



Quality of Life as a Determinant of Poland Citizens Prosperity

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Abstract: This work relies on desk research as well as authors' own studies and it discusses selected aspects concerning the quality of life in Poland against the results presented by global organizations on the quality of life. According to our study, access to employment, social engagement and cultural offerings are the most problematic issues for people living in rural areas and among several factors studied; the highest rated ones are educational system and a sense of security. Comparison with the results of global research indicates that overall quality of life in Poland is still at a lower level than the quality of life in advanced countries. For this reason, as for the EU, for next financial perspective (2014-2020), it is very important to support activities in Poland aimed directly or indirectly at improving the quality of life of country's citizens.

Keywords: Quality of life, poland, testing and evaluation methods

The quality of your life is the quality of your communication.

Anthony Robbins

1. Introduction

Among the factors taken into account in assessing quality of life, there considered health, living conditions and work environment. However, depending on the method used in different sources, quality of life is very differently defined. One of the primary purposes of European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth Europe 2020 is to influence numerous factors of the functioning of societies and the economy that directly or indirectly affect the life quality of European citizens. In this strategy, we notice a distinct paradigm shift; green growth, bio-economy and eco-innovation as the concepts that direct our thinking towards clearly defined elements of life quality. For this reason, it is very important today to conduct studies on the quality of life, as their results allow us to draw conclusions related to the social and economic policies of the European Union and other regions of the world. The aim of the paper is to present selected results of own research and other studies on quality of life conducted in Poland and in the world.

2. Quality of life in scientific research

The quality of life can be related to a set of conditions which have an impact on a certain way of human life (expressed by satisfaction, self-awareness, autonomy, and creativity), and on the objective conditions of life essential for human's needs (material condition, existential security, secure living environment) or subjective conviction about the degree with which these needs have been met (perceiving one's own life within the system of values in certain social, economic and political conditions).

Satisfactory quality of life should be shown as the main objective of community development at the local, regional, national, and international levels (Pogala, 2009). OECD emphasizes the following life quality indicators (OECD, 2014):

- income and wealth - household income adjusted for net income per person, household net financial wealth per capita;
- work and remuneration - working people aged between 15 and 64, the indicator of the long-term unemployed;
- housing conditions – the number of people per room, dwellings without access to basic sanitation (e.g. bathrooms, flush toilets);
- health – the average life expectancy, health self-evaluation;
- work – life balance including the balance between the time devoted to work and personal life;
- job participation of people working more than 50 hours per week, time for relaxation, sleep, personal hygiene, and other physiological functions, employment rates among mothers with children between 6 and 14 years of age;
- education and skills demonstrated by a formal level of education in people between 15 and 64 years of age, competence indicator in relation to students aged 15 (ability to read and comprehend meaning from the text);
- social relationships - the frequency of contacts with other people, the support from other people (in the case where assistance is needed);
- civic engagement and the quality of governance – citizens’ participation in the elections , the range of formal public consultations for regulatory proposals;
- environmental quality - air pollution demonstrated by PM10 concentrations;
- personal safety – crime rate, the number of killings, victims of crime (notifications of people affected by crime);
- subjective quality of life - a sense of satisfaction with life.

In general, life quality parameters and measures present focus on describing financial situation, health, political stability, security, family and community life, job security, political freedom, gender equality as well as climate and topography.

Definitions of life quality in many cases refer to specific situations, economic, social and environmental phenomena. Review of the literature describing selected models of life quality has been presented in the work of J.Braun, A.Browning and T.Flynn (2004).

The concept of quality of life is not new; this topic already alluded by Plato and Aristotle. Today, however, more often it refers to the fields of education, healthcare and family. Currently, as Young (2008) states, many indicators referring to the quality of life combine quality parameters with statistical data. This alternative approach allows for a better understanding and accurate interpretation of the status and position of the researched community in the local, regional, national and international context.

Education is one of important factors in the quality of life as it distinctively affects one’s well-being, improves employment opportunities and economic resources, and thus, increases sense of control over life. It ensures stable social relations, alleviates depression, anxiety, or pain, and boosts general well-being.

