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## **QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENT THROUGH SOCIAL COHESION**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present briefly, rather than discuss systematically, the personal view on the problem of quality of living studies. In the most concise form the position advocated in this paper is expressed by the following slogans.

Values, rather than prices. Human being has dignity not a price. Contractorian ethics instead of utilitarian one. The three: state, society and market, are rather the trees planted by welfare society than a member of a *ménage à trois*. Solidarity is more natural for humankind than exchange. Rather functioning, i.e., improvement by empowerment than opulence should be a criterion for human activity.

Deliberation on quality of life should be more philosophically founded. To establish shared and agreed values is much more important problem to study than the study of the women's satisfaction from markets visiting or the usefulness of telephones.

### **1. Introduction: from virtuous life to quality of life**

Everyone has a desire to live good. The problem is, however, to distinguish good from evil, and to decide what path shall we take in life (*quod vitae sectabimur iter*). In the very ancient Greece, persons who were able to answer such a difficult question were called Sages. They gave advices in the form of short sentences. A little bit later Aristotle defined a good life as a *virtuous* life. In the Age of Reason, the authors of *The Port Royal Logic* recommended to judge what one must do to obtain a good and avoid an evil by considering not only the good and evil in itself, but also the probability that it happens.

The founder of classical economics, A. Smith, treated *the wealth* as a main indicator of a good life. Further on, the notion of *welfare* has been introduced, probably for the first time, by A.C. Pigou in 1920 [29]. Already in 1913, C.A. Perry, considering the measurement of quality of living, preferred to use the term *manner of living*, instead of *standard of living* [28].

The Committee of Experts of the United Nations trying to define the notions of *standard*, *norm* and *level of living*, in 1954 confined itself only to the notion of

level of living (see [19]). Recently, the term *quality of life* is the most popular (see [4; 6; 13]).

## 2. Quality of Life notion

Since the 1970s the term “Quality of Life” has become more and more popular. But before the 1970s this term was rarely in use. A. Szalai examined, for example, 20 major encyclopedias published in five languages in the period of 10 years, from 1968 to 1978, and did not find a single entry having quality of life as its subject [32].

According to W.O. Spitzer, in the period of 20 years between 1966 and 1987 there were published only 4 papers that have QoL in their titles. M. Rapley reports that now more than 1000 new articles a year are indexed under “quality of life”. Entering this term into Google returned more than 3,000,000 web pages [31]. The term “Quality of Life” is considered as the shibboleth, although it has neither precise meaning nor satisfactory definition. Cummins noted the existence of more than 100 different definitions and models.

There is also quite a big diversity of approaches to the researches on quality of living. One usually distinguishes the Scandinavian approach contrasting it with the American one [21; 22].

It is also worth noting here the very pragmatic German point of view, realized under guidance of W. Zapf, W. Glatzer and H.-H. Noll (see [12]). This approach treats quality of life as a good living conditions jointly with a positive subjective well-being.

In spite of many different points of view, all researches are focused upon the development of quality of life indices. Annually there are published hundreds of articles which address measurements of happiness, satisfaction, hedonism, cynicism, health status, etc. Nobody doubts that indicators are crucial, because if we wish to know whether or not a quality of our life is improving, we must measure it and monitor how is it changing.

Everyone who looked through these papers is in full agreement with Fitzpatrick’s observation that the diversity of concepts and definitions of quality of life “is nothing compared with the plethora of measuring instruments that have been developed” (see [18]).

Most of the indices were developed as a population-level constructs. Recently there have been developed the so-called “modern”, i.e. individual-level constructs. In the first case QoL is considered as a state of states, and in the second case this notion is treated as a state of persons.

