



## THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BAROMETER OF WELL-BEING IN MOROCCAN URBAN SPACES

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the determinants of well-being in urban spaces. Inspired by the urban marketing approach and based on the case of Moroccan big cities, our investigation attempts at analyzing the degree of compromise between quantitative variables and qualitative variables that make up the quality of life of Moroccan citizens;

The main lesson of our research lies in the fact that well-being, as perceived by Moroccan big cities residents, englobes several dimensions which should be broken down into items weighted according to their degree of importance.

**Key Words:** Barometer, well-being, Moroccan citizens.

### Introduction

Since the mid-1990s and above all since the announcement in 2011 of advanced regionalization project, the Moroccan regions have been awarded new missions to accomplish in order to meet new challenges. The present tendencies converge to confirm that the future of Morocco is in the region and that the unitary state is progressively yielding its position to the state of territorial organization.

The Moroccan weekly “La vie Economique” in collaboration with Valyans Consulting led a study on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2010 and found that the municipalities finance were surplus (accumulated in more than 25 billions in 2011) (Agoumi, 2011), which made a big contrast with the enormous need in terms of infrastructures and maintenance. To take advantage of this manna, we have to imagine projects, recruit visionary strategists and behave like marketers to

commercialize them. These strategists and marketers would know how to be good listeners to the citizen and meet perfectly his needs in terms of comfort and well-being.

But, still, we need to know what constitutes the major concern of Moroccan citizens. More precisely, we ask ourselves the following questions:

- What do we mean by comfort, well-being or quality of life?
- How can it be measured?
- What is the impact of cities size on the perception of comfort in Moroccan urban areas?
- What perception do Moroccans have of their cities?
- As well-being in urban zones is pluridimensional, what balance is there between its components?
- How can such perception direct local decision-makers in such a way as to meet the aspirations of citizens?

All these inquiries are focalized on the cities of Tangier, Casablanca and Meknes as they fit into the scheme of metropolisation and are positioned on different attributes to meet the desiderata of their respective inhabitants.

Our research is justified by academic, practical and methodological concerns:

Academically, we aim to lead a series of investigations on cities seen from a social, economic and managerial perspective.

Practically, we clearly hope that local officials will draw valuable lessons and even elaborate viable strategies of urban development.

Methodologically, we have focused our discussion on the construction of a barometer of well-being which can combine relevance (the barometer is composed of themes judged by the citizens themselves) and sustainability (the barometer captures the well-being of citizens of today and those of future generations).

Combining the above context, our questionings and the concerns of our research, it seemed to us imperative to adopt a scientific approach as rigorous as possible. In fact:

We started our work with a synthesis of the notion of well-being (or quality of life or comfort) as it belongs to disciplinary fields as diverse as territorial marketing, strategic management, and political and social sciences.

Then, we constructed a tool which allows to solidly measure the well-being of citizens in Moroccan big cities.

Finally, we have ensured that data collection and analysis obey the standards of scientific research preferring, initially, contacts and interviews with all stake-holders who can shed light on well-being in urban areas and, then, provide a grid that can cross the readings of international institutions, national official sources, press and the Moroccan citizens' own perception of their cities.

Thus, our research is structured as follows:

First, we will examine the meaning attributed by researchers, practitioners, international institutions and media to the notion of the quality of life.

Second, we will try to synthesize the different themes that have been capitalized over the years to measure the quality of life while questioning about the possibility to raise it as a solid and universal concept.

Third, after recalling our field approach in data collection and data analysis, we will explain the perception that Moroccan citizens hold of the quality of life they lead in urban areas.

## **1. Notion and measurement of the quality of life in urban areas**

In principle, the marketing addressed to residents targets two populations: residents on site and potential inhabitants of other regions (national or international) and who may be attracted by the city (Meyronin, 2008). However, in most cases, it is less intended for potential residents (who are at risk of unemployment and insecurity) than already established ones, striving to improve their quality of life. If the city stake-holders share the same urban space, they are so much plural (local authorities, citizens, interest groups, NGO, industrials, traders, state, governmental organizations, public and parapublic institutions, etc.) that their concerns diverge. The aim of this Section is to try and make a list of parameters which can measure the quality of life of urban space inhabitants. But, beforehand, it seems appropriate to trace a historical thread of the advent of the notion of life quality.

