

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE PROVINCE OF AVILA, SPAIN: 1980-1988:
A SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

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"I liked and I like the pueblo, but I could not continue to live in it". (Vila-Valentí and Capel, 1970)

The above quotation by a Spanish emigrant reflects the subjective nature of the quality of life in certain areas, people are often forced to leave, usually for economic reasons. Therefore, the subjective perceptions of life quality may not necessarily coincide with the objective.

Geraldine Coakley, in a previous edition of *Chimera*, wrote on the quality of life in south Cork (Coakley, 1989). In this she dealt with problems which are also common throughout Europe and can be found, for example, in the province of Avila in Spain. This study of Avila's quality of life is based mainly on information obtained from a questionnaire survey and from the 1981 and 1986 Spanish Census.

The province of Avila is located in Old Castile (Fig. 1), and can be divided into two distinct parts - the Tierra Llana (Flat Land) to the north, and the mountains to the south which are dominated by the Sierra de Gredos (Fig. 2). The five study areas are chosen on the basis of this division. The town of Arévalo in the north, the nearly rural pueblo of Langa, the city of Avila (roughly divided between the centre and the outskirts) and a rural area in Gredos are the areas studied in the survey. In each one of the five areas, an equal number of questionnaires was distributed. In the Gredos area, three adjacent pueblos - Navarredonda de Gredos, Hoyos de Miguel Muñiz and Hoyos del Espino constitute one study area.

Firstly, income levels are investigated through the use of demographic and socio-economic indicators. Secondly, housing conditions are investigated. The section on opportunity deprivation deals with education and employment levels. Mobility and accessibility to services are examined, and the final aspect of the quality of life which is dealt with is the environment, i.e., crime and the physical environment.

