# Philosophical Aspects of the Concept "Quality of Life"

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# Философски аспекти на понятието „качество на живот"

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, the problem with the quality of life concept is in the center of attention for all who want not only to model the best society at the theoretical level, but also to ensure the positive development of modern society. At the same time, there are several certain qualities of life, but there is no consensus on what its basic characteristics are. Philosophical approach is very important when assessing quality of life, as it presupposes a thorough qualitative study of its individual aspects. The report explores the cultural dimension of the phenomenon quality of life in modern society and the cultural environment as a factor in improving the quality of life of people. As a methodology, activity approach to culture and a system-functional analysis, are used. As a philosophical category, quality carries a great spiritual potential and should be considered as a value characteristic of the person and society. The construction of "common values" plays an important role in citizens' participation in democratic life. It is impossible to develop adequate indicators of the quality of life, if the cultural component of the quality of life is ignored.

*Keywords*: philosophy of quality, image of life, cultural construct, value characteristic

**Резюме**

Днес, проблемът относно понятието качество на живот е в центъра на вниманието на всички, които се опитват да моделират най-доброто общество на теоретично ниво, но и да осигурят положително развитие на съвременното общество. В същото време съществуват няколко определения за качество на живот и няма консенсус кои са основните му характеристики. Философският подход е много важен при оценка качеството на живот, доколкото предполага задълбочено изследване на отделни негови аспекти. Докладът изследва културното измерение на феномена качество на живот и реализацията на културния конструкт, като фактор за подобряване качеството на живот на хората. Като методология са използвани системно-функционален анализ и дейностен подход към културата. Философската категория качество на живот носи голям духовен потенциал и се разглежда като ценностна характеристика на обществото. Конструирането на „споделени ценности“ е ключово за участието на гражданите в демократичния процес и в живота като цяло. Ако се пренебрегне културният компонент не биха могли да бъдат разработени адекватни показатели за качество на живота.

*Ключови думи*: философия, образ на живота, културен конструкт, ценностна характеристика

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## Philosophical aspects of the concept “quality of life”

### Introduction

The concept of quality of life, apart from an economic dimension, also has a great social potential. In Scandinavian studies, it is based on the so-called "resource indicators" related to well-being. In Anglo-American, it is based on subjective evaluations - the degree of satisfaction assessed by the individuals themselves (Ananad & Sen, 1999).

In the 90s of the last centuries, the new concept of development of human potential (human development) emerged in the programs of the United Nations, as a counterweight to the traditional understanding of the development of the volume of material goods and services (Human Development Report, 2000).

Concepts focus not on the ability to work productively (i.e., the economic value of the individual), but only on the development of a person through the expansion of choice due to the increase in life expectancy, education, and income.

The concept of quality of life as we know it was first used in 1964 by John Galbraith in his work "Abundance Society" (Galbraith, 2018, p. 134). The concept of quality of life can be explored through economic, social, medical, psychological, and ecological approaches, but the report will focus on the philosophical approach. From the point of view of Romanian sociologists quality of life is a sociological concept, with economic and psychological dimensions” (Marginean, 2004). The word quality as a philosophical category helps evaluate life, which is one of modern philosophy and sociology trends.

The role of sociology as an evaluation mechanism is vital because it uses the following criteria: obtaining information, evaluating the quality of life, and determining tasks. With the help of a set of objective and subjective indicators in the context of individual social groups and territorial communities, it is possible to assess the quality of life.

The philosophical approach is very important when assessing quality of life, as it presupposes a thorough qualitative study of its aspects. This approach allows using a detailed study of the identified problem fields, considering each specific case to determine the most effective management measures and influences that regulate the formation of the quality of life of various groups and strata of the population. Philosophical indicators characterizing individual aspects of the quality of life are determined based on average indicators, expert assessments, and sociological survey data.

The report aims to study the cultural paradigms of the quality of life through a philosophical approach. The subject of the study is the cultural dimension of quality of life phenomenon within modern society. It also explores the culture understood as a systemic,

historically formed, and changing integrity of specific human activity methods and for the formation of a dignified life.

