

Conceptualising human needs and identifying minimum satisfiers for decent living

Ian Gough

CASE, LSE
Associate, GRI, LSE

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Grantham Research Institute on
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The reference budgets movement

- Very pleased to speak at this conference
- The RB methodology an improvement on alternatives, eg:
 - Early budget standards studies
 - Consensual or majoritarian approaches of Mack and Lansley, David Gordon
- Berenice Storms and colleagues at Antwerp present strong theoretical justification for RB
 - Pleased to see this based on *A Theory of Human Need* by Len Doyal and myself!

Plan of this talk

- Summarise our theory of human need
 - Crucial distinction between needs and need satisfiers
 - Also touch on its relationship to the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum
- Discuss ways of assessing need satisfiers in specific contexts
 - Link to reference budgets

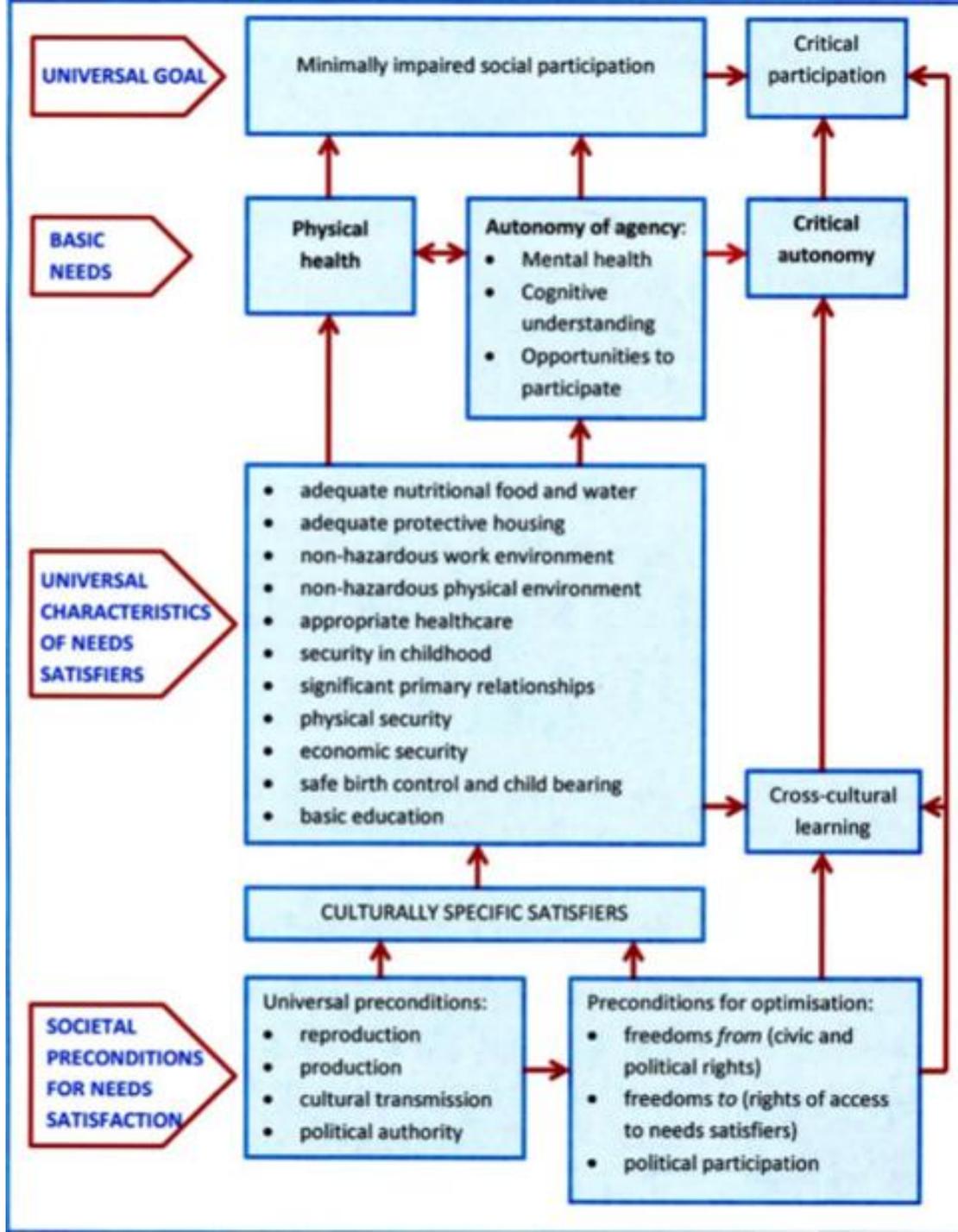
1. A Theory of Human Need

(THN, 1991)

A hierarchical theory in 5 stages:

- A. Universal goal
- B. Basic needs
- C. Universal satisfier characteristics (USCs)
- D. Satisfiers
- E. Societal preconditions for satisfiers

See figure



Level A. Universal goal

- Distinguish *needs* from *wants*
- To avoid *serious harm*
 - ‘Fundamental disablement in the pursuit of one’s vision of the good, whatever that vision is’
- Equates with impaired social *participation* or social *functioning*
- Basic needs are then the universalisable preconditions for effective participation
- This permits a collective view of needs

