



## Article

# The Contested Terrain of Sport and Well-Being: Health and Wellness or Wellbeing Washing?

Steven J. Jackson <sup>1,\*</sup>, Michael P. Sam <sup>1</sup> and Marcelle C. Dawson <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences, University of Otago, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand; mike.sam@otago.ac.nz

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology, Gender Studies and Criminology, University of Otago, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand; marcelle.dawson@otago.ac.nz

\* Correspondence: steve.jackson@otago.ac.nz

**Abstract:** Wellbeing has firmly established itself within contemporary practice, politics and policy. Indeed, the cultural, commercial, and terrestrial landscape of the concept is staggering and manifests within popular discourse and across global organisations and institutions, national governments, workplaces, and consumer lifestyle products and services. Notably, the field of sport, exercise, and physical activity has been identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations, and the OECD as a key sector with the potential to contribute to people's wellbeing. This should not be surprising given that there is a large body of literature espousing the benefits of regular physical activity (in myriad forms) as part of a healthy lifestyle. However, there are increasing concerns that wellbeing's global ubiquity may be leading to a range of unintended consequences and/or unscrupulous practices within both international organisations and nation-states. This largely conceptual essay focuses on the concept and process of wellbeing washing by (1) tracing the historical roots and evolution of wellbeing; (2) exploring its reconceptualization within the framework of neoliberalism; (3) offering a preliminary outline of the concept of wellbeing washing; and (4) briefly describing how wellbeing washing is manifesting within the context of sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Overall, this analysis explores wellbeing as a contested terrain of interests marked by a range of complexities and contradictions.



**Citation:** Jackson, Steven J., Michael P. Sam, and Marcelle C. Dawson. 2024. The Contested Terrain of Sport and Well-Being: Health and Wellness or Wellbeing Washing? *Social Sciences* 13: 366. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13070366>

Academic Editor: Denis Bernardeau-Moreau

Received: 17 June 2024

Revised: 5 July 2024

Accepted: 5 July 2024

Published: 11 July 2024



**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Keywords:** wellbeing; health; wellbeing washing; sport; neoliberalism

## 1. Introduction

Wellbeing has firmly established itself within contemporary practice, politics, and policy. Indeed, the cultural, commercial, and terrestrial landscape of the concept is staggering and manifests within popular discourse and across global organisations and institutions, national governments, workplaces, and consumer lifestyle products and services (Cederström and Spicer 2015). Notably, the field of sport, exercise and physical activity has been identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations, and the OECD as a key sector with the potential to contribute to people's wellbeing (World Health Organization 2024; United Nations 2023; OECD 2024). This should not be surprising given that there is a large body of literature espousing the benefits of regular physical activity (in myriad forms) as part of a healthy lifestyle. However, there are increasing concerns that wellbeing's global ubiquity may be leading to a range of unintended consequences and/or unscrupulous practices within both international organisations and nation-states (Bache et al. 2016; Chapman 2016; Davies 2015; Murphy 2021). Specifically, the combined compulsion to identify and implement often well-intentioned wellness and wellbeing policies, including those associated with sport, within a dominant neoliberal political-economic paradigm is problematic on two fronts. First, the pace at which alleged evidenced-based wellbeing policies and practices are being mandated within state, public,

and private organisations may be counterproductive and may be leading to new and more harmful types and levels of unwellness (Atkinson 2021; White and Blackmore 2015). Second, the same groups, in order to commodify and capitalise on the concept or to meet key performance indicators in order to justify their budgets (or their very existence), may deliberately or unconsciously engage in what could be referred to as “wellbeing washing”, the strategic use of wellbeing by governments, corporations, or organisations to cultivate an image of being proactive, positive, and caring while they are in reality doing very little or actually doing harm.

With respect to the commodification of wellbeing, consider the Canadian multinational athletic apparel retailer Lululemon. In 2023, the company published its own Global Wellbeing Report, which, in and of itself, highlights how the concept is being appropriated and commercialised by corporate entities. Moreover, the Lululemon case provides insights into how corporations are strategically positioning themselves not only to provide information about contemporary wellbeing trends, but also to offer expertise on how wellbeing should be conceptualised and pursued. Consider the following quotation from their global report:

“Institutions, brands and society at large have an important role to play in enabling and supporting the pursuit of wellbeing, without creating stressful imperatives and upholding unachievable standards. It’s time to introduce a softer take on self-care—one where the journey towards being well includes enjoyable, simple acts of movement, mindfulness and connection”. (Lululemon Global Wellbeing Report 2023, p. 7)

The fact that Lululemon asserts that “brands have an important role to play in enabling and supporting wellbeing” could be considered a form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Hiswåls et al. 2020). While some public health scholars support CSR in this domain (Johansson et al. 2022), it could also be regarded as a strategic form of wellbeing washing and a sign of the widening scope of who is involved in setting the wellbeing agenda.

Arguably, wellbeing has become intricately entwined within the vast realm of politics, economics, health, education, and consumer lifestyles, shaping a vast network of discourses and policies that wield power, allocate resources, and ultimately impact people’s quality of life. This analysis responds to one aspect of a recently proposed research agenda related to wellbeing. Jackson et al. (2022) advocated for a future focus on three lines of wellbeing research, including: (1) wellbeing as a wicked problem; (2) wellbeing and alternative futures; and (3) wellbeing washing. This essay focuses on the latter by: (1) tracing the historical roots and evolution of wellbeing; (2) exploring its reconceptualization within the framework of neoliberalism; (3) offering a preliminary outline of the concept of wellbeing washing; and (4) briefly describing how wellbeing washing is manifesting within the context of sport in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Overall, this analysis explores wellbeing as a contested terrain of interests marked by a range of complexities and contradictions.

## 2. Origin and Evolution of Wellbeing

Even a scant review of the literature reveals that the concept of wellbeing comprises a rich historical tapestry, encompassing a spectrum of meanings including quality of life, happiness, flourishing health, and even morality and mindfulness (Dodge et al. 2012; Seligman 2012; Davies 2015; Smith and Reid 2017; Leary 2019). In light of this multiplicity of understandings of wellbeing, a major challenge faced by scholars, policy makers, and everyday citizens is the diversity of uses and meanings embodied within the concept. For example, Pollard and Lee (2003) describe it as a “complex, multi-faceted construct” that defies easy definition and measurement, while Thomas (2009) contends that wellbeing is “intangible, difficult to define, and even harder to measure”. The confusion is exacerbated by the conflation of wellbeing with concepts such as wellness and welfare. Perhaps we should not be surprised given the origins and development of wellbeing, particularly in relation to public policy.

