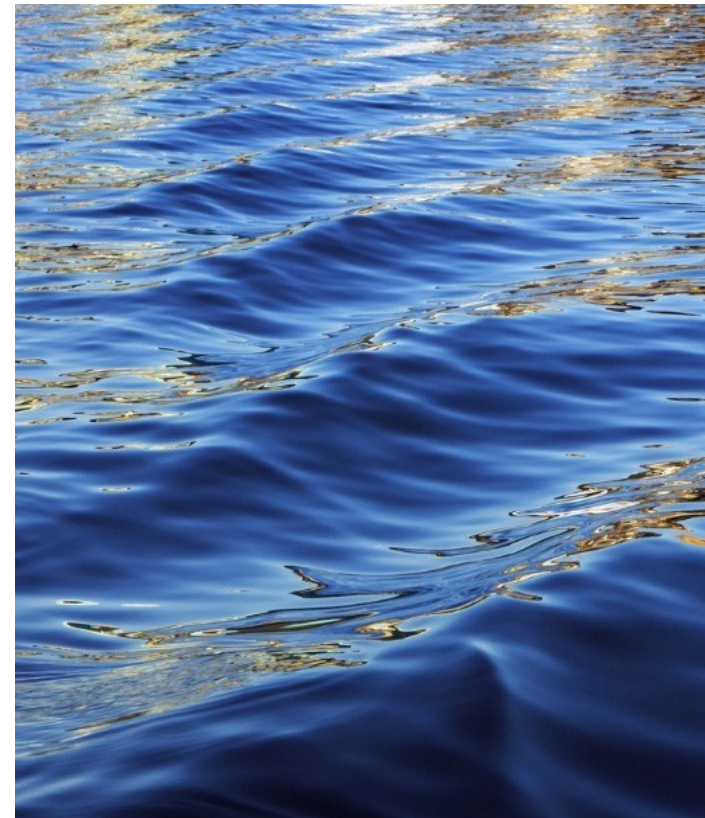




The importance of the natural environment for mental wellbeing

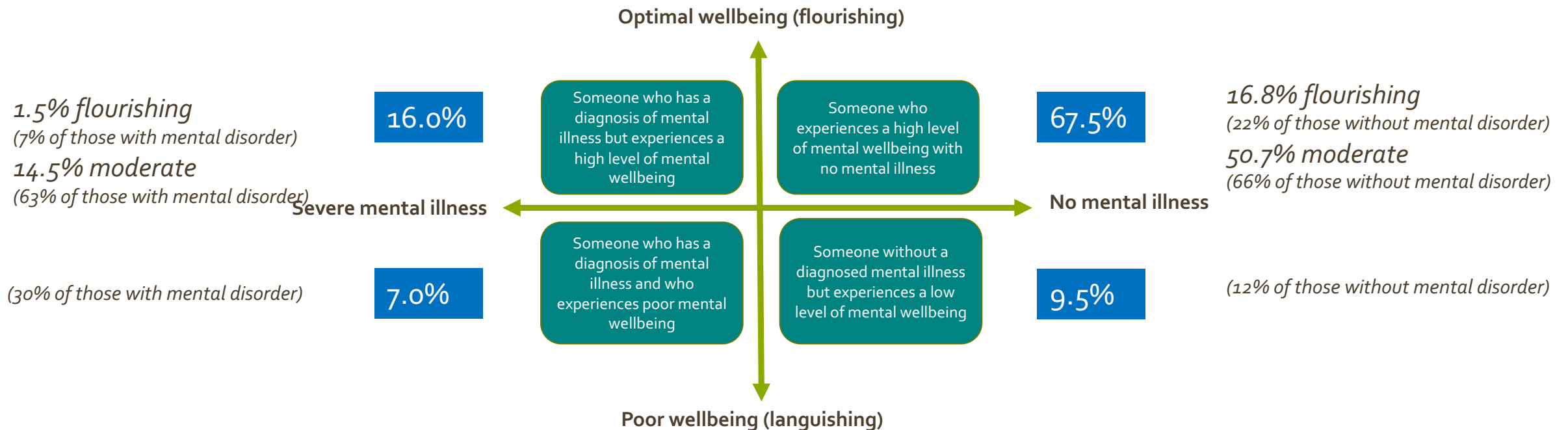
Ann DeSmet

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
University of Antwerp, Belgium



