

Season 3 episode 2: Cressida Gaukroga

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SPEAKERS

Cressida Gaukroger, Lily Spencer

Lily Spencer 00:13

Hey reMAKERS! Welcome back to the podcast. In this season, we are doing a bit of an exploration of the idea of a Wellbeing Economy. What would it look like to create an economy that actually serves people and planet? And one of the big components of this I, well...what would it look like to have a Wellbeing Approach to government? And what does that actually mean? So our next guest is a bit of a global expert in this and in what countries all around the world are starting to do. Her name is Dr. Cressida Gaukroger, she is a Senior Policy Adviser in wellbeing, for the Centre for Policy Development, here in Australia. Centre for Policy Development is a leading independent policy institute. And they say their model is threefold: to create, connect and convince. So, they are pragmatic, but they're also about really bringing those big ideas, you know, into government, into the public, to try to spread that influence. And they've got one right now that they're really excited about. And it is inspired a lot by the small but very mighty country of Wales. So we talk about that in this conversation. Cressida's background, though, is really fascinating. It's not what you would potentially expect. She's actually has a PhD in Philosophy, and kind of the Philosophy of Psychology. She's taught ethics at Oxford. And there's this famous degree that she was working at, you know, teaching on at Oxford, called Philosophy, Politics and Economics. And she reckons more than half the Prime Ministers of England, did PPE at Oxford. So here she is, you know, teaching the kind of upcoming leaders and, you know, the Oxford model, it's a bit like Hogwarts. You sort of, you learn in these houses, and she said her house was a lot like Hufflepuff – her college. So you're there in your little college, having these very small, kind of, one-on-one or one-on-two lectures and discussions. And they'd be talking to her about economics, and you know, questioning it from a kind of ethical place of well, "why do we do what we do? Why do we value this? Is it GDP that matters? Is it the quality of the growth is it the quality?" And she started to get really intrigued by economics and almost being jealous of her students and started to go off and do these deeper dives into things like behavioural economics, and the psychology of all of it, and became, basically, a specialist in this area. Came back to Australia, and found herself in Melbourne in lockdown with three small children, and started writing, what she calls revenge parenting genre books, on the side, as just a little bit of therapy. So it's like stories of children that do naughty things and, and kind of like modern day fairy tales, and have to reap the consequences. But, it's all you know, meant lovingly, as kind of a cautionary tale. I think it sounds fantastic. So I'm going to include a link to that in your show notes. But basically, this is a wonderful conversation with someone who's so nuanced and so bright, she doesn't come out as offering, you know, a bunch of glib answers. She's really thinking about

wellbeing, and what it could look like to take a far more ambitious approach here in Australia than perhaps any of us think possible. Here's my conversation with Cressida. I'm sitting here looking at the wonderful Cressida. Cressida, welcome to the reMAKERS podcast, it's such a delight to have you.

Cressida Gaukroger 04:12

Hi, thanks so much for having me, Lily.

Lily Spencer 04:15

And look, I have given our audience a little bit of an intro to you and to the kind of work that you do. But I'm really curious – so you're a Senior Policy Adviser who specialises in wellbeing, and you're a bit of a global expert on this theme. What does wellbeing actually mean to you in the work that you do? Because I think it's a term that feels a bit fuzzy and people don't know is it wealth, is it health, is it happiness? What is it?

Cressida Gaukroger 04:43

Yeah, that's a fantastic question. And I think, you know, to some people working in this, this space, wellbeing is just about subjective happiness. So, how am I feeling right now? Maybe, what's my level of life satisfaction? But actually, the kinds of work that I think is being done globally, looking at how to build wellbeing into say, policy decision making, has a much more kind of complex idea of wellbeing. So, one of the, kind of, foundations for this idea comes from Amartya Sen. So he was a economist and philosopher – Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. So he says, basically, to have wellbeing, is to have a...the capac...the capability, the capacity to live a life that you have reason to value. And so what does it mean to have that capacity or capability? Well, there are gonna be external features, for example, that make it hard to live a healthy life. So if you've got high levels of air pollution, or you are experiencing poverty, then it's going to be really hard to live a healthy life. And obviously, not being healthy can make it harder to get in, you know, makes it harder to pursue the things that you value in your life. There are also things, capabilities, that come from within you, but can be promoted through external things. So, for example, having high levels of education is going to allow you both to achieve jobs that you might find meaningful, but also participate in society in different ways that might be really meaningful to you. Having strong social connections are going to be really important for things like health outcomes, things like, you know, overall happiness and mental health outcomes, things like educational outcomes, employment outcomes. So the way in which wellbeing is understood generally, in these kinds of movements, is you think of "what are the things that together essentially make, make a good quality of life, or make life worth living for us, but also for future generations?" And so this is really important because wellbeing approaches typically have really key environmental values. And we know that the environment is important for us immediately in terms of health, short-term and long-term health outcomes, in terms of mental health outcomes. But we also know that preserving the environment is really important for allowing future generations to be able to have high levels of wellbeing and the capacity to kind of pursue meaningful lives. And, you know, for many, also, the importance of preserving the environment's sustainability is that it's a value in and of its own sake. So it's a value for non-human animals, it's a value because this is actually part of what's important about, you know, the human experience is, you know, living with the world rather than kind of dominating over the world.

Lily Spencer 07:43

So, okay, so things like education, strong social connections, lack of impediments to, you know, a good life, such as, you know, being in poverty or experiencing high levels of pollution, having a healthy natural world. All of this sounds really good. And there could be people listening, or indeed policy, people or government people thinking, "but we already take care of that stuff. Or we at least try to you know, we have a Department of Health, we have a Department of Environment, we have education, we fund all of these things." How is a wellbeing lens...how does that change the way that government might make decisions or allocate money? Or does it risk becoming just a bit of a wellbeing washing kind of a box ticking exercise?

