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NATIONAL HAPPINESS AND NATIONAL CULTURE: WHAT'S THE LINK?

Paulo Finuras, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Organisational Behavior
ISG - Lisbon Business & Economics School
E-mail: paulo.finuras@isg.pt

Abstract

Could National Culture be also associated with National Happiness? If we consider that the happiness perceived by individuals is also produced in a given cultural context in addition to the variables already measured in the World Happiness Report, then it is expected that there will be some influential relationship between the dimensions of national cultures and the results of perceived happiness in each country. This is what we have tried to understand by researching and studying the relationship between national cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede Model and the results of happiness worldwide using the 2019 WHR statistics and the measures of cultural values in the database from Hofstede Insights. The findings are surprising.

Keywords: National Culture, Happiness, Correlations

1. Introduction: national culture as a software of the mind

The famous Geert Hofstede work propose a set of dimensions that aloud understand national characteristics of each country culture and also compare the scores between countries (from 0-100 in each index). (Hofstede, 1980a)

According Hofstede, the concept of culture can be defined in many ways. However, he propose that national culture (specifically) can be define and understood as a “collective mental software” which characterize and distinguish one group or category from another one. (Hofstede, 1992)

As we know, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) reducing complexity and making the influence of culture more visible and tangible, because values cannot be seen. They are the unseen part of culture that guides behavior in a society, somewhat like the iceberg image with regard to the unseen and most important part staying under the see.

The combination of the dimensions yields a new insights that can be summarized in a ‘typology of national culture’. This typology enables people to analyze the likely effects of cultural collective preferences in different national contexts.

It is important to emphasize that all the six dimensions represent worldwide the same six key life questions to which people in the different cultural systems of countries around the world, over centuries, have developed different answers to the same survival and adaptive dilemmas.

2. Hofstede’s 6 Dimensions of Culture

Hofstede defines culture as “*a collective phenomenon (Hofstede, 1980b) because it is shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which mean that culture is learned.*” Culture consists of the unwritten rules and meanings of the social game. He had identified six dimensions of national culture:

‘Power Distance (PDI) – which indicates to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In short: how do people deal with hierarchy? Do they accept that power is divided unequally or not?’

‘Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV) – which indicates the level at which individuals look after themselves or their immediate families, or instead consider themselves a part of “larger groups”. In short: which is more important, the interests of the individual or the interests of the group?’

‘Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) – is not specifically about gender, but rather about dominant values expressed in a society by both men and women: in masculine societies is achievement, performance, status and competition and in feminine societies is cooperation, people-orientation and consensus. In short: What is people’s role and motivation in society? Do they prefer competition, quantity, showing personal success or collaboration, quality, humility, modesty and consensus?’

‘Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) – refers to the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and unpredictability and try to avoid these situations. In short: How do people deal with ambiguity and uncertainty? Are they relaxed about it or do they try to minimize or avoid it?’

‘Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation (LTO) – refers to the extent to which a society exhibits a future-oriented perspective rather than a near-term point of view. In short: How do people relate to their past, present or future? Do they value past-oriented traditions and norms or are they future-oriented and flexible?’

‘Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) – refers to the level of relatively free gratification that some societies allow vs other where strict social norms regulate gratification. In short: How do people deal their natural drives? Do they enjoy life and have fun in many ways or is this strictly regulated?’

How can national culture be associated with the National Happiness scores of each country? If we consider that the happiness perceived by individuals is also produced in a given cultural context in addition to the variables already measured in the happiness report, then it is expected that there will be some influential relationship between the dimensions of national cultures and the results of perceived happiness in each parents (Finuras, 2018; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This is what we have tried to understand by researching and studying the relationship between national cultural dimensions and the results of happiness worldwide using the 2019 WHR statistics and results and the measures of cultural values in the database from Hofstede Insights. The findings are surprising.

The World Happiness Score Report (WHR) is an annual document of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. It contains articles, and rankings of national happiness based on respondent ratings of their own lives, which the report also correlates with various life factors.

3. Methods and philosophy of the World Happiness Report (WHR)

The rankings of national happiness are based on a “Cantril Ladder”¹ survey. Nationally representative samples of respondents are asked to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10, and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale. The report correlates the results with six life factors, namely:

- I) GDP per capita
- II) Social support

¹ The so call “Cantril ladder” method used in the WHR ask for respondents to think of Happiness as a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10, and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale.

