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# **Quality of Life – A Survey among the Cities of Change**

Based on a research project  
by Ryszard Cichocki

A Knowledge Product of

**CITIES OF CHANGE**



THE WORLD BANK



Bertelsmann Stiftung

## Acknowledgements

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*The exclusive owner of the data for the city of Poznan is the Quality of Life Research Centre, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan.*

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## 1. Assessing Quality of Life in communities

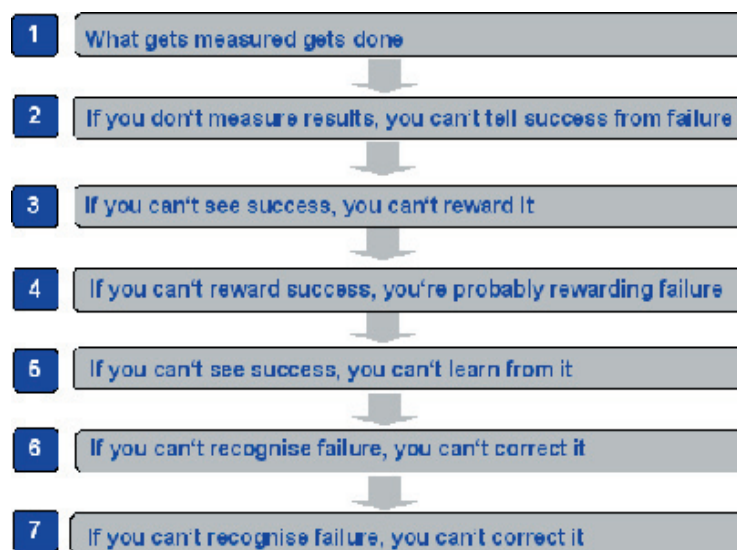
In a recent editorial, the problems with citizen surveys have been well described: “Ask five people what they think quality of life means and you’ll probably get five different answers. Now imagine asking a whole city’s worth of people that question. Yet this is the job that local government leaders face - understanding and trying to balance the diverse ideas of quality of life held by a diverse population.”

The same is true for an assessment of quality of life in communities. The perceived quality of life is an individual evaluation, bringing together existing private and public facilities, services, infrastructure, individual well-being and individual values. How can this mixture of objective and subjective data and impression give any valuable information for decision-makers?

### 1.1 Why are citizen surveys relevant for strategic management?

Citizen surveys are based on indicators. You have to know what you are measuring and you always have to keep in mind to which political goal the relevant indicator is attached to.

Indicators are tools that measure, simplify and communicate important information, issues and trends. They are valuable in providing a benchmark against which future progress can be measured. Indicators can help people understand the breadth of local sustainable development issues – quality of life – and the relationships between them. Those using indicators have found that they are invaluable not just as a means of **measuring progress**, but as a tool to **raise awareness** of the key issues among the public and policy-makers, and to **help people - citizens, politicians and municipal staff - understand what they themselves need to do**.



after Osborne and Gaebler, 1992

*Exhibit 1: What gets measured gets done*

Citizen surveys provide people another access to politics and policies in addition to democratic elections, and they are not limited to specific groups of citizens – like party members or active residents. Citizen surveys, carefully designed and regularly repeated, may provide both the Council and the administration with valuable information on current satisfaction with municipal and private services, identify future problems and challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Citizen surveys may thus support the availability of data – but how to use data in the day-to-day management and within political decision-making?

The Bertelsmann Foundation developed in the early 1990s a strategic management circle, which served as an orientation for several projects initiated by the Foundation. The circle is based on the assumption, that successful, effective political steering and efficient administrative leadership is based upon a vision, subsequent political goals, whereby indicators serve as “flags” – giving information, whether measures and programs being delivered by the municipal administration and other local stakeholders contribute to the identified goals or not. So indicators form the base. However, there are several approaches for the use of indicators:

- marketing,
- general information,
- policy learning.

Indicators aiming at marketing aspects naturally do not emphasize negative or problematic aspects of a community. That alone does not mean that further promoting measures or policy learning cannot be derived from the given information. But there is a probability that holistic or sustainable aspects would be dropped for external purposes. There are quite a few Quality of Life indicator programs that serve marketing purposes only. Examples can be found throughout the world, where cities use some information of a “Survey“ for local political marketing.

Another, often initial, purpose of indicator programs is the provision of generally accessible information for individual use or the definition of a status quo. An indicator set of that kind, like those aiming at marketing, would comprise indicators that are simply out of reach concerning influence by local authorities. On the other hand, indicators like this can offer information for the local press, promoting a general vision process or produce political pressure.

Policy learning is one idea behind the use of indicators. Policy learning is the result of reaching out for better measures. Policy learning, however, is not necessarily connected to indicators. The goal is to trigger the biggest influence on the indicator by using the most efficient measure(s). These measures might be identified through knowledge exchange with other local governments. The problem is, however, that the value of an indicator is not connected with the appropriateness of the measures behind. A local government with a “disappointing” indicator value may have developed innovative measures to cope with the problem, but external factors dominate the overall value.

<sup>1</sup> The Bertelsmann Foundation included citizen surveys as one tool among others to support “good local governance” (Find more information at [www.cities-of-tomorrow.net/docus.html](http://www.cities-of-tomorrow.net/docus.html), the website of the former “Cities of Tomorrow” Network).

For example: A local government that never experienced bigger unemployment usually does not have specific knowledge how to reduce unemployment. The indicator for unemployment, however, is quite low and thus indicates a “good performance”, while local governments that suffer from high unemployment may have developed innovative measures, but cannot reduce the indicator significantly, neither “learn” from the well performing community. Policy learning is not linked to the value of an indicator.

Policy learning is the goal of the whole exercise. Quality of life can be expressed in some numbers, but the relevant aspect is whether the data collected – quantitative or qualitative data – helps politicians to develop policies, create new programs to target local concerns.



*Exhibit 2: The Strategic Management Circle*

In a strategic sense, indicators should be embedded in a performance plan and should serve as “flags” for future policy decisions. Quality of life is not limited to municipal programs and measures, and indicators should not be limited to municipal action, but include community concerns beyond direct influence of local government. Politicians have to control not only the day-to-day performance of municipal services, but also the overall picture of community concerns.

The strategic management circle should not be regarded as a ready-to-use template for strategic management. The circle underlines the importance of reliable data for effective political decision-making in local governments. One possibility to obtain additional information are citizen surveys.

## 1.2 How to assess citizen opinion with indicators?

“The core to the successful use of quality of life indicators is that they reflect citizens’ agreed views on what makes for a good quality of life in the city.”



How should citizen opinions be collected? Most cities make use of city generated data (statistics, polls and citizens’ surveys) collected locally. This is usually the case where an indicator was chosen that relied on new information being collected. However, many of the indicators used are chosen because there is existing data available either from city, state, national government or other outside organisational sources. Many cities are collecting data yearly; some information is collected monthly or weekly. Most cities’ staff do the bulk of the data analysis and evaluation; a few involve outside consultants, regional councils and citizen groups.

How Were Indicators Developed? Indicators are developed best through group discussions, a community strategy process, or through a nationwide process to develop indicators. The core to the successful use of quality of life indicators is that they reflect citizens’ agreed views on what makes for a good quality of life in the city. This can either be achieved by having extensive community and citizen involvement in developing indicators, or by having civil servants and elected officials work through the choice of indicators based on a previously developed (with community participation and involvement) “vision” for the priorities for quality of life and wellbeing in the city.

What quality of life is, depends on the views of local citizens. There is no general set of indicators that reflects all over the world the content of quality of life.

Citizen surveys can differ by type of information they are designed for:

### **SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

This type of survey asks citizens how satisfied they are with existing services and facilities based on the performance. Usually, satisfaction surveys are limited to some services and facilities run by a single municipal department. These surveys focus on customers and results can be used for improving existing surveys. However, there are some important aspects to be considered when designing a satisfaction survey: Questions should not be formulated by the producing unit only; instead, a so called customer focus group, consisting of a small sample of customers, clients and non-users can add considerable value to satisfaction surveys and can avoid the problem of “constructed satisfaction” (see box 1). The problem of constructed satisfaction occurs, when the design and the type of questions will likely result in a too positive view of a service or facility being surveyed. In addition, satisfaction surveys do not provide information why citizens are satisfied, and why they are not.

