Chapter 5
Qualitative Methodologies in Geography, Contributions to the Study of Quality of Life

Claudia Mikkelsen and Josefina Di Nucci

> *Quality of Life lessens intimate space to a minimum*
> (Woman 66 years of age, San Eduardo de Chapadmalal,
> Partido de General Pueyrredon, 2008)

5.1 Introduction

Methodological reflection accompanied the evolution of geographic thinking from its roots, although since the second half of the twentieth century, it significantly deepened. Such Geography, conceived basically as a science of space, was presented as a discipline which epistemological and ontological basis was supported on logical positivism, and therefore provided predictive explanations through the creation of laws and quantitative theories.

It is relevant to point out that over the past decades, with the development of Humanistic Geographies (based on more subjective Philosophies) and Human Geographies of critical style, it was necessary to review the already developed qualitative methodological field, both because of the discipline itself and because of other disciplines related, especially Anthropology and Sociology.

Additionally, visions of geographical space as lived, felt, perceived and socially constructed space, have led geography to think about the need to know other individual and social aspects in its studies, for which it started opening up to qualitative and interpretative approaches.

C. Mikkelsen (✉)
Study Group on Population and Territory, Geography Department, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Geographic Research Center, Geography, History and Social Sciences Institute,
Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina
e-mail: claudiamikkelsen@gmail.com

J. Di Nucci
Geographic Research Center. Geography, History and Social Sciences Institute, Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires. CONICET, Buenos Aires, Argentina
e-mail: josedinucci@yahoo.com

From this viewpoint, the way to grasp the meanings and uses of space in Geography departs from a set of qualitative techniques that trace three possible paths: the observation of territory utilization or the spatiality of the acts; the use of documents, contents and images that account for this; and the study and analysis of the discourse of people that occupy and build the space.

The improvement observed in the set of theoretical and methodological contributions converged to give precision and complexity to the geographical investigations, which is an observable condition, for example, in the study of quality of life.

Although the concern of humanity about their quality of life is old, its scientific treatment is new; it was in the 1960's that it began to be included in various disciplines and in various fields: politics, economics, geography, planning, architecture, environmental studies, psychology, medicine, education, among others.

As Gómez and Sabeh (2007) point, it was not until the late 1970's that the concept achieved its own identity and is defined "as an integrative concept that involves all areas of life (multidimensional character) and refers to both objective conditions and subjective components" (p. 1)[1]. It is a multidisciplinary and multidimensional concept comprising the satisfaction of material and non-material needs, desires and ambitions of individuals, and which is culturally and territorially defined.

In this work we are interested in reflecting on the methodological background disciplines considered in the studies of quality of life, which were specially developed from the elaboration of objective indices. Nevertheless, we want to consider that by applying certain qualitative techniques (focus groups, analysis of documents and objects, and interviews, among others) it will be possible to perceive and search other aspects of quality of life, thus contributing to understand the well-being of the population and the complexity of its knowledge.

We seek to contribute to the generation of knowledge, reflecting on a theoretical-methodological approach, able to combine lifestyles, value systems, living conditions of individuals, and on the use and appropriation of space, both in an objective mode as well as in a symbolic evaluative manner.

The chapter is organized into four sections: along the first section it describes the theoretical background and qualitative existing contributions in Geography; in the second section it resumes the notion of quality of life, reflecting on its definition; the third part presents, in general terms, the methodological approaches applied to the study of quality of life; finally, in the fourth section, our proposal for a qualitative approach to the geographical study of quality of life is outlined, ending with a series of integrating reviews.

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5.2 The Background and Qualitative Contributions to the Geographical Thought

The evolution of theoretical thinking in Geography was accompanied by changes in the methodological aspects. In Geography the positivist view dominated authoritatively for most of the twentieth century, however:

> from the dawn of Modern Geography, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, another current can be detected that, without denying the importance of reason, aims to build a different Geography, based on the "sensitive" reason, that is a reason that does not depreciate or forget the symbolic, emotional and human dimensions of life in its spatial dimension (Hiernaux 2008, p. 29)[2].

In the history of thought we find stimulating background to the use of what we today call qualitative methodologies or techniques, yet it was not until recent decades, with the development of the Humanistic Geographies of idealistic, phenomenological and existential styles, and Human Geographies of critical trends, that it became necessary to review the qualitative methodological field achieved by other disciplines, especially Anthropology and Sociology.

Among the historical antecedents we must highlight the use of methods of observation and the realization of field work from travelers and historians such as Herodotus and Marco Polo, which have been recognized as the geographers of those times.

In Greek Geography we find a literary heritage, under the trend of "qualitativist geography, the science of the places and the conception of the Earth, in which mythical, philosophical and metaphorical speech occupies a fundamental place" (Lévy 2006, p. 460)[3]. It is the geography of Strabo against that of Tolomeo, becoming the first in a literary center and the second in a scientific one.

On the other hand, and as a reference which exceeds Geography as a discipline, the classic study of Le Play (1855) must be mentioned, which profits from what today is called 'participant observation', known as "the study of the community technique", which comprises an exhaustive inventory of the conditions of daily life of working families in different cultural contexts.

It can be recognized in some classical authors like Ratzael, Schlüter, and Brhunes that in their geographical studies related to human nature and landscape there is the presence of culture as an explanatory factor. As Claval (1999) explains: "the way in which geographers apprehend culture at the beginning of the century is not different from the one adopted by ethnographers and anthropologists: ones and others were primarily interested in tools, artifacts, the fields, the habitat" (p. 51)[4]. With the contributions of Boas and Malinowski, on field work, participant observation and familiarity with other languages, ethnologists incorporate the way they say things, the interpretations made by individuals of history and reality.

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But as Claval (1999) states:

> Geographers are unaware of this evolution. Their field work keeps different: in the regions of the world where humanity is fragmentized and languages are numerous, their concern for comparison forbids them to limit to the analysis of a community: they do not always make the effort to master at least one indigenous language (p 51)[5].

It should be noted that Geography (as other disciplines related) in the positivist context of change from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, was concerned to find a place within the natural sciences, and therefore, to formulate general laws for natural as well as human phenomena.

During the 1920 and 1930 decades in the twentieth century, the "Chicago school" was developed in the United States, with substantial input for the further promotion of a Geography that we can call Pragmatic or Quantitative, notably urban geography, given the progress of ecological type models. However, this school also employed, in its research, participant observation, in-depth interviews, the development of life histories and the use of personal documents as a source of qualitative information.

However, it will only be with the Classical, Human and Regional French Geography from the beginning of the twentieth century that this discipline perceives the need to apply some methodologies which today we call qualitative. That Geography, following the basic guidelines of the functionalism of Durkheim, planned to study the influences of the environment on man within a defined geographical framework: the region, proposed to interpret these relationships based on distinctive life groupings, i.e. the way that "man has the environment humanized for their own objectives" (Vidal de la Blache 1931, p. 202, quoted by Gregory 1984, p. 143)[6]. Nevertheless, de la Blache avoided any internal tests over those genres of life, i.e. studying the interior links, only to develop empiricist typologies and not structural explanations (Gregory 1984). You can see in this Geography Bergson's philosophical methods, with their emphasis on the role of intuition to learn the particular truth of individual beings, in particular region and landscapes. Thus this geography was more inclined to "understand their own cognitive practice as an 'art' dedicated to descriptively 'evoke' the 'life' of the regions" (Gómez Mendoza et al. 1988, p. 68)[7].

Vidal de la Blache himself had referred to a "geography made from the feet", "as argument of the centrality of the direct work of the geographer with places, and the personal and experiential geographer contact with space through his field work" (Hiernaux 2008, p. 38)[8].

