

Subjective well-being and its safeguards: older and younger people in Flanders

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Overview

1. Introduction, analyzing time: Age, Period & Cohort
2. More specific surveys on subjective well-being in Flanders of younger and older people
 - Survey on Social-Cultural Changes in Flanders (SCV), 2008 versus 2018: from a U-curve to a linear increase
 - The Social Study in 2024 in order to look for “Determinants” of subjective wellbeing
3. Conclusion

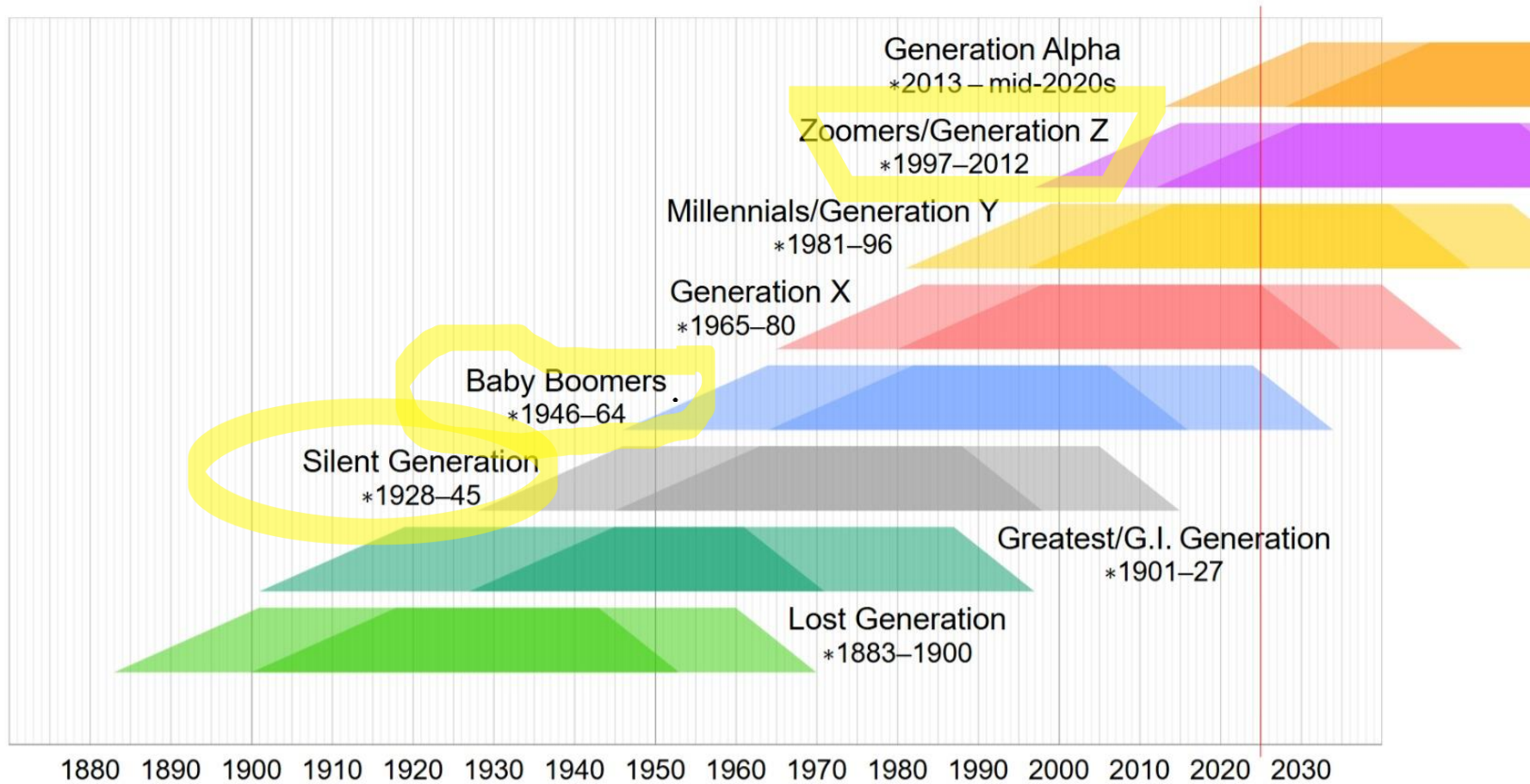
Introduction: analyzing time: Age, Period & Cohort

Three components: $\text{Age} = \text{Period} - \text{Cohort}$

Each component is related to specific type of theory:

- Age (life cycle)
 - Age-related developmental changes (e.g., health)
- Period (historical time, trend)
 - Cultural, economical and other changes unique to a specific time period (e.g., covid-crisis)
- (Birth) Cohort (generation) (Ryder, 1965)
 - A birth cohort experiences cumulatively the same kind of social experiences;
 - Formative years are important (e.g.; media type)
 - Shared experiences across life course

