**PANELS AND ABSTRACTS**

MORNING

**Policy (I)** (Reception Room B)

*Chair: Karen Scott (Newcastle University)*

*Saamah Abdallah (New Economics Foundation) - Subjective wellbeing: A force for radical change?*

The idea that wellbeing and subjective wellbeing (SWB) evidence can play a role in policy and decision-making is one that has been championed by a wide range of actors, from academics such as economist Lord Layard (e.g. Layard, 2005) and psychologists Ed Diener and Martin Seligman (2004) , to community groups such as Happy City in Bristol and Sustainable Seattle, to organisations such as the OECD (2013), to right-wing politicians such as Nicholas Sarkozy (Stiglitz et al., 2009) and David Cameron (2010), to degrowth activists (D’Alisa et al., 2014), to ourselves at the New Economics Foundation (e.g. Michaelson et al., 2009).

The aims of these multiple actors are diverse. In BRAINPOoL, an EU-funded project exploring how the use of alternative indicators such as SWB indicators could be accelerated, we explored the multiple motivations of their proponents. Amongst them, we found: a new tool for aiding detailed policy decisions, a tool for increasing democratic engagement, a tool for raising the profile of mental health, and indeed, a way to overturn orthodox economic thinking (Hak *et al*., 2012). With so many hopes pinned on SWB, the question is whether it can satisfy any of them, and if so which?

We at NEF argue that SWB can indeed be a force for radical change and contribute to overturning orthodox economic thinking. We will explore three potential modus operandi for this transformation, based on Boulanger’s three models of how indicators in general influence policy – rational-positivist, discursive-constructivist, and strategic-political (Boulanger, 2007). We conclude that the discursive-constructivist model is most likely to lead to SWB playing a radical role in policy, but note the importance of the other two models. To that end, we also demonstrate how a rational-positivist consideration of SWB evidence points to a radical transformation of politics, to which most objective measures of wellbeing or progress do not.

*Charles Seaford (World Future Council and formerly New Economics Foundation) - Is wellbeing a useful concept for progressives?*

There are, broadly, three positions on economic and social change taken by commentators and politicians: first that greater equality and sustainability are priorities and require serious change to our economic and social system, second that greater equality and sustainability are priorities but do not require serious change – or in any case only incremental change is possible, and third, that greater equality and sustainability may or may not be desirable but are not priorities, and change should be designed to make markets work more effectively. This paper is about whether and how the concept of wellbeing is useful to those arguing for serious change, and is based on almost five years’ experience as head of the Centre for Wellbeing at the New Economics Foundation.

The potential value of wellbeing as a concept is not as a rhetorical device, designed to rally support. In this respect it has been totally ineffective, and in any case there are plenty of alternatives available (fairness, decent work, living standards and so on). It is rather as a replacement to ‘choice’ which plays a fundamental role in neo-classical economics. It thus creates a standard by which market outcomes can be judged in a process that does not require the identification of specific market failures. By the same token it dethrones consumption, prioritised over other human activity in traditional economic policy making, while the evidence about what drives wellbeing opens the way to more balanced policy that makes equity and sustainability easier to achieve. However the concept and the evidence do not tell us what to do: an effective theory of political economy to replace that in practice driving domestic and international politics still needs to be developed.

*Tim Taylor (University of Leeds) - The proper role for well-being in public policy*

Whilst some commentators argue (or assume) that governments should seek to maximise well-being (or happiness), others reject this view. The objections fall into three main categories:

* *ethical/ideological objections,* citing potential conflicts with other values such as autonomy or human rights, or the claim that promoting well-being is not a proper role for government.
* *conceptual/technical worries* about the definition of well-being, the idea of aggregate well-being, and the prospects of measuring these things meaningfully and reliably, given the shortcomings of the various methodologies and the existence of incentives to manipulate or distort data.
* *feasibility concerns*about whether, in practice, governments can be relied upon to promote well-being and whether their intervention is likely to be successful in doing so.

This paper discusses the various objections and assesses their force. It concludes that they do not constitute a compelling case against the proposition that governments should seek to promote well-being, but highlight real issues concerning *how* they should do so, and how well-being should be measured.

