

Improvement of Quality of Life through Adaptation?

A Qualitative Longitudinal Approach on Households in Precarious Prosperity in Three European Countries

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Le doyen
Pierre Alain Mariaux

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Summary

The present study investigates adaptation to precarious prosperity through linking quality of life research with social inequality research. The focus is on households in a specific socioeconomic position termed precarious prosperity. These households struggle to maintain a degree of secure prosperity and are a concern addressed by researchers and policy makers. The topic of adaptation is analyzed in the same population group by means of three theoretical approaches, two methodological perspectives, and three country contexts (Romania, Spain and Switzerland). The objective of the dissertation is to advance research on adaptation by contributing to the empirical, theoretical and methodological debate.

The qualitative approach adds an innovative perspective to the quantitatively dominated debate on adaptation. Based on international collaboration, the research contributes to the methodology of cross-national comparisons. Moreover, it investigates longitudinal data, which is rare in qualitative research. The three published articles have been elaborated in an iterative process by working alternately on literature, theories and analysis. The processes of sampling, data collection, coding and analysis are clearly documented. The data corpus I analyzed is composed of two or three waves of qualitative interviews conducted in three countries between 2008 and 2014. The three articles adopt the same analytical approach and contain elements from content analysis and analytic induction.

Empirical results provide evidence that adaptation occurs when people do not perceive it possible to change their living conditions, and also that specific processes of adaptation are linked to social experiences. The qualitative approach to quality of life in precarious prosperity is empirically enlightening, because it allows for revealing adaptation processes and better understanding them.

The research refines theoretical approaches for analyzing adaptation, quality of life and precarious prosperity from a qualitative perspective, referring to how the three concepts are theoretically linked. Article 1 brings together objective situations and opportunity structures on the macro level with the subjective well-being and agency on the micro level to identify their quality of life. Article 2 refers to the concept of social bonds (Paugam 2008) to conceptualize opportunities for protection and recognition. Article 3 applies the framework for agency in poverty (Lister 2004) in the situation of precarious prosperity.

The investigations result in a definition of agency in precarious prosperity: agency is considered a purposeful action that is influenced by the social context and individual experiences. It may be individual or collective, is oriented to the short term or the long term, and aims at improving subjective well-being or changing living conditions. I argue that in order for the theoretical concepts for analyzing quality of life in precarious prosperity to be fruitful, adaptation must be integrated as a pattern of agency for improving subjective well-being when dealing with structural constraints.

Keywords: Adaptation, Quality of Life, Precarious Prosperity, Qualitative longitudinal research, Switzerland, Spain, Romania

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'adaptation à la prospérité précaire en mettant en lien la recherche sur la qualité de vie et celle sur les inégalités sociales. L'accent est mis sur les ménages vivant une situation socio-économique spécifique appelée la prospérité précaire. Ces ménages luttent pour maintenir un niveau de prospérité sécurisée et constituent une thématique d'actualité aussi bien dans le monde scientifique qu'en politique sociale. Le thème de l'adaptation est analysé au sein du même groupe de population à travers trois perspectives théoriques, deux approches méthodologiques, et dans trois contextes nationaux (Roumanie, Espagne et Suisse). L'objectif du présent travail est de faire progresser la recherche sur l'adaptation en contribuant au débat empirique, théorique et méthodologique.

L'approche qualitative apporte une perspective innovante à la discussion sur l'adaptation. Basée sur une collaboration internationale, cette thèse apporte sa contribution à la méthodologie de la comparaison entre nations. De plus, elle analyse des données longitudinales, ce qui est rare dans la recherche qualitative. Elle est composée de trois articles publiés dans des revues scientifiques qui ont été élaborés dans un processus itératif, en travaillant la recherche de littérature, la théorie et l'analyse en plusieurs cycles. Les processus d'échantillonnage, de collecte des données, du codage et d'analyse sont clairement documentés. Le corpus de données analysé est composé de deux ou trois vagues d'entretiens qualitatifs qui ont été menés dans trois pays entre 2008 et 2014. L'approche analytique des trois articles est la même et intègre des éléments de l'analyse de contenu et de l'induction analytique.

Les résultats empiriques montrent que les personnes qui vivent dans des ménages en prospérité précaire s'adaptent à leurs conditions de vie si ces dernières sont perçues comme impossible à changer, et aussi que certains processus d'adaptation sont liés aux expériences sociales que ces personnes ont vécues.

Cette recherche a permis d'affiner les approches théoriques de l'analyse de l'adaptation, de la qualité de vie et de la prospérité précaire dans une perspective qualitative, se référant en particulier à la manière dont ces trois concepts sont liés théoriquement. Le premier article réunit les situations objectives et les structures d'opportunités au niveau macro avec le bien-être subjectif et l'agentivité au niveau micro pour identifier la qualité de vie du ménage. Le deuxième article se base sur le concept de lien social (Paugam 2008) pour conceptualiser des sources de protection et de reconnaissance pour le ménage en prospérité précaire. Le troisième article applique le cadre théorique de l'agentivité en situation de pauvreté (Lister 2004) à la prospérité précaire.

Il résulte de cette recherche la définition suivante de l'agentivité en situation de prospérité précaire : l'agentivité renvoie à une action volontaire influencée par le contexte social et les expériences individuelles. Elle peut être individuelle ou collective, orientée à court terme ou long terme, et vise à améliorer le bien-être subjectif ou à changer les conditions de vie. Cette recherche défend la thèse que, pour que les conceptions théoriques de l'analyse la qualité de vie en prospérité précaire soient fécondes, l'adaptation doit être intégrée comme un type d'agentivité visant à améliorer le bien-être subjectif lorsque les ménages font face à des contraintes structurelles.

Mots-clés: Adaptation, qualité de vie, prospérité précaire, recherche qualitative longitudinale, Suisse, Espagne, Roumanie

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1. Introduction

“We feel really good. We are limited by the money. But fortunately, we are a quite unified family, quite solid and we respect each other a lot and we share everything. But the financial aspect ((laughing))—I would like to participate, to go to the cinema, to the opera, even every week. But you must forget this with our salary. It’s impossible, and even more with two children. That’s what makes life expensive in Switzerland, it’s the children. In that respect we are really limited, we say we can’t participate, but well, we adapt” (CH15, t1, 2008).

People’s desires and aspirations are important for quality of life and well-being, just as their material living conditions are. “Well-being requires a capacity for aspiration as well as the agency and opportunity to make realizing aspirations seem viable” (Fischer 2014:5). The exemplary citation above shows some of the multiple aspects that make quality of life in precarious prosperity complex: subjective well-being, socioeconomic deprivation, household resources, participation in social life, the opportunities of the welfare regime (e.g., underdeveloped children and family policies), and adaptation (e.g., social comparison based on immigration background).

Elements of adaptation are claimed to be included in research on social inequality as well as that on quality of life: There is “a poor fit between ‘social class’ as a category and the ways in which people accord meaning to, and evaluate, their related experiences of socioeconomic inequality. Differently framed questions about social comparison, aligned more closely with people’s own terms of reference, offer an interesting alternative avenue for exploring subjective experiences of inequality” (Irwin 2015:259). This is one reason why the present study links quality of life research with social inequality research to investigate adaptation.

In doing so, the focus is on a specific socioeconomic position termed precarious prosperity. Within the field of social inequalities, these households struggle to maintain a certain degree of secure prosperity while being aware of the limits of their opportunities for agency. Households in this socioeconomic position are also a concern addressed by researchers and policy makers. In light of welfare-state retrenchment, households at risk of slipping into poverty have become a largely debated topic in scientific research (Budowski, Tillman, Keim and Amacker 2010). Precarious prosperity is a social position composed of a very heterogeneous group of households. Adaptation seems to be a common phenomenon within precarious prosperity across different household situations, and it is the common perspective in the contributions of this dissertation. In line with Budowski et al. (2010:284-285) I argue that the position of precarious prosperity could also allow adaptation processes to crystallize because such households do not have the financial opportunities to buy services they might need and at the same time are usually not a target group of social policy measures.

Studying adaptation among households in precarious prosperity is crucial for welfare research, as people adapting to their living conditions are assumed to represent a reality of powerlessness and retreat from society and for this reason are often not reached by social policy measures (Zapf 1984). In consequence, individual adaptation can result in lower collective welfare levels by increasing tolerance for disadvantaged living conditions (Graham 2009:2015). In this respect, there is, for example, a need to better clarify the social and psychological conditions that influence the non-take-up of social benefits: “It would appear that households base this decision on whether they actually feel that they are in financial difficulty and not on ‘objective’ benchmarks. Very little is known about the factors that generate this feeling but that have no bearing on the ‘objective’ facts” (Farago, Hutter Király, Brunner and Suter 2005). The present study aims to contribute to the debate on how adaptation is linked to powerlessness, resignation, welfare and quality of life and to consider whether it contributes to stabilizing existing social inequalities.

Various researchers have issued a call for research on adaptation to understand quality of life and welfare needs: Neff demands an approach “that engages with the person’s life history, their aspirations, their agency and autonomy and the enabling and constraining structures the person is embedded in” (Neff 2012:153). Graham argues that a better understanding of processes of adaptation—and their interaction with the effects of particular institutional arrangements on well-being—may enhance the chances of crafting better policies (Graham 2009:189). Furthermore, Bradburn points out that “Insofar as we have greater understanding of how people arrive at their judgments of their own happiness and how social forces are related to those judgments, we shall be in a better position to formulate and execute effective social policies” (Bradburn 1969:233).

The relevance of this study is due to the following:

- The qualitative approach to adaptation reveals an interesting perspective in the quantitatively dominated sociological debate on adaptation.
- It enables refinement of the theoretical approaches to analyzing quality of life and adaptation, namely through the linkages between agency (household strategies to maintain or improve socioeconomic position and avoid slipping into poverty, collective and individual agency, etc.) and structure (welfare regimes, social bonds, etc.). This is achieved by integrating adaptation as a pattern of agency into the theoretical concepts for analyzing quality of life, which improves subjective well-being when dealing with structural constraints in precarious prosperity.
- Based on international collaboration, it contributes to the methodology of cross-national comparisons. Moreover, it investigates longitudinal data, which is rare in qualitative research.
- The results on three European countries allow for new insights on quality of life, adaptation and its link to social inequalities. Specifically, processes of adaptation

allow for better understanding of the quality of life of households in the specific socioeconomic position of precarious prosperity across Switzerland, Spain and Romania.

These aspects are included in the objectives of the dissertation as explained in the next section.

1.1. Objectives

The objective of this dissertation, which links the debates on quality of life and social inequalities (with a focus on the specific position of precarious prosperity), is to advance qualitative research on adaptation from a sociological perspective. Advancing research means contributing to the empirical, the theoretical and the methodological debate on adaptation research. The three articles included participate in the overall objective and complete each other. These elements will be developed in the present chapter by referring to the intentionally open title:

Improvement of quality of life through adaptation?

Regarding social inequalities and social politics, this question has a normative aspect: Should households in precarious prosperity improve their quality of life through adaptation? What does it mean for social inequality and social policy if people improve their quality of life through adaptation? These questions will be discussed in the conclusion (Chapter 5).

Empirically, the objective of the research is to better understand adaptation in precarious prosperity in three European countries. This requires an investigation of

- whether households in precarious prosperity try to improve their quality of life through adaptation (Article 1);
- whether adaptation is a successful strategy for improving the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity (Article 2); and
- when, how and why households in precarious prosperity improve their quality of life through adaptation (Article 3).

Table 1 summarizes the objectives of the three articles. Article 1 is to my knowledge the first publication to bring together the topics of precarious prosperity and quality of life in qualitative research, which, as mentioned above, is of social political relevance. The results are presented with a focus on problematic life domains. Analysis of adaptation was not the only objective of the article, but adaptation was identified in the Spanish and Swiss cases as well as in cases with different problematic life domains. Article 2 focuses not on problems, but on resources that lead to a good quality of life despite

precarious prosperity. Again, adaptation was found among several cases, both in Romania and in Switzerland. These results confirm the relevance of adaptation in precarious prosperity in diverse contexts and allow for a refined understanding of adaptation processes. Article 3 goes deeper in the longitudinal aspects of the topic using only Swiss data. It develops the processes and reasoning for adaptation, leading to differentiation of different patterns of adaptation. Taken together, the three contributions provide insight into the topic by means of different conceptual and methodological perspectives, advancing the knowledge and theory about adaptation in precarious prosperity rather than providing an encompassing picture of adaptation in the three countries and over the available interview waves. These three papers will be presented in detail and linked in the following chapters.

Table 1: Objective of each article

Article 1 Precariousness and Quality of Life in Switzerland and Spain	Article 2 Good Quality of Life Despite Precarious Prosperity in Romania and Switzerland	Article 3 Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?
To identify possible mechanisms that help to explain the way households experience quality of life	To understand the strategies for improving quality of life of those households that perceive a good quality of life	To understand the processes leading to a state of adaptation

(own elaboration)

Theoretically, the objective of the research is to refine theoretical approaches for analyzing adaptation, quality of life and precarious prosperity from a qualitative perspective. This requires investigation of how the three concepts are theoretically linked.

- Article 1 brings together the objective situations and opportunity structures on the macro level with the subjective well-being and agency on the micro level to identify the households' quality of life.
- Article 2 refers to the concept of social bonds (Paugam 2008) to conceptualize opportunities for protection and recognition.
- Article 3 applies the framework on agency in poverty (Lister 2004) to precarious prosperity.

Methodologically, the qualitative approach adds an innovative perspective to the quantitatively dominated debate on adaptation. The methodological contribution consists of

- conducting cross-national comparative research in an international collaboration;
- investigating longitudinal qualitative data;
- approaching the topic with three different subsamples of the overall sample; and
- providing transparency for the whole research process and explicating quality criteria.

With regard to the quality of qualitative research, the following chapters provide complementary information and reflection, as the possibility to develop conceptual and methodological aspects is limited in the published articles. The next section explains how this will be done and to which quality criteria I refer.

1.2. Quality of the research and structure of the dissertation

The reflection on the quality of research is placed here because, in my opinion, it is crucial to explicate the quality criteria of qualitative research across the whole research. The present overarching text (Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 5: Conclusion) provides the opportunity to do this in a manner that was not possible in the three publications that are part of this dissertation (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). As Mangen states, “the strengths of qualitative approaches lie in attempts to reconcile complexity, detail and context. Critical for protagonists is the integration of ‘reflexivity’, by which is meant the ability of researchers to take stock of their actions and their role in the research process” (Mangen 2009:20).

The concern with improving the quality of research in this overarching text guides the argumentation of the next chapters. This concern is oriented by the statement on qualitative research methods of the Swiss Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences (2011:11). They list the following quality criteria:

- a) Qualitative research is guided by theoretical concepts.
- b) Qualitative research questions and approaches are often theory-generating.
- c) Qualitative research is embedded in a research tradition and makes explicit reference to the theoretical, methodological, and topic-related literature.
- d) Qualitative research makes explicit its links to social scientific perspectives.
- e) Qualitative research selects methods of data collection and analysis that are appropriate for the issue under study as well as for the particular theoretical framework.
- f) Qualitative research clarifies its methods of data collection and analysis to the

point of enabling intersubjective agreement.

- g) Qualitative research is contextualized. In other words, information on the research context is provided. The scope of its results beyond this context must be discussed.
- h) Qualitative research is conducted within an ethical framework.

These criteria have been applied and are explicated as follows: The preceding part of the introduction depicted the general argument, the objectives, and the relevance and originality of the approach and linked the research to specific sociological perspectives (see criterion d). The following parts of the present overarching text will further extract the specific elements on adaptation out of the three publications.

Chapter 1.3. defines the most important terms of the research: Quality of life and subjective well-being, adaptation, and precarious prosperity (see criterion c).

Chapter 1.4. contextualizes the research in the broader context of research projects with its participating countries and reflects on the architecture of the research team (see criterion g). International collaboration implies a culture-laden process of opting for certain concepts and applying them elsewhere, which requires critical self-reflection on the part of the researchers (Kennett 2004).

Chapter 1.5. clarifies the integration of this dissertation with a research tradition and its literature by providing empirical elements on adaptation research in psychology, economics and sociology, as well as research on adaptation in precarious prosperity (see criterion c).

Chapter 1.6. reflects on the choice and utility of the theoretical concepts of the three articles: Household strategies in precarious prosperity, social bonds, and agency and adaptation (see criterion a).

Chapter 1.7. explains the iterative research process, the comparative and longitudinal design, the methods of sampling and data collection, the characteristics of the data and the analysis in order to improve intersubjective agreement (see criteria e and f). It also provides some ethical principles (see criterion h).

Chapter 1.8. provides a synthesis of the preceding chapters and an overview of the 3 articles that will follow. Each of the included publications elaborates on the topic of adaptation among other topics linked to precarious prosperity and quality of life.

Chapter 2. consists of article 1: "Precariousness and Quality of Life—a Qualitative Perspective on Quality of Life of Households in Precarious Prosperity in Switzerland and Spain."

Chapter 3. consists of article 2, which was published in French: "Amélioration de la qualité de vie à partir de la prospérité précaire. Analyse du rôle des liens sociaux et des stratégies d'adaptation des ménages en Roumanie et en Suisse."

Chapter 4. consists of article 3: “Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?” These three chapters show the articles as they have been published in three different peer-reviewed sociological journals.

Finally, chapter 5. summarizes and contextualizes the results and contributions of the research to the theoretical debate (see criterion b), the empirical debate and the methodological debate. It demonstrates the originality and limits of the research and provides prospects for future research.

The references of each part (1 Introduction; 2, 3 and 4 articles; 5 Conclusion) are listed at the end of the respective part. This way of presenting has been chosen in order to keep the three articles in their integral form.

In order to increase transparency, Swiss examples of the research instruments are enclosed in the appendix. These are 1) the list of deprivations for defining precarious prosperity in Switzerland, 2) the questionnaire for Switzerland in 2013, 3) the household grid for Switzerland in 2013, 4) the interview guideline for Switzerland in 2013, 5) the memo sheet for Switzerland in 2013, 6) the transcription rules, 7) the list of codes in MAXQDA and 8) an excerpt of a thematic chart.

1.3. Definitions

As elaborated above, the investigation relates the research fields of quality of life, adaptation and precarious prosperity. While “precarious prosperity” and “quality of life” have been clearly defined from the beginning of the research, the use of the term “adaptation” evolved somewhat during the research process, as the topic became more and more specified.

This chapter defines these three terms and research fields, relates them to other similar terms, and debates and delimits them from other usages of the same terms. The first section explains the use of quality of life and subjective well-being, the second defines adaptation and the third defines precarious prosperity.

1.3.1. Quality of life and subjective well-being

Quality of life as a scientific term has been mainly developed since the 1960s. From the beginning, the term was also a political category (Noll 1999:3). A similar term to quality of life is welfare, yet the terms differ in the accentuation of what the “good life” means. Quality of life is sometimes used as a component of welfare and sometimes as a variation of it (Noll 1999:3), according to the different disciplines and schools of thought regarding it.

The Scandinavian level of living approach was formed in the tradition of social politics and uses welfare and quality of life as synonyms. The term is there defined as the “individuals’s command over, under given determinants mobilizable resources, with

whose help he/she can control and consciously direct his/her living conditions” (Erikson 1974:275). The Scandinavian focus is on objective measures, as only these can be influenced by policies. In contrast to this approach, American quality of life research comes from social psychology and underlines the importance of subjective perception and meaning for quality of life (Campbell and Converse 1972). The focus on subjective perception leads to a position in which high subjective well-being is considered the only aim and measure for evaluating quality of life. The basic needs approach of Allardt (1973) combines these two approaches and proposes to include the needs of having (material resources), loving (integration and social network) and being (possibilities for agency and participation). Quality of life is thus measured by objective and subjective indicators. Wolfgang Zapf’s (1984) definitions and conceptualizations also combine objective and subjective measures. I build on this idea to combine and confront objective with subjective measures in the following chapters.

There are also several recent concepts that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Examples are “sustainable development,” “human development” (Sen 2008), “livability” (Veenhoven 1997), “social exclusion and inclusion” and “social cohesion.” Without going into depth about all these concepts, which have all generated substantial bodies of literature, however, I limit myself to the term quality of life as it fits my research interest in a broader, holistic way. Interesting for the present research is that Sen’s capability perspective includes opportunities for agency and is concerned about adaptive preferences and conditioned expectations. Nonetheless, my choice for the concept of quality of life is motivated by my approach and analysis, in line with the research stream on quality of life in poverty, which looks at the social determinants of individual quality of life (Gasper 2009).

Quality of life as I use it is a holistic concept that sets out to account for all life conditions: structural opportunities (resources and conditions) that are provided to people in society as well as their individual living circumstances. I define quality of life in the three articles as composed of objective living conditions (in various life domains; see also the definition of precarious prosperity) and subjective well-being. As in the body of research on precarious prosperity, quality of life takes into account the importance of past experiences and the future for quality of life.

In psychology and economics, quality of life is often used synonymously with subjective well-being or happiness. I focus on the topic from a sociological perspective and distinguish the three concepts. The sociological concept of quality of life has a macro and a micro dimension, has subjective and objective aspects, and is multidimensional (Noll 1999). I consider subjective well-being to be the “happiness” or “satisfaction” of the individual. These terms are also debated; in much of the sociological literature they are often used interchangeably, yet it is also common to distinguish two different meanings: satisfaction, which includes (more long-term) evaluative elements (“a life worth living”), and happiness, which refers to (more short-term) pleasure or unpleasant feelings. Subjective well-being does not take into account factual living conditions but rather their evaluation or an emotional state (affect) (Felce and Perry 1995).

Quality of life is assessed by socioeconomic living conditions in various life domains (e.g., income, work, health, education, housing, social network, political voice) and people's evaluation thereof (Alber, Delhey, Keck and Nauenburg 2004; Glatzer 1972; Noll 1999; Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi 2009; Zapf 1984). These life domains are interrelated, and conditions in one domain may produce spillover effects into others (Kinnunen, Feldt, Geurts and Pulkkinen 2006). Quality of life also has a temporal dimension: Structural and biographical events change living conditions; also, research highlights the importance of past experiences, present opportunities (Felce and Perry 1995) and the future (Piper 2014) to the perception of opportunities to improve quality of life. According to Zapf, I define quality of life as good living conditions that go together with positive subjective well-being (Zapf 1984).

While the first article defines quality of life by focusing on opportunity structures and their perception, the second and third articles refer to Wolfgang Zapf (1984) as a starting point. He defines quality of life as the result of living conditions and subjective well-being. This is not a contradictory use of the term quality of life, but rather a slight evolution of the research in the direction of a more specified focus on adaptation. The perception of living conditions is important in all articles, and Zapf points it out by defining the four welfare positions (see Table 2). The deficit of a static definition of quality of life and adaptation is compensated in my research by including agency and processes in the theoretical approach and the empirical analyses.

Contrary to the research on precarious prosperity, there is a long research tradition on quality of life in different disciplines. Important results of research linking quality of life and socioeconomic positions (of which precarious prosperity may be considered one) are, on the one hand, that having employment or a job has a positive impact on quality of life and, and on the other hand, that a higher household income level raises happiness as a possible outcome of quality of life only to a small extent (Drobnič, Beham and Präg 2010; Frey and Stutzer 2000). However, there is much less qualitative research on quality of life, and comparative qualitative research on the topic is even rarer, although qualitative approaches are essential to understanding people's experiences of well-being (Camfield, Crivello and Woodhead 2009). Thus, White, Gaines and Jha (2012) claim that "open-ended, qualitative analyses of well-being and quality of life amongst different population groups" (White, Gaines and Jha 2012:773) are required to better understand quality of life.

1.3.2. Adaptation

Research on adaptation started in biology, where it is “used in a broad, general sense as adjustment to the conditions under which species must live in order to survive, and from sensory physiology, where it is used in the much more restricted sense of decrement in intensity of sensation or muscular response as a result of steady-state stimulation or continued responses” (Helson 1964:37-38). Interestingly, Helson already qualified adaptation in biology as an active process (Helson 1964:52).

Today, adaptation is, on the one hand, a term with very different meanings according to the concerned disciplines. The following examples show a variety of ways in which adaptation is understood in other areas of research:

- In arts and literature, adaptation means the transfer of a work of art from one medium to another (such as a book-to-screen adaptation).
- In computer science, adaptation means that interactive systems adapt to individual users and environments.
- In medicine, (neutral) adaptation is used for the eyes’ adjustment to light or the ears’ adjustment to a constant acoustic stimulus.

On the other hand, there are other research streams that are related to the issue of adaptation as adjustment to living conditions. Examples include resilience (Holling 1973:17) and coping (for example Gerhardt 1979). Resilience is originally a psychological concept from development psychology and highlights the individual and environmental resources that enable individuals to successfully deal with stress (and grow up into healthy individuals; e.g., see Antonovski’s (1979) concept of salutogenesis). Adaptation, in contrast, generally refers to the way people deal with stressors and conveys the notion that existing resources are preserved; successful coping with stressors is not required (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

Adaptation as used in the human sciences generally concerns the process by which a person becomes insensitive to the effects of constant stimuli (Helson 1964). In the social sciences it refers to the capacity to act according to the norms, constraints and demands of the society or community (Uglanova 2014); adaptation in this perspective could be understood to mean getting accustomed to a new situation or accepting it as the norm.

A large body of research on adaptation in the human sciences refers to adaptation to climate change, which is not the focus of my research. Other examples of related research include Appadurai’s (2004) concept of the “capacity to aspire,” which he sees as a key for the reproduction of social structural conditions (anthropology), Elster’s (1982) famous argument of the sour grapes (philosophy) and research in the medical field (Ventegodt, Flensburg-Madsen, Andersen, Nielsen, Mohammed and Merrick 2005), which reflects the strong relationship between quality of life and health. The interesting point of the latter in relation to my research is that health emerges as a very important life domain also for adaptation.

In sociology, the most classic theory that refers to adaptation is Talcott Parsons' (1937) action theory. From a structural functional perspective, adaptation is considered one of the four functional imperatives that social systems require for survival. This theory clearly departs from the structural level and focuses on functions of system elements. It does not touch upon quality of life or consider individuals as agents in their own right from the subjective perspective (see Lister 2004). The definition of another sociologist, Wolfgang Zapf, is more fruitful for my research question on adaptation, as he clearly links quality of life and adaptation.

Zapf's (1984) definition of quality of life and its distinction of the four welfare positions has been a key element of the argument regarding adaptation in precarious prosperity. It helps to understand the interaction between objective living conditions and subjective well-being and to avoid simplified definitions of the good life. According to his deliberations, it is possible for individuals to perceive high subjective well-being despite disadvantaged living conditions. This is called the satisfaction paradox and describes a state of adaptation (see Table 2). In contrast to that stands a high subjective well-being with favorable living conditions (well-being), low subjective well-being with favorable living conditions (dissonance) and low subjective well-being with disadvantaged living conditions (deprivation).

Table 2: Welfare positions

Objective living conditions	Subjective well-being	
	High	Low
Favorable	Well-being	Dissonance
Disadvantaged	Adaptation	Deprivation

(see Zapf 1984:23)

In this sense, precarious prosperity is considered a position with disadvantaged living conditions. Indeed, Hübinger (1996), who first identified the position of precarious prosperity within the social inequality order as between poverty and secure prosperity, revealed in his quantitative analysis of socioeconomic positions that the position of precarious prosperity was quite similar to that of poverty and that the "poverty threshold" was more permeable than the "secure prosperity threshold." Similar results were found in Switzerland (Farago, Hutter Király, Brunner and Suter 2005). A quantitative analysis on precarious prosperity in Romania also effectively identified many similarities with regard to living conditions between the poor and the precarious (Precupetu, Preoteasa and Vlase 2015).

I used Zapf's definition of adaptation in the second and the third articles. Yet in contrast to the general notion he departed from, the bottom-up empirical results allowed me to refine the concept by adding the theoretical element that adaptation is not necessarily a global state of the individual, but may concern only one specific life domain or another.

A further novel element in regarding the concept of adaptation that I was able to elaborate from the data is the importance of the dynamics of adaptation. From the first to the third article, the term "state of adaptation" is distinguished increasingly more clearly from the processes leading to adaptation (the term used in the third article) or adaptation strategies (the term used in the second article). Similarly, to "precarious prosperity" and "quality of life," the time component is an important element of the term "adaptation" in my research, but Zapf's (1984) definition of adaptation did not stress it. Hence, the state of adaptation was only used for the case selection. This allowed me to identify the sample of the analysis by confronting objective socioeconomic position with subjective well-being (see 4.3).

The analysis is therefore about the processes or dynamics of adaptation. This aspect of adaptation is grounded in the origin of the term—"adapt" comes from Latin "adaptare" meaning "to adjust" (Helson 1964). Apart from that, to my knowledge, the explicit distinction between state and process in other research on adaptation has rarely been discussed. However, most literature is about adaptation *processes*, although this is implicit and thus not spelled out as it is in my analysis, and the term adaptation is not often used to describe a final state of adaptation.

Adaptation is to a certain extent a natural process over the life cycle. People inevitably change over time with regard to age, health, jobs, social status and experience, and hence they need to adapt to these changes by altering their goals (Teschl and Comim 2005). This research is about understanding to what point adaptation occurs and how adaptation processes differ between people in the specific position of precarious prosperity by taking into account their opportunities, resources and social experiences. This means that I explicitly integrate a time component and a dynamic component into the concept of adaptation to analyze the relationship between social conditions and quality of life over time. Processes can be grasped by asking questions about changes and life events and about why and how people make specific statements in the interviews. In this way, it is possible to get insights into the social and psychological mechanisms of adaptation and their links to living conditions and opportunities. Using a bottom-up approach, I start with the empirical data and conclude with a definition of adaptation processes in precarious prosperity (see chapter 5).

1.3.3. Precarious prosperity

The topic of precarious prosperity is linked to the concern about processes of profound social change and economic strain, as well as the feeling of growing uncertainty, deprivation and the fear of social declassification. Such developments have been described and theorized in the debates on growing inequalities (Atkinson 2008; OECD 2008; Salverda, Nolan and Smeeding 2009; Suter 2010), (relative) deprivation (Boarini and Mira d'Ecole 2006; Fahey et al. 2005; Nolan and Whelan 2010; Townsend 1979), social exclusion (e.g., Paugam 1996, 2005), the working poor (e.g., Masia & Budowski 2009; Ragni 2003), precariousness (e.g., Barbier 2005; Kraemer 2008, 2009; Paugam 2000), the downward mobile or precarious middle classes (e.g., Chauvel 2006; Vogel 2009) and vulnerability (Castel 1995; Castel and Dörre 2009). While notions such as “social exclusion” and “underclass” imply a dichotomous vision of society, distinguishing between the included and the excluded, or between society and the underclass, concepts such as vulnerability and precariousness concern an in-between category (Amacker 2014). These concepts are more closely linked with the group of interest in this research. As shown by Barbier (2005) and Budowski et al. (2010) the concept of precariousness initially referred to lower-middle-class and working-class families before coming to characterize labor market and working conditions and the development of society as a whole.

Hübinger (1996) was the first to empirically identify a position adjacent to and slightly above the poverty threshold. He found that the decisive structural boundary for understanding the lived realities of the population was not, as expected, the poverty line but a zone of “precarious prosperity.” Thus, the concept of precarious prosperity describes a specific position within the inequality order—a position in between poverty and secure prosperity—that configures opportunities and life chances. It is characterized by a limited (yet non-poor) standard of living (Budowski et al. 2010).

Precarious prosperity is an empirical concept applied on the household level. In my research, “household” refers to the people sharing at least one common dwelling room, sharing certain expenses and taking at least one meal together per week; they consider their cohabitation as a long-term arrangement and consider it as their main dwelling (Zimmermann and Tillmann 2004:12). In line with Zimmermann and Tillmann only private households are included (no collective households as homes or prisons and NPO’s). The household compositions, we found in our data are:

- Single households (people living alone)
- Couples (2 persons in partnership)
- Couples with children (two adults living with one or more of their common children)
- Lone parents (one adult living with one or more of his/her children)
- Extended family (family members of more than two generations living together)
- Flat share (people without family or partnership relations living together)

In this research I also use the terms “household member” when I refer to one of the individuals living in the household, and “household strategies”, a term used in the original research projects and that I discuss in chapters 1.6.1., 1.6.3., 2.1. and 5.5.

Analyzing adaptation in precarious prosperity means delving into the links between the overall quality of life of the household, the individuals’ quality of life and his or her subjective well-being (adaptation or not). Taking into account the household allows understanding how the household situation (household income and expenses, relations to other household members etc.) contributes to configuring individual living conditions and well-being. Households rely on similar resources, even if they often do not share them equitably. This is why an individual with a low income (e.g. a student) living in a household with a partner with high income would probably not result in conditions of a household in precarious prosperity. On the contrary, if an individual with a high income lives in a household where there are, for example, expensive health problems that also deprive the household from participating in activities that people usually pursue, then this household might end up being considered precarious (according to the cut-off points applied to operationalize the concept of precarious prosperity). This exemplifies how the household links the micro and the macro level: even if the individual with a high income has many resources, the situation of other household members who are constrained by their problems and perhaps lack of support from the welfare state or the community has implications on the individual’s quality of life.

When working with the household concept the researcher has to be aware of possible tensions and power relations within the household, that are often not explicitly reported. Household strategies are always the result of a cumulation of individual agency which depends upon who decides in the household. The subjective well-being of a household member is also influenced by these power relations as well as the opportunities perceived within the household.

Consequently, the household is a complex entity for analysis. Nevertheless, it is appropriate for research on precarious prosperity. It has been operationalized by an income threshold and a deprivation threshold (see chapter 1.7.4.). “Deprivation refers to the lack of possessions, activities or access to services that a majority of the respective country population has or does due to financial constraints” (Budowski et al. 2010:277). The deprivation threshold reflects a cut-off point regarding the sum of activities and things that a majority of the population has or does, and that the households in precarious prosperity or poverty cannot have or participate in for financial reasons. A concept on the household level clarifies what is not clear in the definition of quality of life and adaptation according to Zapf (see 1.3.2). It also overcomes deficits of the perspective on individuals, as individuals live in relation to the opportunities and constraints within their closest social environment; i.e., family or household members.

The limitation to financial prosperity and material standing makes sense for sampling and data collection in different countries, where the aim is a similar relative position within the social inequality order for comparative purposes. Thus, the concept has been used in the three articles as Budowski et al. (2010) empirically defined it to identify the

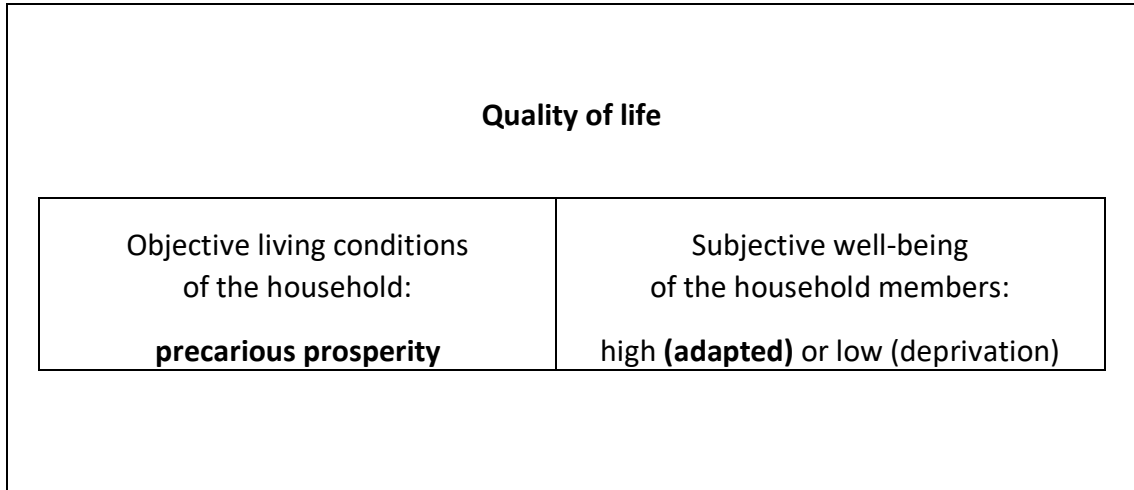
group of interest for the study. From a critical stance, Sen's capability approach (2008) suggests that financial and material well-being is not enough for prosperity, and Amacker (2014) argues for a broader use of the term. In this respect, the analysis encompasses not only financial and labor conditions, but also other life domains of the household members, such as education, care, health, political voice, housing and social relationships. I take into account that precarious socioeconomic positions are often accompanied by experienced or perceived insecurity about maintaining or improving them (Budowski et al. 2010:276). Individuals' and households' biographies as well as their future perspectives, alongside the current household situation, are important elements in analyzing precarious prosperity.

Most research on households around the poverty line (as distinct from research on individuals, about whom there is a lot of literature) has been either theoretical (Geissler 2004; Mayer 1985; Rodgers and Rodgers 1989; Vogel 2009) or quantitative (Andress 1999; Groh-Samberg 2007; Schulte 1999; Precupetu, Preoteasa and Vlase 2015; Vogel 2009; Whelan and Maître 2007; and specifically for Switzerland: Budowski, Masia and Tillmann 2016; Farago et al. 2005; Tillmann and Budowski 2004).

Qualitative research has only recently begun to provide theoretically driven and empirically grounded answers on how those experiencing precarious prosperity assess their situation and what role subjective assessments play when mobilizing and applying available resources to maintain or change the socioeconomic positions within social structures that in turn partially condition agency and well-being. Recent qualitative and comparative research addressing the aspects of care (Amacker 2014; Budowski and Schief 2014; Budowski, Vera Rojas and Schief 2017), work (Grimm, Hirseland and Vogel 2013; Kutzner and Pelizzari 2004; Preoteasa 2015; Preoteasa, Sieber, Budowski and Suter 2016), the perception of the financial crisis and household strategies (Amacker, Budowski and Schief 2013; Vlase 2015), well-being (Vlase and Sieber 2016) and health (ongoing analysis) has put a focus on precarious prosperity. Results show that the ways in which the opportunities provided by the state, the labor market, the community and the household are perceived influence the strategies that households apply to improve or maintain their socioeconomic positions.

Taking together the issues developed in the previous sections, the following illustration summarizes the topic: I investigate the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity (objective living conditions), especially when the adaptation of the interviewed household member occurs (subjective well-being).

Illustration 1: Research fields



(own illustration)

While this chapter theoretically determined the important concepts for my empirical research (quality of life, subjective well-being, adaptation and precarious prosperity), the next chapter focuses on the collaborative and organizational aspects of the research and its international context.

1.4. Elements of the research context

My investigation of adaptation in conditions of precarious prosperity uses data from three different European countries: Switzerland, Spain and Romania. As the qualitative data and the design of the research is rather complex, in this section I will explain how and why the countries were chosen. I will describe the framing conditions of the research and characteristics of the selected countries. Methodological details will be provided in 1.7. A second issue in conjunction with the analysis of international data is the international collaboration with its advantages and challenges, which is detailed in the second section of this chapter.

1.4.1. Selection of countries and organization of the research

Two research projects, both funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, provided the data and collaborative possibilities that I used for my dissertation: “A Comparative Perspective on Household Strategies in Conditions of Precarious Prosperity in Chile, Costa Rica, Spain and Switzerland” (Grant no. 100017-116605) and “A Comparative Perspective on Precarious Prosperity and Household Strategies in Romania and Switzerland in Times of Economic Strain” (Grant no. IZERZO 141975)¹. I was engaged as a scientific collaborator in the second project. During the data collection period and the analysis of Spanish and Swiss data for the first article, I decided to write a dissertation on the topic of adaptation in precarious prosperity.

¹ See www.unifr.ch/go/precarity for further information on the projects

My research has, to a certain extent, been influenced by the broader investigative projects, their organizational and methodological constraints and opportunities. Specifically, the sample of households in precarious prosperity was given and the first waves of interviews had been conducted, transcribed and coded before I started my research. I personally conducted the majority of the interviews in 2013 (households in Bern and Lausanne, 2013). The remaining interviews of this research were conducted following the same methodological guidelines by different researchers and trained MA students. In consequence, my qualitative data set is composed of primary and secondary data. I analyze this qualitative data with a research question that was not initially planned.

The first advantage of this approach is that there is no risk of unconsciously imposing the topic of adaptation on the interviewees: The interviewers' objective was not to get information about adaptation; rather, they were sensitized about household strategies. The topic of adaptation emerged from diverse interviews contrasting the researchers' other possible assumptions about strategies. I realized how relevant adaptation in precarious prosperity is by working on the same data in the context of the research projects.

