

THE ROMANIAN SOCIAL MODEL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POPULATION'S QUALITY OF LIFE³⁾

Ioan Mărginean – University of Bucharest

The quality of life perspective is used to define the social model as a descriptive concept which is focused a people with their needs. The author argues for a social model in Romania like in EU countries characterized by social solidarity and cohesion.

The simple enunciation of the expression “Romanian social model” draws different reactions both due to the polysemy of “model” and to the association made in that particular expression. Indeed, there are multiple reactions, some of them diametrically opposed: from a strong scepticism according to which there could be no Romanian social model, to attitudes of acceptance materialized either in approaching the subject in the strict meaning of the term “model”, such as a success, an example, for instance, or simply considering the general (weak) meaning of the term of system structure (pattern), the Romanian social model in our situation.

As far as I am concerned, I joined the latter option. I will use the expression “Romanian social model” in a **descriptive conceptual** meaning, highlighting its traits. On this background, comparisons can be done with the social systems of other societies, with their strong or weak points, or directions of evolution can be tracked down followed by possible recommendations of public action which are to ensure both the specificity and the compatibility (harmonization) with the situation existing in EU member states and with concerns for transformation.

In order to cope with the requirements of a social pattern analysis, I used the perspective of the **quality of life**, considering its multiple possibilities in society analysis, just because it focuses on **people with their needs and expectations from life, on how can the people appropriate the conditions required to assert in society.**

Quality of life research focuses, mainly, on social, economic and political targets, but not only, which are traced both at the individual and global level. These targets are not imposed from the outside, more precisely, they must not be invented by researchers or by a given political authority, because they

³⁾ This study is a modified form of the communication presented in the seminary “Romanian social model”, I.Q.L., June, 2004.

develop within the human interaction. Therefore, there cannot be an individual initiative, or an election and governing platform of a group, but all this can contribute to the development of the public agenda and to the establishment of joint targets that are thereafter transposed into a set of **objective and subjective social indicators** (I. Mărginean, A. Bălașa, coord. 2002). Thus, I consider that many of the shortcomings specific to other approaches of the social pattern can be avoided, such as approaches narrowed to ethics, or on the contrary, highly technical, or subordinated to various, highly personalized, political-ideological viewpoints, therefore with little chance of drawing the support of the collectivities. Indeed, many attempts try, in normative and abstract manners, to impose what has to be done in one segment or another of the human life so as to fulfil doubtful, unrealistic and even fictional requirements, ignoring the specificity of the social, which is **built by the people and which is only natural to be for the people**.

Without insisting further I must say that the concept of “sustainable development” doesn’t lack such traps, just due to the attempts to introduce external criteria. Other concepts, such as “economic and social development”, “human development” are much more relevant for the topic of discussion than the term of “sustainable development”. Furthermore, it is suggested by this concept that there might also be a “unsustainable development”, which would cancel the idea of development, because it takes place (if it exists) only as sustainable development, at least for a period of time. It remains to be seen how long that period might be because what has been achieved as development at a particular moment will not last forever. Premises for future developments are developed by successive accumulations. The example of the developed countries is eloquent. Despite the difficulties they encountered, once the Industrial revolution started and after the solution of World War Two conflicts, they were “condemned” to development, at least within the current historical trend. Although world conferences on development were organized and support programs for the poor countries have been developed, they proved to be insufficient and the lag widens. This is why the statement “sustainable development” is the adequate translation for the phenomenon involved here: consistent, not single-sided, development.

The idea of “sustainable development” makes sense particularly in warning on global dangers and in emphasizing the requirement for a proper management of the resources and for preventing environmental degradation, areas in which the responsibility of the wealthy societies is particularly high. This concept tells us very little, however, on what happens at the individual, group, community level, of the countries take individually.

In fact, the elements of the sustainable development, as those of the general social-economic development, are included in the quality of life paradigm, considering the every day life of the people, the inter human

relations, their odds for assertion in life, the created resources and the access to them, peoples' expectations, the agenda of the public policies, etc. Indeed, the social indicators depict the targets of the programs for sustainable development provided they are formulated in an operational manner.

The working manner specific to the quality of life paradigm consists in getting social information from various sources regarding the state of the society, of its collectivities and individuals. The economic, social, cultural, political activities of the society are covered. The manner in which the people perceive the state of facts, their expectations, their state of satisfaction/dissatisfaction concerning their life etc., are determined by questioning. It is admitted here that one and the same value of a state of facts can be evaluated in a different manner by people having different interests and expectations, the same as different values of the state of facts may be evaluated identically. The evaluations, the states of satisfaction or dissatisfaction do not change the values of the state of facts, but they display the social significance of the state of facts. All this information is used to develop diagnoses of the current situation and prognoses for the expected evolutions, possibly to crystallize strategies of action in order to secure the expected values in the future. A distinct and very relevant perspective on the social results thus. The significance of these surveys exceeds the reference to external normative criteria (although they can be presented for the purpose of comparison) and it also exceeds the individual expectations or the states of public opinion (they are important too, and analysed by quality of life surveys) and they become relevant to characterizing the type of society, its social model.

