

Happiness Research for Public Policy and Administration

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Happiness Research for Public Policy and Administration

Abstract

Purpose—The purpose of this viewpoint is to introduce happiness research for public policy and administration scholars and practitioners. It focuses on what can be useful for the discipline, provides relevant examples, and presents the most recent findings and directions for future research.

Design/methodology/approach—A combination of literature review, argumentation, and illustrations.

Findings—Over past few decades, there has been a tremendous growth in happiness research, and over past few years this research has started addressing policy issues such as housing, transportation, and inequality. Strikingly, public policy and administration discipline has failed to notice these developments. Happiness research has great potential, and can be used in many theoretical and practical ways to advance the common good.

Originality/value—Happiness is extremely important and useful for public policy and administration and yet largely overlooked in the discipline. Existing literature reviews are not written with the discipline in mind, and this viewpoint is aimed at filling this gap.

Keywords—Public Policy, Public Administration, Happiness, Subjective Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction

Paper Type—Viewpoint

1. Introduction

It is striking that search for “happiness” in two leading journals in public policy and administration, PAR (Public Administration Review) and JPAM (Journal of Policy Analysis and Management), returns zero results.¹ At the same time, leading (and Nobel Prize winning) economists including Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz, and politicians including French former president Nicolas Sarkozy and former UK Cabinet Secretary Lord O’Donnell are actively pursuing the idea of using happiness for policy making and administration (Stiglitz et al. 2009, Helliwell et al. 2012, O’Donnell et al. 2014). Somehow, the discipline

¹ *Of course, it is debatable what a leading journal is. Claim here is only made that PAR or JPAM is one of the leading journals, not the leading journal. Search was conducted in June 2014 using Google Scholar. There were several articles that used term “happiness” in their text—these articles were not, however, even remotely concerned with using happiness measures for public policy and administration. It is disturbing because leading journals in other social science fields publish studies about happiness in sociology, political science, economics, and of course in psychology. Even the leading general interest journals such as Science publish happiness studies. Furthermore, scholars in other disciplines already use happiness measures specifically for public policy & administration—for instance, economists (Layard 2006, Helliwell 2014, Bjornskov et al. 2008, Layard 2006), psychologists (Oishi et al. 2012, Diener 2009, Csikszentmihalyi 2000, Myers 1988), a sociologist (Veenhoven 2000, 2012), and recently researchers working at policy making institutions such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Boarini et al. 2013, Fleche et al. 2011).*

has missed these developments. The goal of this viewpoint is to present some uses of happiness measures for public policy and popularize happiness research among scholars and practitioners in public policy and administration.² Happiness can be used as a “yardstick” to aid with public policy—this is not a new idea—it was already proposed at least as early as in 1980s (Veenhoven 1988). It is constantly overlooked, however, that arguably the ultimate outcome of any public policy is happiness. In few cases it is stated explicitly. One example is Bhutan, which officially tries to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The US, to some degree, does it too—its Declaration of Independence lists “pursuit of happiness.” Yet, it is difficult to imagine a government official pondering how some bill or policy enables this pursuit. At the same time, it is incredibly relevant for public policy & administration because for each policy, administrative action, or process, the ultimate outcome of interest, although virtually never explicitly acknowledged, is happiness.

This relationship between policy making and happiness is depicted in flow chart in figure 1. Usually, we stop at the outcome of interest. Yet the outcome of interest is only of value (with few exceptions as discussed later) if it results in happiness. Let’s start with a problem that we would like tackle with policy, say income inequality. Then, ideally based on practice and academic research, we take some action which can be also conceptualized as a subobjective, say redistribution. This in turn should result in the outcome of interest: income equality. We usually stop here. We tend to forget that the ultimate outcome of interest is happiness—after all, the outcome of interest is only valuable if it results in happiness.³ To advance policy making and administration we should ask how much happiness policy will bring about. There are always limited resources, especially in these tough times and there are many competing needs—education, safety, public health, and so forth—one metric to help direct spending is happiness. Key advantage of happiness yardstick is that it overcomes difficulty of measuring utility in social welfare—for instance, it helps to answer a question whether we should invest limited resources in park, bike lanes, or waterfront?

