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Perception of Quality of Life and its Components among Russian Students - Implications for Academic Teaching

Abstract

The paper has 3 objectives: (i) identify QoL determinants of Russian Students; (ii) assess their relevance for decision-making when choosing life strategies; (iii) recognize their implications for academic teaching. The research sample were students from two Russian Universities. The study employed: literature analysis; exploratory research (direct individual in-depth interviews, survey based on a self-administered, web-based questionnaire with single-answer, limited choice qualitative & quantitative questions and gradings based on the Likert-type scale); explanatory research (informal moderated group discussions). The research findings show the relatively high significance of finance, career, stability, family, free time and other non-material QoL determinants. Research analysis reveals an inconsistency between respondents' expectations and their work-life balance, which imposes a question about decision-making criteria at an early stage of career planning and the role of tertiary education in this process. Implications & Recommendations: (i) multicriteria decision-making processes, such as career planning, should comprise work-life balance; therefore both material and non-material QoL determinants should be incorporated into the analysis; (ii) as the role of Universities, beside educating, is also to guide and shape characters, Academia seems to be the right place for this task; (iii) therefore Universities should promote conscious lecturers as assistants to the process of identification of individual QoL determinants by their students.

Contribution & Value Added: the research provides a fresh and improved perspective on quality of life and its determinants; it includes non-material QoL components and therefore brings qualitative determinants into economic research; it will provide data for future comparisons; it comes from a research network linking European and Russian tertiary education institutions and University lecturers with intercultural teaching experience.

Keywords: determinants of quality of life; multicriteria decision-making; qualitative research; intercultural teaching

Postrzeganie jakości życia i jej wyznaczników przez rosyjskich studentów –
wnioski dla nauczania akademickiego

Streszczenie:

Cele badania: (i) identyfikacja wyznaczników jakości życia rosyjskich studentów; (ii) ocena ich istotności w procesie podejmowania decyzji dot. wyboru strategii życiowej; (iii) wyciągnięcie wniosków dla procesu dydaktycznego. Podmiot badania to studenci dwóch rosyjskich Uniwersytetów. Metody badawcze: przegląd literatury; badanie eksploracyjne (pogłębione wywiady bezpośrednie, ankieta oparta na samodzielnie administrowanym kwestionariuszu on-line z pytaniami ilościowymi i jakościowymi jednokrotnego lub ograniczonego wyboru oraz rangowaniem wg skali typu Likerta); badanie wyjaśniające (nieformalne moderowane dyskusje w grupie). Wyniki badania wskazują na stosunkowo wysoką istotność sytuacji finansowej, kariery, stabilności, rodziny, wolnego czasu oraz innych niematerialnych wyznaczników jakości życia. Analiza wyników ujawniła niespójność pomiędzy oczekiwaniami respondentów odn. równowagi pomiędzy ich życiem prywatnym i zawodowym. To narzuca pytanie o kryteria, według których podejmowane są decyzje na wczesnym etapie planowania kariery i roli Uczelni w tym procesie. Konsekwencje i zalecenia: (i) wielokryterialne procesy decyzyjne (np. planowanie kariery) powinny ujmować kwestię równowagi pomiędzy życiem prywatnym i zawodowym; (ii) Uniwersytety, oprócz edukacji, mają również kształtować charaktery, więc Akademia wydaje się odpowiednim miejscem i czasem dla tych rozważań; (iii) dlatego Uczelnie powinny promować świadomych wykładowców jako asystentów w procesie identyfikacji indywidualnych wyznaczników jakości życia przez studentów. Wkład i wartość dodana: badanie dostarcza świeżej, szerszej perspektywy na kwestię jakości życia i jej wyznaczników; zawiera niematerialne składowe jakości życia, przez co włącza do analizy ekonomicznej

wyznaczniki jakościowe; badanie dostarczy danych do przyszłych porównań; jest efektem współpracy w ramach sieci naukowo-badawczej europejskich i rosyjskich Uniwersytetów i wykładowców o międzykulturowym doświadczeniu dydaktycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: wyznaczniki jakości życia; wielokryterialne podejmowanie decyzji; badania jakościowe; edukacja międzykulturowa

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research is to provide an insight into decision-making patterns of young people who are at the verge of starting their professional careers. The decision-making process in question starts much earlier, most probably at the moment of choosing the dominant programme of their studies – when enrolling into a tertiary education institution. In fact, these young people are expected to consciously make decisions about their entire lives, basing them on very little information. Such multi-criteria decision-making, with the low availability of data on their determinants, is in most cases subject to a significant risk of failure. This in turn is due to an extremely high level of uncertainty in unstable and turbulent decision-making environments. Therefore it is difficult for young people to achieve professional success, work-life balance and happiness at the same time.