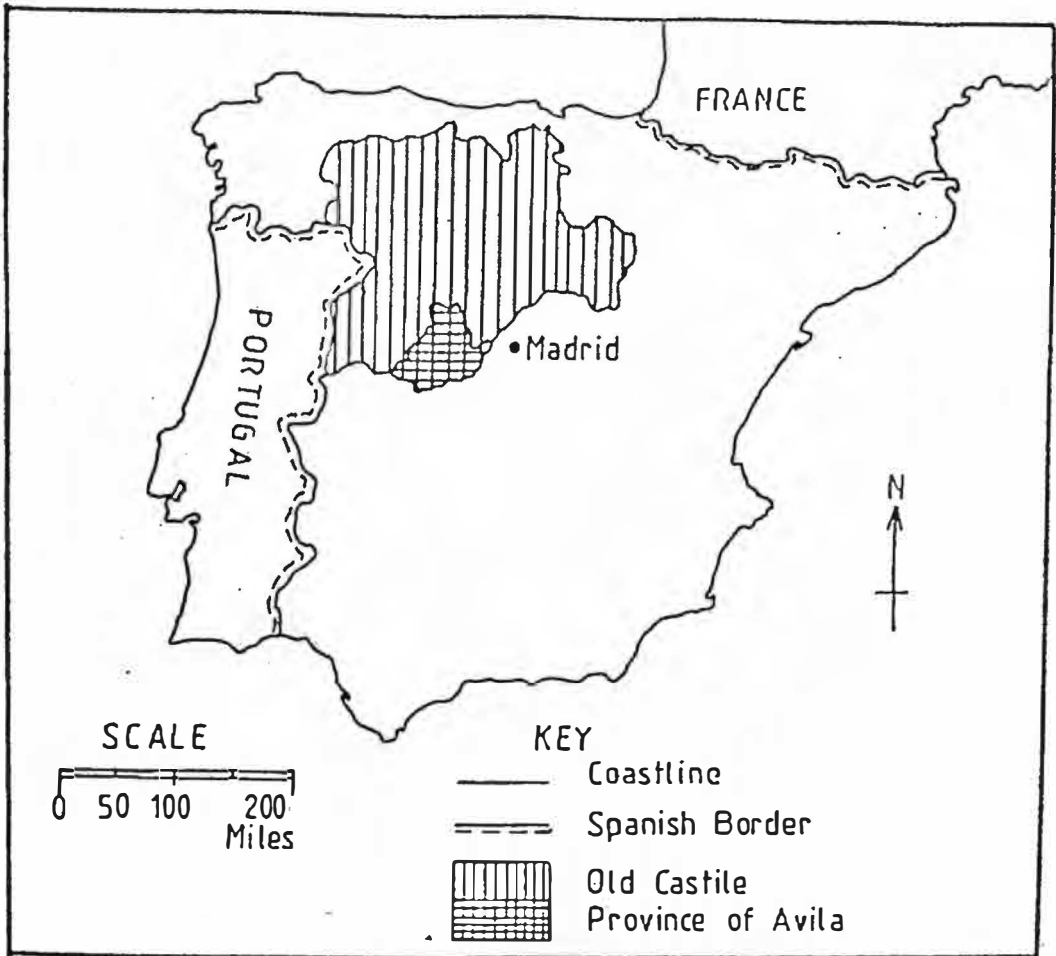


Figure 1 Location Map of Castile and Avila

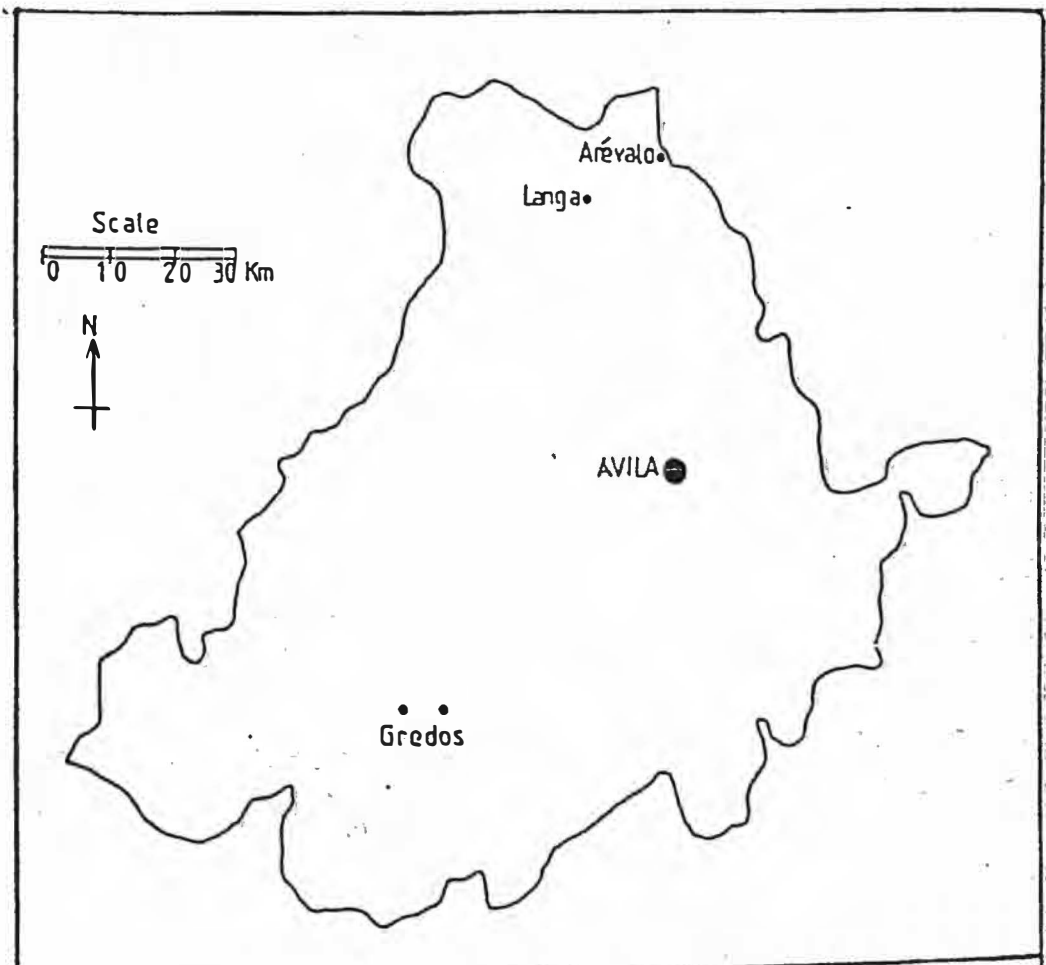


Figure 2 Province of Avila and Study Areas: City, Arévalo, Langa and Gredos

A Centre of Avila B Outskirts of Avila C Arévalo D Langa E Gredos

Figure 3 Respondents who feel their Income is Sufficient

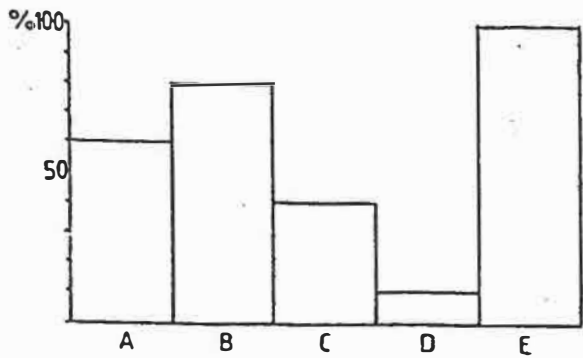


Figure 7 Respondents who feel Bus Service is Efficient

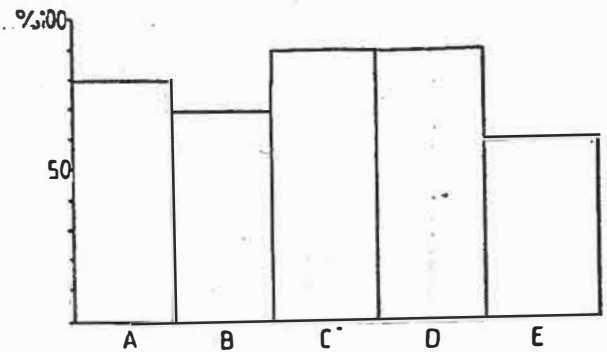


Figure 4 Respondents who feel Income has Disimproved since 1980

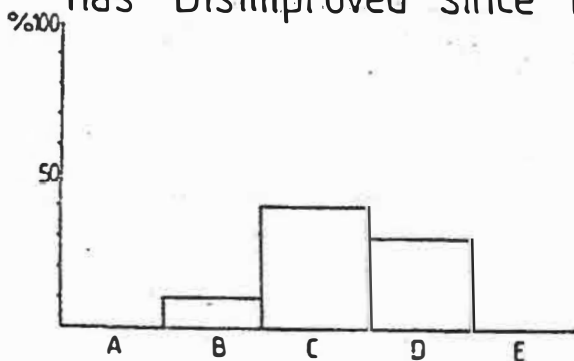


Figure 8 Respondents for whom Bus Fares are Too Expensive

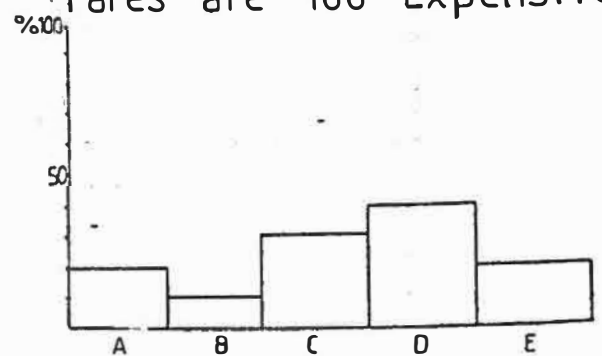


Figure 5 Respondents who feel they need more Household Amenities

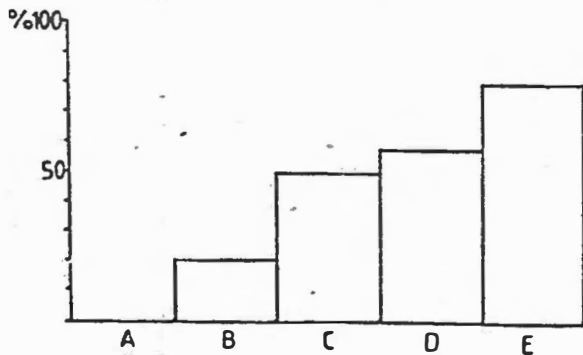


Figure 9 Respondents for whom Transport is Big Problem

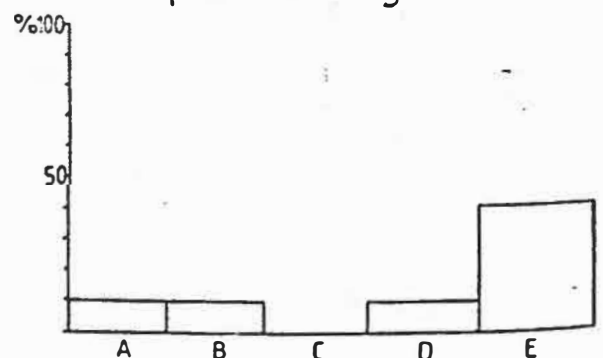


