

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS DRIVER OF LIFE-QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

Egidijus Rybakovas¹, Svetlana Šajeva²

Kaunas University of Technology, Donelaičio str. 73, LT-44029 Kaunas, Lithuania
Email: ¹egidijus.rybakovas@ktu.lt; ²svetlana.sajeva@ktu.lt

Abstract. The research highlights insufficiency in the conceptualization on the general patterns of building strategy for life quality improvements at the local (municipal or regional) level. Life quality improvements related goals of socio-economic development are naturally seen as those being highly agreeable within communities and supported with inspiration by broad range of regional development stakeholders: local citizens, private business, not for profit entities representatives, governmental agencies, etc. The theoretical concept of social entrepreneurship suggests that many of these bodies are able to act as social enterprises engaged in solving social challenges, including those related with quality of life issues. The model investigated in the article is proposed as conceptual framework for socio-economic development strategy decision making. It integrates conventional in academics and practices approach to local level life quality measurement on the one hand, and social entrepreneurship promoting strategic decisions mechanism on the other. The article hypothesizes that some defined types of inadequacies of quality of life (measured in objective as well as in subjective terms) are subject of elimination by realization of adequate models of social entrepreneurship through theoretically predefined strategies.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, quality of life, socio-economical development, strategic planning.

Jel classification: R11, R58

1. Introduction

Following general statements of social theory, it could be presumed, that fulfillment of human needs is one of the goals that rational individuals will pursue with high endeavor of self-interest. Such goals lead to the higher level of participation in activities (including private and public initiatives), which are aligned in the way to help to achieve these goals. Most of contemporary human needs are fulfilled just within social (i. e. public) environment by exchanging produced goods and services, sharing rights to get services from others and responsibilities to provide them for others. Participants become social stakeholders investing some resources (time, money, efforts, etc.) and expecting respective rewards for these investments (Rybakovas 2009). Identification of existing human needs and development of effective means for these human needs' fulfillment are most significant elements in conceptualization and empirical investigation of quality of life (QoL) at the local place phenomena (Pukeliene, Starkauskiene 2009; 2011; Costanza *et al.* 2008; Noll 1998; Diener, Suh 1997, etc.).

Another conceptual assumption refers to the theoretically presumptive strategic success of socio-economic regional development (including QoL improvements) in the case when it is being

supported by everyday actions and respective investments of various resource of broad range of local stakeholders. Therefore, QoL improvements are considered as reasonable goals of strategic socio-economic development, having potential to attract required resources.

However, the general conceptual patterns of building strategies for life quality improvements at the local (municipal or regional) level are incomplete and thus considered as the scientific problem worth solving. Regional and local place development perspective is used through present research as the approach letting to look at the QoL improvement issues solving from the management, strategic planning and development domains.

Empirical life quality research methodologies (e.g. Sirgy *et al.* 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Sirgy *et al.* 2006) are most often aimed to discover and expose some particular QoL measures, to 'show the picture' and some trends of development. Attempts to bring life quality measures to the manageable decision-making level of strategic socio-economic development planning still need to be discussed, conceptualized in theoretical models, researched, validated empirically and widely applied practically (Stimson *et al.* 2006).

Social entrepreneurship is treated as one of possible conceptual solutions to the above elaborated problems. Social entrepreneurship is defined

by its two constituent elements: a prime strategic focus on social impact and an innovative approach to achieving its mission. The combination of social mission and entrepreneurial creativity marks out social entrepreneurship as distinct from other public, private, or civil sector activity (Nicholls 2006).

Since QoL issues are of social concerns, entrepreneurial orientation on social impacts is relevant way to solve these issues. Significant social impacts could be required in most of QoL determining factors: conditional aspects, policy activities, individual motivations and aspirations, etc.

