# Creating Human Capacity

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What are the core capacities that make for a flourishing life? It is an incredibly difficult question to answer. The reason why we have taken this question on as an Institute is that universities always talk of the importance of capacity building. Our own research office treats *capacities* as one of its key three themes, along with *futures* and *impact*. In this essay, we broaden out the question of capacities to ask what capacities do we need to produce a good life, what capacities are needed for positive human development. By beginning with this broad question it allows us to then return to the narrower concept of *capacity building* as part of our engaged research agenda.

Occasionally the terms of what makes for a good life are developed explicitly, but mostly the grounding of such claims is either left implicit or undeveloped, as if we all agree and spelling out the terms of a good life is unnecessary. In the Global North the most common appeals assume some variation on the capacities for freedom, connectivity, democracy, and inclusion, with the ideology of freedom usually prevailing. The initiating questions differ. What makes a life worth living? What capacities does a person need to lead a good life? Or what digital capacities should a person ideally have? These questions orient toward the personal and tend to stay focussed upon the individual. They are very different from more socially expansive questions. What makes a city liveable? What capacities make for conditions of human flourishing? The first set of questions emphasises individual capacities as the basis of the enquiry; the second set begins with the social as their basis, includes individual capacities but extends those to the form of social habitation or the conditions of human flourishing as they are lived both variably and relationally.

Our approach begins with the last question: What capacities make for conditions of human flourishing? It suggests that if we can give a working answer to that question, then we have the foundation for answering all those other more narrowly framed or precisely oriented questions. Put the other way around, if we want to know the answers to practical and policy issues such as what makes for a liveable city, what constitutes good digital engagement, what makes for good *engaged research*, or what capacities we need to learn in order to live a good life, we need to go back to the basics concerning human flourishing in general. This move will not give us one–to–one or complete answers concerning what should be done — which in any case would partly depend upon differences in time and across place. But at least it will slow down the current tendency towards falsely connected fashion-statements about what constitutes good ways of doing things: 'a good life is mindful', 'mindfulness is smart', 'smart cities are better cities', 'better cities require fast connectivity', 'connectivity brings growth', and 'economic growth is the only way to increase the quality of life'. This is the task of the present essay.

In short, we begin with social capacities. Other possible names were considered for headlining the approach. 'Life–skills' sounded too instrumental. 'Life–capabilities' sounded too much as if it came out of a self–help book, and 'life–ways' sounded too folkloric. We also wanted to distinguish our framework from the primary writings in this field that congregate around the concept of 'capabilities' — namely, the Capabilities approach or liberal Human Development approach.[2] The concept of 'capacity' is used here in the sense of its early progenitors — the early fifteenth–century term *capacité* or 'ability to hold' (not necessarily to control), and the Latin term *capacitas*, 'to have breadth', and *capere*, 'to take'. This seemed most usefully able to engage with contemporary debates and to distinguish the approach from the Capabilities approach.

The Capabilities approach list is arguably critically flawed because of its profound liberal bias. *The* fatal problem comes from Martha Nussbaum's insistence that the *Capabilities* approach is founded upon freedom: 'It is *focussed on choice or freedom* [her emphasis], holding that the crucial good [that] societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms.'[3] There are many negotiated pathways to human development, not just the removal of constraints to freedom. In the era of the Anthropocene, the fetish for freedom is beginning to look more than a little problematic. Moreover, the emphasis on freedom betrays a profoundly modern orientation. The compounding problem is that freedom in Nussbaum's hands is both given *the* primary intrinsic value (a reductive claim), and, at the same time, the list is treated as a contingent negotiated relation in tension with other virtues such as justice, equality and rights. Both propositions cannot hold.