In order to create a model that would assist young people in this decision-making process it is necessary to understand its variables, both of a material (quantitative) and non-material (qualitative) nature. Identifying existing decision-making alternatives is needed as well. In this research the first group are the determinants of quality of life, whereas the second are alternative development paths that can be understood as various bundles of time spent on professional and private activities.

It is also important to understand the role of Academia in providing young people with skills necessary for this decision-making process. The role of University professors seems to be of utmost importance here, provided they will be able to understand the intercultural differences and particularities of different stages of socio-economic development of home countries and cultures of their students.

All of the above allowed us to formulate the following main research hypothesis and sub-theses:

Main research hypothesis: Early identification of individual hierarchy of determinants of human life quality provides young people with a solid base for making conscious choices

about their professional careers and personal development resulting in improving their future work-life balance.

- **Sub-thesis 1:** Incorporation of material and non-material determinants of quality of life into the career-planning process is likely to provide young people with a more satisfactory work-life balance ratio in the future.
- **Sub-thesis 2:** University professors should assist their students in identifying individual-specific determinants of quality of life and searches for matching life strategies.
- **Sub-thesis 3:** Intercultural sensibility and the understanding of nuances of socio-economic development are key success factors in such pursuits.

The research methodology consists of a 4-stage literature analysis, direct individual in-depth interviews, a web-based, self-administered survey and finally post-survey moderated discussions. The research sample is a group of 974 students from Russian Universities. The paper is a development of a study started in 2012 and described in Gawlik, 2013.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

For the past 200 years quality of life (QoL) studies used to be attributed to medical research. In the western world, the first that linked QoL with balance (between mind, emotions, body and relations with other people) were Pearls (1942, 1969) and Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951), although Eastern philosophies, i.e. Zen, Buddhism and Confucianism, had already propagated this idea. Interestingly, economists considered this issue at a relatively early stage. As early as the eighteenth century, Smith asked “*What can be added to the happiness of a man who is in health, out of debt, and has a clear conscience?*” (1759, p. 45). In past decades it has been analysed from many angles by Maslow (1954), Sen (1985), Schuessler and Fisher (1985), Layard (2005), Costanza, R., Fisher, B., Ali, S., Beer, C., Bond, L., Boumans, R., Danigelis, N.L., Dickinson, J., Elliott, C., Farley, J., Elliott-Gayer, D., MacDonald-Glenn, L., Hudspeth, T., Mahoney, D., McCahill, L., McIntosh, B., Reed, B., Abu Turab Rizvi, S., Rizzo, D.N., Simpatico, T., & Snapp, R. (2007, 2008) and many others. Recently, further research areas have considered this notion, i.e. sociology, ecology, sport, biology, engineering or chemistry.

The QoL approach to the economic sciences proves to be problematic for a number of reasons. The first of them is the **definition** of this notion. Schlender and Kokin (2003) understand it as “*a complex socio-economic category, which expresses the real level of consumption of material, social and spiritual benefits and services, the degree of satisfaction*”

of rational needs of these goods and services and conditions in the community to meet and develop those needs” (p. 524). Fatkhutdinov (2003) sees QoL as “an integral index of the development of society and of the effectiveness of government administration and the very category of “quality of life” is the subject of many sciences and is multidisciplinary in nature” (p. 60). Agadzhanian and Radysh (2009) write that “Quality of life is a system that includes spiritual, physical, sociocultural, ecological, and demographic components of life” (p. 3). Costanza et al. (2007) state that “QoL as a general term is meant to represent either how well human needs are met or the extent to which individuals or groups perceive satisfaction or dissatisfaction in various life domains” (p. 268). But in their later publication they admit that “QoL has often been subsumed under the heading of “economic growth” under the assumption that more income and consumption equates to better welfare” (Costanza et. al, 2008, p. 18). At the same time they point at the fact that “this equation of consumption with welfare has been challenged by several authors [...] and is now also being challenged by recent psychological research” (Costanza et. al, 2008, p. 18). Sen and Hawthorn (1989) see the value of the living standard “in the living, and not in the possessing of commodities, which has derivative and varying relevance” (p. 34). Publications where a wider than material-based definition of QoL has been adopted are *inter alia* Sen (1985), Nussbaum & Sen (1993), Nussbaum & Glover (1995), Diener & Suh (1997), Diener & Lucas (1999), Easterlin (2003), Alkire (2008), Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi (2009) and others.

The second problematic issue is the **identification of QoL determinants**. Alkire (2008) writes that “any approach to QoL may wish to select the space in which to measure QoL. Of course indicators may be used from different spaces, but a conceptually coherent approach should be able to explain why particular indicators have been chosen” (p. 2). In our opinion this coherence can be achieved by understanding the relevance of particular determinants of QoL for young respondents, as well as the attractiveness of particular work-life balance alternatives offered to them by the Russian socio-economic environment.