Secondly, the specific research context for writing a dissertation had the advantage, that I knew the data very well as I had in my role of scientific collaborator already worked with the data and published several articles based on them. These articles are not included in the dissertation. Thirdly, I disposed over a big body of cross-national and longitudinal data which I would not have been able to collect myself for the only purpose of a dissertation.

Such a research context, however, also implies several challenges for writing a dissertation. On the conceptual level, I had to include the most important concepts of the research projects as they guided its design; I had to explain the sampling and data collection. At the same time, I had to create an original approach on these elements that were given for the dissertation. On the methodological level, working with secondary data meant to deal with the situation that some interviews did not have the in-depth or detailed information that I would have thought helpful; in some interviews, would I have conducted them, I would have asked further questions on certain topics. This was the case to a minor degree concerning the global topic of precarious prosperity and household strategies. Working on a topic that was not planned when the research projects started, though, meant particularly also working with data where specific questions concerning adaptation and quality of life were missing. There was data available on adaptation, but I had to search for it in various categories of the code system, that had been developed for the original research projects. Seeking this information through all the codes required more time, than if there had been straightforward questions and codes. Furthermore, would the interviewers have been sensitized to the topic of adaptation, they would have been more attentive to it and would have gone deeper into these issues when they emerged during the interviews. In the given situation, I also had to define and conceptualize adaptation on the basis of the data available, which was information on living conditions and their evaluation,

information on psychological well-being, information on difficulties and what is going well in the household and information on biography and future perspectives. This is the reason why, for instance, the topic of religion, related to adaptation, is missing in the analyses.

The approach I chose and will present in the following chapters allowed me to deal with and integrate these issues in a way that makes sense for me. Within the existing data on precarious prosperity in five countries, I was able to choose 3 countries and an original research topic that was not part of the initial focus. I worked on Switzerland, Spain and Romania and did not analyze data regarding Chile and Costa Rica, where interviews were conducted as well. Although it was conducted within the framework of the above-mentioned research projects, the topic of the dissertation differs from the project's research that employed the same qualitative interviews because my focus was on quality of life and adaptation, not welfare regimes and the economic crisis.

The two research projects on precarious prosperity had a comparative and longitudinal perspective, with quantitative secondary analysis and qualitative primary data analysis. I only used the qualitative data out of the projects for the dissertation. Longitudinal and cross-national qualitative data sets are rare, and it makes sense to exploit them with different approaches, questions and by different researchers. The qualitative data corpus is large and must be treated systematically with respect to case selection and analysis. This dissertation encompasses only one of many possible topics. However, the choice of writing a thesis based on articles allows different approaches that complete each other to be combined (e.g., cross-national comparative and longitudinal analysis, see 1.7.).

In qualitative research, the aspiration to compile an ideal sample of countries is hardly ever achieved, and justifications of the sample often develop post hoc (Hantrais 2009:7-10). In this sense, the possibilities for international collaboration and funding influenced the selection of countries, but they were chosen in order to provide information about precarious prosperity within the context of different welfare regimes (i.e., levels of social security, combinations of labor market structure and the importance of family ties and social networks) as I will justify now. I decided to concentrate on three European countries: Switzerland, Spain and Romania. They differ according to the types and levels of social welfare provision. Table 3 presents a short overview of some points of reference for analyzing quality of life and adaptation in the three countries: Information about the welfare regime and expenditure on social protection provides an idea of the differences in social policy. The welfare regime was one of the selection criteria for the countries. The gross national income (GNI), gross domestic product (GDP) growth and unemployment rates allow for the comparison of the economic situation of the countries and the labor markets—an important element of the social conditions that frame the scope of agency and household strategies. Moreover, the GNI reminds us that even if we are analyzing a relative and comparable social position (precarious prosperity), the absolute economic situation differs in the three countries. The ranking of happiness is an attempt to compare happiness. It is one of the only available databases concerning quality of life that includes the three countries of interest but is

not synonymous with subjective well-being or quality of life (the terms I use for my analysis; see the definitions in 1.3.1). One has to keep in mind that the measures of happiness apply country means and could be biased by different cultures' ways of evaluating happiness (Allardt 1973) and by adaptation.

Table 3: Country characteristics

	Switzerland	Spain	Romania
Welfare Regime	Moved from liberal to conservative welfare state (Nollert and Schief 2011)	Mediterranean welfare state (Arts and Gelissen 2002)	Still developing toward a mature welfare state, very low level of benefits (Fenger 2007)
Total expenditure on social protection (% of GDP, 2010) (eurostat 2017a)	25,5	24,6	17,3
GNI (per capita, 2010) (World Bank 2017)	70'350 US\$ 7 th place	31'650 US\$ 38 th place	7'840 US\$ 87 th place
GDP growth (2008, 2010, 2013 in %) (World Bank 2017)	2,2, 3,0, 1,9	1,1, 0,0, -1,7	8,5, -0,8, 3,5
Unemployment rate (2010) (eurostat 2017b, for ES and RO; Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2017, for CH)	3,5	19,9	7,0
Ranking of Happiness (2010-12) (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2013:22-23)	3 rd place (7,65)	38 th place (6,32)	90 th place (5,03)

(own elaboration)

The table shows clear differences in all elements among the three countries:

Switzerland has a relatively encompassing and high level of social provision. It is considered to be relatively stable in economic measures. It has the highest GNI of the discussed countries by far, a relatively stable GDP growth and a low unemployment rate. Switzerland is considered to have a very high quality of life (Suter, Iglesias and Moussa 2015), which is confirmed by the comparison of happiness with Spain and Romania.

Spain represents an intermediary position between Switzerland and Romania regarding the types and levels of social provision, as well as the contribution of the family to welfare (Budowski et al. 2010:269), the GNI and the happiness ranking. The negative GDP growth and the high unemployment rate show the impact of the economic crisis in Spain in contrast to Switzerland and Romania.

Romania is situated at the bottom of the lists of European countries concerning levels of social provision, GNI and happiness. However, GDP growth fluctuated in Romania during the research period (2008-2013), and the unemployment rate was lower than in Spain.

The social expenditures and the economic situation allow a clear distinction between Switzerland (at the top), Spain (in the middle) and Romania (at the bottom). The rankings of happiness in the three countries are rather stable over the research period and show the same distribution as the other measures: Switzerland at the top, followed by Spain and Romania, respectively. Supplementary measures about subjective well-being over time show a fluctuation between 2008 and 2013: Heliwell, Layard and Sachs (2013:22-23) report a large decrease of happiness in Spain and rising values in Switzerland over the research period. According to them, happiness is also decreasing in Romania. Regarding the perspective of well-being inequality, data from EU countries (Eurofund 2013) show a low but increasing value in Spain and the highest (and also rising) well-being inequality in Romania. The first values are interesting for drawing comparisons between countries, as is done in Article 1 and 2. The latter, on well-being inequality, also matters for comparisons of population groups within countries (e.g., for adaptation through social comparison; see 1.5.1.).

By applying a qualitative approach, I compared the processes and types of adaptation in different country contexts to better identify social conditions and to understand how they might be related to adaptation. The issue is how the different social conditions configure the situation and strategies of households in precarious prosperity (adaptation and other strategies). The comparative analysis of the data from three different countries was necessary to develop the argument of the research. Through this qualitative research, it is not possible to formulate generalizations about the occurrence of adaptation and other strategies in the three countries. However, firstly, this was not the aim of my research and, secondly, the strength of qualitative research is that the comparative analysis allows for the elaboration of mechanisms. From this perspective, the analyses provide evidence that there are similar mechanisms of adaptation among these three countries, despite differing economic and political conditions (see Øyen 2004:277). That is why the conclusion of this dissertation does not stress the

differences of country contexts; instead, it focuses on the similarities of the adaptation processes.

The choice to analyze the qualitative data of several countries has implications on the analysis and collaboration, as explained in the next section.

1.4.2. Architecture of the research team

Analysis of international data could be conducted by a single researcher; however, collaboration with other researchers who know the respective context and have native language skills presents several advantages and thus additional value. Working in three languages myself, I nonetheless chose to write two articles for this dissertation with co-authors for the following reasons:

- Researchers of different origins feed their local expertise into a research project.
- International collaboration reveals contextualized effects of perceptions of which a national researcher might remain unaware (Hantrais 2007:13); for example, the “cultural impact of researchers on (...) interpretation of results” (Øyen 2004:276) can be reflected because “outsiders pose questions in a different way than insiders” (Øyen 2004:287).
- The discussion of data and results with other researchers improves the quality of qualitative research (see 1.2).

In this sense, “qualitative research provides opportunities to gain more detailed understandings of behavior, attitudes and experiences across countries, but it also raises some of the greatest challenges with respect to interpreting data” (Quilgars, Elsinga, Jones, Toussaint, Ruonavaara and Naumanen 2009:19). Collaboration and shared work in analyzing data, as was performed for Article 1 and 2, demand a greater investment of time, communication and supplementary resources (time, intercultural sensitivity, communication competences, etc.) than the production of an article with single authorship. This is the case because, on the one hand, power relations between the research partners have an impact on the functioning of comparative research and what it may imply for both the research design and the generation of knowledge. On the other hand, partners need to negotiate and find consensual compromise on conceptual issues and research designs as well as how rigorously each step in the research is carried out. Finally, scholarly traditions regarding theoretical and empirical approaches in different countries vary. As Quilgars et al. state, “open communication mechanisms are crucial for understanding and sometimes unravelling self-evident within-country assumptions that otherwise threatened to remain hidden” (Quilgars et al. 2009:28).

The greatest challenges in our analyses were:

- Finding a common understanding of the meaning of a good quality of life and of adaptation (see Øyen 2004).
- Applying a common conceptual framework with the same rigor on all data.
- Discussing collaboration, communication and intercultural understanding on a meta-level between the authors to increase the transparency of the research process and think about how this might interfere with the results.
- Given that the researchers belong to different countries and are themselves part of their cultural systems, collaborative endeavors require making “a systematic effort to understand how cultural systems, as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices, and histories, frame the good life as a landscape of discernable ends and of practical paths to the achievement of these ends” (Appadurai 2013:292).

Article 1 and 2 were published with co-authors. Article 1 analyzes data from urban Switzerland and Spain. At the time of the analysis, there was no more direct collaboration with the Spanish research team (due to a lack of resources), but the interviews and the framing data were available. The Spanish data were analyzed together with colleagues of the University of Fribourg who had either Spanish language skills and/or knowledge about the situation in Spain: Monica Budowski and Sebastian Schief. I focused on Swiss data, and the results were compared and discussed repeatedly with the results from Spain. Each of the authors contributed equally to the article.

Article 2 analyzes data from urban Romania and Switzerland. Again, it made sense for me to focus on the Swiss interviews as my Romanian colleague scrutinized the Romanian ones. In this article, I proposed the theoretical framework and provided the literature review. The co-author, Ionela Vlase, worked in Romania; we met several times during the research period and had intensive exchanges via e-mail and Skype.

After having presented the issues of the research context that may have an impact on the data analysis, the next section will delve deeper into the empirical details of the research.

1.5. Empirical Elements

This section provides an overview of research on adaptation to complete the literature review of the articles of my dissertation and to situate them in a research tradition. Adaptation, as used here, generally concerns the process by which a person becomes insensitive to the effects of constant stimuli (Helson 1964). Research on adaptation has different specificities depending on the discipline. In line with the orientation of the three articles, this review concentrates on research in Europe and in Switzerland. The first section elaborates upon some elements of adaptation research in psychology. Psychological research is presented here because I refer to psychological concepts in the published articles as well. The second section is about adaptation research in economics. Economic research is presented because many sociologists refer to this debate when discussing adaptation (see Easterlin paradox). The third section provides an overview of adaptation research in sociology and specifically on adaptation in precarious prosperity. After having observed adaptation in the analysis and focused on it across the three countries, I conducted a thorough review of adaptation theories, particularly those that help to better understand and explain the analysis, and which were used in the articles to guide the reader.

1.5.1. Adaptation research in psychology

In psychology, researchers mainly seek intrapersonal reasons why hedonic adaptation occurs. The adaptation-level theory discusses the rather weak correlations between subjective well-being and objective conditions. Adaptation level refers to the idea that there is a certain number of stimuli on the individual level that are “neutral.” All stimuli below or above this level exert effects on the individual’s behavior (Helson 1964:62). Early research observed that the subjective well-being tends to return to an individually defined and possibly genetically determined “set point” even after dramatic life events. Adaptation was the explanation for this return to the set point (Diener and Suh 1997:201). A set point, in this sense, means a constant level of happiness that humans generally maintain throughout their lives, despite events that occur in their environment. The happiness set point is also part of the concept of the “hedonic treadmill,” which suggests that any gains in happiness are only temporary because humans adapt so quickly to change and return to their original happiness set point (Brickman and Campbell 1971). In other words, although new circumstances may temporarily cause people to become happier or sadder, the effect of these new circumstances diminishes quickly, or even disappears entirely, because people adjust to them (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade 2005).

This discussion is also linked to the psychological trait theory: Traits are habitual patterns of behavior, thoughts and emotions that remain relatively stable over time and influence subjective well-being. For example, some people are naturally more driven and frustrated than others, and they remain in such a state even after achieving goals (Graham 2009:152). The literature on personality traits says that cognitive, affective and behavioral complexes are consistent across situations and the life span, and that the

subjective well-being set point is stable, partly for this reason (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade 2005:113).

If these theories are correct, there is little an individual, the community or public policy can do to improve individuals' well-being. However, recent studies somehow relativize all these results: "Although inborn factors certainly matter and some adaptation does occur, events such as divorce, death of a spouse, unemployment, and disability are associated with lasting changes in subjective well-being. Thus, happiness levels do change, and adaptation is not inevitable" (Lucas 2007:75). Research now differentiates the above-mentioned theories in the sense that a person may have multiple happiness set points and that well-being has different components (happiness, life satisfaction) that can move in different directions. Furthermore, set points can change under certain conditions, and individuals differ in their adaptation: One individual may change his or her set point after an external event, whereas another may not (Diener, Lucas and Napa Scollon 2006). Men, for example, are more affected by labor market events than are women—in the study of Clark and colleagues, there was no evidence that adaptation to unemployment occurred among men (Clark, Diener, Georgellis and Lucas 2006).

While the theories and concepts of adaptation level, set point and the hedonic treadmill describe what is happening, psychologists have also developed (somewhat intersecting) concepts of how adaptation happens. As these concepts help to distinguish types of adaptation processes that are linked to social experiences in the three articles, I will give an overview here.

Festinger (1954) first described "social comparison," a concept that explains how people evaluate their own resources, living conditions, or possibilities, by comparing such criteria with the resources, living conditions or possibilities of others. For my purposes, the most important hypotheses he formulated are the following:

- "There exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities" (Festinger 1954:117).
- "To the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison respectively with the opinions and abilities of others" (Festinger 1954:118).
- "The tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one's own increases" (Festinger 1954:120).

In other words, this means that humans compare themselves with others when evaluating their quality of life. They compare their situation most likely to the situation of those who are similar to them. If those to whom they compare themselves are worse off than they are, then the evaluation of their own quality of life is positive, even if the objective living conditions are precarious. In these cases, people adapt (according to the proposed definition of adaptation).

Another concept is the aspiration level theory. This theory goes back to Lewin and colleagues. It claims that the aspirations (aims, ambitions, desires) of individuals change when the divergence between former aspirations and perceived possibilities to reach them is too big (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears 1944). It holds that the individual can regulate changes in aspirations by actively adjusting his or her system of aspirations to the situation (e.g., by focusing on downward social comparisons and avoiding upward ones) in order to keep the gap between aspirations and achievements small and maintain the positive effect of desirable development (Brandtstädter and Renner 1992).

The next relevant concept is that of plasticity, referring to “the ability to adapt to changes in contextual circumstances, that is, to change with regard to specific aspects of the organism (e.g., traits) in order to preserve central characteristics of the organism” (Staudinger, Marsiske and Baltes 1995:810). The degree of plasticity depends on an individual’s change potential, which is called “reserve capacity—the sum of resources available to the individual at any given time” (Staudinger et al. 1995:807).

A last concept we found in our data is what Sirgy (2002) has termed reappraisal. It implies reconsidering the importance of life domains according to one’s own successes and failures. A person, for example, can better accept a failure at work if he/she begins to place higher value on family or community involvement. Reappraisal means “changing the way a situation is construed so as to decrease its emotional impact” (Gross 2002).

In sum, psychological research on adaptation first focused on the individual’s tendency to return to his/her previous level of subjective well-being after a life event that initially caused a change in subjective well-being. Recent research on hedonic adaptation somewhat relativizes and differentiates this perspective and investigates differences between individuals and their adaptation, also according to different kinds of life events. This means that consideration of intrapersonal issues is not sufficient for understanding adaptation and that social conditions need to be taken into account to study the topic. As the following sections elaborate, the economic and sociological research completes psychological research in this sense.

1.5.2. Adaptation research in economics

Adaptation is also a research topic in economics. The economic perspective may be distinguished from the psychological one mainly by emphasizing that not just genes but also personal and economic choices matter for happiness (Headey, Muffels and Wagner 2010). The most discussed result in economics is the Easterlin paradox, which suggests that the association between happiness and income over time and across countries is weak because of adaptation mechanisms (Easterlin 1974). Specifically, Easterlin’s research leads to the conclusion that only individual improvements of living conditions in comparison to relevant others result in higher satisfaction, but not collective improvements. Reacting to other researchers who challenge these results, Easterlin still states that economic growth does not lead to increased happiness: “Contrary

conclusions are due to analysts confusing the short-term (positive) relation of subjective well-being and GDP with the long-term (nil) relation, or to a statistical artifact (Easterlin 2015). The economist's explanation of the phenomenon is that aspirations rise as quickly as incomes, and individuals care as much about how they are doing in comparison with their peers as they do about absolute gains, once basic needs are met (Graham 2009). However, Easterlin challenges the psychologists' set point model, stating that life events in the non-financial domains, such as marriage or physical disability, have longer lasting effects on subjective well-being (Easterlin 2003). The study of Frey and Stutzer (2014), for example, provides evidence for adaptation to a higher labor income, but not to commuting. This result suggests that some life domains may be more important for quality of life than others.

Aspirations from an economists' perspective emerge in a social context: "Other individuals—their lifestyles, their social and political norms, and their economic well-being—serve to condition and determine the goals and aspirations of any particular person. At the same time, it is only 'local society'—individuals that are broadly similar to me, or relevant to my experiences—that enter my radarscreen" (Ray 2003:9). In line with Lewin, Ray notices that individuals will have the sort of aspirations upon which they can act (Ray 2003:5). If the gap between what they want and what they have is too big or too small, there is less motivation for attempting to improve what they have (Easterlin 2003).

Another economic concept that is often referred to is the "tunnel effect" described by Hirschman and Rothschild (1973). It depicts the analogy of a two-lane tunnel where the traffic is headed in the same direction and slows to a stop. When a driver sees the cars move forward in the opposite lane, then he or she is initially encouraged. However, if his/her lane continues to remain at a standstill, then that individual "experience(s) the turnaround from hopefulness to disenchantment" with consequent "potential for social upheaval" (Hirschman and Rothschild 1973:552).

Concepts such as the tunnel effect and economists' aspiration theories help to understand processes of adaptation, as do the respective psychological concepts of social comparison and the aspiration-level theory, adding the element of an active individual in a social context. Finally, Easterlin's research is relevant in the sense that a part of the sociological debate still refers to it, as the next section will show.

1.5.3. Adaptation research in sociology

In sociology, adaptation is discussed as referring to the capacity to act according to the norms, demands and constraints of a given community or environment. The literature on adaptation to climate change will not be discussed here because the dissertation focuses on adaptation to a socioeconomic position.

As introduced above, one body of quantitative sociologists reassesses the Easterlin paradox. Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) find a positive link between average levels of subjective well-being and GDP across countries using different data sets. Within countries they state that economic growth is associated with rising happiness. Likewise, Veenhoven and Vergunst (2012) report a positive relation between GDP growth and happiness in nations. Burchardts' (2005) results show adaptation to rising incomes but not to falling incomes, and Neff (2012) suggests that there is no widespread evidence of adaptation to poverty.

Diverse reasons are put forth by sociologists and economists to explain effects that could be interpreted as adaptation in quality of life as generally measured in Western countries, and the way in which it relates to living conditions (Olson and Schober 1993:176): Methodological explanations are a lack of accuracy in measures, the lack of linear relationship between objective and subjective measures and the presence of affective aspects in subjective answers that are not all linked to the objective conditions they are meant to judge. Graham further adds to this the selection of countries that are included in the sample: "Respondents in poorer countries, who are still struggling to meet basic needs, display a stronger income-well-being link than do those in wealthy countries, where that relationship is mediated by factors such as relative differences and rising aspirations" (Graham 2009:42).

In contrast to the methodological issues are behavioral explanations to explain reports of high subjective well-being despite disadvantaged living conditions, such as social desirability issues, cultural socialization and social pressure (Allardt 1993; Roos 1978). These elements highlight the issue that people are expected to report a high subjective well-being because they (consciously or not) respond to a social norm of being satisfied. While these arguments are used as an alternative or in contrast to adaptation, I will further discuss how such reactions could be linked to adaptation in Article 3 and the overall conclusion (Chapters 4 and 5).

An example of quantitative research affirming the existence of adaptive preferences is the analysis of Crettaz and Suter (2013). Their approach also applies the indicators used to identify the population group in precarious prosperity in the research projects to which my dissertation belongs. They use "indicators of nonmonetary material deprivation, since these indicators include both a factual element—whether a household possesses an item or not—and a subjective assessment—is not having an item a choice or is it due to lacking financial resources?" and "argue that this preference question in particular is prone to downward adaptation" (Crettaz and Suter 2013:140). When analyzing the number of years spent in income poverty, both with indicators of material deprivation and subjective indicators related to income satisfaction and

financial constraints, one result is adaptation (Crettaz and Suter 2013:147-148). Thus, they raise doubts about the suitability of subjective indicators for policy making and suggest further investigations for future research, “such as examining other indicators, including more sophisticated indices of subjective well-being and quality of life, other welfare problems or life circumstances that might be prone to adaptation and social comparison (including upward adaptation), as well as group-specific and country-specific mechanisms of adaptation” (Crettaz and Suter 2013:149).

There is very little research on the specific topic of adaptation in precarious prosperity, but the following two analyses with quantitative data reveal initial evidence in Switzerland that points to adaptation, even though the main objective of the studies was not the topic of adaptation.

Henke analyzed economic vulnerability among pensioners in Switzerland. Her results show that “retirees’ social engagement depends primarily on individual preferences and only to a small degree on the availability of financial resources. Still, there remains the question whether part of the discrepancy between the Objective and the Self-Assessed Measurement angles may be due to different aspirations concerning the level of economic quality of life that is deemed to be ‘minimal’” (Henke 2016:184-185).

Results from the first longitudinal study in Switzerland about the influence of welfare positions on satisfaction (general satisfaction and satisfaction in the financial domain) confirm that life satisfaction is higher in secure prosperity than in precarious prosperity and in poverty (Tillmann, Masia and Budowski 2016:178). Observing the evolution of the life satisfaction across the number of years spent in each socioeconomic position, some elements could be interpreted as adaptation: First, when remaining in poverty over several years, life satisfaction decreases more than when remaining in precarious prosperity. Second, in both welfare positions, satisfaction starts to increase again after someone remains in the same welfare position for 6 years (Tillmann et al. 2016:178). However, these results should be confirmed by more statistical analyses.

As in the domain of quality of life, qualitative sociological research on adaptation is much less developed. However, several studies show evidence for adaptation in different European countries: In the 1970s, Ipsen wrote about adapting expectations to the reality of specific milieus and about the standards of reference groups as the most important condition of satisfaction:

“Man weiss, was man zu erwarten hat und bewegt sich in einem vorgegebenen Rahmen von ‘Statusentwürfen’. Zum einen lassen die Erfahrungen in einem geschlossenen Milieu andere Erwartungen als weit unrealistischer erscheinen, die Erwartungen passen sich so der schichtspezifischen Realität an” (Ipsen 1978:47).

Recent work undertaken by Grimm et al. (2013) analyzes precarious work situations in Germany. They find that employees adapt to this specific position in the labor market. This adaptation is characterized by loss of control or possibilities to plan and high eventuality that their own efforts will fail. They call such strategies for coping with insecurities “Zwischenzonenbewusstsein” (Grimm et al. 2013:261-262) and describe

them as the acceptance of the incessant struggle for security and recognition through work: “Die Befragten finden sich damit ab, dass sie immer nur temporäre ‚Verschnaufpausen‘ bzw. ‚Ruhepausen‘ im Kampf um Sicherheit und Anerkennung durch Erwerbsarbeit erhalten” (Grimm et al. 2013:262). In their panel study, they identify changes in values over time: People first report financial deprivations with a negative impact on leisure activities and social contacts. They then renounce hobbies and some social contacts and change priorities in their discourse, saying that other things (such as faith) are more important than wealth (Grimm et al. 2013:263). These results are consistent with the changes in reasoning that are described in Article 3 of this dissertation.

The study on health and aging by Helvik, Cabral Iversen, Steiring and Hallber (2011) describes how elderly individuals maintain a sense of having control over their lives and create stability by adjusting their expectations to their actual abilities. According to these authors, subjective well-being among their interviewees with somatic health problems is the result of adaptation strategies such as utilizing the network of important others, enjoying cultural heritage, occupying themselves with interests, seeking a mission to fulfill, improving the situation by accepting limitations due to health and creating meaning in everyday life. This way, they attain high subjective well-being despite reduced energy, health problems and aging.

In summary, my research is situated in a sociological debate in which the existence of adaptation is still challenged by prominent researchers and where qualitative approaches have a marginal position. As Crettaz and Suter stress, the use of subjective well-being measures should be further investigated as they are not used sufficiently. I argue that a better and differentiated understanding of adaptation is indispensable to investigate subjective well-being measures and qualitative approaches can complete the quantitative effort. The specific topic of adaptation in precarious prosperity has not yet been analyzed by qualitative measures although, as argued above, this socioeconomic group appears to be particularly appropriate for this. The implications of these empirical elements for my research will be recapitulated in the next section.

1.5.4. Summary and implications of the empirical elements

Adaptation research has been presented from a psychological, economic and sociological perspective. While psychologists mainly seek intrapersonal, genetically predefined reasons for adaptation, economists investigate individuals whom pursue personal and economic choices to improve subjective well-being within a social context. In sociology, adaptation is discussed as the capacity to act according to the norms, demands and constraints of a given community or environment. Thus, individuals' actions and choices are configured by the social context in which they are embedded.

Psychological research on adaptation first focused on the stability of subjective well-being by developing the concepts of the adaptation level, happiness set point and hedonic treadmill. Recent research rather investigates the differences between

individuals and their adaptation. The concepts of social comparison, aspiration level, plasticity and reappraisal were introduced to distinguish various types of adaptation processes.

Economic research challenges the psychologists' set point model. However, concepts such as the tunnel effect and the economists' aspiration theories seem conceptually related to the psychological concepts mentioned above. An important economist for the matter of adaptation is Easterlin, who introduced the strongly discussed and debated Easterlin paradox.

Easterlin's research is also a reference for one body of quantitative sociologists. They continue to discuss whether adaptation exists or whether the measurement of stable subjective well-being, despite changing living conditions, is due to methodological and behavioral measurement issues. Quantitative evidence that points at adaptation, especially for Switzerland and the specific population group of precarious prosperity, is provided by Crettaz and Suter (2013), Tillmann, Masia and Budowski (2016) and Henke (2016). Qualitative research is rare, but also observes and describes adaptation (Ipsen 1978; Grimm et al. 2013; Helvik et al. 2013).

On the one hand, my research connects to the longer-lasting debate on quality of life and adaptation. On the other hand, it investigates issues of quality of life regarding a specific position within the social inequality order, precarious prosperity. In this way, the present research refines previous research on quality of life and adaptation in a specific population that is particularly limited in resources and with a risk of slipping into poverty. In line with Crettaz and Suter, the study fills a gap in the research field: Despite the 40-year-old debate on adaptation, "[e]mpirical evidence of how exactly the quality of life and poverty indicators are affected by these processes is still surprisingly scarce" (Crettaz and Suter 2013). I argue that a better and differentiated understanding of adaptation is indispensable to better understand quality of life and qualitative approaches that fruitfully complement quantitative approaches. The specific topic of adaptation in precarious prosperity has not yet been analyzed by qualitative measures. My analyses add a qualitative dimension to quality of life and adaptation research that has basically been quantitatively oriented. They also contribute a longitudinal and a cross-national perspective and herewith shed light on the mechanisms at play between subjective well-being and objective living conditions.

The objective to better understand adaptation processes and the social conditions, when they come into play, responds to a claim for research on the factors that impact the adaptation process and their comprehension: "With the understanding that adaptation may be incomplete and varies across persons, the efforts to understand adaptation should be amplified" (Diener et al. 2006:313). According to Graham, "some of the most interesting—and still unexplained factors—relate to the nature of economic growth and the generation of income, as well as to the institutional framework that mediates that process" of adaptation (Graham 2009:145). Kroll (2014) indicates that sociological theory provides opportunities to enrich research on quality of life that is undertheorized. I hope to contribute to these sociological debates on adaptation by

adding empirical elements and linking social theory with some psychological concepts. Before delving into the theoretical elements of the present research, I will recapitulate the assumptions that underlie my approach on adaptation in precarious prosperity. They have been derived from the elements discussed in the previous chapters:

- Quality of life results from the interplay of living conditions and subjective well-being.
- Living conditions in precarious prosperity are qualified as disadvantaged. They are expected to lead to a negative evaluation of the households' quality of life.
- There is evidence that high subjective well-being, despite objective living conditions, might be due to measurement issues and adaptation.
- Quality of life and adaptation are influenced by the social conditions in which the individual and its household are living.
- Quality of life and living conditions are important to the way in which they are perceived by the household members.

1.6. Theoretical elements

The three research questions of the articles required different conceptual approaches. For this reason, the theoretical perspective is somewhat different in each contribution, yet all three pursue the idea of a sensitizing scheme to better understand the quality of life and adaptation of households in precarious prosperity. The following section summarizes and reflects on the theoretical elements used in the three articles and thereby makes explicit the way that different approaches can be applied to address adaptation in qualitative research.

1.6.1. Household strategies in precarious prosperity

Article 1 brings together research on precarious prosperity with quality of life research. The theoretical framework reflects this attempt and has been elaborated by the authors together. I will explain some aspects to illustrate that the combination of the two research domains appears to be fruitful and theoretically makes sense:

- The interaction of the macro- and micro-level is part of both research on precarious prosperity and quality of life. In precarious prosperity research, the interaction refers to welfare regimes and economic situations on the macro level, and the households' situation and resources on the micro level (Amacker, Budowski and Schief 2013). Sociological research on quality of life likewise points to its macro and micro dimension (Noll 1999:3).
- The importance of perception links research on quality of life and precarious prosperity. The objective situation is assumed to be important for strategies of households in precarious prosperity through the way it is perceived (Amacker, Budowski and Schief 2011). The combination of objective aspects (living

conditions) and subjective aspects (subjective well-being, evaluation of these living conditions) in quality of life research is well suited to precarious prosperity research (Noll 1993:3).

- Both bodies of research focus on agency and its interplay with structure. In precarious prosperity research, the analyses seek to understand how structure frames household strategies (Amacker et al. 2013). In quality of life research it is the body of research on human development, such as Sen's (2008) capability approach, that focuses on agency.

However, the two research domains also enrich each other: Taking into account the household and the opportunity structures distinguishes this research from other quality of life studies that focus only on the individual. Furthermore, this research situates itself in a sociological perspective by embedding the individual into its closest social environment, the household, and the specific welfare regime context. Similarly, the inclusion of the subjective well-being as an element of quality of life helps to recognize adaptation as a household strategy in precarious prosperity: adaptation may not improve or change the objective situation as other household strategies, but it still has implications for the quality of life by changing the perception of the objective situation and therewith improving subjective well-being.

The elements of this theoretical framework can also be found in the body of research on agency and structure, such as Giddens' theory on the interplay of social institutions (structure) and humans purposeful actions (agency) (Giddens 1984). Moreover, they appear in some research on adaptation: Olson and Schober describe that "low satisfaction with life or specific living conditions causes a cognitive tension that cannot be endured for a long time and therefore motivates the individual to take action for change. This action (coping strategy) can consist of actions that change the objective situation or of those that change only the perception of the objective situation" (Olson and Schober 1993:185). In addition, Fischer states that "the effectiveness of aspiration and agency is often limited by available opportunity structures (the social norms, legal regulations, and market entry mechanisms that delimit, or facilitate, certain behaviors and aspirations)" (Fischer 2013:6).

As the theoretical framework of Article 1 is rather broad and includes many elements, the results also show various aspects of quality of life in precarious prosperity. Adaptation is only one of these aspects. It is a first piece of research demonstrating adaptation as a strategy to improve quality of life in precarious prosperity. Thus, the framework does not allow a precise description of adaptation and whether adaptation is linked to specific structural contexts or household situations.

1.6.2. Social bonds

Article 2 focuses on resources for improving quality of life; therefore, Paugam's theory of social bonds was chosen to distinguish types of resources that households in precarious prosperity can mobilize. On the one hand, this theory connects with the theoretical framework of Article 1 as the four social bonds according to Paugam can be directly linked with the concept of « objective situation » in Article 1:

- the citizenship bond (lien de citoyenneté) refers to being embedded in a welfare state;
- the organic participation bond (lien de participation organique) refers to the integration in the labor market;
- The elective participation bond (lien de participation élective) refers to the social network or the community to which the individual or household relates;
- The lineal bond (lien de filiation) refers to the family (see Paugam 2008:64);

Paugam's approach is echoed well by the understanding and perspective of Article 1, as he writes:

« Une redistribution équitable ne concerne pas seulement des biens matériels, des ressources et des revenus, mais aussi ce qu'Amartya Sen appelle des capacités de développer des modes de fonctionnement humains afin de vivre une vie décente et de jouir du bien-être. Autrement dit, pour rendre l'individu responsable, il faut commencer par lui assurer les possibilités réelles d'exercer sa liberté de jouir du bien-être selon sa propre conception de la vie bonne » (Paugam 2008 :106-107).

On the other hand, Paugam's approach explicitly describes the dimensions of protection and recognition that each social bond can provide, while previous research on precarious prosperity focuses mainly on aspects of protection when analyzing household strategies. The following table gives examples of protection and recognition for each social bond:

Table 4 : Social bonds

Type of bond	Forms of protection	Forms of recognition
Lineal bond	Count on the intergenerational solidarity	Be important to one's parents and one's children
Elective participation bond	Count on the solidarity in a chosen network	Be important to the chosen network
Organic participation bond	Stable work	Recognition through work and the social status linked to it
Citizenship bond	Legal protection (civil, political and social rights)	Recognition as a sovereign individual

(table refers to Paugam 2008:64)

The elaborated theoretical framework proved to be useful for structuring the analysis that compares the Swiss and Romanian cases. It provided an analytical distinction that allowed for comparing the cases within and across countries. It helped to understand how the two country contexts influence the resources of households in precarious prosperity.

As Paugam states:

« Non seulement les individus sont complémentaires les uns des autres - ou interdépendants –, mais encore ils vont se doter d'un système institutionnalisé de solidarité à l'échelle de la nation. Ce mouvement va contribuer à renforcer la sécurité de tous—et, par conséquent, des plus démunis. Ce système de protection aura des effets sur l'ensemble des liens qui rattachent l'individu à la société. Au fur et à mesure que l'individu voit son existence encadrée par des mécanismes universels de protection, il peut aussi plus facilement se libérer des contraintes et des exigences liées aux formes de protection plus traditionnelles, comme la famille, le voisinage, (...)» (Paugam 2008:32).

Again, in this article, adaptation was not the only focus, but it came to the fore in the results. Paugam's theory does not provide concrete elements to analyze adaptation or to relate it to social bonds. In this sense, the results of the article rather encourage the further development of a theory of social bonds including processes to adaptation as a resource or as an influence to how individuals integrate in society.

1.6.3. Agency and adaptation

In contrast to Articles 1 and 2, the focus of Article 3 is clearly on adaptation. This is reflected in the theoretical framework. In line with Article 1, the concept of agency is included, and in line with Article 2, the analysis builds on the definitions of quality of life and adaptation according to Zapf (1984).

The term agency has a long and complex history (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach and Lieblich 2008). It is used in Article 3 by applying the theoretical framework on agency in poverty, but, as in Article 1, agency can be defined as “the ability to act autonomously” (Cobb 2000:12). With regard to adaptation, Zilber et al. propose an interesting description: “Sociologists also use the term *agency* widely (...) in reference to purposeful social action and overcoming obstacles. Agency means to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing some process or state of affairs” (Zilber et al. 2008:616). They bring to the fore the idea of “not intervening” as action—in contrast to researchers who oppose active coping and resolution with passive acceptance of negative circumstances (Diener et al. 2006:312; Olson and Schober 1993). Article 3 referred to the sociology of knowledge in order to define adaptation as agency: In line with Schütz (1932), an action is understood as such if there is a reasoning about it. This is the case in the interviews I used for the analysis. The association of adaptation and action has not yet been clearly the case in the framework of Article 1, which distinguishes two kinds of household strategies: doing (e.g., agency) and reasoning (e.g., adaptation).

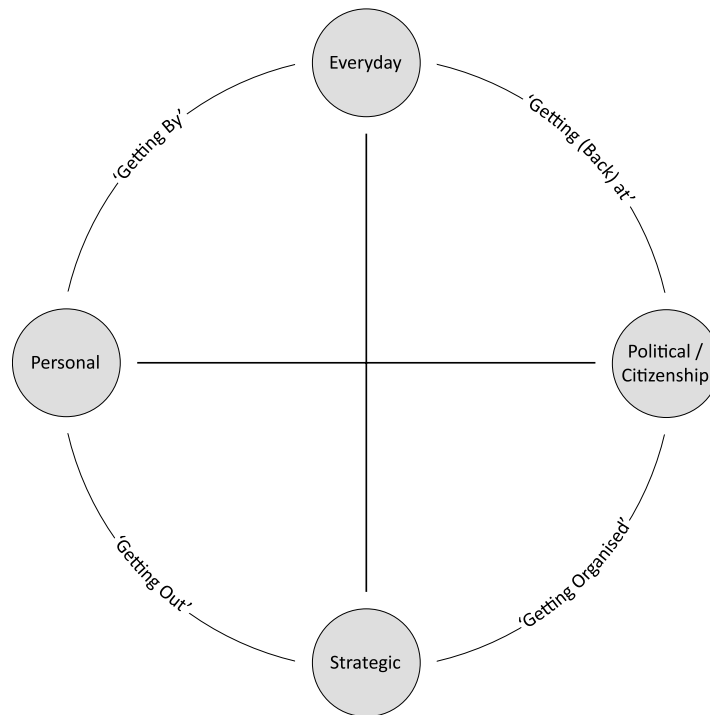
Because theoretical and qualitative empirical work on agency in precarious prosperity and on adaptation is scarce, I was not able to find a theoretical framework that includes these elements. Ruth Lister’s (2004) framework of agency in poverty completes Zapf’s (1984) static and global definition of adaptation by including the time component and the possibility to define adaptation as domain specific and as one pattern of agency in parallel to and completing other patterns of agency. Even though it was originally conceived to analyze poverty, Lister’s framework refers to many aspects that are in the focus of research on precarious prosperity:

- The focus on agency of individuals when considering the ways in which agency is constrained by living conditions and power structures.
- The understanding of social mobility as the result of individual actions but also of economic, social and political processes.
- The distinction between strategic and everyday agency that is in line with the distinction of household strategies as reasoned activities and routine (see Article 1).

These elements thus make this framework as useful for analyzing agency in precarious prosperity as in poverty, and I applied it in this sense. Adaptation was classified as agency of “getting by,” a kind of everyday agency on the personal level. In contrast to strategic agency, adaptation does not involve the intention of change in the long term, and in contrast to political/citizenship agency, it does not have an intended aim for

society either. Adaptation helps one to get by through improving subjective well-being without changing living conditions and power structures. Illustration 2 shows the conceptualization of agency according to Lister:

Illustration 2: Framework on agency



(Lister 2004:130)

Furthermore, including elements of the sociology of knowledge stimulated the analysis of adaptation and reasoning over time, the second part of the results in Article 3. This part complements the first part of the analysis, which is based on Lister's framework. Together, the two perspectives enable responding to the two elements of the research question: First, what happens during adaptation, and second, what reasoning accompanies these processes. Both individual agency in a social context and reasoning of the individual, which is influenced by social experiences are indispensable to understand adaptation in precarious prosperity.

