

# Social wellbeing in Scotland – the ‘career network’ of a policy concept

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**Abstract:** Scotland presents a case where ‘social wellbeing’ as a policy concept and a societal aspiration has had considerable traction over the past decade. Wellbeing is now, according to Scotland’s outcomes-based National Performance Framework, at the centre of local and national policy-making. This article, by employing the analytical lens of governance networks, discusses how wellbeing has become such a prominent policy concept in Scotland by focusing on the actors that were promoting it. The article first maps the development of the concept through an analysis of the connections among the actors which make up the ‘wellbeing coalition’ and then discusses the role that these different actors played. Interviews and published documents form the basis for the analysis and also feed into software-supported social network analysis. The analysis shows that the Scottish Government is taking a central position in a fairly extensive wellbeing network composed almost exclusively of public and third sector organisations, with a very limited number of organisations being particularly prominent over the past decade. Contrary to expectations, the Scottish media took relatively little interest in the ‘wellbeing debate’, and academics played only a minor role. It also highlights how concurrent domestic and international political developments contributed to putting wellbeing on the agenda in Scotland, in particular the Global Financial Crisis.

**Keywords:** social wellbeing; Scotland; public policy; governance networks; social network analysis

## 1. Introduction: Going ‘beyond GDP’

Although never intended to measure anything else than economic output, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has become a proxy indicator for social progress and national wellbeing. However, there have long been doubts about the suitability of equating economic growth with ‘social wellbeing’ (see Kennedy, 1968; Kuznets, 1934 for early criticisms). Following White (2010), we define social wellbeing (from here simply ‘wellbeing’) as a social process with material, relational, and subjective dimensions and shaped by the relationships between the individual and the collective, including the government. This is not to be confused with other understandings of wellbeing such as purely individual and psychological ones, although there clearly is a link to what is sometimes discussed as ‘happiness’ or subjective wellbeing (Arcidiacono and Di Martino, 2016; Clark et al., 2018; Forgeard et al., 2011). Most prominently among the criticisms of GDP features the fact that the economic growth it measures is based on the depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution and therefore undermines the very foundations of wellbeing. Furthermore, as a measure of aggregate wealth, GDP does not

say anything about the distribution of this wealth and any resulting inequalities (Bache and Reardon, 2016; Giovannini and Rondinella, 2018; Stiglitz et al., 2009).

The debate about what really indicates wellbeing has gained considerable global attention since the Global Financial Crisis and the following Great Recession. Already in 2007, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Commission and other international institutions urged statistical offices to ‘produce high-quality, facts-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time’ (European Commission, 2007; also OECD, 2018). Most importantly, concerns about the suitability of measures of economic growth as indicators of social progress have led to the set-up, by the French Government, of the ‘Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress’ in 2008. Led by a Nobel Prize laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz, the Commission made a number of recommendations, including ‘to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s well-being’ (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p12) and to establish ‘national roundtables’ to elaborate ‘a shared view of how social progress is happening and how it can be sustained over time’ (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p18).

This call amplified existing interest in ‘thinking beyond GDP’ across the world (Wallace and Schmuecker, 2012), but not everywhere has measuring wellbeing become an ‘official’ high-profile governmental task, and wellbeing indexes differ (Elliott et al., 2017). Among the pioneers were countries as different as Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001), Canada (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2011), or Taiwan (National Statistics Republic of China (Taiwan), n.d). New Zealand, another frontrunner in the international wellbeing debate (Dalziel and Saunders, 2014), was the first country to announce a ‘wellbeing budget’ in 2019.

Among the countries where the wellbeing debate has taken off is also the United Kingdom (UK) (see Bache and Reardon, 2016). The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures wellbeing along ten domains. ‘Personal wellbeing’ is the first of these domains on the ONS website – expressing the UK Government’s commitment since 2012 ‘to measuring people’s “individual” and “psychological” wellbeing, using indicators such as “satisfaction”, “anxiety” and “happiness”’ (La Placa et al., 2013, p117). The wellbeing debate in the UK’s devolved nations has taken notably different forms. In Wales, the focus is on sustainable development; in Northern Ireland on creating a vision for a post-conflict society; while in Scotland the wellbeing concept is linked to a new way of managing government performance (Wallace, 2019).

Out of the four nations and more so than the UK as a whole, Scotland is seen by some as among the ‘wellbeing worldbeaters’ (Fischer, 2019). Together with Iceland and New Zealand, it was also a founding member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) initiative. Indeed, as this article will outline, heeding Stiglitz’ call, a first wellbeing roundtable was set up by a third sector organisation in 2010 and then, later, a further one by the devolved Scottish Government itself. In 2018, ‘wellbeing’ was literally placed at the centre of Scotland’s National Performance Framework (NPF), an outcomes-based approach setting out policy direction and ambition for Scotland and employing a range of indicators (currently 81, organised along eleven domains called ‘national outcomes’) for measuring progress. At the centre of the visualisation of the NPF are a value and a purpose statement. Scotland’s purpose includes the explicit aim ‘to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth’ (see Figure 1 below). It would be fair, therefore, to claim that over the past decade the concept of wellbeing has experienced something of a ‘career’ in Scotland.

