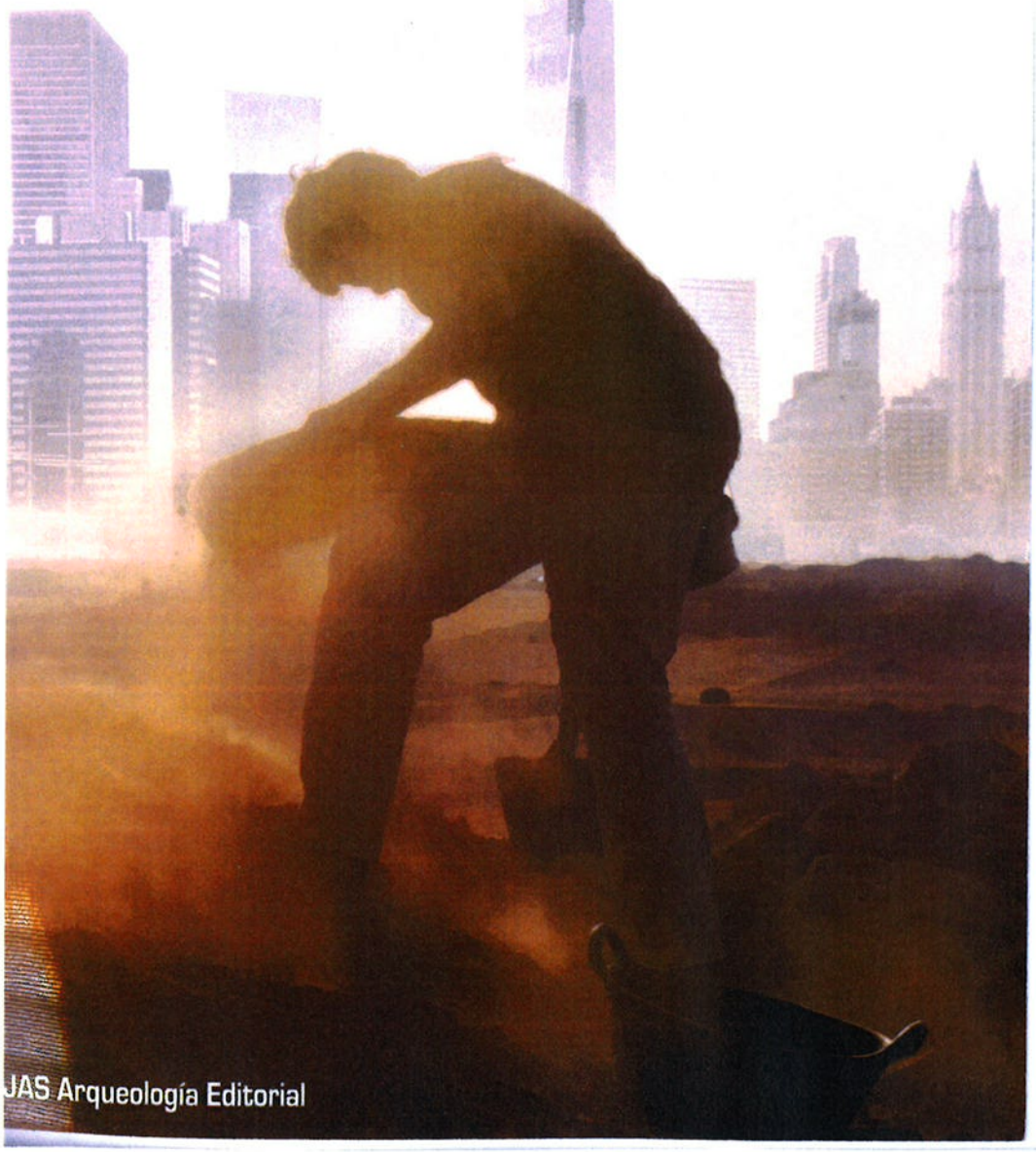
Pablo Aparicio Resco (Ed.)

