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Towards a sociological theory of subjective well-being

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5.2. Towards a sociological theory of subjective well-being

The next pages will attempt to present my theoretical contribution to the subjective well-being research. I argued elsewhere in this thesis that the sociological theories of subjective well-being are rather less represented. Such sociological theories should take into account the influence of social phenomena and should explain the relationship between the individual subjective well-being and its social determinants, but also the influence of the social determinants on the individual causes of happiness. The construction of such a theory would follow three steps:

1. Proposing a more flexible model of the self, that would take into account it's permeability to the social influences.

2. Modeling the social influences (through communication, social values and norms) on the evaluation of subjective well-being.

3. Modeling the relationships between macro-social and micro-social in the evaluation of subjective well-being.

In the following I will offer the preliminaries to the construction of such a theory.

5.2.1. Subjectivity and social processes due to the group membership

I'll start by highlighting that, along with the individual affects and cognitive processes, human beings have emotional processes caused by the membership in social groups. These emotional processes had been studied in connection with several issues including:

- The relationship between the individual identity and the collective identity.

- The relationship between the "private self" and the "collective self".

- The relationship between personal and collective self-esteem.

On the other side, cultural studies and the social psychological analyses showed how "subjectivity"[6] develops itself under the influence of interpersonal and mass communication (Rahn, Kroeger, & Kite, 1996, p.32).

The model of subjectivity used in the standard quality of life studies is subordinate to the positivistic methodological approaches. Here, the subject is considered an autonomous and unified entity, that make continuous exchanges with the social environment, but these exchanges never contradict the *unity* and the *autonomy* of the self.

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There are alternative views based on theories of (partial or total) social determination of subjectivity.

5.2.2.   Theories of the social determination of the subject

There are several theories on the social determination of subjectivity, starting from the denial (indetermination) to the total determination:

a) *Indetermination*. This model asserts the positive ontological status of the subject, its autonomy and unity. The subsumed studies view the set of conceptions, attitudes and affects of the individual as being intrinsically linked to him/her, and being only influenced, from outside, by some psychological or material factors.

The most appropriate terms used for describing these interactions affecting the behavioral and attitudinal modifications are persuasion, manipulation and so on. The influence on individual characteristics is seen in a stimulus-response frame.[1]

b) *Total determination* of subjectivity.

At the opposite side are the theories that assert the social determination of conscience. The Frankfurt School of Social Theory studied the way in which the social environment determines the subjective experience of individuals. Central to their explanation of this mechanism is the term of *ideology*, borrowed from classical Marxism but refined. Marx named *ideology* a system of beliefs characteristic to a class or a group, but the second signification is "false conscience", which dissimulate for the members of a social class the "true" relation with world. Althusser and Gramsci add to this concept a new signification: a "conceptual frame in which people interpret, give sense and "live" their material conditions" (Hall, 1982, p. 33).

Accordingly to this last meaning of the term, not only the language, but also the institutions and the social practices are ideologically framed. Thus, not only the human needs and representations are socially determined, but also the human subjectivity is socially constructed. Ideology, says Althusser, operate implicitly. It manifests itself in those social representation or practices which individuals take as granted. There is no individual and coherent self, but a

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[1] The opinion change, in the behaviorist model, is represented in the following picture :
Communication------>attitude --------------->behaviour
                    ^------------------------|
(Kapferer, 1997, p. 36)

contradictory subjectivity, which can change in some situations, in response to a certain discourse (Turner, 1992, p. 28).

On the other hand, the structuralism argues that the notion of subject is a mystification, as long as it is supposed to be an independent agent of social relations. The structuralists are interested by the processes of symbolic construction of these structures, and by the meaning they contain. In structural and systemic analysis, the possibility of existence of a subject with the personal capacity to maintain or modify social relations is rather denied (Rosenau, 1992, p. 47).

For the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who integrated the theories of semiotic structuralism elaborated by F. de Saussure, the Unconscious is a system of meanings that act as a language (langue), produced not by a single individual, but by the culture. Thus, the Unconscious is composed by the other's perceptions and language. We have here a conception of a total social determination of subjectivity.