Figure 1. Scotland’s National Performance Framework



Source: Scottish Government (2018)

That Scotland’s policy community – including civil servants, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), government ministers, critical journalists, and anti-poverty campaigners – should be interested in wellbeing is perhaps no big surprise given Scotland’s record of persistent social problems around poverty and inequalities (e.g. Scottish Government, 2019). As this article shows, for many in the Scottish policy community GDP has ceased to be an appropriate way of capturing the country’s social progress. Twenty years into devolution and the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament, many deem GDP unsuitable as a framework for discussing ‘Scottish solutions for Scottish problems’ (Stewart, 2004). Beyond the social statistics, Scotland could be considered a most likely case for significant interest in the discussion of wellbeing because of the widespread sentiment, empirically true or not, of Scotland having a ‘more social democratic’ and ‘more egalitarian’ national character in comparison to the UK as a whole (for the debate see

Curtice and Ormston, 2011; Rosie and Bond, 2007; Wigmore, 2015). If these two factors are combined with the notion of a 'Scottish policy style' (Keating, 2005; also Cairney et al., 2016) – a more consultative and cooperative partnership approach to policy-making and implementation between Scottish governments, irrespective of political 'colour', and civil society actors compared to policy-making in Westminster – opportunities may exist for the wellbeing debate to instigate a third-order paradigm change (Hall, 1993) in Scottish economic and social policy. The wellbeing debate thus deserves a thorough analysis on a number of accounts, and it is surprising that so far only few authors have looked at the Scottish case in detail (most notably Wallace, 2019).

This article asks how the wellbeing concept developed in the specific Scottish context, how it 'arrived' on Scotland's public agenda, and who the actors responsible for its 'career' were. Based on a theoretical framework of governance networks, a perspective that to our knowledge has not yet been applied to the wellbeing debate, we are in particular interested in the role of the Scottish Government in this 'career network'. To understand this network better, we have used Social Network Analysis (SNA). We do not scrutinise whether the incorporation of wellbeing in the NPF has resulted in changes in policy outputs and outcomes in Scotland – this is an important discussion to be had in detail elsewhere.

The article's interest in the actor constellation responsible for developing a wellbeing agenda in Scotland is inspired by observations that a strong and strategically focussed actor coalition is required to support its transformation into a governmental policy agenda (Wallace, 2013). Similarly, Wallace and Schmuecker (2012), looking at six international case studies to identify the conditions which ensure that wellbeing measures influence policy-making practice, found that a combination of strong leadership by politicians or civil society organisations, a broad coalition of support based on civil society and citizen engagement, and effective presentation and communication that gets media buy-in were important for establishing a policy-making approach that takes wellbeing seriously. For Scotland, a systematic analysis which takes these factors into account has not been conducted so far.

The article proceeds as follows. After presenting the analytical framework and methodology, Scotland's wellbeing coalition is analysed with the aim of identifying starting points, critical moments, and shifts and changes in the composition of the network that pushed the career of the concept in Scotland. The article concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework of governance networks and highlights in how far Scotland's specific actor coalition was effective (or not) in promoting the concept of wellbeing onto the public agenda to the degree that we can expect an actual change in policy outputs and outcomes. By doing so, the article makes a theoretical, methodological and substantive contribution.

## **2. Governance networks as a theoretical framework**

The analysis theoretically builds on the framework of governance networks to understand the 'career' of the wellbeing concept in Scotland. Governance networks have been defined as 'networks of independent actors that contribute to the production of public governance' and include key actors from state, economy and civil society (Torfing, 2012, p100). The interaction in these networks is characterised by negotiations that might take the form of interest-based, conflictual bargaining or more compromise-seeking deliberation aimed at arriving at a shared understanding of challenges and possible solutions (Torfing, 2012).

