

A photograph of a man and a woman in a kitchen, seen from behind. They are standing near a stove, looking at something together. The man is wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants, and the woman is wearing a dark t-shirt and a patterned skirt. The kitchen has wooden walls, a range hood, and a chandelier with three white glass shades. A window with blinds is on the left, and a potted plant is in the foreground.

The GoodHome Report 2019

What makes a happy home?



Happiness Research
Institute

Kingfisher

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About the Happiness Research Institute

The Happiness Research Institute is an independent think tank exploring why some societies and some people are happier than others. Our mission is to inform decision makers of the causes and effects of human happiness, make subjective well-being part of the public policy debate, and improve quality of life for citizens across the world.
www.happinessresearchinstitute.com

Kingfisher plc

Kingfisher plc is an international home improvement company with over 1,300 stores in 10 countries across Europe, Russia and Turkey, supported by a team of 77,000 colleagues. We operate under four retail brands – B&Q, Castorama, Brico Dépôt and Screwfix.

We offer DIY and home improvement products and services to nearly six million customers who shop in our stores and through our digital channels every week. Our customers are everyone wanting to improve their home, as well as the experts and trade professionals who help them. We believe everyone should have a home they feel good about, so our purpose is to make home improvement accessible for everyone.
www.kingfisher.com

GoodHome is our new home improvement brand and will provide a new, simpler way of doing things for home improvers, their helpers and the pros. It will offer unique products and solutions that are design-led, high quality and well-priced, and help to make home improvement accessible for everyone.

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foreword

What makes a house a home? And what makes that home a happy one? These are the questions we have tried to answer.

Despite the fact that most of us spend more time in our homes than anywhere else, the impact our homes have on our happiness has been relatively unexplored. Until now.

Our research shows that often we look for happiness in the wrong places. Sometimes what we think makes us happy and what really makes us happy are not always the same.

Our research builds on the belief that our homes shape our lives. Our homes are where we find comfort and safety. Where we let our guard down and connect with loved ones. In a world demanding more and more of our attention, our homes are where we can retreat to and seek refuge.

The GoodHome Report builds on thousands of voices. Men and women. Young and old. People who live with others and those who live alone. Homeowners and tenants. Home improvers and those who wouldn't know where to start.

Through these many voices, we have learned how we connect with our homes emotionally and what is truly important to achieve happiness in them.

Together, we hope we may improve not only our homes but our quality of life. To paraphrase Winston Churchill: first we shape our homes and then our homes shape us. Homes are where we may not only live, but thrive.



Meik Wiking

CEO, Happiness Research Institute

I was twenty. I was visiting my grandma who had just done up her living room. Standing in her new room, she had a fresh energy and brightness. Seeing her there, happy and energised, convinced me that our homes are one of the keys to happiness.

That's why I've spent my life working in the home improvement industry. It's why at Kingfisher, our purpose is to make home improvement accessible for everyone. Because we believe everybody should be able to have a home they can feel good about.

With this in-depth research report, we've worked with the Happiness Research Institute to explore the emotional connection people have with their homes and what makes their homes special to them.

The research shows that if you're happy with your home, then you're far more likely to be happy in life. The most important factors are not where you live, how big your house is, or whether you rent or own. What matters most is having a home that gives you a feeling of safety, comfort, identity and pride. What matters is putting your stamp on your home, whether that be changing one room, as my grandmother did, or doing up an entire house.

The truth is that many home improvement projects are abandoned. It might be due to lack of inspiration. Too much complexity. Or not enough skill, time or money. Whatever the problem, there are often too many barriers to creating a home we can feel good about.

Which is why we're shaking things up and doing things differently. That starts with making it all a bit more possible. A bit easier, every step of the way. By simplifying home improvement, we can play our part in helping to make people's homes that little bit happier.

Véronique Laury

CEO, Kingfisher



Chapter 1

How we did it: The process behind the results

From September 2018 to February 2019, we embarked on an exploratory journey to answer two questions: What makes a happy home and how can we make more people happier with their home in the future?

We invited thousands of people from 10 countries across Europe to tell us about how and where they live and what they feel about the place they call home.¹

This has brought us to a deeper understanding of the secret to finding happiness in the home, and it's not always what we expect.

CORE INSIGHT: What makes us happy with our home is not always what we expect.

To better understand the most important and universal emotions that people feel about their home, we asked about their feelings – both face to face and in a major statistical survey – about their home and how happy they are with their home and with life in general, as well as concrete questions about the condition of their home and what effort had been put into home improvements.²

We then analysed the links between all the data points collected in relation to demographics and people's lifestyles in general to find out what actually makes us happy with our home and what does not.³

These efforts were complemented by further research into the causes of happiness, as well as additional interviews with experts in architecture, psychology, sustainable property development, neuroscience, city planning, and social sciences to learn which basic home conditions should to be met and which basic human needs should be fulfilled in order to lead a happy life.

We also analysed the content of more than 300 social media posts that contained the hashtag #happyhome to see how people express their feelings about their home and share what makes them feel proud or frustrated with their home.

¹ Please see the Methodology Appendix for further elaboration on the scientific process behind the results of the GoodHome Report.

² On behalf of the Happiness Research Institute, Gallup has conducted the quantitative survey in 10 countries and 10 languages with 13,489 respondents, December, 2018.

³ We used regression analysis to elicit quantitative insights from questionnaire responses. For further insights into data collection and methodology, please refer to the Methodology Appendix and the end of this report.

quantitative data

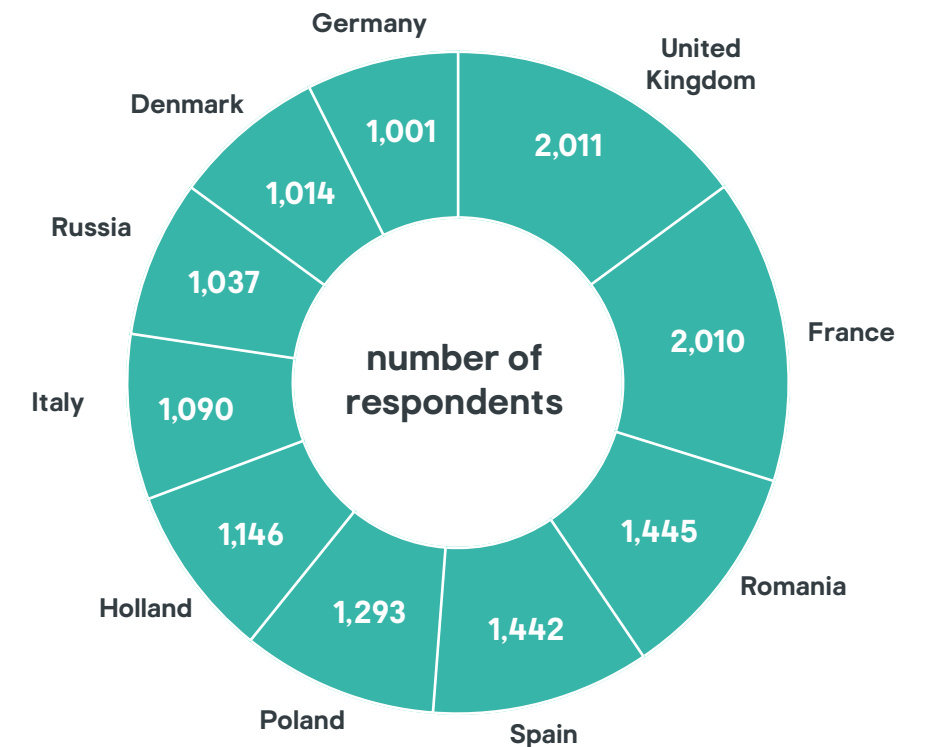
13,489
respondents

10
countries

44
questions

social media survey of
300 #happyhome tags

593,516
data points



qualitative data

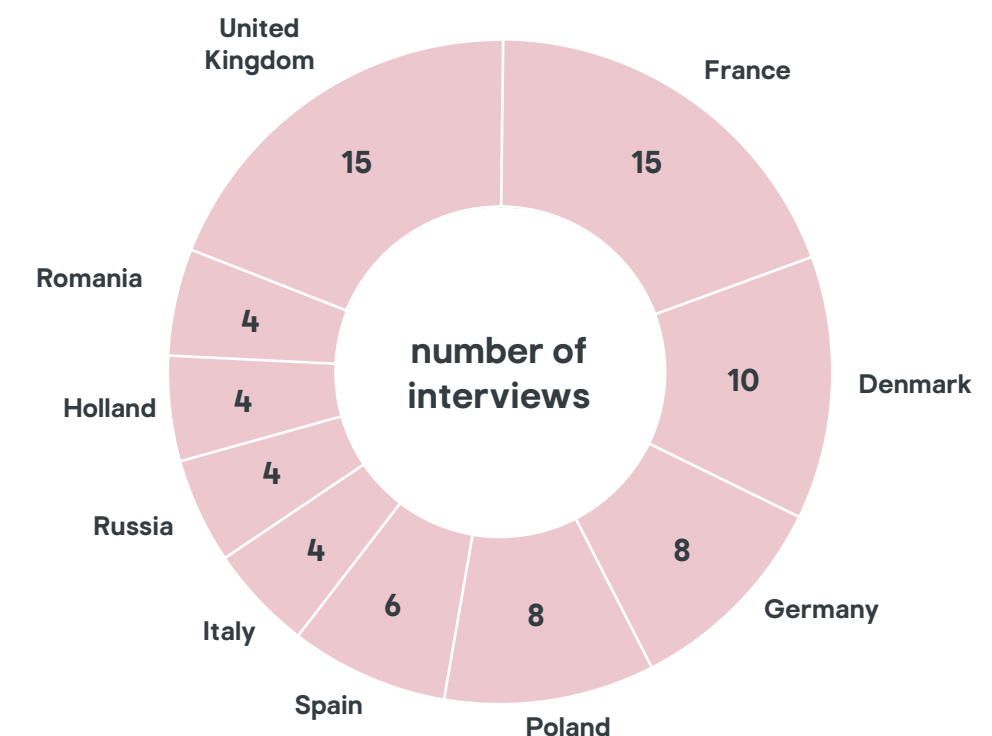
78
interviews

10
countries

20
questions

expert interviews
across academic fields

150,000
words
470 pages transcribed



Chapter 2

The link between happiness and the home

Our homes shape how we feel about ourselves and the lives we lead. This emotional connection is what we have set out to explore in the GoodHome Report. Our study shows that how happy we are with our home is very closely linked to how happy we are in general.

The relationship between how happy we are with our home and how happy we are with our lives in general has been relatively unexplored at a large scale, until now.

In a major European survey, we asked more than 13,000 people to evaluate how happy they are in general and how happy they are with their homes. In this study, we were not concerned with colour choices, decorating styles, garden designs, or kitchen tops. We attempted to go deeper than that and explore people's emotional connection to their home – how their home makes them feel.

The results presented in the GoodHome Report show that how we feel about where we live is actually much more important to our general happiness than might have been expected.

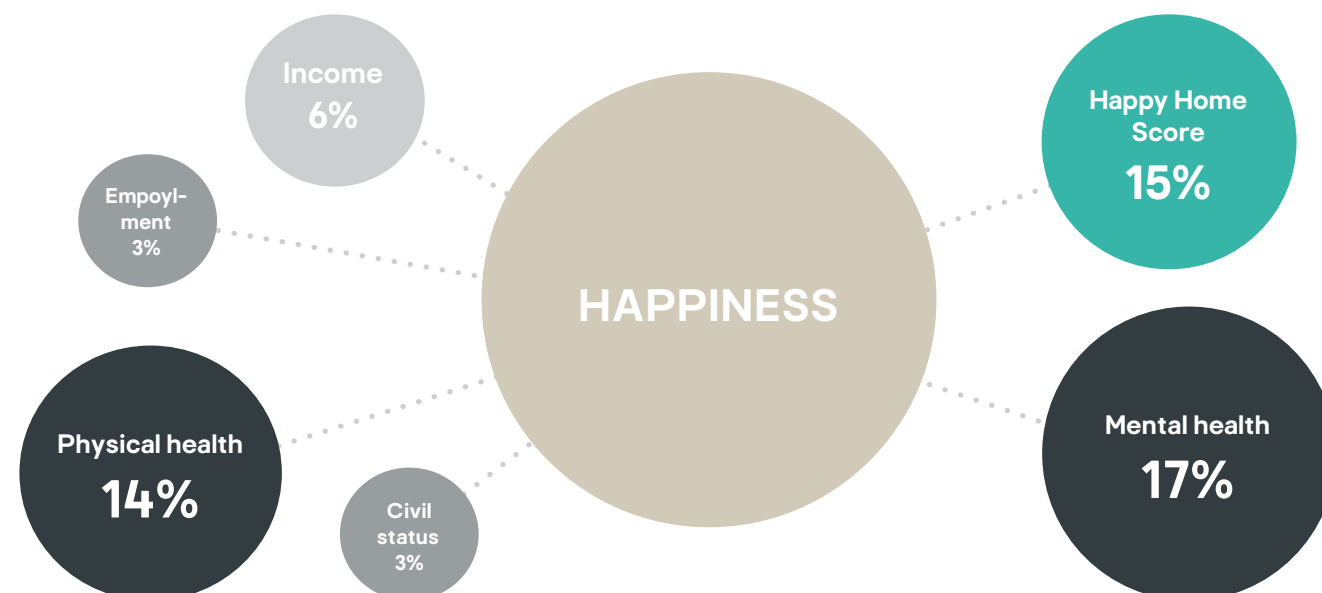
Firstly, we found that as many as 73% of the people who feel happy about their home also feel happy in general.

CORE INSIGHT: 73% of people who are happy with their home are also happy in general.

When we dug deeper, we also found that a happy home accounts for 15% of our overall happiness. This is just slightly more than the percentage of our overall happiness accounted for by physical health and almost as much as mental health.

