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СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ

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D. Naumov
V. Simkhovich
M. Vishniakova
BSEU (Minsk)

QUALITY OF LIFE OF YOUTH AS A SUBJECT OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH: THEORETIC AND METHODIC ASPECT

Various approaches to understanding quality of life are considered. Quality of life of the youth is grounded as a complex characteristic that reflects both objectively existing parameters of standard of living and satisfaction of needs and a subjective perception of the degree of satisfaction of needs in a specific period of time in society. Described is a methodology for measuring quality of life of the youth, based on the index method that enable to diagnose various aspects of youth life and identify specific problem areas in implementation of the state youth policy.

Keywords: quality of life; standard of living; youth; index method; subjective assessment; general and particular index; integral index of quality of life.

Д. И. Наумов
кандидат социологических наук, доцент
В. А. Симхович
доктор социологических наук, профессор
М. В. Вишнякова
БГЭУ (Минск)

КАЧЕСТВО ЖИЗНИ МОЛОДЕЖИ КАК ПРЕДМЕТ СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ: ТЕОРЕТИКО-МЕТОДИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ

Статья посвящена анализу различных подходов к пониманию качества жизни в целом. Качество жизни молодежи обосновывается как комплексная характеристика, отражающая объективно существующие параметры уровня жизни и удовлетворения потребностей, а также субъективное восприятие степени удовлетворения потребностей в конкретный период в обществе. Описывается методика измерения качества жизни молодежи, построенная на основе индексного метода, которая позволяет осуществлять диагностику различных сторон жизни молодежи и выявлять конкретные проблемные места при реализации государственной молодежной политики.

Ключевые слова: качество жизни; уровень жизни; молодежь; индексный метод; субъективная оценка; общий и частный индексы; интегральный индекс качества жизни.

The problems of sociological measuring of quality of life of the Belarusian youth in the context of implementation of the state youth policy of the Republic of Belarus have both an actual theoretical and applied value. In the first case, the issue of correlation of institutional factors and socio-cultural determinants in the process of designing and implementing the state youth policy is actualized, in the second one, — that of development of a methodology for index measuring of quality of life of youth as a tool for sociological monitoring of the given direction in the country. In theoretical and methodological aspects development of a methodology for index measuring quality of young people's life focuses on assessing the international experience of theoretical conceptualization and measuring level and quality of life as correlative parameters, and also involves developing a definition and characterization of the conceptual grounds for subjective satisfaction with the level and quality of young people's life adequate to modern realities of the Belarusian society.

The problem of quality of life, being a complex and multi-level construct, is traditionally a relevant topic of theoretical and applied researches in various scientific disciplines, schools and areas [1; 2]. So, philosophical discourse is characterized by establishing a dialectical connection between a person's spirituality and individual quality of life that leads to viewing the phenomenon through the prism of humanism, virtue, moral perfection, justice, intelligence etc. Such an interpretation is inherent in works of Russian philosophers N. A. Berdyaev, I. A. Ilyin, P. Novgorodtsev, A. I. Subetto et al. Economic discourse is characterized by identifying the nature of the economic growth impact on the society and individual's quality of life, as well as considering quality of life as a factor in distribution of limited economic resources by the state in society (D. Bell, Z. Brzezinski, J. Galbraith, A. Toffler et al.); legal discourse is known for establishing the role of legislation and law enforcement practice in determining quality of life of an individual and social groups (A. de Tocqueville, V. Wilson, D. Horowitz, G. Druri et al.); political science discourse is characterized by identifying the role of quality of life in determining parameters of efficiency, ensuring individual and public safety (G. Almond, S. Verba, R. Inglehart et al.); psychological discourse is known for identifying the role of individual and group psychological factors to determine an individual's quality of life by meeting human needs, as well as by establishing communication links and formation of identities (E. Allard, A. Campbell, T. Logotetti, A. Maslow, A. Todorov et al.).