The concept of governance networks implies a shift from 'government to governance' (Rhodes, 1997), meaning that government becomes just one of many actors responsible for public policy. What this concept tries to emphasise is that horizontal relationships between governmental and other organisations are more important for how policy is made in contrast to

policy-making in more hierarchical traditional public administrations (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2016). However, contrary to early claims of a 'hollowed out state' (e.g. Rhodes, 2007) as a consequence of this shift, later literature has argued that governments continue to hold central policy-making positions as they influence and manage these networks (Torfing, 2012). Arguably such a central position has allowed governments to mobilise expertise from all quarters to influence bargaining and deliberation (Jessop, 1998). Noteworthy is the importance of scientific expertise in this context. Authors in the field of international relations, for example, have suggested that well-informed and consensus-seeking discussions within advocacy coalitions, expert committees, transnational networks and 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992) lead to more efficient, effective and higher quality political regulation of international decision-making and global governance (Nanz and Steffek, 2004). As most governance networks are dominated by experts, public agencies and political elites, some have warned that network governance raises serious issues regarding equity, accountability, and democratic legitimacy (Bogason and Musso, 2006). Conversely, others propose that they could play an important role in facilitating and enhancing civic engagement and wider democratic participation (Torfing, 2012). The importance of expertise in policy-making has also been increased by a turn towards 'evidence-based' or 'evidence-informed' policy-making that emphasises policy solutions 'which work' over supposedly ideological policies, an approach promoted in the UK since the mid-1990s (Davies et al., 2000). In Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has likewise been a keen proponent of 'evidence-based policy-making' since it first came to power in 2007 (Sanderson, 2011; for a history of the term and a critique see Boaz et al., 2019; Cairney, 2017).

Considering the article's objectives, the lens of governance networks appears as particularly suitable for three reasons. First, governance networks can be seen as a mode of governance that relies on multilateral action involving a plethora of government and non-government actors and is often used to address socially and politically complex and uncertain 'wicked problems' demanding expert knowledge (Torfing, 2012). Establishing a new way to measure societal progress beyond GDP is arguably such a wicked problem (Bache and Reardon, 2016), and one that has gained salience since the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession. Second, wellbeing is a broad concept with a variety of interpretations and can therefore be expected to attract a diverse and broad coalition of supporters from across the political spectrum and from a wide range of societal interests. Third, the concept of governance networks seems suitable to analyse the 'career' of wellbeing also because of what was already referred to as a specific 'Scottish policy style' (Keating 2005), characterised by a more consultative and cooperative partnership approach to policy-making and implementation between government and civil society actors. Given all this, SNA was chosen as a method to empirically test assumptions based on governance networks, in particular regarding the role of the government.

### 3. Methods and data

SNA was chosen as a method to generate a better – in particular 'broader picture' – understanding of the 'patterns of relations among social or political actors' which constitute the wellbeing coalition. These patterns are a type of structure which show 'important aspects of social organization that are not captured by the study of individual attributes or characteristics' (Ward et al., 2011, p246). The network patterns, SNA assumes, have explanatory power relating to actions and non-actions and to the development of ideas and ideology.

Methodologically, SNA is based on two critical decisions: which actors to include or exclude and how to measure or categorize the ties between them (Perliger and Pedahzur, 2011, p47). Regarding the first decision, for this article an inclusive approach was adopted because the

nature of the actor constellation in question is such that organisational members who seemed peripheral at one point could have been important at another point. The second decision is about the characterisation of the nature of the ties between the organisations in the focus of this article. Many researchers employing SNA develop this characterisation using detail gleaned from questionnaires, interviews, observations, archival records, or experiments (Ward et al., 2011).

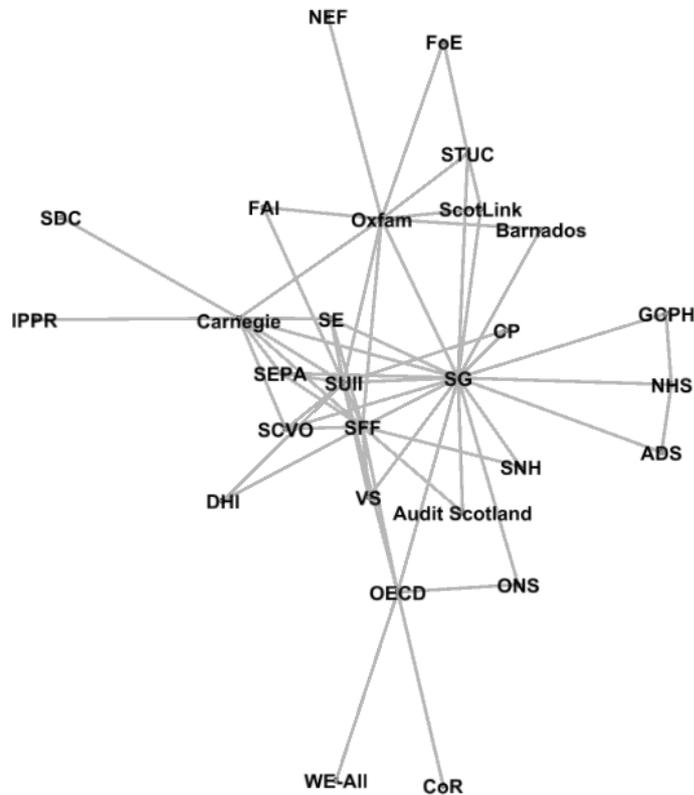
For the analysis of the Scottish wellbeing coalition, different sources in the form of reports, policy documents, government websites as well as secondary research literature and news articles have been used to create a database of all organisations involved in the wellbeing debate in Scotland and across the UK. Among the identified organisations are think tanks, government agencies, the Scottish Government itself, civil society organisations, and academic institutes. As a second step to map organisations of relevance to the Scottish wellbeing debate and to compile the database, semi-structured interviews with ten individuals with expertise in the wellbeing debate in Scotland were conducted – civil servants, representatives of civil society organisations, academics, and politicians. The interviews, conducted between July 2018 and April 2019, explored interviewees' perceptions of how the 'career' of wellbeing unfolded and which actors were driving the debate. Interviewees were also asked to rank organisations and specific individuals – identified during the mapping exercise undertaken for the creation of the database – in order of importance to verify the relevance of specific actors and also make sure that no actor was missed out. This made it possible to arrive at a reliably complete set of actors and a good understanding of their significance and roles over time. This data was fed into social network analysis software (Gephi version 0.92) to create a network graph (see Figure 2 below) which presents a retrospective view of the main actors in the Scottish wellbeing network over a period from about 2010 to 2018 based on the analysis of documents and the interviews conducted for this article.

