

Methodological Aspects of Assessing the Quality of Life of Regions' Residents

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to developing a set of techniques for assessing the quality of life in regions. The authors' proposed system of indicators is not universal, but it does help to demonstrate the significance of social partnership at the regional level. The study's findings help to come to the conclusion that a crucial objective is to cultivate in people the knowledge about human rights and decent work, their own rights and ways to protect them, social protection. The authors prove that assessments of quality of life depend on both a region's economic characteristics and its residents' overall satisfaction with life, work, healthcare, and environmental conditions. The authors' study has revealed that in the climate of social and economic instability the process of improving people's quality of life requires substantial modernization, primarily in the area of determining specific directions and ways of diversifying the key sources of moral satisfaction and income of the population.

Keywords: Economy; Indicator; Modernization; Order; Population; Quality of life; Region.

1. Introduction

In the conditions of reform of the national economy, the issue of increasing people's quality of life and remediating high levels of regional differentiation is becoming increasingly important for the Russian Federation. Insufficient attention to the characteristics of a region's development may have irreversible negative political, economic, and social consequences. In this context, the central issue and ultimate objective of social and economic development in a country and its regions are improving people's quality of life. People's quality of life is not only one of the more generalized indicators of a nation's development level but also a key factor in its economic growth. It, concurrently, makes it possible to ensure positive effects in national economic development and has become a crucial condition for national security and economic competitiveness. Therefore, analysis of people's quality of life is of both theoretical and practical significance for social and economic progress and overall development of the country.

An initial condition for an increase in the quality of life of the population of Russia's regions is the focus on diagnosing the current standard of living and developing relevant activities that are intended to simultaneously ensure positive effects in national economic development and improve the social component of people's quality of life.

From the perspective of the regional economy, activities of this kind ought to be based on the proper coordination of the interests of society, the business sector, and the government and consider regional disproportions, which in a certain way influence such crucial indicators of people's quality of life as decent level of income, social support, development of the labor market, success

in reforming the work pay system, proportional and transparent distribution of public funds, and building the market of affordable housing.

Issues related to assessing people's quality of life in regions have been explored by scholars V.A. Belyakov [1], T.A. Guzhavina [2], N.I. Lavrikova [3], T.Yu. Ovsyannikova [4], V.T. Shishmakov [5], I.V. Tsapenko [6] and others. However, despite the relevance of the "quality of life" category, at present, there is no clear consensus and universally accepted methodology for assessing it. Insufficient attention to people's quality of life has also been observed in terms of the government's national strategy for development. At the same time, no programs for national development will be an efficient mechanism without their focusing on resolving the current problem of people's low quality of life.

Moreover, in the conditions of significant regional differentiation, there is a need to analyze economic development in regions, identify the factors that have a negative effect on people's quality of life, especially those behind quality-of-life differentiation between urban and rural residents, establish clear strategic targets for the implementation of a model for the nation's social and economic development, enhance the mechanism for regulating social processes, and increase the social responsibility of the government, businesses, and residents, which should help determine some of the key areas for regions' development and improve people's quality of life.

2. Methods

The study's methodological basis is grounded in the systematic approach, methods of scientific abstraction, analysis and synthesis,

the dialectical method for cognizing economic phenomena, and certain tenets of assessing people's quality of life. To resolve specific objectives in this study, the authors employed the following methods: theoretical generalization, logical, scientific abstraction, associations and analogies – to explore and summarize the methodological foundations of uneven economic development in the world; methods of systems analysis, generalization, and comparison – to explore methodological techniques and methods for diagnosing the management of people's quality of life in regions.

The study's information basis is grounded in the relevant government statutes and regulations, statistical materials from federal and local authorities, and research publications by Russian and foreign scholars related to issues of assessing people's quality of life [7, 8, 9].

The study intends to substantiate a set of economic prospects for the balanced development of regions' population, as well as a set of strategies for managing the quality of life in regions. In addition, it was sought to develop a set of techniques for assessing the factors that govern improvement in the quality of life in regions and establish and formulate some of the key areas of the development of social and economic processes under various regional conditions.

3. Results

The objective of increasing people's quality of life around the world constitutes the basis of the system of priorities in mega- and macrolevel strategic development documents. In developing this kind of documents, it may help to consider the findings of analyses of quality of life based on relevant characteristics and indicators.

