

HAPPINESS AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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The concept of “happiness” is one of the most popular in psychology, sociology, in the entire complex of the humanities, and even in some areas of economics. The theme of happiness occupies a special place in urban studies.

There is no universally accepted definition of happiness. The World Happiness Database (<https://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/>) contains over 15,000 conceptual publications, almost 18,000 publications on happiness measurement methods, and almost 21,000 publications on issues related to happiness. With all the variety of existing concepts of happiness, we can extract several invariant qualities of this mysterious phenomenon.

First, happiness has attractiveness. Humans strive for happiness, they are willing to pay for happiness, happiness is a significant value (in some conceptual systems - the highest value, in comparison with which all other values are only a means).

Second, happiness belongs to the realm of experiences rather than to the realm of thought. Happiness can be felt, but happiness cannot be thoughted. That is, the phenomenon of happiness belongs to a greater extent to the affective sphere than to the cognitive one.

In our research in the field of social psychology of the urban environment, we use the following definition : happiness is an emotional state with maximum attractiveness. At the same time, we understand emotions as characteristics of the information flow. Several conclusions follow from this definition.

The distribution of the levels of attractiveness in the space of emotions is purely individual, and the maximum attraction can be in any area of this space. The number of options for happiness is almost infinite, as is the number of unique individuals. There are people for whom the emotions of the “conscience, guilt” group are most attractive. For them, the highest value is a law and order, sense of regularity and meaningfulness of the surrounding reality, a clear definite place that they occupy in the reality. A comfortable urban environment for such people

is characterized by harmony, rhythm and balance, clarity and orderliness of the urban structure at all levels.

The opposite type of people finds happiness in the field of emotions “fear, excitement, anxiety.” These are people inclined to risk, they find the highest pleasure in gambling. In extreme, such people are “adrenaline addicts”, lovers of extreme entertainment, they despise the laws and are prone to criminal behavior and dangerous adventures. A comfortable urban environment for such people is motley, contrasting, saturated with dissymmetrical elements with sharp, convulsive dynamics.

Every area in the space of emotions is someone’s happiness. People who are happy in the field of emotions “joy, pride” often have a bright charisma, but they are also can be arrogant. People who are happy in the area of “interest, enthusiasm” are, like curious children, ready for anything for the sake of new experiences and discoveries. Angry people love conflict, they fight and fight for any reason - simply because they enjoy the emotions of anger and aggression.

Even areas of the emotional space such as “disgust, contempt” or “sorrow, grief” can be someone’s happiness. There are people (like Shakespeare’s Iago) who enjoy meanness and hideous intrigue, even if these intrigues do not bring them any benefit. Sad and discouraged people cherish their spleen and get real pleasure from the states of grief. Most people are unaware of the nature of their personal happiness. Usually a person is unconsciously convinced that it is his ideas about happiness that are normal and natural. When faced with a different version of happiness, a person perceives it as “abnormal”, “painful”, or begins to suspect another person of pretense. A significant number of interpersonal and group conflicts arise from the fact that people try to impose their idea of happiness on other people (who have their own ideas about it). Such imposition often comes from the kindest, altruistic motives, and resistance to it is perceived as stupidity or ingratitude.

In English, the word “happiness” has its own meaning as an area of emotion to the group “joy, pride”, which creates certain inconveniences for discussion. Therefore, we prefer to use the special term “felicitas” to denote emotions with maximum attractiveness, and we will use it here.

In addition to the individual felicitas inherent in the particular person, there is social felicitas. This is an idea of which emotional area is the most valuable and approved from the point of view of society. The dominant ideology in society forms felicitas, which society imposes on all its members. Accordingly, the dominant style of the urban environment is being formed.

Obviously, such an environment can be comfortable only for those residents of the city, whose personal felicitas coincides with social felicitas. The greater the difference between

personal and social, the more uncomfortable the urban environment feels by the person.

As an example, we investigated the urban environment of Sofia (Bulgaria) in those locations where Sofia youth are concentrating. Due to quarantine, most of these public spaces are now empty. This helped us assess the quality of the urban environment itself.

Figure 1 shows the main entrance to the Sofia University named after St. Kliment Ohridski.

Figure 1. The main entrance to the main building of Sofia University

The main entrance to the building, according to the architect's plan, looks grand and majestic. The official entrance area from the corner of the building overlooks the intersection of two major highways, it is decorated in a classical style, with a colonnade and a portico, and on the sides of the doors there are statues of the two brothers Georgiev, who financed the opening of the university in 1888. The main entrance image is full of emotions of pride and celebration (like the whole classicism style), but this entrance is tightly closed and has not been used for the past few decades. Obviously, the ideology of national pride that prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century (against the background of the liberation of Bulgaria from Osman rule) has now been replaced by completely different ideologemes. The side entrance, through which students and teachers today enter the university, displays a completely different emotional content. The key frame of this zone is chaotic and asthenic: it lacks symmetry and stability (a building hangs over the viewer's head), the color key of the frame is motley and dim, the symbolic elements of the frame also looks random and meaningless. A quantitative analysis of key frames brings us into the realm of the emotional space between the fear, anxiety and disgust, contempt axes. In this area are located emotional states that correspond to the words "stinginess" and "greed".

Figure 2. The current entrance to the main building of Sofia University

A similar impression is produced by the entrance areas of other buildings of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski, as well as most other universities in Sofia. The second group of places in the city, which we analyzed, are areas for spontaneous gathering of young people on their own initiative ("hangout places" in youth jargon). Such venues are likely to be found in every city in the world, and their emotional content reflects precisely those states that young people

prefer. Figure 3 shows a key frame of one of the most popular youth gathering sites near the Red Army monument. The monument is a large complex of structures, which includes several places where young people can gather. Keyframes from all of these venues show a lot in common. The space of these places is wide open in a long perspective. The frames are symmetrical and balanced. The photographs shown in this article were taken in late winter (February), but in summer the gathering places for young people are saturated with the natural colors of flowers and trees. Most of the shots contain beautiful historical buildings, which are quite enough in Sofia. In general, the emotional content of the frames is located in the area of the space of emotions near the axes “joy - pride”, “interest” and to a large extent - “conscience, duty, honor”.

Figure 3. Entrance to the complex of the monument to the Soviet Army. Despite winter and quarantine, young people continue to visit their favorite place.

Our research allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions. There is reason to believe that youth policy in today’s Bulgaria includes undeclared, implicit and possibly unconscious elements of nudging young people towards ideology of a special type. Let’s designate these states as a kind of “consumeristic Machiavellianism”. The active use of anxious emotional background in combination with a depressive ideology of disgust and contempt for the surrounding reality makes young people more inert, passive and controllable. On the other hand, the imposition of states of petty stinginess and greed helps to promote the values of consumerism and worship of wealth. In general, we can say that the trends we have discovered in the transformations of the urban environment look quite logical in combination with other trends in the field of youth policy - the destruction of the education system, discrimination against young people in the labor markets, a stupefying stream of propaganda, and so on. On the other hand, there are grounds to assert that among the youth there are quite healthy and massive tendencies of resistance to primitive and depressive “Affluenza”. Young people are spontaneously drawn to values of a completely different nature - the values of open, free and respectful communication. This craving is also unconscious and takes mainly the form of passive resistance to official propaganda. Obviously, our conclusions are preliminary. Research into the urban environment - both created under administrative pressure and emerging spontaneously, thanks to the daily activities of residents - must be continued.

References

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