

Urszula GRZEGA

APPLICATION OF INDIRECT SYNTHETIC INDICATORS IN THE RESEARCH ON THE POPULATION'S STANDARD OF LIVING IN POLAND. SELECTED ISSUES

WYKORZYSTANIE MIAR SYNTETYCZNYCH POŚREDNICH W BADANIACH POZIOMU ŻYCIA LUDNOŚCI W POLSCE. WYBRANE ASPEKTY

Department of Consumer Research, University of Economics in Katowice
1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland, e-mail: ugrzega@ue.katowice.pl

Streszczenie. Charakterystyka i ocena przemian w poziomie życia ludności może odbywać się przy użyciu różnych metod i miar. Mając na uwadze potrzebę stałego monitorowania życia społeczno-gospodarczego społeczeństw oraz związaną z nią konieczność doskonalenia warsztatu metodycznego i poszukiwania nowych źródeł informacji o podmiotach konsumpcji, należy włączać do badań zróżnicowany zestaw miar, w tym miary o charakterze uniwersalnym znajdujące szersze zastosowanie w badaniach przemian społeczno-gospodarczych i cywilizacyjnych. Przykładem takich miar są wskaźnik rozwoju społecznego HDI oraz miara przeciętnej długości trwania życia. Należą one do grupy wskaźników syntetycznych pośrednich, inaczej opracowanych. Pierwsza z miar ma charakter miary kompozytowej, druga – miary globalnej. Obydwie miary dostarczają aktualnych wiarygodnych danych o charakterze obiektywnym i sprawdzają się w badaniach prowadzonych w długich okresach, łącząc problem poziomu życia z szerszym tłem społeczno-gospodarczym. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że w latach 1990–2014 nastąpił wzrost wartości wskaźnika rozwoju społecznego HDI w Polsce o 130 pkt bazowych – z 0,713 w 1990 r. do 0,843 w 2014 r. Średnia długość życia w Polsce wzrosła w przypadku kobiet o 6,4 roku, w przypadku mężczyzn – o 7,6 roku. Zmiany te oceniane są pozytywnie, świadczą bowiem o poprawie poziomu życia Polaków.

Key words: standard of living measurement, average life expectancy, degree of needs-satisfaction, the HDI.

Słowa kluczowe: pomiar poziomu życia, przeciętna długość trwania życia, stopień zaspokojenia potrzeb, wskaźnik HDI.

INTRODUCTION

The standard of living, understood as the degree of satisfaction of human needs resulting from the consumption of material goods and services, and the use of natural and social environment values (Bywalec 1997), is an up-to-date and important matter of interest of researchers from various scientific fields, including economics. The complexity of the task of measuring standard of living can be attributed to the diversity of factors that have to be accounted for, and the subject of measurement itself. The research has to span multiple areas, analysing not just the issue itself, but a number of conditions and factors that accompany it. Thus, a proper selection of population's standard of living indicators is of paramount importance as it translates into overall results of the study. The diversity of research methods

applied in analyses of the degree of needs-satisfaction make it impossible to discuss them thoroughly. In this paper, two indicators of indirect synthetic nature were selected and developed, i.e. Human Development Index (HDI) and the life expectancy rate.

First it needs to be stressed that international studies on standard of living have been abundant, traditionally attributing particular importance to research methodology. At the same time lack of uniformity of measurement and interpretation is apparent. Analyses are limited to selected elements of the standard of living of populations of different countries and comparative studies. As it comes to international authors, this research owes a lot to, i.a.: E. Erikson, A. Campbell, H. Noll, J. Stiglitz, A. Sen, J. Fitoussi, R. Veenhoven, D. Cvrlje, T. Coric. Research on the population's standard of living has also been carried out extensively in Poland., focusing predominantly on methodological and analytical issues. These problems have been tackled by many respected researchers, among whom the following must be mentioned: A. Luszczewicz, L. Zienkowski, A. Zeliasi, L. Frackiewicz, B. Szopa, C. Bywalec, T. Słaby, J. Kramer.

