Autonomy and the good life.

Toward a better understanding of the inequality of perceived autonomy and its significance for individual life satisfaction.

Dissertation

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Abbreviations

BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
BPNS	Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction
CA	Capability Approach
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CY	Cyprus
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EQLS	European Quality of Life Survey
ES	Spain
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
Eurofound	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Eurostat	European Statistical Office
EVI	Emancipative Values Index
EVS	European Values Study
EWB	Eudaimonic Well-being
FI	Finland
FR	France
FYR	Former Yugoslav Republic
GDP/GDP pc PPP	Gross Domestic Product per capita in Purchasing Power Parity
GHDx	Global Health Data Exchange
HH	Household
HU	Hungary
ICC	Intra-Class-Correlation Coefficient
IE	Ireland
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCWeB	International Survey of Children's Well-being
ISSP	International Social Survey Programme
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LO	Life Optimism
MI	Multiple Imputation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NL	The Netherlands

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLS	Ordinary Least Square In Chapter 7: Overall Life Satisfaction
PF	Psychological Functioning
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
PWB	Psychological Well-being
SD	Standard Deviation
SDV	Self-Development
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SWB	Subjective Well-Being
UK	United Kingdom
US/USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization
WVS	World Values Survey

1 Introduction

Compared to large parts of the world, Europeans—especially in the West and in the EU—enjoy expansive freedoms. With democracy on decline all around the globe, Europe is still the world region[1] with the most countries rated as free in the freedom house democracy ranking (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021). Despite remaining differences between East and West, Europe overall performs well in terms of guaranteeing civil liberties and political rights (Freedom House, 2021c), as well as personal (Vásquez & McMahon, 2020), economic (Gwartney et al., 2021), internet (Shahbaz & Funk, 2021), and academic freedoms (Kinzelbach et al., 2021). Moreover, European countries generally provide excellent conditions for people to make use of their freedoms: The vast majority of European countries can be classified as high income countries (The World Bank, 2021) with low levels of corruption (Tranparency International, 2020). Few Europeans are (working) poor (Gammarano, 2019), and most are covered by at least one social protection benefit (ILO, 2021) as well as by some form of health insurance (Scheil-Adlung, 2014). Close on the heels of East Asia, Europe occupies a top position in terms of safety and security (Vásquez & McMahon, 2020), which is reflected, for instance, in the small number people killed by vaccine-preventable diseases (GHDx, 2021b), in road traffic (WHO, 2021), or by other people (GHDx, 2021a).

In recent years, Europeans have repeatedly been made aware that these freedoms are not sacrosanct. The reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area during the European migrant crisis in 2015 (Guild et al., 2015) and the travel restrictions imposed during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Carrera & Luk, 2020) have been a reminder to Europeans accustomed to full freedom of movement at least within the EU (EU, 2012) and to the ease of visa-free travel to almost all countries around the world (Henley & Partners, 2021) how quickly freedoms can be curtailed to protect public goods like safety and health. But it is not only increasingly frequent external crises that pose a threat to freedom. Populist movements and governments have also been working diligently to restrict liberties: Countries like Poland and Hungary, where anti-democratic developments were already underway before the pandemic, are deliberately weakening the rule of law and restricting the freedom of the media and of non-governmental institutions, thereby fueling corruption (Freedom House, 2021b; Transparency International, 2021). Restrictions on personal freedoms, particularly with regard to sexual orientation and self-determination, have experienced an upsurge in several countries, from "LGBT-free zones" in Poland, to the restriction of LGBT-related content in general in Lithuania, to further restrictions of rights and access to abortion in Poland and Slovakia (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2021; ILGA World, 2021). On top of this, crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated already existing socio-economic insecurities and inequalities with regards to income (Almeida et al., 2021),

1 The Freedom House reports cluster countries into six world regions: the Americas, Asia, Eurasia, Middle East & North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe.

health (Bambra & Lynch, 2021), and education (Blaskó et al., 2021) within and between European societies, thereby effectively limiting the opportunities and choices of certain strata within society. Compared to other crises, like the financial crisis in 2008, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has been distinctive in that—albeit to an unequal extent—*everybody* has experienced some restrictions on the freedom to shape their own lives. In the midst of travel restrictions, lockdowns, school and workplace closures, closures of playgrounds, restaurants, bars and clubs, shutdown of the cultural, sports and leisure sector, restriction of gatherings and contacts, social distancing, dusk-to-dawn curfew, stay-at-home requirements, restrictions on internal movements, quarantine and contact tracing, protective face covering requirements, and compulsory testing there should be virtually no one whose autonomy has not been curtailed by pandemic policies.

This externally imposed trade-off of freedom for health has direct and indirect negative consequences for people's well-being: First, people—especially in individualistic societies—put a high premium on their autonomy (Inglehart et al., 2008; Triandis, 1995, ch. 3). When individuals experience their autonomy to shape their own lives as being limited—and preliminary results indicate that people did indeed sense a decrease in their autonomy during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Cantarero et al., 2021; Schwinger et al., 2020)—their subjective well-being (e.g., Delhey, 2010; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010) suffers and so does their physical (e.g., Lun & Bond, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020) and mental health (e.g., Delbosc & Vella-Brodrick, 2015; Karim et al., 2015). Indirectly, the limitation of freedom can result in behavior that can potentially harm individuals themselves as well as others. There is already some evidence that imposing restrictions on individuals' autonomy can provoke resistance. For instance, Sprengholz et al. (2021) have shown for the vaccination intention against COVID-19 in Germany that reactance was triggered by a combination of low intention and mandatory vaccination. In the US, people who are generally more reactant against society or the state interfering with their freedom were found to adhere less to COVID-19 protection behaviors like washing one's hands regularly, knew less about COVID-19, and made more trips than others (Resnicow et al., 2021). A further study found more movement in religious areas in the USA, but only *after* shelter-in-place directives were imposed, indicating that where religious freedom was perceived to be under threat, people were more prone to act contrary to policies in place to protect their own health and that of their community (DeFranza et al., 2020).

These selected examples illustrate the importance that autonomy has for both the means and the goals of an individually good life. Individuals need to be regarded as active agents who shape their lives in accordance to their own ideas instead of passive recipients of developments—however well-intentioned—external to them (Sen, 2001, p. 53). The universal importance of individuals' opportunities and autonomy is of course not limited to times of crisis. On a smaller scale, people encounter restrictions to their freedoms on a daily basis—they are "forced" to wear a seat-belt, or "deprived of liberty" by their own children. Furthermore, people are regularly confronted with trade-off considerations between goals or goods they have reason to value: they trade in a night of healthy sleep for another glass of wine with good friends, skip a fun vacation for meeting

a career-building deadline, or exchange a secure job in industry for a temporary doctoral position. People do not work through a checklist of predefined elements of a good life but weigh and select according to their own preferences and goals. The potential gain or harm from achieving or not achieving any such goal or good can therefore only be assessed if the agent's individual autonomy is taken into account.

The first aim of this dissertation is therefore to shed light not only on the direct effect of individual autonomy on individuals' well-being but, more importantly, on the extent to which autonomy can explain how much well-being people derive from an achieved good or goal, or vice versa, how much harm results from an insufficiently or unachieved good or goal. Building on the capability approach, I argue that two people with the same achieved functionings—that is, with identical quality of life achievements such as good health, financially secure, and nice friends—can come to very different life evaluations (Nussbaum, 2001a, 2001b; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1985, 1993a, 2001). The differences in individuals' life satisfaction derived from identical functionings depend on the opportunities and autonomy that people have in shaping their lives: "choosing a life-style is not exactly the same as having that life-style no matter how chosen, and one's well-being does depend on how that life-style happened to emerge" (Sen, 1992, p. 52). When people experience a lack in a basic functioning, we thus need to consider whether they principally had the opportunity and autonomy to achieve that functioning or whether they actively chose not to do so. A voluntarily fasting person and a starving person might both experience an identical deficit in sufficient nutrition, but the life satisfaction of the latter should be impaired much more than that of the first. To date, there has been no systematic investigation of whether achieved (or unachieved) functions have different effects on peoples' life satisfaction depending on how much autonomy the individual has over his or her life. With the exception of financial security (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), the moderating effect of individual autonomy on the relationship between basic functionings and life satisfaction has not been examined at all. To fill this gap, I present for six different basic functionings—safety, leisure, friendship, financial security, health, and respect—whether and to what extent their influence on life satisfaction is modified by the opportunities and autonomy of the individual. Beyond that, I provide first insights into this interrelation for a societal group that is often excluded from "society" both by theory and empirical research, namely children. Using the example of safety—in school, at home, in the neighborhood—I test whether the relevance of a functioning for life satisfaction already varies for incomplete agents depending on whether they experience adequate autonomy over their lives.

Given the significance that opportunities and autonomy have for people's ability to live in a way that reflects their goals and values and thus for their resulting evaluation of their lives, the distribution of and access to opportunities and autonomy inevitably become an issue: Are people provided with the necessary opportunities to achieve a certain functioning? Can they decide freely about achieving or not achieving it? Which contextual and individual characteristics enable people to have autonomy over their lives, and which restrict them? The second aim of this dissertation is thus to investigate

the inequality in individual and contextual conditions that have the potential to increase or restrict individuals' autonomy.

The capability approach provides a fruitful framework for addressing this aim by considering the role societal and personal means and conversion factors play in the process of achieving functionings (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1992, 1999). Especially at the individual level, it calls attention to the human diversity resulting not only from control over resources, but also from the personal characteristics and needs of each individual: an able-bodied and a disabled person might differ in the resources necessary to achieve mobility, less educated people might require completely different information to achieve a healthy lifestyle, and enabling political participation of parents with young children might necessitate social support in the form of childcare. As autonomy itself can be conceptualized as a functioning necessary for the achievement of other functionings (Sen, 1988, 1992), it is subject to these same restrictions imposed by personal means and conversion factors, such as age, gender, economic resources, or social relations. Moreover, the achievement of functionings is shaped by contextual conditions in which individuals are embedded: the opportunities provided by states—like infrastructure, institutions, and welfare—but also social norms and values, and even environmental factors, such as climate or terrain, can influence the convenience or difficulty people encounter when pursuing the achievement of certain functionings (Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021). The significance of contextual conditions is highlighted even more prominently in the human empowerment theory—a "derivative" of the capability approach—which identifies the three interrelated elements of socio-economic developments, changing values, and institutional guarantees as the key movers of expanding individual autonomy (Welzel, 2013).

Despite the prominent position of autonomy in the capability approach and human empowerment theory—but also in other approaches such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012)—, individual autonomy often takes only a secondary role in empirical research. Systematic studies on the distribution of autonomy within and between societies are still rare and provide mixed results, especially with regards to individual conversion factors, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about possible inequalities in people's ability to shape their own lives. Further, as these analyses are often based on very heterogenous global samples, it remains largely unclear whether effects are being driven by certain country groups, like high- or low-income countries, or, for example, by cultural zones. It is therefore hard to determine at what stage of societal development which contextual and individual factors foster (or hinder) autonomy. To provide some clarity—at least for Europe—I examine a variety of potentially autonomy enhancing (or inhibiting) individual means and conversion factors, test their robustness over a period of ten years, and separate the country-specific effects from the European generalities. In addition, I test the relative influence of institutional, cultural, and socio-economic context effects on social levels of autonomy as well as their robustness over time.

In summary, this dissertation sheds light on what factors determine how much autonomy people have over their lives (paper 1); how opportunity and autonomy affect life satisfaction gains and losses that people experience by achieving (or not achieving) basic functionings (paper 2); and whether such trade-offs are already observable in incomplete agents, like young children (paper 3). Chapter two presents the theoretical framework of the dissertation, which mainly draws on the capability approach and human empowerment theory. First, I introduce the concept of autonomy in general and, from the perspective of the capability approach, describe how autonomy is influenced by institutional, cultural, and socio-economic conditions, and I identify relevant individual means and conversion factors. Subsequently, I outline how functioning, autonomy, and well-being are related and why the importance of any functioning for an individual's life satisfaction can only be assessed by taking the individual's autonomy into account. Concluding this chapter, I explain why children can only be viewed as incomplete agents and why it is nevertheless worthwhile to take their (limited) role as agents into account when assessing the significance of achieved functionings for their life satisfaction. Chapter three provides a comprehensive review of the empirical literature on the determinants and outcomes of autonomy, outlines the research desiderata identified in the review, and highlights the desiderata addressed in this dissertation. Chapter four lays out the research design, starting with a description of the data sources and the items used for operationalizing individual autonomy, followed by a paper-by-paper presentation of the analytic strategy, which is concluded by a summary table of the three papers presented in this dissertation. These three papers then each constitute a separate chapter (Chapters five–seven). Chapter eight summarizes the main findings, addresses limitations, and discusses implications for future research and public policy.

2 Conceptual framework

This chapter is concerned with the question of whether it makes a difference to *have* a lifestyle or to *have chosen* a lifestyle which immediately directs the focus to the autonomy that people have in their lives. In the following, I first describe the characteristics of the autonomous individual before discussing the contextual and individual conditions that enable or hinder autonomy and concluding by considering why the *process of choosing* a lifestyle has relevance not only to mature (adult) actors but also to younger children.

Autonomy

The idea of autonomy manifests itself in concepts and theories across disciplinary boundaries in various forms from autonomy freedom, agency, or locus of control to its absence in the form of powerlessness or fatalism, to name just a few (see Hitlin and Long (2009) and Kouba (2016) for an overview of different concepts). Despite their different perspectives, there are considerable overlaps that suggest a general consensus on some basic assumptions about autonomy: ideal-typically, autonomy resides in active agents (1) who are aware that they are the source of their action and have control over their choices, (2) who are aware of and able to reflect on their goals and values, (3) who are able to translate their values and goals into appropriate action, (4) who have opportunities to choose from and the capacity to choose, and (5) who take responsibility for their actions.

Autonomy as an innate, essential, and universal property of an individual

Autonomy is considered to be *innate* in all human beings (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, pp. 74-75). People intrinsically desire to be autonomous and act accordingly (Skinner & Edge, 2004, p. 301), they have an urge to strive to achieve their goals and values (Welzel, 2013, p. 50). Autonomy is also an *essential* property of each individual: it has been identified as a basic good without which there is no "decent human existence" (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 153, 160-162), as one of the two most basic human needs—alongside physical survival (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 54)—and as one of the three basic psychological needs (besides competence and relatedness) that are imperative for individual development and functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2012, p. 417; Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 68). Moreover, autonomy is considered to be a universal need of individuals (S. H. Schwartz, 1994, pp. 21-22). It is not locally bound or zeitgeisty (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 150-151), and it is (nearly) independent from culture and prevalent value climates (Deci & Ryan, 2012, pp. 426-427; S. H. Schwartz, 2012, p. 12), although it may vary in expression, mode, or degree across cultures or even over a lifetime (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 75).

Assumptions about the autonomous self and its environment

The most basic prerequisite for autonomy is a person, with a body and a brain (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 52; Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 456), who has a developed self that is aware of itself as the originator of its actions and to whom these actions are attributed (Lindley, 1986, p. 6). Autonomous behavior is determined neither by a person's own unreflected

inclinations (Lindley, 1986, p. 16) nor by external control, manipulation, or force (Lindley, 1986, p. 6; Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 456). Autonomous individuals perceive themselves as the source of their actions and understand their (potential) consequences as well as their constraints (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 63; Skinner & Edge, 2004, p. 301). They have internal control over their lives (Lindley, 1986, p. 21), without outside influences that force or coerce them to engage in behavior that is not in line with their true nature (Doyal & Gough, 1991, pp. 53-54). This does not mean, however, that autonomous individuals cannot rely on advice and support from others: autonomy is not to be equated with independence (Chirkov et al., 2003; Dworkin, 2008[1988], ch. 2; Williams, 2004, p. 236).

An autonomous person needs the "intellectual capacity to formulate aims and beliefs" (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 63), which are derived through a process of deliberation, as well as the rationality and confidence to act in a way that they have reason to believe will enable the achievement of these aims in accordance with their beliefs (Doyal & Gough, 1991, pp. 53, 63; Lindley, 1986, p. 14). Autonomous individuals are mature enough to form and reflect critically on a view of the world (Lindley, 1986, p. 15). They are able to develop a life plan (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 79; Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 60) reflective of who they are or aspire to be with regard to their values (Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 450; Welzel, 2013, p. 40), aims (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 53), goals and purposes (Lindley, 1986, p. 6), interests and needs (Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 450), desires and preferences (Skinner & Edge, 2004, p. 301), and tastes and temperament (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 60). In pursuing autonomous actions in accordance with their life plan, people give meaning and coherence to their lives (Dworkin, 2008[1988], p. 31).

There is an ongoing debate on how the un- or subconscious and free will play into people's autonomy (see Ryan and Deci (2004) for an overview). While Doyal and Gough (1991) argued that autonomous action is possible *despite* the unconscious "ruling the roost" (p. 65), Ryan and Deci (2004, p. 473) pointed out that the degree of consciousness does not necessarily inform the degree of autonomy as an unconscious action also may or may not be in line with one's goals and values. The views on free will and autonomy are more divided. Whereas Lindley (1986, pp. 14-17) claimed free will as a necessary prerequisite for rationality that allows for deliberation of one's goals and the ability to make free choices, Ryan and Deci (2004, p. 476) recognized that people do not always fully reflect on their values and goals and sometimes might not be aware that they are in conflict or not assimilated as their own, thereby rendering some of their actions not or less autonomous. Similarly, Welzel acknowledged that people may not have full internal control over the values and goals that they pursue, albeit, in contrast to the former authors, without treating this as an obstacle to the study of autonomous action: "From the viewpoint of human empowerment, the critical question is whether people are free from external constraints to act as agents of their values, not whether humans are internally free, in the sense of having full control over the values they prefer" (Welzel, 2013, p. 38).

The environment in which autonomous individuals are embedded needs to provide them with opportunities to act in line with their interests and values and to do so free from external constraints (Lindley, 1986, p. 6; Ryan & Deci, 2004, p. 456; Welzel, 2013, p. 38). The choices made (and not made) enable individuals to express themselves and to display who they are and what they stand for to the world (B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004, pp. 86-87). However, autonomy is more than a lifelong sequence of choosing the best match from a given set of options: autonomous agents actively engage in shaping their lives and their environment (Doyal & Gough, 1991, pp. 67-68). This does not mean that autonomous individuals pursue their own self-interest without any regard for others (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 65) but rather that people have to take responsibility for the actions than can be ascribed to them (Doyal & Gough, 1991, pp. 53, 60; Lindley, 1986, p. 6; B. Schwartz, 2005, p. 105) and thus to "take responsibility for the kind of person they are" (Dworkin, 2008[1988], p. 20).

Autonomy in the capability approach

The core feature of the capability approach (henceforth CA) is its conceptual distinction between capabilities and functionings in the evaluation of people's well-being (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 87; Sen, 1985, pp. 200-202; 2001, pp. 74-76). *Capabilities* capture the set of real opportunities that a person has (Sen, 2001, p. 75), that is, all the positive freedoms to be or do something (Sen, 1985, p. 201); *functionings* encompass all the activities and states of existence that a person has actually achieved (Sen, 1985, p. 197). The bundle of functionings that a person achieves is the key indicator of their well-being (Sen, 1985, p. 198), whereas their capability set equals their well-being freedom. The well-being of a person can only be evaluated in light of both their capabilities and their functionings as two people with identical functionings could have completely different capability sets: both could go hungry for days or weeks, but one could be starving and the other could be fasting (Sen, 1985, pp. 201, 203). Conversely, two people with the same capability set could arrive at completely different functionings if, for instance, one of them were not acting in pursuit of the maximization of their well-being (Sen, 1985, p. 203). This is where agency freedom comes into play: "A person's 'agency freedom' refers to what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (Sen, 1985, p. 203). In line with the features of autonomy identified above, the CA also requires autonomous agents:

(1) to shape their lives and environments actively (Sen, 2001, pp. 19, 53) and to exercise both effective power and control over their choices. While effective power concerns people's choices being respected by others and translating into corresponding actions, the control aspect of choice is concerned with the actual process of choosing, independent from the outcome of the choice (Sen, 1985, pp. 208-209). Individuals may not always enjoy effective power *and* control. Simply put, when people achieve what they want but had no part in the process of choosing, they have power but no control. When people have the ability to choose but are denied what they chose, they have control but no power. Especially when it comes to collective liberties, in which effective power rather relates to what most people would have chosen, people mostly

have little to no control (Sen, 1985, pp. 209-2011). For instance, an inner-city speed limit that most people would have chosen if given the choice bestows effective power on the people, even though they have no control because they are not actively involved in the act of choosing.

(2) to have objectives other than their own well-being. Individuals' agency freedom does not relate to any one set objective (Sen, 1985, p. 204): it enables people to pursue a life that they regard as valuable—reflective of their tastes and interests (Sen, 1985, p. 196) and of their goals and values (Sen, 1985, p. 203). This requires a careful assessment of one's objectives as not everything that appeals to individuals is something that they have reason to regard as valuable (Sen, 1985, pp. 203-204; 2001, p. 18).

(3) to be capable of making complex choices to translate capabilities into functionings. This ability might be limited for children or for people who are severely mentally disabled (Robeyns, 2005, p. 101; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021). Especially with regard to children, it seems preferable to ensure functionings like health and education so that the mature adult can enjoy the uncompromised capability later (Nussbaum, 2001b, pp. 89-90). Moreover, there might even be reasons to restrict the capabilities of autonomous agents later in life, when choices relevant to basic capabilities, like health and safety, become too complex and screening costs too high[2]: food and drug regulations and building and vehicle inspections are just a few restrictions of liberty that are quite common in modern states (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 91).

(4) to enjoy substantive opportunities and decisional autonomy without external interference (Sen, 1993b, p. 524; 2005, p. 152). The CA regards both the opportunity aspect and the process aspect as valuable features of freedom (Sen, 1993b, p. 522; 2004b, p. 585). The former relates to people's real opportunities among which they can choose according to their preferences; that is, it relates to their capabilities (Sen, 1993b, p. 522; 2005, p. 152). These opportunities need to be real in the sense that they could actually be achieved (Sen, 1999, pp. 3-4) and substantial in the sense that they actually constitute alternatives (Sen, 1993b, pp. 528-529). If, for example, higher education in a country were so expensive that some people just could not afford it, the opportunity to be highly educated would not be available to everyone; adding a further expensive educational program would then increase the opportunities numerically yet not substantially. Over and above having different opportunities to choose from, there is value in the actual process of choosing: people do not simply want to "end up" with the opportunity that they would have chosen but instead want to be the one who actually makes the choice (Sen, 1993b, p. 522; 1997b, p. 753). Individuals' freedom of choice thus includes their capacity to make autonomous

[2] A similar argument was made by Dworkin (2008[1988]), who pointed out that people might be inclined to limit their choices in certain situations, for instance not to have the choice to inflict harm on themselves or others, especially when the possible consequences might only become apparent in the distant future (e.g., the consumption of drugs) (pp. 73-76).

decisions without interference from other people (Sen, 1993b, pp. 524-525) since people value choice not only because it is instrumental in achieving their goals and values but also because it has intrinsic value to them (Sen, 1988, p. 290).[3]

(5) to take responsibility for their choices and actions—both made and not made and both taken and not taken (Sen, 2001, pp. 190, 284). This includes taking responsibility for the evaluations that led to their choice (Sen, 2000, p. 484) and for any actual and possible consequences resulting from it (Sen, 2000, p. 485), especially "since our actions influence other people's freedoms and lives as well as our own" (Sen, 2000, p. 500).

Thus, assuming a capable and responsible agent, autonomy can be understood as reflecting the real opportunities that a person holds, that is, their capabilities, and their ability to choose freely from these opportunities in accordance with their goals and values. As the capability set of a person cannot be observed directly, Sen (1992) proposed a "work-around": by combining the achieved functioning with information on choice, he argued, one could abstract the original capability. Insufficient nourishment can be traced back to an *unchosen* capability to be well fed—for instance due to religious or dietary fasting—or to an *unavailable* capability to be well fed—due to famine or other food shortages. Thus, instead of capabilities, the focus would be on the achieved functioning bundle (Sen, 1992, pp. 52-53), and this bundle would then include the "act of choosing" as a functioning itself (Sen, 1988, p. 290; 1999, pp. 44-45). Sen (1992) regarded this approach as a practical compromise that he deemed inferior to an evaluation of actual capabilities yet superior to a mere evaluation of utilities and commodities (p. 53).

Key drivers and determinants of autonomy

People have not always been perceived as the active planners of their own lives that we recognize and expect them to be today. For a long time, the forces shaping individual and collective life were placed outside of human reach, in supernatural and then later in

[3] If choice were only relevant instrumentally, then two choice sets, of which one included the individual's preferred choice among others and the other only included the preferred choice, would have the same value. However, the intrinsic importance of being able to choose between different options would be impaired and might even have consequences for the preference—a person might have enjoyed listening to a public broadcast when it was one of the options available but would no longer prefer it if it was the only option. Sen (1988) and Nussbaum (2001b) further argued that too little choice might directly change the substantive value of what is chosen: functions like playing, or being affectionate toward other people cannot be demanded or forced without changing their value (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 88); others, like religious fasting, are rendered impossible if there is no choice to behave otherwise, that is, no food is available to be refused voluntarily (Sen, 1988, pp. 291-293). Dworkin (2008[1988], pp. 68-73) made a similar point when he argued that the object of choice might be altered by an additional choice: the choice of marriage dissolution surely changed the nature of the choice to enter into marriage and probably also the nature of marriage itself.

natural forces. In the course of human development, they were eventually attributed to particular people—great men and representatives—and to society itself. However, it is only in modern society that individuals are credited with the ability to shape their own lives and drive social change, collectively or individually and planned or unplanned (Sztompka, 1993a, pp. 191-193). This rather ideational bestowment of autonomy is accompanied by a real expansion of individual choice in modernity, which can be traced back to economic, cultural, and political aspects of human development (Welzel et al., 2003, pp. 341-342).

Drivers of autonomy on macro-level

The CA recognizes that opportunity and choice are enhanced by human development, through better economic conditions, better health, better education, and so on, while autonomy in turn is a prime mover of human development (S. Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2039). However, it does not extend beyond a rather general notion of capabilities and individuals' ability to transform capabilities into functionings being influenced by environmental factors[4]; the key drivers and mechanisms involved in the broadening of opportunities and choice have never been systematically addressed. This conceptual gap in the CA can be bridged by human empowerment theory, which identifies three prime movers of human autonomy: socio-economic development, cultural change, and institutional guarantees (Welzel, 2013, pp. 44-47; Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 22; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345).

Socio-economic development

Drawing on the CA framework as well as sociological classics, human empowerment theory describes economic modernization and social progress as being interwoven with a multitude of interrelated processes from urbanization and industrialization to the division of labor and social and spatial mobility, which lead to an increase in social interactions and dependencies and, concurrently, to the diversification of society, the loosening of social norms and values, and the weakening of the power that the collective has over the individual (Durkheim, 2016[1988], pp. 180-184, 314-343; Simmel, 1995 [1901-1908], pp. 126-128, 131). As a result, individuals become freer materially, cognitively, and socially: not only do individuals gain greater access to resources, but these resources are also significantly enlarged (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 22; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345). Increases in income, education, skills, and information promote the enhancement of individuals' physical and intellectual resources (Welzel & Inglehart,

[3]The opportunities and choices that are available to a person can depend on the societal means and resources, provided that they translate into infrastructure or public spending (Sen, 2001, p. 44), but also on conversion factors: social conversion factors, such as the available infrastructure, social policies, or social norms, and environmental conversion factors, such as the climate or pollution, affect whether and how well a functioning can be achieved (Robeyns, 2005, p. 99; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021).

2001, p. 12; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345). Moreover, increases in interactions in a more diversified society enable people to decide themselves who they are and with whom they want to interact (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 24). Socio-economic progress is thus instrumental in the removal of existential, informational, and social constraints on human choices and opens up opportunities for human action (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 24; Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, pp. 12, 22; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345).

That socio-economic progress fuels autonomy in no way means that it evolves from it. All human beings carry within them the latent need for autonomy and self-expression; in times of adverse conditions, however, people adapt and suppress this need in favor of others (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 347).

Cultural Change

As individuals gain more control and power over their growing resources due to socio-economic progress, and at the same time have an expanded scope of possibilities, they place greater emphasis on leading a self-determined life accompanied by a growing desire for more control and choice (Inglehart et al., 2008, p. 266; Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004, pp. 84-86; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345). On the aggregate level of the public, rising ambitions and the valuation of personal freedom and self-determination then translate into demands for more opportunities and more choice, which can best be satisfied by democratic regimes (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 13). The path from cultural change to democracy leads in part through the strengthening of social movements and reformers within the elites, who ultimately do not remain unaffected by the cultural change themselves (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 26; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 349). Elites who are unwilling to respond to the rise of emancipative orientations accordingly will eventually risk the withdrawal of public support (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 348).

Institutional guarantees

Held to be an integral value of democracy, freedom rights provide an ideal breeding ground for individual autonomy (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 12). The rights to personal autonomy, political participation, and compensation guarantee freedom of choice in the personal and public domains as well as equality of opportunities (Welzel, 2013, p. 45). However, for institutionalized legal rights to translate into genuine freedom of choice, they must be guaranteed not only formally but also effectively (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345). Fortunately, democratic effectiveness is on the rise, spurred in part by the socio-economic and cultural developments that precede it: people and social movements not only have more resources to exert pressure on elites but also are more motivated to enforce their rights to equal opportunities and free choice. Furthermore, elites themselves are increasingly, "by their own beliefs, willing to respect people's rights" (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 349).

The human development sequence

Generally, progress in any of the three spheres of human development is assumed to contribute to growing autonomy among the general populace (Welzel et al., 2003, p.

346). Ideal-typically, their impacts unfold interdependently yet in an ordered manner: there is a prevailing sequence starting with economic development increasing people's opportunities and resources and thereby liberating people from existential constraints, which then gives rise to a cultural change in favor of emancipation and autonomy as well as increasing aspirations for more personal freedoms. These growing aspirations will inevitably be translated into demands, which in turn will lead to an expanded supply of such freedoms in the forms of rights and liberties provided by an effective democracy (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004, pp. 83-86; Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, pp. 21-25; Welzel et al., 2003, pp. 345-350). This theoretical sequence is supported by empirical evidence (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, 2010; Welzel et al., 2003). However, economic development, cultural change, and institutional guarantees need not necessarily always progress forward—but their trajectories coincide in that they are likely to improve or deteriorate collectively (Welzel & Inglehart, 2001, p. 23; Welzel et al., 2003, p. 346).

Drivers of autonomy on individual level

Within the capability framework, individual autonomy holds instrumental value in that it is a necessary capacity to transform capabilities into functionings but also intrinsic value as a functioning in its own right. As such, the autonomy that people have over their life also depends on their individual means and their personal conversion factors.

The distinction between means and conversion factors is characteristic of the capability approach; it shifts the focus from people's resources to their individual abilities to make use of these resources to achieve functionings reflective of their conception of a good life (Robeyns, 2005, p. 97; Sen, 1988, p. 276).

Means and resources

As described above, socio-economic progress has led to an individualization and expansion of the resources that people can use to pursue their goals, including intellectual as well as connective and material resources (Welzel, 2013, pp. 45-46). In the CA framework, means and resources refer to all the goods and services that a person has access to, whether derived from market or non-market production or from income or other transfers in kind. These goods and services are not to be understood as ends in themselves; rather, they have instrumental value as they enable or facilitate the achievement of functionings. People are not interested in a bicycle as an object of a certain shape or material but because it enables the functioning of mobility (Robeyns, 2005, pp. 89-99; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021). Individuals' autonomy is thus at least partly a function of their means. As individual means are not distributed equally—people start from very different positions in society (Sen, 1992, p. 19) and differ in their chances and abilities to maintain and increase their means (Sen, 1993b, p. 536)—their autonomy will not be either. The solution to this problem, however, lies not in total equality of means as some people require more means to achieve certain functionings than others (Sen, 1992, p. 20). These differences are conceptualized as personal conversion factors.

Personal conversion factors

Personal conversion factors encompass all the characteristics of a person that might influence whether or how well they can transform means into achieved functionings, such as gender, age, mental and physical abilities, or knowledge (Sen, 1992, p. 20; 1994, p. 334; 1999, p. 17). Some conversion factors are a matter of choice—such as better education and information—while others, such as one's metabolic rate, are more a matter of chance (Sen, 1999, p. 18). Further, conversion factors can be alterable (education) or unalterable (body size), permanent (disability) or temporary (pregnancy), and subject to change over time (metabolic rate). They need not even be inherent in the person but can arise from their position relative to others: what a person "needs 'to appear in public without shame' depends on what other people standardly wear" (Sen, 2005, p. 154). The relevance of conversion factors always depends on the functioning to be achieved: a physical disability might well prevent someone from achieving mobility using a bicycle (Sen, 1988, p. 279) but have no relevance whatsoever to their ability to be well educated.

Using the example of education, one can easily see how means, conversion factors, and capabilities are interrelated: first and foremost, education, when designed to stimulate "sense, cultivation, and thought" (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 78), is a basic capability in itself (Sen, 1999, p. 48) but can also, in the form of human capital, be used as a means to achieve other goods (Sen, 1997a, p. 1959) or, in the form of knowledge, skills, and information, facilitate the transformation of means into functionings (Sen, 1999, pp. 17-18). In the best case, these interrelations create a positive feedback loop or, at worst, a downward spiral: "Those who are disabled, or ill, or old, or otherwise handicapped may have, on the one hand, problems in earning a decent income, and on the other, also face greater difficulties in converting incomes into capabilities to live well" (Sen, 1993b, p. 536).

Individual autonomy inputs

Although the CA provides examples of personal means and conversion factors, it does not provide guidance on how to identify the factors that are most relevant to achieving a certain functioning. The following list contains the personal characteristics that I suppose to have the greatest potential to influence individual autonomy. The selection was informed by the CA literature as well as by empirical research findings while being limited to the factors that are available for empirical investigation on the basis of survey data. Due to their interdependence, the list does not discriminate between means and conversion factors. I suggest that health (and the absence of illness or disability), social connectedness, education, employment, and financial security, as personal characteristics, enable autonomy, whereas being a woman, living with a partner, having children, and having migrated to another country limit autonomy. Any disparities in autonomy by age should be reflected by differences in means and conversion factors, which change over the life course.

From the hitherto-presented conceptual arguments, I derive the first assumption of this dissertation, which is examined in the first paper.

Assumption (1): Economic development, cultural change, and institutional guarantees expand the scope of opportunities and lift constraints on individuals' freedom to choose. Individual means and conversion factors influence the extent to which people are able to shape their lives in accordance with their goals and values.

The autonomy well-being link

The relationship between autonomy and well-being is complex: it can be considered as a dimension of well-being, a source of well-being by means of achieving other ends, or even a hindrance of well-being by means of achieving other ends, which are in conflict with one's well-being (Alkire, 2005, pp. 221-222). On the one hand, individual autonomy is viewed as critical to well-being as it enables people to express themselves better (B. Schwartz, 2005, pp. 103-105) and increases their self-esteem (Welzel, 2013, p. 51). When people perceive their actions as autonomous, they are more motivated to persist and perform better and as a result are more satisfied with their achievements (Ryan & Deci, 2011, p. 53). In a positive feedback loop, the satisfaction that people derive from their ability to act autonomously leads them to attach even greater importance to opportunities and choice (Welzel, 2013, pp. 50-51). This positive autonomy–well-being link is not restricted to certain cultures: "the desire for autonomous choice is anchored in human psychology, with freer choice bringing higher satisfaction even in collectivist cultures" (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 140). However, an enhancement of personal autonomy does not necessarily lead to an improvement in subjective well-being (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 66) for at least two reasons: first, people also pursue life goals that are not aimed at increasing their well-being or might even harm it (Sen, 1985, pp. 206-207); second, in the face of the ever-growing number of options and choices, people might easily feel overwhelmed or pressured by expectations or even experience a loss of control (B. Schwartz, 2005, pp. 105-106).

Well-being freedom and agency freedom

The capability approach distinguishes between people's freedom to achieve well-being and their freedom to achieve whatever they regard as important and valuable in their life, irrespective of how it relates to their well-being (Sen, 1985, pp. 185-187, 203, 206-207). It does not follow that the two freedoms are completely unrelated: the open conditionality of agency freedom includes the possibility that people pursue well-being, that is, that their well-being freedom is incorporated into their agency freedom (Sen, 1985, p. 206). Likewise, the failure to achieve valued goals can result in diminished well-being (Sen, 1992, p. 57). Finally, there are also goals that people have reasons to value that are, however, in conflict with their well-being: people might compromise their own health and safety in pursuit to help others or forgo financial security in exchange for a more fulfilling, yet less secure, career path (Robeyns & Byskov, 2021, p. 207; Sen, 1985).

The pursuit of well-being as a valuable goal among others should not be mistaken for a happiness maximization strategy. Equating well-being with happiness fails to recognize not only that there are numerous other mental states that have relevance to well-being but also that happiness can be a consequence of manipulation and is highly susceptible to adaptation processes (Nussbaum, 2001a, pp. 78-80; Sen, 1985, pp. 188-189). A life full of misery cannot be regarded as a good life just because the person leading that life is happy when that happiness is truly derived from some kind of "mental conditioning (say, via the 'opium' of religion)" (Sen, 1985, p. 188). Happiness further partly reflects the difference between individuals' (perceived) reality and their expectations, which are susceptible to adaptation. Generally, adaptation must be regarded as a powerful tool for the protection of people's mental well-being by scaling down their expectations of what can plausibly be achieved (Nussbaum, 2001a, pp. 78-79). However, when happiness becomes the yardstick based on which social policy or welfare efforts are determined, its distorting effect becomes evident: aid and support will reach not those who suffer the most but instead those who, due to their unwillingness or inability to adapt, complain the most (Nussbaum, 2001a, pp. 79-80). A deficient life does not become deficient *because* the individual leading this life is unhappy about it: a capability failure needs to be judged for itself and not for the emotional resonance that it does or does not produce within the beneficiary of these capabilities (Sen, 1984, p. 363).

That said, the dismissal of happiness as an *exclusive* measure of well-being does not necessarily preclude any measure of subjective well-being from complementing the CA (Robeyns, 2005, p. 97; Sen, 1979, p. 552). In recent years, more attention has been paid to the conceptual overlaps between the CA and the subjective well-being approaches, such as the fact that both extend beyond the idea of economic well-being and take into account the evaluative nature of human well-being (see, for example, Bruni et al., 2008). In addition, there is growing evidence that capabilities and functionings are empirically related to measures of subjective well-being (P. Anand et al., 2009; P. Anand et al., 2005; P. Anand et al., 2011; P. A. González et al., 2021; Hasan & Khan, 2015). The selection of capabilities and functionings in these studies has often been informed by Nussbaum's list of basic human capabilities, which encompasses capabilities like being able to live a life of normal length, being healthy, having bodily integrity, being able to form attachments to other people, and having control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2001b, pp. 77-80). While Sen (2004a, p. 78) generally opposed such a fixed list of capabilities, Nussbaum (2002, p. 131) believed that her list captured the most basic capabilities to which humans universally aspire.

The problems with too much autonomy

There are some concerns about the negative aspects of autonomy, the first of which pertains to the relationship between increasing choice and well-being. As choice is pertinent to autonomy and autonomy is conducive to individuals' well-being, more choices should always be better. However, with the rise of choice, the demands for decision making increase, whereas people's abilities to cope with the new complexity of the decision-making process do not. At the same time, people adapt to the consequences

of their decisions—both improvements and deteriorations—as well as to their increased freedom of choice. As a result, people become unhappier despite having more choices, which should increase their ability to choose determine how to live their lives (B. Schwartz, 2005, ch. 5). Additional choices are increasingly accompanied by high societal and individual expectations to make use of these new options, and thus discouragement of "sticking" with the old ones (Dworkin, 2008[1988], pp. 68-69), and to make the right, that is, the perfect, choice (B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004, pp. 97-99). Due to these growing expectations, the explicit cost of decision making—gathering information and taking the time to make a decision (Dworkin, 2008[1988], pp. 62-68)—as well as the implicit costs of unchosen opportunities rise (B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004, pp. 94-95), as does the burdensome pressure to take responsibility for this decision (Dworkin, 2008[1988], pp. 62-68; B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004, pp. 97-99). With every new option available, the possibility that one will regret a decision made (or not made) increases, while any positive outcome—happiness, joy, or satisfaction—diminishes quickly as people compare the result of their decision with the aspirations that they had and with their own or others' experiences (B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004, pp. 94-97).

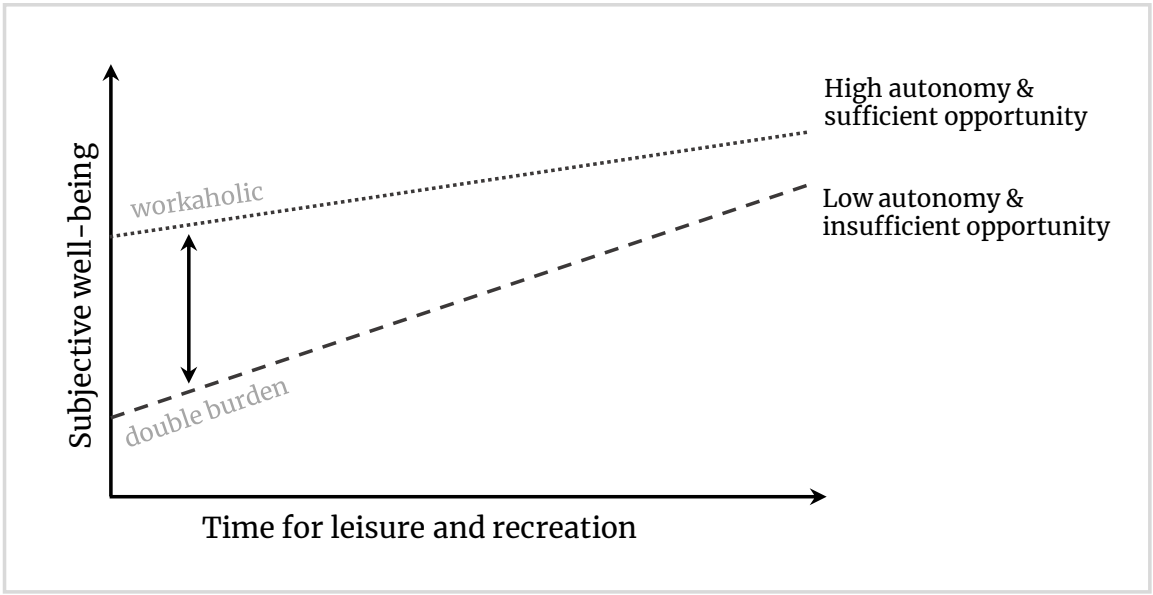
In contrast to B. Schwartz and Ward (2004, p. 90), who concluded that the rising costs of decisions with the lower returns of satisfaction with the decisions and their outcomes will lead to decreasing levels of well-being, Dworkin (2008[1988], pp. 77-81) reached a more differentiated conclusion. Regarding the instrumental value of choices, he recognized that increased choice enables more people to make decisions that satisfy their needs and allow for their preferences to change, yet, with regard to the intrinsic value of choice, he saw the benefit not of an increase in choices but rather of an increase in people's capacity to make choices. Empirical research has lent support to the latter: freedom of choice is linked to greater well-being, individually and on the societal level, cross-sectionally, and across time (e.g., Inglehart et al., 2008; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010; see also Chapter three in this dissertation).

Linking autonomy and functionings to well-being

From the above-presented arguments, it can be derived that a greater scope of opportunities and more individual autonomy generally contribute to people's well-being. When people have autonomy over their lives, they can choose to achieve functionings that increase their well-being, but they do not necessarily have to do so: people might choose a workaholic lifestyle over a life that balances work and leisure (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 87) or they might choose to engage in dangerous sports despite the potential harm to their health and bodily integrity (Robeyns, 2005, p. 101). As long as the functioning set that they arrive at is the result of autonomous choice, their well-being and agency freedom remain unaffected. This would, however, not be the case if their long working hours and their risk of bodily harm were a result of impaired opportunities or choices, like deficient work protection (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 88) or domestic violence (Robeyns, 2005, p. 101). Therefore, any evaluation of achieved functionings and the well-being derived from them needs to consider individuals' opportunities and choices: "choosing a life-style is not exactly the same as having that

life-style no matter how chosen, and one's well-being does depend on how that life-style happened to emerge" (Sen, 1992, p. 52). If well-being is a function of the achieved functioning depending on the opportunities and choices available to a person, then the achieved functioning should have a stronger impact on well-being when the scope of possibilities is small and their autonomy is low. I will illustrate this with the example of a workaholic lifestyle vs. a lack of work-life balance (see Figure 1). Take two people who both have very little time for leisure and recreation. The first has just started her own business and invests every waking hour in her work (marked as "workaholic" in Figure 1). The second was forced to take a full-time job to which she needs to commute long distances every day and has to take care of the household and her children after work (marked as "double burden" in Figure 1).

Figure 1 Graphical illustration of the interaction between functioning and autonomy and opportunity and its relationship with well-being



Although both have very little time for leisure and recreation, their resulting levels of well-being differ significantly. The difference in well-being gained from their functioning is due to the opportunity and autonomy that entered into the achievement of the functioning. Whereas the workaholic chose to forgo any free time, the double-burdened person exhibits a lack of opportunities and autonomy to change her situation. The interaction illustrated above of course has as a prerequisite that both persons generally have a reason to value time for leisure and recreation. The evaluation of people's ability to achieve functionings that *they value* and *have reason to* value thus needs to combine individuals' scope of opportunities and autonomy in shaping their lives in accordance with their goals and values with a selection of functionings that people have reason to value (Alkire, 2008a, p. 468). Such a selection might be based on Nussbaum's (2001b, pp. 77-80) list of basic human capabilities or similar concepts, like Allardt's (1993, pp. 89-93) basic needs or Skidelsky and Skidelsky's (2013, pp. 145-167) basic goods (a comprehensive overview of concepts is provided by Alkire, 2002).

The theoretical considerations on the relationship between autonomy, functioning, and well-being lead me to the next assumption, which is subject to scrutiny in the second paper.

Assumption (2): The scope of opportunities and the autonomy that people have in shaping their own lives contribute to their well-being. The impact of basic functionings, such as health, safety, and affiliation, on well-being depends on individuals' opportunities and autonomy—the fewer opportunities and the less autonomy people have, the stronger the impact of their achieved functionings on their well-being.

The special case of children

Childhood and autonomy

The Western view of childhood has long been characterized, on the one hand, by the wild child who needs to be controlled and integrated into the social fabric and, on the other hand, by the innocent child who needs adult guidance to develop fully his or her potential. Both views regard children as passive objects, who are irrational and limited in their competence (Fattore et al., 2017, pp. 64-65). Like most liberal theories, the CA presupposes a mature and rational agent, thereby generally reducing children to passive recipients of functionings (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 25; Macleod, 2010, pp. 174, 185; Robeyns, 2005, p. 101; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021). There are good reasons to disregard children as mature agents as they are still in the process of acquiring the necessary knowledge, experience, and competence to make good decisions, to reflect on their actions, and to anticipate their consequences (Fattore et al., 2017, p. 68; Graf, 2016, pp. 21, 26-27; Schweiger, 2016, p. 88). However, under these conditions of a fully rational moral agent, children are condemned to wait for their state of incompleteness to be over to have their preferences and choices recognized (Qvortrup, 2005, p. 5). Such an approach is unsatisfactory for (at least) two reasons: first, it disregards the facts that already young children value their autonomy—even though it comes with limitations and boundaries—and that the need for and the value attached to individual autonomy gradually increase with age (Ballet et al., 2011, pp. 28, 32; Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 64; Fattore et al., 2009, p. 74; Schweiger, 2016, pp. 87-88, 91). Second, by narrowing the approach to functionings, the well-being of the child takes a back seat to its well-becoming: though the CA acknowledges that children's quality of life and their (albeit limited) choices and opportunities have relevance to them per se, its emphasis lies on the future adult (Liebel, 2014, pp. 77-78; Sen, 2003, p. 79).

