Social Work and the Quality of Life Politics - A Critical Assessment

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The popularity of quality of life

If we - as professionals or academics in the field of Social Work - would be asked whether we relate our work to 'life quality' issues we would probably agree, since features like serving people and improving their quality of life (QoL) were always essential to the 'liberal professional' imaginary of Social Work as an 'empowering profession' (see Miley and DuBois 1999): To contribute "professional expertise to the development of policies and programs which improve the quality of life in society" is one of the key features of the International Code of Ethics for Professional Social Workers as written down by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

However, improving QoL as a normative political (and professional) objective is hardly limited to the field of Social Work. Rather it is an increasingly important issue in economics, development studies, and political science, to name just a few. On national levels the concept obviously became an important domain of social indicator surveys currently underpinning a significant proportion of new social scientific research. The rise of such issues in social science is no coincident since we find 'quality of life' in the mission statements in nearly all areas of social policy and also in fields like health, education, etc. it seems to emerge as a sort of key performance indicator. On a supra-national level the QoL perspective has been promoted by institutions from the United Nations to the World Health Organization and even the World Bank (describing itself as "a partner in strengthening economies and expanding markets to improve the quality of life for people everywhere, especially the poorest") and - cooperating - the IMF have espoused strategies and goals in order to enhance QoL. It seems to provide a fundamental rationale of evaluation of policy – operationalised in a wide range of different indicator systems such as the basic well-being index (BWI), the world quality-of-life index (WPQLI), the North-South gap in physical quality of life (NSPQLI), World Literacy (WLIT) etc. - enabling a matrix of strategic connections between different policy issues such as health, safety, 'sustainable development', commerce, the environment, and general community well-being.

QoL as *implicit* feature and *distinctive* conception of welfare

Nevertheless 'quality of life' is on no account a totally new political paradigm and it may be misleading to suggest an only current emergence of this issue in policy, science and practice. Rather QoL may be seen as a *normative* criterion for the judgement of what may be called 'socio-cultural-political issues'. It is a pointer to the direction a society should develop and thus a part of (legitimating) governing. From this point of view one may argue that at least an implicit reference to a populations 'quality of life' (however named) as a historical feature a 'good' sovereign is responsible for, has been an issue of governing societies ever since not

later than the 17th century[1]. By its very nature the political processing of developmental aims of societies and its members is a constitutive dimension of welfare concepts, which, as Titmuss (see 1963, p. 39) puts it, "are manifestations, first, of society's will to survive as an organic whole, and, secondly, of the expressed will of all the people to assist in the survival of some people". If we accept that any term of welfare – referring to a state or condition of doing or being well – does necessarily imply an idea of life quality or more precisely of improving QoL, we may agree that QoL – as a political idea – is one part of programs of governing, suggesting certain definitions and framings of problems as well as modes of their resolution. In other words, it represents one "way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations" (Rose and Miller, 1992, p. 173). Having this in mind we can differentiate between QoL as an *implicit* feature of welfare policy and a *distinctive* social scientifically based conception of organizing welfare.

At the beginning of the 20th century Artur Cecil Pigou used the term 'life quality' explicitly in order to describe non-economic aspects of welfare. But it was not before the late 1960s and early 1970s that the concept of 'quality of life' was promoted as an autonomous feature and central objective of welfare production. Against the background of a politically progressive zeitgeist it was mainly pressed ahead by socially progressive movements and forces since it represented a kind of alternative to the concept of the 'affluent society' which dominated the 1950s and 1960s implying economic growth as the major goal and indicator of societal progress[2] (see Noll 1996). This implicated an important shift in the priorities of social policy as not only income redistribution but 'active social policy' aiming at 'life quality' and a 'political formation of social life circumstances' became part of the policy agenda (Kaufmann, 2005, 11). In the US the alternative view expressed in the notion of QoL - which was related to the idea of 'liveability' of a society - is impressively portrayed in Lyndon B. Johnson's famous speech about his political vision of a 'Great Society' at the University of Michigan in 1964. "For half a century" US-President Johnson stated "we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people. The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life and to advance the quality of our American civilization". The answer to this challenge was the mentioned 'Great Society' as a "place where men are more concerned with the quality of their lives than the quantity of their goods" and where "material progress is only the foundation on which we will build a richer life of mind and spirit"[3].

If we keep in mind that the modes of organising welfare and welfare institutions are not only organisational sites of social realities but, as Bo Rothstein (1998) puts it, always expressions of definite moral conceptions, which contain, deliver and produce central normative regulational ideas we may argue that the *QoL perspective* – as an approach to assess economic and social developments as well as central issues of public policy, social legislation, community programs etc. – contributed to the formulation of an alternative normative basement of and a broader view on welfare. It represented a perspective on well-being beyond

[1] In parts we found this concept already in the age of renaissance (see Münkler and Fischer 1999); see the work of Plato and Aristotle for ideas on this issue in the Greek ancient world.

[2] This is also reflected in the socialist dream of a society in which in which the means of production are employed in order to provide for human happiness rather than for profit.

[3] Also in other Western the quality of life issue became a central governmental topic. In West Germany for instance it was a key feature of the 1973 government declaration of Chancellor Willy Brandt, which he related to 'freedom from fear and misery'.

a traditional narrow focus on incomes, economic resources that people possess and other macroeconomic indicators but included issues related to cultural and social aspects of life. In this respect a QoL approach may reflect necessities in containing conflict, reducing inequalities, strengthening opportunities for political, social and cultural participation and improving personal living conditions.

This socially progressive perspective on QoL encompasses and combines both economic and social aspects of welfare. However there is a new tendency in the discourse about QoL which was massively promoted in the last 15 years. Here QoL is portrayed as a kind of *alternative* to redistributive concepts of welfare as QoL is mainly used to mean subjective well-being or life satisfaction. This shift was triggered by the case that in particular since the 1990s Western European as well as North American welfare regimes have been „keen to add the concept of social exclusion to a contemporary understanding of misery amid plenty, or all together substituting social exclusion for poverty" (Abrahamson, 2003, p. 281; see critically Otto and Ziegler 2004). Analytically this conceptual refiguration promoted a "change of focus in the poverty and inequality discourse from a vertical to a horizontal perspective [which] can to some extent also be described as a shift from Marxist and Weberian tradition of class and status analysis to a Durkheimian 'anomie-integration' discourse" (Andersen, 1999, p. 129). Against this political and discursive background reframing the understandings of privation and social distress and subsequently the strategic modes of its resolution it is quite consistent that improving well-being, *rather* than increasing income - and in particular rather than increasing income redistribution - became an appealing political feature.

'Objective' and 'subjective' approaches on QoL

On a scientific level of knowledge production these different political conceptions of life quality also reflect the tensions between 'objective' and 'subjective' approaches of empirical social research, which may measure quite diverse matters. Often the so called 'objective' indicators of QoL do not correlate highly with their 'subjective' counterparts (see Cummins, 1999). Even if we may suppose an overall consensus that welfare measurement is to be based on both 'objective' and 'subjective' indicators (see Glatzer and Zapf 1984), there is a shift in the balance and weight of these indicators in favour of the 'subjective' ones: Subjective well-being is - either implicitly or explicitly - the ultimate goal or evaluative criterion for much governmental, organisational and individual behaviour.

The so called 'objective approach' on 'QoL' is currently most strongly related to Scandinavian countries. The 'objective approach' is not to mistake for a merely income focussed perspective because it does employ other social, cultural, gender and service related indicators, but it is neither concentrated on people's own assessment of their degree of life satisfaction nor on more or less psychological constructs such as happiness. The respective surveys do accordingly not involve items on matters like positive or negative emotions, hopes, fears, moods, anxieties etc. Rather the 'objective approach' is based on explicit criteria that are suggested to exist independent of subjective awareness. A particular application of this usually 'ressourcist' approach are the Swedish 'level of living' studies (see Erikson, 1993) representing an approach assessing 'life chances' which may be portrayed as "the chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural 'goods' that typically exist in any given society" (Giddens, 1973, pp. 130-131) while recognising that social classes are a "specific causal component of [...] life chances" (Weber, 1978, p. 927) which "exist independently of individual occupants of these positions" (Sørenson, 1991, p.72; see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992)

The different forms of 'subjective approaches' on the other hand were most common in

welfare surveys in the US. Quite often this approach is akin to the psychological stream found in economic indicators research. Based on the more or less political premise that our material needs are already satiated (see Frank 1999) but also with reference to academic theories on 'reflexive modernisation' and individualisation and to those kind of 'lifestyle research' investigating horizontal differentiation rather than vertical stratification it is argued that individual designs of living are continuously differentiating in modern industrial society. Thus the subjective approach suggests that since QoL is perceived by individual citizens it can be judged best by them, and therefore a number of researchers suggest to reconstruct QoL in a "thoroughgoing subjectivist way, making the reflexive self-evaluation of the subject him- or herself the ultimate standard" (Birnbacher, 1999, p. 25). This approach insists that 'objective measures' may only have a small direct impact on what people themselves experience as their well-being which mainly reflects issues of personal dedication. When for instance people are asked what they consider as important areas of their life they may indeed mention their material situation but equally if not more relevant are typically their relationships with family and relatives, their own health, and that of close significant others, their social life and leisure activities etc. (see Bowling, 1995; Michalos and Zumbo, 1999; Raphael et al., 1999).
If the 'objective' and 'subjective' approaches on quality of life are related to welfare production we argue that Social Work is going to take centre stage when 'subjective' features of QoL are politically valorised. In order to explain this suggestion it seems to be reasonable to begin with bringing in mind the place of Social Work in welfare production.