1.6.4. Summary and implications of the theoretical elements

This chapter reflected on the theoretical concepts of each article and their implications for analyzing adaptation in precarious prosperity. Article 1 brings together research on precarious prosperity with quality-of-life research. The two research domains have in common the interaction of the macro and micro levels, the importance of perception, and the interplay of agency and structure. However, the two domains also complement

each other: The sociological perspective of embedding the individual in a specific household and welfare regime context enriches quality of life research, which often concentrates on the individual. Furthermore, including subjective well-being explicitly in the framework of precarious prosperity enables conceptualization of adaptation as a strategy (or agency). By including elements of quality of life within the framework of precarious prosperity, the theoretical approach of Article 1 allows for the argument that adaptation in precarious prosperity does exist among other household strategies.

The theory of social bonds in Article 2 provides another perspective on the resources that households in precarious prosperity can mobilize: Paugam identifies four types of social bonds that provide protection and/or recognition to the individual. Applying this concept reveals that adaptation has to be included in theory to understand resources to improve quality of life in precarious prosperity and that protection and recognition through social bonds are not sufficient elements to explain how quality of life can be perceived as good despite precarious living conditions.

The framework of Article 3 opposes adaptation to passivity and shows complex processes of agency and reasoning in adaptation. While the first two contributions illustrate that adaptation occurs in diverse contexts, the third describes how adaptation occurs. Adaptation and agency are associated in a theoretical approach that distinguishes strategic (longer term) from everyday agency, as well as personal (individual) from citizenship (collective) agency—conceptualizing adaptation as individual everyday agency. The understanding of adaptation as agency shows an evolution of the concepts during the iterative research process involving the three articles (see 1.7.1.). Including elements of the sociology of knowledge is a new theoretical element of the third article and enables better integration of longitudinal aspects in the analysis.

The three approaches do not build one overall theoretical framework; they rather represent partly overlapping perspectives on precarious prosperity and quality of life, with a more or less important focus on adaptation. Each of them contributes to the overall objective of advancing qualitative research on adaptation by enhancing the empirical and theoretical debate. In line with Quilgars et al. (2009:20), the three approaches were chosen because they are at once flexible enough to interpret information across cultural and sociopolitical contexts and robust enough to allow for comparison. Moreover, they fit well together because they all assume a perspective on individuals embedded in a societal context and concentrate on possibilities for action to improve subjective well-being as well as on the importance of individual perceptions of the good life.

The next and last chapter of this introductory section explains the methodological approaches and issues of the dissertation.

1.7. Methodological issues

This chapter provides an overview of and reflection on the research methods used. A qualitative approach was chosen to understand and interpret the quality of life and agency from the interviewees perspective. However, precarious prosperity is not a term or category to which people identify directly, and for this reason it was defined by income and deprivation measures. This led to a systematic sampling procedure which is unusual for qualitative research, yet was required to ensure that households had similar relative socio-economic positions across different countries. Thanks to the large number of interviews it became possible to construct systematic subsamples according to specific criteria in order to be able to analyze adaptation that happens over time. After having identified the households in precarious prosperity, the research on adaptation was conducted with a bottom-up approach aiming at finding new concepts and generating theory. As the topic of adaptation is rather novel for qualitative sociological research, the method of content analysis allowed analyzing a greater number of cases than would have been possible through other methods as, for example, a sequential analysis. A systematic approach and selection of a large number of cases combined with the application of content analysis seemed appropriate to me, as I first needed to understand, whether adaptation is at all a relevant element of the quality of life in precarious prosperity. Nonetheless, elements of the sociology of knowledge are included in the third article.

The first section of this chapter explains the iterative process of this dissertation. The second section refers to the cross-national and comparative design, and the third section goes deeper into the longitudinal aspects of the study. Thereafter, I provide information on sampling and data collection and describe the sample. The sixth section explains the methods of analysis, and the seventh section reflects on ethical issues.

1.7.1. The iterative research process

Most qualitative research is conducted using circular processes, even if it is not always presented as such in publications. The state of research, the theoretical framework and the data analysis are developed more or less in parallel, each part influencing and enhancing the other and finally forming a coherent research argument. Likewise, the articles presented were developed by working alternately on the literature, theories and analysis.

Summarizing the elaboration of the three articles resulting in the present work, the research was conducted using an iterative process (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Iteration refers to a systematic repetitive process in qualitative research. This text enables shedding light on these processes, which do not appear as such in the published articles.

The idea of an analysis on adaptation came to my mind during the data collection period in Switzerland in 2013 because some of the interviewees explicitly talked about adaptation. In parallel to that, we worked on the analysis for Article 1, and the topic again came to the fore in the Spanish interviews. When proposing the structure of a

common article on urban Romania and Switzerland to my Romanian colleague, I intentionally did not focus on adaptation but on good quality of life in order to keep our minds open to other aspects and not impose my ideas on my Romanian colleague. The importance of adaptation was confirmed during the analysis for Article 2. Article 3 finally focuses on the topic of adaptation and its processes over time. In that way, the topic of my dissertation was refined and deepened throughout the whole research period. Step by step, the different approaches and theoretical perspectives generated a better understanding of adaptation and its impact for social research on quality of life and precarious prosperity. The methodological approaches will be presented in the following sections, starting with the comparative design.

1.7.2. Comparative design

Cross-national comparisons are conducted in Article 1 (comparing households in Pamplona ES and Lausanne CH) and Article 2 (comparing households in Cluj RO and Bern/Lausanne/Zürich CH). Even though such cross-national comparisons in social research are often imperfect (Hantrais 2009; Øyen 2004), they are strongly recommended: “Country-specific knowledge increases through comparative studies. Through a background of studies from other countries national studies can be analyzed in a larger perspective and the lacunae of knowledge can temporarily and cautiously be supplemented with knowledge from such external studies. From a policy view comparative studies and the increased contact between experts in the field can provide new inputs on pro-poor policies, and best practices in poverty reduction can be provided. Increased awareness or a shared problem is another benefit that throws light on a more general phenomenon and its solutions” (Øyen 2004:288). Specifically, comparative studies provide the opportunity to rethink elements of a topic in different contexts. “When variations arise in one element in one context and not in the same element in another context, it triggers new hypotheses and explanations” (Øyen 2004:286).

According to Hantrais (1995), our research is cross-national: Our team set out to examine a particular issue in several countries with the express intention of comparing its manifestation in different socioeconomic settings. In all countries, the same research instruments were used. The aim of the comparison was to gain a deeper understanding of adaptation in different national contexts. We balanced diversity of welfare regimes and homogeneity of the population group in precarious prosperity in the three countries (see Rihoux and Ragin 2009). In other words, we analyzed particular processes of adaptation in precarious prosperity in a variety of systems (welfare regimes) (Anckar 2008:390).

Apart from cross-national comparative research, all “social science is comparative and comparisons can be made at many levels” (Quilgars et al. 2009:19). In this sense, Article 3 is also comparative in that it is comparing cases, household situations and their evolution over time. Contrary to the cross-national comparisons in Articles 1 and 2, Article 3 balances the homogeneity of social position (precarious prosperity) within

Switzerland and the diversity of household situations and social experiences to better understand different processes of adaptation over time. This longitudinal approach in Article 3 will be discussed in the next section.

1.7.3. Longitudinal design

Because each of the three contributions includes two or three waves of interviews in the respective countries, they all have a longitudinal aspect. Biographical elements and future prospects are also included in the data, following MacKie and colleagues: "Everyday realities of managing spatial and temporal frameworks are informed by past experiences and future anticipations" (MacKie, Gregory and Bowlby 2002:904).

Temporality is most deliberately integrated into the research process in Article 3, using only data from Switzerland. These data cover a longer time period (5 years) than the data from Spain and Romania (2 years). However, change over time is also a topic in Article 2 and, to a certain extent, in Article 1 (see Holland 2011). The qualitative longitudinal design fits the aims of the research because it can "access the fluid and often highly situation-specific experiences, understandings and perceptions that mediate how people deal with and respond to social change (...). With their characteristic sensitivity to context, qualitative studies are also able to combine an analysis of both micro- and macro-social processes and focus on the role of agency" (Holland 2011).

In line with Holland (2011), we distinguish biographical time from historical time when analyzing change. The empirical data provide information about living conditions and perceptions of them, as well as about subjective well-being. That is why the analyses focus on change in biographical time (individuals' and households' lives) and less on change in historical time (social and structural conditions). Events in historical time (e.g., the economic crisis) and their influence on biographical time are nevertheless included in the research.

The time scope of the data (between 2 and 5 years) is too short to deliver results on the relationship between policies, contexts and outcomes, or even on social change. It rather allows insights into short-term changes and explanations of processes and situations (Holland, Thomson and Henderson 2004:2). These processes and types of adaptation across the interview waves are rather complex because people tend to recreate, reselect and reinterpret the past in light of new knowledge (Adam 1990:143). A qualitative longitudinal design seems indeed adequate to address the complexity of adaptation in precarious prosperity, as proposed in the present research: "Indeed, it is only through time that we can gain a better appreciation of how the personal and the social, agency and structure, the micro and macro are interconnected and how they come to be transformed" (Neale and Flowerdew 2003:190).

1.7.4. Sampling and data collection

The population group of interest was defined before my work on adaptation started. It was identified by means of an income threshold and a deprivation threshold, slightly adapted to the situation in each country. In Switzerland, for example, a household in precarious prosperity is defined as:

- having an equivalized household income in the range of 60-80% of the median income of the residents in the country, or
- having an equivalized income below the 60% income-poverty threshold yet not being deprived according to the deprivation threshold, or
- having an equivalized income above the 80% income-poverty threshold yet being deprived according to the deprivation threshold (Amacker et al. 2011; Budowski et al. 2010).

As defined in 1.3.3., “deprivation” refers to the lack of possessions, activities or access to services that the majority of the respective country population has due to financial constraints (Budowski et al. 2010:277). Thus, the list of deprivations varies according to the country. Appendix 1 shows the example of the deprivations used for the Swiss sample. The following criteria for sampling appeared to be suitable because the selected interviewees often referred to their household as forming part of the lower middle class, not really middle class but certainly not poor, when asked to assess their socioeconomic position. The interviewees’ self-descriptions and accounts of difficulties experienced in the household resemble each other in the three countries and refer to similar situations of precariousness.

The sampling strategy was a combination of purposeful and random sampling, as Table 5 summarizes:

Table 5: Sampling strategy

Sampling	Level
Purposeful	Country (reasoned and systematic choice)
Purposeful	City
Purposeful	Neighborhoods (reasoned and systematic choice)
Random	Roads or squares
Random	Buildings or doors for random walk (RO) Telephone numbers for telephone screening (CH, ES)
Purposeful	Households (diversity criteria)

(own elaboration)

As explained in 1.4.1., the three countries and cities were selected through a purposeful process according to their diversity within Europe. The choice of neighborhoods was made according to expert interviews and available statistics, with the objective to select neighborhoods with a high proportion of households in precarious prosperity. The streets or squares within these neighborhoods were chosen by random sampling. Then, two different strategies were applied: telephone screening at random in the selected streets (Switzerland and Spain), and walking from random points (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2003) in the neighborhood, systematically sampling every xx^{th} household (Romania). The screening to determine whether the household belonged to the socioeconomic group of precarious prosperity according to the definition given above was based on a standardized screening questionnaire (for the most part identical to the questionnaire of the third wave, see Appendix 2). If more households than necessary were eligible for the sample, diversity of household composition and of attachment to the labor market was the second purposeful criterion for selection.

The person who could best inform on the household was interviewed. In some cases, the interview was carried out with two household members. The information was collected by “individuals embedded in households” so that the household could be the unit of analysis. The household is considered a dynamic unit linking the macro and the micro level in the analysis (Wallace 2002). In our perspective, analyzing quality of life needs to go beyond the individual because it is always linked to and configured by its household situation. Household members may have different individual resources and constraints, leading to different subjective levels of well-being. Specifically, the state of adaptation was identified among interviewed individuals, and adaptation processes were analyzed, including their household.

The instruments for data collection were developed in collaboration with various research teams. Interviewers were instructed on higher intersubjective and intercultural agreement (see Øyen 2004:276). The household questionnaire (see Appendix 2) contains key information on the household composition and sociodemographic data, the financial situation, the type of labor market attachment and occupation of household members, and housing. This questionnaire was complemented by the household grid, a summary of the household characteristics (Appendix 3). The qualitative interview guide contains key questions and had the function of a checklist to ensure that the important issues (which were known beforehand in order to be able to answer the research questions) were addressed during the interviews (see Appendix 4), yet it was kept open and adapted to unforeseen issues that came up in the interviews. For the second and the third wave of interviews, the qualitative interview guide was individually adapted with respect to the former interviews conducted in the same household before the interview was carried out. The interview guide constituted the key part of the interview and ensured that data collection in the different households and countries remained systematic while at the same time allowing “space for the surfacing of unanticipated personal issues” (Budowski 2005). In the first and second waves of interviews in Switzerland and Spain, questions focusing directly on quality of life (a good life) were not included. As I participated in adapting the interview guide for the third

wave of interviews in Switzerland and the Romanian interviews, I included more specific elements to analyze quality of life. The topic of adaptation was not targeted when elaborating the research instruments. The fact that there were no questions addressing adaptation processes and that there is nevertheless plenty of material to analyze the topic is, again, one more sign of its relevance. Moreover, biased answers were avoided because the interviewees were not asked to evaluate topics that they had probably not thought about before (Andrews 1981).

It is crucial in qualitative research that the interview process is documented. Therefore, after each interview, the interviewer wrote a brief memento about the interview situation and the subjective perception of the interview process, as well as subjective reflections and personal remarks (see Appendix 5).

1.7.5. Description of data

The data corpus I disposed is composed of two or three waves of qualitative interviews in three countries, between 2008 and 2014 (see Table 6). As explained in chapter 1.4-1., it is a mix of primary and secondary data because I conducted interviews only during the third wave (2013) in Switzerland (about 40 interviews) and because the interview waves before 2013 were planned and conducted without my participation. Nevertheless, all these data are comparable because they contain the same population group of households in precarious prosperity. The differences in sample sizes between Switzerland and the two other countries are due to differences in funding possibilities.

Table 6: Data overview

	2008	2009	2010	2013	2014
Switzerland	74 HH	72 HH		50 HH	
Bern	25 HH	25 HH		18 HH	
Lausanne	25 HH	24 HH		19 HH	
Zürich	24 HH	23 HH		13 HH	
Spain		24 HH	17 HH		
Pamplona					
Romania				25 HH	20 HH
Cluj					

(own elaboration)

During the first interviews in 2009, all households were situated in the same socioeconomic position within the specific country frames. During the research period, some of the households experienced upward or downward mobility, yet most of them were still in precarious prosperity at the end of the data collection period.

Each of the three articles is based on a different, partly overlapping part of this data corpus, without claiming an encompassing analysis of all countries and waves of interviews. The following table summarizes the selected sample of interviews for the dissertation:

Table 7: Sample for the dissertation

Article	1	2	3
	Precariousness and Quality of Life in Switzerland and Spain	Good quality of life despite precarious prosperity in Romania and Switzerland	Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?
Case selection criteria	All HH that gave an interview in the first two waves of Lausanne and Pamplona:	All HH with a good perceived quality of life at the last interview in Cluj and the three Swiss cities:	All HH that were still or again in precarious prosperity at t3 (2013) in Switzerland:
Sample of the article	24 cases in Lausanne CH (2008, 2009) 17 cases in Pamplona ES (2009, 2010)	5 cases in Cluj RO (2013, 2014) 17 cases in Bern, Lausanne and Zürich CH (2008, 2009, 2013)	29 cases in Bern, Lausanne and Zürich CH (2008, 2009, 2013)

(own elaboration)

The sample is heterogeneous in terms of household composition and income sources, as well as age, profession and origin of the household members (see Tables 8, 9 and 10).

Table 8: Summary of the Swiss sample characteristics

		2008	2009	2013
Total transcriptions		74	72	50
Household composition	Single	30	32	20
	Couple	13	13	12
	Couple with kids	18	16	13
	Lone parent	7	5	2
	Extended family	1	1	2
	Flat share	5	5	1
Migration background of at least 1 HH member		30	29	25
Main income sources	Salary	50	45	34
	Invalidity pension	5	4	2
	Old age pension	15	19	12
	Unemployment benefits	1	0	1
	Widow pension	1	1	1
	Parents income (student)	3	3	0
Socioeconomic position	Poor	0	8	7
	Precarious prosperity	74	47	29
	Secure prosperity	0	17	14

(own elaboration)

Table 9: Summary of the Spanish sample characteristics

		2009	2010
Total transcriptions		24	17
Household composition	Single	5	3
	Couple	2	2
	Couple with kids (1 lesbian couple)	7	4
	Lone parent	3	3
	Extended family	3	2
	Flat share	3	3
	Unknown	1	0
Migration background of at least 1 HH member		6	6
Main income sources	Salary	17	14
	Invalidity pension	1	1
	Old age pension	4	1
	Unemployment benefits	1	1
	Unknown	1	0
Socioeconomic position	Poor	0	0
	Precarious prosperity	24	17
	Secure prosperity	0	0

(own elaboration)

Table 10: Summary of the Romanian sample characteristics

		2013	2014
Total transcriptions		25	20
Household composition	Widower (single)	1	0
	Couple	7	5
	Couple with kids	7	6
	Lone parent	4	4
	Extended family	6	5
Migration background of at least 1 HH-member		1	1
Main income sources	Salary	12	11
	Invalidity pension	2	2
	Old age pension	11	7
Socioeconomic position	Poor	0	0
	Precarious prosperity	25	19
	Secure prosperity	0	1

(own elaboration)

Concerning the household composition, the samples of the three countries differ: In the Swiss sample, there are more single households than the other household types (often retired people); in the Spanish sample, there is a variety of household types; and in the Romanian sample, there are almost no single households. The extended family is more present in Romania than in the other countries.

People with a migration background are present in the Swiss and Spanish samples, but less so in the Romanian sample (Romania is a country of emigration).

The main income sources in all three country samples are salaries. In Switzerland and Romania, old age pension is also a common main income source in the sample.

All these characteristics were stable over the data collection period. Most of the households also stayed in precarious prosperity. In Switzerland, there were somewhat more households moving up into secure prosperity or down into poverty than in Spain or in Romania.

The interviews required between one and two hours, and are all transcribed completely and verbatim (transcription rules in Appendix 6). They contain information about the household situation (finances, work, education, health, environment, social network), the evaluation of the household situation and its quality of life by the interviewee, and the households' biographies and future prospects (see guideline in Appendix 4). The information gathered is thus retrospective and prospective regarding how these households aimed at maintaining or improving their socioeconomic conditions. Complementing the qualitative interview data, the questionnaire and the household grid are prepared in an SPSS database, and the household grid is also available in an Excel document, which allows for standardizing, to a certain extent, further information (albeit not in as systematic a way) from the qualitative interviews. The analysis of these different data will be explained in the next section.

1.7.6. Analysis

The challenge of the data analysis was to manage the large volume of qualitative data in a systematic way. The first important point was to define clear case selection criteria and research questions for the different analyses (see Tables 1 and 7). The second choice was the method of data analysis.

The analytical approach of the three articles is the same and was chosen in order to grasp the maximum level of meaning from the interviews while still being able to manage comparisons between cases, points in time and countries. It works with elements from the content analysis (Mayring 2000) and from analytic induction according to Znaniecki (1934): We searched for similarities that could point at factors to explain phenomena, and once we had a hypothetical explanation, we tested it with further cases to formulate it more precisely and test it again.

The discussion of results between colleagues was important: On the one hand, the results of the common articles were determined together with all authors; on the other hand, the analyses were regularly discussed with colleagues from the University of Fribourg and presented at the doctoral program PROWEL, where diverse experts gave feedback on the research.

All interviews are coded in MAXQDA – the coding of the Swiss and the Spanish interviews has been controlled and completed by a second coder. Because the coding procedure had already started when I began my dissertation, I worked with a given code system (see Appendix 7). I used the MAXQDA database to construct the thematic charts, which I specifically designed for my analyses (see excerpt in Appendix 8). They constitute a table with a topic (theme) in every column and an interview in every row (Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor 2003:230). Each table cell indicates what one interviewee said on a topic. The topics were identified based on the research questions, the interview content, theories, the literature review and the individual case summaries. The thematic charts were first filled in with citations. Then, a second document was constructed with

summaries of the contextualized citations in order to diminish the size of the document and facilitate the analysis. During the analysis, I went back to the MAXQDA database when I needed to confirm an idea with supplementary data and citations or review the precise context.

Specifically, a thematic chart on household strategies and quality of life with all cases and all waves of interviews was developed. This document enabled selection of the cases, especially for Articles 2 and 3. From this first thematic chart, I excerpted the cases for each specific analysis and completed the table with more columns on new themes, if necessary. Working with thematic charts enabled the systematic comparison of themes across cases, the evolution or stability of a theme within a case over time and the link between themes within cases. This was a fruitful method of analysis for the objectives of the three articles. The main themes for all articles were developed deductively with the help of the theoretical and empirical elements presented above, as well as inductively from the interview data:

- Living conditions and their evaluation: material living standards (financial situation and income), personal activities (work, leisure, care, etc.), education, health, social connections and relationships, environment (housing, etc.)
- Subjective perception of the living conditions, perceived opportunities (state, market, household/family, community)
- Personal issues/biography, household biography/situation, future perspectives
- Strategies for dealing with living conditions and improving quality of life
- Subjective understanding and evaluation of quality of life in the household
- Subjective well-being of the interviewee

As listed, in order to determine the experienced quality of life, we focused on the subjective understanding of quality of life, i.e., what the interviewees said was important in life, what was going well, where they had problems and what opportunities they perceived to have (Camfield 2006; Williams et al. 2014).

Likewise, the interviewees' subjective well-being was evaluated based on the qualitative data. Some of the interviewees reported spontaneously on their well-being in overall evaluations (I am well, I am satisfied, I am not happy, etc.) or in evaluations linked to reports about life domains (health, work, social networks, etc.). If they did not speak about their subjective well-being, the interviewer asked them to evaluate their life domains and how they felt in general.

This method of analysis allowed the interviewer to structure the data without losing the possibility for new elements to emerge, as well as to respond to the three research questions in the articles. During the whole process of screening, sampling, data collection and analysis, ethical principles were respected. They will be explained in the next section.

1.7.7. Ethical framework

It is important to reflect on the ethical principles a researcher wants to respect because it allows one to critically scrutinize his or her actions (see Von Unger 2014:16). The ethical framework concerns the impact research has on others. Because there is no consensus on ethical principles, this chapter explains the most important elements for this dissertation.

The topic of adaptation itself raises ethical issues. If there is adaptation to difficult living conditions, what conclusions do we draw for social policy? The argument could be reversed in the sense that the welfare state is redundant because people adapt and are happy anyway. The question is then what type of society we want and what the criteria are regarding the assessment of how a society is going in the longer term. The relation between individual well-being, societal well-being, social welfare and redistribution in the longer term is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, I assume that the risk of lower collective welfare levels due to individual adaptation and its consequences for societal and individual well-being needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting adaptation (see Graham 2009:215).

The interaction with the interviewees is the second important point in these ethical reflections. We applied the following points in order to be as respectful as possible to the interviewees and their household members:

- The interviewees were informed the first time about the aims of the project and were asked whether they were willing to participate. They had the opportunity to stop participating at any moment of the interview. They were thereafter continuously informed about the progress of the research during the whole research period. Regular letters with New Year's wishes and a summary of results were meant to show our recognition and to be transparent about the research.
- The collected data are treated in strict confidence and anonymized when published or discussed with other researchers. This means that all elements that could allow one to identify a person were removed from or replaced in the transcriptions.
- The topic of "precarious prosperity" was not presented to the interviewees as such because it could lead the interviewees to feel devalued as the concept is not necessarily known beyond the scientific discussion. Instead, we talked about "living conditions."

Finally, the interview and the position and communication of the interviewer requires ethical reflection. The interviewer seeks to construct a confidence base to get as much information as possible, but this also leads to situations in which the interviewer is informed about critical situations (examples could be violence in families, misinformation of people that leads to worse living conditions or other injustices). If this is the case, how does the interviewer act ethically without influencing the evolution of

the case over time? Because I only conducted the last wave of interviews in Switzerland, I had the possibility to inform people about their rights after the interview. The other waves of interviews in Switzerland and in Spain and Romania were partly conducted by master's students in collaboration with the universities. The students were trained for the interviews, and more experienced researchers were there to support them. Nonetheless, they were confronted with a social reality they had not directly known before. In such situations, it is difficult to stay completely neutral, and in some cases, the interviewer happened to give advice. However, because the entire interviews are transcribed, we know what happened during the interviews and can include the information in the analysis.

Researchers have commented on the “therapeutic potential” of qualitative interviews (Thomson and Holland 2003). Even if the interviewer does not give any direct advice, if he or she is an active listener, it can lead to increased awareness of the interviewee. In my opinion, the interviewer cannot totally avoid intervention in the life of the interviewee, but we have to reflect this in the research. Because I am trained in active listening (Rogers and Farson 1987), I applied elements of this technique during the interviews to construct confidence, reduce desirability issues and get information without influencing the type of information too much. However, I was conscious and cautious not to practice active listening as it is used in therapy, namely, to lead people to be aware of their situation in order to provide space for change. Some important tools of active listening are to avoid judgment and advice, to summarize what the interviewee said, to accept silences during the interviews and to be attentive in encouraging nonverbal communication.

Concluding these reflections, I estimate that the research was carried out in an ethically correct and respectful way with all participants.

1.7.8. Summary and implications of the methodological issues

This chapter summarizes the methodological elements with regard to their utility for the objectives of my dissertation.

The three published articles were developed through an iterative process by working alternately on literature, theories and analysis. Cross-national comparative and longitudinal analyses complemented and enriched each other.

The sampling and data collection were the same for all articles. The population group of precarious prosperity with the household as the unit of analysis was identified by means of an income threshold and a deprivation threshold, slightly adapted to the situation in each country. The sampling strategy was a combination of purposeful and random sampling.

The instruments for data collection were developed in collaboration between different researchers and include a household questionnaire, a household grid, a qualitative interview guide and a memento sheet.

The data corpus I disposed is composed of two or three waves of qualitative interviews conducted in three countries between 2008 and 2014. During the first interview, all households were situated in the same socioeconomic position within a specific country frame. The sample was heterogeneous in terms of household composition and income sources, as well as age, profession and origin of the household members. Each of the three articles is based on a different, partly overlapping part of this data corpus.

The interview transcriptions were coded and prepared for analysis in thematic charts. For the analysis, clear case selection criteria were defined for each article. The analytical approach of the three articles is the same and works with elements from the content analysis and analytic induction. This procedure allows for an efficient and systematic analysis and is ready for other researchers to use for further analysis. Overall, the methods of this research were clearly useful for the objectives of my dissertation and respect the ethical principles of qualitative research. The results of these methodological approaches will be discussed in the next chapters.

1.8. Synthesis and overview of the 3 articles

This last chapter of the introduction will synthesize the preceding chapters by giving a short overview of the three published articles and the respective objectives, theoretical approaches and results. By doing so, I will again make explicit how each article contributes to the question of improving quality of life through adaptation.

Article 1

Precariousness and Quality of Life—a Qualitative Perspective on Quality of Life of Households in Precarious Prosperity in Switzerland and Spain

The objective of the first contribution was to identify possible mechanisms that help to explain the way households experience quality of life. Referring to the overall question, this means to investigate whether people in precarious prosperity try to improve their households' quality of life through adaptation. Theoretically, it brings together research on precarious prosperity with quality of life research by linking the objective situation and its opportunity structures on the macro level with the subjective well-being and agency on the micro level to identify the households' quality of life.

The empirical analysis included 24 cases from Lausanne (CH) and 17 cases from Pamplona (ES) over two waves of interviews. It applied a mainly comparative design and resulted in identifying adaptation as a mechanism (among others) to explain the way households experience quality of life. The perceived quality of life depended on important life domains, which varied between the countries: In the Spanish sample, quality of life was related to opportunities for income, work and security to plan ahead; in the Swiss sample, it related to health, work-life balance and loneliness.

Article 2

Amélioration de la qualité de vie à partir de la prospérité précaire. Analyse du rôle des liens sociaux et des stratégies d'adaptation des ménages en Roumanie et en Suisse

The objective of the second contribution was to understand the strategies to improve the quality of life of those households whose members reported a good quality of life. Referring to the overall question, this means to investigate whether adaptation ends up being a successful strategy to improve the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity or if those who perceive a good quality of life use strategies other than adaptation. Theoretically, it applies the concept of social bonds that Serge Paugam (2008) introduced.

The empirical analysis included 17 cases from Bern, Lausanne and Zürich (CH) and 5 cases from Cluj (RO) over three and two waves of interviews, respectively. It applied a comparative longitudinal design and resulted in a better understanding of the household strategies in Switzerland and Romania. While the latter depend mainly on the labor market and their family, the Swiss interviewees perceive a greater scope of agency. Strategies of adaptation effectively come to the fore in both countries when an active modification of the living conditions is not perceived as possible.

Article 3

Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?

The objective of the third contribution was to understand the processes leading to a state of adaptation. Referring to the overall question, this means to investigate when, how and why households in precarious prosperity improve their quality of life through adaptation. Theoretically, it refers to Ruth Lister's (2004) framework on agency.

The empirical analysis included 29 cases from Bern, Lausanne and Zürich (CH) over three waves of interviews. It applied a longitudinal design and resulted in a deeper understanding of how relevant social experiences influence processes of adaptation. The reasoning of people who adapt to their circumstances changes over time. The analysis reveals that adaptation may be conceptualized and understood as a pattern of agency (not complete resignation) to continuously better integrate and conform to the perceived norms.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 consist of these three articles, as they are published in three different peer-reviewed sociological journals. They will be discussed and linked again in the overall conclusion (chapter 5).

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2. Article 1

Precariousness and Quality of Life—a Qualitative Perspective on Quality of Life of Households in Precarious Prosperity in Switzerland and Spain²

Abstract

Households' resources and constraints are key components of quality of life (QOL). QOL also depends on how these are evaluated. In times of crisis one expects subjective well-being and quality of life to decline. We argue that the quality of life depends on objective living conditions, their subjective evaluation and the ability to maintain or improve the situation of "embedded individuals". This ability, in turn, depends on the opportunities provided by the state, labor markets, families and communities. We analyse qualitative interviews (2008–2010) with around 25 households in precarious prosperity in two cities (Pamplona, Spain and Lausanne, Switzerland) to elaborate their QOL. Few sampled Swiss households witnessed a decline in socio-economic status, contrary to the Spanish. Domains important to these households for QOL varied according to the opportunity structures: in the Spanish sample QOL was related to the opportunities for income, work, and security to plan ahead; in the Swiss sample to health, work-life balance and loneliness. In both samples, QOL varied according to scope of agency, people's position within the life course, the households' past experiences, current situation and future perspectives. Lack of future perspectives and opportunities lowered QOL; reframing, adaptation and accepting the situation sometimes moderated QOL. We conclude that apart from living conditions and/or subjective well-being, households' agency within opportunity structures is a promising direction for further research in QOL.

Keywords

Precarious prosperity, ·quality of life, ·Spain, ·Switzerland, ·scope of agency

² Own layout. This article was written by Rebekka Sieber, Monica Budowski and Sebastian Schief. A previous version of it is published in *Applied Research of Quality of Life* (2016), 11, 1035-1058.

2.1. Introduction

The current global economic situation has the potential to seriously influence the quality of life of households: feelings or experiences of uncertainty may arise, or feelings of a change for the worse in financial or social terms (e.g. Carr 2012; S. Drobnič et al. 2010). We investigate the quality of life of households in comparable less advantaged, but not poor, socio-economic conditions in Pamplona (Spain) and Lausanne (Switzerland). As the crisis impacted differently in Spain and Switzerland, we would expect this to reflect in indicators of well-being at the macro level. The World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al. 2013) indeed identifies Spain (-0.750) as one of the countries with the largest decrease in happiness during the last years (along with Italy, Portugal and Greece – which were also strongly affected by the financial crisis), while that of the Swiss rose on average by 0.303 points. Moreover, the average happiness of Spaniards (4.7) was already about 3 points lower (on a 10-point scale) than that of the Swiss in 2005-2007.

Quality of life has generally been measured by quantitative methods (Noll 2002). The call for qualitative research concerning the relationships between objective and subjective information regarding quality of life at the micro-level remains to be addressed (Bartram 2012; Camfield et al. 2009:7; White et al. 2012:773). To investigate how people in similar socio-economic conditions in different contexts experience, assess and pursue their life, qualitative research methods are appropriate; qualitative research has the potential to reveal “precise mechanisms according to which certain well-documented quantitative correlates influence well-being” (Kroll 2014).

We aim to identify possible mechanisms³ that help to explain the way household members experience quality of life. We focus on how households in similar less advantaged socio-economic conditions in two distinct contexts (Lausanne and Pamplona) deal with their situation. We analyze how the macro- and micro-level interact by combining the socio-economic conditions, the opportunity structures (Mackert 2010)⁴, the perception of the situation and the household strategies. The analyses are based on qualitative interviews carried out twice around the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008 with the same households. We hope to shed light on processes leading to subjective well-being (“happiness” or “satisfaction” in quantitative surveys) by embedding individuals into their social and structural context.

³ Following one of the ten definitions of the Webster’s Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989:889), our understanding of the term mechanism for the purpose of our research question is: „the agency or means by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished.“ With this definition, we try to sidestep the vast and on-going debate regarding mechanisms in the social sciences, the natural sciences, and philosophy (for example Hedström and Ylikoski 2010; Hedström and Schwedberg 1998; McKay Illari and Williamson 2012).

⁴ See Mackert (2010) for an overview of the use of the term “opportunity structures”.

Our research questions are:

Is there a relation, and if so of what nature, between the objective situation (welfare regimes, economic situation of the countries, household situation), household strategies and subjective well-being of household members in precarious socio-economic positions?

Do these elements contribute to explaining the household members' perception of the households' quality of life?

Objective situation

The objective situation can be described by a set of macro (welfare regimes, economic situation of a country) and micro circumstances (resources and situation of a household). *Welfare regimes* conceptualize opportunity structures (contexts) by identifying the important domains for providing welfare (the State, the market, the household/family, the community). Each welfare regime structures domains (education, labor market, care etc.) in a specific way (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999) providing people and population groups with distinct opportunities for welfare. The way welfare regimes structure the opportunities also influences how people perceive insecurities (Pacek and Radcliff 2008), how households are affected by external events such as the global financial crisis of 2008, and how they are able to deal with the consequences (Anderson et al. 2012; Amacker et al. 2013).

Welfare regimes thus provide a useful analytic starting point. They embed gendered and culturally based ideas as to which institutional domains of welfare appear most adequate for the provision of services, how this provision should best be organized and which institutional domain should provide it (Pfau-Effinger 2005). Not all socio-economic positions (status) within a country-specific social inequality order benefit in the same way from opportunities provided by different institutional domains. Welfare regimes are thus context-specific; they are also time-bound (Jessop 1996:123). The 2008 financial crisis for example changed the way welfare regimes were able to create opportunity structures.

Since the crisis had a different impact in Switzerland (moderate) and Spain (severe), the opportunities to provide support and security developed in different ways in the two countries. Spain experienced almost a decade of growth since 2000 before it was severely affected by the international financial crisis beginning in autumn 2008. Switzerland was hit too, but recovered quickly, whereas the economy of Spain remained weak and is stuck in a recession. The unemployment rate soared in Spain from 8.4% in 2007 to 20.2 % in 2010 whereas it only slightly increased in Switzerland (3.6 to 4.5% respectively)⁵. Spain's recent expansion of the welfare state was abruptly stopped with the crisis. Spain experienced severe State spending cuts (Banyuls et al. 2009; Banyuls

⁵ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS>. The ILO presents somewhat lower values but for different years (2010: 184–187).

and Recio 2012) and high unemployment, limiting the market opportunities and opportunities for support from the State. Switzerland did not experience these constraints.

Within the socio-economic inequality order, *precarious socio-economic positions* are probably those where many effects of how welfare regimes work crystallize: such positions do not have the financial opportunities to buy services they might need or want, and at the same time are usually not the target of supportive governmental policies (housing, credits, financial support, care opportunities, etc.) nor do they qualify for social assistance. Therefore, we assume that the underlying welfare regime principles structuring socio-economic opportunities are particularly relevant for such positions, in particular in times of crisis.

We focus on households in similar precarious socio-economic positions, defined as adjacent and slightly above the relative poverty line. We consider these relatively-defined same socio-economic positions within the two countries as comparable. Research provides evidence that such positions are particularly prone to experience insecurity and uncertainty to maintain their socio-economic position, and therefore to slip into poverty (originally Hübinger 1996; then Budowski et al. 2010; Groh-Samberg 2010; Whelan 2005; Whelan and Maître 2008; Whelan and Maître 2010). They dispose of a larger range of options for agency compared to poor households in their respective country, but are constrained by limited resources when compared with socio-economically better-off households.

Households are dynamic analytical units consisting of one or more members. Individuals are embedded within the household. Households as unit of analysis have the disadvantage that differences in status, power and conflicts in decision-making among household members are veiled, in particular between men and women and between generations. This might substantially affect individual household members' subjective well-being. However, the advantage of using households as the units of analysis is, that they analytically bridge the micro and macro levels (Wallace 2002): their members live together, organize consumption and contribute in different ways to their material and social reproduction, while households also structure their members' deliberations and actions. We identify agency (the ability to act autonomously (Cobb 2000:12)) by analyzing household strategies.

Household strategies

Household strategies refer to households' ways to maintain or improve their social and economic situation, how members conduct their everyday life within given contexts (Crow 1989; Wallace 2002), how they organize their activities inside and outside their household, adjust or react to events, or transform activities into routines. Members reason and deliberate on their problems and opportunities with their household situation in mind. Such activities and their rationales are embedded and—to a certain extent—bounded by social conventions, values and intra-household power relations as well as by the household's resources and constraints. We expect that household

strategies reflect the perceived ability (i) to influence the situation through action by means of habits and routines derived from the past, (ii) to construct perspectives for the future and (iii) to “contextualize past habits and future moments within the contingencies of the moment” (Emirbayer and Mische 1994:963). Household strategies reveal the perceived scope of agency: they reveal how different types of resources are mobilized in a given context, which resources are lacking, what strategies resources make possible or not at a given point in time and to what extent these are expected to satisfy households’ expectations. Such actions represent the households’ strategies: endeavors and efforts to maintain, influence, or improve the situation in different life domains. Apart from their analytical component, household strategies are basically an empirical concept and require an inductive approach: households need to be asked what they do and why, to understand the sense they make of their own actions and their environment, what opportunities they perceive and what concerns they pursue and prioritize in time and place (Wallace 2002:280-281). Only through the assessment of their resources, constraints and opportunities to act upon their environment, can we grasp their notion of their quality of life given their present living conditions.

Quality of life

Quality of life (QOL) is an elusive concept and it is often used synonymously with subjective well-being or happiness in psychology and economics. We distinguish QOL from subjective well-being. We consider the latter as ‘happiness’ or ‘satisfaction’ of the individual (or the household). The terms do not directly take into account the factual living and life conditions but their evaluation or an emotional state (affect) (e.g. Diener and Suh 1997; Felce and Perry 1995)⁶. The sociological concept of quality of life has a macro and a micro dimension, subjective and objective aspects, and is multidimensional (Noll 1999:3). It is assessed by socio-economic living conditions in various life domains and people’s evaluation thereof (see Alber 2004; Glatzer 1972; Noll 1999; Stiglitz et al. 2009; Zapf 1984). These life domains are interrelated; conditions in one domain may produce spill-over effects to others.

According to Noll (2002:10-11; quoting Cobb 2000:13) who contrasts utilitarian to resource or capability approaches (also human development theory), “utilitarian approaches in Erik Allardt’s terms, are ‘limited to <having>, whereas the human development idea includes <having>, but also encompasses <doing> and <being>’” and thus also emphasizes human action or agency (Sen 2008). We approach QOL by including “having” (living conditions), “being” (such as health or age) and “doing” (political activity, socializing, work, etc.)⁷. Yet we go beyond Sen’s individual QOL by

⁶ Erikson (1988) argues that people adapt to their circumstances; Crettaz and Suter (2013) show empirically that adaptation depends on the measurement (in quantitative studies).

