

## Wellbeing versus Sustainable Development – Conceptual Framework and Application Challenges

### Dobrostan a zrównoważony rozwój – struktura koncepcyjna oraz wyzwania wdrożeniowe

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#### **Abstract**

The idea of sustainable development introduced the strong connection between human wellbeing and the state of natural environment. In the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) perspective, wellbeing is correlated with sustainable development and with ecosystem services, both seen as inextricable elements of one global process, necessary to lead properly *Our common future*. An important consequence of MA is the necessity for wellbeing strategies to be implemented by governments of many countries, including member states of the European Union. In spite of appearances, this is not an easy task not as much with regard to the difficulties in application (obvious for every type of activity) as with regard to the specific mess in defining what wellbeing is.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to wellbeing and sustainability research by presenting a relational conceptualization of wellbeing. The paper is divided into three sections. The author begins with the presentation of wellbeing conceptual background, including Gross National product (GDP), Human Development Index (HDI), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) monetary valuation, Concept of Capabilities, Societal Indicators, QoL and ecosystems wellbeing theory. The second section focuses on subjective wellbeing conceptual framework, including *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* accounts, the Self Determination Theory, the Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis and finally the Responsible Wellbeing one. The third section discuss how wellbeing is presented in official directives and policies such a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 5 dimensions valuation and its implementations in different countries.

**Key words:** wellbeing, societal indicators, subjective wellbeing, responsible wellbeing, sustainable development

#### **Streszczenie**

Koncepcja zrównoważonego rozwoju jako pierwsza dostrzegła istnienie znaczących wzajemnych zależności między dobrostanem człowieka (wellbeing) a jakością środowiska naturalnego. W dokumentach Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) dobrostan człowieka, zrównoważony rozwój oraz świadczenia ekosystemów postrzegane są już jako ściśle ze sobą związane, nierozłączne składowe większego, globalnego procesu. Ich dobre funkcjonowanie uznane zostało za konieczne do właściwego pokierowania *Naszą wspólną przyszłością*. Ważną konsekwencją publikacji dokumentów milenijnych jest konieczność wdrażania ustalonych wytycznych dotyczących dobrostanu człowieka, do narodowych strategii rozwoju wielu państw, w tym państw członkowskich Unii Europejskiej. Wbrew pozorom nie jest to zadanie łatwe, nie tyle ze względu na trudności aplikacyjne (typowe dla wszelkiego typu dyrektyw), co ze względu na brak zgodności, co do tego, czym właściwie jest rzeczony dobrostan, a co za tym idzie – jak należy go zdefiniować.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie struktury koncepcyjnej pojęcia *dobrostan*. Artykuł podzielony został na trzy części. W pierwszej zaprezentowane zostały podstawy koncepcyjne pojęcia, w tym koncepcje Produktu Krajowego Brutto (PKB), Indeksu Rozwoju Społecznego (HDI), Materialnych Wskaźników Postępu Genuine (GPI), Koncepcja Zdolności, Koncepcja Wskaźników Społecznych, Teoria QoL oraz Teoria Dobrostanu Ekosystemów. Druga część skupia się na strukturze koncepcyjnej dobrostanu subiektywnego, w tym na ujęciu *hedonicznym* i

*eudaimonicznym*, Teorii Samookreślenia, Teorii Homeostazy oraz na Teorii Dobrostanu Odpowiedzialnego. W ostatniej, trzeciej części, dyskutowane jest, jak dobrostan rozumiany w wybranych dyrektywach i strategiach na szczeblu międzynarodowym, w tym w 5 płaszczyznowej koncepcji opublikowanej w dokumentach Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, oraz jak prezentuje się polityka wdrożeniowa w tym zakresie w wybranych krajach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dobrostan, wskaźniki społeczne, dobrostan subiektywny, dobrostan odpowiedzialny, zrównoważony rozwój

## Introduction

It would be an understatement to claim that the term *wellbeing* is reaching its peak of popularity nowadays. The term is used on daily basis in academic papers of numerous disciplines (e.g. medical sciences, psychology, economy, environmental sciences or tourism geography) in numerous supranational and national policies, and found its way even into mass culture.

