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ABSTRACT

Happiness and Public Policy: A Procedural Perspective*

This article comments on the role of empirical subjective well-being research in public policy within a constitutional, procedural perspective of government and state. It rejects the idea that, based on the promises of the measurement, we should adopt a new policy perspective that is oriented towards a decision rule maximizing some aggregate measure of subjective well-being. This social engineering perspective, implicit in much reasoning about well-being policy, neglects i) important motivation problems on the part of government actors, such as incentives to manipulate indicators, but also on the part of citizens to truthfully report their well-being, and ii) procedural utility as a source of well-being. Instead, well-being research should be oriented towards gaining insights that improve the diagnoses of societal problems and help to evaluate alternative institutional arrangements to address them, both as inputs into the democratic process.

JEL Classification: D60, D70, H11, I31

Keywords: happiness, life satisfaction, political economy, public policy, social welfare, subjective well-being

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1 Introduction

Democratic policymaking is fundamentally about searching for a consensus about basic rules that allow people to best pursue their ideas of the good life, both individually and collectively. People delegated to serve in state and public authorities are thereby selected and motivated to support this pursuit with their work, their selection and motivation being shaped by state institutions.[1]

It is within the foregoing procedural perspective of government and state that this short article comments on the role of empirical subjective well-being research in public policy.[2] In essence, evidence from this new and intriguing development in the social sciences is here seen to serve as informational input into the political process at all levels and for all actors involved, citizens being central. This is indeed most valuable, as it provides a steadily increasing basis of insights that are promising.[3] However, this perspective also rejects the idea that, based on the promises of the approach, we should adopt a new policy perspective that is oriented towards a decision rule maximizing well-being in terms of some aggregate measure of subjective well-being. This social engineering perspective, implicit in much reasoning about well-being policy, proposing a technocratic decision-rule at the core of political decision-making is not only not necessary to make productive use of the new insights but risks i) disregarding some motivation

[1] The constitutional political economy approach to public policy rests on a contractarian perspective that has evolved in political philosophy since Thomas Hobbes (1651) famous work entitled "Leviathan" and is at the core of John Rawls' "A Theory of Justice" (1971). In economics, it was championed by Buchanan and Tullock (1962) and further developed by Brennan and Buchanan (1986).

[2] The article builds and further develops arguments that have been presented in earlier work (see, e.g., Frey and Stutzer 2012, 2019, Odermatt and Stutzer 2018).

[3] There is an enormous body of literature that is concerned with understanding subjective well-being. In economics, there are a series of monographs including, e.g., Frey and Stutzer (2002a), Layard (2005), Frey (2008), and Graham (2017), as well as review articles including, e.g., Frey and Stutzer (2002b), Stutzer and Frey (2010) and Clark (2018). For contributions from a psychological perspective, see, e.g., the collections in David et al. (2013), Sheldon and Lucas (2014) or the handbook by Diener et al. (2018). Good overviews of cross-country comparisons of well-being are provided in the seven World Happiness Reports published so far (Helliwell et al., 2019).

problems, and ii) neglecting some basic aspects of the role of institutions in subjective well-being as well as procedural utility as a source of subjective well-being.

In the following, I first briefly highlight some advantages of evidence from research on subjective well-being and its value for public policy. It echoes the proposal on how to make use of proxy measures of individual welfare based on individual self-reports in public policy by Frijters et al. (2019). As practical instruments to support decision-making, the life satisfaction approach and the well-being cost-effectiveness analysis offer practical extensions of the toolbox. Second, I argue that public policy in general should, however, not be equated with the solving of technical valuation problems. Public policy is primarily about understanding and addressing societal problems in a discursive democratic process. In fact, there are various challenges for well-being evidence-based public policy even when not part of a well-being maximization approach. I briefly mention some of the obstacles. Third, a series of motivational issues are raised, challenging the implicit view of a benevolent social engineer, and an unbiased representation of people's well-being. Fourth, I take up procedural utility as a key source of individual well-being that is neglected when people merely report mental states. Overall, I argue that well-being research should be oriented towards gaining insights that improve the diagnosis of societal problems and help to evaluate alternative institutional arrangements to address them, as inputs into the democratic process.

