

Quality of urban life in Poland

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Abstract. This article discusses two issues, namely standard of living and quality of life in Polish cities. It should, however, be stated that quality of urban life has not been explicitly defined and methods for measuring its level are disputable. Interdisciplinary research conducted globally has contributed to the development of a number of indexes measuring standard and quality of life in urban areas. These indexes are used for preparing the rankings of urban life quality. The main aim of this article is to identify where, on the map of Poland, cities are more and where they are less "friendly" to social issues. Subject to analysis will be the following aspects: housing, income, work, community, education, environment, civil society, health, satisfaction with life, and security. This paper uses information included in *Diagnoza Społeczna* [The Social Diagnosis] (for the years 2000-2013), the results of a survey conducted by a weekly magazine, "Polityka" [The Politics], and data published by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development as well as the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS).

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INTRODUCTION

One of the indications of civilization's progress is the extent to which a country has undergone urbanization. From this perspective, one may look at changes that have taken place in Polish cities. It is beyond any doubt that those cities achieved great progress in civilization over the past decades. Needless to say, urban development is particularly beneficial for the city dwellers.

This paper is aimed at indicating which Polish cities are more and which are less friendly toward social issues. Subject to analysis will be the following aspects: housing, income, work, community, education, environment, civil society, health, satisfaction with life, and security. The author refers to the results of *Diagnoza Społeczna* [The Social Diagnosis] (for the years 2000-2013), the results of a survey conducted by a weekly magazine, "Polityka" [The Politics], and data published by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development as well as the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS).

CIVILIZATION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In every country, social behaviour is subject to continuous change. On the one hand, it is shaped by macro factors (e.g., political, economic and social determinants) and micro factors (e.g., economic and non-economic). On the other hand, behaviour and lifestyles led by local communities and societies are affected by the past as well as socio-economic-cultural changes that took place over the last few hundred years. To a great extent, social behaviour is also a consequence of industrial and cultural development.

In every historical epoch, society reached a certain level of material culture, which reflected the progress in civilization. Civilization mirrors the history of humankind and, at the same time, enables people to discover their identities (Huntington, 2005, p.46).

For the sake of the present paper, it has been assumed that civilization is, on the one hand, material culture (i.e., goods produced by people, ways of producing these goods, crop farming, and livestock breeding). On the other hand, civilization reflects the extent to which the natural environment is controlled by people and the organization of widely understood social units.

One of the advantages of every civilization is that it can be shown on a map since it is a combination of space, land, topography, climate, fauna and flora, and the natural environment; and, with time, has become a combination of conditions created by humankind, such as farming, breeding, nutrition, housing, clothing, communication, industry, culture, and art. Geographical borders between civilizations do not, however, form borders and barriers to the exchange of thoughts, culture, inventions, goods, and services (Braudel, 2006, p. 43 f.).

Society is created and shaped as part of every civilization. The size of the population and its condition are factors determining the successful functioning of civilization. Apart from demography, this functioning depends on economic condition and technological progress. Nevertheless, one must not forget about religion, moral and legal norms, as well as values cherished by a given society (Braudel, 2006, p. 43 f.).

As this article discusses quality of urban life in Poland, special attention should be paid to the growth of Western civilization, the origins of which date back to the period between the 4th and the 7th centuries. It was created in Europe, and Greek people had made a major contribution to its development. In fact, Western culture had been fostered under the influence of Mycenaen culture (Jaroszyński, 2003, p. 9)¹. In the 8th and 9th centuries, Western civilization was significantly affected by European Christianity. Its further development took place between the second half of the 8th century and the 10th century (Włodarczyk, 2008, p.4). The next centuries, i.e. 11th, 12th, and 13th, witnessed the growth of European culture, which drew upon the achievements of more advanced civilizations, namely Islamic and Byzantine. Western civilization developed most dynamically in the 15th century. Later on, i.e. since the beginning of the 16th century, major geographical discoveries were made and, throughout 250 years, the influences of European countries reached Asia and the entire Western hemisphere. The 15th and 16th centuries, as well as the aforementioned discoveries, allowed the culture under discussion to expand outside of Europe. At the same time, contacts made with the initiators of new religions had broken religious consensus existing within Western Christianity. In the subsequent centuries and epochs, religion did not play such a crucial role as one of the elements integrating Western civilization, mainly as a result of political and economic changes. According to some, the civilization under discussion was expected to collapse (Spengler, 2001, p. 48 f.; Włodarczyk, 2008, pp. 5-33).

