

The Human and the Social

A comparison of the discourses of Human Development, Human Security and Social Quality

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Abstract

This paper presents a structured comparison of the social quality approach with the UNDP-led 'human development' approach and the sister work (especially in the UN system and Japan) on 'human security'. Through clarification of their respective foci and roles and underlying theoretical and value assumptions, the paper suggests that partnership of the social quality approach with these 'human' approaches appears possible and relevant for each side.

Introduction

Attempts to extend and use the social quality approach in East and South East Asia have raised the question of how it relates to, first, the 'human security approach' which has been prominent in various Asian fora, notably in Japan and Thailand, and in the work of some United Nations agencies (UNESCO, UNDP, UN Secretariat, et al.) and development NGOs, and secondly, to its partner or parent, the 'human development approach' led by UNDP which has become well-known since 1990 especially in the form of global, national and local Human Development Reports. Both the social quality approach and the human development and security approaches can be seen as reactions to an economy-centred worldview. Both schools try to bring analytical and policy integration across conventional sectoral and disciplinary boundaries, with concern for priority criteria of human well-being (Gasper, vd Maesen, Truong & Walker, 2008).ⁱ

One difference between the approaches can be seen in their titles: one school emphasises the 'human', the other the 'social'. A repeated criticism of the human development approach has been that its picture of personhood is too simple, and understates the formation and existence of persons as social products (Apthorpe 1997; Douglas and Ney 1998; Davis 2003). UNDP-sponsored human development writing conceives of 'human' mostly in an individualist way, says Apthorpe (2008), who suggests that this conception of 'human' fits with a preoccupation with 'capacity-building'; UN bodies and similar organisations find that less 'political' than social reform and 'lowering of barriers'. Does social quality theory provide an avenue for feasible enrichment of the human development approach?

The paper takes as given a basic familiarity with social quality theory (see e.g. Gasper et al. 2008; Phillips 2006). It begins with a brief overview of the human development and especially human security approaches. It then compares the three approaches by using frameworks developed for clarifying the construction of theories of quality of life, including social quality theory, and of broad orienting perspectives like human security analysis (Gasper 2010a, 2010b).ⁱⁱ In particular, we will explore the approaches' purposes

and roles. We will see that these are aspirant policy approaches that attempt to guide public discussions and influence policy-making.

The UN human development and human security approaches

The human development approach as referred to here was created by a group of socially and development oriented economists who were working for, with and in the United Nations system, in reaction against neo-liberal market economics of the 1980s. The leading figure was the Pakistani economist, Mahbub ul Haq, who founded UNDP's Human Development Report Office in 1989. He sought to bring a person-focused reorientation of the centrally important and potent term 'development', away from the volume of monetized production, towards the contents and quality of the lives of individuals. Drawing on the thinking of Amartya Sen, the approach (re)interprets 'development' to mean expansion of the range of favourably valued life-alternatives attainable by ordinary persons.

Haq initiated also the language of 'human security', in the Human Development Report 1994, as a sister and complement to the 'human development' idea. Again he sought to reorient a central concept, 'security', to make it focus on life-quality of each and every person. The concept of human security complemented the 'human development' language by its emphasis on ensuring basic requirements and stability, not just on expansion of the aggregate or average range of attainable favourably valued life-paths. Work in terms of 'human security' partly occurs as a junior wing of 'human development' analysis, but has also spread beyond it organizationally and intellectually (Gasper 2007; UNESCO 2008; Goucha & Crowley 2008). The two languages are now often found in parallel professional communities that talk relatively little with each other. Here we treat them as siblings and partners, for 'human security' thinking has a potential to enrich and upgrade the human development approach in ways that are not apparent simply by listing their definitions. 'Human security' is a discourse, a way of thinking, that ramifies far beyond a single concept. So too indeed is 'human development', which we may see as a less evolved version of the same enterprise (Gasper & Truong 2010; Mine 2008).

Central to being human is that we are embodied persons with various specific requirements. This theme becomes highlighted in human security thinking. Human security thinking focuses on securing the basics—including physical and mental security—for the least advantaged people, and on security of basics for all. The Millennium Development Goals programs have been a partial attempt in this direction. The concept of 'human security' connects also to people's fears and feelings. It can evoke a sense of real lives and persons, and supports an anthropological-type concern for understanding how individual persons live. Such a perspective can help to better ground human rights and human development thinking, in attention to the nature of being and well-being (Gasper and Truong 2010; Truong and Gasper 2010). The risks and insecurities are diverse and case- and person-specific, and partly subjective. To "the question: what relieves individuals of fear, what liberates them from duress[, the] answer is obviously culturally contingent, context dependent, fixed in a social field, implicitly linked to a moral environment" (Burgess et al., 2007: 92). Human security work must thus be attentive to perceptions and worries, especially of the least advantaged people but

