
SOCIOLOGICAL MEASUREMENT OF THE HAPPINESS INDEX IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *The relevance of scientific work in the field of studying the measurement of the happiness index in the countries of Central Asia is due to the fact that the assessment of the psychological state of society is a significant problem in the social sciences and humanities. The purpose of the study is to analyse the happiness index, the mechanism of its social measurement, which will be based on a comparative analysis of this indicator in Central Asian countries, in particular, on the example of such countries as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The key objectives and directions of this study can be achieved through the use of different methodological approaches, which can reveal both the theoretical and practical components of the research. Such methodological approaches include theoretical and methodological approach, dialectical methodological approach, method of deduction, method of induction, method of synthesis, method of logical analysis, and others. In the course of the research work social and psychological aspects of the concept of the "happiness index" were identified, an assessment of international indices that are designed to conduct sociological change in the index of happiness as a level of quality of life was provided, and a comparative analysis of sociological measurement of the happiness index in Central Asian countries, which was based on an analysis of this index in such countries as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan was conducted. The results of the study demonstrated that the quantitative assessment based on the index of happiness in the countries of Central Asia has a fairly low level of public satisfaction with the quality of life, therefore, an important aspect of the research work is also to identify the problems that impede this and to define the methods to solve them.*

Keywords: *International Happiness Index; social phenomenon; subjective well-being; happiness factors; quality of life*

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Introduction

The measurement of happiness is a social and cultural phenomenon that can combine in this concept a range of crucial aspects of the reality of a social nature, each aspect of which represents a weighty value both for a particular individual and for society as a whole. In modern conditions of world life, a rather important scientific task is formed, which is associated with attempts to study the happiness index using various methodological approaches. In this case, due to Dutch sociologist Ruut Veenhoven (2020), who is one of the significant researchers of the happiness index, claims that the level of this indicator, which shows the population on a par with the level of well-being and health level, is one of the most important indices of how comfortable a particular country, society, or place is for people to live (Tertychnaya and De Vries, 2019).

The idea of calculating the happiness index is gaining in importance each time, and in recent years its use has been aimed at defining a global indicator to assess the quality of life, which serves as a more objective indicator and universal than such economic indicators as inflation or the gross domestic product indicator. For example, several Western countries have developed a range of indices that provide a measure of happiness across various countries (Alba, 2019). Although the indicators measuring the happiness index are quite similar to each other, it should be noted that none of them takes into consideration the ethnic and cultural characteristics of the values of the national character of each of the countries that are included in such a rating, and this aspect is quite important, as each nation's idea of happiness cannot be formed without considering the cultural characteristics. This means that the rating of countries by the happiness index cannot be considered reliable, since the parameters that are suggested in calculating this index cannot be fully relevant based on the perceptions of the respondents on the definition of happiness for them. An important issue is the study of the relationship between happiness and well-being. Considering this case, the paradox invented by Richard Easterlin, according to which an increase in per capita income can only to some extent lead to an increase in happiness (Helliwell et al., 2019). As a consequence, it is worth concluding that demands begin to increase along with per capita income, which means that once the primary and obligatory needs of the population are met, it is not the absolute level of income that matters for well-being, but the relative one (Popova, 2021). Another issue, which is also weighty in the study, is to Defining the composition of indicators that measure the subjective assessments of respondents, is the defining composition of indicators that measure the subjective assessments of respondents, determining the application of national averages without taking into consideration the asymmetry in the distribution of benefits. In addition, it should be examined that often integral indicators do not show problem aspects according to the directions of private indices (Vasilyeva, 2019).

Based on the above, important aspects in conducting research on the sociological measurement of the happiness index in Central Asian countries are to reveal the social and psychological aspects of the concept of "happiness index", its characteristic features and principles that are important in implementing the sociological measurement of the indicator under study, to identify and provide estimates of international indices, whose main task is the sociological measurement of this index,

conducting a comparative analysis of the happiness index indicator in the Central Asian countries, in particular in cities such as Almaty, Bishkek, and Tashkent, and, equally important, to highlight the main problems that may be factors lowering the happiness index in the countries under study, and provide recommendations, which can improve well-being.