In particular, well-being should not be treated as a ‘master value’ to be maximised, but as a legitimate consideration bearing upon the direction of policy and the evaluation of its impact, that may, however, need to be balanced against other values. Issues concerning the definition and measurement of well-being would best be addressed by a broadly-based, theory neutral approach, and by insulating the measurement of well-being as far as possible from the political process

**National developments (**Committee Room 2)

*Chair: Allister McGregor (University of Sussex)*

*Daniela Bressa Florentin (University of Bath) - The politics of Buen Vivir: between policies and life*

Since the beginning of the 21st century the indigenous ethos *Buen Vivir* (life to the fullest) has obtained a distinct symbolic, political and also legal status in Latin America. In brief, it posits a life-project to live in harmony both with others and with nature. In 2008 *Buen Vivir* was integrated into the national constitution of Ecuador as a general guiding principle and heralded as a new model of development. I argue that this inclusion has been the result of the convergence of two processes: (i) the cumulative struggles of highly organised indigenous social movements not only but particularly since the 1990s against the implementation of neoliberal policies; and (ii) the emergence of new political leaders and a popular centre-left government implementing public policies through state institutions, representing a rupture with the politics that dominated most of this nation’s history. However, the above mentioned processes have in themselves resulted in increasing tensions and contradictions opening a new phase of contentious politics (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) in Ecuador. I argue in this paper that what is at stake is the redefinition of areas of inclusion and exclusion, liberation and domination in the construction of social, political and economic relationships.

*Anders Hayden (Dalhousie University, Canada) - Trying to change the dominant economic narrative through alternative wellbeing indicators: the Canadian experience*

The well-known limitations of Gross Domestic Product have led to a proliferation of efforts around the world to introduce new measures of progress and wellbeing. Some advocates of alternative indicators argue that they are key to shifting societal priorities away from economic growth and toward sustainability, equity, and well-being. Others have a less expansive, reformist vision, seeing alternative indicators as a tool for better policy making without challenging the growth paradigm. Is there any evidence to date that alternative indicators have shaped policy and public priorities in ways that live up to their supporters’ expectations? What are the obstacles to fulfilling those expectations? What conditions and further changes are needed to achieve progress toward each of these visions for alternative indicators? Our paper examines these questions based on the experience in Canada, which has been among the leading nations in academic and NGO work on alternative indicators, resulting in a new Canadian Index of Well-Being and similar provincial-level measures. The paper draws on interviews with researchers, NGO leaders, public-sector officials, and former government leaders, along with analysis of relevant documents, to trace the evolution and impact of alternative indicators. It will be argued that in Canada, which has lacked high-level political support for new indicators and the institutionalized means to translate new statistical measures into alternative policies and priorities, the impact has been minimal to date. The Canadian case also suggests that the use of new socio-economic indicators is best seen as one product of political efforts and social movement struggles to bring other values into decision making, rather than as the transformative force that will cause a change in societal priorities.

*Susan Hodgett (Ulster University) and Peter Doran (Queens University Belfast) - Boosting capabilities: reflections on well-being in a post conflict society.*

This paper will explore a unique undertaking in Northern Ireland to measure well-being. It will outline the development of local engagement involving a series of seminars sponsored by the Carnegie Trust UK over 2014. The process involved a high level roundtable of governmental, civil society, private sector and academic stakeholders ground breaking in Northern Ireland as the province moves to transform its thinking into the future. The paper will explore the rationale behind measuring well-being in Northern Ireland and how inspiration was taken from the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. As well the paper will outline the development of the seminar series as part of a necessary process of public reasoning and deliberative democracy. It will illustrate also the useful role the Capability Approach may play in assisting processes of informed discussion in a post conflict context; paying special attention to how theory might inform practice in the pursuit of human flourishing.

**Concept and measurement (I)** Committee Room 3

*Chair: Aki Tsuchiya (University of Sheffield)*

*Paul Allin (Imperial College London and ex Office for National Statistics) - Official statistics on wellbeing: leading the change or just ‘nice to have’?*

In 2010 the UK government adopted a policy to measure wellbeing. This has been put into effect through the measures of national wellbeing developed and published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). We note that the ONS work is acting as an exemplar for measurement, including by embracing survey measures of personal wellbeing and using innovative, web-based outputs. However, this is only one of over 200 community, country-wide and international, official initiatives to measure wellbeing and progress in ways that go beyond just focusing on the economy. Moreover, wider measures are not new: some have been produced for over 40 years, spawned in the social indicators movement or as sustainable development indicators.