For example, wellbeing’s contemporary interpretations can be traced to the late 1770s, when Jeremy Bentham identified happiness as a societal metric that could be used to

advance “utility” or the “greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Bentham 1776). In turn, English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) employed utilitarian principles to shape law and social policy. This fusion of utilitarianism with liberalism paved the way for the emergence of an economic model of human behaviour, with profound implications for society.

Today, most understandings of wellbeing can be categorized into two primary frameworks. The first, known as subjective wellbeing, underscores a holistic, multidimensional evaluation of an individual’s mental, physical, and spiritual health (see the following for systematic reviews of the concept: Das et al. 2020; Ngamaba et al. 2017; Topp et al. 2015). This approach finds resonance in the World Health Organization’s Well-being Index (World Health Organization 1998). Established in 1998, the WHO-5 Index serves to gauge the subjective wellbeing of individuals aged nine years and older. Comprising five statements covering aspects like cheerfulness, calmness, vigour, restfulness, and fulfilment, this index stands as one of the most widely employed questionnaires for evaluating subjective psychological wellbeing. It has been translated into over 30 languages and extensively utilized in research endeavours worldwide. Furthermore, as highlighted in a systematic literature review, “[t]he scale has adequate validity both as a screening tool for depression and as an outcome measure in clinical trials and has been applied successfully as a generic scale for well-being across a wide range of study fields” (Topp et al. 2015, p. 174). Nevertheless, the WHO-5 Index has its critics. For instance, the WHO-5 index concentrates on gauging the frequency of positive emotional states but overlooks negative emotions, along with their intensity and duration (Kusier and Folker 2020). Moreover, condensing the multifaceted nature of wellbeing into just five basic questions for quantification and operationalization oversimplifies the concept. The significant influence of the WHO-5 index cannot be ignored given that governments, corporations, and various other sectors have helped establish it as part of a dominant wellbeing agenda.

The alternative conceptualization of objective wellbeing encapsulates the comprehensive dimensions of the concept, providing an alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a metric for a nation’s overall prosperity (Western and Tomaszewski 2016). An exemplary model is the OECD Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress, crafted based on the 2009 Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, with substantial OECD input. This framework comprises three primary components: present wellbeing, disparities in wellbeing outcomes, and resources for future wellbeing ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)). Similar to the WHO-5 index, the OECD Well-being Framework has influenced a broad spectrum of scholarly analyses across various academic domains and has served as a foundation for international policy development across a range of sectors, including the economy, health, and education (McGregor 2018). Nonetheless, akin to the WHO-5 index, the OECD Well-being Framework faces several limitations, including a lack of consensus on validity and on the constituents and determinants of wellbeing (Cavalletti and Corsi 2018). Furthermore, both the WHO-5 and the OECD approaches to wellbeing have come under scrutiny for several reasons: (1) they both operate on the assumption of objective measurement of wellbeing (Alexandrova 2018), disregarding critical distinctions in the quest for international conceptual harmony (Auld and Morris 2019); (2) both are primarily Western-centric, marginalizing alternative perspectives such as Asian and Indigenous perspectives and those of other cultural orientations (Diener and Suh 2009; Jorm and Ryan 2014; Rappleye et al. 2020; Tiberius 2004; Tov and Diener 2009); and (3) both function within a broader framework of societal norms and values that may not fully encompass the diversity of everyday human experiences and struggles (Bache and Scott 2018; McGregor 2018).

While these two wellbeing frameworks may seem distinct, they are in many ways interconnected and rooted in both positivist and neoliberal paradigms. Thus, on the one hand, the introduction of wellbeing as a more progressive measure of national economic and social outcomes signifies social change. On the other hand, however, the translation of state-level policies and associated performance metrics often centres on *individual* wellbeing

(Jackson et al. 2022). Consequently, being “well” is defined by traits such as health, productivity, efficiency, resilience, obedience, and loyalty—qualities that ensure compliance, reduce costs, and boost economic growth (Cederström and Spicer 2015). Therefore, contemporary wellbeing remains entrenched within a context shaped by a blend of utilitarianism and neoliberalism. Next, we explore the emergence of wellbeing as a tool of neoliberalism and its societal implications.

### 3. Neoliberalism and Wellbeing

The Global Wellness Institute reported that the “wellness economy” reached an estimated \$US5.6 trillion in 2022, with projections suggesting it could soar to \$US8.5 trillion by 2027 (Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2023). These figures are indicative of the commodification of wellness and wellbeing. However, in a broader sense, they represent one aspect of neoliberalism that Harvey (2007, p. 22) describes as: “. . . a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade”. Harvey offers one particular conceptualisation, but it is important to acknowledge that neoliberalism has been widely interpreted and critiqued, particularly when it has been treated as a phenomenon that is everything, everywhere, all at once (Biebricher and Johnson 2012; Cahill et al. 2018; Gamble 2001; Giroux 2008; Hardin 2012; Lane 2023; Springer et al. 2016). Nevertheless, regardless of enduring definitional debates and conceptual limitations, one of the central features of contemporary neoliberalism is that it involves the state negotiating between public and private realms and forming strategic, albeit temporary, alliances where necessary to ensure that a market-driven system is upheld. Consequently, the state is complicit in sustaining a system that involves a fundamental shift in a range of social and fiscal responsibilities from the state to the individual (Connell 2010; Harvey 2005). As such, it is worth reflecting on the emergence of neoliberalism and its subsequent influence on the politics of wellbeing.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of neoliberalism. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy commissioned a report to assess the efficacy of using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a metric for a country’s economic performance and social advancement (Stiglitz et al. 2009). The report underscored the limitations of GDP as a comprehensive indicator, as it fails to reliably predict the health of either the economy or its inhabitants. It recommended the incorporation of supplementary indicators beyond GDP, prioritizing a shift from measuring economic output to assessing people’s wellbeing (Stiglitz et al. 2009, p. 12). Since 2008, wellbeing has gained significant prominence, prompting states and non-governmental organizations, including the WHO and the OECD, to adopt new models and frameworks aimed at recalibrating economic and social priorities.

