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TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF RURAL POPULATION WELLBEING: CASES OF LITHUANIA AND POLAND

Gintarė Vaznonienė

*Vytautas Magnus University,
Kaunas, Lithuania*

E-mail: gintare.vaznoniene@vdu.lt

ORCID 0000-0001-9583-112X

**Agnieszka Wojewódzka-
Wiewiórska**

*Warsaw University of Life Sciences,
Warsaw, Poland*

E-mail:

agnieszka.wojewodzka@sggw.edu.pl

ORCID 0000-0003-2393-0430

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ABSTRACT. The article focuses on the issue of rural population wellbeing (WB) in Lithuania and Poland using data from different Rounds of European Social Survey (ESS). WB research at the local territorial level, including rural areas in the both countries, has not sufficiently been analyzed. Literature shows that WB research may influence the shaping of the future of rural communities because it concerns local people, their choices, and overall WB. Accordingly, the issue of the WB of the rural population becomes central to the viability and successful development of rural areas from the scientific, practical, and political approaches. The research goal is to identify the specifics of the wellbeing of rural residents in Lithuania and Poland and determine their differences from the territorial perspective. The following research methods were used: literature analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, and statistical analysis methods. The differences in the analysis of the selected socio-economic factors (gender, age and income) showed what has a greater impact on the WB of the rural population in both countries. The WB in rural areas of Lithuania was lower than in Poland, although it was increasing in the both countries over time. The article initially focuses on the theoretical approach towards the WB and its research on rural areas, and then proceeds to the results of the rural population research by comparing the two countries.

JEL Classification: I31, O57,
R23

Keywords: wellbeing, rural areas, rural residents, satisfaction with life, happiness.

Introduction

The concept of wellbeing is ambiguous, although many scholars have been attempting to define it as accurately as possible. The multitude of conceptions about wellbeing and approaches towards its assessment shows that both the wellbeing of society and its individual perception are the grounds for the development of research on this area. On the other hand, scientific insights are becoming increasingly relevant to the modern society as well as to the politicians making the decisions related to improvement of the people's lives (Johansson, 2001; Forgeard *et al.*, 2011; Vaznonienė, 2014).

Moreover, there is a variety of views on what should be studied in relation to the objective or subjective wellbeing, whether the priority should be given to consideration of

people's objective living conditions and subjective experiences and emotions, whether research on wellbeing is more important at the national or local level, etc. The complexity of questions indicates that research on wellbeing largely depends on the researchers' choice of the object of analysis and on the research domains that have yet to be addressed more thoroughly. Furthermore, scientific literature highlights that research on wellbeing research is more often conducted from the perspective of differences between social groups (Antinienė and Lekavičienė, 2017; Tamosiunas *et al.*, 2019), with significant attention paid to the interface between health and wellbeing (Furmonavičius, 2001; Brezzi, 2014) and various wellbeing assessment indices developed. In contrast, certain researchers (Annoni *et al.*, 2012; Kozlova *et al.*, 2015; Vaznoniene and Jarašiūnaitė-Fedosejeva, 2019) emphasize that research in wellbeing is much more valuable when focused on a certain territory (rural, urban area) and its residents. The novelty of the research is based on the attempt to narrow the gap related to insufficient consideration of the spatial or territorial dimension in the research of the wellbeing of rural population. **Research object** is the wellbeing of rural residents. **The research goal** is to identify the specifics of the wellbeing of rural residents in Lithuania and Poland and determine their differences from the territorial perspective. Accordingly, the **research tasks** are: 1) to conceptualize the term of wellbeing in relation to territories, in particular, rural areas; 2) to substantiate the research methodology for comparison of the wellbeing of rural population in Lithuania and Poland; 3) to explore the research findings. The research is based on both theoretical and empirical research methods: literature analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, statistical analysis, and graphical representation. The study covers the research period 2008-2018 due to the availability of the empirical data by the European Social Survey for the period for both countries.

The article is divided into several main parts: the 1st part focuses on various theoretical approaches to wellbeing and its research specifics for rural areas. The 2nd part presents the research methodology describing detailed substantiation of the empirical research methods. The 3rd part discloses the research findings on the wellbeing of rural population by comparing Lithuania and Poland and provides the insights into future wellbeing research.

1. Literature review

1.1. Specifics of conceptualization of wellbeing

Although the research on wellbeing has its own history and has already developed in many Western countries, the question of how wellbeing is understood in different sciences or at different levels of analysis clearly still needs to be addressed. Different theories and definitions of wellbeing disagree about what constitutes wellbeing exactly. Wellbeing as one of the many research fields is directly or indirectly reflected in the research and studies in social sciences in general (Meacher, 2001; Verdugo *et al.*, 2005; Royo and Velazco, 2006; Brezzi, 2014; Taylor, 2015). However, in order to understand the specifics of development of research on subjective wellbeing, the concept of wellbeing and its characteristics need to be analyzed. Traditional social sciences associate the concept of wellbeing with “good living standards”, “life satisfaction”, “social well-being”, socially favorable living environment, and happiness (Brown *et al.*, 2004; Pupavac *et al.*, 2020). Furmonavičius (2001) describes wellbeing as the difference between individuals' expectations and the real possibilities to achieve/implement it. The concept of wellbeing reveals the features and properties of people's material and cultural living conditions compared to a standard or a certain level, and adequate satisfaction of those conditions (Mensah *et al.*, 2016; Vaznoniene and Kiausiene, 2018). This shows that wellbeing seems to be a comparative construct that may be examined by looking at

its different cross-sections (Veenhoven, 2002; Wellbeing..., 2005; Servetkiene, 2013; Kwarciański & Ulman, 2020):

- what individuals have (or who they want to be) and what they do not have;
- conceptual and empirical definition and substantiation of wellbeing;
- what individuals have and desire;
- comparison of certain people's wellbeing to that of others;
- having goals and opportunities to achieve them;
- understanding what promotes and limits the improvement in wellbeing;
- perception of wellbeing among individuals, social groups, nations;
- positive and negative effects of life that influencing the attitudes towards self-evident wellbeing, etc.

