



Geoinovace

# Quality of Life: An Introduction to the Concept

Ivan Andráško

Masarykova univerzita Brno 2013



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INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ



# Quality of Life:

## An Introduction to the Concept

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Ivan Andráško

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**GEOGRAFICKÝ ÚSTAV**  
PŘÍRODOVĚDECKÁ FAKULTA MU



Masarykova univerzita  
Brno 2013

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# Introduction to introduction

*“Do not believe that it is always possible to speak about complicated things in a simple way... If it is complicated, then it is complicated.”*

N. Amosov

The main impulses for writing the book that you have just begun to read were the thoughts and experience which resulted from the teaching of the course unit Quality of Life that I started to teach at the Department of Geography at Faculty of Science, Masaryk University in Brno in 2011. The tuition quite naturally called for a textbook which would briefly and synoptically summarize basic knowledge regarding the concept of quality of life, not suppressing but rather primarily encouraging reasoning, invention and creativity.

This book is in the first place a result of the effort to fulfil the mentioned demand. It is not intended just for the students but above all for everybody who is not afraid of thinking and who is interested in looking under the lid of what forms the quality of life of an individual or a society and how this phenomenon can be judged or evaluated.

When I<sup>1</sup> was writing this book, I set two main, mutually linked objectives: to explain why quality of life is not a topic of simple or unambiguous answers and to outline basic starting points of understanding, interpretation and measurement of this extraordinarily complex and increasingly popular concept. The structure of the book and contents of individual chapters correspond with these objectives and I recommend that the chapters should be read in the given order. The knowledge of information presented in one chapter is necessary to understand the information presented in the following chapters. I only hope that I managed to achieve the objectives at least partially. After all, it is up to the reader to consider.

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<sup>1</sup> For several, mainly practical reasons I use so-called authorial plural in this book (except in the introduction and in the closing part).

# 1

## What is it all about?

Everybody who starts to deal with quality of life will probably sooner or later come to a conclusion that this is a multiform topic which is inherently contradictory and disputable. Depending on the point of view we can approach quality of life in a complex or simple way, we can perceive it as both cause and effect, aim and means, source of reconciliation and conflict, it can be dealt with by an expert or a layman. We could undoubtedly continue in a similar vein for a long time.

In this book we aimed at concisely discussing some main reasons of this multiformity or contradictoriness and we tried to outline some starting points or footholds which can be adhered to by a reader interested in understanding the quality of life phenomenon.

Before we start a detailed analysis of more complex issues and problems related to aspects of quality of life such as its definition or measurement, let us introduce the whole concept by means of basic simplifying overview. The basis will be several characteristics which are typical in a way of the quality of life and they allow us to describe and understand this concept better. It is also important to understand that it is impossible to perceive these individual characteristics separately and independently of one another. On the contrary, they are closely related and they overlap to a large extent.

Which characteristics shall we mention? For the needs of the overview we choose the following characteristics:

- *complexity*,
- *subjectivity*,
- *relativity*,
- *plurality*,
- *duality*,
- *multidimensionality*,
- *space-time variability*,
- *popularity*,

- *social and individual relevance,*
- *multidisciplinarity.*

We admit that the set of above mentioned terms may seem too expertly or depersonalized. However, as we will show in the following lines, the individual terms – characteristics relate to human life and its qualitative aspect quite naturally and in this respect they represent above all a comprehensive denotation suitable for interpretation purposes of further information mentioned in this book.

Of course, we must start with *complexity*. It is literally the fundamental characteristic which does not only concern the quality of life but mainly the life itself and which manifests itself in everything that is connected with life and its quality. When we speak about *complexity*, we especially have in mind the fact that human life is formed by virtually infinite number of various aspects and their mutual combinations or interactions where these are subject to continual process of change. It is mainly the *complexity* which makes the issue of quality of life so complicated in itself and it is the reason why we recommend to perceive this problem primarily in a holistic approach. In a simplified way, we can, or rather we should perceive quality of life as a concept in which *everything is related to everything*. It is rightful to object that such approach will obviously be extremely complicated if not impossible. We have to agree with this objection. However, as we will show in further parts of this book, there are possibilities which allow us to partially simplify the *complexity* of quality of life or rather capture its substantial aspects.

Another important characteristic of quality of life is *subjectivity*. To understand its meaning it is essential to realize that our lives are continually judged by both ourselves and by people around us. This process is strongly influenced by a person's experience, attitudes, opinions, preferences and other factors which form our subjective view of the outside world. For example *subjectivity* in relation to quality of life means that while we may feel that our life is not up to much, from other person's point of view it may be otherwise. In other words, if we present the results of any evaluation/measurement/judgement of quality of life both at individual and social level, it is possible to assume that not everyone will agree with these results. On the contrary, it is very likely that the final information will be subject to further discussion<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Let us imagine that, for example, you make a ranking of friends based on their quality of life. Do you think that all of them will accept the order in the ranking and that they will agree with it?*

The *relativity* of quality of life<sup>3</sup> means that the view of this phenomenon is conditioned by a wide spectrum of mutually more or less related phenomena and processes. We could say that the description and evaluation of quality of life is, to a large extent, a matter of *context*. A great number of factors included in this context is already applied in the process of forming of evaluation perspective as well as in judging the results of such evaluation. Let us imagine, for example, that we decide to evaluate the quality of life in certain area<sup>4</sup>. We will use selected procedures, methods and data and we will get a certain result. This measurement result can be considered *relative* for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is influenced by the manner of its formation (choice of indicators, data and methods), secondly, the given result will be subject to assessment influenced not only by personal *subjectivity* but also by other factors such as specificity of social norms and cultural<sup>5</sup>, historical and other connections or backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. Understanding that our view of quality of life depends on a number of factors or, in other words, on a context which we may not even realize is vital to understand the characteristic called *relativity*.

*Complexity, subjectivity and relativity* are related to another characteristic of quality of life called *plurality*. It expresses the variety or diversity or a great number of potential or existing views of quality of life and its individual aspects. *Plurality* for example manifests itself directly through the existence of a number of ways of content and meaning interpretation of quality of life, procedures used for its evaluation and also terms by means of which it can be expressed<sup>7</sup>. The *plurality* of views of quality of life is typical of both non-professional and expert interest. In practical or academic approaches this means that there exists a wider spectrum of methods and procedures which can be used to measure quality of life, or definitions expressing what quality of life actually represents.

If we were to summarize the above mentioned characteristics of the concept of quality of life into one sentence practically applicable in case we wanted to provide somebody with fundamental information about quality of life, the

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<sup>3</sup> *Relativity and subjectivity of quality of life undoubtedly depend on each other closely but it would not be suitable to interchange them.*

<sup>4</sup> *We shall de facto evaluate the quality of life of the people who live in given area.*

<sup>5</sup> *For example what is acceptable or welcome in one country may not be viewed favorably somewhere else.*

<sup>6</sup> *If we were to evaluate the quality of life in terms of eating habits and amount of consumed food, we would find out that while in some countries the lowered quality of life is caused by an excess of consumed food (obesity), in other countries people starve or even die due to shortage of food.*

<sup>7</sup> *Examples and discussion on terms which more or less overlap with quality of life are mentioned in chapter 6.*

sentence would be as follows: *The quality of life is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon in understanding which a wide spectrum of different views can be applied and the views are influenced by the subjectivity of each person and a context formed by a number of varied factors and connections.*

We perceive the following two characteristics of quality of life i.e. *duality* and *multidimensionality* rather as pseudo- or secondary properties of this concept. Both of them can help us in a way to approach the *complexity* of quality of life, to understand and interpret it better. As we have mentioned, human life is so complex and holistic a phenomenon that to deal with its qualitative aspect in such a way that we do not omit anything is virtually impossible. Therefore we are looking for ways which could make the *complexity* of the phenomenon of quality of life *simpler and clearer*. The *duality* and *multidimensionality* are the starting points which help us to reach this goal. They are characteristics of quality of life secondarily resulting from human's attempt to simplify the contents of otherwise complex subject of study.

By the *duality* of quality of life we mean that we usually divide this concept into two partial categories which can be called *basic dimensions* of quality of life. Probably the most typical is the division of quality of life into basic dimensions called objective dimension and subjective dimension. We can further specify the contents of both these dimensions, typically for example in terms of *what forms the quality of life*<sup>8</sup> or in terms of *how we can evaluate the quality of life*<sup>9</sup>. The division of quality of life into objective and subjective dimensions is not the only possibility of *duality* in views of quality of life. As we will show in chapter 4, there exist other divisions which, besides the benefit they bring by means of a certain simplifying view of a complex problem of quality of life, also have their disputable aspects. We can mention especially the exaggerated simplification of the problem distracting the attention from its holistic nature.

Even though the definition of basic dimensions of quality of life is for practical reasons undoubtedly a step which brings some light into this complex phenomenon, it is obvious that in need of a detailed description, content interpretation or even measurement it is suitable to study much more thoroughly what forms the quality of life.

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<sup>8</sup> *Objective conditions of life and their subjective perception by a person.*

<sup>9</sup> *Objective, i.e. unbiased evaluation based on facts and subjective evaluation as the expression of human feelings or opinions.*

Human life is formed by a great number of varied components. These can be for example interpersonal relationships, quality of housing, ways of spending leisure time, employment etc. In connection with the fact that these aspects are naturally formed and influenced by other partial influences, it is important to realize that individual aspects of human life do not exist in isolation but they are linked to one another, they influence one another thus participating in the formation of its qualitative aspect.

From this point of view we can perceive quality of life as a unique combination of quality of its interdependent *partial components* which can be called aspect, domain, element or also dimension of quality of life. We express the mentioned concept of quality of life by means of its characteristic called *multidimensionality*<sup>10</sup>.

We have already mentioned the importance of time and space in connection with quality of life when we were discussing its *relativity*<sup>11</sup>. However, quality of life is not *just* relative with regard to time or space, it is also temporally and spatially variable, i.e. changeable. In other words, quality of life is a phenomenon changing in time and space, both in terms of its understanding and interpretation and in terms of its *level*<sup>12</sup>.

The change in quality of life in time is often interpreted in terms of a certain evolution tendency typically identifying whether quality of life improves or deteriorates. A characteristic approach to spatial variability of quality of life is based on the presumption that different places or territories show different levels of quality of life of their inhabitants and that it is possible to determine places with higher or lower quality of life.

It is suitable to point out that, although we encounter such approaches to evaluation of quality of life quite regularly, they do not represent the only possibilities and obviously not even ideal ones. A problem that is associated with them lies in the presumption that we are able to determine what is *good* and what is *bad* in terms of quality of life. We can surely have some more or less persuasive arguments at hand to support such attitudes but if we take into account the *relativity* of quality of life, we can hardly consider them universally valid.

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<sup>10</sup> We will deal with multidimensionality in detail in chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> We have in mind the connection with historical, cultural or social context.

<sup>12</sup> Especially the issue of level of quality of life is largely based on a presumption that we are able to evaluate the quality of life somehow or measure it in an exact way.

The perception of quality of life in terms of its level which can be higher/lower or which can improve/deteriorate is closely connected with the characteristics of this phenomenon, such as *popularity* or *social and individual relevance*.

Let us look at the *popularity* of quality of life first. Although in strict approach we should imagine under this characteristic especially general *popularity* of the issue of quality of life, our approach is a little wider, in terms of more semantic interpretations. We will mention three of them that we consider the most important in this respect.

The first approach to *popularity* of quality of life lies in its popularity with non-professional public. As we have mentioned, it is possible to perceive quality of life and its varied aspects in different ways which reflect specific starting points, opinions, experience etc. The evaluation and comparison of the level of quality of life is therefore because of its nature largely doomed to be the subject of heated discussion which will probably have no clear winners or losers. Such discussion is undoubtedly tempting for non-professional public – it enables to present the own subjective view and confront it with the view of other people with no risk that it could be clearly and convincingly described as incorrect. In other words, everybody is *sort of an expert* when it comes to quality of life and even though it sounds exaggerated, this statement is justifiable. Each of us leads own life – we should know best what and how influences its quality. Although this opinion is disputable too, and, as we show later, the quality of life can be looked at from the point of view of certain *objective* or society-wide criteria, it is definitely sufficiently important as one of the reasons why quality of life is popular.

The second approach to *popularity* of quality of life can be primarily perceived in relation to *popularization* of the results of scientific research of quality of life. The issue of quality of life can be partly perceived as a problem exceeding barriers between scientific research and what interests laymen.

The third approach to *popularity* of quality of life is mainly connected with *populism*. The ideas of improvement or development of quality of life, investments into quality of life and many similar became part of vocabulary commonly used by socially committed people, especially politicians in the last few decades. The term quality of life is often used as a rhetoric in these cases, or as part of other rhetorics, i.e. empty phrases aimed at attracting attention, increasing political capital and personal popularity. Such abuse of the concept

of quality of life is not innocent or insignificant. On the contrary, quality of life, because of its popularity with laymen public, becomes a (potential) instrument of power exercised for example through the influence on opinions of both individuals and masses, or by influencing important decisions with direct impact on people's life quality. This is also a reason why quality of life should be observed closely by the scientific community.

The overview of a concept of *popularity* of quality of life largely represents the starting point in understanding this conception in terms of its *social and individual relevance*. In the widest interpretation we have in mind the meaning which is attributed to quality of life both from the point of view of a society as a whole and individuals who form this society. This meaning was not always understood in the same way everywhere and, as we show in the next chapter, the demand for information regarding quality of life has its specific development.

In the previous text we have mentioned the research of quality of life. In this context we can mention the last of the characteristics included in our initial overview. It is *multidisciplinarity*. This term, in simple words, expresses that several scientific disciplines and fields are interested in quality of life and its research. Sociology, psychology, medicine, economics, planning branches and, last but not least, geography represent those in which we can meet studies aimed at quality of life most often. Together with *multidisciplinarity*, a big importance of *plurality* manifests itself too, being the property of quality of life which expresses variedness of views of this phenomenon and also contributes to this variedness. Thus different scientific disciplines as well as individual branches or conceptions can in the research of quality of life use different terminology, theoretical foundations or methods. Different approaches to quality of life can be seen not only among individual disciplines but also in disciplines themselves.

The overview of characteristics of quality of life submitted to the reader in previous lines of this chapter definitely is not complete. Despite that we believe that we managed to concisely describe and discuss some fundamental starting points which enable us to understand why quality of life is not a topic of simple or clear answers or why it is important to deal with this problem nevertheless. We will try to plumb the depths of this problem in a greater detail in the following chapters.



# 2

## Where did it come from?

Let us lay aside the deepening of our knowledge about content aspect of quality of life for a moment and take at least brief look at the beginnings and development of the interest in this phenomenon.

Where to start? It is not so easy to answer this question as it may seem at first glance. Let us go step by step and start, of course, with a human. At the beginning we dare to say that the interest in qualitative aspect of life is quite natural for an individual and it is related for example to the fulfilment of certain personal needs or aspirations. We may not directly realize this interest in our everyday life. When we choose a dish from a menu in the restaurant, we are not thinking about our intention to improve the quality of our lives. We are simply trying to choose the dish we feel like eating. Thus we consider the interest in quality of life to be an immanent property which accompanies an individual from the birth.

The concept of interest in quality of life that we have come to in the previous part is undoubtedly very individualistic. However, that kind of interest can be observed on the side of human society too. If we use a parallel with human - individual, we can assert that the interest in quality of life is a natural part of human development and that it is as old as humankind itself<sup>13</sup>.

Suddenly we have two possible views at the beginning of the interest in quality of life. In case of *individual* interest that is the moment of birth of each of us while in case of *social* interest we mean the origin of human society. We must note that in spite of indisputable connection between them it is not possible to equate these two views. Both of them are irreplaceable not only in terms of development but mainly in terms of content aspect of the concept of quality of life<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Paraphrasing the authors Schuessler and Fisher (1985).

<sup>14</sup> We will return to this topic in chapter 4.

Although we have reached some result in our search for the beginning of people's interest in quality of life in previous lines, we must critically note that this result is still too general. How could it be specified in more detail? Obviously, by specifying used starting points. If we have mentioned that the interest in quality of life is natural for a human, it means that it is a direct part of our thinking, decision making and activity<sup>15</sup>. In this regard we can say that the interest is *implicit*, i.e. de facto related to any attention paid to life itself. However, when trying to specify the development of the concept of quality of life, we are more interested in clear *explicit* expression of the interest in this phenomenon. But what should this explicit expression look like? To answer this question would mean to set certain criteria which help us differentiate, when we can *really* talk about the quality of life and when we talk just about the topics that are related with this concept mostly implicitly. It is especially suitable to apply such criteria if we pay attention to *expert* interest in quality of life. The results of scientific research (*academic* interest) and their application in practise (*application* interest) by official authorities<sup>16</sup> can have an important impact on people's lives. The opposite pole can be the public interest which could simply be named *lay* interest in quality of life.

Even if we use a limited number of the above mentioned starting points, it is possible to identify a greater number of sources and time periods of increased interest in quality of life. It is always important how and to what extent we take into account individual or social, implicit or explicit and expert or lay interests. However, we cannot assert that these are the only possible starting points. A significant fact is that in the history of humanity the individual categories of interests appeared at different places in specific combinations influenced by a number of different factors, on the side of an individual for example by the level of personal knowledge or innate intellect, on the side of the society by the level of social development, religion<sup>17</sup>, culture and traditions etc.

It is not surprising that attention was paid to human life and to some of its qualitative aspects in ancient philosophy as early as in ancient Greece. Many authors<sup>18</sup> mention this place and period in connection with the beginnings of

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<sup>15</sup> We mean the level of consciousness and unconsciousness.