Wellbeing gained momentum in 2003-2005, following the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) (2003, 2005) that opened the field for interdisciplinary researches. In the MA perspective, wellbeing is correlated with sustainable development and with ecosystem services, both seen as inextricable elements of one global process, necessary to lead properly *Our common future*<sup>1</sup>.

However, the most important consequence of MA (2003, 2005) is the necessity for wellbeing strategies to be implemented by governments of many countries, including member states of the European Union. In spite of appearances, this is not an easy task not as much with regard to the difficulties in application (obvious for every type of activity) as with regard to the specific mess in defining what wellbeing is.

Paradoxically, despite its growing popularity, the term *wellbeing* is still becoming more and more ambiguous. There is no consensus to what wellbeing really is or to what imprecisely means. For this reason, it is even more difficult to designate indices pinpoint and measuring wellbeing. An important question is, if the wellbeing is an objective state, measurable with objective indicators, or maybe – it's rather subjective perception of individuals (exemplified in the statement that the glass is half full instead of being half empty)? Also what are the factors influencing the wellbeing? Personal predisposition of being happy? Welfare? Good health? Good social relations? Individuals predisposition of being happy or *outside* life events and circumstances?

It can be only stated that wellbeing has a positive connotation. It is something worth striving for, something desired by each and every individual (Tuula, Tuuli, 2015).

Sustainable development – in a very simplified way – can be defined as an idea steeped in principles of intergenerational equity and basic human needs. It says that we should govern our resources in a manner that does not compromise *the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The three pillars of sustainability revolve around the economy, society and the environment thus have very much in common with the wellbeing and ecosystem services looking at the same problems but from a different perspective. The community wellbeing (*to maintain and build local community wellbeing including social infrastructure, resource access, comfort and environmental quality and avoid social corruption and exploitation*) is one of four social pillars of sustainable tourism (UNEP & WTO, 2005). Also other pillars contain elements that are linked to the wellbeing of host, guest and the environment, thus we may state that the wellbeing is one of crucial elements of sustainability. The ideology of sustainable development introduced the strong connection between human wellbeing and the state of natural environment (WCED, 1987).

Ecosystems offer services for human wellbeing but most of all ecosystems are precondition for human existence. The relation ecosystem – human wellbeing must be seen as mutual: the wellbeing relies on ecosystems, but same time the pursuit of wellbeing affects them (Naess, 1995; Giddings, Hopwood & O'Brien, 2002; Haila, 2009; Tuula, Tuuli, 2015). Following Tuula, & Tuuli (2015) *The way needs are met has inevitable social and ecological consequences* (p. 170). The type and quality of human activity has a significant influence on both: wellbeing and sustainable development.

The integration of sustainability into wellbeing research would lead to a more holistic view on wellbeing (Kjell, 2011). Moreover, clarifying the concept of wellbeing will help to further sustainability research and goals. Wellbeing research could be then of service to sustainability science. Consequently, the term requires a more precise definition from the perspective of sustainability sciences. In addition, the inclusion of wellbeing in sustainability sciences will also lead to a more holistic perception of wellbeing itself (Tuula, Tuuli, 2015, p. 169).

<sup>1</sup> The notion of *Our common future* comes from WCED publication introducing the philosophy of sustainable development: *Our common future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to wellbeing and sustainability research by presenting a relational conceptualization of wellbeing. The paper is divided into three sections. The author begins with the presentation of wellbeing conceptual background, including Gross National product (GDP), Human Development Index (HDI), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) monetary valuation, Concept of Capabilities, Societal Indicators, QoL and ecosystems wellbeing theory. The second section focuses on subjective wellbeing conceptual framework, including *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* accounts, the Self Determination Theory, the Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis and finally the Responsible Wellbeing one. The third section discuss how wellbeing is presented in official directives and policies such a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 5 dimensions valuation and its implementations in different countries.

### Wellbeing – conceptual background

A sort of chaos in defining what wellbeing means is a reflection of the perspective of numerous scientific disciplines dealing with this term from their own point of view.

