

Future Trends for Quality of Life in Europe: Scenario Analysis

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Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

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Introduction

In recent decades, Europeans have been facing the various consequences of a series of technological, economic, social and cultural changes with substantial impacts on quality of life and work. Broad societal dynamics like those associated with globalisation, the so-called knowledge society or demographic changes, for example, pose key questions for the political and institutional leaders in the EU and each of its member countries. These dynamics also deeply affect the configuration of employment, family and leisure and are therefore particularly important to heads of companies, organisations, trade unions and employers' associations and of course to every European citizen¹. All these far-reaching changes also offer considerable opportunities for improving quality of life and work, which means that at several levels of social structuring, important research, understanding and decision-making tasks are appearing for political and organisational leaders. It is important to mitigate the negative effects that the main trends may have on Europeans and enhance the positive aspects that they may bring.

In this report of the Quality Project, we will analyse the way in which these socioeconomic trends and public and organisational policies related to quality of life and work will build up in the future. Future scenarios have been developed in each of the eight participating countries – Finland, Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, the UK, Hungary, Bulgaria and Portugal –, which will be useful in an analytical grounded articulation between the dynamics of quality of life and public and private policies and measures. As the improvement of quality of life is one of European citizens' goals, a number of recommendations will be made for pursuing this central goal.

The following text is organised in four sections. After a brief presentation of the theoretical and methodological framework that was behind the fieldwork for the scenarios, we'll make reference to the current institutional context for quality of life in Europe. Section 3 contains the main findings for this work package which include an identification of the main societal trends and uncertainties with an impact on quality of life and work, and an overview of both the key-variables that make up the scenarios built in each country and of the possible chains of events that are related to those scenarios. In section 4 a number of recommendations are given that we believe to be crucial for the improvement of the quality of life and work of European citizens. This report ends with an identification of possible avenues for future research on the scenarios for quality of life.

¹ There are other examples of important societal trends with profound impacts on quality of life: individualisation, demographic developments, higher qualifications, new family structures, etc.

1. Theoretical and methodological framework

In general terms, the construction of scenarios can be regarded as a more useful, theoretically oriented and methodologically sustainable alternative than making simple predictions. It is a particularly appropriate method when appreciating complex problems developing over a long period of time characterised by uncertainty. Scenarios can elucidate these initially vague uncertainties and help clarify the different possible outcomes arising from today's recognisable societal trends (Heijden, 2005).

The effects of certain economic, political, social or cultural trends, their degrees of certainty or uncertainty and their impact can be examined by sketching hypothetical scenarios that, as complex patterns where these macro-trends intertwine, contribute to an analytical approach to the probability of their happening, on one hand, and their desirability with regard to quality of life on the other.

A scenario can be provisionally defined as a description not only of the current status of a society (or its parts) and its possible and desirable future statuses, but also of the series of events that can lead to these possible statuses (resulting from its present condition). Scenarios are particularly useful methodological tools for guiding decision-making, as they allow reflection on the present and sustainable plans for the future.

Central to prospective analysis (Godet, 1985, 1993), a scenario is a plausible description of concrete realities or specific aspects of these realities and underlying this description is empirically sustainable reflection not only on the current configuration of variables, indicators and trends but also on their future development. As a prospective analysis method, the drafting of scenarios includes the phased description of trends, events and horizons for their future development; at its core lies the construction of a view of the current state of the social system, and the identification of both the key-variables of its expected transformation and the strategies of the main agents and institutions at play (Heijden, 2005).

It is also important to remember that the preparation of scenarios also requires different methods of obtaining information. Here we will mainly use existing results from other dimensions of the Quality Project. However, as a central component of the process, eight sessions were held with groups of top-level experts from the fields of economics, politics, science and culture in each participating country.

For the groups of experts consulted, what are the main challenges facing each country in particular and the European Union in general when it comes to quality of life and work? What can or should be done in the different national contexts to deal with these challenges? How can each individual person's quality of life be protected and improved? How can social quality goals be reconciled with economic development targets and inter-generational solidarity in each country and in Europe as a whole?

These were some of the questions that guided the collection and analysis of the material gathered from these meetings of experts organised in a joint attempt to sketch future panoramas of quality of life in the European Union.

1.1 Method used to draw up scenarios

Before the scenarios were drawn up, a training session in the methods used was conducted by two specialists for all the teams in Utrecht, Netherlands. It was very important for aligning the different phases. This session produced a manual that help to standardize procedures in the eight sessions.

As mentioned before, all the experts that attended the sessions in the different countries were highly qualified. Each group of participants had different characteristics, thereby offering access to different and sometimes contrasting but always well-informed perspectives on quality of life. The necessary diversity of ages and occupations was therefore guaranteed for some interesting, fruitful sessions². The sessions lasted from three to four hours and some of them were preceded or followed by a social meeting in the form of breakfast, lunch or dinner. The main goal was to encourage broader debate, communication and interpersonal contacts with a view to networking and stimulating the discussion of quality of life in each national context.

With the exception of some slight variations, the sessions were homogeneous in the eight participating countries. They were divided into the following stages:

- a. Self-presentations of the participants;
- b. Presentation of the Quality Project, some results and the central question of the session – what are the main challenges facing each country in particular and the European Union in general with regard to quality of life and work in the next 10 years?
- c. Presentation by the teams from each country of some of the main socioeconomic trends in the EU today – in most cases before the session, the participants had access to the national institutional reports, making it possible to define a solid starting base for reflection;
- d. Presentation of the scenario-building technique;

After this, the method used to build the actual scenarios was divided into different phases:

- e. Individual reflection on other societal trends that were important but had not been mentioned before;
- f. Individual presentation of these trends and reflection on their degree of certainty / uncertainty (vertical axis) and impact (horizontal axis);
- g. Selection of the trends crucial to the construction of scenarios and posting for discussion in a virtual scenario discussion site with the above two independent axes;

² Table 1.1 summarises the conditions in which the scenarios took place.

