Quality of living and city rankings from an urban and regional development perspective

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Improving the quality of living of the cities is one of the most important targets of urban and regional developers. This target is highly challenging since it covers almost all aspects of human activity. In addition, quality of living and a liveable city are qualities experienced individually. Thus it is challenging to define, quantify and develop appropriate indicators for measuring quality of living. Nevertheless, cities and regional actors need structured information about the state and development of the quality of living in their respective city and city region.

Many international organizations (e.g. EU, OECD, UN, World Bank), research institutes, magazines and media, banks and other financial institutions, foundations etc. produces regularly comparative information and city rankings about quality of life in cities worldwide. One of the most promising entries is the Urban Audit which includes over 350 cities and more than 300 indicators of quality of life in European cities. The concept of the Urban Audit includes also standardized perception surveys collecting assessments of the citizens.

In recent studies and city rankings the City of Helsinki has appeared as an innovative and a safe city with good quality of environment and functional public transport. European Commission’s “Survey on perception of quality of life in 75 European cities” (2010) supports this view. Helsinki dwellers were especially satisfied with cultural facilities, outdoor recreation and sports facilities and public transport. On the other hand, they mentioned the expense of housing one of the main challenges of Helsinki. In addition, the respondents viewed public services and especially health services, education and public transport as the major issues facing the City of Helsinki.

Comparative statistics on quality of living and city rankings derived from these shed light on issues that are common to all cities and help decision makers take notice of distinctive characteristics of each city. Administrative data and perception survey data are complementary to each other and both are needed. This makes the Urban Audit concept and data holdings exceptionally valuable.