This leads to questions regarding the constitutive grounding of the Capabilities approach. By comparison, our starting point, and therefore our entire approach, is organised in social or inter–relational terms. It includes the personal embodied capabilities that Sen and Nussbaum's approach emphasises, but it treats them socially, and as only one layer of the full expression of capacities relevant to persons in social life. It is our argument that human flourishing does not reside predominantly in the *personally* embodied and rational qualities (practical reason) of the individual, but rather depends upon socially framed capacities held by persons and other agents in social engagement: families, communities, institutions, organisations, corporations, states, and so on. That is, persons can have capacities, communities can have capacities, and institutions or organisations can have capacities, but in each case the grounding of those capacities is social rather than just individual. In other words, rather a methodological individualism or even institutional individualism that focuses on individual persons as the carriers of

1 The context for this chapter is a project with Google Australia to develop a Digital Capacities Index for measuring the capacities different people have for engaging in a positive digital life. The team compromises Delphine Bellerose, Philippa Collin, Louise Crabtree, Justine Humphry, Emma Kearney, Liam Magee, Tanya Notley, Amanda Third and myself. This chapter could not have been written without this collaborative setting. Liam Magee and I worked on the terms of the social capacities framework, and I wrote it up. With thanks also to Stephanie Trigg and Paola Spinnozi.

2 Nussbaum, MC 2011, *Creating capabilities: the human development approach*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge; Sen, A 1999, *Development as freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

3 Nussbaum, *Creating capabilities,* p. 18.

capacities,[4] the present approach takes persons–in–interrelation as its starting point. All capacities are always–already social.

Examination of Martha Nussbaum's list of fundamental capabilities leads us to further considerations for choosing the core capacities. She chooses ten crucial capabilities:

1. Life
2. Bodily health
3. Bodily integrity
4. Senses, imagination and thought
5. Emotions
6. Practical Reason
7. Affiliation
   a. Being able to live with and toward others
   b. Having the social bases of self–respect and non-humiliation
8. Other species
9. Play
10. Control over one's environment
    a. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices
    b. Material. Being able to hold property[5]

Are ten capacities the right number? Should more capacities be added? Could the schema be organised differently? What are the most important social capacities of the innumerable possibilities? What constitutes a workable list? How are they to be chosen? There is no right number, no essential list, and no perfect balance or structure to such a taxonomy. Creating taxonomies is itself a cross–cultural social activity.[6] The author who developed the Capabilities approach did so by adding and subtracting capability–domains until the list seemed 'right' and 'balanced'. Some capabilities have sub–domains; some do not. Our approach also depends upon an author in intense dialogue with others, but, to counter the problem of there being no right number, we begin the other way round by positing the constraining numbered structure before we start. That is, we begin with an empty template of four (unnamed) primary domains of capacities, each with seven (unnamed) subdomains. Starting with four domains, we argue, gives a number that allows sufficient range and complexity without the list of capacities becoming too long and unwieldy at the top level. Dividing each of those four domains into seven subdomains then gives added complexity while keeping the structure simple enough to operationalise.

By choosing such a contingent restraint as a numbered set, it accentuates the contingency of the chosen number in the first place. This means that there is nothing wrong with a smaller set of primary domains. The Human Development Index, currently the pre–eminent index for measuring human capacities has for example three primary indicator sets. Problems arise here not because of the number three, but because there is no systematic relation between this set of three indices and the ten capabilities posited by the supposedly connected Capabilities approach. Why were these three domains chosen and how do they relate to the longer list of ten capabilities? This question can only really be answered by talking of the messiness of the political process. It introduces a further consideration that needs to be added to our list of considerations for choosing capacities: namely, the capacities need to be chosen *and* ordered to allow the structure of the framework and the structure of its operationalisation to consistently be mapped onto each other. If it is necessary for operational viability that the primary set is small then the primary set needs be coherent, with each of its elements both necessary to the primary set and representative of a larger secondary set.

The United Nations suggests that the three domains of human development are having a 'long and healthy life', 'being knowledgeable' and having a 'decent standard of living'.[7] In fact the indices that are chosen for each of the domains suggest something much narrower. In the case of the Human Development Index, the indices actually only measure life–expectancy at birth, years of formal schooling, and gross national income per capita. Certainly, these could be argued to be proxies for a more complex set of capabilities. But just as the mismatch accentuates the problem of unstructured mapping, it also opens up the issue of arbitrary or reductive assessment and operationalisation. This suggests another consideration. Ideally, the chosen first–order capacities — *taken together* as a full list and standing in for the longer list of second–order capacities — need to provide a minimal basis for human flourishing. The three chosen domains of the Human Development Index arguably do not. Years and years of formal education, for example, does not necessarily give one a good capacity for being knowledgeable, let alone for experiencing wellbeing.

