

URBAN PLANNING IN THE SERVICE OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF CITIZENS

Alex Deffner¹, Eva Psatha²

Abstract

With deep roots in the ancient Greek philosophy, the issue of well-being and quality of life (qol) has been steadily in the focal point of the modern philosophical thought since the 18th century. The improvement of qol, regardless the definition of the term, is considered to be a natural tendency of humankind, and a standard pursuit for human beings. Thus, what finally defines the level of the qol in a society is the adequacy of the living conditions. In this view, urban planning plays a critical role in the configuration of the collective level of the qol, since it interferes in the very core of the living conditions of people, which it actually targets with its actions. In fact, cities constitute the scene of everyday life for the 75% of the global population, shaping the environment for living. Thus, the effect of the city in the living conditions of citizens is something obvious. The form, the structure and the complex functions of the city determine significantly human functions as well: they determine the space and time of citizens with direct impacts on labor, health, rhythms of urban life (fast or slow), ‘discretionary’ time, leisure and interpersonal relations of citizens. For all the previous reasons, the improvement of the quality of urban life (qoul) can always be found among the targets or objectives of most urban planning projects, regardless the scale. From mega projects, which are considered to contribute to the competitiveness of cities, to minor regeneration projects, the amelioration of the qoul is always present as a causative factor. However, urban planning interventions often fail to succeed in this objective and sometimes even undermine (involuntary) the qoul. This ‘heretic’ induction is reflected on the environmental, socio-economic and structural problems of modern cities which (especially in Greece) usually tend to be attributed to the inadequacy, or even lack, of urban planning. However, they are often derived from wrong, or out of date, planning decisions endangering the sustainability of cities. This happens partly because the qol in general, and the qoul in particular, remain undefined terms – in spite of their continuous invocation – and the relation of the urban parameters to the qoul determinants is still confusing. And yet, qoul can only be defined on the basis of its determining factors, while referring to the living standards of all people, including the less favored citizens. In this paper, the main determinants of the qoul will be analysed, highlighting those factors which can be affected – or even configured – by urban planning. The empowerment, or the undermining, of the qoul determinants through time by urban planning initiatives will be discussed, with an emphasis on the contemporary era. Finally, urban policies contributing to the improvement of the qol of citizens will be proposed.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly, Pedion Areos, 38334, Volos, Greece - adefner@prd.uth.gr

² PhD Candidate, Department of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly, Pedion Areos, 38334, Volos, Greece - epsatha@uth.gr

1. Introduction

Urbanisation, either emerging as a result of social transformations, or as a consequence of productive restructuring, creates an unforeseen concentration of people in a limited urban space. The urgent demand for housing, which inevitably arises, and the attempt for maximum exploitation of the space available can lead to malfunctions and failures. These issues have come to be the focal point of urban planning over time, notably since the end of the 19th century (Bartetzky and Schalenberg, 2009a).

Focusing on contemporary cities, recent trends in urban planning and management, along with new urban policies, cause a realignment of people's perceptions and attitudes towards the city, when considered as a field of social activation and interaction. Current urban issues, such as environmental degradation, the amplification of social inequalities and their reflection on urban space, the depreciation and privatisation of public space, raise critical questions about the quality of life (qol) of the residents, which mainly concern the objectives and practices of urban planning.

The environment in general, and in this case the socio-economic environment defined by the city, although external to the individual, forms the context in which each person is placed and can organise his/her life, and in which groups of people act, interact and function collectively. On the basis of this theory, the individual characteristics of urban residents which can define their qol, are of great interpretative importance for urban function, while, on the other hand, information concerning the urban function directly influences people's everyday lives. In other words, the individuals in the city constitute dynamic entities that continuously interact with the urban environment (Maggino, 2006).

Under the previous perspective, the factors which determine people's satisfaction with their everyday life, their neighborhood and/or their city, are in direct relation with the determining factors for a person's subjective well-being and come under the wider objectives set by the quality of urban life (qoul) research.

In fact, satisfaction with home, neighbourhood and city partly depend on a number of variables, which are sometimes recorded by official procedures and are organised in systematic information resources, e.g. during the population census. They also depend to a significant extent on less-studied factors: factors which are usually ignored by urban policies. Such factors include home ownership, security, urban public transportation, quality of public space (with the condition of streets and pavements included) and the accessibility to green spaces (IDB, 2010).

