HOTEL

How to analyse life quality
An accompanying measure within the EU Fifth Framework Programme
Keyaction "Improving the Socio Economic Knowledge Base"
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Newsletter III

"Workshop II"

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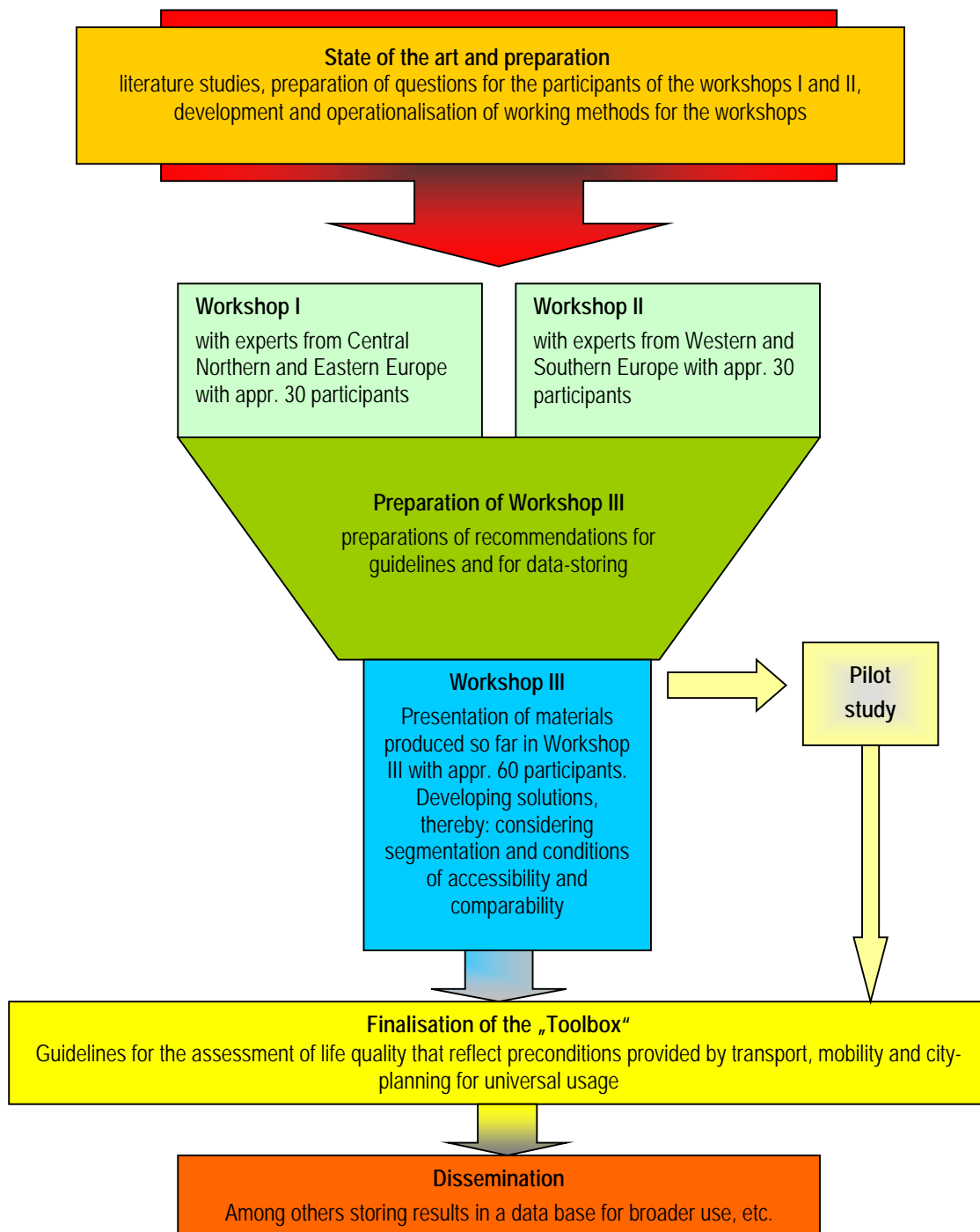Societá Italiana di Psicologia della Sicurezza Viaria (SIPSiVi) • Gian Marco Sardi • Italy

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Preface

HOTEL – How to analyse life quality– is an accompanying measure in the key Action "Improving the socio-economic knowledge base" of the EC Fifth Framework Programme.

