

## **Success as a Cultural Value: a Comparison Between the Notions of Success and Well-being in Bulgaria and Hungary**

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**Abstract:** The goal of this paper is to compare the notions of personal well-being and individual success in Bulgaria and Hungary. Such comparison has not been studied yet in social and cultural sciences. The analysis is based on the results from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Round of the European Social Survey, the 2011's Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey on attitudes to well-being and a small survey on the notions of individual success conducted by the author of this paper in Bulgaria and Hungary in January 2012. Results of this paper shed light on the most important motivating force of one's existence and could be used as guidance for creating problem-solving practices in business and entrepreneurship, based on cultural values.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication; concept; individual achievement; Eurobarometer; European Social Survey

**JEL Classification:** Z1 Cultural Economics; Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology

### **1. Introduction**

One of the greatest questions in an individual's life is making the right choice: which path to choose, what is the best occupation that fits one's personality and, even, why a person needs to have a dream to achieve. Such fundamental questions have always intrigued young people in Europe. Especially in the context of post-modern times when globalization is now reality, cultures have never been that close and yet political and societal changes inevitably determine the individual's course of life.

As part of the European family, common historical roots, both past and present, and their active cooperation united by the river Danube, Bulgaria and Hungary have intrigued many researchers, mainly in the field of linguistics and literature. Intercultural communication has not yet endeavored to compare Hungarian and Bulgarian phenomena, so this paper aims at being a debut work in this field.

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## **2. Cultural Values during the Democratization in Bulgaria and Hungary**

In the dawn of democracy in 1989 a lot was expected from the new political system, including a profound change of values that was supposed to cause economic and social advancement. Unfortunately, societal values are deeply rooted into a culture's "subconscious" and, as the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede reckons, values are the "software of the mind". In other words, cultural values are those common beliefs that determine what is good or bad in a society. They are the core of a culture's "mind" and are the foundation on which attitudes, notions, symbols and behaviors are created. Cultural values are extremely old mental structures, therefore, they are very difficult to change and value transition is a slow process.

In the post-communist ("transition") period all former Soviet Bloc members had to undergo basic changes in legislation, political systems, economy and education. This requires huge societal energy and strong will in order to make profound changes in value systems. The inevitable result is the collision between generations with different sets of values and lifestyles, as well as the impossibility to produce a united and smoothly functioning societal "organism" in both countries. Bulgarian social psychology research calls this process "transition of values" and mentions it as the main reason for difficulties in achieving prosperity and well-being. The transition of values means that members of different generations, even centuries in terms of mentality, live in the same society or cultural group and are in an inevitable conflict because of these profound contrasts. (Garvanova, 2013, p. 62). This is caused by the specific traits of Bulgarian history and geographical position which render the country at the border of 3 worlds: Eastern, Western and Southern Europe. Hungary, on the other hand, is actually also a border culture, combining features of 3 main regions in Europe (Central, Western and Eastern).

This chapter will shed light on the characteristics of Hungarian and Bulgarian cultures according to F. Trompenaars', G. Hofstede's and E. Hall's value orientations. The aim is to find similarities and differences between them and, consequently, analyze the results of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Round of the European Social Survey, the 2011's Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey on attitudes to well-being and a small survey on the notions of individual success conducted by the author of this paper in Bulgaria and Hungary in January 2012. The presence of cultural kinship will be used for summarizing the results.

As mentioned above, Hungarian cultural family predominantly belongs to that of Central and Western Europe, the main reason for which is its location for more than a millennium. This is explicitly represented in Hungarian religious views, which are influenced by both the Protestant work ethic (the Enlightenment) and the traditions of Catholicism, as well as the roots of Hungarian Renaissance that

emerged under strong Italian influence, and their turbulent Ottoman and Habsburg past. All this produced national values such as love for achievement, assertiveness and self-expression which are often intertwined with respect for authority and external powers, and a need for strong leadership to fight these powers. Hungarians belong to the so called “masculine” cultures, where ambition and persistence are highly valued, unlike Bulgaria where the key to a good lifestyle is not hard work but the skill to cooperate. (Sokolova, 2013, pp.141-144)