- III) Healthy life expectancy
- IV) Freedom to make life choices
- V) Generosity
- VI) Perceptions of corruption

In the reports, experts in fields including economics, psychology, survey analysis, and national statistics, describe how measurements of well-being can be used effectively to assess the progress of nations, and other topics. Each report is organized by chapters that delve deeper into issues relating to happiness, including mental illness, the objective benefits of happiness, the importance of ethics, policy implications, and links with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD 2019,2020) approach to measuring subjective well-being and other international and national efforts.

It should be noted that the approach of the relationship and the happiness and culture is not an absolutely new theme. For example, Dutch psychologist Huib Wursten has done so in several articles including the relationship with the mental images of national cultures he conceived and developed (Wursten, 2008, 2018, 2019)

4. Annual Report Topics

The World Happiness Reports (Helliwell et al., 2020) start to be issued in 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 (an update), 2017 and 2018. In addition to ranking countries happiness and well-being levels, each report has also contributing authors and most focus on a subject. The data used to rank countries in each report is drawn from several sources, namely, the Gallup World Poll (GALLUP, 2019), as well as other sources such as the World Values Survey (WVS, 2020), in some of the reports (Inglehart, 1994). The Gallup World Poll questionnaire measures 14 areas within its core questions: (1) business & economic, (2) citizen engagement, (3) communications & technology, (4) diversity (social issues), (5) education & families, (6) emotions (well-being), (7) environment & energy, (8) food & shelter, (9) government and politics, (10) law & order (safety), (11) health, (12) religion & ethics, (13) transportation, and (14) work. We could say that the World Happiness Report is already a landmark survey of the state of global happiness.

5. International rankings

Data were collected from people in over 150 countries. Each variable measured reveals a populated-weighted average score on a scale running from 0 to 10 that is tracked over time and compared against other countries. These variables currently include:

- i) real GDP per capita,
- ii) social support,
- iii) healthy life expectancy,
- iv) freedom to make life choices, v) generosity, and vi) perceptions of corruption.

6. The 2019 National Happiness Report

The 2019 report features the happiness score averaged over the years 2016-2018.

As per the 2019 Happiness Index, Finland is the happiest country in the world. Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Netherlands hold the next top positions. The report was published on 20 March 2019 by UN (Helliwell et al., 2019).

7. National Culture and National Happiness: discussion

Looking at the data we already have for both the 6 dimensions of national culture and national happiness and considering the aforementioned assumption of the expected relationship between cultural dimensions / values and the perception of happiness, we performed a statistical analysis comparing the scores of 108 countries national happiness

(NHS) and the scores of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The most important findings suggested by the correlation analysis are as follows (Vd. Table 1):

		PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IVR	HS
PDI	Pearson Correl.	1	-,604**	,140	,153	-,075	-,298**	-,555**
	Sig. (2 tails)		,000	,171	,137	,496	,008	,000
	N108	97	97	97	96	84	79	97
IDV	Pearson Correl.	-,604**	1	,037	-,152	,205	,168	,546**
	Sig. (2 tails)	,000		,721	,139	,061	,138	,000
	N108	97	97	97	96	84	79	97
MAS	Pearson Correl.	,140	,037	1	,024	,016	,004	-,124
	Sig. (2 tails)	,171	,721		,818	,882	,971	,226
	N108	97	97	97	96	84	79	97
UAI	Pearson Correl.	,153	-,152	,024	1	,045	-,126	,125
	Sig. (2 tails)	,137	,139	,818		,684	,270	,224
	N108	96	96	96	96	83	78	96
LTO	Pearson Correl.	-,075	,205	,016	,045	1	-,399**	,216*
	Sig. (2 tails)	,496	,061	,882	,684		,000	,037
	N108	84	84	84	83	94	89	94
IVR	Pearson Correl.	-,298**	,168	,004	-,126	-,399**	1	,414**
	Sig. (2 tails)	,008	,138	,971	,270	,000		,000
	N108	79	79	79	78	89	90	90
HS	Pearson Correl.	-,555**	,546**	-,124	,125	,216*	,414**	1
	Sig. (2 tails)	,000	,000	,226	,224	,037	,000	
	N108	97	97	97	96	94	90	108

