



(Dis)Satisfaction in
rural areas and agri-
culture? An analysis
of job and life satis-
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Introduction

Demographic change, the migration of young people away from rural areas and the resultant lack of manpower pose great challenges not just to agricultural employers but to policy as well. Poor quality of life in rural areas is often cited as a reason for migration. This paper thus compares life satisfaction amongst rural and urban populations, as well as job satisfaction amongst dependent employees in agriculture.

Principles of spatial planning

Preventing major disparities in living conditions between regions is a guiding principle of policy. Particular attention is paid to the uniform development of income and employment opportunities, and on ensuring a minimum level of public services. In Germany this finds expression in the Spatial Planning Act, for example, which aims to achieve 'equal social, infrastructural, economic, environmental and cultural conditions' throughout the entire country (§2 Para. 2 Nr. 1 ROG). Focusing specifically on rural areas, the principle of uniform development is also embedded in the statutory objectives of the not-for-profit Landgesellschaften operating in most of the

German Länder ('Improving living, working and environmental conditions in rural areas'). It is also reflected in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy in the greater allocation of funds given to the second pillar (development of rural areas).

A certain amount of information is needed to identify the appropriate policy measures to boost the quality of life in rural areas. This includes an answer to the question of whether the quality of life of the rural population differs to any extent from that of the urban population.

Measuring quality of life

The quality of life in a region is often equated with economic performance—measured as per-capita gross domestic product (GDP). In principle EU regional policy also follows this logic, so that top priority for support is given to regions with weak economic development, where per-capita GDP is less than 75% of the EU average. However, academics, politicians and civil society organisations are increasingly challenging the paradigm that social progress and quality of life are exclusively relative to material prosperity and consumption potential. 'Quality of life' is instead understood as a multi-dimensional concept that goes beyond income and consumption potential (NOLL 2000).

These developments are reflected in a variety of approaches for a multi-dimensional computation of quality of life, such as the **OECD Better Life Index** or the **UN Human Development Index**. In the report they put together for the French government, 'Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress', Stiglitz et al. (2010: xvii) summarise these approaches as follows:

¹ This article is in part based on the papers by Jantsch, A. and N. Hirschauer (2017): Lebensqualität und Lebenszufriedenheit in ländlichen Räumen. *Landentwicklung aktuell*, 2017 edition: 37–39. Bundesverband der gemeinnützigen Landgesellschaften (BLG) and Jantsch, A.; Weirowski, T.; Hirschauer, N. (2019): (Un-)Zufriedenheit in der Landwirtschaft? Eine explorative Analyse der Arbeits- und Lebenszufriedenheit in Ostdeutschland. *German Journal of Agricultural Economics* 68(4): 263–74.



Figure 1: Comparing life satisfaction of the urban and rural population



‘What we measure affects what we do. If we have the wrong metrics, we will strive for the wrong things’.

Working with a broader definition of quality of life, the Stiglitz Report offers greater consideration to subjective indicators to measure quality of life. One approach, for example, is to ask people how satisfied they are in various domains (work, family, social milieu) or in their life overall. For the question ‘How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered’ participants are asked to answer on a scale from ‘0’ (completely dissatisfied) to ‘10’ (completely satisfied). The idea behind this is that the rating of life satisfaction should take into account past, current and expected future life circumstances.

The development of life satisfaction over time

Figure 1 depicts the development of life satisfaction in Germany from 2001 to 2014. Although, according to a ZEIT article from 8 June 2017, the eastern Germans were as satisfied with their lives as the western Germans for the first time since 1990, in the years prior to this we can see a clear gulf in life satisfaction between the *new* (eastern) and *old* (western) Länder of Germany. Between the urban and rural populations, however, only slight differences in life satisfaction were evident. Only in the new Länder does life satisfaction in the countryside appear a little lower than in urban areas. In comparison to other groups (e.g. married/unmarried, employed/unemployed), however, this difference is very low.



An interesting trend has recently become apparent. In the period under investigation, life satisfaction in the countryside first surpassed that of the urban population between 2012–14. A similar development occurred in eastern Germany too, where in 2014 life satisfaction in the countryside was for the first time higher than that in urban areas, albeit only very slightly. Despite this, rural areas are often characterised by high levels of migration.

Job and life satisfaction of dependent employees in agriculture

The migration of young people can have direct consequences for agricultural enterprises, as it becomes increasingly difficult for them to find qualified manpower. Migration could also restrict quality of life in the countryside through negative feedback processes. Young people leave because they regard quality of life in the countryside as poor. And because many leave, economic strength and quality of life are further reduced, setting in motion a downwards spiral. When considering how employers and policy measures might intervene here, we need to determine the importance of working conditions in agriculture as well as living conditions in rural areas.