How happy we are with our homes also proves to be much more important to our overall happiness than our income, whether we are employed, retired, single, married, and many more life conditions that we typically consider highly important to our well-being.

Figure 2.1: The Happy Home constitutes 15% of Happiness



CORE INSIGHT: Happiness with our home is almost three times as important to our overall happiness as our income.

Figure 2.2: The most important conditions for a happy home



Happiness with our home reflects many feelings

Why is our happiness with our home so important to our general happiness? The answer is that the two are intricately related. How we feel about ourselves is often reflected in how we feel about our homes, and vice versa. Our homes are expressions of ourselves.

We find in our data that happiness with the home is closely linked to many other emotions and aspects of our lives, such as feeling at ease at home, feeling safe, feeling connected with ourselves, and feeling in control.

"Home is the place where you can be authentic."

- Maria, 32, Mazowieckie, Poland

We call these circumstances mediators of happiness. For example, when we feel happy and fulfilled we are most often also happy with where we live and vice versa. Put simply, positive emotions in one area tend to be accompanied by positive emotions in another.

"I'm definitely [happy in my home]. I'm just in general a positive and optimistic person. I'm pretty good about not letting negative things affect me."

- Claire, 40, Provence, France

Because there is a large overlap between happiness with our home and a general feeling of well-being in other circumstances in life, our happiness with our home is very closely tied to our overall happiness."

"The home space is a treasure trove of information about who we are, who we want to be, and what makes us happy."

Lindsay Graham

Psychologist, Research Specialist, The Psychology of Space at The Centre for the Built Environment, University of California, Berkeley, USA

This fact is often quite evident from how we live: if our home is cozy and warm, if it has been furnished and decorated with care, it often signals that we are content and resourceful – or simply, happy. But if our home is very messy and decorated carelessly (if at all) with few pictures on the walls, it may signal that we are in a bad state mentally as well. In other words, our home reflects how we feel.

Throughout this report, we will investigate how we emotionally connect with our home and what impact various conditions of our home have on our happiness.

4 Foye, C (2017). Housing and Happiness: an empirical study, Ph.D. Department of Real Estate and Planning, University of Reading.

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

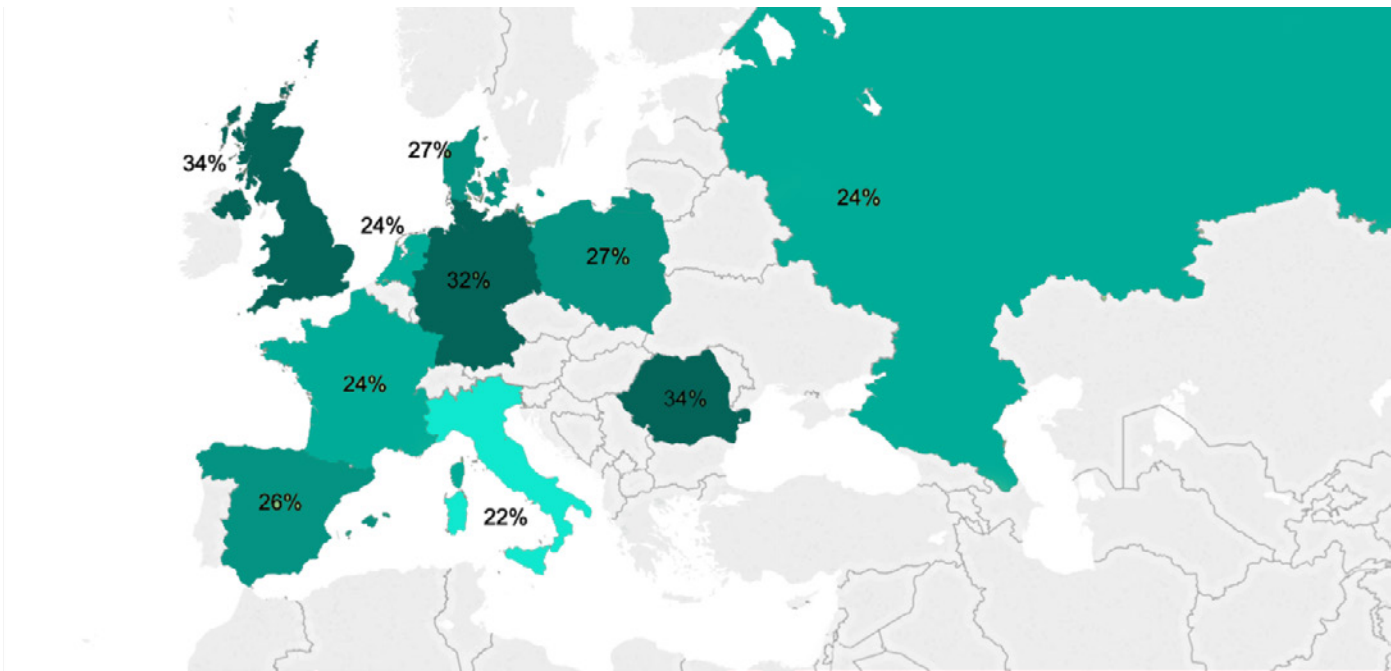
A happy home promotes happiness

To better understand the link between happiness with the home, and happiness in general, we examined the potential impact of moving to a happy home.

If we could theoretically “move” people from an unhappy home or a less happy home⁵, to a home we can truly call a happy home⁶, the average level of general happiness would increase significantly. In fact, happiness could actually rise as much as 34% in Romania and the UK.

From this illustration, it is clear that all 10 participating nations would experience big increases in overall happiness levels if happiness with their homes were boosted. However, Brits and Romanians experience the most significant leap in happiness if they changed their homes to happier ones, and Germans would experience a similar leap of 32%.

Figure 2.3: Increase in average happiness from having a happy home



CORE INSIGHT: People in Germany, Romania and UK could experience a huge increase in happiness from becoming happier with their homes.

⁵ The Happy Home Score is derived from the question: On a scale from 0 to 10, how happy are you with your home? An “unhappy home” or a “less happy home” is a score of 6 or below.

⁶ A “happy home” is a score of 7 or above.

Chapter 3

How we feel about our homes: Five core emotions

Being happy with where and how we live is not only a question of having sufficient heating, good light, and plenty of space, it is also about how we feel and express ourselves through our homes. The GoodHome Report has identified five core emotions and we here explore how they relate to our general happiness and our happiness with our homes. Of these five core emotions, pride is the far most important but also the rarest.

A home is not only a place, it’s a feeling of belonging, of being in tune with ourselves. It is a place where we can express who we are through the way we live, and the way we’ve renovated, furnished, and decorated our homes. These are by no means shallow feelings; our home allows us to express our personality on a deeper level.

“My home is an extension of my soul.”
- Diana, 36, Bucharest, Romania

We can feel at home in different places, but often these places have something in common. Whether it’s specific natural environments, architectural styles, or even colours and materials, all of these elements can make us feel more or less comfortable and at ease. These are all personal preferences.

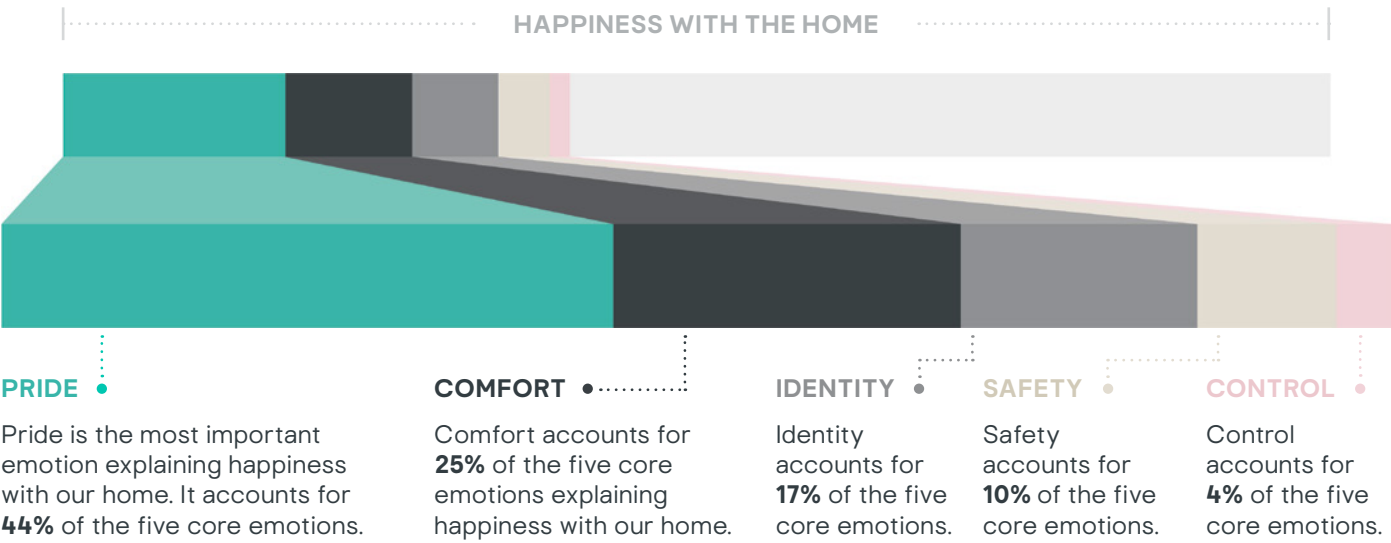
But there are also some universal emotional needs that we share and some basic physical conditions that we need to have fulfilled, no matter who we are or where we live. Recognising these emotions and conditions is crucial to understanding our universal needs as humans.

In this chapter we explore two main questions: What unites us across countries and cultures in defining what we call a happy home? And why are some people happier with their home than others?

Five core emotions

From our own qualitative and quantitative study, independent research, and interviews with experts within the fields of psychology, anthropology and social sciences, we narrowed down the many feelings we have about our home to five core emotions. These are: **pride, comfort, identity, safety and control.**

Figure 3.1: The happy home score is mainly explained by five core emotions



PRIDE • Pride is the most important emotion explaining happiness with our home. It accounts for **44%** of the five core emotions.

COMFORT • Comfort accounts for **25%** of the five core emotions explaining happiness with our home.

IDENTITY • Identity accounts for **17%** of the five core emotions.

SAFETY • Safety accounts for **10%** of the five core emotions.

CONTROL • Control accounts for **4%** of the five core emotions.

These five core emotions have been chosen because they cover many of our basic human needs and together they largely explain whether or not we feel happy about our homes.

Below, we analyse them one by one according to how important they are to feeling happy about our home.

Pride

Pride is about our own achievements. In the present context, these achievements could include all kinds of home improvements and other achievements related to the home. Pride can also be derived from qualities or possessions we have in our home.

Pride is by far the most important emotion out of the five core emotions. It alone counts for 44% of the emotions that explain how happy we are with our home.

CORE INSIGHT: Feeling proud of our home is key to feeling happy with our home.

Later in this chapter, we will take a deep dive into the feeling of pride, as it is so vital to our happiness with our home. We'll show how prevalent this particular emotion is in every country and what we can do to enhance it.

But first, let's take a look at the other four core emotions.

Comfort

Comfort accounts for 25% of the emotions that explain how happy we are with our home, and therefore comes in as the second most important factor.

We define the feeling of comfort as a mental state: It is the feeling of being mentally at ease at home and the feeling of having a home that is a stress-free safe haven, where we have the ability to shut off the rest of the world, if needed.

“My home is my own sanctuary. My job is very social; I like to come home and just relax and not be bothered with anybody.”

- Vanessa, 31, Antrim, Northern Ireland

In a special section at the end of this chapter, we'll come back to how this feeling of the home as a sanctuary is clearly connected with the feeling comfort and also safety from physical threats.

Identity

This is the feeling that our home is a place that is an integral part of ourselves. It represents who we are and how we would like to world to see us.

We can express our personality through our home through the choices we make regarding style. But our personal preferences are also reflected through decoration, colour, furniture, and the personal items we display. These may include photos of people we love or souvenirs from holidays that help us remember who we are and where and with whom we feel we belong.

“I feel at home here. Our home has our identity in it. It makes me feel that it is connected to myself.”

- Ellen, 44, Amsterdam, Holland

All five core emotions are interlinked with each other, but we find that identity and pride are especially intertwined in our quantitative data analysis: when we identify strongly with our home, we also feel proud of how and where we live.

Identity accounts for 17% of the emotions that explain how happy we are with our home and comes in as the third most important emotion.

Safety

Safety is a feeling of being physically secure in our home. We define it as the absence of threats to our physical body.

“Our home spaces are a collection of our lives and who we are and where we’ve been”

Lindsay Graham

Psychologist, Research Specialist, The Psychology of Space at The Centre for the Built Environment, University of California, Berkeley, USA

In particularly dangerous areas, this threat could come from neighbourhood crime and violence.

“[My home is...] a refuge, my castle. Because I feel safe, I feel protected and I don’t feel in danger, I don’t feel that there is anybody who’s going to come and bother me. I feel safe. Within these walls, I feel safe.”

- Giorgio, 60, Berkshire, England

But the feeling of being unsafe could also be related to threats concerning the basic condition of our home. For instance, if a roof continuously leaks when it rains, it could potentially result in water damage, mould, or dry rot. Physical threats could also arise from bad sanitation facilities or structural concerns relating to the building itself.

Safety accounts for 10% of the emotions that best explain how happy we are with our home.

Control

Control is a mental state, a feeling of having agency over ourselves, our finances, and decisions made about how and where we live.

It is a feeling of being ‘on top of things’ and in charge of decisions being made about the home. This could be affected by how high the rent or mortgage is, or the extent to which renovations to accommodate the needs of the family or people living the home are permitted.

“When the home is not yours, you can’t make the changes you want, and you never feel that it is yours. So now when we bought the house we could finally think: I am going to paint this wall this colour. We finally feel that the apartment is ours.”