Accordingly, Nussbaum argued for compulsory functions in childhood to enable the capabilities and functionings of the future adult (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 172). Sen even shifted the focus a little further away from the child itself, explicating the enablement of future capabilities in childhood as having relevance not only to the future agents themselves but also to the future society as a whole—in the sense of preventing future economic and social problems like poverty or delinquency (Sen, 2003, p. 79). It is indisputable that the basis for future autonomy, capability, and functioning needs to be

laid in childhood (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 36; Graf & Schweiger, 2016, p. 5; Schweiger, 2016, p. 89). However, childhood should be diminished neither to a state of transition to adulthood aimed at "reproducing adult social orders" (Fattore et al., 2017, p. 65) nor to a "preparatory stage" of instrumental value only to produce productive and engaged citizens; rather, it should be valued for the intrinsic value of a good childhood itself (Graf & Schweiger, 2016, pp. 5-6). Investigating children's agency therefore entails paying attention to both children's well-being and their well-becoming (Graf & Schweiger, 2016, p. 5).

The child as autonomous agent

Taking the earlier-described characteristics of the autonomous individual as a guideline, children can hardly be considered as fully autonomous agents, but neither can they be viewed as completely passive and heteronomous (Schweiger, 2016, p. 94). In recent research, children have increasingly been understood as (restricted) moral agents (Graf, 2016, pp. 24-25) and social actors (Fattore et al., 2017, p. 65) with an inherent need for autonomy that increases with age (Fattore et al., 2009, p. 74). The experience of autonomy and its sources may vary over a lifetime—the first bike ride without supervision can be an expression of enormous autonomy for a child—but that does not mean that children cannot perceive great autonomy over their lives even when the extent of autonomy is evaluated differently from an outside or adult perspective (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 28).

It is true that children often have little effective power and control over their choices. In many cases, the opportunity aspect of children's freedom is regarded as more relevant to their well-being than their freedom of choice (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 22). Parents or guardians have to strike a balance between considering the child's perspective, preference, and freedom of choice and considering their responsibility to enforce the conversion of certain capabilities into functionings (Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 64). While children do enjoy some process freedom, their effective power to have their choices considered and translated into corresponding actions is limited: "their choices are respected as long as they conform to certain standards, which are defined by adults. In other cases, they are regulated, modified or cancelled" (Graf, 2016, p. 21).

Like adults, children have and develop their own wishes, desires, and preferences (Biggeri & Karkara, 2014, p. 24; Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 64; Schweiger, 2016, pp. 87-88) and are able to envision what constitutes a good life (Schweiger, 2016, p. 94). They express themselves and the values that they deem important in everyday actions (Fattore et al., 2009, p. 69). However, children's internalization of values during socialization is still in progress (Ballet et al., 2011, p. 36), and their capacity to reflect rationally on their choices is still evolving (Schweiger, 2016, p. 94). Thus, though children value the opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of their choices as a basis for future choices, they still depend on help and guidance from adults (Fattore et al., 2017, pp. 69-71). The same applies to the translation of values and goals into actions: while children's ability to gauge appropriate action is still developing, they require assistance and support from adults. Whereas some capabilities, like leisure activities, involve a

degree of autonomy even for very young children, others, like mobility or health, entail consequences that children cannot properly assess (Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 75; Visak, 2016, p. 44) and thus presuppose adult guidance to protect their well-being at this moment and to enable capabilities and autonomy in the future (Biggeri & Karkara, 2014, p. 24; Schweiger, 2016, p. 92). Adult guidance provides the necessary foundation for children's autonomy; as children mature, the boundaries of adult guidance become subject to negotiation (Fattore et al., 2009, p. 63).

From the foregoing, it can already be seen that children's opportunities and choices are directly constrained by the boundaries imposed by adults. However, children also indirectly depend on their caregivers' endowment with means, conversion factors, capabilities, and achieved functionings (Ballet et al., 2011, pp. 30-31; Biggeri & Karkara, 2014, p. 24) as well as their ability and willingness to use them to expand their children's opportunities and freedom of choice (Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 63; Fattore et al., 2017, pp. 75, 81).

Finally, with regard to responsibility, it must be stated that children can only take responsibility for themselves and their actions to the extent that they act as autonomous agents, and this extent—although gradually increasing with age—is limited. While they are entitled to be supported and acknowledged as evolving autonomous agents, neither autonomy nor responsibility must be imposed on children (Lansdown, 2005, p. 4). As children progress on their developmental journey from infants to young adults, their process freedom and their control over means and opportunities are constantly enhanced. Therefore, their ability to shape their own lives cannot be measured by the *extent* of their autonomy but rather by the *adequacy* of their role as agents.

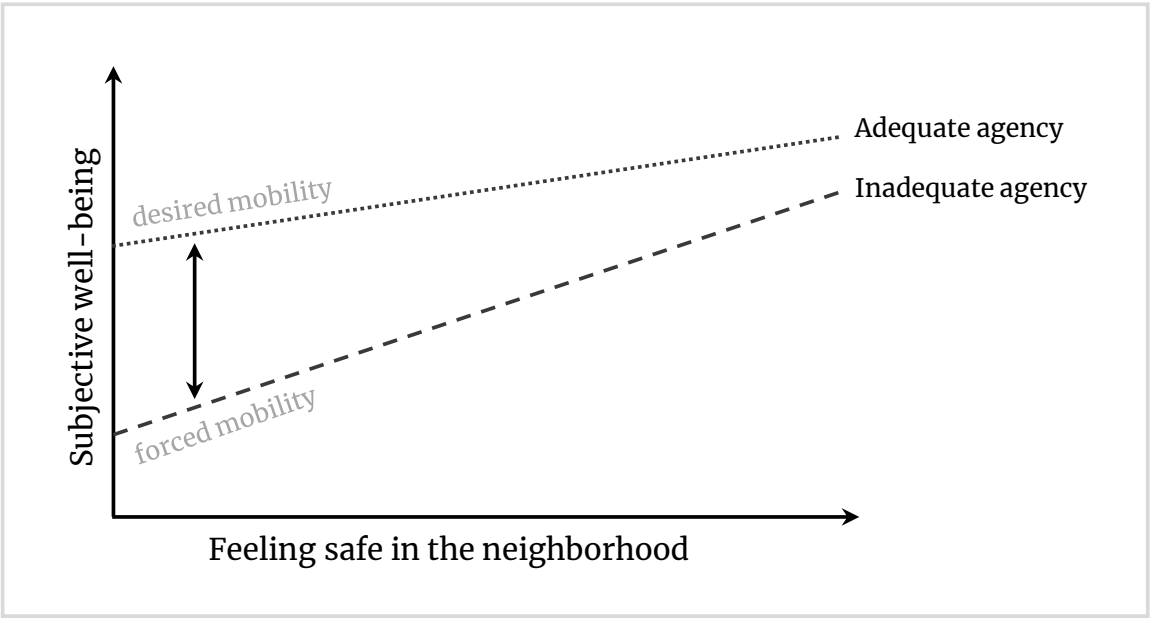
Linking children' satisfaction with their agency and functionings to well-being

Like adults, children do not just end up with a lifestyle. Within the boundaries described above, they (can) make decisions that are expressive of their preferences and goals. The well-being that they derive from the achievement of functionings, as well as the ill-being that they derive from functionings that are not or only insufficiently achieved, cannot be evaluated independently of the child's agentic role in achieving these functionings. Unlike adults' autonomy, however, children's agency can only be considered to the extent that decisions do not seriously compromise their present well-being or future well-becoming. The mechanism presented below therefore refers exclusively to aspects of children's lives in which it is appropriate for them to make their own decisions.

Children, too, do not exclusively pursue goals that promote their well-being but might also engage in endeavors that are disadvantageous. Children might spend all of their free time practicing a sport or a musical instrument instead of playing with their friends or studying for school. They might risk their physical integrity by playing ball in the sandlot or performing tricks in the skate park. They might value the opportunity to walk home alone from a friend's house so much that they are willing to accept that they do not feel completely safe on their walk through the neighborhood. Whether the deficit in a

functioning results in impaired well-being depends on whether it was chosen—willingly and within the child's ability to evaluate the choices and consequences—or not. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship between functionings, children's agency, and their well-being using the example of the child walking home alone. For the purpose of illustration, take two children who are walking home alone from a friend's house through their neighborhood, which the parents perceive as safe enough for their children. However, as children's views on neighborhood safety deviate from those of adults (e.g., Spilsbury et al., 2012), both children perceive their way home as dangerous because it passes the house of a rude neighbor with a scary dog. The first child is glad that her parents now consider her to be mature enough to be allowed to walk home alone. The second child, however, has to walk home alone because nobody is available to collect her. While the first child is enabled to be independently mobile in accordance with her preference for agency, the second child is forced to be mobile despite her dissatisfaction with this external demand for agency. Accordingly, the second child will experience a much stronger impairment of her well-being due to feeling unsafe than the first child.

Figure 2 Graphical illustration of the interaction between functioning and children's satisfaction with their agency and its relationship with well-being



The interaction illustrated above again of course involves the prerequisite that both children value the affected functioning (their safety). An investigation of the role of children's agency in the relationship between achieved functionings and well-being thus needs to focus on the capabilities that children value and have reason to value. Such capabilities can easily be identified by consulting lists of children's well-being domains (Fattore et al., 2009) or lists of children's capabilities (Biggeri et al., 2006; Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011).

The limited autonomy of children as outlined above requires an adjustment of the second assumption to the adequacy of the child's agentic role; this last assumption will be explored in the third paper.

Assumption (3): Children's satisfaction with their agency contributes to their well-being. The impact that basic functionings, such as safety, have on children's well-being depends on the adequacy of their agency—the less satisfied children are with their agency, the stronger the impact of the achieved functioning on their well-being.

3 A Review of the Empirical Literature on Perceived Autonomy

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the empirical literature on antecedents and outcomes of perceived autonomy. I begin with a description of the items that are used as search terms in the review and explain the process of literature identification and selection. The research results are presented grouped by themes: I first discuss the trajectory of and factors influencing autonomy, then present the results on outcomes of autonomy, and conclude with findings on autonomy as a moderating and mediating variable. After a general discussion of the review findings and research desiderata, I address the research gaps that I seek to bridge with my dissertation.

The Items

The subsequent review focuses on three survey questions addressing the freedom of choice people perceive they have over their lives that have been asked repeatedly in four representative cross-national large-scale population surveys, namely the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Values Study (EVS) and the World Values Survey (WVS).

The EQLS includes an item of perceived choice over one's life in its 3rd and 4th wave, i.e. in 2011 and 2016:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
- **I feel I am free to decide how to live my life.**
- 5-point scale: 1 Strongly agree; 2 Agree; 3 Neither agree nor disagree; 4 Disagree; 5 Strongly disagree

The ESS includes a similar item of perceived choice over one's life in its 3rd and 6th wave, i.e. the years 2006 and 2012:

- Using this card, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
- **I feel I am free to decide for myself how to live my life.**
- 5-point scale: 1 Agree strongly; 2 Agree; 3 Neither agree nor disagree; 4 Disagree; 5 Disagree strongly

In contrast to these rather short statements, the World Value Survey and European Value Study item is more comprehensive and deviates from the former in three aspects: (1) The WVS/EVS item asks about choice and control, instead of choice only; (2) While the EQLS and ESS items consider the active agent—of varying levels of freedom of choice—as set, the WVS/EVS item additionally contrasts this active agent with a passive bystander of their own fate. (3) The WVS/EVS item deviates from the other two items as it asks about choice and locus of control. The item was asked in all seven survey waves over the period from 1981 to 2020:

- **Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 1 means "none at all" and 10 means "a great deal" to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.**
- 10-point scale: 1 None at all, 2–9 Unlabeled; 10 A great deal.

Identification and selection of literature using the above-described items

Identification

As most literature search engines, such as Scopus or Web of Science, do not offer full text searches, the subsequent searches were conducted using Google Scholar to identify publications that include the question wording of one of the three autonomy items presented above within the text body. Three queries were conducted (20.04.2021) with the following key phrases: "free to decide how to live" (n1=130); "free to decide for myself how to live" (n2=359); and "completely free choice and control over their lives" OR "choice and control you feel you have" (n3=422). The results were downloaded via Publish-or-Perish.

Selection

From the n=911 (n1=130, n2=359, n3=422) identified search results 538 were excluded because they were not published in a peer-reviewed journal and/or not published in English: 70 were books or book chapters (n1=19, n2=10, n3=41); 84 working/discussion papers and preprints (n1=9, n2=7, n3=68); 212 theses[5] (n1=23, n2=127, n3=62); 126 other publication formats[6] (n1=17, n2=26, n3=83); 7 were published in a language other than English (n1=2, n2=2, n3=3); Further, 39 publications were identified as duplicates[7] (n1=8, n2=16, n3=15).

From the remaining 373 Articles (n1=52, n2=171, n3=150), 25 were nonempirical research articles (n1=18, N2=2, N3=5), and 10 articles included the key phrases in different contexts[8] or in modified versions[9] (n1=1, n2=5, n3=4); further, in 8 articles the

5 Including Bachelor, Honors, Master, and Dissertation Theses.

6 Other publication formats include inter alia book reviews, non-scientific journals, and government reports.

7 Duplicates also include formerly published versions (e.g., as working paper) and manuscripts with or without reviewer-comments.

8 E.g., As part of a regular sentence or in the state-of-the-art when referring to another article that used this item.

9 E.g., "Because of the presence of immigrants, I feel like I am less free to decide for myself how to live my life" (Yong et al., 2021, p. 4).

item was not part of the actual analyses[10] (n3=3) or the results were not reported[11] (n3=5); one article solely focused on the scale response behavior (n3=1). Next, of the remaining 329 (n1=33, n2=164, n3=131) articles only about half used representative data,[12] whereas 163 drew from nonrepresentative samples[13] (n1=7, n2=145, n3=11).

Finally, from the 166 (n1=26, n2=19, n3=121) articles using representative data, in 50 (n1=18, n2=5, n3=27) the choice items were only part of the operationalization of larger, conceptually distinct constructs,[14] such as positive functioning and psychological well-being on an individual level or measures of culture, self-expression and creative capacity on a country level.

After removing one further publication (Steckermeier, 2021) as it is part of this thesis (see Chapter six), the selection process yields 115 (n1=7, n2=14, n3=94) articles to be included for closer examination. The selected articles cover a publication period of 30 years, with the majority (about 75%) being published in the past 10 years. The earliest data used in these articles are from 1980, the most recent data from 2019. The subsequent review considers all results that can be found in the articles even when they are not the main interest of the authors.

Results

This section summarizes in three steps the main findings of the 115 articles selected with regards to the object of interest—autonomy: First, I will summarize descriptive insights on the trajectory of autonomy; second, I will present the parameters that influence autonomy within and between societies; and third I will address the outcomes autonomy has been linked to. For easier readability, I will consistently use the term "autonomy," regardless of the item used and the specific operationalization in the respective article, i.e., items like *fatalism* or *powerlessness* are interpreted reversed.

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10 Item only used for robustness check or tests of construct validity.

11 Item reported in operationalization but neither included in tables and graphs nor reported in text (e.g., subsumed as "control variables").

12 Data drawn from population-representative data sets or data from cluster or quota samples where the composition of the sample was compared e.g., with data from the last national census. All aggregate (mostly country) level data drawing on population-representative data sets and official statistics were kept regardless of the number of countries and their geographical distribution.

13 Non-representative samples were mostly convenience samples of college/university students or surveyed through services like MTurk, but also small samples for experimental designs, as well as small samples of special groups, like adolescents with chronic pain, where no information on representativeness was given.

14 In six articles the choice-item was combined with other items from the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction (BPNS) subscale "autonomy," and one article additionally includes a child-appropriate item on time-use (Main, 2014). These articles were included in the review. See Table A1 in the appendix for an overview of the items combined in these papers.

The trajectory of autonomy

In the past 100 years, autonomy has risen sharply around the world and is estimated to continue to rise, but at a slower rate, and not to the same extent for all countries at the same time: In their trend analysis, Nahkur and Taagepera (2021) estimate that currently, countries such as the Ukraine and Russia are about 30 years behind the average global trajectory, whereas countries such as the United States and Finland, but also Colombia and Mexico, are already 20 years ahead of it. This general trend should, however, not be misconstrued as an absolute law of a permanent and all-embracing rise of autonomy. Downward trends in autonomy were found, for example, in Iraq after the US-led occupation (Moaddel et al., 2008), and in various countries around the globe after the financial crisis (Steenekamp et al., 2015). Any developments need not affect all countries equally. In contrast to the majority of countries stricken by the financial crisis, Poland, for instance, even experienced a minimal increase in autonomy from pre- to post-crisis (Antczak & Zaidi, 2019; Steenekamp et al., 2015). Finally, it must be noted that the country level can statistically explain hardly 10% of the variance of autonomy (Hornsey et al., 2019; van Hoorn, 2015). Although sublevels, such as regions and socio-economic strata, also contribute valuable information, most of the variance is due to differences at individual level (van Hoorn, 2015).

The antecedents of individual autonomy

A number of individual characteristics have been identified in the literature that have the potential to influence how much autonomy people perceive to have over their lives. The review starts with a set of standard socio-demographics subdivided into ascriptive and achieved characteristics, continues with the role of relationships and religion and concludes with the influences of values and political orientations.

Ascriptive characteristics

Gender: Existing research is divided roughly equally between studies that show an autonomy deficit to the disadvantage of women and studies that find no gender difference. Part of this divide can be attributed to the fact that gender differences disappear as development progresses. Women were found to perceive less autonomy globally (Acevedo, 2008b; D'Orlando et al., 2011; Kurzman et al., 2019; Ljunge, 2015; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016; Sastry & Ross, 1998; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), in Europe (Symoens et al., 2014), in Chile and Colombia (Acevedo, 2008a), and in Russia (Carlson, 2001). No relationship with gender was found in a cross-national sample of OECD-countries (Yoon, 2015), and in single-country samples in the Netherlands (Stavrova et al., 2016), the United States (Acevedo, 2008a; Kobau et al., 2010; Sastry & Ross, 1998), Mexico and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a), in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019), and for young children in the United Kingdom (Main, 2014). Only in a sample comprised of four East Asian countries and the United States did women report higher levels of autonomy than men (Narisada & Schieman, 2016). A comparison of high- and low-income countries revealed that the gender difference found in the full global sample persisted in the low-income sample, but not in the high-income sample (Pitlik & Rode,

2016). Similarly, Jayachandran (2015) found the male-to-female autonomy ratio to be higher in developing countries than developed, and to approach parity with increasing national wealth.

Age: The relationship between age and autonomy is ambiguous. One possible explanation for the variety of positive, negative, and insignificant findings might be that age is not linearly but curvilinearly related to autonomy. However, the mixed findings—in the case of the USA even for one and the same country– albeit at different times and based on different autonomy items, cast doubt on whether age has an independent effect on autonomy at all, or only proxies for insufficiently or uncontrolled parameters associated with age, such as starting a family, entering a career or retiring. Evidence that autonomy declines with age stems from global samples (Acevedo, 2008b; Sastry & Ross, 1998; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), one smaller Western sample (Jensen et al., 1990), and single-country studies in the Netherlands (Stavrova et al., 2016) and the United States (Sastry & Ross, 1998). The opposite is found to be true in Colombia, Mexico and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a), and in the United States (Kobau et al., 2010). No relationship was found in a European sample (Symoens et al., 2014), a sample comprised of four East Asian countries and the United States (Narisada & Schieman, 2016), single country samples of the United States and Chile (Acevedo, 2008a), as well as in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019). Finally, a u-shaped relationship between age and autonomy indicating higher levels of autonomy in younger and older age was found in cross-national global samples (D'Orlando et al., 2011; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016). However, when separately examined for low-income and high-income countries, the curvilinear age effect remained significant only in high-income countries (Pitlik & Rode, 2016).

Ethnicity and Migration: The scarce evidence on how ethnicity and migration relate to autonomy suggests that any deviation from the norm—being (perceived as) white, being born in your country of residence, the language of your country being your mother tongue—takes a toll on people's autonomy. Ortiz-Hernandez et al. (2020) found that, compared to Mexicans with white skin color, Mexicans with brown skin color and indigenous people perceived less autonomy over their lives, whereas the (admittedly very small) group of afro-descendants did not deviate. In the United States, self-identified Asian and Black Americans reported lower autonomy than White Americans, and so do immigrants—especially when English was not their first language (Sastry & Ross, 1998).

Achieved characteristics

Education: The relationship between education and autonomy is straightforward: Bar one exception, education has consistently been shown to be conducive to individual autonomy. Education was positively related to perceived autonomy globally (Acevedo, 2008b; D'Orlando et al., 2011; Kurzman et al., 2019; Ljunge, 2015; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Sastry & Ross, 1998; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), in the OECD-countries (Yoon, 2015), in a comparison of four East Asian countries and the United States (Narisada & Schieman, 2016), in the United States (Acevedo, 2008a; Kobau et al., 2010; Sastry & Ross, 1998), Mexico (Acevedo, 2008a), the Netherlands (Stavrova et al., 2016), and the Swedish

working population (Shir et al., 2019). Only one study found that in Chile, Colombia and South Africa, education was unrelated to perceived autonomy (Acevedo, 2008a).

Financial security: Existing research is largely univocal on the positive link between financial situation and people's autonomy. With the exception of one small negative correlation in the Netherlands (Stavrova et al., 2016), higher income has consistently been related to more perceived autonomy: globally (Acevedo, 2008b; D'Orlando et al., 2011; Kurzman et al., 2019; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016; Sastry & Ross, 1998; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018); in the OECD-countries (Yoon, 2015); in Europe (Symoens et al., 2014); in a sample comprised of four East Asian countries and the United States (Narisada & Schieman, 2016); in Chile, Colombia, Mexico and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a); the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019); and in the United States (Kobau et al., 2010; Sastry & Ross, 1998). However, one article pointed out that in the United States it is not those with the highest incomes but those with middle incomes who perceive the most autonomy over their lives (Acevedo, 2008a). The impact of the financial situation even transfers to children: In the UK, children who lived in at-risk-of-poverty households and children who experience material deprivation reported lower levels of autonomy (Main, 2014). In addition to objective conditions, financial satisfaction has also been positively associated with autonomy, globally (Lun & Bond, 2016), and in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019).

Employment: Studies consistently show that employment is beneficial while unemployment is detrimental to people's autonomy (at least in affluent societies). While housewives and students relative to employees also perceive their autonomy as limited, the evidence for retirees and part-time workers is unclear. Being employed has been found to be conducive to people's autonomy, globally (Ljunge, 2015; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016; Sastry & Ross, 1998; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), in the OECD-countries (Yoon, 2015), in Europe (Symoens et al., 2014), and in the United States (Sastry & Ross, 1998). Likewise, self-employment has also been shown to be beneficial to autonomy, globally (D'Orlando et al., 2011; Ljunge, 2015; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016) and in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019). Complementarily, being unemployed has been found to be detrimental to autonomy globally (D'Orlando et al., 2011; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Pitlik & Rode, 2016), and for young people in Europe—especially in countries with less inclusive education and low unemployment expenditure (Högberg et al., 2019). In contrast to full-time and self-employment, which foster autonomy in both low- and high-income countries, the negative effect of unemployment that Pitlik and Rode (2016) show in their global sample proved significant only in high-income, but not in low-income countries. Regarding other employment status, Nikolaev and Bennett (2016) found that compared to the employed, people working part-time, retirees, homemakers and students all perceived lower levels of autonomy, whereas D'Orlando et al. (2011) found these negative deviations only for homemakers and students, yet not for part-time workers and retirees (both studies made use of global samples).

Other achieved characteristics: Consistent with the above findings on education and financial well-being, self-reported social class has also been positively associated with

individual autonomy, globally (Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), and in a smaller Western sample (Jensen et al., 1990). Additionally considering age and an urban–rural divide, in a small Western sample Ester and Vinken (1993) found yuppies (young urban professionals) to perceive more autonomy than non-yuppies of any age group, and more than non-yuppies of the same age group in Canada, the United States, the Netherlands and Norway (however, not in France, Spain and West Germany). Finally, individuals' health has also been positively linked to autonomy around the world (D'Orlando et al., 2011; Pitlik & Rode, 2016).

Relationships

Marital status: The link between people's marital status and their autonomy is probably determined more by the nature of the relationship than by its legal state. Unfortunately, there is much more evidence on the latter than, for instance, on autonomy in relation to whether people are actually living together with a partner. One exception is Symoens et al. (2014) *who show for a European sample of married and divorced people that living with a partner is detrimental to autonomy. Moreover, since marital status is operationalized differently in the literature, and reference groups in statistical analyses vary, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about associations with autonomy. In general, an autonomy gradient can be discerned with singles at the top, followed by married people and finally divorced, separated, and widowed people in unclear order.* When compared to everyone else, married people perceived more autonomy over their lives, globally and in the United States (Sastry & Ross, 1998), as well as in a sample comprised of four East Asian countries and the United States (Narisada & Schieman, 2016). The same is true when the married are compared to the group of divorced and widowed (Ljunge, 2015), and the divorced alone, globally (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016). Further, they experienced more autonomy as compared to singles in Mexico (Acevedo, 2008a). However, when compared to singles elsewhere, married people have been shown to experience about equal levels of autonomy, globally (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016) as well as in the United States, Chile and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a), or even lower levels than singles, globally (Acevedo, 2008b; D'Orlando et al., 2011; Verme, 2009), and in Colombia (Acevedo, 2008a). Singles report the same level of autonomy as widowed, and separated individuals, globally (D'Orlando et al., 2011), as the combined group of divorcees or separated, globally (Acevedo, 2008b) and as divorcees alone in the United States, Mexico, Colombia, Chile and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a). However, singles report more autonomy over their lives when compared to the group of divorced and widowed (Ljunge, 2015), as well as to divorcees alone, and to people cohabitating, globally (D'Orlando et al., 2011).

Family and children: The existing evidence on whether and how autonomy is contingent on family and children is too tenuous and contradictory to draw meaningful conclusions. Research on autonomy in different family types is scarce. From descriptive results for a small Western sample it can be cautiously deduced that families with children generally perceive lower levels of autonomy over their lives than singles and couples; while singles and couples do not differ in earlier and later life, couples report higher autonomy in mid-life (Jensen et al., 1990). For children, at least in the United Kingdom, the type of family

(two parents, single parent, step-parent) was found unrelated to autonomy (Main, 2014). It remains unclear, whether people with children generally perceive more or less autonomy over their lives: The associations reported so far vary from positive in a global sample (Acevedo, 2008b), to unrelated, globally (Ljunge, 2015; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016) and in the United States (Sastry & Ross, 1998), and finally to negatively in a sample of married and divorced in Europe (Symoens et al., 2014). Concluding this inconclusive part of autonomy-research, Ljunge (2015) finds in a cross-national global sample that people who believe family to be important and who have stronger family ties report higher levels of autonomy.

Social connectedness: Only two studies addressed how social connections outside the family relate to individuals' autonomy. Social trust has been shown to be beneficial to autonomy globally, however only in high-income, not in low-income countries (Pitlik & Rode, 2016). In Europe—at least among the married and divorced—being socially active and feeling close to the people in one's area was further positively linked to autonomy (Symoens et al., 2014).

Religion and religiosity

Religious denomination: The comparability of the few findings on the role of religion for individual autonomy is complicated by different operationalizations of denominations and the differences in the reference categories. A tentative ranking would see Hindus at the top of the autonomy ranking, followed by atheists, Protestants and Buddhists, and concluding with Catholics, Jews, Muslims and Orthodox. There is some evidence that Protestants perceive more autonomy over their lives, globally, when compared to a not otherwise specified 'non-Christian'-reference category (Ljunge, 2015), and when compared to Catholics in South Africa, but not in the United States, Chile, Colombia and Mexico (Acevedo, 2008a). In the OECD, Protestants together with Buddhists were found to have the same autonomy level as the reference category of atheists (D'Orlando et al., 2011). Orthodox were found to report lower levels of autonomy, globally, compared to the "non-Christians" (Ljunge, 2015) as well as to atheists in the OECD (D'Orlando et al., 2011). While Catholics did not differ in their perceived autonomy from the "non-Christians" (Ljunge, 2015), together with Jews and Muslims they reported lower levels of autonomy than atheists in OECD countries (D'Orlando et al., 2011). The only denomination whose adherents perceived higher levels of autonomy over their lives than atheists was Hinduism (D'Orlando et al., 2011).

Religiosity: In much of the world, there is no relationship between religiosity and autonomy; where it exists, it tends to be positive rather than negative. It must be noted, however, that the regional distribution of positive and negative effects may be an indication that the meaning of religiosity and the resulting effects vary substantially across cultures. Being a religious person was found positively related to autonomy, globally (Acevedo, 2008b; Kurzman et al., 2019; Pitlik & Rode, 2016; Verme, 2009), as well as in Chile and South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a), yet unrelated to autonomy in the United States, Colombia and Mexico (Acevedo, 2008a). While Pitlik and Rode (2016) provided evidence that the positive link between

religiosity and autonomy was only prevalent in high-income countries, Stavrova et al. (2016) found that both are unrelated in most countries (39 out of 72); in the remaining countries, a positive relationship was prevalent more than twice as often (23/72, mostly Africa and Asia) than a negative (10/72, mostly Europe). In comparison: The belief in scientific–technological progress was found to be positively associated with autonomy in 67 out of 72 countries around the world (Stavrova et al., 2016).

Religious behavior. The only indicator of religious behavior reported in the literature is church attendance, which has been linked positively to autonomy globally (Acevedo, 2008b) and in the United States, Chile, and Colombia (Acevedo, 2008a), negatively in Mexico (Acevedo, 2008a), and was found unrelated to autonomy in South Africa (Acevedo, 2008a).

Values, and political orientations

Values: Research shows that people who hold individualistic values and are open to change perceive more autonomy, whereas people who hold collectivistic values and lean towards conservation perceive less autonomy over their lives. People who endorse individualistic values were found to perceive more autonomy over their lives, globally (Verme, 2009), in the OECD (Yoon, 2015) and in Europe (Bobowik et al., 2011). In contrast, individuals' collectivistic values were negatively related to autonomy, globally (Verme, 2009), and in Europe (Bobowik et al., 2011), yet unrelated in the OECD (Yoon, 2015). The latter study further showed that individualistic values were not stronger tied to autonomy in countries with a more individualistic value climate (Yoon, 2015). Consistent with this finding, Narisada and Schieman (2016), too, find a positive relationship between individualistic values and autonomy in a sample comparing the United States and four East Asian countries. While the autonomy differences between Asians and Americans were not explained by differences in individualistic value climates, the positive relationship between individualistic values and individual autonomy was stronger in the Asian countries than in the United States. From Schwartz's universal values, benevolence, self-direction, stimulation and hedonism proved positively, universalism, tradition, conformity, security and power negatively related to autonomy in Europe, whereas achievement was unrelated. In Spain, autonomy was only related positively to self-direction and stimulation, and negatively to security and power (Bobowik et al., 2011).

Political orientations: People who place themselves more to the right on the political left–right scale—and should thus hold more conservative values—were also found to perceive more autonomy about their lives, in the OECD countries (Yoon, 2015). This contradiction could be due to a faulty assumption of causality: Owen et al. (2008) showed that people who deviated from the center ground also report higher levels of autonomy, especially in presidential (compared to parliamentary) systems; the authors suggest that people who perceive more autonomy over their lives might simply be more comfortable to report their minority views.

Country-level conditions of autonomy

This section summarizes the state of research on country characteristics that were associated with the overall societal level of autonomy, grouped by economic, institutional and cultural conditions.

Economic conditions: Research on economic conditions suggests, that at country level, autonomy flourishes in growing and competitive economies with as few constraints as possible and limited welfare. National wealth has been associated positively with overall autonomy levels, globally (C. J. Clark et al., 2014; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015; Sirola & Pitesa, 2018). However, when economic freedom and period (5-year intervals) are controlled for, the relationship was found to turn insignificant (Pitlik & Rode, 2016), or even negative (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016). In a longitudinal perspective, economic development was positively associated with autonomy, over and above the effect of economic freedom (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016). It was further positively related to autonomy in global samples from a cross-sectional perspective (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014; Pitlik & Rode, 2016) and over time (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016). Additionally, the latter study found no evidence for a "paradox-of-choice," i.e., diminishing returns of autonomy from too much economic freedom after a certain point of economic development. However, Pitlik and Rode (2016) found that economic freedom was only linked to autonomy in high-income countries, and to a stronger extent for the lower-income deciles. Nikolaev and Bennett (2016) further showed that from the five areas covered in the Economic Freedom of the World index, effectively only one (sound money) was related to autonomy. In a variety of global samples, overall autonomy was also found to be higher in countries with less labor productivity gains (Li et al., 2017), lower inflation rates (Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015), and with higher income inequality (C. J. Clark et al., 2014). The results on the link between autonomy and unemployment rate are mixed: While Okulicz-Kozaryn (2015) found overall autonomy to be higher when unemployment rates were lower, Nikolaev and Bennett (2016) found overall autonomy to be higher when unemployment rates were higher—unless economic freedom was controlled for, then the relationship turned insignificant. Additionally, in the OECD countries, weaker employment protection legislation related to higher levels of autonomy, while unemployment benefits were unrelated to country-level autonomy (D'Orlando & Ferrante, 2009).

Institutional conditions: Guaranteed human freedoms and (equal) capabilities provide a breeding ground for autonomy, whereas political system and form of government proved inconsequential. Autonomy was in global samples found to be overall higher in countries that guarantee human freedoms, such as freedom of speech and movement, or freedom from violence and threats (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014). Surprisingly, country-level autonomy was also found to be higher in more crime-ridden countries (C. J. Clark et al., 2014). Countries that provide better conditions for human development, overall (Jagodzinski, 2011), and in subdimensions of human development—a long and healthy life (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015), knowledge (D'Orlando & Ferrante, 2009)—achieved overall higher levels of autonomy. However, in Europe the

positive effect of human development was found to be diminishing—an effect possibly driven by the post-communist countries (Jagodzinski, 2011). Globally, the relationship took a u-shaped form, which strongly depended on the European countries, and vanished once cultural zones were controlled for (Jagodzinski, 2011). Though gender equality did not contribute to country-level autonomy, the globally still existing small gender gap in autonomy diminished with increasing gender-equality (Kurzman et al., 2019). Further, the global male-to-female autonomy ratio was found to be more equal in countries with a smaller male–female gap in employment (Jayachandran, 2015). Currently there is no evidence that political system or governance systematically facilitate or constrain autonomy in a country. Country-level autonomy was found to be unrelated to political democracy (Pitlik & Rode, 2016), to voice and accountability, and regime type (C. J. Clark et al., 2014), and to the size of government in the OECD countries (Yoon, 2015). No differences in autonomy were further detected between majoritarian and proportion electoral systems, or between parliamentary and presidential systems (Owen et al., 2008).

Cultural conditions: Current research suggests that societies that embrace post-materialist and individualistic values promote autonomy; two isolated research findings further point to an autonomy advantage for Protestant countries, and for countries characterized by smaller families. Country-level autonomy was found to be higher globally in more post-materialist societies (Jagodzinski, 2011; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014), as well as in more individualistic societies around the globe (Sirola & Pitesa, 2018), and in the OECD countries (Yoon, 2015), and to be lower in more collectivistic countries (Yoon, 2015). This link has even been traced back to the Neolithic revolution: Olsson and Paik (2016) found in a larger sample of Western countries that countries and regions that adopted agriculture at a later point in time still exhibit higher levels of autonomy to this day compared to countries and regions that settled earlier and up until now are more collectivistic and value obedience more. However, there is also evidence for a u-shaped relationship between collectivism-individualism and autonomy, globally (Jagodzinski, 2011), and for a null zero-order association of autonomy and individualism in a smaller global sample (Hornsey et al., 2019). Country-level autonomy was further found unrelated to Hofstede's value dimensions masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Hornsey et al., 2019), and to the autonomy subdimension of the self-expression values (Jagodzinski, 2011). Regarding dominant denomination around the globe, Acevedo (2008b) found that compared to Protestant countries, country-level autonomy is lower in countries whose populace is predominantly Muslim, Eastern-European Muslim, or Greek orthodox, and higher in countries where people are predominantly Catholic. However, the high autonomy levels of Catholic countries might result from the overall high autonomy-levels in Latin America, whereas the low levels of Muslim countries, which differ considerably in their levels of autonomy, are driven by three outlier countries (Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey). When they are excluded, predominantly Muslim countries in Eastern Europe take the last place. Finally, regarding dominant family type worldwide, Rijpma and Carmichael (2016) found that autonomy is

overall higher in countries characterized by nuclear and stem families compared to countries characterized by extended families.

Outcomes of autonomy

The majority of articles reporting on outcomes of autonomy look at well-being and health, followed by, in descending order, economic outcomes, elements of civic culture, values and attitudes and beacons of a peaceful culture.

Autonomy and well-being

Individual autonomy is consistently and positively associated with different forms of well-being—on an individual and country level, in different world regions, and in different segments of the population.

Life satisfaction. A multitude of studies finds a positive relationship between individual autonomy and life satisfaction for the general population in cross-national global samples (Beja, 2014a; Delhey, 2010; Greenaway et al., 2015; Jagodzinski, 2011; Musson & Rousselière, 2020; Ngamaba, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015; Stavrova et al., 2016; Verme, 2009; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), in a European sample (Sørensen, 2014), a Western sample (Eichhorn, 2013), and one sample comprised of four East Asian countries and the United States—the relationship being somewhat stronger in the US and China than in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Narisada & Schieman, 2016). Further, a positive relationship has been found in a number of single-country studies: in Australia (Vinson & Ericson, 2014), China (Abbott, Wallace, Lin, et al., 2016; Brockmann et al., 2009; Steele & Lynch, 2013), Luxembourg (Pénard et al., 2013) and in the Netherlands (Stavrova et al., 2016). The positive autonomy-life satisfaction link has also been found in a variety of samples limited to a specific part of the population, viz. globally in the group of married women (Beja, 2014b), in the European working-age population (Orlowski & Wicker, 2015), the elderly in Europe (Karim et al., 2015), in a Western sample of at-risk youth (Kelley & Stack, 2000), the working population in Sweden (Shir et al., 2019), and in the group of emerging adult internal migrants in China (Xia & Ma, 2020). Over and above the individual level, autonomy and life satisfaction are also positively related on a country level globally, both cross-sectionally (Domínguez & López-Noval, 2021; Jagodzinski, 2011; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015) and over time (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010).

Even though autonomy and life satisfaction have been found to be positively associated in both emerging and industrialized economies (Beja, 2014a), as well as in low-, middle- and high-income countries (Beja, 2014b; Delhey, 2010), there is some evidence that the relationship is stronger in more affluent (Delhey, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2020), more modern, and higher developed societies (Delhey, 2010), and less straightforward in less affluent societies (Beja, 2014b), where the relationships have been found to be stronger when income inequality is higher (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Happiness: The positive relationship between autonomy and happiness has been shown for the general population in cross-national global samples (Greenaway et al., 2015; Ngamaba, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020), in a comparison of East Asian countries and the

United States (Narisada & Schieman, 2016), as well as in single-country studies in Australia (Vinson & Ericson, 2014), the Czech Republic (van Ophem et al., 2016), Luxembourg (Pénard et al., 2013), and the Netherlands (van Ophem et al., 2016). Further evidence stems from studies on subpopulations like the European elderly (Karim et al., 2015), the self-employed (Kara & Petrescu, 2018) in Europe, at-risk youth in Western countries (Kelley & Stack, 2000), and the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019). The positive autonomy-happiness link has also been shown on a (global) country level (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; Domínguez & López-Noval, 2021).

Studies on country differences regarding the connection between autonomy and happiness are currently rare. An exception is the study by Nguyen et al. (2020) who find autonomy to be more strongly associated with happiness in more affluent societies, and within the poorer countries in more unequal societies. Additional evidence is provided by Kara and Petrescu (2018) who find a weaker link between autonomy and happiness in more individualistic societies—yet only for the group of self-employed.

Further well-being measures: Adding to the above presented research findings, Lun and Bond (2016) found a positive link between autonomy and subjective well-being measured as a combination of life satisfaction and happiness in a global cross-national sample both on an individual and country level. Making use of the WHO-5 well-being index, Maguire et al. showed a positive relationship between individual autonomy and well-being in frequent caregivers (2019) and the chronically, yet not severely limited, ill (2021); both studies are based on a cross-national European sample. Mentus (2020) also found a positive association between autonomy and the WHO-5 index in the general population of Serbia, which upon closer examination, however, holds only for men and only for the age group 25–44 years. Investigating students' online need satisfaction in China, Wang et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between both online and offline autonomy and students' well-being, measured as a combined index of life satisfaction and affects. Finally, individual autonomy has also been shown to relate positively to vitality in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019), and to flourishing in the New Zealand working population (Hone et al., 2015).

Autonomy and health

The relationships between autonomy and health on individual and country level differ: Individual autonomy is associated with better self-rated physical and mental health and better health behavior. Country-level autonomy is linked to better overall health, but also to a variety of lifestyle diseases and self-endangering behaviors.

Health and health behavior: Individual autonomy has been linked to better self-rated health of the general population in cross-national samples globally (Greenaway et al., 2015; Lun & Bond, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020) and in Europe (Karim et al., 2015), as well as in single-country studies in Bulgaria (Todorova & Todorov, 2006), in Russia (Carlson, 2001; Rose, 2000), and the Ukraine (Gilmore et al., 2002). The same positive relationship was found in Bangladeshi men—yet a negative one for Bangladeshi women—(Tareque et al., 2015), and in the group of emerging adult migrants in China (Xia & Ma, 2020).

Beyond health ratings, individual autonomy has also been found to relate negatively with alcohol consumption in Russia (Carlson, 2001). Regarding country differences, the positive link between autonomy and health was found to be stronger in more affluent societies, and—within the group of less affluent—stronger in countries with a higher level of income inequality (Nguyen et al., 2020).

On a country level, autonomy is found to be related with better overall (reported) health globally (Lun & Bond, 2016). Two studies linked autonomy to specific causes of death, but only in very small samples of Western countries: Lynch et al. (2001) and Muntaner et al. (2002) find country-level autonomy positively associated with coronary heart disease, death by unintentional injury in the elderly and lung cancer in women, yet unrelated to mortality in general, life-expectancy, and overall self-rated health. Investigating direct and intergenerational cultural transmission of autonomy, Grytten et al. (2013) found that migrant mothers in Norway have a greater probability of having a voluntary caesarean-section when the autonomy level in their country of origin is higher, whereas Ljunge (2014) finds no evidence that the subjective health ratings of second-generation migrants in Europe are influenced by the overall level of autonomy in their mothers' countries of birth.

Mental health: Research on the relationship between individual autonomy and mental health is more dispersed. Starting with positive outcomes, individual autonomy has been linked *positively* with self-rated emotional health in Russia (Rose, 2000), with mental well-being of young adults in Australia (Delbosc & Vella-Brodrick, 2015), with self-esteem, optimism and social relationships of Europe's older adults (Karim et al., 2015) and with the social integration of younger adult migrants in China (Xia & Ma, 2020). Following up with negative outcomes, individual autonomy has been found to be *negatively* associated with psychological distress globally, yet to a lesser extent for Asians (Sastry & Ross, 1998), with depression and anxiety in the United States (Sastry & Ross, 1998) and in older adults in Europe (Karim et al., 2015), and with perceived stress and mental illness in the group of young adult migrants in China (Xia & Ma, 2020).

On a country level, younger adults in Europe tend more to live every day as it comes instead of planning far ahead into the future when they live in a society that exhibits an overall higher level of autonomy—a relationship that does not exist on an individual level (Hellevik & Settersten Jr, 2013). Finally, whilst Muntaner et al. (2002) find no relationship between country-level autonomy and suicide rates in their (rather small) Western sample, Eckersley and Dear (2002) find a positive relationship between autonomy and male youth suicide rates on country level.

Autonomy and economic outcomes

Current research suggests that individuals with more autonomy are more satisfied with their jobs, save more money and achieve higher incomes. They are more likely to go into business for themselves and don't mind job insecurity as much. Countries with overall higher levels of autonomy overall show better macroeconomic outcomes and developments.

Job: In a smaller global sample, autonomy has been found positively related to job satisfaction, both on an individual and country level, and this relationship is stronger in countries with an overall higher level of autonomy (Feldman et al., 2018). However, there is evidence from New Zealand that autonomy only contributes meaningfully to the job satisfaction of people in professional jobs (Hamling et al., 2015). Further, two global studies showed that autonomy is linked to a greater propensity of being an entrepreneur or self-employed (Ruiu, 2018) and to set a lower value on job security as an important aspect of work (D'Orlando et al., 2011).

Saving and income: Autonomy has been linked to individual saving behavior, globally (Gneezy et al., 2020; Ruiu, 2018; Wu, 2005), as well as to higher income in Pakistan (Mumtaz, Javed, et al., 2019; Mumtaz, Malik, et al., 2019).

Macroeconomics: On a country level, autonomy is globally positively linked with stronger financial development (Klein & Klein, 2017), current economic development—yet not economic growth (Tabellini, 2010)—and with the duration of expansion, i.e., the phase when GDP grows, in Europe (Altug & Canova, 2014). Further, autonomy was associated with the size of the mutual fund industry in Western countries (Dragotă et al., 2016). However, country-level autonomy is negatively associated with growth of labor productivity (Li et al., 2017).

Autonomy and civic culture

A number of studies showed that autonomy is conducive to social trust and—although less consistently—to political participation, but largely unrelated to the support of institutions and democracy in general.

Social trust: In global cross-national samples a positive relationship between individual autonomy and social trust was found for in-group members, yet not on a country level (Lun & Bond, 2016). Individual autonomy was also positively linked to trust in strangers—however, only in countries of at least medium level of human empowerment and only when well-being and trust in known people is not controlled for (Almakaeva et al., 2018). A similar positive association was found for autonomy and generalized social trust in older adults in Europe (Karim et al., 2015), yet not for the general population in Western Europe (Tabellini, 2010).

Civic engagement: Although, overall, a positive relationship between autonomy and engagement emerges, the evidence is rather mixed in detail. Fukuzawa and Inamasu (2020) find that autonomy increases the odds of participating in any kind of collective action in Korea and Taiwan, yet not in Japan or the West. Closer examination revealed that the autonomy–participation link was positive only when political interest (Korea) or income (Japan) were low; in Germany, autonomy was even found to have a negative impact on participation when education was high. In contrast, Marchenko (2014) found a positive impact of autonomy on her encompassing measure of civic engagement (composed of organization membership, volunteer work, collective action, concern for other citizens, and institutional trust) in Europe. Mixing and matching various types of collective action, Corcoran et al. (2015), Omelicheva and Ahmed (2018), and Šarkutė

(2017) generally confirm this positive relationship, yet inconsistently: Participation in what Corcoran et al. (2015) call low- and medium-cost political action (petitions, boycotts, and demonstrations) has been shown to be positively related with individual autonomy globally (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018) and in Europe in the early 2000s, yet unrelated (boycott) or even negatively related (petition, demonstration) in Europe in the early 2010s (Šarkutė, 2017). Participation in high-cost political action (occupations and striking) are found to be positively associated with autonomy in a global sample—striking more consistently than occupations (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018). However, in the European sample high-cost political action and autonomy are found to be unrelated, unless individuals perceive social inequality as structural injustice, in which case the relationship turns positive (Corcoran et al., 2015). While individual autonomy relates negatively (yet again, inconsistently) to voting intention globally (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018), it relates positively to past voting behavior in Europe (Šarkutė, 2017). Last but not least, being a member in a political party (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018) and working in a political party or organization are positively linked to individual autonomy (Šarkutė, 2017). However, this does not extend to religious organizations: In a global sample, individuals with higher autonomy were found to be more likely to not participate in a religious organization than to even passively participate (Sønderskov, 2011).