Kalinina (2006) seems to follow a similar logic by saying that “the quality of human life can be considered as the unity of indicators that characterize the level of implementation of human needs, the degree of satisfaction of life plans correlated with rational social standards on the one hand, and resource capabilities of society - on the other” (p. 77). This suggests the categorization of QoL determinants into four groups: descriptors of human needs, of life satisfaction of social standards and of availability of societal resources.

Șerban-Oprescu (2012) divides the QoL determinants into three groups:

- purely economic determinants, inspired by consumer theory which is trying to provide some viable economic explanation to non-material aspects of life;
- utilitarian approach, where subjective well-being is derived from the utilitarian theory which aims to explain specific phenomena through individual subjectivity;
- the capabilities approach inspired by Sen's (1985) theory that aims to assess the quality of life through objective indirect observations on the actions and status of a person (p. 86).

Costanza et al. (2007) propose to divide the indicators of QoL into objective and subjective. *“Objective indicators of QOL include, for example, indices of economic production, literacy rates, life expectancy, and other data that can be gathered without a subjective evaluation being made by the individual being assessed. [...] Subjective indicators of QOL gain their impetus, in part, from the observation that many objective indicators merely assess the opportunities that individuals have to improve QOL rather than assessing QOL itself. Thus economic production may best be seen as a means to a potentially (but not necessarily) improved QOL rather than an end in itself [...] e.g., life expectancy or material goods”* (p. 268-269).

Alkire differentiates QoL determinants between monetary and non-monetary. In her opinion *“the most common resource measures by far are monetary indicators of income or consumption”* although *“non-monetary resources may include a range of assets, as well as access to certain public services such as health, education, water, electricity, and roads”* (Alkire, 2008, p. 2). Other authors that have also attempted to identify the non-material determinants of QoL are, e.g., Nussbaum & Sen (1993), Greenley, Greenberg, & Brown (1997), Alkire (2008), Gawlik & Kopeć (2012), Gawlik (2013), Mularska-Kucharek (2015).

The third problematic area, the **QoL measurement**, is often limited to material, income-related determinants. As early as 1970, Nissel found that *“economic progress must be measured, in part at least, in terms of social benefits and the fact that it is just as important to have good statistics on various aspects of social policy [than it is economic statistics]”* (after Hicks, 2012, p. 1). Layard (2005) states that QoL measurement *“must be based on how people feel”* (p. 113). Stiglitz, Sen, Fitoussi (2009) advocate a wider approach to QoL analysis by saying *“[...] the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s well-being”* (p. 12). Alkire (2008) adds that *“data on [people’s] emotional states are not limited to material means”* (p. 3). Therefore it is necessary to include non-material determinants of quality of life into economic research.

Supporters of this thesis are numerous, including Diener & Suh (1997) and Kahneman & Krüger (2006).

The subjectivity of QoL measures has been discussed by Morozova and Shabashev (2005), who reason that "*the quality of life is understood as a comprehensive characteristic of people's level of life and living conditions, reflecting the degree of satisfaction of the various needs and subjective perception of life and its individual aspects*" (p. 105). A development of this approach can be found in Ulman's and Šoltés's research on poverty, who propose two approaches to its measurement (Ulman & Šoltés, 2015, p. 63). When transposing their findings into QoL studies we can adopt objective and subjective measurement. "*The objective measurement [of poverty – here of quality of life] is usually carried out by experts whose task is to determine what are the needs and how much they should be satisfied that a unit may be considered as [not poor – here satisfied]*" (Ulman & Šoltés, 2015, p. 63). The cited authors also quote Desai: "*the level of the poverty threshold should be determined by the community*" (Ulman & Šoltés, 2015, p. 63 after Desai, 1995, p. 105). This concern addressed to QoL research leads us towards a subjective measurement of quality of life, as the only person ready to provide the researcher with an evaluation of his/her own life-satisfaction is the respondent.

The implementation of non-material, subjective and therefore qualitative determinants of QoL measurement leads us towards a multicriteria decision-making processes. These require methods that allow for the combining of empirical qualitative determinants and statistical quantitative data in one model. The methodology in question could include Analytic Hierarchy Process, Analytic Network Process and other instruments based on Artificial Intelligence (e.g. fuzzy logic models and neural networks).

The fourth problematic area is the **implications of QoL research for intercultural academic teaching**. Hofstede (1980) states that "*cross-cultural studies presuppose a systems approach, by which I mean that any element of the total system called "culture" should be eligible for analysis, regardless of the discipline that usually deals with such elements. At the level of (national) cultures, these are phenomena on all levels: individuals, groups, organizations, or society as a whole may be relevant. There is no excuse for overlooking any vital factor because it is usually treated in someone else's department at the university*" (p. 32). Education is definitely one of the relevant fields mentioned in Hofstede's statement. Therefore an individualised, culture-sensitive approach to students is necessary.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology contains a literature analysis, preparatory, exploratory and explanatory research. The general literature analysis is a general overview of recent publications on quality of human life, well-being and multicriteria decision-making. The in-depth literature covers material and non-material determinants of QoL (based on the authors' former research), work-life balance and their place in intercultural teaching.

