Measuring the objective or objectifying the measure?

– the tyranny of New Philistinism in setting quantitative goals for EU territorial policy

Tomas Hanell

University of Helsinki, Department of Geosciences and geography, Research group on Spatial Politics, Policy and Planning

Structure

1. **The context**

2. **Main scientific findings**

3. **The geography of QoL in the EU**

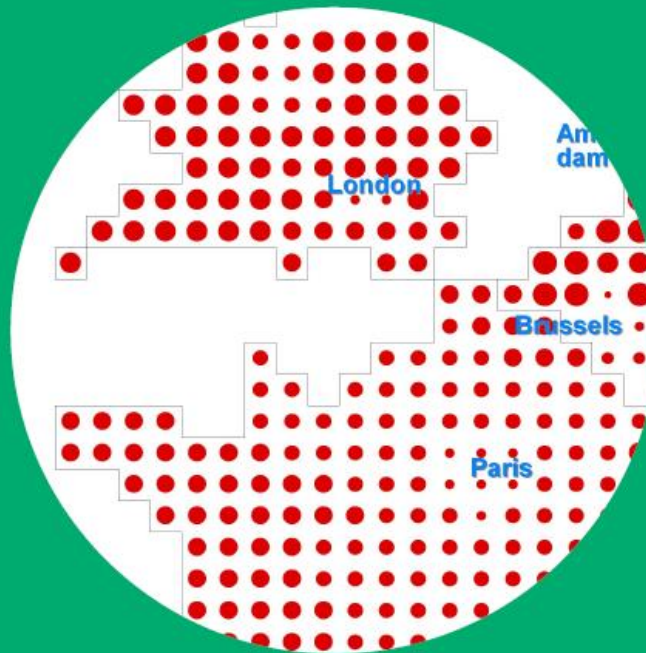4. **General QoL patterns**

5. **Exemplifying country cases**

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1. The context

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Dramatis personæ

		Issue	Implication (vis-à-vis QoL)
1.	+	Religion of quantification	One must count (supposedly)
2.	+	Formalistic view on society	The society = the economy
3.	=	Mismeasurement	Counting wrong things = "*New Philistinism*"
4.	+	The discursiveness of indicators	Goals become distorted
5.	=	Broken link betw. economic progress and QoL	Failure to reach targets that *matter* for citizens
6.		Opportunism of policy / politics	QoL used to justify "business as usual"

… then

If …

QoL as an explicit goal for structural policies and strategies

On the rationale for the Structural Funds:

"Regional Policy targets all regions and cities in the European Union in order to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and **improve citizens' quality of life**."

(European Commission, 2016a)

On the EU 2020 Strategy:

"inevitable to **maintain our quality of life** and secure our social models".

(European Commission, 2010a:28)

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Objective of the study

To demonstrate that regional indicators currently in use

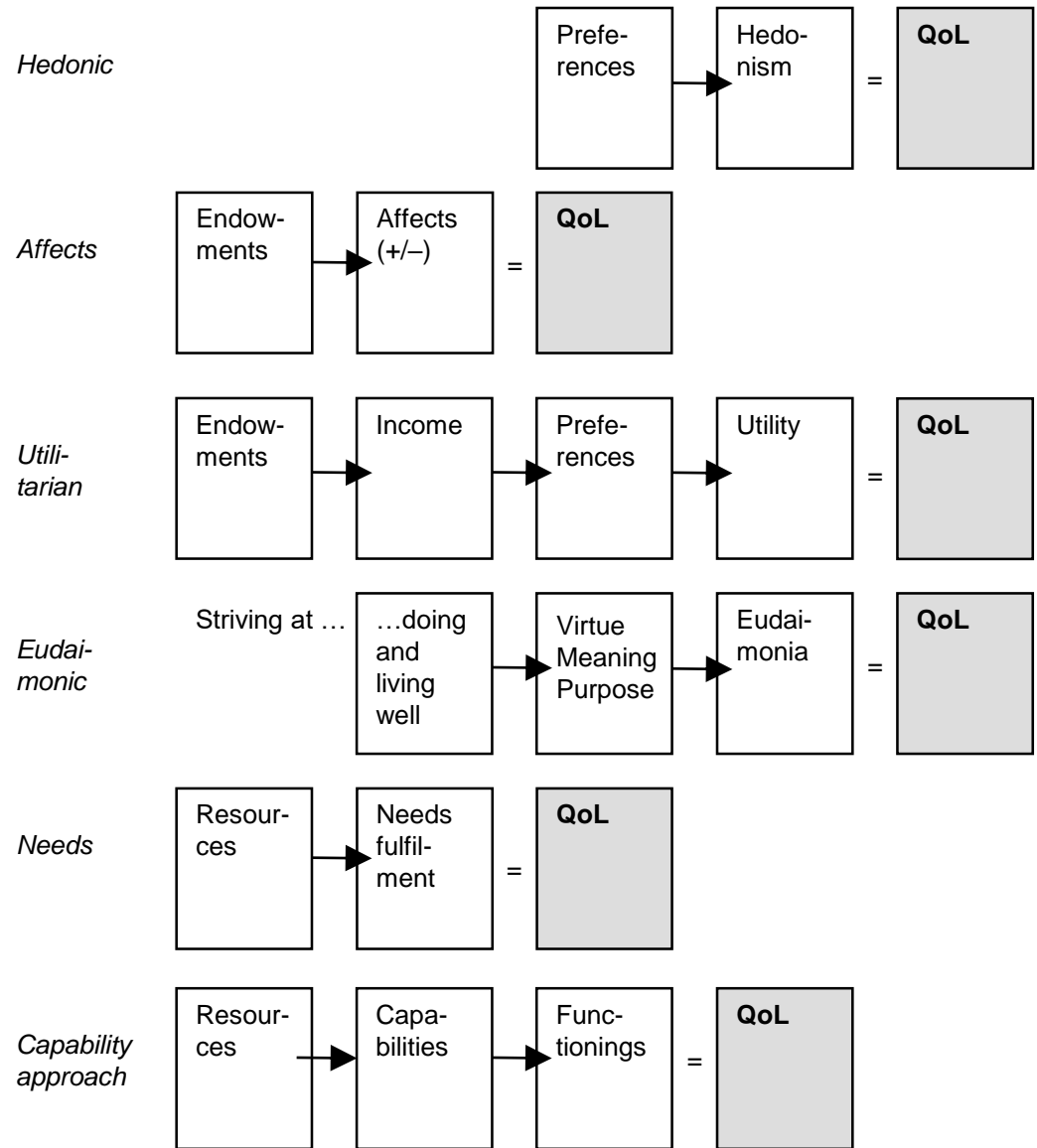 i) for evaluating the progress of the Europe 2020 Strategy and

ii) for determining Structural Fund eligibility

are **not** able to portray levels of quality of life of the concerned populations.

