**Wellbeing in Politics and Policy**

**Workshop organised by the Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy (CWiPP) and the Governance and Participation Research Group, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield.**

Wednesday 24 February 2016, 2.30-430, Room 2.16, Elmfield Building.

*The Politics and Policy of Wellbeing: Understanding the Rise and Significance of a New Agenda - Professor Ian Bache, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield*

The past decade has seen an explosion of governmental interest in the idea of wellbeing, not least in the UK, where David Cameron has suggested that ‘Improving our society’s sense of well-being is… the central political challenge of our time’. While in some respects this interest is new – marked by a proliferation of new measurement instruments, shifts in discourse and experimentation in policy – it has a long lineage. Debates on the ‘good life’ and how the state might contribute to this goal date back as least as far as the ancient Greeks. However, current interest is part of the second of ‘two waves’ of activity since the Second World War, both of which have centred on a critique of GDP as the dominant indicator of societal progress. In this context, this paper addresses two questions relating to this second wave:

1) How and why has the idea of wellbeing risen up the political agenda?

2) What are the policy implications of this rising interest in the idea of wellbeing?

The paper draws on a forthcoming book (with Louise Reardon) of the same title (Edward Elgar, 2016).

*Wellbeing and Environmental Agendas: Mutually Supportive or Cannibalising? - Oliver Zwirner, Visiting Researcher, University of Leeds – on leave from European Commission DG Environment*

Political initiatives to promote wellbeing such as “Beyond GDP” in the EU were intended to make the case that the state of the environment and a sustainable management of natural resources are indispensable conditions for human wellbeing that have to be better understood and measured. Framing the environmental agenda as a contribution to “the progress of societies” also fostered a significant rise of wellbeing as a topic in national and international politics and efforts of researchers and statistical offices to measure it, with the OECD, the EU and several of their member states driving it. However, an evaluation of the discourse and the measurement concepts from the past 20 years reveals that wellbeing has become a ‘stand-alone’ that increasingly side-lines environmental concerns.

This talk explores the interrelation of environmental and well-being agendas regarding politics and measurement, and how these dynamics tend to marginalise ‘green’ topics. An outlook is given on how both agendas might be reconciled again.

**Biographies**

Ian Bache is Co-Director of the Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy at the University of Sheffield. He is co-investigator of the Community Wellbeing Evidence Programme of the *What Works Centre for Wellbeing* (http://whatworkswellbeing.org/) launched in 2015 and was principal investigator and convenor of the ESRC seminar series on *The Politics of Wellbeing* 2013-15 (<http://politicsofwellbeing.group.shef.ac.uk/>). His recent publications include: *Multi-level Governance and Climate Change: Insights from Transport Policy*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015 (with I. Bartle, M. Flinders and G. Marsden).

Oliver Zwirner is a specialist in designing environmental and sustainability performance indicators, drawing from a broad range of experience in business (mainly the financial industry), research (e.g. the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research–UFZ) and policy. For the last 10 years he has worked at the European Commission, Environment Directorate-General on environmental and sustainable development indicators and measuring overall societal progress to complement and go beyond GDP. Oliver is on leave this year, which includes a visiting researcher position at the University of Leeds.