The Value of Happiness: Well-Being on A Global Scale

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Abstract

The scope of the publication is to describe the value (relevance) of happiness using comparative analysis of sociological and statistical data through various methods. Consideration of socio-cultural values is associated primarily with the transformational processes activating in the modern Russia and other countries. A comparative analysis of demographic processes in other countries was conducted to compare them with the similar processes taking place in Russia. The secondary analysis of sociological data of the World Values Survey international crosscultural project as well as the analysis of design indexes of “happiness levels” from the World Happiness Report 2017, the International Happiness Index or the Happy Planet Index (HPI) 2016 were carried out, allowing us to compare the indexing results, track the transformation processes related to the dynamics of sociocultural values in many countries of the world, as well as in Russia. The document analysis techniques used were the traditional (primary) analysis of documents, as well as secondary comparative analysis. Specialized quantitative content-analytical methods were practically tested during the work on this project. Thus, a “triangular approach” was used to study the processes in the value consciousness.

Keywords: value, happiness, well-being, world society

1. Introduction

The problem of research of the happiness value has not yet been fully studied and is relevant to the development of various theories. There exists a variety of sociological concepts of measurement of the Happy Planet Indexes, International Happiness Indexes, quality of life, human development indices, etc., which, once again, strongly underscore the relevance of the inexhaustibility of this problematic. In many respects, the happiness indexes intersect with the informative content of calculation indices related to the level and the quality of the population’s life. This problem becomes of special importance during society transformation and demographic changes [16, 33]. Values play some integrative role in a society, ensuring the cohesion of a particular society. Despite the fact that all values are susceptible to modification and evolution, the values of the modern society are a key aspect of the sociocultural transformation.

Values play a fundamental role in the life of an individual, being a basis on which the future activities and relations with the world are built. Values are the result of interaction between the object and the subject, the human and environmental reality, they are one of the key elements of the public, group and individual consciousness, defining the scope of activities and taking an essential place in the structure of the target setting.

The diversity of values determines the complex nature of the inner world of an individual. The experience of multidimensional reconstruction of the Russian's value core is of specific research interest. However, there is a set of values united by a special importance, which can be called "universally significant" - sociocultural and "key" ones for a particular society (which determine the functioning of the ordinary consciousness of an individual). The decrease in the significance of these values causes problems in the functioning of the society. Let us call these values sociocultural [4]

Among the classifications of values, the concept proposed by D.A. Leontyev can be considered as the most appropriate for social processes: 1) social ideals: the original form of values, since each value is generated by some social community; 2) subject-embodied values: social ideals are given to us not in the abstract, but through their embodiment in the works of specific people; 3) personal values: the values are objectively embodied only through the activities of people who implement these values. Thus, the recognition of the existence of values in the structure of personal motivation is inevitable [12, 13].
2. Methods

When working on this study, the document analysis techniques were applied. A secondary sociological analysis of cross-cultural research data of the World Values Survey [8, 22, 23] was carried out as well as the World Values Survey [30], wave 2010-2014 based on research conducted in 60 countries; analysis of the “happiness level” indices for 2014-2016 from the World Happiness Report 2017 [29] the analysis of the International Happiness Index (or the Happy Planet Index - HPI) for 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2016 [7], etc. had also been carried out.

The concept of sociocultural values refers, primarily, to the basic life meanings which guide the everyday life of the individuals participating in the various forms of social activity, and largely determines the attitude of individuals to the surrounding reality and the basic models of social behavior [1]. On the one hand, these values are determined by the nation's history and culture, and on the other hand, they continuously mutate and are supplemented in people's lives, being transmitted from generation to generation [25]. In the value exchange process, the strong dialectic connection may be noted. Figuratively we can call these values "social genes" that determine the structure and reproduction of social organisms.

While measuring values in the empirical research, the following confrontations were noted: traditional values - the secular-rational, and the survival values - the values of self-expression of human beings. This forces us to reevaluate the process of perception of the classical perspective of sociocultural values' consideration [2].