<sup>16</sup> For example the government.

<sup>17</sup> An example of how the conditions in certain historical period can influence the view of life can be the middle ages. In some parts of Europe in that era, life after life was in focus under the influence of religious authorities which, together with other factors, substantially influenced the view of attributes of quality of secular life.

<sup>18</sup> For example Bowling (1995), Diener and Suh (1997) et alia.

the interest in quality of life<sup>19</sup>. In a culturally developed (social) environment, the questions of human existence and life were often discussed including what is connected with them (for example in terms of *good* life).

We can consider the twentieth century to be the decisive in terms of a more consistent *society-wide* and closely connected expert interest in quality of life. In that period the scientific knowledge intensely developed and it reacted to challenges such as rapid growth of urban areas, new forms of social organization or deprivation, environmental problems etc. In connection with social development in economically developed countries in the second half of 20th century the increase of interest in quality of life can be connected for example with the shift of part of the interest in usually preferred quantitative aspect of life to its qualitative aspect<sup>20</sup>. In the context of the growth of material riches, an important knowledge arose, i.e. that human happiness or satisfaction is not possible to *buy for money* and that these feelings are influenced by a much wider spectrum of factors. In wider concept we could consider the key element to be the transition from modern to postmodern society. Philosophically oriented works try to explain this for example by (growing) interest in hedonism, increased orientation to consumption or (deepening) individualisation of the society.

As we have mentioned, expert approach to the issue of quality of life can be understood in terms of two basic categories – scientific and applicatory and in the implicit concept we can consider the interest in quality of life to be as old as humanity itself. Analogically we can assert that implicitly perceived scientific interest in quality of life is as old as science itself<sup>21</sup>. In other words, scientific knowledge has always been connected with people’s lives somehow but its influence needn’t have always had just a positive character but also a negative one, in extreme case even destructive.

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<sup>19</sup> *We point out that this view is strongly oriented at European, or rather Western civilization. However, we can encounter the ideas more or less connected with quality of life within philosophical or religious conceptions all over the world.*

<sup>20</sup> *We strongly point out that we do not perceive qualitative and quantitative aspects of human life as opposites – in our concept they are two parts of the same phenomenon that are related to each other. For example long life can be more or less a quality life depending on the demands placed upon it.*

<sup>21</sup> *In this respect we mean science in terms of exercising strictly scientific procedures and methods.*

However, what can we say about the beginnings of explicit scientific or expert interest in quality of life? Andráško (2007) states that in this respect we can recognize two main groups of opinions.

One point of view is that the beginnings of expert interest in quality of life are connected with important economic and social issues and problems in the thirties of the past century. Massam (2002) gives an example of extensive research report *Recent Social Trends in the United States (1933)*, which was for President's Research Committee on Social Trends commissioned by Herbert Hoover edited by a sociologist William Ogburn.

As far as the second variant is concerned, it places the beginnings of explicit expert interest in the problem of quality of life to the 60s of the 20th century<sup>22</sup> and there exists a strong connection to problems of the society. These problems were closely connected not only with the society, but also with people's psyche, with the processes of perception and evaluation of one's own life and with the feelings of happiness or satisfaction. As Schuessler and Fisher state (1985): "The climate of opinion in the early 1960s was generally favourable to the study of quality of life" (p. 130), and they mention *The Report Of The President's Commission On National Goals (1960)* and Bauer's work (1966) on the secondary effects of national space programs on American society as the expression of expert interest in this regard.

An ever growing emphasis on qualitative parameters of human life characteristic of social environment in developed countries in that period lead inter alia to the understanding that it is a multilevel complex problem which cannot be easily solved by a selective emphasis on its partial components. To be more specific, it was namely the knowledge that long-term preferred indicators expressing economic situation (material riches or wealth) do not necessarily have to adequately express whether people are satisfied or happy and that the connection between these two aspects of human life is just partial and it can even be paradoxical<sup>23</sup>. Thus the interest in the complex approach by means of using a wider spectrum of "new" indicators became an important aspect of increase in the meaning of expert view of the concept of quality of life. In the 60s and 70s of the 20th century there is a significant increase in the

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<sup>22</sup>*It is necessary to note that in view of the development in the United States of America this is a majority opinion.*

<sup>23</sup>*An exemplary reflection of these problems can be seen for example in Elia Kazan's film *The Arrangement* from 1969.*

number of scientific studies aimed at social conditions in the society which include research aimed at perception and value orientation of individuals. Such research was based on the use of indicators in wider concept marked as *social indicators*. As it was not just an expert interest represented by a relatively numerous group of studies trying to provide a deeper look inside the society but also a social interest as such, in this context we usually speak about so-called *social indicators movement*. In 1974 an expert journal *Social Indicators Research* is founded which presents studies regarding the problem of quality of life up to these days. We must note that in a wider context of the development of the concept of quality of life, in the case of social indicators it was not a substitution of indicators of economic situation but rather a creation of complementary indicators expressing up to then more or less ignored aspects of human lives.

The trend of development of expert concept of quality of life, perceived *inter alia* in terms of (further) widening of the spectrum of indicators used in the studies dedicated to this problem, continued in the following period. As a result of the events in the 70s of the past century (for example oil crises in 1973 and 1979) or new approaches and information (for example the study *The Limits to Growth* elaborated for The Club of Rome in 1972), new indicators became inseparable part<sup>24</sup> of the concept of quality of life, namely the indicators to evaluate the condition and development of the environment and the results of interaction between environment and society. It is necessary to understand this shift in a wider context, i.e. for example in relationship with the development of concepts of *environmentalism* or *sustainable development*, connected on the side of the society and especially some experts with a pronounced acceptance and development of ideas regarding for example the problems of exploiting of non-renewable sources of energy and the growth, or the effects of the cumulation of the pollution in the environment. Namely the interest in environmental aspects of human life represents another important component of a “puzzle” of the concept of quality of life. It is not surprising that for example the term *sustainability* is often perceived as a synonym of the term quality of life. Although we cannot agree with such opinion, it is clear that these are two strongly internally related concepts<sup>25</sup>. In approaches and conceptions mentioned

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<sup>24</sup> However, the research of environmental aspects of quality of life had already taken place in the previous period. Examples of such studies are given for example by Liu (1975).

<sup>25</sup> The relationship between sustainability and quality of life will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 6.

in key documents<sup>26</sup> regarding the environment and sustainability of life on earth, the topics of environment condition development or social environment and (improvement of) quality of life often largely overlap.

The beginning of 21st century is strongly connected with the problem of quality of life both in individual and social regard. We can mostly perceive this situation as a natural part of social development which, inter alia, on the one hand reflects the effect of changes and accomplishments regarding the knowledge of quality of life in previous period, on the other hand takes into account new challenges brought by the present day and those which can (potentially) be brought by the future<sup>27</sup>. In this regard it is impossible not to mention a very important aspect of interest of quality of life which is definitely the connection of this concept with another popular, but also a disputable concept, i.e. the concept of *development*. As Hancock (2000) states, one of the starting points of current interest in quality of life is the knowledge “...that development is not just about economic development but about social and ultimately human development...”, and that “...if development is to be environmentally sustainable it must also be socially sustainable and contribute to an improved quality of life” (p. 1). However, both in expert and lay approach, we must realize that connection of the topics of development and quality of life is again, owing to the existence of a great number of possible standpoints, an extremely disputable matter. We can for example contemplate what development we have in mind – individual, social, environmental, regional? A number of further questions appears in this context which is difficult to answer unambiguously. Shall we perceive the interest in quality of life just as a manifestation of a certain phase of social development which will sooner or later fade away or will be replaced by the interest in something else? Is it possible to perceive quality of life as a “motor” or motivation of development itself?

The expert interest in quality of life should bring answers to these and similar questions and through them it should contribute to the solution of problems in people’s lives. As the previous development shows, the preservation and support of social justifiability supported by the results of concrete scientific research is vital for the future of the concept of quality of life.

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<sup>26</sup> For example so-called Brundtland Report (1987) or a well-known Agenda 21 (1992).

<sup>27</sup> It is definitely not by chance that we have discussed as one of the fundamental characteristics of quality of life its (growing) popularity.

# 3

## What is quality of life?

Everybody who deals with quality of life somehow, either as an expert or a layman, either on a long-term basis or as a passing fancy, will sooner or later be confronted with the fundamental question of this concept: “What is in fact the quality of life?”

It is not by chance that we dedicated chapter one to a concise overview of characteristics of the concept of quality of life. The reader who is familiar with this information surely understands why there exists no unambiguous, generally not only valid, but also accurate and satisfying answer or why it is possible to give several, more or less different answers to the given question.

We can also use other words. We can “explain” quality of life on the one hand in a very simple way but this way, as we will show soon, will probably not fully satisfy anybody. On the other hand, it is not a problem to give some time and space to a more detailed content analysis of quality of life and this approach will inevitably lead us to the variedness of view of quality of life as well as to what this phenomenon means and what forms it. It is only fair to admit that the power of a person to intellectually embrace and above all to express quality of life in a transparent way within all its *complexity* and complicatedness is somewhat limited.

As we have indicated, both simple and more complex variant can be used to express the contents of the term quality of life. The term *simple variant* indicates that we will strive for as simple a view as possible. In such concept we take into account the fact that quality of life is a compound term, i.e. a term composed of the words *quality* and *life*<sup>28</sup>. The contents of the compound term could be in terms of our reasoning trivially expressed in these words: quality of life simply represents the *qualitative aspect of human life*. Such solution, even though truthful, is definitely not very tempting and in the end it is not even a solution.

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<sup>28</sup> See for example *Schluessler and Fisher (1985)*.

On the contrary, it is obvious that we have made no step forward in this matter and our answer would probably impress nobody. Let us try to further analyze the whole problem and, although not intentionally, to make it a little more complicated. We will start by looking more closely at both partial terms – i.e. at the quality and life.

We will start by the harder one – life. We are not able to answer the question how to define life in a way which would be generally and without any objections acceptable from all points of view and we are not even interested in clearly answering it in this publication. It is not our intention to polemize with a great number of opinions of what the term life expresses or what it exactly means. To support this attitude it is possible to mention that this is a topic which frequently becomes the subject matter or part of controversy and heated exchange of opinions<sup>29</sup>.

In spite of varied interest and in spite of human progress and scientific achievements connected with a great number of fascinating discoveries and new knowledge, life and its nature still remains a fairly fascinating enigma. And this is probably one of the roots of the problem to define quality of life – we still miss an unambiguous definition of life itself.

Let us try to move on from these rather general reflections closer to the point now. We can assume<sup>30</sup> that life can among others be perceived in terms of certain state of existence or experience which shows varied aspects and it is possible to describe and characterize it somehow. A typical characteristic is for example the duration of life which can be perceived as (a part of) its quantitative aspect<sup>31</sup>. Similarly quality of life is certain aspect, a comprehensive characteristic of life expressible by means of other intermediary characteristics. In order to specify the contents or evaluate quality of life it seems to be important to create or identify certain characteristics or parameters that will enable us to approach the qualitative aspect of life, to describe it or even evaluate (e.g. by means of exact measurement)<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> For example some aspects of the social debate regarding abortion.

<sup>30</sup> We use commonly available definitions that can be found in monolingual dictionaries.

<sup>31</sup> As we have indicated in chapter 2, such concept is simplified as the duration of life can be strongly related to its quality.

<sup>32</sup> This topic is connected with the issue of partial components of quality of life which we deal with in more detail in the following chapters in relation to duality, multidimensionality and measurement of quality of life.



Let us have a look at the second part of the term quality of life now, namely at the term quality. What does this term represent and how is it defined? It seems that even in this case there is no single clearly valid definition. Nevertheless we believe that our position in interpretation of the term quality is a little firmer when compared to the term life.

Quality can be perceived as a property of things or phenomena which in terms of a certain *potential* exists regardless of whether we deal with it or not. In other words, everything around us and we alone have some characteristics which we may not pay attention to and it is rather a potential of quality. The quality gets more explicit and from our point of view more important contours when we identify, or rather when we determine certain *amount* or *level* of quality. This level of quality is usually specified by the fact that certain *demands* are placed on a given thing, phenomenon or person whose quality we speak about. In other words, the quality of a given subject will be judged by the way and extent of fulfilment of specific demands placed upon the subject.

A common example from everyday life can be shoes. All shoes show some characteristics regarding for example their manufacturing, material used, design or just the fact that they are new or worn out. These characteristics represent the mentioned potential of quality as they are related to shoes regardless of whether anybody is interested or not. In reality the quality of shoes only shows when somebody is interested in them and when there appear some demands regarding their use. The qualitative level is then usually determined with a view to their primary purpose, which in this case would be wearing the shoes for protection of the feet against cold or injury. We usually speak about quality shoes if they are able to provide demanded level of comfort and they have long durability even when they are worn often. A similar mechanism of quality evaluations works with people too. We can show certain work performance and according to our own demands we will consider ourselves to be good workers but our boss who has a different view and different demands may not share our point of view.

We can use the above mentioned information to create a *simple* definition of quality of life. We will repeat the procedure used by Andráško (2009). The basis will be the definition according to which quality means “the degree to which a set of characteristics meets the demands”<sup>33</sup>. The connection of this definition

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<sup>33</sup> *Definition from the National quality program of Slovak Republic for the period 2004 to 2008 (p. 166).*

with life allows us to perceive quality of life as *the degree to which a set of characteristics of human life meets the demands placed upon it*<sup>34</sup>.

Although our reasoning and resulting definition do not obviously lack some logic and the definition comprises both the potential of quality of life (*...a set of characteristics of human life...*) and its specification (*...demands placed upon it*), this does not mean that we are home and dry. This simple definition does not give answer to all questions regarding the contents of the term quality of life and it can rather be a subject matter of further reasoning. This reasoning as well as further possibilities to define quality of life will follow later, in chapter 7. In order to understand and interpret individual definitions better as well as notice and explain the differences between them, it is necessary to thoroughly explain the content aspect of the *complexity* of quality of life as well as some terminological nuances of this concept. This information will serve the reader as a starting point in case of interest in creating own definition of quality of life or to prepare own measurement procedure.

The basis in this respect will be especially the characteristics of quality of life that we called in the introductory chapter *duality* and *multidimensionality*. In both cases we can speak about secondary or pseudo-characteristic of quality of life. The reason for such designation lies in the fact that we do not perceive these attributes as natural for the phenomenon of quality of life but we rather perceive them as a result of an effort to simplify and make clear an overly complex subject of study. This simplification will enable us to understand quality of life better, to approach it and to look for and use the methods of its measurement etc. We will also shortly examine the question of terminological ambiguity and interpretation of terms which are closely related to quality of life or which are even considered identical with it.

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<sup>34</sup> Similar definitions can be encountered in the works of other authors too, which probably points out to the similarity in the way of their specification.

# 4

## It has two main components, hasn't it?

We have mentioned the meaning and content of the characteristic of quality of life called *duality* in the initial part of the book. In very simple words, it is a basic division of the concept of quality of life into (usually) two wide categories in terms of content called *basic dimensions*. The character of such division depends on used criteria or point of view. Therefore we can identify more *dualisms*, for example in terms of differentiation of approaches to evaluation or measurement of quality of life, in terms of differentiation of the main components participating in its formation or in terms of setting the starting point attitude to the whole concept of this phenomenon. In all cases it holds true that in view of the criteria used, categories are created, i.e. basic dimensions, internally relatively homogenous which differ from one another<sup>35</sup>.

In the first place we will mention *dualism* within which we specify basic dimensions called the *objective* dimension and *subjective* dimension. In a way it is a typical and an often used way of division of the concept of quality of life. This *dualism* can frequently be encountered in connection with definitions or conceptualizations of quality of life in terms of objective characteristics of life or living conditions of a human being and subjective aspect representing perception of these characteristics or conditions by a human. The objective and subjective concept also regards the way that we evaluate or measure quality of life or its partial components<sup>36</sup>. Thus, this concept or approach is directly connected with the selection of research methods, character of input indicators etc. The objective dimension pertains in such case to *unbiased* or *impersonal*

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<sup>35</sup> It is possible to use them as a starting point in the classification of approaches to the measurement of quality of life.

<sup>36</sup> It is possible to encounter a slightly different concept of objective and subjective dimension of quality of life which can be caused by differences in interpretation of words objective and subjective. However, in this book we will only take into account the meaning interpretation that we have presented.

view of qualitative aspects of human life, i.e. the view that should not be, if possible, biased by personal feelings or opinions of an individual<sup>37</sup>. It is typical of the indicators characterizing this dimension of quality of life that they are precisely defined and unambiguously and exactly measurable. They can usually be expressed in both absolute and relative values. These indicators are very often connected with various *norms* or *standards* which represent a certain recommended or reference level which can be used to compare measured values in terms of higher/lower, better/worse, suitable/unsuitable level etc. *Subjective dimension* of quality of life is connected with subjective view of this phenomenon. Or rather, it is a matter of preference of its subjective evaluation by means of personal attitudes or opinions influenced by many factors, for example by experience or by a person's value system. In terms of practical use, a typical example can be the subjective evaluation of quality of life expressed as the level of person's satisfaction with its selected aspects or with quality of life in all.

