

The relationship between well-being, social engagement, and the role of the state in realizing civic happiness

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Abstract

Happiness is an important aspect of a country's life, even in the study of public policy making happiness the main goal. Happiness comes from internal factors that come from personal motivation and motivation for something, while external factors come from various conditions outside of oneself, the focus in this research is external factors (such as government public policy). The problem of making public policy only limited to political decisions results in neglecting the happiness of citizens. This research aims to examine social aspects based on various previous studies that have contributed to citizen happiness. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature studies, materials derived from journals and books are the main sources used as units of analysis. The results show that social aspects, such as population, welfare, religion, social capital, and social engagement have an impact on happiness. Creating public space in developing various social aspects is an important thing that needs to be done so that citizens have broad access to develop themselves and feel happiness in the public space created by the state.

Keywords: citizens; public policy; social aspects

Introduction

In the contemporary era, territorial justice has become a crucial means to enhance social rights by involving communities in creating equitable civic spaces. Establishing just territorial concepts, such as fair and inclusive shelters, underscores the intrinsic link between citizen happiness and justice. Ivaldo (2014) further asserts that the right to a just territory is intimately connected to the right to a civil territory. Therefore, implementing equitable policies that involve communities can lead to happier and more compassionate societies, highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between public, civic, and political spaces in enhancing citizen happiness.



Research indicates that social behaviors linked to higher happiness levels are more common among individuals who report greater well-being. This suggests that while personal fulfillment is significant, happiness also involves contributing to the well-being of others. Governments have a pivotal role in fostering widespread happiness, as Bentham (1789) argued, by gauging a country's happiness through its citizens' well-being. Countries with robust welfare systems often exhibit higher happiness levels, demonstrating that prosperity and the fulfillment of needs correlate with overall life satisfaction. The contemporary welfare state operates on the principle that improving living conditions enhances individual happiness, as supported by Peterson et al. (2005), reinforcing the importance of policies aimed at elevating societal quality of life to boost overall happiness.

Mill (in Hoag, 1986) posits that humans are driven by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, distinguishing between higher and lower forms of happiness. Basic needs are relatively straightforward to fulfill through sensory gratification but achieving higher aspirations such as artistic and moral accomplishments demands more complex cognitive and physical efforts. Mill argues that individuals can choose greater pleasures over lesser ones, asserting that focusing solely on lower pleasures can diminish one's ability to experience richer, more fulfilling experiences. He suggests that a person content with only lower pleasures has forfeited their potential for more profound satisfaction, and that it is preferable to be a dissatisfied individual than a contented "pig," as the loss of human dignity is significant.

Plato's Republic emphasizes the state's role in enhancing the welfare of its citizens, though the specific contributions to overall well-being are not always clearly defined. Mill envisions an ideal society where virtuous individuals strive to enhance the happiness of others, with public officials playing a crucial role in improving societal welfare. While private individuals have the freedom to pursue personal pleasures, they are also obligated to support societal well-being, with the cultivation of mental faculties to appreciate subtler forms of pleasure, such as emotional and moral satisfaction, being essential for achieving a higher quality of happiness.

In practice, analyzing social and political issues is inherently more complex than addressing quantitative problems, given the diversity and complexity of individual experiences. Social and political difficulties arise from the unique and varied nature of individuals, which cannot be easily generalized. Despite their advanced cognitive abilities, humans continuously face societal challenges, such as the lack of transparency in political systems, which can inhibit open discussions. Empirical studies on happiness reveal differing perspectives and definitions, often linking happiness with concepts of "good" or "the good life." According to Eddington and Shuman (2005), Diener et al. (2003), in the contemporary era, territorial justice has gained prominence as a crucial means to enhance social rights by involving communities in creating equitable civic spaces. The concept of 'just territory', which refers to fair and inclusive shelters and other civic spaces, underscores the intrinsic link between citizen happiness and justice. Ivaldo (2014) further asserts that the right to a just territory is intimately connected to the right to a civil territory. Therefore, implementing equitable policies that involve communities can lead to happier and more compassionate societies, highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between public, civic, and political spaces in enhancing citizen happiness.

