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**THE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF
CHILDREN**

Ph.D. Thesis Summary

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
PART I THEORETICAL FRAME	17
CHAPTER I. CHILDREN, CHILDHOOD AND CHILD WELL- BEING RESEARCH	17
1.1. CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS (CHILD, CHILDHOOD).....	18
1.2. CHILD WELL-BEING AND CHILD POSITION IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY	21
1.3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES.....	23
1.3.1. <i>Traditional sociological theories</i>	23
1.3.2. <i>The new sociology of childhood</i>	27
1.3.3. <i>The model of the child well-being based on his rights</i>	28
CHAPTER II. QUALITY OF LIFE AND CHILD WELL-BEING.....	34
2.1. SOCIAL INDICATORS OF THE CHILD WELL-BEING – BRIEF HISTORY.....	35
2.2. OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL INDICATORS.....	43
2.3. PARADIGM CHANGE IN THE FIELD OF CHILD WELL- BEING.	48
2.4. QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELL-BEING – CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION.....	52
2.5. INDEXES AND INDICATORS SYSTEMS IN MEASURING CHILD WELL-BEING.....	68
2.6. THE PRESENT STATE IN KNOWLEDGE ON THE CHILDREN’S QUALITY OF LIFE AND THEIR WELL-BEING IN ROMANIA.....	79
CHAPTER III. SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING – KEY COMPONENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE	86
3.1. DEFINITION AND STRUCTURE.....	86
3.2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND DOMAINS OF THE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING.....	91

3.3. COGNITIVE COMPONENT OF THE SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING – LIFE SATISFACTION.....	94
3.4. TRADITIONS IN STUDYING SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING. HEDONIC <i>VERSUS</i> EUDAIMONIC.....	95
3.5. EXPLANATORY THEORIES OF THE SUBJECTIVE WELL- BEING.....	99
3.6. MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING.....	107
3.7. EVALUATING INSTRUMENTS OF THE CHILD SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING.....	113
3.8. DETERMINANTS OF CHILD SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING.....	120
PART II EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	137
CHAPTER IV. SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN.	
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	137
4.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH.....	138
4.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES.....	143
4.3. PRELIMINARY STUDY.....	151
4.4. INTERNATIONAL ISCW _e B QUESTIONNAIRE ADAPTATION AND TESTING TO THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT.....	152
4.5. RESEARCH POPULATION AND THE SAMPLE OF INVESTIGATED SUBJECTS.....	155
4.6. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH AND THE DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE.....	161
CHAPTER V. SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN.	
MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND DATA	
INTERPRETATION.....	164
5.1. VARIABLES DESCRIPTION AND CONSTRUCTION. ANALYSIS OF THE WELL-BEING STRUCTURE.....	166
5.1.1. <i>Independent variables.....</i>	166
5.1.2. <i>Dependent variables synthetically constructed – psychometric scales and indexes of children’s well-being.....</i>	166

5.1.3. <i>Analysis of the relationships between scales and items, respectively between the scales and the most important aspects and domains of the children's lives</i>	208
5.1.4. <i>Dependent variables analytically constructed –factors description</i>	217
5.1.5. <i>Relationship between indexes, psychometric scales and the factors of the children's well-being</i>	236
5.2. TESTING HYPOTHESES.....	240
5.3. OTHER RELEVANT RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH.....	296
5.4. SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS.....	302
CONCLUSIONS	313
ORIGINAL RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS.....	322
LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	322
REFERENCES	327
LIST OF TABLES	359
LIST OF FIGURES	364
APPENDICES	368

Key words: well-being, children, subjective well-being, children's quality of live, indicators, psychometric scales, instruments for measuring children's subjective well-being, International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB).

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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

This study belongs to one of the most current topics debated in the international academic field dedicated to children – child well-being. By way of analysis of the subjective dimension of children's well-being this study adopts a new perspective within the Romanian context.

The motivation behind this study is due on one hand to my analysis of existing research on the quality of Romanian children's well-being and on the other hand it is due to my previous participation in an exploratory research on the Romanian children's quality of life. I came to the conclusion that the current research topic represents something new to the Romanian scientific community which is more advanced in the field of measuring adult's well-being than that of the children.

Also, I believe that there is great potential for the development of this field of research within academia and the community of specialists working with and for children, as well as for those involved in socio-political policy making.

Over the last few years, there was a growing heightened interest on the part of social researchers for the assessment and monitoring of children's quality of life based on objective indicators such as those gleaned from statistical data as well as by employing subjective well-being indicators (based on children's own experiences as described by them) leading to the development of newer and more effective instruments for measuring this dimension of children's lives. Children's well-being could not be well understood without the inclusion of their own perceptions and evaluations of their lives (Casas, 2004) and measurements reflecting positive aspects of their lives (Huebner, 1991a; Moore&Theokas, 2008).

Within the last few years developed countries performed large scale surveys constituting important sources of comparative information relative to children's well-being in accordance with different social and cultural contexts (Adamson, 2007; Bradshaw et al., 2007a; Richardson et al., 2008; Chaple&Richardson, 2009; Lau&Bradshaw, 2009).

Current research on the subjective well-being of children is performed mostly in OECD countries, central and east-European countries such as Romania having a smaller contribution to this field.

Studies indicate two major impediments within this field of research, one being a consequence of the other: "The lack of internationally comparable subjective data on children's and adolescent's well-being at the macro level enabling a comparative approach

and the lack of political importance given to the younger population's point of view " (Casas, 2011, p.555). A number of authors highlighted the existing lack of trust regarding the validity and precision of measurements of the indicators originating from children (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Casas, 2011) as well as their fragility and the difficulties encountered in interpreting them. The above constitute debate issues within research performed on adults as well (Veenhoven, 2002), although the subjective well-being reflected by how people feel and think about their own lives is considered by Diener & Suh (1998) as a complement to social and economic indicators, as one of the most important methods for the evaluation of the quality of life across different societies (apud Diener et al., 2003).

Other authors (for instance, Chaple&Richardson, 2009), notice the existence of a certain amount of skepticism relative to children's ability to answer questions regarding their subjective well-being and also that the applicability in policy-making of such subjectivity measurements is still less explored, although important steps are taken in this direction: the latest children's subjective well-being report by UNICEF contains links between subjective indicators and the domains pertaining to objective indicators of children's well-being. The latter is an indication that social policy and the policy-makers have a significant contribution to creating happy lives for children (Bradshaw et al., 2013).

A growing number of experts in the field suggest the need for a research framework within the children's well-being domains to be developed from the children's perspective inclusive of children's subjective perceptions as a contributing factor to the study of children's well-being, and that such information being accepted and valorized, that is transformed into social indicators that could inform and guide the development of social policy to the betterment of childhood (Ben-Arieh&Goerge, 2006; Frønes, 2007; Coulton et al., 2009 Casas, 2011).

This study entitled "The Subjective Well-Being of Children" follows the methodology laid out by the international study of the children's subjective well-being "Children's Worlds" (ISCWeB, 2010), which was originated and developed by the International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) with the purpose of providing a wider image of children's well-being on a global scale by the inclusion of subjective indicators.¹

¹ In Romania the above mentioned international research has been launched and coordinated by Dr. Sergiu Bălătescu, University of Oradea.

The purpose of my research is to provide a contextual understanding of everyday life of sixth grade schoolchildren (a general outlook as perceived by the children themselves) from the Cluj county by measuring their own perceptions and evaluations of various life domains: their own person, family, friends, wealth, school, health, social connections, rights, extracurricular or leisure time activities etc., also, to identify the level of the well-being of the above mentioned children , and also of certain specific aspects and factors responsible for the dynamics of children's perception of their own well-being.

Furthermore, the **general objective** of the study is outlining and clarifying the concept of children's well-being emphasizing the subjective dimension, by bringing to light the links and relationships existing between various subjective well-being indicators within the Romanian context as evinced by the children themselves and also the augmentation of the awareness of the importance of using such indicators within the research with children and in creating a system of indicators for the assessment and monitoring of children's well-being in Romania.

This study adopted a synthetic perspective in regard to the construction of the children's well-being concept with the emphasis on the subjective dimension – the cognitive component – the evaluation of children’s life satisfaction level. Using the results obtained on the representative sample of children in the sixth grade from Cluj county, this study attempts to bridge subjective well-being theories, the factors with which the preceding are associated to within the context of the sample and the results obtained internationally up to date within the field. As such, this study could be used as a reference point for further research.