Figure 6 Households from which a Member has Emigrated

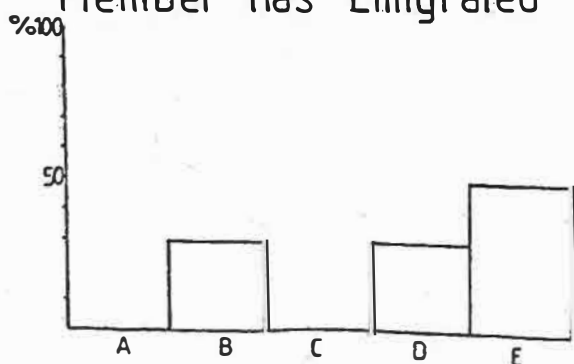
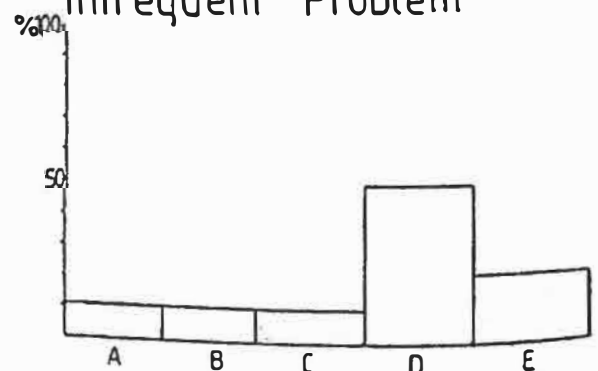


Figure 10 Respondents for whom it is Infrequent Problem



However, any study of the quality of life is incomplete unless the satisfaction of the people themselves is also taken into account. It may be that deprived people are completely content with their lot in life or vice versa. Each section of the questionnaire includes at least one question which is based on subjective criteria.

The first and most important aspect of the quality of life dealt with in this study is income. The number of income-earners per household is used as an indicator of general income levels. Through information acquired from the questionnaire survey, it is discovered that the urban study areas (the city of Avila and the town of Arévalo) have more income-earners per household than the rural areas. Socio-economic indicators are also used and the results of this also show a clear urban-rural distinction. Respondents were asked if they go away on an annual holiday and if their households have central heating and a car. In all three cases, the three urban areas have a higher positive response rate than the rural areas.

Respondents to the questionnaire were also asked if they feel that the weekly household income is sufficient. The results can be seen in figure 3. A massive 100 per cent of all respondents in the Gredos area are satisfied with their income. The outskirts of Avila is in second place with 80 per cent, with the centre at 60 per cent. Both of the Arévalo areas (urban and rural) have low levels of satisfaction - 40 per cent in the town and 20 per cent in Langa. The principal dichotomy is not urban-rural, but seems to be between the three general areas: the city, the Arévalo area and the Gredos area.

