

Country Towns and Happiness: What is the connection?

Robert A. Cummins

Australian Centre on Quality of Life
Deakin University

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol>

Speakers' Briefing Paper

Conference Theme and Objective

- to 'look over the horizon'
- to examine emerging global trends
 - and -----social issues
- crucial to the future development of the South West.



Bunbury City Council

Mayor's Report 2008-09

- “The Premier, in particular, has said several times Bunbury cannot **achieve its destiny as the second city of WA** – without amalgamation. “

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“A uniquely Western Australian international port city linked into the global economy, Bunbury will strive to become a sustainable community, **offering a high quality of life----**”

Quality of Life

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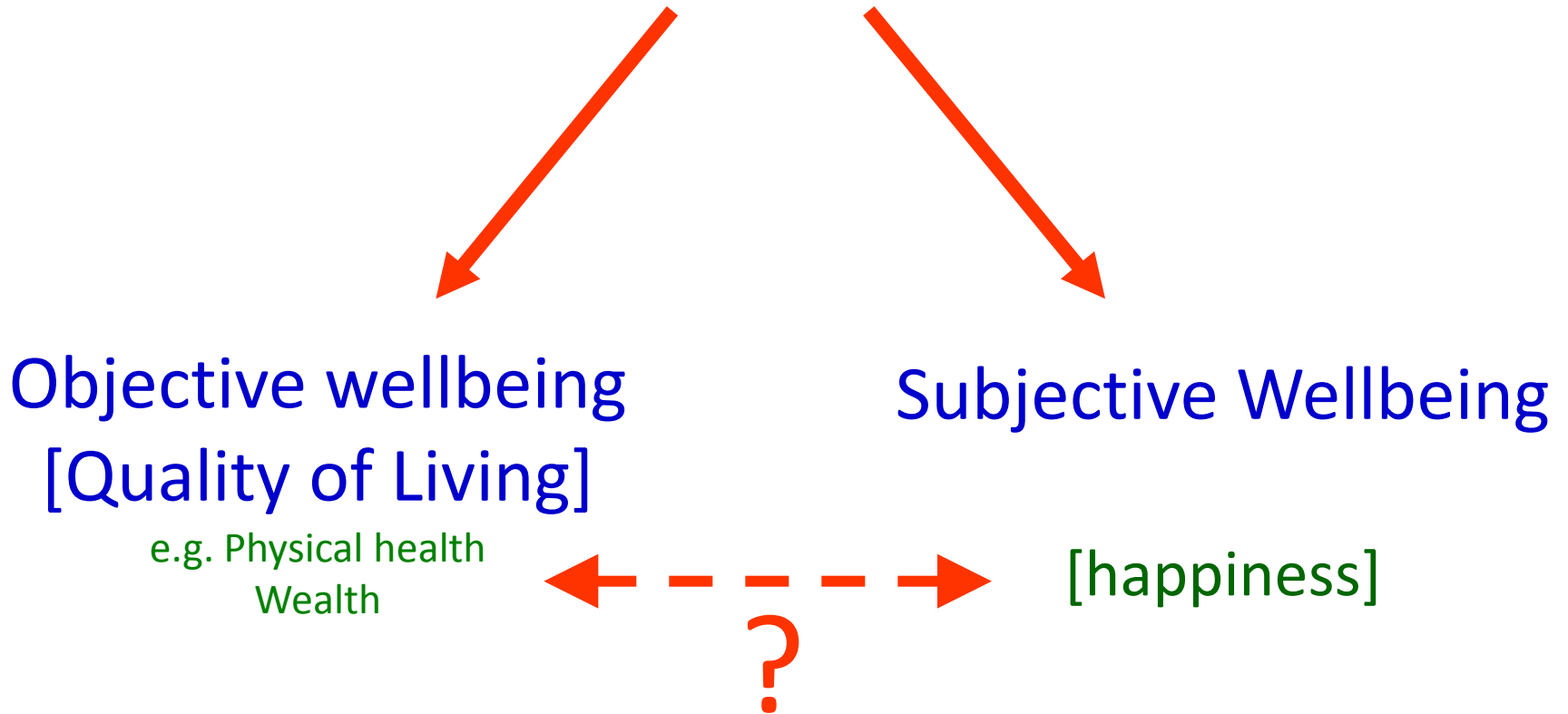
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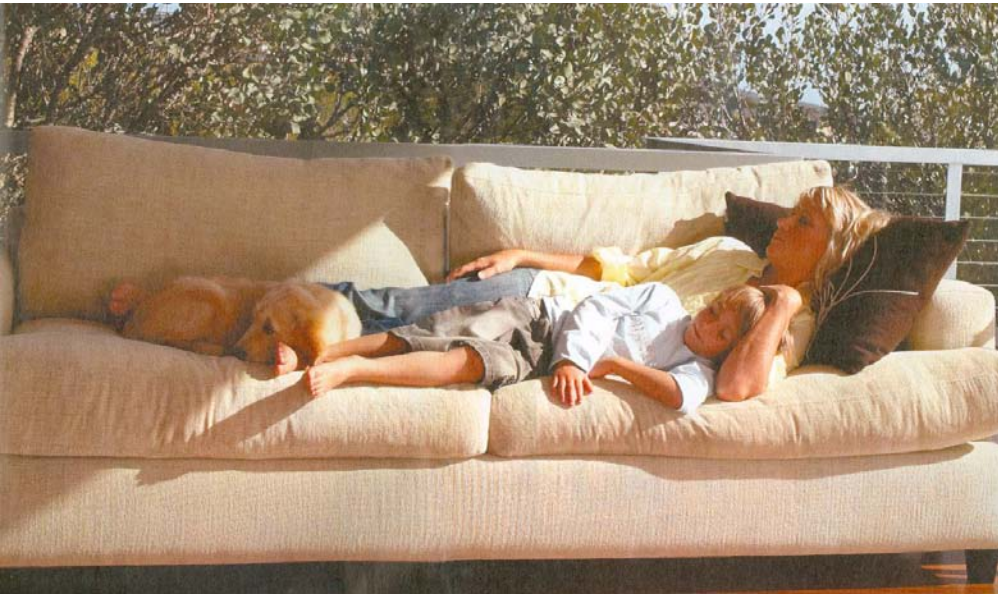
Quality of Life





Feelings of 'wellbeing'
come in two varieties

Short-term 'emotional' happiness
An emotional response to something nice



Long-term 'mood' happiness
A mood with a genetic basis

Subjective wellbeing
[Contentment]

Why is subjective wellbeing so important?

**Positive emotions build a range of
personal resources as:**

Physical resources (health, longevity)

Social resources (friendliness, social capital)

Intellectual resources (intellectual curiosity, expert knowledge,)

Psychological resources (resilience, optimism, creativity)

Personal Wellbeing Index

How satisfied are you with your-----?

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achieving in life
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community connectedness
- Future security
- Spirituality/Religion

Average = Mood
happiness

In 2000 we linked with our industry partner, Australian Unity

Purpose: to create a quarterly index of subjective wellbeing for the Australian population.

As an alternative to the traditional economic indicators such as GDP

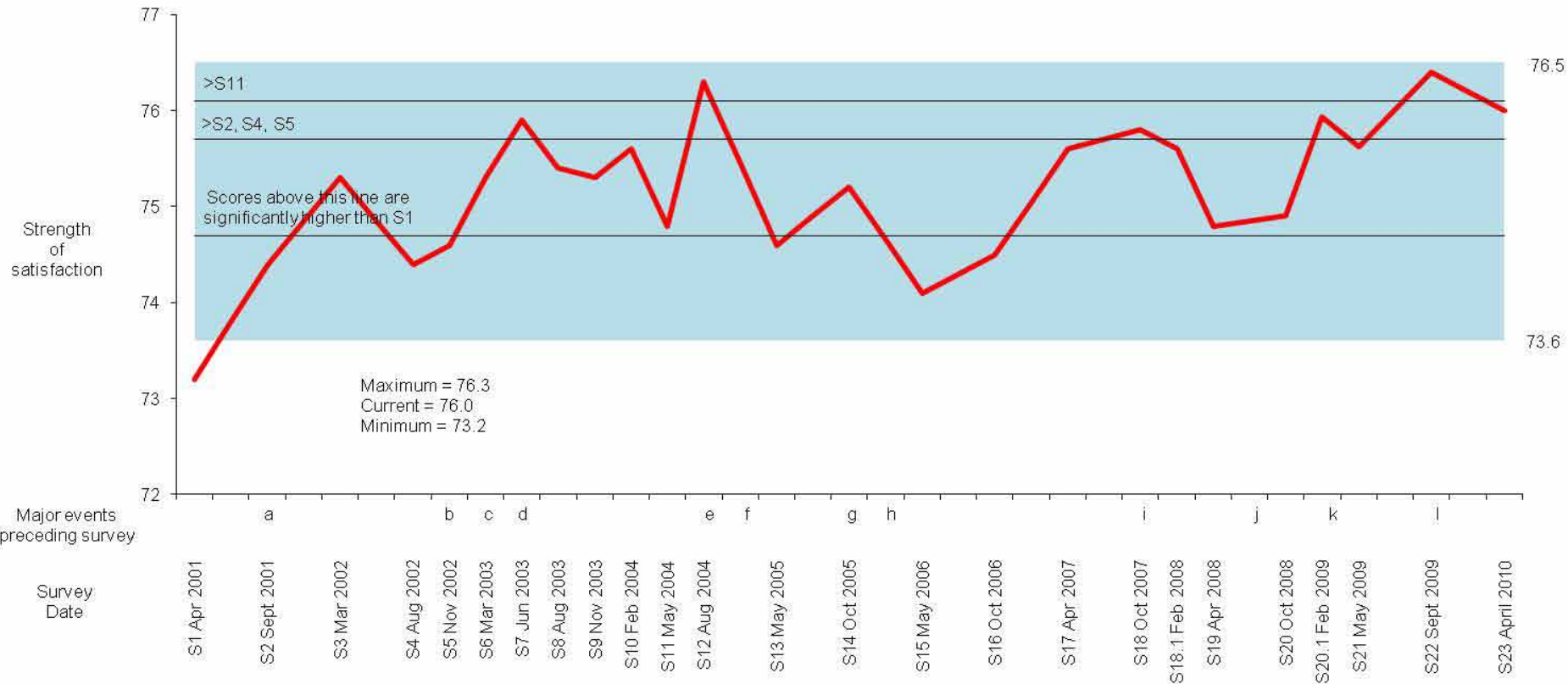
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- **Geographically representative sample**
 - N = 2,000
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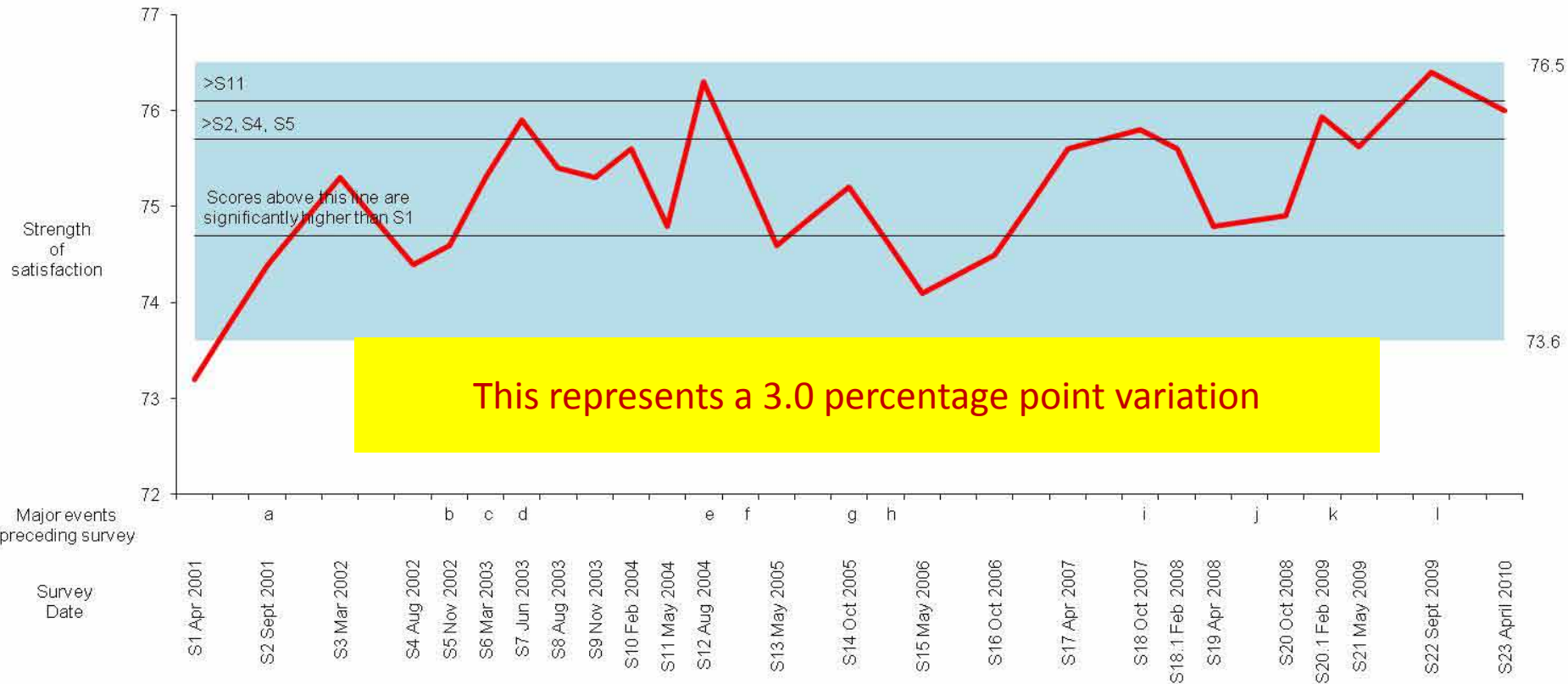
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Personal Wellbeing Index 2001 - 2009



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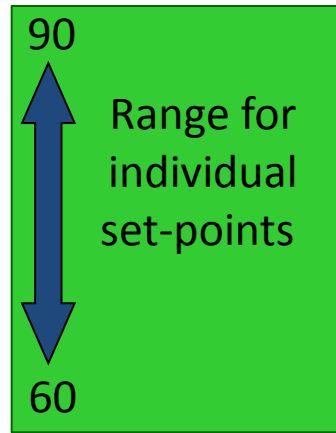


Why is subjective wellbeing held so steady?

- **Homeostasis**
- Just like we hold body temperature steady
- **Subjective wellbeing homeostasis**

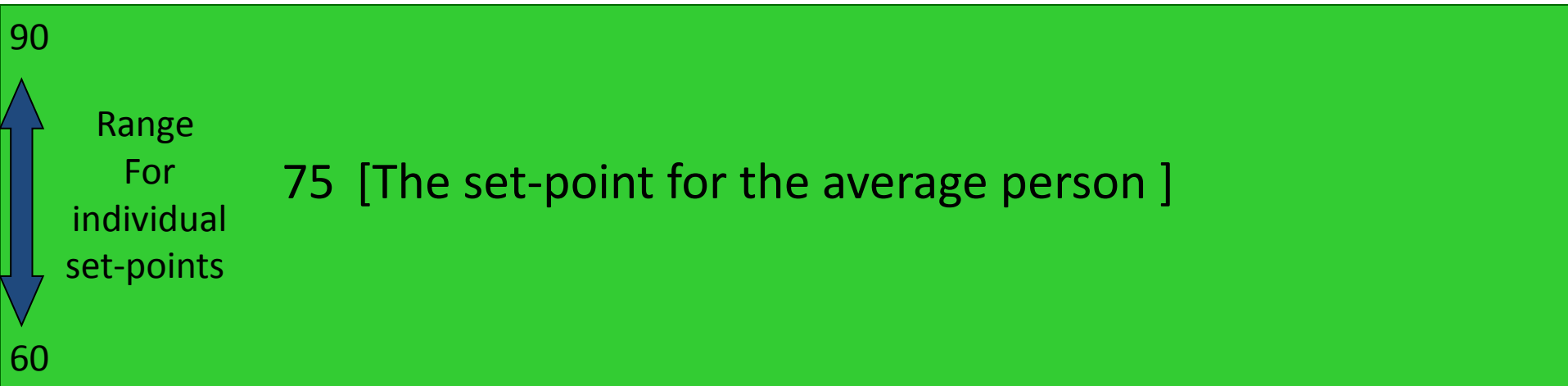
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These set-points
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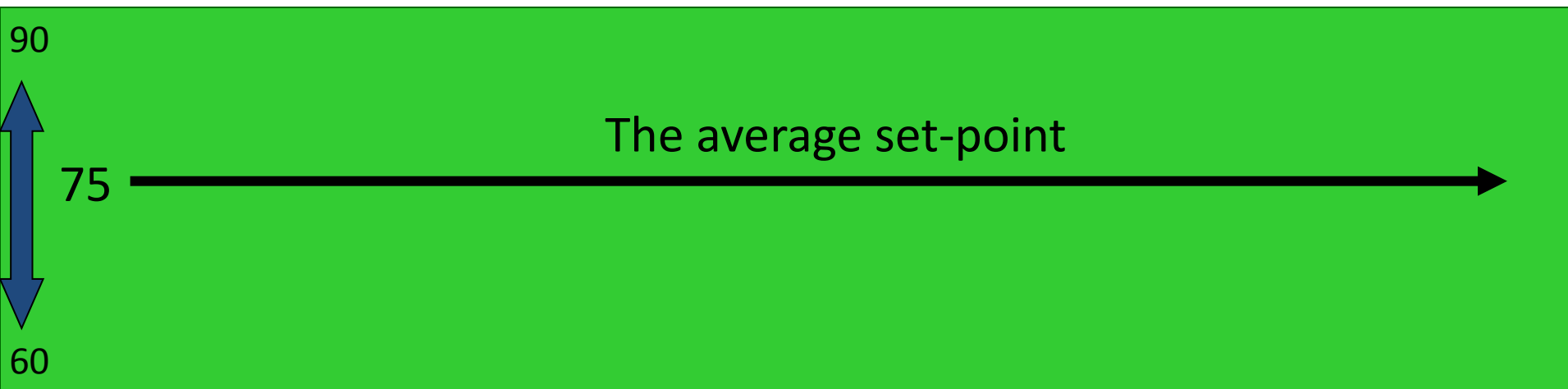


Set-points are always POSITIVE
ie above 50

The average set-point is 75.



