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The Reform of the Quality of Life Indicators in the EU from the Perspective of Sustainable Development

Studia Philosophiae Christianae 51/1, 75-98

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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THE REFORM OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS IN THE EU FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

Abstract. The focus of this article is on the conformity of quality of life indicators reformed by the institutions of the European Union with the concept of sustainable development. The reform was launched in 2009 under the title *GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world*. The issue is presented from the perspective of conclusions drawn on the basis of philosophical analysis of the problems we need to solve in order to design the indicators adopted to sustainable development concept, such as defining quality of life, needs, objective and subjective quality of life measurements, existence of universal quality of life indicators (on the example of gross domestic product). In order to describe the tools used to perform the analysis, the issue of theoretical status of sustainable development philosophy is approached.

Keywords: sustainable development, philosophy of sustainable development, quality of life, quality of life indicators, needs, equity

1. Introduction. 2. Theoretical background of sustainable development philosophy. 3. Definition – quality of life. 4. Quality of life measures. 5. Sustainable development indicators and gross domestic product. 6. Conclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of life indicators are currently being reformed by the European Union institutions. The purpose of the reform is to adopt them better to the policies of the Union and those of individual Member States. The Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force on 1 May 1999, amended Article (7) of the Treaty on the European Union and recast Article 2 of the Treaty. As a result, the principle of sustainable development must be taken into account in the framework of any measures aiming at reinforcing cohesion and environmental protection, accomplishing internal market and promoting economic and social progress for the peoples of the European Union, including high level of employment and social security, sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of competitiveness and convergence of economic performance, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life.¹ Development plans and strategies of the UE were based on these provisions. However, the economic crisis, continuing already for five years, prevented pursuing further the targets specified in renewed Lisbon strategy (2005) and renewed sustainable development strategy of the EU (2006). Development plans and strategies were pushed aside by emergency measures urgently required by current situation. The term “sustainable” in connection with different names was downgraded to an empty slogan, while sustainable development lost much of its earlier impetus. That is why it is important to ask whether the reform of the indicators is compatible with sustainable development policy in the UE or not. Seeking the answer to this question, I will make reference to philosophical analyses carried out within the framework of sustainable development. In this article I am asking questions concerning the definition of “quality of life” concept, existential needs, the nature of the quality of life indicators, the scope of the set of these indicators and I am attempting to answer these questions in dual perspective. The first

¹ Treaty of Amsterdam Amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Related Acts, 1997, Official Journal C 340, 10 November 1997, Article 1, 2 [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11997D/htm/11997D.html>] (accessed: 08.11.2013).

one is defined by the concept of sustainable development. In this context the issues mentioned above are considered from the point of view of the solutions compatible with the concept of sustainable development. The other research perspective consists in evaluating the conformity of the proposals made by the EU institutions with earlier findings.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

In Poland the philosophers investigating the issue of sustainable development assume that sustainable development philosophy constitutes a part of ecophilosophy. Zbigniew Hull made an attempt at justifying this idea in his paper entitled *Ecophilosophy – its subject and scope* presented during the Ninth Polish Congress of Philosophy.² I do not agree with this point of view. I presented my position on this question in a separate article, where I attempted to present the arguments supporting the thesis that sustainable development philosophy constitutes a substantially separate part of political philosophy.³ There is no need to repeat what is argued in that article, apart from the arguments that are relevant in the context of the issue examined in this article.

Therefore, I shall start with the question of equity. This question is essential, as the reform of the quality of life indicators referred to in this article is aiming to develop a tool ensuring, generally speaking, the best conditions for socio-economic development of the EU Member States, i.e. economic growth in quantitative terms and social development in qualitative terms. On 17 June 2010, the European Council approved a long-term strategy entitled: *EUROPE 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. In the context of fighting the economic crisis, the strategy obviously insisted on economic growth targets,

² Z. Hull, *Ekofilozofia – przedmiot i pole problemowe*, Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria 83(2012)3, 235–248.