In the 18th century, Western civilization did not dominate any more since the United States and Latin America became independent of its influence. In the 19th century, the civilization under discussion regained its power. It was then that Europe subjugated Africa, India, and a number of Asian states, and established

¹ The Mycenaen culture reached its apotheosis between 1400 and 1200 B.C., while Hellenic tribes - in the 7th century B.C.

a new relationship with the U.S.A. The 20th century was also when Western civilization flourished since it subjugated the Middle East (except for Turkey). The civilization under discussion reached its apotheosis in the 20th century (Huntington, 2005, p. 63 f).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the notion of civilization was considered a synonym of Western civilization. Particular European states shared culture and established business relations (to exchange goods and services) and social relations (to enable the labour force to migrate). At the same time, new civilizations “emerged” and the Western one did not occupy a leading role any longer. A brand new era in the progress of civilization began, i.e., the time of continuing and multidimensional interaction among civilizations (Huntington, 2005, p.67 f.).

Urban development is an important aspect of civilization’s progress. Many European cities grew in importance after major geographical discoveries, i.e. in the 15th and 16th centuries. Their dominance had its origin in the expansion of trade with the overseas colonies. Before the industrial revolution (initiated in England in the second half of 18th century), large cities were in the minority, compared to modern times. Urban populations were sparse, unlike rural ones, and urbanization processes began at the beginning of the 19th century. At the end of that century, more than fifty percent of British and German citizens lived in towns. Similar processes were observed in other countries subject to industrialization. In the 19th century, major technological, economic, and social changes took place and intensified the urbanization processes. It was then that technological progress contributed to industrial development based on factory production. Urban development changed the spatial structure of towns and population inflow, and contributed to transportation revolution (which took place hand in hand with the industrial revolution and resulted mainly from popularization of the railway). It was in urban areas that plants, schools, railway stations, post offices, hotels, museums, and exhibition buildings were erected (Rybicki, 1972).

During the last decade of the 20th century, changes effected by civilization’s progress and the growing role of globalization placed an emphasis on issues relating to urban planning. To be more specific, spatial development of cities was subject to criticism, which gave rise to a discussion on the following topics: objectives of urbanization, rules to be followed as part of contemporary urban planning, processes of urban concentration, processes of excessive suburbanization taking place on the fringes of cities, tendency to create metropolitan areas, issues relating to overpopulation, mega cities, types and uses of planning tools, and optimum forms of urban areas. At the same time, it can be noted that parallel to mainstream urban planning, alternative housing ideas, such as “new urbanism”, “smart grow” or “slow cities”, were put into effect to propagate sustainable spatial development of cities. These new ideas are based on social and spatial values and depart from the model of rapid urban development of new districts and entire cities (Panerai, Castex, Depaule, Samuels, 2004; Rogers, Power, 2000; Paszkowski, 2011, p. 13).

URBAN QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is an interdisciplinary notion. A number of studies undertaken in this scope interpret it in a variety of ways and propose different tools and methods for measuring it. According to one definition, quality of life depends on such elements as: wealth (i.e., goods possessed by people), health and well-being, security (i.e., health status vs. possible danger to life), material security (i.e., possible loss of possessions as a result of crime or natural disaster), economic security (i.e., financial assets essential for living), state of the environment, spiritual development (achieved thanks to access to education and widely understood culture), sense of belonging to a local community, interpersonal relations, and one’s effect on decisions made about his/her life or the life of the community (Kusterka, 2003; Daszykowska, 2012). Each of the aforementioned

aspects of life quality has an objective dimension, but the assessment of this quality depends on a subjective system of values and opinions as to the extent to which people's needs and aspirations are satisfied.

Quality of life is often considered a notion which refers both to prosperity and well-being. Studies in this scope often treat quality of life and standard of living as synonymous. E. Allardt, sociologist, attempted to combine the notion of welfare with the other two, namely standard of living and quality of life. He assumed that social welfare is the case when the following three spheres of human needs are satisfied: having, loving, and being. He divided social welfare into two aspects, namely standard of living (i.e., material needs) which depends on the first-mentioned human need (having), as well as quality of living (i.e., non-material needs) which depends on the remaining two spheres (loving, and being) (Narkiewicz, 1996).