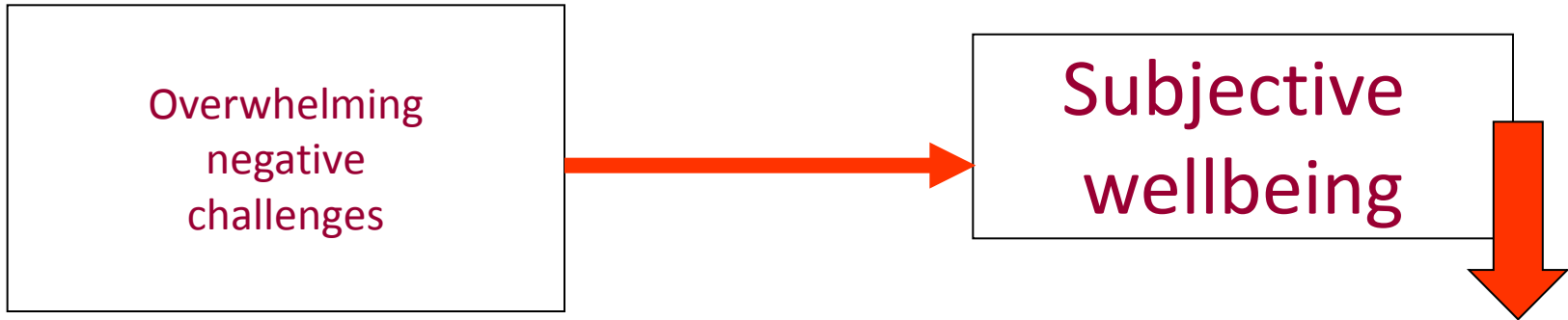
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→ When nothing much is happening to them, people rate how they feel about their life in terms of their set-point for SWB

Time

Homeostasis can fail

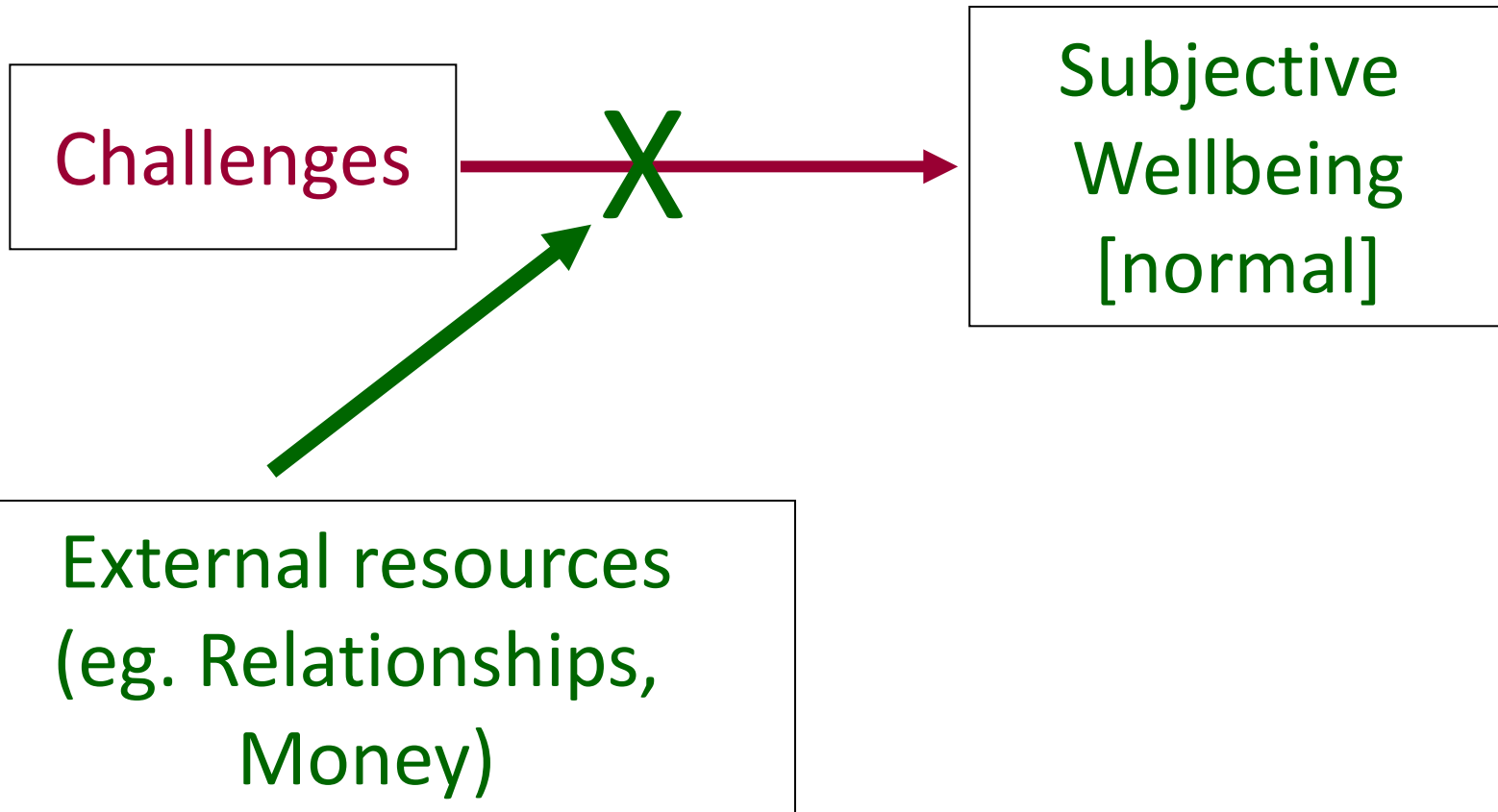


- The result of subjective wellbeing loss is **depression**

What determines whether we can defend ourselves against homeostatic defeat?

- **Resilience**
- It is the power to defend wellbeing against sources of threat, such as poverty or loneliness
- It is a balance between personal resources and the level of challenge

Subjective wellbeing constantly under challenge, but is well protected



The most protective External Resources

A close relationship

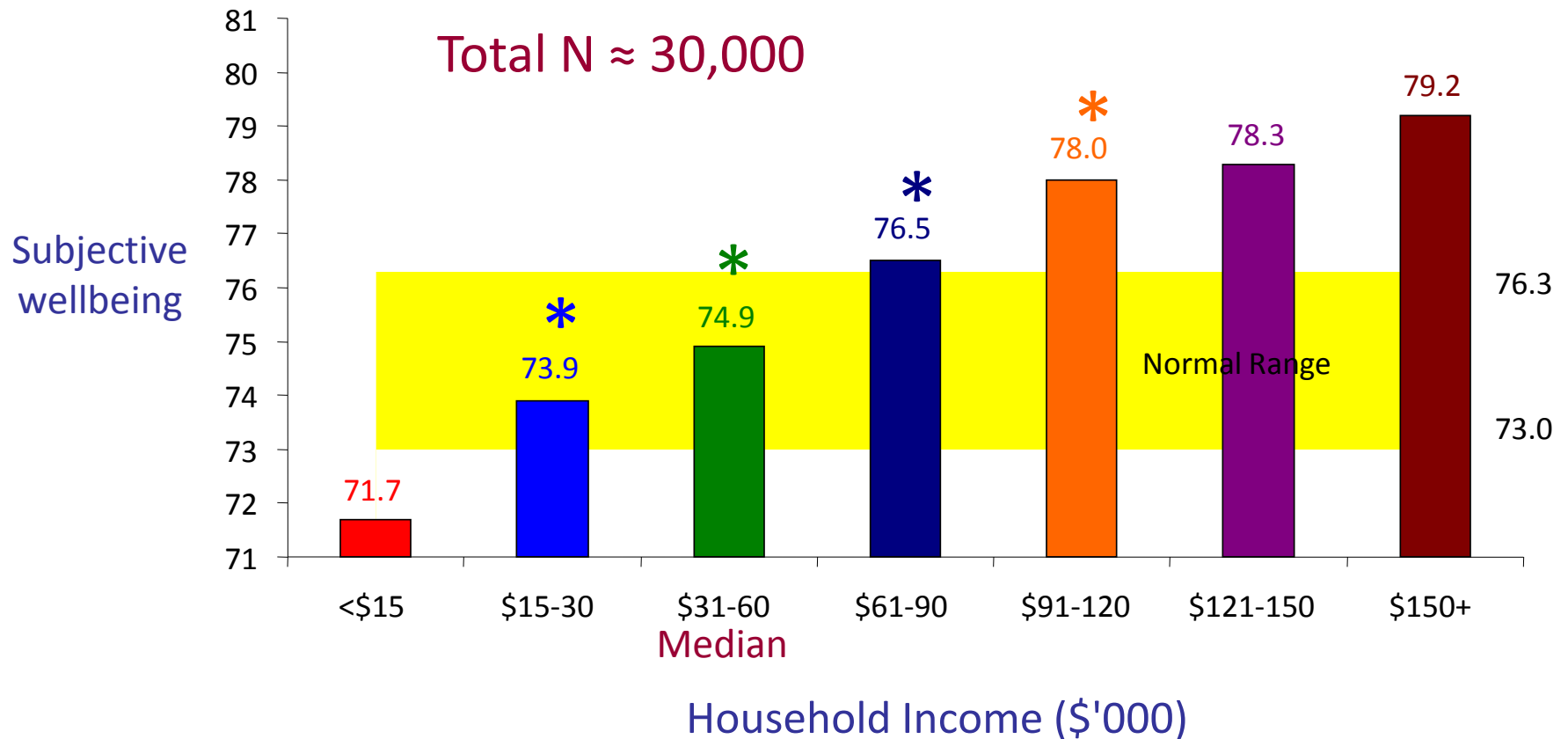




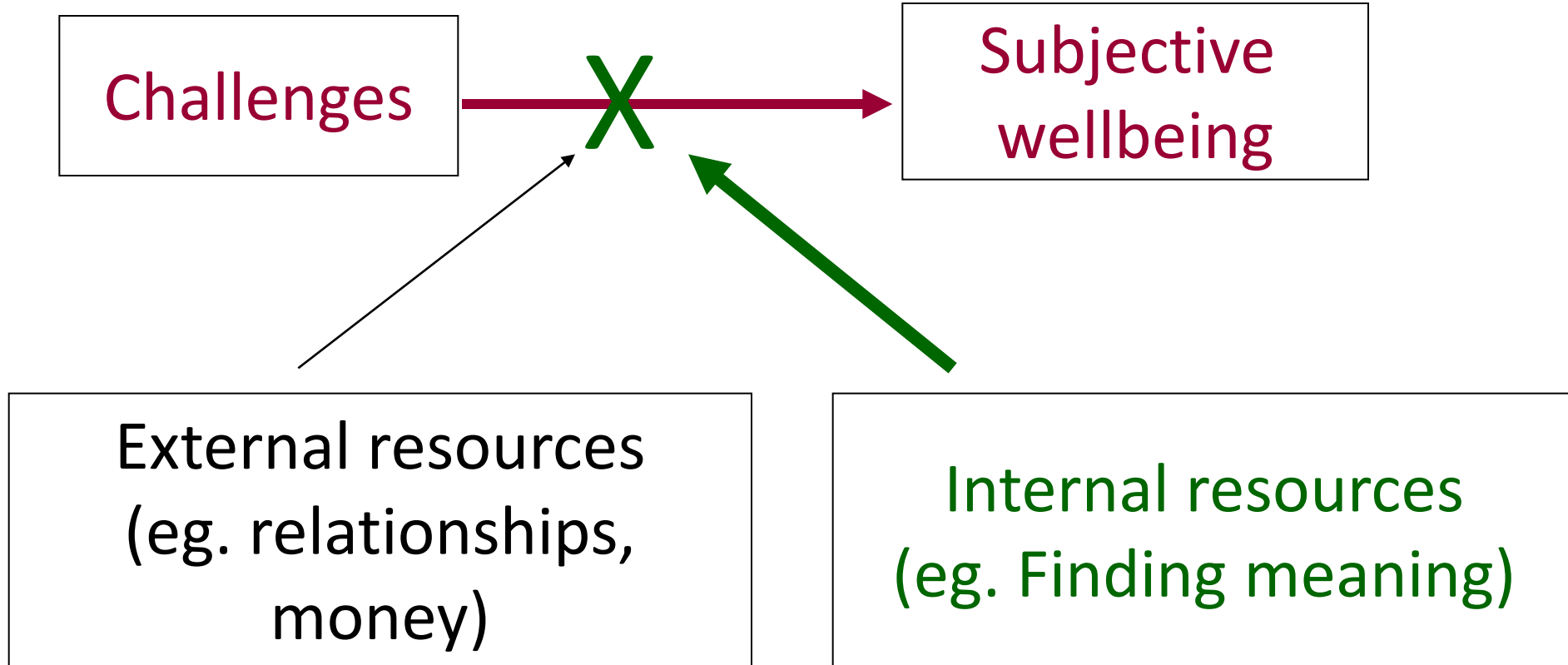
Money

- How does money link to happiness?
- Money is a flexible **resource** that allows people to defend themselves against life's challenges

Income is an external resource that enhances resilience



Internal resources



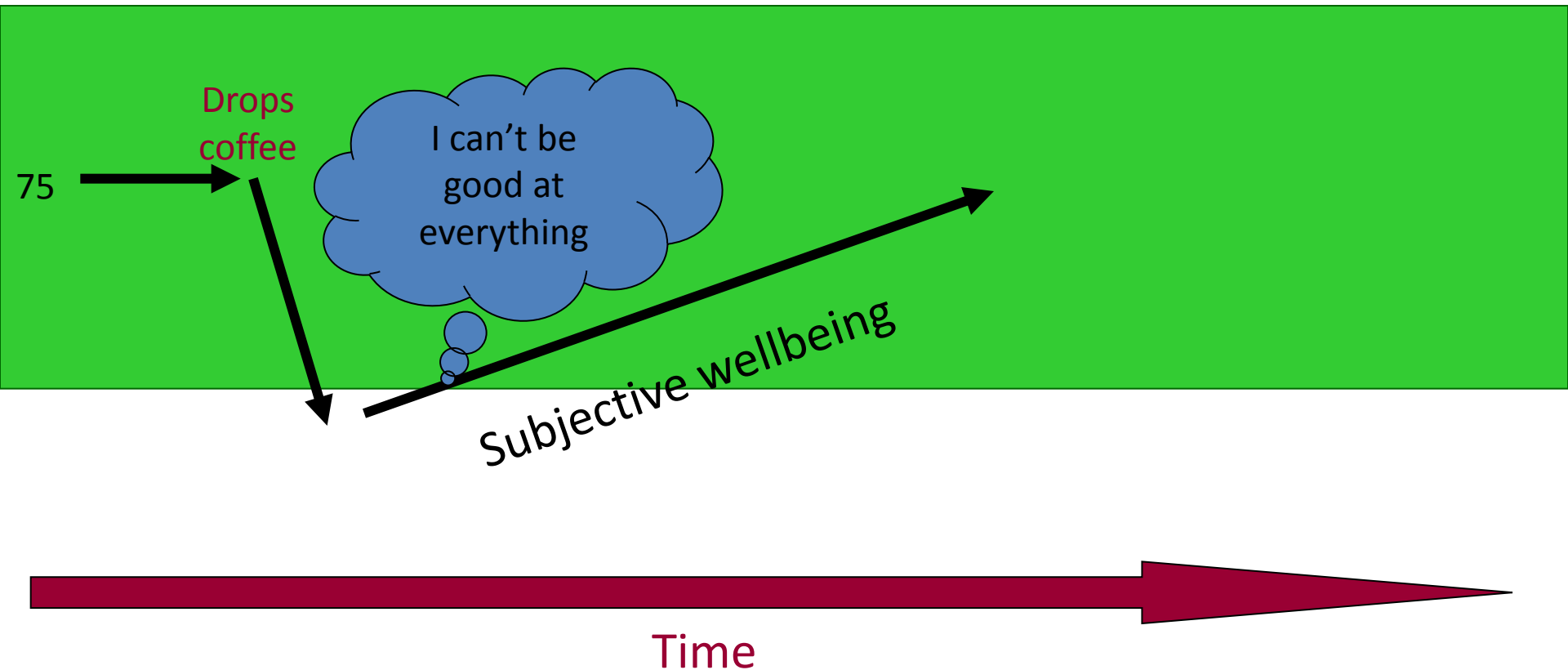
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When we fail to control the world around us
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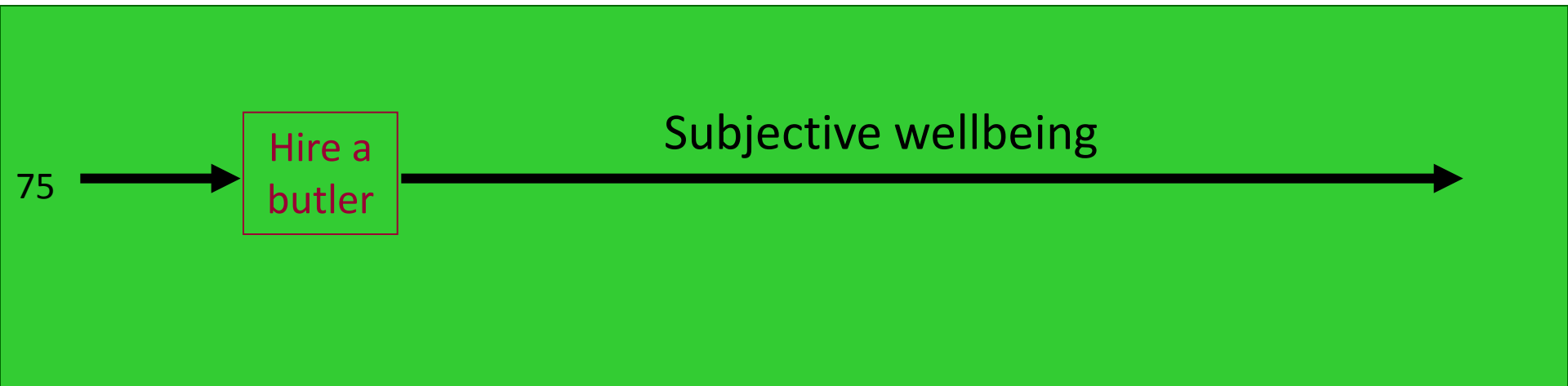


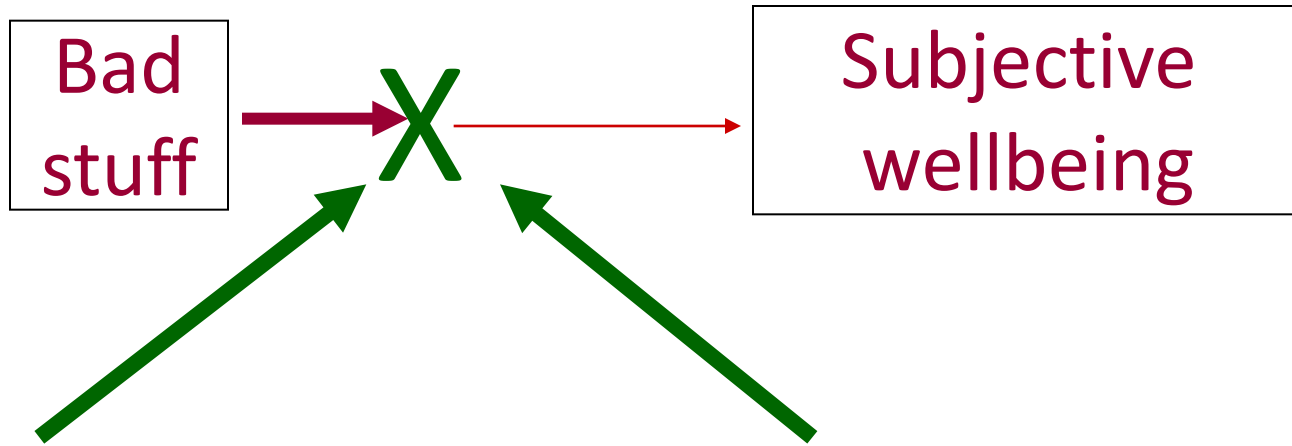
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Using **internal resources** to protect wellbeing



Using **external resources** to protect wellbeing



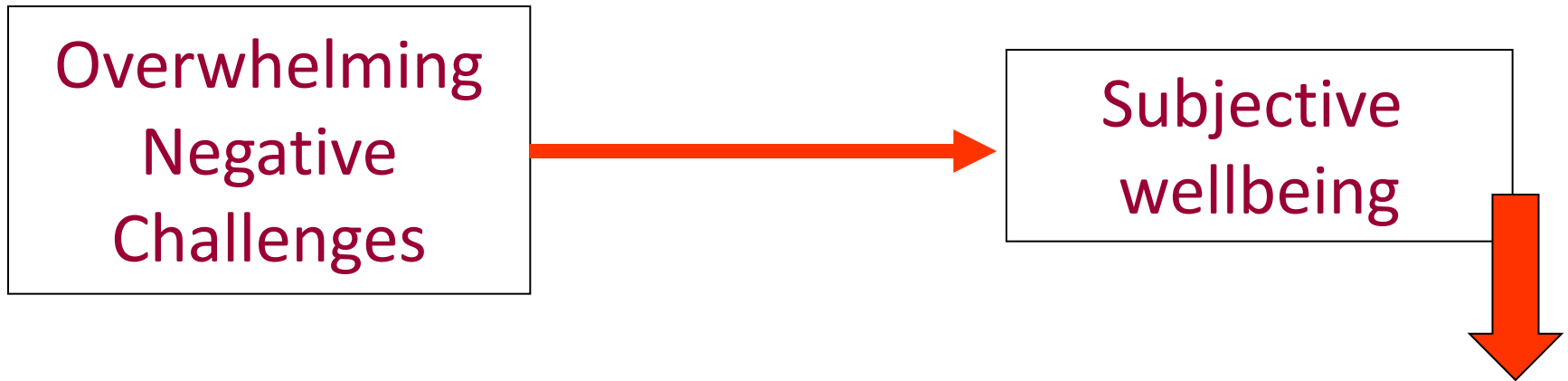


Major external
protective resources
(Money, Relationships)

Internal resources
(eg. Finding meaning
for the bad event)

Protective resources allow people to be
RESILIENT: to defend homeostasis and their happiness

Homeostasis can fail



- The result of subjective wellbeing loss is **depression**

How is all this relevant to
'Country towns and happiness'?

