

Book Review

Reviewed by Lucía Macchia

Email: lucia.macchia@citystgeorges.ac.uk

The Happiness Revolution in Europe

by: Richard A. Easterlin and Kelsey J. O'Connor

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In 1974, Richard A. Easterlin wrote what would later be recognised as the seminal article in the literature of the economics of happiness. Fifty years later, Easterlin and one of his last PhD students, now an accomplished scholar, Kelsey J. O'Connor, have written an excellent book that continues to add value to the field.

One of Easterlin's contributions to science was the idea that happiness scores are more informative about citizens' wellbeing than national income. Based on this idea, the book highlights the role that happiness scores have in understanding modern society and debates how meaningful is to not only use but also average people's feelings scores to get a broader picture. Wisely, the authors also describe the disagreement that these ideas had among scholars – a situation that typically arises when ideas that challenge traditional thinking are proposed.

The book focuses on Europe. First, it compares the happiness of European countries with that of the rest of the world, highlighting the now widely known fact that the Nordic countries are at the top of the world happiness ranking. Then, the authors show how citizens' happiness has changed over the years and empirically test potential causes, such as welfare policies and the shifts in income inequality in the countries where people live. They also test factors that many might assume are major drivers of happiness but that, according to empirical analysis, have little or no impact.

Toward the end of the book, the authors examine happiness inequality across countries and investigate whether happiness scores differ by socioeconomic-status, gender, age and cohort, nativity, and place of residence. Finally, they discuss the role of the COVID-19 pandemic on the happiness of European nations.

The book addresses these topics across seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the field and key concepts that are important for making the most of the rest of the book. Chapter two focuses on the global ranking of happiness and examines whether happiness has increased or decreased across countries over time, while chapter three offers potential explanations for those trends. Chapters four and five explore happiness inequality and differences in happiness across demographic groups. Chapter six covers happiness during the COVID-19 pandemic, and chapter seven concludes the book. The authors use tables and figures to support the narrative, lending scientific credibility to their argument. These

visual aids are well-integrated into the discussion and clearly explained making them accessible to readers from a wide range of backgrounds, including those without formal academic training in the field.

This book is a must-read for early-career and experienced scholars. Younger readers will gain insight into the evolution of the field of the economics of happiness, while more experienced academics will have the chance to consolidate 50 years of work in a concise yet detailed account. The book is highly accessible to non-academic audiences as well as scholars from other disciplines. Policymakers, health practitioners, and educators will also benefit from the insights shared in this book.

By combining rich discussions and easily accessible empirical analyses, the authors provide a comprehensive account of the key findings that have shaped how the world views people's happiness. This book definitely contributes not only to the now well-established field of the economics of happiness but also to the pursuit of happier nations.

Overall, this book offers a valuable contribution to the literature on wellbeing by bridging decades of scholarship with contemporary social issues. Its accessible style and empirical depth make it a useful resource for many audiences. The scientific evidence offered in this book invites people to think about their happiness not just as an individual pursuit, but as something shaped by broader social, economic, and policy contexts. In doing so, it encourages reflection on what truly matters for creating happier societies.