

Paper to be presented at the Urban Research Symposium 2003

Title of paper:

A Quality of Life Assessment to improve Urban and Housing Policies in Chile

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Please indicate the topic(s) and theme(s) which your proposal addresses (check all that apply):

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Theme</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strengthening the sources of (and reducing barriers to) urban incomes and livelihoods	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban economic growth and poverty reduction
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Abstract:

The Chilean housing and urban development process has generated social and environmental conditions which make quality of life (QOL) unequal and inequitable for the different groups in its population. Housing policies over the past decade have made considerable efforts to reduce the housing deficit and have managed to contribute to the construction of an average of over 100,000 units yearly, an impressive figure considering the country's population and in comparison to other Latin-American nations. The Chilean government has also taken special attention, particularly over the past couple of years, to improve the construction quality of the solutions. Nonetheless, this achievement is yet to be considered optimal and, as recognised by national authorities, the current policy orientations require a turn in gear in order effectively improve the quality of life of Chilean population.

The Chilean Housing Ministry has included among its priorities to provide better quality of life to people. This initiative seems commendable, considering that the notion of QOL involves a series of factors that could contribute to overcoming some of the endemic deficits. These deficiencies can be generated by a series of conditions including the lack of co-ordination between urban and housing policies and the lack of common objective for both. Additionally, the situation is worsened by the persistence of partial and sectorial approaches, separating housing from other social and territorial policies as well as centralist interventions that tend to dismiss regional and local initiatives and decision-making. Moreover, targeting policies are generally myopic to the complexity of poverty, wasting important

resources on parallel efforts. At a city level, the lack of consideration of the segregational impacts that housing location can have on city dwellers, exacerbate the perception of poor QOL in Chilean cities.

Though the initiative to provide better QOL is presented as promissory, the approach being applied in Chilean housing and urban policies and strategies does not necessarily reflect the holistic quality inherent to the concept. It is observed that in the use of this notion two basic aspects are being neglected. On one hand, the physical conditions of the surrounding are still being privileged over those emanating from environmental, socio-cultural, human and economic aspects of quality of life. On the other hand, only the objective conditions of this notion are considered, leaving to a secondary place, or in most cases ignoring, the perception of QOL of those who living it. The imprecise knowledge of the state of citizens' quality of life, due to deficient information, insufficient analysis of existing data and lack of assessment of the above enunciated priority, makes it difficult to take informed action on the central issues at stake.

This paper will be based on the final results of a three-year research¹ that assessed the Quality of Life of various communities living in low to medium income multi-storey complexes in Greater Santiago. The cases correspond to three different subsidised housing programmes targeted to groups of diverse socio-economic characteristics. The methodological process included the analysis of information from the various factors and indicators of quality of life relevant to the inhabitants of the settlements studied. It also related this analysis in an objective (how were there in concrete terms) and subjective (how were they perceived) manner. This process of relating the information was done using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Using the results of this research, this paper, will intend to provide an explanatory diagnosis of the situations detected *within* each of the communities being studied and *among* the different communities in terms of quality of life. From this, it pretends to make a contribution to the study and discussion of QOL from a holistic perspective and at conceptual, methodological, policy, management levels. These suggestions can be particularly useful in the assessment of quality of life to improve (or implement) the current (or future) monitoring and evaluation the performance of the Chilean urban and housing sector as well as that of social policies as a whole. The Chilean example can be considered relevant given the current context and the use of this model in other countries in the Region. The suggestions can be seen as a way of eventually improving QOL of urban inhabitants, particularly the lower income ones, who depend on government policies and who constitute a large percentage of the inhabitants of the city.

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