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WELL-BEING, PARTICIPATION, COMMUNICATION FOR THE MARGIN

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Summary:

The questions of development and well being are not new. The European cultural tradition of thinking has several roots from the antiquity, through the enlightenment and the modern philosophy giving base points of the questions raised.

Contemporary thinking is influenced by the media and the content of the media is heavily influenced by the aforementioned traditional European thinking. This is not a dark concept that we should revile. It is a structure we should understand.

This paper will not attempt to decide on value judgments such as "good" or "bad" but will try to outline an applicable structural model. This paper is going to be a rather theoretical approach, which tries to figure out the main aspects of a structural model usable to understand. The aim of understanding is to draw some conclusions. For the future actions going to be carry out simply not possible to avoid the decision on good and bad. The influence of the consensus priorities is an interdisciplinary question. It is not just an economical, biological question but – as it is not surprising -also a sociological, cultural and communicational as well.

“Our discussion starts with the belief that the territorial actors constitute territorial intelligence and this should then constitute the research-action aimed at a sustainable development as well as the democratic and participative procedures of promotion and intervention.” (Saccheri 2008, p. 72) In this short essay we are going to add some remarks to the connections between well-being, participation, communication and media.

“Another belief which harmonizes with our account is that the happy man lives well and does well; for we have practically defined happiness as a sort of good life and good action.” Aristotle (350 BC) Nicomachean Ethics, Book I. page 9. (Translated by W. D. Ross)

In the early sixties social psychologists turn their attention to the problem of well-being. The focus expressed on how the judge on being happy took place. The question was not new. The old Greek word *eudaimonia* – as Riff quoted (1989 p. 1069) – used by Aristotle could be translated as happiness.

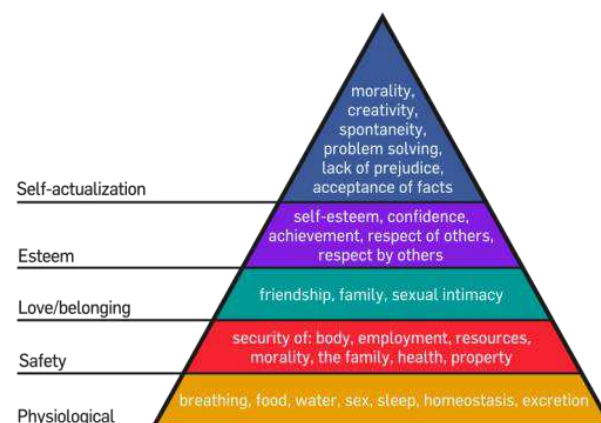
From the mid seventies happiness and subjective well-being became indexed terms of the sciences from philosophy to psychology. (Diner 2009, p. 11) And also the meaning of the word happiness has been continuously changing throughout the centuries. (Kesebir-Diner 2009, p. 60) The change of the meaning is an interesting researching field. It could be investigated empirically by corpus linguistics procedures, use-oriented approach could show how the meaning vary by time or by cultural context. Using any kind of survey method in researching well-being using language, and it entails the silent agreement on all have more less the same understanding of expressions (questions) we use. This problem was discussed by Diener earlier. (Diener 2000 p. 39) With the term of Horányi it is a participation in communicative - namely the legitimated and accessible signification (Horányi 2007, p. 255). The trust in understanding without any criticism could ruin the force of comparative studies.

In the research it had become obvious, that counting only health, money and power dimensions is an oversimplification. We have seen poor people having health difficulties with no power of being

happy and people with both not being well at all. Personalities, relative comparative measures, culture has enormous influence on decisions on values of well-being.

We have to face with the point: Wellbeing is not a standard and it is subjectively evaluated. Well-being is an indicator impossible to measure without individual decisions on values. If the researcher constructs a structure of indicators for well-being it will include the researcher’s decision on values and it is not surely matches with the individual’s opinion.

The most interesting and most difficult question is: How the individuals decide on their own well-being? There are some events which have evidently negative impact. (Death, illness, fear, missing satisfaction of important needs) As the nature of problems raised, moves from the bottom to a top of the Maslow pyramid, the question of well-being becomes much more difficult.