- h. Creation of two groups and four scenarios based on the trends selected;
- i. Preparation of chains of events hypothetically leading to the proposed scenarios;
- j. Presentation of scenarios and their chains of events and discussion of their implications in terms of recommendations for public and organisational policies.

The participating experts invariably found the experience rewarding as it helped create conceivable scenarios for quality of life in the country in a European context, not only in terms of more plausible trends but also of more appealing possibilities. They particularly welcomed the opportunity to discuss the future development of relevant issues for each country and the EU without constraints resulting from the need to draft concrete programmes of action and reform. They also appreciated the ease of understanding between agents from different fields, especially the use of a shared language in an informal environment.

Although the meeting with specialists was only possible after a complex and somewhat difficult organisation process, we can say that it would have been useful to have more time for the work.

Table 1.1 Conditions for scenarios

	Date	Place	Duration	No. participants	Participants
Finland	12 May 2008	Helsinki Conference Centre	3 hrs	9	- Representatives of government bodies - Representatives of workers' organisations - Researchers
Sweden	21 February 2008	Social Service Department, University of Gothenburg	4 hrs	10	- Representatives of the four organisations with which the Quality project worked - Politicians - Representatives of the media - Trade union representatives - Experts in local, regional and global issues, work and family, equality and labour law
Netherlands	10 April 2008	The Hague Congress Centre	4½ hrs	17	- 8 consultants - 2 scientists - 2 trade union representatives - Member of the Social and Cultural Planning Office - Representative of a bank's HR department - Representative of an insurance company - Representative of a political party - Representative of a ministry.
Germany	19 June 2008	Department of Social	3½ hrs	6 (2 women / 4 men) out of	- 2 political scientists - 2 participants with a law degree

		Sciences, University of Hamburg		12 invited	- Biologist - Sociologist
United Kingdom	7 February 2008	Nuffield Trust, London	3 hrs	9 out of 12 invited	- Labour Member of the European Parliament - Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) - Sociologist and consultant - Confederation of British Industry - IPSOS Mori - Equalities and Human Rights Commission - Trade Union Congress (TUC) - European Health Management Association (EHMA) - Policy Studies Institute
Hungary	19 April 2008	Central European University, Budapest	4 hrs	8 (4 women / 4 men) out of 9 invited	- Lawyer - Agro-engineer - Historian - Economist - MP - Social worker - Sociologist - Former director of the Hungarian branch of an international human rights NGO
Bulgaria	21 March 2008	House of Science and Technology, Plovdiv	3½ hrs	14 (8 women / 6 men) out of 15 invited	- 3 heads of a marketing, a consultancy and an IT companies - Biologist - Economist - Newspaper journalist working on social issues - High level experts from the National Employment Agency, the National Agency for Social Assistance, National Agency for Child Protection, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Bulgarian Business Chamber, the Agency for Regional Development, a trade union and a non-government ecological organization
Portugal	19 March 2008	CIES-ISCTE, Lisbon	3h	6 (4 women, 2 men)	- Social researchers

2. The institutional context

Responding to a specific goal of the Quality Project, the results given in the final report of Workpackage 3 (Deliverable 3.2) make it possible to analyse each partner country's institutional context, and map central socioeconomic trends affecting quality of life and work in Europe.

The design of the scenarios, sustained by strategic thought, followed the reflection on the main socioeconomic trends identified in this report. These trends constituted a portrait of the current position in Europe and its development in recent years.

From an economic point of view, there are two trends essential to quality of life and work marking the situation in Europe. On one hand, although the accession of new member states has been successful and ongoing, there are still substantial differences between the old and new members-states, which are identifiable mainly in economic conditions, which are considerably less stable in the new countries. On the other hand, as a trend that affects many countries, there is an increase in social inequalities and the widening of the gap between the more and less advantaged.

Always associated with these economic trends we find the latest tendencies in the labour market, which follow a line of world-scale competition and are therefore sustained in the increased flexibility of work contracts, times and places.

The specific issue of unemployment is a problem that directly affects people's quality of life and poses a threat to more vulnerable groups, such as people with low qualifications, older people and women. Although overall unemployment rates have been falling in recent years, unemployment is still a serious problem, especially for Germany, Hungary and Portugal.

Employment and social protection policies are highly diverse in the different countries, following the orientation of their own welfare systems. In the project countries, there are social democrat or universalistic systems such as those in Sweden and Finland, corporatist or conservative systems like those in Germany and the Netherlands, liberal systems like the United Kingdom, under-protective or Mediterranean system, as in Portugal, and post-socialist systems such those in Hungary and Bulgaria. Here, where the regulation of flexibility of work is concerned, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have more flexible models, the systems in Sweden, Finland and Germany are of medium flexibility and Hungary, Bulgaria and Portugal have less flexible models.

The demographic changes in Europe over the last 10 years are based essentially on two phenomena, the fall in the fertility rate and the resulting aging of the population. Most European countries have fertility indicators below the limit of 2.1 children per woman. The fertility rates in the project participating countries in 2006 (Eurostat, 2006) were higher in Sweden (1,85), Finland (1,84), the UK (1,84) The Netherlands (1,70), and lower in Bulgaria (1,37), Portugal (1,35), Hungary (1,34) and Germany (1,32). Parenthood is also being progressively postponed and women and men are older when their first child is born. Demographic changes are also the result of the growth in different types of family and greater liberalisation of people's conjugal and reproductive practices.

Another relevant aspect to consider when analysing recent European trends is the integration of migrant minorities. In recent years, Europe has witnessed a huge increase in internal and external migratory flows and this has caused cultural and socioeconomic integration problems in many countries. Inequalities between the majority population and migrant minorities persist in Europe and this phenomenon is one of the most pressing challenges in Europe today.