We can demonstrate the differences between evaluations within objective and subjective dimensions using a simple example. We can start with a presumption that one of the important living conditions influencing quality of life of the inhabitants in a certain area is greenery. In case of objective evaluation we determine an indicator which can be expressed by both absolute and relative values – for example square metres of greenery or square meters of greenery per one inhabitant. Then we exactly measure the green area and we can calculate the greenery area per one inhabitant. If we have the data from more locations or for example city wards, we can compare them and point out where there is more (most) greenery and where less (least) greenery per inhabitant or where the situation is in terms of the given indicator *better* and where it is *worse*<sup>38</sup>. If we had a *greenery requirement standard*<sup>39</sup> (per inhabitant, total area etc.) we could also determine which areas in terms of the values of the corresponding indicator show satisfactory level (i.e. standard or above-standard) and which areas do not

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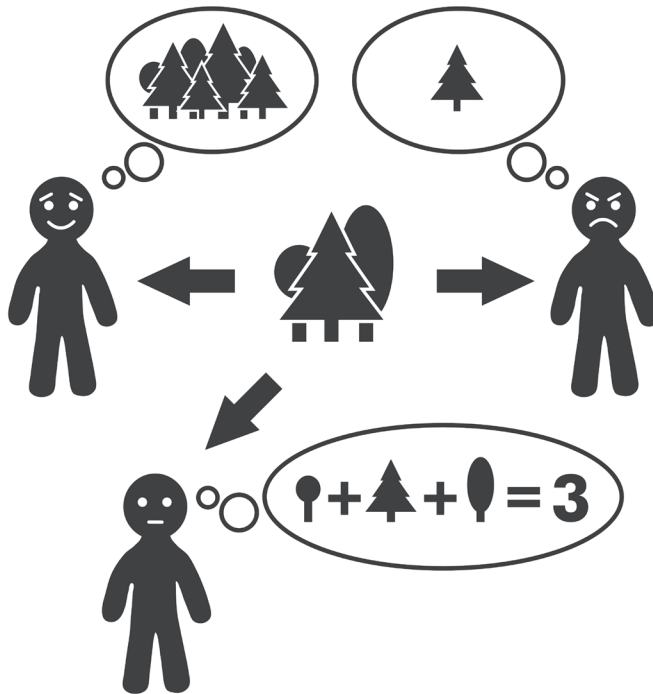
<sup>37</sup> *In connection with this we take the liberty to present the opinion that this is rather a quasi objective view. The reason for this is the fact that we do not consider any decision regarding the evaluation or study of quality of life to be fully objective. On the contrary, we believe that in every case a subjective intervention by a person or persons involved always shows to a certain extent (an example can be the selection of suitable indicators of quality of life). Other authors share this opinion too, e.g. Diener and Suh (1997).*

<sup>38</sup> *It can often be disputable to determine what is better and what is worse in terms of quality of life and it depends on the context. It is advisable to thoroughly judge the situation in case of such statements.*

<sup>39</sup> *Such standards are often used for example in the specification of approaches or conceptions regarding landscape or urban planning.*

reach the standard level and therefore it is possible to evaluate their situation as unsatisfactory. Subsequently, particular steps could be taken to tackle the identified problem.

The greenery does not exist only in objective dimension but it is also subjectively perceived by the people. When evaluating the greenery within the subjective dimension, we will primarily be interested in the subjective evaluation of this aspect of quality of life on a given territory, for example by its inhabitants. The search for necessary information can use both quantitative and qualitative procedures or methods, especially questionnaires or personal interviews are often used at present. The researcher concentrates on attitudes and opinions of people regarding the greenery in given area, so information can be acquired from the respondents/participants about how much they are satisfied with the amount, quality or accessibility of greenery in the place where they live or how important the greenery is in their lives.



**Figure 1** Objective and subjective dimensions of quality of life

In connection with objective and subjective evaluation of quality of life, questions quite frequently arise regarding their interrelation. We will mention this topic in the chapter dedicated to the measurement of quality of life but we can already say that the situation in terms of character of this relation is still unclear<sup>40</sup>, or rather, it is difficult to take a clear attitude here. As Pacione (2003, p. 21) states about this problem: “Empirical evidence generally shows the extent of congruence between objective and subjective indicators of the same phenomenon to vary from a strong relationship to one that is weak or non-existent. Given the complex nature of cognition, however, it is hardly surprising that there should be divergence between perceived conditions and conditions measured by means of objective indicators”.

We can mention the question of existence of a certain hierarchy of the meaning of basic dimensions. Let us imagine for example that we would perceive the subjective evaluation as superior to the objective one. This opinion could be supported by the fact that *subjectivity* is one of the main characteristics of quality of life. In evaluating the quality of life we would attribute the key importance to personal, individual experience and to a feeling and attitude related with it. If we got back to our example of greenery, it would mean that if we evaluated it as a factor of quality of life in a certain area, we would consider the subjective evaluation of greenery by inhabitants more important than the objectively measured data. In other words, we would give more weight to such evaluation. However, would it be a correct step? We do not believe so. People’s evaluating attitudes are often irrational and influenced by factors such as limited access to information or process of adaptation to certain conditions. Thus the judgement of the situation on the basis of objective indicators has its irreplaceable equal position in the concept of quality of life.

At this point we would like to mention that we consider the idea to give precedence of the meaning of one dimension over another one erroneous. Our main argument is that we consider the *dualism* of quality of life to be just a means of simplification and a way of making an extraordinarily complex phenomenon clearer for specification of possible views of it. Above all, we should perceive both basic dimensions as mutually *complementary*. Although there exist definite advantages, or rather reasons for selective approach to basic dimensions, such approach is always a (potential) threat to the concept whose substance is *complexity*. Information acquired in the objective dimension as

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<sup>40</sup> We do not consider this as negative aspect but rather as a challenge for further research.

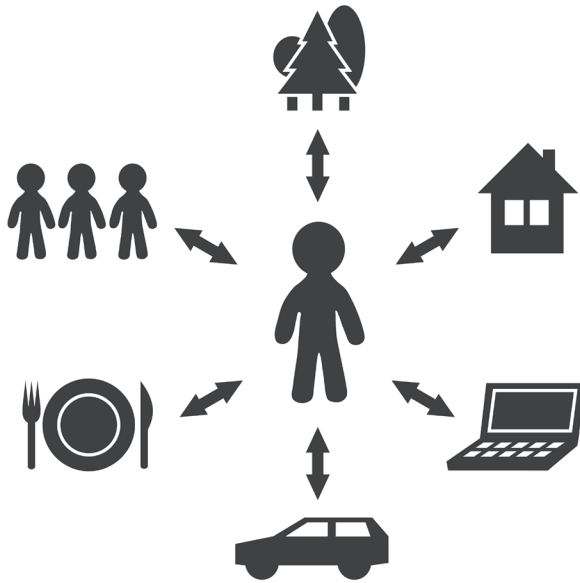
well as in the subjective dimension are usable partially in view of specific intentions and aims, but at the same time representing just part of the total. This point of view is definitely not autotelic. Connection of objective and subjective views enables us to create knowledge that we would not be able to acquire if we used them selectively<sup>41</sup>.

Now let us get back to the core of the problem of *duality*: we have a complex phenomenon (quality of life) which we are trying to understand and approach somehow. For this reason we divide it into two basic dimensions. However, is the division into objective and subjective dimensions the only possibility in this respect? As we have indicated at the beginning of this chapter, it is not so. Let us examine some other ways of basic division of quality of life. We will especially emphasize two options which are quite frequently part of its definition or are part of theoretical and practical starting points of its study in a wider concept.

Another one of the *dualisms* is closely related with the question of basic elements which take part in formation of quality of life. It is not very difficult to determine the first of these elements - it is the human being. Every person in terms of the *bearer* of life thus determines its quality, for example by maintaining or increasing the personal physical fitness. However, everyday experience of each of us points out to the fact that quality of life is also influenced by something else, not only by the human, but also by something the human being is always in contact with. This second basic element forming the quality of life is the *environment* in which our lives take place. This point of view represents two important starting points for the concept of quality of life. The first one is connected with the fact that we can perceive quality of life as a phenomenon which is formed during the contact of a person with surrounding i.e. *external* environment. In other words, quality of life is a result or manifestation of this interaction. The second starting point concerns the *dualism* - if we want the phenomenon of quality of life simplify to a certain extent, we can divide it into the dimension of *environment* and dimension of *human*. As the terms environment and human appear quite frequently and in many contexts in this book, we will be using the term *external* dimension for the dimension of environment and *internal* dimension for the dimension of human being. It is necessary to note that it is rather a substitutive solution adopted in order to

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<sup>41</sup> We will point out to that in the chapter dedicated to measurement and indicators of quality of life.



**Figure 2** External and internal dimensions of quality of life

make the text clearer. Especially in the second case we emphasize that by internal dimension we mean the human in terms of all personal aspects (including psychical or physical aspects)<sup>42</sup>.

The external dimension includes all the aspects or conditions of a person's living environment. This can be natural or built environment or for example elements of social environment. On the other hand, the internal dimension represents the conditions on the side of a human, a unique combination of various characteristics (e.g. nature, intelligence or age). We are specifying this *dualism* separately in order to emphasize the mutual relation between external and internal dimensions because, as we have mentioned, it is a decisive factor in terms of quality of life. The essential aspect of our view of this relation is its *inevitability*, especially if we take into account that human life cannot take place in an absolute isolation from the surrounding environment. It does not only concern basic biological needs (for example the need to breath), without which life is not possible, but also the subsequent needs (e.g. the need of shelter).

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<sup>42</sup> We could also call this dimension *individual* or *personal*. However, this might be the source of confusion especially with the following *dualism*.



Interaction does not have unidirectional character – the human influences the environment and the environment influences life and the quality of life of a human upon a feedback.

In spite of what we have stated above, it is possible, in case of *dualism* comprising external and internal dimension, to evaluate the quality of life separately, i.e. either primarily in terms of conditions of quality of life on the side of a person or by preferential research of external conditions<sup>43</sup>. After all, the reason for the division of quality of life into basic dimensions is to make the contents clearer in order to better and more easily understand this concept, so the above mentioned division is definitely justified. However, in a complex holistic approach, it is important to perceive both basic elements as parts of one total and to have this idea in mind especially in case of selective directing of the research of quality of life and while interpreting the knowledge acquired during the research.

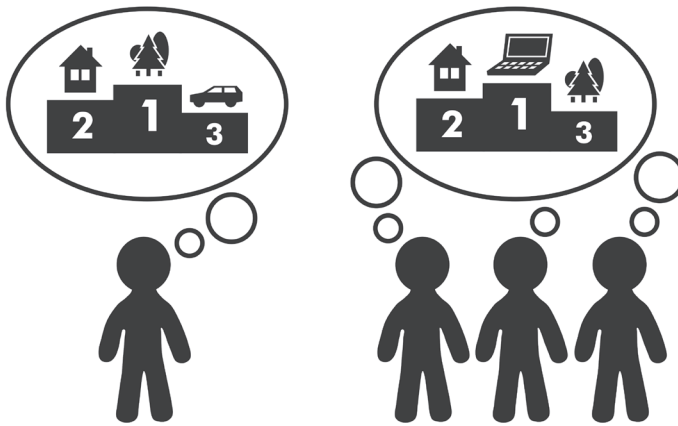
The third *dualism* that we would like to briefly mention in this chapter is connected with the idea that a human occurs in the concept of quality of life de facto in a dual way, showing own *dualism*. We have indicated this idea before. In the chapter dedicated to the development of interest in quality of life we have said that in given respect we can differentiate the *individual* interest and *social* interest. When characterizing the preceding *dualism* we indirectly pointed out that an *individual* stands on the side of internal dimension and at the same time every person is part of other people's external environment. Besides that, we need not perceive the link *human – environment* just in terms of *individual – environment* but also in terms of *society – environment*. At this point it is probably obvious what we aim at with these remarks.

Every person has two basic positions in the concept of quality of life. The first one as an individual representing the *individual* dimension and by the second position we mean the person as part of a group of people or in the widest context of human society so we speak about *social* dimension. It is very important to make difference between these two dimensions so that we can understand many aspects of quality of life and the problems that are connected with it<sup>44</sup>. Vagueness of the concept of quality of life surprisingly too often results

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<sup>43</sup> By this we mean rather a quasi separate evaluation. As we have mentioned, it is practically impossible to strictly separate a person from environment in the concept of quality of life in view of their permanent mutual influence.

<sup>44</sup> We will return to this topic in the chapter dedicated to the definitions of quality of life.



**Figure 3** Individual and social dimensions of quality of life

from the fact that it is not clear whether we speak about the quality of life of an individual or about the quality of life of the society or a social group<sup>45</sup>. The emphasis on individual dimension or *individual quality of life* means the preference of a view of an individual, i.e. individual opinion, preferences, needs or demands which may have a very egoistic character. In the extreme concept we could speak about the quality of life of an individual who has no regard for other people's needs and claims. The opposite would be a one-sided emphasis on the *societal quality of life*, on the needs and demands of the society or a certain social group not respecting the status of an individual. It is here that we find a strong point of contact between the concept of quality of life and the conceptions of the organization or management of the society or its internal rules, i.e. for example the issue of political system, the law etc.

As far as social dimension is concerned, we would like to add that we perceive the substance of its definition primarily in the expression of quality of life of a greater number of people, i.e. a certain group specified on the basis of particular criteria. In terms of terminology, it is possible to encounter, in connection with these criteria or other nuances or with the context of perception

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<sup>45</sup> We use the terms *society* or *social group* quite freely, especially when we define a group of people as an opposite to an individual. We realize that this approach may not be very concrete from the standpoint of some scientific disciplines (for example sociology), but we believe that a more detailed discussion and definition of further terms would be counter-productive in this publication.

of *societal quality of life*, some other variants of its designation. For example Andráško (2005) speaks about *settlement quality of life* in terms of quality of life of the inhabitants of a certain part of a settlement structure (municipality, town). Other variants of social dimension of quality of life are for example terms such as *collective*, *community* or *shared* quality of life.

We could proceed with detection and characteristic of *dualisms* of quality of life<sup>46</sup>. However, we would exceed the intended extent of this book and, why not to admit that, we consider the three above mentioned *dualisms* in terms of outlining and specification of content part of the concept of quality of life to be the most important. Let us summarize in several points the basic knowledge resulting from the information presented in this chapter instead:

- a) The *dualism* of quality of life is above all an aid enabling us to better understand this phenomenon, to describe it more precisely or specify the starting points of its study. We can perceive it as a basic model or rather a suitable starting point for the construction of models of quality of life. Regardless of any division, the phenomenon of quality of life is in fact a complex structure in which everything is connected with everything.
- b) In connection with the previous remark we would like to emphasize again that by specifying basic dimensions and by concentrating on just one of them the other one does not cease to exist. Although such reminder may sound trivial, our experience regarding both lay and expert interest in quality of life proves its relevance.
- c) The term *dualism* of quality of life is not important in itself. What is important is what it represents, i.e. the division of a complex phenomenon into partial components which are easier to deal with. The starting points (criteria) for the specification of *dualisms* can be also used as classification criteria (for example in terms of classification of approaches to the measurement of quality of life).
- d) The ways how to approach *duality* of quality of life are based on dimensions called:
  - objective and subjective,
  - internal and external,
  - individual and social.

In this book we aim especially at their content specification, in terms of terminology these dimensions can be called differently.

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<sup>46</sup>We can mention for example the specification of material and non-material dimensions.

- e) We do not recommend to judge individual variants of the specification of basic dimensions or the dimensions themselves in terms of greater or minor importance. Each variant has its specific justification and serves a certain purpose.
- f) The mentioned variants of specification of basic dimensions are, of course, closely related and they partly overlap. It is possible to combine the starting points that they include and it is possible to retrospectively judge every study of quality of life in terms of these combinations.
- g) We recommend avoiding content equation of basic dimensions or their swapping as this might contribute to confusedness and vague concept of the issue of quality of life.

# 5

## Let us change it into small coins

If we try to give a thought about what human life consists of, we will probably come to a conclusion that it is a great number of various mutually mingled components. They include such spheres of our lives as housing or interpersonal relationships as well as what further influences and internally forms these spheres. We can assume that all such components assist in forming the qualitative aspect of human life to a certain extent and in this respect they can act as more or less important factors. That all points out to the fact that quality of life is an extraordinarily complicated and complex phenomenon which is difficult to grasp, evaluate or measure. Therefore, in this chapter we will especially concentrate on the above mentioned partial spheres or components of human life and on identification of those which can be considered in terms of their influence on quality of life to be the most important. In comprehensive meaning we use the term *multi-dimensionality* for this field of interest within the concept of quality of life.

Let us proceed step by step. As we have mentioned, human life is formed by a huge number of components. In terms of terminology, various terms are used for these components of human life in works dedicated to quality of life that are usually not unambiguously distinguished. We can mention for example the expressions such as aspect, domain, element or partial dimension. We do not distinguish them explicitly in the text either or rather, we use them as equivalents<sup>47</sup>. The mention of the possibility to use the term *partial dimension* warns us to pay attention to the need of distinguishing *multidimensionality* and *dualism*, in which we used the term *basic dimension*. The reason of existence both of *multidimensionality* and *dualism* is de facto the same - in both cases it is the way to simplify and make clearer an extraordinarily complex phenomenon of quality of life. The *dualism* represents above all a strongly generalizing view dividing quality of life into categories expressing basic ways of its evaluation or

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<sup>47</sup> We admit that a detailed discussion about the possibilities of their content differentiation is undoubtedly an interesting challenge, however, having in mind the main purpose of this book, we will leave it out.

basic components which form it. In the case of *multidimensionality*, it is also about the distribution of the contents of the phenomenon of quality of life into certain categories but this distribution is much more specific, it is more in-depth. Therefore there are many more *partial dimensions* than *basic dimensions*<sup>48</sup>. Partial dimensions and basic dimensions are, of course, related to each other. For example we can evaluate housing as the aspect of human life both within objective<sup>49</sup> and subjective<sup>50</sup> dimension. Some partial dimensions can primarily concern *individual quality of life*, others rather *social quality of life*. We can also include partial dimensions into *internal*<sup>51</sup> or *external*<sup>52</sup> dimension. However, when judging them, it is suitable to have in mind permanent interaction between a human and the environment. Individual aspects of human life often stand at the intersection of these basic dimensions<sup>53</sup>.