#### **4. Analysis – the wellbeing network in Scotland**

The social network graph (Figure 2) shows a wide range of different actors in positions of relative centrality or peripherality to each other. The Scottish Government appears as a central actor in this network with connections to a large number of organisations. It also shows that, out of many civil society organisations identified as stakeholders in the debate, in particular two – Carnegie UK Trust and Oxfam Scotland – have a large number of connections to the Scottish Government and to other organisations in the wellbeing network. Furthermore, the Scottish Parliament's own think tank, the Scottish Futures Forum (SFF) as well as the Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII) – a joint effort of several Scottish universities to foster knowledge exchange – are well-linked to the Scottish Government and other organisations, including Oxfam Scotland and the Carnegie UK Trust. The graph shows the OECD as the only non-UK actor in the Scottish wellbeing debate, while organisations of much relevance for the wider UK debate, such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the New Economics Foundation think tank (NEF) (see Bache and Reardon, 2016; Forgeard et al. 2011), are rather peripheral.

In the following, the network graph will be discussed in conjunction with insights from interview and document analysis with the aim of exploring the significance of the various actors in the wellbeing network. This approach allows the fact that the wellbeing governance network went through change over time to be taken into account.

Figure 2. Wellbeing network Scotland (Fruchterman Reingold algorithm)



4.1 Unintended consequences – how a new mode of governance set the foundations for the wellbeing concept

While, as stated earlier, the ‘beyond GDP’ debate is by no means a recent development, prior to Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession it had not captured the interest of the Scottish policy community generally. In combination with the crises, the 2007 elections to the Scottish Parliament, which allowed the centre-left SNP to establish a minority government supported by the Green Party, were an important moment in the career of wellbeing in Scotland. The SNP was perceived as coming to power prepared with policy ideas, willing to challenge the inertia which had, according to a former government advisor, developed under the previous coalition governments of Labour Party and Liberal Democrats (Interview 1). As several interviewees pointed out, most crucial for the development of wellbeing as a policy aim were plans to transform how the civil service operated (see also Wallace, 2019). At the heart of this transformation was to be a shift away from the focus on inputs and outputs to an ‘outcomes-based’ approach to encourage collaboration across departments and between local and national level on the foundations of a single and shared purpose (Birrell and Gray, 2018; Cook, 2017). Central to this approach was the introduction of the National Performance Framework (NPF), a set of initially 15 national outcomes and 45 indicators. It sought to present a 10-year vision for Scotland under one main purpose:

‘To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth’ (Scottish Government, 2007).

Shortly after the NPF's launch, in November 2007 the Scottish Government added a measuring and reporting tool on the progress reached against the NPF indicators. Known as 'Scotland Performs', it was based on the 'Virginia Performs' model from the United States (Scottish Government, 2017; Wallace, 2019). To some in the Scottish policy community, the NPF was a 'genuine attempt to look at overall performance of society in Scotland in a more rounded way', as an academic observer and early participant of the wellbeing debate said (Interview 2). While 'sustainable economic growth', a concept that had by then become mainstream throughout Europe, sat at its core, the NPF would, much later, prove crucial for the wellbeing agenda. For the time being, the process of developing the NPF established a close rapport and effective working relationships between the new government and the civil service. In particular, John Elvidge, Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government between 2003 and 2010, and John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth (2007-2016) and a senior figure in the SNP, were key actors in driving forward this new approach. As a former senior civil servant said:

'The partnership of John Swinney and John Elvidge was absolutely crucial in terms of the NPF, and the trust that they had and taking a leap of faith in doing government in a different way' (Interview 3).

