LIFE SATISFACTION, BELIEFS AND RELATIONS TO ONESELF AND OTHERS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS[*]

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Abstract: The IDEX (Identity Exploration) instrument was used in the study to verify that the statements "satisfied with life", "lives a good life" and "useful for others" are for university students of humanities (N = 154, mean age 21.93, SD 1.45 years, age range 19-27 years; 26 men, 125 women, 3 unidentified) important key criteria for their experiencing of themselves and their social world. It was further found that students satisfied with their life (N = 45) believe in their ability to uphold important matters, live up to their own expectations, live a good life, be useful for others and care for their family and close friends more than do students less satisfied with their life (N = 26). Students satisfied with their life perceived and assessed themselves, the person they admire, people close to them, and their communities significantly more positively than the less satisfied. Their relation to "my community" and "university students" was also more positive. No differences were found between satisfied and less satisfied students in their perception and evaluation of communities with different values and large groups of people. According to the results, life satisfaction in university students is linked to active approach to life, positive evaluation of oneself, positive relations to people close to one, especially one's best friend, and acceptance of one's social position; a lesser satisfaction with life means the absence of such strong beliefs and less positive relations to oneself and others.

Key words: life satisfaction, beliefs, relations to oneself and others, homeostatic model of life satisfaction

Assessment of life satisfaction as an indicator of subjective quality of life seems to be an authentic psychological approach to quality of life study. This approach is often used by other scientific disciplines[3] as well. In the majority of research studies a simple measurement of global life satisfaction by Likert scales is mostly used (of the best-known scales see e.g., Diener et al., 1985; Cummins et al., 2003); the results are relatively clear and easy to interpret. People's life satisfaction assessed this way can be compared in various populations and on different levels, thus they also appear in such large multinational projects as Eurobarometer or European Social Survey (ESS)[4]. Direct evaluation of global life satisfaction requires abstract thinking from the respondents. Another possibility is to assess satisfaction in specific areas of life connected to particular

[3] E.g., the Proquest 5000 database contains almost 69 thousand full-text entries for the term satisfaction (in September 2007).

[4] In the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 2, the item says "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?"

experiences - e.g., material well-being, health, relationships, performance, security, place in community, emotional well-being. Here the problem arises out of different lists of important life areas, i.e. domains that the participants have to assess. This is also one of the reasons why the simple scales for assessment of global life satisfaction still prevail, especially in comparative studies with a large number of participants.

A new perspective of the life satisfaction issue was brought by R.A. Cummins (2003; however, Rapley, 2003, is very critical about this theory). According to Cummins, life satisfaction is maintained in a manner analogous to the homeostatic maintenance of blood pressure or body temperature. Thus people can feel good, can express satisfaction despite unfortunate life circumstances. Cummins derived the theory of homeostatic maintenance from surveys confirming that the measures of general life satisfaction were systematically approaching the mean values 75% ± 2.5% with the difference approximately 18% of scale maximum. According to Cummins et al., life satisfaction data assessed in this way show a surprising stability. Unusual, good or bad events can create in a person a short-time change in his/her life satisfaction, but after some time the life satisfaction evaluation returns to the former level, typical for the given individual (Cummins et al., 2003). Cummins mentions the set-point as a basic life satisfaction level. Apart from the stability of opinions about life satisfaction it has been found out that the majority of measured values is grouped around the positive pole, to the right of the theoretical center (i.e., half of the scale maximum) of satisfaction, which means that it is common to be relatively satisfied with life in various life circumstances.

Identity Structure Analyses and IDEX Instrument

In this study we have made an attempt to explore life satisfaction indirectly through sophisticated conceptual and methodological framework Identity Structure Analyses - ISA (Weinreich, 2003a). ISA conceptualization is aided by the computer software Identity Exploration - IDEX. The IDEX software represents a data obtaining tool; it enables one to create the custom-designed instruments, "tailored" to the particular research study or to the particular participant (or client in psychological counselling or clinical diagnosing and therapy, for more details see Weinreich, 2003b).