The current view on the standard of living in Poland is greatly influenced by the transition, globalization and integration processes that have been taking place in Poland and Europe over the last twenty-five years. These interpenetrating, synchronous processes were a characteristic feature of the turn of the century 20th and 21st century. They definitely modified market conditions in which entities operate. On the one hand, new ways to satisfy consumer needs were created, and, on the other, hitherto unknown limitations and difficulties appeared. All these factors reshaped consumer needs, preferences, ways of satisfying these needs, and ultimately, the population's standard of living.

The theoretical purpose of the study is to systematise indicators of the population's standard of living, with particular emphasis on synthetic indicators.

The empirical aim s to identify and assess changes in the standard of living of the Polish population in the period of 1990–2014 with the use of two synthetic indicators, i.e. Human Development Index (HDI) and average life expectancy rate.

The research is nationwide, and spans over a period of 1990–2014. To attain the assumed objective, information from secondary sources was used. The paper consists of three parts. The first reviews basic terminology regarding the concept of population's standard of living indicators. The second part elaborates on the characteristics of the HDI social indicator and applies it to analyse the standard of living in Poland. The third part analyses degree of the population's satisfaction of needs based on the average life expectancy rate. Finally, the author presents conclusions and implications of the research.

POPULATION'S STANDARD OF LIVING INDICATORS – AN OUTLINE

As a result of measuring the standard of living, specific numbers are obtained, which may take the form of indicators or rates. Basically, standard of living indicators are divided into subjective and objective ones.

Subjective indicators capture feelings of people expressed in the form of individual opinions on the degree of needs-satisfaction, whereas objective indicators determine the level of phenomena and processes taking place outside the individual (Fronczek 1990). Among the

objective indicators of the standard of living there are indicators expressed in value terms, or monetary units (e.g. in Polish zloty, US dollars) and quantitative indicators, i.e. those expressed in natural units (e.g. in pieces/units, kg). The division of the standard of living indicators is shown in Fig. 1.

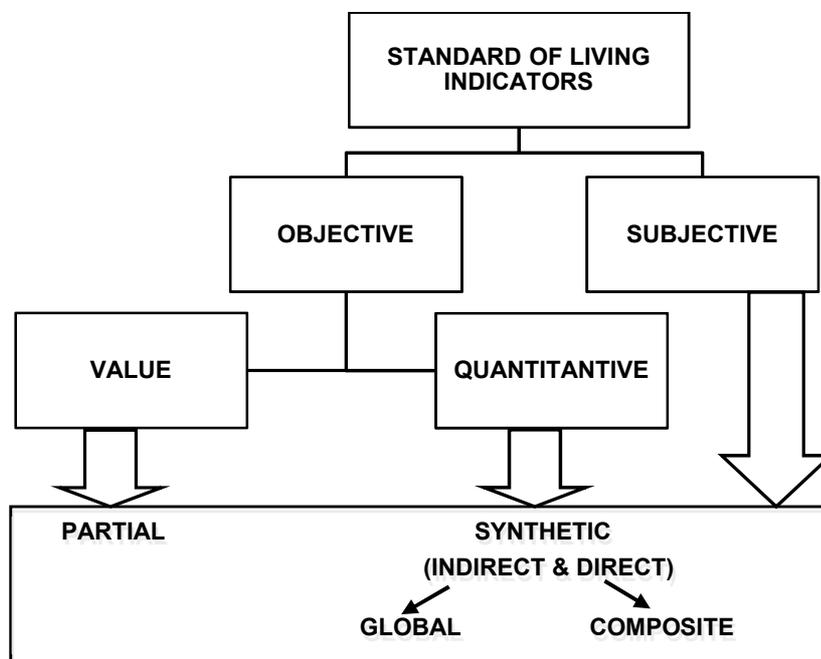


Fig. 1. Division of standard of living indicators

Source: own elaboration based on: Bywalec and Rudnicki (1999), Grzegą (2012).

In the case of value indicators, the measurement of expenditure (costs) incurred by the population (e.g. disbursed income) and state (e.g. collective consumption expenditure) to achieve a given standard of living is obtained. Whereas in the case of quantitative indicators, the measurement of outcomes (benefits) in the form of actual degree of satisfying the lower and higher order needs is acquired. Value indicators allow to answer the question: how much does the population's standard of living cost, while quantitative indicators allow to measure the degree of satisfying groups of specific needs. Quantitative and value indicators are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary – they should be used complementarily, as value indicators are economic in nature, while those expressed in natural units meet the social criterion in studies on the standard of living (Luszniewicz 1972).

