

# The evolution of the classical and contemporary concepts within the socio-economic approach to life quality

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**Svetlana GOROBIEVSCHI**

Doctor habilitate, University Professor,  
Dept. of Engineering and Industrial Management  
Technical University of Moldova

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**Abstract.** *The author describes the evolution of the concepts of Life Quality (LQ), which is perceived as a socio-economic category. Starting from the economic doctrines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then exposing the LQ concepts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author arrives at the contemporary concept of LQ, expressed by the degree of satisfaction degree and social cohesion. The complexity of the notion of LQ and the absence of a universally accepted definition motivates this scientific endeavour, which identifies the main theoretical approaches to the concept. Thereby, the components and features of LQ are presented at doctrinal level and, in particular, the contemporary concept of LQ expressed through social cohesion at the levels of the individual, community and the society as a whole. The consequences resulting from the pluralist approach of the concept of LQ are shown at the level of public policy, stressing the importance of considering the two dimensions – social inequality/exclusion and social relations/social ties – to offer a complex view on the human society.*

**Keywords:** *life quality, human needs, living standards, social cohesion, social exclusion, social ties.*

In the contemporary economy, many enterprises of the countries in transition face a scarcity of qualitative labour, which is caused by migration of the population, especially from the rural areas, characterise by a low level of living standards and low motivation of employees. Human development is in a close relationship not only with human rights and living standards but also with human security, gender equality, environmental sustainability, according to the Millennium Development Goals.

The Republic of Moldova economy makes no exception to this chapter. In the context of transitioning to the market economy, human resource ought to be brought forward. The clear majority of local economic units is trying to increase the efficiency of the company by reducing the costs, especially those related to the staff: salaries, training etc. Still, this is an outdated attitude in the management of the personnel.

According to the opinions of the following scientists: A. Balasa, E. Burduş, P. Burloiu, Gh. Căprărescu, I. Ignat, I. Mărginean, C. Zamfir et al.(Romania), A. Bîrcă, A. Cotelnic, T. Dăni, D. Moldovan, A. Rojco, G. Ulian, V. Zbârciog et al. (R. Moldova), D. Cenzo, A. Robbins, P. Stephen, P. Drucker, S. Kermally, E. Schein et al. (USA), the key factor of success of an investment in the enterprise is the man and managerial effort directed to this end. We agree with this opinion and recommend a careful selection of staff that would focus more on skills and personal qualities rather than on the presence or lack of the experience in the field [13; p. 65-68]. We would like to mention that the interest for the concept of *human life quality* (LQ) is a rather old one and representatives of different generations of specialists in various fields: economists and philosophers, sociologists, physicians, technicians, etc., sought to explain the essence of LQ from different points of view, in order to analyse mostly historical stages of formation of theoretical concepts bordering the notion of life quality.

Thus, M. Friedman, a Nobel laureate, being a defender of the human freedom, which is expressed by the phenomenon of the private market economy, ignored the need to achieve social justice and stability. He believed that, for

most people, human freedoms are simply unattainable, being reserved for specific groups of individuals. Friedman's concept has been applied in multiple countries, specifically in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Israel tacitly and partly in the US and England, but this failed to deliver the desired outcome [2, p.171-172].

The great ancient philosopher Aristotle in his work "Politics" wrote: "*True happiness of a human life lies in the free development of his talents.*", which is consistent with Goethe's statement from his work "Wilhelm Meister": "*Who is born with a talent, born for that talent, shall find in this the most beautiful form of existence.*" [paraphrased].

The representatives of the neoliberal school, including Friedrich von Hayek – Nobel Prize laureate in economics – emphasised the state's role in the economy and in the personal life of each individual. Friedrich von Hayek was committed to an active state within the rule of law, one that would create the legal framework for the competition between economic agents and provide the necessary services to the society, including public order, national defence etc. In this regard, he stated that "*A real competitive system requires, like any other system, an intelligently designed and continuously adjusted legal framework. Even the most essential conditions for its correct operation, the prevention of fraud represent a significant and by far not accomplished goal of the legislative activity*" [2, p. 168-169]. It states that freedom and the rule of law are fully compatible. According to the authors mentioned above, there is no incompatibility between freedoms, order in society and law enforcement [2].

