

# Positive Nations and Communities

# Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology

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## Volume 6

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Helena Águeda Marujo • Luis Miguel Neto  
Editors

# Positive Nations and Communities

Collective, Qualitative and Cultural-Sensitive  
Processes in Positive Psychology

 Springer

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*To our loving sons, David and  
Thomas, who constantly expand  
and multiply our world views*

*To our dearest parents, Maria  
José and José Luis, Maria do  
Rosário e Heraldo, who birthed  
our daily efforts to affirm an  
ethical way of being*



# Preface

In the dark middle ages, society was seen as a God-given moral order. That view did not invite to a planned social change. In those times, earthly life was also commonly considered as a test for entrance to heaven and was not supposed to be pleasant, since God had driven man out of paradise. That view did not encourage quests for a better society either.

These views changed in the eighteenth century during the European Enlightenment. Society came to be seen as a product of human making that could be changed. Happiness came to be seen as something possible in earthly life and even desirable. These new perspectives gave rise to a widespread call for social change, which materialized in the late eighteenth century from the French revolution, in the nineteenth century through the development of political ideologies, such as liberalism and socialism, and within experiments in new societies such as the “Walden” commune. In the twentieth century, it materialized in “social engineering” by the state, which resulted in the development of “the welfare states.”

This quest for a better society instigated much discussion about what a good society is like. Social philosophers, such as Karl Marx, dominated that discussion for long. As social philosophers were moral philosophers in the first place, they emphasized how a good society *should* be. For instance, they were more interested in questioning how much equality ought to be desirable in society, rather than in how livable societies actually should be. This later question was addressed by the empirical social sciences, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Sociologists were the first to contribute to the discussion about the good society on the basis of fact. They started assessing actual progress on the way to a better society, in areas such as the reduction of poverty. This strand is called “Social Indicators Research” and now it is part of a wider strand of research into “quality of life.” Empirical researchers have also looked for optimal combinations of desired societal characteristics and question, for instance, what degree of social inequality is functional for economic growth. This is one of the issues in the new field of “Happiness Economics.”

Although psychology is, in the first place, about individual mental functioning, psychologists have not been prominent in the discussion about the good society.

So far, psychologists have mainly dealt with societal determinants of mental health, sometimes considering the context of cross-cultural psychology. Curiously, even social psychologists have remained marginal in the discussion about the good society. Nevertheless, interest in this matter is growing among psychologists. A first manifestation is the stream of “critical psychology,” which emerged in the 1960s and, more recently, the development in the rise of “positive psychology” since 2000. Though the focus of positive psychology is also on individual quality of life, it also keeps an open eye for the social conditions for a good life.

Social experiments in the past have showed that realization of societal ideals might be achieved at the cost of individual happiness. Hence, one of the challenges is to find out which forms of social organization provide the best setting for human thriving. In this context, the input from psychology and in particular from positive psychology is most welcomed. This book provides such input. It is the first, of hopefully many more books, on Positive Nations.

Emeritus professor of Social Conditions for Human Happiness     *Ruut Veenhoven*  
Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands  
and North-West University in South Africa



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# Toward a Participatory and Ethical Consciousness in Positive Psychology: The Value Positioning in the Genesis of This Book

Helena Águeda Marujo and Luis Miguel Neto

The happiest places on earth are not internal ones. They are not geographical ones. They are the places between us (...).

Christopher Peterson, *Pursuing the Good Life*, 2013, p. 226

The whole constitution of my spirit is one of hesitancy and of doubt. Nothing is or can be positive to me; all things oscillate around me, and all is meaning. All things are “unknown”, symbolic of the Unknown.

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), Portuguese Poet.  
Untitled excerpt

This book is the consequence of an ethical commitment and an invitation to even more participatory and polyphonic dialogues inside positive psychology.

Committed to a vision of science that honors the giant scholars of the past, and fosters a culture that appreciates its accomplishments, the editors of this book are also embedded in a scientific praxis that constantly and ethically challenges ideas and procedures while recreating and co-constructing “what is.” In this sense, we encouraged a group of scholars and practitioners to look from a postmodern perspective to the field of positive psychology. While stepping upon the virtues of current models, the richness of data collected so far, and the tendencies inside the field, we were touched by Abraham Maslow’s idea of “growth science” (1979, p. 113), instead of a “safety one,” envisioning an approach that asks different questions, is predisposed to be mistaken, and is open to new and co-constructed versions of reality. Therefore, we invited colleagues from around the world to imagine “what if?” What if we intensely embrace the trends that are emerging (Biswas-Diener et al. 2011; Chirkov et al. 2011; Delle Fave et al. 2011a; Diener et al. 2010; Pawelski

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and Moores 2013), and using supplementary participatory and transformative methods (Gergen and Gergen 2003; Kotzé 2012; Mertens 2009), we actually and progressively bring a more collective, qualitative, culturally sensitive, and transformative approach to our processes of making sense and implementing the science of positive psychology? What if in particular we move beyond the individual level toward a “knowledge community” and “knowledge of the communities?”

