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Well-being in the Feminine – The “Doings and Beings” of Gender and Well-being in Marginalized Neighborhoods

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Mestrado em Serviço Social

Orientadora:

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ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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SOCIOLOGIA
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“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine rights of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.”

Ursula K. Le Guin

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Abstract

The present dissertation explores the experiences and perceptions of well-being of women living in marginalized neighborhoods of the city. It aims at exploring the modes and the states of well-being, by looking at their constituents. Three lines of enquiry attempt to inform on the empirical objectives here proposed. At the first level, it is here enquired about “what are the possible converging determinants of well-being” and “to which extend does marginalization affect the substantiation of well-being”. These questions ultimately shed light on “how is well-being experienced and perceived by adult women residing in marginalized neighborhoods”. Central to this work are the insights of Capability Approach, employed as a conceptual framework for guiding the empirical process. In terms of methodological arrangements, the research is guided by its exploratory purpose, using a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. The major findings of this study revealed the main domains of importance for the participants, pertaining to different arenas of life that relate to central indicators of well-being. More specifically, “Personhood”, “Interpersonal Relations” and “Values” and their most expressive elements inform on the experiences and perceptions of well-being and how women in these circumstances navigate their lives. This study contributes to the area of social work by highlighting the necessity in taking on a more individual-centered approach in tackling issues of well-being and quality of life.

Keywords: well-being; women; marginalized neighborhood; Capability Approach

Abstrato

A presente dissertação explora as experiências e percepções de bem-estar de mulheres residentes em bairros marginalizados da cidade. Tem como objetivo explorar os modos e os estados de bem-estar, olhando para os seus constituintes. Três linhas de investigação procuram informar sobre os objetivos empíricos aqui propostos. Num primeiro nível, questiona-se “quais são os possíveis determinantes convergentes do bem-estar” e “até que ponto a marginalização afeta a fundamentação do bem-estar”. Estas questões acabam por esclarecer “como é que o bem-estar é vivido e percecionado pelas mulheres adultas que residem em bairros marginalizados”. No centro deste trabalho estão os conhecimentos da Abordagem das Capacidades, utilizados como quadro concetual para orientar o processo empírico. Em termos de disposições metodológicas, a investigação é orientada pelo seu objetivo exploratório, utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa baseada em entrevistas semiestruturadas. Os principais resultados deste estudo revelaram os principais domínios de importância para os participantes, pertencentes a diferentes áreas da vida que se relacionam com indicadores centrais de bem-estar. Mais especificamente, a “Personalidade”, as “Relações Interpessoais” e os “Valores” e os seus elementos mais expressivos informam sobre as experiências e percepções de bem-estar e sobre a forma como as mulheres nestas circunstâncias navegam as suas vidas. Este estudo contribui para a área do trabalho social ao realçar a necessidade de se adotar uma abordagem mais centrada no indivíduo na abordagem das questões do bem-estar e da qualidade de vida.

Palavras-chave: bem-estar; mulheres; bairros marginalizados; Capability approach

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Glossary

ATA	Applied Thematic Analysis
CA	Capability Approach
UIT	Territorial Intervention Units

Introduction

Well-being represents an irrefutably fundamental part of human experience. The wider social, cultural, economic and political contexts, at a macro level, circumscribe the multiple interactions and living circumstances between and among people that take place and are inevitably shared with the immediate physical space. At different moments of a person's life, her surroundings are in constant transmutation: from the household to their neighborhood and community, as well as the city and around, the physical space can impact the ways in which a person lives. Besides the physical space and geographical local, social factors characterize and abstractly locate the person within society, in accordance with its social structures and definitions: gender, class, sex, 'race' and ethnicity, age, place of residence, as well as other factors, inform about the material and immaterial ways and accesses a person may have in her possession or in absence, in different forms of the various parts of life itself. As such, the experience of well-being is not universal, not grasped in equal ways and may take different forms, making it difficult to define and assess in scientific terms.

The development of the present work aims on furthering the topic, in an exploratory manner, by shedding light on the experiences and perceptions of well-being by taking in the context and circumstances of adult women living in marginalized and disadvantaged neighborhoods within the city of Lisbon, Portugal. More specifically, the subjectiveness of well-being takes the conjectural forefront of well-being, pressing on the importance of attending to personal and individual accounts. These do not only inform on the complexities of well-being, as a concept and as a constituent of life, but also lay bare causes and effects of prevailing life circumstances upon the well-being of people residing in marginalized and disadvantaged neighborhoods. The provision of insights as well as the formulation and framing of these scientific intents are realized against the background of the Capabilities Approach, a theoretical framework that opens the doors to discussions pertaining to freedom and the importance of individual choice and decision.

In this sense, the research at hand poses the following question, as the foreground for inquiry, namely: *how is well-being experienced and perceived by adult women residing in marginalized neighborhoods?* In addition, this question led to other subsequent questions pertaining to the interrelation between gender, age and place of residence. Hence, it is further questioned about 1) "*To which extent does marginalization affect the substantiation of well-being of women residing in marginalized neighborhoods?*", and also 2) "*What are the possible converging aspects and determinants of well-being among women living in marginalized neighborhoods?*".

These questions aim at revealing the determining and influential aspects and components, whether they are abstract and/or material, from the personal perspective of the research group,

as these may not only unveil necessities and concerns that may be covert or overlooked but also inform on current living conditions that put at stake the experience itself of well-being. Adult women, residing in marginalized neighborhoods of the city of Lisbon constitute a unique social group, within a scientific context, since women confront multiple structural obstacles and constraints, that may become prominent in contexts marked out by deprivation and social exclusion. By inquiring about this social group and gaining access to their ways of 'being' and 'doing', it becomes possible to delineate and comprehend plausible points of pressure that may aggrandize and aggravate conditioning aspects of deprivation, disadvantage and inequality. Once these aspects are uncovered, they can be recognized, examined and integrated within the practice and theory of social work and its interventionist frameworks.

This dissertation begins by providing a synthesis of the theoretical building blocks of the work, by showing the existent, conceptual relations. The *second chapter* is dedicated, in the first part, to a systemic overview of the Capability Approach (CA), as it serves as an analytical tool, and the second part to relevant and covert issues central to the empirical objectives. The *third chapter* lays out the methodological landscape developed and employed. The *fourth chapter* is dedicated to the presentation of results and their discussion. Finally, the *last chapter* offers a conclusive overview of the empirical work.

Chapter 1. – Intricacies of Gender, Neighborhood and Well-Being

The experience of well-being is dependent upon a cluster of factors that derive not only from the individual plane, but also from the collective and thus the wider context wherein a person finds herself. The complex arrangements of social life inevitably lead people and groups to constant interactions and interdependence in distinct manners, depending on their particular location within societal structures. Such complexity implies a scrutiny of the social characterization of a person's present and general living circumstances, taking into consideration both abstract and material dimensions. As such, well-being should not be subjected to a universalizing formulation and not be perceived as a homogeneous or relatively constricted experience.

On a more theoretical level, gender, age and the place of residence are some of the many categorizing factors that need to be highlighted, due to their influence upon people's lives. Different social groups are typified and present different characteristics that in distinct fashions exhibit some attributes and dispositions, that can influence the degree and extent of accesses and resources, and exert other impacts, in alignment with societal beliefs, customs, expectations, norms, roles and traditions. However, differences and similarities in experiences of well-being may be identified *between* and *among* distinct and identical social groups, thus highlighting conceptual divergences.

The present chapter delves into the theoretical formulations of the concepts of gender, age and the place of residence, with the aim to shed light on the intricacies and correlations of how gender, age and place of residence influence the perceptions and experiences of well-being of people, as individuals and members of collective groups.

Chapter 1.1. - The Role of Gender and Its Intricacies

The centrality of discussions surrounding gender derives from a necessity in recognizing insistently the oftentimes invisible yet undeniable presence of gender-based phenomena that takes places within the social world, capable of determining the ways in which people and groups navigate through life. Aligned with the feminist epistemological concerns, gender-based phenomena are brought out to analysis against a multilevel and multidimensional background, that serves as a stage for all human interactions and inherent relations. The experiences of well-being of women and women's pursuit of all that is valued to them to achieve such states can be hampered by systemic and structural barriers derivative from gender and the binary, heteronormative and patriarchal structures they rely on, as they carry symbolic meanings and express symptomatic manifestations.

Following social constructionism's epistemological analysis, reality comes about by "the shaping of perception of [that same] reality by the subjective meanings brought to any experience or social interaction" (Lindsey, 2015, p.11). As such, gender is a social construct, that is mutable in its various conceptions, that "change[s] across time, between and within cultures, and even within one's lifespan" (Launius and Hassel, 2015, p.26), intersecting and overlapping simultaneously with other social factors, that are equally attributed with interpretative and impactful meanings (Launius and Hassel, 2015; Lorber, 1997). Gender is manifested by means of distinct and hierarchical gendered expectations, cues, behaviors, roles and other socially reproduced phenomena in both private and public spheres of social life, being impacted by social, cultural, economic and political institutions (Abbott et al., 2005; Epstein, 2006; Lindsey, 2015; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, the expression of gender can be substantiated in various forms, affecting multiple layers of a woman's identity, as her own personas as a daughter, a sister, a professional, a colleague and all other enacted roles and positions she may exercise. However, gender is not the only factor that is weighted in a woman's life; the social construction of gender and other social factors, such as age, sex, 'race', ethnicity, class and so on, intersect and overlap, characterizing and circumventing the life experiences of individuals and groups at all levels and dimensions of social life (Abbott et al., 2005; Collins and Chepp, 2013; Cooper, 2016; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 2006). This means that such factors "coproduce one another to result in unequal material realities and the distinctive social experiences that characterize them" (Collins and Chepp, 2013, p.60), implicitly engendering multiple types of oppression and discrimination (Epstein, 2006; Evans, 2017; Omvedt, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin. 2006; Walby, 1991).

In the present work, women, in a general manner, represent a heterogeneous social group. One central sustaining aspect for such statement tracks down to the oppressive subordination and exploitation within and by patriarchal structures and its ramifications, that has been endured throughout history by groups of women, and still so, in all dimensions of society, in all parts of the globe (Abbott et al., 2005; Bourdieu, 2002; Beechey, 1979). The multifaceted and complex character of women's oppression takes up form in the socialization processes, the expectations and the enactment upon roles, attitudes and behaviors that are ascribed to women and men. In part, these gender-based differences, stemming from socio-cultural structures and relations, appear to 'justify' the multiple inequalities that exist between men and women, in the various dimensions and context of the social sphere (Abbott et al., 1990; Ridgeway, 2011). These multiple inequalities can be also mirrored in experiences and understandings of well-being, and it is conceptual and material matter.

Therefore, the pertinence for the discussion around well-being in the feminine (although here alluding to the identification of women, and not to the stereotypical connotations of conventionally constructed 'femininity' and 'being feminine') is contextual in terms of the

specific place of residence women live in. As such, the makeup of disadvantaged neighborhoods, as a place of residence with socially and culturally meaning-laden and physical characteristics, exerts inevitably influence over the residents and the life that takes place there, including a woman's well-being.

Chapter 1.2. - The Meaning of the Neighborhood

The place of residence can be a discernible signifier of one's living conditions. In this particular case, disadvantaged neighborhoods within the urban setting can negatively define one's social location, can constrain and enable the accesses and resources necessary to lead one's life, as well as affect how well-being is apprehended and experienced (Mela e Toldo, 2019; Opacic, 2021; Sen, 2010).

Taking up its general characteristics, a neighborhood is inevitably pinpointed by its spatiality, the (co-)existence of various, heterogeneous groups encompassing interrelations and implicit transactions that occur between and among individuals, groups and other significant non-human elements of the collective, social life (Chaskin, 1997; Gyerin, 2000; Pierson, 2010). This involves a recognition of the abstract quality of place as being bounded to a finite space, subjected to changes over time, that can be taken up in many forms, meanings and interpretations by different people, which ultimately relate and relate through their roles and connections (Chaskin, 1997; Gieryn, 2000; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Rivlin, 1987; Warren, 1978).

The configuration and the collective experience of a neighborhood mirrors and is reflected by social, cultural and economic indicators. These influence the ways in which its residents live and understand their individual and collective, and how they are viewed by the population exterior to their neighborhood (Mela and Toldo, 2019; Wacquant, 2007). Marginalized neighborhoods are oftentimes charged with negative perspectives by the general population, as the physical and abstract environment can be symptomatic of the existing processes of social exclusion and poverty. Consequently, the very experience and perception of well-being is affected. Pinned down by demographic and geographic components, discrimination of a neighborhood reproduces and carries symbolic attributes, that become materialized and (re)produce certain forms of living, laying out the living conditions of the individual, the household, the neighborhood at its collective level and the immediate region (Mela and Toldo, 2017; Musterd, 2020; Ropert and Di Masso, 2021).

