Common goals, different values

How to build social well-being and commitment to global challenges in a culturally sensitive way

Norway grants

„All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

United Nations

General Assembly Resolution 1514, 1960

Introduction

Today’s world faces complex global challenges. Climate change, the migration crisis, hunger, poverty, social inequality, extremism, terrorism, armed conflict, cybersecurity concerns – these are just some of the issues that are shaking up contemporary society. On the one hand, we see uncertainty, helplessness and fear; on the other, we see the need for a decisive and comprehensive response. Meeting these challenges requires immediate action and cooperation between different actors: states, international organisations, society and the private sector.

Social mobilisation is necessary, but commitment to common goals and the ability to work together are not always easy to achieve, let alone sustain. Moreover, each country, each social group, each individual faces its own challenges as a result of its history, culture, local circumstances, individual predispositions and values. As a result, globally shared goals carry different weight at the level of different social groups and individuals.

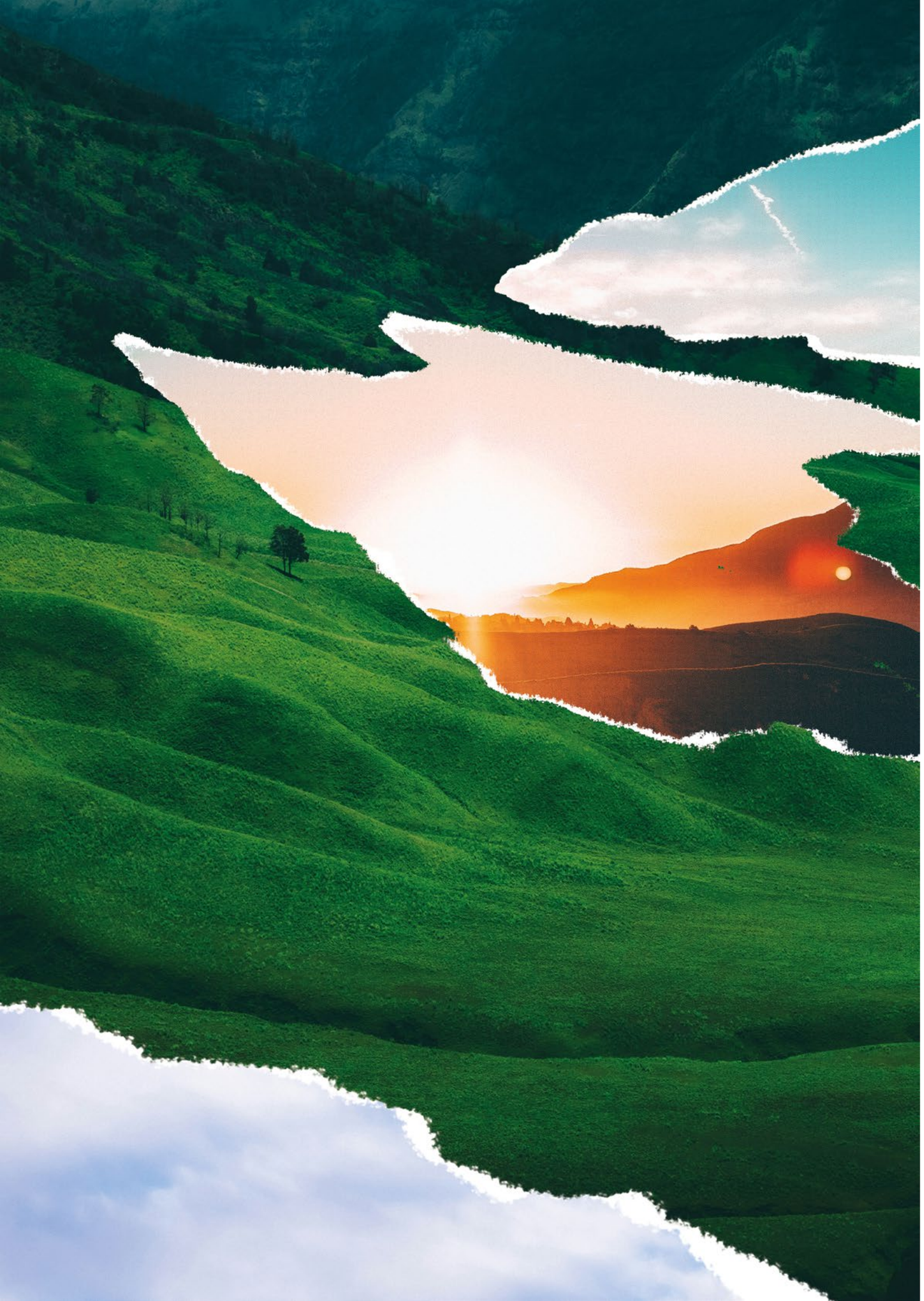
Understanding, awareness and respect for differences make it possible to build trusting relationships and work effectively together. It is in the realm of interpersonal relationships that both challenges and key opportunities lie. It seems that promoting communitarianism and cooperation can be an antidote to the anticipated threats to future societies. By strengthening these values, we not only address concerns about the future, but also build a solid foundation for future social well-being. To achieve this, however, it is necessary to redefine the approach to development. We need a socially engaged approach that takes into account the diversity of perspectives and values of societies around the world.

The lessons of recent years show that we can join forces and act together to address the crises of our time. The COVID-19 pandemic has motivated us to work together on an unprecedented scale. It gives us hope and shows how much we can achieve when we unite and act together.

This report is a summary of the results of research at the interface of psychology and the science of social development, carried out in collaboration between three research units: Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, SWPS University and the University of Oslo, with the participation of scientists and researchers from all over the world.

It is an attempt to answer questions about the desirable directions of social development, how to minimise social pessimism or how to involve individuals in the realisation of common goals. It also aims to highlight the need for a culturally sensitive approach to the measurement and design of social and development policies - an approach that recognises the diversity of social values around the world as a way of effectively addressing the challenges of the future and as a path to sustainable social development.

We invite you to read on.



Executive Summary

Every society has not only the right to development and self-determination, but also the right to choose the direction of its development. How do we measure social development? What are the desired directions of development in different societies around the world? How can well-being and social engagement be developed in the face of global change?

The main conclusions of the research may have important implications for the analysis of social development and practical implications for the programming of international social policy, including migration policy, global education and charitable activities, and other initiatives requiring cross-cultural communication. The conclusions are presented in the form of recommendations addressed to social science researchers, policy-makers, international and local institutions responsible for social policy-making, research agencies, think-tanks or NGOs, educators, volunteers and all those interested in culturally sensitive dialogue.

» ADDRESS THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Modern societies are ambivalent about the future: belief in the benefits of further technological development is coupled with strong concerns about the breakdown of social ties. How can this be remedied? Research by the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences shows that policies that support the social aspects of society's development (promoting togetherness and cooperation) make it possible to look more optimistically to the future and strive for future well-being. In order to offset the negative effects of industrialisation and technological progress and to enhance the sustainable well-being of present and future societies, it is essential to develop appropriate social policies and invest in social institutions.

For more information, please visit page **8**

» ADOPT A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

If the social aspects of societal development are considered crucial, what exactly do they entail? Visions of a 'good' social life vary widely across societies, suggesting that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' recipe for social progress. In response, the institutions that govern our societies should adopt a culturally sensitive approach to social development. This paradigm is underpinned by two fundamental principles: first, the recognition that there is no universal formula for developing societies; and second, the recognition that social development should be conceptualised in a way that respects and reflects each society's unique indigenous vision of progress. This proposal argues for the explicit inclusion of societal voices in social development policy-making, thereby democratising the discourse on this crucial issue.