The objective analysis of income levels concludes that in very general terms, it seems likely that the income levels of the urban areas are higher than those of the rural areas. It can now be added that both areas of the city also have relatively high levels of satisfaction with income, which distinguish it from the other extreme, i.e. Langa, which is likely to have low income levels and has only a 20 per cent level of satisfaction. The Gredos area is remarkable because although its income levels are likely to be low, its level of satisfaction is 100 per cent. On the other hand, Arévalo is likely to have relatively high income levels, but its level of satisfaction is only 40 per cent.

Respondents were asked if they believed their income of 8 years ago was sufficient. The results can be seen in figure 4. In general, there is little indication of change, certainly of an improvement, in satisfaction with income levels. Both areas which show low satisfaction with income levels are the same two areas which report relatively high rates of disimprovement: 40 per cent of respondents in Arévalo feel their income has not improved, as do 30 per cent of those in Langa.

The second aspect of household deprivation is housing conditions. It is discovered that the vast majority of dwellings in the province of Avila have all the basic household amenities, and the frequency of central heating seems to have increased substantially since 1980. Langa is clearly by far the most traditional of the rural areas, with a very high proportion of combined family dwelling with agricultural use buildings, according to the Census, a fact which is supported by the questionnaire in that Langa emerges an area with a high proportion of old buildings. If it is true that older buildings tend to have worse housing conditions than new or refurbished buildings, then Langa is once again the most deprived, along with the centre of Avila.

Respondents were also asked if they feel they need any household amenity which they do not already have (Fig. 5). A clear urban-rural distinction is apparent and also a distinction between the three general areas. The highest level of dissatisfaction is in Gredos and the lowest is in the city centre (0 per cent). A general conclusion of the analysis is that Langa is the most deprived area with respect to housing according to various objective criteria. This is now compounded by a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with household amenities. The city centre is also an area with a large proportion of old and unrefurbished houses, but in this case, satisfaction with amenities is 100 per cent. On the opposite end of the scale, Arévalo has a very high proportion of new houses but a 50 per cent dissatisfaction with the level of amenities.

The best way to investigate the subjective perceptions on housing deprivation is to ask a direct question on the satisfaction of inhabitants with their dwellings. Respondents were asked the following question:

'If given the opportunity, would you prefer to live in a different house/flat?'

It is intended to give an overall indication of satisfaction with housing. A very clear distinction between the centre of Avila and the rest is apparent. As already seen, the centre of Avila and Langa are the areas most likely to suffer from housing deprivation. In the case of the city centre, this is now reflected in the subjective perceptions, but satisfaction is surprisingly high in Langa. It seems the dissatisfaction with housing conditions in the city centre is not due to material deprivation (income levels are likely to be high and satisfaction with household amenities is 100 per cent), but is strongly related to the age of buildings.

Respondents were also asked the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the dwelling. Some in the city of Avila said their house/flat is too small. Those who are satisfied with their dwellings usually give comfort to the reason.

The analysis of opportunity deprivation deals with education and employment. Areas which suffer from opportunity deprivation generally have one short-term solution, i.e. emigration. Data on emigration can therefore be used as an objective indicator of opportunity deprivation. According to the Census (1980 and 1987), total emigration in the province fell from 1765 persons in 1979 to 1505 in 1987, a small decrease, but a relatively high level overall. Respondents to the questionnaire were asked if any member of the household has left it in order to go to live in a larger town or abroad since 1970 (Fig. 6).

In both Langa and the outskirts of Avila, 30 per cent of respondents live in a household from which a member has emigrated. The largest proportion - 50 per cent - is in Gredos. This can be taken as a reliable indicator of spatial variations in opportunity deprivation.

When asked the reason for the decision to emigrate, most respondents give work as the simple answer, reflecting the involuntary nature of emigration. Therefore, as already mentioned, emigration may not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction with the quality of life. For example, one farmer in Hoyas de Miguel Muñoz said his son had emigrated 'para buscar otro modo de vida mejor' ('in order to look for another better way of life').