His concern for the detailed observation of the region and the genres of life, encouraged a methodology in which field work is a fundamental share. It also used more or less qualitative surveys, a wide range of documentary techniques, to expose

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well-informed regional analysis and literary works to provide data that denote social facts of a region or descriptions of a landscape (Carreras 1998).

During the same years, but in the German School of Geography, we must mention Hettner, who proposed Geography as a chorological discipline of the Earth's surface, according to a regionalist concept of idealistic neo-kantian basis that tried to differentiate themselves from the positivist basis in vogue at that time.

Between Ist and IInd World Wars, another kind of Geography is originated, which attempted to differentiate itself even more radically from the scientific rationalist perspective and that intended to be a geography separated from science. This "artistic geography", as it announced itself, (linked to the German Bance and the Italian Gribaudi) claimed an artistic geography nature, because they conceived it as an aesthetic discipline, associated to emotional satisfaction, to subject's sensitivity (Ortega Valcarcel 2000). That Geography pretended to be art, literary endeavor, result of aesthetic and intuitive, individual and group perceptions and experiences of the landscape. It was also, known as the "geography of the landscape", since the personality of the region and of the landscape should be found through creative description.

Such geography laid the groundwork for development since about the 1920s, it was the Historical Geography, a distinctive product of British geography and the Cultural Geography born in a North American context.

Following two prominent British Geographers, East and Darby, a Classic Historical Geography was developed until the 1960s. East studied the European historical landscape and Darby turned his attention to Britain. Roughly, you could say they were looking for analysis over time of spatial-geographical type variations in landscape (García Ramón 1985). This geography had and still has an interesting methodological challenge since it took ancient documentary sources for his research, which was a customary qualitative technique among historians and archaeologists of the period, and this "geographic history" (as East named it) should use it. García Ramón (1985) puts forward that these geographers faced "primarily a problem of interpretation as it has to be able to infer the spatial dimension of its documentary sources without the possibility of checking on the ground" (p. 14)[9].

Cultural Geography was born in 1920 at Berkeley School's with Sauer and became a very accepted proposal in all North American geography. It proposed studies of a globalizing and integrative character, for which they drew nearer a human geography in which cultural aspects were the last phase of those studies. Cultural Geography seeks "understanding of the differentiation of the Earth according to the different cultures and the establishment of a critical system covering the phenomenology of landscape as a method of apprehending all the meaning and richness of these diversities" (García Ramón 1985, p. 16) [10]. It sought to find the "historicist character, which seeks to discover the genesis of landscapes, as a result of a process

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of adaptation of social groups to their environment, in accordance with their cultural, ethnic, or social characteristics" (Sauer 2010)[11].

Sauer and his disciples put emphasis in field work and the relationship with other disciplines, particularly with Economy, Anthropology and History.

These classical geographers used different literary accounts as essential sources for their landscape descriptions but, apart from this, their own works had high quality and literary richness, accompanied by images of great beauty and precision (Carreras 1998).

It should be noted that Sauer at the end of his career introduced some very interesting questions in the context of logic quantitative domination in Geography. He says:

> beyond all that can be transmitted through instruction and can be mastered using the techniques, it is the domain of individual perception and interpretation, the art of geography. Really good regional geography is finely figurative art, and creative art is not constrained by the guideline or method (…). While field work is performed, more than a letter is written that gives life and illustrates the study, but there is no trace of it in the final report (Sauer 1985, pp. 52–53)[12].

Middle twentieth century found Geography again involved in the search for "objectivity" through the accurate use of quantitative techniques and methodologies, which have been widely developed in different areas of geographical interest until now. It was precisely this geographical neo-positivism which led many geographers to look for other alternatives; on the one hand, a broad humanistic perspective, and on the other hand, the neo-Marxist historical materialistic radical approach (Unwin 1995).

Studies on the development of critical-radical-Marxist Geography are abundant, and even more the different authors of that tendency who have written works central to the development of that theoretical proposal.

In a simple and general way we can declare that this perspective focused, from the beginning, at the end of the 1960s, on studying reality from the interrelationship between social processes (in the broad sense of the term that includes what is economic, political, cultural, etc.) and the processes of space, being the analysis and discussion of the social processes previous to that of the space. The thematic studies established in Economical, Urban, Historical, and Cultural Geography, among others, were central to this perspective.

Critical Geography made fundamental contributions to Geography as a social discipline in terms of: the vision of the space as a social product; the linking of Geography with Philosophy and other disciplines related to a global Social Theory; the incorporation of new focuses of attention more committed to reality; and the progress in conceptual theoretical formulations, among others. However, neither the discussions nor the methodological contributions, particularly qualitative, have been central, as developed from this vision of Geography.

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It is Humanistic Geographies, in their theoretical, philosophical and thematic explorations, which have advocated a methodologically renewed development for our discipline, either by examining their own qualitative disciplinary bases, or by resorting to advances in other related disciplines with longest tradition on the subject.

Humanistic Geography, based on philosophical approaches of Humanism, denounces the primacy of reason and science, as equivalent concepts, and the existence of a scientific and rational pattern as a validity standard of knowledge (Unwin 1995). The term Humanistic Geography was definitively introduced in 1978 with the publication of the book Humanistic Geography of Ley and Samuels, considered the forerunner classical work of this geography. The exclusive entitlement of rational or scientific knowledge is there criticized; the individual and his personal experience being vindicated instead.

Several papers have studied the theoretical, conceptual and thematic contributions to this perspective (García Ramón 1985; Unwin 1995; García Ballesteros 1998; Gregory 1984; among others).

Phenomenology is considered a fundamental instrument in Humanistic Geography, vindicating the everyday experience of the subjects as a essential feature to the understanding of the place of human beings in the world.

Ultimately, it is to overcome the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. If we add some features of Existentialism to this, which embrace being and existing, a Geography not only focused on the individual and the fragmentary will be obtained. All this is framed in a strongly idealistic conceptual context. Thus Guelke (1985) states that:

> the nucleus of the idealistic position requires a method of interpretation, quite different from the one that is suited to the non-rational human and non-human phenomena (…). The idealistic sustains that the rational action is explained when thoughts behind it are understood (p. 195–196)[13].

Tuan (1985) poses that Humanism in Geography should reflect "on the geographical phenomena with the purpose of achieving better understanding of the man and his condition" (p. 143)[14], because of which he differentiates from the traditional geographical view by stating that:

> scientific approaches to the study of man tend to minimize the role of awareness and human knowledge. Humanistic Geography, on the contrary, is committed specifically to understand how activities and geographic phenomena reveal the quality of human awareness (Tuan 1985, p 146)[15].

This Geography postulates the need to seek the understanding of phenomena to be studied, therefore far from minimizing the role of consciousness and human knowledge, it tries to understand specifically how activities and geographic phenomena reveal the quality of human consciousness (García Ballesteros 1998).

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Links between individuals and the material environment become central, once expressed in the definition of site. The place is unique and complex, being a special set, characterized by being rooted in the past and develop towards the future (Tuan 1985). The place takes on a value that results from the perception of its own residents and the meaning they attribute to it; in addition, it represents the embodiment of the experiences and aspirations of the people. The place as a physical entity, such as a point or an area, as a simple objective, acquires a subjective dimension, becomes an individual image taking into account aspects such as its emotional, aesthetic and symbolic charge. A fundamental work that reflects this model, where subjective experience is central in the everyday space is Tuan's (1974) "Topofhilia". It refers to a set of affective and emotional relationships that man, through his five senses, keeps with a place.

