

# Impact of the activities of local government on the quality of life of households, in the opinion of the inhabitants, of the border commune, Hanna

## Abstract

The issue of quality of life is an interdisciplinary issue. Non-economic and economic factors influence its level. The aim of the study is a subjective assessment of the quality of life for residents of the border commune of Hanna and to assess the impact of investment in the commune on its level.

The article attempts to answer the following question. What types of investment affect the quality of life of residents to the greatest extent? In order to achieve these objectives, surveys were conducted for the period January – April 2014. The samples for the research were not made by randomised choice, but instead used the snowball method. The results indicated that the subjective assessment of the quality of life for residents is high. It can be said that in the opinion of the respondents, quality of life has not changed significantly over the past five years. Respondents recognize the affect that the important role of the commune's activities has on the quality of life of households; particularly investments from EU funds.

## Keywords

Household • quality of life • rural areas • municipal government

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## Introduction

The issues and concept of quality of life are areas of interest to many sciences, including economics, that examine the issue from different points of view. The issue of quality of life and the attempt to define concepts was highlighted in the United States after World War II. The issue was initially associated with material status. In connection with curiosity about “being” instead of “having”, interest was expanded into other areas of human activity (Wnuk & Marcinkowski 2012).

Initially, quality of life had only been of interest to economists who combined the concept with the social consumption of goods and services needed to meet the requirements of an individual at a particular level of societal development (Bartkowiak 2009). Today, quality of life is a very important category and major theme in discussions on the future of human life (Torjman & Minns 2005).

The term “quality of life” was introduced into scientific literature in the 60's. It was presented by sociologists and by advocates responsible for environmental protection. The greatest impact on the introduction of this concept was made by people who were critical regarding assessment using only the indicators of living standards. In the 60's, following the post-war economic growth, quality of life was perceived as all the property at the disposal of the consumer in order to achieve their prosperity (Daszykowska 2007).

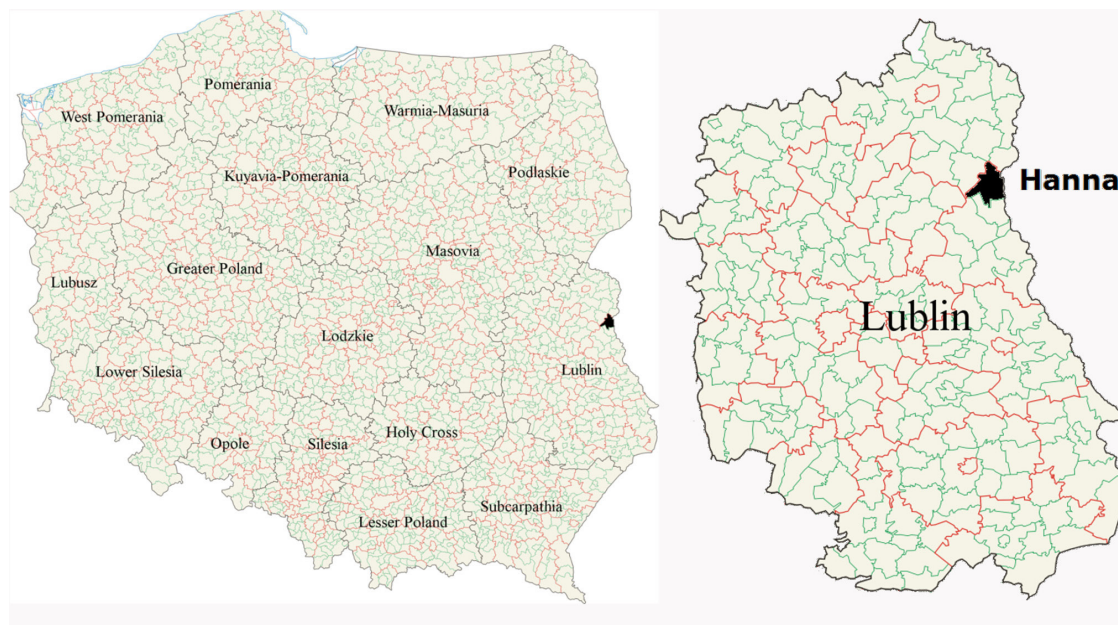
Research on human material position specifies that quality of life is dependent on owned and accumulated wealth. On this basis, it is concluded that quality of life is defined as the feeling of happiness that results from a predominance of positive feelings (Mróz 2009).