⁷ “Functionings represent parts of the state of a person – in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life. The capability of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection. The approach is based on a view of living as a combination of various ‘doings and

applying a sociological perspective, embedding the individual into his/her household and structural context and taking into account the embedded individuals' accounts of their lives.

In this perspective, people's narration about what would be a good life for them within their household and what they think is important in life (Camfield 2006:4) is as important as are the households' life circumstances, their living conditions, the position within a social inequality order, and the opportunity structures perceived to be available. This approach links the micro and the macro level. QOL also has a temporal dimension: research highlights the importance of past experiences, present opportunities (e.g. Felce and Perry 1995) and the future (e.g. Piper 2014) for the perception of the opportunities and these, in turn, depend on (changing) structural conditions (e.g. also the financial crisis).

In the following section, we describe the conceptual framework that guides our research (section 2). The data and methods are presented in section 3. Section 4 depicts the analyses of the interviewed households' quality of life. In the conclusion (section 5), we compare the perceived quality of life of households within and between the countries.

2.2. Conceptual framework⁸

In our understanding, QOL depends on the opportunity structures provided by a given context, the availability and accessibility of resources *as well as* their assessment. In other words, QOL depends on the relationship between agency – i.e. the ability to influence one's life and capability to act, and structure – i.e. (the framework) shaping the varied opportunities for agency and the perception of this relationship. We analyze the subjectively perceived role which resources and opportunities play to shape everyday life. Living conditions and households' resources interweave with subjective well-being, resulting in an experienced quality of life of a household⁹. In order to understand the relationship between these elements, we include the households' perception of its scope of agency.

Illustration 3 summarizes this conceptual framework to analyze quality of life (that is elaborated thereafter): at the macro level, opportunity structures (welfare regime, economic situation of the country) provide the broader framework and principles. Households vary regarding the non-material resources and specific household situations (needs, aims, ambitions, problems) at the micro level (we compare households in similar

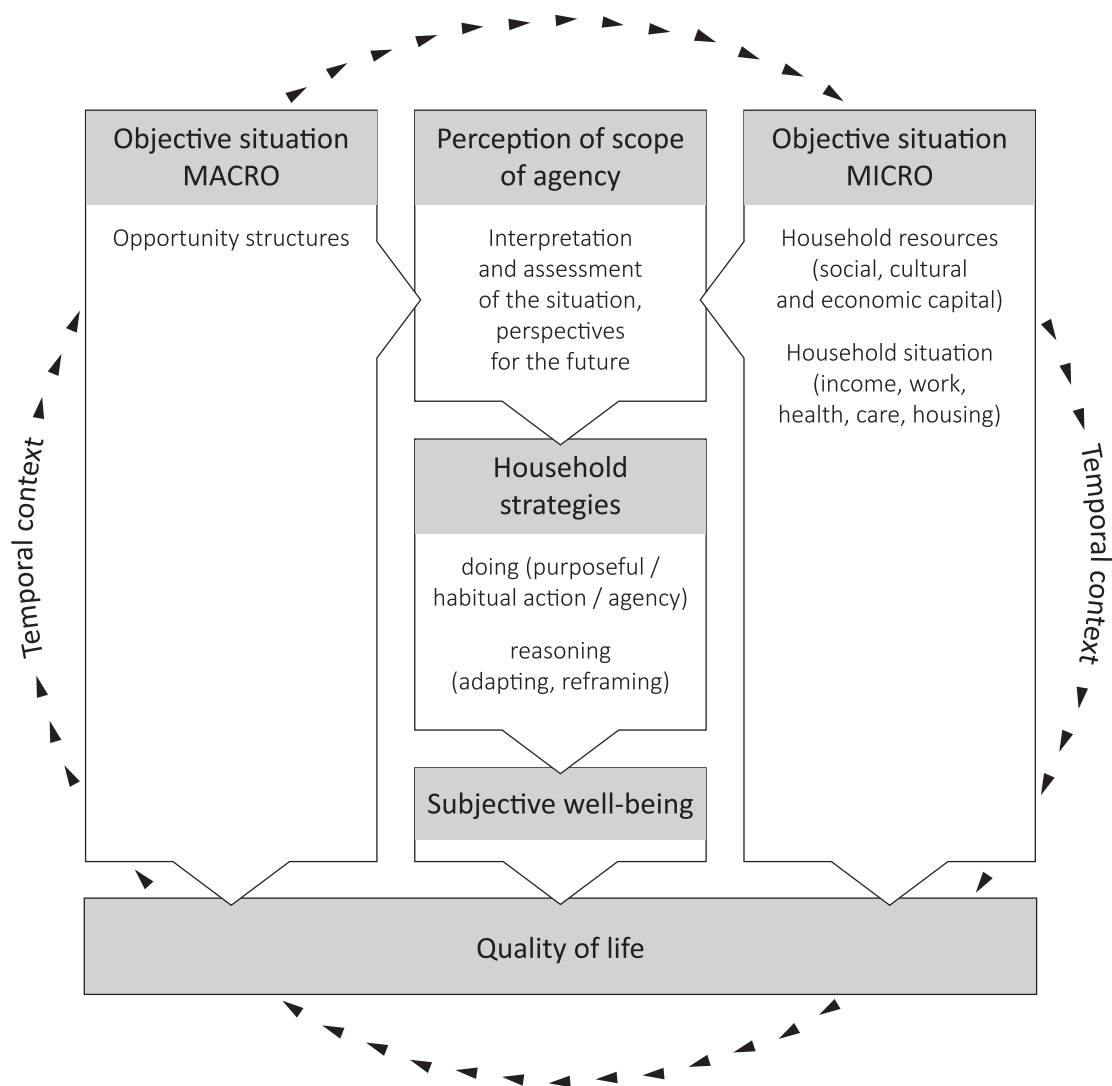
beings', with quality of life to be assessed in terms of the capability to achieve valuable functionings" (Sen 2008: 171).

⁸ Maxwell (2013:39) defines the conceptual framework as "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs" research. It may be understood "as a set of key concepts and interrelationships organised in a way that reflects aspects of a process or system, and which helps us guide our choice of methods and research design" (Vesely 2008:494).

⁹ In contrast to Veenhoven's (2000) concept of four qualities of life, living conditions and household's resources are not seen as *quality* of life but as *conditions* for quality of life.

socio-economic conditions). To grasp the households' ability to influence their situation, it is important to analyze what they perceive their scope of agency to be. This is revealed by their assessment and interpretation of their situation (at micro level) and the opportunities they perceive to have (provided by institutions at the macro level). This framework enables the identification of household strategies that feed into the subjective well-being. All these elements change over time (temporal context) and contribute to the quality of life of the household.

Illustration 3: Conceptual framework for the qualitative analysis of quality of life



(own illustration)

Based on this framework, the following assumptions and expectations underlie our research¹⁰:

- Previous research shows that rather secure and predictable objective conditions (welfare state, economic situation, household situation) which allow for planning are key components of quality of life (e.g. Geissler 2007; Pacek and Radcliff 2008; Schöneck et al. 2011; Wood 2006). Quality of life should therefore be enhanced if individuals or households are able to maintain or improve current material conditions and their social position in a society, whereas the lack of the ability to plan would rather lead to anxiety and worries which may spill over from one domain to another (Bassi et al. 2012; Drobnič et al. 2010).
- The global financial crisis of 2008 changed the objective conditions; therewith it has the potential to impact on subjective well-being and QOL. Although everybody may be affected by such changes, specific positions within the social-inequality order are more strongly affected than others (Mackert 2010), in particular the population in precarious socio-economic conditions. Due to the strong and enduring impact of the crisis in Spain in contrast to the rather short impact of the crisis in Switzerland, we expect differences regarding the households' QOL in our samples in Lausanne and Pamplona.
- The conceptual framework suggests that quality of life results from the interplay of living conditions and subjective well-being. As people position themselves and their households within a social and spatial context with distinct opportunities and constraints, we assume that the perceived scope of agency is an important mechanism to better understand quality of life. Households and their members assess, deliberate, negotiate, and take action (Williams et al. 2014 [1999]:167) with their particular resources and constraints in mind. Hence, to detect how people and their households experience their QOL, we account not only for their resources, but also for their assessments and valuations of their perceived scope of agency (Camfield et al. 2009:7). This should reveal mechanisms that help to unpack the way they experience quality of life.

¹⁰ The data we analyze were collected within a project focusing on household strategies and not quality of life. From the results of previous research and theories, we elaborated a conceptual framework that makes our perspective explicit, clarifies our assumptions and expectations and guides the analysis of the data without determining the perspective. Our analysis is deductive (guided by the conceptual framework) and inductive (from the information given by the respondents).

2.3. Methods

The data were gathered within the project “A Comparative Perspective on Strategies of Households in Precarious Living Conditions in Four Countries” financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF, Grant no. 116605). We analyzed the qualitative interviews of households in two cities: Pamplona, Spain (t1: 2009, n=24; t2: 2010, n=17), and Lausanne, Switzerland (t1: 2008, n=25; t2: 2009, n=24). To obtain the defined population group, households were sampled in purposefully selected lower-middle-income neighborhoods according to expert interviews and statistics available. Households were screened by means of a random selection of telephone numbers. The criteria for screening were the combination of an income measure and a scale of items of deprivation (Budowski et al. 2010). To establish the final sample from those eligible, we selected according to the diversity of household composition. Within the household, we asked to interview an adult person who was knowledgeable about the situation. Sometimes the interview was conducted with two people (e.g. couple or a mother and daughter). Our information was collected by ‘individuals embedded in households’ and represents a specific perspective of the quality of life experienced by a household. In Switzerland, we interviewed the households just before and during the onset of the global financial crisis (spring/autumn 2008) and again in autumn and winter in 2009; in Spain, the interviews were carried out in spring 2009 and in autumn 2010.

The information gathered is retrospective and prospective on how these households aimed at maintaining or improving their socio-economic conditions. Having information from two points in time allows analyzing beyond a ‘snapshot’ of the situation that interviews at one point in time provide. Topics were the actual household circumstances, difficulties, resources and assets, how they managed everyday life, what their expectations and plans were, and the household trajectory, including important events and changes between the first and second interviews.

We carried out the analyses by working inductively and deductively applying thematic charts on the following themes (Ritchie and Lewis 2003): a) Living conditions and their evaluation; b) strategies to deal with living conditions and to improve life; c) future perspectives and d) the meaning, reasoning and assessments provided for the strategies in the current situation, in order to grasp how the households assess their scope of agency, their quality of life, and with regards to which points of reference (Williams et al. 2014 [1999]) in time, in place or socially.

To elaborate the experienced quality of life, we focused on what the interviewees said was important in life (Camfield 2006:4; Williams et al. 2014 [1999]), what was going well, where they had problems, what opportunities they perceived (scope of agency in a given context), what strategies they adopted to resolve these problems and what perspectives they felt they had.

In a second step, we sought connections between the scope of agency and the household specific resources and constraints. We distinguished between what ‘facts’ informants told us about and how they interpreted and assessed them (subjective evaluation of opportunities and constraints as well as satisfaction with the domain or

situation). We developed thematic charts to identify/illustrate different patterns of agency (action, adaptation/reframing, resignation) and their logics for the household. These patterns were combined with the households' perspectives and what the situation meant for them. From this empirically grounded approach, we were able to identify some mechanisms of how objective living conditions and subjective well-being were linked and how the interviewed households experienced their quality of life. From an analytical point of view, this procedure suggests that objective aspects (the welfare regime, the economic situation of the country, the households' resources and constraints) *and* subjective aspects (assessments, interpretations, agency and well-being) contribute to quality of life.

2.4. Results

We limit our analyses to the strategies concerning those life domains in which the households in Lausanne and Pamplona declared to have the greatest problems: health, work, finances, work-life-balance and care, and housing. In Lausanne, the problems in these domains were rather straight-forward with only a few spill-overs into other domains. In Pamplona, most households had cumulated problems, generally with one or two separate salient problems. These problems led to spill-overs into other domains. Unsurprisingly, nearly all households talked about financial problems. In Lausanne, health and work¹¹ were the major issues, always simultaneously linked with financial problems. In Pamplona, the major issues were work and income, but most households had to deal with two problems simultaneously and also further spill-overs.

In the following sections, we describe the households according to the domain in which their major problem was the spill-over into other domains and the households' possibilities to improve quality of life via the opportunity structures. There were 1) households with health problems of at least one member, 2) households with a difficult work situation, 3) households with financial problems only, 4) households with problems to find a work-life-balance, 5) households with housing problems and 6) households not perceiving problems.

2.4.1 Health problems

Health was a core problem in eight Lausanne households (CH07, CH08, CH09, CH10, CH13, CH14, CH18, CH21) and two Pamplona households (ES08, ES03). In two more Pamplona households, a health problem developed in combination with other problems (ES18, ES06). In both cities, health problems spilled over into the financial domain and were experienced as limiting the quality of life.

¹¹ "[W]ork is a core activity in a society and being in paid employment is consistently ranked as one of the most important determinants of a high quality of life in Europe" (S. G. R. Drobnič, Ana M. 2011:233).

Although households in Lausanne did not have other resources to buffer the health impact on the financial situation (e.g. household members that could work, other income sources), state transfers by means of disability or old-age pension alleviated feelings of insecurity. The pension income was low but sufficient to make ends meet; this led to a positive attitude towards the welfare state.

"When I see how much difficulties people have to find a job, I have to say I'm lucky to be retired now. [...] The SUVA (accident insurance) pays me a pension. If I add the pensions of the SUVA and the invalidity pension, I get 80 to 90% of my former salary." (CH18, t1, 2008)

As household members with health problems were not integrated in the labor market anymore, their quality of life was not affected by working conditions. At the same time, not all households managed to accept their situation: some felt excluded from work and social relationships.

"I don't have anybody. I'm really totally alone to get through." (CH13, t1, 2008)

Their scope of agency was limited because they did not know how their health would evolve, but their income was assured by the State. As a consequence, the Swiss households did not need to adopt other strategies to make ends meet. They had stopped planning the future.

"I live from month to month, from day to day. I won't make plans for the next year or think about what I will do in ten years - except if my health will change. But now we live from day to day." (CH07, t1, 2008)

These households had no future perspectives, and experienced a lot of frustration and suffering (from illness).

"My life? It's only to bear the pains and, euh, to be all alone. It's true that there are days when I am discouraged." (CH10, t1, 2008)

When compared with the other households in the Swiss sample, the quality of life of households with health problems seemed to be lowest. They had the fewest opportunities, least subjective well-being, lacked plans for the future and perceived no perspectives to improve their situation.

In Pamplona, a pension-aged woman with health problems (ES03) had a widow pension that was too low to live off. Her children also supported her financially. Health and too low an income were experienced as obstacles to socialize more and led to frustration; she lived from “day to day”.

A second household with a couple in their fifties with a child (ES08) was confronted with the husband’s serious health problems a decade previously. His subsequent disability required a complete reorganisation of the household’s income sources. The household experienced downward socio-economic mobility despite the 100% disability pension and the wife’s (very fulfilling) self-employment. Their quality of life (economic problems, problems within the family) was then substantially affected at the onset of the husband’s health problems. However, at the time of the survey, it was the unreliable labor market that threatened their prospects.

“His illness has triggered all this [...] the economic problems and in particular family problems. [...] Because of [the unreliable labor market] this uncertainty, if I have a job now, who knows if I might not have any job at all or no formal job later on. We are all in the same boat, I see it with my family, they are on fixed contracts, but they don’t know till when, they don’t know what will happen.”
(ES08, t1, 2009)

Should the household need support, they would first resort to the family for help and consider social assistance in the worst case. However, the household had the impression that its profile would never quite fit the criteria for state support, so state support did not really seem to be an option.

“I would seek help from my family and if for some reason that would not be possible, if I would not have any other opportunities, I’d go to social assistance. [...] They select very clearly defined and specific profiles ... this makes every application difficult; they always create problems for you, something that does not fit. They don’t accept any variation that might exist within a profile.” (ES08, t1, 2009)

Through processes of adaptation, reframing, and slight health improvements, this household’s situation had stabilized at a lower level. The interviewee felt proud that they had managed the situation and felt they had regained in quality of life. The economic crisis in Spain and uncertainty regarding their income were major problems. Uncertainties were addressed by actively seeking solutions where possible (e.g. the interviewee would apply for stable jobs despite her age and fear of loss of work satisfaction), and also by adapting and reframing (building perspectives).

In summary: the ability and opportunities for household members to work or potential for support from the family beyond the household moderated the impact of the low level of financial income provided by the State. Quality of life as experienced in the

Spanish cases varied: it seemed important to be able to manage the situation and invest in domains where they felt something could be done or achieved (even if these domains were curtailed by the crisis).

2.4.2 A difficult work situation

Work was a difficult life domain for five households in Lausanne (CH03, CH04, CH12, CH19, CH23) and eleven households in Pamplona (work being the major problem among the households ES02, E04, E05, ES06, ES17, ES11, ES16, ES20, E22; and with it as a spill-over problem among others: ES15, E21).

In Lausanne, all five households were affected by insecure employment conditions and times of unemployment and/or by perceived pressure and stress at the workplace, which clearly worsened their quality of life.

"I can't bear that stress any more, but I just can't say this in my job, because journalism without stress doesn't exist." (CH04, t1, 2008)

"It is really a strain. [...] When you nurse the patient at home, you are alone with him - which means alone with big responsibilities, alone in a job that is a physical and - even more - a psychological strain." (CH12, t1, 2008)

"All I want is to work, to have a stable life." (CH23, t2, 2009)

The work problems were associated with income insecurity and financial problems, often at specific periods of the year, when there was less work available (e.g. in summer for the journalist or in winter for a man working in the construction sector). Other life domains were not explicitly perceived as problematic – however, they all talked indirectly about how their insecure jobs spilled over to worries concerning health (would they be able to resist the pressure in the long-term?) and isolation (they lack time to maintain their social network because they had to work so much).

In these households, no other member could compensate the lack of income: two cases (CH19, CH23) were households with an immigration background and their educational certificate was not recognized in Switzerland. The other three households (CH03, CH04, CH12) were single households or lone parents. They experienced particular stress, insecurity and pressure at work, as they had no partner to rely on who could also contribute to income. Most of these households with work problems linked their difficulties to the global financial crisis. Being independent workers or working in professions particularly affected by the crisis (e.g. independent journalist or construction worker), they perceived their scope of agency as being limited by the economic situation.

"Maybe, if the global situation, the society, the economic system - I don't know - if people earn well, if life is stable and if there is no crisis, perhaps people will use taxis." (CH19, t2, 2009)

These interviewees tried to work as much as possible to make ends meet without external help. As market opportunities were only partially available, they had the welfare state in mind as a "lender of last resort". There was a positive attitude towards the welfare state and they knew there would be unemployment benefits when needed.

"Life is work, work is life. [...] In Switzerland, there is a social system, they give you money, they pay the rent, the bills, the insurances, all this. Thus, 'having nothing' does not exist." (CH19, t2, 2009)

Compared to the households with another type of main problem, households with difficult work situations experienced their quality of life as moderate; they saw some opportunities to manage their socioeconomic well-being with the State as "lender of last resort", but they felt constantly threatened by unforeseen events like the crisis.

In Pamplona, a large range of households was affected by work problems: households with young people, people in pre-pension age and immigrants with and without work permits. Amongst almost all households, there were spill-over effects from work problems into other domains. *Young people* sharing their flat (or exceptionally living alone) complained about the difficulties to get a stable job corresponding to their qualification, and about not being able to become independent and live the way they wanted to.

"We three young people living here together, I think we are living through a very difficult moment regarding work, very difficult, because no work will provide you with a stability over time nor with a decent wage, so we are living in constant insecurity and from day to day. You can't make plans from now to a year from now, at least economically." (ES22, t1, 2009)

Most young people responded by investing in education, seeking work, mutual solidarity, applying for State help that was rarely granted, and if so, rarely paid out. Some interviewees adapted by 'keeping what they have' even if the job criteria were below their qualifications; others deplored the insecurity. Those who managed to have a stable job felt privileged and stressed the value of the security of their contract, even if the wage was barely sufficient.

"I have continued studying to achieve an even higher education to be able to get a better job, but doing this and not being able get a better job, well ... this is due to the crisis. [...] [My job] is more or less stable but it also has to do with the situation of the labor market, they reduced my time to one and a half days per week." (ES20, t2, 2010)

The analysis reveals that education and work among young people were considered important assets to assure their quality of life. Despite bleak prospects, young people still had hope that the situation would improve. The stage in the life course seemed to allow young people to imagine a (better) future ahead.

Households in *pre-pension age* varied regarding their evaluation of their situation. Members became unemployed, became pre-pensioned or could not change their workplace. The interviewees felt obliged to accept whatever job they managed to get and were partly resigned.

“What makes the situation complicated is, evidently, the bad economic situation in general. It is very different in a home when all working age members are working and live a life based on the work schedule than when the situation is bad and almost all members are unemployed.” (ES06, t1, 2009)

“[In order to avoid very long commuting hours] I would have to find a new job, but I cannot, I cannot, because I have a fixed contract and if I would find a job here and leave the other job, I am at an age at which they won’t take me anymore, so I will be working here till I become pensioned.” (ES11, t1, 2009)

“[I]t could be better, but if you cannot influence the situation directly, all you can do is adapt and that’s it.” (ES06, t1, 2009)

Some households relied on other household members’ resources and on their rights from the State as working citizens (widow, invalidity or old age pension). The analysis of these households reveals that they evaluated their living conditions with respect to future prospects: approaching pensionable age with sufficient income in the near future relieved current problems and enabled positive perspectives, otherwise not.

“[Y]ou know some situations pass, like that you have to face some expenses and so on [...]. Well in our case it will be better, because we will have liberated ourselves from various expenses [children, mortgage].” (ES11, t1, 2009)

If prospects were poor due to health problems, cut-backs in salary or due to the crisis, then the future looked bleak. Future perspectives impacted on the way the households assessed their well-being: for instance whether the scope of agency to improve a situation was perceived available or not (ES11), whether the situation was considered transitory (ES07) or rather impossible to change. The latter case led to adapting to the situation (ES09).

Most *immigrants*¹² with work problems emphasized the opportunities they have received in Spain from the State and NGOs. Nonetheless, they experienced the crisis presently and were very worried about the future. They had networks with citizens of their country of origin, were active in NGOs or made use of governmental services for migrants or courses.

“If I lose my job, then we are really screwed up [the interviewee and the two unemployed country mates living with him whom he supports].” (ES05, t2, 2010)

Their view towards the State and the opportunities provided were rather positive (when compared towards their country of origin, in terms of support, implementation of laws, etc.). Despite rather deprived living conditions, most migrant interviewees assessed their life to be more or less working. They mentioned benefiting from one or other situation and to have some form of perspectives for the future. They were active (having migrated, seeking work opportunities, legalization, further education, achieving something, supporting each other etc.), they adapted and accepted (because there were few alternatives or they had few options or because of the crisis) and they reframed their assessment of the situation (using their country of origin as a reference and the opportunities or constraints they would face there).

“[I]f I think, considering the crisis as a foreigner, well in my country there are several substantial problems, because here there is a lot of help for the Spanish people, so I think that the situation is much more difficult in other countries. Things like this will pass here.” (ES16, t1, 2009)

The way immigrants dealt with the situation seemed similar regardless of household composition, age or stage in life. It could be argued that it was a particular selection of people who decided to migrate. A naturalized single man having achieved a certain standard of living was currently standing at the crossroads of the decision on whether to stay in Spain or return to his country of origin because he was experiencing downward mobility.

“Many of my friends have returned to their country. So, I too, I have to think about this decision. I don’t know what to do. [...] My preoccupation is that if it continues for several years, and we will have to deal with the situation, the lack of jobs and you can’t find a job [...] there were a lot, because in my work and in view of the critical situation and as the management saw no way out, they laid

¹² Immigrant households with work permit are: ES19: Ecuador, ES04: Ecuador, nationalized Spanish, ES05: Senegal, ES13: Colombia, ES15: Colombia; without work permits: ES05: Senegal, ES16: Peru. A qualitative study on crisis-ridden Spain further differentiates the populations and finds that undocumented workers and “immigrant workers experience greater precariousness”; they are pushed to extreme precariousness, that “will probably also have an impact on the physical and mental health of these workers” (Porthé et al. 2010:422-423).

off a whole bunch of us. I was kind of used to work and to receiving a certain amount of money that helped me for everything, a good salary.” (ES04, t2, 2010)

In summary: quality of life varied substantially amongst the households with work problems in Pamplona; it seemed to depend on whether and what opportunities they saw to manage their socioeconomic well-being, on whether they thought they could ‘muddle through’ in some way or another as times would change. Nonetheless, the effects of the global financial crisis in Spain threatened them all.

2.4.3 Only financial problems

Four households in Lausanne (CH05, CH15, CH17, CH22, all migrants) and two households in Pamplona (ES01, pension, socially integrated; ES10 very old couple) reported financial problems that were not combined with other problems.

In Lausanne, the households’ financial problems were due to low salaries, low social transfers (pensions) or high costs for children. The people who were employed were mainly in stable jobs. Households with double-earners felt somewhat more secure than single-earner households. Their difficult financial situation did not seem to spill over to other life domains. Their scope of agency and quality of life could be enhanced only if they had a higher level of income through pensions or salaries. Households with pensions in Switzerland had almost no perspective to improve their situation over time. Households with members working did not consider the State as an option to seek support.

“Who wants to work, finds a job in Switzerland. In Switzerland, if you don't want to have problems, you have to work. The social insurances won't give you anything.” (CH22, t2, 2009)

If the labor market did not offer possibilities to earn enough money, migrant households sometimes re-framed their situation by comparing their current situation in Switzerland with that in their country of origin.

“I know well misery, the poverty of a country – I grew up in Latin America. Here you have economic wealth, but you have human misery. But we are happy not to be in this human misery, we feel very well, we're just limited by the finances.” (CH15, t1, 2008)

Being a migrant led to a higher rating of their quality of life in Switzerland, not least because they even had the option of returning to their country of origin if they could not make ends meet. Apart from their financial problems, their quality of life seemed to be rather high.

In Pamplona two households had financial problems only: they both received very low (old age or widow) pensions, supplemented by an additional (financial) support from their children and from the State of Navarra. Also the State of Navarra provided some in-house care. Similarly to households receiving pensions in Switzerland, Spanish households had no perspectives for improving their material living conditions. One widowed single-woman household (ES01) 'adapted' socially, she is a very active volunteer in the community, and therefore she felt socially integrated. Yet she felt substantially deprived overall and particularly ashamed to receive the supplemental financial support from the State.

"I am not satisfied because it is a shame that someone becomes a widow and they give you 45% of your husband's salary as widow pension (€520). Then the government gives me some supplementary help of €115." (ES01, t1, 2009)

The couple of the other household (ES10) was old and fragile (aged between 80 and 90). They had accepted life the way it is (help from their son, children and external care) without seeking further perspectives.

2.4.4 Problems to find a work-life balance

Four households in Lausanne (CH11, CH16, CH24, CH25) and one household in Pamplona (ES19) had some form of work-life-balance problem. In Lausanne, the care and health of children was a problem that spilled over into the work and financial domain in a negative way. Cumulated problems and psychological fragility reinforced the households' already insecure situation and rendered a balance between the different life domains difficult.

"There is what happened to my daughter (sexual abuse), there is the fact that my husband is alcoholic. There is my disease. Anyway, these three points have changed the course of our life at different levels." (CH11, t1, 2008)

"[T]here is a little bit the feeling of being crushed between the young children and my parents who have demands, nevertheless. To reconcile everything that's not possible." (CH16, t1, 2008)

The scope of agency is perceived as limited when the children are at home and not yet independent. In contrast to Spain (Budowski and Schief 2014), problems regarding childcare in Switzerland are not linked to the global financial crisis; childcare problems seem to lead to a negative attitude towards the Swiss welfare state that provides too little support for families¹³. There is a lack of adequate state support and the household members do not earn enough money to buffer risks, only the community can buffer problems with emotional and sometimes financial support.

¹³ The public child-care system in Switzerland is relatively underdeveloped (Holtmann et al. 2012:91).

"We don't have a lot of support in Switzerland and, well, with only one salary you can't get through. So, uuh, yes, I think it is a bit complicated. [...] I was looking for a self-help group of parents, but this didn't exist, so we created a self-help group ourselves." (CH25, t2, 2009)

Apart from that, the households adapt to their situation and limit their expenses as far as possible. The quality of life experienced among this group seemed low.

In Pamplona, the household's work-life problems resulted from the working time schedules (rotating shifts between the couple), childcare and opportunities for self-fulfillment in terms of time (for further education and opportunities for the child in this case).

"You have three shifts so it is difficult to do anything. I would like to finish my studies or follow courses from a university at distance, but this way I simply can't [...I would like] my son to be able to do some sport like three days a week, but it is not possible this way." (ES19, t1, 2009)

Other than that, a number of households mentioned issues regarding work-life-balance problems that were related to the global financial crisis; having to work in the jobs available, regardless how time-consuming they might be (e.g. in terms of commuting) or in terms of time spent seeking work, they had no opportunity for leisure due to financial constraints.

2.4.5 Housing

Housing did not seem to be a pressing problem for the interviewed households in Lausanne. In Pamplona, alongside the problem of qualified stable work, housing was a major problem for most households with young (Spanish) people sharing a flat (ES20, ES21, ES22, ES24). A qualified stable job, however, was more important than housing. Only work seemed to allow for some type of planning, as they felt they did not qualify for state support if they were younger than 25 years old; however, there were opportunities for some to receive support from a governmental program to become independent.

"A lot of young people live here, we have a lot of friends; we help each other a lot. But regarding the institutional support, the truth is that we young people do not qualify because you have to be older than 25." (ES22, t1, 2009)

"I had the opportunity to [...] live alone [thanks to the social housing funding scheme] [...] the truth is that about 95% of the young people have problems to become independent and live on their own [...]." (ES02, t1, 2009)

There was one exception where housing was the main problem: a young couple (ES14) experienced the loss of their mortgaged house through fire. This event triggered their financial¹⁴, couple, work-related and work-life related problems, as it pushed them over their financial limits. The global financial crisis aggravated the problem. Although the couple was desperate and first focused on working as many hours as possible to decrease their financial debts (first interview), they seem to have resigned a year later (second interview). The young man, basically in charge of earning the salary, opted for a trade-off between trying to make ends meet at the end of the month, his health, and his work-life balance. The applied strategy did not fulfil their expectations.

"Formerly I worked weekends, now not! Formerly I couldn't make ends meet at the end of the month and I cannot do it now either, so it is the same bottleneck in the end." (ES14, t2, 2010)

This household did not rely on the State and did not want to ask for help; however, help was accepted when offered (e.g. a cheaper apartment from a friend); they adapted by reinterpreting and reframing their situation.

"I love one quality she (his partner) has: she does not allow me to be sad for such things like not having money or not being able to make ends meet. [...] [In order to be happy, the interviewee is writing a book:] It is a dream that is free of cost; you wake up every morning saying you are obliged to the people who want to read my book. Hey, and I love this, it really works!" (ES14, t2, 2010)

2.4.6 No problems

Four households in Lausanne (CH01, CH02, CH06, CH20) and two households in Pamplona (ES12, ES13) had no substantial problems. Their situations varied. Communalities of the households in Switzerland are that they have high social and cultural capital, are active and have a positive attitude.

"I am a very autonomous and very independent person, so it is clear that I get through well." (CH01, t1, 2008)

"I found plenty of people who helped me a lot, at the social assistance or at the unemployment benefits service." (CH20, t1, 2008)

Despite (objective) difficulties regarding the work situation of at least one household member, these households consciously adapted to their situation, so their subjective well-being was high.

¹⁴ A trial with the house insurance for compensation was on-going at the time of both interviews.

"I am very satisfied with my life. [...] I think my life would change a lot if I had a lot of money, but it is no problem to live my life right now without a million Euros." (CH1, t1, 2008)

"Actually, I still can buy what I want and there are a lot of people who can't. That's why I say I feel well where I am." (CH02, t2, 2009)

This situation corresponds to a kind of precariousness regarding the living conditions but it was not perceived as problematic because the household members knew they could rely on the State in case of need.

[Nurse, working on call]: "Well, my personal work situation suits me perfectly. I want to work like that. I always did it like that and I always got through very well like that. I am very satisfied with how it runs at work." (CH01, t1, 2008)

[Explains why he would have no problem to ask for state support]: "I am Swiss, I have a Swiss passport, so I know that I never - maybe it's easy to say - it's not in the sense that I want to take advantage of the system." (CH06, t1, 2008)

Their confidence in the opportunities of the labor market was high (due to high cultural capital and no risks cumulating); should they fail on the labor market, they could mobilize their social network. As a consequence, they were able to plan, there were perspectives for the future and a feeling of mastering of the situation. Their quality of life was the highest in our sample.

[Their wish for the future]: "That we continue well, that we feel well, as we do so far." (CH20, t1, 2008)

In Pamplona, we interviewed two households with no problems; both were couples with high cultural and social capital. A Spanish couple (ES12) had a daughter studying abroad (they had accomplished their responsibility towards her education), their work and life as a couple was going well. They were able to pursue aims of self-fulfillment, building on what they had achieved in the past, they were doing well at present and perceived perspectives and opportunities in the future. The migrant couple with working permits (ES13) was young and highly educated. They compared their opportunities in Spain with their country of origin, highlighting how large their scope of agency (albeit legally complicated and burdensome) in Spain was. Therefore, they wanted to contribute to change their environment for the better.

"As our life has been so satisfying professionally and personally in the sense that we have been able to do what we want to, for example in our enterprise [...] we want to contribute our grain of sand to change the mentality of dependence [on the State] that exists in this country." (ES13, t2, 2010)

The two couples were socially integrated; they had accomplished or were accomplishing various aims; they were focused on the opportunities of the labor market, so they felt they were doing well. The State had more of a constraining role regarding self-employment, and communities and the household were important. The larger family was less a topic as the two couples had their own resources (education, social network and household).

2.5. Conclusion

Whether and how the objective situation (welfare regimes, economic situation of the countries, household situation) and the subjective perception of the opportunities relate to the households' quality of life was our research question. We explored the mechanisms that might be at play by means of a conceptual framework that connected the objective situation, the household strategies, subjective well-being and quality of life. We focused on households in precarious socio-economic positions where we assumed the effects concerning the way welfare regimes work to surface. Based on the conceptual framework, we argued that opportunity structures and households' quality of life might be linked by means of the scope of agency households perceive to have. Subjective well-being represents the evaluation of the households' situation, whereas quality of life results from the way households are able to deal with their situation in the light of the opportunities they perceive to have.

Empirically, we analyzed household strategies and living conditions and elaborated what quality of life means for about 25 households interviewed twice around the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 in two cities, Pamplona and Lausanne. We applied a qualitative approach that emphasizes subjective accounts of how people are doing and feeling. Apart from gathering factual information regarding current living conditions, our aim was to reveal what households do to maintain or improve their socio-economic positions. We (mostly) interviewed one person ("embedded individuals") about what he/she perceived as positive or desirable for the household, what he/she thought was negative or lacking and how satisfied he/she was with these different issues with respect to their household. The analysis of the household strategies revealed crucial problems in various life domains, how they were linked to other domains, and how they spilt over from one life domain to another. It also brought to the fore the structural opportunities the households perceived to have and their strategies to address their problems. We interpreted this information by taking into account the households' individual conditions and subjective well-being. By comparing the results of our analysis grounded in these subjective accounts in connection with the households' more factual current socio-economic situation, we elaborated how the households experienced their quality of life.

Our approach is novel in that it tries to unpack the existing relationship between objective conditions and subjective well-being by including opportunity structures and introducing the notion of the "perceived scope of agency" revealed through household

strategies. Empirically, the analysis reveals the way households argued about, acted within and experienced their current state of quality of life.

Opportunity structures

The households in the two cities were in similar socio-economic situations and had similar difficulties to improve their quality of life. The results suggest that opportunity structures influence the households' interpretation and assessment of the situation and their perspectives for the future in different ways in the two cities. A number of the sampled households in Spain perceived the 2008 global financial crisis to reduce their scope of agency by limiting their opportunities; they faced work-related problems. In Lausanne, the sampled households seemed to experience the crisis less strongly; moreover, the problems and resources at the micro level seemed to be more important for quality of life. On the one hand, health problems and/or stressful work situations hampered planning in everyday life. On the other hand, being conscious of the household members' cultural and/or social capital was considered a resource and enabled perceiving a higher quality of life.

Structural opportunities became clearly visible in the way the sampled households assessed the extent to which seeking support from the State or/and the labor market's opportunities and/or relying on organizations and the family might be successful. Due to the strong impact of the economic crisis in Spain, the perceived lack of, low level, conditional or unreliable state support and difficulties to access the labor market, the households' problems seem to emerge independently in various domains. They cumulate, and are aggravated when they spill over to other domains. This situation is less the case for the sampled households in Switzerland, where problems did not cumulate to the same extent. The majority of the interviewees in Lausanne considered the State as a "lender of last resort" for employed people and a stable, reliable support for the retired. However, this notion was dependent on the households' subjective perception of the State; this varied, in particular amongst migrant households in Switzerland, as some rejected the State as a last resort, while others emphasized exactly this function.

Scope of agency

The results both from the Spanish and from the Swiss sample (Pamplona and Lausanne) suggest that perceived scope of agency is very important to improve living conditions, to achieve subjective well-being and perceive a better quality of life. If action ("doing") in response to the global financial crisis or the limited opportunities in the labor market was not considered or experienced as a successful endeavor, agency changed from action to either adapting and accepting the situation, reframing it in another way, or resignation. Although a few sampled households did not accept their objectively deprived and precarious situation, almost no households voiced their concern through a political process or protest. If efforts aimed at improving the viability of the

household's strategies succeeded, it enhanced feelings of increasing quality of life. In addition to this, reframing ambitions ('downsizing', dreaming, seeing the positive side of the issues or doing what was possible), or projecting prospects of improvement into the future (in particular for older people waiting for their pension, or for young people) allowed for postponing satisfaction for the future without questioning and feeling menaced by the current situation too much.

Life course

The sampled households' answers clearly revealed that action was closely linked to their past and present experiences with opportunity structures, and what they thought their future prospects to be. The interviews at two points in time enabled us to trace changing patterns of agency. The position within the life course is important: young Spanish people are desperate because they see no future prospects, however, they hope that the situation will change and meanwhile invest for the future; immigrants were grateful to be in Spain or Switzerland, although they were very worried about their chances in the labor market; amongst the elderly, it was their perceived scope of agency that would enable them to change their situation that varied and seemed to influence quality of life. Scope of agency seems to be related to future prospects and in this way feeds into quality of life.

In summary, we argued that QOL is the product of the interplay between (1) the objective situation (welfare regime; economic situation of the countries, households' resources and situation) creating opportunity structures, (2) the perception and assessment of these opportunities, (3) the perceived scope of agency allowing for managing the problems households face in various life domains and for reducing uncertainty, and (4) subjective well-being resulting from (1), (2), and (3). As our research revealed, the interplay between the objective situation and subjective well-being is dynamic: the sampled households' account was grounded in their situation and the interviewees took the time perspective into account: if households were able to buffer insecurity and individual problems, their quality of life seemed to be higher; if there was an accumulation of problems of the different household members or if people lived alone and had difficulties integrating themselves socially, QOL seemed to be lower. These results contribute to shedding some light on and unpacking the aggregate indicator of subjective well-being (happiness and satisfaction) by analyzing the complexity of the interactions between the macro- and micro-level. Subjective well-being of embedded individuals seems to be related not only with the evaluation of the objective situation (satisfaction) or an affective state (happiness), but also with the opportunities perceived to be available within the given household and the spatial context (Switzerland or Spain) as well as future prospects. Subjective well-being varied substantially in similar situations: this was, on the one hand, related to the perception of such different opportunities and future prospects and, on the other, dependent on whether the household was able to manage its situation (agency) or whether it resorted

to adapting, reframing, or accepting the situation, in particular when opportunities for agency were lacking. Perceived lack of opportunities and/or the inability to act and deal with the situation lowered subjective well-being and the way the households experienced their quality of life; however, subjective well-being could be influenced by means of adaptation and reframing despite objective conditions that were constraining and limited (as stated already by Sen 1989:45). This way of influence, in turn, moderated how QOL was experienced.