With a Permanent Secretary and a government open to novel approaches, the civil service at the time was given the space to start an exploration of ideas 'beyond GDP'. Government and civil servants were 'quite enthusiastic' in terms of engaging in discussions with stakeholders, as an academic participant of the wellbeing debate said: 'I felt that the government or the civil servants were reaching out' (Interview 2). And while 'civil servants understandably can be quite guarded, careful that they don't overexcite the expectations', as somebody involved in discussions at the time stated (Interview 2), in this case timing and constellation were conducive to instigate change: 'You need to marry both [the civil service and political] perspectives to work. That timing worked really well', as a civil servant found (Interview 10). In sum, for the development of the NPF the close relationship between elected politicians and civil service was crucial, as was the interest of the new government to do things differently and also to learn from elsewhere.

While the NPF was a significant innovation and was implemented quickly after the SNP had come to power, the concept of wellbeing took much longer to have impact on governmental thinking. This was so even though the term 'wellbeing' had been used by earlier Scottish governments already, but mostly in relation to health or children's services rather than in relation to societal progress. Only the financial and economic crises changed that: 'Ironically, wellbeing got impetus when economists picked up on this', as a senior civil servant said (Interview 4). However, even under dramatically different economic circumstances and with a changing view even within mainstream economics on what kind of growth may constitute societal progress, it took many years for wellbeing to become an explicit and central concept in Scottish politics. In the NPF 'refresh' from 2011, economic growth measured by GDP was still central and wellbeing was not explicitly mentioned.

#### *4.2 Gaining momentum – civil society as a catalyst*

It was Scottish civil society which took up the wellbeing concept first and gave it a 'career boost'. The Carnegie UK Trust followed the Stiglitz Commission's recommendation to set up 'national roundtables' and, in 2010, established the 'Roundtable on Measuring Economic Performance and Social Progress in Scotland'. Here, it gathered academics, Scottish and local government officials, representatives from third sector and business, a journalist, and also Sir John Elvidge, who by

then had retired as Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government and would later become a Carnegie Fellow and in 2017 the Chair of the Trust. Their task was to review the findings of the Stiglitz Commission and discuss how they might apply to Scotland (Carnegie UK Trust, 2011). Amongst the roundtable members, the Carnegie Trust's leading role in setting up and running the roundtable was uncontroversial due to 'the space that Carnegie occupies as an organisation, independent from government, people trust it', as one roundtable member described the Trust's position as a broker (Interview 5).

While the Carnegie Trust set up the roundtable under the impressions of financial and economic crises and the beginning 'age of austerity', it also had identified Scotland as fertile ground for this experiment because many in the policy community understood the NPF as a 'wellbeing framework in all but in name' (Interview 5). Some of the roundtable participants perceived the roundtable to be influential 'in shifting the language around wellbeing' in Scotland's policy community (Interview 3), and the final report *More than GDP: Measuring What Matters* left no doubt that the Trust sought to push wellbeing as a central concept in the discussions. This report, while stating that the NPF was a useful framework that had been 'ahead of the curve' when first introduced, recommended that the NPF should be adapted to regard wellbeing as more than GDP in order to meet the Stiglitz Commission's recommendations (Carnegie UK Trust, 2011, p24f).

However, the roundtable had little direct influence on the Scottish Government; it also stimulated little public debate: 'The report was a really slow burner and went flat after a bit of flurry after its launch' (Interview 5). This may explain why the 2011 NPF refresh made no mention of wellbeing; only some of the newly included NPF indicators 'provide an overall picture of individual and societal wellbeing in Scotland [...] beyond GDP', as a briefing to the Scottish Parliament noted (SPICe, 2012, p14).

At around the same time as the Carnegie roundtable was convened, a number of third sector organisations came together independently of the Trust's efforts to discuss their shared criticism of the NPF's focus on economic growth. In September 2011, Oxfam Scotland, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES), supported by some further civil society organisations, prepared a briefing for the Scottish Parliament to challenge this focus and to also highlight that, in their view, there was a paucity of data on wellbeing, equality and environmental impact of economic activity (Friends of the Earth et al., 2011). This cooperation was important as it introduced, with Oxfam Scotland, a new actor into the emergent wellbeing governance network which at this point was developing mainly around the Carnegie Trust. Oxfam Scotland made a place for itself in the wellbeing governance network primarily through its work on the 'Humankind Index' (HKI). The HKI was developed in collaboration with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and other smaller think tanks to show what 'communities across Scotland say is important to them in making a good life' (Oxfam, 2013, p4). It was supported also by the Carnegie UK Trust. The most influential aspect of this project – resulting in a first report in 2012 and an update in 2013 – was probably its method. For the HKI, Oxfam undertook a large-scale 'participatory consultation' which involved around 3000 people from across Scotland. While wellbeing was an important, but not central term in the two HKI reports, the HKI made clear that GDP growth was not what 'the people of Scotland' wanted to lead better lives.