# ARCHAEOLOGY & NEOLIBERALISM



JAS Arqueología Editorial




First edition: December 2016

© Edition:
JAS Arqueología S.L.U.
Plaza de Mondariz 6
28029 Madrid (Spain)
www.jasarqueologia.es

Edition: Jaime Almansa Sánchez
Correction: Jason Sanjeev Ganesan (Argo Eds. www.argoeds.com)



ISBN: 978-84-944368-7-1
Depósito Legal: M-43749-2016

Printed by: Service Point
www.servicepoint.es

*Impreso y hecho en España* - Printed and made in Spain

# 23.
# CAUGHT IN A BUSINESS SCENARIO: IMPLICATIONS OF NEOLIBERALISM ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

Monique H. van den Dries

## Introduction

Neoliberalism runs in the blood of Dutch society. Since the early 1980s, a market democracy has firmly underlay Dutch politics. It is dominated by capitalist forces and characterised by economic liberalisation, decreasing state interference, and a downsizing of government expenditures. It is all about making business; economic criteria (like cost-effectiveness, making profit) have even come to be applied in science, culture and healthcare.

*Cultural entrepreneurship* has become the ideal model for the cultural sector, and archaeology is not excluded; the policy and practice of archaeological heritage management in the Netherlands is shaped by the neoliberal principles of deregulation, privatisation, and commercialisation. It is primarily development-led, contract-based and market-oriented; the state is withdrawing, the role of the main public institutions is changing and the commercial sector dominates practise.

This not only affects the profession and the way archaeological research is organised, it also influences how we deal with preservation, the choices we make and the accessibility of cultural heritage for ordinary citizens. In this chapter, I reflect on the implications of archaeology's embeddedness in the contemporary

Dutch political ideology of neoliberalism and its subsequent socioeconomic philosophy. After briefly picturing the (archaeological) heritage management sector, the extent to which some of the effects of neoliberalism influence archaeology will be explored, and how tenable this practice is.

## A sketch of the sector

The Netherlands has a history of a strong private sector influence on heritage and conservation. Fortunate private investors used to collect antiquities and bought old buildings to prevent their destruction (see also Van den Dries, Slappendel & Van der Linde 2012; Van den Dries 2014). Of all ca. 62,000 scheduled national monuments (including 1,600 archaeological monuments), only 3% is owned by the state (Blok 2013); the rest is private property.

In archaeology it is almost the opposite, with a long history of governmental concern for the preservation and the protection of archaeological remains. A first (regional) heritage resolution was already implemented in 1734. But as of the 1990s, the idea emerged to privatise this part of the cultural sector as well (see Willems 2005; 2007). After the Malta Convention was signed in 1992, companies were gradually allowed to conduct archaeological research, and in 2007, this was officially implemented as policy with the revised Monument Act (see also Bazelmans 2012; Van den Dries & Willems 2007; Van den Dries 2013).

In this case, however, there was no intrinsic optimistic belief in a self-correcting market that would guarantee the quality of the archaeological product. The Dutch government therefore implemented a quality

assurance system, which at first was state-controlled and partly formed by public sector regulations, but which was aimed to be governed by the private sector, through a quality standard, a certification system and a professional register.

The aim of achieving self-regulation is still being pursued today. While there is no signal that state-supervision is obsolete, the government is nonetheless handing over more to the private sector. In June 2015, a new Heritage Act (Erfgoedwet) was accepted by Parliament, which abolished the excavation licensing system, and introduced in 2016 a private sector-run system of control that is based on certificates and regular audits (cf. Krauwer 2015).

The revised Monument Act of 2007 also decentralised the decision-making process, and gave municipal councils full authority to decide on archaeological research in their jurisdiction. Almost every local authority now has a policy on archaeology, and all embed research in local planning processes, which they can oblige developers to finance.

