

Critically examine the
extent to which
happiness is



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Critically examine the extent to which happiness is linked with the content of our leisure lifestyles. The focal point of this paper is happiness and the degree to which it is connected with the content of people's leisure lifestyles. Therefore, to examine this subject thoroughly, an insight into some of the psychological and physiological theories will be presented. The definition of happiness is one of the greatest philosophical quandaries. As said by one of the greatest contributors to Western philosophy, Aristotle, " more than anything else, men and women seek happiness. Moreover, every ambition such as health, beauty, money, or power is treasured only because people expect that it will bring them happiness.

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1992) Throughout the centuries, psychologists and philosophers searched for ways in which to improve the quality of experience. A great contribution in understanding what conditions can generate happiness comes from sociology, economics and neuroscience. Although, Aristotle died even before the Christ was born, as said by Csikszentmihalyi (1992) " we do not understand what happiness is any better than Aristotle did. Yet, despite all the great knowledge and amazing improvements, which made our lives more comfortable, " people still end up feeling that their lives have been wasted , that instead of being filled with happiness their years were spent in anxiety and boredom. " Csikszentmihalyi (1992, p.

1) Layard (2005), observes that, although societies became richer, people are not happier. A comparable view holds Scitovsky (1992), who notes that, when people become richer with other people, they become happier. But when whole societies have become richer, they have not become happier.

Possibly more significant source of satisfaction, still connected with income hierarchy is work.

According to Marx, work provided the most important means for people to fulfill their basic needs and held the key to human happiness. However, he also believed that, this primary human activity can be a source of deprivations of people's nature and relationships with others. Marx developed the idea of 'alienated labour', where individuals are disconnected from their work. This can be observed on capitalist economies where the ownership of the means of production belongs to a minority, and workers do not own goods they make. As a result, they become alienated not only from their actual work, but also from themselves.

They feel 'physically exhausted and mentally debased' and only during their leisure time they can be themselves. (Haralambos&Holborn, 1990) Marx's ideal model of work was: 'a process in which man (...) of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material recreations between himself and the Nature'. Torkildsen (1992, p. 36) The theory of alienation, which according to its founder, was one of the main aims of communism, have been developed by neo-Marxist sociologists. Andrew Gorz, cited in Haralambos&Holborn (1990) saw the consumption of products as a more important phenomena and argued that alienation at work leads the worker to searching for self-fulfillment in leisure. They observed that leisure provides 'means of escape' from the problem, although the basic dissatisfaction remains unchanged.

According to Gorz, this process creates the passive consumer who finds pleasure in the consumption of the products produced by the entertainment industries. A related view held Herbert Marcuse, who introduced the idea that: ' society encourages the individual to develop certain ' needs', which are not essential but which serve the interest of society as whole. '

Torkildsen (1992, p. 82) Such desires as ' need' for cars, television or kitchen equipment, Marcuse called ' false needs', as they are only created to be seen as basic.

Specialization, fragmentation, isolation and repetitiveness contributed to anonymity and alienation for many workers, whose as described by Marcuse were mindless ' happy robots' hunting their ' false needs'. The Industrial Revolution changed the role of leisure, which was no longer a part of everyday life, but has become a relief or even a rehabilitation from work.

(Torkildsen, 1992) However, before we will examine this subject further it is crucial to understand what does leisure is. This expression, has been used several times, yet a definition of this process has not been introduced. In opposition to what may be perceived as a common fact, the idea of leisure is not new and an explanation from the ancient times can be used. Once more, the thought comes from Aristotle, who confirmed ' that is the principal point, with what kind of activity, is man to occupy his leisure'.

(Torkildsen, 1992, p. 15) For Greek philosophers, leisure was the time for contemplation and self- development which were obligatory in order to achieve happiness. In modern times, to have ' leisure', is to live we want to live, to do the things we want to do and to be all that we want to be. It is an

important part of lifestyle and people are bombarded with suggestions for the best way to balance the various aspects of their lives.

People show bigger interest in leading healthier lifestyles and an individual's free time may have more impact on the quality of life than any other area of behaviour and experience. (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) As already mentioned, leisure is based on free time or choice. Most people have more personal control over what they do during their leisure than at any other time during their daily activities. Social research aims to understand the consequences of leisure choices, but also the factors that affect the quality and meaning of these choices. Similarly, this paper also investigates leisure lifestyles, however the focal point is to understand the role happiness plays in those choices. People perceptions about their lives are the results of many factors which have an impact on whether we feel good or bad.

