Fiscal Decentralization and Life Satisfaction in Chile. A Municipal Multilevel analysis.

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Abstract

This research hinges upon the relationship between fiscal decentralization and life satisfaction. It contributes to the field in performing an empirical analysis focused on the case of Chile, by mixing the national household survey (CASEN) with municipal level information. This is analysis is based on a multilevel analysis, thereby both data bases are integrated. While municipal fiscal autonomy does not appear to be related with life satisfaction when we look at municipal averages, this effect seems to be robust and significant in the multilevel analysis. Interestingly, our results show that the elderly groups are the most benefited from local level expenditures. Environmental conditions do affect life satisfaction, this being the case of the municipal poverty rate and the municipal share of rural people. But most importantly, municipal fiscal decentralization affects individual level life satisfaction positively.

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I. Introduction

It has been argued that decentralization in general and Fiscal Decentralization (FD) in particular, may enhance the quality of local public goods (Oates 1972). The theoretical literature has provided some well-known explanations to support this hypothesis. Among others, it has been hypothesized that decentralization takes advantage of the (potentially) more accurate knowledge of local authorities about their own constituency (Hayek 1945), that it encourages stronger accountability to people (Seabrihgt 1996, Escobar-Lemmon and Ross 2014) and it raises the likelihood of more innovation in the design of effective public policies (Rose-Ackerman 1980). Since the theoretical down side of decentralization is also a case in point (e.i. Treisman 2007, Boffa et. al. 2016), an extensive but not fully conclusive empirical literature has been developed to provide evidence on the likely effects of FD on a wide number of areas (e.i. Ahmad and Brosio 2009, Letelier 2012).

This research builds upon previous empirical studies that show a systematic positive relationship between decentralization and life satisfaction (Frey and Stutzer 2000, 2002; Bjørnskov et al. 2008; Hessami 2010, Voigt and Blume 2012, Díaz-Serrano and Rodríguez-Pose 2012 and Sujarwoto and Tampubolon 2015, Saez and Letelier 2016). While results generally confirm the hypothesis that subnational autonomy tends to improve individuals' life satisfaction, a number of relevant issues are still unattended in this research agenda. First, there is the challenge as to how we can properly measure this autonomy as it entails fiscal, administrative and political dimensions. Second, FD itself admits a myriad of alternative measurements, in which a basic distinction should be made between its revenue and expenditure sides. Third, if we focus on the expenditure side, the question remains as to what types of "decentralized government expenditures" are the ones that fit the theoretical predictions on the benefits of decentralization. This present research intends to address some of these questions by testing the effect of FD on individuals' life satisfaction in the case of Chile.

Under the recognition that not all local jurisdictions in a particular country are equally decentralized from the fiscal view point, we propose a municipal specific "FD measurement" which is meant to capture the expenditure side of FD. In dealing with municipal-level FD indicators and individual characteristics taken from a survey, a "multilevel" analysis is conducted (Hox 1995). Our empirical model is estimated on a database of 345 municipalities for 2013 and 250.000 individual level observations taken from the national Household Survey (CASEN), in which interviewees are requested to define their satisfaction with life in the range of 0 to 9. Main results from the empirical analysis confirm the relevance of municipal level environmental factors in explaining life satisfaction, among which FD and municipal expenditure per head are two of them. At the individual level, our estimations are generally on line with previous studies on the subject matter.

The remaining of this paper is as follows. The revision of the literature in presented section II, the data analysis is made in section III and the empirical model is presented in section IV. Section V contains our main conclusions.

