

“Gender Equality and Quality of Life. Policy-Making in Times of New Gender Regimes” Summer school, August 30 – September 4, 2015, Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

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Keynote speech:

Privilege and stigma. Well-being through intersectionality lens

I am sure that the question: - what is the role of social sciences – came across the minds of everyone gathered here today. Is it a better understanding of the world around us (after Talcott Parsons) or showing better ways of living together (after Max Weber and Ernst Bloch)? Should social sciences contribute to social change and therefore enable societies to better organize their tangible and intangible resources to respond to the challenges and opportunities they face (Jacobs et al. 1997)? Finally, do we do enough in terms of research to learn from others, do we even reach them? Or should we be more involved? What methods should we choose?

Certainly, there is an obsession with validity, credibility and objectivity of research. As an economist myself, I know that we love small - or even big - mathematic formulas, charts, panel datasets etc. and although we know that objectivity does not exist and facts are socially constructed, we aspire. All social sciences aspire. The French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour has spent years in a laboratory to discover how facts are made and his works represent positive knowledge. We can blame philosophy of science for that. That is why we usually refer to statistics. But unreflective use of statistics can be dangerous. Does it mean that phenomena that cannot be measured are less scientific? E.g. how to measure affect in numbers? At the same time we acknowledge this significant contribution of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to humanities.

That reminds me of a statement that Gayatri Spivak, the author of a founding text of postcolonialism “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, made during her public lecture at the London School of Economics and Political Science in June, explaining her presence at the World Economic Forum in Geneva. I quote - “I go there to do fieldwork. To see, how useless I am” – end of quote. The way the economists interpret “development” by, among others, using impoverished statistics like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or creating unreflective economic toolkits for governments of the Global South is very arrogant and differs considerably from what ordinary people understand by this term. For them “development” means - more schools, hospitals, jobs, trees etc. along with un-doing the story of colonialism that imposed hierarchies, understood here as privileges and stigmas (the most obvious case being the caste system in India) and rights denial. For that we need a new kind of thoughtful social research that delinks from the mainstream “confidence” of possessing the entire knowledge on development and people’s good, with culture imperialism. Therefore, instead of an abstract measurement, it should contribute to social change, as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, and translate the world into languages that people understand, at the same time it should

acknowledge their subjectivity, autonomy and agency. All these qualities constitute a basis for my further inquiries.

What to begin with in reference to humans' and non-humans' well-being (to use the posthumanism approach)?

In this speech I will be using the terms of "good standard of living", "quality of life" and "well-being" interchangeably, despite of certain epistemological differences between them. The living standard is usually seen through the lenses of income, while the quality of life indicators are equally based on value of one's possessions and employment, as well as on dimensions of environment, health, education, leisure and belonging. Finally, well-being covers both objective and subjective measures of its perception.

Many people believe that well-being or quality of life signifies a possibility of fulfilling one's desires. The latter may be seen as moving beyond both biology (meaning e.g. exceptional nutrition or coveted leisure patterns) and material standing (understood as the level of income and/or the worth of one's possessions) and is instead viewed as pertinent to one's higher needs such as cultural participation or satisfaction derived from social interactions. A question that nevertheless arises is how people know what they should desire? This usually marks the point where we note that our desires are neither spontaneous, nor do they reflect any natural order of things, but result solely from a fictitious creation instead. We are taught to want. That is why Lauren Berlant in "Cruel Optimism" (2006) points out that desire is often an obstacle to ones flourishing.

Regardless of whether our desires are fulfilled or not, they can only revolve around a given scope of the *imaginarium* that we are aware of. Such interpretation relates to Jaques Lacan's triad of symbolic-real-imaginary psychoanalytic orders (Lacan 2006). In regard to a given cultural framework, a standard of life in its symbolic dimension may suggest that we follow one of the available life patterns and conduct normal activities, inclusive of the accessible comforts which are common and widely recognized by our society at that specific historical period. Being an unwritten constitution of society, this order creates, particularly in the area of consumption, illusions that we learn and use in framing our limited choices.

Conversely, the imaginary level, which assumes moving beyond accessible scenarios, could allude to taking on alternative values and life choices, such as those derived from social agreements and institutions (understood as norms, rules and common strategies) operating in different cultural settings and communities. This attitude would signify choice and power of human agency that allows fulfilment of different models of being, perhaps unrelated to the generally accepted "life standard".

This prefiguration of alternatives can be a starting point for our new reflective social research.

The final element of Lacan's triad - the real order - encompasses an entire set of accidental circumstances and various individual or group characteristics that influence the decisions that are being made. Those are difficult to take into account in a universal indicator examining average life quality of a given population and are, thereby, important to remember when interpretations on the occurrence of alternative indications for different world regions are being attempted.

