

Forming The Quality Of Life In Slovakia After Entering The EU

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Abstract

Quality of life is one of the most frequent notions of today in European space. It is used primarily as a target value of economic development of the society, but has also become a new challenge to ensure a dignified life of EU citizens. Quality of life can be considered as the holistic category, but can be analyzed also as a fragment in the meaning of orientation only in terms of the individual, respectively partial areas (domains) of human life. One of the important components of quality of life is consumption. From a microeconomic perspective consumption not only speaks about the degree of satiation of human needs but its structure and level is an important factor in shaping the quality of life. If the quality of life in terms of consumption is monitored, its existential side is evaluated using three spheres, namely sphere of non-working time, leisure time and cross-cutting areas. The present contribution focuses on the analysis of these spheres and assessment of the quality of life of Slovak households after joining the EU in terms of changes in consumption. The aim of this paper is to create a picture of the formation of quality of life after joining the EU, while providing a prediction of possible developments in this area.

Keywords: Qquality of life, consumption, model of consumption, model of quality of life, spheres of quality of life

Introduction

The current quality of life of Slovak households is the result of a long-term process of creating socio-economic, social, political and other conditions in society. Slovakia is a country that has undergone in the past two decades significant political and economic changes, and these have a significant impact on the quality of life of our residents. The most significant

changes can be considered the transformation process, entering the EU and entering the EMU.

Transformation of the Slovak economy to a market economy started the process of significant stratification of our society, started the process of significant differentiation of Slovak households, though many of them have moved from the established forms of life and standard of status in low positions. Most of Slovakia's population got into such a socio-economic situation, which meant a significant reduction in quality of life.

Slovakia's entering the EU, the quality of life of our households began to be assessed and evaluated in wider European context, which indicated that the Slovak households by their standard of living and living standards lag far behind the developed countries of the EU. The integration process has created for us a path of shaping the quality of life in terms of copying, respectively approaching the trend in developed countries, where the level of quality of life is founded on the basis of technological innovation and higher economic performance is mainly influenced by the material level, which in these countries reflects a high degree of material security. This trend in Slovakia is not fully implementing, it takes place in differentiated and not planary, or even homogenized image.

Current quality of life of larger Slovak population is a compromise between a relatively small real possibilities and relatively large life aspirations and needs. Discrepancies between possibilities and aspirations are indeed getting smaller, which can be assessed as a positive phenomenon, but the structure of consumption and the level of quality of life for the greater part of our population lags far behind the developed countries.

Definition of the definition of quality of life

A systematic review of quality of life falls into the second half of the last century, when economists, sociologists and politicians started to show an interest in this concept. Snoek (2000) attributed the introduction of quality of life in professional discussions to Ordwayovi and Osborn, who used the term in 1953 in the context of highlighting the ecological dangers of unlimited economic growth [Snoek, FJ, 2000].

Great role in close attention to this concept played Galbraith that used quality of life as a counterweight to the explicit consumer orientation of American society, respectively as a counterbalance to mass consumption of abundant society in the 60s of last century, thus highlighting the importance of this concept [Galbraith, JK, 1967]. He responded to mass consumption, which diverts man from the activities contributing to his development and orients him to purposeless consumption.

Quality of life was at that time used in relation to the criticism of mass consumption but also in relation to the evolution of society, i.e. the

anticipated shift from materialist to post-materialist values and the search for meaning of life with self-reflection priority. In connection with the stages of economic growth of the society Rostow ideas are known, whereby after the stage of high mass consumption stage should follow a searching for a new quality of life [Rostow, WW, 1971]. The concept of quality of life in this context has not been fulfilled; considerations about the importance with focusing on content determination, however, continued and continue until now.

Although the debate about the meaning and content of this concept have their justification in theoretical and empirical area, by today has not sounded adequate response to mass consumption, in contrast with which was this phenomenon created as its positive alternative. This does not mean that the problem of mass consumption and its impact on quality of life in advanced economies does not exist. It has just acquired new forms and is accompanied by new challenges of today.

One of such challenges, we could consider a new concept of consumption, so called productive consumption, and its role in meeting the needs to develop personal and professional skills of a person. In this context, the productive components of consumption could play an important role in shaping the quality of life in terms of sustainable development of developed countries but also in terms of ensuring a certain level of quality of life for the rest of the world in order to that achieved quality of life could become a sign of a decent life for the entire population in the World.

