Chapter 13

SATISFACTION IN 10 COUNTRIES: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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In:Willem E. Saris, Ruut Veenhoven, Annette C. Scherpenzeel & Brendan Bunting (Eds.)
A Comparative Study of Satisfaction with Life in Europe
Eötvös University Press, 1995, Budapest, ISBN 963 463 081 2, pp. 223-229

1 INTRODUCTION

In line with earlier comparative research we found large differences in satisfaction across countries. Average satisfaction is highest in North-Western Europe and lowest in the East-European nations. The South-European nations score in between. This pattern is observed in average satisfaction with life-as-a-whole as well as in satisfaction with three life-domains (finances, housing, social contacts) with minimal exceptions. Within countries, individual satisfaction is hardly related to social position as measured by age, gender, education and income. This result is also in line with earlier results. On the other hand we observed high correlations between life-satisfaction and domain-satisfaction which differ in order in some countries from what was expected in Chapter 1.

In Part II the results of the research in the different countries have been presented. In several countries comparisons are made between the new data and existing data. These comparisons have shown that minor differences in the wording of the questions lead to quite different responses. This result is not new but found in many studies (Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Schuman and Presser, 1981; Converse and Presser, 1986; Billiet et al., 1986). This is an illustration of the necessity to correct for measurement error in order to be able to compare results across data sets and across countries. These corrections have been applied to three topics in each of the studies in order to make comparisons across countries with respect to:

- satisfaction levels measured on a 5-point scale
- an explanation of observed differences in satisfaction by demographic variables
- the correlation between general satisfaction with life-as-a-whole and satisfaction with specific life-domains (finances, housing, social contacts).

In this chapter we will bring the findings of the different countries together, and in the next chapters these results will be further discussed while in the last chapter an effort will be made to formulate a theory which can explain most of these results.
Level of satisfaction in countries

2 LEVEL OF SATISFACTION IN COUNTRIES

In Scheme 1 the responses from the four satisfaction items in the different countries are summarized. All four satisfaction variants are measured with a five points response scale. First of all it is clear that there is a considerable variation in the level of satisfaction across countries. The largest variation is seen for satisfaction-with-finances. In Flanders 85% of the population

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is satisfied with the financial situation while in Hungary only 17% is satisfied. This is not the only topic for which the differences are large. Also for satisfaction-with-life in general the variation is very large; again in Flanders the satisfaction is the highest (96%) and in Hungary it is the lowest (33%). The variation in satisfaction-with-housing is a bit less; from 89% satisfied in Flanders to 43% satisfied in Russia. while for satisfaction-with-social-contacts the variation is the smallest, going from 91% satisfied in Flanders to 49% satisfied in Hungary. This analysis of the extremes shows that on all four domains Flanders had the most satisfied population. while Hungary scored the lowest on three of the four domains. Hungary was also close to the lowest score on the other domain which was satisfaction-with-housing.

Looking at the different domains separately, the data show a very regular picture. Satisfaction is highest in the West European countries, is a bit lower in the South European countries and goes even further down if we look at the Central and East European countries. The only slightly deviant case is the satisfaction-with-social contacts of the Tatarian and Russian population. They are more satisfied with their contacts than some Western and some Southern European populations. This clustering seems to suggest that satisfaction across countries is related to income per head of the population. Although this is an interesting finding it is nevertheless also interesting to see if other clusterings are possible which might connect with different criteria. Chapter 14 presents the results of formal procedures in order to see whether different clusters of countries can be obtained from the scores on all four satisfaction variables simultaneously. In Chapter 15 it is shown that the clustering presented here is one which is found in other studies as well, and therefore corroborates these results.

3 CORRELATES

Next to the above analyses at the societal (macro) level, we also performed analyses at the individual (micro) level. Individual satisfaction was related to social position and individual satisfaction scores were related mutually. Both results are summarized below.

3.1 Relation between satisfaction and social position

In part II a second issue was the explanation of satisfaction by different background variables. The literature suggests that the four variables used, age, gender, education and income, do not explain much of satisfaction. This is certainly surprising for the variable income which seems to he a good predictor of the average satisfaction level across countries, as we have seen in the last section and which is also mentioned in the literature. One possible explanation for this lack of explanatory power could be measurement error. Therefore one of the purposes of this study was to see what happens to the explaining power of these variables if the satisfaction variables are corrected for measurement errors.

In Scheme 2 the results of efforts to explain the different satisfaction variables with these four variables are presented. In this scheme the explained variance is presented in two ways: uncorrected and corrected for measurement error. When the explained variance is corrected for measurement error the corrected R^2 gives an unbiased estimate of the explanatory power of the four objective background variables.

These results are clear. The background variables considered here hear little relation to satisfaction. Age, gender, education and income explain typically less than 5% of the variance in satisfaction. Only in a few cases do we see percentages in the range of 10 to 20%. In the column of financial-satisfaction the percentages are a bit higher but not much. These results suggest that these social positional variables do not explain much of the variance in satisfaction levels. As we said before this is surprising especially for the income variable. Therefore, Chapter 16 looks again at the relationships between objective living conditions and subjective satisfaction in order to detect if there are still reasons for doubt with respect to this lack of relation on the individual level.