The term “quality of life” is an open issue, too complex to be clarified. In spite of these difficulties, it is of great value in scientific

research and in life. Currently, the concept does not only refer to the level of meeting the needs of society in the material sense; it also takes into account the social, physical, and emotional spheres (Daszykowska 2007). Along with the development of the scientific evolution new intangible assets have been introduced into the term “quality of life”. Scientists have inevitably linked health, freedom, happiness, as well as education, with the quality of life of humans.

Basic experiments to create tools for measuring quality of life appeared during the interwar period. Further attempts started in the 1950s and reached their final form in the 1960s. A significant part of these, relating to the objective nature of the measurement of quality of life, were introduced by statistical surveys. They identified the term “quality of life” with the socio-economic situation in life, and especially the level of satisfaction with regards to needs. Only after this, curiosity concerning aspects of quality of life increased, with the highest point of interest taking place in the 1980s and 1990s (Wnuk & Marcinkowski 2012). Methods for measuring quality of life include various indicators characterizing, inter alia, economic, social, cultural, environmental, educational, and transportation aspects. Indicators of quality of life characterize economic, social, cultural, environmental, educational and other aspects. Therefore, the analysis of quality of life includes multiple types of indicators and is multidimensional (Rimkuviene 2013).

The classification of quality of life is largely dependent on the definition found in the literature. There are seven important criteria for the classifying quality of life, due to the ways of defining this term (Borys & Rogal 2008):



Map 1. Location of the Hanna commune

Source: own research

- valuation of quality of life,
- scope and quality of life issues,
- objective measurement of quality of life,
- number of objects,
- directness of research dependence and the actual quality of life,
- sustainability of aspects of quality of life,
- axiological criterion.

The concept of objective quality of life includes the conditions or level of life. While the concept of subjective quality of life is an estimate of the level of fulfilment of the needs of individuals. Quality of life, in subjective terms, is also referred to as the state of mind that accompanies a person at the time of the study. These states are the result of a cognitive evaluation of the implementation of plans and assumptions that occur between the person and the environment, assessment of their personal achievements and failures, and assessment of opportunities for the achievement of their own life goals and desires (Chudzicka 1995). For the purposes of this study, the essence of quality of life is best described in the following definition: subjective quality of life is a kind of a collection of the levels of satisfaction with various objective ways of satisfying the needs that characterize various aspects of human life (Borys & Knippschild 2014). Subjective conditions are considered on an individual basis, specific to individuals, and are expressed through well-being. Self-assessment of the conditions of life also plays an important role, as determined by hope, happiness, contentment, fear, anxiety or loneliness (Broniewska 2005). These conditions are indirectly created by the closest local government unit, the municipality. The funds possessed by municipalities, for example to be spent on infrastructure or on improving environmental values, affect the quality of life of its inhabitants (Kozuch & Noworól 2011). In addition, the statutory responsibility of the municipality is to carry out a policy that will affect the creation of conditions for improving the quality of life of residents. Studies on the quality of life of inhabitants are mainly implemented in large cities where they are a tool for obtaining knowledge in order to diagnose the needs of local societies and subsequently take up development

activities. However, such actions are more often taken up by local governments (Rogal 2009).

#### Methodology

The study is based on a survey carried out on a group of 100 people. The research process was conducted during in the period January – April 2014. The samples for the research came from non-probabilistic (non-random) selection, with the snowball method being used. The research tool used was a questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, and 5 metric questions.