If we follow the genesis and evolution of the human economy, we can observe that values have always been created by man for man and the only being, like many researchers appraised, endowed with rationality is the creator of everything on earth. Nowadays, profound transformations generated by the scientific-technical and ecological process and the emergence of new systems of economic activity undermine the pillars of the old economic system, transforming the life of the individual, family environment, business, politics, morality, placing the economy on the verge of the most

profound changes – on the trend of a sustainable economy that would ensure a decent standard of living and life quality. Let us examine some opinions of the contemporary scientists' on the concept of life quality. Here is how the distinguished Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1982) appreciated the human species:

*"There is an economic myth: if a man as an individual is mortal, the human species, however, is immortal"* [17, p.44]. So, one can tell that the *continuous* improvement of the labour resources, the system of education and training in correspondence with the requirements in economic development, could be a fundamental direction of the strategy aiming to strengthen the market economy of the Republic of Moldova.

Abraham Maslow carried numerous studies on the motivations of human behaviour. In 1943 he published the paper entitled "A Theory of Human Motivation", outlining the needs theory, known as the "Maslow's hierarchy of needs". The theory is valid today, with only a few changes and serves to understand the incentives and motivations behind human actions [19]. According to Maslow, we are all motivated by certain needs – an innate characteristic. The scholar shows this as a pyramid with five levels, dividing them into five categories: physiological needs, security needs, human needs for affiliation, appreciation needs and the needs related to self-realization [19, p. 370-376]. Needs are structured as a hierarchy in which their position depends on the degree of urgency and individual priorities. "*For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined very simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. (...) But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? At once other (and 'higher') needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hunger, dominate the organism.*" [19]

In Table 1 we have attempted to follow the development of the concept of life quality between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries using various research methods.

**Table 1.**  
**The evolution of approaches related to the concept of Life Quality between 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century**

*Source: elaborated by the author [12, p. 7-24]*

<b>Century</b>	<b>The developed concepts</b>	<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>XIX</i>	A. Marshall in his work "The Principles of Economics" (1890) – the role of the state in regulating the wealth of the nation through the tax system and subventions. The <i>theory of the knowledge society</i> .	The method of induction.	<i>Determination of the roles of the state in the economy</i>
<i>XX</i>	In 1960, the American sociologist A. Schlesinger approached the notion of LQ from the perspective of one's individual socio-psychological perceptions.	The method of analysis and synthesis.	<i>Life quality – a socio-psychological concept</i>
	J. K. Galbraith claims that there is no perfect society. There will always be differences between various groups of the population in terms of life quality. "What matters is not the number of goods we have but life quality".	The method of qualitative analysis.	<i>Welfare – recognised as a component of LQ</i>
	The futurist B. de Jouvenal in 1967 was researching the role of the society as a dominant factor in assuring the welfare of an individual.	The method of analysis and synthesis; The induction.	<i>Determination of the role of economic growth in assuring LQ</i>
	R. Schalock's model (1996) describes life quality as a product of the following components: Material welfare, interpersonal relationships, personal development, spiritual and physical wellbeing, social appurtenance, self-realization, freedom of rights.	The comparative method	<i>LQ seen a complex category based on the freedom of rights and the level of human happiness</i>
	The Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen elaborated the concept of the "Index of Human Development", which became the basis of a global ONU program with the aim of estimating this indicator.	Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the human factor	<i>The paradigm of human development as a factor in the economic growth</i>
<i>XXI</i>	In 2001, researchers from Toronto D. Rafael, R. Rebecca, I. Brown, T. Myerscough have studied the concept of life quality from the perspective of the endogenous factors: physical, psychical and spiritual dimensions of the human existence.	The method of deduction	<i>LQ as a socio-psychological concept</i>
	The Russian scientists I. Levada, J. Bestujev-Lada, N. Rimaşevskaia, V. Bobcow, N. Grigorieva, A. Subbeto, A. Vişnevskii, L. Zubova, T. Zaslavskaia have studied, between 2010-2015, the problem of evaluation and differentiation of life quality in various geographical regions of the Russian Federation perspectives of: human needs, minimal consumption basket, social exclusion problems, uncertainty of the economic growth etc.	The methods of deduction and induction	<i>LQ seen as a socio-economic category – the result of the fulfilment of the human needs</i>