We conclude that a qualitative approach to quality of life is empirically enlightening and theoretically promising. Novel aspects for QOL studies are revealed: the role of the opportunity structures, the contexts and their interaction with individuals embedded within households seeking better living conditions could be carved out. Also, mechanisms between QOL and the life course, and future prospects were revealed. Embedding individuals in households, locating them in particular socio-economic positions within opportunity structures and considering them active agents provides a fruitful analytical focus. Quality of life might be more than the interaction between living conditions and subjective well-being or these dimensions taken separately. Detecting mechanisms resulting from the interaction between structure and agency with respect to research on quality of life appears to be a promising direction for further research.

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3. Article 2

Amélioration de la qualité de vie à partir de la prospérité précaire. Analyse du rôle des liens sociaux et des stratégies d'adaptation des ménages en Roumanie et en Suisse¹⁵

Abstract

This article investigates the strategies to improve the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity in urban contexts of Romania and Switzerland – two countries who are characterized by strong structural and political differences and dissimilar living conditions. The paper advances qualitative research on the topic, which is still scarce. Quality of life is approached according to the definition of Zapf and the empirical analysis is based on the concept of social bonds of Paugam. The authors undertook a longitudinal analysis on several interview waves in order to shed light on the role of the welfare state, the labor market, the family and the community for the households' quality of life. The Swiss households perceive a greater scope of agency than the Romanian households, which depend mainly on the labor market and their family. Strategies of adaptation come to the fore in both countries, when an active modification of the living conditions is not perceived as possible. This new element goes beyond the Paugam's concept of social bonds and allows for understanding where new social policy is needed: in the adapted cases, the welfare state and communities could actually play an active role to improve the households' quality of life.

Keywords

Precariousness, quality of life, Romania, Switzerland, household strategies, adaptation

¹⁵ Own layout. This article was written in collaboration with Ionela Vlase. The two authors contributed equally to the completion of the manuscript. It is published in *Sociologie Românească* (2016), XIV(1), 61-74.

3.1. Introduction

Les recherches empiriques récentes dans le champ des inégalités sociales mettent en évidence une réalité socioéconomique encore peu étudiée : les ménages qui luttent pour maintenir ou améliorer leur position socioéconomique précaire (Budowski et al. 2010). Cet article porte sur les stratégies de ménages en situation de prospérité précaire pour améliorer leur qualité de vie dans des contextes urbains de deux pays: la Roumanie et la Suisse. Notre choix de pays permet d'illustrer des stratégies de ménages à partir de contextes européens très différents en matière de niveau de vie. Ces deux pays peuvent être considérés comme représentatifs des deux régions de l'Europe – Est et Ouest – sous l'angle de l'organisation politique de leur société (ex-communiste vs démocratique/fédéraliste). Leurs régimes de protection sociale sont également historiquement différents.

L'enjeu principal de cette étude est d'investiguer des stratégies de ménages situés dans une catégorie socioéconomique semblable, enracinés dans deux contextes nationaux structurellement et culturellement différents. De ce point de vue, ce plan de recherche se situe dans une perspective de "most different design" (Hantrais 2009 :61). La priorité de l'article n'est cependant pas une comparaison systématique des contextes macro des deux pays. L'analyse porte sur les ménages et leurs stratégies et pratiques qui revêtent des significations spécifiques selon les contextes différents.

Le concept de *prospérité précaire* fait référence à une position spécifique dans la stratification sociale, à savoir celle qui réunit les individus et les ménages dont les revenus et les conditions de vie leur permettent de se situer juste au-dessus du seuil de pauvreté, sans toutefois jouir d'une prospérité stable (Budowski et al. 2010). Le terme a été développé par Hübinger (1996) et opérationnalisé par Budowski et al. (2010). La prospérité précaire a été définie à l'aide d'une mesure du revenu et d'une échelle de privations (annexe 1), adaptée à la distribution de l'inégalité des deux pays (Budowski et al. 2010; Precupetu et al. 2015)¹⁶. Nous considérons ainsi que la position relative des ménages en situation de prospérité précaire est comparable dans les deux pays.

Le thème de prospérité précaire est en lien avec les discussions sur la précarité et la vulnérabilité (Bankoff 2001; Castel et Dörre 2009; Whelan et Maître 2008) dans un contexte d'inégalités croissantes et de peur quant à la mobilité descendante. Si les recherches quantitatives sur les ménages à proximité du seuil de pauvreté en Suisse et sur la prospérité précaire en général sont relativement nombreuses et ont une longue tradition (Andress 1999; Budowski et Tillmann 2004; Farago et al. 2005; Mayer 1975;

¹⁶ Plus précisément, nous avons considéré comme précaires les ménages suisses qui correspondaient à un des critères suivants:

- Revenu entre 60% et 80% du revenu médian équivalent
- Revenu supérieur à 80% du revenu médian et 2 privations ou plus (parmi une liste de 9 biens ou activités)
- Revenu inférieur à 60% du revenu médian et maximum 1 privation

En Roumanie, les ménages précaires devaient correspondre à un des critères suivants:

- Revenu entre 60% et 100% du revenu médian équivalent
- Revenu supérieur à 100% du revenu médian et 4 privations ou plus

Schulte 1999; Vogel 2009), il n'en est pas de même pour les recherches qualitatives.

Les études qualitatives commencent en Europe et en Amérique latine. Ils approfondissent le lien entre prospérité précaire, le "care" et la perception de la crise financière en Suisse et en Amérique latine (Amacker 2012; Amacker et al. 2013; Budowski et Schief 2014; Budowski et al. 2016; Klenner et al. 2011; Vera Rojas et al. 2016; Vlase et Sieber 2016). Pour la Suisse, les résultats montrent l'importance du marché du travail comme structure d'opportunité et celle de l'Etat social comme « prêteur de dernier recours » (Amacker et al. 2013). En Roumanie, l'intérêt des chercheurs pour la prospérité précaire est encore plus récent (Precupetu et al. 2015; Preoteasa 2015; Vlase 2015) et une comparaison transnationale des ménages partageant des situations de vie, des privations et des risques similaires fait encore défaut.

La présente étude tente d'affiner les connaissances sur la prospérité précaire et approche la thématique dans une nouvelle perspective centrée sur la qualité de vie. Le concept de *qualité de vie* est souvent utilisé comme synonyme du bien-être. Nous différencions toutefois la qualité de vie du bien-être subjectif : ce dernier est ici considéré comme une évaluation cognitive qui résulte de la perception et de l'interprétation des conditions de vie (satisfaction) et qui contient des aspects émotionnels (happiness) (Diener 1994). Le concept de qualité de vie, quant à lui, comprend des aspects objectifs relevant des conditions de vie et des aspects subjectifs qui concernent le bien-être individuel; il contient des dimensions macro (Etat, marché du travail, communauté) et micro (famille, individu), ainsi que des domaines de vie différents (Noll 2002:3; Zapf 1984b). Ces domaines de vie sont liés et s'influencent mutuellement (spill-over effects, voir Bassi et al. 2013; Drobnič et al. 2010).

Le but de cet article est de mieux comprendre les stratégies que mettent effectivement en place les ménages en prospérité précaire pour améliorer leur qualité de vie. Le choix de focaliser l'analyse sur les ménages qui réussissent à aller mieux nous aide aussi à comprendre les besoins de ceux qui ont une qualité de vie moindre. Pour ce faire, nous disposons de plusieurs vagues d'entretiens qualitatifs avec des ménages en situation de prospérité précaire des deux pays concernés. Une approche qualitative est adéquate pour comprendre les processus contribuant à une amélioration de la qualité de vie dans le temps, même si cette dernière a généralement été mesurée avec des méthodes quantitatives (Camfield et al. 2009:7; Noll 2002; White et al. 2012:773). Les données ont été récoltées dans le cadre de deux projets internationaux successifs, employant une méthodologie commune et portant sur la prospérité précaire et les stratégies des ménages.

Ce dispositif doit nous permettre de répondre à la question de recherche suivante :

Quelles stratégies les ménages en situation de prospérité précaire appliquent-ils pour améliorer effectivement leur qualité de vie en Suisse et en Roumanie ?

Avant de répondre à cette question, nous devons prendre en compte les contextes des deux pays, car ils influencent la qualité de vie des ménages en prospérité précaire. Comme le but de cet article n'est pas une comparaison systématique de la politique ou des systèmes de protection des deux pays, le contexte n'est ici que brièvement décrit. La Roumanie connaît une croissance des inégalités sociales depuis la chute du communisme en 1990 (Stănculescu 2007). La population roumaine se caractérise par une méfiance généralisée au sein de la société, notamment envers les institutions publiques, héritage du régime communiste (Precupetu et Precupetu 2013:12; Voicu 2010). Le régime de protection sociale pourrait être décrit comme une réforme inachevée de l'Etat-providence communiste caractérisé par une large couverture des risques sociaux, auxquels se rajoutent les nouveaux risques liés à l'abandon de l'économie planifiée, mais avec toutefois un très modeste niveau de prestations et une faible qualité des services sociaux qui restent encore sous-développés par rapport aux besoins de la population (Fenger 2007). Après l'effondrement du communisme en 1989, le chômage a augmenté et les prestations des entreprises ont diminué. Par conséquent, le système d'assurances sociales s'est trouvé surchargé (Esping-Andersen 1996:9). Avec l'intégration du pays dans l'Union Européenne, le développement économique a été accéléré et l'amélioration du système de protection sociale renforcée. En même temps, l'émigration a augmenté et les contributions à l'Etat-providence ont ainsi encore diminué (Tache et Dumitrache 2012:82). En parallèle à ces développements, le taux de pauvreté a considérablement augmenté dans les premières années après la chute du communisme (Stănculescu 2007), tout comme au début des années 2000. Puis, il a commencé à décliner en raison de la croissance économique du pays (Banque Mondiale 2003). Pourtant, suite à la crise économique récente la Roumanie connaît un pourcentage élevé de personnes exposées au risque de pauvreté (40.3% en 2011 contre 17.2% en Suisse selon Eurostat 2013).

Contrastant avec le cas roumain sous différents aspects, la Suisse fait partie des pays les plus riches d'Europe (Eurostat 2013) et elle n'a été que peu affectée par la crise économique récente (International Labour Office ILO 2010:184-187). De manière générale, la Suisse est considérée comme un des pays avec la meilleure qualité de vie du monde, ce qui peut être attribué à la stabilité économique avec un taux de chômage faible et un revenu par habitant élevé (Bühlmann et al. 2012; Suter et al. 2015). La Suisse a été créée sur une base fédéraliste et encore aujourd'hui la démocratie directe et le pouvoir des cantons sont importants. Son régime de protection sociale est considéré comme hybride. Le pays suit un chemin libéral concernant le marché de travail (Esping-Andersen 1990; Nollert 2006). Dans le même temps, le régime de protection sociale a des éléments conservateurs reposant sur la famille et le support de l'Etat-providence en cas de besoin (Nollert 2006).

Le contexte des deux pays laisse supposer que les stratégies des ménages pour améliorer leur qualité de vie diffèrent entre la Roumanie et la Suisse. En Roumanie, la méfiance généralisée au sein de la société, notamment envers l'Etat, à laquelle s'ajoute un système d'assurance surchargé, pourraient mener les ménages en prospérité précaire à s'orienter plutôt vers un soutien à l'intérieur du ménage ou vers la migration économique internationale à défaut d'offres de travail dans les villes qui ont connu une faillite massive des entreprises étatiques. En Suisse, le taux de chômage faible et la perception de l'Etat-providence comme prêteur de dernier recours pourraient amener les ménages en prospérité précaire à orienter leurs stratégies vers le marché du travail et l'Etat-providence.

3.2. Cadre théorique

La qualité de vie est un concept polysémique utilisé de multiples manières dans la recherche scientifique. Les contributions de Wolfgang Zapf et Serge Paugam peuvent éclairer la construction de notre cadre analytique. Selon Zapf (1984a), la qualité de vie résulte de l'interaction entre les conditions de vie et le bien-être subjectif. On peut supposer que les conditions de vie des ménages situés en prospérité précaire sont faibles, en raison de leur revenu limité et des privations subies. Cependant, notre approche qualitative nous permet d'enrichir cette observation en prenant en compte l'avis détaillé et informé des personnes interviewées sur ce qu'elles perçoivent comme conditions de vie satisfaisantes pour leur ménage, compte tenu des besoins, aspirations, histoire de vie familiale et personnelle. En effet, certaines personnes interviewées dans notre étude évaluent leur qualité de vie comme satisfaisante, voire bonne, d'où l'intérêt de cette analyse. De plus, malgré la situation matérielle semblable des ménages en situation de prospérité précaire, leurs ressources non matérielles, faisant partie des conditions de vie, peuvent varier. C'est pour cette raison que nous intégrons à notre réflexion l'approche de Serge Paugam, développée dans son ouvrage sur le lien social (Paugam 2008). Paugam catégorise les ressources que l'on peut mobiliser en quatre types de liens sociaux : lien de citoyenneté, lien de participation organique, lien de participation élective et lien de filiation (Paugam 2008:64). Selon lui, chaque lien apporte une forme de protection (supports face aux aléas de la vie) et de reconnaissance (valorisation par le regard des autres) qui sont nécessaires à l'existence humaine (Paugam 2008:63). L'intensité de ces liens dépend d'un côté de la socialisation de chaque individu, et de l'autre, de l'importance relative que les sociétés leur attribuent (Paugam 2008:77).

Les ménages de cette analyse ont donc des conditions de vie matérielles similaires en rapport avec le contexte national de référence et partagent des difficultés et des risques comparables à travers ces contextes en début de recherche. Autre similitude, les ménages choisis pour la présente étude témoignent explicitement d'une bonne qualité de vie dans les entretiens de la dernière vague de récolte de données. Cette évaluation positive de la qualité de vie peut pourtant se baser sur des éléments variés entre les cas. Notre analyse porte sur ces différences entre les ménages, qui se situent à la fois dans

l'évolution de leurs conditions matérielles (par exemple, l'augmentation du revenu), dans la configuration de leurs liens sociaux, comme dans les stratégies que les ménages mettent en place pour améliorer leur qualité de vie.

Nous définissons les manières d'agir, de maintenir ou d'améliorer la situation objective et le bien-être subjectif comme stratégies du ménage (Crow 1989; Wallace 2002). Ces stratégies comportent l'organisation des activités du ménage pour prévenir ou réagir à des événements et peuvent progressivement se transformer en routines inconscientes. Elles peuvent prendre la forme d'actions ou de raisonnements. Les membres du ménage les mettent en place en ayant en tête la situation de leur ménage ainsi que leurs ressources. En analysant les stratégies, nous identifions l'*agency* que le ménage met en place pour influencer sa qualité de vie.

3.3. Données et méthode

Nous disposons d'entretiens semi-directifs avec 70 ménages réalisés dans des contextes urbains dans les deux pays: 20 ménages à Cluj (Roumanie - t1: 2013, t2: 2014) et 50 ménages à Berne, Lausanne et Zürich (Suisse - t1: 2008, t2: 2009, t3: 2013). La définition de la prospérité précaire, la stratégie d'échantillonnage, la construction des instruments d'enquête et la méthode d'entretien ont été élaborées en étroite collaboration entre les chercheurs et chercheuses des deux pays. La sélection des ménages qui ont participé dans cette enquête repose sur l'utilisation du sondage téléphonique (Suisse) et sur la technique « random route » (Roumanie). Nous avons dès lors mené des entretiens avec une personne adulte qui connaît bien la situation du ménage¹⁷ et pouvant être considérée comme membre pleinement intégré dans son ménage et dans un contexte structurel élargi. A l'instar de Wallace (2002), nous considérons le ménage comme une unité d'analyse dynamique qui a l'avantage de lier le niveau micro et macro dans l'analyse et donc adéquat pour nos tâches analytiques.

Plus précisément, nous avons tout d'abord sélectionné dans notre corpus de données les ménages qui estiment avoir une bonne qualité de vie lors du dernier entretien (t2/2014 en Roumanie, t3/2013 en Suisse), soit cinq cas parmi les 20 en Roumanie et 17 cas parmi les 50 en Suisse. Cette bonne qualité de vie ne s'accompagne pas forcément d'une amélioration considérable de la situation économique. Nous intégrons des ménages qui sont toujours en situation de prospérité précaire en 2013/2014, et d'autres qui ont vécu une amélioration significative (davantage de revenu et/ou moins de privations) entre le premier et le dernier entretien. Pour évaluer la qualité de vie du ménage, l'accent a été mis sur ce que les personnes interviewées estimaient important pour leur ménage, une démarche déjà employée par différents auteurs (Camfield 2006; Williams et al. 2014).

¹⁷ Dans quelques ménages, deux personnes membres du ménage ont été présentes pendant l'entretien.

Deuxièmement, nous avons effectué une analyse transversale de ces 22 ménages pour identifier dans une démarche inductive les éléments qui contribuent à leur bonne qualité de vie (un résumé peut être demandé aux auteurs). En mettant ensemble ces éléments, le travail de Serge Paugam sur le lien social nous a semblé utile pour structurer ce qui fait que la vie est perçue comme bonne par les ménages. Cette étape a été complétée par une analyse approfondie des situations et des stratégies de sept ménages choisis pour leur diversité et de leur richesse d'informations. L'analyse de ces ménages a été réalisée à l'aide de tableaux thématiques ("thematic charts"; Ritchie et Lewis 2003).

3.4. Résultats

La présentation des résultats sur les stratégies se fera en suivant le concept des liens sociaux selon Paugam (2008) et en le complétant.

3.4.1 Le rôle de l'Etat

Comme défini par Paugam (2008), le lien de citoyenneté se tisse entre les membres d'une même communauté politique. Concrètement, il peut se réaliser au travers des droits octroyés et du soutien que les ménages reçoivent de l'Etat, y compris de l'Etat-providence, ou dans leurs activités politiques.

Les ménages de notre étude font rarement référence au soutien de l'Etat comme source d'amélioration de leur qualité de vie. En Roumanie, en particulier, l'Etat-providence est plutôt critiqué pour le faible soutien qu'il apporte aux enfants et aux personnes malades ou âgées (notamment RO06¹⁸). En Suisse, par contre, l'Etat-providence peut être un élément sécurisant qui apporte réellement un appui financier au cas où le marché de travail, la famille et la communauté ne peuvent résoudre adéquatement les problèmes des ménages (CH12, CH42, CH07) :

"On est en Suisse ! Au pire des cas, ben, je ferai comme les autres, hein, je vais au service social pour demander de l'aide." (CH12, t2, 2009)

Résumant le rôle de l'Etat pour les ménages suisses, on observe que l'Etat-providence leur apporte un sentiment de protection. La reconnaissance, autre élément que les liens sociaux peuvent apporter aux gens, n'est pas abordée à travers le lien de citoyenneté, même si on aurait pu supposer que l'intégration de chacun dans les processus politiques en Suisse procure un sentiment de reconnaissance aux citoyens (Frey et Stutzer 2000).

¹⁸ Nous avons attribué un code à chaque ménage composé de deux lettres (RO ou CH selon l'appartenance du ménage à un des deux pays) et deux chiffres qui numérotent les ménages interviewés dans chaque pays.

3.4.2 Le rôle du travail

L'intégration dans la vie professionnelle crée le lien de participation organique selon Paugam (2008). Il concerne donc le travail avec ses aspects financiers (protection) ainsi que ses aspects structurants et valorisants (reconnaissance). Des stratégies visant le lien de participation organique peuvent consister en une amélioration des conditions de travail, un changement du poste de travail ou une formation professionnelle.

En Roumanie, le travail est l'élément qui améliore la situation financière surtout pour les ménages avec plusieurs membres en âge actif, mais dans certains cas même des personnes à la retraite essaient de compléter leurs modestes pensions en travaillant informellement, comme le montre le ménage RO09. Ce ménage multigénérationnel est composé d'un grand-père, d'un père (avec lequel nous avons mené l'entretien) qui a divorcé entre le premier et le deuxième entretien et de sa nouvelle conjointe qui est médecin de formation. Le fils, issu du premier mariage, habite avec sa mère mais leur rend visite régulièrement. L'interviewé témoigne de l'amélioration de leur situation matérielle, car tous les adultes ont des revenus en 2014: pension de retraite et revenu informel du grand-père, revenu de la conjointe et ses propres revenus, qui ont quelque peu augmenté grâce à la formation de masseur qu'il a récemment achevée. Le ménage a encore des dettes à la banque suite aux emprunts pour des travaux de rénovation dans la maison du grand-père dans laquelle ils habitent. L'interviewé l'a rénovée lui-même et envisage de construire une mansarde sous le toit pour pouvoir transformer le rez-de-chaussée, où il reçoit déjà sa clientèle, en salon de massage. Il a été très actif les deux dernières années dans l'acquisition de nouvelles compétences : il a participé à des stages et conférences et se sent très fier, optimiste et valorisé pour ses nouvelles compétences.

"Professionnellement, pour ainsi dire, ça va de mieux en mieux, et lié à ça, la question financière s'améliore aussi. J'ai réussi à aménager mon cabinet de thérapie, à aménager ma chambre récemment, j'ai réussi à changer la voiture, il y a eu donc de très grands changements durant une année, je dirais, même pour une famille aisée." (RO09, t2, 2014)

En Suisse, pratiquement tous les ménages ont fait usage d'opportunités sur le marché du travail pour améliorer leur qualité de vie. En 2013, ils ont eu plus de revenu et/ou un travail plus stable/intéressant/valorisant et/ou moins d'heures supplémentaires à faire. L'exemple du ménage CH70 montre les changements au niveau de la situation du travail et la reconnaissance sociale provenant du travail. En 2008, l'interviewée a travaillé comme caissière à 20 ou 30% (malgré sa formation tertiaire) et comme conseillère fiscale indépendante. Lors de ce premier entretien, elle parle surtout des difficultés liées à l'insécurité de sa situation professionnelle et des difficultés financières de la famille. Elle sait qu'en cas de besoin, des aides de l'Etat existent, mais elle n'envisage pas d'y avoir recours. Ses projets sont orientés vers l'investissement dans sa carrière professionnelle (formations, réseautage), ce qu'elle a fait dans les années suivantes. En 2009, elle trouve un travail de secrétaire à 80% et en 2013, elle travaille dans le domaine

des ressources humaines. Malgré un accident vasculaire cérébral début 2013, causé vraisemblablement par le stress et la surcharge de travail, l'interviewée souligne que son nouveau poste de travail lui procure beaucoup de reconnaissance (contacts avec les collègues, valorisation au travail), et qu'en lien avec ce changement, le budget du ménage s'est équilibré. Les trois autres membres du ménage ont travaillé dans la vente (le mari a fait une formation de chauffeur de bus et travaille comme tel en 2013).

Contrairement au lien de citoyenneté qui a une fonction de protection uniquement pour les ménages suisses interviewés, le lien de participation organique apporte protection et reconnaissance aux ménages des deux pays qui réussissent à améliorer leur situation de travail.

3.4.3 Le rôle des liens entre conjoints, amis et proches

Selon Paugam (2008), le lien de participation élective résulte des relations entre conjoints, amis et proches choisis. A l'intérieur du ménage, c'est donc la relation dans un couple, mais pas entre parents et enfants ou grands-parents, qui est concernée. A l'extérieur du ménage, le lien de participation élective comprend le réseau social d'amis, associations et communautés ou services de soutien non-étatiques. Malgré les différences que l'on aurait pu supposer entre les deux pays, en raison de la méfiance généralisée au sein de la société roumaine, l'intégration dans des réseaux sociaux ne paraît pas être plus déterminante pour l'amélioration de la qualité de vie des ménages suisses que des ménages roumains. Au contraire, le lien de participation élective prend une forme assez similaire dans les deux pays. Seulement le lien entre conjoints apparaît important pour la qualité de vie, en effet. En Roumanie, les ressources financières sont souvent redistribuées à l'intérieur du ménage, de façon à accroître les chances d'amélioration de la qualité de vie (RO02). En Suisse, une utilisation consciente des ressources non matérielles entre conjoints et la poursuite de projets de vie améliorent la sécurité financière et la valorisation de ses membres (CH70). De plus, dans trois exemples, une séparation du couple ou un emménagement avec un nouveau partenaire augmente la qualité de vie du ménage du point de vue de la personne interviewée (RO06, RO09, CH70). Cependant, nous n'avons pas d'information sur la qualité de vie du partenaire qui est parti du ménage.

Un exemple est la famille-RO06 - le couple était en voie de séparation au moment du 2^{ème} entretien. La différence d'âge et des objectifs différents semblaient être à l'origine de cette décision. Lors du premier entretien (avec la femme), l'attachement des époux à leur fille semble inégal, ce qui pèse sur la qualité de la relation conjugale.

"Non, je n'ai pas de temps libre, je m'occupe d'un petit enfant. Je n'ai pas de temps libre et je ne veux pas en avoir. Maintenant c'est elle [la fille]... c'est d'elle dont je veux m'occuper, pour le moment elle a besoin de moi et j'ai besoin d'elle [...] Il [le mari] s'occupe d'elle ((elle rit)) mais il se donne du temps pour autre chose aussi. Par exemple, il court, il fait du marathon, il fait aussi la cuisine [...] Il a du temps, il s'en donne." (RO06, t1, 2013)

A ce moment-là, l'interviewée mentionne encore qu'elle aurait besoin de soutien psychologique et de conseil pour faire face à tous les changements de sa vie mais qu'elle n'a pas encore pu joindre un service spécialisé dans ce domaine.

En 2014, la décision de séparation et une prise de conscience de ses propres besoins sont un soulagement pour cette femme, en tout cas momentanément.

"Je suis finalement arrivée à un compromis avec moi-même. Maintenant j'ai... j'ai pris une décision: ok, je veux passer du temps avec ma fille, mais je ne dois pas non plus m'abandonner parce que cela ne fait pas de moi un modèle pour ma fille, et tant que je ne suis pas heureuse et je stresse - c'est-à-dire que je suis heureuse avec elle aussi, mais j'ai également d'autres besoins. Hmm, maintenant je sors plus souvent, à peu près une fois toutes les deux semaines."
(RO06, t2, 2014)

Le lien entre conjoints est cité comme élément positif pour la qualité de vie seulement dans un cas (CH42). Il apparaît que parmi les ménages analysés ce lien électif est perçu comme déterminant pour la qualité de vie surtout quand une mauvaise expérience (problèmes de couple, séparation) y est liée.

3.4.4 Le rôle du lien parents-enfants

Le lien de filiation se noue entre parents et enfants (Paugam 2008). Il concerne donc les liens entre parents, grands-parents et enfants à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du ménage. Il y a, pour ce lien-là, des différences entre les deux pays : en Roumanie, la famille est le principal réseau sur lequel repose l'augmentation de la qualité de vie des ménages en matière de reconnaissance. On observe un repli sur la famille dans un contexte de bouleversements sociaux. Dans les cas analysés en profondeur, c'est le ménage RO02 qui montre au mieux cet aspect de la qualité de vie: à côté des échanges fréquents tant matériels qu'affectifs entre les générations, les conjoints lient l'amélioration de leur qualité de vie principalement à la transition vers le rôle de grands-parents entre les deux entretiens. Ce couple âgé est très actif et engagé dans le soutien de ses filles, desquelles il est très fier.

"C'est une joie d'avoir des petits-enfants... pour nous, pour nos enfants, pour la famille en général." (RO02, t2, 2014)

Pour cette famille, mener une bonne vie semble découler en grande partie de la reconnaissance sociale attachée au fait d'accéder au rôle socialement valorisé de grands-parents en Roumanie. S'y investir est la stratégie pour améliorer la qualité de vie dans un contexte où la marge de manœuvre pour améliorer la situation financière est marginale.

En Suisse, le soutien financier des parents envers leurs enfants (aussi adultes) est courant quasi exclusivement pendant qu'ils sont encore en formation. La cohésion dans la famille est mentionnée comme importante uniquement dans les familles où les enfants suivent leur scolarité ou une formation professionnelle avec succès. Les personnes qui vivent seules n'ont que peu de soutien de la part de leurs parents ou enfants :

"Je ne sais pas si c'est de l'orgueil de dire, euh, je vais me débrouiller par moi-même, et puis aussi je me suis mise à l'école directement parce que je sais que mes enfants ne me viendront pas en aide." (CH12, t3, 2013)

3.4.5 Augmentation du bien-être subjectif par l'adaptation

Les quatre types de liens sociaux des Paugam nous aident à systématiser une grande partie des stratégies d'amélioration de la qualité de vie. Cependant, l'analyse inductive des données nous montre des stratégies qui ne visent pas à changer activement une situation ou un lien social, mais qui aident à « faire avec » la situation telle qu'elle est. Nous les appelons des stratégies d'adaptation et les exemples suivants montrent qu'ils peuvent passer par une relativisation des difficultés propres en se comparant à d'autres générations ou contextes/pays (RO02, CH20), le fait d'ajuster ses objectifs aux possibilités perçues (RO02, RO09, CH42) ou une réinterprétation positive d'événements vécus (CH12).

Une comparaison avec d'autres ménages ayant plus de difficultés (relativisation des difficultés propres) et l'ajustement des objectifs aux possibilités perçues sont bien observées dans le cas RO02. Cette famille est composée de deux époux. L'homme est à la retraite anticipée en raison de problèmes de cœur et la femme travaille dans l'industrie des chaussures en attendant sa retraite. Le couple a une bonne dynamique relationnelle, sait bien gérer son budget même si celui-ci est jugé insuffisant. Son style de vie (éviter les vices coûteux comme la consommation de tabac et d'alcool) semble avoir contribué à l'équilibre du budget et à limiter la détérioration de la santé des conjoints. Leurs deux filles sont mariées et vivent dans des ménages indépendants dans la même ville. Elles sont devenues mères récemment (voir 3.4.4). Le couple a un revenu stable et un nombre de privations similaires entre 2013 et 2014.

Pour la personne interviewée, il n'y a pas de sources de soutien possibles:

"Si tu vas n'importe où et tu demandes qu'on t'explique quelque chose, ces personnes n'ont pas de cœur et te mettent sur de mauvaises pistes, car tu ne peux pas savoir. Je ne sais pas comment le dire, mais il n'y a pas de personnes de confiance qui puissent t'aider." (RO02, t2, 2014)

Au niveau financier, le couple s'adapte à sa situation. Il a des objectifs clairs et ajustés à ses possibilités. Il ne se permet pas d'aspirer à des choses au-dessus de ses moyens afin d'éviter la déception ou l'endettement. Bien qu'il soit conscient des limites de ses

conditions matérielles modestes, il en relativise la portée en se référant à d'autres contextes socio-historiques, grâce à son expérience de vie sous différents régimes politiques.

"Nous ne pourrions rien faire... Qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire ? Le mieux, c'est de ne pas se soucier... de penser juste au bien. Tu te dis 'comme je suis bien' et alors... écoutez, nos parents, nos grands-parents, s'ils étaient toujours vivants et s'ils vivaient comme nous vivons actuellement, ils seraient très contents." (RO02, t2, 2014)

Une sorte d'adaptation légèrement différente est observé dans le cas RO09. Il ne s'agit pas d'un ajustement des objectifs vers le bas, mais plutôt d'une capacité d'agir selon les contraintes du contexte. Celle-ci va avec une confiance de l'interviewé en ses propres forces. Les changements professionnels et familiaux positifs (voir 3.4.2, 3.4.3) pourraient expliquer tous deux la confiance de l'interviewé. L'homme semble conscient des opportunités et des défis et fait preuve de suffisamment de détermination pour atteindre ses objectifs, dont il parle explicitement. Le contexte structurel (le pays a connu des élections présidentielles juste au moment du deuxième entretien) est aussi pris en considération, même si l'interviewé perçoit sa capacité à saisir des opportunités comme inaliénable :

"Tant qu'on ne sait pas comment la politique va tourner, il reste un grand point d'interrogation. [...] Cela me convient ou pas, mais cela ne peut pas m'inquiéter.... Je considère que chacun doit être capable de s'adapter à la situation telle qu'elle est." (RO09, t2, 2014)

Un dernier exemple d'adaptation est le ménage Suisse CH12. Cette femme vit seule et a peu de contacts. En 2008, elle travaille dans les soins à domicile. Ce travail pèse beaucoup sur l'interviewée, tant physiquement que psychiquement. Elle se considère comme "working poor". En 2009, elle a pris sa retraite anticipée mais garde quelques clientes en tant que réflexologue et naturopathe. La retraite n'était pas un choix entièrement libre, mais elle en tire du positif en 2009 déjà :

"[J'ai été] poussée un petit peu vers la sortie, j'ai décidé que j'arrêtais, parce que de tout façon, que je prenne la retraite anticipée, je gagnerais le même salaire qu'en travaillant." (CH12, t2, 2009)

En 2013, elle réinterprète son passage à la retraite anticipée d'une manière très positive: une sécurité financière, une hausse de revenu et moins de stress. A ce moment-là, pour cette femme, sa qualité de vie est bonne, car

"malgré tous les petits soucis quotidiens ou les extras qui nous tombent dessus, que quand même le soir tu te couches, t'es bien, tu te dis 'ok j'ai fait au mieux!'"
(CH12, t3, 2013)

La présence de ses deux chiens semble compenser le manque de contacts qu'elle a par ailleurs. Lorsqu'on lui demande comment elle va, elle dit :

"A l'heure actuelle, je dirais c'est pur bonheur [...] je garde ce qui m'intéresse, c'est vrai que j'ai un détachement que je n'avais pas avant, sollicitée par la société, collègues, tout ça, alors que maintenant je mène ma petite vie, mais alors vraiment - je dis : c'est une sorte de - comment dire ça - de quotidien mais heureux." (CH12, t3, 2013)

Des processus d'adaptation et de relativisation sont présents dans plusieurs ménages, surtout suisses, soit en parallèle à d'autres stratégies, soit comme stratégie principale qui améliore le bien-être du ménage et donc l'évaluation de sa qualité de vie. De plus nous observons, que les personnes qui jugent positivement la qualité de vie de leur ménage malgré la situation de prospérité précaire, sont souvent des personnes qui se disent optimistes.

"Je suis reconnaissante pour cet optimisme que j'ai. Même si j'ai des fois des moments difficiles, ça ne dure jamais longtemps, je m'en sors toujours - parce que j'ai assez d'exemples de ma vie où j'ai pu dire 'oui, ça allait de nouveau mieux.'" (CH70, t2, 2009)

3.5. Comparaison des stratégies en Roumanie et en Suisse

Nous avons supposé que les stratégies des ménages pour améliorer la qualité de vie diffèrent entre la Roumanie et la Suisse dues aux contextes structurels et culturels fort dissemblables. En Roumanie, une méfiance généralisée au sein de la société et envers l'Etat combinée à un système d'assurances surchargé pourrait mener à une orientation des ménages en prospérité précaire plutôt vers un soutien à l'intérieur du ménage ou vers la mobilité professionnelle, même réalisée à travers la migration internationale lorsque les opportunités sont très rares au pays. Nos observations montrent effectivement une concentration des stratégies des ménages roumains sur leur ménage et la famille (aussi au-delà du ménage) ainsi que sur une flexibilité concernant l'intégration professionnelle, même si la migration internationale n'est pas présente dans nos cas.

En Suisse, le taux de chômage faible et la perception de l'Etat-providence comme prêteur de dernier recours pourraient amener les ménages en prospérité précaire à orienter leurs stratégies vers le marché du travail et l'Etat-providence. Ce dernier apparaît effectivement comme prêteur de dernier recours dans le discours des interviewés, mais moins comme cible des stratégies et des actions. Cependant, les stratégies visant une amélioration de la situation de travail jouent un rôle important dans l'amélioration de la qualité de vie des ménages suisses, comme également observé en Roumanie. De plus, les liens entre amis ou dans le couple sont un élément important pour la qualité de vie aussi en Suisse. En résumé, les ménages suisses perçoivent et utilisent plus de ressources différentes pour améliorer activement leur qualité de vie.

Selon la théorie de Paugam, le lien de citoyenneté apporte un sentiment de protection aux ménages suisses dont il est question, alors que le lien de participation élective leur apporte plutôt de la reconnaissance. Enfin, le lien de participation organique (l'intégration professionnelle) peut, pour ces ménages, remplir les deux fonctions. En Roumanie, les trois types de liens identifiés comme importants pour l'amélioration de la qualité de vie (électifs, filiation et participation organique) apportent aux ménages dont il est question, la protection et la reconnaissance.

Cette distinction entre protection et reconnaissance nous aide à comprendre les différences entre les situations des ménages dans les deux pays. Même si les liens électifs sont importants aussi en Suisse, ils ont un rôle plutôt émotionnel pour la qualité de vie des ménages. L'aspect protecteur est repris par l'Etat dans la perception des ménages suisses. Selon la théorie de Paugam, les liens sociaux développés parmi les ménages analysés vivant en Roumanie font penser à des sociétés traditionnelles ou rurales, où "les solidarités se développent essentiellement à l'échelon de la famille élargie" (Paugam 2008:3). Pour l'interprétation de ces données, il faut cependant garder en tête que nous abordons ici seulement les stratégies qui, dans la perception des ménages, les aident réellement à améliorer leur qualité de vie. On peut, par exemple, imaginer que l'émigration est une stratégie répandue en Roumanie (Alexandru 2012; Sandu 2010), qui, cependant, ne résulte pas dans une amélioration de la qualité de vie du ménage concerné.

3.6. Conclusion

Le premier but de notre analyse était de comprendre comment des ménages vivant dans des conditions de vie précaires améliorent leur qualité de vie dans des contextes urbains en Roumanie et en Suisse. Deuxièmement, cette analyse visait à avancer la conceptualisation de la qualité de vie pour la recherche qualitative. De l'échantillon total des ménages qui ont fait l'objet de notre recherche sur la prospérité précaire en Roumanie et en Suisse, nous avons retenu pour l'analyse ceux qui percevaient une bonne qualité de vie lors du dernier entretien (22 au total).

Au niveau conceptuel, nous avons pris en compte la définition de la qualité de vie de Zapf (1984a) et l'approche des liens sociaux de Paugam (2008). Cette approche théorique a permis d'identifier et de structurer les ressources qui aident effectivement les ménages en prospérité précaire à améliorer ou maintenir leur qualité de vie tout en restant ouvertes à des éléments nouveaux dans les données (notamment l'adaptation). De plus, l'investigation d'une position socioéconomique similaire dans deux pays structurellement et historiquement dissemblables et la collaboration entre chercheuses provenant de ces deux pays a permis d'aller au-delà des concepts préconçus et des préjugés permettant de remettre en cause les acquis précédents et de déboucher sur de nouveaux résultats.

L'analyse montre que les ménages sont comparables en termes de situation de vie et des difficultés qu'ils rencontrent. Au niveau des stratégies qui améliorent effectivement la qualité de vie, la concentration des ménages sur leurs propres ressources apparaît dominante, autrement dit l'investissement dans leur situation de travail, dans leur couple ou une adaptation à la situation, quand d'autres possibilités d'agir ne sont pas perçues. Souvent, les ménages ont mis en place plusieurs stratégies simultanément, dont l'agencement est toutefois particulier à chaque famille selon la position dans le parcours de vie de ses membres, la santé et les compétences personnelles de ceux-ci.

Des réseaux de soutien à l'extérieur du ménage ou le soutien de l'Etat-providence ne sont que marginalement évoqués. Ceci pourrait être dû au fait que des ménages en prospérité précaire ne sont que peu visés par les réseaux de soutien (contrairement aux ménages en situation de pauvreté) ou alors que si l'Etat providence ou des communautés de soutien interviennent, la qualité de vie du ménage n'augmente pas de manière suffisante dans sa perception. L'analyse des stratégies des ménages qui réussissent à améliorer leur qualité de vie nous donne aussi des informations précieuses concernant les ménages en prospérité précaire avec une moins bonne qualité de vie. Plus précisément, notre analyse montre indirectement que si un ménage n'a pas les ressources pour améliorer sa qualité de vie à travers le travail ou sa famille/le ménage, l'Etat providence ou les communautés n'arrivent pas à lui offrir le soutien nécessaire pour qu'il puisse percevoir une bonne qualité de vie. Nous voyons ici un potentiel d'amélioration de la qualité de vie des ménages en prospérité précaire dans les deux pays.

