

The quality of life in European cities as seen by the citizens and measured by the European Urban Audit

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Measurement of the quality of life in European cities can be based on statistics describing the social and economic structures, the provision of goods and services, housing, educational and cultural facilities, environmental aspects, health, safety, citizens' participation etc. This is done by the Urban Audit, a European project based on more than 300 variables and involving more than 350 cities. But this picture derived from statistical indicators may differ from what people perceive as their quality of life, people's personal views on their living conditions, their perception of the quality of their environment, their satisfaction with public transport, medical care, cultural facilities and their judgements on their economic and social conditions and perspectives.

The European Commission is trying to consider both aspects and measures the subjective facts by the European perception surveys accompanying the Urban Audit. So far, each of the two data sources has been analysed separately, each revealing interesting similarities and disparities among the cities and groups of them.

The presentation will, after an overview of the Urban Audit, show some examples of the Analysis of the statistical data as published by DG Regional Policy and an additional attempt by the association of German cities to encourage the cities to use the data themselves.

DG Regio's idea to confront the "objective" statistical indicators with the citizens' perception of their quality of life may have been taken less serious at first; the presentation of the results of this survey after the first round in 2004, however, was given so much attention by the politicians and the media that in the second round in 2006 more cities were included and the sample size was increased.

In this second round, German cities - most of them cooperating in the "KOSIS-Gemeinschaft Urban Audit" - agreed, on their own account to increase the coverage of cities, at least in Germany, by organising a parallel survey with the same questionnaire, the same method and at about the same time as the European survey. The results show not only real differences in the quality of life but indicate also differences in the mentality of the respondents in different parts of Europe and in the perception of the "objective" facts.

The examples in this presentation may show that combining the statistical facts with the subjective perceptions can produce additional understanding and may help to weight the findings of both of them.

It is an aim of this presentation not only to draw more attention to the unique collection of comparable statistics in Europe as provided by the Urban Audit, but to encourage additional perception surveys also in other countries at the time of the next round in November 2009.