With the deepening knowledge about quality of life and its diverse perception created a wide variety of content definition of quality of life from which we select several definitions ranging from subjective feelings of experiencing life to understanding the quality of life as a set of objective criteria for the life of an individual or of a social group.

In the broadest meaning quality of life can be defined as specific, achieved level domains of human life, which take into account important social values and goals. According to experts of WHO quality of life is defined as "the perception of one's own position in life in the context of culture and value judgments with regard to life goals, expectations, standards and concerns" [WHO QoL, 1997]. Quality of life is defined as individual perception of one's own life situation in relation to certain cultures, value systems, expectations.

Quality of life is often characterized as a multidimensional notion, because it captures the material, spiritual, cultural, social, political, family and other aspects of life, and also has its internal dimension. In this context, Massam indicates the quality of life as a product of the interplay between social, health, economic and environmental conditions that affect human and social development [Massam, BH, 2002].

Thirion understands the quality of life as a result of interrelated conditions which are fair and equal access to available social resources, recognition of human dignity, with recognition of diversity, personal and collective autonomy and responsible participation [Thirion, S., 2004].

By Tokárová quality of life can be established and interpreted by means of three groups of indicators (social indicators, economic indicators and indicators so called subjective psychological well-being (well-being) that apply to the respective sub-domains of quality of life and are connected by economic, socio-psychological, sociological, environmental and other bonds [Tokárová, A., 2005].

Laluha defines quality of life as historically contingent upon the level of life processes in which a person or society reproduces and develops its existence. This view comes from the fact that man is biosocial entity that has an (individual) structure of needs and value orientations [Laluha, I., 2008]. Since life processes (work, family, leisure activities, etc.) of every individual go on in specific opportunities and living conditions, which may be more or less favourable, very important part plays an active life attitude of a man.

Significant shift in opinions on the quality of life brought the Commission report on the measurement of economic performance and social progress by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, which speaks about the need for better interpretation of statistical data and indicators of quality of life. Quality of life is defined in terms of those aspects of life that make up human prosperity using available economic resources. According to these authors, quality of life depends on objective conditions and capabilities of people [Stiglitz, JE, Sen A, Fitoussi, JO, 2009].

Compendium of OECD about indicators of economic and social progress (2011) also deals with quality of life, according to which it is necessary to distinguish between material conditions and quality of life. Material conditions of life are seen as economic well-being and quality of life is defined as a set of non-financial non-monetary attributes of individuals that determine their life opportunities and life chances, and has its own value in different cultures and contexts.

At the OECD conference in Paris (October 2011) was presented the definition of quality of life through eight following dimensions: material well-being, health, education, personal activities, political opinion and governance, social relationships and boundaries, environmental conditions and personal and economic uncertainty.

Very close look at the dimensions of quality of life also applies Eurostat, which states the following structure: material standard of living, health, education, personal activities, political opinion and ruling power, social connections, environmental conditions, personal insecurity, economic uncertainty.

Although in the present structures of dimensions of quality of life we find some conformity of views, a problem and an open issue still remains scales and criteria for evaluation of each dimension in the overall model quality of life.

Currently there is no uniform opinion on the content of the concept of quality of life. Quality of life is still an abstract and complex concept which definition requires a multidisciplinary approach and the cooperation of several disciplines. Research in quality of life from the point of view of single sciences leads to the fact that the theoretical definition of that category, as well as chosen methods its examination are fundamentally different. Partial approaches to examination of the quality of life caused that quality of life has many interpretations, so that its content is not particularly clearly and uniformly defined.

Diversity of opinions on the definition of the quality of life and different methodological approaches to the quantification come mainly from the selected point of view in this category. Scientific studies offer different methods of examining the quality of life and its measurement tools. Their selection and use depends on the content of this concept, selected domains (dimensions, respectively components) quality of life, as well as the purpose to which the results will serve.

Quality of life and consumption

If the quality of life is linked with innovation and modernization of structure of needs, with the possibility of their saturation in society, it means that the quality of life is analyzed in terms of consumption. Examining the quality of life in the context of consumption has its historical and inner justification - from the 60s of the last century, the quality of life is associated with consumption.