Cressida Gaukroger 08:27

Yeah, so I think there might be a couple of questions there, you know, how does it do it effectively? And then how is it kind of different from business as usual? So, there are some problems with the way in which we do business as usual, as usual in government and the public service, which end up getting in the way of us trying to achieve these wellbeing outcomes. Some of them come from the kind of political and, kind of, media over reliance on the idea of growth and GDP, "being this is what's really important, this is what's going to achieve this good quality of life." You know, growth isn't an end in itself. If anything, it would be a means to an end. But we typically do treat it as an end in itself. So we say things like, "look, a good reason for having a healthy, well-educated population is that that will contribute to productivity, and then GDP will go up." And you think, surely having a healthy and well-educated population – that's the good thing that we want. Yeah, not, not the other way around. So there are kind of those, those issues with business as usual. And that typically comes out in, kind of, the political sphere and in manifestos. In governments, you know, as you say, it's not like the health department is thinking about GDP. Even within the Treasury, most of the money that's being allocated by the Treasury, or kind of puffed up by the Treasury, is for things like social services, you know. They're not thinking about increasing growth, they're thinking about ways in which they can kind of fiscally responsibly care for the population, but...and, you know, provide public goods. But there are these barriers that come in most political systems around the world to achieving this effectively. And I'll talk through those in a minute. But I think wellbeing approaches to government really focus on, how do we change the system so that those barriers – which are often barriers, partly in the, in the culture in the way of thinking – can be removed, so that we actually make better – not just policy decisions, but a whole range of decisions. So, you know, government has power over, you know, taxes and spending, but it also has power over legislation, it also has power over procurement, it also has power over all of the government employees, and, you know, their working conditions, and all of these different kinds of things. So, you know, some of the key guiding principles: you know, the first one is to be purpose driven. So actually, having a goal – or typically, you know, a set of goals – that we're trying to achieve. And that might sound really weird, because you think, like, obviously government is trying to achieve the wellbeing of people. But, you know, we know from, you know, the Thodey Review, from numerous kinds of reports, including work that Australia reMADE has done on the public service, that what people within the public service really want and need is to have clear values, purpose-driving values, that can align their work and actually help them in decision making, because they can say, "okay, this is actually the endpoint. This is the kind of thing that we're working to achieve across all of our work," rather than thinking of it, you know, being siloed. The Welsh model, which I'm sure we'll talk about a bit, does really, really well in outlining their goals, and specifically making them goals that government departments and public bodies have to work towards, in everything that they do. So when I talk about goals, things like having a

healthier Wales, or more prosperous Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, you know, those kinds of things, thinking about what are those different aspects, that you need to have the capacity to live your meaningful life or to have high quality of life? Another feature is thinking about the holistic nature of wellbeing. So, you know, you might think, "okay, we've got this government department, and it works on health, right. So why is it...why, why should they be doing anything differently? Why should anyone else care about health, we've already got this covered?" Well, you know, people in government are not unaware of the fact that having this really siloed nature of government does not achieve the best outcomes. So if you want to improve health outcomes, one of the things you could do, for example, is reduce air pollution around schools. The Health Department doesn't have the ability to mandate different transport policies, or you know, even things like policies on importing of high polluting cars, right. Breaking down the barriers between those silos, with departments and jurisdictions as well in Australia, which is a big problem. That is really, really tricky, but it's something that's easier, at least to conceive of why you need it, and how you can, kind of focus your attentions, if you've got this purpose driven approach, if you're thinking, "alright, what is it that we actually want to achieve?" Well, there are a whole bunch of things that make up a good life, and if any of those things are missing, then it's going to have all of these follow on impacts, right? So how can we work together to make sure that everything that we do actually contributes to all of these different areas? Another feature is prevention. So rather than saying, "okay, you know, we've got this problem, we've got huge levels of acute need. Cost is going up trying to treat them. You know, you might have high levels of, you know, crime or violence in particular areas or high levels of poor health outcomes." How do we approach that? Well, we can say, okay well, we need to immediately do something in the short-term, let's, let's increase police capacity. Let's increase police numbers on the streets. Let's increase the amount of time that people will spend in jail, for example, for particular crimes. That might show small effects in the short term, but it's actually not turning off the tap. It's not saying let's look upstream and try to prevent this crime from happening in the first place. So this is fantastic example from Scotland, from Glasgow where...and it kind of shows a bit of the Wellbeing Approach in action. So it's holistic, it's also preventative. So, in Glasgow, there's been historically very high violence levels. You know, high levels of poverty and inequality. And they had really serious problems with knife crime amongst a young male population for a long period of time, which kind of culminated in a UN report, listing Glasgow as the most dangerous place in amongst developed countries in the world. Tied into of course, intergenerational poverty, terribly low life expectancy in a range of areas, you know, really concentrated areas of violence, lack of access to jobs. And the way in which they've been trying to teach or treat it previously, was saying, "it's a law and order problem, we've just got to get more police, we just got to stop these young men from you know, going out with knives and getting involved in this violence." And they had this real turning point where they brought in an approach, which was to see knife crime as a public health problem, rather than as a law and order problem. And as a public health problem, that meant you had police, the police working with social services, working with community centres, working with health services. They had targeted programs to help these young men, who were most likely to be both the perpetrators and victims of knife crime, so that they were able to do things like get training and support to go into targeted work, housing. They had additional sports and recreation facilities. And with this approach, it was a preventative approach, and it was also a long-term approach. They knew they weren't going to see the results immediately. But over the first decade, there was an incredible drop in knife crime in Glasgow. And it's been, it's been unbelievably successful. So more than a 50% decrease in incidents of knife crime and violent crimes, incredible drop in hospital admissions. And you also get all these other, you