Actually, Freud is the first that "breaks" the unity of the subject, splitting human psychic in three levels: *id*, *ego* and *superego*. Freud is questioning the status of modern subject as coherent, integrated and unified. His "subject" is less a "conscious" one, than a psychoanalytic one, characterized by multiplicity and lack of unity (Rosenau, 1992. p. 45). We may say that, "inventing" Unconscious – or, it might be better to say, attributing it a positive experience, in contrast with the meaning of non-conscious from the philosophical and literary tradition before him (B.-Clement, 1975, p. 49) - Freud leaves the door widely open to the theories that challenge autonomy, rationality and the possibility of conceiving the subject in a rational frame. (Game, 1991, p. 38)

Lacan deepen the distinction made by Freud, dividing the subject in three instances: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The Symbolic is the order of the language. This is the definition of culture in Structural anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss. The Imaginary is constructed from versions of the Symbolic intrinsically to every individual, defining the elements of individual biographies. The third element is the Real, a "psychical causality" analogous to the Freud's drive. The subject is conceived by Lacan only as "an instrument, a corridor, a support for the language and the play between the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic" (B.-Clement, 1975).

Pushed to the extreme, this vision strongly denies the positive ontological status of the Self: Foucault and Derrida view it as being rather a linguistic convention, an effect of the

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thinking on language (Rosenau, 1992, p. 43). Actually, Freud is the first that "breaks" the unity of the subject, splitting human psychic in three levels: id, ego and superego. Freud questions the status of modern subject as coherent, integrated and unified. His "subject" is less a "conscient" one, than a psychoanalytic one, characterized by multiplicity and lack of unity (Rosenau, 1992, p.45). We may say that, "inventing" Unconscious – or, it might be better to say, attributing it a positive experience, in contrast with the meaning of non-conscious from the philosophical and literary tradition before him (B.-Clement, 1975, p.49) - Freud leave the door widely open to the theories that challenge autonomy, rationality and the possibility of conceiving the subject in a rational frame (Game, 1991, p. 38).

c) *Partial determination* of subjectivity. This is a middle way privileged, in my opinion, in the social psychology and interactionalist sociology, which consider the subject as a product of social interaction. The mechanisms of ego construction, as conceived in the Mead and Cooley writings, are fundamentally social. But the symbolic interactionalists draw a splitting line inside the subject, between the *private* and the *collective* self.

Thus, for G.H. Mead, the *collective self*, ("me"), is only an internalization of social roles, a reflection of an individual model which the social process grants, and that individuals incorporate in their structure. This doesn't exclude the existence of a *private*, psychological self, (the "I"), which is a more personal component of the self.

> "The psychological self, says Mead, is the reaction of the organism to other's attitudes; the social self is the ensemble of other's attitudes which we assume. The other's attitudes are composing the organized social self, to which we react as psychological self" (apud Doise, 1996).

The symbolic interactionalist approach open important perspectives to the study of the processes related with the ties between "individual individuality" and "collective individuality", "private self" and "collective self" (Rahn et al., 1996).

5.2.3. What consequences have the three models on the study of happiness?

Markus and Kitayama (1991) introduce the concept of *independent self* in order to conceptualize these traits of the self that are predominant in the most individualistic countries from Western Europe and North America. They start from the systematic description of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1975) of the self of the Western man as:

"a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background" (p. 48, quoted in Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

The independent self would have the most private characteristics, and its operating mode would be to be unique, to express itself, to promote its own purposes. Permanently trying to boost its self esteem levels, it exerts a personal influence on others, seeking by pro-social relationships a reciprocity in the control of self-esteem, by reciprocally presenting the appreciation and admiration (Kitayama & Markus, 2000).

To the limit, the independent self is self-built: it develops its own criteria of evaluation of its life, independent from all other criteria. The happiness of a society composed of such personalities is no other than the sum of the individual happiness, independently obtained.

On the opposite side, we have the perfectly *interdependent* self. We can conceptualize it by sending to the limit the characteristics of the interdependent self, that the same Markus and Kitayama (1991) found to be predominant in the East: connected to the social context, flexible, variable, with a strong external character, promoting other's action, staying „in his place", seeking to cooperate, to harmonize, to „fit within the context". Strong fears were expressed in the West about the massification and the loss of individuality as an effect of the contemporary world. Thinkers highlighted that the self would be surrounded by the things that start to have a life of their own (Baudrillard, 1996), perfectly incorporated ideologically (Athussser), placed in a curl of the individuality whose inexorable destiny is to close itself (Foucault).

