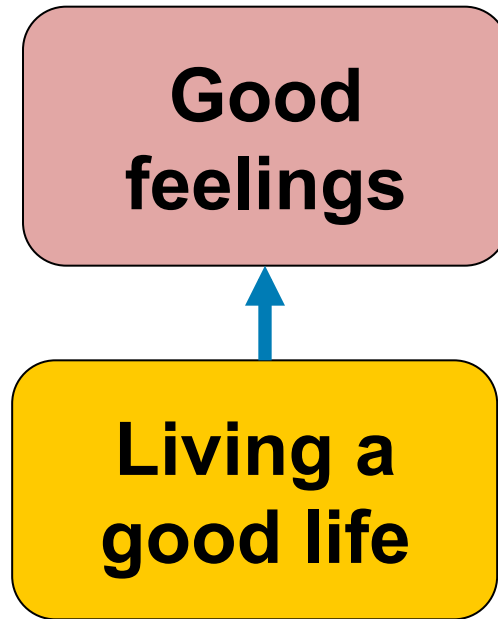# Is there a recipe for wellbeing?

Experiences of public policies on wellbeing
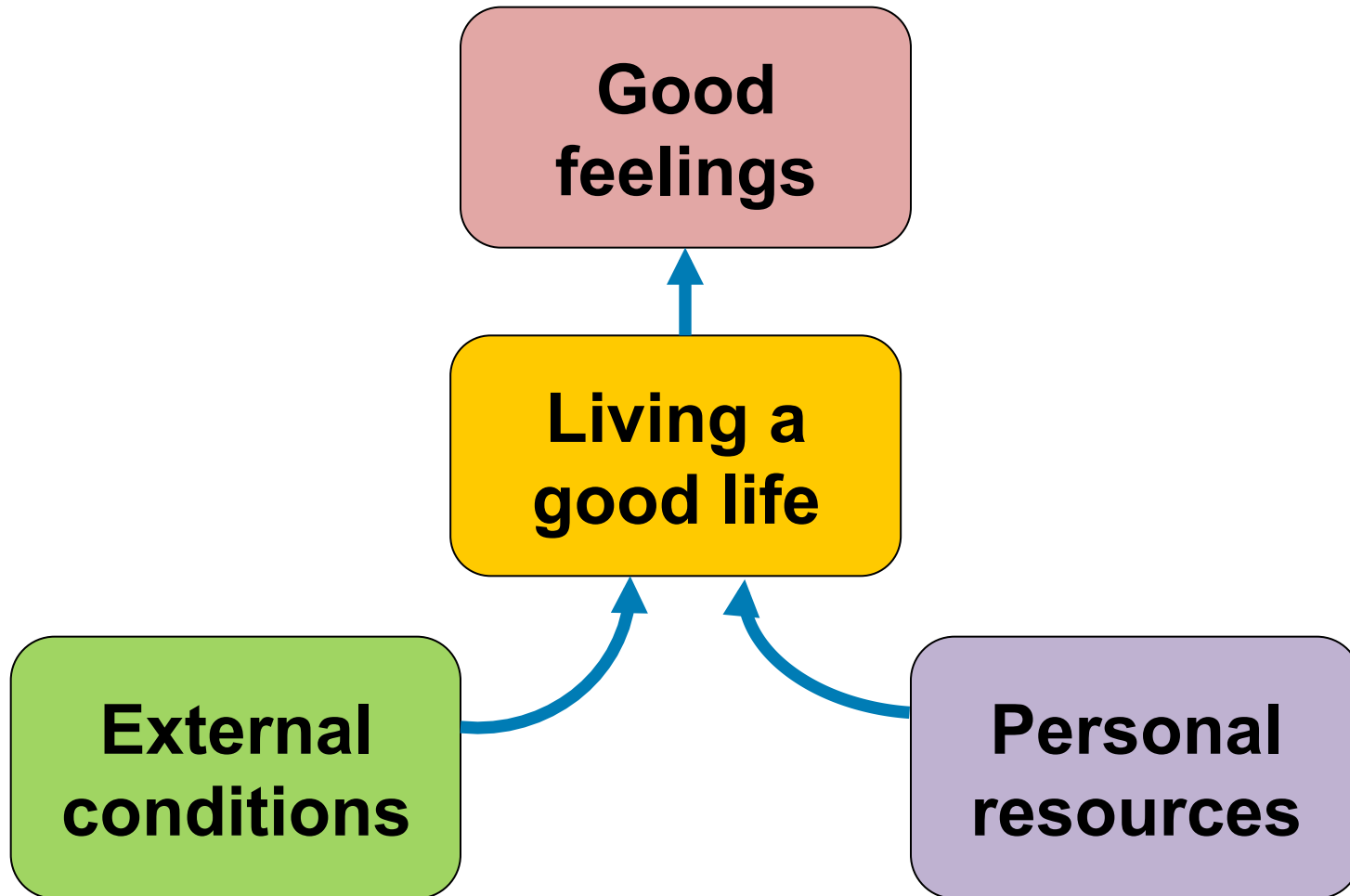
Charles Seaford, Centre for Wellbeing
Guadalajara 25.11.2014