Lacan's model might be seen a little bit too broad for a simple well-being research design. Additionally, as I emphasised at the beginning of my speech, social scientists are led into universalism temptation. One of the most significant assessments of peoples' lives in - narrowed symbolic-real orders - has been done by Amartya Kumar Sen. His theory of capabilities (1993) emphasizes the importance of individual freedom of choice between different options under the existing constraints. According to Sen, who deliberately avoids providing us with a list of specific capabilities, we prosper as people if we have the skills and the freedom to make our choices between different capability sets. Those sets represent distinct doings and beings, which the author terms "functionings". Said functionings may include both basic actions and states (for instance, satisfactory work performance, basic safety or good health) and the more complex ones, such as happiness, esthetical experience, being knowledgeable about something or satisfactory relations with others. In this theory, the capabilities would signify the opportunities to choose among the given functionings. In practice, Sen has specifically focused on basic capabilities, which he deems a capacity to fulfil the specific core and crucially important functionings to a minimally adequate standard (Sen 1993: 40), deemed as allowing avoidance of sickness and death, while securing appropriate nutrition, mobility, and so on (Sen 1993: 36).

As already indicated, aside from outlining basic capabilities, the author does not formulate a specific list of capabilities that influence achieving a good living standard, as for him the freedom of choice constitutes the basis of the very notion of a capability. This was later ignored by the philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, who, in fact, has created such a list and prioritized utilitarianism and its rules in her discussions. Nussbaum has argued for the existence of objective norms of human capabilities that are independent of culture, society or class. While this argument was often criticized by other scholars, Nussbaum provides a list of ten capabilities: a life worth living, life of a normal duration, physical and reproductive health which includes nutrition and shelter, bodily integration with an ability of movement and protection against violence, capability of senses, thoughts and imagination; emotions and expressing them without fear; reflectivity and inference; belonging (both in terms of relations with others/ for others and as grounds for being respected and recognized); coexistence with other species; entertainment and rest; control over political and material environment (Nussbaum 2000: 78-80). Since this list is grounded in an individual's organization stemming from Aristotle's practical reason, which means making appropriate choices of actions leading to the said good standard (Qizilbash 1998: 55), it can only be valid for an individually-derived good standard of life. According to Nussbaum (2000: 72), the identified capabilities are those spheres of human experiences that, to a lesser or greater degree, occur in every human's life, so that every human being will have to make

distinct choices within those areas. Despite this perspective being oriented towards agency (because, actually: does so much really depend on us?), contributions made by Nussbaum should be seen as significant in light of the complexity of the operationalization done for the quality of life theme. Similarly to Sen, she has underscored the importance of fulfilling basic needs and a necessity to take on a primary goal which comes down to all people meeting and crossing that minimal threshold of capabilities, so that they can all equally benefit from the capabilities described above. Only then the societal efforts can be directed at other endeavours.

Another important theoretical contribution to the topic of well-being has been made by Len Doyal and Ian Gough in the early 1990s (Doyal and Gough 1991). Their Theory of Human Needs (THN) is based on two universal goals of avoiding significant harm and ability to participate. Those goals are said to prevent an application of the model of either cruel or exploitative social system described by the authors. Nonetheless, the assumptions require answers to two basic needs of physical health and autonomic agency. The authors argue that in order for individual members of the society to be able to complete their social obligations posed by others, those two needs must be socially fulfilled. This means that meeting this condition constitutes a moral obligation of societies, leading to emancipation, even in light of the rise of globalization. In regards to definitions, the authors see optimal level of physical health as a complete physical, mental and social well-being, inclusive of individual's autonomy. They also pinpoint survival possibility and achieving optimal life duration upon decreasing functions resulting from aging. With regard to those difficult and complex issues of basic needs, Doyal and Gough combine them by using a notion of autonomy of action as a characteristically human trait. Said autonomy is understood as a capacity for making informed decisions as to what should be done and how it should be completed. Both health and autonomy can be achieved through fulfilment of eleven indirect needs defined by Doyal and Gough as nutritious alimentation and clean water, residence that guarantees shelter, work environment safety, safe contraception and child-birthing environment, appropriate healthcare, safeguarded childhood, basic relationships with others, health and physical security, economic safety and proper education.

