

The Role of Happiness in the Economic Environment

Ondřej ROUBAL *
Karel HAVLÍČEK **

Abstract

The concept of happiness is interpreted by using many meanings and a variety of denotations in social sciences. Human happiness (quality of life, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, level of positive emotions, etc.) is schematized in many different contexts of theoretical, empirical, and experimental studies. Various efforts of experts aimed at understanding, describing, and explaining the experience of happiness bring many interesting findings, applicable in both the commercial and noncommercial sector. At the same time, empirical data dispute many stereotypes of human happiness, its laic and intuitive interpretation. The reality is more complicated. Life satisfaction and experienced human happiness are determined by a number of cultural-social, economic, or psychological factors. In this regard, we aim to learn about the potential effects of social comparison, social adaptation, and impact of money on the subjective level of experienced happiness and quality of life. It is becoming apparent that social comparison is an important factor for perceiving one's own satisfaction and happiness. The level of achieved positive emotions and the period of experiencing such emotions depend on the nature of such emotions' source. Money is only important to a certain degree for subjective perception of the quality of life.

Keywords: experienced happiness, happiness, Hedonic adaptation, life satisfaction, quality of life, social comparison

Introduction

The area of human happiness has been subject to ever increasing theoretical, experimental, and empirical studies in the disciplines of social sciences. The growing interest of researches in identifying various contexts of experienced human happiness is particularly apparent in the area of psychological research, studies of the so-called positive psychology, or as part of a current original approach of behavioral psychology of D. Kahneman. While the area of human happiness was only given minor attention at the beginning of the 1960s, approximately 30 years later, the area of "happiness", "subjective well-being", "life satisfaction",...¹ is subject to more than 347 000 specialized monographs and associated psychological studies and papers (Robinson et al., 1991). In addition to psychological studies primarily targeting the individual dimension of human happiness and purely subjective, emotional and sentimental circumstances of experiencing well-being, we should not ignore a number of important studies addressing human happiness from the perspective of social psychology (Argyle, 1987, 1999), anthropology (Eriksen, 2010), economics (Easterlin, 2003, Loewenstein, 1992, Thaler, 2008), or

sociology (Galbraith, 1958, Inglehart, 1977, Durning, 1992, Bauman, 2010). Therefore, the knowledge of human happiness is intensified in a number of possible contexts and implications, examined in a variety of conditions and situations, and interpreted using plurality of symptoms and types. This is also reflected in a noticeable heterogeneity of opinions regarding the sources and other factors of experiencing happiness as well as in its ambiguous terminological definition itself. Across the debate of experts, human happiness is heterogeneously matched with, for example, the **quality of life, positive emotions, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, high-quality life, etc.** Furthermore, uneven attention is given to various dimensions of human happiness (quality, extent, intensity, duration) and to its sources, symptoms, and types. At the same time, empirical and experimental determination and measuring of the degree of human happiness accentuates a wide range of not only psychological factors, but also external effects of social life. Starting from the second half of the 1940s, various sociological studies have been coming out in this regard, addressing the differences in the level of happiness and satisfaction of diverse social groups and societies².

* Vice-Dean, Ph.D., Faculty of Social Studies, University of Finance and Administration, Estonská 500, Prague, Czech Republic.
E-mail: ondrej.roubal@vsfs.cz

**Dean, Ph.D., Faculty of Economic Studies, University of Finance and Administration, Estonská 500, Prague, Czech Republic.
E-mail: Karel.havlicek@vsfs.cz

¹ Specialized psychological (as well as social-psychological or sociological) studies do not agree on unified terminology to describe human happiness. It is most frequently associated with the feeling of satisfaction, pleasure, well-being, harmony, or quality of life.

² The first study based on an international comparison of the level of satisfaction and happiness was published in 1946 (Diener, Suh 1999:435). Similar studies that monitor the differences in the level of happiness for individual countries of the world are regularly published, e.g. in the form of the "Happy planet index" (www.happyplanetindex.org/) or in the form of the research results of the company Gallup, using the Gallup – Healthways Well-Being Index questionnaire, performed daily on a sample group of 1 000 Americans (Kahneman 2012:423).

Various empirical methods of measuring the subjective level of respondents' happiness and monitoring of a wide range of economic, social, political, cultural, or ecological factors, which may subjectively – directly or indirectly - affect the perceived level of happiness and satisfaction, are used for this purpose.