What does a policy on wellbeing do?

What does a policy on wellbeing do?

What does a policy on wellbeing do?

Adapted from Foresight (2008)

What does a policy on wellbeing do?

Good feelings

Living a good life

External conditions

Personal resources

Adapted from Foresight (2008)
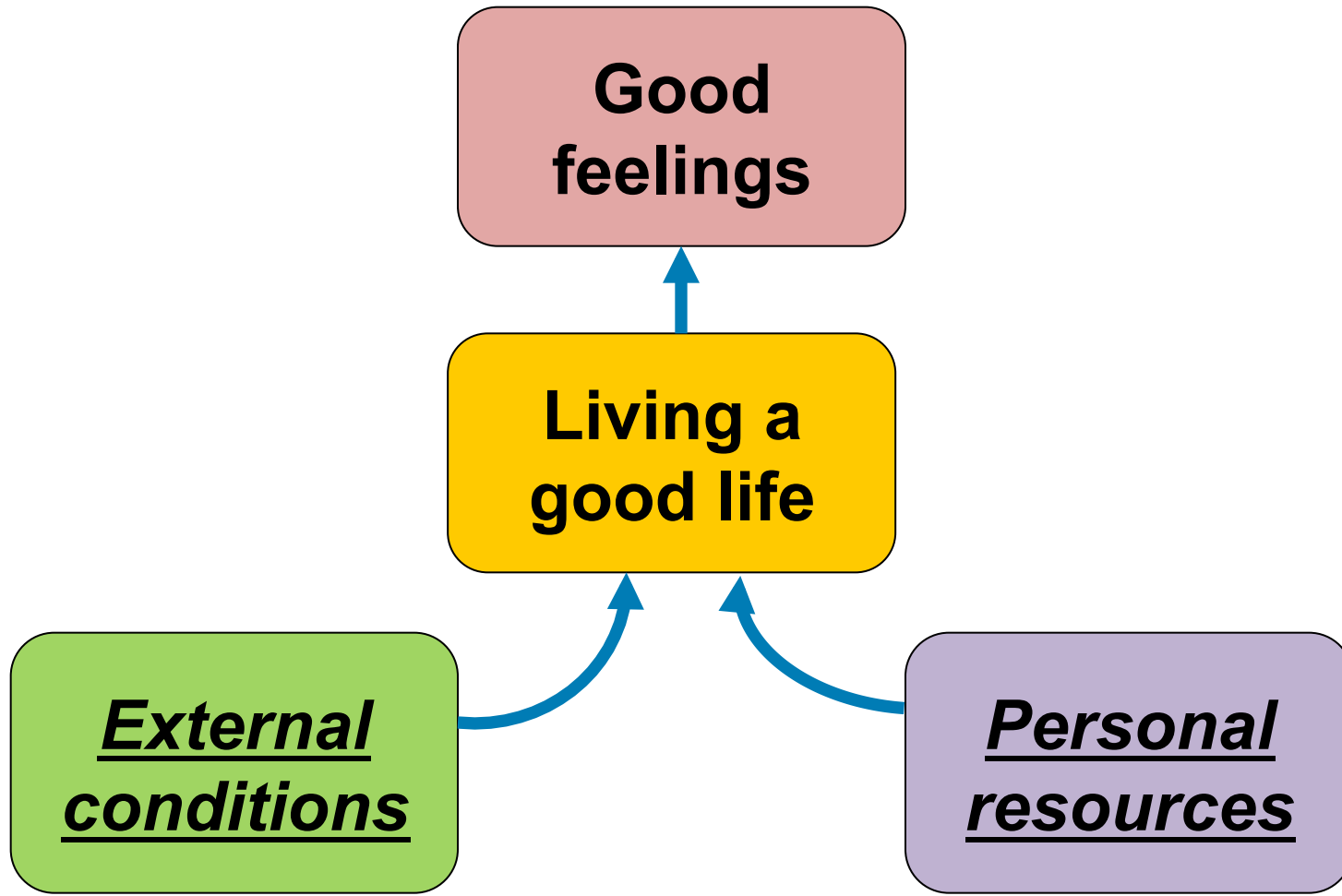
What might a recipe contain?