How can we foster more resilient communities?

- **Is bigger better?**

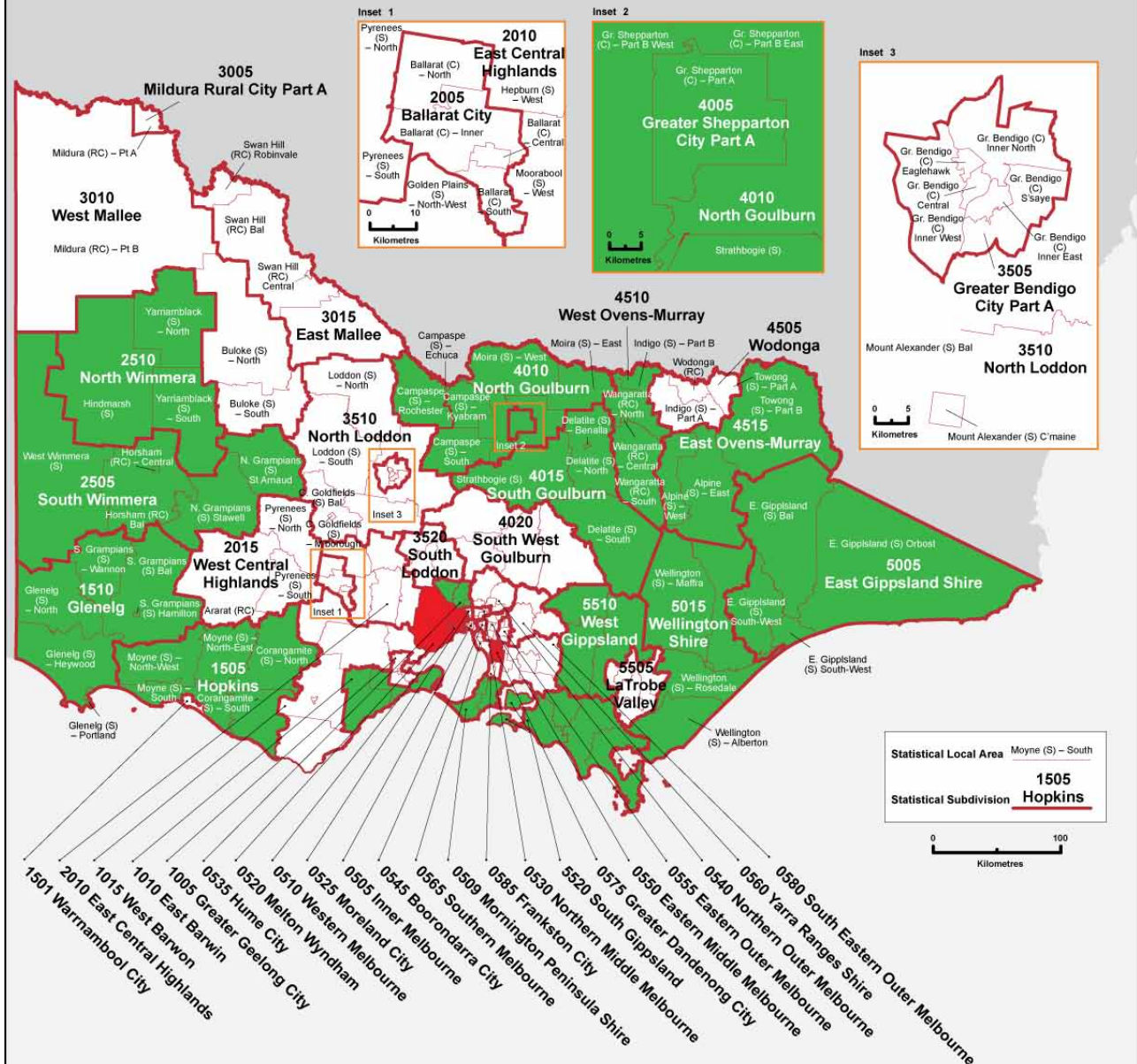




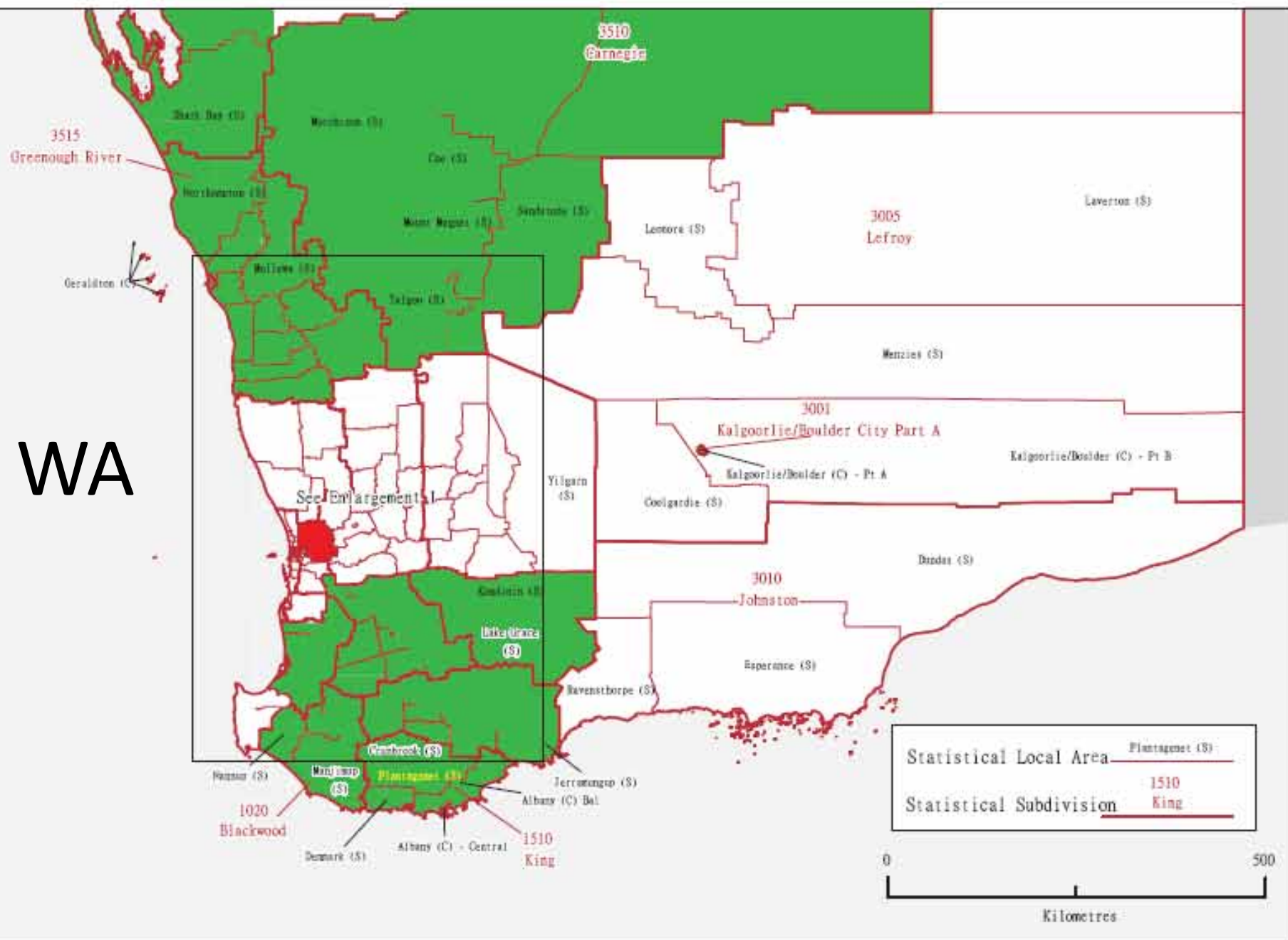
ABS • AUSTRALIAN STANDARD GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION • 1216.0 • 2001

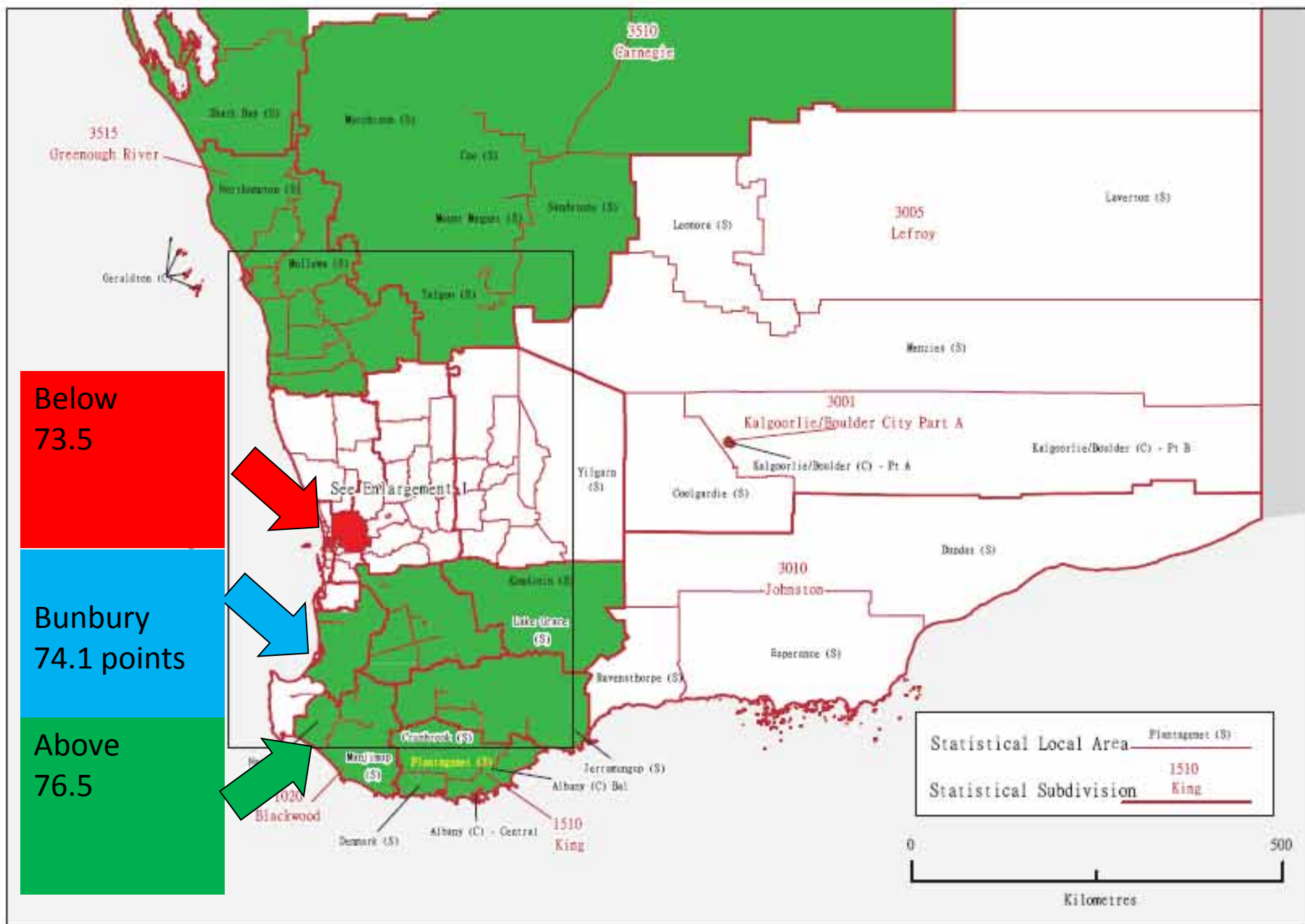
Victoria

VICTORIA – STATISTICAL SUBDIVISIONS AND STATISTICAL LOCAL AREAS, 2001 EDITION



3515
Greenough River.





Country Towns and Happiness: What is the connection?

So, the connection lies in the relative LACK of
development

Bunbury is NOT Sydney

Does Bunbury aspire to become Sydney?



Bunbury City Council

Mayor's Report 2008-09

- **“The Premier, in particular, has said several times Bunbury cannot achieve its destiny as the second city of WA – without amalgamation.**
- **However, the state government has insisted amalgamations should be voluntary.**
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Development/population growth challenges population happiness

