

# SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND SATISFACTION WITH PLACES OF RESIDENCE IN THE COUNTIES AT THE CROSS-BORDER BETWEEN HUNGARY AND ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** *Using data from a survey with 1824 subjects from four counties at the Romanian-Hungarian border, this paper focuses on levels of personal subjective well-being and the relationship that this has with satisfaction with neighbourhood, locality, region, country and EU. We found that Hungarians in Hungary are the most satisfied with their lives, and also with their places of residence. Romanian majority and Hungarian minority in Romania display similar levels of personal well-being, and are equally satisfied with their neighbourhoods and localities. However, the Hungarian minority is less satisfied with Romania, but also with EU. Satisfaction with neighbourhood, locality and region predicts the best personal well-being of the citizens from both countries.*

**Keywords:** *happiness, satisfaction with residence, national satisfaction, cross-border region*

## 1. Introduction

In the present paper I will explore the variations in subjective well-being in the counties at the cross-border between Hungary and Romania. The field research was conducted within the ENRI (European, National and Regional Identity) project<sup>1</sup>. I will start with a theoretical discussion on the signification, measures and determinants of subjective well-being. Then I will explore comparatively the levels and the determinants of subjective well-being in these

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regions, in relationship with satisfactions with variations places: personal house, neighborhood, locality, region, country and European Union.

## **2. Subjective well-being: theoretical approaches**

Defined as the overall evaluation of life (Andrews, Robinson, 1991), subjective well-being is the operationalization of the concept of happiness. It has a multidimensional concept, which comprises a cognitive dimension and an affective one (Andrews, Robinson, 1991; Diener, 1994). The cognitive dimension is measured by “life satisfaction”, or “satisfaction with life as a whole” and is defined as a general evaluation of the way the personal life match the personal aspirations, in domains such as work, family, relations, leisure, etc. (Cummins, 1996). Life satisfaction is measured either by simple scales (answer to the question “taking all your life into consideration, how satisfied are you with life as a whole?” (Andrews, Withey, 1976), or by scales with multiple items.

## **3. Subjective well-being in Hungary and Romania**

Both neighbouring societies share common characteristics concerning the levels and correlates of subjective well-being, which are the product of similar experiences as post-communist countries. Most important, the average happiness level of their citizens are among the lowest in European Union, which is not surprising, giving their communist legacy, the fall of the economy in the early nineties, and that they a type of society plagued by lack of trust and optimism (Bălțățescu, 2002; Orsolya, 2002). Another remarkable aspect is that not only global satisfaction, but also satisfaction with different domains is usually lower than in the rest of EU. It is the case not only for income, but also for more intimate domains such as satisfaction with family or friends is not so straightforward. Delhey (2004: 28) explains that economic hardship matters in their case, making their citizen’s life more stressful, and lowering their level of satisfaction with, for instance, social and family relations.

As displayed in World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven, 2003), people report generally higher values in Hungary than in Romania. For the 4 point life satisfaction scale, used in the Eurobarometer surveys from 1998 in Romanian and since 2001 for Hungary, the average for Hungary is 2.5, which correspond to an average of 5 on a scale from 0 to 10, and the average for Romania is 2.23, which corresponds to an average of 4.4 on a 0-10 scale. Giving these results, we can anticipate that we would find higher levels of interpersonal subjective well-being in the investigated Hungarian region than in the Romanian counterpart.

#### **4. National satisfaction and happiness**

While being experienced mostly at individual level, happiness is not a strictly personal phenomenon, and has strong causal links with the physical, economic and social environments of our lives. It's because - Morrison, Tay and Diener (2011) discuss with reference to countries – living in a specific territory affect many personal circumstances such as job opportunities, health care, crime victimization.

There is not a single factor that matters here: living in certain territories is associated with a sense of social identity, with a potential of enhancing or lowering the personal well-being. National pride and identification is a predictor of subjective well-being in countries like Romania (Bălătescu, 2009), Poland (Hamer, in press), as well as in Europe (Bălătescu, 2010) and Asia (Jagodzinski, 2010).

But living in a certain nation is only a part of the experience that the individual has with “places” or “territories”. Closer areas such as neighborhoods, localities, regions may also have influence on personal well-being.