The first specific objective of the research in this study is theoretical: finding markers for scientific knowledge within the spheres of sociology and psychosociology on the subjects of quality of life and well-being of children. To this end, this study will critically analyze the concepts of child and childhood as specific period of human life, the condition of the child within family and society, child well-being concept, the key domains and indicators from the perspective of current research within the field.

This first objective entailed making a synthesis of the results of Western European and US based research as well as those existing in Romania in relationship with the main theoretical and methodological directions explaining the way complex factors (such as psychological, social, cultural and political) determine children’s quality of life and well-being . The modalities of interplay between objective and subjective indicators of children’s well-being presented in current international research are also scrutinized.

Given the complex nature and the diverse domains that constitute the concept of well-being, the **second specific objective** of this study is a theoretical analysis of the concept of subjective well-being, its key components (cognitive and affective), domains and characteristics, the traditions in which it is rooted and also the theories attempting to explain it, specifically those which, according to some researchers show a certain degree of practical value in the study of child well-being. The domains being emphasized and the corresponding indicators relative to children's well-being are those present in the internationally published materials. My purpose here is a synthesis of the main lines of research of children's subjective well-being with a view to quantitative analysis and the tools involved (both, the scales designed from the beginning for the study of children's well-being and the scales adapted for use with children designed originally for adults). Also, this study will introduce some of the factors (correlates) which have importance in determining children's subjective well-being (with the focus on the social and psychosocial ones) as presented in the main synthesis published internationally.

The third specific objective of this study is the operationalization of the child subjective child well-being concept by defining and identifying subjective domains and indicators for the representative sample of 1591 children in sixth grade from Cluj county. As part of the third specific objective I am presenting by way of using the data provided by the international research tool of ISCWeB an overall view of children's life satisfaction (happiness) and optimal developmental environment related dimensions and indicators. The focus is to identify in this sample the factors associated with children's subjective well-being together with the most important aspects and domains as constituents of the structure of children's subjective well-being by testing the way in which the four different psychometric scales from the research tool operate with the surveyed children. These scales are the Overall Life Satisfaction Scale (OLS), Student Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS developed by Huebner, 1991b), Personal Well-Being Index (by Cummins et al., 2003a, PWI8 version adapted for children) and Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS developed by Seligson et al., 2003).

Additionally, the focus here is to test the functionality of the General Index of Domains Satisfaction (GIDS), calculated as the average of eight indices (representing eight different life satisfaction domains: home and family, material things, interpersonal relationships, neighborhood (area living in), health, time management, school environment and personal satisfaction. I am mentioning the fact that the psychometric scales within the

questionnaire excepting the PWI and OLS scales were never used in Romania on samples of children and adolescents prior to my study although they were used in a number of countries abroad. Validating these scales in the Romanian context would become a priority to my scientific endeavors for the future.

Within this study I will also provide a comparative analysis of children's well-being based on the children's home and school environment (urban and rural). Also, the relationship between subjective well-being indicators from the questionnaire and demographic, psychosocial and economic data available on the children will be examined. Based on the analysis of the relationship between indicators described above applied to a specific set of children, special cases may be identified such as deprived, neglected or simply vulnerable children within their respective families, peer group, school, local community to which they belong (ecological data) or as individuals (personal data).

The fourth specific objective of this study is testing (a first in Romania) the General Index of Children's Subjective Well-Being (GICSWB). This index combines three scales: two psychometric scales frequently used within the international community (OLS and SLSS5) and the General Index of Domains Satisfaction (GIDS). The developers of the GICSWB built on the necessity for a synthetic instrument for the measurement of children well-being in order to overcome the discrepancies (shortcoming) following the use of the psychometric scales with children of different cultural backgrounds. Researchers have not yet discovered the source of the aforementioned discrepancies. The purpose of this synthetic and multidimensional index is simple: to obtain a general classification of levels of children's subjective well-being across cultural boundaries (Casas&Bello, 2012) and also to be able to be used alongside other instruments fitted to a system of indicators for the children's subjective well-being (Casas et al., 2013c).

Both instruments, the GIDS and GICSWB were developed by Professor Ferran Casas at University of Girona, Spain, the Institute for Research on Quality of Life. It is worth mentioning that last year (2012) these research instruments have been first tested on a representative sample of children (N=5934) of the same age (12 years old) and from the same cohort in Spain. The novelty brought by this doctoral dissertation consists in the use in Romania of these instruments on a representative sample (N=1591) of sixth grade schoolchildren in Cluj county and subsequent analysis and presentation of the results. These instruments and the accompanying method are innovative and easy to use by the researchers who wish to work in this field in our country.

The fifth specific objective for this study is achieved by analytically exploring the collected data by way of using advanced statistical methods (such as factorial analysis). The purpose of the analysis is to clarify the structure of children's perceptions and evaluations of their own well-being by comparing the synthetic subjective well-being indicators and the resulting factors yielded by the children's answers. Also, the hypotheses of this research study are tested with both the synthetic indicators (the psychometric scales and the indices constructed according to the model described by the specialty literature) as well as with the analytic indicators (the factors of subjective well-being).

Attaining these **five specific objectives** of this work was done by structuring it into two main sections: the first main section has three chapters and their corresponding subchapters. These chapters describe the theoretical framework involving children and childhood with respect to the domain of their overall well-being and provide an overview of the vast field of children's well-being and quality of life by synthesizing the main frameworks and current tendencies existing in the international arena as well as in Romania while in the end the focus will shift to subjective well-being as a critical component of the concept of quality of life.

The second main section includes the empirical research organized into two ample chapters describing the adaptation and the implementation within the Romanian context of the ISCWeb questionnaire and the testing of a set of instruments for measuring the subjective well-being designed for use by researchers in the field of child well-being. The results yielded by testing the representative sample of schoolchildren of sixth grade from Cluj county are discussed here.

The first chapter entitled "Children, childhood and child well-being research" performs a critical analysis of the concepts of child and childhood as a specific segment of time of human life, the condition of the child within the family and society with a view toward the dimension of quality of life and well-being. The presentation of the main theoretical and methodological directions explaining the way in which different complex factors (psychological, social, cultural and normative, etc.) determine and influence children's quality of life and well-being respectively are contained in this chapter. The theoretical framework referred to in this chapter include the ecological theories of child development, the social capital theory, the new sociology of childhood and the normative framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The reference to the theoretical framework of ecological theories of child development within the discussion of its subjective well-being necessitates taking into account the entire ecological system within the child is developing and guides our understanding of how the multiplicity of factors the child interacts with impacts its well-being. I am also presenting the use of the social capital theory to explore child well-being as an appropriate and useful way to facilitate the understanding of the interactions and relationships between the child and its family and between the child and the community; both family and the surrounding community have a major impact on life domains and development of the child. The study of the aforementioned theories highlights the need for a multidimensional approach to child well-being.

Considering children's perspectives, listening to children, to accord importance to children's participation and their contribution to society, to valorize their competencies while understanding childhood as a product of history, society and culture represent ideas promoted by the new sociology of childhood and the normative framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These principles are the basic pillars of the studies investigating children in an unmediated way, the development of new quantitative and qualitative methodologies and research models so as to access children's interpretations and their points of view. Therefore, the questionnaire based survey methodology applied to children and used by the international project ISCWeB could not be discussed independently of the theoretical and methodological context originating it that is, placing children centrally within the research of their well-being by eliciting children's points of view, opinions and perceptions upon their own lives and well-being and valorizing these subjective views within social policymaking.

Researchers that adopted the new sociology of childhood (Qvortrup, 1987; James & Prout 2005; Jenks, 2005) criticize the biologizing (reduction to biological functions and behavior) and psychological perspectives of the child and childhood while also critiquing a number of the main paradigms of sociology such as those centered upon the socializing function of the family and the analysis of educational systems and other paradigms not according sufficient importance to children's own experiences. Smith (2007) is suggesting the need for rethinking traditionally held points of view (those deeming the needs of children and their age as decisive factors to their behavior and development while emphasizing their lack of knowledge and experience) of children and childhood by researchers, professionals working with children and political decision makers.