In this submission we are concentrating on issues regarding life satisfaction and happiness as part of the way of life within the modernization process of society. The study is a part of a conceptual preparation for a project aimed at recognizing the changes in the way of life of the population of the micro region Hlučínsko. This region stands out in the process of modernization vis-a-vis the rest of the Czech Republic how in various ways it distinguishes itself through a number of specifics which can also be identified in the changes of the way of life. It lends itself to the possibility of an empirical comparison of the impacts of the modernization processes on the way of life, whose meaning contains also a certain quality of life, life satisfaction and the subjective experience of feelings of happiness³.

Why is Happiness Interesting?

It is the sociological perspective that further develops and simultaneously causes problems to the area of human happiness.

Firstly, some psychological approaches that underline the pivotal role of psychogenetic predispositions, as basically lifelong constant determinants affecting the overall nature of experienced human happiness are seen familiar in this regard. At the same time, the sociology perspective of studying the area of human happiness does not refuse or dispute the psychological perspective; it only seeks different bases and solutions of research questions associated with experiencing the feelings of happiness. In addition to the fact that some psychologists prefer to examine human happiness from the “internal” perspective of humans, as it were, and identify models of experienced happiness within the context of essential basis of personality determined by specific emotions, experiences, feelings or type of temperament, sociologists usually shift their attention more to “external” world of social activities, interpersonal relations, living conditions and factors, monitor the ways various positions are experienced and formed, which are subsequently reflected (or could be reflected) in the subjective perception of human satisfaction. Moreover, sociologists – unlike psychologists – free themselves from examining happiness to the extent of individual and intimate experience, towards identifying happiness of various social groups and units.

Secondly, many empirical and experimental studies refer to the fact that a lot of laic views and stereotypes about human happiness do not apply in practical life or are only applicable to a limited extent. The effects of some factors (age, education, wealth, religiousness, employment, etc.) on experienced happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction are overrated; on the other hand, other factors are underrated. Moreover, the relation of various external factors and happiness is often complex and problematic. This also applies to, for example, the relation of money and subjective level of happiness, which should – according to many premises – positively correlate with increasing income. In other words, the widespread and popular ideas that wealthier people are more satisfied / more affluent people are happier, appear to be inadequate from the perspective of many empirical findings. It is a correlation, which is far from explicit. Diener proves that “money has a very complicated relation to the level of happiness”. Kahneman refers to the “clear difference between the effects of income to experienced happiness and to life satisfaction”. He also works with the hypothesis that higher income is associated with lower ability to enjoy the small pleasures in life; this hypothesis is also experimentally verified⁴. Other sociological researches point out the zero correlation of money and happiness once a certain level of income is achieved⁵.

By no means is it just about the relation of money and happiness, which obtains a slightly new form in the light of empiric studies. Therefore, it may be surprising to us that some sources of our pleasure are subjects to a faster degradation of achieved level of happiness and that others provide more lasting and stable feelings of satisfaction. Empirical work may also convince us that we often overrate the effect of circumstances in life of permanent nature to personal happiness, while underestimating the importance of situational factors (Kahneman, 2012). Perhaps, we are insufficiently aware of the importance of adaptability, which prevents us from permanently remaining in intensive state of joyful euphoria or miserable suffering (Brickman, Campbell, 1971). We may thus uselessly overestimate (and we apparently do) some events and situations in life, which only have a limited effect on the subjective perception of happiness/misery (e.g. winning a lottery or paraplegia, on the other hand).

Thirdly, we can assume that various factors affecting the feelings of happiness are unevenly significant and, moreover, subject to a number of social and cultural aspects. It is not solely about the fact that effects of various situations in life do not have identical impact

³ This study came into existence with the financial support under project no. 13-23870S 41 81 CZ Changes in the way of life and modernization processes within the Hlučínsko micro-region.

⁴ This idea is supported by experimental evidence: as part of priming, a selected group of students was exposed to the idea of wealth; at the same time, their facial expressions showed lower level of satisfaction and pleasure in a situation, when they were eating chocolate.