Cohort: “a” classification

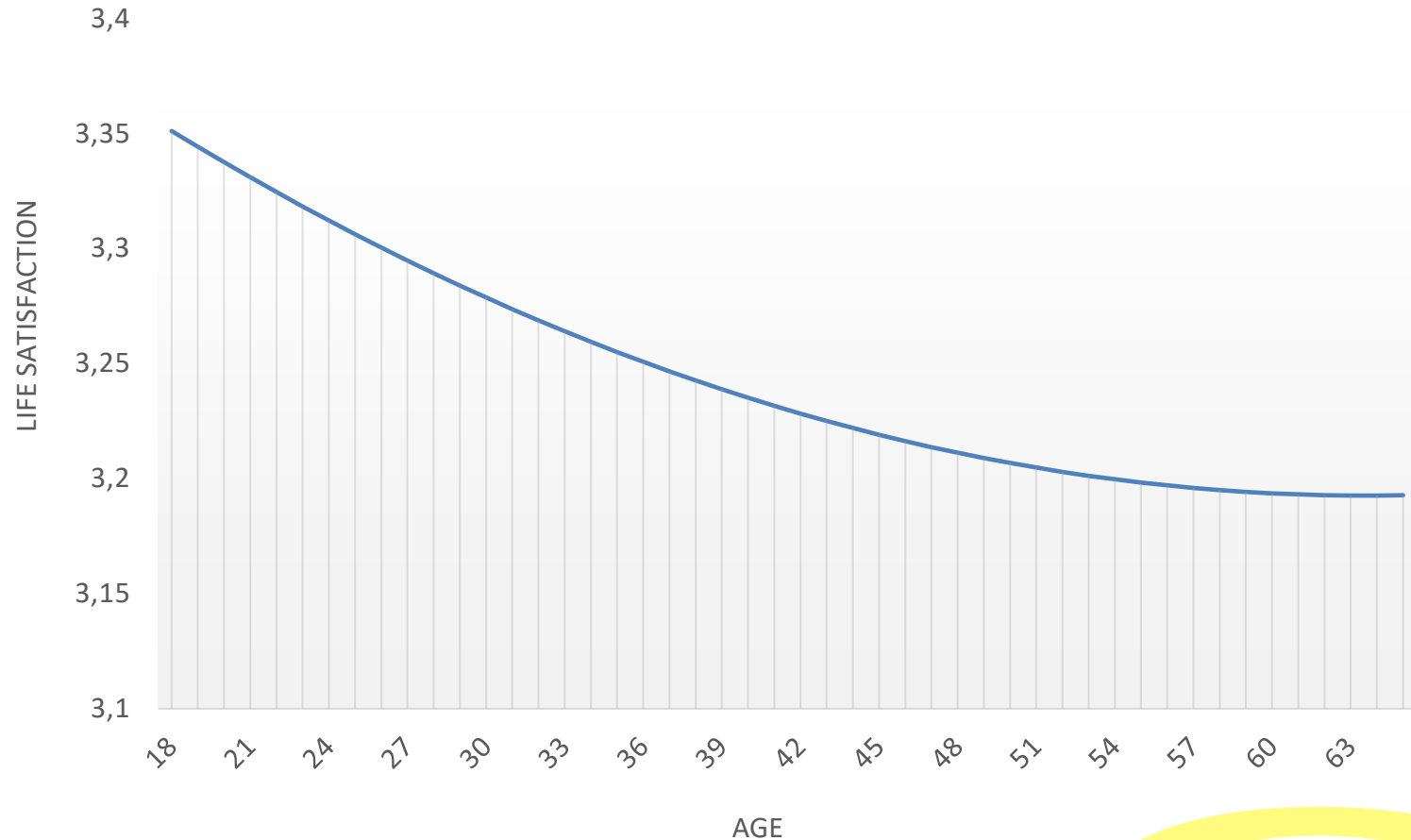


Source: Cmglee based on Pew Research Center

Methodology

- Database:
 - Repeated Cross-Sectional Eurobarometer surveys (1973-2022)
 - 78 time points, $n = 585\ 154$
- Time
 - 23 five-year cohorts: $< 1895, \dots, \geq 2005$
 - 48 periods: 1973 to 2022 (not in 1974 and 1996)
 - age (deviation from overall mean age, quadratic specification)
- Method:
 - Random Intercept Cross-Classification Model
 - Each respondent (level 1) is member of
 - one birth cohort
 - and one time period
 - i.e., a cross-classification (level 2)

Age (Flanders, 1973-2022)