From the point of view more philosophically founded, it seems to be reasonable to distinguish quality of life from quality of living. Quality of life as an abstract scientific concept might be treated in the spirit of Italian philosopher G. Croce. And namely, quality of life is two-sided phenomenon of an organized and institutionalized form of human activity. On the one hand we have the

theoretical life (*bios theoretical*), on the other, practical life which encompasses ethics and economics. The term “quality of life” in such a sense coincides with such terms as: quality of family (as an social institution), quality of environment, quality of employment, and quality of any other good or phenomenon.

From this simply follows that the quality of a family is not the same as the satisfaction with a family. The latter is a component of the quality of living. Similarly, any other form of mood, like happiness or satisfaction, is a personal characteristic, or psychological feature of individual persons. All such individual indicators can be aggregated into some summary measure characterizing the general satisfaction with functioning of public or social institutions and organizations. The synthetic index can be confronted with the measure of the performance of these institutions. The performance of institutions determines the quality of life, while satisfaction could merely serve as a perceptual measure of the goodness of functioning. The basic institution determining the quality of life is the state. The quality of the state should be measured by the quality of life. Besides the family, the other social institutions of great importance for the quality of life are the following: health care system, education, religion, market, politics, and other. All of them should be assessed with respect of social value added. Any social institution has been established to meet some clearly defined people’s demand. The people have therefore right to control and evaluate the performance of all established institutions.

### 3. New face of QoL

Traditionally, QoL is treated either as a property of individual persons, or as a property of human collectives. These two basic faces of QoL: QoL as a state of persons, and QoL as a property of a group of persons, can be supplemented by the third one, and namely

QoL as a product of state.

The main reasons to distinguish this additional point of view on the QoL are given below.

The first of them is the following overlooked fact:

QoL is not a do-it-yourself. Neither can it be considered as a self-made product.

To see that this is true, it is enough to observe that such a basic good as the lives of people, lie in hands of health *systems*. On the other hand, safety of living depends on the other system, called public safety system. Many people will not survive without social security systems, and even such thing as education is beyond individual capabilities. This proves that human development cannot be exclusively a process of self-help.

Since times of Plato and Aristotle we know, and we should know, that the purpose of state is to make people good and to secure justice in their interpersonal relations [17]. Briefly, it means that state is a producer and supplier of a public good which is called QoL.

The performance of state institutions is to be measured by the quality of this good. Already Durkheim and Mill argued that the test of government is the quality of its people and the quality of conditions the people live in [18]. The state as a whole and the local communities are responsible for the living quality of their citizens.

It seems to be very important to observe that all systems which have a vital responsibility to people's quality of living are to be assessed by people themselves, and not, say, by officials or politicians. These assessments, or evaluations, technically are called performance measurements.

Traditionally, almost all measurement instruments devised for performance assessment concern the people's satisfactions. Typical questions of such questionnaires have the forms: Are you happy? To what extent are you happy? How often are you happy? etc.

Many researchers in the field of QoL "discovered" with a dose of surprise that the responses to such questions are typically affirmative. It seems, at least for the author of this note, that there is nothing surprising in such responses.

First of all, we should remember the word "happiness" has many very different meanings. A long time ago, also Aristotle wrote (see [23]): "when it comes to saying in what happiness consists, opinion differs ... and often the same persons actually change their opinion". Similarly, much later, J.S. Mill asserted that happiness cannot be the goal for human activity, because if you ask yourself the question: "am I happy?", then immediately you will be no happy any more.

For most people (at least within the European civilization) happiness means, as Maslow asserted, a peak of experience or ecstasy. The measurement of this kind of happiness is hardly to be considered as a reasonable one. For other people (typically Americans, and American-like) the notion of happiness is treated as a synonym of satisfaction or of being content.

Considering the problem purely from a philosophical point of view, it is not surprising that most of the people to such kind of questions as "are you happy?" answer positively: "Yes, I am happy".

I am happy because *we live in the best of all possible worlds*, as asserted G.W. Leibniz in his famous *Theodicy*. It was confirmed later by L. Euler by the words: "the fabric of the world is the most perfect and was established by the wisest Creator" (see [3]).