The place of Social Work in welfare production

The distinctive perspective of Social Work may be described as a focus on individual and collective problems and necessities of human life conduct arising out of the organisation of a social formation. In doing so, Social Work inventions do typically not imply a direct redistribution of economic goods. Being a human service profession with 'people processing', 'people sustaining' and 'people changing' functions (see Hasenfeld, 1972, 1983) Social Work rather processes the doings and beings of individual actors and their socio-ecological embeddings. Social Work addresses service users as interdependent and interactive within social units. Like other human services Social Work may focus on aspects of human development by improving competence, knowledge and skills through education and training, curing and improving psychological states. But rather unlike other human services Social Work gives priority to the bonds and conflicts *between people*, and to how moral ties and dilemmas as well as the co-operative and competitive aspects of groups and communities, both constrain and enable individuals (see Jordan, 2003).
In this respect Social Work refers to a combination of educational and social-ecological interventions. The main resources used but also created by these interventions are what the French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) would have called *cultural* and *social capital*. Both resources are personally or inter-personally bounded and their value, transferability and effects are much more dependent from the dynamics of the contexts, embeddings, settings, cultures or - again in Bourdieus terms - the 'social fields' in which they are situated, than those of laws, rights, and economic capital that constitute the resources of the more generalized parts of welfare (see Otto and Ziegler, 2004; Ziegler, 2003).
Whether Social Work systematically occupies a rather discrete and major or a rather supplementing position in the arrangement of welfare production is largely a question of how this arrangement is organised. And as we pointed out the different perspectives on QoL do also imply different modes and focal points of welfare production.
Our argument is that the traditional post-war ('modernist' or 'fordist-keynesian') mode of welfare production – in which state provision of goods and services to a national population

was understood as an essential means of ensuring social well-being – has been massively challenged as increasing doubts have been raised about the capacity and (moral) responsibility of states. Furthermore we propose that what may be called the 'new' politics of quality of life is a part of some critical dynamics in the political production of welfare. We suggest that the concept of QoL

1. has been individualised. What quality of life actually is, it is suggested, "must be in the eye of the beholder" (Campbell, 1972).
2. has been adapted to communitarian concepts and subsequently to the concept of social capital, especially in terms of social or rather community cohesion. The social capital/community nexus in the current debate is a tantamount for an informalisation of the concept of quality of life.
3. has become a key concern in the context of, as well as a major legitimation for a 'culturalization' of issues of social justice that stresses issues of 'recognition' at the expense of 'distribution'.

The individualisation of QoL

An ideal typical example for the currently political dominant 'individualisation' of the quality of life discourse is presented by a British think tank stating that a "focus on enhancing people's incomes […] has not tended to result in higher levels of well-being". Instead the NEF supposes that a "set of national well-being accounts should be created which covers the main components of individual well-being – life satisfaction and personal development – as well as a range of components of well-being including engagement, meaningfulness, trust, […etc. This] would help to focus the minds of policy-makers on the true end of policy. In particular, it would help identify the worst off in well-being terms. Policy tends to think of the worst off as the income poor. We need to supplement this with broader definitions of poverty and ill-being and what we might call the opposite of flourishing – languishing" (NEF, 2004, p. 8). One basic argument of the NEF approach is that 'material resources' and other 'demographic factors' do not matter or at least not that much. Rather a considerable proportion of subjective well-being is supposed to be related to 'genetics' and 'personality' (much more than to 'social circumstances', see NEF, 2004; Lykken and Tellegen, 1996). While these 'fixed' aspects are themselves rather unlikely to be affected directly by welfare governance a range of other 'factors' are. But still it is argued that "income, as well as other external factors such as the climate and where we live" would "count for only 10 per cent" of our well-being (with socio-economic factors typically explaining hardly more than five percent of the individual-level variance, see Inglehart and Klingemann, 2000). Thus, the report goes on we would "systematically over-estimate the amount of happiness extra income will bring us […]. We fail to account for the fact that our expectations also rise with our incomes. Spending more time with our children, families, friends, and communities would bring us more happiness" (NEF, 2004, p. 2). It seems to be obvious that from this perspective there is only little need for welfare strategies to reduce material inequality in order to enhance QoL[4]. Positions like those of the NEF may be politically biased, but the individualised

[4] Since studies suggest that situations like being unemployed or being a single parent (= single mother) seem to have stronger diametrical effects on QoL than low income (empirically see Keck and Delhey, 2004) one may also get a sneaking suspicion that such forms of 'subjective approaches' could easily be converted in line with legitimating workfare and conservative family politics (even if this is of course not an intrinsic automatism of this perspective). In particular in the context of workfare policies it is a common argument to suggest that 'welfare to work' is a 'good thing' for the 'subjective quality of life' of those concerned. In our own study we could hardly verify such arguments. While it turned out to be true, that those in full-time employment are somewhat more likely to be satisfied with their lives than the unemployed (r= .154) the same seems to be true for

approach is more than a marginal idea proclaimed by some governmental think tanks with an anti-redistributive stance. In line with an individualised approach even the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1998) for example has defined QoL as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns"[5].

It is important to keep in mind that such positions are neither 'non-' nor 'anti-welfare'. On the contrary, a 'subject centred' notion of QoL itself may still be a feature of welfare production. But it seems that it is conducive to a reorganisation of welfare (respectively it seems to necessitate such a reorganisation). Keeping in mind our comments on the place of Social Work in welfare production we may argue that if welfare production is primarily related to individual well-being, personal development, engagement, meaningfulness etc. the supposable consequence is that human services rather than abstract insurance based forms of social security come to the fore. Therefore it is in line with an individualised perspective on QoL when some commentators even suggest to rename personal social services into 'quality of life services' as their common feature is to "produce services in order to improve QoL in high gear" (Blanke, 2004). Also it seems to fit in this discourse that in most of the Western societies the social service part in welfare production has risen enormously[6] (see Kaufmann, 1994) as we have witnessed a "transformation of governmental assistance from cash to services" (Allard, 2004). Some even suggest a shift in Western Welfare systems from 'Social Insurance States' to 'Social Services States[7]' (Blanke, 2004).

One feature of the individualised approach is the assumption that 'wellbeing' can best be advanced by stimulating people to take their lot in their own hand. In a reframed version this perspective may have been a prominent part within the 'Empowerment' discourse in Social Work relying on the assumption that people are not be to held responsible for their own ill-being and 'underdevelopment', but they are assumed to be very much responsible for their

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he part-time and marginally employed in relation to the full-time employed (r= .110). The effect of marginal employment compared to unemployment was completely negligible. The effect of ones occupational status as scaled by means of the ISEI (i.e. the 'International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status') on life satisfaction was much higher (r= .255). In other words: The 'quality' of a job is related to the (subjective) 'quality of life' – and 'shit jobs' are not a means to make you satisfied.

[5] Very instructively Barbara Cruikshank (1996) demonstrates the *political* rationalities of this approach in her study on US 'self esteem' movements. These developed and deployed technologies for a self assessing life conduct in which the self continuously has to be measured and judged in order to gear personal 'empowerment'. 'Social Problems' tended to be recoded as impediments of happiness and subjective wellbeing to be tackled by encouraging and enabling those who had to face them to take more responsibility for the conduct of their own lives. Corresponding also the sources of such problems as well as their solutions are not to be sought in social-structural factors but rather in individual-subjective characteristics, in the modes of our life conduct, in the (failed) ways of governing ourselves. As even in fields like economics the interest in 'subjective well-being' (or happiness) measures is rapidly increasing (see Frey and Stutzer, 2002), Cruikshank suggests that these rationalities are neither limited to the personal domain nor the field of welfare production. They rather represent a kind of political re-ordering. In terms of public welfare production promoting 'life quality' from the 'individualised' perspective matches this agenda as it *primarily* implies the use of the multiple techniques employed for the purpose of empowerment and involvement of specific individuals and groups or "in consultation and negotiation, techniques of 'voice' and 'representation' […] by which the claims of groups can enter into a process of negotiation over needs and requirements, in contexts as diverse as community development, health promotion, teaching, community policing, the combating of dependency, etc." (Haahr, 2004, p. 217).

