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HOPES AND FEARS – COMPONENTS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Abstract: Hopes and fears are highly characterizing the future orientations of people, groups and societies and they are part of their well-being. Hopes and fears are not only part of individual and collective well-being they are also guiding behaviour and development of societies. Under the same conditions hopeful individuals and hopeful societies are better off than fearful ones. But fears should not always be considered from a critical point of view; they can also contribute to avoiding future problems. Hopes and fears of nations are here regarded in a worldwide view and the changes over time are of special interest. One main goal of this paper is to bring the future expectations back into the discussion in the field of the quality of life research.

Keywords: well-being, future expectations, hopes, fears.

1. Introduction

The future expectations, hopes and fears are part of subjective well-being. They are one component, all in all subjective well-being consists of three components or dimensions. Furthermore we have the positive dimension (happiness and satisfaction) and the negative dimension (worries and pains). Especially for the positive dimensions we find a lot of studies whereas we do not find a lot of research on the future perspective. That is why they are a field for more research activities. For that reason, we need to define what hopes and fears are, how we can measure them, and to answer the question why they are important. The third section will try to give an impression of how hopes and fears are distributed in the world. Finally some conclusions for further research activities are drawn.

2. Hopes and fears – approaching the topic theoretically

The main point is that future expectations, namely hopes and fears, are one out of three parts of well-being. Hope simply defined as: “positive future expectations”

[Staats, Staasen 1985, p. 236]¹ and in analogy to that fear could be defined as negative future expectations. K. Dufault and B.C. Martocchio [1985] describe hope as a process, not as a trait and it has got two spheres, namely, generalized and particularized hope and it has got six dimensions, namely, an affective, cognitive, behavioral, affiliative, temporal and contextual dimension. A definition of fears says: “fear is an automatic emotion, grounded in the perceived present and often based on the memorized past (also processed unconsciously), that leads to freezing of beliefs, conservatism, and sometimes preemptive aggression” [Bar-Tal 2001]. Fears are a negative imagination of the future, what could happen. People who have fears may tend to do nothing, just waiting that their fears are coming true. Besides all this general definition we have to consider that hope is culture specific. “Western conception of hope is predominant as an episodic emotional state, whereas the Eastern conception is as a more enduring personality trait” [Averill, Sundararajan 2005, p. 155].

The other components of well-being, besides the future expectations, are the positive dimension, namely, happiness and satisfaction, and the negative dimension, namely, worries and pains. In order to display the subjective state of a nation we need all three components. If the sample of respondents represents the whole population, we get social reports about the subjective state of the nation [Glatzer 1990, p. 2]. The distribution of future expectations may change, which is important to investigate.

So looking at the (subjective) well-being in detail, we have to regard three dimensions: satisfaction and happiness, worries and pains, and hopes and fears [Glatzer 2013]:

a) The positive dimension of well-being consists of satisfaction and happiness in general and with respect to public and private domains.

b) The negative dimension of well-being consists of the most important present problems and concerns with respect to public and private domains. Worries and pains are part of the negative aspects of well-being. Different terms and words are used to describe this negative dimension of well-being [Glatzer, Gulyas 2014]. “Positive and negative components of well-being are existing at the same time and they are varying independently” [Glatzer 2014].

c) The future expectations consist of hopes and fears with regard to the future in the short and in the long run. We can ask people to think about the next year or the next five or ten years. And it could be that people, who currently evaluate their life at the present situation, may evaluate their life differently with regard to the future. So it might be that two persons evaluate their current life positively and they are on the same level, but for the future the one person is rather optimistic and the other one

¹ In the research field of positive psychology there are more definitions of hope available: M.E.P. Seligman defined hope as a positive future forward looking emotion, like optimism, trust, believe and confidence as well [Seligman 2002, p. 83]. C.R. Snyder et al. [1991]: Hope is “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally-derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals).”

is rather pessimistic. This means that the future expectations are dimensions of their own; they are independent from the other two dimensions (positive and negative), so this dimension has to get attention like the positive and negative dimension of well-being as well.