Les processus d'adaptation à la prospérité précaire semblent augmenter la qualité de vie dans la perception des ménages, quand leurs possibilités d'agir sont limitées. Ils

restent à approfondir dans une prochaine recherche. L'adaptation a été étudiée par des psychologues (*set point* théorie, traits de personnalité), économistes et sociologues (souvent quantitatifs, p.ex. Easterlin 1974; Crettaz et Suter 2013 – pour la Suisse). Le fait d'ajuster ses attentes vers le bas dans des situations ou contextes difficiles semble être une stratégie utile pour préserver son bien-être subjectif. En même temps, cette tendance des individus et ménages à accepter des difficultés ou des désavantages pourrait résulter dans un niveau de bien-être (welfare level) plus bas au niveau de la société (Graham 2009:215). Selon Graham (2009:189), une meilleure compréhension de ces processus aidera à faire avancer la politique sociale, si elle se réfère à des mesures de qualité de vie ou de bien-être pour évaluer son efficacité.

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4. Article 3

Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?¹⁹

Abstract

This paper aims at understanding how adaptation occurs in precarious prosperity. It investigates quality of life in Switzerland using a longitudinal qualitative design. The results show that processes of adaptation tend to be similar according to relevant social experiences and that adaptation does not mean complete resignation. Furthermore, the reasoning of adapting people changes over time. This shows an internalization of the perceived norm to be satisfied. Adaptation thus contributes to the reproduction of inequalities on a societal level.

Keywords

Adaptation, precarious prosperity, quality of life, agency, qualitative longitudinal research

¹⁹ Own layout. This article is accepted for publication in the *Swiss Journal of Sociology* (2018), 44(3).

4.1. Introduction

In light of welfare-state retrenchment and times of crisis, households in risk of slipping into poverty have become a largely debated topic in scientific research. These households, here defined as being in precarious prosperity, are not a target group of social policy as such. Studying adaptation in precarious prosperity is even more crucial for welfare research, as, according to Zapf (1984), people who are adapted to their living conditions reveal a reality of powerlessness and are often not reached by social-policy measures. Despite the 40-year-old debate on adaptation, “Empirical evidence of how exactly the quality of life and poverty indicators are affected by these processes is still surprisingly scarce” (Crettaz and Suter 2013:140). Carol Graham, who has been working on adaptation with a quantitative and international approach, notes: “Adapting expectations downward in difficult contexts or at times of adversity, such as economic crises or rising rates of crime, seems to be a useful trait for preserving individual happiness in the face of major challenges. At the same time, it can result in lower collective welfare levels by increasing tolerance for bad equilibriums, such as high levels of crime and corruption or dysfunctional governments” (Graham 2009:215).

The present research links precarious prosperity to quality of life (QOL) and adaptation. I ask:

What happens over time in adaptation to precarious prosperity and what reasonings go along with these processes?

Precarious prosperity describes a specific welfare position within the inequality order, which lies between poverty and secure prosperity. This stratum is characterized by a limited standard of living. It was originally developed by Hübinger (1996) and refined by Budowski et al. (2010). The topic of precarious prosperity is linked to debates on precariousness and vulnerability (Bankoff 2001; Castel and Dörre 2009). Research on households around the poverty line in Switzerland was first quantitative (Farago et al. 2005; Mayer 1975; Schulte 1999; Tillmann and Budowski 2004). Similarly, longitudinal research on precarious prosperity and well-being is only quantitative (Tillmann et al. 2016). Qualitative and comparative research on precarious prosperity has begun to address the aspects of QOL and adaptation (Budowski et al. 2016; Sieber and Vlase 2016). The results show that the ways in which opportunities provided by the state, the labor market, the community, and the household are perceived influence the strategies that households apply to improve or maintain their socioeconomic positions.

QOL in this research is distinguished from subjective well-being (SWB) and considers the latter to be the “happiness” or “satisfaction” of the individual. QOL is assessed by socioeconomic living conditions in various life domains²⁰ and people’s evaluation thereof (Noll 1999; Stiglitz et al. 2009). Structural and biographical events change living conditions; additionally, research highlights the importance of past experiences, present

²⁰ The growing literature on each of these domains (e.g. health related QOL) can’t be developed here.

opportunities (Felce and Perry 1995), and the future (Piper 2014) for the perception of opportunities to improve QOL. According to Zapf, QOL is defined here as good living conditions that accompany positive subjective well-being (1984). Quantitative research on QOL is a well-established field of social science around the world (Noll 2002). However, longitudinal qualitative research on the topic is scant.

Adaptation concerns the process by which a person becomes insensitive to the effects of constant stimuli (Helson 1964). In psychology, the small correlations between subjective well-being and objective conditions have been discussed for several decades using concepts such as social comparison (Festinger 1954), level of aspiration (Lewin et al. 1944), or reappraisal (Sirgy 2002). Adaptation is also a research field in economy (Ray 2003), anthropology (Appadurai 2004), and philosophy (Elster 1982).

In sociology, adaptation is discussed as the capacity to act according to the norms, demands, and constraints of a given community or environment (e.g., adaptation to climate change). There is quantitative research on adaptation linked to QOL and subjective well-being: Easterlin (1974) first observed that the association between happiness and income over time and across countries is weak, suggesting that adaptation might be the mechanism at play. Since then, quantitative researchers have challenged the observation that people adapt to their living conditions (Veenhoven and Vergunst 2012). Scholars present methodological or behavioral reasons to explain adaptation in subjective well-being as generally measured in Western countries and the way in which it relates to living conditions. The former concern difficulties in the measurement of objective and subjective well-being variables, and the latter concerns the influences of culture and desirability on the expression of satisfaction (Olson and Schober 1993:176). Qualitative researchers have effectively observed that adaptation leads to high subjective well-being, e.g., with analyses of precarious work (Grimm et al. 2013) and health (Helvik et al. 2011).

Zapf (1984) describes the state of adaptation (Table 11), and this description is a starting point for analyzing the processes leading to adaptation; this state was empirically found among individuals living in precarious prosperity in former analyses of the data used in this article. The objective of this article is to understand the processes that lead to this state of adaptation.

Lister's (2004) and Schütz's (1932) theoretical approaches are used to analyze what leads to the state of adaptation. Longitudinal qualitative data analysis allows for the reconstruction and interpretation of the interviewees' perception or their past and present experiences within their household contexts, and of their future prospects.

By addressing the specific topic of adaptation in precarious prosperity, the study sheds light on aspects of adaptation that cannot be revealed by quantitative research and enables analyses of the mechanisms at play between subjective well-being and objective living conditions.

In the following section (2), I describe the conceptual framework that guides the research. The data and methods are presented in section 3. Section 4 depicts the empirical results relating to adaptation in a situation of precarious prosperity, and section 5 concludes the article.

4.2. Agency and Reasoning: The Conceptual Framework

Before describing the conceptual framework for analysis, I will shortly list some assumptions derived from the literature and the former results of research on precarious prosperity:

- In precarious prosperity, the QOL is assumed to be lower than it is in secure prosperity due to limited income and experiences of deprivation (Budowski et al. 2010).
- People exercise agency to maintain or improve their QOL. In contrast, people who have adapted are considered not to actively change their living conditions, because adaptation is associated with powerlessness and resignation (Olson and Schober 1993).

Zapf (1984) distinguishes 4 welfare positions by combining favorable or disadvantaged objective living conditions with high or low subjective well-being. According to this definition, adaptation describes the state of disadvantaged objective living conditions and high subjective well-being. It represents the “satisfaction paradox,” or being satisfied with disadvantaged living conditions.

Table 11: Welfare positions

Objective living conditions	Subjective well-being	
	High	Low
Favorable	Well-being	Dissonance
Disadvantaged	Adaptation	Deprivation

(see Zapf 1984:23)

I will refine Zapf’s understanding of QOL and adaptation through the following elements:

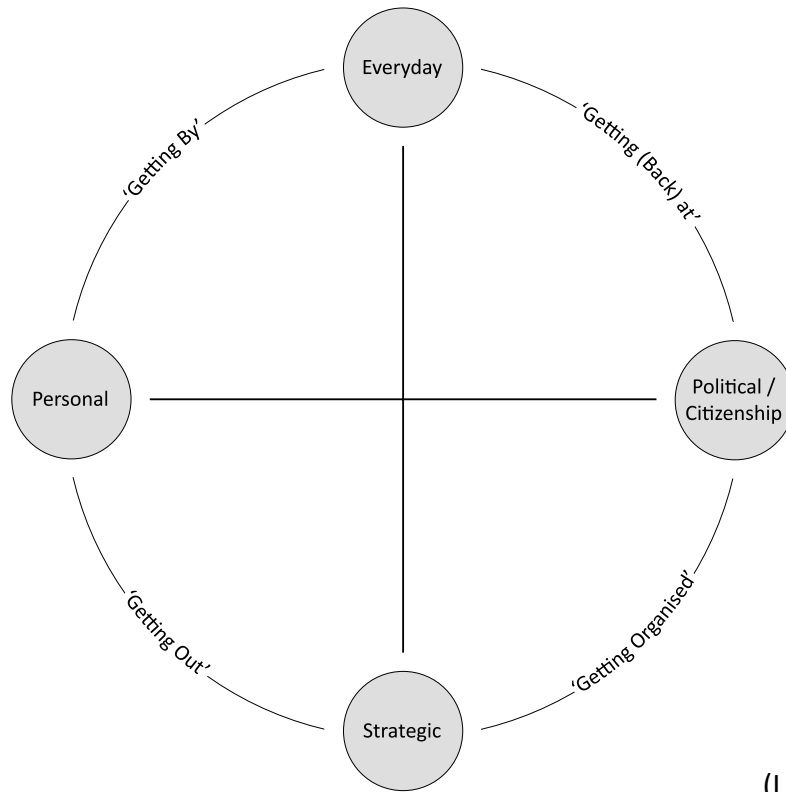
- Adaptation is not necessarily a global state of the individual; it may concern only one or another specific life domain.
- The present analysis will stress the time component by departing from the state of adaptation and linking it to the processes leading to adaptation.

Lister's (2004) theoretical framework furnishes elements to address domain-specific agency and the time component. I consider her framework to be useful not only for poverty but also for precarious prosperity. Her aim is to focus "on the agency of individuals in poverty without losing sight of the ways in which their agency is constrained by lack of material resources and power" (Lister 2004:127). In this sense, adaptation is not only an individual issue, as "movements in and out of poverty are a product of both individual actions (taken by poor and non-poor) on the one hand and economic and social processes and Government policies on the other" (Lister 2004: 145).

Lister (2004) distinguishes between "strategic" and "everyday" agency and between "personal" and "political/citizenship" agency (see Illustration 4). In her framework, she identifies four patterns of agency:

- "Getting by" refers to everyday coping, such as making ends meet. I situate processes leading to adaptation in this pattern of agency because they affect the individual and concern short-term well-being: They help people to cope by improving subjective well-being. However, adaptation is only considered agency if people explain their constraints and how they adapt to them (according to Schütz (1932), see below).
- "Getting back at" refers to everyday resistance or rebellious behavior (black labor, drug use, etc.). It has a political aspect in the sense that every day it shows where social policy measures are not corresponding to the needs of households in precarious prosperity.
- "Getting out" refers to long-term agency to improve one's own living conditions. Typical types of getting out are education, receiving social benefits or pensions, and finding a better job.
- "Getting organized" refers to collective strategic agency (political activities, collective self-help) and depends on a sense of identification as a member of a group (in precarious prosperity, migrants, retirees, etc.).

Illustration 4: Framework of agency



(Lister 2004:130)

While Lister's framework allows for a better understanding of the patterns of agency, the sociology of knowledge perspective links agency theoretically to adaptation by referring to the sense and reasoning of the agent. According to Schütz, people's reasoning guides their actions, and the meaning they attribute to an action characterizes the action as an action (Schütz 1932). Similarly, people legitimize their actions to make sense of life events a posteriori. Making sense of actions occurs in a social context and is influenced by people's social interests (Jarvie 2016:131). From this perspective, adaptation over time can be defined as agency. Combining Lister's framework and the perspective of Schütz allows for a conceptual framework to analyze adaptation in precarious prosperity over time.

4.3. Methods

This section first describes the available data and criteria of case selection for the analysis. Second, it explains the methodology of the data analysis.

Description of Data and Case Selection

The data were gathered from two projects financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation. For this longitudinal analysis, three waves of qualitative semi-structured interviews with households in Switzerland were analyzed (2008, 2009, and 2013 in Bern, Lausanne, and Zürich, for 50 households altogether). The interviews were performed with one household member, an individual embedded in his/her household and the structural context. The interviewees were asked to talk about their living conditions, and the data contain information about the individual and household situation (finances, work, education, health, environment, social network), the evaluation of this situation (quality of life), and the individuals' and the households' biographies and future prospects. Quantitative data on the living conditions of the households complete the qualitative interview data.

Households in precarious prosperity, identified by income and deprivation thresholds, were the group of interest for the interviews, and these were obtained by telephone screening in 2008.

A household in precarious prosperity is defined as follows:

- having an equivalized household income in the range of 60-80% of the median income of the population of the country, or
- having an equivalized income below the 60% income-poverty threshold yet not being deprived according to the deprivation threshold, or
- having an equivalized income above the 80% income-poverty threshold yet being deprived by the deprivation threshold (Budowski et al. 2010).

At the first interview in 2008, all households were situated in the same welfare position between poverty and secure prosperity. The sample is heterogeneous in terms of household composition (singles, couples, families, flat sharing) and income sources (work income, old-age pension, invalidity pension, unemployment benefits, widow pension or other state support, or financial support from parents) in addition to age, profession, and origin of the household members. During the research period, some of the households experienced upward and some downward mobility, but many were still in precarious prosperity at the end of the five-year period (see Table 12). The focus of

this analysis is on the households that were still or again in precarious prosperity at the time of the third interview (29 cases)²¹.

For the analysis, households where the interviewee was in a position of adaptation (according to Zapf's definition) at the time of the last interview in 2013 were identified (Table 12). The subjective well-being of the interviewee was evaluated based on the qualitative data. Some of the interviewees spontaneously reported their well-being in the overall evaluations (I am well, I am satisfied, I am not happy, etc.) or in evaluations linked to reports about life domains (health, work, social networks, etc.). If they did not speak about their subjective well-being, the interviewer asked the person to evaluate the life domains and how they felt in general. As the following table shows, the four welfare positions defined by Zapf have been specified (three categories of living conditions and three levels of well-being) for this analysis:

Table 12: Interviewees in 2013, according to living conditions and subjective well-being

Living conditions of the household 2013	Subjective well-being of the interviewee 2013		
	High	Middle (or domain specific high and low)	Low
Secure prosperity	"Well-being" (8 cases)	"Partial well-being" (3 cases)	"Dissonance" (3 cases)
Precarious prosperity	"Adaptation" CH04, CH11, CH12, CH15, CH20, CH25, CH27, CH32, CH33, CH42, CH43, CH44, CH47, CH54, CH55, CH58, CH71, CH72	"Partial adaptation" CH03, CH17, CH21, CH24, CH45, CH51, CH64, CH69	"Deprivation" CH07, CH37, CH61
Poverty	"Adaptation" (1 case)	"Partial adaptation" (2 cases)	"Deprivation" (4 cases)

(own elaboration, oriented by Zapf 1984)

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze adaptation linked to improved living conditions or to poverty and to compare households in precarious prosperity with those in another socio-economic status.

The analysis focused on the 18 cases in adaptation and the 3 contrast cases in deprivation. However, among the cases classified as “adapted,” 6 were indeed in precarious prosperity in 2013, but they had improved their situation in some life domains, and thus their situation was characterized by dynamics of improving living conditions. Among these cases, no reasoning or processes of adaptation were observed (CH32, CH44, CH54, CH55, CH58, CH71).

Method of analysis

Adaptation processes occur over time and must be analyzed by a longitudinal research design. To be precise, qualitative longitudinal research allows for analyzing the change or continuity of households’ living conditions and interviewees’ subjective well-being, agency, and reasoning (Holland 2011). The selected households’ socioeconomic positions were identified as precarious prosperity at the beginning and end of the research period. The qualitative interviews provided information on the changes that occurred in specific life domains and regarding the opportunity structures between the interviews, even if the household remained in the socioeconomic position of precarious prosperity across the time period. The interviewee who adapted to the conditions of precarious prosperity presented and discussed a high subjective well-being at the time of the third interview, yet subjective well-being differed between cases in the beginning. The analysis focused on the interviewees maintaining or improving QOL during the data-collection period and extended, to a minor degree, beyond the time of the data-collection period in that past experiences (personal and household biography) and households’ and individuals’ future anticipations were also considered in the understanding of their QOL (MacKie et al. 2002). I analyzed the evolution of the QOL and adaptation by means of thematic charts (Ritchie et al. 2003). Elaborated for each case and each year, such charts enable the analysis of QOL by case, its evolution over time, and the comparison of cases and their evolution. The thematic charts reveal recurrent reasonings and links to living conditions that allow for identifying the four patterns of adaptation presented in 4.4.2.

Household information is necessary, as individuals are contextually embedded, and their QOL extends beyond individual issues. However, methodologically, after having selected the cases according to living conditions, the analysis was carried out without taking living conditions and the household situation of the interviewees into account in the first step. In doing so, it was possible to lower the influence of the researcher’s preconceptions about what social experiences are relevant for the reasonings of adaptation. In a second step, the link between agency and reasoning with the respective living situations was made to explain the social conditions and experiences leading to it. Finally, I focused on the way in which precarious living conditions influenced change or continuity and on the agency of all the household members (Saldaña 2003).

4.4. Results

The research question was approached first by means of an analysis of the individual's agency and its evolution over time to reveal the link between adaptation and agency in precarious prosperity. Second, the reasoning about adaptation was further investigated.

4.4.1 Adaptation and Agency

According to the assumption that adaptation accompanies powerlessness and resignation, one might expect that people in a state of adaptation are no longer actively improving their household's living conditions. The analysis of agency showed that all adapted interviewees implemented other patterns of agency, and thus, the processes leading to adaptation did not lead to complete resignation. However, when other patterns of agency failed to improve the situation for the interviewee, domain-specific resignation linked to domain-specific adaptation was observed. Applying Lister's (2004) framework, the following two cases disclose, in an exemplary way, the interplay of agency and adaptation. These cases were chosen as exemplary because they allow for the illustration of various aspects of adaptation.

CH11 was a woman in her fifties. She had lived with her husband in 2008 and 2009 and with her husband and adult daughter in 2013. She worked at night as a nurse in a home for the elderly. The family faced several challenges linked to health problems: the husband was addicted to alcohol, the daughter had psychological troubles linked to sexual abuse in her childhood, and the interviewee was suffering from a non-curable autoimmune disease causing tiredness, fever, aches, and other symptoms (lupus). The main agency reported by the interviewee concerned problems in the domain of health and work, as Table 13 shows in greater detail:

Table 13: Agency over time CH11

CH11	Getting by	Getting out	Getting back (at)	Getting organized
2008		Apply for invalidity pension, psychological and financial support of the daughter		Self-help groups, standing in opposition at work
2009	Social comparison, holiday at their friend's house to reduce expenses	Waiting for invalidity pension, support of the daughter		Self-help groups
2013	Reappraisal, going to Hungary for cheaper dental care	Support of the daughter, looking for paramedical support to complete her health care		Self-help groups

(own elaboration)

On the one hand, this woman actively tried to improve the psychological and physical well-being of all family members during the research period. During the interview period, she applied for invalidity pension with success, leading to greater financial stability for the household and the relieving of financial stress. On the other hand, she stopped the activities that aimed to improve her working conditions between 2008 and 2013. Her resignation and adaptation to her work situation came to the forefront in the interviews when comparing her reports on work over time.

"I dare to shout at my workplace when I need to. If they listen to me is another question." (CH11, t1, 2008)

"At the beginning, I stood in opposition, yes [...] but as they are strict and uff, the management took it bad [...] it's (pff) niet, 'if you are not happy, you can go elsewhere'. That's clear. So, I don't lose my energy in fighting for this [...] I try to do my work according to the values that are important for me within the scope of action I have." (CH11, t3, 2013)

She also adjusted her perspectives on the future, especially connected to her daughter's situation. In contrast with the work domain, the adaptation in this life domain did not accompany resignation, as she still continued to support her daughter psychologically and financially. This represented a type of mental aid that helped her persevere, as her daughter's work situation was worsening (she had lost her job and had not found an apprenticeship) and had returned home to live with her parents. This kind of adaptation came to the fore when she was asked about her plans and wishes for the next five years at each interview:

"I hope that my daughter will soon be independent and that we won't have to support her financially anymore." (CH11, t1, 2008)

"I don't want to foresee to the future and plan something. It's more like – experience what we have to experience and we'll see. I think I would rather make bad foresights for the future so I prefer not to imagine anything. [...] I've enough to do today (laughing); my future perspectives go only until this evening." (CH11, t3, 2013)

On the one hand, the case of this woman showed an ongoing process of adaptation in the domains of work and care during the research period. Resignation seemed to be appropriate to describe what was happening in the work domain, because she had stopped every kind of agency to improve her working conditions. In the domain of care (in particular, expressed through the future perspectives), she seemed to adapt to obtain more emotional distance and better care for herself, but she still continued other patterns of agency in this domain. Therefore, this adaptation could not be interpreted as resignation. On the other hand, she continued to actively change her living conditions in the financial and health domains.

The second case (CH43) is a man in his fifties. He was living with his wife in 2008 and 2009 and alone (after their separation) in 2013. His work situation was not stable; he worked mainly as an actor and supplemented his income by working temporarily as a painter. His reported agency is listed in Table 14.

Table 14: Agency over time CH43

CH43	Getting by	Getting out	Getting back (at)	Getting organized
2008	Being used to live with little money, temporary jobs	Contributions to a special pension pool for artists		
2009	Being used to live with little money, working as an independent painter	Contributions to the pension pool, looking for a new job as actor		
2013	Getting used to social assistance, working as an independent painter, cultivating vegetables in his garden, changing the health insurance every year	Contributions to the pension pool, applying for social benefits between periods of work, waiting for early retirement		Offering himself as a candidate for the city assembly

(own elaboration)

This man spoke explicitly about adaptation in all the interviews. As an actor, he had always had to deal with insecurities linked to his work situation and low income.

“It is not hardship, you rather just get through, well, I am actually used to this.”
(CH43, t1, 2008)

As the respondent’s presentation of his biography revealed, the process of adaptation had already started before we interviewed him and had led to a state of adaptation across all life domains (high overall and domain specific well-being despite insecure and low income, difficulties finding work, problems in his relationship, and unsuccessful political activity). Moreover, one can observe how the interviewee once more changed his agency, which was accompanied by adaptation processes, during the research period to avoid slipping into poverty. This adaptation concerned his attitude toward social benefits. When he still lived together with his wife, they were able to compensate for a temporary lack of income mutually, and in the first interviews, he could not imagine receiving social benefits:

“If I had nothing left, I would have to go to the social benefits office. [...] I rather go cleaning roads, cleaning somewhere, anywhere, it doesn’t matter – but I don’t want this [social benefits]. But I think this will never happen.” (CH43, t1, 2008)

In 2013, living alone, he accepted social benefits to overcome periods of unemployment and adapted to this new situation:

“Well, as an actor I am always muddling through a little bit, and then I have, ahm, in between I just have to go to the social benefits office, but this is nothing special to me. It is, ehm, it is just like that.” (CH43, t3, 2013)

This case shows the result of a longer lasting adaptation process linked to the specific work situation, which still continues to affect current events in the household. In the interviewee’s reasoning, adaptation was not presented as resignation but seemed to be an internalized attitude that allowed for dealing with ongoing insecurities. This man also presented his precarious work situation as a choice, a source of well-being, and, respectively, self-realization. He further exercised other patterns of agency in the financial, work, and political domain.

Comparing the two cases, the main differences appear in the element of choice: CH11 seemed to be constrained by her care responsibilities and the diverse health problems in her family. CH43 presented himself as free and independent. This difference could either be due to effective differences in the living conditions or to a more advanced process of adaptation in the case of CH43 (see 4.2.5). The two cases had in common the fact that while they were both adapting, the interviewees continued to exercise agency

in some life domains. This is the first element that emerged also in all other cases, despite very diverse household situations and the complex interplay between living conditions in different life domains. Furthermore, all cases in precarious prosperity presented reasoning about adaptation, even those with low subjective well-being. The processes leading to adaptation may thus be interpreted as an agency of “getting by” (Lister 2004).

What distinguished the three cases with low subjective well-being (CH07, CH37, CH61) from the others is that they explained how they were able to adjust and adapt to a situation to a certain extent, but that the deprivations could not be addressed in a positive way any longer when they became too important. In all of these cases, it was mainly severe health problems causing the low QOL, which spilled over into all other life domains.

“What do you want? You have to lower your expectations, but I am less and less able to cope with this because I have to lower my prospects too much.” (CH37, t3, 2013)

Second, the interviewees exercise agency mainly on a personal or household level (getting by, getting out). Only a few reported collective agency, and when the agency of “getting organized” occurred, it was not linked to a sense of belonging to precarious prosperity (or other terms describing the socioeconomic position) but to health problems or a specific profession, for instance.

When observing agency, it is important to understand that adaptation does not equal overall resignation. Moreover, the feeling of powerlessness or lack of agency is rather domain-specific and is observed at an earlier stage of adaptation. The next section will go into more depth about reasoning over time to provide a more complete understanding of what is happening in processes leading to adaptation.

4.4.2 Reasoning for Adaptation

Some of the interviewees in 2013 spoke explicitly about adaptation (“s’adapter,” “sich anpassen:” CH12, CH15, CH33, CH42). Going beyond this explicit discourse allowed for an analysis of the reasoning linked to high subjective well-being despite being in precarious prosperity. In fact, high subjective well-being was explicitly explained by all interviewees in precarious prosperity, even if there was no question about the reason for SWB in the interviews. Hence, well-being was not self-evident to them, and they referred to various processes and social experiences to explain it. The interviewees’ statements about how they adapted allowed for the identifying of types of adaptation reasoning. Three of these types can also be found in psychological literature: social comparison (Festinger 1954), diminution of aspirations (Lewin et al. 1944), emotional detachment (term of the author), and reappraisal (Sirgy 2002). The analysis does not focus on personality traits to explain why and how people adapt but on social

experiences (relevant life events or situations that reach beyond the individual) that could explain these types of adaptation. Interestingly, when looking at the biographies, household situations, and different life domains of the interviewees, there was a coincidence of specific social experiences and types of adaptation across the cases. Combining reasonings and social experiences allowed for the developing of patterns of adaptation. In the sample, one person generally referred to several processes and types of adaptation. One person may also have encountered several of the social experiences described in the following section (e.g., a mother caring for her children who had immigrated to Switzerland). Thus, the four patterns of adaptation presented here must be seen as phenomena and can accumulate in some cases.

Social comparison and migration

The first type of adaptation occurs through social comparison (Festinger 1954) and means that people evaluate their own QOL by comparing it with that of others. Social comparison was often drawn upon in the analyzed sample. The interviewees compared themselves to those with worse health problems, to families with care responsibilities, and so on (e.g., CH33). However, social comparison seemed to be particularly crucial for subjective well-being when people immigrated to Switzerland from a country clearly characterized by lower living conditions such as Colombia (CH15), Chile (CH20), or Tibet (CH71). Actually, all people interviewed from such countries strongly referred to their origins in comparison to Switzerland as a frame of reference when evaluating their QOL. This led to a positive perception of their actual living conditions and to high subjective well-being.

“I come from another country where it changed every day, we had the coup d’état, we had earthquakes. [...] I’m so used to starting from scratch that all the changes you have here don’t really change anything for me. [...] I think, compared to other countries where children live on the street [...], here in Switzerland you don’t have that. [...] Here, there is always help – you can always count on something.” (CH20, t3, 2013)

“Getting used to,” changing aspirations, and precarious work

A second type of adaptation to precarious prosperity could be identified in the sample, and it involved getting used to a situation or learning to deal with difficulties, leading to a diminution of stress and negative feelings over time. This process went along with the diminution of aspirations (see Lewin et al. 1944) and a demarcation from others who were not accustomed to precariousness (those who had not been in precarious working conditions for a longer period and those who needed to have money to buy things). A dissociation from the norm of stability and consumer society was observed in these cases. For interviewees involved in this type of process, the processes of adaptation had begun before the research period; this can be considered the reason why the interviewees reported high subjective well-being in all three interviews, despite

worsening living conditions (e.g., loss of a job, CH42). Actually, in the sample, this type of adaptation was linked to a precarious work situation over at least five years (see also case study CH43).

"[Financial insecurity] did not stress me so much. Oh, sure, it is sometimes uncomfortable, but in fact I have always – what shall I say – my life hasn't run in straight lines, so that this didn't scare me." (CH03, t3, 2013, self-employed teacher)

"People don't like to renounce. They want to have everything, and this is expensive. [...] You have to set goals you know you will be able to attain. It's like that, and then you don't have problems, I think. [...] We couldn't be happier, even if we had I don't know how much money on our accounts every month." (CH42, t3, 2013, waiter on call)

Being on your own and care responsibilities

A third type of adaptation process in the sample involved the interviewees reasoning with their own resources to address their situation. The reasoning concerned being on one's own to manage one's life and one's own responsibility for better subjective well-being:

"If I look at the negative, then it is very bad: oh, I am alone, I have to work all day and then there is my son and then... If I think positive, I am satisfied. I think: oh, I am strong enough, I did this like that, I made it myself, I organized this. I am proud, if I think positive." (CH71, t2, 2009)

Looking at the interviewees' household situation with this reasoning, we can see that they were all women with children (teenagers and young adults) in the household and that they cared for the problems of the other household members (health, education, integration in the labor market). Reasoning such as "it's up to you" and "you have to detach" seemed to be linked to the experience of having no help from others in relation to their household needs: they complained about the welfare state's and community's lack of support for families and explained how they bore multiple burdens for their households. During the research period, the analysis revealed an ongoing process of emotional detachment leading to higher subjective well-being despite stable or worsening living conditions (see also case study CH11).

Reappraisal after experiencing health problems

Finally, an interesting link was found between the experience of health problems and adaptation. The importance of health for QOL in precarious prosperity has already been discussed (Budowski et al. 2015). Adaptation to precarious living conditions seemed to be possible in this study's sample when the people who experienced the health problems were (at least partially) cured or stable. In these cases, the interviewees relativized the difficulty of their living conditions in light of the health difficulties they had had in the past (reappraisal).

"It is changing a little bit. Well, you have wishes and stuff, but that's all. Well, perspectives are changing with this disease. You tell yourself health first, that's the most important; isn't it? This has changed; there was a little bit of a turnaround." (CH47, t2, 2009, had a cancer treatment in the year before the interview)

In contrast, the three cases who lived in a situation of deprivation linked their low subjective well-being directly to their health problems. Interestingly, they had a similar reasoning to those who were adapted, but it was the opposite, e.g., CH37 was suffering from a chronic muscle disorder and discussed social comparison:

"I have great difficulty with people of my age because I get really jealous. I'm sorry to say this; it is bad because I compare myself to them." (CH37, t3, 2013)

Reasoning over time

When comparing these four types of cases with regard to adaptation, living conditions, and subjective well-being over time, there was an interesting evolution in the reasoning of the people: among the cases, in which a process to adaptation could be observed within the research period (mainly those with care responsibilities and those who had experienced health problems), the reports of their overall well-being were more positive than what they said about specific life domains in the rest of the interview (see also case study CH11). In these interviews, people told us they were doing well and were satisfied, but between the lines, I could hear another story. They actually corrected themselves, or rather, they persuaded themselves that they were well. There seemed to be a perceived norm to be satisfied in their situation (or no reason to be unsatisfied), even if they experienced difficulties in some life domains.

"I must not complain. I am well, apart from the little aches and pains one has at my age, right? Slowly but surely, everything takes more time. What do you want? [...] No, I have to be satisfied. And as long as I am able to walk, well, I am satisfied; then I don't want to complain [...] No, now I am actually satisfied; yes, I am well, and if my health stays as it is, I must not complain, if it doesn't get worse. Let's be satisfied and make the best of it." (CH33, t3, 2013, retired in 2007, suffering from diabetes, her partner died during the research period)

In contrast, the interviewees whose processes to adaptation had been ongoing for a longer period of time (before 2008) do not correct themselves (mainly the immigrants and those with a biography of precarious work). They rather explained that they were “lucky” and were aware of their luck.

“I think I am rather well because I am very aware of all the luck I have, in fact, to, to – I have friends, I am in good health, I have a great flat, I have a job where I work at home when I want at the time I want. Well, this is liberty, it is an extraordinary luxury – so I am rather, rather well.” (CH04, t3, 2013, journalist)

As illustrated in the case of CH43, they seemed to have internalized the norm to be satisfied and totally identified with it. They also distanced themselves from “the others” who had more money and liked to buy things by explaining that they did not need that many material goods.

“We are not people who change the furniture all the time, who change, ehm, for nothing, or who buy clothes all the time.” (CH17, t3, 2013, day nanny)

In summary, the explanations for adaptation seemed to be linked to a perceived norm to be satisfied and referred to social comparison (migration), “getting used to a situation” and lowering aspirations (precarious work), stressing one’s own resources and emotional detachment (care), and reappraisal (health). The associated social experiences shed light on a possible link between living conditions and adaptation. Moreover, a process of internalization over time could be identified, which showed up in a changing discourse about subjective well-being: the longer the adaptation process had been occurring, the less incoherent was the information given by the interviewees concerning their living conditions and respective well-being.

4.5. Conclusion

Quantitative research has challenged the existence of adaptation, while qualitative research on the topic is rare and has associated adaptation with powerlessness and resignation. This paper is based on an analysis of adaptation in precarious prosperity over time and aimed to explain how adaptation occurs. It investigated the processes leading to a state of adaptation (high subjective well-being despite precarious prosperity, according to Zapf (1984)) using a longitudinal qualitative design. Lister’s framework on agency (2004) allowed for an analysis of the processes of adaptation as agency among other patterns of agency. These processes are understood here as agency, or as the interviewees’ reason about it, even in cases with low SWB. The sociology of knowledge approach (Schütz 1932) was also applied to delve into the interviewees’ reasoning.

The results show that adaptation is, first, domain specific and occurs in parallel with other patterns of agency. The specific processes of adaptation tend to be similar according to what people perceive as relevant social experiences – a link that should be confirmed in future research: social comparison was common among people who immigrated to Switzerland from another country with lower living conditions. “Getting used to a situation” and lowering aspirations came to the fore after longer lasting precarious living conditions (e.g., precarious work). Emotional detachment and relying on one’s own resources seemed to be a way to “get by” when people had care responsibilities in the household, and reappraisal occurred in general after (at least partially) cured health problems. Incidentally, severe health problems were also the main reason hindering adaptation and leading to low subjective well-being in precarious prosperity.

The interviewees seemed to perceive high subjective well-being as the norm, but it was not self-evident to them and was thus explained. However, their reasoning changed over time and revealed a process of internalization of the perceived norm to be satisfied: the longer the adaptation process had happened, the less the interviewees gave incoherent information and self-correcting reports concerning living conditions and respective well-being. Although the interviewees perceived resignation in the beginning of the process of adaptation (when other patterns of agency had been unsuccessful), precarious living conditions were rather presented as normal or even as a choice in a later stage of the process. The state of adaptation spilled over from one life domain into others and into general subjective well-being.

Looking at subjective well-being alone thus presents a distorted picture when evaluating welfare. Adaptation must be taken into consideration when looking at the QOL of people and households in precarious prosperity. This paper contributes to the understanding of how QOL is affected by adaptation. It helps people on an individual level to get by and care for their households. At the same time, the results support Graham’s statement about the risk of lower welfare levels relating to adaptation (Graham 2009, 215) while adding insight about the risk of the reproduction of inequalities on a societal level to it, in the sense that adaptation does not encourage redistribution processes via the welfare state; the analysis shows that adaptation does not accompany political agency and change but rather stability of living conditions and individual welfare.

4.6. References

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5. Conclusion

My dissertation is dedicated to the topic of adaptation, and I focus on a specific position within the social inequality order: precarious prosperity. This concluding chapter first summarizes the topic and definitions of the research (5.1.). It then synthesizes its contributions to the empirical debate (5.2.), the theoretical debate (5.3.), and the methodological debate (5.4.). A reflection on the originality and limits of the research and further questions (5.5.) is provided at the end of this chapter.

5.1. Quality of life and adaptation in precarious prosperity

The research on adaptation in precarious prosperity started with the assumption that aspirations, as well as the agency and opportunity to realize aspirations, are important for quality of life (Fischer 2014:5). Quality of life, as I use it, is a holistic concept that sets out to account for all living conditions: structural opportunities (resources and conditions) that are provided to people in society as well as their individual living circumstances. Based on Zapf (1984), I define quality of life as the result of objective living conditions in various life domains and subjective well-being. This definition is based on the idea of combining and confronting the objective with subjective elements. I consider subjective well-being to be the “happiness” or “satisfaction” of the individual; satisfaction contains (more long-term) evaluative elements (“a life worth living”), and happiness refers to (more short-term) pleasure or unpleasant feelings. Moreover, as the literature suggests, the research also acknowledges the importance of past experiences and the future for quality of life.

Adaptation refers to different mechanisms and processes in different circumstances that have different effects on well-being, as Teschl and Comim (2005) maintain. In human sciences, adaptation generally concerns the process by which a person becomes insensitive to the effects of constant stimuli (Helson 1964). In sociology, it refers to the capacity to act according to the norms, constraints and demands of the society or community (Uglanova 2014). Zapf (1984:23) defines a state of adaptation as a welfare position with high subjective well-being despite disadvantaged living conditions (satisfaction paradox). As the time component is an important element of the term adaptation, Zapf’s definition is used for case selection and is further refined conceptually in the course of the dissertation. The analyses were about processes.

Elements of adaptation are also claimed to be included in social inequality research (Irwin 2015:259). The present study links quality of life research with social inequality research with a focus on the specific socioeconomic position called precarious prosperity. This term, as I use it, describes a position within the inequality order—in between poverty and secure prosperity—that configures opportunities and life chances (Budowski et al. 2010). It is operationalized by an income threshold and a deprivation threshold at the household level. “Deprivation” refers to the lack of possessions,

activities or access to services that a majority of the households in the respective country has or does due to financial constraints (Budowski et al. 2010:277).

The focus of my research is on the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity, when the interviewed household member has adapted. It is situated in a sociological debate where the existence of adaptation is still challenged by prominent researchers, and where qualitative approaches have a marginal position. I thus consider that a better and differentiated understanding of adaptation is indispensable for enhancing quality of life research. This argument is in line with Crettaz and Suter who state that, despite the 40-year-old debate on adaptation, “[e]mpirical evidence of how exactly the quality of life and poverty indicators are affected by these processes is still surprisingly scarce” (Crettaz and Suter 2013:140). The qualitative approach complements the quantitative effort, and the longitudinal and cross-national perspectives shed light on the mechanisms at play between subjective well-being and objective living conditions. In line with Neff, I chose an approach that engages with people’s biographies, their aspirations, their agency and the enabling and constraining structures they are embedded in (Neff 2012:153).

Adaptation seems to be a common phenomenon within precarious prosperity across different household situations and countries, and it is the common perspective in the contributions of this dissertation. Its objective is to advance research on adaptation by contributing to the empirical, theoretical and methodological debates. The research title refers to the question of whether quality of life is improved through adaptation. This question can be approached in diverse manners that I will refer to in the following sections, where I summarize how the objectives were achieved. The next chapter discusses the empirical results of the three articles in response to the controversial sociological debate on adaptation to living conditions and its implications for social policies.

5.2. Contributions to the empirical debate

Adaptation research has been presented from psychological, economic and sociological perspectives. Psychologists seek mainly intrapersonal and genetically predefined reasons for adaptation. They first focused on the stability of subjective well-being by developing the concepts of adaptation level, the happiness set point and the hedonic treadmill. Recent research has investigated the differences between individuals and their adaptation. The concepts of social comparison, aspiration level, plasticity and reappraisal allow me to distinguish types of adaptation processes in my empirical analyses. Economists, in contrast, consider that individuals make personal and economic choices to improve subjective well-being within a given social context. They developed concepts like the tunnel effect and aspiration theories.

A sociological perspective on adaptation embeds it within social relations. Even if the famous Easterlin paradox is still discussed and challenged by sociologists, quantitative evidence in Switzerland (and on the particular social position of precarious prosperity)

suggests that adaptation exists (Crettaz and Suter 2013; Tillmann et al. 2016; Henke 2016). Qualitative research is rare, but it also observes and describes adaptation (Ipsen 1978; Grimm et al. 2013; Helvik et al. 2013). As this research departed from empirical evidence for adaptation identified from analyses of a large qualitative data corpus from various countries, it seemed reasonable to depart from the assumption that people do adapt to their living conditions, possibly under certain conditions.