Going into the detail of Martha Nussbaum's set, the first six elements in the Capabilities approach emphasise body and mind, focussing on the individual. The sixth domain of practical reason takes only one of the many formations of knowledge and gives it priority over others. And then with the seventh element, 'Affiliation', the social is added on. Finally, the approach moves out to its broadest category, '[individual] control over one's environment'. There are many issues here of which we only have the space to discuss a couple.[8] One issue is that the list does not include basic capabilities such as being able to communicate, or build a shelter, or grow food. A core list of capabilities would not necessarily list such particularities, their importance notwithstanding, but it should take very seriously the technical and technological capacities necessary for producing basic existence. This is then another consideration. Technical capacities are only one dimension of the many intersecting capacities that underpin human flourishing that are left out of Nussbaum's list. A *social* capacities framework should provide guiding principles to projects that involve what has been called 'capacity–building'. It should do so in a way that includes but goes beyond the usual emphasis on technique or training, but it cannot leave them out.

4 Hodgson, GM 2007, 'Meanings of methodological individualism', *Journal of Economic Methodology*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 2011–26.

5 Nussbaum, *Creating capabilities,* p. 18.

6 Bowker, GC & Star, SL 2000, *Sorting things out: classification and its consequences*, MIT Press, Cambridge.

7 hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi last accessed 23 January 2016.

8 For gentle critiques see also Watene, K 2014, 'Beyond Nussbaum's capability approach: future generations and the need for ways forward', in T Brooks (ed.), *New waves in global justice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke; Robeyns, I 2005, 'The capability approach: a theoretical survey', *Journal of Human Development*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 93–114.

Still on the content of the Capabilities list, the emphasis in Nussbaum's list on *control over* one's environment suggests a particular kind of instrumentalism in the Age of the Anthropocene that is neither necessarily positive or normatively defensible — remember the earlier definitional point that *capacité* is the 'ability to hold', not necessarily to control. By comparison, the Circles approach describes capacities in ways that puts a dual emphasis on the sociality of the processes and the making possible of good ecologically embedded life without presuming that there is a politically right way. This becomes a further consideration. The capacities need to be chosen *in a way* that allows for the possibility of arguing about and planning possible alternative ways of living (and at the same time, because it is a lived list, the list of chosen capacities needs to include the capacity to develop such a framework including through negotiating and reconciling social contention). It is here in the content of the list that the modern liberal bias of the Capabilities approach becomes quite stark, including putting what seem to be modern property rights and choice–based participation at the centre of its claim to basic human development.

Collating all the problems and issues, we can now enumerate seven key considerations that we need to take into account in structuring and choosing the capacities:

1. The first-order categories chosen as the most critical ways of describing the complex range of capacities, need to operate at the same level of generality as each other, as do the second-order categories;
2. The normative grounding of all the chosen capacities needs to avoid a reductive emphasis on a singular normative value such as freedom;
3. The constitutive grounding of capacities needs to be understood as always–already social rather than intrinsic to individuals;
4. The domain structure and the assessment structure need to be consistent, allowing the named core capacities to be mapped consistently onto a non-reductive and non-distorting set of indicators of positive human development;
5. The chosen first-order capacities, *taken together*, need to provide a minimal basis for human flourishing;
6. The chosen capacities need to encompass the full range of human capacities from creative play and imagination to those technical and technological capacities needed to reproduce the basic conditions of existence;
7. The chosen capacities need to be able to be mapped onto positive outcomes or conditions without presuming a single blueprint for living or a set politics.

Based on these considerations, our process of choosing the basic domains and their subdomains was long and tortuous. The chosen list presented below remains contingent and open to negotiation. On the basis of this method, the first area that we suggest is basic to a flourishing human condition is the capacity for *vitality*. This names the various aspects of the social that Sen and Nussbaum emphasise — embodied, emotional, and mindful wellbeing. The second is *relationality*, the constellation of capacities for relating to other and to nature, from the capacity to communicate to the capacity to reconcile difference and negotiate hospitality to friends and strangers. The third is *productivity*, the set of capacities that allow us to produce the conditions of existence. And the fourth is *sustainability*, capacities for reproducing those conditions in an enduring way that project into the future. Without all of these capacities, at least available in some variable measure, individually/socially, our lives would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.[9] The remainder of the essay elaborates on these four inter-related constellations.