3. Results

3.1. National Happiness as an Integral Indicator

"Happiness is a condition of a man corresponding to the greatest internal satisfaction of conditions of his/her existence, completeness and meaningfulness of life, the implementation of his/her human scope" [15]. The "happiness" category is gradually entering a scientific and political conversation [9-11]. The World Happiness Report is published annually by one of the UN departments on a search of sustainable development solutions. In July 2011, at the meeting of the UN General Assembly, a resolution had been adopted on the assessment of the population's happiness by the relevant UN member countries, and its use as an important component in the policy of the state. Subsequently, on April 2, 2012, the UN General Assembly held a meeting under the chairmanship of Prime Minister J. Thinley from Bhutan, the first and so far, the only country where "gloss national happiness" had been formally adopted as the main indicator of a country's development instead of GDP. In particular, to evaluate the national happiness as integral indicator, the following indicators are used: GDP per capita; the level of social support of the population; life expectancy; freedom of citizens in decision-making; generosity; attitude to corruption, etc. [17]. Also, each country is compared with a mythical "antitopia". Each indicator is evaluated on a 10-point scale. The research is carried out by the research center at the Earth Institute of the Columbia University. A ranking of countries measured by this method was published in the world report on happiness according to data for 2014-2016 (World Happiness Report 2018). The following countries ranked first in the report: Norway (7.537 points), Denmark (7.522 points), Iceland (7.504 points), Switzerland, Finland, the Netherlands. Russia ranked 49th with 5.963 points [29], and the RSA (Republic of South Africa) with 2.693 points was at the last 155th place in the rating. From the CIS countries, Russia lost to Uzbekistan (48th place, 5.971 points). The results of this rating may seem predictable (reasonably justified): the rating "leaders" were the countries with a high level and quality of life; the highest life expectancy at birth. The rating of countries was formed with a predominance of economic indicators.

3.2. Happy Planet Index

Another interesting international project on the analysis of the population's happiness value is the International Happiness Index or the Happy Planet Index (HPI) proposed by the New Economics Foundation in 2006. Actually, the index is an integral indicator used to compare living standards in different countries. Subjective people's satisfaction with life; life expectancy and environmental factors (attitudes towards nature) are used as the indicators. Environmental factors are essential and most likely define the vector of the countries ranking formation. In 2006, Vanuatu (with 68.21 points) took the first place by the International Happiness Index of countries. In 2009 and 2011, Costa Rica took the first place (76.1 and 64.0 points, respectively). In 2006, Russia with 22.76 points ranked 172 of 178 countries. In 2009, Russia with 34.5 points ranked 108 of 143 countries. In 2016, Russia with 18.7 points ranked 116 of 140 countries (Happy Planet Index 2018). In 2016 Costa Rica took the first place (44.7 points); the second place belonged to Mexico (40.7 points); the third place – to Columbia (40.7 points); the fourth place – to Vanuatu (40.6%), and the fifth place – to Vietnam (40.3 points) (Happy Planet Index 2018). The results of this rating could not be termed predictable. The leading countries are united by a number of factors, the first of which is favorable climatic conditions. Most countries are located in North and South America and in Oceania (Mexico, Columbia, Costa Rica, Fiji, etc.). Many of the states with "happy population" are located on islands or peninsulas. The standard of living is low enough. These states develop tourist services.

3.3. Happiness as a Value in the Countries of the World

According to the World Values Survey analysis of sociological data [30], (the study was conducted in 2010-2014 in 60 countries of the world), a number of countries have been revealed whose inhabitants consider themselves very happy (see Fig. 1).
In the World Values Survey project [30], the organizers measured the value of happiness based on the subjective significance of the value of happiness for the respondents of specific countries. In fact, the countries at the beginning of the list (see Figure 1) also appear in the ranking based on the results of the calculation of the Happy Planet Index (HPI) for 2016, for example, Mexico (2nd place of 140 countries), Columbia (3rd place) (Happy Planet Index 2018). Given the relatively low macroeconomic indicators (GDP per capita; life expectancy) of the majority of countries in the list (see Figure 1, Table 1), it can be assumed that the external factors in the form of favorable climatic conditions have played a special role in the significance of the respondents' happiness.

Also, according to the results of the World Values Survey [30], a number of countries have been revealed whose inhabitants consider themselves to be "rather happy" (or moderately happy) (see Fig. 2).

Then, according to the results of the World Values Survey [30], a number of countries whose inhabitants consider themselves to be "not very happy", can be identified (see Figure 3). Some of the countries in the list are in unstable economic and political situations, conduct warfare.
According to the statistical data provided in Table 1, the dependency of the Gini index and location of the country in the Group towards the happiness value can be noted. Paradoxically, in the group of countries with the very happy respondents, the Gini index on average in the array is higher than that in the group of countries with "not very happy respondents". Life expectancy at birth, in general, is greater in the group of countries with the moderately happy respondents.