[6] In Germany for instance -if health care is included- the proportion of social services in the welfare production system (even if some tasks like education are not assigned to the welfare state sector in Germany), has risen up to about 50% of the total budget (see Blanke, 2004).

[7] This also contains that some commentators portray 'quality of life' as a significant business location factor as well as a 'booming sector' where low wage jobs for low qualified and/or unemployed could easily be created (see Beyer et al., 2003, pp. 3, 25).

'development' and improvement of their life quality[8]. But against the background of the currently predominating welfare discourse the view that the state has responsibility for its citizens should increasingly recast as a moral responsibility of individuals to provide for their own life quality, has been politically voiced primarily by proponents of the New Right: People shall be encouraged to be active entrepreneurs in the promotion of their own well-being (i.e. a 'culture of self-responsibility').. Actually a range of studies seem to support the suggestion that a 'generous' welfare state does not promote the happiness and life satisfaction of the people[9]. Presenting an empirical overview of her own and other studies Ruut Veenhoven (2000) points out that there is usually no greater wellbeing in welfare states: There is neither a link between the size of the state welfare budget and the average level of wellbeing (in cross-country comparison) nor between the size of the state welfare budget and equality in wellbeing between citizens. Also increases or reductions in social security expenditure tend not to be related to a rise or fall in the level of happiness.
But even if we agree with 1) the notion that people (whether rich or poor) do know their needs, problems and priorities and do know how satisfied, anxious, trustful etc. they are and 2) that welfare agencies and Social Workers do not and should not have the competency to 'know' these things better as the people who may be concerned we may nevertheless be in serious doubt about an individualised approach on QoL as a normative basement of welfare production. In the following sections we discuss these doubts with respect to two features: the question of the 'socialising effect of welfare' and the question of the 'point of reference' of individualised QoL.

The socialising effect of welfare

We should first keep in mind that 'satisfaction' predominantly reflects cognitive evaluations of what people *think* about the 'adequacy' of their situation (while 'happiness' may be viewed as the *affective* dimension linked with this evaluation) (see Ryan and Deci, 2001). Also the relations between subjective wellbeing and the welfare system may implicitly echo normative judgements on welfare contingent upon citizens' perceptions. They tend to mirror whether the welfare system meets normative expectations or fails in the moral perception of its citizens. There is for instance evidence that unhappiness linked to inequality inter alias differs with respect to political ideologies. While the 'subjective well being' of people who identify with left wing beliefs is affected by inequality, it is not in the case of right wingers (see Donovan and Halpern, 2002). Beyond this it seems even more important to remind that welfare arrangements may also themselves have what Offe (1996) used to call a 'socialising function'. As systems of welfare production mirror as well as shape welfare cultures, value judgements and mentalities of citizens it is fair to suppose that whether QoL is regarded as an *individual issue* or as an issue of the public realm is inter alias dependent from the ways of welfare production[10]. Thus it is not *so* surprising that (at least in affluent societies) comparative studies do not confirm a general effect of the welfare regime on the 'subjective' QoL of the people who life *within* the regarding regime.

[8] This view is pretty good documented by civil rights activist Jesse Jackson's prescription: "You are not responsible for being down, but you are responsible for getting up" (Bröckling, 2004).

[9] There is also only a vague if any correlation between objective measures of poverty and subjective poverty perceptions (see Gallie and Paugam, 2002), since these two issues *are* simply different.

[10] If we thus think about those welfare arrangements Esping-Anderson used to call 'liberal welfare states' we may suppose a higher normative adherence to the idea of the 'free market' and less emphasis on 'equality' but rather on (individualistic) equity i.e. on the idea that individuals are foremost themselves responsible for their own wellbeing and that 'the market' will reward them according to their efforts (see Arts and Gelissen, 2001).

The way in which welfare production is 'objectively' organised tends to interrelate with the organisation of welfare people 'subjectively' prefer[11] and also with whom they first and foremost regard as to be responsible for 'quality of life': 'the public' or oneself. As there is the general tendency to judge private issues - which we can personally influence – less critical than public issues it is not amazing that in welfare systems in which individuals are themselves responsible for their own QoL, people may have quite high scores of subjective well-being despite high levels of inequality and low levels of social security. Furthermore the suggestion that the presumed nil-effect between the generosity of the welfare state and the life satisfaction of the citizens may partly be an effect of the 'socialising function' of the regime is at least indirectly underpinned by the empirical finding that social inequality tends to have significant effects on 'life satisfaction' in European welfare states but not in the USA[12] (see Alesina et al., 2002). On the one hand it may be the case that these findings reflect the typical perception of higher levels of social mobility in the USA[13] (the 'American Dream' that the poor of today could become the rich of tomorrow) which could reduce inequality related 'subjective' dissatisfaction (Ibid.; Donovan and Halpern, 2002). On the other hand they may also and foremost mirror the tendency that citizens in more 'generous' and 'universalistic' welfare regimes favour more equal societies (see Andreß and Heien, 2001). Anyway, the evaluation of life quality does obviously not take place within a social 'vacuum' but is ex ante related to the social, cultural, ideological, moral etc. sites in which they are embedded and out of which they grow.

Yet also in Europe discourses about welfare have significantly changed over the last decades, shifting regulatory competence of the state onto responsible and rational individual citizens while "an important strand in political science argues that trust in state institutions is in decline, and work in sociology claims that citizens are becoming more independent, reflexive and keen to take responsibility for meeting their own needs" (Taylor-Gooby and Hastie, 2003, p. 271). As Janine Brodie (1996, p. 131) has observed, "changing public expectations about citizenship entitlements, the collective provision of social needs, and the efficacy of the welfare state has been a critical victory for neo-liberalism". In most parts of the Western world it is observable that significant parts of those aspects of government that welfare construed as political responsibilities are "transformed into commodified forms and regulated according to market principles. Economic entrepreneurship is to replace regulation, as active agents seeking to maximise their own advantage are […portrayed as] the legitimate locus of decisions about their own affairs" (Rose and Miller, 1992). Increasingly larger realms of society, which were hitherto regulated by specialized and authorized state apparatuses, are now left to (informalised) processes of negotiation and mechanisms of self-organisation. Against this background most Western democracies have invented what they called the 'active citizen' which attempt to constitute citizenship in terms of (financial) self-sufficiency for present and future subjective well being. This invention mainly signifies a qualitative change of forms in which social subjectivity is politically established in order to (re-)activate self-motivation, self-responsibility and self-reliance. 'Active citizens' are portrayed as 'entrepreneurs of their selves' which "are urged to face market compulsion on their own

[11] Using multiple-group structural equation models, for example a cross-national study of Hans-Jürgen Andreß et al. figures out that: "People in liberal welfare regimes show comparably low levels of support for the welfare state. While we find medium levels of support in conservative regimes, the welfare state seems to have a very high legitimacy in welfare states categorized as being social-democratic"(Heien and Hofäcker, 1999, p. 38; see Andreß and Heien, 2001).

[12] In the US we find also the paradox that "it is the rich who are slightly affected by inequality, while the poor seem unaffected" (Donovan and Halpern, 2002, p. 23).

[13] There is evidence, that Americans are much more likely at least "*to believe* they have equal opportunities to get ahead than citizens in other countries" (Aldridge, 2004, p. 27).

responsibility and in an active way in order to bring their entire existence in line with maximizing the 'value of life' or 'quality of life'" (Lemke, 2001). These new rationalities of welfare governance fit very well into the individualisation of QoL as one political means to shift (moral) responsibility from 'the public' to the individuals who are obliged to provide for their own personal well-being. From this individualised point of view it is not a major problem if people think that they cannot rely on public guarantees securing 'quality of life'. On the contrary they should not do so and the more the 'individual' QoL is independent from the welfare state the better (and cheaper).