The literature on the subject offers a number of definitions of life quality, namely:

- It is equated with material prosperity, personal satisfaction or happiness derived from consumption, natural environment, good health status, personal prosperity, professional standing, social status, etc. Understood in such a way, quality of life is the extent to which one is satisfied with his/her existence. It is a sum of individual and collective opinions about the conditions of living (Bywalec, 2010, pp. 41-42; Bywalec, 1991);
- It is analyzed from an objective or subjective perspective. Objective quality of life is a set of living conditions, objective attributes of the natural world, material world and cultural world, as well as objectively assessed human attributes relating to standard of living and social standing. Objective indicators of life quality include human organism and functioning of his/her systems, i.e. health status. On the contrary, a subjective approach to quality of life is the outcome of internal processes aimed at assessing various spheres of life and life as such. It is a cognitive-emotional category, and the subject is the main (if not the only) source of information upon which conclusions about quality and standard of living are based (Sęk, 1993);
- It is interpreted with the use of the following five dimensions: a wealth of subjective experience, practical wisdom, effective actions, creation bringing about beneficial effects, and friendly relations with other people (Tokarz, Beauvale, 1993).
- According to the aforementioned definitions, quality of life includes psychological, sociological, philosophical, biological and economic elements, material and non-material conditions of living, and is a set of dimensions to human life. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to evaluate one's life and measure its quality (Bywalec, 2010, pp. 41-42).

T. Słaby defines quality of life as all the elements of human life relating to the fact of one's existence, being somebody and experiencing a range of emotions from one's relationship with family, friends, acquaintances, etc. She emphasizes the difference between two notions under discussion, namely (Słaby, 1990):

- standard of living should be defined on the basis of a set of objective (quantitative) measures, and
- quality of life should be defined with the use of subjective measures.

Hence, quality of life is a qualitative notion. However, for the sake of the present paper, it should be stated that it has not been explicitly defined and methods for measuring it still arouse controversy. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary studies provide measures of standard of living and quality of urban life. These measures are a basis for preparing the rankings of urban life quality (for more see: Maras, Stimson, 2011; Michelangeli, 2015).

QUALITY OF URBAN LIFE IN POLAND – SURVEY FINDINGS

Of major importance to assessing quality of urban life is the interpretation of data derived from direct surveys conducted by a number of institutions.

Local Human Development Index (LHDI) is one of the indicators showing the development of cities and regions. It is calculated on the basis of the following three categories: 1) health (taking account of life expectancy at birth, cancer death rate, and heart disease death rate); 2) education (i.e., percentage of children in pre-school education (aged 3-4), and average scores in lower secondary school leaving examination (only for mathematics and natural sciences); and 3) wealth (i.e., average wealth level). LHDI was developed to measure human development on local and regional levels. It is based on the Human Development Index (HDI) used for defining life quality at a national level. The creation and use of HDI at a local level (Local HDI) is an innovative idea put into practice on an international scale. It is in line with global trends in new methods for measuring development, particularly with initiatives launched by the European Commission and OECD. It was in 2012 that Polish regions were subject to analysis based on LHDI². According to the post-analysis report, the highest level of social development is the case with metropolises, large cities and their fringes, whereas the lowest one is observed in rural areas³.

Attempts to evaluate quality of life in Polish cities have already been made. One of the first studies undertaken in this scope was a survey conducted in Poznan. Since 2001, the Life Quality Research Centre at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan has been conducting cyclical questionnaire surveys on different aspects of life. It is aimed at getting to know people's needs and adjusting decisions taken by the local authorities to people's expectations (Kobylińska, 2010, pp. 47-49).

Since the mid-1990's, research has been conducted on the conditions of living and quality of life of Polish people, and its findings are published in a report titled "Diagnoza Społeczna" [The Social Diagnosis] (www 2). The research covers many aspects of life in Polish society. It examines, among other things, the social mood and reflections on living in Poland. The results of the aforementioned research indicate that the Poles are gradually becoming local patriots. Table 1 shows the percentage of Polish people declaring satisfaction with their dwelling place in the years 2000-2013.

Table 1

Percentage of Poles extremely satisfied and satisfied with their dwelling place in the years 2000-2013

Year	2000	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Percentage of respondents	50.2	52.9	54.7	53.9	56.2	58.0	54.8

Source: Diagnoza Społeczna 2013. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków [The Social Diagnosis 2013. The conditions of living and quality of life of Polish people]. Report, J. Czapiński, T. Panek (eds.), Warsaw 2013, p. 167.

² The survey was conducted by the experts at the UN as part of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) based on the analysis of data derived from all available sources of information concerning society, i.e., public statistics disclosed by Central Statistical Office (GUS), data derived from administrative registers of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of National Education, National Health Fund, Central Examination Board and National Electoral Commission. Due to the fact that data concerning particular indicators was either available or not, the analysis covered the years 2007-2010, quoted after: Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (www 1).