- Silvia, 30, Madrid, Spain

We define control as the extent to which we can decide what happens to and in our home. Control accounts for 4% of the emotions that best explain how happy we are with our home.

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:
Pride is vital to happiness at home

While the presence or absence of each the five core emotions is vital to understanding how happy we feel with our home, one emotion clearly stands out from the rest: pride.

When we take a closer look at the people who are proud of their homes, 88% of these people are also happy with their homes.

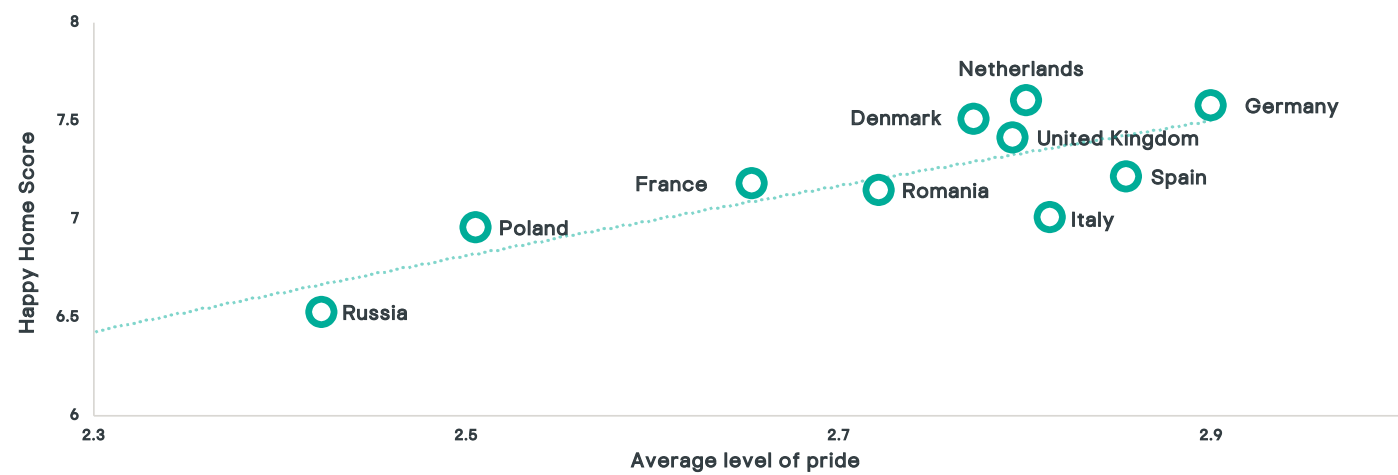
Therefore, in this section we will explore the emotion of pride more carefully and explain why it is so important to understanding what makes us happy with our home.

Pride alone constitutes almost half (44%) of the emotional attachment we experience with our home. The link between pride and happiness with the home is almost twice as strong as any of the other five core emotions. (The second most important emotion is comfort, which accounts for 25%).⁷

CORE INSIGHT: The link between pride and happiness with the home is more than twice as strong as any of the other five core emotions. We also see that the prouder people are of their homes, the happier they are, and vice versa. In other words, if we want to become happy with our home, it is much more important to work on our pride than any other emotion.

⁷ To make sure that we were not overstating the importance of pride in our analysis, we have taken into consideration not only the other four core emotions, but also many other factors that could influence our feeling of being happy with the home, including age, area, income, education, relationship status and so forth. Even so, after taking into account all of these potentially important life circumstances, pride still comes out on top in terms of explaining our happiness with our home.

Figure 3.2: Pride and happiness go hand in hand



Pride is the most important and rarest emotion

In the illustration, we see a clear link between happiness with the home and pride. Germans tend to be very proud of their homes, while Russians tend to be significantly less so.

The fact that pride and generally feeling happy with

our home go hand in hand might seem like an obvious conclusion, but unfortunately pride is also one of the emotions that the fewest people feel about their homes across all 10 countries.

We have found that, across countries, many more people feel safe and comfortable in their home than feel the remaining three core emotions. Pride with the home

stands out as the emotion the fewest number of people feel.

In other words, there is discrepancy in terms of how important pride is to our happiness with our home and how many people actually feel this emotion.

CORE INSIGHT: Despite pride being the most important emotion to have about our home, relatively few people actually feel it.

Pride is about achievements

Pride proves to be the most important emotion we can feel about our homes, but why is this the case?

“So, what makes me proud is that this is my house. And my wife and I have built it and everything that we have is ours. You know, I don’t have any debt, so if I want to sell something, it is mine to sell. So that is what makes me proud because we had nothing and now we’ve got something.”

- Giorgio, 60, Berkshire, UK

The answer is that pride is a mediator for many other emotions that are key to understanding happiness in general. How proud we feel about our homes is often reflective of how much time and energy we are willing to invest in our homes to make sure they suit our needs and preferences.

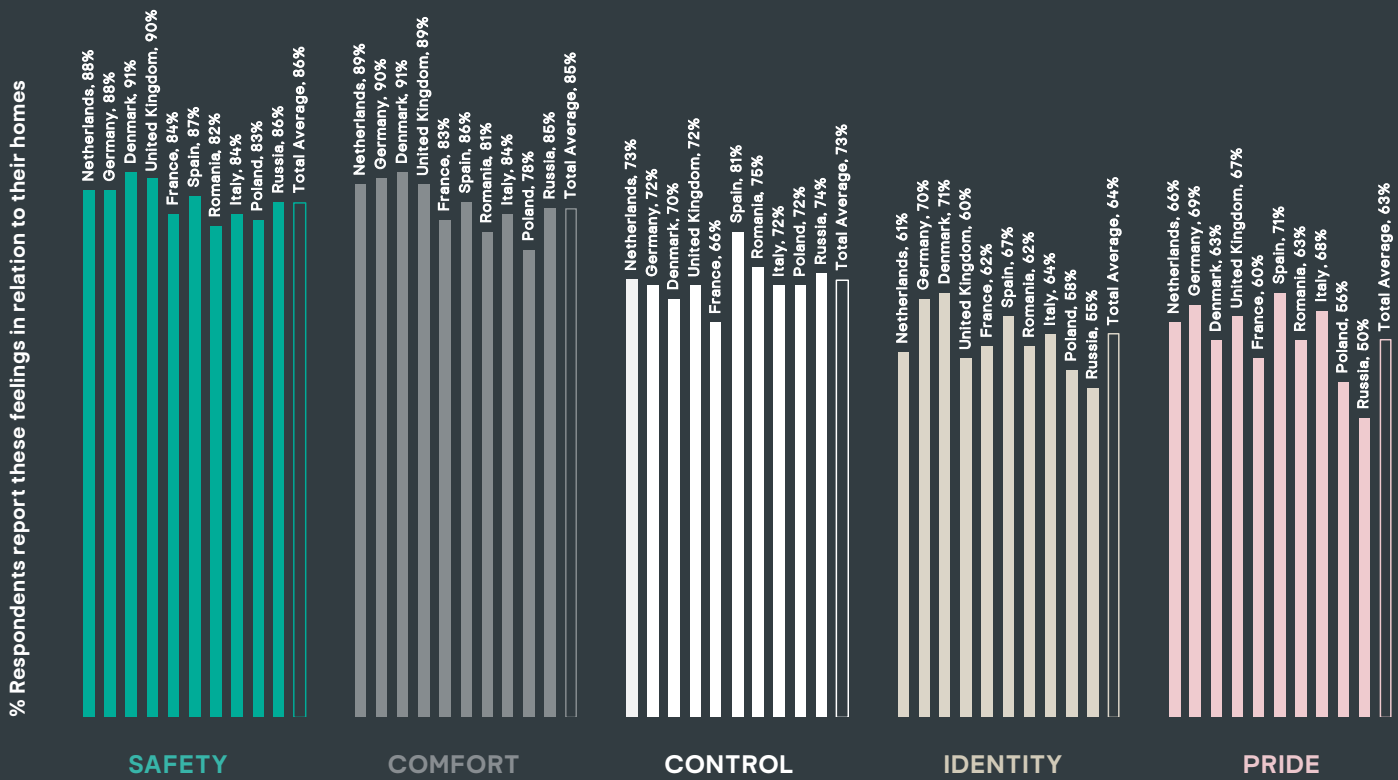
In our study, we found a very clear and direct link between how proud people are of their homes and how much time and energy they put into home improvement. Conversely, we also find that when people have an interest in home improvement but don’t have the time, money, or ability to make these improvements, they tend to feel less proud.

Home improvement promotes pride and happiness

We find in the quantitative survey that the more interested people are in home improvement, and the more time they spend on it, the prouder they become of their home. 74% of people who have an interest in and spend time doing home improvements are proud of their home.

CORE INSIGHT: If we engage in home improvements, even if we have no actual interest in doing home improvements, we become prouder of our home.

Figure 3.3: The percentage of people experiencing the five core emotions throughout Europe



Safety and security

The pattern is similar in all 10 countries: Between 82-91% of our survey respondents report feeling safe and secure in their home.

This means that across all 10 countries, a vast majority of people do not feel physically threatened in their home. Almost as many also feel relaxed in their homes – no matter where they live, whether that’s in the peaceful countryside or in the middle of the hustle and bustle of a big city.

“For me, my house is my sanctuary.”

- Diana, 36, Bucharest, Romania

CORE INSIGHT: A happy home is a place where we can find time and space for ourselves.

In conclusion, we find that a happy home is place to rest our minds, it is a sanctuary from the busy world outside. It’s a place where we can find time and space for ourselves. Home is a place where we feel safe and in control.

“Our home is holding who we are. Where we can truly be ourselves. It’s meant to be a place of restoration. We can completely let go and be our true selves.”

Lindsay Graham

Psychologist, Research Specialist, The Psychology of Space at The Centre for the Built Environment, University of California, Berkeley, USA

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

A happy home is a safe haven

While pride is the most vital emotion to cultivate if we want to feel happy about our homes, another very interesting finding is the relationship between safety and comfort.

We found that both men and women express a need for their home to be a place where they can rest their minds, a place where they can shut off the rest of the world if they need to.

This craving for a home that is a mental sanctuary, a safe and stress-free space, is a basic need which, fortunately, does seem to be fulfilled for the vast majority of the more than 13,000 Europeans who participated in our survey.

We find that most people do feel a sense of both comfort (an ability to rest the minds) and safety (the absence of physical threats) in their home.

“I think [home is] somewhere where you go and everything is ok, it is somewhere where you close the door and shut the world out, where we all are safe, I suppose.”

- Jane, 40, countryside, Wales

Chapter 4

What really makes a happy home: Busting some myths

Regardless of who we are and where we live, several basic and universal material conditions must be present before we can truly feel happy in our home. Many of these conditions are intuitive, but our survey has also revealed that sometimes we look for happiness in the wrong places, and that we should refocus.

Your new granite kitchen worktop or the designer wallpaper in your living room may come to mind when you are asked what you like most about your home. However, while both of those features may fit your personal preferences, they are not basic material needs.

Before a home can become a happy home, several very basic material needs must be satisfied. The most important factor, unsurprisingly, is that the home must be in a generally good condition. If our roof is about to cave in or if we only have access to poor sanitary facilities, a granite kitchen worktop will not make a huge difference in terms of how happy we feel about your home.

The bathroom is a defining feature of a home in good condition

People perceive their home to be in an overall good condition when there is no need for further improvements. In fact, 90% of people who have no need for renovation at all, also report that their house is in good condition.

If you are to consider your home to be in good condition, the most important type of renovation is the renovation of a bathroom. Less than half of all people (43%) perceive their home to be in good condition if their bathroom needs renovation. Of those who report that their bathroom does not need renovation, 75% also believe their home to be in generally good condition.

Figure 4.1: The ranking of material conditions for a happy home



Our research also indicates that sometimes our happiness is dependent on something that we might not have anticipated: some of the material conditions that we might have believed to be extremely important for a happy home are actually less impactful, while other less obvious conditions are extremely vital.

CORE INSIGHT: Adaptability and space are more important to our happiness with our homes than both home ownership and the size of our homes.

In the following we aim to bust a few myths and misperceptions that we might have about what truly makes a happy home:

Owning your home does not necessarily make you happier

For many of us, the dream home is a home that we own. Or at least, this is what we tell ourselves.

Even though we find home owners to be slightly happier than renters on average, owning a home proves to be only the fourth most important condition for having a happy home.

On the other hand, having an adaptable home (number two on the list) is seven times more important for having a happy home than home ownership. Therefore, we find that a happy home can be achieved for renters as well.

In many countries, owning a home is the norm and most people strive to become owners. But in others, like Germany, renting is almost as common as owning and the rental market has many of the same characteristics as the owner’s market⁸. We see in our study that not only Germans, but people across all countries, can also be very happy with their homes as long as many of the other basic needs we have as humans are met and we feel in control of our home.

Previous studies on the link between happiness and housing show that the positive effect home-ownership has on happiness primarily has to do with the fact that the owner feels financially secure. In cases where owners have problems paying the mortgage, home-ownership actually has a more negative effect on mental health than for tenants who cannot pay the rent.⁹

The problem is that owners can feel more out of control of their finances than renters do, in large part because they fear losing a home they have invested a large sum of money in. Because feeling in control is one of the five core emotional needs for having a happy home, losing control naturally has a negative impact on how happy we are with our home as well as on our mental health.

“I would like it [my home] to be mine, so it would be a place that I owned, and that I had some more ownership and decision-making-power over.”

- Anne, 27, Copenhagen, Denmark

In our qualitative study, one of the most common complaints people have is a lack of control. This control can be over decisions made about home improvements and tenure regulation. However, if renters are sufficiently free to make important decisions about their homes for themselves, they can be just as happy as owners. They also don’t have to deal with the often stressful and unforeseen expenses that home owners encounter.

Across all countries, we find that people can be very happy with their homes as long as their basic human needs are met, and they feel in control of their home.

Adaptability is the key

Besides having a home in a generally good shape, having a home that can be adapted to future needs is the second most important condition for a happy home.