A significant number of those affluences cannot be changed, such as: the way we look, time we were born or the state of the world. Wealth, status, and power have become powerful symbols of happiness. For majority of people happiness means experiencing pleasure: quality food, sex, all the comforts money can buy, however, as mentioned before, research did not show a strong correlation between income and well-being. Therefore, it can be assumed that pleasure is important but it is not enough to provide happiness. (Csikszentmihaly, 1992) A different kind of experience, although connected with pleasures but leading to higher feelings is enjoyment. It occurs when individual achieved something unexpected, beyond his or her expectations.

After an enjoyable event a person sees the improvement which happened inside his self. A majority of activities that provide enjoyment are very different from ordinary life. Taking part in designed situations, which often involve risk and can be much more dangerous than the real life activities, let individuals to feel in control of their actions. But what they enjoy the most is not the sense of being in control, but the sense of exercising control in difficult situations. Those moments give a sense of happiness, a kind of enjoyment which becomes a picture of what life should be like.

Csikszentmihaly (1992) sees those episodes as a optimal experience.

What is more, he believes that the best moments of our lives are not only the passive, relaxing periods, but also the events which when occur, are not always enjoyable. Optimal experience is when we worked hard to accomplish something difficult. In accordance, in his book ' The Psychology of Happiness' Csikszentmihaly (1992, p. 4) presents a theory of flow, " the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" . Flow seems to take place only when tasks are within individual's ability to complete. As Csikszentmihaly (1992) stated, for those who do not have the right skills, the activity is not challenging, which means that is pointless.

A second feature of flow is ' narrowing of consciousness' (Csikszentmihaly, 1992). Maslow (cited in Csikszentmihaly, 1992, p. 40) described this process as ' giving up the past and the future', when attention is only on a narrowed stimulus field. For instance in games, the stimuli is described by rules which eliminate irrelevant pieces. In addition, a factor which makes the participant even more involved is a competitive element and the possibility of material

gains. People, before starting to appreciate the intrinsic rewards coming from flow experiences, usually need to be offered some encouragements.

A third element of flow activities has been variously described. Maslow (cited in Csikszentmihaly, 1990, p. 42) called it as a 'loss of self-consciousness'. It occurs when an action occupies a person to extent, where 'self-ish' considerations become unrelated.

This kind of experience happens to enthusiasts of Yoga and other religious habits. Additional characteristic of flow which needs to be highlighted is time, which seems to pass much different than it normally does. In some activities, the concentration continues for incredible lengths of time, whereas in others an hour pass like a minute. The fact that loosing track of the clock might not be the major element of enjoyment, but it certainly widens the excitement people feel during the involvement. The author presents few examples of the flow activities, such as rock climbing, dancing or playing chess.

But also a mother who 'loses touch with the rest of the world' while she spends the time with her child is experiencing the flow. Csikszentmihaly (1992) based on the research findings, reveals that every flow activity, provides a felling of discovery, of being transported to a different world, a new reality. There is a one more, final attribute of the flow, is its 'autotelic' nature. "Autotelic means that the purpose of an activity lies in the activity itself." Mannell&Kleiber (1997, p.

174) Many leisure activities are rewarding enough in themselves and there is no need for any external incentives. As discussed earlier, such activities

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provide a level of challenge that fits well with individual's abilities. However, some people are able to create such internal satisfaction with activities, which are not intrinsically motivating to other people, often not even to themselves. As a result, feelings like boredom and anxiety affect them very rarely, as they can find interests in almost every activity.

As an example, Csikszentmihaly (1992) sees productive work and the daily routines as a source of happiness. "The autotelic experience, or flow, lifts the course of life to a different level". Csikszentmihaly (1992, p. 69) As described above, the various components of the flow experience are connected together and depend on each other.

By limiting the stimulus field, a flow activity helps people to concentrate their actions and ignore distractions. Therefore, they can temporarily forget about their problems, about themselves. Alienation leads to involvement, boredom is being exchanged for enjoyment and psychic energy acts to support the sense of self. (Mannell&Kleiber, 1997) Csikszentmihaly (1990) sees flow as the most creative and fulfilling experience, and in his book 'Beyond Boredom and Anxiety' presents a game of chess, as an ideal activity to investigate the flow model. Playing chess creates variety reasons for enjoyment, it can be competitiveness, intellectual challenge, stress testing or simply prestige.