³ For more see: Krajowy Raport o Rozwoju Społecznym. Polska 2012. Rozwój regionalny i lokalny, quoted after: Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (www 1).

According to *Diagnoza Społeczna 2013* [The Social Diagnosis 2013], which examines, among other things, opinions about the dwelling place, the most satisfied were the residents of Gdynia (38.3 %). Other Polish cities, in which the residents declared they led a happy life, were Poznan (18.9 %), Gdansk (18.4 %), Ruda Slaska (18.4 %), Torun (17.3 %) and Cracow (17.2 %). People living in Czestochowa (3 %), Kielce (4.5 %) and Bydgoszcz (4.6 %) were the least satisfied with their cities (*Diagnoza Społeczna 2013. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków, 2013*).

In November 2013, at the request of a daily newspaper, "Gazeta Wyborcza", Millward Brown conducted a survey in 23 Polish cities. In every city, the survey was conducted on the sample of 500 inhabitants who were asked about general satisfaction with their dwelling place. All in all, 62% of respondents were satisfied with their situation. The highest percentage of those content with their lives constituted the inhabitants of Gdynia (96%), Wroclaw (89%), Rzeszow (88%), Torun (85%) and Poznan (84%). The least satisfied were the inhabitants of Plock (47% of respondents), Gorzow Wielkopolski (46%) and Lodz (27%). In the survey, respondents were asked to express their opinions about eight aspects of city functioning, namely public transport, condition of streets, development of cycling infrastructure, aesthetic qualities of the city, availability of day care centres and kindergartens, forms of spending leisure time, investment level, and security level. The closest correspondence between the overall assessment of the city and the assessment of its particular aspects can be noted in the case of forms of spending leisure time, investment level, and security level. Needless to say, the overall assessment of the city has had an effect on the assessment of specific elements of city functioning; hence, the better the former, the higher the latter (Ciacek, 2015).

In 2014, a weekly magazine, „Polityka” [The Politics], published the ranking of Polish cities to monitor quality of urban life in Poland (Bendyk, 2014). Better Life Index (BLI), created by OECD⁴, was employed as a basis for providing such a classification. The ranking of Polish cities took account of the following factors determining quality of life: housing, income, work, community, education, environment, civil society, health, satisfaction with life, and security (following the example of BLI). One more factor was added, namely quality of self-government. Each category was developed on the basis of two to four features. Each city could be given at most 100 points and 0 points at the minimum. The ranking determined quality of life in sixty-six Polish cities⁵. And so, the highest quality of life index was reported in Warsaw (70.3), whereas the lowest one was the case with Walbrzych (27.9). Table 2 shows five cities with the highest index and five cities with the lowest index along with categories taken into account while calculating the general index for a given city.

⁴ It took OECD ten years to create the Better Life Index (BLI). It was first used in 2011. BLI presents 20 different indicators for 11 sectors of the economy in particular Member States. It takes account of the following aspects: housing, income, work, society, education, environment, social commitment, health, satisfaction, security, and work-life balance for 34 Member States, as well as Russia and Brazil. Quoted after: OECD Better Life Index, oecdbetterlifeindex.org (www 3).

⁵ The analysis covered city counties.

Table 2

Ranking of urban life in Poland - cities with the highest and lowest quality of life indexes (2014)

Ordinal number	City	Quality of life index	Housing	Income	Work	Community	Education	Environment	Civil society	Health	Satisfaction with life	Security	Quality of self-government
1	Warszawa	70.3	57.9	83.0	96.7	70.0	65.7	78.9	61.4	85.9	79.3	54.7	40.3
2	Sopot	66.3	87.6	74.0	70.1	86.5	77.5	46.2	84.3	46.5	56.3	29.6	70.8
3	Wroclaw	59.7	72.5	53.7	83.7	74.9	59.8	63.4	26.6	49.5	61.9	57.6	53.5
4	Rzeszow	59.0	45.1	35.3	65.0	68.1	75.6	80.6	64.5	37.7	61.2	71.5	44.5
5	Ostroleka	58.0	42.1	36.4	66.1	60.5	62.0	88.0	40.3	43.9	92.2	72.4	34.2
62	Ruda Slaska	37.2	28.3	16.9	48.5	58.7	21.5	60.3	24.5	41.6	44.7	43.3	21.0
63	Zabrze	36.6	13.7	21.5	34.0	66.3	33.3	77.4	14.8	23.7	25.4	59.6	33.3
64	Chorzow	35.9	42.3	23.2	46.8	46.5	37.3	62.4	12.8	32.5	53.8	0.0	37.2
65	Wloclawek	32.8	42.9	28.2	31.6	40.4	36.9	61.4	21.7	5.9	29.9	44.4	18.0
66	Walbrzych	27.9	20.6	21.7	26.4	42.4	11.2	62.1	26.9	16.9	17.3	40.9	20.8

Source: E. Bendyk, Nasze miejsca, „Polityka” nr 46/ 2014.