Mental well-being

- Includes amongst others being satisfied with life, having positive attitudes towards oneself and others, having a sense of direction in life and social belonging, personal growth, ability to manage their environment
- Mental health and mental illness are not extremes on one continuum



Source: Keyes (2009). *Toward a science of mental health*. In: Lopez & Snyder. *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology 2nd ed.* Oxford University Press. p89-95

The natural environment and pro-environmental behaviour

- Innate need to connect to nature, stress reduction, reducing attentional fatigue
- **Restorative** environments: away, endless, interest, preference
- Positive effect of quantity of **green spaces** (Van den Berg et al., 2015)
- Small positive effect of **urban blue spaces** (Smith et al., 2021)
- Small positive effect of **nature connectedness** (Pritchard et al., 2020)
 - Moderate effect on personal growth
- Individual and collective environmental **activism** (Schwartz et al., 2022):
 - Collective but not individual action moderates effect of eco-anxiety on depressive symptoms
- May depend on biospheric/self-transcendence **personal values** (Bonnes et al., 2011)



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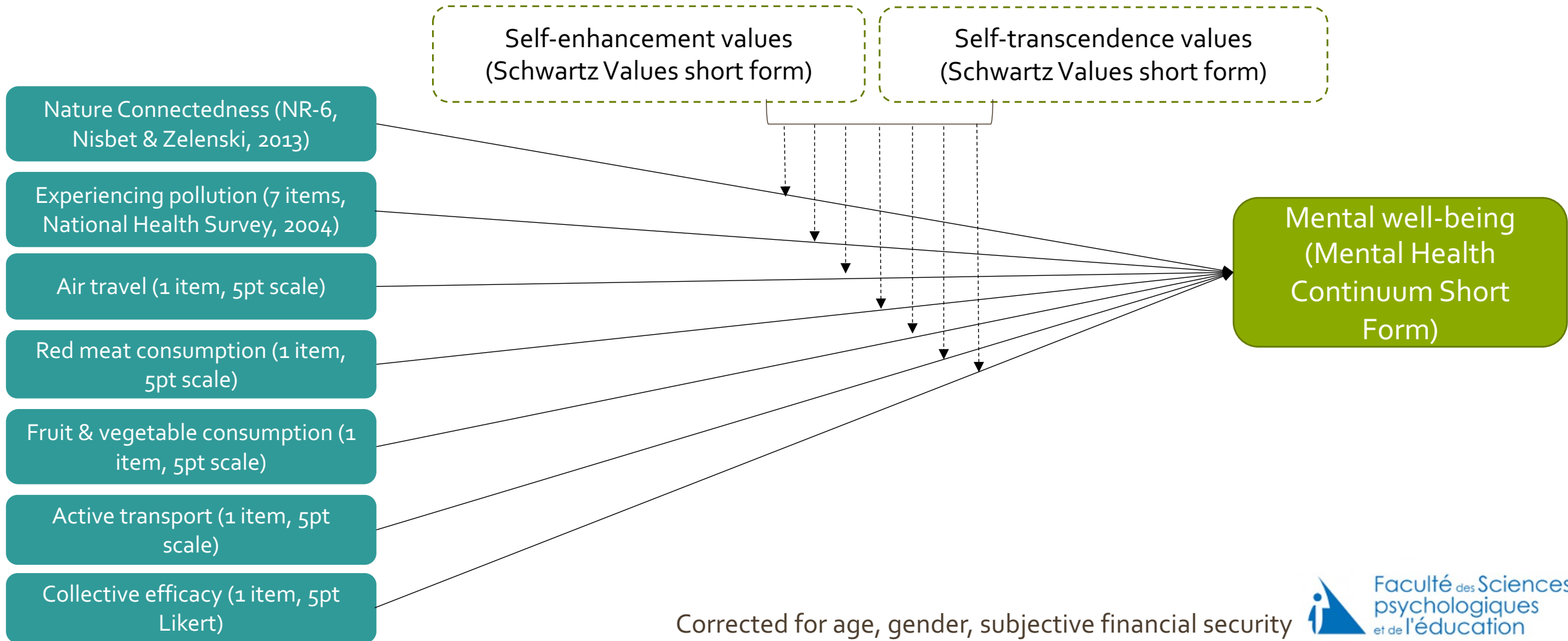
Sources: **Van den Berg** et al (2015). Health benefits of green spaces in the living environment: A systematic review of epidemiological studies. *Urban forestry & urban greening*, 14(4), 806-816.; **Smith** et al. (2021). Urban blue spaces and human health: A systematic review and meta-analysis of quantitative studies. *Cities*, 119, 103413; **Pritchard** et al (2020). The relationship between nature connectedness and eudaimonic well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of happiness studies*, 21, 1145-1167; **Schwartz** et al. (2022). Climate change anxiety and mental health: Environmental activism as buffer. *Current Psychology*, 1-14; **Bonnes** et al. (2011). The ambivalence of attitudes toward urban green areas: Between proenvironmental worldviews and daily residential experience. *Environment and Behavior*, 43(2), 207-232.

