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'the day is not far off when the Economic Problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and that the arena of the heart and head will be occupied, or re-occupied, by our real problems –the problems of life and of human relations . . .' (Keynes, 1933, p. VII)

1 Introduction

In a context of growing concern about the environmental consequences of economic growth, and recognizing that such growth has brought only moderate improvements in well-being (often accompanied by social discomfort) it becomes essential to broaden the perspective and seek, beyond income, other pillars that can support well-being in societies. These other pillars must do so in a sustainable manner, ensuring the well-being of future generations, and in an inclusive way, extend the benefits of the strategy to all social groups.

In this regard, it is crucial to focus on pillars that are environmentally friendly, accessible to all social groups, do not require further economic growth for expansion, and can be easily promoted. This document seeks to highlight human relationships, which are of paramount importance for well-being. It is important to recognize that there are different types of human relationships, and that not all are equally relevant. This paper suggests prioritizing person-based interpersonal relationships, which have a substantial impact on well-being, are readily accessible to all social groups, do not demand high economic growth, and are environmentally sustainable.

The second section of the document discusses the limitations of economic growth in generating well-being and argues that income can be more effectively utilized if it is recognized as a mean rather than as an end, so that it can be used to strengthen other drivers, thus potentially having a greater impact on well-being. A sound strategy would therefore aim to align the generation and use of income with the promotion of these other drivers. Particularly, human relationships that are close, warm, genuine, and long-lasting. The third section delves into human relationships, distinguishes between various types of interpersonal connections, and provides arguments for the importance of these relationships in promoting well-being. The fourth section explores how fostering person-based relationships can lead to a society characterized by high, sustainable, and inclusive well-being. It emphasizes the need to consider policies that directly promote the quality of interpersonal relationships, as well as to evaluate the impact that current policies, that primarily focus on economic growth, have on these relationships. This would allow for a reassessment of economic growth strategies in a way that does not undermine the quality of relationships, but rather complements and supports them. The emphasis on human relationships as a fundamental pillar for achieving a high, sustainable, and inclusive society does not imply neglecting other

contributing factors. Section 5 briefly mentions additional pillars that should also be considered. The final section outlines the general conclusions of the work.

2 Expanding Our View Beyond Economic Growth: Income as a Mean

2.1 Economic Growth and Its Limitations to Generate Well-being

The potential for economic growth to generate well-being for the population is limited, and there are several reasons for this, which can be outlined as follows:

First, an unequal income distribution means that much of the increase in earnings becomes concentrated in higher-income strata, where its contribution to well-being is comparatively smaller than if those resources were directed toward lower-income groups. Additionally, since consumption patterns of higher-income groups often serve as aspirational models, the aspirational gap widens for middle and lower income groups, which subsequently negatively impacts their well-being (Stutzer, 2004). The relationship between income and well-being is highly influenced by what other social groups have, which implies that treadmill traps are frequent due to social comparisons (Clark et al, 2008; Clark and Senik, 2010; Clark et al., 2013; Senik, 2004).

Second, the effect of increased income on well-being depends on how that income is spent. Behavioral economics has demonstrated that personal decisions may often be irrational in terms of optimizing spending to enhance well-being (Scitovsky, 1992; Stutzer, 2007; Thaler, 1992, 2000). Furthermore, certain institutional and cultural patterns may result in a lower well-being impact from spending. This can occur when practices favor the rapid disposal of goods or prioritize individualistic consumption. While these patterns may seem like the result of personal choices, they can be driven by policies that, for example, marginalize public transportation in favor of private vehicles. In a context of limited rationality coupled with policies that encourage inefficient spending trends, it is possible for spending (i.e. the act of purchasing) and consumption (i.e. the act of enjoyment) to become dissociated. Consequently, it is possible to observe an increase in spending without any corresponding improvement in well-being.

Third, generating greater economic growth entails well-being costs, which can be particularly high in contexts where sources of growth are exhausted. For instance, the pursuit of higher economic growth may require greater global competitiveness, a constant search for efficiency, the implementation of drastic economic reforms, ongoing adaptation to change, or the imposition of sacrifices in areas of life related to

leisure time and work-life balance. Additionally, this may lead to greater paternal absence in child-rearing, the disruption of social ties and the erosion of meaningful relational networks, a faster pace of life, and the dehumanization associated with life in large urban agglomerations etc. (Kohr, 1978; Hirsch, 1976; Schumacher, 1973).