³ A. Papuziński, *Teoretyczny status filozofii zrównoważonego rozwoju*, w: *Filozofia – etyka – ekologia. Profesorowi Włodzimierzowi Tyburskiemu w darze*, red. P. Domeracki, A. Grzeleński, R. Wiśniewski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2015, 675–688.

despite the fact explicitly mentioned in the title of the document that the idea of utmost importance for this sustainable development strategy is implementing the principle of equity.⁴

That is because equity constitutes fundamental principle and the main problem of sustainable growth since the Report of the Brundtland Commission was adopted in 1987, which constituted the first comprehensive study concerning sustainable development and which defined this concept. The definition given in the report is very often referred to. Unfortunately, usually the reference is limited only to a part of it. However, the second sentence, very often omitted, is complementary to the basic part of the definition and has a very important role in the context of the issue investigated in this article. Most of all, because it emphasizes the importance of objective needs for the identification of sustainable nature of developmental processes. But also, because it provides for analytical requirement of taking into account the impact of technological, structural and ecological limitations on the extent to which the needs are satisfied. Sustainable development is defined in the Report as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of »needs«, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.”⁵

Although the notion of “equity” is not implicitly mentioned in this definition, the principle of intra- and intergenerational equity has been formulated by the Report. In the case of both of them, reference is made

⁴ Communication from the Commission *Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, European Commission, Brussels, 3.3.2010, COM(2010) 2020 final, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=pl&ihmlang=pl&lng1=pl,en&lng2=bg,cs,da,de,el,en,es,et,fi,fr,hu,it,lt,lv,mt,nl,pl,pt,ro,sk,sl,sv,&val=509103:cs>] (accessed: 14.11.2013)].

⁵ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*, 1987, Part I, No 2, [<http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>] (accessed: 14.11.2013)].

to objective needs. These principles are explicitly mentioned in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992 adopted towards the end of the First Earth Summit, which introduced the sustainable development conception into wide political practice, both local and international. According to Principle 3 of the Declaration: “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.”⁶

Now, coming back to the theoretical background of sustainable development philosophy, the key position of equity issue within the structure of issues having constitutive importance for the sustainable development concept, not only emphasizes the philosophical dimension of this theory, but also attributes theoretical status of political philosophy to the philosophy of sustainable development. However, there are also other important matters inherent to the sustainable development concept, which indicate such status of the philosophical sub-discipline discussed here, such as morality of politics, citizenship, accountability, individual rights versus collective rights, political community and finally – what is important for the issues discussed in this article – needs and desires perceived in the context of moral claims. From the point of view of philosophical analysis of the quality of life indicators, it is also important that equity is perceived in the sustainable development concept as closely integrated with the question of needs (desires, preferences).

Equity and needs constitute philosophical concepts, which receive much attention in contemporary political philosophy. That is what makes the task assumed by the philosophy of sustainable development easier. This task consists in building on the achievements of political philosophy by reference to specific issues covering broad and diverse topics determined by sustainable development issues.

As I mentioned in the article on justifying the thesis that sustainable development philosophy constitutes a distinctive, by its subject, part of political philosophy, there are two variations of sustainable development

⁶ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992, in: Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Annex I, [<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>] (accessed: 14.11.2013)].

philosophy: the normative and the reconstructive one (and in the framework of the reconstructive one – the ideational and critical one).

Firstly, sustainable development philosophy is a normative theory, which should provide assistance in changing the world. In this sense it constitutes – as characterized by Will Kymlicka – a moral argument, which consists in appealing to our reasonable convictions⁷, or the verification of theses as regards their strength and the cohesion of supporting arguments. The purpose of sustainable development philosophy as normative political philosophy is – according to Harry Brighouse – reaching the truth by assigning relative importance to different values in order to balance them and to decide which one should prevail and in what way it should be achieved.⁸

Thus, the sustainable development philosophy is political philosophy in practical terms, which consists in reconstructing the normative core of existing practices and its philosophical premises, on exploring the philosophical context of ideological projects focused on socio-economic policy, environmental protection and plans concerning political, economical and educational activities brought forward in the context of environmental crisis. However, in one case the purpose is to reconstruct the normative meaning of sustainable development policy based on fundamental documents in this area, as well as on the strategies, programmes, projects and analyses. This constitutes the reconstructive-ideational version of sustainable development philosophy. Yet, in the second case two tasks are accomplished. The first task relates to the reconstruction of normative meaning and philosophical premises of any philosophical concepts, ideological projects, political theories, documents, analyses, etc. aspiring to be labelled as having to do with sustainable development. The second task is aimed at evaluating the level of their consistence with the paradigmatic characteristics of sustainable development. This is what constitutes the reconstructive-ideational version of sustainable development philosophy.

⁷ W. Kymlicka, *Współczesna filozofia polityczna*, tłum. z ang. A. Pawelec, Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 2009.

⁸ H. Brighouse, *Sprawiedliwość*, tłum. z ang. S. Królak, Wydawnictwo Sic! s.c., Warszawa 2007, 15, 25.

