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Introduction

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Filomena Maggino and Giampaolo Nuvolati

In the past, alongside the international network development, the theoretical reflection and the applied research on quality of life found it hard to take shape in Italy, especially in the academic field.

However, it should be pointed out that several local administrations promoted numberless studies and researches on liveability of cities and regions. In fact, many pioneer territorial experiences were accomplished during the 1970s, promoted by cities, provinces and regional administrations (e.g. the Bilanci Sociali d'Area, Regional Social Balance, in Milan) and testified a wide interest in quality-of-life studies at local level.

Other experiences have to be added, even though their nature is typically journalistic, like the annual report on quality of life in Italian provinces realized by *Sole 24*, national daily business newspaper.

More recently, a campaign (*Sbilanciamoci!*) involving almost 50 associations, NGOs and networks working on globalization, peace, human rights, environment, fair trade, ethical finance urged the development of an alternative index for analysing quality of life, of development and of public action to be used by local authorities. The *QUARS* is a synthetic index that takes into account different dimensions of development at regional level (quality of production and consumption, environmental sustainability, democratic participation and so on).

In the end, all those experiences were fragmentary, with low comparability and theoretical and methodological reflections.

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At the same time, official statistics have been developing important experiences in quality-of-life research, like the Multipurpose Survey project, introduced by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) during the 1990s and still carried on.

By considering the depicted frame, organizing a national conference on quality of life seemed to be a precious occasion in order to evaluate the state of the art and to take stock of the development of quality-of-life studies in Italy, by comparing different experiences, also referable to different scientific disciplines, and trying to reconsider and reassemble them in a single and joint frame.

This book represents the output of that conference, organized in Florence by the Italian Association for Quality-of-Life Studies (AIQUAV) in September 2010.

At the same time, the book makes an interesting analysis of well-being and quality-of-life topics, paying attention to specific group of populations and themes. In particular, it focuses on some classical quality-of-life concerns: health problems, economic unbalances, employment, democracy and public knowledge, participation. It is very useful not only for scholars but also for users, practitioners, public administrators dealing with quality-of-life issues at different level.

The book is interesting in particular for Italian readers having chapters specifically devoted to the Italian experiences. Some other articles regard the European countries and make possible some comparative analysis. The chapters could be also very useful in order to address economic, social and health policies oriented to improve living conditions, some others to identify a general framework to look at in order to increase democratic and participative processes in the contemporary society. As a matter of fact, quality of life is a multidimensional concept including all these dimensions.

The book is organized in four parts.

The *first part* includes articles concerning conceptual and methodological aspects involved in quality-of-life measurement and promotion.

In their chapter, Enrico Giovannini (President, Italian National Institute of Statistics, ISTAT) and Tommaso Rondinella (ISTAT) illustrate the activities started in Italy aimed at strengthening the ability of official statistics to measure specific dimensions of well-being and the ongoing national consultation, involving the Italian National Institute of Statistics and the National Council for Economics and Labor (CNEL). This process is aimed at identifying a set of indicators showing a strong methodological soundness and grounded on a conceptual framework conceived through a democratic process able to grant legitimacy to the selected key indicators.

Matteo Mazziotta and Adriano Pareto (ISTAT) propose an interesting solution aimed at overcoming the problems yielded by non-compensatory approaches to composite indicators construction. In particular, the solution normalizes the indicators through a traditional 'standardization' and summarizes the indices of the sub-dimensions of the composite indicator using a penalty function to be applied to cases showing 'unbalanced' values of the indicators. They compare the proposed approach with traditional ones by using data collected by 'Il Sole 24ore' on quality of life in Italian provinces.

The chapter prepared by Marco Fattore (University of Milano-Bicocca), Filomena Maggino (University of Florence) and Emilio Colombo (University of Milano-Bicocca) illustrates, through real examples pertaining to material deprivation, an alternative to composite indicators, a new methodology allowing statistical evaluation of ordinal data related to socio-economic phenomena, by overcoming the problems of the classical aggregative approach. Traditionally, in evaluation studies, ordinal scores are turned into numerical values, inconsistently with the real nature of the phenomena at hand. The proposed innovative approach allows this inconsistency to be overcome by employing a benchmark approach founded on partially ordered set (POSET) theory, a branch of discrete mathematics providing tools for dealing with multidimensional systems of ordinal data. This approach allows the problem of ‘weighting’ evaluation dimensions to be handled in pure ordinal terms.

Enrica Chiappero and Nadia von Jacobi (University of Pavia) discuss the impact on the construction of multidimensional indexes of poverty and well-being of three methodological assumptions – namely, the transformation function, the aggregation procedure and the chosen weighting system. They conducted a robustness analysis aimed at quantifying the relative and global impact of different combinations of the three methodological choices on poverty estimates both at national and sub-national level.

The chapters of the *second part* are introduced by Linda Laura Sabbadini (ISTAT), who gives an inspiring picture of the social change in Italy through official statistics.

The authors of subsequent chapters, all researchers at ISTAT, focus on particular aspects of quality of life.