Currently, there is a discussion concerning the use of indicators of quality of life (including those developed by international organizations) in processes of monitoring social development and strategic planning at the supranational and national level. The United Nations (UN), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), European Commission (EC), and other institutions employ indicators of quality of life as benchmarks for development in their policy and strategic documents.

At present, most research studies employ statistical systems of indicators that do not consider people's subjective perceptions, as it is quite difficult to employ subjective assessments for a particular region due to the need to conduct major sociological research on a regular basis. To represent the index numerically, the following indicators can be employed: the average expected future lifetime at birth (a key indicator of longevity); the share of literate residents aged 15 and older, as well as the fullness of coverage with education in institutions of primary, secondary, and higher education (key indicators of education levels); adjusted GDP per capita (a special indicator of material well-being).

Exploring the human development index is crucial for comparing and ranking various nations, with a focus on comparing nations' rankings based on human development and GDP per capita. Apart from ranking and dividing nations into groups, determining the human development index and indexes of particular measurements makes it possible to assess the degree to which the current situation matches the established targets expressed by the optimum values of the indicator of human development and its change in time.

However, this kind of assessment is incomplete. The concept of quality of life may incorporate more aspects that are reflected in a collection of characteristics shaping the environment and the system of ensuring the maintenance of human life: the quality of the population (lifespan, education levels, qualifications, natality, mortality, etc.); people's standard of living (combines all indicators of standard of living and reflects the degree of satisfaction of material and spiritual needs – real income, income differentiation, level of consumption of goods and services, level of healthcare, etc.); the quality of the social environment (reflects working con-

ditions, level of social protection, etc.); the quality of the environment (data on pollution and on natural and climatic conditions). Practice suggests that systems of indicators employed in methodologies for international comparisons of people's quality of life have a clear structure and employ a certain basic set of indicators. In respect to countries with a large territory and imbalance across regions, for instance, the Russian Federation, it may help to employ regional assessments of people's quality of life, which may require the use of additional indicators and development of an integrated system of indicators.

Most of the preconditions for ensuring the quality of life of people residing in Russia's regions are associated with an area's social and economic condition. Life is connected to a specific populated area, so the region's situation with respect to essential services, culture, the activity of local authorities, natural and recreational potential, and economic potential is going to govern the development and conservation of its human potential.

Any region has distinct characteristics in terms of the location, quantity, and use of mineral resources, social and economic development, and issues and objectives of its environmental policy. Accordingly, current methodological approaches to assessing the development of regional social and economic systems are mainly focused on exploring economic development and concentrate less on people's quality of life, for which reason the matrix of links among the elements of sustainable development in regions considers all of its components.

Normally, people's quality of life at the regional level depends on certain factors influencing the effectiveness of management of a region's economic processes and social sphere. People's high quality of life in a region is determined by the following: people's high life's potential (health, sense of self-efficiency, conscious willingness to engage in an activity, and a high level of education); people's existing material well-being, which is reflected in GDP per capita, the consumer price index, the consumption basket, household income, and poverty levels.

The regional paradigm of quality of life can be represented as a collection of one's knowledge, abilities, values, beliefs, and opportunities, which act as factors of one's development taking account of regional characteristics (Table 1).

Today, in developing methodological approaches to assessing people's quality of life at the regional level, it may help to consider the following components: long-term values (long life, reproduction, health, family, spiritual values, wealth, social protection, and culture); current needs (consumption, housing, and security); the living environment (air, water, and industrial waste); social infrastructure (healthcare, recreation and leisure, education, and goods and services).

Table 1: Regional Paradigm of Quality of Life

Environment	Blocks		
	Objective assessment		Subjective assessment
	Overall state of	Current situation in terms of	
Ecology	Natural environment	Ecology	Assessment of the environmental situation
Health	Healthcare system	Health of the population	Assessment of the healthcare system
Education	Education system	Education for the population	Assessment of the education system
Security	Criminogenic environment	Crime	Assessment of personal security
Culture and leisure	Sphere of culture, arts, and recreation	People's activity in this area	Attitude toward culture, arts, leisure, and tourism
Housing	Housing market	Housing conditions	Assessment of provision of public amenities and living conditions
Transportation	Transportation	Transportation	Assessment of the

	infrastructure	safety	operation of transportation
Economy	Economy	Well-being	Assessment of the material environment
Employment	Labor market	Employment and working conditions	Assessment of the situation regarding employment for the population
Social activity	Societal development	Social and political situation	Assessment of the social and political situation
Social environment	Social environment	Social embodiment	Social well-being
An overall estimate of the quality of life is determined by the structural element index			

