



# Introduction

The intent of *The Happiness Policy Handbook* is to provide a clear, cohesive, and comprehensive guide for current and future policy-makers, and community organizers who believe that the primary purpose of government is to secure people’s inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. It gives simple explanations rooted in scientific evidence and on-the-ground applied experience.

*The Happiness Policy Handbook* is inspired by a passionate belief that the happiness, well-being, and sustainability of all life on our beautiful planet is possible today and in our future. As a species, humans have a tremendous capacity for shaping the surface of our Earth, changing our climate, building environments, and forming societies. Indeed, we are now in an age that some call the Anthropocene epoch<sup>1</sup>—the era of significant human impact on the Earth’s ecosystems. Our capacity to destroy our environment and each other can and should be equally met by our capacity to live harmoniously with each other in an ecologically sustainable manner. With an understanding of the human potential for goodness, compassion, and caring, *The Happiness Policy Handbook* is written to enable and empower policymakers to set the conditions for happiness and well-being for all and for the ecological sustainability of our planet.

A basic tenet of the happiness movement is that the purpose of government is to secure conditions providing people equal opportunity to pursue happiness and to live a good life. Securing

the conditions that afford people the opportunity to pursue happiness is very different from dictating behaviors or forcing people to be happy. What makes a person happy and how they pursue their happiness is unique to each person.

The happiness movement represents a new way of governing and living. It is founded on the knowledge that happiness and well-being are grounded in many factors that extend into our natural, built, economic, social, cultural, and personal environments. It was inspired in reaction to the use of gross domestic product (GDP), the sum of all goods and services produced in a year in an economy, as the primary measure guiding policy in many of the world's countries, in addition to a belief that humans have the capacity to govern for the happiness of our species, well-being of society, and environmental health of our planet. When a government sets the goal of increasing the happiness of its people, part of the process is to assess and understand people's current state of happiness. Through this assessment, governments can identify the policies and programs that will best provide opportunities for all people to pursue their happiness.

On a local and global scale, there is renewed interest in policies that secure happiness, such as ensuring equal and adequate opportunities for employment, access to mental and physical health care, access to education, and adequate housing. People are starting to understand that securing today's and future generations' access to a clean and healthy natural environment, fair economies, resilient communities, and personal flourishing, as well as many other factors that contribute to happiness and well-being is *as much as or more important than* economic growth and consumption.

From leaders of nations to city mayors, it is becoming clear to policymakers that protracted placement of economic growth as the predominant goal of nations and states has resulted in widening gaps between human wealth versus human health, commercial rights versus human rights, and distrust versus engagement in the political process. Policymakers everywhere are starting to under-

stand that prioritizing economic policy at the expense of other needs has led to decreases in quality of life for all people, rich or poor. Other needs that need to hold priority encompass such areas as access to education, decent housing, decent paying jobs for all, mental and physical health, rewarding employment, safety in one's neighborhood, social cohesion, social justice, strong families, time balance, trust in one's government, and not least of all, a sustainable environment.

Policymakers worldwide are looking for new ways to secure the happiness of people, well-being of communities, and sustainability of natural systems. Wider measurements of well-being are revealing important information that points the way for policymakers and allows them to understand how to prioritize happiness, well-being, and sustainability. Based on happiness data, policymakers have a new understanding of why economic growth is not the only suitable goal by itself, but just one among many means of influencing people's happiness.

The ultimate outcomes of the happiness movement will be assessed through the many aspects of life that are important to well-being and happiness. Grounded in science and common sense, these aspects are outlined as:

- ♦ *Compassionate communities* with happiness education and loving families in which children grow up with a sense of purpose, meaning, worthiness, positivity, optimism, and agency and become resilient adults who flourish in life;
- ♦ *Ethical, accountable, and accessible government* that puts safeguarding people's inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness before any other goal, and measures these goals with happiness instruments;
- ♦ *Fair economies* in which all people have equitable opportunities for meaningful work and to address their needs through policies and socially just public-private sector partnerships;
- ♦ *Just societies* in which all people fully experience basic human rights, are treated with respect and dignity, provided strong

safety nets, and have equal access to the resources needed to meet their needs to survive and thrive; and

- ✦ *Thriving natural environments* in which the air, soil, and water is clean and abundant; people have access to nature; biodiversity is preserved and restored where needed; and natural resources are managed safely and sustainably for today and future generations.