This geography reflects on spaces linked to the existence of each individual, to his specific experiences, his personal relationship with the environment, to the perception he has of it, according to cultural and personal circumstances.

They argue that there is no unique world of objective character, but different worlds in relation to pluralities of attitudes, feelings, and intentions of individuals. So it is central the notion of an undergone world, that can be defined as the amalgam of facts and values encompassed by the everyday personal experience. In the words of one of the leading exponents of the phenomenology in Humanistic Geography:

> for phenomenology, the world is the context within which principles are revealed (…). It is anchored in the past and addressed to the future; it is a shared horizon, although each individual can build it in a unique personal manner. Once conscious of the world as lived through personal experience, an individual should recognize the shared horizons of the world of other people and of society as a whole (Buttimer 1985, p. 172)[16].

This proposal is supported by a vision of geographical space as subjective space, i.e. the scope of lived experiences, of subjective experience. The space is considered a mental reality subject to the particular perception of each individual, product of experience and individual conscience. Although the concept of space as social product includes the society as producer of that space, from the subjective point of view of the discipline it is argued that it is not including the individual who designed it; "the subject that made the space distorted in the geographical analysis by the pre-eminence of the space produced. When the subject is included, it is usually as an attribute of space" (Lindón 2008, p. 6)[17]. In other words, this concept spreads the idea of geographical space to non-material dimensions that have always been the classic components, and includes the notion of space as experience (Tuan 2007).

Thus, Lindón (2008) argues:

> finding a midpoint that neither puts aside the materiality of space for the sake of a theory exclusively subjective or idealistic, nor forgets everything immaterial with which subjects give sense to space (to space forms), considering that building it socially precisely implies doing it physically and also giving it sense (p. 7)[18].

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This involved new approaches and spheres of interest especially devoted to the conception of place as a space for individual and collective experience, lived space linked to the individual and subjective experiences, i.e. a particular relationship with the environment and with the pursuit of symbolic dimensions of space. Although concepts of place and landscape were the most influenced by Humanistic Geography, we must also mention the work of Frémont (1976), who studied the region as lived space.

A Humanistic Geography,

> open to the study of the arrangement of meanings, exploring them in relation to places and to practices people set up in each place (…) therefore the key trilogy to decode in geographic qualitative research is "spatial practices, spatial forms and significance of places" (Lindón 2008, p. 12–13)[19].

Thus Geography goes into the meanings of places, and then the discipline challenge is to be able to "read" the meanings materialized in practices.

These new visions involved changes in the discipline as a whole, and we want to especially emphasize that, in actual Cultural Geography, it is possible to find extensive conceptual and thematic discussions with interesting approaches to a methodological renewal in Geography. Cultural Geography takes into account "the committed and interdisciplinary character of the production of knowledge, the interaction of culture with economic and political domains, and the critical connection between space and culture" (Clua and Zusman 2002, p. 105)[20]. In this sense Claval (2011) points out that, more than being a sub-area within Geography, it is a type of approach, since facing different themes or classical problems of Geography, for example rural, economic and political Geography, among others, it brings about new perspectives and cultural aspects for their studies.

It is worth emphasizing the type of qualitative inquiry widely used in Geography, influenced by the proposal of Geertz (1973), based on descriptions in depth that he calls thick description; the ethnologist gives the word to observed persons and cares for their speeches and reactions in various circumstances (Claval 1999).

The speech and language of the subjects become important taken from their own narratives, images, creative features, directing to the way in which people speak about the world or speak the world (Claval 1999).

In these humanistic and cultural proposals of Geography, "the novel sometimes becomes a document: novelists subtle intuition helps us feel the place through the eyes of their characters and across their emotions" (Claval 1999, p. 52)[21, 22].

There is a renewed Cultural Geography, Zusman and Haesbaert (2011) distinguish between: the cultural Geography of the French tradition, from contributions of the Vidal de la Blache School, and the recovery of reflections on Existentialism based on Eric Dardel, who have diversified their subjects and objects of interest

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[21] To read about the connection between Geography and Literature, we propose to refer to the article by Bertrand (2006).

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towards representations, myths, landscapes, passions and people's likes, discourses of different cultures and an interest in literary sources, among others (Claval 1999). Secondly, the new Cultural Geographies displayed in the Anglo-Saxon world (Duncan 1990; Cosgrove 2002) where Marxist and phenomenological positions live with different post-structuralist perspectives that try to understand the symbolic interpretation that groups and social classes give to the environment, the aesthetic or ideological justifications they propose and the impact of representations about collective life (Claval 1999); furthermore they have recently incorporated the relationship between the body, the emotions and the environment to the analysis (Lorimer 2007). Thirdly, Zusman and Haesbaert (2011) highlight the contributions of Latin American works on Cultural Geography (Barbosa 1999; Carney 2007; Corrêa 2011; Rosendahl 2011) who:

> Wished to move away from the Eurocentric views and understand the peculiarities of the subcontinent from their own history and the syncretism of their popular cultures. Second, we remark the interest in building a critical perspective of global processes and thinking culture as an element of social transformation (p. 10)[23].

These new objectives, arguments, views, can only be apprehended with qualitative methodologies which comprise getting to understand meanings, values, goals and intentions of the subjects, and their inquiry in relation to the places and practices that people display in each location, becoming central to two issues: geographic language and communication.

As indicated by Lindón (2008), it is necessary that Geography be "closer to hermeneutics, within the connotation of the interpretation of the other, or more precisely, of the interpretation of interpretations of the other" (p. 9)[24], causing another type of approach to the subject of study, to "otherness". Thus the perspective of "experiential" field developed by the geographer Rowles (1978) is a proposal of this type[25].

Experiential field work, clearly humanist biased, carries with it the essence of qualitative approaches in the Social Sciences. It is the importance of getting closer to the other, to allow for empathy, even though the creation of these bonds can prolong the time needed for field work (Lindón 2008, p. 10)[26].

The set of theoretical and methodological contributions so far raised converge to give precision and complexity to geographical investigations, which is an observable condition, for example, in the study of quality of life.

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[25] To go deeper into field work in Geography we suggest reading Katz (1994); Pedone (2000) and Zusman (2011).

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5.3 Defining Quality of life From a Geographical Perspective

Studies on quality of life are neither new nor recent in Geography as they are in other related disciplines which worried about the methodologies related to the well-being of man. Although Geography has had much to say about these studies, we must state that quality of life is a multidisciplinary and multidimensional category (without existing agreement with respect to the number and definition of the dimensions and domains), therefore it is transversal in its contribution to the construction of this knowledge.

In the beginning of the diversity of definitions is the conceptual positioning of the researcher, the heterogeneity of contexts in which the concept is used, the measures to be used, the purpose of the evaluation and the subject who performs the assessment (Albert and Logsdon 2000, cited by Fernandez Mayoralas et al. 2005, p. 122)[27].

Well, as we have pointed out in the previous section, the Chicago School has been a central source of inspiration for Social Sciences and there we can find fundamental quantitative and qualitative methodological background for Geography. Likewise, it was in that school that the academic interest in quality of life around the movement of social indicators started. These studies emerged as a critique of consumption, to the society of opulence, to the need of prioritizing quality over quantity and superfluous consumption in the societies of the developed countries "where despite high levels of comfort, symptoms of social breakdown, loss of the sense of life, intensification of suicide, violence, drug addiction, etc, were increasing" (Palomino and López 2000, p. 33)[28].

Since the 1940s several researchers from different social disciplines have undertaken the work of developing research tools that could effectively assess the ability of Nations to meet the basic needs of their population (Estes, 1989). Thus "all evaluation of human well-being approaches tried to combined different indicators of social welfare into composite indicators, which could be used for international comparative analysis" (Estes 1989, p. 131)[29].

