

## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE LEVEL AND QUALITY OF HOUSING CONDITIONS AMONG POLISH HOUSEHOLDS\*

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**Abstract.** Housing conditions largely affect the standard and quality of life. The problem connected with housing conditions is an important social issue for each country due to its socializing, economic and social functions. Having in mind the importance of apartments in terms of the population security and stabilization, the authors of this paper have made an attempt to present the housing situation in Poland through an analysis of regional diversification of housing indexes. Additionally, subjective assessments of housing conditions by the population of provinces: the Kujawsko-pomorskie, the Mazowieckie and the Warmińsko-mazurskie, have been presented. These studies were carried out using the method CAPI. Based on the analyses it was found that housing resources and conditions in Poland are significantly poorer as compared to those in Western Europe and the disproportions can be noticed throughout the country.

**Key words:** apartment, resources, quality, level, household, regional differences

### INTRODUCTION

The category “living conditions” is not precisely defined as it applies both to material and non-material needs and the degree of their fulfillment in the place of living [Sobczyk 2007]. Słaby [2004] defines living conditions as all objective infrastructure conditions accessible to the society. It seems though that the main determinant of peoples’ living conditions is their economic situation, their basic needs fulfillment degree, housing resources and availability of durable goods.

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The possibility of meeting the population needs is treated as one of the major determinants of the society standard of living [Kosturbiec 2006]. An apartment determines the material and social conditions for people to live and the resources, such as a living space or the location provide boundaries of the living standards for people, their families, households, and whole societies.

The degree of housing needs, distribution of resources and tendencies to change in time are defined through the issues connected with demographic structure and state, processes of housing resources exchange and the country social-economic development as well as the degree of technological progress implementation [Podoski and Turnowiecki 2001]. The problems connected with housing relations and occurring regularities are addressed by the housing policy. As a scientific discipline it sets goals and defines methods for fulfillment and improvement in housing conditions. The issues connected with housing conditions are currently especially difficult social problem. The residential construction lags behind the population needs and the quality of dwelling houses maintenance is rather poor.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study deals with spatial diversification, throughout Polish provinces, in the field of people's housing conditions created by housing resources and equipment of apartments with devices and installations of water supply and sewage systems, bathroom, toilet, and access to gas and central heating.

The addressed research subject has been analyzed on the basis of empirical material collected with the use of publicly available latest data from Central Statistical Office (GUS) and database and report from Social Diagnosis research project realized in 2011 [Rada Monitoringu Społecznego 2011]. The article also presents a fragment of opinion survey carried out within a research grant funded by the National Science Centre "Living standard and quality of life of Polish people". Surveys on the subject of life quality have been carried out in three Polish provinces: the Mazowieckie, the Kujawsko-pomorskie and the Warmińsko-mazurskie. The provinces were chosen according to a synthetic measure of the level of life which was calculated on the basis of objective indicators of the Polish population level of life<sup>1</sup>.

Next, research on the quality of life of people from selected provinces was performed according to CATI (computer assisted telephone interview) method<sup>2</sup>. The research tool was a specially prepared questionnaire which included 69 questions from seven areas: safety level; functioning of social assistance; level and availability of services; functioning of public transportation and the condition of roads; level of culture and entertainment;

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<sup>1</sup> The Mazowieckie Province is one of the these in which there is the highest standard of living, in the Kujawsko-pomorskie – average, and the Warmińsko-mazurskie – the lowest, according to A. Murawska in Socio-economic development and the standard of living of households in Poland (doctoral dissertation, WULS-SGGW, unpublished manuscript), 2009.

<sup>2</sup> CATI is a telephone interview with computer assisted. It consists in conducting a survey through a telephone conversation with the respondent and response selection in a computer version of the survey.

level of education and employment; and evaluation of pro-social attitudes; including the respondents' involvement in sustainable development in their place of their living. In the survey 300 respondents took part including: 181 from the Mazowieckie Province, 71 from the Kujawsko-pomorskie Province and 48 from the Warmińsko-mazurskie Province. Such a distribution of the research sample groups was determined by the number of inhabitants living in a given province with regard to their age, sex, education and place of living.