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Theoretical traditions in quality of life and well-being sciences

Overarching perspective on QoL:

Hedonic: Prefe-rences → Hedo-nism = **QoL**

Affects: Endow-ments → Affects (+/–) = **QoL**

Utili-tarian: Endow-ments → Income → Prefe-rences → Utility = **QoL**

Eudai-monic: Striving at … → …doing and living well → Virtue Meaning Purpose → Eudai-monia = **QoL**

Needs: Resour-ces → Needs fulfil-ment = **QoL**

Capability approach: Resour-ces → Capa-bilities → Func-tionings = **QoL**

Variable list 1(2)

Domain 1. Material living conditions
1. Disposable income of private hh in euro
2. At-risk-of-poverty rate
3. Disposable income quintile ratio (S80/S20)
4. Satisfaction with present standard of living
5. Ability to make ends meet
6. Satisfaction with accommodation
7. Shortage of space

Domain 2. Productive or main activity
8. Employment rate 20-64 years
9. Unemployment rate
10. Long-term unemployment rate
11. Share of part-time employment
12. Average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job
13. Work-life balance
14. Working hrs fit family or social commitments
15. Mean commuting time in minutes
16. Job contract stability
17. Satisfaction with job

Domain 3. Health
18. Life expectancy at birth
19. Subjective health
20. Feeling cheerful and in good spirits
21. Feeling calm and relaxed
22. Feeling active and vigorous
23. Feeling particularly tense
24. Weekly sports or exercise
25. Ease of seeing doctor

Domain 4. Education
26. Tertiary education share
27. Early school leavers
28. Never used a computer
29. Participation in education and training last 4 weeks

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Variable list 2(2)

Domain 5. Leisure and social interactions
30. Spending time with family
31. Spending time w. other social contacts
32. Having time for hobbies
33. Having time for voluntary work
34. Time to do enjoyable things in daily life
35. Access to cinema, theatre or cultural centre
36. Access to recreational or green areas
37. Satisfaction with social life
38. Not feeling lonely
39. Frequency of doing voluntary work
40. Getting support: help around the house when ill
41. Getting support: advice about a serious personal or family matter
42. Getting support: urgently raise amount of money to face an emergency
43. Getting support: wanting someone to talk to if depressed
44. General trust in other people

Domain 6. Economic and physical safety
45. Household in arrears during past 12 months
46. Problems with crime, violence, or vandalism in area

Domain 7. Governance and basic rights
47. Trust in the legal system
48. Trust in the press
49. Trust in the police
50. Quality of 7 public services
51. Tension between poor and rich people
52. Tension between management and workers
53. Tension between men and women
54. Tension between old and young people
55. Tension between different racial and ethnic groups
56. Tension between different religious groups
57. Tension between groups with different sexual orientation
58. Feeling left out of society
59. Gender employment gap
60. Unpaid voluntary work for political parties or trade unions
61. Active citizenship

Domain 8. Natural and living environment
62. Problem with litter or rubbish in immediate neighbourhood
63. Problem with noise in immediate neighbourhood
64. Problem with air quality in immediate neighbourhood

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Validity of the RQLI

	β	R²	P (2 tail)	n
Concurrent validity vis-a-vis analogous QoL metrics				
European Regional Social Progress Index	0.877	0.770	0.000	173
Index of regional quality of living	0.851	0.725	0.000	166
European regional Human Development Index	-0.810	0.655	0.000	175
Predictive validity vis-a-vis QoL outcomes				
Overall satisfaction with life	0.753	0.566	0.000	195
Happiness	0.728	0.530	0.000	195
Doing worthwhile things in one's life	-0.586	0.344	0.000	195

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2. Main scientific findings

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Interventions with a blindfold?

	Bad (traditional)	Good (traditional)
Good (QoL)	Policy intervention superficial	Lack of policy intervention justified
Bad (QoL)	Policy intervention justified	Lack of policy intervention calamitous

Situation according to QoL measurement instruments (vertical axis: Good / Bad)

Situation according to "traditional" measurement instruments (horizontal axis: Bad / Good)

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Summary of multiple regression model results

Dependent variable: the Regional Quality of Life

Purpose/use of indicator

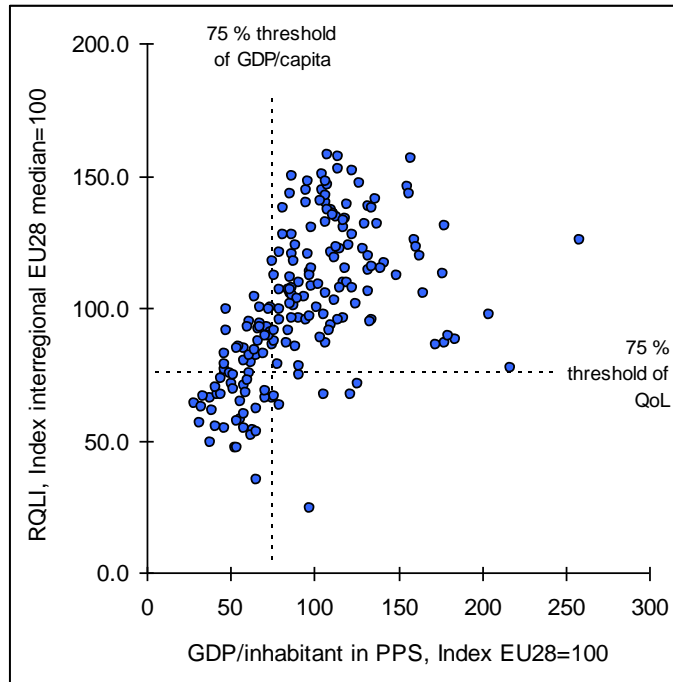| Independent variable	Unstd.coeff	sr²	P (2 tail)
1) SF eligibility			
GDP per inhabitant in PPS, EU28=100	0.180	0.162	0.000 ***
2) EU2020 progress evaluation			
Employment rate 20-64 years (% of age group)	0.982	0.280	0.000 ***
Intramural R&D expenditure (% of GDP)	1.141	0.010	0.172
30-34–year-olds completing third level education (% of age group)	0.225	0.007	0.248
Early school leavers (% of population 18-24 years)	-0.322	0.017	0.080 **
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (% of total population)	-0.698	0.200	0.000 ***

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GDP/inhabitant and QoL 1(3)

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GDP/inhabitant and QoL 2(3)

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GDP/inhabitant and QoL 3(3)

