

## **Exploring the geography of happiness and well-being in Europe amid times of austerity**

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### **Abstract:**

In this paper we build on recent efforts by geographers and regional scientists aimed at adding a geographical dimension to the analysis and understanding of happiness and well-being. As it is the case with previous geographical studies, our work is aimed at revisiting timely research questions regarding the role of space and place as well as socio-economic and demographic characteristics upon happiness and well-being (as well as interactions between variables). In addition, we attempt to explore the changes in observed subjective well-being and happiness measures of residents in countries and regions that were mostly hit by the severe economic crisis and austerity measures. To that end, we present a multilevel modelling approach to the analysis of suitable secondary data derived from the European Social Survey (ESS) and Eurobarometer, as well as relevant contextual regional-level data from Eurostat.

The paper first presents a brief overview of the state of the art in happiness and well-being research, with particular emphasis on the relatively limited but rapidly growing geographical studies, as well as studies by economists regarding the impact of austerity and inequality upon happiness and well-being. We then present key findings from a comprehensive analysis of Eurobarometer and ESS data combined with austerity-related data at the regional level (such as change in poverty rates, unemployment rates and economic growth) in order to explore the geography of happiness and well-being in Europe amid times of economic gloom and severe austerity measures that have disproportionately and brutally hit the most disadvantaged citizens of the continent. The research presented in this paper involves analysis of data *before* and *after* the crisis and it is aimed at identifying geographical as well as individual socio-economic and demographic factors that may be affecting happiness and well-being and their possible interactions. It also attempts to identify and highlight relevant north-south divides in Europe as well as social and spatial inequalities in well-being within countries.