

Chapter 2

Exploring the Concept and Practices of *Felicitas Publica* at Lisbon University: A Community-Based Relational Approach to Well-being

Helena Àgueda Marujo and Luis Miguel Neto

Abstract This chapter explores a collaborative action-research project, whose aim was to generate new knowledge about well-being and happiness in higher education, which might result in improved outcomes for the school communities. The discussion draws upon data from a study conducted across 10 Schools of the biggest Portuguese University—Universidade de Lisboa. The views and perspectives of 109 participants (students, teachers, chancellors and staff) have been sought through Focus-Group interviews, using the World Café methodology to engage and connect participants in conversation, and Appreciative Inquiry to construct meaningful and transformative questions. The study had multiple aims: to generate a genuine, collaborative and positive dialogic environment; to promote a sense of community through relational goods; to co-create a novel consciousness on the past and future of the collective and relational happiness processes inside these communities; to investigate the topic, in contributing with action-research methods; and to provide a framework for the science and application of well-being at the university level. Conversations addressed how each school and domain of science enrolled (Law, Humanities, Medicine, Social and Political Sciences, Physical Exercise and Human Movement, Dental Medicine, Agronomy, Architecture, Design and Arts, and Biology), defined Public Happiness, how the school members consider that they are promoting Public Happiness in everyday life, and how it can be developed and put into practice in the near future inside and outside every school community. Five major themes emerged in the images and written accounts across all school cohorts, associated with well-being, specifically concerning (1) quality of relationships; (2) school identity; (3) presence of virtuousness of the individuals and the community; (4) the vocation to learn and teach; and (5) contributions to the common good. Proposals for the enhancement of well-being in higher education

H.À. Marujo (✉) · L.M. Neto
Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas—ISCSP, Centro de Investigação e Políticas Públicas—CAPP. ISCSP Well-being—ISCSP, Lisbon, Portugal
e-mail: hmarujo@iscsp.ulisboa.pt

H.À. Marujo · L.M. Neto
Lisbon University, Lisbon, Portugal

through a community-based approach are discussed, in particular since such findings highlight the potential of more relational, democratic, reciprocate, virtuous and participatory approaches, beyond and besides academic learning.

Keywords *Felicitas Publica* • Community well-being • Appreciative inquiry • Relational goods • World Café • Well-being University • Action-research

2.1 Why Is There a Need to Address Happiness and Quality of Life from a Collective, Relational and Agentic Perspective?

The topics of happiness, well-being and quality of life have received amplified attention in the past decades and are emerging as a pulsating field of study across disciplines. Together with the drive coming from the burgeoning domain of positive psychology (for example, Biswas-Diener 2011; Huppert 2013; Rojas and Veenhoven 2013), the discipline of economics has also renewed its interest on these issues, even if only from peripheral groups of European scholars from Latin countries.

Both the concept of quality of life and that of happiness/well-being have evolved in recent years, and there is a current consensus on their multidimensional character (for example, Haworth and Hart 2007; Huppert 2013). In particular, in what concerns quality of life, since the time of its basically materialist origin, in which precedence was given to objective aspects of life, this concept moved to a perspective in which subjective aspects are considered essential. Even this group of academics from the economic sector consider that standard economic indicators and objective measures need to be reconciled with subjective components to track over time well-being and quality of life of communities and societies at large, in order to improve our lives and that of the planet (Bruni 2016).

Much of what emerged from the current and expanding well-being and happiness studies, either from psychology, sociology, philosophy, political sciences or economics, have helped subsidizing to the subjective components of quality of life.

In this paper, we contemplate quality of life as the general well-being of individuals and societies, therefore meaning that it points to different components/conditions for happiness. Well-being—or wellness—is a dynamic and active state of flourishing. It can be described as “both a positive and desirable state of affairs with life as a whole and with specific domains of life, such as health, economic situation, and relationships” (Prilleltensky 2013, p. 148). This author proposes six key domains, which include Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Psychological, Physical, and Economical well-being. They all can and must be assessed with conjoint subjective and objective indicators. Alongside, it should be stressed that well-being actually involves a subtle, dialectical interplay between positive and negative phenomena (for example, Lomas 2016; Won and Tomer 2011).

Central to this paper is the relationships/community domain, and its dialectics and ambivalences. To be sure, the referred economists that are exploring connections among constructs associated with objective and subjective indicators of wellness, add that in the realm of immaterial resources—the ones that cannot get consumed like material goods, namely relational goods and the fulfilment of the need to belong—are central for well-being (Bruni and Stanca 2008; Gui and Stanca 2010).

The quality and quantity of non-instrumental social relations consequently appear as key drivers of welfare. This is particularly relevant since, until lately, the topic of interpersonal relations was, often neglected and ignored while studying well-being, even if recognized as important by most scholars (Pelloni 2016).