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0   250   500   750 km
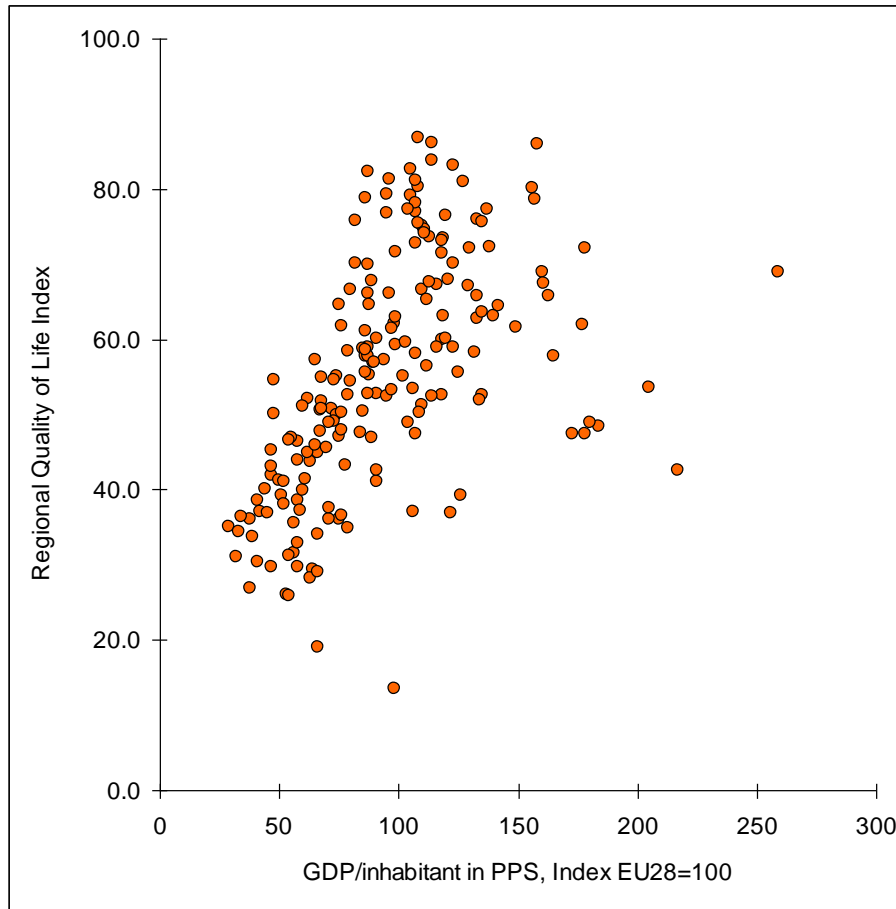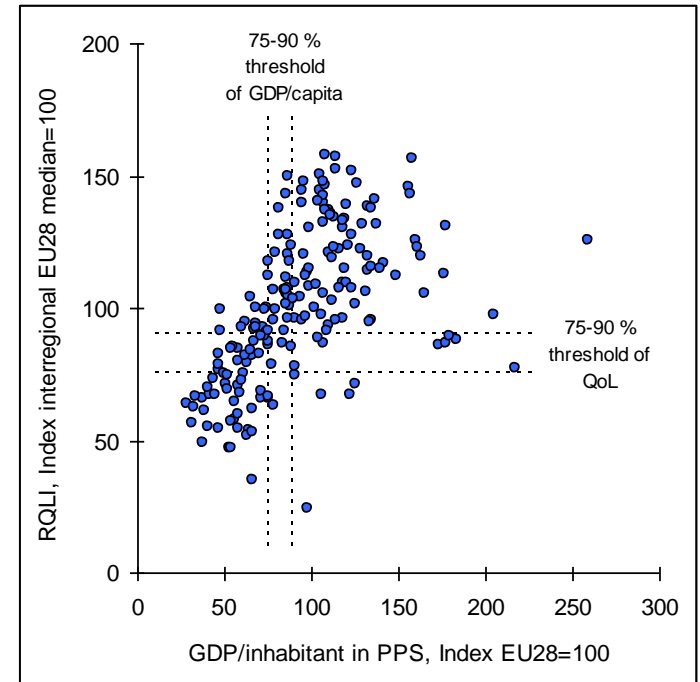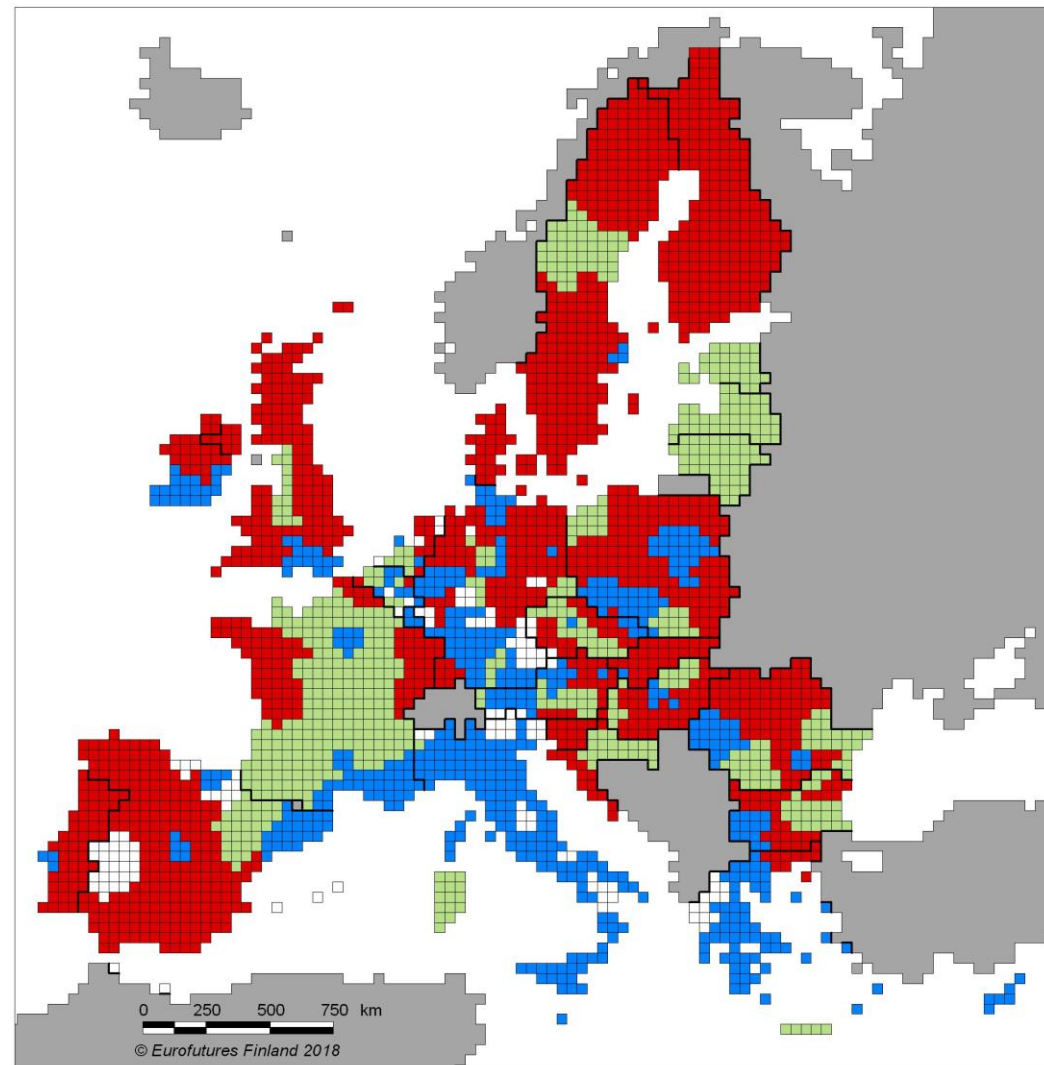
Correspondence between GDP/capita ranking and the Regional Quality of Life Index ranking

Regional QoL ranking >10 positions higher than GDP/capita ranking
(= regional QoL substantially higher than indicated by GDP/capita)

Regional QoL ranking and GDP/capita ranking within 10 positions from each other
(= regional QoL rand GDP/capita roughly in line)