The issue of the reform of the quality of life indicator in the European Union is presented from the perspective of normative variation of sustainable development philosophy. This implies that it will include and investigate philosophical arguments, based on which it will be possible to evaluate the direction towards which the reform is headed. Formulating the issue in such way will make it possible to make use of all political philosophy works, which concern the questions of fundamental importance for quality of life indicators, i.e.: equity and needs. These analyses will be complemented with the remarks made in terms of reconstructive and critical version of sustainable development philosophy with reference to the reform of indicators implemented by the EU institutions.

3. DEFINITION – QUALITY OF LIFE

According to Włodzimirz Tyburski the quality of life constitute the notion of key importance for sustainable development concept.⁹ However, defining its substance encounters serious difficulties. That is why in this article I am going to use the formal definition, following Tadeusz Borys, of the category “quality of life”, according to which it is “above all else the category into which fall all other qualities (...), which become in this way partial qualities explaining the nature of life and which constitute the basis for their evaluation”¹⁰. One of the advantages of the above definition is that it emphasizes the importance of the necessity to make reference to many different qualities – the qualities that are so important due to their capacity to explain the nature of life and that are useful in its evaluation. However, doubts may arise as to whether reference to the “nature of life” transfers the difficulties concerning material definition to the formal dimension of the “quality of life” issue and whether it replicates it. Actually, this might be the case.

⁹ W. Tyburski, *Zakończenie*, w: idem, *Zasady kształtowania postaw sprzyjających wdrażaniu zrównoważonego rozwoju*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, Toruń 2011, 283.

¹⁰ T. Borys, *Jakość życia jako integrujący rodzaj jakości*, w: *Jakość życia w perspektywie nauk humanistycznych, ekonomicznych i ekologii*, red. J. Tomczyk-Tołkacz, Jelenia Góra 2003, 10.

In philosophy there are numerous, separate views on the “nature of life” question, formulated on anthropocentric, biocentric or holistic grounds. That is why it is necessary to emphasize the limitations stemming already from the title of the article on the same question for the potential ways of presenting this issue. The issue of quality of life indicators, as applied, reformed and designed by the European Union, which constitute comparative measures in the area of international relations and sectorial policies of individual Member States, is presented below. Since all of these areas and kinds of policy are anthropocentric and, in other words, all of them are concerned with the quality of life, anthropocentric point of view constitutes an appropriate perspective for the analyses that are carried out and there is no need to go beyond its scope without changing the title of this article. Unfortunately, this is not where the difficulties connected with the meaning of the term “nature of life” end. Once we have found that the issue refers to the “human nature of life”, another difficult philosophical question arises. This question concerns man. The answers provided by contemporary philosophy include the belief that man is good in himself, the thesis that the essence of man is defined by the totality of social relationships, the view that man is an individual and the idea that man is reasonable egoist by his nature. However, the belief that all of them may have common denominator, considering that in one way or another – by affirmation, complementation, omission or partial negation – seems reasonable and it is connected with the first philosophical conception of man presented by Aristotle in his *Politics*. In classical terms of this ancient philosopher man is perceived as ζῷον πολιτικόν – *zoon politikon* – social animal. Apart from the finalistic dimension of Aristotelian approach to human nature, an important aspect of Aristotle’s definition is that it emphasizes the relation between nature and man, when he refers to man as animal and when he emphasizes the social aspect of human nature: man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either above humanity, or below it; he is the tribeless, lawless, hearthless one, whom Homer denounces — the outcast who is a lover of war; he may be

compared to a bird which flies alone.¹¹ In addition, the reference to the interpretation of notion *zoon politikon* by Otfried Höffe, which is based on identifying by the ancient of what is social with what is political – one may conclude on dual meaning of human nature social dimension and say that man is both social and political being. Man is a social animal, because he has to live together with others; the political one, because he wants to live well.¹²

What is important to the question investigated in this article, is the thesis made by Borys, according to which: “Reducing the correlation or changing its value (from positive to negative), between objective and subjective quality occurs particularly when comprehensive (global) quality of life is limited.”¹³ This statement may be considered in two situations.

The first situation refers to the interpretation of the “quality of life” concept with reference to “having”. The evaluation in such case is of objective character, i.e. it is not necessarily connected with the feelings of the entities it refers to. Most of all, it covers the areas and the characteristics of the individuals, which concern mainly the material aspects of their life, in particular the level of satisfying their needs such as: physiological, the quantity of collected material goods used and luxuries. The problem connected with the interpretation of the quality of life concept discussed here is implied by often significant divergences between evaluations based on such methodological approach and personal perception of the quality of life by individuals. One of its sources may be the “keep up with the Joneses” syndrome, where an individual compares himself with other people he knows, especially with those, who are doing better. However, more importantly, it may also result from the feeling of being underestimated due to the lack of satisfying relations with one’s social surrounding or the limitations imposed by external circumstances of the non-economic spheres of life. Another

¹¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, vol. 1, transl. B. Jowett, in: B. Jowett, *The Politics of Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1885, book I, chapter 2,5 (wyd. pol.: *Polityka*, w: idem, *Dziela wszystkie*, t. 1, tłum. z grec. S. Leśniak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003, 5).