The comprehension of the previous factors and the relationship between these factors and urban policies are of crucial importance in order for urban planning to remain focused. And the focal point of urban planning should be nothing more than the

amelioration of the living conditions for the city's residents and users. The complicated relationship between the qoul - in terms of its determining factors - and urban planning constitute the subject of the current paper.

2. Quality of one's life and quality of urban life

The most challenging issue when dealing with the qol evaluation concerns the specification of the determining factors. Although this issue has been the subject of theoretical research for many years and many different approaches can be found in the literature, the factors taken into account are far from being standard. The efforts to reach a commonly accepted set of determining factors are hindered by the underlying subjectivity of the concept, which also makes difficult to define the term.

A basic distinction to be made concerns the level of examination: the individual or the collective level. Qol in a community or a city cannot be considered as the average qol level of the residents. For example, even if the residents of a city evaluate their own qol as high, this finding does not imply directly that the city is characterised by a high qoul level. There are many factors which can determine a person's qol without spatial reflection (e.g. state of health or marital status). There are also spatial factors which play an important role for the qoul, which are not usually considered when evaluating subjective well-being (e.g. the weather conditions). However, when examining the qol in cities we have to start from the subjective well-being of the citizens.

Although defining the qol determinants is a difficult task, many scholars from various disciplines have undertaken it, either by asking people directly about their perceptions (as in European reports about the qol of European citizens), or by setting them in advance in an objective and quantifiable way (e.g. the WHO studies), in order to confront directly the issues of subjectivity.

From the first attempt to record and measure qol on a large scale that took place in Scandinavia during the 70's (Comparative Welfare for Scandinavia, 1972), various researchers have dealt with the qol determinants. Cummins (1996), Diener and Lucas (2000), Frey and Stutzer (2000), Verlet and Devos (2009) are among those who have proposed different sets of factors for evaluating qol at the personal level.

The recent findings of the 'Second European QOL Survey', which evaluates subjective well-being in all European countries, are of special interest, as it is a collective work based on a large-scale project. This research has used the overall satisfaction with life as the basic index for evaluating the qol, while recording important personal characteristics and different aspects of everyday life of the interviewees, in order to highlight those which play an important role (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010). Findings of this research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors which influence an individual's QOL

<i>Order of significance</i>	<i>Life Domain</i>	<i>Relative Facets</i>
1	Financial status	Income Material well-being/lifestyle deprivation Employment
2	Health	Age Health status/disability Social support
3	Employment status	Employment Unemployment Retirement
4	Education	Education Level
5	Marital status	Marriage Divorce Widowhood
6	Practical/moral support	Family Friends Institutions
7	Public Services	Quality of services Accessibility

Source: 'Second European Quality of Life Survey', 2010 (own elaboration)

After concentrating and organising the different variables which emerge in the literature as qol determining factors, in order to decide in the qoul determinants, Psatha et al have proposed the qol determining factors which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. QOL Determinants

<i>s/n</i>	<i>Main QOL Determining Factors</i>	<i>Facets incorporated in the main factors</i>
1	Physical health	Energy, absence of pain
2	Mental health and psychology	Positive feelings, trust in myself
3	Happiness, self-esteem, self-actualisation	Emotional well-being, spiritual well-being, challenges, prestige
4	Family environment and personal relationships	Marital status, giving and earning love and tenderness, understanding and solidarity
5	Social relationships and friendship	Friends, being needed, interpersonal relationships, understanding and solidarity
6	Income	Material well-being, financial sources
7	Employment	Productivity, unemployment, Satisfaction with one's job
8	Education and lifelong learning	Level of education, personal development
9	Distinctive time and Leisure	Recreation, humour, relaxation, leisure opportunities
10	Security and tranquility	
11	Freedom and variety of options	Challenges, capabilities
12	Social Inclusion	Position in the community or society, social participation
13	Factors concerning the wider environment	Satisfaction with the neighbourhood, housing, natural environment, political situation, public services, etc.

Source: Psatha et al, 2011

When it comes to a city's residents, the factors classified in row 13 concern mainly the neighbourhood and the wider urban environment. These factors are the focus of the next chapters.