Different authors (Gasper, 2004; Stevenson and Wolfers, 2008; King *et al.*, 2014; Taylor, 2015; Macku *et al.*, 2020; Kwarciański & Ulman, 2020; Voukelatou *et al.*, 2021) recognize that the classical approach to wellbeing or traditional approaches to its assessment are two-fold: objective and subjective (*Figure 1*). The aspects considered are specific to the kind of wellbeing discussed: individual, community or national. For example, subjective wellbeing (SWB) means that a subjective approach to wellbeing (WB) or subjective assessment is always based on referring to subjective (individual, personal) perception of the feeling about our life or understanding of how people's needs are satisfied. Therefore, at the local (or micro) level, the qualitative information obtained by the researcher from the individuals or the local community is deemed to be important. Moreover, the focus on subjective wellbeing, which is usually defined as individual and intimate, may be associated with the tendency to examine the determinants of wellbeing at a similarly individual or local scale, thereby supporting shifts in the policy directions similarly focused on individual behavior and responsibility (Atkinson *et al.*, 2017).

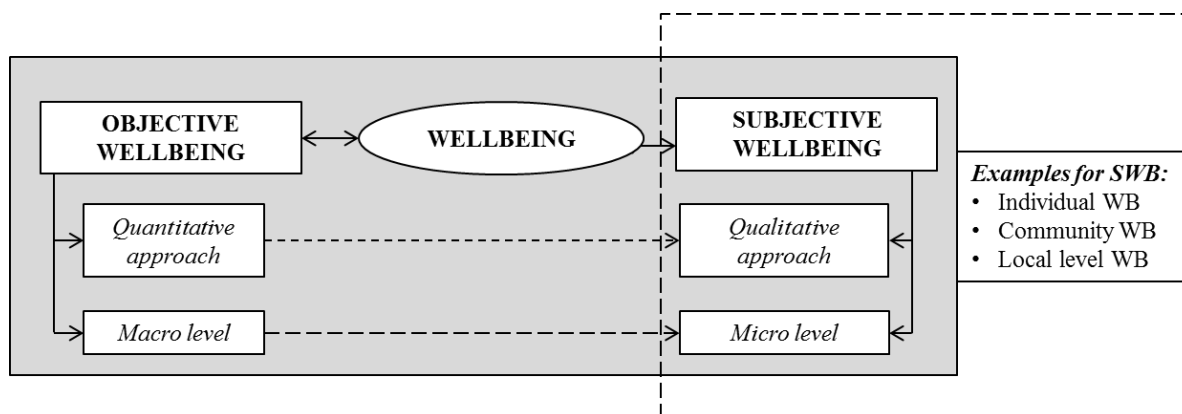


Figure 1. Traditional / classical distribution of the concept and evaluation of wellbeing
Source: adopted and updated following Vaznoniene (2011)

According to a number of researchers (Kahneman, 1999; Royo & Velazco, 2006; Forgeard *et al.*, 2011; King *et al.*, 2014; Macku *et al.*, 2020; Voukelatou *et al.*, 2021) interested in wellbeing issues, the objective wellbeing should be defined as the wellbeing measured by objective criteria/indicators, usually based on official statistics and statistical information by various authorities. Objective wellbeing is often understood as assessment of socio-economic indicators. Objective indicators are described as the data that are based on certain criteria, which reflect the state of the whole society, and their development is determined by experts (Gasper, 2004; Servetkiene, 2013). These indicators show the direction in which society is evolving: progressing, stabilizing, or regressing. The benefit of the

objective data is that they depict the situation of society. Nevertheless, they do not reveal an individual approach to many important aspects, in particular, when it comes to subjective wellbeing. According to Hird (2003), Veenhoven (2007), Forgeard et al. (2011) and Voukelatou et al. (2021), while enabling comparison of social groups or individuals, the objective indicators are just one of the possible perspectives of research on wellbeing. Meanwhile, subjective assessments represent the second perspective of the research, which is then more reflective of the quality factors. It should be pointed out that, in the present article, the authors refrain from the objective assessment of wellbeing and focus on the subjective perception of wellbeing.

The increased interest in subjective wellbeing among researchers has prompted the interdisciplinary debate on a variety of issues. The interdisciplinary interest in subjective wellbeing by various researchers focusing on the expression of human being, personal needs, values, etc. is relevant. Research on and analysis of subjective wellbeing have become the subject of both theoretical discussions and empirical research. Research in subjective wellbeing changes over time (Kahneman, 1999; Bryant, 2003; Durayappah, 2011; Tamosiunas et al., 2019; Long, 2021). According to certain prominent representatives of research on SWB (Diener, 1985, 1999, 2006; Gasper, 2005; Veenhoven, 2002, 2007), a subjective perception of wellbeing, which includes the physical, psychological, and social levels, shows that a judgment about the wellbeing is mostly affected by an individual's subjective opinion rather than specific criteria/indicators used to measure wellbeing. The science of psychology originates from the identification, study and research of the subjective concept of wellbeing. Psychologists have always sought to understand and reveal people's assessment of their lives (Diener & Diener, 2000; Camfield, 2006). Subjective wellbeing as an object of research has been included in the clinical, intercultural, organizational and other research (Ruta et al., 2006; Vaznoniene, 2014; Taylor, 2015). For example, Taylor (2015) preferred the theoretical approach where the subjective wellbeing was measured according to the Satisfaction with Life scale (proposed by Diener et al., 1985). Here, the central figure is the individual and his/her personal perception of wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing has started to be associated with cognitive and personal emotional experiences that affect one's life. Furthermore, it is also a subjective feeling of the fullness of life, which arises from satisfying the spiritual needs of cognition, communication, aesthetics and physiology, and is the actual or imagined equivalent of ideality and existence.