In terms of their views of time, Hungarians seem to value punctuality (monochronic view of time) and see the amount of work as an endless path rather than a way of cooperating with colleagues, and do not focus on interpersonal relations as much as Bulgarians do. (Sokolova, 2013, pp. 141-144). Traditional values of Bulgarian culture are survival, diligence and hard work, perfectionism, cooperation, collectivism, prudence and straightforwardness. (Garvanova, 2013, pp. 29-32). The skills to survive and avoid trouble (uncertainty) were paramount during the 5-century period of Ottoman rule, when Bulgaria practically did not exist as a political and religious structure. Therefore the absence of authority to protect Bulgarian interests made the local population survive on its own in an unfavorable environment.

According to Trompenaars’ and Hall’s cultural dimensions the characteristics of Bulgarian cultural model are particularism, collectivism, affective and diffuse relationships, high context of communication, ascription (status is attributed), mainly polychronic views of time (“time is cyclical”; some exceptions exist in business culture), outer orientation. (Popova, 2006, pp. 20-29). Typical for Bulgarian culture is high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, short-term orientation, transition from collectivism to individualism, femininity (cooperation is better than competition). (geert-hofstede.com, 30.06.2014) Similar to Bulgaria, Hungary avoids uncertainty, is almost as pragmatic (most of the events in the world cannot be explained) and has a similar score in the Indulgence vs. Restraint dimension, which means that both cultures do not put emphasis on leisure time and gratification of needs, cynicism and pessimism are prevalent. The differences lie in the slightly lower power distance, and the extremely high degree of individualism and masculinity (as mentioned above). (geert-hofstede.com, 30.06.2014)

Hungarians tend to be mainly universalistic (Trompenaars) in business culture – rules matter more than people and personal relations, they have neutral and specific relationship to work, outer-directed and achievement-oriented approach to business, future orientation to time (sequential, monochronic). (Hidasi & Lukinykh, 2009, pp. 2-7)

To conclude this chapter, the characteristics of both cultures are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1. Bulgarian and Hungarian Cultural Values according to Hall's, Trompenaars' and Hofstede's orientations**

<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
Polychronic views of time	Monochronic views of time
High context (Diffused)	Low context (Specificity)
Particularism	Universalism
Collectivism to Individualism	Individualism
Affective orientation	Neutral orientation
Ascription orientation	Weak 'achieved status' orientation
Strong outer orientation	Weak outer orientation
Strong orientation to present	Weak future orientation
High power distance	Medium power distance
Femininity	Masculinity
Uncertainty avoidance	Uncertainty avoidance
Pragmatism	Pragmatism
Strongly restrained culture	Restrained culture

It is obvious that both cultures are characterized by mostly different sets of values with the exception of avoiding uncertainty, the role of pragmatism and restraint. Not surprisingly, Hungary is definitely not a survival culture because of its different historical past, when much longer periods of political independence were present than Bulgaria, and nobility and local authorities existed in a certain form for most of the time. Therefore, major cultural differences are present in both countries and the author's prediction of the results of the 3 survey comparison is that both cultures will present completely different notions of individual success and well-being.

### **3. Notions of Well-being in Bulgaria and Hungary**

This chapter analyzes similarities and differences between the notions of well-being in Bulgaria and Hungary using data obtained from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Round of the European Social Survey and 2011's Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey. The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted every two years across Europe since 2001. The ESS collaborates with the European Commission on many research projects. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rounds of ESS (2006, 2008 and 2010) investigate the perceptions of personal and social well-being in more than 15 countries in Europe. Basic indicators of well-being according to ESS are roles of jobs in the Great Recession, healthcare, integration of women, welfare policies, social and personal notions of well-being, overall political situation in the Recession, discrimination in terms of age, role of marriage and partnership, political participation in the post-communist age, fear of crime, politics of immigration, immigrants' civic participation in each country. Hungary has taken part in ESS from the beginning and Bulgaria joined it in Round

3 (2006). There is not enough data in all categories for both countries, so the available was summarized and analyzed in order to compare well-being perceptions.