In modern socio-humanitarian discourse the category of *quality of life* is viewed in an interdisciplinary aspect that is reflected both in developing integral conceptual models of quality of life and in combining various theoretical approaches when methods for assessing the population's quality of life are developed. As S. A. Ayvazyan emphasizes, «there are many theoretical conceptions of quality of life that highlight various aspects of life (happiness, health, ability to lead a decent lifestyle etc.), but there is no single universal definition of this synthetic latent category» [3, p. 10]. Currently, according to a number of researchers' viewpoint [4], the following groups of conceptual interpretations of the concept of *quality of life* can be singled out:

- subjective interpretations saying that quality of life is a degree of comfort of an individual's life activity in micro-social and macro-social frameworks in terms of meeting his needs of various levels;
- objectivist-consumer interpretations that emphasize the objective relationship of an individual's quality of life with the possibilities of practical realization of needs in a specific social context. They focus on the fact that quality of life acts as a specific set of resources necessary to meet individual needs and personal development of man;
- quantitative and consumer interpretations define quality of life as a complex characteristic of the degree of satisfaction of people's material and cultural needs, prevailing conditions of individual and group life, basic parameters of development of the individual and

society. That's why American sociological theories of abundance concentrate on manufactured goods, real incomes etc., interpreted as objective markers of achieving a standard level of quality of life [2];

- axiological interpretations define quality of life as a combination of life-meaningful guidelines and value orientations that characterize the structure of the individual's needs and living conditions, as well as the degree of people's satisfaction with life, social relations and environment;

- complex interpretations define quality of life as a complex of optimal characteristics of an individual's life activities within the framework of a specific social space and time that ensure adequacy of the parameters of individual life to the types of a person's needs and social activities. Here quality of life is considered from the view point of a mutual correspondence of methods and results of the individual's activity, and also actualizes the differences between his long-term and short-term results;

- synthetic interpretations actualize a quantitatively subjective approach to understanding quality of life as associated with the degree of comfort of social and natural environment, parameters of harmonious human life and level of the individual's well-being, social, spiritual and physical health. So, American personal-utilitarian theories concentrate on senses of happiness, pleasures and fulfillment of desires, as main indicators showing a high degree of its achievement [2];

- relationalistic interpretations within which the social potential of quality of life and its practical implementation are related, therefore, quality of life is understood here in the context of an individual correlation of the person's status and resource provision with his normative-target settings and life plans in a specific time and social framework.

The multiplicity of theoretical interpretations of quality of life can be reduced to two main approaches — objective and subjective ones. In the first case, the role of social structures in functioning the society is absolutized, therefore quality of life is seen as a derivative of the macroeconomic activity of various actors and state socio-economic policy, determined by the nature of managerial decisions and economic practice. Accordingly, to assess quality of life a number of macroeconomic indicators is used (population structure, social health of the population, adult education level, labor activity, number of marriages and divorces, income level etc.) that are applied «to calculate a set of private indicators and then reduce them to an integral index with a predominantly uniform distribution of weights between private indicators» [5, p. 31]. In the second case, an individual is brought to the fore and it is him, not any institutionalized groups, who is attributed a fundamental role in social life, so the phenomenon of quality of life is viewed through the prism of individual assessments and public opinion. Accordingly, quality of life is formed, manifested and changed in the process of activity of people who, being united in various communities (professional, political, territorial etc.), constitute a certain social reality in a concrete historical time on the basis of diverse social relationships and interactions. In the framework of this approach, mainly «the results of sociological surveys of citizens or experts in a certain industry are used, and weighting the coefficients of private indicators in calculating the integral index is based on expert estimates» [5, p. 31]. If in the framework of an objective approach the category of *quality of life* is identified with such concepts as *standard of living* and *level of well-being*, within the framework of a subjective approach — with those of *lifestyle* and *level of happiness*. In real practice the combined use of both approaches is advisable that enable to significantly expand the system of indicators for calculating quality of life.

However, with regard to various socio-demographic groups, it is difficult to talk about universality of the manifestation and measurement of quality of life. Indeed, quality of life «represents a wider complex of conditions of human life and includes the standard of living,

as well as the components related to the ecological environment, social well-being, political climate, psychological comfort. To measure quality of life, statistical indicators, even very detailed and reliable, are not enough, subjective assessments of the compliance of these parameters with the needs of people are needed» [6, p. 34]. It actualizes first of all the youth context for considering the given problem field for the following reasons.