## The Origins of the Happiness Policy Handbook

We are inspired by the policymakers and community organizers who have been using the Happiness Alliance's Happiness Index since 2011. Over and over, they have requested guidance on how to integrate happiness measurements, data, and policies into government. In reply, many resources and tools have been developed, and many lessons learned. This handbook draws from these lessons learned over the years and organizes the tools and resources that have proven useful to policymakers into a set of easy-to-use implementable actions.

Ample research in quality of life, well-being, happiness, and sustainable development studies demonstrates that happiness policies, programs, and projects result in greater well-being and happiness for people. The range of policies that increase happiness and well-being is vast. It includes economic policies that ensure adequate incomes and low Gini coefficients (these are numerical measures of income inequality at national or sub-national levels); workplace policies that ensure work-life balance and rewarding jobs; housing and transportation policies that ensure adequate housing, green infrastructure, and low commute times; governance policies that foster trust and participation in governmental processes; health policies that promote access to mental and physical health care; social policies that strengthen safety nets, relationships, and community belonging; and many other policies impacting other areas of life.

A growing number of publications and events are educating and inspiring policymakers by providing evidence and ideas for

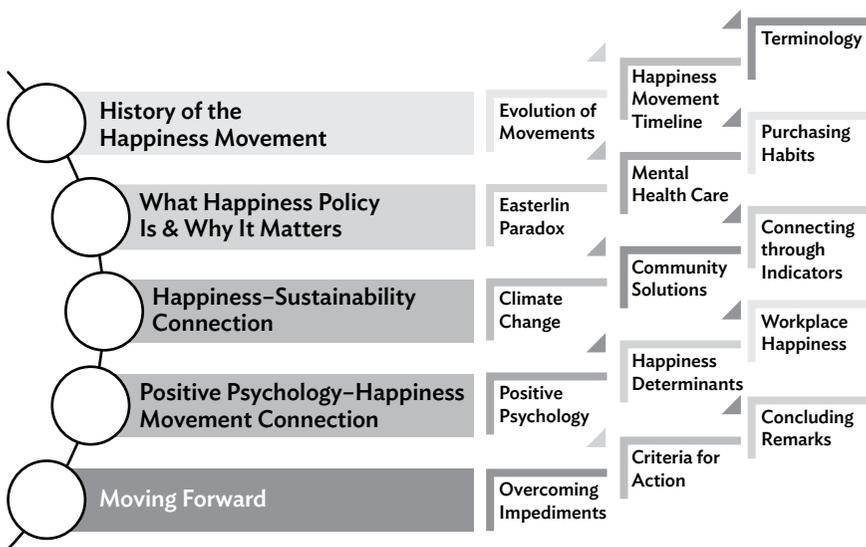
happiness policies, programs, and projects. Important publications in the happiness movement include the *Global Happiness Policy Report*<sup>2</sup> and *World Happiness Reports*<sup>3</sup> which are raising awareness and showcasing happiness research findings. Books such as *Well-Being for Public Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and *The Origins of Happiness* (Princeton University Press, 2018) are providing guidance for policymakers based on valuable findings. These publications should be read and considered by the policymaker when using this book. Some momentous events in the happiness movement are the United Nations High-Level Meeting Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm,<sup>4</sup> the annual gatherings held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Dubai called the Global Dialogue for Happiness, the London School of Economics' "Subjective well-being over the life course" event,<sup>5</sup> and the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) World Forums on Statistics, Knowledge, and Policy. Attending future events held by the OECD, the UAE, and others should be considered opportunities for learning and connecting with people in the happiness and well-being movements.