Basic statistical methods have been used in order to interpret the results, among others coefficients of variation, asymmetry and dynamics have been calculated.

## **RESULTS**

### **Definition of an apartment**

The apartment is one of the most important aspects of human existence and household functioning, being the basis element in a system way of defining this important economic microstructure. An apartment also plays the role of a specific "concentration center" for a group of householders, thus meeting one of the conditions necessary for existence of a social group represented by a household consisting of a few members [Gutkowska 2001]. Significant factors that allow to use a given apartment are: the apartment construction standard concerning its size (area, number of rooms), equipment with technical-sanitary installations, applied construction material, interior layout and technical state.

The assessment of housing resources and equipment of apartments with standard facilities and water supply and sewage installations

One of the basic determinants of housing conditions quality is the independence of residence. According data obtained from Social Diagnosis 2011 in Poland, more than 4% of households do not reside independently. This figure has not changed substantially since 2007. Most frequently households not residing independently were found among those whose maintenance sources did not come from employment contracts (7%), farmers (6%), those located in rural areas (5%) and in the Lubelskie Province (over 11%) [Social Diagnosis 2011].

The analysis of an average number of rooms in an apartment, number of heads falling on one apartment and one room as well as the analysis of an average living space of an apartment play an important role in the assessment of housing resources. According to the latest results obtained from the National Opinion Poll 2011, in the years 2002–2011, there was reported a growth of the average living space of apartments. The average living space of an apartment was 69.2 m<sup>2</sup> in 2011 and it increased by 1.3 m<sup>2</sup> as compared to 2002. In turn, the average number of rooms in an apartment has remained almost at the same level (3.7) [Report of the National Census of Population and Housing 2011, 2012]. This is due to building apartments with larger living space and developing the existing resources.

The average living space of one apartment does not vary considerably from province to province in Poland<sup>3</sup>. Significant differences in this field are not observed in towns or rural areas, either. The smallest apartments, both in towns and in rural areas, occur in the Warmińsko-mazurskie Province (respectively, in towns – 59.90 m<sup>2</sup> and in rural areas

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<sup>3</sup> Obtained results based on data from the Statistical Yearbook of Voivodships 2012.

– 75.95 m<sup>2</sup>). Relatively small apartments are found in towns of the Łódzkie Province (57.17 m<sup>2</sup>) and the Kujawsko-pomorskie Province (59.01 m<sup>2</sup>), whereas in rural areas small apartments, comparable with those in the Warmińsko-mazurskie Province, occur mainly in the Zachodniopomorskie Province (79.64 m<sup>2</sup>) – Table 1.

The households situated in the regions of central and southern Poland are on the opposite side in terms of housing resources, especially the living space of apartments. The larger apartments are located in the Wielkopolskie Province (respectively in towns – 68.20 m<sup>2</sup> and in rural areas – 93.77 m<sup>2</sup>). Apartments in towns have also relatively higher living space in the Podkarpackie Province (66.75 m<sup>2</sup>). In turn, in rural areas can be found in the south of Poland, especially in the Śląskie Province (93.63 m<sup>2</sup>) and the Małopolskie Province (90.97 m<sup>2</sup>) – Table 1.

Table 1. The average living space of one apartment (m<sup>2</sup>) totally in towns and in rural areas, in Poland in 2011

Specification	$\bar{X}$	$V_s$	Minimum	Maximum	Fluctuation amplitude	Data skew
Total	70.73	6.48	65.56 (Warmińsko-mazurskie)	78.18 (Opolskie)	1.19	0.49
Town	62.21	4.30	57.17 (Łódzkie)	68.20 (Wielkopolskie)	1.19	0.51
Rural areas	86.49	5.30	75.95 (Warmińsko-mazurskie)	93.77 (Wielkopolskie)	1.23	-0.54

$\bar{X}$  – average for 16 provinces;  $V_s$  – coefficient of variation in %.

Source: Author's own calculations on the basis of Central Statistical Office data.

