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TENDENCIES OF YOUTH SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING ASSESSMENT IN LITHUANIA: TERRITORIAL APPROACH

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This article represents perceptions of youths' subjective wellbeing (further SWB) mainly focusing on the evaluations of their happiness and satisfaction with life. Youth SWB is an underdeveloped field of research in Lithuania. It is even more obvious that science lacks research on the SWB of young people based on a territorial approach. Youth SWB research are important because they not only reveal the aspects and problems of the current life of this social group, but also highlights the expectations, fears associated with the future. *The research object* – subjective wellbeing of youth. *The aim of the article* is to reveal the attitudes and tendencies of youth SWB in Lithuania by emphasizing territorial peculiarities. The data from European Social Survey Round 9 (2018) were used to assess youth SWB in Lithuania and compared with ESS Round 4 (2008). The sample of the study is young people aged 15 to 29 years. There were used common research methods for this study: comparative analysis, statistical analysis, graphical representation. Research findings support previous scientific works results that youth perceive and value their SWB on the basis of a multiple factors, SWB evaluations differ according to specific age group. The results have shown that the assessment of the SWB of youth following their age groups is not very low and territorial differences are not large.

Keywords: youth, subjective wellbeing, happiness, satisfaction with life, territorial disparities.

INTRODUCTION

Although youth is the future of the country as a whole and is associated with positive changes in the future, it should be noted that research on young people's SWB, including their happiness or satisfaction with their current life, is rather limited and inconsistent. Wellbeing research in Lithuania by social groups is little specialized, more often the concept of wellbeing is discussed at the conceptual level or much attention is paid to the assessment of wellbeing related to the health of various groups (Staškutė, 2014; Antinienė, Lekavičienė, 2017). Following Rigby et al. (2018) the concept wellbeing is related to what people think and feel about their lives, this includes quality of their relationships, positive emotions and resilience, possibilities to realize their potential or overall satisfaction with life. Wellbeing is a subjective construct, which usually involves judgements of life satisfaction and ratings of feelings. This notion is closely related to happiness, positive mental and physical health (European..., 2015; Burvytė, 201). Therefore, the perception of the wellbeing of young people as an exceptional group of society is important for researchers, practitioners and politicians. In addition, assessments of the wellbeing of young people are important because they not only reflect certain aspects and problems of current life, but also highlight expectations for the future. Some scientific articles (Newland et al., 2014; Antinienė, Lekavičienė, 2017) and reports (European..., 2015; Rigby et al., 2018) reveal that the subjective wellbeing of young people is often decisive in different environments and living conditions, social relations, therefore young people tend to emphasize different aspects of wellbeing and life satisfaction, emotional experiences. It should be noted, however, that in practice it is difficult to find research results designed to reveal how young people living in different areas (rural, urban, district, etc.) value their wellbeing (Čevi, Tasar, 2016).

International publications disclose various aspects about youth SWB what cannot be noticed about Lithuanian SWB research. Researchers and policymakers more and more agree that measuring and understanding SWB of particular social groups enable to understand what the factors for higher wellbeing of society are in general, higher wellbeing contributes to many other important outcomes such as better health and higher productivity at work (European..., 2015; Charveriat, Bodin, 2020). Young people are a rather vulnerable group in society, as they are made up of both immature people and those who are already starting families; young people have various perceptions of what promotes wellbeing like adults, although their focus on certain elements may be different (Sakketa, Gerber, 2016). A previous literature of youth attitude on their wellbeing highlight that the domains of most important were quality of relationships, quality of the environment and health and freedom issues (Dex, Hollingworth, 2012; Singletary et al., 2014). Researches about children and youth has shown that place, identity and wellbeing are often closely connected and interrelated (Rigby et al., 2018) as the demographic, psychographic, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors are important in shaping SWB of youth

(Sirghy, 2021). They also highlighted that positive wellbeing rather than negative is identified as a factor in determining higher wellbeing.