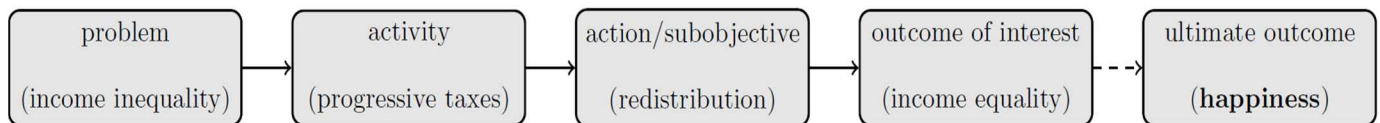


Figure 1: An Outcome Line

² For simplicity, I will often use term “public policy” only, but I mean “public policy and administration.” Likewise, I will use “scholars” only, but I mean “scholars and practitioners.”

³ There are few exceptions to this rule as discussed later; and happiness is not the only outcome of interest especially in the short run, indeed, we may often need to sacrifice happiness in the short run in order to achieve in the long run—for instance save, invest, postpone consumption, and work hard in order to be happy later.

2. What is Happiness?

Happiness is an interdisciplinary subject. It is studied most in psychology, and recently in economics. Happiness is typically measured with a survey item such as "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead? " and it ranges from say "1=not at all satisfied" to "4=very satisfied." Happiness can be defined as people's evaluations of their lives, which include "both cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction in addition to affective evaluations of mood and emotions" (Steel et al. 2008). In other words, it is "overall judgment of life that draws on two sources of information: cognitive comparison with standards of the good life (contentment) and affective information from how one feels most of the time (hedonic level of affect)" (Veenhoven 2008). Some scholars make a distinction between happiness and life satisfaction—life satisfaction refers to cognition and happiness refers to affect. For instance, life satisfaction can be conceptualized as a cognitive aspect of happiness (Dorahy et al. 1998). In practice, however, it is usually difficult if not impossible to separate the two concepts. Hence, the overall happiness definition by Veenhoven (2008), as quoted above, seems most appropriate and I will use terms "happiness" and "life satisfaction" interchangeably.

The happiness measure, even though self-reported and subjective, is reliable (precision varies) and valid (Myers 2000, Di Tella and MacCulloch 2006). The survey-based life satisfaction measure is closely correlated with similar objective measures such as brain waves (Layard 2005). Unhappiness strongly correlates with suicide incidence and mental health problems (Bray and Gunnell 2006). Happiness not only correlates highly with other non-self-reported measures, but also does not correlate with measures that are not theoretically related to it: happiness has discriminant validity (Sandvik et al. 1993). Finally, to be clear, I discuss here general/overall happiness, not a domain-specific happiness such as neighborhood or community satisfaction. The concept of happiness is intuitively understood by almost everyone (Clark et al. 2008). For a more recent and very thorough statement of happiness measure validity and reliability see Diener (2009) (especially ch. 5). Likewise, Diener (2009) provides a good discussion of why potential problems with happiness are not serious enough to make it unusable for public policy—see especially ch. 6. These potential problems include genetic determination of happiness (Lykken and Tellegen 1996), adaptation (Brickman et al. 1978), and various comparisons (Michalos 1985).

Fundamentally, happiness can be a touchstone of morality—what makes us happy is morally good—it is utilitarianism (but also to some degree consequentialism) that originated during the Enlightenment in 18th century in Europe. Yet, not everything that makes us happy is the right thing to do, and sometimes we

need to do what makes us unhappy in order to become happy in the long run. For instance, having children may not result in happiness or even result in unhappiness (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995, Doss et al. 2009), yet a policy promoting no children would result in extinction of the population in the area covered by such policy. A typical example of short run happiness and long run misery is over-use of pleasure inducing chemicals such as tobacco, alcohol, and other recreational drugs (Linden 2011). But there are also less obviously harmful factors that make us happy in the short run such as same-race preference (Vogt Yuan 2007, Postmes and Branscombe 2002). This problem of visible short run happiness, but unclear long run misery is called aggregation bias—each donut or cigarette makes sense, it makes me happy—but aggregated together they cause poor health or even death—the problem is that we do not see it.