The article proposes the theoretical model as conceptual framework for socio-economic development strategic decision-making, considering goals of QoL improvements. The model integrates conventional in academics and practices approach to measurement of QoL at the local level on the one hand, and social entrepreneurship promoting strategic decision-making mechanism on the other. It is being expected that conceptual framework will be useful for rapid building of reasoned regional socio-economic development strategies, aimed at goals of local place QoL improvements.

The aim of the article is to construct the conceptual model representing social entrepreneurship as the main driver of QoL improvements. The research is completed through following tasks: 1) to reveal theoretically reasoned model of QoL, representing presumable areas of QoL inadequacies; 2) to reason core strategic areas of social entrepreneurship initiatives, relevant to solve revealed QoL inadequacies; 3) to construct and argument the conceptual model linking certain QoL inadequacies and different social entrepreneurship initiative strategic areas as the ways to solve certain inadequacies thus improving quality of life at the local place. The model was developed by employing scientific literature review method.

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2. Local place related QoL inadequacies

Following literature review (Rapley 2003), it is observed that QoL research still lacks greater conceptualizations, which are very necessary in order to be used as guiding concepts in the sphere of strategic development planning at the local place (i.e. regional level) helping to align development strategies with the QoL improvements initiatives. Most of applied researches (e.g. Sirgy *et al.* 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Sirgy *et al.* 2006) are single case study based, aimed at solving issues at any one

particular place. These studies develop certain indicator systems and follow them to measure present situation. They expose observed issues that are worth to solve in order to improve QoL.

According to Baker (2003), almost every discipline in the social sciences and health fields has a research history relating to QoL. Each field approaches the QoL idea narrowly with the combined outcome. Despite great versatility, the conceptual proposition stating that QoL is always defined both in macro (societal, objective) and micro (individual, subjective) terms is cited very widely and is well established (Pukeliene, Starkauskiene 2009; Costanza *et al.* 2008; Noll 1998).

Costanza *et al.* (2008) defined the quality of life as somehow measured extent to which objective human needs are fulfilled in relation to personal or group perceptions of subjective well-being. Following this definition (and general academic concept), quality of life has both objective components – external to an individual and measured by 'others'; and subjective ones – i.e. personal assessments of one's own life or of particular aspects of life measured using scales of satisfaction, happiness, or other self-assessments.

According to Noll (1998), the subjective quality of life is about feeling good and being satisfied with things in general. The objective quality of life is about fulfilling the material, societal, cultural and other demands (or human needs) for material wealth, social status, and physical well-being.

Objective and subjective QoL aspects are intervened in multitude of all-embracing quality of life contributory facets (or domains) such as housing, education, work, environment, income and financial deprivation, health and ageing, work and the labor market, the family and social network, safety and security... Many of these QoL aspects are being significantly determined by the objectively measured characteristics of socio-economic system in local place – residential region.

The number of individuals' QoL contributing domains, mentioned within definitions and respective academic conceptualizations, is large. Following Pukeliene and Starkauskiene (2011), core and most often proposed QoL domains are following: material, social, physical (i.e. health related), emotional, and productive (i.e. work and productive activity related). These five domains are seen here as encompassing all possible aspects of individuals' QoL and well-being. Reciprocity between terms 'quality of life' and 'well-being' is clarified by distinguishing between the two above mentioned types of measures, i.e. objective (external to the individual) and subjective (i.e. internal, self assessment based) indicators. Objective living conditions refer to quality of life, while subjective

experience represents well-being. However, generalized single term ‘life quality’ is used, when subjective and objective aspects are not distinguished. Generalized quality of life term is meant to encompass both ways of measurement.

By following Veenhoven (2005, 2009) as well as referring to Pukeliene and Starkauskiene, (2009; 2011) and other authors in the field, it is already observed (Rybakovas 2011) that the linkage between external to the individuals objective socio-economic environmental conditions (i.e. potential opportunities to fulfill human needs) and its subjective perceptions (i.e. individual feelings of extent and quality of needs’ fulfillment) is treated as being governed (i.e. influenced) by two remaining overall QoL building blocks (Fig. 1).