All above mentioned presupposes the idea that SWB includes comprehensive assessments of a person's (in this case – young people) own life (positive and negative), the need for cognition, reactions to experiences, and the influence of experience on the assessment of current life, it is the complete satisfaction of one's life, happiness. Following this concept, it should be emphasized the benefit of youth SWB research:

- the existing studies about youth wellbeing are fragmented, inconsistent in Lithuania;
- the elevation of an individual/social group (their demands, values, priorities) as the central object of the wellbeing research;
- the observation of the youth wellbeing serves for the social, place-based (local), regional and national policy;
- the disparities of regions enable to explore the priorities in improving SWB (specific social, vulnerable groups, passive communities, etc.);
- bring together different actors across sectors into shared and effective action;
- opportunities for scientists to exchange information on research issues specific to youth SWB;
- assists in observing the changes of SWB during a long time;
- it is not easy to collect official statistics on objective wellbeing (there are no clearly developed/distinguished indicators), so SWB research provides useful information on youth, etc.

There should be added that territorial point of view while evaluating youth SWB means that youth SWB and its tendencies were analyzed focusing on place of living (or place of residence). This enable to observe how youth SWB differs / similar in rural areas, towns etc.

According to the scientific relevance and discussion of the selected topic, *the scientific problem is*: what are the peculiarities of the SWB of young people according to territorial point of view? The research object – the subjective wellbeing of youth. *The aim of the article* is to reveal the attitudes and tendencies of youth SWB in Lithuania by emphasizing territorial peculiarities. The next stages of the article represent research methods and research results.

RESEARCH METHODS

European Social Survey (ESS) Round 9 (2018) data mostly were used to assess youth SWB in Lithuania. Tendencies of youth SWB assessment for particular indicators were characterized comparing the data of ESS Round 9 in 2018 with ESS Round 4 in 2008. A representative survey of the Lithuanian population in 2019 September 21 - December 15 was performed by JSC RAIT (N = 1835 respondents). The target group (the sample) – young people, whose age according to the laws of Lithuania (Lietuvos..., 2018) is from 14 to 29 years, but according to the ESS Round 9 it is 15-29 years group. Youth of 15-29 years old in ESS Round 9 accounted for 10.3 percent (188 young people) from all respondents, and the sample from ESS Round 4 (2008) – 545 respondents (28 percent from all respondents, N = 1981). The distribution by territorial dimension and age is given in Table 1.

Territorial units in ESS is divided in such groups: big city, suburbs or outskirts of a big city, a town or a small city, a country village, a farm or home in the countryside. Whether to make easier and clearer comparison by territories, it was decided by the author to combine some groups: a big city + the suburbs or outskirts of a big city (understood as cities with suburbs); a country village + a farm or home in the countryside (understood as rural areas); a town or a small city - left as it is.

Table 1. Distribution of survey participants aged 15-29 of Lithuania in ESS Round 4 (2008) and Round 9 (2018)

Indicators	By living place	
	ESS Round 4 (2008)	ESS Round 9 (2018)
A big city+The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	218	73
A town or a small city	158	54
A country village+A farm or home in the countryside	163	61
	By gender	
Men	312	67
Women	233	121

The research is based on subjective perception of young people about their wellbeing, e.g. how young people themselves value / perceive the wellbeing of their life, happiness, or being satisfied with their life. The focus (following ESS questionnaire¹) was on issues related to the concept of a good life for young people:

- *All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?*
- *Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?*

The above-mentioned questions were evaluated using 10-point Likert scale, where 0 means “Extremely dissatisfied” or “Extremely unhappy” and 10 means “Extremely satisfied” or “Extremely happy”. The answers of ESS Round 9 respondents about satisfaction with their current life and happiness were compared with ESS Round 4, when Lithuania joined the ESS. This allows assumptions to be made about changes in the assessment of youth wellbeing.

¹ ESS. Source Questionnaire Round 9, 2018/2019. Available at https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round9/fieldwork/source/ESS9_source_questionnaires.pdf

There were used such research methods: comparative analysis, statistical analysis, graphical representation. The ESS data were analyzed using programme IBM SPSS Statistics 26.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the study showed that young people in Lithuania (according to ESS Round 9 in 2018) are sufficiently satisfied with their current life (Fig. 1).