When creating an IDEX instrument the discourses are formulated which one uses to express oneself and to construe and evaluate one's own and others' activities in terms of one's values and beliefs (Weinreich, 2003a). Discourses such as beliefs, values, stereotypes and various other personal idiosyncrasies are called *personal constructs* in the ISA approach. They have the form of statements (or adjectives) representing two poles of the evaluation scales. A participant (or a client) evaluates *entities*, i.e. people, institutions, symbols, various aspects of him- or herself, on evaluative scales whose poles are the constructs' expressions. According to Weinreich (2003b) entity is a generic concept that may refer to anybody or anything in the field of the person's awareness at any time (p. 80); after consideration and selection of the entities and constructs relevant to the research questions, entities become targets of participant's appraisal by means of bipolar constructs in the designed IDEX instruments.

In the process of appraisal of entities the participant uses particular constructs with

"affective tone" of definite approval or disdain. The stability of affective connotations of constructs derives from experienced cognitive-affective compatibilities or incompatibilities. Experienced consonance in the construct generates positive structural pressures; experienced incompatibilities (i.e., ambivalent and vacillating emotional modalities of construct) generate negative pressure that undermines stability in the construct usage. On this basis Weinreich divides the constructs into three groups (Weinreich, 2003b, pp. 50-51):

1) Core evaluative dimensions of identity - the evaluative connotations associated with a person's constructs are stably bound (net structural pressure on a construct is high and positive).

2) Conflicted evaluative dimensions of identity - the evaluative connotations associated with the construct are conflicted, the construct in question is an arena of stress (net structural pressure on a construct is low or negative as a result of strong negative pressures counteracting positive ones).

3) Non-evaluative dimensions of identity - the construct in question is without strong evaluative connotations (net structural pressure on a construct is low as a result of weak positive and negative pressures).

After the filling in of the instrument by the participant the IDEX software immediately assesses his or her parameters of identity in accordance with the conceptual framework of ISA: Evaluation of oneself and of others, Idealistic identification, Contra-identification, Emphatic identification, Engagement, Conflicting identification and Structural pressures on constructs. The nomothetic component of IDEX software provides the ISA parameters for a group of participants.

In our study the main focus was to explore whether the constructs *satisfied with life*, *lives a good life* and *is useful for others* would be crucial (core evaluative dimensions) for our participants in their discourses (constructs). Following the verification of this assumption we used the same IDEX instrument to see differences in participants with a different life satisfaction level related to evaluation of self and others and to the usage of the further constructs. Life satisfaction parameters acquired by the IDEX instrument were compared with Cummins's (2003) homeostatic model of life satisfaction control.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were university students of the Faculty of Arts, Prešov University in Prešov (N = 154), between 19 - 27 years of age (M = 21.93, SD = 1.54; 26 men, 125 women, 3 unidentified) who completed the IDEX instrument during lectures.

Method

We designed the IDEX instrument to address university students, selecting these constructs which - as we have assumed - contain the beliefs about:

a) global evaluation of life (construct no. 15), life satisfaction (construct no. 8) and usefulness of life for other people (construct no. 2);

b) trust (constructs no. 7, 9, 12), social networks and community qualities (constructs no. 11, 14) friends and family (construct no. 6) - these constructs were inspired by theories of social capital;

c) basic values according to Schwartz questionnaire used in ESS Round 2 (constructs no. 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13). The full text of constructs is recorded in Table 2.

In the designed instrument we included the following entities to examine evaluation and identification with self and others (see also Table 5); the selected entities also enabled us to compare the results of further research study in voluntary communities (Bačová, Babinčák, 2007):

a) mandatory entities (Me now; Me as I would like to be; Me 5 years ago; Person I admire; Person I do not like);

b) close important persons (My mother, My father, Members of my family, My best friend);

c) three distinctive and value-different voluntary communities that represent original communities (Environmentalists, Motorcyclists, People in religious communities);

d) referential communities and university student groups;

e) population of participant's city and people in Slovakia;

f) Roma people.

The printed IDEX instrument consisting of 15 pages was used in our study. Each sheet contained one of the bipolar expressed constructs and a total list of entities (see Appendix 1).

Data Analysis

Data were processed in the IDEX software program to obtain the immediate results of identification parameters; the aggregate parameters for sub-samples were exported to the SPSS program, which calculated non-parameter U-tests and ANOVA.