It should be noted that the data on subjective WB are mainly obtained through surveys (using questionnaires and interviews). These data complement the objective indicators and provide qualitative information about the individuals, community or local population not revealed by objective (often statistical) indicators.

Summarizing various notions of wellbeing, it can be assumed that, in scientific literature, wellbeing is often understood as a social construct that is constructed by oneself or individuals in general. As soon as we begin to consider our state of wellbeing, it reflects through various objective conditions of one's life plus the subjective positive and negative inner experiences and feelings.

1.2. Research of wellbeing in rural areas

As already mentioned, there is a considerable pool of literature analysing wellbeing on the general conceptual level, by viewing the demographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological variables that influence life satisfaction and happiness. It has however been noticed that the spatial/territorial aspect of wellbeing receives much less attention, in particular, by focusing on rural areas population as the research studies largely focus on national wellbeing. This means that micro level analysis is still limited or not fully understood

and provides a very narrow understanding of how rural people, and not just farmers, perceive their wellbeing.

Certain international researchers, who focus on various issues related to rural wellbeing, analyzed rural wellbeing in comparison to urban areas, as the rural-urban dichotomy is important for the both spatial areas. For example, Çevi, Tasar (2016) conducted a study to verify the existence of urban and rural disparities in terms of material and non-material conditions, and how this reflected in the happiness of rural and urban residents in the case of Turkey. According to the findings, the mean happiness of urban areas was higher than that of rural areas over time. In particular, the differences between rural and urban residents in terms of happiness were reflected by the economic estimators. The study revealed that the employment status, social security coverage and income level were not the statistically significant estimators of the rural sample. In contrary to the urban sample and the sample as a whole, the perceived social pressure and positive expectations for the country's future were not statistically significant for the rural sample. Meanwhile, they were significant for the urban sample. According to the urban residents, happiness positively correlated to both satisfaction with central public services and local public services, while rural happiness only had a statistically significant association with those of central government services. Newland *et al.* (2014) emphasized that even children's subjective wellbeing within rural areas had been vastly understudied. According to the findings, the indicators of rural children's subjective wellbeing, except for life stress, significantly correlated to all home, life, neighbourhood, school, and peer contexts. It was also suggested that rural children's wellbeing was influenced by their family's social economic status, community relations rather than their own perceptions of wellbeing. In some respect, the rural context seems to not be seen or heard. The Eurofound (2019) report "Is Rural Europe Being Left Behind?" addressed the major question of why rural people often received less attention in research or did not receive it at all. It is clear that distinctive patterns of rural economic development, social life, way of living of the rural population tend to be more exposed to poverty, social exclusion compared to the rest of the population. Lenzi and Perucca (2020) analysed how urbanization affected subjective WB. They pointed out that despite a strong dichotomy between urban and rural areas, the latter was characterized by higher levels of well-being than the former. Tamosiunas *et al.* (2019) and Long (2021) have highlighted that various socioeconomic factors are important when exploring their relation to the individual WB. Their research revealed that the conditions in the areas of residence are good predictors of happiness and life satisfaction, women are generally happier than men, the young and the old are generally happier than the middle-aged, and even age and happiness have a nonlinear relationship. This suggests that the research on wellbeing may become the first step towards improvement of the life of various social groups (in particular, those at risk). Following the research of wellbeing in the rural areas of Lithuania and Poland, the theoretical findings were explored in greater detail. Certain Lithuanian authors investigated the relation of social infrastructure to the wellbeing of rural residents/community (Kuliešis & Vidickienė, 2008; Vaznoniene & Kiausiene, 2018). According to Kuliešis and Vidickienė (2008), the effects of improvement of infrastructure are related to subjective opinion of the rural population when evaluating the services and describe the extent to which the progress in wellbeing assessment is visible. In her research, Vaznoniene (2014) found that research of wellbeing was not only about the global (macro level) wellbeing of nations, but also highlighted specific features of smaller units, such as rural areas and their development (micro level). Hence, when implementing research of wellbeing, it is important to properly identify whether objective or subjective wellbeing can be evaluated and on the basis of which positive or negative aspects at the local level. Vaznoniene and Kiausiene (2018) discussed that properly developed social infrastructure services is an important factor of wellbeing because as they create better opportunities for

integration and participation in society, foster functional capabilities of a community, acknowledge human rights, improve judgements related to overall life satisfaction. Furthermore, the essence of wellbeing is related to various life aspects or domains which largely involve social infrastructure services: living in an attractive and healthy environment, the desire to live a healthy life longer, to be educated, ambition to have a safe live, etc. Kriaučiūnas (2018) analysed the trends of development of the Lithuanian rural areas and their underlying reasons in the context of population's wellbeing. He pointed out that spatial territorial shifts (their trends/directions) of rural areas and the wellbeing of population were tightly related to each other: the state of wellbeing of the Lithuanian rural population inevitably faces the phenomena of population migration, economic conditions, and changes in sociodemographic conditions. Moreover, he found that for many years, individual wellbeing (in particular, for the present elder population) had to be sacrificed to "the building of Communism", and the growing gap between urban and rural areas challenges different evaluations of wellbeing.