The introduction of a development-led and commercial archaeology has also affected the profession. It brought more employment for archaeologists; from around 250 FTE just before the Malta Convention was signed (Lauwerier & Lotte 2002) to ca. 1,100 in 2011 (Van der Reijden, Keers & Van Rossum 2011). In 2010, when the archaeological sector had not yet felt the full impact of the economic crisis, it was estimated that almost half of the workforce was found in commercial companies or among the self-employed (Van den Dries & Kwast, in press). In 2015, at least 120 companies had registered—as members of a branch organisation or as

permit holders—to be active in archaeological fieldwork, consultancy, or specialist services (e.g., visitor services).

**Observing effects**

As with any political ideology, neoliberalism is heavily criticised, in particular due to the 2008 global economic crisis, but certainly not exclusively. The neoliberal philosophy and its "market fundamentalism" (Stiglitz 2002) is considered to have severe social (and psychological) effects (e.g., Evans & Sewell 2013; Hall & Lamont 2013). As it permits the domination of political life by capital (e.g., Brown 2006; 2015) and subsequently allows for a sometimes unethical degree of commercialisation, it overshadows and affects altruistic motivations, like volunteering (e.g., Dean 2015), social solidarity, and just making people happy.

In the heritage sector, we lack data on the social effects of neoliberalism, but once one starts looking at the practice of heritage management through the lens of market fundamentalism, it is hard not to see it as being all about money and business. In 2008 for example, former education, culture and science minister Ronald Plasterk called his plan to modernise the built heritage sector "*Een lust, geen last*" ("A help, not a burden"). The 'burden' he meant in this case was the cost of keeping and maintaining the state's monument collection, which he wanted to diminish by selling off parts of it.

Moreover, the state's focus on saving money makes unprofitable monumental buildings easy to demolish. The succeeding education, culture and science minister Jet Bussemaker said that if restoration costs are deemed higher than the expected financial return on

investment after rehabilitation for modern use, state-owned historic monuments will be broken down (Bussemaker 2014). Other values, like an intrinsic worth or emotional appeal, do not seem to count.

In archaeology, the development-led research practice is largely an economics-led process as well. Although in origin its motivation is safeguarding public interests, in practice it is primarily driven by goals of minimising costs, as many local policy plans explicitly admit. Since local authorities now have the authority to decide on the aims and volume of archaeological research, the choice between preservation (in situ) or excavation on the one hand, and building plans on the other, is usually made against the economic benefits of the latter.

Local authorities are often faced with the dilemma to make developers, farmers or other inhabitants pay for research, while they also need to keep their inhabitants (i.e., voters) satisfied. It has led to a practice in which local authorities allow many exemptions in municipal archaeological policies (De Groot et al. 2011). Sometimes, entire historic city centres are freed from research obligations. Moreover, there is an increase of low-cost research practices; since 2008, the number of excavations has decreased, while the cheaper alternative of conducting watching briefs has gained in importance.[1]

One can also observe that the domination of economic criteria has turned the past into a commodity for merchandising. Local authorities look for value, and heritage is foremost of tourist attractions. As cities well-known for their historic centres (like Amsterdam, Maas-

1 See *De Erfgoedmonitor*, reterived from http://erfgoedmonitor.nl.

tricht and Delft) draw the most visitors, city marketers are happy to acknowledge that culture sells.[2] And heritage foundations are happy to help, through a heritage agenda for decision makers that is called 'Goud in handen' ('Gold in your hands') they encourage city councils to exploit the past for city marketing.[3]

Where archaeology is concerned, this implies that local authorities favour research that fits their city branding and local identity building purposes. In some cases, this even entails focusing on specific historical periods, and forgetting about prehistoric archaeology (Van Vuuren 2010: 68-71). It also implies that archaeologists need to 'sell' their work to local authorities in order to convince them of the need to conduct research. We do not know whether this may influence professional behaviour and research proposals in archaeology, but municipal archaeologists notice that it is becoming increasing difficult to convince politicians and developers to preserve yet another site, unless it is absolutely unique (De Jager 2015).

