

QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE POPULATION AS A SCIENTIFIC CATEGORY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO DEFINITION

Djumanova Rano Fayzullayevna

Associate Professor, Department of Economics and
Digital Technologies, Diplomat University

Abstract

In contemporary scientific circles, intense discussions persist regarding the definition of the concept of the "quality of life of the population." To date, a definitive academic consensus has not yet been reached. The primary conceptual challenge lies in delineating the precise boundaries and theoretical differences between two interconnected categories: the "standard of living" and the "quality of life."

Introduction

Introduction and the Definitional Debate

In contemporary scientific circles, intense discussions persist regarding the definition of the concept of the "**quality of life of the population.**" To date, a definitive academic consensus has not yet been reached. The primary conceptual challenge lies in delineating the precise boundaries and theoretical differences between two interconnected categories: the "**standard of living**" and the "**quality of life.**"

The **standard of living** is traditionally operationalized by a system of quantitative indicators that reflect specific socio-economic dimensions of human existence and activity. To construct a comprehensive understanding of the standard of living, it is essential to analyze the following elements in an integrated manner:

- Population income streams and evolving structures of human needs.
- Consumption volumes, patterns, and structural composition.
- Provision of housing, personal property, and cultural or household durables.

While the standard of living is inextricably linked to the broader concept of "quality of life"—a relationship thoroughly documented by economists—their core focuses differ.

Definition: The quality of life is a holistic synthesis of vital human values. It characterizes individual identity, types of human activity, the structure of needs and the degree of their fulfillment, and the harmonious relationship between an individual, social conditions, and the natural environment. Ultimately, it generates a profound psychological sense of life satisfaction.

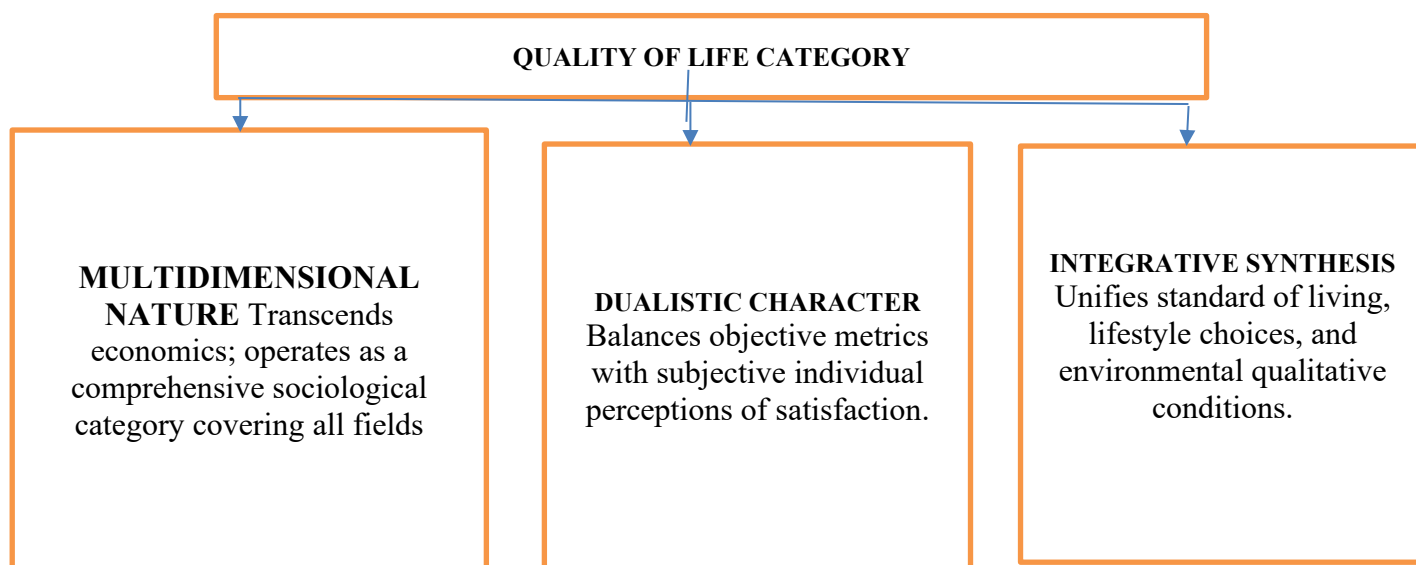
In our view, the fundamental distinction can be summarized as follows: while the standard of living primarily captures the quantitative and material dimensions of human existence, the quality of life encompasses the qualitative, cultural, and socio-environmental facets, serving as a primary metric for the holistic development of human civilization.



The Multifaceted Nature of Quality of Life To formulate effective state policies aimed at enhancing human welfare, it is vital to master the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of this topic. In the modern era, it has become evident that economic growth alone (\$GDP\$ expansion) cannot automatically resolve deep-seated ecological, cultural, and social crises.