First, youth is a special socio-demographic group, distinguished on the basis of the aggregated age characteristics and features of the social position due to various socio-psychological properties that are determined by the social system, culture, regularities of socialization, education of the society. Representatives of this group are characterized by specific age and socio-psychological properties, values and life-meaning attitudes, a special subculture etc. It acts as the most dynamic part of modern Belarusian society that is considered the most important social resource in ensuring the country's socio-economic and scientific-technical development. But a characteristic feature of the given socio-demographic group is its constant mobility and variability in structural and socio-cultural aspects that actualizes the problem of measuring quality of young people's life of in methodological and methodological perspectives. In general, quality of young people's life can be considered as a synthesis of objective and subjective factors and parameters (state and dynamics of macro-social processes, nature of secondary socialization, choice of worldview guidelines and value orientations).

Second, youth is both a subject and object of the state youth policy defined as a system of social, political, organizational, legal and other measures aimed at supporting young citizens and implemented by the state for the purpose of social formation and development of youth, and fullest realization of its potential in the interests of the whole society. It is closely interconnected with other areas of the state policy (demographic, scientific, technical, cultural, social policy, etc.), as well as with the governmental bodies, institutions and organizations acting as subjects of youth policy. Accordingly, the state youth policy should act as a system-based technology aimed at developing the human capital, creative and innovative potential of youth as the most important prerequisites for improving quality of life. In this functional aspect the issue of assessing the main directions of implementation of state youth policy is updated in terms of their contribution to improving quality of life of young people, while being evaluated on the basis of criteria and standards that are different from other age cohorts. In the managerial aspect this moment actualizes the feasibility of a higher involvement of young people in supporting the functioning of mechanisms for achieving the goals of the state youth policy, while minimizing the significance of the very facts of its achievement. Practical implementation of such a solution can be facilitated by the fact that the state youth policy is manifested at the interpersonal, group, intergroup, institutional and societal levels.

The task of developing a methodology for measuring quality of young people's life demands using the method used in sociology — the index method, the essence of which is to reduce social information to a single indicator, regardless of the total number of the object's signs-indicators which are the object of a transformation procedure of the same kind [7; 8]. In foreign and domestic sociology many research centers and companies engaged primarily in the study of public opinion, widely use indices as a working tool. Thus, a worldwide fame is given to the Human Development Index (HDI) that is published as part of the UN Development Program in annual reports on human development since 1990. The index is used for cross-country comparisons based on three basic indicators: life expectancy, duration of education in educational institutions, gross national income per capita at purchasing power parity (in US dollars). Thus, a sociological index is «a tool for classifying, comparing and measuring, constructed by logical and analytical combination of empirical indicators by means of mathematical operations» [8, p. 3].

In the aspect of the research, quality of young people's life is understood as a complex characteristic that reflects objectively the existing parameters of the standard of living and satisfaction of needs for directly unpaid benefits, as well as a subjective perception of the degree of satisfaction of the entire totality of needs in a specific period of time in the society. A sociological analysis of the level and quality of life of the youth implies determination of its subjective assessment as being most representative of the youth's typological characteristics, and based on an appropriate system of signs and indicators.

In our research the following indicators of quality of life are indices of the subject under study:

- a subjective assessment of the material standard of living that requires indicators of satisfaction with material status and housing conditions;
- a subjective assessment of health, accessibility and quality of medical care that requires indicators related to the assessment of one's health, quality and accessibility of care;
- a subjective assessment of accessibility and quality of education that require indicators characterizing quality and accessibility of services in education;
- a subjective assessment of availability and quality of social infrastructure by means of which an individual assessment of satisfaction with the presence and functioning of social infrastructure facilities at the place of residence (cultural institutions and public services, sports facilities etc.) is characterized;
- a subjective assessment of the state of ecological environment — it is determined by assessing the environmental situation at the place of residence and the latter's level of pollution (water quality, air purity) as well as by satisfaction with the landscaping of the region of residence;
- a subjective assessment of quality of social environment — it is determined by assessing the level of security provided at the place of residence, study, work of the individual and in the country as a whole;
- a satisfaction with quality of life that takes people's assessment of their life in general, their emotional state at a certain point in time into account.