Processes of simultaneous segregation and stigmatization fabricate a distorted portrait of marginalized neighborhoods. These two concurrent socio-cultural phenomena engender defining and intricate repercussions, felt at the level of damaging preconceptions as well as the concrete living conditions and standards one faces, which bolster and perpetuate

hierarchical systemic structures and processes of marginalization, poverty, and social exclusion (Bernt and Colini, 2013; Mela and Toldo, 2017; Opacic, 2021; Ropert and Di Masso, 2021). Thus, disadvantaged neighbourhoods become usually associated with marginality, since by fixating class-based, 'racial'/ethnic and other communities away from the wider society, they become a distinctive yet forgotten place, less deserving of attention by different institutions, including those of the State (Byrne, 2005; Mela e Toldo, 2017; Wacquant, 2014). In this light, the marginalization of disadvantaged neighborhoods, is concomitant to an "intensification of the functional division of space, residential segregation, consolidation of infrastructure for production, all of which deepen the divide between capital-rich and capital-poor areas" (Bernt and Colini, 2013, p.9). Therefore, the extent, quality and condition of and for the experience and perception of well-being may become more significantly distinctive for people and groups living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, due to complex and interrelated processes and structures that obstruct access to services and the acquisition of resources that other groups may enjoy.

The experience and apprehension of well-being within a context of disadvantages, inequality and social exclusion finds itself largely influenced by the general material living conditions and the ability to follow and promote one's own sense of being (Sen, 2010). Considering the gender-based inequalities and discrimination women confront in their lives, their experiences of well-being, in holistic terms, take shape and are carved by their living circumstance, thus their place of residence. Forms of disadvantage and inequality in matters of well-being can be more or less immediately pinpointed in comparative terms and at different levels and in dimensions of society. However, the determination of well-being may become harder to identify, when the individuation of subjectivity takes on a pivotal stand.

Chapter 1.3. – The Constrained Space of Well-Being

As it has been previously observed, the impact of one's place of residence purports to an abstract and physical place, capable of exerting influence upon one's living circumstances. Furthermore, the experience of well-being is highly impacted by a cluster of factors, that being closely dependent upon the circumscribing societal setting, end up impacting and being reflected in one's modes and ways of living (Brulé and Maggino, 2018; Knowles, 2018). Thus, when prioritizing the individual, at a micro level, attention is given to the particularities entailed, highlighting the complexity of the subjective experience of well-being.

Alternative conceptualizations of well-being spurred after the Second World War, as a consequence of the destruction of societies and the violation of what became *fundamental human rights* (Ife, 2009; McGillivray, 2007). The utilitarian understanding of well-being has prevailed throughout the decades, being consistently translated into perceptible, economic

metrics of individual income and national wealth (Lee and Kim, 2016; McGillivray, 2007; Oman, 2017). These have superimposed more subjective and qualitative determinants of well-being, becoming the predominant measuring units in national welfare policies, political agendas and discourses, serving as a benchmark for data at a national level (McGillivray, 2007; Oman, 2017; Sen, 2010). The prevalence of positive and high quantitative measurements commonly signifies (and still do, to this date) prosperity, growth, process and quality, and are reflected by indicators such as life expectancy, birth rates, poverty levels (McGillivray, 2007; Oman, 2017; Sen, 2010). However, in response to global and multidimensional phenomena, alternative theoretical understandings of well-being have criticized the limiting scope of such measurement units, departing from various strands and gaining ground while placing emphasis on the subjective dimension of well-being.

Diener (1984) points out three central characteristics of subjective well-being (SWB). For the author, SWB purports to the individual and subjective experience, that is highly associated with positive, perceptible attributes, and involves a wide-ranging measurement of a person's life (Diener, 1984). Here, affective and cognitive components act simultaneously, as a person's cognitive action assigns affective aspects to a certain domain or feature of her life (Brulé and Maggino, 2017; Diener, 1984). These processes are realized in reference to personal standards, close and specific to the individual, that as being highly influenced by the living circumstances wherein she finds herself in, serve as "a compass to evaluate one's life vis-à-vis the level of attainment of certain objectives, the degree of achievement of certain ambitions, and the fulfillment of certain needs" (Brulé and Maggino, 2017, p.5). Hence, the reflective evaluation of one's *own* living well-being and living conditions – that takes on material and mental forms – is a pivotal characteristic of this subjective approach.

The concept of quality of life comprises not only objective components that relate to the exterior and perceptible conditions *per se*, that are unique to the individual, but also subjective components, that correspond to all that is specific to the internal and personal realm of the individual life (Brulé and Maggino, 2017; Omar, 2017). Both components can be identified in terms of attributes of the contextual living conditions, which according to Brulé and Maggino (2017), are made of "objective living conditions" (all that is externally traceable constituents), and the "subjective evaluation of living conditions" (p.7), where the former can be gauged by "objective indicators", and the latter rely on internal and subjective perceptual assessments (ibid., p.8). Both the subjective and the objective apprehension are driven by *values* or what a person *deems valuable* in and for her own life (Martela, 2017; Oman, 2017; Sen, 2010), making it an incontestable determinant in one's subjective perception and experience of her own well-being, and therefore the meaning attributed to her quality of life.

This line of argumentation takes on a central role for the present work, employing Amartya Sen's approach to expose the complexities of well-being, while pressing on possible

overlooked components and facets in people's lives, experienced in their subjective modes and beings. Sen (2010) establishes a connection between freedom and value, by affirming that, by *having freedom*, one is presented with more possibilities in terms of what she can do and be (considering a temporal enactment upon oneself), being thus concerned with "our ability to achieve what we value", and with its fundamental importance of "the process of choice [in] itself" (Sen, 2010, p.228).

The conceptual analysis of the experiences and perceptions of well-being by women in marginalized neighborhoods follows the conceptual frame of the conceptual lines behind CA (see Sen 1999). It stresses the importance of "a person's capability to do things he or she has reason to value" (Sen, 2010, p.231), referring to the importance of freedom to enact, the availability of accesses and resources and the existing obstacles that hamper the attainment of valuable purposes. The implications here presented will be later applied in the context of the social group here determined (see Chapter 4).

Chapter 2. – Well-Being in the Feminine: Testimonies on What One Values

Matters pertaining to well-being can be discussed within the frames of the Capability Approach as a normative framework initially developed by Amartya Sen (1999, 2000). Well-being signifies an important evaluative constituent of evaluations of one's quality of life, and the overall sense of the experience of life in itself. The affective and cognitive dimensions of perception are entangled in complex relations in terms of the materialization of living conditions, as well as of the substantiation of abstract elements, that are valued to the person herself.

From the various theoretical approaches that surround reflections and discussions of what is well-being and how it can be assessed and measures, by means of qualitative and quantitative metrics, the CA presents itself as an alternative path to explore the topic, by looking at the real agency and actual freedoms one has (capabilities) in her capacity to effectuate whatever a person values in life (functionings) (Kjellberg and Jansson, 2022; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2000). The application of the CA takes a central role in providing an opportunity to "[explore] individuals' expectations and their possibilities to realize those expectations in general" (Kjellberg and Jansson, 2022, p.225). The CA has been increasingly used to broaden the understanding of matters relating to marginalization, social exclusion, poverty and other related phenomena that continues to push people to the margins of inequalities (Kjellbeg and Jansson, 2022; Naz, 2016; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2000).

Since a conceptualization of well-being was already previously proposed, it is necessary to further dissect and understand the depth of the matter in the light of the CA.

Chapter 2.1. – The Capabilities Approach – An Overview

In the book "Well-being, Freedom and Social Justice", Ingrid Robeyns (2017) scrutinizes the applicability of the CA, presenting its multiple constituents, dimensions of analysis, conceptual lines, and present discussions and complications pertaining to the normative framework. For the current work, the book serves a base for the guidelines and principles of the CA. In order to understand the framework, from to its most integral components to the accessory ones, it is necessary to lay down its foundations.

The development and integration of the CA within explorations of well-being is well studied, being a central theme for discussion. In a general manner, the CA has provided contributions on various fronts, due to its expansive and flexible theoretical application. One of its major contributions imputes to its critical stance on economic-driven analysis and assessments based on income and wealth. Proponents of the CA criticize the insufficiency of such material and utilitarian metrics of well-being, since income and wealth cannot comprehensively inform

about people's, individual and subjective, real modes and states of living (Atkinson, 2015; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). Thus, the CA opens doors to delve into the actual living conditions of people and groups, by considering how they take advantage of and make use of (or not) what is available to them. As such, a person's ability to make choices with regards to her well-being and overall life satisfaction is highlighted, while taking into consideration her social positioning and the living circumstances that circumscribes her (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). Such explanations sustain the concern in addressing the experiences and perceptions of well-being of marginalized women, as these represent one of multiple realities of the contemporary world.

For the determination of such objectives, two concepts emerge as unequivocal components of the framework, namely capabilities and functionings. In an immediate grasp, *capabilities* refer to the real opportunities (also understood as real freedom) that people have at their disposal to enact on something they desire to achieve, while *functionings* pertain to the actual things that are valued to the person that, therefore, become the achieved, valuable states of "being" or "doing" (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). More precisely, capabilities precede functionings, as the latter refers to the substantiation of the valued options and intentions that people are disposed of to achieve (capabilities). As such, a person may consider becoming academically educated as a capability (as she sees value in it, in her own understanding), however she may not be able to get that education, due to a set of external and internal constraints. One important aspect to highlight here is the quality of the capability in question, wherein discussions of whether only positively valued or value-neutral capabilities and functionings (i.e., positive, neutral and negative) should be considered (see Sen 2009). The present work adopts the view that functionings and capabilities are value-neutral and thus do not disregard any types of capabilities and functionings, which ends up widening the scope of determining factors and valued *things* in people's lives (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). This remark will be referred to later into the analytical reasoning of this work, as to inform of the empirical results reproduced.

Additionally, the CA acknowledges and stresses out the influence exerted by the social, economic, cultural and political environment where one finds herself in. This means that functionings become contingent to the configurations of the circumscribing context of the person and thus restrain the access and conversion of the capability set, which translate into the actual opportunities to achieve such functionings (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999, 2000). Here is a recognition that people, due to their specific design and life circumstances, have different conversion factors. These are "factors which determine the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning" (Robeyns, 2017, p.45). In this light, the CA includes (a) personal conversion factors, which pertain to all that is within and characteristic of the person, (b) social conversion factors, which relate to societal phenomena and conditioning,

and also (c) environmental conversion factors, which refer to the material or tangible environment that surrounds the person (Robeyns, 2017). In acknowledging the impact of conversion factors as delimiting denominators, it is required to look beyond the acquisition and possession of material resources and accesses. As such, focus is placed on the end of what that particular resource enables, as well as under which circumstances a person can actually make use of and benefit from it. Thus, the achievement of well-being is constrained by multifaceted forces, that may barren not only the action upon it, but also how it is employed and made use of in a way that is desired and valued by the person in terms of what can contribute to her well-being and overall quality of life.

The conversion factors are intimately dependent upon the circumstances and conditions that characterize the lived experience of the person. Sen (2010) speaks of *contingencies* “which result in variations in the conversion of income into the kinds of lives that people can lead” (p.255). The scholar includes “personal heterogeneities” (referring to discrepancies in terms of physical characteristics), “environmental diversities” (referring to the environmental surroundings), “variations in social climate” (referring to wider social arrangements, that structure social life), “differences in relational perspectives” (referring to behavior-related phenomena), and “distribution within the family” (referring to how income is dealt with within the household and family) (Sen, 1999, pp.70-71). It is important to emphasize the inevitable and instinctive aspects of the experience of life, considering that these end up punctuating people’s attainment of accesses and resources, to the extent that they can determine the available functionings and the realization of capabilities along spatial and temporal lines (Robeyn, 2017; Sen, 2010). This same feature highlights the multiplicity of states of well-being as well as of life satisfaction.

At the same time, some scholars debate about the composition of a substantially universal and fixed set of capabilities. One of the most well-known lists was drawn up by Martha Nussbaum. The scholar (2000) has delimited a list of capabilities and perceived them as the “central human functional capabilities”. These include ten capabilities, namely: 1) Life; 2) Bodily Health; 3) Bodily Integrity; 4) Senses, Imagination, and Thought; 5) Emotions; 6) Practical Reason; 7) Affiliation; 8) Other Species; 9) Play; and 10) Control Over One’s Environment (Nussbaum, 2000, p.79-80). Nussbaum (2000) affirms that even though such capabilities are singled out, this list is comprised of “separate components [since one] cannot satisfy the need for one of them by giving a larger amount of another one”, while recognizing the restriction the list implicates (Nussbaum, 2000, p.81)¹.

¹In “Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach” (2000), Nussbaum exposes the scientific formulation behind the ten-item list of the capabilities in “Chapter IV. Central Human Capabilities” (pp.70-86).

Another relevant component in discussions of well-being and the pertinence of functionings and capabilities contributes to the distinction of certain constituents, in their practical terms. As such, *freedom* and the *inherent agency* are implicated in the ‘mechanisms’ of consolidating the determination of what is of value to a person’s own life (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999, 2010). In Sen’s point of view (2010), the value of freedom comes from its natural condition in setting up opportunities to achieve what one values, as well as “a process of choice itself” (p.228). This transformation exalts the significance of agency, as “intrinsically valuable” (Sen, 2000), and thus the ability to act accordingly to one’s own decisions, in the achievement of one’s own desired objectives.

In a quick glance, the CA demarcates interdependent combinations of achievement and freedom, that end up informing the location of a person in a social arrangement: (a) well-being achievement; (b) agency achievement; (c) well-being freedom; and (d) agency freedom (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2000). While well-being achievement can be translated into the functionings a person has, directed towards her personal wellness, agency achievement refers to the general idea of the reasoned fulfillment of whatever she aims at. Similarly, well-being freedom is unfolded by the real opportunities a person has to contribute to her state of wellness, whereas agency freedom closely signifies the available capabilities and hence the disposition of freedom to reach any valued decisions (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010; Sen, 2010). This fourfold distinction is required as it elucidates on “points of evaluative interest in assessing human advantage”, opening doors to decode the extent of deprivation (and in contrast, the benefits) a person has in her life and how she, with her agency and freedom, can make use of possible functionings (Sen, 2010, p.287).