The preparatory research had the form of direct individual in-depth interviews with randomly chosen respondents from the analysed research sample, which is a representative group of students from two Russian Universities: the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics and the Moscow Technological Institute. The role of the interviews was to provide us with the basis for the preparation of a questionnaire that would reflect the specificity of Russian youth's understanding of the QoL notion. This step allowed us to compare initially the perceptions of Russian respondents with findings from a similar, international group of students questioned in former research (please refer to Gawlik & Kopeć, 2012 and Gawlik, 2013).

The exploratory research – our main research method – was a web-based survey that allowed us to collect data through a self-administered questionnaire. A short explanation on research goals, targets and possible outcomes preceded the questionnaire. The questions were single-answer limited choice questions of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. Some questions left space for their own formulation of elements not included in limited choice options. Furthermore, a few questions have a form of a relevance-seeking table based on Likert-type scale.

The final methodological step was the explanatory research. It took the form of informal group discussions between randomly chosen respondents. These were moderated by us – the research supervisors. Post-survey group discussions were meant to provide us with a deeper understanding of the obtained survey answers in order to enhance the credibility of the interpretation of the survey results.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Within the established scope of the research 974 students from two Russian universities (Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics and Moscow Technological Institute) participated in the survey. 57% of the students were males and 43% were females (9 respondents skipped that question). The students under 20 years old comprised 6.69%, from 20 to 25 – 25.95%, from 26 to 30 – 22.66%, and above 30 – 44.70% (3 respondents skipped that question). So the majority of students were 26 and older. The

prevalence of mature students can be explained by the fact that the Moscow Technological Institute provides primarily part-time educational programmes based on distance learning solutions. Hence the students of Moscow Technological Institute which constituted the majority of the survey participants are mainly grown-up adults with an average age above 25. The majority of students were from Russia (90.91%) with insignificant participation of students from the European Union Member States and non-EU countries.

566 participants (58.35%) were still students of a bachelor programme. 8.25% (80 students) already had a bachelor degree. 21 respondents (2.16%) were students of the masters programme, 41 students (4.23%) already had a masters degree. 46 students (4.74%) graduated from high school and 216 respondents (22.27%) were students with vocational upper secondary education. 76.99% of students were full-time employees, 8.15% were part-time workers, 5.78% were entrepreneurs and 9.08% were unemployed. 6.90% of respondents did not have any work experience, 4.84% had less than 1 year work experience, 15.86% - between 1 and 3 years, 13.80% - from 3 to 5 years and 58.60% had more than 5 years work experience. The prevalence of full-time employees is caused by the fact that the majority of MTI students are enrolled on part-time programmes.

Most of respondents lived in cities above 500 000 inhabitants. The rest lived in rural areas (5.27%) and cities and towns with a population of less than 500 000. The majority lived with a spouse (51.76%). Other students lived with their parents (23.81%), with other people (13.56%), alone (9.32%) or in the University dormitories (1.55%).

In terms of the availability of free time, 2.48% of students responded that they had a lot of free time and 8.98% declared rather a lot. 34.16% were satisfied with the actual availability of free time. However, other students thought that they had rather little (36.33%) or very little (18.06%) free time.

The students' monthly income distribution is shown on Fig. 1. The students' assessments of their monthly income are depicted on Fig. 2.

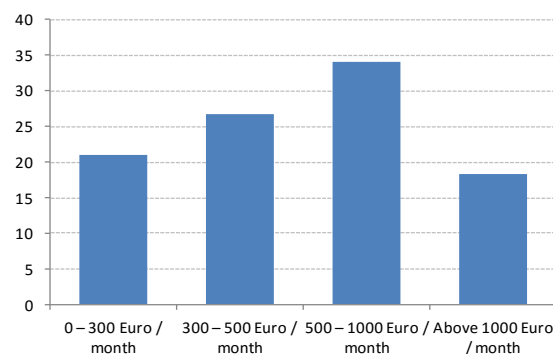


Fig. 1. Students' monthly income distribution (in % to all responded)

Source: own study based on research results

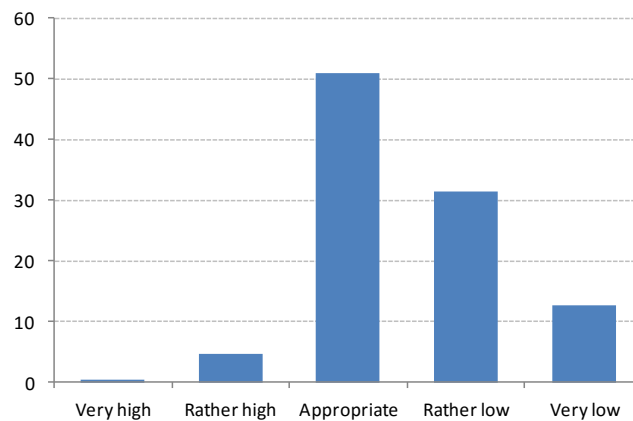


Fig. 2. Students' assessments of their monthly income (in % to all responded)

Source: own study based on research results

From Fig. 2 it can be deduced that more than a half of all students were content with their current income. The main source of income for the majority (75.88%) of respondents was their salary. 7.94% were still dependent on their parents (7.94%) or partners (14.43%).