Albeit the terminological, conceptual and methodological complexities and limitations that still permeate the fields of quality of life, well-being and happiness, and that are not the focus of this chapter, there is an impressive accumulation of empirical evidence that shows that an intra-individual and psychologically hedonic perspective on well-being, that does not take into consideration social institutions, interpersonal relations, and eudaemonic elements, is considered not sufficient to understand and explain such multifaceted and complicated processes (Pelloni 2016; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006; Sen 2016).

In our current societies, our individual behaviour is frequently tackled as optimal, but our communal behaviour is considered suboptimal which, among other reasons, can contribute for current relational scarcity (Pelloni 2016). This is especially relevant when empirical studies convey an unambiguous conclusion: in large measure, genuine relationality (or relational goods) is the most influential component in people's happiness (Bruni 2013, 2016).

In fact, the prominent role of relationships and social connectedness as sources of meaning in life—and as a substantial source of well-being—have been proved in a variety of recent studies (for example, Delle Fave 2016; Helliwell et al. 2014). The fray of the social fabric is coming into place to explain some of the paradoxes inside the field, namely the Easterlin Paradox (Easterlin 1974).

One of those explanations considers that, in parallel with the most common models (Hedonic, Satisfaction and Positional Treadmill) used to elucidate why per capita income has risen sharply in most countries in recent decades, yet average happiness has stayed constant or has grown less than traditional economics claims, is that the accumulation of material goods lowers the consumption of relational goods (Stanca 2016). Nonetheless, and as a side note, just highlight that all those explanatory models include, somehow, a relational component (Bruni 2016).

The Latin American Paradox—the fact that people in Latin American countries report higher well-being and life-satisfaction levels than expected, taking into consideration objective indicators such as income, violence or corruption—also recently brought forward a relational and spiritual explanation (Rojas et al. 2016).

Other authors are including the social and relational dimension within the analysis of happiness, and with it, the intrinsic motivational needs. For instance, studies at city level have indicated that time spent with friends, active participation

in associations/volunteering and the frequency of going out for leisure activities, which are three basic indicators of relational amenities, is important enough so that individuals are willing to pay a positive and significant monetary price to live with better access to those amenities (Pelloni 2016).

This is particularly noticeable regarding the possibility of spending time with friends, and in terms of size, the monetary price of social relations is comparable to that of other relevant environmental and socioeconomic amenities (Stanca 2016). It is therefore possible nowadays to create a profile of a city with high or low Quality of Relational Life and to add to the studies of well-being the confirmation that relational variables account for substantial variations in quality of life. Both neo-positivism and behaviourism, that mostly disregarded social considerations and a systemic, collective outlook, combined with the reductionism of a utilitarian and pleasurable view on happiness, mostly excluded these variables and limited our vision (Bruni 2016).

Agentic perspectives on happiness (Bandura 2008) consider that we are not passive recipients of others actions toward us; we are dynamic and operating agents in the world, and the quality of our experiences activities affect how we experience others. It is not simply that the way we participate affect our experience: the quality of experience depends on the relationships in which we are participating, on what we are seeking, and what role we are playing (Gergen 2009).

Therefore, to be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and the course of environmental events, and not only to depend on externalities (namely, in what "happens" to make us happy). This implies that people are essentially contributors to their life circumstances, and not just products of them (Bandura 2008).

But there might be a risk underneath this agentic perspective, unless it is integrated in a relational and social consciousness. Understanding persons and nature as separated realities—as circumscribed units or independent selves, attending manly to individual minds, even if considered motivated by beliefs of self-efficacy—can be disastrous in its consequences and impairments (Gergen 2009). Alienation, selfishness, separation, isolation, animosity, a sense of individual responsibility for social problems like poverty or injustice, that are in fact webbed in the ways we live together, bringing upfront individualistic instead of structural explanations, are such examples. If bonded relations are vital to our well-being, the process of bonding needs attention.

Accordingly, one focal concern are practices that invite productive co-creation of meaning—namely facilitating conversations that generate common understanding, and that break the barriers of separation and individual differences through an investment in inclusive participation (Marujo and Neto 2014). The spirit of community is co-created within dialogue, and we believe this is a path to serve local communities, championing community development and benefit society. Addressing and promoting a relational being point of view, and inviting people for common action and reflection, eventually creates a different social order and begins to tackle systemic inequality through the strengthening of human and social capital (Gergen 2009; Jackson 2009). Imagining together can free us to envision another and better conjoint future and stimulate more active citizenship.

Bringing forward a relational and communitarian perspective on the research and optimization of quality of life and happiness is, therefore, a tendency with consequences for the future of the field.

2.2 Why *Felicitas Publica*?

If we want to question the *homo oeconomicus* hypothesis, and dispute a purely utilitarian perspective on happiness, the model from the school of Civil Economy is a fundamental conceptual route to take. Based in an epistemic architecture and tradition of thought linked to the “Civic Humanism”, it can be traced as early as the fifteenth century, but continued up to the Italian Enlightenment (Bruni and Zamagni 2007). The Latin word *Civil* can be overlapped with the Greek word *Politics*, also stated as *Social*. It is inside this school of thought that the ancient concept of *Felicitas Publica* (FP) gets its complete meaning.