For more information, please visit page **10**

» MEASURE DEVELOPMENT IN WAYS THAT REFLECT LOCAL VALUES

The proposed culturally sensitive paradigms of societal development can help to construct new measures of societal development, but they can also be applied to existing measures. For example, the current main alternative to GDP - Human Development Index (HDI) - can become a culturally sensitive measure (CS-HDI) if it incorporates the preferences of societies.

For more information, please visit page **12**

» GO BEYOND HAPPINESS, CULTIVATE WELL-BEING IN ITS FULL COMPLEXITY

Social sciences suggest that social development should be measured by changes in social well-being. However, measuring well-being accurately and reliably is a challenge. In Western culture it is often equated with happiness, but in other cultures it is interpreted differently and has many components. The same is true of the concept of happiness, which can mean different things in different cultural contexts. Social policy-making institutions should measure quality of life and well-being on the basis of indicators that take account of cultural diversity in order to provide a more reliable picture of the good life in different cultural contexts. Only then will social policy instruments and programmes be properly adapted to the real challenges, needs, values and opportunities.

For more information, please visit page **14**

» PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE WELL-BEING

Well-being is an essential element of social development; it should be culturally sensitive, but also sustain-

able. Tackling climate change, eradicating poverty or ensuring decent living condi¬tions are essential actions for the well-being of present and future societies. Meeting these challenges requires integrated action and cooperation at many complex levels, which is not always easy to achieve. The goals of different countries, groups and individuals may differ, but their harmonisation is crucial for the future of our planet. A study by researchers at SWPS University in Poland clearly shows that individuals' beliefs have a significant impact on their motivation to pursue common goals, and that a sense of community and convergence of priorities can provide motivation to engage in global challenges. According to the researchers, shaping the right narrative can inspire and build commitment to act for a better future for all.

For more information, please visit page **18**

» CONSTRUCT CIVIC ATTITUDES

Today, social researchers and policy-makers commonly treat individualism – a psychological characteristic of Western societies – as the universal psychological 'software' that underpins processes of societal development and well-being. However, the argument linking indivi¬du¬alism to societal well-being is seriously flawed. Consequently, a new psychological compass for research and policy-making on societal development is needed. International governing bodies should turn to civicness – a way of being in which an individual, when faced with a dilemma, prioritises the good of the larger community unit of which he or she is a member over the good of the smaller community unit. The civicness framework helps to understand and develop a variety of social bonds that bind communities together, well beyond purely Western cultures.

For more information, please visit page **24**

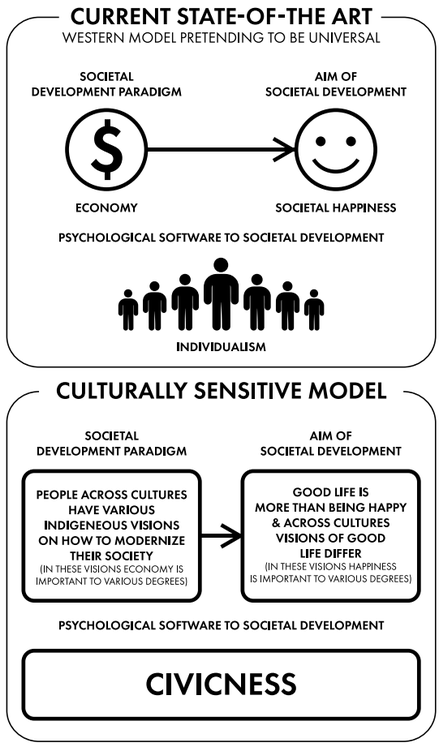
» LEARN FROM BEST PRACTICES

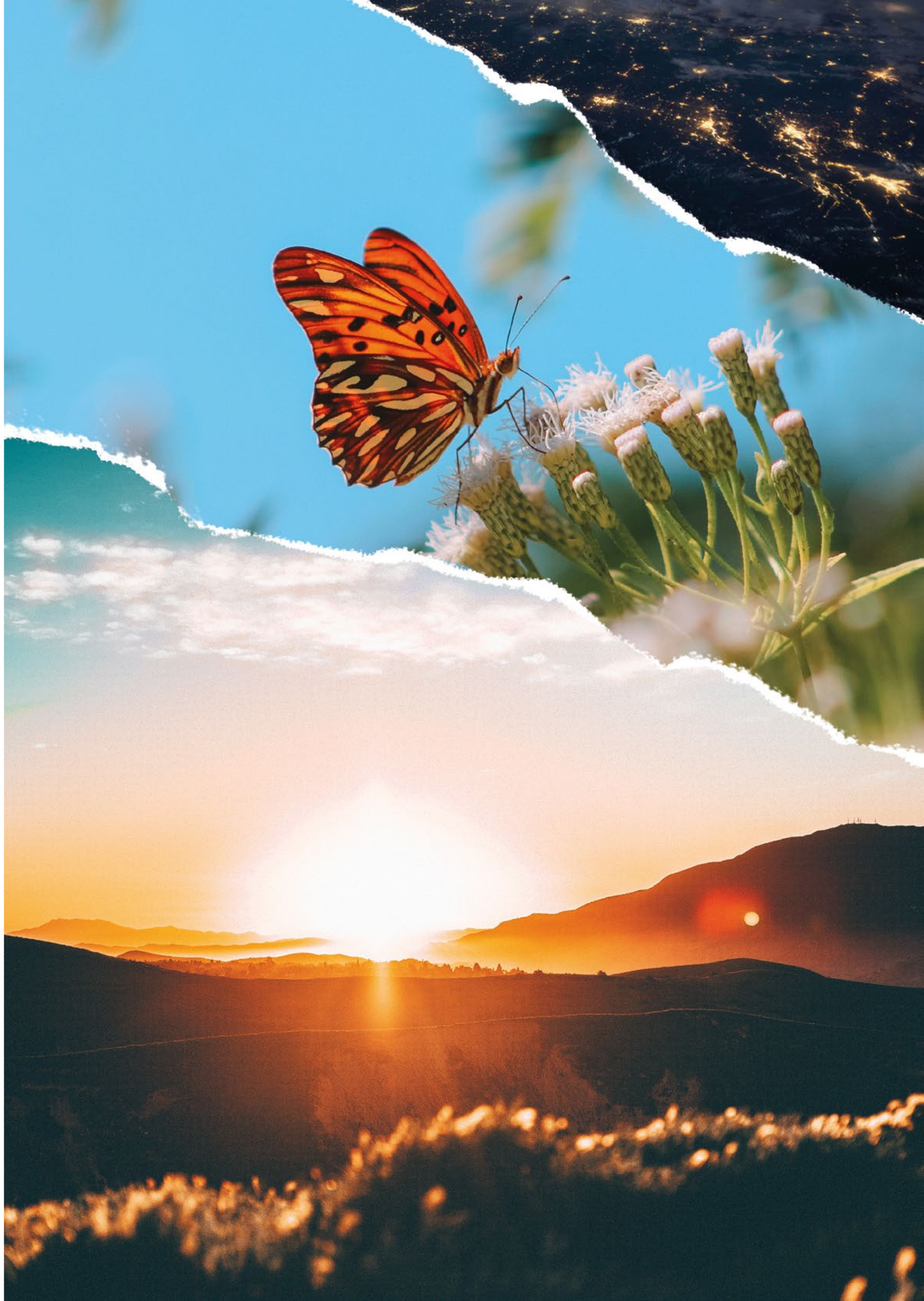
Case study: Norway is often regarded as one of the best places in the world to live, and Norwegian social policy solutions are described as exemplary. The Scandinavian social model – based, among other things, on social equality and a balance between individual autonomy and a high level of pro-sociality – shows that a high quality of life and social well-being are the result of a long history of social development in the North. A comparative study by Nina Witoszek and Mads Larsen of the University of Oslo highlights the influence of historical and cultural context on action, using the example of different models of cooperation and altruistic strategies in Poland and Norway. Their research shows that while it is necessary to adapt social policies to local conditions, it is equally important to seek inspiration and learn from cross-cultural experiences.