A question in a typical satisfaction survey could be:

*“How satisfied are you with the local refuse collection?”*

Answers could be a scale between “very much” and “absolutely not”. The problem is that a result of, for example, 85% of respondents are very much or much satisfied, gives no hint why the other 15% of respondents are not. Is it within a specific area? Is it a specific group of people, for example elderly people? Too many questions, sometimes even more than before, remain unanswered when a questionnaire asks only for satisfaction.



*Box 1: Problems of satisfaction surveys*

### PROBLEM-ORIENTED SURVEYS

Another type of citizen surveys are surveys which focus not only on performance issues, but on individual needs, assessments of individual perceived quality of life. These surveys are usually more explorative and their results offer information for future policy formulation, while satisfaction surveys offer information on program or facility performance only.

The more often a local government runs surveys, the more detailed and focused surveys can be designed. There are a number of leading-edge local government that know well the problems and needs of specific citizen groups, specific areas and can allocate municipal services according to articulated needs, rather than to provide a “one size fits all service”.

In 2002, the Bertelsmann Foundation organised a workshop on quality of life programs by local governments. Some examples of municipal can be found at [www.cities-of-tomorrow.net](http://www.cities-of-tomorrow.net), and some examples are presented here: The City of Charlotte developed an interesting approach to collect data in sub-local statistical units – the “City within a City approach”. Although the data collection is limited to some key indicators, the city is able to locate problem areas and growing or decreasing problems (see box 2).

#### Addressing Quality of Life in Charlotte, North Carolina

The 2002 Neighborhood Quality of Life Study evaluates Charlotte’s neighborhoods based on social, crime, economic and physical conditions. The City of Charlotte has been conducting Quality of Life studies since 1993. The 1993 and 1997 studies focused on the 73 City Within A City (CWAC) neighborhoods. The 2000 study expanded the geographic focus to 173 neighborhood statistical areas that now include the entire City and its sphere of influence. The 2002 study follows closely the framework and format of the most recent quality of life study. The composition of variables has changed slightly in order to strengthen the rigor of the statistical analysis. However, the baseline neighborhood scale quality of life framework developed in 2000 remains comparable to the 2002 data. As in earlier studies, this research converts the individual statistical scores into three neighborhood-ranking categories ... “stable,” “threatened,” and “fragile.” In this way, holistic neighborhood changes can be examined for positive and negative shifts. Find more information on the web at:

[www.charmeck.org/Departments/Neighborhood+Dev/Quality+of+Life/home.htm](http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/Neighborhood+Dev/Quality+of+Life/home.htm)



*Box 2: Pragmatic approach to Quality of Life*

One example of a broader citizen survey can be found in Minneapolis (USA) – see box 3.

The Minneapolis Citizen Survey is a key component of Minneapolis' efforts to engage citizens in City Government. This random sample telephone survey was conducted between November 9, 2001 and January 4, 2002. 1,210 telephone surveys were conducted, averaging just over 20 minutes in length. The survey was designed to gain citywide input and opinions:

- (1) To measure citizen satisfaction with City services and perceptions about key quality of life indicators. Collected information will be used as a baseline from which to compare future survey results,
- (2) To gather citizen information on citizen priorities, which will inform the citywide strategic planning/goal setting process as well as departments' business planning efforts.
- (3) To gauge citizen need for services, their expectations regarding the level of those services, and their willingness to pay for service enhancements or maintenance of existing services,
- (4) To gather information about citizen's knowledge and behavior, and
- (5) To determine how citizens get information about City services.

*Box 3: Minneapolis Citizen Survey*

The report "Citizen - Client Surveys: Dispelling Myths and Redrawing Maps" by Geoff Dinsdale and D. Brian Marson for the Citizen-centred Service Network (Canadian Centre for Management Development) in March 1999 had some key findings:

- **Specific vs. general services:** surveys which compare the service provision of government or public services in general to specific private sector services may not be telling an entirely accurate story. Research indicates that public ratings of government or public sector services *in general* are significantly lower than their ratings of *specific* public sector service experiences. This suggests that the performance gap which supposedly exists between public and private sector services may be smaller than previously reported, and for some services may be nonexistent.
- **The need for normative benchmarks:** it is difficult to attribute meaning to satisfaction ratings in the absence of normative benchmarks. Currently, a number of survey methodologies are used to measure a variety of public services. Since some services are predisposed to receiving high or low ratings, it is difficult to make reliable comparisons. If public sector service providers were able to compare their ratings with those of similar public sector providers, they could then determine how well they are performing relative to others. This, in turn, would allow for the development of normative benchmarks at the public service, agency, and program levels. Comparisons could be made using scale conversion methodologies, a customer satisfaction index, or a standardized survey instrument; it is argued here that the last of these three instruments provides the most advantages.
- **The value of surveys:** surveys are a powerful tool for identifying and closing gaps between internal and external clients' expectations of and satisfaction with services; they have, however, been vastly underutilized in the past. If surveys ask the right questions, especially with respect to satisfaction, drivers of satisfaction, priorities for improvement, and internal services the findings generated can inform managers of what they need to do in order to improve service to their clients specifically and/or to citizens generally.

### 1.3 Why comparing with other cities?

“The best that Quality of Life Indicators can do is to measure outcome changes. Getting from there to determining how effective City government interventions have been in influencing these outcomes, and deciding how these outcomes can be optimized, is a challenging area where cities should continue sharing international experience.”  
(Report of the Cities of Tomorrow Network, 2001).



The development of quality of life questionnaires for local communities is useful. However, one important questions remains: After designing the questionnaire, collecting data and presentation of results from the study, what should be used as a reference for interpretation of data?

Data is only useful, when there are some references to rank – to qualify – the data collected. This reference could be a normative benchmark. Normative benchmarks are either developed by the local community or in comparison to other local communities. It is helpful for discussion and comparison that other local communities are of similar size and economic conditions.

Comparisons with other local communities may serve several goals:

- First, data can be used for ranking purposes. This approach is mostly used in international and national comparisons of quality of life in communities
- Second, benchmarks are needed for the interpretation of data. Any result needs a point of reference to know the difference and to estimate the efforts how to achieve a better result.
- Third, comparisons provide incentives not only to compare data, but also the reasons, why results in some cities are better. Comparisons form the basis for the exchange of approaches for problem-solving.

## 2. The study on Quality of Life: Methodology

Quality of life indicators include a wide range of community issues and topics: reflecting municipal services, community issues, conditions and trends, and progress toward goals. Like a report card for the community and for policy makers regarding municipal services, a quality of life reporting system can serve as a snapshot of current factors; track changes over time; support community decision making; and follow public policy priorities. Useful indicators also can link performance measures in combinations that can help achieve better public understanding.

The main purposes of the quality of life study for the Cities of Change network were formulated as:

- to provide local government of the ten member cities in five countries with a data on citizens' perception on quality of life issues;
- to provide an instrument for comparative measurement between the member cities of the network;
- to serve as an illustration for the need of "good local governance" and the connected use of indicators for strategic political decision-making.

Quality characteristics of quality of life indicators are:

- public debate and access;
- quality of life indicators must be coupled with a vision process of the local community;
- indicator programs should be accompanied by professional expertise after an initial indicator formulation process;
- public participation in monitoring and evaluation (co-management for sustainability of the quality of life indicator process).

The focus of the questionnaire developed within the international Cities of Change network, however, was to create an incentive for the participating cities to develop a quality of life questionnaire. Therefore, the quality criteria described above could not be fulfilled for the first run in the cities. The purpose of the first run of a quality of life based questionnaire was to encourage city council and administration to support future citizen surveys that include more topics than just satisfaction with municipal services, but focus on policy areas and problems identified by citizens.

