

## Livability as a Public Good

Robson Mandishekwa\*

*School of Economic Sciences, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe*  
*mandishekwar@staff.msu.ac.zw/rmandishekwa@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*Interest in livability of cities has been on the rise for almost four decades. That livability, sustainability and resilience are intertwined is non-debatable. However, the definition of livability still remains marred with difficulties because of seemingly conflicting views. Therefore, it remains less understood among policy-makers and researchers with some perceiving it as quality of life while others perceive it as an environmental quality. This work brings in the views of Charles Tiebout into the livability debate. The objective of this paper is to categorically show that livability is a characteristic of the environment not a quality of life as argued by some authors. The results from the arguments presented show that livability is a public good which enhances life satisfaction and, therefore, quality of life. This corroborates the predictions of the Tiebout model. By so doing, the study managed to show that livability is not quality of life but a person-environment relationship to enhance happiness. Therefore, researchers, planners and policy-makers must understand livability in the context of the person-environment relationship with livability being a public good.*

**Keywords:** *Environment, Livability, Policy-making, Public good, Quality of Life.*

### **1. Introduction**

Interest in livability has been increasing for some time now (NRC, 2002; Gough, 2015). Various conceptions of livability are prevalent in literature. The two main being that livability is a determinant of quality of life (QoL) and that it is QoL itself (Veenhoven, 2000).

Its definition however remains somehow contentious. For example, according to the NRC (2002, p.24) livability "... refers to the extent to which the attributes of a particular place can, as they interact with one another and with activities in other places, satisfy residents by meeting their economic, social, and cultural needs, promoting their health and well-being, and protecting natural resources and ecosystem functions". By meeting socio-economic needs, it may be taken to imply that a livable environment must, at least be able to, satisfy some human needs. The environment must also help one to assess public and private actions and failures, externalities included. From the definition above, key aspects can be deduced. These include attributes, which may mean characteristics which make the quality of the said environment and with using this perspective, livability is a public good. The word interact, as used in the definition by NRC (2002), may mean relate. Using this definition of interact, one may deduce that livability of an area is interpreted in relation to other areas with which it may be compared. To this end, it may imply that when one evaluates an environment's livability, the evaluator has a comparison