¹² O. Höffe, *Sprawiedliwość polityczna: podstawy krytycznej filozofii prawa i państwa*, tłum. z niem. J. Marecki, Znak, Kraków 1999, 230.

¹³ T. Borys, op. cit., 10.

factor constitute statistical errors, connected with presenting average values, without taking into account actual distribution of value among different social groups and individuals. On the basis of the problems mentioned above, it may be concluded that where quality of life measures are based on economic measures, the divergence between objective and subjective quality may be quite significant.

The second case concerns defining the “quality of life” concept from the point of view of “being”. In this case the objective evaluation refers only to the areas and characteristics of human life, which relate to spiritual and social development. Among the values that are of significance here, we may include dignity, truth and beauty, but other ones as well, such as being free from state intervening into private life, the possibility of taking decisions which influence the principles regulating social life, freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, clean environment. Another, complementary question is the way the quality of life in terms of “love” is perceived. Of greatest importance here, are the interpersonal relations with family, friends, colleagues, love, affection, a feeling of safety and satisfaction. The data obtained on the basis of the indicators relating to such issues naturally reflect the objective and subjective aspect of quality of life like two sides of the same coin. That is why they constitute vital complement of strictly economic measures.

From philosophical point of view, the need to supplement economical data with the indicators connected with other spheres of life has been very well justified by Michael Sandel in his famous book published in 2012 *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. In his book Sandel does not make direct reference to the quality of life indicators, but he asks a question, very important from this point of view, concerning what such indicators may refer to. His work is of particular importance in the context of this question due to the fact that gross domestic product (GDP) has been used for many years as a universal quality of life indicator. In his attempt to defend other, non-market spheres of life from market dominance, Sandel's book may be understood as critical of the GDP monopoly and justification of other measures taking into account non-market areas of life. According to Sandel money repudiates all non-market standards from a given area of social reality and transforms the phenomena present within its framework in a way that is not desirable

for us.¹⁴ Why is that? Because the markets, by corrupting non-market values (goodness, ideals and standards) that are not worth protecting, lead to technocracy dominating democracy and assault equity.¹⁵

Another theory advocating the need to complement economic data with indicators connected with other, non-economic areas of life is the theory by Michael Walzer, in which the concept of difference plays an important part. Michael Walzer, an American communitarist, claims that the creation of differences is a major characteristic of modern history. On this basis, he brings forward a postulate, which has important implications for these areas of life, to which quality of life indicators should refer to as a source of obtaining information necessary for making reasoned political decisions. He insists on rejecting all contemporary theories of reasoned choice, which disregards or diminishes the importance of differences. The differences referred to in this article are implied by the division of social and individual activity among different practical areas. One of them is economy, another one – politics, religion or family. Each area is defined by its proper kind of goods, which is specific only for it and the rights it implies to accomplish the interests and capacities of an individual. That is why he considers that reducing one area to another one or reducing all areas to one of them would constitute as assault on man's freedom. According to Walzer, the society dominated by the market is an inequitable (repressive) society. Unjust societies make for simplified projects, since they hold forth the promise that success in winning one social good can be converted into general success – a triumphant parade through all the spheres. But this triumph can only be achieved at the expense of other people seeking other valued, but non-dominant goods.¹⁶ In brief, the market is not able to cope with the requirements of “total concept of freedom”.

The point of view of Sandel and Walzer are not isolated in contemporary philosophy. It goes well within the stream of culture criticism

¹⁴ M. Sandel, *Czego nie można kupić za pieniądze. Moralne granice rynku*, tłum. z ang. A. Chromik, T. Sikora, Kurhaus Publishing, Warszawa 2012, 113, 137–138.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 27–28, 137.

¹⁶ M. Walzer, *Moralne maksimum, moralne minimum*, tłum. z ang. J. Erbel, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2012, 43–44, 45–46.

represented by such contemporary philosophers as Hannah Arendt, Michael J. Oakeshott and Alasdair MacIntyre. All of the authors mentioned above share the view that each sphere of life has its characteristic and distinctive rationale, which constitutes different criteria of importance, evaluation, requirements and legitimacy. They share the view that transferring criteria from one sphere to another or considering all kinds of social reality within the framework of one sphere is wrong, both in theoretical and in practical terms and that in both cases it incurs losses for the society.

