Celebrations are pervasive. At a personal level they include birthdays, funerals, weddings, get-togethers, award ceremonies, and parties organised for any number of reasons. At a community level they include faith-based services, public holidays, commemorations and community festivals. These are just a selection. I argue that there is a need to better understand what role celebrations can play to improve health and wellbeing and not just for individuals but for communities. In this thesis I examine the experiences, context, processes and politics of celebrations and how they contribute to both personal and collective health and wellbeing. Of course, some celebrations make a more meaningful contribution than others. And it is the nature of that difference I seek to understand. The two leading research questions I address are: • How do celebrations contribute to personal and collective health and wellbeing? • What is ‘healthy’ celebration practice? There are three sections in this thesis. In the first I describe and discuss the Australian context of celebration activities. I also explore definitions of celebrations. I consider celebrations to be an active process made up of both play and ritual. Celebrations seek to focus people’s attention, and intention, in a positive way. The resulting celebratory act(s) are a cultural expression of what a particular individual or community values. There are a diversity of celebration forms and practices - open, spontaneous, planned and formal. Each celebration is influenced by, and influences, the context in which it occurs. I will be focusing on celebrations occurring within a community context. A community may be a family, an organization, local community, shared interest group or a whole of society grouping. In the second section of the thesis I analyse the relationship of celebrations to various dimensions of health and wellbeing. These dimensions include: social connectedness, identity, transitions and lifespan development, and community capacity. A major part of my fieldwork was undertaken in Victoria where I studied 20 community celebrations. The community celebrations I examined in varying degrees, did positively contribute to personal and collective wellbeing. They did so because they included positive and personally meaningful activities. They explored identity. Celebrations played a role in supporting transitions leading to ongoing healthy development. They provided opportunities for learning; not just knowledge but allowed values to be explored and skills and resources to be gained. They brought people together to interact and fostered a sense of belonging. Celebrations that were health enhancing valued diversity but also explored what unites people. My research confirmed that celebrations can foster our connections; to ourselves, others, the
Here are five steps to improve personal well-being, societal cohesion and greater cooperation with our future. Increasing support to mental health. During the last century, major efforts have been deployed to promote physical health. According to the World Health Organization, mental challenges account for 47% of disability in life, calculated in the number of days during which people are unable to function normally in their daily life (depression 17%, other psychiatric conditions 12%, alcohol and drug addiction 10%, Alzheimer’s 8%), compared with 8% for respiratory diseases, 5% for cardiovascular diseases and 2% for cancer. However, addressing mental ailments account for only a small part of the health budget of developed nations (about 10%). Source: Jakob Trollbäck.