

**WORKSHOP “WELL\_BEING OF THE ELDERLY”**

**ESF FORWARD LOOKS project “Ageing, Health and Pensions in Europe”**

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# Regulation of Subjective Well-being in the Elderly

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# Conceptual issues: Subjective well-being

1. Subjective well-being represents an abstract, superordinate construct subsuming diverse subordinate constructs
  - life satisfaction
  - quality of life
  - happiness (eudaimonia, eutychia)
  - morale
  - positive and negative affect
  
2. Consideration is given to perceptions of life experiences as opposed to objective conditions of life. Although such conditions (e.g. health, wealth) have to be seen as potential influences on SWB, they are not seen as an inherent and necessary part of it.
  
3. SWB comprises two general interrelated components:
  - a cognitive component, covering judgmental processes
  - an affective component, covering the intensity and frequency of positive and negative affect

# Conceptual issues: Subjective well-being – Cognitive component

- Life satisfaction: the comparison of one's life circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard;
- This judgment is based on a **comparison standard** which each individual sets for him/herself, not upon some criterion that is judged to be important by a researcher;
- the judgement of life satisfaction has three temporal orientations, namely past, present, and future life that may lead to a distinction of
  - retrospective satisfaction
  - present satisfaction
  - prospective satisfaction

# Conceptual issues: Subjective well-being – Affective component

- Emotional reactions and feelings towards events;
  - Valence of emotions – affect balance
  - Frequency and intensity of emotions and feelings;
  - Expression of emotions
  - Stability and variability
    - Feelings= transient state
    - Emotion as (a) state and (b) trait

# Perspectives on subjective well-being

- Microsystemic perspective
  - Subjective representations of life
  - Individual factors contributing to SWB
    - e.g. demographic factors, personality, adaptive efforts ...
- Macrosystemic perspective
  - The societal level and societal indicators of *welfare*
    - E.g. economics and employment, health provision, education, ...

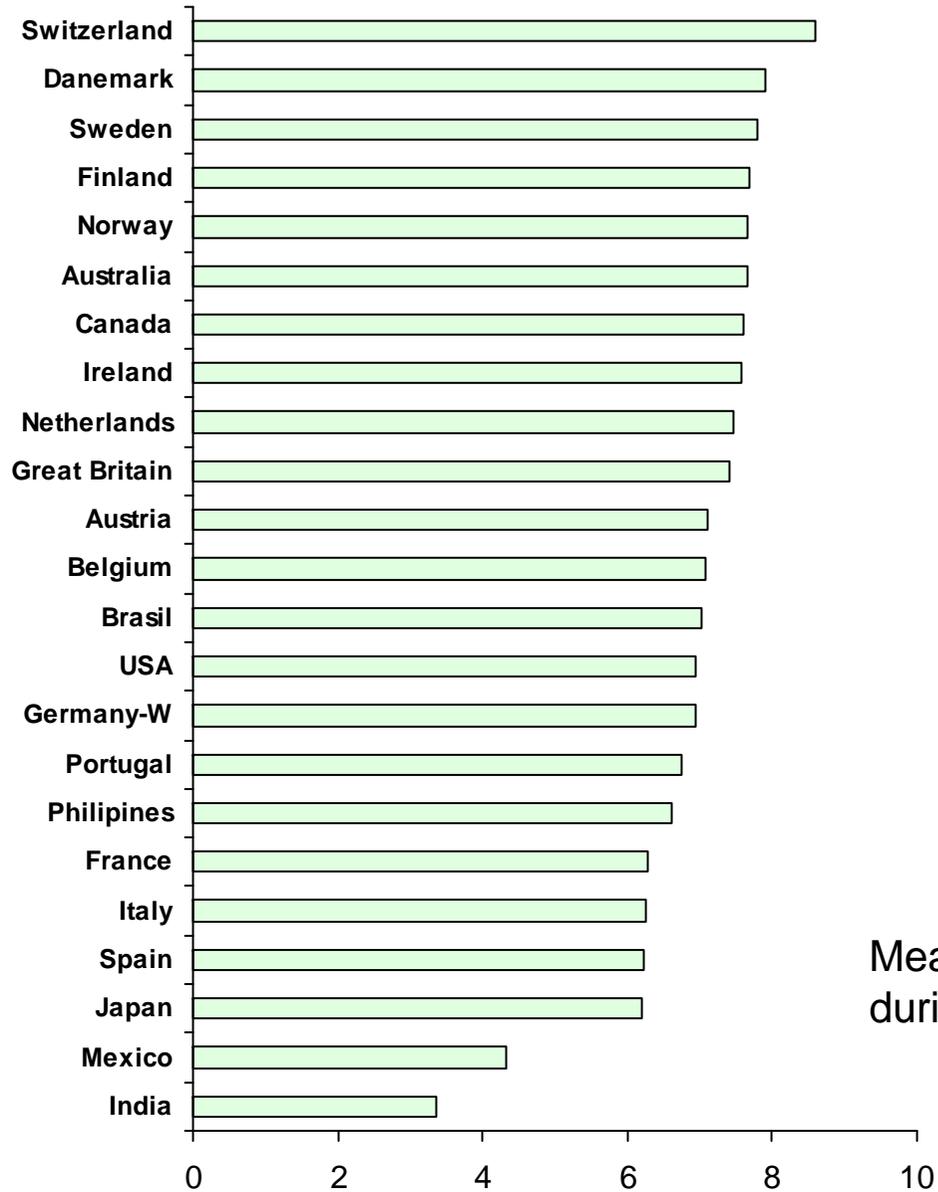
# Combining the perspectives (Veenhoven, 2002)