The Cities of Change network commissioned the "Quality of Life Center Poznań" at the Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań to design and conduct a quality of life survey in all ten cities of the network. The author and executive of the survey was Ryszard Cichocki. Co-authors were Maria Dudzikowa, Jan Paradysz, Zbigniew Woźniak, Irena Cichocka, Małgorzata Waligórska, Krzysztof Podemski, Marta Śliwińska, Piotr Jabkowski.

The methodology of quality of life measurements utilised by the “Quality of Life Center Poznań” at the Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań consisted of two types of indicators:

- statistical data, local and national, if available;
- indicators developed for the survey in the ten cities.

The questions to be included in the questionnaire were developed first in Poznań. The goal was to address dimensions of quality of life that were of importance for citizens. A number of citizens and experts from all disciplines were involved in the process, as well as staff from the local administration.

The design of the questionnaire could start from previous pieces of work like

- desk research on municipal quality of life programs which use indicators not only for information purposes, but for policy decisions (see the details at [www.cities-of-tomorrow.net/docus.html](http://www.cities-of-tomorrow.net/docus.html), select “Conference”);
- identification of most commonly used dimensions of quality of life.

Based on these previous efforts of another network, the Quality of Life Center

- invited citizens in focus groups to evaluate the dimensions and to get information about relevant aspects of the dimensions selected;
- then invited experts to evaluate the dimensions and the selection of citizens;
- then invited staff from the municipal administration.

After this process, twelve dimensions of quality of life were identified:

- self-assessment of personal well-being;
- housing and neighbourhood;
- city and urban space;
- health and health services;
- public safety;
- unemployment, work and working conditions;
- education, schools and kindergartens;
- leisure, sports, recreational facilities, entertainment, shopping and culture
- civic participation;
- social welfare and social safety;
- natural environment and natural resources;
- population and demographic changes.

For each of the dimensions, experts developed indicators, using existing national and local data and experiences of municipalities already using quality of life surveys. After formulation, these indicators were again subject to citizen evaluation:

- **General importance for citizens**

Does the indicator refer to an important aspect of life?

Do the indicators cover all relevant aspects of a dimension?

- **Importance for individuals**  
Are individuals able to influence the indicator?
- **Importance for local government**  
Does the indicator represent an important feature for the city?  
Do the indicators allow an interpretation of on-going change in the community?
- **Importance for decision-making**  
Are the indicators relevant for political decision-making?
- **Importance for quality of life**  
Are the dimensions and the connected indicators valuable for an analysis of quality of life trends and challenges.

The Quality of Life Center conducted a pre-test in Poznań, interviewing some 800 people. After this first round, in each of the nine remaining cities some 400 interviews were conducted. Overall, around 4,400 interviews form the base for the quality of life study. The research was done in 2002 and presented to the network members in autumn 2002.

### 3. Results from the Quality of Life Study

First main results of the Quality of Life study are presented here. First, an executive summary describes the key results and differences between the cities included in the study. Thereafter, some detailed results from specific questions are presented.

#### 3.1 Executive Summary

The results from the international survey on quality of life issues in ten cities in five countries show different “speeds” of transformation. The Quality of Life study included a number of topics, aspects and dimensions of quality of life (see box 4).

Among the topics covered in the Quality of Life Study were

- 1 Key problem identification
- 2 Evaluation of local government addressing problems
- 3 Evaluation of local image and attractiveness
- 4 Evaluation of housing conditions
- 5 Customer satisfaction with municipal administration
- 6 Satisfaction with political decision-making
- 7 Civic involvement
- 8 Health
- 9 Social Welfare
- 10 Public Safety
- 11 Evaluation of leisure opportunities and facilities
- 12 Environment
- 13 Work and income
- 14 Education



*Box 4: Aspects and topics of quality of life in the study*

Hungarian citizens ranked their cities in general better compared to the other cities, while citizens in the Bulgarian cities were much more dissatisfied with the local quality of life.

The Slovak, and to a lesser extent also the Latvian cities, were rated rather balanced by their residents, meaning, that respondents neither were very much dissatisfied, nor were they very much satisfied.

The Polish cities ranked rather well, although for some questions no data was available for Poznań.

### 3.2 Some results in detail

From the vast possibilities of extracting data and results from the Quality of Life study some questions and results have been extracted that might be of specific interest for readers. These are:

1. CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL PROBLEMS
2. CITIZENS OVERALL PERCEPTION OF THE CITY AND ITS CONDITION
3. UNEMPLOYMENT
4. ASSESSMENT OF MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
5. EVALUATION OF CITY STAFF
6. THE CITY AS A PLACE FOR DOING BUSINESS
7. PUBLIC UTILITIES
8. PUBLIC SERVICES
9. LEISURE AND SPORT FACILITIES
10. GOING-OUT
11. ECONOMIC SITUATION OF HOUSEHOLDS
12. ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



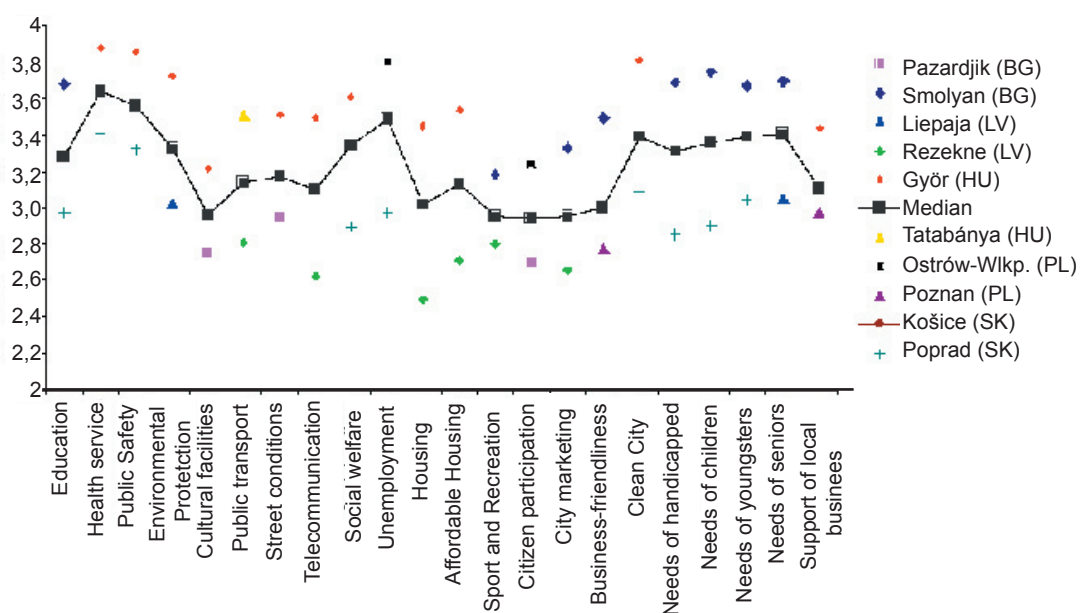
#### 1. LOCAL PROBLEMS

The first question dealt with perceived local problems. The question offered twenty-two options, and respondents could rate the importance:

- education in primary and secondary schools
- health service
- public safety and protecting the citizens against crime
- protection of the natural environment
- cultural institutions, cinemas, museums etc.
- public transport
- street infrastructure and condition
- telecommunication network
- social welfare for the poor
- labour market and reduction of unemployment
- housing
- low-cost housing
- sport and leisure facilities, recreational sites
- citizen participation in local government decisions and services
- city marketing – national and international
- support for investors, attracting national and foreign investments
- cleanliness of the city
- needs of handicapped
- needs of children
- needs of youngsters
- needs of elderly citizens
- supporting the development of local businesses, commerce and services

In general, citizens of the Hungarian city Győr rate their local community in twenty-one out of these twenty-two topics better than citizens in any other city. Only one topic – sport and leisure facilities – ranked lower, here the other Hungarian city, Tatabánya, was ranked better.