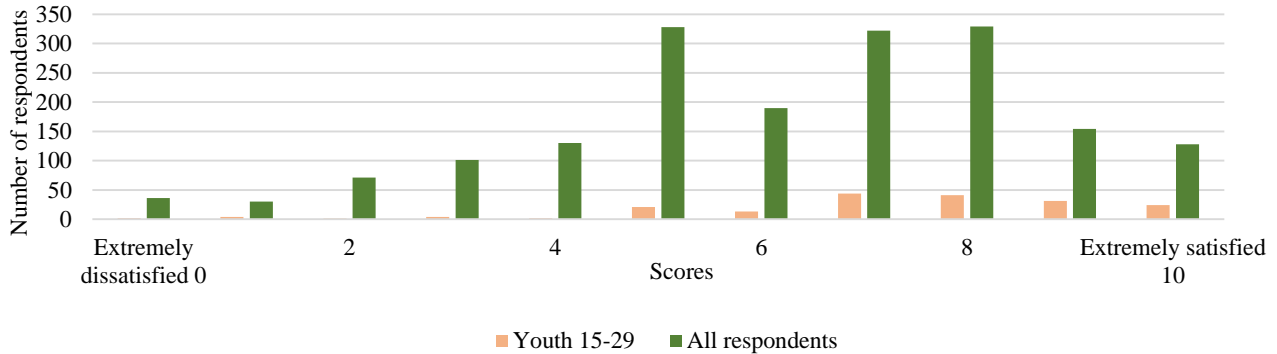


Figure 1. Respondents' opinion on whether they are satisfied with their current life in ESS Round 8 (2018) (in scores)

Evaluation of satisfaction with current life can be related to both instant evaluation of current life and life experience already gained. This is determined by many factors that are specific to the group under analysis. Young people mostly reported 7-9 scores, while all respondents indicated much more diverse assessments of their current life. The results are positive in that only a small proportion of young people indicated a 0-4 scores, indicating that they are not satisfied with their current life. Comparing ESS Round 9 (2018) with Round 4 (2008) data, it was observed that assessments of satisfaction with current life in ESS Round 4 were more diverse and more young people reported 0-4 scores, with a significant number of respondents choosing 5 scores. It can be argued that there has been positive development over the years, as seen in the ESS Round 9 assessments.

Data on young people's satisfaction with their current life by living place (Fig. 2) allowed some observations to be made.

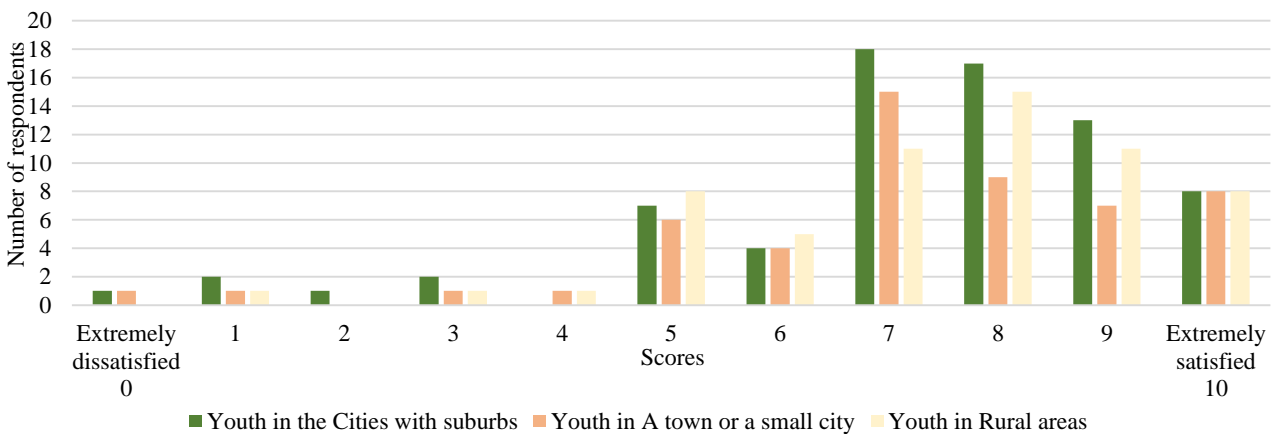


Figure 2. Youth opinion by living place on whether they are satisfied with their current life in ESS Round 8 (2018) (in scores)

Satisfaction with current life differs by living place. It turned out that although the scores are high enough in all territorial groups, youth living in cities with suburbs and in rural areas were more satisfied with current life than those living in a town or a small city. There are various assumptions here as to why such choices were made, but those living in big cities naturally have a greater access to a variety of services, leisure activities, etc., which are typical for young people. On the other hand, young people living in rural areas probably included more natural, healthier living environment factors in their assessments, which is less so in cities with suburbs.