Factors for well-being in *both* countries:

- levels of personal and social well-being (equal score, average of 4,5 of 10, lowest in Europe);
- degree of support for government intervention in economy (above 8 of 10 (highest score after leaders Ukraine, Russia and Greece));
- proportion of housework done by women (70%);
- trust in government quality: official data vs. respondents' attitudes – Hungarian government has medium quality according to official data but receives low trust, Bulgarian government scores low in both dimensions;
- support for higher taxes and social spending – Hungarian support for higher taxes is located in the lowest end of classification score, Bulgarians show “medium” support in this dimension;
- trust in justice institutions (courts, police) – low trust in both countries.

Additional data for each country shows that Bulgaria has the lowest happiness index and the lowest levels of overall trust while Hungary demonstrates overall positive political trust and satisfaction with democracy. As seen from the data above, both societies share traditional values (roles of women in family chores), strong pessimism and cynicism (mostly low-trust societies), and find the role of authority extremely important (importance of government interventions, trust in government quality). Differences could be found in attitude to taxes and social spending where Bulgaria “acts” like a typically feminine society (egalitarianism and equal funding for all), unlike Hungary which finds governmental interventions in welfare unnecessary. These characteristics show that in terms of sets of values both countries share the following dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, pragmatism and restraint.

The 2011's Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey was commissioned ad hoc to investigate (using qualitative research) the issue of well-being in the European Union in 15 EU Member States. 35 focus group discussions were conducted in February and March 2010, each lasting two hours. The results were analyzed at a country level and then aggregated to produce an overall report<sup>1</sup>. Main factors contributing to well-being according to Eurobarometer are subjective well-being, economic and employment situation, education and intellectual development, health and nutrition, infrastructure, interpersonal relationships, civic life, cultural and spiritual activities, environment (no data for Bulgaria and Hungary).

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<sup>1</sup> [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm), 30.06.2014.

**Table 2. Factors contributing to well-being according to Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey 2011**

<b>Factors contributing to well-being</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Hungary</b>
<b>1. Subjective well-being</b>	Satisfaction	Satisfaction, freedom of choice
<b>2. Economic and employment situation</b>	Job satisfaction, income, non-essential consumption, debt and savings	Job satisfaction, income, non-essential consumption
<b>3. Education</b>	Educational <i>attainment</i>	Educational <i>opportunities</i>
<b>4. Health and nutrition</b>	Personal health, Nutritional intake	Personal health, healthcare
<b>5. Infrastructure</b>	Quality of residence	Quality of residence
<b>6. Interpersonal relationships</b>	Family situation	Family situation friends, overall satisfaction in marriage / partnership
<b>7. Civic life</b>	Current government	Current government, freedom of expression
<b>8. Cultural and spiritual activities</b>	Spirituality / religiosity, cultural life	Time for leisure activities, cultural life
<b>9. Environment</b>	-----	-----

Trends in attitudes to well-being across Europe are common, which means that there should be common similarities in the investigated attitudes in both countries. Differences are due to the local socio-cultural characteristics, as well as local policies in each country. Despite the latter there are some specific differences between both countries, which originate from the value systems of these societies. An example of that is the role of education in the impact on well-being – Bulgarians see education as a form of material possession, something that has to be acquired and preserved in order to provide security and status. Hungary regards education an opportunity, a way to achieve dreams and prosperity.

Hungarians put individuality first in terms of satisfaction and freedom of choice, and work is seen as an opportunity, rather than a chore. Bulgaria finds the availability of savings of much greater importance than individual independence, perhaps because of the constant sense of uncertainty and the unstable social situation in the country.

In conclusion, results of Eurobarometer Qualitative Survey on attitudes to well-being show that Bulgaria and Hungary demonstrate different concepts while sharing certain similarities, which proves the value system classification in the previous chapter. Both countries show an exact interpretation of their cultural

values and the expectation of the author is to find the same demonstration of sets of values in the results of the perceived notions of success survey.

#### **4. Success through the Eyes of Youth**

The author of this paper conducted a small survey in February 2012 with 28 students (18 to 26 years of age, men and women) in both countries. Structured interview questionnaire is used to determine the basic notions of success, the perception of personal successfulness by respondents and the presence of particular external influence (family and friends) on the notions of success. (Sokolova, 2013, pp. 141-144 in Proceedings of...)