For more information, please visit page **27**

TOWARDS A TRULY GLOBAL CULTURALLY SENSITIVE MODEL OF SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

In light of the above, we propose an evolution from the Western-centric model of societal development (which emphasises economic growth, takes societal happiness as the end state, and is driven by psychological individualism) to a culturally sensitive model of societal development. This new model recognises a variety of pathways of societal development, adopts cultu¬rally defined concepts of subjective well-being as an end state, and is driven by psychological civicness. In the face of pressing global challenges and the need for collabo¬rative efforts to address them, the study of societal development and well-being in a culturally sensitive and sustainable manner seems not only relevant but imperative.





Address the social aspects of development

Based on research by
Mateusz Olechowski and Kuba Kryś

The results show that people believe that the future will bring enormous technological development. This will make societies more competent, but at the same time social ties will break down. Is the progressive atomisation of social life the only future scenario? How can we counteract the negative emotions associated with the prospect of progressive digitalisation, including the fear of losing one's job? Research by a team from the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences shows that activities that support the social aspect of development allow people not only to look more optimistically to the future, but also to better assess their own future well-being.

Many challenges of the contemporary world are addressed by new technologies. They save lives, improve quality of life, promote security and protect the environment. Technologies provide access and open doors to information, new possibilities and opportunities for humanity. Over the past century, it is estimated that human life expectancy has increased by about 40 years, the world's gross domestic product has increased 25-fold, and the computing power of our machines is doubled every two years.

But while new technologies have brought unprecedented improvements in the lives of societies around the world, they have also brought many risks. They are an instrument of crime, cyber-bullying, exclusion and deteriorating mental health. They are also becoming a source of anxiety - about security, the future, job stability or the breakdown of relationships with family and friends. In a number of studies exploring the psychological perspective of social development, initiated by the Folk Theory of Social Change (FTSC), when asked about their expectations for the future, people predict that it will bring enormous technological development, making societies more competent and efficient, but at the same time less communal, warm and moral[1].

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Is modernisation associated with technological progress and industrialisation the only path to social development? For years, classical theories of social development have focused on its economic aspect[2]. Economic development and the culture of consumerism have been symbols of progress, but the associated threats to mental health, social ties, the environment or the global ecosystem are increasingly being openly discussed. Although the mid-20th century perspective that equated social development with economic growth has now been challenged, most research into social perceptions of the future has focused on the economic dimension.

A team of researchers from the Institute of Psychology at the Polish Academy of Sciences predicted that different types of change could differentiate social moods and expectations about the future. Their research therefore divided modernisation into several subtypes, distinguishing between conventional, economic, technological and social development.

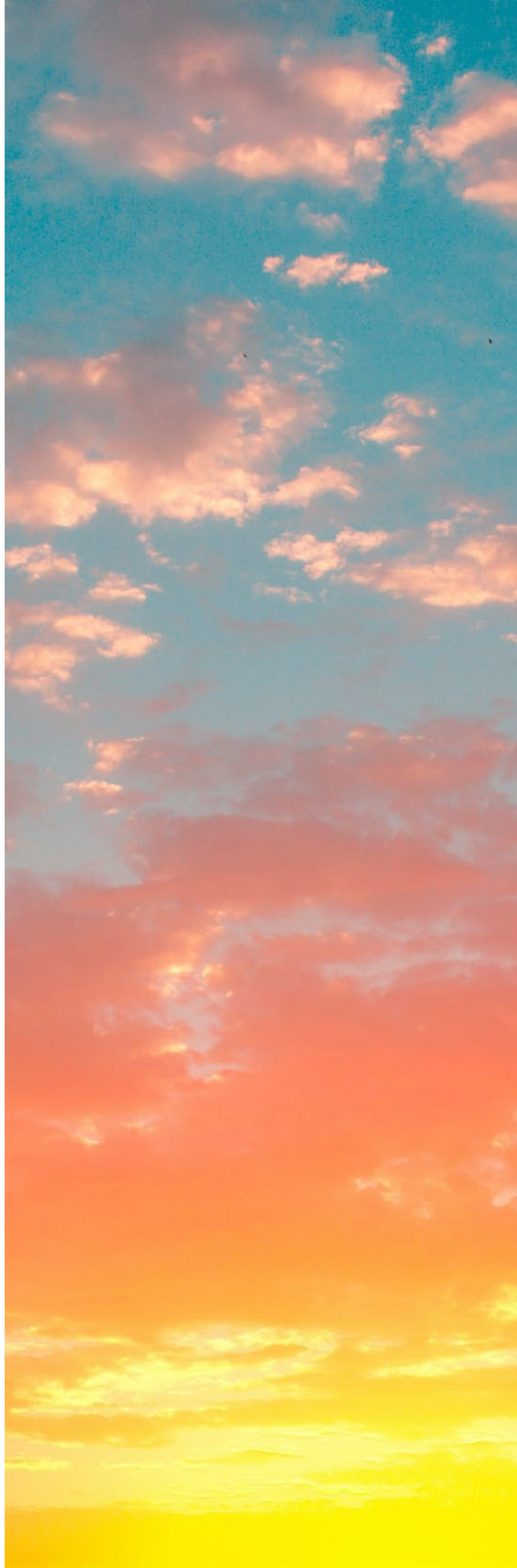
The results of the series of three studies confirm the fears about the future of industrialisation that have been identified so far, but, most importantly, they also point to new, more optimistic scenarios. A better vision and expectation of the future is possible if modernisation and development are based on social aspects. Communitarianism is the basis of the 'social fabric' that holds society together, and its decline can lead to a breakdown of bonds, lower well-being and increased conflict. It is community values – such as social ties, trust or family values, as well as assertiveness and leadership - that are positively correlated with the well-being of future societies.

SHARED FUTURE = BETTER FUTURE

New technology experts predict that technological development will continue, and that further modernisation based on it is certain. Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives. Innovations are helping to meet many of today's challenges and will probably be needed in the future to meet the next. But the future need not be frightening. Research shows that smart social policies can offset the negative effects of technological modernisation, minimise fears about the future and the breakdown of social ties, and positively influence the well-being of societies around the world.

The creation of appropriate social policies and the active building of social ties are essential to offset the negative effects of industrialisation and to enhance the sustainable well-being of present and future societies. Consequently, measures should be taken to promote communitarianism and cooperation, with a view to eradicating poverty, eliminating inequalities, providing education, building trust and supporting the reconciliation of work and family life. To build a sustainable future, it is essential to create societies that are not only economically prosperous, but also supportive, sustainable, morally developed and resilient.

What should the process of social development look like in order to create a society that can cope with global challenges and is optimistic about the future?



[1] Kashima Y, et al. Folk theory of social change. Asian J Soc Psychol. 2009; 12(4): 227–46.
[2] Krys K, at al. Psychologizing indexes of societal progress: Accounting for cultural diversity in preferred developmental pathways. Cult Psychol. 2020;26:303-19.

Adopt a culturally sensitive approach to development

Based on theoretical and empirical research by **Kuba Kryś, Colin A. Capaldi, Vivian Miu-Chi Lun, Christin-Melanie Vauclair, Michael H. Bond, Alejandra Domínguez Espinosa, Yukiko Uchida, Wijnand Van Tilburg, Patrick Denoux, Julien Teyssier, İdil Işık, Katarzyna Cantarero, Claudio Torres, Victoria Wai Lan Yeung, Brian W. Haas, Laura Andrade, David O. Igbokwe, Agata Kocimska-Zych, Lea Villeneuve, John M. Zelenski, and over one hundred researchers assembled in the Live Better research consortium.**

Visions of the good life vary widely across societies, reflecting a diversity of models of human flourishing. There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for social progress; the Scandinavians have a different vision for their societies from the Japanese, and these systems differ from the American or Chinese models. This diversity is not only acceptable, it is desirable. The institutions that govern our societies should adopt a culturally sensitive approach to social development, recognising and respecting the unique indigenous vision of each society. This report argues for the explicit inclusion of societal voices in social development policy-making, thereby democratising the discourse on this crucial issue.