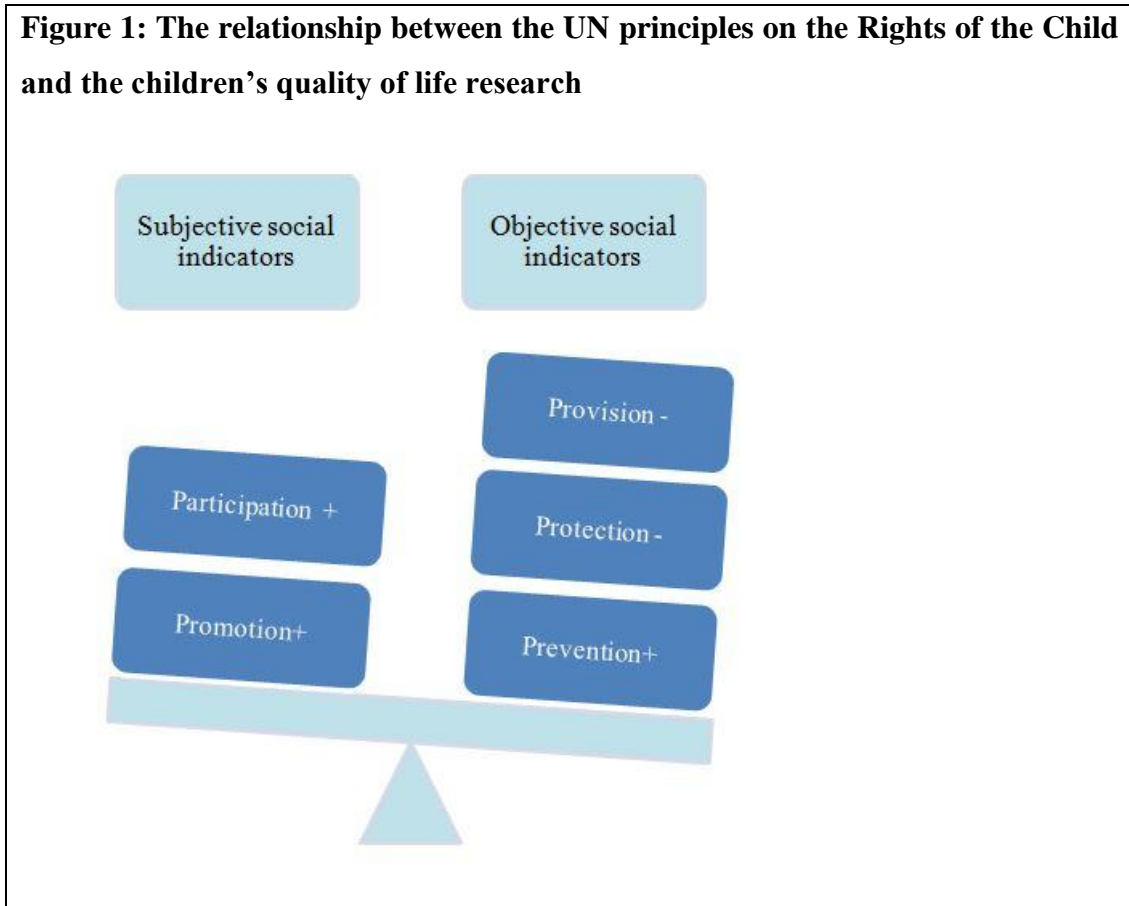
The new sociology of childhood and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child advocate a framework within which new solutions could be found to the problems confronting children by changing the paternalistic view which held the view of children as simple recipients to solutions and by which children were never consulted much less involved in the design of solutions, situation which led to implementing solutions that in many instances did not accord with children's needs. The new approach starts first and foremost by accepting the role of children as *socially active subjects participating in the society where they live*, whereby it determines the reorganization of identities, the sense of belonging, of relationships and activities, consequently allowing children's potentialities to develop (Zambrano et al., 1997).

A number of authors indicate that there is a gap between theory and the implementation of these principles and theories mostly due to the fact that the social image of adults on childhood differs from the view propounded by international legislative frameworks. Consequently, there is not much change in the political and social spheres regarding the subjects of children and childhood. The prevailing view of children as recipients of solutions had and still has a negative impact on the field of studies of children's well-being as well. The above came to be recognized as a significant methodological problem in the investigation of children's quality of life and well-being that endured for years (the view that did not take into account children's point of view) much like the misuse of the concept quality of life which should include by definition, the *perceptions, evaluations and aspirations* of the children being investigated and not, as currently in practice, adults being asked about what they think of the lives and needs of their children (Casas, 2011). Research has shown that children's participation in research studies not only acknowledges their competence of providing valid information regarding their lives but also makes them partners in utilizing the resulting data (Ben-Arieh, 2005).

Juxtaposing the principles of the normative framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which regulates the rights of the child and the research on the quality of life of the child (Figure 1) highlighted the fact that by acknowledging and applying these principles would allow an evaluation of the deficiencies or the negative aspects of the lives of children with the goal of Prevention as well as the positive aspects of children's lives, that is the evaluation of the degree of happiness of children, the right to happiness being the synthesis of all rights of the child. The Principle of Promotion (development, growth, progress) alongside Participation implies the existence of a number of subjective child well-

being indicators some of which are: “the points of view of children on issues that impacts them as citizens, the evaluation of various aspects of their lives, the satisfaction with the services provided to them, the perception of their rights, values they consider to be important, their attitude towards adults and institutions” (Casas, 2011, p. 568). The adoption of this positive view is truly critical for a complete and complex approach to the lives of children.

Figure 1: The relationship between the UN principles on the Rights of the Child and the children’s quality of life research



Own elaboration based on Casas, 2004 and Casas, 2011

As a conclusion research on child well-being needs take into account a large variety of factors such as: children’s rights, the relationships of the child, environmental factors, individual factors (child potentialities, physical and mental health, emotional state, values, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations) etc. The principal ideas of chapter one are those that emphasize the need for **children’s voices to be heard** especially when it comes to their lives, without intermediaries (such as parents, teachers, relatives, friends and experts from various fields), **trusting unmediated information** coming from children regarding their own lives and well-being and **valorizing such information**. The preceding are three essential preconditions for a valid evaluation of children’s well-being and moreover these are normatively acknowledged – children are considered citizens with full rights just as adults), and also methodologically –

their voices need to be heard since they are subjects, the subjective view is essential when discussing about quality of life (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Casas et al., 2013b).

The second chapter entitled “Quality of life and child well-being” provides an immersion into the vast field of quality of life and child well-being. This chapter provides a presentation of a list of topics such as the development of the domain of social indicators for use with children, the complementarity of the two sets of indicators - the objective and subjective ones, the mode in which well-being is defined together with associated concepts, the dimensions and characteristics of the concept of well-being, the instruments currently available internationally for its measurement (indexes and systems of indicators) to be used for the assessment and monitoring of children’s well-being. The last section of this chapter is a brief overview of the current state of knowledge in the field of quality of life and child well-being in Romania.

From a historical point of view, the social indicators of children grow somehow in parallel with the social indicators of the adult population, they are reinforced and perceived as an independent domain in the late 90s, early 2000s when the Child Indicators Movement appeared. Nowadays, internationally there is a strong determination on the part of institutions and organizations for the development of complex indicators that take into account a variety of characteristics and specific factors needed for the measurement of the tendencies and changes regarding the well-being of children. Researchers emphasize the potential of these indicators for better informing and thus improving policies and programs geared toward the betterment of quality of life and well-being of children and their families (Ben-Arieh & George, 2006; Frønes, 2007; Coulton et al., 2009; Casas, 2011). In line with the above, researchers also emphasize the need for developing well-being indicators based on the actual experiences of the children (Ben Arieh et al., 2001 apud Fattore et al., 2009).

Surveying the scientific literature from the vast field of quality of life studies I noticed that in order to obtain a better view most researchers agree with using both types of indicators (objective and subjective) in their work (Zamfir et al., 1984; Cummins, 2000a; Kahn & Juster, 2000; Fahey et al., 2003; Liao, 2009) so that these could better inform policymakers on the mentality of the people, their needs, with the goal of improving their living condition (Veenhoven, 2002; Delhey, 2004) following the reviewed scientific literature.

Current literature highlights a change of perspective of the domain of child well-being whose main feature is the positive evaluation of the childhood that is, an evaluation of the degree of happiness of children.