Fig. 3 shows the satisfactory net income level for students after graduating from their actual academic programme.

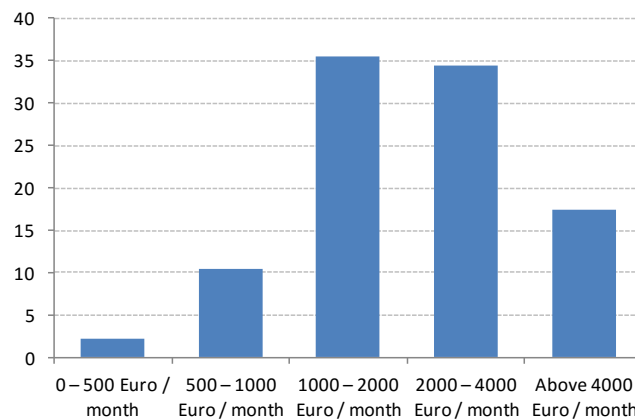


Fig. 3. Distribution of students' satisfactory net income level after graduating (in % to all responded)

Source: own study based on research results

A comparison of data from Fig. 1 and Fig. 3 shows that most of the respondents were expecting higher incomes after graduating.

Our main research field – the relevance of QoL determinants for our target group – has been addressed in survey questions No. 14 to No. 19, as well as in post-survey explanatory research. This last had the form of group discussions that aimed at clarification and

interpretation of obtained survey results. The information was obtained from survey answers and these discussions allowed us to draw the following conclusions.

For 11.15% of respondents their future professional position is extremely important, whereas 7.95% see it as not particularly important, and 2.06% as not at all important. The majority of the surveyed students described the importance of their professional position as relatively important, but without extremities. In this group 34.15% saw their professional position as highly important, and 44.69% as of little importance.

The relatively low number of respondents who considered their future professional position as extremely important can be explained by the fact that our respondents placed greater value on other, substitute QoL determinants such as family, social relations, friendship, free time or stability. At the same time a significant proportion of respondents – especially women – expressed the attitude that they would gladly sacrifice their high professional position in favour of other social or family QoL determinants (which could have been observed in responses to other questions).

It is interesting that the majority of respondents perceived this determinant as transitory, related to employment within a single organization. With actual employment dynamics the students expected to change their posts many times during their career. Besides, some students reckoned that a high professional position does not necessarily correspond with the appropriate level of income.

The income level was rather important for almost all students. Only for 11.09% income level was rather not important and for 2.38% not at all important for achieving a satisfactory level of QoL. 7.56% saw their income level as being of the utmost importance for this purpose, and 38.34% perceived it as highly important, with 40.62% viewing it as of having little importance.

Explanation: for a great number of respondents money is not of the utmost importance. It is rather perceived as a means for development or as an intermediary measure to obtain other benefits. Moreover, they emphasized that many benefits and QoL determinants are of a non-material nature and can be obtained alternatively, without money.

Some respondents questioned the existence of any correlation between material QoL determinants and a satisfactory level of life. The more extreme opinions argued that it was a very limited understanding of a good life, which is more likely to lead to a personal downturn, than happiness.

The overwhelming majority of respondents declared themselves as family-oriented persons. For 60.74% family life was of the utmost importance. For 33.37% the family was

important, but so were other areas of their lives. Only 1.76% referred to family life as just another equal factor of QoL, whereas 3.62% saw themselves as not family-oriented people. A minor share (0.52%) did not see any contribution of family life to their QoL.

Explanation: the high level of declared importance of family-related values correlates with the relatively low importance of money. Moreover most of the respondents considered family to be the only durable value in the world. The roots of such attitude can be found in Russian traditions and culture, which still determine the perceptions of a good life in Russian society. Both are deeply influenced by Christian values and norms, but also by the communist legacy in the relatively recent past. Nevertheless, most of students thought that a reliable family would practically guarantee happiness in their lives. From the opposite angle, many students could not imagine a happy person without a loving relationship, even if money and good health were abundant. Some respondents emphasized as well that family relations have also a practical value and may be useful in different spheres of life, business included.

