

Performance of European Cities Assessed in the Light of Quality of Life for Improved Local Planning

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This paper explores the possibilities presented by DEA to assess the efficiency of cities in what concerns the urban quality of life, an issue that raises growing concern in terms of European policies. A fundamental difficulty in the analysis of quality of life is the operationalisation of an urban quality of life index. An unsettled controversy around the concept of quality of life remains in the literature, and there is no agreement in terms of the dimensions to be used for the construction of an index. However, comparison between cities and through time is essential if the evaluation of the impacts of local policies is to be done in order to improve planning.

At the European level, a set of data on 284 cities have been gathered in the Urban Audit project. Included in the core business of Eurostat, this project has gained a new strength as a political tool to evaluate cities management. This raising importance should correspond to the development of new methodological approaches for data analysis, providing new frameworks for local political action and planning. In that sense, Urban Audit data can be used to assess quality of life and the efficiency of city management.

The aim of this work is to develop innovative methods to assess the performance of European cities in order to enhance local planning and improve quality of life. Using the data provided by the Urban Audit we defined the city profile regarding quality of life for 236 cities, belonging to 27 countries. The quality of life analysis was contextualised by the GDP per capita to measure the ability of local authorities to promote quality of life in cities given the economic condition of the country. The DEA model, adjusted for the existence of bounded variables, was defined with a single input (GDP per capita) and outputs associated to 9 dimensions. With the results of the DEA analysis, it becomes possible to identify benchmark cities with urban best practices, and to elaborate a model of intervention for the cities considered inefficient.

Keywords: Data Envelopment Analysis; Quality of life; Urban Audit.