Among the objective value and quantitative indicators one can also distinguish:

- partial indicators, or individual, specialist or specific – used to assess one element of the living standard or a specific group of needs (e.g. number of people per 1 room);
- synthetic indicators – used to assess the needs of a wider group of needs or general living conditions of the population.

Partial indicators show the state of the phenomenon from the point of specific features. They are often a compromise between the desire to have a scientifically valid indicator, adequately measuring a given characteristic, and the availability of information upon which its approximation can be made. Various aspects of life are captured by a variety of partial indicators.

In contrast, synthetic indicators are adopted to determine general development trends and dynamics in living standards. They may be either:

- direct indicators, i.e. developed to solve a specific problem (e.g. Hellwig's synthetic indicator of the standard of living, Perkal's indicator);
- indirect indicators, constructed and provided by various international organizations, government bodies, research centres (e.g. the UN, CSO). In their final shape, they are presented in the form of ready-made lists, statistical tables, social reports, etc. (e.g. GDP per capita, ratio of multidimensional poverty – MPI).

A common feature of all the synthetic indicators is that they correspond and capture various dimensions of social life, including, for example: economic activity, environmental conditions, cultural, educational, housing backgrounds, and others. In addition, they can be further divided into:

- composite indicators, which is a measure of socio-economic development obtained through empirical aggregation of a number of economic, social and political variables (partial indicators or partial indicators with other synthetic indicators). Their goal is to bring a multi-dimensional time series to a form of a one-dimensional aggregate variable (Grabiński et al. 1981) (e.g. Human Development Index – HDI, Geneva method);
- global indicators, i.e. indicators that despite the nature of single number indicators, which are a combination of various dimensions of life, do not give the possibility to separate them from indicators shaping their value. It is also difficult to determine the effect of individual dimensions of social life on their formation (e.g. global consumption indicator, average life expectancy rate).

The main advantages of synthetic indicators mainly include their one-dimensional way of representing a multi-dimensional phenomenon. In addition to facilitating the interpretation of complex phenomena and socio-economic processes, the advantage of using these indicators is also their usefulness and usability in the context of evaluating discrepancies between the existing state of affairs and the pattern, or the desired state, thereby they have a warning function. They inform the public and decision makers about the historical, current and projected trends of changes in the area which the indicator refers to. Long-term, multidimensional research based on synthetic indicators of development greatly facilitate international comparisons or analysis of the development of one country over time. They are successfully used for the periodization purpose and facilitate graphical representation of the issue. A particular advantage of synthetic composite indicators is also their high flexibility in selecting variables for testing, scaling, attaching weights, aggregation (such procedures always occur at the expense of their comparability, both timewise and across space). Disadvantages of synthetic indicators – besides the obvious one, namely, too overly averaged image of the studied reality – mainly concern the composite group of indicators. These are: discretionary nature of partial indicators, arbitrariness in determining the weights, high degree of complexity of the methods and techniques used for the construction of indicators (Grzega 2012).

Composite indicators can be classified according to various criteria, among which the following should be mentioned (Grzega 2012):

- the content of the study (the question being what aspects of development are measured);
- the type of measurement (whether indicator measures quantitative or qualitative aspects in an objective or subjective way);

- the dimension and scope of comparisons (whether the indicator compares the level of development time- and space-wise, in absolute or relative terms);
- the degree of indicator's complexity (meaning its methodological complexity);
- the availability of data (in terms of timeline and territory);
- the flexibility (whether it offers an option to change variables, objectives, methods, applications).

To conclude, the current consensus among the vast majority of researchers is that partial indicators (of specialist nature) should be combined with synthetic indicators.