The survey included residents of the Hanna commune, which is situated in the north-eastern part of the Włodawa district that delineates the Polish border with Belarus. The commune has a typical agricultural character. Typical sources of income for its residents are from agricultural products (including organic), and tourism. The territorial location of the commune in comparison with the region is shown on map 1.

The Hanna commune occupies 13,929 hectares, and is inhabited by 3074 people, including 1544 women (the population has decreased in comparison with earlier periods).

The study used the following statistical methods: descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The data is presented using graphs and tables.

#### Analysis of the results

The group of residents from the Hanna commune that were studied accounted for 53% of women. The average age of the respondents was 42.99 years, with a standard deviation of 13.01. In the studied group, more than 40% declared secondary education and nearly 20% declared post-secondary or college education. Higher education was the characteristic of 15% of respondents, while 16% were educated at the vocational level.

Considering the economic and professional status of the studied group it should be noted that, in this regard, this is a varied community. The participants of the study included, among others: farmers (30%), employed persons (26%), unemployed (26%), and retirees and pensioners (10%).

The assessment of one's own financial situation is a determinant in the subjective perceptions related to the quality

of life. Among the respondents, consisting of 100 residents of the commune, close to 60% assessed their situation as average, while only 1 person found it very bad, and 11% found it bad. Almost 30% of participants in the study indicated that their financial situation was good, while only 2% indicated it was very good. Regression analysis was used in which the variable being explained was the assessed quality of life on the day of the study, and the explanatory variable was the assessed financial situation of the household. The regression model proved to be well matched to the F data (1.98) = 37.641; p <0.000. Based on the regression coefficients, it can be concluded that the assessment of quality of life is moderately associated with the assessment of the financial situation of the household (beta = 0.527; p <0.000). The regression equation can be written as  $Y = 4.38 + 054X$ . The tested model explains the 27% variation in the dependent variable.

The sense of the level of satisfaction and quality of life is associated with the defining of the issue. The respondents defined quality of life from two perspectives: as a good financial and property situation along with all the other aspects associated with it; and secondly as issues related to a sense of security and self-satisfaction with the achievements of one's own life. Respondents attempted to assess the quality of life of their household on the date of the study<sup>1</sup>. The results indicated that a significant proportion of the respondents (43%) believe their situation was good or very good. Only 8% of respondents rated it as bad and very bad. Nearly 50% of those participating in the study indicated an average assessment (Figure 1).

When analysing quality of life, it can be compared to various periods in the past. Respondents compared their quality of life at the time of the study to a period five years earlier. More than half of the respondents assessed their current quality of life at the same level as it was five years earlier<sup>2</sup>. A quarter of respondents assessed their quality of life as higher or significantly higher, while one in five respondents rated it as lower or much lower. There is a statistical relationship between the perception of the quality of life at the time of the study compared to the perceived quality of life five years earlier (Kendall's tau-b 0.356; p <0.000). The strength of the relationship between the occurring variables is moderate.

The factors that affect the quality of life of households are both the financial situation of the household as well as the level of infrastructure, access to a range of public services, inter alia, public transport, health protection, and culture. Respondents evaluated the factors on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant very little impact, and 5 a very large impact on the quality of life. The subjective assessment of the factors indicated that the respondents believed that access to medical services has the greatest impact on quality of life (Table 1).

Equally important was the respondents' opinion on the access to cultural services (a mean of 3.66, with a standard deviation of 0.75) and the level of environmental pollution and public utilities.

One of the elements that is responsible for actions that affect the quality of life of the inhabitants of the commune, and at the same time knows their needs best, is the people's nearest local government. In the opinion of 98% of the respondents all investments made in the commune significantly affect the quality of life of its inhabitants. This effect, in the opinion of almost three-quarters of respondents, is big or very big. Only 1% of respondents rated it as very small.