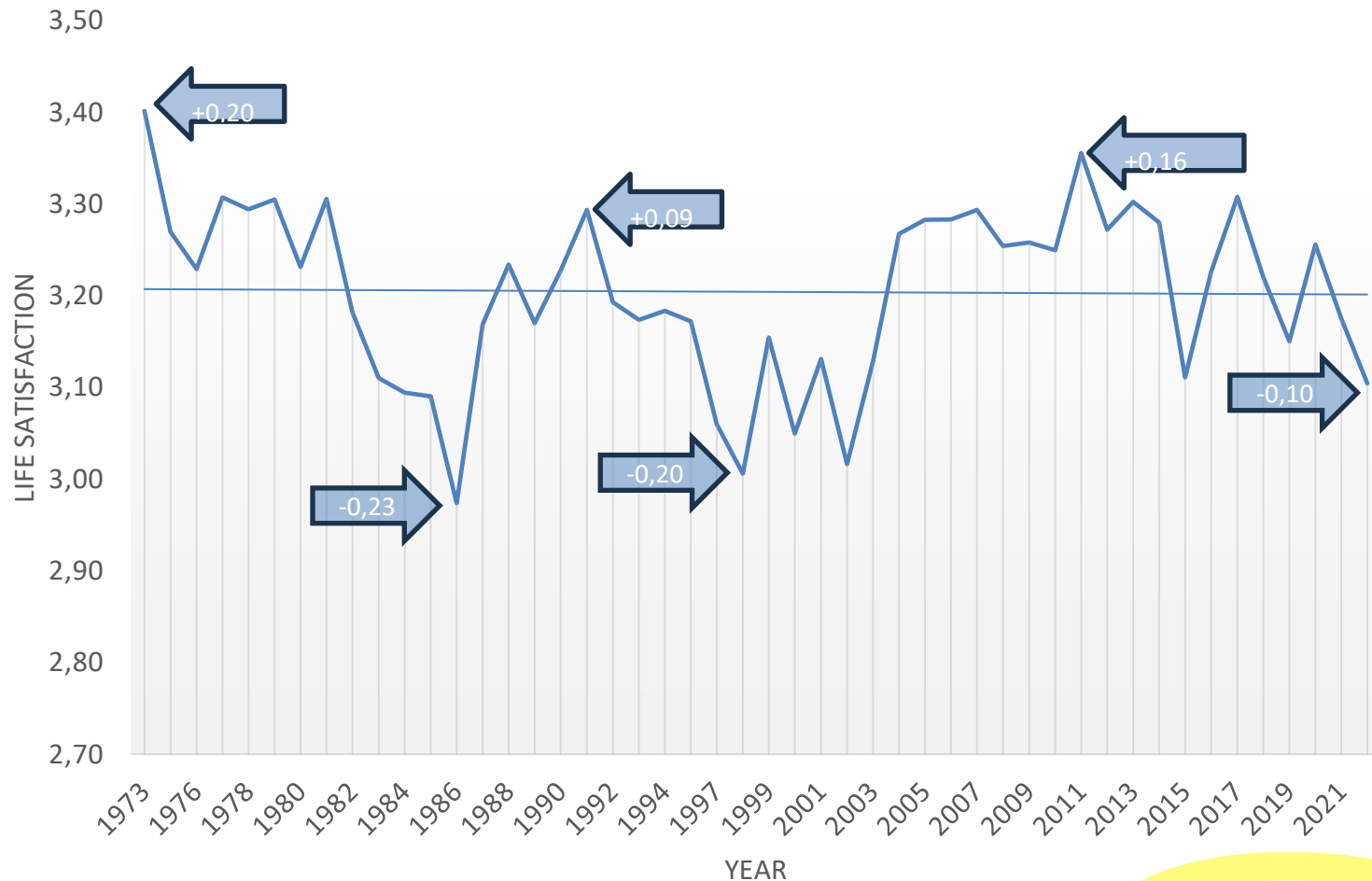


R= 4,8%



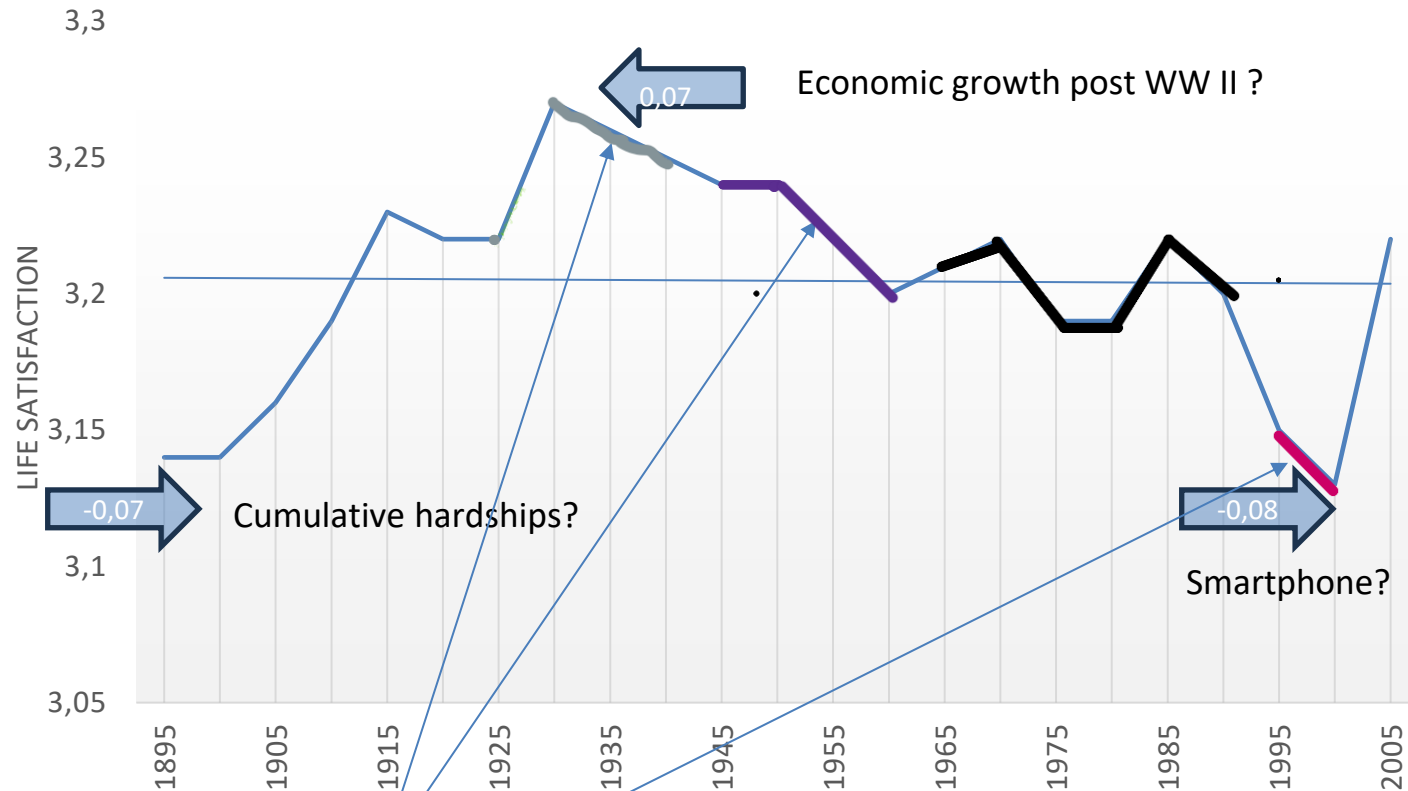
Flanders
State of the Art

Period (Flanders, 1973-2022)



R= 14%

Cohort (Flanders, 1895-2005)



Silent Generation (1928-1945)

Babyboomers (1945-1964)

Gen Z (1997-2012)

BIRTH COHORT

R= 4%

Some conclusions for Flanders by introduction

- Cohort results for Flanders:
 - Period effect clearly dominates cohort effect
 - Silent Generation: unexpected high(est) cohort effect
 - Gen Z:
 - negative cohort effect as expected
 - lowest cohort level since 1895

More specific surveys on subjective well-being in Flanders

- Surveys in order to analyze subjective well-being and its determinants in Flanders:
 - Survey on Social-Cultural Changes in Flanders (SCV), 2008-2018: face-to face
 - The Social Study (TSS): a self-completion panel study measuring subjective well-being next to internal and external buffers