The history of societal development can be described as a transformation from the so-called Malthusian world, characterised by militarism and demographic growth consuming all increases in productivity, to the era of economisation. This transformation appears to be a "success story", as evidenced by the significant increase in global life expectancy over the last 50 years. In 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), there was no country with a life expectancy below 50 years, and only 6% of countries had a life expectancy below 60 years.

However, the dominance of the economic paradigm has been increasingly challenged since the 2007-2009 financial crisis, highlighting the flaws in equating societal development solely with economic growth. As we face new global challenges in the 2020s, it is clear that societal development involves more than just economic progress. It is essential to develop social policies and prioritise investment in social institutions. But what exactly does 'social development' mean?

In this report, we argue for a culturally sensitive paradigm of social development that respects each society's unique, indigenous vision of progress and allows for development based on cultural values and locally defined pathways. Our research shows that lay visions of societal development are similar across cultures, prioritising well-being and inclusivity, while de-prioritising military or demographic growth. Thus, by involving people in the decision-making process, policy-makers can tailor modernisation efforts to local conditions and expectations without the risk of halting or reversing modernisation.

In order to build an evidence-based, culturally sensitive paradigm of societal development, it is crucial to research lay people's expectations. This report calls for international and local government and research institutions to study people's expectations of societal development and incorporate them into policy-making. Initiatives such as the World Values Survey, Gallup, the European Social Survey or organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development can expand their research initiatives to study a wide range of preferences for societal development. Initial steps have already been taken, such as the CRONOS panel of the European Social Survey, which has begun to explore indigenous visions of social progress in Europe.

„People can live a good life in a variety of ways; there are numerous recipes for societal flourishing. Policy-making and research on societal development should take into account the diversity of cultural contexts and expectations. Our empirical research demonstrates that across cultures, lay expectations towards societal development generally prioritise various social aspects of modernisation. Therefore, by adopting a culturally sensitive paradigm, policy-makers can effectively fine-tune policies to indigenous visions without a significant risk of halting modernisation."

dr hab. Kuba Kryś
Institute of Psychology
of the Polish Academy od Sciences

Measure development in ways that reflect local values

Based on empirical research of the **Live Better** research consortium.

Policy-makers are like pilots guiding our societies. The quality of their work depends on the measurement tools they have at their disposal and on which they rely. Here we propose that a battery of culturally sensitive measures of societal development be added to the toolkit of our societal pilots. The culturally sensitive paradigm of societal development can help to construct new measures of societal progress and refine existing ones. For example, we briefly outline the methodology for a culturally sensitive variant of the Human Development Index (HDI).

The Human Development Index (HDI) is currently an important alternative to purely economic measures of societal development, such as GDP per capita. The HDI averages three sub-indices: access to education, long and healthy life and economic well-being. There are already a number of variations of the HDI. The United Nations Development Programme calculates several indices annually, including the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII), the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), and the Planet Pressure-adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI). Here we argue for the addition of another compass to this toolkit: the Culturally Sensitive Human Development Index (CS-HDI).

The HDI is the geometric mean of the normalised indices for each of the three dimensions, as shown in the formula below:

$$\mathrm{HDI} = (\mathrm{I}_{health} \times \mathrm{I}_{education} \times \mathrm{I}_{economics})^{\frac{1}{3}}$$

Thus, the HDI implicitly assumes that each of its three components is equally important to each society. However, there is no empirical evidence that each society values each of these three development paths equally. Our empirical research in 70 countries documents substantial differences in preferences for these three dimensions.

By using data on societal preferences, the CS-HDI can weight longevity, education and the economy according to each society's actual preferences, and then assess how well each society is achieving its own goals in a culturally sensitive way. The formula for the CS-HDI may be as follows:

$$\text{CS-HDI} = \left(\mathrm{I}_{health}^{\mathrm{W}_{health}} \times \mathrm{I}_{education}^{\mathrm{W}_{education}} \times \mathrm{I}_{economics}^{\mathrm{W}_{economics}}\right)^{1/(\mathrm{W}_{health}+\mathrm{W}_{education}+\mathrm{W}_{economics})}$$

As a result, this adapted CS-HDI places relatively more emphasis on the dimensions that a given society aspires to achieve, making it more culturally sensitive. Below is a sample table comparing the 2022 HDI with its 2022 CS-HDI version, based on the preference data we collected in 70 countries.

„The HDI was a significant advancement over purely economic measures of societal development. However, existing variations of the HDI—such as the MPI, PHDI and GII—suggest that there is room for further improvement. We propose another step forward: a culturally sensitive version of the HDI, or CS-HDI. In this report, we outline the methodology for the CS-HDI and demonstrate its application to nearly 70 countries. Our analysis shows that the regular HDI, when compared to CS-HDI which accounts for societal expectations, may underestimate or overestimate development by as much as 10 years for some countries. This significant discrepancy can provide valuable insights into social reality."

dr hab. Kuba Kryś
Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy od Sciences

Table comparing countries on HDI and CS-HDI. Full version available here.

HDI Ranking	Country	Human Development Index (HDI)	Culturally Sensitive Human Development Index (CS-HDI)	Difference between CS-HDI and HDI	Difference between CS HDI and HDI illustrated by average yearly change (0.004)
2	**Norway**	0,966	0,962	-0,0037	**-0,9**
3	**Iceland**	0,959	0,962	0,0033	**0,8**
4	**Hong Kong, China (SAR)**	0,956	0,955	-0,0008	**-0,2**
5	**Denmark**	0,952	0,951	-0,0012	**-0,3**
7	**Germany**	0,950	0,946	-0,0038	**-0,9**
7	**Ireland**	0,950	0,948	-0,0016	**-0,4**
10	**Australia**	0,946	0,954	0,0076	**1,9**
15	**United Kingdom**	0,940	0,946	0,0062	**1,6**
17	**United Arab Emirates**	0,937	0,921	-0,0163	**-4,1**
18	**Canada**	0,935	0,942	0,0074	**1,8**
30	**Italy**	0,906	0,874	-0,0320	**-8,0**
36	**Georgia**	0,881	0,882	0,005	**0,1**
77	**Mexico**	0,781	0,752	-0,0295	**-7,4**
93	**Algeria**	0,745	0,719	-0,0258	**-6,5**
107	**Viet Nam**	0,726	0,696	-0,0297	**-7,4**
119	**Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)**	0,699	0,665	-0,0345	**-8,6**
120	**Morocco**	0,698	0,660	-0,0382	**-9,5**
124	**Suriname**	0,690	0,723	0,0333	**8,3**
129	**Bangladesh**	0,670	0,635	-0,0347	**-8,7**
159	**Uganda**	0,550	0,581	0,0306	**7,6**
161	**Nigeria**	0,548	0,557	0,0094	**2,3**
164	**Pakistan**	0,540	0,504	-0,0355	**-8,9**
169	**Senegal**	0,517	0,523	0,0061	**1,5**
177	**Madagascar**	0,487	0,448	-0,0389	**-9,7**
185	**Burkina Faso**	0,438	0,429	-0,0086	**-2,2**

It is important to note that our data on societal expectations are not representative and the analyses presented are for illustrative purposes only. Our scores should not be interpreted as accurate representations of countries. Large-scale, representative data collections on societal expectations are needed to reliably calculate CS-HDI scores.