2 The subjective well-being lens: valuable complementary perspective on individual welfare

Traditional public policy in many areas is challenged by evidence that links possible policy outcomes directly to individual welfare consequences in terms of reported subjective well-being. This is a most welcome development, as it invites reflection and reconsideration of beliefs about the costs and benefits of various policies. Complementary attempts to assess policy consequences in terms of some direct proxy measure for individual welfare naturally focus on ends rather than means to an end, such as individual or aggregate income. The orientation is towards the subjective well-being of current and future generations rather than towards their material well-being.[4]

[4] The inspirations and lessons of empirical well-being research for public policy are discussed in many recent publications, including, for example, Diener et al., (2009), Bok (2010), Hämäläinen and

2.1 Proxy for individual welfare

Based on the accumulated evidence, it is fair to say that the evaluation metrics applied in empirical well-being research fit people's appraisals of their lives better than the alternative metrics constructed around income, and are thus comparatively good proxies for individual welfare (see, e.g., Clark 2016).[5] At the very least, we can learn from people's reported judgments in addition to what they choose. We get ex post evaluations of individuals' experiences.

These qualities render measures of subjective well-being an attractive tool for evaluating policies and institutions. In particular, measures of subjective well-being allow moving towards analysis of the net effects of policy interventions (including spillovers between individuals) and the experiences of particular circumstances (see Odermatt and Stutzer 2018 for many examples and references). This includes the study of covariates of subjective well-being, which helps us to understand the critical determinants of individual welfare, involving both tangible and intangible (psychological) aspects. And it facilitates identifying institutions that enable individuals to better meet their preferences. In sum, based on measures of subjective well-being, it is possible to uncover welfare consequences that are partly unobservable when traditional measures of economic and social progress such as national income are used.

2.2 Learning about individual weaknesses reducing individual well-being

This is particularly relevant for policy evaluations in areas that might involve suboptimal behavior and where, for example, consumption vices turn into diseases.[6] The well-being

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Michaelson (2014), and the reports of the Legatum Institute (O'Donnell et al., 2014) and the Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing (Sachs et al. 2019).

[5] The specific standards might, however, differ quite substantially across people: Some individuals might favor a reasoned ex ante evaluation, while others might wish to adopt a distant perspective, reflecting on one's life ex post facto. Still others might emphasize the affective experiences of life as it is lived. Finally, there are individuals who prefer a cognitive appraisal of the overall quality of life as captured in evaluative measures such as satisfaction with life.

[6] A case in point are the effects of tobacco control policies on people's subjective well-being. In an early contribution, Gruber and Mullainathan (2005) find a positive effect of higher cigarette taxes on the reported happiness of likely smokers for the United States. Based on a similar approach in a study

perspective is thus compatible with the notion in behavioral economics that people do not always behave in their own best interests (weakening the assumption of consumer sovereignty in rational choice analyses and the strong (or exclusive) reliance on observed behavior as a welfare criterion). It provides a tool for policy evaluation in areas where decision utility (as reflected in behavior) systematically diverges from experienced utility (contributing to the approaches in behavioral welfare economics extensively discussed in Bernheim and Taubinsky, 2018).[7] If some behavioral choices are suboptimal from an individual's perspective, research can then seek to identify the conditions under which such choices are less likely or at least less harmful to the individual. Research on subjective well-being can thus provide a valuable input for the discourse on people's limitations in pursuing their ideas of the good life.[8]

2.3 Valuing non-tangible and public goods

The valuation of non-tangible and public goods like environmental quality or the fear of certain risks happening in terms of subjective well-being have direct utility in some practical policy work in which, formally or informally, the costs and benefits of a given project are analyzed. Otherwise, the benefits from public goods are difficult to measure, as the marginal utility to consumers is not reflected in market exchanges. Given that an appropriate empirical design is found, the marginal utility of public goods (or the disutility of public bads) is captured

for member countries of the European Union, Odermatt and Stutzer (2015) observe the contrary, i.e. a reduction in reported satisfaction with life upon an increase in cigarette taxes. Moreover, they find that smokers who would like to quit smoking report higher life satisfaction if there is a comprehensive smoking ban in place. Overall, the evidence for Europe is consistent with a model of cue-triggered decision-making that prevents "wannabe quitters" from pursuing their long-term plans if people in their environment smoke and thus create external stimuli leading to a craving.

