satisfaction. For the purpose of this article it is particularly useful to include new indicators in the debate on family policy indicators and well-being.

It is interesting to focus the concept of quality of life and well-being in relation to the development of family policies within the framework of social change and family change. Family care policies can therefore be seen as the best exponents of how human beings have developed sophisticated adaptive care tools to guarantee their well-being and reproduction in modern capitalist welfare states. Seen in this light, the public policies implemented in each country play an essential role in the quality of life of its citizens. Although numerous indicators are being tried to measure people's quality of life and well-being (OCDE 2013), they do not include family policies and the need for care (Carrasco-Campos, Martinez and Moreno 2013). Processes like greater life expectancy, lower birth rates, the later emancipation of young people and the incorporation of women in the labour market have placed care at the centre of the debate about public policy and the welfare state (Bettio and Plantenga 2008; Jensen 2008; Kremer 2007; Lewis and Guillari 2005), as a fundamental aspect of social cohesion and well-being.

1 The OECD (2011c; 2012) measures "subjective well-being" as a broad definition restricted to measuring "happiness". In particular, subjective well-being is taken to be: good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences.
One of the aims of this paper is to establish how family policies and, more specifically, the indicators that measure the efficiency of public policies for care and balance between work and family in Europe, in terms of the well-being of individuals, have been formulated unrelated to social change and, in particular, to the development of family policies. In this regard, the interdisciplinary perspective is scientifically relevant as it allows us to incorporate in our analysis elements like geographical space, and the diachronic component, to assess the real impact of public policies on people's quality of life. It also allows us to incorporate concepts from game theory, with a view to explaining the differentiated action of institutions regarding family policy, in terms of the cooperation established by the public in response to a common need (Ostrom 1990; 1992).

A starting point for properly understanding the concept of "need for care" is the evolutionary paradigm developed by Kohlberg (1982), which inspired Gilligan to criticise the biased interpretation this theory makes of the need for care in terms of gender. According to Gilligan (1982) family policies come into existence based on the recognition of a care ethic, which has historically been mainly responsibility of women. The concept of a care ethic based on the responsibility felt by women to meet people's need for care would be based not so much on abstract principles as on the responsibility that stems from their awareness of forming part of a network of interdependent relationships, a key premise in the social change for understanding human progress. This is due to the fact that their identity is strongly relational (Rossing et al. 1999). This perspective is scientifically relevant, as recognition of the need for care in the management of family and gender policies implies not only accepting that the need for care is a form of social capital, but also institutionalising and externalising care as a basic need of people living in modern capitalist economies.

In response to the difficulties arising from the new family lifestyles, local and national governments have developed various measures designed to promote the work/family balance through family policies and social services that help parents meet their childcare needs. In this regard we are going to refer to the way in which "care" has
been organised and managed via public family policies in Europe and how it relates to people's well-being, assessing this by means of indicators designed for this purpose.

Having contextualised public and family policies in social sciences, we are going to define what we understand by family policies and how they are related to quality of life and well-being in different European welfare states. In the last twenty years a considerable body of literature has been published concerning to public policies and care (Pfau-Effinger and Geissler 2005; Gauthier 1996; Held 2006; Daly and Lewis 2000). However, the question of care and family policies was absent from academic debate and the political agenda until the mid-twentieth century, being considered a private family matter, but lower birth rates and population ageing have aroused unprecedented interest in finding ways to externalise care by means of family policies and to enhance people's quality of life.

From the functionalist perspective, human history represents the development of institutions as a linear succession of events linked to economic and technological development as a result of adaptive human cooperation to the environment and to biological factors. Policy management has been geared to responding to this progress and social change in terms of economic production, leaving aside the more private facet of satisfying needs related to care and the individual. Initially family policies 2 were originally defined as measures taken by the State to help meet people's needs and thus influence the future of the family as an institution (Kamerman and Kahn 1978). However, this definition does not explicitly relate family policies with people's quality of life. Zimmerman (2001) goes further, considering that we are dealing with a policy which introduces family well-being as a criterion, i.e. it introduces family considerations and a family perspective in the political arena, in both the setting of political objectives and the measurement of results (Zimmerman 2001:38). Initially these policies were conceived as a mechanism to facilitate access to employment and economic development and not as a quality of life indicator. Nevertheless, these concepts indirectly contribute criteria that can be used to assess the extent to which

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2 Family policies include a wide range of indicators (direct social spending on families, services to attend to dependents, parental leave, childcare, working hours, etc.). For more information: OECD Family Database (2013): http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/oecdfamilydatabase.htm
family policies contribute to individual and family well-being, but how does social science understand this concept?