We explore the role of official statistics, especially the notion of meeting user requirements, a core feature of the UN’s fundamental principles of official statistics. Is this about official statisticians responding to clearly stated political and policy needs, or is there also a need for official statisticians to set out how wider measures could be used, and not just in government but also by businesses, civil society, the media and the public? We consider whether the legacy of the social indicators movement is essentially a set of ‘nice to have’ statistics and alternative measures. If so, this suggests that current initiatives could merely refresh and update those measures, rather than leading to a paradigm shift in how we assess wellbeing and progress and, crucially, act in light of the wider measures.

*Marco Boffo, Andrew Brown, and David Spencer (all University of Leeds) - Dissatisfaction with happiness research: from subjective well-being to systems of provision*

This article takes a critical stance towards the rise of happiness research and advocates an alternative needs-based approach to well-being developed through the notion of 'systems of provision', a notion drawn from the political economy tradition. The article argues that happiness research and happiness indicators can be potentially regressive in their nature and implications. They fail to capture vital aspects of the human experience – well-being is more than just a positive feeling, it is also about meeting vital human needs. Whether and to what degree these needs are being met cannot be read-off from a survey of peoples’ subjective feelings, but rather warrants a deeper enquiry into the circumstances and conditions of social individuals, in particular the systems of provision that sustain people's lives. The paper draws out conceptual and methodological failings in happiness research and happiness based policy discourse. It also highlights the limits to the practical application of happiness research via the examination of the trend in subjective well-being measures during the recent global crisis. The fact that reported happiness does not tend to fall and often rises in times of crisis is used to highlight the problems in using subjective well-being data as a proxy measure of peoples' well-being during crisis as well as non-crisis times. Moving beyond subjective well-being, the paper argues that the systems of provision approach can advance and concretely apply a different view of well-being that captures the importance of human needs and their provisioning (or not) in society. Here the paper draws on and develops ideas found in the broader political economy tradition. The value and application of a needs-based systems of provision view of well-being is set out in the paper.

*Susan Oman (University of Manchester) - ‘Free-text’ and ‘forced-choices’: ‘What matters to who about measuring national well-being?’*

The UK’s Office for National Statistics is one of many national government agencies looking to decipher and track national well-being as an alternative measure of progress. Its 2010 *Measuring National Well-being: What Matters to You?* debate accomplished 34,000 responses in what might be considered a successful exercise of political participation. The ONS stated that these responses would inform the, then, forthcoming well-being indicators. I will argue that the outcomes and outputs of the debate indicate that the ONS overlooked opportunities to understand the meaning of well-being presented in certain forms of participation which has implications for well-being indicators as the basis for policy-judgements or evaluations.

Building on current research which questions 'what matters' for measuring well-being, I return to 6,787 responses in the consultation’s ‘free-text’ fields named 'Other'. These reflections on the meaning of well-being were written by those who elected to describe ‘What matters to you?’ in their own words, rejecting what one participant describe as the ‘forced choices’ of ONS-prescribed tick-boxes. I conceptualise the distinctive space of the ‘free-text’ field in opening dialogue between participants to conceive the ‘grand(er) narratives’ of national debate and well-being. I argue that the ‘participatory spirit’ (Kroll 2012) of the debate was compromised by methodological oversights, to the detriment of the Measuring National Well-being programme as a political and social science project to understand and improve the well-being of all.

AFTERNOON

**Policy (II)** Reception Room B

*Chair: Paul Allin (Imperial College London)*

*John Brazier and Tessa Peasgood (University of Sheffield) - Is well-being a legitimate basis for policy judgements or evaluations in health care?*

There are compelling reasons to consider to the use of well-being as an outcome to evaluate cost-effectiveness of health care interventions. Health care interventions can impact on aspects of life for both patients and their carers that extend beyond health – such as relationships or participating in pleasurable activities. A focus on a health may overlook these important consequences. Furthermore, the integration of health and social care budgets requires evaluations which can compare benefits across both health and social care avoiding any double counting which could arise from separately measuring health and well-being benefits.

However, a large barrier to the use of well-being measures to evaluate health care interventions is the lack of sensitivity of WB measures to changes in health states. We explore this lack of sensitivity through analysis of 4 UK datasets containing both currently used health measures and well-being measures (including WEMWBS, the capabilities measure ICECAP, life satisfaction and the other ONS core WB question).