⁵ According to research work performed by Kahneman, the average increase of experienced happiness associated with an income in excess of USD 75,000 (annual household income) equals to exactly zero.

on the level of experienced happiness of individuals or groups of individuals, but also about the fact that such effects also significantly depend on the environment and context, in which they take place. The examination of effects of acquired education on experienced happiness may serve as a suitable example. Many empirical studies confirm the widely accepted idea assumption that the level of acquired education positively correlates with the manifested level of personal happiness and satisfaction (Argyle, 1999). In other words, higher level of satisfaction and happiness is usually detected in respondents with higher education compared to those, who did not reach a similar level of education. At the same time; however, it has been empirically proven that “more educated” respondents in countries with a lower standard of living are relatively more satisfied than people with the same level of education of wealthier societies with high standard of living (Křivohlavý, 2013).

Happiness from the Empirical Perspective – Money, Adaptation, Comparison

We addressed selected aspects of (horizontal) happiness within the project entitled *Changes in the impact of marketing communication on the area of consumption and lifestyle of people within the context of the current economic crisis*⁶. The research work originally targeted the identification of potential changes in consumer behavior of Czech citizens in connection with the consequences of the current economic crisis as well as the analysis of changes in the content and forms of marketing communications and the reflection thereof by consumers (addressees) and professional public (producers, marketers). The project was further expanded by the certainly useful and interesting examination of how respondents perceive the quality of life in the context of their own financial situation, which factors they identify with their life satisfaction, where and in what they look for the sources of feelings of joy, and how long they are willing to enjoy such sources.

The project was solved via a quantitative method, using a standardized questionnaire consisting of 27 material and 5 identification questions. The deliberate selection procedure predominantly focused on the student population of a private university (University of Finance and Administration - VŠFS), predominantly from families of middle and upper middle classes. By a deliberate choice we sample predominantly members of the young and middle-age generations (75% of the respondents) who are simultaneously secondary school or university graduates (93%). We have attached a particular value to the responses of this population segment realizing fully that the sample is not representative of the adult population of the Czech Republic. This fact corresponds to the work with data and their analysis, which is based primarily on the interpretation of the basic response frequency and a comparison of the response value in the male and female populations. A deeper analysis of the possi-

ble correlations of the other variables and response values is with regard to the character of the empirical probe not the objective of this empirical work.

The sample was additionally expanded by respondents of middle and oldest generation, with diverse education.

Table 1. Structure of the analyzed sample

Total number of respondents	713	
Gender	Males: 43.2%	Females 56.8%
Age	15-30 years (53.6%) 31-45 years (21.2%) 46-60 years (20.7%) 61 + years (4-5%)	
Education	Primary education (1.4%) Vocational training (4.4%) Secondary education (51.2%) University (43%)	
Employment	Employee (39.7%) Student (30.9%) Self-employed (13.1%) Business with employees (8.8%) Retiree (4.7%) Other (2.8%)	

Source: authors' calculations

In connection with addressing the problem of experiencing human happiness, we targeted – among others – the following research areas:

- A) Quality of life and income level
- B) Hedonic adaptation and its effects within the duration of the attained level of happiness
- C) Social comparison and its effects on the subjective level of experiencing happiness

In connection with the aforementioned research areas, the following working hypotheses were formulated:

H1 – **With regard to the subjective notion of increasing quality of life, the monthly income of up to CZK 300 thousand (EUR 12 thousand) is decisive; money is not crucial for increasing quality of life over the level of CZK 300 thousand (EUR 12 thousand);**

H2 – **Goods of nonmarket nature are subject to slower degradation of the level of attained happiness compared to tangible goods;**

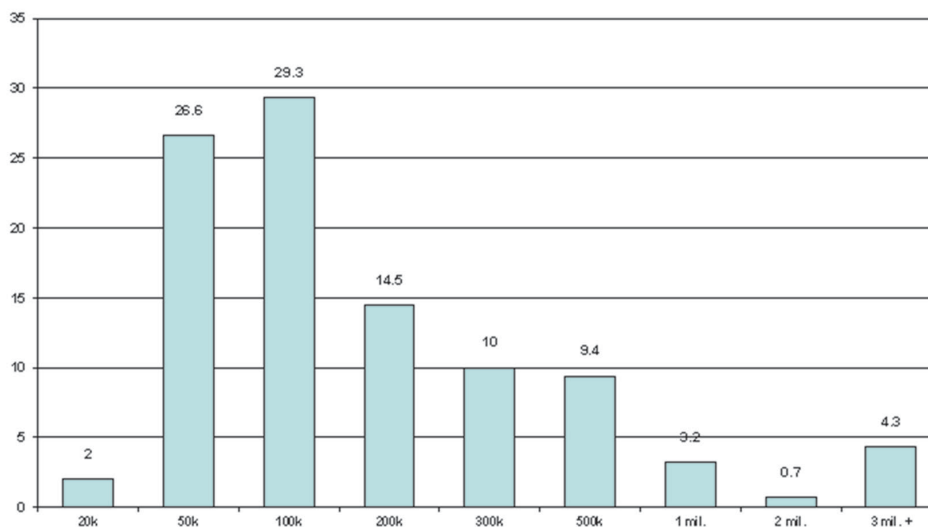
H3 - **One's own assessment of the subjective level of happiness is based on the comparison with other people within his/her social environment.**

