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SOCIO-GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE POPULATION UNDER CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS: THE CASE OF CHERNIVTSI REGION

Oksana Trusii

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Associate Professor in the Department of Economic and Social Geography, Faculty of
Geography

Mariia-Anastasiia Chubrei

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

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Abstract

The article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the socio-geographical study of population quality of life. It substantiates their application to the analysis of Chernivtsi region as a border region characterised by pronounced internal territorial differentiation. Quality of life is interpreted as an integral socio-geographical category reflecting not only the level of material well-being of the population, but also spatially conditioned opportunities for access to basic services, security, mobility, social integration and an environmentally favourable living environment. It is argued that, under contemporary conditions of wartime transformation, increased migration mobility, growing pressure on social infrastructure, and the reorientation of regional development, the territorial organisation of society is the fundamental factor shaping the uneven distribution of quality of

life. For Chernivtsi region, the key determinants include its border position, a finely dispersed settlement network, contrasts between urbanised, foothill, mountainous, and border-transit territories and the increasing role of social resilience and accessibility. The study proposes an analytical typology of intraregional territories according to the dominant parameters of quality of life. It outlines the priorities of regional policy aimed at reducing spatial disparities and enhancing the life capacity of territorial communities.

Keywords: quality of life of the population; human geography; territorial organisation of society; region; spatial disparities; Chernivtsi region; typology of territories.

СУСПІЛЬНО-ГЕОГРАФІЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ЖИТТЯ НАСЕЛЕННЯ В СУЧАСНИХ УМОВАХ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ ЧЕРНІВЕЦЬКОЇ ОБЛАСТІ)

Анотація. У статті розкрито теоретико-методологічні засади суспільно-географічного дослідження якості життя населення та обґрунтовано доцільність його застосування до аналізу Чернівецької області як прикордонного регіону з виразною внутрішньою територіальною диференціацією. Якість життя інтерпретовано як інтегральну суспільно-географічну категорію, що відображає не лише рівень матеріального забезпечення населення, а й просторово зумовлені можливості доступу до базових послуг, безпеки, мобільності, соціальної інтеграції та екологічно сприятливого середовища. Доведено, що в сучасних умовах воєнних трансформацій, зростання міграційної рухливості, посилення навантаження на соціальну інфраструктуру та переорієнтації регіонального розвитку саме територіальна організація суспільства виступає базовим чинником нерівномірності якості життя. Для Чернівецької області визначальними є прикордонне положення, дрібнодисперсна мережа поселень, контрасти між урбанізованими, передгірськими, гірськими та прикордонно-транзитними територіями, а також зростання ролі соціальної стійкості й безбар'єрності. Запропоновано аналітичну типологію внутрішньообласних територій за домінуючими параметрами якості життя та окреслено пріоритети регіональної політики, орієнтованої на зменшення просторових диспропорцій і підвищення життєвої спроможності громад.

Ключові слова: якість життя населення; суспільна географія; територіальна організація суспільства; регіон; просторові диспропорції; Чернівецька область; типологія територій.

Problem Statement

In modern Ukraine, the issue of the quality of life of the population goes far beyond the narrow statistical sense of the socio-economic dimension. Military events, large-scale internal displacements, changes in the role of border regions, increased infrastructure risks, and, at the same time, the growing importance of security, service accessibility, and social stability necessitate analysing the quality of life as a territorially organised social phenomenon. Chernivtsi region is an exemplary region in this sense. It is located in the south-west of Ukraine, has an area of 8.1 thousand km², is one of the smallest regions of the state in terms of territory, borders Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and its state border is 404.4 km long. The modern administrative-territorial structure of the region comprises three districts and 417 settlements, forming a complex configuration of territorial accessibility and social services. The region's population as of January 1, 2022, was 890.5 thousand.

