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Cultural Trauma and Social Quality in Post-Soviet Moldova and Belarus

Pamela Abbott*

This article looks at influences on the social quality of the lives of the citizens of Belarus and Moldova in the context of the traumatic shock—economic, political, and social—experienced after 1991. It argues that lived experience—how people *evaluate* their condition—is as significant an influence on their welfare as the actual circumstances in which they live. The majority of respondents perceive the post-1991 economic and political changes negatively, and levels of general satisfaction and happiness are comparatively low. The findings suggest that objective economic factors, health status, and social context influence well-being, but also personal control and satisfaction with material circumstances, with health having a greater influence on happiness, while material circumstances and the evaluation of them have a greater influence on general satisfaction.

Keywords: cultural trauma; social quality; general satisfaction; well-being

There is incontrovertible evidence that the dramatic social, political, and economic changes since 1991 in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have had a dramatically negative impact on the welfare of the populations.¹ The context of the lives of the peoples of the former USSR has undergone a triple transformation since 1991: the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the formation of nation-states; the collapse of

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the nonmarket command economy and the introduction of elements of a market economy, including employment insecurity and market prices; and a move from totalitarian to more democratic political systems.² These changes have been accompanied by a deep depression resulting in a decline in GDP, hyperinflation, an increase in economic inequalities, an increase in poverty and unemployment, and a decline in state spending with a resultant reduction in or loss of many welfare benefits.³ Most dramatically this has been evidenced by the decline in life expectancy, especially of men in midlife.⁴ Much of the evidence for the negative impact of the transition on the daily lives of those who have survived relates to Russia;⁵ less is known about the impact on the well-being of citizens in other CIS countries.

Belarus and Moldova provide an interesting contrast in terms of examining the impact of the transition on quality of life. They were both formed as nation-states in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR. They are both relatively small countries with boundaries not of their own choosing and are still, especially in the case of Belarus, attached to Russia, although they think of themselves as European.⁶ In the case of Moldova, there is ethnic tension between the Russian and Romanian populations exacerbated by the cessation of the pro-Russian Transnistrian region in 1992.⁷ Moldova has also experienced considerable out-migration, mainly to Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus,⁸ resulting in the loss of younger, more enterprising citizens (though they still contribute to household finances by remitting money home). The two countries share the status of being outsider states, located between the Russian Federation and the European Union.⁹ Belarus has retained a command economy and never democratized, the old communist elite have reestablished despotic rule and there has been minimum economic and political reform,¹⁰ although around half the population support the current regime and a similar proportion are optimistic for the future.¹¹ Moldova has democratized, but the old communist elite has retained power, and the Communist Party won the general election in 2001 and was reelected in 2004.¹² The Moldovan economy has begun the transition from a command economy and is best described as a distorted market economy or rent-seeking transition economy, concerned not with the welfare of the whole

population but with redistributing to benefit the privileged few.¹³ There are low levels of trust, civic engagement, and tolerance¹⁴ and a weak state and civil society.¹⁵

The economic impact of the dislocation has been significantly less in Belarus than in Moldova; the latter has become the poorest country in Europe, with a collapse of the public welfare system and an increased dependence on subsistence agricultural and petty trading.¹⁶ Belarus's poverty and inequality indicators are, by contrast, relatively favorable, and it has been relatively successful in maintaining its GDP.¹⁷ Taking 1989 as 100, GDP fell to 31.9 in 1999 in Moldova, and by 2001 it was only 34.2; while in Belarus it had fallen to 62.7 by 1995 but had recovered to 87.3 by 2001,¹⁸ the year in which the survey reported on in this article was carried out. (For comparison, GDP never fell below three-quarters of its pre-depression level in the United States in the 1930s.) Economic inequalities, as measured by the Gini coefficient (a measure of economic inequality, with 0 being perfect equality and 100 perfect inequality) for *earnings* increased by 14 percentage points in Moldova and 11 in Belarus,¹⁹ while the Gini coefficient for *income* increased by 19 percentage points in Moldova but by only 2 in Belarus. Fifty-five percent of Moldovans but only two percent of Belarusians live below the \$2-a-day poverty line, and 66 and 22 percent, respectively, below the \$4-a-day line. (In 1989, 3.3 percent of Belarusians and 11.8 of Moldovans lived on less than 75 Rbs a day, an estimate of a reasonably generous poverty line equivalent approximately to the \$4 poverty line.²⁰)

The different situation of both countries is clearly evidenced by their rank in the Human Development Index, a measure of capability poverty, which focuses on the ability and capability of people to live healthy, active lives free from poverty and poor health. Belarus is ranked fifty-third, the highest-ranked country in the CIS, while Moldova is ranked ninety-eighth, the lowest-ranked country in Europe and one of the lowest of the CIS countries.²¹ Interestingly, on one fundamental measure of well-being—life expectancy at birth—there was a decline in both countries in the 1990s, most notably for men in midlife; however, the decline was greater in Belarus than Moldova.²² While there is some debate as to the causes of the unprecedented increase in mortality, there is

general agreement that increased stress after 1991 combined with historically unhealthy male lifestyles is a major factor.²³