This term derives from economic sciences. For the first time it was used in the 1930s when the term Gross National Product (GNP) was introduced. According to then requirements, GNP was supposed to depict the value of assets and services provided by each country (Shea, 1976). Soon, GNP evolved into the presently used Gross Domestic Product (GDP). From GDP perspective, the higher the income and the expenditure in a specific community, the higher the *goodness* of citizens of such a state is. Economic sciences were perceived as best adapted to studying the wellbeing according to the logic that the quality of life of every individual must be determined by the level of income earned by such an individual (Wilson, 1972). To some extent this is real. Affluent countries recording high GDP levels can invest in the development of culture, allocate more funds to health care and to development of social space available to all citizens etc. (Lai, 2000).

However, a high GDP does not reflect the full complexity of the phenomenon even if wellbeing is perceived solely in terms of material prosperity. First, GDP does not provide information about the distribution of profits generated in the specific country among respective citizens. It does not reveal anything about social disparities connected with age, education, place of residence etc. It is no secret that many countries with high GDP levels have very large social disparities. Many inhabitants of the so-called wealthy countries simply live in poverty.

Another drawback of using the GDP indicator in wellbeing measurement is the fact that it does not take into account the actual costs of maintenance in a specific country related to the accomplishment of

basic needs (accommodation, food, clothing, health care) and supplementary needs (going out to the cinema and restaurants, expenditure on leisure, buying a car, going on holiday etc.). It is obvious that an amount that in some countries is sufficient to ensure very affluent life will cover only the basic needs in other countries. As a consequence the subjective wellbeing perceived by individuals will be different. Thirdly, GDP does not make a distinction between expenditure to serve the holistic concept of wellbeing and expenditure that is harmful to wellbeing. From the GDP perspective, every financial transaction (e.g. buying drugs, tobacco) is assumed to have a positive nature (Redefining Progress, 1995). GDP is guided by simple logic – the more, the better.

The deficiency of information given by the GDP indicator led to the search for additional, supplementary indicators to measure the wellbeing of individuals. For example, Human Development Index (HDI), next to GDP, takes into account the level of education and lifespan of the citizens of the specific country (UNDP, 2003). The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) also derives from economic sciences. It makes a distinction between positive expenditure which improves wellbeing and negative expenditure which is harmful to wellbeing (Halstead, 1998; Hamilton, 1998).

The *concept of capabilities* by the economist A. Sen (1985) is also an attempt to look at the wellbeing from a wider perspective. This concept takes into account economic and social as well as political factors. It has become very popular in surveys into the social and economic development of different areas of the world. However, it is puzzling that although the so-called *value* is a central term here, literature based on the *concept of capabilities* only mentions values (that they are important). However, it does not investigate them, more – it does not distinguish them. It is commonly assumed that specific values are equally significant irrespective of their social or cultural context. Perhaps, it is the greatest weakness of this method. S. Deneulin and J.A. McGregor (2009) argue that *capability approach needs to pay greater attention to the different groups which construct the value frameworks from which people derive their values* (p. 1).

There is also another weakness of wellbeing measurements based on economic ratios, which is more and more often emphasized in literature (Gardner, Oswald, 2007). Irrespective of whether we talk about having money, material assets, making expenditure on good or harmful products, fair or unfair distribution of GDP – the obvious effect of high economic ratios on high wellbeing perceived by individuals is more and more often contested (Gardner, Oswald 2007, p. 3). Most examples come from the so-called western countries where GDP is particularly high. What is characteristic, the level of subjective wellbeing (SWB) is not equally high there either (Shea, 1976; Cummins et al., 2003). In turn, the results of

studies on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) carried out by the University of Bath Research Group indicate that in the least affluent developing countries (e.g. Bangladesh or Ethiopia) subjective wellbeing and happiness (SWB) is frequently very high (Blackmore, 2009; Copestake, 2009; Copestake, Campfield, 2009; Deneulin, McGregor, 2009; White, 2009). Of course, these results can be referred to Appadurai's (2004) *capacity to aspire*, concluding that inhabitants of poor countries have less knowledge and lower aspirations, thus they do not realize that their wellbeing is low (White, 2009, p. 6). However, they lead to extensive thinking about the adequacy of the measures used.