Regime support: The relationship between autonomy and regime support is largely absent. With the exception of a positive association with trust in the communist party in China (Su et al., 2015), and a negative association with nostalgia towards the past communist system in Russia (Munro, 2006), autonomy has been found unrelated to support for democracy in Romania (Dragoman, 2012) and Slovenia (Stebe, 2013), and to satisfaction with democracy in Slovenia (Stebe, 2013).

Autonomy, attitudes and values

The evidence on values and attitudes paints a clear picture: Autonomy was positively linked to both personal and economic freedoms, i.e., to secular-rational and self-expression values, and to economic liberalism.

Socio-cultural attitudes and values: At global level, high-autonomy societies were found to be less tight regarding morally debatable behavior, like abortion or suicide, as well as regarding attitudes towards work, family and religion (Uz, 2015). Concurrently, individual autonomy has been linked positively to permissiveness towards euthanasia (Verbakel & Jaspers, 2010), and negatively to gender-stereotyping—especially for people who construe themselves as interdependent instead of independent (Ma et al., 2019). Autonomy was shown to relate positively to cosmopolitism, and negatively to xenocentrism and neuroticism in the United States and Canada (Cleveland & Balakrishnan, 2019), yet not at all to prejudice against immigrants in Europe (Greenaway et al., 2014), and Islamic fundamentalist attitudes among youth in Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Moaddel & Karabenick, 2008).

Further, in European countries with overall higher levels of autonomy, managers were found to put a stronger emphasis on creativity-promoting values (Hoegl et al., 2012). No

relationship was found between autonomy and environmental attitudes within the Christian community in Europe (Petrescu-Mag et al., 2020).

Economic attitudes and values: In cross-national global samples, individual autonomy has been linked to a preference for individual over governmental responsibility in ensuring everyone is provided for—particularly in countries with low corruption (Kay et al., 2008)—and to the attribution of individuals' success to hard work alone, irrespective of luck and connections (Sirola & Pitesa, 2018). Along the same lines, individual autonomy was also found negatively related to preferences for income redistribution in Egypt (El Rafhi & Volle, 2020), and positively to a meritocratic worldview and the inclination to underestimate existing inequalities in US society (Aldama et al., 2021). This latter relationship between autonomy and perceived inequality in society is partly mediated by the belief that the current economic system is fair (Aldama et al., 2021).

Autonomy and a national culture of peace

The few studies that investigate a relationship between autonomy and structural and personal violence provide mixed findings from which no clear conclusion can be drawn.

Culture of peace: In cross-national global samples, country-level autonomy was negatively related to corruption (Mornah & Macdermott, 2018), and positively associated with liberal development, comprising inter alia freedom of press, human rights, literacy, and gender equality, but also with violent inequality, capturing income inequality, homicide rates and human rights violations (Basabe & Valencia, 2007). Regarding direct violence alone, country-level autonomy has been found unrelated to the homicide rates in Western countries (Muntaner et al., 2002), and with the ratio of suicides to the total amount of suicide and homicides globally (Stack & Laubepin, 2017).

Autonomy as moderator and mediator

This last section of the review provides an overview on all studies that investigated autonomy as a moderator or mediator. The limited evidence on autonomy as moderator is mixed with autonomy dampening both positive and negative influences on well-being yet dampening negative and strengthening positive effects on health. As mediator, autonomy carries at least partially the positive effects of a variety of health and well-being determinants.

Autonomy as a moderator: For a global sample, Welzel and Inglehart (2010) show that the relevance of monetary saturation for life satisfaction decreases when people experience more autonomy. Eichhorn (2013) finds in a European sample that in countries with overall higher levels of autonomy, unemployment had a less detrimental effect on life satisfaction. On an individual level (UK), perceived terror threats were found related to prejudice against migrants only when people perceived their own autonomy as low (Greenaway et al., 2014). In the sample of early adult migrants in China, a dampening and an enhancing effect were observed: While autonomy dampened the mental illness-enhancing effect of perceived stress, it enhanced the alleviating effect of social integration on perceived stress (Xia & Ma, 2020).

Autonomy as a mediator: Autonomy has been found to fully mediate the negative effect of social position on health in the Ukraine (Gilmore et al., 2002). Partial mediations were further found in cross-national global samples for the positive relationship between group identification—be it with the local community, the nation or the world—and well-being (Greenaway et al., 2015), and for the positive effect of belief in science and technology on life satisfaction (Stavrova et al., 2016). Additionally, differences in self-rated health and in happiness among Mexicans of different skin color and ethnicity were shown to be partly explained by individual autonomy (Ortiz-Hernandez et al., 2020). Individual autonomy was further found to explain some of the positive relationship between transport independence of Australian young people and their well-being (Delbosc & Vella-Brodrick, 2015), as well as more than 40% of the positive relationship between entrepreneurship and well-being in the Swedish working population (Shir et al., 2019). On a country level, autonomy mediates between actual freedoms (including, for example, civil liberties, economic freedoms, number of newspapers) and happiness in Europe (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014).

Summary

Not only autonomy itself, but also the scientific interest in autonomy has increased over the past 30 years, probably not least because of better data availability. This review has focused on findings from analyses that made use of one of three autonomy items with the objective of identifying the individual- and country-level parameters influencing autonomy and the outcomes autonomy is associated with.

Conclusion number one: *The evidence derived from the research on autonomy is not as consistent as one might wish.*

This is in part because some contexts and associations are under-researched, but to a greater part because of the limited comparability of the findings. Besides the discrepancies that might arise from comparing data across time or world regions, it is especially the different operationalizations of independent variables, the choice of reference categories, and the inclusion of control variables that affect comparability between different studies. Nonetheless, some of the reviewed relationships have proven surprisingly consistent, and are therefore (briefly) recapitulated.

Conclusion number two: *Autonomy makes people happier and healthier.*

- With unparalleled consistency, research has linked autonomy to life satisfaction, happiness and other forms of subjective well-being.
- Based on slightly less evidence, but still fairly consistent, autonomy goes hand in hand with better physical and mental health.

Studies investigating the relationship between autonomy and measures of subjective well-being and health make up more than 40% of the reviewed articles, which makes these not only the most consistent but above all the most scientifically substantiated findings. The close relationship of perceived autonomy and life satisfaction even led Verme (2009) to test whether they were not simply proxies for each other; they were not. Societies that aim to maximize the well-being of their citizens should therefore also

strive to provide people with opportunities and to enable them to exercise freedom of choice in and over their lives. One possibility to do so would be to make use of the possible mediating effect of autonomy with regards to health and well-being: By improving the conditions of autonomy that can be influenced by policy, one increases the autonomy of people, which in turn has a positive effect on their health and well-being. Conveniently, the main determinants of individual autonomy are also known to improve health and subjective well-being (Dolan et al., 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), which leads to the next conclusion:

Conclusion number three: *Individual autonomy is vertically structured.*

- Whether education, financial security or employment, people with a better position in society—and thus more resources—also have more autonomy over their lives.

To increase people's autonomy and thereby also improve their health and well-being, policymakers should direct their attention first to improvements in education as it provides the foundation of later employment and financial security—there is some evidence in favor of a longer duration of education, i.e., more years of schooling (D'Orlando & Ferrante, 2009), with less educational tracking, a stronger focus on general than vocational education, and more inclusive access to second-chance education (Högberg et al., 2019). With regards to unemployment, the limited evidence suggests more effort should be directed towards inclusion policies: Higher labor market policy expenditure proved not only beneficial to the autonomy of young unemployed adults but also alleviated the negative effects of unemployment on their well-being (Högberg et al., 2019). The current research clearly suggests that higher income comes with more autonomy, yet remains largely unclear on how much of this effect is relative, i.e., relates more to people's social position in society than to the amount of their resources. However, there are some indications that autonomy gains by income (Acevedo, 2008a, 2008b; Nikolaev & Bennett, 2016), and economic freedom (Pitlik & Rode, 2016) are much larger at the lower end of the income distribution than at the top. Further, financial insecurity not only impairs the autonomy of the adult earners, but also of the dependent children. Policies should thus focus especially on improving the living conditions of the lower income strata. How this can best be done—for instance by setting or raising minimum wage, universal basic income, or targeted child support—will have to be determined by future research.

The last main finding of this review relates to both conditions and outcomes of autonomy: Conclusion number four: *Autonomy needs and breeds freedom.*

- Autonomy thrives on freedom: It flourishes in booming economies with little constraints and limited welfare, in countries that guarantee human freedoms and provide opportunities for development, and in postmaterialistic societies that embrace individualism.
- People who hold more individualistic values perceive more autonomy over their lives—however, people who perceive more autonomy also endorse self-expression values, begging the question of the chicken and the egg.

- Not only do people who feel autonomous over their lives advocate economic liberalism, but they actually perceive society as less unequal than it is, and as others see it.

These findings of freedom-enabling autonomy and autonomy promoting freedom-supporting values are in line with the general notion of human empowerment theory (Welzel, 2013) and would explain why autonomy has increased so strongly in the past century and is presumed to increase further. So far, research on the relationship between values or value climates and autonomy has been mainly focused on individualistic and emancipative values and conveyed pleasant prospects of the future: tolerant and diverse societies, full of opportunities for individual self-fulfillment. What has been largely overlooked so far is that autonomy is not only linked to the pursuit of more freedom for self-expression but also with the liberation of the economy from state constraints and the liberation of the state from its welfare responsibilities. This raises the question of whether everybody will benefit from rising freedom, or whether some will be left behind. The preliminary findings suggest that economic freedom overall leads to more autonomy, but it remains unclear whether growing income inequality and weakened worker protection really help to increase the autonomy of those who already have less autonomy over their lives due to low education, low income or unemployment. This is an important question for future research.

Some of the reviewed relationships are considered in a larger body of literature but allow at best for crude conclusions mainly due to differences in model specifications, operationalization, choice of control variables and reference categories. To create clarity, future research should pay closer attention to the following relationships.

- Gender. The mix of positive and non-effects raises two questions: At what point of economic or human development do gender differences in autonomy vanish? What individual parameters explain gender differences?
- Age. Regarding age, all possible effects were reported, and research should investigate whether these differences stem from age proxying for other unmeasured covariates (and which) or whether age effects vary across cultures — or both.
- Family. Due to the sheer endless combinations of marital status, with or without children, it is close to impossible to draw any conclusions on the significance of family for autonomy. Future research should desist from the legal marital status and question why family would influence autonomy and thus take a closer look, for instance, at living arrangements, age of children or larger family networks as a support system.
- Civic engagement. Despite the general positive relationship, future research should take a closer look on whether and why civic engagement varies by autonomy, both for forms of engagement and its content.

Three further aspects need addressing in future research: Up until now, very few studies consider ethnicity and migration status even as a control variable; the two studies that do, show that these categories hold valuable information for our understanding of

individual autonomy. More research is further needed on how autonomy is shaped through relationships outside the home, with friends, coworkers or neighbors, and how in turn individual autonomy influences how trusting people are, and whom they trust.

Research gaps addressed in this dissertation

The gaps addressed in this dissertation relate to the determinants of autonomy—both on a country and individual level—as well as to the moderating role of autonomy in shaping the effects of capabilities on well-being.

The literature review identified studies on a bouquet of economic, cultural and institutional conditions on a country level with the potential to enhance individuals' scope of opportunity and thus their autonomy. However, the majority of these studies address only one, seldom two, of the aspects of human development. Additionally, most of these studies are based on heterogeneous global samples covering countries at various stages of development, which raises the question of whether these factors continue to enhance people's autonomy in regions that have already reached a high level of human development. To answer this question, paper 1 of this dissertation adds to the existing research an analysis of autonomy-enhancing factors from all three spheres of human development and over four points in time for a sample of countries characterized by a high level of human development.

On an individual level, autonomy has been identified as vertically structured, yet not systematically with regard to relative strength of vertical factors to each other and to horizontal parameters, such as gender and family, for which the existing research evidence is overall inconsistent. Further, there are indications that the role of these means and conversion factors changes with proceeding human development. Investigating a wide range of vertical and horizontal parameters, paper 1 adds to this so far mixed evidence an analysis of the influence the means and conversion factors have on individuals' perceived autonomy in Europe. The analysis of four survey waves as well as the combination of cross-national analyses with single-country analyses allows identifying which of the means and conversion factors contribute most strongly to individuals' autonomy and show consistent effects across time and across countries.

In terms of outcomes, previous research has consistently shown that autonomy is positively related to well-being. However, very little is yet known about how autonomy interacts with other potentially well-being-enhancing functionings. Only one of the reviewed studies investigates such a relationship, showing that the effect between financial security and well-being is weaker when people have high autonomy over their lives. For other basic functionings, such as health or safety, such analyses are, however, currently missing.

Papers 2 and 3 both address this issue, the former for adults, the latter for children. Proposing that autonomy—over and above its intrinsic value for people's well-being—has an instrumental value for people in that it enables the achievement of capabilities, paper 2 examines the impact of autonomy on the relationship between functionings and individuals' life satisfaction; the assumption being that the well-being of people with

little autonomy over their lives is impaired more strongly by a lack in basic functionings than the well-being of people with high levels of autonomy. Paper 2 adds a comprehensive analysis of the dampening effect of autonomy on the relevance of six basic functionings for individuals' life satisfaction. Paper 3 adds the view of children, who are often excluded when research addresses "the society" and when theory addresses the "active agent." Similar to the interactions in paper 2, paper 3, examines how children's satisfaction with their role as agents influences the relationship between one basic functioning—safety—and their life satisfaction. This allows for the first time to shed light on whether the theoretically assumed dampening effect of autonomy on the relationship between functionings and well-being also holds for actors who are not (yet) fully autonomous.

4 Research design

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the three individual-level data sources used in this dissertation and introduce the items used to operationalize autonomy and agency satisfaction. Subsequently, I describe, paper by paper, how the assumptions derived from the theory and the research gaps identified translate into a research strategy that contributes to answering two main questions: Which individual and contextual conditions promote and which restrain individual autonomy? Does individual autonomy explain the disparity in the strength with which a basic functioning affects life satisfaction? Table 1 concludes this section with a summary of the main objectives, data, and methods used in each of the papers.

The data

For individual-level data, I draw on three different cross-national surveys: the EQLS (wave 3 and wave 4), the ESS (wave 3 and wave 6), and the ISCWeB (wave 2).[15] The first two are established surveys monitoring the values, attitudes, and well-being of the European adult population; the third is the first cross-national survey to be concerned specifically with the living conditions and well-being of children.

The EQLS is conducted on behalf of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), an EU agency. So far, four survey waves have been conducted (2003, 2007, 2011, and 2016), targeting members of the adult population (aged 18 and older) who usually live[16] in a private residence in the country where the survey is conducted and have sufficient language skills to answer the questionnaire (EQLS, 2013, p. 3; Eurofound, 2018a, p. 31). A multistage stratified sampling procedure is applied to achieve a representative sample of the target population. Every individual who meets the sampling criteria and is selected by a probabilistic within-household selection procedure, such as the kish grid or birthday method, has a non-zero probability of being included in the sample (Eurofound, 2013a, p. 13). Nonetheless, in some waves, the EQLS data deviate from the census data regarding both individual and household characteristics: single-member households are overrepresented in most of the EQLS samples and younger people are underrepresented—a problem that most larger surveys, like the ESS, also face (Eurofound, 2018a, pp. 25-26). The response rate in the EQLS is moderate, with vast

15 The fieldwork periods of the survey waves were August 21, 2006–November 5, 2007 (ESS 3), August 14, 2012–December 20, 2013 (ESS 6), September 19, 2011–July 25, 2012 (EQLS 3), September 5, 2016–March 3, 2017 (EQLS 4), and winter 2013–spring 2014 (ISCWeb 2).

16 A usual residence is defined as the place where people usually sleep, which is not necessarily their legal address (EQLS, 2013, p. 3).

differences between countries,[17] and, like other larger surveys, such as the ESS and the ISSP, the EQLS suffers from declining response rates (Jabkowski & Kołczyńska, 2020, p. 200). The EQLS includes the countries of the current EU-27 as well as a range of non-EU countries: Albania, Iceland, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. In all these countries, interviews are conducted in the form of computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPIs) (Eurofound, 2018b, p. 30). The EQLS monitors the objective circumstances of Europeans' lives and their subjective evaluation of their living conditions and well-being (Eurofound, 2013a, p. 4; 2018b, p. 1). For the purposes of this dissertation, the EQLS is a particular valuable data source for two reasons: the first, and most important, is that the two latest waves contain a measure of autonomy; the second is that its broad interest in people's everyday lives, how they are doing, and what they are doing makes it a unique source for the investigation of human functionings and their association with people's evaluation of their lives.

The ESS is an academically driven survey, funded by the European Commission, the European Science Foundation, and national funding bodies (ESS, 2018[2006], p. 7; 2018[2012], p. 8). The survey was first conducted in 2002 and has since been conducted every 2 years, accumulating nine survey waves at this point (Koch, 2016, p. 2). The ESS's target population is "all persons aged 15 and over resident within private households, regardless of their nationality, citizenship, language or legal status" (ESS, 2018[2012], p. 8). To achieve a representative sample of this population, the ESS specifies strict rules for the sampling procedure, such as stratified multistage probability sampling, a maximum non-contact rate of 3%, and a 70% response rate in each country (ESS, 2012, pp. 1, 5-6). The ESS allows kish grid methods as well as birthday methods for the selection of the household member who is to be interviewed. These specifications ensure that individuals of the same strata have the same probability of inclusion in the sample (ESS, 2018, pp. 10-12).

The achieved response rates of the ESS are higher than those of the EQLS, yet only a few countries actually achieve the target response rate of 70% (ESS, 2021a, 2021b).[18] Higher response rates are generally associated with better representation of the target population in the data; however, they cannot fully compensate for unit response biases, like the overrepresentation of women and married people, which also exists to some

17 The overall response rate of the fourth wave was 37% (34% in the EU-28; 63% in the non-EU countries); Sweden had the lowest response rate with 16% and Montenegro the highest with 69% (Eurofound, 2018b, pp. 76-77). In the third wave, the response rate was 41% in the EU-27 countries and 45% in non-EU countries; the lowest response rate was in Luxembourg with 15%, and the highest was in Kosovo with 89% (Eurofound, 2013b, p. 25).

18 Across countries, the average response rate was 63% in the third wave and 62% in the sixth wave of the ESS, with country-specific response rates varying from as low as 46% in France (third wave) and 34% in Germany (sixth wave) to 73% in Slovakia (third wave) and 79% in Albania (sixth wave). The target of a 70% response rate was achieved in 20% of countries in the third wave and 28% of countries in the sixth (ESS, 2021a, 2021b).

extent in the ESS (Koch, 2016, pp. 9, 12). The ESS includes both EU and non-EU countries; the third wave covers 25 and the sixth wave 29 European countries. Depending on the country, both computer-assisted personal interviews and paper and pencil interviews are conducted (ESS, 2018[2006], 2018[2012]). In addition to the core module of the ESS, which encompasses the main interests of the survey—the attitudes and values of the European public and their relation with national and European institutions—as well as a broad range of socio-demographic information, each ESS wave includes a rotating module on a specific theme. In the third and sixth rounds, the rotating module focused on personal and social well-being, including a question on individuals' perceived autonomy over their lives. Since both the ESS and the EQLS survey ask about autonomy in similar ways (see below) and include a wide range of comparable socio-demographic characteristics and individual resources, combining the data sets lends itself to an examination of the individual means and conversion factors influencing autonomy at different points in time and thus to the identification of the key determinants that have relevance across countries as well as the uncovering of differences between countries.

The ISCWeB is a survey project initiated by the International Society for Child Indicators, which, like the ESS, is realized through the collaboration of national research teams. The second wave of the ISCWeB was funded by the Jacobs Foundation (ISCWeB, 2021a). The survey was first conducted in 2011–2012 in 14 countries around the world and has since been repeated twice: the second wave, conducted in 2013–2014, already included 21 countries,[19] and the third wave, for which data collection started in 2017, so far extends to 35 countries (Dinisman & Rees, 2014, pp. 2-3; ISCWeB, 2021a, 2021b).

The target population of the ISCWeB consists of children aged between 6 and 14, who are grouped into three categories (8, 10, and 12 years old). The age categories have different questionnaires that differ in the length and sophistication of the scales (ISCWeB, 2015, pp. 1-2; Rees & Main, 2015, p. 18). As school attendance is mandatory for children in these age groups in all the participating countries, the surveys are conducted through mainstream schools. To achieve a representative sample of children, multiple stratification strategies are used to account for factors like region, population density, and type of school, depending on the countries' specific contexts. The administration of the survey varies: in most countries, research teams administer the paper-based surveys themselves on site, whereas, in some countries, the survey is set up online. For the youngest age group (8 years old), the option is given for teachers or researchers to read the questions aloud (Rees & Main, 2015, pp. 16-18). To ensure high data quality, cases are excluded when children deviate from the target group by more than 2 years, when the item non-response exceeds 25%, and when systematic response patterns are detected. In the second wave of the survey, this procedure resulted in the exclusion of 6% of the age group of 8 year olds and 3% of the other two age groups (Rees & Main, 2015, p. 18).

[19] At the time when paper 3 was submitted for review, only 16 countries were available.

The ISCWeB survey is the first internationally comparative survey of children's own views on their lives that covers a broad scope of topics. Beyond socio-demographic parameters, such as gender, age, and living situation, the study asks about attitudes, satisfaction, and behavior regarding different topics, like economic circumstances, family and friends, and personal well-being. As the ISCWeB further includes a measure of children's agency satisfaction even for the youngest age group, it provides a unique possibility to investigate the interplay between functioning, agency, and life satisfaction for actors with limited autonomy.

Operationalizing autonomy

As described in Chapter three, the EQLS and the ESS use a similar item to capture individuals' perceived autonomy—*I feel I am free to decide (for myself) how to live my life*—which has been used in various studies to operationalize autonomy (see for instance Hamling et al., 2015; Hone et al., 2015; Kara & Petrescu, 2018; Maguire et al., 2019, 2021). The item was adopted from the basic psychological need satisfaction scale (La Guardia et al., 2000) for the personal and social well-being module of the ESS (ESS, 2013, p. 13) and has been part of the EQLS core questionnaire since 2011 (Eurofound, 2016, p. 16).

I prefer this item to the more frequently used EVS/WVS item—*Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them*—for three reasons. The first reason relates to the question design: the EVS/WVS item is a double-barreled question asking people about the choice and control that they perceive over their lives, which causes uncertainty about the aspect (choice or control) to which people are referring. Following the assumptions of the paradox of choice, further, it is conceivable that people experience a large amount of freedom of choice in their lives but feel that they have little control over what happens to them or have little freedom of choice but still feel in control of their lives. The ESS module therefore explicitly differentiates between autonomy and control (asked as separate questions) as they have been shown empirically to capture distinct concepts (ESS, 2013, pp. 13-14). With regard to scaling, the EVS/WVS would clearly be preferable because its 10-point scale allows for finer nuances in respondents' evaluations than the 5-point scales specified by the ESS and EQLS. However, this advantage must be weighed against the known disadvantages of 10-point scales, such as ten-over-nine excess (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2017) and midpoint misperceptions (Zigerell, 2011).

The second reason relates to the conceptual objective of the items: the EVS/WVS question allows people to report that they have *no* control and choice over their lives and no effect on what happens to them, thereby contradicting some of the characteristics of the autonomous agent, who was identified above as an individual who has control over their choices and both the opportunity and the capacity to choose. It is therefore better suited to capturing the spectrum from external to internal locus of control than to gauging the *extent* of freedom that autonomous agents experience over their lives, which is the focus of this dissertation. Despite their differences, however, the EQLS, ESS, and EVS/WVS

items correlate positively on the country level, which suggests that they capture similar concepts.[20]

The third reason relates to practical issues of data availability. Since the EQLS is the only data set that allows for the operationalization of a wide range of individual functionings, choosing another autonomy item from a different data set, like the EVS or the WVS, would result in a limitation of functionings available for analysis.

The ISCWeB survey provides an item asking children how satisfied they are with their freedom. This question allows children to verbalize possible dissatisfaction with either too little or too much freedom, thereby capturing the adequacy of children's agency. The item is part of a larger battery asking about children's satisfaction with their health, their appearance, and their life in general (among others). To facilitate children's evaluation of their satisfaction, the 5-point response scale is accompanied by an emoticon scale:

How happy you feel with …						
	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
The freedom you have?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Children's satisfaction with agency correlates positively with other aspects related to their agency, like how satisfied they are with what they do in their free time and how they are listened to by adults in general.[21] Therefore, I am confident that the item actually captures children's satisfaction with their agency.

Objectives and approaches of the three papers

The first paper, *"What shapes autonomy? How individual and societal means and conversion factors relate to individual autonomy in Europe"* addresses the determinants of autonomy on the individual and country levels. The literature review presented in Chapter three revealed that individual autonomy is vertically structured, whereas the evidence on horizontal parameters is rather mixed. Overall, there is a lack of studies investigating the relative importance of different personal means and conversion factors for individual autonomy. *The first objective of this dissertation is thus to address this gap by conducting a systematic examination of the social structure of individual autonomy*.

Based on the theoretical foundations laid above, I suggest that individual autonomy is subject to both the resources that a person possesses or has access to and their conversion factors, such as gender, age, and health status. While means such as material or intellectual resources should generally foster the autonomy that people perceive themselves to have over their lives, conversion factors can have autonomy-enhancing

[20] For the country-level correlations, see Table A2 in the appendix.

[21] For the individual-level correlations, see Table A3 in the appendix.

or -inhibiting effects, which can also differ by context. Guided by the CA and informed by previous research findings, the paper identifies education, employment, and financial security as the key resources with the potential to enhance individual autonomy. Among the conversion factors, individuals' health and their social connectedness are hypothesized to enable individual autonomy, while being a woman, living with a partner and children, and having a migration background are hypothesized to limit autonomy and age is hypothesized to be unrelated. These relationships are investigated using data from four survey waves of the European Quality of Life Survey and the European Social Survey, spanning the years from 2006 to 2016 in 18 European countries. Estimating pooled-country ordinary least square (OLS) regressions by and across years, the analysis uncovers the determinants that are essential to autonomy in Europe and invariant across surveys and years. The additional OLS regression by country and year reveals the determinants that have relevance across the majority of European countries and those that are only relevant in some as well as the determinants that are conducive to autonomy in some countries and obstructive in others.

In line with the theoretical arguments presented above, previous research has suggested a positive relationship between the aggregate-level autonomy and the scope of opportunities and choices enabled in the economic, cultural, and institutional spheres of human empowerment. Most of these findings build on global data and thus cover a more diverse sample of countries with regard to economic development, cultural climates, and institutional guarantees than is under investigation here. *Accordingly, the second objective of this dissertation is to examine these relationships for the more developed and less diverse European countries.*

For each of the three aspects of human development, two indicators are selected. National affluence and income (in)equality capture the extent of opportunities and the (in)equality in access to them provided by economic development. With regard to cultural development, the societal level of trust and the prevalence of emancipative values reflect the extent to which people can live a self-determined life and express themselves as well as the significance that society attributes to opportunity and choice. The amount of freedom guaranteed both in the public and in the private domain is captured by political rights and civil liberties as indicators of institutionalized guarantees of freedoms. These conditions are assumed to be conducive to overall autonomy, with the exception of income inequality, which is supposed to be harmful. Though these relationships can only be investigated based on ecological correlations (again for 18 European countries in the years 2006, 2011, 2012, and 2016), tentative evaluations can be made regarding the strength and significance of the correlation across different surveys and points in time.

The second paper, *"The value of autonomy for the good life. An empirical investigation of autonomy and life satisfaction in Europe,"* addresses the role of autonomy in people's life satisfaction. The literature review (Chapter three) provided strong evidence of a positive relationship between autonomy and well-being. There are also some indications of a possible dampening effect of autonomy on the relationship between functionings and well-being; however, with the exception of financial security, the interaction effect between autonomy and functionings on life satisfaction has so far not been investigated. *The third objective of this dissertation is therefore to present for a selection of basic functionings an analysis of whether the impact of these functionings on well-being is dampened by individual autonomy.*

In line with the above-presented arguments, I assume that there are basic human capabilities that everyone has reason to achieve and that thus contribute to people's well-being. The choice of basic capabilities is theoretically informed by Nussbaum's (2001b, pp. 77-80) list of basic human capabilities as well as Skidelsky and Skidelsky's (2013, pp. 145-167) basic goods and empirically guided by the good life index (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016), which also draws on Skidelsky and Skidelsky's (2013) approach. The selection includes health, financial security, safety, friendship, leisure, and respect.[22] I further hypothesize that the importance of each of these functionings for individuals' well-being will decrease with higher perceived autonomy or, vice versa, that the basic functionings contribute more strongly to people's well-being when their autonomy to shape their own lives is low.

Using data from more than 36,000 individuals in 33 European countries from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016, I investigate the direct effects that functionings and autonomy, as well as their interaction, exert on life satisfaction. In the first step, I apply multi-level linear regression analysis of life satisfaction on the six basic functionings and individual autonomy to investigate the relative importance of the functionings in relation to each other and to autonomy. In the second step, I add interaction terms of each of the basic functionings with autonomy to these models to investigate whether and how strongly autonomy dampens the positive effect of the basic functionings on individuals' life satisfaction.

As the achievement of functionings is constrained or enabled not only by individual autonomy but also by the economic, cultural, and institutional conditions in which a person is embedded, I further assume that the relationship between the basic functionings and people's life satisfaction is moderated in the same way by opportunity as it is by autonomy: the functioning–well-being link is weaker when the contextual conditions provide more opportunities and stronger when the contextual conditions provide fewer opportunities. The existing evidence on such cross-level effects is (to the best of my knowledge) restricted to financial and employment security. Nonetheless, the

[22] Autonomy is not included in this list due to its unique role as a moderator, although, as already noted, it can be viewed theoretically as a functioning too.

reported relationships are as expected: financial security is less relevant to individual well-being in societies that are more affluent (Delhey, 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008), put stronger emphasis on self-expression values (Lun & Bond, 2016), and have better labor market policies (Carr & Chung, 2014). *In line with that, the fourth objective of this dissertation is to investigate whether the well-being-enhancing effects of the selected basic functionings are weaker in societies that provide a wider scope of opportunities.*

Four macro-level indicators are selected for the analysis, again associated with the economic, cultural, and institutional aspects of human development: national affluence and income (in)equality as indicators of the extent of and (un)equal access to the economic opportunities provided in a society; the emphasis that a society places on tolerance as an indicator of a value climate that enables people to make use of their opportunities as they wish; and civil liberties as an indicator of how well the available opportunities are legally secured. To test the assumption that all the indicators of opportunity (inequality reversed) weaken the relationship between the basic functionings and the individual well-being, I introduce cross-level interactions of each of the societal opportunity indicators with each of the individual functionings into the multilevel models of life satisfaction. The analyses have two important aims: first, to explore which of the functionings are at all dependent on opportunity and autonomy in their relationship with life satisfaction and which are unaffected and, second, to provide insights into which opportunities change the well-being effect of which of the functionings.

The role of autonomy in children's life satisfaction is addressed in the third research paper, "*Better safe than sorry.* Does Agency Moderate the Relevance of Safety Perceptions for the Subjective Well-Being of Young Children?" Previous research has shown that children themselves conceptualize agency as one of the most important components of their well-being; they value their ability to make everyday choices even though they are aware of their limitations (Fattore et al., 2009, p. 64). Children's satisfaction with their agency has been shown to contribute to their life satisfaction at different ages (Casas et al., 2013) and in countries from various world regions; in some countries, it has even been found to be the strongest predictor of children's life satisfaction over and above (among others) their satisfaction with their family, their health, or their possessions (Bradshaw & Rees, 2017). To the best of my knowledge, no other study has investigated the interplay between children's agency satisfaction, achieved functionings, and life satisfaction. *The fifth objective of this dissertation is therefore to investigate whether the well-being-dampening effect of individual autonomy—in the form of agency satisfaction adapted to the child's developing capacity for autonomous action—can already be observed in children.*

In line with the above-presented argument that well-being depends not only on the achieved functionings but also on how they came to be achieved, I assume that the achieved functionings have a lesser impact on well-being when children are content with their level of agency: a chosen deficit in a functioning harms life satisfaction less than a deficit that was enforced by others or by external conditions (and vice versa). To

investigate this relationship, I select a functioning that is considered as a basic condition of a good life for adults (Nussbaum, 2001b, pp. 77-80; Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, pp. 156-158) and children (Biggeri et al., 2006, p. 65; Biggeri & Mehrotra, 2011, p. 51) alike and that is conceptualized by children themselves as one of the most important elements of their well-being (Fattore et al., 2009, pp. 61-62): safety. Children's sense of safety in major areas of their lives—family, school, and neighborhood—significantly contributes to their well-being (Lee & Yoo, 2015). However, as described above, children might have reason to trade their sense of safety for the achievement of other goals. My hypothesis is thus that the positive effect of safety on children's life satisfaction will be weaker for children who are satisfied with their agency than for those who are not. Put differently, a deficit in safety will do more harm to children's life satisfaction when they do not have the appropriate agency to do anything about their situation.

Using data from the second wave of the Children's World Study (ISCWeB, 2013-2014) covering children aged between 6 and 10 years in 16 countries, I examine the relationship between children's agency satisfaction as well as their sense of safety at home, at school, and in the neighborhood and their life satisfaction. In the first step, I estimate linear fixed-effect regressions—to account for the clustering of children in countries—of life satisfaction on safety perceptions and agency satisfaction. In the second step, I include an interaction term for each of the three safety perceptions with agency satisfaction to capture the potential dampening effect of agency on the relationship between a sense of safety and life satisfaction. The analysis has two main goals. First, it adds to the still-sparse knowledge on the relevance of agency to the well-being of young children, a group that is often excluded from theoretical considerations due to young children's incompleteness and irrationality and from empirical investigations due to the lack of child-reported data. Second, it is the first paper to highlight the potential of children's evolving capacity as autonomous actors to explain the differences in well-being derived from identical functioning sets. Unfortunately, due to the small number of countries, no cross-level effects of country-conditions and children's safety perceptions on their life satisfaction can be investigated in this paper.

Table 1 summarizes the main objectives, data, and methods used in the three papers.

Table 1 Overview of the three empirical papers

	Paper 1—Chapter five	Paper 2—Chapter six	Paper 3 —Chapter seven
Short title	What shapes autonomy?	The value of autonomy.	Better safe than sorry.
Main objective	Examine the impact of individual means and conversion factors and country-level economic, cultural, and institutional conditions on perceived autonomy.	Examine the role of individual autonomy and socially provided opportunities in life satisfaction. Analyze the role of autonomy and opportunity in changing the impact of basic functionings on life satisfaction.	Examine the role of children's satisfaction with agency in their life satisfaction. Analyze the role of satisfaction with agency in changing the impact of children's safety perceptions on their life satisfaction.
Context	18 European countries	33 European countries	16 countries: 10 European, 3 African, 2 Asian, and 1 Latin American
Unit of analysis	Adults, 18–95 years old	Adults, 18–95 years old	Children, 6–10 years old
Measure of autonomy	Single autonomy item (EQLS, ESS)	Single autonomy item (EQLS)	Single satisfaction with agency item (ISCWeB)
Dependent variable	Autonomy	Life satisfaction	Life satisfaction
Independent variables of interest	Gender, family, age, education, financial security employment, health, disability, connectedness; national wealth, income inequality, civil liberties, political rights, trust, emancipative values	Autonomy, health, financial security, safety, friendship, leisure, respect; national wealth, income inequality, civil liberties, tolerance	Satisfaction with agency, perceived safety at school, at home, and in the neighborhood
Survey data	EQLS 2011/12, 2016; ESS 2006, 2012	EQLS 2016	ISCWeB (Wave 2) 2013–2015
Macro data	Eurostat, Freedom House, aggregates	The World Bank, Freedom House, aggregates	-
Method	Pooled OLS regressions with country fixed effects, single-country OLS regressions, correlation	Multi-level analysis with individual-level and cross-level interactions, correlation	OLS regressions with country fixed effects and individual-level interaction, correlation

EQLS: European Quality of Life Survey; ESS: European Social Survey; ISCWeB: Children's World, International Survey of Children's Wellbeing. The country-level aggregate variables stem directly from the World Value Studies Key Aggregates or were aggregated from individual data from the following data sets: EQLS 2011/12, 2016; ESS 2006, 2012; European Values Study 2017; and Eurobarometer 83.3.

5 Unequal autonomy. How individual and societal characteristics shape perceived autonomy in Europe.

Abstract

This paper explores the social structure and contextual conditions of individual autonomy in Europe. Drawing on the capability approach and human empowerment theory, I investigate how self-reported autonomy over one's life is structured by individual means and conversion factors, and which economic, cultural, and institutional conditions further it on a societal level. Using data from the European Social Survey and the European Quality of Life Survey, I analyze these relationships for 107,036 individuals in 18 European countries, and at four points in time between 2006 and 2016 to ascertain the most robust determinants. My study finds that having a family is detrimental to the autonomy of the individual across Europe, but financial security, health, and social connectedness are conducive to autonomy. Gender, age, and education have no consistent effect across countries. At the country level, national wealth, trust, emancipative values, political rights, and civil liberties are all positively linked with a population's overall level of autonomy.

Introduction

The emergence of the individual's control over their own destiny is a typical narrative in modernization theory. Where fate was previously determined by external forces—natural as well as supernatural –the onset of modernity meant that freedom of choice and agency were gradually attributed to societies and individuals (Sztompka, 2015[1994], pp. 25-28). The broad interdisciplinary attention to agency and choice—as part of basic need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 1995), as prerequisites of individual empowerment (Abbott, Wallace, & Sapsford, 2016), or as drivers of social change (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010)—is complemented by a growing body of empirical literature on the effects of autonomy: an individual's perceived autonomy, understood as their ability to choose how to live their lives, has been linked with a variety of positive outcomes such as psychological well-being (Maguire et al., 2019, 2021), life satisfaction (Steckermeier, 2021), and optimism (Karim et al., 2015). However, autonomy also has a dark side: it tempts individuals to disregard social inequalities or accept them as fair consequence of merit and ability (Aldama et al., 2021), and while it encourages involvement in political parties and associations, it discourages participation in petitions and protests (Šarkutė, 2017).

Given the numerous benefits that autonomy brings to the individual, but the adverse effects it potentially also has on society, it is surprising how little is yet known about how autonomy is structured within and between societies. Empirical studies devoted to the distribution of self-reported autonomy within society and based on representative data are scarce. Even rarer are cross-national, comparative studies that enable a distinction between universal and country-specific conditions. Of the studies that do examine

perceived autonomy, some consider only one country (e.g., Kobau et al., 2010), while others focus on restricted samples only, such as the self-employed (Kara & Petrescu, 2018), (formerly) married (Symoens et al., 2014), young people (Högberg et al., 2019) (Högberg et al., 2019), or the elderly (Karim et al., 2015). Autonomy itself is rarely the focus of representative analyses: insights into the structure of autonomy stem from analyses using autonomy as a mediator (Shir et al., 2019), from nomological validity testing (Karim et al., 2015), and from simple correlation analyses (e.g., Kara & Petrescu, 2018). This article aims to fill this research gap by providing, to the best of my knowledge, the first comprehensive investigation into the conditions of the perceived autonomy of individuals in a larger number of countries. Using population-representative data from two well-established cross-national European surveys—the European Social Survey and the European Quality of Life Survey—for four points in time between 2006 and 2016 allows time-invariant effects to be separated from temporally instable effects, as well as European generalities from country-specific effects.

In order to identify the relevant individual and contextual conditions of individual perceived autonomy, I draw on two theoretical approaches: the capability approach (Sen, 1992) and human empowerment theory (Welzel, 2013). At the individual level, the capability approach, with its particular focus on means and conversion factors that help people transform their opportunities into achievements, provides a more comprehensive framework than human empowerment theory, with its focus on material, connective, and intellectual action resources. The capability approach is much richer, especially with regards to horizontal parameters such as gender or family status, and thus constitutes my point of departure for the discussion of individual-level conditions of autonomy. In turn, human empowerment theory provides more detailed and tangible insights into the economic, cultural, and institutional conditions of autonomy at the contextual level than the capability approach, and therefore guides my discussion of societal conditions.

Accordingly, this article investigates (1) the extent to which socio-structural characteristics such as gender, age, and employment foster or restrict individual autonomy, and (2) which economic, cultural, and institutional conditions relate to higher overall levels of autonomy on a societal level. Informed by the capability approach, the next section provides an overview of *individual* level characteristics and resources that enable or restrict an individual's autonomy, and discusses existing empirical evidence. The following section introduces the *contextual* conditions highlighted by the human empowerment theory, and reviews the empirical literature regarding their relationships with the overall level of autonomy in populations. I then proceed to a description of the data, operationalization, and analytic strategy. The results section first provides a descriptive summary of the distribution of autonomy in Europe before testing the hypothesized relationships at individual and country level. The final section discusses the main findings and makes suggestions for further research.

Conceptual considerations and previous evidence on perceived autonomy

An individual's autonomy is often regarded as a component of well-being (Alkire, 2005). As "practical reason" it is a central human functional capability (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 79). As "freedom of choice and action" (Narayan et al., 2000, p. 28) and "ability to frame and execute a plan of life" (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 160) it forms part of the good life. As ability to "formulate aims, and beliefs about how to achieve them" (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 53) and to "participate in decisions and activities influencing [one's] life" (Allardt, 1993, p. 91) autonomy is a basic human need. Some authors have cautioned that autonomy is not necessarily conducive to well-being, and may even be harmful to it (Doyal & Gough, 1991, pp. 65-66; Dworkin, 2008[1988], p. Ch. 5; B. Schwartz, 2005). The conceptual separation of autonomy and well-being is made particularly clear in Sen's work on human capabilities (Sen, 1985).

Sen argues that even though people value their well-being, not all human action is directed toward maximizing it. By distinguishing between agency freedom and well-being freedom, Sen acknowledges that other motives (such as moral considerations) guide human actions, and that those actions might not only *not* coincide, but even conflict with well-being freedom; for example, when a parent loses sleep by taking care of a sick child (Sen, 1985, pp. 185-188). Considering that different people have different ideas of what constitutes a good life, it is relevant to look at "what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (Sen, 1985, p. 203), instead of what they are and have achieved. Where classical rational choice theory would not distinguish between two bundles of options, where one contains a person's preferred choice among others, and the other consists only of the person's preferred choice, Sen (1988, pp. 270-272) argues that the latter would constitute a substantive impairment of that person's freedom. An individual's choice can only be evaluated in light of alternative opportunities, as the absence of (valid) alternatives can change a person's preference: a person might prefer one newspaper over all others, but would no longer choose to read it if it was (e.g., through governmental regulation) the only choice left. The elimination of alternatives can even change the substantial value of a chosen functioning: a fasting person can only be distinguished from an involuntarily starving person by the presence or absence of opportunities; the ability to choose whether or not to be well-nourished. Taking away that option would substantially change the functioning of the fasting person (Sen, 1988, pp. 291-293). The ability to choose is more than an instrumental means to an end, it has intrinsic value—Sen thus proposes to incorporate "choosing" as a functioning, that is, as an achieved capability, on par with functionings such as working, playing, and being well nourished, educated, safe, and healthy (Sen, 1988, p. 290; 1999, pp. 44-45).

As with all functionings, an individual's autonomy to choose and realize a life in accordance with their goals and values is also dependent on societal and individual means, and conversion factors (Robeyns, 2005, pp. 98-99; Sen, 1988, pp. 275-279; 1999, pp. 17-18; 2005, pp. 155-157). *Societal means* refers to a variety of goods and services provided by the state or other (collective) actors that have instrumental value in

achieving certain functionings, such as schools, health care, social security, road infrastructure, parks and playgrounds. *Individual means* refers to the material resources a person might have, be it income, transfers-in-kind, or property. *Conversion factors* affect whether and how well means can be transformed into achieved functionings. *Social conversion factors* encompass all societal conditions, such as social norms, values, institutions, and rules that aid or limit an individual's opportunities or choices: from arranged to same-sex marriage (and divorce), from racial profiling to social cohesion, from female labor-force-participation to paternal leave, from abortion to euthanasia. *Personal conversion factors* encompass all characteristics that facilitate or hinder the individual in achieving a certain functioning, such as physical fitness, mental health, education and knowledge, but also temporary conditions, like injury or pregnancy. Organized into thematic groups, the following section presents individual means and conversion factors that potentially affect perceived autonomy, and discusses the available empirical evidence. The selection is both theoretically guided and informed by the state of research, but also constrained by data availability with respect to the subsequent analyses.

Gender and family

The development literature has identified a bundle of interlocking conditions that restrict women's autonomy—from opportunities for gainful employment, and education, property and participation rights, to the disregard of (unpaid) care work, and the risks of poverty and deprivation (Sen, 2001, pp. 190-195). Admittedly, the situation of women in developing and emerging countries is only comparable to a certain extent with that of women in industrialized nations, nonetheless, it is also there that women are less likely to engage in paid employment (Tyrowicz et al., 2018), and to be homeowners (De Graaff et al., 2009), as well as more likely to be informal caregivers (Verbakel et al., 2017), to be at risk of poverty and have less control over the households finances (Corsi et al., 2016), and to be materially deprived (Layte et al., 2001). Despite these persistent gender disparities, there is a clear positive trend towards more female autonomy in more developed countries: Using ecological correlations for a global sample of 57 countries, Jayachandran (2015) demonstrated that with increasing national wealth the male-to-female autonomy ratio approaches '1': men and women report the same level of autonomy. This ratio also strongly correlates with the male-to-female employment ratio, indicating that female labor force participation empowers female autonomy (Jayachandran, 2015, pp. 69-70).

Multivariate evidence on gender differences in autonomy is scarce. Whereas no differences were found in a sample of US adults (Kobau et al., 2010) and in the working population in Sweden (Shir et al., 2019), cross-national analyses within Europe suggest a difference in autonomy- that favors men: Symoens et al. (2014) found higher levels of autonomy for men compared to women for a sample of 25-60 year old (formerly) married adults. Analyses using similar concepts which incorporate individual autonomy support this finding: Delhey and Steckermeier (2016) found men to report higher levels

of self-development, and Macmillan and Shanahan (2021) found in a sample of (formerly) employed adults that men show higher levels of self-efficacy.

Although autonomy is not tantamount to independence (Chirkov et al., 2003, p. 98), partnership and especially parenthood are usually accompanied by a loss of freedom and autonomy (Twenge et al., 2003, p. 576). Individuals associate partnership and strong family ties with the relinquishment of choice and control (Burchardt & Holder, 2012). Differences in the use of time appear to reflect this perception: couples and parents spend considerably more time on housework and less on leisure and recreation than singles (Anxo et al., 2011; Sayer, 2016).

Unfortunately, evidence about how family status relates to individual autonomy is limited. Symoens et al. (2014) studied a sample of (formerly) married 25-60 year old Europeans and showed that both living with a partner and living with children exerted a negative effect on individual autonomy. However, drawing from a (with regard to family status) more encompassing sample of (formerly) employed, Macmillan and Shanahan (2021) found that people who have (formerly) been married (even if now separated or divorced) report higher levels of self-efficacy than those who have never been married. Due to the different samples and their focus on related, yet distinct, concepts, the findings are only partly comparable. It is possible, that the de-facto exclusion of life-time homemakers and stay-at-home-parents leads to a bias towards high-autonomy individuals. Moreover, the singles (who are missing from the (formerly) married sample) might not simply exhibit lower levels of autonomy, but their single status might just as well be a result of this lack of autonomy diminishing their success in the partner market. In that case any negative effects of singledom should be attributable to other autonomy-limiting covariates.

- H1: Women, people living with a partner, and people living with children experience lower levels of individual autonomy.