Sztompka,²⁴ in developing a sociological analysis of the transition, argues that post-Soviet societies are experiencing cultural trauma as a consequence of the rapid, comprehensive, unexpected, and radical/fundamental change: they are societies in which there has been a breakdown of social trust and a loss of a sense of agency. Insecurity and uncertainty have become a normal experience of daily life for many citizens. The dislocation in the social structure has resulted in a breakdown in the normative patterns that define the expectation of actors, in the patterns of social relationships between actors, and in the embodied perceptions, habits, and skills by which people produce and reproduce institutional and related structures. It is not only that structural change means that people's life chances have been transformed (and, for many, for the worse), but so have their understandings of how to make life choices and their ability actually to do so. Culturally shared templates are no longer appropriate for guiding behaviors in the changed socioeconomic and cultural contexts.²⁵

Thus, a fuller understanding of the impact of the transition requires an analysis of the ways in which the change has been interpreted and the impact they have had on the agency and lived experience of citizens—trauma is at the same time objective and subjective. It means going beyond a description of objective living conditions and taking account of the subjective understanding by citizens of their life situation and the extent to which they feel able to make the necessary choices in order to act to secure their well-being—to choose a style of life they value. To relate agency and structure, we need to consider the relationship between objective conditions and the subjective evaluation of them²⁶ and the impact this has on people's ability to take control of their lives. Life choices are related to life chances; the structures we inhabit constrain and control the extent to which and the ways in which we can exercise agency. However, social change impacts differentially not just on individuals but also on social groups that are not all equally sensitive to the negative impact of the dramatic changes that have taken place. Some groups will welcome social change and experience it as a positive opportunity to improve their welfare; for others, it will

be largely irrelevant; but for the majority, it will be experienced negatively and will reduce their ability to act to maintain their welfare. Differential ability to cope will be influenced by the social, economic, and cultural resources on which citizens are able to draw in the changed and changing situation—for example, material resources, social support, cultural capital, and health.

This article, then, aims to explore the effects of the economic and social crisis not as blind determinants of behavior but as interpreted through the lived experience of informants modified by their agency. In other words, we shall be looking at what people believe to be the case and what implications it has for how they act. The indicators that will be used are derived from the Social Quality approach, which provides a framework²⁷ defining the space within which citizens

are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions, which enhance their well-being and individual potential²⁸

(The model is a holistic construct that distinguishes economic security, social context and social engagement.) Ultimately, we need to understand what the main influences are on subjective life satisfaction in societies that have undergone dramatic social, political, and economic change, as ultimately it is the subjective experience that influences agency and indeed people's ability to take control over their lives—to exercise agency.

Methods

The Living Conditions, Lifestyles and Health Survey was carried out in the autumn of 2001. Face-to-face interviews, to ESOMAR (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research Professionals) standards, were carried out in both countries. The partnership responsible for the research built on relationships developed over the five waves of the New Democracies Barometer—an extensive program of research into political transformations in post-communist Europe carried out between 1991 and 1998. The questionnaire was designed by the project partners and amended in the light of a pilot. Samples were

selected using multistage sampling with stratification by region and, within region, by urban-rural divisions and town size. There were sixty-one primary sampling units in Belarus and sixty-four in Moldova. Within sampling units, standard random route procedure was used to select households, and the person aged eighteen or over with a day and month of birth nearest to the date of the interview was selected as a respondent. Quota controls were used for gender, age and education. Transnistria and the new municipality of Bender were excluded in Moldova (about 15 percent of the population). In Belarus all the interviews were carried out in Russian, and in Moldova 68 percent were carried out in Moldovan and 32 percent in Russian. In Moldova 76.6 percent of our respondents identified themselves as Moldovan or Romanian, 7.7 percent as ethnic Russian, and 8.8 percent as Ukrainian. Given that around a third of the population of Moldova, including Transnistria, is ethnically Russian, our sample would seem to be reasonably representative of the main ethnic groups. In Belarus, 80.7 percent identified themselves as Belarusian and 14.6 percent as Russian or Ukrainian (in the 1999 census, 81 percent of the population identified themselves as Belarusian and 13 percent as Russian or Ukrainian). In both countries the remaining respondents identified with a range of ethnicities. Standard quality control procedures were used in both countries.²⁹ Since a sample size of two thousand provides reliable estimates of proportions that represent 3 percent or more of the population at the national level with a precision of 0.75 percent for most countries, that number of respondents was sampled in each country. There was no oversampling or undersampling of subgroups. Eighty-one percent of those asked to participate did so in Moldova and 73 percent in Belarus.

The questionnaire, which took approximately an hour to complete, included questions covering living conditions, lifestyle, political attitudes, social context, health, and demographics. This article draws on responses to the questions on education and material circumstances, social context, and health status as well as satisfaction with various aspects of life and general satisfaction and happiness. Eight of the independent variables used in the regressions were scales/indexes computed using principal

components analysis (social resource, personal support, trust in government, trust in institutions, personal control and psycho-social health)—see the appendix. The extent of internal correlation (the reliability of the scale) was checked using Cronbach's alpha, a measure of average interitem correlation that tests the extent to which the individual items do belong together in a scale, and all produced acceptably high alpha values. Scales were used because one question is not sufficient to measure a multi-dimensional attitude/construct and because using composite scales reduces random variation in responses to individual questions, so that what is lost in detail is gained in stability.