3.2 Relation between individual life satisfaction and domain satisfactions

As noted in Chapter 1, there are two theories about the relationship between satisfaction with life-as-a-whole and satisfactions with specific domains of life. Both theories suggest that, for the domains which were most salient for the respondents the domain satisfaction will provide the strongest relation with the satisfaction with life as a whole. It was suggested that the domain of finances would be more salient for the central and east European countries, while the social contacts would probably be more salient for the West European countries, given the financial situations in these countries, while the southern countries would probably have a middle position in this respect. Therefore, we expected that for West European countries satisfaction with social contacts would be more strongly related to satisfaction with life-as-a-whole. On the other hand, in Eastern Europe it would be satisfaction with finances which would have the strongest relationship with life satisfaction. These correlations could not be taken directly from the data because these estimates are likely to be biased upwards by method effects and downwards by random measurement errors. Therefore a test is done of these correlations where correction for both measurement errors is taken into account. The results of this test are summarized in Scheme 3. Scheme 3 shows high correlations. The correlations go up to .90. This is in extreme contrast to the correlations with the background variables in Scheme 2, where explained variance was mostly below .10. Earlier studies have also shown high correlations between life-satisfaction and domain-satisfactions. However, the earlier correlations were not corrected for measurement error, and could therefore be biased. It was shown for example in Chapter 12 that the order of the correlations for the Tatars was changed by correction for measurement error. The correlations in Scheme 3 are corrected for measurement error, by means of the method described in Chapter 2. Thus, we can now be reasonably sure that we are dealing with better estimates of the correlations.

Looking at the differences between the correlations we see that the expected differences between the countries can he seen with some exceptions. First of all Germany, as one of the richest countries of Western Europe. has a higher correlation between life satisfaction and satisfaction with finances than with satisfaction with social contacts. On the other hand Catalonia (Spain) and Italy behave in a different way than was expected according to the results in the first scheme. Italians seem to put more emphasis on income than the Catalan people. Finally the Tatars are the exception in the Eastern countries having a slightly higher correlation or satisfaction with social contact than for satisfaction with finances. We will have a second look at these results in Chapter 17.

4 DISCUSSION

All these results have been obtained with correction for measurement error. This is the new aspect in this study compared to previous studies. However these corrections for measurement error did not change most of the already reported results by other researchers. In particular, the explained variance by the demographic variables did not increase much. The most important reason is the very low explained variance itself so that the correction must be very small with a reasonable quality of measurement. The correction for measurement error in the correlations between the satisfaction variables had quite a large effect. The order of the correlations for the Tatars was even changed. The absolute size of the correlations increased substantially in many cases. This means that the random errors are much larger than the systematic effect of the method used for these variables. The final result was that the order of the different correlations was, in several countries, different from what we expected in Chapter 1

In Chapters 14 and 15 we look once more at the result that richer countries are more satisfied than poor countries. In Chapter 16 and 17 we check once more the result that the demographic variables can not explain much of the variation in individual satisfaction. In Chapter 18 we try to find if a clustering of the countries can be found which is more in line with the expectation of Chapter 1. Finally in Chapter 19 we summarize the results and will formulate a theory which is in agreement with all the empirical results found in this study and in the research of others.

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Scheme 1

Percentages of people who are satisfied (+) satisfied nor dissatisfied(?) or dissatisfied (-) for 13 different populations in Europe and four domains.

Population	Life in General			House			Finance			Contact		
	+	?	-	+	?	-	+	?	-	+	?	-
Flanders	96	3	1	89	7	4	85	10	5	91	7	2
Walonia	91	5	4	88	7	5	74	17	9	90	7	3
Brussels	88	8	4	82	10	8	70	17	13	85	9	6
Netherlands	89	10	1	66	27	7	75	22	3	63	30	7
Germany	83	15	2	78	16	6	71	24	5	84	14	2
Norway	92	6	2	80	16	4	68	14	18	86	8	6
Sweden	78	17	5	85	11	4	62	21	17	74	19	7
Italy	77	12	11	82	8	10	66	19	25	74	13	13
Spain	67	24	9	57	27	16	38	36	36	75	18	7
Tatars	58	34	8	50	26	24	32	39	30	81	16	3
Russians	42	44	14	43	29	28	19	40	41	79	17	4
Slovenia	44	47	9	57	29	14	29	48	23	54	34	12
Hungary	33	52	15	52	29	19	17	37	46	49	37	14

Scheme 2.

Explained variance in individual satisfaction by Age, Sex, Education Uncorrected- and corrected for measurement error.

Population	Life in General		House		Finance		Contact	
	uncorr	corr	uncorr	corr	uncorr	corr	uncorr	corr
Flanders	.02	.03	.04	.06	.06	.09	.04	.04
Walonia	.03	.05	.03	.04	.06	.09	.03	.03
Brussels	.03	.04	.08	.09	.13	.17	.03	.03
Netherlands	.01	.02	.03	.05	.10	.14	.00	.00
Germany	.09	.10	.05	.05	.20	.21	.15	.15
Norway	.05	.07	.03	.04	.10	.13	.03	.04
Sweden	.01	.02	.01	.02	.06	.07	.03	.05
Italy	.08	.10	.03	.04	.13	.14	.03	.04
Spain	.05	.08	.06	.07	.04	.06	.00	.00
Tatars	.01	.01	.06	.07	.09	.11	.01	.01
Russians	.02	.02	.09	.10	.13	.14	.01	.01
Slovenia	.02	.03	.03	.06	.04	.06	.02	.05
Hungary	.12	.19	.12	.16	.09	.13	.05	.08

Scheme 3.

The correlations between life satisfaction in general and satisfaction with 3 specific domains corrected for measurement error in 13 populations.

Population	House	Finance	Contact
Flanders	.54	.54	.75
Walonia	.73	.58	.95
Brussels	.60	.58	.80
Netherlands	.35	.46	.50
Germany	.44	.52	.44
Norway	.26	.23	.52
Sweden	.79	.52	.88
Italy	.47	.41	.59
Spain	.45	.72	.48
Tatars	.60	.79	.50
Russians	.37	.83	.32
Slovenia	.47	.58	.60
Hungary	.41	.55	.38