

Emerging Markets Queries in Finance and Business
Measuring of subjective quality of life

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Abstract

The present study discusses the partial results of a more comprehensive research and its front line goal is to identify the factors which affect the quality of life. Do we subconsciously make some kinds of mathematical calculations weighing our results achieved in certain areas of life to assess how we are getting on? Or rather we use one “indicator” (e.g. money, number of friends, professional recognition) and we assess our situation accordingly? These issues necessarily emerge when it comes to the consideration of the quality of life. Among factors determining life satisfaction, earnings, employment, health and relationships play significant roles. Therefore, on the leading edge of this research are primarily the cognitive factors of life quality. Questionnaires were completed in one of the most popular tourist destinations of Hajdúszoboszló. The 804 local respondents expressed their views primarily about factors determining their well-being and about the impacts of the dominant presence of health tourism on their lives.

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1. Introduction

Tourism in Hungary, especially health tourism is considered as one of the key sectors of the economy and defined as a breaking point and a priority by several programs and development strategies. On the other hand it is relevant to know the factors determining our life standard and satisfaction not only from governmental but from scientific aspects as well. If all these factors and influencing elements are revealed, there will be a

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chance to create a happier and more satisfied nation.

Our hypothesis during the examination was the fact that the regional differences in the life standard of the Hungarian society are significantly explained by settlements having health touristic attractions.

2. Methods

The study presents the partial results of a great research activity. Analysis on some factors influencing the quality of life was performed by evaluating questionnaires completed in Hajdúszoboszló. The study was premised on primary and secondary research. Exploratory and analytic work was started with the survey and evaluation of existing data sources, studies and statistics dealing with Hajdúszoboszló and other materials available from the Local Government of Hajdúszoboszló.

Primary research included the analysis of technical literature closely related to the topic and earlier studies prepared about Hajdúszoboszló. Primary research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire survey, 804 pieces of questionnaires were filled in by local inhabitants in October 2012 - February 2013. The questionnaires were analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program

The variables include both socio-economic and socio-cultural factors, but only those factors of the latter type have been included that have earlier been used by other researchers of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism as well (for example: Pizam et al. [17]; Rátz [19]), and those that have significant roles in influencing the quality of the life of the people.

3. Results

With respect to actual economic and labour market conditions in the country, the majority of respondents were unable to voice positive feelings about their own lives. 58% of Hungarians claimed in the autumn of 2009 that they were not satisfied with their lives. The rate of pessimistic people increased by 2% as compared to a previous survey 6 month earlier; at the same time the rate of Hungarians pronouncedly satisfied with their lives dropped to 42%. In international comparative terms, merely Bulgaria precedes Hungary on the list of dissatisfaction, where the rate of those who are satisfied with their lives is only 38%. The highest rate of those who feel well is represented by people of 15-24 (67%). The least satisfied category is the age group of 40-54 with 70% of those who find their present conditions far from being ideal Eurobarometer 74 [7].

3.1. *The cognitive dimension of subjective quality of life*

There are subjective and objective sides in life quality researches. The two significant life quality research models are the Scandinavian, starting with the availability of resources and their possession, therefore laying emphasis on objective factors; and the American, which rather finds subjective perception and evaluation important. A kind of mixture of these two is the life quality approach by Erik Allart. Following Maslow's [12] model, he also created a hierarchy of needs and distinguished 3 levels:

“Having, loving, being” (material–environmental and social needs and needs for personal development as well). Moreover, he differentiated objective factors and the related subjective attitudes on all the three levels. In the present study the level of “having” is the most relevant, so objective and subjective indicators will be highlighted at this level:

- Objective: objective measurement of the standard of living and environmental conditions
- Subjective: contentment with the standard of living, the feeling of contentment Utasi [21].

In the analysis of life standard and living conditions, objective indicators include primarily earnings, labour-market status, the availability of consumer goods and other similar material indicators. In general, GDP per capita and various indices, mainly those formed from national economic indicators may also be

analysed.

In the last fifty years, there has been a concerted effort to empirically investigate SWB, from its correlations Oishi et al. [16], to forecasting affect Gilbert [9] to cross-cultural differences Scollon et al. [20]. Yet, only a few have attempted to search for a unifying theory of subjective well-being (Brief et al. [1]; Feist et al.[8]; Kim-Prieto et al. [11]). As an alternative to utility, subjective well-being (SWB) has been proposed as a measure of individuals' benefits in a number of domains Kahneman, [10]. SWB expresses individuals' cognitive and emotional well-being, directly measured by means of reliable psychometric scales Diener and Suh [5]. Since SWB refers to satisfaction with life in general, it is assumed to be relatively stable across time and to go beyond, but implicitly include, domains such as family life, work life, and leisure. Yet, there is an increasing interest in understanding how SWB depends on context-specific factors such as, for instance, various forms of consumption, improved schools, or reduced commuting stress (Diener and Seligman [4]; Diener et al. [3]).