That is why the study of quality of life in the region cannot be limited to income statements or individual social indicators. In the socio-geographic dimension, it should reveal how the natural resource prerequisites, settlement structure, border location, transport accessibility, the state of social infrastructure, security challenges, environmental risks and institutional capacity of communities are combined. This approach allows us to move from a sectoral description to a systemic analysis of the territorial organisation of the quality of life [4].

Research methodology

In geography, the quality of life is an integral synthetic category that combines the conditions of the population's life, the results of the territory's social development, and the degree of satisfaction of basic and extended human needs. The works of I. V. Gukalova emphasise that the quality of life in geography is not reduced to a standard of consumption or income level, but is a multidimensional characteristic of the development of space for human life, including its inclusion in public goods, services, and development opportunities. At the same time, methodological developments in the study of the living conditions of the population emphasise the need to combine the objective statistical and subjective social dimensions, as well as consider the economic, social, environmental and socio-cultural components in a single analytical system [1, 2].

Within the framework of the socio-geographical approach, it is advisable to interpret the quality of life as a function of the territorial organisation of society. It means that the central subject of the study is not only the set of social indicators themselves, but also the spatial method by which they are formed, distributed, and reproduced. In this approach, territorial differences in population density, the configuration of the settlement network, the location of service centres, the availability of medical and educational infrastructure, the state of transport connections, environmental safety, and the institutional capacity of government bodies become crucial. That is why the quality of life of the population is not just a social, but a socio-geographic category [3].

Main content

Methodologically, the study is based on systemic, territorial and typological approaches. The systemic approach allows us to consider quality of life as the result of the interaction among demographic, economic, settlement, infrastructure, environmental, social, and security subsystems. The territorial approach records the unevenness of their manifestation in different parts of the region. The typological approach ensures the allocation of territories with similar combinations of advantages and limitations. For empirical analysis, it is advisable to use official regional statistics, covering the blocks "population and migration", "labour market", "income and living conditions", "education", "health care and social protection", "culture" and "environment" [1].

Given current conditions, it is advisable to include at least 6 interrelated blocks in the integrated assessment of the quality of life in the Chernivtsi region. The first is demographic and settlement, which reflects the population size, the scale of communities, and the density and dispersion of settlement. The second, economic value, covering income, prices, investment base and the cost of everyday reproduction of life. The third – service-infrastructure, which includes the availability of healthcare, education, social services, digital and transport services. The fourth – security-sustainability, associated with the functioning of critical infrastructure, backup energy supply, and the system's ability to respond to risks. The fifth – social-inclusive, where the integration of internally displaced persons, barrier-free access, inclusion, and mental health are assessed. The sixth – environmental, which characterises the natural living conditions and environmental risks [1-3].

In the spatial organisation of the quality of life of the population of the Chernivtsi region, its border location is the starting point. The region combines a peripheral position in the all-Ukrainian system of transport flows with the potential for international transit and interstate interaction. The updated regional development strategy directly captures this

duality: the border location makes the region a potentially attractive transport corridor with established connections to Poland, Romania and Moldova, but it is also on the periphery of national transport flows. For quality of life, this situation means simultaneously expanding external contact possibilities while preserving intra-regional accessibility barriers.

The internal territorial differentiation of the region is very pronounced. Data on communities show significant differences in population and area. For example, the Storozhynets community has 42,154 people, Sokyrianska – 36,520, Novoselytska – 28,201, while Konyatynska has 4,792 people, and Selyatynska – 4,709. No less significant are the contrasts in areas: the Novodniestrovsk community occupies 7.1 km², while Selyatynska occupies 367.7 km², and Sokyrianska occupies 606.5 km². In a socio-geographical sense, this means different costs of spatial provision of life for the population, different configurations of daily trips, unequal density of social services, and different degrees of proximity to decision-making centres. Thus, the quality of life within the region is initially shaped by unequal territorial conditions [6].