However, to date, there is no one publication that lays out what is needed so that policymakers can take action based on the findings presented in these publications and the learning and information provided at these events. *The Happiness Policy Handbook* seeks to fill these gaps. We base our book's information on the principle that once happiness and well-being are understood and integrated into the processes and institutions of government, then naturally policies will be promulgated, programs adapted or formed, and projects undertaken that realize the goals of happiness and well-being.

### A Roadmap to the Handbook

*The Happiness Policy Handbook* has two major sections. The first provides an overview, or landscape, of the happiness movement and is written for the reader who is seeking to quickly gain a strong grasp of the movement. Section One starts by giving the reader

an understanding both of what the happiness movement is and what happiness policy is. It explains the connections between the happiness movement and allied movements—the sustainability movement and the positive psychology movement. While most of us are aware of the rise of the sustainability movement (often referred to in academia as seeking balance between “the three E’s—equity, economy, and environment,” and in business as measuring and managing a triple bottom line of “people, planet, and profit”), perhaps not as many of us are familiar with positive psychology. This movement is the study of human flourishing with a focus on the good or positive attributes of life and represents a shift in the field of psychology from focusing on why people are mentally ill to focusing on what makes people happy. Key lessons from the positive psychology movement are provided, including an action plan for implementation in the workplace. Section One ends with suggestions for overcoming impediments and criteria for choosing pathways.



**FIGURE I.1.** Roadmap to Section One: The Landscape of the Happiness Movement.

Section Two of this handbook provides action plans that can be implemented sequentially or can be customized to fit unique circumstances. The section starts with a description of a happiness proclamation and how it has been used by various policymakers. A model proclamation is provided as well as a model press release. The next action plan presented explains two approaches to creating happiness roles and responsibilities, with descriptions of approaches taken by various governments, from Bhutan to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to cities in the United States. A model job description is provided to support these roles. Engaging the community through social media, the convening of global or local councils, and working with populations through online



FIGURE I.2. Roadmap to Section Two: Action Plans for Happiness in Policy.

portals, town hall meetings, and world café style meetings is then explained. An action plan for policymakers' uses of social media platforms is provided. The action plan for measuring happiness includes an explanation of how to measure happiness with survey instruments and sampling procedures, along with an explanation about how to use happiness data. This action plan includes access to a subjective measure of happiness and well-being, the Happiness Index. Concluding Section Two is a happiness policy screening tool and instructions for using it.

It is our intent to help you gain understanding of what you need to take action. After reading *The Happiness Policy Handbook* you will be able to answer the following questions:

- ✦ What is the happiness movement?
- ✦ What is happiness policy?
- ✦ What does happiness have to do with government?
- ✦ What kinds of activities have governments undertaken in the happiness movement?
- ✦ What are some of the impediments to happiness in public policy and what are some ways to overcome them?
- ✦ What is a happiness proclamation?
- ✦ What are three models for community engagement?
- ✦ Can happiness be measured? If so, how?
- ✦ What is the relationship between gross domestic product and happiness measurements?
- ✦ How can happiness data be used?
- ✦ How does one know if a happiness policy is working?

Extensive appendices are provided after Section Two. We have included a variety of policies and approaches, ranging from happiness proclamations and tools for measuring happiness, to community engagement methods. The Happiness Policy Screening Tool is also provided, along with examples of how to calibrate the tool in your own circumstances and how to interpret results.

## SECTION ONE

# The Landscape of the Happiness Movement

Learning the landscape of the happiness movement, like learning any landscape, includes understanding its history, its peaks and its valleys, where the possible impediments to progress lie, and which paths are best to undertake. This section is written in strokes broad enough to give a comprehensive portrait, and with enough detail that you can find a way to make meaningful progress in the happiness movement. It is intended as an overview and we hope inspires you to learn more.