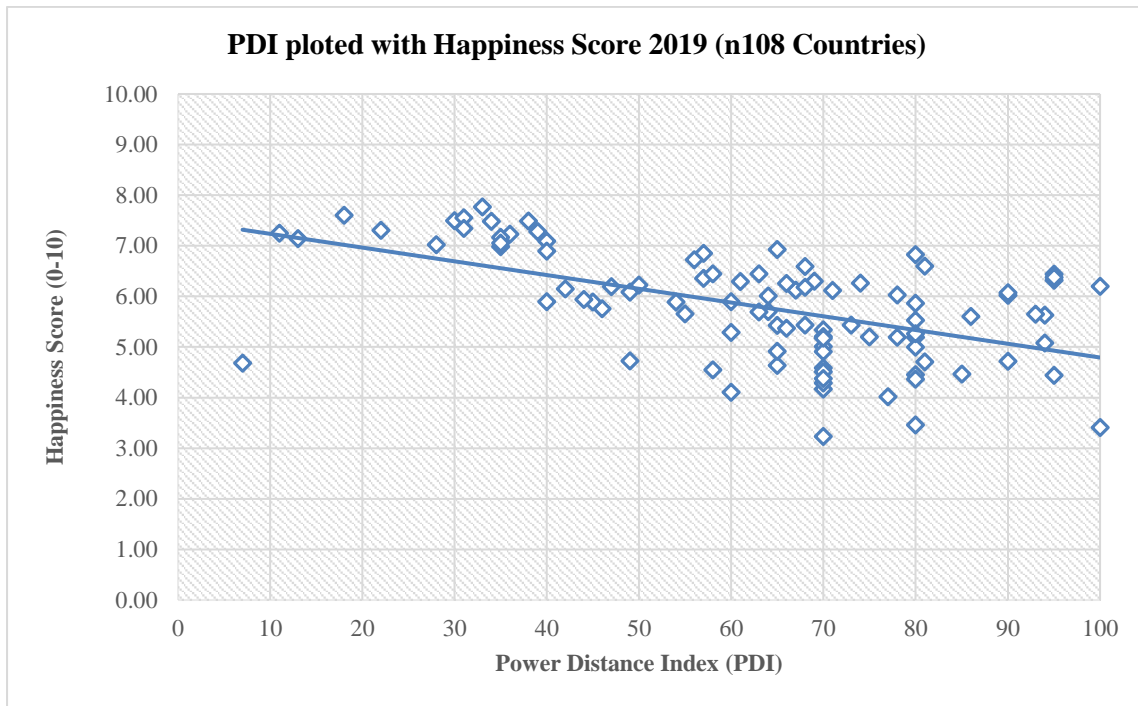
** . The correlation is significant at the level of 0,01 (2 **).

Source. Authors research

7.1 Happiness and the Cultural Values – the 6D Model

Data reveal a significant and relatively strong correlation between the Power Distance Index (PDI) and the national score of happiness ($r = -.555^{**}$ n108) which means that the greater the acceptance and expectation of the inequality of power, the lower the feeling and perception of national happiness;

