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Designing, Implementing and Evaluating Behavioural Public Policies for Sustainability Using Subjective Wellbeing Insights

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) measures and data offer underexploited insights for behavioural public policy (BPP) aimed at sustainability. We argue that embedding SWB in BPP can advance how policies are designed, implemented and evaluated. At the design stage, evidence on anticipated, immediate and collective emotions can inform interventions that work with, rather than against, the affective dynamics underlying private and public-sphere sustainable behaviours. At the implementation stage, mapping and tracking emotional responses to environmental issues and specific policies can support more effective communication strategies that evolve over time. At the evaluation stage, experiential measures can serve as proofs-of-principle in lab and online experiments, while life satisfaction, monetised through the Wellbeing-Year (WELLBY), can provide proofs-of-practice in the field and a convenient tool for ex-post policy appraisal and value-for-money assessments. Three worked examples, including cycling promotion, congestion charging and recycling, illustrate how this SWB-informed approach can yield more effective, acceptable and wellbeing-enhancing sustainability interventions.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable lifestyle shifts are key to mitigating climate change and other environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss or pollution (1). Behavioural public policy (BPP) efforts for sustainability aim to encourage such shifts by understanding and shaping people's private-sphere consumption habits – such as what they eat and how they heat their homes – and by encouraging public sphere actions like pro-environment voting and policy advocacy (2). This paper argues that subjective wellbeing (SWB) insights and data can inform these efforts by advancing how policy is designed, implemented and evaluated.

SWB is an umbrella term that captures how people experience and evaluate their lives (3). Experiential measures capture moment-to-moment emotions like happiness or stress, while common evaluative measures include responses to questions about overall life satisfaction, or those assessing satisfaction in specific domains of life, like leisure or work. SWB measures assess both hedonic and eudemonic types of wellbeing. The former reflects pleasure (and the absence of displeasure) while the latter is more closely aligned with feelings of meaning and worthwhileness (4). Lastly, SWB measures can also take on a temporal dimension, reflecting either remembered or forecasted SWB – for instance, measures predicting emotions during a future event or remembering emotions during a past event (5), or on a more general level, people's expected life satisfaction in five years' time (6).

Researchers have used SWB measures to explore the determinants of wellbeing, as well as to inquire into psychological phenomenon like the importance of relative comparisons (7), the pervasive nature of adaptation (8) and the value of procedural fairness (9). Additionally, SWB measures are also increasingly captured by statistical agencies around the world and leveraged for policy purposes (10). For example, SWB-based approaches feature in UK Government's guidance on appraisal and evaluation (11) and in New Zealand's Living Standards Framework (12).

Despite the inroads that SWB measures have made into research and policy, there has been relatively little attention paid to the insights they offer for BPP in general and for BPP for sustainability specifically. This represents a missed opportunity. In what follows, we draw out some of the key advantages of embedding SWB in BPP research and practice in relation to policy design, implementation and evaluation, with a particular focus on sustainable behaviours.[1]

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly introduces the main approaches to measuring SWB, distinguishing experiential measures from evaluative ones. Sections 3, 4 and 5 then set out, in turn, how SWB insights and data can inform the design, implementation and evaluation of BPPs for sustainability, with each section concluding with a worked example. Section 6 concludes.

2 MEASUREMENT

Experiences. Emotional experiences can be assessed in a range of ways. The gold-standard approach involves 'experience sampling'. This approach leverages technology, such as smartphone apps, to capture people's emotions and activities at random points within a day (16). Less intrusive methods employ survey instruments and ask respondents to self-report their emotions over a given period, such as the Day Reconstruction Method's use of diary exercises to reflect on the previous day, or global-yesterday measures that focus on specific emotions. Conceptually, such subjective measures of experiential wellbeing may comingle affect with cognition, preventing researchers from capturing 'pure' emotions. Retrospective measures may also be vulnerable to other measurement issues due to aggregation and cognitive biases such as duration-neglect or peak-end-bias – that is, the tendency to remember only how one