The last remark mentioned in the previous section reminds us again that it is necessary to primarily perceive quality of life as a complex, dynamic and ever changing phenomenon. This means that individual components of our lives are related to one another, a change in one can influence the others. The connections between various spheres of human life exist both among basic dimensions and within them<sup>54</sup>. To express the mutual links and influence between dimensions, we can use a term *interdimensionality* of quality of life.

It is virtually impossible to include all partial dimensions and all links among them into the evaluation or measurement of quality of life. In other words, in terms of understanding and especially practical use of *multidimensionality* and *interdimensionality* in a complete approach, we are rather in the realm of theory. However, if we want to truly study quality of life, we have to tackle this problem somehow.

In chapter 3 when we tried to explain how we can perceive the term *quality*, we gave an example of shoes. We mentioned that shoes can have many properties, but they represent just a potential of quality. We can speak more

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<sup>48</sup>Therefore we speak about *multidimensionality*.

<sup>49</sup>For example the evaluation of the housing quality on the basis of indicators expressing household facilities.

<sup>50</sup>For example the personal satisfaction with housing quality.

<sup>51</sup>For example psychic or physical condition of person.

<sup>52</sup>For example the environmental pollution.

<sup>53</sup>For example the state of personal health can be perceived as partial component of internal dimension but it can be strongly influenced by external factors.

<sup>54</sup>A simplified example can be a sudden loss of employment which shows in the level of income but also in the psychic state of a person.

explicitly about quality, when we start to judge these properties of the shoes in terms of certain demands. It is important that some properties will have a greater importance than others in this respect and we will perceive them as main factors which influence our evaluation of the quality of the shoes. It is similar in human life. We do not even realize many of its components and they are merely everyday trifles to us<sup>55</sup>. On the contrary, there are things in our lives that we consider especially important and we pay much more attention to them<sup>56</sup>. And it is the identification of such important domains of human life which is a way to determine what we can perceive as *parameters* of quality of life.

However, which components of human life should we consider relevant and how can we determine them? Although there is no clear answer at hand, we have some procedures that can lead us to it<sup>57</sup>. In any case, if we do not want our evaluation of quality of life to be chaotic and if we want it to have rational justification, it is necessary to select an approach based on clearly specified starting points or criteria.

M. Pacione (2003, p. 23) mentions two, or rather three basic procedures of identification of key elements of quality of life:

- 1) The first approach is based on the determination of these elements on the basis of theory (“to derive them from theory”). Pacione himself admits that this procedure can encounter the problem of plurality of theoretical starting points.
- 2) In the second case Pacione recommends to use such procedures within which we could determine relevant elements of quality of life according to the information acquired directly from the people (“asking people directly”).
- 3) Pacione considers the third variant to be a combination of the preceding two variants and thereby he means what we could call an *expert method* – i.e. identification of elements of life based on the opinions of experts or scientists (“reference to expert opinion”). However, the author himself notes that the view of experts may not be (and often is not) identical to the opinion of the public.

As Pacione suggests, each of the mentioned procedures has its advantages and disadvantages. We can add some more to those that have been mentioned. For example if we use a particular theoretical basis, it can facilitate the choice

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<sup>55</sup> For example automated activities on the way to work.

<sup>56</sup> For example the family or health.

<sup>57</sup> Besides, there is no reason why other ones could not be created.

of key domains but it can also be a limiting factor which will not allow us to cover certain parts of the problem. Also, if the original theory is based on simplifying presumptions, these presumptions will be transferred into our solution to the problem which may not only lower the relevance of selected domains but especially weaken the reliability and authority to use the results acquired this way. Identification of domains of life based on subjective consideration or on people's opinions may not be the ideal solution on account of limited rationality or lack of information. In case of some studies it may not even be practicable<sup>58</sup>. The selection of relevant domains based on expert evaluation can be perceived as more objective, but it may be difficult to determine who is a real expert and the resulting choice can always be disputable in this respect.

In spite of these and some other possible reservations, the mentioned procedures are undoubtedly useful and practically usable under suitable conditions. Andráško (2007) suggests making a list of important components of quality of life on the basis of combination of mentioned procedures or comparison and feedback of their results. However, this approach is not applicable without problems in any research and it can complicate a difficult research even more. In other words, interconnection of procedures would not have to mean just a combination of their advantages but also disadvantages that are related to them.

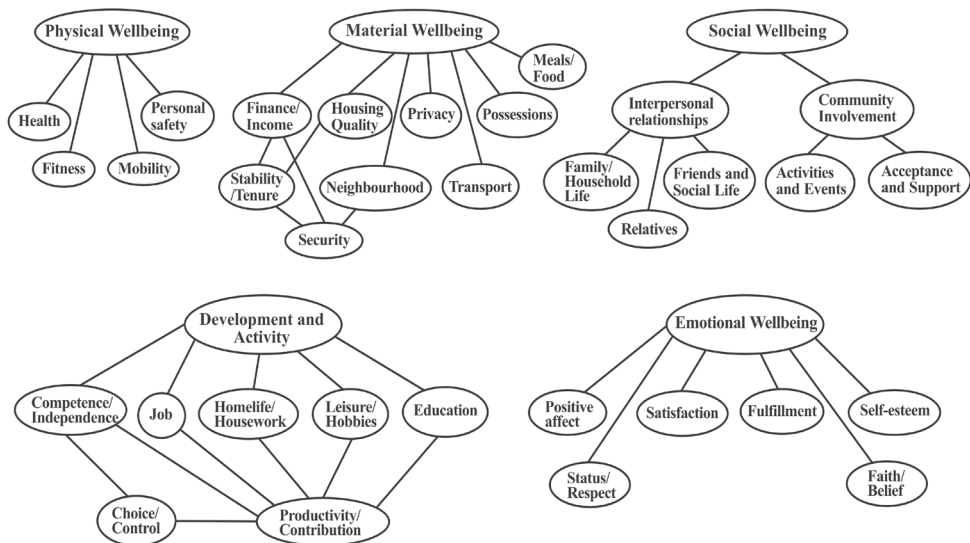
We can mention one more, quite a frequent approach to the determination of the domains of life which should be taken into account when evaluating its quality. This approach summarises or generalizes the knowledge applied or acquired in individual studies of quality of life and therefore its starting point is primarily the study of literature or rather expert studies and works.

We have discussed the theoretical starting points of the study of quality of life in terms of *multidimensionality* and we pointed out some procedures using which we can deal with the problem of identification of partial dimensions of human life which primarily influence its quality. Now let us have a look at what results have been achieved in some concrete studies when using some of these procedures.

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<sup>58</sup>For example a representative questionnaire survey on the level of several states would be an extremely difficult task in terms of finance and organization which might not be in power of any researcher.





**Figure 4** Domains relevant to quality of life according to Felce and Perry (1995)  
 Source: Reproduced from Felce and Perry (1995, p. 61, Figure 2)

In the first two studies the results of which we will mention, the used procedure was based on the *survey of (professional) literature*. This way the authors Felce and Perry (1995) determined 5 basic domains relevant to quality of life: physical wellbeing, material wellbeing, social wellbeing, emotional wellbeing and development and activity. As shown in the figure 4, these domains are further subdivided internally, so for example physical wellbeing subsumes health, fitness, mobility and personal safety. A similar approach was used by Dissart and Deller (2000) in their study. These authors have come to a conclusion that the main dimensions of quality of life are personality, social support, personal satisfaction, personal skills, environmental factors, economic factors, health and stressful events.

We have not mentioned these studies and their results by chance. Our priority was to give our readers some examples of specification of domains or dimensions considered in professional literature to be relevant in terms of interest in quality of life. We also wanted to suggest some impulses for further considerations. We will make several remarks in this respect:

- a) At first glance it is obvious that domains or dimensions specified in the mentioned works are not identical which is not a substantial problem<sup>59</sup>. It is mainly the terminological difference but in terms of interpretation of content aspect we can see a major overlap of identified partial dimensions.
- b) In both cases we can notice that it is not possible to strictly separate individual categories (domains, dimensions) and it is only possible to understand them in their mutual connection (*interdimensionality*). For example Dissart and Deller separately classify the dimensions of personality and personal satisfaction but it is very likely that these are two related and interconnected categories. However, Dissart and Deller themselves point out that the individual dimensions are “potentially interactive”<sup>60</sup>.
- c) We can perceive the wide scope of specified dimensions to be problematic. It makes their use in a concrete research potentially difficult. Felce and Perry further divide the domains internally but this does not fully solve the problem.
- d) It is the internal classification in Felce and Perry’s work that draws our attention to the fact that we can, or rather, we should perceive *multidimensionality* as a *hierarchic* structure. This means that partial dimensions can be identified at multiple levels or that the specified domains are further divided internally. An example is the domain of housing. Most people will probably agree that it is an important domain of human life with an influence on its overall quality but it is obvious that housing is still in terms of contents a very wide category. If we were to evaluate it exactly, we would have to further specify its contents and possibly emphasize what is the most important for a person just within this domain<sup>61</sup>.

An example of the theory or theoretical starting points often connected with the issue of quality of life in connection with the specification of its relevant domains is so-called *hierarchy of needs theory*, created by Abraham Maslow in the field of psychology. Although it is not the aim of this book to characterize this theory in detail and in this respect we recommend the reader to preferably use specifically oriented information sources<sup>62</sup>, a brief reference definitely has

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<sup>59</sup> *These differences can be caused by the specifics of the working procedure, by using different literary sources, by different expert starting points etc.*

<sup>60</sup> *Dissart and Deller (2000, p. 137).*

<sup>61</sup> *The mentioned research problem is in the case of the measurement of quality of life often connected with so-called weighting of indicators used. We will return to this aspect of quality of life in chapter 8.*

<sup>62</sup> *For example Maslow (1943, 1970). We strongly point out that the presented view of the theory is largely simplified and does not concern many studies discussing or elaborating on it.*

its meaning. Above all, as we have mentioned, the hierarchy of needs theory is an example of *theoretical starting point* that we can adhere to when identifying the main components of quality of life. This statement is based on the argument, which the name of the theory itself suggests. Namely, it comprises the emphasis on the issue of *needs* appearing in human life. We can equate these *needs* to a certain extent with *demands*, i.e. with what determines the quality (of life)<sup>63</sup>.

Maslow has specified five basic kinds of needs that he calls *physiological needs* (e.g. the need of food or air), *safety* (e.g. the need of personal safety against violence), *belongingness* (social needs), which includes emotional connections, friends, family etc., *esteem needs* (it regards the value of a person and its status) and *self-actualization* (realization and use of individual properties, interests etc.). Maslow arranged these needs into a hierarchy where each level is related to the fulfilment of needs on next level. Within this sequence it is necessary to fulfil physiological needs before we can proceed fulfilling the needs related to safety etc.

Maslow's theory is definitely an inspiring concept and theoretical starting point<sup>64</sup> and in publications dedicated to quality of life it is often widely presented. But as we have mentioned, specific theoretical starting points need not only be an advantage but also a limitation. In terms of the concept of quality of life we have to realize that Maslow's theory is aimed at an individual – applying its presumptions and starting points in the *social* dimension can be very disputable and in some research contexts not very justifiable. This theory also includes many questions and problems<sup>65</sup>.

At the end of this chapter we would like to pay attention to two more studies – examples of specification of the most important domains of life influencing its quality. In both cases the authors used the variant of approach called in Pacione's classification as “asking people”.

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<sup>63</sup> *In this respect we intentionally take a careful attitude – needs as perceived in given theory cannot be, in our opinion, universally equated with how we perceive demands within the concept of quality of life.*

<sup>64</sup> *It is only fair to note that Maslow's theory is mainly concerned with the problem of human motivation and it is not explicitly dedicated to quality of life.*

<sup>65</sup> *For example how to explicitly measure individual kinds of needs, because it may be extraordinarily difficult if not impossible in cases such as esteem needs or self-actualization.*

Ann Bowling (1995) within a wider study aimed at the connections between quality of life and health did the research on the aspects of life the people consider the most important. As a basis the author used the results of a survey which took place in Great Britain and included the answers of 2000 respondents. In terms of the structure of the answers, these things were identified the most important<sup>66</sup>:

- relationships with family / relatives,
- own health,
- health of someone close / responsible for,
- finances / housing / standard of living.

The next positions were occupied by aspects of life such as relationships with other people, availability to work/able to work, social life/leisure activities, conditions at work/job satisfaction, education, religion/spiritual life, environment (pollution, rubbish, noise, cleanliness, safety), others (crime, politics/government, happiness/well-being, unspecified, etc.).

The second mentioned study is the work by Andráško (2005). The author did a survey in 38 Slovak towns and villages in order to identify the most important factors influencing people's quality of life. Andráško based the formulation of questions on the previous theoretical definition in terms of the existence of *duality* and division of quality of life into its individual and social dimensions<sup>67</sup>.

The respondents were asked two basic, open ended questions:

1. What are the factors that most influence your personal quality of life?
2. What are the factors that most influence the quality of life in your municipality?

According to respondents' answers the most important factors influencing individual quality of life were<sup>68</sup>: interpersonal relationships (any other than family relationships), family and family relationships (in terms of importance determined as a separate factor), finances, employment, environment, health, housing, cultural life, education, leisure time and leisure time activities etc. As

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<sup>66</sup>The answers were evaluated according to their order (priority order) as well as according to their frequency. We have partly simplified the results in view of the aim of this publication so as to point out just the most important knowledge.

<sup>67</sup>The societal quality of life was in this case represented by the quality of life of the inhabitants of the municipality and the author called it community or settlement quality of life.

<sup>68</sup>The order corresponds to the attributed importance.

for societal quality of life the respondents mentioned these most important factors: environment, interpersonal relationships (any other than family relationships), transport, facilities, finances, culture, employment, accessibility, housing, safety, services etc.

It is worth noticing that the results of both the above-mentioned studies in terms of subjective perception of the extent of influence on quality of life show the top priority of interpersonal relationships, primarily the relations between family members or relatives. The similarity is obvious even in terms of the importance of such aspects of quality of life as health, state of environment, financial security or housing. The study by Andráško pointed out at the difference in the perception of individual and societal quality of life. The evident orientation at private, personal life in first case represents especially the strong position of the factor *family* while its certain antipole on the side of factors of societal quality of life is *environment*.

In spite of the fact that the importance of such values or aspects of quality of life such as family, housing and others will not probably surprise us, it is important to point out that their position is very relative. As Bowling, Andráško and other authors have shown, the preference of what a person considers important (or the most important) is strongly influenced by the number of conditioning factors. It can be for example the age, sex, education but also a place where a person lives or the total character of person's everyday life environment<sup>69</sup>. A detailed analysis of all these aspects of the problem would exceed the framework of our publication. Using the knowledge acquired in the discussed studies, we will at least mention the examples of differences in perception of the importance of selected aspects of life which have a spatial context, i.e. they are related to the place of residence.

Bowling (1995, p. 1452) for example points out "...that respondents in the South West and Wales were the most likely to mention their own health as the first most important area of their lives (34%), and respondents in London and the South East were least likely to mention this (16% and 17%, respectively, in comparison with 23% in Scotland, 24% in the North and 25% in the Midlands and East Anglia). Respondents in London and in the Midlands and East Anglia were least likely to mention relationships with family or other relatives: 29% and

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<sup>69</sup>*In this respect the influence of interdimensionality is obvious – what forms our life, either in terms of aspect on the side of a human or on the side of the environment, affects what we perceive in life as more important.*

28% respectively, in comparison with 30% in the North, 31% in the South East, 35% in the South West and Wales and 35% in Scotland. Finally, respondents in London were most likely to mention financial security/housing/standard of living: 13% mentioned this, in comparison with 11% in the South East, 10% in the North, 9% in the Midlands and East Anglia, 8% in Scotland and 7% in the South West and Wales”.

Andráško noticed especially the differences in the preferences of individual factors of quality of life depending on the size of a municipality the respondent came from. The knowledge regarding the factors of individual quality of life called *interpersonal relationships* (any other than family relationships) and *family* suggest that the more inhabitants the municipality/town has, the perceived importance of family decreases and the importance of other, i.e. non-family relationships increases. Factor *housing* showed important differences in the preference which was important especially in larger towns or cities. On the other hand, in the villages much more importance when compared to (bigger) towns was attributed to the factor *faith*. It is also interesting to see the results of comparison of factors influencing societal quality of life. For example the *local authorities* were perceived as much more important in smaller municipalities and the bigger the settlement the less important this factor was. In the biggest cities the interest in overall political situation and the activity of Slovak government prevailed.

As it is obvious from the contents of this chapter, the problem of *multidimensionality* of quality of life is an extraordinarily complex problem which is still fairly solvable. There exist procedures which enable us within virtually infinite number of partial dimensions of human life to determine those that we can in terms of the influence on its quality consider the most important. This de facto means that even in the case of human life we are able to largely determine what we have called parameters of quality. On the other hand, it is always necessary to have in mind that these parameters may not have a universal validity and that even individual procedures to disclose relevant components of human life are not perfect. Each of the procedures has certain advantages and disadvantages which we must take into account when interpreting or practically using the knowledge acquired by them.

# 6

## How does it differ from...

In discussions dedicated to quality of life it is possible to commonly encounter views which, in interpreting it, put an emphasis especially on the quality of the environment, standard of living or material wealth, but also views according to which quality of life is mainly the matter of health or feelings of well-being, satisfaction or happiness.