Regional QoL ranking >10 positions lower than GDP/capita ranking
(= regional QoL substantially lower than indicated by GDP/capita)
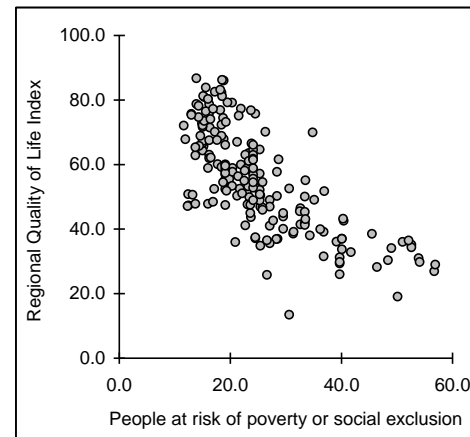
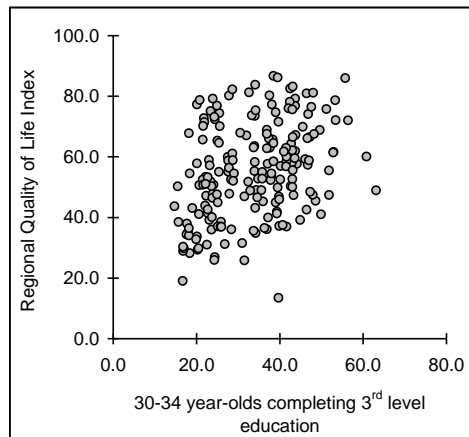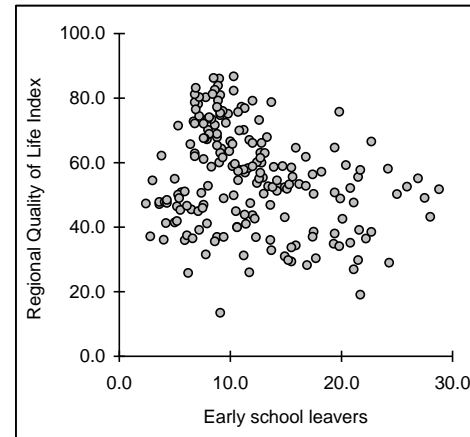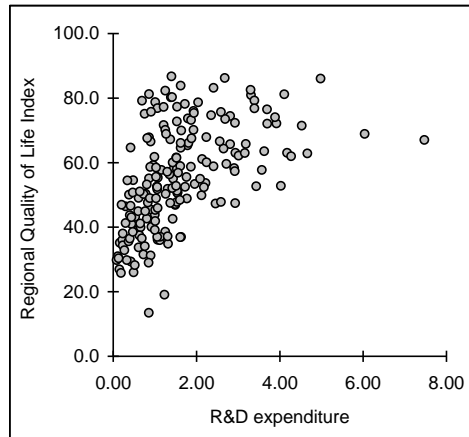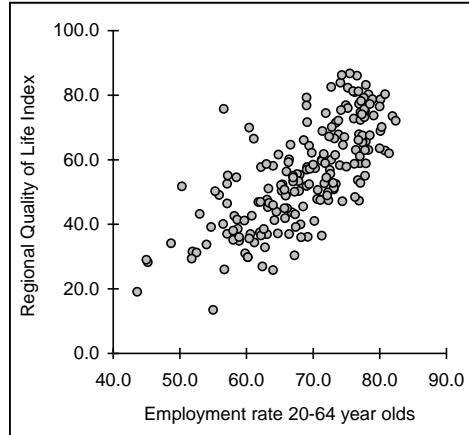Data not available   Non-EU territory   n=195

Data sources: EQLS, Eurostat, OECD

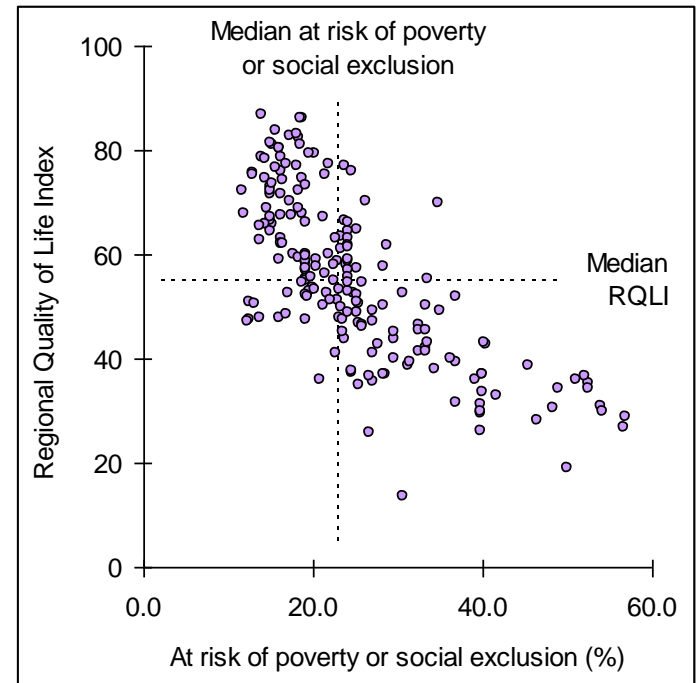N.b. Data for overseas EU territories not displayed on map.

EU2020 headline indicators and QoL

Employment rate, at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion and QoL

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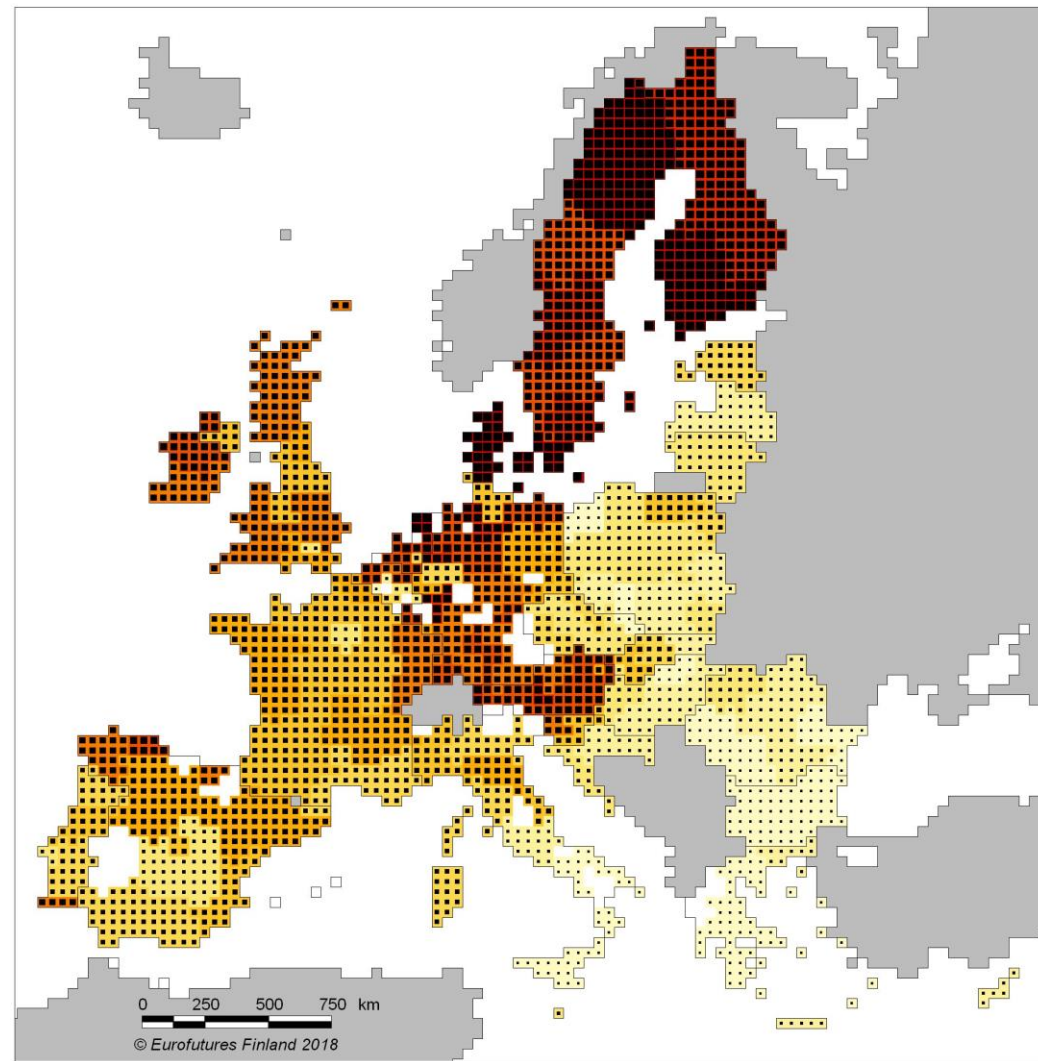
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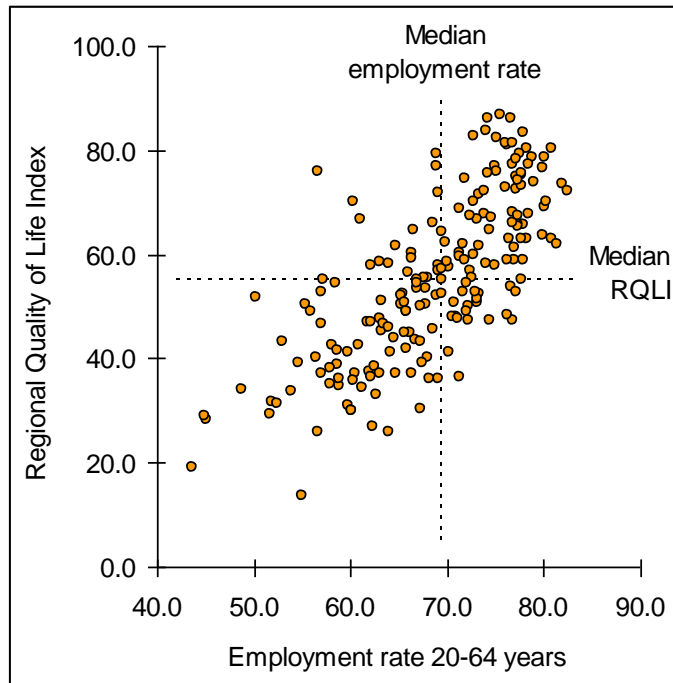
Main policy takeaway

