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## ABSTRACT

Happiness here is investigated by means of 12 young people from Serbia and Norway. The main instrument was interview with a short questionnaire. Happiness is in line with other studies found to be a complex human quality with a variety of meanings and numerous influences. These meanings can be divided into *actual* happiness (predominant positive feelings and satisfaction of life), *ideal* happiness (complete and lasting one), *good fortune or luck*, *the pursuit* of happiness, *creation* of happiness and meanings of happiness within the terms of Aristotle's *Eudaimonia* (leading a virtuous life). The influences on happiness can be broadly divided into three groups. Important external influences are state policy and living conditions, work, money, free time and mass media influences and standards of physical beauty. Interpersonal influences are relationships, whereas important intrapersonal influences on happiness seem to be personality factors, cognitive factors and personal goals. Differences between two countries are emphasized regarding the satisfaction with state policy and living conditions. Cultural effects are taken into consideration when making comparisons between the two countries. Regarding the stability in happiness, we found that happiness rather goes up and down depending on what happens in one's life. Regarding the effects of happiness, it seems that being happy brings numerous positive effects. We concluded that happiness can be changed (despite our relative control and responsibility) and that it is a desirable goal.

When our results are confronted to the major theories of happiness, we argue that none of them (set-point theory, cognitive and affective) can by themselves explain all the variance in happiness. Critical questions were addressed to every theory of happiness. The important challenge for further research is to uncover how internal factors and events and circumstances interact (Diener, 1984). Very important is also to identify universal and cultural specific factors of happiness and to uncover how universal causes might be channelled by culture (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). One general future perspective is the methodological and theoretical sophistication. In this area there seems to be many self-help books and as the scientific studies of happiness are pretty new (they started in 1960), there is a great need for explicit scientific research. Even more so, as happiness is the bottom line of all desire, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) the supreme good where all the rest is means to attain it (Aristotle in Myers, 1992).

*When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down "happy". They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life. - John Lennon*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Happiness is among scholars commonly regarded as the central dimension of personal experiences and emotional life. Accordingly, it appears to strongly correlate with well-being - if someone is happy we normally assume that he or she is doing fine and vice-a-versa (Haybron, 2005). In our ordinary practical reasoning we regularly use happiness as a proxy for well-being and an indicator of how well a person thrives in life, hence our tendency to claim: "I just want you to be happy" (Haybron, 2005).

According to Pascal, happiness represents the motive of every act of every individual, metaphorically expressed as even the motive of those who go and hang themselves (Pascal in Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Or in Aristotle's words, happiness is the supreme good, so important that all else is merely a means to attain it (Aristotle in Myers, 1992). So important that America's Declaration of independence is rooted in our human right to the pursuit of happiness (Myers, 1992). Happiness, therefore, could be said to be "the only intrinsic goal that people seek for its own sake, the bottom line of all desires" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 821).

Yet, interestingly the scientific study of happiness is pretty new (the first survey studies were performed in 1960s in the USA) and the literature is full of existing dilemmas and diversities with regard to this issue (Veenhoven, 1997). There is no clear and accepted definition and the existing theories tend to be divergent. Happiness implies "the meaning of which everybody knows, but the definition of which nobody can give" (as cited in Lyubomirsky, 2001, p. 239). Whether happiness is the product of thinking or of emotion, whether it is a state or a trait, whether it results from comparison or from gratification of needs are just some of the controversies that take place here (Veenhoven, 1991b). According to Veenhoven (1991b) part of the problems lies in the varieties of meanings that the term happiness has in common language. Similarly, to Haybron (2003), happiness is among the most "obscure expressions in English language" (p. 307) and when people talk of being happy, they seem to have different things in mind, sometimes life satisfaction, sometimes emotional conditions and sometimes nothing precise (Haybron, 2005).

This author wonders whether there is a straightforward answer to what happiness is and whether happiness denotes a unitary phenomenon (Haybron, 2005). Due to these theoretical diversities and inequalities, Dodge even emphasized that “the theory of the happy life has remained at about the same level that the ancient Greeks left it” (as cited in Veenhoven, 1991b).

In line with this, philosophers today commonly refer to happiness in the same way that Aristotle did (Haybron, 2005). This ancient Greek philosopher defined happiness (*eudaimonia*) within external criteria as a virtuous life (Diener, 1984) and claimed it as “the whole aim and end of human existence” (as cited in Lyubomirsky, 2007). The main scope for Aristotle was to find out how we should live our life in order for it to be considered a happy life (Haybron, 2000). Virtue was prescribed as the normative standard against which people’s lives can be judged (Diener, 1984). Happiness in Aristotle’s view figures as an evaluative matter that goes beyond the scope of psychology. This is a question for ethics, a question of value: what sort of life makes a person better off (Haybron, 2000). Yet, although it is not hard to imagine a person to feel happy without leading a virtuous life (Kesebir & Diener, 2008) many scholars agree that happiness and *eudaimonic* well-being are sufficiently close (Kesebir & Diener, 2008) and that leading a happy life implicitly includes something of ethical values and virtue (Haybron, 2005).

This problem is closely related to a distinction between ideal and actual happiness. Ideal happiness is defined as “complete and lasting and that touches the whole of life” (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Such happiness, pure, perpetual and perfect is probably beyond anyone’s reach. However, people can still experience predominant positive emotions and be satisfied with their lives. This, the so-called actual happiness, an attainable one, is what the psychologists are interested in (Kesebir & Diener, 2008).

However, beyond this basic agreement, the psychological literature is full of different views on happiness, sometimes opposite. Thus, there are attitudinal views where happiness is said to be a “happy” disposition and a positive attitude towards life (Veenhoven, 2006b). Also, very common are definitions on happiness as an affective phenomenon (*ibid.*). Some authors, however, regard happiness as a cognitive phenomenon. Happiness here is the result of a deliberate evaluation process between standard and reality (*ibid.*). These views reflect different theoretical assumptions, which will be described later. Importantly, within these different definitions, diversities are still possible. For instance, Veenhoven (2006b) does not distinguish between hedonistic and affective views of happiness.

He uses them interchangeably (Veenhoven, 2006b), whereas Haybron (2001) finds the distinction between these two important, and to him, happiness, defined as emotional state, is not reducible to hedonism. Instead, it incorporates emotions and moods, whereas hedonism includes only experiences (pleasant and unpleasant).

In addition, there are mixed definitions on happiness that combine one or more of the above elements (Veenhoven, 2006b). For instance, to Sumner's (1996) being happy means having a *positive attitude* towards life, which involves both a cognitive component (positive evaluation of life) and an affective component (feeling satisfied or fulfilled by life).

Veenhoven (1984) who uses happiness and life satisfaction as synonyms is also the representative of these hybrid views and to him, happiness or *life satisfaction* is "the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life as a whole in a positive way" (p. 22). According to Veenhoven (2006b), when evaluating their lives, individuals use two distinct sources of information: their affects and their thoughts. These appraisals represent components of happiness. Hedonic level of affect refers to pleasantness in feelings and moods. Contentment refers to the degree in which a person perceives his or her aspirations to have been met (Veenhoven, 2006b). The affective source of information is more important than the cognitive one (Veenhoven, 2006a). Yet, these two appraisals tend to coincide and people who *feel* happy also tend to *think* their life is satisfying (Myers, 1992).

Diener, Lucas & Oishi (2002) share a similar view and to them *subjective well-being* (SWB) is "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life" (p. 63), which is the definition that is most commonly used when investigating happiness (Diener, 1994). Subjective well-being, defined in this sense, includes three components: life satisfaction, absence or low levels of negative emotions and the relative presence of positive emotions. The reason to include negative emotions is due to the fact that early studies on subjective well-being surprisingly revealed that pleasant and unpleasant affects are not simply opposite from each (Diener et al., 2002). In these studies, answers on questions about positive functioning did not predict answers to questions on negative functioning (Ryff, 1989). The two dimensions were found to have different correlates; hence they seem to be independent dimensions (Diener et al., 2002). This finding has important practical implications for it indicates that attempts to eliminate negative states will not necessarily foster positive states. In the authors' words, "the elimination of pain may not result in a corresponding increase of pleasure; ridding the world of sadness and anxiety will not necessarily make it a happy place" (Diener et al., 2002, p. 64).

Therefore, psychologists do not have consensus on what happiness is. Yet, the above conceptualizations where person's (cognitive and affective) *evaluations* are emphasized are the most common holds on happiness (Argyle, 2001; Diener, 1984; Diener 1994; Diener et al., 2002; Ryff, 1989). Psychologists seem to agree that "the way people perceive the world is much more important to happiness than objective circumstances" and that happiness is an inherent *subjective phenomenon* (Diener et al., p. 68). Individuals themselves are, thus, the best judges of their own happiness. Conceptualized as such, happiness represents a democratic concept (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). It is not the experts who make the judgments, but people and if people do not consider themselves happy, then in some sense the society is not succeeding (Diener & Oishi, 2004). To express the point, psychologists use the expression "subjective well-being" with the same meaning as happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2007) and I shall also use the term interchangeably in this paper. It can be argued that psychologists are interested in the subjective side of well-being (a person's feelings of happiness, a person's feeling of satisfaction with life) rather than objective measures such as health and money, which can have potential influence, but are not an inherent or necessary part of happiness (Diener, 1984).

Authors also raise questions about whether happiness can be permanently enhanced. Three major theories differentiate with respect to this issue (Veenhoven, 2006b). Two of them use different arguments, but maintain that happiness cannot be changed (Veenhoven, 1997). First is cognitive theory to which happiness is a matter of mental constructs and entirely a relative issue. Comparisons are regarded as the main cognitive mechanism that people use when assessing how happy they are (Veenhoven, 1991a). Since standards of comparisons always adjust, happiness cannot be permanently changed (Veenhoven, 1991a). The second theory, the so-called set-point theory also holds that a better society will not make people happier (Veenhoven, 2004). Yet, here, happiness is regarded as a fixed trait or a stable disposition towards life (Veenhoven, 1994). People are said to be in some way "programmed" to experience a certain degree of happiness (Veenhoven, 2006b). Finally, there are some theories that would answer affirmatively on the possibility raising levels of happiness. This is affective theory that views happiness as a reflection of how well people feel in general. Happiness is said to be a matter of affective experience rather than cognitive appraisal and people are regarded as not capable to adjust to everything (Veenhoven, 2006b). Happiness, seen here, seems to depend on the gratification of basic human needs and since these needs are viewed as universal among people, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" can be created (Veenhoven, 2006b).

Authors finally do not agree on whether happiness represents a desirable value at all. In the nineteenth century the “pursuit of happiness” represented the backbone of utilitarian philosophy. Happiness was considered as the highest good and the final “utility” and these philosophers claimed political priority in attempts to promote human happiness (Veenhoven, 1988). However, although this ideology was widely accepted, certain scholars denounced it as undesirable due to happiness being not good at all (*ibid.*). Many negative effects of happiness were stressed, which were often mixed with effects of hedonism. Happiness is said to turn people into “contented cows”, to spoil and to lead into selfish individualism (*ibid.*). To this group of thinking, the “pursuit of happiness” would create a society of selfish egoists and even a mild unhappiness seems to be a preferable state (*ibid.*).

With regard to methodology issues, they are no less problematic. Whether happiness can be measured validly is an important issue. Happiness is measured with questioning, direct or indirect and in personal interviews or by anonymous questionnaires and great doubts have been expressed with regard to such self-reports (Veenhoven, 1991b). Methodological concerns will be described thoroughly in the methods part.

Being aware of all of the mentioned problems and dilemmas, the aim of this research was to investigate happiness by means of 12 young people in Serbia and Norway. In examining this issue an interview seemed to be the most appropriate way. Happiness is pervaded by subjective meanings and it cannot be examined by the questions prepared in advance, but needs to leave enough space for the informant’s personal story. We were interested not only in how happy young people in Serbia and Norway are, but also which meanings they attach to the concept and how they experience happiness.

## **2 THEORY AND RESEARCH ON HAPPINESS**

### **2.1 THEORIES OF HAPPINESS**

#### **2.1.1 COGNITIVE THEORY**

This theory figures in the literature within the different names: comparison or discrepancy theory (Lyubomirsky, 2001), judgment theory (Diener, 1984), relative standard theory (Diener & Lucas, 2000). Whatever the variant, this is a view on happiness as a product of human thinking, a life satisfaction issue. People seem to compare life as it is with standards of how life should be, whereby the better the fit, the happier the person (Veenhoven, 1997).

Happiness is said not to be sensitive to the actual quality of life (Veenhoven, 1997), rather the actual context is decisive. The same event can be evaluated positively or negatively depending on what it is compared with (Smith, Diener & Wedell, 1989). An implication of this view is that people might be unhappy in perfect living conditions taken that they strive for more and be perfectly happy in misery taken that they have decreased their aspirations and have adjusted to the given circumstances (Veenhoven, 1991a).

However, reality has an important role in determining the context in the sense that once the living conditions of an individual change for worse, his/her standards get lower and vice-a-versa (Veenhoven, 1997). Happiness, following from these assumptions, is regarded as essentially relative and since standards of comparisons do always adjust, there is little chance for happiness to be changed permanently (Veenhoven, 1991b).

Standards of comparison, circumscribed as arbitrary concepts, can be of different nature. Yet, due to their personal salience, certain authors hold that people tend to use goals as standard, rather than any standard when making life satisfaction judgment (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

A standard can also be time/previous experience and in that case the focus is on whether we are better or worse than before (Veenhoven, 1997). However, people would not feel happy long after things have changed for the better in their lives for they would soon get used to that level and as a consequence feel neutral again (Veenhoven, 1991a). Happiness, in this view, is doomed to oscillate around a neutral level.

The social comparison variant asks how well we are relative to others, in particular to compatriots of about the same age and social class. Permanent happiness is again unlikely due to our reference having a tendency to drift towards the ones who are more successful (Veenhoven, 1997). According to Martin (2008), similarly, people's prestige oriented comparisons have a devastating impact on their happiness.

A related view is that people make comparisons with their aspirations. It is commonly held that the more people are getting what they want the happier they are about their life (Veenhoven, 1991a). Yet, since aspirations are almost impossible to be gratified, people do not necessarily feel happier after the things are changed for better in their life. Every positive change would be followed by the emergence of higher demands (Easterlin, 2001).

This is the major postulate of the "hedonic treadmill theory". The idea is that our emotional systems adjust to almost anything and that people in common behave in accordance to the cliché: "the more I have, the more I want" (Martin, 2008). So if a person experiences a certain success, he/she will never enjoy his/her success lastingly, as shortly after they will start to take for granted what they have (Gauthier, 1967). Adam Smith would say that sooner or later people would adapt to anything that is their permanent situation (Adam Smith in Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Tolstoy similarly observed that there are no conditions to which an individual cannot adjust (Tolstoy in Kesebir & Diener, 2008).

Some authors emphasize that people use not one, but several standards when they evaluate their life. People rely not only on their aspirations, but also on what people around them have, whereby the more they have and the more people around them have, the more is needed for a decent life (Veenhoven, 1991a). To Michalos even more standards are important and one complex calculation incorporates not only what people want and what others have, but also what they need and what they deem fair (Veenhoven, 2006b). Among these standards, the perceived gap between what one has and what one wants appears to be the best predictor of happiness. Moreover, it figures as a mediator between all other discrepancy variables and happiness (Veenhoven, 1991a).

There are certain implications of this theory. On the bases of its postulates, this view on happiness implies that foremost, changes in living conditions can affect happiness at best temporarily. Also, this theory argues that people tend to be typically neutral about their life and happier after hard times. Finally, and maybe the most important, this theory predicts that happiness for everybody is impossible, as one's happiness requires another's unhappiness (Veenhoven, 1991a).

There are findings that speak in favour of cognitive theory of happiness.

Followers often allude to empirical evidence that the lottery winners seem not to be happier than others and that even paralyzed accident victims tend to adjust to the experienced accident (Brickman, Coates & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). Studies have also shown that happiness is weakly linked to objective conditions and strongly to subjective ones. One possible explanation is that standards adapt to any circumstances, whereby the more stable the condition, the more likely that standards adapt (Veenhoven, 1991a). Despite a doubling of income per head in decades after the Second World War, inhabitants in European and US states did not become much happier (Brickman et al., 1978). Several investigators have similarly reported high levels of happiness among unfortunate people, which is again an evidence for the “adaptive” view of happiness. Once the standards of comparisons adjust to failure, people can remain fairly happy in spite of serious misfortune (Veenhoven, 1991a).

### **2.1.2 SET-POINT THEORY**

This theory regards happiness as exclusively an internal matter, as a general tendency to react similarly across different situations (Veenhoven, 1997). This view does not allow for variations of happiness even in the short run, but implies the stability throughout the life span (Veenhoven, 1991b). Happiness is believed to be beyond the control of an individual, irrespective of what is happening in her/his life. People are regarded to “be programmed” in some way to experience a certain degree of happiness (Veenhoven, 2006b).

There is a classic religious version of this theory, it is the belief in Divine predestination and that God has *a priori* decided that the “chosen ones” will be happy and others not (*ibid.*). In psychology, this way of reasoning follows secular arguments and assumes that happiness is an issue of mental inclinations that are beyond our control (*ibid.*). This is commonly regarded as the “top-down” view on happiness. The idea is that there is a global propensity to experience things in a positive way and that this propensity influences the interactions that individual has with the outside world (Diener, 1984). Happiness, seen here, is not a matter of happy feelings *per se*, as commonly held, but rather a global tendency to like or dislike things. Notably, in this stance, a person seems to enjoy life because he or she is happy, not vice-a-versa (Diener, 1984).

There are two major variants of this theory that coexist. In the individual variant, the so-called “happy personalities”, happiness is regarded as a fixed trait, as an aspect of a personal character. This aspect is to some authors regarded as innate and rooted in born temperament. We are born as either happy or unhappy, those who are born happy are prone to feel cheerful and to be positive about their life, whereas those who are born unhappy are prone to depression and to perceive and to judge their life negatively (Veenhoven, 1994). Other authors argue that happiness is an acquired disposition, a developed positive attitude towards life (Veenhoven, 1994). Personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism shape this attitude and they determine our affective responses to what happens to us (Veenhoven, 2006b). Whatever the variant, the implication is that a better society will not make people happier since “subjective happiness is too invariant to respond to improvements in real quality-of-life” (Veenhoven, 1998, p. 211).

There is research that provides empirical support for these assumptions. Firstly, happiness tends to be and commonly remains stable in time and even if changes do occur, they are typically short-lived (Veenhoven, 2006b). Also, as we have seen, several studies have reported a great discrepancy between objective conditions and the subjective appreciation of life that was presented not only as the evidence for the cognitive view on happiness, but also for the set-point view (Veenhoven, 1994). Twin studies also provide answers as to why some people are by nature and temperament happier than others (Lykken & Tellegan, 1996). Empirical support can further be found on studies that investigated the relative impact of external and internal factors on happiness. The typical finding is that external factors, commonly operationalized as social resources (income, status, social networks, education) and life events (marriage, illness, job loss, etc.) explain less variance in happiness than internal factors, commonly referred as personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, self-esteem, etc.). This was presented as evidence that happiness is merely psychological (Veenhoven, 1994).

A collective variant of this theory, “happy nations”, on the other hand, depicts happiness as a part of national character (Veenhoven, 2004). Individual happiness seems to be a relatively stable characteristic of a given nation and differences in happiness between nations reflect shared cultural values and beliefs, rather than individual joy and grief (Veenhoven, 2006b). Veenhoven (2006b) refers to this view “Folklore theory of happiness”. The common idea is that “much of who we are, what we think and feel, and how we act is determined by the culture in which we live” (Diener & Lucas, 2000, p. 60-61). Self is socially and culturally constructed entity (Kitayama, Duffy & Uchida, 2007).

The protagonists search for what is unique in cultures and how cultural practice transform human psyche. They consider comparisons as dangerous and they search for unique patterns of experience and they argue that cultures should be assessed from an internal frame of references (Diner & Oishi, 2004). People eat, behave and relate in culture specific ways, they emphasize. People also think and feel and act in culture specific ways, ways that are defined by practices and particular meanings of their everyday life (Markus & Hamedani, 2007). Cultural approaches to human happiness follow the same assumptions; happiness is said to be constructed and experienced within a social and cultural context (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004).

Happiness is differently conceptualized in different cultures. In individualistic cultures, in those who place an individual above the group, happiness is regarded within the terms of a personal achievement, whereas in collectivistic cultures, in those where the group stands above the individual, happiness represents “an inter-subjective state that is grounded in mutual sympathy, compassion, and support” and is constructed as a realization of social harmony (Uchida et al., 2004, p. 226). Predictors of happiness between the two cultures are also different. Person’s emotions seem more important in individualistic culture, whereas the extent to which one’s life is in accordance with the wishes of significant others is more important in collectivistic cultures (Diener et al., 2002).

