

<b>Institution: University of Aberdeen</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 – Sociology</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Monitoring Quality of Life in Europe: Developing New Indicators to Measure Wellbeing
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The University of Aberdeen has played a key role in designing and analysing surveys for European institutions to monitor and evaluate quality of life – a concept adopted as a key measure of economic growth in Europe in 2000. The research findings (including insights into particular aspects of quality of life, such as working life) have been used by the commissioning institutions to stimulate debate and shape policy. They have also been used by individual countries both within the European Union and further afield, notably in China and Rwanda. Interactive web resources have opened up the findings to policy makers and the general public.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Following the 2000 publication of the Lisbon Strategy for economic growth in Europe, the European Commission adopted Quality of Life as one of the measures of progress in European societies. The need to monitor and compare quality of life data from a growing number of EU countries posed major new challenges. It was against this background that the University of Aberdeen produced a substantial body of research which – as it was commissioned by European institutions – had impact built into it from the outset.</p> <p>The Aberdeen research was led by Claire Wallace, Professor of Sociology (at Aberdeen since 2005) and primarily involved designing and analysing surveys for the commissioning institutions, including the EU Directorate-General (DG) Employment and Social Affairs and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), an independent organisation set up in Dublin by DG Employment and Social Affairs along with the European Trades Unions and Employers' Associations. Major projects included design and analysis of the Eurobarometer (EB 62.2, one of the main instruments for measuring the climate of opinion in European states; 2005/6) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, 2007-11).</p> <p>The findings highlighted two types of 'social capital': formal (participation in civil society) and informal (participation in social networks and levels of giving and receiving social support) [3.1]. Further research showed social capital to be a significant component of life quality more generally [3.2]. Both of these were shown to be highest in Northern Europe, but low in the South and East, where informal social capital was predominant. In Southern Europe, family support was the primary form of social capital.</p> <p>One of the most important constituents of quality of life is satisfaction with work. Using the EQLS, Wallace and her team found that the most main components of job satisfaction for poorer people and people in poorer countries were having a regular job and an income [3.3]. The research showed that once a certain level of affluence is reached, more intrinsic rewards of working (such as job interest and autonomy) become more important. In Southern and Eastern Europe, poor working conditions and low job security were factors lowering quality of life in general.</p> <p>Working life was explored further in another EU project [3.4], which also analysed work and care in terms of the model of social quality that the Aberdeen team had been developing since 2006, building on the work of a European Social Quality network. Research findings added to knowledge about the social context of quality of life by examining the role of socio-economic security and social cohesion, inclusion and empowerment [3.5].</p> <p>In 2012/13, Pamela Abbott, Honorary Professor of Sociology at Aberdeen since 2010, conducted research on social quality in Rwanda, which looked at the extent to which policies to build social cohesion in the wake of the 1994 Genocide were succeeding. She found that although economic</p>

security and social integration at community level are improving there is less evidence that people are empowered and they are generally dissatisfied with their lives [3.6].

### 3. References to the research

#### Academic publications:

- 3.1 Pichler, F. and Wallace, C. 2007. Patterns of Formal and Informal Social Capital in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 23(4): 423-436.
- 3.2 Wallace, C. and Pichler, F. 2009. More Participation, Happier Society? A Comparative Study of Civil Society and the Quality of Life. *Social Indicators Research* 93(2): 255-274.
- 3.3 Pichler, F. and Wallace, C. 2009. What are the Reasons for Differences in Job Satisfaction across Europe? Individual, Compositional and Institutional Explanations. *European Sociological Review* 25(5): 535-549.
- 3.4 Abbott, P. and Wallace, C. 2013. Social Quality, the Quality of Life and Parents with Young Children in Europe, pp. 27-54 in Moreno Minguez, A. (ed.), *Family Wellbeing. European Perspectives*. Social Indicators Research Series 49. London: Springer.
- 3.5 Abbott, P. and Wallace, C. 2012. Social Quality. A Way to Measure the Quality of Society. *Social Indicators Research* 108(1): 153-167.
- 3.6 Abbott, P. and Wallace, C. 2012. Happiness in Post-Conflict Rwanda, pp. 361-376 in Selin, H. and Davey, G. (eds.) *Happiness across Cultures: Views of Happiness and Quality of Life in Non-Western Cultures*. London: Springer Verlag.

#### Supporting Grants:

- 2012-2013 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions *Quality of Society and Public Services*.
- 2010-2011. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. *Quality of Life in Candidate Countries: Croatia, FYROM and Turkey*.
- 2010-2012. EU Seventh Framework Programme, Dissemination Grant for work and quality of life. *Work-Care Synergies*.
2008. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. *Subjective Well Being in Europe*.
2008. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Comparison of 2003 and 2007 European quality of life surveys.
- 2006-2009. European Commission Sixth Framework Programme. Co-ordinator of project, *Workcare. Social Quality and the Changing Relationship between Work, Care and Welfare in Europe*, with 10 international partners, €1.3 million.
- 2006-2007. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. *Updating of EurLife Database*.
2005. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. *Quality of Life in Europe*, €135,000.
2004. DG Employment and Social Affairs (European Commission). *European Observatory on Social Cohesion, Trust and Social Participation*, €260,000.

### 4. Details of the impact

The research described in Section 2 was commissioned primarily by the European Commission and its associated bodies. It was therefore designed to have impact by stimulating debate and shaping policy within these organisations. The findings have also been used by individual EU governments and beneficiaries beyond the EU.