II. The review of literature.

Augments in favor of FD may be divided into two broad groups. Those that advocate the benefits in economic efficiency as we devolve fiscal capacity of subnational governments, and those that relieve the benefit of government's accountability as subnational jurisdictions are made responsible for the actions they take. While the so called "first generation" of theoretical models was more inspired on the first approach (Oates 1972), the second generation is clearly focused on the second one (Oates 2008). Whatever the argument is, a more efficient delivery of public goods leads to better quality for the same cost (tax) and/or more control of the people on the expenditure being made by those who spend the budget. A straightforward generalization of above statement implies that FD is likely to raise individuals' life satisfaction. Nevertheless, two caveats are in order. First, a comprehensive list of reasons may put this hypothesis into question. Among factors worth mentioning, decentralization may favor corruption as local level politics makes private and public interest to get too close to each other, it may also lead to poor management practices if local level officers lack the necessary professional skills, or it may lower government's accountability as democratic values are not fully integrated into the existing institutional framework (Prud'homme 1995). Second, even if we accept the benefits and the costs being involved, the most likely outcome is that only some areas of government will improve with decentralization. Following Letelier and Saez (2013), the net benefit of decentralizing specific areas of government hinges upon a tradeoff between the advantage of information resulting from a closer knowledge of local affairs, and the cost resulting from a smaller scale of operations.

In line with above arguments, we hypothesize that FD in general is expected to enhance people' quality of life, as it is likely to improve the quality of local public goods and/or reduce their cost for residents. Nevertheless, this improvement is likely to depend on a number of factor, some of them boing individual characteristics, and some other are environmental factors linked to the living conditions of the jurisdiction where this individual lives. Factors such the age and/or the income of the individual in question may be relevant in this regard, as not all individuals are likely to take advantage of local services in the same way. Albeit we do not address this issue in this study, there is also the chance that only some types of expenditures are genuine "local services", while other are more efficiently delivery (or at least funded) by the national level Saez and Letelier (2016).

As far as determinants of life satisfaction, an extensive empirical literature has addressed the matter. A review by Dolan, et. al (2009), suggests that a comprehensive list should at least include income, age, gender, ethnicity, education, heath, labour status, , marital status, religión and number of sons, among other. Nevertheless, the analysis of the effect of institutions on subjective well-being is still a new area of investigation, less is known about the link between decentralization and happiness. Frey and Stutzer (2000) carried out a pioneering study in which they analyzed the effects of decentralization on an interregional level in Switzerland. They concluded that institutional factors, such as government initiatives, referendums, and local autonomy, have a significant and positive effect on the satisfaction of the Swiss. Nevertheless, this effect is dependent upon the direct link that exists between the binomial democracy-voter preferences and subjective well-being. Similiar studies were carried out by Díaz-Mountain and Rodriguez-Pose (2012), who extended their

analysis to every European country and studied how different powers and resources of regional and local European governments improve the level of individual satisfaction. Bjørnskov et al., (2008), making use of a more extensive database that included 60,000 individual observations of 66 countries, concluded that decentralization of spending does not have a significant impact on happiness.

III Data Analysis

Our data set comes from two sources. One is the national household survey (CASEN), which in this case corresponds to the 2013 version. Correspondingly, we merge this data with municipal level information, which is taken from the Ministry of Interior Affairs (SINIM), and the Electoral National Service. Chile has 345 municipalities, for which average values between 2011 and 2013 are used. It should be bear in mind that not all variables usually considered in empirical studies can be obtained from the household survey at stake. As stated above though, life satisfaction (LS) is one of the survey's question, this being assigned ten values from 0 to 9. Our measurement of fiscal decentralization is inspired on a definition proposed by Bahl (2005), which has been made into a country level metrix by Boex and Simatupang. (2008). At the municipal level, this may be defined as the share of municipal revenues not being spent on long term contract personnel (see annex), all of which is divided by the number of local residents who are formally registered to vote. This last factor stands for the degree of accountability that local authorities are exposed to (more of this below).

As far as municipal averages are concerned, Figure III.1 below shows the relationship between life satisfaction and decentralization, this being weighted by four alternative variables. Despite this preliminary only captures the second (municipal) level correlation between pairs of variables, some stylized facts can be observed. Frist; despite some exceptions, an important share of urban municipalities appear to be above the regression line (first graph), which suggests the hypothesis that urbanization improves life quality. As for poverty (second graph), bigger circles tend to locate below the regression line, this being an indication of poverty having an effect on life satisfaction. Dots in the third graph are weighted by the share of elderly people. Most municipalities with a high share of people above 65 are above the line, suggesting that municipal fiscal autonomy may have an age-differentiated effect. The impact of personal income may be seen in the fourth graph. Expectedly, high personal income dots are generally above the line, which supports the view that income does affect personal perception of welfare. As far as municipal expenditure per head is concerned; Figure III.2 shows a similar exercise. An important share of jurisdictions is above the line in the cases of dots being weighted by "urban" "% of residents above 65" and "personal income". Similarly to Figure III.1, the opposite occurs when we weight by "poverty".