In conclusion, the capability approach can be a useful framework to expand on the debates revolving around the personal and subjective experience and perception of well-being, concomitant with the level of (dis)satisfaction a person leads her own life. The distance between what the person is *capable* of achieving (capability) and the *substantiated* and *valued* mode of doing and being (functioning) is extended by the complexity referent to the person’s own subjectivity and her individual life circumstances. These determinants affect the construction, and the mobilization of the personal capability set, being equally dependent upon the person’s ability to convert valued capabilities and functionings, as these are predicated on the social, cultural, economic and political environment she finds herself in, with its various heterogeneities. For this reason, it is fundamental to look beyond the auxiliary role of income and hence ascertain the ways and modes that are available and accessible to people in order to promote their well-being and overall satisfaction with life.

Chapter 2.2. – Marginalization, Well-being, and the Capability Approach

One can affirm with great certainty that how one perceives and experiences well-being is greatly influenced by the social position one finds herself in, within societal structures and interactions. Well-being, in its broad understanding, finds itself under the influence of the overlap of social factors, such as gender, age and the place of residence, intertwined within the social, cultural, economic and political constituents, present in the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of social life.

In order to comprehend how well-being and wellness are experienced and perceived, and hence how one can promote one's life, the actual effects of social exclusion must be briefly determined. The concept of social exclusion applied in the present work follows the proposed interpretation formulated by Levitas et al. (2007). According to the authors, social exclusion constitutes

“a complex and multi-dimensional process [that] involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.” (ibid., p.25)

To identify the key constituents of social exclusion is to ascertain its complex intricacies and its debilitating effects on a person's life, by looking at its various defining features. Various authors (Levitas et al., 2007; Millar, 2007; Pierson, 2010) point out to: a) its multidimensionality, as different variables influence one's liveability; b) its dynamic character, as the interacting variable pointing out to a changeable character and its effects; c) its collective extent, since it affects the individual experience and the implicit interpersonal relations; d) its relativity, since it functions along spatial and temporal lines; and e) its emphasis on agency, as social exclusion is brought about by actions taken by a person and people.

Poverty can be promptly associated with social exclusion, primarily as a form of aggravated deprivation in terms of income. However, by employing the term of social exclusion, poverty becomes one of the integrating constituents of social exclusion, crucial for determining disadvantages and unequal relations in a concomitant manner (Millar, 2007; Pierson, 2010). The use of the term of social exclusion admits a wider comprehension of phenomena, that does not only pertain to the individual level, but also the simultaneous interaction of the person within and with the collective and surrounding environment wherein she finds herself in.

The relationship between social exclusion and well-being can be established by the former's ability to “drastically [reduce] the ranges of choices that individuals and families have at their disposal (Pierson, 2010, p.11). The latent effects of deprivation, deriving from social exclusion, become visible in moments when individual decision-making is restricted due to the limited availability of resources and accesses in contexts that aim at contributing to one's well-

being and life satisfaction. This reduced control and possibility to enact is contingent with CA's conversion factors, as they are seen as the opportunities to convert, and therefore 'make use', of the valued capabilities. The harnessing of opportunities is bounded to the general social environment and the available income, with their enabling and disabling capacities. The confrontation with precluding parallel conditions corresponds to a deprivation of capabilities, as this inability indicates a constricted freedom to put into effect any valued state of "doing" or "being" (Sen, 1999). However, Sen (2010) alerts to the possibility of socio-psychological responses by disadvantaged people to their current social circumstances, as there is a susceptibility to downgrading and undervalue their material and non-material living conditions.

According to the author (2010), people facing deprivation "may lack the courage to desire any radical chance and typically tend to adjust their desires and expectations to what little they see as feasible" (p.283), which end up influencing their own ways of constructing their capabilities and realizing their functionings. This disposition may be adopted to adaptive preferences that oftentimes lead to a perceptive distortion of needs and current conditions. On one hand, the adjustment of preferences leads people to accept and become complacent with their circumstances (even when they are aware of the harm and disadvantages they face), and, on the other hand, "have the consequential effect of distorting the scale of utilities", leading to a perceived minimization of their current circumstances (Sen, 2010, p.283). Such proclivity can constitute a problem inasmuch as it may twist "the reliability of interpersonal comparisons of utilities, by tending to downplay the assessment of the hardship" (Sen, 2010, p.284), and thus hamper the assessment of objective effects and barriers of deprivation in terms of its intensity and its individual perception (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2010).

Within the urban setting, the city's socio-cultural diversity is often highlighted by the delineation of residential areas. This, in turn, highlights the socio-geographical dimension of deprivation." (Espino, 2015; Mela e Toldo, 2017). The implicit distinctions derived from the heterogeneous and diverse character of cities are featured in the symbolic significance of social, cultural and economic attributes attached to specific places and regions within them (Eradyin, 2021; Mela e Toldo, 2017). As it has been already referred to (see Chapter 1.2.), a person or a group's place of residence can enhance or curtail their social position within the wider society, depending on the relevance and predominance of the social factors that characterize them. Socio-demographic and socio-economic factors, such as social class, 'race' and ethnicity may reinforce any symbolic and geographical distance in terms of residency between and among social groups, highlighting the material and abstract differences that demarcate those same communities. Implicitly, the overlap of the hierarchically positioned economic, social and cultural determinants reinforces a dissimilarity in terms of the geographic location of a person's place of residence, ending up substantiating those differences, which

rapidly become a space of spatial and symbolic segregation and social inequalities (Espino, 2015; Mela and Toldo, 2017; Ropert and Di Masso, 2021).

The existing inequalities that emerge from the concentration of groups and communities feed off circumstances of deprivation, marginalization and social exclusion, which end up aggravating the life experiences. These states of disadvantage can preclude developments pertaining to interpersonal relationships, at both individual and collective levels (both are central features of their social identity), but also be manifested in material conditions (Forrest and Kearns, 2001). As the underpinning of interpersonal networks and relationships is capable of affecting the general life experience that takes place within the neighborhood, the extent and quality of the sense of group identity may prefigure social phenomena at the wider scale of coexistence of the neighborhood, becoming significant in the minimization of adverse social conditions and phenomenon (Forrest and Kearns, 2001). It ends up reproducing and perpetuating structural social and economic phenomena, such as criminality, poverty, violence, inadequate urban hygiene and other social issues, as these are symptoms of recurrent patterns and structures of discrimination and stigmatization by the wider society (Bernt and Colini, 2013; Mela and Toldo, 2017; Ropert and Di Masso, 2021). These ultimately end up affecting a person's quality of life and her well-being.

In the context of deprivation and capabilities, income cannot be employed as a sole and reliable determinant in the measurement of well-being and life satisfaction. As a variable, income is insufficient in informing about a person's general well-being, since it not only is highly contingent and influenced by the social and personal circumstances of the person (e.g., gender, age, place of residence), but also has an instrumental use, making income a mean and not an end, since it assists in the realization of a person's functionings (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). The CA does not negate the influence of income in people's ability to exercise on their well-being and achieve life-satisfaction, however it does not perceive income as an exclusive and conclusive factor.

Chapter 3. - Methodology

To serve its empirical and academic purposes, this work has resorted to a qualitative methodology, nearing its epistemological approach to social construction feminism. The rationale of qualitative practice allows to “describe life-worlds ‘from the inside out’, from the point of view of the people who participate” (Flick et al., 2004, p.3). It accommodates the conceptual and experimental necessities of empirical practice for the execution of research, by establishing links between theoretical and conceptual readings to that of empirically oriented research.

The epistemological approach of social construction feminism focuses on the role and impact of gender as a permeating and influential institution, that is present in all societal structures and functions and inherent dynamics of social life (Lorber, 1997). Social construction feminism directs its attention towards “the processes that create gender differences and also render the construction of gender invisible” (Lorber, 1997, p.30). Therefore, framing the issues in such a way, aligns feminist concerns and scrutinizes them through a sociological lens, while recognizing not only the individual and subjective point of view, but also those same organic factors that make up the settings for all social, cultural, economic and political phenomena and intrinsic interpersonal relations. Such stance accommodates intersectionality’s assertions of the interplay of diverse social factors that predicates one’s symbolic location of advantage or disadvantage (Collins and Chepp, 2013; Cooper, 2016; Lindsey, 2015). For the methodological frame, this epistemological approach accepts and looks after the (re)production of data that can be identified and compared across and between social groups, without generalizing it to a point of objective and normative standardization of cases and phenomena, which would inevitably become contradictory to this work’s scientific objectives.

Chapter 3.1. Empirical field

Adult women, residing in marginalized neighborhoods in the city of Lisbon constitute the population under empirical inquiry. Their inherent relationship is brought to light, putting their conceptual implications into question, within the specific setting of disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Lisbon is not only the capital city, as it is the most populated one of Portugal², making it a hub of heterogeneity in terms of social and cultural groups, against an urban setting with visible segregating marks of poverty, exclusion and disadvantages in multiples arenas of social life (Costa et al., 2022; Harding and Blokland, 2014; Wacquant, 2007). The not-so-distant events

² According to the INE – National Statistical Institute, in 2022, Lisbon had a total population density of 5484,3/km².

of the Portuguese history have led to the rehousing of various communities from slums (“barracas”) to new yet precarious concrete buildings³. Following the evolution of rehousing programs, the “BIP/ZIP Program – Lisbon's Priority Intervention Zones and Neighborhoods” served as a starting point for the empirical inquiry here proposed, as “an instrument of municipal public policy, which aims to boost partnerships and small local interventions to improve the habitats it covers” (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2025b; my translation), of areas with poor and declining economic, environmental and urban levels, that previously were “barracas” (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2025a).

The “BIP/ZIP Program” divides the city of Lisbon in five ‘territorial intervention units’ (UIT), entailing a total of sixty-seven neighborhoods, that belong to the specific geographical area to which they are a part of (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2025a). The featured neighborhoods in the present work make part of the “BIP/ZIP Program” and are the following: Alfama (43), Alta de Lisboa Sul (22), Flamengo (29), Marquês de Abrantes (33), Mouraria (44) (see Annex D)⁴.

Chapter 3.2. Participant Selection

In view of exploring the lived experiences of adult women residing in vulnerable neighborhoods, the study participants were selected through purposive sampling, due to the specificity of the study group, but also through a snowball sampling, as interviewees spoke with people of their own neighborhood.

“Diana”⁵, an intermediary contact, has assisted in the search for participants. She invited to attend sessions of two different community groups in the municipality of Marvila (Lisbon), namely, the “Bairro da Flamengo Community Group,” as well as the “4Crescente Community Group”, and also helped in disseminating the search for participants in Flamengo’s Neighborhood. From this conjoint work, two out of the eight participants were contacted. Three other interviewees willingly participated in the study, being members of the same community group. At the same time, a participant from an association in Alfama was directly contacted via email. The participant has agreed to be interviewed and also contacted two other participants. The interviews were conducted on distinct occasions and in different places, with the intention of facilitating the execution of the interviews.

³ In the beginning of 1990, in order to respond to rampant levels of illegal housing constructions, the “PER – Programa de Realojamento” (Especial Rehousing Program) led to the rehousing of vulnerable communities into new buildings, in specific marginalized areas of Lisbon (Cachado, 2013).

⁴ The indicated numbers correspond to the neighborhoods’ identification number according to the “BIP/ZIP Program” (<https://bipzip.lisboa.pt/conhece-os-bipzip/carta/index.htm>)

⁵ Fictitious name.

Three defining components steered the selection criteria of the sample group: gender, age, and place of residence. Firstly, *gender* is understood as an influential social factor, with the ability to “[shape] institutions, ideologies, interactions and identities” (Reinharz and Chase, 2003, p.73). Along these lines, even when looking through a binary and heteronormative lens, gender is rapidly connoted with women and promptly associated with the world of women and girls, making it primarily “a ‘women’s issue’” (Abbott et al., 2005, p.2), at both individual and collective levels. Secondly, age assists in allocating periods of life for individuals by means of age ranges, due to generally shared events and states. In this case, the selected age range concerns institutionally recognized adult women (comprising ages between 18 and 65 years of age), distancing itself from children and youth and elderly people. The place of residence is perceived as a material and symbolic space with an ability to condition both the material and mental experiences of one’s life. In the present context, the type of place of residence takes the form of marginalized neighborhoods, as these find themselves in spatial and symbolic fringes of the population. These can ultimately affect its residents’ daily interactions, social positionings, whether within a macro or micro level, from the inside and the outside, and the accesses and resources to promote one’s well-being.

Chapter 3.3. Data Collection Method

The empirical data gathered and generated came from first-hand accounts brought about by individual interviews of a total of eight (N=8) women of different neighborhoods of the city of Lisbon. The study counted with participants from different neighborhoods, such as: Bairro da Flamengo (n=2), Quinta do Marquês de Abrantes (n=2), Mouraria neighborhood (n=2), Alto de Lisboa Sul (n=1), and undetermined ⁶ (n=1).