POPULATION'S STANDARD OF LIVING IN POLAND BASED ON THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)

One of the most common measures of social and economic development applied to assess and compare progress over time and space, used by academia, politicians and media, is the Human Development Index HDI¹.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), from 1990 onwards publishes annual reports on the state of social development in all countries of the world, applying the HDI. This is a composite index, commonly cited and used for the evaluation of the standard and quality of life in different countries (Engineer et al. 2008). Although it is a composite indicator, it has a relatively simple construction, hence its popularity.

The methodology of constructing the index has changed in the last 25 years. Currently the HDI measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living. To measure these dimensions four indicators are used, the so-called HDI components (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>):

- life expectancy at birth,
- mean of years of schooling (for adults aged 25 and older),
- expected years of schooling (for children of school-entranceage),
- gross national income per capita in USD calculated according to purchasing power parity of a currency (PPP \$).

The HDI is expressed as the average value of the indicators mentioned above, and takes values from 0 to 1. The higher the ratio, the higher the level of socio-economic development of a country². The indicator has the following strong points: its composite nature covers social and economic aspects, it is simple to calculate, and enables cross-country comparisons. However, on the minus side, the indicator is too sensitive to changes in a country's social and economic situation, it is negligent in its selection of sub-indices (the indicator does not include e.g. human rights, security, participation in political life, and other essential needs). As it is the case with other synthetic indices, the HDI has been criticized for presenting averaged values. According to the HDI classification, 25% of countries with the highest HDI are clustered within a category of very high human development, followed by another 25% classified as "high human development", and respectively, two more categories of medium and low development (Cahill 2005; Ranis et al. 2006; Grimm et al. 2008).

¹ The HDI was developed in 1990 by a Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and his Indian colleague, the future Nobel Prize winner in economics, Amartya Kumar Sen.

² In issues of the report before 2010, more absolute than relative methods of division were used.

The data in Fig. 2 show that in the 1990–2014 period the HDI in Poland increased by 130 base points – from 0.713 in 1990 to 0.843 in 2014. In the early stage of transition of the Polish economy it was associated with the implementation of the government program "State-Owned Enterprise Pact" of 1992 (Kołodko 2012). In subsequent years, a slow but steady increase in the value of the index was observed, which was largely the result of a boom in the private higher education sector.

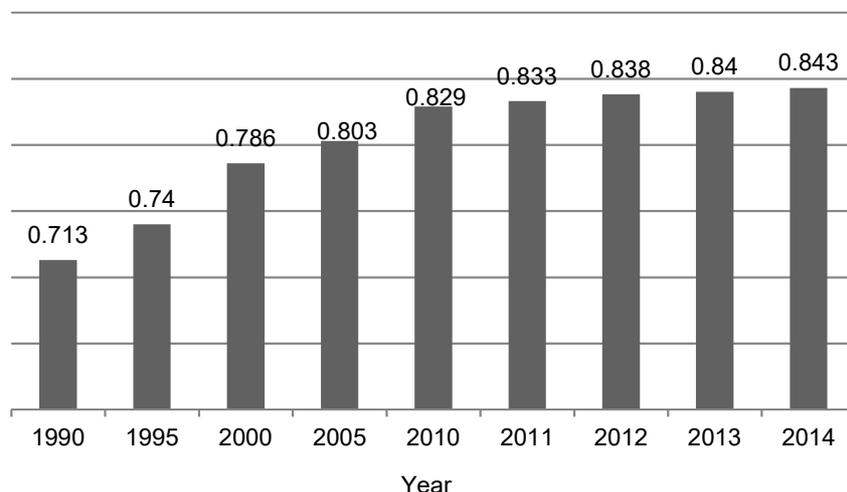


Fig. 2. The HDI in Poland. 1990–2014. The 2015 report includes recalculated HDIs from 1990 to 2014 using consistent series of data

Source: Human Development Report (2014, 2015).

As for Poland, in the first years of economic transition, its relative position in the global ranking deteriorated by as much as several places (in 1990 Poland ranked 43th, and in 1994 – 58th). A gradual improvement began in 1995. Until 2001 Poland consistently improved, at least maintained its position in the ranking. In 2001 it ranked 35th, and in 2002–2005 Poland 37th (with the exception of 2003 – 36th), whereas in 2006 its position decreased to 42th, and in subsequent years, until 2010, it occupied 41th place in the ranking of the surveyed countries (except for 2008 – 39th). The decrease of Poland's position in 2009 was associated with the consideration, for the first time, of such countries as Andorra and Liechtenstein, which does not alter the fact that in 2010 Poland for the first time was among the countries with the highest level of development in the world. In the last year of the analysis (2014), it occupied 36th position among 188 countries surveyed.