To realize the purpose, the report identifies the characteristics of the cultural dimension of the quality of life and reveals the role of its cultural construct in the modern world. To solve the set tasks systemic and complex methods are used. The work is based on interdisciplinary developments in quality of life research. It is based on the following theoretical and methodological approaches and concepts: system-functional analysis and activity approach to culture. Quality of life is a complex, multi-level theoretical construct, the subject of various research approaches. To create adequate quality of life indicators is impossible to ignore the cultural component.

**Philosophical aspects of the concept "quality of life**

Such categories as the image of life, lifestyle, and standard of living replaced the concept quality of life. However, these categories generalize only certain qualitative and quantitative aspects of life people.

The category image of life denotes an organized set of processes and phenomena of human activity in society. The organization of these processes and phenomena are determined by the natural geographical, social, and cultural conditions for their implementation, on the one hand, and the personal characteristics of representatives of various socio-cultural groups. The concept reflects the everyday life of people. It serves to identify the ratio of established, typical, and changeable individual characteristics of vital activity of various people in some regions of culture.

The concept of lifestyle allows to significantly deepens the concept image of life, considering in detail the influence of internal psychological factors on the development of a person's way of living and fixing the versatility of people's everyday behavior within the framework of a single lifestyle.

The category standard of living focuses on life support, fixing only the quantitative side of life, the degree meeting the material and cultural needs of people. The level of life is an indicator that characterizes the population's well-being level. It is designed to determine the degree to which people are provided with vital goods and means of subsistence. That is, an increased standard of living is associated with increased consumption. However, reality has shown that economic growth and high consumption levels lead society to poverty, crime, drug addiction, environmental pollution, and man-made disasters. Economic growth should not be seen as means of an end but rather as a way to implement the essential social transformations that ensure the creation of the necessary conditions for meeting not only the

primary material needs of the population but also needs for communication, respect, creativity, and self-expression.

Thus, the quality of life is not identical to such concepts as lifestyle since these categories reflect only certain aspects of such a multifaceted category as the quality of life. The construction of the quality of life is conducive to realizing social unity and the cohesion of all people. As a philosophical category, quality carries great spiritual potential and is related to the realization of cultural construction. Social and cultural needs are associated with people's perception of their position depending on the system values and social standards that exist in society.

There is a dualism in philosophy: is it a single quality reflecting the entire spectrum of the human being, or is it a collection of qualities? There are no universal concepts, and I agree with Romanian colleagues that "their utilization in science is done by reinterpreting them in agreement with the theoretical and methodological system of reference regarding the social reality (Marginean, 2004).

"Quality of life" has all characteristics of a total social fact. It includes the whole society and its functioning, institutions and human behavior, and the individual and collective life with objective and subjective data. And it's an advantage to study this social fact (Mauss, 1997).

In contrast to the economic approach, in which there are optimistic *(*transition to a new qualitative level is possible only based on scientific and technical progress) and pessimistic (economic growth threatens the environment and negatively affects human life) points of view regarding quality of life, the philosophical approach offers a multifaceted concept. An essential part from a philosophical point of view is the transformation of man himself.

As a philosophical category, quality carries excellent spiritual potential. Apart from the fundamental component of assessing the quality of life of societies at the micro- and macro-levels, “the quality-of-life category” should be considered a value characteristic of the person and society. The quality of life is determined by a person's satisfaction with the possibility of realizing his spiritual and cultural needs, along with justice and well-being, in the context of the philosophy (Aseeva & Mayakova, 2015).

According to Mayakova, the meaning of the term quality of life is determined by the following:

- The social basis - society;

- Philosophical orientation of the personality - its moral orientations;

- The spiritual factors - the person's satisfaction with the conditions of life (Mayakova, 2015).

Shatrova's research is in a similar direction, related to people's perceptions of their place in the system of values and social standards of society. She brings out five types of needs affecting the quality of life. For her, 'the quality of life' is considered the degree of satisfaction of material, social and cultural needs related to people's perception of their position depending on the system of values and social standards in society (Shatrova, 2011).

Spiritual needs are an irrevocable element of the psychological state of a happy person, a way of organizing people, people's vital activity, and interactions in different spheres of culture.