According to the survey findings, Polish cities have achieved great progress in civilization. For instance, a number of buildings have been restored, municipal infrastructure is finally adequate, and, last but not least, quality of life is relatively good. At the same time, the categories making up the index highlight problems encountered by the city dwellers. Changes taking place in Poland are particularly beneficial to Warsaw which, owing to the process of metropolization, has dominated economic life not only in the region, but also in the entire country. Apart from Warsaw, dynamically developing cities include Wrocław, Gdansk (6th place, index 56.7), Cracow (8th place, index 56.2) and Poznan (10th place, index 55.5).

Looking at the urban development of Poland, researchers ponder the prospects for its further growth. On the one hand, in many cities one may see how EU funding was used (new roads, new bike lanes, development of public transport, new academic opportunities, sports and cultural facilities, sewage farms and reprocessing plants - all of which should guarantee that cities will continue to develop). On the other hand, urban areas may find it difficult to maintain their investments since these may impose a heavy burden on municipal budgets, as a result of which cities may develop less dynamically (in extreme cases they may not develop at all).

Regardless of the prospects for urban development, the majority of Polish people would choose to live in a city rather than in the countryside⁶. This fact is reflected in the results of a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) (Table 3).

The survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) examined Polish cities and divided them into large, medium, and small. The last-mentioned were chosen by respondents for whom peace (34%) and access to municipal infrastructure (18%) were important. Medium cities were preferred as a dwelling place by respondents who declared their attachment to a dwelling place (24%), as well as paid attention to infrastructure (20%) and peace (18%). Last but not least, large cities were chosen for the fol-

⁶ It should be emphasized that 'living in a countryside' can be interpreted in a number of ways. The percentage of respondents declaring they would like to live in rural areas may stem from the fact that they would choose "urban" or suburban villages (situated near towns or cities) and lead an urban lifestyle.

lowing reasons: labour market (35%), entertainment and cultural offer (31%), well-developed infrastructure (24%), attachment to a dwelling place (23%), and growth opportunities (21%) (Kto marzy o życiu na wsi, a kto o życiu w mieście, 2015).

Table 3

Poles' declarations about a dwelling place in the years 1998-2015

Year	Percentage of respondents answering to a question: If you could choose, where would you like to live?		
	In the countryside	In a city	It is hard to say
1998	30	67	3
2006	42	55	3
2015	40	58	2

Source: Kto marzy o życiu na wsi, a kto o życiu w mieście [Who dreams of living in the countryside, and who wants to be a city dweller?], Komunikat z badań CBOS nr 18/2015, CBOS, Warszawa 2015.

Therefore, respondents choosing small towns sought peace and security – the categories seldom mentioned by those preferring living in large cities. On the other hand, the latter sought access to culture and entertainment, as well as greater job and growth opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the above discussion, it can be stated that having overcome a number of difficulties caused by political, economic, and socio-cultural changes, Polish cities are subject to rapid development. They have been given tools for making independent decisions about their strategies on development, and their inhabitants have been enabled to improve their financial standing and find new ways of improving quality of their lives. Therefore, urban development provides the city dwellers with a good quality of life. In this way, Polish cities can compete with metropolises situated in Western Europe. EU funding will enable cities to make further investments dedicated to urban development. As far as Poland is concerned, Warsaw, Trojmiasto, Wrocław, and Poznań can be considered cities with the greatest potential for development and, at the same time, can provide their inhabitants with a good quality of life.

Having analyzed information presented in this paper, it should be noted that the dwelling place (city, in particular) is a major factor determining quality of life in the opinion of inhabitants. Nevertheless, theoretical discussion, empirical verification, and different approaches to quality of social life illustrate various aspects of this phenomenon. Apart from the relevance of issues under discussion, research on quality of urban (and rural) life should be continued since there is a relatively small number of empirical studies on quality of life in cities, as well as very few publications (especially by Polish authors). Rural areas should also be subject to analysis, bearing in mind that we live in the era of global and civilization changes. Hence, research should be undertaken to empirically verify selected theories of quality of life, with special reference to the inhabitants of urban and rural areas. This will, however, require an interdisciplinary approach to the matter, i.e., detailed and wide-ranging research.

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