Zagozdzon *et al.* (2011) studied the association between the health-related wellbeing and rural residence among Polish females, including the variables related to social environment and clinical characteristics. They found that the role of middle-aged women's place of residence in relation to their wellbeing was minor, in particular, in Poland and in other developing countries. Michalska-Żyła and Marks-Krzyszowska (2018) aimed to show the relationship between the quality of life and quality of living in rural communities at varying levels of socio-economic development. They identified that, in case of the both aspects, it was possible to observe the relationship between the objective resources of the local community as well as the level of their socio-economic condition and level of satisfaction of the inhabitants. This shows their ability to meet specific needs within the local environment. The authors found that rural residents who participated in the study were characterized by a relatively high satisfaction with their own lives, in particular in relation to the family sphere. In contrast, the greatest factor of dissatisfaction was their financial situation. Furthermore, the studied residents generally provided positive assessment of the living conditions in their community. First and foremost, they were content with the natural environment and security, where the lowest level of satisfaction with living in the commune was associated with the technical infrastructure, transport links, activities of NGOs and political parties, and the lack of possibilities to exert influence on what was happening in the communes. Finally, they confirmed that the high heterogeneity and diversity of the rural communes in Poland, even within a socially, culturally and economically coherent area of a voivodeship (province), affected the residents' quality of life. Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska *et al.* (2020) analysed the social and economic dimensions of sustainability in rural areas in order to explore its relation to the farmers' quality of life using the case of Poland. It was found that farmers' quality of life strongly affected the farm's viability. They identified the dependencies between life quality components such as living conditions, mental comfort, and economic situation. This enabled them to demonstrate that the research on relationship between various components of farmers' quality of life is important not only for the farmers, but also for the general rural development policies, as farming families account for a significant share of the rural population in a number of countries.

As discussed above, the research revealing the wellbeing of rural population and rural development are indeed important not only in the scientific context, but also for local authorities or local government. Besides, as pointed out in certain reports on the research of wellbeing (Kangmennaang and Elliott, 2018; Eurofound, 2019; Bilan *et al.*, 2020; Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska *et al.*, 2020; Kwarciński and Ulman, 2020; Long, 2021), the following assumptions regarding the necessity of research of wellbeing in rural areas could be identified:

- wellbeing is important for all people, as well as for vulnerable groups, for the present and future generations;
- efforts to tackle poverty, social exclusion, and integrate people with disabilities;
- maintaining the quality of public services;
- recognizing the importance of the relationship with people's wellbeing;
- in order to measure rural people wellbeing, it is necessary to understand how people evaluate their own life and being;
- measurement of wellbeing reflects two approaches: wellbeing treated globally (objective approach) and individually (subjective approach);
- the research of rural people's wellbeing broaden the understanding of how to improve their life in the future and help identify the important life domains/spheres.

Finally, the wellbeing of rural population is an important niche of the research of wellbeing. It shows the direction of the changes to be observed in wellbeing research at the local level and rural development in general. This field of research may provide greater understanding of what should be improved and whether the rural people feel that they are living a better life.

2. Methodological approach

Subjective wellbeing refers to an individual's assessment of his or her own wellbeing. In order to reveal the subjective aspects of wellbeing, various researchers and organizations conduct research based on the surveys on the respondents' wellbeing (Kahn, Juster, 2002; Hird, 2003; Eurofound, 2019; Long, 2021). To evaluate and compare the wellbeing of residents of the rural areas in Lithuania and Poland, the data by the European Social Survey (ESS) were used. ESS is an academically driven cross-national survey and one of the most qualitative surveys in Europe measuring the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than 30 European countries. The survey is conducted every two years and includes face-to-face interviews with newly selected, cross-sectional samples (About..., 2020). Time dimension was also important for the present research, as wellbeing is not a static phenomenon and changes over time. It should be noted that Poland has been included in the ESS since 2002 (starting with Round 1) and Lithuania – from 2008 (starting with Round 4). Therefore, the years of comparison (2008 and 2018) were not a random choice: in Lithuania, the ESS survey has been implemented since 2008, and the latest data for both countries are available for the year 2018. As people life changes and becomes affected by various life events, this also has an impact on their evaluations of own wellbeing. As a results, the authors were able to compare the both countries by focusing on the data which reflects the attitudes towards the rural resident's wellbeing.

The sampling for each country within every Round was based on principles formulated by the ESS according to the requirements on the official ESS website (European..., 2020). The data by the ESS enabled the authors to observe and evaluate the data according to the time dimension. Time dimension is important for the present research, as the general evaluation of life satisfaction includes not only current situations/events, but also the moments that have occurred, as well as those yet to happen. In order to achieve the research aim, the data from Round 4 (in 2008) and Round 9 (in 2018) of the ESS were used. The sample size varied in different Rounds of the ESS (*Table 1*). The data from Round 4 of the ESS in 2008 (as mentioned, the first year available for Lithuania) enabled identification of changes in the rural residents' wellbeing over time in the both countries.

In the present research, the rural areas were defined by combining territorial units provided by the ESS. The territorial units, as provided in the ESS methodology, were divided into the following groups: big city, suburbs or outskirts of a big city, town or small city,

country village, farm or home in the countryside. For the purpose of the article, a rural area is defined as countryside village and a farm or home in countryside. This enabled the research to perform comparison at the very local level in both countries – Lithuania and Poland.

Table 1. Respondents' distribution by place of residence in LT and PL in 2008 and 2018

Place of living	2008		2018	
	LT	PL	LT	PL
Cities with suburbs (a big city + suburbs or outskirts of a big city)	744	481	482	338
Towns or small cities	623	533	549	498
Rural areas (a country village + a farm or home)	614	601	801	664
Total* (N)	2002	1619	1835	1500
Percent of rural areas respondents from all respondents	30.1	37.1	43.7	44.3

*Note: the specified sample size includes the number of respondents who failed to indicate the place (refusal, don't know).