Differentiated from the British and the French views at the end of the eighteenth century, the conception behind it considers the market as based in principles of civic virtues and reciprocity, where the common good and the communitarian perspective (civil society organizations) are central, and the economic and the social are intertwined and not opponents (Bruni and Zamagni 2007).

The underneath proposal is to move from a rationality of universal selfishness of the economic agents toward a particular type of relationality and self-actualization of the persons. There are three principles portrayed in this new view: the principle of exchange of equivalents; the principle of redistribution; and the principle of reciprocity.

Bringing forward the complexity of the topic on how to transform economic goods into well-being, this movement argues that the standard economic theories do not address this problem (Bruni and Zamagni 2016). It retrieves from the past a Roman and classic Italian tradition, where relatedness is central to the vitality of both individuals and society. It also gives voice to the doubts that have arisen about the moral value of economic growth, alongside with the ethical base of progress (for example, Bruni, 2016; Jackson 2009).

Felicitas Publica has an important history in the Roman Empire, from as early as mid-second Century BC. *Felicitas*, from the Latin adjective *felix* and the prefix *fe*, has diverse meanings, in particular “*fecundus, femina, fetus, fruitful, blessed, fertile, generative, virtuous, full of nourishments*”, and evokes the concept of fecundity (e.g. Bruni and Zamagni 2016; Champeaux 1987; Marujo and Neto 2013, 2014; Neto and Marujo 2013). Differentiated from *Fortuna* (unpredictable in its effects and even potentially negative), FP was seen as a positive quality influencing life, namely throughout a fruitful cultivation of virtues. Bringing fruits—as opposed to being sterile—is substantially different from the Anglo-Saxon perspective on happiness, meaning the things that happen to us, in the sense of “good fortune”.

On the other hand, *Publica*, the feminine of *publicus*, is a word contracted from *populicus/populus*, and points to meanings of “belonging to the people;

community; state”. It directs to the common good, to the indivisible tie of the interest of the individual and the interest of others.

In the European Middle Ages, the Roman tradition of FP remained buzzing. The expression was common in Roman coins, and a woman with a cornucopia full of fruits is the most common symbol of FP. Interesting enough, from its previous nomination as *Olissipo*, during the subjugation of the Roman Empire, Lisbon was named *Felicitas Julia* (*Municipium Cives Romanorum Felicitas Julia Olissipo*) while integrated within the Roman province of Lusitania.

The concept, and associated model, experienced a profound revitalization during the Italian civil humanism of the fifteenth century (Bruni and Zamagni 2016). Its influence continued in Europe, and not only in Italy. It is still possible to found buildings in France and Germany with that inscription in their porticos or frontages, as much as paintings and sculptures originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

One of the key ideas of the Enlightenment was precisely that of *felicité publique*, claiming that economic growth was no more than a means to happiness, not its end. In England, Adam Smith also interprets happiness as the goal of human life, recognizing indirectly, in his moral theory, the importance of sociability through its *fellow-feeling* motto (Bruni and Zamagni 2016). The fact that he did not introduce these elements in his theory of wealth impacted all our history of economics, and it was the engine of all social and economic development the way we know it: the focus on wealth and the consideration that more wealth means more happiness. Bentham contribution also oriented the perspectives on happiness toward a hedonic view, namely the maximizing of pleasure (preferences) and the avoidance of pain (Bruni 2016).

The “horizontal” view of happiness as FP portrayed by one of the most prominent authors addressing the topic in the eighteenth century, Antonio Genovese, conveyed a revival of Aristotle’s conception, linking relationships with a citizen’s well-being and tackling the concept of happiness with the person as a social being. The model addresses happiness and economics as a path towards generation and cultivation of relational virtues—as Aristotle had done centuries before. His meaning for the currently resuscitated word *eudaimonia*, encompassed the relevance of the role of civil virtues and sociability for happiness. The North American philosopher Marta Nussbaum (2005) depicts “friendship, love and political commitment” as the three basic relational goods in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. This also implies that for Aristotle, the interpersonal relations lead to happiness only if they are genuine expressions of the practice of virtues. It is contemplated that happiness cannot be reached instrumentally, since it is the indirect result of virtuous actions, carried out for their intrinsic value.

Making others happy, as a route to be happy, was one of the concepts common to both Aristotle and Genovese, in an explicit conception of happiness quite distant from the one depicting self-interest perspectives (Bruni and Zamagni 2007). Happiness is thus social by nature, and synonymous of “social weal” (*ben-vivere sociale*, Bruni and Zamagni, *op. cit.*). One of the basic concepts that is foundational for FP is, therefore, that of Relational Goods.

2.3 How Can Relational Goods Be Defined?

The recent economic literature on social interaction has been characterized as including two main groups of scholars—the ones who study social capital and the ones investigating relational goods.