Beside already mentioned objective socio-economic external conditions and subjective personal experiences, characteristics describing utility of social life in certain local place and individuals’ personal abilities to utilize externally existing opportunities to fulfill their human needs are used as two additional overall QoL phenomena building blocks. They also are described both by objective and subjective measurement means. These two components are seen as influencing linkage between objective and subjective quality of life.

Personal life-abilities include objectively measured level of education, health conditions, while subjectively evaluated aspects relate to personal aspirations and level of individual motivation to improve quality of their personal life. Considering utility of social life, indicators of objectively described contributions of society members to improve overall living conditions (including data from fields related to taxpaying, crimes, participation in decision making, etc.) and subjective personal attitudes of community members about utilities they receive from the society are included (Fig.1). Thus five local place related QoL generalizing factor categories are divided into objective and subjective indicators’ groups. Overall QoL is

seen as emerging from material objective conditions translated into subjectively perceived experience. This translation is lead by physical and productive as well as social and emotional QoL constituting factors, describing personal life-abilities and utility of social life QoL building blocks.

Following above just provided description of conceptual interpretation of QoL at the local place, locally created opportunities to meet human needs – local livability – are seen as the first of possible origins of the inadequacies of QoL at the local place. These inadequacies are identified when established opportunities are not sufficient compared to the conventional life quality standards. Objective side of material QoL is characterized using criterions describing built (i.e. locally manufactured and imported means: tools, equipment, consumer goods, buildings, and infrastructure) and natural (the structure of natural ecosystems) capitals of local place, i.e. particular city or wider socio-economic region. Subjective side of material QoL is measured by qualitative data on individuals’ subjective attitudes towards locally existing opportunities to fulfill their present human needs.

The second of origins of QoL inadequacies at the local place encompass locally created and supported personal capabilities to utilize external environmental possibilities (opportunities) – i.e. personal life-abilities. They are determined (and could be respectively measured) both by objective and subjective sides of physical and productive QoL. Objective physical and productive QoL arise as a result of local socio-economical external conditions that influence individuals’ skills, level of education, competences (i.e. quality of life influencing educational system’s parameters), persons’ health (i.e. health-care systems and environment parameters), and overall intellectual capacities. These aspects also are possible to be grasped subjectively by analyzing community’s members faiths and motivations, believes and sel-reliance related to the future live in local place (Fig. 1).

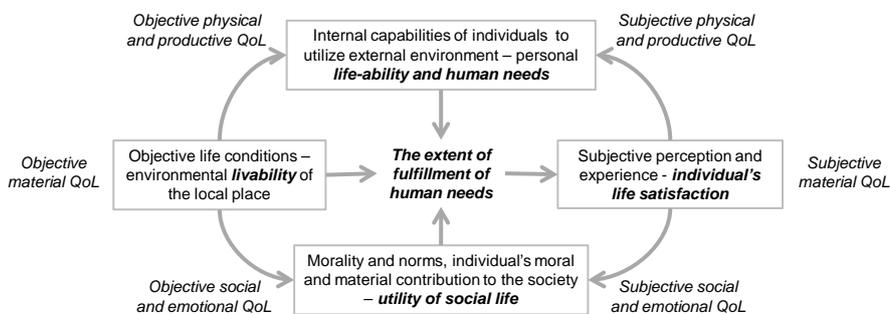


Fig.1. Quality of life concept (based on Veenhoven 2005, 2009; Pukeliene, Starkauskiene 2009, 2011; Costanza et al. 2008)

Potential inadequacies of QoL at the local place lie also in the socio-economic conditions and personal experiences that determine social and emotional life quality components. Objectively they are measured by criteria describing extent and quality of local place's social capital – i.e. extent of various stakeholder networks, degree of individual and corporate participation, as well as locally established norms that facilitate cooperative actions in socio-economic development of the local place and other criteria that are summarized in moral economy models (Wilson 1997). From the subjective point of view, to reveal locally existing QoL shortages, social and emotional QoL domains are measured by individual attitudes about prevalent morality, efficiency of norms.