Regarding women's position in the labour market, there are still differences in the employment rates of men and women, though there has been a substantial increase in female employment in Europe. The position of women in the labour market is more vulnerable than that of men and they are affected more by atypical, unstable and flexible jobs.

The road towards a more egalitarian society in terms of gender has been a trend in Europe in recent years. While education opportunities for women and men are increasingly equal, gender differences in fields of study still persist. The fact that women are completing increasingly higher levels of education is not, however, reflected in the labour market, where they are still at a disadvantage, with a tiny few represented in top management and leadership positions.

The share of women in top-level positions in Europe (ISCO 1: legislators, senior officials and managers) has slightly increased from around 30% in 2000 to around 32% in 2006. Within the project countries, in 2007, only the Netherlands and the UK had a share of women in national parliaments (upper house) higher than the EU average (18%). The share of women senior ministers in national governments in 2007 was higher in Finland (60%) and Sweden (46%). Germany, The Netherlands and the UK showed women participation between 35% and 40%. Women ministers in Bulgaria and Hungary had a representation around 20% and Portugal was the country with lower participation of women in national ministries, under 15% (European Commission, 2008).

In what concerns women representation in highest decision-making bodies of the largest companies in each country, Sweden and Finland had, in 2007, a percentage of participation higher than 20%, followed by The Netherlands and Bulgaria, which had values around 15%. The UK, Germany and Hungary had a representation between 10% and 15%, and Portugal had the lowest women representation, of less than 5% (European Commission, 2008).

Gender mainstreaming in policies continues to be a complex process, although it is figuring more and more in public discourse.

With regard to reconciling work and family life, there has been a progressive weakening in the limits separating work and family spheres. Family assistance policies in general and parental leave in particular have focused on two central choices, extending the duration of parental leave or increasing the amount of payment during leave.

The encouragement of male participation in family life can be noticed, for example, in countries like Finland or Sweden. In Finland, besides the 18 days of paternity leave and possibility of sharing the 158 days of parental leave, fathers are entitled to 12 more days if they use the last 12 days of the parental leave in an exclusive "daddy month". In Sweden, the 480 days of parental leave are equally shared between both

parents, and although one parent can transfer his/her right, that is only possible if she/he had used at least 60 days of the leave.

The availability of childcare services has been another fundamental issue that has changed in several European countries. Trends go towards greater availability, although it is decreasing in post-socialist countries.

Older workers, another group that is vulnerable to changes in the labour market, continue to figure little in the distribution of employment, though there has been a gradual increase in their active participation.

Finally, environmental changes have also become a central issue in quality of life in Europe. Recent trends have been towards changing energy consumption habits and harmful environmental practices in order to achieve greater environmental economic sustainability.

3. Quality of life scenarios in Europe

3.1 Trends and uncertainties

One of the essential components in building the scenarios was the identification by the experts of future trends with an impact on quality of life, with greater or lesser degrees of uncertainty and grouped into subject areas.

The economy

The trends in the economy at the time of construction of the scenarios indicated a potential financial crisis, which in fact occurred months later. The resulting recession in the world economy, the collapse of the financial markets, the crisis in world trade systems and reduction in confidence in economic and social systems were trends mentioned as being highly likely and having a high impact on quality of life and work in Europe.

The rise of small companies and sole traders accompanied by growth in specific market sectors, such as leisure and communications, were also uncertainties considered relevant to quality of life and work in a globalised setting.

The labour market

The trends in the labour market were the intensification of the main changes that work has undergone in recent years in Europe and the rest of the world and an accentuation of the effects of globalisation on the labour market, such as greater flexibility in the labour market, intensification of work, longer working hours and resulting reduction in free time, a progressive alteration in the importance of time and space at work, more outsourcing and offshoring and generalisation of technology in the production process.

Increasingly difficult time management and the tendency to maintain a culture of presence at companies were indicated as being highly likely and having a major impact on the quality of work and life.

The centrality of time in a globalised labour market was a dominant subject of debate in the experts' groups and the trend mentioned was an increase in the importance of time as "merchandise" and a rise in the costs of leisure time.

The change in the role of trade unions in defending workers' rights and the weakening of their power in negotiation processes was one of the trends indicated as being inevitable and having a high impact on the defence of working people's rights and social benefits.

The knowledge society has been posing more and more challenges to the inclusion of all workers in the employment market. As increasing value is being given to knowledge and highly specialised skills and as some traditional know-how is weakening, the social exclusion of less qualified people and a shortage of highly qualified workers were strong trends. As a result, other probably tendencies were identified, such as the exploitation of more vulnerable workers and growth in social inequalities between those with socially recognised jobs and those in a fragile position in the employment market.

A rise in unemployment was also considered highly likely as a result of severe economic recession. The most negative impacts of this phenomenon on quality of life would be on less qualified groups and the immigrant population. The promotion of unqualified work as a way of reducing unemployment in these groups was regarded as highly likely in the scenarios built.

According to the discussion groups, flexibility of contractual relationships would tend to increase and, in the knowledge economy, the number of workers who were self-employed or had fixed term contracts would exceed those with indefinite contracts.

The future prospects related to the introduction of technologies at work point to a weakening of traditional work patterns and the appearance of new forms of communication and new facilitators of the production process. The probability of a certain stagnation in technology was also suggested.

Other prospects indicated as being highly likely were the generalisation of the principle of social responsibility, an increase in strategies for setting up an inclusive market and the development of management models more oriented towards workers' autonomy and wellbeing.

The groups also identified trends that were less likely, but still had a high impact on quality of life and work, such as the possibility of reducing social inequalities by increasing productivity, a satisfactory minimum wage for all or an EU directive on working hours.

In some working groups, the intensification of trade between Europe and Asia led them to identify an unlikely trend towards matching working conditions in Europe to those in China, for example.

Another trend regarded as unlikely but with a high impact on quality of work and life was the possibility of creating jobs in low-energy consuming sectors, thereby promoting a true "green revolution".