To encourage scientific conversations around these topics, we have been bridging the postmodern relativism with a discussion about values and moral commitment (Oliver 1996), far beyond considering them as opposing grammars (Marujo and Neto 2011).

In the year 2000, Ed Diener and Eunhook M. Suh proposed a discussion about cultural issues, defending the idea that the cross-cultural comparisons of subjective well-being of societies, experienced as a value in increasingly democratic societies, is dependent of cultural relativism, addressing the need for taking into account the values of its citizens and inherent methodological challenges. In the book, they reject a complete cultural relativism, pointing out that diverse societies can be good, but that does not mean that all institutional arrangements are good (op. cit., p. 5). More than a decade has passed and we have begun responding to this complexity (Diener et al. 2010) and gradually figuring out progressively inside the positive psychology domain how to integrate in meaningful and respectful ways diversity and communality, values and science, individual and collective processes, rigor, and different and more creative forms of inquiry – with a scientific meticulousness focused not only in numbers but also in language. Nevertheless, we believe that an in-depth focus inside group, communities, and countries’ dynamics can help expand the debate and convey light over some paradoxes.

The challenge of postmodernism can be traced originally to the question of *what is knowledge* – ‘does it represent the world as it is?’ – to the issue of *how* we congregate scientific information. It defied the dominant paradigms and discourses of the modernistic positivistic practices, where notions of objectivity, neutrality, and easy and superficial dualisms between practice and theory, researcher and subject, description and prescription, etc., where in the foreground, and brought instead to the front profound ethical concerns (Kotzé and Kotzé 1997, p. 8). These apprehensions included debating the places of context and time, disapproving a science of consensus, and questioning the angle of the “generalized other,” the view from nowhere. The movement went from prescriptive ethics (knowing what is right and wrong) to participatory ethics (participation of all is a crucial obligation if we aspire to being ethical, since *to be is to participate*). The question then changed to *what are the effects of knowledge* (Kotzé 2012).

We all know how easy and inevitable it is to be caught up in the restrictions of our ways of being and reasoning, trapped in our incomplete and therefore imperfect cultural and historic perspectives, unless we are invited to new awareness through complementarities. Some of us recognize that, as a consequence, and although without intention, we marginalize and silence worldviews, particular voices and languages, and specific groups and relations. As Foucault argued (1980), we are all caught up in a web-interlacing power and knowledge and are accountable for our



*moral positionings* (in White and Epston 1990). If “people exist in language” (Kotzé and Kotzé 1997, p. 31), to become aware, or from the French, “la prise de conscience,” arises mainly from dialogical relations, namely from the energy and tensions uphold by the transactions with others, from that “space between us”, and from the endorsing of new and diverse grammars.

That leads to the invitation to encourage new visions toward understanding human beings, groups, communities, and nations, while they are in positive relations and uplifting communion – of shared values and beliefs, routines, rituals, history, and narratives. We believe that this course of action can help positive psychology to progress through more inclusive ways of thinking and investigating and that those new processes of knowing *with* the other will permit the growth of higher forms of social accountability and a conjoint ethical consciousness, while venturing together toward more participatory processes of co-constructed knowledge.

Heshusius (1994, p. 15, cit in Kotzé 2012), while addressing the “hermeneutics of connection,” describes “participatory consciousness as a freeing of ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity, as a re-ordering of the understanding between the self and the other to a deep kinship of ‘selfother’, between the knower and the known.” A participatory consciousness then requires a “deeper level of kinship...an attitude of profound openness and receptivity.” Two years later, in 1996, Heshusius goes on saying: “When the self and the other are seen as belonging to the same consciousness, all living is moral...To live morally requires, in the first instance, not moral discourse, but a relentless awareness of ourselves in the particulars of moment-to-moment living” (pp. 133–134).