The interviews followed a semi-structured composition that enabled the creation of thematic guidelines, with constructive effects. Semi-structured interviews, on one hand, assure that the individual accounts follow some kind of direction, avoiding significant thematic deviation, and on the other hand promote the fulfilment of the empirical objectives set out for the interviewees, while creating opportunities for “the conversation to go in unexpected directions” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, n.p.). This relatively unrestrained structure may allow interviewees to speak about matters that may have been overlooked or not even considered throughout the conceptual elaboration of the work, broadening the space for participants to freely express their points of view and stances on the themes that arise, with comparatively

⁶ The participant “Carolina” did not disclose her place of residence. There was no possible way to determine whether “Carolina” resides or is going to reside in a neighborhood or zone that is included in the “BIP/ZIP Program”. Considering her willingness and close connection with Alfama neighborhood, her participation was determined fitting.

less restrictions than other interview frames (Flick, 2009). Therefore, it spurs possible empirical ramifications that are beneficial to scientific inquiry, being valuable in terms of the contributions it may offer.

Chapter 3.4. Data Analysis

In terms of the data analysis, after their formally consented and anonymized transcription, the interviews were thoroughly analyzed. The process of transcription and the later analysis were conducted in accordance with the guidelines of Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA). The developed themes emerged from the personal accounts of the participants, following an inductive and reflexive approach (Naeem et al., 2023).

This approach relies on an inductive identification and interpretation of emerging and repeated themes that can be found in the collected empirical data (Guest et al., 2012), since one of the objectives of the present work is, in a first instance, to look at individual accounts for recurrent themes and topics, to later compare them across the data gathered. This not only highlights personal lived experiences, as ATA goes after “presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible” (Guest et al., 2012, n.p.), but it also offers an opportunity to further explore knowledge about the general themes presented here. The questions that were formulated and later asked to the participants rose in light of the envisaged theoretical background.

As this work provided an opportunity for adult women in marginalized neighborhoods to share their personal and individual experiences and conceptions of well-being, three main themes have steered the direction of the empirical objectives in terms of the interview guide and the testimonies themselves: a) “Individuality”, b) “Well-being” and c) “Level of Satisfaction with Life”, as these find themselves in being in close relation and complementing each other, since they share a certain degree of conceptual proximity (see Annex A). The block of “Individuality” focuses on matters relating to the distinctiveness and personality of the interviewee, which includes not only an opportunity to reflect about the presence and extent of the gender factor (that is, of identifying as a woman), but also to ponder about what that person values in her own life, in general terms. The block of “Well-being” becomes central as it allows immediate access to understandings of what is well-being to the participant, but also about its constituencies, in both immaterial and material terms, taking into account the extent of influence of her place of residence. Finally, in a concluding tone, the block of “Level of Satisfaction with Life” finalizes the empirical guidelines with a moment to think about specific things that make the participant feel content and realized with her life.

The software program “MAXQDA” was employed throughout the development of this work, with an analytical purpose. It aided in the identification and correlation of thematic codes of the interviews with that of the construed theoretical explanations.

Chapter 3.5. Limitations of the study

The design and accomplishment of the present work matched the formal academic requirements and was carried out within unique circumstances, which may have posed significant impacts on the results. These relate to the intrinsic limitations that are characteristic of formal and informal aspects that accompany the development of a dissertation. Nevertheless, even in the face of such hurdles, it was possible to finalize the present work.

Throughout its implementation, the following issues were identified as the most significant ones, in terms of their impact on the research. Firstly, the sample presented may be considered rather insufficient in quantity. Even with the assistance of ‘Diana’, it was not possible to reach more women that were willing to participate in this project, thus being exposed to issues related to scientific representation. Second, even when considering the leading questions of the interview guide, some questions were not directly questioned, due to the discursive unpredictability of the participant’s account. Such a possibility was contemplated upon the decision in adopting semi-structured questions. The priority was to provide space for the participant to freely speak and touch upon relevant matters to her. However, some participants have indirectly shed light on subjects related to the envisaged questions in the interview guide. Third, the participation of the interviewees in terms of their discursive length varied. Looking at their accounts, there is a discrepancy in terms of interview length. More specifically, half of the participants (n=4) seemed more willing to talk and share about their life experiences than the other half. This noticeable difference influences the obtained data with regards to its content, making some interviewees’ accounts more prevalent than others. This, however, does not constitute an impediment to the analytical process of the study. Fourth, as the present work has an exploratory character, it still was possible to construct the work in reference to the CA and provide insights into its empirical objectives. Finally, having in mind the defined empirical questions, it is not possible to analytically determine the extent of the effect of marginalization in the substantiation of well-being. However, the delineation of the geographical space through the selection of the neighborhoods included in the Program assumes their inherent sociodemographic characterization, which ends up partly answering this very question.

Chapter 4. – Well-Being in the Feminine – Testimonies on Experiences and Perspectives

Upon the analysis of the codes and themes created, it was possible to lay ground to explore the personal accounts of the participants. The core inquiry of this work aims at answering the question of *how is well-being experienced and perceived by adult women residing in marginalized neighborhoods?* At the same time, there is an attempt in answering the questions of *what are the possible converging aspects and determinants of well-being among women living in marginalized neighborhoods*, as well as *to which extent does marginalization affect the substantiation of well-being of women residing in marginalized neighborhoods?* Thus, it reflects possible perceptions and experiences of well-being, by directing its empirical focus to the attributed meanings and their subsequent forms and contents, in the particular and subjective social, economic and cultural environment of the participants.

First and foremost, three core conceptual blocks were construed during the conception of the interview guide. A distinction was drawn between “Individuality” (with four sub-dimensions), “Well-being” (with two sub-dimensions), and “Level of Life Satisfaction” (with two sub-dimensions), which have been delineated to answer the proposed scientific goal. These make space for distinguishing the main dimensions that have guided the interviews. Person-related aspects, such as personality, openness to explore and expose perspectives and experiences, have influenced the discourse and direction of accounts, thus allowing participants to freely talk about the topics. Considering the adoption of ATA, as the analytical approach for this work, the final themes created were achieved in accordance with its guidelines.

Chapter 4.1. – Sociodemographic characterization

Gender, age and place of residence were determined to be the central social factors for the conceptual determination of this work. More specifically, this work looks at adult women, living in marginalized and vulnerable neighborhoods in the city of Lisbon, and the inherent intersections that end up aggravating their social positioning within the wider society. In total, eight women (N=8) have contributed to this work. Their real identities were anonymized, and they were given fictitious names. The youngest participant is between 25-35 years old, and the oldest participant is 70 years old. Seven out of eight participants⁷ currently reside in neighborhoods included in the “BIZ/ZIP Program”, of the city of Lisbon. The following table

⁷ The place of residence of one participant was not possible to determined; however, she still was considered eligible.

presents the participants, by their fictitious name, age, place of residence, and professional status.

Name	Age	Employment status
"Luísa"	Undetermined	Employed
"Carla"	Undetermined	Retired
"Sara"	40 years old	Unemployed
"Helena"	58 years old	Employed
"Catarina"	48 years old	Employed
"Carolina"	70 years old	Retired
"Joana"	Undetermined	Unemployed
"Laura"	40-50 years old	Employed

Table 5.1. - Sociodemographic characterization of the participants

Up to the moment of the interview, the employment status of the participants is rather diverse, for it comprises states of "employment", "unemployment" and, in two cases, "retirement". The social class of each participant was not a subject of scrutiny, and thus not integrated in the core discussion, although there is an acknowledgement of its direct and indirect impact and relevance, as such variable can inform on the current, available economic and financial means, in a more thorough examination, and on whether or not the participant receives any kind of welfare support. Nevertheless, it was possible to infer about the participants' current economic situations through their personal accounts, while responding to various questions. The final theme "Socioeconomic Conditions" can be used as an example.

Furthermore, due to the natural progression of the interviews, in some cases it was not possible to seek answers for every question proposed in the interview script. Nevertheless, in their distinctive manners, participants have discursively provided insights into equally relevant and proximate topics and matters.

Chapter 4.2. – Themes in the Experiences and Perspectives of Well-Being

The topic of well-being, and being well, is vast in its complexity and rich in its range of discussion and contents. An attempt at exploring the constituents of well-being, what *makes* well-being, and what images and elements can *emerge* when one is questioned about it offers another point of view. At the same it, it further questions about the relationship between well-being and life satisfaction, the current priorities in one's life and what contributes to one's fulfillment, from her first-person perspective. The debates around these topics are not new nor recent, and whether one proposes to untangle the threads of well-being, as a complex yet

evermore relevant in both practical and abstract planes, they nevertheless leave much space for empirical inquiry.

The identified themes are proposed to be approached from two distinct yet related dimensional stances. A first angle points at the prevailing themes that were identified throughout each account and shed light on the converging determinants of well-being among women residing in marginalized neighborhoods. In a second angle, taking on a more general look at the ways and modes that well-being can be experienced and perceived, questions about one's life satisfaction, one's current priorities and one sense of realization enlightens on the most urgent and indispensable aspects that factor in a person's life and her well-being

Chapter 4.2.1. – Determining and Transversal Themes in a Woman's Life and Well-Being

The day-to-day life of a person is made up of various, interrelated and dynamic components, which states are contingent on spatial, temporal and situational factors. These make one's life always dependent on external and material settings and conditions, as well as internal and abstract configurations, unique to the person. Such a statement does not preclude the urgency to understand what is of value and what is valued by the person that is present at the current time or if it is projected towards the future. It is pertinent to reflect on *the possible converging aspects and determinants of well-being*.

In order to answer this question, it was possible to inductively construe and identify seven central themes. Figure 1 provides a visual construction of the relations between themes, these being: "Personhood" (108), "Interpersonal relationships" (81), "Values" (79), "Defining Well-Being" (60), "Neighborhood Livingness" (60), "Basic Life Conditions" (46), and finally "Employment" (38)⁸ (see Figure 1).

⁸ The provided numbers correspond to the total frequency of each code (see Annex F).

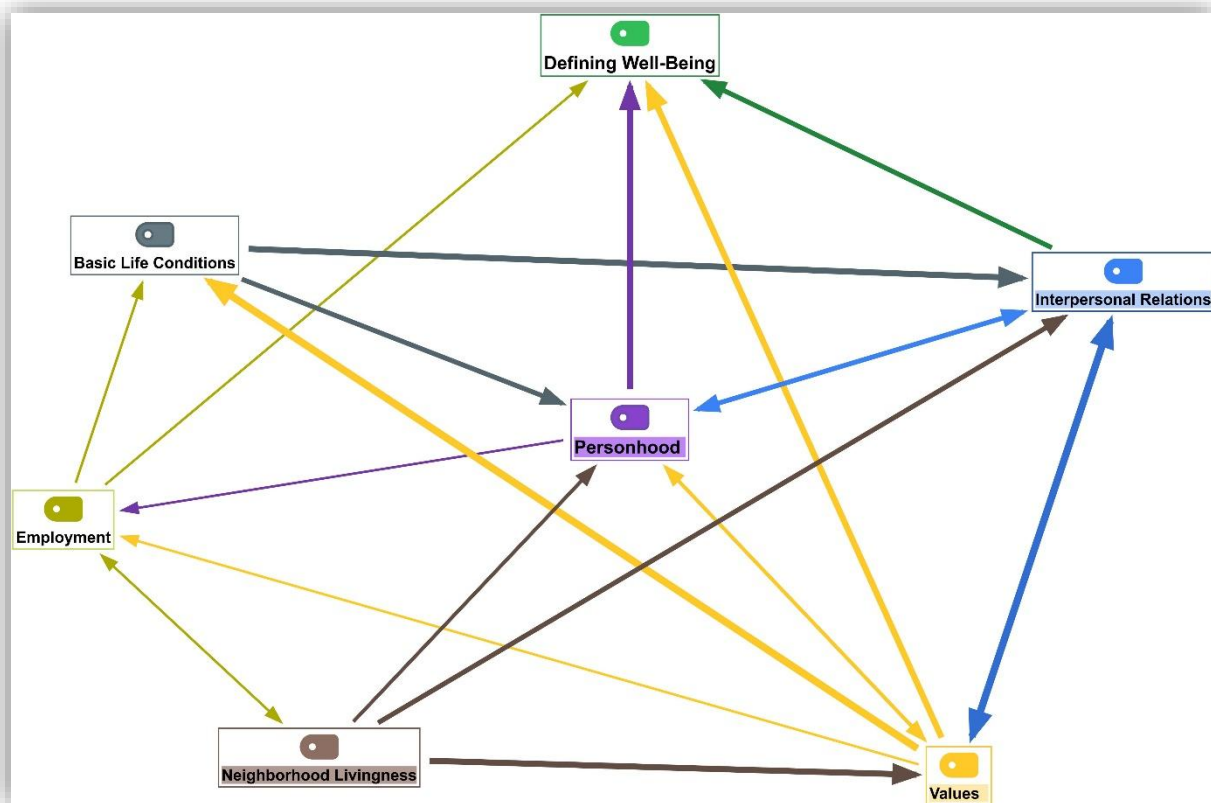


Figure 5.2.1 - Visual map of themes (MAXQDA)

These seven themes were drawn from questions about different facets of important dimensions of human experience, that were formulated in the interview guide (see Annex A). The themes presented correspond to central components in the participants' lives, as integral parts of their individual, subjective experiences, and thus making part of their objective, tangible reality (Sirgy, 2012). These directly and indirectly intertwine or are related to some degree to the participants' general and encompassing sense and understanding of well-being, as well as inform about defining features and elements that can be found in their daily lives. Most of the themes are connected to one another in varying degrees; yet some associations may be more pronounced than others, due to the thematic proximity and overlap they share, in empirical terms. The analytical context in which they arose is not ignored, since they correlate due to their discursive relation, apparent in each participant's account. The visual map (Figure 1) provides an auxiliary, graphical representation of the relations between the final themes. The graph can be read according to the arrows' colors, their direction, as well as their density: the arrow's color tinges the most relevant theme in that relation; the arrow's direction indicates the origin of effect of that relation; and the density signals the prevalence of that same affiliation between themes. The determination of these explanatory factors considered an interpretation and careful consideration of the content of the interviews, as well as on the analysis of tools perceived as relevant for refining the available data.