Following the reviewed literature of the specific domain of child well-being, I noticed that the majority of research that is being done as well as the institutes dedicated to this cause are found mostly across the OECD countries and here it constitutes indeed a priority for governments to improve the well-being of children as proven by the many strategies and programs in use. In addition to governmental initiatives and the contribution of the civil society, universities and research institutes in the OECD space developed lines of study that contributed significantly to the body of knowledge in the field.

Although there are a significant number of instruments such as indexes and systems of indicators for measuring child well-being, there are only a small number of studies including subjective well-being measurements for the domains considered important in research, nationally and internationally: material well-being, home and environment, social relationships, health and healthcare, safety, education, involvement in the community, emotional and spiritual well-being. Based on the analysis of the existing studies in the field I concluded that there is a lack of a unique index for measuring children's well-being and also a lack of a culture of measuring subjective well-being, therefore it is difficult to compare groups of children from different geographical locations or different cultures, age groups etc., and it also makes it hard to notice the changes in time of the well-being of the children. In addition, there are difficulties developing and validating new measuring instruments due to gaps between the collection of the data and their availability, the inadequacy of the data to reflect the whole of children's reality (subjective and objective). The authors of the last comparative UNICEF report in the field of child well-being suggest that subjective well-being should be measured independently and not as a component of the well-being index (Adamson, 2013, p. 38).

Defining the concept of child well-being is not an easy task as proven by the multiplicity of definitions and meanings as adopted by different authors within the existing literature. This study did not attempt an exhaustive review or an in-depth analysis of these definitions however, I thought definitions are useful for achieving uniformity of meaning (uniform understanding) and this would help in our case having to do with such a controversial concept (of such a controversial concept). In total I found forty-two definitions of child well-being, and by the subsequent analysis I clarified the key elements involved and the characteristics of the concept itself. I also developed a definition of child well-being based on a few elements borrowed from other authors (Andelman et al., 1999, pp. 1400-1401;

Bradlyn & Pollock, 1996, p.49; Lindstrom, 1994 apud Andelman et al., 1999; Bradshaw et al., 2007a):

The well-being of children is a multidimensional construct which encompasses both objective and subjective data of their lives (aspirations, perceptions, personal evaluations of their own lives) including, but not limited to the child's social, physical, emotional and spiritual functioning, child's adaptability and when necessary, of his family, is sensitive to the changes that occur in the process of children development and it is influenced by environment and socio-cultural conditions. The indicators measuring this construct should take into account especially the positive dimension of these aspects, in other words the degree to which the child achieves his maximum potential.

The current priority in the field is to conceive a unified and synthetic definition of the concept of child well-being so that researchers could use it as a point of reference in their discussions.

All of the above indicate that this domain has not yet matured and that the development and systematization of the work of measuring child well-being is still an ongoing process that is, according to recent reports in the field. It will take some time until the well-being of children will become a priority both nationally and internationally.

In the case of Romania elements that are specific to its socioeconomic, political and ideological context influenced the development of this research domain and led to a diminished number of studies on quality of life and child well-being much less studies incorporating the subjective aspect of child well-being. This situation resulted in the lack of a system of standardized indicators by which periodical and timely assessments and monitoring of all the dimensions and changes of the lives of children could be made possible.

Given the state of knowledge in Romania on child well-being, its inadequacy due to the small number of studies that have been made, and a reduced number of research initiatives regarding the measurement the subjective well-being of children (Bălțătescu & Cummins, 2006; Bălțătescu, 2009a; Casas et al., 2009a; Casas et al., 2013a) I am signaling the necessity for the remediation of this situation. There is an acute need for research to be done on representative samples, integrating current knowledge of key domains of quality of life of children in a way that would involve the children in this process. Collection of data should be made not only nationally in a centralized and uniform way but *also in ways that reflect the cultural and socioeconomic differences of each region of Romania.*

Preparing the ground for the discussion involving the subjective well-being of children and of data interpretation, the **third chapter entitled “Subjective well-being – key component of quality of life”**, presents: the concept of subjective well-being, clarifies the key terms used to define it, its structure (the affective or emotional component and the cognitive component – that is satisfaction with one’s own life), the general characteristics of subjective well-being and related domains, the main historical traditions behind this research line (Hedonic/Eudaimonic) as well as the theories explaining the concept of subjective well-being which, according to the views of a number of researchers, apply to this study (the Bottom-up and Top-down theories, the Multiple Discrepancies Theory, the Homeostatic Theory), the modalities for measuring this phenomenon and finally some methodological problems. All of these facilitate the comprehension of the dynamics of this domain and the determining factors (correlates) of child well-being and also provide a justification for the study of this particular population segment.

Among the conclusions reached subsequent to the analysis of the characteristics, main historical traditions and theories of the subjective well-being is that understanding the overall domain of well-being of children necessitates taking into account both the psychological influences (genetic, personality, temperament) as well as the social ones (the condition and the role of the child within the family and society, culture, social values, the structured facilities provided for children as full citizens). It is also shown in this study that the subjective child well-being differs from that of adults not due to structural make-up, but due to specific influencing factors. Consequently, it is necessary to elaborate theories based on empirical data for this particular segment of the population and research instruments should differentiate between children and adults on the basis of: development, interests, ability, intercultural and social distinctions while providing a mechanism of integrating children’s views on well-being. Experts indicate that refining the theoretical construct above represents a precondition for the process of development of various scales for evaluating life satisfaction.

By systematizing the well-being measuring instruments, the ones made specifically for children with those adapted for use with children this study provides an overall view of the main instruments currently in use within the space of international research. The field of measurement of child well-being is still in an incipient stage therefore measurements need a rigorous evaluation: more attention should be accorded to response distortions (that is due to social desirability bias, individual child characteristics, adaptation to changes in life), of children’s evaluations (their role models, what is important for them according to their

aspirations), to enhance scale accuracy and sensitivity to better distinguish between specific child life domains. Diener (2000) does lend credence to the existence of potential problems when measuring subjective well-being. He raises the problem of bias resulting from the momentary state of the respondent or other situational factors and the phenomenon of social desirability (which could lead respondents to report they are happier than what they truly are). As such, the literature pertaining to subjective well-being accords ample space for validity testing and instrument fidelity by which this construct is evaluated. Headey in (Headey et al., 1991) suggests that a fundamental problem of subjective well-being measurement is due to the difficulty of distinguishing between the variables determining subjective well-being and those that are outcomes of the same thing.

The review of the factors influencing and determining subjective well-being is based on the synthesis research on subjective well-being of children and teenagers (Huebner, 1991a; Gilman&Huebner, 2003; Huebner, 2004; Proctor et al., 2009). The presentation of the factors contributing to the subjective well-being of children was performed in a selective way given the make-up of the chosen instrument (ISCWeB) and the objectives of this study. I have given a larger space to social and psychosocial factors influencing children's subjective well-being while I only mentioned the psychological factors that belong to child personality.

All of the aspects discussed in this chapter argue for and emphasize the importance and moreover the necessity of studying the phenomenon of child well-being.

Chapter four brings together aspects related to **research methodology**. There are a number of topics presented in this chapter, such as the purpose, objectives, the main research questions and the hypotheses, the preliminary steps taken before the implementation of the quantitative research, that is the adaptation and testing of the ISCWeB questionnaire within the Romanian context.

Given the novelty of this subject (*subjective child well-being*) to the Romanian academic sphere and the approach it takes to the domain of children's quality of life (*due to placing the children at the center of the research by allowing them to voice their concerns in an unmediated fashion, their points of view, opinions and perceptions about their own lives and well-being*) I felt persuaded to use this approach in order to offer a contextual understanding of the everyday life of schoolchildren in the sixth grade from Cluj county.

The **main research questions** are the following:

- What is the situation of child well-being in Romania based on their perceptions?

- Are these children happy (satisfied with their lives), what is their degree of happiness and what are the factors associated with their subjective well-being according to their own perceptions and evaluations?

Given this context, **the research hypotheses** are the following:

Hypothesis 1. My assumption is that the perceived material wealth influences the level of children's subjective well-being: less material wealth is being associated with a diminished subjective well-being.

Hypothesis 2. The child's family structure influences the perception of well-being.

- a. Children living with a single parent regard their well-being to be lesser than that of the other children.
- b. Brothers and sisters are associated with higher levels of satisfaction among children. This is valid in general and for the eight life domains.
- c. For children belonging to multigenerational households the level of subjective well-being is higher.