To sum up the remarks concerning the quality of life definition, it is worth mentioning that different qualities that are within the scope of this category must make reference to the basic dimension of human existence, i.e. to human life in biological terms, income and assets with purchasing power, as well as to the relationship to other (individual and collective) entities of social life in an attempt to live life that is a source of satisfaction. All this requires elaborating quality of life indicators embracing man's economic potential, his environment, access to health care, possibilities of development through access to education and culture, the sphere of independence from the state, participating in political life, freedom in accomplishing the projects of satisfactory life, relationship with family, friends, different kind of collectivities, etc. Thus, in order to elaborate the "quality of life" category embracing all other qualities defining the nature of life and the basis for its evaluation, we should aspire to integrate the qualities vested within the traditional categories of "having", "being" and "loving".

4. QUALITY OF LIFE MEASURES

However, such conclusion is not sufficient to bring this issue to a close. Determining, what the quality of life measures should refer to, does not bring anything into the question of the nature of such measures. In the research, so-called objective and subjective quality of life measures are applied.

Objective quality of life measures were adopted from the economy. The most commonly known one is GDP, which was elaborated back in 1930's to measure economic growth. Currently, it is being criticized. Its

numerous disadvantages are emphasized. What is important for the issue being investigated is that the citizens feel more and more separated from statistical data based on this indicator, since they experience growing disparity between the information on GDP growth and the decline of quality and quantity of public services.

Can we assume in this context that the time has come when we achieved objective quality of life measures? Rather not. Paraphrasing the ancient sceptics one may say that subjective quality of life measures carry the information on personal level of satisfaction with one's life, experienced by an individual on the basis of own evaluation criteria. Hence, the impossibility to translate them into an objective description of the quality of life of the society consisting of such individuals. Such measures may be significant for collecting the information useful when making promises before elections, but they are not appropriate for elaborating the programmes of economic growth and social development, which are needed. As regards contemporary philosophy, a number of arguments, which are nowadays used against utilitarianism may be also used against subjective quality of life measures, as both are concerned with satisfaction experienced at a specific moment because a need has been satisfied.

The position of utilitarianism concerning quality of life measurement on the basis of satisfaction experienced by an individual while satisfying their needs is based on Aristotelian theory of goodness, which was later developed in the framework of the duty-based ethics by Immanuel Kant and utilitarianism by Henry Sidgwick, who referred to Kant in his theory. According to this theory of goodness – based on preference – the individual good is dependent on what is the most rational and sustainable life-span plan, as long as the conditions for its achievement are favourable. It implies that the sensation of happiness is felt, when one is able to make such a plan effective. So, the goodness consists simply in satisfying reasoned desire. However, such theory of goodness was contested by John Rawls, who concluded that preferential theory of goodness may imply unacceptable results. His theory of goodness was elaborated in spite of utilitarianism, due to his conviction that utilitarianism implies for the social quality of life evaluation the preferences, which not equitable. His criticism of utilitarian theory

of goodness presented in the book *Theory of Justice* begins with the reconstruction of hidden meaning of this theory. We are to suppose, then, that each individual has a rational plan of life drawn up subject to the conditions that confront him.¹⁷ The following steps are based on analysing the value of this assumption. Rawls shares the view involved in this analysis concerning the rationality of man as subject to goodness, but he denies that any plan of life determined by the circumstances with which man is confronted may be deemed as rational. He assumes that society members are rational individuals, able to adapt their theories of goodness to their own situation, but this rationality is conditional on compliance with the principles of justice.¹⁸ What does it mean, actually? The answer to this question provided by Rawls is significant for the interpretation of data obtained on the basis of quality of life indicators. He claims that the participation of individuals in the pool of basic goods should be organized so as the growth experienced by some imply the improvement of the situation of everyone else who has less. According to this American philosopher, such solution leads to two conclusions, which should be deemed as significant from the perspective of the way in which the quality of life measures are established. First of all, it overrides the question concerning total satisfaction of the members of society and cancels the need to hold hedonist account of poor descriptive and explanatory value. Secondly, it leads to establishing publicly acknowledged and objective measure, which may be accepted by reasonable individuals.¹⁹ However, its price is the simplification of goods that are as a matter of fact desired by individuals, but – without risk inherent in such cases due to axiological constraints imposed by political institutions and the paternalism of cultural institutions – the gain includes a set of basic goods, comprising everything needed to accomplish one's plans.

