

**PUBLIC HAPPINESS AND
CULTURAL VALUES**

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A Complex Relation

- The divergence of cultural values and products
- The divergence of cultural and economic values

Culture: values and products

- Cultural values are the set of values that shape the character and identity of a human community
- Cultural products are value-laden goods and services provided in markets and public spaces.
- *Cultural products do embody cultural values and, at the same time, have the potential to destroy them*

Divergence of cultural and economic values

Is there a significant correlation between the increasing happiness indicator of living standards (material welfare) and the decreasing indicators of human interconnectedness (socio-cultural values)?

The happiness paradox

- J.S. Mill (1848): The more we strive for happiness, the less we will get it.
- R. Easterlin (1974): in international comparisons variations of national income per capita do not correlate with variations of happiness
- Beyond a certain threshold, more welfare state does not create more well-being

Revising happiness

- Human happiness has a *dual nature*. It partly results from our *rational* capability of maximising pleasure. But without the *spiritual* capability of self-gift and reciprocal commitment, it will not last.
- If we want a positive correlation between happiness and economics, we have to focus on the quality of human relations.

Relational Economics

- How do we create an economy that *prioritizes* the relational view on happiness over the maximising pleasure view?
- Two guiding principles: the principle of frugality and the principle of vulnerability.
- Both principles are counter-intuitive in the framework of modern rational economics but they are meaningful and even rational in the context of a relational economy.

The principle of frugality

- Frugality can be defined as an *art de vivre*, which implies low material consumption and a simple lifestyle to open the mind for non-material social, cultural and spiritual goods.
- The economic case for frugality and its limits
- Frugality as a culture of (self) detachment is the *spiritual* condition to disclose and enjoy the intrinsic value of things.

The principle of vulnerability

- Relational economics combines autonomy with interdependency
- The principle of vulnerability follows from the recognition of our condition of global and reciprocal dependency.
- Being aware of the vulnerability of our planet and of future generations is a strong motivator for a global culture of compassion and responsibility

Conclusion

To sustain public happiness we should prioritize in a systematic way the relational view of happiness over the maximising pleasure view. This is the lever to co-create a culture of interconnectedness - not only in the socio-cultural domains but primarily in the economic sphere.