

Possibilities of quality of life measurement for the needs of public administration

Možnosti měření kvality života pro potřeby veřejné správy

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Anotace

Přes svoji diskutabilnost přináší koncept kvality života jednu z možností, kdy má veřejná správa možnost, zjišťovat názory občanů nad rámec běžné operativní agendy. Spokojený život občanů by měl být prioritním cílem regionálního managementu. Koncept kvality života tak skýtá příležitost dotazovat se občanů na různé aspekty života v obci a sdělovat své postoje. Příspěvek si klade za cíl nastínit možnosti měření kvality života s ohledem na praktické využití tohoto konstruktů pro potřeby veřejné správy na regionální úrovni. Výchozí myšlenky vycházejí z výzkumů, které byly v oblasti sociální politiky realizovány v konkrétní lokalitě za pomoci rozsáhlého dotazníkového šetření mezi místní veřejností. Tyto výzkumy v sobě zahrnovaly oblast kvality života. Sekundární analýza dat představená v příspěvku přináší další pohledy na interpretovanou realitu s tím, že ukazuje, jaké oblasti kvality života lze systematicky sbírat s ohledem na jejich limity dané nejasností zakázky od veřejné správy, která nedokáže vždy jasně definovat svá očekávání a přináší možné náměty, jak s tématem kvality života pro potřeby veřejné správy dále pracovat.

Klíčová slova

Kvalita života, veřejná správa, rozhodovací procesy.

Annotation

Despite its questionable points, the concept of quality of life presents an opportunity for the public administration to canvass views of citizens beyond common operational agenda. Well-being of citizens should be a priority objective of a regional management. Concept of quality of life thus offers the possibility to ask the citizens questions about various aspects of life in municipality and share their views. The paper aims to outline the possibilities for measuring quality of life with regard to the practical use of this construct for the needs of public administration at the regional level. Initial ideas are based on surveys that were in the area of social policy implemented in a particular area with the help of an extensive survey among the local community. These researches have involved the area of quality of life. Secondary data analysis presented in this paper provides additional insights to interpret the reality that shows what quality of life can be systematically collect with regard to their limits given uncertainties orders from public administration, which is not always able to clearly define their expectations and brings potential ideas on how with the theme of quality of life for the needs of public administration further.

Key words

Quality of Life, Public Administration, Decision-Making Processes

JEL classification: H83, I31, R58, O21

Introduction

Public administration is not used to carrying out research studies which would explore views of citizens. At least not on a local level and in a systematic way. Surveys are carried out primarily in cases where public administration has to deal with some issue majority of the society is concerned about, e.g. creation of an incineration plant, etc. It deprives itself of valuable source of information which could be help to improve decision making processes. Coherent database containing data of the last couple of years would then allow to create more interesting conclusions. On the other hand, it is necessary to note that carrying out similar surveys costs considerable financial resources and subsequent data management thus poses personal challenges for its existence. In no case do we claim that public administration does not rely on respectable source of information or that within its strategic decisions it does not use reliable data sources. Attention should only be drawn to the lack of system which would collect regularly information on selected phenomena which the public administration considers crucial within its area of work.

Concept of quality of life introduces one specific field suitable for measurement in order to know the life in the region. Given its ambiguity, the primary task is to identify variables which define the quality of life for our specific tasks. Thus the whole discussion about right or wrong usage of this construct in practice becomes simplified, see below. We consider the very questions related to the citizens views on selected aspects of life in the region to be significantly determining in subjective perception of well-being of the population of a given region. Citizens generally do not like accepting responsibility, however, they appreciate the opportunity to present their views. This paper does not focus on theoretical debates on the subject of what is quality of life. It gives a short overview of quality of life measurement and namely discusses practical findings taking the city of Pardubice as an example where several aspects of quality of life were surveyed in the years of 2012 and 2015. Based on the findings, we will make recommendations for possible adoption of indicators of quality of life into political perception as a meaningful instrument for surveys of well-being within a municipality. The concept of well-being is in this context understood as a synonym of the term quality of life, even though we are aware that despite objective quality of life, from a psychological point of view, an individual does not have to be satisfied with his/her life. Emphasis is put on subjective perception of quality (although a brief overview of objective approaches is provided) rather than attempting to objectify the quality by using various indicators. We consider more important to discuss the role of public administration within the process of caring for the region and its actual implementation. As it is further shown, there are countless possibilities to measure quality of life. Public administration thus needs a simple and efficient instrument if the usage of the concept of quality of life should even be considered.