During the past three decades, the domain of the quality of life became of a major formal interest within the EU. Such an example is the **2001-2004 program for quality of life survey and monitoring** (T. Fahey *et al.*, "Monitoring Quality of Life in Europe", 2003. See the presentation made in nr. 2-4/2004 of the Journal of Quality of Life) started by the European Foundation for the Improvement of the Life and Working Conditions (established in 1975, headquarters in Dublin, Republic of Ireland). This program includes the concerns for quality of life on EU agenda both as research approach and as objective of public policy.

Indeed, as the authors of the cited paper show, **quality of life monitoring surveys the resources and opportunities existing in the society, as well as the life conditions required in order to have access to resources and opportunities**. These are both individual and collective resources: education, health care, dwelling and social services, opportunities for the population, choices that were made and their outcome.

By such an approach, the subject of *quality of life* is connected to many areas of a major interest such as welfare, human development, social capital, quality of the society, social exclusion/inclusion. **It is not only about the**

results, because they are not affected by the different choices of the people, but also about the capacity of getting those results, of the existing opportunities, about the constraints in the different domains where the people act. It results thus the potentiality of the paradigm to reveal the changes in the society and the causal processes, the trends and prospective changes, its potentiality to make descriptions and predictions concerning the social model.

All this requires a comprehensive definition of the quality of life approach which, inherently, is a descriptive one, such as the one promoted by the surveys conducted within IQL: the assembly of the elements concerning the physical **conditions**, the economic, social, cultural, political, health **state** of the people, the **features** of the relations and the **social processes** in which they participate, the goods and services to which they have access, the **consumption patterns** they adopted, the **life style, assessment of the circumstances and of the results** of the people's activity, the **subjective states** of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, happiness, frustration, etc. In turn, the social indicators, as elements that depict the traits of the social phenomena and processes, are instruments of the practical action. When the social indicators are developed, both the information (knowledge) and the organization and management requirements at a given level of the social structure, from small collectivities to a whole nation, are considered. (I. Mărginean, A. Bălașa, coord. 2002).

As far as I am concerned, 14 years ago (Journal of Quality of Life nr. 3-4/1991), starting from the achievements in the field synthesised in the paper "Social Indicators" (ed. R. Bauer, 1966) and considering the further developments such as the "Indicators and sources of variations of the quality of life" (C. Zamfir, coord., 1984), I defined an area of attributes of the quality of life materialized in 21 particular dimensions and in one general dimension of satisfaction. At the same time, I identified a minimal set of indicators for each dimension considering the relevance and inter changeability, which resulted in a model with about 100 indicators: the individual (state of health, safety, fears), the population (vital statistics), the environment (polluting factors, affected areas, reachable standards), human settlements, dwelling, social environment (trust in people, social pathology), family, occupation, work, macroeconomic resources of the standard of living (GDP per capita, population's fund of consumption), incomes (sources, level, structure), consumption, services, household, education (access, quality), health care, culture, insurances and social assistance, leisure, political environment, public order, general satisfaction with life and with the specific components.

Several studies published on quality of life topic in several field journals such as the International Association of Sociology's "Social Indicators Research" or the "Journal of Quality of Life" published by the IQL at the Romanian Academy Press, strengthen the viability of quality of life paradigm.

In turn, the authors of "Quality of Life Monitoring in Europe" give the following recommendations when selecting the social indicators: consider their significance to the peoples' quality of life the, consensus on what the progress in the social field means, capacity to reveal the change, how much some social results affect the European political agenda, how much they are a concern at the different levels of public policies, how much they reflect the priorities of the foundation, the quality of measuring the social results, how much is the social result adequate to survey and monitoring, how much adequate is a given indicator to comparative analyses.

In conclusion, I consider that the theoretical debates and the acquisitions of quality of life research allow to monitoring systematically the evolutions in the social life, in the social models, providing the informational basis required for the development of corrective measures if deemed as necessary and for the development of strategies and programs of public policy. Therefore, this is that **social pattern characterized by social solidarity and cohesion** in which to achieve the **equal opportunity, the social inclusion, integration and participation**. In fact we only ask for an as fast as possible approach of Romania of the general characteristics of the social model already existing in most of the developed countries, which was achieved by special programs such as the welfare state developed in the western states or of the "Big Society" developed by the Kennedy and Johnson administration in the United States during the early 70s. The lag in time for Romania spans on some decades, but it is absurd to suppose that Romania, that prepares to join the EU, under the conditions of adopting the Lisbon Agenda for social inclusion, may be a component of this community without getting compatible as far as the social model is concerned.

The past experience of the developed countries shows the requirement for an as good as possible coordination between the economic and social components. No spectacular results can be achieved in economy as long as the social domain is not granted attention. The social policy can prove to be a factor of development provided it receives the required resources and provided these are directed towards active policies of occupation, towards supporting the social services of education and health care, towards the protection of the vulnerable social groups. Romania currently allocates to social expenditures only half of the average GDP percent allocated by EU member states. The neighbouring countries in transition that achieved significant progresses and became EU member states were close in relative values to the social allocations of the older EU member states. (I.Mărginean, 2004b).

Without at least 25% of the GDP allocated to social expenditure, without a proper management of these funds and of all the sphere of the public life, we can not expect to change the Romanian social model, so as to allow the access of the population to better paid jobs, to social services, to respect for human

dignity, to the elimination of the flagrant lags in the population's conditions of living, so that we can expect future improvements of other components of the social life such as the trust in people, sharing common values and national objectives, outlining harmonized life styles based on mutual respect and tolerance.

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