know, positive follow on outcomes, because you can break some of those cycles of intergenerational unemployment, you can make communities better places for everyone to live, which is obviously going to have, you know, economic, health, social benefits. And, you know, it's an expensive, very, very involved programme. But, if you take the preventative approach, then – and you understand that it's for the long-term – then you get much better wellbeing outcomes, but you also end up saving a lot of money. Which, so, it's actually, in some senses, a Wellbeing Approach to government isn't just not fluffy, but it's actually very targeted, fiscally responsible, kind of economically responsible government management, where once you know what it is that you want to achieve, it can provide you with some of the kinds of guidelines and targets that allow you to actually achieve that.

Lily Spencer 18:06

A few things struck me in what you just said about, you know, that one, instead of spending a lot of money building new prisons, we're spending money building better communities that we can all enjoy, and that are just nicer places for everyone to live. And two, you know, it was a 10 year return on investment, when they started to see the, you know, the numbers really go down and what government has the courage to say, "okay, I know we're up for re-election in, you know, three years, but we're gonna we're gonna put a plan into place here for the next decade and beyond, and we're gonna watch the fruits of that labour come to life, like that's quite courageous."

Cressida Gaukroger 18:42

Yeah, it really is. And I think it's, you know, some of that is going to be trial and error, because there is also, there are risks associated, it could be that you don't achieve what you hope to achieve. And it also could be that you will have to potentially redirect some funding from acute service responses, which means that people are going to feel left out, or people are going to feel overlooked. And so, politically, it's tricky on many levels. So it's tricky, because the outcomes that you see are not going to happen within the election cycle that you make a promise in. And we see this in New Zealand. So New Zealand has had long-term wellbeing goals, where some of the criticism that the Ardern government received in relation to those was that you weren't really seeing the dial changing, even though there were budget priorities. So goals on reducing child poverty, for example. And we're actually seeing very, very small shifts now, which is still, you know, if you think about the number of people whose lives are affected by even a small shift, and the positive follow on effects, you know, this is a great thing. But politically, that's, that's quite tricky. There are kind of easier entry points. So there are programs that are very, very cheap, or even free, that are preventative that are, you know, holistic, that a wellbeing-focussed. So, in Wales, for example, they had a program where they got young people who were particularly at high risk of truancy in school, to go regularly to visit an aged care home in the area and engage with the older people there. And, you know, it didn't cost any money to do this. And then you ended up seeing – actually in quite a short period of time – these amazing results. So these children were...their truancy and kind of reports for behavioural issues went down in the kids who were participating in this. It had a really positive impact on them. We also saw certain positive increases for the residents of aged care homes, so there was a 50% reduction in use of antipsychotics within aged care residents. In Australia, I know there's a similar one in Seymour in where, you know, young people who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds or challenging backgrounds are being paired up with aged care homes. And one of the things that they've seen, kind of anecdotally, is, you know, a number of these young men who may be at higher risk of being unemployed later on, want to go and work in

the aged care sector after having participated in this program So you get these easy wins, you get these things where they're no brainers, but you need systems that that foster that, that share that knowledge, that encourage that kind of innovation and experimentation. But also, we have some systems, or some kind of tools, that are beginning to feed back future savings from these preventative approaches. Though, I don't think enough. So, in Victoria, the Victorian Treasury has this fund called the Early Intervention Investment Fund. The Early Intervention Investment Fund is an extra pot of money. So it's not tied to different departments budgets. And it's a pot of money, which any department can apply to. You can apply collaboratively. And the idea is, it's only for policy initiatives and programs, which take a preventative or early intervention lens, such that you will see a reduction in the need for future costs. So you might say, "okay, look, if we get this amount of money to have this social intervention scheme, you're going to see a reduction in need for prison places and, you know, policing or something, so those costs are going to reduce in the long term." And so this one says, "okay, give us your policy proposals, and then all you have to do is fill out this extra spreadsheet." So on one side, you say, "what are the positive outcomes that are going to happen within the next – I think – 4 to 10 years, something like that." And then on the other side, you say, "and what are the savings that we are going to get from those positive outcomes." And the Treasury has run this very, very well. So they work incredibly closely with this department to fill in that second bit. Forecasting savings based on prevention is really, really difficult. But what the Treasury found was, they've got to do it anyway, because they've got to assess whether or not the numbers that have been presented are correct. So if they're going to do it anyway, maybe they can kind of do it for you, right. So they want to build up the capacity in these departments to be able to do it themselves to a certain extent. So the savings then get banked back into that fund. So each year that fund grows off the back of the projected savings that come from the programs that it's sponsoring. And it's, it's a very, very clever way of addressing this. And I think that the...there's a kind of untapped political value in increasing our capacity and models to work out how much we actually save. And maybe then, you know, when you do the budget, you couldn't just say, "oh, well, this service costs us this amount of money." You might say, "this service cost this amount of money right now. But actually, in the long term, it's going to save this amount of money."

Lily Spencer 24:34

And not only that, but we have all of the wellbeing dividends. We have the better society, we have the moral reason to be doing better. Yeah, we can. Yeah, that's really clever. So it's Treasury working with these different departments to help them try to forecast what they're going to say, and then that grows the pile of money for everybody. And I imagine it's quite a coup internally, right, like to be able to say to your team or your boss or the other like "look, look what we did, you know." That's, yeah, that's awesome. So we've got purpose-driven, holistic, preventative – are there any other key wellbeing lenses, things that factor into that?