1 Our argument roots wellbeing in behavioural welfare economics and is welfare-consequentialist, in that it judges policies based on the wellbeing outcomes they achieve, amongst others. This is a quantitative, measurement-centrist view, which implicitly assumes that policy-makers should seek to promote SWB. We acknowledge that measures may not be perfect when it comes to capturing a broad concept such as wellbeing and that there is diversity of perspectives on how to assess and promote wellbeing, including those who think that maximising wellbeing should *not* be the ultimate goal of policy (13, 14). Despite whatever limitations such an approach may contain, we hold that state-of-the-art data and methods on wellbeing nonetheless provide meaningful insights for BPP. It is also worth noting that we see participatory approaches that incorporate qualitative input on people's lived experiences into policy design, implementation, and evaluation as complementary to the approaches outlined here. See Richardson and John (15) for an example of how different sources of expertise and evidence can be integrated into the BPP development process.

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felt at the end of an episode or at the point in time during an episode when one was in a particularly heightened emotional state (17–19). Nonetheless, there is a plethora of research exemplifying the value of measuring emotions and using survey questions to collect data on emotional states. For example, the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) asks people 'Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?' and 'Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' as part of assessing personal wellbeing, using an 11-point Likert scale that ranges from zero ('not at all') to 10 ('completely') for each (24). Another instrument, more suitable for experiments, is the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, which asks people to what extent they have felt 20 named emotions during the past week – for example, pride or guilt – using a five-point scale that ranges from one ('very slightly or not at all') to five ('extremely') (20). This instrument can be easily adapted to ask about emotions experienced 'just now' and anticipated experiences in the future.

Evaluations. Evaluations of wellbeing are typically captured using standard survey instruments. A person's self-reported life satisfaction can be captured using a Likert-scale question such as 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?', ranging from zero ('not at all satisfied') to 10 ('completely satisfied'), typically collected via (paper-based or online) surveys. Variants of this question have been asked by psychologists and other social scientists in national and international surveys since the late 1970s, leading to thousands of studies on its determinants and consequences (see Dolan et al. (21) for an early, cross-sectional review and Clark et al. (22) for a more recent, life-course perspective). In general, life-satisfaction scales have been shown to have solid psychometric properties, including reliability, validity, sensitivity and discriminant validity (23). There may, however, be issues, in that life-satisfaction responses may be relatively insensitive to small changes due to minor interventions or in that they need large samples to detect small changes. The question on life satisfaction is now routinely asked by the ONS in the UK, amongst others, to measure personal wellbeing (24). It is also the advocated measure by the EU and the OECD.

3 POLICY DESIGN

Those working in BPP could design better, more effective sustainability policies by drawing on insights on emotions.

Many of the environmental issues the world is currently facing reflect complex collective action problems with significant intertemporal dimensions and a large degree of uncertainty. In complex decision-making contexts such as this, people can and do look to their emotions to inform what to do and think (25, 26).

Existing models of behaviour change in BPP tend not to adequately engage with how emotion influences behaviour. Williamson and Thulin (27) highlight that current behaviour change models have significant gaps in how they handle emotions: they either do not directly include emotions (e.g., Theory of Planned Behaviour (28), Health Belief Model (29), Value-Belief-Norm Theory (30)), treat all emotions as the same without distinguishing between different types or examining how different emotions affect behaviour change through distinct pathways (e.g., COM-B (31), MINDSPACE (32)), or focus too narrowly on one specific emotion, like fear, rather than considering the full spectrum of emotional influences on behaviour (e.g., Protection Motivation Theory (33), Terror Management Theory (34)). This is despite a growing body of evidence suggesting that emotions of various forms are linked to behavioural intentions and actions, including in the environmental domain (35–37), and existing calls for behaviour change interventions to be theoretically grounded in affective psychology (25, 27).

