

INTEGRATION OF DATA AND THEORY: A MIXED MODEL OF SATISFACTION

Willem E. Saris

Chapter 19: 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. 280-297

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this book several relationships between satisfaction variables have been studied, with the maximum effort given to correct for measurement error in the data so that the best possible estimate of these relationships can be established. This research has led us to the conclusion that any theory on life satisfaction should at least be able to produce the results summarized in the first five statements mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Next we have tried to formulate a theory which can indeed explain the before mentioned empirical evidence. A mixed model of livability and comparison theory has been formulated within a number of equations and the necessary assumptions which make it easier to verify the consequences of this theory. It has been shown that all of the statements derived from the empirical evidence are in agreement with this model. It has also been argued and it could be demonstrated in a similar way too that both the livability theory and the comparison theory alone couldn't explain all the empirical evidence, which now exists in this field. This is, of course, a strong argument that our new theory, the mixed model in this research should be considered. An interesting feature of the mixed model is that it suggests that the correlations between life satisfaction and domain satisfactions are spurious relationships caused by positive and negative experiences. This means that the mixed model does not agree with either the top down or a bottom up explanation for these correlations. *

In the mixed model both positive and negative experiences play an important role. However, so far these variables have not been measured. It would be interesting to look for measures of these variables. In this way the model could be estimated and tested. It would be especially useful if the assumptions with respect to the equality of the parameters across persons and domains could be tested. An important role is also played by the subjective aspiration levels which people impose on themselves. These aspiration levels can cause a lot of bad experience if they are placed too high and a lot of positive experiences if they are placed rather low. However, it is not known how people determine their aspirational levels, or when people change these aspirational levels or how they are changed. This would be another important issue for further research.

* In principle both alternatives could be formulated with minor changes to the model but this will not be discussed here. We leave this puzzle for the reader.