All five core emotions – pride, identity, comfort, safety and control – are extremely dependent on whether we have an adaptable home. For instance, we find in our study that four out of five people who feel proud of their home also live in a home that they consider adaptable to future needs.

These findings support the idea that, because our lives are ever-changing, a happy home is a lifetime project: we have children, we need more space, we get divorced, our kids move out, our elderly parents move in and we grow old.

A home can feel ‘complete’ at a certain stage of life, but if it cannot be adapted to the ever-changing conditions of life, it can also undermine how happy we feel about it at a later stage.

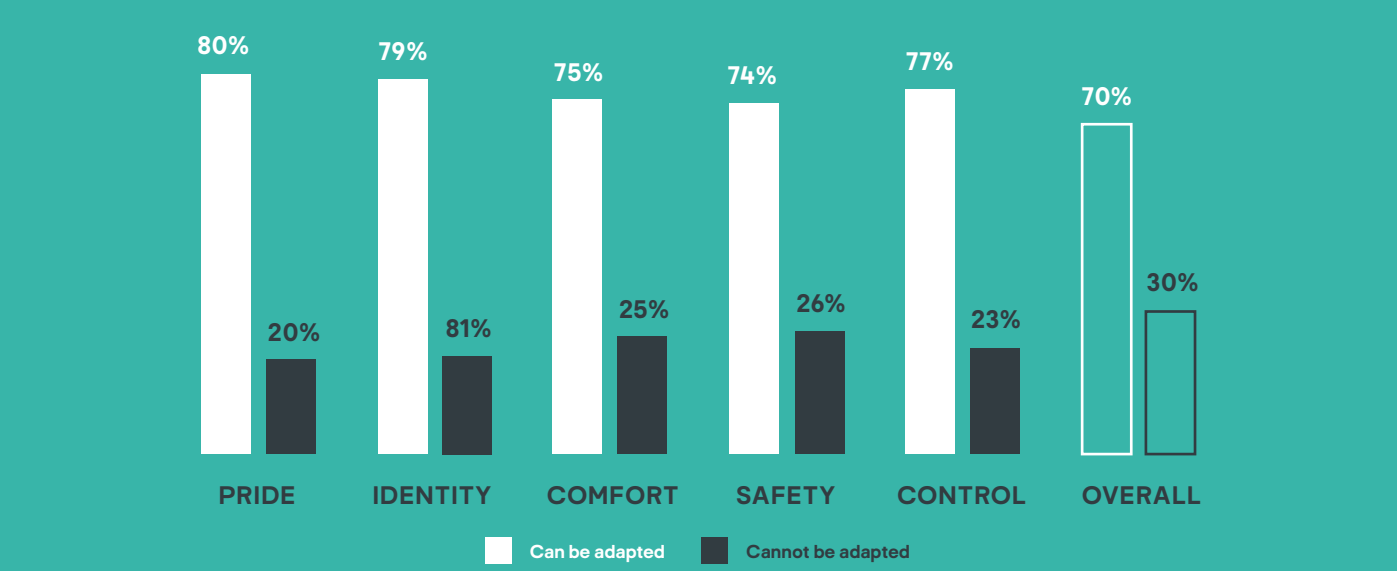
Size isn’t everything

Another myth contradicted in our research is that we become happier if we live in a larger home.

If our home is very small and therefore cramped and cluttered, most of us will be unhappier with it.

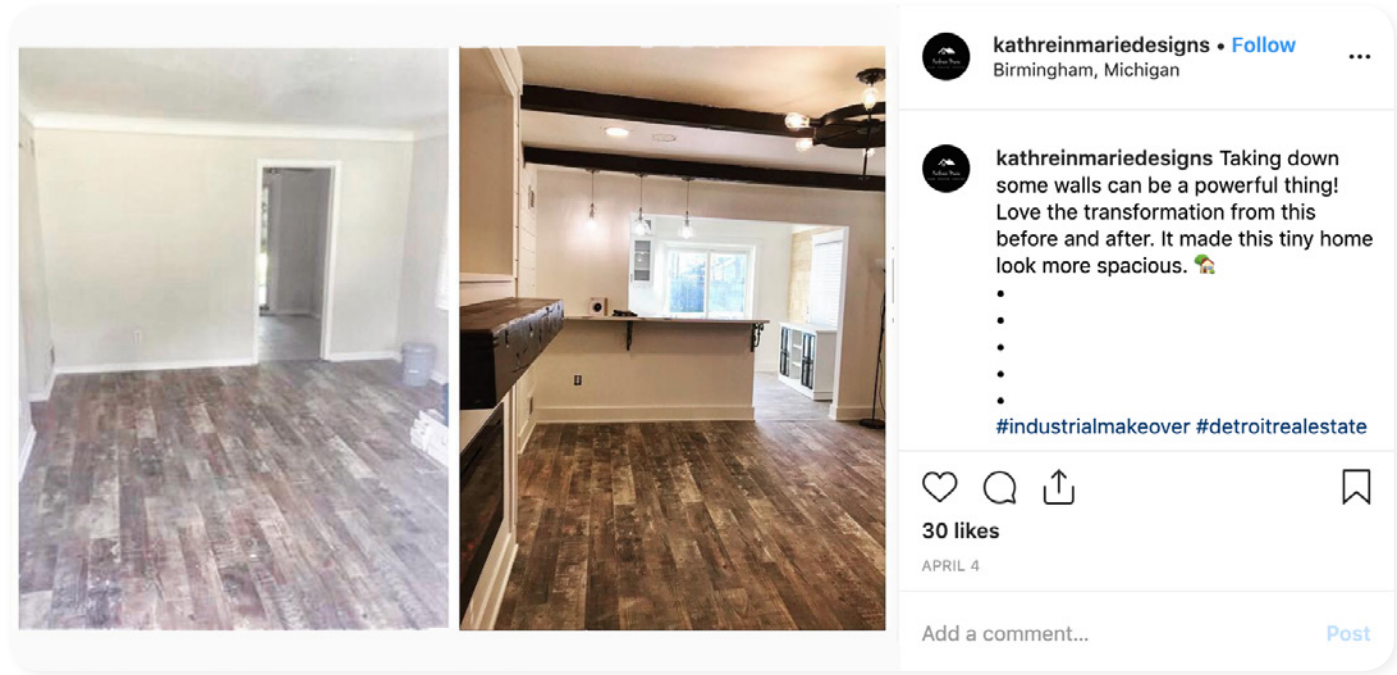
But we find in both in our analysis and in previous research¹⁰ that size and the number of rooms matter only until a certain point. It is the feeling of living in a cramped home that is the problem, not the size of the home itself.

Figure 4.2: The five core emotions are dependent on the adaptability of the home
Percentage of people who feel their home can be adapted depending on the presence of the emotions



“What’s in favour of the single unit house, is that you can change it. You can make the house fit the different stages of your life. That’s related to quality of life. And the fact that you are the master.”

Henrik Mahncke
Head of Analysis, Philanthropy, Realdania Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark



⁸ Foye C (2017). Housing and Happiness: an empirical study, Ph.D. Department of Real Estate and Planning, University of Reading.
⁹ Ibid p. 51.
¹⁰ A study amongst 1000 households in the UK, conducted by PhD Chris Foye in 2017, shows that an increase in number of rooms per person above four does not produce an increase in housing satisfaction at all. And that the initial increase in housing satisfaction that does come from moving from smaller into larger accommodation, wears off by 30% after just 3 years (Foye, 2017).

We tend to use the words ‘size’ and ‘space’ interchangeably, but that may be a mistake. In this study we tested both dimensions: we asked people to report how many rooms they have in their homes, and also whether they are satisfied with the amount of space in their home.

Surprisingly, these objective and subjective measures are not very correlated. An objectively large home can easily feel cramped, while a small home can feel spacious. Even more interestingly, we found that the perception of space is three times more important for a happy home, than the number of rooms.

Size versus space

While ‘size’ can be defined as number of rooms or square metres, having a feeling of a ‘spacious home’ is more intangible. Based on our research, however, we find that our perception of space is strongly related to how we design and furnish our home, and whether it is cluttered

It is important to note that the pursuit of a bigger home may be meaningful and necessary for some: When we have children, we may need to upsize our home to fit in more people. And then, when we grow old, we may need to downsize our home again to make it easier to manage. With the exception of these obvious needs for more or less room, size is actually not as important for a happy home as we tend to think.

Spacious homes may also be the key to understanding why some populations on average are happier with their homes than others. We find a very clear link between how happy people are with their homes on average (per country) and the prevalence of spacious homes.

The three top countries where people are happiest with their homes – the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark – also have a large proportion of people who report to have spacious homes, but not necessarily sizeable homes.

“The perceived quality of a space and its size are almost certainly not correlated as a general rule, especially once you factor in individual preferences and whether that space is activity appropriate. It is more a matter of how the space is designed and arranged, it’s connection to views, and the materiality of the space that impact whether we find that it satisfies our needs.”

Itai Palti,
Architect, HUME

Figure 4.3: The relationship between the Happy Home Score and satisfaction with space in the home

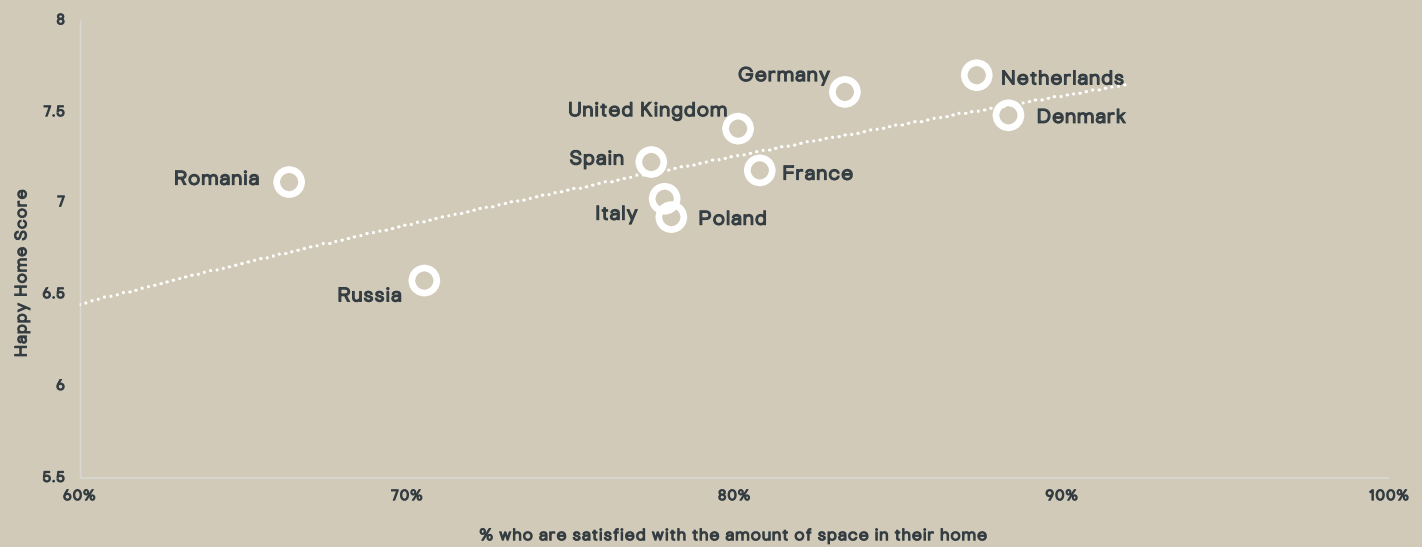
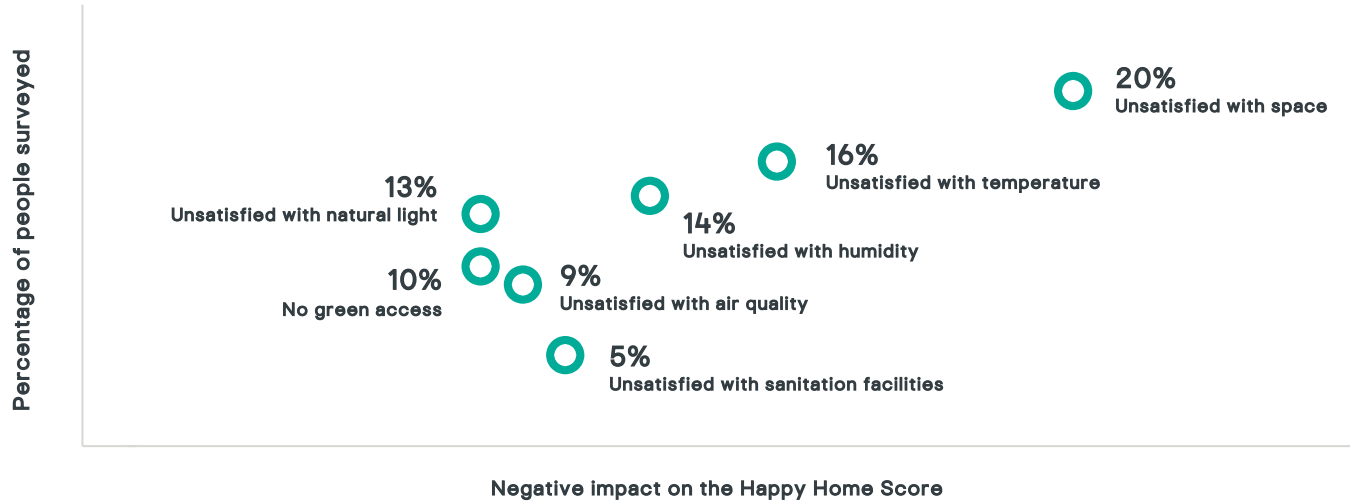


Figure 4.4: Being unsatisfied with the amount of space at home has the largest negative effect on the Happy Home Score



The importance of space is hard to understate. In our research we tested how lack of space undermines how happy we are with our home relative to other fundamental problems such as poor natural light and poor air quality. The overall conclusion is that the absence of any of these fundamental needs are truly detrimental to our sense of having a happy home.