As the values of the HDI components (Table 1) imply, in the life expectancy in Poland increased (by 6.5 years) over the study period. The expected number of years of schooling for children entering school also increased by 3.2 years, and the average number of years of schooling received by adults aged 25 years and older went up by about 2.1 years. GNI per one inhabitant (GNI per capita in PPP terms, constant 2011 PPP \$) increased in 2014 compared to 1990 by 133.8%. It should be added that GNI per capita is a category which lowers the overall value of the HDI for Poland. The position of our country in the ranking is mostly reinforced by the level of education and level of health (Human Development Report 2015).

Table 1. Trends in composite indices in Poland in the period of 1990–2014

| Years | Life expectancy at birth | Expected years of schooling | Mean years of schooling | Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2011 PPP\$) |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1990 | 70.9 | 12.3 | 9.7 | 9.915 |
| 1995 | 71.8 | 13.0 | 10.5 | 11.193 |
| 2000 | 73.7 | 14.8 | 11.1 | 14.777 |
| 2005 | 75.0 | 15.1 | 11.3 | 16.909 |
| 2010 | 76.3 | 15.4 | 11.7 | 20.621 |
| 2011 | 76.6 | 15.4 | 11.8 | 21.611 |
| 2012 | 76.9 | 15.5 | 11.8 | 22.004 |
| 2013 | 77.2 | 15.5 | 11.8 | 22.395 |
| 2014 | 77.4 | 15.5 | 11.8 | 23.177 |

Source: Work for human development (http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/POL.pdf).

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY IN POLAND

The indicator of average life expectancy, apart from its synthetic and universal quality, serves also as an alternative measure, i.e. non-standard, complementary in relation to traditional and officially recognised measures (Grzega 2015). Like the other measures in this group (e.g. biological, anthropometric) it is based on the non-value categories and the idea of its use arose from the preference of intangible values to material ones (Steckel 2008).

As a measure of standard of living, the life expectancy rate reflects overall living conditions of a population. It is used not only to assess the health status of the population or the effects of physical activities, but also to assess the level of socio-economic and civilisational development of a society, especially over longer periods of time. The length of human life is a combined result of various life dimensions, including diet, housing conditions, medical care, cultural and educational benefits, natural and social environment, and others. Of course, a matter of genes and chance, and individual choices made by people such as e.g. physical activity and intellectual effort are not insignificant in this context. However, according to some researchers, including the Nobel Prize winner R. Fogel, the length of human life depends to a greater extent on external factors rather than internal (genetic) ones. R. Fogel described the changes associated with the aging of the population as "technophysio evolution" of the human race, powered by advances in food production and health care. In his opinion, environmentally induced changes in human physiology significantly extended the life expectancy of the human population (Społeczno-gospodarcze uwarunkowania... 2010).

Therefore, it can be safely concluded that average life expectancy rate is a useful indicator in the studies on a population's standard of living. Moreover, as a non-conventional measure it is often positively correlated with conventional measures. In industrialized countries, income growth and overall socio-economic development are usually associated with better diet, reduced physical workload and better health care, which translate into higher values of the life expectancy measure. On the other hand, the decrease in income corresponds to improper diet, can cause malnutrition, and be followed by growth retardation, arrested body development, as well as various types of diseases, and as a result a shorter life (Steckel 2008). However, it may be the case that traditional measures of the population's standard of living, e.g. GDP growth and household consumption, indicate improvement and the so-called "long, systematic progress", while alternative measures point to a different conclusion, and vice versa (Brainerd 2010). One example of that is the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, where, in spite of slow or negative economic growth, increased life expectancy was observed over the last half century.

To recapitulate, the synthetic indicator of average life expectancy is a measure used to assess changes in the standard of living of the total population over time. The use of this indicator is also supported by the fact that its application refers to one country – Poland, located in one climatic zone and with one ethno-cultural background (Poziom życia... 2004).

