QUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER REGION

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INTRODUCTION

Areas along national borders are sometimes called “peripheral”. They may experience relatively low growth, low standard of living and poor infrastructure development. Of course, despite the unfavourable characteristics, border areas have the potential for social and economic development, for example due to increased contacts or cross-border flows [6].

Quality of life and cross-border flows in a border area were examined in a research project “The quality of life in the border area – strengthening of cross-border flows for the common sustainable development and regional planning” conducted by the Wrocław University of Economics and the Dresden University of Technology. Research area includes Goerlitz county in Saxonia (Germany) and Zgorzelec county in dolnośląskie voivodship (Poland). The project is financed through Operational Programme ‘Poland-Germany (Saxony)’.

The aim of the project is to determine the impact of border location on subjectively perceived quality of life and to evaluate the objective life quality of residents of two border counties. In addition, the project aims to identify how difference in life quality between residents of two border counties lead to cross-border flows. These flows are defined as flows of people and goods which have the starting or destination point within the area covered by the research.

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of research on life quality in the Polish-German border area. The paper focuses on perception of life satisfaction and satisfaction with the place of residence among residents of Goerlitz and Zgorzelec counties.

1. OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE. MAIN RESULTS

As already mentioned, the research analyzed both objective and subjective quality of life.

Objective life quality is conceptually similar to the concept of life conditions which mean the set of objective infrastructural conditions in which a society lives. These relate to: financial situation, existential security and environmental protection of life [3]. In the project, indicator module was used to assess the objective quality of life. For example, available statistics shows that in 2011 average monthly gross wages in dolnośląskie voivodship were 3 times lower than in Saxony[1]. The unemployment rate in Zgorzelec county and in Goerlitz county was respectively 12.6% and 13.0%[2].

Subjective quality of life represents assessment of the degree, to which wants are satisfied [1]. In order to assess subjective life quality of residents of the two border counties, the questionnaire survey was used. The survey was conducted from October 2012 to February 2013. The sample size was 847 (397 in Goerlitz county and 450 in Zgorzelec county).

The survey questionnaire included general questions about satisfaction with life and with various aspects such as health (including health care), education, place of living, safety in the place of living, cultural and sporting offer in the neighbourhood, financial and professional situation. Respondents used a scale from 1 to 6 to rate those issues; 1 is “very dissatisfied” and 6 is “very satisfied”.

The main conclusions of the survey are:

- In Goerlitz county 8 out of 10 respondents are satisfied with their lives (variants: satisfied and very satisfied). In Zgorzelec county the respective share was only a little more than 50%.
- Relatively more Poles believe that the quality of life in their neighborhood is improving. The share of respondents from Zgorzelec county who agreed with this statement was 42%, and in Goerlitz county – 22%. Almost half of the respondents in Germany found that quality of life in their neighborhood does not change. In Zgorzelec county the respective share was 38%.
- Almost two thirds of Zgorzelec county residents believe that the quality of life is better on the other side of the border. At the same time, only 4% of Germans think that life quality is better on the Polish side of the border. It is worth noting that quite a large proportion of respondents feel that the

1 It should be noted that average monthly gross wages in Saxony were 21% lower than in Germany [5].
2 In Poland the unemployment rate was 12.5% and in Germany – 7.1% [2].
quality of life in the two counties is similar. There were 36% of Poles and 23% of Germans who felt this way.

As one can see in Fig. 1 respondents from Goerlitz county are slightly more satisfied with their health, education and professional situation.

**Fig. 1: Satisfaction of respondents with their health, education and financial and professional situation**

To assess the satisfaction with different issues more specific questions were also asked (using a scale from 1 to 5; 1 is “very dissatisfied” and 5 is “very satisfied”). For example, respondents were asked about the current job. In Goerlitz county only 24% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their job. In Zgorzelec county such answers were given by 56% of respondents.

**2. SATISFACTION WITH THE PLACE OF LIVING**

Fig. 2 shows the respondents’ answers to the question about their satisfaction with the place of living. The data suggest that over three quarters of Goerlitz county residents are satisfied or very satisfied with life. In the Zgorzelec county such answers were given only by 45% of respondents.