3. Determining factors for the qoul

Qoul has to do with the capabilities and chances offered to the city residents in order to obtain a good personal qol. Thus, those cities which cultivate the factors in Table 2 are the most probable to be characterised by a high qol level. The level of achievement of these factors in the city level largely depends on infrastructures and urban planning (Psatha et al, 2011).

An individual's qol determinants can lead to the most important qoul determining factors. These include health services, urban green spaces and recreation areas, quality of urban environment, employment opportunities, social networks, education opportunities, leisure resources, urban crime and socio-economic structure (Psatha et al, 2011).

There are also further issues which influence the qoul. These include circulation conditions, the level of efficiency of public services (which was highlighted by the 'Second European Quality of Life Survey'), the quality of public space (which is

mentioned by many scholars and researchers as a critical factor for the QOUL) and less obvious issues such as the weather, the accessibility of public spaces particularly for disabled people, and the social infrastructures for vulnerable groups.

One of the most important issues concerns urban green spaces, whose role vis-a-vis the qoul has extensively been proved by many researchers. There is a plethora of references for the documentation of the positive relationship between green spaces and the qol in cities. Most of them originate from health sciences (Morris, 2003; Pretty et al., 2005) but references from urban economics (e.g Mansfield et al., 2005; Arvanitidis et al 2009), urban planning (e.g. Swanwick et al., 2003; Lake et al., 2010) and environmental disciplines (Bird, 2007) can also be found.

Circulation conditions and accessibility of urban facilities can have an equally important impact on the qoul, since they formulate the number of alternatives and capabilities a city can offer to its residents concerning housing, employment and leisure. They can change the time balance and everyday life of citizens in many ways (Cramer et al., 2004; Nuvollati, 2009).

After having projected the qol determinants from the personal level onto the city level, Psatha et al evaluated and incorporated the significant factors that can be found in the literature, proposing a set of 12 categories that constitute qoul determinants suitable for European cities. See Table 3.

Table 3. General categories of QOUL determinants for European cities

<p><i>Economic Environment</i></p> <p>Employment opportunities, employment structure, average income and income distribution, living costs, etc.</p>	<p><i>Social Environment</i></p> <p>Crime, social inequalities, social exclusion, networks and infrastructures</p>
<p><i>Natural Environment</i></p> <p>Air quality, water resources, waste management, suburban natural environment, accessibility to areas of natural beauty, weather and climate</p>	<p><i>Built environment</i></p> <p>Building density, housing conditions, public monumental buildings, building stock, neighbourhoods, etc.</p>
<p><i>Urban and suburban green spaces</i></p> <p>Total area and rate per resident, condition, allocation, accessibility, usage, etc.</p>	<p><i>Public spaces –Public buildings</i></p> <p>Area, quality, condition and maintenance, accessibility, visiting rates, etc.</p>
<p><i>Culture - Leisure</i></p> <p>Cultural resources, tourism infrastructures, recreation areas, leisure activities, entertainment capabilities, cultural life, available choices</p>	<p><i>Demographic data</i></p> <p>Marital and family status of adults, age rates, level of education</p>
<p><i>Education</i></p> <p>Education units, quality and maintenance, attendance per education level, private schools, etc.</p>	<p><i>Health care</i></p> <p>Health services, accessibility, social welfare for the disadvantaged, etc.</p>
<p><i>Democratic Institutions</i></p> <p>Democratic regime, election of local government, voting rates, etc.</p>	<p><i>Traffic and transportation</i></p> <p>Traffic conditions, parking spaces, efficiency of public transportation and level of transportation services, accessibility of districts</p>

Source: Psatha et al, 2011

4. Quality of urban space and quality of urban life

As previously mentioned, probably the most highlighted issue of urban space relating to the qoul concerns urban green and open spaces. From this central premise, other side issues arise, concerning the adequacy, the accessibility, the quality and the condition of green spaces and also of the urban public space in general. These issues also emerge in the literature as qoul determinants (Beck, 2009; Minton, 2009; United Nations - HSP, 2011). The importance of the quality of the urban space extends to the economic function of the city. It seems that well designed and well maintained public spaces of high quality can attract business and touristic activities, enhancing the competitive profile of a city (Rogerson, 1999; Florida, 2002; Psatha and Deffner, 2012). In addition, well maintained public spaces assign a positive value in the hosting cities, from a social, economic and environmental aspect. According to CABE Space (a U.K. consulting organisation on public space issues), public spaces

of high quality generate positive economic values in the long term. They are actually considered to be a unique case of public infrastructure, offering many benefits to the city (Beck, 2009).

