



Enhancing wellbeing in Malta

How can we enhance wellbeing in Malta?

These questions have long been among the most pertinent questions that governments are tasked to answer the world over. But there is an important change that has come about in recent years: the kind of wellbeing. In many countries, for many years, it was all about material wellbeing. Government's role was to ensure that an ever-larger pie-full of money was baked annually and that this pie is split as equitably as possible, or at least in a way that does not leave anyone in poverty. But over time, there has been a rise in the number of governments, across different countries, that have become interested in a different kind of wellbeing, a more flavourful pie that looks at human wellbeing more broadly.

For these governments, the wellbeing pie is not composed of just one ingredient, that is money, but rather of multiple ingredients, like health, the environment, education, civil rights, free time, social life, the arts, in short, all that which contributes to quality of life and which brings happiness. It is for this main reason that the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the University of Malta embarked on a project to take stock of the kind of ingredients governments around the world were keen to include in their wellbeing pie.

So what do others do?

Well it is clear, first of all, that an ever-growing number of countries from Canada to Bhutan are measuring wellbeing using data that goes beyond GDP and economic indicators. But besides this, it is also clear that there are several examples of policy which help contribute to enhancing human wellbeing. For example? In some countries, like the USA, happiness is actually enshrined in the constitution. Some governments like that of the United Arab Emirates have set up a ministry for happiness and enacted laws to promote happiness. During the budget cycle, some countries, like New Zealand assess government expenditure against its impact on wellbeing, beyond its economic impact. There is growing importance being given not only to how the country is doing as a whole but also on how wellbeing is spread. Inequality does not just exist in the financial sphere but also in life more generally. In an ever-growing number of countries across all continents, citizens are being asked what it is that makes them happy, so that government can be better informed on how to improve human wellbeing among the different communities. In countries like the UK there are growing effort to educate both adults and children at school for happiness.

What about Malta?

There is no doubt that the notion of wellbeing beyond material gain is one that is gaining ground in Malta. Many entities, including the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the University of Malta and the National Statistics Office have given considerable importance to this field. Other agencies, political parties, local councils and voluntary organisations, are make increasing reference to wellbeing, wellness, human wellbeing and similar notions. In short, it seems like the idea of wellbeing has found its way in Malta too.

So what's next?

To enhance wellbeing in Malta we must of course continue to gather data and conduct studies but we must also take strategic decisions on how to use the country's resources based on how these decisions impact wellbeing, especially on how they impact the worst off in society. We would do well to improve consultation among citizens and education about wellbeing among children. These goals would ideally be shared among the entities responsible for strategic decisions in Malta.