
'HOME NOT HOUSING'

**ENGAGING WITH
WELLBEING OUTCOMES**

FINAL REPORT

November 2014



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The images in the report are by Ian Watson and Douglas Robertson.

Acknowledgements

The work of the 'Home not housing' SUII wellbeing project was informed by a large and diverse group of participants who are listed at the end of this document (See Appendix 1). While not all participants attended all three workshop sessions a significant number did. Their input provided the raw material for the study and this report. We would therefore like to acknowledge our thanks to them all for giving so much personally to this study, for making it such an enjoyable experience and for so clearly illustrating the worth of this participative approach to new knowledge creation. We hope this record of that endeavour does justice to the work and efforts of our co-producers.

Thanks also to Jennifer Hoolachan for proof reading and commenting on the final report.

Last but by no means least, thanks also go to the Scottish Universities Insight Institute, Charlie Woods, Nicola Allan and Anne Logie for not only funding the project but also ensuring the range of events and their associated administration ran so smoothly.



SUMMARY

This project foregrounds individual understandings of home, neighbourhood and wellbeing. It does so in order to explore the many and varied ways individuals understand how their home, as well as the neighbourhood in which the home is located, contributes to their personal appreciation of wellbeing. To achieve this end an innovative 'knowledge mobilisation' approach was pursued which gave equal voice to all participants, through valuing the ideas and understandings they offered. Through utilising a series of carefully planned participatory exercises individuals were encouraged to share, discuss and debate these personal understandings, drawing from their knowledge, specialist skills, strengths and individual capacity. While most participants were drawn from professional backgrounds (embracing housing, planning, social work, public health, social care as well as design), it was their personal understandings of home, neighbourhood and wellbeing that were critical to this exercise. So those not possessing such professional baggage often found this to be to their advantage, given the levelling demanded through focusing primarily upon the personal. That said, trying to separate the professional from the personal often proved a challenging endeavour.

What emerged from this work was a different 'story' which offers a unique contribution to personal understandings of wellbeing. We had argued in proposing this work the notion of home 'could' be at the heart of an emerging common vocabulary that helps to enhance public understanding of individual and community wellbeing. We now argue it 'should' be at the heart of that debate. The synthesis of diverse and varied interpretations of home offered by this project should help frame a public understanding of wellbeing, given that personal understandings of the home and neighbourhood are critical to an individual's construction of what exactly constitutes wellbeing. So if wellbeing measures are to become core to the Scottish Government outcomes focused National Performance Framework (NPF), then the home and its neighbourhood need to be core to that measurement exercise. Adopting such an approach would, in turn, alter the architecture of current public policy given the way home and neighbourhood contribute to achieving personal wellbeing.



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PROJECT CONTEXT

One of the two Scottish Universities Insight Institute funding calls for 2013-14 was for a series of projects that focused on expanding the understanding, measurement and promotion of wellbeing. With the Scottish Government setting in place a National Performance Framework in 2007, entitled 'Scotland Performs', there has been a growing official interest in the development of outcome measures to support this public policy innovation. Paralleling this specific Scottish public policy development there has been a growing wider public interest in both the notion of wellbeing and its measurement. Part of the thinking behind this call was to explore how wellbeing might contribute to the refinement of outcome measures. This ambition helps explain why the call was supported by the Scottish Government, Scotland's Futures Forum, Carnegie UK Trust, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Audit Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, David Hume Institute, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and Oxfam Scotland, given each had a stated interest in the role wellbeing measures could have in terms of developing outcome measures of public policy.

The six funded programmes, of which this was one, sought to address key issues around social, environmental and economic wellbeing with the aim of making a contribution to the development of policy and practice in Scotland and elsewhere. For further details of the programme and the other funded projects are available at: <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Wellbeing2014.aspx>

NEW KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDINGS

Methods

'Home not housing' was a knowledge mobilisation exercise that sought to explore what constitutes our shared understandings of home, neighbourhood and wellbeing. Through holding three participatory 'ideas workshops' (in May, July and October 2014) we attempted to first pin down a common vocabulary by involving a wide ranging, self-selecting group of participants each of whom brought their own personal and, in certain



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cases, professional understandings to the exercise. Having captured such understandings, the group sought to examine the linkages between the terms, in order to better understand and appreciate the role home and neighbourhood plays in promoting personal and societal wellbeing. Our third, and final workshop, explored the Scottish Government's NPF to consider whether this adequately captured the wellbeing contribution offered by both home and neighbourhood.

