HAPPINESS AND MIGRATION

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Happiness Studies

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  - e.g. income, health, education, etc.
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- Happiness studies asks:
  - What are the *subjective* consequences of different forms of objective well-being?
- So: happiness = subjective well-being
- Other definitions
  - Layard: “feeling good”
  - Haybron: “positive emotional state”
    - (more durable: “mood propensities”)
Happiness Studies

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- An empirical question, as against an assumption or axiom 
- Thus quite different from “revealed preferences”
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Different ways of forming empirical question:  
- What determines happiness?
Happiness Studies

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- Different ways of forming empirical question:
  - What determines happiness?
  - *How much* do different factors contribute to happiness?
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Empirical methods:

- Mainly surveys
- Many large surveys contain a question on happiness:
  - Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
  - 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
  - Extremely unhappy  extremely happy
Happiness Studies

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  - Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
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  - Extremely unhappy extremely happy
- Sometimes “life satisfaction”
  - Cognitive as opposed to affective
  - But answers are usually very similar
Happiness Studies

- Empirical methods
  - Single question vs. multi-item scale?
    - Results/answers very similar
  - Other approaches:
    - Diaries
    - “beeper” studies
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Key findings

- Income
  - The “Easterlin paradox”
    - Those with higher incomes are happier than those with less (cross-sectional comparison)
    - But gaining more money / a higher income generally doesn’t bring greater happiness (longitudinal)
Happiness Studies

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  - Explanations:
    - The relative dimension of income (income as a positional good)
    - “Social comparisons”, status
Happiness Studies

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    - **Explanations:**
      - The relative dimension of income (income as a positional good)
      - “Social comparisons”, status
      - So: economic growth generally doesn’t raise happiness
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Key findings

- Income (Easterlin paradox cont’d.)
  - Aspirations: we want more – but we continue to want more even after we get more
    - Holds for people in poorer countries, not only in wealthy ones
Happiness Studies

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  - So, even with individual mobility:
    - Average happiness doesn’t rise
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Happiness Studies

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- Recent work: broaden focus beyond income, to include wealth
Happiness Studies

- Key findings
  - Other factors:
    - Health (but: “subjective health”)
    - Avoiding unemployment
    - Religiosity (but only in religious contexts)
    - Spouse/partner
    - Social capital (friends, community)
Happiness Studies

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    - Social capital (friends, community)
    - Demographic variables: age, gender, race/ethnicity
Migration and Happiness

- Focus on income, in connection with “economic migration”:
  - If in general ↑income does not mean ↑happiness, then perhaps migration as a means of gaining more income doesn’t lead to greater happiness.
Migration and Happiness

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    - Migrants often move from middle-income positions at origin to lower-income positions at destination
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  - So, improvement in objective well-being – but subjective?
Migration and Happiness

Data problem:
- No panel data on immigrants with data collected before migration and after
Migration and Happiness

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  - So, cross-sectional comparisons
    - Direction of causation?
    - Omitted variable bias?
Migration and Happiness

Two types of comparison:

- First, compare immigrants to natives in destination countries
  - Typical result: immigrants are less happy than natives, e.g. in the USA, in western Europe
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Two types of comparison:
- First, compare immigrants to natives in destination countries
  - Typical result: immigrants are less happy than natives, e.g. in the USA, in western Europe
    - Holds in a simple bivariate comparison, and also in regression models
    - The regression models adjust for the fact that immigrants and natives might already be different in ways that matter separately for happiness – thus the “net” difference associated with being an immigrant
## Migration and Happiness

|                          | b     | s.e.  | P>|t| | β    |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Ln(income)               | 0.198 | 0.081 | 0.015| 0.073|
| Immigrant                | -2.189| 0.998 | 0.028| -0.290|
| Interaction              | 0.563 | 0.276 | 0.041| 0.270|
| married                  | 0.720 | 0.185 | 0.000| 0.173|
| split                    | -0.320| 0.230 | 0.163| -0.049|
| widowed                  | -0.042| 0.263 | 0.872| -0.006|
| one child                | -0.314| 0.189 | 0.096| -0.054|
| two+ children            | -0.429| 0.152 | 0.005| -0.105|
| Age²/100                 | 0.019 | 0.003 | 0.000| 0.179|
| Unemployed               | -0.466| 0.223 | 0.037| -0.053|
| God                      | 0.090 | 0.020 | 0.000| 0.116|
| Health                   | -0.608| 0.062 | 0.000| -0.266|
| Constant                 | 6.843 | 0.384 | 0.000|       |

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Migration and Happiness

Key points re comparison of immigrants to natives in the USA:

- Lower happiness among immigrants in a simple bivariate comparison
- Lower happiness with regression controls
  - Including a variable indicating that the income/happiness association is stronger for immigrants than for natives
- Lower financial satisfaction
  - Even though even immigrants from poorer countries have average earnings on par with natives
Migration and Happiness

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  - Second: compare migrants to stayers in the origin country
    - For Europe E→W migrants, the migrants are happier than the stayers
Migration and Happiness

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  - Second: compare migrants to stayers in the origin country
    - For Europe E→W migrants, the migrants are happier than the stayers
    - While this is true generally, it is not true for all flows:
      - Migrants from Romania are no happier than stayers in Romania
Migration and Happiness

- Don’t try to answer the question in a “universal” way
  - Some migrants are probably happier, some aren’t.
  - Why the differences?
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- Some migrants are probably happier, some aren’t.
- Why the differences?
- The Eastern European case is probably the most “optimistic”:
  - Happiness in Eastern Europe is low
  - Contrast with migration from Latin America to the USA: happiness in Latin America is high
Migration and Happiness

- Other issues:
  - Return
  - Remittances
  - Refugees
Migration and Happiness

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  - Remittances
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- Almost all work so far is quantitative
  - Though there are affinities with (non-quantitative) sociological migration studies
Policy implications?

- For admissions policies:
  - Beware the potential for misuse
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- For admissions policies:
  - Beware the potential for misuse
    - Paternalist policy: “keep them out, it’s for their own good”
  - Even so: more emphasis on alleviating the local deficiencies that lead people to prefer migration?
    - Joseph Carens: most people don’t want migration for its own sake – it is a means to address other needs
Policy implications?

- For integration policies:
  - First, is happiness an appropriate policy goal?
Policy implications?

- For integration policies:
  - First, is happiness an appropriate policy goal?
  - Perhaps for some areas
    - Thus to support employment – reinforces need to support language learning
    - (Perhaps would also help with social integration, social capital)
Policy implications?

- Getting better data
  - Panel data, before and after migration
    - (useful for assessing consequences of migration more broadly, not just happiness)
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- Getting better data
  - Panel data, before and after migration
    - (useful for assessing consequences of migration more broadly, not just happiness)
  - Data collection efforts must be rooted in origin countries, prior to migration