Fourth, much economic growth takes place from producing goods with a dubious reputation. Economic growth can have collateral effects that are not beneficial. For example, the dehumanization of workplaces and urban environments, increased commuting time, a loss of mental health associated with anomie, loneliness, and depersonalization, as well as physical and mental exhaustion tied to more competitive work environments (where workers not only compete with others globally, but also with increasingly powerful machines and automata with limitless access to information). These problems -largely a byproduct of how economic growth has been promoted- are addressed with palliative measures that are counted as economic growth (e.g., metro systems, high-speed trains, hospitals and clinics for mental health care, daycare services, workforce training programs, more highways, etc.). This type of economic growth, known as defensive growth, which addresses problems created by the same growth, as expected, has a very low impact on well-being. A vicious cycle can be created where economic growth occurs, but without any significant increase in well-being, as more of this growth aims at palliating the problems caused in the process of growth (Mishan, 1967, 1977; Bartolini, 2019; Sarracino, 2019).

2.2 Increasing Difficulties to Generate Economic Growth

Not only is income's ability to generate well-being limited, but in today's context marked by growing environmental challenges and social discontent it is becoming increasingly difficult and costly to achieve economic growth, even in many developed countries. Economic growth is hindered by the depletion of fossil fuels and growing concerns about environmental issues linked to growth. Achieving growth under these conditions is more difficult than in the past. Global warming and environmental degradation serve as a stark reminder of the reliance on fossil energy that has fuelled past growth. The adoption of new technologies and the transition to clean energy may present an opportunity to mitigate environmental problems, but this transition is not only time-consuming, but also requires substantial financial resources, which could have been better utilised if the original problems were not created. This creates additional debt pressure for many nations and poses a barrier to low-income countries. Ultimately, the strategy of relying on new technologies is a palliative solution, as its primary aim is to mitigate the environmental consequences of fossil-fuel-based growth. As such, minimal further well-being can be expected from this strategy. Economic growth is also constrained by the availability of non-renewable resources, as well as by the renewal cycles of renewable resources.

Economic growth faces a central obstacle: the limitations of human capacity to adapt and adjust to the demands of the growth process. While the underlying assumption is that growth is pursued to generate well-being, it is also true that people have increasingly become instrumentalized for growth. This can be seen in many social trends that involve people and that ask more of them; such as: the push for human capital development through education, the structuring of social relations to expand markets, geographic mobility to boost productivity, adjustments in life cycles to sustain professional careers (e.g., delaying family formation or childbearing), continuous skills updating in response to technological acceleration, acceptance of precarious jobs often framed as "entrepreneurship" activity, and the prioritization of work demands over family and health needs. In a global market environment characterized by heightened competition, ever-increasing demands are placed on people. Thus, the pursuit of higher economic growth requires greater demands from people, which may be detrimental to their well-being.

2.3 Better Ways of Using and Generating Economic Growth

Undoubtedly, there are more effective ways to generate and utilize economic growth to positively impact well-being, and this is a path that warrants further study. There is a need to make better use of economic growth, especially if it is slowing down, in order to generate greater well-being. This requires reconsidering how income is generated. For example, what is the well-being contribution of economic growth when it comes at the expense of work-life balance? Or when it leads to greater job vulnerability? It also necessitates reconsidering how increased income is utilized. For instance, is it more beneficial to invest in infrastructure that promotes private transportation, or is it better to invest in public transportation systems?

The strategy for making better use of income rests on five fundamental principles that should guide public policy:

1. The relevant measure of well-being for guiding public policy and for the assessment of social organization systems, is not income itself but the well-being experienced by people. The reports people make regarding their well-being, such as life satisfaction, provide valuable information about their well-being experience.
2. Income is a means, not an end. Its value should be assessed based on its contribution to life satisfaction.
3. Income is not the sole driver of well-being. There are other factors that can also contribute to well-being.
4. Other drivers of well-being may be expanded independently of income, and public policies can be designed to directly promote these other pillars.

5. The generation and utilization of economic growth could have a greater impact on well-being if it is directed towards promoting other drivers of well-being.

Public policy aimed at well-being must recognize the importance of addressing other drivers of well-being. Some factors that contribute significantly to well-being are independent of economic growth, are environmentally friendly, sustainable, and can be directly influenced by both public and private policies. From this perspective, economic growth can play a larger role in promoting well-being if it contributes to the expansion of other drivers. Policies for generating and utilizing economic growth can be designed in a way that does not undermine these other drivers, but strengthens them.