XXI	In 2005, the Romanian researchers C. Zamfir, E. Zamfir, N. Lotreanu, I. Rebedeu, I. Marginean, G. Socol, A. Bălașa have defined the concept of <i>life quality</i> as the ensemble of physical, economic, social, cultural, political conditions of human life, the content and nature of the activities carried out by the individual, the characteristic of the social relationships and processes in which they are involved, the goods and services they have access to, the consumption models adopted, the lifestyle, the evaluation of the degree to which one's goals were accomplished, which causes the subjective states of satisfaction/unsatisfaction and happiness. [„Calitatea Vieții în România”, București, 2005].	The dialectical method	LQ seen as a socio-economic concept
	Between 1980-1992 the corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova A. Timuș has founded his research school in the field of <i>life quality</i> . During the transition period, A. Timuș and the UNESCO academician A. Cojuhari together with their disciples have carried out a series of researches on the level of life quality in the Republic of Moldova.	The dialectical method	LQ seen as a socio-economic concept
	In 2005 T. Danii, in his doctoral thesis on the subject of life quality, brings up the acute contradiction between the necessity of improving the life quality of the Moldovan population and the state's actual capability of ameliorating the socio-economic situation.	The comparative method	LQ seen as a socio-economic concept
	During the transition period, the National Institute for Economic Research, led by prof. A. Stratan, have carried out a series of research studies on the economic growth, welfare and life quality in the Republic of Moldova.	The complex method	LQ seen as a complex economic concept

Most contemporary scientists, representatives of the American and European schools - Bruno Hansen [14], János Kornai [18], I. Mărginean [20], C. Zamfir [27], G. Ranis, F. Stewart, A. Ramirez [22], R.L. Schalock [25] - recognize that living standards can be treated as the degree of realization of the human needs, which ultimately depends on the purchasing power of the population. Therefore, LQ expresses not only the degree to which population's needs are satisfied but also its interests and values in all the dimensions of life: physical, social and spiritual.

In the 1970s, when the theoretical concept of economic growth emerged, it turned out that economic growth cannot guarantee the

social and demographic development of a country, *life quality* becoming a priority field in the scientific research. The widespread use of the concept of *life quality* was determined by the recognition that social progress is strongly related to the complex social phenomena, from the perspective of the organisation and stratification of the human society [17, p. 3-44]. LQ remains a topic of research in Western Europe where the way in which one perceives *life quality* is studied because it has been found that there is no direct relationship between one's level of material wealth and his level of life satisfaction.

Starting from the opinions mentioned above, we believe there is a reciprocal

complementary relationship between the level of life quality perceived by an individual and his material welfare. The latter influences population's state of mind, which is subsequently reflected in its behaviour within various fields of human activity.

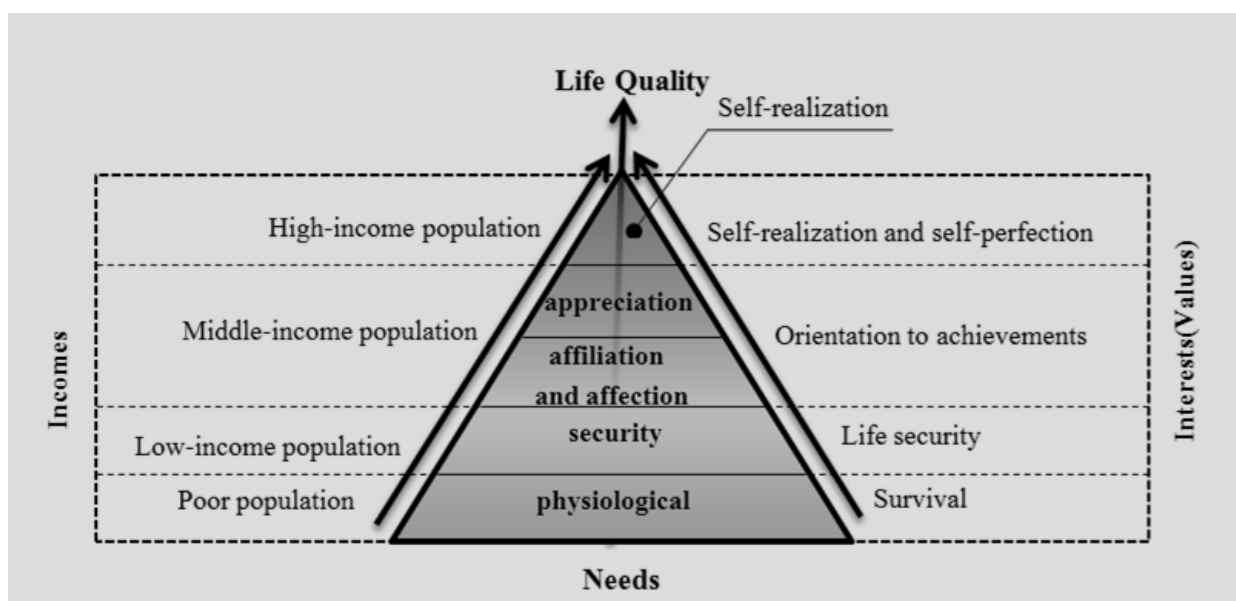
Already 30 years ago, the corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, N. Rimashevskaja stated that „*The standard of living, the lifestyle and the life quality - are outcomes of the social mechanism, which may partially intersect on different levels, but never find themselves in contradiction with each other.*” [29, p. 18]. We also agree with the Russian demographer A. Vishnevskii, who believes it is necessary to complement the macroeconomic indicators with elements that characterise the