**How does culture reproduce quality of life?**

Answering that question requires analyzing society's culture as a systematic phenomenon**.** Society as a cultural system, on the one hand, reflects the complexity of the social system and, on the other, has its characteristics. It is a collection of people spontaneously united by the desire to reproduce the image and quality of their life (and improve this quality if possible).

The image of life as a concept is considered in the most detail by Rozalina Ryvkina and includes a set of specific forms of people's life in all spheres of public life (Zaslavskaya & Ryvkina, 1991). The image of life as a philosophical category is understood as some local features of the culture of social activity that has developed historically among different peoples, individualizing their cultures and regulating the practical life of people with more or less typical forms of behavior and general lifestyle.

How does culture replicate the image and quality of life? There seems to be no universal method and mechanism that implements this function.

In the early stages of history, such a tool was the custom - a vital tool in the Antiquity and Middle Ages (Genkin,2001). At later stages of history (in the industrial and postindustrial eras), such a determining tool of culture became an ideology. The dominant ideology, based on certain considerations of rational consciousness, determined the desirable parameters of the image and quality of life. Modern society as a cultural system is characterized by a complex combination of images and qualities of life and their social segments, focused on three socio-cultural strategies - creative, traditional, and mass.

A life strategy focused on creative culture is characterized by good technical and informative support, fundamental knowledge of the classical cultural heritage, but most of all, by the large-scale intellectual involvement of the bearers of this culture in solving urgent

problems of social development (regardless of the real possibilities of influencing the practice of this development). Adherents of this culture, are concerned about the future of mankind and, to one degree or another, work for the interests of this future. The image and quality of life of this social segment of society are characterized by moderate traditionalism, average material security, high tolerance for extravagant experiments of the modern cultural avant-garde, and concern for the preservation of the classical cultural heritage.

A life strategy focused on traditional culture is characterized, by low technical and information support and absolute alienation from the problems of modern social development. The carriers of this culture are usually distinguished by high religiosity, a penchant for nationalistic views, and intolerance to any cultural manifestations not provided for by tradition. They are characterized by an orientation towards the past as the "correct" state of social reality. Modernity and its cultural features, as a rule, are not perceived by them. Their literary and artistic preferences are ideologically biased to the utmost. The image and quality of life of the bearers of this culture are mainly focused on self-isolation from modern problems and staying in the virtual world of historical and religious traditions. The life strategy focused on mass culture is distinguished by the most intensive technical and informational support, mainly for entertainment. The participation of the bearers of this culture in the intelligent solution to the problems of our time is minimal. Modern culture is perceived as much as it corresponds to the current fashion. The attitude to the past and the future is indifferent; only the present is relevant. Within the framework of this culture, escapism is very characteristic - going into the virtual world of dreams and games with the help of modern electronics (Shapinskaya, 2014). The image and quality of life of the carriers of this culture are focused on the non-stop consumption of technically available goods.

Mass culture has gradually become universal in recent years, defining the image and quality of life. Creative culture's role and social influence have significantly decreased in recent years. The main social contradiction of postmodernity is the conflict between the individual and society, the development of which will determine future cultural dynamics. Modern culture, in which the apologists of mass culture prevail, with its adaptability, directs attention to the active participation of society in a dynamic socio-cultural process.

In sociological research, the concept of social capital is used to measure civic engagement, people's social motivation, and the effectiveness of social institutions. Lifestyle changes are one of the most important indicators of social development, also understood as human development, since during its development the goals, activity, and interests of people change the entire main range of indicators representing the way of life.

**The realization of cultural quality construction**

The quality of life, as a dynamic socio-cultural process, in the domain of the quality of the political environment, is represented by the civil participation of members of society in the processes of their life in certain conditions. Completeness has a cultural meaning and is conditioned by the human capacity for productive activity and participation in decision-making.

In “Politics," "Nicomachean Ethics," the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (1993) discussed issues on justice, courage, prudence, wisdom, and other virtues. They are still of great significance to our democratic construction today. The quality of life is related to democracy, one of the main values. That needs:

1. To build the fundamental value pursuit of the community. To improve the civil qualities of public culture is to make common values of society and then let the people form a common quest for value.