A specific example of defining and applying the theory of life quality is provided by the approach implemented in Bhutan. Bhutan’s GNH Index is a multidimensional outlook on the quality of life associated with political and economic parameters which take into account the segments of the population and place of residence in urban and rural areas. In this index, contrary to some concepts of happiness presented in Western literature, happiness is perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon, not only measured by subjective well-being in relation to oneself, but also, to the communities in which an individual lives and works. Four categories of life quality can be distinguished here: unhappy people, narrowly happy people, widely happy people and deeply happy people (Ura, 2012). The theory of Gross National Happiness (GNH) is based on the ideology that the pursuit of happiness can be found in all humans (Ura, 2011). This theory attaches significant importance to all other areas of development such as health, education, justice, environment and poverty (SAARC, 2011).

Bhutanese authorities claim that the aim of the government is to promote their people’s happiness and this faith is emphasized in the statement: “Gross National Happiness is more important than the Gross Domestic Product”. The main objective of this kind of philosophy is the promotion of culture and good governance (Thinley , 1998). In this

respect, it is intended to benefit from economic development and modernization and to gain a higher status as well as greater wealth, which makes Bhutanese people happy, not forgetting about tight family bonds, culture and traditions, clean environment, respect of the community and the country, and peace, thus, emphasizing the slogan “our government must be a human”. Unlike other developing countries for which the environment is not a priority, the government of Bhutan kept preserving the environment at the center of its development strategy (Brown, 2011). Its members strongly suggest that the real development can't be achieved only by determining economic order but it should also be combined with social, spiritual and environmental well-being. The main international standards for evaluating the quality of life dependent on the region refer primarily to:

Happy Planet Index (HPI) - a project of the British New Economics Foundation. Its standards relate to eco-efficiency in the exploitation of natural resources to ensure long and healthy life;

National Account Prosperity - a joint initiative of the New Economics Foundation and its stakeholders which takes into account individual and social quality of life in terms of the emotional quality of life, vitality, life satisfaction, self-esteem, social support, social trust and the quality of life in the workplace;

Quality Index - shown by the British weekly *The Economist*, which combines objective factors with a sense of subjective assessment of life quality. In the index one specified dependent variable is satisfaction with life, whereas the independent variables are as follows: financial situation, health, security and political stability, social life, family life, geography and climate, stable employment, political freedom and gender equality;

Better Life Index - an initiative of the OECD agencies, which takes into account the factors of socio-economic development shaping the quality of life, and in particular areas such as: society, education, health, civic activity, safety and balance between personal and professional life, the environment, housing conditions, safety jobs, income and satisfaction with life;

European Quality of Life Survey - carried out by Euro-fund, established as an agency of the European Union. It is based on the physical, mental and spiritual integrity. The studies include the following areas of quality of life: health, education, employment, poverty, family, family participation in the life of the society, housing, transport and communications, environment, safety, leisure time and life satisfaction;

The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions - compares data on income and poverty as well as other factors determining the quality of life in the EU countries. The research focuses on people aged 16 and above living in private households and takes into account the following areas: demography, education, health, deprivation, housing conditions, income and economic activity (Borysa , 2014).

3. Methodology

The section devoted to the analysis of life quality in Poland is based on the research of the Central Statistical Office. An analysis of interviews conducted by the Central Statistical Office and relating to the most important aspects of quality of life consistent with the Stiglitz Report (Report by the Commission, 2009) was made. The research was carried in 2011 and it covered 26,999 households. One member who by 31 December 2010 turned 16, was selected randomly from each household. A household was defined as a group of people both family members and non-relatives living together under one roof and sharing living arrangements. In this article, the life quality of the rural Sub Carpathian community was assessed on the basis of subjective factors. The analysis uses the results of the author's own survey conducted in 2011 among 1130 residents of the rural Sub Carpathian communities. The collected material was subject to statistical analysis in order to find regularities in the perception and analysis of inhabitants' quality of life. Data analysis included a variety of answers and their interpretation was made according to respondents' age by means of one-way analysis of variance and determination of the value of basic statistical measures at 0.05 level of significance. In the article, the rural areas were defined in accordance with the nomenclature of the statistical office as areas lying outside the administrative city boundaries.

Poland - the country of happy or unhappy people

The research carried out under the Better Life Index shows that a significant number of factors concerning the quality of life in Poland is much poorer than in many of the leading countries.

Table 1 shows selected results of tests carried out by the OECD, which are components of the Better Life Index.