In addition, several states (including Canada, Ecuador and the UK) have implemented national wellbeing frameworks. Perhaps the most explicit is New Zealand’s Living Standards Framework featuring a “wellbeing budget.” Aligned with global trends, New Zealand’s wellbeing model relies on aggregated individual indicators and is backed by social investment in areas aimed at securing future wellbeing (Treasury 2018). Driven by subsequent “wellbeing budgets” spanning five years (2019–2023), such measures have become embedded in the strategies and programs of all state agencies. One aspirational positive outcome of the Living Standards Frameworks was increasing awareness of the potential value of Māori indigenous perspectives on wellbeing. However, the 2023 election of a centre-right National-led government has raised fears that any progress made could be quickly eradicated. Consequently, despite its purported advantages, five sequential versions of the wellbeing budget could not reduce the country’s enduring social problems, including: poverty, homelessness, employment insecurity, and labour exploitation. Rather, based on any available set of quantitative or qualitative measures, New Zealand’s economic, health, and social wellbeing levels have declined (McClure 2021). What is particularly

noteworthy in relation to this analysis is how wellbeing, as both discourse and policy, has been appropriated in order to reframe the aforementioned systemic problems as individual challenges and responsibilities (Rose 1999; Sointu 2005).

To illustrate how the neoliberal agenda impacts the experiences of citizens, let us consider how wellbeing has been embraced and operationalised within the values and logic of the organisational workplace. Over the past decade, we have witnessed the rising emphasis on the idea of “self-care for work”, which has resulted in the emergence of a wellbeing services industry comprising consultants, coaches, and specialists (Cederström and Spicer 2015). In conjunction with this change, there has been an increase in workplace wellness and wellbeing programs featuring “wellbeing champions” and their corresponding awards. The organisational logic of these initiatives is that employees who proactively manage their wellbeing are more productive and take less sick leave, but they also promote alignment with corporate values that are increasingly defined in terms of demonstrating loyalty and commitment to the employer. Beyond these benefits, employers are rewarded with being able to use their wellbeing programs as a marketing and recruitment tool to attract new employees and/or as evidence of benevolence because they demonstrate duty of care for existing workers through messages of “work-life balance” and the offering of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). This neoliberal reconfiguration of wellbeing has yielded two significant and interconnected effects. Firstly, wellbeing now functions as a “policy paradigm through which the mind and body are assessed as economic assets” (Davies 2011, p. 65). Secondly, akin to health, wellbeing has become deeply ingrained within organisations and wider society to the extent that “deviation from its norms is stigmatized” (Cederström and Spicer 2015, p. 4).

The preceding discussion presents a critical evaluation of the constraints inherent in scholarly conceptualizations of wellbeing, as well as its potential exploitation by state, corporate, and other agencies. This scenario has resulted in rising uncertainty and doubt regarding the theoretical and practical value of tools like the WHO-5 index. Notably, some observers have even questioned whether the concept of wellbeing is itself counterproductive or potentially hazardous (Gruber et al. 2011; Murphy 2021; Timimi 2020; Whitaker 2010). Given some of the ambiguity, complexity, and at times contradictory nature of wellbeing as concept, practice and policy, a number of concerns emerge. First, from its idealistic roots, wellbeing has evolved into a type of ideological norm that stigmatizes those who fail to align with it. Second, the increasingly entrenched dogma that endorses the uncompromising pursuit of wellbeing may, ironically, lead to negative outcomes; that is, wellbeing may not only be alienating people, but actually making them sick. And, third, the uncritical collective fixation on a neoliberal model of wellbeing is leading to a range of both unintended consequences and malicious practices, including the phenomenon of wellbeing washing.

#### 4. Wellbeing Washing

“Wellbeing washing” derives from similar concepts such as sportswashing (Boykoff 2022; Fruh et al. 2022; Skey 2023) and greenwashing (Kolcava 2023; Miller 2017; Williams 2024). These concepts share a number of characteristics, including the fact that they: (a) signify something that appears intrinsically positive, (b) operate at both global and local levels; and (c) seek legitimacy within the popular consciousness while simultaneously masking or marginalising the root systemic causes and effects of real social problems. Here, we define wellbeing washing as the strategic use of narratives, policies and practices by supranational, state, and corporate organisations to signal positive and even morally obligatory intentions, while these narratives, policies and practices are designed to advance neoliberal values of productivity, cost reduction, brand maintenance, conformity, and control. Arguably, the real power and influence of wellbeing lies primarily in its positive meaning, which creates a type of “halo effect” (not unlike concepts such as “democracy”, “freedom”, “liberty”, “sport”, etc). Thus, even though there is nothing natural, essential or inherently good about “wellbeing”, anything associated with it tends to inherit its positive qualities, thereby

making it a powerful and strategic, albeit speculative, concept and tool that can be used by a range of stakeholders. Thus, we should not be surprised that many agencies and organisations use wellbeing as a virtue-signalling term to launder or “wash” the real effects of some of their objectives and practices. The next section provides a preliminary exploration of how wellbeing and wellbeing washing are emerging within the context of sport. It is important to note at the outset that, given the fledgling nature of the concept, our analysis focuses on using examples to illustrate the nature and potential implications of wellbeing washing.

## 5. Sport and Wellbeing Washing

There is an established body of literature highlighting the positive relationship between sport, exercise, physical activity, and health and wellbeing. The majority of research in this area tends to focus on one of three areas. The first, and probably the largest, area is the impact of sport, exercise and physical activity on subjective and psychological wellbeing (Chalip et al. 1996; Downward and Rasciute 2011; Fasting 2015; Steptoe and Butler 1996; Testoni et al. 2018; Wilson et al. 2022a, 2022b; Zhang and Chen 2019). Second, research and concurrent policy have emerged in response to the negative impact of hypercompetitive elite sport on athlete wellbeing. This category includes issues of athlete wellbeing ranging from maltreatment (Kerr et al. 2014; Kerr et al. 2019; Kerr and Kerr 2020) to governance and integrity issues, to basic mental health challenges, and, finally, to financial challenges related to living and training costs. The profile of the problem is evident in the fact that the world’s leading sport organisations, including the IOC and FIFA, have introduced programs that support athlete wellbeing. For example, the IOC has developed a platform called *Athlete365*, which “supports more than 130,000 elite athletes and entourage members on and off the field of play through a range of advice, services and tools, with a particular focus on well-being” (IOC Expands Mental Health Support for Athletes 2022). For the 2022 Beijing and 2024 Paris Olympics, the program included the Mentally Fit Helpline, which is available to all Olympians, Paralympians, and associated members of their entourages 24 h a day, 7 days a week, in 70 languages. Viewed from one perspective, this appears to be a very positive and supportive scheme that recognises the physical, mental, emotional, and financial challenges facing elite sport personnel. However, viewed from a more critical perspective, it raises questions about the negative and challenging culture of hypercompetitive sport, which is generally proclaimed to be a source of health and wellbeing. Indeed, it is often only when a crisis of extreme severity that poses a risk of reputational damage occurs that an organisation, such as the IOC, takes action. As such, there are reasonable grounds for critics to question the motivation behind these programs and whether they are genuinely dedicated to athlete wellbeing or whether they constitute a form of corporate social responsibility or public relations strategy. A key question then is, how do we determine whether or not institutional programs, like those of the IOC, are genuine and proactive in preventing or fixing problems rather than ex post facto, reactive initiatives prompted by a need to manage public relations scandals related to athlete welfare and wellbeing?