The point of reference of individualised QoL

Obviously the validation of the quality of our own lives and issues concerning the public realm may reflect different things. Most research demonstrates that satisfaction in life or psychological well-being is closely related to meaning in life, with positive life meaning being related to strong religious beliefs, self-transcendent values, membership in groups, dedication to a cause and clear life goals. As Headey and Wearing (1992) note: "A sense of meaning and purpose is the single attitude most strongly associated with life satisfaction." But if QoL and subjective well-being depend more on relative levels of satisfaction – rather than absolute levels of achievement – serious problems arise if these features are deployed as the currency of welfare. As questions on 'happiness', 'subjective well-being' or 'life satisfaction' tend to be reflections of respondents' aspirations rather than their real circumstances in life (see Vogel, 2002) one of the most obvious problems is the 'decline of aspiration'. If for instance – as Runciman (1966) puts it – "people have no reason to expect or hope for more than they can achieve, they will be less discontent with what they have, or even grateful simply to be able to hold on to it". And there is indeed empirical evidence that also vice versa "aspirations appear to grow commensurately with household wealth" (Easterlin, 2003, p. 1; see Kahneman, 2002).

More generally: the way we judge the quality of our lives may reflect how successful we deal with our lives within what we see as *our* scopes of the feasible rather than the scale and scope of the opportunity structure itself. Subjective QoL is, as Veenhoven (1995, p. 33) puts it, "one symptom of a good 'fit' between human nature and habitat". Keeping in mind that neither the 'human nature' nor the human 'habitat' are that 'natural' we suppose that perceptions of QoL largely reflect the quality of the 'fit' between what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus* – or 'internalized common sense' – and (social) habitat. In this context we may argue that beyond the problem of 'declining aspirations' the QoL perspective faces the sociological noteworthiness that the 'habitus' tends to 'search' its habitat. In particular the work of Bourdieu (1984) has demonstrated that the taste and the aspirations of human actors are relational issues: what we *prefer to do and be dependents from what we actually are* and how satisfied we are is dependent from the satisfaction of our preferences and aspirations. As our values, preferences, expectations, aimed achievements and their satisfactions are merged with our 'habitus' it may be the case that we all want our preferences and aspirations satisfied but our preferences and aspirations are not the same (see Bourdieu, 1984, 1990; Gough, 2004). Rather they are structured by our class position. But if this is the case, equality of personal life satisfaction may mask dramatic forms of inequality.

Against this general background it may be explained that research in *some* Western countries – namely the so called 'liberal regimes' and most obviously the USA (see Alesina et al., 2002) - shows that the correlation between education or income and happiness is rather

negligible[14] – and even this small relation can be explained by the fact that the affluent and educate tend to have 'better health' (lower morbidity rates) and 'more social capital'. Once these factors are controlled for the relationship often drops or even disappears. In other more welfarist countries, like for instance in Germany, however there is evidence that (*low*) income does (ceteris paribus) reasonably well in explaining differences in life satisfaction even though this relation is not linear but implies a diminishing marginal utility of income. But still, while currently around 35% of the Germans live in what is called 'precarious affluence'[15] – more than seven of ten of whom are 'happy' - only about 8 % of the Germans turned out to be more or less unhappy (see Datenreport 2004). Actually a rather big gap between 'objective' and 'subjective' indicators!

In our own community study[16] (n= 350) in Bielefeld (Germany) investigating different neighbourhoods we found some other interrelations implying the relevance of socio-ecological contexts: Unexpectedly we found that 'low class'[17] inhabitants in neighbourhoods labelled as 'social hot spot' tended to report slightly more often that they are satisfied with their lives compared to 'low class' inhabitants living in non-poor neighbourhood. Middle class inhabitants on the other hand reported - as expected - clearly more life satisfaction when living in a rather affluent respectively non-poor neighbourhood[18] (r=.228).

	Class specific correlation between life satisfaction and neighbourhood[19]
relative class position	
low	-.057
average	.120
high	.320**

**The correlation is significant at p<0,01.

More remarkable still, we also found that not only the strength but even the direction of the correlation between class and life satisfaction turned out to be area specific. In the non-poor neighbourhoods 'class' does reasonably well in explaining life satisfaction (r= .237) while w*ithin* the poorest neighbourhood we actually fond *no*, or even a slightly *reversed* relation between 'class' and life satisfaction with the members of the most affluent class being least satisfied[20].

[14] Ironically even actual income is only modestly related to income satisfaction (Veenhoven and Saris, 1996). Furthermore in the UK we find the paradox that subjective life satisfaction scores tend to be *lower* for *more* educated individuals (see Donovan and Halpern, 2002).

[15] 'Precarious affluence' is defined as less than 75% of the arithmetic median equivalized household income.

[16] Our community study in Bielefeld is part of a research project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) under the head of Prof. Hans-Uwe Otto.

[17] 'Class' was built as a factor out of the variables 'income', 'educational degree' and 'occupational status' (ISEI).

[18] This is in particular true for the upper middle class (r= .320).

[19] 'Life satisfaction' was surveyed by the standard question "All things considered, how satisfied or unsatisfied are you with your life in general?" Scores were based on a four-point scale from "very satisfied" to "very unsatisfied" with four being "very satisfied". Poor neighbourhoods were coded by '1', non-poor neighbourhoods by '2'. Hence positive correlation means that people living in the non-poor neighbourhood feel more satisfied.

[20] In particular for men within this neighbourhood we found a slight but significant negative correlation between income and life satisfaction.

Neighbourhood specific correlation between life satisfaction and class factor	
poorest neighbourhood	-.031
non-poor neighbourhood	.237**

**The correlation is significant at p<0,01.

So if perceived life satisfaction and happiness is the currency of welfare, should we encourage poor people to move to poor neighbourhoods in order to make them 'happier'? Should Social Work in poor areas care not for (the happy) poor but for the (mirthless and woeful) affluent? Could we scale down welfare because most of the poor are happy anyway? Or should we, to take up an example from Elizabeth Anderson (1999), in the case that Tiny Tim would still be happy without his wheelchair and sullen Scrooge would be consoled by having the money it costs, force Tim to give up his wheelchair to Scrooge?
Even if we stress the crucial importance of positive life meaning, self-worth, belonging, identity, purpose etc. such a view would be cynical. Anderson (1999) is right in pointing out that the trouble is that such approaches "in relying on subjective evaluations, and in aggregating over different dimensions of well-being, allow private satisfactions to count as making up for publicly imposed disadvantages. If people find happiness in their lives despite being oppressed by others, this hardly justifies continuing the oppression".
We should keep in mind the processes of '*individualisation'* of social justice because this leads to the second currently ongoing shift – to what we call the '*informalisation'* of QoL. Part of this informalisation as discussed in the following section is a re-scaling in terms of a decomposition of the national 'social' into a variety of (spatial, ethical, cultural etc.) 'communities' (with potentially incommensurable allegiances and obligations) as a major site of welfare governance (see Clarke, 2005).

The informalisation of QoL

The interweaving of individualisation and (community) informalisation discourses is colourfully expressed by Karen Jespersen (2000)[21]: Today, she argued "it is more about improving internal rather than external well-being. It concerns the fact that many people are lonely and are in need of self-esteem and social networks, they simply do not have a sense of belonging. It concerns a poverty problem which the government on it's own will not be able to deal with. Individual citizens must, to a much greater degree, take responsibility for others at work, in residential areas, within the family, in organisations etc. Particularly, it is about people being able to take responsibility for them selves if we are to move away from the fact that many people are being taken care of via public funding. This does not mean that government participation should decrease, but that it needs to change. The government should strengthen individual citizen's professional, social and personal expectations with the goal of having them being self-sufficient and become active participants in society's community. Thus we need to have individuals and their opportunities as a central political focal points. However, people only become strong and able to help themselves if they are part of strong communities, in which they take co-responsibility" (taken from Larsen, 2001, p. 3).

Despite this discursive conjuncture the *community* perspective has distinctive features which seem to contradict the accentuation of the 'subjective'. While the individualisation discourse seems to endorse a notion that each woman/man is the architect of her/his own fortune the informalisation discourse emphasises 'the community' and communitarian virtues. Here the tendency is bemoaned that "each of us" makes him- or herself "the centre of our moral

[21] Jespersen is the former social democratic Minister of Social Affairs of Denmark.

universe, […] assess[ing] everything - from personal relationships to taxes - in terms of 'what's in it for me'. The net result in a shift in moral focus from the community to the individual, from responsibilities to rights, from cooperation to competition, from self-restraint to self-indulgence – in all, from values conducive to well-being to those harmful to well-being, both socially and personally" (Eckersley, 1999, p. 5).