## VITALITY AS A BASIC CONSTELLATION OF CAPACITIES FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

The first constellation names those capacities necessary for enjoying a flourishing embodied, emotional, human life. Here the concept of 'enjoy' does not depend on the contemporary thin concept of 'happiness'. Happiness is an important emotion, but only one of the many emotions necessary to a full life. It is also primarily a feeling, understood colloquially as a state of mind. By comparison, the domain of vitality sets out a threshold set of mental *and* embodied capabilities that are basic to human flourishing. Within this domain we have identified seven key subdomains.

1.1. The first critical subdomain is *health and wellbeing*. Without at least basic embodied health and a basic sense of wellbeing maintaining relations with others and developing a flourishing life–world is put under considerable strain. This is not to suggest that a person with ill–health cannot positively experience other elements of the good life — adversity negotiated well is an important and productive part of the human condition — but chronic and consequential ill–health certainly qualifies that potential in a significant way.

1.2. Adding the capacities for *strength and vigour* underlines the way that *vitality*, as one of the first-order capacities necessary to a flourishing world, requires more than minimal capacities for bodily health and mental wellbeing. It requires the vigour to engage physically in relating to others, producing the means of existence and sustaining social and environmental life. This is not in any way to imply that a person who has disabilities in specific areas of embodied strength has a lesser life. In many cases, an incapacity in one area leads to focussing on alternative ways of being in the world. However, neither is it to ignore embodied or mental incapacities. As disabilities and incapacities compound it becomes imperative that other socially supported capacities are enhanced to counter limits of strength and vigour.

1.3. The cluster of capacities for *emotion and feeling* is fundamental to being human and is one of the capacities on which to relating to others (*relationality*) is most intimately connected. The capacity to have and express emotions, including the so–called negative emotions such as anger and sadness, is one of the bases for responding in complex ways to others, events, things and processes.

1.4. *Dignity and recognition* is a set of capacities that is relevant to all social situations. In her debate with Axel Honneth,

9 Hobbes, T 1973, *Leviathan*, Dent, London (1651), p. 65

Nancy Fraser,[10] emphasises the political dimension of recognition, but the cluster of capacities associated with *dignity and recognition* also has economic, cultural and ecological dimensions. On the other hand, to recognise the multiple dimensions of recognition is not to agree with Honneth that it therefore is a singular overarching category that can encompass all others.

1.5. The capacities to maintain bodily *integrity and consonance* name a further critical dimension of *vitality*. Rather than referring to ethical integrity or consistency or ethics (which is covered in our framework under the heading '*Relationality: Justice and Truth*'), *integrity* here refers to embodied and mental integrity. For example, it presumes the capacity — individual and collective — to impose clear limitations on interference, penetration or violation by others. This inclusion parallels Nussbaum's emphasis on 'bodily integrity'. The concept of *consonance*, that is, consonance of identity, adds to this the capacity to act as if one's identity is relatively continuous in relation to self and others. This is an anti–*Anti–Oedipus* argument.[11] Despite postmodern romanticism, schizophrenia or being a stranger to oneself is not a positive way of living.

1.6. *Security and safety* as a cluster of capacities that cannot be left out of the primary list. As with all our clusters it can be taken either as an individually held set of capacities (albeit, always understood as always–already social) or as a socially extended set of capacities dependent upon the practices of communities, polities and institutions. This is another of the many capabilities that Martha Nussbaum leaves out.

1.7. Capacities for *sensuality and sexuality* are included as a basic set of capacities under the heading of *vitality* because without them humanity would cease to be viable. Like all the other capacities in this list, they are relational before they are personal, and they are both individual and collective. Without a social capacity for sexuality, for example, there would be no viable reproduction of the species (see also *productivity* below), and without sensuality and the capacity to enjoy sensory experience, including in relation to sexuality, reproduction of social life or reproduction of the species would be reduced to a technical or empty post–human activity.