A third category of sport and wellbeing research relates to nation-state sport policy development and investment and, more specifically, to the value of sport. Most Western nations have a dedicated Ministry of Sport (or similar) that is responsible for delivering a range of programs from the grassroots to the elite level. A regular challenge for these agencies is to provide evidence of the value of sport to the nation. For many years, governments typically cited the benefits of community sport with respect to promoting healthy, active lifestyles; building confidence and character; and fostering social cohesion. By contrast, at high performance levels, the value of sport tends to be characterized in terms of enhancing national identity, with success on the world stage enabling governments to celebrate heroic medal winners to inspire future generations. However, within the context of neoliberalism and new public management, such intangible indicators have been insufficient as objective, quantifiable criteria capable of providing the hard data demanded by governments seeking evidence of a return on taxpayer investment (Brookes and Wiggan 2009; Coalter 2007;

De Rycke and De Bosscher 2019; Grix and Carmichael 2012; Kavanagh and Rinehart 2021; Nessel and Kościółek 2022; Sam 2009, 2012). As a result, new structures of management emerged along, with a new vernacular and set of narratives about accountability and key performance indicators (KPIs), regardless of whether the data were related to grass-roots or high performance sport. At this point, we provide a brief example of how New Zealand's introduction of a new wellbeing economy in 2019 is having some unintended and concerning consequences for both sport policy and related research.

Between 2017 and 2023, New Zealand was led by the centre-left Labour Party, first as a member of a coalition agreement under the Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP), and, in its last term, as a majority government. During its six years in office and particularly in its last three years with a majority, it embarked on an almost unprecedented journey of transformational social change. Much of the change was linked to two interrelated policies, which were previously noted: The Living Standards Framework, which was introduced in 2017, and the subsequent five annual versions of the Wellbeing Budget (2019–2023). In combination, these foundational policies provided the scaffolding for the emerging “Wellbeing Agenda”, wherein:

“... wellbeing budgets allocated resources based on a broader array of pre-defined *wellbeing outcomes*. In practice this means that Government departments are required to clearly articulate the wellbeing benefit of initiatives when seeking new funding in the yearly budget cycle”. (Lane et al. 2023, p. 6, *emphasis added*)

Enhancing both the scope and influence of the state's authority, in 2020, the Labour government introduced the *Public Service Act* (Parliamentary Council Office, *Public Service Act 2020*), which:

“...created a nimble and collaborative public service. . . . This vital legislative change addresses the need for more flexible and collaborative approaches. . . to tackling the more intricate challenges in a policy environment, and provides the legislative clout to enable meaningful cross-agency collaboration and potential partnership. Working across government agencies is key to influencing physical activity settings and behaviours in areas otherwise unreachable by sport policy makers alone (e.g., into the policy domains of the likes of Education, Transport and Health)”. (Lane et al. 2023, p. 6)

Not surprisingly, it did not take long for the state-level wellbeing agenda and its attendant policies to materialise across, and manifest within, almost every state department and state funded entity, including universities and research centres.

Specifically related to this analysis, Sport New Zealand, the government's Crown Agency responsible for sport, quickly signalled its intention to support wellbeing, inserting it as a dominant narrative and policy focus across the New Zealand sporting spectrum. With respect to high-performance sport, the issue of athlete wellbeing emerged from a range of scandals within national sport organisations (NSOs) including New Zealand Rugby, New Zealand Football, New Zealand Cycling, and New Zealand Gymnastics. Initially, it was the NSOs that commissioned their respective task forces and inquiries to review the evidence and make recommendations for transformational change (Dawbin et al. 2021). However, Sport NZ followed suit, commissioning its own investigation into athlete welfare in 2018. While sport journalists would eventually call 2018 the “year of reviews” (Cleaver 2018; Pearse 2019), government action began in earnest the following year, at the same time as policies associated with the New Zealand Labour government's first “wellbeing budget” were being implemented across state sectors.

Alongside Sport NZ's attention to wellbeing in elite sport, the agency began to re-prioritise community sport (or sport-for-all) under the belief that “growing the quality of participation opportunities helps to maximise wellbeing” (Sport New Zealand 2019, p. 4). Thus, after a period of focusing almost exclusively on sport (rather than physical activity) between 2012–2018, Sport NZ would once again promote “quality experiences in play, active recreation and sport. . . to ensure the greatest impact on wellbeing for all New Zealan-

ders" (Sport New Zealand 2020, p. 6). Central to its new mission was a focus on youth wellbeing, particularly the wellbeing of Māori and Pasifika youth. Sport New Zealand thus launched its 2020–2032 Strategic Plan to "demonstrate impact and show alignment to the Government's Living Standards Framework". The plan was titled "Every Body Active" and introduced two major policy initiatives: (1) The Big Wins and (2) Balance is Better. Notably, both programs focus on identifying and extracting the "value of sport" beyond basic physical activity, skill development, winning medals, or securing world rankings. Indeed, both initiatives are premised on the belief that sport participation enhances youth wellbeing.

However, while Sport New Zealand (2019) could show alignment with government policy priorities, its assertions regarding sport's 'Return on Investment (RoI) to the government's wellbeing agenda' were as yet unproven. Thus by 2020/2021, the agency introduced total estimated subjective wellbeing value into its reporting framework (Sport New Zealand 2023). Thus, drawing upon data collected as part of its ongoing "Active NZ Young Peoples Survey" (2017) which involved over 6000 participants aged 5–17, Sport NZ, in strategic collaboration with academics across the nation, developed a research plan to link sport and wellbeing.