Methodology of the SCV-survey

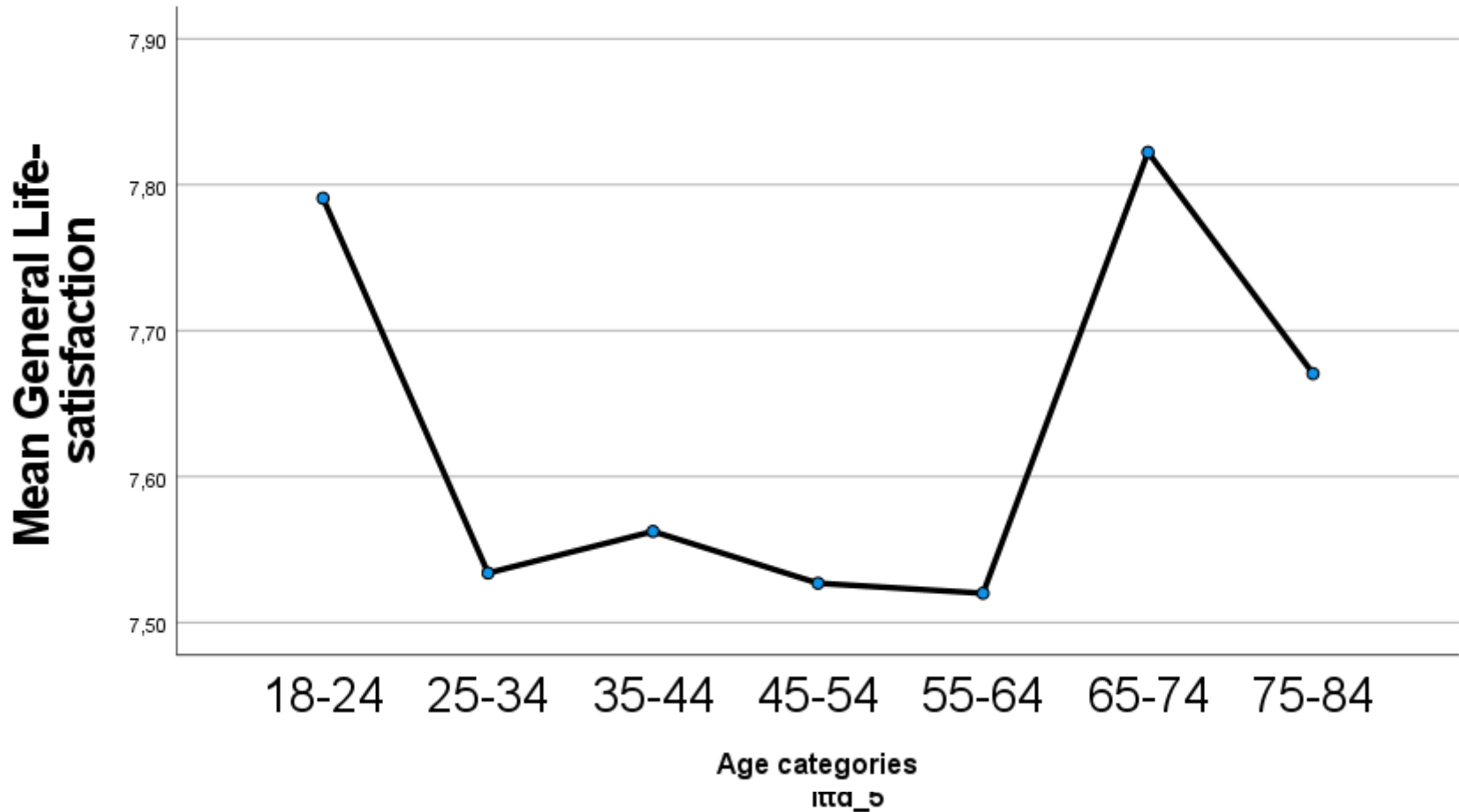
- 1996-2018
- Research Centre of the Flemish Government
- Design:
 - Random sample from the **national register**, including all inhabitants of the Flemish region, age : 18 or older, living in a private household, no restrictions on nationality
 - **Face-to-face** (duration about 1 hour/interview)
- Wide range of topics
- Scientific advisory body
- About 1500 realised interviews per year (stable response rate, 65%)
- Focus on scientific policy research

The Social Study

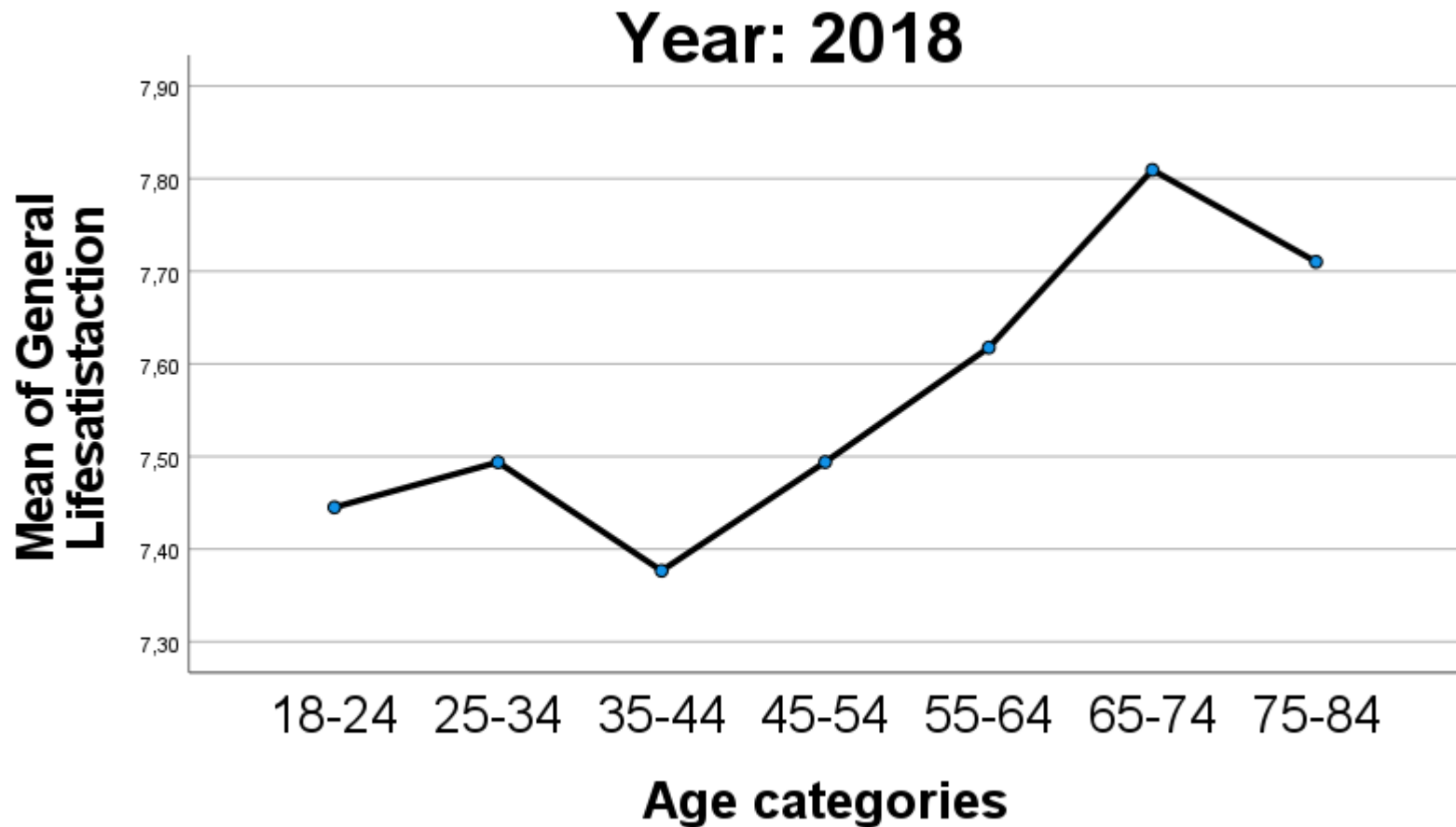
- Data collection infrastructure, pool of panelists that are surveyed 6 to 10 times per year, since the end of 2024
- **Self-completion (online and paper)**
- Pool of almost 5500 panelists
 - Flanders – 3443
 - Wallonia – 1496
 - Brussels – 488
- Target population
 - Persons aged 16 and over
 - Resident within private households in Belgium
 - Regardless of nationality or citizenship