## RELATIONALITY AS A BASIC CONSTELLATION OF CAPACITIES FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

The second constellation of capacities concerns *relationality* — relations to others and to nature. This domain of capacities is so rich and complex that is profoundly difficult to decide on the seven primary subdomains. For relationality to be meaningful it requires that we have the capacity to establish regimes of mutual care, affinity, reciprocity and so on. At the same time it is important to recognise the complexities of social difference. Therefore positive relationality also requires capacities for reconciliation and negotiation across the boundaries of that difference. It also requires capacities for basic communication, a capability not included in Nussbaum's list. Proceeding on this basis, the following seven sets of capacities are taken to be fundamental:

2.1. *Communication and dialogue* are fundamental to all questions of relationality. Such capacities include the capacity on the one hand to share ideas with others in a way that is understandable and expressive, and, on the other hand, to listen, take in the ideas of others, and respond. While there are some writers who make communications *the* basis of social life,[12] here, while it is treated as basic, it is not a master category.

2.2. A second basic set of capacities for relating is *affinity and reciprocity*. There is a vast literature on this area, with *affinity* naming the capacity to develop ongoing affiliations as families, friends, groups and communities. The capacity for affinity, also extending to objects and the natural world, makes it possible for us to feel close to things, animals and places. Practices of embodied reciprocity are associated with the dominant form of exchange in customary communities, but also in the more abstract form of generalised co-operation they are also necessary to well–functioning modern social systems.[13]

2.3. The cluster of capacities for *care and trust* in and for others involves a stronger claim about a social inter–relation than the acceptance of others or tolerance of difference. This cluster brings in Carol Gilligan's embodied notion of an 'ethics of care' developed by others including Joan Tronto,[14] but it also includes (with critically qualification) more abstract notions of trust in co-operative activities from communal relations to market exchange processes.[15]

2.4. Capacities for *justice and truth* also need to be included as a set of capacities that are basic to good relationality. It is interesting that Martha Nussbaum's list of fundamental capabilities does not include this cluster directly even though the Capabilities approach is directed towards developing a theory of justice.[16]

2.5. The capacity to reconcile potentially destructive or negative differences across social and natural boundaries of continuing and flourishing positive differences, including through positive friction, is named under the subdomain of *reconciliation and negotiation*. The possibility of embodied encounter and social friction is important here.[17] A flourishing

10 Fraser, N & Honnett, A 2003, *Redistribution or recognition? a political philosophical exchange*, Verso, London.

11 Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 1977, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, Viking Press, New York.

12 This is therefore to go against Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, which treats communications, however contingent, as the autopoetic basis of society (1995, Social Systems, Stanford University Press, Stanford).

13 Sennett, R 2010, *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

14 Gilligan, C 1993, *Psychological theory and women's development*, 2nd edn, Harvard University Press, Cambridge; Tronto, JC 1993, *Moral boundaries: a political argument for an ethic of care*, Routledge, New York.

15 Misztal, BA 1996, *Trust in modern societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge; Fukuyama, F 1995, *Trust: the social virtues and the creation of prosperity*, Hamish Hamilton, London.

16 Nussbaum, MC 2006, *Frontiers of justice: disability, nationality, species membership*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

17 See Sorkin, M 1999, 'Traffic in democracy', in J Copjec & M Sorkin (eds), *Giving ground: the politics of propinquity*, Verso, London.

world is not one in which all differences have dissolved into empty harmony or slide past each other because lines of 'neutral' infrastructure facilitate easy flows.

2.6. The cluster of capacities concerning *faith and love* includes the capacity to have faith in others, to love them, but it also opens the way to including the capacity for faith in forces and beings beyond other humans or human–created things and processes. This suggests a capacity either for some kind of spirituality or at least for an understanding of the limits of human rationality.

2.7. Practices of *conviviality and hospitality* express another important set of capacities for relating to others. The concept of *conviviality* from the Latin *con* and *vivium*, meaning to come together in life–affirming ways: to eat, to celebrate, or to enjoy social engagement. *Hospitality* in relation to others can include both hospitality to intimate others and to strangers.[18]

## PRODUCTIVITY AS A BASIC CONSTELLATION OF CAPACITIES FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

The third constellation of capacities is the most difficult of all to name. Here various terms were considered as possible way of naming the general capacity to reproduce the conditions of existence. For a time we settled on using an older Greek term, *poesis*, meaning *to make*. However, the problem with the term *poesis* was its archaic heaviness and the contemporary tendency to emphasise its poetic dimension. We then moved back and forth between the concepts of *making, creativity*, and *productivity*. However, the constellation of capacities that we are trying to get at is broader than either physical production or *making*. As Henri Lefebvre writes: 'Making reduces social practice to individual operations of the artisan kind on a given material which is relatively pliant or resistant'.[19] The constellation is also broader than what can be contained by the concept *creativity*. It also includes the capacity for basic practical technique.