The criticism of utilitarianism concerning quality of life measurement on the basis of satisfaction experienced by an individual while satisfying their needs led to the discrediting of the descriptive value of needs (preferences) and completed the dispute provoked by Rawls. There are

¹⁷ J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford UP, Oxford 1999, 81.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 82–83.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

different reservations made concerning the reference to needs in the framework of measuring the quality of life (well-being). The following issues are mostly emphasised:

1. a lack of sufficient information concerning the object of desire,
2. changes in individual preferences,
3. adaptational preferences,
4. selfish preferences based on prejudice.

The first three directions of criticism confirm the position of Rawls as regards considering such plans of life as irrational, which result from life circumstances as estimated by an individual, with which he considers himself confronted with, so without taking basic goods into account, that is to say without all that one needs in order to carry out one's plans.

The problem concerning the objectification of the subjective quality of life evaluation on the basis of one's needs is derived from the information, which determines the choice made by an individual. Due to insufficient information concerning the object of desire, very often it is impossible to estimate properly the actual needs. The claim made by Kymlick – Canadian philosopher, who promoted Rawls' theory – seems well founded. According to him, our desires do not determine what is good for us. It would be more appropriate to say that our desires constitute prediction concerning our goodness. However, it is not always easy to find what is worthy for us, as our predictions may be wrong.²⁰

Another problem concerning the objectification of the subjective quality of life evaluated on the basis of one's needs, results from the fact that satisfying one's needs is limited to current satisfaction felt "here and now" and does not necessarily result in future feeling of satisfaction. It is connected with long duration of human life, which constitutes the process of collecting different experiences. As people change in physical and psychical terms and they revise their desires, also something that once gave them satisfaction, another day may provoke discomfort or a sense of wasted time and effort. The disadvantages of the criticized approach are very well presented by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in *Faust*.

Another problem is the result of evaluating the quality of one's life from the perspective of adaptive preferences. The question of adaptive

²⁰ W. Kymlicka, op. cit., 31.

preferences may be better understood by reference to the *Experience Machine* by Robert Nozick, prominent libertarian philosopher. The situation is analogical. Also in the case of preferential desires the question refers to living life that is not authentic. The problem is that adaptive preferences substitute real preferences, which in specific circumstances are impossible to be achieved by an individual. In reference books it is emphasized that in its extreme case, the adaptation to the preferences that can be achieved by an individual result in the situation of a “satisfied slave”. A “satisfied slave” is someone who is able to adapt to the state of enslavement, having persuaded himself that he does not desire freedom.²¹

The existence of selfish preferences based on prejudice also confirms the position of Rawls and Nozick on the issue discussed, but in addition it shows that limiting the estimations to one’s personal situation, without taking into account basic goods, infringes the principles of justice. In other words, it distorts the result of the social outcome of the quality of life estimation by altering negative value into positive one. The selfish preferences are connected with the desire of having at one’s disposal the part of resources exceeding the one that is due. Yet, the preferences based on prejudice constitute a kind of external preferences, i.e. preferences, which refer to other people. Prejudice may result in preference for the situation resulting in limiting the goods, means or possibilities to which other individuals are entitled, such as limiting the access of women to managerial positions.

What is the conclusion one may reach? Certainly, on one hand, it is impossible to adjust objective measures to subjective sense of satisfaction everyone draws from life. On the other hand, one may not accept the situation, in which they will uncompromisingly go against general public opinion concerning the quality of life of most citizens. That is why it seems reasonable to develop the indicators which will refer to the spheres of life considered important by the society and which can be mutually adjusted with reference to basic goods – the goods which each individual must have in order to realize their own life plans without

²¹ R. Nozick, *Anarchia, państwo, utopia*, tłum. z ang. P. Maciejko, M. Szczubiałka, Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 1999, 61–64.

limiting the abilities of others to do the same. Correct quality of life indicators must be based on public consultations. Additional conclusion concerns the interpretation of the results obtained due to appropriate collection of quality of life indicators. Marcin Leźnicki is right when he emphasizes two advantages of objective approach to individual quality of life. Apart from focusing the research on the needs above individual ones, he classifies also as one of them the threshold value of satisfying the needs: “the value that defines the minimum and maximum value of satisfying one’s needs by an individual, while taking into account the capabilities (i.e. the efficiency) of the environment in which the individual will satisfy his needs. In other words, the claim of balancing, on the one hand, personal needs to be satisfied and, on the other hand, the level of environmental efficiency (including the environmental resources).”²² In this way he shows that objective measures are compatible with the claim expressed in the second sentence of the definition quoted above, which refers to sustainable development, the claim concerning taking the technological, political and environmental limitations into account when considering the level of satisfying one’s needs.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS AND GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

