

16th Conference
“Social Monitoring and Reporting in Europe”

Quality of Life in Europe at Risk?
Effects of the pandemic and Recent Social Change

Introduction
Heinz-Herbert Noll

Villa Vigoni, Lovenno di Menaggio, October 10-12, 2022

What is the reasoning behind the question overarching our 2022 conference:

„Quality of Life in Europe at Risk?“

- Not really result of a thorough analysis, but it seemed as if the quality of life in European societies was at least at risk, if not even declining already, in the fall of 2021!
- Diagnosis **based on several symptoms and observations in many European societies**, like e.g.
 - Increasing economic problems
 - Increasing polarization and conflicts
 - Declining subjective well-being
 - Increasing inequality
 - Disordered social relations
 - Impaired social climate, e.g. perceived cutback in freedom of expression (Germany)

- ➔ In June 2021 only 45 % of adult population in Germany agreed that people can articulate their political opinion freely.
- ➔ In previous surveys - beginning with the 1960s - this percentage always exceeded two thirds of the population!

Source: Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, FAZ

If the quality of life in Europe is at risk, it seems to be due to at least 3 crises:

- The Covid-Pandemic
- The global climate-change and related anti-climate-change policies and movements
- The Russian war against Ukraine

Negative impact of the Covid-pandemic on quality of life rather obvious!

- Many surveys and studies have shown various negative impacts of the pandemic at the individual and household level, e.g.
 - Economic deterioration
 - Health impairments and excess mortality
 - Temporary social isolation
 - Restricted access of various kind, e.g. cultural events and institutions
 - School closures and limitations in learning opportunities
- Either direct consequences of the pandemic, or
- Outcomes of intended or unintended consequences of related policies, such as measures of social distancing, economic lockdowns etc.

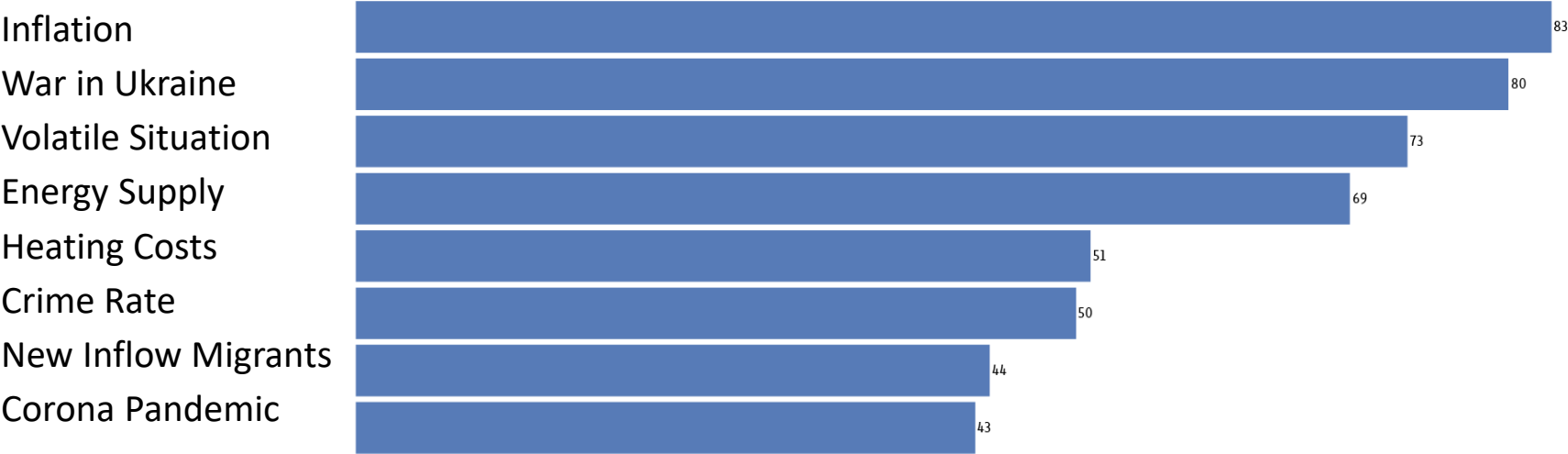
Well before the outbreak of the Covid-Pandemic European populations became increasingly aware of a global climate change!

- In response to this, **anti-climate-change-movements** – like „Fridays for Future“– **and climate-change mitigation policies increasingly dominated public debates** and politics
- **Call for attitudinal and behavioral changes** towards life styles which are supposed to be less materialistic, less consumption driven, more sustainable and less harmful to the global climate
 - **Examples of requests for behavioral changes:** less consumption in general, no consumption of fossile fuels, less individual mobility, less meat consumption, smaller homes etc.
- In consequence **„sufficiency“ became the new credo** and the **request for different sorts of „relinquishment“ entered political programmes** at national and international levels **as well as policies** of governments
- **But: neither** calls for **„sufficiency“** nor for **„relinquishment“** are easily **compatible with preserving high levels of well-being or quality of life!**

Russian war against Ukraine

- Call for papers published only few days prior to the outbreak of the war
- War not only created a completely new reality in our European societies, but also amplified already existing tendencies towards declining quality of life (e.g. economic problems, polarization of public debate, declining Subjective Well-Being)
- Obvious consequences include:
 - Speed-up of inflation, particularly energy costs
 - Shrinking wealth and living standards
 - Strong threat to objective and perceived security
 - Impairment of subjective well-being and future optimism
- “Zeitenwende” or turn of an era?
 - What does it mean for future well-being?
- Are we facing a reversal of societal progress?

Worries, % Adult Population Germany*



* Most frequently mentioned worries out of 19.

Source: Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, August 2022; n=1008

Interestingly **movements, like** e.g.

- **Beyond GDP** = strong movement at national and European levels, e.g. Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Report
- **Quality of life indicators** ⇒ various national governments & statistical institutes, OECD, Eurostat
- Use of **happiness metrics** to guide public policy, and even
- **Social Reporting** Initiatives

...which **flourished just a few months and years ago, almost disappeared** from the agenda **with** the appearance of the **climate change debate, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine!**

- Today this conference will focus on impacts of the pandemic!
- Tomorrow morning:
 - Recent Developments in European Social Monitoring and Reporting
 - Business Meeting