Novels such as George Orwell's *1984* describe the destiny of human happiness according to this conception. Theoreticians such as Baudrillard refer to happiness as simulacra, to which the individual participate in a perfect falseness. When everybody is happy, the concept itself of happiness loses its significance. The Romanian political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu uses the metaphor of communism as a society in which people were „condemned to be happy" (Tismăneanu, 1992); by doing so, it highlights the oppressive character of the communist society that repress any expression of dissatisfaction and privileges, and compulsory brings in the public discourse the expressing of positive feelings of gratefulness, joy, etc. It is futile to affirm that the persistent dissatisfaction was what triggered the fast collapse of the Romanian communist regime in December 1989, and also to the overrated expectancies in the first years of transition. The image of a society of „easy satisfied people" or „happy robots" isn't, however, stranger to some

interpretations of the contemporary capitalist society too. Thus, the advertising would cultivate positive moods, associated with the consumption of goods, creating an image of happy consumers. Accordingly to the title of a recent book, advertising offers a model of „happiness as obligation" (Brune, 1996). Happiness transformed in ideology dissimulates the internal contradictions of happiness pursuit in the consuming society, such as greed and insufficiency of goods. The radical approach to the happiness implies that happiness is conceived as a pure sign, having a variation independent of the human conscience that participates mimetically to it.

The models of the relationship between self and happiness are situated, nevertheless, far between those two extremes. On the other hand, only recently the quality of life research started to leave behind the atomistic model of conceptualization of the self, and this is without doubt the merit of the cross-cultural psychology. However, this rather new domain of psychology focuses on the difference between the Western and the Eastern self, highlighting the social influence of the self only in the second case. Moreover, it is static and doesn't follow the historical development of the self construct. This is why a model of the independent self in United States cannot explain the powerful mass movements in such a country. In the following chapter I'll try to offer a more equilibrated perspective, introducing in the model the social influences at the affective level (through moods) and cognitive (through social values and norms).

5.2.4.   A model of the influence of the communication on the affective dimension of subjective well-being: public mood

Important applications of the splited self to the modelling of personal and social psychology emerged in political psychology, interested in the *nature* and the *sources* of satisfaction with political system and authorities. In this field of study appears the concept of "public mood", defined as "diffuse affective state, having distinct positive and negative components, that people experience because of their membership in a particular political community" (Rahn et al., 1996, p. 32). In the referred study, the authors recognize that:

> „Public mood is not merely the projection of a private mood on to a public object, nor is public mood the aggregation or the average of the moods people experience in their everyday lives. Instead, our concept of public mood recognizes the fact that individuals often have emotional experiences because of their membership in a particular national community, just as they experience emotional reactions because of their other social group memberships" (Rahn et al., 1996, pp. 32-33).

I argued that, subsumed to the independent model of the self, it is the conception that the variation of subjective well-being follows the dynamics of individual psychological states, implicitly excluding the way the individual participates to the collective moods. „ I feel very confident and proud of what I've done" quote Suh (2000) the speech of the coach of the USA soccer team immediately after losing an important game at the World Cup, in order to illustrate the independent operational mode of the Western self, that modifies its evaluation in order to keep a positive self esteem.

I think, however, that choosing an example from sports to illustrate the independence of the self is rather wrong, because often powerful feelings are revolving around the national sports, the victory being often associated with group and national pride. Brichford (2002), for instance, quotes the General Douglas MacArthur, that in 1928 linked the national pride, collective self esteem and Olympic Games:

> „"Athletic America" is a telling phrase. It is talismanic. It suggests health and happiness. It arouses national pride and kindles anew the national spirit." "Nothing is more synonymous of our national success than is our national success in athletics. If I were required to indicate today that element of American life which is most characteristic of our nationality, my finger would unerringly point to our athletics escutcheon" (American Olympic Committee, 1928, p. 6, quoted in Brichford, 2002).