Across all 10 countries we find that 9% are unsatisfied with the air quality, 13% do not have any access to green areas, 14% are unsatisfied with the humidity, 16% are unsatisfied with the temperature, and 5% are not satisfied with their sanitation facilities.

However, lack of space stands out. Not only is lack of space the most undermining factor for a happy home, it is also one of the most common: 20% of our survey respondents are unsatisfied with the amount of space in their home.

Poor air quality is a health hazard

Even though lack of space is the most important factor explaining why some people are less happy with their homes than others, there are several other important factors that can influence how happy we are with our homes.

“In Poland and especially in Warsaw they start to build over the green land that is left, so it’s bad, it is pretty bad I think. It affects the mood and behavior, and I would really like to have a nice green space around my house... we should have peace and quiet in the house, not noise

from car and traffic, and pollution as well.”

- Zofia, 30, Warsaw, Poland

In the case of poor air quality, we are dealing with a living condition that puts our health at risk. This is not only a problem in countries with high pollution; it is especially acute in countries that have focused on building homes with excellent insulation to bring down energy bills. For instance, in Denmark, air quality is becoming so poor due to the lack of fresh air streaming through the home that it is becoming a health hazard.

“72% of all children [in Denmark] have too much CO2 in the room while they’re sleeping. It wouldn’t be recommended for any work place. It would be shut down! We have too much CO2 in general, also in schools. This means that you are in bad indoor climate two thirds of your time as a kid.”

Henrik Mahncke
Head of Analysis, Philanthropy, Realdania Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Having access to a garden creates happiness with our home

“We live right outside the forest, so I definitely have [access to green spaces]. I feel very connected to nature, and I get really happy. It gives me a sense of calmness, I can move, I can breathe. It’s really good for body and soul.”

- Claudia, 39, Island of Funen, Denmark

55% of the global population today live in cities, and this number is only going to grow in the coming years¹¹. At the same time, research suggests that living in cities can be stressful and even undermine general happiness.¹² For this reason, we wanted to test whether people living in rural areas were happier with their homes compared to people living in the cities. In the end, in fact, we found no significant difference.

That that we found no difference between living in rural areas and in the city is likely to be a matter of personal preferences: Some people prefer a quieter environment, while others prefer a more fast-paced environment. However, according to our research, a green environment is universally important.

“We also go outside of the city often. We live close to the beach, so we go there often, just for a walk or for running and drink something. I love the city life, but sometimes it is nice to have a quiet surrounding: less stress, less noise.”

- Ellen, 44, Amsterdam, Holland

Having access to a green area or to other outdoor spaces, such as a balcony or a yard, is also fundamental to our happiness with our homes. We find that people who have none of these are significantly unhappier with their homes – regardless of where they live.

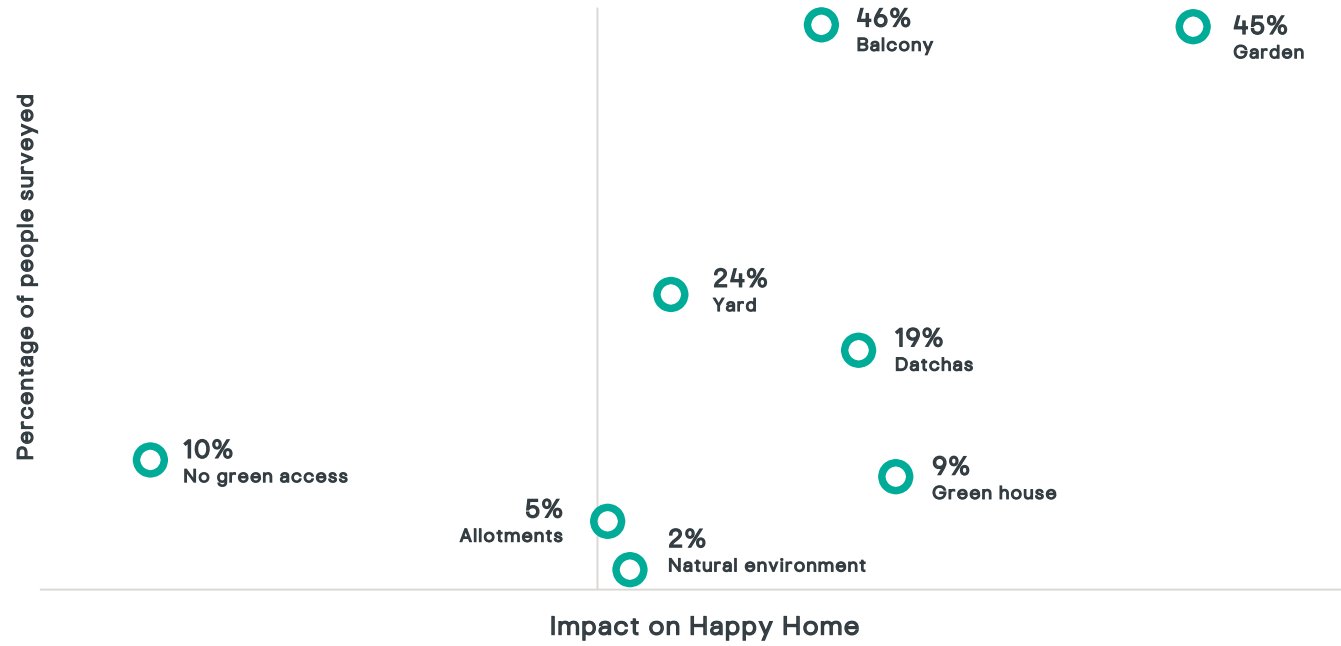


However, while yards, balconies and greenhouses all seem to make people happier, nothing is as good for us as a regular garden.

On average, we find that 45% of people across all 10 countries have a garden, while 10% have no green or outdoor access at all.

So even though some people choose to live in cities, most likely because of personal preferences, they still seek out nature to some extent all the same. In our qualitative interviews, we also learned that people usually seek out nature to breathe, feel calm, and relax.

Figure 4.5: The impact of having access to green spaces on happiness with the home



So why do we need to connect with nature?

According to cognitive psychology, one explanation could be that we have lived and thrived in the natural world for more than 200,000–300,000 years, and therefore it is the environment in which we have adapted to feel most comfortable. The fact that more than 50% of all people worldwide now live in cities does not change our emotional and cognitive need for a connection with nature. After all, we have only lived in large cities for 100–150 years, and evolution simply does not progress this fast.¹³

That means that when we find ourselves in nature, we feel calm and satisfied. We experience a feeling of being home. Whereas in the city we can feel stressed because of an overstimulation to the senses.

Keeping up with our neighbours

We have now established that a home in an overall good condition, a home that is adaptable, and a home that is perceived as spacious are important for the happy home, while homeownership and size are less so.

These factors are measured in absolute terms, meaning that more of it (more space, more adaptability etc.) always leads to more happy homes. While this is almost always true, there is one thing that must be taken into consideration: social comparison.

As humans, we are inherently social beings who often compare ourselves with people we know or people we think we should behave and live like.¹⁴ According to social comparison theories,¹⁵ instead of exclusively defining our needs in absolute terms (such as the need for more space, the need for three-bedroom flat or the need for a up-to-date kitchen), we often look at the lives of those around us to determine what expectations and feelings about our own lives. This leads to situations where people can actually be happier with their homes than we might expect them to be. However, we could also find the opposite to be the case: that people are unhappy with their home even though objectively they are fairly well off.

The people we compare ourselves with are most often people of similar age, background, neighbourhood or region as well as our families.

¹¹ United Nations (2018), The Speed of Urbanization Around the World, WorldPOPFACTS, No. 2018/1

¹² Bin Bishr, Aisha. (2018) Happy Cities Agenda, Global Happiness Policy Report 2019

Renters are as happy with their home as homeowners

A good example of how social comparison works is our feelings about tenure. Normally, we would expect homeowners to be happier than renters – i.e. this is the case in the UK, where most renters aspire to become home owners¹⁶. But in Germany, where renting is almost as common as owning a home, we find that renters are happier with their situation than renters in other countries.

As evidence of this dynamic, we find in our study that people in one region of a country can be happy with their homes although they objectively do not live up to the same standard as people in other regions of the country.

“[My home is] not really expensive compared to the rest of London. Just what I need for studying, sleeping and having friends over.”

- Tomasse, 22, London, UK

CORE INSIGHT: Even if we live in poor conditions or don't feel particularly proud of our homes, we may still feel quite happy as long as we don't have substantially less than those around us.

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

What we compare with others

Number of people living in the household: We compare household size with others. If it is common for three people to live together in the group of people we normally compare ourselves with, then we are likely to be less happy with our home if we live in a household with less (or more) than three people. It is important to note that the number three isn't necessarily the 'magic household size'. This number varies for different social groups.

Living with a partner and children: We compare civil status. If the majority of people we normally compare ourselves with live with a partner and have children, and we do not, then we are more likely to be unhappy with our home.

Tenure: We compare ownership. If we rent our home, but most people around us own their home, we are more likely to be unhappy with our home. However, if most people rent their home, then it's less of a problem to be renting ourselves.

Type of home: A house is preferable to a flat for most: If we live in a flat, but everyone in our social reference group lives in a house, then we are more likely to be less happy with our home. But does not hold the other way around.

¹⁴ In this report, our 'social reference group' is defined by three demographic variables:

1. Similar education
2. Living in the same region
3. Same age group

¹⁵ Foye C (2017). Housing and Happiness: an empirical study, Ph.D. Department of Real Estate and Planning, University of Reading.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 5

Who lives in a happy home?

A happy home is not just about the material condition of the home, it also about our life stages and the plans we have for our home and how we use it in our daily lives. In this chapter, we look into the personal conditions that make a happy home; we discover that there is a “magic age” where we are most happy with our home and learn that social people are happier with their homes than people who spend more time alone at home.

It's all about getting settled

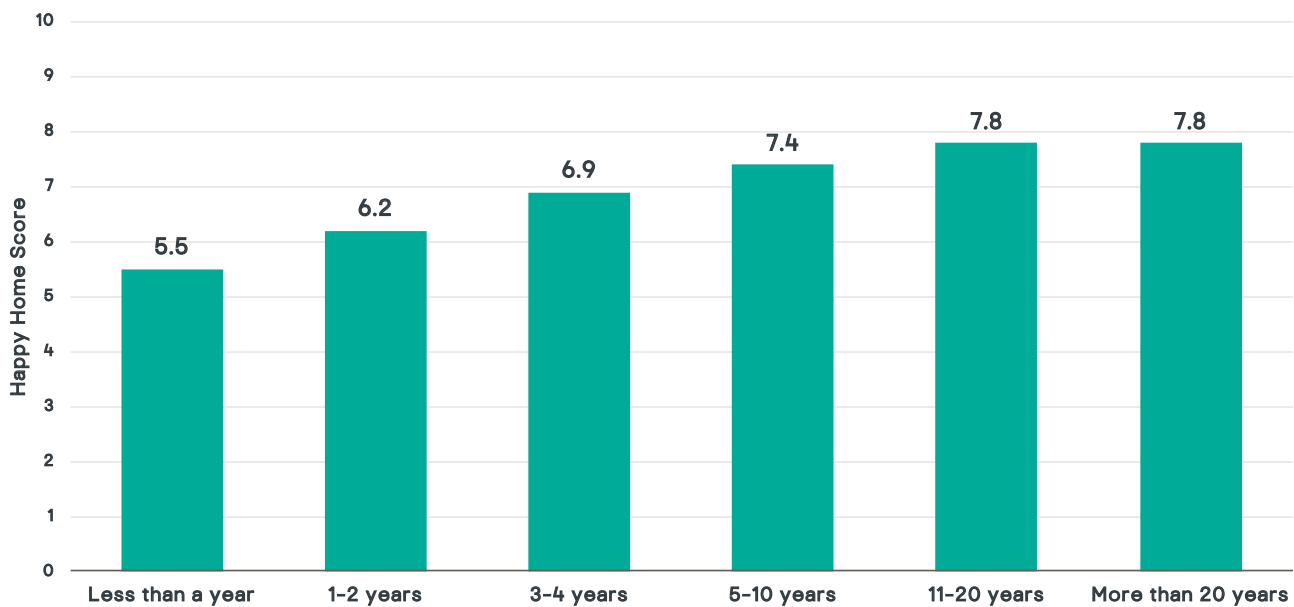
In our survey data, we find a strong link between settling down and having a happy home. If we see ourselves living in a home for a short period of time, then we are simply less likely to be happy with it. On the other hand, if we expect to live for more than 10 years in our current home, then it's very likely that we are happier with it.

“I am going to live here forever. That is fantastic. I don't have to think about anything. When I was younger I was thinking about [the uncertainty of where to live] a lot. But now we are here, and it is all good.”

- Berit, 52, Island of Zealand, Denmark

The explanation for why this is the case may seem relatively straight forward: If we see ourselves living in our current home for more than just a year, then we may be more likely to become emotionally attached to it. Similarly, if we have already found our dream home, then we are more likely to stay put. It's all about settling down.

