

Theses of doctoral (Ph.D.) dissertation

**Connections between the Quality of Life and the System of  
Values**

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Debrecen

2009

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## **The Main Aims and the Importance of the Research**

The topic of the thesis is the connection between the system of values and the quality of life. I wanted to know more about their inner structure and about how these two affect each other. The economic importance of the issue is shown by the substantial purpose of economy, which is to satisfy human needs and to ensure and increase the well-being and welfare of people. Talking about values social sciences have taken significant steps and have produced great results in the investigation of the effects of these values on the economic life and economic activities. However, they don't know too much about the values themselves and their very nature. In connection with happiness the economists tried to examine the so-called happiness-paradox, which is about the fact, that rising financial conditions do not go together with rising happiness, neither on individual nor on national levels. (Bruni-Porta [2005]). Recently economists have been examining the relationship between happiness and inflation, rate of unemployment or several institutional factors. (Frey [2000])

Our purpose was to expand and to deepen the research of Inglehart and of the economists who deal with the question of happiness. Inglehart did not deal with the differences in the system of values within a country, because he supposed that they are smaller than those which can be seen between countries. He examined the connections between the quality of life and economic development, but did not examine the inner structure of the quality of life and the relationships between the QOL and the system of values.

According to Inglehart the economic development as well as the cultural and political changes go together in a coherent and to a certain extent predictable patterns. Once a society has embarked on industrialization, for example, a few related changes will occur such as mass mobilization, urbanization, diminishing differences between gender roles, specialization, etc. But modernization has drawbacks: mass production, alienation, impersonality, bureaucracy. In preindustrial societies modernization is worth the money, because societies can win a lot: starving and existential insecurity disappear, life expectancy rises dramatically. In industrial societies this price is too high. The material values -like physical and economic security- are replaced by postmaterial values such as the importance of self-fulfillment and quality of life. The main findings of the World Values Surveys –besides the above mentioned shift in values- are that the values of a generation remain stable during the life of this generation and that change of value-system occurs between generations.

In our research we have examined whether there are regional differences within a country in the system of values. Further to that we were interested in the present situation of

Hungary concerning those values which are the most important in the economic life and economic development and the related problems, prospects and tasks. Today one of the biggest social problem of Hungary is the integration of gipsies. According to many people the gipsies have a different system of values and this is the reason why they cannot integrate into our society.

Concerning the quality of life we wondered whether its objective (visible to an outsider) and subjective (experienced by the individual affected) sides are in connection with each other and whether the system of values influences the feeling of satisfaction.

## The Process and Methods of Our Research

During the years 2007 and 2008 we carried out a research with questionnaires. The thesis is a result of the outcome of this research as well as the analyses of the database of the WVS. For the data analyses we used spss 11.0. programme.

For the research we chose three settlements in a way that it should include a town and a village as well as settlement in East Hungary and one in Transdanubia.

The method we used for sampling was quota sample in Miskolc and Bükksgzentkereszt and we asked everybody who was willing to answer in Pilisszentlászló.

For our questionnaire we used some of the questions of the WVS questionnaire. We chose those questions and values which are the most important in the economic life. These were:

- importance of the different value domains
- postmaterialist values
- achievement motivation
- trust

The next table contains the structure of our research about the QOL. The certain questions of our questionnaire can be read in the columns of the objective and subjective indicators.

Dimensions		Objective indicators	Subjective indicators
Having (material and imprsonal needs)			
	Economic resources	-what amount of monthly income is enough -vacation trips -number of rooms in the house (flat)	-satisfaction with one's financial situation
	Quality of the environment	-air pollution -noise pollution the proportion of the green area	- satisfaction with the cleanness of the environment
	security	-crime rate -the number of crimes in one's settlement -the number of accidents	- satisfaction with public security
	State of health	-ability to run 100 meters -the frequency of illnesses over the last	-satisfaction with the state of health