Indeed, the *public mood* may significantly change as a result of a collective event such as like the winning of a Gold medal at Olympic Games by an athlete running on behalf of a country (Rahn et al., 1996). On the other hand, Braud (1996) highlights the periodical boost of public optimism as a result of general elections. Rahn and the co-authors also remarks:

> "a periodicity in people's collective optimism that correspond to national elections. People seem to get more optimistic during elections campaigns, and their feelings towards the political system improve as a result" (Rahn et al., 1996, p. 42).

May this kind of collective events influence the subjective well-being of a nation? The accumulated proofs would suggest much precaution in this matter. A first example is South Africa, where the fall of apartheid the average level of life satisfaction increased with a point on a scale from 1 to 10. In fact, the cause of change was found in the increasing of average levels of life satisfaction of the black population and took relatively little: after two years they dropped to those initially (Moller, 1998).

Moreover, the Bradburn's research from NORC using the Affective Balance Scale coincided with the assassination of the President Kennedy. Researchers scheduled a mini research wave in the hope of measure the changes in the levels of subjective well-being caused by this event. The result, apparently surprising, was that the increase of the negative affect levels was compensated by the increase in the levels of positive affect (Bradburn & Noll, 1969). It looks that the increase in the national grief and the shock of the death of a President were counterbalanced by the positive effects of the increasing in the activation (people became more active, more interested by the political and social events) and the reaffirming of the solidarity (people stopped at the streets and discussed with persons they didn't knew, and so on). Because of this, presumably, the overall levels of subjective well-being in his research sample didn't changed.

Schwarz and Strack (1987), in their study of the soccer influence, found that increased levels of subjective well-being had only those respondents who watched the mach in which their national team won and were interested in the football.

These results suggest that this thesis should be amended as following:

1. The *public mood* is not necessarily *national*, and affects rather particular groups [such as football fans];

2. The effects coincide with those on other indicators such as optimism; thus, the sense of the causality is not entirely clear;

3. It looks that through manipulation of these states can be achieved higher levels of perceived quality of life than the objective living conditions would predict (such as, for example, the effect of "initial feel-good" discussed by Delhey (2001) [in the case of the population of the countries that recently entered EU]). Moreover, are we entitled to talk about an "illusory increase in the quality of life?" An excessive preoccupation for the management of subjective component of quality of life, to the detriment of the efforts for the increasing of level of living, can alter the direction of the researches in the field from the initial project, including them in the frame of a science of a "perfect happiness". On the other hand, a political project visible unbalanced towards this direction can only have the totalitarian characteristic of the will to create a society in which human being, using the above quoted expression, is "convicted to happiness".

5.2.5. Social norms

The social norm is a behavioral pattern expected in a certain circumstance in a group or society. It has a regulatory effect on human behavior by mechanisms that imply also social sentiments, such as the feeling of shame. In these conditions, I expected that the issue of the social norm to be already approached in the study of subjective well-being.

Paradoxically, the only scholars who studied, *en passant*, the effects of the social norms on happiness have been the economists, in the context of the studies on the psychological effects of the unemployment. As presented in an previous chapter of the thesis, Clark (2003) proves that the relationship between unemployment and subjective well-being depend on the social norm: if the reference group of the individual is composed of unemployed persons, then the fact he/she has no job doesn't reflect so negatively on the subjective well-being. Recently, Stutzer şi Lalive (2004) confirmed this finding, showing that the social norm also determine the time after an unemployed person would get another job.

On the other hand, in the cross-cultural psychology the interdependent self is supposed to be more subjected to the social norm than the independent self. How can we extend the model of the social norm on subjective well-being?

Hochschild (2003) propose the term „feeling rules" as representing a set of social norms that governs the way we try to feel or feel not emotions in given social relationships. Heise şi Calhan (1995) make an inventory of these norms in 128 of personal situations, identifying both *prescriptive norms* (what to do) and *reactive norms* (how to answer). Norms have a regulatory character of positive emotions. Hochschild (2003) gives a suggestive example with the narrative of a bride that, in the wedding day, is confronted with an avalanche of unforeseen events:

> „ I wanted to be so happy on our wedding day. I never ever dreamed how anyone could cry at their wedding. That's the happiest day of one's life. I couldn't believe that some of my best friends couldn't make it to my wedding. So I started out to the church with all these little things I always thought would never happen at my wedding goung through my mind. I broke down - I cried going to the wedding. I thought, "Be happy for the friends, the relatives, the presents." But I finally said in my mind, "Hey, people aren't getting married, you are." (Hochschild, 2003, pp. 60-61).

