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## Educating young people for quality of life improvement

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### Abstract

Quality of life has many definitions, specialized literature giving us a very broad spectrum of dimensions and indicators by which we can describe this concept. But it is doubtful that the quality of life dimensions identified in a particular geographic area can be extended globally. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a research for each country in order to identify people's perception on quality of life and its dimensions. This article presents the results of a qualitative research conducted among young people from Romania, aimed at establishing how they perceive the concept of quality of life. One of the most important conclusions of this research emphasizes that, although young people have not yet formed a clear picture about this concept, it can be said that, most often, quality of life is associated with material wealth and health. A dimension of quality of life with increased importance among Romanian youth is related to leisure activities. Starting from the research results, the main purpose of this article is the identification of possible strategies for educating young people in order to improve their quality of life.

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### 1. Introduction

Quality of life has many definitions, specialized literature giving us a very broad spectrum of dimensions and indicators by which we can describe this concept. But, while the theory of quality of life has a history of more than 60 years, there is still no generally accepted opinion on the quality of life dimensions, different classifications been based on different levels of importance for various aspects of life.

Moreover, it is doubtful that the quality of life dimensions identified in a particular geographic area can be extended globally. Specialists must take into account the particular socio-economic and demographic environment, as well as the culture that characterize each country.

The statistical information provides an overview of the macroeconomic indicators describing the quality of life from an objective approach, but the subjective approach should not be omitted, because it describes “the individual's perception on living standards and welfare” (Costanza, 2008). Therefore, in order to have a complete image about the quality of life, besides de statistical data, it appears the need to study people's perception on quality of life, and then correlate these two approaches (objective and subjective).

### 2. Research methodology

The aim of this qualitative research is to identify the perceptions of young people in Romania regarding the quality of life and the factors that influence it, in order to identify the specific dimensions for this country.

In accordance with this purpose, the following set of objectives has been established:

- a) Identify the significance associated with the concept of quality of life;
- b) Determine how a person with a high quality of life is described;
- c) Determine how a person with a low quality is described;
- d) Identify the factors which the quality of life depend on;
- e) Establish the persons / entities responsible for quality of life improvement;
- f) Analyze the quality of life dimensions identified in the scientific literature.

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The method for collecting information: the information was collected through focus group (a qualitative research method); the discussions with the participants were detailed and long-termed (1.5-2 hours), each person being able to extensively present their views on the phenomenon.

Sampling: this research aims to analyze the perception among young people, therefore the first selection criteria of the 50 participants was age, choosing the segment of 18 to 30 years old. In order to analyze the differences of opinion within this age segment, sub-segmentations by gender, education and income were made.

**3. Analysis of the research data**

In order to present detailed information, content analysis was used, a specific technique of qualitative marketing research, which focuses on words and phrases used by participants. The analysis presents the information obtained in each section of the focus group, with examples of answers given by participants, and also a number of correlations between the answers (in order to better explain the information obtained).

a) The first section of the focus group focused on participants describing the concept of quality of life, a spontaneous description, without any help from the moderator. This qualitative research technique aims to identify how participants perceive a phenomenon – in the case of this research, how they perceive quality of life.

Thus participants were asked to indicate the first word that comes to mind when they hear "quality of life", in order to identify the significance that a person associated with this concept. It is noteworthy that more than half of participants did not mention anything, which means that the concept has not yet a clear image in their mind. There are two explanations for this situation: first, the age (most youngsters do not face life's problems yet, so they don't have a very clear perspective on the manner for now) and, secondly, the fact that this concept is still new for Romania, even though theoretical elements of quality of life have appeared in specialized Romanian literature since the early '70s. Considering the educational role of this paper, a recommendation for future strategies of quality of life improvement involves developing the cognitive dimension of the attitude towards quality of life, meaning the increase in information about the phenomenon through credible and attractive sources for young people.

There was also a category of people who described the quality of life through its dimensions, most often been mentioned health, financial security and employment. Regarding the relationship between quality of life and the work place, there are a lot of recommendations and strategies that focus on helping the young people to integrate within the labor market (Dobre, Angelescu & Mosora, 2010).

A more general approach in describing quality of life is identified for persons who associate the concept with well-being, living standards and lifestyle. This quality of life association is quite common in the literature, where authors often make the equivalent with the English term "well-being" (Kahn & Juster, 2002; Naess, 1999; Felce & Perry, 1995), especially when subjective approach of quality of life is discussed (Haas, 1999).