As such, the centrality of “Personhood” is acquired by its own metaphysical nature. The quality of *being an individual person* is evoked by the inextricable connection of one’s own personal and individual sense of oneself, made of one’s experiences and perspectives of well-being and overall meaning of life. The particular characterization of this “self” concedes the personhood here employed as the condition and the quality of *being a woman* - something that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p.293). Although various scientific strands may approach and offer various compounded explanations on the matter, the importance of one’s existence, and thus personhood, suffices to the evidence of the individual agency, since “[h]aving’, ‘doing’ and ‘being’ are the cardinal categories of human reality” (Sartre, 1992, p.557). The “self” becomes by means of interacting with the world, society and those most proximate to her, acquiring one’s own understanding of the self. At the same time, identifiable and meaningful aspects arise and allude to processes of reflexive identification that stem from an interaction with that same subject and/or object that circumscribes one. For this reason, “Personhood” interacts with other facets and parts of the participant’s life, and although perceived as both a conglomerate theme of all that relates to understandings of the self, once dissected, contains two salient components, those being one’s “Resilience” towards life’s obstacles and adversities, as well as the condition and role of “Being a Mother” (Table 4.3.):

“É ser independente. Sinto que tenho... o meu posicionamento no... eu digo no mundo, nem digo na sociedade, digo no mundo.” – Luísa, lines 97-98
“Eu sou mãe, mulher, cuidadora. Educadora. Sou um bocadinho de tudo; tem que ser um bocadinho de tudo.” – Sara, lines 238-239
“O facto de ser mulher, de passar essas coisas todas... tornou-me forte. Mais defensiva.” – Helena, lines 325-326
“Quero uma vida melhor, como toda a gente! [risos] Continuar a seguir em frente, a tentar alevantar- ter sempre a cabeça levantada, nunca a baixar!” – Catarina, lines 168-169
“Contribui para o meu bem-estar, eu pensar que eu não fui a mãe que eu tive.” – Laura, lines 442-443
“[...] eu não seria esta pessoa se eu não fosse militante [party’s name]! Porque foi [no partido] que eu aprendi muita coisa!” – Carolina, lines 430-431

Table 5.2. - Participants’ accounts on the theme “Personhood”

In close proximity, “Values” are identified in a palpable distance from “Personhood”. However, it maintains an adjacency in terms of its metaphysical property and proximity to the theme. This separation is justified inasmuch as “Values” integrate the ethical and moral compass that guide one’s own actions, in a more abstract level, where emphasis is placed upon their immaterial substance and quality. More specifically, “Help and Being Helped” was identified as the most important and highly appreciated virtue, thus as something that the participants actively engage in and benefit from; whether within, between friends and acquaintances and with their neighborhood, as a collective (Figure 4.4.):

“Gosto de ajudar e de ser ajudada.” – Luísa, line 21
“E principalmente, termos amor por nós próprios, para podermos transmitir também aos outros [...]” – Sara, lines 146-147
“Quando estou a fazer o bem aos outros, eu sinto-me concretizada.” – Helena, line 679
“Porque eu gosto de ajudar os outros. E gosto de viver num sítio que esteja- que seja melhorado e que possa ser melhor ainda do que aquilo que é!” – Catarina, lines 138-139
“Eu costumava dizer que [sou] assistente social, sou polícia, sou padre, sou médico, sou... era tudo assim!” – Carolina, lines 263-264
“E ainda ajudar pessoas que só necessitar, isso tudo me transmite o bem-estar.” – Joana, lines 328-329

Table 5.3. - Participants' accounts on the theme “Values”

Furthermore, meaningful connections and the reciprocity of “Interpersonal Relationships” are equally important factors in a person’s life. This theme pertains to the present relations that the participant looks after and esteems to have. In concrete terms, it includes not only friendships and close relations, neighbors and acquaintances, but also, and most significantly, those people the participant perceives and makes her *family*. Not only that, but the kinds of interpersonal relationships are implicit in the various facets of social life and linked to a wide array of functions of the participant’s daily lives. This is to say that the various relations the participant establishes contributes to her own individual perception, through roles, responsibilities and values, motivating her own understanding and perspectives on life and well-being (Table 4.5.). Conceptually, the identification of the theme is validated and supported by the already established significance of social capital, affecting both the personal and collectively lived dimensions of life (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Sato et al., 2022; Stanzani, 2015):

“É mais na igreja; na nossa comunidade [name of community][...]” – Luísa, lines 142-143
“Se preferir ser sozinha ou com amigos ou até com a minha filha com o meu genro, passamos muito tempo aqui juntos, e com o meu netinho [...]” – Carla, lines 20-22
“Tenho um marido fantástico [...] Tenho um filho que me dá muitas dores de cabeça [...] Mas é a melhor coisa do mundo. E tenho o meu núcleo duro.” – Sara, lines 259-261
“E depois da família vem todo o resto, porque eu tenho vizinhos meus que são como se fossem família. [...] quando estou a resolver algum problema ou a ajudar alguém, é como se tivesse a resolver um problema meu.” – Helena, lines 186-189
“O que é que eu mais aprecio na minha vida? Família!” – Catarina, line 77
“E eu fui adotada por este pessoal, pelos mais antigos, pelas coletividades. [...], e custa muito de deixar o bairro (...)” – Carolina, lines 26-27

Table 5.4. - Participants' accounts on the theme “Interpersonal Relationships”

Here, the “Neighborhood Livingness” refers to two dimensions. First, the “Perspectives” of the neighborhood are composed by perceptual apprehensions of characterizing phenomena

and traits by the participant, whether it originates and takes place within or outside the neighborhood. And second, the “Material Conditions” of the neighborhood which is present in a more physical and tangible plane of its characterization. These two descriptive dimensions are of importance inasmuch as they inform about the neighborhood’s attributes and characterization (Table 4.6.):

“[The neighborhood] é sossegado! É um bairro tranquilo.” – Luísa, line 407
“Estou habituada a este barulho, a esta confusão e a estes carros, e a isto e aquilo [...]” – Clara, lines 56-57
“Sei o nome de toda a gente. Toda a gente me conhece. E às vezes vejo vizinhos que não estão bem e perco às vezes um bocadinho do meu tempo [...]” – Helena, lines 157-158
“O bairro também me protege muito com isso, não é? [...] não há quem nos proteja mais do que as pessoas do bairro!” – Laura, lines 496-499
“E tento que o bairro fique melhor! Que as condições, aqui no bairro, sejam melhores para os moradores.” – Catarina, lines 233-234
“Porque essas pessoas – para além de invadirem as casas - levam para lá as tais pessoas menos boas, vidas muito complicadas, de tráficos, de outras coisas mais, e nós acabamos por nos sentir ali, no fundo do poço, no meio daquele bairro social.” – Joana, lines 469-472

Table 5.5. - Participants' accounts on the theme "Material Conditions"

Another topic closely related to the day-to-day experience within the neighborhood is that of the “Living Conditions”, that unequivocally pulls its thread on the subject of “Employment”. These two themes do not belong to the thematic block, being thus conceptualized separately. The former theme alludes to elemental conditions that mold and outlines life’s experiences and perceptions by and of the participant. The theme “Living Conditions” (Table 4.7.) becomes salient when in reference to participant assessments of their lives. Here it is possible to grasp and highlight passages that shed light on actual and current living circumstances, pertaining specially to socioeconomic vulnerabilities, as well as past ones:

“[...] mas um sacrifício para poder conseguir ter o mínimo que nós entendemos que é preciso para o nosso dia-a-dia, para o nosso bem-estar.” – Clara, lines 240-242
“O que é que eu quero agora? Quero uma vida melhor, como toda a gente!” – Catarina, line 168
“Claro: gostaria de viver com mais comodidade, ter mais dinheiro; mas isso, quem é que não quer mais dinheiro?” – Carolina, lines 361-362
“Que eu vivi sempre num bairro social, devido às partes económicas da minha mãe.” – Joana, lines 87-88
“Se eu for olhar para o tempo... em que dormi na rua... Eu aí não tinha qualidade de vida [...]” – Laura, lines 412-413

Table 5.6. - Participants' account on the theme "Living Conditions"

The latter, although providing information on the current employment situation of each participant, does inform about the connection and understanding of the role of work and employment in their lives, while it simultaneously reveals that most of the participants have been working since a very early age (whether in the public and/or the private sphere) (Table 4.8.):

“E troquei esta forma de viver, e justamente porque-porque o que eu tinha não me trazia esta realização pessoal. A nível de satisfação, certo.” – Luísa, lines 164-165
“Estou desempregada. Neste caso, desempregada por opção.” – Sara, lines 20-21
“neste momento tenho dois empregos, não é? Já tive três.” – Helena, line 13
“[...] eu sempre trabalhei toda a vida! O meu trabalho atualmente, porque sou reformada, tem a ver com o trabalho voluntário [...]” – Carolina, lines 13-14
“[...] já tinha conseguido juntar algum dinheiro e conseguido ajudar a minha mãe. Foi uma vitória, que a minha mãe conseguiu vencer todas as despesas mais essenciais da casa [...]” – Joana, lines 38-40

Table 5.7. - Participants' account on the theme “Living Condition” (work)

As stated, the identified themes emerge naturally from the participants' accounts and hence point to the central elements present in their day-to-day lives. These aspects are subjective and intrinsically valuable, due to the significance they possess for the participant, and, although their different facets are contextually identified, these themes transverse the perceptions of the participants' experiences of well-being. However, it is equally necessary to directly question what well-being is and how well-being is lived by each participant, as to provide an attempt in “Defining Well-Being” (Table 4.9.):

“[Bem-estar é] como a própria palavra diz é 'estar bem' e sentir-se com a vida. É ter saúde. Poder trabalhar.” – Luísa, lines 200-201
“[...] o bem-estar é ter- a primeira coisa é saúde. Depois, ter um pouco de paz de espírito [...]” – Carla, lines 201-202
“[Bem-estar é] É sentir-me bem, sentir-me feliz, sentir-me realizada.” – Sara, line 140
“[Bem-estar é] Fazer bem aos outros. À noite, tomo o meu banhinho, meto-me um cremezinho no corpo, estico as minhas peles [...]” – Helena, lines 380-381
“[Bem-estar é] Isto que eu faço. E como me sinto, também.” – Carolina, line 803
“Eu acho que o bem-estar é relativo. Porque nós nunca conseguimos nem estar bem, todos os dias, nem estar mal, todos os dias.” – Laura, lines 402-404

Table 5.8. - Participants' accounts on the theme “Defining Well-Being”

Considering the conceptual nature of the theme “Defining Well-Being” and its encompassing thematic capacity, it shares content with the other identified themes but also covers passages that respond to direct questions of well-being. The dualistic capacity of this particular theme allows an expansion of thematic identification as it adds to other subjects, as well as it focalizes topics on their own, fostering a better understanding of the layered complexity of the theme

itself. Nevertheless, the seven themes correspond to underlying domains of the lives of the participants that are involved in the experience and perception of well-being.

Chapter 4.2.2 – Well-Being in Terms of Satisfaction, Priority and Fulfillment

Another way to consider well-being is through its links with notions and perceptions of *life satisfaction*, current and active *priorities* and also the *sense of fulfillment* that one may perceive. Studies within the area of well-being, whether at the individual or collective level, generally refer to concepts and measuring indicators related to happiness, life satisfaction and a myriad of explicative constituents, the dimensions they cover and so on (see Brulé and Maggino, 2018; Oman, 2021; 2012 Sirgy, 2012). The determination of the present dimensions provides insights into *the ways in which well-being is experienced and perceived*.

The inclusion of these three dimensions can serve as evaluative measures that inform about one's subjective well-being, as constitutive facets of the concept. They were developed as singular units for empirical observation to their respective objectives as to provide opportunities to explore their thematic objectives individually. The three indicators are also, and most importantly, intrinsic parts in the determination of understanding of well-being. Each indicator translates subjective understandings of *what is* and *what constitutes* well-being for the person, in her own subjective judgement and discernment. Hence, the garnering and identification of concrete objects associated with life satisfaction, current priorities and sense of fulfillment, without following restrictive structural parameters, have led to exploring the most significant determinants in the participant's life.

A concrete formulation and exposition of the correspondent questions were directly applied in order to ascertain accurately what are the constituents identified by the participant: "what are your current priorities?", "do you feel realized?" and "do you feel satisfied with your life?". These questions grasp the participants' ineffable, existential position and interpretation of both material and intangible dimensions of their existence, and hence personhood.