Quality of life is perceived on the one hand as an expression of the desires of man for a better and fairer life, and on the other hand the consumption as its part and fulfilling. Although consumption is an important component and a natural part of quality of life, it cannot replace it. Between the consumption and quality of life operates very important, interact relationship. Consumption speaks not only of the degree of satiation of needs but its structure and level is an important factor in forming the quality of life. In terms of quality of life and achieving its effective forms should be the relationship between consumption and quality of life in a balanced relationship. Focusing only on material side of consumption as well as on trend towards purposeless consumption can be described as an adverse development.

The basis of the solution of mentioned relationship should be the achievement of such consumption patterns and quality of life contributing to

the achievement not only reproductive but mainly developing needs and human values. This trend in the real life activities of our households is not well contained. In certain extreme situations, for example in emergencies or wealth, consumption can perform distorting role. In general terms, the optimal condition is considered a functional balance between consumption and quality.

If we look at the quality of life through its five components, we are taking into account when examining the quality of life the needs, living conditions, social environment, value orientations and life activities [Laluha, I., 2008]. The starting point for any life process is particularly needs, from the satisfaction of which emerge impulses for the emergence of new needs of a diverse nature. Meeting needs is one of the main priorities of human existence but also the functioning of the economy. Achieved level of meeting needs speaks about the economic maturity of the society, standard of living of its individual members and also reflects in the quality of their lives.

In relation to quality of life, consumption is irreplaceable because it speaks about the material meet of the needs and desires of a man. Collating data on the quality of life of households in relation to their consumption creates an image of the existential quality of life. For this purpose, monetary expenditures of households are used, according to the basic spheres of lifestyle, i.e. in division into work time, leisure time and other expenditures [Holková, V., Laluha, I., 2009].

The structural composition of spending on leisure time is dominated by activities that are focused on meeting the basic material and reproductive needs. These consist of expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, clothing and footwear, housing, water, gas and electricity, furniture and household equipment as well as health. The second sphere of quality of life is leisure time generally seen as a time of day when a person pays its attention to matters of his choice and options in such activities, which contribute to its relaxation, self-realization and self-improvement. Expenditure patterns consist of recreation and culture, education, hotels, cafes and restaurants. The third sphere of quality of life is made of cross-sectional areas that are diffusing other activities overlapping spheres of living and contributing to the modernization of lifestyle. In terms of expenditures, this area comprises expenditures on transport, communications and various services.

On the basis of expenditures by those spheres quality of life we distinguish three models of consumer behaviour of our homes, namely economical, luxurious and restorative model of consumption [Holková, V., Laluha, I., 2009]. Majority of Slovak households is characterized by economical patterns of consumption and the resulting reproductive model of quality of life, which is aimed at meeting the basic needs and requirements,

is a manifestation of postponed consumer aspirations and lack of personal development of household's members. This model of consumption limits the improving of the quality of life of our households, evidenced by a relatively high proportion of expenditure on leisure time.

To measure the quality of life we have quite a large number of indicators, which have different explanatory value. The best known and most widely used indicator is the Human Development Index (HDI), which allows us to express the quality of life in a broader context, to monitor its objective side.

Another possibility is the assessment of quality of life is Happy Planet Index (HPI), which involves the measurement of the effectiveness of welfare level obtained per unit of environmental impact. It shows development of a country in the context of real ecological limits. Index contains three separate indicators, namely ecological footprint, life satisfaction and life expectancy. Increasing the value of HPI means that the country is able to use limited natural resources to the welfare of the people better. If the well-being of the country achieved high costs to the environment, HPI value is low.

Assumptions and starting points of improving the quality of life in Slovakia

One of the trends in changes in the quality of life in the long run could be the Slovak population trend to spread desired changes in consumption patterns, which would lead to an improvement in the quality of life and overall development of man, thus to the development of elemental and spiritual forces. Realistic prospect of fulfilling this trend is to create economic conditions that ensure dynamic growth in household income. Coming the trend true we could expect the following changes:

- reproduction model of quality of life will no longer be dominant, gradually elements of development model will be progressively expanded, the model that binds predominantly to the middle and upper part of the middle class,
- social basis of restorative consumption pattern will be narrower, part of the population will move into standby consumption model,
- social basis of prestigious and luxury models and consumer activities will broaden.