Materials and Methods

The scientific research, which was carried out within the framework of the study of sociological measurement of the happiness index in the countries of Central Asia, used various methodological approaches, which helped in revealing the theoretical and practical components of the topic of work. Thus, due to the theoretical and methodological approach, it is possible to study the concept of the happiness index in more detail, to highlight the characteristic features and principles of implementation of its sociological measurement. The method of logical analysis will help to analyse in more detail what features there are in the allocation of the sociological measurement of the happiness index in the countries that make up Central Asia. The dialectical approach is equally important in scientific research, due to which one can identify key objectives, directions, and features included in the sociological measurement of the happiness index, in particular, in the countries of Central Asia. Further, it is worth noting the method of deduction that allows identifying specific features of implementation of the sociological measurement of the happiness index, which will allow characterising this mechanism in the Central Asian states. The methodological approach opposite to this one, in particular, the method of induction, allows identifying specific features inherent in the implementation of the measurement in the states of Central Asia on the basis of a general characteristic of sociological measurement of the happiness index. The following methodological approaches will be applied in the course of the research of this aspect of the study: the method of analysis and the method of comparative analysis, to carry out a detailed analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects outlined and to highlight the main objective of the scientific research, in particular, to identify the features of sociological measurement of the happiness index in the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan). The method of synthesis is also of significant importance, through which the studied theoretical and practical aspects are combined into a general picture and there is an opportunity to present the material consistently and logically, thus achieving the main goal of the work. In this way, the author identifies the main stages of the research work undertaken:

1. The first stage reveals the theoretical component of conducting scientific research, which allows exploring and analysing the concept of the “happiness index” in more detail, highlighting its inherent characteristics and principles in the implementation of the sociological measurement of this indicator.
2. The second stage helps to reveal the practical component of the research work, through correlation analysis there is an opportunity to trace happiness index

indicators in the Central Asian countries, using the example of sociological measurement in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

3. The third stage is the final stage in the current study, allowing for a comparative analysis of the sociological measurement of the happiness index in the different Central Asian countries, and, equally important, highlighting key issues that may be an obstacle to a proper happiness index score in the states under study.

Results and Discussion

Concept of happiness as a social phenomenon

In sociological science, there are a sufficiently large number of definitions of individual happiness, such as well-being, life adaptation, happiness, joy, personal satisfaction of the individual, and fulfilment of life. Based on the fact that an important task of the human species is to improve one's state and fullness of life and to discover new possibilities for improving the quality of life, this is gaining more significance for the study of this issue. In general, happiness is defined as the moment when an individual perceives the significance and fullness of his/her own existence. The concept of happiness is characterised by several key features. These include, first of all, the subjectivity of this concept, the abstractness and perception of the concept of happiness, and the effectiveness of the period of duration of happiness. The cognitive and legal scope of the concept of “happiness” allows for defining people’s life satisfaction (Akiner et al., 2020).

In addition, the concept of happiness in sociological science should be defined as such that is gaining relevance, significance, and fundamentality. This concept should be described as multidimensional, making it difficult to measure through the tools of sociological science, and requires quantification of the concept under study. In general, happiness should be interpreted as one of the advantages of social mood, which means that the happiness of a social actor of a lasting nature is referred to as its social mood of a stable nature, and, in turn, allows concluding that a comprehensive measurement of the object under study by the methods of sociology is a comprehensive measurement of social mood (Dukic and Singla, 2019). Thus, a lasting positive social mood can also act not only as an indicator that regulates different spheres of human life but can also be defined functionally. That is, happiness can have a positive impact on various spheres of life of people, and this impact will be different for each individual. On this basis, the sociological measurement of the happiness indicator should necessarily take into consideration individual characteristics of the functioning of the indicator in different social strata and specific actors.