Hypothesis 3. The positive evaluation of family relationships and friendships corresponds with an increased level of general well-being and the well-being within various life domains.

Hypothesis 4. Higher levels of insecurity normally associated with urban settings and the more changes in the lives of children tend to decrease the perceived well-being.

Hypothesis 5. There is a high positive correlation between children's aspirations for materialistic values and the level of perceived well-being. Materialistic values are more important for their life satisfaction than relational values.

Hypothesis 6. My assumption is that children participating within the household, school and community would show higher levels of satisfaction and thus report higher levels of well-being.

In order to conform to the original format of the research instrument (ISCWeB, the version for twelve year old children) and in order to facilitate future comparisons with international data, I used for the most part, the original questions and scales of the questionnaire.

For the purpose of exploring the link between the material dimension (the material necessities as perceived by children) and the subjective well-being of the children, I added a few items to the existing questions on this particular domain of the questionnaire. More specifically, for question number 12 – “Which are the things you own or do not own?” I added to the four existing items (quality clothing for school, access to a computer at home,

access to the internet, cell phone) another three (family car for transportation, your own room, a desk for your personal use). Likewise, I added another set of questions – questions 10 and 11 from the questionnaire. A part of the items added to the questionnaire were adapted from research produced by The Children’s Society (Main & Pople, 2011).

The total number of questions in the questionnaire I used with the sixth grade schoolchildren in Cluj county is thirty-five. A part of the questions are in regard to objective situations of the lives of the children while the rest of the questions explore the subjective area of children’s opinion and evaluations about different aspects and domains of their lives. There are **nine major domains** that make up the research questionnaire: the self, home and family, money and material belongings, school, health, interpersonal relationships – friends and others, neighborhood, leisure time and rights.

This research was implemented in two stages. The first stage was a pilot study and it was performed in June 2011 on a sample of 200 children with ages between twelve and fourteen and this time was the first time the ISCWeB questionnaire (the twelve year old children version) was used in Romania. The results of this pilot study showed certain tendencies regarding the subjective well-being of children of the tested age group, and it also yielded information on how this questionnaire functions in the Romanian context. In other words, this stage of the research provided me with information and clarification on how to adapt the instrument to the Romanian context, the questions themselves, the difficulties encountered by children with questions and their corresponding rating scales. Also, this first survey helped clarify some of the research hypotheses.

The second stage represented the actual study and it was performed in 2012 on a representative sample of sixth grade schoolchildren in Cluj county. This stage yielded data which constituted the **primary source of information** for this research.

Chapter four also contains a description of the research population, the population of sixth grade schoolchildren chosen from public schools with the Romanian language as the main study language and schools with the Hungarian language as the main study language from Cluj county. The number of children in the representative sample is $N = 1591$ out of which 14.9% are children from schools with the Hungarian language as the main study language. The sample is representative according to the school environment (urban / rural distribution) and also to the clusters of localities (4 groups of cities in urban area and 7 commons, geographically clustered groups in rural areas). The subjects of this study are students between 11 and 14 years old. The age structure of the sample is: 8.7 % are 11 years

old (138 children), 69.6 % are 12 years old (1105 children), 19.1 % are 13 years old (303 children) and 2.7 % are 14 years old (43 children). The number of males and females is as follows: 801 males (50.4%), and 789 females (49.6 %). The mean age of the sample is 12.16 years, (standard deviation 0.601). The sample is representative for sixth grade schoolchildren of Cluj county with the margin of error being equal to $\pm 2.5\%$ (the maximum permissible error for the significance level of 0.05).

The ethical aspects of research and the data collection procedure associated with the ISCWeB are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter five entitled “Subjective Well-Being of Children. Measurement, analysis and data interpretation” is an ample chapter which presents, interprets and discusses the results of the quantitative research.

The output of the quantitative research was produced in two phases.

The first phase involved the construction and validation of the variables (the psychometric scales OLS, SLSS5, PWI8, BMSLSS and indexes GIDS and GICSWB). The next step in this stage was validity and fidelity testing for the subjective well-being measuring instruments. Subsequent to the above, the following links needed to be analyzed: between the psychometric scales of subjective well-being and the items in their composition between the scales, and between the scales and the GIDS and GICSWB indexes of subjective well-being (convergent validity). A multiple regression analysis yielded the factors (the aspects and life domains) contributing most to the explanation of the subjective well-being for the sixth grade school children from Cluj county.

The second phase involved an analytical exploration (factorial analysis with 29 variables and 66 variables) of the collected data, with the purpose of clarifying the structure of the perceptions and evaluations of well-being as reported by children, by way of comparing the synthetically constructed subjective well-being indices with the factors resulted from children’s answers.

The six hypotheses of the research were subsequently tested by using the subjective child well-being measurement instruments and the identified factors. The outcome of the preceding is that there are a number of similarities between specific factors and mechanisms involved in the dynamics of this process (cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction) for children from different economic and socio-cultural contexts as well as aspects that are specific to the structure of the well-being for children within the Romanian context.

The purpose of the authors of the psychometric scales included in the questionnaire is the measurement of life satisfaction based on a cognitive type of life evaluation in general (OLS and SLSS) and life domains evaluation (PW18 and BMSLSS). The results clearly display that the psychometric scales, with their corresponding items are statistically valid. The preceding was demonstrated through factorial analysis and through Cronbach's alpha coefficients having the results fit within the range of other studies' results, the latter using the same scales with children and adolescents from other countries (see Table 1). These scales and indices contain items covering a large spectrum of subjective well-being, and thus they are able to provide important information on the scrutinized phenomenon. In conclusion they are adequate for the measurement of the subjective well-being of twelve year old children.

The psychometric scales employed in this research demonstrated they are sensitive enough to be used for comparisons of subjective well-being of children of different life contexts reflecting various perceptions and evaluations of the environments in which children live. Multi-item scales correlate adequately to one another and also to unidimensional scales – OLS and SLSS (that measure life satisfaction). The correlation of psychometric scales (convergent validity) included in the questionnaire were identified in other research studies on children and adolescents as well, across different societies and cultures, however the point should be made that these scales tend to yield different results based on the characteristics of each sample and the socio-cultural context.

The fourth objective of this research is achieved by testing the two subjective well-being measuring instruments (the GIDS and GICSWB) which were designed based on the international theoretical model (Casas&Bello, 2012 and Casas et al., 2013c). The results for the two preceding instruments indicate adequacy in this case too, thus the possibility for these instruments to be used in future research, their results systematized and used for the purpose of making comparisons nationally and internationally.

Life domains satisfaction is an important dimension of the subjective child well-being. Among the eight life domains that are part of the GIDS index, the domains that seem to have most relevance for children are *home and family*, *material things* and *health* whereas the domains proven to be least satisfying are *neighborhood (area living in)* and *school*.

The testing of the general index of children's subjective well-being (GICSWB) with the sample used in this study has proven once more the explanatory potential of each scale in the composition of this index (GIDS, OLS, SLSS5). The data yielded by this study corroborates the data yielded by the recent research performed in Spain (Casas et al., 2013c)

which makes it clear that notwithstanding their child status, children are able discriminate between the values attributed to different scales and therefore researchers should consider their answers reliable. This can be seen in Table 1 by following the scores by intervals corresponding to various instruments.

Table 1: Synthesis of the results obtained by psychometric scales and indexes of children’s subjective well-being

Indices of life satisfaction	Mean	St. Dev.	Low score (below 50)	Average score (50-89,9)	High score (90-99,9)	Maxim. score (100)	Cronbach’s alpha
OLS	93,2	14,25	1,3%	12,4%	20,0%	66,4%	—
SLSS5	83,0	16,30	2,9%	48,9%	24,9%	23,2%	0,830
PWI8	89,6	10,90	0,6%	34,7%	50,7%	13,9%	0,785
BMSLSS	90,9	11,13	0,8%	27,2%	49,0%	23,0%	0,705
GIDS	89,1	10,09	0,7%	38,3%	57,7%	3,4%	0,871
GICSWB	88,5	11,40	1,2%	42,5%	54,2%	2,1%	0,771

A general trait of the children from the sample as shown by the output of the empirical research is that they are satisfied with their lives to a high degree. This high degree of life satisfaction of the Romanian children reinforces the results of various studies performed on children and adolescents belonging to different cultures showing a positive outlook on life. The preceding is essential for a person to be able to function individually and within the society.