Beyond this rough distinction, how happiness is strongly embedded into a socio-cultural context could still be seen all over the world and throughout human history. At some places in the world happiness is regarded as undesirable and is concealed. This is the case in the Ifaluk tribe that lives on a small Pacific Island. Its inhabitants regard happiness as unacceptable behaviour and others would react with anger to a person who is feeling happy, who would then become anxious (Argyle, 2001). In Elizabethan England similarly, it was desirable to feel melancholic, especially for poets and intellectuals. In China, it is important to have a modest demeanour. They like ancient Greeks are afraid of punishment by fate if they are too happy (Argyle, 2001). In certain cultures negative emotions are seen as neutral, for instance, in Confucians cultures of Asia (Argyle, 2001). There are also cultures which encourage experience and expression of positive emotions and conceal negative and this is especially the case in USA where high scores of happiness are partly due to social norms (Argyle, 2001). In Latin America, similarly, negative emotions are regarded as very undesirable and happiness and life satisfaction in these countries have greater importance than in certain other societies, such as Pacific Rim of Asia (Diener et al., 2003).

In Japan, expression of emotions depends on whether it is in public or not, whereby to show the negative facial expression in public is labelled as not acceptable. In public one should smile (Argyle, 2001).

The cultural effects are underestimated when trying to understand the differences between the nations (Diener et al., 2003). Some cultures are less happy than others and the reasons were commonly found in how a specific country is able to satisfy basic human needs. Yet, these differences don't have to be a result of an actual emotional experience, but rather of culturally shaped values and norms of happiness (*ibid.*). Notably, happy and unhappy nations maintain even when the income differences are controlled (Myers & Diener, 1995). For instance, Italians seem to be easy going, whereas Swedes seem to have a gloomy outlook on life (Veenhoven, 1994). These differences seem to be due to cultural variation in outlook. Collective beliefs and values that exist in society seem to have an important influence on the individual evaluations of life (Veenhoven, 2006b). Therefore, an explanation of differences between nations within the terms of differences in "livability" might sometimes be misleading, although in some cases it is valid (Diener, et al., 2003).

### **2.1.3 AFFECTIVE THEORY**

Affective theory, as the name speaks for itself, regards happiness as a reflection of how well one generally feels. When assessing enjoyment in life, people are said to use typical heuristic that if "I feel happy all the time, then I must be happy", rather than cognitive appraisal and mental calculation such as "I have what I want, I must be happy" (Veenhoven, 2006b). In this account, it is unlikely for a depressed person to state that they enjoy life. Neither is it likely that people can be happy in miserable conditions such as chronic danger, starvation or loneliness, "not even if they have never known better and if their neighbours are worse off" (Veenhoven, 1991a, p. 18). An obvious implication is that happiness does depend on external influences and that it can be changed by means of improving the "livability" of the environment (Veenhoven, 2006b).

To followers of this theory, being happy or unhappy depends on gratification of basic human needs that seem inborn and shared by all humans. Needs are commonly defined as “the bio-psychological prerequisites for functioning, which are innate, largely unconscious and universal” (Veenhoven, 1991a, p. 14). Maslov’s theory has better than others succeeded to grasp what is involved in these innate needs and the current view in psychology follows his assumptions. Accordingly, today it is common to speak of various organic needs (food, sex), social needs (belonging, social ties) and higher self-actualizing needs (mastery, control, meaning, etc.) (Veenhoven, 1997).

Whatever the needs postulated, to representatives they are an evolutionary product, crucial for our functioning and our survival (Veenhoven, 1991a). Nature is further said not to leave this crucial gratification to the means of conscious reasoning alone. Rational thinking was developed later in evolution, it was added to an existing affective system and didn’t replace it; therefore, it cannot be the main way. Nature seemed to take care of us by linking the need gratification to a hedonic experience. Pleasant and unpleasant affects seem to be supervisors of our functioning and well-being (*ibid.*). In line with this, Damasio has demonstrated that injuries in the parts of the brain, which are responsible for our affective responses, leave patients unable to think and make choices even when their thinking is still intact (Damasio in Veenhoven, 2006b). Cognitive appraisals could therefore be said to play at best an additional role in the assessment of happiness (*ibid.*).

Notably, evolution tends to bring about a good fit between species and their environment and happiness, therefore, in this view, seems to be a natural state of an individual (Veenhoven, 1997). In line with this, most people seem happy. An analysis of 43 nations showed that 86% of the sample was above neutral level (Diener & Diener, 1996). Happiness could be said to require livable conditions, but not paradise (Veenhoven, 2007).

On the other hand, it is unlikely that people will adjust to all conditions and everything cannot be relative, there are differences in the livability of cultures (Diener & Oishi, 2004). There are some “sick societies” where conditions are miserable, which have a dramatic impact on human happiness, for instance, Nazi Germany. Today, this could be said for the countries that are immersed in continuing civil war or those in which basic human needs cannot be met (Diener & Oishi, 2004). In line with this, happiness is higher in the nations that provide most safety and allow most autonomy (Veenhoven, 1997).

## **2.2 DEMOGRAPHY OF HAPPINESS**

### **2.2.1 AGE**

Many people believe that there are notably unhappy times of life, typically stressful teen years, the midlife crisis and declining years of old age. But research show that knowing one's age provides no meaning for the person's average sense of well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). The predictors of happiness do vary among different generations, for instance, satisfaction with health becomes more important in later life (Myers & Diener, 1995). And the emotional terrain is different for different years - variation of moods is a feature of youth (Myers & Diener, 1995) and as years go by feelings seem to mellow (Myers, 1992). Yet, despite these age related differences there is no evidence that a particular time of life is notably happier or unhappier than others (Myers & Diener, 1995). Whatever the explanation, be it reduced stress, newfound sources of joy, lowered aspirations or acceptance of life, older people show as much happiness as the younger generation (Myers, 1992).

### **2.2.2 GENDER**

Research has also confirmed that gender does not seem to be a predictor of a person's happiness. For instance, in a meta-analysis of 146 studies, gender has shown to account for less than one percent of people's global well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). That gender is not a predictor of happiness has also been proven in a study of 18,032 university students surveyed in 39 countries around the globe (Myers, 1992). In another study, conducted among 16 nations, similar results occurred, namely, 80% of women and 80% of men regarded themselves at least fairly satisfied with their life (Myers, 1992).

However, these overall results seem to obscure some important gender differences. The sources of happiness are different for the two genders. For women, family and children bring the most joy, whereas for men, job and economic satisfaction figure as happiness factors (Argyle, 2001). The intensity of experience of different emotions is also different for different gender, with a typical finding that women experience stronger emotions than men, both positive and negative. Women are twice as likely to become depressed and to suffer from anxiety or neurosis and they experience more negative emotions in everyday life (Argyle, 2001). However, they also seem to have a greater capacity to experience intense joy under good circumstances and that is probably the reason why they report being happy as men (Myers & Diener, 1995).

## **2.3 INFLUENCES ON HAPPINESS**

As it has been said already, a number of studies have shown that happiness is fairly stable in time and that it strongly correlates with stable personality traits (Diener et al., 2003). Following from these results, many authors have turned their attention towards understanding the relation between personality and happiness (Diener et al., 2003). The important psychological question was to determine the traits that contribute to happiness the most. In study after study, extraversion, self-esteem, a sense of personal control and optimism were commonly found to be inner traits of a happy person (Myers & Diener, 1995). On the other hand, there are certain objective factors identified as having some impact on happiness. Especially important seem to be work, leisure and social relationships, to which Argyle (2001) refers as the main causes of happiness.

### **2.3.1 TRAITS OF HAPPY PEOPLE**

#### **2.3.1.1 EXTRAVERSION**

Sociable and outgoing people tend to obtain higher score on happiness tests (Myers, 1992). Compared with introverts, extraverts seem to be happier both when they live alone and with other people, when they live in rural and urban areas and when they work in solitary and social occupations (Myers & Diener, 1995). The explanation seems to be partly due to their temperament. Costa and McCrae (1980) emphasize that extraverts are simply more cheerful and high-spirited. However, Argyle (2001) has carried out a series of studies in which it has been observed that happiness of extraverts is partly due to the joys that follow engagement in social interaction, which is greater for extraverts because of their superior social skills. Extraversion is also in other ways indirectly related to happiness. Extraverted people are obviously more involved with people and are likely to have supportive social relationships, which are the greatest single cause of happiness (Argyle, 2001). Extraverted people also experience greater social support and more affection, which is an important source of well-being (Myers, 1992).

### 2.3.1.2 SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is most commonly defined as a stable sense of personal worth (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996) and has been found to correlate with happiness in many studies (Argyle, 2001). Individuals with high self-esteem are also less prone to drug and alcohol addictions, they show more initiative and resilience and more persistence after failure (Myers, 2008).

However, there is an important problem with studies of self-esteem where all scores tend to be skewed towards high self-esteem where “even low-scoring people respond in the midrange of possible scores” (Myers, 1992, p. 110). Following from here, some authors have suggested that responses reflect self-serving bias, rather than true feelings (Myers, 2008). Yet, although it has been acknowledged that most people exhibit self enhancing perceptions of themselves, this does not necessarily invalidate self-esteem scores. People seem to function best with modest positive illusions (Myers, 1992) and “an individual who fails to endorse self-esteem scale items at least moderately is probably clinically depressed” (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, p. 123).

### 2.3.1.3 A SENSE OF PERSONAL CONTROL

According to Rotter, people have generalized tendencies to perceive events as either being under their control or being due to other people or fate or luck (Rotter in Argyle, 2001) People who have a strong sense of controlling their life are consistently found to be happier (Argyle, 2001). Personal control is also an important factor of mental health. When deprived of this feeling (people living under totalitarian regime, prisoners, concentration camp victims and even those in well-meaning nursing home), people experience low morale and more stress, suffer worse health and feel depressed and helpless (Myers, 1992).

Therefore, it can be argued that for optimal level of well-being it seems not important to *have* what we want, but to *do* what we want and to feel as rulers of our life (Myers, 1992). In line with this, it has been proven that “severe poverty demoralizes when it erodes people’s sense of control over their life circumstances” (Myers & Diener, 1995, p. 14) and that people tend to thrive best when they live in conditions of democracy and personal freedom (Myers, 1992). Consequently, happiness is higher in the nations that provide most safety and allow most autonomy (Veenhoven, 1997).

#### 2.3.1.4 OPTIMISM

Optimism is most commonly defined as a global expectation about a positive future (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Yet, to Lyubomirsky (2007), optimists are people who have a tendency to look on the bright side of life in general and not only regarding the future. These people recall good things in the past, rather than bad, they feel good about their future and the future of the world, they notice what is right, rather than what is wrong and they have a positive view of others. Following from this, it seems hard not to expect that optimists will be more successful, healthier and happier than pessimists - studies reveal a common sense and something that could have been anticipated (Myers & Diener, 1995).

### 2.3.2 OBJECTIVE FACTORS

#### 2.3.2.1 SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In an evolutionary perspective, relationships present the most important factor responsible for survival of *Homo sapiens* (Lyubomirsky, 2007). We are predetermined to be social creatures and the need to belong seems crucial for us. Deprived of familiar attachment, people experience meaningless and children reared in institutions or in homes under extreme neglect, often feel withdrawn, speechless and frightened (Myers, 1992).

To Argyle (2001), social relationships are the greatest single cause of happiness and empirical evidences go in line with this. When asked about the causes of happiness, most people report satisfying relationships with family, friends or a romantic partner before anything else (Myers, 1992). The causal direction between social relationships and happiness is bidirectional. Satisfying social relationships make people happy and happy people are also more likely to acquire them (Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Failing in love is usually rated as the strongest source of positive emotion (Argyle, 2001). In study after study, married people are happier than the single, widowed, separated or divorced (Myers, 1992). The power of love is due to great intimacy that partners share. Some more cognitive processes are also involved, for instance, being loved enhances self-esteem (Argyle, 2001). Family life is also found to be a source of happiness although it can be extremely stressful at times (Argyle, 2001) and is generally a source of our “greatest heartaches” (Myers, 1992).

Simply being with friends is found as a source of joy. In a Larson's study friendship was shown as important not only for those in their 20-s, but also for older individuals (Argyle, 2001). Benefits of friendships are partly due to enjoyable activities friends do together. But friends are also likely to be similar, to share attitudes, beliefs. Thus, by liking us and by having high opinion of ourselves, our self-esteem rises (Argyle, 2001). However, care for other people implies not only seeking rewards for ourselves, but also concerns about their welfare and in close relationships people are even more occupied with needs of others, which is found to be an important source of positive emotion (Argyle, 2001).

There are several explanations why relationships are important factors of happiness. According to Argyle and Furnham (1983) there are three major sources of satisfaction in relationships – instrumental rewards, emotional support (both given and received) and companionship. Benefits from relationships are also due to satisfaction of important social needs like the need for affiliation or intimacy (Argyle, 2001). Relationships can also be looked at as resources, properties, which help people to cope with challenges and achieve certain goals (Argyle, 2001). Whatever the explanation, the relationships are found to have a notable impact on happiness that goes above the effects of personality. Relationships seem to be special and unique phenomena, beneficial by themselves (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007).

#### 2.3.2.2 WORK

Generally speaking, job satisfaction is the psychological concept that more comprehensively than others reflects a complex interaction that exists between one person and his/her job (Guzina, 1988). Most commonly job satisfaction is defined as a general relation towards a job. That general relation is according to some regarded as an affective relation. Job satisfaction is then operationalized as the degree to which a person loves his/her job (Guzina, 1988). Others regard job satisfaction as a generalized attitude towards the job, which is comprised of three components: affective (love towards a job), cognitive (opinion of job in general, of social relationships, of income, of work conditions etc.) and behavioural (employees' readiness for intercession, for change of work etc.) (Guzina, 1988).

To expect that job satisfaction is related to life satisfaction is likely since a majority of people work around seven to eight hours a day during the working days (Argyle, 2001). However, although in general employed are happier than unemployed (Argyle, 2001; Diener, 1984; Myers, 1992), the truth is that a job does not have to be important in the life of every person and it is not unusual to represent solely a means for existence.

In this case, job is necessary, but not important in itself (Guzina, 1980). On the other hand, jobs may involve an activity highly evaluated by one. In this case, it becomes the central aspect of life. In accordance with this, the subjective experience/feeling of an individual extends from a dissatisfaction and sadness to a satisfaction and feeling that the person has realized his/her possibilities (*ibid.*).

Many studies have confirmed the importance of job satisfaction not only for immediate work behaviour, but for wider life satisfaction. Yet, job satisfaction will be a cause of life satisfaction if work has an intrinsic, not an extrinsic value (Guzina, 1980). The content of work seems to be the major source of job satisfaction (Dejvis & Seklton, 1975). In line with this, there are big differences in job satisfaction among workers and it commonly rises with complexity in working tasks. Hence, experts are in general more satisfied than workers (Dejvis & Seklton, 1975). In one study, 91% of mathematicians and 82% of lawyers said that they would choose the same job again compared to 16% of steel workers. This motivation seems not related to the level of income (Argyle, 2001). When people are asked of whether they would still work, if they inherited a large fortune, nearly everyone (4 in 5) who experience non-material rewards at work (a sense of identity, community and purpose) say yes. When they do not experience such rewards, many more answer no (Myers, 1992). Whether or not a specific job is challenging is also an important issue. Studies have shown that “the most satisfied workers find their skills tested, their work varied, their tasks significant” (Myers, 1992, p. 132).

In line with this, the work is often unsatisfying for two reasons (Myers, 1992). People can feel overwhelmed. When challenges are greater than one’s skills, people feel stressed and become anxious (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991). People can also feel underwhelmed. When tasks do not present a challenge and do not engage people’s skills, people feel bored (*ibid.*). Between anxiety and boredom, there is a subjective condition where challenges are matched with skills. As Csikszentmihalyi (1999) states, this condition is called “flow”, where a person experiences the highest levels of well being.

### 2.3.2.3 LEISURE/FREE TIME

In the nineteenth century the work-day lasted fourteen, even eighteen hours. Today, it lasts from seven to eight hours and futurists predict the four-day working week (Kacavenda-Radic, 1992). Along with changes in duration of the work-day, work has stopped being the central part of life. Instead, leisure has obtained a greater importance for the individual. Leisure and happiness are today almost synonymous (Cohen-Gewerc, 2006).

Leisure or free time is commonly regarded as a period of time when people are free from work or other obligatory activities (Kacavenda-Radic, 1992). What is specific about free time is its relative autonomy. The way of using free time is largely based on preferences of an individual. An individual is here free and possesses autonomy in deciding what he/she truly wants to do and how to do it (Friedmann & Naville, 1972). Thus, the freedom of choice is an important feature of free-time and although the choice itself exists until a certain level in the work time, free time should correspond the most the one's needs, interests and attitudes (Kacavenda-Radic, 1989). Following from these assumptions, to expect that leisure will be a cause of happiness is likely, as it is likely that people will choose the things they enjoy (Lu & Hu, 2005).

However, important to underline, free time will not always be a cause of happiness and when it represents an empty space with which people do not know what to do, it will bring unhappiness (Kacavenda-Radic, 1989). Therefore, there is a great importance of using free time in an active and a rich way (Argyle, 2001; Kacavenda-Radic, 1989)

According to French sociologist Dumazedier, free time represents the greatest possible potential for a development of an individual (Dumazedier in Kacavenda-Radic, 1989). This is due to free time being multi-dimensional (here an individual can use all his/her abilities) and multi-functional (in free-time a person can have fun, be creative, do some sport or exercise etc.). Hence, its possibilities for development are limitless. Work time is, on the other hand, mostly one-dimensional (in work man uses a limited part of his abilities) and one-functional (people work to satisfy his/her existential needs). "Determination" is, to him, an important feature of work time and "indetermination" of free time (Dumazedier in G., Friedmann & Naville, 1972).

Research findings suggest that regardless of whether they are engaged in serious and committed activity or not, most people are very pleased with their leisure (Lu & Hu, 2005). Some studies have also found leisure as the strongest source of life satisfaction (Argyle, 2001). Research in this area found both, short-term benefits of leisure including positive mood and immediate satisfaction and long-term effects on happiness, mental and physical health, and social integration (Lu & Hu, 2005). These findings seem to have a great practical importance, since leisure (unlike personality, work, and relationships), as we have said, is largely under our control and can easily be changed (Argyle, 2001).

## 2.4 MONEY AND HAPPINESS

Most people believe that increased income would make them happier. “Few agree that money can buy happiness, but many agree that a little more money would make them a little happier” (Myers & Diener, 1995, p. 12-13). An established economical belief is also that growth of income will improve happiness. The prevailing theory seems to be “more is better” (Easterlin, 2003).

Yet, the results of many studies do not confirm the common sense and although the correlation between the wealth of a country and the happiness of its inhabitants exists, it is far from being perfect (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Irish are, for instance, happier than wealthier West Germans (Myers & Diener, 1995), Swedish score lower than Japanese even though both are economically developed and industrialized (Diener & Oishi, 2004). Japanese also do not seem to be much happier than people from India, and Latin Americans are in some respects happier than European countries (Diener, 1984). Within one country, even more apparently, after being able to afford life’s necessities, increasing levels of income matter surprisingly little and “there is a only a slight tendency for people who make a great deal of money to be more satisfied with what they make” (Myers & Diener, 1995). Data over time is the most revealing and it indicates that as country is becoming more affluent, increases in income are not followed by equivalent increases of individual happiness (Drakopoulos, 2007). Authors refer to this as the “paradox of happiness” (Drakopoulos, 2007).

There are several potential reasons why material rewards do not provide the happiness we expect. First reason lies in the fairly universal phenomenon of “relative deprivation”, which takes place when resources are distributed unevenly. Then people would evaluate their possessions not in terms of what they need in order to live in comfort, but in comparison with those who are better off (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). As a consequence, even those relatively affluent would feel poor and unhappy when comparing themselves with the very rich (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Second reason is related to first and lies in an already mentioned phenomenon of escalated aspirations. People strive for certain levels of affluence and believe that it will make them happy, yet when they reach it, they quickly become habituated and start to set higher demands (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Homan states that “any satisfied desire creates an unsatisfied one” (as cited in Easterlin, 1974). In line with this, the Chicago tribune asked people how much money would fulfil their dreams and people who earn 30,000 dollars asked for 50,000, whereas those with yearly incomes over 100,000 said that 250,000 would make them satisfied (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Ungratified aspirations can explain one more curious phenomenon. People tend to think that they were less happy in the past and that they will be happier in the future (Easterlin, 2001). According to Easterlin (2001), this is due to the fact that people by mistake assume that their current aspirations will remain the same throughout the life cycle, while their income grows. Yet, as aspirations seem to grow along with income, income growth does not contribute to well-being.

