

# GOOD GOVERNANCE AND HAPPINESS OF CITIZENS

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## **Abstract**

*The right to happiness, part of human rights belonging to the third generation, is the result of globalization and the evolution of human rights over time. At the same time, the happiness and well-being of citizens are premises that underlie the creation and adoption of public policies, aiming at ensuring good governance. Good governance means, among many other definitions given in the literature, also the happiness of citizens and the ways in which it can be achieved. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and identify these premises, from the perspective of human rights and public authorities; in order to benefit of a good governance which can help ensure the happiness of citizens and also the guarantee of citizen rights, transparency, effective public policies and trust are needed. The aim is to investigate some aspects that can confirm the idea that good governance is interconnected with citizens' standard of living and happiness and contributes to guaranteeing and promoting their rights.*

**Key Words:** *good governance, public policies, efficacy, the right to happiness*

**JEL Classification:** [K30; K38]

## **1. Introduction**

Good governance and human rights are two concepts often used in the last century by each state, as well as by international organizations, amplified by the phenomenon of globalization, of the desire to create "unity in diversity". In this way, the interest given to this topic attracts the attention of theorists, but also of the practitioners, in trying to identify solutions for the promotion of effective public policies, whose purpose is, among other things, the happiness and the well-being of the citizens.

In the last years, the policy of global happiness has been developed at an international level, a policy in which human rights occupy a central place, and the happiness and well-being of citizens are constituent elements of this policy. Creating and maintaining a balance in this sector is a delicate subject, subject to change from day to day. The 21<sup>st</sup> century represents for good governance the moment when it has acquired multidimensional values, aiming at respecting and

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promoting human rights, creating public policies that will ensure the common good of citizens, to ensure the rule of law and democratic governance.

This paper highlights one of the multiple approaches in analyzing happiness and good governance, in terms of human rights, the right to happiness, but also a citizen-centered governance, the collective well-being of the citizens of a state and, not least, of a government for the happiness of citizens.

## **2. Good governance - requisite of happiness**

Starting from the premise that happiness depends entirely on the exercise of one's own freedom, and, on the other hand, that it consists of states and events that do not automatically depend on the person's freedom, that it is subjective or that indicators can be found, in one form or another, to express the state of happiness, it is, equally, existing or non-existent in the lives of citizens, based on identical premises.

But, just as well, we can lean on the idea (Kurt Bayertz & Thomas Gutmann, 2011, p. 6) according to which "the state and the law do not exist for the sake of happiness", but they are created by human beings for human purposes and also that "the promotion of happiness is not an attribution of the state or a legal one", even though some people share the belief that "the promotion of happiness is a legitimate and even necessary purpose of the state and the law".

Regarding the right to happiness, we mention that it is a right determined by the phenomenon of globalization, it is a right determined by the phenomenon of globalization, with a pronounced progressive character, which has been noticed with the initiative of Buthan State, by paraphrasing the "gross domestic product" with "gross national happiness" and more with the inclusion in the Constitution of an index of happiness measurement, continuing later, not necessarily in the order of enumeration, with the actions taken by the United Nations, by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, by European Union, all this ensuring its consolidation and visibility on the big stage.

The right to happiness (Moroianu Zlătescu, I., 2015, pp. 455-457) it is considered to be a fundamental right of some states, and other states interpret it in a more restricted form, as "a right to seek happiness" (Eric Weiner, 2009), the purpose of the two being the happiness of the citizen.

Globally, the right to happiness "promotes the idea of an additional fundamental correlative subjective right of humans resulting in a central goal of states, bearing in mind that the moral legitimacy of a state is based on righteous justice, as an obligation undertaken in favor of the citizen and its well-being" (C.E. Marinică, 2017, p. 54). We support the idea that "the appearance of a right to happiness is based on the premise of a fundamental right, which belongs to all human beings, which is inalienable, that doesn't

have a patrimonial nature, which shall not be subject to change and cannot be waived” (C.E. Marinică, 2017, p. 54).

From another perspective, widely used in World Bank documents, the concept of ”good governance” started with the general definition given to governance, namely ”exercising the authority, control, management, power of government”. Later, along with it, the principles of good governance, which outline the guidelines for governments, were designed and developed, so that there is an efficient management of resources, a good implementation of public policies, but also ensuring the respect of citizens for the state institutions. Good governance „it helps strengthen democracy and human rights, promote economic prosperity and social cohesion, reduce poverty, improve environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources, and increase confidence in government and public administration”.

Currently, is encouraged ”more decentralisation and a better division of powers to be developed, as they are essential elements of good governance and help to increase transparency, accountability and the quality of policymaking. Greater participation of all levels of government should be encouraged in the policy coordination stage, to increase legitimacy, ownership and proximity.” At the same time, it is “necessary to respect the basic principles of multi-level governance practices in Europe, by ensuring a transparent, open and inclusive decision-making process, by promoting participation, by encouraging the efficiency and coherence of public policies, by respecting subsidiarity and proportionality in within the decision-making process and, last but not least, by ensuring the protection of fundamental rights, regardless of the level of governance” (Moroianu Zlatescu, I., Marinică, C.E., 2017, pp. 213-214).