The quality of life is a joint dimension of objective factors determining human life and their subjective reflections Michalkó [14]. Whereas welfare refers to the objective factors (earnings, health, infrastructure, public security) of the quality of life (Table 1.), well-being relates to subjective ones (delight, appreciation, affection). The relation of earnings and health has been widely investigated. Research findings reveal that higher incomes lead to better health, but better health may also result in higher incomes due to increased labour productivity and more active participation in the labour market. Similarly positive, two-directional relations can be detected in the relation of education and incomes. Education enhances social participation which is a significant component of the quality of life Putnam [18].

Table1. Pillars of the quality of life

Quality of life	
Objective pillar	Subjective pillar
Welfare	Well-being
Living standard	Satisfaction
Way of life	Happiness
Living conditions	Delight

Source: Authors' own work based on Michalkó (2010)

3.2. Evaluation of results

For more than 70 years Hajdúszoboszló has been called “the Mecca of rheumatic patients” and the “paradise of beachgoers” by Hungarian and foreign guests who seek remedy for their diseases. Since 1925 – following the outburst of the thermal spring of 73C0, it has seen tremendous development. The town has become not only one of the touristic destinations of “Hajdú Golden Triangle” (Debrecen–Hajdúszoboszló–Hortobágy) but after Hévíz, Lake Balaton and Budapest, the fourth most popular health and holiday resort. This is a fact which evidently influences the health condition of local residents.

Key issues for inhabitants in the town and for local hospitality employees are the following: as a result of development and growth

- how will Hajdúszoboszló be able to preserve and renew its natural, social, cultural and economic resources;
- what pace of development is acceptable for the town without disadvantageous changes;
- what are the potential avenues of further development, what investments, infrastructural developments are required;
- how can visitors and local inhabitants respect each other's customs and traditions.

Survey data were collected from a sample of 804 respondents which makes 3.34% of the total number of inhabitants of the town, and 0.15% of the total number of the inhabitants of the county. We consider the size of the sample adequate, since several domestic Rátz [19]; Michalkó [14] and international surveys used samples of smaller sizes Michalkó et al.[13], 2011: 500 respondents; Milman and Pizam [15] 1988: 203 respondents.

The research is representative of gender and age, the sample mirrors the settlement's distribution ratios: females 53%, males 47% (Table 2.).

Table 2. Distribution of the sample in terms of age group, gender

	Person	%
In terms of gender		
Man	424	53
Woman	380	47
In terms of age		
20 years or below	136	16,8
21-40 years	250	31,3
41-60 years	235	29,1
above 61 years	184	22,8

Source: Authors' own work

The local inhabitants interviewed were asked to use a scale of 1-5 points to evaluate the contribution of the individual elements listed to their positive attitude to life quality (Figure 1.). It shows very clearly that the average of the values assigned to the individual elements hit, but more typically exceed (except for those assigned to the items concerned with political atmosphere and traveling) value 3, which means that the respondents attribute higher than average values to the factors listed.

Thus, it has been justified that the factors that I (and literature sources) consider to be determining factors of life quality, do contribute – to different extents, though – to life satisfaction. The respondents assigned the highest values to family (4.2) and to personal relationships (4.1).