In principle, we could say that the idea of material welfare has been displaced towards the idea of subjective well-being as a result of social evolution and change (Inglehart 1990). Sociology of family and economic science have attempted to operationalise well-being, based on indicators such as income, employment, health, housing, etc., and only recently has there been interest in indicators like personal satisfaction with one's job, the family, the neighbourhood, the environment, etc. Griffin (1986), defines well-being in terms of basic needs and the degree to which they are met, basic needs referring to that which is essential for survival, health, the avoidance of harm, and proper functioning. Sen (1980; 1985) says the primary feature of well-being can be seen in terms of how a person “functions in the broadest sense” which here extends to families and how families function in the broadest sense. Moreover, Zimmerman (2013: 10) points out that family well-being as an indicator of the quality of life can be conceived in widely varying forms, depending on the country or region being studied.

The contributions of researchers such as Bohnke (2006) and Watson et al. (2009) are also of great interest for our study. They consider that quality of life and progress cannot be measured solely with economically based criteria like GDP (Stiglitz et al. 2009) but that the way in which social policies and institutions contribute to well-being also needs to be analysed. According to this perspective, well-being should be measured by means of subjective quality of life indicators referring to how individuals feel, how they perceive happiness, etc. (Diener and Suh 1997), which implies the inclusion of other dimensions to describe quality of life and social change. Cross-national analyses of the variability of quality of life show that in Europe the impact of economic factors on well-being is influenced by aspects such as social policies, health or confidence (Fahey and Smyth 2004; Bohnke 2006; Watson et al. 2009). The cross-national analysis carried out by Abbot and Wallance (2012), in which they examine an index of social quality for different European countries, shows the direct association that exists between the development of family policies and the well-being of parents with regard to employment and the family, as well as the variations between countries.

**Objectives and research questions**
While there is an emerging literature on the economic appropriation of subjective well-being, its scientific utilization through other disciplines has not yet been analyzed in any greater detail. Although scientific literature about quality of life and well-being does not record specific empirical analyses of the effect of family policies, it does show that this type of policy, and in particular family services to improve the work-family balance, help to reduce the conflict between working and family life and thus increase parents' satisfaction (Abbot and Wallace 2012; Rode et al. 2007; Segado and López, 2013).

Based on the aforementioned earlier research and on the arguments regarding the role of social policy, we will try to give an empirical assessment of the relationship between the state of family policies and people's satisfaction, as an indicator of their quality of life and the development of well-being in the European countries for which data are available. Finally we will go on to evaluate the possible limitations of existing indicators for family policies as a way to measure people's quality of life, with a view to contributing to future improvements. In short, this analysis will attempt to look for answers to the following research questions, which will enable us to identify some trends:

1) Are there substantial variations in family policies in different European countries and to what extent is this related to well-being?
2) Is well-being related to the family and social policies applied in each country and to what extent?
3) Do existing indicators for well-being reflect the meaning of the changes in work and families’s needs brought about by social change in different countries, beyond the materialistic criteria?.
4) How could these indicators be improved introducing subjective criteria on individual well-being and taking into account the territorial diversity?.

Method

Interest in family policies and quality of life has increased in recent decades in Europe, as evidenced by the three European Quality of Life Surveys (2003; 2007; 2012) published by Eurofound and the well-being modules incorporated into the European
Social Survey. The present cross-sectional study includes aggregate indicators relative to family policies, well-being and quality of life drawn from the OECD family policy database (2013) and the well-being module in the 2010 European Social Survey. The indicators selected for this study –for both family policies and well-being– have been validated and applied in a number of previous research projects, and we therefore consider that they respond to the aims of our analysis.

The empirical analysis carried out is based on the presentation of descriptive analyses of the current state of family policies. Bivariate analyses have also been made of correlations to determine whether there is any type of association between the measure of well-being and other indicator traditionally linked to life satisfaction and subjective perception of happiness (included work and family balance). For this purpose, we will take into account the indicators included in the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014. This index incorporates different dimensions of well-being: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health status, work and life, education and skills, social connections/community, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security/safety and, finally, life satisfaction (subjective well-being). It is also important to note that the most significant aspect of this type of quantitative analysis is not so much the identification of pairs of variables with the most significant correlations but that correlations are systematically manifested in pairs of variables in the entire universe of the study, which allows us to identify trends more than causal relationships. Lastly, the analysis also presents a critical review of existing indicators related to well-being and the need to improve them, introducing new variables which correctly measure social and family change and the effect of variables such as location. The countries used for the analysis are those for which comparable national data were available: Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, France, Finland, Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Belgium.