### **3. Good governance - happiness relationship**

In recent decades, there has been a wealth of research and studies on happiness, well-being and good governance, the result of which shows that the people and societies in which they live, in which they are governed, are not so different, after all, the effect of globalization being more and more visible.

Thus, in the literature (Mirko Bagaric, James McConvill, 2005, p. 2) it is claimed that ” happiness is a more relevant and important benchmark than justice because, despite the thousands of years that have been spent examining the notion of justice, its meaning remains vague and indeterminate and hence provides little guidance on important issues. More importantly, justice is less important than happiness. Who needs justice if we are all happy?” However, this is a social and legal approach, without taking into account economic growth and development.

It should be emphasized that, starting with 2012, at the request of the UN, independent reports have been prepared, entitled Annual World

Happiness Reports. They differ in terms of time, content and geographical area. So, The United Nations, through the UN Sustainable Development Network, has developed and released, these annual reports and later another one (the World Happiness Policy Report), to identify the best practices at national and local level, in the search and achievement of happiness and well-being. Further, in the last two years (2018-2019) there have been published Reports on the Global Happiness Policy Report, reports that analyze and try to identify good practices in managing happiness policy, for better governance in respect of the rights of citizens.

In the Report of 2018 there is a first chapter entitled "Good Governance in the 21st Century" in which the author considers that "the UAE's new initiative to promote a dialogue among governments in order to explore and share best practices for happiness is to be universally applauded. The Global Dialogue for Happiness will play an important role in enabling the world to fulfill Agenda 2030, meet the SDGs, achieve the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement, and more generally, fulfill the hopes of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Considering globalization as a "a multicultural process, which is the result of events taking place in a part of the globe, with repercussions on societies from other parts of the world on the globe" (Moroiianu Zlătescu, I., Bucur-Ioan, A., 2019, pp. 198-206) in the 2018 World Happiness Report, professor John Helliwell highlighted that "happiness is considered to be a key measure of social progress and a fundamental objective of public policy." The report is considered to be "a starting point in the development of appropriate public policy proposals, on the basis of examples designed and proposed for different purposes but which have also entered into these policies of happiness because they support some form of happiness. For the future, regular and widespread collection of data on subjective well-being is needed, thus improving the scientific basis for evaluating policies designed to improve happiness" (Marinică, C.E., 2019, p. 49).

In the second Report, from 2019, it is stated that "happiness can be promoted through public policy" and the creation of a global coalition for happiness and well-being can lead to the identification of the best practices of government happiness, by studying the impact of public policies on happiness.

In addition to the statements in the 2018 World Happiness Report, come the ones in the Global Happiness and Wellbeing Policy Report 2019, stating that "more and more nations are learning that economic growth alone is not enough to produce happiness. Second, as psychological science has demonstrated, happiness and well-being can now be measured and studied with rigor. Third, there are new and effective public policies for raising societal well-being." So, the report "is based on the idea that the pursuit of

happiness should no longer be left to the individual or the marketplace alone. Happiness and well-being should be of para-mount concern for all of society, engaging governments, companies, schools, healthcare systems, and other sectors of society.”

In this context, we ask ourselves what role does good governance play in ensuring the happiness of citizens and what are the most appropriate measures to be taken, through the public policies adopted? What is the relationship between good governance, public policies and happiness?

We believe that citizens' happiness and well-being are essential components of good governance, which are reflected in the public policies proposed and implemented at national, European and global level. The use of happiness and well-being indicators together with other economic indicators in the elaboration of public policies reflects the socio-economic conditions existing at the state level. As an example, the use of the indicator of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in the Bhutan state can be given for national assessment of progress, but also for the promotion of public policies, which involves the analysis and research of a number of nine areas, including good governance. The fact that happiness is an objective of every citizen makes it extremely relevant to good governance and state policy, to identify the most effective solutions to intervention, by developing clear, transparent and accessible policies.

Richard Layard calls for "the adoption of public policies to help create another type of society. He suggests, for example, that we spend more money on mental health, so as to reduce unhappiness, instead of simply focusing on how to be happier” (Layard, R., 2005).

Governance for the happiness of citizens is a central final goal of good governance, being guided by a value framework that includes happiness as a human right, as a component of well-being (in a certain form) and as an aspect of social justice. From this perspective, happiness not only becomes relevant for the adoption and implementation of public policies but can become a prerequisite for good governance. However, the possibility of keeping a clear record of people's happiness, which can be achieved through the measures adopted by public policies, is not so easy to achieve, despite the unequivocal intention of those involved in the government act to ensure the happiness and well-being of the citizens. Ensuring the happiness and well-being of citizens can be achieved, mainly, by guaranteeing their social-economic conditions.