Finally, the third essential approach refers to mutual humanist perception and building social relations. As I've already mentioned, focus on fulfilling ones' desires and individual-centered approaches are often criticized by scholars researching quality of life topics. The first problem is posed by the "content slave" attitude, which has largely been theorized in reference to women. If women live in a society that limits their freedoms, some of them may develop adaptation strategy, which allows them to make the best out of a bad situation rather than form resistance against servitude they consider inevitable. That way, they can be happier than those women who, for example, consciously decide to take action towards social change in a given society (Philips 2006: 62-64). Another problem concerns individual choices and maximizing utility (hedonistic attitude). People often maximize their utility by obtaining what they actually want in lieu of what they should want, or could want, had they been given complete information. According to James











Griffin, these kinds of people replace their mind-set with single experiences that provide them with temporary feeling of happiness (Griffin 1986: 10). The author makes a proposal for formulating a theory of life quality based on informed desires, conscious choices, or, simply, people's businesses that are not necessarily connected to material aspects of life. He contributes an approach grounded in prudential values, which give us a basic standard for evaluating numerous (everyday/mundane) lives of people. They make it possible for us to, with a certain generality, state how good a given life is, how it could be improved and how it compares to other lives (Griffin 1986: 119). The author believes that the core of prudentially valuable object is its impact on improving life in a generally understood manner, in a way that refers to human life on the whole and not to a single person's life (Griffin 1986: 27). This commonality of values and orientation towards others is also underlined by Ludwig Wittgenstein who claimed that people are unable to show mutual understanding unless they share specific core values (Wittgenstein 1969 [1953]).

This last perspective was confirmed by Anne Bowling's study (1995) in which respondents were asked to list the most important elements that shape life quality. Relationships with friends and family have been scored the highest, followed by one's health, health of family and friends, and, finally, financial standing and materially-conceived life standard placing fourth. That material component was only ranked fourth.

Stemming from Sen's work, Nussbaum's capability approach, the theory of human needs by Doyal and Gough and finally the social approach, many well-being indexes have been created over the last two decades. To give you an impression what aspects of our lives have been recognized as the most important for our well-being and, simultaneously, try to measure these fields somehow for international comparisons (although I still have doubts if such analyses are eligible), I have juxtaposed different well-being indicators in a table.

[TABLE]

Table 1. Summary of the quality of life indicators (dependent on the analytical aspects included)

										
Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index™	physical health	emotional health	pro-health behaviors	basic access	-	-	work environment	-	life evaluation	-
Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)	reproductive health	-	-	child mortality	education	-	-	-	-	-
Human Development Index (HDI)	life expectancy	-	-	-	literacy	-	-	gross national income per capita	-	-
Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)	healthcare expenditure	cost of violence and unemployment	costs of air and water pollution, noise costs	consumption of durable use goods, state investments	educational expenditure	natural environment	urbanization, traffic accidents and commuting costs	net capital gains, foreign investment balance	-	unpaid work
Genuine Savings Indicator	-	-	-	capital necessary for long-lasting resources production	education expenditure	depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution	-	gross savings	-	-
Value Aggregators Method (MAW) and Social Diagnosis	healthcare protections	mental well-being, stress, social capital	leisure, cultural participation, lifestyle	food, clothing, housing, transport, social welfare.	education, children's education	-	employment	wealth-generated income, personal finances	aspects of social exclusion, values and norms system	causes of low fertility in Poland
National Well-being (NWB)	health	governance, relations with others	-	where we live	education	environment	what we do	economy and finance	individual well-being	

Canadian Index of Well-being (CIW)	population health	social vitality, democratic rules	leisure and culture, time spending patterns	-	education	environment	-	living standards	-	
Better Life Indicator (BLI)	health	community, civil engagement	work and life balance.	housing, security	education	environment	employment	income	life satisfaction	-
SPIRAL	-	immediate surroundings: personal and social relations, attitudes and initiatives	personal balance	access to key resources	-	-	-	-	social balance, well-being level	-
Quality of Life Indicator (QLI)	health	family life, social life	-	political stability and safety, political freedoms	-	climate, geography	work security	material quality of life	-	gender equality
WHOQOL	physical health	mental health, social interaction	-	-	-	environment	-	-	-	-
Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)	-	-	sanitary standards	child mortality, malnutrition, type of cooking fuel, drinking water, electricity, flooring type	completed years of education	-	-	resources	-	-

I have selected thirteen measurements from a variety of existing instruments. In general sense, they have all corresponded to certain universal factors, which, while they might have been called differently, are presented in a comparative manner. Rather than naming the areas they describe, I use pictogram representations for column headers, while the original names of the indexes' elements can be found in the rows below.