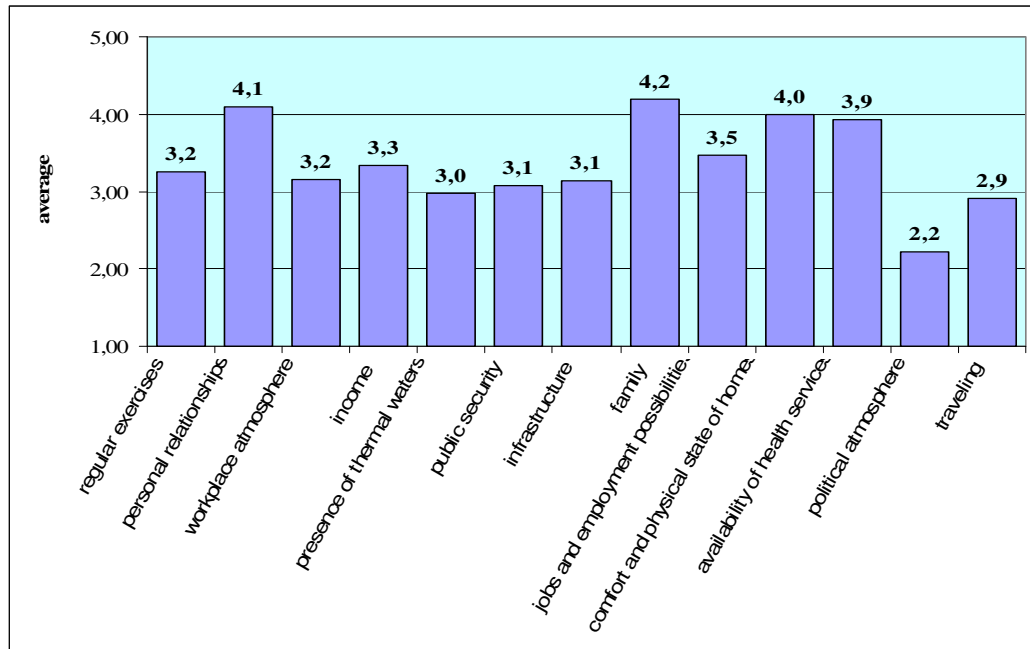


Fig. 1.: Evaluation of the factors of life quality

Source: own development based on questionnaire responses

Three quarters (74.11%) of the respondents claim that family largely contributes to the positive assessment of their quality of life. It is asserted by other domestic studies as well that the majority of the society considers family to be the most precious value. General distrust and lack of trust in foreigners, typical of our modern societies, make close family relationships even more precious. The average value of the 1-5 values of the scale (1 = dissatisfied and 5 = totally satisfied) gives us the measure of satisfaction. In Table 2. we demonstrated that respondents not having primary level education are considerably less satisfied (2.84) than those having degrees in higher level education 3.86). Another socio-demographic factor, marital status also influences life quality. Table 3 highlights a point of interest: unmarried (male or female) individuals are more satisfied with their lives (3.43) than those living in partnership. This can be explained by recent preference trends of single life styles and the desire to preserve some degree of personal independence.

Table 3: Assessment of life satisfaction by selected socio-demographic characteristics (marital status, education)

Marital status	Measure of satisfaction
Not married	3,43
Married	3,19
Having partnership relation	3,13
Widow(er)	2,71
Divorced	2,65
Education	
Lower than 8 years primary school level	2,83
8 years primary school	3,27

Vocational school	3,06
Secondary school degree	3,1
College/university degree	3,38

Source: own development based on questionnaire responses

The creation of welfare and financial stability is a vital issue in our days. Naturally the slogan is well-known: money cannot buy happiness. Unfortunately, it is not quite true. It may not buy happiness after reaching a certain level, earnings of millions will not increase individual satisfaction, but proper income is needed to live our lives to the fullest. Money is not only essential to satisfy our everyday needs but it is also instrumental to obtain other elements included in the quality of life.

We wish to keep relationships with our friends and relatives in vain if we do not possess the necessary amount of money to go out somewhere for a glass of drink or to invite them to our homes or if our mind is continuously obsessed with our financial safety instead of enthusiastic conversation.

There is a clear relationship identified between life satisfaction and income. The higher the income, the higher is the measure of life satisfaction (Table 4.). Similarly, the relationship between national incomes and average subjective welfare has been established at the international level too (correlation of 0.6- Cummins [2]).

Table 4.: Assessment of life satisfaction by income

Income level	Measure of satisfaction
Lower than 50 thousand HUF	2,11
Between 50-100 thousand HUF	3,14
Higher than 100 thousand HUF	4,36

Source: own development based on questionnaire responses

In our correlation analysis we found a correlation of 0.6, which indicates a close relationship between the two factors examined (Table 5.). Also, it shows that the average measure of life satisfaction of the respondents having incomes higher than 100 thousand HUF is substantially higher (4.36) than that of those earning incomes lower than 50 thousand HUF (2.11) (Table 4.).

Table 5. Relationship between selected factors and life satisfaction (Spearman correlation)

Factors	Correlation coefficient	Significance
Are you happy with your life?	1,000	-
What average monthly household income per capita do you have?	0,676	0,000
What changes in your financial conditions have you had over the past 3 years?	0,565	0,000
Which social group do you think you belong as concerns your life style?	0,672	0,000
Are you an active member of the job market?	-0,395	0,000

Source: own development based on questionnaire responses

We can only realize ourselves and live our lives to the fullest if we are healthy. This statement is primarily underpinned by the examination of health conditions and satisfaction. Figure 2. demonstrates that 12% of people were satisfied and 24% were rather satisfied with their lives of those respondents who did not suffer from illnesses at the interview date.