The level of subjective well-being (life satisfaction) of Romanian children in the sample, as revealed by the psychometric scales and the indexes used in this study, is slightly higher than that of children and adolescents belonging to countries better developed economically. This is indicated also by the few comparative research studies done internationally that included Romanian children (Casas et al., 2009a; Casas et al., 2013a). Researchers suggest various reasons for the situation above: some argue psychological reasons invoking homeostatic theory, others indicate sociological reasons (parents tend to protect their children sheltering them from the relative material hardship prevalent in Romania and thus children experience better health, safety and security, in short a better living standard than that of their parents) while still others believe that there is no need for the

homeostatic theory or any other theory to explain the high levels of subjective well-being as reported by children and adolescents because, they argue, this specific age is characterized by happiness as it must have always been. The researchers and adults in general did not know this because they did not ask children about their subjective well-being, as the studies in this field were very recent. Future research will surely explore further this topic.

There were no significant differences between boys and girls for subjective well-being measured by three psychometric scales (the OLS, PWI8 and BMSLSS) and the two indexes of well-being (GIDS and GICSWB). The exception is the SLSS5 scale which revealed significant gender based differences, the boys subjects reporting a higher average than their girls counterparts.

There were however, a number of differences in the answers provided by boys and girls subjects on the twenty-nine items of satisfaction with life domains: girls are more content regarding issues concerning school, relationships and environment while boys are content with themselves, the ways they spend their time and things they achieved.

Significant differences between the both sexes are found with the following items: “the school you go to”, “your school marks”, “the local police in your area”, for which girls report significantly higher numbers than boys and for the items: “the way you look”, “how you use your time”, “the things you want to be good at”, “your self-confidence”, for which boys report significantly higher scores than girls.

By comparing the average scores for the scales and the indexes of subjective well-being I identified a first set of factors associated with lower levels of well-being within the sample (rural environments, single parent households, households having more than two generations, families having many children). I deem these results to bear significance within the Romanian context.

By using multiple regression analysis were identified the factors (the aspects and life domains) contributing most to the subjective well-being of the sixth grade schoolchildren from Cluj county.

When the dependent variable was overall life satisfaction (OLS), three items scored the highest β coefficient: “yourself”, “what you do in your free time” and “your opportunities in life”. For the dependent variable life satisfaction (SLSS5), the items with the highest β coefficient were: “all the things you have”, “your opportunities in life” and “how safe you feel”. Using the PWI8 scale (which contains eight life domains) as dependent variable, the following items measured the highest β coefficient: “your friends” and “the area where you

live in general". In case the BMSLSS scale (contains five child life domains) represents the dependent variable the highest β coefficient items are: "other children in your class", "the school you go to", "all the things you have" and "your relationships with people in general".

On the basis of existing literature on research involving adults I assumed that the **domains** considered important for the individual will have a greater influence on life satisfaction, thus for twelve year old children, "personal satisfaction", "satisfaction with their families" and "interpersonal relationships satisfaction" (friends, schoolmates) are the most important things. The "personal satisfaction" domain is most important in explaining life satisfaction (the OLS and SLSS5), but also for satisfaction measured by multidimensional scales for different life domains (PWI8 and BMSLSS). The domain of "interpersonal relationships satisfaction" displays a high explanatory power within the PWI8 and BMSLSS scales. To the BMSLSS scale, also "school related satisfaction" contributes with a high β coefficient.

Also, the domains, "school related satisfaction", "satisfaction with time management" and "material things" help significantly in explaining life satisfaction as measured by the OLS and SLSS5 scales.

Since there is not a general consensus by the authors in the field, on the number of domains that should make up the construct of subjective child well-being, future research need explore which life satisfaction domain should be part of the instruments measuring the well-being of children and adolescents.

By analytically exploring the collected data using statistical methods (factorial analysis) and comparing the synthetic subjective well-being indices with the factors obtained from children's answers, I sought a clarification of children's structure of perceptions and their evaluations of well-being.

Building the eight life domain satisfaction indices based on the international model (Casas&Bello, 2012), twenty-nine variables of the questionnaire were used. By performing a 29 variable factorial analysis, eight life domain satisfaction factors were subsequently established and named: time management and opportunities (TMO), home and family (HF), personal satisfaction (PS), environment (EN), safety and activities (SA), interpersonal relationships (IR), satisfaction with school (SS), school performance (SP).

The correlation between the eight life domain satisfaction indices synthetically constructed based on Casas's model with the eight factors resulting from the factorial analysis of twenty-nine variables indicated the commonality of the two models. This

parallelism between indices and factors shows that two factors only match two corresponding indices: the second factor – home and family (HF) matches index 1 (satisfaction with the home and family) and the sixth factor – interpersonal relationships (IR) matches index 3 (satisfaction with interpersonal relationships). Furthermore, the analysis revealed commonalities but also some notable differences between the six remaining factors with their corresponding indices. Revealed similarities are notably strong, given the fact that the indices are mutually correlated, whereas the factors are uncorrelated and thus, for the testing of the hypotheses, the eight factors were used together with the synthetically constructed index GIDS.

By factorial analysis using the 66 variable model, the general factor of subjective child well-being was identified the general factor of child well-being (GFCWB). Significant correlations were also found between the scales measuring subjective well-being and the general factor of child well-being (GFCWB), showing that the latter is nearly identical to the GICSWB index. The GFCWB factor has a nearly Gaussian distribution as compared to the GICSWB index, thus the former may be better suited than the latter for statistical testing and consequently both of them were used for hypotheses testing in this study.

Using the factors and indexes described above in future research, requires statistical work but also conceptual (completing the domains and indicators by using unmediated information provided by children within the qualitative research framework capable of exploring children's vision of their own lives and well-being).

The six research hypotheses were tested both with the synthetic indicators (the constructed scales and indexes) and the analytical indicators (the subjective well-being factors). As shown in the table below, out of six hypotheses, four were fully validated (hypotheses 1, 3, 4, 6). Also, results were partially validated or invalidated at the same time, the remaining two hypotheses (hypotheses 2 and 5).

Table 2: Synthesis of the results obtained by testing the research hypotheses (✓=Validated hypothesis ; ✗=Invalidated hypothesis)

Hypotheses	GICSWB	GIDS	GFCWB	Life satisfaction dom. (8 factors)	SLSS5	PWI8	Geographic Urb./Rur.	Result
H.1 Perceived material situation								
Material well-being index	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓Urban Rural✓	Validated
Deprivation categories	✓	✓(↓Urban Rural↑)	-		-	-	✓Urban Rural✓	Validated
H.2 Family structure								
Single parent family	✓	✓	✓	U=5 ✓3✗ R=2✓6✗	-	-	✓Urban Rural✗	Validated only in urban environment
With brothers/sisters	✓	✓	✓	U=1✓7✗ R=2✓6✗	-	-	✗Urban Rural✓	Validated only in rural environment
More than 2 generations	✗	✗	✗	U=2✓6✗ R=1✓6✗	-	-	✗Urban Rural ✗	Invalidated
H. 3 Positive rel. with family & friends								
The quality of family relationships	✓	✓	✓	8✓	-	-	-	Validated
The quality of relationships with friends	✓	✓	✓	7✓ 1✗	-	-	-	Validated
H. 4 Insecurity and changes in children's lives								
Insecurity	✓	✓	✓	8✓	-	-	✓Urban Rural✓	Validated
Changes	✓	✓	✓	7✓ 1✗	-	-	-	Validated
H.5 Children's aspirations								
Correlation between aspirations for materialistic values and subj. well-being	✗	-	-	5✓ 3✗	-	-	-	Invalidated
Materialistic values are more important than relational ones in children's life satisfaction	-	-	-	3✓ 5✗	✗	✗	-	Invalidated
H. 6 Children's participation								
Family	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	-	Validated
School	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	-	Validated
Community	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	-	Validated

This study used two methods of material well-being measurement: the material well-being index and categories of deprivation. In order to test **hypothesis 1** the correlations between these measures and subjective well-being (GFCWB, GICSWB, GIDS) were calculated. The results were the same in both cases; they show a strong positive relationship between material wealth and subjective well-being (confirming the first hypothesis). In rural environments the percentage variance of material wealth relative to overall well-being is less (3-5.4%) than in urban environments (6-9.3%).