RESULTS

Comparison of Life Satisfaction Results: The ESS, IDEX Instrument and Cummins's Life Satisfaction Model in the Slovak Population

In step one we compared distribution of life satisfaction measures obtained in the European Social Survey Round 2 (2002 - 2004) with the parameters provided by the IDEX instrument in university students and the satisfaction model of Cummins's theory (Cummins et al., 2003). In Table 1 the statistics adjusted to the percentage of scale maximum in accordance with Cummins et al. (2003) are presented, whereas

Table 1. Life satisfaction indicator comparison in the ESS 2004, IDEX and Cummins et al. (2003) homeostatic satisfaction model

	ESS original Slovak sample	ESS Slovak university students sample	IDEX Slovak university students sample	Cummins at al. theoretical model (2003)
	N = 1496	N = 22	N = 154	
Scale	0 - 10	0 - 10	0 - 4	0 - 100 %
Mean of satisfaction in %	55.8 %	70.9 %	70.5 %	75 ± 2.5 %
Standard deviation	25.7 %	17.7 %	27.8 %	18 ± 1 %
Normative variation	4.4 - 100 %	35.5 - 100%	15 - 100 %	40 - 100 %

100% means maximum satisfaction. According to Cummins, mean value of satisfaction should be at the positive pole of satisfaction, at 75% of scale maximum with a slight variability.

Although empirical mean values appear at the pole of satisfaction, they are not at 75% of scale maximum (as given by Cummins), and have higher standard deviations and thus higher normative range (± 2 SD referring to approximately 95% of all values). This is especially apparent with the Slovak sample of ESS data. To compare: the life satisfaction mean value of the whole ESS data file is 68.8%, deviation 22.9%.

Life Satisfaction in the Belief System of University Students

In step two we examined the preferred poles of students' beliefs and their strength expressed by the parameter of structural pressure (SP). A large portion of university students participating in our research used the following constructs highly consistently: *resistant to unfair behavior* (SP = 64.8); *usefulness for others* (SP = 64.4); *reliability* (SP = 62.8); *living up to one's expectations* (SP = 62.5); *ability to uphold important things* (SP = 55.8). The statements *he lives a good life* and *is satisfied with life* proved to be core constructs. In the whole sample the construct *good life* is used more consistently than the construct *life satisfaction* (SP = 59.8, SP = 51.0 respectively).

If both poles of the construct are preferred by equal numbers of participants in the studied sample (or at least a relatively large proportion of them), we talk about "split construct". The university students in our study split up into two relatively large parts that "support" opposite beliefs, in four constructs (constructs no. 1, 7, 13 and 14; see Table 2).

Table 2. Structural pressure on constructs in the total sample of participants (N = 154)

N	Preferred pole of construct	SP	N	Opposite pole of construct	SP	N
1	want/s to have an exciting life	15.32	*83*	want/s to live safely	49.04	*70*
2	is/are useful for people around	**64.40**	154	is/are not useful for people around	-	-
3	value/s good relations above all	38.55	120	value/s good job above all	12.25	30
4	is/are able to uphold things which he/she/they consider/s important	**55.83**	149	is/are not able to uphold things which he/she/they consider/s important	**57.19**	4
5	think/s that for most people those things money can't buy are important	41.21	123	think/s that for most people money is very important	29.95	28
6	devote/s time to the family and friends	47.84	149	spend/s a lot of time without the family and friends	24.39	4

Table continues

Table 2 (continued)

N	Preferred pole of construct	SP	N	Opposite pole of construct	SP	N
7	think/s you can't be too careful in dealing with people	35.87	*86*	think/s it is right to trust others	21.84	*64*
8	is/are satisfied with his/her/their own life	**51.04**	150	is/are not satisfied with is/her/their own life	2.54	4
9	is/are able to resist when forced into dishonorable behavior	**64.78**	150	is/are not able to resist when forced into dishonorable behavior	10.66	4
10	wants to live life up to his/her/their expectations	**62.48**	150	do/es what his/her/their friends approve	3.40	4
11	accept/s easily new people in his/her/their own community	43.62	127	take/s a long time to accept new people in his/her/their own community	19.38	24
12	is/are reliable	**62.81**	153	is/are not reliable	6.97	1
13	want/s to rule others	23.32	*103*	submit/s to others	19.79	*49*
14	believe/s an individual can succeed in implementing good things	35.71	*104*	believe/s more people can accomplish more	48.28	*48*
15	do/es live a good life	**59.85**	149	do/es not live a good life	**59.88**	5