Age

A person's age should—beyond the limitations of childhood (Abbott, Wallace, & Sapsford, 2016, p. 74; Robeyns, 2005, p. 101; Steckermeier, 2019, pp. 33-34)—not have any implications on autonomy, per se, however, age-effects could emerge due to the varying disposability of resources and changing conversion factors over the life-course. For example, the autonomy of young people might be impaired by a lack of financial resources, but the elderly might be limited by poorer health.

Empirical findings regarding the relationship between autonomy and age are mixed. Whereas Kobau et al. (2010) found a positive age-effect in the US, Macmillan and Shanahan (2021) found a negative age-effect in the working population in Europe. Investigating a related concept, Delhey and Steckermeier (2016) found a U-shaped age-effect, indicating that younger and older people achieve higher levels of self-development than the middle-aged. This curvilinear effect might also explain why Symoens et al. (2014) found no significant (linear) age-effect on autonomy in their sample of 25-60 year old (formerly) married people.

- H2: When age-variant life circumstances, such as family and employment status, are controlled, age has no independent effect on autonomy.

Education

Education and knowledge play a key role in empowering people, as they are not only resources through which other functionings (like employment) can be achieved, but are first and foremost the key to recognizing which opportunities are available and understanding how to make use of them (Abbott, Wallace, & Sapsford, 2016; Sen, 1997a).

Autonomy has been positively related to education in the US (Kobau et al., 2010), in the working population in Sweden (Shir et al., 2019), and in a sample of self-employed Europeans (Kara & Petrescu, 2018). In contrast, Symoens et al. (2014) found the autonomy of (formerly) married unrelated to their education. Including studies on related concepts only adds to the mixed evidence: Delhey and Steckermeier (2016) found that education had a positive effect on self-development, but Macmillan and Shanahan (2021) found no effect on self-efficacy.

Employment and financial security

Employment and financial security are both cause and consequence of an individual's autonomy. Employability presupposes a set of resources, conversion factors and capabilities that are then in turn improved by employment (Olejniczak, 2012, p. 149). Beyond the manifest function of financial compensation, employment fulfills a range of latent functions such as time structure, social contacts, appreciation, and a sense of purpose (Beehr & Bennett, 2015, p. 120). Being deprived of gainful employment thus has a host of disadvantageous repercussions, ranging from a loss in income to the deterioration of mental and physical health, self-confidence and skills, to the impairment of private and professional relationships, and even social exclusion (Sen, 2001, p. 94). An individual's employment status thus mirrors what in human empowerment terms is denoted as past and present material, intellectual, and connective resources (Welzel, 2013, p. 46). Depending on societal resources and conversion factors, an employment status outside the dichotomy of 'employed' and 'unemployed'—homemakers, students, retired—often carries certain entitlements, such as tax relief, social housing, or discounts for transportation and culture.

There is evidence of a relationship between autonomy, and both the manifest and the latent functions of work: individuals in higher income groups experience more autonomy over their life (Kobau et al., 2010; Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021; Shir et al., 2019; Symoens et al., 2014). Autonomy is further found to be related to financial security (Steckermeier, 2021), economic satisfaction (Shir et al., 2019), job satisfaction, and appreciation (Duarte & Lopes, 2018).

Generally being in paid employment (Symoens et al., 2014), and being self-employed (Shir et al., 2019) prove beneficial to autonomy. Students and retirees have been shown to report similar levels of autonomy compared to the employed (Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021). A detrimental effect of unemployment on autonomy has been demonstrated for young adults (Högberg et al., 2019), but also for the general working population

(Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021). Only those who are unable to work report even lower levels of autonomy (Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021).

- H3: Education, employment and financial security are conducive to an individual's autonomy.

Health and disability

Like education, health is a prerequisite for human development—reflected, for example, in the Human Development Index—and enhances people's freedom in leading their lives (Sen, 1997a). An individual's health is a fundamental human capability (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 76) as well as a conversion factor (Sen, 1985, pp. 198-199; 1999, pp. 17-18) affecting how easily people can achieve certain functionings such as avoiding or escaping poverty (Sen, 1994, pp. 333-334), achieving sufficient nutrition (Sen, 1999, p. 17), or being mobile: "If a person is disabled, or in a bad physical condition, or has never learned to cycle, then the bicycle will be of limited help to enable the functioning of mobility." (Robeyns, 2005, p. 99)

There is some evidence that health and disability influence an individual's autonomy. Steckermeier (2021) found a positive relationship between subjective health and perceived autonomy in Europe. Karim et al. (2015) showed a similar effect for older adults; they further found depression and anxiety to be negatively linked with autonomy. While people with disabilities show lower levels of autonomy in general, it is particularly those who experience limitations in daily activities due to their disability who largely lack autonomy (Maguire et al., 2021).

- H4: Individuals in good health and without limitations due to disability or illness experience higher levels of autonomy.

Social connectedness

To be socially connected, "to live with and towards others" (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77) is a basic human capability. Social affiliation means to be recognized as equal, not humiliated, and not discriminated against. It is the foundation of self-development, of freedom of assembly—political or otherwise—and of freedom of opinion and speech (Nussbaum, 2006), and should therefore be beneficial to an individual's autonomy. Migrants as a group demonstrate an exceptional case of social (dis-)connectedness. The act of migration itself may already be a manifestation of choice—viz. to voluntarily leave one's home country—but it might also be the result of a complete absence of choice—when people were forced to leave their home due to war, natural disaster, or other hardship. Regardless of the cause, migration often results in a loss of social ties, in addition to a curtailment of freedom as regards political, social and cultural participation and representation (Eichsteller, 2021, p. 176).

As expected, social connectedness appears to be positively associated with autonomy. Social relationships and trust have been linked to higher autonomy among older adults (Karim et al., 2015). Symoens et al. (2014) found for the group of (formerly) married that feeling close to the people in one's neighborhood increases autonomy. Thus far there is

no evidence about the relationship between migration or citizenship and autonomy, however, it could be inferred from the negative effect found by (Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021) for non-citizens in regards to self-efficacy, that there is a similar negative effect on autonomy.

- H5: Social connectedness exerts a positive, migration a negative impact on individual autonomy.

National characteristics

Over and above personal means and conversion factors, an individual's autonomy depends to a considerable extent on societal conditions and their capacity to provide opportunities and choice (Sen, 2001, p. 142). Where the capability approach ties together a varied bouquet of societal conditions under the notion of social conversion factors, the human empowerment theory clearly identifies three groups of conditions that promote freedom: *economic*, *cultural*, and *institutional*.

From a human development perspective, *economic development* lifts the burden of constant existential threat, thereby improving overall quality of life and creating freedom economically, culturally and institutionally (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, p. 49). In the course of modernization, a host of interrelated processes (from population growth, industrialization, urbanization, division of work, and specialization, to geographic and social mobility) has drastically increased the number of social relationships and interactions, thereby fostering social diversity, and liberating the individual from the tight corset of traditional norms and values (Durkheim, 2016[1988]; Simmel, 1995 [1901-1908]). As a result, the individual not only gains more autonomy over their resources, but economic development also contributes to an increase in these resources, which in turn gives the individual more freedom of choice (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 345). In a positive feedback loop, increased individual autonomy (Tabellini, 2010) and growing intellectual resources then further contribute to prosperity and progress (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, pp. 49-50). Economic development is further linked to *cultural change*, which brings about a shift to more secular and more post-materialist values, higher levels of tolerance, trust, and well-being (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), as well as a stronger emphasis on emancipative values. Emancipative values motivate people to make use of their freedom, and as such promote equal opportunity, self-expression and the opportunity to voice concerns and be heard (Welzel, 2013, pp. 46-47). Aside from individual resources and motivation, the use of freedoms largely depends on *civic entitlements*. As a constitutive element of democratic systems, the guarantee of personal autonomy, political participation, and rights to compensation "provide the license to freedoms" (Welzel, 2013, p. 45) without which even the most comprehensive resources and the greatest motivation might lose their empowering impact. Although the pathway from economic development to democratization has been demonstrated as through cultural change, these processes must not be understood as a clear-cut sequence of successive steps, but rather as a coincidental development (Welzel et al., 2003).

The relationship between economic, cultural, and institutional conditions, and the overall level of autonomy in a society has received little attention so far. As above, I therefore draw not only on research that examines perceived autonomy aggregated on a country level, but also on research into similar concepts, such as self-development and the locus of control perceptions.

Overall there is little variance in autonomy at the country level in Europe (Duarte & Lopes, 2018; Högberg et al., 2019). Compared to conservative and Nordic welfare states, the level of autonomy is significantly lower in liberal welfare states, and even lower in the Mediterranean welfare states (Conzo et al., 2017). Bodor et al. (2014) and Hellevik and Settersten Jr (2013) similarly found a matching pattern with higher autonomy levels in the northern and western European countries, and lower levels in eastern and southern Europe.

Regarding *economic resources* there is mixed evidence about the relevance of national wealth and its concentration. Whereas Conzo et al. (2017) found no relationship between national wealth and autonomy, related constructs such as self-development (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016) and perceived freedom and control (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; C. J. Clark et al., 2014; Sastry & Ross, 1998) have been shown to be more pronounced in wealthier societies. While higher income inequality is associated with higher levels of choice and control globally (C. J. Clark et al., 2014), high inequality within Europe is linked to lower levels of self-development (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016). There is scant evidence with regard to *cultural value climates,* but it is more consistent: societies which are characterized by a strong emphasis on obedience and by a lack of trust have lower levels of autonomy (Conzo et al., 2017). In line with this, perceived choice and control is overall weaker in materialistic societies than in more post-materialistic societies (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014). Finally, there is also some evidence for the positive effects of *institutional guarantees*. Conzo et al. (2017) found that quality of governance (e.g. voice and accountability, control for corruption) is positively associated with autonomy (Conzo et al., 2017). Beyond that, a variety of guaranteed freedoms—freedom of marriage, travel, and abortion, civil liberties, and economic freedoms—have also been positively linked to perceived choice and control (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014).

- H6: More prosperous societies with an emancipative value climate, and extensive guarantees of rights and freedoms, have a higher overall level of autonomy.

Data and method

The data for individual-level analyses stems from two large representative European population surveys; the European Quality of Life Survey and the European Social Survey. Both surveys contain a measure of perceived autonomy in two of their waves, as well as a range of comparable socio-demographic and horizontal and vertical explanatory parameters. The sample thus covers four points in time, spanning a period of about 10 years: 2006 (ESS 3), 2011 (EQLS 3), 2012 (ESS 6), and 2016 (EQLS 4). To ensure comparability across the waves, only the countries that participated in all of these waves

were included. This selection leaves 18 countries, six of which are northern European countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), four central (Belgium, Germany, France, and the Netherlands), four southern (Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, and Slovenia), and four eastern European (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). The pooled sample across all four waves covers 107,036 individuals. Sample sizes vary between waves from 18,974 in 2016 (EQLS 4) to 34,136 in 2012 (ESS 6), and between countries from 900 in Cyprus 2006 (ESS 3) to 2,932 in Germany 2011 (EQLS 3). Overall, of the 72 country-waves more than two thirds cover a sample larger than 1,000 respondents. As missing values did not exceed 4% in any of the waves, cases with missing values in any of the variables employed were excluded using listwise deletion.

Operationalization

Dependent variable: perceived autonomy

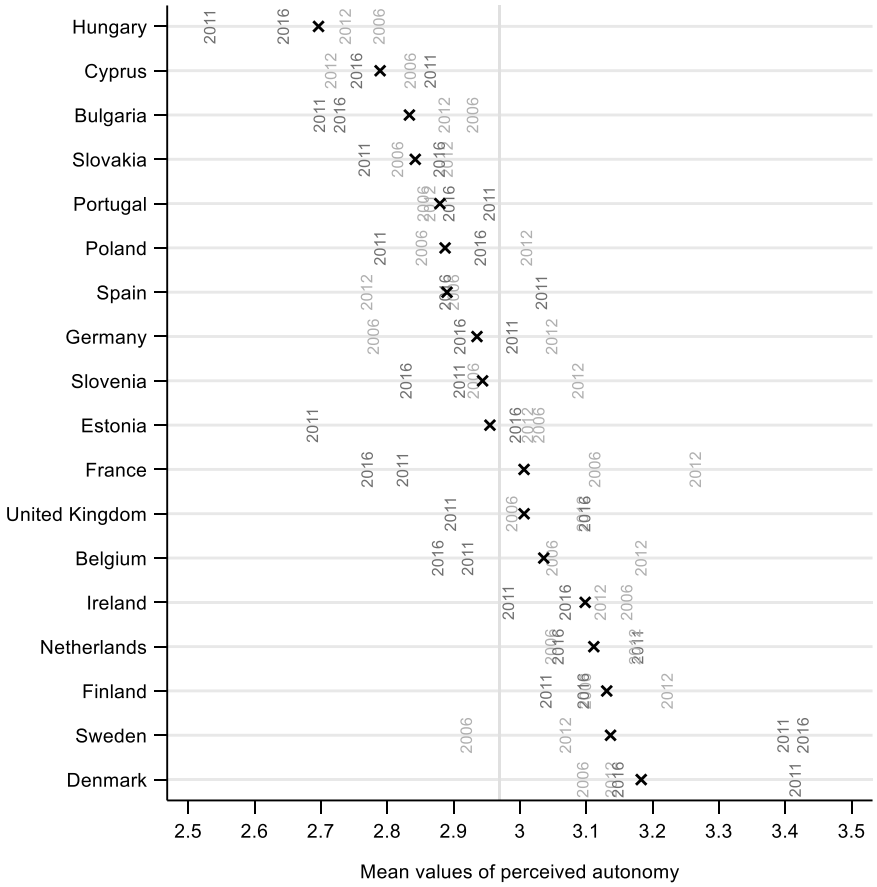
The ESS and the EQLS each include a similar item capturing an individual's *perceived autonomy*, which is adapted from Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination concept (ESS, 2013). Individuals in both surveys were asked about the degree to which they agreed with the following statements, on a five-point scale from *o 'strongly disagree'* to *4 'strongly agree'*:

- "I feel I am free to decide for myself how to live my life" (ESS)
- "I feel I am free to decide how to live my life" (EQLS)

Apart from the stronger emphasis on the *self* in the ESS item, both statements are identical. They have been used to capture *individual autonomy* using EQLS data (Maguire et al., 2019, 2021; Steckermeier, 2021), using ESS data (Kara & Petrescu, 2018; Karim et al., 2015; Symoens et al., 2014), and using data from the New Zealand Sovereign Wellbeing Index (Hamling et al., 2015). With mean values between $2.93_{\text{EQLS 3}}$ (SD: 1.00) and $3.02_{\text{ESS 6}}$ (SD: 0.89), the overall level of perceived autonomy is relatively high in the 18 European countries, across all four waves (for full descriptive statistics across all samples see Table A4 in the Appendix).

Figure 3 displays the average levels of perceived autonomy across all waves by country (marked by an x), and per survey wave (marked by the respective year). The ranking of the countries based on the full sample mirrors the patterns described above, with Nordic countries at the top, followed by western and Anglophone countries, and southern and eastern European countries at the bottom of the autonomy ranking. There is about half a scale point between the country with the highest overall perceived autonomy—Denmark—and the country with the lowest—Hungary. A closer look at the individual survey years reveals a narrower difference in 2006 (0.4 points between Germany and Ireland) and a much wider range in 2011 (0.9 points between Hungary and Denmark). Even though the ESS values are slightly more often above, and the EQLS values more often below the overall mean, there is no indication of a systematic over- or underestimation of the autonomy values by either of the datasets.

Figure 3 Perceived Autonomy across Europe



Note: ESS 2006 (N=30,279), ESS 2012 (N=34,136), EQLS 2011 (N=23,647), EQLS 2016 (N=18,974); weighted means; × indicates the weighted country-mean across all four survey waves; gray vertical line marks the weighted population average across all four survey waves and all 18 countries (Ø 2.97). Perceived autonomy indicates the agreement on a five-point scale from 0-4 with the statements: "I feel I am free to decide myself how to live my life" (ESS) or "I feel I am free to decide how to live my life" (EQLS). Higher values reflect greater levels of perceived autonomy.

Socio-demographics

Gender is a dummy variable with male as reference category (women account for 52% in all samples). I distinguish between people who do not live with a *partner* (reference) and those who do, as well as between households without (reference) and with *children*.[23]

[23] As both partner and children in households produced a larger number of missing values in the 3rd wave of the ESS, people with missing values who were married or in a civil partnership were recoded to having a partner. The ESS 3 distinguishes between people who are married or in a civil partnership and people who are separated but still legally married or in a civil partnership. Only those who were not separated were recoded. Households with missing values for children were recoded to households without children when none of the household members was younger than 18.

With the exception of the EQLS 2011 (53%) around two thirds of people live with a partner in all samples. Both the ESS and the EQLS include around 40% of households with at least one child, yet with large disparities between the ELQS waves ($23\%_{EQLS\ 3}$, $62\%_{EQLS\ 4}$). *Age* is measured in years and grand-mean centered for regression analyses. The average age varies marginally from $47_{ESS\ 3}$ to $49_{EQLS\ 4}$. *Education* is measured via the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Since the ISCED levels were measured in varying degrees of detail within and between the surveys, the lower and upper levels are combined: primary education or less (ISCED 0+1), lower secondary (ISCED 2), upper secondary (ISCED 3), post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED 4), and tertiary education (ISCED 5+6+7+8). The average education level is two (ISCED 3), which was also the most prevalent education level in all four waves.

Employment status

Employment status differentiates between employed (reference), self-employed, unemployed, people who are unable to work, retirees, homemakers, and students. The employed make up the largest group in all four samples ($50\%_{EQLS\ 3}$ to $55\%_{ESS\ 3}$), followed by the retired ($21\%_{ESS\ 3}$ to $26\%_{EQLS}$), self-employed ($7\%_{EQLS}$ to $12\%_{ESS\ 6}$), homemakers ($5\%_{EQLS}$ to $10\%_{ESS\ 3}$), unemployed ($5\%_{ESS\ 3}$ to $9\%_{EQLS\ 3}$), students ($6\%_{ESS\ 3/EQLS\ 3}$ to $7\%_{ESS\ 6/EQLS\ 4}$), and those unable to work ($2\%_{EQLS\ 4}$ to $3\%_{ESS/EQLS\ 3}$).

Financial security

Financial security reflects an individual's feelings about their household income. While the EQLS asks how easily a household is able to make ends meet on a six-point scale from 'very easily' to 'with great difficulty' the ESS asks how individuals feel about their household's income on a four-point scale from 'living comfortably' to 'finding it very difficult on present income'. To establish a comparable scale for the pooled analysis, the middle categories of the EQLS scale are combined so that *financial security* comprises four categories: The ESS second category 'coping' is paired with the EQLS second and third categories 'easily' and 'fairly easily', and the ESS third category 'finding it difficult' is mirrored by the EQLS fourth and fifth category 'with some difficulty' and 'with difficulty'. The new variable is then reverse coded, so that 0 reflects low levels and 3 high levels of financial security. With average values between $1.6_{EQLS\ 3}$ and $2.0_{ESS\ 3}$ Europeans overall show potential for improvement in financial security.

Health

Both surveys ask about individual *health* in general on a five-point scale from 'very good' to 'very bad'. The scale is reversed so that 0 reflects very bad and 4 very good health. Europeans rate their overall health as rather good—the mean values vary slightly from $2.7_{EQLS\ 3}$ to $2.9_{EQLS\ 4}$. Both surveys also ask whether respondents are limited in their daily activities by disability, mental or physical problems. The dummy variable *disability* is coded 0 when individuals have no health problems or disability, or do not feel hampered by these, and coded 1 when individuals feel limited in their daily activities. More than 20% of respondents experience such limitations in their daily life across all four samples ($21\%_{EQLS\ 4}$ to $24\%_{ESS}$).

Social connectedness

Both surveys asked respondents whether they feel close to the people in their local area (ESS) respectively the area where they live (EQLS). The original five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree is reversed so that low values reflect weak and high values reflect strong *social connectedness*. With mean values between 2.5_{ESS3} and 2.8_{EQLS3}, social connectedness appears to be relatively strong, albeit with room for improvement. Finally, the variable *non-citizen* captures whether an individual is a citizen of the country they live in ($4\%_{ESS/EQLS3}$); unfortunately, this question was not asked in the EQLS 2016, so that here individuals not born in the surveyed country ($10\%_{EQLS4}$) were coded as non-citizens, which should be borne in mind when interpreting the results for this variable.

Macro-level variables

National wealth is operationalized via a country's gross domestic product per capita in purchasing power parities (GDP pc PPP), as provided by Eurostat (2021b). Bulgaria was at the bottom of the wealth distribution in all four years, and Ireland and the Netherlands took turns at the top. Despite narrowing differences between the countries, wealth in Ireland was still more than 3.5 times that in Bulgaria in 2016, and therefore the national wealth data was log-transformed. *Income inequality* is measured as the Gini coefficient of equivalized disposable income, also provided by Eurostat (2021a). Differences in Gini between countries are smaller. They vary by 11 to 14 points between the most equal and the least equal countries, with larger differences in 2006 and 2016, and smaller differences in the years between. Over the entire period, Slovenia had the most equal income distribution, in 2006 it shared this rank with Denmark, and in 2016 it was slightly surpassed by Slovakia. The most unequal country was alternately Portugal and Bulgaria.

The NGO Freedom House (2021a, 2021d) provides expert ratings of countries according to the civil liberties and political rights they provide for their citizens. *Civil liberties* include freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. Finland and Sweden sustain the maximum rating of civil liberty across all four points in time, with values of 60. The level of civil liberties is constantly lowest and decreasing in Bulgaria, yet the strongest collapse in civil liberties over the ten years occurred in Hungary, which dropped nine points and joined last place with Bulgaria in 2016. *Political rights* evaluate the electoral process, political pluralism, and participation, as well as the functioning of government. Overall, the 18 European countries rate high on political rights. Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden constantly hold the maximum value of 40, but ratings decreased by 3-4 points in the countries at the lower end, Bulgaria and Hungary.

The overall level of *social trust* measured on a 10-point scale (EQLS), or an 11-point scale (ESS), from 'you can't be too careful' to 'most people can be trusted', varies greatly between European societies. For illustrative purposes only (the different trust measurements are not combined nor compared hereinafter) the shorter EQLS-scale was stretched to 11 categories by inserting an empty middle category. With average levels

between 1.0 and 3.3, Cyprus and Bulgaria are the least trusting societies in Europe, whereas people in Denmark and Finland are most trusting, with average values between 6.9 and 7.2. Finally, the *emancipative values index* (EVI) is provided in the World Values Studies Key Aggregates dataset for the World Value Survey waves 1981-2013 (Welzel, 2015). EVI Values for the years 2017-2020 were constructed following the instructions provided by Welzel (2013) using the European Values Study 2017 (EVS, 2020). The time series gaps were closed using linear interpolation. The EVI captures where the value climate of a society falls between obedient and emancipative values. Higher values (on a scale from 0 to 1) indicate a stronger emphasis on individual autonomy, gender equality, people's choice and voice. Across the four points in time emancipative values are least widespread in Ireland and Cyprus, with values below 0.45, and most widespread in Denmark and Sweden with values between 0.66 and 0.74.

Analytic strategy

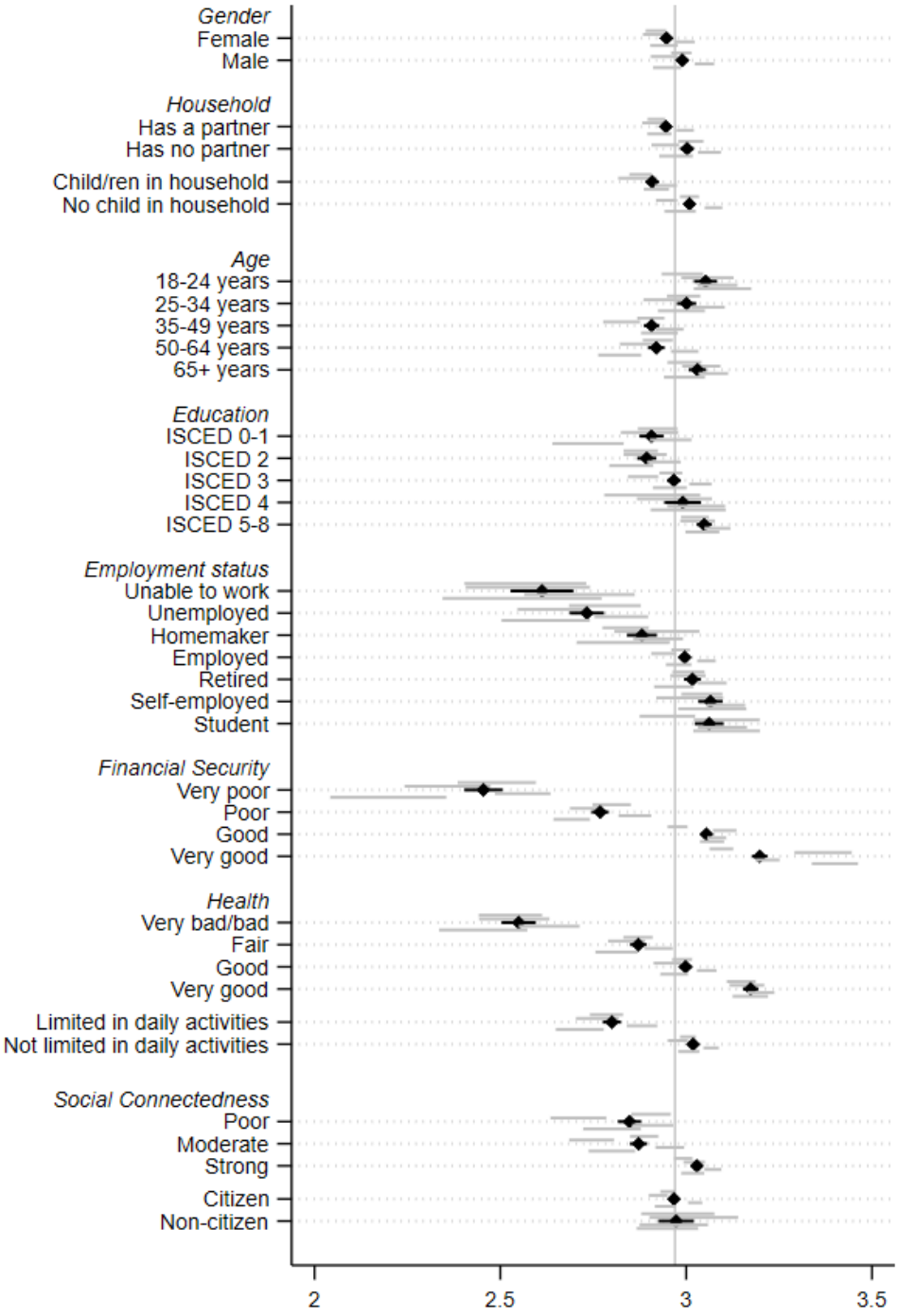
To test which of the means and conversion factors exert an influence on how much autonomy people perceive they have over their lives, I *first* provide an overview of the mean levels of autonomy across these socio-structural characteristics. In a *second* step I estimate linear regression models of perceived autonomy on the same set of characteristics, to assess their independent effects. To ascertain the robustness of these effects, the regressions are estimated for each of the survey waves individually, as well as three pooled samples: the two ESS waves, the two EQLS waves, and all four waves taken together. In a *third* step the same models are estimated for each country and each year individually in order to identify possible country-specific differences using OLS linear regressions. All regressions use cluster-robust standard errors. Regressions based on cross-national samples use country fixed effects to control for, for example, the cultural characteristics of the countries within which the individuals are nested; regressions based on pooled samples further control for survey year. In a *fourth* and final step I investigate the relationship between societal levels of autonomy and economic resources, institutionally guaranteed freedoms, and cultural climates, using ecological correlations for the 18 countries and by year.

Results

Social-structural foundation of perceived autonomy across Europe

Figure 4 displays the population averages and confidence intervals of perceived autonomy for the pooled sample (in black) and the four survey waves (in gray).

Figure 4 Mean levels of perceived autonomy by individual means and conversion factors



Note: ESS 2006 (N=30,279), ESS 2012 (N=34,136), EQLS 2011 (N=23,647), EQLS 2016 (N=18,974); population-weighted country-mean with 95% confidence interval for the pooled sample in black and 95% confidence interval for individual survey waves in gray; the gray vertical line marks the weighted population average across all four survey waves and all 18 countries (Ø 2.97).

The bivariate relations between autonomy and the means and conversion factors already indicate that autonomy is more strongly structured by an individual's financial and employment situation, as well as their health, and considerably less by their gender and family status, age, education, and social connectedness.

The results from multivariate regressions support this first impression. Table 2 reports the results from the linear regressions of autonomy on the means and conversion factors for each survey wave individually, a pooled sample for each of the two surveys, and a pooled sample of all four survey waves.

The already notably small difference between men and women found in the bivariate analysis diminishes in the multivariate regressions, with one exception, *gender* has no significant effect on perceived autonomy and the relatively small effect found in the EQLS 2016 indicates, contrary to the theoretical assumptions, that women perceive slightly more autonomy over their lives, albeit only marginally so. In contrast, *family status* almost always shows the expected sign: both living with a partner and having children in the household reduces individual autonomy. The bivariate analysis hints toward a curvilinear effect with regards to *age*, indicating a higher level of autonomy in the younger and older age-groups. The age effect diminishes in the multivariate analysis, as assumed in Hypothesis 2. Age only exerts a significant, yet minor, negative effect on perceived autonomy in 2016 and in the pooled EQLS sample. A U-shaped (quadratic) effect did not prove significant, and nor did a ∿-shaped (cubic) effect (results not shown). As the bivariate results suggested, *education* is consistently unrelated to individual autonomy in multivariate models across all survey waves.

As expected, *unemployment* has a detrimental effect on individual autonomy. In contrast, the employment status which appeared to be most influential in the bivariate analysis—those who are *unable* to work—did not deviate from the employed in their perception of autonomy once subjective health is controlled for. The slightly negative deviation of the *homemakers* from the overall mean of perceived autonomy diminishes in the multivariate analysis: homemakers do not differ from the employed in any but the pooled EQLS model, where they even report higher levels of autonomy. This positive shift—in case of the ESS from a negative to an insignificant effect, and in case of the EQLS from an insignificant effect to a positive effect—largely comes about when controlling for financial security. This indicates that homemakers are not per se worse off regarding autonomy, but rather that their financial situation is more likely to be unfavorable. The autonomy of those still in education shows an incoherent pattern, with lower values of perceived autonomy compared to employees in 2006, higher values in 2011, and no difference thereafter. This relative 'autonomy-loss' compared to the bivariate values is in part explained by the young age and good health of the *students*, which are now considered simultaneously. Finally, the *self-employed* and the *retired* largely confirm the bivariate results: whereas the self-employed show slightly higher values of autonomy in almost all samples, being retired is consistently associated with a higher level of autonomy compared to the employed. Over and above the different employment status, financial security increases perceived autonomy consistently and quite strongly. Compared with those struggling to make ends meet, those who are free of financial problems report between half a scale-point (0.54 in 2006) and a full scale-point (1.12 in 2016) of greater autonomy over their lives.

Table 2 Linear regressions of autonomy on individual means and conversion factors with country fixed effects

	2006	2011	2012	2016	2 Waves	2 Waves	4 Waves
	ESS	EQLS	ESS	EQLS	ESS	EQLS	ESS/EQLS
Gender (Ref.: male)	-0.017	-0.006	-0.018	0.038*	-0.017	0.013	-0.007
	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.025)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.014)
Living with Partner	-0.145***	-0.064***	-0.132***	-0.101***	-0.138***	-0.078***	-0.113***
	(0.028)	(0.013)	(0.021)	(0.016)	(0.023)	(0.012)	(0.016)
Children in household	-0.086***	-0.043*	-0.072***	-0.014	-0.078***	-0.034**	-0.065***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Age in years	0.001	-0.001	0.001	-0.002*	0.001	-0.001*	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (3 categories)	-0.001	-0.001	-0.004	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001	0.000
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Unemployed	-0.078**	-0.077**	-0.066**	-0.122**	-0.080***	-0.094**	-0.079***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.033)	(0.013)	(0.025)	(0.015)
Unable to work	-0.094	0.019	-0.004	0.003	-0.045	0.013	-0.022
	(0.049)	(0.051)	(0.031)	(0.060)	(0.036)	(0.046)	(0.031)
Self-employed	0.054*	0.028	0.051**	0.091*	0.053***	0.058	0.056***
	(0.019)	(0.031)	(0.017)	(0.039)	(0.012)	(0.028)	(0.012)
Homemaker	-0.021	0.089	-0.017	0.050	-0.020	0.079*	0.020
	(0.022)	(0.046)	(0.030)	(0.033)	(0.020)	(0.032)	(0.016)
Student	-0.150**	0.104*	-0.051	0.005	-0.099*	0.061	-0.035
	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.030)	(0.027)
Retired	0.097*	0.173***	0.079*	0.195***	0.090**	0.184***	0.132***
	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.030)
Ability to make ends meet	0.135***	0.242***	0.156***	0.280***	0.149***	0.263***	0.189***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.010)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.012)
Subjective health	0.138***	0.147***	0.142***	0.167***	0.139***	0.156***	0.143***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.007)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.068***	-0.002	-0.055***	-0.03	-0.060***	-0.014	-0.046**
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.012)
Social connectedness	0.074***	0.147***	0.096***	0.103***	0.086***	0.129***	0.105***
	(0.008)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Non-citizen	0.017	0.172***	0.022	0.057*	0.022	0.092***	0.054**
	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.047)	(0.020)	(0.034)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Year					0.010*	-0.003	0.004
					(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.004)
Constant	2.275***	1.733***	2.220***	1.732***	2.207***	1.745***	2.020***
	(0.075)	(0.055)	(0.067)	(0.073)	(0.065)	(0.075)	(0.055)
Observations	30,279	23,647	34,136	18,974	64,415	42,621	107,036
Countries	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
F statistic	303.94	370.81	497.54	71.57	23020.22	1197.98	11443.54
R-squared within model	0.06	0.10	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.10	0.08
R-squared overall model	0.07	0.12	0.08	0.13	0.08	0.12	0.09
R-squared between model	0.22	0.90	0.40	0.76	0.31	0.89	0.69

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with cluster robust standard errors in parentheses.

The large differences between people of different *health* in terms of their autonomy shown in the bivariate analysis were already a first indication of the close link between health and autonomy, as hypothesized above, and the multivariate analysis supports this. Good health steadily contributes to perceived autonomy and overall makes a difference of about 0.7 points on the autonomy scale between people of very bad and very good health. Those who are limited in their daily activities by a *chronic illness or disability* experience an additional loss of autonomy—although only in the ESS samples, whereas in the EQLS waves the negative effects of those limitations are fully absorbed by subjective health.

Finally, social connectedness also proves beneficial to perceived autonomy: people who feel close to others in their local area report half a scale point more autonomy over their lives than those who don't. There is no difference between people with and without the formal citizenship of their country of residence in the ESS-samples, yet surprisingly there is a positive effect in favor of non-citizens (EQLS 2011) and people not born in their country of residence (EQLS 2016) in the EQLS-samples. This positive effect only comes into play when social connectedness and financial security are controlled for.

Social-structural foundation of perceived autonomy within Europe

Since the 18 countries considered here differ in many ways—historically, culturally, economically, and so on—it is worthwhile examining the respective relevance of the means and conversion factors for each country individually in order to identify country or region-specific peculiarities, or even possible contradictory effects between countries. Table 3 provides an overview of OLS-regressions by country and year (for full models see Table A5 in the appendix). The effects are displayed as follows. Each quadrant of the circle represents one survey wave, positive effects are displayed in black, negative effects in gray, non-significant effects ($p>0.05$) in white, i.e., a missing quadrant (see Figure 5). The last three columns display the total of all significant negative and positive effects out of 72 possible effects (18 countries times four survey waves), as well as the sum of countries in which any significant effect was found at all (out of 18).

Figure 5 Explanation and reading example for Table 3

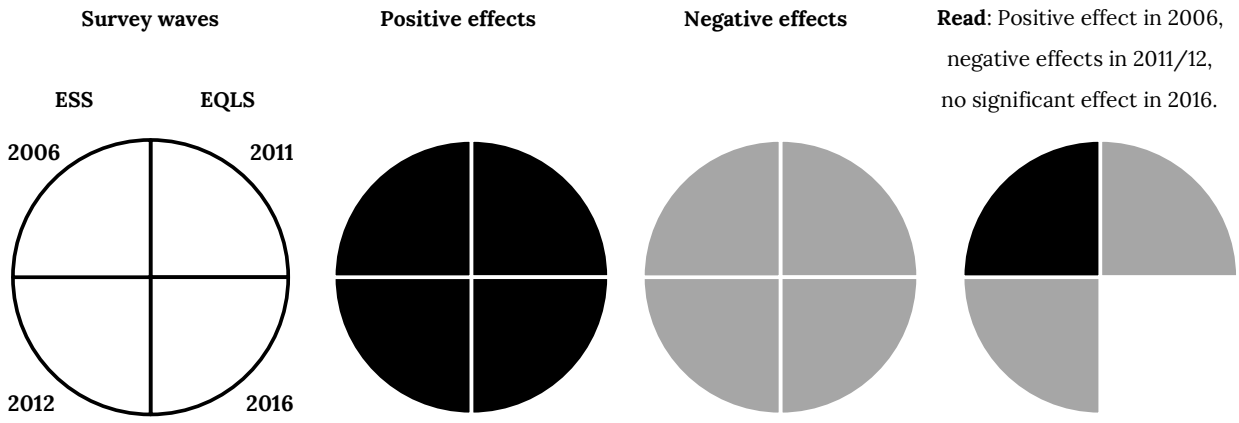


Table 3 confirms that *gender* effects are indeed sparse, yet evident in some European countries: while autonomy is somewhat tilted towards men in some of the southern and southeastern countries, it is exactly the opposite in the Francophone countries. In contrast, the negative *family* effect appears to be more congruent across Europe: having a partner and having a child living in the household is detrimental to individual autonomy in 16 (partner) respectively 12 (child) out of 18 countries. The non-effects of *age* and *education* from the cross-country analyses appear to be composed of an almost balanced set of positive and negative effects, yet without any apparent geographical pattern. Apart from Sweden, the consistently negative effect of *unemployment* is exclusively attributable to southern and eastern European countries—and rather surprisingly the unemployed experienced more autonomy than the employed in Slovenia 2006. While being *unable to work* had no significant effect on autonomy in the cross-national samples, it proved harmful in six countries, and exclusively where limitation due to *illness and disability* is not significant, indicating that both variables might capture two aspects of the same phenomenon. Adding the further eight countries in which illness and disability have a negative effect on autonomy, being unable to work and limited in daily activities hinders autonomy in 14 out of 18 countries in total. Interestingly, only in Hungary both effects are significant: limitations negatively, and inability positively. The ambiguous outcomes of *housewives* and *students* reported above find their counterparts in a balanced mix of positive and negative effects across countries, with the negative slightly more common in southern, eastern, and Anglophone countries, and the positive slightly more common in western and northern Europe. The autonomy-enhancing effects of self-employment and retirement are largely confirmed: not counting the negative effect in Finland, being *self-employed* proves exclusively beneficial in eight countries; and the *retired* benefit in 15 countries—with only Bulgaria and Portugal reporting negative effects. As already suggested by the cross-national results, *financial security*, *health*, and *social connectedness* exert positive effects on individual autonomy in all 18 countries and in most years, proving them to be the three most important and robust influences on autonomy. Finally, there was an unexpected positive effect of *non-citizenship* in at least half of the countries and 12 survey-wave quadrants in total; Estonia stands out with mixed results, and in the Netherlands non-citizenship is detrimental to autonomy.

Overall, the single-country analyses confirm financial security, health, and social connectedness as the most important drivers of autonomy, as well as partnership and children as generally universal obstacles to an individual's freedom of choice. However, the analyses also reveals some notable differences, especially with regard to the previous non-effects. Although very selective, gender is still a relevant category in some countries, with a surprising positive effect in favor of women in France and Belgium. Other apparent non-effects, like those of age and education, conceal significant effects in several countries, with opposite directionality. Lastly, the effects of physical limitations, which had (almost) no relevance in the cross-country analysis, are found in most of the countries, either expressed in terms of the inability to participate in the labor market or as a health impairment in everyday life.

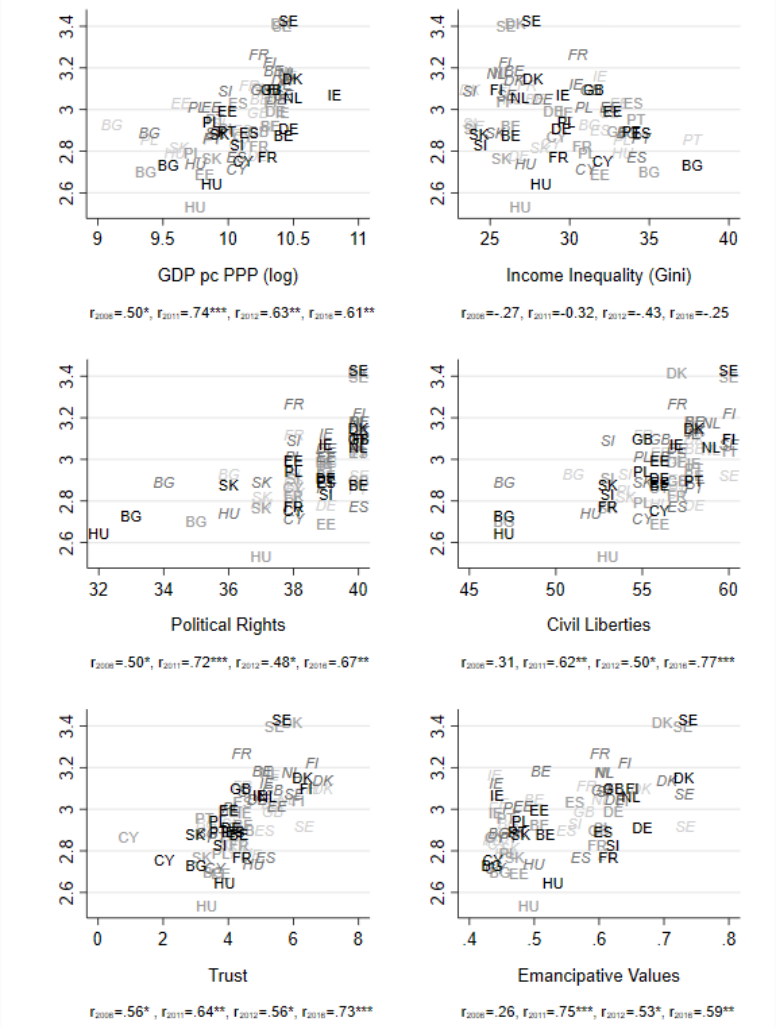
Table 3 OLS regressions of autonomy on individual means and conversion factors by country and year

	BE	BG	CY	DE	DK	EE	ES	FI	FR	HU	IE	NL	PL	PT	SE	SI	SK	UK			C
Gender (Ref: male)																			8	3	5
Living with partner																			34	1	17
Children in household																			20	2	14
Age in years																					7	5	9
Education (3 categories)																				11	9	14
Unemployed																			8	1	8
Unable to work																			6	1	7
Self-employed																			1	9	9
Homemaker																			5	6	8
Student																			11	8	13
Retired																			3	31	17
Financial security																			0	64	18
Subjective health																			0	66	18
Chronic illness/ disability																			9	0	8
Social connectedness																			0	66	18
Non-citizen (Ref: Citizen)																				2	12	11

Societal conditions of perceived autonomy in Europe

In a final step, moving on to the societal level, I explore the relationship between overall levels of perceived autonomy and six measures of societal level means and conversion factors. Figure 6 illustrates these relationships and reports Pearson's correlations by year. As expected, more prosperous countries exhibit overall higher levels of autonomy, whereas the inequality of the distribution of economic resources as measured via the Gini-coefficient is found to be unrelated. Political rights and civil liberties both relate positively to overall autonomy levels in the 18 countries; it is only in 2006 that civil liberties and autonomy do not correlate. Finally, high levels of generalized trust and a prevalence of emancipative values (again except for 2006) are each positively linked with higher levels of autonomy. Although these ecological correlations should be interpreted with caution, economic resources, guaranteed freedoms, and a trusting and emancipative value climate appear to be conducive to a society's overall level of autonomy.

Figure 6 Relationships of perceived autonomy and societal level means and conversion factors



Note: Pearson's correlations by year (earlier years displayed in lighter levels of gray).

Discussion

My paper took its departure from the discrepancy between broad cross-disciplinary interest in individual autonomy and the lack of representative, cross-country research on its distribution within and across societies. I draw on two conjoined concepts to identify relevant individual and societal factors that shape autonomy, namely the capability approach and the theory of human empowerment. Whereas the capability approach provides more insights into means conducive to autonomy, as well as conversion factors that enable or impair autonomy at the individual level, the theory of human development provides a more encompassing framework for the societal conditions that improve overall freedom of choice. The current state of research on these individual and contextual conditions is largely compiled of single-country samples, investigations of selected groups of the population, and by-products of research with an entirely different interest. The main contribution of this paper, therefore, is to provide a comprehensive overview of the means and conversion factors, at the individual and societal levels, that affect an individual's perceptions of the autonomy they have over their lives, for cross-national samples representative of the entire adult population.

Whether as material, connective, and intellectual *action resources* in human empowerment theory, or as *means and conversion factors* in the capability approach, both theoretical concepts emphasize the role of individual characteristics in exercising one's autonomy. For the sample of 18 European countries examined in this paper, the results show that although an individual's perceived autonomy does vary over individual means and conversion factors, the variation is overall rather small: the variance explained by the full set of individual-level variables including gender and household composition, age, education, financial security and employment, health, and social connectedness spans from 6-7% in the ESS samples and 10-11% in the EQLS samples. The relevance of the individual factors varies considerably more among the European countries: from merely 4% in France (2006) and Belgium (2012), up to 19% in Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Denmark (2016). These differences show that even though perceived autonomy is socially structured, individual means and conversion factors matter to a different extent in the European countries. Nonetheless, three factors, financial security, health, and social connectedness, were identified that notably promote individual autonomy universally and robustly across Europe.

The supposed *gender* differences in perceived autonomy could not be confirmed. The female disadvantage was already exceedingly small in the bivariate analysis, and vanished completely in the multivariate analyses. This non-effect matches the results of Kobau et al. (2010) for the US, and of Shir et al. (2019) for the Swedish working population. The observed lack of gender-differences suggests that, first, men's and women's levels of autonomy have approached equality in developed countries, as indicated by Jayachandran (2015), and second, that the minor remaining differences are indeed due to differences in employment, education, care work, and so on, which were controlled for in the multivariate models. As expected, *partnership* and *parenthood* have a negative effect on individual autonomy, adding to the finding of Symoens et al. (2014)

for their sample of (formerly) married people. The trade-offs associated with cohabitation and child rearing are thus well reflected in a reduction of individual autonomy, and are so across all European regions. Partnership shows a negative effect in almost all countries, and parenthood still in two thirds. With the three exceptions of Hungary, Portugal and Poland, positive effects are found only in southern and eastern Europe, but each only for one point in time.