<i>Code System</i>	Life Satisfaction	Priorities	Feeling Fulfilled	<i>Sum</i>
Basic Living Conditions	3	1	1	5
Interpersonal Relations	1	6	1	8
Defining 'Well-being'	0	2	0	2
Neighborhood Livingness	0	0	0	0
Employment	0	0	0	0
Personhood	0	3	3	6
Values	2	2	2	6
<i>Sum</i>	6	14	7	27

Table 5.9. - Code Relation between Vitality Indicators and Themes

The figure above (Figure 2) depicts the correspondence between the “Vitality Indicators” and the respective domains, thus exposing the domains with more significance to that specific indicator. Such exercise provides insights into the main areas of the participant’s life that are more present and are the main signifiers in their life satisfaction, their priorities and the feeling of realization. It is not possible to attribute a particular evaluation on the contribution (whether it is positive or negative), since no specific metrics were conceptualized to each indicator. Nevertheless, they provide insights in a first level of analysis. In “Life Satisfaction”, participants have pointed out the influence of the “Living Conditions”, exerting a critical impact on their lives. Followingly, the participants have identified their “Interpersonal Relations” as their most pressing “Priorities”, with a preponderance of valuing the “Family”. Finally, the sense of realization (“Feeling Fulfilled”) derives from their sense of “Personhood”. According to the conceptual elements, previously explored, the role of “Being a Mother” and their compact ability of “Perseverance” directly instigate and contribute to their feeling of self-fulfillment. Although a thorough review of the central theoretical parts on would positively contribute to the work at hand, it is not possible to proceed as such. However, some clarifications can be brought about as to delineate the space for reflection of the present discussion, while pointing out relevant arguments.

First and foremost, subjective well-being has two perceptual dimensions that inform on the well-being experienced and perceived. The affective dimension comprises the momentary emotions and sensations felt about a certain event or circumstances, that can be positively or negatively apprehended. The cognitive dimension requires judgment-based processes and

thus mental exercises that evaluate a certain domain or area of a person's life, in a comparative manner against a standard that is subjective and thus based on the life experience of the person (Brulé and Maggino, 2018; Oman, 2021; Sirgy, 2012). This distinction recognizes that both characteristics designate different levels of discussion of the same approach, as they pertain to different dimensions of conceptual understanding. Therefore, in the light of the questions and results presented, they look at the objective constituents of the participants' lives (Brulé and Maggino, 2018; Oman, 2021; Sirgy, 2012). These can be promptly associated with determination of components and assessment of one's quality of life. Secondly, as the indicators did not follow any precise framework, their conception follows an elemental directory. This is to say that the indicators follow a simple logic: *life satisfaction* leads to a contemplation of both objective and subjective aspects that make part and are accounted for by the participant; *priorities* here allude to the achievement or attainment of urgent preferences, whether they are material or mental; and *self-realization (sense of fulfillment)* as a dimension that regards mostly subjective achievements and self-actualization of objectives, needs and wishes.

No specific scale was employed, allowing the participants to mention and explore all the topics, aspects and events associated with the question. Here emerges the possibility of investigating the main associations made by people when they are confronted with such questions. The answers, although subjective, are suggestive due to the frequency, and common aspects could inform one about the greatest "urgencies" in the person's life (and in general). This same transversality of the themes may allocate the importance and urgency of the presence and active quality of these domains in practical terms within the area of social work. Upon the given answers, the reflexive exercise was accomplished by confirming the relationship between the general, identified themes ("Personhood", "Interpersonal Relationships", "Values", "Defining Well-Being", "Neighborhood Livingness", "Basic Living Conditions" and "Employment"), and the markers associated with contextual questions. More specifically, these were identified with passages under "Life Satisfaction", "Priorities" and "Feeling fulfilled", are here suggested as "Vitality Indicators" (Figure 2) (Brulé and Maggino, 2017; McGillivray, 2007; Robeyns, 2018; Sirgy, 2012). The configuration of the indicators reflects salient life domains, considering that they reflect vital necessities and properties of human life (Brulé and Maggino, 2017; McGillivray, 2007; Oman, 2021; Sirgy, 2012)⁹, thus highlighting the most urgent and present aspects in one's life. This association allows a correspondence between the themes generated and verifies a positive correlation between the thematic domains and their responsive quality to the Vitality Indicators.

⁹ It is possible to find multiple types of formulae in the assessment of life satisfaction, and therefore well-being. One example is that of the "Quality-of-Life Inventory", by Fischer, which contemplates sixteen dimensions (see Sirgy, 2012).

As the questions were not exclusive to clear-cut dimensions and aspects, nor were they limited in terms of parameters, the retrieved content was obtained from the participants' accounts and the identified themes. As such, it was possible, on one hand, to look at all the themes and subsequent constituents that make part of the participant's life, in the current moment (acknowledging the impact of past events), and, on the other hand, at the ways and means that the participants project their sense of self and life in the future. Insights and reflections about one's life priorities and satisfaction with life are valuable, as they inevitably relate to present experiences and perspectives about their well-being.

Chapter 5. – Discussion about the Valuable Experiences and Perceptions over One's Own Life

The correlation between themes/domains of the life that one leads and the reflection about one's satisfaction with life, top priorities and sense of realization serve as suggestive portrayals of instinctive needs and aspects of well-being, while elucidating on the scientific complexity of the concept itself. The revealed empirical results obtained for this work shed light on the two subjects. On one hand, they look at the most recurrent themes, and therefore the corresponding domains in one's life, an interpretative abstract territory wherein a person (re)creates meaning, thus providing insights into the converging determinants of well-being. On the other hand, the determination of the main correspondence between the "Vitality Indicators" and the identified domains may inform on the ways of substantiation of well-being by means of looking at life satisfaction, the current priorities and the feeling of self-fulfillment. These two dimensions of assessment correlate to one another in as much as they elucidate on the matter of well-being at different fronts and implicitly convene the scientific and ordinary importance of agency and subjectivity. Although a person's life is determined and substantiated in accordance with one personal and subjective point of view and experience, the subsequent meaning is created and attributed individually, specifically to the quality of life of that same person - something that in itself should be valued and considered.

This positioning recognizes the presence of external and objective factors that affect the lives of people, imprinting its influence on individual (and even collective) decisions on the ways and modes of contributing to and guaranteeing one's well-being. These multidimensional factors that characterize and locate people within the societal structures (thus being particular to the different social groups) are in themselves integral components for consideration. The indication and reveal of a group's characteristics inform, to some extent, of the life circumstances, taking in the social, economic, political and cultural landscape.

An inquisitive look at the emotional apprehension of one's satisfaction with life, the determination of the most pressing and anticipated arrangements in life (whether temporally or spatially), and the general sense of self-realization demands an identification of the important domains and aspects in life, and thus one's well-being. Both the indicators and the recognition of domains are indispensable components in the assessment of SWB within scientific and academic inquiry. Having in mind the intricate, multilayered discussions and forms of determining the subjective perception of well-being, the presented questions on the topic take up pertinent and pronounced discernments that are common to both scientific and non-scientific realms. That is, the correspondence between the "Vitality Indicators" and their subsequent matching themes (life domains) allows one to understand how women living in

marginalized neighborhoods navigate cognitively and emotionally their lives, under their current circumstances.

As Sirgy (2012) succinctly points out: “[the] satisfaction of human developmental needs is directly related to the experience of positive and negative affect. That is, life events satisfy human developmental needs (e.g., biological, safety, social, esteem, actualization needs). The satisfaction of needs also influences and guides people’s cognitive evaluations of life events” (p.38). In looking for the personal (subjective) formulation of needs, as a conception of valued aspects (whether material or abstract) to the person, and to her multidimensional (objective) context of the living circumstances, a possibility is offered to take a closer look at which capabilities disadvantaged people may prioritize in their lives, as well as how these are tapped and transformed into functionings. As such, Kjellberg and Jansson (2022) point out to one of the many applications of the CA in social work by referring to contributions at the level of subjective notions of well-being, as well as of expanding on issues of social inequalities. In the paper, the authors allude to the possibility that “subjective well-being can strengthen individual agency” but also inform on the links between existing objective goods and accesses and existing functionings, by a study that “showed that real opportunities increased well-being” (ibid., p.233). The agency found in each person (yet not universally taken for granted) is a central quality for social work theory and practice as well as for the conceptual framework of the CA. Agency within the CA reflects the available conditions and extent of a person to be able to decide her course of action and thus make decisions, and it is intimately woven with (the achievement of) capabilities (Robeyns, 2018; Sato et al., 2022). Within the realm of social work, agency is a pivotal ingredient in the practice and theory of the area when placed and developed for the disadvantaged communities in determining and ascertaining the course of action for their individual and collective lives (Herrick, 1995). In both senses, agency is that mechanical force that enables and effectuates changes in one’s conditions of livings which subsequently implicate her well-being and therefore facilitates the materialization of an action. In terms of interventive practices within social work, concepts such as “agency achievement” and “agency freedom” should envisage interventive methodologies in order to better understand, assess and evaluate the social landscape of disadvantaged people and groups, in an attempt to contribute to their well-being. Thus, the focus must be placed on the capabilities as they correspond to “the freedoms which allow ‘persons to lead the kind of life they value – and have reason to value’” (Sen, 1999, cited in Sato et al., 2022, p.5). Although the results may not constitute a sufficiently solid basis for an analytical departure, they nevertheless validate the fortuity in investigating topics related to the subjective experiences and perceptions of well-being of disadvantaged communities and groups.

Extending on the present line of argumentation, the identified domains are determining in their ability to expose the importance of *something*, subjectively construed and attributed, for

the individual person in their present living situation. As it has been already mentioned, the CA places its emphasis on *what* a person is able to *do* and *be*, while looking at the available material and mental features and resources, that go beyond the economic status of that person. Therefore, in ascertaining *what is valued* by the person may foment reflections on what allows and what barrens that same valued *thing*. Necessarily, the conversion factors and the contingencies, characteristic of the person, are considered insofar as these may distinctively delineate the actual living circumstances of the person or group, which ultimately demark internal and external boundaries at both individual and collective levels. At a conceptual level of the discussion, the valued *things* should frame assessments of well-being, which include gauging indicators such as life satisfaction, priorities and self-realization.

Taking into account the various proposals for relatively fixed lists of capabilities, the acquired themes/domains in this work share a conceptual proximity to that of ‘capabilities’ (in the sense of the CA). More specifically, the retrieved components can be compared and embedded into those of Nussbaum’s “Central Human Capabilities” (see Nussbaum, 2000), that even in the face of criticism, the latter list presents a plurality of life dimensions, thus guaranteeing some degree of variability. Therefore, it is proposed to perceive the developed themes/domains as “capabilities”. The priority of the present work consisted in examining emerging, cross-cutting themes of the various realities explored, leaving behind an investigation focused on the substantive mechanics of converting capabilities into functionings. Nevertheless, the results reclaim their conceptual specificity to the present work and further scientific scope.

More concretely, the themes of “Personhood”, “Interpersonal relationships”, “Values”, “Defining Well-Being”, “Neighborhood Livingness”, “Basic Life Conditions” and “Employment” correspond to domains in the lives of the participants that are meaningful to them, with varying degrees of value. These can be reported as more abstract domains (e.g., “Personhood”, “Values”, “Defining Well-Being”) and more material domains (e.g., “Neighborhood Livingness”, “Basic Life Conditions”, “Employment”), whose meanings are differently attributed by each participant, with some entailing notable sub-themes.

“Help”, “Perseverance” and “Being a Mother” were identified as three prominent sub-themes. Considering their conceptual formulation in terms of their qualitative significance and quantitative substance, these are inferred as “functionings”. This position is taken in accordance with the very definition of functioning, as the enactment of the valued *thing* for the person, and the nominal origin of the themes themselves. In the light of the CA, being of assistance and be assisted (“Help”), having the ability to confront obstacles and be resilient to them (“Perseverance”), and willingly performing the role and responsibilities of “Being a Mother” not only do all refer to valued *things* and states, but also are real (and substantiated)

ends in themselves, turned into capabilities. In these areas, the participants have the possibility to transform the means into their desired, valued ends.

This argument takes into account the already mentioned conditions of these concrete elements. Although abstract in their substance, these “capabilities” find themselves finalized in the personality, and thus individuality, of the participant, which implicates an enactment of her own agency and freedom. The extent of freedom, in close relation to that of an agency, is equally involved inasmuch as these are shaped and motivated by the social arrangements of their lives, while recognizing the limits of their conversion factors. These contingencies can be of material or abstract substance, since, from an academic point of view, social factors, such as gender, age and place of residence, characterize the multifaceted experiences of marginalized women as a social group. This is not to deny the possibility that the themes/domains can be transversal even in varying degrees to various groups of women, yet it recognizes the importance in stressing the specific characteristics of this social group.

Thus, the identified domains are of interest to the participants, so that even in circumstances of curtailed advantages, these aspects maximize the availability of their agency and freedom in their own lives. The identification and attribution of meaning (value) to these domains are embodied in the experience and perception of well-being; this means that being of help, being resilient and being a mother are all important factors involved in the material and mental materialization of well-being. It is important to point out that such a statement does not depreciate the actual and objective amenities, accesses and resources, that constitute one’s living circumstances, nor does it attempt to negate and neutralize imperative issues of real experiences of inequality, disadvantage and marginalization.