The report was unexpectedly successful, not least due to the consultation method used:

'It had more of a high moral ground to go to policy-makers and say "how can you ignore something that is the product of a consultation with 3000 people?"' (Interview 6).

Crucial to this success were Oxfam Scotland's efforts to make the HKI a subject of parliamentary debate and to involve Joseph Stiglitz as a supporter of the findings and recommendations of the HKI project. In 2011, he had become part of the Scottish Government's Council of Economic Advisers – a largely symbolic role, but still his calling into the Council demonstrated that the Scottish Government was open to 'thinking beyond GDP'. Before Stiglitz gave evidence to a Scottish Parliament Committee in a session on alternatives to GDP, Oxfam Scotland briefed him so that he duly praised the HKI, but also the NPF (Stiglitz, 2013). Lobbying efforts such as these around the 'gap between NPF and HKI' (Interview 9) paid off – as one Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) said: 'Professor Stiglitz had an impression on me, and also the experience of other countries [...] this was all coming together' (Interview 8). A civil servant confirmed the relevance of international debates and academic work on wellbeing, inequality and growth: 'The evidence was quite important that was coming out of the IMF and the OECD and some of the academic work, Stiglitz on GDP, the inequality debate' (Interview 10).

The position of the OECD in the network graph, but also the proximity and well-connected nature of the Scottish Universities Insight Institute, underpin this statement. In its efforts to promote thinking beyond GDP, representatives of the OECD and affiliates such as its former Chief Statistician Enrico Giovannini frequently spoke at knowledge exchange and other public events following the momentum created by the Carnegie roundtable. Some of these events were facilitated by the Scottish Futures Forum, the Scottish Parliament's think tank, and SUII. The OECD's involvement would prove to be a lasting one, as it continues to shape the wellbeing debate by supporting the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) alliance between Scotland, Iceland and New Zealand, launched formally in 2019 at the OECD's Wellbeing Forum (Trebeck, 2019).

In addition to these international influences, it was in particular the parliamentary debate on the HKI which demonstrated to John Swinney, one of the key architects of the NPF, that the framework was not perceived to measure what people in Scotland thought important for a 'good society' (Scottish Parliament, 2012). As a consequence, Swinney set up the cross-party 'Scotland Performs Roundtable' in 2013. As well as including representatives from all parties in the Scottish Parliament, members of the civil service's Performance Unit and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – COSLA, the local government umbrella group – a range of third sector organisations were invited to join, among them Carnegie UK Trust and Oxfam Scotland. At this roundtable, Carnegie was perceived to be closely aligned to the Scottish Government and seen as the most powerful actor, besides the government. Oxfam, with its positions more critical of Scotland's GDP focus and more keen on ensuring that wellbeing would be clearly defined as 'social wellbeing', was also an important actor: 'I think the civil servants realised that Carnegie were the most active and the most supportive of their agenda. So, they kept them quite close, they kept Oxfam quite close as well', as a roundtable participant remarked (Interview 9). No doubt, however, the roundtable was determined by Swinney and his civil servants: 'It was a bit like, we'd have input, and they'd usually make a decision, the minister. And Carnegie would always support the minister's decision' (Interview 9). Nonetheless, even though Carnegie was keen on highlighting Scotland's pioneering role in outcomes-based approaches – 'saying that Scotland was great, straight into an SNP line that Scotland is great' – their advocacy efforts were key to anchoring wellbeing in legislation with the incorporation of the NPF in the Community Empowerment Act (Scottish Parliament, 2015), thus putting the NPF on statutory footing (Interview 9; see also Wallace, 2019).

Other roundtable participants, from outside government, were less active than Carnegie and Oxfam Scotland. For example, the MSPs contributed only few ideas and concentrated on

challenging and scrutinising what was brought to the table by others. The trade unions, via the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), only became seriously interested in the NPF when they understood that their own ‘decent work’ agenda could be reflected in the next NPF (Interview 6).

Neither the cross-party nature of the roundtable nor the control exerted by government over its agenda and *modus operandi* were seen as problematic as all roundtable members were signed up to the catch-all goal of ‘wellbeing’. Furthermore, no-one minded that the wellbeing approach with its interest in inequality and structural issues and its disregard of individual problems and solutions (dominating the subjective wellbeing and happiness debate held in England at the same time) could play into the narrative of ‘substantial difference’ between Scotland and England (Interview 5). In sum, the wellbeing concept proved one which neither elicited much conflict nor dissent beyond ‘some discussions around the details of indicators, e.g. what makes a good measure’, as one participant remembers (Interview 4).

