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# The quality of life as a basic attribute of effective influence of state administration in the area of social politics formatison with the aim at regional politics

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## Abstrakt

*Příspěvek prezentuje kvalitu života jako základní vstupní atribut ovlivňující efektivní rozhodovací procesy veřejné správy při tvorbě místních strategií sociální politiky. Jelikož je užítí jakékoliv metody pro rozhodovací procesy závislé na získaných datech, věnuje příspěvek také pozornost metodologickým přístupům sběru dat při zkoumání kvality života. Krátce je zmíněna možnost využití metody komunitního plánování a teorie rozhodovacích stromů pro efektivní rozhodování v této oblasti.*

## Klíčová slova

*Kvalita života. Sociální politika. Komunitní plánování. Rozhodovací stromy. Veřejná správa.*

## Abstract

*This paper presents quality of life as basic entry attribute, which influences effective decision making processes of public administration by formation of local strategies of social politics. Since the method for decision making processes depends on gathered data, the paper emphasizes methodological approaches to data collection by investigation of the quality of life. It briefly mentions possibility of using method of community planning and theory of decision trees for effective decision making in this area.*

## Keywords

*Quality of life. Social politics. Community planning. Decision trees. Public administration.*

## Introduction

The social work should not only help concrete individuals to solve their adverse social situation, but it should also influence the creation of social politics. Only the interconnection of concrete help to people and general tools of social help can successfully support the solution of such phenomena as for example poverty, unemployment etc.

The social work doesn't always solve real needs of people, but it realizes the order proposed by the political representation. In these barriers it exerts to insert the needs and requirements of those whom the social services are intended for.

For example: system of social services for homeless people:

- day centers (free meals, change clothing, toiletries),
- night shelters (bed, free meals, change clothing, toiletries),
- sanctuary houses,
- houses for young people, this young people vacationed some institutions (educational, children's home).

**Table 1:** Real needs of homeless people

<b>Importance</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>
<b>Rank</b>		<b>Rank</b>
1	physical safety	6
2	further education	9
3	transformation	5
4	affordable housing	2
5	medical/ dental treatment	11
6	health information	14
7	job training	3
8	job placement	1
9	information on agencies	13
10	public benefits	4
11	support group	18
12	individual counseling	17

13	budgeting	8
14	legal assistance	10
15	drug/ alcohol treatment	19
16	free meals	20
17	family counseling	16
18	English fluency	15
19	parenting skills	12
20	child care	7

Source: ACOSTA, O.; TORO, P., A. Let's Ask the Homeless People Themselves: a Needs Assessment Based On a Probability Sample of Adults. In *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 28, No. 3; 2000; 353 p. ISSN 1573-2270.

On this example we can see, that the system of social help for homeless people solves the availability of free meals, toiletries and housing. In reality these are the resources meant for the realization of specified goals (freedom, physical safety, job, independence).

Satisfaction of the population belongs to basic goals of regional management. This area includes not only the problems of social services users but also problems of the major society which encounters social services only marginally. One of the indicators which should influence decision making processes essentially is the satisfaction of citizens with the place they live in – quality of life. Human satisfaction is one of the basic requirements which determine quality of one's life. But it is a highly subjective and time-fluctuating value and the term satisfaction itself is very wide and uncertain. Information about citizen satisfaction serves as a significant base for decision-making and self-evaluation for regional management. That is the reason, why it is necessary to measure and evaluate citizen satisfaction. It is important to identify not only areas in which people fulfill their personal aspirations, but also areas with negative influence on people. Region inhabitants judge their own interests by possibilities and barriers which influence fulfilling their personal needs and interests and unwind their positive or negative relation to the place where they live.

Defining terms satisfaction and quality of life brings many dilemmas. If we occupy ourselves with defining the quality of life term,

we have to consider influence of historical, cultural and social changes, which take place in given society. The term satisfaction itself is, like the term quality of life, very wide and uncertain (multidimensional, complex). Psychological, social, medical and philosophical view projects in delimitation of these terms.

## **1 Quality of life**

The term quality of life refers to human existence, comprehension of meaning of life itself of individual being. Quality of life includes individual way of life (lifestyle), not only individual living conditions, but also living conditions of wider groups of society as a whole. Quality of life can be observed through two variables – material and non-material part of human life (Rapley, M., 2003).

Quality of life should be looked upon as a multidimensional variable, which contains information about psychosocial status of an individual which is influenced by, for example, age, gender, education, social status, economical situation or individual's values. Quality of life needs to be viewed as a subjective appreciation of own living situation. Quality of life can be viewed as availability of options, from which an individual can pick during filling his life (Philips, D., 2006; Müllerová, H., Libigerová, E., Prouzová, M., aj., 2001; Curtis, J., R., Patric, D., L., Engelberg, R., A., et al.; 2002).