On the contrary, abandoned or inadequately maintained public spaces have a strong negative impact on their neighbourhoods, as they provoke antisocial behavior, further vandalism and delinquency. This kind of public space disperses the impression of a decadent urban area, which repulses potential residents and investors (CABE Space, 2005a). When public spaces are characterised by a low quality level, they are used by neighbours only out of necessity, for the necessary activities (e.g walking in the street under sufferance in order to go to the bus stop but never going for a walk), leading to deteriorating social isolation. On the contrary, well tended public spaces cause several social activities, giving the impetus for more sophisticated and fruitful social interaction (Gehl, 2008). Thus, the presence of the appropriate public spaces contributes to the generation of powerful and long-lasting local communities in the city (CABE Space, 2005b).

Despite the importance of public spaces in the city, their neglect is a common occurrence in European cities. However, the regeneration, amelioration and adequacy of public space are also a matter of equity. It is usually the less privileged communities that suffer from a low quality public space (Beck, 2009).

In general, the aesthetics of a city has been proven to affect the residents' satisfaction of the urban area and the economic performance of the city. The aesthetics of urban space in combination with economic and social factors form a strong impact on the city, while it also acts individually as a determinant for the satisfaction of the neighbourhood (Widger, 1982; Florida et al, 2011).

For all these reasons, European Ministers responsible for urban development consider the creation and good maintenance of urban public spaces as a critical factor for the enhancement of the attractiveness of the European cities (European Commission, 2009):

Public spaces play an important role in the living environment of urban populations and can attract industry, businesses, tourism and workforces. Being a mix of architecture, infrastructure planning and urban planning, high-quality public spaces should be understood as 'the sum of all the cultural, economic, technological, social and ecological aspects influencing the quality and process of planning and construction.

Focusing on the spatial level of the neighbourhood, it has been found that the latter plays a critical role in the satisfaction with life level for urban residents, participating by 10% in the formulation of the relevant perceptions. The spatial characteristics of the neighbourhood play the most prominent role in the levels of the overall satisfaction, compared with the neighbours or the relationships with them (Verlet and Devos, 2009). This finding is compatible with the conclusions of previous research, according to which satisfaction with the neighborhood correlates strongly with the

overall quality of one's life, regardless of personal factors (e.g marital status, age or education level).

Satisfaction with the neighbourhood and its impact on the qol, passes through the social networking and the fear of urban crime (Adams, 1992; Rojas, 2010). Additionally, when residents are well integrated into their neighbourhood community, they have a better perception of their neighbourhood and they enjoy a higher qol (Baldassare, 1982).

The extent to which urban planning interferes with the satisfaction about the neighborhood, has been a subject of research for many years. Wirth was the first to propose a model according to which neighbourhoods with high density and population levels suffer from isolation and social unrest which undermine directly the qoul, in contradiction with the old and homogeneous communities on a smaller scale (Wirth 1938, as referred by Baldassare, 1982; Adams, 1992; Parkes et al, 2002). This old hypothesis has also been proven, more recently (Adams, 1992), and is usually referred as: the 'Wirthian approach'.

According to other researchers, however, satisfaction with the neighbourhood depends less on the urban characteristics and more in the social inclusion of the individual. Relatives, friends and the opportunity for social interaction are the main determinants. Under this perspective, people who live in urban areas with high population density are not inferior to satisfaction with their neighbourhood, under the condition that they have obtained an adequate social networking (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974 as referred by Parkes et al, 2002).

In conclusion, despite the acknowledgment of the importance that satisfaction with the neighbourhood has for the qol, there isn't yet a commonly accepted theoretical background as far as the determining factors for this satisfaction is concerned. The most important difficulty lies on the existing correlation between the neighbourhood characteristics and the socio-economic ones. The underlying social segregation that exists in different extents in most cities causes the characterisation of urban residential areas, according to the social or income profile of the average resident.

The question relating to the factors that can determine the urban residents' satisfaction with neighbourhood and urban life, although critical for planning and policymaking, is not adequately answered by existing research, because of the large number of and differences between the factors that are taken into account and between the population samples used. There are, however, some common findings. The fear of crime, for example, is always the most prominent factor for the satisfaction with the neighbourhood (Adams, 1992; Rojas, 2010; Parkes et al, 2002).