It is important to look precisely for which subject the hopes and fears are measured. On the one hand there are studies which measure how people feel about their own lives (*personal* quality of life). Synonymously we can speak of private quality of life or well-being. And on the other hand there are those which measure how they feel about what is happening in their society, in the world around them (*social* quality of life) [Eckersley 2000, p. 5]. Synonymously we can speak of public, national quality of life or well-being. And we have the subjective general level, which includes both the personal and societal level. Summarizing we have three different levels:

- Subjective personal quality of life/well-being is reflected in studies asking how people feel about their own lives in the future. Often the one-year or the five-year perspective is used, but there are other time perspectives which are closer or further in the future possible.
- Subjective social quality of life/well-being is reflected in studies asking how they feel about what is happening in their society, in the world around them.
- Sometimes it is hard to identify if the questions in studies are asking for personal or societal level, they are more or less both. Focusing on subjective general well-being, which means that the question is worded in a way that it is not possible to differentiate, so both the private and the public level are included. The personal and the public level may vary independently.

Besides the levels there are different domains (referring to special thematic topics, respectively field of life) to which the levels might refer. Some domains could be regarded on both levels. For example the economic situation could be a domain which refers to public, private and general level.

On the public level the domains could be the following:

- economic situation,
- poverty,
- social exclusion,
- social conflicts,
- inequality,
- political,
- health,
- ...

On the private level the domains could be the following:

- marriage,
- family,
- work,
- leisure,
- income,

- economic situation,
- health,
- security,
- environment,
- ...

To measure the future expectations it is important to differentiate between the levels and the domains.

There are several indexes to measure the quality of life (for an overview of indices see [Glatzer 2012]). With these indexes it is possible to compare countries and their quality of life. Most of the well-known subjective Indicators e.g. the Overall Satisfaction with Life (OSL), the Affect Balance Scale (ABS) do not include the future side of quality of life, but according to the quality of life concept it could be a necessary addition. In some studies we already find the future expectations:

In his research from 1983 A.C. Michalos did not investigate hopes directly. It is astonishing that the word “hope” even does not come up in the paper once, but what he investigates are the future expectations. He has a variable which contains the five-year expectations [Michalos 1983].

H. Cantril measures hopes and fears. People were asked to tell what their wishes and hopes/worries and fears for the future of the country/for personal life were. And he asked the people about their life satisfaction at past, present and future (5 years) perspective [Cantril 1965]. Some researchers have found that expected life quality is a good predictor of present life quality and satisfaction [Horley, Little 1985].

Gallup International measures future expectations. In Gallup’s Global Barometer the hopes and despairs of people around the world have been monitored every year since 1977. One question in the survey is: “So far as you are concerned, do you think that 2012 will be better or worse than 2011?” But they do not embed the results in the field of quality of life research.

Furthermore there are scales to measure hope, like the EBS (Expected Balance Scale). This scale is based on the MABS (Modified Affect Balance Scale) [Warr et al. 1983] which is a modification of Bradburn’s ABS (Affect Balance Scale) [Bradburn 1969]. The EBS measures the affective aspect of hope, it measures expected positive feelings. The cognitive aspect of hope is measured with the Hope-Index which is based on the interactions of wishes and expectations [Staats 1989]. The EBS focuses on the feelings people have, whereas the Hope Index focuses on cognition.

“The Hope Index defines hope as the interaction between wishes and expectations” [Staats 1989]. The Hope Index refers to specific events or circumstances rather than generalized circumstances or expectations. The respondents have to indicate their degree of expectation for the occurrence of events. The Hope Index is a 16-item measure of hope. Respondents independently rate their wishes and expectations for each of the items on a 6-point Likert scale [Stassen, Staats 1986]. Furthermore the self-referenced items are achievement oriented, employing verbs such as achieve and have [Staats 1989, p. 368].

So besides the scales, hope can be measured with single questions like in the Cantril's survey or in other surveys, e.g. The Gallup Global Barometer of Hope and Despair.

Hopes and fears evaluate the possible future in a positive or negative way. These evaluations have an impact on the subjective well-being and they are an essential part of it, because it makes a difference if somebody who is in a bad situation is rather optimistic and hopeful to get out of it [Glatzer 2012, p. 382]. The chance that he will is rather high in comparison with somebody who is also in a bad situation but who is more pessimistic and has fears, he will rather not be able to have the power to change his situation.

