

Quality of Life in Contemporary Society: Social Dimensions in the Context of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The main objectives of the article are to trace different approaches to the study of quality of life and to analyze its essential objective and subjective characteristics. Conceptually, quality of life is defined as a set of conditions and opportunities provided by the environment and institutions for the material, social, and mental well-being of individuals and communities. Emphasis is on living standards and material well-being, with digitalization and AI contributing significantly to improvements in the material environment and access to public resources. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies can also enhance feelings of autonomy, control, and satisfaction, as well as facilitate access to information.

Keywords: Digitalization, Artificial intelligence, Quality of life, Well-being

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines quality of life as a multidimensional and integral concept that has become an object of study in contemporary social, economic, and psychological sciences. Quality of life reflects the state of the living environment and material conditions at both the individual and community levels, as well as people's subjective assessments and perceptions of how they live and how they feel. In the context of contemporary dynamic transformations, the processes of digitalization and the development of artificial intelligence play a key role in shaping quality of life. They influence both the improvement of material living conditions and personal assessments of well-being and satisfaction. In this sense, our understanding is that digital technologies and artificial intelligence are becoming determinants of the quality of life in contemporary societies, as they transform the ways in which people work, communicate, learn, and develop. The main research question is: what are the dynamics of individuals' well-being in Bulgarian conditions and how do their assessments correlate with their subjective understandings and modes of everyday life. The idea of the article is that quality of life is the core of society and its development and is the result of the complex interweaving between the impacts of the wider social environment and institutions.

Automation, digital markets, and new forms of employment create unprecedented opportunities for people's well-being, transform the performance of everyday activities, improve the material environment, and reshape professions. In the field of education, digital resources and AI also bring about decisive transformations. The aim is to show that quality of life is influenced by artificial intelligence and digitalization in ways that are closely linked to the social, cultural, and ethical context. The importance of online interactions, changes in the professional environment, and digital identity is emphasized. It is also important that well-being is a synthetic expression of basic characteristics of economic and social realities at the global, national and institutional levels.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

On a theoretical level, the study of quality of life as an integral characteristic of society includes various objective and subjective features reflecting material life and the conditions in which people live on the one hand, as well as the evaluation and perception of this environment from a subjective perspective (Gerson, 1976). The objective characteristics of quality of life are determined by a set of indicators concerning actual living conditions, while subjective indicators refer to individuals' emotional and cognitive-evaluative perceptions. The subjective dimensions of quality of life also include individuals' self-assessment of their achievements and their place in society. The study of subjective well-being presents various ideas related to the value of the individual, the importance of personal evaluations of life and recognition, as well as the understanding that well-being includes personal and psychological elements that go beyond economic prosperity (Diener et al., 1999). Subjective well-being also encompasses people's emotional reactions as well as their judgments of life satisfaction. In this regard, various needs whose satisfaction is important for subjective well-being begin to be studied.

This comprehensive assessment and self-evaluation of what is real and what has been achieved provides an important point of reference for how individuals feel and how they perceive themselves and their outcomes. At the same time, self-evaluation of achievements, as well as of the environment and conditions, is important because it indicates the presence of prospects and what they are, thereby guiding the next steps in people's lives. For this reason, quality of life represents an intersection of the past, present, and future as temporal and ontological realities of different social subjects. Moreover, the idea of well-being also pertains to society as a whole, indicating a condition measured through indicators of solidarity, cohesion, and sustainability. The humanistic aspect of the theory of well-being also involves encouraging and supporting all people, regardless of their status or economic and cultural level. The very concept of quality of life represents an important stage in the social transformation and transitions of societies.

The development of this issue also involves constructing a system of indicators that capture the essence and nature of the changes. This system of indicators includes both objective and quantitative characteristics as well

as subjective and evaluative measures, encompassing personal development, satisfaction with achievements, and satisfaction with the fulfilment of various material and spiritual needs. Closely related to the evaluative characteristics of quality of life and subjective well-being is the concept of happiness, which includes the following dimensions: evaluation of the environment and surroundings; assessment of material conditions, living standards, and the socio-political context; evaluation of achievements and success; and assessment of prospects and expectations for the future (Veenhoven, 2000).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article is based on results obtained during the research project “Quality of Life and Well-Being in the Context of Professional Communities and Their Activity,” funded by the National Science Fund, KP-06-PH80/2. The empirical work was conducted in May 2025.