The author sees this narrative as an example of emotional management in which the norm intervene, asking to the bride to feel (or to display) happiness.

On the other hand, the social norms intervene in the evaluation that the individual makes on his own life, as a whole or as separate domains. The whole issue is too large to be treated here, but I would make some suppositions:

- The social norm would regulate the way the individuals evaluates different life domains. For example, in rural areas, where the houses have fewer utilities, a modest house would be better evaluated than one in a big town.

- The social norm also intervene in the way the individual select the weight that it attach to a domain or another in the evaluation of his life as a whole. For example, in the traditionalistic countries (with reference to the sex roles), the women would evaluate in a higher measure the family life than the men. In the groups where to acquire luxury goods is an important purpose, the individual will value his material needs more than other needs.

In this last case, the norms are intertwined with the values that socially regulate the desirability or undesirability of some goods. For the Greeks, Max Weber comments, the orientation towards accumulation and the avarice of the modern capitalist would be subjects to the highest disdain.

All these are examples for the plasticity of the experience of the evaluation of the life concretized in subjective well-being and are arguments for the inclusion of the values, emotion and judgment norms in the models of evaluation at different levels.

5.2.6. A model of evaluation that incorporate public moods and social norms

I argued that, by communication, also the moods can be transmitted. On the other hand, as I maintained in the first chapter, even beginning with Herbert Spencer the scholars admitted that the subjective criteria of evaluation of life conditions may be socially determined. Combining this modeling of the evaluation criteria with the theories of the influence of the communication on the level of individual life satisfaction, we obtain the following schema:
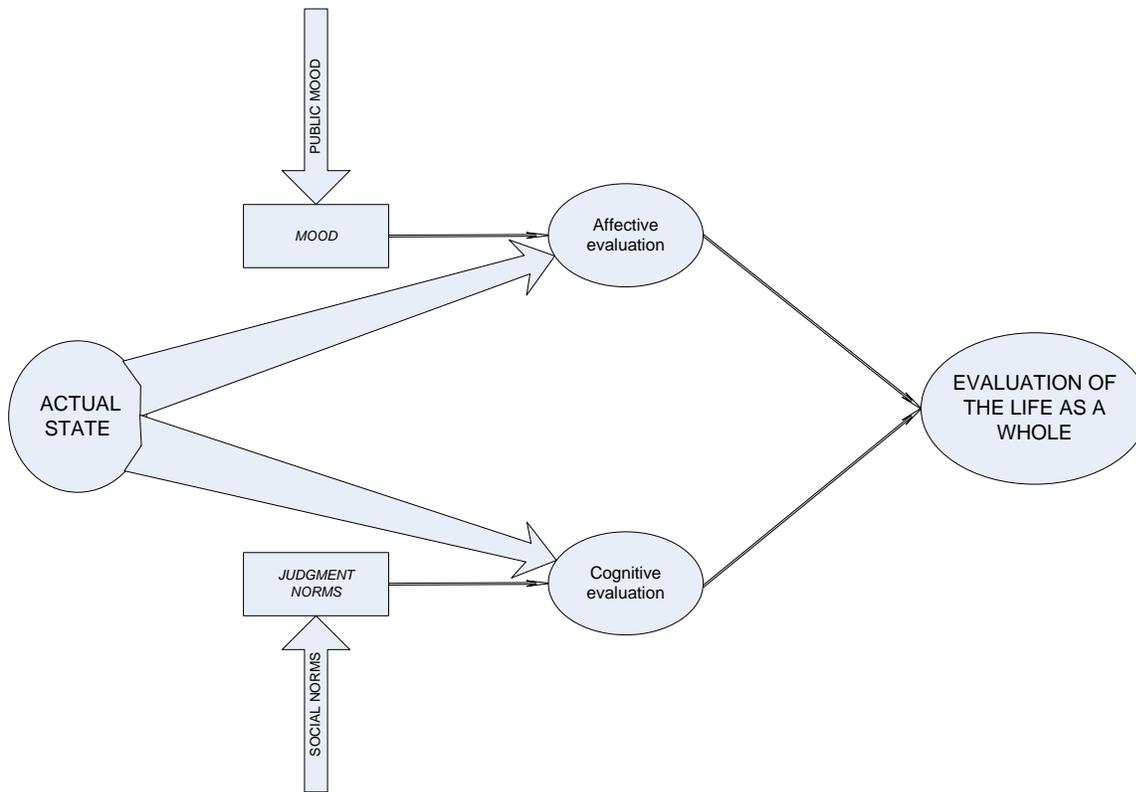
Figura Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1. A model of the social influence on different aspects of the evaluation of subjective well-being.**