[7] The inconsistency between different conceptualizations of utility discussed in Kahneman et al. (1997) has been one of the starting points of subjective well-being research in economics and inspired theoretical as well as empirical research on the misprediction of future well-being (see, e.g., Loewenstein et al., 2003, Kahneman and Thaler, 2006, Frey and Stutzer, 2014, Odermatt and Stutzer, 2019).

[8] Similar arguments in favor of indicators of experienced well-being can be formulated for policy contexts in which people lack information (Sunstein, 2019).

by calculating the partial correlation between the amount of public goods (or public bads) and individuals' reported subjective well-being, controlling for many other determinants. Given this information, two kinds of applied welfare analysis are possible. First, by comparing the marginal utilities of public goods to the marginal utility of income, the trade-off between income and public goods can be calculated. This is the idea behind the *Life Satisfaction Approach* (Frey et al., 2010, Welsch and Kühling, 2009) as an additional evaluation method complementing the stated preference and revealed preference approaches.[9] Second, rather than transforming the benefits back into monetary terms to include them in the same units as costs in a cost benefit analysis, information on benefits can be kept in well-being terms and directly related to costs. This well-being cost effectiveness analysis (WCEA) proposed in Dolan and Fujiwara (2016) and Frijters et al. (2019) has the advantage that it is not affected by any biases in the calculation of the marginal utility of income (an issue that has turned out to be most challenging). However, with WCEA, only projects can be compared that express at least some of the benefits in terms of subjective well-being (applying the same metric, for example, an eleven-point life satisfaction scale). WCEA thus becomes more interesting and informative, the more projects have been analyzed for their well-being benefits per Euro or Pound.

2.4 So should we then maximize individual welfare based on reported subjective well-being?

Given the promises of the new well-being measures, to what extent should we rethink public policy? For Frijters et al. (2019), the advanced possibilities for valuing projects lend themselves to a new perspective in formulating public policy. The perspective reads as follows: "If we envisage a self-financing tax change, we simply evaluate how this alters the happiness of each member of the population and aggregate these changes" (p. 19). Or "if we are considering a new regulation, we simply add up its effects on happiness across all members of the population" (p. 19). In the following, I will argue against this position for a new public policy paradigm. In particular, public policy in general should not be equated with the solving of technical valuation problems. Public policy is primarily about understanding and addressing

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[9] The Life Satisfaction Approach has, among other applications, been used to value airport noise nuisance (van Praag and Baarsma, 2005), air pollution (Welsch, 2006; Luechinger, 2009; Levinson, 2012), crime (Manning et al., 2016), flood hazards (Luechinger and Raschky, 2009), terrorism (Frey et al., 2009), and wind turbines (Krekel and Zerrahn, 2017).

societal problems in a discursive democratic process and contributions from well-being research should be oriented towards this process.

3 Technical and conceptual challenges for policy analyses based on well-being research

Independently of how one evaluates the effectiveness (as well as the desirability) of the movement calling for more evidence-based public policy, the production of high-quality evidence is demanding and costly. This might hold specifically for the causal effects of some circumstances or some policy (intervention) on people’s subjective well-being. I briefly present four challenges. In my view, they are important to keep in mind when addressing technical valuation problems in the cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analyses mentioned above (and suggest that we are still at the beginning with these applications). More generally, the technical challenges also indicate “security gaps” of a maximization approach regarding the risks of mistakes as well as of manipulation. A procedural perspective is likely less prone to these kinds of risks, as the corresponding evidence is less directly linked to policy decisions and has first to survive the political discussion process.

3.1 Causal effects

To get an idea of the never-observed counterfactual well-being of a person if she or he were not to be treated with some life circumstances or some policy is very difficult. Most of the evidence in empirical research on subjective well-being is correlational. Unobserved and thus often omitted third factors driving both life circumstances and well-being outcomes often offer plausible alternative explanations for observed statistical relationships. Moreover, more and more evidence emphasizes how the motivational force of being in a happy state of mind affects people’s behavior (see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005 for a review). For both mechanisms that hamper the causal interpretations of statistical relationships, a case in point is the correlation between individuals’ income and their subjective well-being.

In response, the search is for evidence from research adopting some experimental or quasi-experimental design. For future policy-relevant research, this is probably one way to go, but so far, the evidence base that lives up to this standard is rather limited.