As a priority, the agency aimed to conduct and publish research that supported the proposed link. The result was that Sport NZ and its academic partners excavated their own database to find a link, however tenuous, that confirmed a positive relationship between sport participation and wellbeing. Relying on a single question (wherein youth were asked to rate their wellbeing on a scale of 1 ("very unhappy") to 10 ("very happy"), the authors correlated these scores (with values  $\geq 8$ ) with a range of variables, including whether the respondent had "participated in any physical activity that was specifically for the purpose of sport, exercise, or recreation in the past seven days?" While the paper's authors acknowledged that the single wellbeing question was a blunt measure, they nevertheless maintained its robustness, as the question had been drawn from the OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being. To date, two research articles have been produced, both of which confirm a positive relationship between sport participation and wellbeing (Wilson et al. 2022a, 2022b).

Two observations can be made here. First, in relation to elite sport, the concern for wellbeing emanated from longstanding issues ostensibly created by the government agency's own policies and programmes aimed at achieving medal targets, including centralised operations and performance-based funding models (cf. Cottrell 2018; Heron 2018). A number of remedies have since been proposed. HPSNZ now advances the co-existence of "winning" and wellbeing as 'without compromise'. To "ensure the right balance between wellbeing and the requirements of elite sport", HPSNZ has proposed funding up to eight full-time "Wellbeing Manager Roles" for NSOs while also introducing new measures to monitor wellbeing in NSO environments. From this, we see that athlete *welfare* emerged as a "problem" immediately before Labour's budget was issued but was soon transformed into *wellbeing* in the ensuing years.

Second, and in relation to linking wellbeing, sport, and physical activity, Sport NZ eagerly sought evidence for its annual reporting and, accordingly, added measures to its annual public survey. In this light, Sport NZ's research can be understood as a strategic effort to legitimise sport as an inherently positive activity and not necessarily as an effort for the purposes of scientific advancement *per se*. The idea that a person's wellbeing can be measured by a single survey question poses at least one validity problem (Forgeard et al. 2011; Kusier and Folker 2020). The difficulty in disambiguating activity measures (such as hours spent in 'social sport', versus 'organised sport', versus 'physical education', versus active transport) also introduces issues of validity for these correlations. As such, the studies were not meant to offer policy advice or insight regarding how to improve wellbeing, inasmuch as they were conducted to legitimise the link.

Indeed, the first papers' conclusion—that quality experiences in sport "matter"—is an assertion unconnected to the data but closely reflected in Sport NZ documents over the past decade. Likewise, it is questionable whether the findings "clearly demonstrate[e]



the importance of developing quality coaches that provide positive experiences through the delivery of youth sport" (though this assertion is also evident in Sport NZ policy documents). Taken together, both works can thus be read as exemplars of "policy-based evidence", rather than "evidence-based policy" (Cairney 2016, 2022; Parkhurst 2017; Strassheim and Kettunen 2014). However, a notable dimension to these papers concerns the co-opting of academics, also with an interest in leveraging wellbeing.

Given the Labour government's focus on wellbeing, academics (including one of this paper's authors) may have regarded the shift as an opportunity to leverage research funding. Arguably, this context has at least two dimensions; first, it is opportunistic in the sense that academics seized the chance to secure funding, and second, it is fatalistic to the extent that the scarcity of research funding compels scholars to compete for the limited resources available. Moreover, this context introduces indirect pressure to cooperate, knowing that Sport NZ has considerable influence over current and future national research priorities. In many ways, this situation highlights one of the challenges of undertaking collaborative research between state agencies and academics, particularly in cases where the state agency, in this case, Sport NZ, has representation and influence within both groups. Indeed, it raises the prospect of a potential conflict of interest. For example, one of the authors of the publications cited was not only a co-editor of the special issue within which the manuscripts were published, but also holds joint appointments at Sport NZ and a university. Thus, while the research may have been undertaken with the best of intentions, the lack of independence, including the source of funding and the potential for academics to become complicit in aligning research with government priorities (and by default, Sport NZ's priorities) should raise concerns. Arguably, even if it was unintentional, it represents a form of *wellbeing washing* given that the purpose of this research appears to be to meet Sport NZ's need to: align and promote state-led wellbeing objectives, legitimise its strategic plan, and potentially influence scholarship. In short, wellbeing was not necessarily a socially valued end in itself, but rather an independent variable used as a means to an end (in this case, funding and legitimisation of public policy). Arguably, this facilitated the process of wellbeing washing in three ways. First, the simple incorporation of the word "wellbeing" bestowed a positive aura around Sport NZ's policies and research. Second, Sport NZ's collaborative partnership with academics confers a degree of legitimacy given that it implies that a crown agency draws upon expert advice and guidance. And third, the focus of the published research helped Sport NZ to mask both the lack of existing sport policy success with respect to enhancing national physical activity and health levels and also the fact that they actually had no empirical evidence to support the policy's operating assumption that sport enhances wellbeing. Ultimately, at best, these outcomes represent examples of wellbeing washing, but at worst, they could be described as the weaponisation of wellbeing.

## 6. Conclusions

Given the complex and contradictory nature of wellbeing, along with its enduring, yet precarious, position within policies and programs, we suggest that it is time to critically evaluate the current hegemony of the concept within the political, cultural, and economic spheres. Beyond outlining the contested terrain of the concept with respect to definitions, branding, and policies, this essay has introduced the concept of "wellbeing washing". The concept provides a framework for critiquing research, policies, and programs that intentionally or unintentionally operate to sustain and advance the interests of particular stakeholders. It may be inevitable that wellbeing will be susceptible to being a contested terrain given both its complexity and competing interests. Indeed, wellbeing embodies many of the key characteristics of what is referred to as a "wicked problem" (Rittel and Webber 1973). This concept refers to problems that have ambiguous definitions and meanings, are subject to multiple causes, are linked to a range of vested interests, and where attempts at finding solutions often lead to the creation of new unanticipated problems (Bache and Reardon 2016; Hunter 2009; Rittel and Webber 1973). However, despite