Go beyond happiness, cultivate well-being in its full complexity

Based on research by **Kuba Kryś, Ewa Palikot, Karolina Nowak, Maciej Górski, Katarzyna Myślińska-Szarek and Marta Roczniewska and the Live Better research consortium.**

Cultures differ in their understanding and valuation of concepts such as well-being or happiness. As a result, popular simplistic rankings that compare happiness between countries provide an incomplete picture of social well-being. The research conducted by the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IP PAS) with research teams from around the world sheds new light on the understanding of happiness, meaning, life satisfaction and well-being.

Today, well-being research is receiving more and more attention. Not only is it of interest to psychologists and psychiatrists, but because of its important implications for individuals, societies and general well-being, it also plays an increasingly important role in describing social development. It also forms an important basis for the development of social policies aimed at improving quality of life. It provides a better understanding of what influences quality of life and what measures need to be taken to improve it. Ultimately, it will guide the design of public programmes that build a more sustainable, empathetic and resilient society.

A comprehensive understanding of social well-being is not easy. Well-being can be interpreted in different ways, and its various components – happiness, meaning, harmony, spirituality – have different meanings in different cultures[3]. It is also challenging to measure individual and societal well-being accurately and reliably.

The research conducted by the IP PAS team, with the participation of researchers from around the world, highlights the importance of culturally sensitive measures of well-being and how to conduct research in this paradigm. The cultural diversity of modern societies and the diversity of understandings of what constitutes a good life require that scientific definitions of well-being be broadened and that research on well-being takes into account the diversity of social goals and values. This can lead to measures that more reliably represent social well-being and allow the creation of social policy tools and programmes tailored to the challenges, needs and visions of a good life for people around the world.

HAPPINESS MAXIMIZATION IS A WEIRD WAY OF LIVING

Both psychology and the general public often treat happiness and psychological well-being as synonymous. Although happiness is considered a primary goal in Western cultures, it is not a comprehensive measure of well-being. Recent research sheds new light on this issue.

In a paper entitled Happiness Maximisation Is a WEIRD Way of Living, a team of researchers showed that psychological well-being is more than just being happy and challenged the claim that the pursuit of the highest level of happiness is a universal goal. To provide empirical evidence, 13,000 men and women from 49 countries were asked about their ideal level of happiness. For almost all respondents, it was important to be at least 'somewhat happy'. One in four people (25%) admitted that they did not want to be any happier than they were, even though their subjective level of satisfaction with life was not as high as it could be. In fact, only 15% of respondents said they were striving for the highest possible level of happiness.

Cross-cultural analyses of data from 66 countries suggest that not all people idealise highest levels of happiness. The pursuit of happiness is particularly characteristic of Western cultural societies and less so of other cultural groups. According to the authors of the study, this may be influenced by the mild climate of Western Europe and the resulting low existential pressure compared to other regions of the world.

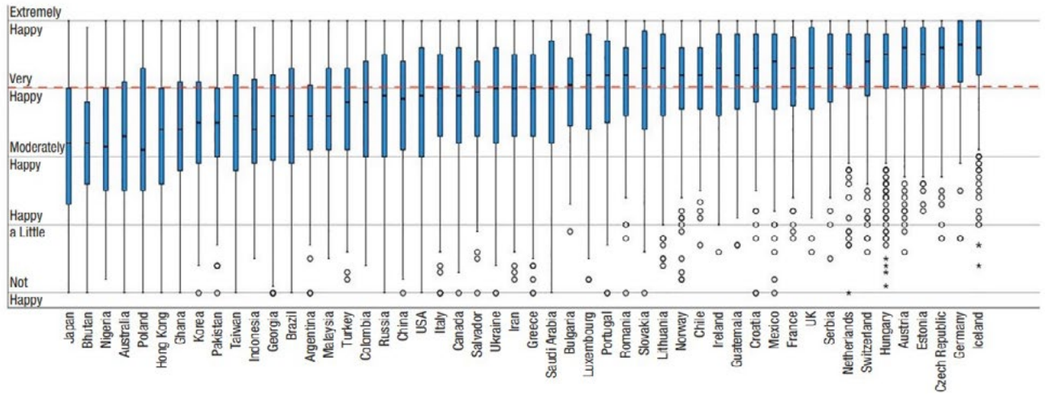
[3] Delle Fave et al., 2016; Kwan, V. S., Bond, M. H., & Singelis, T. M. (1997). Pancultural explanations for life satisfaction: Adding relationship harmony to self-esteem. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73(5),1038.

This study not only opens a new door to understanding whether the culturally determined idea of happiness is universal, but also has implications for social policy. A comprehensive approach to well-being, which takes into account factors and values other than happiness itself, will help to develop more precise measures of the good life and allow a better understanding of the needs and values of different social groups.

In terms of social policy-making, this research highlights that satisfaction with life can be achieved in different ways in different parts of the world. In the Confucian culture of Asia, harmony is valued, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Latin America, religiosity and spirituality are valued, so visions of the good life may differ according to cultural contexts.

IS A SATISFYING LIFE A GOOD LIFE FOR EVERYONE?

The concept of life satisfaction is commonly taken to be synonymous with subjective well-being, but this too may be an oversimplification. The results of our study suggest that life satisfaction does not include (or includes few of) the important components of well-being, such as a sense of purpose, harmony or spirituality.



The red dashed line indicates the ‚Very Happy' level, the middle line indicates the median level, and the circles and asterisks are outliers. Source data are from Kryś, Park et al. (2021), Kryś, Yeung et al. (2022) and Kryś et al. (2023).

To test this hypothesis, a correlational study was conducted to examine the relationship between life satisfaction and individual components of subjective well-being. Regression analysis showed that life satisfaction, as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), accurately captures only happiness, but it reflects the other components of well-being much less well.

In research practice, this means that life satisfaction should not serve as a universal measure of general well-being, although it may be recognised as such in those cultures that recognise happiness as a central element of the good life, i.e. Western cultures.

The broad model of subjective well-being proposes an interdependent network of different components. Happiness is only one of them.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND MEANING?

Although it is widely accepted by both academics and the general public that feelings of happiness and meaning are not the same, there is a surprising lack of comprehensive evidence describing these differences in the psychological literature. Katarzyna Myślińska-Szarek and her team have begun to fill this gap. In a series of experimental studies, she has shown that the factor that differentiates the two concepts may be the effort put into the activity.

It is the effort that gives meaning to the action performed. The more effort we put into a task, the more meaning we attach to it. But effort also influences how we rate happiness – when we perform complicated and demanding activities, our happiness decreases.

Escaping unhappiness is a universal goal, shared by all cultures. But living a good life is more than just being happy. Once you have achieved a basic level of happiness, the question is: should you aim to increase it further, or should you focus more on building a sense of purpose, harmony, spirituality or other components of your good life?

This research points to a variety of pathways to a good life, and shows ways other than those based solely on the pursuit of happiness. Recognising the importance of challenges and challenging activities can help build a sense of meaning and, ultimately, social well-being.

Promote sustainable well-being

Based on research by **Anna O. Kuźmińska, Agata Gąsiorowska, Kaja Głomb, Piotr Błaszcz, Marta Roczniewska and Ewelina Purc**

Well-being as an essential element of social development should not only be culturally sensitive, but also sustainable. Tackling climate change, eradicating poverty or ensuring decent living conditions are essential actions for the well-being of present and future societies. Research shows that individuals' personal beliefs influence their motivation to pursue common goals, and a sense of community and convergence of priorities provide motivation to engage in addressing global issues. Shaping the right narrative can therefore inspire and build commitment to work towards a better future for all.