Considering approaches to defining well-being, there are two main approaches to measuring well-being. The first is referred to as the “Dashboard” approach, while the second is the “Index” approach. Considering at the first approach, it is noted that the individual indicators that define well-being, rather than the arithmetic average of these indicators, are significant. The second approach, i.e. the “Index” approach, on the contrary, focuses on the definition of a composite indicator, which implies the study of

individual parameters, and the possibility of monitoring measurements. However, it is still important that today the measurement of happiness indicators is still mostly index-based. Despite many positive aspects, it is still worth mentioning the problems that may arise in the sociological measurement of the happiness index (Veenhoven, 2020).

First of all, the concepts of sociological mood and subjective well-being are in most cases insufficiently operationalised and often act as interchangeable. Further, there is such a problematic aspect, which consists in the fact that there is a set of indicators that are necessary and sufficient to measure the happiness index, but they vary in each study and can include such indicators as objective and subjective, which, in turn, represent subjective views of sociological objects about happiness and objective indicators of statistics, respectively. It should be noted that the final index of happiness in the methods of index nature is a derivative of private indicators, that is, it is calculated based on sub-indices, which increases the risk of obtaining such an average indicator, which will be irrelevant and cannot fully reflect the index of population happiness by individual components at the current time (Omarova, 2020). In addition, the index methodologies reflect only national indicators of arithmetic average, without showing the emerging inequalities of the population. When considering the process of conducting methodologies that include population surveys, insufficient attention is paid to the unconscious and non-verbalised contents of respondents' consciousness. It is worth emphasising that happiness should be considered through the prism of functions of social direction, which it fulfils. Highlighting the fact that happiness is the main aspiration of a social subject, the functions should be defined according to three key criteria, including the desirable state of a social actor, the start-up of actors' activity by the required norms, and the complex, which includes the highest moral qualities of a social actor. On this basis, it is also worth mentioning the functions of happiness, such as developing the spiritual potential of individuals, norm formation, and the acquisition of needs and benefits (Ngoo et al., 2021). The issue of indicators of sociological measurements of the happiness index also needs to be studied in more detail.

The first is the Happiness Index, in particular, the World Happiness Report, which ranks countries according to this indicator according to the United Nations. The index includes parameters such as gross domestic product per capita, life expectancy, rights, and civil liberties, level of state corruption, the state of security, family stability, and employment. Among the proxy indicators that are included in the index are trust, generosity, well-being, and kindness. Surveys of the population on their well-being also play an important role as part of the index indicators. According to the rankings for this happiness index, the top ten include Scandinavian countries such as Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden (The World Happiness Report, 2020).

The next indicator to examine is the World Happiness Index (World Values Survey, 2020). It is a composite indicator that includes a measure of the relative efficiency with which countries can use their natural resources and economic growth to provide social actors, i.e. citizens, with a fulfilling, happy life. This indicator includes parameters such as well-being, ecological footprint, life expectancy, and inequality of outcome, which

refers to the determination of the variation in citizens' well-being and life expectancy across regions and is counted as a percentage ratio.

Better Life Index is further invited to consider, which comprises 11 categories, including life satisfaction, leisure, well-being, housing, civil rights, income, social development, employment, healthcare, environment, education, and safety. In addition, each category contains one to three indicators, making it possible to compare the same indicators for females and males to assess the social and economic factors of a subject's situation in terms of results.

The Quality-of-Life Index is the last indicator of happiness worth noting. It is calculated according to the methodology of British scholars, which includes such basic indicators as a combination of statistical data from the main indicators that determine the level of happiness and well-being of the population and conducting social surveys to learn the public opinion of different segments of the population of different relevant states regarding their life satisfaction. The top five countries within this index are Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, Australia, and the Netherlands.