In what follows, the context in which the people of Moldova and Belarus live their daily lives is considered in terms of their economic and social circumstances and their reported health. This is followed by a consideration of how satisfied and happy people are in general and with specific aspects of their lives. To determine the influences on general satisfaction, happiness, and life satisfaction, a series of linear regressions were carried out. Three dependent variables were used in the regression analyses:

1. General satisfaction—the responses to the question, How satisfied are you all things considered with your life as a whole these days—(1) *definitely satisfied*, (2) *quite satisfied*, (3) *rather dissatisfied*, or (4) *definitely dissatisfied*?
2. Happiness—the responses to the question, Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days—Would you say you are (1) *very happy*, (2) *pretty happy*, (3) *not too happy*, (4) *very unhappy*?
3. An index computed from the happiness and general satisfaction variables (see the appendix).

Seven blocks of independent variables were used (see Tables 4 through 9 below):

- biological (age and gender),
- human capital (education and employment),
- material circumstances (economic situation, inability to afford basic food, and lack of basic amenities index),
- social context (married, friends to confide in, trust people, active in voluntary organizations, social resource index, personal support index),
- social control (freedom of choice and control, personal control scale, freedom index),

- health (self-reported health, limiting long-term illness and a psychosocial health scale), and
- domain satisfactions (own income, household finances, health, political situation and neighborhood security).

Given the need to consider the multiple influences on the dependent variable and to look at the influence of domain satisfactions separately from the more objective indicators, a series of linear bloc regressions was carried out for each set of indicators as well as for the models as a whole. Model 1 included the biological, human capital, material circumstances, social context, and social control variables, Model 2 added the health variables, and Model 3 included all the independent variables. This enables us to look at what the different variables contribute together, making allowance for the fact that their effects overlap.

Well-being is not a well-defined concept, and it is possible that measures of happiness, general satisfaction, and health are tapping into the same underlying construct. Given this possibility, it is important to be certain that the questions on health and general satisfaction/happiness do measure distinct “things,” and indeed that one or both of them is not a proxy measure for health. The domains of satisfaction (excluding happiness and general satisfaction from the analysis) fall into six distinct factors in Moldova and five in Belarus. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed that the satisfaction variables fell consistently into a number of distinct domains: political satisfaction, satisfaction with services, satisfaction with work and education, satisfaction with economic circumstances, and satisfaction with the environment. When general satisfaction and happiness are included in the analysis, general satisfaction loads satisfaction with economic circumstances, and happiness goes with health to form a separate factor. Clearly health, happiness, and general satisfaction are related, but the questions are not measuring an identical underlying construct and there is no underlying “trait of satisfaction.”

Surviving the transition

There is clear evidence of the impact of the transition on the living conditions of the citizens of Moldova and Belarus.

(Throughout the remainder of this article, “citizens of Moldova/Belarus” or “Moldovans/Belarusians” should be taken to refer to all our respondents in those countries, irrespective of ethnic diversity and possibly differing citizenship.) A majority of respondents to our survey interpreted the post-1991 changes as having had a negative impact on their society and their own lives. For example, 88 percent of respondents in Moldova and 79 percent in Belarus thought that the disintegration of the USSR had a negative impact on the economy of their country. While a majority rated the economy (82.6 percent in Moldova, 65.6 percent in Belarus) and the government (79.0 and 56.9 percent, respectively) highly or fairly highly in the time of the USSR, few do so today (2.2 and 4.9 percent, respectively, in Moldova and 15.9 and 24.3 percent in Belarus) and well over three-quarters think the transition has had a negative impact on health (86.6 and 87.2 percent). Perhaps most tellingly of all, only 30 percent of Moldovans and 50 percent of Belarusians are definitely opposed to a return to the old regime.

The reported current material circumstances of our respondents suggest high levels of poverty, with only a small minority (7.7 percent in Moldova, 10.9 percent in Belarus) reporting the economic circumstances of their household as good. Only a small proportion said they could afford to buy major consumer items such as a car (17.6 percent in Moldova, 26.0 percent in Belarus), and more than half said that they are unable or only just able to afford to purchase necessary clothes and cloths (83.3 percent in Moldova, 55.4 percent in Belarus). Around three-quarters of the respondents in Moldova (74.6 percent) and about a third in Belarus (36.3 percent) reported having to do without basic food at least some of the time. While a third of the respondents’ main source of income is paid employment in Moldova, this rises to 60 percent in Belarus. Almost three-quarters of Moldovans (72.8 percent) and Belarusians (71.9 percent) have a plot of land; more than a quarter of Moldovans (27.1 percent) rely on it as their main source of support, but only around 8 percent of Belarusians do.