3.2 Effect heterogeneity, extrapolation and scaling

Attributing an average well-being premium or reduction to some change in individuals’ life circumstances is not the only difficulty though. The concrete policy questions might also involve particular groups of people for whom the effect of some change in living conditions is expected to be smaller or larger than the average. For example, an income transfer to sick people might improve their lot relatively more if privately financed healthcare services are the critical inputs for living well. However, if the crucial condition is social contact, more or less financial means would be expected to affect well-being relatively less (see, e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2013 for a related analysis).

Some well identified treatment effect of certain living conditions might thus be of little help if effect heterogeneity is likely. Experimental evidence often captures local estimates regarding some change in the affected outcome variable that is difficult to transfer to other contexts or to extrapolate. The well-being effects of education may serve to illustrate this. Based on advanced econometric designs, the effect of an extra year of compulsory education in the United Kingdom (following a reform in 1972) has been studied. While a first study reports a *positive* effect on life satisfaction (Oreopoulos, 2007), a second study detects a *negative* one (Jung and Clark, 2017), the latter estimation being included in the table of key findings in Frijters et al. (2019, p. 15). Independently of whether the reform was beneficial to those bound by the reform in their decision to leave school, it is unclear whether the findings offer an 'externally' valid estimate for policies that increase years of schooling. Imagine, for example, a policy proposal for a mandatory earlier (pre-) school enrollment. The new regime would replace private (pre-)school and household internal arrangements that previously existed affecting well-being in a way that is difficult to compare with the (long-term) consequences for children and parents of attending school up to a higher age and entering the labor market later (as underlay the original policy analysis). Moreover, conditions exploited in instrumental variable designs might affect people's subjective well-being via various other mechanisms than the one econometrically modeled. Given how broadly measures of subjective well-being pick up consequences on people's lives, such effects seem particularly relevant in well-being research. Both arguments suggest that the evidence should be put more in the context of the underlying policy variation (or the instrumental variables), offering more or less meaningful lessons for specific policy proposals.

The effects of a successful intervention might not even be representative if the very same intervention is applied again or rolled out to more people. Neglecting any publication bias, the policy experiment that has proven most successful in a competition of interventions is in fact more probably a false positive (Al-Ubaydli et al., 2019). Moreover, experiments might have taken place where the expected positive effects were largest and the people engaging in them most motivated (see, e.g., Helliwell et al. 2019, p. 20). These two aspects add to possible negative network or equilibrium effects (see below) and diseconomies of scale.

3.3 Global measures

While global measures (for example of satisfaction with life) have the great advantage that they leave the aggregation and weighting of well-being judgments across different domains of life to the individuals surveyed, they come with the inevitable disadvantage that they are less sensitive to changes in some individual circumstances. Accordingly, effects on subjective well-being must either be very large to be detected with some statistical precision in an empirical evaluation or else very large samples are necessary. Specific evaluations then become rather costly. Thus, a trade-off emerges between adopting a comprehensive but less sensitive measure on the one hand, and more specific indicators that help to assess consequences for well-being on the other.

3.4 Equilibrium effects

If research provides information about outcomes linked to individual well-being, it is tempting to suggest policy interventions that strengthen positive outcomes and diminish negative ones, by trading them off in order to obtain an optimal policy mix that maximizes some empirical indicator of subjective well-being. Unemployment is a case in point. One might propose that, to improve the lot of the unemployed, the social stigma related to unemployment should be attenuated, and, to reduce the economic insecurity of the employed during a crisis, employment protection should be extended (see, e.g., Luechinger et al., 2010 for evidence on the well-being costs of general unemployment). However, such conclusions might be premature. Regarding the supporting of the unemployed, the personal psychological costs of unemployment due to a strong social work norm (see, e.g., Clark, 2003, Stutzer and Lalive, 2006) might be functional or even necessary in order to maintain a generous and financially sustainable social benefit system. These costs help to limit moral hazard; namely, that citizens do not search less intensively for re-employment when receiving higher unemployment benefits. With regard to the aggregate level, increased job protection might benefit those who already have a job (see, for example, Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009). However, it is also likely to make employers more reluctant to hire new workers, which is detrimental for the job prospects of those who are unemployed. Thus, stronger labor protection rights might lead to longer individual unemployment spells and to higher general unemployment.

These classic arguments highlight the importance of equilibrium effects and potential (unintended) side effects when thinking about policy interventions. Moreover, they highlight the limitations of an approach that focuses on an optimal outcome mix.