#### **5. Satisfaction with housing, neighborhood, locality, region, nation and Europe**

Among the places we live, our house is an important part of our individual quality of life. Determinants of *housing* satisfaction are not individual, but linked with factors such as the network of relationships that members of the household develop over time, or the characteristics of neighborhood and localities where the house is situated (Vera-Toscano, Ateca-Amestoy, 2008).

*Neighborhood* is the closest instance of a community. Satisfaction with neighborhood is also a very important component of community satisfaction. An array of characteristics determines individual satisfaction with it, among them being the quality of neighborhood itself (e.g. security, pollution, and utilities), frequency of interaction with neighbors, and also sociological qualities such as social capital of the individuals or families involved, and collective efficacy (Allen, Bentler, Gutek, 1985; Hur, Morrow-Jones, 2008; Oidjarv, 2010; Sirgy, Cornwell, 2002).

Satisfaction with *localities and regions* are less discussed in the literature. Here, however, the ethnic differences seem to matter more than for the satisfactions with housing and neighborhood. Finally, satisfaction with EU is important for the citizens of this supra-national entity, and should be linked with personal satisfaction, although there are scarce evidences in the literature.

## 6. Objectives and research questions

In this study I will explore the links between satisfaction with all the above-mentioned instances and personal satisfaction. I will start with the supposition that satisfactions with neighborhood, locality, nation and EU are correlated with the personal satisfaction of the interviewed persons. We chose to explore these relationships in the Romanian counties of Bihor and Satu-Mare, and in the neighboring Hungarian counties of Hajdu-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmar, multiethnic neighboring regions in which the three most important ethnic groups (Romanians and Hungarians in Romania, and Hungarians in Hungary) are supposed to have different levels of satisfaction, depending on the socio-economic development of their countries and counties, their minority status, local and national attachments.

Thus, my research questions would be the following: Is membership in these three groups associated with different levels of subjective well-being? Is it associated with different levels of satisfaction with neighborhood, locality, region, country and EU? And finally, which of these satisfactions are associated with the evaluation of personal wellbeing?

## 7. Method

In the survey conducted within the ENRI project, 1824 subject were interviewed at their homes on both sides of Romanian-Hungarian border. The sample was stratified and is well represented. We were interested in variations of the studied variables by the three most important ethnic groups Hungarians in Hungary (n=979), Hungarians in Romania (n=246), and Romanians in Romania (n=506). The questionnaire includes different measures of attachment and satisfaction with locality, region, country and European Union, as well as various measures of subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being was measured by the Personal Wellbeing Index, a scale composed on 8 items, asking the respondents to rate their satisfaction with: Standard of living, Health, Achievements in life, Personal relationships, Personal safety, Community connectedness, Future security, Spirituality or religion (Cummins et al., 2004). The summative scale shows a very good reliability (Cronbach alpha over 0.8). The sum of the eight items has been linearly transformed on a 0-100 scale.

Additionally, 7 items measured the satisfaction of the respondents with their home, neighbors, neighborhood, locality, region, the country of your residence, and the European Union. The items have been introduced in a Principal Component Analysis. Results were rotated using Varimax method with Kaiser Normalization. For the Hungarian in Hungary subsample we computed a single factor solution. For the rest of the samples, a 2 factors

solution emerged, the second factor explaining satisfaction with country (Romania) and satisfaction with European Union. As a result we computed an index of “regional well-being” from the following four items: your home, your neighbourhood, the locality where you live, the region where you live. The index shows a very good reliability for all the samples, with Cronbach alpha’s varying between 0.797 and 0.816. The scale PWI was constructed as a sum of unweight items, and linearly transformed to a range from 0 to 100.

## 8. Results

### 8.1. Personal Wellbeing Index

Overall, there are serious differences between the three groups in what concerns the average levels of Personal Wellbeing Index. This is in perfect concordance with most country averages in subjective well-being, measured by international surveys.

**Table 2.** Average levels of personal well-being for the three samples, standard errors and sign of significant differences between the means (using Bonferoni test).