What is, then, *this moment* for positive psychology? In its second decade of life, positive psychology has been “taking stock” of its field of study and is considered to be in a turning point (Sheldon et al. 2011; Wissing 2012). While designing the future, and wishing to “stay relevant to everyday human experience” (King 2011, p. 444), positive psychology is intensely debating its proposals and current paradoxes and challenges, opportunities, and obstacles, and showing four major tendencies: (a) moving from an intraindividual toward a relational, collective, and social focus (Biswas-Diener et al. 2011; Diener and Ryan 2009; Veenhoven 2011); (b) integrating objective and subjective indicators and measures and investing in the qualitative study of positive human processes due to the complexities and multifaceted properties of the phenomena under study (Delle Fave et al. 2011b; Forgeard et al. 2011; Marujo and Neto 2011); (c) being less Western and middle-class centered and more sensitive to cultural and social specificities, namely, through the processes of reaching larger groups and addressing societal crucial issues and ills such as poverty and ecological sustainability (Delle Fave et al. 2011a; Marks 2009; Marks et al. 2006; Marujo and Neto 2007); and (d) dedicated to have a cultural, social, and global impact, focusing in the conditions of life and becoming an instrument for positive transformation, not only to people, but to various disciplines (Biswas-Diener 2010; Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 2011; Pawelski and Moores 2013; Veenhoven 2011, 2012). Therefore, these tendencies are present both when reflecting upon theoretical assumptions and the applied work of delivering empirically based interventions and also when addressing research methods (Marujo and Neto 2007, 2011). The request

to align meta-theoretical and epistemological assumptions with theoretical postulates and empirical processes is hence sided with an incitement to a more sophisticated and reflective thinking inside the field and a transformative standpoint toward enhanced consciousness and different versions of the “truths.”

As a consequence, at this point in time, writing one more book on positive psychology makes sense to us if we go beyond the (nevertheless important) dialectics of positive and negative, bad and good, darkness and light, and away from the pressure to create a master theory inside positive psychology. Instead, we propose to move to a clearly contextual, situated, dynamic, collaborative, and cultural transformative perspective, namely, through a social participatory and shared consciousness angle. In so doing, we believe we can diverge the tension between a value-laden or value-free, prescriptive and descriptive science, to focus more on relational and ethical issues.

In an age where governance, macroeconomics, national wealth and growth, ecology and social politics, and other vital areas such as education, work, family, the functioning of organizations, and the construction of cultures are under scrutiny and making us rethink social values and morality, the call for research on interpersonal and social connections is rising, harmonizing with the ascend of more silenced concepts such as relational goods, community, and meaning. Positive psychology is emerging, regardless of its contradictions, with a clear moral leadership toward positive relational prosperity and transformative social change (Biswas-Diener 2010; Veenhoven 2012). In order to achieve this purpose, the field needs to be increasingly more respectful of positive collective processes already in place around the world, to promote in-depth understanding of those processes, and to share its knowledge and large body of research with society at large.

This accumulative sustained engagement with society and with relevant social practices needs to honor several levels of analysis and use a community- and group-based broad-spectrum approach. It needs to consider different types of data and to give tribute to different methodologies, namely, to explore meaning around the construction of cultural and social processes. Ultimately, it should aim, not only to assess, diagnose, and amplify what is positive but also to transform the experience of participants and researchers.

Some of these purposes were present in the birth of positive psychology and can be traced to the Akumal Manifesto (Sheldon et al. 2011). There, the concept of “moral character of society” emerged, aligned with the need to address the cultural and global levels of society. Thirteen years later, the time has come.

## **The Dream**

Accordingly, the aim of this book, affiliated with the vision of the Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology Series, is to bring to life some data, new ideas, and deep theoretical and meta-theoretical reflections on the concepts of Positive Nations and Positive Communities. This purpose aims to complement the

extraordinary and extremely relevant (Diener and Suh 2000; Diener et al. 2010; Veenhoven 2012), but also media frenzy and somehow partial, raking of happy nations and the geographical distribution of happiness and subjective well-being, namely, judged by the average self-reports of their nation's residents.

What is considered a positive nation? What qualitative processes contribute to a positive nation and to good community life? How can cross-fertilization between social sciences help promote new insights on these topics? What lies beyond and besides the added average of the happiness levels of a nation's individual citizen? What processes are we testifying and implementing inside communities and countries, and between countries, that promote a culture of positive functioning? Are diverse processes such as political revolutions, birth of countries, war and independency, youth curricular activities, or European Football Championships assets for well-being in nations? What about friendship, forgiveness, reconciliation, altruism, gift-exchange, and therapeutic indigenous practices or metrics around GNH: Can they be positive cement for citizens in a community or a nation, creating a spiral of optimal functioning? And what sustainable or episodic collective practices are signs of hope inside and among groups?