Source: own compilation based on Round 4 and Round 9 of the ESS

The following socio-demographic variables, otherwise known as the factors influencing wellbeing, were considered, as they had been considered in other previous research (Camfield, 2006; Zagodzón *et al.*, 2011; King *et al.*, 2014; Çevi, 2016; Cannas *et al.*, 2019; Tvaronavičienė, 2019; Bilan *et al.*, 2020; Long, 2021): gender, age, and type of income with the special focus on similarities and differences between the territorial units.

The research was based on the rural respondents' subjective perception of their wellbeing, e.g. how they evaluated/perceived their wellbeing, happiness, or satisfaction with own lives. The focus was placed on issues related to the concept of a good life for the rural population, which was described in the ESS topics of the core module of the questionnaire (the type of questions selected: closed questions):

- Are you satisfied with your current life in general?
- Are you happy in general?

It should be noted that happiness and satisfaction with life are not the same concepts. The use of these concepts in wellbeing research has been strongly substantiated by various researchers (Diener, 1999; Camfield, 2006; Veenhoven, 2007; Taylor, 2015; Yaya *et al.*, 2019; Long, 2021). Moreover, as reflected in Figure 1, both happiness and satisfaction with life are the elements of subjective WB and can be analysed and evaluated at the individual (personal), community and local levels.

Satisfaction with life in general was measured from 0 to 10 according to the Likert scale, where "0" meant "Extremely dissatisfied" and "10" – "Extremely satisfied". The survey respondents were asked how happy they were and evaluated their happiness from 0 to 10 according to the Likert scale, where "0" meant "Extremely unhappy" and "10" – "Extremely happy".

The following research methods were used for data analysis: comparative analysis, statistical analysis, and graphical representation (tables, charts). The ESS data were analysed using the software applications, such as IBM SPSS Statistics 20, R-CRAN Statistical Package, and Ms Excel. To examine the general wellbeing of rural residents in Lithuania and Poland, a multiple regression model was estimated. The relationship between the assessment of life satisfaction and happiness of rural residents was performed by using three selected variables. Model of the form $Y_t = f_t(G_t, A_t, I_t)$ where G_t – Gender, A_t – Age, I_t – Income, was estimated using the least squares method included in the R-CRAN statistical package. Before the evaluation of the structural parameters, the data of the empty observations were

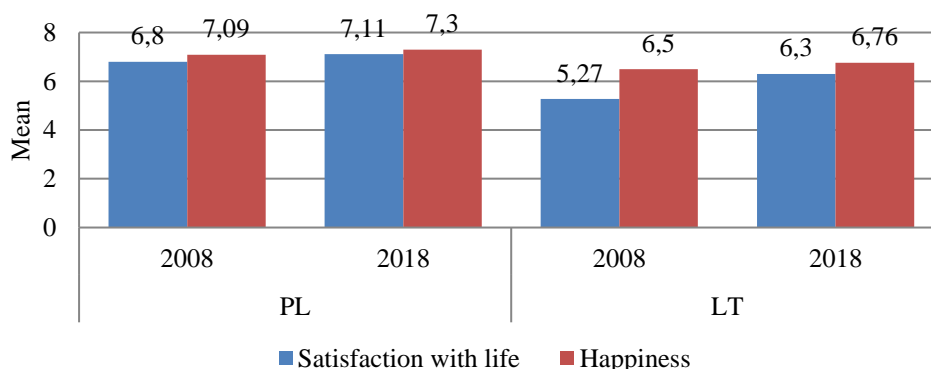
removed. To assess the linear relationship between the dependent variable and the explanatory variables, the Student's t-test was used, which, at the assumed significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, corresponded to the hypotheses. In case of H_0 , the explanatory variable had a significant impact on the dependent variable, and in case of the alternative H_1 , the variable independent had no influence on the dependent variable.

The limitations of the study included a specific set of features included in the ESS, which meant that the variable of interest to the authors in terms of shaping of wellbeing could not be used. Moreover, when comparing changes in welfare over time in both countries, panel data generated from the interviews with the same respondents would be preferable in order to draw the final conclusions.

3. Conduction of the research and results

3.1. Changes in rural wellbeing in 2008-2018

To compare wellbeing in the analysed countries, including differences and changes in the assessment of wellbeing over time, i.e. in 2008-2018, the measures of descriptive statistics, i.e. arithmetic mean, were used. According to the research findings, the inhabitants of rural areas in Poland were more satisfied with their lives and happier than in Lithuania (*Graph 1*), which was confirmed by the average wellbeing scores. In the both countries, an increase in the wellbeing rating was recorded in 2008-2018. In Lithuania, the changes were more significant, with the average rating of life satisfaction increased by as much as 19.4% compared to the base year.



Graph 1. Wellbeing in rural areas in Poland and Lithuania in 2008-2018

Source: own compilation based on Round 4 and Round 9 of the ESS

In Poland, the inhabitants of large cities and towns were also more satisfied and happier in 2018 compared to 2008, but the increase was slightly lower than in the rural areas. In Lithuania, there was also an increase in the ratings of wellbeing regardless of place of residence. The identified changes in the rural areas were similar to those in towns, and the greatest increase in life satisfaction (by 31.6%) was found in cities. The happiness of rural inhabitants increased the least compared to the rest of the areas, while the greatest increase in happiness (by 14.4%), as in the case of life satisfaction, was registered in cities.

