



**THE EVOLUTION INSTITUTE**  
UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING THE HUMAN CONDITION

*Quality of Life Workshop Saturday Presenters*

**Measures of Well-Being and Happiness: How Quality of Life Research is and Could be Shaping Domestic and International Economic and Social Policy-Making**  
**Erik Angner**

This talk explores what we can learn about quality of life and quality-of-life measurement from international comparisons. International comparisons face particular challenges: The fact that things like liberty, wealth, and health tend to be correlated means that it is tricky to identify the relative contribution of each; the relatively small and fixed number of countries limits the power of statistical analysis; and there may be systematic differences across countries in the manner in which people respond to questionnaires. Using the Scandinavian countries as examples, I propose that international comparisons nevertheless suggest some important insights about the nature, measurement, and pursuit of quality of life.

**Quality of Life Research: What It Reveals About Our Nation's Current Health Inequalities and the Path to Global Health**  
**Stephen Bezruchka, M.D.**

The United States by most indicators was one of the world's healthiest nations 60 years ago. Now our health status is that of a middle-income country despite spending half of the world's health care bill. We die much younger than people in more than 25 nations. If we eradicated our leading killer, heart disease, we would still not be the healthiest nation. Length of life for women is actually declining in close to a third of counties. Reasons for the poor health status and quality of life in the United States relate to the political structure of U.S. society and its attendant hierarchy that does not provide a healthy early life when half of our health as adults is programmed. Economic inequality produces inequities in daily stressors that lead to most of the chronic diseases of aging. Medical care treats the symptoms but not the primordial causes. Despite substantial progress over the last century, health measures around the world are diverging. If the United States were to decrease its health gap with the other rich nations, quality of life and health outcomes around the globe would improve. Creating awareness of these concepts wherever we can is the first step towards producing health and well-being around the world.

**Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy, and Politics\***  
**Sarah Cook**

Our host is interested in having Sarah identify and describe the best of what she and UNRISD have seen in terms of successful urban transformation and the factors that she feels have contributed to these successful interventions. In addition, those at the University of Memphis would be interested in hearing her thoughts regarding the research that is most needed to support and advance these efforts.

\*Abstract and actual title forthcoming

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## **Quality of Human Life: What's Ecology Got to Do with It?**

**Daniel Nettle**

Thinking on quality of life tends to be dominated by discussion of internal psychological states such as happiness, fear, flow, purpose, and so on. However, these internal states, though they are partly affected by dispositional individual differences, arise principally through the interaction of the organism with its environment. This means that the way social and material environments are structured – their controllability, their equity, their human-friendliness, the way people can assert themselves – will have massive implications for the quality of the individual's experience. I will discuss examples including the socioeconomic gradient in anxiety and depression, and neighborhood differences in trust, to illustrate why we need to think of the causes of wellbeing are as much ecological as psychological. This has implications for the way we evaluate policy initiatives, from urban planning to economic growth.

## **Theoretical Perspectives Guiding QOL Indicator Projects**

**M. Joseph Sirgy**

Most of the theoretically-based QOL indicators projects can be classified in terms of six major theoretical concepts: (a) socio-economic development, (b) personal utility, (c) just society, (d) human development, (e) sustainability, and (f) functioning. I explain the core aspects of these six theoretical paradigms and show how they help guide QOL researchers to select and develop QOL indicators that are significantly and qualitatively distinct. Thus, a taxonomy of QOL indicators guided by a given theoretical concept is likely to be very different from others taxonomies guided by different theoretical concepts. Thus, the objective of this paper to explain these theoretical paradigms and show how they guide QOL researchers to select and develop QOL indicators that are significantly and qualitatively distinct.

## **Quality of Life from an Ultimate and Proximate Evolutionary Perspective**

**David Sloan Wilson**

Quality of Life (QOL) is both a physical and psychological state of being. Physically, a high quality of life is not possible if people are hungry, diseased, ignorant, or under threat by other people. To achieve a high quality of life in these respects, it is necessary to manage behavioral and cultural change to promote sustainability and prosociality at all scales, from neighborhoods to the planet. This is the goal of all enlightened public policy, but evolutionary science provides a new set of tools for getting the job done. Psychologically, even the most affluent person can be miserable and the most impoverished person joyful. There is clearly more to quality of life than basic physical needs. Evolutionary science also has much to say about QOL in a psychological and even spiritual sense, by clarifying the nature of human meaning systems and the social environments that make people feel most "at home" psychologically. One fundamental conclusion is that most people don't like being told by others what constitutes the good life. QOL can't be dictated in a top-down fashion but must be based upon groups of people empowered to govern their own affairs. In these respects, evolutionary theory consolidates insights that have emerged from proven community action practices and numerous branches of the basic and applied human behavioral sciences.

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*QOL Workshop Sunday Panel: Agents of Change in Lagging Regions*

**The Challenge of Community Development in Lagging Regions: The International Debate**  
**David Westendorff**

**The University of Memphis Urban Transformation Initiative**  
**Katherine Lambert-Pennington**

**The LabPEAT experience in Eastern Sicily, Italy**  
**Laura Saija**

**The Benefits of Transnational Collaboration: The Memphis/Catania Connection**  
**Kenneth M. Reardon**

**Discussant: Katherine Hicks**

Certain places are more resistant to change than others. Often the expression “lagging regions” is used to indicate places within rich nations that are left behind in the process of development, where economic, social, and cultural structures are fairly stable but generate development policies that do not produce desired outcomes. Within these regions, intense economic inequalities are not just the outcome of the recent global economic crisis but reflect a long history of social divides, deeply rooted in local cultural systems. How can transformation take place in those contexts? Who can take the lead, and how can external agents promote endogenous developmental processes? This panel will address these questions through the presentation of two Participatory Action Research teams working in different lagging regions: - the US Delta Region and the Italian Mezzogiorno, which have developed a holistic approach to development, producing some successful outcomes but also facing several challenges. The dynamics of power, resistance, change (or lack thereof) in relationship to development within these two regions have social, as well as, biological consequences. This panel will discuss how each project’s successes have been achieved but also how some of the formidable challenges each efforts confronts might be more effectively addressed in the future.