From the viewpoint of improving the quality of life, the formation of consumption should therefore take place that would contribute to meeting the material and spiritual needs in relations and structure leading to the development of creative potential of man, his self-realization and would contribute to its well-being and happiness.

A key prerequisite for this vision in area of the quality of life of the population of the Slovak Republic is in our opinion economic growth and increasing household incomes, which would lead to the creation of real material conditions for the gradual transfer of the population from reproductive model of quality of life and temporary preferences of the consumer trends to so-called development model of quality of life.

Focusing on the development model of quality of life also assumes:

- changes in value orientations,
- balance between materialist and post-materialist values,
- penetration of technology into everyday life activities and streamline the necessary non-working time,
- Changes in the scope and content of free time, increased spending on education and culture,
- rational healthy lifestyle,
- greening quality of life.

The interplay between these elements of quality of life is a motivational impulse for the momentum of the whole society. For the Slovak society, it follows that, despite various current assessment of its condition, it is able to adapt and incorporate into those transformations, because the current potential of quality of life for Slovak households creates the preconditions. That alone is not sufficient. For the practical realization of the trend of improving quality of life in terms of approaching the level of quality of life in developed EU countries is first necessary to substantially increase investment in science and research, to significantly increase investment in all forms of education, increased demands on human resources development and human capital in terms of global competition, which requires a comprehensive infrastructure improvement, which is everyday way of life of our population takes place.

Foregoing essays on improving the quality of life and the transition from the reproductive to the development model of quality of life based on the basic premise and dynamic economic growth which would enable growth of jobs, income growth, reducing social inequalities. In the selection of specific measures of economic and social policies aimed at ensuring the growth of the quality of life of our population, it is important to take into account the current state of the economy, financial and capital positions of our households as well as positive and negative expectations of the future development of the Slovak economy. Due to the global crisis and its negative impact on the Slovak economy, we can assume that the process of overall quality of life of our household is likely to be subdued for a transitional period.

Conclusion

Quality of life of Slovak society is essentially part of European civilization traditions, where humanistic traditions of the European model paved the way for multicultural coexistence. We can conclude that it is indeed in tune with the fundamentals of the European model of quality of life that applies and specifies the subtype of the variety, but in terms of comparing the level of quality of life among the developed countries of EU fails to meet the required expectations. This follows from our analysis, according to which expenses of Slovak household in unacceptably high level link to the sphere of non-working time. About 61% of total expenditures are spent on non-work time, reflecting high cost of meeting their basic needs. They spend only about 16% of total expenditures on leisure time activities. This means that the majority of Slovak households are located in the reproductive model of quality of life, which is a manifestation of protracted consumer aspirations and lack of personal development of members of our population. Meeting the needs of everyday life takes a lot of space, physically exhausts, so in the sphere of free time people are more oriented towards leisure and less intensive forms of time spending.

In the process of improving the quality of life we must consciously strive for trend of orientation on development model of quality of life of most of our households, focusing on the material and spiritual needs of contributing not only to satisfy the basic, respectively prestigious needs, but also to the improvement of a man and his way of life. Practical meet of this challenge implies change in the composition of spending of our households in the direction of significant reduction in expenditures on non-work time and increase expenditures on leisure time but primarily on cross-sectional areas. Quality of life cannot therefore be merely a reflection of changes in the economy, but has to itself by composition of life activities contribute to the development of human capital potential and thus contribute to the development of the economy.

Enhancing the quality of life for Slovakia is a challenge that must be associated with the need to settle complex socio-economic problems both at the micro as well as macro level. Our policy and practice yet pays this problematic issue little attention despite the fact that in the EU quality of life is declared as a criterion value of success of economic and social policies, serves as the target of economic development of the society, and has become a new challenge to ensure a dignified life for people in the EU.

Acknowledgment

This article is a part of research project VEGA 1/0431/16: Economic growth and social and environmental impacts.

This article is a part of research project VEGA 1/0393/16: The European Union in the post-crisis period - macroeconomic and microeconomic aspects

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