	Outer qualities	Inner qualities
Life chances	<i>Livability of environment</i> (Ecological, economic, social and cultural conditions)	<i>Life-ability of the person</i> (personal resources, physical and mental health; education, lifestyles)
Life results	<i>Utility of life</i> (Utility for children, partner, friends; utility for society ...)	<i>Appreciation of life</i> (global and specific satisfaction; predominant emotional profiles)

## General findings: Macrosystemic view

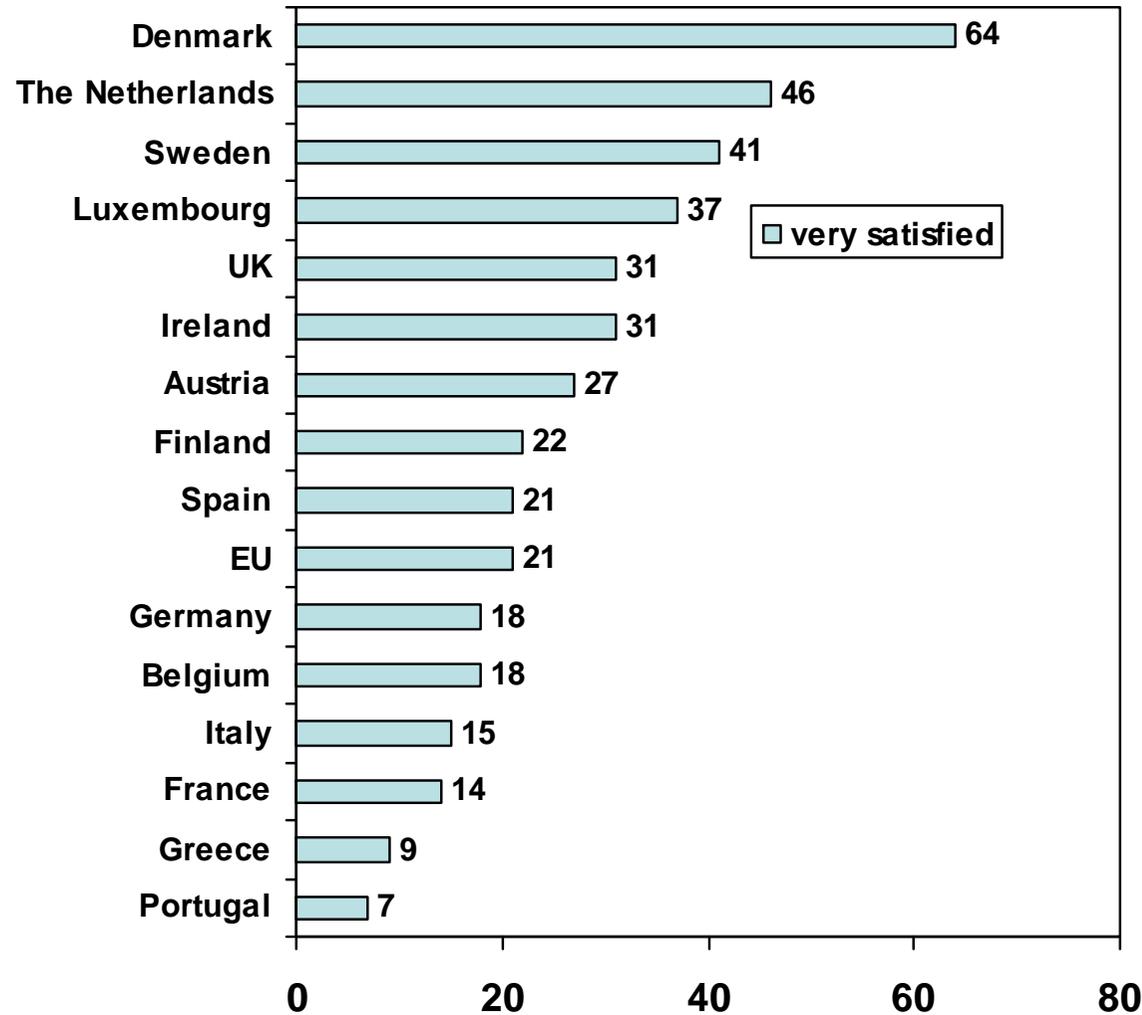
- Correlation of GNP and life satisfaction  
 $r=.84$
- Higher life satisfaction in those nations that provide most *material comfort, social equality, political freedom* and *access to knowledge*, accounting for 77 percent of variance in life satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1997).