Cressida Gaukroger 25:10

Yeah, so there's long-term as well. So you know, thinking about things that are not just going to kind of have long-term effects, but sustainable long-term effects. And then the last one, I think, is future-focused. So thinking not just long-term in terms of, you know, how long is this program going to run? When are we going to see the results? But how do we make sure that, you know, future generations aren't going to be, kind of, severely inhibited in their ability to meet their needs? I mean, it's, it's the Brundtland definition of, you know, Sustainable Development, right. That, you know, we

should meet our needs, but it shouldn't come at the expense of future generations to meet their needs. It's clever in the sense that futures thinking begins to...you know, so if you look at a person, not just at one point in time, but you know, what are their needs going to be across their whole lifespan? If we want children right now, to have a really good opportunity throughout the rest of their lives, one of the things we're gonna have to think about, for example, is we've got an ageing population. So what is it going to look like for them when they get old, and they, you know, need care, or they're no longer participating in the workforce, right? This is stuff we should probably be thinking about right now, because we've got to think about, you know, what kind of workforce would we need? What kinds of things can we put in place now, so that when people get older, they have, you know, fewer chronic health problems, that might make it harder for them to stay at home, if they want to? You see a lot of long term and potential future thinking in business. Business are actually really good at forecasting. And they're not thinking in one or two year cycles. That would be a terrible business plan. You know, they're they thinking, what, you know, what's the landscape gonna look like? What are the opportunities? What are the potential risks going on, you know, for a decade or more. And part of this, and this is why I think it's just about doing government well. I don't think anyone in government actually hates wellbeing, I think, you know, the...in government and in political parties, what people want is a system or, you know, practices that actually bring about the greatest amount of wellbeing. And, if you actually ask people, what's important to their wellbeing, the things that we say, are very, very similar. So I think, actually, we've got very similar concepts. It's just that we disagree about how to get there. And part of this wellbeing government approach is saying, actually, you know, this is a much better way of getting there, because we know where it is that we want to go. And once we've agreed on that, let's think about what's getting in the way. And, you know, how can we achieve that in a broad, sustainable, long-term way?

Lily Spencer 28:12

Hey, just wanted to say that if this conversation has got you thinking, well, we would really like to hear from you. So you can get in touch with us directly via email podcast@AustraliareMADE.org. You can also give us a call, and the details for that are in your show notes. I wanted to give a huge shout out to everyone who takes a minute to spread the word about this podcast or to write a review. It means the world us. We are a small, not-for-profit, independent team, building a community of people who want a kinder, smarter, more hopeful, and solutions-focused politics. So if that sounds like your jam, please go to the website, AustraliareMADE.org and sign up to get updates and stay in the loop and check us out. Thanks, back to the show. And I think that goes to this idea that, um, it's a point that you've made about the fact that this isn't a super political or politicised process, right, like this isn't a left versus right thing. We had a former Treasurer who kind of made fun of the idea of a wellbeing budget as being mala beads and incense, but actually, like, half the countries in the OECD have some kind of Wellbeing Framework. Many of them are conservative government run. It's not, it doesn't have to be some radically political idea. It's actually this, kind of, interesting common ground that we can build of like, "well, what matters to us? What do we actually want? What are our goals?" So what has been most inspiring to you, as you've been studying other countries and kind of, you know, how they...some of the things that they've been able to achieve? Because, I think for a lot of us, there might still be an element of – not even necessarily hardcore scepticism – but just not sure, you know, where could this actually go. You know, and how does it, how does it really change things for people on the ground? What are people really being able to achieve with this that would inspire Australia to try to follow a similar path?

Cressida Gaukroger 30:36

Yeah. And, you know, I mean, I think that's, it's a complicated question in the sense that when I first started doing this work, in the first piece of work that I was working on is this big project called Redefining Progress, where we were essentially doing a global scan of practice. First, it was going to be global scan of best practice, and then that got wound back to a global scan of practice. And, you know, it was a bit of a baptism by fire, right. So we had a huge amount of stuff that we had to get through. And, you know, when I started my job, I had an interest in this stuff, and some background in some areas. So I was a philosopher working in ethics. I'd also done kind of social research with government departments. So I knew some of the skills. But, you know, I certainly wasn't an expert on wellbeing government approaches. And I don't think that there were very many around. And so, looking at all of these other countries, there were so many opportunities, where you think "that sounds like a great idea, I'm sure that's going to make a big difference." And then sometimes you'd read it in reports, but often you get it from actually talking to people on the ground, not a lot of change. So you did get this wellbeing washing. And I think you particularly get that risk, when there's exclusive focus on measurement, which I can kind of go into more detail, but a lot of countries start just with measurement. And actually, that doesn't necessarily lead to any change in action. And there are reasons why it might not really be able to lead to that much change and action as well.

Lily Spencer 32:12

So the government says, "we're not just going to measure GDP, we're going to decide five other themes – or whatever the number is – that we're going to measure. And that's going to be included in how we..." But it doesn't actually change or drive a different set of priorities are way of working.