Measuring happiness in Central Asian countries

In general, the most developed research methodology for the sociological measurement of the happiness and well-being index is the World Happiness Report, which has been published annually since 2012 by United Nations entities, implementing ways and methods for finding solutions to development in its stable focus. This research, on which the World Happiness Report is based, is carried out in 156 countries around the world. As of 2021, Kazakhstan is ranked 45th, well ahead of the other Central Asian states and the Russian Federation (Kyrgyzstan - 67, Russia - 76, Tajikistan - 78, Turkmenistan - 98). However, as for exceptions, it is worth mentioning Uzbekistan, which occupies the 42nd position in the ranking. The top-ranking countries are Finland, Norway, and Denmark. The last positions are occupied by Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan (The World Happiness Report, 2021). The criteria used for sociological measurement of the happiness index in this rating are the level of gross domestic product per capita, social support, life expectancy, perception of corruption in the state, generosity, freedom of choice, subject's feeling of such notions as happiness, joy, and well-being. For example, in social surveys, social actors were asked questions such as "Have you felt anxious today?", "Have you laughed today?", "Have you had a feeling of happiness and well-being?".

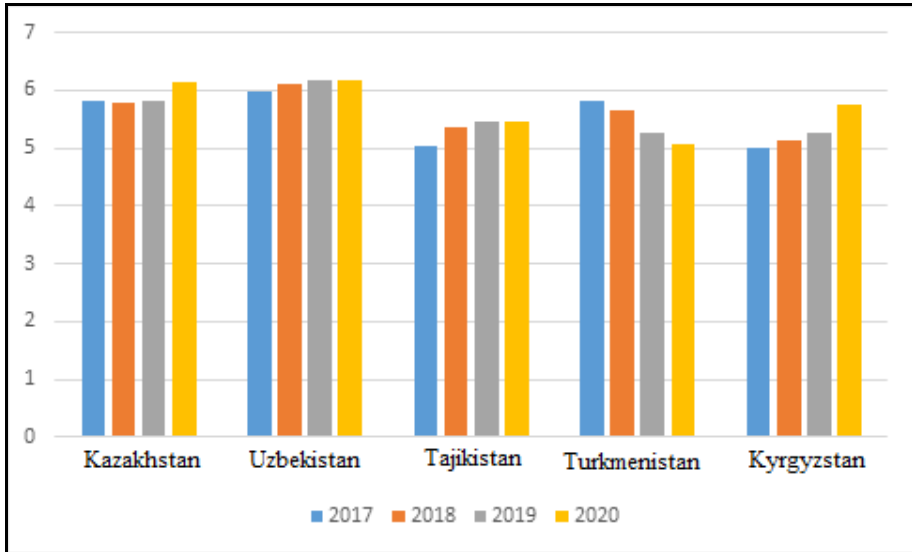
But it is also worth mentioning that this study, namely the World Happiness Report, does not consider factors of ecological character, unlike the study called "World Happiness Index". This research on the sociological measurement of happiness index considers the definition of countries' efficiency in their use of natural resources and economic potential to ensure comfortable and prosperous life for the population. According to data revealed in such a study as of 2017, Kazakhstan ranks 114th out of

140 countries surveyed, and Uzbekistan 51st. Leaders of the ranking include Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia, while Luxembourg and Chad are at the bottom of the ranking (The World Happiness Report). The contradictory nature of the findings of the two case studies can be explained by the negative impact of economically developed countries on the environment. The authors of these studies explain this inconsistency by the fact that sociological measurements of the happiness index do not take into consideration such factors as human rights violations. Conducting research to measure the happiness index in the Central Asian states should consider ethnic peculiarities and territorial features of the regions under study. This is explained by the fact that Central Asia is a rather densely populated region, which consists of five states, including Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. It is also worth mentioning that contemporary scholarship defines the terms “Central Asia” and “Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan” as synonymous, due to the fact that during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, discussions on the terminology of these regions were intensified due to the geopolitical and geographical inconsistency of the region (Rakhmankulova, 2021).