Although the statistical technique applied does not permit direct causality relationships to be established, it does at least allow the identification of descriptive patterns to highlight the possible associations existing between indicators of different dimensions of well-being measured through life satisfaction. This analysis can therefore serve as a reference or inspiration for future works of research on this subject.

The analysis tries to illustrate the correlation between different aspects of well-being in various European countries. The indicators used to measure well-being come
from the indicators included in the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014. This index incorporates different dimensions of well being: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health status, work and life, education and skills, social connections/community, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security/safety and, finally, life satisfaction (subjective well-being). Based on this classification a global index was calculated, using a weighted average.

The correlation between pairs of variables in the two groups was calculated and those in which the correlation was more statistically significant were selected. It should be pointed out that statistical significance depends partly on the number of observations (countries in our case) and the number of countries for which there are data is very variable. Nevertheless, a certain uniformly consistent correlation with the degree of well-being reported by respondents can be appreciated. It should be emphasised that the most important feature of this type of quantitative analysis is not so much the identification of pairs of variables that are more significantly correlated, as the fact that this correlation is systematically present in the whole universe of pairs of variables. The variables used were as follows:

1. In the case of family policies, from a wide range of indicators available, we selected those that had some kind of relationship with well-being, after carrying out the corresponding bivariate analysis. The following were selected:

   - Public spending on family benefits in cash, services and tax measures, (per cent of GDP), 2009.
   - Expenditure on childcare and pre-primary, 2009.
   - Enrolment rates of children under age 3 in formal care or early education services, 2009.
   - Spending on maternity and parental leave payments per child born, 2009, (Spending per birth as a % of GDP per capita).

2. To refer to quality of life and well-being we selected the following indicators for the indicators included in the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014

   - Income and Wealth
     Household net adjusted disposable income
• Household net financial wealth

• Jobs and Earnings
  Employment rate
  Long term unemployment rate
  Average gross annual earnings of full-time employees/ Personal earnings
  Job/Employment insecurity

• Housing
  Number of rooms per person/ Rooms per person
  Dwellings without basic facilities
  Housing expenditure

• Health Status
  Life expectancy at birth
  Self-reported health status

• Work and Family Life Balance
  Employees working very long hours
  Time devoted to leisure and personal care

• Education and Skills
  Educational attainment
  Students’ cognitive skills
  Expected years in education

• Social Connections
  Social network support

• Civic Engagement and Governance
  Consultation on rule-making
  Voter turnout

• Environmental Quality
  Air pollution
  Satisfaction with water quality

• Personal Security/Safety
  Homicides rates
  Self-reported victimisation / Assault rate

• Life Satisfaction
  Subjective well-being

These indicators are intended to measure life satisfaction regarding several aspects of well-being. As mentioned previously the sources used are the OECD Family Database (OECD Social Expenditure Database SOCX). This data set provides a unique tool for monitoring trends in aggregate social expenditure and analysing changes in its composition. It covers 34 OECD countries for the period 1980-2009 and estimates for 2010-2012. The main social policy areas are as follows: Old age, Survivors, Incapacity-related benefits, Health, Family, Active labour market programmes, Unemployment, Housing, and Other social policy areas.
The other source is the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014. The OECD Better Life Initiative, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter to people and that shape their quality of life. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an analysis, published in the How’s Life? Report as well as an interactive web application, the Better Life Index. It also includes a number of methodological and research projects to improve the information base towards a better understanding of well-being trends and their drivers.

**Analysis of results**

Numerous reports have highlighted the fact that the current economic recession has accentuated inequality in Europe. This is due, among other reasons, to the effects of cutbacks in public social policies and the effects of unemployment (OECD 2011b; OECD 2012; EUROSTAT 2012). However, we do not have studies that analyse the effects changes in public policy social spending have had on people's subjective well-being. In this connection we can say that the global economic crisis has had a major impact on the share of economic resources absorbed by the welfare state. According to the OECD (2012), there have been wide differences between countries, with some much more affected by the crisis than others. For example, between 2007/08 and 2011/12, the decline in real social spending (and real GDP) was largest in Greece, Portugal and Spain, while real social spending in the Netherlands increased by about 10% (see graphic 1).