While most variables have a consistent effect on happiness—e.g. employment, health, and income have consistently positive effect on happiness,⁴ many variables work differently depending on a person—for instance, working longer hours makes Europeans unhappy, but Americans happy (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011b), Europeans are unhappy about inequality but Americans appear relatively immune to it (Alesina et al. 2004), Americans are unhappy in big cities but East Asians are relatively happy there (Berry and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2009). Many of these differences are cultural, or more fundamentally speaking situational—people simply function very differently in different situations. This is so called “situationism,” the founding principle of social psychology (Fiske 2009). In short, happiness gained from different actions differs across individuals and situations, and this is a key area for the future research—we already know what makes most people happy or what makes people happy on average—now we need to find out what makes specific persons happy in specific situations.

Finally, happiness is not only a desirable outcome of interest, but it also predicts other desirable outcomes of interest: life expectancy, morbidity, productivity, quits, absenteeism, unemployment duration, and marriage duration (Clark 2008). No wonder we can observe now a “happiness industry”—governments and businesses embrace happiness to advance their own goals (Davies 2015). Happiness predicts outcomes of key policy value, such as fertility (Le Moglie et al. 2015). For a historical overview of happiness—how it evolved over centuries and how different cultures approached it—see McMahon (2006). For a cross-sectional overview—how happiness differs across geographic areas and cultures—see Diener and Suh (2003). Happiness, as any measure, has limitations. Limitations mostly pertain to subjective nature of happiness—for instance, people’s evaluations are influenced to some degree (not too much) by culture, social norms, etc (Diener and Suh 2003), but also happiness is relative at least to some degree and it often

⁴ For a recent review clearly summarizing domain findings see Dolan et al. (2008), and even more complete World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 1995).

bounces back to the so called set point (Lucas et al. 2006), even if one wins a lottery or loses a leg (Brickman et al. 1978). Much of happiness is genetically determined (Lykken and Tellegen 1996). Hence, it is important to keep in mind that not all happiness can be determined by policy or even personal choices. Finally, what we report in happiness surveys is not necessarily exactly precisely how we feel. Fortunately, such errors are quite small—for discussion see Diener and Suh (2003). Furthermore, these limitations are not critical, that is, policy still does influence happiness greatly—for discussion see Diener (2009), especially ch 6 “Issues Regarding the Use of Well-Being Measures for Policy” on p. 95.

3. Quality of Life or Livability, and Happiness

Policy, administration, and especially planning or even architecture scholars study quality of life (QOL). Quality of life is usually defined in a narrow sense as quality of transportation or housing or some other domain; often it is a per capita or per area indicator such as physicians per capita or bike lanes per square mile. Objective quality of life or livability is not the same as happiness or subjective wellbeing (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2011a). Objective indicators, such as one day popular United Nation’s Human Development Index (HDI), and still popular components of the index: education, income, and life expectancy are not to be replaced by happiness but supplemented. An advantage of happiness is that it is an overall measure in a sense that it captures (imperfectly, of course) everything that affects our lives.

There is an inherent problem in calculating quality of life, livability, or recently popular lists of “best places to live” such as Mercer’s Quality of Living Rankings or the Economist’s Best cities ranking.⁵ Simply, there are many components of the rankings—political and social environment, public services and transport, consumer goods and so forth—and the problem is how to aggregate them to come up with the overall ranking. It is usually done by some experts who would weight say safety to be twice as important as education and 1.3 times as important as health care, and so on, and however accurate these may be on average (even perfectly accurate), by no means this is closely corresponding to each person’s own individual weighting that is vastly different from another person’s weighting. Even relatively simple and obvious factors such as income and health are weighted quite differently not to mention other factors like bike lanes v highways, where there is an obvious conflict. This is an amazing advantage of happiness metric, because it takes into account each person’s own weighting—for more discussion see Diener (2009), Okulicz-Kozaryn (2011a). Another problem of using indices of factors affecting wellbeing is that there are too many such factors, in fact, an uncountable number; and that’s the advantage of happiness yardstick that it takes into account known and unknown factors. Again, the happiness yardstick has its limitations,