Note: SP = structural pressure on construct means the consistency of construct use with all entities; range from -100 to +100:

"Core" evaluative identity dimensions: SP over +50 (in bold)

"Secondary" evaluative identity dimensions: +20 to +40

"Conflicted", inconsistent or non-evaluative identity dimensions: -20 to +20

N - number of participants preferring the given pole of construct; in split constructs (no. 1, 7, 13 and 14) in italics

Differences in Beliefs in the University Students Differing in Life Satisfaction

In step three we compared "extreme" groups of students differing in the extent of life satisfaction. They are marked as satisfied and less satisfied students further in the text. This is based on the theory and empirical results that the majority of people choose the positive pole of satisfac-tion, which also means that those who are 1 SD below the average can be relatively satisfied. The extreme group criterion was 1 SD with respect to the self-evaluation on the five-point scale of life satisfaction in the IDEX instrument. Groups determined this way significantly differ in the extent of life satisfaction. From 154 students we, according to the given criteria, included 45 participants (7 men and 38 women) in the group "satisfied", due to their ultimate point scale answer in entity "Me now"

"satisfied with own life", and 26 students (1 man and 25 women) into the "less satisfied" group due to their answering on the two points of the scale pole "not satisfied with own life" (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that satisfied students have a higher tendency to consistent use of the construct *lives a good life* in evaluating their social world (SP = 67.1, less satisfied SP = 47.3; F = 16.543, p < 0.000), which brings the construct into a central position in their evaluation system. There is also an important preference among satisfied students to use the construct *usefulness* (SP = 70.1, less satisfied SP = 60.7; F = 7.775, p < 0.007), although it is a core construct for both groups. It is a similar situation with the construct *live life up to one's expectations* (satisfied SP = 70.2, less satisfied SP = 52.0; U = 294, p < 0.002).

Significant differences were also found in constructs found to be core constructs for satisfied, but not so for less satisfied participants. They are *ability to uphold things* (SP = 63.0, less satisfied SP = 42.2; F = 16.085, p < 0.000) and *spends time with family and friends* (SP = 50.7, less satisfied SP = 37.8; U = 383.5, p < 0.050). The construct *resists unfair behavior* (SP = 64.8, less satisfied SP = 65.5; n.s.) is a core construct for both groups of students, as is the construct *reliability* (SP = 67.6, less satisfied SP = 61.3; n.s.).

Table 3. Life satisfaction distribution in the IDEX instrument for the entity "Me now" (N = 154) and selection of participants for inclusion in the compared groups (satisfied N = 45; less satisfied N = 26)

Absolute response numbers with entity:	... satisfied with my life		Something in between	...not satisfied with my life	
	2	1	0	1	2
Me now	45	68	15	20	6

Table 4. Mean structural pressure on constructs and comparison of groups with different satisfaction level

Preferred pole of construct (R = right, L = left)	Satisfied M	N	Less satisfied M	N	F	U	P
2R useful for people around	**70.89**	44	**60.70**	26	7.775		.007 **
3R values good relations above all	42.93	37	31.72	18	2.927		.093
4L able to uphold things which he/she/they consider important	**63.02**	44	42.25	26	16.085		.000 ***
5R for most people those things money can't buy are important	46.38	34	43.14	22	0.157		.694

Table continues

Table 4 (continued)

Preferred pole of construct (R = right, L = left)	Satisfied M	N	Less satisfied M	N	F	U	P
6L spend time with his/her/their family and friends	**50.72**	43	37.81	25		383.5	.050 *
8L satisfied with his/her/their life	**60.94**	43	28.44	25		129	.000 ***
9R able to resist when forced into unfair behavior	**64.77**	44	**65.51**	25	0.020		.888
10L wants to live life up to his/her/their expectations	**70.17**	43	52.02	25		294	.002 **
11L accepts easily new people in his/her/their community	49.27	37	37.79	21	2.930		.092
12L is/are reliable	**67.60**	44	**61.32**	25	2.145		.148
15R live/s a good life	**67.15**	41	47.27	26	16.543		.000 ***