It was on 25 September 2015 that 193 UN Member States signed the document Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopting an ambitious but necessary plan of action to save humanity and the planet. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were born out of the need to tackle global challenges such as poverty, social inequality, climate change and environmental degradation[4]. Achieving the 17 goals will require cooperation at many levels, including local, national and international action by governments, the private sector, NGOs and civil society around the world.

Well-being and social development should be pursued on the same basis, taking into account the needs of present and future societies around the world. Tackling climate change, eradicating poverty or ensuring decent living conditions are essential actions to be taken for the well-being of present and future societies. But committing to common goals and working together is not always easy. Each nation also has its own challenges, arising from its local economy, culture, history, values and ecological conditions. Globally shared goals at the level of countries, smaller societal groups or individuals may have different or even contradictory outcomes on the value scale.

„The challenges we face are collective in nature and, as such, require collective action to meet them. Understanding what creates a sense of shared reality in the nation can help us act to develop our country more effectively."

dr Marta Roczniewska
SWPS University

PREDICTING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS COMMON GOALS

The research team set out to test how the size of the gap between personal goals and the current state of social development influences commitment to individual development behaviour. In other words, they tested whether a greater gap between the desired state and the current state motivates individuals to engage in more goal-directed activity.

Research on the three selected Sustainable Development Goals (related to well-being and health, environmental issues and road safety) has shown that our personal values and expectations outweigh the influence of the environment and social context. People are driven more by their own needs than by the observed level of achievement of societal development goals. If goals, such as environmental goals, are important to the individual, the motivation to take action to achieve them will be equally high, regardless of the level of achievement in society.

If we want to make a real difference in changing individual behaviour for the benefit of society, we should focus on highlighting the personal importance of the Sustainable Development Goals. Individuals who see a connection between these goals and their own identity or values may be more likely to commit to acting on them, even if there is a personal cost to doing so. What is important to individuals will determine the effectiveness of our influence and persuasion for positive change. For example, the message 'By separating your rubbish you will reduce greenhouse gas emissions' may be ineffective if environmental goals are not important and motivating to the individual. It will be more effective to take concrete action to convince such an individual that separating waste will have real benefits for him or her personally.

SHARED EXPERIENCING OF REALITY

Members of the same country or social group function objectively and factually in the same reality, but their subjective feelings, beliefs or priorities may be very different. What should we do when our goals differ from those commonly held in society? Ewelina Purc and Marta Roczniewska, social psychologists at SWPS University, investigated this question. They conducted a series of three experimental studies based on the theory of shared reality. According to this theory, a sense of shared reality is the feeling of sharing internal states with another person or social group. Shared beliefs, fears and feelings can arise not only in relation to other people or social groups, but also in relation to phenomena that occur in the world[5].

Participants were given a list of 10 social goals and asked to rank them in order of personal importance. They were then given feedback on the perceived high or low correspondence of their preferences with those of other members of society in their country. The results suggest that when people learn that their goal preferences are highly congruent with those of others in the country, it creates a greater sense of shared reality. This, in turn, translates into a greater sense of closeness to and trust in other members of the nation, a greater belief in the validity of their development priorities and, very importantly, a greater motivation to work towards national development – both individually and together with others.

In practice, when, as individuals, we realise that we have similar social development priorities to other members of our nation and feel that we share goals and realities with them, then we are more willing and inclined to take action. Focusing on similarities instead of differences within a society is a key element in motivating people to achieve their preferred social development goals. A shared reality helps to meet interpersonal relationship needs and to understand the world around us – to build a sense of certainty and truth. In turn, according to the individual-environment fit hypothesis, when our individual attributes, values and attitudes are congruent with the environment in which we function, we are better suited to living in society and experience higher well-being.

[4] https://sdgs.un.org/goals. Data dostępu: 20.04.2024 r.

[4] Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. American Psychologist, 52(12), 1280–1300. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.12.1280

Values over divisions

Based on research by **Ewa Palikot, Brian W. Haas and Kuba Kryś**

The vast majority of cross-cultural research focuses on identifying and highlighting the differences that exist between representatives of the world's cultures. Our team's study, Progressing Discourse From ‚How Much of a Human's Life is Cultural' to ‚Which Domains of Life are Cultural', has shed new light on what is common to all people, regardless of their cultural background. The research team analysed the results of questionnaires completed by nearly 88,000 people from 59 different countries, covering more than 200 different variables relating to different areas of life.

It turns out that the strength of the influence of cultural context varies in different areas of life. Some of our views, attitudes and characteristics – such as religious values, sexuality, social capital and beliefs about foreign groups – are particularly dependent on and strongly influenced by cultural context. On the other hand, perceptions of science and technology, economic views and family values remain relatively independent of cultural context – they appear to be universal.

Researchers emphasise that understanding cultural universals can help to transcend cultural boundaries and create common ground for global interaction. Also, knowledge and understanding of key differences between cultures can effectively build culturally responsive social solutions on a global scale.

Construct an appropriate narrative: the impact of the framing effect on motivation

Based on research by **Agata Gąsiorowska, Magdalena Marszałek, Paweł Mordasiewicz and Marta Roczniewska**

Individuals' motivation and desire to achieve are essential for positive global change, so it is important to understand what makes people more likely to take action. Research by the SWPS University team and E.T. Higgins – the creator of Regulatory Focus Theory – suggests that using different regulatory orientations can lead to more effective social action. In pursuing and motivating a goal, the way we talk about it often plays a key role.

According to E.T. Higgins' Regulatory Focus Theory, people have different types of motivation, i.e. we differ in what is important to us and how we want to achieve it. We can speak of two dimensions of motivation: promotive and preventative. Individuals with a promotive orientation strive for success, development and growth, while individuals with a preventative orientation avoid negative consequences and try to maintain the status quo by looking after their safety and security. In terms of achieving social goals, individuals with a promotional orientation may focus on creating new solutions and initiating social change to achieve a better future, while individuals with a preventative orientation will place more emphasis on maintaining existing support programmes, avoiding risks and minimising losses.

A team of researchers at SWPS University tested whether the type of motivation that characterises an individual is related to his or her commitment to goals. In the first series of studies, a clear trend emerged: the greater an individual's promotive motivation, the more important social development goals are to them. However, the researchers suggest that a key element in the pursuit and motivation of social goals may be the narrative we adopt. Goals tend to appear in a broader context, and the way a phenomenon is framed can influence social mobilisation and active support for action.

This phenomenon has been the subject of research involving the creator of RFT himself, Higgins. The two studies conducted so far are part of a project to answer the question of whether the perspective effect influences goal preference. Further studies are in progress. However, the researchers are already in no doubt: understanding the different regulatory orientations and being able to use them effectively in practice, depending on the motivational characteristics of individuals, can lead to more effective action and real achievements.

PROMOTION FOCUS	PREVENTION FOCUS
NEED FOR GROWTH	NEED FOR SAFETY
EAGERNESS	VIGILANCE
MOVING TO A BETTER STATE	AVOIDING LOSSES
MAXIMIZING GAINS	MINIMIZING ERRORS
IDEALS AND ASPIRATIONS	OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES

[5] Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. American Psychologist, 52(12), 1280–1300. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.12.1280

PROTECTION FROM CLIMATE CHANGE OR CLIMATE ACTION?

"The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt. By taking immediate action, we can limit further deterioration and minimise the negative impact on people, animals and the planet as a whole. Scientists are unanimous in warning that the consequences for our future could be catastrophic. Together, we must take concrete steps to reduce emissions, protect ecosystems and adapt to changing climate conditions. Before it is too late."

Well, how about:

„Climate change is not only a challenge but also an opportunity to transform our societies into more sustainable ones. By investing in renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency and encouraging technological innovation, we can create a world where clean air, clean water and a healthy planet become the norm. Our actions can create new jobs, economic growth and a better quality of life. Let us act together to protect the climate and build a better future for all living things on Earth."