The same problem appears in the history of sociology. The definition of relative deprivation describes this characteristic expressively. “A person is relatively deprived of X when (i) he does not have X; (ii) he sees some other person or persons, which may include himself at some previous or expected time, as having X, (iii) he sees it as feasible that he should have X.” (Runciman 1966 p. 10.) (Originally: Stouffer et al. (1949) Paradox military example, relative deprivation first exploration.)

For the individuals it is not possible to compare themselves with the whole society. People compare themselves with reference groups.

It could be called the “Social frame of reference” worked out by Morton and Rossi (1968). (Harrington et al. 2006 p. 723) The relative manners of this kind of variables are well discussed from sociology (e.g. Zsuzsa Ferge et al. 1980) to economy (e. g. Shlomo Yitzhaki 1979). D'Ambrosio and Frick provide empirical evidence for subjective well-being depending more on relative satisfaction than on absolute levels of income. “... people’s satisfaction depends on what they observe around them.” (2004 German Socio-Economic Panel p. 10)

The next question comes up automatically: How people choose their reference group? The group selection is based on communication accessibilities. Regarding the traditional forms of communication the selection is reduced mainly for spatial categories: neighbours, colleges, everyday friends, classmates. The theories about reference groups are usually focusing on them. The characteristics of communication have been strongly broadened and embellished in the last some decades. The mass media communication and recently the Internet changed the society.

The modern change of the mass media titled as “tabloid” or “boulevard” based on blurring the sharp border between private and public, showing ordinary people like stars and stars like ordinary people. (Császai 2003) This process promotes forgetting the border line between fiction and reality. Tabloid prefers using opinions to facts in news. We are not going to go further description of these changes, but this quick sketch shows the possible influence on how people judge on their own position in the society. The media influence is one of the richest researched and disputed areas. The reference group is not only getting wider, but it becomes a structure of reference groups and situations. The description of the media influence has different theoretical approaches. The two-step flow theory of influence about opinion leaders and followers (Katz-Lazarsfeld 1955) shows the importance of social relations in the construction of reality. Perception of public opinion is also an important factor which can enforce a feedback influence effect. (Lazarsfeld 1957)

When we judge on well-being indicators, the structure of reference group is not simply the neighbors we have, but the reference model of normality. The construction of this model overlaps the notion of culture.

Culture in wider sense is a historically transmitted pattern of the meaning. Inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms. Culture is a system which allows people to communicate, perpetuating and developing the knowledge and attitudes about life. (Niedermüller 2001 p. 71)

The decision on perception of well-being is synthesizes via communication. This decision is not only the question of reference groups, but the learned model of how we understand the reference group, the way we interpret the accessible facts, and the way we can legitimate our concepts. Thus the well-being is not just relative as we compare ourselves to the others and it is not just subjective, regarding its dependence on personality and psychological attitude. It is also cultural as we learn to evaluate the situations, interpret differences, boundary conditions and possibilities.

In most of the cases researchers build a multi dimensional model of well-being. Ryff and Keyes (1995 p. 720) used a six “Theory-Guided” dimension: (1) Self-Acceptance (negative or positive attitude toward the self); (2) Positive Relations With Others (trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others); (3) Autonomy (independent, able to resist social pressures); (4) Environmental Mastery (competence in managing life, controls activities, use of surrounding opportunities); (5) Purpose in Life (feels there is meaning to present and past life); (6) Personal Growth (feeling of continued development, sees improvement in self-knowledge and effectiveness.) (Ryff–Keyes 1995 p. 727)

The British “nef” (the new economics foundation) and The National Accounts of Well-being worked out a structure of indicators based on data 2006-2007. This structure aimed to give a guideline for the government to monitor the well-being status of the citizens. There are three headline indicators which are broken down into component indicators. Sometimes further subcomponent indicators. The headline indicators are: Well-being at work, Social well-being and Personal well-being.

The combination of indicators draws 8 dimensions. (nef website) On the website it is possible to relatively compare the dimensional data from many countries.