more broadly too. Attention to risks involves attention to ‘externalities’: interconnections between spheres of life that are conventionally considered as separate, for example between economic fluctuations on the one hand and phenomena such as health decline, the generation and spread of diseases, environmental changes, cultural and political changes. Awareness of these ‘collateral effects’ may build appreciation of a shared human fate: “the recognition of an interconnected world with interconnected threats. The approach of human security broadens the concept of security and emphasizes first and foremost the monitoring and maintaining of human rights everywhere as a basis of security for everyone. [So for example,] security for Europeans can therefore only be achieved by promoting rights-based and universal freedoms for Europeans and non-Europeans alike” (Burgess et al., 2007: 98-9). Unlike in narrow treatments of ‘development’ which function as formats for generalisation and command by rich countries over poor countries, this broad version of human security thinking applies to all regions and to the world as a whole.

Work in Germany by Werthes, Debiel, and Bosold (e.g., Debiel and Werthes, eds., 2006), and in the Netherlands by Gasper (e.g., 2010b) discusses human security discourse’s roles and purposes. The overall role is as a broad meta-discourse that guides work in many more detailed areas. Key specific roles include: (1) the most obvious one, of providing certain evaluative criteria, mentioned above; (2) providing a shared conceptual schema that coordinates communication and endeavour across a wide intellectual community; using these criteria and categories to guide the work of (3) conceptualising and identifying relevant causal chains and patterns, and of (4) conceptualising and identifying policy priority problems and actions; and, not least, (5) providing motivation to energise and sharpen these demanding activities. The work in the detailed areas of application is extremely diverse. The usefulness of such a conceptual scheme of human security—which is not itself a specific theory and should not be judged by that standard—for motivating and guiding policy-relevant analyses is illustrated in the wideranging and creative work summarized by the Commission on Human Security (2003; led by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen), in many national human development reports, as summarised by Jolly and Basu Ray (2007), and for example in Picciotto et al. (2007) and UNESCO (2008).ⁱⁱⁱ

UNESCO, for example, has taken human security as a lead theme, to try—stated in the terms we have just used—to guide, coordinate, and motivate its vast range of concerns. It commissioned a series of regional reviews of its activities in terms of their relevance to human security. This led to a set of books (e.g., Burgess et al., 2007; Lee, 2004; Tadjbaksh et al., 2007), which are synthesised in a recent overview volume (UNESCO 2008). From a survey of resource-persons it records this conclusion:

‘There is overwhelming agreement that, while the holistic aspect and non-fixed definition of human security is a problem that continues to draw criticism and doubt as to the efficacy of the concept, it is precisely its breadth and multidimensionality that make it relevant.’ (UNESCO 2008: 136)

Human security is found valuable as a unifying concept that helps us move beyond archaic 19th century divisions in the organisation of knowledge that are built into our academic systems and systems of governance, including in design of the UN system itself (ibid., p.146).

After this outline of a human security perspective, we move to a systematic comparison with the social quality approach.

Situating the approaches in the range of approaches to quality of life

Different conceptual and theoretical approaches to quality of life and well-being represent different responses to a series of choices (Gasper 2010a, Phillips 2006). First, concerning *focus and scope*: which aspects of *being*, of *life*, are included? The choices made here reflect a further five factors. Second, which *values* lie behind a particular interpretation of *well-being* and/or *quality* of life? Third, which *purposes* guide the sort of valuation exercise that is done; is it for purposes of understanding or of evaluating/praising/condemning or of choosing/acting? Fourth, by whom and from what *standpoint* is the exercise undertaken: for oneself, for others, for and in groups? Which groups of people are speaking about what (and about whom) and to which audiences? Fifth, which *theoretical framework*, disciplinary tradition and fundamental assumptions are employed?; for example, what conception of personhood is adopted? The choices in an approach typically reflect its disciplinary background. Lastly, which methods of observation and/or measurement and which methods of interpretation are employed?

In terms of focus and scope, for example, we observe that quality-of-life approaches range from those that have a primary focus on mental states, through some with a focus on the resources and effective opportunities held by individuals, through to others with a focus on societal environmental conditions conducive to good quality of life. Social quality theory is amongst the approaches which essay a comprehensive coverage, looking at all of these. It includes attention to mental states, including those involved in personal capability, social recognition and personal security; but its main focus has been on what it considers the more objective conditional factors – social inclusion, socio-economic security, etc. In terms of theoretical framework, we see a similar range, through from more methodologically individualist approaches to more methodologically holist approaches.

Let us consider several of these dimensions of choice in the social quality approach (SQA) and the human development/ human security (HDS) work. We will not discuss choices of research instrument; there both streams are flexible and pragmatic.

