

Editorial

This issue is dedicated to two general topics that play a central role in social quality thinking and its policy application. The first is how to sharpen the social quality approach (SQA) as an intellectual instrument to understand the nature and rationale of political/legal, economic, cultural, and environmental processes in societies that aim to cope with their interpretations of mainstream contemporary challenges. The distinction between these processes concerns the main subject of the procedural framework of the SQA (IASQ 2019). The second is how to use social quality indicators for conceiving of the consequences of these processes in communities and cities. This concerns a main subject of the analytical framework of SQA. The connection of these main themes of the SQA is increasingly becoming the crucial challenge for, in particular, the theoretical reflection on thinking and acting for the increase of social quality in communities, cities, and countries. Instead of old and new ideas about individual happiness, the crucial challenge is inspired by ideas about “a good society,” as discussed by antique Greek philosophers. Two articles are dedicated to the first topic and two to the second. The first article, by Marco Ricceri, general secretary of the Italian research institute Eurispes, discusses the rationale, nature, visions, plans, and strategies of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Important is BRICS’ comprehensive theme, namely, to contribute to the quality of global development. In recent decades, member states of this platform have unfolded—in terms of their representatives—political, economic, and legal politics to strengthen their respective and common position on regional and global levels. The outcomes should be functional for the quality of the global development. Of interest is to notice that Eurispes (2019) in Rome is highly interested in the phenomenon of BRICS, and with its Eurispes Laboratory on BRICS, it closely follows the strategies and their outcomes of the five member states.

The second article is presented by Valeriy Heyets, director of the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine. The subject is how to pave the way for ensuring social quality in Ukraine at this stage of political and economic transition. Heyets discusses current political and economic problems and challenges of Ukraine, and for good reason. Gianfranco Tamburelli (2015, 2016) and Zuzana Novakova (2017) have explained Ukraine is currently in crisis because of internal and external causes. Both authors apply their interpretation of the SQA as an ordering principle for making choices from the almost insurmountable information and data. The outcomes may contribute to a heuristic functionality to gain an understanding of these processes from a social quality perspective. Both authors derive



their knowledge about these principles from the renewed Working Paper no. 17 of the International Association on Social Quality. This paper's main objective is—while referring to and elaborating recent social quality oriented projects, studies, and articles—to rearticulate suppositions about the essence of the contemporary SQA. It explains especially and for the first time the distinctive frameworks of this approach (IASQ 2019).

The third and fourth articles are dedicated to the second topic, namely, the nature and application of social quality indicators. The third article is by Ren Liying and Zou Yuchun, scholars of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). By applying these indicators, they are oriented on how Chinese people evaluate their society on the base of these indicators and at the same time on how to improve the instrument of social quality indicators. Both objectives are an outcome of the recent policy of the CASS for supporting the SQA (IJSQ 2018). They use data of the Chinese Social Survey in 2017 and apply the regression analysis on these data. In the fourth article, a comparative approach is applied by Muhammad Yasir Ali, an independent scholar from Pakistan, and Ka Lin, from Zhejiang University. They use the 2017 survey data from the important city Peshawar, Pakistan. Thanks to this comparability, a step is made for building an orchestrated reflection on a global level of the functionality of these indicators to grasp the consequences of politics and policies for human beings.

Some General Questions about the Dialogue as a Challenge

The ambition of this journal is to stimulate an academic dialogue on the dialectic between societal processes resulting into collective identities and processes of individual self-realization. The rationale is to understand the meaning of “the social” and its “quality.” This concerns an ontological challenge. Such a dialogue implies also a notion of the change of the meaning of dialectic in the past centuries (Röd 1986). This is necessary in order to be enabled to analyze the interferences and interdependencies of both contemporary types of processes. This concerns the epistemological challenge. The journal's ambition comes also from the theoretical objective of the SQA, namely, to go beyond the well-known but untenable duality between structure and agency. The SQA's theoretical position refers to relationality as described, for example, by Margaret Archer, who rejected this duality as “analytic dualism” (1995: 66). In many ways and not always with sufficient transparency, this is discussed in all continents. In most cases, this duality counts as *sui generis* evidence. Next to this, it should be borne in mind that the societal context and circumstances of a country have a major influence on the concepts to be used for analysis and research. In the case of this journal, English is used as the language for communication. Historical differences and related linguistic differences, intonations, connotations, and feelings are to be expressed by most authors in a “foreign language.” This applies in optima forma to the first article of this issue, namely, in the presentation of the cooperation of representatives of five

BRICS member states. This platform, supported by a manifold of national expert groups and think tanks, stands for the self-specified task to articulate together a vision about “the quality of global development,” and thus its form and content. In addition, it is eager to develop a vision on how to contribute constructively to the 2030 sustainability goals of the United Nations (UN 2015). With the aforementioned remarks in mind, the following question should be raised: “Representatives of this platform, which concepts and which underlying analytical frameworks do you use separately and together in order to contribute in a logical way to this twofold vision?”