As we have mentioned in chapter 1, the plurality of views of quality of life is, among others, influenced by its *subjectivity* and *relativity*. We can find as many opinions of what quality of life is and what this phenomenon represents as many there are people in the world<sup>70</sup>. In the previous section we have indicated that to express quality of life, either in lay or expert discussion, terms such as satisfaction, happiness, well-being, standard of living and many others are used. We will call these terms in a simplified way *meta-concepts*<sup>71</sup> and we will deal with their connection with quality of life on the following lines.

We can perceive meta-concepts as concepts that more or less overlap in terms of contents with quality of life and they can even be identified with it. The same applies for several meta-concepts mutually.

As far as their content is concerned, meta-concepts are often used as equivalents, in terms of terminology as synonyms. Many definitions<sup>72</sup> of quality of life confirm that one meta-concept can be used for the explanation of another. The situation regarding the use of meta-concepts is therefore very chaotic. This is undoubtedly the result of a fact that, similarly to quality of life, they lack a clear definition.

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<sup>70</sup> *Paraphrasing Ben-Chieh Liu's opinion (1975, p. 10), according to which "There are as many quality of life definitions as there are people".*

<sup>71</sup> *We met the term meta-concepts in the work by van Kamp et al. (2003, p. 8) where we borrowed it. Although in terms of semantics this term can be disputable, in terms of what our publication aims at it is suitable as a simplifying term.*

<sup>72</sup> *We will deal with them in the following chapter.*

Let us at least briefly have a look at some of these concepts. We have chosen the following meta-concepts for further discussion: satisfaction, happiness, well-being, liveability, environmental quality, health, sustainability.

We will start with satisfaction, a concept whose meaning and contents can be understood by anybody. The feeling or expression of whether we are (more or less) satisfied or (more or less) dissatisfied is a common display of everyday evaluation of the world around us as well as evaluation of ourselves. It is an evaluation which is influenced by our personal experience, knowledge and all that affects our subjective view. That is why the research of satisfaction with life (as a whole or its partial components) plays an important role within the study of quality of life.

Another term often appears in connection with subjective evaluation of human life, i.e. the term happiness. As well as the demonstration of (dis)satisfaction, the expressions of feelings connected with happiness are a natural component of human life. The meaning and contents of the term happiness are perceived rather implicitly in this case. Explicit definition of what is happiness is very complicated as it is a term which is strongly influenced by the subjectivity of each of us and by the relativity of its use. We can perceive the differences in understanding happiness as a result of dissimilarities connected with the context, i.e. for example with place, time, reason and the way this term is used. In other words, the expression of whether and how much a person feels (un)happy can be the result of an influence of a wide spectrum of factors like character qualities, cultural and social context which takes part in the formation of personal system of values or expectations or the way of perception of an individual in the society and in the world<sup>73</sup>.

In spite of that (or rather therefore) we encounter discussions regarding satisfaction and happiness in academic literature too, and the authors quite often attempt to explicitly differentiate these terms. As Campbell et al. (1976) have suggested<sup>74</sup> in their work<sup>75</sup>, satisfaction has in terms of connotations or interpretation rather a more “stable” character when compared to happiness.

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<sup>73</sup>*An interesting but also a disputable view of the relativity of happiness was brought by a documentary Happy (2011) by the director Roko Belic.*

<sup>74</sup>*Especially in connection with the search for arguments for the measurement of quality of life on the basis of satisfaction.*

<sup>75</sup>*In view of the orientation of an extensive research to the issues regarding subjective perception of life and its aspects, this work is considered to be one of pioneer studies in the field of quality of life.*



Ruut Veenhoven (1991) presented his own view which perceives happiness and satisfaction (in terms of life-satisfaction) as an expression of what we can call positive part of subjective evaluation of human life<sup>76</sup>.

If we take into account the frequency of use in expert studies, we can determine as one of the most important meta-concepts of quality of life the term well-being. As no clear and generally accepted definition pertains to this concept which would specify its meaning and content aspect, it is dealt with rather freely. The terms quality of life and well-being are frequently considered to be total equivalents without any attempt to differentiate them. However, in expert works dedicated to quality of life, we can usually encounter the term well-being in a certain more specific form – either in connection with subjective evaluation of (quality of) life or with its internal and individual dimension<sup>77</sup> or in connection with objective, external or social dimensions<sup>78</sup> of quality of life. For example Diener and Suh (1997) primarily use the term subjective well-being. They interpret this concept as formed by three interrelated components, one of them being life-satisfaction<sup>79</sup>. We can encounter a less specific use of the term well-being<sup>80</sup> in Felce and Perry's work (1995). As we have mentioned in chapter 5, the authors used the terms physical wellbeing, material wellbeing, social wellbeing and emotional wellbeing for four out of five domains relevant to quality of life.

From the standpoint of the Slovak author<sup>81</sup> of the publication that you hold in your hands now, it is necessary to add one more remark regarding the problem of differentiation of concepts of quality of life and well-being. The decision (not) to use the concept of well-being may be strongly influenced by the particular language the author uses. For example in Slovak or Czech it is quite difficult to find a simply usable equivalent of the term well-being for the translation. The literal translation is possible but not quite understandable. On the contrary, it is possible to translate the term quality of life literally and in a sufficiently understandable way. This points out to the fact that the use of individual meta-concepts can largely be influenced by the language<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> "... the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life favorably" (Veenhoven 1991).

<sup>77</sup> For example subjective well-being, human well-being, personal well-being.

<sup>78</sup> For example material well-being, social well-being.

<sup>79</sup> The two remaining are pleasant affect and unpleasant affect.

<sup>80</sup> In the form wellbeing.

<sup>81</sup> Who works in the Czech Republic.

<sup>82</sup> Not only in terms of semantics but also pragmatic possibilities of translation.

A meta-concept with a usual aiming at the conditions of human life connected with the living environment is environmental quality. In terms of expert interest, both objective and subjective standpoints are generally applied in this case. An example can be the evaluation of quality of air by means of indicators expressing the concentration of polluting substances or by means of people's opinions regarding this aspect of their living environment<sup>83</sup>.

The concept of livability or liveability<sup>84</sup> is another one of meta-concepts which have no generally valid definition. On the contrary, as van Kamp et al. (2003) have shown, there exist more, often very different ways of perception and definition of this term. Authors like Pacione (2003) believe that it is connected with the problem of quality of life or other meta-concepts especially due to a strong emphasis on subjectivity and relativity, or rather human aspects of the link between the person and environment. Pacione (2003) considers (urban) liveability to be "...a relative rather than absolute term whose precise meaning depends on the place, time and purpose of the assessment, and on the value system of the assessor" (p. 20).

The term health occupies an important position among meta-concepts. It often appears not only in definitions of quality of life but also in other concepts. In many cases<sup>85</sup> it is the health which is perceived as a key component of quality of life<sup>86</sup>. However, what does health or that somebody is healthy really mean? Although it may seem strange, there is no clear answer to such questions. Various definitions<sup>87</sup> in terms of contents point out to the fact that, as well as quality of life, health also has more dimensions, for example physical, psychic or social and it is not connected with just a particular illness. Therefore it is no surprise that the concept of health appears in connection with all basic dimensions of quality of life. It pertains both to an individual and to the society<sup>88</sup>, both to internal<sup>89</sup> and external<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *This is just another example of overlapping of meta-concepts. In this case we use one meta-concept (satisfaction with quality of air) to evaluate another meta-concept (environmental quality).*

<sup>84</sup> *It is possible to encounter both forms of the word in academic literature.*

<sup>85</sup> *The concept of so-called health-related quality of life is important and often studied.*

<sup>86</sup> *This is largely expressed by a proverb "A healthy person has many wishes, an ill person just one - to get well".*

<sup>87</sup> *For example a definition of health according to WHO (1947), definition according to Hanušin et al. (2000).*

<sup>88</sup> *The international WHO project Healthy Cities is well-known.*

<sup>89</sup> *For example a predisposition of a person to certain illnesses.*

<sup>90</sup> *For example the influence of quality of air, water or food on person's health.*

dimensions and we can evaluate it on the basis of objective criteria<sup>91</sup> as well as subjective judgement<sup>92</sup>.

The mentioned information shows that health plays a very important role due to various components of quality of life. In this case, too, it is important to have in mind the context and way of use of a given concept and to avoid excessive simplification. Let us imagine, for example a person who is in terms of certain objective standards physically and psychically healthy. However, this does not guarantee that this person will be happy or satisfied with own life etc. Nikolai Amosov (1980) also points out that objectively healthy people have a tendency to lower and underestimate the importance of health in their lives. What is also important is the connection of health (in terms of state of health) with other components of quality of life<sup>93</sup>.

Finally we will take a look at one more important meta-concept which is sustainability. The interpretation of content aspect of this term is not clear, in a wider concept it is especially the school of thought dealing among others with issues of balanced development, links between the society and environment and long-term development and preservation of human life on Earth. In this respect the topic of sustainability is often connected with the problem of so-called sustainable development.

There exist more opinions on the relation between quality of life and sustainability. A situation, in which both concepts are perceived as equivalents or synonyms expressing the same, is no exception. There may be more reasons for such view. On the one hand it is undoubtedly an implicit overlapping of these concepts in connection with the attention paid to complex view of a human - environment relationship, explicitly expressing for example in the use of the term quality of life in documents dedicated to sustainability or to sustainable development<sup>94</sup>. On the other hand there may be pragmatic reasons as quality of life can be perceived as a term which is more accessible and easier to understand than the term sustainability<sup>95</sup>. Such view can be found for example

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<sup>91</sup> For example the levels of blood pressure.

<sup>92</sup> A person can feel unwell even though is objectively healthy.

<sup>93</sup> The director and script writer Juraj Jakubisko points out to this in a witty way in the name of one of his movies – “It’s Better to Be Wealthy and Healthy Than Poor and Ill”.

<sup>94</sup> In chapter 2 we have already mentioned the examples such as Agenda 21 (1992) or so-called Brundtland Report (1987).

<sup>95</sup> As we have mentioned in connection with subjectivity or popularity of quality of life, everybody is kind of expert in this field while the term sustainability may seem too expertly.

in the study DETR (2000, p. 3) where it states that “Quality of life is a term used by government synonymously with sustainable development, because it is felt to be more easily understood by the general public”. However, the authors of the mentioned study point out that it is in fact impossible to interchange the concepts of quality of life and sustainability. In other words, although both concepts have so much in common, they show some specifics which differentiate them. A detailed discussion on all views of this problem would largely exceed the intended range of this publication. However, we will mention at least some links that we consider relevant.

According to a definition<sup>96</sup> presented in so-called Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), sustainable development represents an effort “to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future”. In this definition we can primarily notice its part explaining to a certain extent the relation between sustainable development and quality of life. Above all, it is a shared emphasis on the needs or demands whose importance for the content aspect of quality of life we have indicated in previous chapters<sup>97</sup>. However, there is one important difference. The concept of sustainable development points out to the need of meeting people’s needs at present in such a way that these needs could be met in the future too. According to this view, a satisfactory level of quality of life at present should be reached in such a way that future generations could also have the same level of quality of life.

Two mutually related comments follow from what we have stated:

1) At first glance, the concept of sustainable development contains, when compared with quality of life, a much stronger emphasis on time aspect, on development and the future. Some authors perceive this as a distinguishing feature between the two concepts. For example van Kampt et al. (2003) state that the subject of interest of sustainability is the future while quality of life is focussed on “here and now” (p. 11). We consider such view too simplifying. The time aspect, or rather aspect of development and future also appears in the concept of quality of life which is a temporally variable phenomenon. This means that its level changes in time. These changes are affected both by the factors that a person can and cannot influence. As we have mentioned in chapter 2, the interest in quality of life is an implicit part of the development

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<sup>96</sup> *We point out that there exists a great number of definitions of sustainability or sustainable development.*

<sup>97</sup> *Demands and level of their fulfilment as what defines quality (of life).*

on the level of an individual and the society, it is an important factor influencing the decisions and actions of a human. Especially the future improvement of quality of life can be one of the basic motivations of person's actions. In other words, a human in terms of fulfilment of demands regarding the quality of life does not think only in terms of *here and now*. A number of decisions is motivated by the level of quality of life in the future<sup>98</sup>.

2) The substance of the link or the difference between quality of life and sustainable development does not consist in the time aspect but in something else. As we have mentioned, quality of life, preservation or improvement of its level is a natural part of motivation of people's actions. Such actions can either *take into account the interests or demands of other people* or they may *not take them into account*<sup>99</sup>. In other words, the concept of quality of life comprises any aspects of decisions or actions of people both at the level of formation of individual and societal quality of life. The concept of sustainability is not in conflict with the concept of quality of life in this respect but its focus is on that part of formation of a person's quality of life which includes adaptation to the demands placed on life by other people (at present and in the future). In view of achieving a satisfactory level of fulfilment of people's demands, sustainability has a more distinctive normative character when compared to quality of life. The problem to reach a wider social acceptance of the concept of sustainability lies in the fact that the implementation of its ideas can mean the loss of certain conveniences or lowering of personal comfort for some people, i.e. certain limitation of their quality of life.

In the chapter dedicated to meta-concepts we have discussed just some of them and only briefly. It was important to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the topic of quality of life is connected with the use of many other terms whose contents or mutual relation is often not clear. In spite of the fact (or maybe that is why) we can encounter them both in everyday conversations between people and in professional documents dealing with the future of mankind.

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<sup>98</sup> For example saving money for the retirement.

<sup>99</sup> In this respect we could mention two extremes – egoism and altruism.

# 7

## Briefly and clearly?

The result of our initiative and interest to meaningfully interpret the contents of any term should be its exact definition. If possible, the definition should be brief, clear and it should include basic or typical signs of what we define. The mentioned and more or less generally valid starting points should apply to the definition of quality of life too. The complexity and multiformity of the concept of quality of life indicate that it will not be an easy task in this case. The formation of the definition of quality of life is undoubtedly possible but at the same time it is very probable that the result may not have general validity. In other words, it can be expected that the formed definition will not be capable of including all aspects of the concept of quality of life and that (namely for this reason) not everyone will agree with it.

In the following chapter we will show and briefly discuss several examples of definitions of quality of life. Our overview is far from complete, the chosen definitions will only help us to introduce some possibilities of conceptualization of quality of life and they will serve as an illustration for the use of knowledge acquired in previous chapters.

The publication Dictionary of Human Geography (Gregory et al. 2009) is a well-known source of information and definitions not only for geographers. It states<sup>100</sup> that quality of life is a “concept linked to that of social well-being, which is based on the argument that the human condition should be evaluated on a wider range of indicators than just income – whether at the individual level or through national aggregates” (p. 606). Social well-being is defined in the same publication as: “The degree to which a population’s needs and wants are being met” (p. 700). In this definition we can notice several interesting facts, such as:

- a) The quality of life is characterized rather indirectly. A meta-concept is used for its description, namely social well-being which is defined independently.

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<sup>100</sup> *The Dictionary of Human Geography contains much wider information regarding (not only) the geographical research of quality of life. For the need of our book we only took the part directly related to the defining of quality of life.*

- b) The definition points out the need to evaluate quality of life by means of a wider spectrum of indicators by which it implicitly takes into account *multidimensionality* and also partially the *duality* of quality of life. It also points out the insufficiency of evaluation of (the quality of) human life just on the basis of financial indicators.
- c) The definition also implicitly mentions the *dualism* in terms of individual and social dimension of quality of life. However, societal quality of life is reduced to only a national level which does not fully express the real extent and meaning of this dimension of quality of life.
- d) The social dimension of quality of life, if we understand social well-being this way, is then characterized separately by means of a simple definition of quality of life<sup>101</sup> pointing out to “The degree to which ... needs and wants are being met”.

The definition of quality of life<sup>102</sup> presented in Dictionary of Human Geography undoubtedly contains<sup>103</sup> several important characteristics of this phenomenon. Its minor shortcoming is especially an insufficient internal consistence regarding mainly the individual and societal quality of life.

Now let us move on to concrete studies dedicated among other things to the definitions of quality of life. In one of pioneer studies in this field Liu (1975) presents quality of life as an “output of a certain production function of two different but often interdependent input categories - physical inputs which are objectively measurable and transferable, and the psychological inputs, which are subjectively ordinally differentiable but usually not interpersonally comparable” (p. 12).

Liu’s definition is especially interesting in the fact that it presents quality of life as an output of the influence of two basic categories of inputs. Besides other things, the definition expresses the idea of *dualism* of quality of life and the author not only very correctly points out to mutual link, or rather, interdependence of both input categories but he also calls them using the term dimension (e.g. p. 11). Liu divides quality of life into these dimensions:

- a) *physical*, representing physical resources, influenceable for example by means of income, from which he derives that these aspects of quality of life are objectively measurable and transferable,

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<sup>101</sup> We have written about the defining of quality of life this way in chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> If we consider its part to be the definition of social well-being.

<sup>103</sup> Although they are expressed rather implicitly.

b) *psychological*, which regards psychological, personal, non-transferable, related to private and subjective gratification.

Liu's definition expresses understanding of the fact that quality of life is a complex phenomenon which has its basic components. The specification of these components is largely influenced by author's (micro)economic viewpoint. This reflects in Liu's presumption according to which "...every rational individual always attempts to optimize the level of his life-quality subject to his capability constants in a given time and at a given place" (p. 12). Liu's study does not fully take into account the starting points for the conception or content interpretation of quality of life that he determined himself. The author admits that a weak point of his measurements was not to include the psychological aspects of an individual or the perception of quality of life. In spite of that, we can warmly recommend the reader to read this study. It contains a lot of inspiring information regarding for example the conceptualization of quality of life or the development of the interest in this concept. It brings a more detailed view of some topics that we have only mentioned in a generalized way in this book.