Depending on whether young people are satisfied with their current life by age group, without distinguishing a specific living place, the following results were obtained:

- respondents of all age groups (15-19 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years) indicated sufficiently high scores, dominated by 7-9 points, which indicates that young people are satisfied with their life;
- the response extremely satisfied reported few respondents, but there were such;
- most satisfied with their current life were youth aged 25-29 year - this can be related to various life options and alternatives, different factors influencing the life of that particular group.

The opinion of young people in general and according to the living place whether they are happy is also quite positive (Fig. 3, Fig. 4). The latter assessments are very similar to those of satisfaction with current life. Although the scientific literature stated that satisfaction with current life is more conditioned by objective circumstances (Sakketa, Gerber, 2016; Rigby et al., 2018) and happiness is more subjective (Newland et al., 2014; Antinienė, Lekavičienė, 2017), but the relationship between these two issues is quite strong.

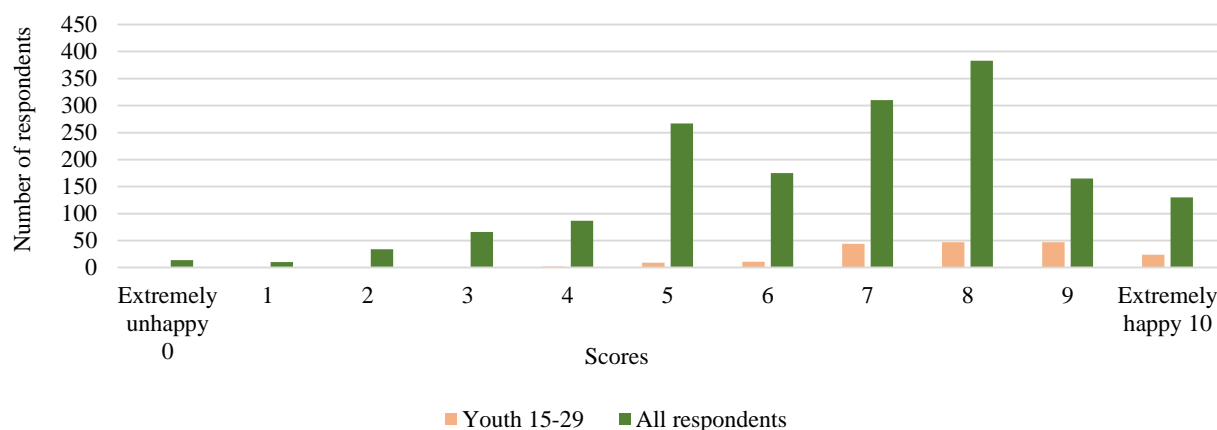


Figure 3. Respondents' opinion on whether they are happy in ESS Round 8 (2018) (in scores)