	Ethnicity by country						Sign of significant differences		
	Hungarian in Hungary		Hungarian in Romania		Romanian in Romania		1-2	1-3	2-3
	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Mean	Std. Error of Mean			
Personal Wellbeing Index	67,30	0,51	63,41	0,86	62,84	0,61	+	+	

### 8.2. Satisfaction with places

We can see that the samples have significant differences in what regards their evaluations of satisfaction with places. The ethnic majority in Hungary reports higher satisfaction with all domains than the Hungarians in Romania, and also from the ethnic majority in Romania (with the exception of satisfaction with European Union). Members of Hungarian minority in Romania are less satisfied than the majority population with nation, but also with European Union.

The fact that Hungarians from Hungary are the most satisfied with the majority of the above mentioned domains proves there is a correlation between social well-being and personal well-being. People in richer countries/regions (Hungary, in our case) are the most satisfied with their neighborhood, locality, region, nation and even with European Union.

We compared average levels of items that compose by sub-samples. Results are shown in the following table:

**Table 3.** Average levels of satisfaction with places for the three samples, standard errors and sign of significant differences between the means (using Bonferoni test).

	Ethnicity by country						Sign of significant differences		
	Hungarian in Hungary		Hungarian in Romania		Romanian in Romania		1-2	1-3	2-3
	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Mean	Std. Error of Mean			
Local & regional satisfaction	73.7	0.55	65.1	0.82	55.3	0.89	+	+	
National satisfaction	65.3	0.90	38.3	1.44	47.1	1.31	+	+	-
Satisfaction with European Union	67.9	0.64	52.1	1.07	53.8	0.96	+		-

Another line of interpretation of these results is the difference within minority and majority. In the Romanian counties investigated, the minority population reports equal satisfaction with the local & regional places, while they report lower satisfaction with nation while even with EU. The lesser attachment with the nation would explain the lower satisfaction with nation. However their lower satisfaction with EU is somehow hard to explain, giving the fact that Hungarian minority in Romania sees European Union as a guaranty for their cultural autonomy.

### 8.3. Unique contribution of local, regional, national and EU satisfactions to personal well-being

I regressed Personal Well-being Index against the three satisfactions variables (i.e. local & regional, national and EU), in order to compare the unique contribution of these satisfactions with the global subjective well-being indicator. The next table shows the results of this analysis for all the items. The

overall fit is very good: variations of PWI items explain around 50-60 % of the variation of the dependent variable.

**Table 4.** Regression of satisfaction with places against life satisfaction for the three subsamples

	Hungarian in Hungary		Hungarian in Romania		Romanian in Romania	
	$\beta$	Sig(t)	$\beta$	Sig(t)	B	Sig(t)
Local & regional satisfaction	.525	0.00	.505	0.00	.436	0.00
National satisfaction	-.067	0.82	.058	0.38	.015	0.78
Satisfaction with European Union	.173	0.00	.046	0.50	.133	0.01
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.584		.549		.508	

A first conclusion is that all sub-samples are very similar in what concerns the structure of the predictors. Local and regional satisfaction has the largest contribution to the prediction of life as a whole for, with beta = 0.44-0.52. The other domain that also predict the dependent variable is satisfaction with European Union, with  $\beta = .13-0.17$  (except for Hungarians in Romania). Contrary to the findings in the cited literature, national satisfaction has no contribution to life as whole.

## 9. Conclusions

In four counties at the Romanian-Hungarian border, the ENRI survey measured personal well-being and satisfaction with local & regional instances, country and EU. We found that, in concordance with other results, Hungarians from Hungary are the most satisfied with their lives, and also with neighbourhoods, localities, country and EU. Romanian majority and Hungarian minority in Romania display similar levels of personal well-being, and they report they are equally satisfied with their neighbourhoods and localities. However, the Hungarian minority is less satisfied with the country in which they live, which is explainable by the lower attachment to the national state. They are also less satisfied with EU, which is somehow surprising. Finally, I found that there is an association between personal well-being, local & regional satisfaction, and satisfaction with EU. Against the previous results, national satisfaction does not seem to be correlated with subjective well-being. These results confirm that places of residence have an impact in people's happiness, which may be explained by variations in living conditions that these different places provide, but also by people's attachments to them.

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