The three workshops were supported through external academic benchmarking, via presentations at both the Housing Studies Association and European Network of Housing Researchers conferences in 2014. Our thinking was also developed through hosting a structured plenary session on 'Home' at the later event, involving Irene Cieraad, Delft Technical University and Vanessa May, University of Manchester (see <http://www.researchunbound.org.uk/home-not-housing/third-workshop/european-network-of-housing-researchers/>).

In common with the other four projects supported by the SUII Wellbeing programme <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Wellbeing2014.asp> we actively sought to develop cross-sectoral perspectives on wellbeing, in our case through embracing participatory methods that endeavoured to treat each participant's knowledge and contribution as equally valid, and of equal weight. To better understand the thinking and approach pursued by the group in this undertaking this exercise visit the projects website: <http://www.researchunbound.org.uk/home-not-housing/>

Results

Two key insights emerged from these deliberations:

Connecting home, neighbourhood and wellbeing

Understandings of 'home' were complex and multi-dimensional, hardly surprising given the personal and life-course dynamics brought to bear when exploring such concepts. For most home was an existing entity, but for a few it was something they had left or lost. It typically was focused on one place, but for some it was many sites, as in the case of a student who shared a flat with her boyfriend, but also considered her parent's house and his parents' place as home. For others home was much larger in scale; a country from which they had migrated from, not the house where they now resided. It was also evident that there is a part real, and part imagined, quality to 'home'.



This draws on nostalgic as well as embodied understandings, which again are both culturally and personally constructed. Thus for some, home may not exist in a physical sense at all, but rather only in an emotional and relational way, expressed through a sense of 'feeling at home'. A slight note of caution should be introduced, given that there was a notable lack of voices from people who have negative experiences of home and neighbourhood. These voices were there but they were very much a minority, specific to one locality, and one traumatic experience. The participant selection method thus had its limitations.

That said, 'home' was found to be critical to personal and emotional support, given its place as a haven offering comfort, warmth, relaxation, nourishment, retreat, sanctuary as well as peace and quiet. While dimensions of ontological security, something foregrounded in academic literature, were evident in both safety and security these were far less prominent than the emotional, personal and family development aspects. Similarly, practical shelter, much embraced within housing policy debates, was also underplayed. 'Home' is thus deeply personal and highly emotional, and as such is critical to each individual's understanding of themselves and their quality of life.

The popular characterisation of wellbeing is as a trilogy: health, wealth and happiness. However, for our participants health and happiness were clearly further to the fore, with wealth considered less significant. This may partly reflect the relative prosperity of most



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participants, and supporting research, which shows that above a certain level of subsistence, additional wealth does not translate into additional levels of wellbeing¹. That said, having more people who had negative experiences of home and neighbourhood may have offered slightly differing observations around the health, wealth and happiness dimensions of wellbeing. The relative rankings, however, reflect the findings in the other SUII projects where participant attention was drawn to ends (health, happiness, purpose) rather than means (resources). What also emerged was the depth of material offered in respect of health, both physical and mental, with the homes role in meeting both self-fulfilment and self-development being disproportionate and thus enlightening. Security and safety featured, as did engagement with the natural environment, but again both were less pronounced than the personal understandings that constituted their understanding of wellbeing. Thus the interplay between home and wellbeing was clear to see, linked to it being conceptualised as a site of personal self-development. This relationship was also shown to be dynamic, with the potential to change significantly over the life course.

Neighbourhoods contribution to wellbeing was more contested, with much more negativity evidenced, often linked to the perceived lack of control individuals could exercise within this sphere. Here the interplay between the personal and communal or societal was more pronounced, which impacted on personal understandings of wellbeing. The quiet, safe, friendly and welcoming aspects of a good neighbourhood, often characterised by notions of tranquillity, nature and the rustic, almost rural, gave way to the realities presented within an urban context of noise, busyness, connectedness as well as a strong sense of anonymity. While at first glance this would suggest a rural (good) and urban (bad) split this was not the case. The quiet suburban could be viewed by residents as respectable but socially distant, whereas the urban noise and busyness was for many a great attraction. Particular tense feelings of unrest, division, unconnected or disconnectedness, also emerged, as did the perceived loss or denial of privacy. So rather than complementing wellbeing, the physical and social reality within one specific neighbourhood, for certain people, acted to undermine it, something eloquently voiced by participants who had long endured what they considered a detrimental regeneration project. Thompson (2001) documented for Chicago neighbourhoods the lasting trauma and social implications, in terms of anti-

¹ This was first identified by Richard Easterlin and is referred to as the 'Easterlin Paradox'. Although higher incomes do correlate with higher levels of happiness, over the long-term increased income does not correlate with increased happiness (Easterlin 1974).



social and violent behaviour that may result from a failure to understand the subjective meaning of place and its socio-relational characteristics.