Allowing a perspective that is not purely economic resulted in introducing numerous Societal Indicators (SI) (Cummins et al., 2003). The function of the SI was to cover multiple areas of life (including moral standards) in order to capture all factors affecting the wellbeing. Attempts were taken at selecting indices suitable on a world scale, irrespective of the context. However, it is difficult to determine the indices in arbitrary terms and even more importantly – to assign specific weights to such indices. Thus, wellbeing level measurements can provide different and even mutually exclusive results, depending on which indices are adopted and how the weights are distributed. An example can be the results of surveys involving US residents carried out by Becker, Denby, McGill and Wilks (1987). Diener and Suh (1996, p. 197) emphasize that the main weakness of SI is their subjective nature.

Societal indicators (SI) focus attention on measuring. Such indices were not adapted however, to measure how people feel about their lives – what is their subjective wellbeing. This requires the use of subjective social indicators. Moreover such a distinction is important *since objective indicators generally are very poor predictors of subjective quality of life* (Cummins, 1998).

An attempt at taking a very broad look on the diversity of indices affecting human wellbeing can be the index of life quality based on values (QoL) proposed by Diener (1995). QoL is created on the basis of a set of 45 universal values defined by Schwartz (1994), focusing on a two-dimensional circular structure consisting of 7 *pie-shaped value regions*: Intellectual Autonomy, Affective Autonomy, Mastery, Harmony, Hierarchy, Conservatism and Egalitarian Commitment. To ensure balance in assessment, for the purposes of analysis QoL takes into account two factors from each 7 *value regions*. QoL index has two versions – Basic – adapted to wellbeing measurement in developing countries and Advanced – adapted to wellbeing measurement in affluent developed countries.

A variant on this view is the proposition of Marmot (2004) stating that human's status and autonomy are more important in the wellbeing than wealth or objective income shown in metrics. Also Kahneman,

Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone (2006) raise questions over the influence of income on individual wellbeing.

Again – despite a very wide spectrum of measures used in QoL studies, the most emphasized weak point of this method and of other methods based on SI, is the fact that even the best selection of objective indices not always matches individual assessment of wellbeing. Likewise a high level of income and wealth is not always reflected in subjective feeling of happiness, other (societal) indicators (having a family, children) objectively considered positive and improving individual wellbeing in reality are not always reflected in subjectively perceived happiness. What is more, even if we assume in advance that some indicators just *must* contribute to improved wellbeing (e.g. winning a prize in a lottery), it must be admitted that improvement of subjective wellbeing will be perceived differently by different people. In an identical situation one can be extremely happy while someone else will feel slight satisfaction. Numerous surveys prove that an objectively high or low level of wellbeing (determined based on objective measures) to a slight extent coincides with the wellbeing as felt by people (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976, Diener, Suh, 1996).

Since the birth of sustainable development ideology (WCED, 1987), wellbeing has been associated with the status of natural environment. From this perspective, the better the status of the environment, the better the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the globe is (Hall et al., 2013).

It was proved that the good state of natural environment is leading to the good health (Pretty et al., 2011; Völker & Kistemann, 2011; Rodrigues & Kastenholz, 2010). The links between wellbeing, health and landscape are frequently recognized (Velarde et al., 2007). The problem of environment-wellbeing relationship was studied in biological sciences, in the sociology (Pretty et al., 2007), but also on disciplines related to leisure (recreation and tourism) (Yang et al., 2013). The relationship of wellbeing and landscape have been studied in regard to so called blue spaces (e.g. Völker and Kistemann, 2011) and the green spaces (e.g. Maas et al., 2006; Pretty et al., 2007; Barbosa et al., 2007).

On the other hand, it is forgotten that the accomplishment of some postulates to support wellbeing (e.g. limitation of air travel due to excessive emission of gases (Peeters et al., 2009, de Bruijn et al., 2010; Dwyer et al., 2010, Pearch-Nielsen et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2008, 2010) is prejudicial to other divisions of sustainable development – in this case e.g. limiting transcontinental tourism and depriving inhabitants of many destinations of income from tourism.

The most far-reaching perception of the role of natural environment is postulated by Prescott (2001), the author of the term *ecosystem wellbeing*. It was defined as *a condition in which the ecosystem maintains its diversity and quality – and thus its capacity*

to support people and the rest of life – and it's potential to adapt to change and provide a wide range of choices and opportunities for the future. Prescott (2001) assigns identical weights to human and ecosystem wellbeing and claims that *The underlying hypothesis of wellbeing assessment is that a sustainable development is a combination of human wellbeing and ecosystem wellbeing. Human wellbeing is a requirement for sustainability because no rational person would want to perpetuate a low standard of living. Ecosystem wellbeing is a requirement because the ecosystems supports life and makes possible any standards of living. Although trade-offs between the needs of people and the needs of ecosystems are unavoidable, they must be limited* (p. 4).