However the communitarian and the individualised perspective on QoL are not necessarily opposed points of view. Rather they can be harmonised since both recognise 'positive life meaning' as one of the key features of QoL. The intersection of the two allegedly conflicting perspectives is the insight that one necessary condition for meaning is to be attached to something larger than the self: 'The self" is, as the psychologist Martin Seligman (1990) puts it "a very poor site for meaning.' This is a central starting point of the communitarian perspective but - as already discussed in the section above - also a 'individualised' notion of QoL reflects the "'fit' between human nature and habitat" (Venhooven, 2000). Thus emphasising the individuals' attachment to his or her (local) community – as the primary dimension of the individual 'habitat'– both perspectives may analytically rather complement than contradict one another.
Also in terms of political governance a (neo-)communitarian approach goes with an individualised perspective on QoL emphasising "discrete and autonomous actors in context of their particular commitments to families and communities" (Rose, 1996, p. 328). Thinking of ideas like the 'Third Way', 'Compassionate Conservativism' or the 'Activating State' etc. - and their maxim of 'steering, not rowing' - we may currently witness the rise of modes of welfare governance in which "contemporary processes of individualisation are circumscribed by a new communitarian ethic" (Larsen, 2001, p. 3) and an accentuation on "the personal responsibilities of individuals, their families and their communities for their own future well-being and upon their own obligation to take active steps to secure this" (Rose, 1996, pp. 327-328). These new configurations of governance - with their focus on 'self-organised care' and activation of unpaid voluntary service to one's fellows - exactly reinforce "the plight of the citizen to be active" (Larsen, 2001, p. 3) by deploying programmes and strategies aiming at encouraging 'community' and collectivism[22] while at the same time emphasising individual responsibility. Nikolas Rose terms this "governing through community" i.e. "through the self-steering forces of honour and shame, of propriety, obligation, trust, fidelity, and commitment to others" (Rose, 2000, p. 187). And this is where social capital comes to the forefront because this is exactly what social capital is about. The currently most influential approach of social capital is the one of the political scientist Robert D. Putnam who defines social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, p. 19) respectively as "features of social life - networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1996, p. 56). In a similar vain also others, like for instance Cohen and Prusak (2001, p. 4), describe social capital as a "stock" of "trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities". There is hardly any doubt that such notions of social capital fit well in the current shifts "of political rationality from 'social' to 'community' governance" which have "brought about a 'new' welfare, built on community, social responsibility and voluntary activity, standing against an 'old' welfare which emphasised society, citizenship rights and statutory provision" (Harris, 2002, pp. 378-379). And it fits also in the intersection of

[22] A main idea is to facilitate, trigger and empower community 'strength' rather than to act as a 'top down' provider of solutions and resources. Social Work may be viewed – and actually tries to represent itself - as a sort of main actor in this 'community empowering' enterprise.

individualised and communitarian informalised approaches of QoL reinventing the 'micro-moral' community as site and frame of reference for well-being. According to the "Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey" of the Harvard University for instance social capital matters a lot for the QoL in communities as well as for personal happiness (see also Helliwell and Putnam, 2004). "Social connectedness" it is reported as a result of this survey "is a much stronger predictor of the perceived QoL in a community than the community's income or educational level". Beyond this community perspective even "*personal* [italics added] happiness is also much more closely tied to the level of community social connectedness and trust than to income or educational levels. […] In other words, your personal happiness is *not* directly affected by the affluence of your community, but it *is* quite directly affected by the social connectedness of your community" (www.cfsv.org/community survey).

As we pointed out, Social Work gives priority to the bonds and conflicts between people. So the importance of social capital also seems to indicate the importance of Social Work. This appears to be very good news for our discipline. Based on the results of our Bielefeld study, we won't deny that there are quite considerable correlations – but not necessarily causal relations – between involvement in community and 'happiness' or 'life satisfaction'. The frequently-used factor 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion'[23] as suggested by Robert Sampson et al. (1997) does indeed reasonably well to explain life satisfaction on an overall level (r= .212). In addition, based on an analyses of key dimensions of current international community approaches as well as on the empirical results of our Bielefeld study we created a neighbourhood related factor, we call 'local involvement factor' (LIF)[24], which does even better (r= .250).
However our results hardly verify the magnitude of community involvement in comparison with income and other class related levels[25]. After regression the coefficient of the quite 'materialistic' EGP-scale[26] (.225) is clearly higher than that of the 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion' factor[27] (.117) and also higher than the coefficient of the 'LIF' factor (.158) which represents the most significant 'community' item. Furthermore the data suggest that class may also in other respects play an outstanding role in the connectedness/happiness nexus which seems overall to reflect a quite (upper-)middle-class oriented point of view. Most of the typical indicators of connectedness in a local community - like for instance feeling at

[23] The 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion' factor was built through three items ('People in this neighbourhood are willing to help each other'; 'This is a close-knit neighbourhood'; 'People in this neighbourhood can be trusted'). The 'cohesion scale' is supposed to be the reliable tool to measure 'social capital' (respectively 'collective efficacy') on the neighbourhood level (see Sampson et al., 1997).
[24] The 'local involvement' is a factor built from the items 'feeling at home in this quarter' 'meeting acquaintances when walking around in this quarter'' and 'being an important part of ones neighbourhood'.
[25] For instance the Pearson's correlation between 'life satisfaction' and agreeing to 'feeling at home in this quarter' is .196, agreeing to 'meeting acquaintances when walking around in this quarter'' is .145 and agreeing to 'being an important part of ones neighbourhood' is .211 while the one of class is .122. After a regression however the coefficient of the class factor turned out to be .154 and therefore higher than that of all other items ('feeling at home in this quarter' [.126] 'meeting acquaintances when walking around' [.100] and 'being an important part of ones neighbourhood' [.151].
[26] The EGP-scale is a class scale of Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero based on occupational position (see Erikson/Goldthorpe, 1992).
[27] The 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion' factor was built through three items ('People in this neighbourhood are willing to help each other'; 'This is a close-knit neighbourhood'; 'People in this neighbourhood can be trusted'). The 'cohesion scale' is supposed to be the reliable tool to measure 'social capital' (respectively 'collective efficacy') on the neighbourhood level (see Sampson et al., 1997).

home in, or stating to be an important part of ones neighbourhood - turn out to correlate only weakly - if at all - in the lower but very clearly in the upper social classes[28] (see table below).

	Class specific Correlation between life satisfaction and …			
relative class Position[29]	… feeling at home in own quarter	… likelihood to meet acquaintances when walking around in the quarter	… being an important part of the neighbourhood	… LIF
low	.079	.107	.082	.124
average	**.199***	.111	**.323****	**.300****
high	**.358****	**.291****	**.310****	**.409****

*The correlation is significant at p<0,05.

**The correlation is significant at p<0,01.

Even more sceptically one may become when considering the statistical relations between life satisfaction and the structure of the network. For the upper classes – and only for those - we find a significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and the degree of connection to kin, friends and acquaintances which are blessed with what Bourdieu would have called cultural and economic capital ('high status') (r= .265) and a significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and the degree of connection to kin and friends which may be portrayed as socially vulnerable (r= -.237) (i.e. being on welfare, jobless and having no German nationality). If we thus put the four factors 'local involvement', 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion' and access to 'high status' and 'low status' network into a regression model to explain 'life satisfaction' we find a very class specific explained variance. The coefficient of determination (adjusted R-Square) through those four factors is .003 for 'low class' respondents while it is .255 for 'high class' respondents. To formulate it in a pointed way: The rich and established seem to be quite satisfied if they are embedded in a close-knit neighbourhood where they are connected with others like themselves and undisturbed by the poor[30]. Thus it is hardly to deny that local connectedness and 'social capital' is related to subjective well being and life quality but this relation seems to be socially differentiated (in terms of class and in terms of gender as well).

If we turn our attention away from the question whether, for whom and to what degree 'community connectedness' may enhance individuals' perceived QoL and turn to welfare politics again we may note that the social capital discourse in this point of view as well as its sister concept 'community' tend to ignore the complexity of social, economic and cultural hierarchies people are placed in. Instead both tend to promote a one-sided horizontal understanding of social formations. Social capital has become a sort of political parole[31] that

[28] To a lower degree the same is true for 'neighbourhood solidarity/cohesion' which is only moderately correlated with life satisfaction for 'low class' respondents (r= .155) but a considerable correlation in the case of 'high class' respondents (r= 345).

[29] These three classes were built relationally out of a class factor. As the universal set of our community study is not all-too affluent it may be that the highest class in our survey is - in comparison with the whole (national) population - rather something like a (upper-) middle class while our 'average' class may rather be a 'lower middle class'.

[30] Furthermore this statement is supported by the result that the highest class in the poor neighbourhood trusts their neighbours least and that the highest class in the non-poor neighbourhood trust their neighbours most.

[31] Nevertheless in another tradition 'social capital' may be deployed as a fruitful *analytical* category – allowing to focus on exactly these structural inequalities, power relations and features of class conflict (see Bourdieu, 1986).