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(2005) supported, reinforcing the importance of policies that elevate societal quality of life to boost overall happiness.

Mill (Hoag, 1986) posits that humans are driven by pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, distinguishing between higher and lower forms of happiness. According to Mill, 'higher pleasures' are those that require more complex cognitive and physical efforts, such as artistic and moral accomplishments, while 'lower pleasures' are relatively straightforward to fulfil through sensory gratification. He argues that individuals have the capacity to choose greater pleasures over lesser ones, asserting that focusing solely on lower pleasures can diminish one's ability to experience richer, more fulfilling experiences. He suggests that a person content with only lower pleasures has forfeited their potential for more profound satisfaction, and that it is preferable to be a dissatisfied individual than a contented "pig," as the loss of human dignity is significant. Plato's Republic emphasizes the state's role in enhancing the welfare of its citizens, though the specific contributions to overall well-being are not always clearly defined. Mill envisions an ideal society where virtuous individuals strive to enhance the happiness of others, with public officials playing a crucial role in improving societal welfare. While private individuals have the freedom to pursue personal pleasures, they are also obligated to support societal well-being, with the cultivation of mental faculties to appreciate subtler forms of pleasure, such as emotional and moral satisfaction, being essential for achieving a higher quality of happiness.

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Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology centred on a literature review, focusing on scientific articles that explore social aspects affecting citizen happiness in Indonesia and other countries. The selection of journals is guided by the geographic focus, concentrating on research from European countries and Indonesia. The choice of these countries is significant as they represent diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts, which can provide valuable insights for shaping public policy. Following Kuhltau (2002), systematic approach, the study advances through stages including topic selection, information gathering, research focus determination, data collection, data presentation preparation, and report writing. This structured framework facilitates a thorough analysis of qualitative data, encompassing interview transcripts, written documents, and scientific articles.

Content analysis is employed to interpret and distill relevant information from a wide array of data sources. Recent literature highlights the increasing importance of content analysis in qualitative research for elucidating social factors impacting various dimensions of human life. Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017) note that, despite its long-standing use, content analysis is gaining recognition for its role in identifying and explaining social dynamics. Kiger and Varpio (2020) emphasize its effectiveness in capturing social and cultural interactions, offering deeper insights into phenomena such as citizen happiness. By utilizing content analysis, this study systematically selects, compares, synthesizes, and organizes data on economic well-being, social capital, community participation, and institutional trust. The study's novelty lies in its integrated analysis of these factors within Indonesian and European contexts, aiming to

enhance understanding and, importantly, inform public policy to improve citizens' quality of life, a task that is crucial and in which your input is invaluable.

Results and Discussion

Happiness can be categorized into two primary forms: subjective and objective. Subjective happiness, also known as individual happiness, stems from personal experiences and is shaped by one's personality, values, and beliefs, reflecting a state of mental contentment and joy, characterized by overall well-being and life satisfaction, while minimizing negative emotions like sadness (Rusydi, 2007; Carr, 2004). In contrast, objective happiness is influenced by external factors such as population size and socio-economic conditions (Selim, 2008; Mehrdadi et al., 2016; Ballas & Tranmer, 2012; Gudmundsdóttir, et al., 2016). An increasing population can have positive and negative effects; it may enhance socio-economic welfare and competitiveness but can also lead to challenges if not accompanied by improvements in these areas (Tsai, 2007). The World Happiness Report highlights Finland as consistently the happiest country since 2017, ranking based on social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and corruption. This report aims to rank countries by happiness levels, providing a benchmark for assessing and comparing global well-being.

The relationship between social capital and citizen happiness has not been as extensively studied as macroeconomic or individual variables. However, several researchers have identified significant positive effects of social capital on overall life satisfaction. For instance, studies by Putnam (2000) in the United States and by Helliwell, John et al. (2010) and Leung et al. (2010) in Canada demonstrate that social capital plays a crucial role in enhancing subjective well-being. Helliwell et al. (2004) argue that social capital is more potent in explaining life satisfaction than economic inequality. Their research highlights that social capital can significantly influence individual happiness by fostering better physical well-being and life satisfaction.