Aims

- Secondary data analysis of a study on health and pro-environmental behaviour
- Research questions:
 - Do positive (nature connectedness) and negative experiences (experiencing neighbourhood pollution as a problem) with the natural environment predict mental wellbeing?
 - What is the association between pro-environmental (fruit and vegetable consumption, active transport, collective efficacy to address climate change) or environmentally damaging (red meat consumption, air travel) behaviours and mental wellbeing?
 - Does this association differ by an individual's personal values?

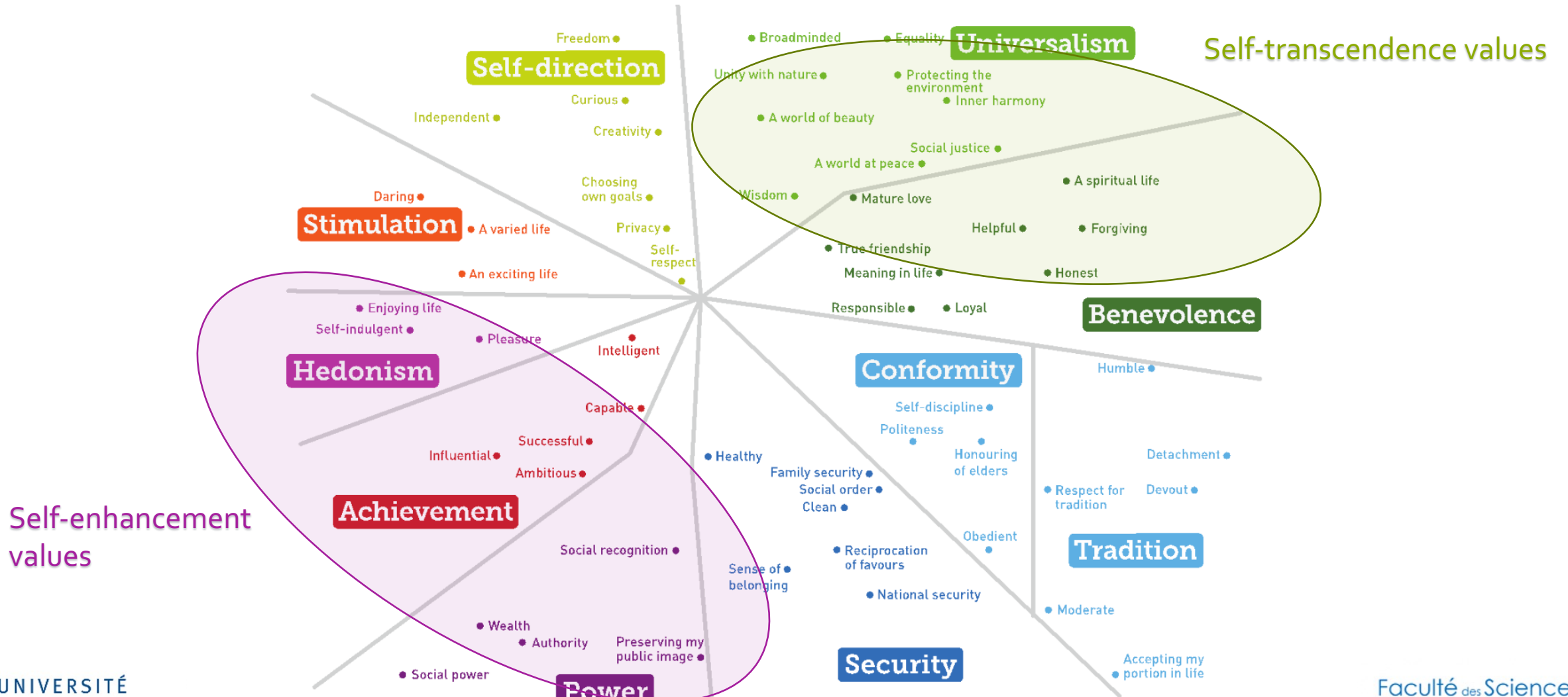
Methods

- n=314 West-European adults (M age=29.26 ± 9.78, 50% female), online 'Prolific' sample
- 21.2% flourishing; 36% some to great difficulty to make ends meet