Regarding the second article, on the political and economic processes in Ukraine, a familiar problem is recognizable. Ukrainian scholars are for historical reasons embedded in the Russian *Geistesgeschichte* (history of the mind). The analytical and related linguistic differences in the nineteenth century between Eastern and Western European countries, as well as Northern American countries, have become strengthened in the twentieth century. To present the current outcomes of Ukrainian research in the English language demands also to overcome the consequences of this divide. For an intercontinental dialogue about how to stimulate the quality of global development, to overcome this divide is a *conditio sine qua non*. In fact, this is a concern of Ananta Giri. According to him, in this area of transformation, it is questionable to think in the conventional language of solution and conclusion. There are limitations of assumptions of the human and the social in approaches of human security and social quality. We need “a creative intertwining of ‘human security’ and social quality approach with visions and practices of practical spirituality, which invites us for new adventures in ideas and relationships and to be engaged in mediations and struggles for realization of beauty, dialogues and dignity in society” (2011: 117). This plea regards also many other Western-oriented approaches as “quality of life,” “social capital,” “capability approach,” and “human development.”

In the third and fourth articles—both about the application of social quality indicators—we will be confronted with a familiar difficulty. Seen in a global perspective, the interpretation of the concept of “indicator” differs strongly. In many cases, indicators concern empirically verifiable and quantifiable monitoring or measuring devices for learning about practical effects of applied policies. Indicators in the context of the SQA have a special meaning, because they are as indispensable as they are highly complicated: “They . . . have to grasp relationships as an integral part of their analytical framework . . . Any social quality indicators are obviously only as valuable as their qualitative interpretation is capable to grasp the interconnectedness on two scales. The first stretches between process and relations . . . The second cover sociogenesis and psychogenesis” (Herrmann et al. 2012: 115). Therefore, not only problems of communication as referred to earlier but also philosophical questions of science will complicate the intercontinental dialogue about the nature and functions of indicators. In his impressive work, Viktor Vanberg (1975: 68) has analyzed and discussed the individualistic paradigm in economics, political science, and sociology, and the collectivistic paradigm, related with respectively atomism and holism. Adherents of

these paradigms hypothesize different but, in both cases, reductionist outcomes of the emergence of complex processes into new characteristics. In his summary of a herewith related aspect of Roy Bhaskar's theory, Andrew Collier says Bhaskar's emergence theory prevents the epistemic fallacy of adherents of both paradigms:

Bhaskar allows us to conceive of real, irreducible wholes which are both composed of parts that are themselves real irreducible wholes, and are in turn parts of larger wholes, with each level of this hierarchy of composition having its own peculiar mechanisms and emergent powers. This in turn allows us to understand dysfunctions in those wholes that are functional in character, since the parts are not pure functions of the whole, but go their own way as well. One word for such a theory of potentially dysfunctional wholes is "dialectic." (1994: 117)

The emergence theory and dialectic are in Bhaskar's case intertwined. He also characterizes non-relational duality of structure and agency as an outcome of an epistemic fallacy. His approach differs therefore from the individualistic paradigm as clearly expressed in the dominant economic theory with Ludwig Mises and Friedrich Hayek as clear examples. It differs also from the collectivistic paradigm in the sociology, with Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons as clear examples (Bhaskar 1993: 49–57; Vanberg: 78, 147). Following Bhaskar, as explained in the third main book about social quality,

This means that [e.g.] collective identities function as the main catalyst between structure and agency; however they differ from catalysts in chemistry because they also change themselves. They cause an ongoing dynamic because they are, themselves, a consequence of the ongoing interdependency with the process of individual self-realization . . . This approach is not related implicitly or explicitly, to the static Newtonian order, which is the main legitimation of, for example, [individualistic] utilitarian and related neo-liberalism. (Bhaskar 1979: 68; Herrmann et al 2012: 87)

For understanding and deepening the theoretical position of social quality thinking, the interrelated topics about dialectic, emergency, and the confusing role of suppositions about the duality between structure and agency should be theorized further. Also, the roots of the very popular academic supposed duality between the social and the economic refers to the roots of the aforementioned duality. According to Novakova, the duality between the social and the economic "cannot be appreciated in a dialectical sense. Such an understanding [of this duality] is a result of a hegemonic common sense related to a particular ideology and as such is not power-isolated but rather an ideational expression of the increasing power of interests in the (neoliberal-dominated) economic dimension" (2017: 6).