In that decade such investigations addressed the strictly quantitative and economic study of the development of the countries, using objective indicators such as the gross domestic product (GDP), "however, this was not successful at the time of measuring social aspects, since it was linked to monetary values and did not allow assessment of behavior of the determining social variables on the welfare of populations" (Estes 1989, quoted by Camargo Mora 1999, p. 251)[30]. Tonon (2008) indicates that it was the English Economist Pigou who first used the term "quality

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of life" referring to the possibility of quantifying social services or social costs of Governments' decisions to calculate the net social product.

In the 1950s, and following the economistic view of these studies on the development of Nations, the concept "standard of living" was incorporated, a notion coming from Economy, referred to aspects of monetary nature which support the idea of consumption of goods and services, purchasing power becoming a mechanism allowing the achievement of personal development. The standard of living allows for distinction of a set of individuals deprived of those who have a series of material possessions and capabilities to acquire them, differentiating, in this sense, social classes. Critics and limitations to this conception have been pointed out. Espinosa (2000) argues that what is known as luxury and abundance does not necessarily mean having the optimum in reference to quality of life, and that these aspects will only provide social status.

It was from the 1960s since another perspective in the studies of quality of life began to be included, both in different disciplines and in various fields, such as politics, economics, geography, planning, architecture, environmental studies, psychology, medicine, education, among others. The central objective was to do research that went beyond the importance and centrality that had been previously given to the economic growth and development, and to include topics related to the well-being of societies.

In this way, the term quality of life corresponds to the idea, conception and implementation of the Welfare State, developed from the second post-war period, mainly in the core countries. It should be noted that the notion of welfare, according to Camargo Mora (1999), presents two different views throughout the twentieth century. At first, it is identified from a mainly quantitative perspective associated with the level that individuals acquire from the economic and social points of view, measured on the basis of education, nutrition, employment accessibility, health, among others. Until the 1970s this utilitarian approach whereby what is central is to maximize the well-being of the population prevailed, being known as welfare. In this sense, welfare is similar to the idea of living conditions and standard of living, while its arrival is associated with the implementation of economic and social policies which make sustainable consumption of goods and services most relevant as the engine of the economy.

At a second instance, welfare reaches a more humanistic meaning (in the sense of well-being), beginning with Sen (Sen 1996; Sen and Nussbaum 2001) postulates about human development and quality of life. Welfare is interpreted in a broader sense, associated with capacities, opportunities and advantages of individuals. This approach, known as the capabilities one, dares overcome the perspective of basic needs, proposing as essential the discussion about the person and his abilities, and not about the goods he should attain. Sen (Sen 1996; Sen and Nussbaum 2001) argues that a set of capabilities should not be assessed in accordance with actual achievements (welfare achievements), but according to the set of real opportunities (freedom to achieve well-being). In this way, the discussion focuses not only in knowing what a person achieves but also what the options were, among which that person had to choose. To include in the studies of quality of life the perspective of

capabilities and skills of the subjects implies a change of approach or perspective given that:

> It is not the same to assess the achievements made by individuals as a reflection of the access that they have to the use or consumption of any good or service, than as through the capacities that they have to apply or use those goods or services specifically, in order to meet their needs (Camargo Mora 1999, p. 254)[31].

Having said that, to trace the central background in Geography, as regards the studies of quality of life, we must go back to the 1970s, in the context of the critical-radical Geography, which began to worry about the relevant social issues of the time. As pointed out in previous attempts by Smith (1980)

> to widen the field of interest of the human geographer, we must include suggestions for possible uses of the index of the standard of living in regional delimitation (Lewis 1968) and the efforts of Gould (1969) to associate the spatial preference with a "social welfare indicator" (p. 26)[32].

Themes of poverty, crime, black ghettos, health care and issues began to be developed, which related Geography with what Knox and Smith called Geography of Well-being. The work of Smith (1980) must be highlighted, entitled 'Human Geography a Welfare Approach', being him the same Smith who first talked about Radical Geography, and proclaimed it as "geography corresponding with the end of the continuous growth experienced by the real standard of living in the postwar period, and with a time in which the issues about the distribution of wealth became urgent" (Smith 1980, p. 27)[33].

Smith (1980) proposes a new way of structuring Human Geography around welfare, considering that this subject is integrative and brings together the contributions of the geographical currents of the previous 20 years (quantitative geography and radical geography, especially), to constitute a social science for the benefit of the age.

For Smith (1980), Human Geography should be defined as "the study of "who gets what, where and how"" (p. 30)[34], and this is the meaning of the question of social welfare in a spatial context. It is significant to remark that the author uses the term social welfare including "all things through which human satisfaction (positive or negative) is obtained, and also their distribution within society" (Smith 1980, p. 32)[35].

It is particularly interesting the distinction that this author makes when he uses the terms quality of life or social welfare, the first being "to describe the state of the population ranging from a set of territories" and the second to refer "not only to what but also who gets this what and where he gets it" (Smith 1980, p. 32)[36]. Then,

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he holds that the quantity and quality of goods consumed and supported disadvantages are the result of the system of production and distribution. García Ramón (1985) summarizes this proposal of Human Geography, asserting that:

> the productive system must take decisions about the type of goods produced, its quantity as well as the techniques used to produce them, and the location of the production process. Each of these dimensions of the production system generates goods but also troubles, because of its effects over both the differential availability of goods and the geographically distinguished external effects (p. 144)[37].

It is this way, considering that the production not only engenders division of work and differences in levels of development, i.e. geographical inequality implications, but also that it is a process that contributes to the increase or decrease of human well-being in each of its phases.

Evidently, Geography of well-being is a theoretical discipline essential to current studies on quality of life. Caution must be taken that, from a more objective point of view, closer to Quantitative Geography or its latest variety, the Automated Geography (Buzai and Baxendale 2006), the study of quality of life can be condensed in the construction of macro-variables which bring together diverse indicators. Through mapping of elaborated groupings, it is possible to detect areas or regions formed by spatial units in which data have a fairly homogeneous inner distribution.

In this respect, the contributions of Velázquez (2001) in Argentina should be mentioned, having defined quality of life as "a measure of achievement with respect to an established optimal level, taking into account socio-economic and environmental dimensions that are dependent on the scale of values prevailing in society, and which vary according to the expectations of historical progress" (p. 15)[38]. The concept quality of life would make it possible to accomplish convergence between quantitative analysis and geographical interpretation of the social processes (Boroni et al. 2005).

Questions made by Bailly (1998) to studies based on objective indicators become interesting from a more humanistic attitude of Geography. They can be summarized in three points: (a) is it possible to use the same dimensions and variables in different socio-spatial contexts?; (b) statistical series in general fail to respond to the data requirements to explain problems in micro-geographical ratios; finally, (c) of all the indicators with data availability, which one should we choose?. In this way this author claims that:

> not every indicator can be objective, since it must reveal the internal subjective framework on which all behaviors stand. The environment reveals to whoever studies it through observation or interpretation. Both methods are very important, allowing you to seize the emphatic relationship environment-subject and, therefore, the way in which the environment is perceived and lived (Bailly 1998, p. 49)[39].

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In relation to this outlook, and trying to give greater prominence to the subjective components of quality of life, Liberali and Massa (1986) argued that it includes not only material or economic needs, but it also comprises what makes men happy (agreeing with Nuvolati 2002, 2006). There appears affection and leisure as subjective components of quality of life.

To conclude this section, we synthesize some central ideas about the concept of quality of life.