Life Satisfaction: age profile (SCV, 2008)

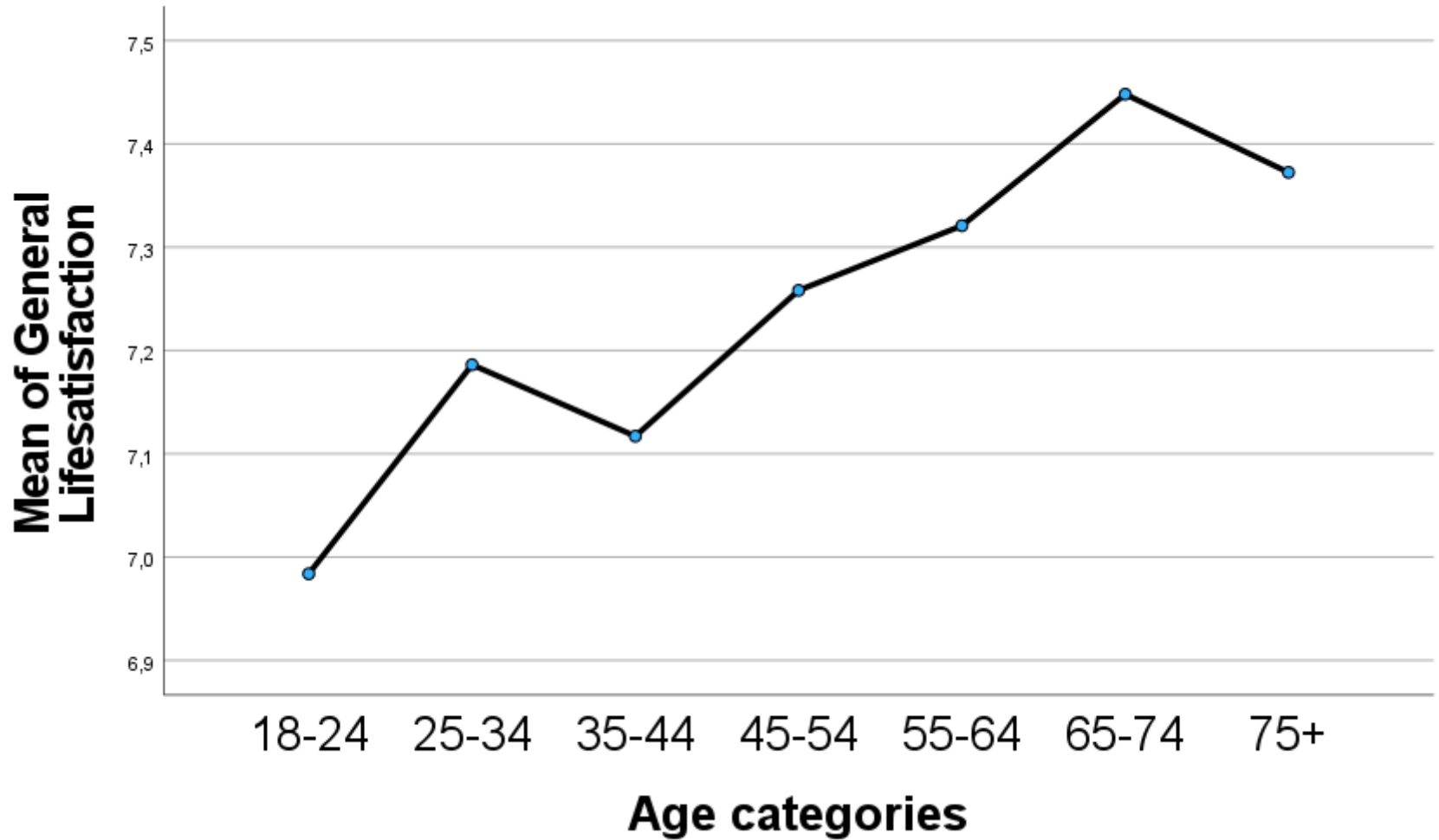
Year: 2008



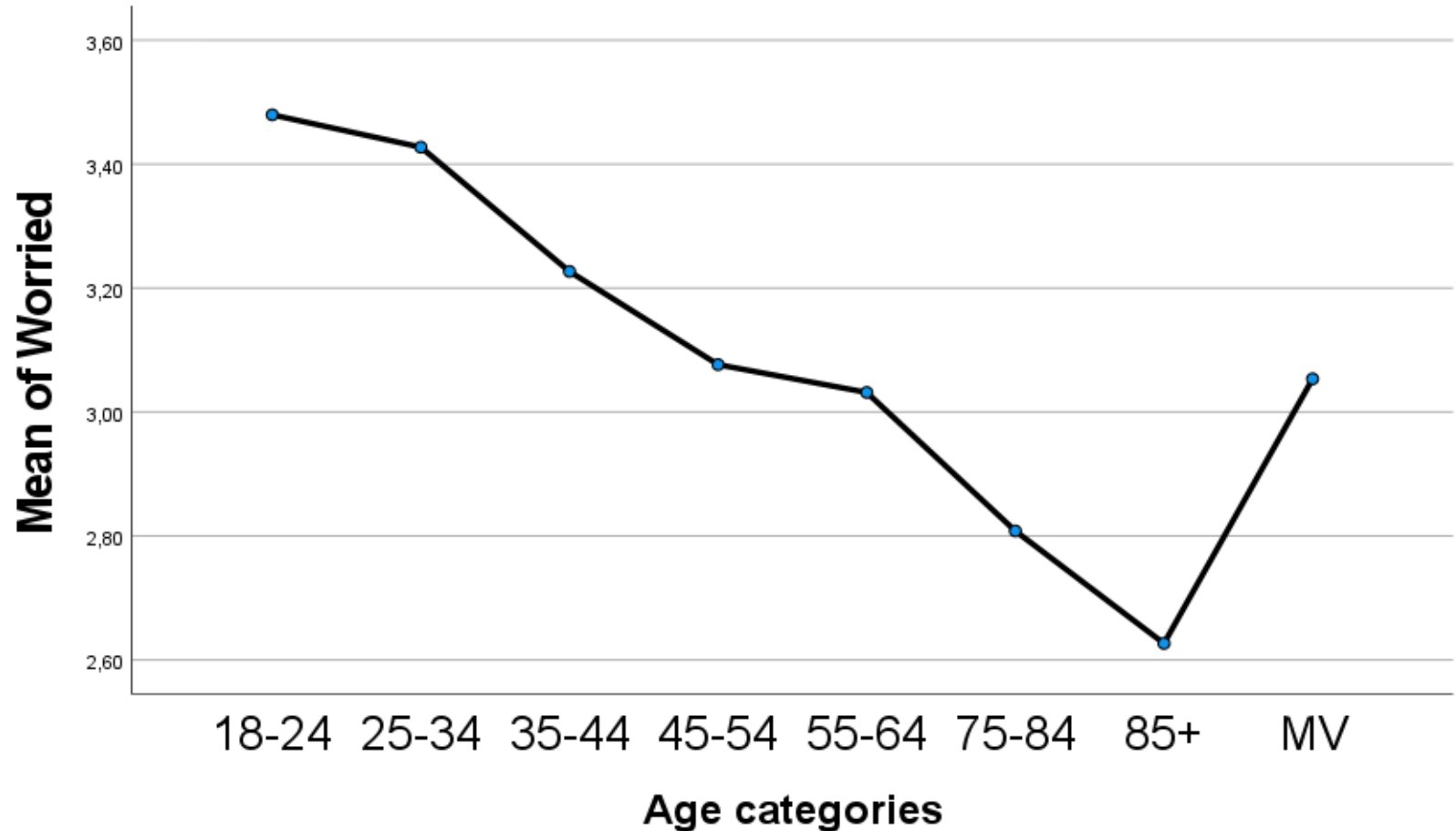
Life Satisfaction: age profile (SCV, 2018)



Life satisfaction: age profile (TSS, 2025)