Overall perception of human needs fulfillment (or the level of life quality) is expected to have feedback influences on other QoL constituting components (Fig. 1). It is presumed that higher levels of subjective well-being positively influence attitudes to utility of social life as well as motivation and aspirations to utilize environmental opportunities to increase individual quality of life.

All above described possible QoL shortages at the local (regional) level are just theoretical considerations. Their practical implementation would still be quite complicated. Difficulties may arise because of the fact that human lives in any certain society is very diverse and it is virtually impossible to distinguish a finite number of abstracted dimensions. Validation of any 'right', 'full' and 'complete' list of indicators capable to cover all possible QoL inadequacies would be problematic. The social life is contextual, conditioned by specific cultural and other factors. Indicators' system developed in one context will be at least partly insufficient in other contexts (Merkys *et al.* 2008).

Bristow (2010) also emphasized, that policy-makers should not try to end up pursuing 'identikit' regional development strategies with "no clear prioritization or tailoring of the dominant prescriptions to suit local contextual circumstances". Diskienė *et al.* (2008) also emphasize every single context specific expert evaluations as core background for strategic planning at the local or national level. Therefore, only core principals are expected to be general, but not exact indicators. Presented concept is not intended to generalize lists of indicators for QoL measurement. This framework is intended to be used to elaborate contextually fitted QoL measurement instruments, representing certain characteristics (by the means of used indicators) that are important for that single socio-economic system.

3. The concept of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is defined as innovative and effective activity, that focus strategically on resolving social market failures while creating new opportunities to add social value systemically. It is being achieved by using a range of resources and organizational formats to maximize social impact (Nicholls 2006; Dawans, Alter 2010). Social entrepreneurs work towards a combined value proposition that blurs the traditional view. According to it, creation of economic value is quite separate from its social equivalent; but "value includes not only superior goods or service delivery, but also more nebulous effects such as empowerment and systems' innovation" (Nicholls 2006).

Conceptual framework for local place related QoL phenomena explanation and measurements just discussed above reveals range of possible origins of QoL inadequacies at the any certain local place. These QoL inadequacies identified by respective measurements are treated as social market failures requiring some initiatives to resolve them.

Economic (or private) market failure concept well known within economic theory is used to analyze situations when the allocation of goods and services provided by a free market is not efficient (e.g. Krugman, Wells 2006, etc.). The failures occur, when another conceivable outcomes exists, where a market participants may be made better-off without making someone else worse-off. Economic market failures can be viewed as scenarios where individuals' pursuit of pure self-interest leads to results that are not efficient – that should be improved upon from the societal point-of-view.

Social sector (or social market) is described as the part of the economy, characterized by organizations, those goals and responsibilities are the maintenance and development of the common / public goods through the acquisition, transformation and allocation of public property (Dawans, Alter 2010; Scitovsky 1997). QoL improvements, since concerning whole local place community (not some certain groups of residents, eg. stakeholders in private businesses) as unified entity, goes naturally under the mentioned common / public goods domain (Scitovsky 1997). It means that quality of life and goals of its improvements are managed within the social market framework.

The social market failure term is being employed by social enterprise literature (e.g. Dawans, Alter 2010) to describe a malfunction of government institutions (i.e. traditional public property managers) to render efficiently social services: health care, education, communal utilities, transportation, etc... Social enterprises (performing in the social entrepreneurship framework) are social-

ly-oriented ventures (nonprofit / for-profit or hybrid) created to solve a social problems or market failures, but through entrepreneurial private sector approaches that increase effectiveness and sustainability while ultimately creating social benefit or change (Dawans, Alter 2010).