Comparisons – I: Focus, scope and guiding values in HDS work and SQA

Both streams choose a very broad scope. This is more standardized in SQA work and somewhat more flexible and wide-ranging in HDS work. The idea of social quality covers at least four major component areas, including social cohesion, social inclusion, and social empowerment, not merely socio-economic security. The socio-economic security aspect of SQA concerns life chances and social risks (Beck et al., 2001a). These are the same foci as in HDS work, except that the latter refers to access to and risks around *all* valued doings and beings, not only those which may be called ‘socio-economic’. SQA does covers some other valued doings and beings, through its attention to social recognition and social membership. It has however been a somewhat narrower conception, reflecting its origin in European social policy debates and associated ideas about which matters are within the remit of public policy. In HDS work the wide-ranging, in principle unrestricted, scope does not mean that its analysis is never-ending, rather that the particular variables that are highlighted will depend on a judgement in the particular

case, about which are the threats and interconnections that most demand attention there (see e.g. Jolly and Basu Ray 2007, UNESCO 2008).

Within social quality work too, focus within its broad scope will partly reflect ideas about priority values. Lin and Gabe (2007) report that whereas ‘Social quality studies take social integration as the key, which is suitable for the cases of European societies’ (p.347), in China ‘familistic groupism’ continues as the core component in social cohesion (p.337); ‘people have a weak sense of public citizenship, and the normative and institutional contexts...discourage them from developing social democracy in the name of citizenship’ (p.345). Similarly, ‘As for social empowerment, there is a great distance between understanding the values and meanings of mass democracy in European and Asian societies...’ (p.347).^{iv} Even in Europe, Calloni (2001) argued that already before its recent enlargements the European Union was too diverse for the implicitly Northern European / Nordic model in the existing SQA to be valid for all member countries. SQA needed to become more cosmopolitan, she suggested. Achieving this faces no fundamental obstacles, as seen by the ongoing vigorous adaptation in social quality work in East Asia.

Concerning the natural environment, both families of work are humanist in the general sense and both have accordingly been relatively weak in attention to environment, although human security work increasingly transcends this. The human development strand, with its emphasis on increasing the range of human choices, has been ‘problematically ambiguous’ on questions of environment (Phillips & Berman 2007: 473). However, the notion of ‘sustainable human development’ has been prominent in United Nations work since the mid 1990s, and, for example, the impressive *Human Development Report 2007-08* from UNDP is on climate change. The human security strand has gone further, to include a central concern for environmental sustainability (see, e.g., Springer-Verlag’s Hexagon book series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace; for example Brauch 2007). While no panacea, the human security approach does direct our attention to key issues concerning physical environment and interlinkages: environmental sustainability will only be possible within governance arrangements that reflect a good understanding of people’s felt insecurities. SQA, in contrast, has been preoccupied with social sustainability and appears to have given little attention so far to environmental sustainability. Bouget (2001) and (Phillips 2006) have pointed out this major gap, and Phillips and Berman (2007) provided a first response.

A key issue that is perhaps not yet considered by either social quality or human development work concerns the activist strand in capitalist society. Some human security work, with its attention to psychological security and insecurity, does consider this. The unending expansionist drive of capitalism stems not only from its institutional design in which, first, many groups in society gain only if commoditized economic turnover expands and, second, market competitors fear that they will be eaten if they do not first eat others. The institutional design reflects and is added to by deeper factors (Gasper 2009). Not recognised in most classifications of perspectives on quality of life is one of the dominant perceptions in the world today: an activist stance in which well-being consists not just in maximising monetised flows, but where the good life is considered to be the packed, busy, strenuous life, the exertion to the full of one’s human forces in unceasing aspiration, acquisition and contestation. In our era of far faster disappearance of, for example, the Northern polar cap than previously feared, research on social quality

and human development must look at environmental devastation and dangers and at the deeper forces driving them.

A final remark on respective scope is that—in contrast to its careful exploration of ontology, which we refer to in the next section—SQA’s engagement with substantive theory about well-being appears limited in some respects, reflecting a mistrust of work on subjective well-being, and a distance from the economics-and-philosophy tradition represented by human development theorists like Sen and Nussbaum. This is an area where SQA has much to gain from interaction with ‘the human discourses’ and similar work. Bill Jordan (2004, 2008), for example, presents a more elaborate theorising of the nature and sources of well-being than given in SQA, undertaken from a philosophical and empirical basis that is closer to SQA than Sen or Nussbaum.^v

Comparisons – II: Theoretical frameworks - conceptualising being in society

A strong theme from Phillips (2006)’s book survey of theories of quality of life and human well-being is the contrast between individual-centred and society-centred approaches. HD and SQA work illustrate this contrast, with human development thinking more individual-centred, SQA more society-centred, and human security thinking lying in between. However, a basis exists for cooperative work.