4 Incentive issues in well-being policy

4.1 Motivation and Manipulation

Engagement for the explicit goal of an increase in people's well-being might provide a direction many people in the public sector can associate themselves with, contributing to a positive public sector motivation. This very goal might indeed have been the reason that they chose to work in the public sector in the first place. Next to some intrinsic motivation, people involved in public policy face various external incentives and pursue their ideas of the common good as well as their own private good. These fundamental aspects are neglected when a well-being maximization approach is proposed that implicitly rests on the view of a benevolent and unconstrained government. The critique of traditional welfare economics (see, e.g., Mueller, 2003) thus also applies and holds lessons for productively dealing with well-being policy (Frey and Stutzer, 2019).

In general, some mechanical implementation of well-being measures in the policy process is likely to induce strategic interactions between all the actors involved, including citizens. Once a specific aggregate happiness indicator has become established as being politically relevant, the government, public bureaucracy, and various interest groups have an incentive to manipulate it. This has proved to be true for various policy-relevant indicators before, like gross national product, measures of poverty and crime, or the rates of unemployment and inflation. For example, when the unemployment rate had become a politically crucial indicator, governments started to influence it in order to paint a better picture of the state of the labor market than was actually the case (see, e.g., Hughes, 1976, Gregg, 1994 or Levitas, 1996 for the experience in the United Kingdom).

4.2 Misrepresentation and reactance

Similarly, when individuals become aware that the well-being level they report influences the behavior of political actors, they have an incentive to misrepresent it. Imagine, for example, a fiscal equalization scheme that takes into consideration people's subjective well-being across regions. Misrepresenting one's state of well-being in self-reports has little cost. Moreover, I am not aware of an incentive-compatible mechanism for the measurement of subjective well-being. People's motivation to truthfully report their perceived well-being is thus a crucial precondition for any well-being evidence oriented politics. How can this motivation be maintained? How can non-deliberate or even strategic answers be prevented? Answers to these questions should be part of any broader well-being perspective on public policy.

The idea that people react if they feel threatened in their freedom is well established in psychology as reactance (Brehm, 1966). A counter-response might thus occur if people feel they are part of an engineering problem that includes the reporting of their subjective well-being but little other involvement.[10]

4.3 Avoidance and outcome orientation

Reactions to a well-being policy that is perceived as technocratic might be strategic or apathetic and neglectful. Under both conditions, for different reasons though, a relationship between some outcome measure and people's subjective well-being may no longer be observed once policy measures try to exploit it. This might hold in particular for policy measures that involve any kind of transfer, be it in terms of money, services or personal attention. The problem that people avoid an intervention (or game the system) is well-known in economics and dubbed the Lucas critique in macro.

A subtler problem arises when the outcome measure in terms of subjective well-being becomes the primary orientation and replaces the necessary constant debate regarding the importance of various societal problems and the corresponding readjustment and reorientation of public policy towards more intermediate outcomes as well as the further development of basic rules to provide a more productive constitutional framework. This essential part of the democratic process is seemingly superfluous when the policy problem can be reduced to the ranking of projects in terms of their contribution to some well-being indicator. It takes away an important and productive task in which traditionally parties and political entrepreneurs engage themselves alongside citizens and the public administration.

[10] A similar concern is discussed for behavioral public policy by De Jonge et al. (2018).

5 Procedural utility versus individuals as 'metric stations'

Ideas about citizens' involvement in government decision-making differ depending on the policy perspective. Conceptually, citizens play no active role when a well-being policy is oriented towards the maximization of reported well-being. Citizens are in fact reduced to 'metric stations'. In other words (as cynics might express it), rather than having a say on issues in politics, they become targets of mental state management. This disregards the fact that citizens have preferences for processes over and above outcomes. They gain procedural utility from living and acting under institutionalized processes, which offer them possibilities for self-determination in the economy and polity, contributing to a positive sense of self. Specifically, processes contribute directly to people's well-being if they address innate needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (for an introductory review, see Frey et al., 2004). Lane (1988) emphasizes the procedural goods of democracy when people feel respected and treated with dignity and perceive some personal control, understanding, and public resonance.[11] The 'gilets jaunes' movement in France might be a behavioral reflection of the consequences when people feel the absence of procedural qualities.