"aids the shift in responsibility for 'social inclusion' from economy to society, and from government to individual, informing policies that focus on social behaviour, reducing the cost to government, since […] it provides non-economic solutions to social problems" (Franklin, 2003, p. 349; Portes, 1998). Thus it is no coincident that the same political forces that advocated a diminishing role for the State and a decrease in public expenditures turned out to be mayor advocates of the social capital perspective[32]. While there is striking empirical evidence that high levels of social capital – like in Scandinavian countries for instance - may inter alias be explained through a high degree of economic equality and universal non-discriminating welfare programs (see Kumlin and Rothstein, 2003), the dominant discourse in welfare policy points into a diametrically opposite direction. A frequently used interpretive pattern in this context is, as van Oorschot and Wil Arts (2004, p. 1) point out critically, that a generous system of welfare production is pretended to 'crowd out' "informal caring relations and social networks, as well as familial, communal and occupational systems of self-help and reciprocity, thereby fostering social isolation, anomie and self-centeredness, and leading to a general decline of commitment to civil norms, of participation in civil society, and trust in fellow citizens and social institutions". In particular welfare interventions based on economic and legal capital tend to be represented as 'expenditures' having no pay-off while interventions based on cultural (or human) and social capital are propagated as 'investments'. With respect to Social Work the probably most relevant dimension of the social capital discourse may be that it seems to be embedded in a rationality of welfare production which Rose (1996) used to call 'government through community'[33] implying a further shift away from citizenship rights and politics of redistribution which were essential dimensions of the fordist modes of welfare production within 'the Social' on a national scale. These regulatory re-figurations result in an emphasis on localism, diversity and place specific small-scale solutions. In particular local communities are viewed as the site where the 'stocks' of social capital are most likely to prosper. However, a number of research demonstrates that poor (and also ethnic) local communities may typically 'possess' quite plenty of what is called 'bonding' social capital, or 'strong ties' with people in similar circumstances to themselves[34] but they tend to lack links to people who are unequal in their power and their access to resources[35] (see Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

[32] As Pauline McClenaghan (2000, p. 580) puts it: "[S]ocial capital is used in such a way as to place the main emphasis upon social cohesion; an emphasis which gives the analysis a profoundly functionalist and socially conservative bent in that it discounts community organisation and mobilisation in defence of citizenship rights and the political articulation of rights-based demands which inevitably generate conflict, in favour of activities designed to enhance social cohesiveness and, by implication, social control".

[33] See Clarke (2005) for a critical discussion of this issue from a perspective of cultural and post-colonial studies.

[34] On the other hand there is evidence that higher educated people tend to have more extensive, more heterogeneous and less dense networks which consist of a higher proportion of non-kin (see Bekkers et al., 2005).

[35] This seems to be true not only for poor people but indeed also for 'poor neighbourhoods'. Looking on how 'place' seems to relate to the allocation network structures the result of our study is as such: 'Low class' respondents in 'poor' neighbourhoods tend to have more 'low status' respectively 'socially marginalised' (r= .208) and less 'high status' persons in their networks (r = -.192). They nevertheless tend to get somewhat more 'friendly turns' through their networks (r= .138) compared to 'low class' respondents living in 'non-poor' neighbourhoods. 'Middle class' respondents in 'poor' neighbourhoods on the other hand tend to have considerably more 'low status' respectively 'socially marginalised' (r= .344) and considerably less 'high status' persons in their networks (r = -.343) compared to 'middle class' respondents living in 'non-poor' neighbourhoods, while the differences in getting 'friendly turns' through their networks turned out to be negligible (r= -.039). Thus after the influence of 'class' is controlled the residents of 'poor neighbourhoods' tend to get negligibly more 'friendly turns' through their networks (r= .045) but considerably more 'low status' (r= .225) and less 'high status' persons in their networks (r= -.215) compared to the residents of 'non-poor' neighbourhoods.

While in particular for the non-affluent the rather weak ‚cross-cutting ties' of the so called 'bridging' social capital, may provide access to resources, opportunities and 'leverage support' in order to 'escape' from disadvantage it tends to be 'bonding' social capital supporting them to 'get by' (see Briggs, 1997) which seems to be more relevant for the 'subjective' well being of individuals. This suggestion is also backed by our study. Looking at the relation between social networks and life satisfaction our results indicate that in particular for 'low class' respondents in 'poor neighbourhoods' there is a considerable correlation between being connected to people who may give 'friendly turns' (i.e. help to 'get by') and being satisfied (r =.280). For this group getting 'friendly turns' was virtually the only relevant network factor related to life satisfaction[36].

By promoting mutual understanding and support as well as supplying a basis for shared identification 'bonding' social capital derived from family and close friends - which seems to be strongly related to what Emile Durkheim used to call 'likeness of consciences' - contributes to QoL (see Cattell, 2001) as it has the capacity to foster psychological well being and a sense of belonging because it is a major base for emotional and esteem support (see Klein, 2004; Morrow, 2003; Onyx, 2003). This contribution to QoL may - in particular in case of the less well-off (or 'successful') – tend to depend on the intimacy or 'warmth' of social bonds. However exactly this 'quality of life enhancing' form of social capital – referring "to trust, concern for one's associates, a willingness to live by the norms of one's community and to punish those who do not" (Bowles and Gintis, 2002, p. 1) – has a number of potential downsides like for instance excessive obligations to provide support, pressure to conform, loss of flexibility, producing and degrading outsiders and down down-levelling norms (see Portes, 1998). But the major problem of this bonding social capital is that it may have a "negative effect on the degree of sociability outside the closed social circle" (Beugelsdijk and Smulders, 2004, p. 4) and thus turn out to consist of ties that bind and keep you down exactly because it 'binds' to the parochial primary group from which it derives and to the fields in which this capital may realise its symbolic value best. As "similarity breeds connection" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001) it may be that social capital serves to create or maintain inequalities, hierarchies and social closure. "Because social capital is lodged in social relationships, the boundaries of its utility are likely to be defined by the boundaries of those relationships. Social capital creates resources for some people that are unavailable to others. Social relationships reflect the inequalities of society, especially because they tend to operate on principles of homophily" (Sapiro, 2003, p. 9). Given the fact, that we may find a whole range of stereotypes about the poor and other marginalized and subdominant actors, "there is little reason to believe that the poor will be welcome in most networks" (Øyen, 2002, p. 13). Thus a policy of 'activating' informal social capital on a local community level may run the danger rather to intensify than to resolve a situation in which the poor and societal disaffiliated are 'included out' within their small scaled territories of relegation and the proximities of their own degraded parochial groups. It is a rather cold comfort that they may be happy and locally embedded despite this situation. Thus social capital may contribute to individual 'life satisfaction' but it seems to be a rather poor means for providing social leverage for the poor. As Else Øyen[37] puts it: "In any network a member

[36] While for other groups 'friendly turns' - albeit to a lower extend and among other network features – tend also to effect satisfaction with life, for the (relatively) high class respondents this correlation is rather negligible and independent from the neighbourhoods they reside. Noteworthy is also that there is no major gender-gap with respect to the 'friendly turns'/ 'life satisfaction' correlation for the lower classes. For the rest however, this gap was considerably: Life satisfaction and getting friendly turns turned out to correlate considerable in the case of women (r = .272) but not for not-lower class men.

[37] Else Øyen is the Scientific Director of the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty of the UNESCO.

is expected to contribute something, whether it be material or non-material resources. By definition the poor may not have much to offer in the way of material resources to any non-poor network, and their non-material resources may not be much appreciated since they stem from a different background. The rosy picture that is presented of integration through social capital formation is in fact gloomy and unrealistic. If a majority of the poor are neither able to develop useful networks for increasing their own social capital on a large scale, nor given entry into […powerful] networks […], how can social capital then be an efficient instrument for poverty reduction? The conclusion must be that at present social capital formation is not a useful instrument for poverty reduction" (Øyen, 2002, p. 13). And one may add that it is neither a useful way of thinking about QoL as the development of intensive linkages within a marginalised community may serve to reinforce its marginalisation in particular as the currently dominating social capital "discourses are in danger of avoiding tackling inequalities, whether these are based on gender or other structural differences" (Morrow 2003, p. 18). Furthermore - at least in terms of public policy - the politics of mobilizing social capital are most often one element of an emerging 'politics of proximity' significantly influenced by (neo-) communitarian thought. It is no reason to doubt that communitarianism may be a legitimate political stance of radicals as well as conservatives. Yet the politics of communitarianism are notoriously at risk to promote exactly those harmonious views about 'community'[38] which often have been used to justify hierarchical arrangements and sites of social domination by delegitimising areas of conflict and contestation (see Frazer 1999) while celebrating "a holy trinity of family, community and nation, as if community represented a halcyon pasture, small but perfectly formed, an immaculately conceived domain of homogeneous kinships, shared interests and common histories" (Campbell, 1995, p. 51).