In the analysed period, the assessment of satisfaction with life increased both among men and women in the both countries (*Table 2*). The increase was much higher among women, in particular, in Lithuania (by 24%). In 2018, women were much happier than in

2008. Nonetheless, a slight decrease in the happiness among men (by 0.3%) was registered in the both countries.

Table 2. Wellbeing in rural areas in Poland and Lithuania in 2008-2018 by gender and age (mean)

Variables	2008		2018		2008		2018	
	Satisfaction with life				Happiness			
	LT	PL	LT	PL	LT	PL	LT	PL
Male	5.30	6.92	5.88	7.02	6.51	7.25	6.49*	7.23*
Female	5.25	6.71	6.52	7.18	6.46	6.95	6.89	7.34
Up to 30 years	5.80	7.5	7.42	7.38*	7.03	7.66	7.88	7.63*
30-50 years	5.06	7.1	6.72	7.53	6.28	7.56	7.18	7.62
50-70 years	4.87	6.24	6.16	6.72	6.21	6.52	6.62	6.92
Over 70 years	5.85	5.65	5.89	6.42	6.42	5.79	6.33*	6.69

*Note: the decrease in value 2018 comparing to 2008 is shown in bold

Source: own compilation based on Round 4 and Round 9 of the ESS

To demonstrate the changes in the wellbeing by age, different age groups of rural inhabitants (Lachman *et al.*, 2015; Miller *et al.*, 2020) were taken into account. In relation to the respondents' age, it can be concluded that there was only a slight decrease in satisfaction with life among young people (under 30) in rural areas in Poland. There was an increase in satisfaction with life among the remaining people, mostly among people over 70 (by 13.6%) in Poland. In Lithuania, satisfaction with life increased regardless of age, the lowest increase was registered among the respondents over 70 (by 0.7%), and the highest was observed in the group of respondents under 30 (by 27.9%) and aged 30-50 (by 32.8%). In Poland, happiness increased the most in the oldest age groups, mostly in the group over 70 (by 15.5%). Meanwhile, the situation was the opposite in Lithuania in 2018: there was an increase in happiness, except for the oldest age group, where the average rating fell by 1.4% compared to 2008.

In Poland, satisfaction with life and happiness decreased among the unemployed and people receiving social benefits. It increased among the remaining respondents, mostly among those whose income was related to investments (by 133% and 66.8%, respectively). In Lithuania, all the respondents, regardless of the type of income, were more satisfied in 2018 than in 2008, with the most satisfied being those who received wages (increase in the rating by 32.3%) and those who were business owners (increase by 30%). In Lithuania, happiness decreased in the group of people receiving social benefits and the unemployed and living on other income. Others were happier, with the greatest increase recorded among the inhabitants with investment income (by 28.6%).

In order to examine the general wellbeing of rural residents in Lithuania and Poland, the relationship between the assessment of satisfaction with life and happiness of rural areas residents was performed by using three variables: gender, age, and income. A multiple regression model of the form $Y_t = f_t(G_t, A_t, I_t)$ was estimated (where G_t – Gender, A_t – Age, I_t – Income). The results of the assessment of the hypotheses are given in *Tables 3 and 4*.

Table 3. Comparison of satisfaction with life in rural areas in Lithuania and Poland by gender, age and income type in 2018

Variables		Lithuania				Poland			
		Mean	t	df	p	Mean	t	df	p
Gender	Male	5.88	4.113	783	<0.001	7.01	1.631	647	0.103
	Female	6.51				7.2			
Age	Years	x	-3.96	783	<0.001	x	-3.57	647	0.0004
Income	Wage or salary	7.01	-5.28	783	<0.001	7.38	-1.78	647	0.075
	Self-employment (excluding farming)	6.67				7.53			
	Farming	6.76				7.1			
	Pensions	5.89				6.54			
	Unemployment/ redundancy benefit	4.7				6.67			
	Any other social benefits or grants	4.84				6.25			
	Investment, savings, insurance or property	6.32				6.73			
	Other sources	5.69				7.29			

t – t-student statistics; df – degrees of freedom; p – statistical significance

Source: *own compilation*

Table 4. Comparison of happiness in rural areas in Lithuania and Poland by gender, age and income type in 2018

Variables		Lithuania				Poland			
		Mean	t	df	p	Mean	t	df	p
Gender	Male	6.51	2.786	783	0.005	7.24	1.251	647	0.211
	Female	6.89				7.35			
Age	Years	x	-3.74	783	0.0002	x	-3.38	647	0.0008
Income	Wages or salaries	7.45	-5.55	783	<0.001	7.54	-2.08	647	0.038
	Self-employment (excluding farming)	6.69				7.72			
	Farming	7.15				7.32			
	Pensions	6.37				6.78			
	Unemployment/ redundancy benefit	5.46				7			
	Any other social benefits or grants	5.52				5.75			
	Investment, savings, insurance or property	6.53				7.10			
	Other sources	6.38				6.86			

t – t-student statistics; df – degrees of freedom; p – statistical significance

Source: *own compilation*

Based on the model (*Tables 3 and 4*), it can be concluded that in Lithuania, both satisfaction with life and the level of happiness statistically depended on gender, age and general income, which was the main source of income for the respondents' household ($p < 0.05$).

According to the above tables, the analysis of data on wellbeing in Poland has suggested that, among the analysed variables, only age had a statistically significant influence on the assessment of life satisfaction and determined the happiness of the surveyed inhabitants ($p < 0.05$) based on the model considered. Gender, however, was not related to the assessment of satisfaction with life or happiness in rural areas ($p > 0.05$). In case of the main source of the respondent's household income, a statistically significant correlation to the level of happiness was found in Poland ($p < 0.05$). The lack of relationship between the type of income and the assessment of satisfaction with life could be explained by the existence of a lot of other factors influencing and differentiating the assessment of satisfaction with life by rural residents. Other factors, including non-financial ones, were likely to be more important for the respondents (Cannas *et al.*, 2019). The obtained results enabled verification of the statistical hypotheses. It could be concluded that at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, each variable had a statistical impact on the general wellbeing in Lithuania ($H: 0$), while in Poland, only age had a statistical impact on the course of the phenomenon considered.

It is advisable to extend the research to include other factors, e.g. health that could determine wellbeing, especially concerning the research findings for Poland. It would also be interesting to determine the extent to which the satisfaction with life and happiness of the inhabitants of rural areas depend on individual factors that are considered as statistically significant.