Resuming the model, we may say that the individual is evaluation his life conditions affectively and cognitively. The affective evaluation is conditioned by the personal moods that are in relationship with public moods. On the other hand, the cognitive evaluation is based on judgement criteria, which can also be influenced by social values and norms.

Staring for this schema, I will systematize the possible theories of the social influence on subjective well-being in the next table:

		Social criteria	
		NO	YES
Social moods	NO	INDEPENDENCE The individual establish separate criteria and public moods don't modify the evaluation of his life.	VALUES AND NORMS The individual doesn't answer to the public moods, his evaluation is influenced by social norms and values
	YES	CONTAGION Even if the individual establish itself the criteria, the diffuse (collective) affective states contaminates his evaluation.	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION Both the moods and the criteria are collectively determined.

Tabel Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1. Clasification of the models that conceptualize the social influence on the subjective well-being.**

In the following I would discuss separately the models that differ from that of the independent self:

1. CONTAGION. The model is based on a supposition that we deal with diffuse affective states, spread by mass or interpersonal communication, that influence, with regularity, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the individual without, in this process, the criteria by which the different domain components of life are evaluated. Thus, we may suppose that in a community with multiple disaccords, and a general pessimism, the individual depressing and despondency to represent a social norm. Studies on subcultures showed how can induce negative affective states, corresponding to a nihilist and contestatory attitude. Well-known subcultural currents such as the one of Young Angry Men, in English literature and cinema of the sixties, brought forward the revolted type of personality, to who predominant are the dissatisfaction and despondency.

2. VALUES AND NORMS. Even when the individual satisfaction is increased, there are norms that discourage its manifestation, starting from the simple ones (e.g. don't laugh when someone stumble on the street), to the most complicated (e.g. those associated with the superstitious fear of expressing happiness in the traditionalistic societies). Sometimes the norm is allegorized in a cultural product. Take, for instance, the Rolling Stones song in which, on the background of a dynamic and optimistic melody, the soloist repeats obsessively: "*I can't get no satisfaction*". We may suppose

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that this kind of social and cultural contexts favors the expression of a certain kind of mood, detrimental to the opposite mood. The *spiral of silence* is a model for the opinion of the majority (here, the emotional state of the majority) spreads by repressing the expression of opposed states or attitudes (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

3. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION. The model starts from the notion of the culture as a system of significations. Because of that, all the human phenomena, including happiness, are plastic and elaborated by a collective process. Thus, the society gives the individual the ways in which he or she can perceive and express happiness or unhappiness. The demarcation line between the sentiments inspired by the individual experience and those generated by the social experience is at least very fragile, as the social existence dictates the way in which are constructed the identities around where those sentiments are developing.

We are, however, far from having a unique perspective on the processes that would contribute to this collective elaboration of happiness. For that we should answer at some important questions:

1. Which are the components of the emotions of the "social self" having influence on the variations of perceived quality of life?
2. What are the dynamic elements of these affects (regularities, correlations, and so on…).
3. In which way correlate those emotions with the affects of the "individual self" and what influence have the individual variables (age, sex, socioeconomic status, type of personality, etc.) on them.
4. What is the specificity of these satisfaction states "authentic" individual and those socially constructed, and where is the border between the two situated?
5. What are the laws of this "normativity" in the domain of the recognition and expressing these affects?

5.2.7. Modeling the relationship between macro-social and micro-social in what concerns the life domains

One of the key points of construction of a new sociologic theory of happiness would be to model the relationship between micro-social (individual perceptions and evaluations) and macro-social linked with the large context in which the perceptions on the good life sits (se aşează) and

report to.