There are many other instances of the domination of economic value over social value. The media, for instance, report frequently on the high costs of development-induced excavations. On the occasions where members of parliament ask the minister critical questions about archaeology, these usually concern excavation costs as well. It can also be read from the relatively low valuation—in terms of salary—of activities like visitor education; telling the story of the past is accepted as an

2 The Nationaal Congres Citymarketing is intended to discuss policies and strategies to make cities more marketable. See *Nationaal Congres Citymarketing*, reterived from http://www.nationaalcongrescitymarketing.nl.

3 See Kunsten 92's *Goud in handen* report, retreived from http://www.kunsten92.nl/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Gemeentelijke-Erfgoedagenda.pdf.

intrinsic need, but educators are paid little more than junior employees (Van Londen et al. 2014: 76).

This is also apparent in World Heritage Site nominations. A content analysis of 19 nomination dossiers of sites that were added to the list in 2014, including one Dutch, demonstrates how little attention is paid to aspects of social responsibility (Van den Dries 2015). While they all talk abundantly about tourism, most of these dossiers do not make any reference to Unesco's social aims like community involvement, sustainable development, job generation, and capacity building for the local community.

*Inequality*

A second issue—voiced for instance by prominent critics of neoliberalism like Wendy Brown (2006; 2015) and David Harvey (2009)—is that neoliberalism generates and legitimises inequalities of wealth and life conditions (see also Hall & Lamont 2013; Lazzarato 2009). Fighting economic inequality is high on the international political agenda since many nations are faced with increasing gaps between the rich and poor.

The Netherlands enjoys a high level of prosperity across the board. It has a higher GDP per capita than the EU-27 average, but the gap between the top ten income earners and the poorest is widening. While income disparities are not growing for the mid-market segment, the level of wealth between the top and bottom ten percent is drifting apart, with the former estimated to hold 61% of all assets (Kremer et al. 2014: 16-20).

In archaeology, the workforce does not show extreme differences in salaries for junior and senior positions. However, the profession on the whole does not

pay well. While those working in the sector have a high level of education (85% with academic training, 11% with a PhD), and 64% have senior positions or serve as scientific staff, the average income of €39,424 before tax is only just above the national average of €35,800 (Van Londen et al. 2014: 72-3).

The average income before tax of the highly educated self-employed is even lower, at €31,129 euro (Van Londen et al. 2014: 73). Although most archaeologists do not seem unhappy, such figures certainly do not help to change the overall public opinion that archaeology is romantic and adventurous but—due to poor payments and its association with labouring—not a serious option for a professional career (see also Everill 2007).

Moreover, the sector has an inequality issue concerning gender. While female students have been outnumbering their male colleagues for over two decades (Van den Dries & Kwast, forthcoming), there is still a reversed gender balance in the workforce, with 58% being men and 42% women (Van Londen et al. 2014: 60). Worse still, women still earn lower salaries than men and they work more often in part-time and junior positions (Van Londen et al. 2014: 76-7).

Such inequalities cannot exclusively be ascribed to neoliberalism, as they occur in other economic systems as well. Gender wage gaps even predate the emergence of neoliberalism. However, neoliberalism does not seem to improve the status quo either. Andrea Cornwall, Jasmine Gideon and Kalpana Wilson list an abundance of literature showing that neoliberal policies "have given rise to...a 'feminisation' of labour that was accompanied by a deterioration of working conditions" (2008: 2). Apparently, the underlying motivation

was not to empower women, but mostly to tap a new (cheap) source of labour, and to enhance access to new customer markets. The increasing number of women in archaeology across the continent (Lazar et al. 2014) should therefore be carefully monitored—why is this happening and could it affect the profession in the long run?

