Afterword

Quality of Life and Sustainability: The Relationship Between Place and People Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries

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The term quality of life is expanding in meaning and gaining prominence in academic and everyday discussions. Why is this so? It would seem that further disciplines have discovered an affinity for defining what quality of life means and integrating these new meanings into various disciplinary contexts. Quality of life has thus become a target goal in development. From an economic standpoint, competitiveness was—and still is—the primary goal. However, quality of life is gaining prominence and is being integrated into traditional discussions about the key values of economic development to move discussions in the direction of sustainability, thereby significantly impacting the debate about economic growth and development. In the process, this continually emphasizes the objective and subjective nature of the quality of life. Even if the material standard of living, the GDP, economic development, and prosperity have a large positive impact on the quality of life, these factors can also lead to a deterioration of quality of life, for instance, when a region's environment and culture suffer from a style of politics that is too focused on businesses and industry. Dealing with limited natural and environmental resources sustainably and using human resources responsibly are necessary prerequisites to ensure a high quality of life in any location or place. Places are interesting when they have an intrinsic value, a value that stems from their special functions, historical situations, architectures, topographies, and the communities themselves. Only then can a place live its inherent identity, history, and memory.

Places are reservoirs of complex information; they are also the result of developing the skill sets of different actors, who, driven by goals such as quality of life, form networks and make it possible to establish quality of life in the first place because the quality of the networks built also includes such factors as health, education, personal development, time and leisure time, personal financial status, the

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given social environment, security, and a wide array of opportunities in society. All of these aspects define how subjectively one experiences quality of life.

In the course of social change, environmental awareness changes on different levels, giving sustainability a tangible value whenever and wherever quality of life is defined. In the end, an indelible quality of life can only be guaranteed if growth-oriented economics and sustainable management of the environment, coupled with various societal aspects, are incorporated seriously. The quality of the networking defines the place; at the same time, the place distinguishes itself from other places because of its individual network. Functionally specific definitions are insufficient to delimit places and spaces. Identities and values or standards are what give a region its meaning and what enable it to shine within its own borders and beyond its borders. In short, making a particular place attractive for specific target groups, such as tourists, local inhabitants, and economic powerhouses, means that the place must be meaningful in the first place. Creating meaning results from a standard of networking that does not stop at community boundaries but that, rather, defines regionalism as the quality of life experienced at the crossroads of morphology, topography, sociology, and geography. Region is thus synonymous with those settings and spaces which present people who distinguish themselves through their reachability, services, and special experiences with the quality just mentioned. The degree to which people are readily available can be measured by such factors as physical and social mobility, as well as by the prevailing infrastructure; services, on the other hand, refer to those services that attract people, for instance, catering or location-specific services; and finally, it is the quality of the experience which explains emotions, feelings, and identities and which makes the aesthetics of longing for the sublime possible—beauty is decisive for the quality of a landscape and for urban quality. Herein lies the deeper meaning of quality of life (Fig. 1).

Quality, however, can be developed only in the context of systems of relationships in such spaces. This community-based model presupposes that there is a broad consensus among stakeholders that the seed for quality of life is deeply rooted in the intense debate about what it means to live together. Quality of life means being able to define and develop how to live (together) in a particular space. It is the ability not only to be economically productive, live, shape the landscape, consume goods, and enjoy one's leisure time in the given landscape but also to continually develop the culture of the space. It is the quality of relationships that defines and determines the quality of an entire network.

The commitment to relationships shifts between cooperative, collaborative, and coordinating networks. For example, while cooperative networks are largely based on exchanging information, collaborative networks are more concerned with creating common network services that require a strong interdependence between individual network partners (Mandell and Keast 2008). The quality of relationships in a network thus makes possible and requires a high level of commitment in a collaborative network, which is an excellent basis for establishing quality of life because the partners become increasingly aware of the fact that they are dependent upon one another and each participant in the network relinquishes some of its unique procedures for the good of the whole network.
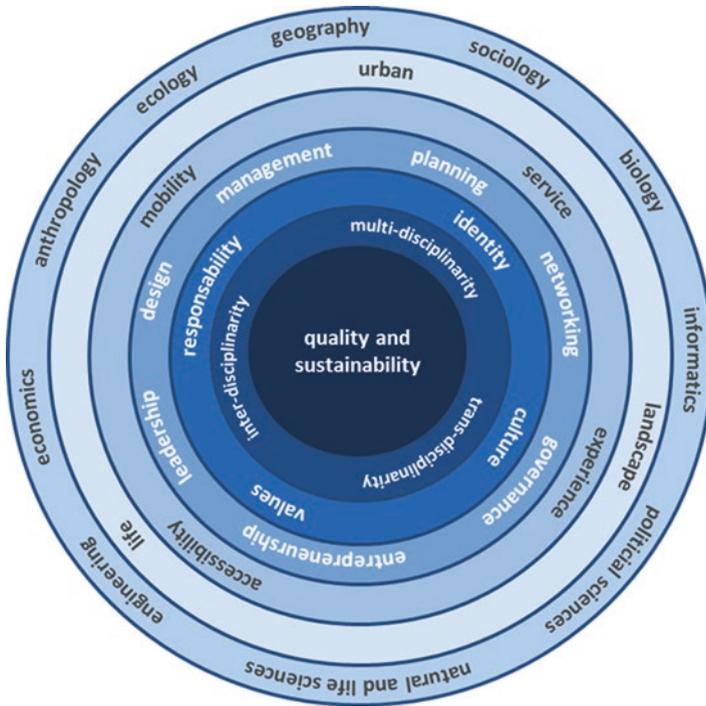
Fig. 1 Beyond the disciplinary boundaries of quality and sustainability (Source: Based on Pechlaner et al. 2017)

