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**IS HAPPINESS POSSIBLE DURING THE WAR: AN
ANALYSIS OF VALUE SHIFTS ON STUDENT ESSAY
MATERIALS**

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Keywords: happiness, biographical essays, values of survival and self-realization, war, trauma.

The article analyses the dynamics of the value of happiness during war. The article is based on the material of students' biographical essays, as well as on the results of the World Values Study. The author considers happiness as a value construct which manifests itself in a high degree of personal satisfaction with one's activities, conditions and lifestyle, in positive emotions of joy. Citing the results of the World Values Study, the author argues that the positive dynamics of happiness in the Ukrainian society over the past decades is an important indicator of the update of the value of self-expression among Ukrainians. It is difficult to say whether this trend will continue now, as war updates survival values. The materials for the students' "autobiographies of happiness" provide a reason for optimistic predictions. The experience of the war has become a real test of survival for Ukrainians, but at the same time it has made them reflect on the meaning of their own existence, taught them to give and to be grateful. These biographical essays are research material that can deepen our understanding

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of the value of happiness. They are a tool for self-reflection and a means of preserving the meaning of life in conditions where this meaning can be lost.

CZY SZCZĘŚCIE JEST MOŻLIWE PODCZAS WOJNY: ANALIZA ZMIAN WARTOŚCI NA MATERIAŁACH ESEJOWYCH DLA STUDENTÓW

Słowa kluczowe: szczęście, eseje biograficzne, wartości przetrwania i samorealizacji, wojna, trauma.

Artykuł analizuje dynamikę wartości szczęścia podczas wojny. Artykuł oparty jest na materiałach esejów biograficznych studentów, a także na wynikach World Values Study. Autorka uważa szczęście za konstrukt wartości, który przejawia się wysokim stopniem zadowolenia ze swoich działań, warunków i stylu życia, w pozytywnych emocjach i radości. Powołując się na wyniki World Values Survey, argumentuje, że pozytywna dynamika szczęścia w społeczeństwie ukraińskim w ciągu ostatnich dziesięcioleci jest ważnym wskaźnikiem aktualizacji wartości wyrażania siebie. Czy ten trend będzie się teraz utrzymywał, trudno powiedzieć, ponieważ wojna aktualizuje wartości przetrwania. Materiały do „autobiografii szczęścia” zawierają powód do optymistycznych przewidywań. Doświadczenie wojny stało się prawdziwym sprawdzianem przetrwania dla Ukraińców, ale jednocześnie skłoniło ich do zastanowienia się nad sensem własnego istnienia, nauczyło ich dawać i być wdzięcznym. Te eseje biograficzne są materiałem badawczym, który może znacznie pogłębić zrozumienie wartości szczęścia. Są narzędziem autorefleksji i środkiem zachowania sensu życia w warunkach, w których ten sens może zostać utracony.

The 24th of February 2022 divided life of Ukraine into ‘before’ and ‘after’. The destruction of a security cocoon – the loss of home and loved ones, families torn apart, the loss of the usual rhythm of life, work, fear of the uncertainty of the future – has become a reality for all Ukrainian citizens, regardless of their social status. The war has provided an enormous experience of injury, which significantly transforms the social values and identities of citizens. We can observe this transformation happening right now. Every day every Ukrainian self-reflects on the traumatic experience of the war; the generalization of such reflections has an important research value.

Happiness is one of the most important social values and in recent decades an analysis of happiness as a social indicator of the country's prosperity has become one of the main priorities in international comparative social studies. The theme of happiness has sounded in a new way, moving from the category of ephemeral, elusive, and immeasurable concepts into the category of scientific indicators. The reason why the phenomenon of happiness has attracted the attention of sociology stems from the fact that sociology has always seen its task in finding ways to improve the human society. Veenhoven et al. (1993), one of the most prominent modern happiness researchers, notes that the level of happiness along with health and well-being is a criterion for the suitability and comfort of a society for people's lives.

The factors that have contributed to achieving goals such as health and happiness include: a favourable socio-political context, especially in the developed countries of the Western world, the lack of serious military clashes, strengthening the principles of democracy in the world, and high rates of economic and scientific and technological progress. Another factor that has contributed to the change in attitude to happiness among professional social analysts was the processes of individualization. The idea of 'multiple choice society', where a person was given the opportunity to choose certain strategies in accordance with their personal tastes and desires (individualization of life projections) has led to strengthening the role of the value of happiness in both political and personal lives.