⁵ For detailed description of the two rankings see Okulicz-Kozaryn (2011a).

but these limitations being different from limitations of other measures, happiness provides additional information—again, the idea is not to replace other indicators, but complement them.

Finally, to be clear, it is not necessarily the goal of the government to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number (in the Benthamite spirit),⁶ but it is definitely the goal of the government to make the pursuit of happiness possible. In other words, equal opportunity (to achieve happiness) should be a human right, protected by government even in America that is relatively not unhappy about inequality (Bartels 2009, Alesina et al. 2004). Furthermore, it is arguably the government's role to prevent unhappiness or misery such as that resulting from poverty or unemployment. There are many more examples of adversities that arguably result in unhappiness and that governments should tackle—for examples see The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly 1948). In general, an important role of the government is to take care of mental health of its citizens—the World Health Organization estimates that in the decades to come depression will become the second most frequent cause of disability in the world (cited in Diener 2009, p. 66). By preventing misery such as poverty, unemployment, and depression governments can increase happiness, and importantly happiness can be used to measure the progress that governments are making.

4. Away from Misery, Towards Constructive Thinking Using Happiness Yardstick

Much of public policy (and to lesser degree public administration) scholarship is about misery and human suffering. Examples include segregation, discrimination, inequality, lack of social justice, public mismanagement, lack of engagement, and crime. There are good reasons to study the dark side of human experience because a fundamental role of government is to prevent it. Yet, this focus on the negative goes beyond a technical study of a problem at hand and gets into an overall pessimism. For instance, much of the scholarship is simply complaining and pinpointing the problems and disasters, and then, further contemplates the failure of public policy to fix these problems. We tend to focus on what doesn't work as opposed to having a constructive discussion of what should be done and what works. This overall powerlessness and pessimism is further successfully instilled into our students, so that by the time they graduate, they turn from enthusiastic to cynical about the world. We need to change approach and constructively find out what should be done. Happiness research can help by showing what makes people happy, and illuminating why people behave the way they do—people almost always do what they think will make them happy, but often (predictably) end up unhappy.

⁶ *Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a British philosopher, is a founder of moral utilitarianism—an idea that what makes us happy is the right thing to do. It follows, according to this doctrine, that the role of the public policy should be to maximize the happiness, that is, governments should produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number.*

The public policy and administration pessimism is very akin to that in sociology or psychology. Sociologists are interested in social problems and human misery. A similar preoccupation exists in psychology, much of which is about mental problems such as depression, but this preoccupation with the negative was recently countered by “positive psychology” movement led by Martin Seligman (Seligman et al. 2005, Diener and Seligman 2004, Seligman 2004, Diener and Seligman 2002).

To be sure, much of this negative attitude in public policy and administration is for good reason: economists and business people take a different and positive perspective and often miss problems that we notice, so yes, we should complain to keep the balance. However, the point is that we complain too much and too often we complain for the sake of complaining and we fail to be constructive. We should be constructive—and this is where happiness yardstick comes in—it is a metric to identify key problems and track progress on solving them. One finding from happiness research is of key importance to the field of public policy and administration: people often do not know what will make them happy, that is, they often make wrong decisions. It follows, that there is a role for policymakers to nudge⁷ people in the right direction, because people are (predictably) irrational (e.g. Ariely 2009). In other words, policy makers can use happiness research findings to help people make the right decisions. The right decision is a decision that will make a person happy, and again, strikingly often people make wrong decisions. Happiness is a useful measure—often better than people’s preferences—again people often don’t know what will make them happy. A useful concept of expected v experienced utility (Kahneman et al. 1997) helps to illustrate it in figure 2. We decide on much of our consumption (cars, houses, etc) and income (how hard and how long to work) based on expected utility (or happiness)—and we are often (predictably) wrong—we think that higher income and consumption will make us happier than they actually do. A related explanation can be advanced in terms of income or consumption aspirations in figure 3. Income increases happiness given some aspirations, but as we increase our income, aspirations curve shifts from A1 to A2, and hence, the resulting happiness is lower than expected.