The slightly negative but weak relationships of FD and Municipal Expenditure per head versus Life Satisfaction hides a great variation of cases within each jurisdiction. This may be appreciated in figure III.3, in which these two variables are graphed against the standard deviation of life satisfaction per municipality. Interestingly, this shows lower dispersion for high FD jurisdictions, which probably indicates more homogenous conditions of life for people living in richer

municipalities. While this is not that clear for the municipal expenditure case (second graph), this figure shows a huge variation of cases for the low expenditure jurisdictions.







IV The empirical model.

Our empirical model is defined in Ec.1. The variable we want to explain (LS) captures 10 levels of "Life Satisfaction", as defined in question r20 from the 2013 National Household Survey¹. Explanatory variables are divided into two levels. Level one is that defined by the municipal-level proxy of decentralization (FD). Level two is represented by the set of individual characteristics of interviewees. This combines 345 municipalities with 250.000 individual level observations.

$$LS_{im} = \alpha + \beta IND_{im} + u_{im}$$
 Eq. 1

Our basic model is based on *Eq.1*, in which life satisfaction for resident "*i*" from municipality "*m*", depends on a set of personal characteristics being grouped in set IND_{im} . This includes features which are usually considered relevant in explaining personal level of satisfaction in the empirical literature, as it is the case of , i) personal income, ii) gender, iii) age, iv) marital status, iv) education, v) health status, vi) religion, v) employment status and vi) ethnicity. The number of sons is not available from the survey, this being replaced by the number of family members. The list above

constitutes our set of "first level" variables. Nevertheless, our basic hypothesis is that these personal characteristics interact with the local environment, in which the municipality itself has a major role to play. Following the conventional multilevel analysis, this implies that β and α are both random variables that vary across jurisdictions. Formally, this may be expressed in *Eqs.2* and *3*, which are then substituted into *Eq.* 1 to get the model to be estimated (*Eq.* 4).

$$\beta_m = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MUN_m + \varepsilon_m \qquad Eq.2$$

$$\alpha_m = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 MUN_m + \pi_m \qquad Eq.3$$

$$LS_{im} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 MUN_m + \beta_0 IND_{im} \beta_1 (IND_{im} \times MUN_m) + (\varepsilon_m \times IND_{im}) + (u_{im} + \pi_m)$$

Where MUN_m is a set of municipal (second) level characteristics, which may strengthen or weaken the effect of personal features referred to above. In our case, this variables include both socio economic characteristics, as well as local fiscal and socio demographic variables, of which municipal fiscal autonomy is an important one. This autonomy will be called "fiscal decentralization", which is assumed to vary across municipalities. While FD at the national level admits a myriad of alternative definitions, the use of this term at the local level is assumed to reflect the municipal leeway to decide on its own expenditures and/or revenues. Given the unitary status of the Chilean constitution, very few if any inter-municipal differentiation can be observed as far as the local institutional rules are concerned.

Nevertheless, municipalities do differ in the extent to which they can freely decide on use of their budget. This means that some expenditures are not under the local government's control. In particular, we use the share of municipal revenues not being allocated to paying *long* term staff contracts. According to the so called Public Sector's Administrative Statute in Chile, all staff members who hold a long term contract enjoy a significant degree of labor stability. For someone to be removed from the job, the employer has to "prove" that the employee failed in his duty, which requires a complicated administrative procedure. Given the fact that such a procedure is very unlikely to end up in the employee being fired, the payroll's share represented by long term staff turns out to be a type of unavoidable expenditure. In addition to this general measurement of fiscal autonomy, the general level of municipal expenditure per resident, the share of residents below the poverty line and degree of urbanization are also included in the regression. All second level variables were taken from the National System of Municipal Information (SINIM).