Cressida Gaukroger 32:26

No, typically not. And I mean, there are countries that have tried to build, build that into, for example, you know, reporting or priority setting. But typically, what happens with measurement is, a lot of countries have this measurement dashboard. So the idea is that you look at, you know, what are the different domains that are important for wellbeing and health, education, community connectedness, environment, prosperity, equality, culture – you know, there might be kind of a bunch of others – work-life balance is relatively common. And then you say, "okay, well, we're going to have a look at some indicators that tell us on how...tell us how we're doing on these things. And when I first looked at, you know, wellbeing measurement, and these terms, I didn't really understand what an indicator was. But an indicator is just that, that little piece of information where it doesn't actually say, "here are the health outcomes of all Australians right now." That's like, how do you get that much detail? They're not very detailed. So Australia had its own kind of wellbeing measurement dashboard in the early 2000s, called Measures Australia's Progress that was run by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. And that ran for over a decade. And their indicators, just to give you an example, so, you know, their headline indicator for health was life expectancy. So, so that's it. I mean, they had, you know, a couple of other indicators below it. So behavioural indicators, you know, smoking rates and obesity rates. But you know, they didn't have all of the information that you'd need to get, you know, really great and deep understanding of what health is looking like in Australia, they had a couple of pieces of information that were seen, as, you know, indicative of health outcomes, that would be easy to read and understand for the general population. And, you know, for decision makers, how do you, how do you work with that?

So how do you say, okay, life expectancy – because these indicators, they move very, very slowly. You know, even if you're doing the right things, they move slowly.

Lily Spencer 34:34

Are we getting healthier or not? Are we moving toward greater wellbeing or aren't we? How do we know?

Cressida Gaukroger 34:40

I know. And then, in addition, it's very hard to make a causal link between individual policies and these indicators, right. So in the life expectancy case, all right, well, how do we...how do we...let's say we've put in a whole bunch of different policies, and life expectancy has increased – which one of those policies was it? Or was it actually that, you know, we did have a pandemic, or we didn't have a pandemic, or, you know, that people were closer to work so they were walking more, or further away from work, so they weren't going in? So, you know, it's just very, very hard for these kinds of indicators and dashboards to give us the deep and granular data that we need to assess policy proposals or how well policies have succeeded. And, you know, and to a certain extent, to work out policy priorities. Because they're only giving you...the, they don't purport to do anything more than give you a snapshot of how things are doing. And a snapshot, you know, you're only aiming the camera in one direction – it's going to miss a lot. So I think that they're actually really valuable in terms of public communication tools. And, you know, the way in which the media talks about this stuff, the way in which the public thinks about this stuff is really important for the way in which, you know, politicians engage, the way in which they develop manifestos, the, you know, what they sell, or what they draw on. And, you know, keeping focused on things that are really important, for example. But, that kind of measurement and dashboard, we shouldn't imagine, as I did when I was first doing the research, that they were going to they were going to be the answer. That they were actually going to be a good way of changing products within government.

Lily Spencer 36:18

Yep, so measuring is not enough, especially because it's so hard to actually get measurements that we can directly use to guide us. I know I've asked you these big meaty questions, and probably haven't even given you the proper space to sort of unpack, you know, that last one there. But I'm curious, I really want to make sure we don't run out of time to talk about Wales, because I know that they have been such a shining light of what is possible, and that you have spent a lot of time, most recently with the outgoing Commissioner from Wales, for Future Generations, which is in and of itself, just a phenomenally cool job title. But, you know, that you spend a lot of time with her when she was out recently in Australia visiting and gave the fabulous John Menadue oration for the Centre for Policy Development, which we'll link to in the show notes so everyone can watch it. But, Wales really has shown a model of this that I think is so much more transformative and ambitious, than it seems like, you know, would be possible. And particularly, when you talk at that very start about being purpose driven. And you think, "well, who gets to decide that? Who gets to decide our goals? Who gets to decide our vision? How does that happen? Do we just pick things that we assume everybody kind of agrees with? Or do we actually go out and talk to people?" So, can you talk us through just a little bit of what Wales has done and how it's, kind of, been so effective?

Cressida Gaukroger 37:36

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, I was nodding furiously, as you're saying all of this. And, you know, sometimes I find it almost difficult, because when you say, "what are you excited about?" And it's really, you know, we've seen a couple of good things in different places. But the practice in Wales, from kind of beginning to end, is so exciting, that it's hard not to just get stuck on talking about it.

Lily Spencer 38:00

Let's just praise Wales, that's fine.

Cressida Gaukroger 38:04

Let's do it. In Wales, every single public body, from government ministers to departments, but down to other public bodies that fall under the jurisdiction of Wales – so sports organisations, national parks, hospitals – must work towards the seven Welsh Wellbeing Goals in everything that they do. So they must work towards them, as in it's required of them, it's not just a nice thing to do. They must work towards all of them. So if you think now about you know, okay, we've got a health department who, you know, can't just now think about health outcomes, but they've got to think about sustainability health outcomes, for example. We know that the health sector is a very, very high emitter of carbon internationally. They've also got to think about, you know, community connectedness, for example, or social cohesion, or equality. You know, how is equality represented in the way in which they're treating people, but also, you know, the people who they're employing? So, you've got to work towards all of them, and everything that you do – which is quite amazing. So this just, this isn't just about policy decision making, and obviously, if you're including, you know, national parks and sports bodies and things, they don't make policies, right. But also about procurement. And that's had a huge follow on effect. So obviously, if the government is thinking about meeting all seven of its wellbeing goals in every, you know, procurement...whats it called...expression of interest that it puts out there, then all of the, you know, huge power that you have in terms of getting private businesses to act in value-driven way, value-driven ways, really comes to force, because the government is a huge procure of goods and services, right? So we saw the Treasurer in a recent piece – the Australian Treasurer, Jim Chalmers, in a recent piece that he wrote in the Monthly Magazine, talking about values-based capitalism. And you know, one way of government and business working together towards shared values is to say, "okay, well, government is going to work towards that...businesses...will work with businesses in ways that are specifically underpinned by the values that we want to pursue. So that's kind of the basis of the legislation. And then there are a couple of other cool things. So one thing that's really, really important is how do you make sure that the values that you have – that these seven Wellbeing Goals – are going to stand the test of time in terms of, you know, potential political change, which is actually less likely in Wales. So in Wales, the Labor Government has never been out of power since the first Parliament in 1999. Or, you know, they've shared power, but, but you know, very, very important for places like Australia.