Anticipated Emotions. Anticipated emotions – the feelings people expect to feel when engaging in actions, such as feeling proud or not guilty – are predictive of pro-environmental behaviour in general (37, 38), as well as of specific behaviours like taking measures to reduce the use of home air conditioning (39), purchasing an electric car (40), or reducing food waste (41). Other work demonstrates how experiencing (or anticipating experiencing) various emotions can affect pro-environmental action (42), as well as highlights the role that these emotions play in self-regulatory processes (43) – for example, not engaging in quick, satisfying consumption behaviour due to the anticipation of feeling guilty about it afterwards. Considering what people expect to feel, and how to shape what they expect to feel, should be an active consideration for those working on sustainable behaviour change. For example, if BPP practitioners are

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seeking to encourage a pro-environmental action that could be wellbeing-enhancing, such as one that delivers a sense of pride or meaning to the actor, communication strategies should seek to emphasise this. By contrast, where sustainable behaviours are expected to lead to negative emotions, such as stress, they may need to design supportive measures to mitigate these negative perceptions or impacts. Such actors should also remember that anticipated emotions may vary across subgroups – for example, health-conscious experienced cyclists may see cycling in an urban context as likely to yield positive emotions, while others may anticipate feeling fearful. Different types of BPP intervention could nonetheless encourage cycling among both groups. Mapping the anticipated emotions across a representative sample of the target population to predict who is likely to feel what can assist in developing tailored intervention strategies that are sensitive to people's affective attitudes and expectations.

Immediate Emotions. Immediate emotions – the emotions experienced during the decision-making process – have also been linked to pro-environmental behaviour (36). Importantly, different emotions serve specific behavioural functions that promote or inhibit pro-environmental behaviour rather than having generalised motivational effects. For example, while both pride and hope have been linked to pro-environmental action (44, 45), they appear to operate through distinct mechanisms. Pride is posited to work through self-enhancement mechanisms such as feelings of self-worth, whereas hope's hypothesised mechanisms include self-efficacy and future orientation (27). BPP practitioners and researchers should leverage SWB measures to investigate how specific feelings at the decision-making moment influence what people choose to do. Immediate emotions can include emotions unrelated to the choice at hand, as well as emotions a person feels when contemplating a given behaviour. In the case of emotions unrelated to the choice, behavioural economics has used SWB measures to demonstrate that inducing anger compared to happiness reduced subjects' cooperative behaviour and increased their tendency to punish others (46). Understanding which emotional states are more conducive to specific pro-environmental actions can help practitioners ensure that interventions are delivered when the targets are in a receptive emotional state, as well as develop strategies that aim to induce those states. In the case of the emotions a person feels when contemplating a behaviour, the choice architecture around pro-environmental choices is of central importance. For example, pro-environmental decision processes that are burdensome both psychologically and practically, or rife with 'sludge',[2] are at risk of impeding pro-environmental choices. Those working in BPP can use SWB measures to explore these issues and consider how to design choice architecture such that pro-environmental choices feel more positive in the moment, including, for example, through graphical user interface design and feedback systems.

SWB evidence can also highlight how people actually feel when engaging in behaviours. For instance, research indicates that the correlation between pro-environmental behaviour and SWB tends to be positive, but that pro-environmental behaviours show stronger links with eudemonic than hedonic wellbeing and that the relationship is strongest for social, active and effortful behaviours (48). SWB insights can also reveal when an actor's expectations are based on negative forecasting errors, anticipating behaviours to feel worse than they will or to be more sacrificial than they will be, and so acting (or not acting) accordingly (49). In these circumstances, it could prove effective to design BPP interventions that communicate how others who engage in the behaviour report feeling while doing so and to develop interventions to encourage people to act regardless of their concerns (49, 50). More generally, this evidence can feed into efforts to develop co-benefit messages around pro-environmental action. Most such efforts have focused on objective benefits like health and economic returns to pro-environmental action, yielding mixed results (51), but the efficacy of messages communicating psychological benefits remains underexplored.

Collective Emotions. Finally, emotions not only reflect individuals' responses to their own actions but can arise as responses to the actions of others and can be felt and determined collectively (52). For example, research finds that the negative emotions (such as feeling shameful) evoked by the violation of group-based environmental norms have important implications for collective environmental action (53). Other work suggests that collective action in this context can elicit

2 Intentional features that exploit individuals' cognitive boundaries, biases or habits to engage them in behaviours that make it harder for individuals to engage in the right behaviours, as Shahab and Lades (47) put it.