Social ties (freely defined by the respondents) were not binding for a bigger part of the target group. 30.44% could possibly or even easily (38.39%) live in another society than the one they actually belong to. A tenth of all students (10.01%) turned out to be culturally and socially inflexible and responded that they could not be a part of any other society than the one they were actually living in. On the other hand, 16.51% identified themselves as extremely socially mobile. They preferred an individualistic approach, while society mattered only slightly to them. And 4.64% did not identify themselves as part of any particular society.

Explanation: an insignificant number of respondents were not oriented towards social or cultural community, which could be the result of the collectivist culture of the former Soviet period in Russia. Another explanation could be the rising individualisation of modern capitalist societies. At the same time, more than half of respondents agreed that they could easily live in any other society, which could come from the influence of globalist trends and permanent exposure to alternative cultures and societies through culture, media, tourism, business, travel, education and everyday life in general.

The core concern of our research was the identification of QoL determinants between Russian students. We were particularly interested in whether there is a correlation between their rankings by individual people and preferable life strategies chosen by our respondents. This was covered in our survey by questions presented in Tables 1 & 2 and Fig. 4 & 5. The respondents were asked to rate the relevance of each QoL determinant with regard to its importance for their QoL. The rankings were based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (where 5 is very important and 1 is not important at all). The total score of a determinant (describing its

overall importance) was calculated as a sum of products of the number of students that attributed this particular determinant with a certain rank and its value. Table 1 shows the distribution of responses and the calculation of total scores (in descending order of total scores).

Table 1: The perceived relevance of the quality life determinants

Determinants for quality of life	Distribution of the answers (in %) along the established rank scale					Total score
	1	2	3	4	5	
Having a stable job	1.84	2.16	7.68	17.97	70.35	4184
Ability to obtain a well-paid job	1.08	1.84	7.92	23.21	65.94	4159
Having interesting work	1.41	1.95	8.03	20.96	67.64	4158
Being able to develop professionally	0.54	1.85	8.8	28.26	60.54	4107
Being able to pursue self-development	0.33	1.74	9.25	28.62	60.07	4102
Keeping contact with family and friends	1.41	2.28	10.65	22.61	63.04	4081
Living without fear about the future	4.13	2.16	9.55	18.13	65.58	4038
A proper work-life balance	1.96	2.61	10.12	29.27	56.04	3996
Level of income	2.07	2.94	11.76	32.46	50.76	3919
Having basic access to information	1.74	2.29	17.74	29.6	48.64	3870
Being able to combine private and professional life	3.05	4.57	16.21	27.09	49.08	3810
Geopolitical safety and stability	3.69	5.97	17.48	23.56	49.29	3765
Working accordingly to my qualifications	2.28	4.24	18.91	31.85	42.72	3758
Free time	2.07	5.64	18.04	32.24	40.59	3702
Free and safe travelling in an open World	6.32	6	17.12	21.05	49.51	3681
Being useful to the society	4.68	6.2	19.8	30.47	38.85	3608
Ability to save money	5.25	7.44	18.49	28.54	22.21	3577
Predictability of consequences of my actions (<i>i.e. I study, so I will find well-paid, interesting, stable work</i>)	3.49	5.64	18.04	32.24	40.59	3555
Living according to high legal and societal standards	4.04	5.9	23.47	32.64	33.95	3541
Retirement pension level in the future	9.29	10.6	17.49	20	42.62	3441
Not being victim to "information overload"	7.76	10.05	26.78	23.17	32.24	3313
Cost of living	7.31	13.21	32.86	25	21.62	3118
Level of risk related to financial investments	15.69	13.26	25.3	23.54	22.21	2926
Level of debt to pay back after graduating	30.31	16.23	20.66	14.64	18.16	2415

Source: own study based on research results

The QoL determinant of highest importance was "Having a stable job". It is interesting to note that this measure does not include the salary level. Its meaning is rather of a psychological nature, where the notion "stable" provides the employee with certainty and confidence. Explanation: the high significance of this determinant could be the result of an overwhelming feeling of instability in actual micro- and macroeconomic environment of Russia. In this sense a "stable" job provides employees with a feeling of predictability about their future and allows them to bother less about possible income shortages. A correlation

with another highly ranked determinant (7th), “*Living without fear about the future*”, can be observed, too.

Other very important determinants were “*Ability to obtain a well-paid job*” – a purely material determinant, but coming only second in relevance. But at the same time the “*Level of income*” appeared only 9th highest in the total score. Explanation: the relatively high appreciation of material determinants of QoL correspond to the material-based nature of today’s Russian society. After a period of limitations and shortages in relation to access to goods, the wish to participate in a market economy, and also to be its beneficiary, not only as part of the labour force, is understandable.

What seemed quite interesting to us is that at the same time other factors of a non-material nature, such as “*Having interesting work*” or “*Being able to develop professionally*” were ranked very high. It can be observed that all of the above determinants are linked to professional activities, although only one of them is of a strictly material nature. Explanation: in this case our respondents pointed to their willingness to have more decision-making opportunities in their careers, which ensures their higher independence and flexibility.