The primary research method associated with the results presented in the article is qualitative – the “in-depth interview.” This method was chosen because it allows individuals’ opinions and evaluations to be expressed more freely. A key distinguishing feature of the in-depth interview is the greater intensity of interaction with respondents, enabling a deeper exploration of the specific characteristics of phenomena in the context of the collected data. This allows respondents to focus their attention on different aspects of the issue under discussion. The in-depth interview is a method that encourages the expression of diverse opinions and evaluations, as well as the discussion of multiple topics by participants, creating an opportunity to gain insight into the lived world of individuals. A total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted, with respondents including national experts on quality of life and professional communities, researchers and representatives of scientific organizations and NGOs involved with the issue, experts from trade union organizations, as well as government officials in ministries engaged in the development of national quality of life policies. It also draws on findings from previously conducted studies on transformations in professions and working conditions under the influence of digitalization. When conducting the survey, all ethical norms were observed, which fully validate the results obtained.

RESULTS

The presentation of the results provides an overview of the various thematic areas and questions included in the interview. Based on the respondents’ answers, it creates a clear picture that reflects the opinions and assessments of the experts and specialists who participated in the in-depth interviews, both regarding quality of life in general and specifically in the context of Bulgarian conditions.

In response to the question, ‘What, in your opinion, is the content encompassed by the concept of “quality of life”?’, the levels and multidimensionality of the concept, as well as its integral nature, are clearly distinguished:

“By the concept of ‘quality of life,’ I mean my understanding of the degree of spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and cultural satisfaction on the one hand, and well-being—both physical and material—on the other. Quality of life under different socio-economic and cultural conditions has specific dimensions and concrete manifestations. At present, ‘quality of life’ is determined by an individual’s ability to realize their own potential to the fullest extent.” (university lecturer, female).

“Quality of life encompasses a person’s overall well-being, including material conditions, health, education, social relationships, and a sense of security. It depends both on objective factors (income, access to services) and on an individual’s subjective satisfaction with life.” (representative of an NGO, female).

Another important issue addressed in the interviews relates to the subjective aspects of quality of life, insofar as, taken together, the material and subjective conditions for personal satisfaction constitute the prerequisites for quality of life. The respondents were asked to indicate what, in their view, constitute the subjective aspects of quality of life:

“Yes, quality of life has significant subjective indicators, which are no less important than the objective ones. These include an individual’s sense of life satisfaction, emotional and mental health, sense of justice and security, personal autonomy, opportunities for social fulfilment, quality of interpersonal relationships, trust in institutions, and prospects for development. These indicators reflect a person’s inner world and their subjective assessment of the extent to which the conditions in which they live and work meet their expectations, needs, and values.” (expert from the Ministry of Education and Science, female).

From a social perspective, there are various factors influencing quality of life that underlie individuals’ subjective evaluations and which the respondents identify as follows:

“Quality of life is shaped by a range of interrelated factors. Key among them are economic conditions—wages, inflation, access to employment, and job security. Social infrastructure is also crucial, encompassing access to quality healthcare, education, cultural services, and transportation. Social protection plays a decisive role through effective and accessible measures addressing poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. Environmental quality, public safety, gender equality, civic engagement, and the rule of law are equally important. Trade unions help place these factors on the institutional agenda to support balanced and sustainable societal development.” (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria, Vice President, male).

The influence of various factors on quality of life was explored across several social domains, with respondents asked to indicate which factors, and to what extent, affect it. The responses were clear: all the areas mentioned play a significant role:

- Economy and labor market *“directly influence our material security and comfort”*.
- Infrastructure and housing conditions *“determine our everyday comfort in life, work, and leisure”*.

- Education and its quality “*contribute to the development of individual potential and its full realization.*”
- Healthcare and medical services “*are undoubtedly a prerequisite for personal comfort and well-being.*”
- Public order and safety “*create the necessary social comfort, which is also a condition for personal comfort.*”
- Political governance and institutions “*leave their mark on all aspects of social life and amplify certain positive or negative trends in society, ranging widely—from cultural flourishing to moral decline and crime.*”

The finding is that “*these are key indicators, each of which has an independent and distinct role, while also being interrelated with one another in terms of the material provision of quality of life within the community*” (civil servant, ministry representative, female).

