

# ARE THE RUSSIANS AS UNHAPPY AS THEY SAY THEY ARE? Comparability of self-reports across nations

Ruut Veenhoven

*Journal of Happiness Studies, 2001, vol 2, pp.111-136*

## ABSTRACT

*Since the 1980s, several polls in Russia included questions about happiness. The responses to these questions were quite similar. Average happiness was low in comparison to other nations and declined over time. Ten years after the fall of communism Russians are less happy than during the communist period.*

*There are doubts about the validity of these self-reports. One source of doubt is that these data may not reflect Russians self-appraisals adequately, due to distortions in translation and a differential response bias. A second misgiving is that true discontent could be rather superficial, and be largely due to unfavorable comparison with the West and folklore of negativism.*

*These qualms are checked in this article. It appears that the Russians are as unhappy as they say they are, and that they have good reasons to be so. The current unhappiness is not due to the Russian national character, but has more to do with the troublesome transitions taking place in Russian society.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960's there has been a growing interest in how people feel about their life, and this interest has materialized in a stream of studies on subjective wellbeing. A core variable in this tradition is the overall appreciation of one's life-as-a-whole, commonly referred to as 'happiness' or 'life-satisfaction' (Veenhoven 1984: ch2). This matter is usually measured by self-report. Self-reports of happiness can be gathered from life-review interviews or diaries, but they are easier to obtain from answers to direct questions.

Since then, many survey studies have involved questions about happiness. Most of these studies focus on differences in happiness within a country. The purpose of these studies is typically to provide social policymakers with information about 'deprived' social categories and crucial living conditions. Landmark studies of this kind have been made by Bradburn (1969) in the USA and by Glatzer & Zapf (1984) in Germany. There are also studies that compare average happiness across nations. The main point of this research line is to assess the livability of society as a whole. Cantril (1965) carried out one of the seminal studies of this type.

In Russia, studying happiness started only after the overturn of communism in 1990. Since then, several surveys have been carried out with regard to happiness in Russia. This paper summarizes the findings and explores their significance.

## SURVEYS AND ITEMS

Survey research was not very common in Russia during communism. Although before the transition there were a few questionnaire studies carried out in regions and branches of industry, there were hardly any nationwide polls. Happiness was not surveyed at that time; the focus was more on objective 'ways of life' than on subjective 'appreciation of life'. After the transition, many survey programs were

started; several of which were sponsored by Western agencies. Five of these studies involved questions about subjective appreciation of life as a whole.

#### *World Value Surveys*

The first time a representative survey that assessed happiness in Russia was in January 1991. This survey was part of the second wave of the World Values Survey (Inglehart 1994). Russia also participated in the third wave of that international program, interviews for which took place in January 1995. The WVS questionnaire involved the following three measures of happiness:

- a single question on happiness, rated on a 4-point verbal scale
- a single question on life-satisfaction, rated on a 10-point numerical scale
- the 10 item Affect Balance Scale (in 1990 only)

The full items and scores are presented in appendix 1.

The first wave of the World Values Survey was in the early 1980s, that is, before the overturn of communism. That first wave did not involve a representative sample of all Russia, but it did cover two main regions, the Tambov area in 1981 and Belarus in 1984. The Tambov area can stand for Russia as a whole. Its population is fairly characteristic and the region went through the same political and economic changes after 1990. Belarus was also quite similar to wider Russia before the overturn, but did not liberalize as much after.

#### *Russian 'Political Participation Survey'*

A nationwide survey of Russia on political participation was held in 1991. Interviews took place in May and June. Complete information was obtained from 10.962 respondents. This survey formed part of an international Multi-Trait Multi-Method study (Saris et al. 1996) and is described in more detail by Andreenkova & Scherpenzeel (1996). The questionnaire involved several questions on life-satisfaction:

- a single question on life-satisfaction, rated on a 5-point verbal scale
- a single question on life-satisfaction, rated on a 10-point verbal scale
- a single question on how things are going in life, rated on an 11-point numerical scale

These items and the scores are also presented on [appendix 1](#).

#### *Erasmus Russia survey*

A nation wide survey of Russia was held in cooperation with Erasmus University in 1992. Details of this study were provided by Bernhard VanPraag (personal communication). This study involved a single question on mood of the moment. The full text is in [appendix 1](#).

#### *Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)*

The year 1992 also saw the start of a social-survey program, sponsored by the World Bank. This program involves yearly surveys; and surveying representative samples of households, to date from 1992 to 1999. At this moment (2000), the data of the last surveys are not available. The core-questionnaire contains a single question on life-satisfaction, rated on a 5-point verbal scale. See [appendix 1](#).

### *Russet panel*

The RUSSET panel started in 1993. The participants were also interviewed in the years 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 and 1999. Saris describes this study in more detail in this issue (Saris and Andreenkova 2001). The questionnaire involves three items on subjective appreciation of life:

- a single question on happiness (1993 and 1997)
- a single question on life-satisfaction (all years)
- the 10 item affect-balance scale (1998 and 1999)

At the first interview, the subjects also estimated how they had felt 5 years earlier, that is, before the transition from communism. These questions and the responses are also included in [appendix 1](#).

## **PATTERN OF RESPONSES**

The average scores on the above items are presented in the [schemes 1 to 3](#). In order to see the trend over time these averages are plotted by year.

For reasons of comparison, the averages are transformed to a same scale from 10 to 0. The verbal scales were transformed using a Thurstone procedure<sup>1</sup>. The numerical scales are stretched linearly<sup>2</sup>.

In order to assess the relative sizes of the scores, means observed in some neighboring nations are also presented. The characters RU denote Russian means. The numbers behind a character denote the survey program. As Russia is our prime concern here, the Russian codes are underlined. The codes for the other nations are SE for Sweden, BL for Belarus and HU for Hungary. The Tambov area is indicated by the code TB. As these comparison cases are all from the same survey program (WVS), there is no need for numbering in this case. More comparison nations can be found in [appendix 2](#).

### **Self reported happiness**

The average scores on the happiness items are presented in [scheme 1](#). The chart shows that average happiness of Russians (RU) was about 5.5 in the 1990's. In [appendix 1](#), we can see the full distribution of responses: few Russians characterize their life as 'very happy', while about half describes it as 'not very happy' or 'not happy at all'.

The available data from the 1980s suggest a drop of about one point after the overturn of communism. In the Tambov area (TB), the average was 6.1 in 1981 and 5.2 in 1995. In Belarus (BL), the average score was 6.0 in 1984, 5.3 in 1990 and 5.2 in 1996. The case of Belarus is especially interesting, because the drop can not be attributed to the perils of a market economy. In Belarus the regime has hardly changed, so, the drop is probably due to the economic backlash and upheaval brought about by the split from the Soviet Union. A retrospective estimate of happiness just before the political transition also suggests a decline. In 1993, respondents estimated how happy they had been five years before. Retrospectively happiness was estimated 6.0 in 1988, while the same respondents rated their current happiness in 1993 only 5.4.

During the 1990s, Russian ratings of happiness remain at the same level, except for a temporary dip after the 1996 economic breakdown.

Average happiness is clearly lower in Russia than in its neighboring nations. In the 1980s the difference with Sweden (SE) was about 1 point and in the 1990s the

gap widened to more than two points. Unlike the Russians, the Swedes have remained about equally happy. Russians are also less happy than the Hungarians (HU). The difference is about one point in this case. Hungarian happiness declined somewhat in the 1980's, but stabilized in the 1990's.

### **Self reported life-satisfaction**

The responses to comparable questions on life-satisfaction are presented in [scheme 2](#). The pattern is quite similar. Again, we see low averages in Russia in the 1990s. The averages were below the midpoint of the scale, at about 4.5.

Again, there are indications of a decline after the fall of communism. That decline is more pronounced in this case. In the Tambov area (TB), average life-satisfaction was 6.8 in 1981 and fell to only 3.6 in 1996. In Belarus (BL), average life-satisfaction may have been 7.2 in 1984 and dropped to 5.0 in 1990<sup>3</sup>. The retrospective question about satisfaction in 1988 also yielded higher scores than the questions about present satisfaction in 1993.