- 1. It causes towns to grow too big**

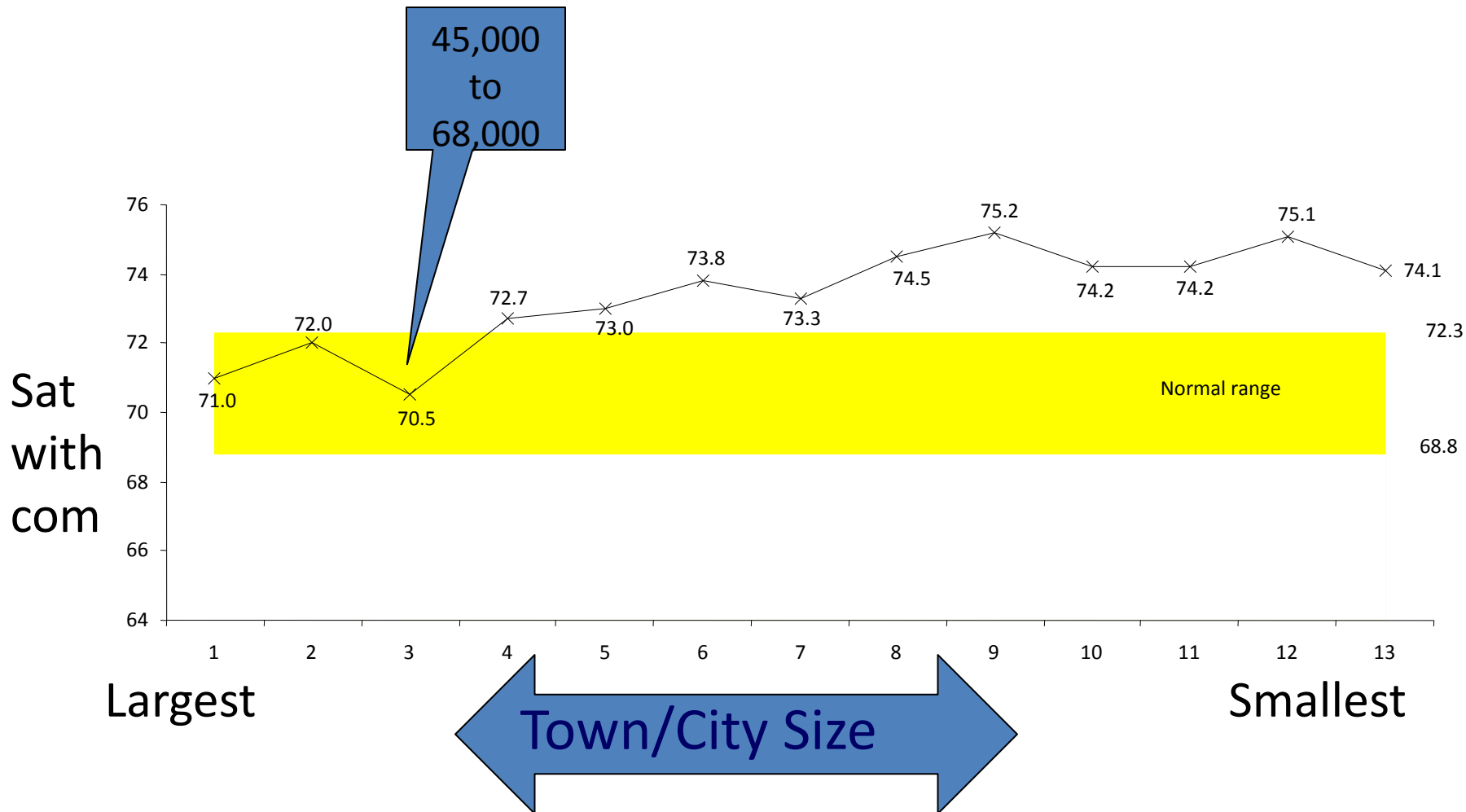
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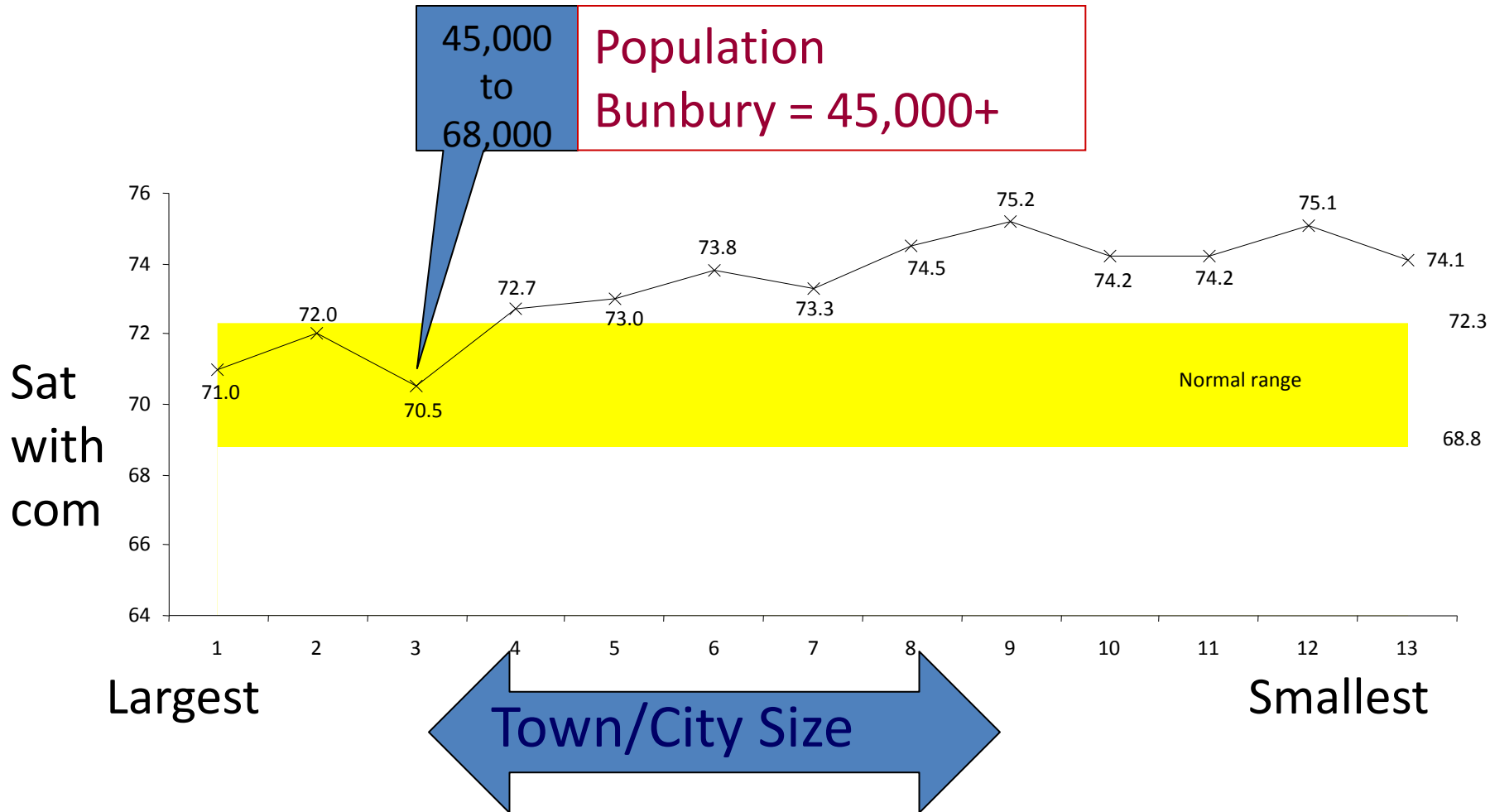
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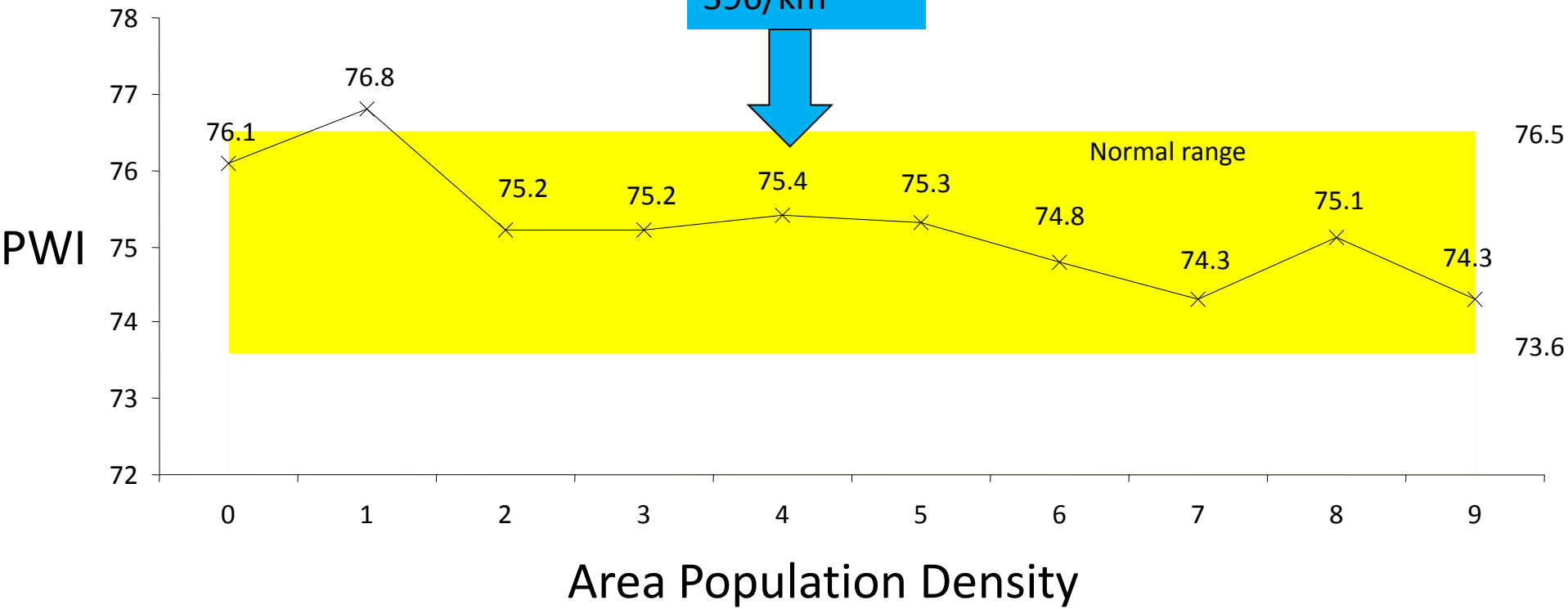


Development challenges population happiness

1. It causes towns to grow too big
2. It increases population density

Population density

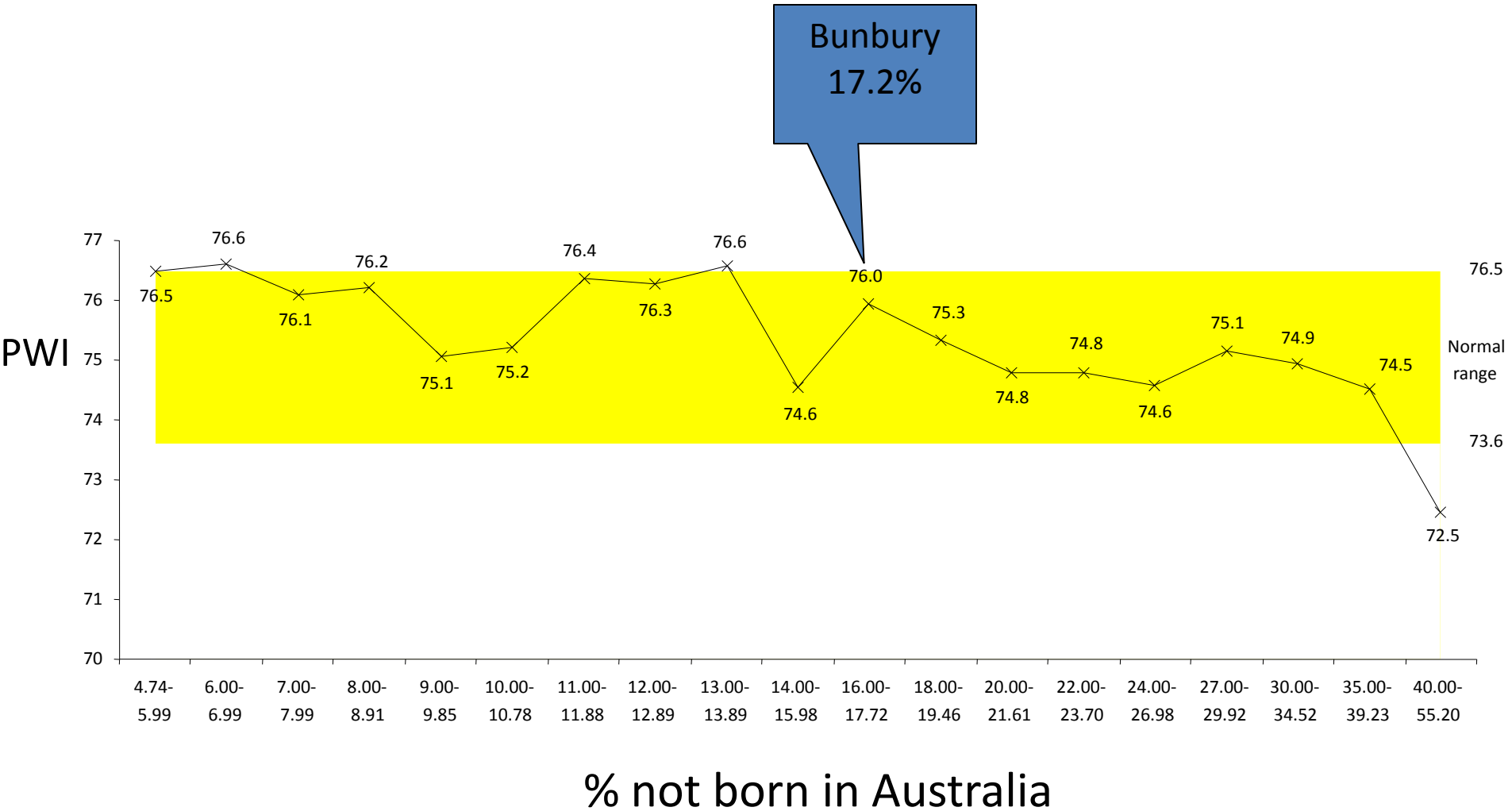
Bunbury
396/km²



Development challenges population happiness

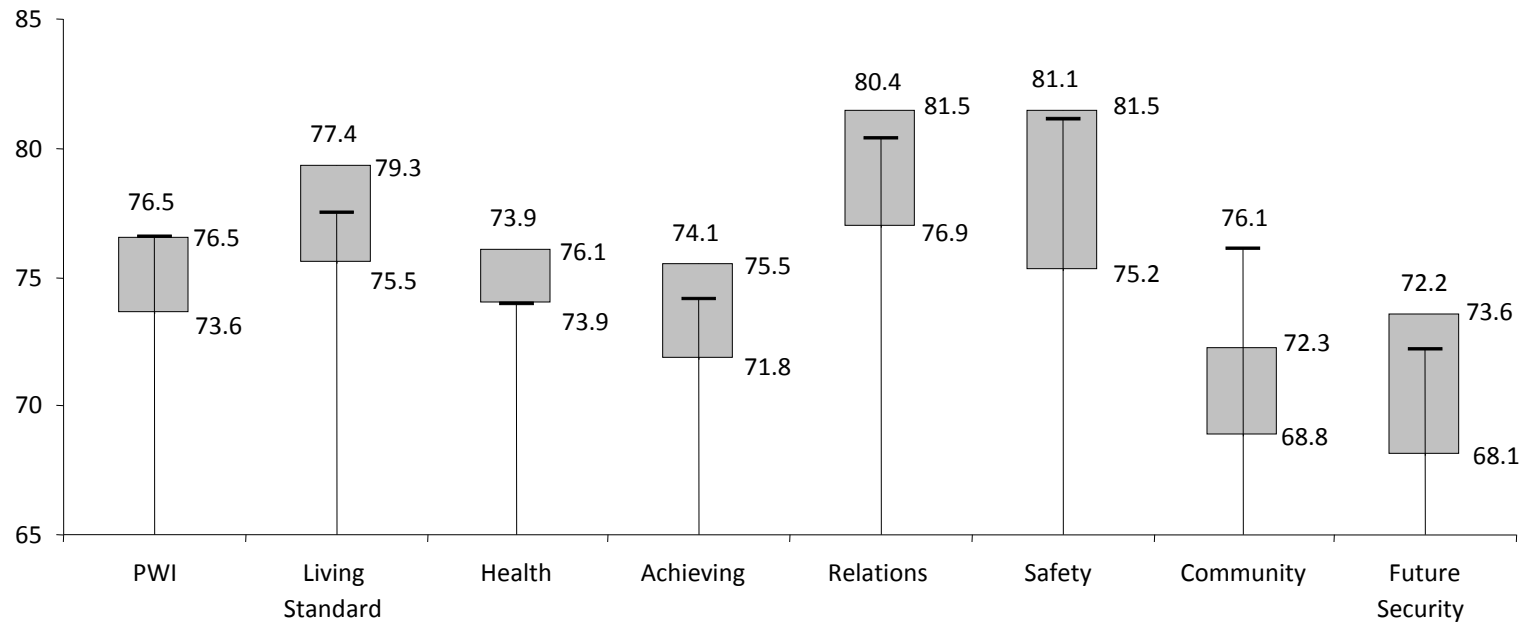
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2. It causes towns to grow too big
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% of people not born in Australia

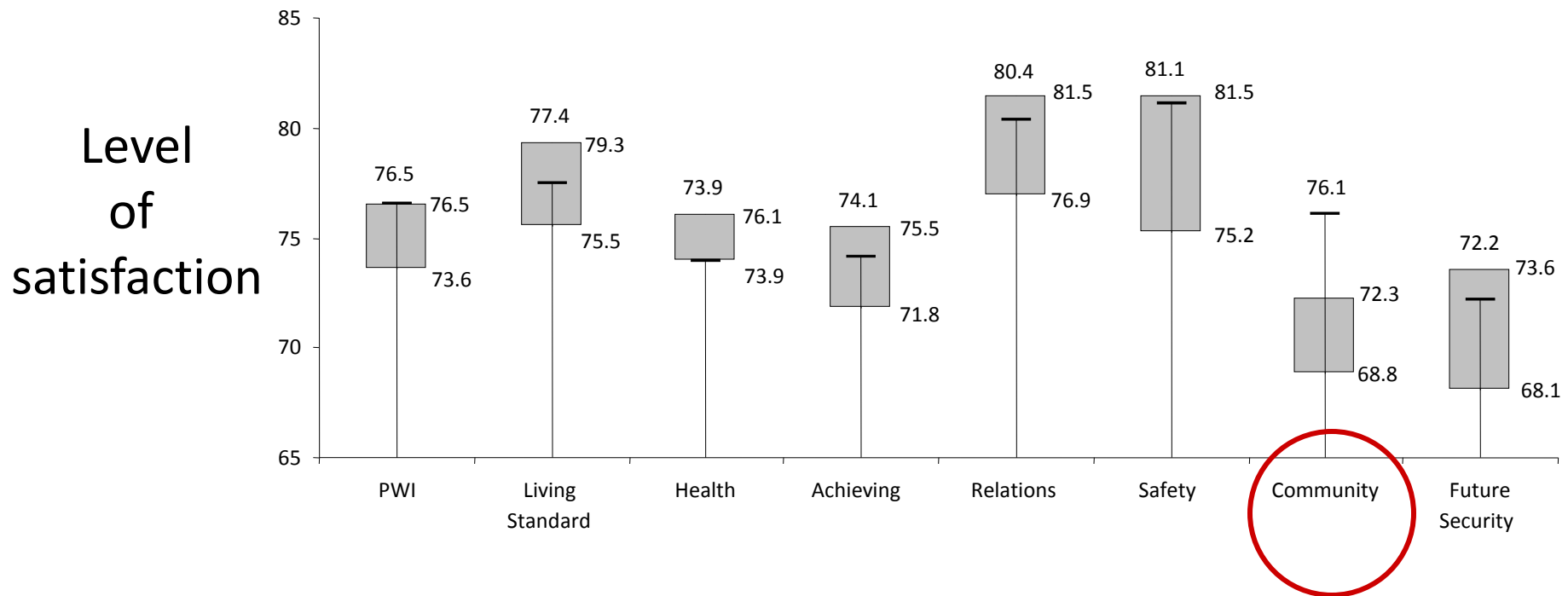


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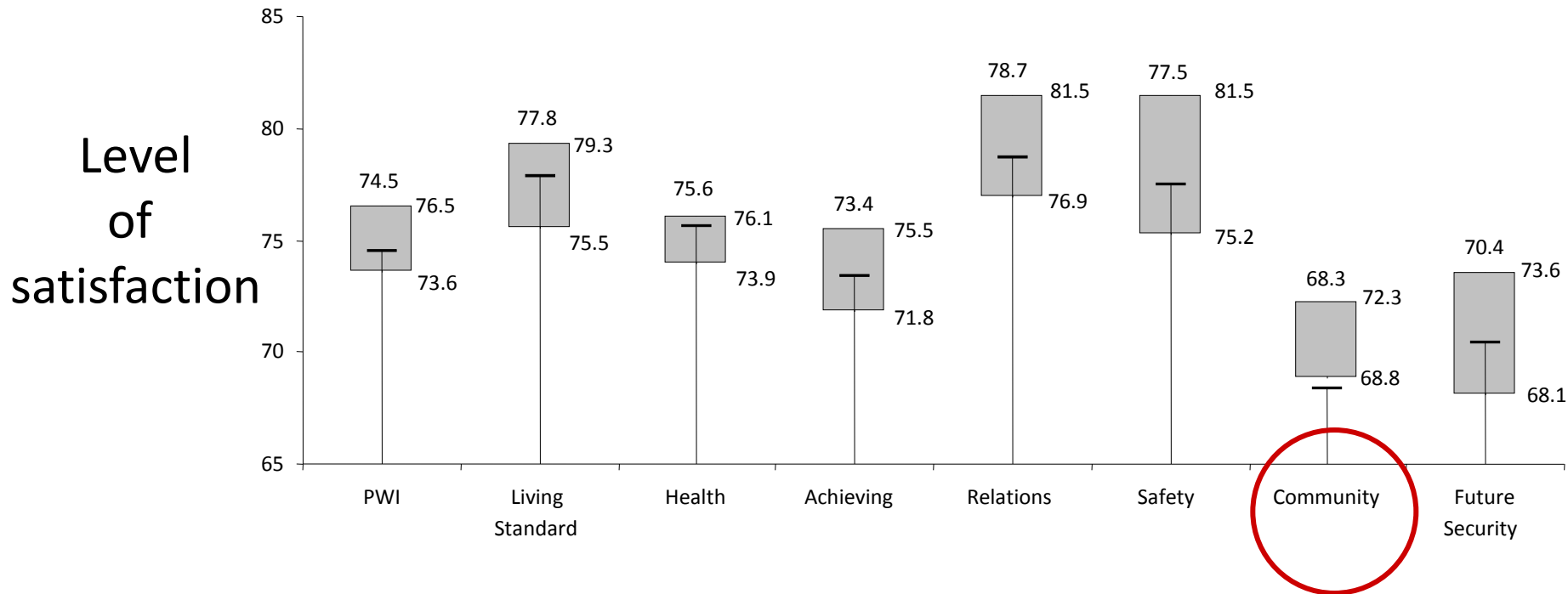