### ***1.1 Psychological view***

In psychology, the term quality of life is often connected to the term personal well-being. That represents a long-term emotional status which reflects content of the individual with his/her life. Personal well-being can include components such as life satisfaction, morale, luck. Psychological methodology defines well-being as experience lasting for weeks rather than short-term moments. Variable characteristics like actual physical status, reaction on life events or moodiness are also taken in account. Personal well-being belongs to frontier of moods, affects and

personality characteristics (Dvořáková, Z., Dušková, L., Svobodová, L. a kol., 2006).

### ***1.2 Sociological view***

Besides individual factors, quality of life is influenced by social factors, for example culture, religion, health, income, age, satisfaction from work, mobility, transport and so on. The term quality of life expresses and defines the qualitative side of life processes and evaluation criteria. Quality of life is viewed mainly according to indicators of environment, indicators of health and disease, housing standards and recreation, human relations, free time, social and technological characteristics of work, possibilities of participating in company management, according to personal and social security, social guarantee and civil liberties (Maříková, H., Petrusek, M., Vodáková, A., 1996).

### ***1.3 Medical view***

Health represents one of most important values of human society which is recognized virtually in all cultures and times. Health and disease are usually comprehended as two different qualities, which are mutually opposed. Generally, we can comprehend the term health as state of absolute physical, mental and social peace. Lately, concept of health is not limited only to presence of illness, but also works with spiritual level. Health is viewed as a complex event. Quality of life is usually judged based on data obtained from a sick person. Health-related quality of life is comprehended as the part of life, which is primarily determined by health of an individual and healthcare, which could be influenced by interventions (Quality of Life for Patients with Chronic Illness, 2009).

### ***1.4 Philosophical view***

From philosophical point of view, the significant characteristic of quality of life is meaningfulness of life. We can call it routing of life. If a man sets general supreme meaning of life, this meaning becomes the main indicator of his life meaningfulness. This goal then shows him/her,

what has a meaning and what does not. This general set goal reflects to oneself in conscience. Conscience then tells him/her, what to do and what to avoid doing and also tells what he/she should have done, but did not do (Křivohlavý, J., 2001).

## **2 Two approaches (methods) for surveying**

With my colleagues I analyze two approaches (methods) for surveying quality of life in the Czech Republic (ČR) based on system approach. It presents comparison of methodological approaches. In the first case it is the Sociological institute of Academy of Sciences (SOÚ AV) ČR, which regularly (monthly) realizes surveys, that open wide specter of political, economical and social themes, which represents opinions of the Czech Republic inhabitants. In the second case it is a project of civic association the Team Initiative for Local Sustainable Development (TIMUR), which occupies with quality of life in the light of indicators ECI (European Common Indicators), specifically indicator A1 – Satisfaction of citizens with local society. Based on intersection, we can define common categories of both approaches, for example: living environment, education, healthcare and possibility to participate in local decision-making.

Basic difference between both approaches to data collection is that TIMUR realizes questionnaire survey within particular town (for example Chrudim), whereas SOÚ AV has a wide target group of respondents and habitation is just one of parameters (attributes) of the questionnaire. As for expressing “life satisfaction“, TIMUR uses a satisfaction index (attitude scale) for evaluation while SOÚ AV uses perceptual representation and thus frequency occurrence. Both methods ensure individual attitudes of respondents. It is vital that SOÚ AV collects data repeatedly and so we can deduce that results really represent society opinion. TIMUR society uses value scale for inquiring, which represents actual psychosomatic state of respondent better, but also tempts respondents to prefer average values. Their findings are not done repeatedly (at least not in case of town Chrudim), on contrary to SOÚ AV. On the other hand, individual survey in given location concerns

emotional state of citizens better. Questionnaire solution which TIMUR realizes results from general methodology with consideration to regional anomalies.

The crucial weakness of the questionnaire method which TIMUR uses is that the solution is not realized repeatedly and thus does not work with risk of response being given by actual emotional state of mind of the respondent and thus it does not have to reflect his/her long-term attitude. Another imperfection is the conclusion report itself, from which it is possible to obtain input data for model design. A description of methodology of data collection and description of research set is entirely vague. Any description of selecting representative set is missing. Also, a questionnaire description or any link to it is missing. A reader has to search for necessary information in other documents of the civic association. That is completely a violation of the methodology of sociological research.