We finally settled on the last of those broad concepts: *productivity*. This is still a dangerous choice of terms. The concept of *productivity* can be easily misunderstood, particularly given the contemporary narrowing of its meaning by productivity commissions and the like as they measure efficiency and output. *Productivity* is used here with all the nuanced complexity entailed in describing the creative process of reproducing the conditions of existence. The theme of productivity brings in Adam Smith's work on the division of labour, and the even richer work of Karl Marx on production of the means of existence. However, it significantly widens the meaning of theoretical discussions of 'the means of production'. Creative play can be as productive of social life as can structural engineering.

3.1. Capacities for *learning and teaching* are fundamental for achieving positive *productivity*. They require receptivity to events, processes, and meaning across time as well as capacities for *communication and dialogue* (Capacities 2.1 above). Unlike the emphasis of the UN Sustainable Development Goals on formal and institutionalised practices of reading and writing, this cluster of capacities has an equal emphasis on informal processes. A child obviously learns but can also teach, and not just by inference where an adult learns from the unintended consequences of a child's actions. Under conditions of flourishing productivity a child learns positively to teach quite early in life, even if this begins as imitation.

3.2. *Learning and teaching* in turn have an object — knowledge — that requires certain capacities for acquisition and elaboration. This brings us to the second subdomain of *productivity*: *knowing and comprehending*. It is worth elaborating here because Martha Nussbaum's list emphasises a single form of knowing: practical reason. There are however many different forms of knowledge. Where, for example, in Nussbaum's list of capabilities is reflexive knowledge: the form of knowing that gives one the capacity to write, criticise or actively respond to a capacities framework in the first place? Where is the capacity to learn?

3.3. The other side of *knowing and comprehending* (Capabilities 3.2) is the capacity to act upon that knowing: that is, capacities for *practicality and technique* — for means and ways. *Practicality* is the capacity to adopt different means to an end, from *praktos,* to be done. The associated concept of *technique* or *techne* refers to the capacity to use craft–knowledge, technical proficiency, and so on, in adopting practical ways to chosen ends.

3.4. Without capacities for *vocation and labour* all the practicality in the world amounts to little. This cluster of capacities is almost self–evident in naming the capacities for work and developing a bounded, committed and renewing set of productive technical skills — a vocation.

3.5. *Imagination and creativity* is also critical to flourishing social life. This cluster brings together a whole range of capacities and allows us to express in perhaps a more abstract way the capacity to play, one of the ten important capabilities in Martha Nussbaum's list. However, imagination and creativity is, of course, much broader than play and enters into every aspect of vital, relational, productive and sustainable life. Without imagination and creativity, life would be instrumental, brutish and curt.

3.6. Capacities for *enquiry and vision* take imagination (Capacities 3.5) in an interrogative direction that seeks to project social possibilities into the future. They build upon the capacities for *knowing and comprehending* (Capacities 3.2) and give knowing a self–active dimension, addressing the world.

3.7. Finally in this constellation of capacities for productivity, we need to recognise the importance of capacities for *innovation and change*. This set of capacities is included as basic not because it is fashionable, but because it is one side of the innovation–conservation dialectic and both sides need be included (see Capacities 4. *Sustainability* below for the other side of this dialectic).

18 Derrida, J 2000, *Of hospitality*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

19 Lefebvre, H 2014, *Critique of everyday life, vol. 1–3*, Verso, London, p. 528.

## SUSTAINABILITY AS A BASIC CONSTELLATION OF CAPACITIES FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

Finally, there is an important fourth constellation of capacities that enable us to sustain the conditions of social and natural flourishing. For all of the capacities for bringing about change (Capacities 3.7) we also need capacities to respond to change and to effect continuity and positive conservation. This entails having the capacity to adapt in relation to rapid external change, to recover from social forces that threaten basic conditions of social life, and to resolve to continue on in the face of adversity. This is the domain that we have called *sustainability*.