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emotional contagion processes and collective emotions, in turn spurring on further action (52). BPP scholars and practitioners should therefore examine how these group-based emotional dynamics can either facilitate or hinder pro-environmental behaviour change. Interventions that cultivate shared emotional responses may be particularly effective at promoting group commitment to and actions towards pro-environmental goals (52).

WORKED EXAMPLE: POLICY DESIGN

Imagine that you are a BPP practitioner tasked with increasing cycling as a mode of commuting within a given city. Prior to taking any action, you decide to map the feelings associated with cycling across your target population. Your initial survey reveals significant heterogeneity in anticipated emotions: younger professionals anticipate feeling energised and less stressed when they commute by bicycle, while older commuters anticipate feeling tired and fearful about navigating traffic. A substantial proportion of the parents among the employee group anticipate stress from needing to leave home earlier to accommodate cycling time. You also conduct a study tracking how people feel while cycling and linking it to their routes. This study highlights two key insights. It indicates areas of the urban space where cyclists feel particularly anxious and unsafe. It also points to significant affective forecasting errors – most cyclists report the experience as more enjoyable and less stressful than they and others anticipated.

These insights point in the direction of several potential intervention ideas. Rather than treating all potential cyclists in an undifferentiated way or focusing solely on influencing cognitive beliefs about environmental benefits, you instead look to develop an intervention portfolio that addresses the full spectrum of emotional influences on cycling. This could include supportive measures targeting older commuters like subsidised e-bikes to reduce physical strain and accompanied cycle training sessions to build confidence and provide safe routing support. It also highlights the need to address cycling pain points in urban spaces where infrastructure investments may be needed to enhance the perceived safety of cyclists. The exact design of this infrastructure can also be informed by insights on the cycling infrastructure features associated with both objective and subjective safety (54). To help overcome affective forecasting errors among potential cyclists, you could promote 'Try before you bike' (55) schemes that mitigate the trials of commuting by bike without having to purchase a bike outright and adopt messaging campaigns that include testimonials from similar people who report feeling energised and less stressed after their cycling commute, as well as tips on how they integrate it into their lives. Finally, recognising that emotions can be collective, you could support workplace initiatives where teams collectively track and publicise their cycling kilometres, helping to cultivate shared pride and friendly competition.

4 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Emotions strongly shape public and policy-makers' responses to sustainability issues and policies, so understanding, measuring and tracking these emotional dynamics is essential for policy implementation.

Achieving necessary shifts towards sustainable consumption will require implementing a suite of behavioural, economic and regulatory policy measures. As both environmental issues and specific policy solutions evoke strong and varied emotions amongst people, emotions are central to successful policy implementation.

Various emotions around environmental issues like climate change have been linked to policy support and acceptance (25). For example, Bouman and colleagues (56) find that worry about climate change directly predicts climate policy support, while Smith and Leiserowitz (57) find that worry, interest and hope are also associated with support, but that anger is not. In contrast, Gregersen and colleagues (58) find that climate anger can predict policy support but that it varies depending on the specific content of that anger: anger evoked by linking climate change to human actions is positively predictive of policy support, whereas anger with existing mitigation efforts is negatively so. Other work also supports the importance of content: Ojala (59) finds that constructive hope positively predicts pro-environmental action whereas denial-based hope does the opposite. Bearing the above in mind, BPP practitioners and policy-makers need to understand the emotional landscape around sustainability issues before designing

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implementation strategies to ensure that they address and work with, rather than against, prevailing feelings. Emerging computational methods, including machine learning approaches, offer new possibilities for mapping and analysing such emotional landscapes at scale and across diverse populations (60).