Exhibit 4 shows the median (over all data) in each topic evaluated in question one, the top ranking city and the lowest ranking city. People in Győr (Hungary) and Smolyan (Bulgaria) tend to rank the topics more important than citizens in other cities, while residents of Poprad (Slovakia) and Rezekne (Latvia) tend to rank the topics of lower importance. What is interesting is the fact that citizens of Győr evaluate their local government much better than residents in any other local government included in the study. The people of Smolyan, Bulgaria, are not satisfied with the efforts of the local government in addressing these topics. Both Bulgarian cities, Smolyan and Pazardjik, rank here lowest.



*Exhibit 4: Evaluation of key problems in ten cities*

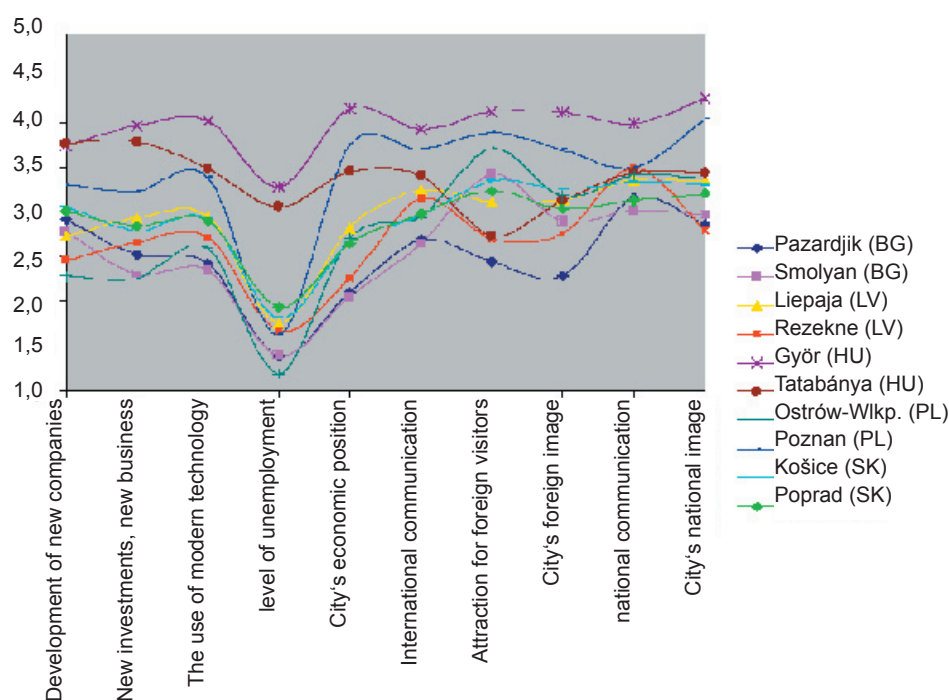
*(median, top and lowest ranking shown for each topic)*

Exhibit 4 shows the median of each topic, and for each topic the highest value and the lowest value. The results from the other eight cities are not shown in this exhibit. The exhibit wants to demonstrate the median over all topics, and to give hints, which cities often, seldom or never achieved top or lowest results.

Health, public safety and unemployment are the topics that concern citizens most, while culture, sports, civic participation and city marketing rank lowest. The economic problems tend to crowd out cultural facilities and leisure, and the history of local governments as service deliverers, housing company, and electricity provider within a socialist system of local government reduced the participation and civic engagement.

## 2. THE OVERALL PERCEPTION OF THE CITY

Exhibit 5 shows clearly, that people in the Hungarian cities – especially Győr – tend to see their city in a rather good general condition, together with the citizens of Poznan (Poland).



*Exhibit 5: Citizens' views on some general city conditions*

Exhibit 5 shows the results for the topics. Although the individual lines are difficult to distinguish, the exhibit at least shows where residents rated their community.

The top three cities are Győr, then Tatabánya and Poznań, then Liepaja (Latvia), Košice and Poprad (Slovakia), Ostrów-Wielkopolski (Poland), Rezekne (Latvia), Smolyan (Bulgaria), and Pazardijk (Bulgaria).

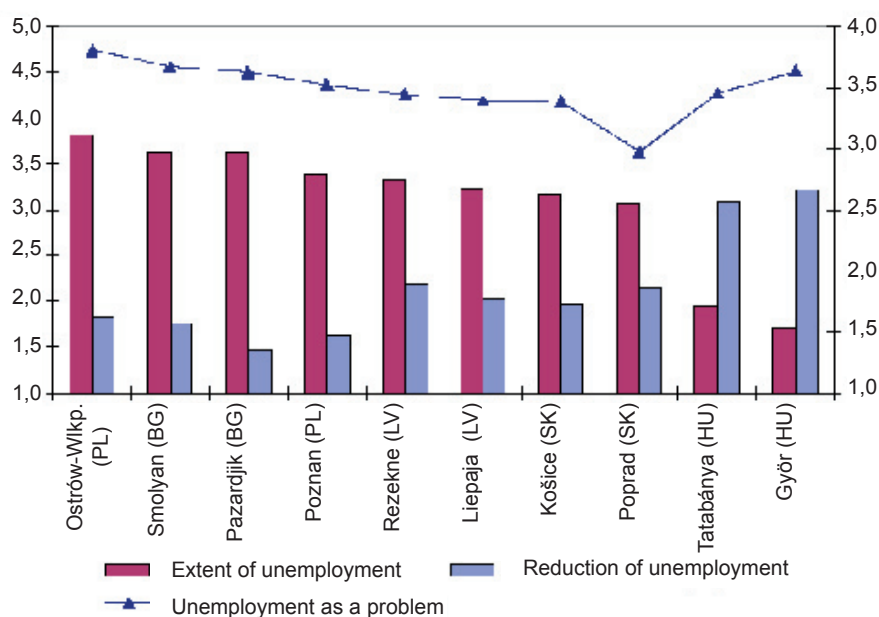
The economic position of the city is seen rather bad in a number of cities, Pazardijk, Smolyan, and Rezekne; another group of cities are Poprad and Košice, Ostrów, and Liepaja, and the top group consists of Győr, Poznań, and Tatabánya.

Smolyan, Bulgaria, did receive a rather good rating for its attractiveness for foreign visitors. In many other topics, however, residents were less positive.

What strikes in exhibit 5 is that unemployment is regarded in both the Hungarian cities less dramatic – “neither good nor bad” – than in any other city. Citizens in the other cities tend to see unemployment as the major problem and consider the situation as “very bad” oder “bad”. Interesting is, that the two Slovak cities rank better – although a rather small difference to the other – than Latvian or Bulgarian cities. It is rather astonishing, that people in Ostrów-Wielkopolski see the employment situation much worse than residents in any other city.

### 3. UNEMPLOYMENT – A KEY PROBLEM IN ALMOST ALL CITIES

Unemployment is a key problem in all cities – however, there are big differences in the perception of importance.



*Exhibit 6: Unemployment and evaluation of local labour market policy*

Inverted exhibit of data for column “extent of unemployment”: “1” (very good) to “5” (very bad) on the left scale, column “reduction of unemployment” from “1” to “5”, whereby “5” means big efforts; the right scale (from 1 to 4 only) refers to the graph, describing the individual perception of unemployment as a problem.

Only in the two Hungarian cities – Győr and Tatabánya – the extent of unemployment is regarded less dramatic as in the other eight cities, although residents rank unemployment as a key problem like in all other cities. Citizens in the two Bulgarian and Polish cities criticize the extent of unemployment, and vice-versa the little efforts of local government to reduce local unemployment. In the two Hungarian cities, in which unemployment is not seen as severe as in the other cities, the efforts of local government to reduce unemployment are evaluated by citizens rather good.

The efforts of local government to reduce local unemployment is significantly higher in the two Slovak and Latvian cities – and in the Hungarian, of course – while the efforts in the Bulgarian and the Polish cities are ranked rather low.