# General findings: Macrosystemic view



Mean Life satisfaction in 28 countries during the 80's (nach Veenhoven, 1997).

# Percentage of « very satisfied » persons in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2001)



*On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead ?*

# What you get when you ask people ...

*On the whole are you very satisfied ... with the life you lead ?*

## Global life satisfaction

- top-down, concept-driven judgment
- Use of the availability heuristic and affect infusion

## Domain-specific satisfaction

- bottom-up, data driven judgment

**Forgas (2000); Schwarz & Clore (2003)**

# General findings: Microsystemic perspective

		<i>Objective Life situation</i>	
		„bad“	„good“
<i>Subjective estimate</i>	„bad“	Deprivation	Dilemma of discontent
	„good“	Satisfaction-Paradox (Adaptation)	Well-being

e.g., Ferring & Filipp (1992, 2002); Staudinger (2000); Zapf (1984)

## General findings: Age and subjective well-being in the microsystemic perspective

- No pronounced cross-sectional differences in life satisfaction;
- Only small deviation in longitudinal studies in life satisfaction;
- Differences in the intensity and the expression of emotions.

Perrig-Chiello, 1997

# Conceptualisations of regulative efforts

- Successful Aging (Rowe & Kahn)
- Selective optimization with compensation (Baltes & Baltes)
- Accommodative, assimilative efforts and immunizations (Brandtstadter)
- Socio-emotional selectivity (Carstensen)
- Primary and secondary control (Schulz & Heckhausen)
- ...

# Successful aging – Rowe & Kahn

Successful aging implies the ability to maintain three relative and interrelated key elements or characteristics:

- Low probability of disease and disease-related disability,
- High cognitive and physical functional capacity
- High engagement with life (i.e., activities)

Rowe & Kahn (1998)



# Selective optimization with compensation – meta model (Baltes & Baltes)

## Selection: Elective and Loss-Based

- Concerns selection of alternative contexts, outcomes, and goal structures

## Optimization

- Means for achieving desired outcomes and attaining higher levels of functioning