Note: Core constructs are in bold (SP above 50)

Data which lack normal distribution (normality tested by Shapiro-Wilk test) are tested by non-parameter statistics (U-test); the same applies for further tables

Relations and Identifications of Students Satisfied and Less Satisfied with Their Life

Furthermore we explore differences between satisfied and less satisfied students in identification patterns with other people and communities through IDEX instrument parameters *Evaluation of oneself and others, Empathetic identification and Idealistic identification.*

Evaluation of Oneself and Others

The parameter shows how positively or negatively a person evaluates entities according to his/her own value system anchored in the individual's aspirational self - *Me as I would like to be* (Weinreich, 2003b).

Groups of life-satisfied and less satisfied students differ significantly in their self-evaluation. The difference is of high significance in the evaluation of *Me now* (U = 108, p < 0.000) and significant in evaluating the entities *Me 5 years ago* (F = 9.345, p < 0.003) and *University students*, to which the participant belongs (F = 4.638, p < 0.035), in favor of a more positive evaluation in satisfied students. Satisfied students also have a more positive evaluation of people close to them: entities *My mother* (F = 5.296, p < 0.024), *My father*

(U = 376, p < 0.017), *My family* (F = 5.392, p < 0.023), *My community* (F = 5.058, p < 0.028) and *Person I admire* (U = 342.5, p < 0.005); a highly significant difference was presented in the evaluation of *My best friend* (U = 213.5, p < 0.000).

It is impossible to talk about a global tendency for satisfied students to have more positive evaluations in general, as in other entity categories differences were not present. Life satisfaction is therefore connected to the positive evaluation of one's present and past self, people close to one and less so to the evaluation of communities and large groups of people.

Table 5. Evaluation of one's self and others - comparison of students satisfied and less satisfied with their life

	Entities	Satisfied (N = 44)	Less satisfied (N = 26)	F	U	p
	Mandatory entities - self-evaluation					
1	Me now	**0.71**	0.30		108	.000 ***
14	Me as I would like to be	**0.98**	**0.99**		480	.099
16	Me 5 years ago	0.35	*0.11*	9.345		.003 **
5	Person I admire	**0.77**	0.60		342.5	.005 **
12	Person I don't like	-0.04	*0.03*	0.725		.398
	Family and friends					
3	My mother	0.61	0.46	5.296		.024 *
10	My father	0.44	*0.26*		376	.017 *
17	My family	0.55	0.44	5.392		.023 *
7	My best friend	**0.71**	0.47		213.5	.000 ***
	Communities and city councilors					
6	Environmentalists	*0.28*	*0.27*	0.026		.873
11	Motorcyclists	*0.13*	0.04	0.868		.355
15	People in religious communities	0.41	0.34	0.857		.358
2	Roma people	*-0.20*	*-0.25*	0.524		.472
4	People in my town	*-0.02*	*-0.08*	0.863		.356
13	People in Slovakia	*-0.13*	*-0.14*	0.046		.831
8	My city councilors	*0.00*	-0.02	0.037		.848

Table 5 (continued)

	Entities	Satisfied (N = 44)	Less satisfied (N = 26)	F	U	p
	Peers and own community					
9	University students	*0.27*	*0.11*	4.638		.035 *
19	Classmates	0.44	0.32	3.228		.077
18	My community	0.55	0.43	5.058		.028 *

Note: Value range in evaluating oneself and others: -1.00 to +1.00
High: over 0.70; Medium: 0.30 to 0.70; Low: -0.10 to 0.30; Very low: under -0.10
High values in evaluating oneself and others are in bold, low and very low values in italics

Empathetic Identification

Empathetic identification expresses the degree of similarity between the qualities a person attributes to the other, whether "good" or "bad", and those a person attributes to self (Weinreich, 2003b).

Satisfied students perceive themselves as similar to the entities *My best friend, Person I admire the most, Me as I want to be, My community, My family, My mother, My father, Classmates*.