Figure 5.1: How long we see ourselves living in our home is strongly linked to how happy we feel with it

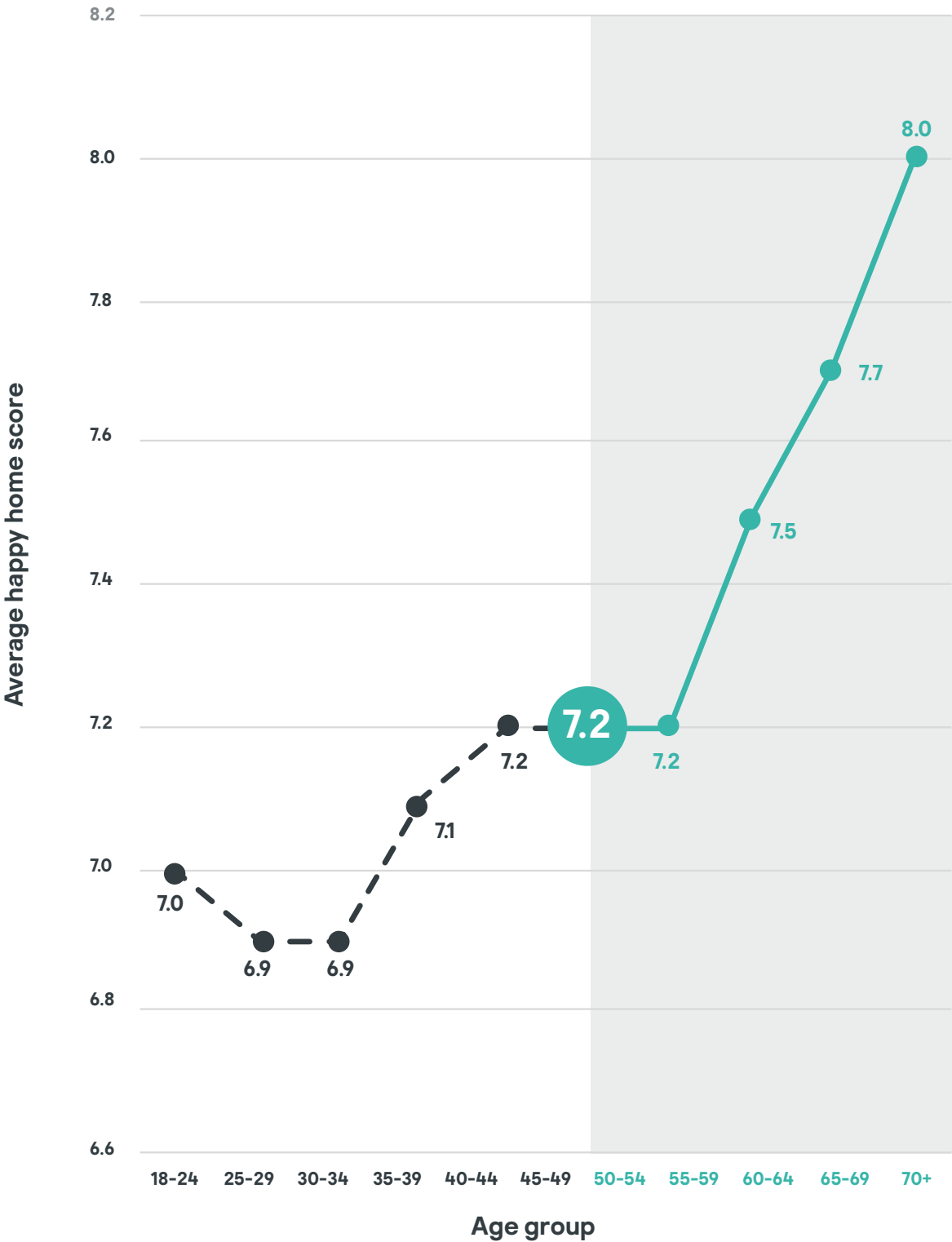


If settling down is so vital for a happy home, this of course raises the question of whether a happy home is dependent on age and life stages?

Presumably many young people do not see themselves staying in their current home for a long period of time.

It may be a natural consequence of how they choose to live their lives, moving from one city and flat to another, before finally settling down later on. In fact, our research does indicate that we get happier with our home with age, and that we become increasingly happy with our home after the age of 50.

Figure 5.2: After we turn 50, our happiness with the home increases



Why is 50 the magic number?

The reason why we start to become happier with our homes after turning 50 has a lot to do with home improvements. In other words, as we get older we will have likely put more effort and energy into improving our current home, which in turn makes us happier with it. Interestingly, at the 50-year mark, the average amount of home improvements increases significantly and so does the happiness with our home.

But why is 50 the magic number?

Several factors play a role in this. First and foremost, at 50 we are (on average) more likely to have found the place we want to call 'home' for good. This ensures the feeling of 'settling down' which is so important for a happy home. Secondly, at the age of 50 we may still be physically healthy and capable of doing home improvements. Finally, once our children move out, we may also have more time and resources to dedicate to improving our home.

CORE INSIGHT: At the 50-year mark, the average amount of undertaken home improvements increases significantly and so does our happiness with our home.

“We are not moving. We will live here for as long as we can. But maybe we don’t get to decide that ourselves [do you think that the house supports you staying for as long as possible?] yes, I do... it is not so big, so it is easier to maintain. It shouldn’t be a problem... yes, as the conditions are, yes, and the age, you are not going to change a lot now... we don’t need anything it is all good.”

- Hans Christian, 86, Island of Zealand, Denmark

Social people are happier with their home

One of the most consistent findings in happiness research is that strong social connections are crucial to living a good life.¹⁷

In our interviews, we encountered people who actually did not associate a happy home with a social home, a home where we often invite friends and family over. This is consistent with psychological theories that stress the importance of recognising personal preferences depending on personality type: extroverts will more often desire spaces to interact with others, whereas people who tend to be more introvert will desire less chaos, socially as well as physically.¹⁸

“My job is very social. I like to come home and just relax and not be bothered with anybody.”

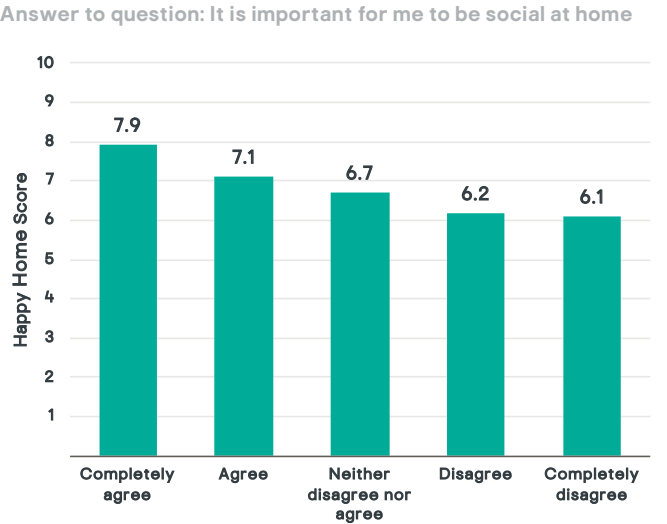
- Vanessa, 30, Anthrim, Northern Ireland

For this reason, we were reluctant to define 'socialising at home' as a basic emotional need and something that would always be the foundation of a happy home. We simply had to recognise the possibility that some people would only socialise outside of their home and then seek solitude and refuge in their home, which would make them happy with the function of their home and their happiness with their home in general.

Despite our reluctance to see 'socialising' as a universal need, we did find that it is indeed a driver of happiness: in our quantitative analysis, we found that people who do find it important to socialise at home are significantly happier with their home than those who do not.

It's not just about whether we feel it is important to have a social home – frequent visits are often the key to the core emotions.

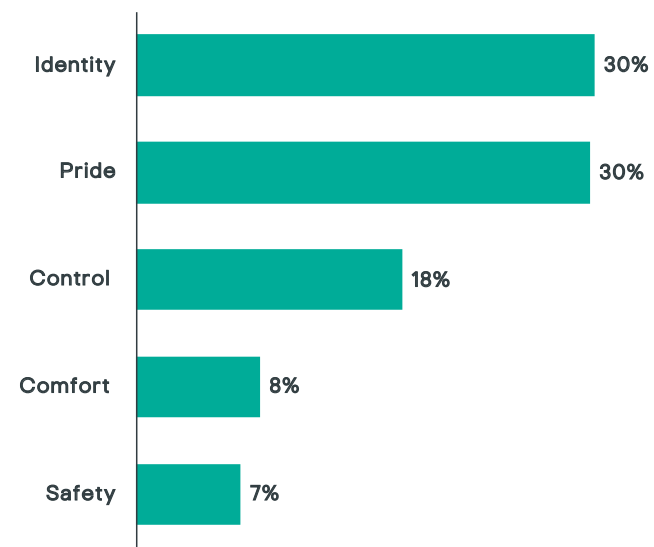
Figure 5.3: People who are social at home tend to be happier with their home



¹⁷ Diener, E. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2018) Social Well-Being: Research and Policy Recommendations, Global Happiness Policy report 2018

¹⁸ Graham L, Gosling S, Travis C (2015). The Psychology of Home Environments: A Call for Research on Residential Space. Perspectives on Psychological Science 2015, vol. 10(3) p. 346-356

Figure 5.4: Increase of the experienced emotion when people have frequent visitors at their home



“I think home is somewhere where you are proud to bring your friends and family back to.”

– Stefan, 30, Berkshire, UK

Out of the five core emotions, identity and pride are particularly linked to having people visiting our home. We find that people who often have guests feel prouder about and are more likely to identify with their home than people who rarely or never have guests.

“When there is something to do, everybody decides to do it at my house. Some friends of mine say that this is a cosy house, and they say that they feel good in this house... [It makes me] very proud. I will continue to make sure that people feel at home in my home. I am very proud that... you know when people are happy to be in your home, and you do the best, and people see that you do the best.”

– Clemence, 33, village close to Dunkirk, France

However, it is important to take causality into consideration. Our research suggests that frequent visits do not necessarily increase a person's sense of pride and identity with their home, but rather the other way around. When we are proud of and identify ourselves with our homes, we are more likely to invite people over.

In the end, a happy home turns out to be one that can accommodate our social needs and provide space for us to be alone and have time to ourselves if need be.

Home improves are happier with their homes

In the GoodHome Report, one of our core findings is that people who get involved in home improvement – whether they do it themselves or hire someone else to do it for them – are prouder (and therefore happier) about their homes than those who do not.

Our research demonstrates that 74% of people that have an interest in and spend time doing home improvements are proud of their homes. On the other hand, only 36% of people who neither have interest nor spend time doing home improvement are proud of the homes.

“[I feel proud of the work I’ve done] because I have transformed the space, which was unloved, and I turned it into a very good apartment to live in.”

– Thomas, 33, London, UK

Interestingly, this effect is so strong that it also remains true for those of us who have no interest in doing home improvement at all. Specifically, 51% of people that have no interest but do spend time doing home improvements are still proud of their homes. This fact proves to be one of those interesting conclusions that we can draw in happiness research using regression analysis: We find that something we have no interest engaging in, perhaps even something we believe would make us unhappy, actually ends up having positive effects.

CORE INSIGHT: Home improvements actually make us happier with our home, even if we have no interest in doing home improvements.



Because pride is so closely linked with happiness, doing home improvement can also actually make us happier with our home.

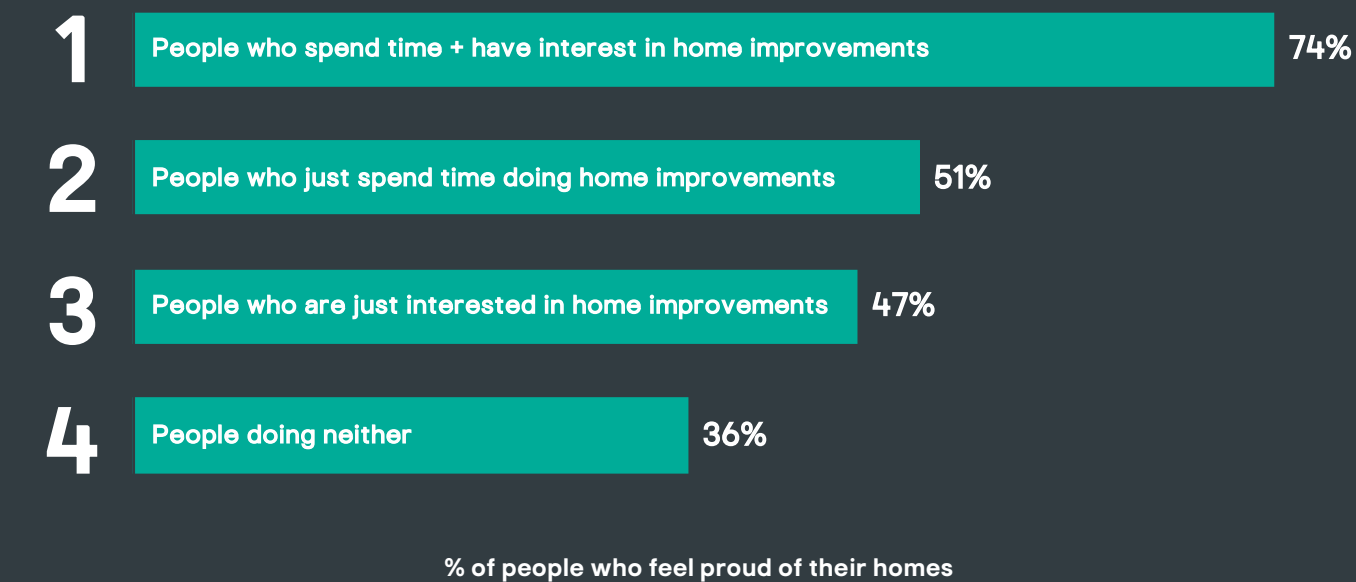
72% of our survey respondents feel happy about their home if they have either had improvements made to their home or have actually made home improvements themselves (more than just ordinary maintenance and decoration).

As we grow older, the home improvements we have undertaken in our home accumulate, which then translates into an even happier home in the long run.

“It is nice to have an idea about how I would like to live [and decorate]. Then you know what you are like as a person, when you can imagine how you would decorate your dream-home... it gives a sense of certainty, like, I actually know myself well, and I know what I would do, and that is a nice thought.”

– Anne, 27, Copenhagen, Denmark

FIGURE 5.5: The more interest and time a person spends doing home improvement, the more proud they are of their homes



SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

Improving the kitchen and bathroom gives the biggest boost to happiness

In terms of home improvements, renovating our kitchen impacts our happiness with the home the most, while renovating our bathroom comes in second.