The bigger group addresses social capital, which has been defined as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficacy of society facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993, p. 167). The smaller and more recent group investigates social relationships as relational goods. Both groups of scholars are interested in investigating and measuring the economic value of social connections, a truly new and challenging venue, including the monetary price of social relations.

The goods that can only be pursued as a function of a relationship with others are in themselves “relational”. These goods are, in a small scale, the outcomes of family and friend relationships, but can be experienced in so many other contexts, such as work and community. In the economic and political fields, Gui (1987) used the term relational goods for the first time while researching a communitarian economy, and two years later Ulhaner used it as a rationale for explaining the process of voting in the political context (cit. in Pelloni 2016). They are described as non-instrumental, personalized and intangible goods, and are simultaneously produced and consumed in an encounter with others, and characterized by reciprocity. They also do not have a price and cannot be sold on the market (Gui 2005; Pelloni 2016).

As Gui and Sugden (2005) put it, relational goods include the so-called affective components of social relations, perceived by people as having value through two main processes: genuinity and sincerity. They are characterized as experiences of companionship, fellow feelings, intimacy, sympathy, caring, compassion, empathy, and understanding. People tend to consider them as valuable contributors to their welfare and well-being (Pelloni 2016). Relational Goods are a central concept of the FP model.

2.4 What Is a Community?

Community is a challenging concept. Its density, diversity, ambivalent and context-driven character make a common and unique definition difficult, despite rigorous and concise theories. The honouring of diverse historical and scientific traditions has produced assorted and not easily articulate standpoints.

In fact, community can be addressed in a broad and comprehensive sense, embracing all scopes of human culture and society. Community can be discussed as an exclusive entity, with well-defined characteristics. One can speak of community when we want to cease social problems like injustice (Prilleltensky 2012), and when we want to enhance social and relational well-being (Khumalo 2014). It can also be discussed in less bounded ways, exalting its diversity, and mentioning

instead to “border-crossings” (McCarthy and Vickers 2013), *intersectionality* (Schmitz 2010), or “relational being”, envisioning the transcendence of units through relationships (Gergen 2009). One can attend to community as a positive human aim, as much as a place of ambivalence (Bruni 2012a; Tonon 2013).

In order to understand what is a community is, therefore, important to focus on the values, the functioning, the processes and the dimensions of interaction, negotiation, coordination and communication that surround and inform all dimensions of common life, while people relate to one another and to the world.

Community can consequently be referred as a value (e.g., to bring about cohesion, social justice, empowerment) or as a set of variables and descriptive categories (e.g., location, interest, identity, communion, risk, resources, organizations, diasporas). The meaning depends on aspects such as type, size, focus, ethnic and social composition, cultural history and the force of sense, projection or ethos. From the diverse classifications that emerged, the one presented in 1977 by Warren is still a far-reaching one, with six different operational definitions: (a) the community as space; (b) the community as people; (c) the community as shared values and institutions; (d) the community as interaction; (e) the community as a distribution of power; and (f) the community as a social system. Together, these definitions portray differing aspects of communities, but also a framework for understanding and comparing them.

Amidst all this range, there has been a common nostalgic feature in interpreting community: it is associated with a quality of completeness, and thus remains related with the aspiration of “reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages” (Elias 1974).

2.4.1 *Has Community an Ambivalent Nature?*

Some authors claim that the early communities operated in basically hierarchical and unjust ways, and were not an aggregation of fraternal, liberated and equal human beings (Bruni 2012a; Esposito 2003). A glorified thought of community has been a powerful organizing ideal, but its inherent contradiction is supported in the etymological roots of the word. Community comes from the Latin *communitas*; in turn, *communitas* is a composed word: *cum-munus*, an expression that designates an ambivalent dimension, namely *cum* (together, joint) and *munus* (gift **and** obligation). This conceptualization of community is thus tied to a meaning of debt and duty. With the advent of modernity, that type of community draws back, and what came into view was an affirmation of the individual—now without community, and immune to the other, avoiding the vulnerability and the “wounds” attached to every relationship (Bruni 2012b). Accordingly, in 1972, in their conflict model, Bates and Bacon defined community as a complex social system with unique structural properties that function in terms of reciprocal (structurally supportive) or conjunctive (potentially conflictive) relationships. This dialectic ambivalence is fundamental for a deep understanding and promotion of community and social capital.

2.5 Why Consider Well-being and Quality of Life Approaches in Higher Education Communities?

Presently, education is starting to be addressed as a relevant instrument towards the promotion of well-being, rather than just a process focused on literacy and academic achievement. Research around specific and tangible ways to optimize happiness in the school community, in particular in Higher Education communities, is therefore relevant and up to date. Given the presence of relationships between some components of well-being and academic learning itself (for example, Dweck 2006), the incorporation of well-being/happiness as a target in education should be facilitated. The knowledge that will emerge can enrich theory on well-being and guide specific actions in University contexts.

