

## **A STUDY ON QUALITY OF LIFE IN ROMANIA – SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

*Sustainable development requires responsibility to future generations in this regard, we could say that the satisfaction felt by every citizen should be motivation for adopting a sustainable economic behavior. At the same time, only if we can say that the existence of sustainable development are met the high standards of quality of life. The present research aims in determined the evolution of the quality of life in Romania, given the fact that Romania was the first socialist country where the quality of life issue was brought into attention. The research question is in what manner the European projects have improved the quality of life in Romania. The hypothesis is that there is just a small improvement of quality of life indicators that affects social and environmental sectors in Romania after the absorption of the European funds. In order to obtain the result, we analysed the data regarding social and environmental aspects and compare them in dynamic and with the public policies' proposed goals. The conclusions show little modifications of these indicators, therefore, the proposal of the paper is to better manage the European funds of the 2014-2020 Financial Exercise.*

### **Keywords**

*quality of life, environment, labour market, European funds*

### **Introduction**

Let us imagine Earth as a land identical in all its features. It would be very strange that in a world dominated by globalization, we see that there is a real effect of this globalization, but that it is a natural result of the lack of regional or national identity.

So on Earth so different in time and space, in so many ways, economic, social, educational, traditions and concerns of national, regional and beyond, quality of life is meant to be a concept that succeed a coverage of all important aspects of societal development.

What would be the purpose, however, the classification of this approach?

Quality of life is a dynamic concept, a living organism. This statement is supported by the fact that human needs, individual and collective, are in constant change.

Now a century inhabitants of the cities began to experiment with street lighting. Today, if there are streets in urban areas or incomplete poorly lit, we consider a problem of poor public management, but not an indicator of quality of life.

Now a century rural Romania to implement land reform attempt to determine the specific structure of ownership and exploitation of land for agriculture, rural Romania today wants a young workforce stability to create value-added activity in rural areas.

Needs change over time. Quality of life is quantified differently in time as the individual's needs are different, as are various facilities at its disposal by society. Therefore, quantifying the structural change from a historical period to another, because the premises are always different.

At the same time, differences in economic, social, educational, health and personal safety are different in space.

Residents of Japan want keeping a job for life, to be able to create an image of the ideal Japanese. Europeans and North Americans change their work based on several criteria: salary, leisure, distance from the house, transport between work and home etc. Africans certainly a good part of them, they want food and housing and personal and family safety. Quality of life is totally different between these regions, because the conditions are not identical, the premises are at totally different poles. And it is due to different needs. We must keep in mind that these differences are manifested not only vast distances, but also between regions within a country, a zone between social media and thus between people.

Residents of Vaslui want a lower unemployment rate at county and jobs for as many of them. Residents of Brasov city hospital reopening want. Residents of Săpânța and Râncea want as many tourists and residents want to improve and intensify County real estate. Everyone acknowledges the need, just that they are different.

In these circumstances, the question comes naturally: what is the role of quality of life for all and for each?

First quantify quality of life indicators give a clear picture of the needs of the group and can influence the formulation of public policies. Role of the State in a market economy is to ensure the achievement of high standards of quality of life of citizens and to intervene with specific levers in this regard. Issues such as education, transport, access to culture, economic conditions, health issues and medical services and citizen safety are

Precise identification of the needs of citizens is the obligation of public authorities and intervention is necessary, regardless of the doctrine on which this is based. The first sign of social responsibility of the authorities is to identify weaknesses in the quality of life at the national level and subsequently to intervene where appropriate.

Secondly, quantifying indicators of quality of life is to harmonize all so different needs of residents of these areas. Decrease or even eliminate discrepancies quality of life must be made to the top level of these indicators. In this way, we can talk about efficiency of public interventions to improve quality of life.

Finally we can say quantifying the relevance of quality of life as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Sustainable development requires responsibility to future generations in this regard, we could say that the satisfaction felt by every citizen should be motivation for adopting a sustainable economic behavior. At the same time, only if we can say that the existence of sustainable development are met the high standards of quality of life. A citizen dissatisfied with working conditions for the education and health care, personal safety is not enough reason to have altruistic behavior by which to think about his business and human footprint. Thus, quantifying the relevance and quality of life is a major challenge not support. Moreover, the large number of institutions that have been initiated in recent years, increasing the number of actions taken for this purpose, the number of people interested in these issues shows that the concept of quality of life is not only a topical scientific concept, but and a prerequisite for development of modern society.

## **2. Literature review**

The changes and phenomena that marked our society during the last centuries enforce more and more methods for the human behaviour and economic analysis. The already used instruments seemed not to be enough any and new tools and methods were created in order to better illustrate the current state of the phenomena.

