

## **SLOVENIAN (UN)HAPPY PEOPLE COMPARED WITH BHUTANESE**

### *CULTURAL CONTEXT OF HAPPINESS*

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**Abstract:** The paper explores the understanding of happiness in everyday life in Slovenia using data of measurement happiness as satisfaction with life, quality of life, well-being, and others Slovenian data, compared with the Bhutanese concept of GNH. It also explores Slovenian cases of subjective and objective experiences of happiness. It looks into the problems of modernization and provide suggestions on how can modern way of living make people happy (again).

**Key words:** *happiness, well-being, everyday life, values*

### **Introduction**

When we firstly met the concept of Gross National Happiness, we became very interested in a sense, is it possible - in material oriented society - to measure people satisfaction, subjective well-being?

The researchers agree that happiness is culturally oriented. The paper is about cultural context of happiness in Slovenia, compared with Bhutan. Some researches from comparison between Slovenia and Bhutan was done, and also some key points from analysis of Bhutanese GNH concept for further observation were taken.

Starting point of the research is based on reflection of the subjective experience of happiness at human beings. It exposes a dilemma, whether this subjective experiencing of happiness is how-so-ever considered in results within national surveys in case of Slovenia, and also Bhutan.

### **Bhutanese people are happier than Slovenian**

The first opinion as hypothesis was that Bhutanese people are happier than Slovenian. And also, there was a question, what we can learn from Bhutanese experience to increase the level of happiness at people in Slovenia?

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Slovenia and Bhutan are, at first sight, similar countries. Both are small. Slovenia with 2 million citizens and expanse of 20 thousand square km. Bhutan has less citizens and more land. Both countries are characteristic after forests, green land, mountains, lakes .. Social way of living in everyday life between Slovenia and Bhutan looks much different.

Slovenia has been going through the huge changes during last 50 years, development of the Slovenian society after disaster of 2. world war was created together with six nations with different culture in Yugoslavia, it was based on socialism, independency of Slovenia took place in 1991, establishment of own currency (tolar) and then joining the Europe Union 2004, adopting of a new currency euro in 2007, privatisation of economy and facing of economical crises during last few years, as most other countries, speaking globally.

A short cultural characteristic of Slovenians could be:

*“ People have great ideas and wishes to fulfil these ideas. That’s why we can find Slovenian people in the most extreme sports, they are living in the most countries in the world, we can find them between great inventors. They like to be very happy, and they are also somehow unhappy.”*

### **How to measure happiness**

Survey about Bhutanese concept and its GNH Index (Alkire and others 2012), was a ground, according to which we prepared a topic about happiness. We presented it on 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of Social Work in Slovenia, in 2013, where colleagues, social workers and other professionals, working in social welfare sector, have found the topic as very interesting. A debate exposed many questions about the measurement of the happiness, individual feeling of “being happy”, collective happiness and about comparing of the GNH Index with other concepts: Human Development Index (HDI), General Social Survey (GSS), World Values Survey (WVS), Better life (OECD).

Besides all mentioned indexes above related to happiness, we have been also dealing with general questions about these issues, such as:

- What is the meaning of happiness in global world? Is social development actually subordinated to economical paradigm - and Whether or not it should be otherwise ?
- Is progress lose its own potential and meaning by being subordinated to concept of growth, which is based on “more”?
- What could be the meaning of »different« growth?

- Could economical crisis be bridgeable/manageable also by development of subjective feeling of happiness?

These questions were the starting point, by including philosophical and practical level of dealing with happiness, what was also the title of GNH conference in Bhutan, From the Philosophy to Praxis, according to which the questions of creating of the Policy in this regard came up. First of all, by searching of the differences between ideal of the happiness and real happy.

Approaches to fulfil happiness in everyday life through simple workshops or reading the books in a sense “how to be happy in 10 steps”, are according to our view quite problematic. Success of “instant happy” in modern world is based on wrong direction. We prefer to address the happiness as a state of emotion, that lasts and in follow way, as Durkheim said, as well: “Happiness is a personal experience, which is socially conditioned” (1972). Nobody could be happy alone, since happiness is the social dimension. We therefore treat a concept called Economics of happiness, that has come out in recent period, as strange, or let say unusual.

### **Slovenian public opinion polls**

We would like to stress an example, how difficult is to follow reasons for changes in people happiness, as it shown in data of Slovenian public opinion polls (Toš 2013). Study was done by researchers at Faculty of social sciences. Data were compared during a period of 10 years, from 1999 to 2009, within which Slovenia were going through post-socialism transformation and became a relatively stable state.

Study included three hypothesis:

- it was expected that due to the gradual rise in economic prosperity and political stability in Slovenia during these period, the level of happiness would be increased;
- it was expected that due to the new social division generated by the country's post-socialist transformation this period would be characterised by a growing gap between the least and the most happy people;
- it was expected that the social composition of the least and most happy parts of the Slovenian population would changed considerably over the course of time.

None of these hypotheses were confirmed by data of Slovenian public opinion polls. There were some oscillations in both the average level of happiness and the gap between the least and the most happy but no clear trends of change. There was also no change in the social composition of the most and the least happy. The data indicate that in Slovenia in the period under study the dynamic of happiness was largely unaffected by the outcomes of the country's post-socialist transformation

Results of Slovenian public opinion polls show the ‘unresponsiveness’ of happiness to the social transformation. Feelings of happiness does not imply in socially patterned. Data show that the level of happiness is systematically related to age, religiosity, education and partnership status. There is no doubt that happiness is a social fact. Nevertheless, happiness tends to be socially quite ‘free-floating’ even in a period of rapid and deep social change. Happiness is related to – as also shown by data – a multitude of social phenomena situated on the macro, mezzo and micro levels of social life. Their multitude and the fact that their conditioning effects can run in different directions may neutralise each other’s effects on the level of happiness or make the sum effect unpredictable. In addition, it should be considered that the relationships between happiness and its social correlates are strongly mediated by social norms which change according to their own logic, independently of change in other social spheres (Bernik 2012).