What might a recipe contain?

- *Ingredients* - we know these very well now
- *Proportions* – these are more difficult
- *Method* – this will always require a good chef

There is evidence* for at least 28 ingredients

Material conditions
1. Decent income – no deprivation
2. Secure income and employment
3. Economic stability more broadly
4. Housing
5. Limited amounts of debt

Activity
6. Employment
7. Hours worked/enough time
8. Other aspects of a good job
9. Caring for children – but not the elderly
10. Volunteering and giving
11. Short commute times
12. Physical activity
13. Cultural activity

Education
14. Education

Health
15. Health and vitality
16. Good sleep

Relationships
17. Social activity, friends, family life
18. Membership of clubs and institutions
19. Trust of neighbours/other people

The local environment
20. Clean, unvandalised local environment
21. Green space, trees
22. Accessible amenities
23. Good quality drinking water
24. Low levels of noise and pollution

Society as a whole
25. Equality
26. Freedom
27. Governance and trust in institutions
28. Low levels of crime, physical security

* Based mainly on life sat correlations

But what matters most? What are the trade-offs? What can we influence? With what side effects?

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Wellbeing economics *will* give us the tools to *help* answer this

FIGURE 2. IMPACT OF POLICY A UPON LIFE SATISFACTION

Source: Gus O'Donnell et al, 'Well-being and Policy'

But even without this, much can be done

Work is going on to develop tools that allow this multi-dimensional impact analysis to take place

Eventually this will allow a coherent wellbeing government programme – based on a new paradigm

But in the mean time a lot can be done now
1. Programmes to influence *behaviour*
2. Public spending *prioritisation*
3. *City planning* (housing, transport, land use)
4. *Economic policy*

The 'five ways to wellbeing' are used to promote *behaviour* that enhances wellbeing

- Evidence-based actions that anyone can do
- Promoted and used in the UK by:-
    - Doctors and hospitals
    - City authorities
    - Voluntary and community groups
    - Charities
    - Government agencies
- Used overseas eg Australia and New Zealand
- Good impact, but will only on small numbers

The UK lottery funds projects designed to change *behaviour* and increase wellbeing

- A £160 million programme supporting civil society and public sector projects

- Designed to encourage healthy eating, increase physical activity, promote good mental health – and personal wellbeing

Results

- Life satisfaction increased from 6.5 to 7.1 – and sustained

- Proportion of people reporting depressive symptoms fell 35%, 41% more people reported feeling relaxed

- Increased self-esteem; almost a quarter more feeling good about themselves and optimistic about the future

- Increased confidence and more able to interact with others

- Again good impacts but only on small numbers

We identified features that made projects successful

- Skill (and confidence) building
- Involving volunteers
  - Through a sense of purpose and feeling valued by being able to support others.
  - Projects which did not involve volunteers had a lesser impact on a range of outcomes, including overall well-being
- Sociable activities delivered in small groups, fun
- Physical activity
- Participants co-design, co-deliver and monitor projects
- Community led and 'owned', activities embedded in institutions which play a role in daily life, eg schools
- Regular engagement over longer period
- Broader lessons for public service design

Wellbeing impacts can be and sometimes are used to *prioritise* spending within programmes

Material conditions

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8. Other aspects of a good job
9. **Caring for children – but not the elderly**
10. **Volunteering**
11. Short commute times
12. **Physical activity**
13. **Cultural activity – including singing…**

Education

14. Education

Health

15. **Health and vitality**
16. **Good sleep**

Relationships

17. Social activity, friends, family life
18. Membership of clubs and institutions
19. Trust of neighbours/other people

The local environment

20. Clean, unvandalised local environment
21. Green space, trees
22. **Accessible amenities**
23. Good quality drinking water
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City planning important to several of the ingredients

Material conditions
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2. Secure income and employment
3. Economic stability more broadly
4. **Housing**
5. Limited amounts of debt

Activity
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7. Hours worked/enough time
8. Other aspects of a good job
9. Caring for children – but not the elderly
10. Volunteering
11. **Short commute times**
12. **Physical activity**
13. Cultural activity