The significance of social relationships, connections, engagement, plus having voice and some degree of control all featured within these discussions which challenged the role that community played in being able to create, manage and adjudicate peoples personal relationships with place, and its crucial social relations. Thus the interplay of personal understandings of both home and neighbourhood impact greatly on their personal understandings and experiences of wellbeing. Home is clearly deeply personal. Neighbourhood proved to be that bit more nuanced. For the majority their personal wellbeing was enhanced by their neighbourhood, for others wellbeing was challenged, and the dynamics of change meant there was a temporal dimension operating here, both in terms of the place and the residents. Some over time found themselves out of place, and this challenged their wellbeing.

Wellbeing itself thus emerged as a nuanced entity. This reflects developments within its broader study, which suggest the concept of wellbeing should not be seen only as synonymous with happiness. Keyes (2002), Seligman (2001) and others have helpfully introduced the concept of human flourishing as a socio-relational concept. Human flourishing is not a disposition, but rather a multi-faceted process that involves existential (meaning), emotional (feelings), social (relationships) and practical elements (tangible achievements). It is thus not reducible to a simplistic indicator or marker. In



terms of home, flourishing is intricately linked to personal biography, social connections, sense of purpose, contentment and sense of place and belonging. Each of these themes chimes strongly with the core findings emerging from the workshop sessions. As participants noted such personalised constructions of home cannot be achieved merely through the provision of housing in the sense of shelter, providing the roof over your head, nor through the functional or material conditions of housing alone. Finally, and reinforcing the importance of the personal and temporal, what we consider and accept as home does alter and change over time. People may experience a sense of homelessness and dislocation when forced to relocate to a new environment, such as a care home. They lose their meaningful life space, social relationships and that familiar environment, thus experience a sense of loss of home and homeliness.

Measuring home, neighbourhood and wellbeing

The proposed evolution of the NPF through introducing wellbeing measures, which is about to go out to consultation, was felt by participants to offer an opportunity to change the template upon which public policy is currently structured and organised. The on-going refinement of the NPF is part of what has been described as the 'emerging Scottish model' of policy-making. It is informed by four key principles outlined in the Christie Commission Report (2011) on the future delivery of public services:

- Reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services through involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.
- Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.
- Expenditure on the public must prioritise services which prevent negative outcomes from arising
- The whole system of public services – public, third and private sectors – must become more efficient by reducing duplication and sharing services wherever possible.

The emerging model thus focuses on outcomes (what is actually being achieved), not on inputs (how much money has been spent on, say housing) or outputs (the actual number of houses built). Although there is not as yet an agreed definition of what constitutes specific outcomes, it is clear that wellbeing, along with capabilities and happiness, lies at its heart.



As illustration of the growing strength and importance of the emerging wellbeing agenda the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work have recently agreed a new definition for social work:

'The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.' (IFSW and IASSW, 2012).

The focus on wellbeing is significant as an indicator of change, particularly as social work exists to support real-life improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of the people and communities throughout Scotland.

In examining the housing measures employed within the NPF, the group concluded that they currently reflect the remnants of previous administrative arrangements and associated budgets, which were governed by inputs and outputs. This was felt to largely explain the disconnect between the ambition set by the measure and the limitations evident in the actual selected indicators. The validity of all the current housing indicators was thus questioned, in that the indicator employed could not satisfactorily provide validity for the selected measure.

So developing an appropriate suite of outcome measures and indicators that embraced personal understandings of wellbeing was then explored. This could be achieved through a deeper interrogation of the Scottish Household Survey, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12) and Oxfam's Humankind

Index (Dunlop *et al*, 2012). That said, the contribution of home and neighbourhood to personal and societal wellbeing should not be ghettoised within the narrow constraints of existing housing policy indicators and measures, for doing so would shade their wider wellbeing contributions. This is always a danger when wellbeing is primarily viewed through the narrow health lens.