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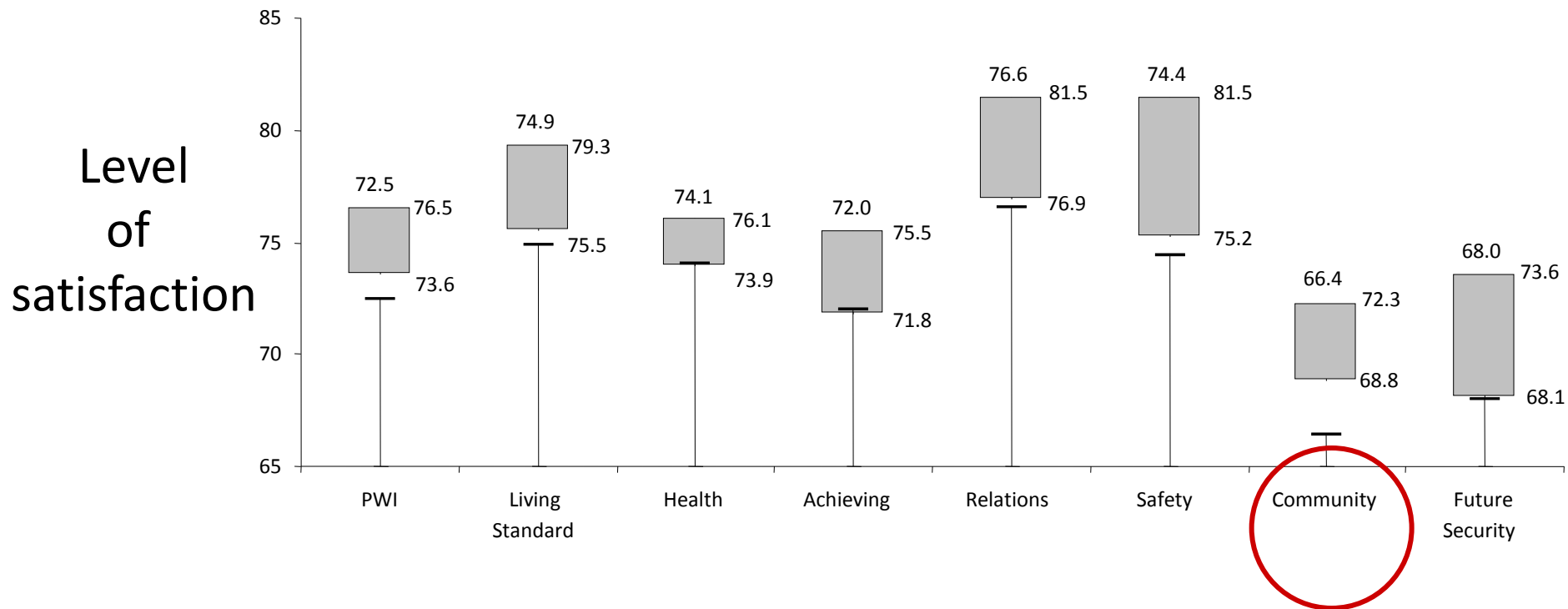


36-40% not born in Australia

[Bunbury 17.2%]



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- So---the advantage of living in a small community, and the advantage of strong social connection, is progressively lost.



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- Beware the politicians who direct their policies to development rather than to population happiness



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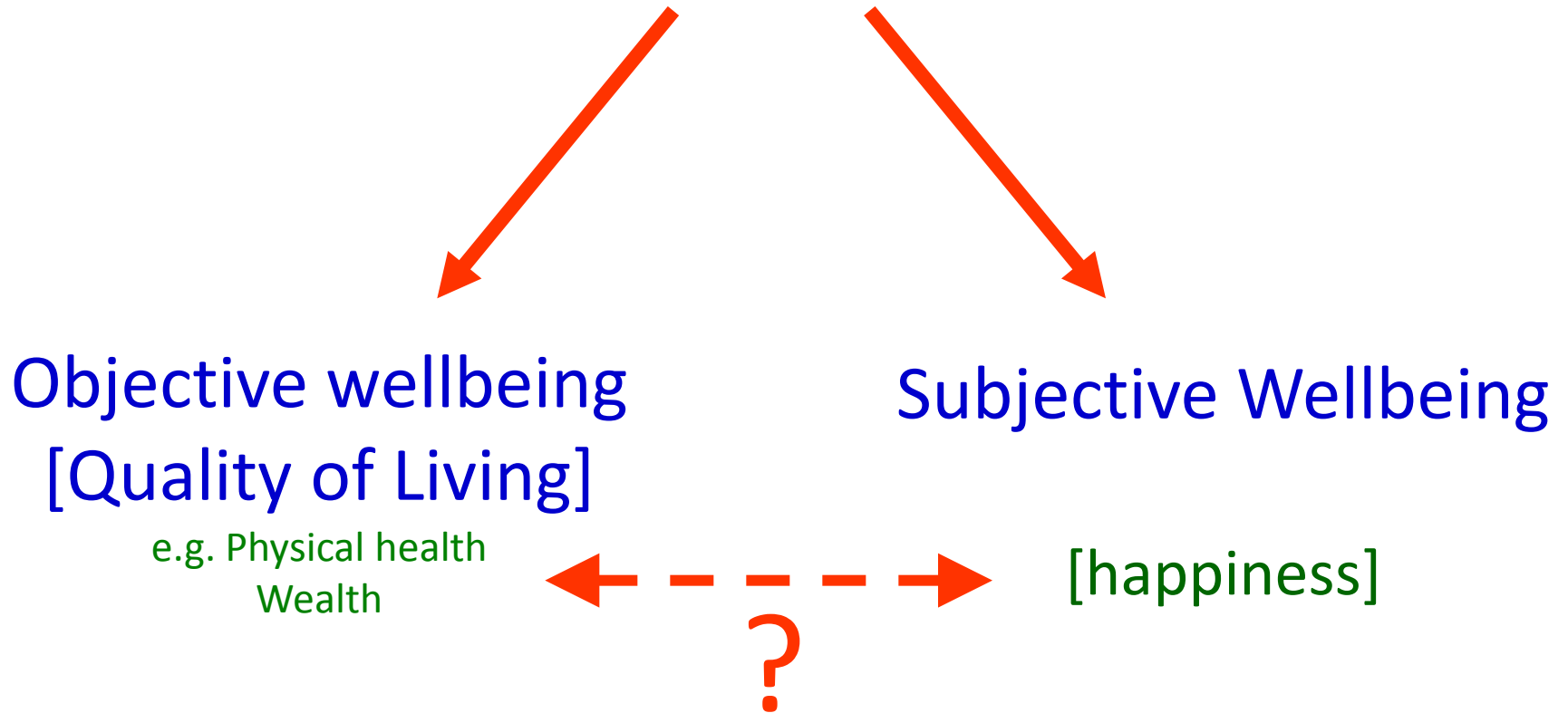
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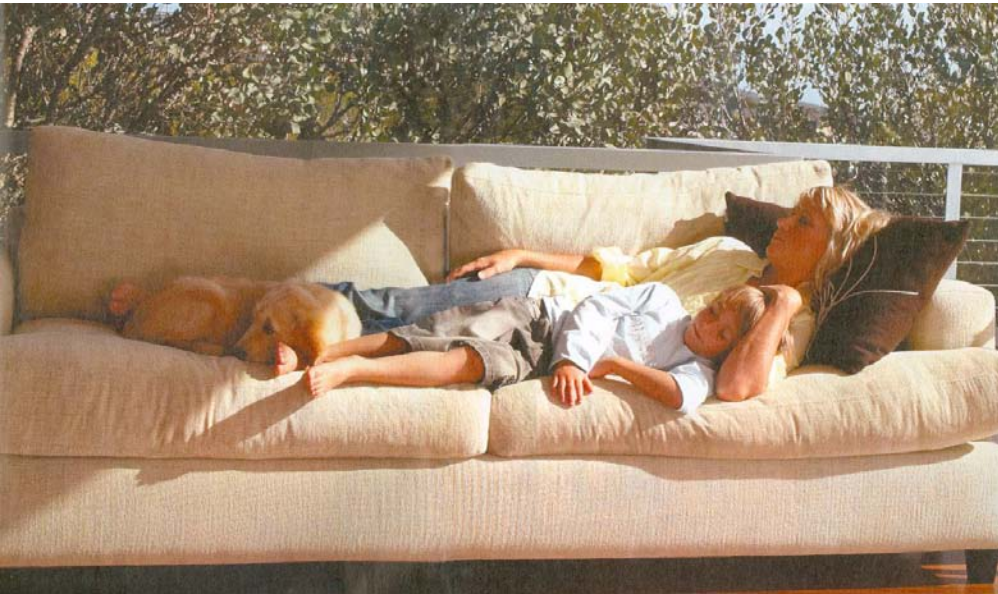
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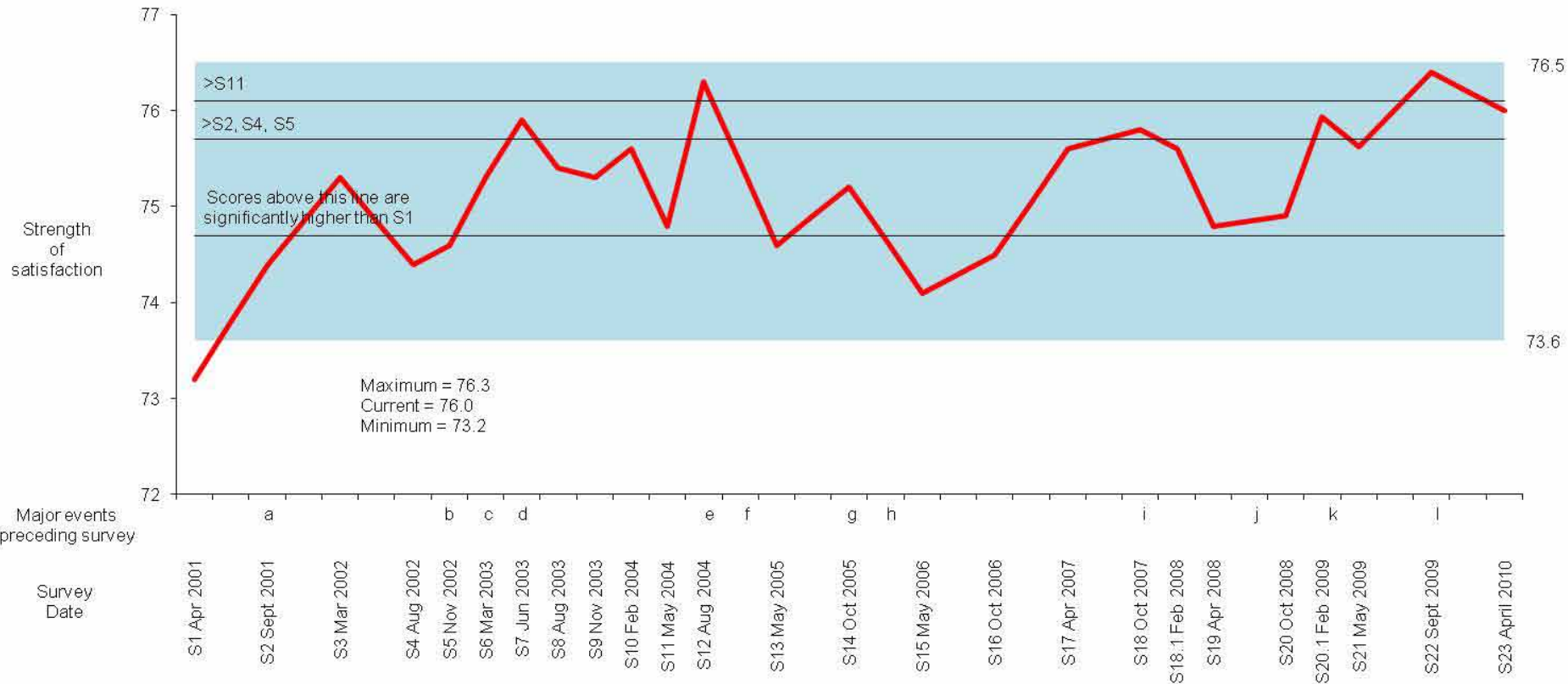
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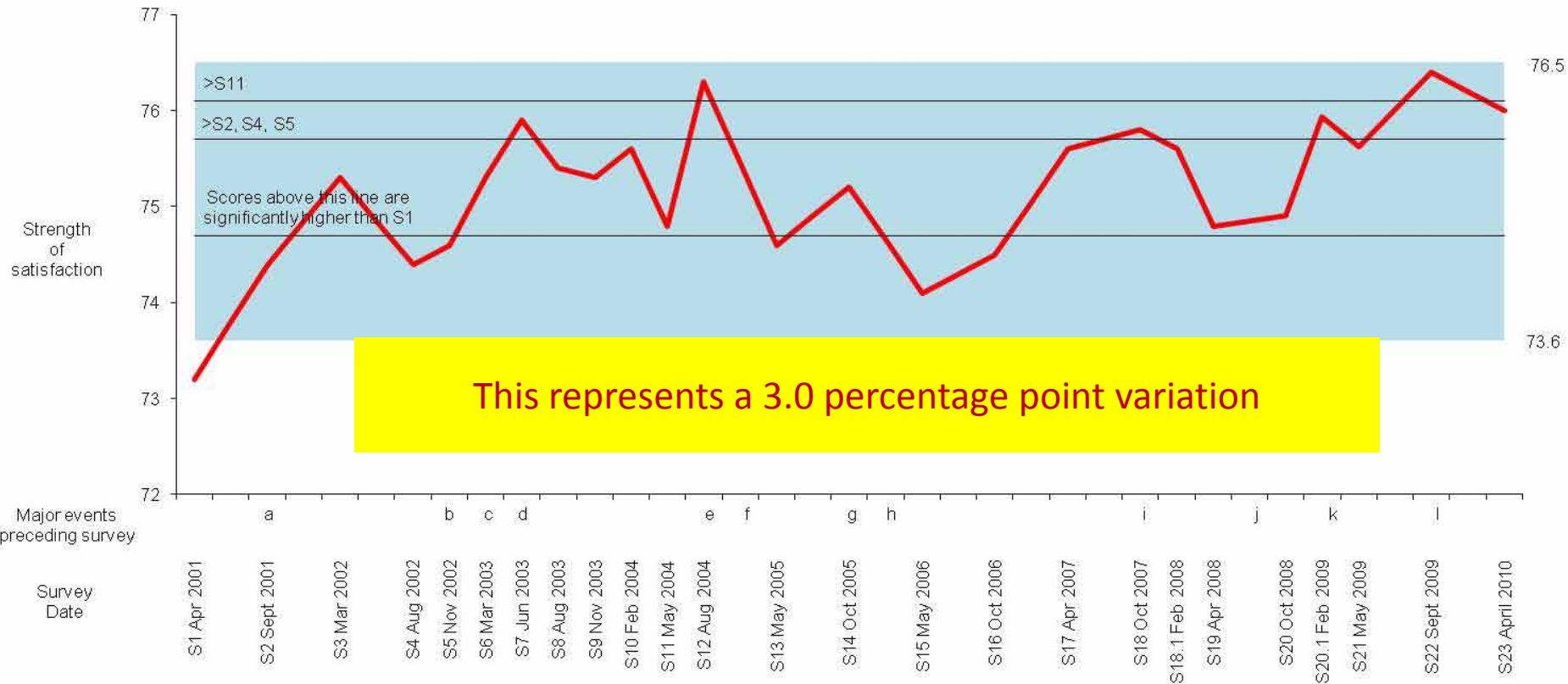
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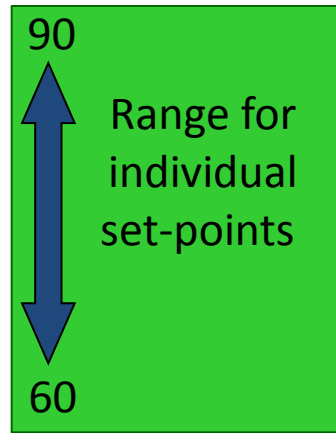


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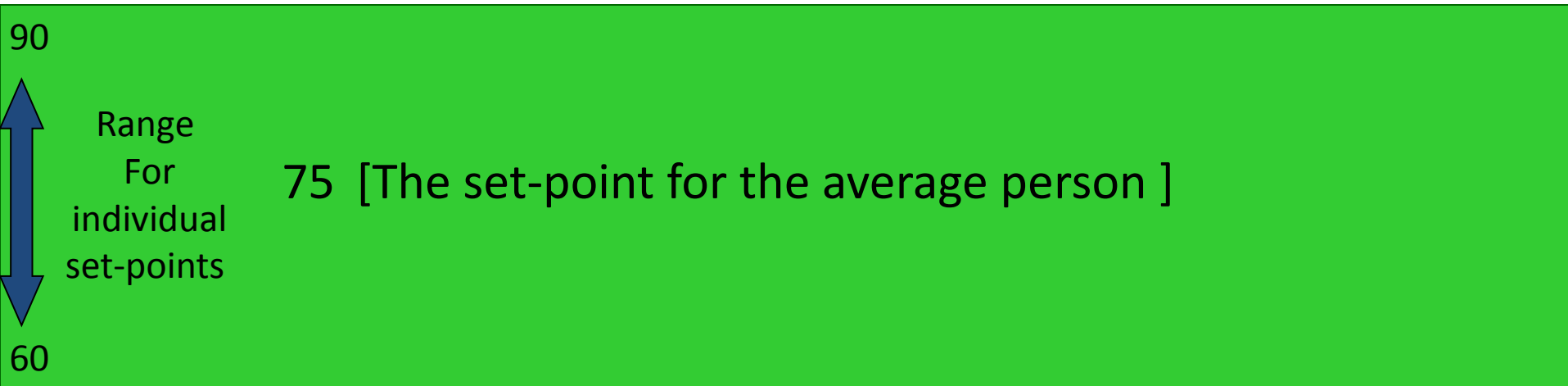
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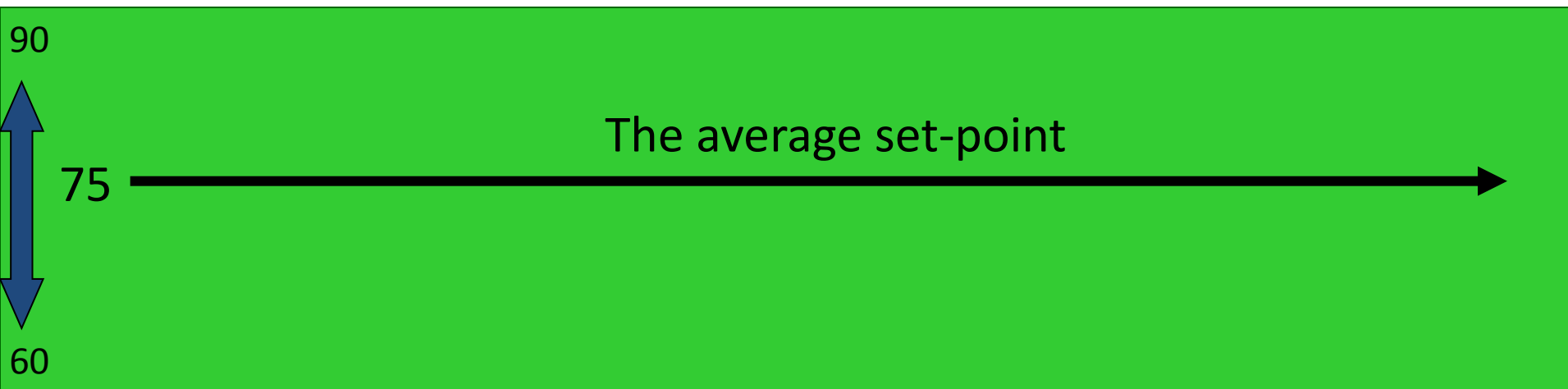