Was the government roundtable the moment of ‘breakthrough’ of wellbeing as a key concept in Scotland? It certainly was set up after criticism of the NPF and of how the Scottish Government, according to ‘the people’ as represented in the HKI, was not ‘doing the right thing’. But the roundtable was not an ‘activist’ forum, it was largely government-controlled and therefore unlikely to produce highly radical departures from existing approaches. Nonetheless, over the duration of the roundtable the government increasingly took on board the wider wellbeing debate, and its Performance Unit actively participated in a number of knowledge exchange events on wellbeing (SUII, 2014). This shift in outlook was complemented by a paradigm change which introduced a related concept pushed by the OCED, that of ‘inclusive growth’, into the Scottish Government’s vocabulary (Interview 10).

#### *4.3 Wellbeing at the centre – civil society or government in control of the agenda?*

The 2018 revamp of the NPF finally put wellbeing firmly – also visually – at the centre of the Scottish Government’s purpose statement (see Figure 1 above). Despite the central position of wellbeing, economic growth – now labelled ‘inclusive’ – continues to feature highly in the NPF, making clear that the Scottish Government does not wish to replace GDP, but rather supplement it with other indicators. This change in emphasis of the NPF was preceded by a large-scale consultation in 2016/17 (Scottish Parliament, 2018). The desire to very publicly involve ‘the people of Scotland’ in this latest revision of the NPF stemmed from the impact of the HKI’s participatory method and the legitimacy Oxfam Scotland’s recommendations derived from it (Interview 2). By adopting this method, the government tried to address a longstanding criticism of the NPF, namely that the NPF was never based on a wider consultation on what it should include (Carnegie, 2011). The Scottish Government asked the Carnegie UK Trust to lead this consultative effort to reduce the risk that the central question – ‘What kind of Scotland would you like?’ – could be seen as part of the SNP’s continuing campaign for Scottish independence, after the setback of the failed referendum on Scottish independence from 2014. Carnegie, in turn, approached Oxfam Scotland due to their prior experience with the HKI.

When the new NPF was launched in 2018, the consultation itself and that it was undertaken by a third party was important for the Government as it made it easier to present the NPF as something beyond partisan lines: ‘The new framework [...] is not something we see as being solely a Scottish Government document. It has been driven by responses, ideas and proposals from individuals and organisations across the country’, as the First Minister said upon the NPF launch, also praising the sign-up by all parliamentary parties to the NPF (Scottish Government, 2018).

The analysis has so far shown that the governance network that emerged around the concept of wellbeing between 2010 and 2018 evolved in ways which made the Scottish Government a central actor, taking up the challenge, albeit reluctantly, from a range of Scottish civil society organisations to change the way that Scotland measures social progress. The analysis has also demonstrated that among the many Scottish civil society organisations interested in the ‘beyond GDP’ debate only the Carnegie UK Trust and Oxfam Scotland had central positions within the network for much of the period analysed. What the graph does not show, but what the interviews highlighted, is that the ties between the organisations suggest a rather loose, informal and non-hierarchical network: ‘At various points organisations came together, mainly for the roundtable, but it was no organised campaign that put wellbeing at the centre of the NPF. Everyone had their different campaign priorities and wanted to push the government for that’, as a member of the roundtable said (Interview 7). The governance network proved to be an open one. Some interviewees, however, described it as comprising only ‘the usual suspects’: ‘Everybody sort of knew everybody. When you went to these events you mainly met “the converted”. There was a feeling that there were “harder edged” folk who don’t buy it’ (Interview 3) and thus did not take part in these discussions, as a former civil servant said.

One omission from the government’s roundtable were academic experts: ‘They never brought in some of the academics which were looking at wellbeing frameworks or policy frameworks more generally’ (Interview 6). Academics were involved, however, in several events organised by Scotland’s Futures Forum and SUII (SUII, n.d.). This relative lack of academics, specifically economists, is in stark contrast to the wellbeing and happiness debate in Westminster. A second notable omission was that of business. While initially some in the business community were sceptical about the wellbeing agenda, ‘now nobody bats an eyelid’ and the relationships between growth, productivity, wellbeing, and inequality are accepted even though ‘the Scottish Chamber, the CBI, took a bit longer to get the broader connections. But they weren’t excluded or antagonistic’ (Interview 10). Finally, a surprising dearth of media interest characterises the Scottish wellbeing debate. Only the HKI gained some national media coverage when published (see Carrell, 2012).