The human development thinking led by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen represents an enrichment of the perspectives of welfare economics. The conception of welfare in mainstream economics has centred on individuals’ degree of access to commodities that they prefer. Western economics inherited Descartes’ monological picture of subjectivity, with the human subject conceived as ‘isolated from other subjects and confronting a world of things which it seeks to use and control’ (Callinicos 2007: 286, paraphrasing Habermas). Sen transcended, first, the welfare economics focus on commodities, by making well-being theory look at the content of people’s lives in terms of valued functionings and the ranges of valued options which they have, not just at the contents of their wallets and homes (e.g., Sen 2009). This notion has wide appeal – it was adopted for example by the European Commission, for whom empowerment and development became defined as increasing the range of human choice (European Commission 1996). Sen moves, secondly, to a richer conception of personhood than as a monological subject; he rejects the idea of a single psychic currency of ‘utility’ and gives a central significance to public reasoning (Sen 2009).

The formulations remain clearly a variant of liberal individualism. ‘Durkheim argued that modernity *sanctifies* the individual, as the ultimate basis of value and holiness’ (Jordan, 2004: 8). This ‘cult of the human individual—identity, expression and fulfilment’ has intensified in the West since Durkheim’s day, with increasing preoccupation with ‘intimate relationships and consumer lifestyles’ (loc. cit.). By the late 20th century many rich countries had experienced a decisive shift from a view of social life as rule-governed, and as rightly and necessarily so ordered, to a belief in life in society as choice—choices that are and should be made by individuals and ‘not derived from stable moral or political traditions’ (Jordan 2004: 17) but instead by constant review and reconsideration of priorities and directions, including in interpersonal relations.

An approach to human development requires—for purposes of understanding and motivation, not only evaluative accounting—to say more about ‘human’, human action and personhood, than just a stress on reasoned valuation and choice. Sen inherited a

utilitarian conception of persons and society, in the sense stated by Talcott Parsons (1937): society is seen as a sum of individuals, and individuals are seen as reasoners who make choices, rather than as more fundamentally social actors. His 'thinking originates within the liberal tradition of ideas about individuals and society that takes individuals as pre-given independent agents. ... Sen does not actually have a *theory* of the individual' according to Davis (2003: 163-4). A way of life is more than a set of private choices; personality and identity have a psychic and social grounding; and community memberships typically have more than instrumental status. In Nussbaum's richer and more realistic formulation of human development theory, affiliation is treated as a universal good in itself, not just a handy instrument for giving individuals more options that they value (Nussbaum 2000).

Social quality thinking takes a more social conception: 'The individual is totally dependent on the social appreciation [by] his/her social environment' (Beck et al. 2001a: 327). Human security work lies in between. But nor does SQA occupy an extreme position in the spectrum: it has explicitly sought a synthesis of individual-centred and society-centred approaches. Thus its complex definition of social quality (Beck et al., 2001a: 6-7) may be simplified to 'the conditions necessary for personal well-being', suggested Therborn (2001; my paraphrase). These conditions include, first, resources available to individuals, which Therborn suggested subsume the socio-economic security and empowerment aspects (the latter includes individuals' skills and capabilities); and, second, the environments that surround individuals (including norms, institutions, infrastructures), which subsume, he suggested, the social cohesion and inclusion dimensions. In contrast, the mainstream of human development thinking has until recently given little attention to issues of cohesion and inclusion. It has though begun to think about the formation of individual identity and the nature of community membership, as in the *Human Development Report 2004* (UNDP 2004).

Sen and UNDP's human development theory has paid little attention to locating itself in relation to thought in sociology, a discipline which has traditionally rejected Descartes' stance. In contrast, social quality theory has been preoccupied with doing so. For social quality theory; 'the social refers to configurations of interacting people as social beings' (Beck et al. 2001a: 312) and the structure of these configurations is critically important: '[It] is not the psychology of individuals which holds the secret of human affairs, but the ensemble of relations of human subjects as social beings' (2001a: 310). Social quality theory's stance here has similarities to those of Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu sought to transcend both structuralism, which reduces individuals to the effect of structures, and methodological individualism which reduces structures to the unintended side-effects of individuals' actions (Callinicos, 2007; Hodgson, 2004). SQA's link to this ongoing Durkheimian tradition comes via Habermas, who in turn had drawn on Talcott Parsons.

Ananta Giri (this issue) makes a number of criticisms of some of these positions in Western social and economic theory. Some points are close to those made in other lines of Western theory, and to positions taken by SQA and human security theory. First, in contrast to both methodological individualism and socio-centric approaches, we should think in terms of ontological reciprocity of individual and society. Here Giri appears close to the SQA perspective. Second, both 'human' and 'social' are adjectival terms that refer to ongoing processes of interaction and unfolding. This theme is mirrored in human

security theory, for which “the understanding of the social is not pre-determined but evolves with the monitoring of social change... ..the ‘social’ [is] a multi-layered entity open to transformation by diverse transnational forces, such as transnational families, transnational social activism and new transnational spaces of communication” (Gasper et al., 2008: 27, 28). Third, Giri reminds us that we require a multi-dimensional conception of the self, as simultaneously consisting of techno/practitioner, the unconscious, and the transcendental. The latter two aspects seem more attended to in HS thinking than in SQA. Finally, he warns the ‘human’ theorists of the significance of humankind’s animal heritage, and warns ‘social’ theorists that ‘the social’ is by no means automatically normatively favourable. In the modern West both these strands of thinking about being human in society lack the broad reverence for life that is required as basis for species-survival, he fears. Human security thinking, with its concern for environmental embedding and global interconnections, is hospitable though to this final point. Social quality thinking is perhaps only beginning to give attention to the elements of violence in ‘human’ and in ‘social’, and to respect for the non-human.