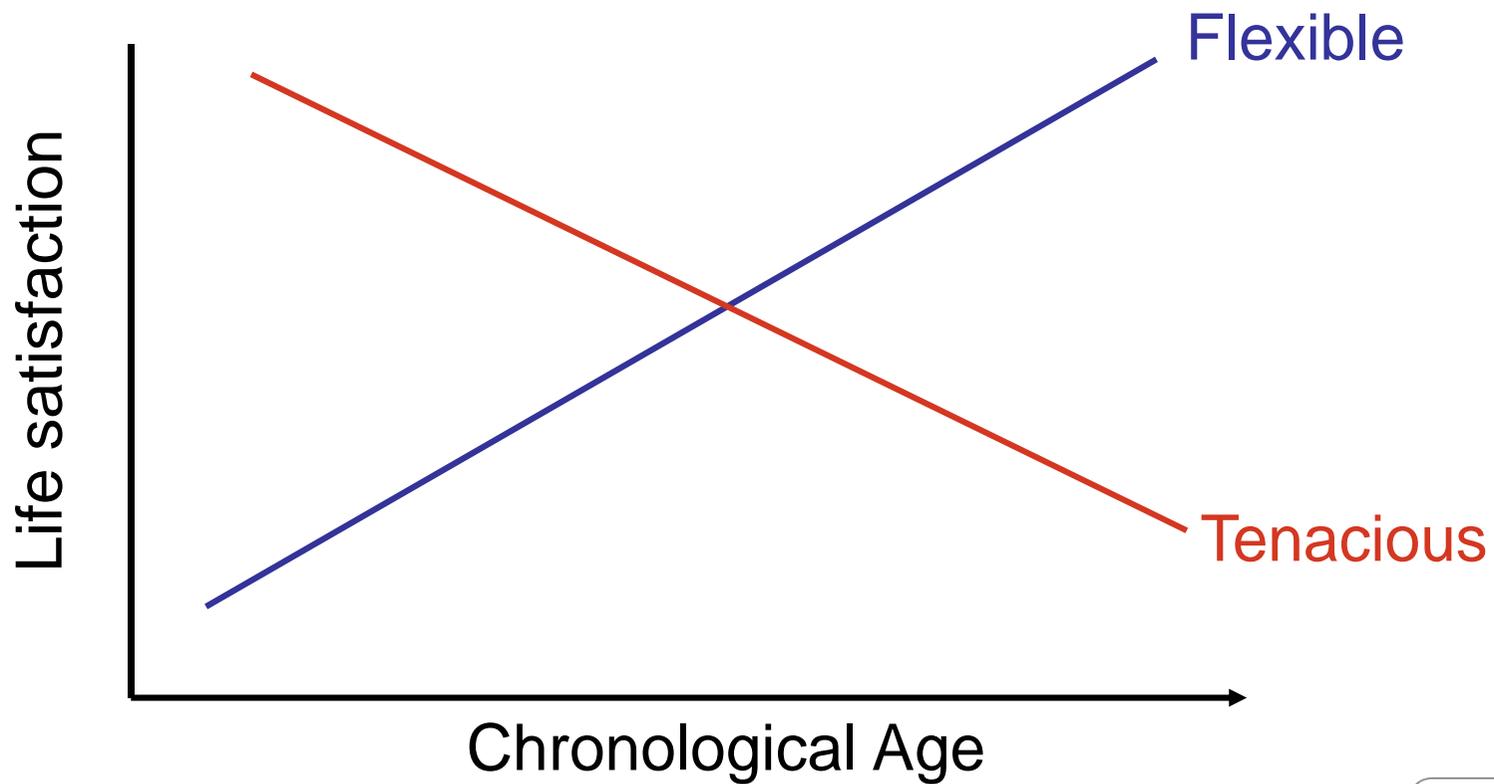
## Compensation

- Activation or acquisition of new substitutive means for counteracting loss/decline that threatens maintenance of a given level of functioning

Baltes, P. B. & Baltes, M. M. (1990)