If the housing resources do not reveal substantial differences from region to region, significant disproportions can easily be observed between towns and rural areas. In 2011 the living space of apartments in rural areas was larger in rural areas as compared to towns by 25.91 m<sup>2</sup> (in 2010 this difference amounted to 24 m<sup>2</sup>). While in 2011 the average number of rooms in rural areas was 4.21, in towns it was 3.54. In turn, in towns almost one person less falls on one apartment than in rural areas (respectively 2.59 and 3.45 persons per 1 apartment).

For the last 10 years there has been noted an improvement in the equipment of houses with standard installations, though this development has not reduced regional disproportions, especially in rural areas. The survey results show that, although in terms of housing resources, there are no substantial differences between towns and rural areas, the same cannot be said about the equipment of apartments with standard facilities, such as water supply, sewage systems and gas. As far as towns are concerned, regional differences in this field are not much visible and insignificant ( $V_s < 10\%$ ), though they do differ in rural areas ( $V_s > 10\%$ ) – Table 2.

Analyzing particular regions, significant differences can be observed in the Mazowieckie Province. In this region there are usually high values of indexes defining the level and quality of life, such as GDP per head, average amount of people's salaries and incomes. However, in the field of apartment's equipment with standard facilities, this region leaves much to be desired. The number of inhabitants, provided with basic instal-

lations both in towns and rural areas, is the smallest in this province from all the provinces in Poland. Thus, the lowest percentage of people in towns, who use the water supply system, is in the Mazowieckie Province (in 2011 – 91.5%) and in the Podkarpackie Province (91.8%), those, who use sewage system, live in Śląskie Province (82.1%), and those, who has access network gas, live in the Podlaskie Province (42.6%). As for rural areas, the worst situation in terms of using the water supply system can be observed in the Małopolskie Province (58.1%) and the Podkarpackie Province (64.6%), in case of the sewage system – in provinces: the Lubelskie (13.6%), the Łódzkie (15.1%) and the Mazowieckie (17.8%), whereas gas network – in the Kujawsko-pomorskie Province (2.9%) – Table 2.

The Pomorskie Province appears to be on the opposite side in terms equipment of rural and urban apartments with elements of the water supply infrastructure. As compared to other provinces, the inhabitants of towns of this province account for the highest percentage of those, who use the water supply system (in 2011 – 98.0%) and sewage system (93.7%). In the rural areas of the Pomorskie Province the number of people, who use the sewage system infrastructure, is also the highest in Poland (40.6%). It has also

Table 2. Population using facilities in towns and rural areas (%) of the total population of towns and rural areas in Poland

Specification	$\bar{X}$	$V_s$	Minimum	Maximum	Amplitude of fluctuations	Data skew	$I_z$	
Water supply	Town 2011	95.57	2.06	91.50 (Mazowieckie)	98.00 (Pomorskie)	1.07	-0.93	100.1
	Town 2010	95.51	2.09	91.20 (Mazowieckie)	97.90 (Pomorskie)	1.07	-0.98	100.0
	Rural areas 2010	77.40	11.11	58.10 (Małopolskie)	91.30 (Opolskie)	1.57	-0.66	100.7
Sewage	Town 2011	87.43	3.56	82.10 (Śląskie)	93.70 (Pomorskie)	1.14	0.53	100.6
	Town 2010	86.90	3.73	81.40 (Śląskie)	93.40 (Pomorskie)	1.15	0.59	100.3
	Rural areas 2010	25.43	33.83	13.60 (Lubelskie)	40.60 (Pomorskie)	2.99	0.51	104.8
Gas	Town 2011	72.11	14.46	42.60 (Podlaskie)	88.80 (Podkarpackie)	2.08	-1.38	99.6
	Town 2010	72.38	14.38	43.00 (Podlaskie)	89.00 (Podkarpackie)	2.07	-1.36	99.9
	Rural areas 2010	16.49	101.41	2.90 (Kujawsko-pomorskie)	60.10 (Podkarpackie)	20.72	1.76	102.0

$\bar{X}$  – average value for 16 provinces;  $V_s$  – coefficient of variation in %,  $I_z$  – index of dynamics in comparison with the previous year.

