

Peer Review

Review of: "The Price of Living a Full Life and Experiencing Well-Being: Why a Dignified Life Costs Thousands of Dollars per Person – And Why This Is a Structural Question for Nations"

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The topic of the paper is highly relevant and shows strong potential to contribute both to the academic debate and to policy design. That said, the manuscript would benefit from several revisions aimed at improving its overall coherence, conceptual clarity, and engagement with the literature. The following comments are intended to be constructive and to support further development of the paper.

The manuscript opens with a short section that effectively functions as an abstract; I recommend providing it with a title.

From the outset, there is some conceptual ambiguity in the use of terms such as *well-being* and *subjective well-being*, which are at times used interchangeably. While well-being is indeed shaped by both objective and subjective dimensions –which are intrinsically linked– it is important either to treat them analytically as distinct or to clearly define how the paper conceptualizes them and their relationship. The lack of explicit definitions constitutes a non-trivial weakness of the article, especially given the extensive and well-established literature on this topic (see, for example, OECD, 2013^[1]).

This issue recurs throughout the manuscript. It is evident, for instance, in Section 2 ("Structural conditions of well-being"), where the first paragraph refers to "determinants of subjective well-being," while the second paragraph addresses them as "determinants of well-being." This shift in terminology, without clarification, risks obscuring the analytical focus of the argument.

I therefore encourage the author to deepen the conceptual discussion by more explicitly engaging with the state of the art in the academic debate and by clearly defining the key concepts used throughout the paper, as well as their interconnections. Such a reflection would also allow the author to more clearly articulate the paper's original contribution (namely, which gap in the literature it seeks to address or which problem it intends to solve).

Along these lines, a more thorough engagement with the various concepts related to the study of well-being could lead to a reconsideration of the paper's "central thesis," as stated in the second paragraph of the introduction: that *"a 'full life' is not primarily an individual achievement but the outcome of quantifiable structural and social investments."* If the paper aims to focus on *subjective* well-being, greater attention should be paid to the individual level, not in terms of achievement but rather in terms of evaluation or affect. Subjective well-being can be understood as shaped, at least in part, by an individual assessment of the "outcomes of structural and social investments," as well as of how those investments shape individual experiences and sentiments.

In this sense, there is a clear relationship between those investments and subjective well-being, but I would encourage the author to consider reformulating the thesis accordingly (for example, by framing it in terms of individual evaluations of life conditions that are shaped by quantifiable structural and social investments). This point is also closely related to the definition of *flourishing* offered on page 3, described as *"a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good."* Here, it would be useful to clarify: *good as evaluated by whom?*

In Section 3, the concept of MIS is introduced. This line of reasoning appears to align more closely with objective well-being than with subjective well-being, as it focuses on the conditions individuals possess rather than on how they experience or evaluate those conditions. Once again, this underscores the need for greater conceptual precision and a more clearly articulated theoretical framework in order to support the paper's argument.

On page 4, the paper presents a particularly compelling argument: *"When converted into per capita spending in PPP-adjusted dollars, high-performing welfare states such as Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland spend on the order of USD 14,000–21,000 per person per year on social programs [4][5][6]. These are the same countries that consistently top the World Happiness Report, with high scores on life evaluation, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, and low corruption [15]."* This passage could serve as a strong motivation for the study and might even be moved to the introduction. However,

if the argument is framed in terms of subjective well-being, the underlying theoretical framework would still require further refinement.

On pages 5 and 6, the construction of the table is not entirely clear. Providing additional methodological detail on how the table was developed would improve transparency and readability.

Overall, the line of reasoning is promising, but it would benefit from further polishing. For example, on page 7 the author states: *“The ‘price of plenitude’ is not infinite; it is on the order of several thousand dollars per person per year, adjusted for national income levels.”* Here again, issues related to subjectivity arise. Once individual evaluations are incorporated, assigning a precise monetary value becomes highly problematic. A possible alternative could be to reframe the argument in terms of *“the price of achieving a minimum threshold of plenitude,”* which might offer greater conceptual precision.

The conclusion is thought-provoking, but it would need to be more firmly grounded in the preceding sections. The statement that policies should be evaluated *“not only by GDP growth but also by their contribution to flourishing indices, both at the individual and structural levels”* (page 8) is of great importance and reflects a long-standing concern within the literature. Research such as this has the potential to significantly strengthen that argument.

Thank you for your work!

References

1. [△]OECD. (2013). *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*. doi:10.1787/9789264191655-en.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.