Table 3-1: Selected components of the Better Life Index

	Rooms per person	Household net adjusted disposable income	Employment rate	Years in education	Air pollution	Life expectancy	Life satisfaction
Australia	2,3	31197	72	18,8	13	82	7,4
Austria	1,6	29256	73	16,9	27	81,1	7,5
Belgium	2,3	27811	62	18,8	21	80,5	7,1
Canada	2,5	30212	72	17	15	81	7,6
Chile	1,3	13762	62	16,4	46	78,3	6,6
Czech Republic	1,4	17262	67	17,9	16	78	6,7
Denmark	2	25172	73	19,2	15	79,9	7,6
Estonia	1,6	14382	67	17,5	9	76,3	5,4
Finland	1,9	26904	70	19,7	15	80,6	7,4
France	1,8	29322	64	16,5	12	82,2	6,7
Germany	1,8	30721	73	18,1	16	80,8	7
Greece	1,2	19095	51	18,6	27	80,8	4,7
Hungary	1	15240	57	17,5	15	75	4,9
Iceland	1,6	22415	80	19,5	18	82,4	7,5
Ireland	2,1	23721	59	17,5	13	80,6	6,8
Israel	1,1	20434	67	15,7	21	81,8	7,1
Italy	1,4	24724	58	17	21	82,7	6
Japan	1,8	25066	71	16,2	24	82,7	6
Korea	1,4	18035	64	17,5	30	81,1	6
Luxembourg	2	35635	66	14,1	12	81,1	7,1
Mexico	1	12850	61	15,2	30	74,4	7,4
Netherlands	2	25697	75	18,6	30	81,3	7,4
New Zealand	2,3	21773	72	18,1	11	81,2	7,3
Norway	2	32093	76	17,9	16	81,4	7,7
Poland	1	16234	60	18,3	33	76,9	5,7
Portugal	1,6	18806	62	17,8	18	80,8	5,2
Slovak Republic	1,2	17228	60	16,4	13	76,1	5,9
Slovenia	1,4	19692	64	18,3	26	80,1	6
Spain	1,9	22799	56	17,6	24	82,4	6,2
Sweden	1,7	27546	74	19,2	10	81,9	7,4
Switzerland	1,9	30745	79	17,1	20	82,8	7,8
Turkey	1,1	13794	49	16	35	74,6	4,9
United Kingdom	1,9	25828	71	16,6	13	81,1	6,9
United States	2,3	39531	67	17,1	18	78,7	7
OECD - Total	1,6	23938	65	17,7	20	80,1	6,6
Brazil	1,4	10310	67	16,3	18	73,4	7,2
Russian Federation	0,9	17230	69	15,8	15	69	5,5

The results presented in the International LIVING magazine indicate that Poland ranks 35th among the countries subject to a life quality assessment (Table 2) and top-performing countries are: France, Australia, Switzerland and Germany.

Table 3-2: Poland's position against the countries leading in the quality of life index 2010

Country	Cost of Living	Leisure and Culture	Economy	Environmet	Freedom	Health	Infrastructure	Risk and Safety	Climate	FINAL SCORE
1.France	55	81	69	72	100	100	92	100	87	82
2.Australia	56	82	71	76	100	87	92	100	87	81
3.Switzerland	41	86	79	78	100	95	96	100	77	81
4.Germany	54	82	71	83	100	89	90	100	79	81
5.New Zeland	62	82	65	77	100	88	70	100	84	79
35.Poland	51	74	52	72	100	80	64	86	76	71

Studies in the quality of Polish people life in 2012 show that three quarters of Polish feel contentment with their lives; they like their work, appreciate the relationships with the loved ones, friends and neighbors and almost every second person (58%) are happy with their sex life. This is in stark contrast to the stereotype of a polish who is always complaining and whining. In addition, the study has revealed that the most satisfied are the residents of small towns (up to 20 thousand inhabitants), having two children, doing physical exercise two or three times a week and maintaining positive relationships with their neighbors and friends. These findings negate the current perception of urban life, often anonymous, as giving happiness. The polish feels best living in a smaller city, where life is slower, more peaceful and careful. The most satisfied with their lives are people between 35 and 44 years of age remaining in stable relationships (85%) and whose finances are in good shape. Such people are willing to play a sport, maintain contacts with eight neighbors on average and like to eat out.