1. Wishing to maintain QoL as a primary target of structural policy and development strategies requires as accurate as possible QoL measurements to be developed *and* integrated with policy development processes and their outcome evaluations.

2. Alternatively, such instruments and strategies should openly and unambiguously declare, that they in fact are not targeting QoL at all, but that the objectives lay somewhere else.

–> The current situation, where not only *ratio*, but also *causa*, are seemingly used to legitimise policy claiming to address the QoL of ordinary citizens, combined with an obvious incapacity to assess the matter in the first instance, appears intolerable.

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3. The geography of QoL in the EU

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RQLI: the Regional Quality of Life Index

EU Regional Quality of Life Index

- 1st decile (Highest quality of life)
- 2nd dec.
- 3rd dec.
- 4th dec.
- 5th dec.
- 6th dec.
- 7th dec.
- 8th dec.
- 9th dec.
- 10th dec. (Lowest quality of life)

- Data not available
- Non-EU territory

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Based on a compilation of 64 unique variables from the EQLS, Eurostat, and the OECD.
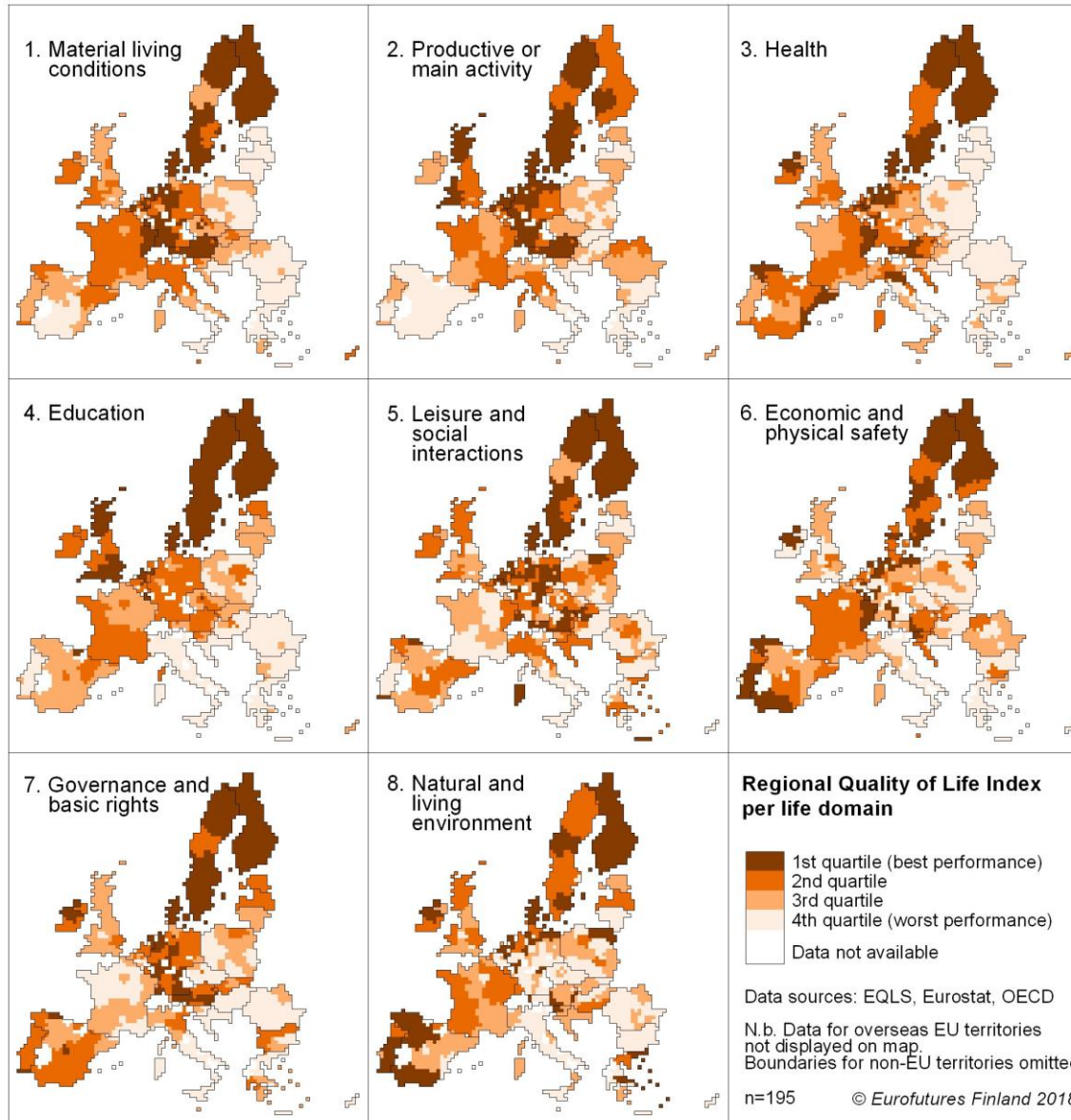
n=195

N.b. Data for overseas EU territories not displayed on map.

For notes on method, see:
Hanell, T. (2018). Regional Quality of Life in the EU. Comprehending the European Space Beyond GDP Through the Capability Approach. Aalto University publication series, Doctoral dissertations 190/2018, pp 141-183.

Domain wise performance of the RQLI

1. Material living conditions
2. Productive or main activity
3. Health
4. Education
5. Leisure and social interactions
6. Economic and physical safety
7. Governance and basic rights
8. Natural and living environment

Regional Quality of Life Index per life domain

- 1st quartile (best performance)
- 2nd quartile
- 3rd quartile
- 4th quartile (worst performance)
- Data not available

Data sources: EQLS, Eurostat, OECD

N.b. Data for overseas EU territories not displayed on map.
Boundaries for non-EU territories omitted.

n=195   © *Eurofutures Finland 2018*

1. Material living conditions	2. Productive or main activity	3. Health	4. Education	5. Leisure and social interactions	6. Economic and physical safety	7. Governance and basic rights	8. Natural and living environment

4. General QoL patterns

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Traditional EU dichotomies challenged

"Traditional":

1. **North – south**

2. **West – east**

3. **Core – periphery**

Quality of life:

1. **North and west – south and east**

2. **Periphery – core**

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Quality of life and agglomeration economies