Abaleron (1999) considered that:

> quality of life in a territory is the degree of excellence that a given society, precisely located in a particular time and a specific geographical space, offers in the supply of goods and services, in order to satisfy certain range of human needs for all its members, and the corresponding level of individual and group satisfaction or dissatisfaction, according to the perception held on that offer, accessibility and use, by the population involved (p. 8)[40].

Therefore it is not a universal category, but it is cultural and territorially defined.

UNESCO defines quality of life as:

> the satisfaction of needs which represent the requirements that must be fulfilled to make a person physically and psychosocially healthy. The components of quality of life and the degree of well-being of people are determined by the perception of the relationship between the desired satisfiers (which meet human needs) and those actually obtained. Implicit is the adaptation between the characteristics of the reality that surrounds them and the expectations, capabilities and needs of individuals, such as they and their social group perceive them (Pérez Maldonado 2002, p. 22)[41].

It is interesting to reflect here on the definition of quality of life of the Dictionary of Human Geography of Johnston et al. (1987):

> Quality of life: psychological and individual aspects of social welfare. It reflects a frame of mind that depends on the socio-economic position and the individual characteristics. Therefore the conception of what a high life quality is will be based on the unchallenged conformity with the existing state of things. In a more general sense, quality of life can be evaluated with respect to environmental factors such as pollution, energy and nutrition. In this way, it can be used as a general term to compare the prevailing situation in different Nations (p. 65)[42].

Therefore, quality of life concerns both satisfaction of material needs as well as subjective and symbolic desires of the people. This sort of satisfaction is not preferring one over the other, meeting them separately or in steps, as they are strongly linked and associated (Palomino and López 2000), the spatial dimension being fundamental to be taken into account. The options present in the territory are not the same for all subjects; the geographical space offers potential of uneven value, by which there are disputes and competitions (Santos 2000). Feu (2005) warns that the space is unequally provided with infrastructure, and that it conditions the individual or group access to essential services.

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It should be noted, matching what Alguacil Gómez (2001) points out, that quality of life is at the same time synthesis and expansion between the individual and the collective subject, between personal and objective character, between small scale or great scale social analysis, circumstances that make it possible to overcome the traditional breakdown between scientific technical and scientific humanistic culture.

5.4   How do We Study Quality of Life? Objectivist Traditions and Subjectivist Potentials

Studies on quality of life, based on the proposal of the Geography of Welfare, have traditionally built indexes held on secondary data coming from various statistical sources, official and unofficial, i.e. from the generation of quantitative indicators. Objective quality of life refers to how individual life is evaluated by the outside world, influenced by the culture in which population resides, and it is usually based on social indicators. As Diner and Suh (1997) express, the trademark of social indicators is that they are based on quantitative criteria, statistics and not on subjective perceptions of individuals, according to their social environment.

Objective questions are transformed into a search of a series of goods and services provided by the constructed environment to meet the so-called basic needs (housing, education, health and work). In this sense, objective quality of life discloses a person's ability to adapt to the values of a culture, but tells us little about the life of that person. In this regard, if we try that the quality of life consider the appreciation and understanding of individuals and societies, it is here where a necessary subjective nature of the concept appears, which implies both interpersonal and inter social strata relationships. As Abaleron expresses (1999), the qualitative posture, non-measurable, subjective…

> emphasizes the internal environment of people, their vision of the world, their beliefs, their values, aspirations and desires, culminating in exclusively perceptive aspects of preference or disapproval, happiness or unhappiness, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, pain or pleasure to different dimensions of life, in general, and of those goods and services located in the geographical area in particula (pp. 4–5)[43].

According to Gallopin (2006), "qualitative indicators may be preferable to quantitative indicators in at least three situations: when there is no availability of quantitative information; when the attribute of interest is inherently non measureable (such as it happens with many variables of cultural or political nature); and when cost considerations become determinant" (p. 16)[44].

In this way, it is possible to work with micro geographic scales of primary data gathering, which allow a direct approach to the subjects and their evaluations with respect to quality of life. Subjective well-being means to contemplate subjective

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experience of life that persons have, thus to understand the quality of the experiences of individuals. It is convenient to examine directly how a person feels about his life in the context where it is developed (Diner and Suh 1997).

In this sense, the subjective quality of life is what is good in life for each individual. The quality of existential life means that one's life is good on a deeper level. It assumes that the individual has a more intense nature that deserves to be respected.

In recent years, the number of investigations which include subjectivity in the study of quality of life, focusing on the assessment of life satisfaction made by the same subjects has increased. When referring to life satisfaction this is valued globally (satisfaction with our lives as a whole) or for particular domains, i.e. family, education, work, health, friendship, income, among others, "these conditions, in particular those enabling human behavior as soon as they meet requirements, are called satisfiers (…)" (Abaleron 1999, p. 7)[45]. The possibility and availability of satisfiers will allow to cover the requirements of individuals and communities, thus "the balance between the desired satisfiers and those actually obtained will indicate the degree of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of each component of necessity involved in the quality of life concept" (Leva 2005, p. 34)[46]. As Schalock & Verdugo Alonso claim "satisfaction has been used to examine the subjective nature of the quality of life, usually asking people their degree of satisfaction with various aspects of their lives" (2006, p. 34)[47].

As Vega Rapun and Lamote de Grignon Pérez (2008) hold, that the

> objective and subjective indicators of wellbeing are partly interrelated, insofar as the objective indicators refer to the coverage of basic needs, it is expected that the objective and subjective indicators have a close connection. However, as countries develop and income is intended to cover fewer basic needs, less clear the relationship between both. It is precisely for this reason that subjective indicators of well-being have gained importance in recent years (p. 13)[48].

Subjective measurements have become a complement of objective indicators where assessment surveys of different domains characteristic of quality of life of subjects try to find the perceptions that individuals have with respect to their lives, and to their lives in places of residence (Matijasevic et al. 2010). The subjective approach is specifically designed to collect primary data at a disaggregated level into micro-ranges (districts, cities, towns) or at the level of the same subjects, using social surveys, where attention is focused on the behavior of the population and in the evaluations they make with respect to their quality of life (Marans and Stimson 2011). It is possible to "go directly to the opinion of individuals to know what they think about the most important aspects of their lives, such as their health, their education, their jobs and their homes, and how they perceive the main aspects of public policies and the social and economic environment where they live" (Lora 2008, p. 5)[49].

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From this view, Cerda and Vera (2008) pose that any social indicator is the result of a question made to social reality, and that each question initiates from a certain implicit or explicit tendency, or a hypothesis, or a problem. When planning a project of social indicators, researchers make theirs and explicit, the proposal by Smith (1980), which can be considered as the paradigm of social welfare: "who gets what, where and how". As we have already explained, each one of the words: "who", "what", "where" and "how" raises its own set of dimensions.

> Empirical studies carried out seem to indicate that the seven major factors affecting the subjective well-being are (Layar 2005a): family relationships, finances, work, community and friends, health, personal freedom, personal value (the first five shown in order of significance) (Ansa Eceiza 2008, p. 22)[50].

In this sense, what was customary in the creation of information related to the subjective assessments of individuals and of communities or places with respect to their quality of life, was to apply more or less closed questionnaires, from which people are consulted about how they evaluate various aspects of their lives, those questions presented as domains or dimensions of quality of life. Roughly, those questions are linked to levels of satisfaction and are held with closed or fan-like answers, being the Likert scale shown as one of the more exploited options (McCrea et al. 2011a, b; Marans and Kweon 2011; Lucero et al. 2008a; Sirgy et al. 2006), placing 7 points in the measurement of satisfaction, which range from completely satisfied to fully unsatisfied.