**Impact case study (REF3b)**Europe-wide impact:

In June 2010 and November 2012, the Aberdeen team presented their findings to the Eurofound Board, which includes European Trade Union leaders and representatives from Employers' Federations, the European Commission and EU member states. Robert Anderson, who oversees all quality of life research at Eurofound, confirmed the importance of Aberdeen's work, saying that it had contributed "to the work of the Foundation which underpins social policy developments in Europe" by providing evidence for underpinning policies and discussions [5.1.] The research also informed a regional Eurofound meeting with representatives from Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey in Zagreb in November 2010, where it was presented to policymakers responsible for EU accession negotiations. The Aberdeen reports provided information on a range of social indicators to inform accession nations' efforts to meet European standards [5.2].

The Aberdeen team's findings have also been incorporated in the EurLIFE interactive database, a Eurofound project set up as a resource for policymakers wishing to access comparative quality of life data. Between January 2008 and July 2013, the database had more than 336,000 page views [5.3].

The European Foundation Reports and the EQLS surveys, to which the Aberdeen team have often contributed, were frequently used in policy documents and discussions at a European level between 2010 and 2013; this work was also repeatedly cited by the Council of Europe (3 times), the European Commission (31 times), the European Parliament (14 times), the European Economic and Social Committee (once), European Agencies (twice), European Social Partners (twice), European Thinktank's (3 times), EU NGOs (3 times) and International Agencies such as the OECD (twice), UNECE (once) and WHO (twice) [5.4].

Wallace gave a keynote address on her findings from the Eurofound research in June 2013 in Dublin at the 21<sup>st</sup> European Social Services Conference. This gathering was attended by over 360 European policy makers from 32 countries and organised by the European Social Network (an independent network for local public social services in Europe) in partnership with the Irish Presidency. [5.5] Among those present was the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins, who indirectly endorsed the work of Eurofound by stating that "it is time for socially driven politics based on normative theory."

Impact on individual countries:

For the benefit of individual countries, the Aberdeen team have distilled relevant findings on particular aspects of life quality. For the UK Work Foundation (a provider of research-based analysis, knowledge exchange and policy advice) the Aberdeen team presented their findings on quality of working life in two sessions in Edinburgh in 2010 and 2011. At the 2011 event, the Aberdeen team also organised a deliberative forum. The results were used to help inform the Scottish government's 2012 Parenting Strategy [5.6].

Individual country information has also been made available to policymakers and the general public via the Workcare Synergies project, a two-year dissemination scheme (2010/11) involving Portugal, Austria, Denmark, England, Scotland, Italy, Poland and Hungary. The information gathered for the scheme remains available on its website [5.7].

As a result of this work, Wallace was invited to Germany in January 2013 to present her social quality model to the Bertelsmann Foundation, an influential think tank. The Foundation used the model in their report, *Social Cohesion Radar. An international comparison of social cohesion*, published in July 2013 [5.8]. The report was widely picked up by the German national media, including *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Tagesspiegel*, as well as *Focus* and *Stern* magazines.

In early 2013, Wallace was invited to present her Social Quality model in Hangzhou in China (designated City of Quality of Life by the Chinese Government) where the model had been used by city government since 2004 in its policies for urban development and to promote collaboration between different stakeholder groups. Since 2010, the Hangzhou city authorities have built further

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

on this model, developing indicators to measure progress [5.9].

For the Senate in Rwanda, Abbott and her collaborators produced a specially commissioned report and analysis focusing on how social quality can be used to inform national policies aimed at peace and reconciliation [5.10]. Findings were presented to the Rwandan Senate in July 2013 and received positive feedback, which were incorporated into the final report.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

5.1 Corroboration of the importance of the work of Aberdeen academics on the work of the European Foundation has been provided and is available from the HEI on request.

5.2 Contact: European Foundation Research Manager, Living Conditions and Quality of Life Unit

5.3 EurLIFE database <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eurlife/index.php>  
Written confirmation available from HEI on request

5.4 A full list of references to the EQLS surveys (which Wallace helped to design) and the work of the European Foundation (to which the Aberdeen team contributed) are available from the HEI on request, along with a full list of reports authored by the Aberdeen team.

5.5 Details of 21<sup>st</sup> European Social Service Conference. This page shows Claire Wallace's contribution: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/events/2013/esndublin/index.htm>

5.6 The Scottish government's Parenting Strategy 2012 is available at:  
(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00403769.pdf>).

5.7 See the Workcare Synergies website (<http://workcaresynergies.eu/social-quality/>).

5.8 See Social Cohesion Radar (Bertelsmann Stiftung): ([http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms\\_bst\\_dms\\_38334\\_2.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/bst/en/media/xcms_bst_dms_38334_2.pdf))

5.9 A letter of corroboration has been provided by the Deputy Director of the Centre for Sociological Studies in Zhejiang University in China, confirming that the City of Hangzhou is using the Social Quality Model to inform social and public policies that can improve life quality in the region.

5.10 *The Constant Quest for Solutions through Dialogue and Consensus in Rwanda*. Abbott, P., Musonerwa, R. and Lodge, G. 2013. Report to the Senate of Rwanda. The report has been presented to the Rwandan Senate to inform discussion in this area, and will appear on the Rwandan Parliament website (<http://www.rwandaparliament.gov.rw/home/>) (expected autumn 2013).