### Subjective wellbeing – conceptual background

The concept of wellbeing was also covered by social sciences. Here, three main approaches can be distinguished (Brock, 1993; Diener, Suh, 1996). The first one associates wellbeing with norms following from the specific culture or religion. In this context wellbeing can even result in sacrificing one's own good for the sake of other people since the individual considers such behaviour adequate and morally reasonable (Diener, Suh, 1996, p. 189). The second approach is based on individual preferences of respective people. It emphasizes the diversity of feelings – a thing making someone happy does not have to make another person happy at all. On the other hand, the third approach focuses on individual evaluation – from this perspective, if someone thinks highly of their wellbeing, it must be assumed that it is true – irrespective of objective circumstances (Land, 1996).

SWB research is focussed on individuals' subjective estimation about their lives, in terms of hedonic feelings or cognitive satisfactions. SI and SWB approaches are based on different understanding of quality of life. But as Diener and Suh (1996, p. 192) argue, scientific approaches to wellbeing need to incorporate both perspectives: SI and SWB, despite the conceptual and methodological differences between them.

SWB research raises the key question about the source of wellbeing. Is it an effect of individual predispositions of a person (cognitive & intrinsic components) or is it influenced by external factors (affective & extrinsic components)? If so, what are they? Is it more about things that happen to us or about things we give to others? The answer leads us to the most common division into *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* accounts, introduced by Waterman (1993) and used in the reference literature.

The hedonic approach focuses on the happiness of given individual. Here, the wellbeing is perceived as reaching the maximum of one's own happiness and pleasure, while limiting pain and sadness to the min-

imum. Still, hedonic approach should not be equalized with egoism. More often than not, pro-social activities, gaining responsibilities elevate one's self confidence, and as a result bring a higher SWB (Thoits, Hewitt, 2001; Brown, Kasser, 2005; Blackmore, 2009). So the question remains unanswered – which factors make us happy? Is it the cognitive features (individual abilities) or rather affective factors, e.g., winning a lottery (Gardner, Oswald, 2007), having offspring (Condon, Boyce & Corkindale, 2004), faith (Fry, 2000) and so on. And if it is a mixture of the cognitive and affective, then what is the relation between them?

The *eudaimonic* approach considers the quality of social life to be important. It is assumed that SWB is connected with the realization of one's own potential and involvement in good relations with others, and even more – involvement in world events (Ryan and Deci 2001). The high positive significance of social behaviours was emphasized e.g. in the multidimensional model of wellbeing by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Wellbeing is based on six elements necessary to ensure positive mental condition of an individual. These include: *Purpose in Life, Environmental Mastery, Self-Acceptance, Personal Growth, Autonomy and Positive Relations with Others*.

Another example of the eudaimonic approach is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000). For the purposes of analysis, SDT takes into account affective & extrinsic components that can either motivate or demotivate an individual as well as cognitive & intrinsic components having influence on the person's individual responses to external events (Ryan, Deci, 2000, p. 68.). According to this theory, some external events lead to increasing or decreasing internal motivation so they transform intrinsic components. Extrinsic and intrinsic components are mutually correlated. According to SDT the basis is three key needs of every individual: competence, autonomy and relatedness. If any of these key needs is not satisfied, it can lead to ill-being or even to pathologies.

However, sociologist Erik Allardt (1993) claims that the basic needs of every individual underlying their wellbeing are *having, loving and being*. *Doing* forms part of being. In turn, Tulla and Tuuli (2015) consider *Doing* as the fourth, independent pillar of the need-based theory. Both Allardt (1993) and Tuulla and Tuuli rely on the basic division by Allardt and Uusitalo (1972, p. 11) into material – non-material needs, and interpersonal – intrapersonal ones.