Graphic N.º1



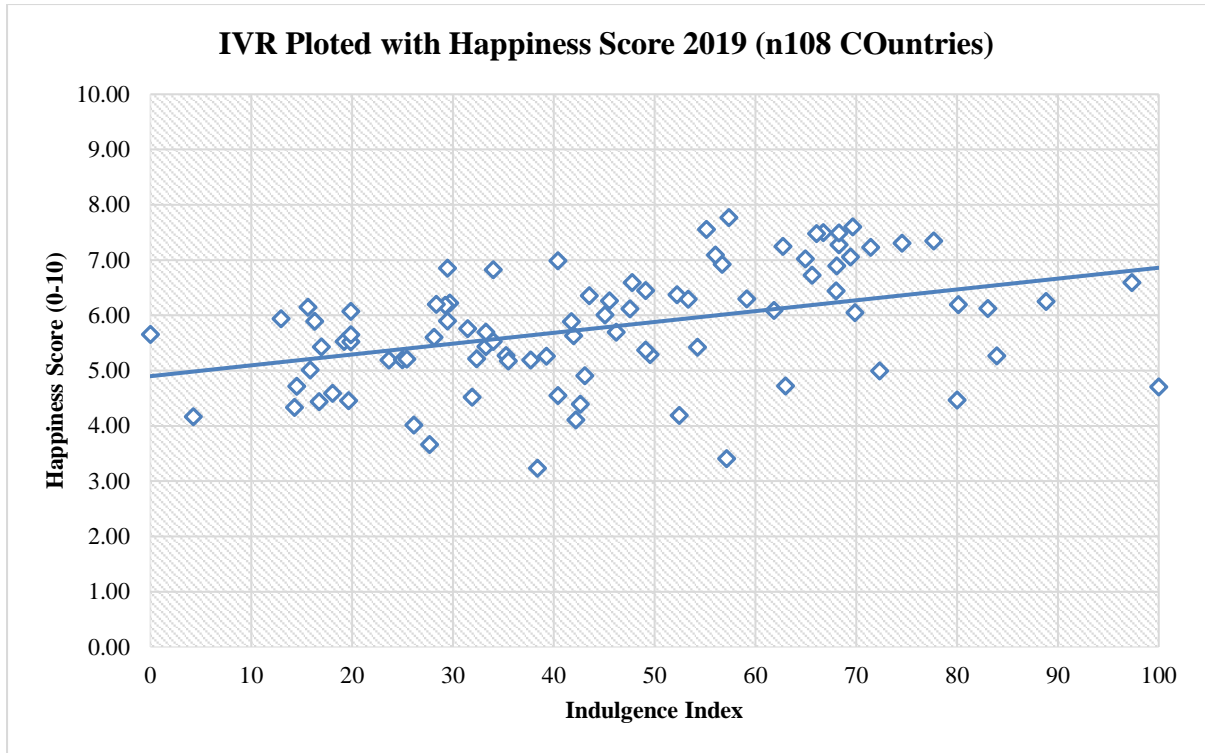
Similarly, but in the opposite direction, data show a positive, and also relatively strong and significant correlation between Individualism Index (IDV) and National Happiness ($r=0.546^{**}$, $n=108$) and also,

Graphic N.º2



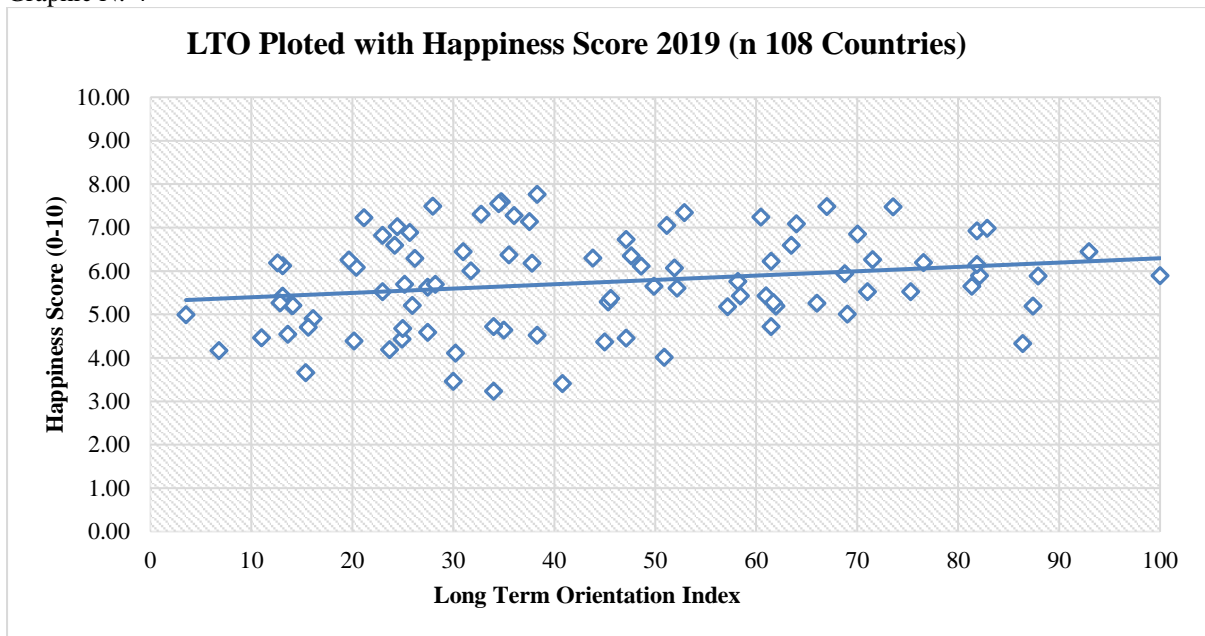
A positive relation with the Indulgence Index (IVR) and National Happiness ($r=0.414^{**}$, $n=108$)