The ability to combine social interests with entrepreneurial practices, to achieve social change by marrying social interest and market mechanisms, to create both social and economic value through a new type of institution (Alter 2006) – are most notable and well known characteristics of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs are those who have the talent, skills and the visions to solve the problems, to change the world for the better. They are expected to have a unique approach that is both evolutionary and revolutionary, operating in a free market where success is measured not just in financial profit but also in the improvement of the people's lives (Nicholls 2006; Alter 2006).

Mulgan (2006) also notes that the key contribution of social entrepreneurship for local governments is that it can create social value more effectively than the public sector can on its own. The best socio-economic environments for social entrepreneurship to evolve are ones that engage with civil society, those are open, accessible, active, and supportive. Accordingly, “social entrepreneurship is supported with the increasing governments funding related to certain outcomes – no longer giving the public sector a guaranteed monopoly” (Mulgan, 2006).

Social entrepreneurs engage simultaneously with government, philanthropic institutions, the voluntary sector, and firms, as well as the commercial market to secure funding and other support (Nicholls 2006). It means that social entrepreneurship is not just for the social sector. Corporations can also be social entrepreneurs (Austin *et al.* 2006). The concept of corporate social entrepreneurship is defined as “the process of extending the firm's domain of competence and corresponding opportunity set through innovative leveraging of resources, both within and outside its direct control, aimed at the simultaneous creation of economic and social value” (Austin *et al.* 2006).

In summary, social entrepreneurship is about going far beyond the traditional strategy of socially motivated charitable giving or some suchlike model of social concerns. Social entrepreneurs are expected to focus on discovering creative ways to mobilize the key assets to eliminate observed shortages with the higher possible social and economic benefits,

4. Social entrepreneurship as the way for responding to life quality inadequacies

Quality of life inadequacies identified according to objectively and subjectively measured criterions in five domains across four QoL phenomena building blocks (Fig. 1) are termed as social market failures, which are expected to be addressed by social entrepreneurs. Opportunities for evolvement of social entrepreneurship are expected to be found in insufficient objective socio-economic conditions of local place, individual subjective perception of these conditions and self-evaluation of extent of needs' fulfillment, as well as in two intermediate QoL building elements, i.e. objectively described and subjectively evaluated utility of social life and individuals' capabilities to utilize possibilities for better life provided by external environment.

It is supposed, that when opportunities for social as well as economical value creation are evident (as revealed social market failures or QoL inadequacies), social entrepreneurs take workable value creation models and adapt them for the benefit of community stakeholders (Nicholls 2006).

It is hypothesized here that QoL inadequacies of certain kinds (revealed in objective as well as in subjective terms) are subject of elimination by adequate social entrepreneurship initiatives. This relationship should be recognized and utilized by local government representatives and other stakeholders in socio-economic development of local place. Respective measures by the means of development policy and strategy should be applied. Policy must aim at creating favorable and enabling socio-economic environment for certain types of social entrepreneurship models to be performed.

The models creating added social value are diverse, combining personal, family, and community resources, market and government levers in novel combinations (Young 2006). Social enterprises are designed by social entrepreneurs to accomplish their social and economic value creation objectives (Alter 2006). Following Alter (2006), all social enterprise models fit into the three main archetypal categories, distinguished according to the level of integration between their social programs and business activities. These models are named as embedded, integrated, and external.

According to Alter (2006), embedded model means that social enterprise's business activities and social programmes are synonymous. Social programmes are self-financed through enterprise revenues; the relationship between business activities and the social programmes is comprehensive, achieving financial and social benefits simultaneously. In integrated social enterprises social programmes overlap with business activities, often

sharing costs, assets, and program attributes. Not-for-profits may create integrated social enterprises as funding mechanisms to support their operations and social activities. The relationship between the business activities and the social programmes is synergistic, adding value – financial and social – to one another. Finlay, according to Alter (2006), social enterprises performing external model of social entrepreneurship are those where social programmes are distinct from business activities. Not-for-profit organizations create external social enterprises to fund their social programmes. The relationship is supportive, providing funding to the not-for-profit parent organization.