The culturalization of QoL

A third major shift may be called the politics of recognition. Politics of recognition tend to mirror a 'culturalisation' of the QoL perspective which is related to the politics of proximity concerned with individualisation and informalisation.

It would be misleading to deny that the problem of recognition as part of the quality of live project is a major part of the struggle for social justice. To put the question of recognition on the top of the agenda is indeed an important corrective to the bureaucratic and near-exclusive focus on distribution of the traditional post-war welfare state, particularly as its class compromise rested on a series of gender, racial-ethnic and other exclusions. In a certain way recognition is a central part of the project of deepening democracy because it recognises that what Johan Galtung (1969) used to call 'structural violence'[39] does not only reflect poverty but also other faces of oppression like symbolic marginalization, status hierarchy, domination, exploitation, heteronormativity, paternalism and cultural imperialism. *Within* the scope of a solidaristic welfare state the proper aim of this cultural turn in the politics of QoL could be both, to make welfare less exclusive and less discriminatory and to expand the political

[38] It is not to deny that also the notion of community is contested. As Burns et al. (1994, p. 224) figure out: "On the one hand, community is a unifying concept, the expression of common interest, solidarity, integration and consensus [...]. On the other, community is not a singular concept but in reality represents a mere umbrella under which shelter a multitude of varying, competing and often conflicting interests".

[39] Structural violence in the sense of Galtung is a mostly 'invisible' (and 'indirect') form of violence, embedded in social structures which is promoted institutionally (or not prevented by failing to engage in structural redress) and/or occurs because of economic and political formations (exploitation and/or oppression). It refers to any constraints on human potentials. Structural violence thus occurs in the case that people are harmed because of inequitable social arrangements or the denial of decent and dignified lives and refers to the infringement of very survival, the personal or cultural identity and the general (physical) well-being of an individual as well as to the infringement or his or her freedom to choose among various options.

agenda beyond the confines of mere class redistribution, to broaden our understanding of justice, i.e. to synergize problems of recognition and cultural difference with struggles for social equality. To sum it up, the cultural turn in welfare production did not start in order to dismantle the welfare state but rather in order to promote radical democratization. But, as Nancy Fraser (2004, pp. 1111-1112) puts it, against the background of a neo-liberal globalisation project, this aim "has fallen prey to the larger *Zeitgeist*. In the *fin de siècle* context, the turn to recognition has dovetailed all too neatly with a hegemonic neoliberalism that wants nothing more than to repress all memory of social egalitarianism. The result is a tragic historical irony. Instead of arriving at a broader, richer paradigm that could encompass both redistribution and recognition, we seem to have traded one truncated paradigm for another - a truncated economism for a truncated culturalism" framed by a moral discourse about independent, responsible and morally upright citizens. This reductionism is of course *not* an inherent problem in dealing with cultural inequalities (see Landhäußer, 2003). But erroneous abstractions from the material world in which they are enmeshed, notoriously run the risk to result in a one-sided subordination of social struggles to cultural struggles and the politics of redistribution to the politics of recognition.

And again - just like in the case of individualization and informalisation of well being and QoL - Social Work seems to be the welfare agency that stands to benefit: Social Work successfully discovered the recognition discourse as its major focus in its struggle for social justice[40]. As already mentioned, recognition or the quest for cultural justice is indeed an important aspect of QoL. Yet it is important to keep in mind that cultural injustice is rooted in social patterns of representation which deny their members equal social status and therefore impede their participation in social life.

Obviously whenever Social Work practices are involved we are in a field that has to deal with ambiguities and with issues of impeding, permitting or enhancing participation, projects of identity, obstinacies of cultural life worlds, 'misfit' forms of 'voice', patterns of life conduct its clients – but not necessarily the majority of society - view as desirable, etc. All of these features are in the realm of recognition/mis-recognition and seem to require "that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem" while precluding to burden them "with excessive ascribed 'difference'" or "failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness" (Fraser, 2002, p. 6). However it would be misleading to focus on recognition and identity building in isolation from other forms of injustice. Not despite but because of the importance of recognition it seems necessary to realise that, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) notes, respect for difference – admitting an undistorted relation to themselves for those enjoying this respect - is not to be reduced to cultural distinction and, even more important, it is not to be treated as a r*eplacement* for other criteria of social justice. Quite the contrary: a resolution of cultural injustice is unlikely without redistributive redress as the quest to ensure 'voice' and independence may be impeded by economic dependence and inequality: "Social arrangements that institutionalize deprivation, exploitation, and gross disparities in wealth, income, and leisure time, [… tend to deny] some people the means and opportunities to interact" on a par with others in social life - which is the progressive core of recognition (Fraser, 2002, p. 6). Thus contesting devaluation and celebrating diversity alone may render the risk to convert in rather conservative identity politics displacing questions of redistribution to reify simplistic

[40] As the results of our study suggest the way people are treated by authorities does affect their life satisfaction. Inter alias our respondents tend to be significantly more satisfied when they state that the staff of public authorities 'really tries for understanding' them and 'takes their problems seriously' (which are features that relate to realm of recognition). This is even more so if the respondents were women and/or experienced migration.

conceptions of 'autonomous identity' and to produce and legitimise structural inequalities while obscuring cross-cutting axes of subordination and drawing on the gloomy but misguided 'horizontal rather than hierarchical model of society' (see Lister, 2002).
If Social Work and other forms of welfare production deal with cultural injustice the main concern should therefore not be a wired imagination of a putatively natural, 'authentic subjectivity' – while coding some as less 'authentic' than others - or a quest to help its clients to find out 'who they really are' but rather how they come to be located in the deprived, class stratified, racialised and sexual space they reside. In other words 'misrecognition' points to the status order of society which corresponds to these cultural dimensions of injustice (see Fraser 2004a). If this is ignored, the cultural perspective – especially in the context of current community approaches - could lead to a development of competitive local autonomous groups defined on the basis of difference and habitat "that drastically simplifies and reifies group identities. In such forms, struggles for recognition do not promote respectful interaction across differences in increasingly multicultural contexts. They tend, rather, to encourage separatism and group enclaves, chauvinism and intolerance, patriarchalism and authoritarianism" (Fraser, 2002, p. 7) which may in turn promote a morally prescriptive agenda of life conduct and an exclusion of outsiders.
So what is to be done about the politics of QoL?

What is the Point of QoL?
We were sceptical about what we have called 'individualisation' and 'informalisation' of social justice and we pointed to some ambiguities of its 'culturalisation'. This however does not contradict that we, as Ruth Lister (2004, p. 178) puts it, "need to pay more attention to the positive exercise of agency by people in poverty. This cannot, though, be divorced from their severely disadvantaged structural position or from the exercise of agency by more powerful actors, which helps to perpetuate that structural position". We suggest that paying attention to the exercise of agency of people and enabling them to realize their potential as democratic citizens is the crucial challenge for Social Work.

We have to keep in mind that Social Work is a welfare producing profession which may not be able to redistribute (economic) goods but capable to process doings and beings of individual actors and reflect their social embeddings. While appreciating that material resources, rights and social infrastructures are basic necessities of agency which are not to be replaced through Social Work, a reflexive Social Work practice is aware that such resources alone may still be insufficient, as they neither "tell us what the person will be able to do with those properties" (Sen 1985, p. 9) nor inherently capture features of non-exploitation and non-discrimination nor necessarily erase "personal heterogeneities, environmental diversities, variations in social climate, differences in relational perspectives, distribution within the family" (Sen, 1999, pp. 70-71).
We suggest that an appropriate QoL approach for Social Work should primarily reflect the living people manage to achieve - i.e. what they are actually able to be and to do - while aiming at enhancing their real and genuine, socially, economically and culturally constrained opportunities to reach their autonomous ends – i.e. their ability to do valuable acts and reach valuable states of being and thus to choose a life they have reason to value (see Sen 1999). Adapting such an approach of QoL however Social Work - as a people changing institution intervening in the lives of people – runs always the risk of being paternalistic. Paternalism is, as Gerald Dworkins (1971, pp. 7-8) famously puts it, a doctrine that justifies "interference with a person's liberty of action [...] by reasons, referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests, or values of the person being coerced".