Overall, the success of the wellbeing concept – if measured by its ‘arrival’ at the heart of the NPF in 2018 – seems to have been pushed by a number of quite different actors and seems to have been largely uncontroversial. What explains this broad buy-in? One explanation for its attractiveness is that wellbeing is a fairly vague concept, and including it in the NPF was unlikely to prove costly. While no political party or actor wanted to be seen taking positions ‘against wellbeing’ – not even those opposed to replacing GDP – it was clear to roundtable participants that the Scottish Government was unlikely to introduce radical measures and that the roundtable was mostly a mechanism to create consensus in the ‘Scottish policy style’. For the SNP itself the wellbeing agenda has been advantageous as ‘it allows people to tell a story of Scotland being a wellbeing country. That story serves the current establishment’, as a roundtable member said (Interview 9), similar to how the NPF provides the SNP with a tool to set out a future image of an independent Scotland:

‘Establishing broad goals (and outcomes) around which the government can attempt to build consensus has been part of the SNP strategy to build the idea of the ‘nation’ and translate it to the concerns of day-to-day policy. However, the party must also develop a vision of what an independent Scotland would be like’ (Arnott and Ozga, 2010, p95-96).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Based on a methodology of document analysis, interviews and social network analysis, this article developed a broad picture understanding of the wellbeing network in Scotland. This analysis has shown that the concept of wellbeing made it to the centre of the Scottish Government's policy-making and that the Scottish Government, over time, moved into the centre of the Scottish wellbeing network. This happened in the context of the international 'beyond GDP' debate following the Global Financial Crisis. Initially, it was a small number of civil society organisations which critically questioned what social progress should look like and how it ought to be measured. This coincided with the Scottish Government's new approach to public performance management in the form of the NPF. While the term was initially not part of the NPF's vocabulary – rather, (sustainable) economic growth measured by GDP was at the centre of the first NPF – the wellbeing concept was not at odds with the new outcomes-based approach. As described, lobbying efforts by a range of civil society organisations eventually contributed to wellbeing appearing centrally in the NPF in 2018.

The SNA, as employed here, has limitations in that no data was produced that could be used to measure the strength of relationships between organisations and the impact of organisations at specific points in time in a longitudinal way. However, interviews were able to add extra depth beyond the network graph.

The findings support claims made by Wallace and Schmuecker (2012) that strong leadership by civil society organisations – in this case the Carnegie Trust UK and Oxfam Scotland – and a broad coalition of supporters as shown in the network graph are important for policy concepts to make a breakthrough. No doubt, the timing of financial and economic crises and NPF was important for the successful career of the concept. However, what also contributed to this career is that wellbeing is a vague, yet 'common-sense' concept and is open enough to bring together a wide range of stakeholders. The article shows that one factor discussed by Wallace and Schmuecker as important to for policy concepts to succeed hardly existed in Scotland – the media showed little interest in the wellbeing debate. Academics were less involved than the proposition, as discussed earlier, that expertise is used by governments to create consensus in governance networks would have led to expect. The variety of actors participating in the 'beyond GDP' debate has had an impact on how Scotland adopted its specific approach to wellbeing. Unlike in other countries, developing the wellbeing framework was not a technocratic exercise handed over to the statistical office. Rather, it was a wider social debate with many stakeholders, well-managed by the Scottish Government.

The findings do not show a 'hollowed-out state' as a result of network governance in Scotland. Also, the governance network that was established was clearly based on compromise-seeking deliberation rather than conflict. In that sense, the case of wellbeing is in line with claims of a 'Scottish style' as the roundtable proved an effective mechanism for integrating all actors into a framework which reduced political value conflicts and did so under government 'stakeholder management'. However, the quest to establish a broad consensus on what wellbeing means and how it should be measured may have diluted the potential effectiveness of the term itself. While wellbeing has become a frequently used term in public and political discourse, it is debatable whether it so far has led to substantially different policies even where they were explicitly designed to increase wellbeing rather than just GDP.

For this reason, future research should examine whether an explicit outcome-based approach, such as that of the NPF with wellbeing at its heart, actually leads to improved outcomes. While the examination of policy outcomes was not the aim of this article, it seems clear

that little progress has been made on most of the indicators (see Performance of National Indicators as of 13th May 2020, Scottish Government, n.d.).

While the outcomes appear to be disappointing so far, the institutionalisation of an outcome-focused approach which holds government to account via the NPF and involves a broad governance network of public, third sector and private organisations and actors has put the wellbeing perspective on a firm basis in Scottish policy-making for years to come. The commitment to wellbeing will be seriously tested in the context of the developing policy response in the aftermath of the most recent economic crisis caused by the 2020 Covid-19 virus pandemic and the costly 'lockdown' of public and economic life. This crisis is likely to be more severe than the 2008 crisis that gave the wellbeing debate a first impetus in Scotland and might lead to a further rethink of what constitutes social progress.

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- Interview 7 – Member of Scottish Government roundtable
- Interview 8 – Member of Scottish Parliament
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