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## QUALITY OF LIFE RESEARCH IN SLOVENIA

*The Quality of Life Research was initiated by Veljko Rus in 1983 at the Institute of Sociology in Ljubljana. In 1991 the Institute joined the Faculty of Social Sciences and the research group continued with its work at the Institute of Social Sciences - Center for Welfare studies. The long term aims of the project are:*

- to develop non-monetary measures of social development and of the well-being of citizens;
- to analyse the relationships between measures of well-being in various areas of life;
- to follow changes in the situations of various social groups;
- to understand the mechanisms influencing the improvement and deterioration of the quality of life;
- to analyse the relationships between changes (political, social and in economy) on a macro-level and individual and group reactions ;
- to identify the disadvantaged and the most deprived social groups;
- to offer suggestions for social policy planning and the evaluation of its implementation.

*The first survey was conducted in 1984 on a representative sample of the Slovenian population aged from 15 to 75 years (N= 2472). The second survey was titled "Stratification and the Quality of Life in Yugoslavia - 1987" and was conducted on a sample representing Yugoslav regions. The next two surveys in 1991 (N=1395) and 1994 (N=1806) were again on representative samples of the population of Slovenia. The sample in 1994 included the population from 18 years onward and had no upper age limit. The analysis of this sample indicated that the sample was biased in some demographic dimensions, therefore in the elementary analysis the data has been weighted. Vehovar (1995) undertook the analysis of the sample and the weighting procedures.*

*Researchers from different professional backgrounds, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers, have collaborated since the beginning of the project. Economists, mathematicians and doctors have occasionally been consulted or have joined the project as well. The project provided an opportunity for the professional development and academic promotion of young researchers and others involved, who were able to transfer their knowledge to undergraduate and post-graduate students and to the various public organizations responsible*

for the implementation of social policy measures. The concept quality of life has also been used outside the social sciences, in medicine, technology and in economics (Svetlik, 1995).

The results of the researchers' work number about 350 bibliographical units published in scientific or professional journals and books in Slovenia and abroad. In Slovenia most of the results are presented in *Družboslovne razprave* (Social Sciences Discussions) numbers 4 and 12. A *Quality of Life Studies bibliography from 1983 to 1992* edited by Černigoj Sadar was published in the bilingual (Slovenian/English) *Welfare Studies Center Bulletin*, No.5, 1992. The tenth anniversary of the empirical surveys was celebrated with *Kakovost življenja v Sloveniji (1995)* (*Quality of Life in Slovenia*), a book edited by the recent project coordinator Ivan Svetlik. In the following monograph the leading themes are taken from this book, however most of the articles have been abbreviated and some new analyses of the empirical data have been added.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

In the first *Quality of Life in Slovenia* research in 1984 we adapted the Swedish model - the *Level of Living Study* - which put forward man's/woman's capacity to satisfy various needs. In the Swedish welfare research three constitutive elements of an individual's level of living were taken into account: the individual's resources, the context and the most essential living conditions. The first *Level of Living study* (1968) was inspired by Titmuss's concept of 'command over resources'. Level of living was defined as "the individual's command over resources in the form of money, possessions, knowledge, mental and physical energy, social relations, security and so on, through which the individual can control and consciously direct his living conditions" (Johansson, 1970:20, citation from Erikson & Aberg, 1987)). Erikson and Aberg (1987:3) emphasised the importance of context:

"The context refers to conditions that reflect the labour market, the housing market, the educational system, and the health care system. Individual's resources and the conditions for making use of them together determine the scope of individuals for directing their own lives". Partly influenced by a group of experts on social indicators at the United Nations and partly influenced by the most important problems in all industrialised societies, the following areas or components of life were included in the research:

- Health and the access to health care
- Employment and working conditions
- Economic resources

- Education and skills
- Family and social integration
- Housing and neighbourhood facilities
- Security of life and property
- Recreation and culture
- Political resources

The same areas, covered mostly by the same indicators, were included in the first questionnaire on Quality of Life (1984) in Slovenia. In the Slovenian approach besides, the access and control over resources, the reflective participation of men and women in both private and public life has been emphasised (Černigoj Sadar, 1992).