⁷ Also, see a related book under the same title: *Thaler and Sunstein (2008)*.

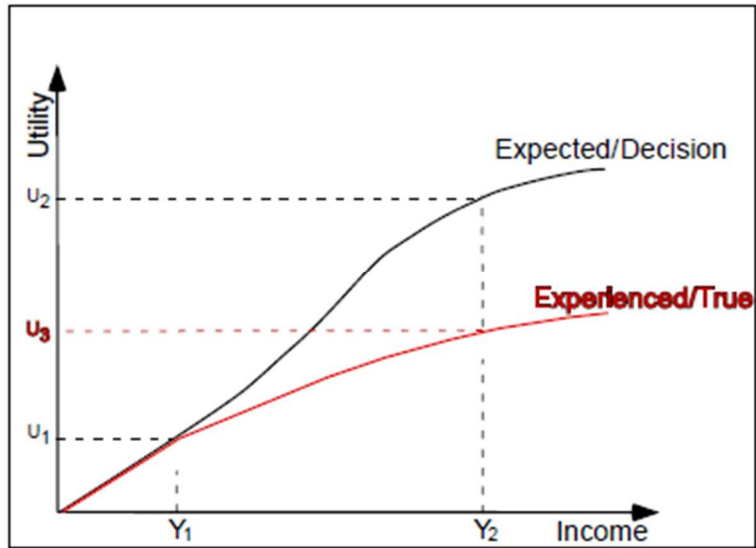


Figure 2: Expected vs. experienced utility or happiness.

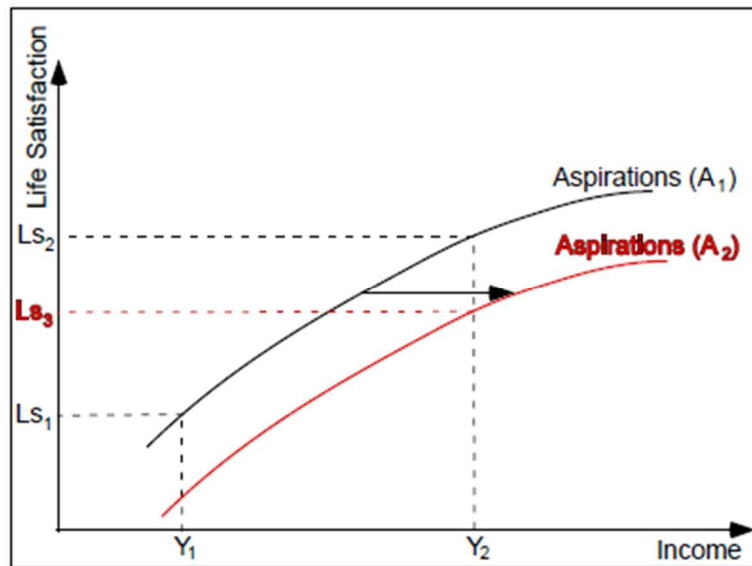


Figure 3: Income (or consumption) and life satisfaction (or happiness) given aspirations.