Considering Central Asian culture, it is noted here that it is a culture that straddles the boundaries between the West, the Russian Federation, and has its own link to the constructs of traditionalism in its conservative manifestation. On this basis, divergent and contradictory characteristics in the sociological and cultural space of the states are noted, which entails a lack of unified functioning. As a consequence, the Central Asian region cannot be seen as a single mechanism of the sociocultural system (Hirai, 2019). In the integration processes of Central Asia into the world community, the cultural segment of the social institution is increasingly determined by contemporary processes of globalisation and regionalisation. For example, globalisation processes are directly related to the development of information and communication technologies, the strengthening of industrialisation tools, the spread of the mass culture of the West, and the blurring of linguistic, national, and confessional boundaries. Considering the process of regionalisation in this matter, on the contrary, ethnic, confessional, regional, and other communities strive to preserve their own culture (Tertychnaya, 2019).

As a consequence, the regions of Central Asia are facing not only global problems but also local problems, which are associated with the preservation of specific national culture, and cultural characteristics of the people who live on the territory of Central Asian regions. The unresolved range of these problems necessitates a more detailed study of the social index of happiness in the region in modern conditions. To analyse in more detail the sociological policy of the Central Asian states, a closer look should be taken at the statistics of happiness indicators in the regions under study for the period from 2017 to 2020 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Attitudes towards statements describing three studied dimensions of the sense of place



Source: The World Happiness Report, 2020

As can be noted, although the happiness index is approximately the same in the countries under study, there are cross-country differences in this indicator. There are two hypotheses about the factors influencing such differences, in particular the dominant influence of the social environment and macroeconomic conditions, and factors of national and cultural character. On this basis, an important aspect is to study the influence of macrosocial conditions on the happiness index in such states as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (Table 1).

Table 1: Attitudes towards statements describing three studied dimensions of the sense of place

Country	Overall level of happiness, %	Maximum level of happiness, %	GDP, US dollars	Democracy Index	Corruption index	Urbanisation, %	Life expectancy, years	Inflation	Higher education, %
Kazakhstan	89	31	9603	3.24	2.7	57	69	8	21
Kyrgyzstan	96	36	921	4.34	2.1	35	70	17	14
Uzbekistan	96	65	1452	1.74	1.6	51	70	13	16

Source: World Values Survey, 2020

Next, the impact of national and cultural factors on the happiness index in the states studied should be studied (Table 2).

Table 2: Influence of national and cultural factors on the happiness index

	Overall level of happiness, %	Mother tongue		Nationality	
		Title, %	Russian, %	Title, %	Russian, %
Kazakhstan	89	93	84	92	82
Kyrgyzstan	96	97	86	97	84
Uzbekistan	96	97	84	97	83

Source: World Values Survey, 2020

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that the general pattern of formation of the happiness index on the example of the Central Asian states are understood. The fact that Central Asian states occupy relatively high positions in the world ranking in comparison with other states of the Commonwealth of Independent States is also noteworthy. When analysing these results, it can be assumed that this is due to the relatively low economic inequality of the Central Asian states. That is, for example, the poor strata of Central Asia can compare their situation and well-being with similarly poor people. In addition, due to the highly developed national and cultural characteristics of the Central Asian states, factors such as national pride, trust in the state, religious beliefs, family, leisure activities, and friends have a positive impact on happiness and well-being in the countries studied (Bergsma et al., 2020).

Shortcomings of the sociological measurement of the happiness index

An equally important aspect is to consider the experience of foreign countries that have a rather high index of societal sustainability, which also influences the high happiness index in these countries (Ahtesham, 2020). This index helps to assess the sustainability of societies around the world and in individual regions. The essence of the concept of this index lies in its three key components, which include economy, society, and environment. Countries with a relatively high score include Sweden, Finland, and Norway (Benuyenah and Pandya, 2020). Although they are not dominant ideologies and economies, the core industries of these countries generate value added through a large proportion of high-tech and intellectual labour. These countries are world leaders in terms of society indices, environmental dimension indices, and competitiveness, which are based solely on knowledge. Finland, Norway, and Sweden are quite active in innovation. As a consequence, these countries have been quite successful in implementing such policies as the “knowledge economy” and the “environmental economy” in public policy (Andreenkova, 2020). That is, they are focused not only on the production of new knowledge, but also on the production of goods and services of environmental direction. The pattern also emerges in their strategic approach to