It is noticeable that material wealth explains a relatively small part (between 5-8%, depending on which subjective well-being indicator is used) of the well-being perception, and thus it can be concluded that there is a certain number of disadvantaged children who are content with their well-being whereas there are advantaged children who are dissatisfied with their well-being. These results accord with international research performed with children as well as adults and such empirical evidence together with homeostatic theory indicate a threshold (generally, it is about satisfying basic needs) beyond which, additional income is incapable of increasing the subjective well-being. It was somewhat contrary to expectations that in a country like Romania where the poverty rate is fairly high, material wealth or income seems not to be the most important factor associated with subjective child well-being as opposed to the results yielded by studies involving adults.

Testing the relationship between family structure and the level of subjective child well-being (**the second hypothesis**) yielded the following results: the first part of the hypothesis is validated only in urban environment – children belonging to single parent households report significantly lower levels of satisfaction than children having two parents, especially in the urban environment. In rural environments, the difference between levels of well-being reported by children from single parent households and children having two biological parents is not so significant except for children living with stepparents (one natural parent only). The second part of this hypothesis assumed increased levels of satisfaction for children having siblings, however this is validated only in rural environment (urban children who don't have siblings report significantly higher levels of subjective well-being as opposed to children from rural environments). Children from households of more than two generations are less satisfied with their life than children from two generation households; the third part of the second hypothesis being invalidated by this particular result. In urban settings, the subjective well-being is significantly lower for children living in households of three or more generation families compared to children who live only with their parents. The same

significant differences are to be found in rural environments, revealed only by the general factor of child well-being (GFCWB) and domain indices (GIDS). In case of the general subjective well-being index (the GICSWB) for three generation households the average score was smaller but not significant.

The quality of family and friends relationships and household and family related satisfaction are strongly associated with the subjective well-being of the children. The positive perception of the quality of family relationships and friendship is correlated with a high level of general well-being and the well-being reported for different life domains. Thus, **hypothesis 3** is fully validated by the results with the observation that the domains home and family and school performance does not correlate with quality of friendships. The way children are treated and listened to by their parents, but also the safety, stability, optimal home conditions and the way the family functions overall are aspects that prove that the family is a major factor for child well-being. This result is in agreement with results obtained by research I mentioned in the theoretical framework as well as in the analysis and interpretive segments of this study. The well-being of children is directly linked to the well-being of their parents, therefore supporting the family, improvement and diversification of the services provided to families with children, promoting positive relationships in children's lives, are important factors for the improvement of the subjective child well-being.

For urban as well as rural settings, results confirmed that insecurity and a high frequency of changes in children's lives (for instance changes involving parents and moving constantly from house to house) are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being (**hypothesis 4**).

As was recently demonstrated by international studies (Rees et al., 2012; Casas&Bello, 2012) an important aspect influencing the subjective well-being of children is participation within the systems with which they interact (family, school, community). At family, school and community levels, participating children reported higher levels of life satisfaction (**sixth hypothesis**).

Some of the results seem to be surprising (unexpected) for this category of subjects (twelve year old children). One of these is related to children's aspirations in relation to their subjective well-being as measured by the SLSS5 and PW18 scales.

The **fifth hypothesis** assumed that there is a correlation between children's aspirations for materialistic values and their subjective well-being and that materialistic values are more important to their life satisfaction than relationships ones. The expectation was for this

hypothesis to be validated by the results, fully or at least to a high degree since statistical data shows a large number of economically disadvantaged children in our country, but it was not validated. The correlation of aspirations for materialistic values and life satisfaction proved to be very weak. Children reporting high aspirations for materialistic values indicated a satisfaction level higher than the average on only five domains out of eight life domains. Children's aspirations for relational values as opposed to aspirations for materialistic values, display a stronger correlation with life satisfaction domains included in the PWI8 scale.

This complex phenomenon of life values and subjective well-being was reported by previous international research studies mentioned in the theoretical part of this study. The results yielded by this study are in line with those studies which underline the importance of exploring children's aspirations in the subjective well-being evaluation process. These type of results enable researchers to assert that adolescents are "active agents" within families and societies and the life values they deem important for their future are intrinsic to them, therefore these values represent a key element of children's culture and their well-being and they should not be analyzed based on adult perspectives.

The identification of an increased positive relationship between the perception of children's rights and their subjective well-being is also an unexpected outcome of this study; worth mentioning is that such a precedent was set only by studies involving Spanish children (Casas&Bello, 2012; Casas et al., 2012d and 2013c). Another significant result here is the positive association between a heightened sense of subjective well-being and the frequency of children participation in extracurricular activities. Data shows the importance children accord to playing outdoors with friends, around their homes or in the neighborhood, doing sports individually or part of teams. These results may prove to be useful to those who plan academic and educational strategies in order to stimulate and facilitate children and adolescent participation in extracurricular activities, and this could lead to an increasingly positive outlook on school and schooling and the subsequent higher academic achievement.

Performing the testing of the research hypotheses yielded **two categories of results:** structural and operational. Structural results represent children's life situations that do not usually change (material wealth, family structure, environment) while operational results represent situations that can be acted upon (for instance, children's degree of participation within the family, school and within their communities; improvement of family relationships and friendships, promotion of positive social relationships within schools and extracurricular activities, supporting parenthood, etc.).

Society in general, professionals working with children and parents need to be sensitive to the factors described above, and especially the ones having negative impact on the lives and well-being of children, and these negative factors should be identified sooner, and acted upon so that situations of risk to children (poverty, divorce, certain life changes, insecurity associated with different life contexts such as home, neighborhood, school, etc.) do not materialize and endanger the functioning of the well-being maintaining mechanisms. Thus, adult interventions need to be focused on preventing situations that may engender imbalances in children's lives and reduce children's abilities to adapt to stress due to changes in their lives.

In conclusion, the subjective well-being measuring instruments (the OLS, SLSS, PWI8, BMSLSS psychometric scales and indexes GIDS and GICSWB) as well as the synthetic indicators obtained by factorial analysis (eight life domain satisfaction factors resulting from the twenty-nine variable factorial analysis, nine factors of subjective well-being of the sixty-six variable analysis and the general factor of subjective child well-being GFSCWB) help identify diverse life situations and children's perceptions and evaluations of the lowest and highest respectively, levels of subjective well-being.

Lower levels of subjective well-being are encountered in case of children from needy families, when children are deprived of certain material goods and elements linked to social insertion such as holidays, based on the type of family the child belongs – single parent, with many siblings and some cases of multigenerational families, insecurity felt for various reasons, lack of safety at home, school or neighborhood, reduced participation in diverse activities, changes happening too often – involving children's parents or changing homes, low quality relationships with family or friends, bullying at school or violence, health issues preventing children to attend school, feelings of sadness, loneliness, worrying.

Higher levels of subjective well-being in the sample were reported by children living in urban environments, with two parents, in one home and by those having better material wealth. The same level of well-being is reported by children who feel safe in their environments, those who have the feeling that people they interact with – at home, school and elsewhere treat them well (the feeling of inclusion), children whose voices are heard by parents, teachers, community representatives (participation), children having good relationships with the family and friends. Likewise, participation in extracurricular activities, playing with peers around their homes, reading, team sports and stability as in not having to experience significant changes in the time of a year, results in higher reported levels of

subjective well-being. Lastly, children who are informed regarding their rights and those perceiving their rights are being respected by adults report higher levels of well-being as well.

Analyzing the literature in the field of child well-being elicits the idea that the need for measuring child well-being and the use of social indicators (objective and subjective), is justified by multiple types of reasons: strategic, economic, academic and also moral. The establishment of systems of social participation for children would be able to guide families, the academic community, civil society, policymakers and it could inform the public at large in order to increase children's quality of life.