The use of well-being measures to evaluate health care also needs to be understood within the context of a publically funded health care system. The delivery of tax-funded care free at the point of use has arisen both from classic market failure caused by uncertainty and asymmetry of information between patients and health care providers and the special status society attributes to health and health care. We reflect on how both these aspects frame the debate on possible moves to incorporate well-being into health care evaluation.

*Kathryn Ecclestone (University of Sheffield) - From national measures to everyday assessments: a critical evaluation of the evidence base for wellbeing interventions in educational settings*

A consensus that it is desirable and necessary to develop people’s wellbeing permeates social policy settings. Education in particular has become a key site for a growing array of instruments and associated interventions that aim to teach an expanding list of psychological and emotional dispositions, attitudes and ‘skills’ claimed to comprise wellbeing. Promoted by the previous Labour government, this skills-based approach enabled the Conservative-led Coalition government to shift political emphasis from wellbeing to positive mental health and ‘character development’.

Using education settings as a focus, the paper reviews key characteristics and underlying claims for interventions that have emerged in the trajectory from national measures to everyday practice. It argues that diverse strands of psychology dominate policy, research and practice to compete in a growing market for intervention. Rooted in powerful images of psychologically and emotionally vulnerable human subjects, these developments elide wellbeing, mental health and character development. The paper argues that the theoretical and empirical evidence base for interventions and, in particular, for assessments of wellbeing is, at best, uncertain and, at worst, highly flawed. More debate about the implications of this would challenge the dominance of psychological approaches to wellbeing in education policy and practice.

*Toby Lowe (Newcastle University) - The performance (Management) of wellbeing*

This paper explores the problems inherent in using Wellbeing outcome measures as commissioning and performance management mechanisms for public policy. It unpicks the problems in the theory which underpins the use of outcome measures as tools for public policy performance, and uses these to reinterpret the evidence about the effectiveness of methodologies to measure wellbeing from a commissioning and performance management perspective. The paper explores two theoretical concerns: 1) Can wellbeing outcomes be measured? And 2) Can wellbeing outcomes be attributed?

It uses this theoretical understanding to cast new light on the evidence that has been generated concerning the implementation of outcomes-based commissioning and performance management. It will explore the problems of the way in which such performance management regimes are required to simply the world, and the way that this simplification leads to the creation of performance management for wellbeing as a game – the performance of performance management for wellbeing.

The nature of this game is then further explored – what are the rules? What are the cultures required to play it well? What impact does playing this game have on those who undertake the work, and what impact does it have on those whose wellbeing is the subject of policy concern?

*Louise Reardon (University of Leeds) - Quality of life and transport policy: lessons for the wellbeing agenda*

The idea that government should focus on wellbeing and use subjective wellbeing measures to aid the policy process and its outcomes is gaining traction in many countries and is on the verge of becoming a reality in the UK. One of the main reasons proponents of this agenda argue governments should play a role in wellbeing is because of the (now vast) body of evidence that suggests that there are many domains of activity that influence wellbeing and which government already plays a role in shaping in some way (Donovan and Halpern 2002). Subsequently there has been much made of the ways in which governments can use wellbeing evidence to make better policies that hopefully improve wellbeing (Diener et al 2009). However, there has been little reflection on how policy makers understand wellbeing, and how effective bringing wellbeing into decision-making processes could be. This paper aims to step into this void.

This paper aims to draw lessons for the wellbeing agenda by assessing the impact of its precursor (in policy terms) – ‘quality of life’ – on UK transport policy. The paper will analyse how the term was understood at national and local level, and in turn how it was used within local transport planning in two local authority areas. The paper will argue that ‘quality of life’ was powerful in terms of widening the perceived scope of transport policy in the eyes of local policy makers, but that rather than change current policy practice, the term was used to reinforce the existing status quo, which is largely tied up with the ‘ABC’ approach (Shove 2010) of trying to change attitudes, behaviour and choice. The paper reflects on the extent to which the UK government’s approach to wellbeing can be said to fit within this individual-centric policy paradigm and what the barriers to shaping transport policy may be as a result.