To test the first hypothesis (H1), we used the following question in the questionnaire: "It is said that money is not everything. However, you will certainly agree that money is important to ensure quality of life. What minimum amount would you have to earn per month (net amount) to say that **money is no longer important** for the quality of your life?" Respondents were offered individual options (specific minimum monthly incomes), starting from CZK 20 thousand (EUR 800) to income in excess of CZK 3 million (EUR 120 thousand). We mainly wanted to find out, up to what financial amount (expressed as net monthly income) respondents would consider money important for the quality of life, while identifying the point, at which the effect of diminishing marginal utility of wealth occurs, i.e. from what monthly income would respondents view money irrelevant for the quality of life. We expected that money would be relevant up to the amount of CZK 300 thousand (EUR 12 thousand) per month for the subjective perception of the quality of life. At the same time, any increase of such income would have no effect on the perception of the quality of life. As shown in the below Chart (Chart no. 1), the

mode of answers (29.3%) is observed for up to CZK 100 thousand (EUR 4 thousand) per month, whereas approximately 27% of respondents replied that the minimum monthly amount for ensuring the quality of life is CZK 50,000. This means that financial income exceeding CZK 100,000 (EUR 12 thousand) is no longer an important factor of the quality of life for more than one half of respondents. It is apparent that for nearly 85% of respondents, the net monthly income of CZK 300 thousand (EUR 12 thousand) is the amount, beyond which any income increase no longer plays an important role for the subjective perception of the quality of life. The approximate amount of the average net monthly income for the test sample as a whole, beyond which the money is no longer a relevant factor for the quality of life, is the amount of **CZK175 thousand per month (EUR 7 thousand)**. In other words, this is the amount that shows the imaginary line, beyond which any increase of the respondents' financial income should not affect the quality level of their lives. For the sake of completeness, Kahneman comes to an amount of USD 75,000 (EUR 60,000) per year / household in his empirical study of the same phenomenon (2012:423), while Eriksen states CZK 200,000 (EUR 8,000)per month / person.

In case we look at the results of the data based on the respondents' gender (Table 3), the mode of answers falls within the interval of minimum monthly income of CZK 50,000 (EUR 2,000) for women (32.7%); the most common answer for men was in the interval of CZK 100,000 (EUR 4,000), i.e. 30.7%. Furthermore, the cumulative frequencies of answers also suggest that approximately 87% of women consider the net monthly income of CZK 300,000 (EUR 12,000) to be a sufficient amount for ensuring the quality of their life that no additional increase in income would affect the quality of life. In case of men, this interval (i.e. up to CZK 300,000) took about 87% share in the sample group. It is observed that men – compared to wom-

Table 2. What minimum amount would you have to earn per month (net amount) to say that money is no longer important for the quality of your life? Frequency – total (%); 713 respondents.