In order to control for the degree of municipal government's accountability, we include the ratio of local municipal council members to the number of local voters, a Herfindahl index built upon the political party that each municipal council member belongs to, and a dummy that captures the existence of some type of "participatory budget" program in place. We may assume that the higher the number representatives per voter, and the lower the Herfindahl, the more accountable is the local authority to its constituency (Boex and Simatupang 2008, Porto and porto and Sanguinetti 2001). On the one hand, more homogenous preferences among residents produce stronger demands on local public goods. On the other, more representatives per head are likely to result in

Eq.4

specific groups of residents being better represented at the local level, which gives them more "voice" in front of the local authorities. While participatory budgets are meant to strengthen local accountability, it should be mentioned that only 19 municipalities formally declare to use such a budget decision mechanism. It must be mentioned though, that in the cases at stake, only a very small share of the whole budget is actually decided on a participatory fashion, to which must be added that "participation" in this case means a wide variety of different ways to express collective demands (Paglai and Montecinos 2006). Political variables were taken from the Electoral Service (SERVEL).

Results of multilevel regressions are reported in table 1. The average LS score across municipalities is 6.42 (in the range between 0 and 9), which reflects in the intercept (model 1). Since the variance component (0.115) is very significant, it follows that a substantial variation in LS exists in municipal means. As for the share of this variance due to the municipal level, this can be estimated from the inter-municipal correlation coefficient, which equals 2.5%. A second version of the model (model 2), in which a set of basic second (municipal) level explanatory variables are included, which leads to a reduction in the deviance Statistics. This shows that second level variables do explain some of the variance in LS. In a third estimation (model 3) three variables of level 2 are added. They are meant to detect the effect of local government accountability on citizen's life quality. As it can be seen though, none of these variables appear to have a significant effect. Nevertheless, both in model 2 and 3, our fiscal decentralization measurement (DF) is marginally significant at 10%. So, we repeat the estimation of model 2, by adding a set of level 1 variables (model 4), and remove the accountability variables. This significantly reduces our deviance statistics, as these variables do contribute to explaining part of the variance in LS. By looking at the estimated coefficients, the average LS appears to be 3.049 had the set control variable be at their average. Similarly to models 2 and 3, urban and poverty have significant albeit opposite effects. Interestingly, FD appears to be very significant in this case. As for level 1 variables, they do not deviate from the expected sign.

A last refinement can be done by adding the interaction effects (model 4), as this stands for the model structure in Eq.4 above. In this case, two variables will be added, which are the interactions between municipal expenditures per head with income and age respectively. As far as age is concerned, we hypothesize that only those individuals above certain age do appreciate municipal services. This occurs for two reasons. First, they have rather little mobility across jurisdictions and have a more permanent contact with the local environment. Second, elderly people very often use municipal services more intensively, as many of the municipal activities benefit them directly. Thus, we generate a dummy for those above 65 (D65), which is interacted with M_EXP_CAP (M_EXP_CAPD65). The interpretation of this result is that; while municipal expenditure per head has very little if any impact on people's perception of life quality, this effect is positive and significant in jurisdictions with a higher share of residents above 65. Despite other age thresholds were taken to test, they do not seem to affect results being reported.