During the 1990s average life-satisfaction has fluctuated. As in the case of happiness, we see another decline after the 1996 economic recession.

The Swedes (SE) again score higher. The difference is about 2.5 points, and represents a quarter of the possible range. In Sweden, the average remained at the same level over this period. Hungary (HU) is again closer to Russia, but still consistently higher. As in [scheme 1](#), we see again a decline in Hungary in the 1980's.

### **Self reported mood**

Data about mood are less abundant. This matter has been assessed only four times in Russia, of which three times with the Affect-Balance Scale. The latter data show a considerable decline. In 1991 the average score on the Affect-Balance Scale was 5.3 and in 1998 5.0 and in 1999 4.0.

Once more, there are indications of a decline after 1990, though less pronounced on this indicator. In Belarus, Affect -Balance was 5,9 in 1984 and dropped to 5,7 in 1990. The greatest decline in mood seems to have occurred in the late 1990s.

Once more, the Swedes score consistently higher, the difference is again about 2,5 points and as before the Hungarians again score almost one point higher. Both countries remain about at the same level between 1981 and 1990.

## **VALIDITY DOUBTS**

It will be no surprise that average appreciation of life is low in Russia, because the Russians have a firm reputation for being an unhappy people. The observed decline in subjective wellbeing is not altogether unexpected either; the media make most of the misery in Russia. At first sight, there is little reason to doubt these data.

Still, there are some qualms. Comparison across cultures is beset with problems, which may cause false conclusions to be drawn. Possibly, Russians are happier than these self-reports suggest. Even if the responses reflect Russian's appreciation of life adequately, it could still be that the expressed dissatisfaction is rather superficial and not comparable with the experience of individuals from other nations. We will consider these possibilities in more detail.

### **Negative bias?**

Cross-national comparisons of self reported happiness might be distorted in several ways. Elsewhere, I have reviewed the possible biases, and evidence for their occurrence. My conclusion was that none of them seems to apply (Veenhoven 1992: ch 5, 1998). This conclusion is largely based on the differentiating power in a set of 48 nations. It is not impossible that some of the biases occur in particular cases, and that Russia could be such a case.

One possible source of bias could be that of translation. The Russian words for 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' could carry a slightly stronger sense of meaning for a Russian, and therefore elicit answers that are more reserved. Another possibility is that response tendencies are somewhat different in Russia, and that Russians are more apt to respond negatively or to choose the middle of response scales. Subject-specific social desirability distortion may also be involved alongside general response tendencies. Possibly, there is a normative pressure to present oneself as unhappy in Russia. Lastly, familiarity with the concept could play a role. If the concept of happiness is less current in Russia, responses will be more haphazard and therefore more centered around the middle of response scales.

Not all this sounds implausible. If only part of it is true, the real difference in appreciation of life may be smaller or even non-existent.

### **Discontent superficial?**

Even if the answers to the various questionnaires express adequately how Russians judge their life, there is another question. That question is: how deep does the discontent lie? There are reasons to assume that Russians in fact feel less miserable than their self-reports suggest.

One reason is that a Russian's judgement could largely be based on comparison, and that life in Russia compares unfavorably with life in the West. In this vein, the observed post-transition decline could be explained by increased exposure to a western life-style. The discontent is then mere 'relative' deprivation, which will hurt less than 'absolute' deprivation.

A related possibility is that individual self-definitions are flawed by the common stereotype of unhappiness in Russia. The reason for the discontent is then in social labeling, and not so much in experienced misery.

Another possibility is that Russians tend to be negative about everything, and are therefore also negative about their own life. This attitude could root in folklore of misanthropy and lamentation; similar to the habitual cynicism, which Inglehart (1990: 30) attributes to the French. Perhaps such a tendency to report unhappiness is reinforced by the above noted reputation for unhappiness.

If these two objections cut any ice, a negative evaluation of life does not mean that the Russians do not enjoy it.

## VALIDITY CHECKS

These doubts can be checked in two ways: one way is to test each of the objections separately, the other is to test their joint implications.

### Specific objections

Not all the objections raised can be checked separately. For instance, one can not check the claim that social desirability causes unhappy responses in Russia, because we do not have comparable measures of desirability pressures for all the nations. Still the following assertions can be checked rather easily.

#### *Meaning of words not the same?*

The first objection was that words like 'happiness' and 'life-satisfaction' can not be adequately translated into Russian, and that the difference in responses may largely be a matter of semantics. If this is the case indeed, we might expect that the observed differences across nations vary considerably with the wording of questions. We could further expect that these differences in average happiness across nations would be smaller when multiple item scales are used, because semantic differences cancel out in such measures. If so, this must manifest in lower standard deviations in nation samples.

Above we have seen in the [schemes 1](#) and [2](#) that the questions about happiness and life-satisfaction yield similar responses in Russia, and that these responses differ systematically with scores in neighboring countries. A similar picture emerges when we consider the broader 39 nation set of World Values Study 2. See appendix 2. In this nation-set the correlation between average happiness and average life-satisfaction is almost perfect,  $r = +.89$ . Russia is not an exception in this pattern; it is at the bottom of both ranks. The 10-item affect-balance scale also apparently grasps much of this common meaning. In this national sample, affect-balance correlates  $+ .67$  with average happiness and  $+ .68$  with life-satisfaction. Again Russia fits the pattern; on affect-balance Russians also rank at the bottom.

The prediction that the multiple item affect-balance scale will be less vulnerable to semantic effects than the single items is confirmed. The standard deviation is indeed smaller for average scores on the 10-item Affect-Balance Scale (0,60) than for the average scores on single questions about happiness (0,73) and life-satisfaction (0,84).

A last check of this kind is provided by the item in the Political Participation Survey about 'how things are going'. This question does not use terms like 'happiness' or 'satisfaction', but still the average score is quite similar. See appendix 1.

The hypothesis of semantic bias can also be tested by comparing responses to non-verbal items, such as the 'faces-scale' (Kunin 1955) or with scores on Cantril's (1965) 'self-anchoring' rating of life. Unfortunately, these items have not been used in Russia yet.

#### *Negative about everything?*

Now let us move to the objection that Russian self-reports of happiness be deflated by a general tendency to react negatively. That claim was raised with respect to response tendencies and with respect to judgement formation.

If it exists, this tendency must manifest in all self-reports of satisfaction, thus in not only satisfaction with life-as-a-whole, but also in expressed satisfaction with life-domains, such as marriage and the weather. This appears not to be the case.

Though average satisfaction with economic conditions is very low in Russia, the satisfaction with social contacts and marriage is high. Life-satisfaction is in-between. This pattern is demonstrated in table 1 given in the introduction to this issue (Saris & Andreenkova 2001). It has also been observed in the 1991 Political Participation Survey (Andreenkova & Scherpenzeel, 1996: 208). Therefore, this objection is not tenable. Rather than a negative bent, the responses seem to reflect a balanced judgement.

#### *Concept of happiness less known in Russia?*

Another qualm was that happiness is a typical Western concept, and that questions regarding happiness are therefore less well understood in Russia. If so, this should manifest in a higher rate of 'don't know' responses to questions on happiness and a greater number of 'no answer' cases. It should also manifest in higher dispersion, due to haphazard response.

We can check the first implication by comparing non-response rates in Russia with such rates in West European nations. The World Value Surveys are quite suitable for this purpose, because questions and questionnaire context are identical. On the happiness item, the non-response level was indeed high in Russia in 1991 (9%), yet in 1996 it was much lower (2%). For the life-satisfaction item, the non-response level is only 2% in Russia and the other East-European score likewise. In West-European the non-response rate is typically about 1%. Therefore, non-response is indeed higher in Russia, but the difference is small.