From our first two stages of comparison, the following suggestions arise: SQA can offer a basis in sociological theory to help to ground human security (and human development) work; while the latter can assist with an agenda of priority criteria and priority threats to help in orientating social quality work. Otherwise social quality work could face a danger of becoming a factory of routine monitoring of diverse corners of quality of life, serving rather than questioning the system world.^{vi} Ulrich Beck’s work on ‘risk society’ has extended Habermas’s investigation of the invasion by the system world (for example, the impersonal mechanisms of the market) into the lifeworld. The invasion dissolves traditional formations, releases individualization, and enlarges risks. Understanding this is central in human security research, whereas human development discourse that talks only of the expansion of choices is in danger of feeding the processes that Beck describes. SQA includes Habermas’ concerns centrally and gives attention to the impact of these invasions, and here it can work in partnership with human security studies.

Comparisons – III: Purposes and standpoint of an approach

Subordination to the system world is a danger for scientific approaches with large appetites for data, at any rate for funded data collection. Apthorpe (2008) argues that the work on human development has run into this danger. It has thereby become preoccupied with snapshots of situations, rather than attention to institutions and processes. He warns that, for example, a racist situation and racism as an institution—or poverty as a situation of deprivation and poverty as a religious institution—are quite different topics and require quite different forms of conceptualisation and research method. Aspects of the situations can be captured by numerical scores, but institutional complexes and social structures cannot be adequately understood in this way. We must thus consider carefully what to monitor, by reflecting on research purposes.

Let us take a longer example, concerning choices of purpose and standpoint for work using the social quality approach. Nijhuis (2007) discusses practices of social policy in Europe (and especially, in his case study, the Netherlands), in which agencies are increasingly sectoralized and ‘professionalized’, so that they operate without much

reference to each other or to any coordinating agency, including even local government. They have drifted into their own abstracted worlds of management jargon, 'product orientation, accountability, output steering, marketing and advertising', and away from any integrated concern for ordinary people's lives (Nijhuis 2007: 28). He illustrates, in particular, how this undermines or fails to improve people's health. He describes, in contrast, a project with people in a locality of The Hague, that, consistent with the social quality approach, treated them as whole people and active agents rather than as sites of particular isolated symptoms or other 'customer characteristics'. The project very significantly upgraded health, indirectly, by helping people to form new self-images and new contacts which contributed to changing their lifestyle in healthier directions.

Social quality concepts proved useful in this health project 'as a conceptual scheme to interpret and clarify what was done' (Nijhuis, p.33) and to communicate that to other professionals and policy makers. It 'was not introduced by exposing it deductively in its entire social theoretical content and shape' (p.34). More or less the same applied in an exercise with managers of the sectoralized, 'professionalized' private social service organizations: informal use of social quality concepts gave a language to identify and discuss key issues in their work. But: 'The proposal to adopt SQ as a common conceptual scheme for the development of a shared vision on urban development in The Hague was strongly rejected by the managers' (pp. 36-7). Attempts to introduce SQ theory as an explicit framework to synthesise and organise the work of the numerous different strands of scientific research on urban issues proved equally fruitless. The lesson has been learnt for current work with local government councillors, managers and bureaucrats, which instead proceeds more fruitfully by leaving the full intellectual framework implicit.

Nijhuis distinguishes four possible purposes or roles of the social quality approach, respectively as:

1. a normative political vision;
2. a full scientific approach, providing theory and methodology for description, explanation, measurement, perhaps even prediction: 'a comprehensive metatheoretical scheme' (Nijhuis 2007: 40);
3. a heuristic conceptual scheme, that can serve as a tool of policy influence: 'a configuration of concepts and a way of reasoning about urban development. ... a language, which can be shared by actors with diverging perspectives. ... It [appears] to carry the great capacity to inspire, to structure, to connect and to guide' (p.42);
4. use of the heuristic conceptual scheme also as a scientific tool for suggesting relevant lines of research, including relevant categories for organising observation and measurement.