Mobility and accessibility are also concepts which depend a great deal on subjective criteria. Deprivation is a function of the way in which people perceive their own well-being. The people's

A Centre of Avila B Outskirts of Avila C Arévalo D Langa E Gredos

Figure 11 Respondents for whom Transport is not a Problem

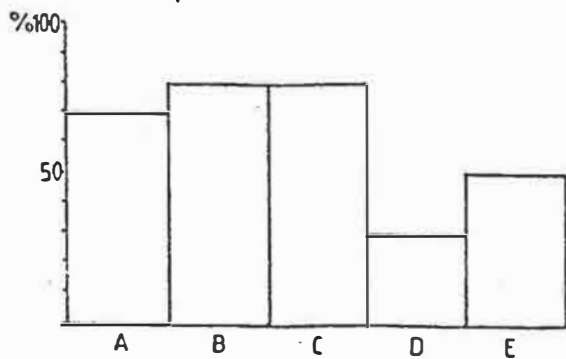


Figure 15 Respondents who feel Safe in their Area

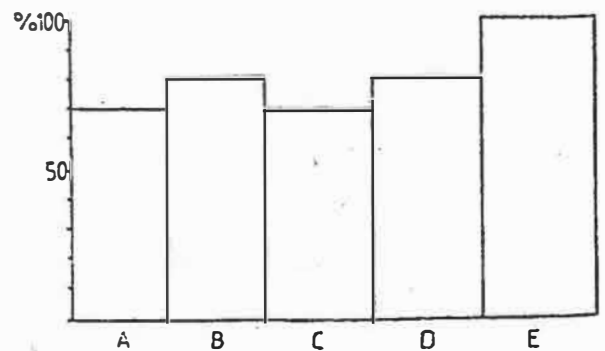


Figure 12 Respondents satisfied with Proximity to Services

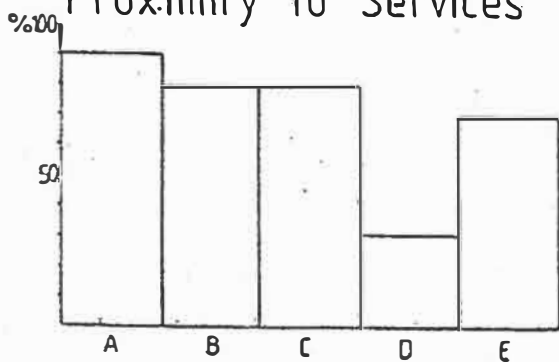


Figure 16 Respondents who feel their Water supply is clean

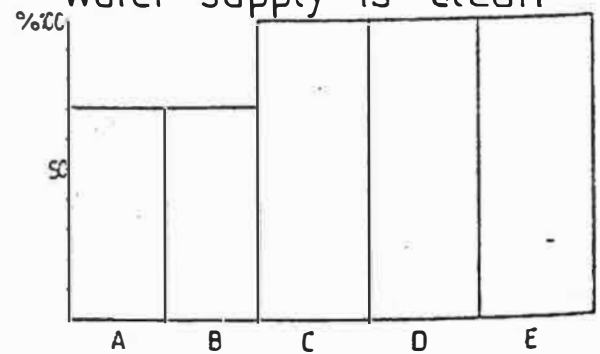


Figure 13 Respondents who feel Situation has Improved

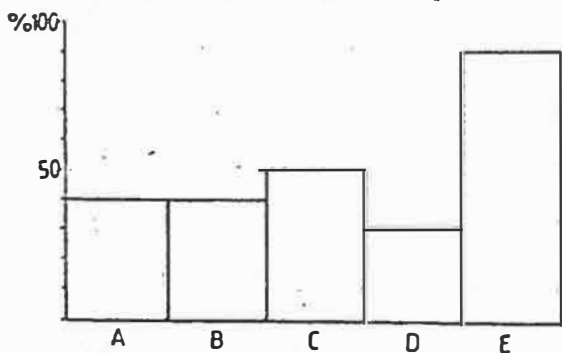


Figure 17 Respondents who would not leave their Area

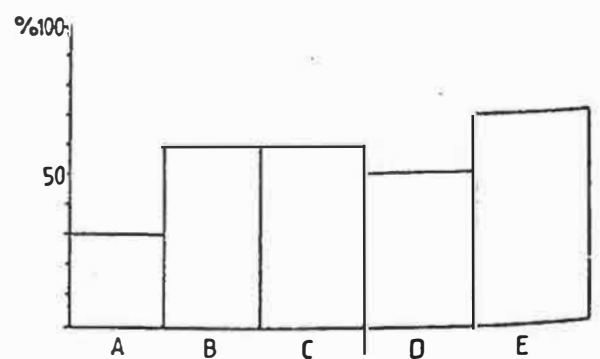


Figure 14 Respondents who would not leave their Dwellings

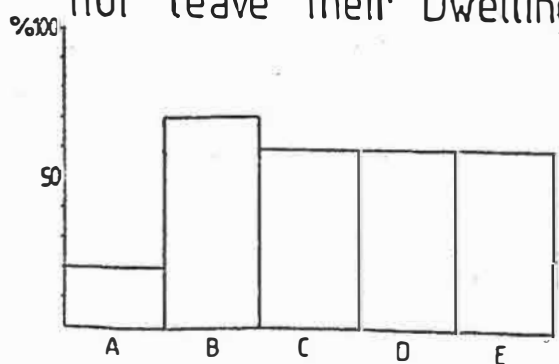
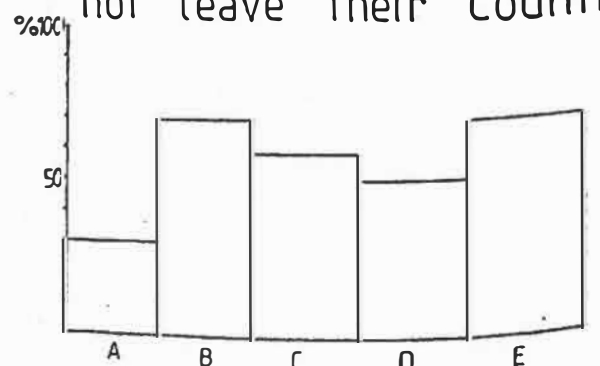


Figure 18 Respondents who would not leave their Country



perceptions of the availability of transport and their accessibility to the services which they need are facets of this deprivation.

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked

1. if they feel the bus service is efficient;
2. if they feel it is too expensive; and
3. if the rail service is too expensive.

As can be seen in figure 7, the level of satisfaction with the efficiency of the bus service is very high in all areas - 90 per cent in both of the Arévalo areas. The lowest is 60 per cent, which is in Gredos. As can be seen in figure 8, the satisfaction with bus fares is also quite high overall, ranging between 40 and 70 per cent. Once again it is lowest in Gredos, although the highest level of dissatisfaction is in Langa - 40 per cent say bus fares are too high.

Satisfaction with train fares is also very high overall, with Langa once again displaying the highest level of dissatisfaction (40 per cent). Sixty per cent of respondents in the city say train fares are not too expensive.

In general, it can be said that the highest levels of dissatisfaction with public transport in the province of Avila are in each of the rural areas, although overall, satisfaction is high.

In order to get a direct indication of subjective perceptions of mobility deprivation, respondents were asked if they feel transport is a big problem, an infrequent problem or not a problem for them and their families (Figs. 9, 10, 11). Satisfaction with transport is clearly highest in the three urban areas - between 70 and 80 per cent say it is not a problem. In Langa 40 per cent consider transport to be an infrequent problem and 30 per cent say it is not a problem. In Gredos, only 20 per cent say transport is an infrequent problem but 40 per cent consider it a big problem. Dissatisfaction is highest in Gredos, but of the two rural areas, satisfaction is also higher in Gredos. This may reflect a higher degree of polarisation in Gredos between the deprived and those who have access to transport.

Nevertheless, as a general rule, it can be said that satisfaction with mobility is lowest in the rural areas. Does this condition the level of satisfaction with accessibility to services? Respondents were asked if they feel their dwellings are situated close enough to the services which they and their families need.