As established by Lora (2008), one of the pioneering works in terms of the measurement of the quality of life considering the subjectivity of the persons was the "comparative welfare study" for Scandinavia, directed by Allardt. In this work, the relieved criteria were: income, housing, political support, social relations, being unique, doing interesting things, health, education, and satisfaction with life.

These indicators allow distinguishing between "having", "loving" and "being", considered as the three basic dimensions of well-being based on humanistic psychology then in fashion (Lora 2008).

"A scale of measurement of the quality of life recognized in the world of psychology is the proposal by Cummins (1997), that considers quality of life as an aggregate of objective and subjective components" (Lora 2008, p. 10)[51]. Each component includes seven aspects:

- Material well-being; measured by income, quality of dwellings and possessions.
- Health: measured by the number of disabilities and medications.
- Productivity: measured by the work, education and leisure activities.
- Privacy: contacts with close friends, availability of support.
- Security: perceived at home, sleep quality, safety concerns.
- Place in the community: social activities, responsibilities, being requested for advice.
- Emotional well-being: opportunity to have/ do things desired, enjoying life.

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It is also likely to involve the Index of Satisfaction with Life, created by White of the University of Leicester, a social psychologist who measures satisfaction with life in a subjective way, or the Happy Planet Index, conducted by the New Economics Foundation, which includes 178 Nations, designed to measure development according to life expectancy, the subjective perception of happiness and the ecological footprint.

As Lora (2008) designates an:

> underlined effort of measuring progress of societies is that promoted by Estes, University of Pennsylvania, by means of the Weighted Index of Social Progress (WISP), covering 163 countries. The WISP includes 40 objective indicators that comprise 10 sub-indices on the following components of quality of life: education, health, status of women in society, defense efforts, economy, demography, environment, social chaos, cultural diversity and efforts in social welfare programs (p. 10)[52].

You could build a long and rich list of valuable contributions in terms of the measurement that combines objective and subjective aspects, at various scales (neighborhoods, cities, metropolitan areas and countries), however it must be indicated that, in most of these works, there is a quantitative analysis of the information achieved, i.e. the exercised operationalization is statistical in nature, for example, establishing percentage, offsets and counts of how many subjects of the prospected samples say they are more or less satisfied with their lives, given that broadly, in an overall analysis of data created through the surveys, they are addressed from statistical packages.

Therefore, while there is today some agreement with regard to dealing with the study of quality of life from the objective and the subjective sides, where the objective refers to social welfare, the material environment, the constructed environment; and the subjective or psychosocial refers to satisfaction with life, analyzed on the basis of the valuations of their lives that the same subjects perform (Tonon 2005), we consider necessary to reflect on the qualitative analysis of data obtained directly from the everyday experiences of subjects and their actions in a lived space.

Complementarity between objectivity and subjectivity becomes increasingly a possibility, in this way, quantifiable measurable outcomes that are obtained through objective criteria can be used to judge the conditions of a society and allow obtaining a first approximation to reduction or case study. This could then be enhanced through a qualitative approach to the study of quality of life. As noted in Diner and Suh (1997), the parallel use of objective and subjective indicators is important from methodology, since both provide alternative views of quality of life, breaking thus the opposition of purely quantitative or qualitative approaches, since each of them captures a different aspect of the welfare of society. As established by Díaz (1985):

> Obviously the opinion of the people is essential to be able to evaluate the level of needs satisfaction. For this purpose, the best way to identify and prioritize needs consists of using various methods and different categories of needs (p. 59)[53].

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On this path of analysis, Chacon (1998) establishes that the most important problem at present is the need for further studies on a theoretical and methodological approach able to combine lifestyles, value systems and living conditions of individuals in an objective and perceptive way, where self-assessment, or self-definition, processes of welfare are respected.

We uphold with Lindón (2008) that the way to capture meanings and spatial practices in Geography is from a set of techniques that spot us three possible paths: the observation of practices and its spatiality; the use of content and images that account for such practices; and the study and analysis of discourses of the subjects who carry out these practices.

5.5   Quality of Life and Everyday Space: A Qualitative Proposal

We start from the concept of quality of life as:

> perceptions, aspirations, needs, satisfaction and social representations that members of any social grouping experience in relation to their environment, and the social dynamics into which they are submerged, including the services that are offered to them and the social interventions to which they are eligible and which come from social policies (Ferran Casas 1996, quoted by Tonon 2010 p. 26)[54].

It is a concept that involves the undergone experiences of the subjects in everyday space, their possibility of access to goods, services and the use of the territory. It involves multiple dimensions considered fundamental in the experiences of the subjects in their lived, felt, and perceived space. Accordingly, it should be pursued to jointly consider the material environment, i.e. the created environment, the territory and the psychosocial environment; thus bringing together, the study of living conditions (objective aspect) and the valuations, images, and perceptions of satisfaction with life that subjects have (subjective aspect) (Tonon 2010). In Geography, this conception of quality of life leads us to think in socially constructed space in which the material and non-material or symbolic dimensions are articulated from the perspective of spatial experiences of the subjects (Lindón 2008).

Therefore, to consider quality of life as a sensitizing notion, a social construct (Verdugo et al. 2006) takes us to reflect on the possibility of including the valuations of subjects from new questions and techniques. We are not underestimating the major achievements from the construction of objective social indicators, but it is the challenge of managing a different proximity with the object of study.

The qualitative leap means starting from a first approximation, provided by the objective indicators, in order to study later, in a different mode, other dimensions that contribute to the quality of living of the subject, i.e. to survey and analyze what statistics don't show us.

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The proposal is to add to the dimensions that are traditionally studied on the quality of life, other dimensions that we understand put together fundamental elements for their study, and those altogether are: family, education, health, work, recreation, safety, territoriality or everyday space.

The purpose is to obtain other types of information, to empathize with subjects, enhancing the possibility of increasing the scale of analysis, and to apply different techniques of a qualitative nature, such as, among others, the gathering of documents, the straight observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews and life stories.

The basic unit of all subject reference is the family,

> the family context is a privileged space for social development, being an area where multiple interrelations occur, where spaces, time, outings, entertainment, experiences are shared, where everyone learns through confrontation with others, where everybody can learn to live together and be with others (Romera Iriuela 2003, p. 53)[55].

We understand that to achieve a good life or a worthy life is a commitment of the subjects, and of the subjects with and in their families, independently of the family model, i.e. nuclear, without children, single parent families, assembled, among others.

The family dimension, which as designated by Madariaga and D'Arterio (2008), little of it is included in the works on quality of life, is of utmost importance in achieving a better quality of life, given its importance as a cell which mingles the individuals who constitute it, containing, supporting, advising and developing them in a first instance. Words like "*being together*", "*having a well-established family*", "*meeting at the table*" (Mikkelsen 2010), appear as important signals and as justification enough to be incorporated as a dimension of the quality of life, understanding that it refers to more subjective, spiritual or emotional conditions. Within the family dimension, in objective type studies, the following indicators have been employed: single, nuclear, extended, female parental homes, which can be obtained from national censuses (Madariaga and D'Arterio 2008; Velázquez and Mikkelsen 2010).

We look at education as a dimension of the quality of life in the sense of present and future possibility of legal rights, of freedom, of accomplishment, for individuals and families, since it allows the subjects "to be an element of and participate in life in society" (Lucero et al. 2008b, p. 98). There is a relationship, although not decisive, between education and the possibility of carrying out a good life since, when you think of this pair, the level accomplished may not be the source of satisfaction, but what is really achieved through the level of instruction, promoting awareness in subjects to interpret education as improvement of their quality of life, and thus also enhancing the education of future generations. Such as Velázquez expresses (2004, p. 179), the low educational level "…tends to provide a vicious cycle feedback that reduces the possibilities of development and social promotion of massive sectors of society". For the elaboration of objective indices of quality of life, it is customary to use variables belonging to the educational pyramid, these being: alphabetization rate of population over 6 years old; percentage of population over 25 years old having

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completed a university level degree; educational level of the head of the family (Madariaga and D' Arterio 2008; Velázquez et al. 2013; Velázquez 2008; Lucero et al. 2005, among others).