### **1.1 Meaning of quality of life**

Determining the life quality indicators remains a major concern from which academic research dealing with management and territorial development cannot be subtracted. It should be noted that such a determination is not mechanical. It remains an “approach” or a “perception often subjective which differs from one person to another and one space to another and whose “objectification” and, hence, “universalization” remains a difficult and perilous exercise. (Contrarily to OECD who would have hoped to establish an objective indicator, solid and universal of the quality of life).

The quality of life generates several indicators, the list of which continues to be powered (but with a kind of capitalization of existing indicators) over the years. There exist institutions, organisms and agencies at the national and international level which define the quality of life.

As life quality is defined through the indicators it involves, the definitions which have been attributed to it are distinguished by the nature of the variables chosen to reflect it. Nevertheless, the vocables used are as much diverse as the quality of life, well-being, comfort or happiness. From the point of view of urban marketing, two choices are made on the terminology: on the one hand, and in order to translate the quality of life, we talk a lot about attractiveness towards citizens. On the other hand, for the sake of its declination, we prefer either the notion of battery of indicators (for the follow-up of public policies), or the notion of dash board (in order

to remind of landmarks, to sensibilize, alert and above all take appropriate local decisions) (Degron, 2010). Americans, by inventing since the 1950s the concept “American best way of life”, prefer the term happiness in order to let the citizen himself appreciate it instead of scientists or politicians.

In what follows, we will be indifferent in using such or such term.

No one doubts the existence of a definition of the quality of life commonly accepted (WHOQOL group & Kuyken, 1995) among members of the scientific community across all the fields, though the term remains recurring and on a large scale, mainly in political speeches (Bech, 1987; Mercier & Filion, 1987; Spitzer, 1987). The definition attempts (how massive they are!) are to be sought more in the Anglo-Saxon tradition than in the francophone world since the dimensions which make up the quality of life are interpreted in French differently from English.

On the other hand, international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) tried to define the quality of life as “the perception that an individual has towards his place in the existence, in the context of the culture and the value system in which he lives, in relation to his objectives, expectations, norms and worries. It is about a wide conceptual field englobing in a complex manner the physical health of the person, his psychological state, his level of independence, his social relations, his personal beliefs and his relation with the specificities of his environment” (WHO, 1994). Anyway, the majority of theoreticians (Lepège, 2001; Rejesky, Mihalko, 2001), international institutions and press (Ipsos, 2008) underline the multidimensionality of the phenomenon in so far as the concept englobes not only the physical state, the mental balance, the environmental situation, but also the material ease.

The large bulk of literature developed in this respect subscribes in two complementary approaches, namely the approach linked to health and the approach attached to environment.

From an environmental situation perspective (Mercier, 1994), the quality of life meant a variety of standards of a comfortable life, which are supposed to be objective, such as the reduction of the number of offences and offenders, the reduction in pollution levels in terms of greenhouse gas, sound or visual pollution and the limitation of its extent, the increase in incomes and the multiplication of their sources, the broadening of the scope of material comfort, etc.

However, the different studies (Irwin & al., 1979) conducted in the field have quickly revealed two major findings that will dispel the strict objectivity of the quality of life.

First, there does not exist a strong correlation between objective standards and the daily happiness of citizens.

Second, there is not always a correlation between internal evaluation and external evaluation of the life quality of individuals.

Also, a new subjective reading imposes itself more and more in the measurement of the quality of life.

From a health perspective, we should say that the medical world was very rigid as to the overly strict assessment of well-being by pretending to measure it objectively by the number of diseases, functional disorders and the spectrum of sufferings of an individual. We had to wait for the nineteen seventies in order to integrate the notions of “state of health”, utility and social ties (Bergner & al., 1976; Shea & King-Farlow, 1976).

At the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, other notions such as mental capacities, freedom, independence, social skills, competencies (Katz, 1987), psychological distress (De Leval, 1987), stress (Sorensen, 1994), etc. became an integral part of the quality of life.

In brief, after having been concerned for long with the objective variables, the medical field largely adopts subjective variables. However, it still remains that it has been criticized for opting for expressions often with a negative connotation (sufferings, troubles, mental delay, psychological distress, depression, etc.) which would translate much more ill-being than well-being.