The future perspective is here conceptualized as one separate part of subjective well-being. Although there has been observed an interdependence between satisfaction and hope [Staats 1989]. But it is important to regard the future expectations separately like happiness and satisfaction and worries and pains as well, in order to investigate the subjective state of a nation.

An important point is that the way we are thinking presently about the future might influence the future. This refers to the self-fulfilling prophecy which implies that if I think that something will happen, I behave in the way that it will become real.

The self-destroying prophecy implies that someone behaves in the way that the prophecy does not come true. It could be that a person is threatened by getting unemployed. He has fears to lose his job in the future, so he does a lot of extra work, is doing courses to increase his qualification. So in the end, he will not get unemployed. The prophecy has destroyed itself. Hope can set personal, social and economic resources free, and it is part of the social reality which is reproduced in interactions and their interpretations.

Hope could be positive, but fears are not bad in general. Nevertheless a hopeful society, a society where more people are hopeful than fearful, is preferable in general, because hope could set energy free, but if a society is hopeful where there is no hope, this would be the false way as well. Sometimes the expectations with regard to the future can just only be negative, but having negative expectations is better than having naive or surreal expectations, because disappointment is programmed and this may lead to depressive feelings. Fears regarding the future also can function as warning signals which can lead to a change in behaviour (self-destroying prophecy) so the fears will not come true. Fears can flood consciousness, preparing the individual to cope with the threatening situation and fear motivates protection from events that are perceived to be a threat [Bar-Tal 2001]. Hope has also an affective component. Emotions are reflecting norms, values, and expectations of the society and "both fear and hope can become collective emotional orientations that organize society's views and direct its forms of actions" [Bar-Tal 2001, p. 601]. So emotions in general are not just individual processes and phenomena, they are part of the social reality and therefore "cultural-societal reflections as well" [Bar-Tal 2001].

In research much effort is made referring to the positive and negative dimensions of subjective well-being, and the future expectations are in some way neglected. Wrongfully, because does not it make a difference for the nation's well-being if a nation looks hopefully or fearfully into the future? It does matter, if the expectations for the future are hopeful or fearful and a nation where more people are hoping is to prefer than a nation where more people have fears. Hopes and fears are evaluating the possible future in a positive or in a negative way. We have to regard them to investigate well-being.

3. Monitoring hopes and fears

The following remarks have got two goals: On the one hand to give an impression about the kind of domains the people have hopes and fears, and on the other hand to give an impression about the distribution of hopes and fears in a global perspective.

The questions for the following analysis on a global perspective are:

I. What are the hopes and fears of the people? About which domains have they got hopes, about which have they got fears?

II. In which countries/regions do people have more hopes or do people have more fears?

III. Do people have more hopes or fears regarding the economy?

Table 1. Domains of hopes and fears²

Country	Level	Hopes	Fears
1	2	3	4
Germany	National	Economic Political International peace	International war Economic Political
	Personal	Economic Health Family	Economic Health Family
USA	National	International peace Economic Social	International war Economic Political
	Personal	Economic Health Family	Health Economic Family
Brazil	National	Economic Social Family	Economic Political International war

² Questions on the national level; Now, what are your wishes and hopes for the future of our country? And what about your fears and worries for the future of our country? Questions on the personal level: When you think about what really matters in your life, what are your wishes and hopes for the future? What are your fears and worries about the future?... , what would your life look like then?

1	2	3	4
	Personal	Economic Health Family	Health Economic Family
India	National	Economic Social Political	International war Economic Political
	Personal	Economic Family Job or work situation	Economic Health Family

Source: author’s elaboration, on the basis of [Cantril 1965].