On the other hand, from a pragmatic, or everyday life, this does not mean, however, that the world we live in is free from evils. On the contrary, there are a lot of them. It is enough to mention only some of the most painful of the society's ills like famine, poverty, crime, violence, drugs, inequity, etc.

As early as in 1835 A. Quetelet (see [15]) wrote that "we pass from one year to another with the sad perspective of seeing the same crimes reproduced in the same order and calling down the same punishments in the same proportions. Sad condition of humanity!". This implies the need to focus more on the *ill-fare* and

*ill-being* rather than on the *welfare* and *well-being*. The need of improving wellness by eliminating illness. Briefly, this means that the question

Are you happy?

is to be replaced by the questions of this kind:

why are you sad?

what is bothering you?

Major efforts should be stimulated to devise the effective instruments for policy making with the aim of eliminating ills.

#### 4. Acting vs. talking

Already Aristotle said that just talking about virtue does not make a man virtuous (see [17]). The same concerns both quality of individual persons as well as whole collectives of them. Just measuring and evaluating various aspects of quality of life does not improve the living quality of people. It is of course a plain triviality that in order to improve the quality of life, the government should know whether the quality of life has been improved or not. One of the ways to know that is to use quality of life indicators. Indicators should indicate, however, the causes of social evils rather than the level of happiness.

The already mentioned Quetelet has discovered that social evils are caused by certain *social conditions*. The problem is therefore to find the connections between evils and their causes, because changing the latter also changes the former. In order to eliminate, or at least mitigate any social dis-amenities, above all, they are to be identified.

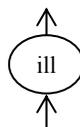
As in the science called etiology, the first step in treatment of ills consists in the detection and examination of symptoms, the same should be in social sciences. Namely, one should start with a detection and examination of the symptoms of social ills. The effort of the construction of such a “social symptomology” undertook for the first time A. Niceforo as early as in 1922. A statistical modelling of social stressors (smss) is shortly sketched in [1; 21].

Recently hundreds of various sophisticated indicators have been proposed, reporting all aspects of human life, which are discussed, evaluated and compared from different points of view (see [7; 10; 20]).

The next step in construction of social etiology is the assignment of causes.

The basic model for the improvement of quality of life could be sketched as follows [24]:

indicators of illness (i.e. observed symptoms)



stressors (i.e. discovered or deduced causes)

Statisticians called this kind of models MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes). It seems that in order to shift the concern from just talking to truly acting, it would be useful to treat QoL as a product, and to control its quality using for example the TQM techniques (see [11; 25]). To improve the quality of living, government or local community must, above all, demonstrate its commitment to people's need for better life, and accept responsibility for improving it. Never-ending process of improvement can be aided by a modified version of Deming cycle.

1. Ask stage: go to individuals and ask them what can you do for them?
2. Plan stage: design the policy of ill-being reduction, and stressors elimination.
3. Act stage: implement the plan design which previously was collectively approved.
4. Check stage: go to individuals again, and ask them if they are satisfied?

For the measurement of quality of living various indicators are used. The history of quantitative description of social phenomena like quality of living can be traced to 1830s. It was A. Quetelet who for the first time applied statistical approach to social sciences. The second name which is worth mentioning is A. Niceforo, who in 1920s tried to measure quality of living. In 1950s J. Drewnowski conducted important investigation within the United Nations. In 1954 "Report on the international definition and measurement of standard and level of living" was published. In 1959 a system of social indicators for measurement twelve basic domain of human life appeared. The term "social indicators" became very popular after 1966 when appeared the book under such a title.

The very turning point in the history of development of social indicators was the year 1989, when the United Nations' *Handbook of Social Indicators* appeared [14]. This handbook laid for the first time a firm scientific foundation to build systematically social indicators. Particularly important is the following principle used in this handbook: indicators should be developed as a product of basic statistics, not independently. Basic statistics, in their turn, should be direct observations or measurements of the statistical units determined by statistical classifications defined by international organization for standardization.