#### 4. ASSESSMENT OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL

Another question asked the respondents to agree or disagree with some statements relating to the Mayor and the City Council. The statements were:

- The Mayor and the City Council promote the city well within the country and abroad.
- The Mayor and the City Council take care of city development.
- The Mayor and the City Council are guided by the city's interest when taking decisions.
- The Mayor and the City Council know well the problems of citizens.
- The Mayor and the City Council solve the crucial city problems.

Residents in both Hungarian cities, Győr and Tatabánya, were rather satisfied with the performance of the Mayor and the City Council (see exhibit 7).

With a significant difference, residents in the other cities rate their Mayor and City Council less positive. Citizens in the two Bulgarian cities, Smolyan and Pazardjik, were least satisfied with local politics. An interesting result can be found in Ostrów-Wielkopolski in Poland. Here, residents were mostly in line with results in the other seven cities (excluding Smolyan and Pazardjik), apart from two statements: They do not support very much the statement that the Mayor and the City Council solve the crucial problems of the city, and, which might be even more dramatic, residents ranked their Council lowest for the statement that the Mayor and the Council know well the problems of the city.

A rather positive result for the Mayor and the City Council was also achieved in Poznań (Poland) and in Košice (Slovakia). The other cities, among them both Latvian cities, ranked rather average.

Overall, citizens rank city promotion better as well as city development. They agree less to citizen-oriented issues and to actual problem-solving.

The Mayor and the City Council...

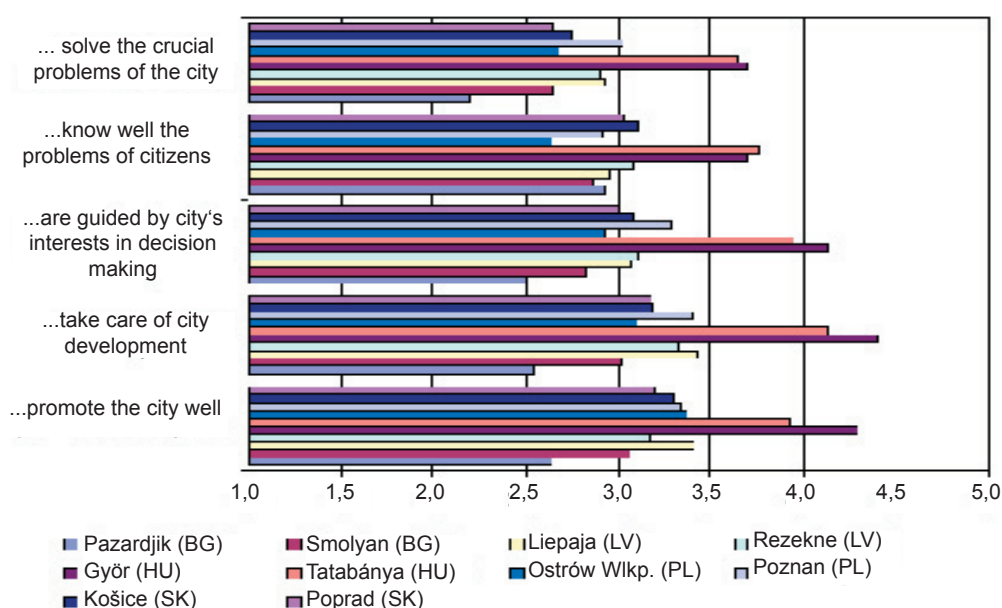


Exhibit 7: Mayor and City Council

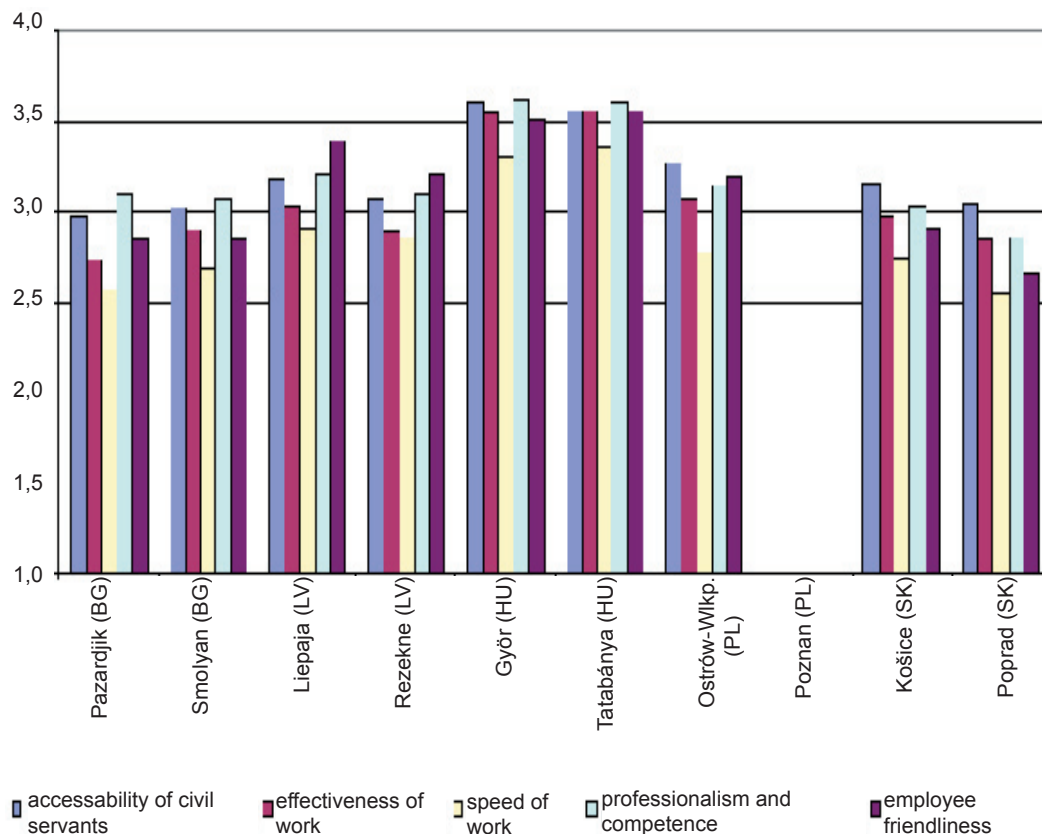
Respondents could answer “definitely yes” (5), “rather yes” (4), “don’t know” (3), “rather no” (2) and “definitely no” (1). Legend reads from left to right for each line, i.e. Tatabánya represents the sixth column from bottom.

## 5. EVALUATION OF CITY STAFF

Another question in the study asked whether city staff

- is accessible,
- is effective at work,
- is doing business fast,
- is professional and competent, and for
- employee courtesy.

In general, residents in both the Hungarian cities evaluate their city staff better than in any other city within the sample. Also the Latvian cities rank very high, and also Ostrów-Wielkopolski (Poland).



*Exhibit 8: Evaluation of City Staff*

Respondents could answer in five categories, whereby very good represented “5”, and very bad “1”. There is no data available for Poznan.