The society itself reached superior development levels, in many parts of the globe, and the population and nations' needs have known strong changes. There are new stages of the lifestyles, new models of food consumption behaviors, new development stages of agrofood, educational, sanitary system.

Thus, the public opinion strongly asked for superior transparency of the public expenditures. Therefore, modern mechanisms for a more equal and efficient funds allocation were developed. All of these elements are part of a bigger perspective: improving the quality of life of citizens.

Quality of life is a modern concept that was imposed by the societal changes. Organisations and scientists tried during the last decades to emphasize the importance of the concept. In the same time, it became a complex and deepened analysed phenomenon.

Quality of life has three main approaches (Fahley, Nolan și Whelan, 2003): it mainly concentrates at an individual level, but the authorities actions have a macroeconomic perspective; it is a multidimensional concept and it gathers domains, such as economy, health, social assistance, education, environment, food, and it confronts own actions; it has been measured both by the life conditions from a bias position, and wealth from an objective perspective, trying to harmonise the public intervention with individual expectations.

In 2009 The Stiglitz Commission in France (Stiglitz, J. et al., 2009) revealed that there are differences between what public authorities believe quality of life is and means and what individuals' expectations really are in this regard. In this respect, it reported three main issues to be analysed: GDP analysis, quality of life and sustainable development, and environment.

Moreover, van Zanden (van Zanden, J., et al., 2014) shows in year 2014 that, "with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, countries have generally become more equal to each other in terms of well-being than in terms of per capita GDP – particularly in recent decades". The study presents for the first time systematic evidence of trends in areas such as health, education, inequality, the environment and personal security over the past 200 years.

Thus, not only the income seems to be important, but the consumption and life style, too (Stoian, M. 2013).

We may affirm that quality of life is the integrator concept of wealth, satisfaction, happiness, and availability of a person towards society, and it therefore succeeds to offer a good image of the economic and social development level of the entire society (Ignat, R, 2013, A).

### **3. Data and Methods**

The quantification methods of the quality of life have known a constant development. There are many modalities used in order to affirm and emphasize the quality of life during time, and in different part of the world.

In 1989, the United Nation Organizations elaborated the Manual of the Social Indicators, a guide for the nations' actions towards better life conditions, wealth and economic development.

Since then, many others instruments were used in order to cover these issues and needs. One of them is OECD Better Life Index, a pioneer instrument that brings into attention the scientific debate upon well-being and economic development. It combine modern technology and statistics in order to allow to each person to compare well-being across countries, based on 11 topics the OECD has identified as essential, in the areas of material living conditions and quality of life" (<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

In each of these studies or guides, statistics were used. The present research aims in determined the evolution of the quality of life in Romania, given the fact that Romania was the first socialist country where the quality of life issue was brought into attention. The research question is in what manner the European projects have improved the quality of life in Romania. The hypothesis is that there is just a small improvement of quality of life indicators that affects social and environmental sectors in Romania after the absorption of the European funds.

In order to obtain the result, we analysed the data regarding social and environmental aspects and compare them in dynamic and with the public policies' proposed goals. The conclusions show little modifications of these indicators, therefore, the proposal of the paper is to better manage the European funds of the 2014-2020 Financial Exercise.

### 3.1. The impact of the European Funds for Romania's quality of life

The most of the European funds for Romania aim for a better quality for life, if considering the complexity of this concept. If we talk about any of the seven operational projects for Romania, we discuss upon the subject of well-being, environment, competitiveness, employment, public services, a more facile access to better life conditions, in general.

The main objective is convergence; all these funds aim to adjust the regional disparities between Romanian and other European regions, and to provide special life conditions to Romanians, as European citizens.

The two operational programs that we analysed in this research are Sectoral Operational Programme Development of Human Resource and Sectoral Operational Programme Environment.

The main objectives of these two for the 2007-2013 Programming were given as following:

**Table 1 Main objective of SOP Environment and SOP HRD, 2007-2013**

SOP Environment	SOP HRD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the quality and access to water and wastewater infrastructure</li> <li>• Development of the sustainable waste management systems</li> <li>• Reduction of negative environmental and mitigation of climate change caused by urban heating plants</li> <li>• Protection and improving of biodiversity and natural heritage</li> <li>• Reduction of the incidence of natural disasters affecting the population</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting quality initial and continuous education and training, including higher education and research;</li> <li>• Promoting entrepreneurial culture and improving quality and productivity at work;</li> <li>• Facilitating the young people and long term unemployed insertion in the labour market;</li> <li>• Developing a modern, flexible, inclusive labour market;</li> <li>• Promoting (re)insertion in the labour market of inactive people, including in rural areas;</li> <li>• Improving public employment services;</li> <li>• Facilitating access to education and to the labour market of the vulnerable groups</li> </ul>