5. The role of urban policies and urban planning to the qoul

5.1 New urban policies vs the qoul

Public open spaces have always been considered as a medium for the improvement of the living conditions in cities. The availability of public spaces helps interpersonal relationships to develop, enhancing the social capital of urban areas. Thus, their provision had been a target point for local governments for many decades. Cities used to 'proudly' promote the use of public spaces and urban residents used to incorporate this use in their daily routine, converting public space into a field for social participation and interaction. However, recently cities tend to pursue the privatisation of public spaces (Muehlman, 2005).

Recreation places are increasingly considered as commodities that can be exploited on the basis of their economic potential, rather than facilities which can enhance the qol at large (Lloyd and Auld, 2011). Pursuing economic development, however, cannot always guarantee the maximisation of qol for all residents. The increasing commercialisation and privatisation of urban public spaces led to the attraction of those people who can afford– and are willing to pay– to visit them and for obtaining the leisure experiences offered, while for many residents the access remains problematic or even impossible (Crane, 2000 as referred by Lloyd and Auld, 2011).

Security against crime along with cleanliness are usually the rationale for 'developing' extensive urban areas, mainly in former industrial or degraded entities. Malls and residential complexes emerging in those cases display cleanliness and safety as their major benefits in their attempt to attract the potential buyers and users of the new places (Minton, 2009). Private common spaces, however, can contribute to the degradation of the public character of open spaces, through the limitation of social interaction, the restrictions on free access and the exclusion of certain groups of residents (Nemeth and Schmidt, 2011).

Another issue related to the previous urban policies, concerns the competence of urban governments. In many cities, especially in the U.K. and the U.S.A., the 'traditional' responsibilities of local governments (e.g cleaning services and the maintenance of public spaces) have been transferred to the private sector, raising serious issues concerning the quality of services and the function of democratic institutions. The new urban policies include the concession of local tax management on private companies which undertake regeneration projects in the city centres in order to enhance commercialism. The relevant policies are often criticised for the kind of the public spaces they generate, as the only citizens to be acceptable are the potential clients, while the other residents are eventually excluded (Minton, 2009).

Picture 1. Homeless shelter in San Diego³.



Source: <http://www.kpbs.org/news>. Photo by Ana Tintocalis.

Although regeneration projects beautify the degraded areas and can bring them back to the scene of economic urban activity, their contribution to the goal is not straightforward. In regenerated urban areas, homeless people are undesirable and they are usually kept away by several policies, including regulations for specific areas, which prohibit begging and sleeping or loitering in public places (U.S National Coalition for the Homeless, 2012). There are references to the fact that in New York, after the regeneration of the central but degraded areas of the 90's, 100,000 homeless people had to move to other areas, away from the centre. This phenomenon was repeated in other U.S. cities, such as San Diego, where a specialised camp was created on the city's outskirts (Smith, 1999).

5.2 The role of urban planning

Many scholars have examined and documented how urban planning affects the ways in which people use public spaces. Different urban forms can play different roles in the structure of the public-private relations within the cities. This is predictable, because public spaces from their origination and design are composed by factors which act as limits between functions, directly affecting their own use and social exploitation.

³ The homeless population in the area has reached 9,800 individuals in 2011, according to The Regional Task Force on the Homeless (<http://www.utsandiego.com/>)

Whyte has discerned some design characteristics which encourage the concentration of people in the public spaces. The qualities related to the natural environment (sun, water and vegetation) come first, as they can beautify and soften the built environment. Important factors for the attraction of people are food sites, sitting facilities and resting areas. Art of various types (e.g. sculptures, or street artists) can also be important. Other factors are those characteristics which affect the attraction of people to the surrounding area, including parking facilities, commercial or business activities and public services (Whyte, 1980).

The planning and design of public spaces plays an important role in the social interaction in cities, as public spaces shape the capabilities for audiovisual contact and meeting together, providing a motivation for social communication (Gehl, 2008). Meeting a neighbour, a colleague or even a stranger in a public space (street, park or square), contributes to closer social relationships and intensifies the social bonds, while it offers the chance for motivations and inspiration (Lloyd and Auld, 2011). The simplest form of social interaction, just seeing and listening to other people seems to remain the most important attraction of public spaces for all (Gehl, 2008).