1. Problem formulation

If the very concept of quality of life while being defined introduces a wide range of dilemmas, it must be stated that neither the concept of public administration with regard to multidisciplinary views is completely clear. Hendrych at all (2014) draws attention to the understanding of the current public administration in the sense of service or governance. This means that public administration is understood as having the meaning of governing or governance for active participation of citizens and acts on their behalf. Public administration is similarly defined by Hrozinková and Novotný (2013) who point out that matters of public interest have given objectives which define performing public tasks. Public administration is carried out by public bodies and their authorities, or by natural persons and legal persons if they carry out public administration by applying public law. Currently we are also talking about New Public Management (practical example e.g. Fuka, Lešáková). In theory, public administration is considered in two meanings (Hendrych at all.; 2014):

- **Material:** type of activity (governance). It is the type of activity which is decisive. These can be performed by various entities entitled to carry out the governance in order to perform public tasks.

- **Formal:** institutions, organizations (authority, entity). It is the character of the organization and the tasks which the organization performs which is decisive. It is a system of legal bodies and other authorities. This concept primarily focuses on activities carried out by them.

If we attempt to simplify the quality of life definition, we can say that quality of life is namely the way an individual perceives his or her place within society (Vaďurová, a Múhlpachr; 2005), as well as the availability of options he/she can choose from while during the course of his/her life (Philips; 2006, Mulligan G. F., Carruthers J. I.). Quality of life has also material and nonmaterial aspects of human life (Rapley, 2003). In the context of such reasoning it can be said that quality of life has its subjective (psycho-philosophical, difficult to measure) and objective aspect (measurable). As no individual can stand alone and is part of countless social interactions, functioning of public administration has a significant impact on individual's need for well-being. Public administration represented by legislation and institutional procedures determines to a large extent human life, in both positive and negative sense. The question then could be raised - which instrument for quality of life measurement to offer to public administration in order to deliver expected results in the form of regional knowledge map administered/governed by public administration. At the same time, it is necessary to ask whether public administration knows how to formulate in practice commissioning for data which it needs to know.

With regard to public service aspects of the whole issue, we could take into consideration the quality of life assessment described by Isakin (Isakin; 2007). First approach is characterized by necessity to carry out interstate and interregional assessment for the purpose of monitoring the dynamics of indices and comparative variables for these indicators. The second approach focuses on adopting state administrative decisions. Therefore, correct interpretation of data is a major issue which assesses quality of life within a region. As already stated, quality of life has many definitions. Following table presents an outline of key concepts.

Table 1 Main theoretical concepts of quality of life

Theoretical concepts	Description
Theory of economic welfare	Approach to quality of life measurement proceeds from the premise that the basis is high level of social life and level of material welfare.
Utilitarian concept	Approach is characterized by special attention to subjective quality of life assessment. The core of the concept are three aspects: individual perception of quality of life, positive emotions and lack of negative emotions.
Capability concept	Approach is based on the premise that improvement of quality of life is a process of developing individual freedom and human cultural development.