In this example, pro-environmental actions are presented in two approaches. A seemingly subtle difference, presented in a broader context and preceded by verbs associated with different types of motivation, can have a completely different effect on individuals with a dominant promotional or preventative motivation.

How does social development shape emotional communication in different cultures?

Based on research by **June Yeung and researchers assembled in the Live Better research consortium**

How do institutional structures and social trust influence the expression of emotions across cultures? Research suggests that societies with developed institutional structures are less likely to express negative emotions by relying on formal procedures such as complaints and grievances, while less developed societies are more likely to resort to the expression of negative emotions as a form of 'cry for help'. This finding sheds light on issues of emotion regulation and the importance of cultural sensitivity in fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

Expressing emotions is part of social communication. Cultural context plays a role in shaping how emotions are expressed, perceived and interpreted. Different cultures have different norms, expectations and judgements about the expression of emotions, which also affect social interactions[6]. Starting from the assumption that well-organised, efficient institutional systems should effectively fulfil the social functions assigned to them, including helping to build trust, we tested whether the efficiency of institutional structures can influence the degree to which emotions are expressed in a given society. Using data from more than 12,000 respondents in 48 countries and regions, we examined the relationship between social development and the expression of both positive and negative emotions.

We found that social factors such as trust and quality of life influence how people express their emotions. In societies with effective institutional structures, where trust in institutions is high, people express fewer negative emotions and tend to prefer ways of resolving problems based on formal procedures, such as written complaints or grievances. In contrast, in societies with less effective structures, the expression of negative emotions may be a way of signalling social problems. The effect of development on the expression of positive emotions remained negligible.

This study highlights the unique and important role of social development in shaping the expression of negative emotions. These findings have both research and practical implications, suggesting that the reasons for expressing negative emotions as a social tool may vary depending on the social context. They also highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in areas where cooperation between individuals from different cultures is required.

[6] Mesquita, B., & Boiger, M. (2014). Emotions in context: A sociodynamic model of emotions. Emotion Review, 6 (4), 298–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073914534480

Construct civic attitudes

Based on theoretical research by **Kuba Kryś, Maciej Górski, Arek Wąsiel, Brian W. Haas, Vivian Miu-Chi Lun, Igor de Almeida and Michael Harris Bond**

Individualism – a psychological characteristic of Western societies – is commonly treated as a universal psychological ‚software' that underpins and drives processes of social development and well-being. However, linking individualism to social well-being is an oversimplification based on faulty assumptions. A new psychological compass for social development research and policy is needed. We propose that international institutions support the formation of civicness, a way of being in which individuals prioritise the well-being of the larger community to which they belong over that of their smaller community and themselves. Civicness, as the psychological ‚software' of social development, will help to better understand and develop the social bonds that bind developing societies together.

The individualism-collectivism dimension is recognised as the aspect that explains most of the cultural variation between countries around the world. It is often associated with social development, and some identify it with the Human Development Syndrome , supporting the thesis that the West – as a term for individualistic societies – is more advanced than the rest of the world, and that the Western trajectory represents the optimal development path for all of humanity.

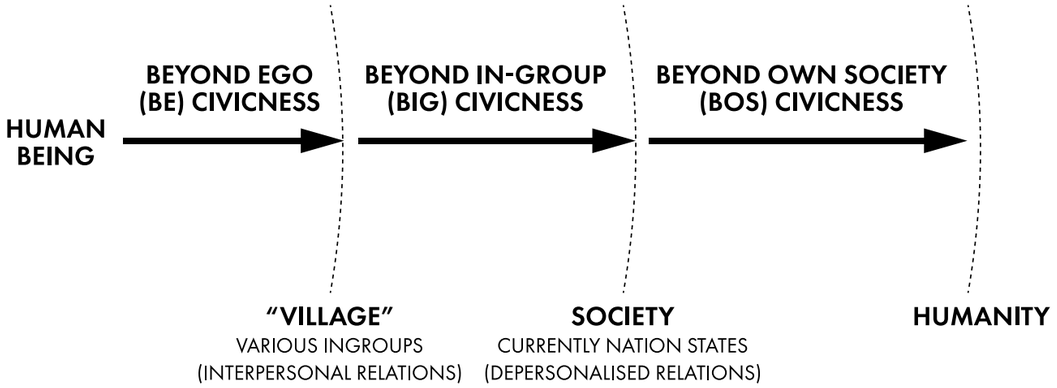
An international team of researchers, led by the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, critically evaluated the results of 40 years of research on social development and individualism and questioned the relationship between individualism and positive social outcomes. Here are the main reasons why individualism should not be seen as the 'software' of social development:

1. current measures of individualism-collectivism are not ecologically valid;
2. there are alarming inconsistencies between theory and empirical data in the area of individualism research;
3. the impressive development trajectory of Confucian Asian countries challenges the thesis linking individualism to social development;
4. the neglect of colonialism and its legacies in analyses;
5. the negative consequences of promoting individualism;
6. the lack of cultural sensitivity in social development models based on individualism

Based on this, and on the evolutionary theories of multi-level selection and complex adaptive systems, the research team developed the Theory of Civicness as a psychological compass for social develop¬ment research and social policy-making.

The research team recommends that international and local social policy institutions should focus on shaping civic attitudes. These are understood as a way of being in which an individual, when faced with a dilemma, prioritises the good of the larger social group to which he or she belongs over the good of the smaller group and the individual. Civicness is the prioritisation of a pro-social way of being, rooted in a sense of responsibility, duty and concern for others. By proposing three types of civicness – group, social and global – the model allows us to explore the psychological 'software' that builds social bonds and their consequences for social development, taking into account the specificity of the cultural context.

[7] Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations. New York, NY: Sage publications.
[8] Inglehart, R., & Oyserman, D. (2004). Individualism, autonomy, self-expression. The human development syndrome. In H. Vinken, J. Soeters, & P. Ester (Eds.), Comparing cultures, dimensions of culture in a comparative perspective (pp. 74–96). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.



The three basic forms of civicness.

Learn From Best Practices: The Norwegian recipe for well-being

Based on research by **Nina Witoszek and Mads Larsen**

Famous for its picturesque fjords, mountainous landscapes and progressive culture, Norway is often considered one of the best places in the world to live. What is the phenomenon of the country? Based on interviews with representatives of different generations, research by Nina Witoszek and Mads Larsen shows that it is by no means the strong economy, stable politics and welfare state that are the main sources of Norwegian well-being. Rather, the relatively high levels of happiness and self-fulfilment depend on three cultural factors. First, a pro-social ethos that emphasises the importance of acting for the good of others. Second, a tradition of cooperation and compromise between different social actors: government and citizens, parents and children, men and women, employers and employees. Third, an intimate relationship with nature, which for many Norwegians is an alternative 'home', a place of physical and spiritual renewal.

In the eyes of many external observers, the Nordic countries, including Norway, are paragons of good governance, environmental stewardship and enlightened altruism, as reflected in rankings of the world's 'happiest' countries. The secret of Nordic well-being is the result of many cultural, economic and geopolitical factors that have been shaped over the years.

The foundations of Norway's unique social fabric and high quality of life have been laid by a strong emphasis on social equality and emancipation. The struggle for human, women's and minority rights has deep historical roots and is an important part of Norwegian identity. Norwegians recognise the great value of individual autonomy and a sense of empowerment. Civic education from an early age teaches individuals responsibility for themselves and for society, and thus plays a key role in the formation of Norwegian identity. It makes every citizen feel that he or she is an important participant in society and actively involved in the development of the country.