these complexities, the concept of wellbeing washing may have merit and utility for a wide range of sectors, including policymakers and practitioners. For example, it provides an alternative perspective that challenges the hegemony of the current neoliberal wellbeing agenda, which may be doing more harm than good. Moreover, basic awareness of the risks of wellbeing washing may encourage people to engage in critical reflection about the policies and practices that they are responsible for implementing or that may influence their everyday lives. Such reflection may help limit or avoid some of the ethical pitfalls associated with many contemporary health policies and practices. Future researchers may wish to explore the shifting trajectories of conceptualisations of wellbeing and attendant incorporation and co-optation within and across a range of political, economic, and social institutions, including sport, at both the local and global levels. Here, research that examines the nature and effectiveness of wellbeing policies and programs, including those linked to sport, in different nation-states may offer valuable insights. Overall, this modest analysis has hopefully responded to Carrington's (2024) recent declaration that "For Sport Studies to remain relevant, for it to continue to produce insights. . .we need to. . .engage in public debates around sports politics and policies. If we are able to do so, then Sport Studies will continue to play an important role in current and future struggles to remake and reimagine the world" (2024, p. 16).

**Author Contributions:** The first author developed the overall conceptualisation but all authors contributed equally to the research, analysis, resources, writing, and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** This is a conceptual versus empirical analysis therefore there is no data set.

**Acknowledgments:** We are grateful to the Editor and the two Reviewers for their constructive and valuable feedback.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## References

- Alexandrova, Anna. 2018. Can the Science of Well-Being Be Objective? *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 69: 421–45. [CrossRef]
- Atkinson, Sarah. 2021. The toxic effects of subjective wellbeing and potential tonics. *Social Science and Medicine* 28: 113098. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Auld, Euan, and Paul Morris. 2019. The OECD and IELS: Redefining early childhood education for the 21st century. *Policy Futures in Education* 17: 11–26. [CrossRef]
- Bache, Ian, and Karen Scott. 2018. *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bache, Ian, and Louise Reardon. 2016. The 'wicked problem' of wellbeing: Theorising the prospects for policy change. In *Advances in Happiness Research*. Edited by Toshiaki Tachibanaki. Tokyo: Springer, pp. 23–38.
- Bache, Ian, Louise Reardon, and Paul Anand. 2016. Wellbeing as a wicked problem: Navigating the arguments for the role of government. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17: 893–912. [CrossRef]
- Bentham, Jeremy. 1776. *The Commonplace Books, "Elogia—Locke, Priestley, Beccaria, Johnson"*. In *Bentham Jeremy (1842). The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Now First Collected: Under the Superintendence of His Executor, John Bowring*. Edinburgh: William Tait, Part XIX.
- Biebricher, Thomas, and Eric Vance Johnson. 2012. What's Wrong with Neoliberalism? *New Political Science* 34: 202–11. [CrossRef]
- Boykoff, Jules. 2022. Toward a Theory of Sportswashing: Mega-Events, Soft Power, and Political Conflict. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 39: 342–51. [CrossRef]
- Brookes, Stephen, and Jay Wiggan. 2009. Reflecting the public value of sport: A game of two halves. *Public Management Review* 11: 401–20. [CrossRef]
- Cahill, Damien, Melinda Cooper, Martijn Konings, and David Primrose, eds. 2018. *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Sage.
- Cairney, Paul. 2016. *The Politics of Evidence-Based Policy Making*. London: Palgrave Springer.

- Cairney, Paul. 2022. The myth of 'evidence-based policymaking' in a decentred state. *Public Policy and Administration* 37: 46–66. [CrossRef]
- Carrington, Ben. 2024. "There's an awful lot of rubbish around masquerading as Cultural Studies": Rethinking Sport Studies after the Cultural Turn. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 48: 7–25. [CrossRef]
- Cavalletti, Barbara, and Matteo Corsi. 2018. Beyond GDP: Effects on National Subjective Well-Being of OECD Countries. *Social Indicators Research* 136: 931–66. [CrossRef]
- Cederström, Carl, and André Spicer. 2015. *The Wellness Syndrome*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Chalip, Laurence, David R. Thomas, and Judy Voyle. 1996. Enhancing wellbeing through sport and recreation. *Community Psychology and Social Change: Australian and New Zealand Perspectives* 2: 126–56.
- Chapman, Audrey R. 2016. *Global Health, Human Rights, and the Challenge of Neoliberal Policies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cleaver, Dylan. 2018. Big Read: The Year of the Review—New Zealand's Broken System and Broken Athletes. *New Zealand Herald*, December 22. Available online: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/big-read-the-year-of-the-review-new-zealands-broken-system-and-broken-athletes/773ZRE6PGSV545GOV2W7MGXMHQ> (accessed on 20 July 2022).
- Coalter, Fred. 2007. *A Wider Social Role for Sport: Who's Keeping the Score?* London: Routledge.
- Connell, Raewyn. 2010. Understanding Neoliberalism. In *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*. Edited by Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 22–36. [CrossRef]
- Cottrell, Stephen. 2018. *Elite Athletes' Rights and Welfare*. Auckland: Sport New Zealand.
- Das, Kirti V., Carla Jones-Harrell, Yingling Fan, Anu Ramaswami, Ben Orlove, and Nisha Botchwey. 2020. Understanding subjective well-being: Perspectives from psychology and public health. *Public Health Review* 41: 25. [CrossRef]
- Davies, Will. 2011. The political economy of unhappiness. *New Left Review* 71: 65–80.
- Davies, William. 2015. *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being*. London: Verso.
- Dawbin, Timothy M., Michael P. Sam, and Cecilia Stenling. 2021. National sport organisation responses to independent reviews. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 13: 29–43. [CrossRef]
- De Rycke, Jens, and Veerle De Bosscher. 2019. Mapping the potential societal impacts triggered by elite sport: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 11: 485–502. [CrossRef]
- Diener, Edward, and Eunkook M. Suh. 2009. Culture and subjective well-being. In *Culture and Wellbeing*. Edited by Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh. Cambridge: The MIT Press, pp. 185–218.
- Dodge, Rachel, Annette P. Daly, Jan Huyton, and Lalage D. Sanders. 2012. The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 2: 222–35. [CrossRef]
- Downward, Paul, and Simona Rasciute. 2011. Does sport make you happy? An analysis of the well-being derived from sports participation. *International Review of Applied Economics* 25: 331–48. [CrossRef]
- Fasting, Kari. 2015. Assessing the sociology of sport: On sexual harassment research and policy. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50: 437–41. [CrossRef]
- Forgeard, Marie JC, Eranda Jayawickreme, Margaret L. Kern, and Martin E. P. Seligman. 2011. Doing the right thing: Measuring wellbeing for public policy. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 1: 79–106. [CrossRef]
- Fruh, Kyle, Alfred Archer, and Jake Wojtowicz. 2022. Sportswashing: Complicity and Corruption. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 17: 101–18. [CrossRef]
- Gamble, Andrew. 2001. Neo-Liberalism. *Capital and Class* 25: 127–34. [CrossRef]
- Giroux, Henry A. 2008. *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Global Wellness Economy Monitor. 2023. Miami: Global Wellness Institute. Available online: [https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GWI-WE-Monitor-2023\\_FINAL.pdf](https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GWI-WE-Monitor-2023_FINAL.pdf) (accessed on 15 November 2023).
- Grix, Jonathan, and Fiona Carmichael. 2012. Why do governments invest in elite sport? A polemic. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 4: 73–90. [CrossRef]
- Gruber, June, Iris B. Mauss, and Maya Tamir. 2011. A Dark Side of Happiness? How, When, and Why Happiness Is Not Always Good. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6: 222–33. [CrossRef]
- Hardin, Carolyn. 2012. Finding the 'Neo' in Neoliberalism. *Cultural Studies* 28: 199–221. [CrossRef]
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, David. 2007. Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610: 21–44. [CrossRef]
- Heron, Michael. 2018. Independent Review of Cycling New Zealand High Performance Programme. Available online: <https://hpsnz.org.nz/content/uploads/2018/10/CNZ-Review-Final.pdf> (accessed on 9 February 2023).
- Hiswåls, Anne-Sofie, Cornelia Wulff Hamrin, Åsa Vidman, and Gloria Macassa. 2020. Corporate social responsibility and external stakeholders' health and wellbeing: A viewpoint. *Journal of Public Health Research* 9: 27–29. [CrossRef]
- Hunter, David J. 2009. Leading for health and wellbeing: The need for a new paradigm. *Journal of Public Health* 31: 202–4. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- IOC Expands Mental Health Support for Athletes. 2022. October 10. Available online: <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-expands-mental-health-support-for-athletes> (accessed on 15 December 2022).
- Jackson, Steven J., Michael P. Sam, Marcelle C. Dawson, and Daniel Porter. 2022. The wellbeing pandemic: Outline of a contested terrain and a proposed research agenda. *Frontiers in Sociology* 7: 950557. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

