

## **GROWTH OF KNOWLEDGE ON HAPPINESS**

### **Foreword to the Glücks Atlas 2022**

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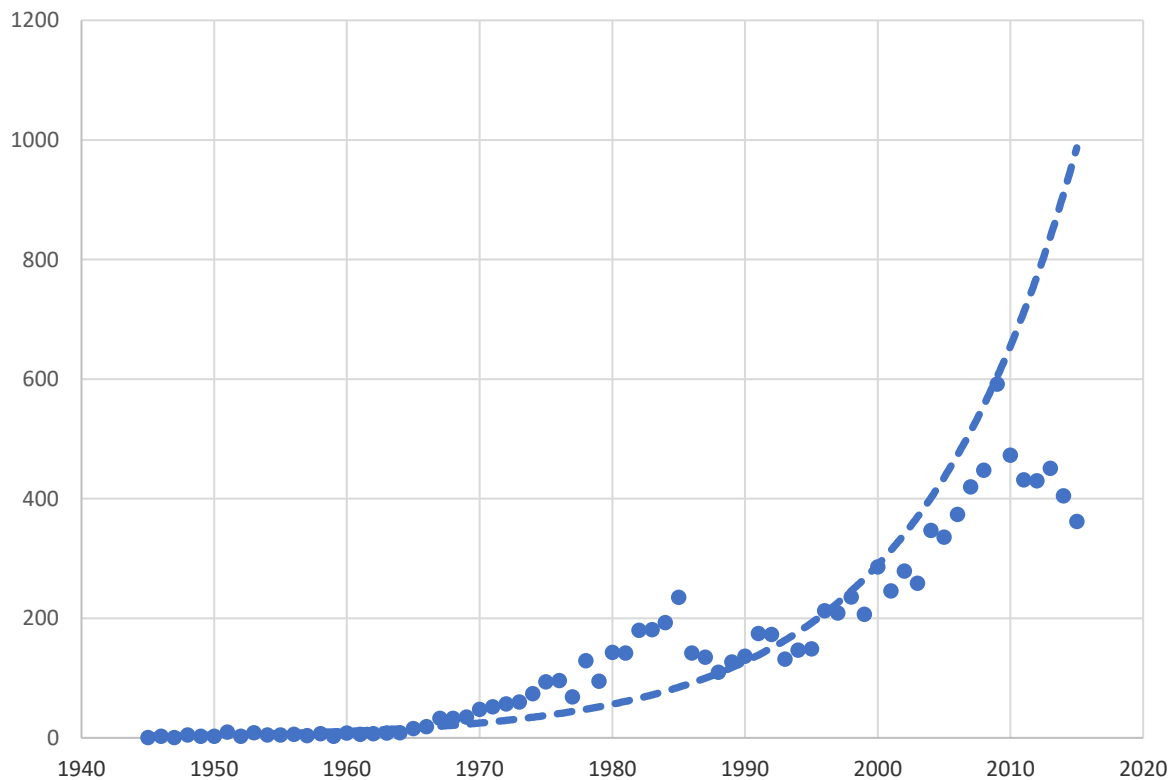
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This Glücks Atlas is part of a swelling stream of empirical research on happiness, in which happiness is conceptualized as satisfaction with life, and measured using self reports. The first few studies of this kind were held in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century among university students and from the 1960s onwards, happiness became a topic in general population surveys. See [Bibliography of Happiness](#), sorting by year.

The number of scientific publications on happiness has increased very considerably since this time, as depicted in the graph below. In this year (2022), some 1000 new scientific publications on happiness will appear and will be added to the 15000 publications already listed in the World Database of Happiness. One may wonder who needs all this information for what reasons and why the supply of scientific research continues to grow.

## Number of publications on happiness per year<sup>1</sup>



Source: World Database of Happiness; Bibliography<sup>2</sup>

### Who needs this knowledge on happiness and why?

This supply of information serves the demands for know-how from three kinds of customers, individuals, organizations and governments.

#### *Individuals*

People typically want to lead lives that are satisfying. They also want that their children enjoy life. As such they are interested in information about ways to greater happiness. Mass media meet that demand in ongoing features on happiness, such as in daily news-papers and self-help magazines. This type of information provision draws on scientific studies, just as we find for the case of health, where popular writing is commonly based on empirical research and there is a constant demand for more supportive scientific data.

#### *Organizations*

Most organizations want to produce something that adds to the happiness of their clients

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<sup>1</sup> Happiness defined as the subjective enjoyment of one's life as a whole. Entries in the World Database of Happiness are inspected for fit with this *concept*. As such, this count differs from search on the word 'happiness', which yields more than a million hits in Google Scholar.

The dots in the graph denote the number of publications currently (2022) entered in the database. The most recent years are not yet fully covered, since it takes time to find, select and enter them. The dotted line represents the estimated number of publications per year

<sup>2</sup> <https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/search-the-database/bibliography/>

and for some organizations happiness is the main product, e.g., in the case of care homes for demented elderly, where the product is a number of not too unhappy life-years. Organizations want to know how their products affect the happiness of what types of customers, e.g., in the case of estate developers, they might ask: In what kind of housing will what kind of people feel best? This can be seen as analogous with organizations in health care which have an insatiable demand for information on what medical interventions will create the most gain in health for whom.