This book is tentatively trying to answer versions of these questions. It was originated in an international conference on Positive Nations that also overlapped with the 1st Portuguese Congress on Positive Psychology, held at Lisbon University on September of 2010. Some of the authors of this book were presenters at the conference, and the willingness to publish on the topic emerged as a need, after the fascinating presentations and sparkling of ideas that emerged from the speakers and audience. At the same time, what is now known as the Lisbon Group on Leadership and Culture Studies (ISCSP, Lisbon Tech University) began an international study on Positive Nations, still under process, but already with very exciting results, that connects data from countries as diverse as Portugal and Namibia.

## **The Creation**

The book is the fruit of a group of scholars and practitioners from six continents (Asia, Australia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America) currently living and working in 12 different countries (Argentina, Australia, Canada, Brazil, India, Italy, Namibia, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland, USA), and the diversity of nations involved is even higher when we acknowledge their countries of birth, where nations like Nigeria and Austria emerge. They are authors specialized in the arenas of positive psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, family therapy, community psychology, sociology, industrial/organizational psychology, human resources management, political science, medicine, geography, and international relations. The divergence of approaches, methods, and focus chosen by the authors and portrayed is, in our perspective, a beautiful sign of how diverse and rich this line of study is – and also how incipient – a reason that congregates us in a quest for future developments and expansions. As you will see, some of the authors

answered the pledge with new points of view, more centered in the cultural sensitivity aspect, but still using methods that are closer to a more traditional discourse and line of work in positive psychology (for instance, using pure quantitative methods to analyze a collective process), while others concentrated more upon the qualitative methods, and still others risked more challenging views and analyses around collective processes and how they make communities thrive. All of them display intellectual rigor and are fascinating and prosperous, with a potential for opening up dialogical and critical perspectives, encouraging all of us to rethink our current representation and study of collective positive psychological realities.

The structure and sequence of the chapters are supported in the three-dimensional and orthogonal continuous model presented by Rom Harré (1984, pp. 45–46). In his thesis, he defends that most of our personal being may be of social origin, and that consciousness, agency, and autobiography are the three unities that compose it. He suggests that this personal being derives from the complementary powers of human beings both to display themselves socially as unique and to create novel linguistic forms. In the three-dimensional and orthogonal model he considers (1) Display, (2) Realization, and (3) Agency as way of expressing psychological attributes.

The *Display* of one's psychological attributes is represented with a pole of "private display" and "public display." *Realization* considers that those attributes can be realized as a property of one or of many, which implies that we can have "individual realization" and "collective realization." Finally, *Agency* is the third dimension that marks the degree to which, in possessing a psychological attribute or using a skill, a person is "active" or "passive," exercises power, or suffers from liability. The model helps us integrate the current movement exposed in the book from the personal being to the social being, when we are connecting and making sense of individual attributes within a global perspective.

After the Preface by the extraordinary sociologist Ruut Veenhoven, and word of value positioning by the editors regarding the story and the share vision for the book, it continues with two introductory chapters: one by Christopher J. Kinman regarding two organic visions for the community work – the rhizome and the gift-exchange – innovating beyond fixed boundaries using models of horizontal networking, and egalitarian and open dialogue, and another by Grant J. Rich that takes a positive critical stand in what relates to methodological issues in the field, explores the richness of cross-fertilization with other disciplines, namely, anthropology, and defends the urgency of internationalizing positive psychology, to go beyond cultural universals. In the third chapter that inaugurates the session on *Display*, we have a feast of historical and cultural knowledge related to altruism as a collective vital strength, which being considered a mental attitude by the authors – Lawrence Soosai Nathan and Antonella Delle Fave – is considered to spiral in ways that have an impact upon society. The fourth chapter is written by two Argentineans, Graciela Tonon and Lía Rodríguez de la Vega, and brings interesting data from their own studies regarding friendship as relational glue for a positive nation. The fifth chapter brings a qualitative study from India, where Kamlesh Singh, Anjali Jain, and Dalbir Singh vividly analyze a cultural-specific indigenous therapeutic practice, *Satsang*,