**International comparative studies (**Committee Room 2)

*Chair: Annie Austin (University of Manchester)*

*Donatella Alessandrini (University of Kent) and Suhraiya Jivraj (University of Kent) - Exploring well-being and Gross National Happiness in sustainable development policy making*

In this paper we reflect on the transnational discourse on national Well-Being and Happiness (WBH) which has gained international prominence with the 2012 UN Conference. Although studies on WBH have been on the agenda of international bodies for quite some time, we see the post-2007 proliferation and transnational convergence of well-being initiatives, particularly those aimed at measuring well-being through indicators, as potentially replacing the development discourse of the post-war period in terms of normative force and appeal. Aiming to unpack such normative appeal, we focus on three sites, the UK, Bhutan and Ecuador, and ask what well-being and happiness mean in each context. While common to the three sites appears to be a critique of growth as an end in itself, there are crucial differences in terms of both how Well-Being and Happiness are conceptualised, and the ways in which this understanding is able to affect policy-making and engender socio-economic change. At stake, we argue, is the appreciation of what the co-production between economic and non-economic spheres of life would generate. Our aim is to emphasise what the focus on convergence leaves out and what the turn to measurement says about the potential of well-being initiatives.

*Paul Anand (Open University) - Multi-dimensional wellbeing for the assessment of progress: evidence from the US and UK.*

The presentation draws significantly on recent analysis of a three country survey conducted with YOUGOV that provides the first full and direct operationalisation of the capability approach. The presentation outlines how ideas from Sen and Nussbaum are developed to create a unique database that measures what people are able to do, their activity involvement, their social resources (conversion factors), the ONS four measures of experience (life satisfaction, anxiety etc). We then focus on the analysis of these data to see what the drivers of wellbeing are and how it is distributed. In particular we show that men and women and whites and blacks dominant each other with respect to home, work and environment related capabilities differently in the US and UK. We show that the ability to plan ahead is related to both income and life satisfaction and that adding in data on what people are able to do adds dramatically the amount of variation in ‘happiness’ that can be explained. We also compare rankings of what people are to do and note that effective political competition, political cultural difference and different policy regimes appear to explain some of the more significant differences between the US and UK. We also look at deprivation and note that the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation are strongly related to externally driven capabilities but not to dimensions of wellbeing more closely related to the home or work. The paper concludes that our approach indicates that a full and direct operationalisation of the capabilities approach is feasible, that important ideas of Sen and Nussbaum can be combined in quality of life surveys, that analysis could help policy-makers shape and target policies to tackle deprivation but also facilitate human flourishing through education.

*Karen Scott (University of Newcastle, UK), Annick Masselot (Canterbury University, NZ), and Bronwyn Hayward (Canterbury University, NZ) - Skivers, strivers and thrivers: the impact of the shift from welfare to wellbeing on women in New Zealand and the United Kingdom*

An intensification of policy interest in the concept and measurement of wellbeing has recently occurred in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These wellbeing agendas have been promoted by central government in both countries at the same time as a drive to reform welfare systems. This paper examines the wellbeing agendas and welfare changes being implemented under The United Kingdom Coalition Government and New Zealand’s National Government. In both countries a combination of legislative tools and strategic policy directives have the potential to change how welfare and well-being are conceptualised, assessed and supported by government. This move from ‘a welfare to a wellbeing state’ (Dalziel and Saunders 2014: 132) is supported by a range of economic advocates who explain this as primarily a shift in responsibility for agency. Traditional welfare is focussed on provision (of housing, social support etc.) whereas, they argue, a progressive wellbeing state would be an enabler rather than a provider. This should result, it is assumed, in a state that supports the capabilities of individuals to choose their own good life. Cognisant of critiques of both wellbeing agendas and welfare reforms, the authors of this paper examine the relationship between these two strategic goals of government. Scrutinizing the actual and potential impact of welfare reforms on women in particular it is argued that far from developing the capability of citizens to live more independent lives, these reforms have the potential to incapacitate women, in particular mothers, by undermining the conditions which enable women to thrive, and framing their long term struggles in ways that obscure the lack of meaningful choice many women may face in their long term future.

**Concept and measurement (II)** Committee Room 3

*Chair: Susan Hodgett (Ulster University)*

*Peter Doran (Queens University, Belfast) - Paper: Towards a political economy of attention (Reclaiming the Mindful Commons)*

As advanced global capitalism – or capitalist realism – targets, perhaps above all else, the human capacity for attention, there are far-reaching implications for our well-being – psychologically, physically and spiritually, and ultimately for our global ecology. The paper will show that, in this consumer age, the underlying teachings of Buddhist mindfulness offer more than individual well-being at home and in the workplace, but also new sources of critical inquiry into our collective condition under the sway of consumer culture.