The author of another definition is Szalai (1980)<sup>104</sup>, who says that quality of life represents "the degree of excellence or satisfactory character of life. A person's existential state, well-being, satisfaction with life is determined on the one hand by exogenous ('objective') facts and factors of his life and on the other hand by the endogenous ('subjective') perception and assessment he has of these facts and factors, of life and of himself".

We will give four comments on this definition:

- a) The basis of the definition is obviously the first sentence which, although rather indirectly, stresses the importance of perception of quality of life in terms of the degree up to which certain demands are fulfilled. Szalai perceives this degree especially in connection with "excellence or satisfactory character of life" which could potentially be the subject matter of further discussion.
- b) The definition primarily concerns the quality of life of an individual.
- c) The quality of life is presented as something that is formed by *facts and factors* which we could understand in terms of *multidimensionality* and by a person's perception and evaluation of these factors. Thus the definition is created especially in terms of *what forms quality of life*, i.e. objectively existing factors and their subjective evaluation. However, from our

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<sup>104</sup> Cited by van Kamp et al. (2003).



standpoint, a mention is missing about *how we can evaluate quality of life* differentiating subjective and objective evaluation<sup>105</sup>.

- d) The definition uses some meta-concepts such as well-being and satisfaction to express quality of life. Particularly satisfaction with life should be according to it determined by “exogenous facts and factors” and “by the endogenous (‘subjective’) perception and assessment... of life...”. In this we can see a certain inconsistency of the mentioned definition – as a matter of fact, satisfaction is a subjective evaluation per se.

Still, satisfaction is not the only way of subjective evaluation of quality of life. It is closely related to the importance that people attach to different components of their lives. This aspect appears in the following definition of quality of life.

David Felce and Jonathan Perry (1995) whose work we have mentioned in the previous chapters of this book paid close attention to the issues connected not only with the definition but also with an overall conceptualization of quality of life. These authors discuss in detail different views of quality of life in their study and they point out to three or four ways<sup>106</sup> of its conceptualization (Figure 5):

- 1) In the first case<sup>107</sup>, the quality of life is primarily perceived in terms of objectively measurable life conditions of a person. In other words, this view regards objectively existing/measurable/evaluable living conditions (e.g. owned property, social relations but also physical health) which determine quality of life. The relation to satisfaction (personal satisfaction) is mentioned too, but the satisfaction is not considered relevant in this view.
- 2) The second variant offers an opposite view – the emphasis is placed on subjective evaluation of life conditions. In this case personal satisfaction is considered to be the equivalent of quality of life.
- 3) The third view favours neither life conditions nor personal satisfaction but it perceives quality of life as their combination, i.e. the result of mutual influence of conditions affecting human life and the way in which these conditions are subjectively evaluated.

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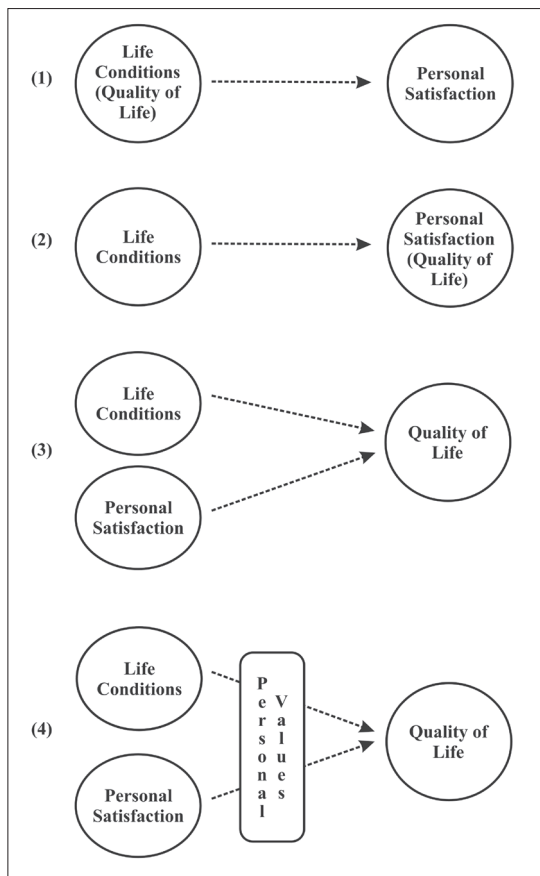
<sup>105</sup> *In terms of impersonal or normatively oriented objective evaluation.*

<sup>106</sup> *They based the first three ways of conceptualization of quality of life on a work by Borthwick-Duffy (1992) and they discuss arguments and opinions which appear in greater numbers in the works of other authors. This discussion is a basis for the fourth solution variant.*

<sup>107</sup> *We point out that our comments regarding the four mentioned views of quality of life are largely simplifying. We recommend the readers with deeper interest in the subject to thoroughly read the study by Felce and Perry (1995).*

4) The fourth view is based on the preceding knowledge and it adds another element to the scheme of quality of life – personal values. These express on the basis of what and in what way a person judges the components forming the quality of life. It is especially this view of defining and total conceptualization of quality of life that Felce and Perry consider to be the most suitable.

This concept of quality of life is similar to the one that we have encountered in the definition by Szalai. We will make two comments:



**Figure 5** Conceptualisations of quality of life according to Felce and Perry (1995)  
*Source:* Reproduced from Felce and Perry (1995, p. 55, Figure 1)

a) The first comment is rather an extension of an idea that we have indicated when we commented on the previous definition and it emphasizes the importance to differentiate objective and subjective evaluation of quality of life. We will try to explain this on a simple example of *food*, obviously an indisputable life condition with an impact on quality of life. Every person creates certain demands in terms of food. These, as well as the level of their gratification, can be influenced by various factors and therefore they can look different. The basic demand for food and level of its gratification is given by the inevitability of intake of nutrients for the human to be able to survive. However, such level of demands is just the “bottom level”. The “top level” of the demands regarding food can be influenced by a number of other factors, habits, accessibility of food, level of material welfare etc. The level of demands itself can be determined and judged in terms of objective view or in terms of subjective attitude. The objective view can have de facto two forms. The first one consists in the fact that food objectively exists and it has certain objective characteristics. The other one regards the situation in which we determine a certain norm on the basis of these characteristics and their link with something else, for example with the health of a person, and we will use this norm to objectively judge whether the given food is favourable for a person or not. It can be for example the determination of a satisfactory level of demands placed on food on the basis of calculation of minimum<sup>108</sup> or optimum<sup>109</sup> need for calorie intake in terms of energy output of a given person. The subjectively determined satisfactory level of demands for food will only be determined on the basis of personal preferences potentially influenceable by a number of factors. These can also include objective characteristics as well as their judgement according to a set norm. The subjective attitude of a particular individual may or may not be influenced by this<sup>110</sup>. In connection with our example we can argue, for example, that it is the difference in objective and subjective judgement of demand for food that results in the fact that many people suffer from overweight or obesity.

b) The second comment regards what Felce and Perry use to enhance the conceptualization of quality of life. In variant 4 they provide a model according to which the quality of life is formed by life conditions, personal satisfaction and personal set of values<sup>111</sup> and these three basic components pertain to 5 domains relevant to quality of life that we have described in chapter 5. It is important that the authors perceive the three mentioned main components in terms of their permanent

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<sup>108</sup> *Necessary to survive.*

<sup>109</sup> *So that a person would not overeat or suffer from malnutrition.*

<sup>110</sup> *Or only to a certain extent.*

<sup>111</sup> *This component represents the importance which people attach to various aspects of their lives.*

mutual interaction, i.e. in terms of internal dynamics of quality of life. As they mention: “Changes in some objective facet of life may change satisfaction or one’s personal values or both. Similarly, changes in values may change satisfaction and precipitate change in some objective circumstance. In the same way, a change in a sense of satisfaction may lead to reappraisal of values and lifestyle” (p. 62). But they also assert that the three basic components can change independently as a result of external influences (Figure 6). We could consider whether the fact that Felce and Perry specify three main components of quality of life is not in contradiction with the idea of *dualism*. However, this approach has no foundation. Firstly, the *dualism* is not and is not supposed to be a norm or a pattern, it is just an aid to understand the internal complexity of quality of life. Secondly, we perceive both the satisfaction and the importance as subjective attitudes.

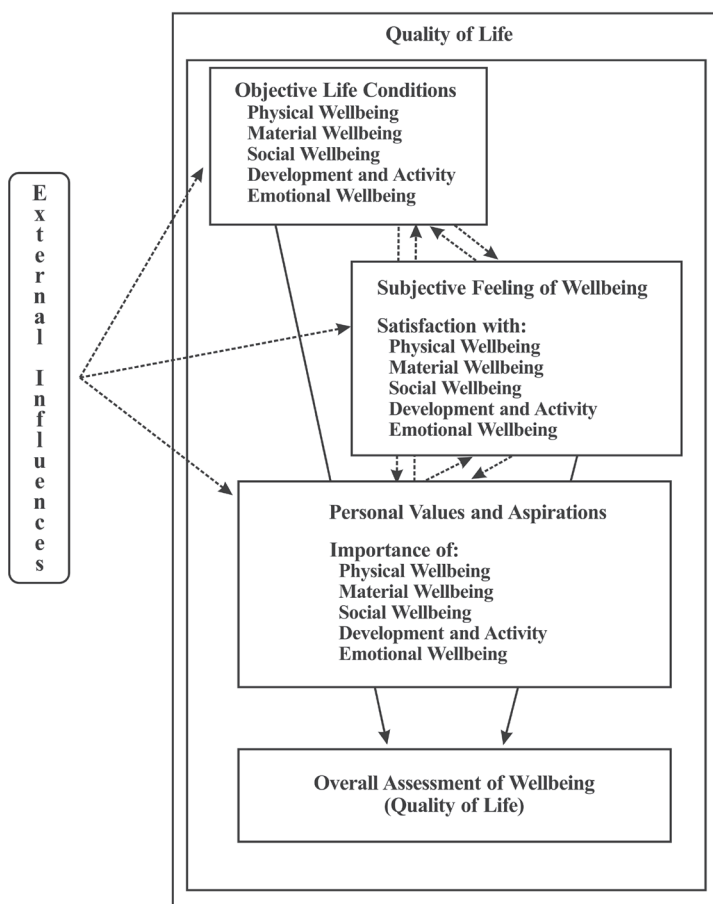
The last definition of quality of life we will comment on briefly is a “simple” definition that we have mentioned in chapter 3. Starting with definition of the term quality and its connection with the term life we have specified quality of life as *the degree to which a set of characteristics of human life meets the demands placed upon it*. The advantage of this definition is the fact that there is some logic in it owing to the process of its specification and also the fact that it puts emphasis on the level of fulfilment of demands regarding the set of characteristics, i.e. it implicitly mentions the specification of quality according to achievement of a certain level of its attributes. In spite of that we take the liberty to assert that the mentioned definition is not sufficiently specific. This fact results in many shortcomings, inaccuracies or ambiguities. Therefore, by formulating and briefly analysing several comments, we will try to point out at least the main problems of the mentioned definition and indicate the possibilities of their solution.

Firstly we should consider whose life we mean within the given definition. It can be a particular individual as well as a specific group of people. In generalized approach we can take into account the *dualism* differentiating the individual and social dimensions of quality of life by which two variants of original definition will arise. Then the quality of life can be perceived as:

- 1) the degree to which a set of characteristics of life of an individual fulfils the demands placed on it,
- 2) the degree to which a set of characteristics of life of a society<sup>112</sup> fulfils the demands placed on it.

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<sup>112</sup>In terms of a group of people specified according to a certain criteria.



**Figure 6** A model of quality of life according to Felce and Perry (1995)  
 Source: Reproduced from Felce and Perry (1995, p. 62, Figure 3)

However, this is not the end of use of the mentioned dualism. We can take further interest in whose demands the human life should meet or who determines these demands. The setting of *degree of fulfilment of the demands* is closely related to it. Our reflection leads us to the fact that demands, either by an individual, by other individuals or aggregate demands by a certain social group (e.g. some social norms) can be placed on the life of a particular individual. The same thing applies in terms of demands connected with the life of a society – they can be based on an individual or social basis. We speak

about the evaluation of quality of life in the context of personal attitudes of an individual towards the society, as well as the society towards an individual. In certain respect it can be the expression of harmony or disharmony of personal interests and preferences in relation to social standards and both formal and informal elements of social life (e.g. legal system, social conventions etc.) By applying such starting point we can specify the first of the above mentioned variants of definition in a way that quality of life is represented by the degree to which a set of characteristics of life of an individual fulfils the demands placed on it:

- a) by a given individual,
- b) by another individual,
- c) by the society or a certain group of people.

We should proceed similarly with the second variant of the definition. In terms of a particular level of fulfilment of demands, we can take into account for example some objective norm in terms of suitable/good/correct/satisfying... situation or fully rely on subjective evaluation. Of course, we can simultaneously use several possibilities as a basis and point out to the problem from several points of view.

The last remark regards the set of characteristics that the definition mentions. Which particular characteristics do we have in mind? The knowledge we have acquired when analyzing *multidimensionality* of quality of life can be a good aid. By means of several methodological procedures, we have a possibility to decide which domains of quality of life the given characteristics should concern. It is important to be able to justify the selection of individual characteristics on the basis of concrete arguments.

In this chapter we have tried to mention and briefly comment on several possible views of quality of life. Each of the mentioned definitions has certain specifics and each is a potential subject matter for another discussion. This points out to the fact that the definition of quality of life definitely is not a simple task. In spite of that we consider it to be a shortcoming if the authors who present in publications or in other ways the results of research of quality of life give up the effort to define the subject matter of their interest. After all, if we research quality of life, it should be at least a bit clear what we mean by that term.

# 8

## Let us use indicators. And what about indexes?

When it comes to evaluation or measurement of quality of life, it is generally expected from the experts to provide some guaranteed, universally applicable “guide” or “recipe”. However, we claim that there is no such thing and we certainly have a reason for that. We could briefly express it as *complexity* versus *plurality*. In other words, on the one hand there is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon, on the other hand there exists a great number of potentially applicable approaches formed by factors such as methodological starting points or the purpose of measurement. In practise, there are many procedures<sup>113</sup> for the measurement of quality of life and each of them has its pros and cons.

Or is that all a little different? Although it may seem paradoxical, we have to raise a certain objection against our own statement presented in the previous section. A universal recipe for the study and measurement of quality of life exists after all and it is even very simple. We just have to learn to clearly answer the question: “What do we want to study/measure?”. We could surely object that the answer to this question is obvious. We want to measure the quality of life. However, the vagueness of the concept partly resides in the fact that a lot of attention is paid to the measurement of *something in the context of quality of life*, but only a little attention is paid to what the given measurement means or how the acquired results are in fact connected with quality of life. The absence of concrete definitions or at least content specification of the term quality of life is a weak point of many expert or popular science works<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> And others can and undoubtedly will appear.

<sup>114</sup> We can call this interpretative alibi.

When we were discussing the content aspect of quality of life, its *duality*, *multidimensionality* or the possibility of its definition, we also tried to point out to the problems and starting points of its measurement or interpretation of acquired results.

Now let us try to use the knowledge acquired in the previous chapters and suggest a simple example of the measurement of quality of life on its basis. We will start with the definition according to which we can perceive quality of life as *the degree to which set of characteristics of human life meets the demands placed upon it*<sup>115</sup>. From this definition we will take three basic starting points for the measurement:

- a) we can measure the quality of life of an individual and/or quality of life of more people,
- b) we will measure quality of life on the basis of certain characteristics<sup>116</sup> connected with certain demands,
- c) the level of quality of life shall be determined by means of a certain level of these characteristics.

We admit that the starting points could be formulated in a different, more demanding way. However, we need just a simple example that will point out several basic aspects of measurement of quality of life which are worth mentioning.









Our model example (Figure 7) in basic features represents a typical, although not the only one or ideal way of measurement of quality of life. In this example we will consider the most important domains of quality of life to be health, partner relationships and financial opportunities. Then we will examine the level of these characteristics for three people and we will express it by values from 1 to 3 where **1** represents the **best evaluation** and **3** the **worst one**. By counting the values of partial dimensions we can calculate the level of individual quality of life for every person and by counting the values of partial dimensions for all the three persons we can calculate the level of societal quality of life. By counting all the values we can get the overall or total level of quality of life of the given group of people.

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<sup>115</sup>At this point we will not take into account the individual variants of this definition presented in the previous chapter.

<sup>116</sup>By that we primarily mean the domains of life relevant in terms of the influence on its quality.



				
	2	1	3	6
	1	3	2	6
	3	1	1	5
	6	5	6	17

**Figure 7** Model example of the measurement of quality of life

The example, although considerably simplified and with minimum internal variability of the values, points out to several significant findings:

- a) In the first place it is obvious that the measurement of quality of life is based on an individual. Individual person is the bearer of genuine quality of life as a unique and permanently varying result of interaction between a human and environment.
- b) The second finding tells us that individual aspects of quality of life of an individual can reach both very similar<sup>117</sup> and very different level. In our opinion it is the result of causal connections at the level of *interdimensionality* – some connections may be obvious at first glance<sup>118</sup>, others rather represent the influence of latent factors.
- c) The quality of life of an individual can be expressed by means of a certain summary value that we can call IQOL index<sup>119</sup>. By means of this value we could determine which person reaches a higher and which a lower individual quality of life.
- d) The value of the IQOL index does not obviously reflect internal variability in view of the level (values) of partial dimensions and its information value is

<sup>117</sup> *In terms of better or worse level.*

<sup>118</sup> *Although it may only seem so.*

<sup>119</sup> *Index of individual quality of life. The name of the index is not firmly set.*

quite limited in this respect. As a result, two persons can show the same overall level of quality of life but there can be substantial differences between them due to the level of partial dimensions. For example in the figure 7 we can see that two persons reached the same level of IQOL index = 6 but one of them reaches the best level in partner relationships while the other's partner relationships are the worst.