Phillips (2008) likewise contrasts variant 2 with variants 3 and 4: a total theory versus a more loosely articulated perspective. Nijhuis notes that version 2 has faced resistance in urban development circles in The Netherlands, and points to the difficulties that any new way of thinking faces: it is hard to absorb by those trained in other 'languages' and is seen as a competitor and a threat. In addition, all the categories that the SQA uses are inevitably somewhat vague—such as empowerment, cohesion, inclusion, life-world, system-world—and have, or at least had, substantial overlaps (see e.g. Bouget 2001) so one has to be careful in the associated scientific claims (see also Berman 2008). Any full scientific approach could take many years to develop, and require the work of large

numbers of people. Yet, while not generating ‘a scientific theory in the traditional sense’ (Nijhuis 2007: 41), SQA’s categories and schemata are clearly useful in increasing aspects of our understanding, and in helping to steer our research activity and practical action in better informed ways. In other words, SQA serves as a heuristic set of maps, both in description/explanation and in processes of planned change. This is similar to the understanding, that we saw earlier, of human security discourse as a generative methodology and heuristic conceptual scheme, rather than as a formal scientific model or evaluation template (see, e.g., Jolly and BasuRay 2007).

Göran Therborn suggested that social quality work should concentrate on supporting broad social consultation rather than on expert working groups to prepare SQ indicators (Therborn 2001). Arguably though the preparation and use of indicators can provide a good location for social consultation, but this depends on how the indicators work is undertaken. Denis Bouget (2001) warned likewise that the variety of distinct intentions in SQA could be in tension: a broad rhetoric with which to point to issues, an interpretive theoretical framework, an explanatory model, a detailed evaluative model, a political programme. He advised that the first two might be the most important: a highlighting of areas of concern, and a framework for how they interconnect. For these purposes the SQA diagram of ‘the architecture of social quality’ is central: it lists the posited conditional factors, constitutive factors, and normative principles of social quality, as three connected pillars.^{vii} The so-called ‘quadrant’ diagrams – ‘orthogonal graphs’ (Bouget 2001) – around vaguely defined categories are useful as an aide-memoire, to help in recall of agenda items, but often need not be further emphasised. The attempt to classify factors into single quadrants may serve as a heuristic to help in recall, or as a generative device to help identification, but may be too crude to deserve much emphasis.^{viii}

A relevant comparison here is to the influential ‘Cultural Theory’ created by Mary Douglas (1921-2007) (e.g., Douglas 1982), and taken further by many associates. Douglas and her co-workers consolidated and extended ideas from the Durkheimian tradition into a simple and widely applicable but, if subtly used, sophisticated methodology. They too work with quadrant diagrams, to identify and understand possible cultural orientations. For some readers the categories have seemed too vague and general and the diagrams and their dichotomies irritatingly simplistic. Yet Cultural Theory has grown over four decades to become a considerable stream of work (e.g., Rayner and Malone, 1998; Verweij and Thompson, 2006). By conceiving itself as an heuristic methodology of investigation not as a photographic mapping of reality, it has proved to be a fruitful way to generate relevant questions, contrasts, and insights into complex, fluid, multi-layered social realities. It fulfils functions 3 and 4 in Nijhuis’s list: a heuristic conceptual scheme that serves both as one scientific tool and as a framework for policy discussions. The combination of simplicity (four main cultural orientations, generated by two orthogonal dimensions) and potential depth has encouraged wide adoption and application in the past twenty years—*after* it became understood as a guiding heuristic, rather than as the equivalent of a universally valid X-ray picture of human societies. The quadrant diagrams became reconceived, simply as ways of making relevant contrasts. Thus within each quadrant one can again subdivide into quadrants, when helpful for investigating a particular situation. This is illustrated in Christopher Hood’s prizewinning *The Art of the State*.

Beck et al (2001a: 337) imply that SQA might have similar potential: ‘in each component the same structural determinants exist. In other words, the dialectic between the self-realization of the individual subject and the formation of collective identities determines the essence of each component’. A sister to Hood’s book, entitled ‘The Art of Society’, might show SQA as a fruitfully generative methodology for investigation and policy diagnosis-and-design, rather than an attempt to specify a universal DNA of society. Lin and Gabe, for example, present a review of social quality indicators that uses the EFSQ’s categories and supports and is subordinated to a broad investigative and interpretive narrative of social change in China and its risks, including of division and conflict. They use the social quality approach to ‘[probe] the very foundations of the social system [in China], including both normative and institutional perspectives’ (Lin & Gabe 2007: 345).

A review of contrasts and suggestions

We can now summarise possible contrasts and complementarities between the approaches, as a set of hypotheses that can lead to more detailed work. A tabular annex contains a fuller overview and additional points that are generated by the step-by-step comparison. This review, like the annex and the paper as a whole, starts from a critique of the human development formulation and a wish to upgrade it, then concentrates on social quality research and human security thinking as sources for doing that, and comes to some conclusions about how they can also support each other.