We see the kitchen as the heart of the home. It is where we prepare and share meals with others – but we share so much more than that. We talk about our days and our dreams for tomorrow.

“The kitchen is associated with some very nice and deep conversations. It is really important – it makes me feel, hmm, to some extent it makes me feel happy.”

– Yelena, 23, Moscow, Russia

One in four of us has renovated our kitchen. 82% of us who have renovated our kitchens are happy with our homes, compared to 68% of us who have not renovated our kitchens.

“My favorite room is the bathroom – because it is the one room which is actually finished. Everything else have small little projects that I am still working on. The bathroom makes me feel like I have achieved what I set out to achieve.”

– Thomas, 33, London, UK

Chapter 6

Country comparisons: Where are the happiest homes?

In the GoodHome Report, we find that what unites us is greater than what divides us when it comes to what makes us happy with our home. However, we do see some important differences in how happy people are with their homes across nations.

We might be British, French or Russian, but we are people first and foremost who seek good conditions for good lives at home: we share the same basic emotions towards our home, and we need the same basic conditions to thrive. A happy home allows us all to flourish.

Across Europe, we find that there is more that unites us than divides us when it comes to feeling happy about our homes. For example, a house full of clutter is frustrating, having access to green space brings joy, and we all need to find time to spend alone and together with loved ones.

However, we do see some important differences in how happy people are with their homes across countries.

The Dutch are the happiest with their homes

In the GoodHome Report, we asked each of the 13,489 people who participated in our survey how happy they

were with their home. We then calculated an average “Happy Home Score” for each country.

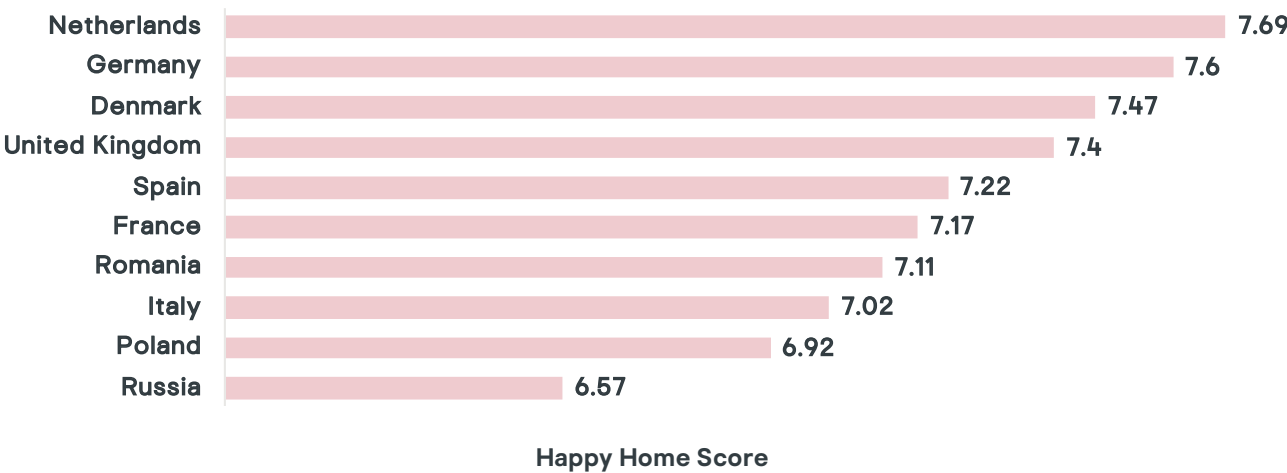
In our study, the Dutch come out on top: On a scale from 0 to 10, the Dutch average Happy Home Score is 7.69.

The Dutch are followed closely by the Germans with a score of 7.60, and Denmark comes in third with a score of 7.47.

“I am generally really happy – also in my home. I think generally, I am happy. There are no unpredictable factors, and here are the people that I love. There is no noise and there is no chaos like in the streets and it is warm and dry and here are people we love.”

– Fleur, 35, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Figure 5.1: The happiest homes are the Dutch homes



The link between happy homes, happiness, trust, and equality

There is very little difference between the Dutch, Germans, and Danes in this ranking. In fact, it is more interesting to talk about the similarities between the three countries than their differences.

Besides being geographically proximate, the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark have a lot in common. Residents of all three countries have most of their basic human needs fulfilled. They are generally happy, trust each other, and live in fairly equal societies. These elements are strongly connected to each other, and also to drive the experience of having a happy home.

“People who feel safe, have a higher quality of life.”

Henrik Mahncke

Head of Analysis, Philanthropy, Realdania Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

When it comes to the fulfillment of basic human needs, these Northern and Central European Countries provide basic living conditions that are well above average. They provide for public safety, spacious homes, good sanitation, access to stable electricity, clean air and access to green space for many people.

As we have discovered in the previous chapter, these conditions are crucial to having a happy home, but they are also necessary components of general happiness. It is no surprise that the Netherlands, Denmark and to some extent Germany score very highly in international rankings like the Social Progress Index and World Happiness Report.¹⁹

Spacious homes divide the top from the bottom in the happy home ranking

One basic need that is more fulfilled in high-ranking countries is space. In Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark, people generally perceive their homes to be spacious, even when their homes are not that large. Again, it is not a matter of actual size, but of how we perceive the space we live in. Residents of lower-ranking countries often feel as though their homes do not have enough space.

Another observation worth noting is that populations with less income inequality – including Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany – are generally happier with their homes.

One obvious explanation for this is that people in more equal societies have similar access to the necessary resources that make them happy with their homes. Adding to this, people in equal societies tend to trust each other more²⁰. This leads to more trustworthy neighbourhoods and communities, which, in turn, make people feel safer, more connected, happier in general, and happier with their homes.

However, the obvious question then becomes one of cause and effect: Is it our experience of having a happy home that makes us happy? Or is it our general happiness (enabled by social and environmental structures) that makes us happy with our home?

“For me, it is security as well as freedom. Like the feeling that I have in the bedroom, the feeling of security and perspective. For me home is also a place where I can freely evolve and unfold myself and have the possibility to meet and engage with people.”

- Sabine, 70, Munich, Germany

The most likely answer is that it goes both ways.

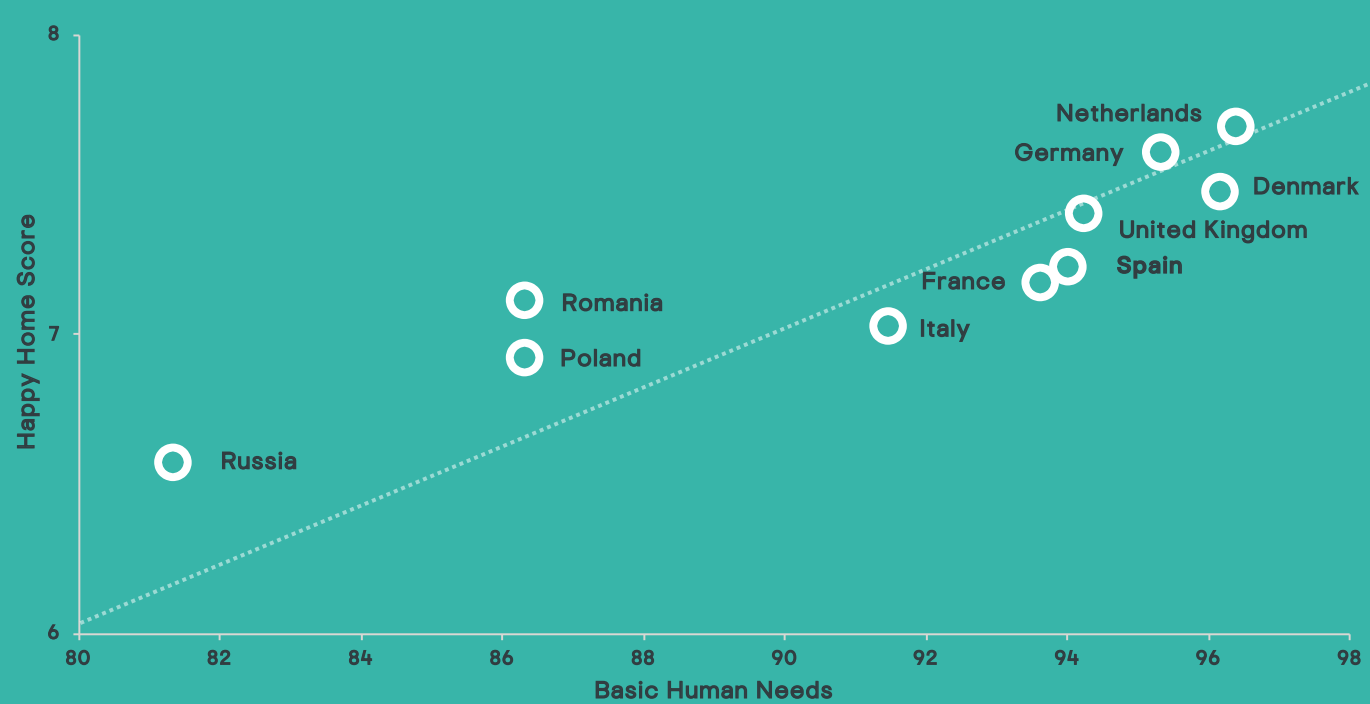
As we have explored in the previous chapters, having a home that accommodates our basic and personal needs equals having a happy home, which is then again linked to high levels of overall happiness.

However, the social and environmental structures that surround us also play an important role in determining how we live. If people in our country or neighbourhood generally trust each other, if we have equal opportunities to have a happy home as our neighbours, and if our personal safety is not a daily concern, then it becomes significantly easier to put effort into making our home a happy one and enjoying it on a day to day basis.

Figure 6.1: Perceiving the home to be spacious is essential to feeling happy with the home



Figure 6.2: Happy Home Score and basic human needs²¹



¹⁹ Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2018). World Happiness Report 2018, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

²⁰ Rothstein, B. and E M Uslaner (2005), "All for all: equality, corruption, and social trust", World Politics, 58 (1).

²¹ Basic Human needs values extracted from: <https://www.socialprogress.org/download>

Figure 6.3: Happy Home Score and inequality²²

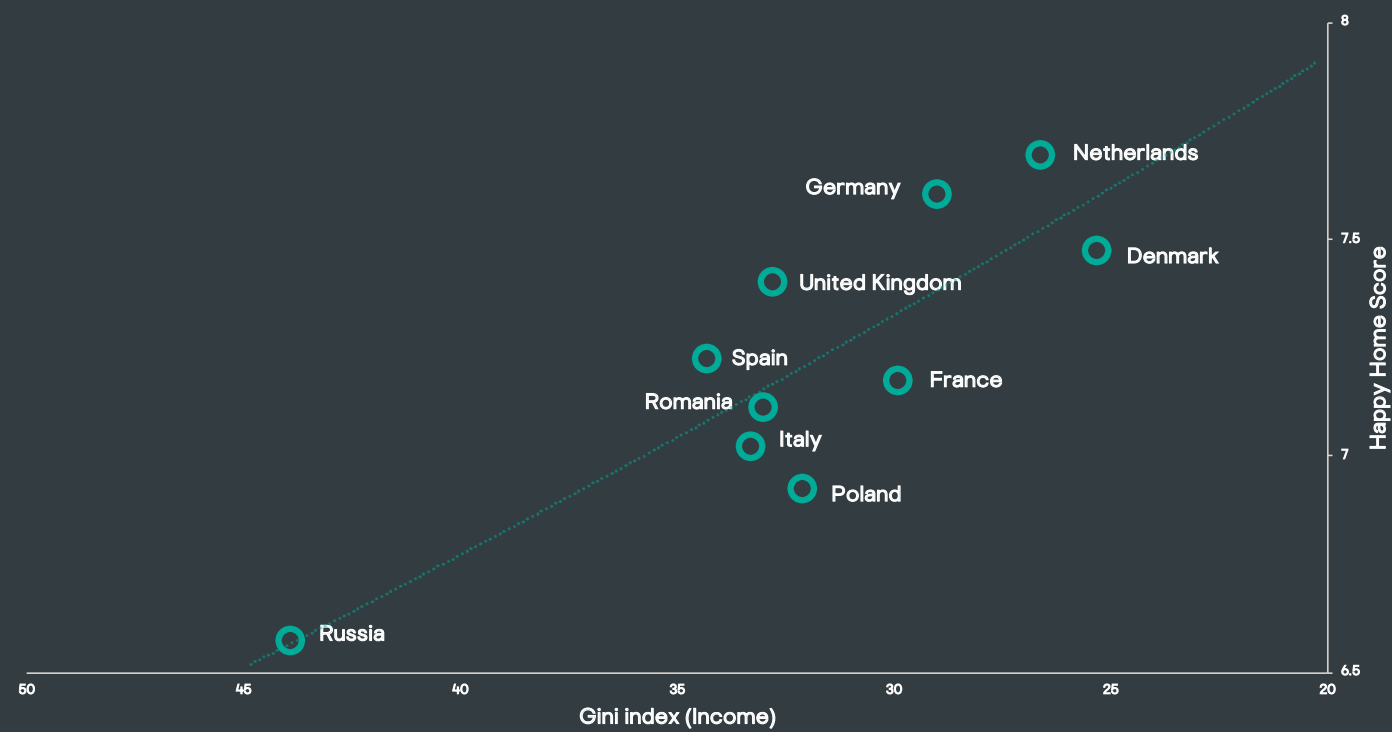
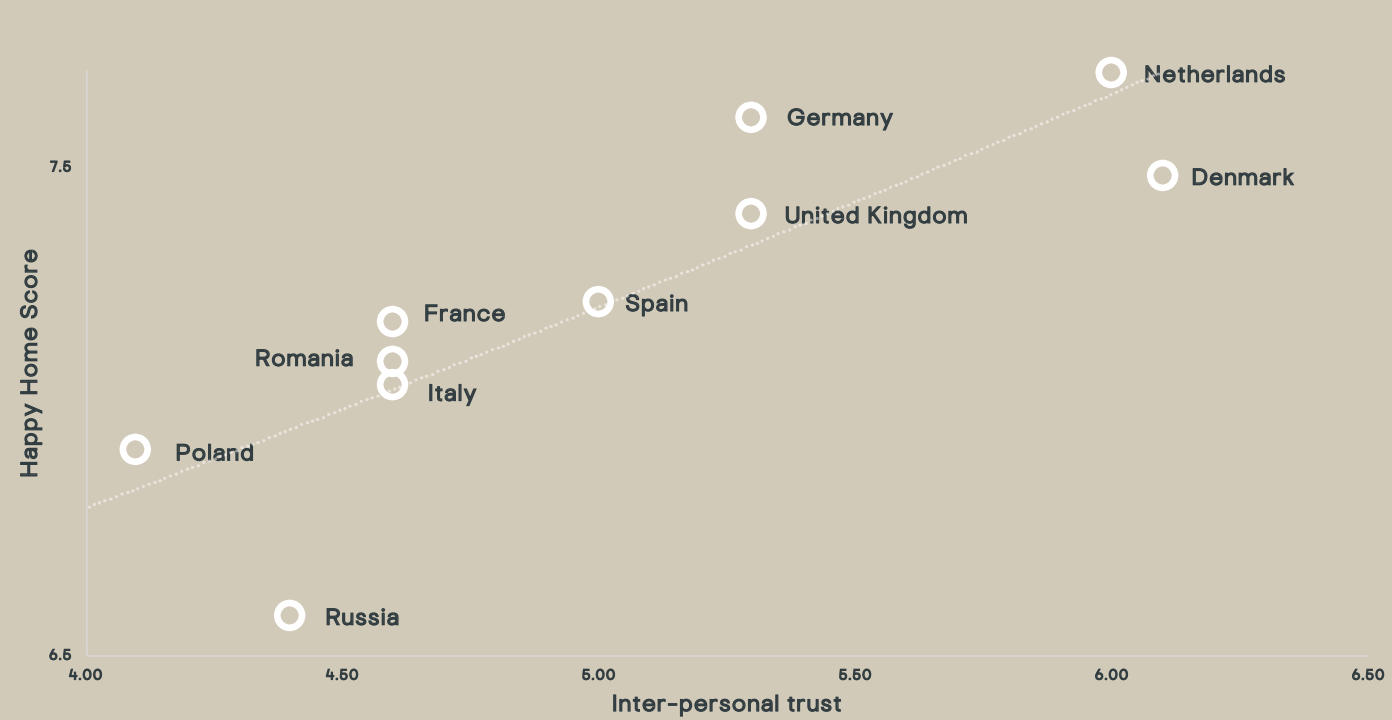


