

The Quality of Society and Individual Quality of Life – How do they relate?

- Introduction to the Seminar -

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Individual Quality of Life & Quality of Society

- Current debate about measuring and monitoring well-being covers issues of individual quality of life as well as quality of society, but usually does not distinguish the two qualities explicitly
 - Distinction seems to be crucial however for social monitoring and reporting activities as well as from a policy making point of view
 - So far **discourse on** the conceptualization as well as measurement of **well-being** is **more or less limited to individual quality of life**
 - At the same time it is **obvious that societal characteristics**, e.g. the degree of freedom, rule of law, extent of social cohesion and inclusion as well as the quality of governance and institutions, **have strong impacts on individual well-being**
- ⇒ Necessary to have a specific and separate view on issues of the quality of societies, which seems to be different from the sum (or average) of individual well-being.

The „good life“ and the „good society“

- Aristotle: „A **good society** is a society that enables its members to lead a **good life**“
- Bertrand Russell: “The **good life** must be lived in a **good society** and is not fully possible otherwise“ (quoted in Harrison/Stoop 2012:2)
- ⇒ Importance of the quality of society for individual well-being emphasized in both statements!
- But what are the characteristics of a society that provides the opportunities to lead a good life?
- Recent debates:
 - e.g. “The Good Society Debate” - launched several years ago by SPD and Labour Party politicians

Issue of „quality of society“ or „societal well-being“ not new!

⇒ Already part of early notions and definitions of quality of life and well-being...

➤ e.g. Gerson (1976): distinction between ‚individual‘ and ‚community‘ QoL:
 „The problem of defining and measuring quality of life ...becomes one of simultaneously defining „community“ quality of life in individual terms, and „individual“ quality of life in communal terms“ (ASR, Vol 41, pp. 793-806)

UNESCO – Round Table Meeting on Quality of Life, Budapest 1975:

„Does quality of life refer to individual well-being or does it refer to a state of society“?
 (unpublished summary report, p. 3)

➤ Noll (1990): „QoL comprises all relevant domains of life and covers not only material and individual well-being, but also immaterial and collective values, such as freedom, social justice, the protection of natural resources and responsibility for future generations“ (originally in German)

Distinction in Empirical Measurement and Monitoring

- Key Topic in German Welfare Survey 1998:

What do you mean? In what degree the following freedoms, rights, life-chances and securities are realized in (the Federal Republic)?

Are their fully realized, rather realized, rather not realized or not at all realized?

	fully	rather realized	rather not realized	not at all
A) Freedom of political participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B) Freedom to choose for yourself your occupation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C) Protection of environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D) Protection of private property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E) Just and fair distribution of wealth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F) Equality of men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G) Equality of life chances regardless of origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H) Freedom of free speech always and everywhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I) Freedom to live according to one's own fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J) Freedom of religion/faith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
K) Protection from crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
L) Social security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
M) Solidarity with the poor and needy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
N) The right to work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The social differences in our country are overall just and fair