Other less likely trends were, for example, the extension of the retirement age to 75, a possible crisis in the recruitment of people for personal care occupations, a four-day working week, an increase in absenteeism due to mental disorders and a rise in the importance of happiness and wellbeing over that of money.

Demography

The demographic trends identified also followed the main demographic changes in Europe in recent years. They included the continuity of the population aging process and a drop in the fertility rate. The groups pointed out the growing difference between the number of children of qualified and unqualified women.

The accentuation of these demographic trends points to the development of ways of dealing with the demographic crisis and the promotion of active aging, among other aspects.

Another possible trend was a slowdown in current demographic indicators and a substantial increase in the birth rate resulting from possible improvements in life and work conditions.

Migration

Migration is a field of great uncertainties in the future of Europe. Trends pointed to an increase in internal migratory flows and more migration from Asia. The forecast was for the continued attitude towards immigration as a source of cheap labour and the promotion of unqualified work for immigrants.

The increase in highly qualified emigration in many European countries is also a growing phenomenon as a result of inadequacies in labour markets, research, science and technology in relation to these population groups. This tendency was specifically meaningful for Finland and the Netherlands (it was also noticed in the UK, but as an internal skills' migration flux).

In view of these trends, the main uncertainties lie in the equal probability of opposite trends in the integration of immigrants. It is expected not only an increase in cases of successful inclusion and a reduction in the importance of ethnic origin with the generalisation of migratory flows but also an equal likelihood of an increase in intercultural intolerance.

Gender and reconciliation of work and family life

In the field of gender issues, trends indicated a reduction in gender stereotypes and their importance as a discriminatory criterion, with visible effects mainly in the reconciliation between work and family life.

In general, the trends presented suggested an increase in the importance of questions of gender equality in society civil (gender awareness) and a restructuring of gender identities that would pave the way for new types of family, new forms of family organisation, an increase in women's participation in public life and men in the private sphere and equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities by women and men.

One unlikely trend was the possibility of returning to traditional families as the material conditions of life deteriorate.

The strengthening of family support structures was indicated as a probable trend to respond to the saturation of family structure resources caused by the aging population.

The adoption of an approach of the life cycle to paid employment was mentioned as a probable trend as it is a way of better adapting workers to their personal needs.

The environment

The trends indicated here suggest the continued rise in environmental and energy problems along with an increase in individual and collective environmental responsibility.

The trends were continued climate change and global warming, a reduction in non-renewable energy sources, rising prices and unsustainable congestion of traffic and urban life.

At the same time, trends point to the development of environmental preservation and technological development strategies in favour of the discovery of alternative energy sources, an increase of the importance of the environment in the economy, incentives for rural and ecological tourism, a reduction in energy consumption and a change in consumption patterns in favour of renewable energies. These trends are expected to be accompanied by greater restrictions on energy consumption, such as rationing and charges on the use of polluting forms of transport.

City planning

Here too there are opposing trends. On one hand, we have the accentuation of deregulation of urban planning and the housing market and on the other a trend towards urban planning strategies compatible with environmental sustainability and the promotion of quality of life.

Tendencies concerning urban planning were especially prominent in the UK, Germany and Hungary.

Political and institutional aspects

The uncertainties in the future political and institutional field focused on confidence in the political system and institutions, political representation, the role of national and European government bodies and patterns of political and civic participation.

Where political confidence is concerned, the main trend is towards a loss of confidence in institutions and political systems and representatives. The uncertainties lie in the equal possibility for several European countries of the appearance of strong, extreme political forces or large numbers of small, dispersed political parties with little representation.

With regard to political and party representation, a probable trend is a forfeit of power of decision of national political systems to EU systems accompanied by a relative loss of political control at European level due to the strength and conditions of globalisation in a progressive change of governments' role. At the same time, the rise to power of nationalist parties is a trend in some European countries.

Processes like full democratisation of the European Union and a reduction in inequalities within Europe were also mentioned as likely future prospects.

A strong trend discussed in the scenarios was a change in patterns of participation and probable directions mentioned were an increase in citizens' movements, the establishment of democratic citizenship and more volunteer work and social solidarity. A reduction in accountability of civil society was considered unlikely.

The increase in political instability and military and diplomatic conflicts, especially in the Middle East, were aspects mentioned as future uncertainties.

Other tendencies, of regional incidence, were referred for example in Portugal, pointing the eventuality of conflicts with Spain over the management of transnational rivers, and in Bulgaria, presenting an eventual conflict within the Balkan countries.

Society and social protection

The retraction of welfare states and growing pressure on social security systems were phenomena considered likely in Europe's near future. Associated with the potential collapse of the social protection system we find growing social inequalities, mainly in access to health and education, with a widening gap between rich and poor.

The deterioration in living conditions, more poverty (especially among the elderly), growth in disadvantaged classes and a weakening middle class were trends considered highly likely.

Other possible but less likely trends were growth in individualism and an increase in the importance of religion.

Table 3.1 Main trends and uncertainties

Main Trends and Uncertainties	
Economy	Financial crisis Economic recession Collapse of the financial markets Crisis in world trade systems Rise of small companies and sole traders Growth in leisure and communications sectors
Labour market	Accentuation of the effects of globalisation on the labour market : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flexibility in the labour market - intensification of work - longer working hours - less free time - alteration in the importance of time and space at work - outsourcing and offshoring - generalisation of technology in the production process Difficult time management Maintenance of a culture of presence at companies Increase in the importance of time as "merchandise" Rise in the costs of leisure time Weakening of the power of trade unions in negotiation processes