		year -the frequency of visiting the GP over the last year	
	Nutrition	-healthy diet -intention to have a healthy diet	- satisfaction with one's diet
	Living conditions (housing)	-number of persons per room	- satisfaction with one's living condotions
	Education and qualification	-level of education reached	- satisfaction with one's own qualification
	Work	-job -loving one's job success in one's career - experience in unemployment -place of work (settlement and institution) -opportunities to use one's ability at work	- job satisfaction
Loving (social needs)			
	Family	-marital status -number of children -frequency of meeting one's children -number of sisters and brothers -frequency of conversation with one's children -frequency of conversation with one's parents	- satisfaction with one's family - satisfaction with one's love life
	Friends	-number of friends -frequency of conversation with friends	- satisfaction with one's friendship
	Local community		-satisfaction with the community life of the settlement
	Membership in organisations (civil activity)	-membership in civil society organisations	

	relationship at work		
Being (needs for personal growth)			
	Harmony with the nature	-the number of hours spent outdoors -handling waste -considering environmental aspects when purchasing something	
	Alienation	-how much people/family members/friends can be trusted -sense of autonomy -amount of free time per week - free time activities	-satisfaction with the amount of free time  -things ones would like to do in their free time and at work
	Integration into the society	-participation in political elections -membership in political party or in an NGO	-the importance of politics in one's life
General satisfatcion with one's life		-the aims in life	-feeling of happiness -felling of suces -the extent of achieving one's goals

1. table. Measuring of QOL in our research

## **The Structure of the Thesis and the Main Statements of Professional Literature**

In chapter 1.1. we placed this research in the system of theories of social sciences and we also tried to clarify some of the concepts we used.

Production, distribution, exchange and consumption (satisfaction of human needs) constitute the sphere of economy. The economic activity is intentionally rational, it is characterised by calculation which is necessary because of the scarcity of ends and means.

Culture is made up of attitudes, values and knowledge, which are learnt and are vary according to countries. (Inglehart, 1997)

Mainstream economics considers these two spheres to be independent, more precisely the world of values is omitted. Historical materialists consider economy as the decisive factor in the relationship of the two spheres. Max Weber thinks just the other way around. Analyzing the origin of capitalism he found it in a special spirit, in a special system of values, in the ethics of protestantism. (Weber, 1995, 1979) Inglehart condiders that there are mutual effects between the two spheres.

In chapter 1.2. we concentrated on values.

Values give answers to the questions: what is beautiful and what is ugly, what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what is avoidable (Hankiss, 1977) Clyde Kluckhohn speaks about three dimensions of values. Modality is one of them and it manifests itself in allurement and repulsion. Content is the second dimension and it describes the field where the values operate. The third dimension is the will, which indicates the presence or the absence of the reflexivity of the actor. (Csepeli, 1997)

We have presented three different economic approaches to values.

According to Myrdal a social scientist has to consider the relevant and significant values of the given society and elaborate their suggestions based on these. (Myrdal [1972])

Becker works with the methodology of mainstream economics, but he handles values, culture and other social phenomena as the inner variable of the system.

Etzioni claims that we make the majority of our decisions on a normative-emotional basis and not on a rational one. (Etzioni [1990])

Chapter 1.3. is dedicated to the presentation of several theoretical notions concerning happiness and well-being, as well as the method of their measurement and the results of research. In social sciences we measure and analyse well-being and welfare instead of



happines. We suppose that we measure these, because happiness is unmeasurable and we cannot define it. Welfare does not equal well-being. The purpose of economic growth is raising welfare. The word well-being has a wider meaning. It has different definitions, but all of them consist of the following elements: subsistence, good state of health, good human relationships, the security of the person and his property, freedom, opportunity to develop.

The GDP and GNP are good for measuring economic growth. There are efforts to create new indexes which are capable of measuring economic development<sup>1</sup>.

At the micro level the most frequently used measurements are single or multi-item survey questions. The economists who examine the questions of happiness (especially Frey and Easterlin) use single-item survey questions in their research.

We found that there is no agreement on the relationship between the objective (visible to an observer) and subjective (experienced by the individual itself) sides of the quality of life, nor on its relationship to different economic and social dimensions eg. wealth, age, education, sex, state of health, human relationship.

The second chapter contains the hypothesis of our research and the applied methodology. The third and fourth chapters show the findings of our research, the fifth represents the scientific results of it and the sixth contains our proposals for practical applicability.

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<sup>1</sup> eg. NEW (Net Economic Welfare), ISEW of Daly-Cobb (Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare), GPI (Genuin Progress Indicator) from Cobb-Jackson-Marks and HDI developed by the UNDP (Human Development Index)

## Summary of the Research Findings

Question 1. Are there regional differences in the system of values in Hungary?