Because “public policy is as old as the history of human governance” and taking into account that “it has come to refer more specifically both to what governments do as they transact with civil society, the economy, and states within a global state system and to the creation and deployment of knowledge about these sites of authoritative transactions” (Katznelson, I., 2001, pp. 11541-11547).

The right to happiness implies, among other things, the adoption of public policies, the implementation of programs that can directly influence the assurance and exercise of human rights, the lack of respect or the violation of human rights having serious consequences on the human being, whose happiness is directly affected. The approach to happiness as a human right is an approach to good governance, closely related to human dignity, to the welfare of the inhabitants of the state, but also to protecting and ensuring the exercise of the rights and freedoms of citizens, on the one hand, and on the other, as a moral, ethical obligation of the state to ensure a globally uniform set of values, from the perspective of human rights.

Certainly, the public policies of the 21st century must respect the human rights, which occupy a central place in the government of the states, in ensuring the idea of good governance, beyond the idea of national citizenship, since in this era of globalization, human rights must be viewed more than ever as universal and inalienable. Good governance requires, among other things, active citizen participation, citizen involvement and cooperation in the elaboration and implementation of public policies, in order to maintain the democratic values that underpin the rule of law. Good governance, transparency and cooperation of the citizens can lead to the improvement of the well-being of each citizen, the increase of the correctness and the confidence that he shows towards the government and, finally, the balance necessary for each citizen to feel the state of his own happiness.

However, some authors (Carl-Henric Grenholm, p. 63) considered that “a increasing income and material wellbeing is not commensurate with increasing happiness, once a modest level of income has been achieved”. According to Richard Layard, “in richer societies increasing prosperity and standards of living have not been accompanied by increasing happiness or wellbeing. Happiness should be a goal for public policy, which seems to be a challenge for economics and the conceptions of a good human life presupposed within mainstream economic theory”.

So, the same author considers that “the best public policy is one which produces the greatest possible happiness in a society. In social ethics, the principle of utility means that an action is right if it produces the greatest overall happiness, and in individual ethics a right private action is one that promotes the greatest happiness of everyone affected” (Layard, R., 2005, pp. 65-72).

It is true that the happiness of the people is determined by the family relations, the income obtained, the work performed, the community in which the man lives, the friends he is surrounded by, the state of health he has and, last but not least, the freedom individually and personal values (Layard, R., 2005, pp. 65-72). But, happiness can also vary depending on the quality of governance, the idea of good governance being the one that comes to confirm

the well-being and happiness of the citizens. By the simultaneous analysis of all these, happiness and its variation can be explained, finding that some of them justify and explain to a very small extent happiness (eg the income obtained). Richard Layard argues that "we would all be much better off if countries measured success by the happiness of their people than by making economic growth the central objective of public policy and the central measure of success. We should learn from the Scandinavian countries, which are uniformly happier than, for example, the U.K. or the United States. There are important lessons to be learned: You don't have to turn your back on economics, but it's not the be-all end-all. Human relationships are extremely important and need to be given a great deal of attention - we shouldn't sacrifice them in the name of economic efficiency. Neither should we sacrifice human relationships at work, give up our work-life balance, or drive our children crazy at their high schools." So, he strongly believes that "everybody needs to design things to preserve their own happiness and, even more, that of others. We won't have a happy society unless people start counting their success in terms of how they're contributing to the happiness of other people rather than just what they are getting out of the system for themselves" (Layard, R., 2018).

### Conclusions

Our study followed the analysis of the relationship between good governance and the happiness of citizens, to explain the role that good governance has, to a lesser or greater extent, in achieving citizens' happiness. Because happiness is a subjective state of affairs, keeping it within the limits of common parameters is impossible, because people are different in nature and government and public policies, which protect the right to seek happiness, but also the general happiness of a society, differ from one state to another.

In an increasingly globalized world, we must look at human rights especially from the point of view of their universality, emphasizing the differentiated approach to the values that society is founded on, realizing that "the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal", recognizing "the relevance of happiness and well-being as universal goals and aspirations in the lives of human beings around the world and the importance of their recognition in public policy objectives" and also "recognizing also the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the well-being of all peoples."

Finally, we can conclude that, good governance and solutions implemented through public policies should aim rather at the general happiness and well-being of citizens, to the detriment of the individual, as well as the continuous promotion of solutions for seeking and achieving happiness.

In the light of the above, we believe that the need for happiness must exist, the thought that you can seek and achieve happiness is absolutely necessary for the individual, good governance represents a premise for the happiness and success of citizens, and the need to ensure a balance of life can be realized in one form or another through public policies, as component parts of good governance, which will lead to a close connection between happiness and good governance and to a brighter and happier future for people.

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