2.4 Focus on Other Drivers Beyond Economic Growth

There is a social need to focus on other drivers of well-being.

First, economic growth is currently slowing down and efforts to stimulate it require greater sacrifices from people. In this context, the ultimate goal of growth towards fostering well-being is lost. Instead, a system emerges in which the relationship between means and objectives is reversed, with humans being asked to make sacrifices in order to sustain economic growth.

Second, current patterns of economic growth contribute little to human well-being. Policies can be designed to increase the positive impact of growth on well-being, but this requires a different perspective. Specifically, one where growth is seen as a tool for well-being, rather than an end.

Third, not all forms of growth are appropriate from a well-being perspective. It is essential to carefully evaluate growth policies to ensure they do not undermine crucial drivers that contribute to human well-being.

Fourth, even when economic growth is utilized to its fullest potential and generated in the best possible way, it must be recognized that there is more to life than money. Life involves more than just material living standards. For people, other aspects are of utmost importance. Therefore, public policy must broaden its focus and acknowledge that well-being can be achieved through various mechanisms, with income being only one of them.

There are alternative options, beyond income, that can be leveraged to generate well-being. This should be pursued for several reasons:

1. Economic growth generates limited well-being and comes at a high environmental and human cost.
2. It is beneficial to diversify policy tools.

3. Other drivers may be more effective in generating well-being, both due to their high impact and low cost.
4. Alternative drivers can be highly inclusive, enabling access to greater well-being for groups excluded from growth-based strategies, such as those with limited productive knowledge but the potential to strengthen other well-being drivers.
5. Other drivers are environmentally sustainable, thus contributing to the well-being of future generations.

2.5 Organic Vision of Society and Pillars of an Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being Strategy

This report argues for the need to bring other drivers of well-being, beyond income, to the spotlight of public policy and development strategy. It is important to clarify that this approach is grounded in an organic vision of society, which emphasizes foundational pillars for development, rather than standardized, one-size-fits-all policies.

This document proposes developing public policy for well-being based on an organic vision of society, contrasted with the engineering perspective. The engineering approach assumes that society can be molded according to a predetermined plan, with public policies serving as tools to construct that society. In this view, people are seen as mere components placed where they fit best for the planned societal structure. This perspective ignores human interests and motivations. In contrast, the organic vision of society recognizes that the will, motivation, and interests of various groups and persons influence the relationship between public policies and outcomes. Therefore, specific results are not guaranteed by the mere application of a set of policies. Rather, the role of interventions is to redirect social trends toward the desired orientation: greater well-being, more inclusivity, and enhanced sustainability. Instead of proposing a set of specific policies, this position paper advocates for a vision based on pillars for people-centered development. These pillars do not define a particular outcome or build society according to a plan. Rather, they guide the trajectory of society toward public and private actions that contribute to well-being, acknowledging that the specific result depends on the motivations and behaviors of the members of that society.

Based on the aforementioned perspective, emphasis is placed on certain pillars that can alter social trajectories and generate, in the context of slowed economic growth, a society with greater well-being, inclusivity, and environmental and social sustainability. Identifying these pillars also helps to evaluate more appropriate uses of economic growth and, in some cases, the best ways to generate it.

The literature on subjective well-being has demonstrated that multiple factors influence human well-being (Bok, 2010; Rojas, 2020). This is unsurprising, as human

life involves numerous dimensions, and well-being emerges from these various factors. However, not all these factors are equally relevant, and it is important to prioritize and identify those pillars that should concentrate the attention of public policy and social organization.

One of the key pillars highlighted in recent research on subjective well-being is interpersonal relationships. Not all relationships are equally important for well-being, so it is crucial to identify which types of interpersonal relationships should be promoted to guide public policies in that direction. This document focuses on human relationships as a core pillar, given its significance for achieving inclusive and sustainable well-being in societies experiencing slowed economic growth.