The project HOTEL takes a starting point in a heuristic approach that focuses on different disciplines' practice in connection with the assessment and consideration of Quality of Life (QoL) and underlying mobility and transport preconditions. The core concept is to find out how aspects of QoL are taken care of in practice in the field of transport, mobility and city planning. With "practice" all kinds of activities are meant that set the scene for the living conditions of citizens. The responsible actors for these activities are politicians and decision makers, planners, implementers and administrators.

Fig I: **Graphical presentation of the project components**

State of the art and preparation
literature studies, preparation of questions for the participants of the workshops I and II, development and operationalisation of working methods for the workshops

Workshop I
with experts from Central Northern and Eastern Europe with appr. 30 participants

Workshop II
with experts from Western and Southern Europe with appr. 30 participants

Preparation of Workshop III
preparations of recommendations for guidelines and for data-storing

Workshop III
Presentation of materials produced so far in Workshop III with appr. 60 participants. Developing solutions, thereby: considering segmentation and conditions of accessibility and comparability

Pilot study

Finalisation of the „Toolbox"
Guidelines for the assessment of life quality that reflect preconditions provided by transport, mobility and city-planning for universal usage

Dissemination
Among others storing results in a data base for broader use, etc.

The Workshop – methodological aspects

Workshops are the central elements of the HOTEL project. The concept of a workshop implies to make various disciplines and professional groups related to the covered subject work together. Here, in the case of the concept of life quality, the participants are architects, town planners, engineers, social psychologists, public decision makers, territorial authorities, companies of transport etc., on all the levels of governance. In general a workshop is a heuristic approach appropriate for analysing a relatively unstructured universe of activities that are neither strictly theory-steered nor systematically knowledge- or rule based: Much work is unreflected routine, intuitive, steered by hidden agendas, following "private" hypotheses, done in the frame of certain schemes of distribution of power on the working place, etc.. The internal logic of such a system can be made better transparent with the help of heuristic methods.

In the context, the goal was thus to enhance the generation of new ideas and the clarification of habits and practices not structured consciously, by being confronted with unusual questions and by making use of working methods or practices that do not belong to everyday routine. For that reason the workshop was structured in such a way that multiple feedback and interaction between participants, but also between the participants and the organisers was possible. Small-group work in combination with plenary sessions seemed suitable for the achievement of our objectives, as it is an interactive method which is very motivating for the participants and allows efficient work. Besides, topics can be dealt with in detail.

The Workshop in Paris – HOTEL workshop No. 2

This document presents some principal and synthetic elements of Workshop 2 within the framework of work-package 3 of the project HOTEL. The workshop was organised by IN-RETS (WP-leader of WP3) in Paris June 30 and July 1, 2003. It was dedicated to the data acquisition concerning QoL determinants in the particular field of traffic and cities planning, mobility, land use and in relation to sustainability. The HOTEL project and Paris Workshop's philosophy was based of "grounded theory" principles, developed by Glaser and Strauss as a research methodology in social science including inductive, heuristic and conscientisation perspectives from different social key actors.

Around 30 experts from Southern and Western Europe were selected and invited on the basis of different criteria: professional function, experience on mobility and quality of life, levels of governance (local, regional, national, European) and nationality. The goal was to produce the development of new ideas, to clarify some practices, and to make transparent the practices not structured consciously, by confrontation with questions, through the production of spontaneous individual presentations, or by collective reflection in small-groups.

The <u>objectives</u> of this 3rd work-package (Workshop 2) were two:

- to share, examine and discover how the aspects relating to quality of life in the field mentioned are taken into account in everyday practice by the main actors, and

- to sensitise and stimulate these actors to the possible questions and stakes posed by this concept in practice, with the aim of facilitating exchange and meetings in the future

The experts worked in small groups on followings general <u>topics</u>:

- The concept of life quality and the role in daily work

- Verbalisation of the concept of QoL in programmatic papers and documents

- Specification and operationalisation of the QoL concept in their practice

- Types of evaluation used in their practice

- Failures, consequences and improvement

The work was organised on the basis of different axis of reflection suggested by the consortium, within the framework of three distinct sessions: Session I**:** *Scanning of thematic field*; Session II**:** *Deep analysis of one topic*; Session III**:** *Guidelines for adequate consideration of quality of life aspects.*

The last session (III) tried to suggest axes of reflection and deliberations about:

- Criteria how to assess life quality appropriately
- How different societal, political and demographical conditions of groups or of countries can be considered
- How evaluation should be done (methods, frequency, etc.)
- What kinds of problems one has to be aware of when dealing with this topic and how one can deal with these problems ("barriers to improvements")

In addition to the objective of data-gathering, the common reflection engaged in this occasion on the subject should allow direct experience sharing between participating experts. The establishment of a reciprocal confidence between the experts, through a certain "user-friendliness" of the workshop, was one of the conditions of a creative collective production.