Source: Author's own calculations on the basis of Central Statistical Office data.

been observed that an equally high value of this index in rural areas occurs on the territory of the Zachodniopomorskie Province (40.6%). In turn, the highest percentage of rural population, who use the water supply system, is in the Opolskie Province (91.3%) and the Wielkopolskie Province (87.3%). In the Pomorskie and the Zachodniopomorskie Provinces the availability of water supply system is the highest, though it does not exceed the average in the country (Table 2).

Gas network is best developed in the Podkarpackie Province (town 89.0%, rural areas –60.1%). Gas network is also characterized by a very high regional diversification in rural areas. In 2010 the variance coefficient ( $V_s$ ) for 16 provinces was 101.41% (in 2009 – 103.39%). However,  $V_s$  equal to 124.5% in 2003 [Murawska 2012] means that the differences from region to region are decreasing, and the index of dynamics in 2009 at the level of 111.7% and in 2010 at the level of 102% (compared to the previous year) confirms ongoing dynamic development of the gas infrastructure in order to decrease of disproportions that occur in rural areas (Table 2).

According to the latest results of the National Census of Population and Housing, since 2002 there has been observed a notable improvement in apartments equipment with installations, such as water supply system, sewage system, bathroom, central heating or network gas. Since 2002 the number of apartments with a bathroom has increased by 7.7%, with sewage system by 14.7%, central heating by 4.9% and network gas by 4.2%. A dynamic drop in the number of apartments without the considered facilities and installations has also been confirmed by the results of Social Diagnosis [Social Diagnosis 2011]. The housing conditions in Poland have been improved not only by development of water supply, sewage systems and gas network, but also by building new apartments and modernization of the earlier resources.

The number of households provided with all the considered equipment is relatively high in towns, and regional diversification in this field is insignificant ( $V_s < 10\%$ ). In rural areas these indexes are different as they are much lower than in towns and here regional disproportions occur. On the basis of carried out analyses it can be said that the fewest town households with water supply system, sewage system and bathroom are in the Świętokrzyskie Province, whereas in rural areas, in the Podlaskie Province. In turn, the biggest number of apartments with water supply system, bathroom and sewage system is in the north of the country, in the Pomorskie, the Zachodniopomorskie and the Warmińsko-mazurskie Provinces, and also in the Opolskie Province – Table 3.

The percentage of households without network gas is constantly decreasing [Social Diagnosis 2011, Murawska 2012], however, the results of surveys indicate that there are still significant differences in equipment of households with this installation, especially in rural areas. In 2011, in towns, the coefficient of variance, calculated for 16 provinces was  $V_s = 12.78\%$ , whereas, in rural areas  $V_s = 107.58\%$ . As far as towns are concerned, the fewest apartments equipped with network gas can be found in the Podlaskie Province (49.8% – data from 2011) and in rural areas in the Kujawsko-pomorskie Province (2.6%). However, on the opposite side there is the Podkarpackie Province, where the number of apartments equipped with network gas both in towns and rural areas is the largest.

In 2007–2011 there has been observed a notable drop (by almost 3% points) in the number of apartments with fuel stoves giving place to collective and individual central

Table 3. Apartments equipped with installations (%) totally Poland and in towns and rural areas in 2011

Specification	$\bar{X}$	$V_s$	Minimum	Maximum	Amplitude of fluctuations	Data skew	
Water supply	Total	96.21	3.39	89.80 (Lubelskie)	99.30 (Zachodniopomorskie)	1.11	-0.89
	Town	99.18	0.78	97.70 (Świętokrzyskie)	99.90 (Warmińsko-mazurskie)	1.02	-0.75
	Rural area	91.41	6.85	80.50 (Podlaskie)	97.80 (Zachodniopomorskie)	1.21	-0.70
Sewage system	Total	95.43	3.96	87.70 (Lubelskie)	99.00 (Pomorskie)	1.13	-1.00
	Town	98.96	0.79	97.40 (Świętokrzyskie)	99.70 (Pomorskie)	1.02	-0.86
	Rural area	89.18	8.84	75.50 (Podlaskie)	96.80 (Zachodniopomorskie)	1.28	-0.77
Bathroom	Total	93.46	5.51	82.60 (Lubelskie)	98.20 (Opolskie)	1.19	-1.07
	Town	98.40	1.08	96.00 (Świętokrzyskie)	99.40 (Pomorskie)	1.04	-1.09
	Rural area	85.14	11.74	67.60 (Lubelskie)	96.50 (Opolskie)	1.43	-0.73
Network gas	Total	56.53	21.82	32.10 (Podlaskie)	73.60 (Podkarpackie)	2.29	-0.34
	Town	78.02	12.78	49.80 (Podlaskie)	90.30 (Dolnośląskie)	1.81	-1.50
	Rural area	15.36	107.58	2.60 (Kujawsko-pomorskie)	58.50 (Podkarpackie)	22.50	1.84
Central heating	Total	78.81	4.25	72.70 (Lubelskie)	84.10 (Pomorskie)	1.16	-0.07
	Town	86.17	4.31	80.00 (Śląskie)	91.10 (Mazowieckie)	1.14	-0.31
	Rural area	66.08	11.32	49.50 (Podlaskie)	78.20 (Śląskie)	1.58	-0.59