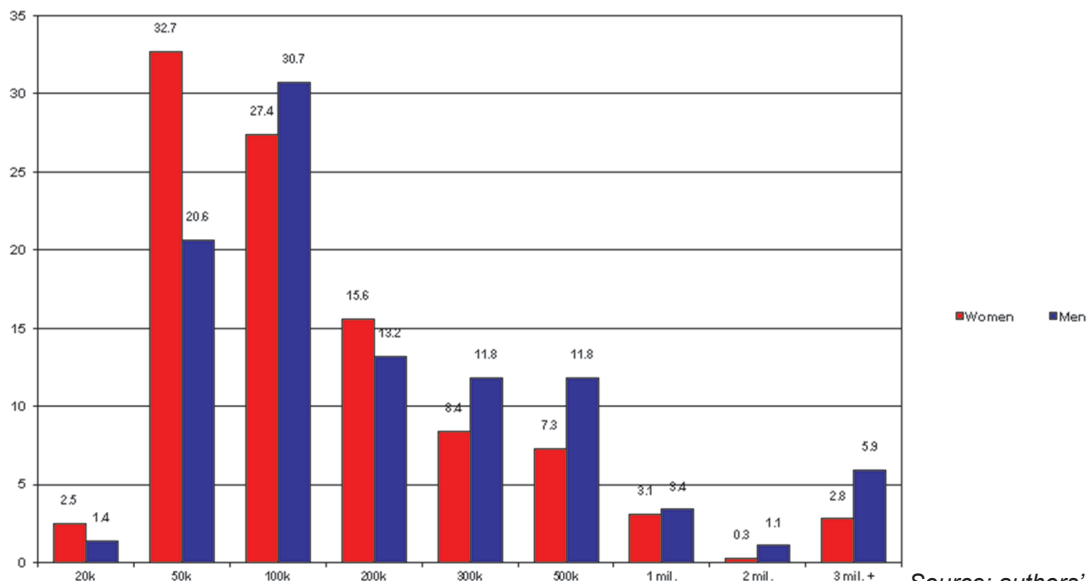
Source: authors' calculations

en – ascribe more important role to money in respect of the quality of life. In this regard, their demands for financial income are more ambitious than in case of women, who apparently do not consider money to be that relevant for the quality of life. Overall, the comparison of relation of money and quality of life for men and women results in the finding that men consider financial income to be more important factor of the quality of life and that the subjective feeling of the quality of life is more derived from the amount of money. Naturally, the question is, how respondents understand the “quality of life” category and what this means to men and women, respectively. However, it is likely that men and women will attribute different significance to different aspects of the quality of life, as also demonstrated in this example.

In the second area of the research, we targeted the problem, which is referred to as hedonic adaptation in literature (Brickman, Campbell, Eriksen, 2010; Kahneman, 2012). It is a phenomenon representing a universal psychological rule that ensures the ability to adapt to external conditions in life. Adaptation thus represents a mechanism that prevents people from staying in a permanent positive or negative state. We assume that it is hedonic adaptation that is closely linked to subjective experience of happiness, which is – more or less, sooner or later – subject to adaptation processes one way or another. We have formulated a hypothesis that goods of nonmarket nature are subject to slower degradation of the level of attained happiness compared to tangible goods. In other words, we tested the assumption that some intangible sources of happiness and joy provide more permanent feelings of well-being and satisfaction and are not subject to such a rapid subsiding of positive emotions as a result of adaptation mechanisms, as could be the case for tangible assets. We assumed that assets of nonmarket value – i.e. something that cannot be simply bought

and possessed – will be more immune to adaptation processes compared to tangible assets and other pleasures, thereby also offering a more lasting and stable feelings of happiness. For this purpose, we included the following question in the questionnaire: “On a scale from 1 to 10, record **how long** you personally experience the most intensive feelings of joy and happiness in case of the specified situations (1 shortest period of time– 10 longest period of time)”. The following potential sources of pleasure were provided to respondents: mobile phone; new clothing; good food; sports activity; time together with good friends; job-related/school-related achievements; acknowledgement of close relatives for a performed service; job well done; and good health. The results suggest (Table 4) that respondents personally experience the most lasting feelings of joy and happiness in connection with good health, job well done, time with good friends, job-related/school-related achievements, and acknowledgement of close relatives for a performed service. Therefore, it concerns situations evoking the feelings of joy and satisfaction a person must somehow earn, which require some effort or activity. It is not possible to attain such values without one’s own effort or endeavor; these sources of happiness cannot be simply bought (perhaps with the exception of better healthcare) or otherwise acquired other than via one’s own social activity, self-disciplined effort, and capabilities. As expected, the relatively shortest period of happiness results from the purchase of a mobile phone, clothing, food, but also a book, which – according to the answers and rather surprisingly – provides only a limited period of the feeling of joy. We have discovered that both the intensity and the duration of such positive emotions resulting from the purchase of a new book positively correlate with age and completed education. A book brings more pleasure and satisfaction to older and more educated respondents.

Table 3. What minimum amount would you have to earn per month (net amount) to say that money is no longer important for the quality of your life? Frequency – according to gender (%); 713 respondents.