	<p>Social exclusion of less qualified people</p> <p>Shortage of highly qualified workers</p> <p>Exploitation of more vulnerable workers</p> <p>Rise in unemployment</p> <p>Promotion of unqualified work for immigrants</p> <p>Increase of self-employed workers and with fixed term contracts</p> <p>Weakening of traditional work patterns</p> <p>Appearance of new forms of communication and new facilitators of the production process</p> <p>Certain stagnation in technology</p> <p>Generalisation of the principle of social responsibility</p> <p>Increase in strategies for setting up an inclusive labour market</p>
Demography	<p>Aging population</p> <p>Drop in the fertility rates</p> <p>Promotion of active aging</p>
Migration	<p>Increase in internal migratory flows</p> <p>Migration from Asia</p> <p>Increase in highly qualified emigration</p> <p>Social inclusion of immigrants or intercultural intolerance</p>
Gender and reconciliation of work and family life	<p>Reduction in gender stereotypes</p> <p>Gender awareness</p> <p>Reconstruction of gender identities</p> <p>New types of family</p> <p>Increase in women's participation in public life and men in the private sphere</p> <p>Equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities by women and men</p> <p>Strengthening of family support structures</p> <p>Adoption of an approach of the life cycle to paid employment</p>
Environment	<p>Rise in environmental and energy problems</p> <p>Climate change and global warming</p> <p>Reduction in non-renewable energy sources</p> <p>Rising prices</p> <p>Unsustainable congestion of traffic and urban life</p> <p>Development of environmental preservation</p> <p>Discovery of alternative energy sources</p> <p>Increase of the importance of the environment in the economy</p> <p>Incentives for rural and ecological tourism</p> <p>Reduction in energy consumption</p> <p>Change in consumption patterns in favour of renewable energies</p> <p>Rationing and charges on the use of polluting forms of transport</p>
City planning	<p>Accentuation of deregulation of urban planning</p> <p>Urban planning strategies compatible with environmental sustainability</p>
Politics and institutions	<p>Loss of confidence in institutions and political systems and representatives</p> <p>Appearance of strong, extreme political forces or large numbers of small dispersed political parties with little representation</p> <p>Forfeit of power of decision of national political systems to EU systems</p> <p>Loss of political control at European level due to the strength and conditions of globalisation</p> <p>Progressive change of governments' role</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rise to power of nationalist parties Full democratisation of the European Union Increase in citizens' movements Establishment of democratic citizenship Volunteer work and social solidarity Increase in political instability and military and diplomatic conflicts especially in the Middle East
Society and social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retraction of welfare states Growing pressure on social security systems Collapse of the social protection system Growing social inequalities Widening gap between rich and poor Deterioration in living conditions Growth in disadvantaged classes Weakening middle class

3.2 The scenarios

As mentioned before, the construction of scenarios is an important method in analysing current economic, social, political and cultural conditions in the EU and the main types of change affecting social structures and contexts, organisations, families and individuals in this specific framework. Scenarios also serve as a theoretical and methodological tool for preparing more suitable, effective policies based on a preview of the main trends that have decisive impacts on Europeans' quality of life and work.

Therefore, following on from the previous point, where we identify the main trends and uncertainties pointed out by the European experts – what they did was map the main contexts (economy, labour market, demographics, etc) and (macro, meso and micro) levels of structuring that will provide a complex determination of future scenarios – we must now identify and describe the quality of life scenarios in the EU that emerged from the sessions. It is basically a question of summarising them and pointing out the future coordinates that must be taken into account by all countries.

This is where, in part, the scenarios for use in preparing European policies have their *raison d'être*. In the following point of this report we will focus directly on the recommendations that can be taken from the cross-referencing of variables in the scenarios described below. Here, we will reflect on the key variables identified in the different countries – measured in terms of impact and certainty/uncertainty – that can be regarded as the driving force of change. They can have many senses. These key variables intersect in a way with the signs of the predominant direction of the different scenarios. This means that, while some of them point to desirable futures because they foster an increase in people's quality of life and work, others are complexes of factors opposed to improvements in social and economic wellbeing.

From the start, *demographic issues* are of particular importance. The current trend towards an aging European population may compromise the quality of life of large segments, as, if they are not reversed, they will lead to scenarios of not only demographic, but also economic and social imbalance. Other trends – such as active aging or the creation of a societal “environment” more favourable to a rise in the birth rate – can in turn contribute to the appearance of more auspicious scenarios in this crucial dimension. An increase and improvement in healthcare for the elderly and different forms of active aging are factors associated with this wider demographic dimension, and their impact on the future cannot be ignored.

We can also say that any scenario of high quality of life in Europe will only be possible with progress towards the *elimination of economic inequalities* and *social inclusion* of minorities and immigrants in order to promote social, cultural and religious diversity.

If we are to achieve scenarios of harmonious *social inclusion*, it is vital to establish the integration mechanisms and social networks (diversified and, possibly, renewed) needed to create *social capital*, a fundamental factor for improving the interactive components of quality of life and work.

Speaking of *social inclusion* is also speaking, in part, of a general rise in the *population's qualifications*. This is a decisive factor in the panorama of today's societies based on scientific and technological knowledge and its importance in improving quality of life is well known. In fact, the future EU scenarios must always be associated with a rise in levels of schooling and qualifications and the growing importance of lifelong learning (particularly important for individual capacity building at different levels). The construction of hypothetical scenarios in which this does not happen shows the highly negative effects on the economy, work and culture of a European population that is not properly prepared to meet the challenges of contemporary societies that are unique in their structural and symbolic complexity. Quality of life therefore requires quality of education, which in turn must be associated with the creation of more egalitarian access to it.

The *labour market and employment* played a very important role in the discussions of Europeans' future quality of life. Of the different variables pertaining to this central dimension of people's existence, the most imperative are sustainable flexibility, a predominance of qualified work in countries' employment structures, the importance of the service sector and low levels of unemployment. While these factors may develop differently and uncertainly, it must be said that improvement in quality of life clearly depends on these trends.

Gender equality is also an essential factor in the scenarios. It intersects complexly with other factors, such as those in the labour market, family and the balance between the two, and helps model the different frameworks that people experience in their everyday lives.