Finally, material rewards alone are certainly not sufficient for a person to be happy. Other factors such as, close personal relationships, a happy family life, an existence of goals and diverse interests has proven to be more important for happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Previous research showed that people who are strongly motivated by money are less happy (Headey, 2008). Moreover, materialism has proved to be a strong predictor of unhappiness (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

However, although organizing life around possessions has a devastating impact on happiness (Argyle, 2001), this does not mean that material rewards in general detract from happiness. Rather, it seems that there is a certain minimum threshold after which income stops to add to a person’s happiness and becomes irrelevant (Argyle, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Drakopoulos, 2007, Myers & Diener, 1995; Veenhoven, 1997). “It increases happiness dramatically by moving individuals out of poverty, but thereafter it contributes little and haphazardly to happiness” (Martin, 2008, p. 177). This seems also as a relevant explanation for why the relationship between income and happiness is more pronounced among poor nations than among affluent countries (Veenhoven, 1997) and for why there are low levels of subjective well-being in very poor countries (Diener et al., 2003). As Myers and Diener (1995) emphasize, money seems to produce similar reactions among people. Having it doesn’t guarantee happiness; yet its absence can produce misery.

## 2.5 THE EFFECTS OF HAPPINESS

Utilitarian philosophers of the nineteenth century conceptualized happiness as the highest good, as the most important prudential value and they interceded for the promotion of happiness to become a political priority (Brulde, 2007). The pioneer of this philosophy was Jeremy Bentham (1970), according to whom, goodness of one action should be judged by the utility of its consequences, rather than by the decency of its intentions. As human happiness had been conceived as the final utility, the good policy was regarded as the one that makes people feel good about them. Following from these assumptions, it has been argued that the success of state policy should be evaluated by the observed happiness of people. Accomplishment of other prudential values such as fairness or equality is less important for the policy to be assigned as good (Duncan, 2005).

Not all authors agree that happiness can be permanently changed for better (Veenhoven, 2006b) and two theories, as could be seen, hold that this is an impossible human ambition (Venhoven, 1997). However, “the greatest happiness principle” is by some even denounced as undesirable, as happiness is a mere pleasure and an illusionary matter, trivial as and of less worth than other values (Veenhoven, 2004). One of the harmful side effects mentioned is that happiness turns people into “contented cows” and leads into idleness that no longer stimulates the search for a better life (Veenhoven, 1988). Happiness is also viewed to foster superficial hedonism, to lead to complacency and to inhibit initiative and creativity among people (Veenhoven, 2004). This line of thought also predicts that contentment induces a “glossy and rosy view”, which would ignore signs of danger and suffering (Veenhoven, 1988). Finally, it is argued that happiness weakens social bonds, leads to spoiling and makes us irresponsible and less sensitive to others’ needs. This is due to contentment resulting in selfish individualism by means of self-conceit (*ibid.*). Following from the said arguments, even mild unhappiness is presented as a preferable state, as the promotion of happiness seems to lead society into overall decay (*ibid.*).

Humanistic psychologists, on the other hand, emphasize broad positive effects of happiness and they view happiness as being both, a result and an accelerator of growth (Veenhoven, 1988). For instance, in Barbara Fredrickson’s (2002) “broaden-and-build theory” it is stressed that positive feelings allow individuals to explore the environment, to approach new goals and to build their intellectual, psychological, social and physical resources over time.

Decades of studies revealed these views on happiness and broad positive implications emerged. Happiness appeared not to be a matter of the pursuit of pleasure, but of striving for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Happiness seems to stimulate activity and to encourage active involvement, rather than to induce apathy (Veenhoven, 1988). Happiness also seems to accompany creativity, rather than to kill it and it facilitates social contacts and makes us more sensitive to others, whilst actually unhappiness involves preoccupation with oneself (*ibid.*) Compared to being unhappy, happy people are more responsive, more trusting and more loving (Myers, 1992). Happiness, furthermore, appears to buffer the impact of negative life events and to preserve good health, whereas a chronic dissatisfaction increases vulnerability to disease (Veenhoven, 1988). Myers emphasizes that emotions are biological events (1992) and that our body's immune system is more effective in fighting diseases when we are happy. When we are depressed, the number of certain immune cells declines (Myers, 1992). Thus, apparently, happiness is not only good for us, but it seems to bring out the best in people (Veenhoven, 1988). On the bases of these arguments, it can be stated that happiness is both an end and a means to more caring and healthy society (Myers, 1992).

### 3 METHOD

When happiness began to be investigated, there was a discussion whether it can be assessed validly. The following questions were addressed:

1. Can happiness be measured “objectively” or only “subjectively” by means of questioning?
2. If happiness can be measured only subjectively, do questions reflect an existing state of mind or they merely invite a guess?
3. If people do have an idea about their happiness, do their responses reflect that idea adequately? (Veenhoven, 1991b).

Measurement was long considered to be “objective”, “external” assessment similar to the measurement of blood-pressure by a doctor and the authors who follow up this positivistic doctrine stood up for the same scientific attitude in examining happiness (Veenhoven, 1997). It is clear, however, that happiness cannot be measured this way. Physiological correlates have not been discovered, nor has any overt behaviour been found to be consistently linked to happiness (Veenhoven, 1997).

Therefore, happiness must be examined by questioning: either direct or indirect and in an interview or by a questionnaire. Great doubts have been expressed about the validity and reliability of such self-reports (Veenhoven, 1991b). Critics have argued the responses do not reflect true feelings, but rather informants’ normative notions and desires (Veenhoven, 1997). People tend to agree, they shade truth towards the positive optimistic side (Myers, 1992). Most people rate themselves above the average happy. “But most people say they are very happily married in Britain though half of them will get divorced” (Argyle, 2001, p.17). It has also been emphasized that happiness results are compromised by the effects of people’s momentary moods (Diener, 1994). When our moods change, we perceive the world out there as different and as always have been so. Even trivial factor such as sunny day after rain is enough to brighten people’s reports of happiness. Moreover, even memories change with moods (Myers, 1992).

Thus, due to the reasons of social-desirability, ego-defence and the effects of moods, authors suggested that people (even if the questions are interpreted correctly, which is not always the case) who are actually not happy, tend to respond that they are (Veenhoven, 1997).

However, Veenhoven (*ibid.*) has found that these objections are not valid. People have no problems to answer questions on happiness and they are quite aware of their enjoyment in life. The responses on questions of happiness tend to be prompt, non-response rate is low and temporal stability is high. “Do not know answers” are also infrequent and stereotypical responses are not the rule (Veenhoven, 1984).

Myers and Diener (1995) also state that we can believe people’s answers. Effects of social desirability and current mood do not invalidate the happiness measures and, furthermore, people’s self-reported well-being converges with other types of assessment, including interviews rating or experience sampling measures in which feelings are reported on random basis in everyday life (Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993). The self-reported scales, further, correlate with personality measures and show high convergent validity (Diener, 1984). In addition, the scales correspond with non-self-report data, for instance, with certain demographic variables with the typical finding that advantaged groups are happier than others or that employed are happier than unemployed (Diener, 1994). Above all, those who describe themselves as happy are also rated as happy by their friends and their family members (Diener, 1984).

Therefore, self-reported measures could be said to possess acceptable levels of validity and reliability, although it is suggested that whenever possible, researchers should use multiple measures of subjective well-being in order to reduce error of measurement (Diener, 1994).

The most frequently used measures of happiness are single-item scales, which simply address a direct question like: “Taking all together, how happy would you say you are: very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy?” (Veenhoven, 1997, p. 29). Despite having been found to be reliable and valid, these measures seem not appropriate (Argyle, 2001). One problem is that they are too obvious and hence, likely to be affected by responses biases. In order to measure racial attitudes psychologists would not use a single, direct question like: “Do you like black people?” Instead, they use less direct items (Argyle, 2001). The second problem is that single-item scales do not offer differentiated view of a person’s subjective well-being. Happiness is composed of several components and this information is lost when using single-item scales (Diner, 1984).

Multi-item scales, therefore, are more appropriate and recommended; yet, for several reasons they do not correspond to the demands of this study. First, multi-item scales measure solely how happy particular person is - they do not reflect the reasons of one's (un)happiness (see Argyle, 2001 and Ljubomirsky, 2007). Second, the responses in scales, since being offered, could be said to narrow, moreover, to compromise the subjectivity of happiness. Finally, informants are in this study regarded as complex units, which is the demand impossible to be realized by use of any scale.

An interview seems to be the most appropriate way to examine happiness. Happiness does depend on certain objective conditions, but is mostly the minds, it depends how we look at things (Argyle, 2001). Accordingly, it must be investigated in depth through the meanings that individuals attach to the concept. By use of the interview, not of less importance, the qualitative aspects of happiness can be embraced. This method should provide the answers of not only who is happy and how happy the particular person is, but also the reasons why the particular person consider him/herself happy or unhappy (Oishi, Diener, Suh & Lucas, 1999). This question is commonly neglected in studies on happiness, but it has a profound value. It shows us causes of happiness and what we can do to put more joy in our lives.

Justification of an interview as an appropriate method is based on deeper reasons. We do not only consider it as an appropriate method when investigating happiness, but in general we could be said to be protagonist of qualitative methods. This is due to the following argumentation. According to certain social scientists, differences between natural and social sciences do largely exist and it seems not feasible for the methods of the natural sciences to be used in social sciences (Robson, 2002). These authors have challenged both; the opinion that science comes from natural science and the belief that one particular method is the best. To them, it seems necessary to get rid of the standard, positivistic view of science where the aim is to collect value-free facts/"hard" data, usually in the form of numbers which are then analyzed by use of statistical methods. Reasons are following. First, "constant conjunction" of events in strict sense doesn't exist. Psychology and other social sciences did not produce any scientific law yet. Second, social science deals with people as objects of research who are social persons, purposive individuals with their own wishes, perceptions and interests. Finally, it is not true that every scientist sees the same thing when looking at the same bit of reality. What he/she sees is determined not only by the characteristics of the thing observed, but also by the characteristics and perspective of the observer (*ibid.*). Moreover, the perceptions and meanings of a researcher do interfere in the research process in many ways, not even standardization and distance from the research object guarantee objectivity (*ibid.*).

But above all, as Toomela (2007) argues: “If quantitative prediction is the final goal of science, then this goal is very limiting. Phenomena can be understood by far more deeply than any correlation-based prediction allows” (p. 15-16).

The greatest benefit of this research seems, therefore, to be in the approach in examining this issue. Our ambition is to catch up the particularity and complexity of every informant with regard to his or her happiness. Afterwards, the aim is to compare the informants, but compare them not as averages, but as complex units. Hence, if the similar patterns are to be found between the informants, generalization will be on a higher level. If so, then this research can move from the solely ideographic knowledge to reach the stricter demands of nomothetic knowledge, at least for the sample group, hopefully and more. This research, further, in our opinion, entails more benefits as compared to the same research conducted just in one country. Notably, it will make us open to the perspectives and experiences of others that extend our horizons beyond reductionist views on reality.

In examining happiness, the goal is by no means different than in any other study. We seek for truth, but the informants are treated as “experts” in providing knowledge and not as objects and as informants of data, which is the case in quantitative research (Robson, 2002). Thus, for being scientific, I would agree with Robson (2002), it is not important to accept and follow up a positivistic view on science, but rather to have a scientific attitude within which every method is equally valid. By this, it is meant for the research to be carried out systematically, sceptically and ethically:

- *Systematically* means explaining in depth what is to be done and how and why it is to be done; in particular, “being explicit about the nature of the observations that are made, the circumstances in which they are made, and the role you take in making them” (p. 18);
- *Sceptically* means subjecting researcher’s ideas to possible disconfirmation and subjecting the findings and conclusions of the study to scrutiny (firstly by researcher, then by others);
- *Ethically* means that it is ensured that the interests and concerns of those taking part in or possibly affected by the research, are safeguarded.

On the other hand, the drawbacks of an interview and of qualitative methods in general need to be acknowledged. Here the level of subjectivity and the influence of the researcher on the results are especially emphasized. This is due to the fact that the permanent existence of reflections and interpretations represent their key feature (Robson, 2002).

The impact of the researcher on informants also needs to be taken into consideration. Interviews are generally conducted face to face and the sex, ethnicity or a role of interviewer (as a researcher, expert, scholar) is said to have a notable influence on informants (Langdrige, 2004). Especially emphasized is the threat of socially desirable effects (Robson, 2002). With a questionnaire this problem is better solved. Since they fill the form in privacy, respondents would rather be sincere (Robson, 2002). Thus, the self-rating of happiness is commonly higher in personal interviews than in anonymous questionnaires. Yet, this is not always the case. If the interviewer is in a wheelchair, modest self-presentation is encouraged (Veenhoven, 1997).

These objections call for awareness and it must be stressed that we did as much as possible to prevent and to minimize the interference of the personal bias of the researcher, the effects on informants and the occurrence of socially desirable answers.

The threat of personal bias is especially emphasized in Serbia, since sharing the cultural background and living in the same country necessarily implies certain pre-knowledge of what informants could think. There are some concrete measures undertaken in order to deal with this threat. Firstly, the interview guide is semi-structured with the questions mainly open-ended. There were no questions that would eventually lead an informant to a certain “wanted” answer. Secondly, we waited to conduct all the interviews before starting with transcription and analysis of data. In doing so, we attempted to prevent certain themes found in analysis to lead our next interviews. Of course, certain themes were noticed from the beginning, but they were not introduced. By focusing mainly on the interview guide and by not coming up with any “new” question that did not supervene informant’s previous answer, the occurrence of the said problem was hopefully prevented. To begin, we analyzed the data and after we wrote the theory. We wanted to minimize that the theory made us “see” and find evidences of what has been written, although pre-existing knowledge of the topic remained a possible bias.

The influence on the informants and the occurrence of the socially desirable answers were also an important consideration. In order to deal with them, we tried to use an appropriate language, to create “natural” atmosphere and to make informants relaxed and open enough to say what they really think. Not of less importance, we tried to appear neutral and not to judge or to look shocked and assuring anonymity and confidentiality were also means of helping informants to be sincere.

Finally and above all, every interview was tape recorded. Thereby, it allowed the researcher to deeply analyze and constantly reflect on the meanings of the narrative of every particular informant. If an analysis shows that informants contradict themselves this may be a sign that they are trying to present themselves in a positive light. For instance, there is a question of whether money is important for happiness and at the end of the interview guide informants are asked to make three wishes that would make them happy. If, for instance, they wished for money, but had previously radically stated that money has no relevance for happiness, this would be an obvious contradiction that would have significance for interpretation. A possible contradiction would also be if informants were, for instance, constantly being negative, complaining and expressing dissatisfaction, but later stating that they are happy.

The study sampling was purposive sampling since the researcher had to get right informants for a research. The age range was between 18 and 25 and, all in all, the sample consisted from 12 informants. Six were from Serbia and six from Norway. In each of these groups there were three females and three males. Three were employed after finishing secondary school and another three were students.

This sample was chosen for several reasons. Jeffrey Arnett (2007) holds that reaching adulthood has become increasingly prolonged in the modern world and that many young people between 18 and 25 have not fully reached adulthood as commonly held and that they feel somewhere in “between”, between being children and being adults. He refers to this period as emerging adulthood, which is characterized mainly by change and exploration of possible life direction. During this period, most people will try various possibilities in a variety of areas, especially love and work. However, at age 30 most of them will succeed to grow up and take responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2003).

Emerging adulthood is not a universal period (Arnett, 2000). This new phenomenon is a characteristic of cultures rather than countries. It is typical for the highly industrialized or post-industrial countries, but with the increasing globalization of the world economy, we can expect that emerging adulthood would expand rapidly in the whole world.

We were interested whether the concept of “emerging adulthood” works for the informants, namely, how young people between 18 and 25 in Serbia and Norway regard themselves and whether these specific ages have impact on their happiness. We were also interested how cultural and socio-economical differences are important for young people’s concept of happiness. Not of less importance, we asked ourselves whether gender differences produce certain variance in informants’ responding. Finally, it seemed interesting to compare students and employees and to see whether entering the job figures as a significant factor.

To find informants appeared as a bigger problem in Norway, than in Serbia. In both countries we relied on the same principle – to ask people we already know whether they can address us to someone who corresponds to the demands of our study. To find students in Trondheim was not problematic. However, finding a female employee caused a lot of headache and we almost gave up. Trondheim is a “student city”, hence it is hard to find people (and as it seems, especially girls) that after finishing secondary school have started to work without being involved in some kind of further education. We literally asked everyone we know if they could help us. We even asked strangers on the street and in stores all over the Trondheim that looked like a potential target to do an interview with. Eventually, after promising to pay, we found a girl that was compatible with the demands of our study. We also needed two male employees and after the experience with finding the girl, we could say that we were lucky to find them quite fast. In Serbia, almost within 24 hours we found the appropriate sample. Being native is certainly an important issue and it made a lot easier the fulfilment of this task.

The interview guide was divided into two parts. First is the narrative part where the informants should describe the situation in which they were very happy. Second is the problem focused part constructed to cover the following areas: meanings of happiness and happiness reports, causes of happiness, dynamics of happiness/stability in happiness, the responsibility of an individual for his/her happiness, the role of state policy and living conditions, the role of money, the role of media and perspectives for the future. The word areas should be underlined, since our aim was not to follow rigidly the interview guide, but rather through some general themes, to hear the story, to find out what is for the informant particularly important. Thus, individual differences that exist among people were embraced and their respect was even stressed by the question of adding something personally relevant we didn’t ask.

Apart from the interview as the main instrument, we used a short questionnaire that addresses basic demographic data of participants. The question of the amount of income and the satisfaction with that income were included in this short questionnaire. This should eventually help us to understand more deeply employees' relation towards money as the factor of happiness.

A pilot study was also conducted in order to examine how well the areas of happiness are covered with our semi-structured interview guide, are the questions clear, unambiguous and open enough and to test whether we fulfil ethical demands. On the basis of results of the pilot study, two questions were included into the final version. First is the question that addresses the role of media and how important standards of physical beauty are for a person's happiness. A Norwegian student emphasized that this has an impact. Second is the question that addresses the role of state policy for the happiness of an individual and how much politicians' acts are governed by citizens' happiness. This appeared as a major theme in a Serbian informant's narrative that has lived in Norway for several years. This informant actively compared these two countries while underlining dissatisfaction with the Serbian state policy and its contribution to citizens' unhappiness.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face. In Norway, interviews were conducted in English, in Serbia, they were in mother tongue. Even though we did not intend it to happen, interviews seemed to have diverse effects on informants. General ones were, however, more positive than negative and in line with Kvale (1996) they could be described as a constructive experience for informants. After the interviews were done, informants used to say that the study made them think about happiness and how important it is in life of every person and how it made them question whether their lives were heading in the right direction.

The different language used had an impact on the dynamics of interviews. In Serbia, the interviews seemed more natural and informants had fewer problems to express themselves and to make a point regarding their attitudes. We also felt more comfortable to speak in mother tongue and this was probably an additional factor for why in Serbia the interviews were conducted more in a way of an informal chat. In Norway, on the other hand, the interviews were conducted more in accordance with scientific demands and the researcher was on a greater distance, although still trying to make an atmosphere as relaxed as possible.

It seems that not only is it language and the shared cultural background that enabled more of a natural setting in Serbia, but the characteristics of the Serbian culture are an important factor. This means that it is not only easier for the people who belong to the same culture to find a mutual language, but the Serbians themselves seem to be more open and easier to get in touch with or to get to know. Serbian people are extraverted and oriented to each other. Hence, they probably have more developed social skills, which are relevant factors when using an interview as an instrument of the study. Moreover, interviews in Serbia were conducted at the homes of informants due to being a good host, which is in line with this, part of the cultural behaviour.

In Norway, on the other hand, some of the interviews were done in the rooms of the Dragvoll campus, whilst the others were conducted in the rooms of Dronning Maud mine. Hence, the place where the interviews were done made the atmosphere more formal and more rigid than in Serbia. When taking this into consideration the English language used and Norwegians being more closed and introverted, the differences in the “flow” of interviews between these two countries become understandable.

However, although interviews were conducted in one more natural setting, personal bias was a greater threat in Serbia than in Norway. This could also be said for social desirability effects. It was probably easier for Norwegians to say what they really think to “complete stranger”, whereas Serbians could feel the social obligation to present them in a good light. In Norway, on the other hand, we could say that we had more “objectivity”, but at the cost of the setting which could have been more natural.

