LIFE SATISFACTION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF OKLAHOMA*

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ABSTRACT. This paper analyzes the relation between regional development and perceived life satisfaction measures. Using Oklahoma it is identified that people in less developed regions tend to be equally (or more) satisfied in almost every aspect of their lives. This leads to the conclusion that aspirations, in addition to the attainment of aspirations, depend on the level of development.

Perceived life satisfaction has been extensively discussed in quality of life literature by Campbell (1972), Andrews (1974), Andrews and Withey (1974), Duncan (1975), McCall (1975), Rodgers and Converse (1975), Schneider (1975), Campbell (1976), Campbell et al. (1976) Clemente and Sauer (1976), Andreasen (1977), Bharadwaj and Wilkening (1977), Chatfield (1977), Kennedy et al., (1978), Larson (1978), Mason and Faulkenberry (1978), McKennell (1978), Andrews and Inglehart (1979), Andrews and McKennell (1980), McKennell and Andrews (1980), Michalos (1980a, 1982), and Headey (1981). A fundamental problem underlying subjective measures of quality of life involves the role of aspirations. Clearly a person having lower aspirations would be likely to be satisfied with less, according to McCall. It is anticipated that differential levels of development would affect aspirations in this manner. The objective of this paper is to investigate perceived life satisfaction and regional development, using Oklahoma as a case study.

Development can be characterized as the ability of a society to transform more efficiently natural resources into goods desired and needed by its members. Here goods include not just manufactured or marketed products but non-economic output, such as personal interaction, cultural events, or aesthetic environments (Barrows and Schaffer, 1975; Ewusi, 1976; and Bunge, 1981). The more efficiently society performs this task, the greater its level of development. As development increases two factors contribute to greater aspirations, as discussed by McCall. First, as development enables society to provide goods satisfying basic physiological needs, higher psycho-
logical needs (esteem, self-actualization) become more pressing (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, the literature suggests that higher psychological needs (particularly self-actualization) can never be completely satisfied. As one desire is satisfied another replaces it. This is the fundamental problem of escalating aspirations. Second, while merely satisfying lower wants and needs contributes to escalating aspirations, general societal development also contributes to escalation by increasing the range of experiences available to its members. Therefore, applying the expectancy theory of motivation, people have higher expectancies and valences for rewards change (Wahba and House, 1972). Integral to development is improvement in communication, transportation, and general interregional linkages. This enables members of a region to expand their horizons continually, as they become familiar with other life styles.

Considering the integral relationship between quality of life and regional development, it is an area that is vastly underexplored and the literature lacks material on the impact regional development has on life quality. While several studies have included income or education (variables often used as indicators of development) in analysis of perceived life satisfaction responses (Duncan, 1975; Rodgers and Converse, 1975; Andrews and Crandall, 1976; Bharadwaj and Wilkening, 1977; Kennedy et al., 1978; and Michalos, 1980b), Kuznets (1973) and Todaro (1977, pp. 62–64) have discussed the imperfections associated with these indicators of development. Allardt (1976) and Hankiss et al. (1978) are two studies that explicitly investigate the relationship between development and perceived life satisfaction. In this study the primary indicator of development is the proportion of urbanized population in each county. In a related line of research Liu (1980) investigated the relationship between economic growth and objective measures of quality of life. Also using objective social indicators Cebula and Vedder (1973), Liu (1975), Kau and Sirmans (1976), Nijkamp (1976), and Larson and Wilford (1980) have investigated the impact quality of life has on human migration. The importance of human migration to regional development has been discussed by Williamson (1965).

The underlying objective of all quality of life research is to identify the well-being of society and its members. Development is the term given to the process of improving this well-being. It is the objective of this paper to analyze the relationship between perceived life satisfaction and regional development, augmenting the limited research undertaken on this topic. The