Emotional responses to specific policies are important predictors of policy support and resistance. In the case of the introduction of water charges in Ireland, for example, Rodriguez-Sanchez et al. (61) find that negative emotions had a large direct effect on policy acceptance and that the role of anger was particularly pronounced. A series of papers have also identified the emotional underpinnings of responses to energy infrastructure developments, including hydrogen fuel stations in the Netherlands (62) and wind farms in Finland (63). Additionally, emotional responses to information relating to causes, impacts and solutions have all been linked to policy support, acceptance and resistance (25, 61–65). Importantly, there is substantial heterogeneity in how people react to emotionally framed policy issues. For instance, when policy issues are framed in ways that evoke anger or disgust, this can lead to polarised responses, with some individuals becoming more supportive while others become more resistant (66). Finally, emotional responses to policy beneficiaries influence attitudes to a policy itself (67, 68). Affective attitudes towards groups targeted by policies and policy proponents have been shown to predict policy support (69), and those attitudes can be shaped by how those groups are presented within a policy narrative (70, 71). Given these findings, policy-makers should pre-test emotional responses to the details of sustainability policies before introducing them. Such pre-testing could include sentiment analysis of focus groups or media coverage and experimental studies measuring emotional responses to policy frames and communications – for example, using discrete choice experiments.

Other work highlights how timing can affect emotional responses and their consequences. For example, Russell and Firestone (72) document differing emotional responses from those who moved into an area close to a wind power generation project pre- and post-construction. Policy-makers should track how policy-related emotions evolve: initial resistance might fade as people experience benefits, or positive anticipation might wane during implementation challenges. Such tracking will allow for emotionally responsive policy communications and adjustments.

Finally, literature on policy advocacy and agenda setting contains an interesting discussion of how policy-makers themselves are subject to emotional influences and how scientists can leverage this to emotionally frame evidence so as to influence policy agendas (73). Yet this discussion raises the question of whether and to what extent BPP scholars should 'frame' their evidence in such emotional terms. Discussions try to weigh up the efficacy of such approaches with the potential ethical issues arising from them and the risks to long-term scientific credibility.

WORKED EXAMPLE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Imagine that you are a policy-maker considering two competing approaches to implementing congestion charging in a major city: Approach A is a traditional flat-rate congestion charge framed neutrally with emphasis on revenue generation for public transport improvements, while Approach B frames the same charge as an effort to deliver on 'clean air as a right', with messaging that highlights health impacts on vulnerable groups (children, elderly residents) and emphasises how the policy protects them from pollution. Before implementing either approach, imagine you conduct emotional pre-testing through focus groups and sentiment analysis of online discussions around the policy area. The results show that the first approach generates mixed emotions: some acceptance among citizens with strong environmental values and those that already engage in active travel, but significant anger from commuters who perceived the policy as a cynical effort to meet city budget shortfalls. In contrast, Approach B initially generates stronger positive emotions among parents and healthcare workers who see it as a protective measure and link it to social justice arguments, while at the same time it also evokes some guilt among some drivers and feelings of anger among a minority who perceive it as emotionally manipulative.

Based on the above results, you opt for the second policy framing approach, bearing in mind the mixed emotional responses it may generate. When you then continue to track the emotional responses that evolve over time towards the policy, you go on to see that the policy is better received than anticipated (see suggestive evidence of this from an attitudinal support

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perspective for congestion charging in the case of Gothenburg from Börjesson et al. (74)). This shift appears partly attributable to the dissipation of negative emotions among those originally opposed to the policy and partly to the high level of public support from people with positive affective attitudes towards the affected groups, which your communication strategy intentionally amplified.

5 POLICY EVALUATION

Using wellbeing data to evaluate the impacts of BPPs can provide evidence of their benefits to personal as well as planetary wellbeing.

After designing and implementing a BPP, it is necessary to evaluate its impacts, ideally involving a causal research design such as a randomised controlled trial (RCT). While policies targeting sustainable behaviours naturally need to look at these behaviours as the primary outcomes of any evaluation, there are various reasons to look at people's self-reported SWB as an additional outcome.[3]

First, policy-makers may be interested in looking at wellbeing as a *direct* outcome of policies, to evaluate their overall, or net, welfare impacts on individuals and to prioritise options. Take two policies, A and B, for example, and assume they both lead to the same behaviour change but that Policy A increases individual wellbeing more than B (or, alternatively, decreases individual wellbeing less than B). Surely, a rational and prudent policy-maker with public acceptance in mind would, first, want to know about this, and second, would choose A over B. What is more, policies that improve wellbeing may have longer-term impacts, in the case of a virtuous cycle between behaviour and wellbeing: for example, an initial behaviour change may improve wellbeing, which, in turn, likely incentivises individuals to uphold the behaviour change to continue to reap positive wellbeing returns.