This flexibility means that wide range of intrinsic rewards can be found in the same activity. Similarly, already mentioned rock climbing is perceived to be another example of flow activities. In this case, danger draws the individual into total concentration, both mental and physical. What is more, as in a

flow activity, a participant can choose the level of challenge that best suits his abilities.

According to a survey results presented in 'Beyond Boredom and Anxiety' (1990, p. 5), climbers themselves, consider their sport as a real human activity, as achievement in it is their private experience, a feeling of harmony with the environment and simplicity of goal, not a public entertainment. These are the factors that make the activity worthwhile, even though there are no practical reward to gain. The same author states, that in 'real' life is rather impossible that challenges will match one's skills. Therefore, games like chess, religious rituals and other artistic forms were created to provide enjoyable experiences within the interstices of real life.

For this reason, people become involved into 'autotelic activities', to understand the system which could bring happiness into life. It is generally believed, that by studying people's behaviour in their free time and the factors that influence it, can strongly contribute to individual's satisfaction and quality of life. Knowledge about leisure benefits is crucial for public and private services, as it gives the an idea what people are looking for and develop programs and services that provide these benefits. However, this knowledge is also important for an individual itself, so that he or she can decide how to make a use of the free time. As the aim of this document is to examine the extent to which psychological well- being is a part of people's leisure lifestyles, it is significant to consider some of the explanation theories.

The most popular of the way in which leisure is linked to psychological well-being is personal growth theories. (Mannell&Kleiber, 1997) According to this idea leisure offers an opportunity for individuals to discover their strengths and weaknesses, and let them begin the process of development of their abilities. This actions lead them to self- actualization, as they can become a kind of people they would like to be and feel good about themselves.

Mannell&Kleiber (1997) presents the work of Maslow (1968) who described the process of self- actualization as a development of an individual's true potential to the fullest extent. However, an individual to achieve his personal best performance, first must satisfy his lower needs from substance driven stages. These include safety, security and comfort, belonging love and acceptance.

If these are fully met, next level consists of esteem driven or outer directed necessitates. In this stage an individual want to meet the esteem of others, recognition as well as self- esteem and achievement. The last, inner directed stage, contains aesthetic and cognitive needs, desires to understand and explore, and at the top of that ' self actualization' or ' meta needs derived from integration and transcendence of all needs. According to Maslow's theory, self- actualization does not mean that individuals stand out as the best on the world, but they do best according to their abilities.

Mannell&Kleiber (1997) give an example of people expressing their self-actualization through music. To develop and enjoy their musical talents, they do not have to be word class musicians.

A great number of versions of Maslow's theory can be found in the literature, it becomes a base for many new ideas of modern psychology. For instance,
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MacNulty (TOES, 1985) came up with a classification of values and attitudes based on Social Value Groups. According to this categorization, need or sustenance driven individuals are concerned, as in Maslow's hierarchy, only with satisfying the basic psychological requirements. Outer directed personalities invest most value in the possession of material goods, in order to increase their status. At leisure they are not more active than the population as a whole and tend to engage in leisure pursuits for social reasons. Whereas, for inner directed individuals, a need to express themselves creatively, is the most important aspect of their life.

Industrious at work, like to 'improve' themselves with leisure, e. g. an idea of looking after health and physical fitness, whilst on holiday, was established by this group. As stated earlier on, this type of theories can help in understanding the role that leisure may play in personal development, as well as is an excellent source of information for the leisure business organizations in attempt to define their existing and target audiences.

When looking at the situation of UK tourism market, it can be seen that activity holidays overtake a traditional sun, sand and sea holiday. " People want to improve themselves when they go on holiday now, whether it be cooking, painting, learning to mountain bike or sail. " Pete Tyler, Managing Director of Thomas Cook If an individual has an interest, hobby or there is something he or she wishes to try, there is a great possibility that someone will be running a holiday that allows to experience it at leisure. Some of the best holidays include: swimming with humpback whales in the waters of South Pacific; cooking lesson with a Michelin chef; hell ski cruise in British Columbia; exploring Japanese culture or discovering prehistoric civilizations.

(source: CII seminar notes) When people try to achieve happiness on their own, often they seek to maximize pleasures. Those can be biologically programmed or fashioned by the society they live in. Income, power, TV creations become the main directions. However, the way to happiness leads towards different qualities. Happiness is within the reach but only direct control of enjoyment, moment by moment, can overcome the obstacles and take us to the fulfillment.

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