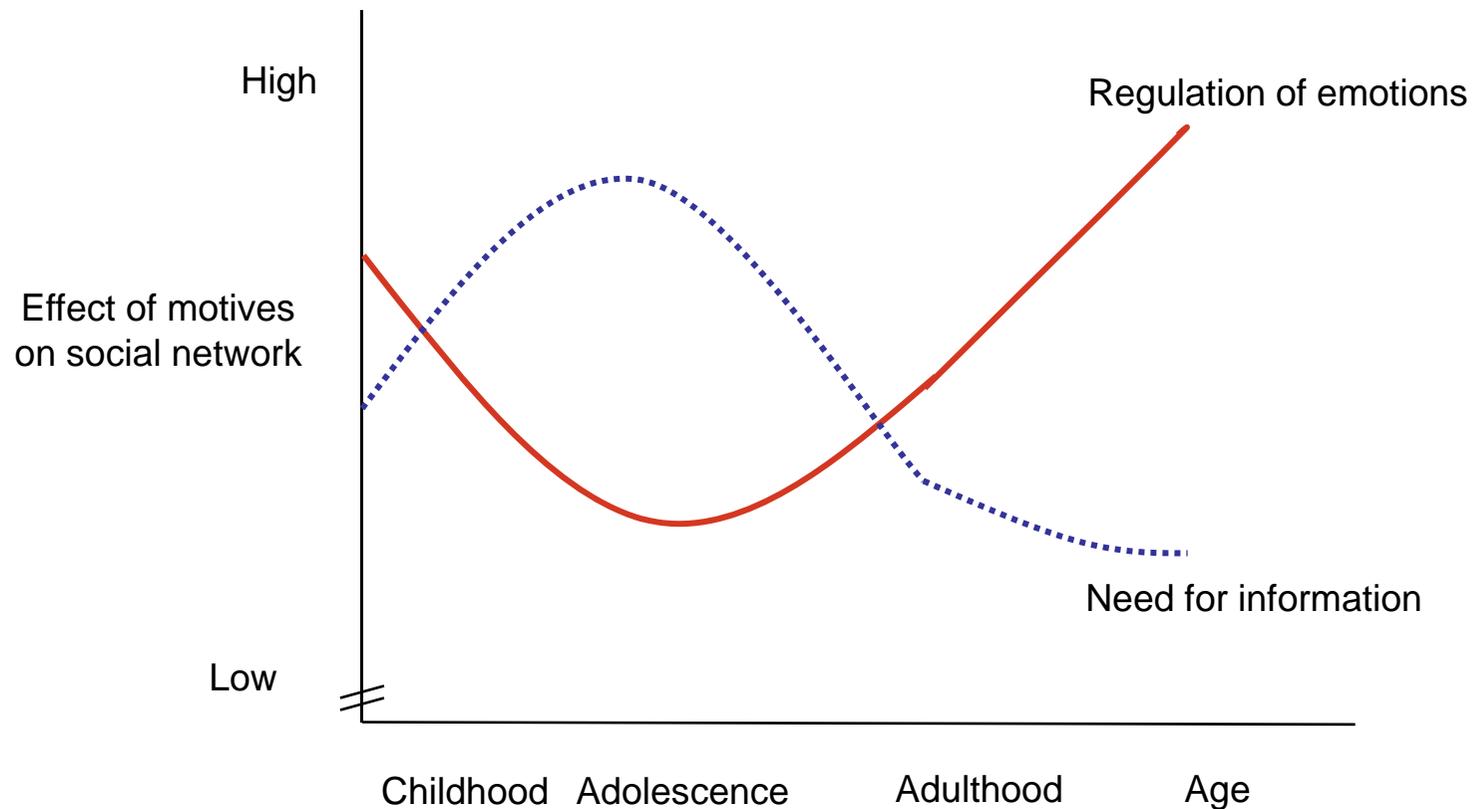


# Accommodative, assimilative efforts and immunizations (Brandtstadter)



Brandtstadter & Greve (1994)

# Socio-emotional selectivity (Carstensen)



Carstensen, Isaacson & Charles (1999)



# Primary and secondary control

## Primary control

- manipulating and changing the objective conditions of the environment to fit one's needs and goals;

## Secondary control

- manipulation and accommodation of one's internal cognitive and affective states (i.e., changing one's goals and aspirations) in order to reduce the impact of events, which are not controllable by primary control endeavours.

Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder, (1982); Heckhausen & Schulz (1995)



# Conceptualisations of regulative efforts – Common characteristics

- Change in contextual, social, and individual demands across age;
- Change in adaptive strategies across the life span;
- Differences in SWB are explained by the motivated « rational » use of strategies;
- Emphasis on cognitive adaptation;
- « Neglect » of the socio-ecological context

# Comprehensive Model on the socio-ecology of subjective well-being

- Combining the macro- and microsystemic perspective
- Socio-ecological context
  - Microlevel
  - Exolevel
  - Macrolevel... in their impact on the individual.

# Comprehensive Model on the socio-ecology of subjective well-being: Multidimensionality

Socio-ecological level	Indicators	
	Subjective	Objective
<b>Individual level</b>	Subjective definitions and criteria of a good life	Mental, physical and social resources
<b>Microlevel</b> (i.e. partnership, family life)	Qualitative indicators of networks; representations about being a parent, about family ...	Quantitative indicators of family structure and life
<b>Mesolevel</b> (indirect influences on the individual; person's home, neighbourhood, and school).	Attachment to living area and institutions	Living situation (house, loan, ...); living area; ...
<b>Exolevel</b> (e.g. community politics, and administrations)	Satisfaction with services and administrations	Availability of services; health provision; education, employment ...
<b>Macrolevel</b> (e.g. socio-cultural and economic context)	Political engagement and identification; feelings of control ...	Social policy Economics

# Comprehensive Model: Further desiderates

- Multicausality of SWB
  - Causes on the individual and societal level are interlinked
- Linear and non-linear relations between predictors and SWB
- Life span approach in studying SWB
  - Putting a person in the context of his or her individual development

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