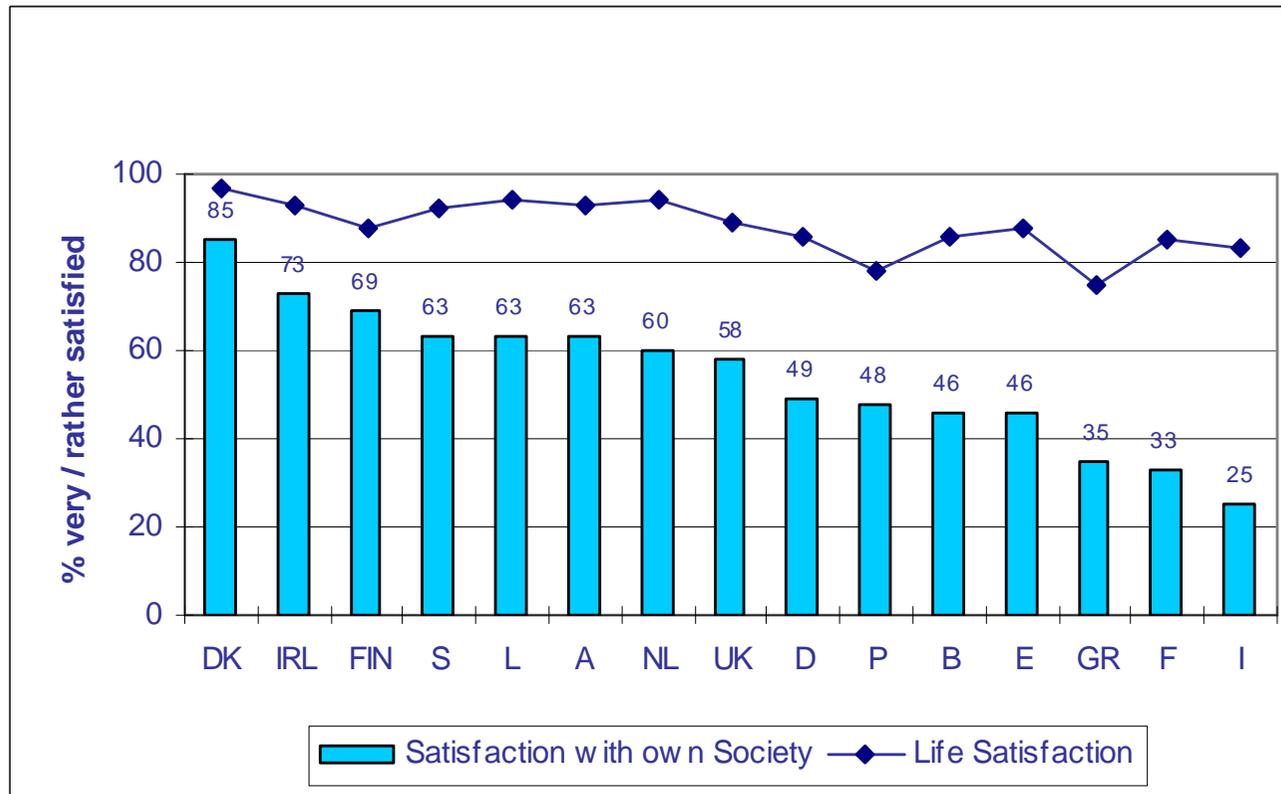
	West-Germany	East Germany
Fully agree	} 29 %	} 8 %
Rather agree		
Rather not agree		
Don't agree at all		
Don't know		

Overall in a country like Germany one can live a very good life

	West-Germany in %	East Germany in %
Fully agree	37	13
Rather agree	56	66
Rather not agree	6	19
Don't agree at all	1	3
Don't know		

Eurobarometer 2001 (56.1): Social Exclusion and Modernization of Pension Systems:

Would you say you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the kind of society we live in ?



Distinction between individual quality of life and quality of society also key in conceptual framework of **European System of Social Indicators**:

Concepts and Basic Dimensions of Well-being

Individual Wellbeing	Quality of Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Conditions • Subjective Wellbeing
Societal / Collective Wellbeing	Social Cohesion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequalities, Disparities, Exclusion • Social Relations, Ties, Inclusion (Social Capital)
	Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Capital • Human Capital

- Compared to individual well-being conceptualization and measurement of quality of society as yet less developed and elaborated!
- ⇒ Need to address these issues more rigorously and systematically

Issues to Be Addressed in this Seminar...

- How to define and conceptualize the “Quality of Society” as compared to the “Quality of life” of individuals?
- What are the relevant domains and dimensions of a concept of “Quality of Society”?
 - ⇒ e.g. quality of welfare state, governance and democracy, social capital, inequality
- How to measure the “Quality of Society”? Are there survey questions, indicator sets or composite indices available to be used to measure and monitor the “Quality of Society” in reliable and valid ways?
- In which ways are societal qualities and individual well-being related to each other conceptually and empirically?
- How to describe and analyse the “Quality of European Societies” by example of specific EU member states or in comparison?