Source: authors' calculations

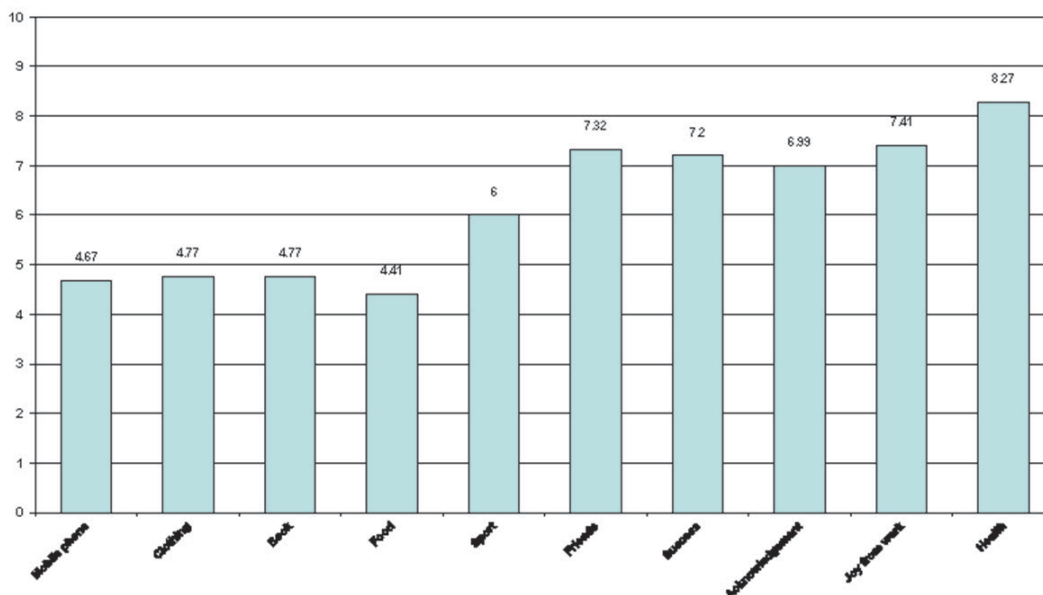
In this question, we also examined potential differences in the answers of men and women. We came to a preliminary finding (Table 5) that women, compared to men, show higher ability of longer experiencing of more intensive positive emotions in all items under review (with the exception of sports activities) / sources providing the feelings of joy and happiness. This could be, for example, attractive information, particularly for clients/creators of marketing and media campaigns, because – as the results suggest – the target group of women may be, compared to men, a social group that is more immune to adaptation mechanisms and, overall, more capable of preserving the more intensive feelings of joy and happiness in the different situations under review. In case the adaptation process to each new situation consists in the fact that such situations receive less of our attention and deliberation, it is safe to assume that men – unlike women – get used to some situations faster and sooner disengage their attention from them. It is possible that the reason why women experience longer and more intensive joy and happiness in the given situations is the fact that they give greater deal of attention to such situations and think about them more. From this perspective of findings, women are – compared to men - a target group, for which the joy saturation threshold occurs after a longer period of time, whereas the sources that provide the feelings of well-being do not lose their value as quickly for women as in case of men. Naturally, these findings would require additional detailed examination and verification; however, it is interesting information, which could be applied, for example, for the needs of marketing strategies and commercial practice.

In the subsequent area of the research, we focused on the problem of social comparison, as an important aspect affecting the subjectively experienced level of happiness. We were inspired by a number

of empirical studies examining the circumstances of how comparisons with other people and mutual comparisons of economic situation with those, who live close to us, affect the subjective level of satisfaction and happiness in life. Some studies and experiments prove that in a society, where all people get richer, the level of individual happiness remains constant (Erikson, 2010). In this regard, we thus derive from the assumption that the level of subjective satisfaction and personal happiness is determined, to some extent, by the effects of social comparison. These effects may hardly be overridden or ignored within a modern complex society; they are not just part of day-to-day life, they are also an object of many marketing messages and media images. The advertising industry works effectively due to the very reason that it made these effects commercial and spread, on a mass scale, the general desire of people to resemble or get closer to those, who are slightly better off than the rest of us (Erikson, 2010). The natural, spontaneous, private, and often unspoken need for mutual comparison and stacking up results in an artificially fabricated model of life that exposes via media every detail and perfection, a model that is more and more difficult to follow, because the objects, which we are to compare ourselves with within the media world of advertising, are even more unattainable and unbelievable. New forms of commercial and media-produced objects of social comparison open ever increasing space for feelings of relative deprivation for those, who are exposed to such comparison, in spite of the fact they are objectively doing well.