As hypothesized, *employment* and *financial security* each play a role for individual autonomy. In accordance with previous findings (e.g., Kobau et al., 2010) financial security furthers individual autonomy, and it does so across all 18 countries, and with few exceptions in all surveyed years. This result highlights the paramount importance of economic resources in capitalist market economies for the freedom of individuals to shape their lives according to their own ideas and values. My findings add to the results of Macmillan and Shanahan (2021) regarding employment statuses, in that unemployment is negatively associated with autonomy, and yet they deviate in that being unable to work does not differ from being employed as regards perceived autonomy. This difference is explained by the fact that although both statuses already reflect an impairment of autonomy, the deficit of those unable to work stems entirely from their health, which has not been controlled for by Macmillan and Shanahan (2021). Apart from the possibility of people with low autonomy being "selected" into unemployment, the state of being unemployed itself cuts them off from any autonomy-enhancing functions of work, and, as welfare recipients, further curtails their autonomy through external conditions and obligations imposed by the competent authorities (Adkins, 2018, p. Ch. 5). Along with homemakers and students, the employed occupy only the middle position in the autonomy ranking of employment statuses, which already indicates that work not only furthers autonomy, but also constrains it. The autonomy levels of the final two status groups support this notion. Being largely independent of external constraints and directives, the self-employed perceive more autonomy over their lives than the employed—surpassed only by the retirees. Whereas the autonomy perceived by the self-employed might also be a reflection of the freedom of choice necessary to self-select into becoming your own boss, the retirees' even higher level of autonomy highlights the constraints on freedom imposed by the rat-race of the obligation to work.

An individual's health and associated limitations play a significant role in the capability framework—both as a desirable capability and as a conversion factor. Consistent with Steckermeier (2021) correlation results and Karim et al. (2015) findings for the elderly, my results also show that health contributes significantly to individual autonomy—across all countries and waves. Additionally to subjective health, being limited in daily activities due to disability or health problems draws on individual autonomy, which corroborates the descriptive findings of Maguire et al. (2021). This result can only be found in the ESS data, however, not in the EQLS. The difference between the datasets could result from the EQLS respondents only being asked about their daily limitations if they previously reported suffering from a chronic illness or disability of at least six

months duration. The EQLS is thus more likely to capture the permanent limitations that constitute a subject's normal state, rather than minor and short-term limitations that are likely to be perceived by the individuals themselves as a (negative) state of exception.

I have assumed that being socially connected to others expand people's freedom by providing them with a social environment where they feel respected and free to engage with others, and to express and develop ideas and opinions. Social connectedness is found to be conducive to individual autonomy in all 18 countries, complementing existing evidence (Karim et al., 2015; Symoens et al., 2014). One unanticipated finding was that non-citizens experience somewhat higher levels of autonomy than citizens, which supports Eichsteller's (2021) argument that the act of migration is already a manifestation of autonomy.

Drawing on human empowerment theory, I hypothesized that economic, cultural, and institutional conditions further autonomy. With the exception of income inequality, the overall levels of autonomy are significantly associated with the investigated societal means and conversion factors: consistent with existing research on related concepts such as self-development (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016) or freedom and control (e.g., Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014), the level of autonomy is overall higher in countries with greater economic resources. Similarly, societies that are more trusting and that place stronger emphasis on emancipative values are characterized by higher levels of autonomy. This, too, complements existing research that finds levels of autonomy to be higher in post-materialist (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014) and more trusting societies (Conzo et al., 2017). Finally, the societal level of autonomy also proves to be higher where political rights and civil liberties are thoroughly guaranteed, lending support to similar results found by Okulicz-Kozaryn (2014) for economic freedom and Brulé and Veenhoven (2014) for social freedom.

My study is not without limitations. While the pooling of two European datasets made it possible to investigate the relationships between means and conversion factors and autonomy across four points in time over a period of ten years, this approach also comes with some disadvantages. The overlap of the two data sets varied between topics, which in part required compromise solutions in the selection of variables; for some, comparability could only be established to a limited extent. The restriction to 18 countries not only limited the number of parameters that could be studied, but also narrowed the expressiveness of the results for Europe as a whole. The ecological correlations particularly should, as always, be interpreted with caution. More research is needed to cross-check the effects of individual and societal means and conversion factors found here for other world regions and larger country samples.

European societies should strive to minimize existing socio-structural differences in individuals' autonomy; first and foremost, as a value in itself, but also taking into account the positive effects associated with individual autonomy, such as well-being and optimism. It is obvious that *family life* requires compromise, and that childcare causes a certain deprivation of freedom, however, the extent of this deprivation depends among other things on cultural norms predisposing the assignment of responsibility

within the family context (c.f. Fuwa, 2004), as well as the level of trust that a society places in external childcare and the mere availability of adequate childcare options, and their affordability (c.f. El-Attar, 2013). Especially with regard to the latter, states can create conditions to increase the freedom of parents specifically, but also of other caregivers whose autonomy is compromised (c.f. Maguire et al., 2019).

Two aspects of *employment* should receive further attention. First, since the unemployed are the only group that deviates negatively from all others, their loss of autonomy cannot be explained solely by their non-participation in the labor market. Assuming that out-of-work-welfare requirements substantially limit individual freedom, measures such as the suspension of sanctions or an unconditional basic income could restore this group's autonomy. Second, the fact that retirees are the status group with the highest autonomy is a positive finding in light of aging European societies. Nonetheless, opportunities should also be identified and facilitated to provide people with more freedom in shaping their lives even before retirement, for example through more spatial and temporal flexibility in education and work, even if these come with their own pitfalls (c.f. Börner et al., 2020). Closely linked to a long (working) life, good *health* proves to be one of the driving factors of individual autonomy. Societies should therefore promote and maintain health not only as a capability per se, but also as a conversion factor. The discrepancies identified between the two datasets with regard to limitations in daily activities suggest that it is precisely the disabilities and illnesses that are not commonly referred to as chronic that cause a limitation of individual autonomy—possibly because they are limitations that are not recognized as such by society, or even by the health care system. Further research on the different disability questions is needed to identify which limitations respondents "only" perceive as longstanding, and which as chronic, as well as the circumstances under which a limitation is associated with a loss in autonomy (initial evidence on the latter has been provided by Maguire et al. (2021), who show that autonomy is linked to well-being only up to a certain level of limitation).

After financial security and health, my analysis identified *social relations* as the third major determinant of individual autonomy. My results show that social connectedness and a trusting society do not debilitate individual autonomy but invigorate it, corroborating the argument made by Chirkov et al. (2003) that autonomy is not tantamount to independence. However, this significance of social ties for individual autonomy also presents modern society with the challenge of balancing social integration on the one hand and the growing demands for and claims to freedom on the other. As the ongoing controversies on issues of sexual self-determination in (primarily eastern) European countries exemplify, cultural change toward increasing freedom, tolerance, and equality is not self-evident. Civil society and institutional actors alike must strive to uphold a value climate conducive to individual freedom, and to protect guaranteed rights and freedoms.

A final remark pertains to the possibility of autonomy having a dark side. Although still limited, the evidence to date suggests that individual autonomy might also have a negative effect on society as a whole. Those who have a lot of autonomy tend to overlook

social inequalities or brush them away with reference to the merit principle (Aldama et al., 2021); they organize themselves into parties and associations, while the autonomy-poor protest in the streets and sign petitions (Šarkutė, 2017). A more equal distribution of autonomy is therefore also important to prevent the already privileged—financially secure, healthy, well socially connected—from exploiting their autonomy to impose their ideas of freedom and entitlement on society. Future research should shed more light on the negative effects that autonomy and its unequal distribution have on society.

6 The Value of Autonomy for the Good Life. An Empirical Investigation of Autonomy and Life Satisfaction in Europe

Abstract

This paper examines the association of opportunity and choice enhancing societal conditions and perceived autonomy with life satisfaction in Europe. Building on the capability approach, I investigate whether the positive effects of six basic functionings—safety, friendship, health, financial security, leisure, and respect—on people's life satisfaction are weaker when people have more opportunity and choice. This paper addresses two main questions: (1) Are people more satisfied with their life when they have more opportunity and choice? (2) Do basic functionings play a smaller role for life satisfaction in societies that enable more opportunity and choice and for individuals with more perceived autonomy? The analyses are based on the European Quality of Life Survey (2016), covering 36,460 individuals in 33 European countries and using multilevel linear regressions. My study finds that both choice and opportunity enhancing societal conditions and individual's perceived autonomy are positively associated with on life satisfaction. Further, all six basic functionings are conducive to individual life satisfaction. The positive effects of health, financial security, respect, and friendship are reduced when people experience a great deal of autonomy over their lives. Societal conditions that provide people with more opportunity and choice further lower the positive effects of financial security, leisure, respect, and safety on individual life satisfaction. This corroborates the importance the capability approach attributes to individual opportunities and freedom of choice.

Introduction

Autonomy, understood as the ability to decide how to live one's own life, plays a fundamental role in shaping well-being. Individual perceived autonomy has been shown to be related to the three general components of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984): perceived autonomy enhances life satisfaction (Conzo et al., 2017; Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Maridal, 2017; Verme, 2009; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010); increases positive affect like happiness (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Maridal, 2017); and protects from negative affect such as depressiveness (Chaves et al., 2018; Karim et al., 2015). Further, people who feel they have autonomy over their lives show a more positive future time perspective (Coudin & Lima, 2011), are more trusting toward others (Chaves et al., 2018; Conzo et al., 2017; Karim et al., 2015), and are less prone to conflict thinking (Spruyt et al., 2018).

Increasing individual autonomy and its relevance for social change also constitutes a major component of modernization theory (Sztompka, 1993b, ch. 13). Through the lens of different disciplinary foci, autonomy has been viewed as a key element of cultural change and as necessary for individual self-actualization (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), as a basic psychological need for mental and physical development and functioning (Deci

& Ryan, 2002), and as the freedom to "do and achieve whatever in pursuit of whatever goals or values [a person] regards as important" (Sen, 1985, p. 53). One of the most comprehensive theoretical models revolving around individuals' autonomy is provided by the capability approach (CA), as developed by Amartya Sen (1985, 2001, 2005) and further developed by Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2001b, 2002, 2014) and other scholars (Alkire, 2005; Robeyns, 2005). At the heart of the CA lies the idea of focusing on peoples' capabilities—what they are able to be and do—instead of their achieved functioning—what they in fact are and do. By distinguishing between possible capability and actual functioning, individuals are understood as active agents with different prerequisites and conceptions of what constitutes a good life. The CA considers that two people with the same set of functionings might have completely different levels of well-being. This means that the individual relevance of an achieved functioning such as financial security or health on individual well-being varies depending on their autonomy—that is, whether they choose to achieve or not achieve this functioning. The CA further recognizes that individuals are embedded in socio-economic, environmental, and cultural contexts that can provide (or prohibit) opportunities as well as enable (or constrain) individual choice. These societal conditions range from public provision of health care and education to enforcements of human rights to the social norm to work or the importance of family values.

Despite a growing body of research on the relationship between various functionings—like being in good health—and subjective well-being (for a comprehensive overview, see Veenhoven, 2010) and between autonomy and subjective well-being (e.g., Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015; Veenhoven, 1999, 2000; Verme, 2009; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), only a few studies have investigated how the relationship between functioning and well-being is shaped by individual autonomy (Eichhorn, 2012; Steckermeier, 2019; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Likewise, while the relationship between subjective well-being and various societal conditions like national wealth, income inequality, or culture have been examined in detail (for comprehensive literature reviews see Ngamaba et al., 2018; Steel et al., 2018), only a few studies have explored how these societal conditions influence the link between functionings and subjective well-being (Delhey, 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008).

By incorporating elements of the CA into subjective well-being research, this article aims to shed light on the role both individuals' perceived autonomy and societal conditions that provide opportunities and enable choice play in shaping the importance of achieved functionings for individuals' well-being. It provides a comprehensive quantitative test of the effects of individual autonomy and societal opportunity for individuals' subjective well-being, guided by the following two questions:

First, how do societal conditions that enable people's opportunity and choice, as well as individual autonomy, relate to individuals' subjective well-being?

Second, how is the relationship between achieved functionings and subjective well-being influenced by individual autonomy and by opportunity and choice enhancing societal conditions?

This article is composed as follows. In the next section, I provide a brief introduction to the CA and its main assumptions on the interplay between autonomy, functionings, and well-being. The second section discusses previous research that provides insights into the above mentioned research questions. Using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016, comprising 36,000 individuals in 33 European countries, I explore these empirical relationships, applying multilevel modeling to control for and incorporate the country-specific cultural and socio-economic conditions in which individuals are embedded. Finally, I discuss the key findings against the background of the CA.

Conceptual framework

Individual autonomy is an integral part of various concepts within the humanities and social sciences. Depending on the approach, autonomy is regarded, for example, as a universal value (S. H. Schwartz, 2012), agency freedom (Sen, 1985), or a dimension of psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Some approaches consider individual autonomy as a *component* of their well-being and development: understood as the ability to act willingly and in accordance with one's interests and values, autonomy is seen as one of the basic needs that foster individual well-being (Chirkov et al., 2003; Doyal & Gough, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Autonomy is necessary for reaching the top of Maslow's pyramid—self-actualization—and it enhances people's ability to adapt to change (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010, pp. 44, 48). In contrast, within the capability framework, autonomy and well-being are seen as two *separate* aspects of a person which "each also yield a corresponding notion of freedom" (Sen, 1985, p. 169). Whereas well-being freedom refers to the freedom to achieve something *specific*—namely well-being—agency freedom refers to the freedom to achieve *anything* a person autonomously chooses to achieve (Sen, 1985, pp. 203-204). Thus, within the CA, autonomy refers to the ability to pursue the goals that a person values. Advancing one's goals *can* contribute to individual well-being, but it does *not necessarily* have to (Alkire, 2008a, 2008b). For example, if someone donates blood at the blood bank, his or her agency goals might be advanced, yet at the same time his or her immediate well-being might be impaired due to blood loss or a fear of needles. Therefore, from a CA perspective, autonomy is not only distinct from well-being but should also not solely be evaluated in terms of its influence on well-being (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 87; Sen, 1985, p. 187; 2001, p. 53).

Consistent with the CA, I understand autonomy as distinct from well-being. As people's autonomy cannot be observed directly, this article will rely on individuals' self-reported—that is, *perceived*—autonomy, as is the common practice in empirical research. How people evaluate the freedom they have to decide how to live their lives should reflect the opportunities they perceive themselves to have (opportunity freedom) as well as the amount of choice they experience (freedom of choice). Relying on self-evaluated autonomy has both advantages and disadvantages resulting from perception biases. On the one hand, people might over- or underestimate the autonomy they objectively have, or might factor in opportunity and choice to different extents. On the other hand, in accordance with the Thomas theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1928), when

people experience their level of autonomy as very high (or very limited), this perception will shape their actions and thus will have real consequences for their well-being.

Capabilities and functionings

The CA distinguishes between capabilities and functionings (Nussbaum, 2001b, 2002, 2014; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1985, 2001, 2005). Functionings encompass all states an individual realizes and all activities he or she engages in. A functioning is descriptive, not normative: being well nourished is just as much a functioning as playing computer games. Nonetheless, some functionings, such as feeling safe or being educated and well nourished, are rather universally understood as desirable while others are not. Such evaluations should, however, only be made after taking into consideration the context (e.g., voluntary dieting vs. anorexia) and the normative framework (e.g., religious fasting). Capabilities, in contrast, can be understood as the realistic possibility to achieve a functioning. They comprise both the opportunity to choose and the ability to choose. For example, the capability to be well nourished requires a supply of and access to food (opportunity freedom), as well as the individual's actual freedom to choose whether or not to be nourished (freedom of choice). This allows us to distinguish between those who are starving and those who are fasting for health or religious reasons, for instance.

All capabilities available to a person taken together make up their capability set, and all achieved functionings make up their functioning set. The capability set of a person and his or her functioning set need not be identical. When people have the opportunity and choice to live their lives according to their goals and values, their functioning set will be a reflection of the life they perceive to be worth living and thus will exclude the capabilities a person has but has autonomously decided not to transform into a functioning.

Despite the CA's general emphasis on capability, it recognizes that a life full of capability yet without any achieved functioning could hardly be considered a good life (Nussbaum, 2001b). Still, the main emphasis of the CA lies on people's autonomy. A person who *chooses* to be a workaholic is likely more content with his or her life than when forced to slow down. If this work-oriented lifestyle is, however, the result of social norms or faulty work protection policies, the autonomy of this person is impaired. Nussbaum argues: "If people do not have choices, and do what they do because of requirements, their actions may no longer have the same worth, and may in effect be different functions. [...] Play is not play if it is enforced, love is not love if it is commanded" (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 88). In contrast, in exceptional cases it might even be considered desirable when public policy restricts choice to enable functioning—for example, enabling safety and health by "forcing" people to wear a seatbelt or a helmet (Nussbaum, 2001b).

The basic capabilities

Which capabilities are relevant or even necessary to live a good life depends on context and is subject to change over time (Sen, 2004a, p. 78). Although Sen (2004a, 2005) is opposed to the idea of a fixed list of universal capabilities, he deems such lists useful when they are designed for a certain purpose (e.g., measuring human development) and

take into account a society's social conditions and needs. In contrast, Nussbaum Nussbaum (2002, p. 131) advocates a list of basic capabilities of cross-cultural adequacy. The current version of her list (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 76-78) encompasses, among others, the capabilities to be bodily healthy, have bodily integrity, live and engage with other people as well as respect and be respected, have leisure time filled with play and enjoyment, and have control over one's political and material environment. Similar compilations have been proposed, for example, by Allardt (1993), who, in the terminology of the CA, summarizes a range of functionings and individual conversion factors under the categories of having, loving, and being (Allardt, 1993, p. 89). Other concepts, like Max-Neef's (1992) compilation of human needs and Skidelsky and Skidelsky's (2013) basic goods, summarize more or less the same capabilities compiled by Nussbaum under other terms. In practice, such compilations find their counterparts in aggregate-level indices, such as the Human Development Index (S. Anand & Sen, 1994) or the OECD's Better Life Index (OECD, 2011), as well as in individual-level indices, such as the Good Life Index (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016) or the domain satisfaction approach in subjective well-being research (Binder, 2014; Diener & Diener, 2009; Kaliterna Lipovčan & Prizmić-Larsen, 2006; Rojas, 2006).

Means and conversion factors

Capabilities and functionings are constrained by personal, social, and environmental means and conversion factors (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 2005). Individual means encompass the goods and resources a person holds, such as income, real estate, or a bicycle. Societal means comprise goods and services owned or provided by collective actors, such as national wealth or health care. Conversion factors influence the relationship between means and functionings. Personal conversion factors encompass the abilities and characteristics tied to a person, such as physical condition, education, gender, or the ability to ride a bicycle. Social conversion factors include public policies, but also social norms and values—for example, the right to paternity leave or the standards of propriety governing whether women should ride a bicycle. Environmental conversion factors comprise climate and geographical conditions, such as the presence of certain diseases or the condition of the manmade environment, like bike paths. The CA thus takes into account that people's *ability* to transform an opportunity into a functioning is not merely a function of personal means and conversion factors, but also of societal means and socio-environmental conversion factors (Robeyns, 2005).

Linking achieved functionings to subjective well-being

A functioning vector is thus a result of the capability set available to a person combined with his or her idea of what constitutes a good life—that is, which capabilities they choose to transform into functionings—as well as of the means invested to achieve these functionings and the societal conditions enabling (or restricting) opportunity and choice (Sen, 1985, 1988, 1993a). These differences in opportunity and choice in achieving certain functionings should be reflected by subjective evaluations of the functioning vectors: take two people who work overtime, nights, and weekends. One is a self-

employed workaholic who voluntarily chooses to work as much as possible in pursuit of making her young business profitable, whereas the other is compelled to work overtime because he needs his job and is—due to poor employment protection in his country and an overarching norm to work long hours—afraid to contact his union representative. Both will report long working hours, a lack of free time and leisure, and a certain degree of financial insecurity, but they differ significantly regarding their opportunities and their autonomy. The second person's achieved functioning vector does not correspond to his idea of the good life. He would therefore suffer more from his work situation than the young entrepreneur who chose a work-centered life. Factoring in an individual's opportunities and choices when evaluating achieved functionings can therefore help to explain how people with identical functioning vectors end up with different levels of subjective well-being. The poorer the opportunities available and the weaker an individual's autonomy is, the more strongly his or her subjective well-being will be affected by their achieved functioning; conversely, the better the opportunities and the more extensive a person's autonomy is, the less reflective their subjective well-being will be of their achieved functioning vector.

The capability approach and subjective well-being

The CA understands well-being as the "ability to achieve valuable functionings" (Sen, 1985, p. 200), which is neither reflected by the possession of goods nor by the achieved functionings nor by personal utility (Sen, 1985, 1993a). Equating resources with well-being neglects that individuals vary in their conversion abilities: people with disabilities, for example, might require different resources to achieve certain functionings. Equating achieved functioning with well-being neglects people's choice regarding their conception of what constitutes a good life (Nussbaum, 2002). Finally, equating personal utility with well-being neglects that people's lives are not solely focused on maximizing happiness, that happiness can be a product of negative influences (e.g., drugs), and that people adapt to their circumstances (Nussbaum, 2001a; Sen, 1979, 1985). Therefore the CA opposes the evaluation of people's well-being *exclusively* on the basis of subjective well-being measures such as happiness (Sen, 1979). This does not, however, exclude the possibility of complementing the CA concept of well-being with individuals' own sense of their well-being. In recent years there have been several efforts to integrate the CA and subjective well-being research conceptually (e.g., Binder, 2014; Comim, 2008; Schokkaert, 2007) and empirically (P. Anand et al., 2009; P. Anand et al., 2005; P. Anand et al., 2011; Hasan & Khan, 2015). Notwithstanding their differences in data base, operationalization, and methods, these analyses show that an individual's capabilities and functionings *are* statistically positively linked to subjective well-being. Following the CA, most of these studies reject the more hedonic measure of happiness and instead rely on the cognitive component of subjective well-being: life satisfaction. The works of Anand et al. (2009; 2005; 2011), especially, demonstrate that individuals' evaluation of their life is informed by self-reported capabilities beyond the effects of demographics and personality traits. The subsequent analyses will therefore also use individual life satisfaction as the outcome measure.

Conceptual model of the subsequent analyses

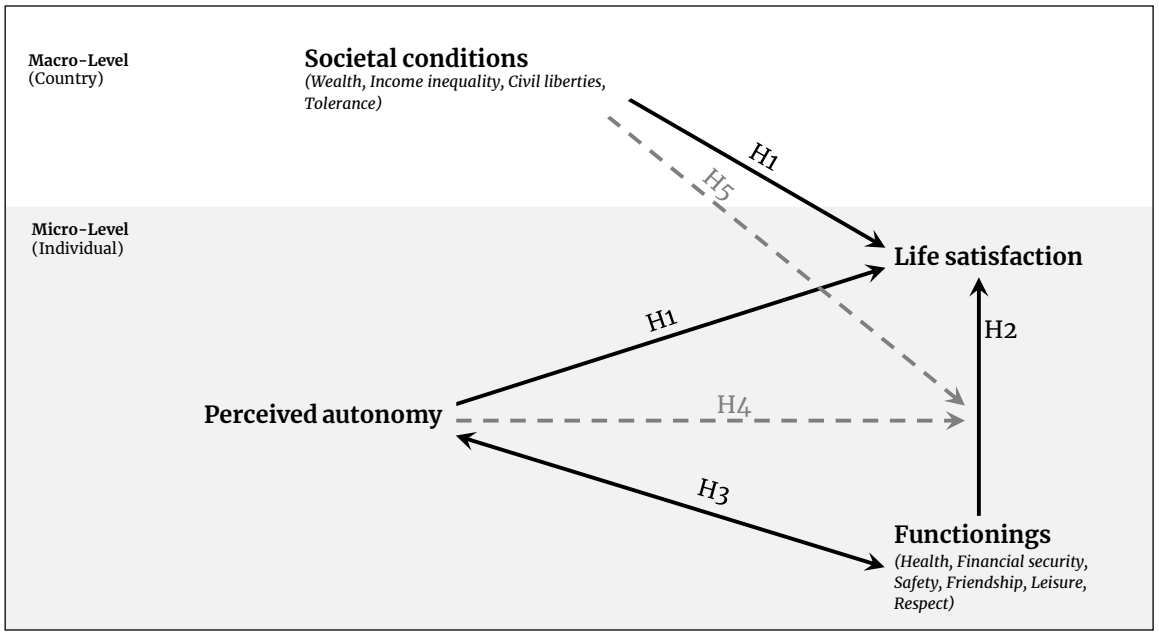
To investigate the relationships between individuals' opportunity and choice, their functionings, and well-being, the above presented theoretical assumptions need to be transformed into empirically testable hypotheses. As already noted, individual autonomy cannot be measured directly, and I will therefore focus on *perceived autonomy* (controlled for a range of individual-level means and conversion factors). As individual opportunity and choice is further influenced by societal means and conversion factors, I will also include a selection of *societal conditions*—including economic factors (national wealth and income inequality), freedoms (civil liberties), and climate of cultural values (tolerance). These societal conditions are indicators of an environment that creates and warrants opportunity and enables or even empowers people to exercise their freedom of choice. From a capability point of view, individual well-being will be captured by six *basic functionings*: health, financial security, safety, friendship, leisure, and respect[24]; individual subjective well-being will be captured by their *satisfaction with life.*

If—as the CA assumes—it makes a difference whether a functioning is or is not a result of choice, this difference should also be reflected in individual life satisfaction. Those who starve because of famine should be worse off than those who starve because they are dieting, and those who religiously fast because it is important to them personally should be better off than those who fast because they feel pressured by societal norms to engage in that practice. The subsequent analysis will thus investigate whether and how the relationship between life satisfaction and the six basic functionings is influenced by individuals' perceived autonomy and the societal conditions in which they are embedded. Figure 7 summarizes the central theoretical assumptions incorporating elements of both the CA and subjective well-being research.

As shown in Figure 7, the theoretical model assumes that people's life satisfaction is positively and independently influenced by both their perceived autonomy and societal conditions that enable opportunity and choice (H1). An individual's achieved functionings exert a positive influence on their life satisfaction (H2) and are themselves positively correlated with perceived autonomy (H3). The positive influence of an individual's achieved functionings on life satisfaction is dampened by perceived autonomy (H4) as well as by societal conditions (H5).

[24] The basic functionings are largely derived from Skidelsky and Skidelsky's (2013) list of basic goods, which also draws on Nussbaum's (2000) list of central human capabilities. The final choice was largely driven by the data available.

Figure 7 Theoretical model with hypotheses.



Note: Black arrows present hypotheses for direct relationships, the double arrow presents the hypothesis for correlations, and dashed grey arrows present hypotheses for interaction terms.

Literature review and hypotheses

A growing body of empirical research has investigated the role of autonomy in people's lives, be it as a direct measure of perceived choice and control (e.g., Verme, 2009) or as part of more comprehensive concepts such as eudaimonic well-being (EWB, e.g., Chaves et al., 2018), psychological well-being (PWB, e.g., Goswami & Pollock, 2016), self-development (SDV, e.g., Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016), life optimism (LO, e.g. Kafková, 2018) or psychological functioning (PF, e.g., Peralta et al., 2018). Whenever perceived autonomy is measured as part of an index (e.g., SDV, EWB, PWB, LO, or PF), this will be indicated accordingly. The literature review follows the above presented hypotheses.

H1: Individual autonomy and societal conditions that enable both opportunity and choice individually have a positive impact on subjective well-being.

Many studies have shown that autonomy enhances subjective well-being. This relationship has been found in cross-sectional individual-level analyses (Chaves et al., 2018 [EWB]; Delhey, 2010; Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016 [SDV]; Kara & Petrescu, 2018; Karim et al., 2015; Maguire et al., 2019; Maridal, 2017; Verme, 2009) as well as in country-level (Conzo et al., 2017) and longitudinal analyses (Inglehart et al., 2008; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010).

Societies and collective actors can further supply opportunities and choice, for example by providing services, guaranteeing freedoms, and creating and sustaining a value climate that enables individuals to make free choices. Wealthier societies have been shown to spend more on social welfare like health care or child and family support (Bahle et al., 2010; Chahoud et al., 2016); they also provide better access to public facilities such as public transportation (Whelan & Maître, 2012) and protection from material

deprivation (Bárcena-Martín et al., 2014; Whelan & Maître, 2012). Income inequality, on the other hand, has been linked to lower public expenditure in social protection (Marrero & Rodríguez, 2012), education (Manzano, 2013), and health (Bhandari et al., 2015), and to insufficient protection from material deprivation (Bárcena-Martín et al., 2014; Whelan & Maître, 2012). While a large number of studies found a positive effect for national wealth on life satisfaction over and above the effect of individual perceived autonomy (Chua et al., 2020; Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016 [SDV]; Haller & Hadler, 2004, 2006; Inglehart et al., 2008; Ng & Diener, 2014; Ngamaba, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Verme, 2009), the evidence with respect to income inequality is rather mixed: some find a negative impact (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pitlik et al., 2015), whereas others find a positive (Haller & Hadler, 2006) or no significant impact at all (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016 [SDV]; Haller & Hadler, 2004; Ngamaba, 2017).

Regarding freedoms, political rights and civil liberties (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; Chua et al., 2020; Haller & Hadler, 2006; Maridal, 2017), political freedom (Bavetta et al., 2017), and economic freedom (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014) have been shown to enhance life satisfaction beyond the positive effect of individual perceived autonomy.

Finally, positive value climates like high levels of tolerance and respect prevalent in a society (Inglehart et al., 2008; Lun & Bond, 2016; Ng & Diener, 2014) and a strong emphasis on self-expression values (Lun & Bond, 2016) also exert a positive influence on life satisfaction—again, when controlled for individuals' perceive autonomy.

H2: All achieved basic functionings have a positive effect on subjective well-being.

The positive effect of various functionings, such as health and financial security, on subjective well-being has been well established for individual functionings (for a comprehensive overview, see Veenhoven, 2010) and combinations thereof (P. Anand et al., 2011; Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Vladisavljevic & Mentus, 2019; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016).

H3: Achieved functionings and individual autonomy are positively related.

Regarding the functioning of health, autonomy has been linked to better subjective health (Chaves et al., 2018 [EWB]; Ervasti, 2002; Karim et al., 2015), lower prevalence of depression (Chaves et al., 2018 [EWB]), and more physical activity (Goswami & Pollock, 2016 [PWB]; Peralta et al., 2018 [PF]). The interplay between safety and autonomy is mostly studied for young and elderly people. For both groups, however, a positive relationship has been established (M. González et al., 2012; Meijering et al., 2019). Autonomous people are also found to have close social relationships (Chaves et al., 2018 [EWB]; Karim et al., 2015; Symoens et al., 2014), be more socially active, meet with other people more frequently (Ervasti, 2002; Goswami & Pollock, 2016 [PWB]; Symoens et al., 2014), and feel closer to people in their neighborhood (Symoens et al., 2014). There is also evidence that being treated with respect and experiencing autonomy over one's life are positively linked (Kafková, 2018 [LO]). Regarding financial security, autonomy is negatively related to financial hardship (Ervasti, 2002), the inability to make ends meet, and future financial worry (Goswami & Pollock, 2016). The functioning of leisure time

provides an opportunity to experience autonomy as an active agent outside restricted social roles (Lloyd & Little, 2010).

Current research provides only scant insight into the interactions between autonomy and functionings on the one hand and societal conditions and functionings on the other.

H4: The more autonomy a person perceives him- or herself to have over his or her life, the weaker the relationship between achieved functionings and subjective well-being will be.

Only two studies could be identified that included an interaction between perceived autonomy and a measure of a functioning on individual level: Welzel and Inglehart (2010) have shown that the positive effect of financial satisfaction on life satisfaction is attenuated by perceived autonomy. Steckermeier (2019) found that the negative effect of perceived lack of neighborhood safety on subjective well-being is less for children who perceive their autonomy as appropriate.

H5: In societies that provide individuals with more opportunities and choice, the positive effect of individuals' achieved functionings on their life satisfaction is weaker than in societies with few opportunities and little choice.

The moderating effects of societal conditions on the relationship between functionings and subjective well-being have—to the best of my knowledge—only been investigated with respect to economic aspects: Delhey (2010) and Inglehart et al. (2008) have shown that financial satisfaction becomes less important for individuals' subjective well-being in more affluent societies, while Lun and Bond (2016) have found that financial satisfaction becomes less relevant in societies with more prevalent self-expression values. Carr and Chung (2014) further show that employment insecurity is less harmful to individuals' life satisfaction in societies with more generous labor market policies.

Data and methods

Data

The following analyses are based on the fourth wave of the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) conducted in 2016 by Eurofound. The survey covers about 36,000 individuals in 33 European countries. It includes questions on the objective circumstances of people's lives and various aspects of their subjective well-being. Using this survey, I can operationalize both individuals' life satisfaction and their perceived life autonomy and basic functionings, while simultaneously controlling for a range of socio-demographic variables. As life satisfaction, perceived autonomy, and the basic functionings are self-evaluations, it is possible that they are partly influenced by latent personality traits. Unfortunately the EQLS dataset does not contain any measures of personality traits, so possible personality effects cannot be investigated.

Operationalization

Dependent variable

I operationalize individuals' subjective well-being via their life satisfaction. Using life satisfaction as an outcome variable has been proven fruitful in the quantitative analysis of self-reported capabilities (P. Anand et al., 2009; P. Anand et al., 2005; P. Anand et al., 2011). Although life satisfaction has been found to be relatively stable over time and partly explained by personality traits (Lucas & Diener, 2009; Schimmack et al., 2009), research shows that life satisfaction does also reflect contextual circumstances such as personal loss, unemployment or economic recession to some extent (Lucas et al., 2004; Lucas & Donnellan, 2007; Luhmann et al., 2012; Mayer, 2015). Life satisfaction is measured using individuals' ratings of their overall life satisfaction on a ten-point scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (10). With a mean value of 6.8 (SD: 2.21), life satisfaction is, overall, rather high in Europe.

Independent variables

Perceived autonomy To examine the mechanisms outlined above, it would be desirable to measure perceived autonomy in various areas of life, as it is plausible that people who enjoy a lot of autonomy in one area, for example financial security, do not automatically experience a lot of autonomy in other areas, like their family life or leisure. Unfortunately, neither the EQLS nor other population surveys contain items on perceived domain-specific autonomy. However, I am confident that a lack of autonomy in any domain will be reflected in individuals' overall perceived autonomy, so that it can be used as a convenient proxy for domain-specific autonomy.

In accordance with existing research investigating the relationship between autonomy and subjective well-being (e.g., Delhey & Dragolov, 2016; Kara & Petrescu, 2018; Maguire et al., 2019), I operationalize individuals' perceived autonomy as their level of agreement with the statement "I feel I am free to decide how to live my life." This single-item measurement captures a feeling of overall freedom and choice in the shaping of one's own life. Unfortunately, the EQLS dataset offers no further questions on people's autonomy, neither specifically on perceived opportunities, nor on the goals and values that a person deems important. Perceived autonomy is measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4). On average, European citizens feel they have a certain degree of autonomy over their lives (Ø 2.88, SD: 0.98); only in Greece (Ø 2.07) do people feel they are rather *not* free to decide how to live their lives.

Basic functionings Health is measured using individuals' self-assessment of their overall health on a five-point scale from very bad (0) to very good (4). Financial security is measured as a household's ability to make ends meet on a six-point scale from with great difficulty (0) to very easily (5). I operationalize individual safety as the unweighted mean of agreement with the statements "I feel safe when I walk alone in this area after dark" and "I feel safe from crime when I am at home alone at night," both measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4). The basic good of friendship is measured using the average frequency of having face-to-face contact with

friends and having contact over the phone, by post, or over the Internet. Both items are measured on a five-point scale from never (0) to (almost) every day (4). Leisure is measured as the amount of time spent on things that interest the respondent, from at no time (0) to all of the time (5), and the level of disagreement with the statement "In my daily life, I seldom have time to do the things I really enjoy from strongly agree (0) to strongly disagree (4). Both items are rescaled to a range from 0 to 1 before averaging. Finally, respect is constructed as disagreement with the statements "I feel that the value of what I do is not recognised by others" and "Some people look down on me because of my job situation or income." Both items are measured on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4) and are averaged unweighted. All basic functionings are rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better functioning. Overall, Europeans on average do well on most basic functionings (indicated by averages above the midpoint). Two functionings—safety (Ø 0.76, SD: 0.23) and friendship (Ø 0.76, SD: 0.21)—are especially well achieved. Only financial security is, overall, far below the midpoint of the scale (Ø 0.53, SD: 0.27).

Control variables As vertical parameters influencing both the autonomy and subjective well-being of people, I include education (ISCED scale, ISCED 3–5 as reference), employment status (employed as reference, unemployed, unable to work, retired, house spouse, student, and other), and income (four quartiles of household equivalized income by country and an additional missing income information dummy). As horizontal parameters, I include gender (male as reference), family status (not living with a partner as reference), own children and minor children in the household (no (minor) children as reference), and age (five groups, 35–49 years old as reference). Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics of all individual-level variables.

Table 4 Means, standard deviations, minima, and maxima of all individual-level variables

	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
	Autonomy	2.88	0.98	0	4
	Life satisfaction	6.80	2.21	1	10
Functionings	Health	0.70	0.23	0	1
	Financial security	0.53	0.27	0	1
	Safety	0.76	0.23	0	1
	Friendship	0.76	0.21	0	1
	Leisure	0.60	0.27	0	1
	Respect	0.69	0.24	0	1
Horizontal parameters	Gender (Ref. male)	0.52		0	1
	Partner living in household	0.63		0	1
	Never married	0.26		0	1
	Married (Ref.)	0.57		0	1
	Separated	0.02		0	1
	Widowed	0.09		0	1
	Divorced	0.06		0	1
	Children living in household	0.59		0	1
	Minor children living in household	0.27		0	1
	Age group 18–24	0.11		0	1
	Age group 25–34	0.17		0	1
	Age group 50–64	0.24		0	1
	Age group 65+	0.22		0	1
Vertical parameters	ISCED Levels 1–2	0.30		0	1
	ISCED Levels 3–5 (Ref.)	0.50		0	1
	ISCED Levels 6–8	0.20		0	1
	Employed (Ref.)	0.50		0	1
	Unemployed	0.08		0	1
	Unable to work	0.02		0	1
	Retired	0.25		0	1
	Homemaker	0.08		0	1
	Student	0.07		0	1
	Other employment status	0.00		0	1
	Lowest income quartile	0.21		0	1
	Second income quartile	0.19		0	1
	Third income quartile	0.20		0	1
	Highest income quartile (Ref.)	0.20		0	1
	Missing income information	0.20		0	1

EQLS 2016; N=36,460; weighted means and standard deviations.

Societal conditions that enable people's opportunities and choices are captured by four country-level measures that can be grouped in three topics: economic conditions, freedoms, and norms and values.

Economic conditions are captured by a nation's wealth—more affluent societies are more likely to provide individuals with more opportunities—and the (in)equality of income distribution, as more people can profit from these opportunities in more equal societies. National wealth is operationalized using GDP per capita in purchasing power parities (PPP). Income inequality is operationalized using the income quintile share ratio comparing the top 20% of incomes to the bottom 20%.[25] The data for both indicators stem from the World Bank.

Regarding freedoms, I make use of the Freedom House's measure of civil liberties, which is based on expert ratings. Civil liberties include freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and individual autonomy and individual rights. The civil liberties rating ranges from 0 to 60, with higher values indicating greater civil liberty.

To capture a societal value climate that foster individuals' opportunity and choice, I use the significance attached to tolerance in a society. The importance of tolerance is measured as the percentage of people in a society who, out of a list of 12 values, deem tolerance as one of the three most relevant. These data stem from the Eurobarometer 83.3 from 2015. The macro-level variables are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 Means, standard deviations, minima, and maxima of the societal conditions variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Log GDP	2.12	0.43	1.10	3.26
Income quintile share ratio	5.71	1.52	3.66	9.25
Civil liberties	51.81	7.81	29.00	60.00
Tolerance	14.04	5.46	1.40	26.40

All values for 2016 except income quintile share ratio and tolerance (2015).

Missing data treatment and methodological procedure

Taking all variables together, the missing information leads to a dropout of about 10% of cases. This large number of missing values is largely driven by the basic functionings, especially leisure and respect, that each has more than 4% missing values in the overall sample. By replacing the missing values in the basic functionings with their country mean, further subdivided by gender, three age groups (18–34, 35–64, 65+), and three

[25] There are various ways to measure economic inequality, such as the Gini-coefficient, the S80/S20 ratio, the S90/S10 ratio, at-risk-of-poverty or poverty rate, or the share of national wealth held by the wealthiest 10%. Here, the income quintile share ratio (S80/S20) was used, as it is the only measure for which data for all countries are available. The income quintile share ratio correlates strongly with the S90/S10 ratio (r=0.91, N=32), the Gini-coefficient (r=0.89, N=32), and the at-risk-of-poverty-rate (r=0.85, N=32).

education categories (ISCED 0–2, 3–4, 5–8) missing data are reduced to 2%. This approach is chosen over multiple imputation (MI) methods such as predictive mean matching, as MI does not produce different results while vastly limiting graphical illustration options.

All univariate and bivariate statistics are weighted according to the recommendation of Eurofound. For all multivariate analyses on life satisfaction linear multilevel modeling is applied. In multilevel modeling, individual-level data for all countries are pooled in one dataset; country effects are not estimated as distinct values for each country, but the country-level variance is estimated instead. I apply multilevel models for two reasons: first, to account for the nested structure of the data (individuals are nested within countries). This approach is necessary as the individuals of one country are likely to be more similar to one another than to other individuals from different countries, because they share similar characteristics and are affected by the same environment (within-cluster dependence). Second, to explain variance in intercepts and slopes between countries: Both the differences in life satisfaction and differences in individual-level factors, such as perceived autonomy, exert on life satisfaction might be explained by country-level conditions, such as national wealth or income inequality. Empirically, the variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the macro-level is measured using the intra-class-correlation coefficient (ICC). When the ICC is higher than 10% a multilevel approach is considered necessary. The ICC of the subsequent analyses shows that 14% of the variance in life satisfaction is explained by the country level. The subsequently applied multilevel approach makes it possible to control for these country-level differences; moreover, it allows me to investigate how strongly autonomy varies due to country-level characteristics and which societal conditions statistically explain this variation. For all analyses, including cross-level interactions, random slopes are estimated for main effects and interaction terms, assuming an unstructured covariance.

Steps of the analysis

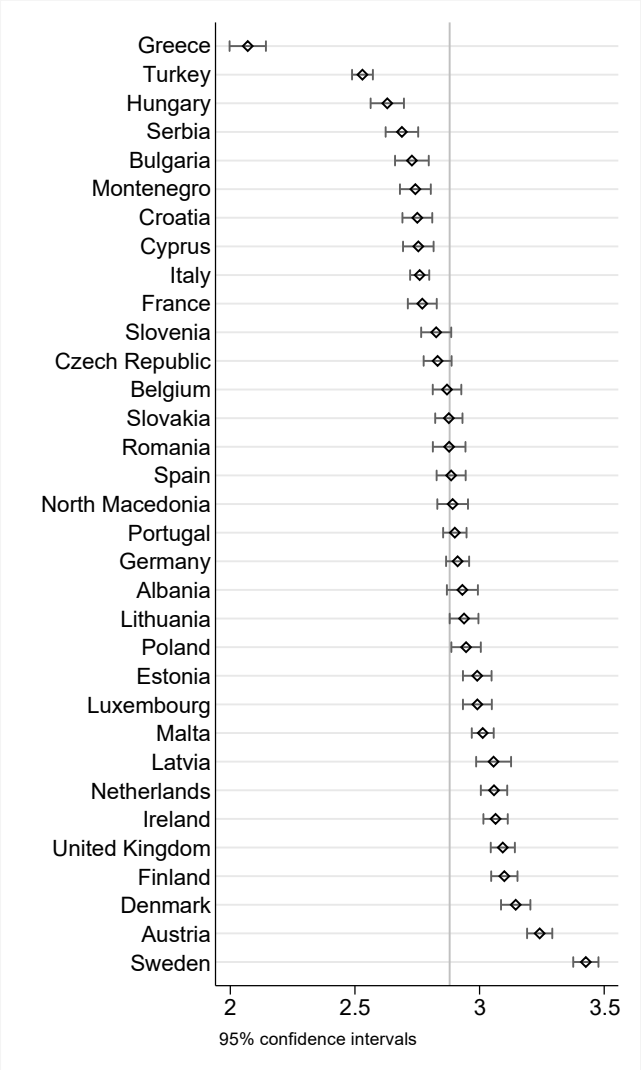
Following the theoretical model, as shown in Figure 7, I will first present descriptive statistics on the distribution of autonomy in Europe. Second, I will examine the effects of individual autonomy and societal conditions on life satisfaction (H1). Third, I will investigate the correlation between autonomy and the basic functionings (H3) and test how strongly the basic functionings contribute to individuals' life satisfaction (H2). Fourth, I will examine whether the positive influence of the basic functionings on life satisfaction is dampened by individual autonomy (H4). Finally, in a fifth step, I will investigate for each of the six basic functionings and each of the three societal conditions whether the basic functionings have a smaller impact on individual life satisfaction in societies that provide more opportunity and choice (H5).

Results

The distribution of autonomy in Europe

Figure 8 displays the distribution of individuals' perceived autonomy in Europe around the European mean of 2.88. With a mean of 2.07 on a five-point scale from 0 to 4, Greece is the only country around the midpoint of the scale; the next two countries in line, Turkey and Hungary, score above 2.50. In total, only ten countries report mean autonomy levels significantly below the weighted population average, twelve countries around the mean, and eleven significantly above, headed by Denmark (3.14), Austria (3.24), and Sweden (3.43). Overall, reported autonomy is lowest in the South Eastern European countries and highest in the Anglophone and Nordic countries.

Figure 8 Distribution of autonomy in Europe



EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; weighted means with 95% confidence intervals; grey vertical line indicates the weighted population average across all 30 countries (2.88). Autonomy is measured on a 5-point scale from "agree" (0) to "disagree" (4): To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel I am free to decide how to live my life.

The role of individual autonomy and societal conditions for life satisfaction

How much of an influence do individual autonomy and the societal conditions that promote opportunity and choice exert on people's life satisfaction? Estimating multilevel regressions of life satisfaction on autonomy, the societal conditions, and the individual-level control variables, I find that both individuals' perceived autonomy and societal conditions exert significant effects on life satisfaction, lending support to hypothesis 1 (see Table 6).

Table 6 Multilevel regression of life satisfaction on individual autonomy and societal conditions

Societal condition included in the model	***Log GDP***	***Income quintile share ratio***	***Civil liberties***	***Tolerance***
Autonomy	0.589***	0.589***	0.589***	0.589***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Societal condition	1.399***	− 0.224**	0.079***	0.072***
	(0.151)	(0.078)	(0.012)	(0.020)
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
F statistic	309.96	306.08	307.95	306.34
Chi²	8058.96	7958.19	8006.82	7964.73
Log likelihood	− 74,336.14	− 74,353.53	− 74,342.91	− 74,351.64

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; unstandardized b-coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. The societal condition coefficient represents the effect of the societal condition specified in the top row controlled for the individual effect of perceived autonomy and the individual-level controls.

The influence of perceived autonomy on individuals' life satisfaction is quite substantial. With a change in life satisfaction of 0.589 points per increase on the four-point autonomy scale, the difference between no autonomy and high autonomy accounts for more than two points on the ten-point scale of life satisfaction. Regarding the country-level economic conditions, income inequality is the strongest predictor within the analyzed European sample: with each increase of 1 in the income quintile share ratio, overall life satisfaction decreases by 0.224 points, which adds up to a difference of 5.6 points between the least unequal and the most unequal country in Europe. When comparing the countries with the lowest and highest values for each of the remaining indicators, the full difference in life satisfaction explained by the societal conditions ranges from 1.5 to nearly 3 points: national affluence (2.9), civil liberties (2.4), and tolerance (1.6).

The interplay of basic functionings, autonomy, and life satisfaction

As assumed in hypothesis 3, all basic functionings are positively related to autonomy (see Table 7.) While autonomy appears to be more closely related to financial security and respect than, for example, to health or friendship, the correlations are overall weak

to moderate. Taken together with the rather weak yet significant correlations among the basic functionings, these results indicate that functionings and autonomy each capture independent aspects of people's lives and thus are not interchangeable.