In terms of social context, there is evidence of high levels of personal support from family and friends but lower levels of trust and integration into the wider society, and there is little evidence of the development of civil society (Table 1). In particular, there are low

levels of trust both in other people generally and especially in political institutions—lower in Moldova than Belarus. Trust is essential for a society to function and for social integration.³⁰ This supports the evidence from elsewhere in post-communist societies of a reliance on kin and friendship networks, a lack of integration into the wider society, and a lack of social cohesion.³¹ It also questions the legitimacy of the political regimes, although the relatively high trust in the president, especially in Belarus, should be noted.

Levels of perceived personal control are also low in terms of responses to the individual questions. More than half the respondents (Moldova 62.3 percent, Belarus 50.2 percent) report feeling that life is too complicated, and around 40 percent say that they are unable to enjoy normal everyday activities (Moldova 39.8 percent, Belarus 44.7 percent), while only slightly more than half the respondents in Moldova (50.7 percent) and Belarus (56.9 percent) report having a high level of freedom and control in their answers to individual questions. However, more than three-quarters of respondents think that they have freedom of speech (Moldova 79.8 percent, Belarus 82.2 percent), association (Moldova 75.0 percent, Belarus 84.0 percent) and travel (Moldova 74.6 percent, Belarus 79.3 percent) This suggests that the level of perceived freedoms is quite high but that levels of perceived control over life are much lower.

Health is a resource that enables people to participate in socially valued activities, including income-generating ones, and lack of good health can be a barrier not only to participation but also to economic well-being. Levels of self-reported poor health, limiting long-term illness, and poor psychosocial health are comparatively high, although lower for men than for women and lower for men in Belarus than Moldova (Table 2). Thus, while life expectancy for men is lower in Belarus than Moldova, men report poorer health in Moldova than Belarus.

We can conclude that Moldova and Belarus are societies that have undergone changes perceived by their citizens as having had a negative impact on their welfare. In both countries the social, political, and economic situation is seen as having deteriorated; a majority experience material hardship. There is a lack of social cohesion and trust and low levels of integration into the

Table 1. *Social Context (in percentages)*

Variable	Moldova	Belarus
Married	67.7	60.3
Friends confide in	73.3	78.1
Help depressed	48.2	64.8
Help find job	42.6	61.0
Help pay urgent bill	57.9	77.5
Someone to listen	86.9	90.0
Someone help in crisis	87.5	90.3
Someone be self with	82.4	88.9
Someone appreciates you	89.1	91.0
Comfort when upset	89.7	89.7
Active in organization	9.2	9.3
Trust people in general	31.2	54.4
Trust president of country	56.1	70.2
Trust national government	34.7	57.7
Trust national parliament	26.2	52.7
Trust regional government	30.2	51.0
Trust political parties	10.8	22.0
Trust the courts	31.7	51.4
Trust the police	31.5	51.3
Trust the army	51.3	79.8
Trust the trade unions	23.0	48.6

wider society, although strong personal support structures exist. There are low levels of perceived control over life, and the physical and psychosocial health status of the populations is poor. The Moldovans view the economic and political changes more negatively than the Belarusians and report their material situation as poorer. They also report lower levels of personal support, lower levels of trust, less perceived control and freedom, and, for men, poorer health than the Belarusians.

Happiness, general satisfaction, and well-being

The pattern of satisfaction for the various domains is comparable for both countries (Table 3). The highest levels of satisfaction are

Table 2. *Health (in percentages)*

Variable	Moldova		Belarus	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Self-reported health less than good	48.0	39.7	49.1	29.2
Limiting long-term illness	41.4	35.5	48.1	30.2
Three or more psycho-social health symptoms	53.8	44.6	56.0	34.2
Psycho-social health symptoms, mean (<i>SD</i>)	3.1 (2.4)	2.4 (2.1)	3.1 (2.3)	2.1 (2.0)

Note: Gender difference significant at $p < .001$.

with the environment and utilities and the lowest with income, the way the economy is developing, the way democracy is developing, the way the government is performing its duties, and the social services. In Moldova, for example, more than six times as many respondents reported being satisfied with their electricity supply (82.3 percent) as were satisfied with the social security system (13.1 percent). Similarly, in Belarus more than three times as many respondents reported being satisfied with the climate (82.6 percent) as with the way the economy is developing (25.3 percent). We should note especially the very low levels of satisfaction, the more so in Moldova than Belarus, with the progress of the transition—the development of democracy and a market economy. While nearly a third of Belarusians are satisfied with the way democracy is developing, only around a sixth of Moldovans are. Similarly, while a quarter of Belarusians are satisfied with the way the economy is developing, this is true of only just over a twentieth of Moldovans. General satisfaction, however, is around the average for all the satisfaction domains, 41.3 percent of respondents being generally satisfied in Moldova and 56.4 percent in Belarus. The proportion of respondents who reported that they were generally happy is even higher than those reporting that they are generally satisfied—16 percentage points in Moldova and 15 in Belarus. Gender differences