In the process, networks can be developed in local, regional, or supraregional (spatial) contexts. The geographical proximity to one another increases the likelihood that there will be face-to-face communication, thereby enabling knowledge transfer and the development of common values. These are values in the sense of standards—for example, a standard of quality—and they constitute a central pillar around which commitment can be fostered that is more deeply rooted than that created by mere geographical proximity. Partners' commitment to one another is determined by topics such as health, education, culture, and security, which are all topics essential for the quality of life people experience in a particular place and which also highlight the similarities and differences between rural and urban spaces. At the same time, the competitiveness of tourist destinations and businesses is also decided along a rural to urban continuum with regard to how mobility, attraction, services, and the general tenor and values of similarities and identities are organized in the space. This stimulates societal, environmental, and economic sustainability (Slocum and Kline 2017), thus supporting the thesis that setting can be an indicator of urban sustainability.

Sustainability includes the entire development of human circumstances. It is not only about using material resources but also about securing and improving social, political, and ideal resources. To a certain extent, this necessarily leads to a sustainable quality of life. It is ultimately about the fact that a truly sustainable quality of

life can only be had by doing more than satisfying material needs. Only those who can satisfy people's basic economic needs also have the necessary capacity to free themselves from material thoughts and the ability to tackle the question of the quality of life. It is clear that Western lifestyles in particular ultimately destroy that which they seek to guarantee, namely, happiness, satisfaction, and well-being, by relying too heavily on certain resources. In other words, true quality of life demands that people reflect on their modern lifestyle to compensate for a lack of quality of life by seriously contemplating what sustainability means. Mobility through space and time as a sign of quality of life serves as an example of how places and regions attempt to balance acceleration and deceleration and urban and rural challenges in order to give people living there the feeling that they are experiencing quality of life and that they can determine and appreciate the value of such regions.

Quality of life in urban landscapes: In search of a decision support system. This idea warrants the question of how the goals of achieving a sustainable quality of life (quality of life plus sustainability) can be met. Leadership means more than merely managing because it is not enough to simply make decisions within the existing system. Instead, decisions need to be made within the framework of a given system that is adaptable and subject to transformative processes.

System innovations are key to sustainable change because such innovations require combining technological and social innovations to be able to incorporate social practices and learning processes in a regional context, thus fostering the requisite easing up of resource use to protect ecosystems. The standard of sustainability thus moves within reach because it has been considered and integrated more carefully. Leadership means making transformative learning processes possible in spaces to leave room to develop a comprehensive sustainable quality of life. Urban landscapes are complex landscapes and can apparently be places for system innovations only by means of transformative processes, for instance, as living laboratories of experimentation.

One prerequisite for achieving this goal is to concomitantly create cooperative and/or integrated thinking in conjunction with stakeholders thinking in parallel in regional contexts. Thinking within discipline boundaries constitutes parallel thinking because it means looking for models and solutions from the standpoint of a particular discipline. Disciplines have the advantage of having developed methods for solving problems accepted by their respective community due to intense academic debate. Quality of life, however, cannot readily be placed comfortably within the confines of one particular discipline. Rather, it requires a multifaceted examination and, thus, must be explored by a multitude of disciplines. Such a multidisciplinary approach indeed strives to incorporate further disciplines, coupled with the demand that the models, methods, and solutions of the various disciplines be highlighted—which constitutes parallel thinking, researching, and implementation. At the very least, there needs to be a foundation for interdisciplinary cooperative thinking in research, as well as political processes to inform the debate, to determine new boundaries, and above all, to develop new methods, which will arise out of the close examination by various disciplines. A decision support system for an urban-rural context or an urban landscape must accommodate interdisciplinary thinking.

What is more, it must allow for an integrated transdisciplinary viewpoint. By integrating diverse environments, such as digitalization, mobility, and health, new areas of research will become available and create the basis for regional governance, and these areas of research will be compelled to follow transdisciplinary transformative ways of thinking. In a manner of speaking, these new areas of research will foster horizontal and vertical transdisciplinary thinking and acting in science and in practice, which will be required of private and public actors in the name of a new form of regional governance cloaked in an integrative design.

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