Alter (2006), Dawans and Alter (2010) used these three generic archetypes to identify range of distinct operational prototype models of social enterprises. According to cited authors, it is important to recognize that the field is still immature; the models are “not intended to straitjacket practitioners into the prescribed formulas, but rather to guide through the social enterprise landscape”.

Irrespective chosen operational model, social entrepreneurship initiatives are expected to be performed in four main strategic areas (Dawans, Alter 2010). These areas are meant to produce social impacts through four results’ categories (Fig. 2). Strategic social entrepreneurship initiatives under the resource mobilization strategic area are realized by means of using market mechanisms to turn social challenges into wealth-creation opportunities. These strategies are intended to achieve blended (i.e. social and economical) values. Considering OoL inadequacies that are discussed above, strategic mobilization of private and public resources is the way to enhance objective living conditions at the local place, providing also increased opportunities for individuals to utilize these external opportunities.

Strategic area of resource mobilization initiatives could be illustrated by ‘entrepreneur support model’ (Alter 2006) of social entrepreneurship. This model prefigures social enterprise that mobilizes its own private and/or public resources to sell business support and financial services to its target population – self-employed individuals or small firms. ‘Market intermediary model’ is very similar: social enterprise provides product development, market access, and credit services to its target population – small producers. Thus mobilized resources are used to increase external opportunities in socio-economic environment for better life.

Initiatives under strategic area of stakeholder engagement seek to achieve deeper social impacts. Such strategies are realized by integration of traditional social stakeholders into mainstream markets by engaging them as employees and consumers, by increase of interaction and dependence among all stakeholder groups by engaging them through integrated market mechanisms, and other means (Dawans, Alter 2010). The strategies seeking wider stakeholder engagement are seen as relevant for solving QoL issues by increasing measurement rates of objectively measured aspects of social and emotional QoL, determining perceived by the residents utility of social life.

Strategies under the knowledge development and culture management strategic areas are meant to achieve impacts through subjectively measured QoL elements. Knowledge development strategic initiatives seeking increase of efficiency at the local place socio-economic development and QoL improvement processes are implemented through expanded use of market research methods to conduct a down-market needs (and respective human needs) analysis (Dawans, Alter 2010). Widely shared knowledge about locally prevalent human needs and aspirations are key prerequisite for social entrepreneurs to address these needs

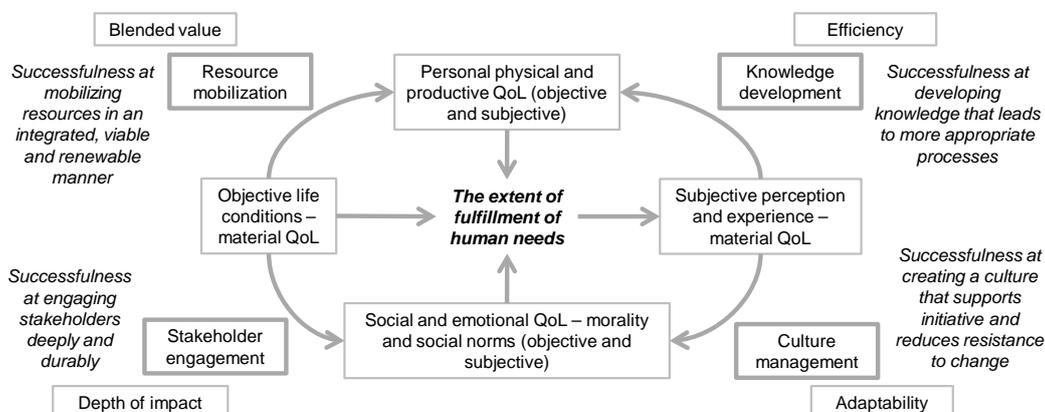


Fig.2. Strategic areas of social entrepreneurship as the means for eliminating quality of life inadequacies of particular types (based on Dawans, Alter 2010)