Table 3. *Domain Satisfactions (in percentages)*

	Moldova	Belarus
Satisfied way democracy developing	16.8	32.8
Satisfied way economy developing	6.6	25.3
Satisfied way government's performing its duties	14.1	31.9
Satisfied way local authorities solving regional problems	20.6	29.2
Satisfied with education system	22.9	60.8
Satisfied with health system	17.4	52.8
Satisfied with social security system	13.1	46.2
Satisfied housing	78.8	70.2
Satisfied quality domestic water supply	72.1	64.6
Satisfied air quality	69.6	61.3
Satisfied climate	89.2	82.6
Satisfied domestic electric supply	82.3	95.1
Satisfied security level in neighborhood	39.6	67.7
Satisfied public transport	59.7	52.3
Satisfied work/study	57.4	77.1
Satisfied education	65.4	74.3
Satisfied conditions of work	45.0	66.7
Satisfied personal income	17.9	27.0
Satisfied house hold financial situation	17.7	27.7
Satisfied health	58.2	59.5
Generally satisfied	41.3	56.4
Generally happy	57.5	71.1

are generally small and for the most part not statistically significant with the exception of satisfaction with health, where, not surprisingly given the gender differences in self-reported health, the differences are large, with women significantly more likely to say they are dissatisfied with their health than men. Overall the Belarusians are generally much more satisfied than the Moldovans.

To explore the factors influencing happiness, general satisfaction, and well-being, a series of linear regressions were carried

out. To test which of the sets of factors (material circumstances, social context, personal control, health, and selected domain satisfactions) influence them, separate regressions were run initially with an appropriate bloc of indicators, then regressions were run combining blocs of indicators.

Tables 4 and 5 show the results of the regression analysis with happiness as the dependent variable. For both countries, age, gender, employment, and education make a significant contribution to explaining the variance, but the amounts explained are trivial. However, material circumstances, social context, health, and domain satisfactions all independently explain a nonnegligible amount of the variance in both countries. Social control explains less, but more than biological and human capital variables. When the biological, human capital, material circumstance, social context, and social control variables are entered together, the total variance explained in Moldova is 28.9 percent, and 22.7 percent in Belarus—more than any of these blocks explain independently for Moldova but less than domain satisfaction variables alone explain for Belarus. The greatest contributions to the variance explained in both countries are made by material circumstance variables, followed by social context variables and social control variables. While economic situation is the variable that has the greatest explanatory force, not having basic amenities also makes a noticeable contribution. The most important aspect of the social context is marriage. When health variables are added to the model (model 2), the amount of variance explained increases to 32.2 percent in Moldova and 30.1 percent in Belarus. In Belarus, self-reported health makes the greatest contribution to the variance explained, with material circumstances as the second largest predictor; while in Moldova, material circumstances make the largest contribution, followed by health. Social context and social control variables make a reduced but still significant contribution. When the domain satisfaction variables are included, the amount of variance explained increases to 35.6 percent in Moldova and 32.7 percent in Belarus. Satisfaction with health makes a significant contribution in both Moldova and Belarus, satisfaction with work in Belarus, and satisfaction with conditions of work and political satisfaction in Moldova. It is worth

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Table 4. *Regression Happiness: Moldova*

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .289$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .332$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .356$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Trust institutions index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Active in organization	-.11	-.08**	-.09	-.07*	-.08	-.06*
Block $R^2 = .121$						
Social control						
Personal control scale	.20	.24**	.10	.12**	.06	.07*
Freedom of choice and control	-.10	-.14**	-.06	-.09**	-.06	-.08**
Freedom index	.02	.07*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .09$						
Health						
Self-reported health	.35	.40**			.22	.25**
Psycho-social health scale	.12	.14**			n.s.	n.s.
Limiting long-term health problem	n.s.	n.s.			n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .186$						
Satisfaction						
Security level	n.s.	n.s.			n.s.	n.s.
Work	.09	.10**			-.11	-.07*

Conditions of work	.10	.10***	.08	.09*
Personal income	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Household income	.22	.21***	.09	.09*
Health	.27	.31***	.12	.14**
Political satisfaction	.02	.08***	.02	.07*
Block $R^2 =$.252			

Note: Dependent variable: Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days—Would you say you are 1 = *very happy*, 2 = *pretty happy*, 3 = *not too happy*, 4 = *very unhappy*?

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Trust institutions index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Active in organization	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .11$											
Social control											
Personal control scale	.23	.25**	.14	.16**	.10	.11**	.10	.10	.10	.11**	.11**
Freedom of choice and control	-.07	-.09**	-.07	-.09**	-.05	-.06**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Freedom index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .078$											
Health											
Self-reported health	.40	.45**			.29	.32**	.17	.17	.17	.19**	.19**
Psycho-social health scale	.10	.12**			.08	.09**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Limiting long-term health problem	n.s.	n.s.			n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.15	-.15	-.09*	-.09*
Block $R^2 = .203$											
Satisfaction											
Security level	n.s.	n.s.									
work	.15	.16**									
Conditions of work	n.s.	n.s.									
Personal income	n.s.	n.s.									
Household income	.12	.13									
Political satisfaction	n.s.	n.s.									
Health	.34	.39									
Block $R^2 = .24$											

Note: Dependent variable: Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days—Would you say you are 1 = *very happy*, 2 = *pretty happy*, 3 = *not too happy*, 4 = *very unhappy*?