An attempt at measuring the extrinsic and intrinsic factors in human wellbeing is also undertaken by the Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis developed by Cummins and Nistico (2002). Homeostasis takes place at an abstract level. It can be illustrated by a classic question *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?* Comparing oneself to others is essential here. Thus, the respondent can feel better,

worse, wealthier or more decent only by comparing their situation with the situation of other individuals. The theory of subjective wellbeing homeostasis opened the call for new – place focused – researches, having in mind how people feel comparing with others. The theory will be of a high utility in sustainable development research, especially in regard to sustainable tourism. The theory of subjective wellbeing homeostasis proposes that: *in a manner analogous to the homeostatic maintenance of blood pressure or temperature, subjective wellbeing is actively controlled and maintained by a set of psychological devices that function under the control of personality. The operation of these devices is most evident at the level of general, personal wellbeing* (Cummins et al., 2003, p. 162).

Chambers (1997) introduced the term of *responsible wellbeing* (RW) in order to depict the impact of an individual on the sustainable development. As such RW allows individual perspective, and agrees that this perspective is rooted in cultural and social context. Equity and sustainability are the two most important elements of RW. However, they are not understood as limitations, but rather as appreciation of the environment, other people, and the feeling of responsibility for the future of Earth. In turn they increase each individual's self-esteem and enhance their SWB.

In nearly all concepts of wellbeing the perspective of affluent developed countries is predominant. Determining the components of wellbeing based solely on the western world perspective as generally applicable throughout the globe, is more and more often criticized by people who acquired experience from research carried out in developing countries (White, 2009; Copestake, Campfield, 2009).

The results of research by a group of scientists exploring Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) indicate that factors having influence on SWB are much differentiated and largely determined by the cultural context. Wellbeing will be perceived differently by an inhabitant of Western Europe than by an Egyptian or a Pakistani. It is emphasized that wellbeing dimensions are not easy to capture as they are always context-oriented. The strongest differences occur between developed countries where material status is very important and developing countries where good life is understood as other people's respect, family happiness or believing in God (White, 2009). S. White (2009, p. 4) proposes two separate schemes of wellbeing:

*doing well* → *feeling good*, for western communities, and

*doing good* → *feeling well*, for the so-called developing countries.

These schemes are very significant in relation to sustainable tourism.

### Wellbeing versus application policies

Since Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) administrative measures concerning wellbeing have been obligatory for many countries, including the member states of the European Union that were obligated to develop relevant strategies.

In regard to application policies at national & regional level, an adequate understanding is supposed to be based on MA (2005) guidelines. In order to measure human wellbeing, the MA uses combined five dimensions indicators such:

- 1) *Basic material for a good life* (economic)
- 2) *Health* (medical)
- 3) *Good social relations* (social)
- 4) *Security* (social and political)
- 5) *Freedom of choice and action* (social and political).

Poverty is considered to be an extreme deprivation of wellbeing.

The findings of MA (2005) led to the *revised* interpretation of sustainable development and activities whose name includes a *sustainable* component. For example, the World Tourism Organization among its seventeen new priorities of sustainable tourism developed in 2016 in the first place mentions *no poverty* and *zero hunger* in response to the first guideline of MA – *basic material for a good life*. Other pillars of sustainable tourism are *peace, justice and strong institutions* (that is security).

According to the MA perspective (2005), wellbeing is a very holistic term comprising economic, medical and political components. Despite this, the lack of agreement in the theoretical framework in academic level, results in the disorder of national application policies. Same as academic literature, particular national policies are mostly looking only at some aspects of wellbeing (like health or welfare) and in consequence, giving responsibilities for the ministries corresponding for chosen, selected understanding, and neglecting all others ([www.tobewell.eu](http://www.tobewell.eu)).<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, when MA was introduced in many EU countries it became distorted, because the health factor evolved into the sole element of wellbeing; hence, all other characteristics were lost. Such an approach is visible in national policies around Europe especially in those countries where English is not a native language and *wellbeing* was first translated into national languages before applying any solutions. As a consequence, domestic healthcare institutions deal with wellbeing understood mainly as absence of illnesses ([www.tobewell.eu](http://www.tobewell.eu)).

Even in English speaking countries the wellbeing is often understood on purely economic terms, from medical/ health point of view or in socio-psychological way (as needs fulfilment or happiness). When going to translation to other languages, the term be-

informed policies). A meta-analysis, comparing application policies of participating countries will be published in an individual article.