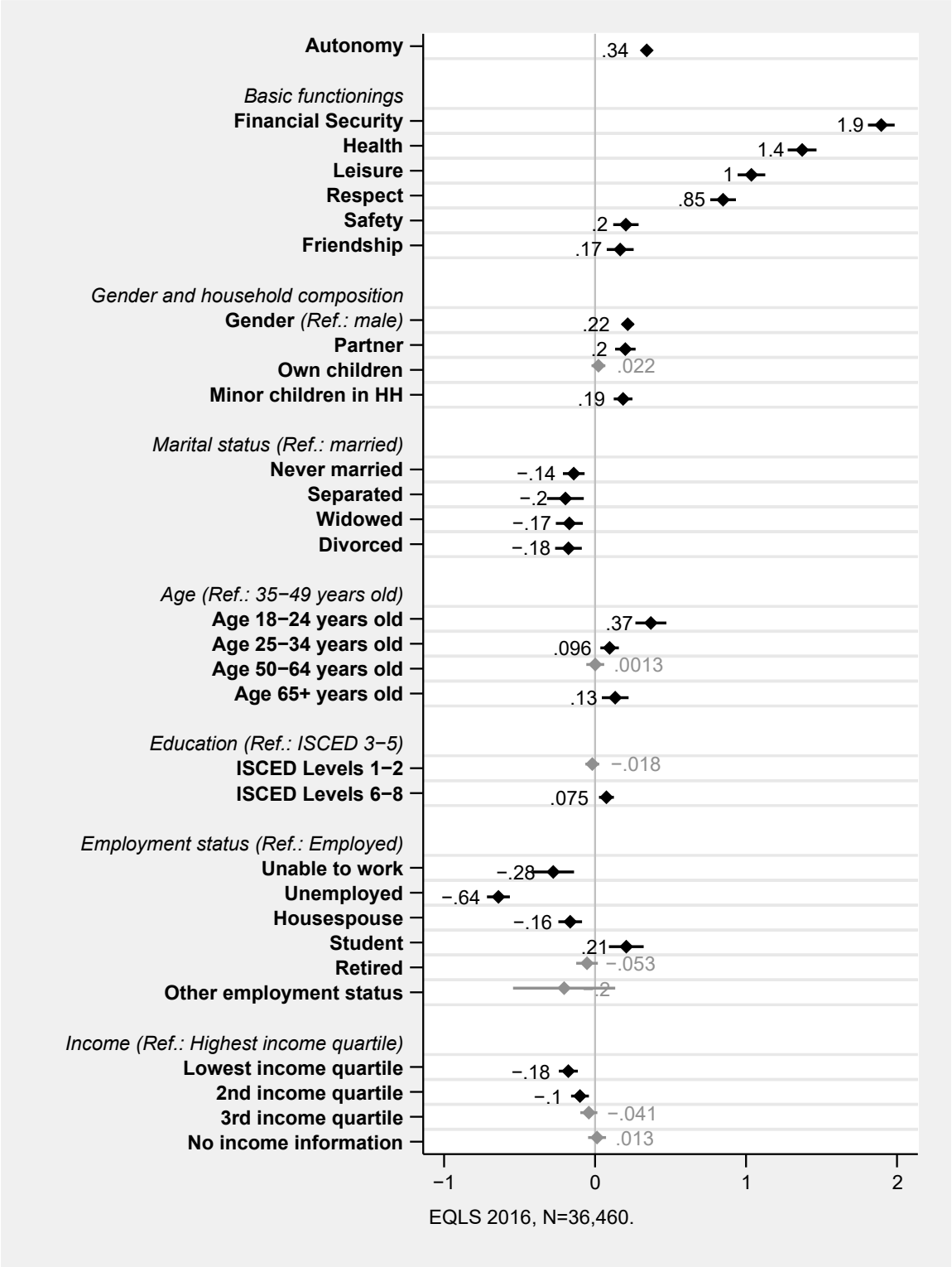
Table 7 Correlations between autonomy and basic functionings

	Autonomy	Financial security	Health	Respect	Friendship	Leisure
Financial security	0.28	–				
Health	0.17	0.27	–			
Respect	0.28	0.31	0.18	–		
Friendship	0.10	0.03	0.16	0.10	–	
Leisure	0.23	0.24	0.16	0.26	0.10	–
Safety	0.22	0.20	0.16	0.21	0.09	0.16

EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; Spearman correlations; all correlations significant at $p < 0.001$

Figure 9 reports the results of a multilevel regression of individual life satisfaction on autonomy and the six basic functionings while controlling for socio-demographic parameters. The graph plots unstandardized b-coefficients and 95%-confidence intervals. For easier readability, significant effects are shown in black and insignificant effects in grey. The results lend further support to the independent relevance of the basic functionings for life satisfaction, but also show that some functionings count more than others. While the difference between low and high financial security can explain a difference of nearly two points on the ten-point life satisfaction scale, physical safety and friendship can only explain about 0.2 points between a not achieved and a fully achieved functioning. Compared to being in bad health, being completely healthy increases life satisfaction by 1.4 points. Having time to do the things one really enjoys and filling one's life with interesting things adds another point to life satisfaction compared to a life that is lacking in leisure. Finally, feeling respected by others increases life satisfaction by a little less than one point (0.85), again compared to those who feel not respected at all. Altogether, the difference between a life fully lacking in all functionings and a life characterized by the full achievement of all six basic functionings statistically explains more than half of people's life satisfaction (5.52 points). In parallel to the strong contribution of the basic functionings, individual autonomy still exerts an independent positive effect that, comparing the extremes, can account for another 1.4 points on the 10-point life satisfaction scale.

Figure 9 The effects of basic functionings and autonomy on life satisfaction.



EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; unstandardized b-coefficients with confidence intervals; significant effects at $p < 0.05$ shown in black, insignificant effects in grey. Multilevel regression of life satisfaction on the basic functionings and autonomy (with individual-level controls). Random intercept only model. Full model in Table A6.

Now, does autonomy weaken this positive relationship between basic functionings and life satisfaction? To answer this question, Table 8 reports the results of six linear multilevel regression models of life satisfaction on interactions between autonomy and each of the basic functionings. For four out of six basic functionings, a dampening effect of autonomy is found, as assumed in hypothesis 5. Financial security, health, respect, and friendship all still have a positive effect on life satisfaction, but this effect weakens with increasing autonomy, as the negative interaction term between autonomy and the respective functioning shows.

Table 8 Multilevel regression of life satisfaction on individual autonomy, basic functionings, and their interaction

Functioning included in the interaction	Financial Security	Health	Leisure	Respect	Safety	Friendship
Autonomy	0.436***	0.421***	0.371***	0.463***	0.383***	0.453***
	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.036)
Functioning	2.495***	1.721***	1.203***	1.368***	0.346**	0.624***
	(0.176)	(0.136)	(0.135)	(0.126)	(0.118)	(0.135)
Interaction autonomy* functioning	− 0.205***	− 0.127***	− 0.055	− 0.189***	− 0.057	− 0.155***
	(0.035)	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.043)
Other basic functionings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
F statistic	178.80	254.79	322.63	299.59	347.49	345.63
Chi²	5721.45	8153.44	10,324.17	9586.74	11,119.65	11,060.23
Log likelihood	− 71,590.65	− 71,749.96	− 71,779.65	− 71,751.01	− 71,780.27	− 71,769.84

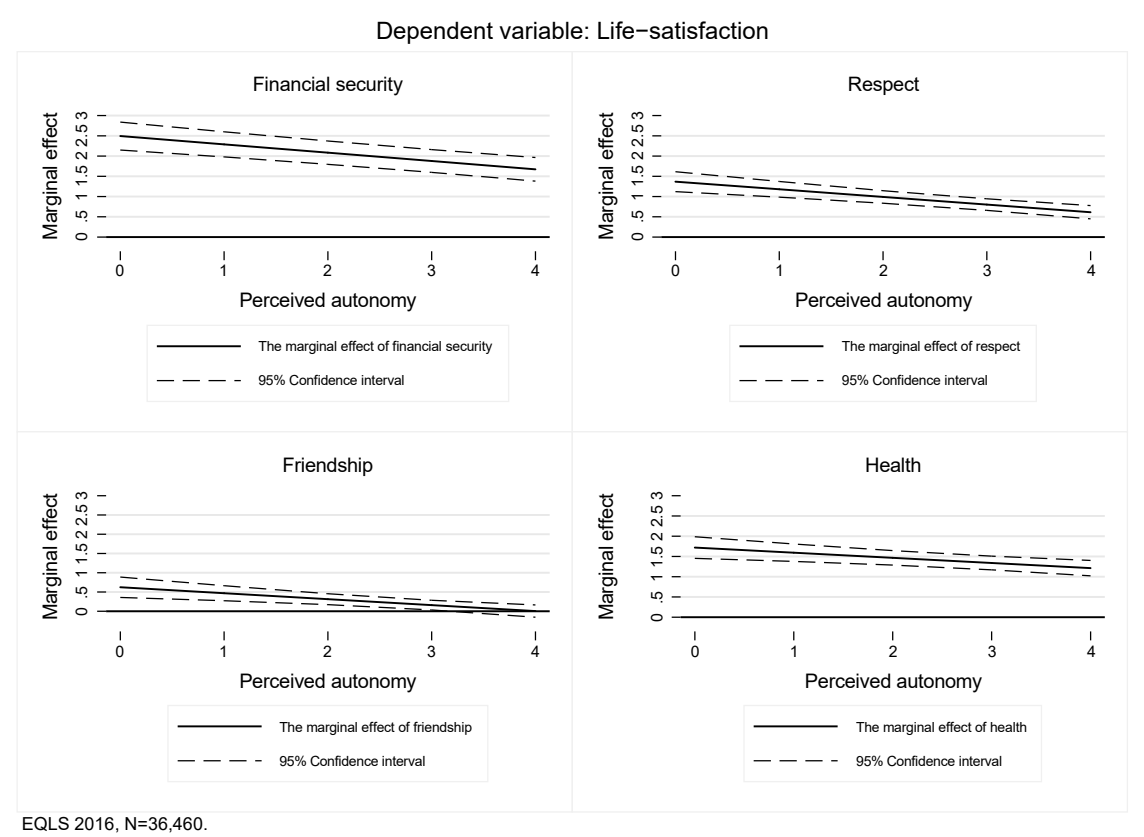
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; unstandardized b-coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Multilevel regression of life satisfaction on the basic functionings and autonomy (with individual-level controls). Random slopes for autonomy and the functioning that is part of the interaction. The functioning included in the interaction between perceived autonomy and functioning is specified in the top row; this effect is controlled for the effects of perceived autonomy and the respective functioning, as well as the remaining five functionings and the individual-level controls.

Figure 10 displays the marginal effects of financial security, respect, health, and friendship on life satisfaction at different levels of autonomy. As can be seen, the four basic functionings have a positive impact on life satisfaction, but with increasing perceived autonomy this effect becomes smaller. This indicates that the more autonomy people perceive they have over their lives, the weaker the relationship between achieved functionings and life satisfaction becomes. The difference in life satisfaction gains at the

varying levels of perceived autonomy is greatest for financial security, followed by respect and friendship, and smallest for health. When comparing people with low (0) and high (4) perceived autonomy, the maximum gain in life satisfaction from financial security ranges from 2.5 to 1.7 points on the 10-point scale. The functioning of being respected by others increases the life satisfaction of people with low perceived autonomy by 1.4 points, yet only by 0.6 points when people perceive full autonomy over their lives. The positive effect of friendship can explain around 0.6 points of life satisfaction for people with low perceived autonomy; but decreases to practically zero for people with high perceived autonomy. Finally, the difference between poor health and very good health explains around 1.7 points in life satisfaction among people with low and 1.2 points for people with high perceived autonomy.

Figure 10 The marginal effects of the basic functionings on life satisfaction



EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; unstandardized b-coefficients. Random slopes for autonomy and the functioning that is part of the interaction.

The interplay of basic functionings, societal conditions, and life satisfaction

The final step of the analysis investigates whether societal conditions also weaken the relationship between the basic functionings and individuals' life satisfaction. Table 9 shows, in a reduced form, the results of multilevel regressions of life satisfaction on the four societal conditions, the basic functionings, and their interaction (full models available on request). In all models, the basic functionings exert a positive and significant influence on life satisfaction, as do the societal conditions (naturally, the

effect of income inequality is negative). Whenever the positive effect of a basic functioning on life satisfaction is weakened by a societal condition (significant interaction effect), this is indicated by a check mark in Table 9. The results of this final step of the analysis are quite mixed.

Table 9 Cross-level interactions between basic functionings and societal conditions

	Financial security	Health	Leisure	Respect	Safety	Friendship
Log GDP	✓	n.s	✓	✓	n.s	n.s
Income quintile share ratio	✓	n.s	n.s	✓	✓	n.s
Civil liberties	✓	n.s	✓	✓	✓	n.s
Tolerance	✓	n.s	n.s	✓	n.s	n.s

EQLS 2016; N = 36,460. Multilevel regression of life satisfaction on the basic functionings and societal conditions (with autonomy and individual-level controls). Random slopes for the functioning that is part of the interaction. Variables included in the interaction are grand-mean centered. Check marks indicate interactions are significant at least at $p < 0.05$.

Starting with economic conditions, in more affluent countries financial security, leisure, and respect exert a weaker influence on life satisfaction; in societies with a more equal income distribution, financial security, respect, and safety contribute less to individual life satisfaction than in more unequal societies. Moving on to guaranteed freedoms, in countries with strong civil liberties, four of the six basic functionings—financial security, leisure, respect, and safety—have a lesser impact on life satisfaction than in countries with weaker civil liberties. Finally, the results show that in societies that place a higher value on tolerance financial security and respect are less important for individuals' life satisfaction than in societies where tolerance is valued less. The positive effects of health and friendship are not influenced at all by any of the societal conditions.

The assumption made in hypothesis 5 can therefore only partly be supported: the relevance of financial security and respect for people's life satisfaction decreases where economic conditions are better, where freedoms are granted, and a positive value climate prevails; leisure and security decrease in relevance where the economic situation is better and freedoms are guaranteed, but are unaffected by the value climate. Overall, a society's economic conditions, freedoms, and value climates can level the relationship between functionings and people's subjective well-being, but the relevance of some functionings, like health and friendship, remain unaffected by societal conditions.

Conclusion

By incorporating elements of the CA into subjective well-being research, this article provides first empirical insights on how the relationship between six basic functionings and individual well-being is affected by *individuals' perceived autonomy* on the one hand and *societal conditions that provide opportunities and enable choice* on the other. Although the positive contribution of basic functionalities such as health, respect, and safety to subjective well-being is well documented, very little is known about how this relationship varies depending on the different levels of autonomy individuals perceive

themselves as having over their lives and on the prevalence of societal opportunity and choice. This is surprising given the significance attributed to opportunity and choice in the capability framework. That basic functionings contribute less to people's life satisfaction when they have more options and more autonomy may seem counterintuitive, but is in line with the theoretical assumptions of CA: only when people have sufficient opportunity and choice are they able to choose freely which capabilities to transform into functionings that correspond to their notion of a good life. When opportunity and choice are poor, individuals' subjective well-being depends much more on their achieved functionings.

Using survey data from 33 European societies, I applied multilevel modeling to address three empirical relationships: (1) the contribution of individuals' perceived autonomy and the opportunity and choice enhancing societal conditions in which they are embedded to life satisfaction, (2) the contribution of six basic functionings to individual satisfaction, and (3) the moderating effect of perceived autonomy and societal conditions on the relationship between functionings and life satisfaction.

The first key finding of the article is that both individual perceived autonomy and opportunity and choice enhancing societal conditions increase individual life satisfaction. Even when controlling for a broad range of individual-level characteristics and societal conditions, perceived autonomy always strongly positively influences Europeans' life satisfaction, which is consistent with other existing evidence of this relationship (e.g., Hojman & Miranda, 2018; Maridal, 2017; Ng, 2015). Additionally, independently from their level of perceived autonomy, individuals are significantly more satisfied with their lives in countries that provide better economic conditions, offer more civil freedoms, and are characterized by a more tolerant value climate. These results agree with other observations on the life satisfaction—enhancing effect of national wealth (e.g., Chua et al., 2020; Ngamaba, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020) and lend further support for a *negative* impact of income inequality, which was also found by Pitlik et al. (2015) and Nguyen et al. (2020). My results further support previous research findings that civil liberties and political rights add to individual life satisfaction irrespective of how much choice people perceive themselves to have over their lives (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2014; Chua et al., 2020; Maridal, 2017) and corroborates previous findings on the conducive effect of living in a tolerant society (Inglehart et al., 2008; Lun & Bond, 2016).

Second, all six basic functionings exert a positive influence on individual life satisfaction. This shows that individuals' overall evaluation of their lives does indeed reflect their well-being when quantified as a multidimensional vector of achieved functionings, which accords with the findings of previous research (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Vladisavljevic & Mentus, 2019; Western & Tomaszewski, 2016). That only six basic functionings together can statistically explain more than half of people's life satisfaction is also a good indicator that lists of basic universal capabilities as provided by Nussbaum (2002) capture quality of life elements that are significant to individuals and can be applied cross-culturally.

Third, and most importantly, the relationship between functionings and subjective well-being is attenuated by perceived autonomy and societal conditions. Taken together, this paper provides both more encompassing and more detailed support than previous research for one of the fundamental assumptions of the CA: a person's functioning vector can only be evaluated when taking into account their opportunity freedom and freedom of choice. When people experience high levels of autonomy over their life, the basic functionings of financial security, respect, health, and friendship are of less relevance for their individual life satisfaction. Conversely, a lack in one of those four basic functionings is much more detrimental to someone with low than for someone with high perceived autonomy: despite their identical functioning vector, they differ in their life evaluation because they differ in the autonomy they perceive over their lives. The comprehensive investigation of interactions between perceived autonomy and six different functionings indicates a general dampening effect of perceived autonomy, for which so far only scarce evidence exists (Steckermeier, 2019; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010) . However, two functionings, namely leisure and safety, remain unaffected by individual autonomy, indicating that some functionings maintain a rather universal importance for life satisfaction independent from people's autonomy or lack thereof.

Alongside the dampening effect of individual autonomy, societal conditions that promote people's opportunities and choices also weaken the relationship between functionings and well-being. The civil freedoms and rights guaranteed by the state shape the relationship between functionings and life satisfaction most broadly. Four of the six functionings—financial satisfaction, leisure, respect, and safety—are less relevant to peoples' life satisfaction when they live in a country with more civil liberties. One reason why the effects of so many functionings are dampened by civil liberties could be that their scope is so far-reaching: among many others, they encompass freedom of speech and beliefs, the right to own property, the right to privacy, the right to live, and the right to bodily integrity. When these are not guaranteed or not enforced, individuals suffer when aspired functionings are not—or not sufficiently—achieved. In more affluent societies, which are known to provide people with public goods and services, such as education, health care, and social security, the relevance of financial security, leisure, and respect for individuals' life satisfaction is reduced. Regarding financial security, the results match those found by Delhey (2010) and Inglehart et al. (2008). The expected reverse effect is evident for income inequality, which is associated with insufficient provision of public goods and services. In societies with a more equal income distribution, financial security, respect, and safety are less important for life satisfaction, and vice versa, in societies with high income inequality, individuals' life satisfaction is much more dependent on their financial security, the respect they receive from others, and the safety they enjoy. Finally, a societal value climate characterized by tolerance attenuates the effects of financial security and respect. Regarding financial security, this finding is consistent with those of Lun and Bond (2016), who found a similar effect for societies with higher self-expression values. Individuals who experience financial insecurity and disrespect thus suffer even more when their society

is characterized by a low level of tolerance towards others than when they lived in a more tolerant society.

Financial security and the respect individuals receive from others are the two basic functionings that become less relevant for individual life satisfaction with both increasing individual perceived autonomy and increasing societal opportunities and choice. Leisure and safety are less important in societies with better economic conditions and more encompassing civil liberties, yet do not vary among individuals according to their perceived autonomy. Conversely, health and friendship do differ in their positive effect on life satisfaction among individuals with different levels of perceived autonomy but are equally important notwithstanding societal conditions.

A different reading of the results could conclude that people whose needs for good health, safety, belonging, and respect are met enjoy higher levels of autonomy. This would be in line with Maslow's pyramid of needs. However, this reading overlooks two important aspects. First, empirically, need fulfillment does not strictly follow Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but instead people sometimes attend to fulfilling psychosocial needs *before* their basic needs are met (Tay & Diener, 2011). Second, whereas autonomy in Maslow's theory is an independent need in addition to other needs, within the capability framework it is not just another functioning but instead the freedom necessary to achieve the functionings one values. The difference can be well illustrated using the example of health. The prominent Whitehall (II) study examining the health of 10,000 British civil servants found that deficient autonomy at work and at home strikingly increased the risk of certain illnesses, such as depression and heart diseases (Bosma et al., 1997; Marmot, 2015). This finding contradicts the idea of needs strictly based on each other and indicates instead that the (continuously) unfulfilled need at the tip of the need pyramid impairs the lower tiers.

Overall, the results of this paper strongly support the notion of the CA including individuals' autonomy and capability instead of focusing on their functionings alone. Some limitations, however, need to be addressed. One of the main limitations of this research is that the only available item to capture individuals' autonomy only asks people about the overall freedom they perceive in deciding how to live their lives. It is plausible to assume that people consider opportunities and choice alike when evaluating their perceived autonomy, but it remains unclear to what extent the two aspects are taken into account. Asking people specifically about the opportunities they (perceive themselves to) have could help to distinguish the distinct effects of freedom of choice and opportunity freedom, as well as to investigate their interplay. Further, the autonomy item used here captures a general evaluation of people's life autonomy and thus gives no information on the autonomy perceived in different life domains—for example, at work or within the family (for a comprehensive analysis of individuals' understanding of choice and control see Burchardt & Holder, 2012).

A second major limitation of this analysis is that the measures of basic functionings, perceived autonomy, and life satisfaction are all derived from interviewees' self-evaluations and thus might be influenced by latent personality traits that influence how

people answer such questions. Psychological research shows that self-rated functionings such as health (Löckenhoff et al., 2012) and health behavior (Hampson et al., 2006), financial satisfaction (Tharp et al., 2020), or leisure involvement and leisure satisfaction (Lu & Hu, 2005) are partly influenced by certain personality traits. Unfortunately, the EQLS dataset does not include any information on personality traits, so these effects could not be considered. However, there is also evidence that autonomy (Hojman & Miranda, 2018; Ng, 2015), as well as self-evaluated functionings like respect (Ng et al., 2019), friendship (Ng et al., 2019), health (Budría & Ferrer-I-Carbonell, 2019), or financial satisfaction (Ng, 2015), have independent effects on life satisfaction when controlled for personality traits. These are shortcomings enforced by the data available. Future research should seek to shed light on opportunity freedom and autonomy in different domains, ideally while controlling for personality traits. As my dataset encompasses only European Societies and only at one point in time, looking at more global sample and for a longer period of time could further provide valuable information on the universality of the findings.

For subjective well-being research, the results of this paper indicate that when societal conditions improve and overall individual autonomy increases over time, subjective well-being will become less reflective of well-being operationalized as achieved functionings. For now, while societal conditions and individuals' (perceived) autonomy still vary between countries and people, my results advise caution: Omitting autonomy from analyses of subjective well-being might lead to the false conclusion that basic functionings such as good health or financial security are no longer beneficial, even though this would by no means be true for those who do not perceive themselves as autonomous agents. With regard to the macro-level, a valuable next step would be to investigate who benefits from societal means, freedoms, and a positive value climate—and who might "fall through the cracks."

A further area for research that could benefit from my findings is research surrounding the income inequality hypothesis or status anxiety hypothesis advanced, among others, by Marmot (2015) or Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), which assumes that more unequal societies suffer from social malaise because the people in these societies experience higher levels of stress, disrespect, and status anxiety, and lower levels of control over their lives. Whereas this mediation has empirically been investigated at the individual (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016) and country levels (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2020), my findings suggest taking a closer look at the *moderation*, instead of the mediating effects. The lack in respect people experience when suffering from status anxiety not only is more common in more unequal and more competitive societies (Delhey et al., 2017; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Steckermeier & Delhey, 2018), but also impairs individual life satisfaction more strongly when opportunity and choice are limited.

A further promising step would be to shed light on the role of individual means and conversion factors. Investigating the social stratification of individuals' (perceived) autonomy—by vertical parameters such as income and education as well as horizontal parameters like gender, family status, and age—might allow us to expose inequalities in

the distribution of autonomy and identify resources that would help people to develop more freedom of choice over their own lives. Factors related to people's financial situation, such as employment status, income, and education, have been shown to be especially conducive to supporting individuals' perceived autonomy (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Ervasti, 2002; Symoens et al., 2014). This points to a strong connection between financial resources and autonomy, which could be supported, policy-wise, by a stable economy, social security, or even an unconditional basic income, for example. Yet clearly, individual autonomy cannot be reduced to economic independence. How autonomously individuals experience themselves contributes to their subjective well-being alongside income, employment status, and financial security.

In sum, this paper attempts to build a bridge between the multidimensional understanding of well-being proposed by the CA and individual life evaluation investigated in subjective well-being research. Factoring in the opportunities and choices people have in shaping their lives recognizes that achieved functionings are the result not only of societal and socio-economic conditions, but also of people's preferences and their ability to act accordingly. This recognition of individuals as active agents of their own lives thus helps to reveal the paternalism inherent in quantified empirical well-being. Despite constituting a pivotal part of human development, the significance of individual autonomy has so far been undervalued in the investigation of subjective well-being. As a direct driver of subjective well-being and as a condition for the achievement of an aspired functioning, autonomy deserves a more prominent role.

7 Better Safe than Sorry. Does Agency Moderate the Relevance of Safety Perceptions for the Subjective Well-Being of Young Children?

Abstract

This article explores the subjective well-being (SWB) of eight-year-old children in relation to two aspects important to young people's lives: perceptions of safety and agency. Research has shown that safety perceptions among children are positively correlated with SWB. Building on the capabilities approach, this paper argues that not only is the achieved functioning of being safe important to well-being, but so are substantive opportunities to decide whether or how to achieve that functioning (agency). As young children's ability to convert capabilities into functionings largely depends on their parents or guardians, current research has regarded children as mere recipients of functionings without considering children's agency. This paper advances our understanding of children's SWB by explicitly considering children's agency in regard to their safety. Using data from the second wave of the ISCWeB project for eight-year-olds in 16 countries, the paper follows three aims: First, to examine the relationship between safety perception in three different areas and SWB. Second, to investigate the relationship between children's agency and their SWB. Third, to explore how agency and safety interact in influencing SWB. The results show that children's agency and their perceived safety at home, in their neighborhood and at school each contribute to their SWB. Further, first empirical evidence is provided on a moderating effect of agency on the relationship between neighborhood safety and well-being. The paper makes a case for the relevance of considering children's agency and alludes to the importance of discriminating between safety in different life domains.

Introduction

In recent years, the capabilities approach has gained currency within the rapidly-evolving research field of children's subjective well-being (Biggeri et al., 2011). The capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen is a normative framework for the assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements (Sen, 2001). It is known for its focus on what people *are able* to be or do (i.e., their agency), rather than on life outcomes (Nussbaum, 2014; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 2001). Within the child well-being research, it has been applied for the identification of key capabilities (Biggeri et al., 2006), possible indicators (Domínguez-Serrano & del Moral Espín, 2018), or the multidimensional analysis of children's well-being (Clery et al., 2014; García & Ritterbusch, 2015). However, the notion of children as agents has been debated intensively in recent years (Ballet et al., 2011; Lancy, 2012). Some scholars argue that children *are* agents of their own lives and are thus entitled to have a view on and participate in decisions affecting their lives, according to their age and maturity (Ballet

et al., 2011; Biggeri et al., 2006; Fattore et al., 2009). In contrast, others question the ability of children to act as moral agents (Macleod, 2010), and, consequently so the appropriateness of focusing on opportunities rather than outcomes (Macleod, 2010; Robeyns, 2005; Visak, 2016).

The paper at hand contributes to this ongoing discussion about the role of agency for child well-being. From the capabilities approach, two assumptions can be derived: If children are indeed subjects of capabilities, their level of agency (albeit limited) will positively influence their subjective well-being. If not only the achieved functioning but the capability (i.e., the opportunity to choose is relevant to children's subjective well-being), the level of agency will further moderate how strongly functionings influence their subjective well-being. Put differently: A lack of a certain functioning should cause greater harm to a child's well-being when he or she does not have a chance to achieve this functioning in the first place.

Despite the theoretical debate, little empirical research has been conducted on the role of agency in children's lives (Casas et al., 2013; M. González et al., 2012). To the author's best knowledge, no study has yet investigated the importance of achieved functionings on children's subjective well-being with consideration for the varying levels of the children's agency. This paper will provide initial insights into the interplay between children's (self-reported) agency, and achieved functioning in generating subjective well-being. The functioning selected to illustrate this interplay is children's *perceived safety*. Safety has been identified as one of the most important domains of children's well-being (Fattore et al., 2009). Safety is an integral part of various general lists of capabilities (Biggeri et al., 2006; Nussbaum, 2014). Even though many studies report on the exposure of children to violence in different settings, such as neighborhoods and schools (Milam et al., 2010; Noble et al., 2011; Singh & Kenney, 2013; Spilsbury et al., 2012), only a few studies have analyzed the influence of children's safety perceptions on their subjective well-being (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014; M. González et al., 2012; Lee & Yoo, 2015).

My main research question is whether a lack of safety harms children's subjective well-being more when they have little agency over their lives. This research question unfolds into two objectives that build on each other. The first objective is to investigate the role that both safety and agency play for the well-being of younger children. The second objective is to examine whether the importance of safety for children's well-being depends on their level of agency. These relationships are empirically addressed for three different settings that are particularly important for children's lives: their home, their school and their neighborhood. The data used stem from the second wave of the *International Survey of Children's Wellbeing* (ISCWeB, 2013-2014).

The article is structured as follows. The first part sets the conceptual framework by discussing: (1) the role of agency generally and of children specifically within the capabilities approach, (2) children's safety and its relationship to well-being, and (3) the relevance of agency for the influence of safety on subjective well-being. Each section covers conceptual considerations and a review of previous research. The second part

summarizes the data and methods, and presents the main empirical results. The final section discusses the key results against the background of the capabilities approach.

Agency and the capabilities approach

The concept of agency gained growing attention in the last half of the past century in various fields, including moral and political philosophy (cf. Dworkin, 2008[1988], ch. 1), psychology (Deci & Ryan, 1985), economy (Sen, 2001), and social sciences (Mayall, 2000). The essence of agency lies in the reflection of one's desires and wishes and the ability to implement those in one's life. "By exercising such a capacity, persons define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are" (Dworkin, 2008[1988], p. 20). Agency combines two different aspects: The ability to act independently from others—comparable to the process aspect of freedom in the capabilities approach; and the ability to choose from different opportunities—denoted as the opportunity aspect in the capabilities approach (Archard, 2015, p. 5; Sen, 2007, p. 10). It is important to note that agency does not equal independence; a volitional choice can well be made while relying on the support, guidance and resources of others (Chirkov et al., 2003, p. 98; Williams, 2004, p. 236).

Capabilities, functionings and the good life

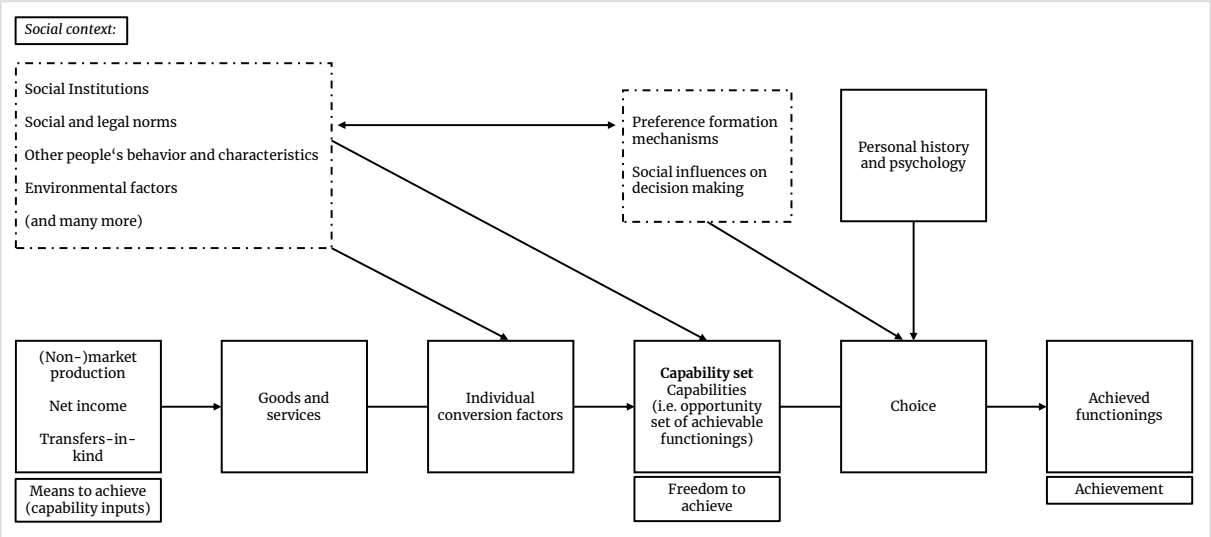
The opportunity aspect is pivotal to the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2014; Sen, 1985, 2001, 2005) which explicitly distinguishes between capabilities and functionings (see also Figure 11). *Functionings* can be understood as actually realized states or actions, like being well-nourished, being educated, riding a bicycle, praying, or being involved in an accident. Some functionings can be categorized as *good* (living in a safe home) or *bad* (being mugged), while others depend on the context (i.e., a child being hit by his parent versus a boxer being hit by another boxer), or the normative framework applied (a mother working full-time). *Capabilities* comprise effectively possible functionings. A capability is thus the real opportunity to achieve or not achieve a functioning; so an individual's capability set represents what s/he could be or do if s/he chose to.

As depicted in Figure 11, the capabilities approach further takes into account the resources an individual holds (means) as well as personal, social, and environmental factors that influence their ability to use these means to achieve functionings (conversion factors).

Let us take books as an example of a good that can enable the function of being educated. Focusing on the bottom part of Figure 11, there are six *steps* starting from capability inputs and leading to an achieved functioning. First, the book has to be acquired. The resources a person holds (e.g., money, internet access, social network) will influence which or how many books s/he can acquire. Second, the book itself is relevant to this person not because of its material worth, but because of the information it contains. Third, certain personal characteristics and abilities are required to make use of the book. These personal conversion factors (e.g., ability to see, reading skills, knowledge of a language, intelligence) influence whether a person has the ability to make proper use of the book. Fourth, if s/he is able to read and properly understand the book, the

opportunity to learn from the book becomes part of her/his capability set. Fifth, this capability can then be chosen to be (or not to be) transformed into a functioning. Finally, if the person chooses to read the book s/he will then achieve the functioning of being (more) educated.

Figure 11 The capabilities approach



Note: Figure taken from Robeyns (2005, p. 98).

This process is embedded in a larger social context that influences the individual's conversion factors, capability set and choices. Social conversion factors (e.g., cultural and social norms, social hierarchies, gender roles) and environmental conversion factors (e.g., climate, geographical location, and daylight hours) can affect the successful conversion of a book into education.

Taken altogether the capabilities approach accounts for human diversity by recognizing that two people with the same capability set are nevertheless likely to end up with different functionings due to different ideas of a good life that are embedded in diverse societal and cultural settings (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 2005). The important aspect for the article at hand is the actual choice to achieve a functioning. Being forced to read Kafka or being denied access to religious texts (or vice versa) will surely influence a person's achieved functioning of being educated in a certain way; but this might not reflect this person's idea of a good life. This link between agency, achieved functionings and the good life is described in more detail below.

The capability approach eliminates the causal relationship between a person's capabilities and functionings and his or her subjective well-being. A person's well-being is most likely influenced by his or her capabilities and achieved functionings. However, the sole focus on well-being outcomes neglects the crucial role of agency as well as an individual's conceptions of what constitutes a good life. Focusing on well-being as the main pursuit of life, thereby, reduces agency to a mere instrument to achieve well-being (Sen, 1985). The constitutive role of agency becomes clear when a person's conception of the good life and his or her well-being do not coincide: Sen (2005) provides the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who fasted to protest and thereby willingly reduced his

own well-being, when he would have had the freedom to be well-nourished (Sen, 2005, p. 155). Thus, well-being can well be one outcome of achieved functionings, but cannot serve as a proxy for capabilities and functionings. Robeyns identifies two cases that justify looking at achieved functionings rather than capabilities. First, when it is plausible to assume that a capability needs to be transformed into a functioning (e.g., not being beaten up by a husband); and second, when people are not able to make complex choices: "Some people, like young children or the mentally disabled, might not be able to make complex choices, which should make the evaluations of their well-being in terms of achieved functionings often a sensible thing to do" (Robeyns, 2005, p. 101). This perspective, however, is increasingly challenged by a growing body of literature which argues for the importance of agency in children's lives (Fattore et al., 2009; Graf, 2016; The Children's Society, 2012).

Children's agency

The agency of children has long been disregarded by researchers. Children have often been viewed as incompetent actors whose freedom and rights are and need to be defined and limited by adults (Graf, 2016, p. 21; Visak, 2016, p. 43). Further, children have been conceptualized as *becomings* rather than *beings* (Qvortrup, 2005, p. 5), thereby diminishing childhood to a *preparatory stage* (Graf & Schweiger, 2016, p. 6) for becoming valuable adult members of society (e.g., Sen, 2003). Recently, children's agency has gained increasing attention, especially from the sociology of childhood (Vandenbroeck & Bie, 2006, p. 127). Article 12 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) is political evidence of this shift. This article entitles all children who are able to express themselves verbally and non-verbally to be informed, to be heard and to participate in decision-making processes, while taking into account the competence and willingness of children at different stages of their development (Lansdown, 2005, p. 4).

Children should, thus, be enabled, but not forced to participate, leaving them in a transitional state in-between the *full-process freedom* that adults enjoy and the *no-process freedom* (Stöcklin & Bonvin, 2014, p. 4). The capability approach accounts for this transitional stage by recognizing the multidimensionality of children's well-being and the changing salience of each domain as it evolves with the development of the child (Biggeri & Karkara, 2014, p. 21). However, this also means that the capabilities approach cannot be transferred directly on to children. Beyond their own capabilities and conversion factors, parents' or guardians' capabilities and conversion factors also shape children's lives directly and indirectly (Ballet et al., 2011; Biggeri et al., 2006). First, children's capabilities depend on their guardians' capabilities. This intergenerational transfer of capabilities becomes apparent, for example, in the impact of a guardian's level of education and material deprivation on children's nutrition, shelter and education. Second, children's ability to convert capabilities into functionings is constrained by guardians' decisions. Caregivers might restrict agency in order to enable the realization of functionings. For example, they might *force* children to get vaccinated to enable future health or *force* them to do their homework in order to enable education. Children's agency should, thus, not be conceptualized as the *amount* of choices and

opportunities as this would negate their need for guidance and foresight. In fact, children themselves described their agency as making choices in everyday situations at home and in school within the boundaries set by adults, as well as the ability to negotiate about these boundaries (Fattore et al., 2009). Thus, the quality of children's agency lies not in its mere extent, but in its adequacy for the child's capacity and willingness to act as agent. In accordance with Casas et al. (2013) who found satisfaction with agency to have a positive impact on children's subjective well-being, it can be hypothesized that children's subjective well-being is directly impacted by the adequacy of the agency, as perceived by the child him- or herself.

- H1: The more satisfied children are with their role as agents, the higher their level of subjective well-being.

In order to perform additional evaluation on whether children's agency moderates the extent to which achieved functionings influence subjective well-being, *perceived safety* served as exemplary functioning. Safety was chosen since it had been identified as a major component of a child's well-being, even for young children (c.f. Lee & Yoo, 2015).

Children's safety

Safety has been identified as one of the basic domains of quality of life in general (Cummins, 1996; M. González et al., 2012) and for children's well-being in particular (Fattore et al., 2009). It is part of Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2014) and part of the list of children's capabilities by Biggeri et al. (2006). Moreover, safety is an integral part in several composite indices of well-being, such as the *OECD Better Life Index* (OECD, 2015), the *Good Life Index* (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016), and the *Personal Wellbeing Index* (Casas et al., 2013).

Different studies have shown the importance of acknowledging children's subjective view on safety. Children evaluate dangers differently from adults. They see, for example, the neighbor's dog as a greater danger than the drug dealer down the road (Spilsbury et al., 2009, 2012). Further, they are frequently present in situations and locations unobserved by adults, as in, for example, the way from and to school (Ben-Arieh et al., 2009; Benbenîštî & Astor, 2005).

Fattore et al. (2009) find that children associate safety predominantly with being protected by parents, having a safe home and trusting people in their surroundings. To a lesser extent, children associate safety with conditions that are beyond their control, like global threats and a general insecurity about the future (Fattore et al., 2009, pp. 65-66). As children understand their safety in a local rather than in a socio-political context, the focus of this paper will be on the three settings where (young) children spend most of their time: family, neighborhood and school[26] (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014).

[26] Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) and Casey et al. (2016) report for 9- to 12-year-old Americans resp. 12–15 years-old Australians that children spend around 20% of their time in school, around 30% in free-time activities and the rest with their family, including sleep.

Children's safety at home

Children associate home safety primarily with their parent's responsibility to keep them safe: "Children expect that home should be a place where personal threats do not exist and emotional and physical security is promoted" (Fattore et al., 2009, p. 66). According to the UK's good childhood reports (The Children's Society, 2012, 2014), nine out of ten children feel safe at home but of those who don't, the majority reports low subjective well-being, which alludes to the importance of a safe home. Safety at home is positively related to overall safety and to safety at school and in the neighborhood, and contributes to children's well-being (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014; Lee & Yoo, 2015).

Children's safety in the neighborhood

Children's conception of neighborhood safety is composed of the (absence of the) risk of being victimized and the level of social capital (Fattore et al., 2009). Even though children factor in different dangers and evaluate dangers differently from adults, children are confronted with and aware of dangers in their neighborhoods (Ben-Arieh et al., 2009; Spilsbury et al., 2009, 2012). Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood might have negative spill-over effects on other functionings (Fattore et al., 2009). For instance, lacking neighborhood safety has been associated with negative health outcomes (Cecil-Karb & Grogan-Kaylor, 2009; Molnar et al., 2004; Weir et al., 2006), and lower academic achievement (Milam et al., 2010; Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006). Only a few studies have examined the negative impact of unsafe neighborhoods on children's subjective well-being (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014; Lee & Yoo, 2015).

Children's safety in schools

An unsafe school environment presents itself in physical, verbal, emotional and social forms (Benbenîšťî & Astor, 2005, p. 25). This is associated primarily with peers and, to a lesser extent, with school staff (ibid, p. 79). Similar to safety at home, only a few children feel unsafe at school according to the *UK Good Childhood* report; but over one third of those children report low overall subjective well-being (The Children's Society, 2012). Aside from lower well-being (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014; Lee & Yoo, 2015; Tiliouine, 2015), the lack of safety in school is further associated with lower educational achievements (Lowry et al., 1999; Milam et al., 2010) and greater self-harming behaviors (Noble et al., 2011).

Safety and subjective well-being

So far, few empirical studies have focused on the relationship between (perceived) safety and children's subjective well-being. Measuring present and future safety for adolescent Spanish students, M. González et al. (2012) found that safety is positively correlated with overall life satisfaction. Casas et al. (2013) show that, for a sample of Spanish 11- to 14-year-old students, overall satisfaction with safety still contributes very strongly to three different subjective well-being measures—even when controlled for 25 other domain satisfaction items. Lee and Yoo (2015) confirm this relationship using cross-national

data of 12-year-olds in 11 countries: home safety, school safety and neighborhood safety all contribute positively and significantly to children's subjective well-being.

The research discussed in this section provides strong evidence for the importance of safety in children's lives, as well as for the interrelation of safety in different settings. According to the capabilities approach, a lack of safety in one setting cannot be compensated for by the abundance of safety in another setting. In fact, it might even impair it, as the research of Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2004) indicates. Hence:

- H2: A perceived lack of safety at home, in the neighborhood and at school each individually impairs the subjective well-being of children.

Agency and safety

This last section of the conceptual discussion addresses the link between agency and safety. At the heart of the capabilities approach's perspective on the good life lies the idea that the achieved functioning of safety should reflect the level of safety that the individual *chose* to achieve. However, a simple examination of the achieved functioning of safety (or the lack thereof) does not tell us *how* this functioning was achieved. When an individual has the agency to choose to achieve the functioning of safety, it will contribute to what this individual understands as a good life.

Take, for example, two children who bicycle the same dangerous road to school every day. One child has to take the road, because for him there is no other way to access the school. The other child chooses the dangerous road despite having other options, like different roads or taking the bus. Both children have the same feeling of unsafety on their way to school, but their agency differs significantly. Thus, the first child's level of unsafety does not correspond to the level of unsafety he would choose if he had other opportunities. He should, therefore, suffer more from bicycling the dangerous road than the second child who *chose* this road. Linking agency to the achieved functioning of safety can, therefore, help to understand how two children with the same feeling of unsafety end up with different levels of well-being.

Little is known about the relationship of safety and agency empirically. Fattore et al. (2009) find that children's sense of safety is strongly related to their sense of agency. They describe safety as the foundation for their agency and locate their ability to act autonomously mostly in safe environments. This concurs with the findings of Spilsbury (2005) which indicate that children's agency is largely dependent from the parent's assessment of local safety. M. González et al. (2012) find a positive relationship between freedom of choice and control over one's own life and the satisfaction with present and future safety. Yet, to the best knowledge of the author, no study has so far empirically investigated interplay between safety and agency: the relevance of safety (or any similar functioning) for well-being under consideration of the child's agency. Assuming an interplay precisely according to the logic of the capabilities approach, the third hypothesis reads as follows:

- H3: The more satisfied children are with their role as agents, the less impact unsafety at home, in the neighborhood and at school will have on their subjective well-being.

Data and methods

The Children's Worlds Study

This study uses data from the second wave of the *Children's Worlds Study* (ISCWeB, 2013-2014) which was conducted between 2013 and 2015. The *Children's Worlds Study* is an international mainstream-school-based survey among children attending the second, fourth or sixth grade. The self-completion questionnaires for the different age groups mostly cover the same eight core topics: demographics, living situation and family, financial situation, social relationships, local area, school, time use and subjective well-being. The 10- and 12-year-old's questionnaires cover three further topics and are, overall, more extensive. The survey aims at closing the information gap on children's lives and well-being around the world and also aims to identify the development of child-centered, self-reported well-being indicators. It is funded by the Jacobs Foundation and conducted by national teams of researchers. The questionnaire and guidelines on translation, sampling, ethics, and so forth are provided by the *Children's Worlds* core group of researchers who first initiated the project in 2009. Country reports and comparative overview reports including details on sampling and conduction of the survey are available on the project's website (www.isciweb.org).

The strength of the ISCWeB for the purpose of this study is considerable. Not only does it provide information on subjective well-being of younger children in a wider range of countries, but it also provides measures of children's perceived safety in three different areas, along with a measure of satisfaction with their own agency.

The following analyses focus on the data from the 8-year-olds'[27] sample of the second wave of the ISCWeB. This sample covers 17,500 children in 16 countries: Algeria*, Colombia*, England, Estonia, Ethiopia, Germany, Israel, Malta, Nepal, Norway, Poland*, Romania, South Africa*, South Korea, Spain* and Turkey.[28] The sample sizes vary between 802 in Malta to 2432 in South Korea. All countries are included in the subsequent analyses.

[27] The 8-year-old dataset includes children between six and ten years of age, who were surveyed using the questionnaire for the 8-year-olds. Overall, 75% of children in the dataset are 8 years old, 23% are seven or nine years old, and only less than 2% are six or ten years of age.