In the first theoretical discussions in Slovenia on quality of life (Antončič & Boh, 1991; Kolarič, 1984; Rus, 1984) and in the interpretations of the first empirical results the concept of basic needs (Allardt, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Mc Call, 1986) has been taken into account; however the level of need satisfaction together with the subjective evaluation of various areas of life had not been sufficiently elaborated as a research tool until the nineties. The concepts most often cited by Slovenian researchers are Allardt's concepts of Having, Loving and Being (Allardt, 1995:89-91):

"Having refers to those material conditions which are necessary for survival and for avoidance of misery. It covers needs for nutrition, air, water, for protection against climate, environment, diseases, etc." For this group the author proposes the following measures: economic resources, housing conditions, working conditions, health, education, and measures pertaining to biological and physical environment.

"Loving stands for the need to relate to other people and to form social identities. The level of need satisfaction can be assessed by measures denoting: attachment and contacts in the local community, with the fellow members in associations and organizations, attachment to family and kin, active patterns of friendship and relationships with work-mates.

Being stands for the need of integration into society and to live in harmony with nature. The positive side of being may be characterized as personal growth, whereas the negative aspects stands for alienation". The following indicators belong to this group: participation in decisions and activities influencing an individual's life, and opportunities for meaningful work and leisure-time pursuits and for enjoying nature.

The author suggests that in order to assess the level of human welfare we need objective measures of external conditions (usually designed by experts or researchers) as well as subjective evaluations by citizens themselves. The word 'objective' also refers to reports of real conditions and overt behaviour, while the word 'subjective' refers to evaluations - subjective feelings of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, feelings of happiness /unhappiness - or to personal growth, wants, aspirations, and attitudes.

The recent Slovenian Quality of Life study is concerned with resources and the needs of the individual<sup>1</sup>. The interviewee himself /herself describes and evaluates his/her well-being. To give a picture of individual well-being, both objective and subjective indicators are used. The studies in particular areas of life also use the statistical data on aggregate level. However, to understand the level of satisfaction, we need to know, apart from the information about resources, at least one of the following : with whom (or with which group) the individual compares himself/herself, what is the goal-achievement gap, and the level of adaptation to sources of satisfaction. In our survey we have no direct measures to answer these questions. However, our conceptual approach enables research into social inequality and the way of life determined by the social structure as well as the research into life styles constituted by subjective preferences and values (Novak, 1995).

## CHANGES IN THE RESEARCH APPROACH

In the first three surveys (1984, 1989, 1991) the cross sectional approach had been used. In the last empirical research (1994) we were interested in the dynamics of processes in the lives of the interviewees, therefore the cross-sectional approach was combined with an event-oriented observation design<sup>2</sup>. Retrospective data on the representative sample from 1974 to 1994 has been obtained for the domains of education, employment/working conditions, family (cohabitations, marriages, children), housing mobility, housing conditions, spatial mobility, and some aspects of leisure. In addition to the primary representative sample, retrospective data on the educational and employment careers of coresident partners of the respondents has been collected.

During the last ten years the content of the questionnaire has changed; however, the main core questions have remained unchanged. The questionnaire "Quality of Life in Slovenia 1994" has the following chapters:

- A. Conditions while growing up
- B. Regional and housing mobility
- C. Housing conditions and neighbourhood (living environment)
- D. Partnership and household
- E. Children
- F. Health
- G. Education
- H. Working status and career
- I. Present work situation
- J. Economic resources
- K. Safety
- L. Leisure
- M. Final questions: general satisfaction with life, control over one's own life, and personal/family plans for the next few years

The questionnaire is translated into English and available at the Institute of Social Sciences' Center for Welfare studies, Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. The members of the research team are interested in exchanging the ideas and undertaking comparative research on various aspects of quality of life with academics and practitioners in Europe and from other parts of the world.

## THE CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS

The articles in this monograph are very heterogeneous. However, they give an overview of the most relevant themes on quality of life discussed among social science professionals in Slovenia and cover the most recent studies based on empirical material.

The articles are divided into two groups according to their research approach. In the first part the articles based on crosssection design and comparisons of living conditions in 1984 and 1994 are presented. The first articles cover the area of formal production, material quality of life and quality of life in living environment.