Effective approaches to educational change, namely the projects that go beyond the goal of academic achievement and have as *foci* the ability of students, teachers and staff to live a full, virtuous and meaningful life, has been the topic of recent projects and research (Oades et al. 2011; Parks 2011). Some incorporate the design of programs based in positive psychology—advancing the so-called Positive Education that integrates education for happiness alongside with engaging with the academic traditional curricula. Others offer courses in positive psychology supported by the scientific literature, namely through Master of Applied Positive Psychology programs. Still others embrace the topic in a more comprehensive way, at the institutional level, permeating basic knowledge on happiness in all their organizational processes—from human resources management and leadership, to pedagogy, student’s competency assessment and even student’s dormitories (Bloom et al. 2013; Oades et al. 2011).

Universities are a special case of “enabling institutions” (Peterson 2006) that can and should create conditions to the conduct of a life at its best. Alongside, they have their own specific limitations and convolutions.

The complexities related with current student engagement, retention and learning; school success, graduation rates and the capacity to secure a good job; competition and cooperation matters in teachers and students; mental health issues; financial problems; employee professional and faculty well-being, quality of life and development, to name just a few, are particular challenges.

Some elite universities around the world are currently being criticized for being mainly a place where “Excellent Sheep” are trained for the work market, incapable of critical thinking, unable to be resilient when faced with life and work struggles, or inept for creating a meaningful life (Deresiewicz 2014; Saarinen and Ursin 2012).

For those reasons, approaches to successful educational change have increased in the past decades, and some Universities are becoming places defined by their capacity to intentionally cultivate, in its community members, the skills and the knowledge to prosper together. They have been moving into the direction of position all school stakeholders in debates and dialogues concerning improvement and reform, in matters of concern to everyone, in particular well-being and the fabric of mutual interrelatedness and shared human endowment (Saarinen and Ursin 2012).

To exemplify, there are recent initiatives, like the Healthy Universities Project (based on the World Health Organisation's settings-based approach) that recognize that health and well-being are important for university contexts (Pinkney 2016), and the Well-being in Higher Education Network (WiHE 2016), that connects scholars around the world whose interest is to research and endorse the practice of happiness in their universities. If, as presented, social factors have a profound influence on mental health, universities need to reform and adopt settings-based tactics to recognize the links between well-being and wider campus issues—those issues traditionally considered to be academic and the ones that are not (Pinkney 2016).

Included in the many ways of promoting FP in higher education there is an unprecedented interest of endorsing the cause of life-improving relational and meaningful processes through thinking and reasoning together. As Saarinen and Ursin (2012) and Gergen (2009) propose, if people are given the opportunity to reflect on their lives of free citizens through dialogue and mutual interrelatedness and interdependence, in an appreciative, accepting, broad-minded, emotionally exciting, encouraging, inspiring and respectful environment, a new consciousness and revitalization emerges. This is not always possible in the current Western academic culture, which supports the urgency to study and endorse universities for well-being.

2.6 *Felicitas Publica* at Lisbon University: Can a Community-Based and Relational Approach to Well-being and Quality of Life Be Fruitful in a Peripheral Country?

2.6.1 *What Are the Particularities of the Portuguese Context?*

In recent years, Portugal has faced several trials to the material well-being of its citizens. Life satisfaction is the second lowest in OECD (2015). Trust in other people, being as it is, an important component of social capital, lies also below the European OECD average level. Almost 80% of Portuguese students agree that most of their classmates are kind and helpful, which is one of the highest shares in the OECD, but at the same time, 14% of Portuguese children report that they have been bullied at least twice in the last 2 months, a higher result than the OECD average of 10.1% (op. cit). According to the same report, for Portuguese users of the Better Life Index, the three most important topics for a life with quality are health, life satisfaction and safety, while community and civic engagement are considered the less relevant.

In most contemporary societies there is an ongoing but widespread move from established forms of civic (and political) participation—such as associations' membership (civic, cultural, sports, recreational, voluntary) or church/religious groupings—towards more independent and random forms of participation (conscious consumer behaviour, raising funds or contributing financially for causes

considered relevant, signing petitions, participating in street demonstrations, or in virtual groups or forums...). This change has implications for interpersonal trust and reciprocity and has shown to bring a deterioration of bonding and bridging social capital, both internationally and in Portugal (Putnam 1993; Villaverde Cabral 2007, 2015).

Indeed, these tendencies on participation and voicing opinions in the public space have a special context in the Portuguese history. During the twentieth century Europe went through deep political transformations, and Portugal was no exception. Transformations have been clearly specific in the European Latin countries, in particular in the Iberian Peninsula. Both Portugal and Spain have gone through a democratic transition in the mid-seventies, after decades of dictatorship and fascism. In Portugal, the repressive regime was instituted in the late twenties, and followed an epoch of intense political, economic and social crisis. Both Iberian countries faced war during the dictatorship period. In Portugal, there was a colonial war in several countries in Africa, in its previous colonies, from 1961 to 1974, the year of the Carnation revolution when democracy was restored and this dark period of the history of the country ended (Azevedo and Menezes 2008).