### **Understanding cultural and global context**

It was a further challenge for us to find out how Slovenia can be reflected within existent concepts and indexes with regard to happiness. At the same time we were interested, what can be connection between national measurements (as study mentioned above) and study of subjective feeling of happiness.

Four points has appeared important to be stressed here:

- 1) Human Development Index from ideal to reality
- 2) Connection between economic development and happiness
- 3) From crisis to development of values
- 4) Individual and collective happiness

#### *Human Development Index from ideal to reality*

Regarding first point “Human Development Index from ideal to reality”, within Human Development Index, Slovenia was found at 25<sup>th</sup> place, Bhutan, for example, can be found at the 136<sup>th</sup> place . We were surprised, since, as it was said at the beginning, our hypothesis was, the Bhutanese are happier people than Slovenian. While, comparing of HDI and BNH indexes, then the differences between Bhutan and Slovenia are not so big. Besides, Bhutanese research show that most Bhutanese people are actually happy. So, a question appears, why Bhutan is so low ranged in case of HDI index?

And, on the contrary, in case of Slovenia, when we have observed different national issues, related to happiness (observations, different public opinions) we have found out that Slovenians are not so happy nation. People have expressed a lot of un-satisfaction about government, leadership, social and health care, education. So, with regard to HDI

index, also a question appears (as it was case before with Bhutan): Why Slovenia is ranged so high?

According to results, Slovenian people do not express feeling of happiness publicly, comparing with the results from other countries. Slovenian people are mainly not satisfied with the state in its covering of their needs. They are affected by the disclosures that the unearned benefits are available for individuals in positions. Happiness due to above facts has become even more intimate experience. Although Slovenian people did not appear as a happy nation, it is not the case with Slovenian individual. Happiness is lying in the heart of individual and it is experienced in intimate everyday life.

### *Connection between economical development and happiness*

Economy found a new interest in study happiness, with a goal of economic point of view that everyone wants to be happy (Frey 2008).

Studies show that economical development is not connected with happiness or there is difficult to find a significant correlation between these two facts. What about economic downturn? We considered the results, that are based on subjective opinions from supervision groups within social welfare field. Most of the members have claimed, that economical crises has a hard influence on quality of life, comparing with past. Not only in terms of having smaller payment, but also related to having less of free time, by being less satisfied in general sense.

### *From crisis to development of values*

Third point "From crisis to development of values" is also indirectly connected with economic crisis. As it seems that economical crisis is global phenomenon, Slovenian people have noticed that also crisis of values is a problem in case of Slovenia.

Such standpoint was confirmed due to fact, that people were ranging family, health and honesty as indicators of values, very high. With regard to World Values Survey from 2011 (measuring of six statistical elements: family, friends, leisure time, politic, work and religion), element of family is ranged very high, together with elements of friends and work.

While elements of family, friends and health are placed in private life, elements of honesty and work appears to be more publicly monitored and mutual connected. So, since the information have nowadays become more transparent comparing with past, people have chance to judge easier, whether individual became rich through honest work, or not. When has happened, that leaders or managers have used dishonesty for personal interests, it was a big disappointment for people.

### *Individual and collective happiness*

We started with the point, how happy are the Slovenian people, with regard to World Value Survey from 2011. Results show, that nearly 20 % of them are very happy, nearly 64 % are rather happy, while not happy at all are 2 % of them.

*Table 2: Happiness in Slovenia*

SLOVENIA	Number of cases	% / Total
Very happy	208	19.5%
Rather happy	682	63.8%
Not very happy	152	14.2%
Not at all happy	19	1.8%
No answer	5	0.5%
Don't know	3	0.3%
(N)	(1,069)	100%

Source: World Values Survey 2010-2014 in Bernik (2013)

From the table above we can see that most Slovenian are actually happy. As we have found the difference with subjective measurements, the final conclusion from here goes on direction that individual happiness is not recognizable in cross-national survey. Collective happiness in socialist society was managed by the state and it is completely different from collective happiness of postmodern society. What is collective happiness behind the state and behind the statistic, is opened question to individual culture context.

### **Conclusion**

There are noticeable differences between national and cross-national survey, which need to be reduced or alleviated through usage of additional qualitative approaches, such as case studies or deep interviews, for example.

The economical development is not a guarantee for happiness, as many researches show. But, as we have found out, in case of the economic downturn, correlation with happiness exists. The economic crisis has the influence on happiness, especially looking from perspective on short time.

Final standpoint from perspective of social work, with regard to claim, that money is not needed for peoples' happiness, is totally agreeable. Especially having in mind a reflection

of happiness primarily on philosophical level. But, when we are focusing to happiness on level of practice and policy, there is a hypothetical treat, speaking from a perspective of social work in its dealing with poverty and social exclusion that Governance could say – the poor people have happiness, while rich people, who are not so happy, have at least their goods. Such potential logic should not be considered and taken seriously in anyway in future. Because, hunger, poverty are not going together with happiness.

If people are hungry and see the others, how they are throwing food away, then such picture is totally missed and it can not be a picture of collective happiness, what suppose to be after all, a final goal of society of welfare.

*“The nation is happy as much as is happy the weakest individual.”*

In the end, what we have found out about initial question what Slovenian people can learn from Bhutanese to increase the level of happiness? Proudness. Be proud to leave in small, green country, with values and people with good heart.

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