Case: capitals *vs.* rest

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QoL and population density

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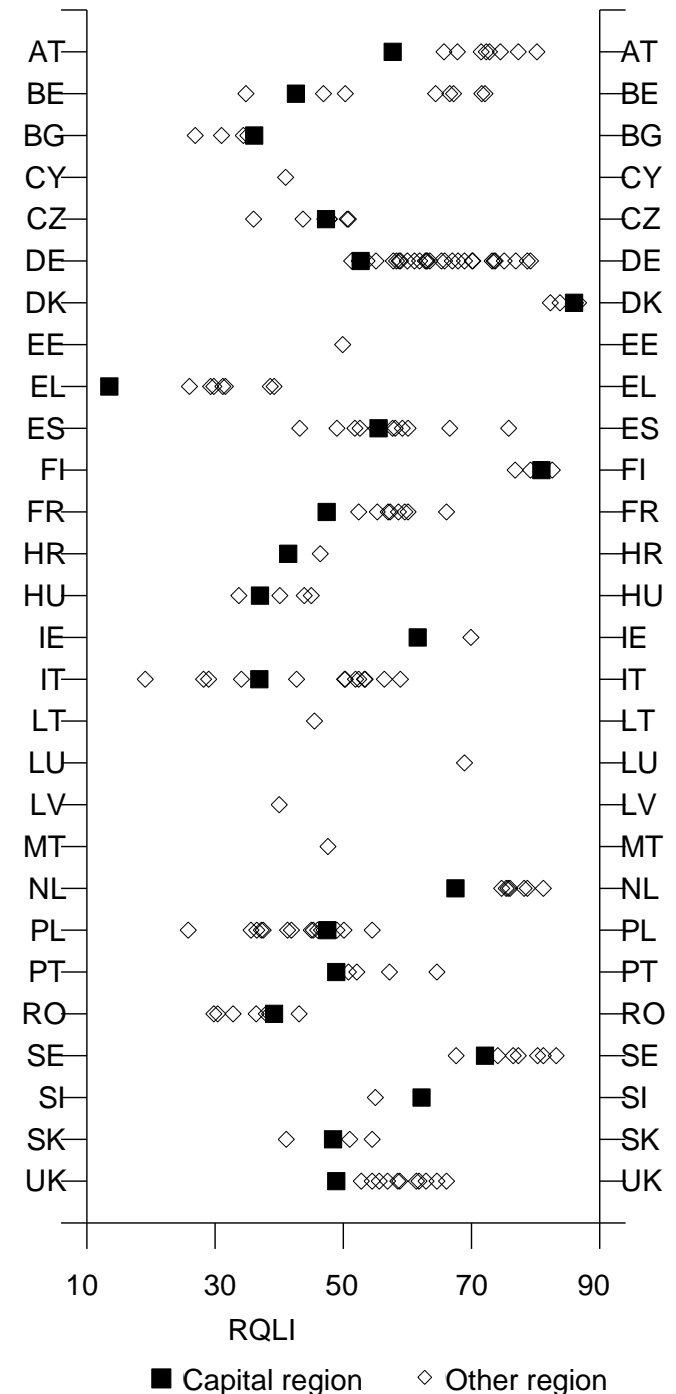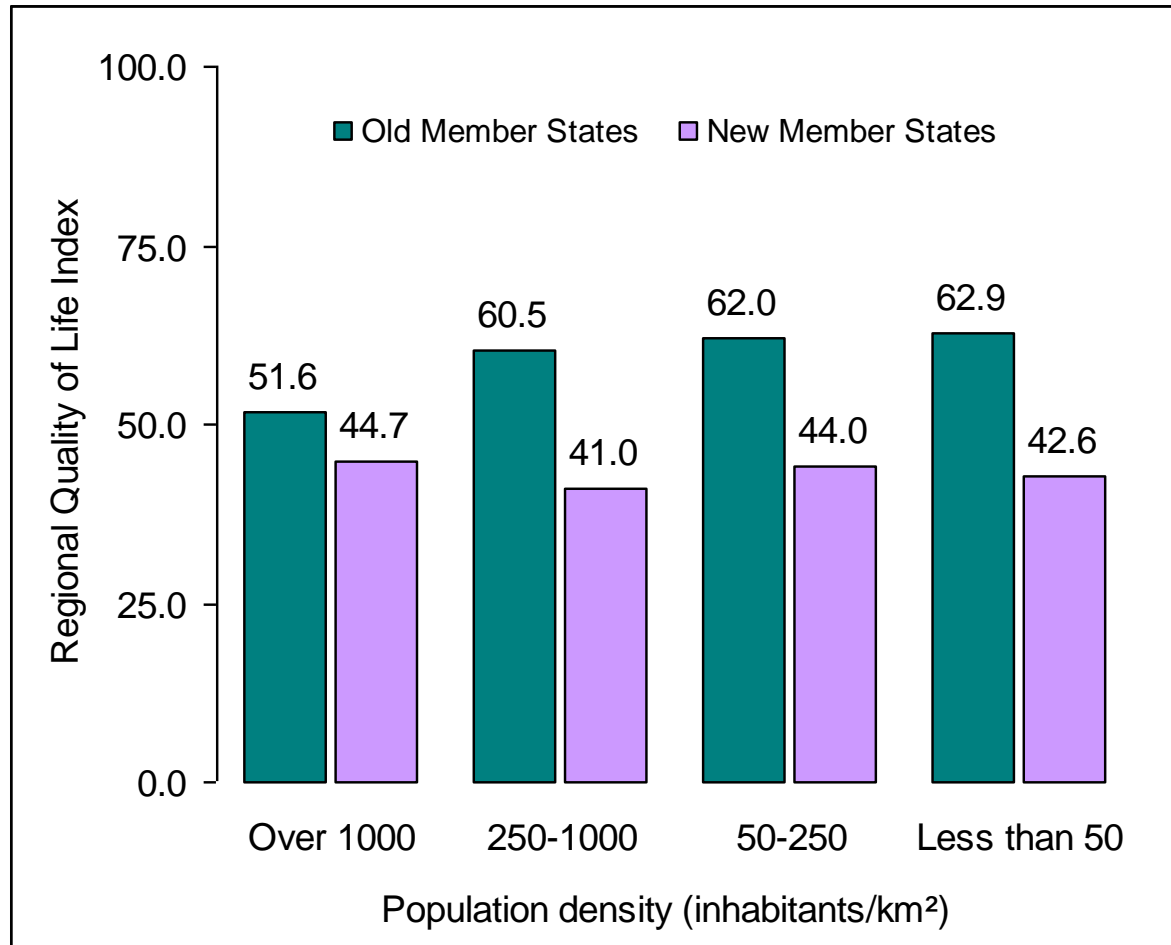
Interregional average performance per QoL domain and OMS/NMS

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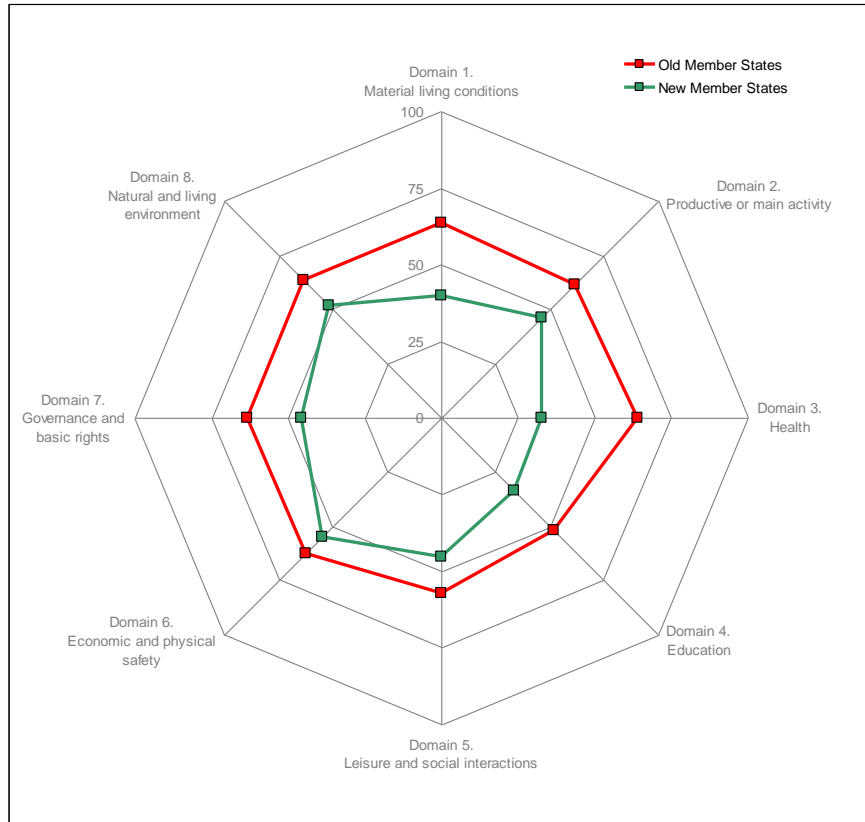
Interregional average performance per QoL domain and GDP/capita in PPS