In order to suggest ways of modeling this relationship I would refer to the particular situation of the relationship between life domains. We previously saw that the relationship between the evaluation of different life domains (work, family…) and the evaluation of life as a whole preoccupied the specialists from long time. There are several questions to be answered in this regard:

1. Are the personal domains perceived by the subject as the sole criterion for subjective well-being?
2. Are there (internal and external) domains not perceived that are relevant here?
3. Are there elements of the social framework that can be measured only at societal level but have an influence here?

The answer to the third question is apparently the simplest. Let's just remind that the whole domains of social indicators research and quality of life started from a global perspective, trying to incorporate all the domains that contribute in a way or another to the individual and collective well-being. This needed the elaboration of data collection that go beyond the simple measurement of the economic domains. From here emerged the conception on quality that integrates the whole elements measurable at micro and macro levels. All the systems of social indicators have these characteristics.

How can we found the links between macro-sociological and micro-sociological, i.e. to discover the way the individual experiences compose themselves in order to construct big social phenomena? In terms of quality of life, how the qualities of life of the individuals compose themselves to give the quality of life of a bigger social unity? The question was systematically avoided by the researchers in the field, even if, for example, in poverty studies the effects at macro level of the unequal distribution of poverty inside the household are well known.

We also saw in subchapter 2.5 the way in which are conceptualized the links between the quality of life of the individual and those of the society, elaborating variables of evaluations of social life by the individual, and also by the evaluation of the relationship between the individual and the society. This strategy only partially solves the problem, because it presumes that only the perceptions of the society and the relationship with these perceptions affects the individual.

I would suggest as a solution to this problem to add several factors, both from personal and societal domains on which the individual has no complete perception.

A comprehensive sociological theory should include personal factors on which the individual has only a limited perception (hidden conflicts, irreconcilable tendencies). Let's take for instance the psychological materialism: the materialists are unhappier because are doing more frequently than others social comparisons. On the other hand, in their case the hedonic treadmill works with more intensity. What Freud considered definitory for the human nature (insatiability of the desires) is rather controlled by personality and educational mechanisms. The thirst for power is another very well known example. The authoritarian bosses are unsatisfied because they enter in a hedonic treadmill in which they never perceived themselves as being appreciated enough.

On the other hand, there is a category of factors unperceived at social level. As Durkheim showed, the power of the social link doesn't entirely manifests at individual level. Macro-social constraints are in the same measure generating unhappiness. Take, for example, the lack of adaptation to the changing norms in the transforming societies. The individual [at least in the in the post-communist societies] has visible more well-being than its parents and grandparents, but he or she isn't happier. He is only in a partial way aware of the social pressure that prevent him to have an objective relationship with his well-being (see, for example, the theories of counsciousness as epifenomena summarized in Zamfir, 1987).

The perceived social factors (social domains) represent only the portion of the macro-social framework situated above the level of perception. They have an influence on individual well-being that the individual is recognizing. On the other hand, between the (personal and social) perceived and the unperceived factors there are dynamic links and reciprocal conditionings. For example, the *habitus* influence the processes of adaptation. Social norms influence the comparison processes, and the ideologies are influencing the values. Conversely, the norms are concretized in institutions that are perceived as concrete influence. We can associate the process of *structuration* of the institutions with the raising at the perception level of these social conditionings: for example, in case of the political institutions, the perceptions of inefficiency and corruption negatively influence the satisfaction with life as a whole.

5.2.8. The Prediction of this theory and the testing possibilities with the societies in transition

From the point of view of those who study the society, to model the processes of change from the post-communist transition raises big problems. We have to simultaneously analyze the

changes in structure, demography, economy and so on, together with the transformations in the social values, norms, attitudes, evaluations, and with the changes in the relationships between those two domains. The study of the subjective well-being is relevant in this regard because it is preoccupied by the relationship between the two domains – objective and subjective.

In order to have a coherent perspective we need an approach that accurately models the relationship between the objective and subjective dimension of the quality of life. I argued that the sociological perspective is the most appropriate because it extends the models of evaluation elaborated until now in order to include the influence of psychosocial factors. The way sociological theories become useful or not to the study of this domain depend on the way they manage to link the micro-social with the macro-social.

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