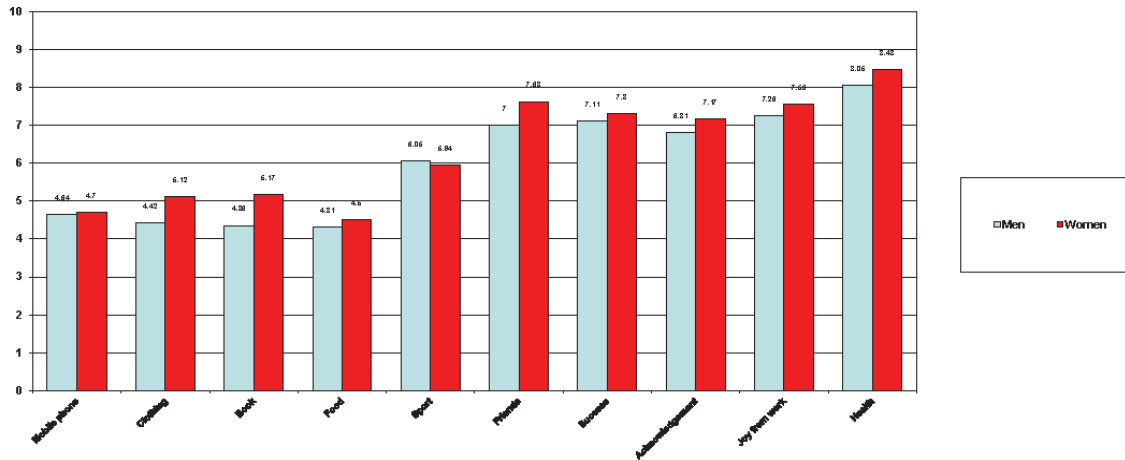
Solnick and Hemenway (1998) tested the hypothesis consisting in the importance of social comparison for the subjective feeling of happiness using an experiment carried out at Harvard University. The research targeted students, who were faced with two alterna-

Table 4. How long do you personally experience the most intensive feelings of joy and happiness in case of the specified situations? Averages – total (the higher the average, the longer the period of experiencing the feelings of joy and happiness) 713 respondents .



Source: authors' calculations

Table 5. How long do you personally experience the most intensive feelings of joy and happiness in case of the specified situations? Averages – according to gender (the higher the average, the longer the period of experiencing the feelings of joy and happiness) 713 respondents.



Source: authors' calculations

tives, whereas they were required to select the one alternative they would find more pleasing.

Alternative 1 – To live in a world, where you earn USD 50,000 (EUR 40,000) and other people earn half the amount.

Alternative 2 – To live in a world, where you earn USD 100,000 (EUR 80,000) and other people earn twice the amount.

Approximately two thirds of respondents opted for alternative no. 1. Authors of the experiment thus demonstrated certain impact of the social comparison effect on the nature of the subjectively experienced happiness and satisfaction. Based on the answers, most respondents prefer to live in an environment, where other people are worse off financially, even if this means lower standard of living on their part. It is a similar situation to the following dilemma: would you rather opt for a bicycle in a world where all people have to walk or would you rather have a small motorcycle in a world where all other people drive faster cars? Based on the results of the experiment by Solnick and Hemenway, it is safe to assume the preference of a bicycle to a small motorcycle in a society defined above.

The questionnaire included a similar question, with the objective of verifying the assumption that individual's own assessment of the subjective level of happiness is based on a comparison with other people from individual's social environment. We slightly adapted and reformulated the question:

Select one of the following two alternatives:

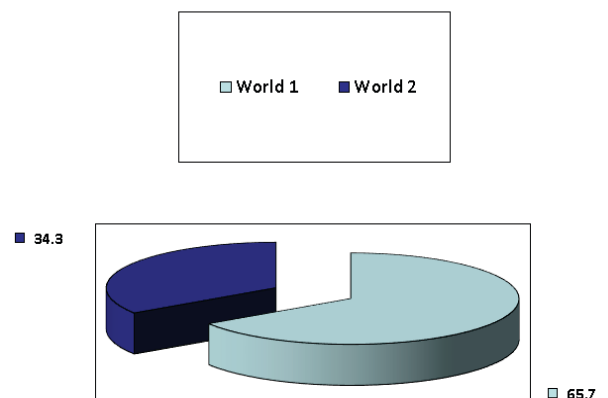
Alternative 1 – I wish to live in a world, where I earn CZK 100,000 (EUR 4,000) per year and other people earn half the amount.