Whatever the measurement is, the quality of life is a strong argument for the attractiveness of territories, nourishing almost all speeches of leaders of local governance. We still need to know which messages they convey to the urban population.

## **1.2 Measuring the quality of life**

The list of life quality indicators widens increasingly, but for the sake of simplification, they are regrouped into relatively homogenous categories. For instance, in the rubric “equipments and infrastructures”, we can count the number of schools within a given area, the presence of a university, the number of hospitals, the presence of local public services, the number of urban transport and mobility, etc.

In spite of being numerous, the life quality indicators are defined according to rigorous methods such as unemployment rate, air pollution levels, rate of participation in elections, the number of sport or culture facilities, the average annual net salary, etc.

Being pluridimensional, the notion of life quality raises the issue of aggregation. At this level is raised the problem of weighting of the involved variables and their substitutability. These two questions are raised at two levels: intra and inter variables.

In France, the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi (commission Stiglitz, 2008) highlighted eight dimensions of life quality: material life conditions (income, wealth...); health; education; personal activities; participation in political life and governance; social ties and relations; environmental conditions; physical and economic insecurity.

The relevance of the measurement is guaranteed by a method called “vignettes” which allows citizens themselves to be the closest possible to the situations they are offered. The aim of this is not to influence the optimistic or the pessimistic character of the individual. This relevance is, moreover, supported by the fact that the life quality is both captured in its global sense and

declined in weighted and prioritized sub-indicators. The question of synthesizing and prioritization can be solved by proposing to citizens to weight by themselves the dimensions of life quality, which is what Canadians do (Commission Stiglitz, 2008). After they had put focus on the metropolises and had strongly associated the quality of life and the health of people (Sénécal & al., 2008), the barometer of life quality started from 2000s to open on, drawing on the approach of Richard Florida, new dimensions such as identity, culture, artists weight, tolerance (Florida, 2004)

By comparing countries to each other, we notice that the most frequent categories are: equipments and infrastructure; training, employment and incomes; environment, climatology and landforms; territorial planning; safety of persons and property, etc.

The big majority of international experiences in life quality were nourished by the spirit of “now and here” and rare are the countries (or exactly some of their cities) which made a link between today’s life quality and tomorrow’s one. Concretely, it was not until the 2000s that a new philosophy came to animate the leaders of the whole planet, namely sustainability (or sustainable development) which led to large corrections as to the meaning to give to life quality, by emphasizing the necessity to raise for future generations living conditions which are at least equal to those of current generations. In other words, today’s happiness should not make the misfortune of tomorrow. It is an approach by capital where stocks of resources (physical capital [such as production tools, buildings.], natural resources [arable land, mineral, energetic and fisheries resources, green spaces, forests and air quality, clean oceans], immaterial capital [Knowledge and techniques, morality, principles, conscience and civility]) and capacities that must be well reserved for future citizens (UNECE/ OECD/ Eurostat, 2008), although the future well-being of each region or each country is based on positive or negative externalities that would come from stake-holders belonging to other places (Isn’t it the case that global warming is caused by some whose harm is experienced by others located in very remote regions?)

Therefore, the sets of quality indicators are updated and are increasingly projected in the future. Better yet, countries (or regions) with more awareness of sustainability, not only integrate sustainable development in the measurement of quality of life but also give it more weight.

## **2-Perception of the quality of life in the Moroccan big cities: Case of Casablanca, Tangier and Meknes**

### **2.1 Objectives and methodology of research**

In 2011, the Moroccan weekly “La Vie Economique” (in collaboration with Valyans Consulting) established a barometer revolving around six themes (health [enumerated in terms of: number of hospital beds for 10 000 inhabitants, presence of a CHU (University Hospital Center), number of doctors for 10 000 inhabitants, number of paramedical staff for 10 000 inhabitants], education [enumerated in terms of: primary and secondary schooling, university students, success in baccalauréat], Climate and environment [enumerated in terms of: climate, proximity to sea, proximity to mountains, environment], culture[enumerated in terms of: cultural heritage, number

of movie screens, number of national and regional libraries, number of national or international festivals], housing [enumerated in terms of: housing availability, housing price, equipments] and social development [enumerated in terms of: human development index, security, poverty rate])

This model is based on purely quantitative criteria while distinguishing between big cities, medium cities and small ones.

