

Chapter 2

Quality of Life

2.1 Introduction

The concept, *quality of life*, has several formulations. There is the personal, ever-changing perception one's life and its rewards and vicissitudes. Structured by emotions from pleasure to pain, and extending into past and future, the subjective version is dynamic and changeable. This perceived state is a sense of one's personal world which includes people, events, and the unpredictable. Despite its apparent solipsism personal quality of life is assessable through psychometric questionnaires.

The alternative formulation addresses society as a whole through lists of factors external to the individual, but impinging on the person directly or indirectly. A degree of detachment from the individual and an empirical flavor permit an objective estimate of quality of life in a particular place, and for a particular aggregate of people; the locus of inquiry may be a household, a neighborhood, a country, or a region, and the people will be a group of interest. These observations are summarized in the "... generic definitions of Quality of Life ..." set forth by the Australian Center on Quality of Life in 2010:

Quality of life is both objective and subjective. Each of these two axes comprises several domains which, together, define the total construct. Objective domains are measures through culturally relevant indices of objective well-being. Subjective domains are measured through questions of satisfaction.

Objective formulations of quality of life begin with the subjectivity inherent in the act choosing what to study by empirical means. The horizon is wide and includes choices about which people, places, occasions, and institutions to consider. Natural forces also enter, and can range from the amount of rain a place receives to the impact of earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and droughts. The subjective and objective can be combined; in the research of Pine et al. (1997),

psychiatric states and obesity in the young were combined; this study also includes points in time.

The scope of quality of life has several aspects conveying a person’s degree of internal to external focus. At one extreme is the examination of satisfaction with life (Diener et al. 1985); at the other is the use of quality of life as a concept to guide development of a nation; an example is Latvia (Karnitis 2006). Such aspirations call for well-honed specifics. For people dwelling in cities Wills-Herrera, Islam, and Hamilton (2009) formulated a thirteen-item schema for appraising subjective quality of life; the elements are:

Standard of living	Health	Future security	Health
Economic situation	Safety	Social conditions	Government
Local security	Business	Environment	Achievements
Sense of community	Relationships		

It is unlikely that respondents would rate all aspects of their lives as equally satisfactory. Such a predictable imbalance led Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) to ask, “Does happiness lead to success?” The question might be expanded to ask, “and for how many?” Related is the question of whether a high quality of life is attainable for an entire country. The Good Society Framework (ISQOLS 2010) set forth nine domains as a “comprehensive model of wellbeing.”

Relationships	Peace and security	Environment and infrastructure
Economy	Culture and leisure	Spirituality and philosophy
Governance	Education	Health

Similarly, Cummins et al. (2005) reported a list of criteria for evaluating “The World’s Best Country,” drawn up by Lazakekic:

Income	Health	Freedom	Unemployment
Family life	Climate	Security	Gender equality
Political stability	Family and community		

There are commonalities in the three lists just presented, and there are unique items; also, there are elements which rise and fall in salience; political stability and security, for example, may not be reconcilable in some contexts.

The formulation of quality of life used by the Organization for Economic and Social Development (OECD 2011) in its survey of thirty-four countries explained how the concept influences lives:

Quality of life defined as the set of non-monetary attributes of individuals, shapes their opportunities and life chances, and has intrinsic value under different cultures and contexts.

The concept is framed empirically through eight domains; they are:

Quality status, work and life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, subjective well-being.

OECD added four sustaining elements designated as *natural capital, economic capital, human capital, and social capital*.

It does not follow that what distinguishes quality of life for people as a whole automatically applies to individuals. Working within the framework of the British Household Panel Survey Plagnol and Scott (2011) asked individuals to tell them,

... what things you consider are important for your own quality of life?

Respondents gave items within the following categories:

Health	Family	Finance	Happiness
Friends	Leisure	Home comforts	Employment
Misc. other	Freedom	Time self	Other material
Education	Other personal	Spiritual	Environment
Negatives (i.e., need more/better)			

The author concluded that perceptions of quality of life were likely to change when people experienced events such as marriage or the birth of a child. The life course rather than belonging to an age cohort explained changes associated with age.

The formulations of quality of life, so far, apply to the present day. There arises the search or quality of life in former times. In the case of the former Soviet Union, Brainerd (2010) sought answers in six cities from St. Petersburg in the north to Kharkov in what is now Ukraine. Of critical significance were periods in the new Economic Policy 1921–1928, and the era of rapid industrialization in 1929–1940. On a smaller scale, and in an earlier era, Lindberg (2009) examined the social and economic factors which led to the decline of two ports of the Hanseatic League, Danzig, and Lubeck.

Keeping records was well established in the German city, Breslau, in the seventeenth century allowing Edmund Halley (1693) to publish his “... Estimate of the Degrees of Mortality ...” London’s Bills of Mortality were the source of John Graunt’s (1662) monograph on patterns of death by age and place. Interesting physical accounts from south county Dublin were transcribed by Flatman (1989). In this essay, two estimates of quality of life in the nineteenth century are employed. The VICQUAL index (Jordan 1993a, b) is applied to study children’s mortality in Victorian England and Wales, and the QUALEIRE index (Jordan 2000) is applied to Ireland in the same century.

There arises the matter of what quality of life for children entails. In the seventeenth century, a colleague of Halley and Graunt, Sir William Petty, faced the challenge to arrange a superior quality of life for his young brother. After much of what he termed ratiocination (i.e., an interior dialog), Petty concluded that the best thing to do was to, “Let Nature work, and let him follow his own inclination (and) provide him a course of life whereby he may make the best use of his natural wares.” For his two sons Petty provided a list of books to prepare them for their futures. In this work, quality of life for children is formulated as,

The extent to which children can fulfill their potentials for self-realization and happiness in surroundings conducive to health and harmony.

This formulation reflects, of course, present-day perspectives. Applied literally to earlier times it seems quite inappropriate because children’s role tended to be prescribed narrowly. Childhood itself was brief, and adolescence was not a clearly marked phase. By the teens young people were expected to function as adults, in some respects. For example, marriage viewed as a mechanism for the expeditious transfer of property and wealth. Family life was rough and tumble, and abuse of alcohol by parents placed children at risk for survival. For children without parents the future was bleak, at best. In the earliest days they lived or died on the streets. Depending on the ideology of the parish Vestry children might be put out to board; one Irish parish required that a boarded-out infant be presented alive every three months in order to continue welfare payments. Charles Dickens gave us Pip, and Dickens recalled the harsh terms of his early experience in a small factory. In the face of abuse of children which could be seen every day, the Victorians summoned the initiatives of Mary Carpenter and the oratory of Lord Shaftesbury, “The Children’s Friend.” In Ireland Edmund Rice and Richard Whately, for example, worked to improve the quality of life for children.

We view childhood and mortality from our own century and a perspective is necessary. Death itself was a denial of the elements proposed in the formulation of quality of life presented here; and it suggests the scope of mortality’s impact among the young of earlier generations eliminating their *self-realization ... happiness ... health ... harmony*.

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