The imperfections of the research methodology which is used by TIMUR, are not apparent in SOÚ AV methodology. There is no doubt about representativeness of the research set. Another positive is regular attribute repeating (questionnaire inquiries) in longer periods of time. An unquestionable disadvantage of the inquiring is that it concerns representative opinion of wide public, but only on general level. The questionnaire does not take into account regional specifics and also formulations of questions about various aspects of quality of life are on general level. An example is expressing whether the respondent is or is not satisfied with current status areas of the Czech Republic as environmental, social guarantee, unemployment rate, authorities functionality and so on.

### **3 Community planning**

Social services community planning is a method which we use for planning of social services at regional level. We use this method to plan the services adequate to local specifics and needs of citizens. Availability of social services is the main role of community planning. Concretely, this method surveys the situation of providing of social services in the

region and also the needs that aren't saturated. These two indicators are compared with the quantity of financial means spent on social services by the municipality (Author's team, 2006).

Three interested parties participate in development of regional social politics (Programový tým projektu EQUAL 0076, 2006):

- Contracting authorities: municipalities, self-governments. These are the sources of financial means funding the social services. Other subject might be the employment bureau.
- Providers: non-governmental organizations, allowance organizations.
- Users: final beneficiaries, services, public.

Not a long time ago, there has not been any instrument implementing social politics of municipalities and region in complex. This system had many disadvantages (Rosecký, D., Orniaková, P., 2000):

- User of services was dependant on the offer of providers. It might be against his/her concrete needs.
- User was only a passive receiver/beneficiary.
- Public financial means flew to the social sector without a knowledge of concrete needs of users.
- Possibilities of evaluation of correctness of social politics, quality of social services and evaluation of efficiency of spent public finances did not exist.

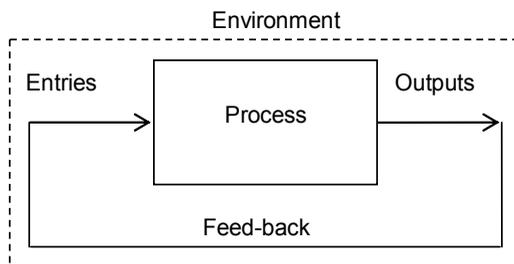
#### **4 Decision trees**

It is possible to process the data obtained by investigation of citizens' satisfaction by range of artificial and computational methods. Known classificatory model is algorithm for creation of decision trees. We define decision tree as a tree (tree graph), where each non- foliar kink presents a test of value attribute and the branches leading out of the kink present possible results of the test. Foliar kinks of the tree are rated according to category identifiers (results of classification). Own classification by help of the tree proceeds in the way of notation from the root of the tree to its leaf. Notation is proved in each step according to the test in actual kink of decision tree and it further continues up the branch

identical with concrete result of the test. In the event that the notation comes to foliar kink, it is classified according to the category identified by the value of the particular leaf of the decision tree. We choose suitable attribute for embranchment of the tree on base of the characteristics taken over the theory of information and probability: entropy, informative profit, relative informative profit, Chi-square test, Ginino index tec. Intuitive, visual picture of the tree helps laic users to understand clearly results and relations and in practice it helps them to decide. It is easy to transform the decision tree to decision making rules. Modeling is very extensive working and cognitive method suitable for use in a range of social practices (Křupka, J., Kašparová, M., Jirava, P., 2009).

Discussing the control, we must suppose that controlling is a dynamic system and we might accept the validity of theories of systems. Control cybernetic principles of dynamic system are shown generally in the picture 2. There are two components (control – represented by regional management and controlled – understood as a region) and link between represented control intervention.

**Picture 1:** Model of system control according to Norbert Wiesner



Source: KŘUPKA, J., KAŠPAROVÁ, M., JIRAVA, P. Modelování kvality života pomocí rozhodovacích stromů. In *Ekonomika a management (E+M)*. Technická univerzita v Liberci. 2009; 2 p. (in press)

## **Conclusion**

Regional development and increase of quality of life belongs to basic goals of regional management. Actions for improving the quality of lives of citizens and thus increasing their rate of satisfaction with not only the environment where their live require that there are tools, which would allow successful evaluation of these actions. Suitable tools of regional management are questionnaire surveys which are realized under principles of sociologic research.

Social work should create by its activity base material for decision processes in the terms of social policy. One of the ways to reach this is to use aside a classical statistic elaboration of empiric data also new informational technologies. However, it is always necessary to consider the fact that any result has to be interpreted in the context of the given region, on the base of needs of the target group on which the social policy is aimed and that any outcome of a measurement and following interpretation cannot be considered as an invincible dogma. It is just a base material, which supports and supplements the whole decision-making process.

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