The paradigms of societal development have shifted. Modern metrics prioritize the human being—specifically, the human capacity to generate new knowledge and utilize unique information. The transition to this new model of social progress is objectively driven by the urgent need to address contemporary global challenges.

The distinct features of the "quality of life" category can be synthesized into three core dimensions:



- **First, it is intrinsically multidimensional.** Quality of life is incomparably broader than the standard of living. It extends far beyond pure economic boundaries, operating primarily as a sociological category that encapsulates all spheres of social life.
- **Second, it possesses a dualistic character (Objective vs. Subjective).**
 - The Objective Dimension relies on scientifically validated standards of human needs and interests, against which actual consumption and living conditions can be empirically measured.
 - The Subjective Dimension recognizes that needs are deeply individualized. They cannot be fully captured by aggregate statistical figures because they exist within human consciousness. Thus, they must be assessed via personal perceptions, self-reported well-being, and psychological satisfaction.
- **Third, it is an integrative, synthetic category.** Rather than existing in isolation from other socio-economic concepts, it acts as a unifying framework that infuses them with qualitative meaning. The structural components of quality of life represent a synthesis of lifestyle, standard of living, and a qualitatively enriched environment.

Theoretical Classifications and the Role of Human Capabilities Despite a consensus among researchers regarding the complexity of the quality of life, a universally accepted classification of its determining factors remains absent. The scientific literature offers various models to systematize these variables and analyze their interdependencies.



Historically, the recognition of a correlation between a population's living standards and its intrinsic characteristics led to the coining of the term "**population quality.**" Within Soviet academic literature, this phrase was pioneered by demographers who evaluated quality of life through its direct impacts on public health, morbidity rates, and life expectancy.

Macro and Micro Environmental Determinants A nation's development trajectory, alongside its political and socio-economic climate, dictates whether individuals can attain a high quality of life. The interaction between macro-level structures and individual agencies can be divided into two primary categories:

Factor Group	Components Included	Degree of Policy Control
Group 1: Macro-Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate and geographical location. • Political stability and institutional transparency. • Macroeconomic growth (\$GDP\$) and social safety nets. 	Exogenous/Partially Controllable: Geographic variables are fixed, while socio-political elements are directly regulated by state policy interventions
Group 2: Micro-Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal health status. • Attained level of education. • Family structure and social networks. • Access to and utility of leisure time. 	Endogenous: Highly controllable by the individual, representing personal agency and lifestyle choices.

B. Lindström and B. Eriksson [1] advanced this discourse by categorizing these determinants based on specific spheres of influence, distinguishing between **global, external, interpersonal, and personal** dimensions.

The Paradigm Shift: Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach. A milestone in the evolution of this theory was established by Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his contributions to welfare economics. Sen championed human development over mechanical economic output. He argued that economic analysis should focus not merely on nominal population incomes, but on equality of opportunities and human capabilities (the freedom to achieve well-being). Sen's framework challenges classical optimization models that maximize short-term utility at the expense of long-term distributional equity or future generations.

Furthermore, Sen emphasized that household welfare—the primary analytical unit of welfare economics—cannot be accurately measured solely through monetary income. It must encompass diverse elements of social support and public goods that are not traded on the market [2]. Consequently, institutional and social policies serve as the foundational architecture for building a modern economy of well-being.

Socio-Economic Foundations and Income Distribution. Certain scholars define the quality of life as a matrix of indicators characterizing material consumption alongside the consumption of non-monetized public goods. This systemic view treats the category as a framework reflecting how successfully individuals execute their life strategies and fulfill expanding human desires. Because civilizational progress continuously drives the expansion of human needs, defining quality of life requires identifying the baseline conditions that allow a person to be an active, functioning member of society.



As a socio-economic category, the quality of life is explicitly bound to the macroeconomic cycle: **Production** \rightarrow **Distribution** \rightarrow **Exchange** \rightarrow **Consumption**.

1. **Production** generates the material wealth and services required to satisfy human demands.
2. **Distribution** allocates the incomes derived from production, establishing the financial reserves intended for human welfare.
3. **Exchange** provides individuals with market access, allowing them to trade their labor for income.
4. **Consumption** transforms income into realized utility, directly establishing the observed quality of life.

Given that the level of human development and the degree of need satisfaction are of equal importance, we align closely with the academic perspective of V.N. Bobkov, who posits that "quality of life is the dialectical synthesis of the population's level of development and its degree of need satisfaction" [3].

Conclusion

To facilitate dynamic empirical analysis, we propose defining the quality of life as the quantitative and qualitative rate of goods and services consumption achieved by the population under specific income levels and market price structures. In a market economy, virtually all foundational human needs possess a material base, making disposable income one of the most critical determinants of welfare. Therefore, the primary engine driving inequality in the quality of life is the uneven distribution of income inherent in market mechanisms.

In conclusion, the quality of life is a complex socio-economic category. It reflects the degree to which a population is supplied with essential material and spiritual assets via their earned income, which manifests as a lived reality evaluated through both objective structural standards and subjective human satisfaction.

References

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