

Publication

The Use of Happiness Research for Public Policy

JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

ID 1443305

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Year 2012

Title The Use of Happiness Research for Public Policy

Journal Social choice and welfare

Volume 38

Number 4

Pages / Article-Number 659-674

Research on happiness tends to follow a "benevolent dictator" approach where politicians pursue people's happiness. This paper takes an antithetic approach based on the insights of public choice theory. First, we inquire how the results of happiness research may be used to improve the choice of institutions. Second, we show that the policy approach matters for the choice of research questions and the kind of knowledge happiness research aims to provide. Third, we emphasize that there is no shortcut to an optimal policy maximizing some happiness indicator or social welfare function since governments have an incentive to manipulate this indicator.

Publisher Springer International

ISSN/ISBN 0176-1714

edoc-URL <http://edoc.unibas.ch/dok/A6043843>

Full Text on edoc Available;

Digital Object Identifier DOI 10.1007/s00355-011-0629-z

ISI-Number WOS:000302262200008

Document type (ISI) Article