Irrespective of the happiness of their clients, organizations are also interested in the happiness of their workers, since happy workers tend to be more productive. This incentive is particularly strong in the current situation of labor shortage.

### *Governments*

National and regional authorities have to pursue multiple goals and the happiness of their citizens is one of these, in line with the utilitarian moral creed that governments should aim at 'Greater happiness for a greater number of people' (Bentham 1789).

The priority given to happiness by a government depends on the fit with its other goals, such as political stability and economic growth. Research has shown considerable synergy between happiness and several of these goals, such as the promotion of responsible citizenship. Happy people appear to be better informed voters and more honest in tax payers (Guyen 2011).

### **Why this ongoing rise in the production of knowledge on happiness?**

Have not the 1500 scientific publication on happiness answered all questions? Why are there another 1000 publications due to be published this year? The drivers are found in the supply and in the continuing demand for knowledge about happiness.

On the *supply* side, a main reason is that happiness research has matured scientifically. Initial qualms about measurability of happiness have been refuted, as have theoretical claims that happiness is short lived and relative. A research infrastructure has developed involving periodical survey studies, specialized journals and periodical reports, such as this Glücks Atlas. Now that this subject has reached its academic majority, scientists can get their work on happiness published and are freer to follow their interest.

The maturation of happiness research has also fostered a *demand* of information about happiness. Now that great happiness appears to be possible and 'makable' to some extent, interest in more specific know-how is increasing; once again following the trend of what happened in the case of research on health. Looking specifically at the above-mentioned users of knowledge on happiness the following additional trends in the demand for information can be noted.

### *Individual demand*

Interest in ways to a happy life is always there, but is relatively strong in modern multiple-choice-societies. More than ever, people face questions on how they should live their life and consequently they wonder how life-choices will affect their happiness, for example whether or not they should have children, and if they have children, whether they should

chase them into the highest level of education they can achieve.

This trend to greater choice is ongoing and creates a limitless demand for more detailed information. In the case of having children, we not only want to know whether parents tend to be happier than non-parents, but we want to know how parenthood has worked out on the happiness for people like us, that is, people of a similar age, education and sex, preferably also for people with the same type of personality. This is analogous to the development of 'personalized medicine' in health research.

### *Organizational demand*

The rising interest in happiness of individuals is pressing organizations to pay more attention to the effects their products have on the happiness of their clientele. Though this may begin with sales talk, competition will press them to provide to evidence based claims; as in the case of medicine again.

This tendency is strengthened by the insight that marketing research about what people *want* to buy does not predict well how happy they will *feel* after the purchase of a product. A basic insight we have gained from happiness economics is that the 'expected utility' of a purchase does not always fit later 'experienced utility' (Kahneman et al. 1997).

With respect to the effect of happiness on workers performance, it is becoming increasingly clear that life-satisfaction is a stronger driver than job-satisfaction, the affective component of life-satisfaction in particular. This insight fosters a tendency to include life-coaching in human resource management, much like occupational health care was developed in the past and continues today. New professions, such as a 'Chief Happiness Officer' have come into existence, and this professionalization brings about a constant demand for new information on happiness.

### *Governmental demand*

The growing interest in happiness of individual citizens is reflected in the rise of the subject up the political agenda. Happiness is becoming more prominent as a political goal of authorities for other reasons as well.

One reason is that a lot of pressing social problems have been largely solved in many countries, such as lawlessness and malnutrition. The more such 'negatives' are resolved, the more room for 'positives' on the agenda. Once again like in health care, where the focus was initially placed on preventing premature deaths, but is now shifting from mere length of life to quality of life.

A related reason for the rising government demand for information about happiness is that several leading political ideologies have largely been realized, in contemporary western nations at least, there is considerable social equality, freedom and democracy. This leaves room on the political agenda for new topics, such as sustainability and happiness. In this context, happiness is also becoming a topic in the ideological competition between societies, such as that seen today between the 'western' world and 'eastern' Russia and China.

A more mundane variant of such use of happiness data is the competition on among

nations, regions and cities to attract new business and attendant qualified people. Though the emphasis is as yet on objective 'quality of life', such as costs of living and clean air, subjective 'satisfaction with life' is becoming part of this 'place marketing'. Support of these needs is one of the functions of this periodical Glücks Atlas.

All this calls for ongoing registration of how happy people live in different places. At the global level this information demand is met by the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2022) and the yearly World Happiness Reports (Helliwell et al 2022). Within nations this information is part of periodical reports such as this Glücks Atlas.

### **This "Glücks Atlas"**

The Glücks Atlas is designed to show how is today satisfaction with life in Germany and how it has changed over time. It also gives an annual survey of satisfaction with various domains of life. Data are presented by region and population groups. In the long-term, the atlas helps us to answer to various questions, such as whether East and West Germans are converging or diverging in terms of happiness, whether a gender happiness gap is emerging in Germany, as is the case in the U.S., or how Corona policies worked out on the happiness of different groups in the country.

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