**Fig. 2: Satisfaction of respondents with their place of living (satisfied and very satisfied)**

Respondents used a five-point scale to rate the importance of various issues concerning the place of living. These issues are grouped into three blocks (Tab. 1). As one can see Poles gave higher ratings to all aspects.

**Tab. 1: Questions to assess satisfaction of respondents with their place of living**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Goerlitz</th>
<th>Zgorzelec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state and access to green areas (e.g. parks, squares, forests)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image of the place of living (cleanliness and aesthetics of public)</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey questionnaire also included questions about the state of issues concerning the place of living. The results of the survey indicated that the quality of local environment (drinking water, air, acoustic environment and waste management) was higher rated by residents of Goerlitz county. For example, in Germany 8 in 10 respondents described the state of waste management as good or very good. In Zgorzelec county such answers were only given by the half of the respondents. It should be noted that the survey was done several months before the new waste law in Poland came into force.

Differences in respondents’ answers were strongly determined by the place of living (rural or city). For example, almost half of the Germans from the cities consider the drinking water quality as very good. In Poland this fraction was only 8.5%. Significant differences were also observed in the air quality assessment made by Germans and Poles living in towns (Fig. 3). These differences may be due to the fact that there is a large power station in Bogatynia (Zgorzelec county). Air emissions from Turów Power Station significantly contribute to total emissions in the dolnośląskie voivodeship [4].

Fig. 3: Sample description of the figure The air quality assessment by city dwellers in Goerlitz and Zgorzelec county

Slightly more respondents in Goerlitz county respondents (both both rural and urban areas) think they have good or very good conditions for cycling and for driving. However, at the same time more villagers of Zgorzelec county think they have good or very good connections to the nearest urban centre. This result may seem quite unexpected, although it should be remembered that Zgorzelec county is located at the crossroads of important national road routes.

Relatively more respondents from Poland said that they had good or very good access to necessary products such as food or clothing. As one can see in figure 4 respondents from rural areas in Zgorzelec county were particularly satisfied with the access to necessities. A similar distribution of answers was apparent when villagers from both counties were asked about the access to commercial services. However, in the case of city dwellers the differences were not significant.
To some extent the assessment of the access to products and services depends probably on the prices of goods and services. Research carried out by regional statistical offices from Czech Republic, Germany and Poland suggest that prices of catering services and prices of food such as bread and cereals, meat, fruits and vegetables are higher on the German side of the border [5]. These price differences also encourage cross-border flows of consumers.

In some cases there were no significant differences between the two groups of respondents. This was the case for questions about cross-border road connections, access to the technical infrastructure (water supply, sewage system, gas network) and to green areas (e.g. parks, squares, forests). It is worth noting that while statistics show that percentage of population covered by water supply services in both border counties is over 90%, the share of the population connected to sewage in Zgorzelec county was significantly lower than in Goerlitz county (respectively 66.7% and 90.8%).

### CONCLUSION

The survey was intended to compare the objective life quality determined on the basis of statistical data (the subjective) opinions of respondents. In some cases these results were consistent with each other. Moreover, some results were also in line with expectations. It seems that respondents’ answers were affected by the comparison of the socio-economic situation in a given region with the situation in other parts of the country.

The research shows that the state of environment was higher rated by residents of Goerlitz county. Poles believe that they have better access to necessary products and to services. Differences in the assessment of communication were not clear-cut.

The paper presents results of the project “The quality of life in the border area – strengthening of cross-border flows for the common sustainable development and regional planning” (100100575). The project was financed through Operational Programme ‘Poland-Germany (Saxony)’.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY


QUALITY OF LIFE ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER REGION

Abstract
The paper presents main results of research conducted within the project “The quality of life in the border area – strengthening of cross-border flows for the common sustainable development and regional planning”. The research was carried out in 2012-2013 in the German-Polish border region. The author analyzes perception of life satisfaction among residents of Goerlitz county and Zgorzelec county. The study shows that Germans are more satisfied with life. At the same a higher percentage of Poles consider life quality in their area is improving. The next part of the paper focuses on satisfaction with the place of living.

Key words
Quality of life, cross-border area, Goerlitz county, Zgorzelec county

JEL Classification
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