General Remarks in Response to the Four Articles

The first article, about BRICS and by Marco Ricceri, should be intriguing, because it discusses the outcomes of research, interpretations, and negotiations of representatives of five “different worlds.” Together they propose—next to the elaboration of daily circumstances in these five worlds—to contribute to the quality of global development and to strongly support the realization of the UN sustainable development goals. The author’s objective is to present a systematic overview of negotiations resulting into declarations, as well as to deliver important background information. He follows the procedural framework of the SQA, namely, to distinguish between activities, negotiations, and plans regarding the socioeconomic/financial, sociopolitical/legal, sociocultural/welfare, and socioenvironmental dimensions. This procedural framework has been applied earlier regarding the state of affairs in Ukraine (Novakova 2017) and has recently been further elaborated (IASQ 2019). In this case, after the presentation of each dimension, the author formulates “considerations” from the perspective of the SQA. The essence of these considerations has affinity with the previous sections of this editorial. They concern the expected difficulties when five highly different and extensive countries, as outcomes of incomparable histories, try to adjust their politics and policies without losing sight of the meaning of their own history. With these considerations, the question is raised whether, given the different histories the conceptualization of the “rule of law” or policies, “to strengthen dignified conditions in daily circumstances for all people” means the same in all five member states of BRICS. The answer is relevant for knowing what the “quality” of global development means.

With this in mind, the argument by Marina Calloni, elaborated in the second book on social quality, published in 2001, is relevant here. She argued the concept of “quality” is a key category in the history of philosophy and logic:

Yet quality does not apply only to material things, but to [all] human beings as well. Namely, quality derives from the Latin word *qualitas*, which comes from *qualis* that means “of what kind.” Quality is thus a distinguishing attribute and “essential” character, determining a specific “property” belonging both to an object and subject. Therefore it also refers to the “nature” of human beings, i.e. their “ontology.” (2001: 72)

She concludes: “Quality has thus become a social, political, economic and cultural issue that has both a local and global meaning, starting with the daily life of all individuals” (75). She did not reflect at that time on the concept of “the social” itself, on the adjective “social,” or on the “quality of the social” in order to understand “social quality.” She remained halfway. At this stage, we will say the “quality of the social” becomes (or always was) a political, economic, cultural, and environmental issue, encompassing the subjects of these societal phenomena. With this new encompassing approach in mind, Ricceri’s considerations concerning the discussions and actions of the BRICS member states clarify that the current underdeveloped and rather eclectic

discourse demands for deepening the underlying philosophically based assumptions. This is a *conditio sine qua non* for understanding what the quality of the global development really means. A consensus about this may change common politics and policies fundamentally. And this concerns also the concept of “sustainability,” which until now in the dominant discourse, and in the context of BRICS, has not been problematized or really conceptualized (Van der Maesen 2018).

On a very practical level, the consequences of the hypothesized underdevelopment of a common conceptual and herewith related analytical framework of the BRICS member states can be demonstrated decisively with the global protests, also from the side of the UN (*Nature* 2019), about the deliberate burning of large areas of the Amazon for economic gain. As the first article explains, also Brazil as a BRICS member state will strongly support the UN sustainability goals. The environmental expert of *The Guardian*, Jonathan Watts (2019), has on the other hand noticed:

As a nationalist, the president [of Brazil] sees the Amazon in terms of ownership and sovereignty. As a chauvinist, he sees the region as a possession to be exploited and opened up, rather than cherished. Since taking power eight months ago, Bolsonaro has layer by layer, stripped the rainforest of protections. First, he weakened the environment ministry and put it in the hands of a minister convicted of environmental fraud. Second, he undermined the agency responsible for monitoring the forest, Ibama. Third, he alienated Norway and Germany, the main donors to forest-protection causes. Fourth, he tried to hide what was happening by sacking the head of the space agency responsible for satellite data on destruction. Fifth, he accused environmental charities of starting fires and working for foreign interests. And sixth, he verbally attacked Amazon dwellers—the indigenous and Quilombola communities who depend on a healthy forest.