The first component is the perceived image of success in both languages. Hungarians classify the concept into 4 groups: 1. Private life, 2. Job availability, 3. Abstract notions, 4. Physical health. The largest group of concepts contains the abstract notions of success, second is group 2 where most frequent words are "money", "career" and "occupation". Groups 1 ("happiness", "love") and 4 ("health", "beauty") contain the smallest number of concepts.

Similar to the above, Bulgarians' classification includes 4 groups, but unlike Hungarians, the concepts are evenly distributed within groups, where the answers are various, mainly explanatory and do not contain particular definitions but a detailed and long description of a person's aspirations. The concept groups are "achieving goals and results", "life satisfaction", "personal gratification and recognition (abstract concepts)", "materialism (home and financial status)". Bulgarian success is associated with acquiring a certain material and spiritual lifestyle, while Hungarians "see" it as an abstract journey, a never ending path. In other words, the main "conflict" of notions is between static and dynamic visions.

The second component of the questionnaire is a specific set of questions regarding the self-perception of successfulness and the need for external influences to make choices. 66% of Hungarians tend to exclude family and friends when making life choices (individualism), while 75% of Bulgarians need their family support to make a final decision in their lives (collectivism). When assessing their own individual rate of success 58% of Hungarians regard themselves as "successful in life", while only 0,6% of Bulgarians feel the same way. On the opposite range of answers only 0,8% of Hungarians feel unsuccessful, while 62,5% of Bulgarians regard themselves as "partially successful" (lower self-confidence, balance oriented).

The table below includes 12 pairs of association of the notion of success according to young people in both countries.

**Table 3. Pairs of association of the notion of success according to Hungarian and Bulgarian youth**

<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>
Abstract	Particular
Explicitness	Diffusion, verbalism
Dynamic	Static
Recognition	Satisfaction
Endless path	Desired lifestyle
Metaphysical	Materialistic
Independence	Imitation (dependence)
Stoicism	Softness
Confidence	Timidity
Determination	Non-committal
Assertiveness	Inactivity
Risk-taking	Balance/ harmony

This classification is created by the author of the small survey, based on the topics of the language units used as answers. Some characteristics of value orientations are found in these concept dyads, for instance, “explicitness” is similar to low context, “verbalism” – high context, “independence”(individualism), “imitation”(collectivism), “assertiveness” (masculinity), “inactivity” (femininity), etc. Some pairs are partially synonymous and belong to the same cultural dimensions.

This classification shows that Hungarian culture values qualities like assertiveness, independence, idealism and competitiveness to achieve results in a certain area. Bulgarian culture values the most qualities like pragmatism, cooperation, respect for authority and striving for materialism as most appropriate for achieving goals.

## **5. Conclusions**

The analysis of all 3 surveys shows that, firstly, there are major differences in Bulgarian and Hungarian notions of success and well-being, as well as minor similarities. As predicted, respondents’ answers were motivated basically by their cultural values and to a much lesser extent by an “individual” choice.

Notions of well-being and success seem quite distant at a first glance, but when investigated in depth they seem to show similar patterns of motivating the



respondents. Well-being is majorly a materialistic, tangible and easily detectable element of one's life. Success is an abstract idea, something like a lifetime dream, something impossible to touch or smell. Success is accepted "as it is", it is a driving force to achieve high-quality well-being and existence. Undoubtedly, well-being is part of the notion of success, but perceived differently: Hungarians see it as a form of recognition for their success, Bulgarians find it to be the materialization of successfulness, the final destination of their journey. Therefore, success can be considered a cultural value in each investigated country, while well-being is the material demonstration of this value.

These results could be used for the basis of more detailed research on the concept of success not only in Bulgaria and Hungary but also on the whole European continent. Academics interested in societal and cultural values and business may benefit from researching it because detailed knowledge and understanding of main values in a society is crucial for international contacts and entrepreneurship. Being the first scientific work investigating the general concept of success in intercultural communication, results of this paper shed light for the first time on the most important motivating force of one's existence and could be used as guidance for creating problem-solving practices in business and entrepreneurship.

The author is also convinced that future problem-solving practices in education and social welfare could be successful if based on providing basic knowledge of cultural values in schools and universities.

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