It should be noted that none of the participants mentioned the term "happiness" as a association with quality of life, a term that is often found in this concept's definitions (Meeberg, 1993; Haas, 1999; Coffman, 2002). One explanation for the absence of this term may consist in the not very high level of satisfaction with life in Romania, so that it prevents the individual from describing the quality of life through positive aspects. In this regard, an efficient strategy for quality of life improvement should focus on the positive correlation with quality of life dimensions that can contribute to satisfaction increase for young people, therefore to their happiness. Involvement in sports can be one solution, considering the fact that young people find happiness in social relations and also in achieving greatness.

b) The next section of the focus group focused on how research participants describe a high quality of life, as well as a poor one. For the necessary information, phrases completion technique was used, as shown in Table 1. This technique enables the participant to continue a sentence as he sees fit.

Table 1. Phrases completion technique used in evaluating how Romanian young people perceive a high quality of life and a poor one

Phrase	
1	"To have a high quality of life it's necessary to ..."
2	„ A man with a low quality of life ..."

Depending on how they completed the first sentence, participants can be divided into three categories, depending on the approach they have on increasing quality of life:

- a) Those who believe that a higher level of quality of life depends on what they have (money, job, number of friends, spare time, culture, etc.); this category of participants can be fit, in terms of quality of life theory, within the utilitarian approach, in which "quality of life depends essentially on the welfare of the individual, and this level is defined through pleasure or satisfaction that one feels through consumption of goods or, more generally, resources" (Serban-Opreescu, 2011);
- b) Those who believe that a higher quality of life depends on what they do (choices in life, activities undertaken, objectives and priorities, etc.); in the theory of quality of life this category of participants can be classified within the capabilities

approach, through which quality of life is defined in terms of a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states (Serban-Oprescu, 2011);

- c) Those who believe that a higher level of quality of life depends on the society they live in ("a society should be characterized by an intensive cultural and economic life", "the society must be sufficiently developed", "a country should be more advanced and least corrupted").

The educational strategy should redirect young people towards the second category, convincing them that a better life is depending on them, on what they do, not what they have in a certain moment of their life. This way, young people could be driven towards an active behavior, in order to take action for improving their quality of life.

Analyzing the words used in completing to the first sentence, it can be noted that most participants associate a high quality of life with material wealth ("favorable financial conditions", "high salary", "very good financial situation", and "financial security"). Health is in second place, represented as an overall dimension of quality of life, or through its influencing factors ("healthy food", "sport", "active lifestyle").

Another dimension of quality of life mentioned by some participants was the leisure, considering that "a man with a high quality of life has more free time", which he can share between daily activities and people in his life.

The completion of the second sentence ("A man with a low quality of life ...") leads to the division of young people into three categories:

- a) Those who believe that the individual is to blame for the low quality of his life ("he has a disorganized life," "he is disorganized", "he is lazy and a social misfit", "he doesn't give enough attention to himself", "he doesn't try enough");
- b) Those who present the factors that led to this poor quality of life (low income, work stress, poor health, lack of time allocated to self or loved ones, poor education, lack of social integration, lack of free time, improper nutrition);
- c) Those who do not speak of what happened in the past, but of what to do in the future in order to change this situation in a better one ("he should review his priorities", "it's necessary to change optics and daily choices"). This is the proper orientation for educating young people, showing them what to do in the future, not blaming them for what they did in the past, or making them feel sorry for what they have lost.

After analyzing the words used to describe a person with a low quality of life, it can be concluded that most often this is related to material wealth, health, work and leisure. Thus we can identify the dimensions with a higher importance for the young population in Romania, dimensions that have a major influence on the individual level of satisfaction regarding its standard of living.

Although within the early discussions there have already been identified a number of factors influencing quality of life, the focus group had a special section devoted to these factors, participants being asked what they think the quality of life depends on.

Most responses were directed towards material wealth, a factor which is in correlation with the second answer given by the participants - work. In third place, as frequency of mention, are education and health.

There are also participants who didn't mention quality of life dimensions, but have indicated that to have a satisfactory quality of life means "to want this", "to do something about it", the standard of living depending on choices in the personal and professional life of each individual.

In contrast to this view is that the quality of life depends on society, on the economic and political development and on the public policy and administrative decisions implemented by state institutions.

This separation in terms of quality of life is also emphasized by the response to the question "Who is / should be responsible for quality of life?" where the participants were divided into three categories:

- a) Those who believe that they are the ones responsible for their quality of life (through the decisions they make and actions they undertake), the most frequently mentioned response being "each person is responsible";
- b) Those who believe the state is the main responsible entity for the quality of their lives, taking into account that governments with their decisions give the individual the opportunity to grow;
- c) Those who believe that quality of life is a common goal of both the individual and society.