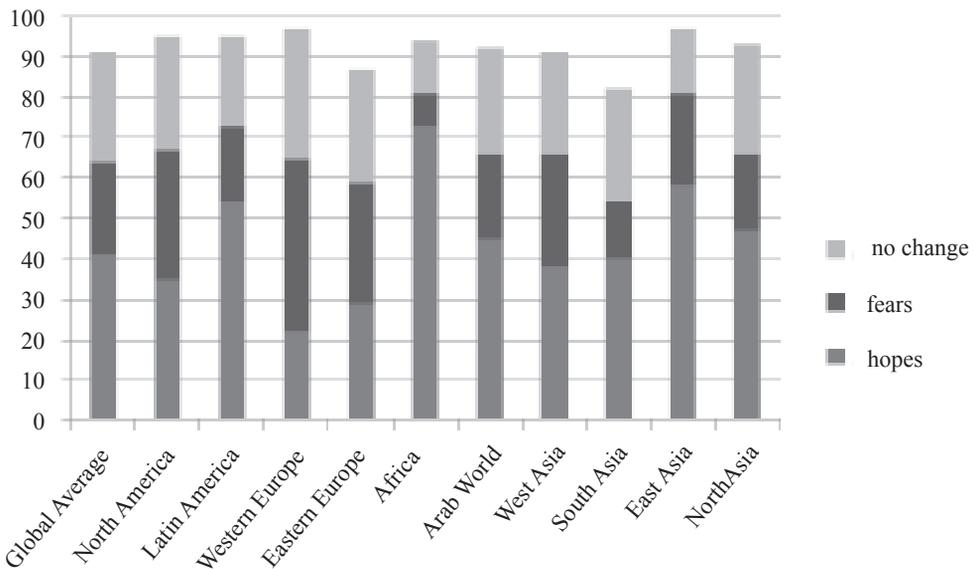


Figure 1. Hopes and fears for the year 2012 on the general level – 1-year perspective

Source: author’s elaboration, on the basis of data from [Gallup International 2011a].

I. What are the hopes and fears of the people? About which domains have they got hopes, about which have they got fears?

The following results are from [Cantril 1965]. People were asked to tell what their wishes and hopes/worries and fears for the future of the country/for personal life are and then the answers were summed up in categories. He analysed the personal and national hopes and fears for 15 countries. Looking at the top three ranking of national/personal hopes and fears for Germany, USA, Brazil, and India in Table 1 we see that: Hopes and fears regarding economic aspects are in the top three of mentioned domains of all selected countries referring to the national/public and to personal/private level. We see that economic aspects are the most important domain on both levels.

On the national level further categories of hopes and fears are: political, social and international peace/war. Besides economic aspects, health and family are important on the personal level and, e.g. in India, the job or work situation as well.

We should concentrate the analysis of hopes and fears even on the economic domain, because it is important to people on both levels: private and public.

II. In which countries/regions do people have more hopes or do people have more fears?

In Figure 1 we see that on the global average more people in the world are rather optimistic for the year 2012 than having fears or thinking that it will stay the same.

Looking separately at the regions of the world we see huge differences.

Especially in Africa the people were having hopes for the next year, they were expecting that it would get better. Africa is the continent where a lot of people are poor (e.g. Niger 92,7% of the population are affected by multidimensional poverty [*Human Development... 2010*]) and where a lot of people have rather low levels of satisfaction (e.g. Rwanda 5 on the OSL, the values from the survey 2005–2008). Western Europe is a region where more people are looking rather pessimistic into the future, although we find there rather low levels of poverty and high levels of satisfaction.

III. Do people have more hopes or fears regarding the economy?

As we have seen before, economic aspects are important to people, because people often mentioned them with regards to hopes and fears. In Figure 2 we see that most of the Africans are expecting economic prosperity and just a small amount of people is expecting economic difficulty. Again a lot of the Western Europeans expect economic difficulties for the next year, but most of them expect that it will remain the same.