So is there any alternative between a culturalisation, individualisation and informalisation of QoL on the one hand side, stating that QoL is in the eye of the individual beholder and thus running the danger to be socially cynical, and a positivist approach on the other hand side suggesting that 'we' – as the profession – know best what 'their' (the clients) QoL is and thus running the danger to be paternalistic. We suggest that there is indeed an alternative: An approach which considers QoL as a *political* issue based on the idea of each citizen – rather than clients - as a free and dignified human agent and thus referring – in a formal *and* substantial sense to (individual) *autonomy* and to *democracy* (i.e. collective autonomy). Yet strictly speaking autonomy is impossible. Human beings are always mutually embedded. In short: They are never substantially 'autonomous subjects'. Worse still the counterfactual pretension of autonomous subjectivity fits well into the political suggestion that every man is the architect of his own fortune and thus into cynical strategies of blaming the victims of social distress. Yet given the fact that autonomy is a matter of degree, and that some people are *unnecessarily* more constrained than others – may it be because of individual, economical, cultural or other reasons – we may suggest that autonomy is indeed a fiction but a useful one if we consider the social conditions of its potentiality (see Ziegler 2003). Having these degrees in mind we may define autonomy as "the ability to determine autonomously the form of life that one wants to lead as long as this is compatible with the equal freedom of others" (Pauer-Studer, 2002, p. 2).

The point of a mere autonomy-based approach of QoL would be that people should be capable to conduct the life they want to. We think that this is appropriate as long as their life conduct does not disenable the autonomy of *any* other person. Thus the always precarious balance between the different modes of autonomous life conducts - which may indeed constrain each other - has to be regulated. If we do not abandon the idea of the primary value of autonomy for each – yet ever interconnected - individual this regulation can only be the collective self-regulation of autonomous individuals. In other words: the only possibility to arrange equal 'individual autonomy' on a collective level is to deepen democracy. Only a democratic 'parity of participation', reflecting a 'status' model – as opposed to an 'identity' model - of recognition (Fraser, 2002) may ensure equal opportunities for participation in social life and thus secure that in collectively binding decisions - against the background of the fact of heterogeneity which implies the fact of particularistic ideals of the good life - all the different life plans and preferred modes of life conduct have an equal opportunity for achieving social esteem and equal opportunity to articulate 'voice' and an equal opportunity to be heard (as peer with others).

What may be equally important for Social Work is the question which aspects of life conduct should not only be allowed and enabled but publicly *promoted*. Put differently: which opportunities, resources and capacities – i.e. 'capabilities' – of each person to realise his or her own idea of a 'good life' does a society and its institutions have an obligation to provide equally for all its citizens (see Anderson, 1999)? Consider that some people would prefer to spend their entire life surfing at all the best beaches around the world during the day and slurping champagne in the evening. Some may argue that this life plan is not authentic but alienated, snotty, expressing slothfulness, a 'false consciousness' or reflecting 'false needs'. As the case may be this plan may be legitimate, as it may not disenable the autonomy of any other person. Therefore people should have the freedom to do so. Yet should the public – in the name of an autonomy-based egalitarian approach to QoL – be obliged to provide free surfing lessons and pay for such endless and expensive 'all-inclusive' holidays?

We may endorse e.g. the liberal neutrality of Philippe van Parijs' (1991) arguments for an *unconditional* basic income – which indeed includes surfers – and still deny that the public must donate every wish for everybody, to say nothing of the obvious impossibility of this idea

off-side the land of cockaigne. Yet our suggestion was neither a QoL approach based on the promise that everything should be provided nor that everybody has three wishes free but an approach based on the premise of equal democratic autonomy. Such an approach should focus on the conditions of 'autonomy-based' democratic equality and should ensure for each individual to be, as Elizabeth Anderson (1999) puts it, "capable of functioning as an equal citizen". This "involves functioning not only as a political agent […being treated as an equal before the law] but participating as an equal in civil society […] including participation in the economy[41]". Furthermore it is convincing when Anderson suggests that functioning in these ways presupposes at least "three aspects of individual functioning: as a human being[42], as a participant in a system of cooperative production, and as a citizen of a democratic state" (Anderson, 1999; see Gutman, 1988).

We may call such an approach on QoL an equal democratic autonomy approach. Still autonomy is a fiction. But equal democratic autonomy is a useful fiction because one of its defining feature is that each individual human being is to be treated with equal respect[43] and that minority attitudes as well as individual preferences of life conduct are to be respected independently from the question whether Social Workers – or other political actors - enjoy them or not. Considering the conditions of the potentiality of equal democratic autonomy, one of its necessary preconditions is the capacity of individuals to form their own conception of the good in a reflexive way and thus „to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 43). Of cause "[a]utonomy depends on the existence of options" (Callan and White, 2003) and Social Work is sometimes but not always able to supply them directly. But Social Work may nevertheless be able to open access to alternative options and/ or make people aware of them. This also includes the primarily educational task to "open up horizons on different conceptions of how one should live" and to support its clients "to interpret their major goals and establish priorities among them" as well as to "understand the main features of the society in which they live and among whose options they will choose" (Callan and White, 2003). All of these features imply the creation of sites of reflexivity and of possibilities for people to live their conception of the good (this may e.g. include the development of alternative practices *within* and revaluations *of* the social world as well as how to conduct a 'good life' in it) rather than a quest to surge 'clients' into certain states of being.

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[41] This has nothing to do with forcing 'unemployed' people from 'welfare into work'. As Gilles Raveaud puts it: "The capabilities of the person who needs help should not be evaluated a priori, when they are precisely in a moment of vulnerability, as in the example of the 'unemployable' person. On the contrary, they have to be assessed when taking into account what they will do with the resources they will be provided with. The question is therefore not: 'Is this person entitled to anything, according to the capacities I can evaluate now?', but 'What is this person entitled to, in order to develop his capabilities best?' […] The question is no longer to look for ways to restrict help and make it conditional, or to expect certain attitudes and actions from the poor and the unemployed. It is on the contrary to provide the persons with what they need in order to restore and develop their capabilities" (quoted from Bonvin/Farvaque, 2003, p. 6).

[42] This does also reflect the Marxist idea of the 'German Ideology' that "men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely I order to sustain human life" (Marx, 1974, p. 48).

[43] Respect, as Pauer-Studer (2002, p. 6) points out, "presupposes that people have basic personal and political rights, and it implies, moreover, that people have social rights that guarantee them at least a minimum of social and economic goods. Without these positive rights, our appeals to freedom would remain an empty way of talking".

Beyond the ability and possibility to form an own conception of the good and thus "to plan a life in accordance with one's own evaluation of ends[44]" (Nussbaum,1999, p. 57) the freedom of people to achieve beings and doings they value also necessitates to capacitate 'parity of participation' (see Fraser, 2002) and to integrate demands of equal distribution and equal respect which are combined in the demand of equal democratic autonomy. Equal democratic autonomy is not primarily an individual virtue but a political product of a combination of equal capacities and equal opportunities to decide about the projects of ones own individual and collective life and thus of the freedom from - avoidable and/or compensable - economic, social, political and personal restrictions X to be or to do Y (see Pauer-Studer, 2000; Ziegler, 2003). Such an approach of equal democratic autonomy enables a non-cynical and non-paternalistic view on QoL from an 'autonomy-based' egalitarian position "that finds expression in the notion that autonomy needs to be supported by a complex form of egalitarian distributions" (Pauer-Studer, 2002, p. 8) and social conditions of the freedom to choose a life one has reason to value against the background of an as equal as possible effective access to a "heterogeneous collection of desirable states" (G. A. Cohen quoted in Wright and Brighouse, 2002).

If we understand QoL as the realisation of autonomy *and* democracy we suggest that it is indeed an appropriate measure for evaluating societies with regard to social justice. Hence the objective of the politics of QoL is to effectively entitle and to capacitate all individuals to equal democratic autonomy. Then the primary negative aim is to end socially imposed – and in particular institutionally anchored - oppression and subordination while its corresponding positive aim is to create a society in which 'autonomous' people stand in relations of democratic equality to others (see Anderson, 1999). Unequal (power) relations between people (and between people and agencies), significant gaps between - equal - formal and - unequal - substantial entitlements, deficits of realising human potentials and individual or collective projects are constraints of democratic autonomy. They are unnecessary. Unnecessary in the specific sense that democratic changes in cultural, political and socioeconomic relations could eliminate them. Therefore there is reason to suggest that welfare and welfare producing agencies – including Social Work - may contribute to an understanding of QoL reflecting the 'real freedom'[45] and thus personal as well as social autonomy of people (see Ulrich, 2004; Vobruba, 2001). And Social Work should do so: Neither happiness nor 'social cohesion' nor the mere recognition of 'group identities' but substantial and democratic 'autonomy' should be the currency of quality of life.

[44] This demands the *creation* of social spaces for reflexive agency.

[45] Here we follow van Parijs (1995, p. 30) as the „real freedom we are concerned with is not only the freedom to purchase or consume. It is the freedom to live as one might like to live."

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