Ivan Svetlik, in "Quality of Working Life", analyses the opportunities for the satisfaction of material, security, societal and personal needs of employees.

Srna Mandič, in "The Changing Quality of Life during 'Transition' - The Housing Component", discusses the changes between 1984 and 1994 in the housing properties, referring to physical attributes and housing tenure characteristics.

Barbara Verlič Christensen, in "Quality of Life in the Living Environment of Slovenia", follows trends of urbanisation through an analysis of urban standards in Slovenia and with reference to cyclical model of development.

Tadeja Kolenc and Meta Gnidovec describe the nature and characteristics of Slovenian victims of crime in "Security of Life in Slovenia".

The next three articles deal with various aspects of disadvantages in life, the accumulation of deprivation, poverty, and their social consequences. Nevenka Černigoj Sadar and Alenka Brešar Iskra in "Material Quality of Life in Various Life Cycles" focus on housing standards, financial resources, and the employment of seven groups in various life cycle stages and their evaluations of living conditions.

Mojca Novak, in "Poverty: Facts and Feelings", considers objective and subjective aspects of poverty. She compares the socio-structural characteristics of those who are categorized as poor on the basis of household income per head (below 50 percent of median) and those who are categorized as poor on the basis of their reporting a lack of money to make ends meet.

Martina Trbanc, in "Social Exclusion: The Concept and Data Indicating Exclusion in Slovenia", describes the extent of the material, social and interpersonal dimensions of exclusion and identifies the demographic and other socio-economic aspects of most disadvantaged groups.

The last three articles discuss the themes of health, leisure and general satisfaction with life, which are often treated as the results of the quality of working life, personal relationships and living environment. Nevenka Černigoj Sadar and Alenka Brešar Iskra, in "Determinants of Self-reported Health", analyse within the biopsychosocial model of health the demographic, social, economic and main behavioural determinants of self-reported health.

Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, in "Social and Material Determinants of Leisure", examines patterns of activities during free time, evaluations of leisure and aspirations for new activities. She analyses which among demographic, material, family, residential and health factors have the greatest influence on leisure time activities.

In "Satisfaction with Life and Work", Ivan Svetlik analyses the relationships between the available resources people have to satisfy their needs and the general level of satisfaction with their lives. He takes into account objective and subjective aspects of quality of life in working, living environment and in private spheres.

In Part two of the monograph, the articles are based on dynamic research design using event history analysis to describe and explain the changes in the last twenty years in the areas of labour market, work and education. Special attention is given to the period after the

*independence of Slovenia and the transition to a market economy accompanied by privatisation processes and radical changes in all areas of social policy.*

*Sonja Drobnič in "Labour Market Dynamic in Slovenia: Transitions from Unemployment" analyses the characteristics of unemployment episodes and factors influencing the transition from unemployment. The author also gives a short description of event history analysis approach.*

*Vojko Antončič and Meta Gnidovec in "Work Career Defined by Autonomy in Work" describe the process of changing autonomy in work and factors influencing changes in autonomy status.*

*In "Investment in Education and Training and Shifts Between Jobs in the Slovenian Labour market", by Angela Ivančič the characteristics of transition rates from one job to another, intra-firm and inter-firm job shifts and the influence of demographic, cohorts, period, educational, occupational factors on these transitions are presented.*

*In most articles the basic demographic and social stratification dimensions are taken into account. The gender dimension is discussed in the articles on security, poverty, social exclusion, health, leisure, unemployment, autonomy in work and education.*

## NOTES

(1) In this introduction only the Scandinavian approach to the level of living and quality of life has been mentioned because it represents the theoretical frame of reference for the Slovenian quality of life indicators. However, for understanding the sociological aspect of quality of life, many other theoretical works are also relevant, to mention just two: Doyal and Gough's Theory of Needs (1991) and contributions in Quality of Life, a book edited by Nussbaum, M.C. and Sen. A.(1995).

Those involved in the Quality of Life project in Slovenia have tried to relate the Scandinavian approach to the recent theoretical discussions in specific fields of research such as work, family, etc.

(2) The basic information on event- oriented observation and event history analysis is given in the article by Sonja Drobnič in this monograph.

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