$\bar{X}$  – average for 16 provinces;  $V_s$  – coefficient of variability in %.

Source: Author's own calculations on the basis of Central Statistical Office data.

heating, whereas, this type of change was most visible in groups of households of farmers and the retired, multiperson, non-family households, households of married couples and multichildren families [Social Diagnosis 2011]. Despite an improvement in the situation, in rural areas only 66.08% of all the apartments are equipped with central heating, whereas, in the Lubelskie Province this index ranged in 2011 at the level 55.0%, the Podlaskie Province – 49.5%, which was the lowest in the country.

The Opolskie Province deserves special attention as in this region, thanks to dynamic drop in the number of apartments with fuel stoves in rural areas, a considerable improvement has been noted, and in 2011 this province was found to be in the second position (74.6%), right after the Śląskie Province (78.2%). However, as compared to rural households, the highest percentage of apartments equipped with the central heating, can be found in Provinces: the Mazowieckie (91.1%), the Lubelskie (89.6%) and the Podlaskie (90.9%).

Subjective assessment of housing conditions quality and the place of living on the basis of empirical data.

The quality of housing conditions and the place of living is an important factor determining the population living standards. Perception and assessment of housing conditions by people is diversified and depends on different features characteristic for respondents. According to data coming from the research project Social Diagnosis 2011, those who are relatively more often satisfied with housing conditions include persons up to 24 or above 60 years old, living rural areas in the Pomorskie and the Opolskie Provinces, with high school and university education. Whereas, the most dissatisfied with housing conditions are persons at the age from 25 to 60 years old, living in big cities of the Lubuskie, the Zachodniopomorskie and the Świętokrzyskie Provinces, with elementary and vocational education and the unemployed and retired.

On the basis of empirical tests, carried out within a research grant no 1708/B/H03/2011/40, it can be said that the inhabitants of the Kujawsko-pomorskie, the Warmińsko-mazurskie and the Mazowieckie Provinces are of a positive opinion on the subject of their housing conditions. Whereas, town inhabitants who have a high opinion of their housing conditions account for 86.7%<sup>4</sup> of the respondents are from the Warmińsko-mazurskie, 77.3% of respondents are from the Kujawsko-pomorskie and 75.0% from the Mazowieckie Province. However, in rural areas this statement was supported by relatively fewer respondents. That is, in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province it was 74.1% and in Warmińsko-mazurskie Province 72.3% and in the Mazowieckie Province only 66.2% of rural areas inhabitants were satisfied with their housing conditions. One of the factors affecting the low evaluation of housing conditions by the inhabitants of the Mazowieckie Province can be connected with the above presented low values of infrastructure indexes involving equipment with water sewage installations (Table 4).