When studying pillars of well-being, several key questions must be considered:

1. How does increased income influence the pillars? Does economic growth strengthen or weaken the pillars? The answers to these questions will also lead to a more relevant inquiry for public policy: what types of economic growth and growth policies are complementary to the pillars?
2. Is economic growth required to strengthen the pillars? In a context of slowed economic growth, it is prudent to focus on pillars that do not depend on high income or significant economic growth for their promotion. Therefore, those well-being pillars that can be promoted under conditions of moderate or low income and in a context of slowed growth, deserve particular attention. Especially if they are shown to have a high impact on well-being.
3. Do the pillars promote social inclusion? Do they provide opportunities for all social groups to access well-being? How easily can social inclusion be fostered through these pillars? It is important to emphasize that social exclusion arises from a combination of personal attributes interacting with a system of social rewards. Having attributes that are not socially rewarded contributes to exclusion. This also applies in situations where a lack of those attributes are rewarded. A well-being promotion strategy centered on economic growth tends to favor the exclusion of those who do not possess the attributes valued for competitiveness and productivity (such as cognitive skills, technological or mathematical knowledge, business acumen, etc.). This strategy also leaves out those who possess unrecognized attributes, such as empathy, socio-emotional skills, a sense of dedication to others, community collaboration, etc. Strategies for social inclusion are clearly different when less importance is placed on economic growth and more emphasis is given to interpersonal relationships in the pursuit of well-being.

4. While it is important to consider aspects of inclusion, it is equally critical to assess the environmental impact when well-being is pursued through the pillars, rather than through income. The sustainability of well-being depends on whether the pillars that support its achievement do not threaten the planet's environmental conditions.

3 Human Relationships and Well-being

Research on subjective well-being has shown that interpersonal relationships significantly contribute to people's well-being. There are various types of human relationships, and some have a greater impact than others. Thus it is crucial to distinguish between different relationship types. It has also been found that interpersonal relationships that most substantially contribute to well-being are independent of income (Rojas, 2024a). In fact, under certain circumstances, and depending on how income is generated and used, higher income may even be associated with a deterioration in the quality of interpersonal relationships (Sugden, 2005).

Both public and private actions can be taken to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships, thereby enhancing the well-being of the population. Furthermore, it is possible to modify the ways in which income is generated and used to ensure that it supports, rather than undermines, the interpersonal relationships that contribute to well-being.

3.1 Kinds of Human Relationships

Various types of interpersonal relationships can be distinguished, and not all are equally important in the pursuit of well-being (Rojas, 2024b). The literature has primarily focused on instrumental, transactional, and supportive, relationships, while also highlighting civic relationships. Civic relationships occur between people who interact infrequently and in a superficial manner, which is characterized by limited knowledge of one another and little interest in fostering a deeper relationship. Person-based relationships constitute a different kind of human relationships. They are characterized by a deep and comprehensive understanding of the other person, a genuine interest in their specific circumstances, and a durable bond. Moreover, person-based relationships are crucial for people's well-being.

3.1.1 Instrumental Relationships

Instrumental relationships are those that seek or are based on support. The interaction with the other person is self-interest, and in principle, the relationship is maintained as

long as the other person remains helpful. The contribution of these relationships to well-being depends on the benefits derived from the support received, as well as the gratification obtained from providing help. Research indicates that there are benefits both for the recipient and the provider of support (Barrera et al., 1981; Barrera, 1986; Nguyen et al., 2016; You et al., 2018). However, in this case, the relationship serves merely as a tool for achieving goals that are external to the relationship itself. The interaction is fragmented and self-centered, which limits the potential well-being that the relationship could generate.

3.1.2 Transactional Relationships

Transactional relationships are superficial, as they do not involve a deep knowledge of the other person, beyond the function that this person may play in the attainment of the goals that motivate the relationship. In these relationships, the interaction is partial and self-interested, with a fragmented view of the other. The purpose of the relationship is external to the relationship itself, and its contribution to well-being depends on the external objective being pursued and its relevance (Fukuyama, 1995; Granovetter, 1973). For example, a transactional relationship might be motivated by the pursuit of greater income, whether through the launch of commercial or financial transactions, the access to information and technology useful for productivity, or by leveraging contacts for career advancement. In this case, the contribution of the relationship to well-being depends on the amount of income generated and its subsequent impact. Trust between parties is a facilitating factor that contributes to achieving the external goals of the relationship. However, the self-interested, fragmented nature of the interaction, and the focus on external goals, limit the well-being that the relationship could generate.

3.1.3 Civic Relationships

Civic relationships occur between fellow citizens (i.e., people who may not know each other well but live within a shared space and time, where their actions and decisions are interconnected). These relationships tend to be impersonal and are based on social norms, which may range from informal courtesies to more structured interactions. Trust and knowledge of these norms facilitate the development of civic relationships (Putnam, 1995; Helliwell and Putnam, 1995; Helliwell et al., 2017). These relationships contribute to well-being through social cohesion and the functioning of society. However, the interaction remains superficial, fragmented, and standardized, which limits the potential well-being that such relationships can provide.