Access to nature is also an important part of the Nordic way of life, which is reflected in a high quality of life. Norwegian society values proximity to nature and sees it as an important source of psycho-physical renewal. The concept of friluftsliv, or outdoor living, is an integral part of their lifestyle, which includes weekend hikes, trips to the mountains, fishing by the river and generally spending time outdoors. These practices not only affect the well-being of the population, but also shape Norwegian culture through a relationship based on respect, sustainability and harmony with the environment.

What sets Norway apart are the many pro-social activities undertaken by both the government and its citizens, including massive aid projects in developing countries. Norway spends more than 1% of its GDP on development aid, one of the highest amounts in the world, to promote peace, human rights and democracy. Norway's social and political programmes are characterised by the visionary energy and philosophy of pragmatism at the heart of the welfare state. Helping and working for the common good are part of the Norwegian ethos, and the country also has a high level of altruism among its population. Voluntary work, charity and support for various social initiatives are commonplace, further strengthening the country's social bonds and solidarity.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT, ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR AND WELL-BEING?

Nina Witoszek and Mads Larsen from the University of Oslo investigated this in their study. Through in-depth interviews with Nordic and Slavic volunteers involved in helping Ukrainian refugees, they shed light on the influence of culture and history on altruistic practices.

Different aid strategies were clearly highlighted in the study. Norwegian altruism is a systemic action that stems from Lutheran traditions, according to which caring for the well-being of the individual is a shared responsibility. It is based on trust in authority and its effectiveness comes from following the principles of helping. For example, Nordic volunteers believe that aid should be institutionally organised, fair to all and based on long-term benefits. They seldom feel a strong emotional benefit from the help they provide; rather, their involvement translates into building self-fulfilment and a sense of duty fulfilled. In contrast, the experience of Slavic volunteers, largely shaped by their post-communist past, means that their aid strategies are characterised by spontaneity, improvisation and working against the system. For this group of activists, helping is associated with high emotions, but also with rapid burnout.

This research sheds light not only on the historical and cultural context that has programmed us to want to help others, but also on how we act. Universal pro-social attitudes are filtered through cultural values and norms, political systems and ideological beliefs. A better understanding of the biocultural origins of altruism could be crucial in an era of resurgent and increasing authoritarianism. At the same time, researchers and scholars emphasise the role of international cooperation and the exchange of experiences between people from different cultures. Existing differences and mutual learning can become a strength if a society can use them to build a relationship based on respect, tolerance and openness to patterns and stimuli from outside.

„Although altruistic acts are a common feature of well-being in many societies, we found interesting differences in altruistic strategies. The Polish ethos of altruism emphasises spontaneity, improvisation and frequent rule-breaking. The Norwegian strategy of helping others emphasises acting according to rules. Despite these cultural differences, for most of our interviewees, helping Ukrainian refugees became more than just a good experience. It was often a transformative process that allowed them to discover their hidden potential, improve their self-image and gain self-respect. Statements from our male and female interviewees showed a cross-cultural inspiration in the process of helping others. There is an important practical conclusion to be drawn from our research: it pays to be open to creative cross-cultural collaboration that leads to innovative and effective solutions. The work of improving quality of life and well-being begins with rethinking the model of education, from kindergarten to university. A world in crisis needs more innovation in pedagogy and education that teaches societies to work better together, to accept compromise and to build coalitions."

prof. Nina Witoszek
Centre for Development and Environment, University of Oslo, Norway

FROM WELFARE STATE TO WELL-BEING STATE

In 2011, the United Nations unanimously adopted the resolution Happiness: Towards A Holistic Approach To Development. Since then, dozens of countries around the world have begun to turn their attention to measuring and achieving social well-being. Rather than focusing solely on economic indicators, Norway, sometimes referred to as the country of happiness, has placed increasing emphasis on indicators of social well-being. This shift is key to further improving the quality of life for residents and building a more sustainable and fulfilling community.

A turning point came in 2022 with the signing of the so-called White Paper , in which the Norwegian government declared that:

„We want a society where as many people as possible experience a good quality of life. A strategy for quality of life gives us the basis for effective measures that match the needs of the citizens. We will develop political measures in line with what the citizens emphasize for their quality of life. A good quality of life is about feeling good and functioning well. This is how we want as many people as possible to have it. [...] Increased knowledge about the importance of different life conditions for quality of life gives us better knowledge about which actions can have the greatest effect."

Many experts in well-being stress that the Scandinavian model is worth replicating. However, it is important to bear in mind that Scandinavian values and practices may have different efficacy in countries with a different cultural past, and that not all social policy solutions will be feasible. Drawing on the latest developments in evolutionary thinking, the Oslo researchers stress that most societies have more in common than they do differently. While it is important that a country's development policy is adapted to its unique local circumstances, openness to external inspiration counteracts social stagnation, inspires positive change and impacts on the well-being of citizens.

[9] www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/regjeringa-vil-forankre-ein-nasjonal-strategi-for-livskvalitet-i-folkehelsemeldinga/id2947291/ Dostęp: 20.04.2024 r.

Constraints and challenges

» The research presented in this report is subject to the typical limitations of the social sciences. Macro-scale studies conducted in dozens of countries were correlational in nature, so causal relationships presented in this report should be treated with caution. In-depth experimental research, which allows conclusions to be drawn about the causality of phenomena, has again been conducted in selected – mainly Western – cultural contexts, so generalisation to other cultural contexts is fraught with risk. The lines of research presented in this report are ongoing; we are developing them by asking further research questions. In future editions of the report, we hope to provide further confirmation of the theses presented here and additional recommendations.

» **Let's measure more and in a better way:** We recognise that implementing the recommendations set out in this report may be challenging and will require time and effort. A key tool for implementing the recommendations is the effective and comprehensive measurement – internationally and locally – of social well-being and societal expectations for social develop¬ment. We hope that this report will be another voice addressed to international (Gallup Institute, World Values Survey, European Social Survey, World Bank, etc.) and local institutions (ministries, think-tanks, research agencies) responsible for social research, encouraging them to make efforts to measure social well-being and social development expectations comprehensively. In order to have progressive and effective social policies, it is necessary to measure more and better.

» **Let's have a discussion about solutions:** The recommendations presented in this report are general. Specific solutions remain to be worked out, and it is reasonable to assume that they will evolve: societies and societal needs change, and social policies should follow these changes. Social dialogue is needed to work out the best solutions and then systematically update them. It is good to base social dialogue on reliable statistics describing well-being and social expectations, as mentioned in the previous bullet point.

» **Let's adapt solutions to local contexts:** Our general recommendations can – and should – be adapted to local contexts. How can they be implemented in your country? How can they be implemented in your institution? Be bold in seeking solutions, for the world will not improve by itself. We will continue to develop the research, but we also remain at your disposal (to a limited extent).

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The recommendations and interpretations presented in this report have been developed by the project management in collaboration with the PR Hub agency. Others involved in the project, in particular the leaders of the local teams in the research consortium, had no influence on the content of the report.

The Norway Grants and the EEA Grants represent Norway's contribution towards a green, competitive and inclusive Europe. Through the Norway Grants and the EEA Grants, Norway contributes to reducing social and economic disparities and to strengthening bilateral relations with beneficiary countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. Norway cooperates closely with the EU through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA). Together with the other donors, Norway has provided €3.3 billion through consecutive grant schemes between 1994 and 2014.Norway Grants are financed solely by Norway and are available in the countries that joined the EU after 2003. For the period 2014-2021, the Norway Grants amount to €1.25 billion. The priorities for this period are:

#1 Innovation, Research, Education, Competitiveness and Decent Work,

#2 Social Inclusion, Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction,

#3 Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Low Carbon Economy,

#4 Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance and Fundamental Rights,

#5 Justice and Home Affairs.

For more, please visit: www.norwaygrants.org

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