Source: own processing based on Isakin; 2007

Quality of life thus represents universal category determining welfare of citizens of certain region. This category relies on:

1. **Subjective aspect:** Subjective aspect of quality of life derives from individual well-being. Regarding the issue of wellbeing authors state (Dvořáková, Dušková, Svobodová, at all.; 2006) that well-being represents long-term emotion state of satisfaction of an individual with his/her life. This emotional state is relatively constant over time. Life satisfaction, morality or happiness can be considered as components of well-being.
Other examples: Quality of life index from World Health Organisation, Consumer Confidence Indexes – CCI, Eurobarometer (Ayvazyan; 2016, Database web of science; 2016).
2. **Objective factors:** Objective factors of quality of life are considered the following:
 - Gross domestic product: (Czech statistical office; 2016, Kubátová; 2010).
 - Living standards of a single individual or a household: income levels and consumption, wealth and poverty (Kubátová; 2010). Direct quantification of amount of consumed goods and services, or financial incomes and property, leisure, means spent on public services from the budget. Also amount of harmful substances discharged into water or air, average life expectancy, infant mortality, level of insecurity/insecurity index (Červenka; 2010).

- The human development index: contains these three components: wealth, health and level of education. Within these items minimal and maximal fixed values have been established (Kotýnková, Kubelková; 2011)
- Other examples: Economic welfare index, Index of Social Health – ISH (Ayvazyan; 2016).

All of the above and other indices should be treated with caution within informative capability. In fact, subjective perception of quality of life should never be forgotten. It is where the individual personality is reflected. On the other hand, these internationally valid indicators which can be compared. They represent indicative (practical) information monitorable despite cultural specificities of individual nations (Možný, 2002). Based on what was mentioned above, the question is which indicators of quality of life the public administration should decide about in its strategic decisions. To what extent and on which issues should the administration perform research from citizens. We have to ask at the same time for a good formulation of commissioning so that the data collected on quality of life brings real answers which will help to improve life within a municipality.

3. Objectives and methods

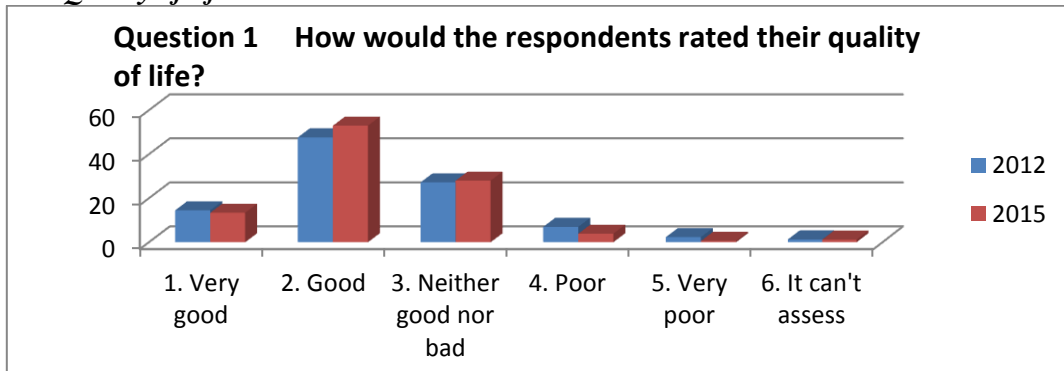
The aim of our paper is to demonstrate, using the example of Statutory city of Pardubice, our reflections on surveying the quality of life of citizens, where there are limits of existing research and try to outline possible options for further development of the course of empirical research of quality of life of a reference area. We will briefly outline results and limits brought about by the two surveys (Mandys, Jirava, Křupka, Kašparová, Duplinský; 2012, Mojžíšová; 2016) which analysed public perception in relation to social issues in the city of Pardubice in the years of 2012 and 2015. Under the terms of this analysis, there was a first and subsequently a second survey on views of citizens on quality of life in this region. In both cases, the responses were carried out by means of a questionnaire with the help of trained questioners. In both cases, the same methodology of data collection was used including intentional selection based on age category and residence in one of the 8 Pardubice districts.

The first survey focused on the situation in social services within the city of Pardubice (Mandys, Jirava, Křupka, Kašparová, Duplinský; 2012). This was a complex analysis of the situation. Enquiries directed to the public were merely a partial component. Altogether 384 respondents took part in the analysis in the given region. Respondents answered nineteen questions. The second survey focuses on mapping satisfaction with social services in the city of Pardubice (Mojžíšová; 2016). Data collection and analysis was carried out in the year of 2015. Under the terms of pre-research, the questionnaire from the 2012 analysis was tested in the second place. Subsequently slight modifications have been made which resulted in a 22-item questionnaire. Questions related to quality of life have not been modified. 387 respondents took part in the survey in 2012 and 337 in 2015. Both survey equally asked following questions: How does the respondent assess his quality of life? How secure does the respondent feel in everyday life? Does the respondent have access to information which is necessary for his/her life?