Highly significant differences between the groups of participants satisfied and less satisfied with their life are found in the entities *Me as I would like to be* (U = 126.5, p < 0.000), *Person I admire* (U = 246.5, p < 0.000), *My mother* (U = 255.5, p < 0.000), *My father* (U = 266.5, p < 0.000), *My family* (U = 221, p < 0.000), *My best friend* (U = 229.5, p < 0.000), *Classmates* (U = 262, p < 0.000), *My community* (U = 155.5, p < 0.000).

Table 6. Empathetic identification - comparison of students satisfied and less satisfied with life

	Entities	Satisfied (N = 44)	Less satisfied (N = 26)	F	U	p
	Mandatory entities - self-evaluation					
1	Me now	1	1			
14	Me as I would like to be	**0.84**	0.60		126.5	.000 ***
16	Me 5 years ago	0.66	0.56	4.782		.032 *
5	Person I admire	**0.84**	0.61		246.5	.000 ***
12	Person I don't like	*0.46*	*0.42*	0.867		.355

Table continues

Table 6 (continued)

	Entities	Satisfied	Less satisfied	F	U	p
		N = 44	N = 26			
	Family and friends					
3	My mother	**0.80**	0.65		255.5	.000 ***
10	My father	**0.73**	0.56		266.5	.000 ***
17	My family	**0.80**	0.62		221	.000 ***
7	My best friend	**0.85**	0.68		229.5	.000 ***
	Communities and city councilors					
6	Environmentalists	0.63	0.50		347.5	.006 **
11	Motorcyclists	0.50	*0.42*	3.043		.086
15	People in religious communities	0.67	0.54		364.5	.012 *
2	Roma people	*0.37*	*0.43*	2.013		.161
4	People in my town	*0.45*	*0.44*	0.018		.895
13	People in Slovakia	*0.40*	*0.47*	2.046		.157
8	My city councilors	*0.48*	*0.42*	0.905		.345
	Peers and own community					
9	University students	0.61	*0.47*	6.628		.012 *
19	Classmates	**0.71**	0.53		262	.000 ***
18	My community	**0.81**	0.58		155.5	.000 ***

Note: High: over 0.70; Low: under 0.50
High values of empathetic identification are printed in bold, low values in italics

Idealistic Identification

Idealistic identification is defined as the similarity between the qualities a person attributes to the other and those which a person attributes to the ideal self-image (Weinreich, 2003b).

The most significant difference in idealistic identification between the groups of satisfied and less satisfied students is found in the entity *Me now* (U = 104.5, p < 0.000). Further significant differences are related to the other entities as well: satisfied students identify themselves idealistically more with the entities *My best friend* (U = 270, p < 0.000), *Me 5 years ago* (F = 12.407, p < 0.001), *My family* (U = 336, p < 0.004), *Person I admire* (U = 344, p < 0.005), *My father* (U = 275, p < 0.000), *People from my community* (U = 360.5, p < 0.009), *My mother* (U = 362.5, p < 0.010), *University students* (F = 5.806, p < 0.019), *Classmates* (U = 347, p < 0.009). In many cases the listed entities represent

high idealistic identification in satisfied students (over 0.7), whereas in less satisfied students the idealistic identification is low.

Table 7. Idealistic identification - comparison of students satisfied and less satisfied with life

	Entities	Satisfied (N = 44)	Less satisfied (N = 26)	F	U	p
Mandatory entities - self-evaluation						
1	Me now	**0.84**	0.61		104.5	.000 ***
14	Me as I would like to be	**0.93**	**0.90**		482.5	.265
16	Me 5 years ago	0.66	0.51	12.407		.001 **
5	Person I admire	**0.85**	**0.72**		344	.005 **
12	Person I don't like	*0.44*	*0.41*	0.582		.448
Family and friends						
3	My mother	**0.78**	**0.69**		362.5	.010 **
10	My father	**0.71**	0.56		275	.000 ***
17	My family	**0.80**	0.68		336	.004 **
7	My best friend	**0.84**	**0.74**		270	.000 ***
Communities and city councilors						
6	Environmentalists	0.63	0.59	1.591		.211
11	Motorcyclists	0.51	0.43	2.538		.116
15	People in religious communities	**0.70**	0.64		472	.222
2	Roma people	*0.36*	*0.33*	0.328		.569
4	People in my town	*0.43*	*0.35*	2.510		.118
13	People in Slovakia	*0.37*	*0.35*	0.114		.736
8	My city councilors	*0.44*	*0.40*	0.960		.331
Peers and own community						
9	University students	0.60	*0.47*	5.810		.019 *
19	Classmates	**0.71**	0.59		347	.006 **
18	My community	**0.79**	0.69		360.5	.009 **