In the state of the art, adaptation is, to a certain extent, considered a natural process over the life cycle. This research is thus about understanding to what point adaptation occurs and how adaptation processes differ between people in the specific position of precarious prosperity according to their opportunities, resources and social experiences. That is why I analyze how social conditions influence quality of life over time. The objective to better understand adaptation processes and the social conditions in which they come into play responds to a call for research on the factors that influence the adaptation process and their comprehension. Referring to the overall question of improving quality of life through adaptation, this research means to investigate:

- when households in precarious prosperity try to improve their quality of life through adaptation, and
- in which way adaptation improves the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity.

Other researchers have reflected on this, such as Clark in his book about adaptation wherein he raises the following questions:

- What triggers adaptation? “Is it a response to past experience, future expectations, new possibilities, social comparisons with others or some sort of shock or crisis?” (Clark 2012:2).
- What form or shape does adaptation take? “Does it involve non-grumbling resignation to fate or valiant struggle against adversity?” (Clark 2012:2).

Each of the three contributions of my dissertation had a specific focus on the topic of precarious prosperity and quality of life. The results on adaptation link the three articles, and they confirm each other, despite the different approaches, contexts and research questions. In article 1, adaptation was identified in Spanish and in Swiss cases as well as in cases with different problematic life domains. This first analysis resulted in identifying adaptation as a mechanism (among others) to explain the way household members experience quality of life. In article 2, again, adaptation was identified among several cases, both in Romania and in Switzerland. These results substantiate the relevance of adaptation in precarious prosperity in diverse contexts and allow for a refined understanding of adaptation processes. Strategies of adaptation effectively appeared in both countries when the respondent did not perceive that an active modification of the living conditions was possible. Article 3 provides a deeper understanding of how relevant social experiences influence processes of adaptation. The reasoning of people who adapt to changes over time reveals that adaptation is a pattern of agency (and not complete resignation as is usually assumed) to be able to better respond to perceived

social norms. Overall, the empirical analyses of the three articles lead to a better understanding of adaptation and suggest when and how adaptation occurs.

5.2.1. When do household members in precarious prosperity try to improve their quality of life through adaptation?

When “stuck” in their situation, i.e., when the respondents feel they have no chance to change their living conditions, or when other patterns of agency fail to improve the situation, adaptation occurs. Agency and adaptation are closely linked to the household’s past and present experiences with opportunity structures and what they thought their future prospects to be. The position within the life course is also important. For example, young Spanish people were desperate because they saw no future prospects; however, they did not lose their hope that the overall situation of crisis would change. Therefore, they invested in their future, e.g., by pursuing educational opportunities. Retired people in Switzerland need to adapt to their financial situation of low old-age benefits because they know it will not change in the future.

On the contrary, people do not adapt when they perceive that they can change their living conditions. This is the case of households in an upward-mobility dynamic, for example Swiss students when they finish university and look for a job to earn their own money and become more independent, or older respondents in the three countries (in conditions of stress at work, of insecure income or receiving social assistance) when they feel that retirement will provide a solution for them (stable income, less stress and a new social status). Projecting prospects of improvement into the future allows for postponing satisfaction to the future without questioning or feeling menaced too much by the current situation.

Finally, there are some cases where adaptation does not occur, even if changing living conditions is not a successful strategy. This was observed in Swiss households where a member is suffering from severe health problems that spill over to other life domains. These households have the lowest quality of life in the sample. Thus, there seems to be some kind of threshold of deprivation and suffering to which people cannot adapt anymore.

5.2.2. Does adaptation improve the quality of life of households in precarious prosperity and, if so, how?

The analyses conducted for the articles provide evidence that adaptation is not an isolated strategy for improving quality of life. Therefore, it needs to be considered in parallel to other strategies that aim to improve living conditions over a longer term. In this sense, subjective well-being, adaptation and other patterns of agency are domain specific. Often, the households implement multiple strategies at the same time. However, almost no households voiced their concern through a political process or protest. Rather, they concentrate their strategies on their own household and their personal resources.

The longitudinal analyses for Switzerland reveal that adaptation is domain specific and can become a general state over time. They further reveal that adaptation is linked to feelings of resignation at the beginning of the adaptation process (when other patterns of agency appear to be unsuccessful) but transforms to a state of higher general subjective well-being over time. After having adapted, the respondents presented their precarious living conditions as normal or even as a choice. In other words, people perceive high subjective well-being as the norm, but it is not self-evident to them at the beginning of the adaptation process, and the respondents explained this in the interview. However, the respondents' reasoning changed over time and revealed a process of internalization of the perceived norm to be satisfied: the longer the duration of the adaptation process, the less the interviewees gave incoherent information and self-correcting reports concerning living conditions and respective well-being. They get used to a situation and lower their aspirations after longer-lasting precarious living conditions (e.g., precarious work). Thus, there is more reflexivity about adaptation in the beginning of an adaptation process. Those who have got used to precarious living conditions over a long time do report about their adaptation, although they seem to be less conscious about ongoing adaptation processes in their everyday lives. This is an example of how reflected agency becomes routine over time.

The specific processes of adaptation tend to be similar according to what people perceive as relevant social experiences in the analyzed sample. I was thus able to link the psychological concepts of adaptation to life events and household situations, such as migration, care responsibilities or health problems. Specifically, social comparison was common among people who migrated to a country with higher living conditions: They compare the situation in their current country of residence to their country of origin, where it was worse. Emotional detachment and relying on one's own resources seemed to be a way to "get by" when people had care responsibilities in the household; they must care for others but do not perceive support from the welfare regime or opportunities they could take advantage of. Finally, reappraisal occurred in general after (at least partially) cured health problems. People in this situation perceive changed priorities because their previous situation was dominated by their concerns about their health.

These psychological concepts were very helpful to better understand the diversity of situations and determinants of adaptation. They allowed me to distinguish types of adaptation processes in my empirical analyses. However, the sociological perspective enables the understanding of why psychologists and economists identify plenty of different theories of individual adaptation. The focus on social conditions shows that neither personality traits nor personal choices can be the only reasons for adaptation: It is also the specific social experiences that lead a person to reason in one way or another. Linking my results to the state of the art allows me to say that the Easterlin paradox might be more than a statistical artifact in the sense that people do adapt to changing living conditions. Additionally, other concepts, like the introduced tunnel hypothesis aspiration theories and the evoked psychological concepts, make sense for analyzing well-being. My analyses add to former empirical results about adaptation elements to understand the fact that some people adapt and others do not. In other words, the former developed concepts about adaptation explain little about the differences between individuals' behavior. I will show how my results can be linked to other concepts by relating them to the tunnel hypothesis: If there is a perceived opportunity to change living conditions, people hope and try to change them and do not adapt (when the driver sees the cars move forward, in the tunnel hypothesis). They adapt when they perceive no possibility to change their living conditions (if their lane continues to remain at standstill, in the tunnel hypothesis). Contrary to the tunnel hypothesis, I found no evidence for "potential of social upheaval" (see Hirschman and Rothschild 1973:552) in such a situation of adaptation. I will further develop this element now.

5.2.3. What implications does adaptation in precarious prosperity have for social policies?

As households struggling to maintain a certain extent of secure prosperity (here defined as precarious prosperity) are a concern addressed by policy makers, I will reflect the implications of my results on adaptation in this socioeconomic position for social policy. The research departed from the assumption that people adapting to their living conditions represent a reality of powerlessness and retreat from society, and for this reason, are often not reached by social policy measures (Zapf 1984).

Regarding social inequalities and social policies, the question of improving quality of life through adaptation has a normative aspect: Should households and their members in precarious prosperity improve their quality of life through adaptation? Or, in other words: What does it mean for inequality and social policy if people improve their quality of life through adaptation? The literature review and my own empirical results show that adaptation is a successful strategy for individuals and their households' quality of life when the structural constraints do not allow other patterns of agency. At the same time, the analysis reveals that adaptation does not accompany political agency or change: Almost no households voiced their concern through a political process or protest. Rather they concentrate their strategies on their own household and their personal resources. This contributes to the reproduction of inequalities in the sense that

there is no collective agency to improve the living conditions of people in precarious prosperity. Adapted people are implicitly accepting inequalities or injustice of the society they live in. They do not fight (anymore) for changing their living conditions. As Graham states, individual adaptation can result in lower collective welfare levels by increasing tolerance for disadvantaged living conditions and through less redistribution via the welfare state (Graham 2009:2015). Thus, the consequence of adaptation is that existing structures and social inequalities are stabilized if actors of the welfare regime do not contribute to improving the living conditions and scope for agency for the people that have adapted.

The empirical results show that adaptation is a good thing for individual from a short-term perspective because it improves the subjective well-being and the perceived quality of life. It also helps people to get by despite their disadvantaged living conditions. Such observations led other researchers to draw conclusions for well-being on a very individualist level: One should find the personal resources to be happy with what one has, and others could help the individuals find these resources for adaptation for improving well-being (for example Ventegodt et al. 2005). I posit that drawing such conclusions would be ignoring the dynamics of a society as a whole (the consequences of inequalities, such as crime) and possibly, but not yet researched, longer term consequences of adaptation for the well-being and the health of people in precarious prosperity. This is why, in a social political view, we should also attach importance to these adapted households and try to improve their living conditions as well to reduce inequalities. In line with Sen, I take up the position that we should not attach a smaller value to the need to improve living conditions for those who adapt than for those who report a low subjective well-being.

“The hopeless beggar, the precarious landless labourer, the dominated housewife, the hardened unemployed or the over-exhausted coolie may all take pleasures in small mercies, and manage to suppress intense suffering for the necessity of continuing survival, but it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach a correspondingly small value to the loss of their well-being because of this survival strategy” (Sen 1987:45-46).

Instead of measuring subjective well-being alone, adaptation should also be considered for measuring and improving the welfare level. Specifically, adapted cases show where policy measures are needed: those who have adapted perceive a lack of opportunities to improve their living conditions and are “stuck” in their conditions. In other words, looking at those who manage to “be well” shows, for some cases, what works in a welfare regime. Other cases, such as those who “feel well” because they have adapted, reveal where there is potential to improve welfare support or opportunities or where constraints could be reduced. These are identified in life domains where people adapt because action does not seem possible or in the kind of support that people consider to be possibly helpful, e.g., the welfare state and community support in Romania.

If research takes into account individuals' adaptations to precarious living conditions, it provides a direction to reveal social inequalities and, thereafter, an empirical base to think about policies to reduce them. It is my conviction that a society should, from an ethical point of view, aim for welfare-state support that enables opportunities or provides a level of financial security to allow people to adapt to difficulties in other life domains (such as health) and creates the structures that make it unnecessary for individuals to adapt to socioeconomic deprivation and precariousness. From the perspective of agents being subject to the constraints imposed by material and cultural inequalities, the task of public policy would be to loosen these constraints and to accord respect and recognition to the moral decisions that are taken and the diverse social relations that result from them (Deacon 2004:448).

The next section will explain how adaptation is theoretically integrated in the research and what my dissertation contributes to the theoretical debates linked to adaptation.

5.3. Contributions to the theoretical debate

This section reflects on the contribution of the applied concepts to the theoretical debates on quality of life and on social inequality as well as on the conceptualization of adaptation as agency. The following assumptions were the starting point for my research on adaptation in precarious prosperity, on the theoretical level:

- Quality of life results from the interplay of living conditions and subjective well-being (Noll 1999).
- Objective living conditions concern the opportunity structures of the welfare regime, including the welfare state, the labor market, the community and the household (Budowski and Schief 2014).
- Living conditions in precarious prosperity are qualified as disadvantaged (Budowski et al. 2010).

One of the objectives of the research was to refine theoretical approaches for analyzing adaptation, quality of life and precarious prosperity from a qualitative perspective. Referring to the overall question of improving quality of life through adaptation, this means to investigate

- why and how household members in precarious prosperity improve their quality of life through adaptation, and
- how the three concepts are theoretically linked.

Again, Clark deliberated about this and formulated it as follows:

- In which conceptual space(s) do human beings adapt? “The possibilities seem almost endless and include happiness, satisfaction, aspirations, desires, preferences, interests, values, goals, capabilities, survival strategies and human behavior generally” (Clark 2012:2).

I will start the theoretical discussion with a critical review of the contributions of the frameworks used in the articles. The research questions in the three articles required different conceptual approaches. That is why in each contribution, the theoretical perspective varies somewhat, but the idea of a sensitizing scheme to better understand the quality of life and adaptation of households in precarious prosperity was always present. The three approaches together do not build one overall theoretical framework; rather they represent partly overlapping perspectives. Article 1 deals with quality of life research for households in precarious prosperity. Theoretically, it brings together quality of life research and its opportunity structures on the macro level with the subjective well-being and agency on the micro level. It focuses on problematic life domains and allows for the argument that adaptation in precarious prosperity exists—among other household strategies—by including elements of quality of life in the framework of precarious prosperity. This rather broad framework was useful for a first analysis.

The theory of social bonds (Paugam 2008) in article 2 provides another perspective, namely one on resources that households in precarious prosperity can mobilize. Applying this concept reveals that adaptation should be included in theory to understand resources for improving quality of life in precarious prosperity. From an adaptation perspective, this framework seems less straightforward than the other concepts I used. This is grounded in the chronological and iterative process of the dissertation: We found adaptation in a first subsample and I was not yet sure if it was an important issue for quality of life in precarious prosperity. The second article was aimed to be written on a Swiss-Romanian subsample, and I looked for a theoretical framework that allowed for a comparison of these contexts so as to identify emergent issues in the aim of identifying successful household strategies. Paugam’s theory was helpful when comparing the different dynamics of households and families in Romania and Switzerland: In Switzerland, the household is a main source of support, and the family (lineal bond, according to Paugam) is less important. Conversely, the solidarity and support in Romania is strongly linked to these lineal bonds across household borders. Moreover, Paugam explicates the links between the state, the family, the labor market and the organization of society from a cross-national perspective. The fact that adaptation came to the fore again in both Swiss and Romanian cases, despite this framework that has no focus on adaptation, stresses the validity of the importance of adaptation in precarious prosperity.

The framework of article 3 opposes adaptation to passivity and reveals complex processes of agency and reasoning in adaptation. Theoretically, it refers to Ruth Lister’s (2004) framework on agency. This framework proved to be applicable on precarious

prosperity, even if it was designed for an analysis of agency in poverty. It further allowed adaptation to be defined as one pattern of agency amongst others, which was crucial for the empirical results. Lister does not reflect about adaptation in her work, but her description of “Getting By” agency corresponds to the characteristics of adaptation I found in the empirical data. I will further develop this link between agency and adaptation, which is a main contribution of this dissertation, in the last section of the present chapter.

Finally, the inclusion of elements of the sociology of knowledge in this third article allows for a better integration of longitudinal aspects into the analysis by developing the reasoning over time and going deeper into specific cases.

In sum, the concepts used have to be understood as being part of an advancing research process, from a broad approach on quality of life and precarious prosperity to a more and more specific analysis of adaptation processes, as it is in the nature of qualitative research where the aim is to stay open for new emerging issues. In the following sections I will discuss the specific contributions of this research to quality of life research and to social inequality research.

5.3.1. Precarious prosperity and quality of life research

Adaptation is an individual issue, but quality of life is also defined by the opportunities and constraints of the household this individual lives in. In this sense, adaptation and opportunity structures, as well as individuals, households and the welfare regime are theoretically linked, which is the main contribution of my dissertation to quality of life research, as I will further develop in this section.

Considering the household on the micro level and opportunity structures on the macro level distinguishes this research from other quality of life research that focuses on the individual, and it also situates it in a sociological perspective by embedding the individual in the household and the specific welfare regime context. The household-level perspective overcomes the deficits of focusing on individuals because the household (the individuals’ closest social environment) also configures opportunities and constraints, and individuals perceive their opportunities and constraints with their household situation in mind.

On the macro level, the opportunity structures were conceptualized according to Paugam (2008) by the citizenship bond (belonging to a nation or welfare state), the organic participation bond (integration in the labor market) and, partly, the elective participation bond (community support). The elective participation bond (concerning partners and friends) is also part of the opportunity structures on the micro level, together with the lineal bond (that concerns the family). From a sociological perspective, the intrapersonal processes of adaptation are linked to the household situation and the welfare regime. Experiencing health problems, problems linked to the work situation and care responsibilities seem to be the most important life domains for the prevalence of adaptation in precarious prosperity.

As my research revealed, the interplay between the objective situation and subjective well-being is dynamic. The sampled households' accounts were grounded in their situations, and the interviewees took the time perspective into account. If households were able to buffer insecurity and individual problems, their quality of life seemed to be higher; if there was an accumulation of problems of the different household members, or if people lived alone and had difficulties integrating themselves socially, quality of life seemed to be lower. These results contribute to shedding some light on and unpacking the aggregate indicator of subjective well-being (happiness and satisfaction) by analyzing the complexity of the interactions between the macro and micro levels.

Overall, the research elaborates several elements that moderate how quality of life is experienced by households and their members in precarious prosperity:

- The role of the opportunity structures, the contexts and their interaction with individuals embedded within households seeking better living conditions could be carved out.
- The perception and assessment of opportunities were conceptualized as the perceived scope of agency allowing for managing the problems households face in various life domains.
- Embedding individuals in households, locating them in particular socioeconomic positions within opportunity structures and considering them active agents provide a fruitful analytical focus.
- Mechanisms between quality of life and the life course and future prospects were revealed.
- Subjective well-being can be influenced by means of adaptation despite constraining and limited objective conditions.

5.3.2. Adaptation and social inequality research

As Irwin states, elements of adaptation are claimed to be included in social inequality research (2015:259). The present study is linking quality of life research with social inequality research by analyzing adaptation with a focus on the specific socioeconomic position called precarious prosperity. The term, as I use it, describes a position within the inequality order—in between poverty and secure prosperity—that configures opportunities and life chances (Budowski et al. 2010). Including elements of quality of life research into the quite recent tradition of research on precarious prosperity enhanced the theoretical debate on precarious prosperity and inequality by putting emphasis on perception and the resulting subjective well-being. The living conditions on the macro and micro levels are important for quality of life not only from an objective point of view but also because of the way they are perceived. This so-called perceived scope of agency, in turn, influences what pattern of agency people and households in precarious prosperity implement. Adaptation improves subjective well-being and leads to a good perceived quality of life. Including perception thus allows us to identify

adaptation as a household strategy. Adaptation does not improve or change the objective situation as other patterns of agency may, but it still has implications for quality of life because a change in perception of the objective situation results in an improvement of subjective well-being and reevaluation of the objective situation.

Processes of economic strain as well as feelings of uncertainty, deprivation and the fear of social declassification that are deliberated in the research on precarious prosperity are linked to the debates on relative deprivation, social exclusion, the working poor, precariousness or vulnerability as it has been presented in the introduction. The strength of the concept of precarious prosperity in relation to these other debates is that it allows the understanding of the dynamics of possible in-between categories, in contrast to a dichotomous conceptualization of society (e.g., the included and the excluded) (Budowski et al. 2010). By investigating precarious prosperity, the research focuses on a neglected position in the stratification system of societies: those in-between poverty and secure prosperity. I argued that this could be a position where adaptation processes crystallize because these households do not have the financial resources to buy the services they need, but at the same time they are not usually a target group for social policy measures as the poor are (Budowski et al. 2010:284-285). Effectively, adaptation does not appear to be linked to classic concepts of inequality such as race, class or gender, but to this specific situation at the margin of being moved up or down. Even if gender issues, for example, play a role (e.g., when having care responsibilities in the household), they are leading to adaptation linked to these difficulties to make ends meet.

The concept of precarious prosperity makes sense because it allows for analysis of a very heterogeneous group in terms of age, education, race etc. that all face similar challenges of insecurity and difficulties to make ends meet. Thus it can grasp the interplay of other categories that were used in inequality research, and that lead to adaptation (or not). In sum, it is the perspective on precarious prosperity that probably allowed recognition of adaptation as a relevant issue, which has—to my knowledge—not yet been discussed in social inequality research.

Integrating quality of life and adaptation in social inequality research means taking into account people's perception of their social position and belonging in relation to adaptation processes. Interestingly, members of households in precarious prosperity do not explicitly evoke belonging to a class or group. Rather, they refer to their need to adapt for getting by across categories of social inequalities and household situations. In line with Irwin, I argue that "(s)ocial comparison and reference group theories offer overlapping conceptual frameworks but potentially more flexible tools for exploring people's experiences and perceptions of their positioning within society" (Irwin 2015:260). Such a new perspective on inequality offers new perspectives of research and allows new concepts to emerge and indirectly enhance other theories of inequality. For example, the integration of subjective well-being, perception and adaptation allows researchers to shed light on the processes that can lead to the apparent paradoxes when people who are in similar conceptualized positions of inequality have different interpretations of similar events (as it is discussed in concepts of intersectionality, e.g.,

Urvashi 2012). Another new issue that emerged from the data is the conceptualization of adaptation as agency, as I already mentioned. The next section will explain and define this issue.

5.3.3. Adaptation as agency

This final theoretical component explicates how the issue of adaptation evolved over the time of the elaboration of the dissertation. As the reader may have noted there is a move in the reflection from the first to the third article. The concepts of adaptation and agency became more precise over time—a typical evolution of a longer research process. The format of a cumulative dissertation allowed me to shed light on this evolution: In the first article, changing living conditions was associated with “action” and adaptation was classified as “reasoning.” As such, we aimed at distinguishing strategies that influence the objective living conditions from strategies that influence the perception. As this implies an association of adaptation as “nonaction,” the terms have been chosen differently in the third article, wherein adaptation is described as a pattern of agency that improves only the subjective well-being, amongst others that aim at changing living conditions. To this effect, the encyclopedia of quality of life defines adaptation in sociology as referring to the capacity to act according to the norms, constraints and demands of the society or community (Uglanova 2014).

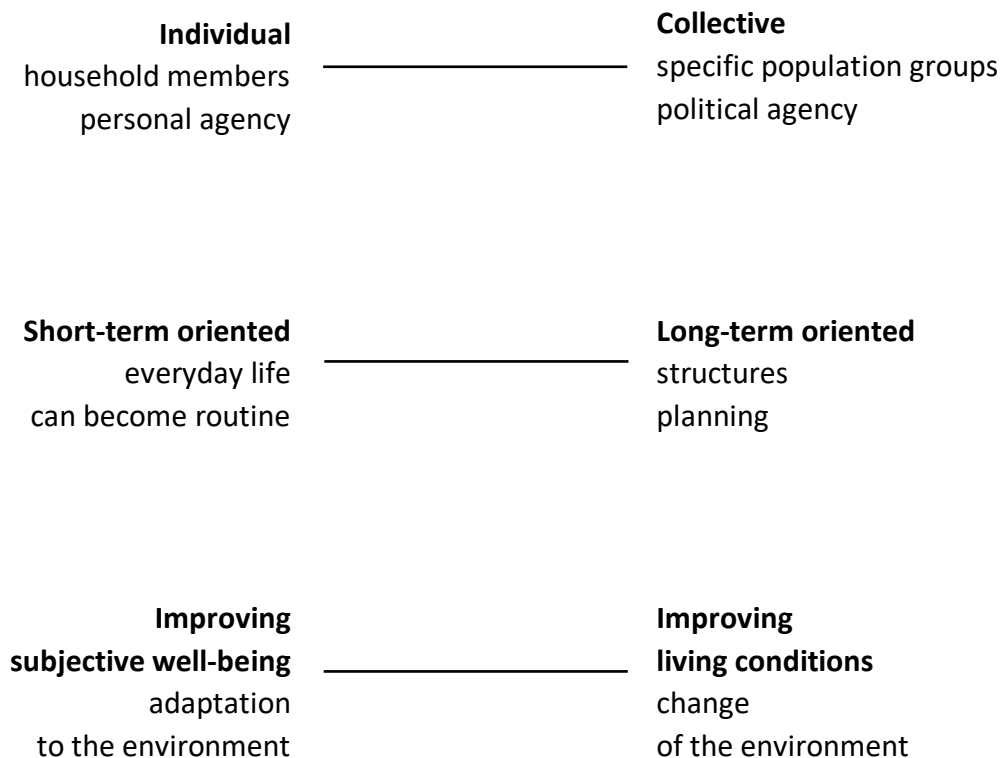
Theoretically, the dissertation is situated in a perspective that assumes people have the capacity for agency. As Deacon summarizes, this stands in contrast to an interpretation that can be found in the literature on market socialism and quasi-market and assumes that “individual actors are able to identify and pursue their ends, and the task of public policy is to facilitate their agency by providing resources and opportunities for its expression” (Deacon 2004:448). This is unlike the literature on welfare dependency that “assumes that especially long-term recipients of welfare lack either the motivation or the capacity for such agency, and the task of public policy is to create it through a combination of compulsion and persuasion” (Deacon 2004:448).

Conceptualizing agency in precarious prosperity means integrating time and dynamic components to analyze how social conditions influence quality of life over time. The perspectives for the future and the past experiences are as important as present social conditions for agency and adaptation. When analyzing agency, one must take into account these links between past, present and future. This way, it is possible to obtain insights into social and psychological mechanisms of adaptation and their links to living conditions and opportunities. Ruth Lister’s (2004) framework of agency in poverty provides this possibility for integrating time and dynamic components. It also allowed me to define adaptation as domain specific and as one pattern of agency parallel to and complementary of other patterns of agency. This approach distinguishes strategic (longer term) from everyday agency as well as personal (individual) from citizenship (collective) agency, conceptualizing adaptation as individual everyday agency. Specifically, I classified adaptation as the agency of “getting by.” In contrast to strategic agency, adaptation does not intend to change in the long term and, in contrast to

political/citizenship agency, it does not pursue aims for society. Adaptation helps to get by through improving subjective well-being without changing living conditions and power structures.

In a bottom-up approach, I started with the empirical data and concluded with a definition of adaptation processes in precarious prosperity. I thus define agency as purposeful action that is influenced by the social context and individual experiences. According to Schütz (1932), an action is understood as such if there is a reasoning about it. This is the case for adaptation in the interviews I used for the analysis. Interestingly, all of these interviewees reflect about adaptation. Sociologists, such as Zilber et al. (2008:616), also include purposeful nonintervention as agency because refraining from intervention likewise influences some processes or conditions. This way, adaptation is conceptualized as a pattern of agency. In line with the term “household strategies” (used in article 1), agency has the following dimensions.

Illustration 5: Dimensions of agency in precarious prosperity



(own illustration)

Agency can be individual or collective, it can be oriented to the short term or the long term and it can aim at improving subjective well-being or changing living conditions. The elements of the three dimensions combine to form different patterns of agency, and the

dimensions have to be understood as a continuum. Agency, e.g., can be short-term oriented (today), longer-term (next month) or very long term (in 10 years).

Adaptation is a pattern of agency that is situated on the individual level, is short-term oriented and improves subjective well-being. Linking adaptation and other patterns of agency theoretically, as they appear in parallel, would be a promising option for future conceptualizations. For example, adaptation could be understood as short-term agency that improves subjective well-being and allows this by means of mobilizing resources from another agency aimed at changing living conditions in the longer term. In other words, adaptation to one element or domain (for example, the precarious financial situation) can intervene for change in other domains (for example, education). These conceptual contributions have been possible due to a qualitative methodological approach that allowed for the emergence of new concepts. The methods will be reflected in the next section.

5.4. Contributions to the methodological debate

In this section, I will first briefly summarize the methodological approach and, second, further elaborate on the aspects I consider to enhance the methodological debate on quality of life and adaptation research: the iterative process, the cross-national comparison in international collaboration and the qualitative longitudinal design.

Research on quality of life and on adaptation is mainly quantitative. Methodologically, the qualitative approach adds an innovative perspective to the quantitatively dominated debate. Combining cross-national and longitudinal qualitative research was ambitious and required a very systematic methodological approach. The sampling and data collection were the same for all articles. The population group in precarious prosperity with the household as unit of analysis was identified by means of an income threshold and a deprivation threshold, slightly adapted to the situation in each country. The sampling strategy was a combination of purposeful and random sampling. The instruments for data collection include a household questionnaire, a household grid, a qualitative interview guide and a memento sheet. The data corpus I used is composed of two to three waves of qualitative interviews in three countries between 2008 and 2014. At the first interview, all households were situated in the same socioeconomic position within a specific country. The sample is heterogeneous in terms of household compositions and income sources as well as age, profession and origin of the household members. The interview transcriptions were coded and prepared for analysis in thematic charts. For the analysis, clear case selection criteria have been defined for each article. The analytical approach of the three articles is the same and works with elements from the content analysis and analytic induction. This procedure allowed an efficient and systematic analysis, and it is available to use for further analysis by other researchers.

5.4.1. The iterative process

Most qualitative research is conducted in circular processes, even if it is not always presented as such in publications. The state of research, the theoretical framework and the data analysis are elaborated more or less in parallel, each part influencing the other and finally forming a coherent argument of the research. Each of the three articles is based on a different, partly overlapping, part of this data corpus and advances step by step the understanding of adaptation in precarious prosperity.

Precisely, the empirical analysis of article 1 included 24 cases from Lausanne (CH) and 17 cases from Pamplona (ES) over two waves of interviews. It applied a mainly comparative design, and the results are presented with a focus on problematic life domains. Article 2 included 17 cases from Bern, Lausanne and Zürich (CH) and 5 cases from Cluj (RO) over two or three waves of interviews. It applied a comparative longitudinal design focusing on resources. Finally, the empirical analysis of article 3 included 29 cases from Bern, Lausanne and Zürich (CH) over three waves of interviews. It applied a longitudinal design and developed the processes and reasoning of adaptation in a perspective of sociology of knowledge. The advantage of a cumulative dissertation is the possibility it provides to present these three articles as pieces of a larger, iterative process of advancing qualitative research on adaptation.

The topic of adaptation was not targeted during the elaboration of the research instruments, but it came to the fore as presented and conceptualized above due to this iterative process. Approaching the data with a research question that was not initially planned has the advantage of not unconsciously imposing a topic on the interviewees. As such, the topic of adaptation emerged from diverse interviews and not from the assumptions of the researchers.

I was able to compare data from three countries with two or three waves of interviews, respectively, by conducting content analysis. Including so many interviews in a qualitative study does not allow for in-depth analysis as is usual in hermeneutics. However, over the iterative research process, the issues of adaptation grew clearer, and the analyses became more detailed, including fewer cases and, in the third article, also applying elements of the sociology of knowledge.

5.4.2. The cross-national comparison in international collaboration

Øyen observes that, despite growing opportunities for international collaborations and the availability of data on a variety of countries and situations, “the unfortunate thing is that comparative methodology has not developed at the same speed” (Øyen 2004:276). She points out the necessity of practical experience for developing the methodology of cross-national comparisons: “If we want to develop better tools and more explanatory power, we shall need to go on trying them out in different contexts and compare the outcomes” (Øyen 2004:285). According to Quilgars et al. (2009:19,28), publications on the experience of undertaking qualitative cross-national research are scarce, and the respective methodological approaches require greater attention. This dissertation

provides an example of cross-national research in international collaboration to enhance the methodological debate.

Specifically, the research team examined a particular issue in several countries with the intention of comparing its manifestation in different socioeconomic settings. The aim of the comparison was to better understand adaptation in different national contexts. Balancing diversity of welfare regimes and homogeneity of the population group in precarious prosperity in the three countries (see Rihoux and Ragin 2009) allowed me to analyze particular processes of adaptation in precarious prosperity in a variety of systems (welfare regimes) (Anckar 2008:390). Some values of social expenditures and the economic situation allow for a clear distinction between Switzerland (at the top), Spain (in the middle) and Romania (at the bottom). Moreover, the ranking of happiness in the three countries shows the same distribution: Switzerland at the top, then Spain and last Romania. The focus on households in the same precarious socioeconomic position where the effects concerning the way welfare regimes work are assumed to surface allowed for a clear identification and operationalization of the sample. The effective sample of the three countries showed that the target group is comparable.

The analysis of data from three countries was useful to develop the argument of the research. I can confirm that similar mechanisms of adaptation exist among these three countries despite differing economic and political conditions (see Øyen 2004:277). The international collaboration provided, despite its challenges of intercultural issues, the opportunity to question culturally framed assumptions and interpretations and allowed for new ideas to emerge. While articles 1 and 2 concentrate on the cross-national comparison, article 3 includes only data from Switzerland, and further develops the longitudinal analysis.

5.4.3. The qualitative longitudinal design

By including several waves of interviews, biographical elements and future prospects, each of the three contributions has a longitudinal aspect. The qualitative longitudinal design fits the aims of the research. It can access situation-specific experiences and perceptions that mediate how people deal with social change. A qualitative longitudinal design is also able to combine an analysis of both micro- and macro-social processes and focus on the role of agency because of its characteristic sensitivity to context (Holland 2011). In other words, the longitudinal analysis allowed me to illustrate links between perceived opportunities, relevant social experiences and specific processes of adaptation.

By analyzing a household based on three interviews at three points in time, including information on the past, the present and the future, each interview grasped the issue of interpreting and reinterpreting quality of life. This is rather complex as people tend to recreate, reselect and reinterpret the past in light of new knowledge (Adam 1990:143). However, this design seems adequate to address the complexity of adaptation in precarious prosperity, as proposed in the present research: “Indeed, it is only through

time that we can gain a better appreciation of how the personal and the social, agency and structure, the micro and macro are interconnected and how they come to be transformed” (Neale and Flowerdew 2003:190).

In sum, the methodological contribution of this dissertation is to combine cross-national comparative and longitudinal analyses in an iterative process with an overall objective. The qualitative approach to quality of life in precarious prosperity is enlightening because it reveals adaptation processes and therewith helps us better understand them. Methodological issues and behavioral explanations such as social desirability may explain reports of high subjective well-being despite disadvantaged living conditions in some (quantitative) research. However, adaptation is empirical evidence in my research. The next section will recapitulate the original aspects of the research, and also its limits and perspectives.

5.5. Originality, limits and perspectives of the research

The innovative aspects of this study on adaptation in precarious prosperity are the analyses of one topic in the same population group through diverse approaches:

- Three theoretical approaches (structure-agency, social bonds, agency and reasoning)
- Two methodological perspectives (comparative, longitudinal)
- Three country contexts (Romania, Spain, Switzerland)

The different but complementary approaches, as well as the international collaboration (with its need to explicitly describe each step of the research), advanced the understanding of adaptation. The systematic setup of the research and the respect for quality criteria gives credence to the value of the results and, hopefully, contributes to the consideration of adaptation in sociological research.

As is customary for qualitative studies, generalizations of the results is not the primary objective. Rather, researchers seek a rich and contextualized understanding of a topic or phenomenon. However, the broad and systematic approach I chose allows for condensing and making particular experiences and reports more abstract so that they provide insight into relationships or mechanisms beyond the empirical cases. In the case of my research, similar processes of adaptation have been confirmed in different contexts and by different research teams over time, so it is reasonable to assume that there is a high likelihood of finding similar processes in other European contexts.

However, I would be cautious applying the present results as they are to other socioeconomic positions within the inequality order (the rich, the poor) or to upward mobility, as the specific opportunities and constraints of the population in precarious

prosperity were a basic departing point for the analyses. This does not mean that there will be no adaptation processes in other socioeconomic positions, but it could well be argued that the interplay of structure and agency is different in those positions. A comparison of adaptation processes between different groups in the same society (e.g., poverty, precarious prosperity and secure prosperity) would be an interesting alternative approach. Likewise, the comparison of adaptation in precarious prosperity according to age, sex or gender and other variables, or even of adaptation according to marital status, employment status or health status (instead of the economic situation) would be another promising approach (see Graham 2009:48). For example, adaptation could partly explain why quantitative studies find elderly people more satisfied than those at middle age (Tillman et al. 2016:176).

Further interesting perspectives for adaptation research concern the link between social experiences and adaptation processes, cultural impacts on adaptation, the implications of adaptation in the long term and testing the qualitative results by means of quantitative methods.

First, the importance of specific social experiences and their implications for adaptation processes should be further investigated and confirmed. The empirical contributions identify migration, care responsibilities, health and work as important social experiences for adaptation.²² In the Swiss context, with its high proportion of immigrants, low social support for families and high value of work, these results seem to make sense. However, the links between individual experiences and social policies could be further developed and theoretically underlined. Accordingly, further research could address to which life domains and to what degree adaptation is possible, and what the consequences of adaptation are in one life domain for other life domains (see Easterlin 2003:23-24). Finally, missing life domains, like religion, could be explicitly included to understand their absence in the present research despite quantitative evidence for links between subjective well-being and religion (Tillmann et al. 2016:168).

Second, the country-specific meanings of adaptation, cultural aspects of evaluating subjective well-being (Roos 1987) and tendencies toward adaptation or social protest could be further investigated. On the one hand, there is potential to develop cultural aspects within the country contexts of this research, for example, including more deliberately the consequences of a socialist history in Romania and a democratic tradition in Switzerland. On the other hand, the research could be expanded to Northern Europe, to Latin America (with available data) and to other continents (e.g., Bhutan with its happiness index). A comparison of countries with individualistic values (as in Western Europe), for example, and countries with collectivist values (as in East Asia) could be promising to better understand adaptation processes. Such analyses would make it possible to investigate more unconscious behaviors linked to traditions that are probably less considered in my research, as I underline the active role of the individual.

²² Detailed analysis on work (Preoteasa et al. 2016) and care in precarious prosperity (Amacker 2014) can complete these results. An analysis on health is ongoing.

Third, the large potential of longitudinal analysis could be further exploited to refine the understanding of adaptation over time and its consequences for the individual and society:

- Is adaptation a definitive or a temporary state (for example, do people adapt only until their children are independent)?
- Does adaptation in one life domain entail negative consequences on other life domains in the longer term?
- How is (individual) adaptation linked to social change?

Fourth and last, the qualitative results should be tested by means of quantitative research. In line with Crettaz and Suter, questions for future research should include “examining other indicators, including more sophisticated indices of subjective well-being and quality of life, other welfare problems or life circumstances that might be prone to adaptation and social comparison (including upward adaptation), as well as group-specific and country-specific mechanisms of adaptation” (Crettaz and Suter 2013:149). The possibilities of quantitative analysis could complement the qualitative. For example, the evolution of perceptions of deprivation over time (i.e., is lack of an item due to financial constraints or to personal priorities?) or the comparison of quality of life and adaptation between different population groups. Adaptation, as elaborated in this research, might be a general phenomenon across different socioeconomic positions, or it could be specific to the position of precarious prosperity, where financial opportunities are restrained but basic needs are generally satisfied (Graham 2009:14-15). The following citation is the answer given by a Swiss interviewee to the question of what distinguishes households in a similar socioeconomic position to his own from households in another position. It suggests that adaptation could be specific to the position of precarious prosperity:

“[What] those people [living in a socioeconomic position of precarious prosperity] have in common, [is] that they burden themselves less, that they can’t burden themselves with things that are superfluous and not necessary. To my knowledge, nobody in this position—how shall I say it—suffers because of being where he is. Because those people have the capacity to see the positive of being where they are.” (CH42, t3, 2013)

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Appendix

1. List of deprivations for defining precarious prosperity in Switzerland

The following items are defined as deprivations for Switzerland, if the interviewee responds “no, because I cannot afford it”:

1	<p><i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you have at least one week's holidays away from home once a year?</p> <p><i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you have at least one week's holidays away from home once a year with most members of your household?</p>
2	Do you invite friends for a meal at least once a month?
3	<p><i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you have a meal out at a restaurant at least once a month?</p> <p><i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you have a meal out at a restaurant at least once a month with most members of your household?</p>
4	Do you practice leisure activities at least once a month? (<i>e.g. cinema, disco, sport, choral society</i>)
5	Do you have a car? <i>This could be a private vehicle or a company vehicle available to the household for private use.</i>
6	Do you have a computer at home?
7	Do you have an internet connection at home?
8	<p><i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Are you paying for any social security provision for old age?</p> <p><i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Are you or someone from your household paying for any social security provision for old age?</p>
9	<p><i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you save in a "3rd pillar" pension fund?</p> <p><i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you or another member of your household save in a "3rd pillar" pension fund? <i>for example a private pension fund, life insurance</i></p>
10	<p><i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Are you able to go to the dentist if needed?</p> <p><i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Are you or any other member of your household able to go to the dentist if needed?</p>

2. Questionnaire for Switzerland in 2013

The questionnaire was first used for sampling and then, slightly adapted for observing the evolution of some variables at each interview. The following example shows the questionnaire that was used in Switzerland in 2013:

I am from the University of Fribourg. We are currently doing a research project on changing living conditions and household strategies in Switzerland. So I am interested in getting to know your experiences about this.