Comparing standard deviations can be used to check the second implication. It appears that the standard deviations on all three measures of happiness are not particularly high in Russia. On the 4-point happiness scale, the standard deviation is 0,63. This is somewhat higher than the standard deviation in Sweden (0,58), but much lower than in South Africa (0,99) and Nigeria (1.05). The differences in dispersion on the other measures are simila<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Global validity tests**

All the objections cited above imply that the self-reports of the Russians exaggerate their misery. If so, that exaggeration should manifest in discrepancies between subjective evaluations and objective indicators. Firstly, Russian self-reports of happiness should be lower than in other nations where living conditions are of comparable quality. Secondly, Russian self-ratings should be lower than in nations where people thrive about equally well. Thirdly, the behavioral consequences of avowed dissatisfaction should be less pronounced in Russia than in other countries. The objections also predict discrepancy between self-reports; that of the general evaluations of life must be more negative than reports of current mood, and these differences must be more pronounced in Russia than in other countries. Further, most objections imply that the Russian's unhappiness is permanent.

#### *No reason to be unhappy?*

The first test is that subjective dissatisfaction must appear to be at odds with objective living conditions. That is, Russian satisfaction ratings must be lower than in nations with comparable conditions, or formulated in another way, Russian satisfaction must be at the level of less developed nations. This implication can be tested by plotting average life-satisfaction in nations against purchasing power per head, as this variable captures most variation in living conditions. These data are presented in [scheme 4](#).

We can see a clear relationship. The higher the purchasing power in a country, the more satisfied its citizens are,  $r = +.61$  ( $p < .01$ ). In this pattern, Russia is one of the cases that scores low on both variables. In this respect, a low satisfaction rating is reasonable.

The relationship is not perfect however; not all of the countries are on the regression line. In fact, we see clusters of nations above and below. Above the line are two clusters of nations, a cluster of Latin nations such as Mexico (mx), and a cluster of Northwest European nations, among which is Denmark (dk). In these countries, people are more satisfied than predicted because of their wealth. Below the regression line is a cluster of former communist nations, with Russia (ru) near the bottom. In these countries, people are less satisfied than their economic situation would predict.

In the scattergram, Russia (ru) is among the most eccentric cases. Like Bulgaria (bg), it scores about one point below the linear regression line, which is outside the 95% prediction interval. This outlier position is in line with the exaggeration hypothesis; given their economic condition, Russians should have been about as equally satisfied as Czecho-Slovakians (cs) and South-Koreans (kr). Russian life-satisfaction is particularly low in comparison with the Latin-American nations, where the buying power per head is even lower.

Yet, a linear regression line is not the best estimate of this relationship. Consistent with the law of diminishing returns, one can also see a curved line in the data. That pattern is better visible in the richer data of the 1995 World Values Survey, which involved 62 nations (Inglehart and Klingemann, 2000: 168). The curve is indicated by a dotted line in [scheme 4](#). In this pattern, Russia is no outlier anymore.

### *Thriving otherwise?*

The objections also imply that Russians in fact do better than their self-reports of happiness suggest. In spite of their moaning, they should thrive better than other people who rate their life equally low do.

How well people thrive can be measured by how long and healthful their lives are. Elsewhere I have discussed that matter in more detail (Veenhoven, 1996: 12-16). As there are no good comparable measures of average health in nations, we must do with life expectancy. Life expectancy is also a good validation criterion for another reason; happiness tends to lengthen life (Deeg, 1989), so, if people are really unhappy in a country, life expectancy can be expected to be lower as a result of this effect.

Data on life expectancy are presented in [scheme 5](#). For reasons of comparability, I have left third world nations out. The scattergram shows again a clear relationship; the happier people are, the longer they live;  $r = +.62$  ( $p < .01$ ). In this pattern, Russia scores again low on both axes.

On the scattergram, we again see clusters of nations above and below the regression line, though the deviations are smaller in this case. In the nations above, people live shorter lives than might be predicted on the basis of average happiness; the Latin American cluster stands out in this respect. In the nations below the line, people live longer lives than might be expected; with Japan (j) as the most extreme case. Russia is under the regression line again, but the deviation is relatively small and remains within the 95% prediction interval.



*Dissatisfaction without consequence?*

If Russians feel less miserable than their self reports of happiness suggest, their unhappiness must be rather inconsequential, and thus will not give rise to higher levels of desperate behaviors than are 'normal' for such levels of unhappiness. For instance, suicide rates must be lower in Russia than in nations where self reported happiness is equally low. This implication can also be tested by looking at escapist behaviors such as alcoholism and at migration rates, but unfortunately we lack comparable data on these matters and are therefore limited to looking at suicide.

Data on suicide are presented in **scheme 6**. The scattergram shows a strong relationship between average life-satisfaction and suicide rates in nations;  $r = -.52$  ( $p < .01$ ). Russia scores consistently on both variables, low on life-satisfaction and high on suicide.

Again, there are systematic deviations. Right on the regression line, we see mainly Catholic countries, such as Brazil (br), Spain (es), Poland (pl) and Austria (at). Above the line are the West-European nations. The relatively high suicide-rates of these nations are probably due to their culture of individualism. Below the line, we see again the cluster of former communist countries, with Russia (ru) near the bottom. In all these countries, the suicide rates are low relative to their level of life-satisfaction.

The position of Russia in this pattern is again in line with the exaggeration hypothesis. If the suicide rates reflect real satisfaction correctly, Russian average self-report of happiness should be about one point higher. Yet once more, the deviation is within the 95% prediction interval.

*Discontent without disphoria?*

Lastly all the objections imply that the Russians feel better than their responses to questions about happiness and life-satisfaction suggest, in particular the claims that the expressed discontent is due to comparison with the West and to a proclivity to lament. If so, we could expect that measures of mood yield less negative responses in Russia.

One reason to expect this is that mood is probably less affected by social comparison than cognitive evaluations of life, because affects are typically intuitive appraisals that need no mental construction. Another reason is that mood will be less vulnerable to response distortions, because information on the matter is more easily available in the mind, especially when questions concern recent mood. Questions on recent mood are also less vulnerable to desirability distortion because it is less embarrassing to avow that one has felt bad lately, than to admit that one's whole life is a failure.

Above in **scheme 3** we have seen that only four studies in Russia have assessed mood, and that all four recorded scores that are in the same realm as the reports of happiness and life-satisfaction. On the 10-0 scale, mood of the moment scores like happiness. Affect-balance scores are slightly lower, though higher than the means of life-satisfaction.

In **scheme 7**, affect-balance is plotted against life-satisfaction to appraise the latter difference in a comparative perspective. Russia is again under the regression line. Given its affect-balance score, life-satisfaction should have been half a point

higher. Yet, that deviation is not significant and not extreme when compared to other nations.

### *Ever unhappy?*

Most of the possible biases mentioned are by their nature fairly constant: the purported different strength of meaning of words when translated into the Russian language, the alleged response tendencies and the assumed bent towards negativism and lamentation of the Russian people. This implies that responses to questions about happiness must remain about equally negative over time.

We have seen considerable changes over time in the **schemes 1, 2 and 3**. Firstly, there was a rather dramatic decline after the overturn of communism in 1989, and secondly there was another dip after the 1996 economic breakdown. Therefore, the unhappiness of the Russians is not so permanent a matter.

## **DISCUSSION**

Two objections were considered, firstly that self-reports of happiness do not adequately reflect how Russians evaluate their life, and second that these evaluations are overly negative.

The first objection was largely refuted by the data; Russians seem to understand the questions well, and their answers to questions about appreciation of life are consistent.

The second objection received at best mixed support. On the one hand, Russian unhappiness appeared to be consistent with its miserable economy, at least not when taking into account that the relationship between happiness and wealth is not linear. On the other hand, average satisfaction in Russia was indeed lower than predicted on the basis of life-expectancy, suicide and mood. Though in the predicted direction, these deviations are not statistically significant.

How else can we ascertain that Russian self-reports of happiness are not negatively biased? One way is to wait and see. If the above interpretation is correct, Russian happiness levels will be restored in the next decade.