Meanwhile, the war reified the search for an answer to the question of what happens to values during radical global traumatic events, how they change. Is happiness possible during the war? And how can we explain the possibility/impossibility of the happiness?

In addition, the experience of war can and should become the subject of scientific reflection in relation to different social communities. For instance, we can study the experience of living during war within our educational community, in particular, Karazin Kharkiv National University.

Our university was subjected to powerful bombardments as early as in the first weeks of the war. Some university buildings, including the building in which the author of the article studied as a student, were completely destroyed. But the university survived, and the university continues to work. The paradox of war is that survival becomes an incredibly concentrated living of life. Karazin Kharkiv National University is home to over 20,000 students. And now, despite terrible external circumstances, the university promises to work, professors and students are connected using the distance learning format and try to save this educational area.

In 2021, I offered an interfaculty course *Sociology of Happiness* to the students of the University; the course was chosen by students of different faculties and specialties. As part of the course, we tried to consider how different communities are constructing happiness and thinking about it, how we can think of different forms of happiness depending on whether they are socially-derived or perhaps more personal; whether there is a difference between happiness as a personal experience, a pleasure as a social emotion, or at least an emotion that depends on social affiliation. Does happiness change in time and space? How do external and internal factors in determining happiness correlate? What is the inequality of happiness? What tools of qualitative and quantitative measurement of happiness exist in sociology, and what is their social importance? How do the processes of globalization, new technologies, the culture of intensive consumption affect the interpretation of happiness? And of course, how can we design our own personal project of happiness?

This year, another important question has been added to this list: Is happiness possible during the war? The students received the task of writing biographical essays on this topic (Skokova 2004), and these essays are important in terms of studying the value of happiness using research materials. Studies of happiness are implemented using different methods, including large-scale survey polls, interviews, biographical and ‘confessional’ surveys. Questions can be formulated directly or be veiled, they can directly touch on the topic of happiness or look like a set of reasons not related to it. Unlike other research procedures, the biographical method makes it possible to trace the evolution of beliefs and values throughout life and in this case to understand what is happening with the value of happiness when external circumstances significantly violate the usual mode of life, break the social circles where a person belongs, leading to value shifts.

Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to reveal the possibility of applying the biographical method in sociological studies of happiness as values in the conditions of war and in the practice of teaching the course *Sociology of Happiness*.

Veenhoven (1984) defines happiness as a degree by which a person evaluates her life as favorable, that is, the extent to which she likes her life. It is a cognitive experience, because evaluation of life is generally impossible without an analytical process and an intellectual activity; this cognitive construct is used by the person to put together one picture of her entire experience.

The mechanism of forming views on happiness will depend on the cultural characteristics of society at the macro level and on the personal

development and biography of the person at the micro level. Two main processes that determine the level of happiness are the influence of reference groups on the formation of human claims and the impact of the ratio of claims and achievements on the level of life satisfaction. Accordingly, sociology is interested in happiness not so much as the emotion of an individual, but as a reflection of many external factors of a social environment, i.e. sociocultural regulators. In other words, the feeling of happiness is social; it is connected with value-normative ideas about what the life of a person should be.

Thus, happiness in the sociological dimension is defined, at first, as the highest value and an ideal state to which society aspires; secondly, as a personal value – a person's desire to meet her social needs and be safe in society in objective terms and in subjective feelings; third, as the goal of public policy to reach the desired optimal state of society; fourth, as a complex criterion that characterizes the level of social, economic, political and cultural development of society.

Systematizing different approaches, happiness can be defined as the dominant orientation of group and individual consciousness, which has social value, normative character and is directly manifested in a high degree of personal satisfaction with its activities, conditions and lifestyle, in positive emotions of joy.

The very emergence of scientific interest in the topic of happiness was due to a significant improvement in the living conditions of people. Thus, the second half of the 20th century marked the onset of a safer period in history, the most comfortable period in the entire previous history of humankind. Brutal armed wars with the capture of territories and the burning of settlements were increasingly replaced by information wars. Armed force was no longer the most effective way of fighting, which significantly increased the safety and comfort of life.

What happens to this value, when living conditions are characterized by significant risks and are accompanied by a significant increase in threat to life, a loss of security in both physical and social sense. Does this lead to the expiry of the value of happiness?