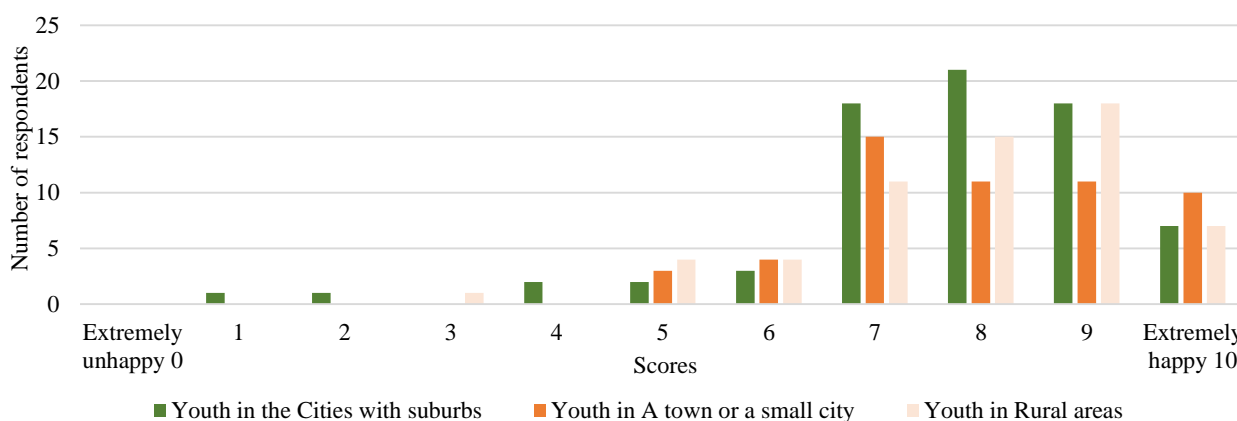


Figure 4. Youth opinion by living place on whether they are they are happy in ESS Round 8 (2018) (in scores)

Assessing whether young people are happy, which also reflects general assessments of wellbeing, results suggest that young people are more happy than unhappy. Most rated their happiness with a scores of 7-9. Only a very small proportion were those who doubted whether they were happy or not, i. y. indicated 5 scores. In terms of living place, as in terms of satisfaction with current life, the happiest were those living in the cities with suburbs and in rural areas. However, young people living in a town or a small city indicated that their ratings of happiness are higher than satisfaction with their current life. In addition, it is important to emphasize that even by living place there were very few respondents who reported 0-4 scores, i.e., that they are unhappy.

Comparing ESS Round 9 with Round 4 data, it was observed that assessments of happiness were very similar, as in both rounds' respondents indicated 6-10 scores, i.e., that they were more happy than unhappy. This shows that the assessment of youth happiness has not changed much over several years. On the other hand, it can be assumed that young people do not necessarily evaluate their happiness on the basis of the same criteria as adults, because of their mindsets, needs, experiences, etc. They are understood differently, they experience it, therefore wellbeing is evaluated with higher scores.

Depending on whether young people are happy by age group, without distinguishing a specific living place, the following results were obtained:

- respondents of all age groups (15-19 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years) indicated that most of them are happy, they pointed out by 7-9 scores;
- happiness increases with the age group;
- the age group of 15-19 years is the least happy compared to the other age groups; this can be attributed to the fact that this proportion of respondents live with their parents and life is largely influenced by their parents.

Overall SWB assessment based on an assessment of current life and happiness has shown that young people are positive about their lives and the results of the study are quite encouraging. In addition to the results obtained, it should be emphasized that it is appropriate to analyze the factors that contribute to such positive scores. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there are many and different SWB factors not only by place of residence, age groups, but also by other

possible sections. Therefore, in order to know more about who decided the SWB for young people, it is appropriate not only to rely on the results of the ESS survey, but also to develop national or local SWB surveys.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. Literature analysis explored that SWB of young people is multidimensional phenomenon. The youth SWB is specific because it is shaped by both objective circumstances and subjective experiences, feelings, needs, etc. that potentially have differences from adults.

2. The results of the research revealed that evaluation of the youth SWB of different age groups is not very low and territorial differences are also not large. It can be assumed that different groups of young people by different territories (rural / urban areas) perceive and value their wellbeing on the basis of a variety of factors. These results are supplemented by various mentioned authors, who are interested in this research field. The results of the study showed that:

- young people in Lithuania are quite satisfied with their lives, as well as happy enough, because relatively high evaluation scores dominate;
- it can be assumed that the satisfaction of life and happiness of different age groups of young people are determined by various factors specific to that particular group especially in separate territorial units;
- youth living in cities with suburbs and rural areas were more satisfied with their current life and happier compared to a town or a small city youth. Territorial differences in the SWB of young people, although little analyzed, are an important object of youth cognition as they provide information about how young people perceive their wellbeing.

3. As the youth is generally made up of people with quite different experiences, research in this area is considered valuable as it can provide useful information on what makes a young person's life good / bad or how current assessments can affect future wellbeing assessments.

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