## Brief History of the Happiness Movement

The origins of the happiness movement could be traced back to over 2,300 years ago, when Aristotle wrote in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence*. Aristotle's definition of happiness rests not on an emotional state but on what today is called *well-being*. The idea of well-being implies a state of flourishing with positive levels of health, economic prosperity (or not being impoverished), and social aspects. Happiness in Aristotelian terms includes living an ethical and virtuous life in relation to yourself and others. This same understanding of happiness seems to be what Thomas Jefferson meant when he said, "The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the only legitimate object of government."<sup>1</sup>

More recently, the happiness movement is based, in part, as a corrective to the unintended outcomes from the use of a measurement first employed during the Great Depression, and that later helped to gauge nations' progress towards economic recovery after World War II. This measurement is the gross domestic product (GDP). As mentioned earlier, this is the sum of all goods and services produced in a year within a country's borders (as a point of interest, Gross National Product [GNP] is the sum produced by citizens or corporations of a nation, regardless of the site of production). The originator of GDP, Simon Kuznets, cautioned the US Congress not to use GDP as a measurement to understand

“the welfare of a nation.”<sup>2</sup> The unintended consequences of a focus on economic production and its measurement have contributed to environmental degradation threatening the survival of many species including our own, social inequalities, and high levels of stress and unhappiness. An example is that economic value is created when natural resources are exploited, environments polluted, and clean up of pollution and contamination contributes to GDP. Nevertheless, GDP has become the predominant measurement of economic growth, which remains the predominant goal for most governments around the world.

### Deeper Dive into Essential Reading for the Happiness Movement

#### *Key Books, Articles, Reports, or Videos*

Essential reading for the happiness movement includes the *World Happiness Reports*, which rank countries and explore related issues, the *Global Happiness Policy Reports*, which focus on key policy topics, the *Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report*, which helped usher in the happiness movement, and the *BRAINPOoL Final Report*, which gives a snapshot of the happiness movement in 2014.

The *World Happiness Reports*, edited by John Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, have been issued every year since 2012 (with the exception of 2014) by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The first report was issued at the United Nation’s High-Level Meeting: Well-Being and Happiness: Towards a New Economic Paradigm. Each report contains a ranking of countries based on satisfaction with life measured with the Cantril Ladder scale question, and an explanation of rankings based on six factors: (1) GDP per capita, (2) generosity, (3) healthy life expectancy, (4) perceived freedom to make

life decisions, (5) social support, and (6) trust in government. Reports also contain analysis of factors and policies that contribute to happiness, such as mental health and family support, as well as discussions about data collection, definitions, and theoretical foundations for happiness ([worldhappiness.report](http://worldhappiness.report)).

The *Global Happiness Policy Reports* are issued annually since 2018 at the Global Dialogue for Happiness in Dubai and are produced by the Global Happiness Council. They contain analysis of happiness policies by subject areas, ranging from data collection processes to educational programs, and city level programs, such as walkability and civic engagement through social media ([happinesscouncil.org](http://happinesscouncil.org)).

The *Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, commonly called the *Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report*, has served as a pivotal influence in the happiness movement by pinpointing what is wrong with using GDP as the primary metric for policy. The report calls on governments to use wider measures of well-being. Flaws identified with using GDP as the primary measure of progress include discounting social inequality, detrimental effects on quality of life, and threats to sustainable development such that future generations will not be able to meet their basic needs ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/118025/118123/Fitoussi+Commission+report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/118025/118123/Fitoussi+Commission+report)).

The European Commission's project called Bringing Alternative Indicators into Policy (BRAINPOoL) concluded in 2014 with a report analyzing the state of the happiness movement. The report, *BRAINPOoL Final Report: Beyond GDP—From Measurement to Politics and Policy*, identified impediments to the happiness movement at that time, including confusion about terminology, lack of common agreement upon a happiness indicator or set of indicators, resource constraints to collecting data, lack of understanding about what happiness policy

is or how to use data in relation to policy, and lack of cohesion between governmental departments in collecting and using happiness data or making policy decisions for happiness ([cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/100577/reporting/en](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/100577/reporting/en)).