4.1. *Resilience and flexibility* are those important capacities that enable us to respond positively to changes brought about by external forces that threaten basic liveability. It includes the capacity to bounce back from adversity.

4.2. The capacities for *adaptation and limitation* have always been salient across human history, but in the Age of the Anthropocene, and with the intensifying structural pressures of climate change, these capacities have come to the fore and become central to the conditions of our survival.

4.3. *Receptiveness and responsiveness* are necessary for being resilient and adapting. Without receptiveness to the world around, to both social and natural relations, and to the patterns of pressures, changes, forces and critical issues, then adaption and resilience can become self–defeating and unthinking practices of mere survival.

4.4. Similarly, without the capacities for *endurance and patience*, the prior capacities for *receptiveness and responsiveness* do not have a temporal purchase. Both are social capacities with endurance being a characteristic that is enhanced by institutional or community embeddedness, while patience tends to be a characteristic of persons.

4.5. The capacities for *commitment and purpose* name the possibilities of directing the various capacities that enhance the long–run sustainability of the human condition towards chosen ends. Such capacities are complementary to and potentially enhancing of the productive capacities for *enquiry and vision* discussed earlier (Productivity 3.6). They give social practice the possibility for purposive orientation, often enhanced by good leadership.

4.6. Capacities for *stewardship and custodianship* are two sides of the same coin, at least in the way that we use them here. They build upon the capacities for *commitment and purpose* (Capacities 4.5 above), directing that commitment to an object. The capacity for *stewardship* is to commit oneself or one's community to care for an entrusted object (linked to Capacities 2.3 above).[20] It is a commitment from above. It is bestowed and bestowing. By comparison, the capacity for *custodianship*, using this concept less in the conventional modern sense of the word and more as the indigenous literature uses it, is commitment from within or from below.

4.7. In the contemporary world of constant flux — and dominant arguments that constant flux is a good and necessary thing — we conclude our list of capacities with the opposite: capacities for *stability and continuity.* Not all change is good. While under the heading of *innovation and change* we discussed the important capacity to bring about change, change becomes a problem when it is an ideologically charged injunction: thou must change or life will be stagnant, static and bad.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the central capacities for a flourishing social life range from *vitality*, the capacity to enjoy embodied life to the full; to *relationality*, the capacity to relate to others and to nature in a meaningful way; *productivity*, the capacity to reproduce the conditions of existence; and *sustainability*, the capacity to set up the conditions for enduring, and therefore good vitality, relationality and productivity that extends over time.

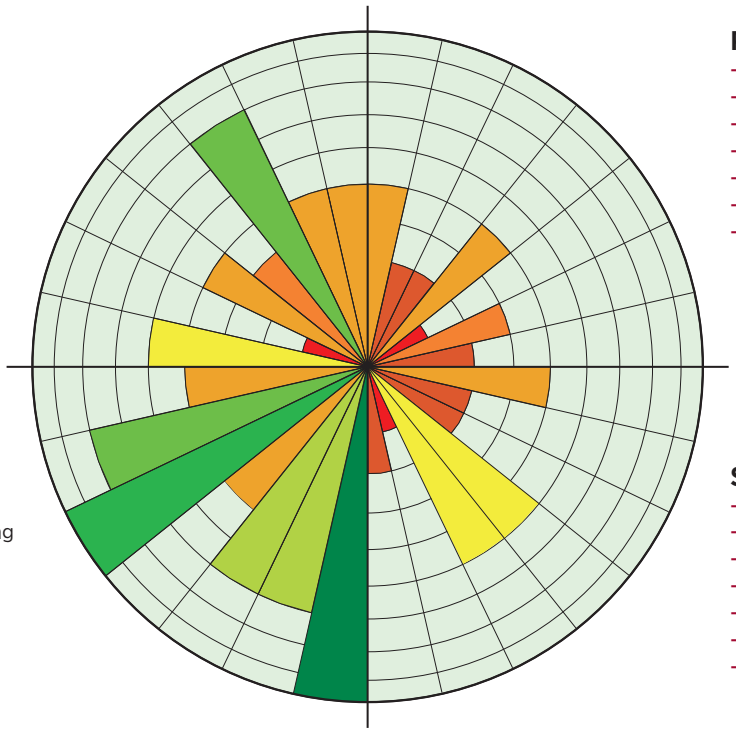
This approach, firstly, has consequences for how discussions of human flourishing are conducted. We would go halfway with David Rasmussen when he writes: 'Thus instead of trying to launder ethical reasoning through such devices as "veils of ignorance", "impartial ideal observers", or agent–neutral conceptions of practical reason, practical wisdom remains concerned with the temporal and the individual'.[21] Yes, veils of ignorance privilege abstract modernist considerations of the good. Yes, a broader conception of knowledge is needed that includes but goes beyond practical reason. Our difference from his conclusion, however, is that even practical wisdom is one capacity among many, and concerns about human flourishing need to be wider than the temporal and individual. Figure 1 summarises this discussion, while making some preliminary and untested judgements about the contemporary condition of capacities across the globe. What it depicts is significant bias towards capacities for productivity and crises in our capacities for relationality and sustainability.