[28] In countries marked with an asterisk* the study took place in only parts of the country (Rees et al., 2016).

Operationalization

Dependent variable

The children's self-reported *overall life satisfaction (OLS)* is measured on a five-point emoticons scale ranging from a loudly crying face with tears streaming down both cheeks to a happy face with a big grinning mouth, showing teeth. Children are asked to evaluate how happy they are with their life as a whole. The OLS is divided by 0.4 as recommended by ISCWeB so that it can take values between 0 and 100 (mean = 89.80, SD = 20.19, see Table 10). The OLS is preferred to measures covering various life domains as the latter restrict the idea of people having different concepts of what constitutes a good life.

Table 10 Mean, Standard Deviation, Minima and Maxima of Variables included in the Analysis.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Overall Life Satisfaction	89.8	20.19	0	100
Gender (female)	0.50		0	1
Age (6-10 yo.)	0.08	0.52	-2	2
Feeling unsafe at home	0.59	1.04	0	4
Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood	1.05	1.33	0	4
Feeling unsafe at school	0.59	1.03	0	4
Satisfaction with agency	3.45	0.93	0	4

N= 15,526. Source: Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, 2nd Wave (ISCWeb 2013-14); own Calculations.

Independent variables

Satisfaction with agency is a single item measure asking how happy children feel with the freedom they have on a five point emoticons scale. This open question wording allows the children to reflect on their process freedom and/or their opportunity freedom. The variable has been rescaled to range from 0 'low satisfaction with agency' to 4 'high satisfaction with agency'. Overall, the satisfaction with agency in this sample is high (mean = 3.45, SD = 0.93).

Asking for children's satisfaction with their agency instead of their level of agency accounts for the fact that children do not enjoy full process freedom. This approach reflects the intent of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by putting an emphasis on how comfortable children feel with their agency. A measure capturing the pure level of children's agency would neglect that children might be overwhelmed by the responsibility put on them. Nonetheless, additional information on the level of agency would have been beneficial for robustness checks. Unfortunately, the ISCWeB data do not include such a measure.

Perceived unsafety at home, in the neighborhood and at school are each evaluated on a five-point-scale from 0 'I do not agree' to 4 'Totally agree': 'I feel safe at home', 'I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in', 'I feel safe at school'. The variable scales have been

inverted to reflect a lack of safety which makes it easier to interpret the results. Thus, the reported unsafety variables range from 0 ‘feeling safe’ to 4 ‘not feeling safe’. Both home (mean = 0.59, SD = 1.04) and school (mean = 0.59, SD = 1.03) are overall perceived as quite safe. The neighborhoods are perceived as less safe than schools and homes but the children still report feeling safe rather than unsafe in their neighborhoods (mean = 1.05, SD = 1.33).

Asking children about how safe they feel in some area does, by no means, reflect how safe their lives actually are. There are risks and dangers children might not know about or understand. However, at the same time a child’s perception of safety may consider risks and dangers that might not be obvious to the observer. Further, focusing on how safe children *feel*, instead of what threats they are actually exposed to objectively, takes into account the fact that children might react differently to the same circumstances. Clearly, linking official data and perceived safety would be desirable. Unfortunately, there is no such objective information on the school or neighborhood level in the data.

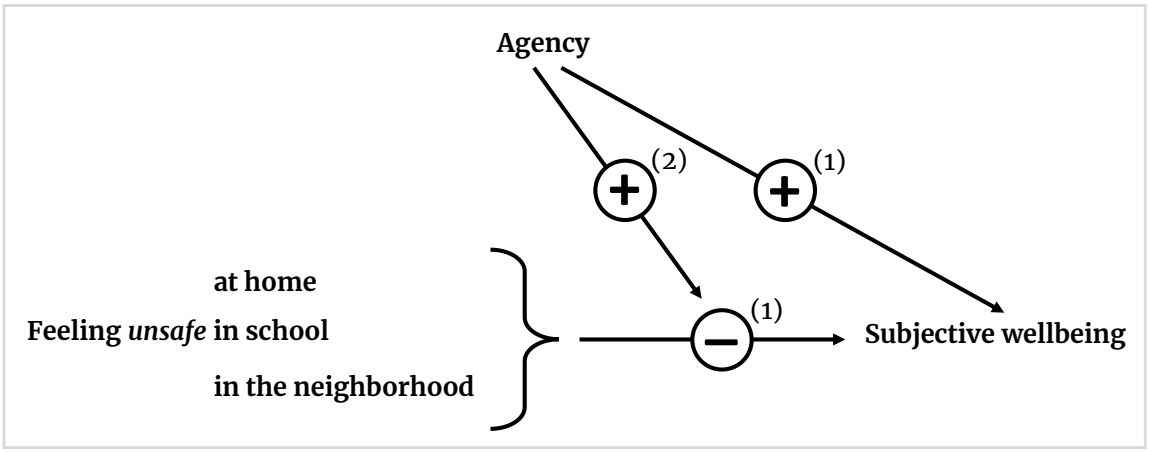
Control variables

All models include age and gender as control variables. Gender is coded as a dummy-variable with boys as the reference group. Age is operationalized in years. As most children (in some countries all) in the sample were eight years old, the variable was centered to that age. Consequently, the new age variable ranged from -2 to 2 (-2 ‘6 years’, -1 ‘7 years’, 0 ‘8 years’, 1 ‘9 years’ and 2 ‘10 years’).

Methods

The first part of the results section focuses on Hypotheses 1. It examines the association between the variables presented in Figure 12 on the basis of bivariate correlations between children’s overall life satisfaction, perceived safety and satisfaction with agency. Next, Hypotheses 2–4 are addressed. In order to explore a possible relation between safety, agency and subjective well-being, four linear fixed-effect regression models have been estimated using subjective well-being as dependent variable. This approach accounts for the clustered structure of the data, where children are nested within countries.

Figure 12 Two steps of the analyses



The model shown in Figure 12 defines two equations that build on each other. The first equation describes the relationship between the children's subjective well-being with the explanatory variables safety and agency. The second equation further includes the interaction term between agency and safety.

$$y_{ij}=\beta_0+\beta_1 safety_{ij}+\beta_2 agency_{ij}+u_i+\varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$y_{ij}=\beta_0+\beta_1 safety_{ij}+\beta_2 agency_{ij}+\beta_3 safety_{ij}*agency_{ij}+u_i+\varepsilon_{ij} \quad (2)$$

where the subscript i identifies the countries and j the respondent. y_{ij} is the subjective well-being of a child in a given country. β_o is the intercept, i.e. the overall mean of subjective well-being. x_{ij} comprises the manifest characteristics of the children that co-vary with their well-being, for example, agency, perceived safety (and the control variables gender and age). u_i comprises all invariant unobserved characteristics of the countries and ε_{ij} all unobserved attributes of the respondents that influence subjective well-being. This fixed-effect model assumes that individual error terms are not correlated with individual characteristics, for example, $Cov\ (x_{ij}, \varepsilon_{ij}) = o$. All models are estimated using cluster-robust standard errors.

Results

Safety, agency and subjective well-being

Table 11 displays bivariate correlations (Spearman's Rho) between OLS, perceived unsafety at home, in the neighborhood and at school, and satisfaction with agency. All five variables correlate highly significant with each other, yet with weak to medium strength only. As expected, feelings of unsafety relate negatively with OLS, while satisfaction with agency relates positively. The small correlations of feeling unsafe in the different settings indicate that although safety perceptions are positively related, they represent independent arenas of safety that should be taken into account individually. The negative correlations between satisfaction with agency and feelings of unsafety point towards an interaction between the two, thereby underlining the importance of estimating their effects in a multivariate framework while holding constant the other variables.

Table 11 Correlations between Overall Life Satisfaction and Safety and Agency

	Overall life satisfaction	Feeling unsafe at home	Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood	Feeling unsafe at school	Satisfaction with agency
Overall life satisfaction	1	-	-	-	-
Feeling unsafe at home	-0.207***	1	-	-	-
Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood	-0.212***	0.232***	1	-	-
Feeling unsafe at school	-0.268***	0.241***	0.280***	1	-
Satisfaction with agency	0.377***	-0.185***	-0.197***	-0.226***	1

N=15,526; *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Source: Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, 2nd Wave (ISCWeb 2013-14); own Calculations.

Multivariate models

Table 12 reports the results of four fixed-effect linear regression results estimating the effect of OLS on feeling unsafe at home, in school and in the neighborhood, and satisfaction with agency while controlling for gender and age. Whereas Model 1 presents only independent effects, Models 2–4 each include an interaction term defined as the product of feeling unsafe and satisfaction with agency.

Model 1 shows how feeling unsafe and being satisfied with agency influences a child's well-being. Most relevant to the research question of this article, the effect of satisfaction with agency on OLS is highly significant and positive. The more satisfied children are with their agency, the higher their overall life satisfaction. Holding all other variables constant, the difference between a child who is not satisfied with his or her agency and a child who is very satisfied is more than 30 points on the OLS scale from 0 to 100, which provides strong evidence for Hypothesis 1. The effects of feeling unsafe at home, at school and in the neighborhood on OLS are all negative and highly significant. The less safe children feel safe in one of these areas the lower their life satisfaction is.

The difference on the OLS scale from 0 to 100 between a child that feels unsafe and a child that feels safe is ceteris paribus around 6 points for safety in the neighborhood, 7.8 points for safety at home and 14.5 points for safety at school. These results support Hypothesis 2. Gender and age did not exert significant effects on OLS over and above the other variables.

Table 12 Fixed-Effect Regression of Overall Life Satisfaction on Safety and Agency

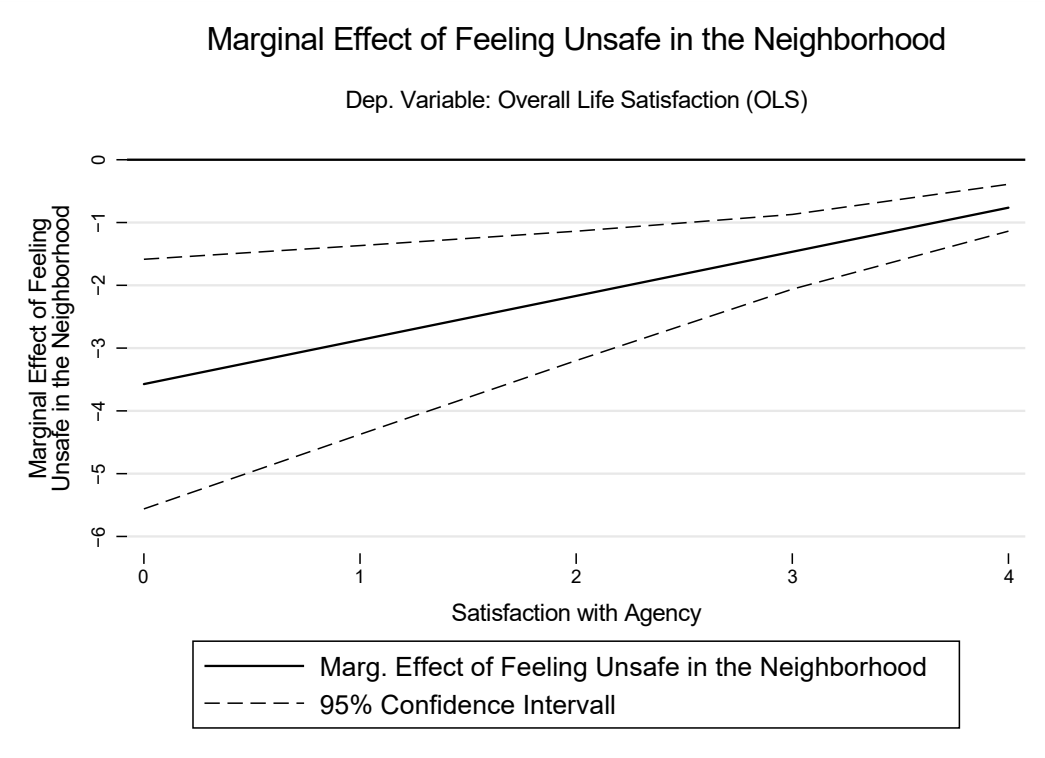
	Modell 1		**Modell 2**		**Modell 3**		**Modell 4**	
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se
Gender (female)	0.713	(0.374)	0.722	(0.371)	0.736	(0.383)	0.709	(0.368)
Age (6-10 years)	-0.212	(0.338)	-0.192	(0.339)	-0.185	(0.331)	-0.188	(0.333)
Feeling unsafe at home	-1.573***	(0.227)	-3.118*	(1.088)	-1.554***	(0.224)	-1.553***	(0.228)
Feeling unsafe at school	-2.917***	(0.309)	-2.903***	(0.305)	-5.014**	(1.265)	-2.908***	(0.309)
Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood	-1.198***	(0.250)	-1.207***	(0.250)	-1.220***	(0.259)	-3.573**	(1.014)
Satisfaction with agency	6.578***	(0.598)	6.140***	(0.621)	5.935***	(0.644)	5.531***	(0.545)
Home unsafe X agency			0.478	(0.290)				
School unsafe X agency					0.659	(0.360)		
Neighborhood unsafe X agency							0.702*	(0.253)
Constant	70.661***	(1.954)	72.191***	(2.078)	72.918***	(2.194)	74.375***	(1.882)
R2 within	0.17		0.18		0.18		0.18	
R2 overall	0.19		0.20		0.20		0.20	
R2 between	0.79		0.79		0.79		0.79	
Number of observations	15,526		15,526		15,526		15,526	
Number of countries	16		16		16		16	

N=15,526; *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001. Source: Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, 2nd Wave (ISCWeb 2013-14); own Calculations.

To test whether the effect of feeling unsafe on OLS is moderated by satisfaction with agency, three further models were estimated. Each model included one additional interaction term between feeling unsafe and satisfaction with agency. Hypothesis 3 stated that satisfaction with agency dampens the negative impact of a lack in safety on subjective well-being. Empirically, the interaction term would have to take a positive value to support H3. Including the interaction terms in Models 2–4 only marginally increases the explanatory power of the models. The effects of all variables that are not part of the interaction remain stable. Albeit all three interaction terms have the hypothesized positive effect on life satisfaction only one is statistically significant: Model 4 shows that satisfaction with agency dampens the negative effect feelings of unsafety in the neighborhood have on overall life satisfaction.

Figure 13 illustrates this effect in more detail. It plots the marginal effect of feeling unsafe in the neighborhood for each value of satisfaction with agency.[29] The continuous line represents the effect a marginal change in feeling unsafe in the neighborhood exerts on OLS at growing levels of satisfaction with agency (dashed lines: 95% confidence intervals). With greater satisfaction with agency the detrimental effect of lacking safety in the neighborhood on children's overall life satisfaction decreases. Thus, two children who feel equally unsafe in their neighborhood but are unequally satisfied with their agency will ceteris paribus end up with different levels of life satisfaction.

Figure 13 Interaction between feeling unsafe in the neighborhood and satisfaction with agency



Notes: ISCWeB 2013-14.

Discussion

The article employed the capabilities approach's central idea of considering what people are *effectively able* to do when evaluating their functionings. Despite the increase in theoretical and methodological developments, empirical applications of the capability approach are still rare. This paper offers first insights into the interplay between agency and achieved functionings in generating well-being.

The empirical analysis investigates, for the first time, a measure of agency as a moderator of the relationship between an achieved functioning and subjective well-

[29] The instructions for the plot were provided by Wenzelburger et al. (2014).

being. Using data from the 2nd wave of *ISCWeB* for eight-year-olds in 16 countries three relationships were examined applying fixed-effect linear regression modelling: (1) the influence of children's satisfaction with agency on their well-being, (2) the influence of perceived unsafety on the children's well-being, and (3) the moderating effect of agency on the relation between perceived unsafety and well-being. The results shed light on the relevance to consider children's agency when examining their well-being. The key findings are:

- Children benefit from adequate agency. The more children are satisfied with their role as agents of their own life the higher their reported well-being.
- Feeling unsafe at home, at school and in the neighborhood takes a toll on children's well-being. Children feel least safe in their neighborhood, but feeling unsafe at school is most detrimental to their well-being.
- The harming effect of feeling unsafe in the neighborhood is dampened by children's satisfaction with agency. The more satisfied children are with their agency the less feelings of unsafety in the neighborhood harm their well-being.

Within the capability framework, this article provides first evidence that the relevance of a functioning (safety) for the well-being of a child is dependent on the child's agency. Though only one of the tested interactions between agency and safety achieved statistical significance, all three indicated the same effect: The more satisfied children were with their agency, the less severe the impact of unsafety was on their well-being. This finding is consistent with the assumptions of the capabilities approach. Without agency, an achieved functioning will less likely resemble what a person constitutes as a good life. Thus, the less real opportunity someone has to achieve or not achieve a functioning, the lower his or her well-being will be. The positive yet insignificant effects of the interactions with unsafety at home and at school however indicate a peculiarity of the perceived unsafety in the neighborhood. As neighborhood is the setting that is most public and thus least controlled and observed by adults it might enable children to act more autonomously and express themselves more freely. The control adults directly and indirectly exercise on children at home and at school might restrict such autonomous behavior thereby diminishing the effect agency can exert on the safety-well-being-relationship. Further research should investigate this relationship examining other functionings and using samples of older children or adults. Moreover, it remains unclear, whether children that young of age factor in agency regarding their safety into their overall evaluation of agency. A measure on safety-specific agency might uncover other moderating effects. Data on functioning-specific agency would thus broaden our understanding of agency composition and enable to investigate the mechanism between functioning, agency and well-being more specifically.

Further, the results add considerable evidence on the relevance of children's satisfaction with agency for their well-being to previous research (Casas et al., 2013). They show how important it is even for very young children to be heard and involved in decisions regarding their own life. With age and the growing capacity of the child, the role of agency will presumably increase. My results further reinforce the increasing attention

children's agency has gained in the past few years. Moreover, they hint toward agency being an important dimension of subjective well-being that could be integrated into multidimensional well-being measures.

Finally, adding to previous research on safety perceptions in different settings (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014) the results confirm the importance of safety for children's well-being. The weak correlations between unsafety at home, at school and in the neighborhood, as well as the individual strong effects in the multivariate analysis clearly indicate the importance of discriminating between these life domains. The finding that school is overall perceived as the least-safe setting goes along with a growing body of literature on verbal and physical violence at schools. Less scientifically explored is the strong negative influence of unsafety in the neighborhood on children's well-being. As discussed above, the neighborhood is probably the setting least observed and controlled by adults. On the one hand, this might expose children to more or greater risks; on the other hand, it might enable children to act more autonomously. The greater impact of unsafety in the neighborhood might well be rooted in this spread: An unsafe neighborhood causes greater harm to well-being, as protective authorities are less present. Yet, a safe neighborhood benefits well-being, as fewer restrictions are in place. Further research should address the role of safe neighborhoods and communities for children's well-being.

Though the evidence collected in this paper is restricted to one functioning and its focus on very young children, it strongly suggests considering agency when analyzing the subjective well-being of children.

Discussion

This dissertation set out to shed light on the value that autonomy has for the good life. Drawing primarily on the capability approach developed by Sen (1985, 1992, 2001) and further developed by other scholars (e.g., Alkire, 2002; Nussbaum, 2001b, 2002; Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns & Byskov, 2021), my main argument was that people evaluated their life differently depending on how much choice went into achieving certain functionings. My assumption was that when people have complete autonomy to shape their lives, the functionings they have or have not achieved would be reflective of their individual conception of what they consider a good life. When people have, however, little autonomy over their lives, their achieved functionings would only match their goals and values by chance and are more likely to deviate from their ideal life plan. With increasing individual autonomy, their life satisfaction would thus depend less and less on the level to which certain functionings were achieved, or vice versa, the less autonomy people perceived over their lives, the stronger their life satisfaction would benefit from an achieved functioning and would suffer if a valued functioning was not or insufficiently achieved. To test these assumptions, first, I followed Sen's suggestion to consider autonomy itself as a functioning (Sen, 1992). Second, to avoid selecting functionings that people have no *reason* to value, I consulted lists of capabilities that are recognized as universally valuable (Alkire, 2002, 2008a; Nussbaum, 2001b). Third, I related individuals' autonomy to their functionings to investigate whether the impact a functioning has on people's life satisfaction differs depending on the autonomy they perceive to have over their lives. This approach might appear to be inferior to measuring capability indicators directly (P. Anand et al., 2009), but there are at least two reasons against a sole focus on individuals' capabilities: With regards to data availability, analyses based on such capability indicators are not feasible for secondary data analysis; since the development of these indicators is still in its infancy and therefore they are not readily obtainable in publicly available representative cross-national surveys. From a theoretical perspective, Nussbaum reminds us that it is not the opportunity to achieve a functioning, but the functioning itself that makes life worthwhile: "if there were no functioning of any kind in a life, we could hardly applaud it, no matter what opportunities it contained" (2001b, p. 87). Moreover, a sole focus on capabilities runs the risk of dismissing the role of personal and societal conversion factors relevant for the transformation of capabilities into functionings and effectively shifting all responsibility for success and failure onto the individual (Fleurbaey, 2002, p. 74). In contrast, measures of functionings are—albeit to a different extent—widely available in most cross-national surveys, thereby providing a greater potential for analysis, as well as for validation of the results through reproduction due to the public availability of the data. However, a sole focus on functionings carries a paternalistic connotation of dictating exactly which functionings constitute a good life, thereby negating people's autonomy to shape their life in accordance with their own goals and values. My approach resides somewhat in between by recognizing autonomy as a functioning in itself, as has been done for example by Delhey and Steckermeier (2016), as well as seeing it as a

moderator of the relationship between other basic functionings and life satisfaction, thereby allowing for different satisfaction outcomes produced by the same functionings depending on the autonomy people hold.

Main research implications

Implications of the individual-level interaction

Using data for 33 European countries from the European Quality of Life Survey, my analyses show that four out of six tested basic functionings do vary by the extent of autonomy people perceive themselves to have: In accordance with the only other study that tested such an interaction (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), I too find financial security to have a lesser impact on life satisfaction when people experience more autonomy over their lives, or vice versa, the life satisfaction of people who perceive little autonomy depends much more strongly on their financial security. Moreover, I provide first evidence for a dampening effect of autonomy on the impact on their life satisfaction exerted by the respect people receive in their everyday lives, the frequency of contact with friends, and individuals' health. These findings lend support to the assumption that it does matter how people arrive at their lifestyle—for instance whether they chose a financially insecure career or were forced to take a precarious job—and have important implications for a variety of research areas, with regards to autonomy in general but also to its moderating role: Despite the extensive evidence on the importance of individuals' autonomy for their well-being—presented both in the literature review and my analyses—it is widely neglected as a potential well-being dimension. The few studies of multidimensional well-being that consider autonomy, subsume it as one indicator among others into dimensions like subjective well-being (Ivaldi et al., 2016) or psychological functioning (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016). However, for autonomy to become a continuous part of social reporting activities, e.g., through instruments like the OECD's Better Life Index (OECD, 2015), instead of sporadically appearing in isolated studies, autonomy indicators need to be collected more reliably in the core modules of cross-national surveys.

The moderating effect of autonomy opens up a wide range of research opportunities in different research areas: With regards to *financial security*, individual autonomy might present itself as an alternative (or additional) explanation of the diminishing marginal utility of economic resources in the pursuit of greater well-being. There are several explanations for why income in the long run subsides in producing greater happiness—from rising aspirations, to social comparison, and adaptation (A. E. Clark et al., 2008). A further explanation was put forth by Delhey (2010) and Welzel and Inglehart (2010) who provided evidence that with progressing economic and human development as well as a cultural change towards more self-expression, individual life satisfaction increasingly arises from autonomy—*relative* to the importance of financial security. Where Welzel and Inglehart (2010) explain the diminishing life satisfaction returns of financial security as the result of a direct trade-off between financial security and autonomy—as the importance of autonomy for their life satisfaction increases, the importance of

money decreases—I argue that autonomy is not a *subject* of the trade-off itself but rather *enables* the trade-off: Increasing autonomy puts people in a position to make trade-offs between financial security and whatever else they deem more important in their lives, be it leisure time, a healthy life-style, or a fulfilling job. It is not my intention to deny the increasing importance of the intrinsic value of autonomy, but rather to highlight its equally important instrumental value; people do not just receive gratification from exercising their autonomy, but also from what this exercise yields.

The dampening effect autonomy has on the relationship between *respect* and life satisfaction might at first glance appear unlikely: Why would anyone trade off being respected by others? However, considering that people hold very different values dear and set their goals accordingly, it is quite plausible that certain lifestyle choices are met with disrespect from people who uphold opposing values; a stay-at-home mother will receive little respect from feminists and a lobbyist for big oil can be sure of the disrespect from conservationists. Irrespective of whether people experience a lack of respect or are confronted with disrespect—their life satisfaction will suffer (Schneickert et al., 2019). However, my analyses demonstrated that as long as the situation from which this lack of respect arises is the result of a voluntary choice, individuals' life satisfaction will be less affected than if they had no choice in the matter. Since experiences of disrespect and feelings of status anxiety have been shown to not only be detrimental to life satisfaction (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2016; Schneickert et al., 2019), but also to satisfaction with democracy (Schneickert et al., 2019) and institutional trust (Delhey & Steckermeier, 2019), it would be worth exploring whether the extent to which they translate into political dissatisfaction, too, depended on the autonomy people perceive to have over their lives.

My finding that the life satisfaction people derive from *contact with their friends* varies depending on their autonomy corresponds to a line of reasoning from loneliness research, arguing that social isolation and loneliness do not necessarily go hand in hand, but that people can be happy in isolation or lonely in a crowd (Newall & Menec, 2017). Whereas this reasoning allows to evaluate the needs and vulnerability of groups that have been predefined by a combination of objective isolation and subjective loneliness, the friendship–autonomy interaction offers the possibility to investigate to what extent and under which conditions social isolation translates into loneliness—and even beyond, whether this translation varies, for instance, across people of different ages, education, or gender, or across countries and (life)time. Considering autonomy as moderator of the effect friendship exerts on life satisfaction might prove useful in obtaining a more realistic picture of the extent of loneliness in certain population groups (like, for instance, men) who are generally assumed to be more reluctant to classify themselves as lonely due to the stigma associated with it (de Jong Gierveld et al., 2006).

More than other functionings, *health* depends on chance as well as on the autonomous decisions of the individual (Nussbaum, 2001b). It is therefore plausible to assume that the dampening effect of autonomy does not *exclusively* capture the fact that people suffer less when their health limitations result from their own choices, such as exercising too

little or eating unhealthily, but also captures the gain in life satisfaction that people derive from having autonomy over their lives despite such health limitations (see for instance, Maguire et al., 2021). The life satisfaction gap that exists between people of similar health statuses due to their varying degrees of autonomy might help to understand why people deal differently with health issues, like who seeks and who forgoes treatment. Especially with regard to the current pandemic situation, the interplay between autonomy, health (risk), and life satisfaction should receive greater attention: There is first evidence that COVID related conspiracy beliefs are fueled by a perceived lack of control (Oleksy et al., 2021; Šrol et al., 2021) and result in less adherence to health protective behaviors like social distancing and hand-washing (Allington et al., 2021; Kowalski et al., 2020). At the same time, those who refuse to adhere to preventive measures limit the autonomy and freedom of everyone else by actively compromising public health and safety (Bialasiewicz & Eckes, 2021). To the misfortune of the holders of such conspiracy beliefs, their attempt to regain control does not translate into higher life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2020). Shedding light on whether the health–life satisfaction link varies not only depending on the *extent* of autonomy but also depending on the *cause* identified for the autonomy restraints could help reveal whether health issues are unequally detrimental to people who perceive their autonomy as restricted by *intrusive government directives* compared to people who feel their autonomy is restrained due to the *irresponsibility of fellow citizens* resisting these directives.

The two remaining functionings—leisure and safety—proved to be relevant to people's life satisfaction notwithstanding their level of perceived autonomy. Although it is possible that people simply do not want to trade their leisure time for anything else and accordingly suffer equally from a lack of free time, whether this is chosen or imposed, it is also possible that the non-effect results from the empirical operationalization. My operationalization of leisure as the time that people spend doing things that interest them and that they enjoy reflects a notion of leisure that is more than simply the opposite to (paid or unpaid) working time, namely time spent on activities that people enjoy doing for their own sake—not as a means for achieving something else. Such an understanding of leisure could thus include activities like paid work or childcare, provided these activities are enjoyed by individuals and done for their own sake (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013; Veal, 2018). Thinking back to the example of the young workaholic entrepreneur and the double-burden mother (Fig. 1), only the mother would experience her leisure as impaired, while the entrepreneur, if she experienced her work as something she enjoys for its own sake, would not. Other operationalizations of leisure thus might yield different results. For instance, the operationalization of leisure proposed by Delhey and Steckermeier (2016) which takes into account the access people have to cultural institutions as well as to recreational and green areas would likely have captured the autonomy losses that people experienced regarding their leisure during the COVID-19 pandemic very differently.

With regards to safety, two aspects are noteworthy: First, safety contributes only marginally to life satisfaction and second, this contribution is similar for everyone,

notwithstanding the autonomy they have over their lives. The fact that security has such a low impact on people's life satisfaction might just indicate that Europeans generally enjoy such a high level of safety that they do not even consider it in the evaluation of their lives. The lack of a significant interaction with autonomy might further imply that people are unwilling to trade off their safety at home and in the neighborhood for any other functioning, and that even when they do trade off their safety willingly in order to live, for instance, in a more crime-ridden but up and coming neighborhood, they have to live with the negative life satisfaction outcomes. The small but equal effect of feeling unsafe might thus not even reflect as much an impairment of a functioning as rather a remainder of the basic human need for physical safety in an otherwise highly secure part of the world. From an empirical perspective, one might question whether safety at home and in the neighborhood can be reduced into a meaningful measurement of safety. The finding that for children the detrimental effect of feeling unsafe in the neighborhood does vary according to their agency satisfaction, but the effects of safety at school and at home do not, suggests that the relevance of safety varies between different life-domains. However, for adults, safety at home and in the neighborhood, each contribute equally—if only very little—to life satisfaction regardless of their individual autonomy (effects tested but not shown in paper 2). Thus, whereas children's life satisfaction is more closely tied to their sense of safety than that of adults is to their sense of safety, children are willing to trade off some of their safety for something else, unlike adults, who are unwilling to trade off the minimal life satisfaction benefit they receive from feeling safe, regardless of their autonomy and regardless of the area of life. Children's willingness to trade off their safety in the neighborhood for other functionings, like mobility, might in part be explained by their evaluation of what constitutes a dangerous neighborhood: where adults (and especially parents) fear criminals and vehicular traffic, children are afraid of dogs and natural features like steep terrain or poisonous plants (Spilsbury et al., 2012). Mismatches of children's and parents' safety evaluations are thus likely to occur and hold the potential for conflict, since parents' perception of neighborhood safety is a key determinant of children's—especially girls'—independent mobility (e.g., Esteban-Cornejo et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2013) and outdoor activity (e.g., Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010; Kepper et al., 2020). Thereby parents not only restrict other functionings for the sake of safety, but also limit children's ability to explore and exercise their agency freedom.

Using child-reported data from 16 countries around the world from the Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, my analyses reveal how important agency satisfaction is already for young children. In line with research findings which focus on older children (Bradshaw & Rees, 2017; Casas et al., 2013) on the positive effects of children's agency satisfaction on their life satisfaction, my research points to the relevance of considering children not only as adults-to-be but as agents, however incomplete, whose voice and choice should be taken into account. My finding that agency satisfaction dampens the negative impact of feeling unsafe in the neighborhood indicates that even young children engage in trade-offs between

functionings, like for instance, trading off a sense of safety to achieve greater mobility. As of yet no other research exists on such agency-functioning-interactions for children, this finding needs to be treated with caution until more research on such interplays has been conducted. Nonetheless it opens up a variety of research possibilities from investigating the changing role of agency satisfaction throughout childhood and adolescence to exploring possible trade-offs between other functionings. Thanks to projects like the Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, researchers now have access to representative cross-national child-reported data for a growing number of countries around the world. Future research should take advantage of these new data sources and investigate how children's agency satisfaction varies between cultures or between countries at different stages of development. Moreover, with the growing number of countries for which such data are becoming available, the possibility emerges to investigate the role that societal level conditions play for children's agency satisfaction but also for their ability and willingness to trade off certain functionings for others—a possibility which, due to the then still small number of participating countries, unfortunately was not available at the time I conducted my analysis on children's agency for this dissertation.

The implications of the societal level interaction

Both the capability approach and human empowerment theory, stress the relevance of societal conditions in which individuals are embedded (Robeyns & Byskov, 2021; Sen, 2001; Welzel, 2013). Drawing primarily on human empowerment theory, I argued that economic, cultural, and institutional conditions influence how tightly functionings relate to people's life satisfaction: how much life satisfaction people derive from an achieved functioning, or how strongly their life satisfaction is impaired when it is not, would thus depend not only on their individual autonomy but also on the societal conditions providing them with opportunities and greater ability to choose. Overall, greater opportunity and choice proved to loosen the link between achieved functionings and life satisfaction. However, this was not the case for all functionings: Health and friendship were identified as two functionings that—despite varying between differently autonomous people—were equally important to life satisfaction in all European societies, notwithstanding their economic, institutional, and cultural conditions. This result is somewhat unexpected as people who live in societies that provide them with more opportunities and more freedom of choice should have better chances to shape their lives in accordance with their goals and values, whether that means to pursue a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle, or to maintain or neglect one's friendships. Two explanations suggest themselves: First, it is possible that the dampening effect of social conditions on the relationship between the two functionings and life satisfaction is accompanied by a counteracting effect due to a general increase in the importance people assign to health and friendship: As life expectancy increases in more developed societies, so does the group of elderly people who experience severe life satisfaction losses due to health problems and social isolation (Nemitz, 2021). It is therefore only plausible that people in these societies place more value on their health

and their friendship in order to minimize unhappy life years. A second explanation might be that societal conditions can only contribute so much to providing people with more freedom in shaping their health and relationships. As noted above, health is more than other functionings subject to chance. Even the best health care, the most inclusive society, and the most comprehensive legal protection cannot fully compensate the limitations people experience due to disabilities or health problems. Since health is also an important conversion factor, such limitations further impair individuals' autonomy, thereby increasing the dependency of their life satisfaction on these functionings. With regards to friendship, already the sociological classics provide valuable insights into the paradoxical developments of relationships in the course of modernization. Increasing geographical and social mobility, urban living, and the differentiation of lifestyles lead to an increase in the number and diversity of social relationships. However, as a result of those developments relationships are becoming more and more superficial, less reliable and less steady (Durkheim, 2016[1988]; Simmel, 1995 [1901-1908]). Any potential gains in people's freedom to shape their social networks in accordance with their ideas and values are thus confronted with new challenges of building and maintaining these relationships. Unfortunately, such counterbalancing effects are difficult to model empirically; one way to approach this issue might be to track how increasing opportunities relates to changes in the impacts health and friendship exert on life satisfaction within countries over time, and then to compare these trends across countries that provide different levels of opportunities and freedom of choice.

Two of the investigated functionings stand out, as their impact on life satisfaction is weaker when people experience greater autonomy over their lives and in countries that provide people with greater opportunities: financial security and respect. Both functionings can be understood as markers of success and of peoples' standing in the social hierarchy. The weakening of the link between social status and life satisfaction lends support to the assumption that economic development and the associated spread of emancipative values would lead to a weakening of vertical structures in favor of horizontal relations (Welzel et al., 2003). This finding is consistent with research that finds a weaker link between financial security and life satisfaction in more affluent countries (Delhey, 2010; Inglehart et al., 2008; Oishi et al., 2009), and in societies where self-expression values prevail (Lun & Bond, 2016). Also, it dovetails research that finds that social status has a stronger impact on life satisfaction in more unequal societies (Schneider, 2019). The declining importance of social status for life satisfaction has important implications for the ongoing debate on the income inequality hypothesis, which is primarily concerned with the role of status anxiety, social cohesion, and economic strain as *mediators* between inequality and social ills (Delhey & Dragolov, 2014; Delhey & Steckermeier, 2020; Kragten & Rözer, 2017; Roth et al., 2017). Adding my results of the moderating role of societal conditions on the relevance that financial security and respect have for people's life satisfaction to these findings of the mediating role of these functionings, points towards a potential double burden: Not only are people in countries with less favorable societal conditions exposed to higher levels of status

stress and therefore develop stronger status anxiety (Delhey et al., 2017; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Steckermeier & Delhey, 2018), but these feelings of inferiority also have a more detrimental effect on people's life satisfaction than they do in more egalitarian and cooperative societies. Further research is required to understand how, and under which conditions, these effects influence each other.

The results of the interaction analyses between societal conditions and functionings further show that it is necessary to look at the spheres of human empowerment individually: Whereas friendship and health were unaffected by all of the tested conditions—economical, cultural, and institutional—in their effect on life satisfaction and financial security and respect varied across all of them, the positive effects of leisure and safety were affected only by some. The life satisfaction that people derive from leisure and safety did, for instance, not vary between societies that put more or less emphasis on tolerance, indicating that the necessary opportunities to engage in leisure or to achieve a level of safety that meets people's needs arise more from economic progress and the equal distribution of resources, as well as from institutional guarantees of civil liberties.

My interpretation of the decreasing link between functionings and life satisfaction in societies that expand people's scope of opportunities and provide them with more freedom to choose follows the assumption that not or incompletely achieved functionings have a smaller negative impact on life satisfaction if this state is the consequence of an autonomous decision. Two alternative interpretations suggest themselves: The first is concerned with adaptation and social comparison. In times of hardship adaptation is a useful mechanism for self-protection (Nussbaum, 2001a; Welzel, 2013), however, people tend to not only adapt to adverse but also to favorable conditions (B. Schwartz, 2005). It is therefore possible that the dampening effects are driven by hedonic adaptation, that is, people might get used to a certain level of achieved functioning and thus derive less and less life satisfaction from it. This erosion might then be further exacerbated by social comparisons that make one's own lifestyle feel inferior relative to that of others (B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004). However, while it seems plausible that the spontaneous joy about a pay raise lasts only for a limited time and might diminish in light of one's neighbors' recent promotion, it remains questionable whether the idea of the hedonic treadmill can be transferred one-to-one into an "eudaimonic treadmill." I would argue that the positive effects of the basic functionings are rather stable: People don't need increasingly better health and increasingly more respect to keep being satisfied with their lives. Compared to the ephemeral states of happiness derived from exciting experiences or consumables, the basic functionings are likely to constitute a sustainable source of life satisfaction (Waterman, 2007). Further, social comparisons have been shown to play a major role in people's life evaluations (for an overview, see, Sirgy, 2021), however, if the level of status anxiety in a society is any indicator of the level of social comparison people engage in, social comparisons should be a more frequent occurrence in less affluent and more unequal countries characterized by a more competitive collective style of relationships (Delhey et al., 2017; Steckermeier

& Delhey, 2018). If social comparisons were the cause of the weakening relationships between the basic functionings and life satisfaction, this weakening should be more pronounced in these countries. My results, however, point to the exact opposite: In societies that are prone to social comparisons, people's life satisfaction is more strongly tied to the achievement of certain functionings.

The second alternative interpretation relates to social expectations and individual responsibility: Increasing opportunities and freedom of choice not only enhance people's ability to shape their lives in accordance with their values and goals, but also heighten expectations of both individuals themselves and society to achieve the best possible life. Since in modern individualistic societies everyone is responsible for their own success, individuals only have themselves to blame for any failure or shortcomings (Dworkin, 2008[1988]; B. Schwartz, 2005; B. Schwartz & Ward, 2004). If this self-blame were to result in lower levels of life satisfaction, the failure to achieve a certain functioning should be more detrimental to life satisfaction in societies that offer a wide scope of opportunities than in societies where people have little opportunity and choice. This is not the case. Instead, my analyses show that people overall suffer a greater loss in life satisfaction when they have less opportunities and less choice. However, the non-effects of health and leisure might indicate that the positive effect of opportunities and the negative effects of rising expectations and self-blame outweigh each other. An interesting starting point for future research could be to translate the typology of worldviews (Sue, 1978) which intersects the individual locus of control with the individual locus of responsibility on to the macro-level. Combining the level of opportunity and choice a society provides with the degree to which people in a society localize responsibility internally or externally could help to understand why certain functionings—despite improved societal conditions—remain persistently tied to life satisfaction.

The implications of the unequal distribution of autonomy

The second major concern of my dissertation was the inequality in autonomy. Autonomy is of paramount importance for people's life satisfaction. Throughout human development, individuals increasingly place value on autonomy both for its intrinsic value as well as its instrumental role in achieving the very functionings that to them constitute a good life (Sen, 1988; Welzel et al., 2003). Only when people actually have sufficient autonomy over their lives can the capabilities approach's notion of evaluating people's lives solely by their capabilities take hold. Unfortunately, the findings that could be compiled from the rather scattered research on the antecedents of autonomy already indicate that autonomy is influenced by a range of personal and societal factors, and my systematic analysis of these factors influencing autonomy confirms that profound inequalities exist both within and between societies.

The contribution of my analysis—based on data from the European Quality of Life Survey and the European Social Survey for 18 countries and across four points in time—to the state of the art is threefold: First, I identify which individual-level means and conversion factors are the key drivers of autonomy across Europe. Previous research

repeatedly found education, employment, and financial security to be conducive to individual autonomy but was less conclusive with respect to personal conversion factors, such as gender, age, health, or social relations. My analysis reveals financial security, subjective health, and social connectedness as the major drivers of autonomy. This finding points towards the multi-faceted nature of autonomy—people derive autonomy not only from greater access to resources, but they also need a body that allows them to act autonomously and a social environment in which they feel comfortable enough to express themselves. More research is needed to understand how these three factors relate to each in other in fostering individuals' autonomy, for instance, whether a deficit in one area can be compensated by a surplus in another. Since measures of autonomy are rarely available in social science survey data, in its absence analysis strategies should, whenever theoretical considerations postulate an impact of autonomy, incorporate financial security, subjective health, and social connectedness to at least capture individuals' potential for leading an autonomous life. Over and above these key drivers of autonomy, my analysis revealed that family life poses a challenge for the autonomous individual—with negative effects greater than those of unemployment or being chronically ill. This result was expected, since social ties almost always involve some form of commitment that inevitably limits the interacting parties' autonomy (B. Schwartz, 2005). Nonetheless this finding has two important implications: First, individuals' autonomy is not a mere function of their personal means and conversion factors but is also shaped by their relationships and social obligations. Even though autonomy is not to be equated with independence (Chirkov et al., 2003), future research should take a closer look at how social relations facilitate or thwart individuals' autonomy. Second, in contrast to the mixed results that the literature review revealed regarding the role of family for individuals' autonomy, my analysis finds living with a partner and with children to have a robust negative impact on people's autonomy in nearly all of the 18 countries studied, and across the four survey waves. This difference in results can probably be attributed to the differences in the operationalization of family status; whereas my analysis considers individuals' living arrangements, the majority of research only considered their legal marital status. Future research should thus prioritize people's actual living situation over their legal status, which in turn requires that this information be included in survey questionnaires.

The second contribution of my analysis of the determinants of autonomy relates to ambivalent factors that prove to be beneficial in some countries and harmful in others. My analysis reveals four such factors, which in the pooled analysis across all countries were either not significant at all (education), were insignificant in most of the survey waves (age and homemakers) or produced mixed results between survey waves (students), yet had significant impact on autonomy in some of the countries. More research is necessary to explore which societal conditions might be responsible for factors such as age or education being conducive to individuals' autonomy in one society and harmful in another. Although no apparent country-patterns emerged for any of the identified ambivalent factors, with regards to education one could tentatively assume a

divide between the European north-west and south-east. Whereas in some of the southern and eastern European countries more education relates to higher autonomy, in some of the northern and western European countries surprisingly it relates to less autonomy. A possible explanation might be that education has the capacity to broaden not only the boundaries of what people can do, but also their horizon of what they possibly could do (Abbott, Wallace, & Sapsford, 2016), thereby raising expectations of how autonomous one's life could be to a level at which reality can only pale in comparison. With the scope of opportunities endlessly growing, people might increasingly become aware of these shortfalls and consequently experience their (formerly satisfying level of) autonomy as curtailed. Just as women in gender-unequal countries perceive themselves as more equal to men than women in more gender-equal countries (Kurzman et al., 2019), the higher educated in societies that provide little opportunity might feel more autonomous than those who live in a society that provides everyone with a broad range of opportunities. However, due to the small number of countries, such cross-level effects could not be investigated in my analysis. Future research should thus take a closer look at how and why the relationships between education, but also age and non-employment and autonomy vary between societies and over time.

My third contribution is concerned with the prime movers of societal autonomy at the macro-level. So far, the evidence on country-level autonomy primarily stemmed from heterogeneous global country-samples and thus might not be transferable to an affluent world region, like Europe, where emancipative values prevail, and extensive freedoms are guaranteed. My analysis thus adds first insights on the societal conditions of country-level autonomy in Europe. Previous research suggests that, globally, autonomy is more prevalent in affluent societies and in more unequal countries. My analysis only partly supports these findings. While national affluence contributes moderately to strongly to Europeans' autonomy, income inequality is found to be unrelated to autonomy in all four cross-sections between 2006 and 2016. Two insights can be drawn from this: First, even in already affluent societies, national wealth still contributes to people's autonomy. Second, within these affluent societies, an unequal distribution of income does not systematically impair people's autonomy, which suggests either that people nevertheless have sufficient access to the resources they require to be autonomous—and any increases in income inequality induced by raising incomes in the upper strata would not change that—or that income inequality only inadequately captures the extent of inequality people are confronted with in daily life. Considering the relevance that individuals' financial security holds for the autonomy they perceive to have over their lives, future research should consider alternative measures of inequality, like inequality of wealth or property ownership.

In accordance with previous research that finds autonomy to be overall higher in countries that guarantee more human freedoms like freedom of speech and movement, my analysis, too, finds autonomy to be overall higher in countries that support and improve political rights and civil liberties, which is remarkable given how little European

countries differ in terms of their guaranteed freedoms. In light of the ongoing constraints to basic rights due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the advancing dismantling of human rights and civil liberties by populist governments, future research needs to examine more closely which liberties and which rights are particularly conducive to individuals' autonomy, and whether these positive associations vary among different groups within societies. For instance, future research should explore whether individuals' autonomy is affected by restrictions to certain rights and liberties regardless of whether they are effectively affected by the restriction: Does a restriction of the right to abortion perceivably affect the autonomy of men? To what extent are heterosexuals affected in their autonomy in societies that implement LGBT-free zones and media content? How much did the COVID-19-related mobility restrictions really harm the autonomy of people who would have not been mobile anyway? More research is needed to reveal the extent to which autonomy is derived from guaranteed rights and liberties due to the value that people attach to freedom in general and how much of it is allotted to self-interest. Such a perspective would allow for more differentiated insights into the role of freedom in societies, like the European countries, that have started to cluster at the upper end of the scale of formal freedom measures like the Freedom House index of political rights and civil liberties.

So far, there is only little and partly mixed evidence on the role that cultural value climates play for autonomy, pointing toward more individualistic and more post-materialistic societies as an optimal breeding ground of autonomy. Despite the prominent role that emancipative values hold in human empowerment theory (Inglehart et al., 2008; Welzel, 2013; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010), the direct association between the prevalence of emancipative values in a society and the extent of autonomy people perceive to have over their lives has so far not been investigated. This gap is bridged by my analysis, which provides first evidence for the positive association between a high prevalence of emancipative values and a correspondingly high level of autonomy in a society. Since emancipative values nurture generalized trust among members of a society (Welzel, 2013), high trust societies should facilitate autonomy, and my analysis shows that they do, even more robustly than the emancipative value climate. Taken together with the finding by Inglehart et al. (2008), who find autonomy to be overall higher in more tolerant societies, one might suggest—at the risk of over-interpreting results derived from ecological correlations—that autonomy generally flourishes in societies that facilitate an egalitarian and cooperative style of interaction among their members, and that an emancipative value climate creates the necessary condition for such styles of relationship.