Table 4. Evaluation of housing conditions in the place of my living (%)

I have high opinion of the housing conditions in the place of my living	Province								
	Kujawsko-pomorskie			Warmińsko-mazurskie			Mazowieckie		
	o	m	w	o	m	w	o	m	w
I definitely disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.9	3.1
I disagree	1.4	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.4	4.3	4.6
I rather disagree	22.5	20.5	25.9	18.8	13.3	27.8	21.5	19.8	24.6
I rather agree	60.6	56.8	66.7	58.3	60	55.6	51.4	47.4	58.5
I agree	14.1	18.2	7.4	18.8	26.7	5.6	18.8	25.0	7.7
I definitely agree	1.4	2.3	0.0	4.2	0.0	11.1	1.7	2.6	0.0
No opinion	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.5

o – generally, m – town, w – rural areas.

Source: Author's own research.

According to subjective rankings on the importance of different human needs, the housing needs is classified right after the need to care for health and reliance on food [Kusińska 2005]. Nowadays, in the times of improving living standards, quality, and fam-

<sup>4</sup> Total of answers: I rather agree, I agree, I definitely agree.



ily model changing from a multigeneration to one- or two-generation, with high involvement of people in job activities resulting in a growing number of educated members of households, adequate housing resources are and will be of great importance. Therefore, it is essential to examine the quality of housing conditions or the place of living on the basis of subjective opinions of the household members.

## CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the carried out investigations, it can be said, that housing resources make up an important element that characterizes the level of the population living standards and affects functioning of households. An apartment is a place, where consumption needs are met, and it determines the natural boundaries of peoples' privacy.

The level of housing resources on the territory of Poland is found to be diversified. There occur significant disproportions between towns and rural areas, to disadvantage of the latter ones. Carried out analyses have also revealed significant regional differences in the housing resources within rural areas, especially in the field of access to infrastructure, such as water supply system, sewage system, gas or other facilities, including bathroom, toilet or central heating.

In households located in towns there can be observed only slight differences between regions and the analyzed indexes fulfillment degree is relatively high. Provinces, such as the Pomorskie and the Podkarpackie, are considered to have relatively good housing conditions in towns, whereas, the poorest ones are found in the Podlaskie, the Świętokrzyskie, the Mazowieckie and the Śląskie Provinces.

In turn, in rural areas the disproportions are significant which has been confirmed by calculated coefficients of variance and asymmetry and fluctuation amplitude. Good housing conditions in rural areas can be found in provinces of northern Poland: the Pomorskie, the Zachodniopomorskie, and the Opolskie, as well as the Podkarpackie and the Śląskie, while poor housing conditions are common for provinces of eastern Poland: the Lubelskie, the Podlaskie, the Małopolskie and the Kujawsko-pomorskie.

Taking into consideration the housing conditions in Poland it can be said along with the process of social and economic development, a significant improvement in the population existence quality has taken place. Dynamic growth of infrastructural indexes levels has been reported especially in rural areas and in the eastern part of Poland. However, due to significant developmental delay of these areas in the past, especially as compared to population centers of central and northern regions, the level of housing resources and availability of public facilities still leave much to be desired.

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## REGIONALNE ZRÓŻNICOWANIE POZIOMU I JAKOŚCI WARUNKÓW MIESZKANIOWYCH W GOSPODARSTWACH DOMOWYCH W POLSCE

**Streszczenie.** Warunki mieszkaniowe są istotnym czynnikiem wpływającym na poziom i jakość życia gospodarstw domowych. Problematyka mieszkaniowa jest ważną kwestią społeczną państwa, z uwagi na jej socjalizacyjne, ekonomiczne, a także społeczne funkcje. Mając na uwadze znaczenie mieszkań dla poczucia bezpieczeństwa i stabilizacji ludności, w artykule przedstawiono sytuację mieszkaniową w Polsce poprzez analizę regionalnego zróżnicowania wskaźników mieszkaniowych. Dodatkowo przedstawiono subiektywną ocenę warunków mieszkaniowych przez ludność zamieszkującą województwa kujawsko-

-pomorskie, mazowieckie i warmińsko-mazurskie. Badania te zostały przeprowadzone za pomocą metody CAPI. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych analiz stwierdzono, że zasoby i warunki mieszkaniowe w Polsce znacznie odstają od tych występujących w krajach Europy Zachodniej, a na terenie kraju są widoczne dysproporcje w tym zakresie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mieszkanie, zasoby, poziom, jakość, gospodarstwo domowe, regionalne zróżnicowanie

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