The materials of the students' 'autobiographies of happiness' provide an opportunity to see the dynamics of the value perception of happiness by students in the context of personal experience of living the war. It should be noted that the article presents excerpts from biographical essays of students of 2-3 courses of different faculties of Karazin Kharkiv National University (a total of 90 essays were analyzed). Thus, the analysis of biographical

essays of students allows us to talk about the reassessment of the value system under the influence of traumatic events of the war¹.

“These circumstances that took us by surprise, give us a reason to reassess values, to rethink what is important and what is secondary in our lives. That there will be a transformation within each person”.

The experience of the war emphasized the value of the family. This value, along with the value of health, had traditionally been the most important in the pre-war times, but in the conditions of war, the family, the presence of loved ones become the main survival resources. It is in such conditions that family solidarity and mutual assistance are more in demand and valued. This is evidenced by the opinions of our informants.

“Now, for me, happiness, it’s every conversation with my mum, it’s the news from friends that they’re safe, it’s a younger sister’s smile, it’s knowing that someone needs you and is worrying about you, it’s basking in the sun with your eyes closed, and enjoying the moment, it’s going to bed and holding that little pen that’s going to get carried away and not let go. And of course happiness is to hear his voice, hide for a moment in a few days and hear, I’m alive, everything is fine.”

“Happiness is to see that all your relatives are alive and healthy. When you call your friends and you hear: »We have quiet«”.

The feeling of happiness in the context of war for many informants is also associated with more solidarity networks, with the ability to provide support and/or to get support.

“In this situation, we all feel special support from the relatives and friends. We see how everyone is trying to support with a word or help financially. For example, personally, in the first days of the war, my friends and acquaintances sent dozens of messages with questions: "How are you? Are you safe now?" I was especially impressed by the fact that I received sms even from those people, from which I never expected it. In fact, it’s a great happiness for me. I feel supported by others, even from a distance. In such moments, you realize that you need it”.

During the war, the value of civic identification increased, which for many of our informants has become a real source of happiness.

“People got faith not only in something high, not only in the state, people believed in their people, their heroes and, even more, believed in themselves.”

“Our nation is unique and powerful. The biggest reward for me is to be Ukrainian. I am proud of my people, I am proud of every person, his work, every story about how noble and fair he is. The courage of the Ukrainian people gives me the strength

¹The original wording of the quotations was preserved.

to live on, it fills me, it reminds me that it is worth appreciating the dearest – your Homeland. I'm happy because I'm Ukrainian.”

“In spite of all the grief that brought the war with it, we also got a little. From the first day of events people tried as much as possible to gather families, reunite against forgotten resentments and disagreements. It made it everyone is also hard to take care of each other. And this is a great achievement. And here it is impossible to evaluate the importance of the incredible unity of the whole people at all. People got faith in something high, not only in the state, people believed in their people, their heroes and, even more, believed in themselves.”

War, oddly enough, makes it more acute to feel the value of life, teaches the ability to notice and be grateful even for what was previously considered something insignificant or ordinary, not worthy of special attention.

Victor Frankl (2016) writes about the experience of life in the context of war in his work “Man in search of true meaning”. In Auschwitz, those who focused on their affairs survived without expecting what could happen. It is about learning how to feel the taste of life, “to live full of life” even in times of war. This is the most difficult, but also the most valuable task.

“Happiness is possible in times of war. Namely because »feeling happy« is an innate characteristic. It is a regular message from relatives that all is well with them; delicious mom's borscht, as soon as the plate is; the smile of a loved one. But even good weather is already raising the mood and, accordingly, the level of satisfaction.”

“Life is almost like a war for survival. But oddly enough, everyday life where terrorism is a threat looks the same as everyday life in cities free from terrorism. Even in the war zone, the chirping of birds is heard. Things are not of great value . Your life is the greatest value. I believe that everyone should be grateful for their life and for the opportunity to feel. If you make a list of everything you are grateful for every day, you can clearly define that happiness exists even during war. It manifests itself in small things: sunrise, your life, food, a place where you can bow your head.”

Meanwhile, all students unanimously say that full happiness will come only with a victory, and indeed for Ukrainians the happiest day of the future looks the same. It is the Victory Day, the first day without war.

“But when will we be able to talk about full happiness? In my opinion, only when the war is over. When all Ukrainians return to their homes. Then, when there are tears in the eyes not of pain and suffering, but from the fact that you finally hugged your close people. Then when the children will not hide in bomb shelters, but play on the grounds. Then when we can say that Ukraine has won.”