Another way is to consider migrants. If overstatement of unhappiness is part of the Russian national character, it must also appear in the self-reports of Russians who have left the country. Other conditions being equal, Russian emigrants should report more dissatisfaction than other migrants in the country of settlement and than autochthons in similar social positions. Conversely, foreigners who settle in Russia should be happier than locals. Elsewhere I have reported on a similar analysis of other people, and found no evidence for such cultural effects (Veenhoven 1994:124). Still, the case of the Russians could be different, and deserves a place on the research agenda.

Further, more could be learnt by applying interrogation techniques that are potentially less vulnerable to response distortion, such as computed assisted interviewing and time sampling of affect.

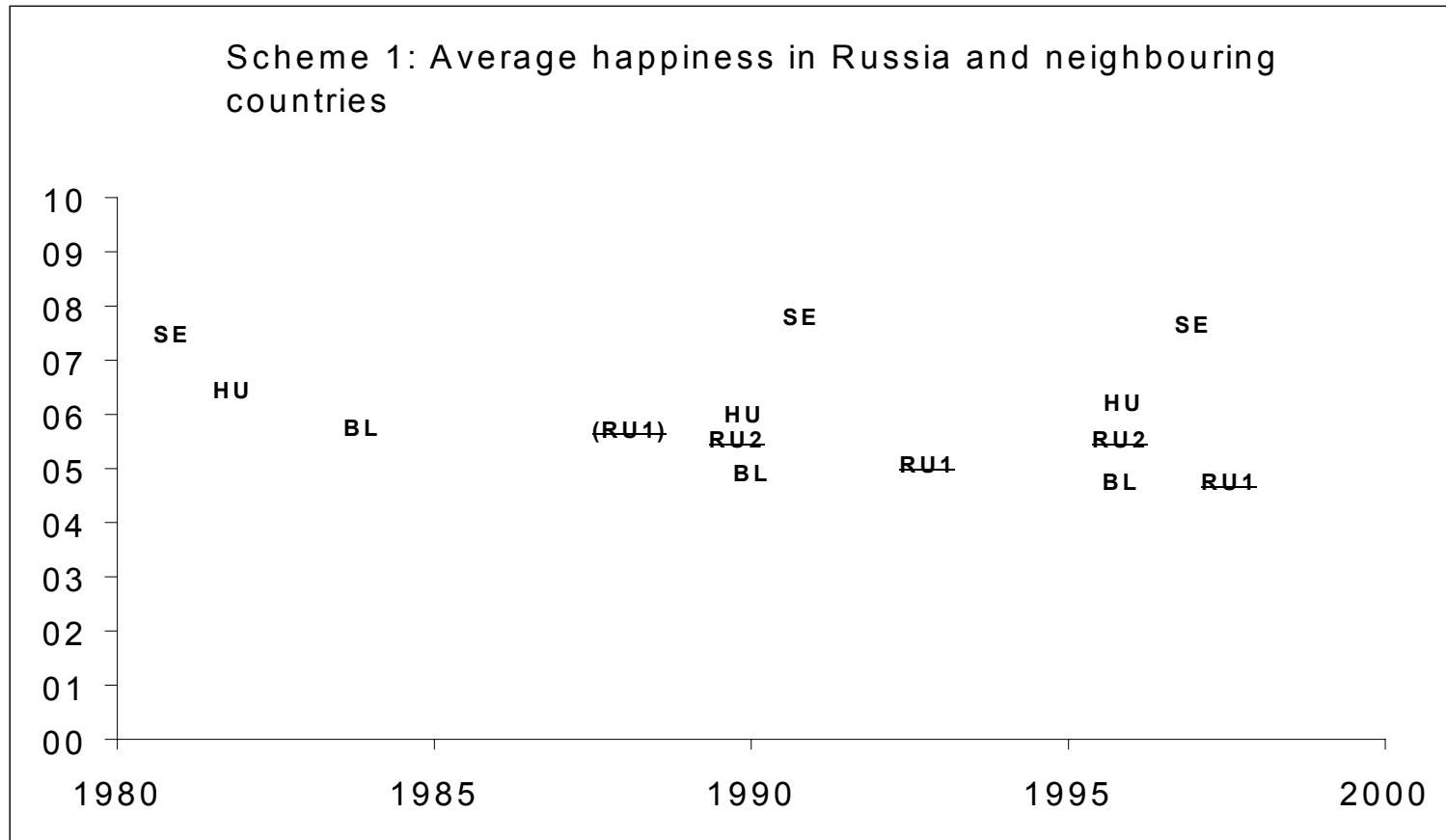
For the time being, it seems that the Russians are indeed as unhappy as they say they are. Their reason for that unhappiness is probably the troublesome situation in the country, in particular its stagnating economy. During this period, average happiness

has closely followed the tide of the economy. Probably Russian happiness will rise to the level of the early 1980s once the economic situation has stabilized, and grow to higher levels than before when the advantages of newly acquired wealth and freedom are reaped.

This is in fact happening in former East Germany. In East Germany, happiness has been measured regularly since re-unification with West Germany in 1990. In that first euphoric year, the average was 6,1, but this soon dropped to 5,5. Since then levels of happiness have again been on the rise in East Germany. In 1998, the average was 7,3, which is not too far from the West-German score of 7.7 (Habich et. all. 1999). In East Germany similar improvements have been observed with respect to stress (Bulmahn 2000) and trust in people (Allensbach 1998: 98).