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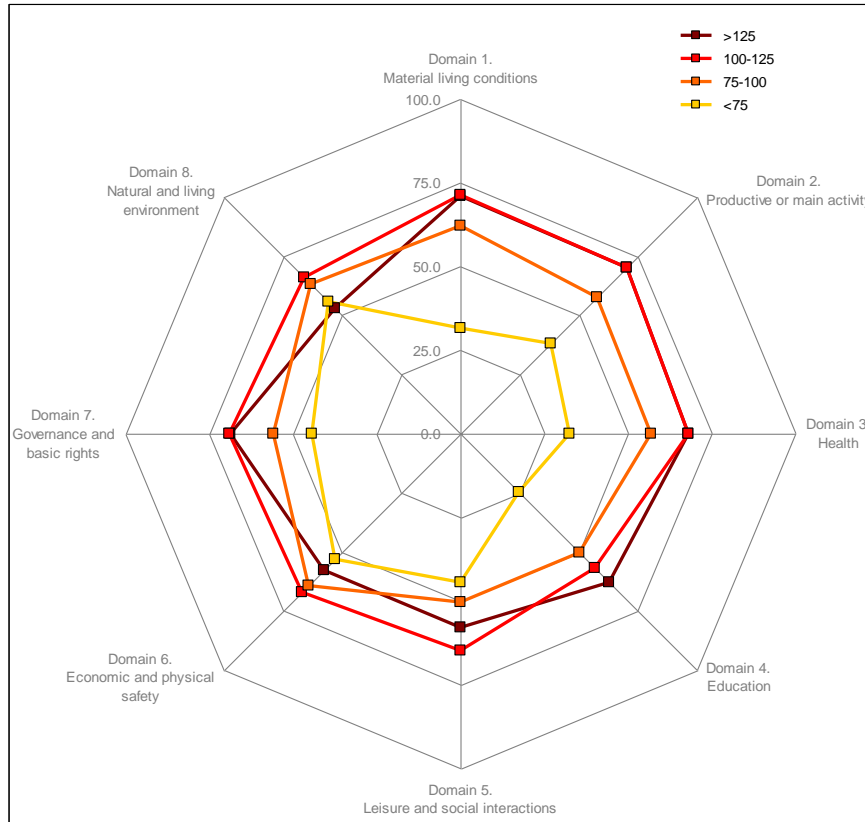
Interregional average performance per QoL domain and population density

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5. Exemplifying country cases

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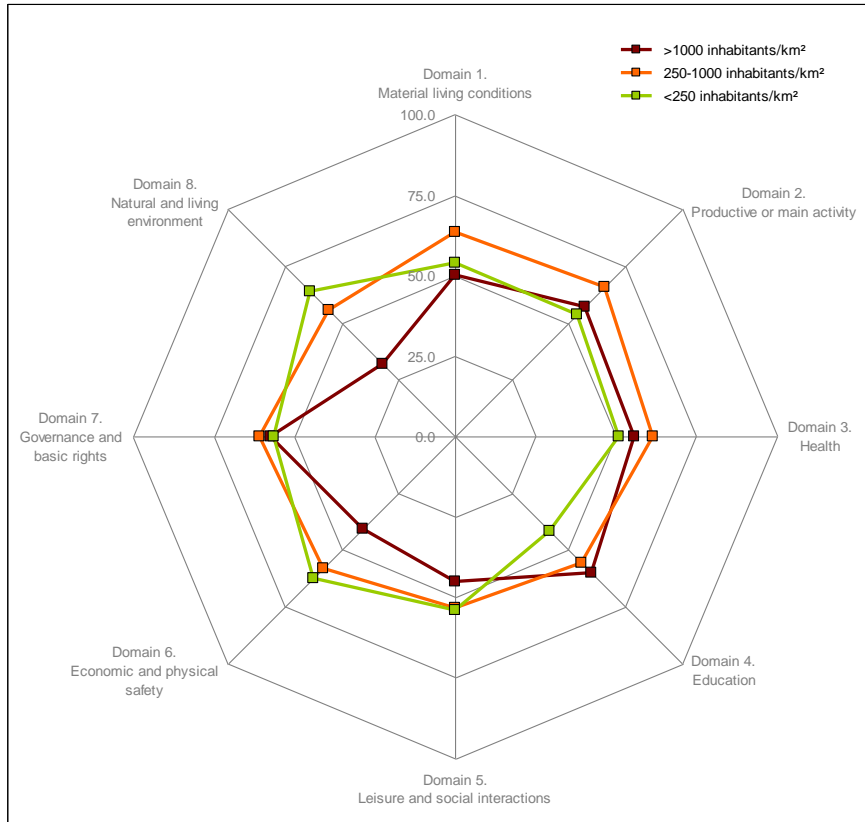
Performance per QoL domain, best and worst region in **Austria**
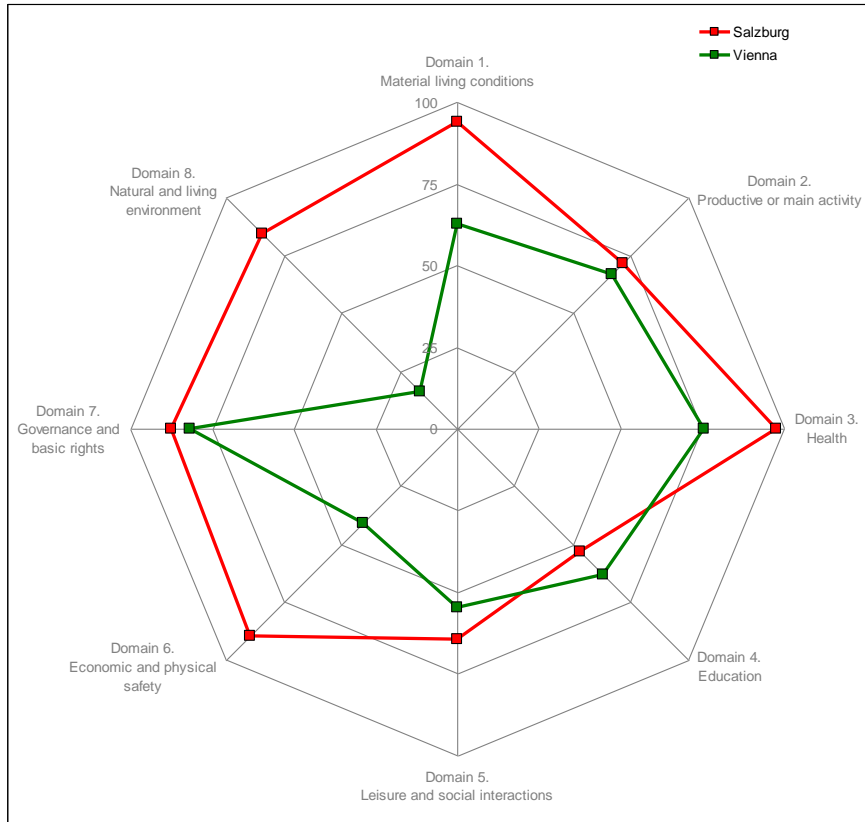
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Performance per QoL domain, best and worst region in **the UK**