Advertising, the mass media, technological advances in social media and celebrity culture have come to mediate our popular self-understanding and how we relate to notions of self in a profound way. There is an increasing recognition that ‘attention deficit’ is the price individuals now pay for the colonization of attention under the neoliberal order, and their participation in this new ‘attention economy’. This paper will draw on rich Buddhist-inspired philosophical and intellectual inquiry that underpins the practice of mindfulness and attention to inform critical insights into the nature of the contemporary political economy, its construction and pursuit of human attention, and its implications for our well-being, collective resilience, and global ecology.

*John Haworth and Sandie McHugh (both University of Bolton) - Enjoyment and wellbeing*

A National Centre for What Works in Wellbeing is now being established

[www.whatworkswellbeing.org](http://www.whatworkswellbeing.org). Wellbeing has been viewed variously as happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment, contentment, engagement, fulfilment, resilience, and flourishing. Wellbeing is also viewed as a process, something we do together, and as sense making, rather than just a state of being. (Haworth and Hart eds 2007/12). Wellbeing and Politics are intimately interrelated. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) ([www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)) is developing new measures of national wellbeing. It has added four questions on happiness, satisfaction, anxiety, and worthwhile activities to its annual Integrated Household Survey.The pilot monthly Opinion Survey conducted in August 2011 by the ONS also included a measure of enjoyment, which showed wider variations than happiness in the sample. The paper will briefly review research into the role of enjoyment in personal wellbeing, and emphasise the importance of investigating this using a variety of methods in local, national and international studies. A collection of data in Bolton in 2014 provides information on the enjoyment scale and definitions of happiness of 489 residents. Enjoyment of life appears to contribute to healthier and more active old age, (Steptoe et al 2014) with significant implications for individuals and society. Research using the Experience Sampling Method (Siddiquee, Sixsmith, Lawthom and Haworth 2014) where participants were signalled on a mobile phone several times a day for seven days and took a photo of their activity and answered several questions at each signal, shows a significant association between enjoyment, happiness, interest and visual interest. It will be discussed in relation to the debate on everyday aesthetics and politics (eg Melchionne (2014), Cederstrom & Spicer 2015).

*Jules Evans (Queen Mary, University of London) - Beyond Liberalism?*

This paper will consider how the modern politics of well-being goes beyond 19th and 20th century conceptions of liberalism - particularly those of John Stuart Mill, Sir Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls - which suggests the state should not try to impose any general theory of the good life onto citizens, but should rather protect their 'negative freedom' to seek their own definition of the good. I will argue that the politics of well-being moves closer to an idea - found in Plato, Aristotle and later in Comte - that it is the proper function of the state to encourage positive freedom or flourishing in its citizens. But this raises problems for liberals: can government settle on one definition of the good life? And should it impose one definition onto the population of a multicultural society? We will look at particular examples, from the Office of National Statistics' definition of well-being to Bhutan's happiness measurements to the US Army's measurement of 'spiritual fitness', and how these definitions are often partial, incomplete and reductionist. And we will examine some attempts - notably by Martha Nussbaum - to create a politics of flourishing that fits with pluralism and multiculturalism.

*J Allister McGregor (Sussex University) - Human wellbeing: universal frameworks and Local realities: can they be reconciled?*

There has been a considerable upsurge in the number of initiatives to measure human wellbeing at national and international levels. Many of these initiatives draw on a range of universalist frameworks that suggest or propose what human wellbeing should be thought as consisting of. While this drive for ‘universalism’ is prominent there is also an important counter tendency in this global movement that sees human wellbeing thinking as a place to explore and express differences in cultural and social identities. Thus movements such as *vivir bien* in South America or Gross National Happiness in Bhutan are founded in and express distinctive cultural values. This paper will explore these divergent tendencies. It considers the role of different public policy and governance purposes in the tendencies towards universalism or localism in measuring initiatives. It uses the example of the OECD Better Lives Framework to explore the possibilities of reconciling the need for universal frameworks and more locally specified measurements of wellbeing at national and sub-national levels