RESULTS AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE CHILEAN URBAN QUALITY OF LIFE PERCEPTION SURVEY

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• Chile is a predominantly urban country: 87% of the population lives in urban areas. It is the 12th most urbanised nation in the world and the third in Latin America.

• The private sector is the main actor in Real Estate and urban infrastructure projects: Emphasis not placed on providing solutions to satisfy the needs of the middle and working-class sectors.

• Pressure to extending cities towards the less valuable land in the outskirts, accelerating growth by “extension” (sprawl).

• Chilean urban housing policies have mainly reduced the housing deficit, paradoxically contributing to aggravating the urban deficit – understood as a insufficient infrastructure, services and public spaces– not allowing cities to function well or satisfy the needs of citizens, with a negative effect on the quality of life (MINVU, 2009).
THE NEED FOR A NEW DIAGNOSIS

• Only recently, in 2004, has the government incorporated urban issues among its policy priorities, highlighting the need to overcome partial solutions and start considering our cities at the center of a sustainable development agenda.

• Improving quality of life reappeared as the “ultimate goal” of public policies. This implies improving public and private open spaces in which life occurs.

• Chile has pioneered the development of housing deficit statistics in Latin America, but there is not enough information for a real comprehension of territorial dynamics (Román y Bravo, 2003), let alone how people are evaluating their own cities.

• This scenario has made it necessary to complement with perceptual information the system of urban indicators organized and managed by MINVU since 2005 through its Urban Observatory.

• The initiative consisted in carrying out a survey applied to the residents of 103 municipalities that consulted the citizen’s views about their urban surroundings, in an attempt to learn more about their concerns and needs.

• This effort was inspired by the Urban Audit: it began applying a survey in 31 European cities in 2004 (“Local Quality of Life Perception Survey”).
CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS

• A review of this European survey led to questions regarding the themes and issues to be included in the Chilean case—in other words, how to define “urban quality of life,” understanding that this concept is multidimensional, subjective and related to the possibilities offered by the urban environment, and by MINVU’s policies and programmes.
“Quality of urban life” refers to residential city space and its influence on people’s sense of well-being.

The concept is related both to the individual as well as the collective experience: the way life is experimented in municipalities, cities and neighbourhoods, based on:

– the characteristics of each territory;
– the specific needs that arise through a combination of environmental, socio-economical and cultural variables;
– the socially constructed expectations of residents, and
– their ideas on what is considered beautiful, secure and habitable.
• Therefore, the operational definition of this concept is the degree of satisfaction of the needs and/or aspirations, that citizens perceive in terms of the physical elements of the city that contribute to satisfying their needs and which are targets of urban public policies.

• The survey thus studies the level of citizen satisfaction with the public space, infrastructure and services provided by their municipalities, using perceptual parameters of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as well as access and proximity.

• Finally, it was considered relevant to inquire about the level of citizen participation and the information concerning measures that aim to improve the municipal environment, as well as the main problems they perceive and their priorities for municipal improvement.
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

- A sampling method was designed to obtain the most representative information at the municipal level, being restricted to 6,200 completed interviews due to budget limitations.

- It was also important to estimate the results and divide the municipalities into the three types of cities defined by MINVU:
  - Metropolitan (over 800,000 residents),
  - Major Intermediate (between 100,000 and 300,000 residents)
  - and Minor Intermediate (between 20,000 and 99,999 residents).
  - The sample is not representative of Minor Cities (between 5,000 and 19,999 residents), as only a few municipalities associated to this type were surveyed.

- Since there was no precedent for calculating the sample, the survey was applied experimentally, using a hypothesis on resident satisfaction. This implies that the results are also subject to errors different from those theoretically calculated. However, these results are still useful to analyze citizen perception of the urban environment, making one of the challenges for the next version of the survey to improve municipal estimates.

- This survey was applied on the basis of face-to-face residential interviews with a randomly selected member of each household, to ensure a diversity of socio-demographic variables.
Sports centers were evaluated worst in all types of cities, with the greatest number of negative responses. Metropolitan city public spaces were worst evaluated by residents, followed by Minor cities.
Sports centres were also perceived as the most distant walking from home (Graph No. 2, includes “far” and “very far”). The perceived “distance” is even greater in Intermediate cities.
Among the service-related infrastructure, health services were evaluated worst in Minor and Intermediate cities. In Metropolitan Cities the negative evaluation of health services is similar, but the worst evaluation was assigned to transportation services.
Health centres tend to be considered the most distant. It is interesting to observe how the number of people who perceive them as distant increases inversely proportional to city size.
Infrastructure is the worst evaluated aspect of cities. Pedestrian infrastructure was evaluated the worst of all.
FINAL COMMENTS

• The results coincide on the whole with the problems and needs detected by MINVU’s regional directors.
• Apart from the Quality of Life Perception Survey there are no relevant sources of information on how people experience their life conditions, in spite of being an essential element for the analysis of quality of life.
• There is still some trepidation regarding the utility of information generated by perception studies, as it has been difficult to ensure the continuity of this survey.
• However, apart from MINVU, other actors have recently recognized the potential of this type of information and are working to ensure additional funding for a second survey with better municipal representation, namely the Ministry of the Interior Unit for Regional Development (SUBDERE)
National reconstruction: new information demands for 19 out of 103 municipalities

- The role of social organisations
- Their relationship with recue and reconstruction institutions
- People’s reconstruction expectations