20 Here 'object' is used in the broadest possible sense to include material objects, places, fields, disciplines, processes, communities, etc.

21 Rasmussen, DB 1999, 'Human flourishing and the appeal to human nature', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 19.

**VITALITY**
→ Health and Wellbeing
→ Strength and Vigour
→ Emotion and Feeling
→ Dignity and Recognition
→ Integrity and Consonance
→ Security and Safety
→ Sensuality and Sexuality

**RELATIONALITY**
→ Communication and Dialogue
→ Affinity and Reciprocity
→ Care and Trust
→ Justice and Truth
→ Reconciliation and Negotiation
→ Faith and Love
→ Conviviality and Hospitality



**PRODUCTIVITY**
→ Learning and Teaching
→ Knowing and Comprehending
→ Practicality and Technique
→ Vocation and Labour
→ Imagination and Creativity
→ Enquiry and Vision
→ Innovation and Change

**SUSTAINABILITY**
→ Resilience and Flexibility
→ Adaption and Limitation
→ Receptiveness and Responsiveness
→ Resolution and Endurance
→ Commitment and Purpose
→ Stewardship and Custodianship
→ Stability and Continuity

Vibrant | Good | Highly Satisfactory | Satisfactory | Basic | Unsatisfactory | Highly unsatisfactory | Bad | Critical

**Figure 1.**
Circles of Social Capacities: Conducted as an Assessment of the Contemporary Global Condition.

This framework, secondly, has consequences for the Human Development Index. Instead of a series of disconnected indicators that only have a marginal connection to the liberal Capabilities approach, proxy indices could developed at two levels: (1) a set of four aggregate proxy indictors for each of the four domains, vitality, relationality, productivity, and sustainability; and (2) a set of 28 more directed indicators for each of the subdomains. At the second level, operationalising the index could be variable across different states, regions and cities, depending upon available statistics and capacity to collect data.

Thirdly, the framework has implications for the classic definition of sustainable development. The now classic text *Our Common Future* (1997), more commonly known as the Brundtland Report, defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.[22] Post-September 2015, as the world's nation–states and international organisations now set out on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals 'to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all',[23] this definition continues to inform most thinking on the subject. The definition still works in superficial sense, however it has many problems. It was written before the entry of ecological considerations into the heart of development thinking. Its meaning turns on the undefined implications of the word 'needs', and it leaves unspecified the assumed importance of specifying economic–material needs as well as social and environment needs (the usual Triple Bottom Line grouping of categories). Moreover, and most remarkably the Brundtland and post-Brundtland definitions of sustainable development do not actually define development at all. They actually only define the *sustainable* part of *sustainable development*, and then only in a minimal sense. In terms of the Social Capacities framework, sustainable development would be redefined as a particular kind of social change — with all its intended or unintended outcomes — that brings about a significant and patterned shift in the technologies, techniques, infrastructure, and the associated life–forms of a place or people that enhances capacities for human flourishing.

Fourthly, this framework has consequences for the engaged research that we espouse in the Institute.

22 World Commission on Environment and Development 1997, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 8.

23 un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ last accessed 29 December 2015.

Image taken by ICS researcher Paul James of a Muslim tailor in a predominantly Buddhist city in Colombo, Sri Lanka.