The attraction of people to the public space, however, relates directly to the matter of safety. As Jacobs has pointed out, vivid and crowded streets seem to be, and actually are, safer than over-guarded streets. On the contrary, in places where order is obtained through the police instead of people's presence, this order is fragile (Jacobs, 1961).

These fifty-year-old remarks remain timely and can still be applied in cases of city centres like in Athens. Having followed a concentrating model of urban development, Athens has faced a city centre on the saturation line, during the 80s. The problems of congestion and air pollution were in part assigned to the over-concentration of activities and public services in the city centre (Prevelakis, 2002). The issue of decentralising ministries and public services to other city areas is coming to the scene from time to time. Nowadays, however, although the relative proposals have only been applied in part (e.g the Ministry of Education and several university buildings were relocated), there is a serious skepticism concerning the purposefulness of these policies. The population mixture and land uses have dramatically changed since the 80s, so keeping public services and ministries in town is often countered as a measure against the degradation of urban areas which used to be vivid, although it can contribute to the coveted presence of citizens in the streets only during the working hours (White Paper for Governance, 2012; www.cityofathens.gr; <http://www.tovima.gr>).

The current phenomenon of gated communities also is also linked with the issue of safety. Behind the development and promotion of this trend lies the depreciation of public space and the prevalence of fear in the urban domain, as urban residents pursue to 'hide' behind walls in order to feel safe (Atkinson & Flint, 2004).

Picture 2: Omonoia Square⁴



Source: <http://athensville.blogspot.com>

Although gated communities are supposed to enhance the feeling of security, which is important to subjective well-being and the quality of one's life, in fact, their very existence discloses the feelings of fear which dominate urban life in many cities, something that acts as a degrading factor for the soul. In addition, those communities could worsen urban crime, because they enhance and highlight the existing social inequalities and the rivalry between the social classes in the city (Gadecki and Smigiel, 2009). The recent case (February, 2012) of the American teenager who was shot dead by a gated community's guard, shaking the U.S. population's perceptions

⁴ Omonoia Square and the streets around remain unfrequented in the evening, despite the recent enlightenment projects. The most centralised square of Athens used to be crowded all day long in previous years.

concerning the purposefulness of this residential arrangement, has tragically confirmed the relevant skepticism.

Picture 3: The entrance of a typical gated community in a U.S City.



Source: <http://massurban.tumblr.com>. Photo by Mark Winfrey

6. Conclusions

Recent trends in urban planning and urban policies redefine the function of the city as a dynamic complex of constant social interaction, while the relations between urban residents and the city are reconsidered. But as cities form the scenery for the everyday life of billions of people worldwide, both current urban issues and the attempts of planning to confront them have a major impact on the citizens' qol. Issues such as the quality of the urban environment, the available green spaces, public spaces, crime and circulation conditions along with the corresponding urban policies, do not simply affect qol of a city's residents, they can actually define it.

Regarding qol, one the most challenging issues for the relevant research concerns the specification and the definition of the term. This procedure mainly depends on the selection of the most appropriate determining factors. Although there have been many notable attempts to scientifically define and systematically study qol, including the suggestion of various sets of determining factors, there isn't yet one commonly

accepted composite index. This indeterminacy is reflected at the city level, concerning also the qoul, for which the determinants are not standard either. On the other hand, there are also many urban parameters which by common consent influence the qoul, undoubtedly forming the major relevant determining factors. These include the socio-economic characteristics, the quality of the urban environment, urban green spaces, recreation resources, public spaces and crime.

Among the previous factors, one of the most important but on the same time often neglected ones, concerns the quality of the urban environment and more specifically the quality and accessibility of public spaces. Current urban practices and the relevant types of urban space have controversial impacts on the qoul. Either because social transformations are some times faster than policymaking and the application of policies, or because the applied policies often target specific groups of the population, neglecting others, there are cases where planning interventions undermine, instead of advancing, the qoul. New policies for town centres, management policies for public spaces and the phenomenon of residential development through gated communities, are among such cases.

Better comprehension of the issues related to the qoul and unequivocally establishing the determining factors of the latter can be the key to avoid biased or ill-targeted interventions and possible urban policy failures, in order for urban planning to remain well-focused on the constant amelioration of living conditions in the city for all residents.