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

noting that in both countries the amount of variance explained by the domain satisfaction variables alone (25.2 percent in Moldova and 24.0 percent in Belarus) is only about 10 percent less than the total variance explained by any of the models, with satisfaction with work, health, and household income being the three variables contributing most to the variance explained, although when entered with the more objective variables these “satisfaction” variables add little to the variance explained. This suggests that actual material circumstances and health are important influences on happiness and not just people’s satisfaction with their circumstances.

Tables 6 and 7 show the results of the regression analysis with general satisfaction as the dependent variable. As with happiness, gender and age explain a significant but negligible amount of the variance when entered as a block, and the same is true for education and employment in Moldova, while in Belarus the variance explained by them is not even statistically significant. In both countries social context and social control variables explain a significant but relatively trivial amount of the variance when entered as separate blocks. Material circumstances and health explain a noticeable amount, and satisfaction domains explain more than 47 percent in Moldova and more than 40 percent in Belarus. Models 1 and 2 clearly show that, in comparison with happiness, material circumstances have a much greater influence on general satisfaction and self-reported health a smaller one, but the psychosocial health and personal control scales both make significant contributions to the model. When domain satisfaction variables are added, the amount of variance explained increase over model 2 by just more than 17 percentage points in Moldova and just more than 17.8 percentage points in Belarus. The amount of variance explained by any of the other independent variables is significantly reduced or eliminated. The variable that has the single greatest influence on general satisfaction in model 3 is satisfaction with the household’s financial situation. Satisfaction with conditions of work and political satisfaction also have a noticeable influence in both countries, with satisfaction with work in Belarus and satisfaction with security level, with own income, and with health in Moldova making significant contributions. While satisfaction with

text continues on p. 251

Table 6. Regression General Satisfaction: Moldova

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .282$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .316$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .490$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Biological						
Age	.01	.17**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender	.07	.04*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .29$						
Human capital						
Education	-.04	-.08**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Employed	-.17	-.11**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .021$						
Material circumstances						
Economic situation	.45	.43**	.38	.37**	.33	.31**
Basic food	-.12	-.10**	-.08	-.07*	-.08	-.07*
Amenities	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .230$						
Social context						
Married	-.19	-.11**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Personal resource index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Personal support index	-.07	-.11**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Friend confide in	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

(continued)

Table 6. (continued)

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .282$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .316$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .490$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Trust people	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Trust government index	.04	.13**	.04	.13**	n.s.	n.s.
Trust institutions index	.03	.11**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Active in organization	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .082$						
Social control						
Personal control scale	.23	.27**	.12	.15**	.08	.10**
Freedom of choice and control	-.06	-.08**	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Freedom index	.03	.08**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = 0.089$						
Health						
Self-reported health	.22	.25**	.10	.11**	n.s.	n.s.
Psycho-social health scale	.21	.25**	.14	.17**	.08	.10**
Limiting long-term health problem	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .151$						
Satisfaction						

Security level	.10	.10**	.10	.10**
Work	.07	.07**	n.s.	n.s.
Conditions of work	.09	.10**	.11	.09**
Personal income	.10	.10**	.11	.10**
Household income	.43	.41**	.35	.33**
Political satisfaction	.03	.11**	.03	.09**
Health	.15	.17**	.13	.15**
Block $R^2 =$.474			

Note: Dependent variable: How satisfied are you all things considered with your life as a whole these days—1 = *definitely satisfied*, 2 = *quite satisfied*, 3 = *rather dissatisfied*, 4 = *definitely dissatisfied*?
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7. Regression General Satisfaction: Belarus

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .224$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .250$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .428$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Biological						
Age	.00	.05*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .007$						
Human capital						
Education	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Employed	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = n.s.$						
Material circumstances						
Economic situation	.40	.31**	.31	.24**	.28	.21**
Basic food	-.23	-.17**	-.19	-.14**	-.18	-.13**
Amenities	-.02	-.06**	-.03	-.09**	-.03	-.10**
Block $R^2 = .165$						
Social context						
Married	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Social resource index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.07*
Personal support index	-.09	-.13**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Friend confide in	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

Trust people	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Trust government index	.03	.11*	.03	n.s.	n.s.	.10*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Trust institutions index	.03	.12**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Active in organization	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .076$												
Social control												
Personal control scale	.17	.18**	.11	.12**	.10	.11**	.10	.11**	.10	.10	.10**	.10**
Freedom of choice and control	-.16	-.18**	-.11	-.12**	-.09	-.10**	-.09	-.10**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Freedom index	.03	.08**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .084$												
Health												
Self-reported health	.21	.22**			.10	.11**	.10	.11**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Psycho-social health scale	.21	.23**			.13	.14**	.13	.14**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Limiting long-term health problem	n.s.	n.s.			n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .103$												
Satisfaction												
Security level	n.s.	n.s.								n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Work	.15	.15**								.13	.13**	.13**
Conditions of work	.10	.10**								.08	.09*	.09*
Personal income	n.s.	n.s.								n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Household income	.42	.42**								.36	.36**	.36**

(continued)

Table 7. (continued)