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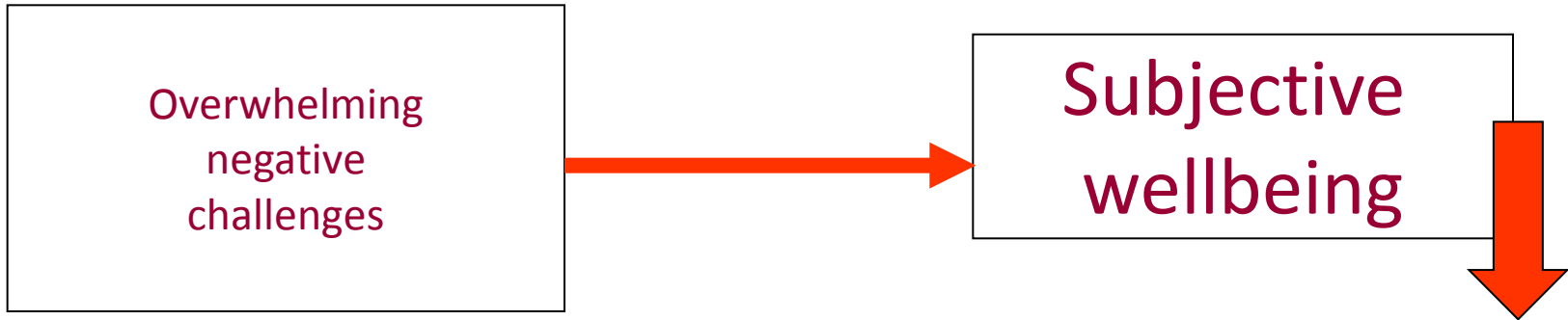
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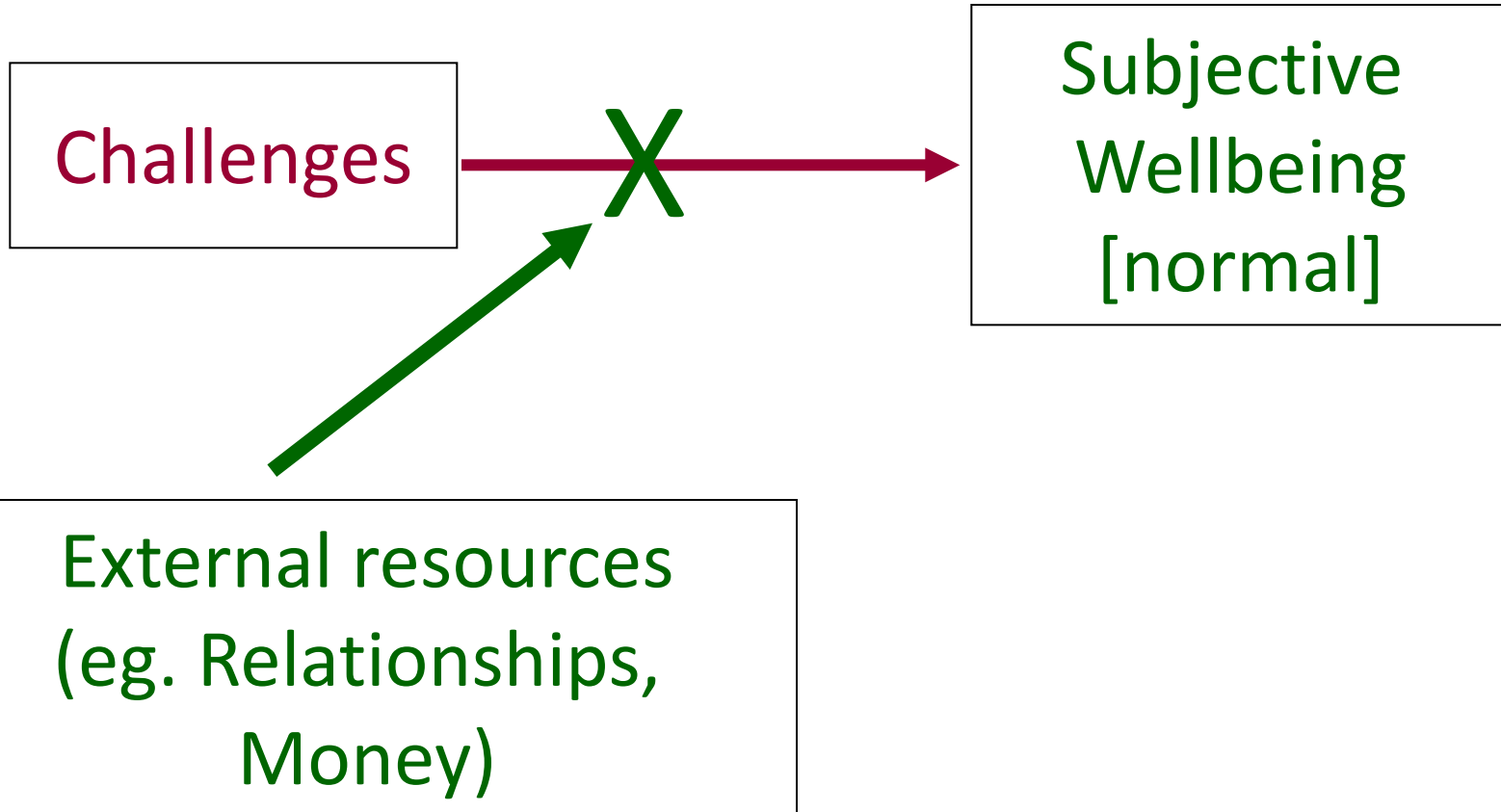


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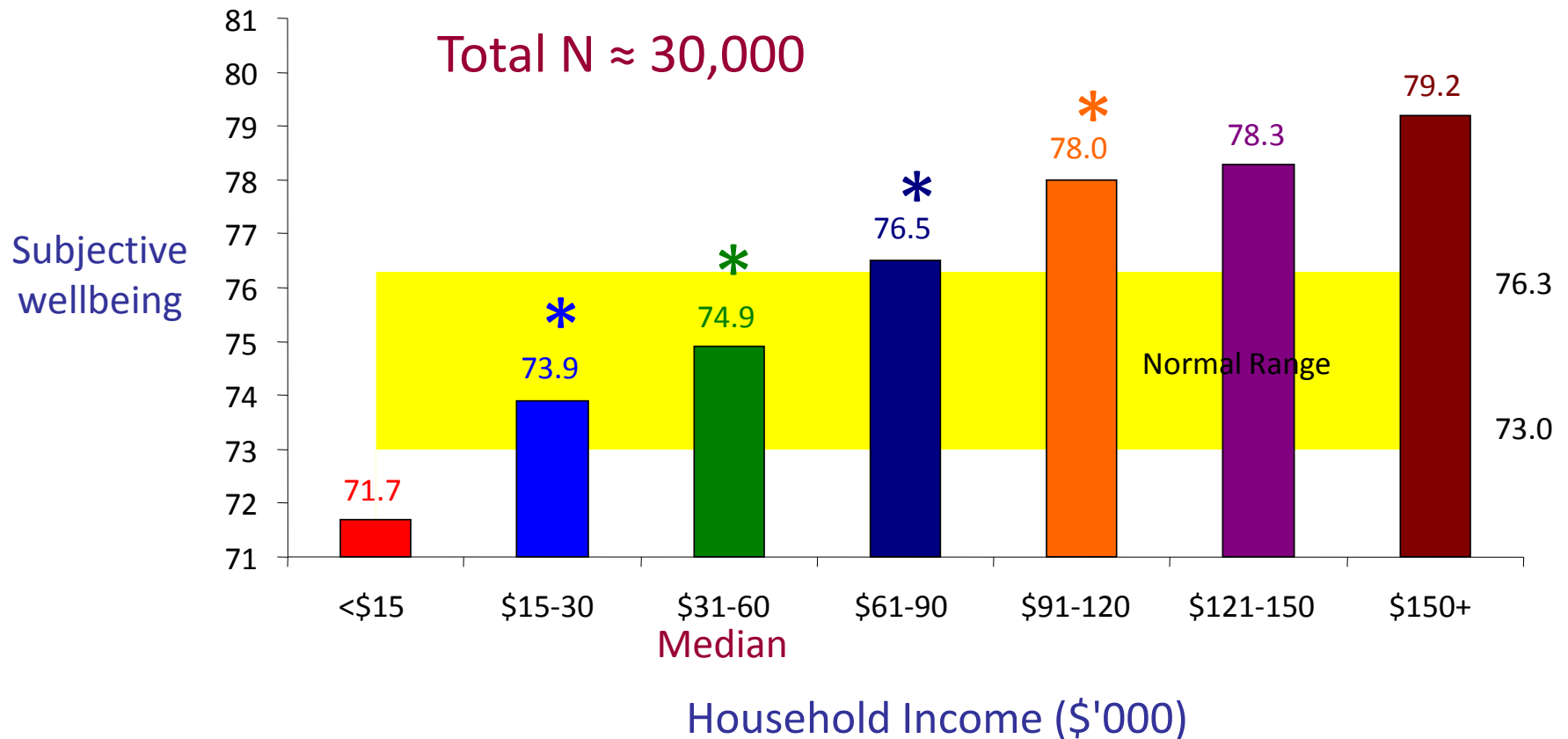




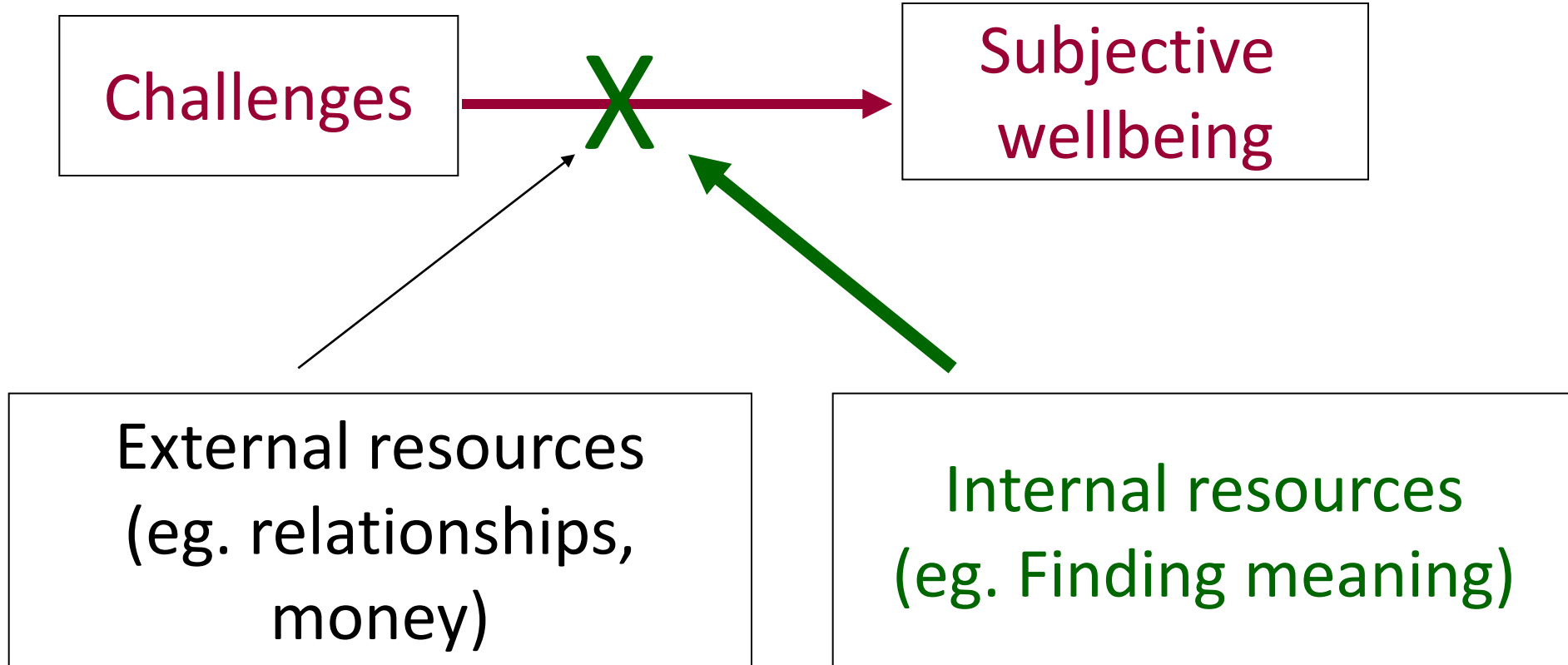
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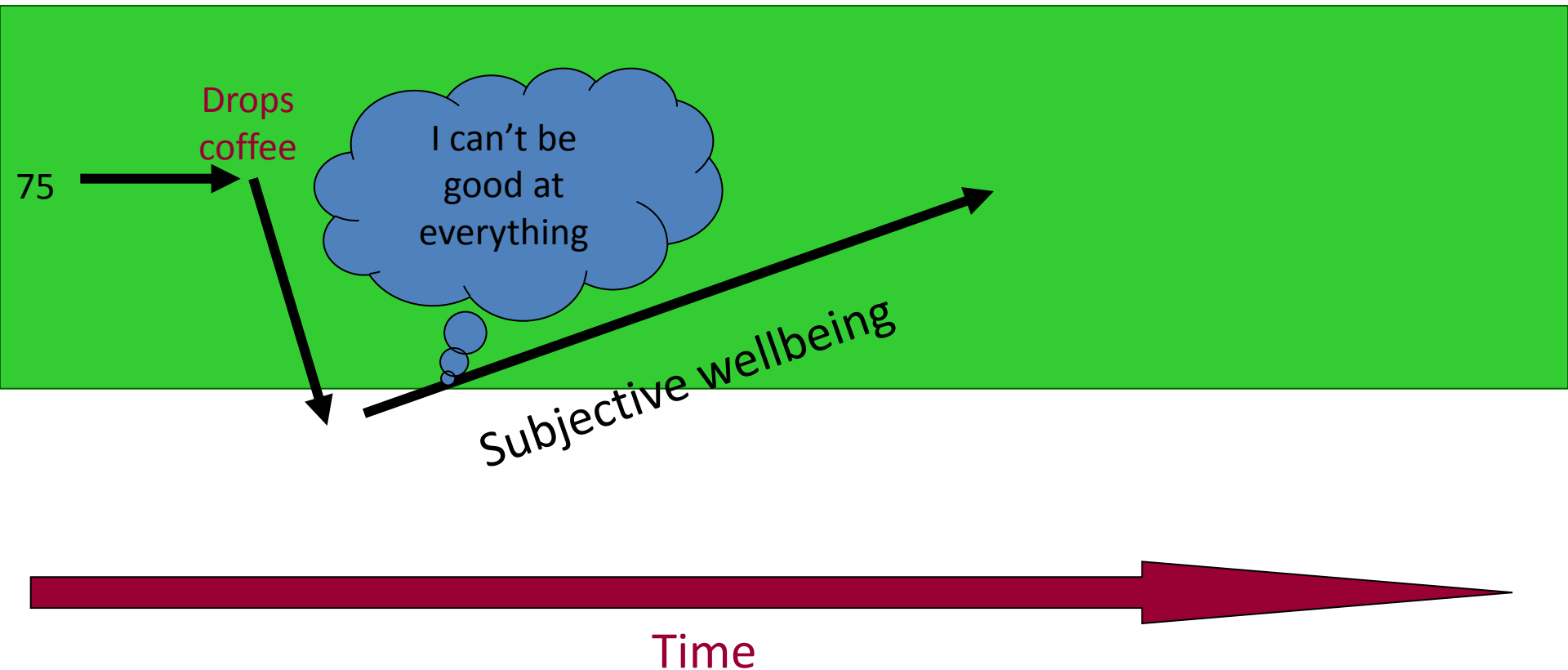
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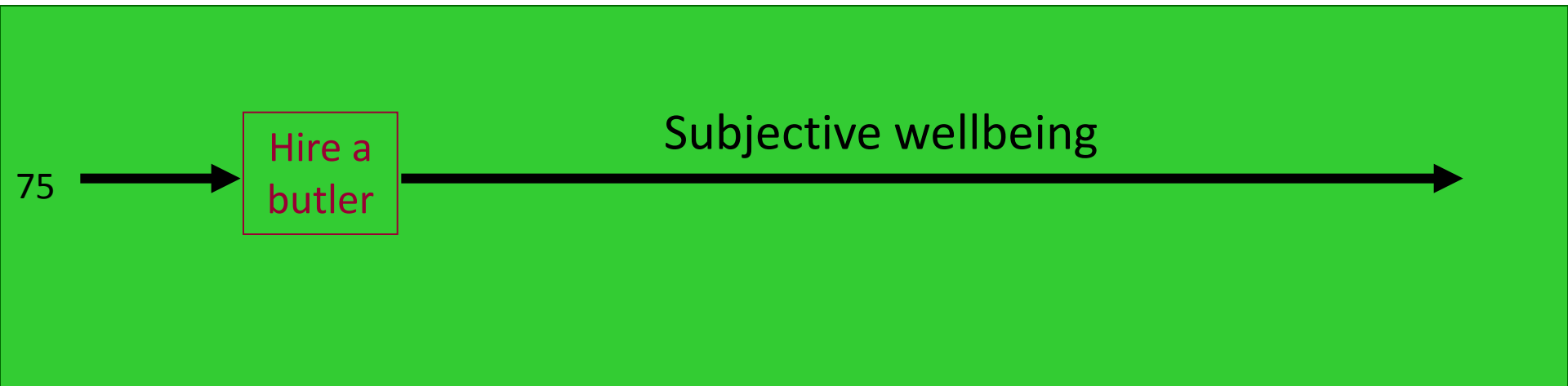