Limitations

As with any research endeavor, my dissertation is subject to certain limitations, some of which have already been discussed in Chapters five to seven in direct relation to the analyses, while others have been addressed in the above discussion. Nonetheless, three

crucial limitations need to be highlighted concerning the selection of functionings, the limitation of cross-sectional data, and the European perspective.

The selection of basic functionings for my analysis was theoretically informed yet limited by data availability. The investigated set of basic functionings—health, leisure, respect, safety, friendships, and financial security—still lacks some important functionings, not because I considered them irrelevant, but because no information was available in the survey data used. This applies, inter alia, to individuals' capability to relate to other species and the world of nature, which in light of the escalating debate on climate change is likely to take on an increasingly important role in people's lives, and to political participation and people's ability to change their environment more generally. With regard to children, it seemed reasonable—given the lack of empirical evidence on children's agency satisfaction and its relationship to their well-being—to investigate the interplay between agency satisfaction, functioning, and life satisfaction in depth for one functioning. However, this approach came at the expense of the generalizability of the interaction effect—without further research it remains unclear whether the dampening effect of agency satisfaction on the relationship between neighborhood safety and life satisfaction is an outlier among children's functionings, and which—if any—other functionings might follow this pattern.

Based on cross-sectional data, my analyses revealed how unequally autonomy is distributed within societies and how crucial autonomy is for people to be able to shape their lives in a way that satisfies them—yet it did not systematically link the unequal distribution to the autonomy outcomes. Partly, this is due to the fact that achieved functionings can—as means and conversion factors—influence the achievement of other functionings, which in the absence of panel data poses a problem for empirical model specification. Since measures of autonomy are already rare in representative cross-sectional surveys, it seems unlikely that they will become a standard item in panel surveys in the near future. A potential workaround based on cross-sectional data could be to investigate whether the autonomy–well-being link, but also the dampening effect of autonomy, differ within the population—and whether these differences are systematically linked to the autonomy resources and conditions identified in Chapter five.

My dissertation sheds light on the drivers of autonomy and the role of autonomy for the good life in Europe, a world region where the majority of people enjoy an abundance of opportunities and choice. Thus, whereas my dissertation adds valuable insights to the hitherto incomplete picture of autonomy in Europe, it leaves us unclear about the extent to which these findings are applicable to other world regions. It can, however, point to the necessity of investigating individual autonomy in different contexts: The literature review presented in Chapter three revealed that as of now most of the representative evidence on both the antecedents and consequences of autonomy stems from global, Western, and European samples. Within the review, only seven articles were concerned specifically with East Asia and China; evidence for other world regions is even more scarce. To prevent regional peculiarities being lost in global samples, future research

should focus on single or contrast different world regions, and at least, consider regional differences as a confounding factor in the study design.

Policy implications

The potential implications for public policy that can be derived from this dissertation have been addressed in detail in Chapters five to seven. Since the key to a good life lies in individuals' autonomy, these final policy recommendations are thus solely concerned with the promotion of individual autonomy.

In order to lead an autonomous life, people require first of all financial security, a healthy body and mind, and social connections. Social policy thus needs to ensure that people can live on what they earn—whether this is done by introducing or raising the minimum wage, providing an unconditional basic income, or other compensation policies—and design welfare policies in a way that does not further restrict people's autonomy, for instance by threatening and enforcing controls and sanctions. States can promote the health of citizens in a variety of ways, ranging from the provision of a well-functioning health care system and health insurance to consumer protection and simple health guidelines and recommendations. Health promotion should be neither so paternalistic as to enforce a healthy lifestyle, nor so liberal as to leave people entirely to their own devices without *any* guidelines or support. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic provides just one example of how complicated it is to strike a balance between the physical integrity and self-determination of the individual on the one hand and the protection of public health and of the public health care system on the other. My cautious recommendation, therefore, would be to provide people with equal access to health care and health insurance, to establish health information offices where people can access easy-to-understand information and support, and to protect people from health hazards that are beyond their personal control, such as air pollution or noise exposure. Social connectedness promotes autonomy because it provides people with a setting in which they can express themselves and join forces with others for purposes that lie outside their personal lives. Generally, states already promote social connectedness through guaranteeing and protecting political rights and civil liberties. More concretely, social connectedness can be enabled by providing public forums for interaction and debate, such as sport clubs, citizens' initiatives, speakers' corners, or block parties. Such forums might be community-based and operated but can still be supported top-down by states and communes for instance, through the provision of infrastructure or financial support. Further, social connectedness also requires that people have the means and time to become socially or politically involved. Thus, in addition to policies that compensate for financial inequalities, there is also a need for policies that minimize inequalities in people's time budgets, such as reducing weekly working hours, enabling remote work, and improving childcare possibilities.

All of these suggested policies, of course, presuppose that governments are able to and interested in expanding people's autonomy. If however, as suggested by theory (Welzel et al., 2003), the trajectories of economic development, cultural change, and

institutional guarantees coincide in a way that if one regresses, the others will too, Europe might just be at the onset of a deterioration of autonomy: In the 21st century, European countries have been increasingly shaken by crises, from the financial crisis, and the refugee crisis, to Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic to name just a few. These crises continue to leave their mark; they have confronted people with a threat to their livelihoods, have exposed and deepened cultural conflicts, and have revealed how fragile freedoms are. The burden from cushioning the consequences of crisis after crisis will increasingly limit the financial leeway of at least some European countries. At the same time, it is no longer just populist governments that are dismantling rights and freedoms; the COVID-19 pandemic forces democratic governments to repeatedly limit fundamental rights of their citizens. The longer the crises drag on, the less trusting of others and tolerant of dissent societies will become. When the societal and personal resources that are necessary for individuals' ability to live autonomously deteriorate, their life satisfaction will become increasingly dependent on achieved functionings and will ultimately decline. Given that autonomy deficits can cause a variety of adverse consequences—from bad physical and mental health to a higher susceptibility to conspiracy beliefs—policy makers should have a vested interest in protecting people's freedoms and minimizing inequalities in the social, health, and economic resources that enable people to live the life they deem worth living. EU institutions, national governments, and civil societies need to collaborate to preserve the status quo and prevent regression, thereby maintaining Europeans' freedom to shape their lives according to their goals and values.

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Appendix

Table A1 Articles that combine the choice-item with other items

		Aldama et al. 2021	Delbosc & Vella-Brodrick 2015	Wang et al. 2015	Cleveland & Balakrishnan 2019	Kobau et al. 2010	Main 2014
BPNS Autonomy Scale	I feel like I am free to decide (for myself) how to live my life.	x	x	x	x	x	x
	I feel pressured in my life.	x	x		x		x
	I generally feel free to express my ideas and opinions.	x	x	x	x	x	x
	In my daily life, I frequently have to do what I am told	x	x				
	People I interact with on a daily basis tend to take my feelings into consideration.	x	x	x	x		
	I feel like I can pretty much be myself in my daily situations.	x	x	x	x	x	x
	There is not much opportunity for me to decide for myself how to do things in my daily life.	x	x	x	x		
	I have enough choice about how to spend my time.						x

Note: Shir et al. 2019 do not disclose which additional three items from the BPNS Autonomy subscale they include.

Table A2 Country-level correlation between EVS/WVS, EQLS, and ESS autonomy items

EVS 05-08						
0.808 16	EVS 09-13					
0.669 32	0.670 17	EVS 17-20				
0.382 22	0.291 14	0.486 21	ESS 2006			
0.408 24	0.402 16	0.504 24	0.808 22	ESS 2012		
0.428 32	0.637 16	0.749 28	0.425 19	0.436 22	EQLS 2011	
0.243 32	0.427 15	0.674 28	0.514 19	0.496 21	0.778 32	EQLS 2016

Note: Pearson's correlation of country-level aggregates of the autonomy items and number of countries in each correlation. EVS/WVS: *Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them;* EQLS: *I feel I am free to decide how to live my life*; ESS: *I feel I am free to decide for myself how to live my life.*

Table A3 Correlations of children's agency satisfaction and related measures and life satisfaction and happiness for comparison

Agency	0.746***	0.817***	0.771***	0.768***
0.413***	Free time	0.761**	0.833***	0.646**
0.388***	0.422***	Listened to	0.851***	0.859***
0.422***	0.401***	0.444***	Life satisfaction	0.869***
0.299***	0.341***	0.355***	0.409***	Happiness

Note: N=15,581, 16 countries. Individual-level spearman rank correlations below the diagonal; pearson's correlations of country-level aggregates above the diagonal. How happy you feel with…the freedom you have (agency), …what you do in your free time (free time), …how are you listened to by adults in general (listened to). For comparison: How happy you feel with…your life as a whole (Life satisfaction); Up to now, are you happy with your overall life (Happiness).

Table A4 Means and standard deviations, minima, and maxima of variables used in analyses

	ESS 2006	ESS 2012	EQLS 2011	EQLS 2016	ESS	EQLS	Full		
	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	Ø | % (SD)	min	max
Perceived autonomy	2.95	3.02	2.93	2.94	2.99	2.94	2.97	0	4
	(0.89)	(0.89)	(1.00)	(0.95)	(0.89)	(0.98)	(0.93)		
Gender (Ref. male)	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	0	1
Partner (Ref. no partner)	0.66	0.63	0.53	0.64	0.64	0.58	0.62	0	1
Children (Ref. no child in HH)	0.44	0.41	0.23	0.62	0.42	0.40	0.41	0	1
Age (in years)	47.25	48.11	48.06	48.65	47.70	48.32	47.95	18	95
	(17.72)	(17.95)	(18.22)	(18.12)	(17.85)	(18.18)	(17.98)		
Education (ISCED)	1.99	2.15	2.15	2.29	2.07	2.21	2.13	0	4
	(1.34)	(1.32)	(1.29)	(1.33)	(1.33)	(1.31)	(1.32)		
Employed	0.55	0.52	0.50	0.54	0.53	0.52	0.53	0	1
Unemployed	0.05	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07	0	1
Unable	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03	0	1
Retired	0.21	0.22	0.26	0.26	0.21	0.26	0.23	0	1
Student	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0	1
Homemaker	0.10	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.09	0.05	0.07	0	1
Self-employed	0.11	0.12	0.07	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.10	0	1
Financial security	2.00	1.85	1.55	1.70	1.92	1.62	1.80	0	3
	(0.84)	(0.90)	(0.73)	(0.74)	(0.87)	(0.74)	(0.84)		
Health	2.75	2.80	2.74	2.85	2.78	2.79	2.78	0	4
	(0.90)	(0.91)	(0.96)	(0.92)	(0.91)	(0.94)	(0.92)		
Disability (Ref. not limited)	0.24	0.24	0.22	0.21	0.24	0.22	0.23	0	1
Social connectedness	2.50	2.59	2.75	2.70	2.54	2.73	2.62	0	4
	(0.98)	(0.96)	(1.08)	(1.08)	(0.97)	(1.08)	(1.02)		
Non-citizen (Ref. citizen)	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.10	0.04	0.07	0.05	0	1
N	30,279	34,136	23,647	18,974	64,415	42,621	107,036		

Note: Weighted means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for ordinal and continuous variables, weighted percentages for binary variables. Minima and maxima are identical in all waves.

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year

	BE 2006	BG 2006	CY 2006	DE 2006	DK 2006	EE 2006	ES 2006	FI 2006	FR 2006
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.078	-0.265***	-0.255***	0.034	0.020	-0.024	-0.060	-0.033	0.046
	(0.044)	(0.065)	(0.069)	(0.034)	(0.043)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.041)	(0.045)
Living w/ Partner	-0.182***	-0.231**	-0.408***	-0.117**	-0.213***	-0.085	0.041	-0.374***	-0.286***
	(0.054)	(0.071)	(0.075)	(0.038)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.046)	(0.051)
Children in household	-0.210***	-0.136	-0.062	0.009	-0.233***	-0.110*	-0.074	-0.073	-0.040
	(0.053)	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.039)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.057)
Age in years	0.003	0.000	0.001	0.004*	-0.002	0.002	0.001	-0.003	0.001
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	-0.023	0.085**	0.053*	0.008	-0.041*	0.002	0.006	-0.036*	-0.034
	(0.018)	(0.029)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Unemployed	0.003	-0.247*	0.152	-0.099	-0.259	-0.089	-0.048	-0.129	-0.112
	(0.092)	(0.110)	(0.188)	(0.081)	(0.174)	(0.152)	(0.127)	(0.108)	(0.106)
Unable to work	0.225	-0.429	-0.329	0.135	-0.276	-0.159	-0.204	-0.115	-0.027
	(0.170)	(0.225)	(0.340)	(0.153)	(0.259)	(0.228)	(0.196)	(0.266)	(0.193)
Self-employed	0.067	0.103	-0.096	0.165***	-0.002	0.050	0.062	0.083	0.054
	(0.061)	(0.111)	(0.084)	(0.049)	(0.075)	(0.096)	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.077)
Homemaker	-0.071	-0.138	-0.062	-0.037	0.052	-0.214	-0.092	0.140	0.051
	(0.082)	(0.129)	(0.093)	(0.056)	(0.089)	(0.135)	(0.072)	(0.100)	(0.077)
Student	-0.237*	-0.340*	-0.817**	-0.134	-0.163	-0.206*	-0.093	-0.304**	-0.276*
	(0.099)	(0.169)	(0.301)	(0.081)	(0.100)	(0.098)	(0.098)	(0.093)	(0.128)
Retired	0.061	-0.258*	0.101	0.204***	0.205**	-0.010	0.114	0.309***	0.097
	(0.087)	(0.107)	(0.117)	(0.056)	(0.075)	(0.088)	(0.085)	(0.070)	(0.080)
Ability to make ends meet	0.046	0.177***	-0.065	0.200***	0.229***	0.056	0.162***	0.138***	0.021
	(0.030)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.025)	(0.046)	(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Subjective health	0.167***	0.057	0.090	0.155***	0.167***	0.206***	0.112***	0.153***	0.133***
	(0.037)	(0.045)	(0.053)	(0.024)	(0.033)	(0.040)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.034)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.070	-0.176	-0.033	-0.126**	-0.077	-0.074	-0.173*	-0.109*	-0.126*
	(0.067)	(0.099)	(0.131)	(0.045)	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.071)	(0.052)	(0.063)
Social connectedness	0.075**	0.086**	0.083*	0.084***	0.071**	0.104***	0.136***	0.037	0.041*
	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.021)
Non-citizen	0.051	0.315	0.015	0.137	0.105	-0.097	0.178	0.244	0.061
	(0.102)	(0.307)	(0.201)	(0.104)	(0.160)	(0.059)	(0.094)	(0.181)	(0.112)
Constant	2.498***	2.798***	2.840***	1.778***	2.130***	2.359***	1.938***	2.637***	2.900***
	(0.155)	(0.174)	(0.192)	(0.112)	(0.176)	(0.164)	(0.142)	(0.139)	(0.144)
Observations	1686	1292	900	2717	1418	1328	1781	1794	1927
F statistic	7.12	11.11	6.87	16.51	11.23	5.53	8.88	10.81	6.24
Adj. R-squared	0.06	0.10	0.08	0.11	0.12	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.04

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	HU 2006	IE 2006	NL 2006	PL 2006	PT 2006	SE 2006	SI 2006	SK 2006	UK 2006
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	-0.028	0.058	0.028	-0.034	-0.089*	0.019	-0.022	-0.010	-0.011
	(0.053)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.036)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.039)
Living w/ Partner	-0.142**	-0.102*	-0.138***	0.132*	-0.150***	-0.120**	-0.103	-0.009	-0.191***
	(0.055)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.052)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.041)
Children in household	-0.046	-0.126**	-0.097*	-0.174***	-0.072	-0.158***	0.037	0.013	-0.088
	(0.059)	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.045)	(0.042)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.046)
Age in years	0.003	0.000	0.004*	0.003	0.003	-0.004*	-0.002	-0.001	0.000
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	0.019	-0.025	0.013	0.037	0.042*	-0.003	0.055*	0.071*	-0.016
	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.012)
Unemployed	-0.067	-0.064	-0.047	-0.070	-0.021	-0.251*	0.231*	-0.111	-0.040
	(0.146)	(0.098)	(0.118)	(0.090)	(0.086)	(0.109)	(0.110)	(0.098)	(0.108)
Unable to work	-0.062	-0.101	-0.014	-0.936***	-0.353*	0.122	0.104	-0.297	-0.147
	(0.153)	(0.176)	(0.115)	(0.270)	(0.149)	(0.125)	(0.274)	(0.220)	(0.111)
Self-employed	-0.013	-0.052	0.017	-0.048	0.040	0.076	0.081	0.207**	0.024
	(0.096)	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.058)	(0.052)	(0.058)	(0.072)	(0.065)	(0.057)
Homemaker	0.067	-0.098	0.001	-0.118	-0.121	0.006	0.240**	-0.020	0.084
	(0.095)	(0.057)	(0.061)	(0.084)	(0.076)	(0.154)	(0.077)	(0.078)	(0.072)
Student	0.083	-0.249*	0.091	-0.156	-0.485***	-0.015	-0.135	0.102	0.229*
	(0.132)	(0.104)	(0.102)	(0.091)	(0.116)	(0.073)	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.103)
Retired	0.087	0.102	0.019	-0.024	-0.088	0.185**	0.249**	0.152	0.157*
	(0.087)	(0.067)	(0.064)	(0.077)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.077)	(0.085)	(0.065)
Ability to make ends meet	0.236***	0.031	0.117***	0.160***	0.134***	0.148***	0.129***	0.179***	0.146***
	(0.038)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.037)	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.028)
Subjective health	0.176***	0.158***	0.140***	0.116***	0.138***	0.164***	0.111***	0.179***	0.073**
	(0.037)	(0.029)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.026)
Chronic illness/disability	0.086	0.017	-0.069	-0.017	0.079	-0.068	-0.091	-0.001	-0.063
	(0.068)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.061)	(0.053)	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.072)	(0.056)
Social connectedness	0.148***	0.028	0.062**	0.109***	0.044	0.071**	0.029	0.080**	0.094***
	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.021)
Non-citizen	-0.697	-0.073	-0.197		-0.033	-0.005	0.797**	-0.782	0.188*
	(0.438)	(0.076)	(0.137)		(0.112)	(0.095)	(0.251)	(0.674)	(0.073)
Constant	1.625***	2.707***	2.347***	2.018***	2.411***	2.008***	2.157***	1.659***	2.402***
	(0.162)	(0.123)	(0.126)	(0.145)	(0.114)	(0.136)	(0.156)	(0.152)	(0.121)
Observations	1439	1505	1821	1589	2122	1801	1337	1545	2277
F statistic	9.37	5.47	7.35	8.68	9.58	9.41	5.84	11.87	9.34
Adj. R-squared	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.12	0.07

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	BE 2011	BG 2011	CY 2011	DE 2011	DK 2011	EE 2011	ES 2011	FI 2011	FR 2011
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.002	0.028	-0.156*	0.061	0.010	-0.063	-0.060	0.030	-0.005
	(0.058)	(0.067)	(0.076)	(0.037)	(0.051)	(0.066)	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.047)
Living w/ Partner	-0.083	-0.061	0.031	-0.030	-0.094	-0.155*	-0.029	-0.142*	-0.062
	(0.063)	(0.069)	(0.082)	(0.039)	(0.059)	(0.065)	(0.054)	(0.063)	(0.052)
Children in household	0.021	-0.188*	-0.074	-0.073	-0.014	-0.001	0.073	0.041	-0.013
	(0.077)	(0.085)	(0.086)	(0.053)	(0.070)	(0.084)	(0.063)	(0.071)	(0.061)
Age in years	-0.003	0.004	0.004	-0.001	0.001	-0.002	0.001	-0.004	0.001
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	-0.027	0.042	-0.033	0.025	0.004	0.008	0.030	0.012	-0.051**
	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.028)	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.018)
Unemployed	-0.200	0.015	0.046	-0.151	-0.203	-0.068	-0.129	0.036	-0.126
	(0.153)	(0.114)	(0.122)	(0.096)	(0.176)	(0.144)	(0.084)	(0.171)	(0.109)
Unable to work	0.270	0.042	0.351	-0.321	-0.192	0.010	-0.436	0.274	0.064
	(0.145)	(0.428)	(0.279)	(0.265)	(0.278)	(0.194)	(0.252)	(0.307)	(0.188)
Self-employed	-0.153	0.148	-0.048	0.081	0.182	0.604***	-0.190	-0.060	0.124
	(0.124)	(0.148)	(0.120)	(0.079)	(0.103)	(0.113)	(0.098)	(0.114)	(0.124)
Homemaker	0.206	-0.195	0.001	0.151	0.261	-0.023	0.022	0.733***	0.120
	(0.159)	(0.419)	(0.123)	(0.080)	(0.237)	(0.214)	(0.089)	(0.208)	(0.117)
Student	0.075	0.402	0.357	0.172*	-0.025	0.173	-0.062	-0.055	0.303*
	(0.134)	(0.254)	(0.202)	(0.087)	(0.158)	(0.161)	(0.140)	(0.132)	(0.127)
Retired	0.269**	-0.206	0.010	0.295***	0.324***	0.234*	-0.072	0.302**	0.229**
	(0.103)	(0.112)	(0.141)	(0.065)	(0.086)	(0.113)	(0.094)	(0.103)	(0.088)
Ability to make ends meet	0.239***	0.255***	0.091	0.296***	0.304***	0.326***	0.187***	0.281***	0.232***
	(0.047)	(0.062)	(0.049)	(0.032)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.040)	(0.050)	(0.039)
Subjective health	0.127**	0.215***	0.198***	0.125***	0.132***	0.136**	0.140***	0.182***	0.121**
	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.051)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.053)	(0.038)	(0.043)	(0.038)
Chronic illness/disability	0.042	-0.146	0.133	-0.067	0.013	0.025	0.050	-0.065	-0.094
	(0.083)	(0.108)	(0.098)	(0.052)	(0.073)	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.073)	(0.070)
Social connectedness	0.091**	0.267***	0.173***	0.097***	0.065**	0.198***	0.232***	0.086**	0.141***
	(0.033)	(0.040)	(0.036)	(0.016)	(0.024)	(0.043)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.022)
Non-citizen	0.315	-0.235	0.063	0.314***	0.078	0.131	0.140	0.645	0.175
	(0.162)	(0.158)	(0.197)	(0.075)	(0.159)	(0.086)	(0.093)	(0.538)	(0.122)
Constant	1.940***	1.095***	1.712***	1.725***	2.183***	1.319***	1.671***	1.763***	1.828***
	(0.185)	(0.216)	(0.233)	(0.112)	(0.153)	(0.218)	(0.176)	(0.190)	(0.150)
Observations	978	942	987	2932	1002	968	1461	982	2226
F statistic	4.61	11.69	3.96	21.45	10.52	9.77	9.33	7.06	11.84
Adj. R-squared	0.07	0.17	0.05	0.12	0.15	0.12	0.09	0.08	0.08

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	HU 2011	IE 2011	NL 2011	PL 2011	PT 2011	SE 2011	SI 2011	SK 2011	UK 2011
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	-0.084	0.063	0.021	0.009	-0.028	0.022	-0.089	-0.060	0.054
	(0.068)	(0.061)	(0.051)	(0.042)	(0.061)	(0.047)	(0.058)	(0.060)	(0.041)
Living w/ Partner	-0.097	-0.055	-0.039	-0.062	-0.063	-0.123*	-0.069	0.078	-0.144***
	(0.075)	(0.062)	(0.056)	(0.045)	(0.060)	(0.051)	(0.070)	(0.064)	(0.041)
Children in household	0.001	-0.100	-0.062	-0.075	0.205**	-0.136*	0.028	-0.202**	-0.033
	(0.087)	(0.068)	(0.063)	(0.047)	(0.074)	(0.063)	(0.072)	(0.075)	(0.054)
Age in years	0.004	0.004	-0.006*	-0.003	0.000	-0.005*	0.001	-0.007*	-0.001
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	-0.046	0.013	0.026	0.005	0.042	0.010	-0.005	0.004	0.007
	(0.033)	(0.023)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.019)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.015)
Unemployed	-0.032	0.184	-0.141	-0.088	-0.124	-0.490**	-0.052	-0.248	-0.106
	(0.141)	(0.105)	(0.155)	(0.075)	(0.118)	(0.168)	(0.104)	(0.139)	(0.099)
Unable to work	0.321	0.202	-0.425*	0.093	-0.334	0.004	-0.610*	-0.041	-0.089
	(0.231)	(0.155)	(0.180)	(0.099)	(0.221)	(0.244)	(0.281)	(0.254)	(0.122)
Self-employed	0.118	-0.025	-0.017	0.072	-0.081	0.065	0.004	0.127	0.001
	(0.145)	(0.096)	(0.092)	(0.095)	(0.117)	(0.109)	(0.131)	(0.098)	(0.084)
Homemaker	0.184	0.177	0.234**	0.005	0.258*	0.480	-0.012	-0.083	-0.301**
	(0.350)	(0.097)	(0.090)	(0.094)	(0.111)	(0.254)	(0.275)	(0.266)	(0.105)
Student	0.308	0.350*	0.211*	0.096	-0.408*	-0.007	-0.083	-0.076	0.201
	(0.172)	(0.140)	(0.105)	(0.097)	(0.179)	(0.092)	(0.121)	(0.202)	(0.122)
Retired	0.343**	0.159	0.257**	0.155*	0.156	0.372***	-0.010	0.286**	0.133
	(0.127)	(0.100)	(0.093)	(0.073)	(0.117)	(0.084)	(0.114)	(0.100)	(0.073)
Ability to make ends meet	0.415***	0.235***	0.084*	0.218***	0.064	0.265***	0.153**	0.284***	0.260***
	(0.059)	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.032)	(0.053)	(0.041)	(0.054)	(0.053)	(0.033)
Subjective health	0.096*	0.149***	0.061	0.169***	0.172***	0.173***	0.119*	0.206***	0.105***
	(0.048)	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.029)	(0.040)	(0.032)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.026)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.162	0.021	0.062	0.101	-0.055	0.061	0.085	0.015	-0.059
	(0.104)	(0.099)	(0.067)	(0.059)	(0.079)	(0.077)	(0.104)	(0.094)	(0.060)
Social connectedness	0.159***	0.131***	0.089**	0.195***	0.142***	0.120***	0.322***	0.208***	0.122***
	(0.039)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.024)	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.043)	(0.034)	(0.020)
Non-citizen		0.217*	-0.430*		-0.089	0.075	-0.187	-0.018	0.294**
		(0.092)	(0.174)		(0.159)	(0.154)	(0.647)	(0.468)	(0.090)
Constant	1.492***	1.675***	2.491***	1.497***	1.993***	1.970***	1.496***	1.232***	1.874***
	(0.210)	(0.186)	(0.161)	(0.125)	(0.174)	(0.173)	(0.213)	(0.183)	(0.118)
Observations	959	1014	988	2132	990	974	982	954	2176
F statistic	10.75	7.45	4.47	14.51	5.68	9.85	7.08	11.22	15.47
Adj. R-squared	0.13	0.11	0.07	0.10	0.07	0.18	0.11	0.16	0.11

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	BE 2012	BG 2012	CY 2012	DE 2012	DK 2012	EE 2012	ES 2012	FI 2012	FR 2012
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.040	-0.330***	-0.284***	-0.036	-0.022	0.067	0.049	0.026	0.117**
	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.074)	(0.031)	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.048)	(0.037)	(0.042)
Living w/ Partner	-0.126**	-0.303***	-0.388***	-0.092**	-0.100	-0.165***	0.020	-0.184***	-0.251***
	(0.047)	(0.043)	(0.082)	(0.035)	(0.055)	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.040)	(0.044)
Children in household	-0.096*	-0.117*	-0.132	-0.043	-0.140**	-0.086*	-0.101*	-0.111*	-0.026
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.084)	(0.036)	(0.052)	(0.042)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.051)
Age in years	0.001	0.008***	-0.003	0.000	0.003	0.001	0.001	-0.001	0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	-0.008	0.115***	-0.001	-0.036*	-0.003	0.022	-0.055***	-0.024	-0.058***
	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.028)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Unemployed	0.012	-0.131	-0.067	-0.003	-0.253	-0.011	-0.014	0.031	-0.146
	(0.079)	(0.078)	(0.131)	(0.093)	(0.134)	(0.090)	(0.076)	(0.086)	(0.093)
Unable to work	0.132	-0.496*	-0.056	0.074	-0.265	-0.180	-0.042	-0.045	0.099
	(0.140)	(0.221)	(0.312)	(0.116)	(0.308)	(0.118)	(0.174)	(0.226)	(0.166)
Self-employed	0.080	0.057	0.251**	0.038	0.053	0.067	-0.016	0.044	0.030
	(0.057)	(0.077)	(0.087)	(0.046)	(0.076)	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.053)	(0.062)
Homemaker	-0.050	-0.146*	0.042	0.129*	0.031	0.022	-0.068	0.041	-0.151
	(0.088)	(0.072)	(0.117)	(0.051)	(0.079)	(0.089)	(0.086)	(0.114)	(0.125)
Student	-0.230*	-0.175	-0.201	0.005	0.245**	-0.038	-0.149	-0.071	-0.162
	(0.102)	(0.166)	(0.198)	(0.076)	(0.083)	(0.089)	(0.105)	(0.081)	(0.113)
Retired	0.103	-0.166*	0.125	0.185***	0.090	0.050	0.133	0.103	0.009
	(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.123)	(0.049)	(0.188)	(0.064)	(0.082)	(0.063)	(0.070)
Ability to make ends meet	0.097***	0.172***	0.082	0.188***	0.182***	0.130***	0.183***	0.164***	0.136***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.043)	(0.025)	(0.042)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Subjective health	0.097**	0.127***	0.148*	0.111***	0.181***	0.169***	0.155***	0.110***	0.123***
	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.062)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.028)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.111*	-0.121	0.121	-0.044	-0.075	0.023	-0.005	-0.102*	-0.083
	(0.057)	(0.070)	(0.116)	(0.036)	(0.063)	(0.043)	(0.073)	(0.047)	(0.054)
Social connectedness	0.062**	0.072**	0.085*	0.110***	0.056*	0.121***	0.186***	0.089***	0.044*
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.030)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Non-citizen	0.073	-0.030	0.116	-0.126	0.007	-0.122*	0.220*	-0.027	-0.013
	(0.072)	(0.303)	(0.127)	(0.096)	(0.125)	(0.054)	(0.094)	(0.149)	(0.119)
Constant	2.657***	2.476***	2.348***	2.185***	2.096***	2.118***	1.578***	2.552***	2.814***
	(0.136)	(0.127)	(0.244)	(0.102)	(0.165)	(0.114)	(0.141)	(0.131)	(0.124)
Observations	1747	2202	1056	2739	1553	2231	1788	2080	1912
F statistic	4.82	25.67	6.30	13.23	8.93	11.40	10.25	7.80	7.81
Adj. R-squared	0.04	0.15	0.07	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.06

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	HU 2012	IE 2012	NL 2012	PL 2012	PT 2012	SE 2012	SI 2012	SK 2012	UK 2012
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	-0.038	0.042	-0.028	-0.033	-0.115**	-0.007	0.072	0.036	0.023
	(0.043)	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.033)	(0.050)	(0.043)	(0.038)
Living w/ Partner	-0.063	-0.102**	-0.182***	-0.001	-0.121**	-0.071	-0.020	-0.159**	-0.094*
	(0.047)	(0.035)	(0.042)	(0.049)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.058)	(0.050)	(0.039)
Children in household	-0.013	-0.104**	-0.078	-0.118**	-0.021	-0.002	-0.061	0.003	-0.098*
	(0.050)	(0.037)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.049)	(0.046)
Age in years	0.002	0.002	-0.001	0.002	0.000	-0.003	0.006*	-0.001	-0.004**
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	0.039	-0.012	0.008	0.001	0.000	-0.001	-0.025	0.037	-0.013
	(0.023)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.013)
Unemployed	-0.200*	-0.037	0.053	-0.003	-0.138*	-0.168	-0.071	-0.109	-0.119
	(0.093)	(0.056)	(0.121)	(0.076)	(0.059)	(0.101)	(0.106)	(0.089)	(0.092)
Unable to work	0.011	0.069	-0.001	-0.240	0.009	0.001	-0.007	0.123	0.041
	(0.135)	(0.120)	(0.102)	(0.246)	(0.210)	(0.128)	(0.261)	(0.243)	(0.113)
Self-employed	0.024	0.051	0.071	-0.055	-0.010	0.132**	0.125	0.175*	0.042
	(0.082)	(0.047)	(0.061)	(0.048)	(0.055)	(0.050)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.055)
Homemaker	0.160	0.073	0.055	0.029	-0.161*	-0.140	-0.229*	-0.064	-0.169*
	(0.093)	(0.052)	(0.066)	(0.079)	(0.072)	(0.090)	(0.098)	(0.088)	(0.084)
Student	-0.093	-0.007	0.001	-0.060	-0.241*	0.132	-0.210	0.273**	-0.024
	(0.107)	(0.076)	(0.108)	(0.095)	(0.100)	(0.071)	(0.110)	(0.091)	(0.108)
Retired	0.198**	0.095	0.121	0.000	-0.125*	0.208***	0.060	0.230**	0.224***
	(0.076)	(0.057)	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.085)	(0.073)	(0.063)
Ability to make ends meet	0.196***	0.160***	0.170***	0.205***	0.130***	0.193***	0.122***	0.173***	0.099***
	(0.029)	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.032)	(0.028)	(0.026)
Subjective health	0.196***	0.175***	0.049	0.123***	0.115***	0.175***	0.134***	0.150***	0.128***
	(0.033)	(0.027)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.027)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.039	-0.108*	-0.039	-0.060	-0.068	-0.069	-0.091	-0.153*	-0.009
	(0.062)	(0.052)	(0.049)	(0.054)	(0.056)	(0.047)	(0.064)	(0.060)	(0.054)
Social connectedness	0.174***	0.143***	0.074***	0.093***	0.097***	0.072**	0.059*	0.159***	0.077***
	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.021)
Non-citizen		0.142*	0.145		0.212	0.234*	-0.217	-0.300	-0.104
		(0.059)	(0.129)		(0.133)	(0.105)	(0.167)	(0.280)	(0.103)
Constant	1.452***	1.985***	2.572***	2.192***	2.375***	1.891***	2.421***	1.699***	2.412***
	(0.131)	(0.115)	(0.128)	(0.132)	(0.117)	(0.141)	(0.146)	(0.140)	(0.118)
Observations	1914	2519	1786	1774	2074	1734	1179	1732	2116
F statistic	19.01	17.01	6.26	7.98	10.47	12.10	5.42	15.28	8.26
Adj. R-squared	0.14	0.11	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.13	0.07	0.11	0.06

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	BE 2016	BG 2016	CY 2016	DE 2016	DK 2016	EE 2016	ES 2016	FI 2016	FR 2016
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.125*	0.023	-0.036	0.025	0.046	0.043	0.012	-0.057	0.150*
	(0.059)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.046)	(0.055)	(0.060)	(0.063)	(0.052)	(0.058)
Living w/ Partner	-0.083	-0.095	-0.139	-0.091	-0.038	-0.156**	0.032	-0.240***	-0.061
	(0.064)	(0.066)	(0.075)	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.059)	(0.063)	(0.061)	(0.063)
Children in household	-0.087	-0.077	-0.027	-0.008	-0.079	0.105	-0.121*	0.065	-0.086
	(0.061)	(0.065)	(0.082)	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.073)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.066)
Age in years	0.002	0.002	-0.008*	-0.001	0.007*	0.000	0.001	0.000	-0.005
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Education (3 categories)	0.015	0.065*	-0.054*	-0.046*	0.017	-0.055*	0.03ß	-0.018	0.039
	(0.023)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Unemployed	-0.048	0.138	-0.253*	-0.072	-0.102	0.040	-0.188	0.048	-0.219
	(0.130)	(0.166)	(0.127)	(0.128)	(0.204)	(0.245)	(0.099)	(0.152)	(0.130)
Unable to work	0.060	0.116	-0.024	0.101	-0.786**	-0.122	0.125	0.204	0.120
	(0.180)	(0.270)	(0.292)	(0.227)	(0.250)	(0.174)	(0.227)	(0.273)	(0.237)
Self-employed	0.132	0.229*	0.138	0.030	0.030	0.155	-0.045	-0.292*	0.471***
	(0.129)	(0.110)	(0.129)	(0.097)	(0.122)	(0.108)	(0.101)	(0.133)	(0.104)
Homemaker	0.160	0.028	0.037	0.002	-0.098	0.225	-0.179	-0.250	0.268*
	(0.150)	(0.288)	(0.121)	(0.127)	(0.472)	(0.169)	(0.112)	(0.177)	(0.120)
Student	0.162	0.168	-0.063	-0.107	0.394**	0.024	-0.225	0.062	0.086
	(0.155)	(0.201)	(0.186)	(0.128)	(0.129)	(0.140)	(0.163)	(0.152)	(0.181)
Retired	0.194	0.082	0.245*	0.164*	0.195*	0.016	0.036	0.254**	0.443***
	(0.103)	(0.109)	(0.118)	(0.075)	(0.095)	(0.099)	(0.110)	(0.090)	(0.114)
Ability to make ends meet	0.263***	0.367***	0.254***	0.415***	0.231***	0.271***	0.155***	0.325***	0.367***
	(0.045)	(0.051)	(0.054)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.052)	(0.051)
Subjective health	0.119**	0.289***	0.088	0.208***	0.177***	0.251***	0.115*	0.136**	0.119*
	(0.041)	(0.056)	(0.045)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.050)	(0.052)	(0.043)	(0.046)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.015	0.148	-0.008	-0.052	-0.121	-0.020	-0.070	0.022	-0.001
	(0.080)	(0.106)	(0.095)	(0.067)	(0.082)	(0.079)	(0.108)	(0.068)	(0.096)
Social connectedness	0.104***	0.172***	0.099**	0.080***	0.052*	0.120***	0.122***	0.072**	0.087**
	(0.030)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.022)	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.025)	(0.029)
Non-citizen	-0.043	0.527**	0.108	0.030	-0.041	0.171*	0.018	0.017	0.151
	(0.081)	(0.204)	(0.100)	(0.078)	(0.121)	(0.081)	(0.076)	(0.227)	(0.086)
Constant	1.774***	0.831***	2.096***	1.474***	1.959***	1.705***	2.023***	2.043***	1.361***
	(0.189)	(0.224)	(0.214)	(0.145)	(0.180)	(0.198)	(0.203)	(0.190)	(0.180)
Observations	985	994	997	1601	995	972	980	1027	1153
F statistic	6.61	13.81	4.24	15.55	12.33	9.86	4.55	8.42	12.89
Adj. R-squared	0.09	0.19	0.06	0.15	0.19	0.13	0.06	0.11	0.14

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty (n ≤ 1).

Table A5 OLS Regressions of Autonomy on individual means and conversion factors per country and year (continued)

	HU 2016	IE 2016	NL 2016	PL 2016	PT 2016	SE 2016	SI 2016	SK 2016	UK 2016
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.067	-0.043	0.107	0.000	-0.100*	0.094	0.044	0.028	0.039
	(0.070)	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.061)	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.061)	(0.054)	(0.048)
Living w/ Partner	-0.129	0.000	-0.117	-0.055	-0.074	-0.126*	-0.189**	-0.100	-0.112*
	(0.072)	(0.057)	(0.063)	(0.062)	(0.053)	(0.056)	(0.070)	(0.054)	(0.049)
Children in household	0.152*	-0.005	-0.032	-0.061	-0.034	0.061	0.026	0.076	-0.041
	(0.075)	(0.051)	(0.062)	(0.060)	(0.052)	(0.058)	(0.064)	(0.057)	(0.049)
Age in years	0.001	-0.005	-0.005	-0.005	-0.002	-0.002	-0.008*	-0.004	-0.004
	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Education (3 categories)	-0.032	0.062**	-0.023	0.053	0.053*	-0.052*	0.011	-0.005	-0.054**
	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.033)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.018)
Unemployed	-0.146	0.152	-0.107	-0.263*	-0.177	-0.488	0.003	-0.380**	-0.132
	(0.227)	(0.117)	(0.176)	(0.134)	(0.114)	(0.402)	(0.146)	(0.129)	(0.131)
Unable to work	0.560*	0.067	-0.059	0.115	0.045	-0.392	-0.57	0.050	-0.143
	(0.245)	(0.188)	(0.159)	(0.146)	(0.248)	(0.305)	(0.384)	(0.209)	(0.199)
Self-employed	0.190	0.060	0.206*	0.086	0.045	0.106	-0.085	-0.027	0.126
	(0.173)	(0.102)	(0.100)	(0.108)	(0.080)	(0.093)	(0.134)	(0.088)	(0.081)
Homemaker	0.284	0.091	-0.093	0.198	0.177	0.331	0.086	-0.013	0.011
	(0.261)	(0.080)	(0.143)	(0.128)	(0.134)	(0.183)	(0.235)	(0.327)	(0.111)
Student	0.312	-0.053	-0.168	-0.265	-0.037	-0.055	-0.126	0.256	0.213
	(0.224)	(0.149)	(0.148)	(0.163)	(0.132)	(0.129)	(0.139)	(0.160)	(0.125)
Retired	0.050	0.286**	0.268**	0.182	0.062	0.284***	0.361**	0.151	0.143
	(0.123)	(0.096)	(0.103)	(0.102)	(0.085)	(0.084)	(0.112)	(0.089)	(0.091)
Ability to make ends meet	0.311***	0.207***	0.187***	0.119*	0.227***	0.224***	0.234***	0.317***	0.318***
	(0.067)	(0.045)	(0.048)	(0.053)	(0.041)	(0.046)	(0.050)	(0.045)	(0.039)
Subjective health	0.137**	0.149***	0.124**	0.237***	0.076	0.179***	0.124**	0.257***	0.128***
	(0.050)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.039)	(0.033)	(0.041)	(0.044)	(0.034)
Chronic illness/disability	-0.232*	0.062	0.035	0.010	0.072	-0.101	-0.157	-0.023	0.036
	(0.097)	(0.098)	(0.078)	(0.088)	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.086)	(0.078)	(0.069)
Social connectedness	0.182***	0.085**	0.038	0.131***	0.068*	0.055	0.185***	0.120***	0.106***
	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.027)
Non-citizen	-0.015	0.018	0.021	0.366**	0.249**	0.067	-0.023	-0.054	0.051
	(0.243)	(0.075)	(0.090)	(0.129)	(0.093)	(0.088)	(0.102)	(0.132)	(0.063)
Constant	1.406***	1.719***	2.287***	1.734***	2.169***	2.327***	1.606***	1.436***	1.951***
	(0.197)	(0.176)	(0.183)	(0.198)	(0.166)	(0.181)	(0.182)	(0.163)	(0.156)
Observations	1013	992	987	973	1047	1038	979	990	1251
F statistic	7.69	6.90	4.63	7.60	7.84	8.26	8.90	14.74	9.49
Adj. R-squared	0.10	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.09	0.14	0.12	0.19	0.12

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, unstandardized b-coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. In Poland (2006, 2011, 2012) and Hungary (2011, 2012) non-citizens were omitted as the category was empty ($n \leq 1$).

Table A6 The effects of the basic functionings and autonomy on life satisfaction

	b	se
Autonomy	0.342***	(0.010)
Financial security	1.896***	(0.045)
Health	1.372***	(0.049)
Leisure	1.036***	(0.047)
Respect	0.848***	(0.043)
Safety	0.204***	(0.043)
Friendship	0.166***	(0.045)
Gender (Ref.: male)	0.216***	(0.020)
Partner	0.201***	(0.035)
Own children	0.022	(0.023)
Minor children in HH	0.186***	(0.032)
Never married	− 0.141***	(0.037)
Separated	− 0.196**	(0.062)
Widowed	− 0.170***	(0.046)
Divorced	− 0.176***	(0.045)
Age 18–24 years	0.370***	(0.052)
Age 25–34 years	0.096**	(0.031)
Age 50–64 years	0.001	(0.030)
Age 65 + years	0.133**	(0.045)
ISCED Levels 1–2	− 0.018	(0.023)
ISCED Levels 6–8	0.075**	(0.025)
Unable to work	− 0.277***	(0.070)
Unemployed	− 0.640***	(0.039)
Homemaker	− 0.165***	(0.040)
Student	0.207***	(0.059)
Retired	− 0.053	(0.037)
Other employment status	− 0.205	(0.173)
Lowest income quartile	− 0.177***	(0.032)
2nd income quartile	− 0.100***	(0.030)
3rd income quartile	− 0.041	(0.029)
No income information	0.013	(0.030)
Constant	2.196***	(0.115)
Countries		33
F statistic		472.75
Chi^2		14,655.21
Log likelihood		− 71,798.89

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$;

EQLS 2016; N = 36,460; Multilevel analysis of the basic functionings and autonomy on life satisfaction (with individual-level control variables). Reference categories: No partner in household (partner), no own children/minor children in household (own/minor children in household), Married (family status), Age 35–44 years (Age), ISCED Levels 3–5 (education), employed (employment status), highest income quartile (income); unstandardized b-coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

Table A7 Mean and standard deviation of variables included in the analysis by country

	Overall life satisfaction		Satisfaction with agency		Feeling unsafe at home		Feeling unsafe at school		Feeling unsafe in the area		Age (6–10 y)		Gender (female)	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	N
Algeria*	90.37	20.13	3.43	1.00	0.79	1.23	0.41	0.95	0.86	1.37	0.08	0.69	0.51	1129
Colombia*	94.37	15.25	3.68	0.83	0.44	0.93	0.37	0.83	0.89	1.33	0.00	0.00	0.53	791
Estonia	92.57	16.93	3.29	0.96	0.37	0.85	0.57	1.05	0.61	1.07	0.08	0.36	0.48	939
Ethiopia	82.20	24.00	2.92	1.21	1.22	1.45	0.95	1.25	1.32	1.41	0.50	0.74	0.51	945
Germany	90.70	18.06	3.53	0.79	0.43	0.79	0.79	1.17	0.96	1.19	0.56	0.58	0.51	903
Israel	91.51	20.39	3.61	0.86	0.52	1.08	0.69	1.22	0.91	1.37	−0.54	0.52	0.51	727
Malta	90.53	21.85	3.32	1.08	0.58	0.97	0.67	1.14	1.23	1.48	−0.50	0.54	0.39	705
Nepal	84.90	22.53	3.27	1.01	0.89	1.15	0.77	0.95	0.94	1.11	0.00	0.00	0.50	874
Norway	90.92	18.66	3.65	0.64	0.36	0.75	0.44	0.86	0.45	0.88	0.30	0.47	0.52	818
Poland*	93.89	14.50	3.59	0.76	0.23	0.67	0.44	0.96	0.92	1.30	0.34	0.52	0.47	884
Romania	95.16	13.18	3.65	0.70	0.33	0.73	0.41	0.86	0.79	1.21	−0.02	0.48	0.49	1085
S Africa*	86.97	24.04	3.50	0.99	0.65	1.24	0.58	1.12	1.51	1.65	0.00	0.00	0.49	988
S Korea	85.48	22.21	3.31	0.93	0.76	1.00	0.72	1.02	1.62	1.22	0.00	0.00	0.51	2260
Spain*	93.30	17.13	3.61	0.76	0.38	0.82	0.45	0.92	0.60	1.02	0.02	0.41	0.50	880
Turkey	93.25	18.41	3.73	0.72	0.60	1.15	0.49	1.00	1.27	1.51	−0.14	0.49	0.53	841

In countries marked with an asterisk the survey only took place in some regions.

N = 15,526; Source: Children's Worlds International Survey of Children's Well-Being, 2nd Wave (ISCWeb 2013-14); own Calculations.