Source: Own concept after *Sectoral Operational Programme Environment, 2007-2013* and *Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007-2013*

The implementation of the programmes was managed different by the involved authorities. The SOP Environment was not so much accessed as the SOP HDR. We may consider at least the following explanations for these situations:

- the SOP HDR was much more accessed given the target group formed by universities;
- the higher quality of the knowledge in the field of accession conditions of the target group,
- the better competences of universities of writing applications, due to their expertise in the field of financed research applications;
- the better function of the universities networks that already have had expertise in the field of partnerships for research and applied science;
- the vast and complex dimension of the environment projects;
- the lack of expertise in the field of environment management and economy;
- the lack of specialists in environment management and economy, in general, and their lack of interest in the application for the SOP Environment;
- the lack of trust in these funds, in general, that was specific to the first year of financing.

### 3.2 The analysis of the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007-2013

This list may continue, but, the first things that came into mind is that these two funds aimed for better quality of life and their goals are not very well reached.

**Table 2 Impact of the results of SOP HDR 2007-2014 – Total number of participants, ongoing evaluation**

<b>Axe</b>	<b>Participants out of the programme until 31.12.2013</b>	<b>Participants in the programme after 31.12.2013</b>	<b>Total aimed</b>	<b>% in total population</b>
Education and training in support for growth and development of knowledge based society	47.900	54.498	102.398	4,66
Linking life long learning and labour market	61.367	120.730	182.097	8,28
Increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises	135.696	113.721	249.417	1,13
Modernizing the public employment service	489	7.650	496.65	0,000022575
Promoting active employment measures	64.336	213.675	278.011	1,26
Promoting social inclusion	59.409	99.244	158.653	7,21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>369.197</b>	<b>609.518</b>	<b>978.715</b>	<b>4,49</b>

Source: Own calculation after *Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007-2013*

The ongoing evaluation of these projects revealed different situations by the proposed indicators, and a small impact upon the situation of the population, taking into consideration the number of inhabitants of Romania. For methodological explanations, the number of inhabitants in year 2012, respectively 22 million inhabitants.

**Table 3 Impact of the results of SOP HDR 2007-2014 – level of training, ongoing evaluation**

<b>Axes</b>	<b>Number of participants in primary or secondary school (ISCED 1 and 2)</b>	<b>Number of participants in highschool (ISCED 3)</b>	<b>Number of participants in post-highschool (ISCED 4)</b>	<b>Number of participants in universities and post universities (ISCED 5 and 6)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% in total population</b>
Education and training in support for growth and development of knowledge based society	21.181	16.254	2.159	62.648	102.242	4.65
Linking life long learning and labour market	83.323	67.900	3.066	18.000	172.289	7.83
Increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises	26.843	62.385	22.504	137.468	249.2	1.133
Modernizing the public employment service	14	422	85	7.618	528.618	2.40
Promoting active employment measures	126.704	95.494	9.236	42.716	274.15	1.25
Promoting social inclusion	62.689	36.015	7.233	46.426	152.363	6.93
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>320.754</b>	<b>278.470</b>	<b>44.283</b>	<b>46.426</b>	<b>689.933</b>	<b>3.14</b>

Source: Own calculation after *Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007-2013*

We may observe (Table 2) that the impact of the SOP HRD is not very high, according to the percentage of the participants in the total inhabitants of Romania. Obviously, the

quantification of this impact is made just in quantitative approach, but we should mention the qualitative impact, too, even this will be felt in all its dimension during time.

Taking into consideration the main objectives of SOP HRD 2007-2013 and according to the calculations (Table 3), we may affirm that the Axes *Linking life long learning and labour market* and *Promoting social inclusion* have already reached high scores and succeeded in involving almost as many participants as it was aimed.

Plus, until 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2012, there were involved 426.086 employees, out of which there are 31095 freelancers, about 216.255 unemployed, out of which 79.099 long term unemployed, and 336.367 inactive persons, out of which 125.352 pupils or students. Therefore, the impact of the SOP HRD in terms of persons, their qualification, discrimination of the vulnerable groups, partnerships, in terms of their real function and results, support for human resources in general, is still under the proposed target, as the Annual Report 2012 has shown.

The most important thing to be mentioned is that this programme covered the period 2007-2013, during the period of economic crisis and post crisis. Its financial support for an important part of the Romanian population was consistent, collaborated with the motivation of accessing by participants of superior qualitative training that would be consistent for their future careers.