The happiness movement in terms of government policies began a few years after the turn of the millennium. In 2008, the nation of Bhutan, situated north of India and to the east of Nepal, adopted a constitution that set the purpose of policy to promote the “condition that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.”<sup>3</sup> Gross National Happiness (GNH), a term used in lieu of gross domestic product, is measured with a survey-based instrument and objective metrics that encompassed the aspects of community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, ecological diversity and resilience, education, good governance, health, living standards, psychological well-being, and time use. Policies are promulgated and implemented for the explicit purpose of the happiness and well-being of people, with the understanding that ecological conservation, a strong cultural identity, sustainable economic activity, and good governance are central to happiness.<sup>4</sup> A Gross National Happiness Commission was formed to work with all governmental departments for the integration of happiness into all aspects of government and a GNH screening tool was created to assist in making decisions about policies and programs. This made international headlines and garnered much attention (both positive and negative).

On the heels of the Bhutanese government’s adoption of happiness as its core purpose, international institutions and other governments took action. In 2009, the *Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report* was issued explaining the need for governments to use wider measures of well-being based on income equality and other inequalities.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Devel-

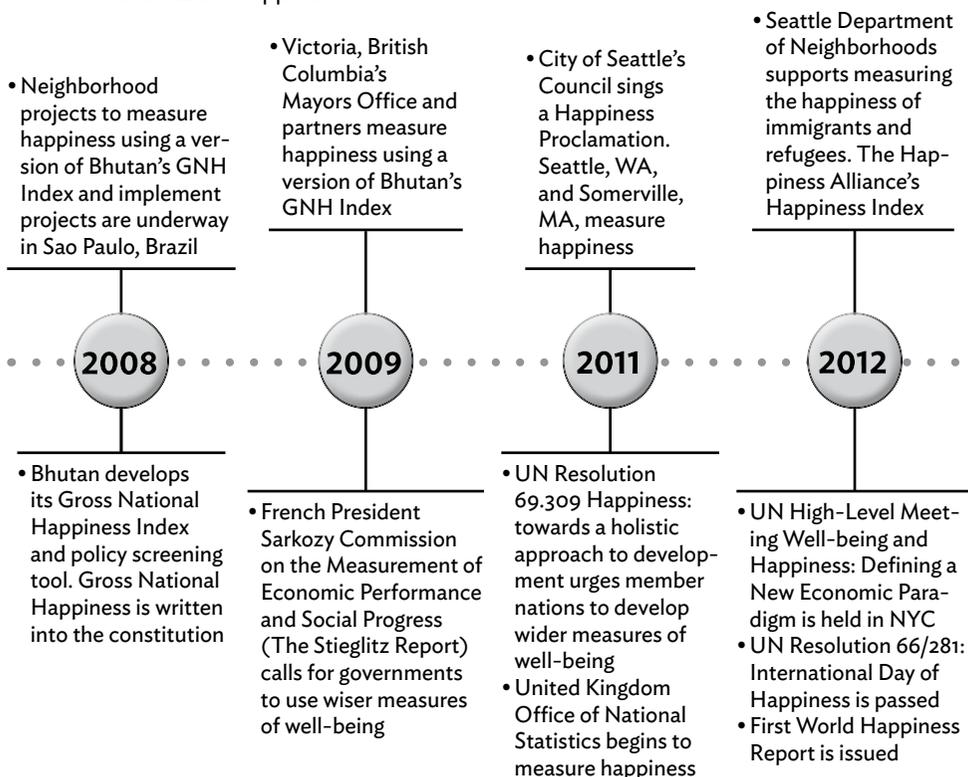
opment (OECD), the organization that traditionally collects and reports GDP data for member nations, released a suggested wider measure of well-being, called the Better Life Index.<sup>6</sup> The OECD is comprised of thirty-six member countries, and its mission is to “promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.”<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting the countries comprising membership of the OECD: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States. It is clear that members include some of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of economic development, along with others in various stages of development. Additionally, they have cooperative relationships with some of the advanced developing countries of the world, such as Indonesia, South Africa, and the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China).