Frequency of worries and age profile (TSS, 2025, the higher, the more frequent the feelings)



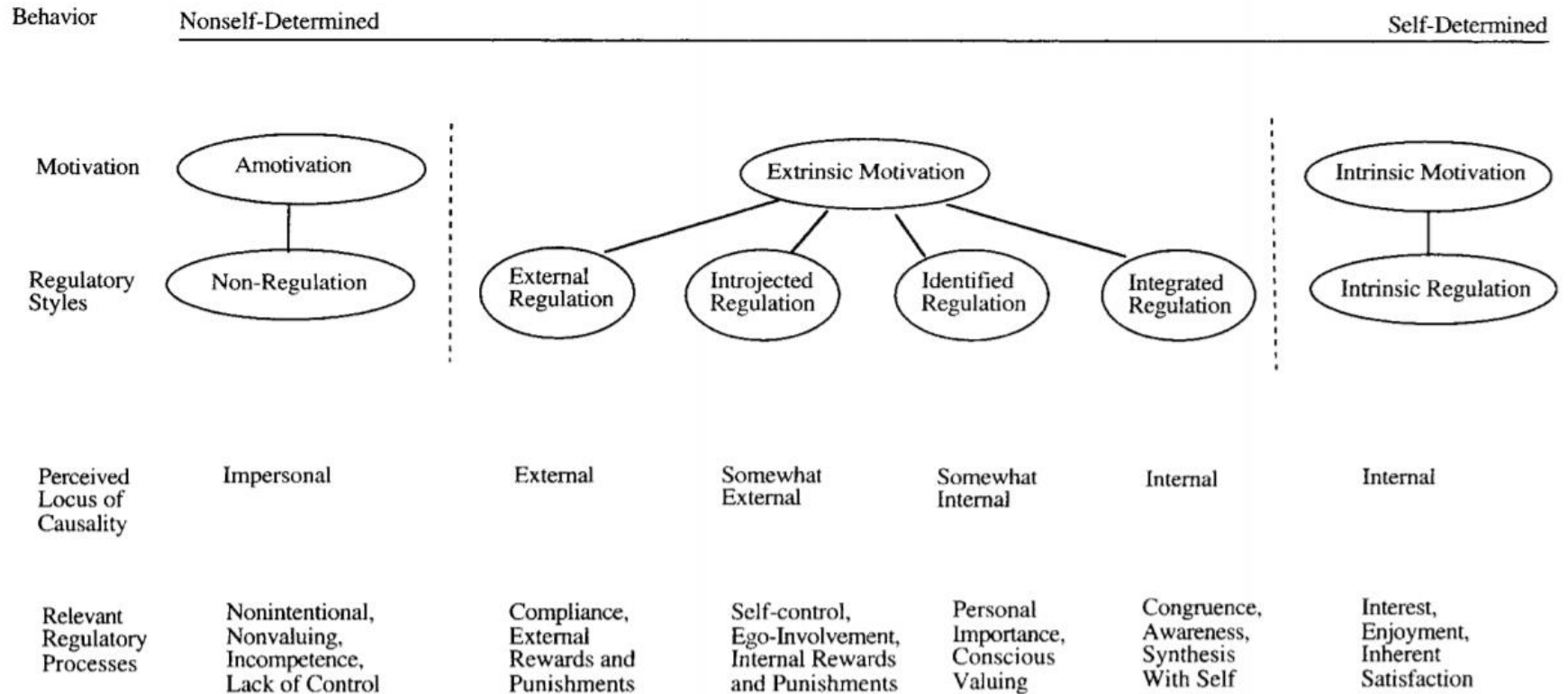
Searching for determinants of subjective well-being