At the same time, currently, the well-substantiated criteria for the assessment of indicators based on which it will be possible to determine the real standard of living of a region's population haven't been established yet. Therefore, the authors suggest calculating a common integral indicator of standard and quality of life of a region's population (I_{sj}), as well as its integrated component (K_i) and elements (K_{ij}), via the following formula:

$$K_{ij} = \sum_{s=1}^n W_l Z_{ijl}, \quad (1)$$

where Z_{ijl} is the quantitative standardized assessment of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population living standard; W_l is the coefficient of the significance of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component, which is determined via the following formula:

$$W_l = \frac{\delta_l}{\sum_{l=1}^n \delta_l}, \quad (2)$$

where δ_l is the dispersion of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population life standard and quality; n is the number of individual indicators used to assess the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population life standard and quality.

A standardized assessment of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population life standard and quality is determined via the following formula:

a) for stimulator indicators:

$$Z_{ijl} = \frac{x_{ijl} - x_{\min l}}{x_{\max l} - x_{\min l}}, \quad (3)$$

where x_{ijl} is the actual value of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population life standard and quality; $x_{\min l}$ and $x_{\max l}$ are, respectively, the minimum and maximum values of the l -th individual indicator of the j -th element of the i -th component of a region's population life standard and quality.

b) for destimulator indicators:

$$Z_{ijl} = \frac{x_{\max l} - x_{ijl}}{x_{\max l} - x_{\min l}}, \quad (4)$$

Among the key stimulators of quality of life is government support of the quality of life of the population of regions within the

Russian Federation (ensuring an increase in well-being, housing conditions, working conditions, social support, etc.). The major destimulators of quality of life include poverty, lack of legal protection of the population, unemployment, no system of mandatory medical insurance, etc.

4. Discussion

The reliability of the proposed techniques for assessing the quality of life of the population in regions is substantiated by the fact that they make it possible to analyze some of the ways of and mechanisms for improving the population's quality of life based on certain components [10, 11, 12]. These components include resolving demographic problems, creating the conditions for people to be able to actualize their life's potential, creating innovative areas for the development of the education, healthcare, and social support sectors, and developing new mechanisms for resolving environmental problems.

Russia's regions differ significantly in the level of economic and human development. This has caused a major increase in differentiation among regions, with regions with different structures of the economy adapting differently to new economic conditions. As a consequence, interregional differences reflect a differentiation between the economic and social components.

Practice suggests that, in undertaking a subjective assessment of people's quality of life in regions, it helps to formulate a list of questions in a way that would allow assessing the degree of satisfaction with the standard of living and potential for development, as well as the level of opportunity for actualizing human potential. Currently, there is a lack of survey questionnaires with a well-substantiated structure that could be used to assess the integral indicator of people's quality of life, which requires additional sociological research.

Along with subjective assessment, another important indicator within this system of indicators is consumption of key goods and services. This component of quality of life, above all, reflects the degree to which the population is provided with work and satisfied with social infrastructure, which is crucial in developing regional programs.

Existing factors that shape the quality of life suggest the need to establish a set of key objectives for increasing people's quality of life, which are based on the cultivation of social partnership at the regional level. At the same time, people's quality of life is determined by two major factors: (1) the conditions created by the government to help actualize people's potential and (2) the readiness and ability of people themselves to use those opportunities. Thus, quality of life is a common cause for the government and people.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, even though the proposed system of indicators is not universal, it does help to demonstrate the significance of social partnership at the regional level. It reflects its state and helps to assess how effectively one performs the obligations assumed in key areas of activity.

The study's findings helped to conclude that a crucial objective is to cultivate in people the knowledge about human rights and decent work, their own rights and ways to protect them, social protection, etc. At the same time, assessment of the quality of life depends on both a region's economic characteristics and its residents' overall satisfaction with life, work, healthcare, environmental condition, etc.

The authors' study revealed that in the conditions of social and economic instability the process of improving people's quality of life requires substantial modernization, primarily in the area of determining specific directions and ways of diversifying the key sources of moral satisfaction and income of the population.

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