The bans of freedom of association and speech, alongside with censorship, were therefore present for almost 50 years. Citizens' participation in the public sphere was severely reduced to cultural or recreational associations (Viegas 2004), leaving behind a legacy of ambivalence towards the public space and a fear for open contribution. Enhancing participatory citizenship seems, therefore, very important, even more than 40 years after the democratization of the political regime.

The referred data and the theoretical models previously mentioned, instigated the choice of methods.

2.6.2 What Were the Research Objectives, Methods and Strategies for Data Collection?

The two authors of this chapter guided a systemic participatory and collaborative action-research project on Public Happiness. The aim was to have the university of Lisbon communities congregating to have a voice and take action on the issue of public happiness. To do so, engaging the participants in conversation on common and affirmative issues, and creating conditions for a positive experience for the ones involved, was crucial. Upholding interpersonal trust in a fast and simple way was also a clear objective, so that people could feel free and enthusiastic about sharing their voices. This was particularly relevant due to the different backgrounds of the participants, and the fact that most of them had never met and belonged to very diverse groups inside each school.

Multiple aims were present: to generate a rich, genuine, collaborative and positive dialogic environment among the diverse participants; to promote a sense of community while enhancing relational goods; to co-create a novel consciousness on

the past and future of the collective and relational happiness processes inside these communities; to investigate the topic, in particular contributing with action-research methods; and to provide a framework for the science and application of well-being at the university level.

The choice of methods for data collection and analysis needed to be coherent with these aims, so the options fall into post-positivistic procedures. Theoretical, practical and ethical reasons supported those choices. The study incorporated an action-research method focus-group-type interviews—supported in both the Appreciative Inquiry framework and the World Café methodology.

Action research has an intricate history, because it is an approach to research that has emerged over time from an all-encompassing variety of fields—education, anthropology, Catholic Action Movements, liberation theology in Europe and Latin America, just to name a few. The movement was introduced by Kurt Lewin in the US in the 1940s, and underscored the notion of collaborative research with stakeholders with a liberating focus.

Action-research is defined as “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, p. 1). This method is the place where knowing and doing, studying and transforming, meet.

The selection for the use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was straightforward. Grounded in the theoretical framework of social constructionism, supporting systemic and affirmative points of view, and having language as the instrument of change, AI was the ideal method to guide the construction of the questions and offer an outline for the study. According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2001, p. 613) “Appreciative Inquiry is about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the “unconditional positive question”.

The questions around what allows for a good collective life, what might and should be in an ideal situation, and how to empower, learn and improvise through appreciating, envisioning and dialoguing, were the backbone of the study. There were questions to focus attention, to connect ideas and find deeper insight and to create forward movement (Vogt et al. 2003).

Another fundamental component of the research structure was the World Café. The World Café is a twenty years’ old methodology that is a very simple, operative and plastic layout for hosting large group dialogue. It is mainly a structured conversational process intended to enable open and intimate discussion, to allow for

high level of diversity in conversations due to several small group rounds, and to address collective wisdom in the community that it gathers (Brown and Isaacs 2005). It provides a structure for connecting people in a secure and warm way, and offers tools that can convert analysis into profound change. In all cases, snacks were part of the method, with participants sharing food and drinks in a relaxed atmosphere of proximity.

At the heart of this method lies the human activity of engendering meaning through interdependence, with a concern with the social as opposed to the individual origins of meaning-making. The allegory of a real-life café is used since in a World Café session participants are encouraged to engage in a collaborative conversation within an environment typically modelled after such a café (i.e. a space equipped with small tables, tablecloth, snacks, light music, inspirational materials like paintings or pleasant books, flowers, etc.). As participants alternate between tables over the course of a session, conversations are co-constructed, and ideas “cross-pollinate”. A collective sense of purpose then emerges.

In our study participants were asked to define Public Happiness, how the school members consider that they are promoting it in everyday life, and how it can be developed and put into practice in the near future inside and outside every school community. Hence, prompt questions used during the focus-group interviews were operated through the World café methodology, and included “When did you experienced more public happiness in your school?”; “What is it about our community that supports public happiness for all of its citizens?”; “What can be done in the future to develop and support practices of public happiness?”; “How can the scientific area studied in your school help to subsidize to the happiness of all in this community, and also to the happiness of the university as a whole, and the city?”.

The way we participate in school systems will critically impact what and how we experience. This kind of welfare practice is created agenticly by and with the citizens, namely by offering relational possibilities. In this conversational research, participants connected with people from their faculty departments that, in most cases, have never met before, and they shared, explored and discussed practices that promoted communal well-being. This included meaning-making, cross-fertilization, understanding, synchrony and continuous co-learning. The small group method promoted occasions for conversations and initiatives to transform school communities.