We are slowly straying away from the stereotype of a Polish who is in poor physical condition, does not like jogging or doing any other sports and is unaware of many diseases. Polish people today are more and more conscious of the importance of preventive health care and they lead active lives although they do not belong to the European countries that are at the top of the list in this respect (egospodarka, 2012).

The results clearly show that in the years 2005-2012 (table 3) we can notice a significant improvement in the quality of life of the Polish society. During this period, the proportion of people whose lives were threatened by extreme poverty fall by almost half and the proportion of people at risk of failing to satisfy their material needs dropped by nearly 60 %. In this period, an increase in average life expectancy of both men and women can be noticed along with the growing numbers of people satisfied with their lives. The most significant progress as for quality of life in Poland can be seen in relation to the amount of the society's wealth, which is directly associated with a substantial scope of poverty reduction as well as slowing price growth and greater availability of goods and their cheaper substitutes.

Table 3-3: Comparison of selected factors concerning the quality of life in Poland in 2005 and 2012

Indicators of quality of life	2005	2012
The proportion of people at risk of extreme poverty	12,3	6,7
The proportion of people at risk of relative poverty (below 60 % of median income)	20,5	17,7
The proportion of people at risk of material deprivation (failure to satisfy the needs)	33,8	(2011) 13,0
The average life expectancy of women	79,3	81,1
Healthy life expectancy of women	66,9	63,3
The average life expectancy of men	70,8	72,6
Healthy life expectancy of men	61,2	59,1
Average usable floor space of dwelling per person in m ²	23,1	25,9
Percentage of adults satisfied with their life	(2001) 58,0	(2011) 76,3
Percentage of adults dissatisfied with their lives	(2001) 12,0	(2011) 5,3

The levels of satisfaction with selected aspects of quality of life among members of the Polish society are demonstrated by Table 4. The data presented in the table shows that the average rating was “satisfied”. Polish residents are especially happy with their relationships, family and professional lives as well as their educational background (which is mainly dictated by the free access to obtaining qualifications in most institutions of higher education), the amount of leisure time and its exploitation, and their health, although this does not mean that we are satisfied with the national healthcare system and with how it operates as the saying goes “everything is fine as long as we are healthy”. To a lesser extent, the Polish are satisfied with and quite often totally dissatisfied with their financial situation. Overall, one person in ten is delighted by the quality of his/her life and nearly 60 % are satisfied; every fifth person remains ambivalent, while only one in 20 admits to being dissatisfied.

**Table 3-4: Selected indicators of satisfaction in various aspects of life in Poland
 (% of people aged 16 and above)**

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor dissatisfied	dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Professional life	9,2	51,2	25,4	11,4	2,8
Education	8,3	45,9	26,5	16,7	2,6
Family life	16,6	58,2	15,4	7,4	2,4
Relationships with other people	13,3	71,7	11,8	2,1	1,1
Financial situation	3	31,2	29,2	25,4	11,2
Material conditions of life (excluding income)	4,8	49,4	27,7	13,8	4,3
Amount of free time	7,7	53,9	21,6	13,9	2,9
Free time exploitation	6,1	54,3	25,5	12,1	2
Health	9,3	48,8	22,2	14,7	5
Overall satisfaction with life	9,2	64,8	20,6	4,4	1

The Sub Carpathian province as an example of a unique society significantly improving the quality of life

Currently, in economic, social and political aspects of human activity, management has to face new realities, new challenges and new uncertainties. Europe and the rest of the world have integrated and at the same time become dependent on each other as never before. We all live and work as P. Drucker (1995) says simultaneously in two dimensions of time: present and future. Tomorrow is being created today often with irreversible consequences. We all have to realize this fact and think about tomorrow’s management. In these turbulent times, we cannot assume that

tomorrow will be an extension of today. On the contrary, we have to think about changes as an asset, but also as a possible threat to our management, especially, in the light of changes to improve the quality of life and the quality of the environment in which we live, work and develop.

The concept of public management providing a desired direction of changes in managerial methods is gaining more popularity. Metcalfe (1993) says that “solutions cannot be imposed from the outside. Willingness to engage in cooperation and identification with the objectives pursued, which are fundamental to solving problems, must evolve internally, regionally and locally”. This also applies to shaping the quality of life, which will help to ensure the sustainability of the region and its viability in the long term.

The Sub Carpathian province located in the northeast of Poland can serve as an example of significant influence that the society and regional self-government have on improving the residents' quality of life.