Note: Value range: 0.00 to 1.00
High: over 0.70; Low: under 0.50
High values of idealistic identification are in bold, low values in italics

DISCUSSION

In their life satisfaction model, Cummins et al. (2003) postulate 75% of scale maximum with the life satisfaction measurement. This population standard of scale maximum was confirmed for western nations. In non-western countries the total satisfaction measures have proved to be lower. The IDEX instrument assessment has also confirmed the Slovak university students' tendency to evaluate their life more at the positive pole of satisfaction, however the measures failed to reach 75% of scale maximum and the variability was higher than that submitted by Cummins. The same results were present in the data of the ESS Round 2 Slovak sample.

The statements evaluating *life satisfaction, living a good life* and *usefulness in life* were used consistently by the participants of our study. Thus the evaluations of life in various formulations represent constant ways for the university students to grasp their social world and define themselves and others. In their evaluations the university students also frequently used the constructs: *living up to one's expectations, honesty, reliability* and *ability to uphold important things*. Surprisingly, the construct *usefulness for others* was used more consistently compared with *life satisfaction* or *good life*. This could be explained by the cultural discourses in Slovak society where usefulness is very often considered the moral requirement of a good life.

According to our results we can consider the various expressions of satisfaction with life as reliable and stable discourses in individuals as well as society. In the IDEX instrument these constructs display a high level of evaluation consistency. This confirms the Diener and Tov (2005) results that life satisfaction (or subjective well-being) is a universal concept present in various cultures and represents an adequate means of examining the total subjective quality of life (Veenhoven, 2000, 2005). Groups of satisfied and less satisfied students differed statistically significantly from each other in 49 out of 124 parameters (this amounts to 40%) of identity parameters used within the conceptualization of Identity Structure Analyses. Thus we can say that life satisfaction is related to many other core constructs, to relations and identifications with oneself and others.

The most sensible significant differences between the satisfied and less satisfied students lie in their consistent use of constructs *lives a good life* and *is able to uphold important things*. An active approach to life is also present in the construct *live life up to one's expectations*, where there are differences between satisfied and less satisfied as well. Beliefs which are different for the satisfied and less satisfied university students, are the evaluation of a good life and an active approach to life. Satisfied students prefer *exciting life*, less satisfied prefer *security*, although in this construct the sample as a whole split.

The positive relation to oneself and positive self-evaluation in the past in students satisfied with their lives were also confirmed. Dissatisfaction or less satisfaction with one's own life is related to a conflicting relation with oneself and a negative self-evaluation in the past. Several authors supporting the connection between satisfaction and self-respect (e.g., Diener et al., 2003) accentuate the importance of a positive relation to oneself for life satisfaction. Our research proved this theory as well: if someone is less satisfied with his/her life, s/he is less satisfied with him/herself too.

The WHO defines quality of life according to a person's aspirations, i.e. the gap

between personal expectations and real experience. The IDEX instrument can handle this problem by the empathetic identification with the entity *Me as I want to be* and idealistic identification with the entity *Me now*. Satisfied students' empathetic and idealistic identification with themselves is higher whereas in less satisfied students it is only on the middle level. We thus can confirm that the differences between aspirations and self-evaluations are lower in students satisfied with their life.

Satisfied students have a strong attachment to their family and friends, they want to resemble them and see themselves as similar to them. The importance of family in the relation to subjective well-being is referred to by Diener and Tov (2005). Haller and Hadler (2006) present the importance of positive experience, primarily with close personal relations, for experiencing happiness. Interesting is also the highly significant difference in the positive relation to one's best friend (the instrument does not disclose whether this difference is dependent on the presence or absence of the best friend). Family and close social relations are accentuated in the majority of multidimensional quality of life concepts (Hagerty et al., 2001).

My classmates and *university students* were assessed more positively by satisfied students, although the identification parameter implies a low attractiveness of the student role for both groups. Similarly to some authors (e.g., Requena, 2003; Doeglas, 2000) who studied the job satisfaction and workplace roles, we discovered (in some parameters) a connection between life satisfaction and evaluation of people from university.