What needs to be stressed is the fact that only a limited number of measurements mention gender identities and gender equality as important areas that influence individual and social well-being. On the other hand, following the recent developments in social sciences, the gender issue becomes more and more complex. Julie A. Nelson in her text - "Would women leaders have prevented the global financial crisis? Teaching critical thinking by questioning a question" - that I have sent in advance as a key reading to my session – concludes critically that gender representation goes beyond simplistic binary thinking and requires more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of both differences and similarities between women and men. Critical thinking is essential to counter cowboy capitalism and sexist oppression. It is true that today it is difficult to build a movement around any type of representation, what Judith Butler calls "an illusion of universal capture". But at the same time coalition building is a better strategy for stigmatised groups than so called - "Oppression Olympics" (Hancock 2011) – that is a competition between the oppressed groups.

Let us now explore the intersectionality approach. I would like to add that we don't think in gender-race-class categories anymore. Every one of us has certain privileges and also experiences different kinds of penalties in the society we live in. It is perhaps quite difficult, but as it was demonstrated by Julie A. Nelson, we have to observe them all at the same time. Furthermore, power structures might change over time, over the course of our lives. Not only gender, class, religion, but certainly age, disability or our geographic location – therefore, these time and space changes give us doses of stability and instability all of the time.

There is no bold standard of intersectionality definition, but the key ideas are grounded in the second wave movement in the US, through the arguments raised by black feminist community. That is why intersectionality is not an abstract academic theory but came from a grassroots protest movement, from a need for social change. Therefore, to respond to that call, intersectionality studies are generating knowledge necessary for achieving more just, inclusive and efficient policies (Hankivsky 2012). In contrast to former methodologies focused on social determinants like gender, race or socio-economic status, intersectionality encourages critical reflection on multifaceted relationships and interactions between social locations (forces, factors and power structures) and identities (e.g. gender expression, sexuality, age, indigeneity, immigration status, religion and ability) that shape and

influence human lives. These social locations as well as access to power and resources are constructed socially by policies that target certain groups, therefore might exclude others.

Still, there is a growing expectation from governments to deliver policies advancing social justice and correcting power imbalances, by addressing e.g. damaging stereotypes (Marmot 2012). There is also a growing civic interest in analysis and monitoring of governmental policies and pressure on improving the measurement of their effects by showing their impact on diverse populations (Braveman 2003). Therefore, their development cannot be founded on simple premises i.e. cost, effectiveness of the policy, feasibility and social acceptance only (Dye 2010, Kraft and Furlong 2009), but should be contextualised and “define and deliver values” (Schneider and Ingram 1997: 2) behind offered goods and services, as well as regulations contributing to improved social status and well-being of all citizens.

Policies need evaluation in terms of determining what groups or individuals benefited most and who experienced burdens, what problems were acknowledged as legitimate and which as unimportant, and finally, what are the broader multi-level relations of power that influence interrelated structural factors of social experience. These policies interact with local values, norms and practices (that are the central subjects of analysis of institutional economics (Ostrom 2005)) and therefore have different impact on people, giving them privileges or penalising them.

I would like to show you a practical tool designed by Canadian scientists from the School of Public Policy at the Simon Fraser University - The Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) Framework.

[\[PDF\]](#)

This tool “facilitates the asking of questions that can capture the most important and relevant information about decision-making priorities, processes and policy outcomes” (Hankivsky 2012: 8). IBPA has two core components: eight guiding principles and twelve questions shaping the analysis (five descriptive and seven transformative) that are logically interconnected. The principles are: Intersecting Categories creating social locations, Multi-level Analysis including different scales and levels of society, Power *over* others but also *with* others, Reflexivity that recognises multiple attitudes and “truths”, Time and Space perception in cultural frames, Diverse Knowledges of different - also oppressed - groups, Social Justice in redistribution of goods (John Rawls 1971) and in social processes (Iris Marion Young 1990) and Equity understood as fairness. The descriptive questions that follow concern self-positioning of a researcher, beliefs behind the decisions taken, their framing, the most advantaged and excluded from policies’ effects and policy responses. The second round of questions focuses on transformative aspects of an issue, challenging common notions of assessment of policies. They concentrate on finding different ways of approaching a subject, possible interventions, short, medium and long-term solutions, policy responses to reduce

inequalities, implementation and up-take of policy recommendations, success measurement and broader conceptualisations of a topic.

To conclude, both well-being and intersectionality fields of study are based on a premise that public policies strongly influence our daily life and construct our safety, comfort, health, welfare and other aspects of life. Well-being research seems to gravitate towards finding universal solutions that provide at least a basic standard for all, intersectionality investigates power structures and intersecting social sets of locations to accurately address existing inequalities. The combination of both - adopted by social scientists can substantially advance our social policies and contribute to social change. And that is precisely the main objective of social sciences.

Thank you.