

Essential Values of Subjective Well-Being for the Development of a Sustainable Society: Romanian Experience

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Introduction

This paper includes an analysis of Romanian students' opinions regarding the main values associated with the subjective well-being concept. A deeper understanding of subjective well-being among the young Romanian population leads to the development of a more sustainable society where individuals, organisations and policy makers are able to make better decisions. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2015) measures subjective well-being considering: material condition (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, work-life balance, housing, environmental quality) and quality of life (health status, education and skills, social connections and personal security). Well-being is tightly connected to the concept of sustainability. In measuring a country's sustainability, the Sustainable Society Index is based on human, environmental and economic well-being (Sustainable Society Foundations, 2012). The sustainability of well-being is reflected in the need to preserve four types of capital: natural, human, social and economic (OECD, 2015). The research on youth well-being is quite limited and the authors considered it essential to conduct a more in-depth analysis about this age group. Inside the European Union, Romania has one of the highest percentages of young people willing to emigrate for improving their quality of life - 30% (Sandu et al., 2014). The research results are valuable by adding to the international framework the

perspective of the young population from Romania, a South-Eastern European country with a different approach of the topic from other countries. The research problem is to understand the meaning of subjective well-being for these students, to identify the most cherished values and to analyse if there is a different perception between males and females regarding this matter.

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to present the results of a survey which quantifies the Romanian students' opinions about the most important values of subjective well-being and their role for creating a sustainable society.

Methodology

To achieve the objective, the authors conducted a quantitative marketing research involving 1122 students (aged 18-35) from 10 Romanian universities. The authors collected the data during December 2016 and January 2017 using an online questionnaire. The sample was built using multistage sampling based on geographical area, university size, faculty profile and the study level. So, inside the sample 55% of respondents are Bachelor's students, 35% - Master's students and 10% - PhD Students. The sample structure includes 68.5% females and 31.5% males. The research variables were selected based on several studies which identified the factors that substantiate the well-being of the young generation; satisfaction regarding personal fulfilment, interpersonal relationships at job and during their free time, finding a sense in life and happiness, health, education, social relationships and environment, finding a stable job and professional satisfaction (Fabbrizzi et al, 2016). The data collected was analysed using the statistical software SPSS 17.

Results and Discussion

Inside this study, the Romanian students were asked to rank 10 values associated with the well-being concept. Overall, the students have mentioned happiness as being the most important value of subjective well-being

followed by freedom and outdoor activities. An analysis by gender shows that there is a difference of perspective. The females ranked the values exactly as mentioned above – happiness, freedom and outdoor activities. The males made a different ranking: personal income, happiness, freedom. One explanation could be the desire of men to support their family, bringing material wealth.

Table 1. The ranking for subjective well-being values

Rank	Values by respondents	Values by females	Values by males
1	Happiness	Happiness	Personal income
2	Freedom	Freedom	Happiness
3	Free time outdoors	Free time outdoors	Freedom
4	Efficiency	Efficiency	Free time outdoors
5	Personal income	Personal income	Efficiency
6	Cooperation	Cooperation	Cooperation
7	Progress	Progress	Competition
8	Competition	Altruism	Progress
9	Altruism	Competition	Consumption
10	Consumption	Consumption	Altruism

Further, the sources of happiness were identified in this study. The majority of the respondents mentioned family as being the major source of happiness. In second place, males mentioned personal income, compared to females who chose career. In third place both males and females mentioned their friends as being an important well-being value. Young people under the age of 25 need friends with the same concerns to provide mutual support. The study results show that *freedom* is a well-being value which also generates happiness. The meaning of freedom is shown in Table 2.

A person considers herself free when he can take action according to his desires or in the absence of constraints. The study's results in the table below show that the freedom of decision is the first sense given to freedom by 46.1% of males and 49% of females. Freedom of speech is the second meaning of freedom cherished by 16.9% males and 24.6% females.

Table 2: The meaning of freedom by gender

Meaning of freedom	All respondents	Males	Females
Freedom of decisions (%)	47.8	46.1	49
Freedom of speech (%)	21.6	16.9	24.6
Flexible program (%)	6.6	7.6	5.9
Free movement (%)	5.2	2.5	6.9
Financial independence (%)	2	1.9	2.1
Other (free conscience, access to information) (%)	4.1	2.3	25.1
I do not know (%)	12.5	13.2	12.1

Source: Authors' Calculation

The third important subjective well-being value mentioned by respondents is the time spent on *outdoor activities*. The results of the study show that students spend an average of 10.37 hours per week in nature (Table 3).

Table 3: Average of hours spent outdoors by age group

Age group	Subsample size	Average of hours spent outdoors	Maximum hours spent outdoors
18 – 21	470	11.24	75
22 – 25	560	9.11	48
26 -35	92	13.63	55
Total	1122	10.37	75

Source: Authors' Calculation

The analysis of age groups shows that although it would be expected for younger students to spend more time outdoors (due to the fact they have more free time), the results show something different. The students aged 26-35 are those who spend the highest amount of hours outdoor – an average of 13.63 hours/week.

Conclusion

The youth population represent a valuable resource for each country's development and Romanian institutions need to make an effort in order to create a safe and promising environment. Considering the high percentage of

youth willing to leave the country for a better life (30%) and the most important well-being values resulting from this study, the authors suppose that the Romanian young generation is not satisfied with the level of happiness and freedom and the amount of free time spent on outdoor activities. Based on this study results, all the responsible parties could apply measures in order to encourage the young generation to remain in the country. Through such analyses, the government could achieve a better understanding of how to use the resources on activities and policies which provide the biggest well-being benefits for citizens (Cloutier et al, 2013). If youth are given more opportunities to have a meaningful experience they would be more likely to remain inside the country building a sustainable society. Romanian institutions should create long term strategies for supporting this generation because its current well-being will influence the future well-being of an entire nation.

References

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