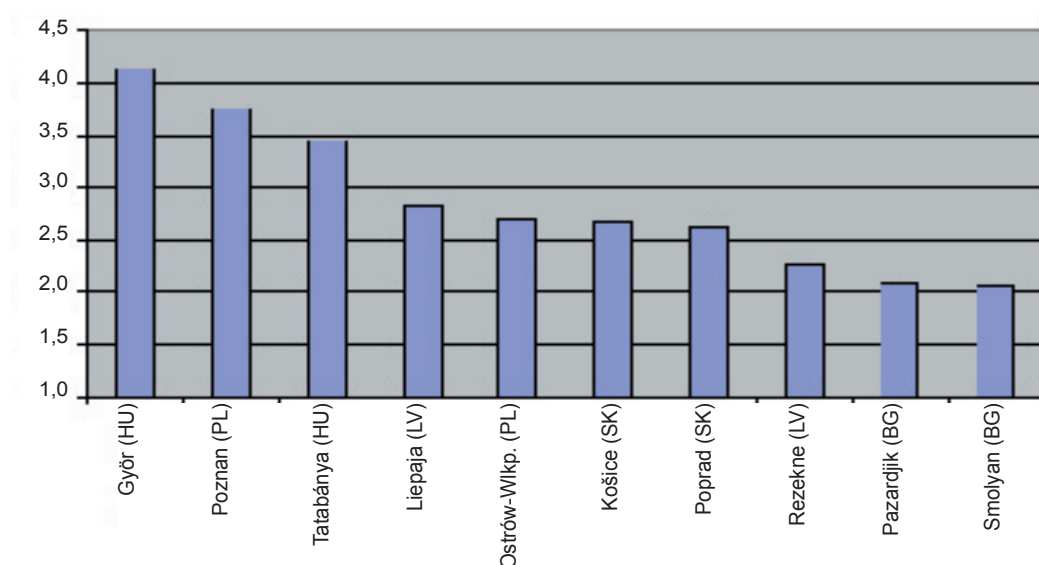
The evaluation of city staff is rather low in the Bulgarian cities, and in the Slovak cities, whereby Poprad staff ranks very low compared to the other cities. It is interesting, that in those cities where respondents were rather satisfied with employee courtesy, all other aspects ranked also rather high.

In all cities, respondents ranked the speed of work lower than any other aspect the questionnaire asked for.

The exhibit 8 includes all responding data, although a more differentiated analysis would have been possible extracting only those respondent which really had contact within the last three years.

## 6. THE CITY AS A PLACE FOR DOING BUSINESS

The City is important for businesses, as well as a vital business community is important for cities. The results show differences between cities (see exhibit 9) – and to a lesser extent between countries, as this had been the case for a number of other questions.



*Exhibit 9: The City as a business location*

Respondents could answer between “1” (very bad) to “5” (very good), “3” meant “neither good or bad”. Median over all cities 2.86.

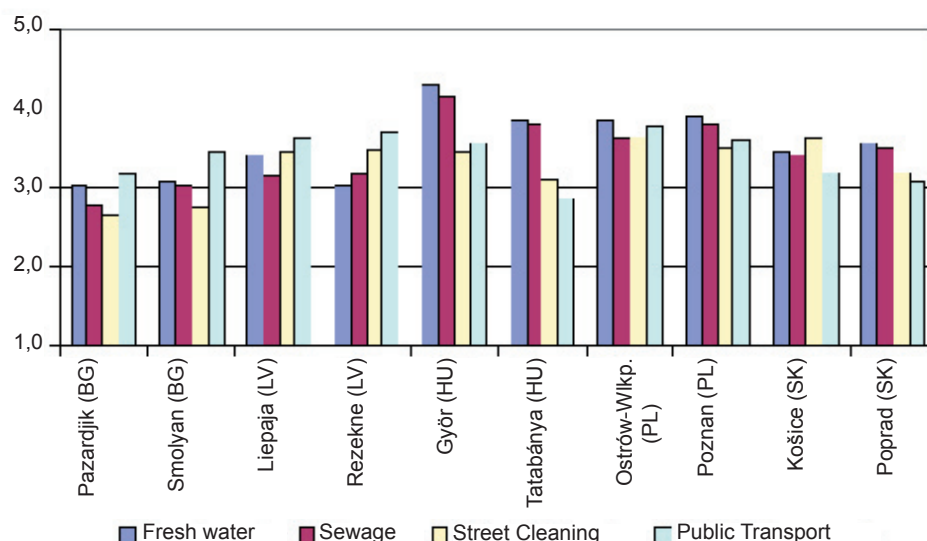
Again, both the Hungarian cities Győr and Tatabánya, and Poznań (Poland) rank over the median. Liepāja (Latvia) ranks very well given the fact that results for many other questions showed much more average or below average results for the Latvian cities.

The Bulgarian cities rank lowest, and also the Slovak cities, together with the other Latvian city included in the quality of life study, Rzekne.

## 7. EVALUATION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

Another part of the quality of life study considered several public services and utilities, like fresh water supply, sewage, street cleansing and public transport as an important feature for municipalities in transforming countries.

The fresh water supply and the sewage system is evaluated best in the Hungarian and the Polish cities, much better than in the Bulgarian and Latvian cities.



*Exhibit 10: Evaluation of selected public services and utilities*

Respondents could rate between “1” (very bad) bis “5” (very good), with “3” as “neither good nor bad”.

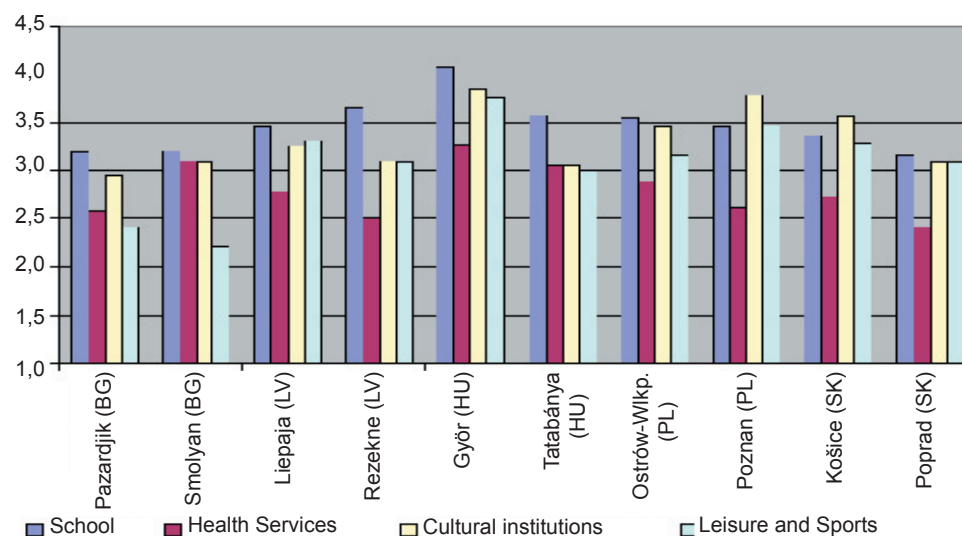
Public transport is considered rather good in the Latvian and Polish cities, also in the Bulgarian and Slovak cities. Public transport is considered much worse in the Hungarian cities. This could be due to the growing individual transport, whereby the economically disadvantaged residents suffer from decreasing mobility. However, the study did not examine the extent of public transport offered.

## 8. EVALUATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SERVICES

Besides infrastructure related utilities and services, the quality of life study asked also for a number of public and private services.

Schools have been rated good compared to other services (see exhibit 12). In some cities, cultural institutions have been rated also rather good. It should be noted, that the overall offer has been rated by residents, private and public services. The evaluation of numbers – availability of services – has been asked in another question (see further down).

Health services had been rated rather bad. A reason might be the transformation of the health system in all the transformation countries.