3.1.4 Person-based Relationships

In person-based relationships, the knowledge of the other person is profound and extensive, the approach to the other is holistic rather than fragmented, the relationship is genuine rather than self-interested, and the purpose of the relationship is the

relationship itself rather than the achievement of any external goal (Rojas, 2024a, 2024b). As a result, these relationships are warm, close, selfless, enduring, and above all, personalized rather than standardized. They fulfil the fundamental human needs for love and belonging, which are essential to well-being (Rojas et al., 2023). In most cases, these relationships result in the joint enjoyment of life. Family bonds often promote this type of relationship, but the characteristic of being person-based is not exclusive to familial relationships. It can also extend to friendships, relationships with colleagues, neighbors, former classmates, buddies in community activities, etc. The person-based attribute pertains to the nature of the relationship rather than the type of relational bond. However, this attribute is common in family relationships, extended families, and close friendships. Person-based relationships require time and disposition, and they benefit from an empathetic attitude, as well as from knowledge and mastery of socio-emotional skills. Research has shown that these relationships are highly rewarding, both in terms of emotional fulfillment and in life satisfaction, and significantly contributes to overall well-being.

Family relationships are clearly person-based ones, and they are widely acknowledged as central for people's well-being. Notably, Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, underscores the central role of family ties in fostering happiness when he states that 'After himself, the members of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affections. They are naturally and usually the people upon whose happiness or misery his conduct must have the greatest influence. He is more habituated to sympathize with them. He knows better how everything is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. It approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself.' (Smith, 1984, p. 219). Smith states that people naturally direct their strongest affections toward their family members, particularly those who share their household, such as parents, children, and siblings. He notes that family members are uniquely positioned to influence each other's happiness or misery, as the bond is characterized by deep sympathy and understanding. While family relationships have historically been viewed as traditional sources of support (Inkeles and Smith, 1976; Barrera et al., 1981; Barrera, 1986; Inglehart, 2010, 2018), Smith's perspective highlights their emotional depth and sense of value. These relationships, rooted in mutual affection and companionship, transcend mere supportive roles and reflect a person-based connection that implies the joint enjoyment of life. This means that family relationships are valued not for what they provide, but for the quality of the emotional bonds shared within them. The intrinsic value of such relationships lies in the warmth, closeness, and genuine affection that family members offer each other over long periods of time.

In contrast, social capital theory views relationships more instrumentally. Scholars like Bourdieu (2001), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000) focus on how social networks provide access to resources, support, and opportunities that contribute to well-being. Research on social capital shows that high levels of social capital improve access to both practical and emotional support (Bartolini et al., 2013; Calvo et al., 2012; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Helliwell, 2001). While social capital theory emphasizes the instrumental role of relationships in enhancing socio-economic and emotional support, it contrasts the person-based view, which focuses on deeper and close relationships that contribute directly to the joint enjoyment of life.

3.2 Human Relationships and Their Importance for Well-being

Human relationships are very important for well-being. However, some relationships may be more important than others. Interpersonal relationships are essential to human well-being, with extensive research highlighting their importance for happiness and health. The Harvard Study of Adult Development, a 75-year longitudinal study, concluded, “Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.” This reflects the centrality of relationships in people’s lives. Early well-being researchers, such as Bradburn (1969), highlighted a strong link between social relationships and positive emotions. Similarly, Campbell et al. (1976) identified high correlations between life satisfaction and social connections, including family, marriage, friendships, and community involvement. Andrews & Withey (1976) further emphasize the importance of family, friends, and neighborhoods in fostering happiness. In his comprehensive review, Argyle (1987) examined various aspects of social relationships, from love and marriage to friendships and work connections, all of which play pivotal roles in shaping well-being.

More recent studies continue to affirm the fundamental role of interpersonal relationships in life satisfaction (Camfield et al., 2009; Siedlecki et al., 2014; Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Holder & Coleman, 2009; Rojas, 2020, 2024a, 2024b). Diwan (2000) introduces the concept of relational wealth, which links strong social bonds to overall well-being, while Sugden (2005) explores how close relationships contribute to happiness.