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15. Health and vitality
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Relationships
17. **Social activity, friends, family life**
18. Membership of clubs and institutions
19. **Trust of neighbours/other people**

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…and can, of course, be more or less successful

- *Housing* – land assembly to reduce shortages (Freiburg)
- *Commute times* – *some* cases of balancing housing and business reducing commute times (Seattle)
- *Physical activity* – density and transport policy can stimulate physical activity through transport
- *Levels of social activity* – eg green spaces associated with stronger sense of community amongst older people, pedestrianisation schemes with greater social interaction
- *Green spaces* – might naturally decline with higher density but two can be combined (Hong Kong), greening brownfield sites, (Toronto)

Wellbeing *economic policy* is the big prize

Material conditions
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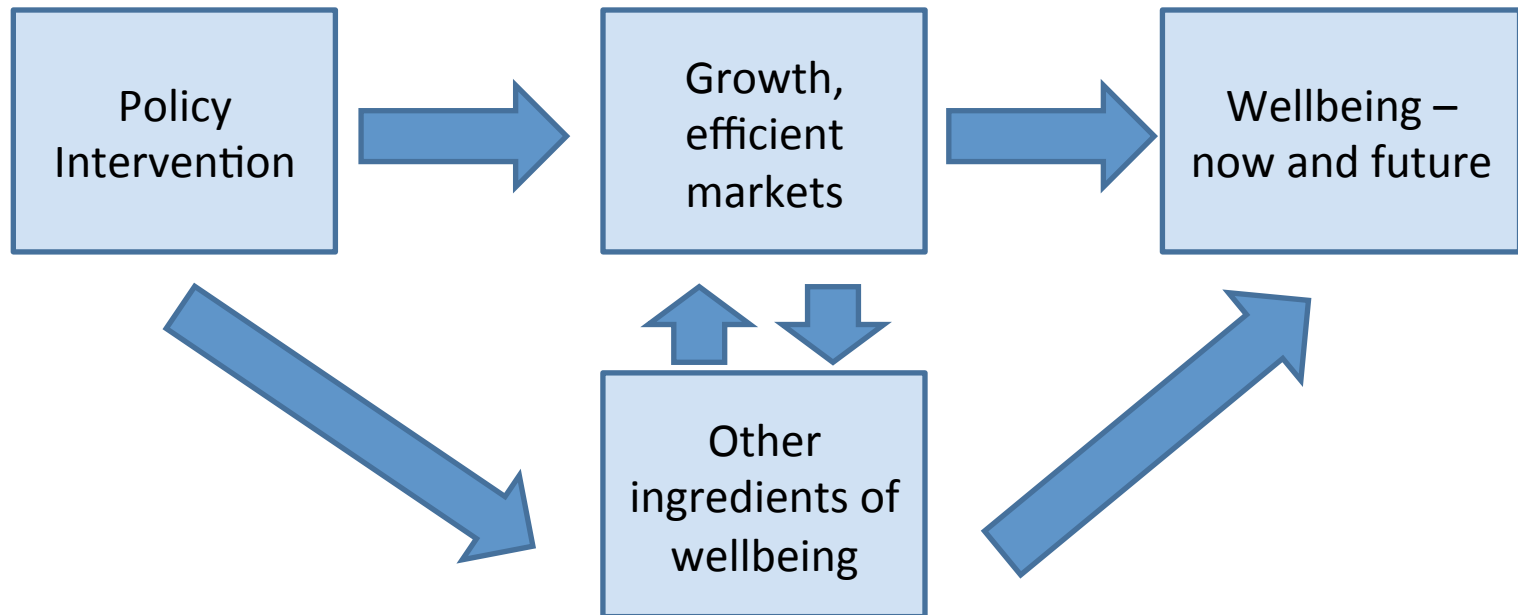28. Low levels of crime, physical security