*Exhibit 11: Evaluation of public and private services*

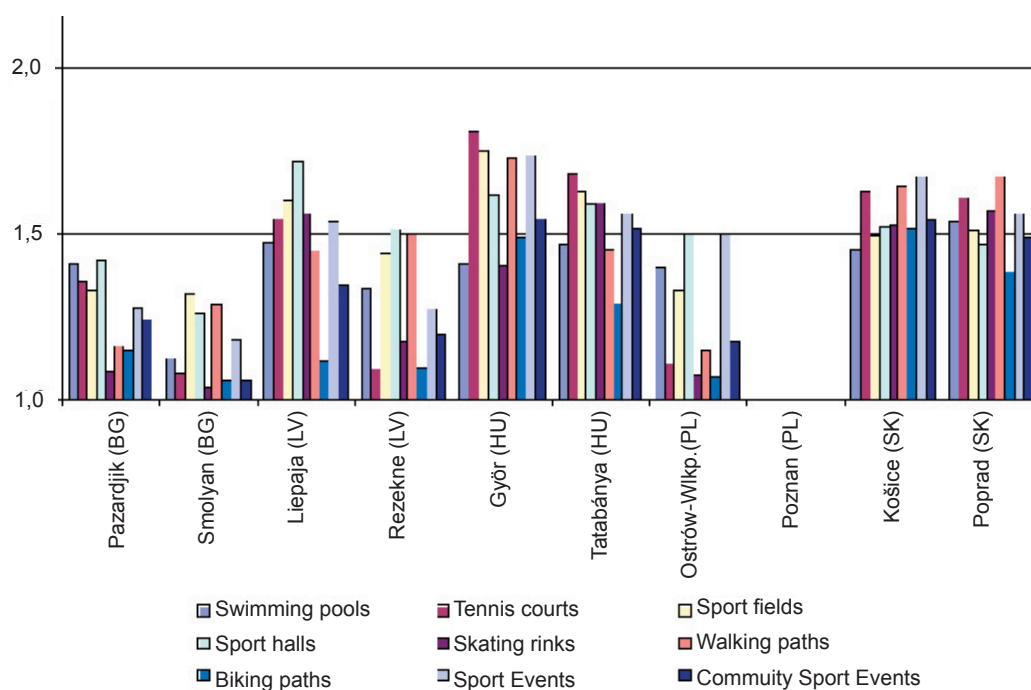
Respondents could rate between “1” (very bad) to “5” (very good), with 32 as „neither good nor bad“.

In both the Bulgarian cities, sport and leisure opportunities were rated lowest.

Citizens in Győr rated the services rather good, while the other Hungarian city rated not as good as Győr.

## 9. SPORT AND LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

Some questions in the quality of life study asked whether there are sufficient facilities accessible for citizens.



*Exhibit 12: Sport and leisure opportunities*

Respondent could answer whether there are “too many” (3), “too few” (1) or whether there is the “right number” (2) of facilities. The exhibit has not been reduced in scale to allow better comparisons with the next exhibit. There was no data available for Poznan.

Respondents were asked to rate the availability of specific services and facilities between “too many” (3), “right number” (2) and “too few” (1). Exhibit 12 shows the results. The exhibit uses as a scale the original three point scale to demonstrate, that in none of the cities respondents thought the sport and leisure facilities to be sufficient. However, citizens often ask generally for more facilities and services.

Apart from the need for a careful interpretation, there are some interesting differences between the cities.

Győr and Tatabánya (Hungary), as well as Košice, Poprad (Slovakia) and Liepaja (Latvia) show more balanced results, with the exception that citizens ask for more biking paths in their cities. In the other cities, citizens rated availability lower, and only some sport and leisure facilities were close to the needs articulated by respondents.

Community sport events, events that include citizens as active participants, were rated higher in those cities in which citizens were more satisfied with the availability of other sport and leisure facilities.

In an overall perspective, sport and leisure facilities could be altered and increased in numbers in almost all cities included in the study. The need for improvement becomes clearer when comparing the results shown in exhibit 12 with the next, similar question summarised in exhibit 13.

## **10. CULTURE, GOING-OUT AND TIME OFF**

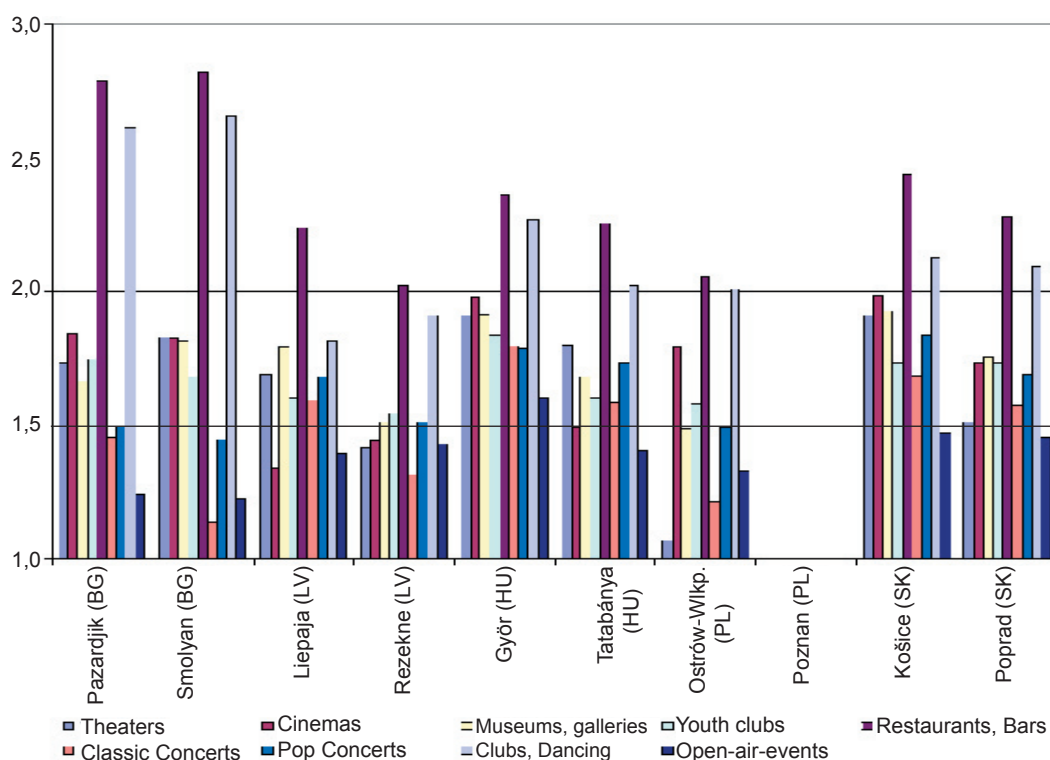
The next question asked for the amount of facilities and offers for going-out like culture – museums and galleries, concerts, restaurants, bars, and so on.

Exhibit 13 uses the same scale as exhibit 12. The first impression is clear: The availability of services and facilities here has been rated much better in all cities compared to sport and leisure services and facilities.

Results above “2,0” indicate that respondents tend to see too many offers or facilities. In both the Bulgarian cities the “supply” with restaurants and bars is evaluated by respondents as “too many”, but also in all other cities, people evaluated the amount of bars and restaurants better than for any other facility or leisure opportunity.

Only Győr (Hungary) and Košice (Slovakia) receive a rather balanced evaluation.

The number of youth clubs is evaluated rather good, possibly a legacy of the former organised youth leisure facilities typical for Eastern European states.



### Exhibit 13: Going-Out

Respondents had the opportunity to answer either “1” for too few, “2” for right number and “3” for too many.

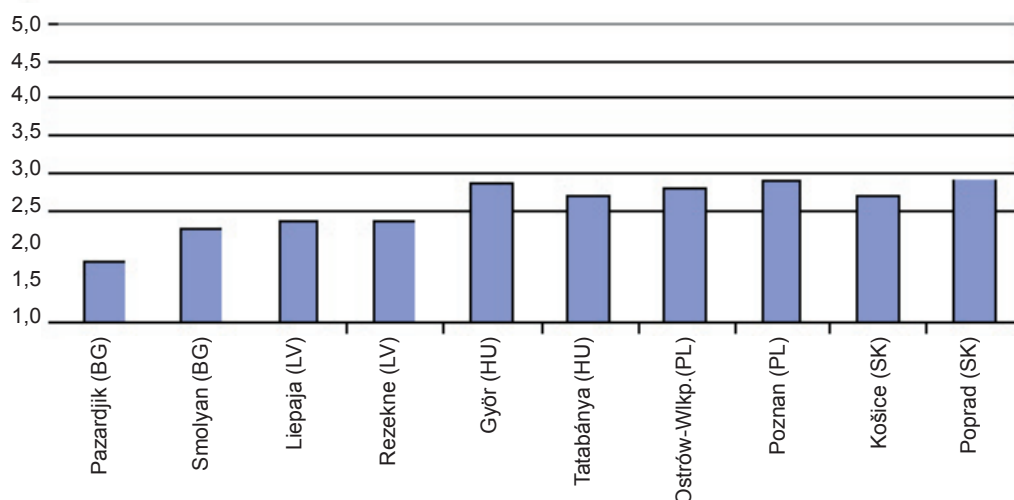
Open-air events rate lower than any other aspect being asked for, and also the number of classic concerts rates usually lower than other aspects.