The “nef” commissioned by the UK Government’s Foresight Project with over 400 scientists from across the world differentiates five aspects of Well-being. They formulate it in imperative sentences: (1) Connect... (With the people, family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. invest time in developing these connections.); (2) Be active. (Walk, run or dance. Discover a physical activity.); (3) Take notice. (Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Be aware of the world around you.); (4) Keep learning. (Try something new. Rediscover. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility.); (5) Give... (Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time.) (Foresight Annual Review 2008 p. 13)

Another interesting direction is to build a complex indicator based on economic and demographic measurements, in order to show something which can hopefully correlate to an imagined well-being like factor. The developed measure is a HPI Happy Planet Index. “It takes as its starting point two axioms. First, that happy and healthy lives are sought-after around the world. Secondly, that this should not be a privilege of the current generation – that future generations should also be able to pursue happy, healthy lives. The HPI combines progress towards these two goals in a single figure. It really is as simple as that.” (HPI 2.0 2009, p. 20) HPI is an efficiency measure: $HPI \approx \frac{Life\ Satisfaction * Life\ Expectancy}{Ecological\ Footprint}$.

To create actions, develop further knowledge on the topic it is crucial to understand how the perception of well-being (which is actually the real one) constructed in a society. In this article we are focusing on its cultural aspect and the media influence on it. So the communication about participation, and knowledge of the territory is not a metaprocess.

Building the surrounding reality is an active process of differentiation between primary and secondary references in other words differentiation between something and the “picture” of something. The

mass media should know it, and in everyday life we can think about the message, is it true, partly true or false. (Luhmann [2004] p. 12, 13)

Agents and devices of Communication

The term agent has a long history. We use this term for independent participants of a situation who are able to solve problems via communication. (Horanyi–Szabo 2007 p. 198) The term agent is an assumption of ability for signification. We use this term for any kind of people or companies, or any other thing we can apply the assumption mentioned to. The agent concept is an assumption of ability of the signification and problem solving. It entails the presupposition of ability to presuppose an agent. This problem is well discussed as third-order intentionality (Grice [1957] p. 193, Dennet 1998 p. 106).

There are a lot of structures appear to be an agent while we know there is an inner structure we are free to recognize and take into consideration or not to deal with at all. The mimetic agent is a special agent, where an “A” agent appears to be a “B” agent. In the theatre we can decide on whether we want to consider about, there is an actor actually acts what we see, or we can take it as it appears, forgetting the circumstances of theatre. We can understand the story in either ways, but the quality of the artistic presentation could be referenced only when we understand the agent as mimetic agent. The ordinary audience and the actor would like to achieve the same: to forget the mimetic concept and enjoy the play as it is presented. The mimetic agent concept is not the only inner agent structure that we can identify. There are some other concepts for example: the collective, the interpretative or the fictive agent concepts. These models or a combination of them extend the understanding of the situation.

Structures of transforming, transferring and storing patterns are often called communication devices. These architectures are aimed at keeping the important (relevant in consideration of communication) structural elements of the source pattern. High fidelity (HiFi) in audio technology, the name of objective on cameras reveals this

aspect. When we use (see or listen to) these devices we also have the option to take its structural specificity into account or not to care about it. We usually try to understand the patterns as original. We listen to music, instead of listening to the radio.

What we call a media product can be understood as perceptible patterns. The media workers, writers, actors, operators take part of the construction of these patterns. The media influence strongly depends on the concept the audience has, the assumption about the conditions (agents and devices) of the creation of the media product.

In terms of this theoretical approach mass media communication and direct human communication are not different disciplines. Situation adds considerable aspect to a concept about the patterns' origin, but prevail the freedom for the agents to ignore or take them into account. Internet based applications often have mass media and dialogic specificities as well. The meaning of neighbourhood which used to be defined as a strictly spatial accessibility for interaction has widened by the possibility of virtual communication. Surprisingly it often extends communication locally instead of strictly focusing on spatially inaccessible. (Ács-Béres-Filó 2003)

Considering the impact of the internet it would be useful to develop a new communicational approach of well-being which describes the effects of mass media and new media together.

The conclusion

The individual well-being is a relative subjective and cultural phenomenon which is highly influenced by the media. Doing research innovation or any action for well-being and better life as project it has to deal with the question of communication. Communication as a part of a project is also a real action just like the economic and health care efforts because social reality and well-being are largely individually and culturally constructed.

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