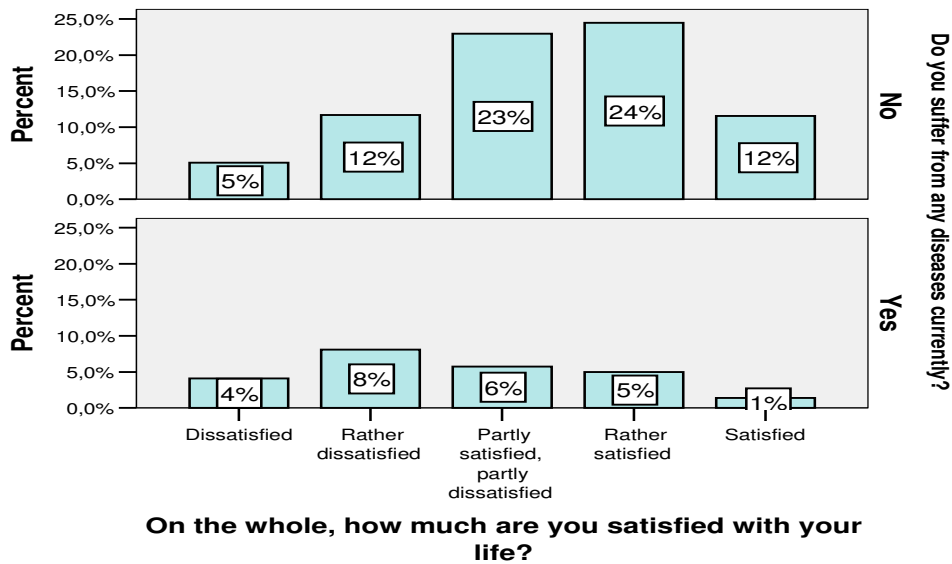


Fig. 2. Correlation of health condition and satisfaction

Source: Authors' own work

4. Conclusions

In Hungary there has not been much research carried out into the impact of tourism on the life of the quality of the local people. It is just recently that quality of life as such is being investigated, the first research results dealing with the relationships between health tourism and life quality at a concrete settlement of Hungary (Orosháza) came out just in 2011. We presume that our research is dealing with the analysis of topic and relationship novel in the research area.

Health tourism in Hungary, in the North-East region in particular, has a long history and will have a long future. Developments in every destination, therefore, must prioritize the objective of the subsequent improvement of the life of the local people.

The survey conclusions have confirmed the findings of previous research activities and unveiled several new correlations as well. More noteworthy is that for Hajdúszoboszló it is a strategic advantage to highlight health in its product range and also the town's endowments are favourable for developing family-friendly offers. The above mentioned do not only improve the life quality of tourists in the region but also the health condition of the local population.

The other impact of tourism on the quality of life is that it inspires inflation. The touristic reputation of the town increases prices by about 15-20% than in Debrecen or in other neighbouring cities or settlements. This definitely poses problems for local inhabitants, as 52% of respondent live on an average of 50-100 thousand HUF monthly earnings but who live above subsistence level and live from more than 100 thousand HUF average earnings per capita are more satisfied with their lives. In the assessment by the individuals of their satisfaction with their lives, society plays a decisive role.

According to the theory of social comparisons by Easterlin [6], members of a society compare themselves with the other members and assess their satisfaction with life in this relationship. After the change of the regime, the earlier base of comparison has ceased to exist any longer, and like other members of the Eastern

European countries Hungarian people now tend to compare their own living standards to the standards of the Western European countries. In addition to the economic aspect, scientific considerations make it also essential to have a clear understanding of the factors that determine the quality of our lives and can give us satisfaction. The knowledge and understanding of these factors and of the elements that have impacts on them will create the potentials of creating a happier and more satisfied nation. The results of the situation analysis show that Hajdúszoboszló is to face great challenges: in order to ensure development and livelihood potentials for its inhabitants, the settlement must make sure that its leading position in the domestic tourism market is maintained, and the challenges posed by competition are met by improvements of the services. The interests of the local people must also be considered: the developments must be aimed at the creation of a hospitable town, at the creation of new jobs, at the adjustment of the profile of education to the specificities of the area, at the improvement of services infrastructure and leisure time programs – e.g. longer and more leveled seasons. Tourism and attached services are the engine of local economic development, they play a major role in employment development too. Present and perspective developments must be designed with a view to environmental and social sustainability.

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