We should point out that social spending on the family as an indicator has only been taken into account in the last fifty years as a decisive factor in people's lives (OECD 2011a; International Federation for Family development 2012), its weight varying from one European country to another. In countries where family support is largely income-tested, public spending on family benefits is also increased. For example in 2009, public spending on such benefits as a percentage of GDP was highest in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the UK, the rise in the number of low-income families increased both the take up of benefits (both child tax credit and working tax credit) and the number of claimants with maximum payments. Another explanation for the rapid rise in family spending trends in Ireland and the United Kingdom is that it has become harder for single parents to find a job in recent years, while in other countries the
increase has been less noticeable since the impoverishment of families has been less pronounced, except in southern European countries, where the reports published confirm that family poverty and social inequality have grown (Eurostat 2012; OECD 2011b; OECD 2012; Consejo Económico y Social de España 2013), while help for these families has not increased. In the following chart it can also be seen that in southern European countries (Spain, Italy and Greece) social spending on family is lower than in countries such as Denmark or Sweden, where it is in excess of 3% of GDP during the period 1980-2010, reflecting the fact that the importance given to family policies varies from country to country according to the development of the welfare state, family culture and the externalisation of family services in each country (Moreno Minguez 2013; Uhlendorff 2011; Kuronen 2011).

**Graphic 1. Social spending on the family 1980-2010**

![Social spending on the family 1980-2010](source)

Another element to take into account when studying the real situation of family policies in each country is social spending on childcare, parental leave and cash benefits. As we can see in the chart 1, there is great variation between countries. Once again Denmark (1.63% of GDP) and Sweden (1.58%) are those devoting most public resources to childcare, while considerably less is allocated by Spain, Ireland and Greece. Countries such as Finland (66.6%), Denmark (53.4%) and Sweden (62.9%) also devote more resources to spending on maternity and parental leave payments by child
born than countries like Greece (10.8%) and Ireland (12.4%). There are also great variations in the percentage of children aged less than two years in public children's care centres, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands having the greatest number, while the lowest figures are for Germany and Greece. These comparative data give an approximate picture of the importance different governments give to family policies. In short, countries with a well-established welfare state and a long tradition of public policies are those which have invested most in family policies for improving the work-family balance, compared to others where family policies have been residual and where the family has been the main agent for providing inter-generational care, as is the case in southern European countries. (Moreno Minguez 2007; Gauthier 2006; Erjnes and Boje 2005; Saraceno and Keck, 2010).

**Chart 1. Summary of indicators: Family policies, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childcare spending as a % of GDP</th>
<th>Maternity and parental leave spending per child born</th>
<th>Enrolment rates of children under age 3</th>
<th>Public spending on family benefits in cash as a % GDP</th>
<th>Public spending on family benefits in services as a % GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0.00048</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>10.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from OECD Family Database, 2013

Going further than the different historical ways that have followed the different welfare states in Europe, in general terms, the comparative social theory has not been able to offer a holistic explanation about the diversity observed in the family policies among countries. The application of interdisciplinary perspective can help us to understand how social groups have collaborated, interacting with their natural, social and cultural environment, to achieve greater or lesser confidence in public sphere. This interaction would have favoured governments to promote different models of social policies and well-being (López and Segado, 2013).
In order to examine which variables are more connected to the OECD’s measure of subjective well-being, we will first analyse the correlations between the life satisfaction score and the other indicators. For this purpose, we will take into account the variables included in the OECD Better Life Index (BLI) for 2014. This index incorporates different dimensions of well-being: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health status, work and life, education and skills, social connections/community, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security/safety and, finally, life satisfaction (subjective well-being). From the variables included in the model, we have selected those that showed a significant correlation with each other.

Firstly, if we pay some attention to the complete list of dimensions of well-being and indicators that includes the OECD Better Life Index (2014) (see table 1), it is remarkable the lack of variables measuring public policies support to citizens (by means of social policies, public services, family policies, etc.). It is also important to remark the minority presence of indicators linked to family and social network supports (only one variable refers to this) and to care (care policies are not included in the list, and personal care is only present in the work and life balance dimension of well-being).