The high rankings of purely psychological determinants, such as “*Being able to pursue self-development*” (5th) and “*Keeping contact with family and friends*” (6th) particularly attracted our attention. Explanation: our respondents pointed at the need for work-life balance in their lives. Our respondents were aware that the meaning of the two mentioned determinants varies from professional development (rank 4th) and family orientation explained a few paragraphs above. These ranks show the need for a “second pillar” of a good and happy life in the perception of our students.

QoL determinants with lowest importance were: “*Retirement pension level in the future*”, “*Not being victim to ‘information overload’*”, “*Cost of living*”, “*Level of risk related to financial investments*”, “*Level of debt to pay back after graduating*”. Three out of five lowest ranked determinants talk about future occurrences. With “*Geopolitical safety and stability*” ranked 12th it seems quite rational that young people rate the relevance of hardly predictable factors very low.

The perceived relevance of QoL determinants presented in a graphical way can be found on the diagram of total scores portrayed on Fig. 4 (in descending order of total scores).

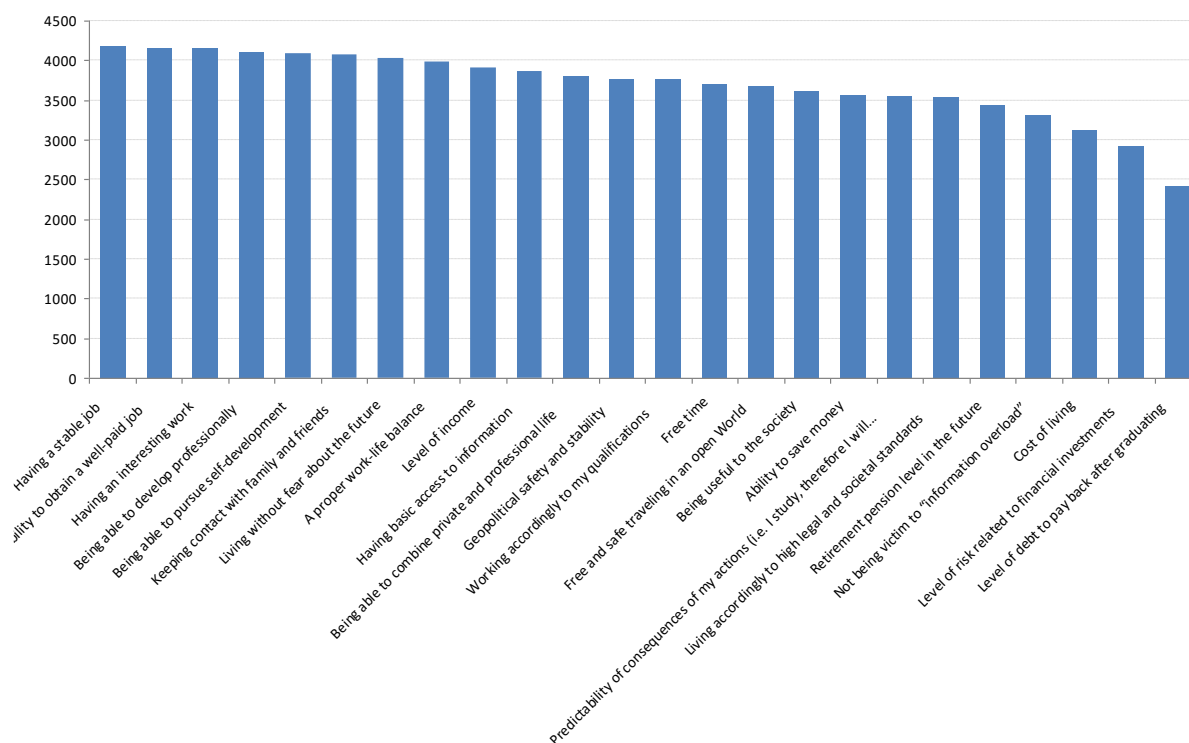


Fig. 4. Total scores of life quality determinants

Source: own study based on research results

Finally, the students were asked to grade five alternative life strategies accordingly to their attractiveness (from most attractive to not at all attractive). The total grades of life strategy attractiveness were calculated in the same way as the total scores of importance of QoL determinants. But in this case the lowest grade means the most attractive life strategy. The distribution of answers and the total grades are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Attractiveness of life strategies

Life strategies	Distribution of the answers (in %) along the established grade scale					Total grade
	1	2	3	4	5	
Income-oriented (constantly increasing your salary)	30.78	34.81	22.08	8.83	3.51	1690
Family-oriented (working only until your job is not interfering with your family obligations)	38.25	20.76	22.98	12.01	6.01	1737
Career-oriented (becoming "somebody important")	20.16	28.14	27.49	18.06	6.15	2001
Time-oriented (maximizing the amount of your free time)	6.34	14.8	23.12	46.76	8.98	2553
Opting - out from the entire socio-economic system (living outside mainstream)	6.48	1.89	4.18	13.5	73.95	3309

Source: own study based on research results

Fig. 5 presents same results in a graphical form. The diagram of total grades of life strategy attractiveness (in ascending order of total grades) can be found below.