The quantification of the real impact of the programme on unemployment and employment rate is very difficult to be run, as the involved factors in these complex situations are huge. Therefore, we do not run this analysis.

### **3.3 The analysis of the Sectoral Operational Programme Environment, 2007-2013**

There are six Axes for this programme and all of them were open in order to receive applications. The delicacy of this field, the importance of the sometimes unpredictable results, and the complexity of the issues made out of this programme one of the most reluctant for the applicants.

There are ongoing evaluations of the implementation of the SOP Environment and part of these results will be processed here. Also, many of the data that should be evaluated in the present paper have no public or online availability, and this represents a limit of the present study. The processed informational should be more complex and technical, but the annexes of the National Evaluation are not present in the public space, but only the core Report, with no statistical data. Therefore, we only resume the conclusion of some documents in the field.

Axe 1, having about 61% of the total funds, was focused on the higher populated cities in Romania, the first 23, as they generate the most part of the organic pollution, almost 30%, and the rest of the cities, 89% generates about 38% of organic pollution. In respect to the proposed indicator, this axe will cover 100% in medium cities and about 80% in small cities. The best results are in this regards, as at the end of the programme, almost 7.672.000 inhabitants will benefit of water services and 9.100.000 inhabitants will benefit of new sewerage systems.

Axe 2 will take into consideration the targets of the waste management as follows: 75% of the total quantity until year 2010, 50% until 2013, 35% until 2016. The ongoing evaluation was made until the end of some of the projects, therefore, there were no waste management system ready.

Axe 3 has some problems in the evaluation of the ongoing indicators, as some of its objectives may be covered by the national programme in the field of air pollution.

Axe 4 Nature conservation sector has no direct or indirect connection with the quality of life in Romania, as the Nature 2000 Programme aimed especially the protected species and nature in general, as animal and vegetable habitat.

At 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012, almost 89% of the financial allocation for this programme were absorbed, about 344 projects were approved with 6,56 billion euro.

The number of the created jobs in the context of the SOP Environment are around 11.811 in the implementation period, and 5425 in the operation period. But there is no evidence in this regard.

### **3.4 Prediction for quality of life in Romania for period 2014-2020**

Strategy Europe 2020 imposed an intelligent development based on superior investments in education, strategic partnerships between education and business. The core of the goals for year 2020 emphasis the social aspects of economic development in Europe, as this strategy is a human oriented and sustainable based.

Moreover, there are eight recommendations of the European Council for the period 2014-2020, the majority of them are social oriented.

The national target for year 2020 are, also, human oriented and sustainable based. The most of the indicators aims at employment arte, education, research and innovation, energy and sustainable development, social inclusion.

### **4. Further research**

The study has some restrictions, given the yet present lack of public data and information in the field of quality of life.

The limits of the study are:

- for the quality of life analysis there was no indicator system created, but an statistic analysis of the indicators in two of the European programmes;
- only two of the SOP were analyzed in the context of the quality of life targets, even if other programmes target the same issues;
- the lack of public data in the field on environment aspects put into risk the analysis, as the study has a environment perspective, and there were made just some connections.

The possibilities of oversee these limits are:

- to better illustrate a system of indicators for quality oin life in Romania, based in European SOP;
- to enlarge the SOPs in order to have a more complex analysis;
- to collect more data and to show the connections in a more transparent connections between the European funds implementation and the quality of life;
- to improve the isolation of the impact of the European SOPs in Romania and to proper illustrate their effects.

The future research should also take into consideration the dynamic of the indicators of quality of life.

### **Conclusions**

The quality of life in Romania has known real improvement upon time, starting the communist period, when this concept was used for the first time. The concept in complex and allows different quantification methodologies in order to demonstrate the wellbeing and the social and economic development level as well as the quality of living, air pollution and many other aspects.

The European funds have a deep impact upon Romania's economy. At the beginning, the population was reluctant to them, the perspective of grants was not so attractive. The lack of knowledge and expertise in the field of project management, doubled by the lack of competences in generic fields generated a small abortions of these funds.

The object of the paper was reached: the public reports and documentation somehow allowed to analyze the implementation of these funds, and to calculate the impact of two of them upon the quality of life in Romania.

The hypothesis of which the impact of this funds was not important was reached, as at the end of year 2013, the SOP HDR covered a small percentage of the total population, and not the target of 1,6 million inhabitants.

Except AXE 1 of SOP Environment, the other axes did not provide following their implementation a large impact upon quality of life, as data shown.

The quality of life in Romania will be better improved in the perspective of year 2020, in regard to the recommendations of European Council, and National Reform Framework.

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