Introduction:

We want to explore what makes us happy, before even starting, I need to preface that the answer is too complex, there has been multiple studies done with more depth by actual scholars, so attempting to answer this in a short article is futile. But what we can do is analyse some easily available data to see if we can draw some conclusions.

But before we even decide to explore any data, we need to explore happiness as a concept.

For this we need to travel to ancient Greece, Aristotle made a critical differentiation, when it comes down to happiness there are two types Hedonia, which refers to pleasure or happiness from pleasure seeking activities, this can be donating to charity or winning a competition. The second type is Eudaimonia, this comes from seeking virtue, a more casual way of explaining it is meaning so Eudaimonic happiness is linked to self fulfilment. If you have ever taken any type of business management class this might sound familiar since Marslows hierarchy (or pyramid) of needs is based on this concepts.

In a study, titled Being good by doing good: Daily eudaimonic activity and well-being. Journal of Research in Personality, by (Steger, Michael & Kashdan, Todd & Oishi, Shigehiro. (2008)), the researchers conclude that there is a difference between the satisfaction that people obtained in engaging in hedonic behaviors and eudemonic. “Contrary to the prevalent popular cultural support for pleasure-seeking, those who engaged in more hedonic behaviors did not consistently report more well-being.” For clarity, hedonic behavior or happiness exists in the lower half of Maslow’s pyramid, and it covers the basic necessities of a person, while eudaimonic happiness or behavior often relates to the top of the aforementioned pyramid and where self-actualization reside.

In economics we have a bad habit of quantifying happiness, we camouflage by calling it utility so that we don’t attract attention to our strange models. To understand utility as a general concept we need to understand Opportunity cost, it is defined by the Concise Encyclopedia of Economics as: “the value of the next-highest valued alternative use of that resource”. In lame man’s words what we miss out by doing something other than what we are currently doing or going to do.

Most economic theories are based around consumers will try to maximize their utility. So, if we already determined that eudaimonic actions bring satisfaction, therefore when the consumer is presented with a choice, he will pick the one that will bring them more utility. This will be different for every consumer since not everyone will derive the same utility of consuming a certain good and hence cannot be accurately measured.

So why is this important when looking at data? Well we need to be able to interpret our data and why it might be biased, without introducing any concepts you probably already know what countries are the happiest on earth. You are most likely thinking of Scandinavia or some extremely rural country in Asia or the amazon. Trying to interpretate this is above our current scope for this article sadly, but we can use the conclusions drawn by on David Myers in his Lecture on the Science and Craft of Teaching Psychology where he explained some of the basic findings of research into well-being.

Diener identifies five factors that contribute to happiness: social relationships, temperament/adaptation, money, society and culture, and positive thinking styles.

This are what we will be focusing most of our attention on, we will include some other connections that can come to mind but this will be what our analysis of the data will revolve around

Finally, it’s time to introduce our data, this study revolves around the results of a survey about the state of global happiness, this survey is conducted every year by Gallup and its known as the Gallup World Poll. The main number we will focus here is the “Happiness Score”. We will not focus on exploring so much where it comes from and dissecting it looking for a fault on it but we will explore why are countries like Finland or Norway at the top.

Graph (Figure 1 )

Body:

The main identifier in Diener is money, and here comes our first main comparison.

* Do taxes make us happier (GDP vs Happiness (per country))(Taxes vs Happiness

For this we will take the places of the world with the maximum individual tax rates and the happiest paces places in earth and try to identify if there is a correlation between one and the other.

We will also just look at the levels of GDP per capita and compare them with happiness, GDP per capita is a really good indicator of individual wealth since it comes down to per person basis otherwise countries like china where individual rights are more of a suggestion than a reality would be at the top of the chart and we have already determined that society and culture, and positive thinking styles are crucial for individual happiness.

Graphs

The next focal point of our analysis is Society, data for this is less robust than taxes or GDP. There is no taxes on social relationships so determining them is tougher.

That Being said, the happiness report includes some statistics such as Social Support, Life expectancy, Fredom to make choices, corruption and generosity.

This are all part of the Gallup survey and they are values with a strange concept behind them, that is that they all are benchmarked against a dystopian country named Dystopia where everything is the minimum it could be or the worst it could be .

Quantifying subjective results such as the freedom to make choices is strange, for example Uzbekistan and Cambodia lead this particular statistic. This presents an interesting chance to see how maybe wealthier countries less freedom and poorer ones might have. Or how freedom might play a role in life expectancy, maybe the less free we are to choose the happier we become?

Thinking of a presentation:

What are my take away messages:

* Where you live will not necessarly determine your level of happiness but it will have an inpact on it.
* Scandinavia shows a very strong presence on the happiness index, even after scoring rather mediocrely in the different indicators, always near the top but not necessarily
* Ultimately happiness is down to the individual person and trying to measure it with a number can only be an estimation

Maybe I can help you where to find a job after Ironhack based on data