Alternative 2 – I wish to live in a world, where I earn CZK 300,000 (EUR 12,000) per year and other people earn twice the amount.

The chart below (Table 6) clearly shows the percentages of those, who preferred the first or the second alternative. Approximately 65% of respondent prefer three times lower annual income, provided they live in

a world where everyone else only earns half of their income. They consider this idea to be so attractive that it leads to a paradoxical decision (at a first glance) to reduce their own standard of living. On the other hand, the idea of life with three times the financial income in a world where everyone else makes twice as much is only the preferred choice of every third respondent. From the perspective of this finding, the social comparison effect appears to be an important factor in life, preconditioning the perception of personal satisfaction. Apparently, some decision-making processes and choices in life are also linked to the need of social comparison, the significant risks of which consist in the negative feelings of relative depreciation.

Table 6. Frequency – total (%); 688 respondents.



Source: authors' calculations

Conclusions

Human happiness has been subject of theoretical, empirical, and experimental studies on a long-term basis. In addition, to classical philosophical papers and deliberations, we traditionally encounter more coherent results of research work regarding the area of human happiness in specialized psychological production; in recent years, there are more intensive efforts for sociological, economic or anthropological grasp of this issue. The research of happiness is being complex, with new perspectives of examining thereof appearing. Moreover, new ways are sought for applying the findings about human happiness, its sources, and ways of experiencing such happiness in the area of, for example, psychotherapy or social policy. However, many empirical and experimental studies are also applied in management theories, human resources, or commercial area of marketing communications.

Expert research of human happiness brings interesting facts and documented arguments disputing a number of intuitive views, schematic images, and stereotypes of human. The reality is more complicated. Human happiness belongs in the group of many types of feelings and experiences, moods, and states of mind. It is characterized by a high level of subjectivity and authenticity, duration or extent. We usually distinguish between horizontal happiness (one-dimensional) and vertical happiness (multidimensional). It is thus important to distinguish between hedonic happiness and emotionally exposed and long-term happiness, associated with more permanent values and overall life satisfaction. In this connection, the theory of Kahneman offers the concept of experienced happiness and remembered happiness. Therefore, happiness has two different aspects, derived from what we currently experience and how we currently evaluate our life. We thus refer to experienced happiness and life satisfaction.

In terms of the horizontal concept of happiness, we addressed some of its aspects. We verified the premise that money is an important factor for the subjective perception of the quality of life; however, only to a certain extent. The positive correlation of money and quality of life is confirmed, but it has its clear limits. From a certain amount of monthly income, the value of money is gradually losing its attractiveness in the respondents' eyes, no longer being relevant for the quality of life.

Moreover, we pointed out the relation of natural adaptation abilities of people to experience positive emotions in different situations of life. We tried to verify whether respondents would be more immune to adaptation mechanisms in situations that are not subject to market principles, i.e. in situations that are of immaterial nature and require personal involvement and motivation, compared to situations, where material values represent the source of positive emotions. It came to light that longer-term feelings of intensive joy and happiness are really more often associated with intangible assets – personal success or interpersonal relations.

We should not further ignore the finding that compared to men, women are on average able to enjoy and rejoice longer in situations, which were provided as potential sources of positive emotions.

The effect of social comparison is an important aspect of experiencing personal satisfaction and happiness in life. How a person assesses his/her own life satisfaction and what he/she currently experiences must apparently be monitored in the context of the people, with whom such person compares his/her own situation of life. The subjective level of happiness and satisfaction probably depends on the nature of the social environment, economic, cultural, and social conditions of the people we share our social space with and in the context of which we experience day-to-day reality. Since many media communications and images intervene with our life space, the issue of social comparison is not only the problem of "living" social relations on the local level, but also of globally operating "mediated" models and types of life, lifestyles, values and patterns of happy life – more or less realistic or viable in the day-to-day life.

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