Level B. Two basic needs

- Physical health
- Critical autonomy:
 - ‘The ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it’.
 - a. Cognitive and emotional capacity to initiate an action
 - b. Cultural understanding
 - c. Opportunities to participate in socially significant activities

Level C: Universal satisfier characteristics (USCs)

- ‘Those characteristics or properties of goods, services, activities and relationships which enhance physical health and human autonomy in *all* cultures’ (and at all times)
- To identify rely on scientific evidence – ‘codified knowledge’
- We identify 11, discussed later
- Storms et al modify this list

Level D. Need satisfiers

- Need satisfiers: ‘all goods, services, activities and relationships that meet basic needs in any culture’ (Max-Neef)
- The majority will be culturally and temporally variable
- Thus needs (level B) are universal; satisfiers (level D) are relative
- *This is the topic of poverty research, including RBs*

Level E. Societal preconditions

- We distinguish these from needs
 - Nussbaum links them
- What are essential, universal social roles that enable people to participate?
 - Production: work, both paid and unpaid
 - Reproduction: family, child care, care
 - Cultural transmission: education, cultural roles
 - Political authority: citizenship, political participation
- Storms: thus social participation both a means and an end

The capabilities approach

- THN similar to Sen on ‘functionings’ and ‘capabilities’
 - But he will not identify *basic* functionings
- Nussbaum does:
 - Clear parallels here: ‘central capabilities’ to lead a flourishing life
 - Her list and overlaps with ours
 - But differences in forms of derivation
 - Our ‘thinner’ approach distinguishes needs/functions from specific external conditions for their flourishing

2. Identifying need satisfiers

- Reference budgets move us from needs to need satisfiers
- What do people require to participate effectively within their social contexts?
- What bundle of need satisfiers does this entail?
- This conference has much more to input here
 - But let me make a few general points

THN: The 'dual strategy'

- To determine bundle of need satisfiers the dual strategy is central
- Requires two distinct forms of knowledge brought together:
 - **Codified** knowledge
 - cumulative scientific knowledge of needs, capacities and risks
 - **Experiential** knowledge of people in their social contexts
 - Sen on the critical role of participation
 - Requires innovative ways to tap this

The dual strategy

- Either without the other is flawed:
 - Expert knowledge can be ignorant of daily lives, can pursue narrow interests. In one sense ‘citizens are experts’ (Concialdi)
 - Experiential knowledge can be ignorant of and adapt to existing structures – *adaptive preferences*; vulnerable to power differences etc
- Must find ways of bringing these together in as open and equal a dialogue as possible
 - Valuing compromise, provided it does not challenge basic needs

The dual strategy and the RB approach

- Thus I welcome the references to the dual approach in RBs
- But of 58 RBs in Europe
 - 40 make use of expert knowledge in a broad sense
 - 21 use focus group discussions
 - Pilot project 2014
- This a problem

Lists and components: THN

Health

- Nutritional food and clean water
- Protective housing
- A non-hazardous work environment
- A non-hazardous physical environment
- Safe birth control and child-bearing
- Appropriate health care

Autonomy

- A secure childhood
- Significant primary relationships
- Physical security
- Economic security
- Appropriate education

Some differences with the Antwerp list:



TABLE 1: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND INTERMEDIATE NEEDS

Intermediate needs to live healthily and to act autonomously

Healthy food

Suitable clothing

Personal hygiene

Accessible healthcare

Adequate housing

Security in Childhood

Meaningful social relations

Lifelong learning

Rest and relaxation

Mobility

Lists and components

- This variation can be healthy
 - Eg. Sabina Alkire finds substantial overlap in different 'lists'
- But can be criticised
 - Some components largely provided by public goods, but should still be on list
 - Eg health and education (cf developing countries – and in USA re health)
 - Problem of inherently collective goods, eg safe environment
 - But can still calculate who does and does not enjoy this

Material v non-material need satisfiers

- This relates to distinction between
 - *Material* needs: cannot possibly be satisfied without some level of material throughput in the economic system
 - *Non-material* needs: can conceivably be satisfied without any extra material throughput.
- Problem: *re latter* much will depend on uncommodified social relationships and social norms.
 - How incorporate into?

Detailed components v a monetary value

- One goal is to aggregate into minimum income values for different groups
- But much interest in the details
 - Mobile phones now a necessity
 - But cars not viewed as a necessity in UK MIS standard (except for families)
 - Collectively provided services (eg health) taken for granted
 - but must be included if comparing different national systems

Conclusion: THN and RBs

- Thus important links between these approaches
 - THN hopefully providing theoretical and ethical foundations to the search for a decent minimum standard of living in contemporary Europe
 - RB methodology is helping to operationalise this in the real world to deliver sound and legitimate budgets for social participation
- Look forward to ongoing dialogue



Thank you!

References:

Gough, Ian (2015) [*Climate change and sustainable welfare: the centrality of human needs.*](#) Cambridge Journal of Economics

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