Several theoretical perspectives help explain why relationships are crucial for happiness. Evolutionary theory suggests that social bonds were central to human development. As Buss (2000) notes, humans evolved mechanisms for deep connections, including those for mating, friendship, kinship, and cooperation, which are essential to emotional well-being. Grinde (2002, 2009) expands this idea by explaining that evolutionary processes favor not only mating but also social structures that allow offspring to thrive and reproduce, further emphasizing the role of social bonds in well-being. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) also highlights the

importance of early interactions between parents and infants, while human development theory underscores the impact of family and community on children's well-being and their transition into adulthood (Diener & Diener McGavran, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In these interconnected relationships, people create their identities, values, and life purposes (Phelps, 2005).

Baumeister & Leary (1995) argue that the need for love and belonging is fundamental to well-being (Suttie, 1935). They assert that stable, emotionally fulfilling interactions with others contribute significantly to both emotional and cognitive well-being. Recent studies confirm that fulfilling this need for love and belonging has a greater impact on life satisfaction than satisfying basic physiological needs (Rojas et al., 2023). Furthermore, family and friend bonds provide a sense of unconditional acceptance, which contributes to well-being and contrasts with society's conditional acceptance based on attributes like wealth, health condition, or productivity (which can lead to insecurity and vulnerability) (Batthyány, 2023)

The quality of relationships also matters greatly. Baumeister & Leary (1995) distinguish between the quality and quantity of social interactions, finding that relationships characterized by close, mutual disclosure, and emotional openness are more beneficial to health and well-being than those based merely on frequency. Emmons (2003) similarly highlights the value of intimacy in relationships, suggesting that those based on mutual gratification are more conducive to happiness than those motivated by power or influence.

Philosophical perspectives on relationships further underscore their importance. Feuerbach (1972) argued that human essence is realized through unity with others, which highlights the role of communal relationships. Macmurray (1961) proposed that relationships are integral to selfhood, which is an idea that aligns with Ubuntu, an African philosophy emphasizing interconnectedness (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Hailey, 2008). Buber (1937) introduced the concept of "I-Thou" relationships, in which persons recognize each other as equals with intrinsic value, as opposed to "I-It" relationships, which objectify others for personal gain. The warmth and personal connection found in "I-Thou" relationships contribute significantly more to well-being than the detached nature of the objectifying "I-It" relationships.

Humanistic psychology emphasizes the critical role of authentic, non-transactional interpersonal connections, especially those that are emotionally close and profoundly meaningful. Pioneers such as Sullivan (1953), Rogers (1961), and May (1969, 1977) argue that these relationships are essential for psychological well-being and personal fulfilment. For example, May suggests that early family dynamics are crucial in developing one's "capacity for empathy, trust, and connection with others" (May, 1977, p. 70). Similarly, Rogers asserts that a supportive family environment is vital for

cultivating the “ability to be open, to express feelings, and to form genuine relationships throughout life” (Rogers, 1961, p. 102). Both scholars highlight the family as a foundational institution for nurturing the emotional and relational competencies that form the basis of meaningful, non-transactional relationships.

Research shows that person-based relationships have a larger well-being impact than instrumental and transactional ones (Rojas, 2024a, 2024b). The contribution of transactional and instrumental relationships to well-being takes place mostly through the achievement of goals that are external to the relationships, such as greater income, new jobs, access to some financial resources, etc. The contribution of person-based relationships emerges mainly from the relationship itself, which makes of this kind of human relationships an interesting driver of well-being, and relatively dissociated from the attainment of greater income, jobs, and others.

4 Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Well-being in Societies: Enhancing Human Relations

To promote sustainable and inclusive well-being it is necessary to focus on enhancing the quality of human relationships in societies. Due to their importance, person-based interpersonal relationships should have priority.

The promotion of high-quality human relationships may be a new area in public policy, but it is possible to think about policies directly oriented to the enhancement of human relationships in society. It is also important to evaluate how current policies, which are usually designed with an interest in fostering economic growth, affect human relationships. The negative side effects of some pro-growth policies are evident and it is important to reconsider how economic growth is promoted, generated, and used in order to mitigate any negative impact on human relationships and expand any positive influence.

4.1 Policies to Promote Person-based Human Relations

When designing policies to improve human relationships, it is essential to consider bonds that facilitate the development of person-based interpersonal relationships. Greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening family, extended family, and friendship bonds, as they are critical to enhance person-based interpersonal relationships. Existing research, including family development and family systems theories, highlights the importance of a systemic, interconnected view of family life

(Hill & Rodgers, 1964; Laszloffy, 2002; Martin, 2018; Bregman & White, 2011; Gilbert, 2021). It is also important to move beyond a view of the family as a caregiving and support network in order to emphasize how family and friendship relationships contribute to the joint enjoyment of life. In fact, caregiving and support are services that both the State and the market can provide. However, neither the State nor the market can provide close, warm, genuine, and enduring relationships that contribute to the joint enjoyment of life.