Being “native” brought one more important fact. We could easily “read” the facial expressions of our people and their vivid gestures and it could be said that Serbian informants, although mostly open, still seemed different. On the other hand, one could say that all Norwegians (apart from only one) seemed the same, closed and introverted and that we could not make differentiation between them beyond this global judgment. This fact seemed very interesting and made us ask ourselves whether it is the belonging to a different culture that had coasts in ability to read their non-verbal signs. The English language used and the formal atmosphere certainly closed largely the possibility for variations and made them a homogenous group. But maybe it is also our inability to perceive the differences that is an important factor. In order to find out this, we asked Norwegian people who know some Serbians whether they see differences between Serbians in their behaviour and their talk. Norwegians stated to have the same problem as us. They are blind to differences between Serbians and have no problems in perception of differences between Norwegians.

Thus, it seems that the different cultural belonging necessarily caused a certain loss of data due to a phenomenon of a “cultural blindness”.

Also, it seems that interviews in Norway, which were conducted with girls, seemed more natural, although we are not sure whether it is the gender of the researcher that had a certain impact or that the girls in Norway are simply less shy than boys. In Serbia, we did not notice any differences when interviewing different gender.

There is also an important methodological concern that needs to be acknowledged. It refers to whether the different language used influenced responding (Diener, 1994). There have been investigation regarding this issue and empirical evidences among those with different languages within the same countries are encouraging. For instance, French and English speaking Canadians report similar levels of well-being when the same measure is translated into different languages (Diener, 1994). These results suggest that specific words used do not have an important influence on the overall score (Diener, 1994). However, it has been emphasized that despite the encouraging results, more research needs to be performed in this area. The issue is not only whether it is possible to adequately translate words, but whether the concepts themselves are comparable across different cultures (Diener & Suh, 2000). Diener (1994) gave an example of his mother that claims never to have been unhappy in her life, although admitting to have been sad or fearful. Apparently this person uses the word “unhappy” in a way that is not comparable to reports of many other people.

With regard to our study there are reasons to be optimistic. There were no problems to translate an interview guide from English to Serbian and to translate interviews conducted in Serbian back to English, although some loss of information was inevitable. On the other hand, whether the concepts are comparable appears as an important consideration for us. It seems encouraging that the aim of this study was to investigate meanings that young people attach to the concept of happiness. These meanings are not already assumed and already attached by the researcher, but invited to come from the informant. Nevertheless, there remains the concern of whether, for instance, the word satisfaction used by Serbian and Norwegian informant implies the same meaning.

After the interviews were done, the researcher would write down the overall impression of the interview and of the informant. For instance, Norwegian male employee II (23) and Serbian male employee (25) appeared both as optimistic persons that have very positive attitude towards life. This could have been observed not only from their narratives, but also from the good mood and the smile they had during the whole interview.

Sometimes we would write down something that represented a curious observation in the particular interview. For instance, that Serbian male student (21) reflects a lot on happiness as a matter of luck in his narrative. The impression wrote down could have been about similarities between the informants. An example is that Norwegian male employee I (23) and Serbian male employee (21) both reflect a lot on their job as a factor of dissatisfaction. Sometimes the notes would be about radical differences between informants. For instance, whereas Norwegian female employee (18) feels lucky to be born in Norway, Serbian male employee (21) is completely disappointed in the Serbian system and thinks that nothing works properly in his country. These notes have significance for interpretation of data.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by using the word-for-word transcription method. Transcription was done by researcher. Translation of interviews, which were conducted in Serbian back to English, was also done by researcher. One interview was translated entirely due to demands of university policy, while with regard to the others we have translated only the lines that will be used as quotes in interpretation part.

In analyzing data, the most appropriate seemed to be Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA aims to find out “how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). In IPA there is no attempt to test a hypothesis, the aim is to explore, in detail, an area of concern (Smith & Osborn, 2003), which is exactly what the aim of our study is.

Regarding the ethical reflections, it should be emphasized that we thought about whether this interview could do any harm to the informants. We did as much as possible to minimize the damage, if the issue of happiness appears to be in any kind painful. The informants were notified about the nature and all the aspects of the study and they were given their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity was emphasized and provided. Since being semi-structured, our interview guide has left enough space for the informants to say what they want to say and to conceal something that eventually represents a problem to talk about. This is one of the reasons why we generally avoided “why questions”, which in Bailey’s (2007) opinion should be excluded in any case since they represent leading questions. We only used “why questions” in order to get deeper consideration of something that the informant had already mentioned. Moreover, all the questions in the interview guide are ”positive”, there is no any question that addresses to some area that could provoke negative emotional reaction.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of results obtained in this study, themes that were recurrent in the narratives of informants are as follows: definitions of happiness and happiness reports, stability and responsibility in happiness, influences on happiness and effects of happiness. The influences on happiness that informants identified could be broadly categorized into three: external, interpersonal and intrapersonal influences. External influences that seem important are state policy and living conditions, work, money, free time, mass media influences and standards of physical beauty. The interpersonal influences were relationships. On the other hand, important intrapersonal influences seem to be personality factors, cognitive factors and goals that one has.

### 4.1 DEFINITIONS OF HAPPINESS AND HAPPINESS REPORTS

In order to find out how the informants define happiness, in certain studies the researchers simply asked a direct question of what happiness is or what the word happiness means in the informants' opinion (see Easterlin, 1974). However, putting this question straight-forward seems to be a problematic approach. The question is too abstract and might be difficult to respond to. Instead, what seemed more appropriate in our opinion was to ask our informants to describe a happy person. This question is more concrete and thereby easier to respond to and it incorporates in itself issues we are interested in – namely, the meanings of happiness for the informants.

Thus, two concepts emerged and were repeated throughout the narratives of the informants: definitions of happiness within the terms of life satisfaction and/or within the terms of feelings. Happiness is a matter of life satisfaction: *“When a person is happy I think that it means that a person is very satisfied”* (Norwegian female employee, 18). The same was emphasized by a Serbian female student (21): *“That he/she is satisfied with her/his life”* (Serbian female student, 21). On the other hand, a Norwegian male employee (23) emphasized that: *“A happy person is a joyful person.”*

Not only in the question where informants were asked to describe a happy person, but throughout the whole interview, these two themes were recurrent. Thus, a Norwegian male employee II (23) stressed plainly that happiness is an affective phenomenon. When asked whether he is happy or not, he responded: *“I do not really think about my mood. I just feel happy, you know.”* On the other hand, Serbian male student (21) seems to use life satisfaction and happiness as synonyms: *“But now I am completely satisfied.”*

Or: *“I mean, in general, I am satisfied with myself and with my friends. Hence, I can consider myself as a happy person”*. When he reflects on the stability of happiness, he again uses a “satisfaction” expression: *“More important is happiness, some kind of satisfaction within the family”* and when we asked whether it seems obvious when someone is happy, he replied: *“But that all depends on a person and whether he/she shows satisfaction.”*

Finally, a Serbian male employee (21) implicitly in his narrative defined happiness within terms, satisfaction and joy: *“From that moment everything went bad and I automatically felt very unhappy, i.e., dissatisfied and joyless.”*

As it could be seen, happiness in the informants’ views represents obviously a psychological concept and it is defined:

1. As being in a state of joy or other positive emotions;
2. As being satisfied with one’s life;
3. As being both, satisfied with one’s life and being in a state of joy.

This finding is in line with other research conducted in this area. Surveys that asked people what they mean by happiness have shown that happiness is often defined exactly within the terms of satisfaction or positive emotions (Argyle, 2001). Also, among psychologists, happiness is most commonly defined as a “person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener et al., 2002, p. 63). The two components, cognitive component (most commonly referred to as life satisfaction), which is a conscious global judgment that people make regarding their life as a whole and the affective component (hedonic level) - the presence of an ongoing pleasant affect - are the most often measured in research (Diener, 1994).

However, there are reasons to doubt whether “satisfaction” is a proper term for the cognitive component of happiness and whether people are making a cognitive evaluation of their life when they say that they are satisfied. In the Serbian language, satisfaction in general and therefore life satisfaction rather falls into the arena of emotions. In Serbia, when people say that they are satisfied, they seem to aim at an intuitive reflection based on feelings and “feeling good” as the result of this process (Trebjesanin, 2000).

Among scholars there are also diverse views with regard to this issue and not all define satisfaction as a cognitive state. To Veenhoven (2006), life satisfaction and happiness are synonymous and life satisfaction/happiness comprises two components: a hedonic level of affect (pleasantness in feelings, emotions and in moods) and contentment (the degree to which a person perceives his or her aspirations to have been met). “Satisfaction”, therefore, seems to be a problematic concept that cannot be universally defined as a cognitive state.

Consequently, asking people simply, especially those who come from different cultures: “how satisfied are you with your life as a whole” (Argyle, 2001) might imply different meanings to the informants and, hence, measure different things. Concepts themselves might not necessarily be comparable (Diener & Suh, 2000). Our study is not an exception, Serbians and Norwegians might not think the same when they define a happy person as a satisfied person. Accordingly, the finding, for instance, that Serbians are less happy than Norwegians might be of little value since we did not measure the same thing. Furthermore, people from separate cultures might have different tendencies in presenting themselves as happy according to their norms (Diener & Oishi, 2004). When taking into consideration that there seems to be a cultural norm to be satisfied and not to complain in Norway - “It is typical Norwegian to be good” as stressed by Gro Harlem Brundtland – then inferences that Norwegians are happier than Serbians might reflect this cultural norm rather than an actual emotional experience, which misleads us again (Diener et al., 2003). According to Diener et al. (2003), these cultural effects are commonly less considered when efforts are made to understand the differences between countries, but they emphasize the importance of caution in making comparisons of subjective well-being across cultures (*ibid.*).

What was also an interesting finding is that happiness for a Norwegian male employee II (23) is a natural state of an individual. In his words: “*We are born happy. That is in our nature... like monkeys, I think it’s the same deal, when they come out, all they want to do is playing. The same is with cats, dogs, everything, you know.*” Somehow similar observation was found in the thoughts of a Norwegian male employee I (23) who seemed convinced when saying that: “*I am sure that human being, I think, cannot survive without happiness.*”

These thoughts reflect the assumptions of the affective theory of happiness. Happiness, in this view, like health seems to be a natural state of an individual and people tend to enjoy life once their conditions are not too bad (Veenhoven, 1991b). There seems to be a great capacity for enjoyment in all of us. Areas in the brain that produce pleasant affects seem to be greater than areas that produce unpleasant affects and most people tend to feel good most of the time. Suffering, although it may be more salient than happiness, is not more frequent (Veenhoven, 1997). Evolution seems to take care and protect species by bringing about a good fit between them and their environment (Veenhoven, 1997). Happiness has a certain survival value and unhappiness would appear only in adverse living conditions from which there is no escape (*ibid.*). In line with this, all our informants declare themselves being happy.

However, the prevalence of satisfaction with life as a whole does not exclude complaints and suffering (Veenhoven, 1991b). The occurrence of headaches and worries among the happy people is not a proof for a response distortion. Life can seem hard at some times, but still be satisfying in the overall balance (Veenhoven, 1997). Bad feelings and the perception of problems may be to some extent beneficial to overall happiness. Realistic acknowledgment of deficits seems necessary so that people could cope effectively with the problems of life and maintain a positive overall balance (Veenhoven, 1991b). Lyubomirsky (2007) also writes that happy people do have their stresses, crises and worries. But their differences lies in poise and strength they show in coping when they face a challenge.

According to Norwegian employee male II (23), in line with this: “... *you can be in general happy and be in the bad mood.*” A Serbian female student (21) similarly hinted: “*In general I am happy...I mean everyone has moments when he/she feels that the whole world is breaking apart.*”

In these thoughts, furthermore, cognitive and affective component of happiness can again clearly be differentiated. These components are further said that tend to converge, but not necessarily (Diener, 1994). They tend to converge due to both being influenced by appraisals of one’s life events and they correlate “at levels sufficient to say that they are parts of a higher order construct” (Diener, 1994, p. 29). At the same time, they are likely to diverge, due to cognitive component being a “global summary of one’s life as a whole whereas hedonic level consists of ongoing reactions to events (and may also be influenced by unconscious goals and biological factors which may influence mood)” (Diener, 1994, p. 28). In this study, the informants’ views reflect an existence of divergence between the two components. When the informants emphasize being happy in general, they seem to aim at the conscious global summary of life as a whole, but when they refer to moments when life is breaking apart or to bad moods, this seems to represent the hedonic level.

This hedonic level is by certain authors subdivided further and usually a third component is included in measurement tests – the absence/the infrequency of depression, anxiety or other unpleasant affects (Argyle, 2001). This component has been found, for instance, in the reflection of a Norwegian female student II (22), who talks of a happy person in the sense of what he/she is not: “*The person is not sad, has no worries, no sad thoughts...*”

The reason why certain authors find it important to include third component in happiness reports is due to an interesting finding that positive and negative emotions do not represent simply the opposite from each other, but are independent and rather have different correlates (Argyle, 2001). These findings have a great practical importance as they warn us that our ability to delete sadness and grief in this world may not result in corresponding increase in human happiness (Diener et al., 2002). Happiness is not an absence of negative emotions, but a different quality. Along the same line, happy people might feel and probably do feel negative emotions too, but infrequently (Diener et al., 2002).

The idea that happiness does not represent a perfect condition is made apparent in the views of Serbian informants who deny the possibility of a complete happiness to happen:

*“Complete happiness cannot be achieved...Maybe you can create an image of your happiness and your ideal, but it is something that is built for years, you always want something more, at least that is what I think”* (Serbian female employee, 24).

A Serbian male employee (25) reflects not only on his views, but also on other people and again does not see the possibility of complete happiness:

*“I am not familiar with anyone ever saying that he/she has reached his/her happiness...I do not believe that it will ever be “it”, because I will always have something to strive to.”*

These findings highlight some important issues. Firstly, the informants' views reflect assumptions of a cognitive theory of happiness. One of the implications of this theory is that a human being is never satisfied. As stressed by a Serbian female student (21): *“I do not know anybody who is completely happy. Something is always missing”*. Also, the informants seem to be aware that one's aspirations do always rise, that people react in the way where *“the more they have, the more they want”* and that they will *“always want something more”* or *“have something to strive to”*, in their words. In these perceptions, complete happiness cannot be achieved. This is due to the fact that every success will be followed by the emergence of higher demands (Easterlin, 2001).

Thereby, it could be concluded that in order to be happy it seems not to be crucial to reach success by success, but rather it is the appreciation of what one has that really matters. Myers and Diener's (1995, p. 13) perfectly explained this by their words that *“satisfaction is less a matter of getting what you want than wanting what you have”* and this was recognized by the Serbian female student (23): *“I do not believe that there is complete happiness. Happiness rather depends on how much you are satisfied with what you have.”*

In the words of the informants, there seems to be hidden one more important meaning of happiness. As said before, one possible distinction that can be found in the literature is between ideal and actual happiness (Kesebir & Diener, 2008). Ideal happiness is complete and lasting; it is one dreamed state where the whole life is perfect (*ibid.*). In this meaning, happiness seems not to be about feeling happy, but about reaching this perfect state. Thus, since setting the highest demands, this form of happiness is probably out of reach from every individual (*ibid.*). This has been well recognized by the informants. They do not know anybody who has reached his or her happiness, they refer to it as an image or ideal and they do not believe that it will ever happen.

On the other hand, there is the actual happiness that simply refers to predominant positive feelings and satisfaction with life (*ibid.*). This happiness is attainable and this is what psychologists are interested in (*ibid.*). The informants seem to move between these two concepts. When they define happiness they refer to the psychological concept of actual happiness. The same stands when they refer to happiness as a natural state and when they state that they are happy or when they acknowledge bad moods and when they say that we all have moments when whole life seems to break apart.

A Norwegian male employee (23) adds one more meaning. According to him there is no complete happiness because: “...*you can always do something better for yourself and your life, you know.*” At other place he adds: “...*and make yourself a better person.*” Happiness, viewed here, is obviously an issue of ethics and is expressed in the meaning of Aristotle’s “*eudaimonia*”. As said before, Aristotle defined happiness within external criteria as a virtuous life (Diener, 1984). Happiness, in this view, is not an internal issue of “*happy feelings*”, as commonly referred, but rather an issue of a “*happy life*”, whereby one’s life is happy if a person leads a virtuous life. This concept obviously exceeds the scope of the interest of psychology. This is a question for ethics, a question of value (Haybron, 2000). On the other hand, the distinction between the two concepts is not so clear (Kesebir & Diener, 2008) and although it is not impossible for a person to feel happy without leading a virtuous life (Kesebir & Diener, 2008), leading a happy life seems to imply something of ethical values and virtue (Haybron, 2005).

## 4.2 STABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN HAPPINESS

Whether happiness remains stable in time or it goes up and down depending on what happens in one's life is an important issue. As it has been said already, a large body of research showed that happiness is fairly stable over time and that it is strongly correlated with stable personality traits (Diener, et al., 2003). Following from these results, many authors have turned their attention towards understanding the relation between personality and happiness and they have come up with a concept of happy personalities (*ibid.*).

Results of our study indicate that there is only one informant who could be said to reflect the characteristics of a happy personality (born with it or acquired). His happiness does not go up and down, in his own opinion, and external factors seem not to have impact on his happiness. This is the Norwegian male employee II (23) who stressed: *"I don't think I can be influenced by outside things very easy... I think I am kind of straight line happy."*

For all the others, happiness seems to be a variable state that is open to fluctuations, as being depicted by the Norwegian male employee I (23):

*"I think everybody is unhappy, no one is happy all the time. Everybody is unhappy at some point you know. There is always something to bring someone down or something to make you sad, so no one is happy all the time. Then something would be wrong with you. You have to be sad sometimes."*

This statement is radically different from the informant who is always happy and cannot be influenced by outside things and hence, one must ask to which outside things this informant refers to. Due to the fact that there are external conditions to which people are simply not able to adjust (Veenhoven, 1991a), it can be argued that this informant did not experience radical shifts in his life, which would certainly be strong enough to provoke certain changes in his happiness level. Therefore, it seems that the question is not only how happy a personality one appears to be, but also to which external factors the person is subjected.

To the Norwegian male employee I (23), previous bad experience even favours future happiness. This informant subtly observed: *"And you have to be unhappy to be happy, you know. You have to know what unhappiness is, to be really happy"*. This is in line with antic Greek philosopher Heraclitus's observation that life contains contrasts and that a good experience becomes good only when compared to a bad one.

According to him, if one weren't hungry, one wouldn't know the benefits of being satiated; if one didn't suffer in love, one wouldn't know the benefits of being loved; if there were no evil in the world, people would not know how pleasant is good (Heraclitus in Harris, 1994).

Thus, for most informants the level of happiness is not fixed, as being observed by certain authors (Diener et al., 2002). The fact is rather that people react on changing circumstances and events in their lives and that these changes are reflected in their reports on happiness (*ibid.*), as stressed by a Norwegian male student (24): *"If I have a fight with my friends, I will not be happy as I was before the fight."*

However, this seems to be a partial explanation and in order to understand the dynamics of happiness of our informants, their ages (18-25 years old) seem to be an important factor to consider. There are many studies that have been conducted with the aim to explore age differences in subjective well-being, which came up with interesting results. Student years and young adulthood, in line with our results, did not appear as the happiest years as often thought. Young people rather show increased emotional experience and emotional distress; they experience high levels of both positive and negative affects, they often change their moods and life is very up and down and very volatile, both pleasurable and stressful (Headey & Wearing, 1992). Similarly, according to Veenhoven (1991b), happiness in young adulthood (and in adolescence) is less stable probably due to living conditions being variable and attitudes towards life less crystallized. When asked about perspectives of their future, informants, in line with this, responded: *"I am still defining myself, I think - finding out what I want to do"* (Norwegian male employee I, 23).

Or:

*"I am still trying to find my way, I think. You know, I have a plan, maybe to be a fireman, but it's just talk, you know. Oh, I am tired to be a carpenter, I want to be something else, so I haven't really decided anything"* (Norwegian employee II, 23).

These reflections support Arnett's (2000) observation that reaching adulthood has become increasingly prolonged in the modern era. To him, many young people from 18 to 25 feel somewhere in "between", between being adult and being adolescent, although "age is only a rough indicator of transition" (*ibid.*, p. 477). He named this new period in life course "emerging adulthood", which is one moratorium stage characterized mainly by change and exploration of possible life courses (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2007; Arnett and Tanner, 2003). Notably, as this period represents ages of instability, happiness will also tend to be unstable during this period.

Therefore, we must agree with Veenhoven, (1991b) who argues that rather than saying that happiness is fixed, it should be said that it tends to get fixed in later phases of life, when changes in happiness is due to more serious life changes. However, we must add that these latter phases seem to move further in the life course, at least, regarding our sample group.