Further, there was felt to be an issue of scale, in that many measures and indicators are national, thus fail to furnish a more localised operational insight. Given the critical



personal dimensions revealed by this exploration of wellbeing, more of the focus needs to be accorded at the individual and household scale. While a great deal of social survey data is collected, offering potentially useful measures, the actual scale of measurement is still problematic, because we rarely survey at a geographic scale small enough to be meaningful to local authorities, let alone local communities. That said, existing tried and tested questions may provide a starting point for feeding into such local strategies or surveys, and importantly such benchmark data is already in the public domain and freely available. This represents an important area for future participatory research work.

To provide a tangible example, the Scottish Household Survey (2008/9 wave) contains a suite of questions around good and bad perceptions and qualities of home and neighbourhood, which address the key themes to emerge from our workshops. These include aspects of safety, security and privacy; quality and accessibility of local facilities and amenities; relationships with neighbours/others in the community and closeness to family/friends; sense of community, belonging or isolation; availability of green space, quality of neighbourhood and so on.

It would also be helpful to make a clear distinction between the characteristics which contribute to, or impact upon wellbeing, namely the qualities and conditions of housing and neighbourhood, and the assessment of subjective wellbeing itself, such as measures of self-esteem, purposefulness and control, again which clearly emerged from the workshop sessions. Much of what the NPF captures are the former; the outcomes that impact on wellbeing. There is no measure of subjective wellbeing itself. As noted earlier, this should be more than just an outcome measure of satisfaction, or happiness overall, but needs to be more nuanced in order to understand what specific components lead to a satisfied outcome. Useful benchmarks here would be the GHQ12, or the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) which asks about feeling useful, confident, being able to deal with problems, capable of making decisions, and feeling loved. This notion of wellbeing which so clearly emerged from our workshops aligns with a 'eudaimonic' perspective of subjective wellbeing, where the focus is on meaning and self-realisation and the extent to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Defining wellbeing has parallels with the definition of obscenity offered by Potter Stewart, a leading American Judge half a century ago. Obscenity was difficult to describe, he said, but 'I know it when I see it': so too for wellbeing. But, as with other



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aspects of the emerging Scottish model, definitions and understandings are emerging not through legalistic or academic endeavours but through discussion, deliberation and the emerging of shared understandings. This project offers an illustration as to how this can be achieved. The crucial point here is the need to develop understandings – plural. There may be some common understanding of wellbeing that we can all share, which take us into debates on human rights and the different generations of rights, but as our deliberations and debates revealed there will be differences reflected amongst different individuals residing within different neighbourhoods. Achieving a balance between uniformity and diversity represents a major challenge for the entire wellbeing agenda. That said, one of the key weaknesses of much public policy-making to date has been a tendency to work within professionally constructed silos, each of which determines what is important to them and how this is defined and subsequently measured. The current NPF offers insight into that legacy, and its impact on current policy, namely the disconnect between silo specified measures and indicators, and the actual outcome achieved by that particular intervention.

What this project also brings to the fore is a questioning of the role expected of individuals, communities, civil society and government in relation to defining, delivering and measuring wellbeing outcomes. We also pose the question, what would success in wellbeing actually look like? The answers to these questions are, at present, elusive but that takes us back to the central importance of discussion and deliberation. To date the perceived success of too much public policy has been defined purely in terms of quantifiable input and output measures and these, in effect, are the current proxies for wellbeing. Discussions such as the ones underpinning this project on wellbeing now need to be incorporated into our way of thinking about policy and its societal impact.

This raises questions about how we define and then actually measure success, the role of open inclusive discussions and debates within policy-making, and its subsequent evaluation and measurement. This project piloted some of that thinking, in terms of policy thinking in relation to how home and neighbourhood impact on personal constructions of wellbeing. It also opened up thinking and discussion on measurement, but that aspect now needs more research and investigation.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Future challenges are thus two-fold. First, we need to properly consider the contribution home and neighbourhood make to the emergent wellbeing agenda, through fully appreciating the core health, happiness and self-development aspects revealed by this work. Secondly, we then need to select indicators that are capable of actually measuring this. To do this we need to break free from the constraints imposed by the current narrow conception of what housing contributes to wellbeing. In selecting appropriate measures from new sources, we should also ensure they are both accessible and manageable at a local scale. Adopting such new wellbeing measures has the potential to dramatically alter the way we do public policy. However, for that to happen, current public policy practice should not unduly determine the measures or emergent public policy thinking.