## 11. ECONOMIC SITUATION OF HOUSEHOLDS

The transformation in the Eastern European states meant tremendous changes in the income situation due to growing unemployment, devalued pensions and increasing cost of living.

For example, Hungary experienced a decline of household income: The income, indexed in 1990 as 100, declined until 1996, since then it increased again, but did not reach the 1990 level. According to the World Bank, 1.3% of the Hungarian population had less than \$ 2.15 per day and capita, which served as definition for “poor”. 0.8% of the Hungarian households were identified as “poor” according to this definition. In Latvia, 5.9% of the population had less than \$ 2.15, representing 5.2% of all Latvian households. The economic situation in Poland has been better, household income increased between 1990 and 1998 from the indexed 100 to 132 in 1998. The increase of the household income, however, did not keep pace with the costs of utilities and the general cost of living.

The transformation meant for a relatively large number of households a decline in income, in some countries both in absolute and relative terms.



*Exhibit 14: Economic situation of households*

The Quality of Life study asked for an self-assessment of the economic situation; respondents could select between the following statements:

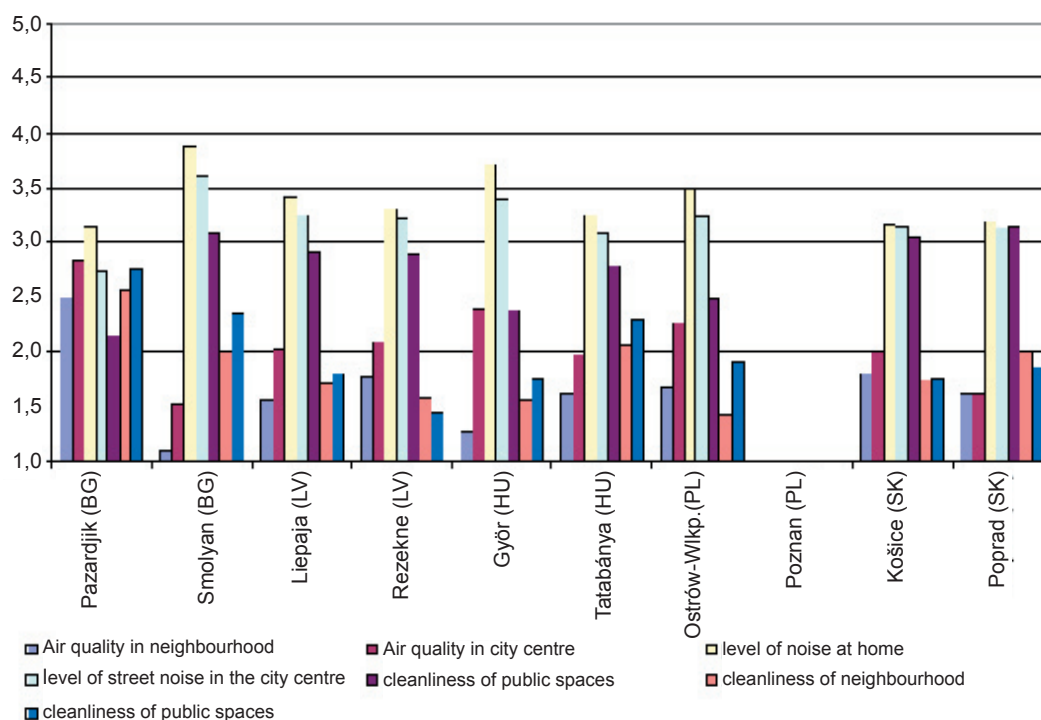
- (1) We live poor, money does not fund our basic needs
- (2) We live very modestly, we have to manage our budget carefully
- (3) We live on an average level
- (4) We live on a good level
- (5) We live on a very good level and can afford some luxury

The own economic situation has been valued rather low. Given the fact of 400 respondents in each city, people might have underestimated their economic situation compared to others. In general, however, compared with OECD statistics, the household income in the countries included in the quality of life study is extremely low.

Residents in Poprad (Slovakia), in Győr (Hungary) and Poznań (Poland) evaluated their own economic situation around “average level”, while citizens in all other cities rated themselves “modest” or even “poor”.

## 12. PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A quality of life study has to include some aspects of sustainable development. From the number of question around one aspect of sustainability, environmental protection has been chosen here to show the results.



*Exhibit 15: Environment and environmental protection*

Respondents could answer between “1” (very low) to “5” (very high), “3” meant “neither good or bad”. The exhibit reads as follows: The air quality is considered best in Pazardijk, and lowest in Smolyan. The level of street noise is considered “best” (meaning lowest street noise) in Smolyan, and worst in Pazardijk. There was no data available for Poznań.

People in Pazardijk are very much satisfied with their natural environment and environmental protection, but most annoyed by noise pollution. Air quality seems to be a bigger problem in most of the participating cities. In general, residents are less annoyed by noise, but much more by air pollution. A rather balanced result could be achieved in both Slovak cities, while in all others at minimum one aspect of environment has been rated rather poor.

#### **4. Conclusion: What to do next?**

The results from the Quality of Life Study are intended to offer Councillors, Mayors and City Managers an additional, representative set of data what citizens and residents think and value.

Any Quality of Life Study in the first run has to be broad in order to cover as many topics as possible. After the first run, more detailed instruments can be used. These instruments can be

- a more specified questionnaire (specific topics in detail),
- more targeted evaluation methods (specific groups of citizens and residents),
- or creation of focus groups, client surveys, and other instruments most suitable to gather detailed information.

The Quality of Life Study offered insights for many topics what people think and where Council and City administration could address key problems of citizens.

*Dr. Alexander Wegener*

## 5. Useful links

Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development:

[www.sustainable.doe.gov/measuring/melocal.shtml](http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/measuring/melocal.shtml)

Cities21® Assessing Mutual Progress Toward Sustainable Development:

[www.iclei.org/cities21/index.htm](http://www.iclei.org/cities21/index.htm)

ICLEI is the International Environmental Agency for Local Governments:

[www.iclei.org/iclei/news22.htm](http://www.iclei.org/iclei/news22.htm)

ICLEI members' community indicator projects:

[www.iclei.org/cities21/member\\_indicator.htm](http://www.iclei.org/cities21/member_indicator.htm)

International Institute for Sustainable Development:

[www.iisd1.iisd.ca/](http://www.iisd1.iisd.ca/)

“Local Sustainability” - the European Good Practice Information Service:

[www.iclei.org/egpis/](http://www.iclei.org/egpis/)

PASTILLE: Promoting Action for Sustainability Through Indicators at the Local Level in Europe:

[www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/geography/Pastille/](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/geography/Pastille/)

Redefining Progress – Community Indicators Project:

[www.rprogress.org/progsum/cip/cip\\_main.html](http://www.rprogress.org/progsum/cip/cip_main.html)

Sustainable Cities Information System:

[www.sustainable-cities.org/](http://www.sustainable-cities.org/)

Sustainable Community Indicators:

[www.crle.uoguelph.ca/indicators/english/News/news.html](http://www.crle.uoguelph.ca/indicators/english/News/news.html)

Sustainable Communities Network SCI

[www.sustainable.org/](http://www.sustainable.org/)

Sustainable Development Communications Network (SDCN):

[www.sdgateway.net/project.htm](http://www.sdgateway.net/project.htm)

Sustainable Measures:

[www.sustainablemeasures.com/](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/)

United Nations – Sustainable Development News:

[www.un.org/esa/sustdev/cppnt5.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/cppnt5.htm)

United States Environmental Protection Agency

[www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/states/projects.htm](http://www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/states/projects.htm)