The results can be seen in figure 12. As is to be expected, satisfaction with proximity to services is highest in the three urban areas. It is also surprisingly high in Gredos: 70 per cent of respondents in an area approximately 60km from the nearest large town say they feel they are situated close enough to the services they need. Langa is the area with by far the lowest level of satisfaction - only 30 per cent. It may be that the inhabitants of Langa have higher expectations as a result of being situated closer (by about 45km) to an urban centre. In order to examine satisfaction with accessibility through time, respondents were asked if the situation has improved since 1980 (Fig. 13). The highest level of improvement (80 per cent) is in Gredos, with other areas at or below 50 per cent.

In an analysis of accessibility, it is discovered that an urban bias exists in the provision of specialised goods and services. Despite this, the level of satisfaction in the Gredos area is still relatively high. This may again be a result of low expectation rates. The urban bias is reflected in the subjective perceptions of urban dwellers and of the inhabitants of Langa, reflecting the higher expectations in Langa (Fig. 14).

The environment is the only aspect of the quality of life dealt with in this study in which the results show a clear superiority of rural areas over urban. For example, only 30 to 40 per cent of dwellings in the rural areas are permanently locked, as against 80 to 90 per cent in the urban areas. Although indications show that the level of crime is low in the province as a whole, clearly rural dwellers exhibit a much greater feeling of security than urban dwellers (Fig. 15). Equally, while there is little evidence of air and water pollution in the province as a whole, city dwellers exhibit some doubt regarding the cleanliness of the water supply (Fig. 16).

The most important indication of life quality in an area is the willingness of the inhabitants to remain there. Therefore, the final section of the questionnaire deals with this. Respondents are asked:

- 'If given the opportunity, would you prefer to live in
- (a) another area
- (b) another country?'

The results can be seen in figures 17 and 18. As with dwellings, the lowest level of satisfaction with the area is in the centre of

Avila, while the highest in this case is in Gredos. Respondents who would like to leave the area were then asked the reason for their answers. One respondent in the centre of Avila gave a materialistic reason: 'Queremos más siempre' ('We always want more'). An explanation given in the outskirts of Avila is dislike of the other inhabitants ('gente maliciosa' - 'malicious people'). In Arévalo the reasons given are related to family. Some respondents would leave the town in order to be closer to their families. The reasons for leaving Langa and Gredos are boredom with the lack of people, of 'atmosphere' and of consumer goods.

The reasons for remaining in an area do not vary much. Many mention the peace and tranquillity (even those living in the outskirts of the city), and the purity of the air is also frequently mentioned. Outside the city, many respondents state simply that they would not leave the area because they were born there and have lived all their lives there.

Satisfaction with Spain corresponds exactly to satisfaction with the area. This probably reflects the satisfaction with the area. This probably reflects the lack of knowledge of other countries. (One couple said that they would not leave Spain because they do not know anything else).

It is clear that a subjective analysis is very useful in a study of the quality of life. In some instances the levels of satisfaction reflect the conclusions drawn by objective analysis. For example, the city of Avila is likely to have high levels of income and it also has a high degree of satisfaction with its income. Also, Langa is likely to have one of the lowest income levels and perhaps the worst housing conditions, and this is reflected in the fact that it also has the lowest level of satisfaction with income and with household amenities. Dissatisfaction with public transport and with general mobility is highest in the rural areas, which is logical given that car availability is lowest here and mobility is probably most important. In other instances the levels of satisfaction give a different perspective on the quality of life than that given by objective analysis. For example, although income is likely to be low in Gredos, satisfaction with income levels is 100 per cent. Also, a high dissatisfaction with the level of household amenities in

Arévalo is obscured by the fact that the highest proportion of new houses is here.

The basic trend which is established in the objective part of this study is that most aspects of the quality of life are better in urban areas than in rural areas. In the subjective analysis it is discovered that satisfaction with mobility and accessibility are also higher in the urban areas. But despite this, satisfaction with the area is not highest in the urban areas. It is highest in one of the rural areas and lowest in the city centre (Fig. 17). In other words, the quality of life is not simply a function of material well-being but is also conditioned by the environment and by subjective perceptions. Therefore, a subjective analysis is a useful and interesting compliment to an objective study of the quality of life.

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