*Access*

A third main critique of neoliberalism is that the transfer of economic control from the public to the private sector and the subsequent privatisation of public goods decreases egalitarian access to them (e.g., Brown 2015). It encourages a shift away from the public and collective towards the private and individualistic (e.g., Barnett 2010). In the heritage sector, public access is indeed an issue. Historic buildings and monumental houses for instance come with high purchase costs, they are popular but of limited availability. The same goes for the rental sector, in which monumental buildings are even rarer. Here a surcharge of 15-30% rent is allowed (Elbers & Geurts 2006).

Moreover, less public property is freely accessible, as it is sold to the private sector. A lot of such historic buildings subsequently end up in the tourism and leisure industry, as hotels or exclusive restaurants. If people want to enjoy such properties they need to be willing and able to pay for it. As a consequence, access to heritage is exclusive, only within reach for the fortunate and happy few.

In archaeology, access to knowledge in particular has a price. Although valorisation, access, public participation and cultural education are important polit-

ical aims, they have no priority in legislation. The government has organised the economic aspects of archaeological research by law—its practice and funding—but not the social aspect of public outreach. As a consequence, only a tiny fraction of all knowledge that is being gained through development-led archaeology is made available to the public via publications, exhibitions, etc.

And if it is made available, it often comes with a price, because the costs involved in producing outreach results usually need to be covered. Thus, while the past is a public good and is studied *on behalf of* the public, the public has little free access to it via museums, books, site parks, etc. Only stories in local free newspapers, open door days on excavations, small exhibitions in city halls, and outdoor reconstructions, are free of charge.

Participation in the archaeological knowledge production process is hardly possible either. Commercial archaeology has led to fewer opportunities for voluntary archaeologists (e.g., Duineveld, Van Assche & Beunen 2008). The new Heritage Act aims to reverse this tendency—by reducing excavation requirements for voluntary archaeologists—but it remains to be seen whether it will have the effect that is expected, or whether it will encourage a replacement of what is considered 'expensive' archaeological research by a cheaper alternative, as we witnessed in the past.

## Facing the risks

Given these observations, the main question for the discussion is how tenable this business focus is for our discipline. For sure, the new practice has brought many

benefits, such as more funding for research, more jobs, more knowledge production, more public outreach, etc., but the economic embeddedness has also introduced risks that jeopardise the system.

An evidential risk is our dependency on a healthy development sector with lots of building activity, i.e., on a growing economy. The loss of jobs in European archaeology due to the global crisis has clearly shown this vulnerability.[4] In the Netherlands, we measured a business decline as well (Van den Dries, Waugh & Bakker 2010; Van Londen et al. 2014: 12-3).

While the situation is improving, the introduction of the certification system may complicate things once again. When organisations and companies have to pay to become certified, the costs for archaeology may rise because these expenses need to be compensated. If prices go up, less research may be conducted because city councils will want to spend as little as possible on archaeology, as was shown above. If the larger expenses decrease demand, it may lead to a loss of employment or to a further minimisation of salaries.

Another risk is our strong dependency on local political agendas having an interest in heritage. What if the current market for heritage as an instrument for city marketing gets saturated, like most markets eventually do? There is for instance no guarantee for a next generation to value what our age values (Holtorf 2011). Demographic changes may foster changes in interests as well; new residents may have different ideas with regard to local heritage preservation than the people

4 The Discovering the Archaeologists of Europe project examined archaeological employment and mobility barriers within the field across 21 European countries. See the *Discovering the Archaeologists of Europe* website, retrieved from http://www.discovering-archaeologists.eu.

who lived there before. We should also wonder whether heritage preservation can continue to be financed in a scenario of depopulation, such as is taking place in rural areas and small villages.