In addition, if we see chart 2 it is noticeable that most of the more significant correlations refers to indicators that are included in dimensions of well-being linked to material conditions of life. This is the case of jobs and earnings, and income and wealth dimensions of well-being, where we can find variables with significant correlations with life satisfaction such as personal earnings ($R=0.82119741$), long term unemployment rate ($R=-0.813668032$), employment rate ($R=0.785112796$) or household net adjusted disposable income ($R=0.787300177$). We will focus on the analysis of these indicators, and also in social network support ($R=0.789315912$) because these are the top five variables with more significant correlations with life satisfaction (subjective well-being) scores.
### Chart 2. Measures of Pearson correlation test (R) and of determination test (R²). OECD Better Life Index (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE 1</th>
<th>VARIABLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Subjective well-being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCOME AND WEALTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household net adjusted disposable income</td>
<td>0.787300177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household net financial wealth</td>
<td>0.589238693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOBS AND EARNINGS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>0.785112796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term unemployment rate</td>
<td>-0.813668032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average gross annual earnings of full-time employees/ Personal earnings</td>
<td>0.82119741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job/Employment insecurity</td>
<td>-0.568572666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOUSING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms per person/ Rooms per person</td>
<td>0.742187265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings without basic facilities</td>
<td>-0.069756495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing expenditure</td>
<td>-0.09331557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH STATUS</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth</td>
<td>-0.00977963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported health status</td>
<td>0.391876888</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WORK AND LIFE BALANCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employees working very long hours</td>
<td>-0.468903475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time devoted to leisure and personal care</td>
<td>0.368489332</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION AND SKILLS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td>0.615230547</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ cognitive skills</td>
<td>0.667809325</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expected years in education</td>
<td>0.266057546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL CONNECTIONS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social network support</td>
<td>0.788384978</td>
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<td><strong>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation on rule-making</td>
<td>0.08489741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout</td>
<td>0.724350929</td>
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<td><strong>ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Air pollution</td>
<td>-0.421264448</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with water quality</td>
<td>0.757415786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL SECURITY/SAFETY</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicides rates</td>
<td>-0.01851255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported victimisation / Assault rate</td>
<td>-0.093732063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration from OECD Better Life Index (2014)

The combined analysis of personal earnings and subjective well-being (see graphic 2) evidences that life satisfaction score is higher in countries with high personal earnings. The cases of Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) and the Netherlands are especially notable, with life satisfaction scores higher than the expected according to the trend line. The same analysis can be applied to household net adjusted disposable income (see graphic 3), indicator that also gives higher results for life satisfaction than the expected. Again with personal earnings, Ireland would be a relative exception, with the higher level of personal earnings but with life satisfaction score lower than the expected trend. We can find a possible explanation of this attending to the other indicators of the job and earnings dimension of well-being: employment and unemployment rates are worse for Ireland than for other countries with high personal earnings, and this can be analyse as an unequal distribution of wealth, that may be linked to a lack of the strong social policies and welfare state that we can fin in Scandinavian countries. Thereby, these data shows that personal earnings are clearly taken into account in the OECD's measures of subjective well-being, but also remarks
that other social elements, such as public policies, should have a heavier presence in order to correct cases of unequal distribution of wealth.

**Graphic 2.** Life satisfaction (subjective well-being) score and personal earnings (USD per year).

![Graphic 2](image)

Source: own elaboration from OECD Better Life Index (2014).

**Graphic 3.** Life satisfaction (subjective well-being) score and household disposable income (USD at current PPPs per capita)
Employment (see graphic 4) and long term unemployment (see graphic 5) are other material indicators that have a very important weight in the measures of subjective well-being. So, again countries with high scores for life satisfaction are also countries with favourable employment and long term unemployment rates. Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands are afresh countries with higher scores for live satisfactions than the expected according to the respective trend lines. On the other hand, Greece and Portugal are the countries with lower life satisfaction scores, have unfavourable rates for employment and long term unemployment, and also are under the respective expected trend line. Ireland and Spain are the exception cases, as they have better scores for subjective well-being than the expected for their employment and long term unemployment rates, but this could be explained because other factors, such as social and familiar network support (as we analyse below).

**Graphic 4.** Life satisfaction (subjective well-being) score and employment rate (%)
Social network support (see graphic 6) shows also significative correlation with subjective well-being, but on this case it cannot be considered as a neat material indicator. In relation to the Scandinavian countries, they present again for this variable life satisfaction scores over the expected trend, just in the same way that countries such as Greece and Portugal have low rates and scores. As we said before, it is remarkable the cases of Ireland and Spain, with relative mid-high rates for social network support.
(similar, or even higher in the case of Ireland, Finland, to Sweden, and the Netherlands scores) that does not correspond with the expected life satisfaction rates, but that allows us to state this social indicator as a factor that probably would correct the previously mentioned mismatch between subjective well-being and general employment rates.