- Why analysing the determinants of subjective well-being?
 - Testing of assumptions about the human preferences affecting subjective well-being
 - Evidence of a widening range of factors affecting subjective well-being
 - Enriching the analysis of the value of non-market goods (cf. “beyond GDP”)
 - Providing information and evidence in the debate on reforming well-being
- UN, OECD, Eurostat, ... : several (international) actors are searching for possible factors explaining subjective well-being

Looking for possible “determinants”

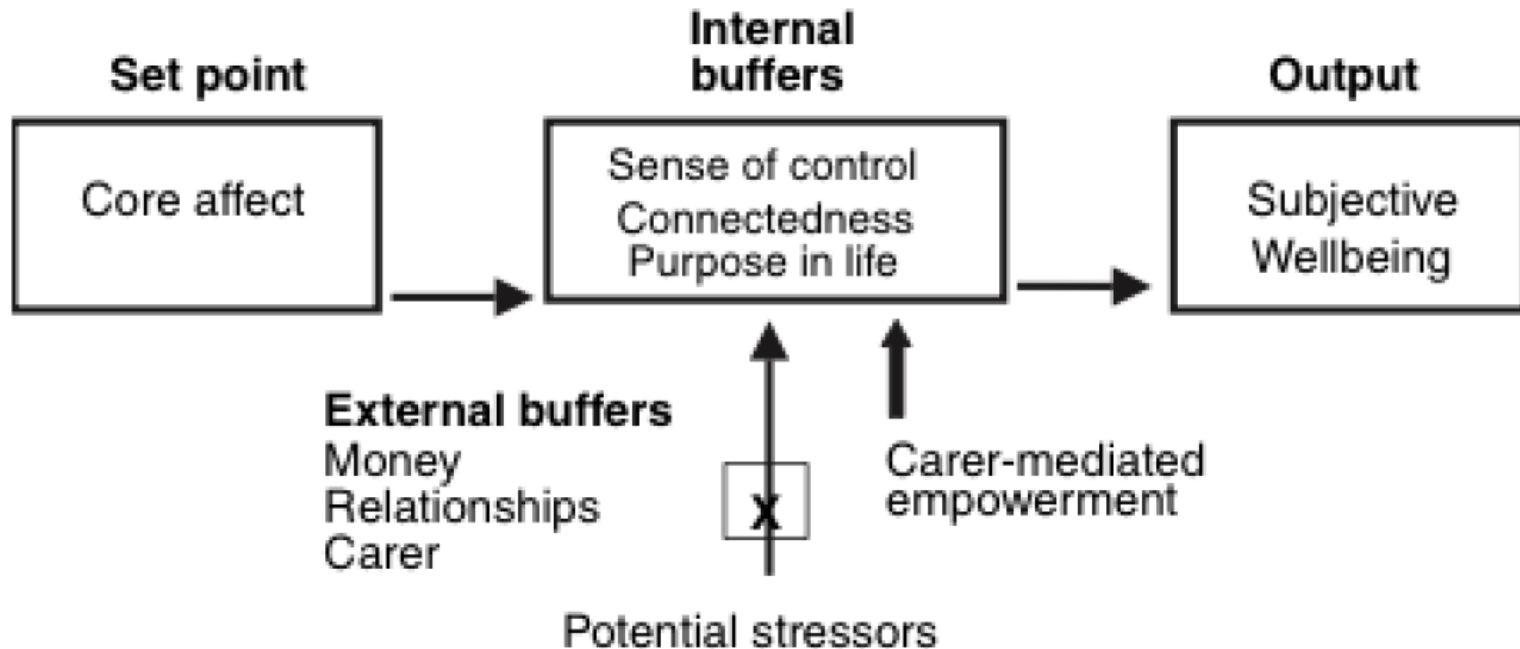
- Inspiring theoretical models:
 - Self-Determination Theory (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000)
 - Homeostasis theory (Cummins)
 - Flourishing
- As reflected and used in different models/research frameworks of different organisations, e.g. OECD, Eurostat, ONS, European Social Survey, EQUALITY Research–Collective, ...

Self-Determination Theory's as a model to explain subjective well-being (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000)