Graphic N.º3



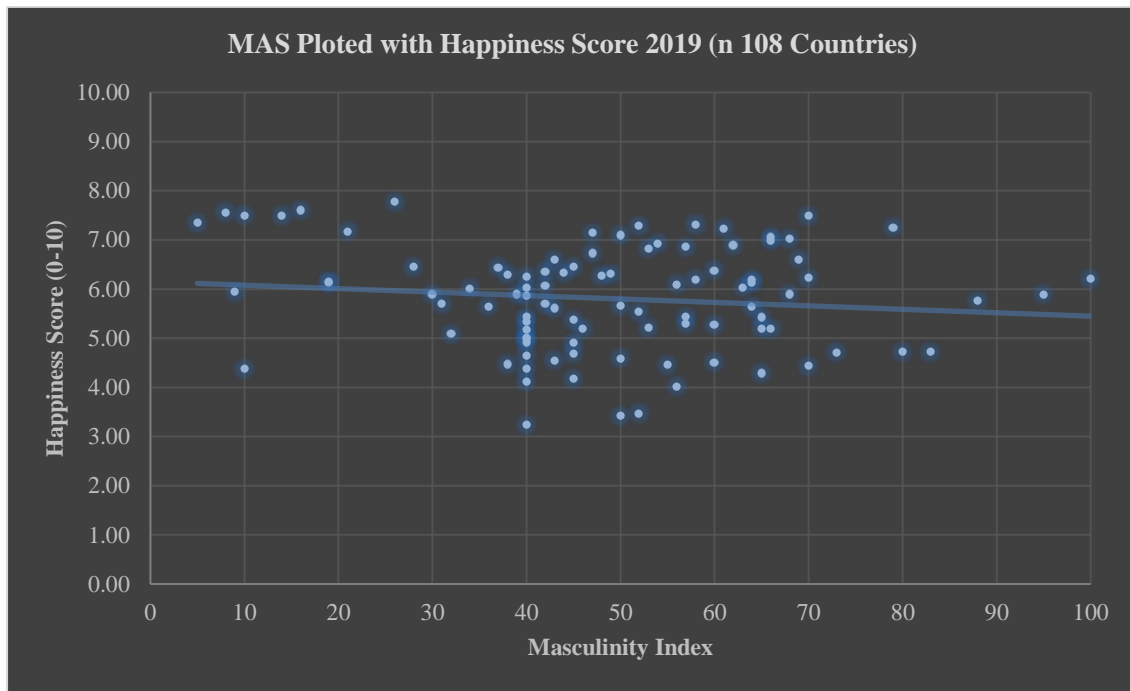
There is also, although more moderately, a positive and significant correlation between the Long-Term Orientation Index (LTO) and national happiness scores ($r=0.216^*$, $n=108$).