## 5. Social Cohesion as a basis for a good life

As a good justification for the title of this paragraph is the following allegory about mealtime in heaven and hell (see [5; 26]): "It turns out that in both places, meals are served at huge round table with lots of delicious food in the center. The food is out of reach, but everyone's got really long forks. In hell, everyone starves because, while people can reach the food with their forks, the forks are much longer than their arms, so nobody can turn a fork around and eat what's on the end of it. In heaven, faced the same problem, people eat well. How? By feeding each other".

Again, as in the case of the notion of happiness, this allegory can be viewed from two sides. First, for some people, like A. Smith, and the other founders of modern liberal political economy, the behaviour of people in the heaven follows not from their benevolence but from their own interest, according to the principle: “I give you, you give me”. According to such neo-liberals the exchange is in human nature, and only in human nature, because as A. Smith has written, nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog. Moreover, for A. Smith, an ideal form for the exchange was market. It turns out, however, that the dictatorship of the economy which is delimited to the only this one aspect of market, caused several social problems. These problems are additionally heavily aggravated by globalization which seems to be economically progressive, but surely socially very regressive.

In order to change the situation several political initiatives are undertaken now by the UN, Council of Europe, OECD and even by the World Bank.

In 1997 during the Summit of Heads of States and Governments it was declared that social cohesion was an essential problem for improving the quality of living, which should be solved as satisfactorily as possible.

A year later, the Social Cohesion Development Division was set up. Within this Division the Strategy for Social Cohesion was prepared, which was approved in 2004 by the Committee of Ministers. This Division publishes a series “Trends in Social Cohesion” – highly professional, by well known experts, according to the best scientific rules. In 2005 the methodological guide was published.

An important role is played also by the United Nations.

Already in 1945 heads of states pledged, among many other things, “to promote social progress and better standard of life”, this pledge was renewed in 2000 by the *Millennium Declaration* “to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty”. Achievements are regularly published in the form of *Human Development Report* [16].

Within the European Union the problem of social cohesion is treated by a number of institutions. For the first time in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) the objective of EU was stated: “to promote economic and social progress ... through the strengthening of economic and social cohesion...” [9].

In 1997 the Council of Europe identified social cohesion as one of the primary needs of Europe. As a consequence, the European Committee for Social Cohesion was created, with the aim to address the issue at the policy level.

European Summit in Lisbon (2000) decided that steps must be taken to make decisive impact on the eradications of poverty by 2010. Social Protection Committee was created which decided to device social indicators that address social outcome rather than means. In Laeken 18 indicators covering four areas were adopted: income, employment, education, health.

European Commission was obliged to submit every three years to the European Parliament reports on the progress in achieving these goals. Two reports were

already published in 2007: “Growing Regions, Growing Europe” and “Social Protection and Social Inclusion”. Both of them are, however, more “political” than “scientific” with a little justification of assertions, with no references, no authors. With these publications nicely contrasted publications of an autonomous body of the European Union – The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions [30].

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## POPRAWA JAKOŚCI ŻYCIA POPRZEZ SPÓJNOŚĆ SPOŁECZNĄ

### Streszczenie

Jakość życia zwykle traktowana jest jako cecha pojedynczych ludzi oraz jako cecha całych społeczności. W artykule proponuje się dodatkowo traktować jakość życia jako dobro publiczne „produkowane” przez państwo, ponieważ to właśnie państwo (i jego organy samorządowe) jest odpowiedzialne za warunki, w jakich żyją jego obywatele. Do „produkcji” jakościowego produktu można wówczas zastosować sprawdzoną w praktyce metodologię o nazwie TQM. Spójność społeczna jest traktowana jako najważniejsza charakterystyka społeczeństwa jako całości, tzn. jako odrębnego bytu. Bez solidarności i odpowiedzialności społecznej jakość życia ludzi nigdy nie będzie zadowalająca.