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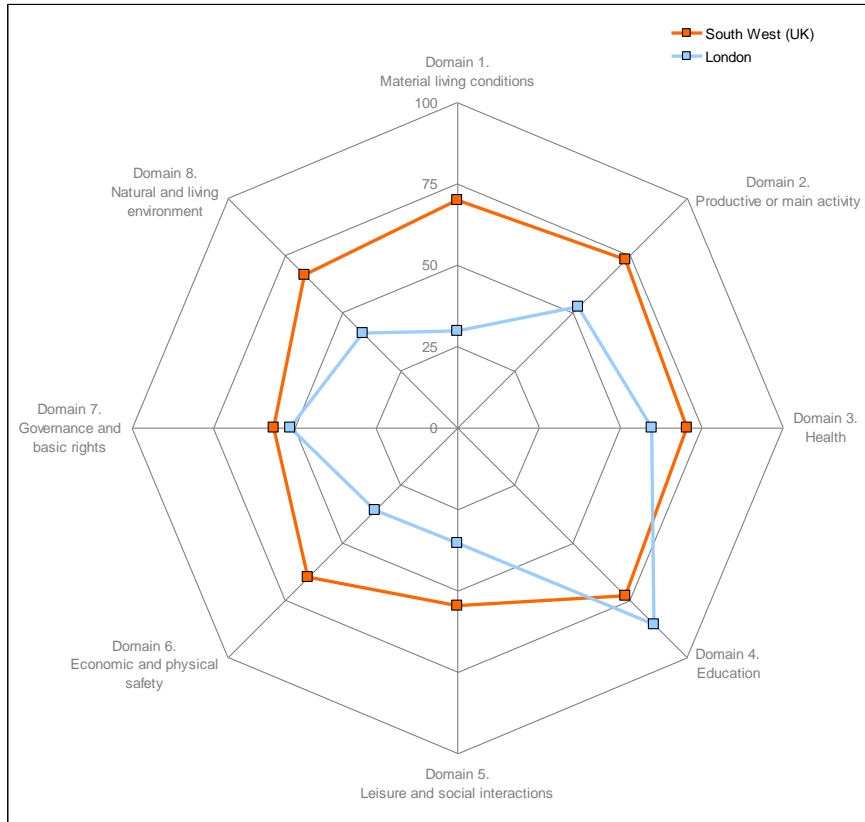
Performance per QoL domain, best and worst region in **Belgium**

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Performance per QoL domain, best and worst region in **Sweden**

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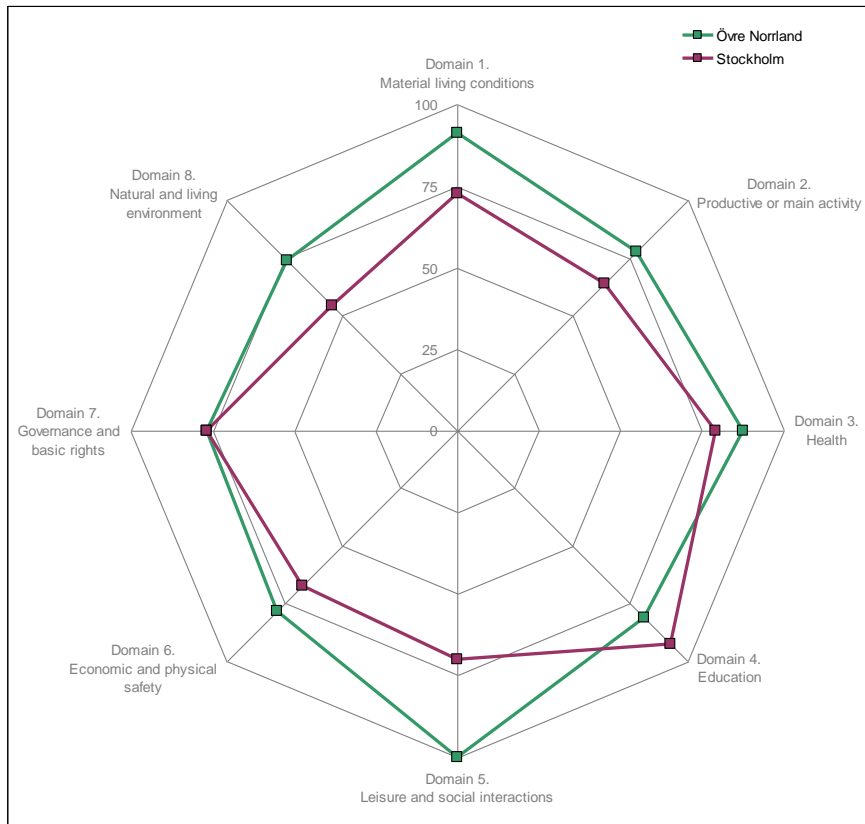
Performance per QoL domain, best and worst region in **Bulgaria**
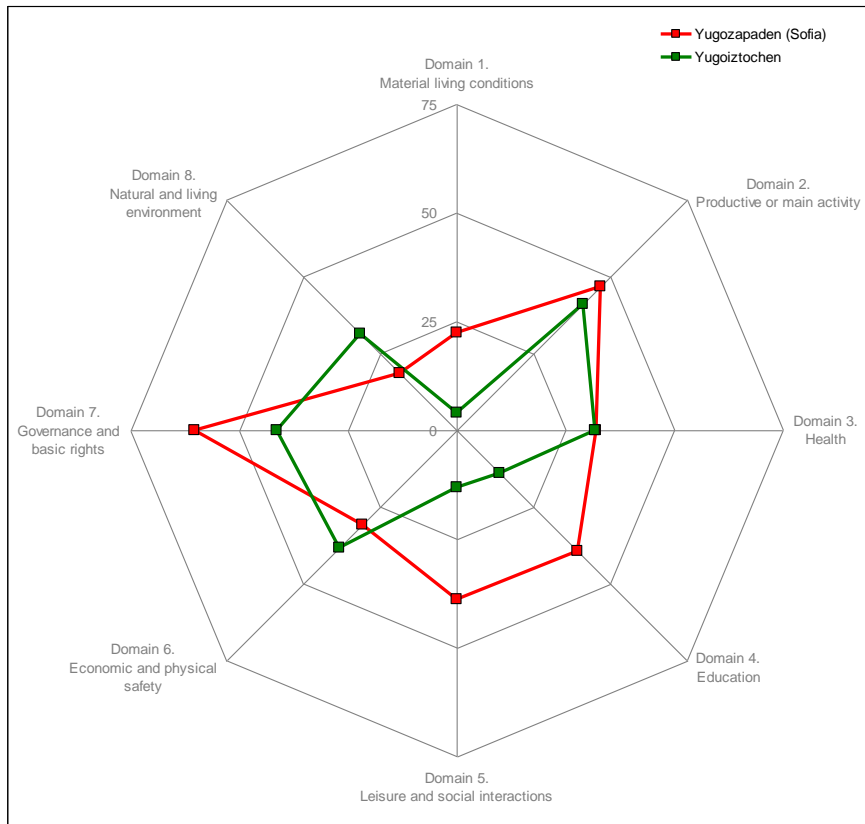
"You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss".

Epistle of James, 4:3

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Study (in pdf) downloadable at:

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