Average life expectancy equals the average number of years a person born in a given country in a given year is expected to live. The indicator presents values for men and women (Table 2).

Table 2. Average life expectancy at birth in the period of 1990–2014

| Years | Men | Women | Years | Men | Women |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1990 | 66.23 | 75.24 | 2005 | 70.81 | 79.40 |
| 1995 | 67.62 | 76.39 | 2010 | 72.10 | 80.59 |
| 2000 | 69.74 | 78.00 | 2014 | 73.80 | 81.60 |

Source: Average life expectancy of population at birth in the period of 1950–2014 (<http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/trwanie-zycia>).

Data in Table 2 show that over the 1990–2014 period a regular lengthening of the lifespan of Polish citizens occurred. Life expectancy rate for men and women – with the exception of 1991 (and 1999 in the case of men) – increased from year to year. The average life expectancy of a male was extended by 7.57 years, a female – by about 6.36. However, due to an excess of male mortality, a significant difference between the life expectancy of men and women can be noted in Poland. According to Bywalec, life expectancy of men is more correlated with economic and social conditions, which is due to the social roles performed by men (Bywalec 1997). In 2014, the difference between the life expectancy of women and men was 7.8 years and in 1990 – 9, which means that it decreased over the study period.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past few decades, significant progress has been achieved in the studies on the population's standard of living. The reservoir of general knowledge about the living conditions and their determinants has expanded enormously, and definitely more information sources and methods of measurement are available today. The use of objective and subjective, partial and synthetic indicators, including global and composite ones in the research on the standard of living has become a common practice. However, despite the huge diversity of sources and measurement methods, there is still a need for supplementary, more versatile measurement tools, e.g. average life expectancy ratio. The HDI, though developed on the basis of three criteria only, is a useful indicator, based on reliable and valid data. This is why it can be recognized as providing high-grade cognitive content, and giving an overall picture of the socio-economic situation of societies.

Based on the analysis of selected measures of the standard of living of the Polish population it can be stated that throughout the period of 1990–2014 the standard of living of Polish people definitely improved. This is confirmed by positive changes in the values of indicators such as the HDI and the average life expectancy. Increased HDI and the upgrade in the ranking of Poland among the countries surveyed justify positive evaluation of the changes that occurred

in the socio-economic development and the standard of living in Poland over the 1990–2014 period. At the same time it should be noted that the relatively high value of HDI can be mostly attributed to education, and in the least to GNI per capita. The positive direction of change is also confirmed by the analysis carried out based on average life expectancy for males and females. The average life expectancy in Poland increased for women by 6.4 years, and men – 7.6. Moreover, the difference in the male and female life expectancy has decreased. The reasons for that positive trend may lie in the general improvement of the economic situation, which translates to higher degree of satisfaction of the population's needs.

In conclusion it should be clearly noted that the study outlines actual changes in the standard of living of the Polish population in a general and simplified way. The synthetic measures adopted only approximate the studied phenomenon. Selected aspects of measurement may be disputed, and the assessment of change cannot be but relative, since there is an abundance of views on measurement methodology and results interpretation.

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Summary. Changes in a population's standard of living can be captured and evaluated by a variety of methods and measures. Acknowledging the need to monitor continuously all spheres of a society's socio-economic life, and the necessity to improve the methodology applied and to seek new sources on consumer information, a wide set of indicators should be incorporated in the research, including universal indicators used in the research on socio-economic and civilisational changes. Such indicators include: Human Development Index (HDI) and average life expectancy rate. They belong to a group of indirect synthetic indicators, though they are calculated differently. The former is a composite index, the latter – a global one. Their application is justified by their capacity to provide up-to-date, objective and reliable data, and what is more, they are effective in longitudinal research, relating the standard of living to a broader socio-economic background. The research conducted shows that in the period of 1990–2014 the Human Development Index increased in Poland by 130 base points – from 0.713 in 1990 to 0.843 in 2014. The average life expectancy in Poland went up, in case of females by 6.4, and males – 7.6 years. These changes are regarded as positive ones, as they indicate improvement in the standard of living of the Polish people.