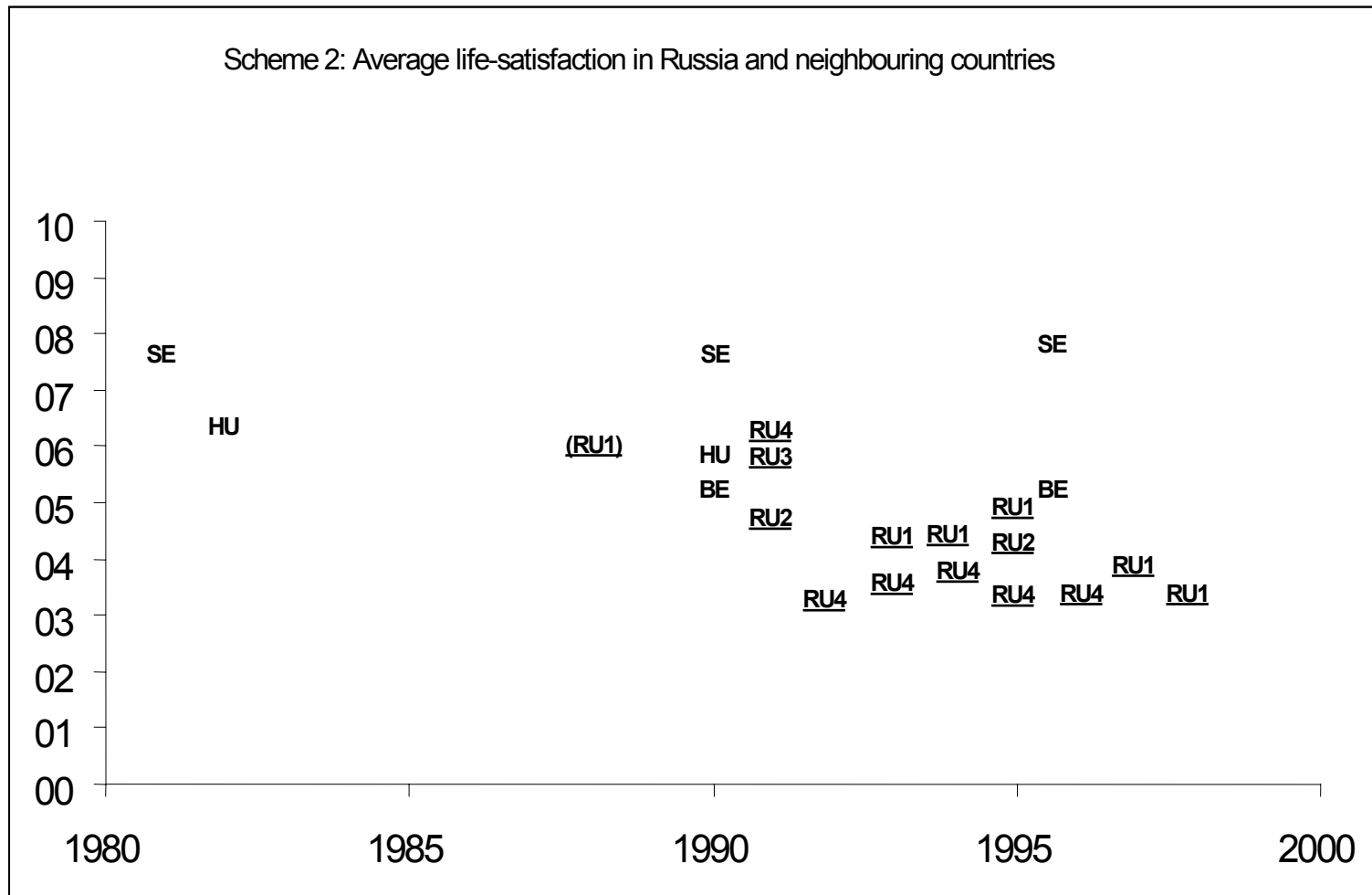
## **CONCLUSION**

The Russians appear to be as unhappy as they say they are, and they have good reasons to be so. The current dip in happiness is probably due to the troublesome transitions taking place in Russian society.

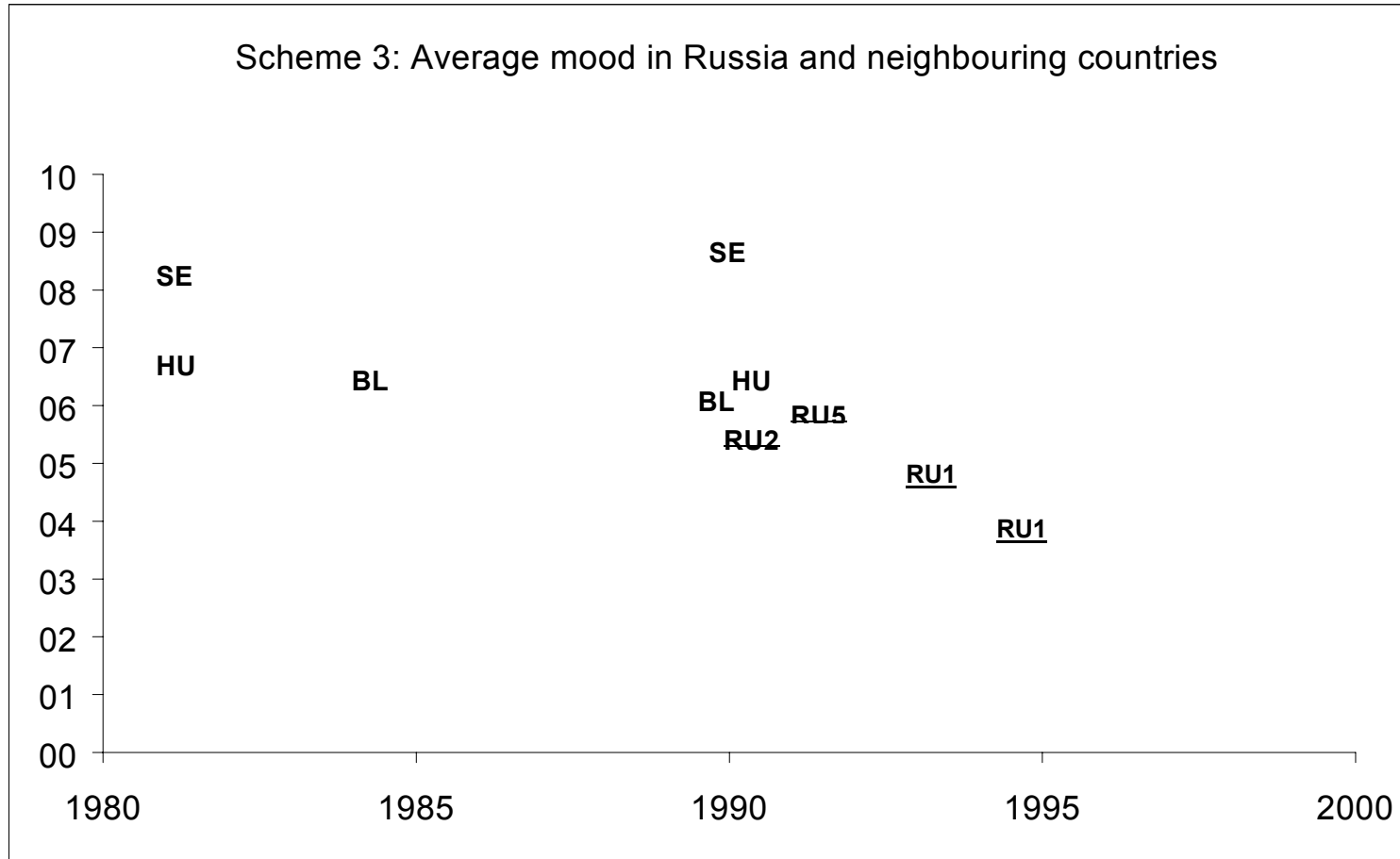


RU1 = Russia: RUSSET Panel, RU2 = Russia: World Values Survey

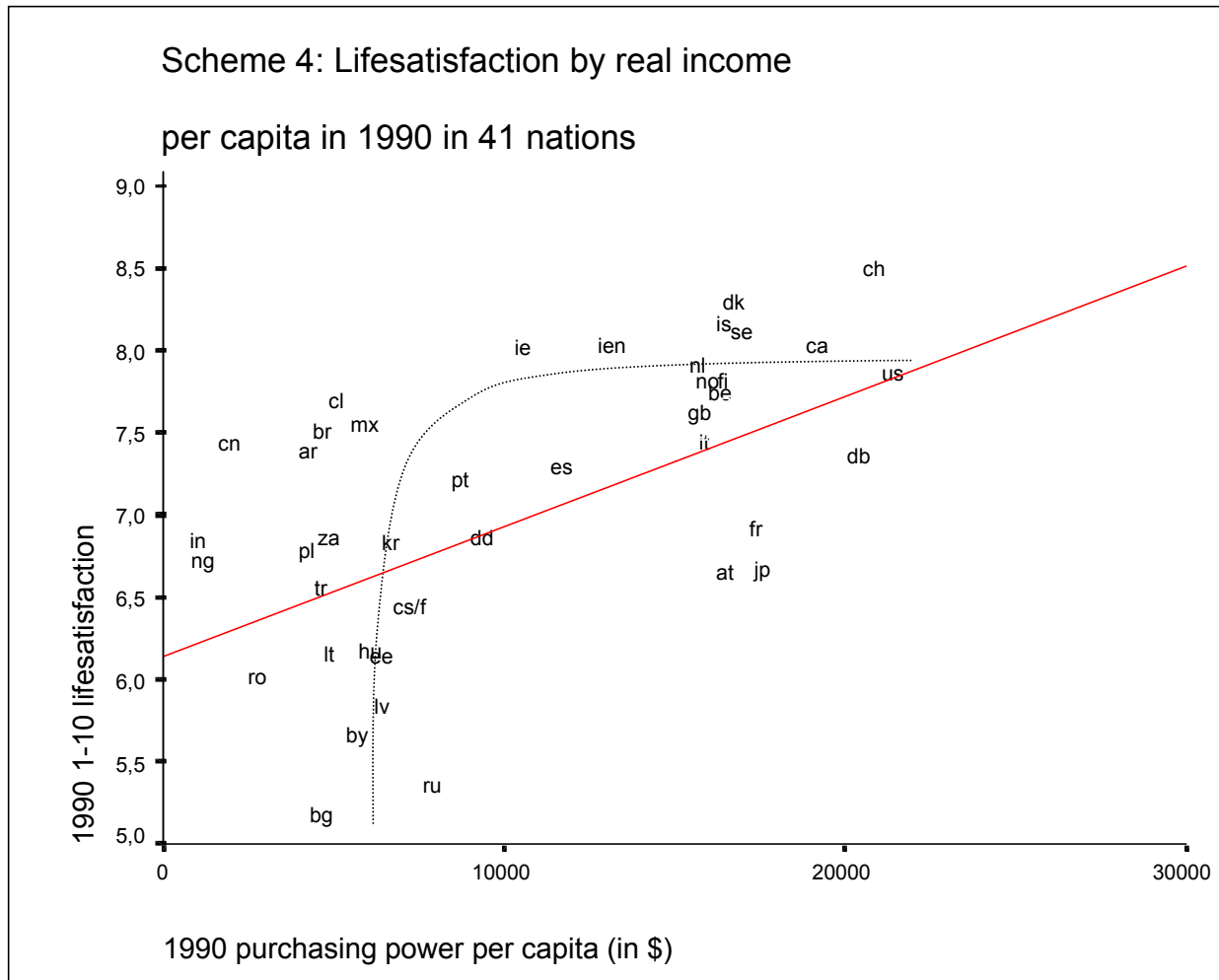
BL = Belarus: World Values Survey HU = Hungary, SE = Sweden, TB = Tombov area (All World Values Survey)