Second, behaviours do not sit in a vacuum, and engaging individuals in one behaviour may lead them to engage, in another, subsequent behaviour, a so-called *behavioural spillover*, with implications for overall welfare (76). For example, intervening to encourage people to engage in one pro-environmental behaviour such as recycling now may lead them to engage in a reinforcing behaviour such as active travelling later (a *promoting spillover*). It could also lead them to engage in an opposing behaviour such as meat consumption (a *permitting spillover*). Whether one or the other type of spillover occurs depends on context and some underlying motive linking both behaviours. This may even work the other way around: merely anticipating engaging in a behaviour in the future may lead individuals to engage in another, antecedent behaviour now, a so-called *behavioural spillunder*, again with implications for overall welfare (77). Here, capturing wellbeing may not only help policy-makers measure the net welfare impacts of policies on individuals but may also serve as a useful screening tool for such behavioural phenomena (which are otherwise difficult to anticipate and detect), or for unintended consequences more generally, to inform policy design and implementation.

Finally, wellbeing data are cost-effective to collect, often involving only a single question, and straightforward to analyse. Importantly, as previously discussed, evidence has shown that engaging individuals in sustainable behaviours may not only benefit the environment but also the individuals themselves – for example, due to warm-glow effects or image concerns (78, 79). That is, policies targeting sustainable behaviours may improve individual as well as planetary wellbeing, and so capturing wellbeing as an additional outcome may render such policies more cost-effective relative to others.

Exactly which measures of wellbeing to use as additional outcomes depends on the stage of the evaluation. In particular, to fully evaluate the impacts of BPPs, we can first conduct lab or online experiments as proofs of principle to learn about mechanisms and what 'works', and only then conduct field experiments as proofs of practice, to learn whether what was tested before in a stylised setting really 'works' in a naturalistic field setting (80). Only these two together provide proofs of policy, and only after several iterations between them should policies be rolled out and scaled up.

3 The discussion in this section builds on the argument by Krekel (75).

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Proof of Principle. If we are at the proof-of-principle stage and are conducting a lab or online experiment, experiential measures of wellbeing assessing emotions lend themselves as the most obvious outcomes. Emotions, in particular, can be used to capture the instantaneous welfare impacts of the design and delivery of policies – their *procedural utility* (or disutility) – in the moment when people are exposed to them. For example, besides achieving a particular outcome, does the procedure by which that outcome is achieved undermine the target group's agency, dignity, or respect, and so impair their momentary welfare? If different options for the design and delivery of policies are available, with each of them leading to the same outcome, then such subtle differences in procedural utility can (and perhaps should) be a criterion for the choice of one policy over another. Note that, so far, there is no commonly accepted way to monetise emotional states (though there is some ongoing work on this topic; cf. Krekel and MacKerron (81)), which limits their use in policy appraisals (e.g., cost-benefit analysis).

WORKED EXAMPLE: POLICY EVALUATION – PROOF OF PRINCIPLE

Assume that you are a BPP practitioner interested in testing two competing policies, A and B, both aimed at improving energy conservation amongst high-energy users. Policy A is a social-norms intervention with a positive reinforcement, comparing individuals in the target group to their (more energy-efficient) neighbours and highlighting their improvement using smileys and positively reinforcing language (cf. Allcott (82)). As a by-product of being exposed to these comparisons and messages, users generate feelings of pride (self-reported by participants in the lab) as they gradually reduce consumption over time. On the contrary, Policy B is a messaging intervention that directly links high-energy users' consumption levels to environmental damages (without any positive reinforcement; cf. Schneider et al. (42)). As a by-product here, high-energy users generate feelings of guilt (again self-reported). Assume that, for the sake of argument, both policies lead to exactly the same reduction in consumption. From a procedural utility point of view, a prudent policy-maker with public acceptance in mind would again, first, want to know about this, and second, choose A over B, and so temporarily improve (rather than reduce) people's instantaneous welfare.[4]