Education can play a pivotal role in cultivating person-based human relationships. Schools are a primary domain in children's lives where lasting relationships with peers are formed. Fostering positive relationships in schools directly contributes to students' well-being (Roffey, 2013). In addition, a human-capital view of education has predominated the educational system, which implies that education programs prioritize teaching knowledge and skills for professional life. However, from a well-being perspective it is more important to prioritize teaching skills to enhance interpersonal relationships. Thus, socioemotional skills, parenthood knowledge and skills, and empathy should be central to the educational curricula. The educational system should also provide the knowledge and skills for people to be able to enjoy their free time both in company and alone. In Aristotle's words, education must make people 'capable of being at leisure'. This issue is gaining increasing attention in academic literature (Fry & Chun, 2024), and educational programs aimed at improving human relationships should not be limited to children, but also target adults.

Family relationships are strengthened by the active presence of parents regarding nurturing children, by institutions that provide family advice, and by a productive system that implants family-friendly practices and recognizes the centrality of work-life balance.

There are also other relational spaces, beyond the family, where person-based relationships can be promoted. A relational perspective of spaces and activities should be held. For example, schools may become a valuable relational space for kids and for their parents, by providing school activities that promote person-based interpersonal relationships. Housing solutions may become neighborhoods, and community activities may lead to a vibrant community life that strengthens the social fabric. The workplace is also a relational space, and with proper practices colleagues may become close friends. Enduring relationships are favored by the strengthening of territorial ties. Hence, it is important to create incentives for people to put down roots. There is relevant literature and evidence on how to build positive relationships in different relational spheres (Roffey, 2013).

While extensive housing projects have been developed in response to demographic pressures, the significance of person-based human relationships highlights that well-

being goes beyond mere shelter. It requires the creation of vibrant neighborhoods and cohesive communities (Tonon, 2017; Muia & Phillips, 2023). Public spaces, conceived as arenas for interaction and connection, offer valuable opportunities to cultivate relationships, foster friendships, and create lasting bonds. Local activities such as dance classes, hiking tours, and book clubs facilitate these interactions and strengthens both family and community ties. The livelihood of the surroundings is not about top infrastructure nor about smart cities, but about people enjoying family and community life. Thus, the focus of policy must be on the quality of homes rather than that of houses, and on building neighborhoods rather than housing solutions.

4.2 Assessing the Impact of Current Pro-growth Policies

In addition to direct policies aimed at promoting person-based human relationships, it is essential to examine the indirect impact of existing policies, which are often designed primarily to drive economic growth. These policies can inadvertently disrupt human relationships. For example, policies aimed at increasing productivity and economic output may involve resource reallocation and the relocation of production facilities, which can displace people and disrupt long-standing relationships (Grinde, 2009b). Migration, often without the accompanying relocation of family and friends, can sever familial bonds, reduce parental involvement in child-rearing, and fracture existing relationships.

Globalization, while opening new economic opportunities, has heightened competition, altering work hours and work-life balance. This shift may negatively affect person-based relationships. Increased working hours and stressful and insecure jobs may necessitate sacrifices in family and leisure time (Ford et al., 2007). Overwork comes at the expense of social interactions and diminishing relational well-being (Mogilner, 2010; Coote & Franklin, 2013).

There are major trends that threaten the abundance and quality of interpersonal relationships, such as:

- An educational system inspired by human capital theory, which conceptualizes children as future labor force rather than as citizens and persons.
- The proliferation of an individualistic ideology promotes the expansion of private space and consequently reducing social interactions.
- The intensification of migratory flows, spurred by increased capital mobility and the globalization of production, which frequently results in uprooting people and the disruption of family and friendship relationships.

- The downsizing of the state and the consequent erosion of public domains exacerbate feelings of disconnection and undermine the sense of collective identity.
- The intensification of rural-urban migration, culminating in the formation of megacities and the proliferation of large-scale housing developments, has contributed to a marked depersonalization of urban dwellers.
- Longer commute times, more competition, and greater job vulnerability negatively impact work-life balance.
- The promotion of materialistic values leads to the commodification of people and the instrumentalization of human relationships.
- The reduction in fertility rates has contributed to the erosion of extended family structures, fostering a rise in single-person households and feelings of isolation.