- Johansson, Malin, Anne-Sofie Hiswåls, Lena Svennberg, and Gloria Macassa. 2022. What do we know about corporate social responsibility and stakeholders physical activity? A Public Health Perspective. *Journal of Public Health Research* 11: 1–9. [CrossRef]
- Jorm, Anthony F., and Siobhan M. Ryan. 2014. Cross-national and historical differences in subjective well-being. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 43: 330–40. [CrossRef]
- Kavanagh, Thomas, and Robert E. Rinehart. 2021. The neoliberal context and conditions of New Zealand sport. In *Sport in Aotearoa New Zealand*. London: Routledge, pp. 7–18.
- Kerr, Gretchen, Anthony Battaglia, and Ashley Stirling. 2019. Maltreatment in youth sport: A systemic issue. *Kinesiology Review* 8: 237–43. [CrossRef]
- Kerr, Gretchen, Ashley Stirling, and Ellen MacPherson. 2014. A critical examination of child protection initiatives in sport contexts. *Social Sciences* 3: 742–57. [CrossRef]
- Kerr, Roslyn, and Gretchen Kerr. 2020. Promoting athlete welfare: A proposal for an international surveillance system. *Sport Management Review* 23: 95–103. [CrossRef]
- Kolcava, Dennis. 2023. Greenwashing and public demand for government regulation. *Journal of Public Policy* 43: 179–98. [CrossRef]
- Kusier, Amalie Oxholm, and Anna Paldam Folker. 2020. The Well-Being Index WHO-5: Hedonistic foundation and practical limitations. *Medical Humanities* 46: 333–39. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Lane, David. 2023. *Global Neoliberal Capitalism and the Alternatives*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. [CrossRef]
- Lane, Jack, Justin Richards, and Alan Tomlinson. 2023. Rights and wellbeing in sport policy and provision: A New Zealand case-study. *Annals of Leisure Research* 27: 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Leary, John Patrick. 2019. *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism*. Chicago: Left Book Club.
- Lululemon Global Wellbeing Report. 2023. Canada: Vancouver. Available online: <https://corporate.lululemon.com/~media/Files/L/Lululemon/investors/annual-reports/lululemon-2023-global-wellbeing-report.pdf> (accessed on 15 November 2023).
- McClure, Tess. 2021. New Zealand's 'Wellbeing Budget' Made Headlines, But What Really changed? *The Guardian*, April 10. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/10/new-zealands-wellbeing-budget-made-headlines-but-what-really-changed> (accessed on 31 October 2022).
- McGregor, J. Allister. 2018. Reconciling universal frameworks and local realities in understanding and measuring wellbeing. In *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice*. Edited by Ian Bache and Karen Scott. London: Palgrave, pp. 197–224.
- Miller, Toby. 2017. *Greenwashing Sport*. London: Routledge.
- Murphy, Brendon. 2021. Against wellbeing: The problem of resources, metrics and care of the self. *Alternative Law Journal* 46: 108–14. [CrossRef]
- Nessel, Karolina, and Szczepan Kościółek. 2022. The total sporting arms race: Benchmarking the efficiency of public expenditure on sports in EU countries. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 22: 833–55. [CrossRef]
- Ngamaba, Kayonda Hubert, Maria Panagioti, and Christopher J. Armitage. 2017. How strongly related are health status and subjective well-being? Systematic review and meta-analysis. *European Journal of Public Health* 27: 879–85. [CrossRef]
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2024. Measuring Well-Being and Progress. Available online: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/measuring-well-being-and-progress.html> (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- Parkhurst, Justin. 2017. *The Politics of Evidence*. London: Routledge.
- Parliamentary Council Office, Public Service Act. 2020. Available online: <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0040/latest/LMS106159.html> (accessed on 20 January 2021).
- Pearse, Adam. 2019. Review Obsession by Sporting Bodies Shows Endemic Issue in NZ Sport. *New Zealand Herald*, February 16. Available online: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/review-obsession-by-sporting-bodies-shows-endemic-issue-in-nz-sport/A636ZTOY65NZLXNBM4HQV4XXAM> (accessed on 20 May 2023).
- Pollard, Elizabeth L., and Patrice D. Lee. 2003. Child well-being: A systematic review of the literature. *Social Indicators Research* 61: 9–78. [CrossRef]
- Rapplee, Jeremy, Hikaru Komatsu, Yukiko Uchida, Kuba Krysz, and Hazel Markus. 2020. 'Better policies for better lives?': Constructive critique of the OECD's (mis)measure of student well-being. *Journal of Education Policy* 35: 258–82. [CrossRef]
- Rittel, Horst W. J., and Melvin M. Webber. 1973. Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences* 4: 155–69. [CrossRef]
- Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sam, Michael. 2012. Targeted investments in elite sport funding: Wiser, more innovative and strategic? *Managing Leisure* 17: 207–20. [CrossRef]
- Sam, Michael P. 2009. The public management of sport—Wicked problems, challenges and dilemmas. *Public Management Review* 11: 499–514. [CrossRef]
- Seligman, Martin E. P. 2012. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. North Sydney: Random House Australia Pty Ltd.
- Skey, Michael. 2023. Sportswashing: Media headline or analytic concept? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 58: 749–64. [CrossRef]
- Smith, Thomas S. J., and Louise Reid. 2017. Which 'being' in wellbeing? Ontology, wellness and the geographies of happiness. *Progress in Human Geography* 42: 807–29. [CrossRef]
- Sointu, E. 2005. The rise of an ideal: Tracing changing discourses of wellbeing. *The Sociological Review* 53: 255–74. [CrossRef]