Lily Spencer 41:08

I'm sure Albanese and Chalmers would happily take that.

Cressida Gaukroger 41:12

Exactly. So, you know, how do you make sure that they stand the test of time? How do you make sure that you've also got public buy-in. So sometimes, you can give be giving the public great things immediately. Sometimes, you are going to ask the public to wait or to do things that might feel hard in the short-term, but have great outcomes in the long-term. So, for example, the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner, as part of her role, objected to a large stretch of road being built on a basis of sustainability grounds, but also on the basis of the fact that the huge amount of money that was going to be spent on this – so I think it was two thirds of their transport budget – could be much better spent improving all of the other wellbeing outcomes by, you know, focusing on public transport, on active transport. And also, you know, the people...equality outcomes, because the people who are most likely to be underserved by active and public transport, are also least likely to own a car, are also most likely to be in the lowest socio economic band, right. But getting up a road – or actually now there's a moratorium on new roads being built in Wales, right? That's something where you have to have a lot of trust in the government and in the process, and you've got to...they have to have the capacity to clearly and compellingly explain to you why it is that they're doing something. And you have to be convinced and believe that, or else it's going to be very politically hard to get, get those kinds of things through that are really very important, necessary things.

Lily Spencer 42:59

And you can imagine an opposition going, "look at this traffic, this is ridiculous." The people who are struggling with will say, "well, hang on our infrastructure isn't currently fit for purpose. We do need better solutions, we do need more investment. You're telling me no new road, but we're gonna switch to better public transport and how long will that take?" I just, for anyone who doesn't know, you know, the ins and outs of Wales and it's seven Wellbeing Goals, I just thought I'd very quickly read them. So it's a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, more equal, a Wales of cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and a globally responsible Wales. How did they get to that vision, like, who decided that?

Cressida Gaukroger 43:40

Yeah, and this is part of, you know, the longevity picture. It's also part of, it's part of the legitimacy picture. So Wales did a really big, what they called a National Conversation, around the question, "what is the Wales that we want to leave behind for our grandchildren and future generations?" And the government, you know, supported this, so kind of signed up to act on the data, the results from this National Conversation – to a certain extent – but it was largely run by an independent organisation that joined up with hundreds of different organisations around Wales. So, the Young Farmer's Organisation and the, you know, Women's Organisation, schools – so children were directly involved. And using all of these different mixed method responses. So, you know, getting kids to submit postcards or pictures of the future Wales that they want, having kitchen table discussions, having public forums, you know, having online surveys, all the different kinds of things, championed by certain, kind of, heroes with public profiles, but also community heroes. I think it was a bit over 10,000 people participated in this, the Wales We Want National Conversation. And out of this – so looking at the findings from this, and also looking at the Sustainable Development Goals – they developed these seven Welsh Wellbeing Goals. And I guess, that's, you know, that's the first part of what is very, very exciting about the Welsh model. So the Welsh model works really well. In terms of, I mean it took many years for there to be enough cultural change that it did work in the way that it does. But it works really well, in terms of how it

has influenced policy decision making. So fewer decisions that might be good in the long-term, but actually bad in the...so, you know, good in the short-term, but actually bad in the long-term, seem to be being made. And lots of ways in which, you know, innovation, so that you can join up all of these good, good, different components that you could draw upon, are kind of really happening. So, you know, they made...it was a manifesto commitment to build, it was 3,000, 30,000, – something like that – 20,000. Anyway, a large number of new social homes in Wales. And after this was made, the Future Generations Commissioner, Sophie Howe, said, "okay, so now we have to think about how to do that in a way which ticks all the wellbeing boxes." So, you know, we think about sustainability, we've got to make sure that these are low carbon homes that are well insulated, using green energy. Thinking about, you know, making sure that they're fit for the future, so we don't have to come in and retrofit them. Which means, we know that we've got an ageing population, they should be fit for an ageing population. Thinking about the workforce that's going to build these homes, you know, we should be...we want a prosperous Wales, we want a Wales where people are able to engage in meaningful work, and, you know, well paid work. So building these homes is going to be that kind of meaningful, well paid work, have we actually got...are we training people already? Because we know that this work is coming? And also who should we be training? So taking an equality lens. Are there ways in which we can target people who are on the outskirts of the employment system, or people who are kind of marginalised within those particular employment areas? So those kinds of, very clever, you know, pragmatic lenses on decision making happens very regularly. But how you get the mandate to do that has to come from that widespread national engagement. And people loved participating in that. I mean, people can sometimes get a bit of consultation fatigue, but, typically in consultation, you are told, "we are going to summarise – you know, we are going to do this thing. You know, you can complain about it if you like, but we've done our job." But often it's, "do you want this thing – yes or no, right? People might not have particular views on it, or they might feel very strongly one way or another and not feel like they're going to be listened to. Whereas the National Conversation educated people and it kind of unified people, and it asked them something which everybody has a view on, and everybody is excited about, you know, what, what do you want to leave behind? What's what's the kind of future that you want? I mean, that's, that's an incredibly optimistic framing, and it's one that, I think, can enable governments to really be ambitious in what it is that they're trying to achieve. So yeah, in terms of the Welsh model – like, step one, would be to have a national conversation, and to make sure that it's focused on these goals, this purpose, that can then be embedded into government decision making. And we know that it works, right. So it's worked in Wales, and sometimes people say, "well, Wales is 3 million people, you know, Australia is a lot bigger." But that's not the kind of thing that doesn't scale. Asking people like...it might be that, you know, if we say, "okay, everybody has to have a potato or something...we have so many people, it's going to be so many potatoes, right?" Asking everybody, "what, you know, what's the Australia you want to live in? What's Australia, you'd be proud to be part of, you know, what's your vision for a future Australia?" That's, that's something that you can scale. And it's something where I it's very unifying way of approaching that. So I feel very excited, you know, Sophie's visit...so I should say, her, her role...and that's the other great thing about the legislation is it created this office, the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner. So it's an independent office, where her role is to essentially support, but also make sure that all of these public bodies are working towards wellbeing goals in good faith in everything that they're doing. Her office has a number of people, and so I think it's 30 people or something like that work there. So they've got research capacities, they've got, they've produced like a amazing range of case studies on their website. So you might think, "I'm not sure how