Hypothesis 1. People living in the western part of the country have a more postmaterialistic value orientation.

Findings. Concerning the importance of certain value domains there are no significant regional differences between the eastern and western part of the country. In the north-east region of Hungary the stable economy, economic growth, the law and order in the country and the struggle against crime proved to be the most outstanding national goals. This refers to a strong materialistic system of values. The value of postmaterialism index is around 10% here. As far as central Hungary is concerned the national goals here proved to be more postmaterialistic than the Hungarian average as having a say in the work was defined as the most important value. The postmaterialism index here is 43,8%.

The lack of trust is a very common phenomenon in every area of Hungary (the education might be the only exception). At the same time we could observe a significant geographical difference concerning both the general and the strategic trust. The mid-Hungarian settlement shows the best result in this term.

Confidence in institutions has no influence on the general trust.

**Thesis 1. The system of values of people are determined by the quality of life of their childhood. Because of this we can find big territorial differences within a country, even bigger than between countries.**

Question 2. Are there any differences between the system of values of the gypsy and Hungarian people? If the answer is yes, does this difference impede the integration of gipsies?

Hypothesis 2. The system of values of the gipsies living in slums is traditional which is an obstacle to their integration. The value orientation of the integrated gipsies is materialistic.

Findings: The most important value domains turned out to be the family, friends and work in the analyzed samples. People of gipsy origin found work and religion more important than the rest of the people. Within the gipsy sample there was no significant difference between the opinions of gipsies living in slums and those with a better standard of living. Concerning the national goals, the gipsy value orientation is more postmaterialistic than the Hungarian average. Concerning the desirable character traits of a child, gipsy people have a

more traditional attitude. They put obedience and good manners first while the least preferred values were the independence and tolerance. The gipsy community show even bigger distrust according to our research.

**Thesis 2. Although the system of values of gipsy people is mixed, it is not an obstacle to their integration, because the values necessary in a modern economy are favoured by them (the importance of work, the achievement motivation)**

Hypothesis 3. The value orientation of the members of the civil society is postmaterialistic and they are happier than an average Hungarian.

Findings: our research revealed that in Hungary the members of the civil society show no difference in the value system while in the global average they do. Our possible explanation is that the civil society in Hungary is underdeveloped, small and weak. But it was shown by our sample as well, that the civil society members are significantly happier than the Hungarian average.

**Thesis 3. Membership in the civil society, postmaterialistic value orientation and bigger concern about the protection of environment as well as a higher feeling of happiness go together.**

Question 4. What kind of connections are there between the importance of certain value domains and the experienced satisfaction?

Hypothesis 4.a. If a certain value domain is very important to someone, they have high expectations in connection with it and that's why their satisfaction will be relatively low.

Hypothesis 4.b. If a certain value domain is very important to someone, they make big efforts about it and reach good results and that's why their satisfaction will be high.

Findings. Higher importance of a certain value domain goes together with higher satisfaction in the case of work, friendship, love, freetime and family. But in the case of money those who find money very important in their life are usually less satisfied with their financial situation.

**Thesis 4. Those who don't care much about money seem to be more satisfied with their financial situation, as their lower level of demand can be more easily satisfied. But in the case of other value domains the direction of the connection is reverse: those who find a certain value domain important are more satisfied with it. They make more efforts in these value domains which leads to better results. This seems to be more important than the increasing demand caused by the importance.**

Question 5. Is there any connection between the objective and subjective sides of the quality of life?

Hypothesis 5. If hypothesis 4.a. is true, there will be no connection between the objective and subjective side of well-being. If 4.b. is true, there will be positive correlations between them.

Findings. The objective and subjective side of the QOL showed an obvious correlation in the areas of health, eating habits, security, qualification, alienation, work, friends, love, freetime and family. The only exception was the financial situation (its proxy indicator is the housing) where there was no relationship between the subjective and objective indicators.

**Thesis 5. Except for financial conditions, the objective and subjective indicators are substitutively capable of measuring the QOL, because there are strong relations between them.**

Question 6. How is the overall feeling of happiness affected by the satisfaction of the different walks of life?

Hypothesis 6. The overall feeling of happiness depends mainly on the satisfaction experienced in those areas which are considered particularly important by the individuals or groups.