MAIN OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS

Outputs

The main outputs from the project to date are as follows:

National

The final report hosted on the SUII site will be posted on the IRISS website which connects a wide social services practitioner audience. There will also be a blog link from the Housing Studies Association and the same for Planning Aid for Scotland. It is also hoped that the Chartered Institute of Housing and Shelter Scotland will promote the work via annual conference presentations in 2015 and also via web links.

International

Academic papers detailing the work of the 'Home not housing' were presented at the Housing Studies Association Annual Conference, University of York, April 2014 and the European Network of Housing Researchers Conference, University of Edinburgh, July 2014. At the later event a plenary session was held exploring anthropological and sociological understandings of 'Home', details of all the above are provided in the Methods section (see Page 5 above). Two academic publications are planned from this work, one on the role of wellbeing in the development of public policy, which draws on



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the Scottish Government experience as an exemplar, while the other will examine and reflect on the knowledge mobilisation methods adopted in this work. Specific journals to be targeted for this output still have to be decided.

Impacts

Although the eventual range of possible knowledge exchange impacts arising from this project are difficult to gauge with confidence at this stage, there a number of initiatives either completed or planned which we can report at this stage. The main impacts planned for the project to date are thus as follows:

National

This report, along with the other four in the programme are specifically designed to feed into the Scottish Government's on-going consultation exercise on refining the outcome measures used in the NPF. As part of this work there is a stated interest in building in a suite of wellbeing measures. All projects teams are being interviewed by Scottish Government staff involved in this exercise on both the approach the projects adopted and their findings. This work is planned for early in 2015. There is also planned a Scottish Parliament exhibition and conference which will detail the work of all five projects. The exhibition is envisaged to tour throughout Scotland over the Spring and Summer of 2015. This public staging of the work, with supporting talks at the different venues, will help ensure the program as a whole has a wider impact with the Scottish public.

The research team also took part in a joint presentation, covering all five to projects funded as part of the SUII wellbeing programme, within the Scottish Parliament to all the programme supporters. It is also hoped that each of these funding partners will actively promote individual projects where they connect with their particular policy and practice interests, as well as the programme in its entirety.

A two-day post-graduate seminar entitled 'Housing in transition', hosted by the University of Stirling, and funded by them and the Housing Studies Association was held in November. This event, which attracted 30 participants, was a direct consequence of post-graduates meeting up at the 'Home not housing' events. A full report on this event can be found on the Housing Studies Association website and the possibility of producing an edited text drawing on some of the papers presented at this event is currently being explored: <http://housing-studies-association.org/hsa-bursaries/support-for-events-and-activities/>



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Further, following the session of 'Home not Housing' at the Housing Studies Association in Spring 2014, a workshop on Housing and Wellbeing is being held at the University of Reading in January 2015, supported by the events fund of the HSA. Speakers and participants include policy, practitioner and academic groups.

This project's final report also contributed to a joint submission from the project team to the Shelter Scotland Commission on Housing and Wellbeing consultation exercise. The Commission's stated aims are to shine a light on the role of satisfactory housing as a fundamental pre-requisite for wellbeing, and thus on the role of housing and housing policy plays in promoting wellbeing within wider society. Again this has a clear tie in with the ongoing review of the national objectives set out in the Scottish Government NPF. The projects submission thus offers tangible evidence of the core role home and neighbourhood make to personal wellbeing. Searle and Robertson were also invited to contribute to the Commission's workshops in Glasgow and Edinburgh respectively. In addition, Paul Bradley, researcher for the Commission, not only provided a contribution at the projects final workshop session but is one of the keynote speakers at the HSA Reading workshop mentioned above.

Finally, under this impact heading Searle is currently developing a new Undergraduate Honours module on 'Flourishing, wellbeing and welfare', within the Geography Department of Dundee University which will start in Spring 2016. The module will draw directly from the workshops methods in its teaching delivery, as well as present the 'Home not housing' findings as a case study.

International

What international impacts remain unclear at present, but given the acknowledged pioneering nature of the Scottish Government work in this area it is possible that other nations will be interested in this work, either individually or as a programme package.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

In conclusion the academic members of the project team are currently considering funding options to explore the potential utility that existing data sets, namely, the Scottish Household Survey, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, the General Health



Questionnaire and Oxfam's Humankind Index, may offer to the measurement of subjective wellbeing. The emerging bid will stress the importance and relevance of the cross disciplinary composition of the research team who worked on this project.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF COPRODUCTION PARTICIPANTS

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