Reflections of Martin (2008) are also important. According to him, not only is one's happiness dynamic, but also "shifts in our attitudes can alter our assessments of when and how much we were happy during other periods of our lives" (Martin, 2008, p. 182). Thus, one can say: "I thought I was happy then, but now I know I was not" and it makes perfect sense. Or: "I did not have that feeling then, but now I consider those days as the best days in my life" (Martin, 2008). The conceptions of happiness as dynamic, rather than static was evident in a Serbian male employee's (25) excerpt, who currently as an adult and working, considers secondary school as the happiest period in his life, although he did not feel that way then. Therefore, it seems that with experiences, "we acquire a wider range of comparisons to use in assessing our lives and our attitudes can shift" (Martin, 2008, p. 182), although level of happiness has a tendency to get fixed as years go by (Veenhoven, 1991b).

Studies that have investigated the importance of the frequency of positive emotions and the intensity of them have also relevance here and they have found that happiness is the frequency rather than the intensity of positive versus negative emotions (Diener, Sandvik & Pavot, 1991). Relatively frequent positive emotions seem to be both necessary and sufficient causes of happiness, whereas the intense positive emotions are only weakly related to happiness. In order to explain these findings, authors suggest that people who experience intense positive emotions are likely to experience intense negative ones when unhappy. Thus, intense positive emotions seem to have emotional costs as being counterbalanced by negative "in such way that they do not greatly enhance the long term well-being and are therefore not strongly reflected in happiness measures" (Diener, Sandvik and Pavot, 1991, p. 128).

However, we also asked our informants whether and how a person is responsible and therefore able to influence happiness and this issue appeared to be very important for understanding the observed changes in a happiness level. On the other hand, both, responsibility and stability in happiness seem to depend on influences on happiness. These influences can broadly be categorized into those:

1. Inside the person
2. Outside the person
3. Between the persons.

There seem to be two cases when people cannot influence their happiness. In the first case, happiness is a fixed trait and stability is a result. People are simply born with it or not or they simply do have developed positive attitude towards life or not. This is the case of the already mentioned Norwegian male employee II (23) who underlined that he is always happy and that he cannot be influenced by the outside world.

People also seem unable to change their happiness when it is a matter of pure luck and chances. Then happiness is outside a person's power and causes instability. No one can choose the place or the family he/she will be born and not all have the same chances:

*“For instance, you were born in healthy and normal family, family without problems...so that you have possibilities for a good start in life” (Serbian male student, 21).*

Or:

*“I think that not everyone, if you look at the whole world, not everyone has the same chances...and that would be the needs that human people have, like clothes, economics, house, water, food, and you need that to be happy, I think” (Norwegian female student I, 23).*

This is exactly what the affective theory of happiness suggests. The basic human needs represent necessities that set the limits of human adaptability (Veenhoven, 1997). Accordingly, no one can be happy in miserable conditions such as chronic danger, starvation or loneliness “not even if they have never known better and if their neighbours are worse off” (Veenhoven, 1991a, p. 18). Also, as it could be seen, when they say “born happy”, informants do not mean born in the sense of being happy by means of an inborn temperament, as set-point theory suggests, but born within good living conditions, which again supports the assumptions of affective theory of happiness.

To the Norwegian female employee (18), living conditions are so important that she even uses the expression “luck” when referring to them: *“Some people are born in better place and they are just lucky. I feel lucky that I was born in Norway that is the world richest country” (Norwegian female employee, 18).*

The “Luck” expression is also interesting as being the first meaning of happiness. In English language, the root word of happiness is the Middle English *hap*, which refers to “chance, fortune or luck” and this can still be found in the meaning of *happen* in the sense of “occur by chance” (Duncan, 2005). Today, the most common meaning has largely shifted from the “good fortune” towards the “good feelings”.

Today, happiness refers to the subjective aspect and the private sphere of the individual and is strongly believed to “come from within”. Yet, a semantic confusion in the word is still possible (Duncan, 2005), which is also evident in our study.

What seems especially interesting to note is that a Serbian male student (21) when speaking in mother tongue also reflects on being born happy as being lucky:

*“Well, there are persons who are lucky throughout their lives...For instance, I met them at faculty. In general, some people are simply luckier than others. Yet, a person can also influence his/her own happiness.”*

When reflecting whether happiness goes up and down, he again talks of luck:

*“It goes up and down depending on what happens in one’s life. I don’t know, at faculty, for instance, I don’t have luck at all...I still didn’t experience to pass an exam by means of luck, like some other students. They go out at exam with 20% of knowledge of a study material, they get questions they know and get an A. I, for instance, was never one of them. That is the most unbelievable to me and I really can say that I have no luck at all...”*

In line with this, the fact that Serbian language does not even distinguish between luck and happiness appears even more interesting, there is only one term for both meanings. However, the context in which the term is used will provide a “simple” basis for the distinction between the two and the right meaning of the word<sup>1</sup>.

Even though several informants do admit that some people are born happy, none of them negates that we are responsible and able to influence it. “Happiness is not something that happens to people but something that they make happen” (Csikzentmihalyi, 1999, p. 823), although the worse the living conditions, the harder this seems to be:

*“I believe that everything can have a positive end in the end. If you were not born within healthy circumstances, you can work for your happiness...That is what I said already, you cannot just sit still and wait for happiness to happen”* (Serbian male student, 21).

Therefore, if happiness stands outside the person, if it is in the outside world and a matter of external factors, but not luck, then people might influence it through an “adjustment of context”.

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<sup>1</sup> The noun “sreca” in Serbian may mean both, luck and happiness. Yet, if it is expressed like the noun “sreca”, but preceded by the verb “to have”, then the old meaning is had on mind. Thus, it could be said that “good fortune” and “happiness” are even more related in Serbian language and that, therefore, confusion of tongue is even more to be expected.

The same applies if it is inside the person, on the condition that people are not born with it. Then they might change it by something that, conditionally, can be called “adjustment of self”. These are two cases when people are able to work for their happiness.

However, due to the fact that happiness also depends on some factors that we cannot influence, as seen, it can be argued that although people have a strong need to feel life in their control (Myers, 1992), there is no absolute responsibility or absolute control. The Norwegian female student II (23) talks about many impulses that come from others and the environment and she emphasizes that the environment must be positive. On the other hand, the Norwegian male student (24) talks of dependency on others: *“I think that people are not born happy. I think that their surrounding, the people around them, that they have much to say about your development.”* Therefore, interpersonal factors must also be depicted as important factors of happiness and it seems that changes in our happiness are a result of this relative responsibility and relative control. Kacavenda-Radic (1992) argues that people are free to choose, but free “within the possible” – namely, that all of us are limited by the socio-historical conditions in which we are born, but that everyone has a feeling of freedom. This feeling of freedom is so important that psychologists see it as a very significant factor for mental health (*ibid.*).

However, one must ask whether this feeling of freedom is universal and therefore universally important factor of mental health? Or it is rather a phenomenon of individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, the group is placed above the individual and people are highly interdependent; hence, they might not feel free to choose. This feeling might have significant impact on their happiness and their mental health.

## **4.3 INFLUENCES ON HAPPINESS**

### **4.3.1 EXTERNAL INFLUENCES**

#### **4.3.1.1 STATE POLICY AND LIVING CONDITIONS**

All informants emphasize the importance of living conditions for happiness. They see them as being generally important. Clothes, economics, house, water and food are said to be required conditions for happiness elsewhere (Norwegian female student I, 22). Society also seems to have influence. For instance, as a result of the current world economic crisis people lose their jobs, which have negative influence on families (Norwegian female student II, 22). In any case, it can be argued that: *“... the easier the living conditions are, the easier for you is to be happy”* (Norwegian male employee I, 23).

The informants also spoke of the concrete impact that the specific and the distinctive socio-economical circumstances within their native country have on personal happiness. At this level the differences between the two countries are huge. Whereas Norwegians profess great satisfaction with the overall situation in their country, Serbians spoke of great disappointment. Norwegians even feel lucky just to be born in Norway: *“I think I am very lucky to be born in Norway. It’s a very easy start. You have to work for everything here too, but you don’t have to work that hard, you know...”* (Norwegian male employee II, 23). Or: *“I feel lucky that I am born in Norway that is the world richest country”* (Norwegian female employee, 18). A Norwegian male employee I (23) even identifies himself with the system. When he was asked whether Norway cares about the happiness of their citizens, he replied: *“I think that in Norway we are very good in that. We always want people to be happy...I think that Norway is one of the best places.”*

The Serbians seem completely different in their reflections on living conditions and an overall socio-economical situation in their country. They all share very pessimistic views like: *“I think that nothing works here. Yes, exactly nothing...I am dissatisfied in everything...We seem to drown in a ‘light velocity’”* (Serbian male employee, 21).

They emphasize that there are no possibilities in the country and they talk of the motivation to emigrate: *“To achieve what you want is simply impossible; neither the policy of this country, nor the country itself gives opportunities for personal expression and development”* (Serbian female employee, 24). Or: *“I would maybe like to live at some other place”* (Serbian female student, 23).

When there are no possibilities, happiness becomes a matter of *the pursuit* and hoping for a good fortune: *“I would go somewhere in pursuit for something, but there would be no need for that if I were able to create it here...”* (Serbian male employee, 21). From the above quote, it could be seen that people are primarily motivated to *create* happiness on their own. At psychological level, this idea is explained as the need that people feel to have control over their lives. Psychologists seem to agree that to *have* what we want is of less importance than to have possibilities to *do* what we want and to feel as rulers of our lives (Myers, 1992). This was consistently found to be an important factor of mental health (*ibid.*)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> However, this sense of personal control seems to be a cultural specific factor of happiness and important in individualistic societies, whereas in collectivistic cultures societies this is not related to happiness (Veenhoven, 1994).

Serbian male employee (21), in line with this, stressed:

*“I would like to have possibilities... If everything were set and organized, there would be no need to wish that somebody gives me something as a present because in such a system I would be able to create what I need.”*

Serbians especially do not believe in politicians and they see them as being governed by their personal interests:

*“I do not believe in politicians. I have never believed in them, nor do I believe in them now. I mean, they declare that they are doing their best and that things will be better, but nobody can see that... Everything they do could be summed up as they are interested in their personal matters and not in citizens’ ”* (Serbian female student, 23)

Or:

*“Today’s politicians have made me completely unhappy...They are interested in their own happiness, in money and power and nothing else... Very corrupt government and not only the government, but also every part of the complex system of power”* (Serbian male employee, 25).

The Serbian informants regard people in their country as unhappy: *“I talk a lot to my customers. We discuss the situation in this country. It seems that people are becoming more and more depressed”* (Serbian female employee, 24).

Or:

*“I see that people around me are dissatisfied...I think that the majority of people are not happy. Some small percent of people are, but the majority are not. At least, that is what I think. However, I think that in certain ways the people themselves are contributing to their unhappiness and not only the politicians...They do not believe, they simply do not believe in anybody”* (Serbian female student, 21).

These thoughts of Serbian informants may have its basis in the socio-political history in their country. After Second World War up to 1990, the society was governed on the ideology of socialism, which was the backbone of political and economical structure of former Yugoslavian country. The value system was collectivistic with egalitarianism in its basis. In 1989 the Serbian politician Slobodan Milosevic rose to power and his overall policy was nationalistic and authoritarian. As a result, tension in region was huge and during the 1990s the former Yugoslavia was faced with its separation, accompanied by wars and sanctions imposed by United Nations on Serbia, which led to political isolation, economic recession, hyperinflation and hardship.

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia became independent countries. These historical events had impact on people's happiness and after their break up, the sharp declines in the level of happiness among Yugoslavians were detected (Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000). Between 1998 and 1999 the peace was again broken, but now it was between Serbian security forces and ethnic Albanians at Kosovo. This resulted in NATO bombing in 1999 to force Yugoslav (Serbian) troops to leave Kosovo. In 2000, opposite parties accused Milosevic of fraud in the federal election and in October the 5<sup>th</sup>, after the organized street protest and rallies, Slobodan Milosevic handed over power to democratic governance. This also meant an end of the international isolation of Serbia. From that period, Serbia experienced a major turning point, from a socialist regime into a system of liberal democracy and market economy. This system entailed completely different core values estimated in the society, i.e., encouragement of initiative and creativity, individualism and self-focused orientation. This period is commonly referred to as *Transition* and has entailed new problems for adjustment. The whole system was changing its structure and people were expected to accept radically new values. In addition, the political climate remained tense and in 2003, the prime-minister, Zoran Djindjic was assassinated by the former security force. Furthermore, in May 2006 Montenegro held a referendum and a majority voted in favour of independence. Moreover, in February 2008, Kosovo also declared its independence, which was supported by most of the world, although Serbia still considers Kosovo as part of her country. When taking into consideration the collapse of the economy in the previous period and an economic crisis that still lasts, the inhabitants' disappointment and unhappiness become understandable.

Two informants emphasize exactly that the crisis is a normal phenomenon in Serbia and that people in some sense got used to it:

*"We have been going through economic crisis all the time. We have always been going through problems. It has always been us who experience challenges; hence, we got used to it..."* (Serbian female employee, 24).

Or:

*"Regarding the current economic crisis, it seems that it affects people who living in the US more than us, since they had a relatively normal life... We here have got used to it and I think that at least half of the inhabitants do not feel the consequences of this crisis because they have got used to it"* (Serbian female student, 21).

This is obviously a relative view and it says a lot about human's capacity for adjustment. Yet, if people are more and more dissatisfied and if they want to leave their country, as seen, then the adjustment process obviously has its limits. As Diener (1984) argues, it is probable that the adaptation process reduces, but does not eliminate the effect of circumstances. Adaptation is a powerful process, but not all-powerful. Regarding downward adjustment, it is unlikely that "if everyone has a pain, then mine doesn't hurt" (Diener, 1984, p. 568) or that a person will be less hungry if everyone is equally hungry (Veenhoven, 1991a).

This is in line with the major postulates of affective theory of happiness to which needs are necessities that set the limits of our adaptability (Veenhoven, 1997). Need gratification sets a certain minimum of what is necessary and what is enough. Unlimited gratification is also unlikely due to our motivation typically following the law of diminishing returns. For instance, the more friends we have, the less we need a new one (Veenhoven, 1991a).

All in all, authors agree that people will rather not adjust to all conditions and that everything cannot be relative. There are differences in the livability of cultures (Diener & Oishi, 2004). In line with this, it has been proven that people tend to thrive best when they live in conditions of democracy and personal freedom (Myers, 1992). Similarly, war, hunger and social disorganization have proven to have dramatic impacts on one's happiness (Veenhoven, 1991b).

Therefore, it seems that a "strict cultural relativistic view must be rejected, in which all cultures are seen as equally desirable" (Diener & Oishi, 2004, p. 1). An obvious implication is that human happiness does depend on external conditions and it can be promoted by means of improving the livability of the environment (Veenhoven, 2006). Happiness, hence, might be used as a criterion for a societal well-being and if people of a society say that they are unhappy and not satisfied with their lives, then in some sense the society is not succeeding (Diener & Oishi, 2004). The subjective well-being criterion is democratic. It is the people that are judging their lives and not experts. Thus, they are having a possibility to give a grade of how well their needs and their cultural specific values are fulfilled in their country.

However, important to underline, research on happiness has proven that external factors in general play weaker role in happiness than expected (Lyubomirsky, 2001) and that actually "the way people perceive the world is much more important to happiness than objective circumstances" (Diener et al., 2002, p. 68). Yet, it can be argued that although inner factors can modify the impact of environmental effects, they do not determine them and they do not explain all the variance in happiness (Veenhoven, 1997).

In other words, external factors seem to have impact on human happiness that goes beyond the effects of personality (Diener et al., 2003), which we also see in this study.

However, in our opinion, socio-cultural influences must not also be underestimated. Serbians are very expressive in emotions and have no problems to express negative ones (Djeric, 2003) and as they lived long in a socialist regime, they partly got used to the need for the society to take care of their problems. Hence, maybe in current times, an era of capitalism, when they are on their own, they have troubles organizing their lives by themselves and partly for these reasons, express a disappointment.

#### 4.3.1.2 WORK

To expect that work will influence one's happiness is likely as people spend, on average, seven to eight hours per day at their work during the working days. However, although employees are in general happier than unemployed (Argyle, 2001; Diener, 1984; Myers, 1992), work does not necessarily have to be important in the life of every person and it is not unusual to have solely an instrumental value. In this case work is necessary, but not important in itself (Guzina, 1980). Some informants see work in this sense, being solely a means for existence: *"If it wasn't because of the money, I wouldn't do it, no chance"* (Norwegian male employee I, 23) or: *"You work for making money to have more vacation, more free time..."* (Norwegian male employee II, 23).

When money is the basic motivation of work, then the work process is unsatisfied (From, 1984a). In other words, this is an obvious sign that work represents a necessary evil and a strain that needs to be tolerated in order to obtain pleasures beyond the work (Despotovic, 1991). This is exactly how a Norwegian male employee I (23) reflects on his job:

*"But for me, what affects my happiness the most is work. Not personal life, you know. In the personal life I am happy since I have my friends and I get to do what I want, you know, so the work is definitely the biggest player that affects my happiness...If it wasn't because of the money, I wouldn't do it, no chance."*

Authors do not look positive towards this the so-called "economic man" (Green in Jusic, 1971; Guzina, 1988). According to Green, he/she has one resigned attitude towards everything that is related to the work he/she performs. He does not have a sense of belonging in the organization and more often he wants to leave it (Green in Jusic, 1971). To Guzina (1988), similarly, people for whom a work is solely a means to earn money are in the worse psychological situation than the ones for whom work has an intrinsic value.

They do not find the pleasure in their work and they will more seldom deal with bad working conditions whereas people with intrinsic motivation will find pleasure even in bad conditions (*ibid.*). There are also a number of authors who see money as a short-term and not good work stimulus that always needs to be increased if the motivation for work is to be obtained. More successful will be measures that are related to the factors of actualization of an individual, as this is the greatest motivation of every individual (Jusic, 1971).

Whether or not work is challenging is an important issue. Studies have shown that “the most satisfied workers find their skills tested, their work varied, and their tasks significant” (Myers, 1992, p. 132). This is exactly why the Norwegian male employee I (23) is dissatisfied with his job:

*“Sometimes work is ok, I like my colleagues and stuff like that and I like to impress my customers, make them happy but it is always the same...No new challenges... I feel like I mastered it, you know. So I want to do something new and to have new challenges. That makes me happy - when I accomplish them.”*

These reflections are in line with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) thinking that in order to experience the highest level of well-being, a balance between skills and challenges needs to be established. When tasks, on the other hand, do not present a challenge and do not engage people’s skills, people feel bored and they do not find pleasure in activity they perform (*ibid.*). Finally, if the challenges are too intense for the person’s skills, anxiety is likely to occur (*ibid.*).

Two employees, however, share negative attitude towards work in general:

*“I think that our parents were more made for work, you know. I think that we developed as humans, and this is not a working generation, you know. This generation does not want to work. We just do it because we need the money. That’s what it is all about - the money to do what you want”* (Norwegian male employee I, 23).

Further he adds: *“...it would be great if I win in a lottery ... and didn’t have to work”*. Or: *“One wish is to have enough work so that I could employ other people and not to have to work anymore”* (Serbian male employee, 25)

That the relation towards work in general and the satisfaction towards a concrete job are related is emphasized by M. Guzina (1980). According to this author relation towards a work is formed in several hierarchical levels. At the highest level, there is a relation towards a work as a social value. This is a part of an overall value orientation of an individual and it extends from instrumental to full intrinsic value of work.

The next, more concrete level is relation towards an occupation, vocation, type of job. This belongs to a level of professional interests and it includes the satisfaction with the chosen vocation and the preferences for further professional development and promotion. At the lowest level, there is a relation towards a concrete job that a person performs. It involves attitudes, satisfaction and commitment and is more dependent on concrete work conditions and job content.

On every of these three levels it can dominate intrinsic or instrumental relation. These three levels are further not independent, but rather interactive. However, the more general level, probably, has more influence on the more concrete ones. Accepting the work as the value and regarding it as meaning and content of life influences greater job satisfaction and vice-a-versa (Guzina, 1980). In our study, in line with this, a negative attitude towards work in general that some informants have is followed by/related to job dissatisfaction.

When job has an intrinsic value, when it is an activity highly evaluated by one-self, then it becomes the central aspect of life (Guzina, 1980). A Norwegian female employee (18) obviously sees her job in this sense:

*“Yes, it’s my dream work. It’s feels like when I work, I am not working, I am just having fun. Because when I was 14, I was an assistant...I had 40 NOK per hour but I didn’t mind because I just think it was so fun, fun to teach new stuff. I just want to be the best.”*

A Serbian female employee (24) shares similar views:

*“To describe a situation in which I was really happy? - Well, it could be the beginning of an independent job and opening of my own hairdresser salon. Ever since I started learning to become a hairdresser, I had wanted to have my own salon, to fulfil my dream and to make it as I want.”*

In line with this, it has been proven that people seem to have a great need for self-expression through their work (Myers, 1992). There are many examples when people choose less paid job only if it is more interesting. In many studies, the content of work has been confirmed as the major source of job satisfaction (Dejvis & Seklton, 1975). All of us have a tendency to spend energy on what is creative and meaningful and we will fresh and happy if being able to do so (From, 1984).