5. Specific Policies that Matter for Happiness: Some Illustrative Findings

The extant scholarship about happiness and policy almost exclusively considers national and international

policy. There is a need for research at more local level and not only about policy making (drafting law), but also about day-to-day administration, for instance, how local bureaucracy affects happiness. Still, many of the findings at the national level are likely to hold at the local level. A list of findings presented here is illustrative only—for an attempt to make an exhaustive list see Veenhoven (1995). Quality of governance matters more than many people realize. Good governance makes people happy (Helliwell and Huang 2008, Helliwell 2014), and in fact there is some evidence that governance may be more important than economic growth (Helliwell 2014). Again, the idea is that government should help people make right choices, nudge them in the right direction. Government should help citizens attain greater happiness without paternalism, only by helping people make better and informed choices (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). Furthermore, people are already happy to be a part of democratic process: happiness and direct democracy (referenda) are positively related. Direct democracy makes citizens happier than non-citizens—it is not the policy outcome that matters (foreigners usually cannot be excluded), but the process of participating in decision-making itself (Frey and Stutzer 2000).

Which specific policies make us happy? Welfare (Pacek and Radcliff 2008b, 2008a), lack of inequality (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010), and progressive taxation (Oishi et al. 2012) boost happiness. Yet, liberals favoring those very policies are unhappy (Napier and Jost 2008). That is, liberal countries, but conservative persons are happy (Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. 2014). The happiest countries in the world, Scandinavian countries, are welfare states. Moreover there is some evidence that people were happier under communism than in market economy in Eastern Europe (Easterlin 2009) arguably due to welfare and safety net under communism. Decommodification, degree to which a person is not a commodity in market economy, predicts happiness (Pacek and Radcliff 2008b, 2008a).⁸ Similar conclusions follow from a recent study by researchers at Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Boarini et al. 2013)—unemployment benefits and employment protection boost happiness and out-of-pocket health expenses depress it. These findings have specific implications for public policy. The current health reform in the US, the so called “Obama Care”, should increase overall happiness.⁹

On the other hand, welfare state is not necessarily effective—we can spend the tax money, redistribute income and generate public goods, but they may not result in improved quality of life and hence may not improve happiness (Veenhoven 2000, Bjornskov et al. 2007). Monopolism of the state can drive out other welfare services—monopoly can become a toy of politicians, not necessarily economically reasonable and efficient (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995). For instance, according to Thomson Reuters, U.S. health care

⁸ *The decommodification captures three dimensions: 1) the ease of access to welfare, 2) welfare value, and 3) breadth of coverage. The key welfare programs captured in this index are pensions, sickness benefits, and unemployment compensation.*

⁹ *It is another issue that the healthcare cost will bankrupt the US if it keeps on rising at the current rate.*

system wastes 600 to 850 billion every year due to inefficient administration (Fox 2009). Welfare state may decrease people's motivation—income redistribution may reduce economic growth and people are happier in wealthier nations than in welfare nations (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt 1995). Bjornskov et al. (2007) show that happiness decreases with size of government analyzing World Values Survey data in a cross-section of 74 countries. Government officials aim to be reelected, not to run the country as they should (Park 1915). According to public choice theory, politicians are sensitive to special interest groups and to lobbyists, and hence, their actions have little to do with efficiency (Becker 1983).

A key policy issue is that of income inequality—there seems to be a sense that things are going in the wrong direction,¹⁰ and it is a reasonable argument to make that growing income inequality is at least partly responsible for it. There is also a great deal of attention given to income inequality among academics—for reviews and in depth treatments of income inequality see Piketty (2014), Frank (2012), Krueger (2012), Oishi et al. (2012), Piketty et al. (2011), Kondo et al. (2009), Bartels (2009), Kawachi and Kennedy (2006), Marmot (2005), Lynch et al. (2004), Marmot (2004), Piketty and Saez (2003), Csikszentmihalyi (1999), Sen (1992). Happiness research can be used to learn more about income inequality. A key finding is that there are diminishing marginal returns from income to happiness. Across countries, regions or persons, the relationship between income and happiness is quadratic (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2012), that is, there are diminishing returns from income to happiness. Hence, income has higher payoff in happiness for the poor than for the rich. This pattern is intuitive—think of taking away \$10,000 from a person who makes \$250,000 and giving it to a person who makes \$25,000—the rich person would barely feel any difference and the poor person would be thrilled. Same should be true when you think of local government—redistributing several million from a wealthy Greenwich CT to poor Camden NJ should result in greater happiness.¹¹ A typical argument not to redistribute is of killing the goose laying golden eggs. But Piketty et al. (2011) have recently calculated that we can tax the rich as high as 80 percent and they would still work hard and be fine. In short, happiness (and other research) mostly points to an overall beneficial (but weak) effect of income redistribution.