Broader *cultural and symbolic factors* also feature in the future scenarios for quality of life and work. Indeed, the cultural dimension permeates all the others mentioned here, as the values and attitudes shared socially with them intersect and modulate them. Although the specific characteristics of factors such as national, regional and local identities, religious attitudes and environmental values intertwine with other variables, they are powerful factors in the configuration of societal frameworks.

The future(s) of Europe naturally depend mostly on the development of *more specifically political factors*. At some sessions, attempts to establish more participative democracy and a more open, harmonious multiparty system were included in the variables leading to an improvement in quality of life. The scenarios submitted to the EU also depend on a good balance of power between the European, national, regional and local levels of decision making, the existence of strong civil societies and the role of the social partners.

Now looking beyond social, cultural and political factors, we can say that they articulate closely with other dimensions of the structuring of global society, developments in which have repercussions on all levels of

life. *Energy sources* and the *environment* are some of most important. The construction of scenarios that find a balance between the discovery of alternative, renewable sources, greater self-sufficiency and efficiency on one hand and an energy crisis with harmful consequences depends on energy sources.

As for the *environment*, it is easy to understand its importance as a fundamental factor in sustaining and improving quality of life. Global warming, for example, can compromise the very socioeconomic foundations of people's lives.

Closely associated with the environment is *urban planning* with its many facets. The attention paid to it will govern the creation of scenarios favourable to quality of life and therefore the population's harmonious growth, urban inclusion careful to foster economic, social and cultural diversity and the establishment of effective but sustainable transport networks.

In today's knowledge societies, *technological and scientific development* is of decisive importance to the future. The existence of appropriate infrastructures and generalised access to information and communication networks is a cornerstone of the opening and maintenance of roads to better quality of life.

As we have already mentioned, the construction of scenarios is a useful tool that, by reducing complexity, enables us to identify crucial trends and factors in the development of a particular reality or certain aspects of it. An integrated analysis of the many scenarios from each country shows a more sustainable approach to reality through the articulation of these key dimensions. Future scenarios for improving quality of life and work in Europe will depend on the favourable, conjugated development of the main variables identified above. The intertwining of the factors in question, which is particularly complex and characterised by broad margins of uncertainty, is open to informed intervention aimed at taking multidimensional action at EU level or in its different member countries. This is the subject covered by section 4 of this report.

3.3 Chains of events

Once the final scenarios had been defined, the experts were asked to identify a chronological chain of events that would lead to these scenarios. The chains of events were aimed at the specific characteristics of the scenarios. In some cases, as the scenarios reflected specific national realities, the chains contained events with only national implications. Even so, it was possible to identify overall convergences in the eight expert groups from the partner countries of the Quality Project. These convergences were orientated, on one hand, towards the identification of common events that would lead to the different scenarios, and, on the other hand, to a similar chronological position of events.

It was possible to indicate three periods of time for the prevalence of the events. The first, short term period, characterized by the nearness of the events, would occur between 2008 and 2011. The second, medium-term period would show events between 2011 and 2015. The final period would occur between 2015 and 2018.

The first period of time would comprise immediate events that would be the starting point of the different chains. The main event in this period was the emergence of an economic crisis. At the time of the expert

groups, there were already signs of a possible crisis. A few months later, a financial crisis effectively took place at a global scale, with consequences at social and economic dimensions.

Another important event was the over-exploitation and subsequent scarcity of oil. This factor, signs of which are being seen at the present time, would cause, among other things, an increase in investments in renewable energies and research into new energy sources.

A third event considered immediate was the possibility of terrorist attacks or diplomatic conflicts especially with origin in Middle East, but with global effects.

The second period of time includes medium-term events, resulting from the ones in the first period. They could have different areas of incidence.

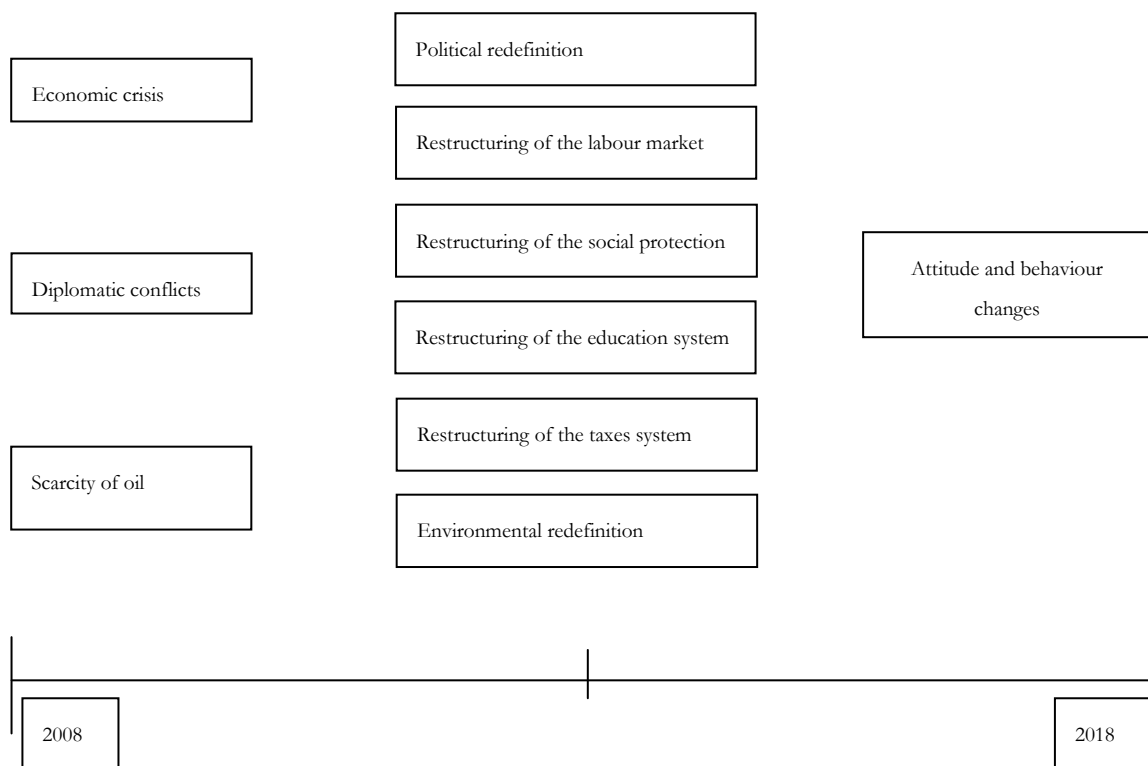
Political redefinition, involving changes in the role of national governments, national and European institutions and decision-making processes, was one of the most important events in this stage. Changes in the labour market, the social protection system, education and the taxes system would also take place in this period.