Figure 6.4: Happy Home Score and interpersonal trust²³



²² Gini index values extracted from: <http://www.oecd.org/social/income-distribution-database.htm>

²³ Trust values extracted from: <http://nesstar.ess.nsd.uib.no/webview/>

Chapter 7

Future perspectives: What would make our homes happier?

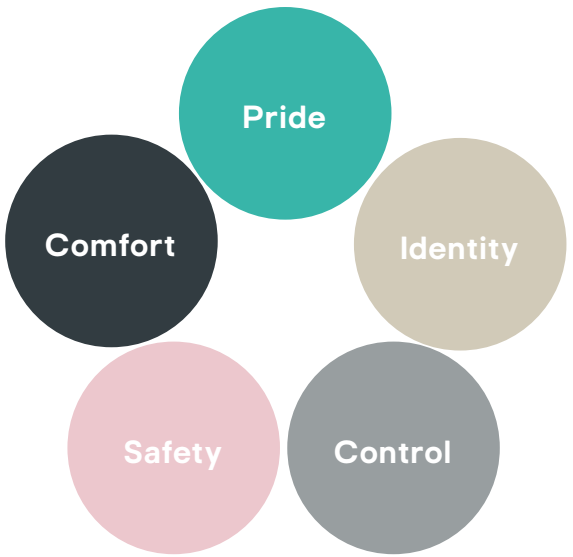
One of the primary goals of the GoodHome Report has been to challenge common perceptions and misconceptions about what creates happiness with our home. We have found that if we can increase how happy we are with our home, we can also increase our overall happiness substantially. The question now is: How can we become more happy with our homes in the future?

As elusive as happiness can be in everyday life, we have found a clear link between how happy we are with our homes and how happy we are in general.

73% of the 13,489 people we have interviewed are happy with their homes are also happy with life in general. Having a happy home is as important to our overall happiness as our mental and physical health, and it is even more important than our level of income and education.

In the GoodHome Report we have found that five core emotions can best explain why some people feel happy with their home and some do not.

Figure 7.1: Five core emotions



Out of these five core emotions, pride stands out as the emotion that has the greatest impact on how happy we feel with our home.

We derive a feeling of pride especially from achievements we accomplish in our home, such as bringing down a wall to bring in more light and space into the home or renovating the kitchen. This gives us a sense of purpose and fulfillment that we can then translate into happiness.

Mythbusting

One of our goals with this study was to test some common myths about the happy home, because sometimes the assumptions we make about what makes us happy do not always hold true, and we find ourselves looking for happiness in the wrong places.

One myth busted in our analysis is that, contrary to popular belief, life as a renter can be just as good as life as an owner, as long as the rental market is well regulated.

In general, tenure plays a much smaller role than we might expect in terms of how happy we are with our home. In fact, whether or not we own our home proves to be less essential than whether or our home is adaptable, in good condition, and has a sufficient amount of space.

Yet another myth busted in the GoodHome Report is that the larger our home, the happier we become. Here, how we organise and perceive the space in our home turn out to be much more important than the actual size or number of rooms.

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

What can we do to make our homes happier?

So, what can we do to make more homes happier in the future? Some things are up to us as homeowners and renters and they need not be costly or time-consuming. It's about finding our own personal way of feeling truly settled and at ease in our home:

1. Re-arrange space

Whilst the actual size of our home is less important, feeling like we don't have enough space was one of the basic needs found to have the greatest impact on the happy home. Rearranging and improving our homes to create a greater sense of space could therefore be an easy way for many of us to boost our happiness levels.

2. Make time for change

We've found that taking the time to improve our homes has a positive impact on home happiness, regardless of whether we enjoy the process itself or not. This means that investing time and energy into updating our homes and adapting them to suit our changing needs is also an investment in our happiness.

3. Invite people in

Our homes are happier when we invite people to share them with us. This increases our pride in our homes, as well as the emotional connection we feel with where we live. Both of these factors are important drivers of home happiness.

4. Get green-fingered

No matter where we live, access to green space makes a big difference to our happiness levels; we found we're significantly unhappier without it. Even if we don't have a garden or balcony, bringing some greenery into our homes will improve our overall wellbeing.

5. Put your own stamp on it

Whether we rent or own, what matters is that we identify with our homes and feel settled there. Finding ways to add personality to where we live will create a home, we feel happier with. Whether we choose to just add a new colour to a wall or hang photos of our loved ones or whether we do a total make-over of our home is a personal preference. It's all about feeling that our home expresses who we are.

SPECIAL INSIGHT SECTION:

What can policy makers do to make our homes happier?

Beyond what we can all do in our own homes, there are also some areas that policy makers, architects and other influential decision makers should consider to help us build happier homes in our towns and cities.

1. Stable tenures

Whether we rent or own is not what matters most when it comes to our overall happiness, but what does matter is having a sense of control. This sense of control is harder to achieve in rental markets that are relatively unregulated, where tenancies tend to be shorter and tenants are less able to make improvements to the property. Encouraging longer, more stable rental tenures, such as those common in Germany, where a high proportion of renters also score highly for home happiness, could be one way forward.

2. Adaptability

Adaptability is one of the most important factors explaining why some people are happier with their homes. It's about being able to change rooms and layouts when life circumstances change. Early on in the design process, we should be considering how we can make the space in the homes we build as flexible as possible for the future.

3. Green access

Having access to green space – whether a communal space or a private garden – almost always improves happiness. Planning or opening up more easily accessible outside space in our towns and neighbourhoods is a way for planners and developers to improve future residents' home happiness.

4. Skills and training

Developing home improvement skills as part of a school education or training is one way to give people the confidence to make changes to their homes and equip them with the knowledge and know-how to do so.



Appendix

The methodology applied in the GoodHome Report

Revealing what makes people happier (without explicitly asking about it)

In happiness research, we are generally interested in understanding what makes people happy by understanding the determinants of happiness. In this specific study, we are interested in understanding the determinants of what makes a 'happy home'.

Determinants can be uncovered through two different methods: by stated preferences and regression analysis.

With the stated preferences method, we ask people about their preferences (e.g. what they believe is the most important factor for having a happy home) and describe these in an analysis.

In the GoodHome Report, as in happiness research in general, we use regression analysis as our main scientific foundation.

Regression analysis

The best way to free ourselves from relying on the generally limited ability of anyone to be able to predict the source of their own happiness exactly, as well as our tendency as social human beings to succumb to social desirability, is to actually test what makes peoples happy (about life or some domain of it) instead of making people state it. This approach is based on a regression analysis and allows us to determine what is important in people's lives when they are not thinking about how important those things are.

How do we do this: We ask respondents to answer questions about their behaviour, their demographics, their surroundings and the circumstances they live under and then we hold these dimensions up against their general happiness level²⁴ and their satisfaction with their home.²⁵

This methodology demands that we be very careful about how we ask the questions used to predict happiness.

In a regression analysis we would ask people to reply to the factual question (rather than to ask them whether a garden makes them happy): 'Do you have direct access to green areas from your home?' (answers could be as simple as yes/no or more graduated).

This question is characterised as an observation rather than a judgement and it doesn't depend on people's knowledge and awareness about what makes them happy (as was the case with the previous framing of the question in the stated preference method).

We now hold the answers to this question up against the general happiness level of the respondents and find whether or not direct access to green spaces indeed explains some of the variance in happiness, and thus can be accepted as a valid determinant. The same can then be done for any other variable (=question) to determine which, or how many of these, best explain the level of happiness of the respondent. This can also be done, of course, holding the variables up against the respondent's satisfaction with his/her home.

Additionally, in a regression analysis, we can adjust for any variable (i.e. income level, age, perceived health or loneliness) to determine more precisely, which of these are the 'explaining factors' and which are the 'moderators'²⁶ or 'mediators'²⁷.

All in all, using regression analysis allow us to explain happiness based on a range of factors (such as 'access to green areas') without asking the respondents to 'guess' or estimate the answer. We can find out how important green areas truly are alongside all the other things that affect how happy people are about their homes and their lives in general.

Limitations to our approach

- 1) As with any quantitative analysis – also the stated preferences method – the variables we choose to include in our study are limited to the knowledge of what predicts happiness of the analysts who formulate the questions. We do, however, have in-depth knowledge of what the drivers of the general happiness of people are and these are our point of departure.
- 2) We cannot explore all the many emotions that we might like in such an analysis, as we do not want to probe the respondents to answer certain feelings and if we were to give them a list of many, many emotions to choose between, the answers would spread out so thinly that the result would be scientifically insignificant.
- 3) Our approach is very inductive (which is positive because we do not probe the respondents to answer within very narrow categories of answer options that might be far from their actual reality), but it also means that we have to ask many questions where some of these will inevitably prove to be insignificant in correlation with the overall happiness level. However, an insignificant result can be a result in itself. E.g. we might find that contrary to our predictions, being proud of one's home does not correlate with a high happiness level.

Despite these limitations, it is our experience that the most valuable insight into the drivers of happiness will be found through regression analysis rather than the stated preferences method.

Statements about core emotions:

Towards the end of the questionnaire, we included a number of statements, which explored the respondents' feelings such as pride, feeling of safety and comfort. These were the core emotions derived from the qualitative study and further expert interviews and qualitative research.

An example was: "I feel proud of my home" and the respondents were then asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with this statement on a scale from 0 to 4.

From previous studies carried out by the Kingfisher Group and from happiness research in general, we know that some feelings are more relevant than others, and we want to explore these feelings and ambiances in correlation with the general happiness level and with the respondents' satisfaction with their home – as well as in correlation with the other variables that constitute our regression analysis. This can be done by formulating such statements.

The statements in our questionnaire were not stated preferences as such. The difference being that in a stated preference questionnaire, respondents are asked to evaluate their preferences. Instead in our questionnaire, the statements are rather emotions that they are asked to bare. This is cognitively much easier for the respondents.

An example of such a statement of a feeling versus a stated preference could hypothetically be.: "I feel proud of my home", which is completely different methodologically to "My home is what makes me proud". The second type of question omits the possibility that something else might also determine a respondent's happiness, whereas the first leaves this possibility open.

Therefore, we did not ask: "Feeling safe and comfortable in my home is important to my happiness", but we instead we asked: "Do you feel safe and secure in your house?" and then held this up against the general happiness level to determine whether or not this feeling was scientifically significant in a regression analysis.

²⁴ The Happy Home Score is derived by asking respondents in each country: "On a scale from 0-10, how happy are you with your home in general?" (by home we refer to your place of residence) Zero means you feel "not at all happy" and 10 means you feel "completely happy."

²⁵ The Happiness Score (internally known as the Cantril ladder) is derived by asking respondents in each country: "Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. If the top step is 10 and the bottom step is 0, on which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?"

²⁶ A moderating effect is when the effect between the dependent variable (e.g. Happy Home) and an independent variable (e.g. home improvements undertaken) is strengthened or weakened by a third variable (e.g. time or interest in doing home improvements).

²⁷ A mediating effect is when the effect between the dependent variable (e.g. Happy home) and an independent variable (e.g. age) is fully or partly explained by a third variable, such as 'being settled'.

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