

ALL WELL IN THE WELFARE STATE? MENTAL WELLBEING AND THE POLITICS OF HAPPINESS.

Call for Papers for a NordWel workshop at Tieteiden talo, Kirkkokatu 6, Helsinki, October 24.– 25. 2011

Topic of the workshop

Welfare and wellbeing have for a long time been closely connected with economical concerns, often associated with economical wealth and material standards of life. However, recent attention has been directed towards the role of various non-economical factors in promoting “mental wellbeing,” “life quality,” and even “happiness”. “Satisfaction with life” has recently been added to the otherwise quite hard-boiled economic measures of welfare according to which different societies are being compared and evaluated (e.g., Human Development Index, HDI, Satisfaction with Life Index, SLI).

So far, the Nordic societies have often ranked rather high in these comparative statistics. Yet, the increase of mental and stress-related disorders and symptoms have been reported as rising in all Nordic societies. At the same time, post-materialist discourses on happiness have increasingly merged with neo-liberal discourses on liberty and self-actualization, thereby posing a complex challenge to welfare states.

The aim of this workshop is to bring historians, social scientists and health professionals together to discuss these emerging trends. *What’s new* about this recent articulation of wellbeing and happiness, if anything at all, and *why now*? We hope that these openly formulated questions may inspire a cross-disciplinary discussion on the following broad themes:

- *The social and historical diagnosis of contemporary interest in happiness/wellbeing?* To what extent is the current problematic of wellbeing engendered by the culture of self-help, the economy of life-management, and the therapeutic society? Are the primary preconditions of wellbeing presented as spiritual, psychological, somatic – or social or economic?
- *The knowledge and political economy of happiness/wellbeing?* What kind of professionals and experts promote wellbeing? What is the role of competing expertise and professions in defining health, wellbeing, and happiness and how do they shape the way in which the market, the state, and individuals themselves seek to remedy stress and mental illness on the one hand and strive for happiness on the other?
- *The psychologization of the political—the politicization of the psychological?* What does the introduction of individual and psychological categories in social diagnosis warrant for the language of politics and for political conflict? Do the preconditions for collective empathy and social dialogue change if articulated in psychological terms?

Keynote speakers

Professor *Jonathan Bradshaw*, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York.
Speech title: *The subjective well-being and mental health of children*

Dr. *Katarina Piuva*, Department of Social Work, University of Stockholm.
Speech title: *Happy without reason?*

Professor *Pekka Sulkunen*, Department of Social studies (Sociology), University of Helsinki; Senior Research Fellow, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.
Speech title: *Autonomy against Intimacy. On the Problem of Governing Lifestyle-Related Risks.*

Application:

If you are interested in presenting a paper in the workshop, please send an abstract to Carl Marklund (carl.marklund@helsinki.fi), no later than 1st August, 2011.