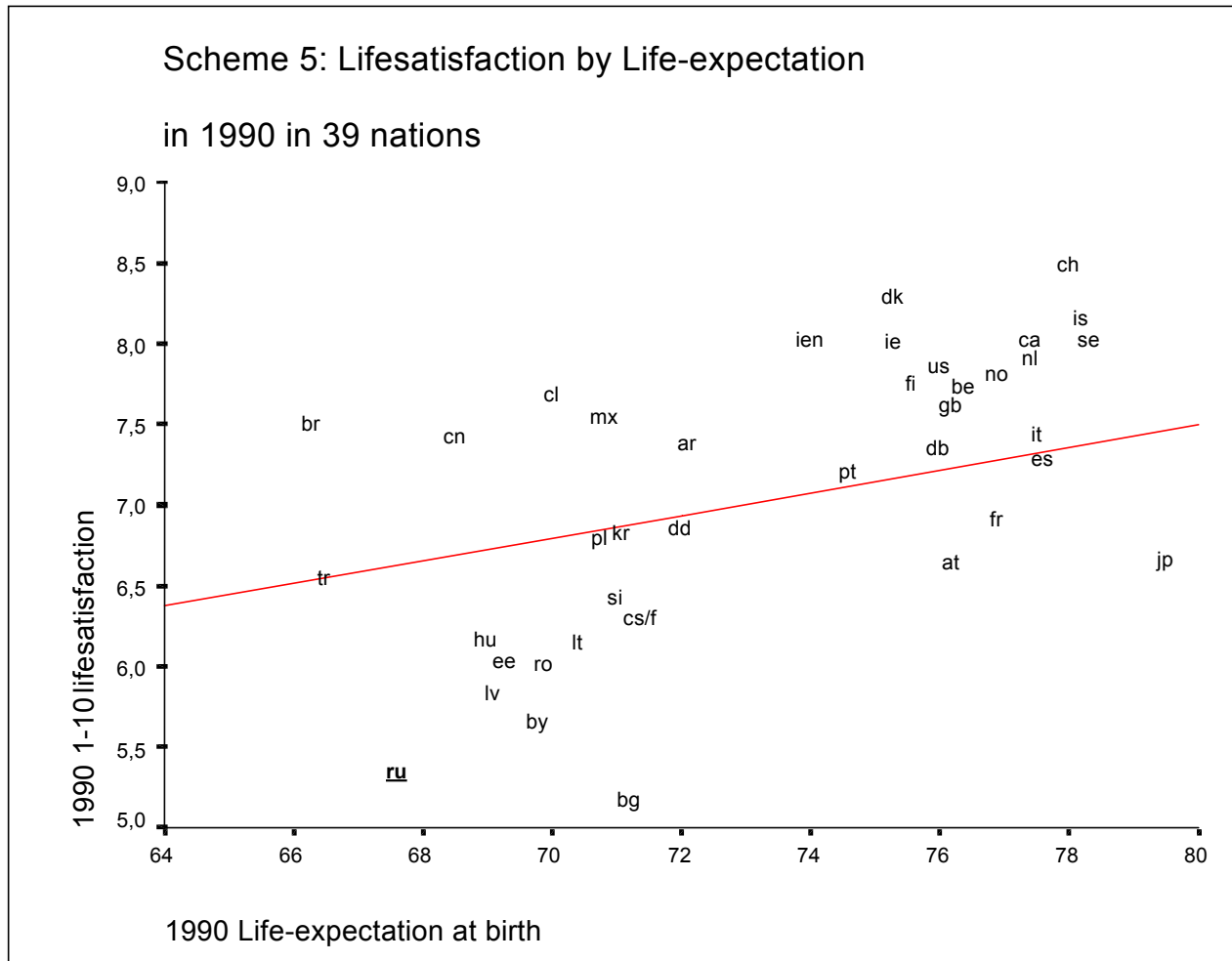
RU1 = Russia: RUSSET Panel, RU2 = Russia: World Values Survey, RU3 = Russia: Political Participation Survey, RU4 = Russia: Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey  
 BL = Belarus, HU = Hungary, SE = Sweden, TB = Tombov area (All World Values Survey)



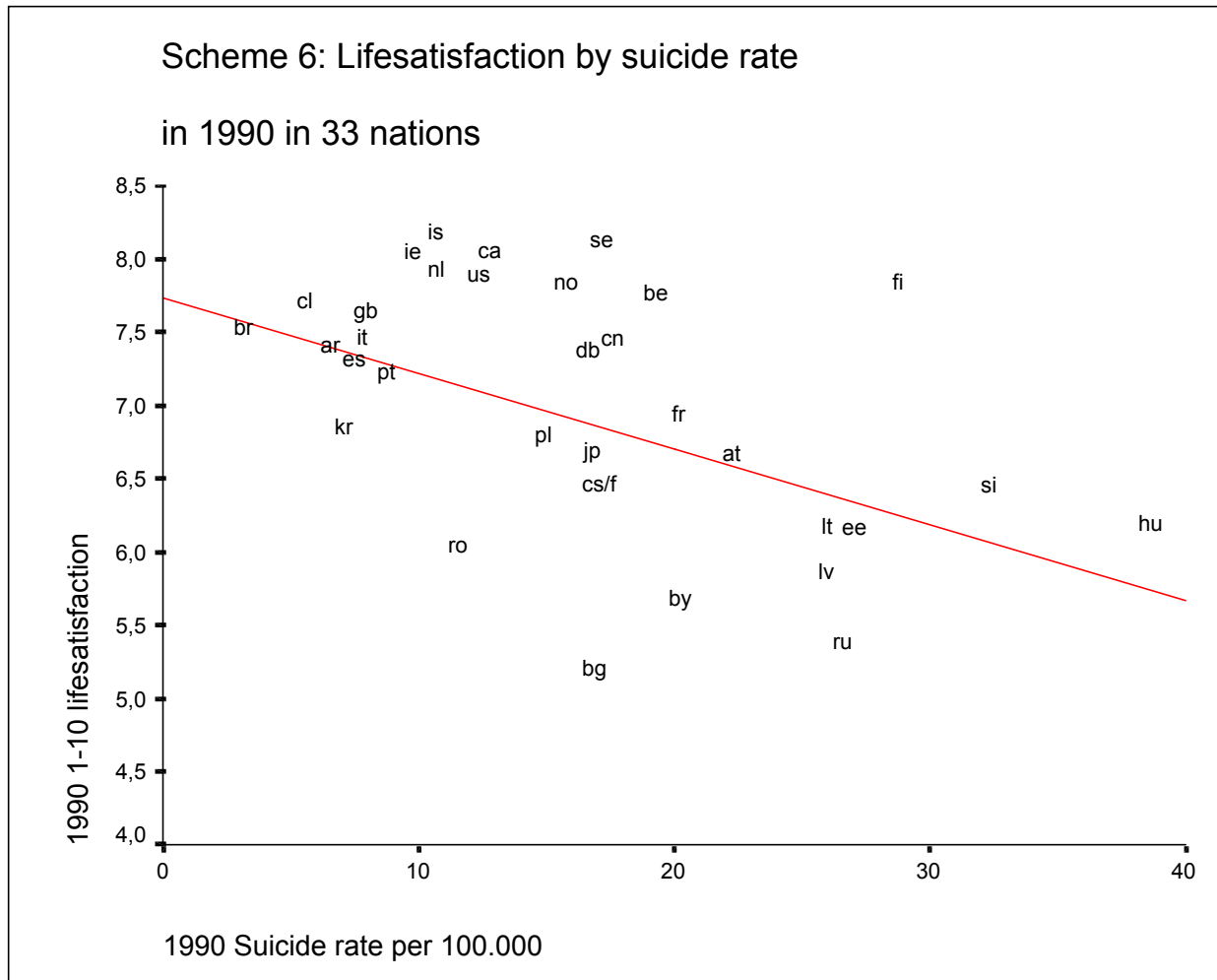
RU1 = Russia: RUSSET Panel, RU2 = Russia: World Values Survey, RU5 = Russia: Erasmus Survey  
BL = Belarus, SE = Sweden, HU = Hungary (All World Values Survey)