to go about doing this." You can go and look at the case studies. If a, say department or public body doesn't look like they're working towards their goals, then that office can do an audit and make recommendations. And they have to comply or justify. So they, the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner can't force anyone to do anything. But putting the effort into justifying why you're not doing something is a very good motivator to change your practice, right. But in addition, it's it's really supporting them. So the recommendations are supposed to be helpful, clear steps that you can take to actually achieve these goals. And then in addition to seven Wellbeing Goals, and, you know, all of this – because the other thing that makes us work really well, if you want to embed it in culture, is clarity. So you think about, you know, the Early Intervention Investment Fund that I mentioned before, in the Victorian Treasury, it could have died within the first couple of years, if everybody thought, "well, I just don't know how to fill out the form. I don't know what models I use to predict those future savings, so I'm just not going to participate. Be nice to get the extra money, but it's not worth all the extra hassle." Yeah, so you've got to, you've got to really support people, people want to do the right thing. But if you don't know what the right thing to do, is, if it's not clear...

Lily Spencer 51:38

Yeah, particularly if you try to do it differently and experiment and do it. Yeah, in a way it hasn't been done before, by definition, that is going to be scary and hard.

Cressida Gaukroger 51:47

Exactly. But, so the amazing thing is that the legislation also sets out these five ways of working. So the, kind of, ways in which you should be working towards these Wellbeing Goals and everything that you do. And I'm going to read them out, and they're going to sound pretty familiar. So, long-term: you've got to be thinking of balancing short-term needs with a need to safeguard the ability to meet long-term needs. Prevention: so deploying resources to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse, rather than just parking, you know, your ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Integration: so considering how your wellbeing objectives are going to impact upon one another, but also, how they're going to impact on the wellbeing objectives of other public bodies. So am I, am I supporting other pilot public bodies and trying to meet these well being goals or is what I'm going to do, actually taking away their ability to work towards these goals? Collaboration: so collaborating with any other people who could assist the body in meeting its wellbeing objectives. And involvement: so involving people who have an interest in achieving these goals, and particularly those who are going to be most affected by those decisions. So those are, I mean, maybe I forgot to include involvement. But those are essentially the characteristics of a Wellbeing Approach that I highlighted at the beginning of our discussion.

Lily Spencer 53:13

Yeah, uncanny.

Cressida Gaukroger 53:15

I know, it's funny, because we came up with those through looking at all of these different Wellbeing Approaches globally, and it was only in like, revising the report where I realised that they were so similar to these milestones. Because they're common sense, in a sense. And so there is this guidance in how to achieve this goal that seems, seems fluffy, but it's actually not. It seems, you know,

economically irresponsible, but actually, it's not. It's, it can be way more responsible. It seems kind of overwhelmingly ambitious, but actually, it's achievable.

Lily Spencer 53:56

I think that's the one that I get stuck on, it's just like, wow, where do you start? Yeah, yeah.

Cressida Gaukroger 54:01

Yep. And I think, you know, I mean, this is like...I could talk about the Welsh model all day long. But...

Lily Spencer 54:07

I know, and sadly we're running out of time.

Cressida Gaukroger 54:10

I know. What I'll say is, during Sophie's visit to Australia, I went from being a somebody who would love to have seen a national conversation, but just didn't really feel like, you know...maybe we could integrate a couple of these different tools into government decision making, right, you know, like, like the Early Intervention Investment Framework, which I think is fantastic. Or, you know, maybe like Wellbeing Impact Assessments or something like that, but that was the most that we could hope for. And Sophie gave 40 or more than 40 different public events, meetings. You know, had connections with all different people from civil society to MPs to members of Government, to, you know, just people from, you know, such a different way range of bodies, and the, the enthusiasm, the excitement, the optimism that I saw from pretty much every single one of these people made me think, actually, I think this is something that we could do. And I think we have, you know, the organisations that we've talked to, the people who we've talked to, you know, they are on the edges of their seats, ready to jump in, and help support run this in the way that, you know, those NGOs and other bodies help support...

Lily Spencer 55:34

...and my own organisation, as you know, did a very, like...we have done a version of this, right, of going out and talking to people from very different backgrounds and quality, you know, places and walks of life and saying, "What is the Australia that you want? What is the country that you dream of?" And people cry, like, it is such a beautiful thing to be asked and to be asked in a way that you're not just thinking about, you know, "hey, politician, x, if you want my vote what are you going to do for me?" But like, what do we want to create, for, you know, our future and our legacy and for the kind of country and society that we want to live in? So I'm 1,000% that I think that it could absolutely be a really positive, practical, but also ambitious – like, it's this interesting paradox that like, it's so practical, and it's so common sense on the one hand, and it seems so radically ambitious on the other, that we're all a bit sceptical as to how it can really work. But it can like it's a pretty cool model.