3. 2 Results

Here we make comparisons of results from both analyses. In view of the fact that in both cases it was a very similar sample without principal difference in terms of number of respondents, their education structure and economic activity, it can be stated that it is a real view of reality. The fact that Pardubice has ranked highly over a long period of time in various opinion polls and charts has a major impact on the questions. There are a lot of working opportunities, the city has a favourable geographical location including transport facilities.

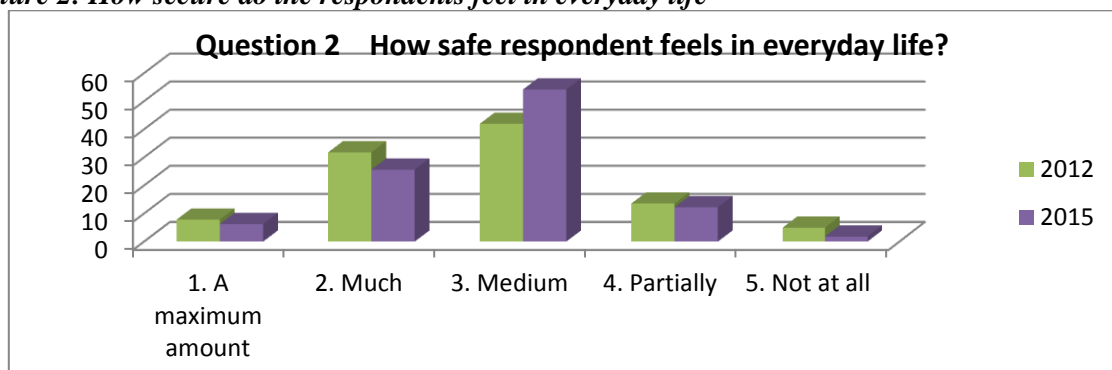
Picture 1: Quality of life assessment



Source: Mandys, Jirava, Křupka, Kašparová (2012), Mojžíšová (2016)

From the answers to the first question it becomes clear that most of the respondents think that the city of Pardubice is a good place to live. Neutral answer within similar classification is usually caused by the fact that the respondent profits from the possibility of escape and avoids definite answer. Only a small part of the respondents do not think that life in Pardubice in a positive way. This appears to be a weak point of the research. In order to identify the reasons, we would have to analyse other aspects of life, or look for individual differences within each individual who responded this way.

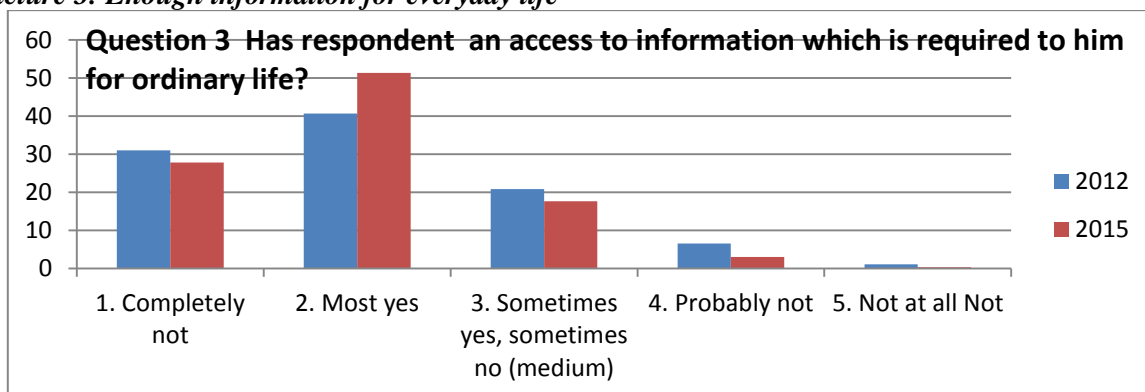
Picture 2: How secure do the respondents feel in everyday life