Modern war conditions have significantly changed the social burden on the region. As of 2025, the Unified Information Database of IDPs in the region contained 73,140 people, including 19,691 children and 3,394 people with disabilities. On separate pages of the Chernivtsi OVA, it is indicated that more than 74,000 people have already found shelter in the region. 63 temporary residences with 3,225 beds are operating to accommodate them. In the geography of quality of life, this is fundamentally important, since it changes not only the burden on the budget and social infrastructure, but also the very social structure of communities, the configuration of local labour markets, and the need for educational, medical, psychological, and integration services. Thus, the Chernivtsi region now performs not only a border function, but also a compensatory and reception function within the all-Ukrainian space of life support [5].

A separate dimension of quality of life is the state of social and medical infrastructure. The hospital district development plan explicitly states that its goal is to ensure the region's population has territorial access to high-quality medical and rehabilitation care. A stable network of primary health care facilities has been established in the region, and by the beginning of 2026, 97% of health care facilities had access to alternative power sources. It means an increase in infrastructural sustainability, which in modern conditions is a component of quality of life no less than traditional indicators of service provision [6].

The development of the mental health sector is also indicative. According to the Chernivtsi OVA, in 2024, 6 mental health centres were created in the region, more than 1,500

primary health care workers underwent appropriate training, and almost 10,000 patients received outpatient rehabilitation care in 21 institutions. Another regional document states that 22 health care institutions in the region provide rehabilitation and psychological care. For socio-geographical analysis, this means expanding the functional capacity of the region's social space and a gradual transition from a narrowly medical to a comprehensive model of the population's vital stability [8].

The economic dimension of the quality of life in the region should be assessed not only through income but also through price pressures and the investment base for everyday reproduction. According to official statistics, in 2024, food products in the Chernivtsi region increased in price by 13.4%, while in 2023 the increase was 3.0%. At the same time, the official interregional table of capital investments for 2023 for the Chernivtsi region recorded UAH 2,808,344. This combination indicates that the quality of life here is determined not only by the availability of resources, but also by the ratio between the cost of living and the scale of the economy's material reproduction. In regions with a relatively modest investment base, price fluctuations are more likely to translate into everyday social restrictions [9].

No less significant is the environmental dimension. On the one hand, the regional development strategy states that the region ranks 4th in Ukraine in terms of water supply. On the other hand, the strategic environmental assessment report emphasises that the ecological situation in the region remains unstable due to a combination of landslides, floods, erosion, transboundary impacts, and the high vulnerability of landscapes. For quality of life, this means a duality in the natural basis for development: favourable resource prerequisites do not eliminate environmental risks, and therefore cannot automatically translate into a high quality of life without appropriate environmental and spatial policies.

As a result, in the Chernivtsi region, quality of life is shaped by the interaction of five key factors: border location, a finely dispersed settlement network, high internal community diversity, increased social burden due to the reception of IDPs, and the growing role of sustainable service infrastructure. It is this combination that makes the region not just an object of social statistics, but a territorially complex system of life support.

Within the framework of this article, it is appropriate to propose an analytical typology of the territories of Chernivtsi region based on the dominant parameters of quality of life. This typology is the author's interpretation, built on a combination of theoretical provisions of social geography and available official data on the region's spatial organisation [5].

The first type is the regional centre and the adjacent urbanised belt, where the highest concentration of services, jobs, medical and educational infrastructure, administrative

functions and digital services is observed. Here, the objective accessibility parameters are higher. However, housing and price tensions are increasing, as is the burden on social systems due to internal migration and the reception of displaced populations.

The second type is formed by border-transit territories, which are characterised by a combination of foreign economic and contact potential with a high dependence on the border regime, the state of transport infrastructure and customs and logistics functions. Here, the quality of life is largely determined by the potential of the border location as a development resource, rather than merely as a peripheral feature.