- e) By adding or a different way of grouping of the evaluation of all the studied persons we will get another summary value that we can call SQOL index<sup>120</sup>. We can calculate the value of this index for individual partial dimensions as well as the total value expressing the overall level of quality of life comprising the levels of all partial dimensions for all the persons. And we can notice again that the total value does not express internal variability. For example if we were to count an average level of health in this way, it might seem that every person reaches level 2 in terms of this dimension. In reality, this level is only reached by one person while the others show either above-average or below-average level of health.
- f) We could compare the total level of SQOL index with equally calculated quality of life level of another group of people and thereby determine which group shows higher and which lower societal or collective quality of life.

This calls for writing: "That's it!". Although, as we have mentioned, this example does not represent the only possibility of measurement of quality of life, it describes a relatively widely used principle of such measurement and points out to the fact that the resulting evaluation may be more or less a compromise. The least compromise is the measurement of quality of life at the level of an individual and at the level of individual components of quality of personal life. Grouping of partial values brings about generalization of the resulting information which shows distortion<sup>121</sup> in view of individual quality of life.

On the previous lines we have shown that the level of quality of life can be expressed both by individual partial dimensions and by means of a certain overall index. However, we have not explained one very important thing - how to determine the given level of quality of life or how to evaluate this level in terms of demands placed on human life. At this point we can take advantage of *dualism* in terms of differentiation of objective and subjective dimensions of quality of life. On the one hand it expresses the quality of life in terms of

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<sup>120</sup> *Index of societal quality of life.*

<sup>121</sup> *A significant distortion of individual quality of life is the fact that we use common dimensions which may differ from individual preferences.*

objective conditions<sup>122</sup> and how a person subjectively feels or perceives them, on the other hand it differentiates two basic evaluation approaches – objective and subjective. The objective approach should express unbiased standpoint which is not distorted by personal feelings and it should be based on exact evaluation and facts. The subjective approach is primarily concerned with subjective evaluation. The concrete quantitative expression of these evaluating approaches is connected with the term which is a key term for the measurement of quality of life – the *indicator*<sup>123</sup>.

According to Hanušin et al. (2000, p. 58), an indicator in general represents a datum, a value of varied character<sup>124</sup> which expresses momentary state or the degree of change in a studied phenomenon. This means that a suitable indicator of quality of life should express the momentary state or the degree of change in this phenomenon or some of its components in terms of either objective or subjective evaluation. We can divide the indicators of quality of life into two basic categories, namely into *objective indicators* and *subjective indicators*<sup>125</sup>.

Now let us try to determine indicators useable in our model example. In subjective evaluation we can consider a usual approach to be the one aimed at the evaluation of level of satisfaction. Thus we could create a short questionnaire in which we could ask the respondents to determine the level of their satisfaction on a given scale in which they would evaluate their state of health, partner relationships and financial situation<sup>126</sup>. We could use for example a scale expressing the level from (*very*) *satisfied* to (*very*) *dissatisfied*. The acquired data would subsequently allow us to calculate the overall indicator as subjective IQOL index or subjective SQOL index.

However, how would we deal with the problem of objective evaluation<sup>127</sup> or objective indicators? In terms of financial opportunities we could use for example the level of income or we could confront the level of person's income with the level of expenses of that person. We could evaluate a person's health by means a whole spectrum of indicators, based for example on the results of blood tests. Even though it is obvious that both in the case of financial aspect and health aspect of

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<sup>122</sup> In this case it is health, partner relationships and financial opportunities.

<sup>123</sup> However, there are methods for the evaluation of quality of life which may not work with indicators perceived this way, e.g. so-called qualitative methods of research.

<sup>124</sup> Physically expressed value, proportional value, financial value, etc.

<sup>125</sup> There are also other possibilities of classification of indicators.

<sup>126</sup> Separately for each characteristic.

<sup>127</sup> And thereby the calculation of objective IQOL index or objective SQOL index.

a person's life, the given indicators would rather represent a compromise, we could consider them to be some kind of solution after all. However, what indicator should we use to objectively evaluate partner relationships? Even in this case we might be able to find some intermediary indicators and methods of their measurement. However, this would be a de facto separate research as common objective indicators do not bring us similar information.

The above mentioned examples and remarks point out to several facts we have to be aware of if we are interested in using objective and subjective indicators for measurement of quality of life or when measuring quality of life as such:

a) Firstly, it is obvious that there can be a big difference between what *we want to measure* and *what we can measure*. In objective evaluation we can identify a suitable indicator but it is disputable whether we are really able to acquire necessary data for its expression as these may be personal and very sensitive data. An example can be the evaluation of state of person's health. Even greater problem is the attempt to objectively express something that can only be expressed this way with great difficulty – for example quality of partner relationships. For these and some other reasons the objective evaluation of quality of life usually aims at the use of data acquired in official statistical surveys. However, these data are often just a compromise as they may not cover the relevant domains of quality of life that we have defined or they may cover them only partially. In other words, they may not sufficiently express what we expect from them in this respect. We can also mention the objection that even objective indicators do not guarantee objective evaluation. Human subjectivity can influence the selection of indicators used for the evaluation of quality of life and also the selection and content specification of indicators whose values are acquired in statistical surveys such as census. The problems do not concern only objective indicators. When looking for the data to express subjective indicators, we can encounter a number of complications too. It would be naive to think that we can ask anybody about anything and to really get an answer or that the way a researcher communicates, selected method, time or research environment does not influence the acquired information. The realization of questionnaire surveys or interviews, i.e. the procedures which are commonly used in these cases at present, is also limited by their time, financial or organizational difficulty<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> A detailed discussion (not only) on the mentioned advantages and disadvantages of objective and subjective indicators is offered by Diener and Suh (1997) in their work.

b) The previous comment points out that the selection of indicators used for the measurement of quality of life may not be influenced only *from above*, i.e. by the selection of domains primarily affecting the quality of life but that this selection is also determined *from below*, especially by the (non)existence and accessibility of necessary data. Although this is a more or less common problem in scientific research, in the study of quality of life it is strongly emphasized by the need of use of a wider spectrum of indicators. Let us point out that we can perceive the problematic accessibility of data for the measurement of quality of life in two levels of meaning. The first one is that we will not be able to adequately express certain part or aspect of quality of life because we will simply not have suitable data at hand. The second one is the risk that certain domains of human life will be included in the measurement of quality of life not because they should be there but simply because the necessary data for their expression are available.

We can perceive objective and subjective indicators in terms of the way of measurement as the opposites. However, in the concept of quality of life we prefer their perception as *complements*, i.e. mutually complementing units of measurement of the same phenomenon. Their connection allows us to look at quality of life and its components in a way that the use of just one type of indicator does not allow. We have demonstrated the reasons for this opinion using the examples of greenery<sup>129</sup> or food<sup>130</sup>. We can give another example.

The basis will be the research done by Andráško (2007) who dealt with internal structure of the city of Bratislava in terms of quality of life. He used a wider spectrum of both objective and subjective indicators describing various living conditions on the city territory. One of the studied domains of quality of life was air pollution. Overviews and maps of the spread of selected polluting substances<sup>131</sup> in the city area as well as of spatial distribution of inhabitants' satisfaction with air quality were created. In most cases a direct connection between objective and subjective evaluation was found, as expected – where the pollution concentration was lower, the inhabitants were more satisfied with the quality of air and vice versa, where concentration was increased, the level of satisfaction was significantly lower. However, it was not true with all the polluting substances and in all the city parts. In some cases even the inhabitants of

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<sup>129</sup> Chapter 4.

<sup>130</sup> Chapter 7.

<sup>131</sup> For example SO<sub>2</sub>, particulate matter, benzene and other.

districts affected by above limit values of pollution showed a high level of satisfaction with air quality.

The fact that findings acquired by means of objective and subjective indicators can both overlap and differ significantly is not a novelty<sup>132</sup> and it is a result which has been acquired by several authors in their research. On the other hand, such finding is just a partial result in the concept of quality of life, or rather a (potential) starting point for another research. The acquired findings made the author take a deeper interest in the reason of similarity or difference in the results following from objective and subjective measurements. By analyzing the factors that were a priori likely to have influence on subjective evaluation of air pollution and correlations in spatial distribution of values of all the used indicators of quality of life, he created a hypothesis according to which the inhabitants did not judge the air quality according to the real situation but according to certain intermediary phenomena. This hypothesis was subsequently confirmed by structured interviews aimed at this research problem. The inhabitants generally pointed out that there is lack of objective information regarding air pollution and a tendency was seen in the interviews to come to terms with worse air quality as a “penalty” for living in city or a particular locality. The air quality was judged by the inhabitants mostly on the basis of other components of the environment, namely those which made them suppose that they influence the concentration of pollutants in air. In this respect, the most important were the intensity of traffic on local roads, amount of greenery and distance from industrial plants. It meant that the more greenery there was in the area and the fewer traffic went through it and the farther it was from industrial production, the more significant the inhabitants’ tendency to subjectively evaluate the air quality positively. Although we definitely have to admit that these three factors undoubtedly influence the overall quality of air in the given territory, they are not the only affecting factors and even their effect is not homogenous. In this case, the subjective inhabitants’ opinion characterized the conditions affecting their quality of life only partially. By connecting the subjective opinion with objective evaluation the information was acquired that was not only more detailed but it also pointed out to interesting aspects of the way people perceive and evaluate their environment.

An important aspect of measurement of quality of life which we must mention in this book is so-called *weighting* of indicators. The basic principle of weighting

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<sup>132</sup> *Pacione (2003) points out to this fact.*

of indicators consists in the fact that we do not consider the influence of individual, even though relevant domains of life on its qualitative aspect to be equivalent. Let us remember the studies done by Bowling (1995) and Andráško (2005) which we have mentioned in chapter 5. On the basis of subjective opinions of people both authors identified the most important domains and factors influencing quality of life. However, the results showed that people express certain *preferences* regarding these factors too. We base the weighting of indicators on the conviction that the domains of life which they represent take a different share in forming quality of human life – some of them influence it more, some of them less. In practise this can mean that we put more weight on indicators representing more important domains of life owing to which their values will have a more significant influence of the resulting evaluation of quality of life as a whole.

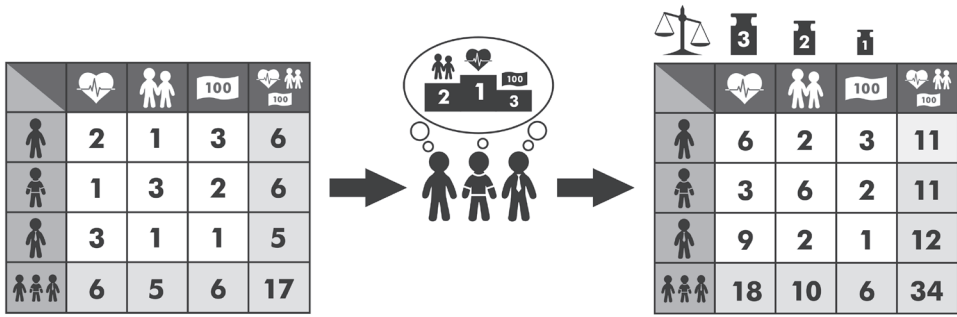
The basic principle of weighting of indicators is shown in figure 8. We will enhance our model example by attributing different weights to partial dimensions. The highest weight (value of 3) will be attributed to health<sup>133</sup>, partner relationships will be attributed weight with the value of 2 and financial aspects weight with the value of 1. It is obvious that weighting causes not only changes in values of partial dimensions for individual observations (persons) but also changes in values of IQOL and SQOL indexes. However, we cannot judge the importance of this change quite unambiguously. On the one hand, the weighting manifested itself in the fact that the person who showed the highest overall quality of life<sup>134</sup> in unweighted version, reaches the lowest quality of life in the weighted version. It is the result of the fact that this person had the best evaluation of less important dimensions and the worst evaluation of the most appreciated health domain. On the other hand we can notice that two persons who showed equal levels of quality of life in unweighted version in terms of comparison of IQOL index values, show equal levels of quality of life in weighted version too.

It is possible to encounter different ways of identifying weights and their application in particular studies of quality of life. Like in the case of identification of relevant domains of quality of life, their weights (or weights of their indicators), too, can be determined on the basis of theoretical starting points, studies of subjective preferences, expert evaluation or a priori by the researcher. There is of course a wider spectrum of possibilities.

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<sup>133</sup> *We will simply multiply the values.*

<sup>134</sup> *The lowest value of IQOL.*



**Figure 8** Model example of the measurement of quality of life using weights

We can mention mutually connected studies by Findlay et al. (1988) and Rogerson et al. (1989) as a concrete example of the use of weights in scientific research. The research of quality of life which connects them is not only interesting by the use of weights but also by the way of their use which represents the combination of objective and subjective indicators. It also points out that the subjective indicator is not just the level of satisfaction but also other explicitly expressed manifestations of subjective evaluating attitudes of a person. In this research of quality of life in British cities, the authors first identified by means of pilot questionnaire survey 20 dimensions of urban environment that the respondents determined to be the most important in terms of quality of their lives. The second phase of the research concentrated on the determination of weights of these components - these were attributed by the respondents on a 5 degree importance scale. The identified weights were subsequently applied on a set of 50 objective indicators representing corresponding components of urban quality of life. Each of the 38 evaluated cities reached a certain position in the ranking according to the results in terms of measured quality of life.

Although the weighting of indicators of quality of life may seem quite understandably like a good idea, even in this case it is not an unambiguous matter. For example the way of determining the weights or their attribution to measured values can always be subject to further discussion<sup>135</sup>. Besides that several studies<sup>136</sup> have shown that the influence of weighting on overall results

<sup>135</sup> For example it is worth noticing that the same weights are used for all the persons in our model example. As well as in the determination of key domains of life, in this case this is a distortion of individual quality of life as its evaluation should be based on individually determined weights.

<sup>136</sup> For example the above mentioned Rogerson et al. (1989).



need not be very dramatic and that the results acquired with or without the use of weights need not differ significantly<sup>137</sup> and that the weighting of indicators may be in some cases just a useless complication for the research.

At the end of this chapter we would like to add several concise comments regarding the measurement of quality of life:

- a) The first will be about objective and subjective evaluation and their expression by means of relevant indicators. In terms of our definition of quality of life they should express the degree to which the certain characteristics of life meet the demands placed upon it. If by the degree we mean the value of indicator, we should connect it to a certain demand. In subjective evaluation the demand is determined subjectively – in our example of satisfaction evaluation this means that a particular evaluation by a particular respondent will express the extent of fulfilment of respondent's demands regarding the given aspect of life<sup>138</sup>. The situation is more difficult in case of objective evaluation. We can encounter the problem how to objectively determine which value is *better* for quality of life and which is *worse*<sup>139</sup> or what is *good* and what is *bad* in a given respect. However, this determination can be very relative and not everybody may agree with it. In our model example we could have supposed that more money equals higher quality of life but this may not apply always and everywhere. There are often some standards or norms of objective evaluation, i.e. the level of accurate demand exceeding which may have certain consequences. For example in terms of health of a human there exists a normal level of body temperature exceeding which results in the lowering of quality of life or even the danger to life itself. However, in many cases the determination of a given norm may be disputable.
- b) The second comment regards the time frame of the research of quality of life. The quality of life is a phenomenon changing in time<sup>140</sup> both on individual and social levels. Therefore its temporal variability represents an interesting starting point connected especially with the measurement of a *change* in the level of quality of life. By means of such measurement, certain development trends of quality of life can be determined in terms of its improvement or deterioration.

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<sup>137</sup> Our model example pointed out to that to a certain extent.

<sup>138</sup> This view would definitely deserve a detailed discussion but we will not pay attention to it at the moment.

<sup>139</sup> Such judgement is especially typical of the construction of various indexes.

<sup>140</sup> In this case we mean mainly in terms of its level.

c) The third comment is concerned with the measurement of quality of life by means of so-called *indexes* or other summarizing or overall indicators of quality of life. We do not intend to discourage the readers from their use but we suggest that they should be judged carefully. As we have shown in our example, these indexes are just a more or less successful generalization of quality of life and their values are often influenced by a number of shortcomings connected with the used data or methods of their construction. Besides that, the indexes often regard only the objective or subjective evaluation of quality of life. It is not a major mistake if we study just part of the phenomenon of quality of life but it is a mistake not to take into account that it is *just part* of a *complex* phenomenon.

We could write much more about the problem of measurement of quality of life. But our aim was, as well as in the case of measurement itself, to give basic starting points - the rest is up to reader's personal interest, effort and consideration.

# 9

## It is studied by many... geographers too

There are many reasons why to study quality of life. This phenomenon is quite naturally connected with different aspects of people's lives on both individual and social level, it manifests itself in objective and subjective levels, it changes in time, it shows more or less obvious internal connections, it concerns people's everyday joys and troubles... We do not have to understand these reasons directly in terms of incentives for the research of quality of life. They represent rather a general framework indicating a huge spectrum of partial, more specific challenges of this research in terms of its contents. Owing to this we can determine one of the basic characteristics of quality of life to be its *multidisciplinarity*. This term indicates that quality of life is researched by many scientific disciplines and fields.