The United Kingdom began to measure happiness in 2011,<sup>8</sup> the same year the United Nations passed resolution 65/309 *Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, the first *World Happiness Report* was issued at the United Nations High-Level Meeting Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm.<sup>10</sup> In 2013, the OECD issued the *Guidelines for Measuring Subjective Well-being*.<sup>11</sup> In 2014, the European Union commission issued a report on the happiness and well-being movement, the *BRAINPOoL Final Report*.<sup>12</sup> One of the recommendations in the report was to use terms such as well-being in lieu of happiness in some political climates. By 2016, every European Union country was measuring happiness and well-being.<sup>13</sup> In 2017, a Minister of Happiness was appointed in the United Arab Emirates government and the first Global Dialogue for Happiness event was convened.<sup>14</sup> In 2018, the first *Global Happiness Policy Report* was

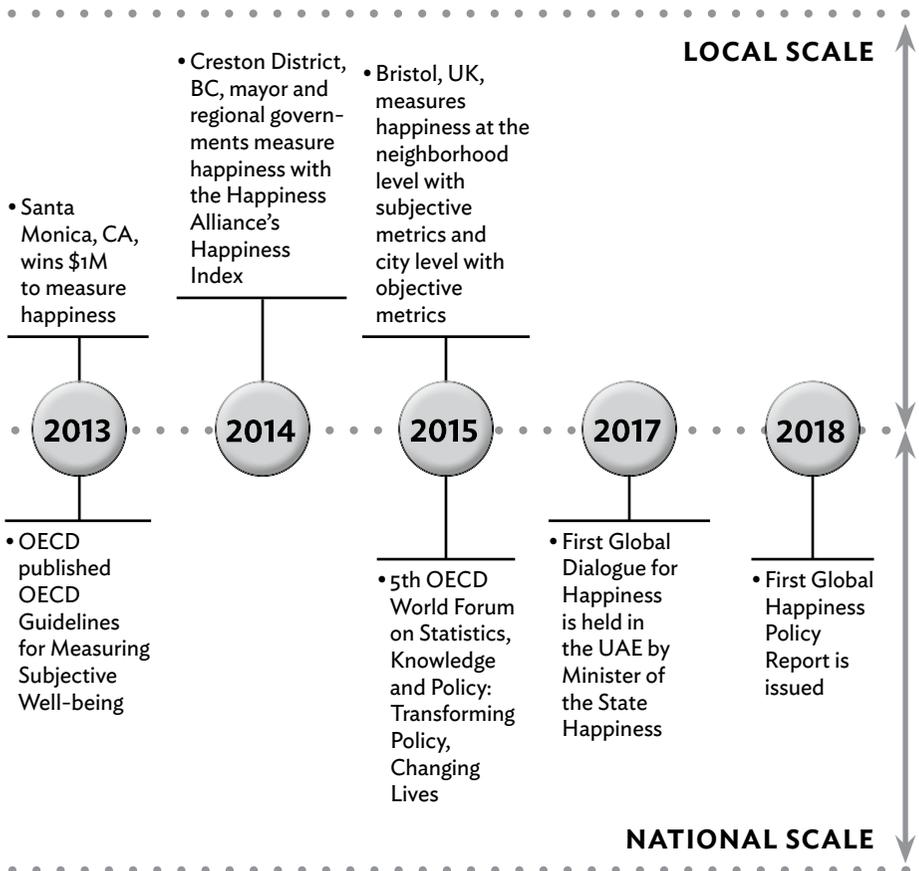
issued.<sup>15</sup> Many other events, from conferences to courses, reports to resolutions, have occurred in the happiness movement and contributed to its momentum.