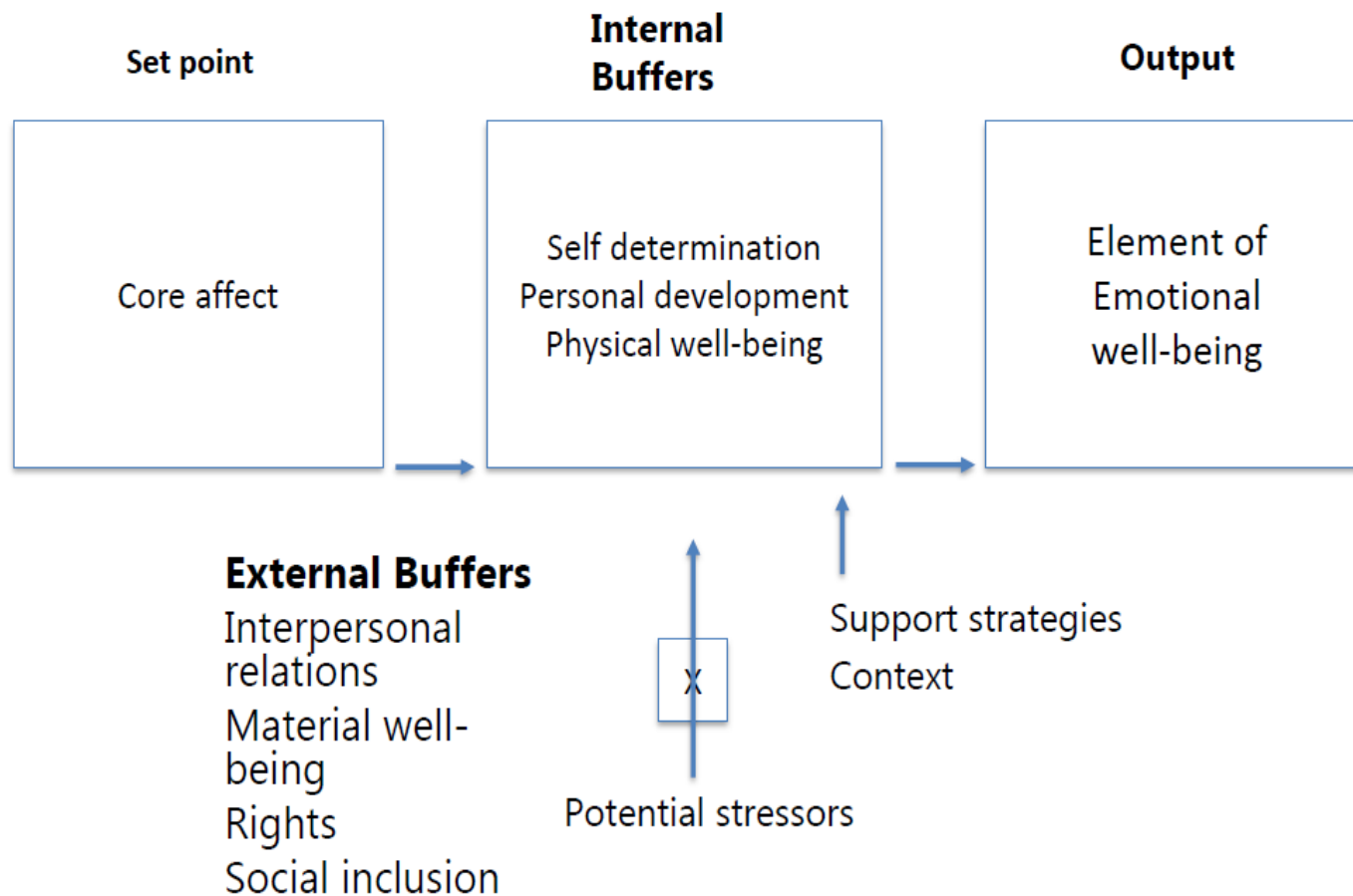


Bron: Deci & Ryan, 2000, 72

An other model: cf. Cummins homeostasis theory

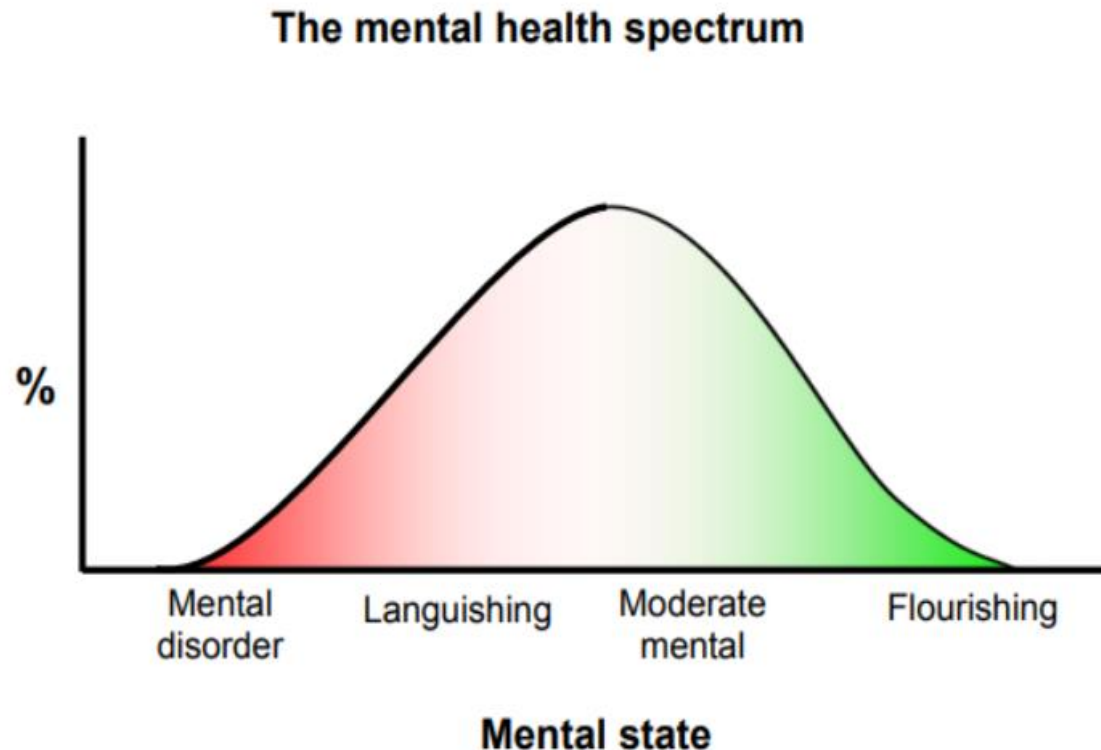


Enriched model by Claes et al. from the EQUALITY Research collective (2019)



The intermediating role of mediators/buffers

- Cf. models on “Flourishing”, cf. Huppert & So, 2009



Pred. value of (groups of) variables in explaining the variance of the general life satisfaction (adj. R²)

Explanatory value in the general population and within the specific age groups (-35 and 65+)

	Gen. Population	-35	65-plus
Socio-demographic variables	10,8%	7,5%	12,3%
Social contact (freq.)	4,9%	4,0%	3,6%
Interpersonal trust	12,7%	15,6%	10,2%
Social position (Subj SES)	11,0%	15,0%	8,2%
Self-determination (6 items)	18,6%	19,7%	12,7%
Self_esteem	22,3%	27,6%	12,3%

Pred. value of (groups of) variables in explaining the variance of the general life satisfaction (adj. R²)

	<i>Gen. Population</i>	<i>-35</i>	<i>65-plus</i>
Anomy	7,7%	9,6%	5,0%
Personality (big 5, 10 items)	10,5%	22,7%	16,4%
Resilience	21,5%	23,5%	19,8%
Feel appreciated	38,1%	44,0%	23,4%
Life going somewhere	27,4%	35,2%	11,3%
Opportunities	20,9%	24,4%	24,6%
Optimism	35,9%	35,7%	33,7%

Conclusions

- Changing relation between age and general life-satisfaction
- Differences between age groups can be explained by the determinants
- Flourishing as an inspiring model, cf. role of resilience, self-esteem, feeling appreciated next to connectedness and subjective socio-economic position
- Importance of both internal and external mediators/buffers for explaining subjective well-being, although we can question if they are determinants rather than proxies for subjective well-being...

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