1. One perspective on respective roles is as follows. Human development thinking provides a survey of issues about human ‘beings and doings’ nationwide and worldwide, as we see in the huge data annexes of the Human Development Reports. These annexes, like the whole of HD thinking, need principles based in social theory, such as from SQA, to help identify priorities for this data collection and to better structure their presentation. Human security thinking provides an orientating and motivating overview of major threats and of their interconnections. Social quality theory provides a series of theorized checklists for helping us think about some of the underlying aspects—including the constitution of the human individual in society, the ongoing dialectic of identity-formation and self-realization, and the nature of some of the threats.

2. The approaches have differences in scope and focus. Social quality work is typically more nation- (and city-) centred, and with less focus on natural environment, than is human security work, which is also transnational and global; but this could be a complementarity rather than an incompatibility. They have partly overlapping intended audiences. The approaches could come together in thinking about societal and environmental sustainability, linking global and local themes.

3. They appear similarly potentially compatible in terms of their guiding values and ontology of personhood and society, if we put aside more strongly individualist variants of HD theory. We noted the gap in understanding of the ‘human’ in most work so far in the human development approach, in particular in understanding humans as social beings. In the same way, narrower conceptions of human security consider at length the concept of ‘security’, but not enough the content of ‘human’. But other work on human security (for example Burgess et al. 2007, Mushakoji 2003), goes far deeper, and can enrich conceptions of personhood and self-development in the human development approach

(cf. Giri 2000). Work on ‘social quality’ can complement these efforts. It offers one way to conceptualise some of the issues involved, and provides a structured form of thinking about ‘the social’. While it has a risk of itself being in some ways oversimplified, it can also—like the in some ways comparable ‘cultural theory’ of Mary Douglas and her school—function as a helpful methodology in investigation.

4. This potential role, as a guiding methodology, is less likely to be fulfilled if SQA aspires to be a comprehensive ontology of social life. Phillips (2008) suggests that if SQA aspires to be a total theory then it becomes harder for it to have allies, both because it leaves no space for others and because it exposes itself to more criticism. Seen instead as what he calls a loosely articulated perspective then it can readily and usefully have partnerships with other loosely articulated perspectives, such as those of human development and human security. Loose articulation does not necessarily represent lower theoretical standards. Within the HDS tradition, Amartya Sen adopts an ‘assertive incompleteness’ on many issues – we should not seek more precision and clarity on questions than their nature allows (Sen 2009). Many important concepts and values are inherently ambiguous, and we should try to understand and intelligently handle that ambiguity rather than try to eradicate it.

Human security thinking contains suggestions for social quality thinking, which was not originally conceived within a global analytical and ethical framework but emerged from a network of academics and practitioners seeking to influence practice at the levels of municipality, nation, and European Union in reaction to neo-liberal trends. The transformation of the EU in recent years by the entry of many new members with an emphatic neo-liberal orientation made that work harder. The project of ‘social democracy in [one half of] one [sub] continent’ proves as elusive as was that of ‘socialism in one country’. For extending its descriptive, explanatory and moral focus in more cosmopolitan directions, SQA will gain much from intensive Europe-Asia interaction and from debate with ‘the human discourses’. It also has much to offer.

Annex: A suggested comparison of three approaches

	Social Quality Approach	Human Development Approach	Human Security Approach
Focus – 1	The good society, in a national context (within, originally, the EU regional context). Recently SQA begins to reflect on its European visions of ‘society’, ‘security’ and ‘state’, and to review them in a transnational context.	The good society, in a global context	Risk, disaster, collapse –as parts of the overall texture of real and/or perceived and possible daily existence of real ordinary people— understood in a global context
Focus – 2	Apparent lack of real attention yet to ecological sustainability and to global sustainability	Includes sustainability in its definitions and in some of its work	Emphasises sustainability (including peace, physical health, mental health, ecology)
Focus - 3	Indicators and measurement are a major preferred focus, including with the aim of gaining attention of policy makers	Contains different streams: - measurers and model-builders - institutional analysts and system-builders	Focus on institutional arrangements which reflect the philosophy and methodology mentioned above
Value focus	Welfare, the welfare state. Seeks to defend welfare within the nation-state, against impinging forces of globalization.	A broader set of values than those measured in markets, constitutive of decent human existence and, further, human flourishing	Human rights, basic rights. Prioritisation in the face of extreme challenges.
Intended Audience	Governments (central, local), and intra-national and regional agencies (e.g., the European Commission). This may relate to the possible lack of attention to issues of global peace and environment.	National and international agencies who are seeking coherence in their work. This leads to a typical highlighting of the universal and downgrading of the national-socially specific.	National and international agencies who are seeking coherence in their work; but the situation-specificity of actual and perceived threats leads to a strong situational character
Theoretical background: Ontology	Individual and systems as mutually constitutive	Individualist (cf. Robeyns 2005) – but aware that individual exists within social systems	Has many variants – some that are the same in this respect as the human development approach, and some that are as the next cell below
...of identity	Group members, who acquire, generate and innovate identities	Individuals who may be faced with identity choices or prioritisations between different elements of identity (Sen 2006)	Group members whose identities can be sources of conflict and sources of solace in the face of conflicts; with scope for evolution
...of personhood	How is the language of sense-making used in SQA?	Persons have emotions, seek meanings	Persons have emotions, seek refuges, solace, meanings
...and of society	Complex notion of ‘the social’: ‘configurations of interacting people as social	Little notion of the social. Elements of actual and potential identity are	‘the understanding of the social is not pre-determined but evolves with the