choosing the most productive development factor, in particular social capital. The above three groups of indicators suggest that this model of public policy is the closest to the highest form of societal development. Accordingly, the development of such areas in the Central Asian countries provides an opportunity to reach a better level of development, which, consequently, can increase the happiness index.

On the whole, the analysis of experience in the practical application of methods for measuring the happiness index allows concluding several shortcomings. These include the fact that the calculation of the index does not take into consideration the cultural and ethnic characteristics of countries; the integral index cannot reflect the problems in the directions of private indices, on the basis of which none of such indices can be included alone to assess the state's position in the world; the sociological measurement of the happiness index cannot be performed promptly and regularly compared with the calculation of gross domestic product (Sulimanly, 2020); there is no reliable reason to assume that the index components have exactly the data considered significant by researchers; index methods for measuring happiness most often rely on arithmetic averages, not involving asymmetries in the distribution of benefits, without taking into consideration certain factors and questions of spiritual and moral development of the population. As a consequence, the various rankings of happy countries that are produced at the same time are led by very different countries and do not include many specific characteristics. Therefore, in order to make the ranking of countries in the happiness index more accurate and reliable, such factors should be removed and more components, especially national and cultural characteristics, should be taken into consideration (Hidayat and Purwandari, 2019).

Thus, having conducted the research in the field of studying the sociological measurement of the happiness index in the countries of Central Asia, a general model of formation of happiness assessment was considered, which consists of macroeconomic conditions and national and cultural characteristics. These factors influence the entire lifestyle of a nation, which, in turn, influences the long-term impact on lifestyles, adaptation strategies, and life values of people, which are in a certain way included into the system of cultural and value characteristics of different national groups. Equally importantly, these conditions also act as a dynamic element influencing changes in assessment of happiness, which are gradually occurring in a large number of countries. Consequently, an increase in these conditions will contribute to an increase in the happiness index in Central Asian countries.

Conclusions

By conducting an analysis in the sphere of research into the sociological measurement of the happiness index in the Central Asian countries, theoretical and practical aspects were identified, due to which it was possible to conclude that at this stage the countries under study occupy fairly good positions in the world ranking of the happiness index, but at the same time, an important direction in development should be environmental policy and the policy of “knowledge economy” to improve this level and consolidate higher positions in the ranking. In disclosing the theoretical component, it is worth

mentioning the study of happiness in general. Dutch sociologist Ruut Veenhoven, who noted that the level of this indicator, which shows the population on a par with the level of well-being and level of healthcare, is one of the most important indices of how comfortable a particular state, society, or place is for people to live, has made an important contribution to this. Two key approaches to defining well-being have also been identified from the writings of this scholar: the “Dashboard” and the “Index” approach. However, the fact that today's measurement of happiness is still mostly index-based is still of significant importance. It was found that such indicators of happiness as the World Happiness Report, the World Values Survey, the Better Life Index, and the Quality-of-Life Index has now become popular in the world.

A special role in the study is played by the correlation analysis of Central Asian countries, through which it is possible to trace the dynamics of the happiness index in the period from 2017 to 2021, the impact of macrosocial conditions and national and cultural characteristics on this indicator. The shortcomings of measuring the happiness index have also been identified, including the fact that the integral index cannot reflect the problems in the directions of private indices, on the basis of which none of such indices can be included alone to assess the state's position in the world, the sociological measurement of the happiness index cannot take place promptly and regularly compared to the calculation of gross domestic product, index methods of assessing the level of happiness most often rely on arithmetic averages, without taking into consideration asymmetries in the distribution of benefits, issues of spiritual and moral development of the population etc.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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