The discipline is also vulnerable because the business of archaeological research does not seem to fit a market-driven economic system. Such a system depends on demand, i.e., on having economic value for society on the one side, and on cost-effectiveness and making profit on the other. There is however little opportunity to make a profitable trade out of archaeology. If we consider who currently benefits most from archaeology, in economic terms, it is not civic society. It is first of all the branch itself, companies, museums, universities and individual archaeologists earning a living by doing research, albeit just.

Maybe some inhabitants in cities profit from tourism revenues, but archaeological tourism is rather limited, as we lack world famous monuments attracting mass tourism. Only some large public attractions, like DOMunder in Utrecht, may have an economic value for some local retailers and the wider community (Boom, forthcoming).

Archaeology mostly racks up costs, if we are looking at the issue in terms of money; it often costs society to do research, to maintain monuments, to keep finds in store and to make the past consumable. The capitalist system may suit the built heritage sector better as historic buildings have an intrinsic economic value (Van Duijn & Rouwendal 2013)—there is a demand and they can easily be turned into trendy establishments that make money. This is not the case with archaeology.

Moreover, there is barely a market for most of the products of archaeology presently offered. Some pre-

liminary results of our ongoing research suggest that neither the public nor developers want to pay (much) for these products because they consider it a public task.[5] Most people do not even associate archaeology with leisure activities they may spend money on. Moreover, as we have seen above, authorities do not want to spend much on archaeology either. Irving Berlin's "There's no business like show business" does not seem to apply here.

The market-driven, neoliberal socioeconomic context is also a risk because it increasingly demands that archaeology—like everything else—demonstrates its value to society. While we primarily need to find this value in the narratives (and participation opportunities) archaeology can produce, the very same commercial context also makes it rather difficult to produce these narratives; there are foremost financial barriers rather than incentives, as was just discussed.

If the discipline provides little return on investment, if hardly anybody can make a business out of it, if it barely has an economic value for society, how economically sustainable is it then to be part of a constellation focussing on cost-effectiveness and making profit? The danger seems to be clear, present, and severe.

## Looking for alternatives

As the discipline at present cannot seem to answer some of the challenges it faces, and as we cannot change the economic system and circumstances we are encapsulated in, we had better adapt to it and

5 Among other objectives, the Nearch project, which involves 14 partners from 11 countries, explores the various dimensions of public participation in contemporary archaeology. See *Nearch*, retrieved from http://www.nearch.eu.

look for businesses, markets and values that do matter to society, and which add to the sector's sustainability. There is certainly a market for the past, even literally; for example, history-themed markets, with traditional crafts and local products, are quite popular. They seem to answer a demand for consuming nice and unique local products, but even a social need to dress-up, gather and relive history (Fig. 1). Archaeologists are usually invisible at such events, why do we not try to 'hook on'?

Figure 1. Creativity at work in a Nohfelden (Germany) medieval market, July 2015.

We can also try to capitalise other social values of archaeology. In European cultural policy, there is an increasing focus on the potential of cultural heritage for social objectives like inclusion, participation, participatory governance, etc. The Council of Europe's Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society is a clear example of that, with the aim to promote

the use and access to cultural heritage for social values, like quality of life and well-being.

So far, this social dimension has little priority in the Netherlands—it has not signed the Faro Convention—but it should actually interest politicians and policymakers more, because Dutch people perceive our social climate (i.e., social protection, inclusion etc.) as declining. Although our social climate index is still positive and in the top five of the 27 EU member states, the Netherlands shows the most notable decline among the top ten since 2012 .[6]

For our discipline, however, it is not very easy to capitalise on social values, since they are not yet well-studied and understood. But what we *do* know is that the social dimension has a potential to raise interest with local authorities for archaeological community activities (e.g., Van den Dries, Boom & Van der Linde 2015). Social values may even play a larger role in well-being and health than economic values, as was shown in a large statistical study among the Italian population (Grossi et al. 2011).