Findings. In case of those people to whom work/family/leisure time/friends are very important, there are strong correlation between the satisfaction with the certain value domain and the overall feeling of happiness. But in case of those who do not find work important there is no correlation between the satisfaction with work and the overall feeling of happiness.

**Thesis 6. The overall feeling of happiness depends mainly on the satisfaction experienced in those areas which are considered particularly important by the individuals or groups. If we want to create one index from the findings of the different dimensions of the QOL, we have to weigh them with their importance.**

## **Further Purposes in Research**

There are certain questions which our research couldn't give answers to. One of them is the hypothesis that there is a considerable difference in the value system between towns and villages. Although we examined this difference we couldn't find any significant differences. One of the reasons seems to be that these settlements are geographically close to each other and have had strong relations for a long time.

The financial situation was measured by proxy indices in our research but it would be necessary to have real figures to test our findings.

The other thing we didn't get an answer to was the reason for the importance of environmental protection.

Another exciting question is: why are there differences in the sense of autonomy between gipsies living in slums and living in better conditions.

Further plans about the research are to compare the outcome of IQ and personality tests with questions about the QOL and the value systems.

Another possible direction of our research is to reveal the driving force behind people's acts, discover the ways in which people make the most important decisions and whether these decisions can be regarded as rational.

## **Proposals for Practical Applicability of the Research Findings**

The postmaterialistic person is innovative, flexible and in this sense of the word they are not only good consumers but also good workers. From the point of view of the sustainable economic development it is good to have a lot of consumers like this. That's why we consider it positive that the education system or the media as well as the marketing activity of companies „create” such consumers.

One of the surprising outcome of this research was that although the inhabitants of the settlements have more or less the same financial status, it was Pilisszentlászló where there were better results in every dimension of the QOL and where the people were happier. Here we could observe a higher level of trust and a more postmaterialistic value orientation. At a national level the main priority should be to increase the QOL instead of the economic growth. Other alternative macro indicators should be measured and published, such as HDI, ISEW, GPI, NEW.

Trust, reciprocity, and informal network can make economic activities go smoother. It is stimulating for financial transactions, if people have confidence in contracts and in the safety of investments. And in a society, where trust is low, it is difficult to interrupt the vicious circle of poverty, low level of investment, and low level of trust. As we said, the lack of trust is a very common phenomenon in every area of Hungary.

One way of the increasing trust in a society is to decrease of the level of corruption. To reach this purpose, it is necessary to raise the transparency, punish corrupt people, and decrease the number of institutions which have discretionary powers. The other source of trust is the civil society. This sphere is important not only because it is useful in creating social trust, but it can possess direct economic effects, create jobs to many people and provide services to the society. The national and the local governments should do everything that they can to strengthen this sphere.

Attitudes to work are very important factors in economic performance. (Phelps [2006]) On the other hand work is a necessary base for the self-consciousness of people. In Hungary work is quite an important part of people's lives, but the importance of it has been decreasing over the previous decade and the rate of activity is quite high in our country. We claim that we have to make attempts to reach full employment and help people find jobs that matches their qualification and skills. Another typical phenomenon of the modern society is that the working time of the social elite is longer than that of the average, and that there are a lot of

workaholic people. We suggest encouraging employers to introduce new forms of work, such as shared work, part-time jobs. In this way more people could find a job and those who work could have more free-time. It requires legal changes.

Our next important question is the so-called human capital. It is clear from our research, that people with higher education are happier and healthier. And as Becker put it, more qualified people have greater ability to imagine their future. (Becker [1996]) We need to develop the quality of our education, the teachers' ability to use creative and interactive methods. More practical knowledge would be necessary in the content of the materials and more practical experience to children. They go to „forest schools” nowadays which is a good initiative, but they could visit factories, organic farms, slums, prisons. More social activities, community programmes would be necessary in schools to counterbalance the Net and television addiction, to increase the ability to cooperate.

As far as slum gipsies are concerned we think it would be necessary to introduce the Grameen-type micro credits and to modify the present social policy. Family allowance should be given only up to three children then families would be entitled to tax allowances. To solve the problem of slum rehabilitation a good solution can be the method of South Shore Bank. They gave credits for ghetto rehabilitation but only to local entrepreneurs who had to employ local workforce. The comprehensive education is also a good initiation but only if it goes hand in hand with helping gipsy children catch up with the others.

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