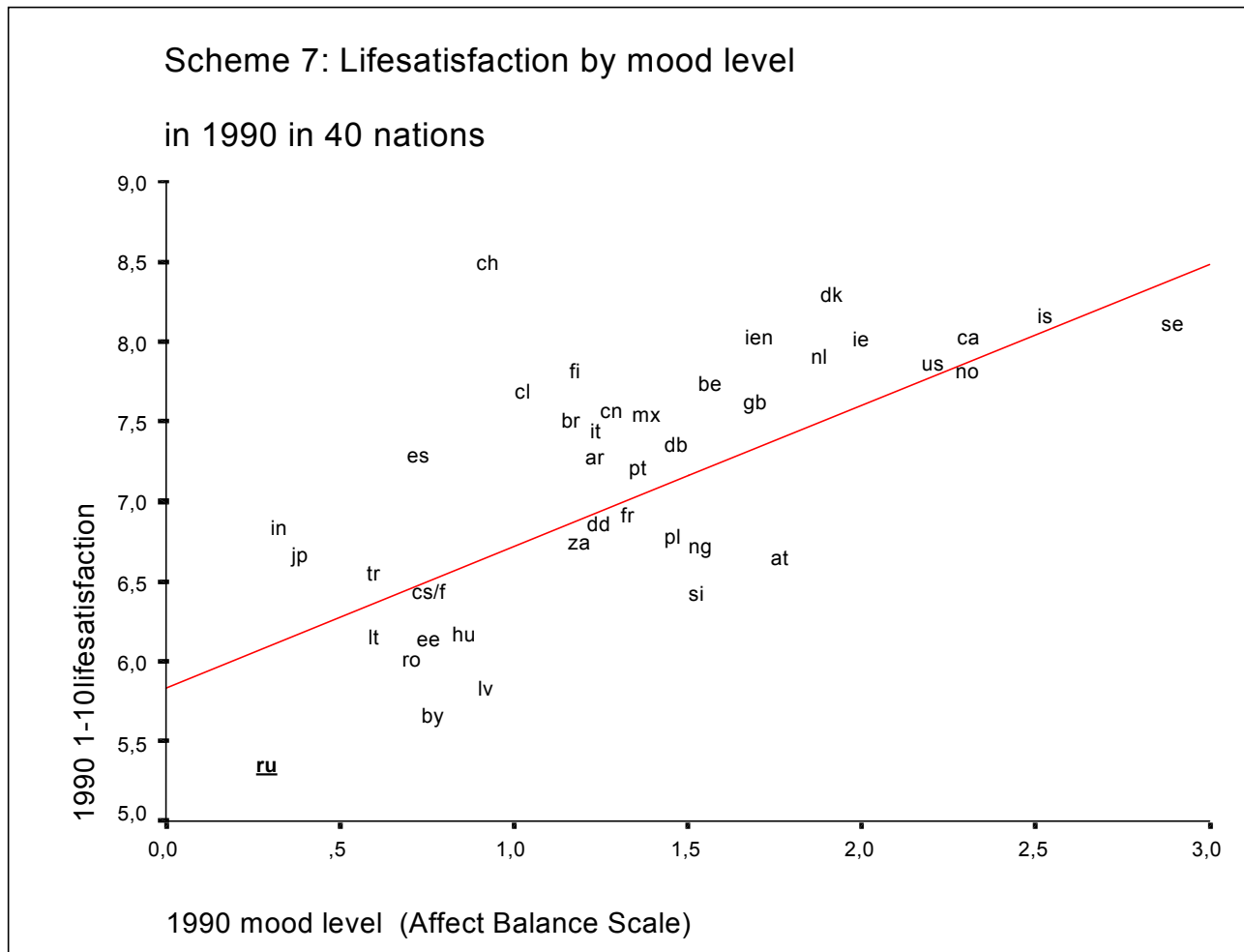


\* ----- Curve estimated by hand









**Distribution of responses to questions about subjective appreciation of life in Russia in the 1990's**


---

*World Value Surveys*

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
'Taking all things together, would you say you are....?'					
- very happy	5				6
- quite happy	42				44
- not very happy	40				40
- not at all happy	4				8
DK/NA	9				2
<i>Mean</i>					
- original range 1-4	2,54				2,54
- transformed to 0-10	<b>5,50</b>				<b>5,43</b>
<i>SD</i>	0,67				0,73
'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life-as-a-whole now?'					
10 satisfied	7				4
9	3				3
8	10				8
7	10				7
6	12				7
5	23				21
4	10				12
3	12				15
2	4				9
1 dissatisfied	7				16
DK/NA	2				1
<i>Mean</i>					
- original on range 1-10	5,36				4,59
- transformed to 0-10	<b>4,84</b>				<b>3,99</b>
<i>SD</i>	2,40				2,53
Affect Balance Score:					
<i>Mean (0-10)</i>	<b>5,33</b>				
<i>SD</i>	1,95				

*Russian 'Political Participation Survey'*

	1991
'Overall, how satisfied are you with your present life?'	
- completely satisfied	5
- satisfied	38
- satisfied nor dissatisfied	44
- dissatisfied	11
- completely dissatisfied	3
<i>Mean</i>	
- original on range 1-5	3,31
- transformed to 0-10	<b>5,55</b>
<i>SD</i>	0,82

'Overall, how satisfied are you with your present life?'

0 completely dissatisfied	5
1	1
2	2
3	5
4	3
5	34
6	6
7	11
8	13
9	4
10 completely satisfied	13
DK/NA	3

## APPENDIX 1 Continued

**Mean** 6.03  
**SD** 2.54

'Altogether and considering all things in life which are important to you, and using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that your life is going very badly, and 10 that your life is going very well, how would you say things are going currently?'

10	4
9	1
8	2
7	5
6	3
5	34
4	6
3	11
2	14
1	5
0	15
<b>Mean</b>	<b>6,19</b>
<b>SD</b>	<b>2,53</b>

*Erasmus Russia survey*

1992

'How is your mood right now?'

- very good	6
- good	34
- moderate	50
- a bit depressed	9
- very depressed	1
Do not know	
<b>Mean</b>	
- original range 1-5	3,35
- transformed to 0-10	<b>6.00</b>
<b>SD</b>	??

*Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)*

1992 1993 1994 1995 1996

'Overall, how satisfied are you with your present life?'