**Graphic 6.** Life satisfaction (subjective well-being) score and social network support rate (%)

![Graphic 6](image)

Source: own elaboration from OECD Better Life Index (2014)

Social network support would be, so, the only social and non-material indicator with significant correlations when measuring subjective well-being. On the contrary, we should remark a lack of significant correlation between subjective well-being and the only OECD BLI variable that includes care components: time devoted to leisure and personal care (see graphic 7). This data reveals a possible secondary relevance of care attitudes and policies when measuring life satisfaction; especially in extreme examples such as Spain, a country that even though having the higher data (together with Denmark) presents, on the other hand, a relative low score on subjective well-being, or on the contrary, Finland and the United Kingdom, with two of the lower scores on time devoted to leisure time and care, but with a life satisfaction punctuation higher than the statistically expected. A possible explanation for the absence of such a correlation may be found considering that care and social policies still belong to private and family
spheres, so they do not become visible as a factor of well-being despite its great importance to personal subjective well-being. So, northern European countries, historically with stronger welfare state policies, present higher correlation index than southern and Mediterranean countries, such as Spain, Greece and Portugal, where these public services have been defamiliarized long ago.

**Graphic 7.** Life satisfaction (subjective well-being) score and time devoted to leisure and personal care (hours per day).

![Graphic 7](image)

Source: own elaboration from OECD Better Life Index (2014)

The results lead us to support that studies and surveys on well-being should take into account indicators not only related to economic situation but also personal satisfaction with family life and the public policies developed. In order to improve the comprehension of quality of life, and also to mobilize public resources and public action in favour of greater individual and familiar well-being, it would be useful to introduce indicators able to measure the development of social services and social and family policies.

**Discussion of results and future research**
Following our analysis of the results, our proposals for future research of well-being would point in two directions: the operationalisation of social policies (for example the care) and the incorporation of variables that include a regional component.

Firstly, we detect a need to go more deeply into the operationalisation of care, as a more subtle and exact form of well-being in terms of welfare. In this way, in view of social changes moving towards more subtle and complex forms of modernity, even in terms of liquid modernity (Bauman 2000) or Network Society (van Dijk 1991; Castells 1996; 1997; 1998), the idea of social progress seems to call for new forms of operationalisation which go beyond traditional socio-economic variables in terms of objectivity (material and monetary well-being, as described above), to include indicators which value people's welfare, taking their perception of welfare into account as well as their own perception of happiness and well-being (and not only the material conditions for such well-being to occur). In this respect, we must also insist, in the light of the results presented, on the relevance of carrying out a more detailed observation of the relationship between life satisfaction geared to services and individual well-being, in order to determine, by using empirical data, whether states which promote service-oriented public spending achieve greater levels of individual well-being. If public policies are result from social change of welfare policies, future research should clear which kind of policies contributes better to future needs of well-being, taking into account social change.

A methodological alternative would be to use triangulation to combine the results obtained by regular macro-surveys with more comprehensive studies, from a qualitative viewpoint (Ryff 1989; Heintzman 1999; Scheiber, Carver and Bridges 2001). The proposal would be to incorporate information coming from research techniques such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, which would lead to a better understanding of the reasons for subjective well-being, with a view to the possible inclusion of new variables in future surveys. However, without going outside the study's scope and descriptive purpose, the alternative would combine efforts to operationalise care, in terms of the personal satisfaction of respondents regarding the possibility of covering family needs via public service-oriented policies, as a way of materialising it politically and increasing people's subjective sensation of well-being and happiness, in line with the data provided previously.

Secondly, as part of our interest in completing the integrated assessment of measurements of well-being in relation to social policies and care, we would also argue
in favour of the value of including a spatial perspective, which has traditionally been neglected in sociological research into social progress. Quality of life and territory are concepts which are increasingly seen to be interwoven when non-material indicators of social welfare are the focus of attention (Gómez et al. 2001; Prescott-Allen 2001; Lucero et al. 2007); this can be deduced from the study of levels of happiness in different countries throughout the world in a recent report sponsored by the United Nations (Helliwell et al. 2013). The European Commission itself argues for the inclusion of the social approach to welfare when the Community's territorial strategies are being designed (European Commission 1999; European Commission 2011).