and its association with well-being of women in the rural communities. The sixth chapter addresses an issue that is very relevant but not often studied – the importance of curricular activities, in particular the belonging to an International Honor Society in Psychology, Psi Chi, to student development around the world – linking data with positive psychology and the benefits that might emerge for the construction of Positive Nations. The authors are currently linked to universities and organizations in the USA: Mercedes A. McCormick, Grant Rich, Deborah Harris O’Brien, and Annie Chai. The next chapter is already under a new heading inside the book structure, that of *Realization*. This seventh chapter presents an interesting and innovative quantitative study on the domain of sports, namely, addressing the changes encountered in character strengths of Switzerland citizens, after the European Football Championship of 2008, when Switzerland was the host country. The authors, René T. Proyer, Fabian Gander, Sara Wellenzohn, and Willibald Ruch, explore the fascinating idea of malleability of strengths at the national level. Chapter 8 brings to scientific discussion cultural data from the research on interpersonal forgiveness, using Enright’s theory on the socio-moral development of forgiveness, voicing an interesting debate about the power and specificity of culture upon it. It was written by Julio R. Neto, Robert Enright, Bruna Siebel, and Silvia Koller, a team that includes Brazilians and a North American researcher. The deepness and sometimes heart-breaking narratives related to the historical process of the South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee, as part of the transition process to democracy, is majestically described by Marié P. Wissing and Q. Michael Temane in the ninth chapter. The insights regarding processes to build a more just and positive society are thought provoking and extremely well supported in a profound knowledge of the positive psychology field. The final four chapters are under the umbrella of *Agency*. Chapter 10 debates Positive Nations through the lens of political philosophies and the metrics of the Gross National Happiness, exemplifying with the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. The richness of its open-minded and informed analysis drives from the intense direct experience of the Australian author, George W. Burns, who has served in Bhutan as a volunteer psychologist 12 times in the last decade, studying the national processes. Chapter 11 focus extensively and interestingly on the Portuguese Revolution of the beginning of the twentieth century that allowed for the establishment of the First Portuguese Republic to explore the relationship between happiness and political revolutions and if and how political revolutions are linked to happiness in people. They also open up a rich debate regarding the ways that can be used at a macro-level by a society and a nation to increase its citizen’s happiness. The case study that Miguel Pereira Lopes, Patricia Jardim da Palma, and Telmo Ferreira Alves have chosen, from their own country, brings a special light upon their conceptualization and perspectives while broadening the frontiers of the narrative to other national processes. Chapter 12 reflects upon the bridges that need to be constructed between positive psychology and community psychology, promoting what already is a new hybrid field full of potential, which dwells upon values, and rethinks research and intervention as transformative appreciative processes. The authors are the editors of the book, Luis Miguel Neto and Helena Águeda Marujo. Finally, the Chap. 13, signed by Martina Perstling (Namibia)

and Ian Rothmann (South Africa), takes us to a historical and fascinating journey addressing the relationships between Namibia and South Africa and brings the studies of subjective well-being to the frontline, at the radiance of such complex experiences as war, independence, and nation building.

Grosby (2005) has defined “national identity” as a social relation of collective consciousness. In historical moments such the ones that we live, where some people believe in the sacralization of death if linked to a national project, where the fight for political freedom and the protection of peace are core values, where the comparisons and competition among nations and continents are rising, and concurrently territorial communities go far beyond that of nativity, and national boundaries are disappearing due to globalization, we, the positive psychology community, clearly need to intensify our investment in addressing societies at large and positive communal processes. We need to try to go beyond what is sometimes an oversimplification of the rich cultural and social interplay and “bring more bodies” to the conversation, as the inspirational family therapist Lynn Hoffman (2012) puts it.

This book is just a humble but yet captivating beginning for future dialogues, where discussions about values and the participatory rise of consciousness and “conscientization” (Freire 1970) can bring a new eloquence to the field.

We now want to show our deep gratitude to all the authors for their contribution and express our profound appreciation to Ana Rego and Thomas Neto for their work on revising several of the chapters. Concurrently, we convey our sincere appreciation to all the authors that helped review the chapters written by others: Antonella Delle Fave, George W. Burns, Janine Roberts, Michael Steger, Miguel Pereira Lopes, Patricia Jardim da Palma, and René Proyer.

I’ve always rejected being understood. To be understood is to prostitute oneself. I prefer to be taken seriously for what I’m not, remain humanly unknown, with naturalness and all due respect.

Fernando Pessoa, Portuguese Poet, *The book of Disquiet*, 2002

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