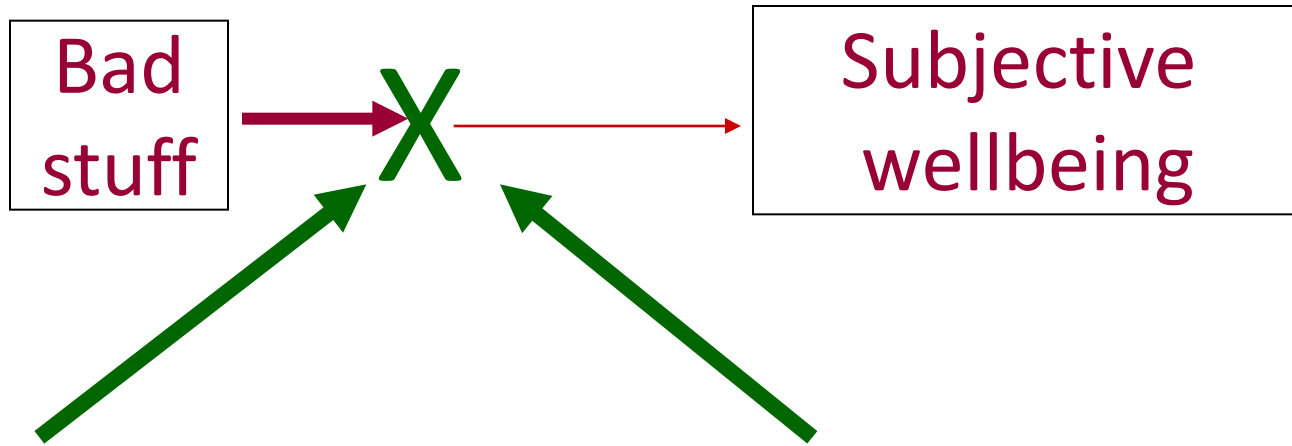
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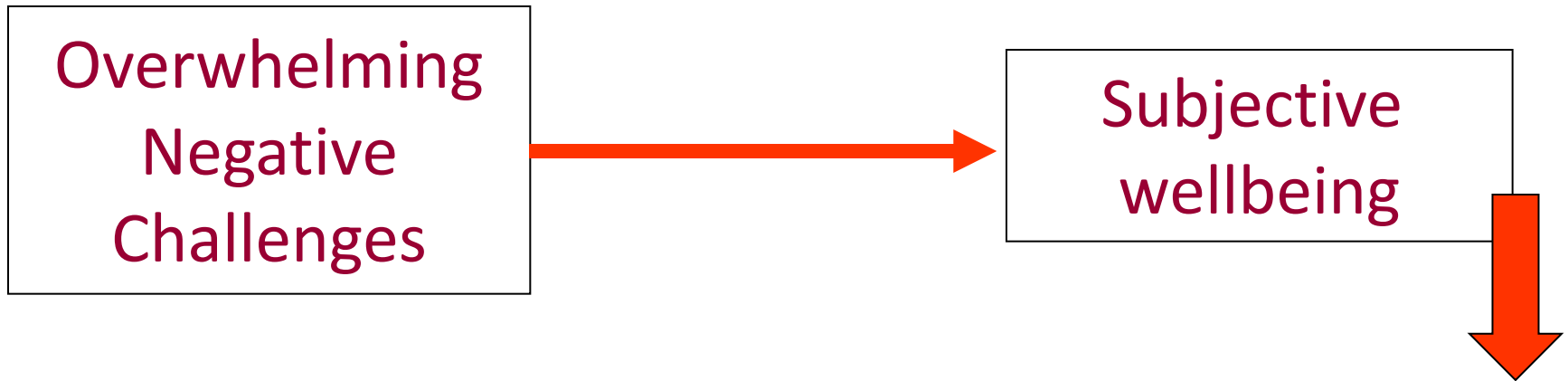


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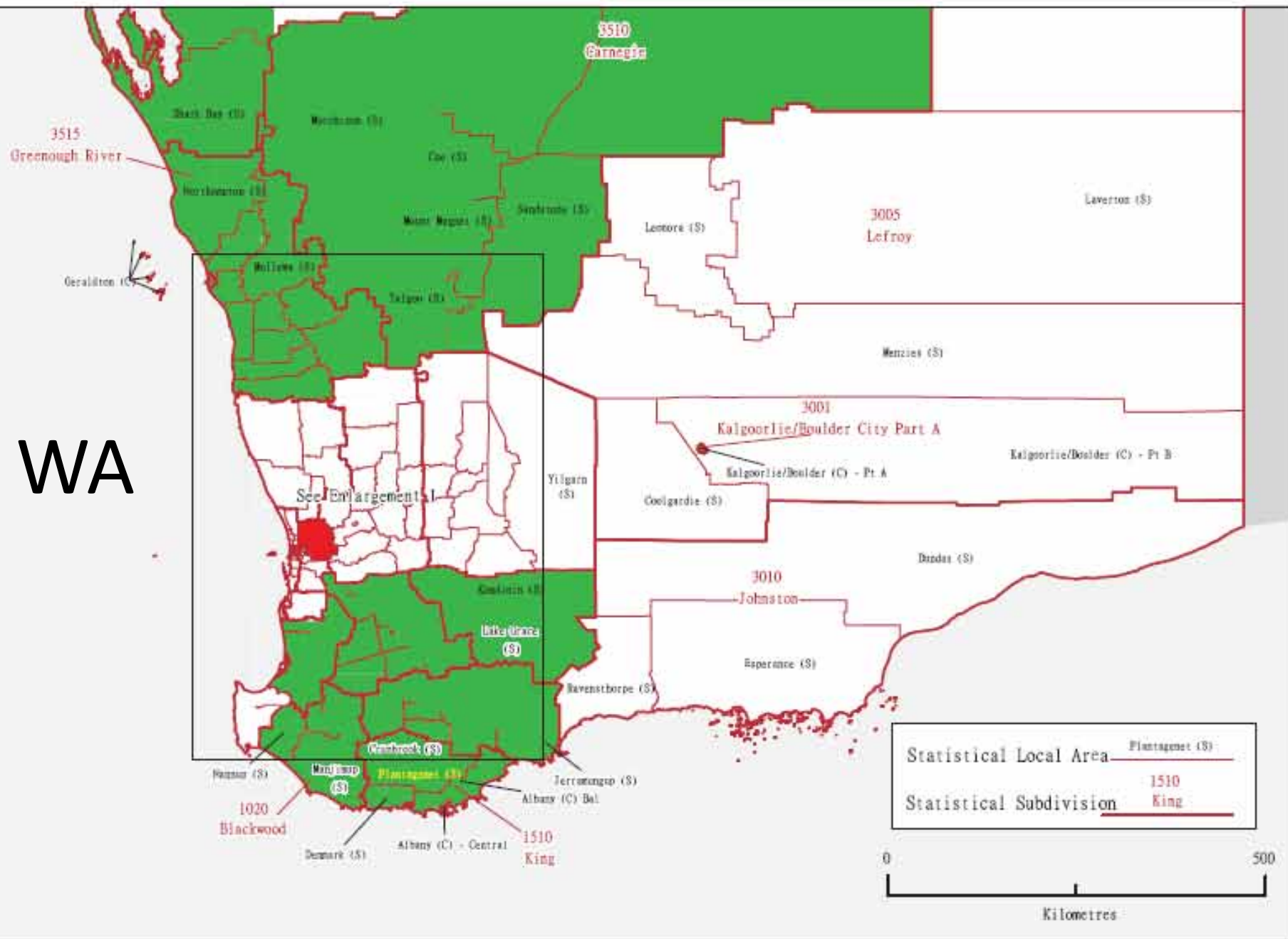
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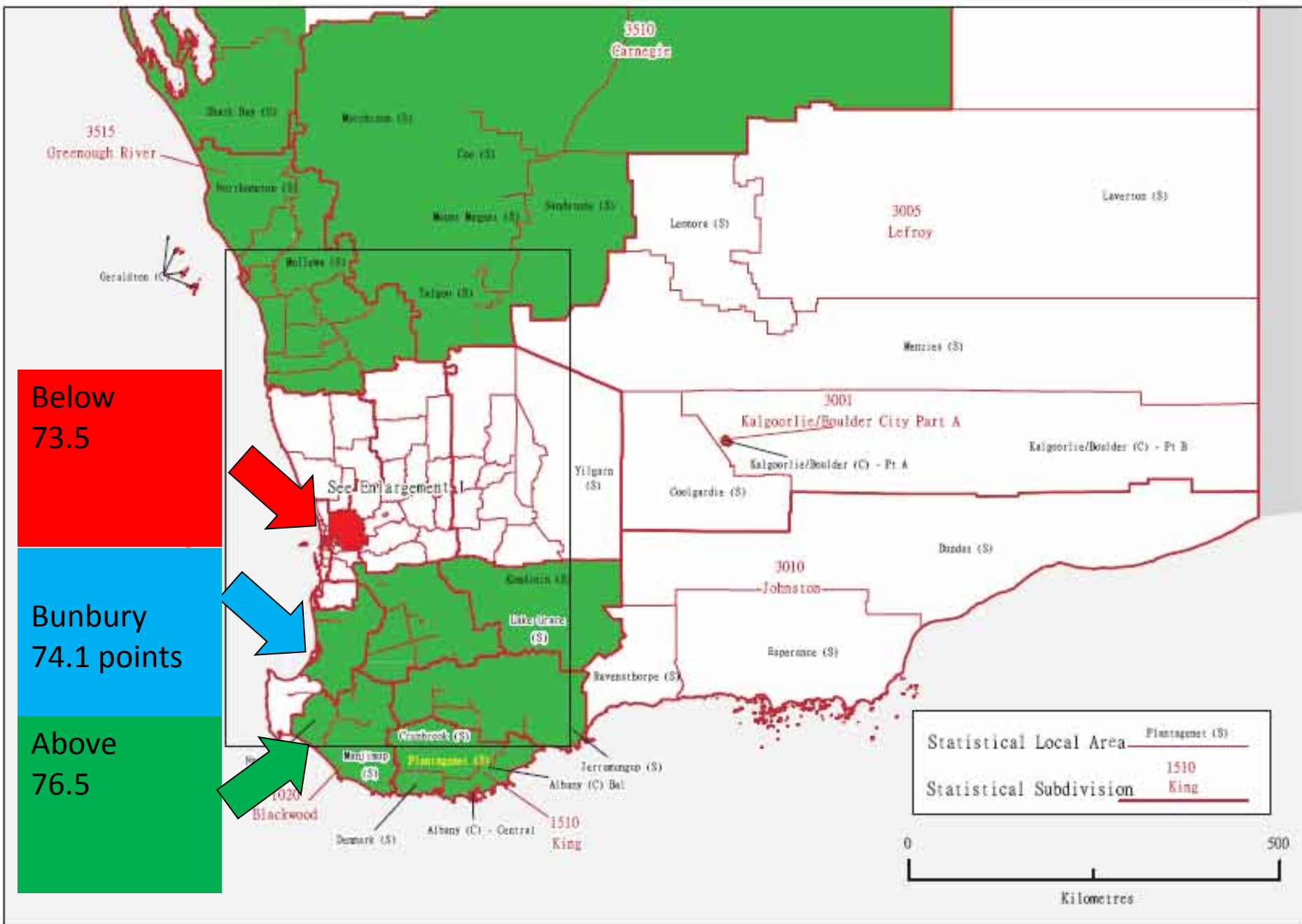
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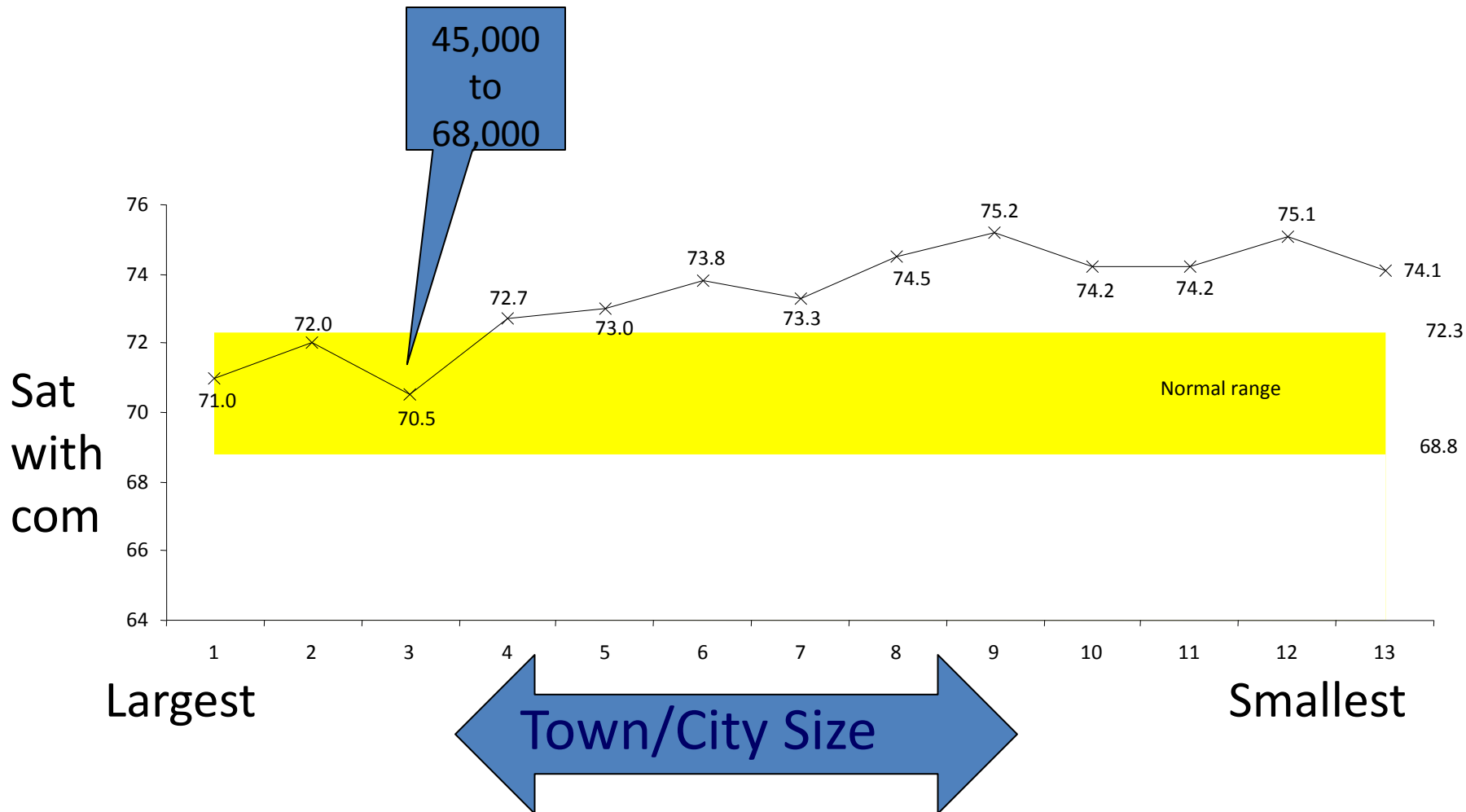
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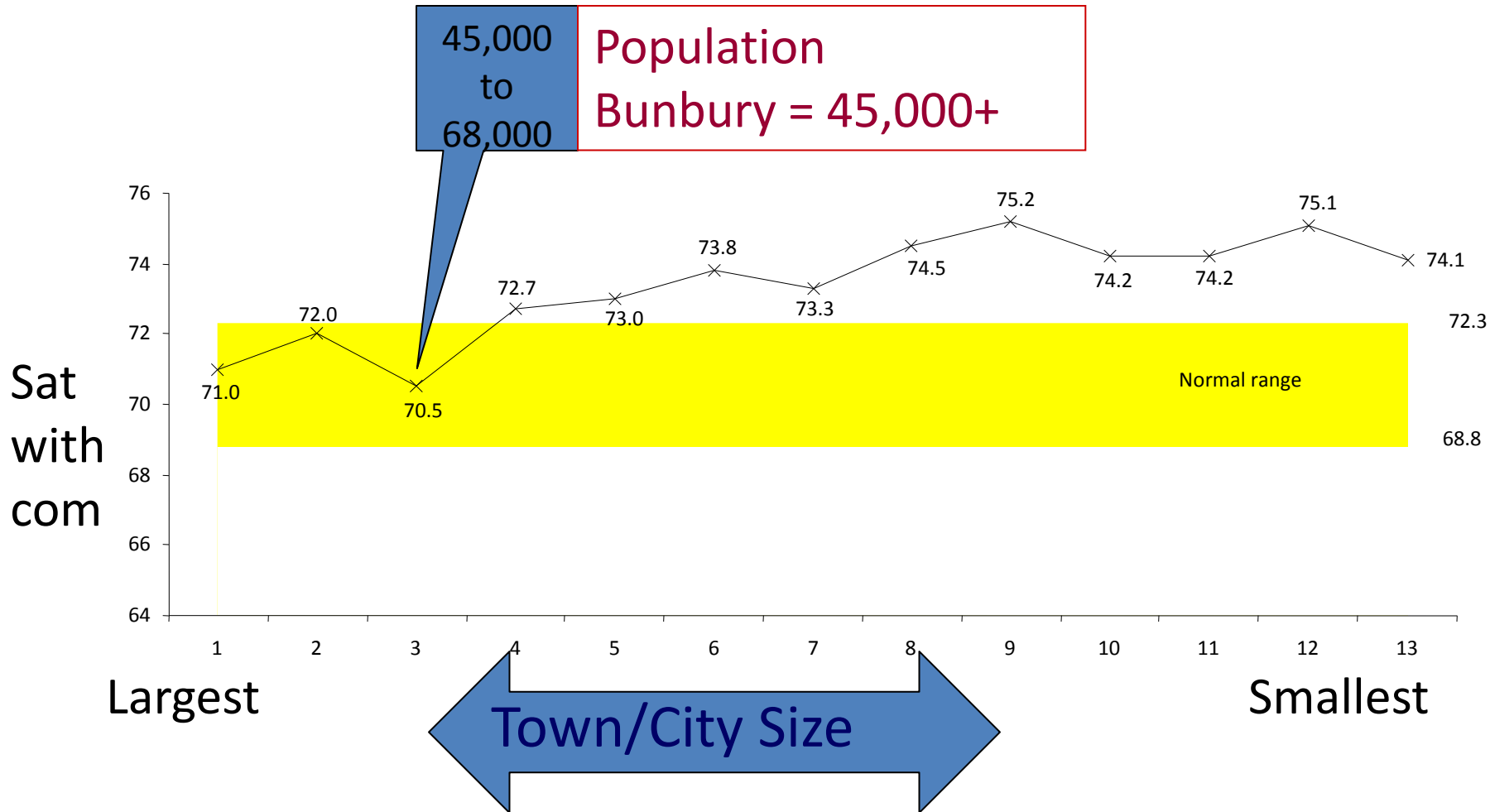
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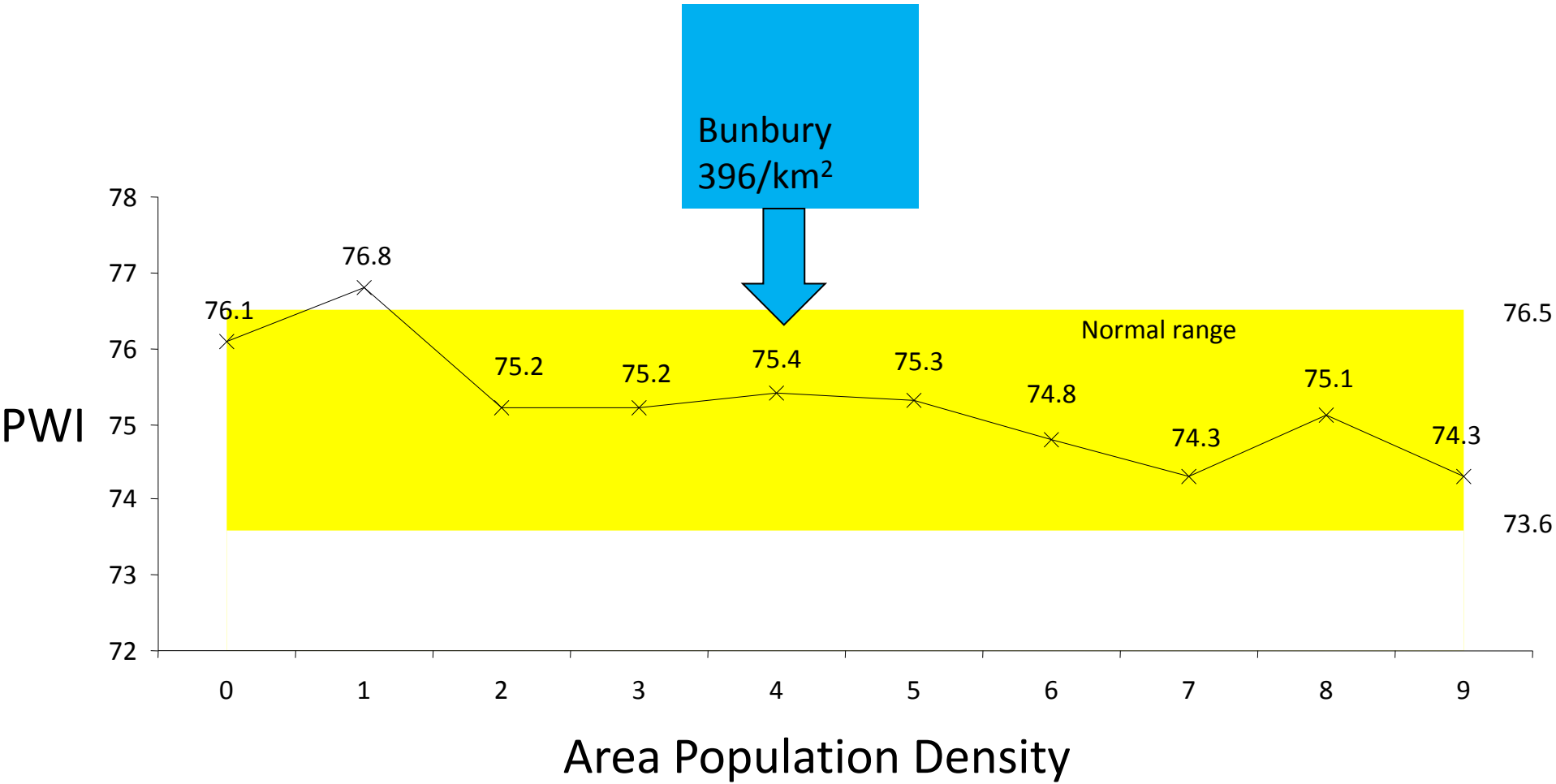
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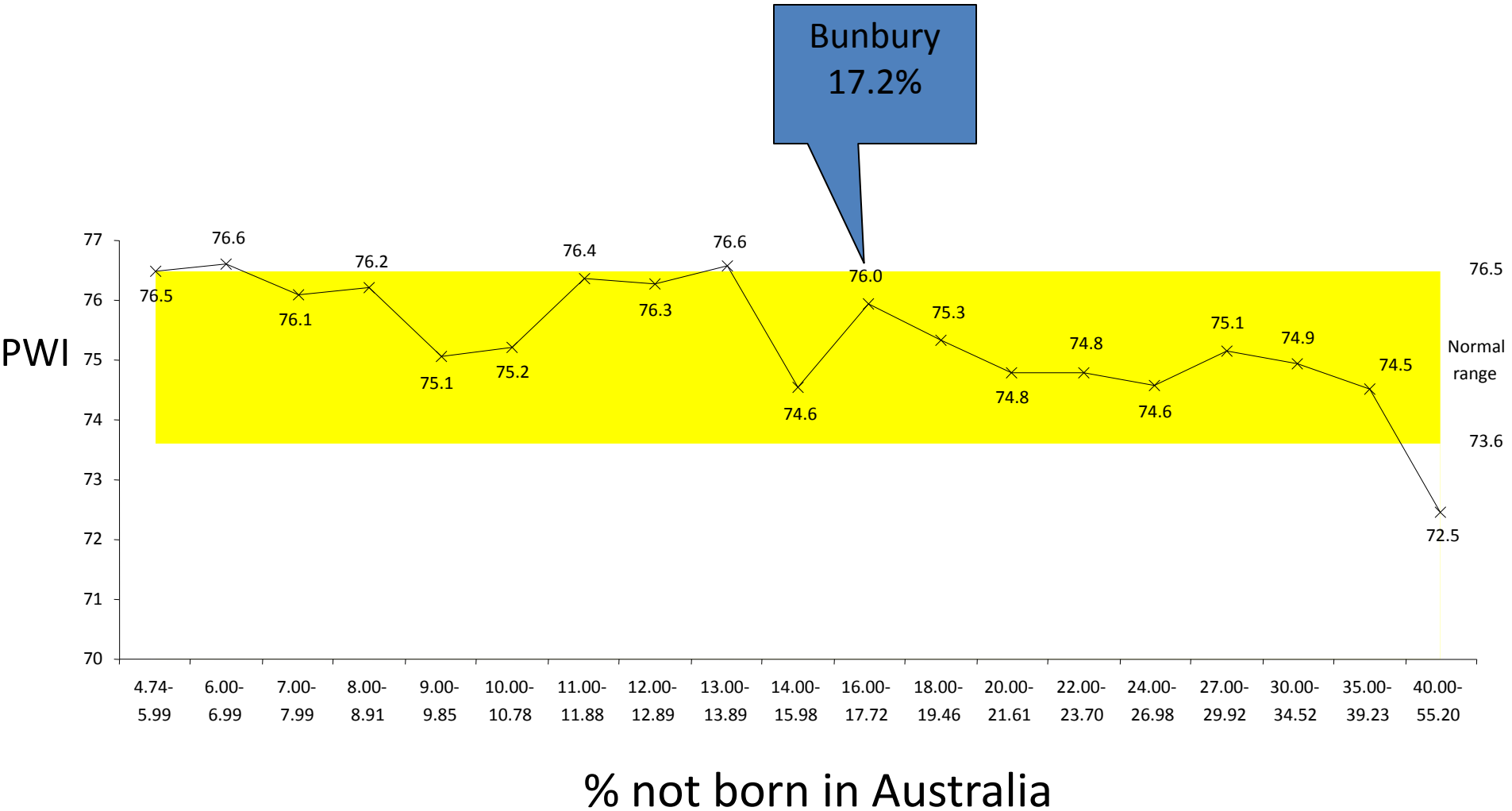
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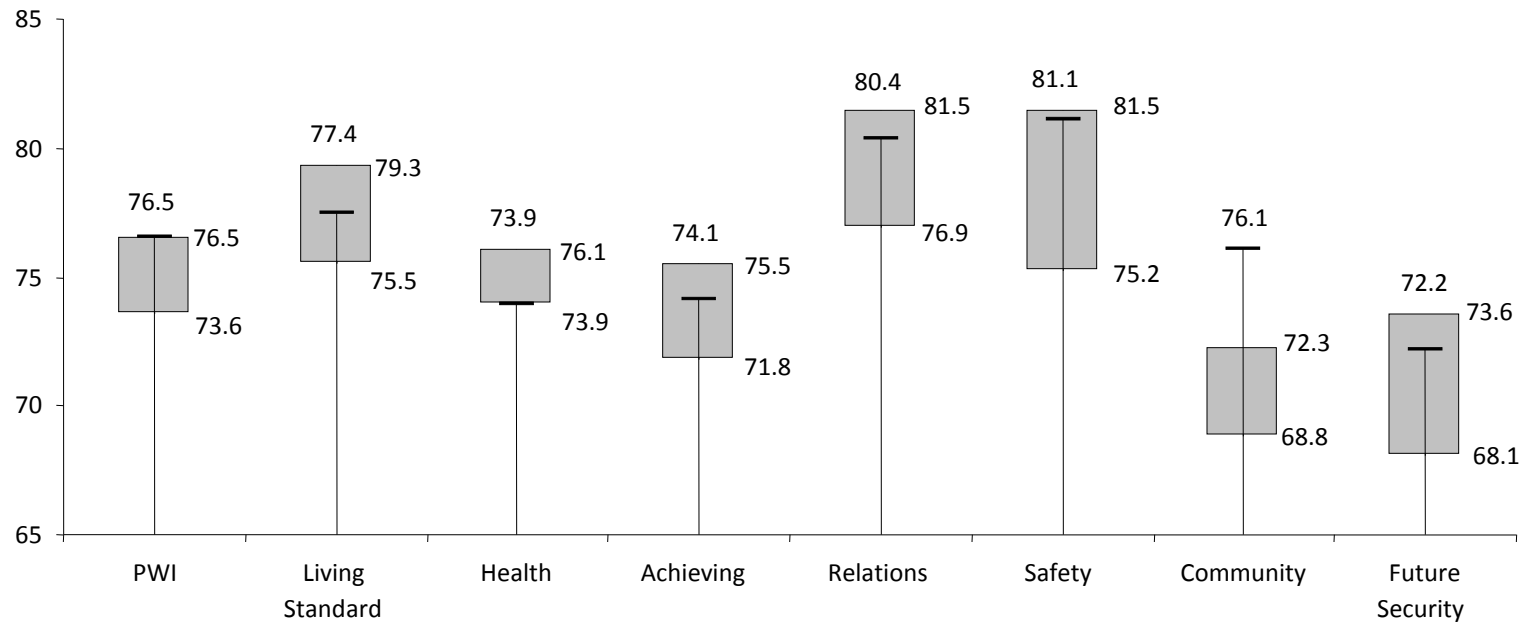
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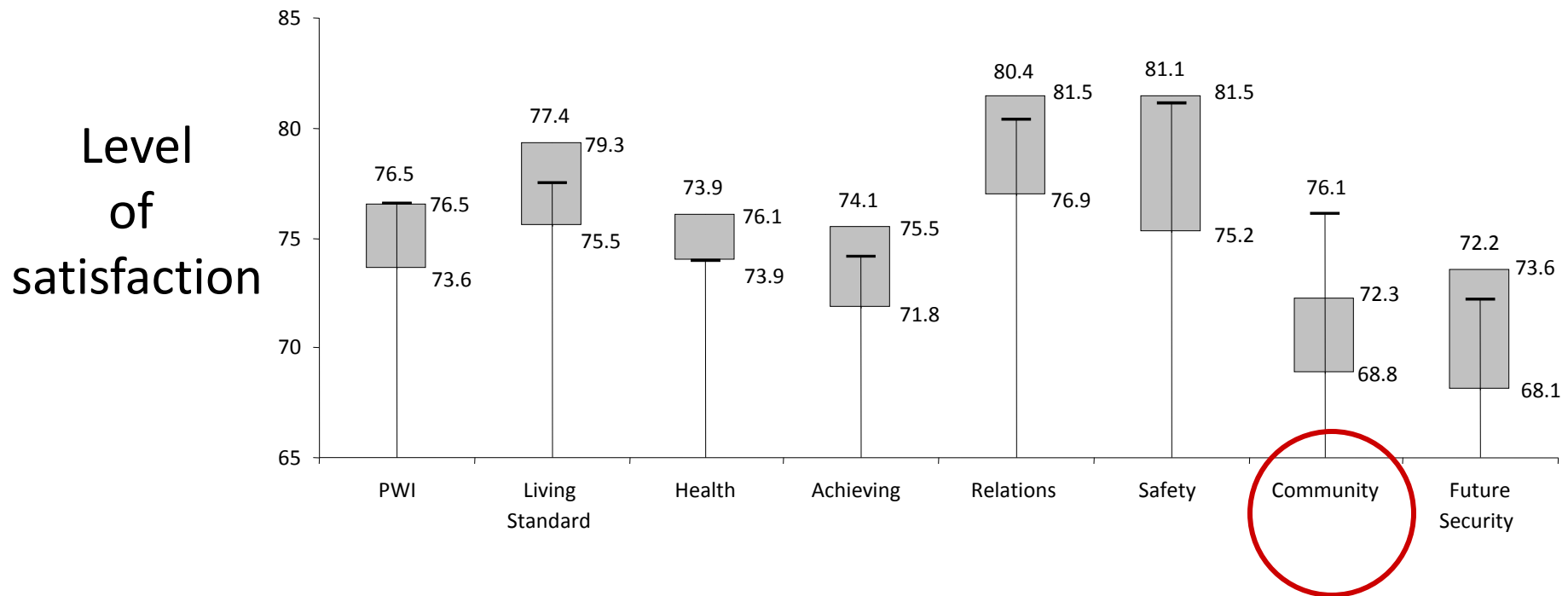