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .224$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .250$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .428$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Political satisfaction	.02	.10**			.02	.09**
Health	.12	.13**			n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .404$						

Note: Dependent variable: How satisfied are you all things considered with your life as a whole these days—1 = *definitely satisfied*, 2 = *quite satisfied*, 3 = *rather dissatisfied*, 4 = *definitely dissatisfied*.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 8. Regression Subjective Well-Being: Moldova

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .398$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .448$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .555$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Biological						
Age	.02	.26**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender	.16	.06*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .071$						
Human capital						
Education	-.14	-.15**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Employed	-.35	-.12**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .048$						
Material circumstances						
Economic situation	.88	.50**	.71	.40**	.61	.34**
Basic food	-.17	-.09**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Amenities	-.05	-.11**	-.04	-.08**	-.04	-.07**
Block $R^2 = .306$						
Social context						
Married	-.48	-.16**	-.23	-.08**	-.21	-.07**
Social resource index	-.12	-.10**	-.07	-.06*	n.s.	n.s.
Personal support index	-.15	-.15**	-.07	-.07*	n.s.	n.s.
Friend confide in	.21	.07*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

(continued)

Security level	.12	.07**	.11	.07**
Work	.17	.11**	n.s.	n.s.
Conditions of work	.18	.11**	.15	.09**
Personal income	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Household income	.66	.37**	.44	.24**
Political satisfaction	.06	.11**	.05	.09**
Health	.43	.27**	.24	.16**
Block $R^2 =$.474			

Note: Dependent variable: Scale computed from general happiness and general satisfaction: 1 = highest level satisfaction, 7 = most dissatisfied.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 9. Regression Subjective Well-Being: Belarus

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .304$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .367$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .488$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Biological						
Age	.01	.15**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender	.29	.10**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .035$						
Human capital						
Education	-.12	-.12**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Employed	-.18	-.06*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .023$						
Material circumstances						
Economic situation	.75	.35**	.58	.27**	.50	.23**
Basic food	-.39	-.17**	-.26	-.11**	-.23	-.10**
Amenities	-.05	-.11**	-.04	-.09**	-.05	-.10**
Block $R^2 = .221$						
Social context						
Married	-.41	-.14	-.32	-.11**	-.31	-.10**
Social resource index	-.10	-.08*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Personal support index	-.20	-.17**	-.10	-.08**	-.10	-.09**
Friend confide in	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
					-.36	-.12**
					n.s.	n.s.
					-.08	-.07*
					n.s.	n.s.

Trust people	.11	.07*	.13	.08**	.09	.06*	n.s.	n.s.
Trust government index	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Trust institutions index	.05	.10*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Active in organization	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .113$								
Social control								
Personal control scale	.42	.32**	.27	.17**	.22	.14**	.20	.13**
Freedom of choice and control	-.23	-.16**	-.19	-.13	-.14	-.10**	n.s.	n.s.
Freedom index	.05	.07*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Block $R^2 = .115$								
Health								
Self-reported health	.62	.40**			.40	.25**	.22	.14**
Psycho-social health scale	.32	.21**			.22	.15**	n.s.	n.s.
Limiting long-term health problem	n.s.	n.s.			n.s.	n.s.	-.20	-.07*
Block $R^2 = .205$								
Satisfaction								
Security level	n.s.	n.s.					n.s.	n.s.
Work	.31	.19**					.27	.16**
Conditions of work	n.s.	n.s.					n.s.	n.s.
Personal income	n.s.	n.s.					n.s.	n.s.
Household income	.55	.34**					.41	.25**

(continued)

Table 9. (continued)

Variable	Model 1 ($R^2 = .304$)		Model 2 ($R^2 = .367$)		Model 3 ($R^2 = .488$)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Political satisfaction	n.s.	n.s.			.04	.10**
Health	.47	.31			.19	.13**
Block $R^2 = .418$						

Note: Dependent variable: Scale computed from general happiness and general satisfaction: 1 = highest level satisfaction, 7 = most dissatisfied.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

material circumstances clearly has the most influence on general satisfaction, models 1 and 2 provide evidence that people's satisfaction with their financial situation is influenced by their actual material circumstances as well as by health, social control (especially personal control), and social context (most notably trust in government and other political institutions).

Tables 8 and 9 show the results of the regression analysis with well-being as the dependent variable. Whilst there are some differences in the influences on well-being between the two countries, the similarities are striking. The main variables influencing well-being are material circumstances, health (especially self-reported health), social context (marriage, the personal support scale), social control (the personal control), and satisfaction (satisfaction with financial circumstances). There is clear evidence that the resources over which people have command and the personal support they have in their daily lives are major factors influencing their well-being.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is the importance of multivariate models in enabling us to understand the main influences on happiness and satisfaction. The analysis demonstrates that while the main influences on happiness are health, financial circumstances, and personal support, the main influences on general satisfaction are evaluation of material circumstances and actual material circumstances. The added value of combining the two variables is that we can get a more complete understanding of how overall well-being is influenced—how people feel and how they evaluate their situation. We can see from the combined models the importance of material circumstances, health, and social control in both countries, together with people's evaluation of their financial situation and personal support, including marriage.