The political agency of citizens and an engineering perspective of well-being policy are thus difficult to reconcile. This holds for the reporting of subjective well-being as well as the reporting of weights that should then be applied in the maximization of some social welfare function (for the aspect of asking people about the weight given to various groups in the aggregate well-being function, see, e.g., O'Donnell and Oswald, 2015 or Frijters et al., 2019).

[11] In corresponding empirical research, Stutzer and Frey (2006) discuss the potential gains in procedural utility from democracy and show in their study, which is applied to direct democracy, that the positive correlation with life satisfaction is larger for citizens than for foreigners. They argue that, because citizens have access to the direct democratic process, they can reap procedural benefits in addition to the outcome benefits that are available to all inhabitants. In the development context, Olken (2010) evaluates different democratic processes based on a field experiment. Before development projects were chosen in forty-nine Indonesian villages, responsibility for the decisions was randomly assigned either to delegated representatives or to all villagers, who decided in direct ballot voting. While there was little difference in the projects chosen, villagers who had a direct say in the project selection reported a much higher level of satisfaction with their choice, expected to benefit more, and were more likely to consider the proposal fair.

6 Concluding remarks outside of the maximization paradigm

The policy paradigm matters for the choice of research questions and thus for the kind of knowledge well-being research aims to provide, as well as for the people seen as addressees. Based on the various considerations about a well-being oriented public policy, I would like to draw six conclusions.

First, measures of subjective well-being offer a most interesting *complementary* indicator for evaluating public policies. While they can serve as close proxies for individual welfare, they should still not be used as a primary policy goal. Instead, they serve best in the diagnosis of societal problems and alternative institutional approaches to addressing them.

Second, keeping survey questions about subjective well-being as one of *several* inputs informing public policy rather than establishing them as key performance indicators that are directly linked to policy decisions will hopefully allow maintaining the motivation of citizens to truthfully report their well-being.

Third, well-being research teaches us modesty in what we assume can be learned and known. On the one hand, the pretense of knowledge should be no issue due to the complexity arising from the organizational problems of interlinked societies. On the other, caution is advisable if one takes into account that people experience anticipatory well-being, adapt more or less to changes in circumstances, engage in social comparisons, and form aspirations – all well-being relevant aspects affected by their institutional environment.

Fourth, a perspective oriented towards the maximization of some indicator of well-being cannot address the normative issue; for example, of whether to tax those people more who more easily adapt to it. Following this line there are several more issues that require a broader policy perspective. For example, should a well-being policy react to any of people's sensitivities or should, instead, processes be set up so that people reflect more on their own preferences? Or what about the manipulation of expectations, the chemical induction of well-being via psychotropic drugs, or the brain-in-a-vat experiments whereby real outcomes are replaced by subjective impressions of them? These issues cannot be answered within a well-being maximization calculus, but must be decided at a more fundamental level.

Fifth, the constitutional approach provides a theoretically consistent alternative normative framework for guiding well-being research in the field of public policy. In particular, it acknowledges the central role that basic institutions play in forming public policy designed to raise individuals' well-being. At the constitutional level, behind the veil of uncertainty, the fundamental rules and institutions are set that determine the decisions taken in the current politico-economic process. The legitimacy of political action finally rests on voluntary agreement on these fundamental rules by the citizens involved. In particular, individuals' sovereignty includes the choice of how to best pursue their well-being. This holds for both the private and the collective realm. Individual sovereignty must not be reduced to a citizen's obligation to report his or her subjective well-being, which is then aggregated into a well-being indicator supposed to be maximized by government.

The political process should, rather, be institutionally structured so that people's interests become the principal controlling force in politics. Fundamental institutions, or rules of the game, have to be established that provide politicians and public bureaucrats with the motivation and information to adequately respond to people's preferences. Well-being research provides insights into how and to what extent institutions have systematic effects on indicators of individual subjective well-being. The focus is on rules and institutions, including written constitutional rules, state laws, social norms, traditions, and even self-binding mechanisms.

Sixth, well-being research also helps to improve policy decisions within the given rules of the game. The improved measurement of subjective well-being strengthens political competition by allowing decision makers to better evaluate the benefits provided by public goods and to compare various measures assessing the state of society.

In sum, the results gained from well-being research should be taken as inputs into the political process. These inputs have to prove themselves in political competition and in the discourse among citizens, and between citizens and politicians.

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