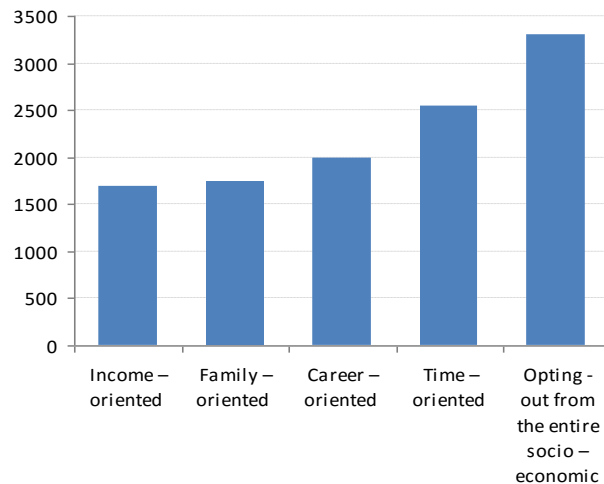


Fig. 5. Total grades of life strategy attractiveness

Source: own study based on research results

It is interesting to note that the income-oriented and the family-oriented strategies were almost equally attractive with a marginally lower total grade in those that were income-oriented. The least attractive strategy was “*opting out from the entire socio-economic system*”.

Explanation: post-survey interviews signalled that the declared attractiveness of an “*Income-oriented*” strategy can be a consequence of objective external factors, such as the constant increase in the cost of living, monetization of some of the non-material QoL determinants (the need to pay for services that used to be free), or a significant inflation rate. The almost equal rank of the “*Family-oriented*” life strategy comes from the perception of family as the only stable value in the modern world, which has been explained above. Those who found the “*Career-oriented*” strategy most attractive pointed at self-realization and positioning in the society that come from a high social status related to some posts. “*Opting out from the entire socio-economic system*” is a strategy that gained relatively little recognition, although the results do not allow us to see it as below the margin of relevance. Possible reasons as to why some people are attracted to escapist life strategies in the opinion of our respondents can come from the very high level of expectations they face from their societies, families, friends and partners. Together with a tremendous and growing competitiveness on job markets, these weak signals cannot be neglected, especially when we realise their growing dynamics.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research findings allowed us to confirm the first sub-thesis. Participation in pre- and post-survey interviews, together with the wish to take part into further research, proved that

the students not only long for an analysis of their work-life balance options, but also expect to be assisted in this task by university professors - this supports our second sub-thesis. The third sub-thesis was the most difficult to assess. Nevertheless, weak signals pointing at a higher relevance of the money-related determinants of quality of life between respondents from Russia – a country that is engaged in the path of socio-economic development quite recently could have been observed. Therefore the third sub-thesis has been confirmed, as well.

Finally, research findings lead us to state that conscious decision-making requires identification, observation and understanding of individual relevance of particular material and non-material QoL determinants. On this basis individuals can decide to choose between alternative life patterns. Therefore the main research hypothesis has been confirmed as well.

The research findings have implications for academic teaching. Firstly, academia should provide students with an understanding of what QoL means to each of them. This implies the necessity of introducing a module on material and non-material determinants of quality of life into the university programme. Secondly, decision-making workshops focused on assisting young people in conscious planning for their future careers, with a focus on sustainable work-life balance should become part of their academic formation. Thirdly, university professors would like to engage in such teaching should be selected carefully. Intercultural sensitivity, high communication skills and understanding of the particularities of socio-economic development should be key criteria of the selection process.

The biggest limitation to scientific modelling of QoL phenomena lies in the fact that the individual set of QoL determinants and their relevance are highly biased by the individual preferences of the decision-maker him/herself. This would be raised by many as the main argument against any attempts at conceptual modelling of young peoples' decision-making at the verge of their entry into adult life. Therefore further research should concentrate on three areas. First, more data for analysis should be provided by conducting similar research in countries at different stages of socio-economic development than Russia (both EU member states and non-EU countries). Second, a larger perspective should be achieved by compiling all local research into a comparative analysis of perceptions of QoL and alternative life strategies at various levels of socio-economic development of countries (or societies). The third area of future research should focus on the appropriate inclusion of qualitative (non-material) determinants into existing quantitative decision-making models (that are based on material QoL determinants). Analytic Hierarchy Process, Analytic Network Process as well as Artificial Neural Networks seem to be promising methods for this purpose.

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