In the most favourable scenarios, political redefinition would include more involvement and civic participation of citizens and increasing protection of human rights. Encouraging conditions for the labour market and social protection system restructuring would include the implementation of policies on working hours to facilitate the work-life balance, or the adjustment of family leave to men's and women's needs. There would be more investment in education, including improvements in syllabuses and school quality, with guarantees of equal, free access to school and education by the whole population. The intensification of tough energy conditions would lead to the implementation of strict taxes on consumption. The taxes system would be an area of progressive general transformation.

In the worst case scenarios, political redefinition would lead to probable dismemberments and national isolation of countries from Europe, what would cause generalized feelings of dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the political systems, as well as a reduction of citizens' public participation. Fewer social rights would be claimed. Changes in the labour market would include an intensification of work and a reduction of time for leisure and family plus a decrease in family assistance rights. Fewer conditions would be created for the improvement of the education system or research into new energy sources.

The final period, the most distant one, would consist of attitudinal and behavioural events and would be characterized by the consolidation of principles, habits, values and ways of living. In the most favourable scenarios, Europe would witness a change of values over the need to reconcile work and family and promote equality, tolerance, diversity and the protection of human rights. The worst case scenarios would include an increase in intolerance, a decrease in democratic citizenship, and a reduction in the importance of education, knowledge and sustainable development.

Figure 3.1 Chains of events



4. Recommendations

Using the scenarios as a reference, central fields of intervention were identified and political and organisational recommendations drafted with a view to improving quality of life and work in Europe. In addition to the results achieved in the strategic thinking exercise, the experts' recommendations described below were the fruit of their professional experience and specialised knowledge.

The labour market

The labour market is an essential target for intervention for guaranteeing quality of life and work in Europe. Suggestions for political action at regional and European level included the regulation of working hours, contractual relations and social benefits.

The globalised context of business competition and the redefinition of the ideas of working space and hours have faced the working population with new challenges. Processes like the increased volume of work and multi-skilled work have resulted in a greater effort at time management and work organisation by workers. We often find that work takes up a disproportional amount of time compared to other spheres of life. It was therefore suggested, as an essential recommendation for improving quality of life and work, that overall working hours should be limited with a guarantee of rest time vital to working people's health and wellbeing.

The discussion of the impact of the growing flexibility of the labour market focused mainly on the effects of the flexibility of contractual relationships. Flexible employment contracts are easily associated with job instability, often resulting in lack of protection for workers in terms of sick leave, unemployment and family care, among others. Guaranteeing that flexibility in work is accompanied by social protection for workers and reinforcing control of employers' abuse of flexibility were also two focuses of intervention recognised as essential in promoting quality of work.

In a context of globalised work, unemployment is still one of the main obstacles to quality of life. The development of strategies that guarantee not only an effective combat against unemployment and full inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labour market but also protection for the unemployed was also strongly recommended.

An analysis of the scenarios showed the continuing existence of discrimination in the labour market on the basis of sex, age, ethnic origin and nationality, among others. The general opinion of the experts was that intervention was necessary both in terms of measures aimed at inclusion and the fight against discrimination and, once again, increasing inspections. The guarantee of equal opportunities and results for women, older workers, ethnic minorities and the disabled must be a political and organisational concern. The role of employers is essential here and they can extend the scope of action of labour laws by taking positive action with a view to implementing the principle of social responsibility. Strengthening the principle of social responsibility is also an intervention strategy and it is vital to stress the role of employers in guaranteeing a fairer, more sustainable society.

Education

Intervention in the field of education was considered crucial to sustaining action taken in other spheres. The recommendations resulting from the scenarios focused mainly on the need to fully democratise education, thereby ensuring that it is accessible to all on an equal footing and doing away with the selective, stratified nature of education systems in many European countries. At the same time, it is increasingly important to stimulate the modernisation and innovation of syllabuses so that they articulate properly with the need for people's personal, civic and vocational development. This aspect is associated with the need to improve the overall quality of education and the development of skills.

The guarantee of a more appropriate education system also involves opening it up to other entities and players thereby articulating schools, local authorities, companies, NGOs, and students, parents, teachers, employers and trade unionists. Greater involvement of these entities and players fosters closer monitoring of the population's education and the design and quality control of education programmes.

In the knowledge society, where increasing value is being given to knowledge and skills, recognition of learning as a lifelong process is fundamental to personal achievement and vocational adaptation. The application of the principle of lifelong learning must, then, also be identified as a strategy for social and economic development.

As a result of reflection on the scenarios, the education system's role was also stressed in the construction of participative democracy and it is important to strengthen this educational component.

Migration

The response to the challenges that Europe is facing as a result of the intensification of migratory flows took the form of three different types of intervention in the experts' groups – social integration of the immigrant population, regional stabilisation of the conditions necessary to stop the brain drain and promotion of ethnic and cultural tolerance.

Where the first dimension is concerned, political action must, as mentioned above, be aimed at implementing educative, vocational and social inclusion measures and fighting discrimination.