The general conclusion of the empirical research is that subjective well-being varies according to various domains and aspects of children's lives, the objective situations given by the context in which children live, with the perceptions, evaluations and aspirations of each child. This study evidenced only **a part of the factors** responsible for child well-being and given the complexity of this phenomenon, it should be approached quantitatively as well as qualitatively, studied with more sophisticated statistical tools in order to identify additional personal and social factors influencing child well-being, and in order to be able to better measure the similarities and differences in children's lives resulting from different cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

All the results obtained by utilizing the ISCWeB questionnaire on the representative sample of sixth grade schoolchildren of Cluj county, **confirms children's potential to reflect and provide data regarding their lives.** The method of exploration of subjective well-being consisting of the use of self-applied questionnaires and psychometric scales, designed originally for children or those adapted for children's age and comprehension, proved to be very efficacious. Knowledge of the sources of satisfaction for children **represents a reference point based on which, teachers, researchers, decision makers and the society in general, could envision strategies for the promotion of happier lives for children.** The results obtained from this study are similar to research showing that the degree of satisfaction of children is not just an indicator of their lives in general but also a guarantee of their ability to cope with potentially adverse circumstances in the future. Programs aiming to increase the general quality of life or specific domains of the lives of children (personal, relational, academic, material, social) need to consider the complexity of the factors which determine the subjective well-being of children and also need to valorize these factors in order to achieve their objectives.

By having accomplished its five stated goals, this study makes important conceptual and methodological contributions in the field of child well-being. There are also relevant practical aspects obtained from surveying the sample of sixth grade schoolchildren from Cluj county, that could constitute a reference for all persons working and interacting with children.

A number of original contributions to the field of child well-being emerged during research performed for this thesis; they are listed below in the order in which they appear in the thesis:

- The research theme of this study represents a novelty for the Romanian academic sphere (see the research objectives).
- This study presents systematically the child well-being indicators as they evolved, and also from the point of view of their use and functionality emphasizing the main subjective indicators in use internationally.
- Development of an own scheme showing the link between the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the field of child well-being research.
- Development of an own definition of child well-being based on earlier definitions found in the literature.
- Composition of a table which contains synthetic information on the main instruments used for measuring subjective child well-being.
- Translation, adaptation and testing of the ISCWeB questionnaire for use in Romanian context.
- Validity and fidelity testing with the sample of sixth grade schoolchildren of the four psychometric scales included in the questionnaire (OLS, SLSS, PWI8, BMSLSS).
- Testing the functioning of the synthetic instruments specially developed to evaluate child life domains satisfaction (GIDS) and the general subjective well-being of children (GICSWB).
- Identified of a general factor of child well-being (GFCWB), identification and designation of eight factors representing satisfaction variables associated with specific domains and aspects related to children's lives.

Limits of research and future research directions

There are a number of categories of limits applicable to this study: limits regarding the *interpretation of results*, limits of the *research method (questionnaire)*, limits due to *theoretical and methodological problems* specific to research studying subjective well-being. With regard to these limits I formulated future research directions in the field of subjective child well-being, which could improve the quality of results obtained using the international research tool ISCWeB and could help in the development of this line of research in Romania.

Limits regarding the *interpretation of results*

While **age** represents an important element besides gender (a multitude of studies have shown that life satisfaction of children and adolescents progressively decreases as they become older), this research was not able to capture the significance of the age variable since the sample included only sixth grade schoolchildren with a mean age of 12.16 years.

Due to the fact that the questionnaire includes **a limited number of socio-demographic variables regarding the children and their family**, the horizon of analysis and interpretation was diminished. Many research studies involving children regard parents' education as an important explicative variable. Low levels of subjective well-being were found for children whose parents had not completed their primary education and in case of children living in families where none of the parents has an income (Casas et al., 2013c).

Another limitation of this study is due to the lack of causal analysis involving different factors (the relationship between children and their families, children and their friends, children and their teachers; the family structure, changes in children's lives, safety levels, levels of children's security within in their environments, the level of participation of children with the systems they interact with, values they aspire to, children's rights) and children's subjective well-being. The analysis that was performed concerned only the associations between these factors and the general subjective well-being, and satisfaction regarding certain life domains. A number of researchers mentioned in the theoretical part of this study consider that performing longitudinal research would solve the problem of causality (the relationship between factors and subjective well-being) and would help clarify the impact of certain factors, events and experiences on the well-being of children, ordered on a timeline; this would enhance the knowledge regarding the changes in the well-being of children across a larger segment of their lives.

Likewise, I deem it as a necessity, performing enhanced analyses by using more sophisticated statistical methods on the complex relationships of the variables identified in

this study (for instance, for the analysis of the relationship between the constructs measured by the psychometric scales – overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with various life domains).

Limits of the *research method – the questionnaire*

Another limit is due to the fact that the ISCWeB instrument contains domains of children's lives and topics established by adults (the researchers and experts conceived the questionnaire). While in use, children have made comments on the questionnaire and its items. Children's input, demonstrate the importance of their participation in developing survey instruments evaluating important aspects of their lives. **Future research need to be based on a consultative process (qualitative methods) whereby children's input** regarding aspects and themes relevant for their age and level of understanding of well-being, is being integrated. As such, the data obtained by research would better reflect situations and context pertaining to children's lives and it would link research objectives, programs, and policies geared toward the Romanian children, to their needs, aspirations, values and competencies.

This study does **not include the perspectives of the parents, teachers and other professionals working with the children**, on the life domains included in the questionnaire. A future line of research may adopt an exploratory approach of the subjective children well-being in parallel to that of their parents and ascertain the links (concordances/ discrepancies) between generations. Such a line of research was in fact started by Ferran Casas and his collaborators (Coendres et al., 2005; Casas et al., 2007b; Casas et al., 2012b).

The monitoring of well-being should apply to all categories of children. The ISCWeB instrument was not yet validated for institutionalized children, children with disabilities or those with chronic diseases. Collecting such data would allow for comparisons to be made for children from different socioeconomic and economic contexts.

The questionnaire used by this research on the sample of sixth grade schoolchildren contains scales measuring life satisfaction and as such it only **explores the cognitive component of the subjective well-being**. Since subjective well-being consists of two fundamental components, the cognitive and the affective (positive and negative affect), and while these two are different although highly interrelated, measuring both seems to be a necessity for an overall image of the individual's well-being. Future exploration of the affective side of the subjective well-being of children, by using specific instruments (some of which were described in the theory part of this study) could establish another line of research.

Limits due to *theoretical and methodological problems* specific to studies of subjective well-being

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the collected data and results, these need to be analyzed also carefully in the studies succeeding this one for they could be influenced by several factors. For instance, a number of difficulties could appear while analyzing children's subjective well-being, especially for the age interval appearing in this study; twelve is the age when children enter adolescence and begin to oscillate between the need for protection and autonomy, at this stage children are developing across the entire range of their lives: cognitively, behavior, affectively, morally and physically and this has a significant impact on their identities and relationships (with family, at school, with friends, within the community). Likewise, children at this age are capable of being easily influenced by what they see around them (school, friends, media, information and communication technologies such as computers, internet, cell phone, etc.) all of which, besides the life context in which they live and the culture they belong to, could influence their perceptions regarding the lives they live. As mentioned previously, homeostasis and the influence of character traits and cultural variables on the subjective well-being, the methodological problems associated with scales interpretation, all of the preceding seen as limits to the interpretation of the phenomenon of subjective well-being need to be analyzed and integrated in future research in this field.

This study represents a source of significant data in the field of child well-being and it is a first in the study of subjective well-being in Romania, applied to a representative sample of twelve year old children, which used the ISCWeB international instrument.

The results yielded by using the aforementioned instrument are encouraging and demonstrates its value in the evaluation of child well-being as proven by its application with the sample of sixth grade schoolchildren. The result it produces is new and credible information about the subjective well-being of the children within the sample. The goal of such an assessment would be to enhance the motivation of all systems with which the child interacts in order to improve the interactions themselves (within family, school, community) and to improve those factors (individual, psychological, relational, material and social) that need to be improved so that all children could experience happy lives.

Having available instruments for the evaluation of subjective child well-being and arguments that demonstrate the necessity and utility for assessing this essential component of children's well-being, practitioners and researchers will be able to dedicate more effort and open up larger spaces for the study of subjective child well-being in Romania. The need is

there, for the development of *subjective social indicators* based on systematic research which considers children's life experiences, their views on their life circumstances and sources of happiness. Another crucial step would represent the inclusion of these subjective social indicators, alongside objective indicators, in official statistics. In such a case, the assessment of quality of life in Romania will also include an important segment of the population, namely the children.

What truly counts for the future is that results of this type of research should be considered by policy makers and by society at large and that decisions made regarding the lives of children and their families should take into account the positive impact of a happy life, individually and also on the society within which the child develops and grows up into an adult, into a person of communication, a person for a multicultural society, a person of complex abilities.

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