This is right against not only the UN sustainability goals but also the “quality of global development” and only for the benefit of investors and their shareholders. What this article demonstrates is the importance of not only a common conceptual framework but also a common hereupon based policy framework to support the development of the overall sustainability on behalf of the world population, of which more than 40 percent lives in the BRICS member states. And this refers also, according to Robert Axelrod, to the need of the emergence of new political actors. His comments are immediately connected with the question of emergence in previous sections. This type of emergence

is fundamental to the question of sustainability. One of the main problems of attaining sustainability is the tragedy of the commons. The tragedy of the commons arises when many independent actors (people, villagers, states, or whatsoever) each “overgraze” because there is no mechanism to enforce the collective interests of all against the private interests of each. This leads to resource depletion, elimination of bio-diversity, overpopulation, war and major social [read societal] problems.

This specific object of emergency is highly important for the BRICS member states, whose implicit “articulated intention” is to overcome this tragedy: “a major route to the prevention of the tragedy of the commons is the emergence of a political actor based upon the organization of previously independent actors” (1995: 20).

The second article, by Valeriy Heyets, is an outcome of the scientific policy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine to introduce the SQA in this country. The objective is to present a new conceptual and analytical framework to deliver an adequate perspective for politics and policies in this stage of transition. Already at the end of 2015, a start was made by this academy. Since then, the Online Project Group SQA, with mostly Western European scholars, supported this academy’s policy. They paved the way for different drafts of the aforementioned Working Paper no. 17 (IASQ 2019). The academy obtained support from the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainian prime minister requested the European Commission (EC) vice president to support the pursuit of the academy to enable it to introduce and apply the SQA, with support by Western European institutes (Kubiv 2017). The first answer from the side of the EC was positive (Hahn 2017). But it appears that afterward it was decided not to cancel out efforts with the already existing European Support Group for Ukraine. Possibly, from the side of this formal support group, the EC and the government have been advised not to go through with the academy’s policy regarding the SQA. The communication about this policy with the EC and the government dried up after this. It was not an outcome of an open dialogue. But from a scientific perspective, this is highly intriguing. Herewith, two different approaches came into the spotlight and could be compared. The Online Project Group SQA and the academy has tried (and still tries) to deliver to relevant actors in all four societal dimensions of Ukraine a consistent and coherent perspective as it has, tentatively speaking, unfolded in the current SQA. The official Support Group for Ukraine presents nonrelated “best practices” or examples from different EU member states. The objective is to renew a manifold of institutional infrastructures of the four societal dimensions of Ukraine (EC 2016, 2017). To understand the—for logical reasons—eclectically based reproduction of nonrelated examples from different EU member states, it makes sense to read the present conclusions of the European Social Observatory on societal policies in Europe. This observatory analyzed different so-called actual crises and their potential societal (socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural) causes and consequences. It concludes in a rather decisive way: “The cooperation between Member States is characterised by increasing mistrust, or even outright conflict . . . [The EU faces] increasing difficulties to broker common solutions between national governments to solve the collective problems of the Union . . . In such a context, short-term remedies are inadequate to give a new dynamic” (Vanhercke et al. 2016: 9). This conclusion legitimizes substantively and politically an alternative in addition to the work of the Support Group for Ukraine. Urgent is the need to break through the one-sided reproduction of unconnected good practices and pave the way for a new dynamic in Europe (IASQ 2019). And to stimulate a dialogue about this issue may be a main objective of

Heyets's article. At the same time, this article demonstrates the substantive difficulty of this dialogue, namely, how to bridge varied intellectual traditions in Eastern and Western Europe and thus to reach a consensus about the recent problematique of Ukraine. A start is made.