Despite these findings, some scholars contend that the impact of social capital on happiness is indirect, primarily affecting health, wealth, or economic development. For example, Zak and Knacks (2001) emphasize social capital as a key driver of economic growth, while Rodrik, (1999) views it as a mechanism for managing external economic shocks. Studies by Helliwell, John & Barrington-Leigh, Christopher (2010) and Winkelmann (2009) suggest that social capital is a robust indicator of well-being, particularly when analyzing microdata from countries like Canada and Germany. These studies indicate that higher levels of social capital contribute to improved well-being, though the correlation may vary across different contexts.

Research on the relationship between social capital and happiness yields mixed results, mainly when using aggregate data from multiple countries. Bjørnskov, (2003) found a strong correlation, especially in northern European countries, where higher social capital was linked to increased economic growth and stability. In contrast, Ram, R. (2010) reported a weaker and less consistent correlation, suggesting that the influence of social capital on happiness may not be universally applicable. Rodríguez-Pose and von Berlepsch (2014) noted that while social capital is often associated with higher happiness levels, the inconsistent results in research can be attributed to varying definitions and metrics used to measure social capital. This variability underscores the need for more standardized and refined methodologies to better understand the specific elements of social capital that impact subjective well-being.

Oswald (1997) research provides a geographical perspective, showing that Northern Europe experiences a significant increase in subjective well-being compared to Southern Europe, where such increases are less pronounced. This disparity also extends to social capital, with Scandinavian countries displaying high levels across various dimensions, whereas Eastern European countries exhibit much lower scores. In Southern Europe, trust in both individuals and institutions is notably lower compared to Western and Northern Europe (van Oorschot, et

al., 2006). These regional variations in social capital and trust levels may account for differing associations between social capital and happiness across Europe and America.

In Indonesia, unique social and cultural dynamics shape the interplay between social capital, well-being, and happiness. Social capital in Indonesia, encompassing social networks, trust, and cooperative norms, significantly influences citizens' well-being and happiness. Studies have demonstrated that social capital enhances social support, reduces uncertainty, and bolsters community solidarity, thereby positively affecting individual well-being (Nugraha, 2021).

Religious activities, categorized as a form of social capital by Putnam, (2000), also play a crucial role in enhancing well-being. Regular church attendance is a standard proxy for measuring religious social capital and is positively correlated with improved well-being, as evidenced by Hayo (2004). Helliwell and Putnam (2004) link frequent religious participation to increased social capital and community trust, which fosters higher happiness levels. While some argue about the primary influence of social participation versus trust on well-being (Pollner, 1989), Mill's perspective on happiness emphasizes the state's role in maximizing societal pleasure and meeting basic needs. However, he acknowledges the challenges in defining the exact level of material security required for optimal happiness (Hoag, 1986).

Research on the relationship between institutional trust and citizen happiness reveals a generally positive correlation. Hudson (2006). In Europe, higher levels of institutional trust are associated with greater happiness among citizens. This view is supported by Leung et al. (2010), who, using data from Canada, emphasized the critical role of institutional trust in contributing to overall well-being, even when accounting for other elements of social capital, such as communication and social norms. Helliwell and Putnam (2004) also identified a strong link between trust in both personal and professional relationships, including trust in authorities and higher levels of subjective well-being. These findings highlight the importance of institutional trust as a significant factor influencing happiness.

In addition to institutional trust, informal social activities enhance happiness. According to Putnam, building relationships with family, friends, and colleagues fosters a sense of social unity and belonging. Pichler (2006) notes that social networks act as a catalyst for maintaining social status and well-being, while Powdthavee (2009) confirms a positive correlation between strong social networks and subjective well-being. Despite this, some studies, like Bjørnskov (2008), suggest that the relationship between informal social interactions and happiness may not be as strong, as evidenced by his research in the United States. This highlights the complexity and variability of how different types of social interactions impact life satisfaction.