The first part of the focus group sought to obtain spontaneous responses from participants (without the moderator's help) so that we can identify their perception on quality of life and the factors on which it depends. But a correlation of the individual perception with the literature it is also necessary, in order to determine how the dimensions identified by specialists match the demographic and socio-economic environment in Romania. Thus, research participants were asked to evaluate the quality of life dimensions according to their importance.

This section of the research is based on theoretical elements presented in the Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, also known as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission. This commission was formed in 2008 at the request of French President Nicholas Sarkozy, who was dissatisfied with the level and quality of statistical information on the economy and society. The aim of the Commission was to highlight the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress and to identify more relevant socio-economic indicators.

Following the analysis made on the quality of life theory and practice, the Commission identified eight dimensions of quality of life, which are themselves determined by a number of indicators, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Dimensions of quality of life, according to Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission

Dimensions	Examples of contributing facets
Material well-being	Income, consumption, change in wealth, income distribution
Health	Life expectancy, diseases, disabilities, infant mortality, physical and mental illnesses, health distribution
Education	Basic reading and writing skills, knowledge of calculus, problem solution competence, information and communication technology, pupils and students performance, life-long learning, education distribution
Personal activities	Working, commuting, various kinds of recreational activities, distribution of personal activities
Political voice and governance	Citizens' voice, legislative guarantees, rule of law; possibility to participate in the political process, voter turnout, membership rates of parties, unions, non-governmental organizations, participation in protests, degree of democracy, independence of media, corruption, distribution of political voice
Social connections and relationships	Family relationships, friends, intensity of friendships, social contacts, distribution of social connections
Environmental conditions	Availability of clean air, water and soil, reachability of pleasant environment next to one's home, climate, distribution of environmental conditions
Personal and economic insecurity	Risk of illnesses, injuries, damages, theft, robbery, murder, death, unemployment, social exclusion, becoming poor, distribution of personal and economic insecurity

Source: *Monitoring economic performance, quality of life and sustainability, Joint Report as requested by the Franco-German Ministerial Council, December 2010, p. 71*

Starting from the answers provided by participants, the following classification of quality of life dimensions it has emerged, in correlation with their importance for each individual (see Table 3). Although the focus group, as a qualitative research method, doesn't involve the use of quantitative assessment, for this section the evaluation resorted to such an analysis for a more precise identification of the most important dimensions of quality of life for young people in Romania.

Analyzing the coefficients corresponding to each dimension, it can be concluded that health is the most important dimension, followed from a distance by material wealth. With relatively equal importance were assessed work, education and social relations. These can be considered the five major aspects of quality of life, those under which the individual assesses his satisfaction, and those that can improve the well-being of a person.

Comparing the results of this analysis with the information obtained in the previous sections of this research, it should be noted that most participants have placed health first, followed later by material wealth and work, which contradicts to some extent the items mentioned spontaneously by participants in the first part of the focus group, where the material wealth and employment were the priority. The explanation of such differences is that individuals are facing more often (even daily) with issues of work and income, resulting in a greater awareness of these concepts in their mind.

Table 3. The importance of quality of life dimensions for young people in Romania

Place	Dimension	Importance (on a scale from 1 to 5)
1	Health	4.67
2	Material wealth	2.77
3	Work	1.81
4	Education	1.67
5	Social connections and relationships	1.48
6	Recreation and leisure	1.00
7	Citizens' security	0.96
8	Culture	0.44
9	Political stability	0.27
10	Environmental conditions	0.15

These dimensions should find their place in an educational strategy for quality of life improvement, with an emphasis on health issues, not forgetting about money and entertainment. An efficient strategy for young people should highlight the entertainment part for the present (through social connections and relationships, recreations and leisure) and the responsible part for the future (through health care, financial stability and a good work place).

#### 4. Conclusions

The qualitative research conducted reveals some information on how young people perceive the quality of life in Romania, and the factors that have a major influence upon it. Given that more than half of participants could not spontaneous described the concept of quality of life, there is a need to better promote the concept, with a focus on the ways they can improve their quality of life. As we have seen in the research, the most important dimensions of quality of life for young people in Romania are health, material wealth and work, therefore it can be concluded that the best way to assess the level of quality of life satisfaction is to consider different proportions in terms of importance for each dimension and then identify the appropriate measurement

indicators. These dimensions and indicators must be correlated in order to capture the attention of young people and, therefore, determine them to take action towards quality of life improving.

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