Among the investments mentioned by the residents of Hanna

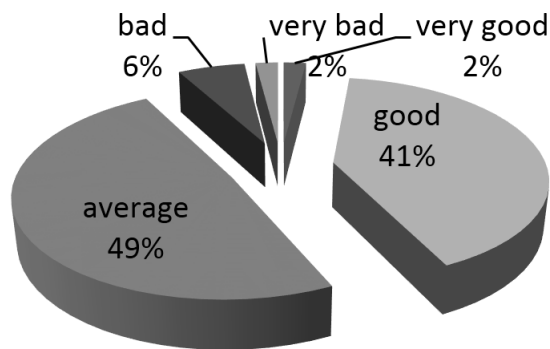


Figure 1. Evaluation of quality of life in the opinion of the respondents at the time of the study

Source: Determined on the basis of own research

Table 1. Evaluation of the impact of factors on quality of life for residents of the commune, in the opinion of the respondents\*

Item	Average	Standard Deviation
access to medical services	3.94	0.83
culture	3.66	0.75
environmental pollution	3.50	1.21
condition of public utilities	3.42	1.20
condition of road surfaces	3.39	1.39
sports – education infrastructure	3.29	1.04
tourist base, i.e. hotels, restaurants, sports facilities	3.22	1.18
transportation	2.99	1.29
housing condition	2.86	1.33
pavement surface condition	2.71	1.20

Source: Determined on the basis of own research.

\*Rating on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means very little impact of a given factor, and 5, a very big impact.

commune were such activities as: construction of water supply and sanitation networks, improvement in the quality of roads, and construction of new sports facilities. One of the sources of funds for investments that are used to improve quality of life is funds from the European Union. According to the knowledge of 95% of respondents, the Hanna commune implements investments financed from EU projects. Municipal government activity in this area has been assessed by nearly 70% of the respondents as good or very good. Only one person found it bad, while other respondents indicated that they evaluated this activity as average. Respondents were of the opinion that the investments made within the framework of EU funds have a significant impact on the quality of life, and thus the quality of life of households.

The investment that influenced quality of life to the greatest degree was the implementation of water supply and sewerage networks. The average rating for this investment was 3.89 with a standard deviation of 1.06 (Table 2). What is interesting is that investments and activities associated with meeting the needs of

<sup>1</sup>Respondents subjectively assessed quality of life and the life of their households on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor quality of life, and 5 is very good quality of life

<sup>2</sup>Respondents subjectively compared quality of life, and the life of their households at the time of the study, to the quality of life five years earlier on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is much lower quality of life, and 5 is significantly higher quality of life.

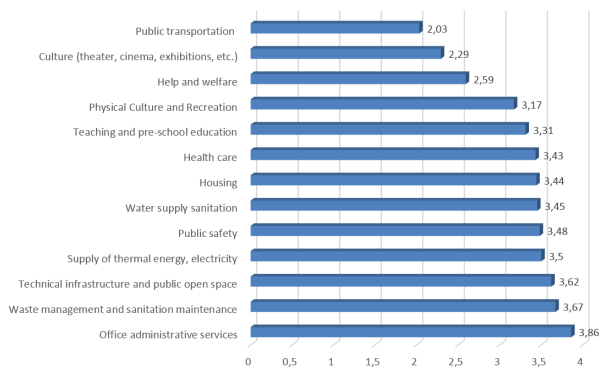


Figure 2. Average assessment of the availability of public services at the place of residence of the respondents\*

\*Assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is low availability and 5 very high.

Source: Determined on the basis of own research.

the residents in the area of leisure and physical activities were, in the opinion of the respondents, equally important. The average rating for these investments was slightly lower when compared to the implementation of the water supply and sewage network. The response provides confirmation that quality of life is, for the respondents, not only a material issue associated with the implementation of basic needs of the lower order. In the case of all of investments implemented under projects co-financed by the EU, the impact on the quality of life, according to the respondents, was high.

The quality of life of residents and households is also associated with their immediate environment. This gives an intangible dimension, whose influence has a number of different factors. The Hanna Commune, due to its location in the trans-border region and its agricultural character, creates specific conditions of life for its inhabitants. Family contacts (mean 3.81, standard deviation 1.04), the aesthetics of the place of residence (mean 3.76, standard deviation 0.86) are, in the opinion of the surveyed residents, factors which affect their satisfaction.