Regarding the subjective characteristics of quality of life, the respondents shared that:

“*Happiness is a subjective indicator that reflects personal satisfaction.*” (representative of an NGO, female)

“*Happiness represents a subjective expression of high quality of life. Those who feel happy often experience a balance between material and non-material aspects of their lives.*” (civil servant, female).

It is widely recognized that “*one’s profession affects quality of life, with certain occupations offering greater security, income, and leisure time than others.*” (expert in municipal administration, female). At the same time, respondents emphasized “*the importance of individuality and personal fulfilment, particularly regarding the extent to which one feels fully realized in the profession.*” (university lecturer, female).

The interviews paid particular attention to the quality of life in Bulgarian society. Respondents noted that, while it is relatively good overall, it differs considerably across various communities and social groups:

“*Quality of life exhibits clear disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as among professional communities, and is increasingly polarized. Individuals with lower incomes and insecure employment often struggle to meet their basic needs.*” (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria, Vice President, male). The topic of quality of life among contemporary Bulgarians was also addressed from a comparative perspective, specifically in relation to ‘ten years ago.’ The opinions expressed generally converge on the view that people today live better than they did ten years ago, “yet there is still much room for improvement”:

“*There has been some improvement, particularly in access to technology and certain aspects of infrastructure. However, inequalities and the sense of insecurity remain high. Progress is unevenly distributed, and many groups continue to be excluded.*” (representative of an NGO, female).

As a result, the view emerges that: “*Bulgarians, in general, are not satisfied with their lives today.*” (university lecturer, female).

“*People are generally rather dissatisfied—there are high levels of distrust in institutions, social tension, and emigration, which serve as indicators of dissatisfaction, despite some improvements.*” (civil servant, female).

A central place in quality of life and its assessment is also occupied by the quality of people's work and labor. Digitalization and artificial intelligence are changing the environment in which people work, as working conditions and forms of labor are undergoing significant transformations. Experts point out that digitalization leads to the introduction of specialized equipment. As a result, routine tasks and operations are reduced, methods and the organization of work change, and new software solutions and automated systems are adopted. In this way, technological integration and access to modern tools are achieved, which leads to increased labor efficiency, improved quality, and reduced time for completing work tasks. According to experts, digitalization also creates some new and atypical forms of employment, such as remote work, ICT-based work, and flexible working hours. Changes in working conditions and in the nature of work processes as a result of digitalization have a number of positive effects at the individual level, related to the development of intellect and cognitive abilities, career development, mobility and opportunities to choose employers, creative freedom and self-expression, as well as motivation for learning and individual development. Digitalization also creates conditions for more free time and stronger connections with family and friends, as well as participation in various informal networks.

CONCLUSION

Quality of life is a significant challenge in the Bulgarian context. Well-being is often closely linked to the economic conditions in which people live, which require income adjustments to maintain a high standard of living. In addition to national specificities, comparisons are often made at a broader European level regarding differences in living conditions in Bulgaria and other European countries. The reasons for the low subjective assessments of quality of life in Bulgaria can be traced to the overall economic condition of society, inadequate levels of education and healthcare, persistent unemployment and migration, as well as crime and the state of infrastructure, which collectively create social tensions. The material environment, in turn, also affects subjective perceptions, causing individuals to feel insecure and unstable, unable to plan their lives over the long term. In this context, more effective measures are needed in social policy, as well as stricter measures in the areas of the judicial system, accountability, and taxation. The findings show that quality of life is influenced by artificial intelligence and digitalization in ways that are closely linked to the social, cultural, and ethical context. The importance of online interactions, changes in the professional environment, and digital identity is emphasized. Attention is also drawn to various challenges that digitalization and artificial intelligence pose at both the personal and professional levels.

The main conclusion is that digital technologies contribute to improving quality of life, as well as to more economical and efficient use of available resources. An important conclusion we reach is that quality of life contains mobilizing resources at both individual and community levels, which do not always align with institutional ones. Another conclusion is that the recognition of quality of life and well-being as key factors for the full development of society has not yet been adequately reflected in the actual

actions of authorized formal and informal social actors, nor in their immediate policies and practices. In this context, the need for greater social security and resilience is emphasized, as these would create more stability in the subjective aspect of quality of life in the Bulgarian context.

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