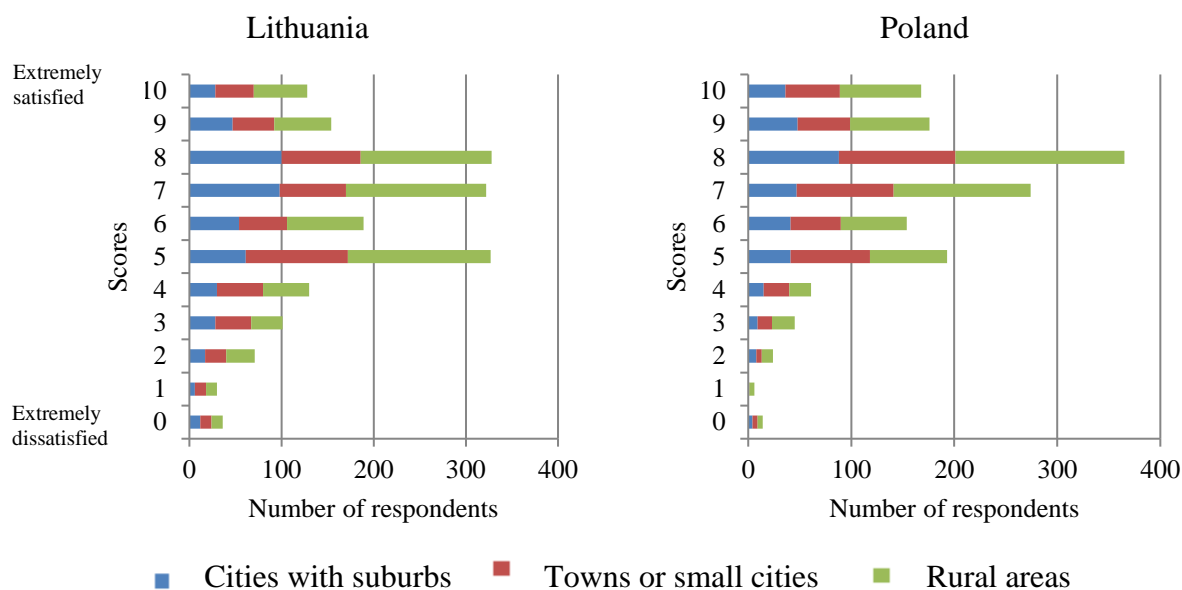
In the both countries, women living in rural areas were more satisfied with their lives and happier than men. Nonetheless, these evaluation rates were lower in Lithuania compared to Poland. Considering the type of income that prevailed in the respondents' households, it could be stated that wellbeing in Lithuania was assessed first by employees of companies and people working in agriculture (due to the fact that a lot of rural residents were still occupied in agriculture or their main activity referred by them during survey was farming), while for Poland, these were the self-employed, followed by the respondents receiving wage and salary. In Lithuania, the lowest assessment of wellbeing was given by the residents receiving unemployment benefits and other social benefits and grants. On the other hand, in Poland the feeling of wellbeing was assessed the lowest by the residents receiving other benefits and allowances and pensions. The fact that the retired people receiving pensions were less satisfied with life than the unemployed may be related to the relatively low pensions in agriculture. In Lithuania, the level of satisfaction with life and happiness among rural inhabitants by income was very similar to that in Poland. There were, however, some differences, as in Poland, for example, the income from other sources provided a relatively high level of satisfaction with life, at the same time providing the least happiness. Generally, the differences in the assessment of wellbeing in the analysed countries may result from different types of welfare system offered by a given country.

3.2. Wellbeing in rural areas versus other types of area

Wellbeing in rural areas was compared to that in other types of areas in order to see the similarities or differences in wellbeing assessment. The assessment of satisfaction with life in the both countries depending on the respondents' place of residence is presented in *Graph 2*.

In Lithuania, majority of the respondents rated their satisfaction with life as 5, 8 and 7. The residents of large cities were more satisfied with life than the residents of other areas,

which was confirmed by the fact that 42% of them rated their satisfaction levels at 7-8. Satisfaction with life of every fifth inhabitant of a small town or city and rural area in Lithuania was rated at 5.



Graph 2. Assessment of satisfaction with life by the respondents in Lithuania and Poland in 2018 by place of residence

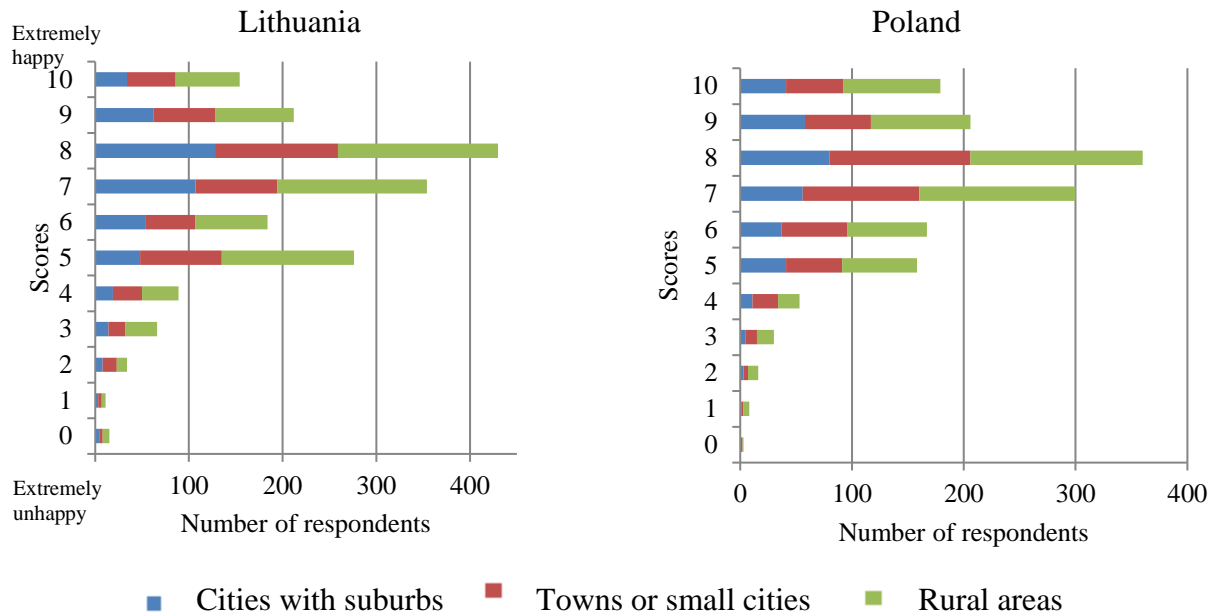
Source: own compilation based on Round 9 of the ESS