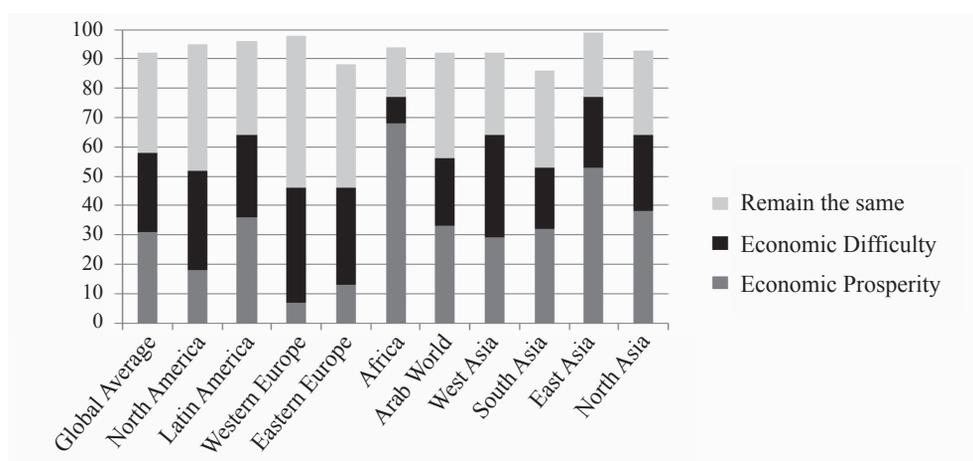


Figure 2. Hopes and fears for the year 2012 for the economy – 1-year perspective

Source: author's elaboration, on the basis of data from [Gallup International 2011a].

Looking at Germany in the long run (Figure 3) we see that in 2010 25% were expecting a positive trend in economy. That is the highest of positive expectations for economic development with respect to the next year ever, although the largest amount of people thinks that it will remain the same. 2008 was the year where over 70% of the Germans were expecting economic difficulty, that is the highest value ever, the amount of negatively thinking people had never been that high before, even not afterwards. Maybe the financial crises influenced the population’s expectations substantially.

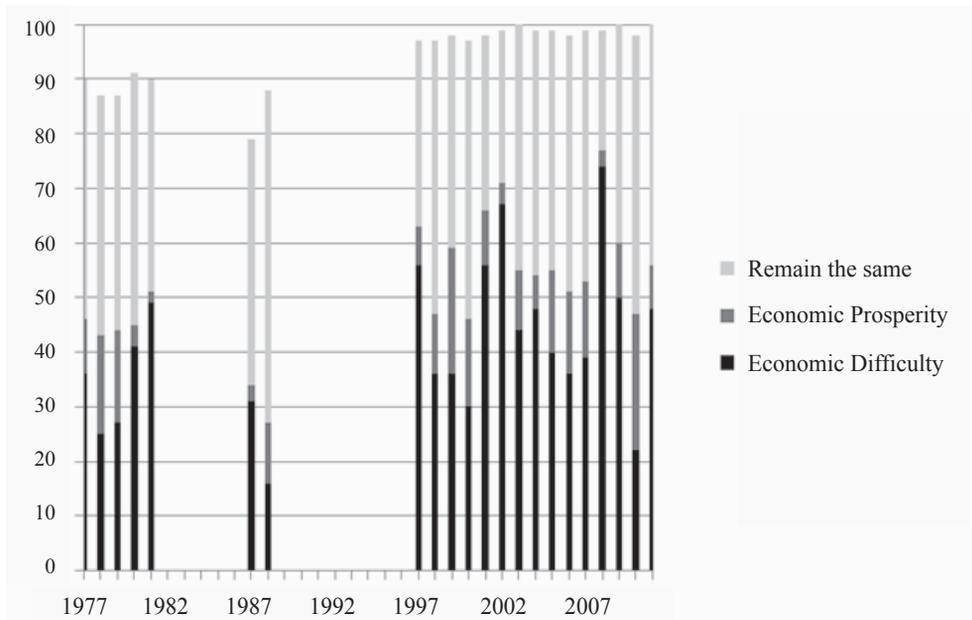


Figure 3. Hopes and fears for the year 2012 for economy in Germany – 1-year perspective, from 1977–2011

Source: author’s elaboration, on the basis of data from [Gallup International 2011b].

From 2007 to 2009 the annual GDP growth rate crashed but in 2011 it was again on the same level as in 2007 (see Figure 4). In 2007 39% thought the next year would be difficult, 46% thought it would stay the same.

But after the economy had been broken and the negative expectations had reached the highest level ever (in 2009) the people’s positive expectations rose, so in 2010 25% were expecting a positive trend in economy. That is the highest of positive expectations for economic development with respect to the next year ever, although the largest amount of people thinks that it will remain the same.