In fact, although difficult to implement, the method "workshop" used to screen the field of QoL was appreciated by the experts as completely relevant with respect to the studied subject. It was a very dense work, demanding very much effort from the experts

These exchanges, reflecting a very great wealth of information, were as useful for them, in their daily work to come, as for the consortium in the later development of guidelines for assessing life quality.

Results

Outside a great variety of information and judgements raised by the experts, analysed and published in "Deliverable 3", Work Package No. 2 (September 2003), it could be said that the results of this exercise were of an almost excessive richness. Of this reason the structuring and the scheduling of the projected ideas, outlined in the dedicated chapters, proved to be relevant. Only as an example, it could be noted that:

In the activity of the experts and in the official documents of programs, the concept of QoL is:

- **Omnipresent**, but not always mentioned as such. An explicit formulation is rather rare. It is in general present under many closed or specified concepts of other type ("sustainable development", etc.), and connected to all the aims of their activities

- **Political**, because the definition of the concept depends on the identity of the person (professional etc.) and because the aims in view between sectors, disciplines or individuals are often incompatible between them, which can produce negative outcomes. Each one tends to attribute harmful effects to the others. The aspirations are individual but measurements are collective, therefore there are winners and losers, which poses the problem of the construction of a joint definition (general interest)

- **A means of justification**, because certain projects, in particular in Greece, answer the objectives and the definitions only with an aim of obtaining financing of, e.g., the European Commission. The collective QoL issues justify the work of the professionals in connection with mobility, traffic and city planning. The experts in general note an evolution towards more participative approaches.

- **Implicit:** Being present under many concepts, it is subjacent in many documents, generally in an implicit way.

- **Contradictory:** The definitions of the concept and the concrete objectives of the various documents of programs are often in conflict between them. The elements of definition are often related to individual aspects and are not connected to collective choices - but these individual elements depend for a great part on these collective choices. The sectorial visions meet without having anticipated this.
- **Dynamic:** The concept is evolutionary, it increases in power, pulled by the concept of sustainable development.

The implementation and operationalisation of the concept of QoL is:

- **Varying and multiple:** a very great number of indicators are implicitly related to QoL. There are 150 indicators in official documents in England, eight groups of five to eight indicators in Ireland, 40 indicators in Switzerland, 153 in France etc.

  These indicators often have a dynamic and participative definition: investigations of households, monitoring activities, statistics, etc. There are elements common to the definitions between them but no real common definition: reduction of noise and pollution, stress, hospitality of public places, adequacy of the offer to the various needs (age, activity etc.), accessibility, option of choice (public transport etc), taking into account the time and quality of waiting, proximity, social co-education, safety etc.

- **Difficult:** A definite standard and thresholds accepted by all are missing. However, there is more and more research on the matter: It deals with insufficient dialogue between the involved parties in order to solve the conflicts of objectives, find compromises, build collective issues, reduce the multitude of partial indicators. At the moment, though, participants are impressed by fragmented subjectivity and conflicts. There are, however, interesting examples of synthesising.
- **Instrumentalised:** The indicators can be used to achieve goals different from those which are announced. Sometimes, for example the indicators are mentioned so as to obtain the financing of the European Union.

Conclusion

However, we cannot speak about exhaustiveness since the zones of shades persist, especially with regard to the definitions of certain concepts (example: QoL with respect to mobility) or problems of hierarchy and taxonomy of certain indicators and determinants. Indeed, because of the variety of disciplinary or institutional membership of the experts, the number of indicators is too large to find here, in this phase of the project HOTEL, a common denominator appropriate for all sub-sectors and population segments (traffic, territorial organisation, users, decision makers etc.).

Moreover, in a provisional way, we already could note that the social practice in the field of the operationalisation of QoL remains chaotic, vague and heterogeneous. There are no validated standards, nor structured methodologies to which to refer. This is undoubtedly partly inherent to the studied field and to the concept itself, because the factors that the concept should take into consideration are numerous (policies, economic, social...), and it is a difficult task to develop adequate models to formalise them in a holistic way, and comprehensively, at the same time.

Our exercise, however, showed clearly that a social need in this field is undeniable, if only in terms of a more rigorous definition of the concept of QoL, and that communication about their mutual experiences in practice between different actors is most welcome. It is noted for example that in certain countries or at certain levels of administration, things seem more advanced and better structured than in others. For this reason, strategies of communication and more coherent exchange would most probably allow progress in the field.

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