The relationship between formal social relationships and happiness remains ambiguous. Several studies, such as Pichler, (2006), have found a negative correlation between participation in formal associations, like professional organizations, and happiness. Leung et al. (2010) highlighted that political activity was the only formal association activity significantly linked to increased happiness. In contrast, involvement in communal activities is akin to those described by Putnam and Robert (2000), is associated with higher overall well-being. Putnam's research suggests that participation in these activities can have a comparable effect on happiness as substantial increases in wealth or additional years of schooling

European studies show that people who engage in non-political and non-economic organizations experience higher life satisfaction (Pichler, 2006). Similarly, Helliwell and Putnam (2004) observed that community involvement positively impacts happiness in the United States, although the effect at the individual level was not statistically significant. However, Bjørnskov (2006) contends that while association activities may foster trust within a group, this trust does not extend beyond the group, challenging Putnam's idea that such activities enhance broader social capital. This view aligns with Olson's theory of negative externalities, suggesting that organizational participation might have unintended negative

consequences. Furthermore, Haller & Hadler (2006) literature review found no significant relationships related to volunteerism, adding complexity to the understanding of formal social relationships and happiness.

In Indonesia, local social and political dynamics shape the interplay between institutional trust, social engagement, and citizen happiness. Trust in government and social institutions is crucial for determining happiness levels. Conversely, through community involvement and social interactions, social engagement has been shown to enhance mental and emotional well-being. Praditya (2019) found that participating in community activities increases a sense of belonging and social support, contributing positively to individual happiness.

Utilitarianism suggests that states have a fundamental duty to enhance the happiness of their citizens by facilitating conditions that promote satisfaction and well-being. To achieve this, governments should focus on two main tasks: developing social channels to increase overall satisfaction and encouraging individuals to value and pursue happiness (Chen & Lin, 2019). However, the ethical foundation of utilitarianism, particularly in industrial contexts, may be limited when it comes to fulfilling higher ideals of human dignity. Although the state can offer material support, its role in addressing deeper aspects of happiness and well-being remains constrained, often falling short of fully meeting citizens' needs and preferences.

Utilitarianism underscores the connection between people and happiness, stressing the importance of enhancing individual well-being. Kahane et al. (2018) argue that while both higher and lower pleasures are significant, efforts should be made to improve individual happiness. Nevertheless, this approach does not inherently guarantee fair opportunities or equal paths to happiness. As described by Williamson (2008), Plato's view suggests that satisfaction can be achieved through individual excellence in various roles. In practical terms, this implies that the division of labour serves not only to boost economic efficiency but also to promote excellence and satisfaction among individuals, whether they are police officers protecting freedom or farmers producing quality food.

As discussed by Hoag (1986), Mill's theory of happiness faces criticism for potentially undermining the significance of individual actions if they are solely focused on personal pleasure without considering broader impacts. Although Mill distinguished between higher and lower pleasures, his concept of happiness remains primarily centred on individual experience without clear connections to practical action. This perspective may overlook the importance of balancing personal pleasure with the social and ethical implications of one's actions.

In Indonesia, implementing utilitarian principles involves addressing diverse socio-economic conditions through tailored public policies to improve social and economic welfare. Thus, while utilitarianism provides a theoretical basis for public policy, practical success in achieving citizen happiness requires ongoing attention to social justice and policy effectiveness.

Conclusion

The passage delves into the concept of territorial justice and its relationship with the fair distribution of resources and opportunities within a specific geographical area. It emphasizes the importance of involving communities in creating a just civic space that enhances the well-being of citizens. The research investigates the impact of Social Capital, Institutional Trust, Social Engagement, and Utilitarianism on civic happiness in various European countries and Indonesia. It differentiates between subjective and objective happiness, highlighting how individual experiences and mental states significantly influence subjective happiness, while societal conditions and government policies shape objective happiness. The study underscores the influence of social capital, institutional trust, and social engagement on happiness, and stresses the role of utilitarian principles in guiding public policies to maximize happiness while addressing challenges related to fair distribution and effective reform.

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