#### 4.3.1.3 MONEY

The informants have diverse views regarding importance of money for one’s happiness. These views have not been found to depend on gender or employment.

Yet, the particular country of origin of informants seems to have an impact.

A Serbian female student (21) obviously talks of materialism:

*“Well, I don’t consider money as important, but I believe that there are many people who find it extremely important... I think that many people are dependent on money...And I actually know many of them who consider money as everything in life. When they do not have money, they literally don’t live.”*

Neither will they be happy as confirmed in many previous studies. Materialism has actually proven to be not only irrelevant for happiness, but harmful (Diener & Oishi; Headey, 2008). Nickerson and cooperatives have found that people who put financial success over everything tend to be less satisfied with their family life and even if they attain high income, their overall life satisfaction is diminished (Nickerson et al. in Headey, 2008). Similarly, in a study conducted by Kirkcaldy, happiness was lower among people who are strongly motivated by material gains (Kirkcaldy in Headey, 2008). Diener and Oishi (2000) have also observed that people, who rate money as very important, are less satisfied. Therefore, it can be argued that a Serbian female student (23) is right when she emphasizes that:

*“Everybody is happy because of money; maybe that is why nobody is happy...I think that money is not the factor of happiness... Although people lately regard it as an indicator of happiness, it is certainly not happiness.”*

Materialistic views have not been found among Norwegian informants and this seems very interesting. According to Guzina (1988), the importance of money varies with the level of socio-economical stability of a country. In periods of economical crises, general expectations go down and employment and payment become significant factors. Otherwise, people will give priority to non-material rewards. That the crisis and bad living conditions in Serbia affects people to a large extent has already been seen. Therefore, it is likely that money will be more influential factor of happiness in Serbia than in Norway.

In line with this, in Serbia, there is the high unemployment rate where even one-third of inhabitants are officially unemployed. As a consequence, Serbians have lowered their expectations that much that simply “having a job” is regarded as success. In everyday talk one can hear opinions that “anything is better than nothing” or “until I find something better”. People are thinking from the aspect of comparative psychology with “a lower than oneself”, like: “I at least, have some kind of job” or “when I see what other people are forced to do, I can be happy...” Certain psychological adaptations have certainly been done. However, this is far from true satisfaction where reality provides possibilities that people realize their potentials (Guzina, 1980).

Material rewards in general do not detract from happiness, but there seems to be a certain minimum threshold after which money becomes irrelevant for human happiness. This refers to a possibility to satisfy essential human needs after which some other things become more important (Argyle, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Drakopoulos, 2007, Myers & Diener, 1995; Veenhoven, 1997). Therefore, money being a means for existence is an important factor. This is also a relevant explanation for why income has more emphasized effect on happiness in poor countries than in rich (Drakopoulos, 2007). The informants seem to talk of money in line with this: *“Of course you need money to have a place to stay, for food and to just enjoy life, but you don’t have to have a lot of money”* (Norwegian female employee, 18).

Or:

*“To be honest, yes! But, I am not talking about being rich, it’s about having the needs fulfilled...The world is built up of the money, so if you don’t have money you don’t have food, you don’t have house, so then you get depressed”* (Norwegian female student I, 22).

A similar view has been found in a Serbian female employee (24):

*“Speaking of me, even small things can make me happy. Therefore, money is not important for my happiness and I personally think that in general money is not a prerequisite for happiness. However, I must emphasize that you have to live and that money is a means for existence...I must pay the bills and I must pay the rent...”*

However, rise in material growth is not followed by an increased happiness after people are able to satisfy their basic needs and there are several explanations for this finding. People become quickly habituated with what they possess or with what they have achieved due to their aspirations growing with their achievements. Pope said: *“blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.”* (as cited in Myers, 1992, p. 119). People also have prestige oriented comparisons (Martin, 2008) and our reference has a tendency to drift towards the ones who are more successful (Veenhoven, 1997). As a result, even the reasonably affluent would feel poor when comparing themselves with the ones who are better off. Life is to Csikszentmihaly (1999) rarely linear and in most cases, what is good in small quantities becomes harmful in larger doses.

Material growth could be said to be like health and people take it for granted when they have it, but when they lose it, it causes considerable unhappiness (Myers and Diener, 1995). The Serbian male employee (21) regards money in this sense: *“Maybe as a habit, not something that I strive to. I simply have got used to have money all my life...”*

And further he adds: *“It becomes important when you do not have it”*. The Serbian female student (21) has similar views. For her money is not important as she had never been in the situation of not “having it”:

*“It is not important to me...I mean I always have for my basic needs. My parents take care of me. They literally provide me with everything I have... Whenever I ask for money, they give me. Thus, as I was never in a situation not to have money at all I cannot say that it made me unhappy or dissatisfied.”*

However, one must ask, why money at higher levels could not be a means to promote self-growth? Then money should increase subjective well-being (Diener & Oishi, 2000). In line with this, Hrnjica and Radojica (1981) have underlined that material rewards do not allow only the satisfaction of existential needs, but also the higher needs, they provide security, add to people’s reputation and change the everyday life. To Neisser (1960), similarly, money has not only objective significance, but also a variety of subjective aspects that have an important impact on one’s personality. Money is an indicator of success and power; it provides freedom and has an important role for one’s self-respect.

The Norwegian male employee II (23) seems to talk of money as a means of self-actualization:

*“...I also do think that money can influence happiness...winning the lottery, the money, just quitting the job, travelling around world, meeting new people, and settling down wherever you want - that would be a dream...”*

And further he adds:

*“Yeah, I always hear that question - ooh, if you would have all the money, you don’t have anything to reach for. But, today, you have diving, and bungee jump, and paragliding and you know... you can try everything in the world and you won’t make it around, you know. So, I think I would always do something, learn how to play a guitar, learn how to play the instruments. Then you really have time to do something.”*

However, as we have said, people who earn more are not necessarily happier than those who earn less and maybe the problem with the money is that we tend to misuse it once we have it, “becoming caught up in endless routines of getting and spending, rather than building wealth to increase freedom and peace of mind” (Martin, 2008, p. 177). To Diener et al. (2003), also, at low levels, income seems to be related to inherent human needs, for instance, obtaining food and shelter, whereas at high levels, income leads to the purchase of more luxury items, which is not important for person’s happiness.

To Csikszentmihalyi (1999), similarly, to the extent that most of a person's energy is invested in material goals, the sensitivity to other rewards decreases and they become less and less interesting. Eventually the person becomes blind for any other sources of happiness, but is not happy. The modern world has had a lot of impact. Money has become the metric by which a person's worth is evaluated.

Not less problematic is the fact that it is the perceived wealth that matters more for happiness than the actual wealth. "Money is two steps removed from happiness: actual income doesn't much influence happiness, how *satisfied* we are with our income does" (Myers, 1992, p. 39). However, strangely, people who earn more are only slightly more satisfied with what they make (Myers, 1992). It seems true: "satisfaction isn't so much getting what you want as wanting what you have" (Myers, 1992, p. 39). According to Veenhoven (1997), similarly, we must distinguish between *presumed happiness* that depends on societal factors and *apparent individual happiness* and they do not necessarily coincide. Consequently, one can be rich and powerful, but still unhappy with what he/she make. This is also the finding of our study. Norwegian female employee (18) earns only 6000 NOK per month and is satisfied with this income. On the other hand, Norwegian employee (I) 23 earns four times more than her, but is not satisfied with this income.

Moreover, material rewards alone are certainly not sufficient for a person to be happy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The clear implication of studies is that people should give priority to non-economic concerns. Social capital (close relationships, a happy family life), an existence of diverse goals, active interests, a purpose and meanings in life is what affects happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Drakopoulos, 2007; Headey, 2008). We will see that exactly within these terms happiness is described by our informants. This has also been recognized by a Norwegian male student (24) when he stressed the personal relevance of his future vacations: "*I am not educating myself after how much money I am going to make. It's more about what I want to do so I don't think that money is the biggest factor for my happiness.*"

Very deep reflections on happiness have been found in a Serbian female student (23). This informant seems to recognize that happiness cannot be obtained by means of individualism and materialism, but by means of spiritual investments and that oneself being responsible for having achieved it represents the vital ingredient of happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). There is an emerging "post-materialism" generation who questions the "prosperity without purpose, money without meaning" (Myers, 1992, p. 179).

In line with this, our informant stressed:

*“I think that happiness is something that is built...I mean how material can make you happy at all? I don't believe that that is possible...If you are changing the car every year, what that means? And how can that make you happy? I think that you should be attached to something and to love it in order to be happy”* (Serbian female student, 23).

The informant's thinking also seems to reflect the assumptions of what Martin (2008) calls the *paradox of getting*. By their very nature, desires promise pleasure once they are fulfilled. Hence, our tendency to think that happiness will come as a result of getting what we want (Martin, 2008). However, happiness has more to do with acceptance and an appreciation of what we already have, rather than with constantly getting more. With this paradox are closely related the *paradox of submission* and the *paradox of choice*, which overlap and imply that actually it is the surrender that can liberate us in ways contributing to happiness. Liberation is, to Martin (2008), a matter of loyalty to ideals, meaningful causes and relationship and not of multiplying the number of options. As we have seen, in line with this, for our informant, happiness is a matter of deep attachments.

It must also be added that there are no reasons why material and socio-emotional rewards are mutually exclusive. Yet, in practice they appear so. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1999) it is time that is “the ultimate scarce source” and the allocation of time presents the choice that after being made determines the content and the quality of our lives. This is why people find it difficult to balance the demands of work and private life and why they often feel that one side suffers. The Norwegian male employee I (23) reflects on money exactly from the aspect of time: *“I am sure that a rich guy with the same amount of work time as me isn't happier, but a rich guy with a lot of spare time, I think he is happier than me.”*

Of course, people will still believe that if they could only have had more money “they would have achieved that elusive state” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). According to Myers and Diener (1995), similarly, most people will not agree that money can buy happiness, but most people will agree that having a little more money would make them happier. This is also the major economic belief (Easterlin, 2003) and the finding of our study.

Although, informants in general do not believe that money is so important, when they were asked to wish something in order to make them happy, all of them asked for money like the Norwegian female student II (22):

*“I think I would be happier if I had more money because if I had more money I wouldn't have to work so much, I could do more social things, I could travel more, I could just see the world and I could give money to my family...It would help me just to be a little bit calmer and relaxed and not to think so much about the future. I could just live more here and now and don't worry about the job.”*

To conclude, the common sense and the major economic belief go against the empirical data. Having more money after being able to satisfy their basic needs will not make people happier; yet all the people believe that having little more money would make them little more happy.

#### 4.3.1.4 FREE TIME/LEISURE

Scholars stress the importance of leisure for happiness and they relate this importance to come along with changes that happen within work (Kacavenda-Radic, 1992). In the nineteenth century, work day lasted fourteen, even eighteen hours. Today, it lasts from seven to eight hours and futurists predict the four-day working week (Kacavenda-Radic, 1992). Along with these changes, work stopped being the central aspect of life and became just one of the aspects (Cohen-Gewerc, 2006).

Research findings also suggest that the majority of people are very pleased with their leisure time regardless of whether they are engaged in serious and committed activity or not (Lu & Hu, 2005). Research in this area found both, short-term benefits of leisure and long term effects on happiness, mental and physical health and social integration (Lu & Hu, 2005). Some studies have also found leisure as the strongest source of life satisfaction (Argyle, 2001). In line with this, happiness for the Norwegian employee I (23) is: *“When you have the freedom to do what you want...”*

In order to explain why leisure is an important factor of happiness, authors argue that although having a feeling of freedom of choice is not the distinctive feature of leisure (it exists in work and any other activity), in leisure this choice should reflect the most of an individual's needs, attitudes and interests (Kacavenda-Radic, 1989). According to Lu & Hu (2005), also, in leisure people have freedom to do what they sincerely want to do and it is likely that people will choose the things that they enjoy.

This has been stressed by a Serbian female student (23): *“Travels make me happy...This is because then I can relax and be happy and not to think of anything and simply enjoy...At vacations I can be me”*. A Norwegian female student II (22) similarly observed: *“Yeah. ... I am often very happy when I am on vacation because then I can relax and not think so much and just be with the people I want to be with and do what I want.”*

According to some authors, leisure and happiness are even synonymous. These findings have a great practical importance, as leisure (unlike personality, work, and relationships) is largely under our control and can easily be changed (Argyle, 2001).

Especially some employed informants emphasize that the true scope of happiness is in their free time. For them, free time seems to represent an antithesis of work and it has the function of recuperation of happiness, which is lost in work. For these people, free time is not only the time independent of work, but the time of triumph over the work (Despotovic, 1991). They work for money due to work being deprived and repressive regarding the possibility to actualize their potentials (Fromm, 1984b), as stressed before. There are empirical findings that support these thoughts. According to results of a study conducted by Rus and Arzensek, there is a high level of job dissatisfaction among employees and they consider their job as a “necessary evil”, whereas the most of what represents a truly scope of their interests exists beyond the work (Rus & Arzensek in Despotovic, 1991). Also, in Kulic’s (1997) study most of the people related personal satisfaction to non-work activities, whereas only 15% found it in work. Similarly, Guzina (1988) has in her study found that work for an employee has only instrumental value and that the sincere pleasure lies in activities of free time.

In line with this, when Norwegian male employee II (23) was asked which aspect is the most important for his happiness, he responded: *“Free time, that’s the most important in life, you know. You work for making money to have more vacation, more free time...”* To the Norwegian male employee I (23), who is happy when he does not work, work is also important: *“just because of the spare time that’s follows with it.”* A Serbian male employee (25) seems also to be the representative of these views:

*“Well, regarding work, I see myself not working anymore... Regarding private life, that is again related to work, I hope that I will have more time for family, friends, for whatever.”*

According to Dumazedier, free time is multidimensional (here an individual can use all his/her abilities) and multifunctional (in free-time a person can have fun, be creative, do some sport or exercise etc). On the other hand, in work, a man seems to use a limited part of his/her abilities and people work to satisfy their existential needs.

Therefore, it is likely that happiness will be more related to free time, than to work. (Dumazedier in G., Friedmann, P. & Naville, 1972). Yet, although we must agree that for some people work has the characteristics of which Dumazedier talks, we cannot agree that work time is necessarily one-dimensional and one-functional. There are people who work for intrinsic reasons and whose potentials for development come to a full expression in their work, which we also could see in our study.

However, the dynamics that takes place between work and leisure is an important question. If an individual is passive and disaffected in his/her work, can he/she use his/her leisure in an active and meaningful way? (Despotovic, 1991) According to Despotovic (1991), this thinking is very problematic as it implies that happiness in leisure will be greater if the consequences of work over a human are harder.

One must also ask where the limits of compensation of job dissatisfaction are. The Norwegian male employee I (23) argues that: “...*what affects my happiness the most is work. Not personal life, you know. In the personal life I am happy...*” And also: “*If a weekend is taken away from me because of my work, I have two weeks of unhappiness*”. Thus, it seems that job dissatisfaction has an impact and that pleasure, which comes from leisure, cannot be enough for an overall happiness. People not only spend on average in their work eight hours during the working days, but even more important, an individual functions as holistic personality and he/she cannot be one person in work time and somebody else in free time (Despotovic, 1991). According to many other authors, similarly, there is not a salutary sphere of free time and (dis)satisfaction in one sphere of life affects its other spheres (Bozovic, 1977).

One must also ask whether free time in any case brings joy. According to Kacavenda-Radic (1989), free time may represent an empty space with which people do not know what to do and in that case it will rather cause unhappiness. In line with this, Lu and Argyle (1994) have found that different leisure activities do not generate the same levels of satisfaction. The greatest satisfaction is obtained when people are engaged into serious and committed activities, such as reading books or writing. In contrast, they found that less serious activities, like watching TV produce less positive effects.

Therefore, on the basis of these assumptions, it can be argued that to have freedom to do what we want is necessary, rather than sufficient cause of happiness and that work time and free time are in complex interactive relation, rather than isolated human existences.

In line with this, according to From (1984a), the true freedom is the so-called “positive freedom” where an individual can actualize his/her self. Not only work, but every activity can have characteristics of positive freedom. Yet, this does not refer to work as the duty, but to work as the creation, where an activity in itself and a process is what matters, not a result. “Personal self is strong as much as it is active” writes From (1984a, p. 184).

#### 4.3.1.5 MASS MEDIA INFLUENCES AND STANDARDS OF PHYSICAL BEAUTY

Media seems to send a message to people that happiness is a matter of being perfect and that celebrities live a life that seems to be an ideal of an average individual. In these messages standards of physical beauty are glorified and modern styling trends seem to follow that what celebrities are presenting at the moment. People seem not indifferent to these messages (Argyle, 2001; Lyubomirsky, 2007). Therefore, to investigate how people react to them and whether they have a certain impact on their happiness concept was important.

Studies have shown that physical appearance matters in the modern world (Argyle, 2001; Lyubomirsky, 2007). Being attractive also seems to entail certain benefits. Good looking people are in general favoured by the opposite gender, teachers and potential employers (Argyle, 2001). They tend to have more prestigious jobs and to earn more and in everyday life they seem to be more popular (*ibid.*). Standards of physical beauty are further proven to be more important for women. They see being overweight as bad and being attractive as more important than men (Argyle, 2001).

In line with this, results of our study have shown that physical appearance matters in Serbia and in Norway. When asked how important is for her to look good, Serbian female student (21) responds: “*For me that is important. I am really satisfied when I lose weight and I am doing my best to succeed in that.*”

Especially in professions that glorify beauty standards, physical appearance seems to have broad implications. People who come to beauty salons do not just care how they look, but also how the employees look. The Serbian female employee (24), who is a hairdresser, stressed: “*Unfortunately, customers look whether I am beautiful; there is negative attitude towards fat and not beautiful hairdressers*” (Serbian female employee, 24). The Norwegian female employee (18), also a hairdresser, has similar observations:

“*...I heard some people telling me that if they go to cut their hair and if they see that a hairdresser is not so beautiful, they won't go there anymore. It's bad, but it's true. Humans are terrible.*”

According to Serbian female employee (24), physical appearance, in general, is an important issue when someone's work and competence in Serbia is to be judged. This informant expressed the negative attitude towards an established praxis that people who are overweighted or older hardly have success to find a job. In our opinion this “praxis“ seems not surprising though. The free market economy has produced the high concureny in the modern world. On the other hand, certain ethical doubts necessarily figure here – namely, whether it is appropriate to judge someone's work qualities on the bases a person’s look seems highly controversial. But, this could also be said to be an indicator of how influential the standards of physical beauty in the modern world are.

However, despite these standards being in general influential, it seems in our informants’ views that it is the personality that determines the impact that they will have on a particular person. Norwegian female employee (18) underlines that media affects people who have low self-esteem and to a Serbian male employee (25) a tendency to imitate celebrities is related to personality problems:

*“Those are the people who don’t have an established identity, but watch MTV and think that if they dress as people from MTV, they will be more respected. The people who have certain complexes or simply do not have their identity established are the ones who copy others.”*

Otherwise, there seems to be something deeper in happiness, as stressed by Norwegian female employee (18): *“If I just have a beautiful hair and I don’t have a personality, I don’t think that I would be happy”* and happiness is something that comes from within (Diener, et al., 2002): *“That is pseudo happiness, I think, because happiness comes from within. I mean, happiness, satisfaction in general comes from within. You should not be perfect in order to be happy”* (Serbian female student, 23). Or: *“No. I am more spiritual concerning that...some internal feelings contribute more to my happiness... In general, this is not an empty story; I am really that kind of person”* (Serbian male student, 21).

In line with this, studies that have investigated whether attractive people and celebrities are happier have observed that although people think that wealth, fame and beauty will make them happy for a long time, they actually bring happiness for a short time. The happiness boost is not likely to endure (Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Serbian female employee (24) has exactly the same reflections on a physical beauty: *“There are a number of women who are trying to look nice in order to be happy. However, that is a moment of happiness. That pleasure of seeing yourself beautiful; nice hair, nice clothes and beautiful body is just ephemeral... Beauty is not prerequisite for happiness.”*

Informants also seem to be aware that celebrities are not necessarily happier than others and that what we see on TV is not a real world:

*“They probably think, he is the happiest, greatest guy in the whole world, but that’s just, you know, on TV... You don’t see when he is upset, you just see the great moments in his life all the time...No one can live like that, not even them, you know. It’s just fake, I think”* (Norwegian male employee II, 23).

Or: *“And you can just see on TV that life is so good and it’s so perfect...But I do understand that it is on TV”* (Norwegian female student II, 22).