The biggest disappointment for the respondents is the lack of attractive jobs and transport links (Table 3).

An important aspect affecting quality of life is the availability of public services. This is particularly important in rural areas where the availability in this regard is much lower.

Availability of services influences the level of the satisfaction of the needs of different types of households. According to the respondents, the greatest influence on satisfaction is the availability of administrative services and municipal services related to waste management. The average assessment of the availability of services in these cases were, respectively, 3.86 (standard deviation 1.07) and 3.67 (standard deviation 0.79). Equally low was the respondents' assessment of the availability of providers of cultural services, 2.29 (standard deviation 1.04) (Figure 2). The results indicate a failure to meet the needs of the respondents and members of the household in terms of the cultural needs and those related to transportation.

In the opinion of 70% of the respondents, investments and activities taken up by the commune affect the quality of life of households. These impacts may also be indirect by raising the investment attractiveness of the commune. This effect can be large or very large in the opinion of 67% of respondents. An increase in investment attractiveness can take place, inter alia, by investing in the improvement of roads (92% of respondents), the implementation of projects related to the economic promotion of the commune (90%), improving the power grid (80%), and the use of information technology (66%).

Table 2. Assessment of the impact of investments in the Hanna commune under EU funds on the improvement of the quality of life.

Item	Average	Standard Deviation
water supply and sewage network	3.89	1.06
cultural events	3.87	0.77
sports facilities	3.85	0.86
environmental protection	3.62	1.098
education and teaching	3.61	1.05
health care	3.56	1.00
quality of roads	3.49	1.20
tourism	3.44	0.94

Rating on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means very little impact of a given factor, and 5, a very big impact.

Source: Determined on the basis of own research. Other activities, which, in the opinion of respondents, the commune should take up in order to improve quality of life, included, mainly, the improvement of roads (94% of respondents) and environmental protection (83%).

Table 3. Factors influencing the satisfaction of the respondents within their domicile.

factors	Average	Standard Deviation
family contacts and established circle of friends	3.81	1.04
aesthetics of the village/town/settlement	3.76	0.86
easy access to public facilities, such as: church, shop, cinema, etc.	3.61	1.31
a rich cultural life	3.26	1.07
overall quality of public social services (health, education, culture, etc.)	3.24	1.12
favourable conditions for leisure, sport and recreation	3.24	1.40
ability to provide housing	3.12	1.24
convenient public and long distance transport connections	2.99	1.25
attractive and well paid gainful employment	2.54	1.22

\*The assessment took place on a scale of 0 to 5: 5 – definitely yes, 4 – rather yes, 3 – neither yes or no, 2 – rather no, 1 – definitely no, 0 – hard to say.

Source: Determined on the basis of own research.

**Summary**

The overall assessment of quality of life in the opinion of half of the respondents was mediocre. Only 8% of participants in the study rated the quality of life of their household as poor or very poor. Comparing the subjective assessment of the quality of life at the time of the study with five years earlier you can see a



slight change in the opinions of the respondents. Nearly 25% of respondents rated it as higher or significantly higher.

According to the commune's surveyed residents, all of the investments implemented in the commune have had an impact on the quality of life of its inhabitants. Investments related to the expansion of water supply and sewerage, and organization of cultural events influenced the quality of life of households the most, according to nearly 75% of respondents. The level of importance of investments related to the expansion and modernization of sports facilities, and environmental protection was also great. The desire to improve the condition of roads and environmental protection were investments affecting quality of

life that should be continued to be implemented in the opinion of the residents. One of the areas of investment, as emphasized by the opinions of the respondents, is the development of the tourism sector. Nearly 60% of respondents felt that tourism is an area in which the commune should increase investment. Second place was taken by agriculture, where one in five respondents indicated this area as important.

Commune inhabitants recognized the significant role of local government activities, which affects their opinion on the quality of life of households. Particularly in the form of commune investments in projects co-financed by the European Union.

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