The Sub Carpathian province, although placed among the poorest regions in Poland (the lowest rate of gross GDP per capita in Poland) has its strengths. It has the highest concentration of modern aerospace industries in Central Europe affiliated to the most advanced industrial cluster in Poland “Aviation Valley”. It also has a beautiful and clean natural environment. While the “Aviation Valley” is growing rapidly, creating thousands of high-tech jobs, natural features and landscapes remain untapped. Additional advantages of the region include low cost and high work ethics, international airport with a new terminal, a motorway currently under construction and the availability of the European Union aid greatly improving the quality of life among the inhabitants of the Sub Carpathian province. With this in mind, the people of the region decided to establish a cluster of Quality of Life of “Sub Carpathian Land” whose aim is to consolidate stakeholders, activate local communities as well as to build a development strategy for the quality of life sector.

The main objectives of the cluster Quality of Life “Sub Carpathian Land” are as follows:

- integration of the participants of the regional sector Quality of Life;
- building long-term development strategy ;
- transforming dispersed tourist offerings into the modern tourism industry, offering a complex tourism product, based on the values of nature and cultural heritage;
- lobbying for the Quality of Life sector in the long-term development strategy of the Sub Carpathian province, and the allocation of adequate financial resources in the future EU programmes;
- promoting the Sub Carpathian sector of Quality of Life home and abroad;
- organization and participation in exhibitions, conferences, trade fairs and study visits;
- establishing international industry contacts;
- attracting domestic and foreign investors;
- obtaining governmental and EU grants;
- promoting knowledge in the field of quality of life and supporting education in this field;
- building strong relationships with the centers of scientific research in order to conduct studies jointly;
- building strong relations with local and central authorities.

The initiative is also a reflection of the society desires, stemming from the results of the Foresight Project for the Sub Carpathian province among others (Woźniak, 2008).

The Sub Carpathian Province still remains rustic in its character. There is a significant proportion of rural communities, which constitute more than 70 % of all the region's municipalities and more than 93 % of the land in total. About 60 % of the population lives in rural areas. At the same time, an average farm size is only 2.63 ha (the average in Poland is 6.82 ha). The Sub Carpathian province, in comparison with other parts of the country, can be characterized by different management conditions that arise from the different natural, socio-economic, economic, and historical conditions. For this reason, the life quality of people living in rural areas of the Sub Carpathian province has been subjected to a detailed analysis. The evaluation of selected factors influencing the quality of life is presented in Table 5.

Table 3-5: Assessment of factors influencing the quality of life in the opinion of the inhabitants of Sub Carpathian rural communities depending on the age of the respondents

Age	The average (evaluation included a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 was the highest rating)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15-18	3,25	2,79	2,55	3,01	3,38	3,64	2,69
19-25	3,23	2,88	2,45	3,17	3,54	3,40	2,81
26-35	3,18	2,81	2,29	3,06	3,49	3,39	2,74
36-50	3,10	2,69	2,23	3,25	3,46	3,38	2,72
>50	3,03	2,77	2,25	3,15	3,57	3,27	2,72

Legend: 1 - generally felt quality of life, 2 - social engagement , 3 job market, 4- medical services, 5 - education system, 6 – a sense of security, 7- cultural offerings Source: Own research

Analysis of variance proved a statistically significant effect of a person's age on the evaluation of quality of life, a rural job market and a sense of security. The assessment of the other factors does not depend on the age of the respondents. The analysis of the results leads to the conclusion that the assessment of perceived quality of life is the highest among a group of respondents between 15 and 25 years of age, and indeed the lowest among respondents aged 36 and above. It is connected with the fact that people aged 15-18 are young learners still having sheltered upbringing and not fully aware of the problems in life. A similar situation exists in such areas as rural job market and a sense of security, which are rated highly satisfactory by most young people, however, the assessment decreases along the increasing age of the respondents.

4. Conclusions

The results of the research in the quality of life of people living in rural areas proved that such indicators as a sense of security and educational system were the most highly rated by the respondents who also highlighted the low levels of social engagement as well as insufficient cultural offerings in rural areas. However, the assumptions of Europe 2020 strategy allow for the optimistic outlook as many of them are directly or indirectly aimed at improving the quality of life of all European citizens, and this improvement being the primary objective in relation to the other activities.

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