In an attempt to make the quality of life category operational, the sustainable development indicators are applied by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (CSO). They have not elaborated on the basis of public consultation, but they constitute a big step towards preparing a system of indicators, which relate to basic goods within the meaning specified above. In 2011, the CSO published a study titled *Sustainable development indicators for Poland*.²³ In the context of the issue presented in this

²² M. Leźnicki, *Jakość życia jako przedmiot badań naukowych i refleksji*, w: *Zasady kształtowania postaw sprzyjających wdrażaniu zrównowazanego rozwoju*, red. W. Tyburski, op. cit., 223.

²³ *Wskaźniki zrównowazanego rozwoju Polski*, GUS, Katowice 2011 [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcf/gus/oz_wskazniki_zrownowazanego_rozwoju_Polski_us_kat.pdf (accessed: 16.07.2013)].

article, it is important that the CSO study takes into account separate character of different spheres of social life. In accordance with common practice widely applied to the question of sustainable development at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the spheres are divided into four domains. Similarly to the document *Agenda 21* published after the Summit, four domains are taken into account: social, economic, environmental and institutional-political. Each domain is further subdivided into separate areas. The social domain includes 7 areas, the economic one – 5, environmental – 8, institutional-political – 4; the total of 24 areas. For each area a set of indicators was elaborated – a total of 76 indicators. There is no need to include the whole list of indicators in this article. What is important is something else. The analysis elaborated by CSO is symptomatic of the tendency to consider GDP as more than just economic indicator, i.e. as the quality of life measure.

The need to complement GDP with other measures was acknowledged by the institutions of the European Union. This decision goes back to the EU Sustainable Development Strategy of 2001. Another incentive was provided by the Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy of 2006. The most recent one: EUROPE 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of 2010. Also, the UN Human Development Index was warmly welcomed. Still, the efforts taken so far are considered as insufficient. By the decision of the European Council of 25 June 2013 concerning the position, which should be adopted by the European Union in the framework of EEA Joint Committee on amending Protocol 30 to EEA Agreement on specific provisions on the organization of cooperation in the field of statistics (2013/333/EU), in the period 2013–2017 a new statistical system will be implemented, based on sustainable development indicators.

The incentive to step up elaborating the indicators of sustainable development was provided by the crisis, which started in 2008. On 20 August 2009 the European Commission issued the Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament entitled: GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world. On the basis of this Communication, the European Parliament adopted its resolution of 8 June 2011 concerning GDP and beyond – Measuring

progress in a changing world.²⁴ As it is said in this resolution, efficient efforts to overcome the crisis are contingent on adopting new approach to the quality of life indicators. Point 2 of the resolution is very critical of the broad application of GDP made so far, stating that it is only the indicator used to measure production and has nothing to do with measuring such issues as: environmental sustainability, resource efficiency, social inclusion and social progress in general. In addition, it is emphasized that applying GDP may be misleading in the sense that ex. remedial measures following certain incidents such as accidents and natural disasters are treated as a benefit instead of a cost. Yet, point 4 calls for developing additional indicators for measuring social progress. It also encourages to develop clear and measurable indicators that take account of such problems as: climate change, biodiversity, resource efficiency and social inclusion, and that focus more closely on the household-level perspective, reflecting their income, consumption and wealth. Point 7 of the resolution underlines the need to measure quality of life in narrow sense – with regard to the societies. Taking into account factors such as health, education, culture, employment, housing, environmental conditions etc. is considered as necessary.

In conclusion, it may be confirmed that in its resolution the European Parliament considered it essential to broaden significantly the scope of the quality of life indicators used to perform the measurement, including by taking into account two types of phenomena connected with changes taking place in the world:

1. social and ecological achievements (ex. better social integration, accessibility and affordability of basic goods and services, education, public health);
2. failures (ex. increasing poverty, increasing criminality, decline of natural resources).