In terms of the quality of life related to health, two situations are evident, on the one hand to enjoy good health and, secondly, in case of illness, to have the possibility of being properly attended. Testimonials attained in various field works claim that "*health is everything*" "*health is to have social security,*" "*at least, to have health*"*,* "*an installed water pump running is health*" (Mikkelsen 2010). According to Fernández Mayoralas Fernández et al. (2005, p. 126) health is defined as "the value assigned to the duration of life, modified by social opportunities, perceptions, functional status and disability, caused by diseases, accidents, treatments or policies (Patrick and Erickson 1993)"[56]. We believe that it is important to consider not only the conditions of disease or the presence and possibility of access to centers and/or health services, but that is also of interest to reflect all around prevention, and this is strongly related to food, hygiene, the habitability of dwellings and even education. With respect to the Health dimension, indicators utilized, among others, are: percentage of population with social health security coverage; percentage of homes with access to drinking water outside the house; percentage of houses with access to water for cooking from automatic pumping water; child mortality rate (Velázquez et al. 2013; Velázquez 2008 and 2004; among others).

In terms of work, in general the subject finds it positive to achieve a salary-based employment or to perform a salary-based activity, since it enables the acquisition of goods and services, constitutes a forethought both for the present and for the future, adding other benefits linked directly with the satisfaction of needs associated with health and education, especially. According to Lucero (2008), "the dominant cultural model in the Argentine society requires to recognize the role attributed to the employment of the active members of the community as a necessary means for access to goods and services and as a key value of emancipation and realization" (p. 253).

Moreover, employment should beunderstood as a social construct, yet it is referred to a historical context, to a specific culture, to experience and to a way of life of the subjects, as well as a system of symbolic relations which develop in its surroundings (Alonso 1999).

In previous works (Mikkelsen 2010), words such as "*having a job, which provides you with the basics*"*,* "*working is essential,*" "*having money*"*,* appear, phrases that are reiterated without distinction of social groups, regarding work as a value that dignifies in addition to enabling personal maintenance.

In the Work dimension, it is possible to refer to the following indicators, which result from the Homes Permanent Enquiry (HPE) and/or the national censuses: Non-demanding Unemployment Rate; Employment Rate; percentage of population incorporated to the retirement system; households heads only workers; home heads in the retirement system; home heads classified as qualified professional or technical

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workers (Mikkelsen et al. 2013; Lucero 2008; Velázquez and Mikkelsen 2010; Ares and Mikkelsen 2007, among others).

Time devoted to leisure and recreation, as designated by Yanes and Liberali (1986) "a compulsion of renewal of one's self, which promotes values, closer relationships, increases performance in the workday, contributes to education and primarily to physical and mental health" (p. 159).

Security, understood as feelings of danger experienced by subjects in their homes, neighborhoods, cities, therefore thinking of places they escape from, in the times they elude (spaces of the day and night routine, (Lindón 2010), and in practices they apply not to be part of a criminal act. Feeling latent threats, mistrusting places they walk and trying to avoid them, organizing special methodologies to enter and exit their homes, using security systems or finding alternative locations: all this leads to the terms "topophilia" or "topophobia". The first "can be defined broadly to include all human emotional links with his material environment" (Tuan 2007, p. 130)[57]. 'Topophilical' ties can be developed by the aesthetic appreciation, by tactile feelings (as when you enjoy the pure air) or by personal and national history built in direct relation with the territory. In the opposite direction, 'topophobical' relations refer to negative relationships between the subject and the space.

In terms of daily life or personal space, it is directly linked to the place in which individuals or families reside, to services present there, combined with the identity and the sense of belonging, that give social significance to the territory. To inquire the territory (Haesbaert 2004) from the perspective of its inhabitants is the right way to observe and interpret their lived spaces, their temporary space trajectories and their spatial practices. Daily life can be defined by the plot constituted by diverse social practices located in the territory at a specific time, and through which it would be possible to find new meanings of the place, by means of geographical studies of the experienced world that consider the role of objects, actions, techniques and time (Santos 2000). The site expresses the relationship among individuals and the material environment, therefore, the study of that link is a basic starting point.

From these dimensions we intend to review the implication that subjects have on their quality of life, now turning to determine "how" they are valued individually and collectively, i.e. how we approach empirically the construction of evidence, information, trying to question subjects according to their values and needs.

In such sense, a way to be closer to what subjects lived on a daily basis is to capture their views and observe them in a given context and time, focusing especially on the significance of the selected dimensions. Guber says (2001) "the only means to accede to those meanings that subjects negotiate and exchange, is the experience, the possibility of experiencing firsthand those senses as it happens in socialization" (p. 60)[58].

A first exercise is to use the technique of analysis of written documents, in this case maps, photographs, satellite, flat images, illustrations, information from the press, objects which analysis will facilitate the construction of a mental perspective

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and a relational position referring to persons and places involved in the study, just for mentioning some examples: location maps of public spaces for recreation, location maps for educational institutions and providers of health services, both public and private, maps of the routes of public transport, among others.

Then, if we take each dimension in an individual way, we understand that *direct observation*, one of the more formerly employed techniques in Geography, will allow not only the visual collection of information, but also the evidence seized by the other senses, i.e. all that is potentially relevant apart from the direct vision, which may add pictures and videos. Hence it is possible to create information concerning leisure as a dimension, from observing persons in public places intended for recreation and their enjoyment of leisure time, paying special attention to the constituent elements of the place, to the handling of the space, to the activities carried out, to the way subjects communicate, to distances that they keep while doing so, to the representation of the roles that correspond to each one of them, to the differences in their behavior and their activities, among others. As González expresses (2005) the geographical observation is neither a simple task, nor a passive or completely objective one, it is a comprehensive systematic operation, and it is an action to include reality in its real dimension, i.e. to scale 1:1. In this sense, you come in touch with the everyday life of the subjects, their actions and practices materialized in the everyday space, you watch them, you see them, you observe them within a geographic matter, being aware in such practice of the overlapping of interpretations, since the subjectivity of the researchers strongly comes into play in the interpretation of the interpretation of the subjects studied. "The main tools are: the experience, the sensory organs, and the affections which, far from ruining, approach the object of study" (Guber 2001, p. 60)[59].

The survey, in order to obtain meaningful information, requires at least a minimum degree of participation; that is, to play whichever role and therefore to influence the behavior of informers, and reciprocally the researcher's. Without thinking in participant observation, it intends "talking" with subjects, who enjoy of recreation spaces on different days of the week and at different times. This allows restructuring the reasons for choosing these places, time of year, forms of amusement, the methods and modes of arrival to the place, as well as the frequency, asking them about the elements that must be present in a place of recreation, if they consider leisure time significant to hold a good life, and other issues that the same subjects identify as interesting in this joint research. To watch them taking pictures and also to photograph them, consists of an exercise of contemplation which involves several visits, on different days and times, taking records in the field, asking and occasionally interacting with the subjects present in the area, attempting also to observe the movements and dynamics of a zone designed for the leisure of the population.