In connection with *multidisciplinarity* of quality of life, its *interdisciplinarity* is often mentioned. *Interdisciplinarity* expresses the fact that quality of life can be a shared subject matter of many scientific disciplines. In connection with *interdisciplinarity*, an *interdisciplinary research* of quality of life is often mentioned and increasingly applied, i.e. the research which should within the study of a given subject matter connect the knowledge and experience of experts from several science disciplines. It is not a surprise that such research is, in view of the complex nature and *multi- or inter-disciplinarity* of the concept, often presented as an ideal way to study the quality of life.

When characterizing *multidisciplinarity*, we seemingly forgot to name science disciplines traditionally or most interested in quality of life. We can find such list in many professional studies of quality of life and it usually includes the disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, medicine, economics, (urban) planning and many others. However, does such list have any practical meaning in itself? If we do not intend to analyze in detail the

starting points or possibilities of specific contribution of individual scientific disciplines<sup>141</sup> to the research of a naturally interdisciplinary concept of quality of life, we believe that it rather does not. Our attitude is connected with the fact that the study of quality of life does not represent a *dominant* research interest or approach in any individual scientific discipline. It is also quite common that the research of quality of life within individual disciplines shows some kind of *internal plurality*. In other words, more approaches can and usually do exist within one discipline and they are based on more or less different basic starting points.

For many reasons it is relevant to speak about quality of life especially in connection with interdisciplinary research and at present, the studies aimed at quality of life, whose authors come from different academic background, are no exception. However, the situation in this case is not quite unambiguous either. Interdisciplinary studies of quality of life can encounter a number of problems connected for example with starting points, theoretical or methodological orientation of participating disciplines and, last but not least, with their view of quality of life or subject matter of their interest within this concept. We must also mention the human factor. Not every researcher is able to effectively cooperate with another one just because they theoretically complement each other in terms of professional orientation. In other words, the success or failure of interdisciplinary research does not have to be influenced only by the concept of research prepared *from above*. It may rather be a result of such factors as a real interest in cooperation, ability to communicate openly or preparedness for a compromise which may mean the willingness to give up part of professional ego in favour of a working team. And, last but not least, a suitable leading personality is necessary, i.e. a person who is able to lead and manage the research effectively.

In spite of the mentioned ideas, we do not doubt that, under suitable circumstances, interdisciplinary studies of quality of life can not only successfully function but they can provide a lot of interesting and useful information. In this respect, it seems to be very promising to create research centres of quality of life which enable to largely circumvent the problems/limitations/compromises of partial studies or projects and to aim above all at generalization of important knowledge in a longer time horizon and also at more practical aspect of the concept<sup>142</sup>. A very suitable base for such centres is

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<sup>141</sup> *And we do not intend to in this book.*

<sup>142</sup> *For example cooperating with other institutions, providing services to commercial subjects, obtaining financial resources for the research, offering specialized courses or teaching programs etc.*

the university environment which is proved for example<sup>143</sup> by The Quality of Life Research Institute (University of Girona), Australian Centre on Quality of Life – An interdisciplinary centre within Deakin University, Quality of Life Research Unit at the University of Toronto, Centre for Wellbeing and Quality of Life (Bournemouth University), The Centre for Quality of Life (Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong), The Quality of Life Research Center at Claremont Graduate University. If we take a close look at the agenda of these research centres, it is obvious that they do not research quality of life as a whole but they prefer to aim at certain components or meta-concepts<sup>144</sup> of quality of life. By specifying the content aspect of their activity they are (at least partially) able to avoid vagueness of the orientation of their research.

We have primarily mentioned cooperation in the research of quality of life from the standpoint of academic sphere. It is also worth mentioning that owing to social relevance or perception of quality of life as a *problem oriented* topic, it can be studied with active cooperation of academic, public or even commercial spheres. Such approach can be called *transdisciplinary*<sup>145</sup> and it is possible to expect that its importance will be growing in the future.

We will dedicate the following lines to several comments on the issues of the research of quality of life in geography. We have two reasons for that. The first, rather a subjective reason is that this book is written from the standpoint of author – geographer. We consider the second reason objective – geography as scientific discipline not only has a whole “arsenal” of tools and knowledge available for application in the research of quality of life but such research is both an implicit and explicitly expressed part of geographical study.

The research of quality of life in the field of geography is underway since the beginnings of geography itself. We must partially specify, or rather explain this daring statement. Thereby we mean that geographers’ attention has always been dedicated to topics that are related to quality of human life. It is definitely a fairly general statement and it is obvious that what we mean is above all an implicit inclusion of quality of life into geographical view of the world. If we

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<sup>143</sup> Some of the research centres functioning in time of writing of this book.

<sup>144</sup> For example subjective wellbeing, health.

<sup>145</sup> Transdisciplinary approach can also be perceived in terms of the approach that totally removes the boundaries of partial approaches and aims at truly holistic concept comprising a critical view too.

take into account the key concepts of geography<sup>146</sup> such as space, place, time, scale, landscape, nature, systems, development or environment, each of them shows more or less obvious connection with human life and its qualitative aspect. This means that the knowledge acquired in studying these concepts is applicable when studying quality of life as such and at the same time each of the mentioned concepts can represent a separate point of reference on the basis of which it is possible to directly study quality of life.

As we have mentioned in chapter 2, the explicit professional interest in quality of life started to significantly develop in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. According to the information given by for example P. L. Knox (1987) or R. J. Johnston (1997), geography was no exception in this respect. Of course, even in this case it is difficult to decidedly determine which studies are already an unequivocal part of research of quality of life and which ones are only connected with it. The term quality of life has not always been used and various meta-concepts were often used<sup>147</sup> instead or simultaneously, such as social well-being, welfare or level of living. We could determine more criteria for differentiation but in a wider concept we can include in the research of quality of life especially geographical studies aimed at social problems<sup>148</sup>, perception of environment<sup>149</sup> and/or mapping of spatial variations of the levels of a wider spectrum of indicators covering several relevant domains of human life or even various overall indexes. In terms of spatial point of view, geographers' interest was mostly aimed at urban areas. As Knox (1987) wrote, the interest in the research of quality of life in urban environment consisted especially in the "possibility of portraying the essential socio-geographical expression of urban communities on a conceptual scale which ranges along the continuum from 'good' to 'bad', thus providing a potent index with which to regionalize the city" (p. 141)<sup>150</sup>.

The geographical research of quality of life from its beginnings naturally headed towards the application of traditional concept of *space* which was, besides other things, connected with disclosure of *spatial patterns* of quality of life. The studies with this orientation frequently used methods of so-called multivariate statistical analysis. The attention of geographers was (also) paid to

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<sup>146</sup> See Matthews and Herbert (2004), Clifford et al. (2009) and others.

<sup>147</sup> This is also true at present.

<sup>148</sup> Especially aiming at urban environment.

<sup>149</sup> Or in a wider concept the interaction between a person or society and environment.

<sup>150</sup> However, Knox himself subsequently dedicated a lot of attention to critical evaluation of such approaches.

the identification and possibilities of solution of problems connected with people's living conditions and their social status, for example in the research of social or urban deprivation (areas) which was partially connected with the perception of geography as an applied discipline. As Pacione (1986, p. 1499) states: "...throughout the Western world, conditions at the disadvantaged or deprived end of the quality of life spectrum form a key area of study in contemporary human geography". The interest in quality of life or related topics then showed in the attempt to create or develop theoretical starting points of its geographical research, models of quality of life and methods of measurement or processing the data and these were subsequently applied in concrete studies<sup>151</sup>.

When evaluating geographical research of quality of life, we can identify several typical, mutually linked starting points or approaches. These are:

- a) human – environment interaction,
- b) integral approaches, emphasis on the synthesis of knowledge,
- c) spatial or spatial – temporal variability (spatial differentiation, differences in spatial distribution, spatial or social processes),
- d) social and environmental issues,
- e) orientation to urban areas,
- f) problem oriented approaches, social involvement, applied geography.

As we have mentioned, these starting points and approaches are often very closely connected. The first of them is based on the research of human's (society's) interaction with the environment. This view has double meaning in terms of geographic research. Firstly, the interaction *human – environment* has long been and still is perceived as integral part of geographic research, some geographers even consider it to be the core of geography. Secondly, this very interaction is also often perceived as the core of research of quality of life. Discovering the character or dynamics of the link between human and environment requires the ability to integrate the knowledge of these dimensions and also within the dimensions themselves. In this respect, geographers should use especially the ability to synthesize the knowledge acquired by means of partial analyses. Such ability is often perceived as one of the strongest or most important aspects of geography. An important starting point of geographical study of quality of life is the fact that it is a spatially variable phenomenon and

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<sup>151</sup> For example Cutter (1985), Pacione (1986, 2003), Rogerson et al. (1989), Rogerson (1995, 1999), Massam (2002) and others.

the space is differentiated in this regard<sup>152</sup>. A typical procedure is then connected with the study of quality of life in selected spatial observation units. The output of such research can be for example a map that, besides other things, enables comparison in terms of *where the quality of life is higher and where lower*. The fact that quality of life does not only change in space but in also in time, indicates the need to research the process of change itself, typically with pointing out whether quality of life improves or deteriorates (in the given territory). An important approach used in the research of quality of life in geography is aimed at the use of results of individual analyses and syntheses in order to point out at social or environmental problems as well at the possibilities of their solution. Such applied approach is often connected with social involvement of the geographers in the processes of administration and decision making.

On the previous lines we have introduced a very *simplified* view of the approaches to geographical research of quality of life and we do not doubt that they can find both their supporters and opponents in contemporary geography. However, we must admit that this does not surprise us. As a matter of fact, some starting points may seem too divorced from reality, others may seem too limited in view of the overall plurality of approaches used in contemporary geography. If we take into account the interaction between a human and the environment, it is obvious that although geography shows the tradition of the research oriented this way, it does not provide any unambiguous, guaranteed way of research and interpretation of results. In case of geographers' ability to produce the information synthesis, it is indisputable that studies oriented this way have its place and tradition<sup>153</sup> in the field of geography, however, this is not a prevailing orientation of research specialization in geography of today. It is also necessary to point out to the danger of approaching to geographical research of quality of life *just in terms of description* of spatial differentiation of its level. To consider such result to

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<sup>152</sup> *What primarily changes is the quality of life of people themselves, thus the spatial variability of quality of life is primarily determined by the population migration and by creating links to a certain environment. We can perceive this as a starting point justifying the research of quality of life in the environment where people usually stay, typically their place of permanent residence. However, it is very disputable whether such approach is really correct and whether it is not rather a manifestation of the factor of data accessibility, for example from censuses.*

<sup>153</sup> *For example so-called landscape syntheses. At this point we take the liberty to mention the Slovak school of geographic research of quality of life based on the tradition of landscape syntheses and involving above all the realization of several research projects and creation of many publications on the ground of The Institute of Geography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (e.g. Ira 2005, Huba 2006, Ira and Suška 2008).*



be the real result is rather disappointing – regardless of other topics for further discussion<sup>154</sup>, its contribution consists especially in providing starting points for further research aimed at explanation, understanding or prediction. The same applies to the process of change of quality of life. Even a simple evaluation of the development of quality of life in terms of improvement or deterioration should be set into a wider context of connected influences and processes<sup>155</sup> or for example the importance which people attribute to the given change. After all, the emphasis on the research of quality of life within applied geography has its problems too as this direction of the use of acquired knowledge is not universally accepted and developed in geography.

We do not intend to start a detailed analysis of individual pros or cons which are connected with contemporary geography and its research possibilities. However, we will try to point out the basic categories of purpose or meaning that the geographical research of the quality of life or *the geography of quality of life* can have:

- 1) We could call the first meaning as *popularizing*. Geography can create outputs attracting public attention to its results. A typical example is the *maps of quality of life* showing spatial distribution of the level of quality of life or *rankings* of certain areas (places, regions) created according to the acquired knowledge. However, it is important to realize that, on the one hand, such outputs may attract attention but on the other hand they can be accused of being biased or that they simply do not tell the truth. The presentation of such results must, besides other things, take into account the *subjectivity* and *relativity* of quality of life – if we for example create the ranking of cities according to objective indicators, it is fair to admit that subjective view of any inhabitant can be quite different.
- 2) We can call the second meaning as *application* meaning. It is usually connected with problem oriented research, i.e. the research aimed at identification and solution of selected problems connected with quality of life. Pacione (2003, p. 28) in terms of “the question of the *usefulness* of measuring quality of life” mentions “several outputs of value to social scientists and policy makers”:

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<sup>154</sup> For example various possibilities of the approach to space in geography.

<sup>155</sup> For example we can view the residential suburbanization as a process which is largely motivated by people's effort to change their quality of life. In terms of suburbanization itself we can observe its impacts on quality of life of the inhabitants who live in the municipality affected by suburbanization.

- a) production of some baseline measures of well being against which we can compare subsequent measures and identify trends over time,
- b) knowledge of how satisfactions and dissatisfactions are distributed through society and across space,
- c) understanding the structure and dependence or interrelationship of various life concerns,
- d) understanding how people combine their feelings about individual life concerns into an overall evaluation of quality of life,
- e) achieving a better understanding of the causes and conditions which lead to individuals' feelings of well being, and of the effects of such feelings on their behaviour,
- f) identifying problems meriting special attention and possible societal action,
- g) identification of normative standards against which actual conditions may be judged in order to inform effective policy formulation,
- h) monitoring the effects of policies on the ground,
- i) promoting public participation in the policy making process.

We need not perceive this list to be complete and the specification of individual outputs should undoubtedly be connected with a concrete sphere or way of their use. At present, very interesting and promising may seem the use of concept of quality of life in connection with regional planning<sup>156</sup> or in the solution of the issues of natural hazards and disasters.

Although the applied geographic research of quality of life can undoubtedly contribute to the solution to more or less serious problems of people's lives, it is advisable to be careful in this case too – the acquired outputs should be used as *impartial instruments* and not as *instruments of power*. In this concept there is a real threat that the results may not always be accepted as convenient by the policy makers.

3) We will call the third meaning of geography of quality of life *academic*. The quality of life is an issue which can help the development of geography “inwards” and “outwards”. However, it depends on geographers themselves and on how they approach the concept of quality of life.

The meaning of the research of quality of life for geography can show in many forms – for example it can be connected with the development of

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<sup>156</sup> *In a wider approach with regional development or regional policy, in a narrower approach with the creation of regional development strategies.*

theoretical basis and/or as a platform of confrontation of approaches based on different ontological or epistemological starting points. Traditional approaches can be confronted with the approaches based for example on poststructuralism or postmodernism, which may significantly influence the overall (not only) geographical view of quality of life and help to attract attention to its research in connection with concepts such as *language, power, context* or *truth*. It does not necessarily have to be perceived as a threat to holistic approach to the complexity of quality of life – this undoubtedly has its meaning, either in terms of looking for a link between theory and empirism or experience or as an answer to a long-term tendency to disintegration in the field of geography. We can perceive quality of life as a concept which can potentially lead to (a more significant) integration of knowledge of geographers or to unification<sup>157</sup> of geography.

We have to admit that in this respect, these are just considerations, (un)justification of which it will be possible to evaluate only with the benefit of hindsight. If we were to name concrete changes in geographical research of quality of life which currently really help its development, we could mention especially the use of so-called Geographical Information Systems<sup>158</sup> or qualitative and mixed methods.

We also could define the meaning of geographical research of quality of life as an independent category in terms of the outward effect of geography. This category includes not only the academic environment but also the sphere of perception and evaluation of research results from the standpoint of the public and the use of these results in application sphere. Thus the study of the problem of quality of life can help a certain social emancipation of geography. A very important aspect in this regard may be not just the participation of geographers in the *interdisciplinary* or *transdisciplinary* research but rather the ability and interest in using the possibilities of what we could call *intergeographic* approach, i.e. the approach which primarily improves internal communication in the field of geography and will subsequently deal with the issues of integrated research itself.

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<sup>157</sup> See Matthews and Herbert (2004).

<sup>158</sup> See for example Brereton et al. (2008).

# The conclusion of introduction

What to say in conclusion? Perhaps just two comments.

We encounter the concept of quality of life virtually everywhere these days. It is a common part of discussions about people's everyday lives, it appears in advertisement slogans, political speeches, it is becoming a trademark or symbol of realization of various efforts and interests. More and more attention is paid to the quality of life from the side of academic community. However, what is the real reason for a growing interest in quality of life and frequency of the use of this concept? Is it really a part of natural development as I have indicated in chapter 2 or is it just an example of self-promoting mechanism in terms of "the more it is spoken about now, the more it will be spoken about later"? Or is it a combination of both of these possibilities? I do not dare to give an unambiguous answer.

The second comment is related to the previous. It is obvious that regarding the concept of quality of life, there are and there will still be many questions to be asked and answered. That is why the intention of this book was, besides fulfilling the main objectives, above all to encourage reasoning and to stir up the discussion regarding the research of quality of life and interpretation and application of its results. If I were to speak as a geographer, there are still a lot of blank areas remaining on the map of quality of life.

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# **Quality of Life: An Introduction to the Concept**

**Ivan Andráško**

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*Quality of Life: An Introduction to the Concept* follows two main objectives:

- to explain why quality of life is not a topic of simple or unambiguous answers and why it is possible to perceive it from different points of view,
- to give the reader basic starting points for understanding, interpretation and measurement of this extraordinarily complex and increasingly popular concept.

The book brings an overview of basic characteristics of quality of life and then it proceeds to a detailed discussion of content aspect and definition of this phenomenon on the basis of its dualisms and multidimensionality. By means of simple examples it demonstrates basic principles and procedures used in the measurement of quality of life. The final chapter is dedicated to selected problems of interdisciplinary research and to a brief introduction to geography of quality of life.

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