Another step forward at the path of developing the pragmatics of the quality of life indicators construction, called for by the philosophy

²⁴ European Parliament resolution of 8 June 2011 on GDP and beyond – Measuring progress in a changing world, 2011, (2010/2088(INI)) 2012/C 380 E/<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=en&ihtmlang=en&lng1=en,pl&lng2=bg,cs,da,d,e,el,en,es,et,fi,fr,hu,it,lt,lv,mt,nl,pl,pt,ro,sk,sl,sv,&val=692870:cs> (accessed: 4.11.2013)].

of sustainable development, is the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) of 21 June 2012 on *GDP and beyond – the involvement of civil society in choosing complementary indicators* (own-initiative opinion). As suggested already by the title of the opinion, EESC considered it necessary to take into account the results of public consultations in the framework of developing new indicators: “5.5.5 The EESC (...) is convinced that civil society can be involved in identifying indicators of well-being and progress through its active participation in both choosing political priorities and in selecting the information that is to be monitored”²⁵. The suggestion of involving the citizens into the activities carried out in this field is the answer to the results of public opinion poll indicating clearly that such development is supported by the majority, which is based on the idea of sustainable development rather than on economic growth. It was shown in the results of Eurobarometer carried out in 2008, in which point 2.3 made reference to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 20 August 2009.²⁶ According to Eurobarometer, over two thirds of the EU citizens believe that the development should be evaluated to the same extent on the basis of social, environmental and economic indicators. The survey indicated also that the mistrust towards statistical data has been significantly increasing in the societies where the survey was conducted. It is due to the fact that they experience growing disparity between the information on GDP growth and the decline of quality and quantity of public services.

Continuing further developments in the direction given by the European Commission on 20 August 2009 and by the resolution of the

²⁵ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on *GDP and beyond – the involvement of civil society in choosing complementary indicators* (own-initiative opinion) (2012/C 181/04), in: Official Journal of the European Union, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:181:0014:0020:EN:PDF> (accessed: 14.11.2013)].

²⁶ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament *GDP and beyond Measuring progress in a changing world*, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 20.8.2009, COM(2009) 433 final, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=en&ihtmlang=en&lng1=en,pl&lng2=bg,cs,da,de,el,en,es,et,fi,fr,hu,it,lt,lv,mt,nl,pl,pt,ro,sk,sl,sv,&val=499855:cs> (accessed: 15.04.2013)].

European Parliament of 8 June 2011, the EESC opinion made an attempt to define the well-being. The Members of this Committee, by overwhelming majority of votes, disapproved the identification of well-being with economic growth. In point 4.4.2. of the opinion, it was assumed that the prerequisite of actual well-being is „social well-being”. “Social well-being” was defined on the basis of the categories of “human well-being” and “ecosystem condition”. It was found that fair and sustainable social progress can be defined only once we take into account progress in this area. The issue of appropriate adjustment of overall result was also approached, by taking into account the disparities, as well as the inequalities “across and within societies or geographical regions and between generations.”²⁷ The claims brought forward by EESC are relevant to the discussion concerning basic assumption of the UE socio-economic policy, i.e. sustainable development. In addition, they tip the balance in favour of pragmatic interpretation of sustainable development against the conservative one.²⁸

6. CONCLUSION

The analyses pertaining to the normative variation of sustainable development philosophy provide the basis for developing propositions on the way in which the “quality of life” category is defined and on the suggested scope of the quality of life indicators.

As regards defining the notion of quality of life only in economic terms (“having”), it implies the conclusions concerning:

1. the reductionist nature of such approach;
2. the results of separating the quality of life from other (basic) goods important for social life and the principle of justice that are destructive for the society;
3. the downgrading of the human being to the level of a one-dimensional person.

²⁷ Opinion of the European Economic, op. cit.

²⁸ A. Papuziński, *Filozoficzne aspekty zrównoważonego rozwoju – wprowadzenie*, Problemy Ekorozwoju 1(2006)2, 25–32.

They constitute the basis and justification of the claim to complement the definition of the “quality of life” category with questions referring to the aspects of life that may be labelled with the notions of “being” and “loving”, that is to say by including in the research concerning the quality of life the diversity of different spheres of life and their rationality specific for their type only, which establishes diverse criteria of their importance, evaluation, requirements and legitimacy.

The philosophical analysis presented with regard to the collection of the quality of life indicators leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to:

1. complement the indicators with measures relating to non-economic (non-market) spheres of life;
2. ensure compliance of indicators with basic goods;
3. take into account the principle of correspondence between the indicators and the principles of justice;
4. apply objective quality of life measures based on the assumption that the spheres of life considered provide the possibility of statistical compliance with subjective evaluation of quality.

According to the analysis presented here, the implications of technological, political and ecological limitations for the level of satisfying the needs should be taken into account in developing the results of quality of life investigations.

The analyses performed from the point of view of reconstructive and critical philosophy of sustainable development show that the reform of the system of the quality of life indicators currently implemented by the institutions of the European Union is in compliance with the above claims and, as a result, is justified by sustainable development philosophy and compliant with sustainable development theory.

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