- very satisfied	2	3	3	3	2
- fairly satisfied	9	10	11	10	9
- neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	18	20	20	20	20
- fairly dissatisfied	40	36	41	37	37
- very dissatisfied	32	32	24	30	31
<b>Mean</b>					
- original range 1-5	2.10	2.17	2.27	2.19	2.13
- transformed to 0-10	<b>3,51</b>	<b>3,67</b>	<b>3,85</b>	<b>3,71</b>	<b>3,58</b>
<b>SD</b>	1,01	1,07	1,04	1,06	1,02

## APPENDIX 1 Continued

*Russian Socio-Economic Transition panel (RUSSET)*

	1988 <sup>5</sup>	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
'Are you happy?'									
(1988 version ... five years ago?)									
- very happy	7		4				3	3	3
- pretty happy	53		43				43	42	44
- not very happy	32		43				42	47	47
- not happy at all	4		6				5	7	6
DK/NA	5		5				7	4	2
<i>Mean</i>									
- original range 1-5	2,68		3,00				2,47	2,49	2,49
- transformed to 0-10	<b>5,99</b>		<b>5,38</b>				<b>5,35</b>	<b>5,33</b>	<b>5,35</b>
<i>SD</i>	0,67		0,67				0,67	0,67	0,65

'How satisfied are you with your life-as-a-whole in the present time?'

(1988 version....five years ago).

1 not at all satisfied

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 completely satisfied

Do not know

*Mean*

- original on range 1-10 6,?? 6,46 5,02 5,14 5,25 4,69 4,10

- transformed to 0-10

*SD*

Affect Balance Score:

*Mean (-5 to +5)*

- 0,03 -1,05

*SD*

2,02 2,04

## APPENDIX 2

**Rank order of nations on three measures of happiness in 1991**

<i>Single question: keyword 'happiness'</i>		<i>Single question: keyword 'satisfaction'</i>		<i>10 questions about mood: no particular keyword</i>	
1	Netherlands	1	Switzerland	1	Sweden
2	Iceland	2	Denmark	2	Iceland
3	Sweden	3	Iceland	3	Norway
4	Ireland	4	Sweden	4	Canada
5	Denmark	5	Canada	5	USA
6	Belgium	6	Ireland	6	Ireland
7	Switzerland	7	Netherlands	7	Denmark
8	USA	8	USA	8	Austria
9	Britain	9	Norway	9	Netherlands
10	Norway	10	Finland	10	South Africa
11	Austria	11	Belgium	11	Britain
12	France	12	Chile	12	Nigeria
13	Finland	13	Britain	13	Slovenia
14	Turkey	14	Mexico	14	Belgium
15	Argentine	15	Brazil	15	Poland
16	Canada	16	Italy	16	China
17	West-Germany	17	China	17	West Germany
18	Spain	18	Argentina	18	Mexico
19	Chile	19	West-Germany	19	France
20	Japan	20	Spain	20	Portugal
21	Italy	21	Portugal	21	Argentina
22	Poland	22	France	22	Italy
23	East-Germany	23	East Germany	23	East Germany
24	Mexico	24	South Africa	24	Finland
25	Brazil	25	India	25	Brazil
26	Nigeria	26	Poland	26	Chile
27	China	27	Nigeria	27	Switzerland
28	Portugal	28	Japan	28	Latvia
29	South Africa	29	Austria	29	Hungary
30	India	30	Turkey	30	Spain
31	Hungary	31	Czecho-Slovakia	31	Estonia
32	Czecho-Slovakia	32	Slovenia	32	Belarus
33	Romania	33	Hungary	33	Czecho-Slovakia
34	Slovenia	34	Lithuania	34	India
35	Estonia	35	Estonia	35	Romania
<b>36</b>	<b>Russia</b>	36	Romania	36	Lithuania
37	Lithuania	37	Latvia	37	Japan
38	Latvia	38	Belarus	38	Lithuania
39	Belarus	<b>39</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>Russia</b>

Data: World Values Survey 2 (Inglehart 1994)

## REFERENCES

*Allenbacher Jahrbuch der demoscopie 1993-1997*

K.G. Saur, Münschen, Germany

Andreenkova, A & Scherpenzeel, A.C. (1996)

*Satisfaction in Russia*

In: Saris et al (Eds.) 'A comparative study of satisfaction with life in Europe', Eötvös University Press, Budapest, Hungary, pp. 201-221

Bradburn, N.M. (1969)

*The structure of psychological wellbeing*

Aldine, Chicago, USA

Bulmahn, T (2000)

*Modernity and happiness, the case of Germany*

Journal Of Happiness Studies, vol. 2, pp. ?-?

Cantril, H. (1965)

*The pattern of human concern*

Rutgers University Press, USA

Glatzer, W. & Zapf, W. (1984)

*Lebensqualität in der Bundesrepublik*

Campus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Inglehart, R. (1990)

*Culture shift in advanced industrial society*

Princeton University Press, USA

Inglehart, R. & Klingemann, H-D. (2000)

*Genes, culture, democracy and happiness*

In: Diener, E. & Suh, E.M. (eds.) 'Culture and subjective wellbeing', MIT Press, Boston, pp. 165-184

Habich, R., Noll, H-H, & Zapf, W.

*Subjectives Wohlbefinden in Ostdeutschland nähert sich westdeutschem Niveau*

ISI bulletin, nr 22, PP 1-6

Inglehart, R. (1994)

*Dataset World Values Surveys 1980-1990*

International Consortium for Political Science Research: ICPSR file 6160

Kunin, T. (1995)

*Construction of a new type of attitude measure*

Personal Psychology, vol. 8, pp. 65-78

Saris, W.E., Veenhoven, R., Scherpenzeel, A.C. & Bunting, B. (Eds) (1996)

*A comparative study of satisfaction with life in Europe*

Eötvös University Press, Budapest, Hungary

Saris, W.E. & Andreenkova, A.  
??

Journal of Happiness Studies, 2001, vol 2, pp. ??

Veenhoven, R. (1984)

*Conditions of happiness*

Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht

Veenhoven, R (1992)

*Happiness in nations*

RISBO, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

Veenhoven, R. (1994)

*Is happiness a trait? Tests of the theory that a better society does not make people any happier.*

Social Indicators Research, vole 32, pp. 101-160

Veenhoven, R. (1996)

*Happy life-expectancy, a comprehensive measure of quality-of-life in nations*

Social Indicators research, vol. 39, pp. 1-58

Veenhoven, R (1998)

*Vergelijken van geluk in landen*

Sociale Wetenschappen, vol. 42, pp. 58-84

Veenhoven, R. (2000)

*World Database of happiness*

Available: <http://www.eur.nl/fsw/research/happiness>

World Value Survey: see Inglehart (1994)



## notes

---

<sup>1</sup>Weights assigned by judges to various response options, which could be from 10 to 0. The following weights are used here:

### *4-points happiness*

- very happy	9.3
- quite happy	7.2
- neither happy nor unhappy	5.1
- not very happy	3.7
- not at all happy	1.0

### *5-points life-satisfaction*

- very satisfied	9.3
- fairly satisfied	6.5
- neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	5.1
- fairly dissatisfied	3.4
- very dissatisfied	1.7

<sup>2</sup> The following formula was applied:  $Mt = (Mo - Ls) : (Hs - Hl) \times 10$

where

Mt = transformed mean on range 10 to 0

Mo = mean on the original scale

Ls = lowest possible score on the original scale (generally 0 or 1)

Lh = highest possible score on the original scale (generally 7 or 10)

<sup>3</sup> There are doubts about 1984 life-satisfaction in Belarus. From a preliminary data-file prepared by the European Value Study Center at the University of Tilburg I computed an average of 7,26. In the definitive version of the data-file prepared by Inglehart this variable has disappeared however. Apparently there was something wrong. I have not found out what. If the results have been manipulated to the positive, that may also apply to the 1981 score of Tambov area.

<sup>4</sup> SD 10-points life-satisfaction: Russia: 2,40, Sweden, 1,74, South Africa 2,71, Nigeria 2,71  
SD 10-points Affect-balance: Russia 1,95, Sweden 1,62, South-Africa 2,61, Nigeria 2,12

<sup>5</sup> Retrospective question in 1993 about appreciation of life 5 years ago.