Another important remark to bring to light is that of the comparison of the participants’ current living circumstances, accesses and resources, as well as their disposition to mental adaptations. The CA framework considers what is called *adaptive preferences*, giving the example that “someone who is in an objectively dire situation may have adapted to that situation and learnt to be pleased with little” (Robeyns, 2018, p.138). Although it was not possible to empirically evaluate whether the participants have adapted or do accommodate their needs and wants in relation to their current circumstances, as well as to gauge the depth of such phenomenon, passages suggest some kind of adaptability that emerged during their accounts. Considering their content, the identified pieces related to the themes/domains “Help”, “Resilience” and “Living Conditions” mostly answered in relation to the “Vitality Indicators”:

“[...] às vezes tem que se fazer um bocadinho de [...], não será bem um sacrifício doentio, mas um sacrifício para poder conseguir ter o mínimo que nós entendemos que é preciso para o nosso dia-a-dia, para o nosso bem-estar.” – Clara, lines 239-242
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<p>“Dá-me imensa pena saber que eu tenho uma casa, que eu tenho uma cama, que eu tenho comida na mesa, e que há pessoas que não têm isso.” – Helena, lines 122-123</p>
<p>“Foi sempre os exemplos que eu vi em casa. De mostrar...É sempre para a frente que a gente tem que andar; nunca recuar.” – Catarina, lines 203-204</p>
<p>“[...] por isso, porque aquilo que eu sinto falta, a maior parte das pessoas não tem nem metade, não é? Aquilo que eu sinto falta... Eu nunca tive problemas; sempre vivi com muito pouco, aprendi a viver com aquilo que tenho.” – Carolina, lines 938-941</p>
<p>“Há pessoas piores do que nós... E nem isto que, nós temos no mínimo, elas têm. Então, nós vamos conseguir. E então, aí, essa forma de pensar faz-me, faz-me sentir bem-estar, também. Aceitar aquilo que eu tenho. Aceitar só até onde é que eu posso ir.” – Joana, lines 1173-1176</p>
<p>“Não é que eu não, por exemplo, neste momento não tenha qualidade de vida – porque até tenho! Se eu for olhar para o tempo... em que dormi na rua... Eu aí não tinha qualidade de vida, porque eu trabalhava, ia dormir para a rua, porque estava a pagar a casa onde morava o meu filho, [...]” – Laura, lines 411-414</p>

Table 6.1. - Participants' accounts on the themes in relation to the "Vitality Indicators"

These statements are illustrative examples of adaptive preferences and comparisons that covertly may make part of the everyday lives of marginalized women. Three distinct yet related observations can be made. First, these passages suggest that the participants feel contentment and appreciation for their current situation as they acknowledge the elements that make part of their living conditions. Secondly, the recognition of their current situation contrasts with that of their past events and thus circumstances; their past was marked by possibly greater difficulties than in the present. And thirdly, besides revisiting former conditions, in the present moment, the participants' reality is actively and cognitively compared with that of people with relatively less (material) living conditions than them. Here, the highlighted passages propose on one hand a mental adaptation to current living circumstances that delimit one's space for action, and on the other hand a comparison on their social standing. These two phenomena are informative as they may communicate about the participants' individual standpoint with regards to their living circumstances and about their interpretation of their positioning within societal structures. These factors ultimately influence and mirror how they understand, perform and enact their modes of doing and being well-being, in this particular case, it was not possible to determine accurately the socioeconomic setting that circumscribes the life experiences of the participants. Mentions of income or other determinants related to the socioeconomic status were almost nonexistent, as thus, do not constitute objects of assessment for the present work. The determination of such aspects could assist in expanding the portrait of the social landscape of the participants. Nevertheless, the personal accounts of the participants are valuable as they can provide a brief glance of their actual circumstances, as they are formulated in part by these same cognitive evaluations and comparisons, as well as by brief direct comments. Aside from first-person observations, the very methodological delimitation of the geographic space that this work contemplates presupposes *a priori* defining aspects that

share some degree of adjacency. The “BIP/ZIP Program” comprises neighborhoods that evidence “worse social, economic, environmental or urbanistic conditions” (BIP/ZIP, 2025). Consequently, these neighborhoods are symbolically located in the margins of the city of Lisbon and therefore find themselves in advantage comparatively to other zones and neighborhoods of the city. This marginalization is consequently reflected in the demographic characterization of the population that resides there; from precarious housing, services and accesses to a concentration of the most socioeconomically deprived social groups, these neighborhoods often do not possess basic, solid and satisfying living conditions. Although in answer to questions pertaining to the main objectives of this work, participants have discursively offered depictions of their neighborhoods, thus substantiating these claims.

Although these may provide significant evidence on the recurrence (or not) of these phenomena in disadvantaged groups, as the literature suggests, their impact on assessments of well-being, with their subjective and objective components, conceptual explanations are inconclusive. Nevertheless, the current work takes on the position that the existence of adaptive preferences and comparisons do not necessarily suppress analytical inputs and arguments for the validation of subjective experiences and perceptions on well-being, which provide analytical inputs on the matter.

Conclusion

Seven underlying themes related to well-being were identified and have been conceptually interpreted as active domains of life. As such, “Personhood”, “Interpersonal relationships”, “Values”, “Defining Well-Being”, “Neighborhood Livingness”, “Basic Life Conditions” and “Employment” correspond to established components of a person’s life, with both abstract and material features, being subjected to subjective cognitive and emotional apprehensions. Due to their thematic relevance, “Personhood”, “Interpersonal Relations” and “Values” are highlighted, as they may signify the most important areas in the lives of these women.

The theme “Personhood” reflects the importance of the individual *self*, as an identity that is intimately interwoven with the understanding of one’s personal experience. Here, “Resilience” and “Being a Mother” are inextricable constituents, that correspondingly pertain to a general mental disposition towards life, and to the performance of one of the most complex roles in a woman’s life. Both themes are conceived and expressed differently yet can be considered as valued states and ends in themselves, which define and mold the very existence of the participants. Their presence validates their importance and intentional enactment. The resilient mindset adopted by the participants emerges as a compelling aspect for analysis, considering its activating ability upon one’s agency and the course of freedom. The theme “Interpersonal Relations” expresses the importance of bonds to family and social circles, that includes friends and in some cases neighbors. Aside from the observation that the concept of family can be looked at beyond conventional moulds, both aspects contribute to the well-being of the participants. The family can constitute the object for action, thus being intimately related to the role of being a mother, as it can have a more passive character. Here, how well the members of the family are, for example, affects the personal well-being of the participants. Finally, the theme “Values” reveal the active and meaningful psychological disposition and the practical mechanisms that guide the experiences and perspectives of these women and their well-being. The relation between these two elements is mutual, having in mind their plans of action. “Help/Being Helped” were identified as the most salient sub-themes. They are considered “functionings”, since they purport to valued ends that are realizable and manifested in a practical format. In helping others, an action is exercised by the participant towards someone or something with a simultaneous effect on herself.

These domains are implicated in the “Vitality Indicators”, which function as indicators of specific objectives that guide the projection of the self in relation to the well-being along temporal lines. The perception of life satisfaction, the objects of life priorities, and the sense of self-fulfillment with oneself imply inherent aspects of well-being as well as of perspectives on their quality of life, thus informing on current living circumstances. Furthermore, these evaluations require exercises of comparison of lived experiences throughout life, by a cognitive

ascertainment of pressing immediate needs and of an emotion-centered reflection of present states, thus enabling a determination of the most central aspects and domains of life. Hence, for most participants, their priorities are allocated to their “Interpersonal Relations”, particularly to their families. In terms of their satisfaction with life, the inherent association was promptly associated with their “Living Conditions”, thus suggesting that material and objective conditions are directly related. And finally, their sense of self-fulfillment, as positively perceived, comes from their “Personhood”, through the role of “Being a Mother” and possessing a disposition of “Resilience”.

Social work intervention benefits from adopting a multidisciplinary approach, in both its theoretical and practical dimensions, in matters pertaining, yet not exclusively, to well-being, as to better identify and cater the needs of people and groups. An encompassing understanding of the intricacies of the personal lives of people may provide insights into the ways and beings of well-being, since the determination of well-being and life satisfaction assists in pinpointing the urgent and fundamental aspects being faced on a daily basis by people. Therefore, it is important to determine what is of value to the person, the central life domains, as well as aspirations, priorities and other fundamental components alike as these aspects may provide a bigger picture of the overall living circumstances and the inherent practical dynamics that inevitably condition people’s lives. This is to say that the development and implementation of indicators and instruments based on the Capabilities Approach and their methodological components can promote a holistic understanding of the situations at hand, that once reflected in practical terms, strives for a more comprehensive intervention, that attends to usually covert yet molding aspects of life. As such, the frameworks behind Capability Approach can be adapted to multiple contexts and applied to different groups. In questioning about the experiences and perceptions of well-being of marginalized women it was possible to come across common expressions and objects of value from subjective accounts that unravel another layer of understanding about well-being and quality of life. From contriving material concerns to the prominence and influence of family, these elements can inform, at both individual and collective levels, the ways and means that people make use of to navigate their lives.

This work claims that the development and implementation of indicators and frameworks based on the Capability Approach offer multiples advantages, with various applications, and are an asset to the expansion of social work practice and theory.

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Annexes

Annex A – Interview Guide for Intervention Subjects (in Portuguese and English)

Blocos Temáticos	Questões
A. Bloco Temático – Introdução <i>(Thematic Block – Introduction)</i>	A.1. Esclarecimento de aspetos mediante as diretrizes da dissertação. <i>(A.1. Clarification of aspects through the dissertation guidelines)</i>
	A.2. Aceita participar nesta entrevista? <i>(A.2. Do you agree to take part in this interview?)</i>
B. Bloco Temático – Individualidade <i>(Thematic Block – Individuality)</i>	B.1. Fale-me um pouco sobre si. <i>(B.1. Tell me a bit about yourself.)</i>
	B.2. Poderia descrever como é uma semana normal na sua vida? Tudo que quiser partilhar e achar relevante. <i>(B.2. Could you describe what a normal week in your life is like? Anything you want to share and find relevant.)</i>
	B.3. Quais são as coisas na sua vida que mais aprecia? De que modo? <i>(B.3. What are the things in your life that you enjoy the most? In what way?)</i>
	B.4. E quais são as suas principais prioridades? <i>(B.4. What are your main priorities?)</i>
	B.5. Considera que o seu percurso de vida tem particularidades pelo facto de ser mulher? Quais? <i>(B.5 Do you think your life path has any particularities because you are a woman? Which ones?)</i>
	B.6. Sente que o local onde mora influencia o seu bem-estar? De que maneira? <i>(B.6. Do you feel that where you live influences your well-being? In what way?)</i>
	B.6.1. De que formas se relaciona com o bairro onde mora? <i>(B.6.1 How do you relate to the neighborhood where you live?)</i>

C. Bloco Temático – Bem-Estar <i>(Thematic Block – Well-Being)</i>	C.1. Como é que define o bem-estar? <i>(C.1. How do you define well-being?)</i>
	C.1.1. O que é ter qualidade de vida para si? <i>(C.1.1 What does quality of life mean to you?)</i>
	C.2. Quais são as coisas que tem presente na sua vida que contribuem para o seu bem-estar? <i>(C.2 What are the things in your life that contribute to your well-being?)</i>
	C.2.a. Em caso de resposta negativa: No seu entender, quais os entraves que identifica que a impedem de ter um maior bem-estar? <i>(C.2.a. If no: In your opinion, what obstacles do you identify that prevent you from enjoying greater well-being?)</i>
D. Bloco Temático – Nível de Satisfação com a Vida <i>(Thematic Block – Satisfaction with Life Level)</i>	D.1. Que coisas na sua vida fazem com que se sinta concretizada? <i>(D.1 What things in your life make you feel fulfilled?)</i>
	D.2. Sente-se satisfeita com a sua vida? <i>(D.2. Do you feel satisfied with your life?)</i>
	D.2.a. “Sim” → De que maneira? <i>(D.2.a. “Yes” → In what way?)</i>
	D.2.b. “Não” → Por que razão? <i>(D.2.b. “No” → Why?)</i>
E. Conclusão <i>(Conclusion)</i>	E.1. Gostaria de acrescentar mais alguma coisa? <i>(E.1. Is there anything else you'd like to add?)</i>
	E.2. Agradeço a sua partilha e participação nesta entrevista. <i>(E.2 Thank you for sharing and participating in this interview.)</i>

DIVULGAÇÃO ENTREVISTA PARA DISSERTAÇÃO DE MESTRADO

Este documento pretende informar sobre a participação voluntária para a realização de entrevistas individuais para o trabalho final do curso de Mestrado em Serviço Social, pelo ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa.

O estudo em questão tem por objetivo explorar o conceito de bem-estar, por meio das suas experiências e percepções na perspetiva de mulheres, que residam em bairros entendidos como marginalizados, na cidade de Lisboa, abrangidos pelo Programa “BIP/ZIP”. Desde modo, sublinha-se o interesse em compreender de que forma o local de residência pode afetar as compreensões e as práticas de bem-estar de mulheres.

A sua participação voluntária neste estudo é valorizada, uma vez que permite informar sobre as questões aqui expostas, promovendo uma expansão de conhecimento dentro da área científica. A colaboração da participante consistirá em partilhar informação que entenda como relevante sobre a sua experiência de vida, relativas a si, ao seu bem-estar e ao bairro em que reside.

A entrevista tem uma duração máxima de uma hora (1 hora), podendo exceder este tempo, mediante o seu contributo pessoal. A entrevista realizar-se-á pela plataforma virtual “Zoom”, sendo necessário ter consigo um smartphone ou computador, com ligação à internet.