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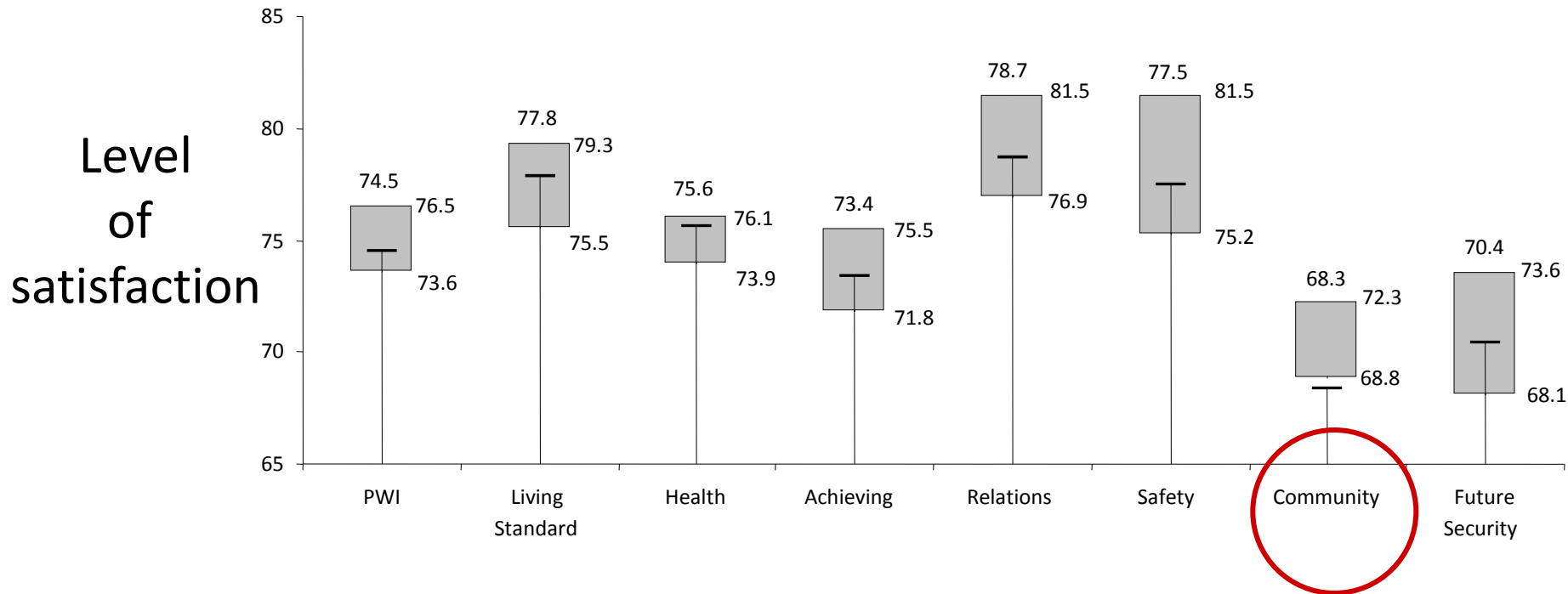


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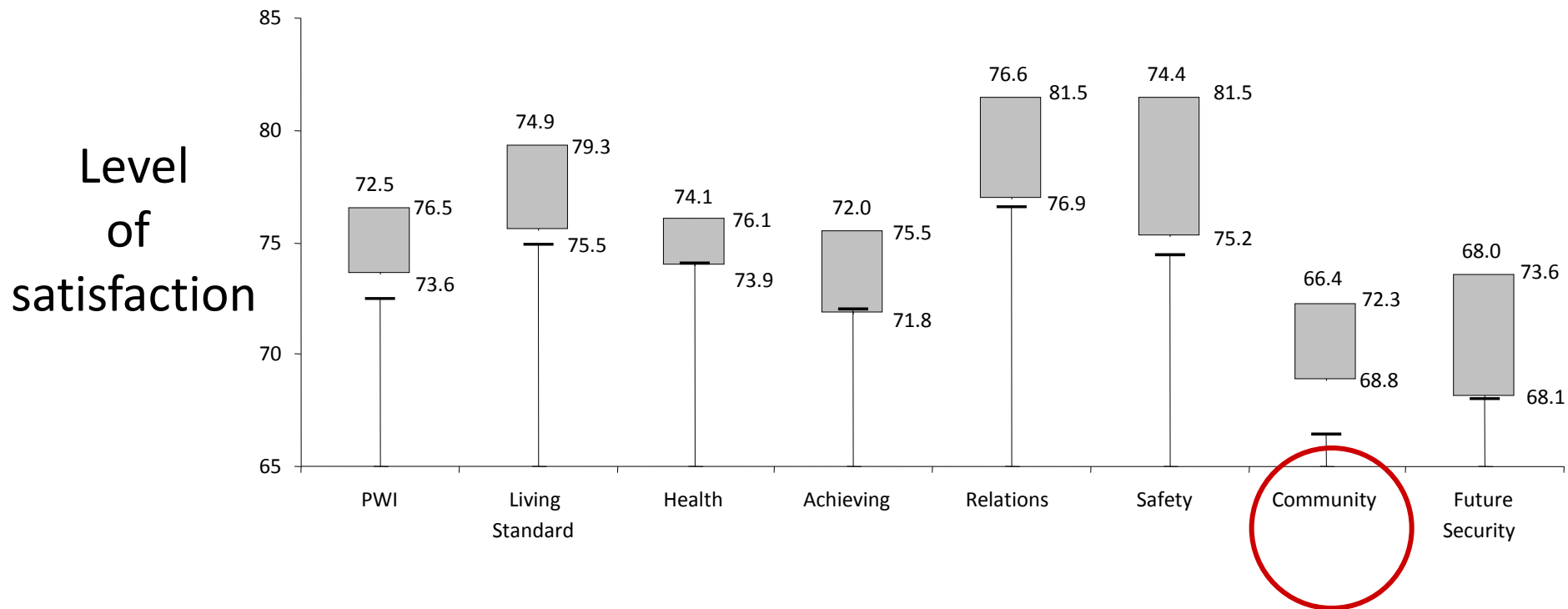


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