Also, broader communities enable better access to sources, lower social isolation, contribute to well-being and a higher

quality of life (Christakopoulou et al., 2001). Life satisfaction of university students is related to identification with their own communities and their more positive evaluation. Nevertheless we were unable to find a difference between students satisfied and less satisfied with their lives regarding the perception and evaluation of communities with different values and large populations such as voluntary communities, people living in city and citizens of states.[5]

Although our results were obtained on an age and education specific group of participants, the results are consistent from different viewpoints and can be also supported by present theories and research. It would be appropriate to verify them on different samples and in different settings, but we dare to say that they may have general validity.

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[5] The previous research studies carried out with various customized IDEX instruments focused on ethnic/political and gender identifications in Slovakia (see e.g., Bačová, 1999, 2000) showed a thoroughly opposite formula: ethnically different participants, men and women respectively, evaluated differently broader categories of people and showed no differences, or only small differences in the evaluation of people close to them. This can serves as evidence that the IDEX instrument is an extremely sensitive tool to tap the specific realm of beliefs and identifications.

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APPENDIX 1

The first page of the ISA instrument: five-point center-zero scale used to obtain university student's construals of entities

	...want/s to live safely			...want/s to have an exciting life	
Me as I am now (current self) ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) Roma people ...	2	1	0	1	2
My mother ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) people living in my city ...	2	1	0	1	2
A person I admire ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) members of environmentalist communities ...	2	1	0	1	2
My best friend ...	2	1	0	1	2
local city councilors ...	2	1	0	1	2

Appendix 1 (continued)

	...want/s to live safely			...want/s to have an exciting life	
(most) university students ...	2	1	0	1	2
My father ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) members of the motorcycling community ...	2	1	0	1	2
A person I dislike ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) people in Slovakia ...	2	1	0	1	2
Me as I would like to be (ideal self) ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) members of religious communities ...	2	1	0	1	2
Me as I used to be five years ago (past self) ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) members of the family in which I grew up ...	2	1	0	1	2
(most) members of my community ...	2	1	0	1	2

SPOKOJNOSŤ SO ŽIVOTOM, PRESVEDČENIA A VZŤAHY K SEBE A INÝM U VYSOKOŠKOLSKÝCH ŠTUDENTOV

P. B a b i n č á k, V. B a č o v á

Súhrn: V príspevku bola použitá metodika IDEX (Identity Exploration) na overenie, že výroky "spokojný so životom", "žije dobrý život" a "je užitočný iným" patria u vysokoškolských študen-tov humanitných a spoločenskovedných odborov (N = 154, priemerný vek 21.93, SD = 1.45 rokov, rozpätie 19-27 rokov, 26 mužov, 125 žien, 3 neuvedené) k dôležitým kľúčovým kritériám hodnotenia ich sociálneho sveta. Študenti najviac spokojní so svojím životom (N = 45) sú sil-nejšie presvedčení o hodnote schopnosti presadiť dôležité veci, žiť podľa vlastných predstáv, žiť dobrý život, byť užitočný pre iných, venovať sa rodine a blízkym priateľom než študenti menej spokojní a nespokojní so svojím životom (N = 26). Študenti spokojní so svojim životom vnímali a hodnotili seba, obdivovanú osobu, blízkych ľudí i svoje spoločenstvá významne pozitívnejšie než nespokojní. Pozitívnejšie hodnotili tiež svoje vzťahy s referenčnými spoločenstvami: "moja komunita" a "VŠ študenti". Neboli zistené rozdiely medzi spokojnými a nespokojnými vo vnímaní a hodnotení hodnotovo odlišných komunít a veľkých populácií. Výsledky naznačujú, že životná spokojnosť u vysokoškolských študentov sa spája s presvedčeniami o aktívnom prístupe k životu, pozitívnym hodnotením seba, pozitívnymi vzťahmi k blízkym ľuďom, najmä k svojmu najlepšiemu priateľovi a akceptovaním svojej sociálnej pozície; životná nespokojnosť znamená absenciu takýchto silných presvedčení a menej pozitívne vzťahy k sebe i iným.