Decisions in the knowledge development area are at the fore of latter day development strategies in many countries and regions (e.g. Karnitis 2006). The ‘cooperative model’ of social enterprise (Alter 2006) illustrates knowledge development strategic areas of social entrepreneurship. The enterprise utilizing ‘cooperative model’ provides direct benefit to its target population or clients – cooperative members – through member services such as market information, technical assistance services, etc. (Alter 2006). This model could be used to solve wide range of QoL shortages. As in all other cases, if the idea of seeing social entrepreneurship as the driver of quality of life improvements is followed, then first prerequisite condition is found in locally realized possibilities to generate simultaneously social and economical values both for client population and for social entrepreneurs.

Culture management strategies are seen as able to increase subjectively evaluated utility of public life through social and emotional QoL indicator categories. Promotion of social norms encouraging collaboration, increased social watchfulness, reduced resistance to change, especially when change creates opportunities for increased performance and impact in line with a changing environment (Dawans, Alter 2010) – are some impacts capable to increase subjective evaluation of utility of public life thus providing potential to make overall QoL at the local place higher.

Social inspiration and community wide support still would be needed to accept the conceptual approach to social entrepreneurship as the way for solving QoL issues. According to Mulgan (2006), main drivers of social entrepreneurship creating new socio-economic markets to provide services are: 1) change in thinking about government (public services reforms allow individual units more autonomy to define their own employment policies, to use assets in more creative ways, and to reshape their relationship with those they serve), 2) new forms of the governance that are more personal, 3) organizational structures that turn government into a commissioner, purchaser, regulator of more diverse, innovative providers, and less like a monolithic bureaucracy that have priority to monopolize social markets, especially those failing.

The second set of trends is expected to come from within the business. More businesses almost generally set themselves overt social goals. Following Mulgan (2006), “more investors around the globe have sought to bridge the gap between classic business in the pursuit of shareholder value and not-for-profit ventures achieving different kinds of value; more businesses have started to use richer metrics of value; and many have become attracted

to a vision of capitalism that is more founded on lasting relationships than on fleeting transactions”

The model discussed in the article responds to the just mentioned global trends in social and economy areas. By integrating well established in academics conceptual approach to QoL measurements from objective and subjective perspectives and concept of social entrepreneurship, it provided conceptual solution for QoL improvements. The model still lacks methodologically reasoned instruments letting to distinguish any certain local place context related indicators of QoL. Further, cited strategic areas of social entrepreneurship also require in reasoning of every day practice ready tools for addressing observed opportunities efficiently. The model contributes to the field of QoL management by trying to make measured QoL at the local place more manageable.

5. Conclusions

Life quality improvements related goals of socio-economic development are generally considered as being agreeable within communities and maintained with inspiration by broad range of regional development stakeholders: local citizens, businesses, not for profits, governmental agencies.

In order to model the strategy of regional socio-economic development aligned to solve quality of life issues, quality of life first should be measured (in order to identify unmet social needs or a new social value creation opportunity that the public or private sectors have failed to address).

Discovered inadequacies then are treated (elaborated, shared, promoted) as opportunities for social entrepreneurs. Subsequent policy decisions are expected to be made to enhance environmental conditions for social entrepreneurship initiatives to take place and achieve social impact, while solving quality of life improvement problems.

The keynote of the article is the idea that social issues (as observed QoL inadequacies) are possible to be solved by applying the means utilizing entrepreneurial logics and practices to achieve social impacts. Target social groups could be reached by implementing decisions in four core strategic areas of social entrepreneurship. Resource mobilization strategies help to solve QoL issues in opportunities provided by external environment QoL component. Stakeholder engagement strategies increase objective characteristics of utility of the public life at the local place. Knowledge development and culture management strategies deal with subjective QoL aspects.

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