

# **The gradient of Life Satisfaction in urban and rural areas**

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The pandemic situation, due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, has emphasized the importance of quality of life in the place of living. Just before and during the lockdowns, many countries coped with the phenomenon of reverse migration (FAO, 2021). In Italy, internal migrant workers in occupations where working-from-home was feasible moved back towards the regions of origin, mainly located in the south and rural/peripheral areas. Quality of life arguments and the displacements have put, once again, the future of urban, rural areas and their sustainability back at the centre of the debate in the European Union (EU, 2021; Le Roy and Ottaviani, 2021). Therefore, analyzing what contributes to life satisfaction in urban and rural areas is paramount to tailor appropriate location-specific policies and to reduce disparities in quality of life among territories.

The present work analyses life satisfaction in Italian regions by looking at the urban-rural dichotomy. Specifically, this paper uses a broad definition of regional well-being that considers quantity and accessibility of services and amenities at the individual level. The core hypothesis is that the interactions between the individual and the place of living matter for life satisfaction. Certain services and amenities are essential but also the actual possibilities individuals have to interact with them. These opportunities vary according to individual constraints such as free time, age, health status, family commitment, job and income status, but also for external conditions such as the actual accessibility of infrastructures and amenities. The presence of a park at a reasonable distance from home without the real possibility to enjoy it might have a similar effect on life satisfaction of not having it at all. The same applies to public and private infrastructures and services as well as social interactions.

Furthermore, the urban-rural gradient of life satisfaction depends also on the strength of the linkages between areas. Indeed, it is likely to report higher life satisfaction in rural areas with good links with urban centres compared to other rural counterparts. On the same line, life satisfaction in urban areas with handy rural is likely to be higher than in other urban counterparts. To explore those issues, the paper uses data from the Survey Aspects of Daily Life of the Italian Institute of Statistic (ISTAT), a multipurpose survey on households. The questionnaire investigates individual socio-economic aspects affecting the quality of life and other related to the area of living. The dataset refers to 2013-2018 and includes 204,892 observations stratified by gender and age at the regional level. The question on life satisfaction is the following “Generally speaking, how satisfied are you in your life?”.

Considering the ordinal nature of the dependent variable (i.e. a five-point Likert scale used to assess life satisfaction) and treating the difference between the levels as rankings, the econometric strategy uses ordinal regression models.

In line with previous studies on the urban-rural dichotomy, results show that people in regions where urbanization is higher are, on average, less satisfied. Contrariwise to previous literature, new findings suggest that living in rural areas do not guarantee a higher life satisfaction per se. Indeed, in rural areas where the income per capita is low and public and private services, and amenities are scarce, people are not as much as satisfied. Therefore, a gradient of life satisfaction in rural areas emerges.