In Poland, regardless of their place of residence, the respondents most often indicated the score 8: 26% of the inhabitants of large cities, 22.7% of the inhabitants of smaller cities, and 24.7% of the inhabitants of rural areas. The residents of large cities assessed satisfaction with life better than others: 50.1% of the respondents in total assessed their satisfaction with life at the level of 8-10, while in small towns and in rural areas, the ratings of 8-7 and 5 prevailed, in total constituting 57% of all the respondents.

In rural areas, a larger share of people (44.7%) rated their satisfaction with life at the level of 7-8. Almost 12% of the inhabitants were extremely satisfied with their lives.

Evaluating the happiness of the inhabitants of Lithuania and Poland (Graph 3), the inhabitants most often rated it at 8, regardless of the place of residence. In the both countries, every fifth inhabitant indicated a score of 7. It should be emphasized that there were relatively few respondents who were very unhappy (indications 3 and below). Among the inhabitants of Lithuania, 8% of rural inhabitants were extremely happy, while in Poland, their share was higher (13%).

Finally, it can be stated that, in general, the distribution of assessment of both satisfaction with life and happiness in the analysed countries was similar, regardless of the place of residence. In general, it can be claimed that the inhabitants assessed their happiness better than their satisfaction with life. However, in Poland, people were slightly more satisfied with their lives and happier than in Lithuania. Therefore, it can be assumed that the WB of the rural population is appropriately assessed not only due to the factors selected in this article (age, gender, and income), as other factors may also be important here. The research on the WB of the rural population can be deemed to be quite extensive, creating preconditions for the researchers to analyse it from different perspectives and by using different cross-sections.



Graph 3. Assessment of happiness by the respondents in Lithuania and Poland in 2018 by place of residence

Source: own compilation based on Round 9 of the ESS

Conclusion

The theoretical debate conceptualizing wellbeing has revealed that wellbeing is a multidimensional concept, where both objective conditions and subjective (individual) perception of wellbeing is important for every person. Discussions about the need for wellbeing research are developing, but should be focused more on the areas which still attain little attention. Furthermore, the theoretical studies and practical insights on wellbeing in rural areas have confirmed the assumption that knowledge about wellbeing using the spatial/territorial approach is analysed the least. This observation has been confirmed by the analysis of the publications on wellbeing and situation in both Lithuania and Poland. Lack of information on the wellbeing of rural population means that there is a gap in the knowledge about wellbeing situation at micro level in general. This could be acknowledged as a lack of scientific interest in rural issues or little attention to what is important to everyone but the rural population.

The inhabitants of rural areas in Poland were found to have greater satisfaction with life and be generally happier than in Lithuania. Nonetheless, the figures for both countries improved wellbeing over time. The specifics that are important in differentiating the wellbeing of rural residents are gender, age and types of income. The empirical study has revealed interesting findings regarding the relationship between these features and the wellbeing of inhabitants in the studied countries. This has enabled further discussion on the similarities and revealed the differences. In Lithuania, wellbeing depended statistically on gender, age, and income. Meanwhile, in Poland, only age was found to have a statistically significant influence on satisfaction with life and happiness. From the territorial perspective, this could be associated with better use of professional development opportunities and the increasing social position with age. This means that in the territorial dimension, the set of features differentiating WB may be different, which requires research on WB by using various cross-sections.

The research on wellbeing from the territorial perspective, carried out on the basis of high-quality statistical data by the ESS, has also enabled the author to generate new interesting conclusions and show a broader context of shaping of wellbeing and differentiating factors. The cases of Lithuania and Poland have shown that wellbeing can be influenced by various categories of factors (including both social and economic). The first group includes the features assigned to a specific person (rural inhabitant), which can be considered universal, regardless of the territory (e.g. age). In addition, other factors that are specific to a given territory (on the meso or macro scale) or community can also be indicated. These may be, for example, the general economic situation and prosperity in a given country, business conditions that indirectly determine the situation of a specific person (e.g. income), the perception of professions in society, which is reflected in the assessment of wellbeing. This shows that, on the microeconomic scale, the development of wellbeing is a very complex process that consists of a lot of elements closely related to the territory and socio-economic factors of rural population. For detailed elaboration of these conclusions, it is recommended to conduct an in-depth analysis considering more potential determinants that shape the wellbeing and showing the details of wellbeing in other areas of the studied countries, i.e. large and small cities.

Moreover, the findings of the research may contribute to the understanding that wellbeing research of rural population could be a valuable niche for researchers in social sciences. Their insights are also needed by the rural development policy makers who are also involved in shaping of rural life. The knowledge of how people perceive and rate their wellbeing enables targeted use of the rural development instruments according to the appropriate social groups, taking into account significant factors which affect the wellbeing of rural population.

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