The choice of methods—the Appreciative Inquiry to create the questions and the World Café to engage participants in conversations that matter for the common good—allowed collecting qualitative data that focused on relational, collaborative and positive practices.

2.6.3 Who Participated? Recruitment Methods

A program dedicated to fund special interventions at Universidade de Lisboa, and supported by the Rectorate, sponsored the study. An email was sent to all the chancellors of the 18 schools that integrate Lisbon University. Ten of those sent

back answers showing interest in participating, and were asked to designate a commission to prepare each meeting at every school. The authors of this chapter were co-organizers of those meetings and offered the theoretical and practical framework for the project and its methods. After two conjoint preparatory meetings, each institution publicized its own day event. This was done through emails in the intra-net, newsletters, posters posted around the school's grounds, and mouth-to-mouth in specific group meetings, such as student associations and administrative and scientific committee's board meetings. Focus-group sizes ranged from seven ($n = 7$) to thirty-eight ($n = 38$), with a mode of fifteen ($n = 10$). In total, 109 persons participated in the focus-group/world café (students, teachers, chancellors and staff). The discussion took approximately two and a half hours in each school and occurred in the University premises of each of the ten schools (schools of Law, Humanities, Medicine, Social and Political Sciences, Physical Exercise and Human Movement, Dental Medicine, Agronomy, Architecture, Design and Arts, and Biology). Age range of the participants was between 18 and 68 years old. Although being part of the same communities, the participants mostly did not know each other, mainly due to the fact that they come from different sub-groups inside each school, and frequently from different power positions. Therefore, the dialogues allowed for "improbable conversations", gathering around the tables people from the highest to the lowest position on the school social hierarchy.

2.6.4 Data Analysis: An Invitation to Change?

Since the focus-group interviews incorporated a mix of verbal, written and drawing activities, they generated extensive rich data. The findings presented in this chapter are solely from the 39 tablecloths that were collected and analyzed. All these data were transcribed, coded and analyzed for recurring themes to look for patterns, using the methodology of intuitive Hermeneutics (Anderson 1998) and Buckingham's (2009) approach to analysing visual data, and involved two stages. Both methods acknowledged the requirement of engaging researchers more reflexively rather than technically. The first stage comprised analysing transcripts of all the sentences, which were coded into themes, alongside those generated in the second phase. The second stage involved image-only analysis. This two staged analysis process allowed for a more comprehensive and accurate synthesis, and consequent understanding of the findings. All the information was collated into school cohorts.

2.6.5 Findings: What Part of the Dreamed Future Is Already Present?

Five major themes emerged in the images and written accounts across all cohorts, specifically concerning (1) quality of relationships; (2) school identity and shared

values; (3) presence of virtuousness in the individuals and the community; (4) the vocation to learn and to teach; and (5) contributions to the common good. Taking into consideration some of the nuances and differences in emphasis, depending on the school, the commonalities were, nevertheless, impressive.

In what concerns the first theme, relationships featured strongly across cohorts. Participants considered that social interactions that are positive, emotionally supportive, non-instrumental, and horizontal, help to build FP. Its affective component was underscored as vital for the experience of shared and reciprocated happiness. The participants discussed wanting practical ways to invest more in the relationships, namely through the creation and recreation of common rituals (celebrations, everyday greetings, collective meals...). We can therefore assume that “relational goods” are key elements to facilitate and contribute to collective happiness, confirming previous research on the topic.

While addressing the second theme, participants wrote, draw and talked about the fundamental appreciation and respect for the history of the school, in a way to maintain its own identity and specificity. The range of ideas and concepts that emerged from the participants across all cohorts also highlights the importance of space and the nuanced ways they link the aesthetic and physical environment with the social, emotional and physical well-being. There was a clear attachment and appreciation of the school physical environment, particularly when it potentiates opportunities—for relationships, for learning and growing, and for a common culture. Aspects such as access to resources, personal safety, hospitality, promotion of personal realization and purpose, sense of belonging and continuity, they all feed an attachment to the space of the school that helps to generate public happiness.

Regarding the third theme, participants identified particular virtues—addressed both in individual and collective terms that they consider intrinsically linked with FP in a university context. Using the Peterson and Seligman model (2004), we can make them coincide with humanity and justice, knowledge and wisdom, and transcendence. There were no references whatsoever to anything related to temperance as a virtue necessary or associated with FP in higher education. A particular virtuous identity profile emerged in some of the schools, depicting positive collective characteristics that are a cluster of virtue. This was addressed, in particular, signaling the relevance of shared implicit and explicit values, ethically and morally pro-social, for the basis of an interpersonal happiness.

The issue of the vocation for learning and teaching, the fourth theme that emerged, provided a reflection on the mission of the institutions. Public happiness can only be present at the university level if students and teachers do their best at learning and teaching, thus investing in the most imperative reason why there is a university. This is its calling, so it must be respected above all.