Graphic N.º4

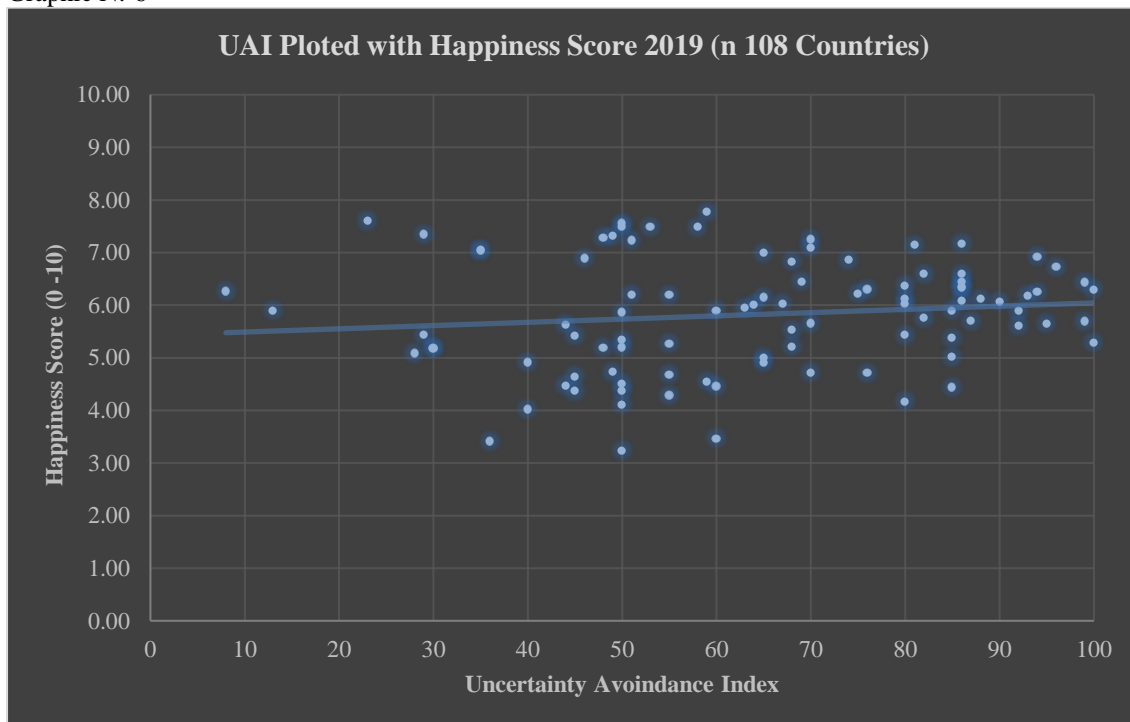


There were no significant correlation or other order of important association between the other two dimensions remain (Masculinity -MAS -and Uncertainty Avoidance – UAI) and the results of the perception of national happiness scores.

Graphic N.º5



Graphic N.º6



8. Conclusions

The data suggest that the national culture also influences perceived happiness in different ways but with a common denominator. Less expectation and acceptance of inequality, greater individualism, greater indulgence, and long-term orientation translate into greater perception and feeling of happiness.

Of course, the perception of happiness is not a direct and immediate cause of these dimensions since there is a set of other parameters that make up each country's happiness index, as shown above. However, we cannot ignore the fact that four of the six dimensions of national cultures are also significantly associated.

A global and rapid picture of all human societies will show that the central trend of cultural values as a whole, as well as the average index of world happiness, will look like this:

Table 2

Dimensions	World Average Scores	N Countries
PDI	62	97
IDV	39	97
MAS	48	97
UAI	64	96
LTO	44	94
IVR	45	90
WHS	5,71	108

Source: Adaptation of the author based on the results of the HI database and the Hofstede research

On the one hand, it jumps in sight that on a scale of 0 to 10, the average result of the 108 countries (covering the overwhelming majority of the human population) does not reach 6 (5.7 out of 10).

The human species, regardless of how it is socially and nationally organized reveals a relatively average perception of happiness, despite the enormous progress made and made by the species, especially in the last 100 years. The data suggest a collective sense of moderate happiness as a whole.

On the other hand, and also in its medium level, our species reveals a high power distance (62 out of 100), low individualism, translated in various forms (group, tribe, identity, creed, nationality, ((IDV 39 out 100), greater tendency towards cooperation in relation to competition (MAS 48 out of 100), a high need to control, avoid or reduce uncertainty (UAI 64 out of 100), a tendency to short-term orientation with more concern with the past and with the present, (LTO 44 out of 100) and finally a medium low indulgence (IVR 45 out of 100) which is aligned and consistent with the characteristics presented by the other dimensions.

In short, we are not yet a species that has clear awareness that controls its destiny therefore is more pessimistic than optimistic, finding in the rules and in its psychological need as a form of emotional comfort.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the average result of national happiness, divided by the human societies of our species, still positively moderate (5.7 out of 10).

Happy but not euphoric!

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