- Sport New Zealand. 2019. *Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa. Active NZ and Active NZ Young People Technical Report for Data Collected in 2018*. New York: The Nielsen Company. Available online: <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1468/active-nz-technical-report-2018.pdf> (accessed on 8 May 2023).
- Sport New Zealand. 2020. *Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa. Active NZ and Active NZ Young People Technical Report for Data Collected in 2019*. New York: The Nielsen Company. Available online: <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/3587/201027-year-3-2019-technical-report.pdf> (accessed on 5 December 2022).
- Sport New Zealand. 2023. *Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa: Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand Technical Report*. New York: The Nielsen Company. Available online: [https://sportnz.org.nz/media/u1dhxmds/sport-nz-sroi-technical-report\\_final\\_february-2023.pdf](https://sportnz.org.nz/media/u1dhxmds/sport-nz-sroi-technical-report_final_february-2023.pdf) (accessed on 5 January 2024).
- Springer, Simon, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy, eds. 2016. *The Routledge Handbook of Neoliberalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Steptoe, A. S., and Neville Butler. 1996. Sports participation and emotional wellbeing in adolescents. *The Lancet* 347: 1789–92. [CrossRef]
- Stiglitz, Joseph E., Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi. 2009. Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf> (accessed on 15 March 2022).
- Strassheim, Holger, and Pekka Kettunen. 2014. When does evidence-based policy turn into policy-based evidence? Configurations, contexts and mechanisms. *Evidence and Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice* 10: 259–77. [CrossRef]
- Testoni, Stefano, Louise Mansfield, and Paul Dolan. 2018. Defining and measuring subjective well-being for sport policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 10: 815–27. [CrossRef]
- Thomas, Jennifer. 2009. *Working Paper: Current Measures and the Challenges of Measuring Children’s Wellbeing*. Newport: Office for National Statistics.
- Tiberius, Valerie. 2004. Cultural Differences and Philosophical Accounts of Well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 5: 293–314. [CrossRef]
- Timimi, Sami. 2020. *Insane Medicine: How the Mental Health Industry Creates Damaging Treatment Traps and How You Can Escape Them*. Seattle: Kindle Direct Publishing.
- Topp, Christian Winther, Søren Dinesen Østergaard, Susan Søndergaard, and Per Bech. 2015. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 84: 167–76. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Tov, William, and Ed Diener. 2009. Culture and subjective well-being. In *Culture and Well-Being: The Collected Works of Ed Diener*. Edited by E. Diener. Cambridge: The MIT Press, pp. 185–218.
- Treasury, New Zealand. 2018. *Our People, Our Country, Our Future. The Living Standards Framework*. Wellington: NZ Treasury.
- United Nations. 2023. The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Available online: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health> (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- Western, Mark, and Wojtek Tomaszewski. 2016. Subjective Wellbeing, Objective Wellbeing and Inequality in Australia. *PLoS ONE* 11: e0163345. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Whitaker, R. 2010. *Anatomy of an Epidemic*. New York: Crown.
- White, Sarah, and Chloe Blackmore. 2015. *Cultures of Wellbeing: Method, Place, Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Williams, Joe. 2024. Greenwashing: Appearance, illusion and the future of ‘green’ capitalism. *Geography Compass* 18: e12736. [CrossRef]
- Wilson, Oliver W. A., Chris Whatman, Simon Walters, Sierra Keung, Dion Enari, Alex Chiet, Sarah-Kate Millar, Lesley Ferkins, Erica Hinckson, Jeremy Hapeta, and et al. 2022a. “Balance Is Better”: The Wellbeing Benefits of Participating in a Breadth of Sports across a Variety of Settings during Adolescence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19: 8597. [CrossRef]
- Wilson, Oliver W. A., Chris Whatman, Simon Walters, Sierra Keung, Dion Enari, Andy Rogers, Sarah-Kate Millar, Lesley Ferkins, Erica Hinckson, Jeremy Hapeta, and et al. 2022b. The Value of Sport: Wellbeing Benefits of Sport Participation during Adolescence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19: 8579. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- World Health Organization. 1998. *Wellbeing Measures in Primary Health Care/The Depcare Project*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, World Health Organisation. Available online: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) (accessed on 12 November 2023).
- World Health Organization. 2024. Achieving Well-Being: A Global Framework for Integrating Well-Being into Public Health Utilizing a Health Promotion Approach. Available online: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240084858> (accessed on 4 July 2024).
- Zhang, Zhanjia, and Weiyun Chen. 2019. A systematic review of measures for psychological well-being in physical activity studies and identification of critical issues. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 256: 473–85. [CrossRef]

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.