Table 1. Multilevel Estimations.								
Fixed Effects	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5			
Level 2								
	6.42***	5.95**	5.97***	3.049***	3.02***			
CONS	(0.02129)	(0.28)	(0.376)	(0.269)	(0.271)			
		4.30	4.59	6.08***	6.52***			
FD		(2.75)	(2.79)	(2.44)	(2.51)			
		-0.002	-0.003	-0.003	-0.004			
M_EXP_CAP		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)			
DOVERTY		-0.010***	-0.011***	-0.005*	-0.004*			
POVERTI		(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)			
		0.004***	0.004***	0.002*	0.001*			
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.0009)			
PART. BUDGET			0.05					
			(0.069)					
COUNS VOTERS			-0.057					
			(0.324)					
HERF			-0.032					
Laval 1			(0.243)					
Level 1			1	0.00***	0.000***			
GENDER				-0.06***	-0.062***			
				(0.02)	(0.02)			
AGE				-0.04***	-0.03***			
				(0.002)	(0.003)			
AGE ²				(0.0004****	(0.0004****			
				0.00002)	(0.00002)			
WITH COUPLE				(0.017)	(0.017)			
				0.206***	0.200***			
EDUC-2				(0.019)	(0.020)			
				0.539***	0.542***			
EDUC-3				(0.026)	(0.026)			
				-0.532***	-0.531***			
UNEMPLOYED				(0.048)	(0.048)			
				0.427***	0.428***			
HEALTH				(0.006)	(0.006)			
RELICION				0.332***	0.336***			
KEEIGION				(0.027)	(0.027)			
				-0.078***	-0.082***			
				(0.025)	(0.026)			
LINCOME				0.105***	0.104***			
				(0.007)	(0.007)			
HOME MEMBERS				-0.012***	-0.014***			
				(0.005)	(0.005)			
Interactions		1	1					
(M_EXP_CAP)×D65					1.24e-07*** (5.84e-08)			
(M_EXP_CAP)× LINCOME					9.62e-10 (9.62e-10)			
Random Effects		1						
	0.115***	0.096***	0.096***	0.067***	0.066***			
var(_cons)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)			
/_ · · · · ·	4.434***	4.44***	4.44***	3.98***	3.98***			
var(Residual)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.022)			
Model Fit Statistics								
Deviance	362,140	356,414	356,414	285,948	281,113			

AIC	362,146	356,428	356,434	285,986	281,155
BIC	362,174	356,494	356,527	286,160	281,346

V Conclusions.

- Our results confirm most of the previous findings regarding the sources of life satisfaction. This is the case of personal income, labor status, religion, gender, among others. Nevertheless, reported results do confirm that environmental characteristics of the jurisdiction in which people contribute significantly to explain people's personal welfare.
- 2. Among municipal level variables worth mentioning, the impact of poverty and the share of urban population appear to be important explanatory variables. Interestingly, urbanization affects life satisfaction positively. The set of variables being used to control accountability do not have the expected effect. Most likely, this occurs because the rather low capacity and almost null visibility that local representatives have in Chile. Participatory budgets are also negligible in explaining life satisfaction. This result is in line with the very low share of the budget being assigned though this mechanism in just very few municipalities.
- 3. Our main finding refers to the positive impact of FD as a level 2 explanatory variables. While this just becomes apparent in the multilevel analyst, it reflects a great variation among individual's perceptions within municipalities. Regarding the municipal expenditure per head, we find that people above 65 perceive municipal services as valuable asset more than the average citizen. This may be the result of them having less mobility across local governments, which raises their personal awareness of local services.

ANNEX: Definition of variables

	First Level	Source	
LS	Life Satisfaction. Ten levels between 0 and 9.	CASEN 2013	
Income	Corrected Individual income. It includes sudisidies.	CASEN 2013	
Poverty	% of por residents in the municipal área	CASEN 2013	
H-Memebers	Number of home Members. Dummy variable.	CASEN 2013	
Primary Edication	It only has Primary Education. Dummy variable	CASEN 2103	
Secondary Education	It only has Secondary Education. Dummy variable	CASEN 2013	
Terciary Education	It has Terciary Education. Dummy variable.	CASEN 2013	
Health	Health status. Seven degrees from very bad (0) to very good (6)	CASEN 2013	
Indigenous	The interviewee defines himself as indigenous	CASEN 2013	
Unemployed	The interviewee has been sershing for a 12obo ver the last 4	CASEN 2013	
	weeks.		
Religion	The interviewee participates in a religous organization	CASEN 2013	
	Second Level		
FD	Share of non Personal Expenditure	SINIM	
	Number of Residents Enrolled in Electoral Registers		
Poverty	% of por residents in the municipal area	CASEN 2013	
ME_CAP	Municipal Expenditures per Head	SINIM	
ME_CAP_CULTURE	Municipal Expenditures per Head on Cultural Activities	SINIM	
ME_CAP_RECREATION	Municipal Expenditures per Head on Recreational Activities	SINIM	
ME_CAP_EDUCATION	Municipal Expenditure (contribution) on education	SINIM	
ME_CAP_HEALTH	Municipal Expenditure (contribution) on health	SINIM	
HERF	Herfindahl index of political parties among council's members	SERVEL	
Part Budget	The municipal government has a participatory Budget programe	SUBDERE	

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