Silvia Montecolle and Sante Orsini investigate the structure and dynamics of the satisfaction by exploiting the wide set of information provided by the multipurpose household survey ‘Aspects of daily life’ (1993–2009). The survey project gathers annually information on satisfaction of the Italian population aged 14 and over (every year the sample included about 40,000 individuals). Results, obtained by analysing data through a multiway approach, show a strong and stable structure over time.

Alessandra Federici, Maria Giuseppina Muratore and Daria Squillante explored, in their well-documented chapter, the relationship between quality of life and security. Their contribution allows the reader to realize how difficult it is to study ‘security’ for many reasons, starting from its definition (involving other concepts, like ‘worry’ and ‘risk’, and different aspects, mainly objective and subjective, and their relationship), its measurement, its data creation and its analytical approach (which should take into account the complex relationship between the different aspects).

The role of working time in individual quality of life is explored in Maria Clelia Romano and Daniele Spizzichino’s chapter. The illustrated analysis allows the authors to investigate the subjective perception of the quality of working time (component of multidimensional concept of quality of working life and measured in terms of level of satisfaction with time devoted to work) and its relationship with the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being and the worker’s and job’s characteristics.

The chapters of the *third part* reflect on the relationship between quality of life and other significant aspects, such as democracy, statistics and public knowledge, security policies and working conditions.

Civic evaluation has been defined as a comparative action research performed by citizens in order to assert their own point of view through the use of established and verifiable methods to issue reasoned judgements on realities that are significant for the protection of rights and quality of life. The chapter of Angelo Tanese and Alessio Terzi regards these topics and in particular the activities performed by *Cittadinanzattiva*: the first organization in Italy aimed at promoting and developing civic evaluation projects and methodologies in different public sectors of intervention.

According to Maurizio Sajevo (University of Turku, Finland Futures Research Centre), security, quality of life and development are concepts to be considered by adopting a holistic approach. In his chapter, the author presents a set of theoretical issues, shows the Finnish approach to these topics and concludes underlying the importance of governance for a secure and sustainable socio-economic development. Security, hardly achievable individually, is the result of a more holistic thinking. Individual security and freedom implies the security and freedom of all.

The relationship between statistics, democracy and public knowledge is the topic analysed by Paolo Parra Saiani (University of East Piedmont). In particular, his analysis regards the success of quantification in the administration of the State and the contextual conditions that interfere with the transformation of information into knowledge. As a matter of fact, we have arrived till today, with a large amount of data available, but with little support to effective citizen's knowledge.

Federica Origo (University of Bergamo) and Laura Pagani (University of Milano-Bicocca) present a paper regarding the linkages between flexicurity and workers' well-being in Europe. Using micro-data from the Eurobarometer survey, authors estimate the effect of a micro-level measure of flexicurity on overall job satisfaction by gender, age and education. Results confirm that job stability offered by the type of labour contract and perceived security are quite different things, and that the duration of the contract may be hardly important for job satisfaction if the worker perceives that he/she is not at risk of losing his/her job.

The chapters contained in the *fourth part* deal with topics which can be included in the traditional field of health-related quality-of-life research.

The methodological paper of Lisa Gnaulati, Francesca Ierardi, Stefania Rodella and Elena Ruviglioni concerns a specific tool aimed at reading and evaluating published and validated measures of health-related quality of life (HRQoL). This tool was created by the Quality and Equity Unit of Regional Agency for Healthcare services of Tuscany Region, in collaboration with the University of Florence. The application of the tool to a set of questionnaires, among the most utilized at international level, is oriented to underline positive aspects and critical areas in HRQoL measures.

While many studies showed that the perceived health represents one of the best predictors of future mortality, the Italian National Institute of Statistics established since the 1980s a particular survey project, aimed at monitoring the perceived health, as part of the more general concept of individual health. The applied questionnaire

includes internationally shared and validated instruments, such as the SF-12 and part of the SF-36. Data allow Lidia Gargiulo, Laura Iannucci and Alessandra Tinto (ISTAT) to investigate Italian population's health with reference to not only physical (such as energy and fatigue) but also mental components (anxiety, depression, loss of behavioural/emotional control, psychological well-being). The performed analysis of the identified indicators allows population's health-related quality of life to be described (also in terms of inequalities) and provide precious information useful for designing national and local health and social policies and services.

The chapter of Marco Bertelli, Annamaria Bianco, Daniela Scuticchio and Ivan Brown is aimed at studying the correlation between quality of life of individuals with intellectual disability and members of their families. To such a purpose, the chapter presents the results of an Italian research based on international survey tools. The study underscores the importance of recognizing variability among families and assessing all dimensions before intervening in an effort to improve quality of life.

At the end, we can say that this book (as well as the Florentine meeting) represents a proof of the great liveliness of quality-of-life research and researchers in Italy (not only in the Academic ambit) and demonstrates also how this issue came out from the academic research field and got firmly in policy agendas and among policy goals also in Italy.