But why then people orient to these factors is an important issue. According to Lyubomirsky (2007), “we have been conditioned to believe that the wrong things will make us lastingly happy” (p. 17). Thus, conditioning in Lyubomirsky’s (2007) view overrules people’s free will and ability to reflect.

#### **4.3.2 INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES**

Aristotle labelled humans as social animals. Similarly, to social psychologists, people seem to have a strong “need to belong” and are strongly motivated to form and preserve social bonds (Lyubomirsky, 2007). The need to belong is found to have an evolutionary basis. Human kind would not be able to survive without an association with others (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Our social nature is a basis for our individuality, writes Valsiner (2000) and to Marks (1956), human can be even defined as the sum of social relations. Empirical evidences go in line with this. Without the sense of belongingness people experience numerous negative consequences for their mental health (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Children reared in institutions or in homes under poor and neglectful care, experience meaningless, feel frightened and will mainly become ill (Myers, 1992). Positive environmental feedback and social attachment could accordingly be said to be a crucial developmental factor, which importance is especially emphasized in infancy and in childhood as a result of dependency on others (Myers, 1992).

This has been perfectly recognized by our informants:

*“The child who is born doesn’t decide so much how it’s going to feel, because the mum and dad are so important in child’s life so if they are happy, I think that the child will be happy, if you know what I mean. There are so many impulses from the others and the environment has to be positive and happy for the child to be happy”* (Norwegian female student II, 22).

Or: *“I am depending on the people around me...they have much to say about our development”* (Norwegian male student 24).

To Argyle (2001) social relationships represent the greatest single cause of happiness. Relationships could also be said to be a qualitative phenomenon and it is an intimacy of relationship that is really important for happiness (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007). In line with this, one of the strongest finding in research of happiness is that most people, when they are asked what makes them happy, report satisfying relationships with significant others before anything else (Myers, 1992). The same stands with our informants:

*“To have people that you can always rely on, to have someone around you - that is more important than to have a lot of money...You know, if I have a big house, expensive car, expensive clothes, but I am there alone, I don’t have anyone to enjoy that with, I would rather wish that I did have little money and more people around me than the opposite”* (Norwegian female employee, 18).

Or: *“I am happy when I am good with my boyfriend. I am happy when I have a good relation with my parents. When we have good relations I am happy and satisfied with life”* (Serbian female student, 21).

Social support is one of the most important coping strategies with life’s challenges and people who have supportive network are proven to be not only happier, but also healthier, less depressed and less anxious (Lyubomirsky, 2007). Yet, as Argyle (2001) argues, in intimate relationships people are not only motivated to seek rewards for them, but an even more, they are concerned about happiness and welfare of others. This observation has also been proved in our study: *“For me it is very important that the people around me are happy. Because, I consider my happiness as useless if people around me are not happy”* (Serbian male employee, 25)

Or:

*“I am happy when my friends and significant others are healthy and when they achieve goals they set to themselves. That makes them happy and I am happy as a result. I cannot be happy if people around are sad”* (Serbian female employee, 24).

Thus, happiness is about a care for other people and as empathy seems to be part of this care, it also appears as a factor of happiness. Happiness *“goes very up and down”* said a Norwegian female student II (22):

*“That is because of all around me, most of all, the closest persons. If my friend is feeling bad, I am so emotional, I can feel this friend’s pain and take it inside and it will be mine pain.”*

Happiness seems also related to altruism. When she was asked what makes her happy, a Serbian female employee (24) replied:

*“...when I am doing something good for others...“I have always tended to help people, if I am able to help. And when I help, I am happy because I succeeded in helping someone to achieve what he/she wants.”*

A Serbian male employee (25) had similar views: *“Sometimes I am happy because others are happy. When I help someone and he/she is happy as a result, that makes me also happy.”*

In line with this, studies have proven that although selfish people are by definition those who seek happiness for themselves, they are less likely to be happy than those who are concerned for others (Myers, 1992). One study has shown the striking result. 70% of people who were judged unselfish seemed happy, whereas even 95% of those who were judged selfish seemed unhappy (*ibid.*). Therefore, happiness could be said to come as a “by-product of pursuing meaningful activities and relationships” (Martin, 2007, p. 171). Happiness cannot be pursued directly, but rather happy life is comprised from worthwhile, meaningful things that must be valued for their own sake (*ibid.*)

### 4.3.3 INTRAPERSONAL INFLUENCES

#### 4.3.3.1 PERSONALITY FACTORS

According to set-point theory, happiness is exclusively an internal matter, a global propensity to see things in a positive way (Veenhoven, 1997). This is the so-called top-down view on happiness. The claim is that people seem to enjoy life because they are happy, not vice-a-versa (Diener, 1984). In the individual variant of this theory, happiness is said to represent an aspect of the personal character, a fixed trait. According to some this trait is innate and rooted in the inborn temperament, whereas to others it is acquired and developed as a positive attitude towards life (Veenhoven, 1994). Whatever the variant is, the underlying assumption is that there are happy personalities.

Research findings support this view on happiness. Individual differences in personality factors, which are partly outside of our control, are found to be important factors of happiness (Argyle, 2001). Happiness seems to be mainly in mind, it depends on how we look at things (*ibid.*). Similarly, to Diener et al. (2002), “the way people perceive the world is much more important to happiness than objective circumstances” (p. 68). This was straight-forwardly depicted by the already mentioned Norwegian male employee II (23): *“I don’t think I can be influenced by outside things very easy... I think I am kind of straight line happy.”*

#### 4.3.3.2 COGNITIVE FACTORS

Cognitive theory defines happiness within judgment terms, as a product of human thinking. External conditions are said to affect happiness indirectly through comparisons with standards of a good life (Diener & Lucas, 2000). In this view, humans’ judgments are inherently comparative phenomena and the degree of satisfaction is determined by the relative value of a condition. “In order to know how hot or cold, big or little, or good or bad something is, we must compare it to a range of possible alternatives” (Diener & Lucas, 2000, p. 47). Due to the fact that the same event can have a different impact on different people depending on what it is compared with, happiness is regarded as entirely a *contextual* issue (Smith et al., 1989).

Following from these assumptions, representatives of this approach are interested to find standards against which people compare themselves and they strive to understand the psychological processes that lie behind these comparisons (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

These standards can be of different nature. The most commonly mentioned are aspirations and “significant others”, compatriots of about the same age and social class (Veenhoven, 1991a; Veenhoven, 1997).

These standards appear to matter in our study. For instance, when reflecting on money as a factor of happiness, the Serbian male employee (25) stressed that when he was in high school he had less money, but that he also needed less. Afterwards, when he started to work, although he had more money, he was not happier, as the aspirations became higher. In line with this, one of the assumptions of this theory is that people will not necessarily be happier when things change for better in their life because aspirations are almost impossible to be gratified. Every success seems to be followed by emergence of higher demands (Easterlin, 2001; Veenhoven, 1991a; Veenhoven, 1997).

When reflecting on how happy she is, on the other hand, the Norwegian female student II (22) seems to use a “social comparison” standard:

*“Yes, I think I am happy in the way I can be happy. I am happy if you would compare me to persons to another country and persons who don’t have a family or have losses in wars. Of course I am happy, I have a family, I have friends, I have a home, I have a boyfriend, I have money to eat and to go to school and because of all those things of course I am happy.”*

This is also one of the propositions of cognitive theory. If people compare themselves with a lower than them, they will be happy and vice-a-versa. According to Haybron (2005), along the same line, happiness in a cognitive stance is an issue of *perspectives* that we “select” when we reflect on our lives. To him, all of us can take one of two possible perspectives in making happiness judgments, none of which is predominant and authentic. First is, what he calls the “perspective of gratitude”, notably, judging our lives with regard to those who are worse off and appreciating what we have. From this perspective, few of us would rate our lives negatively, as being the case with the Norwegian female student II (22). One more informant also seems grateful for what she has: *“I have what I want, I have the work I need, I have people around me, I have friends, I have place to live and food so I consider me very lucky because there is not everyone who has all of that.”* (Norwegian female employee, 18). The second perspective is what Haybron (2005) calls “Stoic perspective”, where we judge our lives with regard to whether we are making the most of them. From this perspective, many people would regard themselves as unhappy. Yet, the stoic perspective is said to be a motivator when things are going well, whereas gratitude perspective is more comforting during difficult times (Haybron, 2005).

Cognitive theory also implies that people seem to appreciate things when they lose them. Otherwise they take for granted what they have (Gauthier, 1967) and these are exactly the reflections of Norwegian female student I (22):

*“Of course, it’s a big deal to have good health to feel happy. Of course, it’s one of the most important things. But I don’t think that people are thinking so much about it when they are healthy, you just take it for granted.”*

The same thoughts were found in a Serbian male employee (21): *“In general I don’t believe that health is the most important. Well, it probably is when you don’t have it, but I don’t have health problems.”*

The most important inference of cognitive theory of happiness is negation the possibility of a permanent happiness as people are able to adjust to almost everything (Adam Smith in Kesebir & Diener, 2008; Martin, 2008; Tolstoy in Kesebir & Diener, 2008).

People also commonly have prestige oriented comparisons, which has a devastating impact on their happiness (Martin, 2008; Venhoven, 1997). Therefore, due to reasons of aspiration growth following every achievement, our great ability for adjustment and our prestige oriented comparison, a human being will never be truly happy, as stressed by Norwegian male employee I (23): *“I just think that it is in human mind to complain and always want more, you know and to never be fully satisfied”* and changes in living conditions will affect happiness at best temporarily (Veenhoven, 1991a).

#### 4.3.3.3 GOALS

Goals researchers have proven that the existence of important goals and progress towards them can have important implications for subjective well-being. When people move towards an ideal state or accomplish valued aims, they attain happiness (Diener et al., 2002). In our study, similar results emerged. For instance, the Norwegian male student (24) defines a happy person within the terms of goals: *“...I would say that he or she has met her/his goals in life or is striving to achieve them.”* According to Serbian male student (21), similarly, happiness seems to be: *“...when someone strives to achieve his/her goals in general.”*

Scholars also argue that due to their personal salience, people will use goals as standard rather than any other standard when they make a life satisfaction judgment (Diener & Lucas, 2000). In line with this, when she was asked whether she is happy, a Serbian female employee (24) referred to her achieved goals:

*“Well I am...for now own I have accomplished everything I wanted. I strive for more like every normal young person, but for now own, I have achieved the goals I’ve been striving for years. Therefore I consider myself as a happy person.”*

According to Emmons, simply having important goals is correlated with happiness, but for most authors, it is their attainment and a progress towards them that has importance for subjective well-being (Emmons in Diener and Lucas, 2000). However, there is also third group of thinking that argues that the moving towards personal goals and struggling to achieve them is more satisfying than their actual attainment. Serbian male employee (25) stressed the same and to him: *“One is already happy while they are reaching the goals they have set.”* And also: *“...attaining the goals is more important than the attained goals”*. In this view, in general, it is the engagement in activity that influences happiness and not reaching some endpoint state (Diener, 1984). According to Gabriel Garcia Marques, also, “everybody wants to live at the top of the mountain without realizing that true happiness lies in the way we climb the slope.”

#### **4.4 EFFECTS OF HAPPINESS**

In nineteenth century, a “pursuit of happiness” ideal represented the backbone of utilitarian philosophers’ thinking who shared a view on happiness as the highest good and stood up for promotion of happiness to become a political priority (Veenhoven, 1988).

However, 19<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophers have raised concerns about desirability and justifiability of happiness (Kesebir and Diener, 2008). “The greatest happiness principle” is by them denounced as an undesirable goal as happiness is a mere pleasure, trivial and of less worth than other values (Veenhoven, 2004). To this group of thinking, happiness fosters superficial hedonism and it leads to a selfish individualism making people less sensitive to the needs of others. According to them, even mild unhappiness represents a preferable state as happiness seems to drag society into an overall decay (Veenhoven, 2004).

However, decades of studies have proven that these objections are not valid and broad positive implications of happiness have been revealed. Happy people are found to live longer and to be more open, warm, facilitative and empathic, whereas actually unhappiness implies many negative effects (Veenhoven, 1988).

Our results go in line with these empirical data and they indicate that being happy brings goodness for both, the person and people around him or her. According to Norwegian employee I (23) “...*happiness makes you want to do new stuffs and make your-self a better person*”. When describing a happy person, the Norwegian male employee II (23) also emphasized broad positive effects of happiness: “*He is trying to make everyone else happy. He is smiling and telling jokes... He is a person you want to be with*”. Similarly, to the Norwegian female student II (22), a happy person “...*is positive to the life, smiling and laughing, just sharing the positive energy*”.

Causes of happiness also seem to be deep and positive, as seen. None of our informants reflected on happy people as pure pleasure seekers. On the contrary, they emphasized that unselfish and anti-hedonistic actions make them happy: “*I have always tended to help people, if I am able to help. And when I help, I am happy because I succeeded to help someone to achieve what he/she wants*” (Serbian female employee, 24). Furthermore, to this informant, it seems impossible to be happy if people around are sad.

Thus, it can be argued that selfish individualism and superficial hedonism cannot be effects of happiness and that happiness is by these views rather reduced to giddy, empty hedonism, which is a false view on happiness (Kesebir, & Diener, 2008). Happiness appears not to be a matter of pursuit of pleasure, but of striving for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life (*ibid.*), which is also clear in our study. In order to be happy you must be attached to something (Serbian female student, 21) and you are happy when you do something good (Serbian female employee, 24) and happy people are people who are fulfilled with their life - with their love life, with their family and with their job (Serbian female employee, 24). Thus, obviously happiness is a useful yardstick and it seems to bring out the best in people.

## 5 GENERAL DISCUSSION

On the basis of the results obtained in our study there emerges several broad meanings of happiness. First is the psychological concept of actual happiness that refers to simply predominant positive feelings and satisfaction with life. When happiness is defined like this, it seems that being happy is in our nature and in line with this, all our informants declare themselves happy. However, although attainable and even natural, this form of happiness does not exclude worries, stresses, crises and bad moods; it is about predominant happy feelings.

On the other hand, there seems to be ideal happiness that is about being completely and continuously happy. This form of happiness is probably out of reach from every individual due to the limitations that the powerful process of adaptation sets to human happiness and due to setting the highest demands. In the informants' view, it is an image or ideal and it seems that none of us have reached this form of happiness. Moreover, the informants express a disbelief that complete happiness will never happen.

Happiness also seems to include some ethical norms and values. Yet, as we can always do something better for ourselves and improve our lives and be better people, complete happiness is unattainable again.

A further meaning of happiness that could be found in narratives of our informants refers to fortune or luck. To be happy by means of good fortune implies that some people are simply happier by chance. On the other hand, being lucky is sometimes presented as having possibilities and/or being born within better living conditions. Happiness is finally found to be a matter of creation, when there are possibilities; otherwise, it is a matter of pursuit.

Thus, it can be argued that happiness in our study figures as a complex concept with a variety of meanings and that it is about: *happy feelings per se, reaching the perfect state of complete happiness, leading a happy life (a virtuous life), good fortune, creation and the pursuit of happiness.*

Regarding the stability of happiness, we did not find it. People react on changing events and circumstances in their life and these changes are reflected in their happiness level. Happiness is a state like issue, rather than a trait. The conceptions of happiness are also rather dynamic. For example, people may change their judgment of when and how happy they were during certain times in the life course. This is due to the fact that we seem to acquire a wider range of comparisons to use in assessing our lives as years go by (Martin, 2008).

However, in order to understand these ups and downs in the happiness levels, the age of the sample group of our study seems to be an important marker. Young people experience high levels of both, positive and negative emotions and they often change their moods and life is very up and down and very volatile (both pleasurable and stressful) (Headey & Wearing, 1992). Notably, as years go by, feelings seem to mellow (Myers, 1992), circumstances get more stable and attitudes towards life tend to be more defined (Veenhoven, 1991b). In line with this, our informants' attitudes towards life tended to be less crystallized and they seemed to explore possible life directions that also brought changes in their happiness level.

Regarding the responsibility and ability to influence happiness, we have found that in some cases a person can influence happiness, through an "adjustment of self" and an "adjustment of context" and in some cases it is not possible. A person cannot change "luck", cannot choose where he/she will be born and a person cannot influence happiness when it is a fixed trait. Thus, it can be argued that although people have a great need to feel as rulers in their lives (Myers, 1992), there is no absolute, but relative control and relative responsibility and it seems that changes in happiness are also the result of this fact.

Regarding the influences on happiness, we have found that these can broadly be separated into:

1. Those that stand outside the person – external;
2. And those that stand between persons – interpersonal (relationships).
3. Those that stand inside the person – intrapersonal;

State policy and living conditions seem to obtain their impact through chances and possibilities and human rights in a particular country. Following the psychological reasoning, the importance of these factors is related to the idea that people feel the need to have control over their lives. In line with this, as our results point to, it has been proven that in order to be happy, it seems not so important to have what we want, but to have possibilities to do what we want and to feel empowered (Myers, 1992). In our study, work has a positive impact on happiness when it is challenging enough and when it allows a person to realize his/her potentials. On the other hand, when work is something that solely provides means for existence, then it negatively affects people's happiness and pleasure comes only from free time. Yet, free time/leisure has been found as an important factor of happiness for all our informants and probably the explanation for this lies, in what Lu & Hu (2005) emphasize, that in leisure, people have the freedom to do what they sincerely want to do; hence, it is to expect that people will choose the things that they enjoy.

Regarding money as factor of happiness, it has been proven, in line with results of other studies, that its impact is limited and that there seems to be a certain minimum threshold after which money becomes of less importance for human happiness. This refers to a possibility to satisfy essential human needs after which some other things become more important (Argyle, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Diener & Oishi, 2000; Drakopoulos, 2007, Myers & Diener, 1995; Veenhoven, 1997). Regarding the mass media influences and standards of physical beauty, we have found that although these factors are generally influential in the modern world, it seems that it is the personality that determines the impact that they will have on a particular person. Otherwise, happiness seems to come from within and is a matter of spiritual investments. In line with this, the clear implication of studies is that the social capital (close relationships, a happy family life), an existence of diverse goals, active interests, a purpose and meanings in life is what affects happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Drakopoulos, 2007; Headey, 2008).

Relationships obtain their impact on happiness in several ways. Happiness can be enhanced when there is a positive environmental feedback and social support and when people have strong social bonds. People also seem to find pleasure in altruistic activities.

Regarding the intrapersonal influences on happiness, personality factors, cognitive factors and personal goals were identified as important. Thus, first maybe there are happy people in the sense that they simply obtain a rosy outlook at life in general. Second, in several ways, cognitive factors are able to modify the effect of environmental factors. First, we have found that if people are grateful when judging their lives, they regard themselves happy and vice-a-versa (Haybron, 2005). Furthermore, our results indicate that people seem to be happier after bad times and they appear to appreciate things when they lose them, otherwise they tend to take the things for granted (Gauthier, 1967). Moreover, the more they have, the more they want (Easterlin, 2001; Veenhoven, 1991a; Veenhoven, 1997). Finally, one general conclusion is that in order to be satisfied with life, to want what we have appears as more important than to have what we want (Myers & Diener, 1995). Personal goals have also proven to be important indicators of happiness. When a person meets her/his goals, happiness is enhanced. It seems also that not only reached goals, but already the moving towards personal goals and struggling to achieve them bring happiness.

Following from our results, it can be argued that happiness is a complex human quality that like all the others has numerous influences (Myers, 1992). However, there is a certain caution that must be addressed in treating influences on happiness as solely influences as causal directions might not be straightforward and one directional (Headey, Veenhoven & Wearing, 1991). For instance, longitudinal studies have found that job satisfaction and life satisfaction mutually influence each other (Argyle, 2001). Also, social contact and supportive relationships are causes of happiness, but being happy may also predispose an outgoing and sociable behaviour and result in good relations with others (Myers & Diener, 1995). Altruism is also both, a cause and a consequence of happiness as being happy makes people less self-focused and more compassionate (Myers, 1992). Therefore, as the causation might be two-directional, it seems better to understand influences on happiness in our study as *correlates* of happiness.

Regarding the effects of happiness, our results indicate that happiness is not a matter of the pursuit of pleasure, as argued by certain authors. Instead, it is about striving for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life (Kesebir & Diener, 2008) and brings goodness for both, the person and the people around them. Consequently, happiness is obviously a useful yardstick.

Thus, on the basis of the results of our study, there are certain myths of happiness that can be dispelled:

1. That few people are genuinely happy (Lyubomirsky, 2007);
2. That being happy exclude worries, stresses and crises (*ibid.*);
3. That wealth, fame and beauty can buy happiness (*ibid.*);
4. That young adulthood is the happiest time in the life course (Headey & Wearing, 1992);
5. That external factors play only a modest role for happiness (Veenhoven, 1991a; 1991b; 1994; 1997);
6. And finally, that happiness remains stable in time (*ibid.*)

Things that are found to pander happiness are:

1. Positive outlook and gratitude perspective;
2. Commitment to personal goals and ambitions;
3. Having chances and possibilities;
4. Feeling of control over own life;

5. Supportive and satisfying relationships and altruistic activities;
6. Free time and challenging work.

Due to the fact that internal and external factors were both found as important for happiness in our study, it can be argued that there seems to be empirical evidence for every one of the three most profound theories of happiness, but that none of them can by themselves explain all the variance in happiness.