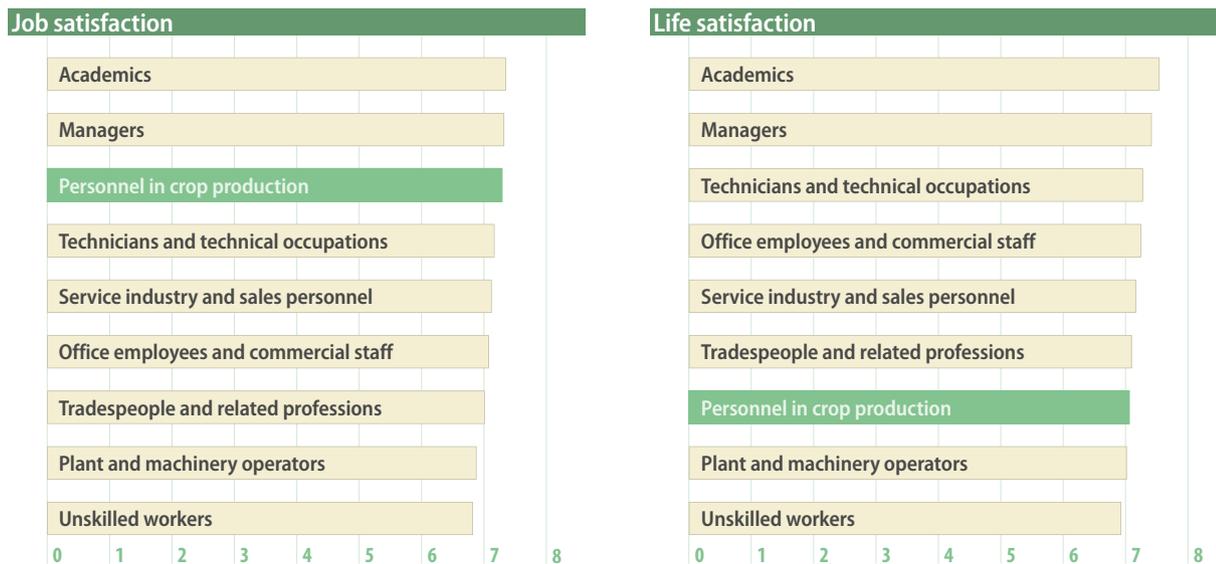
The infrastructure and general living conditions of a region are not, as a rule, directly affected by businesses. At the same time, however, they are of major importance to firms when considering the availability and acquisition of staff (BEETZ and NEU 2009). The general living conditions in rural regions, however, are only one factor of many that determine the attraction of a job in agriculture, which may be perceived as very low for a number of reasons. Right at the top of these, besides the rather negative image, is the poor pay compared to other sectors (GINDELE et

al. 2016), which has a negative impact on hiring staff. This is all the more serious seeing as agricultural jobs are often associated with a substantial physical workload, seasonal labour peaks and little free time or holiday (GINDELE et al. 2016, BITSCH and HARSH 2004). Limited training facilities and opportunities for managers in agriculture also make recruitment harder, especially of suitable up-and-coming managers (BITSCH and HOGBERG 2005: 661).

Figure 2 depicts the job and life satisfaction of dependent employees in crop production ('Personnel in crop production') compared to other occupational groups in eastern Germany. For a direct comparison of various professions, we rank the main different occupation groups as defined in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88) by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Two interesting findings can be seen here. First, the hierarchical order of job satisfaction of the non-agricultural occupation groups follows the order of educational level. The higher the degree of education or training, the more satisfied employees are with their job. The picture is different for dependent employees in crop production. Relative to their level of education or training they exhibit an 'over-average' satisfaction with their job. Second, for employees outside of agriculture the ranking orders of job and life satisfaction are congruent across all levels of education (with the exception of the service industries and technicians). For those working in crop production the situation is different. Here it is evident that a gulf exists between job satisfaction and life satisfaction, with the former clearly surpassing the latter. Two 'discrepancies' contribute to this: the aforementioned job satisfaction which is 'too' high, and a life satisfaction which is



Figure 2: Average job and life satisfaction of individual occupation groups, 2000–2014



‘too’ low, both measured against degree of education or training.

These findings suggest that the lack of manpower in agriculture is not a result of poor working conditions. On the contrary, an above-average level of job satisfaction appears to offset a lower-than-average appraisal of the rural living environment. This is an interesting finding, but we should not be rash in concluding that the lack of manpower in agriculture is mainly caused by shortcomings in the rural living environment. **Figure 2** depicts the opinions of those currently employed in agriculture. Young people on the threshold of their professional lives perhaps see this quite differently. Gender-determined

differences in role expectations can also play their part when choosing careers and jobs (LEHBERGER and HIRSCHAUER 2016). This means we still cannot be sure about the impact of work conditions in businesses and regional living conditions on migration. For policymakers and businesses in rural areas much more information is needed here. On the one hand there is a lack of information and surveys which differentiate between age groups, especially those focusing on young people. But there is also a lack of systematic studies of other regions (for example western Germany) and other groups of people employed in agriculture (for example those working in livestock farming). A more detailed differentiation of regions (districts, com-

munes), especially focusing on areas that are particularly marginalised economically and affected by out-migration, could also be insightful. ■

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Sources and credits

Title 'Welcome'-Design of the Renningen maize maze, 2016 © Lukas Weiß
▶ The first maze in a maize field was set out in 1993 in Annville, Pennsylvania. The maze designer, Adrian Fisher, shaped it like a stegosaurus. (Source: wikipedia)

Fig. 1 Comparing life satisfaction of the urban and rural population © Own presentation. The data used here comes from the annual household survey 'Life in Germany' (SOEP—Sozio-oekonomisches Panel) carried out by the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin.

Fig. 2 Average job and life satisfaction of individual occupation groups, 2000–2014 © Own presentation. Data: SOEP—Sozio-oekonomisches Panel/ DIW Berlin