“In the novel of the English writer George Orwell “1984” writes that a person in wartime cannot feel happy in any way, because everything that happens to the

human body and brain is a complete disorder, the disintegration of personality under the influence of tragic events ... Personally, it cannot be happy for me. At this time for me the only understandable and noticeable concepts are support, faith, hope. I am sure that more I will feel happy after the end of the war, after the victory of our country, which is not far off – it is only a matter of time, unity and joint efforts“.

As it does not sound cynically, but the war added meaning to our life. Happiness without meaning is characterized by a rather superficial, concentrated only on itself, even a selfish life in which everything goes well, needs and desires are easily satisfied, and trying to avoid difficulty. Instead, a meaningful life is “the use of strengths and talents in favor of something more than ego. People who have a high level of consciousness often continue to search for meaning, even realizing that it can be to the detriment of their happiness.

The search for meaning is the only thing that makes a person human. By putting aside our selfish desires and devoting ourselves to others, we not only show humanity, but also realize that a good life consists in something greater than the pursuit of simple happiness as a satisfaction of our own needs and desires. The experience of the war became a real test of survival for Ukrainians, but at the same time it made them think about the meaning of their own existence, taught them to give and be grateful.

Happiness is one of the key indicators, which is measured in the world study of values. The World Values Survey (WVS) is a long-term comparative study that was launched in 1981 by professor Ronald Inghart from Michigan University (USA) based on European Value Research (EVS) and quickly became one of the most widely used international research, which covers almost 120 countries (almost 95% of the world population).

Ronald Inglehart proposed to measure values by two groups (and, accordingly, two axes on his civilization map of the world). The first group (vertical axis) concerns how much a society is traditional-religious or secular. The second group (horizontal axis) is related to the values of survival – in opposition to the values of self-realization. It is measured by the answer to the question of how happy people feel happy, tend to trust other people, show public activity, signing petitions, etc. The averaged data shows the place of a country on a civilization map of the world, and changes in its place between different waves of the survey shows in which direction this country is moving.

According to Inglehart, for almost all history, the priority for humanity was survival and this updated the values of group solidarity, traditionalism, rejection of otherness and subjugation to strong leaders. Modernization,

economic development and security, established in many countries after World War II, led to a movement towards secular-rational values and values of self-realization: reducing the influence of religion and authoritarian leaders, spreading democracy, tolerance, gender equality, etc. All this, in turn, contributes not only to economic growth, but also to an increase in the level of happiness.

Ukraine, holding an intermediate position on the traditional-secular scale, during 2011-2020 demonstrated a gradual movement to the pole of “self-expression”.

Thus, according to the survey of the population of Ukraine in the framework of the 7th wave of the World Values Survey, the majority (78.3%) of Ukrainians reported that they were happy. Over the past 25 years, the self-esteem of the feeling of happiness of Ukrainians has increased significantly (from 46% in 1996 and 1999 to 78% in 2020) (Ukraine in World Values Survey 2020. Resume of the Analytical Report 2020).

The study also helped to identify groups/clusters of the Ukrainian population, in which the values of self-expression are most pronounced. These are residents of large cities (Lviv, Kyiv, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv); youth (18-35 years); people with higher education and the middle class. To a large extent, these groups are intertwined: young people with higher education, which tends to the middle class, are most represented in the large cities in which the most universities are concentrated.

It should be remembered that the experience of radical upheavals was inherent in Ukraine in previous years. As a result of the war, which began for Ukraine in 2014, there was a significant decrease in household incomes and migration of more than a million internally displaced persons (IDPs) to government-controlled territories. In 2020, a lockdown took place in the spring due to the COVID-19 epidemic, as a result of which many Ukrainians lost their jobs or part of their income. And yet, despite all these upheavals, according to WVS' Seventh Wave data, in 2020, Ukrainians felt safer, including financially safety, and happier than 9 years earlier. In addition, most trends testified to the movement towards secular-rational values and values of self-realization.

Ukrainians entered this war, being able and/or learning to appreciate what is in our lives, this is what made us happy before the war, gives strength and faith now, will give social confidence in the future. These biographical essays are the kind of research material that can significantly deepen our understanding of the value of happiness and its dynamics in war, and in addition, is an excellent tool for the self-reflection of personal

residence of trauma, as well as a means of preserving the meaning of life in conditions where this meaning may be lost.

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