First, it seems that the same external conditions may have a different impact on happiness for different people. Theorists of the cognitive approach would say that it is not the absolute level of a condition that is important for happiness, but a relative one: “in order to know how hot or cold, big or little, or good or bad something is we must compare it to a range of possible alternatives” (Diener & Lucas, 2000, p. 47). However, although cognitive factors are able to modify the effect of external conditions and although individual differences in the ability to adapt must be acknowledged, it can be argued that happiness seems not to be merely psychological. External influences attain a notable impact on happiness (Diener et al., 2003; Diener & Oishi, 2004; Veenhoven, 1991a; 1994; 1997; 1998; 2006).

In accordance with this, in our study, the living conditions and an overall state policy are found as markers of big differences in satisfaction of Serbian and Norwegian informants. When reflecting on these issues, Norwegians feel lucky just to be born in Norway. In contrast, the Serbian informants all share very pessimistic views on the overall situation in their country. They express great disappointment with living conditions, with an overall state policy and they do not have faith in their politicians. They also do not see that there are chances and possibilities in their home country and they are motivated to emigrate. Furthermore, it can be argued that Serbians have got used to bad circumstances in their country. They consider a crisis as a normal phenomenon and they stress that the current economic world crisis has probably a higher impact on people who did not have political struggles and crises before. Therefore, it could be said that certain psychological adaptations among Serbians definitely have happened.

However, as they have a tendency to leave their country and as they see their fellow citizens as becoming more and more dissatisfied, then an adaptation process has obviously its limits (Diener, 1984). And although adaptation is a powerful process, it is not all-powerful and it rather reduces than eliminates the effects of circumstances (Diener, 1984). In addition, with regard to certain bad conditions adjustment does not happen (Lyubomirsky, 2007).

An example could be war or hunger, which have been proven to have dramatic impacts on happiness (Veenhoven, 1991b). Thus, in line with affective theory, it can be argued that there are certain human needs that represent necessities and set the limits of our adaptability (Veenhoven, 1997). Consequently, ineffective need gratification manifests itself in bad physical and mental health and dissatisfaction with life (Veenhoven, 1994).

Happiness therefore might be used as a criterion for a societal well-being and if people of a society say that they are unhappy and not satisfied with their lives, then in some sense the society is not succeeding (Diener & Oishi, 2004). The subjective well-being criterion is democratic. It is the people that are judging their lives and not experts, thus, they have a possibility to give a grade of how well their needs and their culturally specific values are fulfilled in their country. However, although the positive subjective well-being of citizens seems to be necessary, we must agree with Diener et al. (2003), that it is not sufficient for the good life and for the good society. It is hard to imagine a desirable society where people are depressed, miserable and dissatisfied, but there are other characteristics that we value such as longevity, human rights or fairness, which are also important indicators (Diener & Oishi, 2004).

This makes a lot of sense in Serbia. Politicians today argue that things are better and better in the country, but, in our informants' views, this is far from citizens' claims and perceptions. Therefore, the experiences of people are important indicators of a good society and must be considered. On the other hand, although after the break-up of former Yugoslavia, levels of happiness among citizens declined (Inglehart & Klingemann, 2000), one can assume that many people in Serbia during the Milosevic era would have claimed that they were happy, as they were hearing only one side. Manipulation and propaganda were the most important means of his overall policy. The great stimulus for these claims would also be the people's enormous capacity to adapt. Yet, when judging their lives on the basis of human rights, fairness and other societal values, we would find that these did not exist. The standard of living during those times was also at the edge of existence. Therefore, we must agree that happiness cannot be the only indicator of a good society, but together with economic and social indicators, it represents an adequate criterion to assess the quality of life in a particular society (Diener et al., 2003).

Although we have found that external influences are important for happiness, which is in line with assumptions of the affective theory, this view on happiness still must be considered as reductionist one.

This is due to the fact that it seems to overlook the likelihood that some nations can obtain high scores on happiness not only for the reasons of better living conditions. According to Diener et al. (2003), some differences between nations appear to be due to differences in life conditions, whereas others seem to be due to the fact that happiness is differently valued in different cultures. When taking into consideration that there seems to be a cultural norm to be satisfied about not to complain in Norway - "It is typical Norwegian to be good", as highlighted by Gro Harlem Brundtland. On the other hand, in Serbia, expression of emotions (both, negative and positive) is very vivid and is considered as part of the cultural repertoire (Djeric, 2003). Consequently, inferences that Norwegians are happier than Serbians might reflect this cultural norm rather than an actual emotional experience (Myers & Diener, 1995). These cultural effects are commonly underestimated when coming to understanding the differences between the nations, but they emphasize the importance of caution in making comparisons of subjective well-being across cultures (Diener et al., 2003).

Thus, the problems with affective theory on happiness seem to be within its basic assumptions. Notably, beliefs that certain human needs are universal remained without support in reality. Many needs actually appeared as cultural specific. For instance, Maslow thought that high self-esteem is universally important, but studies have shown that self-esteem adds much more to human happiness in individualistic cultures, than in collectivistic and that for women in some cultures it is not significant factor at all (Diener & Lucas, 1999). According to Diener and cooperatives, needs of humanistic psychologists seem to reflect too much of western values and they have found more strong correlation between these needs and life satisfaction in the United states than say in South Korea or China, for instance (Diener et al., 2003).

But even if all universal needs were known, the connection between them and objective conditions is not as clear as implied in this theory. This is the case regarding even fundamental human needs such as objective temperature that is most comfortable for different individuals. Some people are comfortable at 15 degrees, whereas others are freezing. High ordered needs, for instance, the need for social contact, vary even more significantly across individuals. Some people need much social contact, whereas others need very little (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

However, as we have seen, everything cannot be relative, which is the important shortcoming of the cognitive theory of happiness. Other problems also appear where actually different approaches within cognitive theory lead to opposite predictions and inconsistent results for the same phenomenon.

For instance, if someone uses past experiences as standard of comparison, then increase in income should lead to increased happiness. Nevertheless, if expectations increase with income, which generally tends to be the case, then income change will not make a person happier. Ideally, this theory should be able to predict when change will have impact on happiness and when people, by means of adaptation mechanism, should remain as happy as before. Not of less importance, there are individual differences in the ability to adapt or in the ways people use upward and downward comparisons that ought to be acknowledged (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

In addition, people might be more likely to use goals as a standard of comparison than any other standard because of their personal salience; hence again, everything cannot be relative (Diener and Lucas, 2000). In line with this, happiness is in our study exactly within the terms of personal goals sometimes defined and, all in all, personal goals were proven to be important factors of happiness for our informants. Along the same line, although Smith et al. (1989), view intrapersonal and social comparisons to be important sources when people make happiness judgments and although they emphasize that these two types of information are confounded with each other, they suggest that a person will most probably give priority to intrapersonal comparisons. For instance, if a person ranks last in a race, he/she can still be happy with his/her performance if it represents a personal best. Alternatively, a person may have finished the race as first in the group and still be unhappy if it reflects poor personal efforts. Ross and cooperatives have also found in their study that most of the informants use their goals when they make life satisfaction judgments (Ross in Diener & Lucas, 2000). In another study, similarly, it has been proven that achievement of intrinsic goals adds more to happiness than success in extrinsic, what obviously contradicts idea that happiness is based on comparison with socially constructed standards (Veenhoven, 2006).

Above all, it seems very problematic to define happiness as a cognitive state and to make inferences from life satisfaction to happiness. As Haybron (2005) emphasizes, then our happiness might have less to do with how things are going for us, but would rather be an issue of how we look at our lives, which has a number of serious difficulties. All of us can choose one of the two perspectives when judging our lives, none of which is necessarily predominant. First is the gratitude perspective, notably, appreciating what we have, and second is Stoic perspective where we judge our lives with regard to whether we are making the most of them. From the gratitude perspective, few of us would rate their lives negatively, but from the Stoic perspective, many of us would.

Yet, since the choice of these two perspectives is significantly arbitrary, it can be (and often is) substantially capricious whether one is satisfied with one's life.

These problems, Haybron (2005) states, become especially relevant when emotional state and life satisfaction diverge. It seems possible to imagine a person who is satisfied with his/her life even though he/she is depressed or otherwise experiences emotional hazards. An example could be an artist who might think that emotions do not matter or even that it is good to be melancholic or depressed and thus be satisfied with his life. It appears as deeply controversial to ascribe this person as being happy without the emotions markers. Especially in this particular case where life satisfaction and emotional state diverge, happiness seems to track emotional state, rather than the judgment (Haybron, 2005). Cognitive appraisals could therefore be said to play at best an additional role in the assessment of happiness (Veenhoven, 2006).

Also, life satisfaction seems to be a very problematic concept by itself and it is deeply controversial whether it represents a clear cognitive state. On the contrary, in Serbia, life satisfaction rather refers to the emotional sphere of personality (Trebjasanin, 2000). Not all authors regard life satisfaction as a cognitive state or a cognitive component of happiness. For instance, to Veenhoven (1984) life satisfaction and happiness are synonymous and life satisfaction/happiness is comprised from cognitive and affective component. This problem becomes especially relevant in cross-cultural studies and especially when happiness is measured by a single question, such as: "how satisfied are you with your life as a whole", which frequently arises in happiness surveys (Argyle, 2001). This question might imply different meanings for the informants and consequently, a researcher might measure different things. Concepts themselves might not be necessarily comparable (Diener & Suh, 2000) and our study is not an exception. Serbians and Norwegians might not think the same when they define a happy person as a satisfied person and then finding that Serbians are, for instance, less happy than Norwegians, might be of little value as the validity of measurement is compromised.

The greatest argument for the trait claims on happiness is an observed tendency in certain studies for happiness to be fairly stable in time and not so open to fluctuations (Veenhoven, 1997). However, in our study, although it has been shown that some people obtain a rosy outlook at life in general, there seems no stability in happiness.

Not of less importance, the observations that happiness is fairly stable in time and a matter of internal factors are made in peaceful, prosperous and egalitarian societies; hence, they may say more about these societies, than about the nature of happiness (Veenhoven, 1997). Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that there remain “stabilities” other than happiness as such that can mislead us in conclusion that happiness is due to an inner disposition to enjoy life, when actually it is not. For instance, stability might reflect stability of personal characteristics such as good health, nice character and ability to cope with problems. Or it can maintain due to stability in living conditions in these countries (Veenhoven, 1997).

Following the above observation (Veenhoven, 1997), there is an important claim that can be made – namely, that the importance of internal and external factors may vary depending on of which society we are looking at. In line with Maslov’s theory, it may be assumed that external conditions are likely to obtain their impact when they are not provided, like in poor countries. Whereas in peaceful, prosperous and egalitarian societies, they do not longer stimulate happiness, which then becomes due to inner factors. Following this argumentation, external factors might be more influential in Serbia, whereas in Norway, the inner factors would be predominant. This is the challenge for further research.

On the basis of the empirical evidences, there are certain claims that can be addressed. Firstly, that what is happening in a person’s life is found to have important implications for happiness beyond the effects of personality (Diener et al., 2003) and although there seem to be people who perceive life in a more positive way than others (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991), in certain living conditions no one will be happy regardless of their propensity to feel happy or their ability to adapt (Veenhoven, 1991b). Also, followers of the cognitive view on happiness seem to be right in their assertion that cognitive factors are able to modify the impact of external influences (Veenhoven, 1991a). However, not everything is subject to comparison and people do have personal goals, which simply do not follow the cliché: the more I have, the more I want (Diener & Lucas, 2000). Finally, different cultures set different meanings of happiness and happiness of the particular individual of a particular country seems to be saturated by these meanings (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

To conclude, views on happiness as entirely a trait, entirely a situational, entirely a cultural specific, or entirely a relative issue must be labelled as reductionist views and the solution seems to be in an eclectic theory that would ideally succeed to integrate all these different approaches.

Although our data provided some interesting findings, there are certain limitations of our study that need to be acknowledged. This is a qualitative study; thus, it suffers the limitations of self-reported, qualitative studies and of an interview as a method in general and critics might be addressed regarding validity and reliability of obtained data. However, we were aware of these problems and we did as much as possible in order to minimize the interference of personal bias, the effects on respondents and the occurrence of social desirable responding. The possibility that the different language used might bias the responding was not of less a consideration for us and, all in all, we did our best to carry out this research systematically, ethically and sceptically, as explained in method part.

The important critiques might also be addressed regarding the generalization of our results. Nevertheless, we did not aim at that, but rather by means of interview to catch up the particularity and complexity of happiness of every particular informant, which in our opinion is actually the greatest advantage of this study. The great encouragement for this approach lies in the very nature of happiness. Happiness is subjective and it refers to feelings and satisfaction of life that can only be experienced and articulated by the individual. Thus, it seems that happiness cannot be investigated by the questions prepared in advance, but needs to leave the space for personal story.

On the other hand, as we have found similar influences on happiness among our informants, despite them belonging to different cultures, it seems that happiness is not entirely subjective and culturally specific. In line with this, Cantril carried out a study in fourteen highly diverse cultures and at widely different stages of socio-economic development and found sources of happiness to be quite the same in every country (Cantril in Easterlin, 2001). The things that are somewhat under people's control and that occupy their everyday life (material circumstances, family concerns and relationships, concerns about one's personal and family health, job, leisure etc.) are the things that people commonly mention elsewhere and that are also found in many other studies (Easterlin, 2001). This is not to underestimate the cultural influences. On the contrary, we have found that certain results might also be explained by means of cultural effects and at some places we asked whether something is necessarily universal, or rather it might be cultural specific. However, there seem to be certain things that matter elsewhere for happiness, as Easterlin (2001) emphasizes.

## 6 FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

First, the methodological sophistication is an important task in this area. Research can no longer rely solely upon single single-item scales that simply address a direct question like: “Taking all together, how happy would you say you are: very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy?” (Veenhoven, 1997, p. 29). These types of questions are not only too obvious and likely to be affected by response biases (Argyle, 2001), but they do not enhance the scientific knowledge of happiness at all. This is the general perspective. In this area there seem to be many self-help books and as the scientific studies of happiness are pretty new (they started in 1960), there is a great need for explicit scientific research. Also, due to deficiencies of self-reported measures, it seems that whenever possible, researchers should use multiple measures of subjective well-being in order to reduce error of measurement (Diener, 1994).

Second, theories of happiness should answer the critical questions we have raised. And the main question seems not to be whether internal or external factors of happiness are predominant. As Diener (1984) emphasizes, it is probably none of them. People react to events as subjectively perceived and, therefore, some internal processes must be involved. On the other hand, certain events are pleasurable to most people, which imply that external factors are also important. The challenge for the further research is to uncover how internal factors and events and circumstances interact (Diener, 1984).

Also, it seems that the critical question is not whether there are human universals for human happiness or its’ causes vary among cultures. On the bases of results obtained by research, it makes sense to say that there are both. We all belong to the same species and it seems reasonable to suggest that certain human needs, such as, for food, water, shelter, health, social relationships are necessary and important for subjective well-being elsewhere and that some societies are more “livable” in the sense that they are better in satisfying these needs (Veenhoven, 1991a). Accordingly, the low levels of happiness in very poor nations are unlikely to be merely measurement artefacts (Diener et al., 2003). At the same time, some differences between nations appear to be due to the fact that happiness is differently conceptualized and differently valued (*ibid.*). The empirical challenge is to identify universal and cultural specific factors and to uncover how universal causes might be channelled by culture (*ibid.*).

Not of less importance, in research the most common used definition of happiness is cognitive and affective appraisal of one's life (Diener et al., 2002). On the other hand, cognitive and affective theory are even opposite in their assumptions and it is very hard to explain the empirical data on the basis of their assumptions. Thus, we also need a theoretical sophistication and theories that are able to grasp more deeply and accurately what happiness is all about.

Finally and maybe the most important, we have found that happiness can be changed and that it is very worth of promoting. In line with other studies, broad positive implications of happiness emerged indicating that happiness is both an end and a means to more caring and healthy societies (Myers, 1992). Therefore, the promotion of human happiness should be a perspective and a priority of every particular society.

*I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But now I thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. –  
John Stuart Mill*

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## APENDIX A

### Questionnaire in English

1. Sex: a) male b) female
  2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Are you married? a) yes b) no
  4. Do you have children? a) yes b) no
  5. Who do you live with? \_\_\_\_\_
  6. You are: a) employed with finished secondary school b) student
  7. If you are employed, which is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
  8. If you are employed, which is the amount of the income you receive per month?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How satisfied are you with this income? a) I am satisfied b) I am both, satisfied and dissatisfied c) I am dissatisfied

## APENDIX B

### Questionnaire in Serbian

1. Pol: a) muski b) zenski
2. Godine starosti: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Da li ste udati/ ozenjeni? a) da b) ne
4. Da li imate dece? a) da b) ne
5. S kim zivite? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Vi ste: a) zaposleni sa završenom srednjom skolom b) student
7. Ako ste zaposleni koje je vase zanimanje? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Ako ste zaposleni koliko je iznos vasih mesecnih prihoda? \_\_\_\_\_  
Koliko ste zadovoljni ovim iznosom? a) Zadovoljan sam b) I zadovoljan I  
nezadovoljan sam c) Nezadovoljan sam

## APPENDIX C

### Interview guide in English

#### Introduction part:

First of all, thank you for time and your decision to be part of this study. The aim of this study is to investigate happiness among young people in Serbia and Norway. We are aware that this phenomenon is subjective and we want to hear your personal story and opinion about this issue. There is no right or wrong answers. These results will be used only in scientific purposes as explained before. If you feel enough comfortable, I think that we can start.

#### Narrative part:

1. Could you describe a situation where you have been really happy? What happened in this situation that made you happy?

#### Problem focused part:

1. When you say: a person is happy what do you mean by that?
2. What makes **you** happy? Which aspect of life do you consider to be the most important for your happiness?
3. What do you think: is a human being born happy, or is he/she responsible for his/her happiness and can work for it?
4. How important and emphasized is the issue of happiness in the overall policy of your country?
5. Do you perceive your degree of happiness stable in time or does it go up and down depending on what is happening in your life?
6. What do you think of money as the factor of happiness?
7. What is your opinion about media's message that happiness is perfection? Does it affect you?
8. How do you look on life in general? Are you happy?
9. How do you see your future?
10. If you met a fairy that gave you three wishes in order to make you happy, what would you wish for?
11. Is there something you would like to add that we did not ask?

Thank you for participation!

## APPENDIX D

### Interview guide in Serbian

#### Uvod:

Kao prvo hvala na izdvojenom vremenu i odluci da ucestvujete u ovom istrazivanju. Cilj ove studije je da ispita pojam i doživljaj sreće među mladim ljudima u Srbiji i Norveškoj. Mi smo svesni da je ovaj fenomen subjektivan te hocemo da cujemo vasu licnu pricu i misljenje po ovom pitanju. Nema tacnih i netacnih odgovora. Ovi rezultati ce se koristiti iskljucivo u naucne svrhe kao sto je vec objasnjeno. Ako se osecate opusteno I udobno mislim da mozemo da pocnemo.

#### Pripovedanje:

1. Molim te opisi mi situaciju u kojoj si bio veoma srecan. Sta se desilo u toj situaciji da te ucinilo srecnim?

#### Problemski fokusirana pitanja:

2. Kada kazes da je osoba srecna sta podrazumevas pod tim?
3. Sta **tebe** cini srecnim?
4. Koji aspekt zivota smatras najbitnijim za tvoju sreću?
5. Sta mislis: da li se individua radja srecna ili je pak potpuno odgovorna za svoju sreću i samim tim moze da utice na nju?
6. Koliko je pitanje sreće kao ljudsko pravo vazno i istaknuto u sveopstoj politici tvoje zemlje?
7. Da li doživljjas svoju sreću kao stabilnu u vremenu ili pak tvoja sreća ide gore dole u zavisnosti od onog sto se desava u tvom zivotu?
8. Sta mislis o novcu kao faktoru sreće?
9. Sta mislis o poruci medija da je sreća savrsenstvo? Da li to utice na tebe?
10. Kako gledas na zivot uopste? Da li si srecan?
11. Kako vidis svoju buducnost?
12. Kada bi upoznao dobru vilu koja ti daje mogucnost da zamislis 3 zelje koje bi te ucinile srecnim, koje bi to zelje bile?
13. Je l' imas nesto da dodas na temu sreće, a sto mi nismo pitali?

Hvala na ucestvovanju!