Caso tenha interesse em participar neste projeto, poderá contactar-me das seguintes formas:

a) Contacto de email: acbwe@iscte-iul.pt

Ou

b) Preenchendo o seguinte campo, a deixar junto ao Grupo Comunitário da Flamengo

Nome	Participar na Entrevista (preencher de acordo com interesse)	
	Sim	Não

CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO PARA PARTICIPAR NUM ESTUDO DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

Título: Bem-Estar no Feminino – O “Ser” e “Estar” do Género e do Bem-Estar em Bairros Marginalizados (Título original: “Well-being in the Feminine – The “Doings and Beings” of Gender and Well-being in Marginalized Neighborhoods”).

Informação da Estudante: Ana Wende, ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Mestrado em Serviço Social.

Finalidade do Estudo: O estudo tem por objetivo explorar o conceito de bem-estar, por meio das experiências e percepções do mesmo pela perspetiva de mulheres que sejam residentes de bairros entendidos como marginalizados, na cidade de Lisboa, estando abrangidos pelo Programa “BIP/ZIP”. Desde modo, existe um interesse em compreender de que forma o local de residência pode afetar as compreensões e as práticas de bem-estar de mulheres.

A sua participação no estudo é valorizada, uma vez que permite informar sobre as questões aqui expostas, estendendo o conhecimento da área científica. A sua colaboração consistirá em partilhar informação sobre a sua experiência de vida que ache relevante, relativas a si, ao seu bem-estar e ao bairro em que reside. A entrevista tem uma duração máxima de uma hora, podendo exceder mediante o seu contributo, sendo esta gravada (telemóvel) para efeitos de análise científica no contexto do presente trabalho académico.

Informações Institucionais: O ISCTE é responsável pelo tratamento dos seus dados pessoais, recolhidos e tratados exclusivamente para as finalidades do presente estudo, tendo como base legal o seu consentimento. A sua autorização remeterá para o Art. 6º, nº1, alínea a), do Regulamento Geral de Proteção de Dados.

O estudo é realizado por Ana Wende (acbw@iscte-iul.pt), que poderá contactar caso pretenda esclarecer uma dúvida, partilhar algum comentário ou exercer os seus direitos relativos ao tratamento dos seus dados pessoais. Poderá utilizar o contacto indicado para solicitar o acesso, a retificação, o apagamento ou a limitação do tratamento dos seus dados pessoais.

A participação neste estudo é confidencial. Os seus dados pessoais serão sempre tratados por pessoal autorizado vinculado ao dever de sigilo e confidencialidade. O seu nome será substituído por um outro, uma vez que poderá haver a necessidade de referir passagens do seu relato pessoal. O ISCTE garante a utilização das técnicas, medidas organizativas e de

Além de confidencial, a participação no estudo é estritamente voluntária: pode escolher livremente participar ou não participar. Se tiver escolhido participar, pode interromper a participação e retirar o consentimento para o tratamento dos seus dados pessoais em qualquer momento, sem ter de prestar qualquer justificação e haver qualquer complicação ou consequência. A retirada de consentimento não afeta a legalidade dos tratamentos anteriormente efetuados com base no consentimento prestado. A sua participação nesta entrevista não atribuirá benefícios diretos para si, porém os seus relatos assistiram no fornecimento de informação sobre as experiências de bem-estar de mulheres que vivem em bairros marginalizados na cidade de Lisboa.

Os seus dados pessoais serão conservados até ao término oficial do curso de mestrado, e assim até à obtenção do grau académico, de modo a garantir o acesso à informação disponibilizada pela participante, contrariando possíveis e necessárias alterações ao trabalho realizado. Durante este período, os seus dados serão guardados de forma pessoal, sendo depois destruídos ou anonimizados, garantindo o seu anonimato nos resultados do estudo, apenas divulgados para efeitos estatísticos, de ensino, comunicação em encontros ou publicações científicas. Terá ainda a possibilidade de fazer questões sobre o estudo realizado antes e depois da entrevista. As suas questões serão respondidas, de acordo com as possibilidades.

Não existem riscos significativos expectáveis associados à participação no estudo, dado o modo da sua participação neste trabalho. O ISCTE não divulga ou partilha com terceiros a informação relativa aos seus dados pessoais.

O ISCTE tem um Encarregado de Proteção de Dados, contactável através do email dpo@iscte-iul.pt. Caso considere necessário tem ainda o direito de apresentar reclamação à autoridade de controlo competente – Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados.

Procedimentos da Entrevista: Eu, Ana Wende, entrevistar-lhe-ei no âmbito deste estudo, sobre as suas experiências e perspetivas relativamente ao conceito de bem-estar, enquanto mulher e residente de um bairro considerado marginalizado. A entrevista está prevista para uma duração entre trinta minutos (30 min) a uma hora (1h), podendo exceder mediante a extensão do seu relato pessoal.

Declaro ter compreendido os objetivos de quanto me foi proposto e explicado pelo/a investigador/a, ter-me sido dada oportunidade de fazer todas as perguntas sobre o presente estudo e para todas elas ter obtido resposta esclarecedora. Aceito participar no estudo e consinto que os meus dados pessoais sejam utilizados de acordo com a informações que me foram disponibilizadas.

Sim ☐

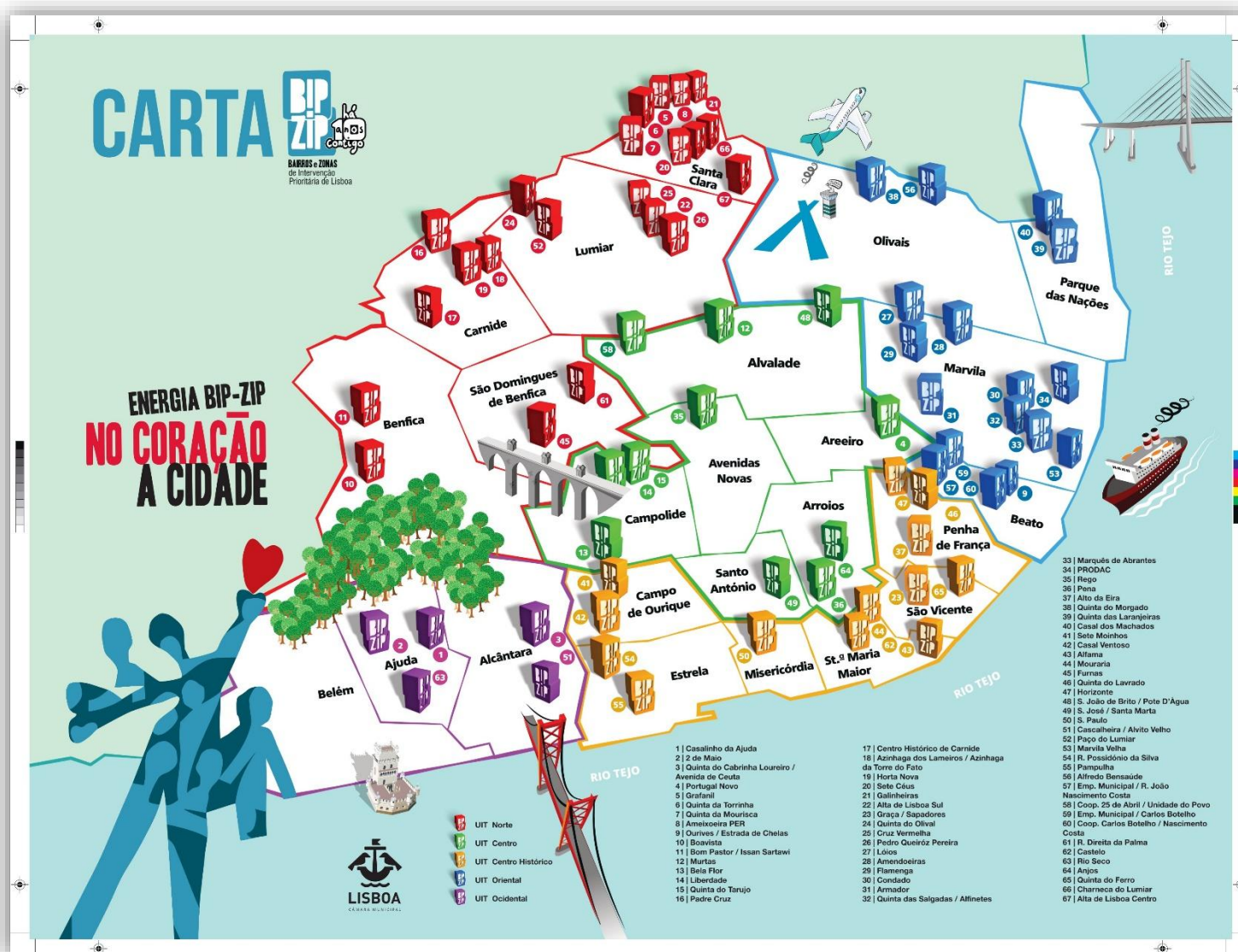
Não ☐

_____ (local), ____/____/____ (data)

Nome: _____

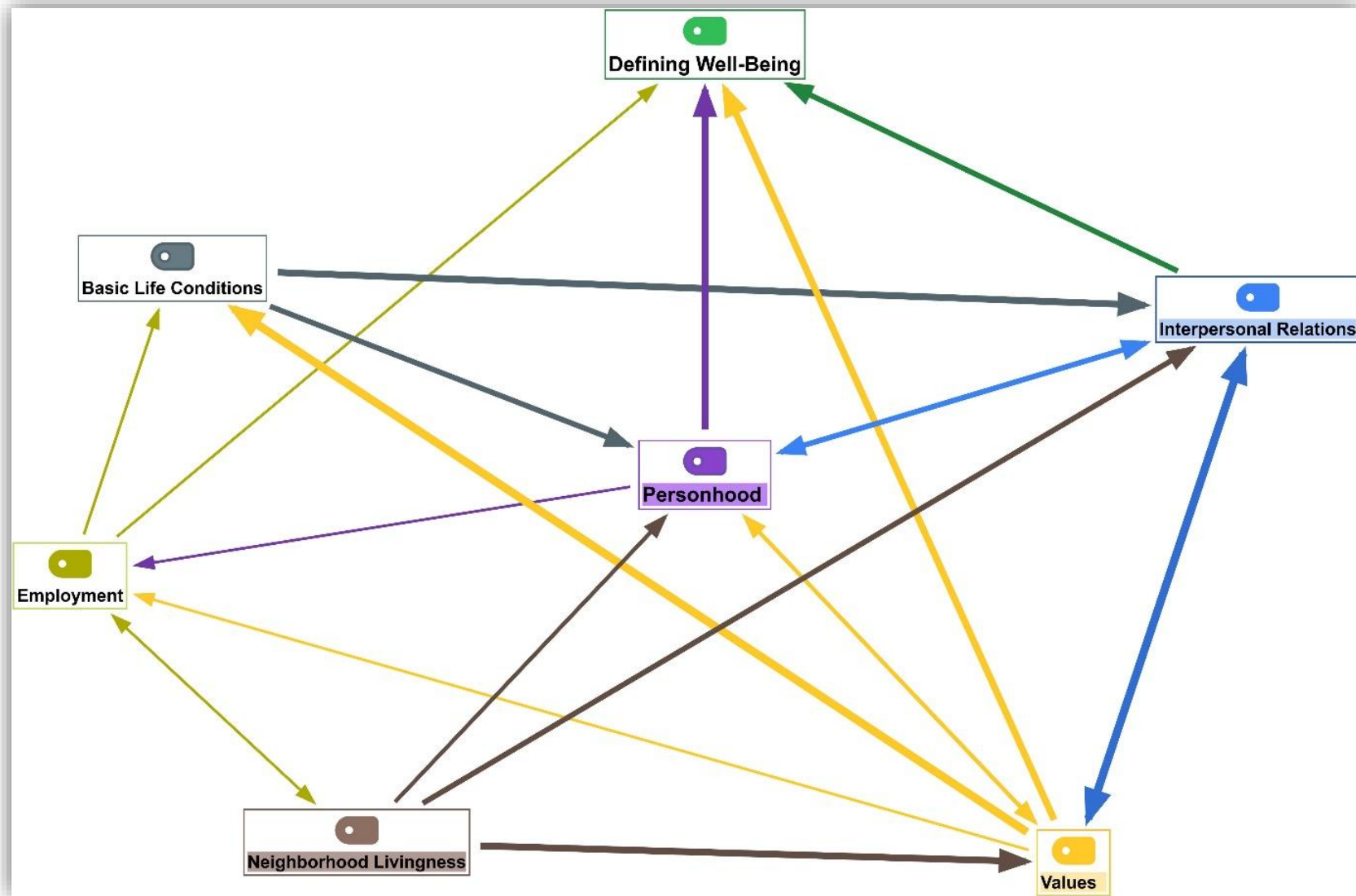
Assinatura: _____

Annex D – “BIP/ZIP Program” Distribution of Neighborhoods Map



Source: <https://bipzip.lisboa.pt/conhece-os-bipzip/carta/index.htm>

Annex E – Visual Map of Developed Themes (MAXQDA)



Annex F – Code Matrix Browser results from software MAXQDA

<i>Code System</i>	Luísa	Carla	Sara	Helena	Catarina	Carolina	Joana	Laura	<i>SUM</i>
Basic Living Conditions	0	8	0	4	3	10	13	8	46
Interpersonal Relations	11	6	9	6	8	7	18	16	81
Defining “Well-being”	4	6	5	11	8	5	18	3	60
“Neighborhood Livingness”	6	1	3	3	4	3	9	9	38
Individuality	12	9	8	13	14	14	21	17	108
Values	14	2	4	15	4	13	18	9	79