The information you give in this interview will be treated confidentially and will exclusively be used for the purpose of this project. The interview will take about 10 minutes.

We start with questions on the people living in your household. Then we talk about your living conditions (Begin with grid)

1 Can you tell us how satisfied you are with your living standard? We mean with goods and services that you can buy like housing, clothes, food, cars, vacation. How satisfied are you with your standard of living if 0 means „not at all satisfied" and 10 means "completely satisfied?"

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all completely
satisfied satisfied

does not know (99)

no answer (98)

inapplicable (97)

H08EU22 reformulated question

(these numbers refer for each question to the corresponding question in the household panel)

2 Compared to **one year ago** has your standard of living improved or worsened? 0 means “greatly worsened" et 10 "greatly improved“?

Code 5=situation remained the same.

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
greatly situation greatly
worsened remained the same improved

does not know (99)

no answer (98)

inapplicable (97)

H08H01 reformulated question

3 1 person-households: Are you tenant or owner of the accommodation you currently live in?

Household size > 1 person: Are you or another household member tenant or owner of the accommodation you currently live in?

tenant 1 -> 4
owner / co-owner 2 -> 4
non-paying tenant 3 -> 5
does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08H29 changed order of household size: first 1-person-households, second households > 1 person

4 *If question 3=tenant or owner/co-owner:*

Is the accommodation subsidized or do you get a state or private housing subsidy or do you receive private help from your family or relatives?

yes, state-subsidized 1
yes, subsidy by a private organization 2
yes, by family or acquaintances 3
no 4

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08H30 broadened question and answer categories, originally only "yes", "no"

5 How many rooms does your accommodation have, not counting kitchens, bathrooms and toilets?

Exclude rooms used solely for business purposes.

1-1.5 rooms 1
2-2.5 rooms 2
3-3.5 rooms 3
4-4.5 rooms 4
5-5.5 rooms 5
6 rooms 6
7 rooms 7
8 rooms 8
9 rooms 9
10 rooms 10

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08H20

6 What is the total of expenses connected with your accommodation, including rent, interest, redemption and service charges?

Consider all the costs (rent/interests and supplementary costs) = water-electricity-gas-heating, fire insurance, alarm systems, taxes related to housing and regular expenses of maintenance and repair. If hesitation, an estimate is enough (indicate -4); specify the reference period. If no costs are paid (indicate -5) and estimate the supplementary costs

SFr (two-weekly)							
------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

or

SFr per month*							
----------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

or

SFr per 3 months							
------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

or

SFr per 6 months							
------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

or

SFr per year							
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does not know (99)

no answer (98)

inapplicable (97)

estimate (96)

no rent or interests to pay; only supplementary costs (95)

Reference period for total of expenses connected with accommodation:

H08H31, additional category (two-weekly)

Amount in SFr paid for accommodation: owner: H08H32

Amount in SFr paid for accommodation: tenants: H08H34

7 Do you judge the expenses connected with your accommodation very small, small, reasonable, high, very high?

very small 1

small 2

reasonable 3

high 4

very high 5

does not know (99)

no answer (98)

**H08H38 reformulated question and answer categories
(instead of "too high", "much too high": "high", "very high")**

8 Is your accommodation too small, adequate or too large?

too small 1
adequate 2
too large 3

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08H23 reformulated

9 Overall, how satisfied are you with the neighbourhood you live in, if 0 means "not at all satisfied" and 10 means "completely satisfied"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all completely
satisfied satisfied

does not know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

H08EU49

10 Would you please indicate whether your household owns the things or carries out the activities that I am going to name? If not, could you tell me whether it is due to lack of finances or for other reasons?

	Question	Yes	No	If no ->	Because you cannot afford it?	For other reasons?
1	<i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you have at least one week's holidays away from home once a year? <i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you have at least one week's holidays away from home once a year with most members of your household?	1 ^a	2 ->		1 ^b	2
2	Do you invite friends for a meal at least once a month?	1 ^c	2 ->		1 ^d	2
3	<i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you have a meal out at a restaurant at least once a month?	1 ^e	2 >		1 ^f	2

	<i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you have a meal out at a restaurant at least once a month with most members of your household?					
4	Do you practise leisure activities at least once a month? <i>(e.g. cinema, disco, sport, choral society)</i>	1	2 >		1	2
5	Do you have a car? <i>This could be a private vehicle or a company vehicle available to the household for private use.</i>	1 ^g	2 >		1 ^h	2
6	Do you have a computer at home?	1 ⁱ	2 >		1 ^j	2
7	Do you have an internet connection at home?	1 ^k	2 >		1 ^l	2
8	<i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Are you paying for any social security provision for old age? <i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Are you or someone from your household paying for any social security provision for old age?	1 ^m	2 >		1 ⁿ	2
9	<i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Do you save in a "3 rd pillar" pension fund? <i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Do you or another member of your household save in a "3 rd pillar" pension fund? <i>for example a private pension fund, life insurance</i>	1 ^o	2 >		1 ^p	2
10	<i>Household size = 1 person:</i> Are you able to go to the dentist if needed? <i>Household size > 1 person:</i> Are you or any other member of your household able to go to the dentist if needed?	1 ^q	2 >		1 ^r	2

a H08I06 modified: all members

b H08I07 modified

c H08I08 modified

d H08I09 modified

e H08I10 modified: all members

f H08I11 modified

g H08I12

h H08I13

i H08I26

j H08I27

k H05A20 modified

l H05A20a (NEW)

m new for LA

n new for LA

o H08I22

p H08I24

q H08I24

r H08I25

11 Where would you locate yourself, if 0 means „very poor" and 10 means "very rich"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
very poor very rich
does not know (99)
no answer (98)

How would you call this position/the class you belong to?

lower class 1
lower middle class 2
middle class 3
upper middle class 4
upper class 5
does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08EU22C modified ("classe ouvrière" replaced by "lower middle class")

12 Household size = 1 person: During the last 12 months have you experienced problems which resulted in arrears in payments of your household bills?

Household size > 1 person: During the last 12 months have you or another member of your household experienced problems which resulted in arrears in payments of your household bills?

yes 1
no 2
does not know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

H08I31 modified: specification of household size

13 If your household were to receive an unexpected bill of, say, 750 Swiss francs, would it be able to pay this amount in one week from its own resources, e.g. from savings?²³

yes 1
no 2

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08I20A

14 Household size = 1 person: During the last 12 months have you paid monthly premiums linked to a loan, a debt or a leasing, not including mortgage?

Household size > 1 person: During the last 12 months have you, or another member of the household, paid monthly premiums linked to a loan, a debt or a leasing, not including mortgage?

yes 1
no 2

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08I39 order of household size inversed

H08I49A

15 If you consider the total of your household's income and expenses, would you say that currently your household can save money, your household spends what it earns, your household has to consume its assets and savings, or your household gets into debts?

your household can save money 1
your household spends what it earns 2
your household has to consume its assets and savings 3
your household gets into debt 4

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08I50 reformulated question and answer categories

²³ The amount of 750 SFr corresponds to more or less 20% of the equivalized net median household income or of approximately 34% of the poverty threshold. Each country calculates the corresponding amount.

16 How do you manage on your household's current income, 0 means "with great difficulty" and 10 "very easily"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
 with great difficulty very easily

does not know (99)
 no answer (98)

H08I51

17 In your opinion, what is the minimum monthly income your household must have in order to be able to make ends meet?

If hesitation, an estimate is sufficient.

<i>Minimum net income to make ends meet per month</i>							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

does not know (99)
 no answer (98)
 estimate (96)

H08I54

18 Can you tell me what is the TOTAL income of all the persons living in your household? *Gross = before social deductions: OASI/DI, net = after social deductions: OASI/AI, pension, etc. or estimate. If hesitation: an estimate is sufficient, indicate the yearly or monthly amount.*

Total monthly income

gross (1)
 net (2)
 does not know (99)
 no answer (98)
 inapplicable (97)
 estimate (96)

Or: Total yearly income

gross (1)
 net (2)
 does not know (99)
 no answer (98)
 inapplicable (97)
 estimate (96)

H08I58, H08I59, H08I62, H08I66 Adapted to NET for Latin American context.

19 In the last 12 months, have you been able to count on this household income very unsurely, rather surely, rather unsurely, very unsurely?

Sure=you can plan and count with this income

very unsure 1
rather unsure 2
rather sure 3
very sure 4

does not know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

H08W02 modified: job security adapted to household income security

20 Household size = 1 person -> Question 21

Household size > 1 person: Can you tell me who contributes to the household's income? Is it one person only, one person mainly, with supplementary income from other members of the household, two or several persons in an equal manner, or another situation?

one person 1
one person with supplementary income from other members 2
two or several persons in an equal manner 3
other 4

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08I57 modified, 1-person-households added

21 Household size = 1 person: Do you currently work?

yes 1
no 2
does not know (99)
no answer (98)

Household size > 1 person: Are the people who contribute to the household income currently working in a remunerated job?

yes, all 1
yes, some 2
no, none of them 3
does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08W01 modified, in original only one person, "yes" and "no"

22 What income sources other than from paid work does your household have?

Multiple answers are possible (help with examples if necessary)

	pension	1
	social assistance	2
	child alimony	3
financial support from sons/daughters/family in the country		4
	remittances (family members abroad)	5
	income from property	6
	income from capital	7
	Invalidity pension	10
	other sources	8

Which?

No other income sources	(9)
does not know	(99)
no answer	(98)

New question (maybe compare with sources in householdpanel)

23 Do you (or your household) have to fulfill financial obligations toward persons who don't live in your household, or do you financially support other persons who don't live in your household?

Yes	1
No	2

If yes: Who is this person?

(Multiple answers are possible, underline the concerned person)

	YES	in CH	abroad?
Your father or mother	1	2	1
Your partners father or mother	2	2	1
Financial support of sons/daughters	3	2	1
Other family members	4	2	1
Others	5	2	1

weiss nicht	(99)
keine Antwort	(98)

24 Overall, how satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household, if 0 means "not at all satisfied" and 10 "completely satisfied"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all completely
satisfied satisfied

does not know (99)
no answer (98)

H08I30

25 Who handles the finances in your household?

Me 1
My partner 2
Other person in the household 3
Together 4
Everyone handles it for himself 5
Everyone handles it for himself and contributes to the income 6
of those who aren't gainfully employed
Other solution 7
Doesn't know (99)
Now answer (98)

26 How many persons can provide you with practical help (this means concrete help or useful advice) if necessary? How many persons can be available in case of need and show understanding (by talking with you for example)? *If the distinction of practical and emotional help isn't possible, fill in for practical help.*

practical help, number ____
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

emotional help, number ____
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

27 If necessary, in your opinion, to what extent can the following persons provide you with practical help (this means concrete help or useful advice) or be available in case of need and show understanding (by talking with your for example), if 0 means "not at all" and 10 "a great deal"? *Also persons who don't need help at the moment should judge the possibility for support; practical help = e.g. go shopping if you are sick, go to the doctor with you, provide you with practical information if you look for something. If the distinction of practical and emotional help isn't possible, fill in for practical help.*

Partner (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Parents/parents-in-law (*ask and note: mother/mother-in-law; father/father-in-law; partner (if existing)*)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Children (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Brothers and sisters (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Other relatives

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Friends (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Neighbours (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Persons in the professional environment (if existing)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

Other acquaintances (if existing, e.g. of sport societys etc.)

practical help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal

emotional help

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
not at all a great deal
no answer (98)
doesn't know (99)

SHP W2 P00N04/P00N05

28 How do you see the near future: To what extent will your standard of living improve or worsen one year from now if 0 means "greatly worsen" and 10 means "greatly improve"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
greatly situation will greatly
worsen remain the same improve

does not know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

H08H500

29 **And in five years?** To what extent will your standard of living improve or worsen if 0 means "greatly worsen" and 10 means "greatly improve"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
greatly worsened situation will remain the same greatly improved

does not know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

H08H501 modified: question repeated

30 When they talk about politics, people mention left and right. Personally, where do you position yourself, 0 means "left" and 10 "right" ?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
Left Right

doesn't know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

SHP W2 P00P10

31 How much confidence do you have in the Federal Government (in Bern), if 0 means "no confidence" and 10 means "full confidence"?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
no confidence full confidence

doesn't know (99)
no answer (98)
inapplicable (97)

P99P04

Thank you!

3. Household grid for Switzerland in 2013

Household	Family Name	First Name	Sex	Year of birth	Age	Schooling a	Relationship to interviewperson	Type of occupation b

% of employment	Type of working relationship c	Has social security	Has un-employment insurance	Has health insurance	Other type of (governmental) project help	Welfare, social assistance

Housing d	Household income f	Type of education (if in school) e	Who takes care of whom g	Gendered division of labour	Nationality	Type of stay permit

- a 1=Primary school 2=Secondary school not finished (7-8J) 3=Secondary school (9J) 4=Professional education (10-13J) 5=Secondary school (12-13J) 6=University
- b Student - Housekeeper - Invalidity pension - Old age pension – Profession
- c formally employed, limited in time -formally employed, un limited in time -informally employed -self-employed
- d Owner, renter, with subventions
- e Private, Public, Mixture
- f All sources
- g within the household / outside of the household
- h 0-10 what does the number mean in words?

4. Interview guideline for Switzerland in 2013

Ich komme von der Universität Freiburg, vom Departement für Soziologie, Sozialpolitik, Sozialarbeit. Im Rahmen unseres Forschungsprojektes zum Wandel der Lebensbedingungen in der Schweiz haben wir sie bereits zweimal besucht und mit ihnen längere Gespräche geführt. Nun haben wir sie für ein drittes Interview angefragt. Ganz herzlichen Dank, dass sie nochmals bereit sind, uns von ihrem Leben zu erzählen. Es ist für uns sehr wertvoll.

Die Informationen, die Sie in diesem Interview geben, werden vertraulich behandelt und werden ausschließlich für den Zweck dieser Forschung genutzt. Das Interview wird in etwa eine Stunde dauern. Mich interessiert zuerst die aktuelle Situation bei Ihnen zu Hause, dann was sich in den letzten beiden Jahren seit dem letzten Gespräch verändert hat, welche Pläne sie für das nächste Jahr und für Ihre Zukunft haben.

Haben Sie irgendwelche Fragen, bevor wir anfangen?

Kann ich das Interview aufzeichnen?

[Blatt zu Haushaltsfragen ausfüllen]

1. Frageblock: Evaluierung der derzeitigen Lebenssituation

Aktuelle Lebenssituation und Veränderungen seit dem letzten Interview
<i>Einstiegsfrage:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wir haben Sie vor fast 4 Jahren das letzte Mal interviewt. Könnten Sie mir erzählen, wie Ihr Leben (Lebenssituation) im Moment aussieht?• Was beschäftigt Sie zur Zeit am meisten bei Ihnen zu Hause? (<i>Bezug auf Lebensbereiche</i>)
<i>Themen der letzten Gespräche (allenfalls aufgreifen):</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was ist denn im Moment schwierig für Sie und Ihren Haushalt/Ihre Familie?• Und was läuft gerade gut bei Ihnen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wir haben Sie vor x Jahren das letzte Mal besucht; inzwischen hat sich viel verändert. Was ist seit dem letzten Besuch bei Ihnen passiert?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Also wenn ich Sie richtig verstanden habe, dann ist die größte Schwierigkeit bei Ihnen derzeit ... Was tun Sie denn, um damit umzugehen?

<p>Wohnen/Nachbarschaft</p> <p>Wir haben bei den letzten Gesprächen über Ihre Wohnung und das Quartier gesprochen, wo Sie leben. Sie haben erzählt, dass...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wie sieht es heute mit Ihrer Wohnsituation aus? Wie zufrieden sind Sie? • Wie zufrieden sind sie mit ihrer Nachbarschaft? (Eigentumswohnung/haus oder Miete? Wie lange leben Sie schon hier?) • Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit Ihrem Quartier? (Einkaufsmöglichkeiten, Schule, kulturelles Leben, Umwelt)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wenn ich Sie richtig verstanden habe, sind die Vorteile/Chancen Ihrer Wohnsituation, in der Nachbarschaft und im Quartier...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Und die grössten Schwierigkeiten mit Ihrer Wohnsituation, Ihrer Nachbarschaft und dem Quartier sind ... • Unternehmen Sie denn etwas, um das zu ändern?

<p>Organisation Haushalt, Aufgabenverteilung unbezahlte Arbeit im Haushalt, Familienleben</p> <p>Nebst bezahlter Arbeit gibt es ja auch sehr viele Arbeiten, die ohne Bezahlung ausgeführt werden (Pflege, Kinderbetreuung, putzen etc.). Beim letzten Mal haben Sie mir erzählt, dass ...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Können Sie mir erzählen, wie dies in Ihrem Haushalt zurzeit organisiert ist? • Wie haben Sie denn die Aufgaben und Verantwortlichkeiten bei Ihnen verteilt?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wie kommen Sie mit ihrem Beruf und dem Familienleben daneben zurecht? Gibt es Probleme mit den unbezahlten Arbeiten, die bei Ihnen zu Hause anfallen? <p><i>Falls Kinder:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welche Rolle spielen die Kinder in Ihrer Haushaltssituation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wie geht es Ihren Kindern? (Gesundheit, Entwicklung) • Wie geht es dem Partner/der Partnerin? <p><i>Falls Kinder im Haushalt:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wer sorgt sich wie um die Kinder? Und während der Ferien? Nutzen Sie auch externe Einrichtungen (Kindertagesstädte, etc.) oder haben Sie Hilfe von anderen Personen dafür? • Was sind die Vor- und Nachteile in Ihrer Organisation der Kinderbetreuung? • Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit dieser Organisation?
<p><i>Falls ältere Personen /kranke/ invalide Personen im Haushalt:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wer sorgt sich wie um diese Personen? Nutzen Sie auch externe Einrichtungen (Spitex, etc.) oder helfen Ihnen noch andere Personen? • Was sind die Vor- und Nachteile Ihrer Organisation der Alters-/Krankenbetreuung? Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit dieser Organisation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Die grössten Schwierigkeiten in der Organisation Ihres Haushalts sind also ...? • Und die Chancen ... ?

Bildung und Erwerbsarbeit

Auch über Ihre Ausbildung und Ihre berufliche Situation haben wir beim letzten Mal gesprochen. Mich interessiert nun Ihre aktuelle berufliche Situation.

- Haben Sie in letzter Zeit Weiterbildungen/Umschulungen gemacht?
- Wie ist denn Ihre derzeitige berufliche Situation? Wie sind Ihre Arbeitsbedingungen? (Formelle/informelle Arbeit, Art des Arbeitsvertrags un-/befristet, Voll-/Teilzeit, reguläre/unregelmäßige Arbeit, Lohnarbeit/Selbständig, z.B. eigenes Geschäft).
Ev. versuchen Kalender zu erstellen seit dem letzten Besuch um zu sehen, wie viele Phasen von Arbeitslosigkeit, Unterbeschäftigung, geringerem Einkommen des Haushalts vorgekommen sind.
- Sind Sie damit zufrieden?
- Was könnte besser sein?
- Setzen Sie sich für die Verbesserung oder die Veränderung ihrer Arbeitsbedingungen ein? (Gewerkschaften, Organisationen, etc.)
- Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon an diesem Ort?
- Was haben Sie seit dem letzten Interview beruflich sonst noch gemacht?
- Wie nehmen sie die Arbeitswelt war: Inwiefern haben Sie Chancen / wo erfahren Sie Probleme? (Belastungen; Arbeitsbedingungen; Einkommen; Unsicherheit des Vertrags; der Situation; Alterssicherung etc.)
- Haben Sie das Gefühl, Ihr Arbeitsverhältnis/Geschäft ist sicher?
- Falls arbeitslos:
 - Seit wann denn?
 - Wo haben Sie denn vorher gearbeitet?
 - Und was haben Sie jetzt für Pläne und was haben Sie bereits unternommen? (Arbeitssuche, Arbeitsvermittlungsstelle, Weiterbildung)
 - Haben Sie denn Unterstützung dabei?
- In Bewerbungsgesprächen kommt ja immer die Frage nach Stärken und Schwächen. Wo sehen Sie denn Ihre besonderen Stärken?
- Können Sie mir noch etwas über die Ausbildungen und die berufliche Situation der anderen Haushaltsmitglieder sagen?
- Trägt bei Ihnen sonst noch jemand zum Haushaltseinkommen bei?
- Hat sich da etwas seit dem letzten Interview verändert?
- Falls Kinder:
 - Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit der Schule für Ihre Kinder?
 - Gibt es Schwierigkeiten mit der Ausbildung der Kinder, welche?
 - Hat eines der Kinder zu arbeiten begonnen?
- Zusammenfassend könnte man also sagen, dass die Vorteile/Chancen Ihrer beruflichen Situation ... sind?
- Und die Schwierigkeiten ... Habe ich das richtig verstanden?

Wohlbefinden/Zeit für sich selbst/Gesundheit

Jetzt haben wir viel über Erwerbsarbeit und andere Tätigkeiten gesprochen. Ich interessiere mich nun dafür, wie es Ihnen persönlich geht.

- Haben Sie denn auch Zeit für sich selbst, um sich zu erholen? *(Befragte Personen und HH-Mitglieder)*

Allgemeines Wohlbefinden:

- Wie fühlen Sie sich allgemein? Wie finden Sie Ihr Leben? *(Sinnvoll? Negative Gefühle? Zufriedenheit?)*
- Was macht für Sie ein gutes Leben aus?
- Wie geht es Ihnen gesundheitlich?
- Ist die Gesundheitsversorgung für Ihre Probleme adäquat?
- Was sind die Vor- und Nachteile Ihrer Art der Gesundheitsversorgung?
- Zusammenfassend könnte man also sagen ... *(Belastungen/Stützen)*

Soziales Netz/NPO

Wir haben auch in den letzten beiden Interviews darüber gesprochen, woher Sie Hilfe bekommen, wenn Sie einmal Unterstützung nötig haben. Gerne würde ich darüber nochmals sprechen. Vielleicht hat sich etwas geändert.

- Wenn jetzt bei Ihnen zu Hause ein Problem auftaucht, welche Unterstützung haben Sie aus dem privaten Umfeld – Freunde, Verwandte, Nachbarschaft? Welche Art der Hilfe?
- Es gibt ja auch Probleme, die man nicht im privaten Umfeld lösen kann, wo können Sie sich sonst noch hinwenden? (Kinderbetreuung, Spitex, Putzhilfe, Beratungsstellen, Bildungsprogramme, Rechtsberatung, Angebote durch Arbeitgeber, Caritas usw.)
- Haben Sie schon einmal daran gedacht, sich zusammen mit anderen zu organisieren, die in ähnlichen Situationen sind, um gemeinsam Ihre Bedingungen zu verbessern?
- Sind Sie zufrieden mit der Unterstützung, die Sie von anderer Seite erhalten, sei das jetzt auf individueller Ebene oder durch Organisationen?
- Gibt es Bereiche, wo Sie finden, Sie sollten mehr Unterstützung bekommen?
- Gibt es Bereiche, wo Sie eigentlich das Anrecht auf Unterstützung hätten, diese aber nicht nutzen oder erhalten?
- Es gibt ja verschiedene Organisationen, die finanzielle oder andere Unterstützung anbieten. Wie stehen Sie dazu?
- Unterstützen Sie denn auch andere?
- Habe ich also richtig verstanden, dass die wichtigsten Stützen in Ihrem Umfeld ... sind?
- ...und dass ... eher ungenügend ist?

Soziale Positionierung/subjektive Klassenzugehörigkeit

- Stellen Sie sich eine Skala von 0 bis 10 vor. Die Skala würde die Bevölkerung der Schweiz darstellen, bei 0 sind all die, die gar nichts haben und bei 10 sind die ganz, ganz Reichen. Wo ordnen Sie sich ein? Was denken Sie zeichnet Haushalte aus, die in einer ähnlichen Position sind wie Sie?

Falls viele Auf- und Abstiege:

- Was zeichnet die ganz Reichen aus?
- Was zeichnet die aus, die gar nichts haben?

Finanzielle Situation und staatliche Unterstützung

Wir haben beim letzten Mal auch über Ihre finanziellen Möglichkeiten geredet. Mich würde interessieren, wie Sie mit dem Geld zu Recht kommen, das Ihnen zur Verfügung steht.

- Können Sie mir darüber etwas erzählen?
- Wofür geben Sie denn Geld aus?
- Und wo müssen Sie sich aus finanziellen Gründen einschränken?
- Hatten Sie in den vergangenen 4 Jahren (seit dem letzten Interview) finanzielle Schwierigkeiten?
- Wie sind Sie damit umgegangen? Wer hat Sie unterstützt?
- Sie hatten das letzte Mal von der Belastung durch Ihre Schulden gesprochen. Wie hat sich die Situation entwickelt?

ODER:

- Haben Sie Schulden?
- Wie stark belasten diese Sie; können/wollen Sie die Schulden abbauen?

Im Fall von Sozialhilfe/IV/andere staatliche Unterstützung (Zuschüsse für Wohnen, Elektrizität, Ausbildung der Kinder, etc.):

- Welche Unterstützung erhalten Sie vom Staat?
- Finden Sie die finanzielle Unterstützung, die Sie vom Staat erhalten, angemessen für Haushalte in Ihrer Situation?
- Welche Erfahrungen haben Sie mit dem Staat bei der Suche nach finanzieller Unterstützung gemacht?

Falls keine Sozialhilfe/IV/andere staatliche Unterstützung:

- Für den Fall, dass es Ihnen einmal finanziell schlechter ginge und Sie nur mit Schwierigkeiten über die Runden kommen würden, was würden Sie tun? Würden Sie Hilfe aus dem Familienkreis suchen oder Sozialhilfe beantragen?
- Beantragen Sie keine Sozialhilfe, weil Sie denken, dass Sie die Kriterien hierzu nicht erfüllen, oder hat das andere Gründe?
- Würden Sie so etwas annehmen, wenn es so weit käme?
- Die Schwierigkeiten Ihrer finanziellen Situation sind also ...?
- ... und die Chancen ...?

2. Frageblock: Haushaltsbiographie (seit dem letzten Interview)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wenn Sie einmal zurück denken, seit wann leben Sie in dieser Situation, wie Sie heute ist?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was waren die wichtigsten Ereignisse in den letzten zwei/drei Jahren, die zur heutigen Situation geführt haben?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Würden Sie sagen, dass Ihre Situation vor einem Jahr/ vor zwei Jahren wesentlich anders war?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Und die Situation der anderen Personen bei Ihnen zu Hause?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Falls ja, was ist denn seither passiert, das Ihre Lage verbessert/verschlechtert hat?

3. Frageblock: Zukunftsaussichten

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jetzt haben wir viel über die Vergangenheit gesprochen. Können Sie mir sagen, wie Sie Ihre Zukunft sehen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Haben Sie irgendwelche konkreten Pläne für die Zukunft?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wenn Sie einen Wunsch frei hätten, was würden Sie sich für Ihre Familie/Ihren Haushalt wünschen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was könnten Sie denn tun, um das zu erreichen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gibt es etwas, das Sie bezüglich Ihrer Zukunft beunruhigt?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welche Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie auf sich zukommen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was würden Sie tun, falls das eintreten würde?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wie sehen Sie Ihre Situation im Alter, wenn Sie pensioniert sind (Einkommen, soziale Kontakte, Pflege, Betreuung)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wie möchten Sie am ehesten leben? Wovor haben Sie am meisten Angst?

4. Frageblock: Gesellschaftliche Diskurse/Öffentlichkeit/Politik

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seit einigen Jahren ist das Thema ‚Krise‘ ja allgegenwärtig. Inwiefern sind Sie in Ihrem Alltag direkt davon betroffen?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was denken Sie zu diesem Thema? Macht es Ihnen Angst?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was ist Ihr allgemeiner Eindruck, wie es in der Schweiz zurzeit läuft: Was läuft gut und was läuft schlecht zurzeit? (<i>Politik, Krankenkasse, Kriminalität, Gesundheit, Ausbildung, Kinderbetreuung, Alterssicherung und -betreuung...</i>)
<p><i>Weitere öffentliche Debatten:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Man hört ja viel zum Thema Migration/Asyl: Was denken Sie darüber? Bereitet es Ihnen Sorgen?

Abschließende Bemerkungen, Reflexion über das Gespräch

- Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass ich etwas Wichtiges nicht gefragt habe?
- Möchten Sie dem noch irgendetwas hinzufügen?

[Standardisierter Leitfaden zu Finanzfragen hier ausfüllen]

Ich möchte mich ganz herzlich bedanken, dass Sie sich Zeit genommen haben, mir Ihre Erfahrungen mitzuteilen.

Das Ziel dieser Forschung ist es, Haushalte in ihrer Entwicklung über einen gewissen Zeitraum hinweg zu begleiten. Wir wissen nicht, ob wir noch einmal kommen können, aber falls es möglich wäre: Könnten Sie mir die Adresse oder Telefonnummer von nahen Freunden oder Verwandten mitteilen, die mit Ihnen im Kontakt sein werden, für den Fall, dass wir Sie nächstes Jahr unter dieser Anschrift nicht mehr finden? So sind wir sicher, wieder mit Ihnen Kontakt aufnehmen zu können.

5. Memo sheet for Switzerland in 2013

	Question	Explanation	No.	Remarks
1	Date and time of the interview			Date: Time:
2	Location of the interview	e.g. home, restaurant		
3	Was the interview carried out with more than one person? Whom?			
4	Was anyone else apart from the interviewee present, who?	e.g. neighbour, husband, child		
5	How was the atmosphere of the conversation	0 awful 10 very agreeable		
6	What was the attitude of the interviewee?	Was s/he comfortable/relaxed/nervous/wanting to please		
7	Did s/he take the questions seriously?	0 not at all seriously 10 absolutely seriously		
8	Do you feel answers were credible?	0 not at all credible 10 absolutely credible		
9	How would you judge the interviewee's personal characteristics?	Outgoing, silent, optimistic, pessimistic, etc		
10	How would you judge the capacity of self-reflection of the interviewee?	0 absolutely missing 10 highly reflective		

11	Did s/he capture his/her own problems?	0 no idea 10 completely aware of her/his problems		
12	What relevance do you think did the topics that were addressed in the course of the interview have for the interviewee?	0 not at all important 5 about half were important 10 absolutely important		
13	Did you feel at ease during the interview? Why or why not?	0 not at all 10 absolutely at ease		
14	How well do you think you conducted the interview/ presented the questions?	The interview went 0 very badly 10 very well		
15	What were emotional, spontaneous reactions to questions?	Anything special that might be of interest for the research?		
16	Details and observations about the place where the interview was carried out	Anything special that might be of interest for the research?		
17	State and conditions of the living environment where the interview took place	Anything special that might be of interest for the research?		
18	What impression did you get from the neighbourhood?	Anything special that might be of interest for the research?		

6. Transcription rules

Sign	Meaning
....	long break
((laughing)) ((angry))	nonverbal expressions as laughing, clapping hands etc. (note before the respective phrase)
<u>sure</u>	demonstrative emphasise of a word, also volume
()	incomprehensible
(so bad)	not clearly comprehensible, supposed wording

(Hoffmann-Riem 1984:331; zit. nach Kuckartz 2005:47)

7. List of codes in MaxQda

Household situation

Household members
Spouse/partner All information about spouse/partner of the interviewed person
S. Children All information about spouse's/partner's children
S. Ex-Partner All information about spouse's/partner's ex-partner
R.Children All information about respondent's children
Flat mate All information about respondent's flatmate
Other All information about other persons who live in the household
Allocation of tasks What household tasks are done by whom
Housework Who does housework chores?
Child care Who cares for the children?
Lone parent Information about the specifics for lone parents
Care for elderly or disabled Who cares for elderly or disabled?
Household biography Information about the biography of the household (household as a whole)
Responsibility for decisions Description of the decision making process; Who does take the decisions?
Reconciliation of family and employment How do household members reconcile domestic work and employment?

Important event

Respondent talks about an important life event

Change t1-t2

Respondent refers to the last year (1st interview)

Personal biography

Respondent's personal biography (not household biography)

Self-evaluation

Own strengths and weaknesses, qualities, success, failures

Multidimensional precarity

Insecurities produced by various life domains (e.g. health and employment, or work and childcare)

Reconciling different activities/domains

Strategies to manage the requirements of different life domains

Social inequality

Statements and/or information about social inequality relating to different levels (global, national, regional) and aspects (class, gender, nationality etc.)

Social status

Statements and/or information about the social position in the social structure

Social positioning

Quantitative 1-10 assessment (poorest-richest). What does the number mean?

Participation in social life

How do household members participate in social life; what are they doing?

Social capital

Information about relationships and social networks

Rejection of informal support

Respondent doesn't want to receive informal support

Loss of social capital

Loss of social relationships

Informal voluntary work

NGO's

Self-organisation

Respondent joins together to change his/her situation

Formal network

Supporting associations

Church

Support from and contacts with churches

Labour union

Support from and contacts with the labour union

Informal network

Supporting, not institutional networks

Larger family relationships

Contacts with the larger family

Cousins

Contacts with cousins

Grandparents

Contacts with respondents parents or parents-in-law

— **Friends**

Contacts with friends

— **Neighbourhood**

Contacts with neighbours

— **Work colleagues**

Contacts with work colleagues

Leisure, free time

What does the respondent tell about his free time?

Income situation

Information about income and work

— **Employment**

Information about employment

— **Self employment**

Respondent is self employed, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Full time work**

Respondent is working full time, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Part time**

Respondent is working part time, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Shift work**

Respondent is doing shift work, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Work on call**

Respondent is working on call, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Hourly wage**

Respondent is working with hourly wage, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Permanent employment**

Respondent has a permanent employment, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Temporary**

Respondent has a temporary employment, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Undocumented, unusual work**

Respondent is doing undocumented, unusual work, information about his working and employment conditions

— **Secondary occupation**

Information about respondent's secondary occupation

— **(Perceived) job security**

What does he/she tell about job security

— **Unemployment**

Respondent talks about his unemployment

— **Seeking employment**

Respondent talks about seeking employment

...

- **Work biography**
History of respondent's work biography (where did he work, how was it)
 - **Old age pension**
Respondent receives old age pension
 - **Invalidity**
 - **I. with pension**
Respondent is disabled/invalid and receives pension
 - **I. without pension**
Respondent is disabled/invalid and does not receive pension
 - **No work situation**
Residual category
 - **Voluntary work in employment**
Engagement at work without pay
-

Civil service
Respondent is/was/will be in civil service

Education
School, Vocational training, studies

- **Further education**
Continuing education
-

Finances
Information about the financial situation of the HH

- **Financial emergency/need**
Objective financial needs, exceptional situation, emergency
 - **Constraints in everyday life**
Constraining expenses
 - **Assessment of the financial situation**
What does the respondent think about his financial situation?
 - **Debts**
Talking about debts
 - **Saving, investment**
Talking about saving or investment
 - **Expenses of the household**
What is the HH spending money for?
 - **Household income**
Information about the amount of HH income
 - **Taxes**
Talking about taxes
 - **Property**
Has HH got any property?
- ⋮

Heritage

Talking about heritage

Insurance (life i., health i. etc.)

Talking about insurances

Alimony

HH is receiving or paying alimony

Bridging of a financial gap, transient situation

Respondent is talking about a situation where the HH had transient financial problems

Housing

Information about apartment/house and neighbourhood the HH is living in

Apartment/House

Quality, size, location etc.

Precarious

Risk of loss of accomodation

Neighbourhood

Relationships, problems, support?

Gap in the social system

Needs of the population group and no state support, not qualifying for social/financial support

Uncovered need of support

Needs of the population group and no support (non financial support)

Contact with (state) institutions

Attitudes towards state support

What is the respondent thinking about state support, does he want to receive it or is it difficult to be dependent on the state?

Unemployment benefits

What experiences has the HH with receiving unemployment benefits and unemployment benefit services?

Premium reductions

Remarks and/or statements about contact with premium reduction institutions

Family allowance

Remark and/or statements about contact with family allowance institutions

Child allowance

Remarks/statements about contact with premium reduction institutions

Old age pension

Remarks/statements about contact with old age pension institutions

Additional/complementary old age benefits

Remarks/statements about contact with institutions for complementary old age benefits

Invalidity Pension

What experiences has the HH in contacts with the invalidity insurance

Additional invalidity benefits

Remarks/statements about contact with additional invalidity benefit institutions

Widow pension

Remarks or/and statements about contact with premium reduction institutions

Social assistance/Welfare

What experiences has the HH with social assistance

Housing support

Remarks or/and statements about contact with housing support institutions

Educational grants

Remarks or/and statements about contact with premium reduction institutions

Micro credit

Remarks or/and statements about contact with micro credit institutions

Other (state) benefits

Remarks/statements about contact with other state institutions

Refusal of state benefits

HH could receive state support, but does not accept it

Professional help from NGO

HH get support from NGO's

Strategy

What does HH do to improve or maintain their situation?

Deliberated strategy

Strategy with a with conscious intention

Not deliberated strategy

Strategy without a conscious intention

Values

Personal values of the respondent/HH

Quality of life

Directly mention quality of life

Subjective: happiness and life satisfaction

Talking about happiness (or negative feelings)

Objective: situation

Assessment of the living conditions

Change t1 t2

Change in quality of life between the two Interviews

Well-being

— Psychological/mental well-being

Statements and/or information about the psychological condition

— Physical well-being

Health (problems)

Future

— Anxiety for the future

Respondent expresses worries/anxiety or fears concerning the future

— Plans for the future

HH has plans for the future (more concrete)

— Desires for the future

HH has wishes for the future (les concrete)

Crisis

— Direct

HH directly experiences crisis

— Indirect

HH indirectly experiences crisis, talks about others who experiences crisis, other information on the crisis

— Life is a crisis

Life consists of constant crises

Gender

Statements and/or information about gender issues

Migration

HH has migration background or has been migrated

— Foreigners

Immigrants

— Roma

— Migration within the country

Why do they help migrants

Deliberations about the state which in the respondent's perception is helping migrants (more than others)

Political attitude

Left-right? Active in politics?

Other

Residual category

8. Excerpt of a thematic chart

	financial situation	work situation 08	other activities
CH1	„comme j'ai un tout petit peu d'argent à côté /je peux m'offrir tout ce que je veux/ moi je suis très satisfaite de ma vie. Il y a des rêves, mais il y a pas de besoins. Les besoins pour le moment sont satisfaits, on a un niveau de vie très modeste, mais, on se sort très bien.”	Elle: infirmière (sur appel) convient parfaitement/ Lui: éducateur social (80%) en formation	vacances, restaurant, passions qui coûtent pratiquement rien
CH2	“pu mettre des sous à côté, puis on vit en somme sur son salaire/ il y a l'argent qui découle entre les doigts”	Elle: retraite Lui: au chômage: “Alors il faut toujours faire quelque chose, autrement on perd./ Pour le moment il l'aide mais il ne gagne rien”	peinture, cours de piano , gym/ “puis l'après-midi j'ai une mémé, je suis bénévole...((pause)) occupation à domicile”
CH3	„finanzielle ist zweitrangig/ guten Lebensstandard , nicht alleine für die Kinder sorgen muss und halt den grössten Teil meines Gehalts auch für mich ausgeben kann./ sind mir andere Sachen im Leben wichtiger als ein Auto.“	enseignant: arbeitet zuviel, ist unabhängig am Arbeitsplatz, verdient zu wenig, Mühe abzuschalten	„wir haben zwei behinderte Kinder, / Es mangelt mir an Zeit für mich“
CH4	„je travaille beaucoup en hiver, très rare en été. Donc l'été c'est une période pendant laquelle je suis plus engoissé sur comment je vais payer mes factures”	journaliste: “Le stress je supporte plus / j'aime ce que je fais ,tout le temps en train de se battre pour avoir un salaire selon la convention collective bêtement.”	jardin/ „si j'adorais sortir, aller au cinéma, m'acheter des fringues fin, tout ce que les gens adorent, je serais très malheureuse.”
CH5	„on fait pas les malins quoi, c'est tout,/ disons satisfaite moyennement”	retraite	“on s'occupe beaucoup de nos petits enfants Mon mari, il fait du sport encore, j'ai d'autres petits hobbies (...) du tricot,”