The brain drain is common in many European countries and can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, it is a natural result of the globalisation process that promotes the exchange of knowledge between countries and institutions. On the other hand, it deprives the countries of origin of useful specialised skills. In this situation, the conditions for keeping these groups are stabilised by improving working conditions, in the broadest sense, and by investing in innovation, science and technology, adapting the labour market and stimulating support for young, qualified entrepreneurs.

The fight against intolerance should also include information, civic education, awareness-raising measures and strategies for fighting discrimination and promoting social integration.

Gender

Gender is a transversal dimension when designing and implementing policies. Gender mainstreaming is not actually practised in policies and organisations. Although, as we have already mentioned, gender equality is increasingly present in public discourse, it is necessary to go beyond talk and take action.

Improvement of existing legislation is a necessary path, which must be accompanied by measures stimulating gender equality by combining different dimensions and areas of intervention.

School plays a fundamental role here and concrete measures must be taken towards education in citizenship and equality. Workplaces are playing an essential part in the domain. Going back to some of the recommendations already suggested for the labour market, there is a pressing need to combat gender discrimination and introduce positive measures to encourage balanced participation in work by women and men. The far-reaching nature of gender issues means, however, that integrated intervention is necessary and it is important to articulate action at schools and workplaces with that of public institutions, local and regional authorities, NGOs, the media, etc.

Reconciling work and family life

Reconciling personal, working and family life is also a component of extreme importance to quality of life and work. The trend towards an increase in the volume of work carries the risk of uneven distribution between time for work and for leisure, family and personal investment, which generates feelings of dissatisfaction, discouragement and general malaise.

According to the working groups, a good balance between these two spheres can be achieved by regulating working hours and adopting flexible time management models suited to the needs of both companies and workers. An effective, free, integrated network of family support services is also essential to this balance. Family assistance takes different forms. Available free, high-quality public services for caring for children and elderly people is becoming an increasingly vital need. It is also essential to guarantee access to maternity, paternity, parental and family care leave that is universal, balanced and economically fair.

There is a direct association between the balance between work and family and the position of women and men in the labour market. There will only be balanced participation of women and men in employment when this balance reflects on the domestic sphere. It is therefore important to take measures to promote equal division of domestic chores and child care and encourage men to participate.

A specific way of supporting the balance between work and family is to develop employment policies encouraging an approach to the life cycle and allowing workers to make greater or smaller investments in their jobs depending on their personal lifelong needs.

The environment

Environmental quality is also an essential dimension in the promotion of quality of life and we can say that this is an area under constant threat facing systematic challenges.

Awareness of good environmental practices can be raised at school by the introduction of environmental education into syllabuses or through awareness campaigns in the media.

Other measures are the regulation of energy use by restricting the use of non-renewable energies and stimulating the development of renewable energies.

City planning

The increase in migratory flows, growing social inequalities and more severe environmental problems also affect city planning processes all over Europe. The main recommendations made in this area focused on the urgent need to reform urban planning and restructure housing policies. The main goal is based on the relationship between sustainable development and a guarantee of quality of life in cities and there is a clear concern here for reducing social inequalities.

A complementary urban transport planning policy based on effective services is another crucial instrument in ensuring quality of life.

Political and institutional aspects

The recommendations on political and institutional aspects were based on three main aspects – the development of civil society and the creation of the right conditions for civic participation, strategies for promoting a climate of political confidence and a political and institutional commitment to promoting quality of life.

The education system and the media once again play a central role in increasing active civic participation. It is important to develop principles of participative democracy through education in citizenship and an information dissemination strategy at regional and European level. The central goal is developing citizens' social involvement, raising their awareness with a view to their active involvement in public life, more decisions made through direct policies and the creation of a real, civic nation.

Civic participation can also be increased by reinforcing local power, empowering local authorities to solve local problems and giving them the right material and immaterial conditions to do so.

The restoration of a climate of confidence in the political system must be given special attention by regional and European political authorities. There is more likely to be confidence in the political system if they respond to and give a voice to citizens' needs on the basis of communication, sharing and truth. It is also necessary to guarantee continuity in government strategies and policies to make them more consistent and achieve better results.

Regarding support and commitment to promoting quality of life, the groups recommended reinforcing the economic and legal sustainability of good practices on the part of the European Commission and greater financial support for NGO's on the part of companies and national governments.

The economy and social protection

From an economic point of view, a restructuring of charges applicable to work, consumption, profit and property was suggested in order to achieve a stable, sustainable economic situation.

As for social protection, the experts suggested improvements in national and European policies on support for more vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, immigrants, the poor and high-risk families.

From a broader point of view, the need to focus policies on people's needs, life experiences and feelings was stressed.

5. Future research

The analysis of the scenarios made it possible to identify both politic intervention axes for the improvement of the quality of life and work in Europe and future research orientations towards a better understanding of quality of life and work contexts and their impacts on different spheres of life.

Changes in work in recent decades, with the globalization of the economy, more flexible contractual arrangements, working hours, space, and tasks, have been having significant effects on people's quality of life. Workers are confronted with the need to make more effort to manage and organize their time for work, family and leisure, increasing possibilities of stress and feelings of dissatisfaction with life.

The present diversity of the European context, with the intensification of migration flows and geographic mobility, brings together people with different backgrounds, life and work experiences, knowledge, expectations and needs.

In this context, the research agenda should find answers to a wide range of questions. What are the different meanings of quality of life and work? What impacts can be found for societal development? How can workers, companies, families and communities prosper? What risks and opportunities do these new forms of life and work organization bring?

The future research agenda will necessarily include a focus on the elements that converge for quality of life, like the study of ways of promoting work-life balance, integration of minorities, quality of working life in different occupational groups and the preservation of sustainable development. This will guide the research agenda to detailed attention on issues like employability, unemployment, material and immaterial conditions of life, environment and family and interpersonal relationships. At the same time, it is fundamental to include in the research agenda the evaluation and monitoring of public policies and their effects, fragilities and strengths for the improvement of quality of life.

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