Source: Mandys, Jirava, Křupka, Kašparová (2012), Mojžíšová (2016)

Security is among the key attributes of quality of life. We see again that there are generally no major changes in the results. Slight increase in neutral assessment can be seen in the year 2015. Yet most of the respondents perceive security in the city in a neutral or rather positive way. It can also be influenced by the fact that people are more trying to solve their problems with the help of Pardubice city police (The statutory town of Pardubice; 2016).

Picture 3: Enough information for everyday life



Source: Mandys, Jirava, Křupka, Kašparová (2012), Mojžíšová (2016)

Awareness within the city of Pardubice can also be considered as good. We consider adequate information to be a principal attribute of quality of life and namely with respect to current information overload in society. In this point in particular we recommend concrete definition of typology of information which the public administration considers to be essential for life in a municipality (region).

We know that it is merely a schematic procedure while analysing quality of life. We are also aware of considerable generality of questions. Concept of quality of life is a cluster of a wide range of indicators and here they were carried out in their most general categories. In both cases, this was primarily a test about how the respondents will react to these questions, what results they will bring and whether these results will be interesting for local administration management. Interpreted results do not bring complex view on given problems on a selected region. We consider a partial success the fact that questions on quality of life have been successfully integrated into sub segments of analytical work for the needs of the city of Pardubice.

4. Conclusion

Our experience with analytical work for public administration in the city of Pardubice and partially for Regional authority for Pardubice region (in addition to quoted surveys) show that to carry out surveys for the needs of public administration is highly problematic. There's lack of continuous data collection over selected areas of public interest. Political representation focuses solely on knowledge of specific issues they are currently dealing with. Analysis does not always bring expected results. Use of the concept of quality of life has undeniable advantage in its multidimensionality. This concept is thus predetermined to be used in majority of areas public administration deals with. It is necessary to involve political representation in creation of serious information system for this is the main visionary of all processes in the region. At the same time, we have to insist on the fact that political representation should be able to take responsibility for its decisions. In the current political system it is, however, often an empty idea from a citizen's point of view.

We consider important to identify a range of interests which should monitor long-term objectives, not only assessing some current issue. Ranges of interests could then be used for other entities which try to analyse from their point of view selected issues in the municipality (region). Local administration alone has both political (deciding) and financial (provisioning) capital. It is thus entitled to take responsibility for well-being of citizens. To analyse anything is not possible without a real interest of political representation and authorized executive officers. Political representation is responsible for the form of measures directed at well-being of citizens, have to be able to identify its visions and direct financial means from its budget accordingly. For this it needs appropriate knowledge base so that the adopted decisions live up to public expectations and respect public interest. We must also state that in majority of cases there have been identified neither objective nor subjective indicators which could help in deciding on the basis of serious inputs. And finally, it is important for the public administration to know whether it needs research for its decision or not and which specific data it expects and demands. At the same time, it concerns background material not an exact identification of the best journey. In order for the survey to bring expected results, it is clearly necessary to search answers for pre-asked questions. These should reflect the direction of local policy, should be instrumental in its outcomes in making more accurate estimations where the planned measures should be directed. Nowadays it is not sufficient to monitor only certain socio-demographic indicators, we have to choose effective composite indicators on social reality.

Possibilities of quality of life measurement often offer overcrowded amount of indicators. We only outlined the existing approaches for its measurement and at the same time established that only general enquires are not sufficient. Their relevance does not bring major changes during further research. On the other hand, public administration should know that thanks to research on well-being (quality of life) gains advantage of public involvement, interest groups, professionals/experts etc. to local decision making. Involving other entities increases their responsibility for quality of life within their area, increases sense of belonging of people to the region and also saves capacity of their officers.

At the same time, we have to respect public choice and be understanding towards the fact that public by itself does not have to have the need to discuss social issues.

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