Both articles on the application of social quality indicators—by Ren Lying and Zou Yuchun in China and Muhammad Yasir and Ka Lin in Pakistan—follow the debate and research on how to grasp the outcomes of societal processes. Both articles concern the other side of the SQA coin as indicated in the introduction of this editorial. Of interest is that the article on China starts to reflect on the question if the SQA may be functional for reaching a “good society.” In line with this, the (implicit) question is: What role can the social quality indicators research play in this? In other words, do societal processes with which to stimulate the social quality in communities and cities contribute to the “good society?” And regarding their article, the main objective is how to make the research with help of social quality indicators functional for this endeavor. In fact, this article is the fourth one about the current social quality indicators research in China. It concerns the “third wave” of this research. The first happened in the EU (2001–2007), and the second in Southeast Asia and Australia (2007–2014). From the side of the the CASS, the start of the third wave is strongly supported. The objective is also to stimulate comparative research in other countries. Herewith, a way will be paved for a global dialogue about the meaning, function, and outcomes of social quality research. The first article of the third wave was published by Xu Yanhui and Gong Ziyu (2017), the second by Cui Yan and Huang Yongliang (2018), and the third by Li Wei and Cui Yan (2018). New in the present article is, apart from the orientation on the “good society,” an explicit distinction between subjective and objective social quality indicators. This conclusion is rather new and does not refer in this stage to theoretical arguments. Therefore, this present article stimulates a new reflection on the nature of these indicators. It implicitly suggests all contributions of the third wave should be thoroughly analyzed. The objective is to grasp the differences and similarities with each other, as well as with the articles of the second wave and first wave. A following reason for the orchestration for a critical reflection of recent and past social quality indicators research concerns their extension of this research. They reflect the outcomes of applied indicators to the domains of the four conditional factors of social quality (socioeconomic security, social cohesion, social inclusion and social empowerment), which are according to the authors significantly related with the overall evaluation by the public. For example, families with a low-middle and middle income (as a domain of the conditional factor socioeconomic security) are more dissatisfied with the overall situation of society than low-income families. And people who have participated in voluntary work (another domain) have a higher overall evaluation of society than those who have not participated in such work. With their research, the authors open the doors to new causal relationships that may help better understand the outcomes of societal processes in daily circumstances of people. It is clear that a critical dialogue about the outcomes of past social quality

indicators research is important for stimulating comparative work in other countries, a main objective of the CASS for supporting the enhancement of the SQA.

The article by Muhammad Yasir Ali and Ka Lin adds new information about the state of affairs in Pakistan, following the introduction by Syed Hussain and Pirzada Ullah Sabri about Pakistan's sustainable economic growth. The latter ones delivered in fact a context for this present article. Their conclusion was rather serious:

Like most developing countries, Pakistan faces critical challenges in the conservation of existing natural resources and their further enhancement to meet the demands of an ever-increasing population. The rapidly shrinking wetlands, some of which are of international significance, and the wondrous juniper forests inhabited by numerous forms of fauna and flora are in danger of extinction due to rapid deforestation, discharge of sewage and industrial effluents into marine and aquatic ecosystems. (2014: 92)

Both authors of the present article are oriented on the "lifeworld" of the city of Peshawar. This lifeworld is of course highly determined by the overall context. Peshawar is the capital city of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with a population of four million people. For their social quality indicators research, both authors selected survey cases from six administrative regions of this city. The survey used the heterogeneous purpose sampling technique of selection. Of interest is to mention that both authors used the outcomes of their investigation into the indicators of the domains of the four conditional factors to explore the state of affairs of various policy areas. In their terms, it concerns people's perception of outcomes regarding the policy areas of income, gender, education, and age. They conclude, for example, different income groups have incomparable views about outcomes of the indicators' application to the distinguishable aspects of the conditional factor of social cohesion. In other words, there is a lot of affinity between this fourth article and the third article. The difference is that the third is oriented on the overall evaluation of daily circumstances of the interviewees, while the fourth on the evaluation of specific policy areas. Both additions should play a role in the ambition to compare daily circumstances between different countries. This may be clarified with their conclusion that despite the low income level and the few social spending on sociosecurity programs, however, the respondents in this survey still give a relatively high SQ score to the indicators of [the conditional factor] socioeconomic security. The major cause for this is due to the function of social [societal based] networks that gives informal support to people's livelihood from their relatives and friends, and from the local community, religious organizations and voluntary teams.

In other words, with the third article, this fourth article adds new layers of social quality indicators research. The challenge is, of course, are they in line with the basic assumptions, referred to in the beginning of this editorial? Or do both articles imply an invitation to rethink the basic assumptions? This is important, because as opposed to mainstream indicators research, the social quality indicators research as

epistemological challenge is for logical reasons strongly related with theorizing the assumptions underlying the theory of social quality, and thus its ontological challenge. Finally, a very important aspect of the basic assumptions remains unclear. The analytic framework, referring to the “social quality architecture” (Beck et al. 2012), underlines the necessity to simultaneously analyze the three sets of social quality factors: the conditional (objective) with help of indicators, the constitutional (subjective) with help of profiles, and the normative (ethical) with help of criteria. For a global oriented comparison of recent and past social quality indicators research—for being heuristically meaningful—cannot neglect the role of social quality profiles and criteria anymore. This will be the forthcoming huge and interesting challenge.

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