Finally, the fifth theme brings forward the issue of how public happiness is mainly a result of everyone’s contributions to the common good. Being fully present, engaged, connected, dedicated to public and civil causes, enmeshed in a web of relationships and conjoint interests, helps develop stronger, more trusting and purposeful relationships, and fosters the experience of belonging to a community. Being happy means making others happy or participating in dialogues to coordinate

meanings and find a shared happiness. Here, the school is positioned as a sanctuary where an awareness of community and interdependence can actually happen.

Some of the current pressing social problems, such as the socio-economic and political ones, were debated across the groups, exploring the potential of participative interventions and dialogue to address them in a more fertile way. What we can call the awakening of a “relational responsibility”.

After each meeting at each school, several of the schools involved in the study were motivated to self-organize themselves to continue working around the topic of well-being and public happiness. New research projects applied to the particular scientific area of study of each school, connecting it with well-being, conferences on topics around hedonic and eudaemonic happiness, and photography and lyrics contests on the theme, followed the world café meetings already described.

The findings from this study underline the importance of honouring and nurturing respect for the persons, the values, the identities, the sense of belonging, the communal goods, and the mission of the educational system.

2.7 Discussion: Gaining a Deeper Understanding?

This action-research project aimed at contributing to understand what is public happiness (*Felicitas Publica*) in the context of higher education, using a community-based relational approach. The findings reported might subsidize to the understanding of the cause of the good life at the university level, which might result in improved outcomes for the school communities.

Participants placed particular emphasis on relationships, namely into the importance of opportunities to relate in more equal, horizontal, affective and constructive ways, all considered imperative for the collective well-being. They also highlighted the need for the creation and recreation of common rituals and stressed the potential of more participatory, inclusive and democratic approaches, which will also endure a sense of community and instigate an interest to contribute to the common good. In a very competitive and stressed context, where mental health problems are pressing, and outcomes are more valuable than processes, these findings are particularly interesting. Alongside, they underscore the relevance of honouring the values and virtuousness of each person and institution, ensuring the strengthening of the identity of the school. This implies respecting the particularities of its past history, and the opportunities that its physical space opens to all. The mission of the universities is still to teach and to learn, so the accounts from the participants lend strong support to fully living this vocation.

The vitality and richness of the methods chosen indicates that research into well-being university needs to extend not just in the formal teaching environment but include the whole organization, and even the surrounding community (Oades et al. 2011). In a moment when our welfare needs to move away from transactional services towards an increased collaboration among citizens, we invite to bring

together more ambitious action-research projects for cross-pollination and shared visions.

To get there, the journey can have three complementary itineraries: (1) integration and differentiation, towards dialectic development (bridging different areas of knowledge, as happened here, for instance, positive psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy...) (e.g. Bruni and Porta 2003, 2007, 2016; Stanca 2016); (2) combining the approach to humane optimal functioning and well-being with the pressing social problems within a frame of relational responsibility (going “beyond self and community”, and approaching people as interdependent “relational beings”) (Gergen 2009; Sen 2016); and (3) incorporating quantitative indicators of quality of life with qualitative and transformative action-research of good collective daily life, namely investigating in the coordination of meanings (Marujo and Neto 2014, 2016).

Attending to the ambivalent dynamics of communities will help to understand and promote a positive sense and experience of community, and fructify social and community well-being. This will allow us to move from the present individualistic *imunitas*, where we isolate ourselves from others, to reciprocal *communitas*, where we regain a sense of bonded selves (Bruni 2012b).

2.8 Conclusion: A Window to New Horizons?

Exploring the potential of communities is currently considered vital for positive psychology and quality of life, due to promising data on social well-being and positive communities. It is important for the evolutionary development of those fields towards post-modernity.

This way, the increasing availability of findings and theorization, and the need for new integrative models, allows for a relational, collective and agentic standpoint that will made possible to measure the relevance and effects of relational goods on social welfare, and develop a framework that guides research and intervention. The model of *Felicitas Publica* (Public Happiness) is at that juncture, and allows for particular community-based and relational forms of practice. Higher education is a particular niche whose social impact needs to be tackled more than ever.

Launching the humanity of the participants as a platform for their personal and collective growth, in the service of better common lives, can not be deliver, we believe, operating from a deficit model. In contrast, if the starting point is one of abundance, the participants of these initiatives are welcome in their uniqueness and plenitude, and therefore, in their exclusive potential. Dialogic, inclusive practices that bring humans and their environments together, and move them beyond an ideology of self-gain—either when considering happiness or any other domain and goal of life—can renovate or even repair the stream of fecund effective collaboration and meaning-construction through additions in everyone’s potential for saying and transforming (Gergen 2009).

The well-being of our communities depends on our capacity to encourage civic organizations (Bruni and Zamagni 2007), as universities should be, where transversal, reciprocal and horizontal relational nets are generated. This implies fomenting the growth of civic virtues, which might guide people to invest in the public interest and the joy of communal happiness.

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