References

Adams, R. E. (1992), 'Is happiness a home in the suburbs?' *Journal of Community Psychology*, 20, pp. 353-372.

Arvanitidis, P., Lalenis, K., Petrakos, G., Psycharis, I. (2009) 'Economic aspects of urban green space: A survey of perceptions and attitudes', *International Journal of Environmental Technology and Management*, 11(1/2/3), pp. 143-168.

Atkinson, R. and Flint, J. (2004), "Fortress UK? Gated Communities, the Spatial Revolt of the Elites and Time-Space Trajectories of Segregation", *Housing Studies* 19(6), pp. 875-892.

Baldassare, M. (1982), 'The effects of neighborhood density and social controls on resident satisfaction', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 23, pp. 95-105.

Bartetzky A., Schalenberg, M. (2009a) (eds) *Urban Planning and the Pursuit of Happiness*, Berlin: Jovis Diskurs.

Bartetzky A., Schalenberg, M. (2009b) 'Shapes of Happiness' in Bartetzky, and Schalenberg, (eds), pp. 7-17.

Beck, H. (2009) 'Linking the quality of public spaces to quality of life', *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 2(3), pp. 240-248.

Bird, W. (2007) *Natural Thinking*, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. [online] Available at: <<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/health/>> [Accessed 30 April 2012].

CABE Space (2005a) *Decent Parks? Decent Behaviour? The Link Between the Quality of Parks and User Behaviour*. London: CABE Space. [online] Available at: <<http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/decent-parks-decent-behaviour.pdf>> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

CABE Space (2005b). *Does Money Grow on Trees?*. London: CABE Space. [online] Available at: <<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/does-money-grow-on-trees.pdf>> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

Cramer, V., Torgersen, S. and Kringler, E. (2004) 'Quality of Life in a City: The Effect of Population Density', *Social Indicators Research*, 69, pp. 103-116.

Crane, P. (2000), 'Young People and Public Space: Developing inclusive policy and practice', *Scottish Youth Issues Journal* 1(1), pp. 105-124.

Cummins, R. (1996), 'The domains of life satisfaction: An attempt to order chaos', *Social Indicators Research*, 38, pp. 303-332.

Diener, E. and Lucas, R.E. (2000), 'Explaining Differences in Societal Levels of Happiness: relative standards, need fulfillment, culture and evaluation theory', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1, pp. 41-78.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Regional Policy (2009), *Promoting Sustainable Urban Development in Europe. Achievements and Opportunities*. [online] Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/presenta/urban2009/urban2009_en.pdf> [Accessed 27 February 2012].

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2010) 'Subjective well-being in Europe: Second European Quality of Life Survey', Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. [online] Available at: <<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/108/en/1/EF09108EN.pdf>> [Accessed 27 February 2012].

Florida, R. (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York: Basic Books.

Florida, R., Mellander, C. and Stolarick, K. (2011), 'Beautiful Places: The Role of Perceived Aesthetic Beauty in Community Satisfaction', *Regional Studies*, 45(1), pp. 33-48.

Frey, B., Stutzer, A. (2002), *Happiness and Economics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gadecki, S. and Smigiel, C. (2009) 'A Paradise behind Gates and Walls', in Bartetzky and Schalenberg (eds), pp. 81-86.

Gehl, J. (2008), *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, Washington DC: Island Press.

IDB [Inter-American Development Bank] (2008), *Beyond facts: understanding quality of life*. [online] Available at: <www.iadb.org/pub> [Accessed 30 April 2012].

Jacobs, J. (1961/1993), *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, London: Pimlico.

Kasarda, D., Janowitz, M. (1974), 'Community attachment in mass society', *American Sociological Review*, 39, pp. 328-339.

Lake, A., Townshend, T., Alvanides, S. (2010), *Obesogenic Environment*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Lloyd, K. and Auld, C. (2011), 'Leisure, Public Space and Quality of Life in the Urban Environment', *Urban Policy and Research*, 21(4), pp. 339-356.

Maggino, F. (2006), 'Perception and evaluation of the Quality of Life in Florence, Italy', in Sirgy et al (eds), pp. 75-126.

Mansfield, C., Pattanayak, K. S., McDow, W., McDonald, R. and Halpin, H. (2005) 'Shades of Green: Measuring the value of urban forests in the housing market', *Journal of Forest Economics*, 11, pp. 177-199.