Cressida Gaukroger 56:33

Yeah, I mean, I think so, so my, my background is, as a philosopher, as I said. And like, the ethicist in me loves the idea of making the world a better place. But, you know, the person who's just done problem solving and logic says, "it's just really good sense." There's...it's part of what I love so much about this, is identifying ways in which it's, it's a no brainer, it's just an absolute no brainer. And like, what an incredible gift to politicians to know what it is that people actually want, rather than making

assumptions. And people getting cross or saying, "you know, look, isn't this really important, but we can't sell it to the public?" Maybe you can sell it to the public when the public knows that's actually what everybody wants and dreams about.

Lily Spencer 57:16

And isn't it better than just having the same arguments every year, over and over again, about debt and deficit and GDP? And is the economy growing or shrinking? And "oh my God, if it shrinks the sky is going to fall in, and what are we going to do, and how we're going to pay for all the things that we need?" And yeah, it's so much more inspiring. But, what do you reckon? How optimistic are you about Australia? Do you think we could actually get something like this happening?

Cressida Gaukroger 57:39

Yeah, I mean, I think, I think the challenge is to get the supportive government to agree to, you know, look at an act on the findings of a national conversation. That's...and I don't think, I don't know how big a challenge that is, or actually, maybe that's something that would be easy to achieve. Like, let's see, that's actually something that we're going to be thinking about and talking with people about, I think, in terms of the logistics of how you get it off the ground. Well, on the one hand, we've got, you know, these incredible international models and experiences. I'm going to be in Wales in two weeks and talking to the group that actually ran the National Conversation in Wales. But, you know, on the other hand, we've got incredible organisations like Australia reMADE, like the Australian Council of Social Services, Victorian Councils of Social Services, who've done already, essentially, a version of this National Conversation, and we've got these incredible skills and resources and desire to work together. Like, I honestly think, you know, there's going to be a moment where we just, we – I don't want to say, pull the trigger, that's a horrible kind of mental image...

Lily Spencer 58:57

Not a good wellbeing image.

Cressida Gaukroger 58:59

Or whatever it is, a horn that says, "you know, this is the time." And I really think, you know...and I think we need to be mindful of giving the Voice Referendum it's space. And, but, you know, after that, yeah, I, I mean, I am a bit of an optimist.

Lily Spencer 59:21

No.

Cressida Gaukroger 59:22

But I'm not a deluded optimist.

Lily Spencer 59:23

Yep, yep.

Cressida Gaukroger 59:26

And I think it's really achievable. And I, you know, and this is...I've come to this, you know, point of view very recently, because of the evidence in front of my own eyes, which is, this is, you know – it's a complicated model, in some respects – but it's one that makes sense to everybody. And it's actually really clear, you can see these fantastic results. And we know that, you know, the public service, that the government, they, they want to do things better. They want to have, have a bit more purpose and vision. There's a real anxiety – because these are and have to be apolitical bodies, right. So it's not just that we don't want them saying, "let's come up with, you know, these wellbeing goals." They don't want to come up with, you know, wellbeing goals or purpose, to a certain extent. And there is going to be some, you know, potential resistance, if they try and do it all on their own, because they have the remit to be apolitical – kind of an important remit. But it's not political, to ask people, what matters to them. And then to say, "okay, well, we work for the people, we work, you know, for I, you know...or our purpose is to improve the well being of these people. And now we know what this means, because they've told us." So it should be really, really empowering. And I just don't know how you couldn't get excited.

Lily Spencer 1:00:55

Oh, look, you've got me excited. I'm there, I'm with you. I think it's a fabulous idea. And I think it holds a lot of promise and potential. And, as you say, there's some really interesting conditions within the public service and way beyond that show that maybe the time is really right for this. Cressida, I'm so sorry, I have to say goodbye now. I could just keep talking to you for like another three hours. But it has been such a delight. And I really appreciate you coming on and sharing your expertise. You know, you're an expert in this at a global level. And, you know, particularly have obviously done a really good deep dive into what they've achieved over in Wales, and how inspiring that can really be for all of us. So thank you so much.

Cressida Gaukroger 1:01:32

Thank you so much for having me. It's a lot of fun to talk about this stuff, we'll have to do it again soon.

Lily Spencer 1:01:36

So all right, thank you.

Cressida Gaukroger 1:01:39

Thanks a lot.

Lily Spencer 1:02:02

Wouldn't that be amazing to get something like that happening in Australia? A national conversation, that was truly led by the community, for the community. People talking to each other, in their sporting clubs, in their neighbourhoods, in their schools – imagine school children getting to have conversations about the Australia they want. And imagine all of that genuinely feeding back into a process that government listened to and used to develop a set of long-term future-focused, holistic goals for us as a society. I just think it's a really cool idea. And, if you want to learn more about kind of any of this stuff, or if you're already into the kind of wellbeing space, and you want to go along to something pretty exciting, there's actually a global forum coming up in Iceland. I really want to go! It's in June, but you can attend online if you can't get there in person. So I'll link to that in your show notes. I'll link to an article that

we've written in Australia reMADE about Sophie Howe's visit and how incredible we found it, as well as the Welsh Government website, the Centre for Policy Development's work on this. There's a lot of inspiration here. Thank you so much for listening. We are actually going to have Sophie herself on the podcast in a couple of months. So look out for that one. I'm so looking forward to it when she's back in Australia. And our next guest is none other than the incredible wellbeing economist and one of the global leaders in this space of wellbeing economics, Dr. Katherine Trebek. She'll be on the show next time. Thanks for listening.