Proof of Practice. If we are at the proof-of-practice stage and are conducting a field experiment, evaluative measures of wellbeing such as life satisfaction lend themselves as the most obvious outcomes. Life satisfaction, in particular, can be used to evaluate the overall, or net, welfare impacts of policies on individuals in both the short-run and long-run and to prioritise options. Accounts of life satisfaction are the underlying measure of the *Wellbeing-Year (WELLBY)*, which has a monetary value, and so can be used to appraise policies ex-post (or ex-ante, even before policy design, to find out whether policies are worth implementing in the first place). In particular, a WELLBY is defined as one point of life satisfaction on a zero-to-ten Likert scale for one individual for one year (83, 84), and is officially valued at GBP 13,000 (in 2019 prices) by HM Treasury in the UK (11), with equivalent valuations in New Zealand (an official valuation of about GBP 5,000; cf. NZ Treasury (85)) and the US (a suggested valuation between GBP 5,000 and GBP 7,500 (86)). Similar developments are underway elsewhere too.[5] If there is space for only one wellbeing measure in an evaluation, life satisfaction as a global evaluative measure of wellbeing is the preferred candidate. If there is space for more, domain evaluative measures that are specific to the policy at hand, such as health satisfaction, satisfaction with the neighbourhood, the local environment, or even satisfaction with certain government services, can be used as complementary outcomes to shed light on mechanisms through which effects on overall life satisfaction may come about.

WORKED EXAMPLE: POLICY EVALUATION – PROOF OF PRACTICE

Imagine that you are a policy-maker considering a policy that targets sustainable behaviour, for example, nudging people into recycling in their local community (about 50,000 people). Assume that the nudge is not taken away and so has a permanent effect – for instance, via habit formation – and that recycling as a pro-environmental behaviour also has a positive effect on people's life satisfaction – for instance, via image concerns. This effect is 0.005 points on the

4 Interesting, Schneider et al. (42) find that stimulating people to anticipate feelings of pride for positive future pro-environmental actions seems to have a stronger effect than prompting feelings of guilt for inaction.

5 See Frijters et al. (87) for an introduction to the WELLBY as a measure of social value and progress.

zero-to-ten Likert scale. Assume further that the behaviour change saves the government GBP 5 per person per year (after all, it does not have to costly separate waste itself). The policy itself has implementation costs of GBP 1,000,000. Is it worth it? To answer this question, we can take these results (presumably coming out of a policy evaluation, ideally an RCT) and conduct an ex-post policy appraisal. Not accounting for wellbeing impacts yields benefits of 5,000 * GBP 5 = GBP 25,000, and so a net social value of GBP 25,000 – GBP 1,000,000 = GBP –750,000. Clearly, the policy is not worth it, and a policy-maker should not roll it out and scale it up (say, to other local communities). However, accounting for wellbeing impacts paints a different picture: we obtain benefits of 5,000 * GBP 5 + 5,000 * (GBP 13,000 * 0.005) = GBP 3,500,000, and so a net social value of GBP 3,500,000 – GBP 1,000,000 = GBP 2,500,000. That picture is very different: the policy turns out to be value-for-money after all, and a policy-maker should roll it out and scale it up. This simple example shows that, when sustainability and wellbeing go hand in hand, as evidence has shown (see Zawadzki et al. (88) for a meta-analysis), accounting for wellbeing impacts can change policy priorities in favour of sustainability.

6 CONCLUSION

The integration of SWB into BPP represents an evidence-based opportunity for promoting sustainable transitions. Current policy approaches that ignore emotional dynamics or treat all emotions equivalently are likely missing significant opportunities to enhance effectiveness while potentially creating unnecessary resistance. By understanding how anticipated and immediate emotions shape environmental behaviours, and how different emotions operate through distinct psychological mechanisms, policy-makers can design and implement BPP interventions that work with, rather than against, people's feelings. By leveraging SWB data to evaluate BPP interventions, BPP for sustainability can gain richer insights into the impact of policies on individual as well as environmental outcomes. This SWB-informed approach to BPP for sustainability, encompassing design, implementation and evaluation phases, offers a pathway to more effective, acceptable and wellbeing-enhancing interventions.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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