At the local level, many cities have joined the happiness movement. One of the first was in Brazil, in the state of São Paulo, where academics collaborated with local schools and the mayor to gather happiness data through surveys, convene world café style meetings and work with the local government to implement interventions decided by the people surveyed. In 2010, the mayor along with the local health authority, the Victoria Foundation, and other stakeholders in Victoria, British Columbia, used a version of Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness index to survey the population and hold town meetings about the results. In 2011, the Happiness Alliance, at that time a project of Sustainable Seattle,

FIGURE 1.1. Happiness Movement Timeline.



worked with the Seattle City Council to survey the population and provide an analysis of the data for budgeting decisions. Another effort was that of the mayor’s office in Somerville, Massachusetts, to measure the happiness and well-being of its population. They used the data they gathered to support policy decisions. A year later, in 2012, Santa Monica, California, was awarded one million dollars from the Bloomberg Foundation to measure happiness and well-being. In 2015, Happy City, a nonprofit in Bristol, United Kingdom, began to measure the happiness of neighborhoods as well as the city at large. Numerous other governments and community organizers have also joined the happiness movement, many of them using the Happiness Alliance’s happiness index. Figure 1.1 provides a view of the timeline of the happiness movement at the national and local levels.



## An Evolution of Sustainable Development: The Happiness Movement

In many aspects, the happiness movement extends the sustainability movement and helps move it forward, with a focus on human flourishing and societal well-being. The sustainability movement is generally considered to have begun in 1987, with the Brundtland Commission's report *Our Common Future* seen as a way of reshaping the environmental movement for a broader focus. There were certainly earlier efforts to raise awareness of environmental issues, including Rachel Carson's seminal work, *Silent Spring*, in 1962. Today, the United Nations continues to use the term "sustainable development" broadly, and this is one reason that the UN High-Level Meeting Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm, was held under the umbrella of the UN's sustainable development arm. Nevertheless, over time, sustainability for many has come to be synonymous with environmentalism. While the sustainability movement has elicited very beneficial impacts and raised awareness, as evidenced by environmental protection laws worldwide, the popularity of businesses measuring and managing sustainability, and the creation of sustainability departments in governments, it often leaves out important aspects of economic equality, societal well-being, and personal happiness. The happiness movement can be thought of as an evolution of the sustainability movement, or as bringing it back to its original intent of encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects, while expanding it to more thoroughly include personal aspects. Newer efforts to expand sustainability can be seen, for example, in the broader UN Sustainable Development Goals (which, by the way, include one goal on health and well-being).

### A Few Words about Terminology

The happiness movement represents a wider understanding of individual and national well-being that includes satisfaction with life as well as the domains of community, culture, economy, envi-



FIGURE 1.2. Terms for Happiness.

ronment, government, human settlements, lifelong learning and education, physical and psychological health, social support, time balance, and work. This is the reason we often see the term well-being used synonymously with happiness.<sup>16</sup> The word happiness, in reference to the happiness movement, is often used synonymously with the terms well-being, quality of life, or better life. Another term that is used is “beyond GDP.” Often happiness and well-being are used together. Figure 1.2 shows the common terms for happiness and some of the allied names.

Between 2011 and 2014, the European Commission’s Bringing Alternative Indicators into Policy (BRAINPOoL) project studied the hurdles faced by the happiness movement through work done by governments to adopt wider measures of well-being in lieu of GDP. One of the conclusions was that terminology could act as an impediment when the term happiness is used. It is important to assess the circumstances and political climate of a given area

before settling on a word. One of the benefits of the term happiness is that it is attractive to people and to the media. One of the drawbacks is that it can be seen as improper or not serious enough for government. Regardless of terminology, a step that should not be overlooked is educating the public, media, and colleagues about the definition of happiness, well-being, quality of life, better life, beyond GDP, or other terms.