Discussion and conclusions

Five main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis:

- First, well-being is influenced by more than economic factors, even in societies where economic security is a major concern. Other important

influences are being in good health, feeling in control of one's life, having strong personal support, and trusting people.

- Second, both actual material circumstances and satisfaction with financial circumstances influence well-being.
- Third, influences on happiness and general satisfaction are not identical. In particular, satisfaction with one's financial circumstances has much less impact on happiness than on general satisfaction and health status a greater influence on happiness than on general satisfaction, thus confirming the added value of constructing a well-being scale and tapping into nonidentical domains.
- Fourth, the analysis supports the need to consider both objective and subjective domain variables to come to an understanding of the influences on the welfare of citizens and their ability to act to secure socially valued goals. Lived experience—how people evaluate their circumstances—significantly influences well-being, although actual material and other circumstances do so as well.
- Fifth, in societies that have undergone sudden and dramatic negatively perceived economic and political change, perceived and actual financial security are major influences on well-being, and other variables that influence well-being are not only themselves influenced by material circumstances but at best are probably acting as buffers that provide some support in a society where a majority of the population has been negatively affected by social change and where this has resulted in widespread economic hardship. It is likely that a majority of citizens are unable to act to secure their welfare and achieve socially valued goals.

There is evidence that the post-1991 economic and political changes are perceived negatively by a majority of the people of both countries. Economic hardship is reported as being the norm, levels of trust in political and other institutions are low, and there is a feeling of a lack of control over life in general. This is reflected in the comparatively high levels of dissatisfaction. What is perhaps surprising is the number of people who are apparently *generally* satisfied (41.3 percent in Moldova and 59.5 percent in Belarus) and happy with the way things are (57.5 percent in Moldova and 71.1 percent in Belarus) despite low levels of satisfaction with the political and economic situation, and this suggests that there may be a need to do qualitative work to get below people's accounts to the "real" stories.³² (Qualitative work carried out in Belarus as well as in other post-Soviet societies would support this and suggest that levels of satisfaction and happiness are probably overestimated by the survey data.³³)

Two further points are worthy of note. The first is that the Belarusians report greater general satisfaction and happiness than the Moldovans. This points to the importance of incorporating place (social and geographical) in social research³⁴ and, in the case of post-Soviet societies, recognizing that the post-1991 changes have not taken identical form and consequently have not had the same impact on the populations of the different countries that have emerged. Explanations for the differences do appear to be related to the severity of the economic impact of the transition. Second, it must be recognized that it is difficult to measure the economic circumstances of households in post-Soviet societies, given both the range of sources of income and the reliance of many households mainly or in part of the produce of their plots of land. In this situation it should be recognized that the combination of the influence of subjective and more objective material influences on happiness and, especially, general satisfaction might be a strong indicator of the “real” influence of material circumstances.

Appendix

Composition of Scale Variables

Satisfaction with Political Development

Democracy developing
Economy developing
Education system
“Social security” system
Health service
Government performs duties in National Office
Local authorities solving region’s affairs

Cronbach’s alpha: Moldova .75, Belarus .85

Freedom Index

Say what I think
Join any organization I like
Travel freely anywhere I want

Cronbach’s alpha: Moldova .66, Belarus .64

Trust Government Index

President of country
National government
National parliament
Regional government
Political parties

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova 0.86, Belarus 0.92

Trust Institutions

Courts
Police
Army
Trade unions

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova .75, Belarus .78

Social Resource Index

Someone to rely on if feeling depressed
Someone to rely on if need help finding a job
Someone to rely on if need to borrow money to pay urgent bill

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova .70, Belarus .79

Personal Support Index

Someone can really count on to listen when you need to talk
Someone can really count on to help you out in a crisis
Someone you can totally be yourself with
Someone you feel appreciates you as a person
Someone can really count on to comfort you when upset

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova .92, Belarus .93

Basic Amenities

Cold water
Hot water
Toilet
Bathroom
Kitchen

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova .81, Belarus .86

Malaise Factors—Rotated Matrix

	Psychosocial Health Scale	Personal Control Scale
Percentage variance explained	24.03	17.52
Unable to concentrate	.52	.30
Insomnia	.65	.07
Felt under constant strain	.62	.28
Felt could not overcome difficulties	.45	.47
Unable to enjoy normal daily activities	.17	.73
Often shaking and trembling	.69	.10
Frightening thoughts	.58	.20
Get spells of exhaustion/fatigue	.54	.21
Feeling of stress	.64	.15
Feeling lonely	.43	.23
Dissatisfaction with work	.01	.77
Impossible to influence things	.34	.60
Life is too complicated	.27	.52
Losing confidence in self	.44	.37

Components

U = UC + I + CS + OD - DA + CS + ST + FT + EF + FS + FL - DW - IT - LC

U = UC - PI - CS + OD + DA + CS - ST - FT - EF - FS + FL + DW + IT + LC

Well-being Index

General satisfaction
Happiness

Cronbach's alpha: Moldova .63, Belarus .59

Note: The author will supply details of the factor analysis for the scales on request.

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