It was promised that this ranking would be updated every year, but no other publication followed.

From our point of view, it is a highly commendable initiative because first it is a first in Morocco. Then, it borrowed a very rigorous approach and finally, dense and rich analyses are drawn. We reproach, however, to this initiative its strictly quantitative character, its static nature (since it does not integrate the sustainability of measurement criteria of well-being) and its purely descriptive analyses which do not sufficiently inform territorial managers about the measures to take and the actions to undertake. We add to the above remarks the institutional status of the majority of data sources. These sources do not make citizens express their perception of the quality of life they lead and are not updated. Their collected statistics give inadequate weight of subjective order. Therefore, we see it useful to nourish such a model.

Thus, our approach was to know the representations that Moroccan big cities dwellers make of their urban space the way it is experienced and interpreted by themselves, according to a survey conducted in relation to a sample of 160 citizens from the city of Tangier, 96 from Casablanca and 48 from Meknes. This sample is certainly weakly representative in the eyes of statisticians, but we wanted to conduct thorough investigations to get closer to the truth. Since urban services are coproduced between providers and users, we have decided to integrate the judgements of each of them. Concretely, and in order to preserve our neutrality, we proceeded by constructing several synthetic indicators made up of items that might be modified by the respondents.

## **2.2 Attempt at the elaboration of a barometer of well-being in Moroccan big urban spaces**

Eager to stick to the reality on the ground, our model of life quality measurement of citizens in Moroccan big cities is the fruit of:

- The literature concentrating on the notion of life quality.
- The study of some international experiences.
- The recommendation of the Stiglitz commission.
- The definitions and instructions of world institutions.

The exploratory research we conducted with residents of Moroccan big cities on the significance they have of the quality of life and the various composite sections.

Thus, we have conceived the quality of life according to the following grid:

### Grid of the quality of life in an urban context

Dimensions	Declinations
Wealth, human development and purchasing power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Economic dynamics</li> <li>. Index of human development</li> <li>. Cost of living</li> </ul>
Services to the population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Training institutions</li> <li>. Health institutions</li> <li>. Connection to basic services</li> </ul>
Housing, transport and urban fluidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Access to housing</li> <li>. Urban mobility</li> <li>. Territorial planning</li> </ul>
Climate, green spaces and pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Climatology and landforms</li> <li>. Green spaces</li> <li>. Sources of pollution</li> </ul>
Culture and sport activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Organization of festivals</li> <li>. Cinemas, cultural spaces</li> <li>. Sports fields and gyms</li> </ul>
Security concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Physical security</li> <li>. Property and heritage security</li> <li>. Economic security</li> </ul>
Local identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Feeling of pride</li> <li>. Tolerance</li> <li>. Citizenship</li> </ul>

### Conclusion

At the end of this research, since the urban services are co-produced between providers and users (the same can be said about responsibility which can only be shared between them), and following radical changes, in terms of challenges and promises, which are looming on the horizon of Moroccan big cities (Haut Commissariat au plan (HCP), 2004), our quality measurement grid would lose its usefulness if it is not involved in a dynamic approach. With time, it is called to be prioritized, purified or nourished.

Because the urban areas do not have the same size, the construction of this grid would probably be adjusted to the size of Moroccan cities.

The grid in question is not an end in itself. It would be fruitful to articulate at its construction the perception that citizens have about Moroccan big cities, by inviting them to “note” each of the variables which make up the quality of life in their urban spaces.

In parallel, our research provides food for thought for our regional and national institutes of statistics to insert in their investigations questions allowing to find out the perception that everyone has about the quality of life and one's preferences. Such institutes intervene in a periodical manner (after every ten years!), but our wish is to rather create a permanent observatory of quality of life at town halls (or urban communities) in order to study the degree of life satisfaction of citizens in their urban space. The ultimate goal is to reach a time when we can generate a public debate and build consensus on aspects of urban life quality while operating comparisons between individuals, the same individual over time, between cities of the same country and between countries.

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