Local newspapers have a fundamental role, especially in the **Security** dimension, since based on the analysis of their contents, we can recognize, rebuild and observe security/insecurity cuttings. Reading a text, in this case written press, has been the most extensive and universalized form of survey. Ruiz Olabuenaga (1996) establishes that "content analysis is nothing but a technique to read and interpret the

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contents of all kind of documents, specially written documents" (p. 192)[60], in this sense, a text or an object cannot be interviewed but it can be interpreted.

The possibility of having the perception and assessment of the inhabitants in these places allows underlining the importance given to language, a component showing what people do and what they think about the places. According to Di Meo (cited by Lindón 2007), the permanent building of the territory is engendered in everyday practices, which are not strange to the interaction between objective structures (built by society) and cognitive structures (individual, but influenced by the social constituents).

In this context the *individual and group interviews* will be the best option to collect verbal information from subjects with regard to the health, work, education, and security dimensions. Interviews are the most utilized instrument in empirical social research, defined as a purposeful conversation between two partners, which is comprehensive, since during the meeting held by interviewed and interviewer, the dialogue about the purpose that brings them together, must be exhausted: talking with goals, the interviewer knows the objective of his interview and his research problem deeply.

In this case we propose to employ individual in-depth interviews aimed at representative qualified informants for each dimension to deal with: hospitals managers, health centers, clinics, and first aid small quarters, school headmasters representing various levels of instruction, social workers, dining rooms, and inspectors, just to mention some of them. The snowball technique could be used for the elaboration of this qualitative sample, i.e. the selection of qualified informants, which allows choosing subjects who have special characteristics and who, because of their knowledge of the subject to be addressed, may point to other subjects for interviews, who could provide valuable information to the problem in research.

Later the health, work, education and security dimensions will also be treated in *discussion groups* formed by subjects with different roles in the analyzed society, since one of the key elements that have an important impact on the type of material obtained by this technique is the design of the groups (Colectivo IOE 2010). The proposal is to form a heterogeneous group of discussion, establishing as the meeting space, an emotionally representative site for the local society: a school, a social club or a neighborhood association. The dynamics of the group will be observed, for which the purpose of the meeting and the issue of research are made explicit, opening the possibility of the debate addressed by a series of structured lines, while researchers perform the role of guides of the story, writers, inviting everyone to reflect on the issue that brings them together, their well-being. As established by Scribano (2008):

> the central idea that motivates its use is to catch the view that a group of individuals in interaction elaborate on certain issues that constitute their social reality… [since]… the discussion group is a scaled representation of the forms of production, circulation and reproduction of social discourse (p. 116)[61].

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[61] Translation of the authors of the original in Spanish language.

The family dimension can be worked through the use of *stories of life* applied to women between 50 and 60 years of age being part of a family which, even though it is relevant to reconstruct the story of their lives around the family dimension, will be guided so that it is possible to renovate the meaning of the past and the present with regard to the concept of quality of life, taking care to observe continuities and changes in their social and individual well-being. The story of life

> implies a combination between what their individuality and their place are in a network of interpersonal and social relations. Therefore, a story of life is presented as the coming and going through different levels: the individual's own and those in which his life was inserted (Scribano 2008, p. 99)[62].

In this way, as García Ferrando et al. (2005) express that,

> when surrounded by social reality, the researcher can select a single perspective or overlap several. And, although he will never solve the paradox that the closer to social reality, the farther it will be—because his own approach is part of social reality-; if the researcher puts together several perspectives, he can at least have access to a greater number of dimensions of that everlasting complex social reality (p.11)[63].

Then the information obtained must be properly systematized by building codes and labels that simplify the understanding of the problem considered, interpreting it and trying to find its meanings. Thus, the surveyed information receives a double treatment for its interpretation: on the one hand, it is decoded in order to establish broad categories; secondly, it focuses on the analysis of the evidence, now transformed into first-hand documents, central inputs in the achievement of a compromise between research theory and practice.

When employing a methodology of a qualitative nature, data are analyzed as stories, vignettes and short stories which ideal is the so-called "dense description", i.e. the interpretation of the interpretations of subjects taking part in a social action. Thus the analysis and interpretation of qualitative information is accomplished at the intersection of field work and processing, i.e. survey of data and its analysis are exchanged since the beginning of the qualitative research, in a process from the field to the text to the reader. As a result, the ultimate goal is the apprehension of meanings, a claim that was present throughout the entire investigation.

To analyze discourses on the quality of daily life is the central work back to our office; we have created information that comes from the spatial practices of subjects, using various techniques, since Lindón says (2010)

> the subjects not only construct their places when they build houses, buildings, cut down forests, open roads, cultivate land. Places are also built when talking about them and doing it in a certain way, emphasizing some features, ignoring anothers, associating with certain phenomena to others"…"Places are also built by the senses and meanings attributed to them (p. 32)[64].

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[62] Translation of the authors of the original in Spanish language.

[63] Translation of the authors of the original in Spanish language.

[64] Translation of the authors of the original in Spanish language.

So in the words of Velázquez (2008), the

> concept of life quality that, from a certain point of view, we can assimilate to "everyday life", will become, from each of the notions of population and its reference groups, a subjective quality of life. Each assessment will largely focus on the individual experiences, environment, culture, etc, of each group. This sort of self-diagnosis can partly take 'objective' elements as: provision of services, infrastructure, landscape, etc. But, however, it will always be present in perceptions—sometimes with greater power—factors such as: memories, associations, emotional ties, ideologies and beliefs, among others (p. 20).

Quality of life is then conceived as a sensitizing, sensitive, emotional, sentimental notion that provides reference and guide on what is "important" in the daily life of individuals and society, i.e. that it can reflect the space socially lived.

5.6 Conclusions

Resuming the objective that guides this study, we want to emphasize that in recent decades, the inclusion of renewed forms of addressing the object of study is evident in the geographic community, penetrating into the interpretation of the meaning of the places as they are materialized in the spatial practices of the subjects. One of these realizations comes concurrently with the study of the quality of life of the population. In this sense, the possibility of methodological complementarity allows a multiple approach to the concept of quality of life, promoting an appreciation of micro-geographical type studies in combination with those of macro-geographical nature. In this way, the conjunction of both modes of study, objective and subjective, can help provide clarity to the explanation of how and why people live every day in certain places.

Thus, the employment of objective indicators, statistical techniques and macro-geographical scales can be unpredictable at the micro-social level, where lived experience, the relationship subject-place, and spatial practices provide new answers to the social-territorial problematic in research.

As we have seen, quality of life is a concept consisting of multiple and varied dimensions that are interrelated in a complex way, according to the prevailing historical context in each of the places, but above all it is a highly sensitizing concept, as it refers to the life of the subject, to our own lives, to analyze it and analyze us, to study it and study us, and that is why sometimes it can be difficult to focus our lens, and in this sense, to consider objective measures as much as subjective appreciations animate us in the path of the understanding of the well-being of the population as a dynamic and controversial construct.

We understand the concern for the quality of life of the population as a practical sensitive issue currently always present in political debates; in the discussion forums; in the aspiration to solve education, health, work, environment, among others, for specific age groups (young people, children, older adults, women), therefore the fact of being present works as "evidence", as a track, a sign, which in the different academic disciplines attracts your attention, appears as an issue needed to

be addressed, and it becomes the object of study which must be accompanied by methodology.

In this way Geography has much to provide and offer, beginning by turning back to the central categories, bearing in mind a problem that is at right angles with scientific knowledge, reviewing the methods for knowing, apprehending this subject from "how", from methodology, from a methodological convergence, so to contribute with ideas, understanding, knowledge that, in the field of decision-making, allow contributing to "live a life of virtue", since we as human beings aspire to welfare, to happiness, to a meaningful life full of significance with ourselves, with our communities, with our daily lives.

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