	beings' seeking to 'realize themselves' (Beck et al., 2001a: 312, 310). It can help us to think about the evolution of 'the social'.	available, floating in the individual's environment, in an unexplained way.	monitoring of social change...' (Gasper et al., 2008: 27)
Purposes	Sometimes attempts to be a comprehensive explanatory system. Sometimes instead sees itself mainly as a methodology for investigation and evaluation, like the HD approach (Gasper 2008) and HS approach (Jolly & Basu Ray 2007)	Heuristic frame for structuring policy-relevant investigation (e.g., Dreze & Sen, 1989, 2002)	Has a philosophy of inter-connectedness, but makes no attempt to be comprehensive; instead focuses situation-by-situation on what are adjudged to be the key sources of threat to what are felt as key threatened values in that situation
	Social Quality Approach	Human Development Approach	Human Security Approach

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ⁱ Gasper, vd Maesen, Truong and Walker (2008: 25-26) highlight the following points of similarity: “1. a human focus, a focus on the well-being of persons, rather than a primary focus on ‘the economy’, the sphere of monetary values; 2. an explicit normative basis, beyond values as expressed only through wants backed by purchasing power in markets; 3. strong multidimensionality in their conception of human well-being, rather than a reduction to a single denominator of money or ‘utility’; 4. a holistic analytical style; which leads to concerns about interconnections which can overstep boundaries and threaten sustainability; 5. a dissatisfaction with the nineteenth century pattern of disciplinary and professional divisions; 6. an underlying preoccupation with relationality: an open or implicit realisation that every entity is a nexus of relations and that entities are mutually constitutive.”

ⁱⁱ I do not adopt the narrow interpretation of the term ‘quality of life’ found in some social quality theory, which equates ‘quality of life’ work to a data-dominated, undertheorised and/or individualist stream in Northern sociology. I treat ‘quality of life’ work as something much broader (see e.g. Nussbaum and Sen eds. 1993; Phillips 2006) and see social quality theory as a particular, complex, approach to quality of life.

ⁱⁱⁱ See also the Thailand Human Development Report 2009.

^{iv} EFSQ puts high weight on the values in all its four domains. However, Chan (2007: 270) remarks for Hong Kong that people there put much more weight on socio-economic security than the other three; and even doubts ‘whether an entity called “society” do exist in [Hong Kong]’ (p.271; *sic*), given the prevalent ‘everyone for himself’ mentality (p.272). By ‘everyone’ and ‘himself’, Chan presumably means family units.

^v Jordan (2008) presents ‘the idea of *shared* social value -- goods and people derive their worth from a set of *collective* meanings, standards and practices’ (p.115), including ritual values that are given through cultures and institutions. He proposes that we can analyse ‘the sources of well-being in social relations in terms of *intimacy*, *respect* and *belonging*’ (p.136); for well-being relates to ‘esteem, regard and empathy...[which] stem from and reside in relationships, not individuals or their material possessions’ (p.128). Economic growth generates only economic value and is often antagonistic to social value. In Jordan’s terms, SQA treats social value—value generated in culturally-structured interaction between persons—and not only economic value (‘welfare’ in Jordan’s usage) which is the market measure of the types of value that can be managed by markets.

^{vi} “Following Parsons, we can conceive the integration of society as a continually renewed compromise between two series of imperatives”: those of the essentially communicative understanding of actors rooted in a shared lifeworld (social integration), and those involved in the functional interdependence of sub-systems operating according to logics which we cannot fully control (system integration)’ (Habermas 1987 as cited and paraphrased by Callinicos 2007: 288-9).

^{vii} ‘Constitutive’ seems a more suitable term than ‘constitutional’, given the latter’s legal connotations.

^{viii} SQA writings have spoken of ‘the social quality quadrant’, to refer to these Cartesian maps. However a ‘quadrant’ means one of the four spaces in such a map, and a better term for the SQA cross-figures would be ‘quadrants diagram’. it functions as a generator and reminder of concepts and their relevance, and of fields for each of which a variety of concepts are relevant, not a single one. The space of interaction of the system-world and of individual life trajectories, for example, is a space where we look at issues of social responsiveness and social inclusion – but also at much else. Beck et al (2001a: 324) acknowledge that the quadrants diagrams should be read as simplified heuristic devices, not as sufficient representations.