Yet surprisingly, simply giving money to the poor does not appear to result in greater happiness. A recent experiment in UK provided money and training for 2 years to a randomly selected group of people in

¹⁰ Respondents were asked questions such as "In general, do you think things in the nation are headed in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong track? " "In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time? "—and majority, usually two thirds say that things are going in the wrong direction, and this is much more pessimistic point of view in recent several years than earlier PollingReport.com (2014) or Schapiro (2014).

¹¹ On the other hand, Americans are unusually income inequality resistant—for review see Bartels (2009), and accordingly whether inequality causes misery is disputed—much supportive evidence presented in Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) was criticized by Snowdon (2010). Finally, people get used to conditions, both affluence and misery (Sen 1992). For more criticism of the idea that inequality leads to unhappiness see Veenhoven (2005), Berg and Veenhoven (2010).

need. After 5 years (3 years after end of intervention) the treatment group (people who received the money) ended up poorer and less happy than the control group (people who did not receive any extra government assistance) (Oswald 2014). In a similar fashion, lottery winners do not end up being happier (Brickman et al. 1978). Perhaps, especially if unearned, money corrupts. A solution then appears to redistribute money with strings attached, for instance, pay for effort as in American Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Another illustrative finding is that of consumption. For most people, house is the biggest purchase they ever make and Americans tend to prefer big houses, but to afford them they need to commute longer distance. Will it result in happiness? No. We get used to big houses, but not to commute (Stutzer and Frey 2003, Kahneman et al. 2004). Any luxury consumption (not only big houses) is not likely to result in lasting happiness because luxuries are positional goods—you buy them to have a better position in a society, or to show that you are better than others—not to have a better quality of life. The problem with positional goods is that acquiring them leads to consumption arms race. You cannot win such race, because you are on hedonic treadmill. Even worse, we adapt to luxuries such as big houses—they don't make us any happier after some time, and in a vicious cycle we desire ever bigger houses. But we don't adapt to commuting, which consistently makes us unhappy (Frank 2005).

Another example is unemployment, one of the strongest determinants of happiness. Unemployment affects happiness net of income, that is, unemployment makes a person more unhappy than just a loss of income. Furthermore, we do not adapt to unemployment (Lucas et al. 2006). This finding strongly supports policies aimed at prevention or lessening of consequences of unemployment. Last, but not least, arguably the biggest challenge for human species, and hence public policy & administration at all levels is that of pollution and sustainability. A recent report by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is alarming (Pachauri et al. 2014). Indeed, a threat is serious enough that claims for not growing the economy anymore or even “degrowing” it appear reasonable (Kallis et al. 2012).¹² Happiness research has something to contribute here as well. First, pollution makes us unhappy (Weinhold 2012, Welsch 2005). Second, and more important, there is some evidence that happy people are more sustainable, that is, happiness affects sustainability (Ericson et al. 2014). Causation possibly goes in the other direction as well (as noted by authors), but in general it is safe to say that happiness and sustainable behavior are correlated (Brown and Kasser 2005, Corral-Verdugo et al. 2011).

For more examples of uses of happiness for public policy & administration see a dedicated section III of Diener (2009) and see the following articles: Layard (2006), Helliwell (2014), Bjornskov et al. (2008),

¹² *Although it is not immediately obvious what is the best strategy to achieve greater sustainability—degrowth (Kallis 2011) or simply public policy (Van den Bergh 2011)—for more discussion see Daly (2013), Kallis et al. (2012).*

Layard (2006), Oishi et al. (2012), Diener (2009), Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Myers (1988), Veenhoven (2000, 2012).