<sup>2</sup> The statement is based on comparative countries research done in a frame of COST project Tourism, Wellbeing and Ecosystem Services, working group 4 (Toward research

comes even more inexact and confusing, exposing some aspects of wellbeing only and rejecting all others. An example of this can be *wellness*. While in English literature wellness is always related to the wider understanding of wellbeing, in most of European countries it gained a kind of *independent life*, being mostly related to SPA, luxury hotels and beauty treatments, not with spiritual life, happiness or welfare. An example for this can be the literature in Polish. From 300 hundreds reviewed articles containing the term of *wellness* in the title, 76 % is automatically joined with SPA (SPA & wellness) and all of them describe different activities in a frame of SPA or health product (Dłużewska, 2016b).

By the same token, wellbeing is studied in a similar way in relation to tourism. They are connected by the concept of ecosystem services or cultural ecosystem services. Unfortunately, the subject matter is studied by academics not specializing in tourism; hence, there are major interpretation gaps, e.g., activities that do not constitute basic elements of tourism are often listed as such (Dłużewska, 2016a).

The term *wellbeing* has also been incorporated in mass culture. Here, it is understood as goodness, happiness, feeling that life makes sense etc. Once it was fashionable to be *eco* or *fit* (the generated behaviour was not always related to the main ideology of these concepts), and now the terms *being well* or *wellness* have become popular.

## Conclusions

Undoubtedly, wellbeing is a complex term. Numerous discussions on multiple fora of various scientific disciplines confirm the complexity and multilayers of the term. To some authors wellbeing is a concept of meaning that can be never defined.

It is very difficult to determine the components of wellbeing. In addition, it must be remembered that even when indicators are defined, significant challenges still remain to be researched.

Beyond any doubt, narrowing this term in any way, either with regard to adopting the perspective of a scientific discipline or only the wealthy western countries, leads to numerous misrepresentations and abuses. Wellbeing must be perceived in very broad terms. It requires the liaison of multiple disciplines: economy, psychology, cultural anthropology and – without any doubt – natural environmental sciences. We cannot talk about a policy to foster the wellbeing of individuals when natural environment is not given due care. Multiple authors (cf. Allardt, 1993; Prescott, 2001; Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2013; Tuula, & Tuuli, 2015) notice the need to research wellbeing holistically, to include the state of natural environment related to adequate ecosystem services.

To improve the understanding of wellbeing same as with cultural ecosystem services the interdisciplinary approaches are needed. We should take into account the dynamic nature of human – environment

interactions, possible trade-offs and synergies between given ecosystem services and human wellbeing. Following Carpenter et al. (2009) and Prescott (2001) quantification of trade-offs among ecosystem services and their interactions with human wellbeing are among the most persistent areas for research.

Tuula and Tuuli, (2015) talking about links between wellbeing and sustainable development state that *wellbeing is something that all humans recognize and wish to attain in their lives. Wellbeing is always related to the fulfilment of needs, and to say that something is needed implies an end that is considered good* (p. 170). They argue that the wellbeing and sustainability must be seen, researched and applied jointly.

Wellbeing, just like sustainable tourism, has been used in abundance in administrative policies of various levels. However, it must be emphasized that in application policies the only adopted perspective is the perspective of wealthy western countries.

Western world standpoint dominated the understanding of wellbeing and its constituents in relation to the whole globe; however, this approach was already challenged by researches who conduct studies in developing countries (White, 2009; Copestake, Campfield, 2009). As already told, WeD indicates that factors influencing SWB are quite diverse and they depend on the cultural context to a large extent. Wellbeing will be perceived in a completely different fashion by a citizen of West Europe, by an Egyptian, or by a Pakistani. It is stressed that wellbeing dimensions are not easy to capture as they are always context-oriented.

This seems to be tremendous abuse of power by the rich countries, which *know* better what is good for poor and uneducated masses populating the Earth. This negative impact caused by applying only the Western perspective is stressed by numerous researches, e.g., WeD group, who conduct studies in developing countries.

To conclude – the main gaps in both scientific research and application activities regarding wellbeing are the lack of an interdisciplinary approach and attempts at applying the western perspective to the whole world.

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