Corrected for age, gender, subjective financial security

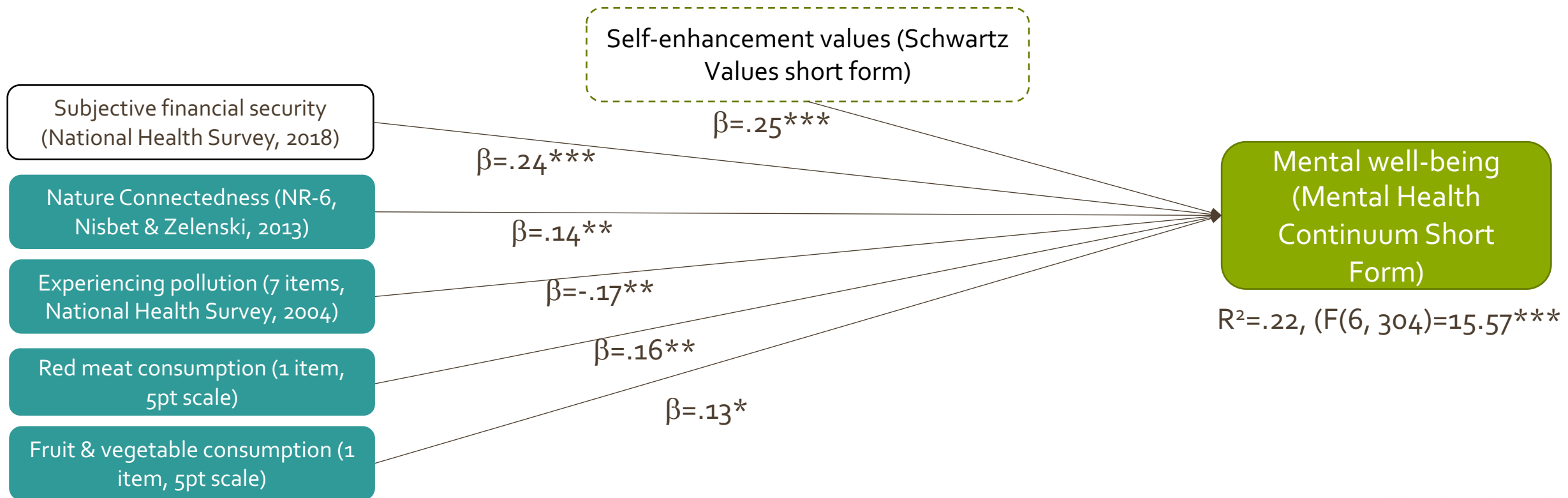
Personal values



Dimensional smallest space analysis: individual level value structure average across 68 countries from Schwartz, S. H. (2006). Basic human values: Theory, measurement, and applications. *Revue française de sociologie*, 42, 249-288.

Results

- Individual actions but not collective efficacy predicted mental wellbeing
- Main effect but no moderating effects of personal values



Conclusions and future directions

- Direct effect of experiences with nature on mental wellbeing:
 - Positive effects of positive experiences (nature connectedness)
 - Negative effects of negative experiences (pollution)
 - Regardless of individual's personal values
- Food consumption predicts mental wellbeing
- Valuing personal benefits predicts mental wellbeing, whereas values that focus on caring for others and the planet do not
- Social determinants are important (financial security)
- **Recommendations:**
 - Messaging consistent with self-enhancement values rather than biospheric/self-transcendence values may be associated with higher well-being when promoting environmentally friendly behaviour
 - Substitute red meat for FV may not lower mental wellbeing
 - Urban/environmental planning to reduce pollution and encourage nature connectedness



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Thank you!



Ann.DeSmet@ulb.be

Research Center for the promotion of health,
prosocial behavior and wellbeing (PACE)