The third type is the northern and energy-infrastructure territories of the Dniester range, where larger communities determine the spatial organisation of life, the linear-nodal nature of settlement, transit and attraction to functionally specialised centres. They are characterised by a relatively higher level of infrastructural concentration, but also by a greater dependence on a limited set of economic functions.

The fourth type is mountainous and foothill peripheral territories, where environmental advantages, landscape attractiveness and recreational potential are combined with the increased cost of infrastructure maintenance, the dispersion of settlements and lower availability of specialised services. In these territories, the quality of life is determined not so much by the absolute volume of resources as by the ability to compensate for spatial remoteness through mobile, digital and intermunicipal forms of service.

The fifth type is formed by territories of enhanced social reception and integration of IDPs, for which the key factors are not so much the traditional parameters of material well-being, but the availability of places to live, social and psychological services, inclusiveness and the ability of local institutions to quickly adapt to new population groups. In modern conditions, this type increasingly affects the overall quality of life in the region [8].

From a socio-geographical point of view, improving the quality of life in Chernivtsi region cannot rely on a unified policy. It requires a territorially differentiated management model in which the regional centre, border nodes, mountain communities, transit territories and IDP reception communities are considered distinct functional subsystems. This is the logic underlying the updated regional development strategy, which lists among its priorities improving the quality of public services, creating safe conditions for comfortable living, integrating IDPs, and reducing disparities in community development and the quality of human life [9].

The primary direction is to increase the spatial accessibility of services. This is not only about preserving the network of basic institutions, but also about forming a multi-level

system of service centres, mobile services, telemedicine, schools and social logistics. Hospital district planning, mental health development, and measures to digitally connect educational institutions to Wi-Fi should be considered as a single block of territorial accessibility policy, rather than as separate sectoral solutions.

The second direction is the development of a barrier-free and inclusive living space. For an oblast that hosts a significant contingent of IDPs, has a dispersed settlement system, and strengthens mental health-preserving practices, barrier-freeness should not be an additional social option, but a basic criterion for territorial development. Important in this context are regional programs for social support of vulnerable segments of the population, measures to implement the concept of mental health care, and programs for the safety of educational institutions.

The third direction concerns the combination of natural resource potential with environmental safety. High water supply and favourable natural conditions do not eliminate flood, erosion, and landslide risks. Therefore, the region's quality-of-life policy should include not only environmental protection but also the adaptation of infrastructure and settlements to natural threats, which is especially important in mountainous and foothill areas [8].

The fourth direction is the use of the border position as a resource for everyday development. For Chernivtsi region, this means that cross-border connections, modernisation of checkpoints, development of transport and service infrastructure should be assessed not only in macroeconomic categories, but also through their impact on employment, mobility, availability of services, formation of local markets and, in general, on the quality of life of the population of border communities.

Conclusions

Therefore, socio-geographical research on the quality of life of the population enables us to go beyond a narrow socio-economic description and to reveal the spatial nature of life inequalities. Using the example of the Chernivtsi region, it was established that the quality of life is an integral result of the interaction among the border position, the territorial structure of settlements, large-scale contrasts between communities, the state of social infrastructure, environmental conditions and the latest security and migration transformations.

In modern conditions, not just the volume of resources becomes decisive, but the territorial accessibility of goods and services, the stability of infrastructure, the inclusiveness of social space and the ability of communities to integrate new population groups. That is why for Chernivtsi region, the quality of life should be assessed through a combination of

economic, service, environmental, security and settlement parameters and regional policy should be built on the principles of territorial differentiation.

The proposed typology of territories in Chernivtsi region shows that intra-regional disparities are not accidental but structurally determined. Accordingly, the strategy for improving the quality of life of the population should be based on spatially targeted solutions that strengthen functional centres, support peripheral and mountain communities, develop barrier-free access, expand mental health care, build cross-border infrastructure and strengthen resilience systems. Only under such conditions can the quality of life be considered not as a declarative social standard, but as a real result of a rational territorial organisation of society.

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