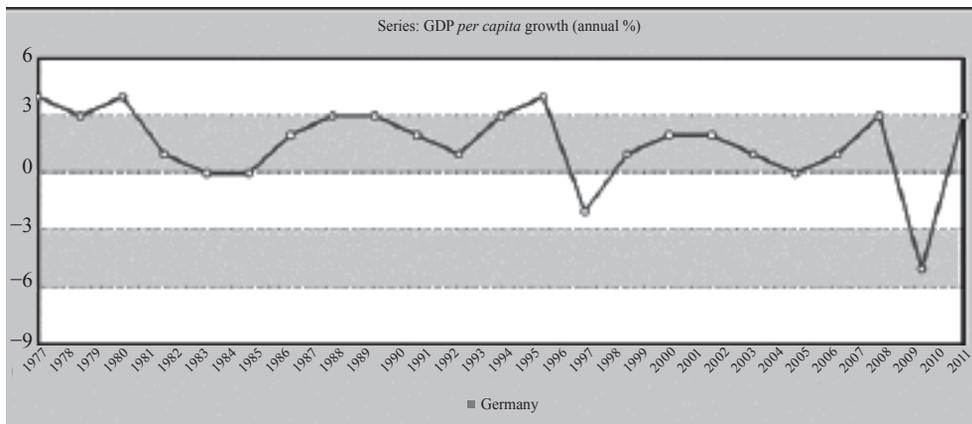


Figure 4. GDP per capita growth in Germany

Source: [<http://databank.worldbank.org/http://databank.worldbank.org/>, (retrieved 6.05.2013)].

4. Conclusions

It does make a difference for subjective well-being of people or whole nations if the future – under the same conditions – is filled with hopes or with fears. Hope might have positive effects on subjective well-being, because hope sets personal, social and economic resources free. S. Staats and M.A. Stassen [1985] found out that hope is an important determinant of subjective well-being and satisfaction is not only related to present and recent past events, but also to the expectations and hope for positive events. The future expectations are a dimension in the spectrum of subjective well-being, which is rather underinvestigated. More research and a systematic theory for the field of quality of life research have to be worked out. To explore both, the causes of hope and the outcomes with which hope is accompanied is a task for new research activities. In such studies as that for South Africa [Boyce, Harris, 2013], geographic and social differences in citizens' average hope levels were determined using a modified Snyder Hope Scale. This has to be expanded on a worldwide level, including cultural differences. By using the Gallup Barometer data we have compared regions in the world (like North and Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Arab World, West, South, East and North Asia) and we have seen that we can display the subjective expectations for the future whether they are positive or negative; to see which countries are more hopeful or more fearful than others. Furthermore we have seen that events (e.g. the financial crisis) which happen in the society influence the future expectations of people. It seems that we presently hope for events which are not reality, yet. We see that hope e.g. for the economy specifically increased from 2009 to 2010. The conclusion is that “threat leads to greater need and

this need may serve as a stimulus for hope” [Staats, Partlo 1992]. Maybe that is one reason why African nations like Nigeria are despite bad societal conditions are more hopeful than others.

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NADZIEJE I OBAWY – SKŁADOWE SUBIEKTYWNEJ JAKOŚCI ŻYCIA

Streszczenie: Nadzieje i obawy charakteryzują orientację na przyszłość ludzi, grup i społeczeństw oraz stanowią część ich dobrostanu. Nadzieje i obawy są nie tylko częścią indywidualnego i zbiorowego dobrostanu, ale także kierują zachowaniem i rozwojem społeczeństw. W tych samych warunkach optymistyczne osoby i społeczeństwa radzą sobie lepiej niż te pełne obaw. Jednak obawy nie powinny być traktowane wyłącznie krytycznie, mogą się one przyczynić do uniknięcia przyszłych problemów. Nadzieje i obawy narodów rozważane są w niniejszej pracy w ujęciu światowym, ze szczególnym naciskiem na zmiany zachodzące w czasie. Jednym z głównych celów pracy jest przywrócenie oczekiwań na przyszłość do dyskusji nad zagadnieniami jakości życia.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrostan, oczekiwania na przyszłość, nadzieje, obawy.