Minton, A. (2009) *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in Twenty-First Century*, London: Penguin Books.

Morris, N. (2003) 'Health, Well-Being and Open Space', Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University. [online] Available at: <<http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/pdf/healthwellbeing.pdf>> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

Muehlman, R. (2005) 'Privatization of Public Space', University of Virginia School of Architecture, Discussion Paper. [online] Available at: <www.arch.virginia.edu/~dlp/pab/work/rmuehlman/> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

Németh J, Schmidt S. (2011), 'The privatization of public space: modeling and measuring publicness', *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 38(1), 5-23.

Nuvolati, G. (2009) 'Quality of Life in Cities: A Question of Mobility and Accessibility', in Moller, V. and Huschka, D. (eds) *Quality of Life and the Millennium Challenge*, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 177-191.

Parkes, A., Kearns, A. and Atkinson, R. (2002) 'What makes people dissatisfied with their neighbourhoods?' *Urban Studies*, 39(13), pp. 2413-2439.

Pretty, J., Peacock, J., Sellens, M., Griffin, M. (2005), 'The mental and physical health outcomes of green exercise', *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 15(5), pp. 319-337.

Prevelakis, G. (2002), 'Metropolitan Planning in Greece: The case of Athens, Aeihoros 1(1), available at: <http://www.aeihoros.gr/article/el/o-itropolitikos-sxedias-os-stin-ellada-h-periptosi-tis-athinas> (in Greek)

Psatha, E. and Deffner, A. (2012), 'Quality of urban life and city competitiveness. Compatible or incompatible concepts?' *Proceedings of the 1st Panhellenic Conference of Place Marketing and Place Branding. (CD-ROM)*

Psatha, E., Deffner, A., Psycharis, Y. (2011), 'Defining the Quality of urban life: which factors should be considered?', *Proceedings of the 51st European Congress of the European Regional Science Association. (CD-ROM)*

Rogerson, R., (1999) 'Quality of Life and City Competitiveness', *Urban Studies*, 36(5-6), pp. 969-985.

Rojas, E. (2010), *Building Cities. Neighbourhood Upgrading and Urban Quality of Life*, International Development Bank.

Sirgy, M.J., Rahtz, D. and Swain, D. (eds), (2006), *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases II*, The Netherlands: Springer.

Smith, N. (1999) 'Which New Urbanism? New York City and the Revanchist 1990's', in Beauregard, R., Body-Gendrot, S. (eds), *The Urban Moment: Cosmopolitan Essays on the Late 20th Century City*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 98-105.

Swanwick, C., Dunnett, N. and Woolley, H. (2003) 'Nature, Role and Value of Green Space in Towns and Cities: An Overview', *Built Environment*, 29(2), pp. 144-156.

United Nations – HSP [Human Settlements Programme] (2011), Draft resolution on sustainable urban development through access to quality urban public spaces.

[online] Available at:

<http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/9771_1_593694.pdf> [Accessed 12 March 2012].

U.S National Coalition for the Homeless (2012), ‘A Dream Denied:

The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities’. [online] Available at:

<<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/crimreport/meanestcities.html>> [Accessed 2 May 2012].

Verlet, D. and Devos, C (2009) ‘The Main Determinants for Subjective Well-Being: A Quest for the Holy Grail?’, in Moller, V. and Huschka, D. (eds) Quality of Life and the Millennium Challenge, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 193-219.

White Paper for Governance (2012). [online] Available at:

<http://www.opengov.gr/minreform/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/01/lefki_vivlos.pdf> [Accessed 2 May 2012]. (in Greek)

Whyte, W. (1980) The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. Washington: The Conservation Foundation.

Widgery, R. (1982) ‘Satisfaction with the quality of urban life: a predictive model’, American Journal of Community Psychology, 10, pp. 37-48.

Wirth, L. (1938), ‘Urbanism as a way of life’, American Journal of Sociology, 44, pp. 1-24.

Internet Resources

<http://www.utsandiego.com/>

<http://www.kpbs.org/news/2010/mar/31/san-diego-winter-homeless-shelter-closing/>

www.cityofathens.gr

<http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=435177>

<http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=441042>

<http://athensville.blogspot.com>

<http://massurban.tumblr.com>