5 Other Pillars of Well-being

This document has emphasized the pillar of human relations, because it creates opportunities to promote well-being in a sustainable and inclusive way. Furthermore, it also provides lessons that prompt us to reconsider the way in which economic growth is generated and used. However, it is also necessary not to neglect other pillars that can also contribute to guiding public policy towards a high well-being society.

5.1 Job satisfaction and quality of the workplace

Work is a central aspect of life for many people and occupies a significant portion of their time and mental attention. The focus on employment and salaries conceals other relevant aspects that make for a satisfactory job. In addition, approaching human beings as human capital reduces people to mere machines and neglects many aspects relevant for their well-being. Besides a salary, jobs also provide an opportunity to interact with colleagues, to gain a sense of competence and worth, to face challenges and attain goals, and to structure the day. There are many attributes of jobs and the workplace that may significantly contribute to job satisfaction and to well-being in general (Green et al., 2024; De Neve and Ward, 2025)

5.2 Physical and mental health

Health has intrinsic value that extends beyond its connection to productivity. While human capital theory has focused on health as a productive input (i.e., valuing it in terms of the income it enables) subjective well-being theory better captures the

intrinsic value of physical and mental health in relation to human well-being (Layard and De Neve, 2023; Layard, 2006). Thus, the application of a subjective well-being framework reaffirms the importance of health, emphasizing that its value goes far beyond enhancing productivity and facilitating labor market participation. The association of economic growth with mental and physical health requires further scrutiny. Some ways of promoting economic growth may be asking too much of human beings, thereby pushing their limits and negatively affecting their mental health and their well-being. Due to physical and mental health's importance for well-being, skills and knowledge associated with preventing health problems should be at the center of any educational curriculum. It is also well-known that there are social factors associated with physical and mental health deterioration (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Marmot, 2007, 2015; Wilkinson, 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Thus, some positive synergies can be created by enhancing the quality of human relationships. In addition, some health regimes have proven to be more effective than others in delivering good health at a low cost. These regimes deserve further study as they could be very useful within a context of low economic growth.

5.3 Leisure and free time

Leisure and free time also make a direct contribution to well-being. In other words, they have intrinsic value that cannot be adequately captured by income-focused approaches. Income-based models view free time as an opportunity cost in terms of production and often treat leisure as an industry that can generate profits. Conversely, a subjective well-being approach recognizes that free time is essential for engaging in numerous meaningful activities and most of them are unrelated to income generation. This perspective also allows for an understanding of how various leisure activities and the availability and use of free time can enhance well-being. A focus on leisure and free time implies a reconsideration of the value of recreational infrastructure, the importance of collective activities, and even an assessment of time poverty and the consequences of holding an accelerated pace of life.

6 Conclusion

The pillar of human relationships, specifically person-based interpersonal relationship, is identified as a central component for guiding public policy towards the achievement of a sustainable and inclusive society with high well-being. This also necessitates a reconsideration of the methods by which economic growth is generated and utilized.

To summarize the key arguments presented in this document:

- Research on subjective well-being has established that interpersonal relationships play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of the population.
- It is possible to distinguish between various types and qualities of interpersonal relationships, thereby creating opportunities for targeted interventions that have the greatest potential to enhance well-being.
- The quantity and quality of meaningful human relationships are not contingent on the income level of the population or on cognitive or productive characteristics. As a result, promoting well-being through abundant and high-quality human relationships presents an opportunity to foster well-being inclusively as quality relationships are largely accessible to most people in society.
- It is plausible to conceive of public policies aimed at promoting quality human relationships. These policies are likely to be low-cost, impose minimal strain on government budgets, and yield substantial benefits in terms of overall well-being.
- Well-being policies that enhance the quality and quantity of human relationships aligns with environmental sustainability as human relationships do not inherently contribute to the high ecological footprint associated with the production and consumption of many material goods linked to economic growth.
- The reliance on income to promote well-being diminishes when other key drivers of well-being are emphasized. Consequently, promoting well-being through the cultivation of human relationships presents an appealing strategy, particularly within contexts characterized by low economic growth.
- Significant efforts have been made by national statistical offices to measure and monitor production and economic growth. Similar efforts should be directed towards measuring and tracking human relationships and other key pillars of well-being.

In conclusion, this position paper calls for a shift in focus towards interpersonal relationships as a central pillar in the development of strategies to foster inclusive and sustainable well-being within societies.

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