Europe is a diverse, changing territory on many geographical levels. Without going into greater detail, we can see that the variety of physical environments in which social development can be compared is worthy of consideration (Demangeot 1992; Bailey 1995). A prior analysis to identify the different units defined by climate, morphostructural relief groupings and plant coverage as the ultimate expression of the environmental puzzle is needed to establish possible indicators for well-being associated with nature and the environment. Atmospheric conditions, relief, vegetation and the effects of human intervention on the environment are thus among the components of the geographical environment that can influence climate comfort, pollution, biodiversity, natural hazards and have a varying impact on the region. The European Environment Agency (EEA³) provides an extensive documentary basis for the establishment of mechanisms to measure a series of markers which link the quality of life to the characteristics of society’s physical environment (European Environment Agency 2009) (see Chart 3). In this respect other studies have paid special attention to linking well-being to ecosystems, although they restrict their examination of natural systems to a strictly bio-geographical order (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2003; Martín-López et al. 2007; Montes et al. 2007; Ash et al., 2010).

**Chart 3.** Indicators in nature and the physical environment associated with well-being. Initial proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural system</th>
<th>Element/factor</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Climate comfort</td>
<td>Number of hours of sun per year/number of rainy days/number of foggy days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average annual temperature/average in coldest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³http://www.eea.europa.eu/
The method for measuring several of these indicators involves processing the data from a variety of commonly available statistical sources, most of which are satisfactorily collected by the EEA. For example, climate comfort could be instrumentalised and weighted based on normalised climate variables such as hours of sunshine, days of rain, and days of fog per year, to which could be added variables referring to the heat component: annual average, average of the coldest month and average of the warmest month. In the case of air pollution, aspects to consider include greenhouse gas emissions per person, and emission of CFC compounds per person. The diversity and protection of the “environment” can be easily classified based on measuring criteria such as percentage of land use out of the total area in question, percentage of protected area out of the total space considered, and variety of plant species and formations present in a particular territory (all aspects that can be mapped with a powerful Geographic Information System such as Corine Land Cover). Finally, environmental issues for the detection of natural and technological hazards or impact on ecosystems are included through statistics on the number of natural/technological disasters a year and their causes, cost in human lives and economic losses and, in the case of “sustainability”, through a standardised indicator such as environmental footprint per person in global hectares or energy consumed per person and hectare.

From a functional viewpoint, regional and local territorial structures are also complex. There is no doubt about the wide range of types of geographical region that exist in Europe⁴. From metropolitan areas (namely big cities in a casuistic of varied

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⁴ Not wishing to include too extensive a list, we recommend taking as a complete taxonomy the territorial synthesis commonly used by the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPRON - [http://www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)). It includes several criteria, such as population density (urban/rural regions), territorial hierarchy (metropolis/medium-size cities/small towns/service centres,
dynamics and specialisations) continuing through the ample corollary of situations defining cities of an intermediate and smaller size, to the “deeply rural”, the European population inhabits and is distributed according to an uneven population model which dilates over time and determines human cooperation in a complex context of social relations.

Each of the territories defined is the scenario and in turn the product of the social relationships of those who inhabit it. It can be stated that the greater the quality of life in an area, the greater its inhabitants' well-being (Committee of the Regions 1999; Pacione 2003; Leva 2005). The most recent approaches, based on "smart city" methodology, list a series of indicators for the quality achieved in a territory (European Smart Cities 2007; Tranos et al. 2012; Chourabi et al. 2012). Accordingly, the more "intelligent" a place is regarding the variables of government, mobility, environment, social policies and way of life, the greater the well-being of the resident population will be. Chart 4 shows a series of integrated indicators that should be borne in mind to optimise the measurement of well-being, taking the social and functional evolution of cities into account.

**Chart 4.** Indicators of territorial quality associated with well-being. Proposal based on smart city methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territorial quality factor</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smart governance</strong> (Participation)</td>
<td>Participation in decision-making</td>
<td>City representatives per resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political activity of inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of politics for inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share of female city representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public and social services</strong></td>
<td>Expenditure of the municipality per resident on PSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share of children in day care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparent governance</strong></td>
<td>Satisfaction with quality of schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction with transparency of bureaucracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction with fight against corruption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local accessibility</strong></td>
<td>Public transport network per inhabitant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interational accessibility)</td>
<td>Satisfaction with access to public transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction with quality of public transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability of ICT-infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>International accessibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computers in households</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadband internet access in households</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainable, innovative and safe transport systems</strong></td>
<td>Green mobility share (non-motorized individual traffic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of economical cars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smart environment</strong> (Natural resources)</td>
<td>Attractiveness of natural conditions</td>
<td>Sunshine hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green space share</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pollution</strong></td>
<td>Summer smog (Ozone)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Particulate matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatal chronic lower respiratory diseases per inhabitant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