The researchers found evidence that participation in cultural activities was the second most important determinant of psychological well-being, right after physical health. They concluded that keeping people engaged into meaningful activities will reduce the (financial) risk of long term care. Furthermore, studies on branding show that culture and heritage (events, historic buildings) attribute more to the attractiveness of an area and the enjoyment of living there than sports.[7] Such

6 European Commission (2014), Special Eurobarometer 418—Social climate, *European Commission*, retreived from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_418_en.pdf.

7 *Hendrik Beerda Brand Consultancy*, retrieved form www.hendrikbeerda.nl.

studies even suggest that companies sponsor culture rather than sports, as it has a more sympathetic, creative and friendly image.[8]

Besides looking for such new opportunities to put heritage to use (see also Holtorf 2011), we may also explore the possibilities of social entrepreneurship, of public sector policies on social return on investment, and of private sector partnerships in the context of corporate social responsibility and creating shared value (see also Groot, 2017; Van den Dries, Boom & Van der Linde 2015). There may be all kinds of business opportunities in these directions; the private sector is, for instance, rapidly exploring the value for business of emotions like happiness (Fig. 2). If there is anything archaeology can trigger, it is emotions, and since we are caught in this business scenario, we might as well look and capitalise upon such selling points.

8 Sportsponsoring overschat door bedrijven (2014), *RTL Sport Update*, retrieved from http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/sport/sportsponsoring-overschat-door-bedrijven

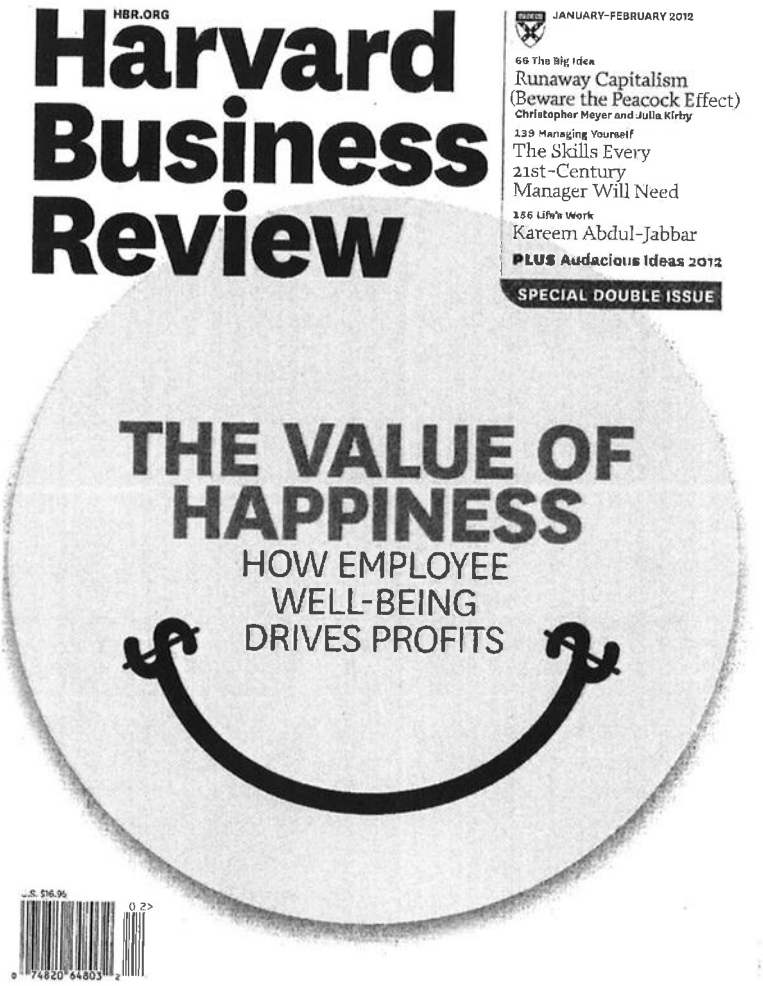



Figure 2. The Harvard Business Review on the value of happiness.