J. Habermas (1962, as cited in Singh, 2012) once pointed out when analyzing the problems of contemporary social development, “modern society depends on three different media to maintain, that is, the integration of money or market, management power or national administration, as well as common values, norms, and languages." It can be seen that the construction of “common values” plays an important role in citizens’ participation in democratic life.

2. To cultivate civic consciousness. Strengthening civic subject consciousness should first improve the civic consciousness of rights and obligations. Enhancing the civic consciousness of ownership is conducive to realizing their value of life, the respect for others, and the norms of social order and promotes social harmony and orderly development. Meanwhile, besides protecting his right, the citizen should also fulfill his relevant obligations. This is a manifestation of the mature personality of the citizen and reflects his significance as a social subject. On the other hand, cultivating citizen consciousness is conducive to promoting the development of social fairness and justice (Lin Yi, 2022).

People should actively cultivate civic consciousness, making citizens supervise the whole public power organization. To ensure the construction of the system and improve the soft power of society, both of them are effective ways to avoid the abuse of power and corruption, which will guarantee a better quality of life.

3. To pay attention to the development of the social ethics consultation. Public affairs are both social and individual, and they are related to the particular situation and future development of the quality of life. The improvement of the consultative ethics system will

also help the development of the model of democratic politics. "It's important the sensitivity of the political elite to issue of material and emotional welfare as objectives of public policies" (Marginean, 2004, p. 170).

The construction of "the quality of life" is conducive to the realization of social unity and the cohesion of all people to jointly achieve the grand goal of prosperity, democracy, civilization and harmony, freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, integrity, and friendliness, and actively cultivate and practice the core values.

People should actively improve the civic and cultural level of the corresponding social subjects and focus on cultivating citizens' public spirit. The path is neither an individual nor familial one, but rather a collective one, and that's the most significant challenge ahead of us, ahead of both humanity and culture.

Paying attention to "dialogue and consultation" includes recognizing society's diversified development and the diversity of the subject's interests. Still, it sublates the sharpness of freedom and democracy and provides a legitimate communication channel for coordinating many individual interests, which is conducive to developing social values.

Philosophers should continue to strengthen the construction of artistic quality through knowledge transfer. We should not ignore the cultivation of social science research ability and pay special attention to the cultivation of humanistic quality (Human Development Report, 2000). It is important to raise consciousness and strengthen the construction of artistic quality in practical activities by participating in daily public affairs. To exercise the subject's ability to deal with making decisions when solving specific problems, it needs to face and analyze such issues with a calm attitude and choose appropriate strategies.

## Conclusion

Summarizing all the above, we emphasize that the generally accepted concept of "the quality of life" does not exist, and the aim is to give a concept that would reveal the whole essence of the given problem. The quality of life became the object of research in various sciences in the second half of the 20th century, the following areas of research are distinguished: a study of the influence of scientific and technological progress on the quality of life and economic growth of societies; analysis of the impact of socio-cultural factors on quality of life; social-psychological analysis constituent qualities of the population's life, etc.

The philosophical approach to quality of life is considered a value characteristic of the individual and society. An active system of culture allows us to see it in close connection with the development of society and requires complex, systematic study rather than a thin branch. For a humans, it is essential not only the opportunity to lead a healthy and dignified life,

acquire knowledge, having access to material resources but also the presence of conditions for creativity and self-realization as well as active participation in life. Culture, therefore, appears as a special source of quality of life.

It is important to cultivate consciousness and strengthen the construction of cultural quality in practical activities. It is necessary to pay attention to the construction of the community's fundamental value pursuit and the construction of citizens' cultural quality, from improving civic awareness. This determines the importance of a more comprehensive and detailed study of the phenomenon of "quality of life" from cultural positions, as well as the identification of specific segments of the sphere of culture, the development of which contributes to the improvement of the quality of life of our contemporaries. Quality of life equates to the degree of social development and the fullness of people's life experiences. The connection between the high quality of life of the population and the development of culture is an argument in favor of the thesis about the need to expand the base of cultural policy in postmodern society.

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