rural towns) and large functional standars (form global centres to depopulation in abandoned agricultural areas). For further information, see ESPON Typologies at: [http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_ToolsandMaps/ESPONTypologies/](http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_ToolsandMaps/ESPONTypologies/).
In short, the results exposed on this paper points to an opportunity to explain the relationship between life satisfaction and well-being in different European countries. In application to our analysis, we can state that the observed differences on the comparative map of family policies in Europe could be explained according to the significant role played by the diffusion and the social learning of public issues in every cultural and territorial context. This would have helped the regulatory change in some countries regarding to the development of family public policies, in benefit of the entire community by means of a greater long-term welfare of citizens.

We have not attempted to cover all aspects of well-being perspective in this paper, but have instead chosen to highlight some of the recent work in the field that addresses the relationship between the family and social policies and well-being. The theoretical and methodological limitations of this analysis are obvious, since well-being theory has had little development and applicability in social and political studies. However the contributions presented on this paper can be an opportunity to move forward in the uses of well-being perspective on social and political studies. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of the life satisfaction of the communities and how elements of our natural and social environment has changed, will help us the effectiveness of our approaches. The strength of the social approach trough well-being perspective can help us to understand how social policies (develop of family policies and care services) will vary in different ecological or social contexts.
Conclusions

The theoretical and empirical analysis presented in this article shows the need to extend the analytical concept of well-being in social studies and life satisfaction. In particular the study has emphasised the opportunity to include family policies on care in analyses of well-being, as a key element in people's satisfaction and social evolution in terms of progress and social well-being. The study highlights trends that indicate a clear association between material conditions of life in Europe, specifically in northern European countries, and the degree of life satisfaction reported by their inhabitants. The results suggest a possible association between the development of public care policies and citizens' satisfaction, because in these countries there is a great development of social and family policies. This could be interpreted as the development of social policies in these countries in response to the need for care generated by the new family lifestyles in the North of Europe. The new theoretical insight could be interpreted in part as an indication that the advances made in citizens' quality of life and well-being in modern welfare states are the result of development of social policies in a range of territorial and ecological environments, exemplified in family policies as a means of optimising the management and political organisation of welfare.

In a time of recession this shows the need to insist on a service-based model for the welfare state as a guarantee of social progress. If we go beyond the concept of a welfare state and pass from material to subjective concerns, the possibility arises of institutionalising and operationalising care via specific public service oriented policies, as a way of recognising the perception of subjective well-being as a political issue and not just a private matter, and as an indicator of progress. Thus, the life satisfaction and well-being discourse can be used as an argument for the expansion of the welfare state to also include more qualitative social services and family policies with more ambitious aims in terms of happiness and well-being.

In short, from the data and information provided and analysed before we can state that the OECD measures for well-being clearly privilege material conditions of life, traditionally linked to welfare, rather than subjective conditions for happiness, life satisfaction and subjective well being. Also, neither public services nor political support
by means of social or family policies) are very considered for the evaluation of life satisfaction. This clearly indicates that well-being operationalization barely takes into account political support and subjective conditions. In order to test this affirmation, future research should include the analysis of correlations between OECD subjective well-being and data for indicators measuring the influence of public policies and services on inhabitants’ quality of life.

We have also pointed out the scientific value of including contributions from disciplines such as geography, so as to examine the operationalisation of care in greater depth, recognising the explanatory potential of the territorial factor. Even from a purely methodological point of view, it also seems relevant to consider these proposals for the operationalisation of care from a qualitative perspective, in order to add more comprehensive elements to traditional statistical explanations.

The progress of societies and civilisations calls for an assessment based not only on economic variables, but also on care dimensions and even on territorial considerations. In this way we recognise that when we evaluate social progress we should not only consider it from a purely objective point of view, based on the traditional indicators of public spending as a way to facilitate the material conditions for well-being, but also take into account the operationalisation of variables, and even methodologies, which are able to deal with subjective aspects directly linked to the idea of progress, subjective well-being and life satisfaction.
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