### 3.4. Assessment of Happiness in Russia

Let's turn to the situation in Russian reality. The WCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) happiness index was calculated as the difference in the share of happy and unhappy respondents (based on respondents' self-assessment). The index ranges from -100 to +100 points. The lowest level of the index was recorded in 1992 (-6 points) (WCIOM calculated the index of happiness of Russians 2009). Different happiness levels are recorded in different regions of Russia. The residents of large cities (for example, of the capital of Russia) are happier, and those of medium and small towns are less happy. Apparently, this is due to the material situation of the respondents, and the infrastructure of human settlements. The level of happiness is higher among the more educated respondents [18, 20]. According to WCIOM (Happiness in Russia: monitoring 2017), (the survey was conducted in Russia), as of August 2017 the presence of the family is one of the main components of happiness (the significance of 33%). "The health and personal life and that of the loved ones" (22%) ranks second by significance. The third significance position is shared by "the presence of children"; "overall satisfaction with life" (14%) each, and "good work" (13%) [32]. On average in the array, 84% of the Russians surveyed by WCIOM in June-July 2017 had a sense of happiness. According to WCIOM, traditionally happy are young people aged 18 to 24 years - 87%; as well as the respondents with high income - 94%; and the elderly group (78% in the group from the 70 and older) are happy to a lesser extent, and low-income people are happy to even lesser extent (61%). The WCIOM respondents reported that problems of material nature (10%) and deterioration of health (5%) did not contribute to a sense of happiness [6, 28].

Opposing views on the index of happiness and the need for its measurement also exist in Russia. The services of the Central Bank of Russia in particular note that in the future it is necessary to measure the well-being of Russians and to explore the factors of well-being, since the measurement of the "happiness index" is inexpedient, ephemeral and not very related to well-being [18, 27].

### 4. Discussion

In many sources, the happiness is seen rather as a subjective category [2, 3, 31, 34]. There is a point of view that three main groups of factors form happiness: a "pie model" by S. Lyubomirsky and K. Sheldon [14, 24]. The first group is represented by objective factors (rather external ones), for example, where individuals were born and live. The second group consists of factors related to the type of personality (character traits). In certain cases, people interpret or perceive the situation differently (the optimists and pessimists, etc.). The third group of factors is formed of the abilities of individuals to design a reality around themselves: to build relationships with others, and to maintain them. Researchers identify three major components of happiness: contentment, positive and negative emotions.

Approaches to treating happiness as a value are often confined to review of the indices of living standards and quality of life in the country. Also, the understanding of happiness sometimes identifies the meaning of life. In philosophy, this trend was named "eudemonism": (the representatives of this trend are B. Spinoza, M. Montaigne, L. Feuerbach, F. Akvinsky et al.).
The hedonistic trend in eudemonism correlated the meaning of happiness with pleasure (Epicurus, J. Lametri, F. Volter, P. Golbach et al.). However, the full meaningful combination of categories of happiness and the meaning of life, happiness and pleasure is impossible because of the different details of the categories.

5. Conclusion

Happiness is a subjective category with a standard-value nature. For each individual, the value of happiness is perceived based on an individual choice.

There is a trend that happiness as a value in many countries of the world is the most important issue for respondents of the younger age groups. This can be explained by the relatively good health [26] and the lack of (or minimum number of) the problems faced by senior respondents.

The grouping of countries into three blocks with “very happy”, “moderately happy” and “not very happy” respondents based on the results of the World Values Survey [30] (see Figures 1-3) was developed on the basis of the variable values of numerical variables in the respondents’ answers. Based on the results of the study as a whole, the living conditions in the countries under survey (climatic conditions) turned out to be particularly significant for the sense of happiness. This is confirmed by the ratings of countries following the indexing results [7] and is partially confirmed by the survey based on the results of the World Values Survey (2010-2014 wave).

Often, population associates happiness with physical and mental health and well-being in general. Religiosity positively influences the concentration of a sense of happiness. Social support in any of its forms (family, friends, religious community, etc.) can be a powerful factor generating happiness. Also, for happiness, it is necessary to show social activity.

According to the results of empirical studies, the following factors are particularly important for the lucky Russian respondents: health (personal and that of relatives); the presence of family, children (as propagation), an interesting and highly paid job, and material well-being (a stable financial situation) [32].

References


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