human and demographic potential, the income levels and the population education levels, its predominant goals and values [30, p. 169].

We believe that the development of the human society in the social-economic aspect is a very complex multidimensional process that is expressed by the increase in the standards of living and life quality of the population. It is important to assess these indicators at the level of various social layers. One can perceive the development model of the human society through the systemic approach, which reflects the interdependencies between the living standard, fulfilment of the population's needs and life quality regardless of the country of origin, Figure 1.

**Figure 1.**  
**Model of interdependence between the living standards,**  
**fulfilment of population's needs and life quality.**

*Source: elaborated by author [11, p. 36]*



**Note:** The left side of the triangle characterises the standard of living based on income. The right side indicates the links between the human values (lifestyle) and the dominant behaviour of the individual. The motivational base of the triangle refers to the population's needs as determinants of the socio-economic activity. The dotted lines show levels of life quality for different social strata. The figure also illustrates the interdependence between population's living standards and their moral values, including the reasons for economic behaviour. The degree to which an individual is able to fulfil his needs and express his values in the society represents his level of life quality.

## Conclusions

Thereby, summarising the current approaches to the concept of life quality which have been formed over the period of two centuries using different research methods, we have attempted to identify the interrelationships between the psychological, social and economic factors determining life quality as a socio-economic concept as shown in Table 1. We believe that the priority needs of the poor social stratum, in most cases, are oriented towards survival; those of the stratum with a low level of income - towards assuring optimal life security; those of the middle-income population - towards the fulfilment of affiliation and affection needs; those of the high-income stratum - towards self-realization.

We also think that the indicators of the living standards and *life quality* are in a close interrelationship and they are representative of the entire range of biological, economic and social forms of behaviour of the individual in the society, including his potential to have a family life, his ability to take care of himself and his family.

Summing up the examined aspects, we arrive at the following conclusions:

1. The essence of the socio-economic concept of *life quality* derives from the dialectical law of the unity between the form and the content

expressed in the *life quality* paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paradigm reflects the dual role of the human factor: on one hand, humans - as a labour resource develop and apply their skills in the process of producing goods, while on the other hand, they are also consumers. Consequently, the concept of LQ can be identified as an element that reflects the equilibrium of the human factor.

2. The perceived *life quality* reflects the degree to which an individual is satisfied with his life, from the perspective of fulfilling his human needs through exerting a social role, through participating in the production process, through his involvement in social and family relationships, as well as his satisfaction with the level of material welfare provided by the state.
3. While the standard of living of an individual is characterised by the social, economic, political and ecological conditions offered to him in a state, his perceived *life quality* also implies his subjective level of satisfaction with his performance and achievements.
4. The development model of the human society can be perceived through the systemic approach, which reflects the interdependencies between the living standard, fulfilment of the population's needs and *life quality* regardless of the country of origin.

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