There are several key readings about policy and happiness that may be unfamiliar to public policy and administration audience—these are great references for a reader who would like to learn more. First, there are general reports: Helliwell et al. (2012), United Nations (2012), O'Donnell et al. (2014), Stiglitz et al. (2009), where Stiglitz et al. (2009) is probably most useful. Helliwell (2014) is itself a list (in appendix) of further readings about governance and happiness. Veenhoven (2012) lists many useful findings about happiness based on World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 1995).¹³ Other useful readings specifically about happiness and policy making include work by economists (Layard 2006, Helliwell 2014, Bjornskov et al. 2008) and psychologists (Oishi et al. 2012, Diener 2009, Csikszentmihalyi 2000, Myers 1988). Diener (2009) is a book dedicated specifically to the topic of happiness and public policy.

6. Conclusion

Recall the outcome line showing happiness as the ultimate goal of public policy and administration in figure 1. One does not have to fully subscribe to Benthamite “greatest happiness for greatest number” to find value in happiness research. The weaker form of utilitarianism is enough—it can be put in words of Newt Gingrich: people deserve “not happiness stamps; not a department of happiness; not therapy for happiness. Pursuit” (quoted in Brooks 2008). Furthermore, even if one does not see happiness as the goal (utilitarianism) or pursuit of happiness as the goal (weak form of utilitarianism), happiness has many objectively positive consequences. Happy people are healthier, more productive, more environmentally sustainable, have more social capital, and are more peace oriented (Corral-Verdugo et al. 2011, Lyubomirsky et al. 2005, Diener 2009). In short, happiness is a yardstick for broadly understood progress.

The scientific study of happiness is taking now place for several decades in psychology and economics, other fields such as sociology and management are slowly joining, and recently studies specifically focusing on public policy are being published. Even OECD and UK government have recently joined the debate. Yet, these developments are happening without public policy and administration scholars. There is always path dependency—tendency to do research in an old fashioned manner using familiar concepts. But perhaps a key obstacle preventing public policy and administration scholars from embracing happiness is their peculiar attention to, or indeed obsession with the negative: problems, difficulties, and disasters.

¹³ *World Database of Happiness is a database of literature, finding and datasets pertaining to happiness—while incomplete and little clunky, it is the most comprehensive single source of scientific knowledge about happiness.*

Somehow human flourishing and wellbeing are not in the discipline's vocabulary. Fixing problems and dealing with misery would at best bring a neutral state—such approach does not aim for anything better. It is time to change it, especially that happiness research is maturing now in other fields and we already know surprisingly a great deal. It is time to use this knowledge and expand it further with public policy and administration in mind. This viewpoint hopes to challenge status quo and popularize happiness research in public policy and administration. For further readings and data sources see appendix.

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Appendix: Policy Initiatives and Datasets

What are some policy initiatives and measures used? Happiness is already studied with focus on policy making, but at international level by OECD (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>), at national level by UK Office of National Statistics (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/people-places/communities/societal-wellbeing>), and in the US, Gallup tracks happiness daily (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/106915/gallup-daily-us-mood.aspx>), but Gallup data are not very useful because they are not free.

London School of Economics and Political Science has a website listing some research on this topic, mostly by its health economist Paul Dolan and labor economist Richard Layard at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/new/research/wellbeing/happiness.asp>. Dutch EHERO (Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organization) also aims at public policy, yet also without input from public policy and administration scholars (<http://www.eur.nl/english/ehero/>). Brookings Institution in the person of Carol Graham is involved in an effort to produce better happiness indicators and policy.

There are already measures of overall wellbeing representative of counties—easy to use health indicators at county level in the US are available at <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>, much of which is based The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) from US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>) where there is a happiness measure available, and these data are representative of counties or metropolitan areas and can be readily used by local policy makers to measure

how we are doing. BRFSS is an excellent example of data representative of counties. There are also a plenty of person-level datasets that have shed light on what makes people happy, and hence, indicate how public policy and administration can improve happiness—for review of major datasets see <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/>.