It should be noted that assessing quality of young people's life is impossible without determining their standard of living that is achieved by identifying the parameter of individual consumption of goods (food, clothes and shoes, goods for current and long-term use etc.) and services (domestic services, education, leisure and entertainment etc.) aimed at meeting the basic vital needs of the young people.

In the study of quality of life of the youth, individual indices should be calculated that describe the characteristics of public consciousness in relation to one or another aspect of quality of life. In the given case the choice of particular indicators and how to coordinate them is a certain difficulty. Therefore, the questions of the questionnaire (15 questions) used to construct individual indices are aimed at highlighting positive or negative assessments of significant aspects of an individual's life. Options denoting «average positions» and «find it difficult to answer» option are excluded from the analysis. Each individual index is calculated on linear distributions of answers as the difference between the shares of positive and negative answers; to avoid the appearance of negative index values 100 is added to the obtained data.

Based on the arithmetic average of individual indices, 7 general indices are formed corresponding to the selected indicators of quality of life (table). The integral index of quality of life of the youth is calculated as the arithmetic average of the general indices. A similar way is used to construct the aggregate index of the standard of living of the youth that is considered as an integral indicator of effectiveness of implementation of the state youth policy.

System of subjective indicators of quality of life

Indicators (general indices) of quality of the population's life	Particular indices	Questions for calculating private indices
Index of subjective assessment of the material standard of living	Assessment of financial situation	How do you assess the financial situation of your family?
	Retrospective assessment of the family's financial situation	How did the financial situation of your family change over the past year?
	Prospective assessment of the family's financial situation	How do you think the financial situation of your family will change in a year?
	Satisfaction with housing	How satisfied are you with your living conditions?
Index of subjective assessment of health, accessibility and quality of medical care	Health condition	How do you assess your health state?
	Availability of medical care	Are you satisfied with the possibility of receiving medical care if necessary?
	Quality of medical care	Please rate the quality of free medical care provided by healthcare institutions
Index of subjective assessment of accessibility and quality of education	Accessibility of education	Are you satisfied with the possibility of getting an education?
	Quality of education	How do you assess the quality of education (by level of education)?
Index of subjective assessment of availability of social infrastructure	Satisfaction with availability of institutions of social sphere	How satisfied are you with the availability of institutions of social sphere at your place of residence (by type and type)?
Index of subjective assessment of the state of ecological environment	Assessment of the state of ecological environment	How do you assess your place of residence (by aspects of the environmental situation)
Index of a subjective assessment of quality of social environment	Assessment of the level of security	Do you feel safe (by territorial localization)?
Index of subjective assessment of life satisfaction	Assessment of life at the present moment of time	To what extent are you satisfied with the life you lead now?
	A retrospective assessment of family life	How did the life of your family change over the past year?
	Prospective assessment of family life	How, in your opinion, will the life of your family change in a year?

Source: compiled by the authors.

Thus, the given methodology for measuring quality of young people's life, constructed on the basis of the index method, enables both to diagnose various aspects of the youth's life and identify specific problem areas in implementation of the state youth policy.

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V. Simkhovich
F. Mikhailik
M. Vishniakova
BSEU (Minsk)

SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE OF STUDENT YOUTH IN SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The results of a study of subjective assessment of quality and level of life of Belarusian students are considered. Its indicators are assessments of the material standard of living, health, accessibility and quality of medical care, education, social infrastructure, state of ecological environment, quality of social environment and satisfaction with quality of life. The revealed assessment of subjective satisfaction with life is characterized by weakly expressed optimism, due to the factual equivalence of all quality of life' indicators for the students that are determined by the logic of development of the information society.

Keywords: quality and standard of living; student youth; index method; subjective assessment; general and individual indices.