The traditional approach focuses on growth and efficient markets

Policy Intervention → Growth, efficient markets → Welfare

But clearly other factors matter in Latin America…

Life sat vs GDP per capita (PPP)
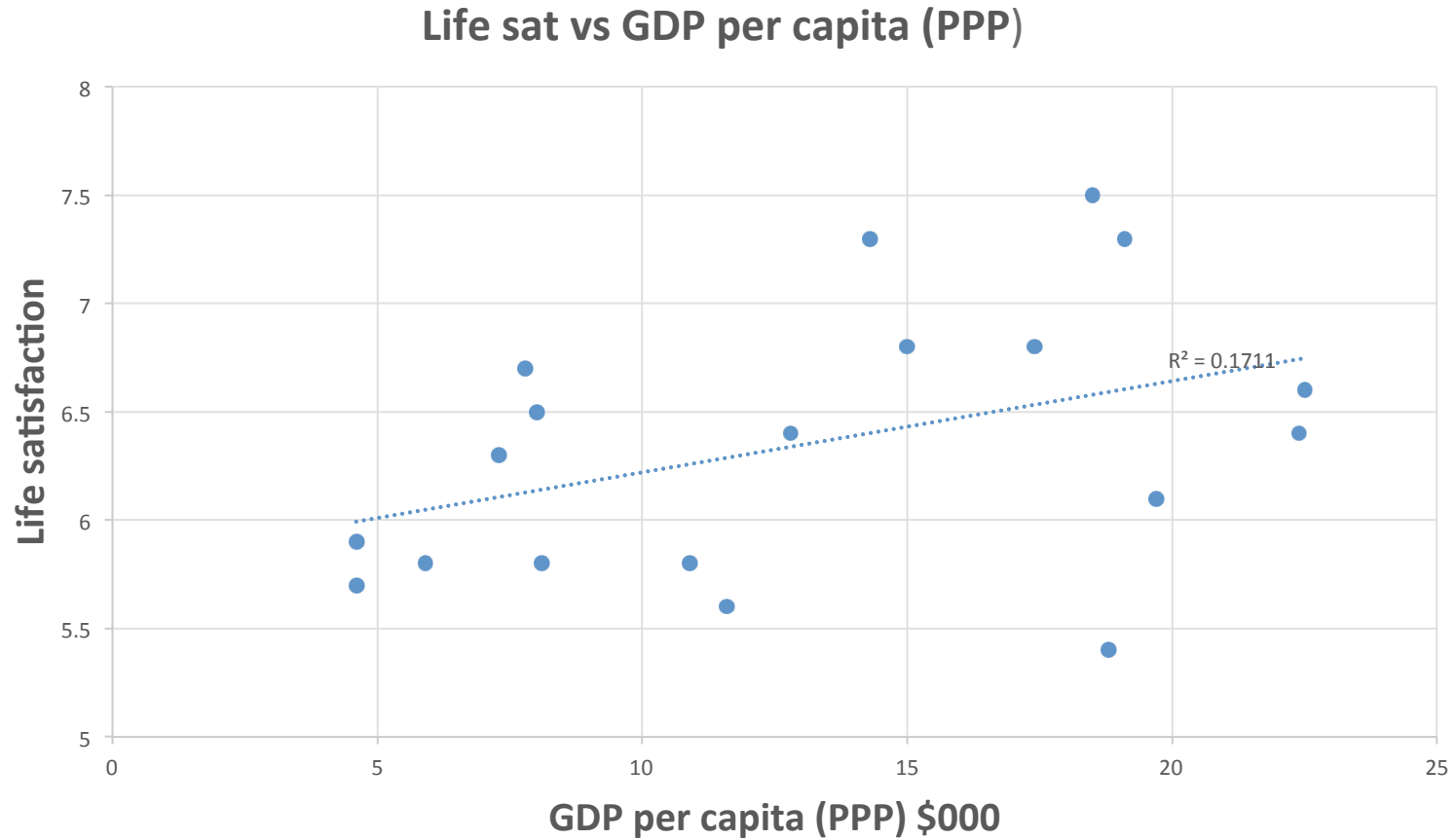
So an approach taking into account a broader range of ingredients make sense

Policy to deliver this builds on a well established social democratic agenda

1. Decent income – no deprivation
2. Full employment
3. Secure income and employment
4. Economic stability more broadly
5. Limit to hours worked/enough free time
11. Other aspects of a good job
12. Limited amounts of debt
13. Equality

1. An industrial strategy designed to create good jobs
   - Business bank
   - Infrastructure
   - Skills
   - Research/transfer
   - Co-ordination
2. Public sector employment and procurement practices
3. Effective trade unionism
4. Flexicurity welfare
5. Good governance – often decisions at city or region level

So – there is a lot going on, even if it is not always called wellbeing

- Creating the tools that can produce a wellbeing based government programme – a new paradigm
- Specific programmes designed to improve wellbeing of relatively small proportions of the population
- Using wellbeing analysis to prioritise within public spending programmes
- City planning designed to improve wellbeing
- Industrial activism by government – creating good jobs and the other ingredients of a high wellbeing economy

To advance the agenda we need to review policies that are achieving the 'ingredients' even if they are not called wellbeing policies

Thank you
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