

# 23. Disparities in Living Conditions and Life Standards of D.D.B.R.'s human communities - Sulina case study

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**A**bstract: Considering the socio-economic situation and the existing disparities of Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve's human communities, it is necessary to raise awareness among the local population, hence bringing greater benefits for the sustainable socio-economic development of the localities.

The changes occurred in Danube Delta during time, were triggered by the interaction of several decisive factors, such as: economic, political, social, environmental. As the deltaic landscape underwent major transformations, the relationship of local communities with the environment and natural resources changed as well.

Sulina, the only city in Danube Delta, was chosen as a case study to surprise both the positive aspects of life that can constitute support points for individuals as well as those components that remain in critical negative areas, permanent sources of dissatisfaction in people's lives.

The methods used in the research activity were the questionnaire and direct survey organized on five dimensions: living conditions, social environment, political environment, professional life, personal life. The main purpose was to capture as much as possible the elements describing the conditions and quality of life in Sulina city.

The results regarding the quality, complexity, and rhythm of Sulina's socio-economic life are directly influenced by demographic evolution, in general, and by the natural growth and migration rate as well as demographic aging, in particular. Based on statistical data interpretation it is emphasised that the quality of life in Sulina is ranked with medium level, with few support elements and many critical areas, especially regarding economic and social facilities.

**Keywords:** Danube Delta, living conditions, human communities, socio-economic development

## INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of the Biosphere Reserve, the Administration of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve has also been set up, having as object the creation and application of an administration regime for the preservation and protection of biological diversity in the natural ecosystems of the reserve, for the development of human settlements and economic activities in correlation with ecosystem support capacity (\*\*\*, 2015).

Sulina, the only city in Danube Delta is the easternmost point of the country, at the mouth of Sulina's canal, on the banks of the shores on a length of approx. 3 miles.

Over time, the population of Sulina has experienced numerical variations, depending on the socio-economic context of the region. If during the interwar period the population of the Sulina port reaches 15,000 inhabitants (during which Sulina had 40% of the total population of the Danube Delta), its number began to decrease considerably to 5,256 in 1997, 4,601 inhabitants in 2002, 4,569 inhabitants for year 2006 and respectively 4258 inhabitants in 2011, decreases due to declining birth rates, specific isolation of the Danube Delta, poor economic resources and insecure employment prospects, especially for the young population.

The research data presented in this paper attempts to capture as much as possible the elements describing the conditions and quality of life in the city of Sulina: references to the state of affairs, the assessments of the people on their own lives, but also the states of satisfaction / dissatisfaction that people are trying in relation to living conditions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods used in the research activity were the questionnaire and direct survey organized on five dimensions: living conditions, social environment, political environment, professional life, personal life. The main purpose was to capture as much as possible the elements describing the conditions and quality of life in Sulina city.

In this study were completed 40 questionnaires established from the sample of the selected population to fill the questionnaires, namely the active population from the city aged between 20 and 69 (representing 77.9% of the total population of 4258 inhabitants according to Population and Housing Census 2011) (\*\*\*, 2011).

The questionnaire variables included: socio-demographic indicators; socio-economic indicators; subjective indicators of the socio-economic state; access to public health services; the effective use of primary care and medication during the last 12 months prior to the survey by the subject and other members of the household; the level of (in) satisfaction with health care, the relationships between the people of the locality, the political life of the locality, etc .; appreciations regarding the relations with the neighbors; appreciations regarding the activity of the mayoralty in various fields; indicators of the health status of the respondent and other members of the household (\*\*\*, 2006).

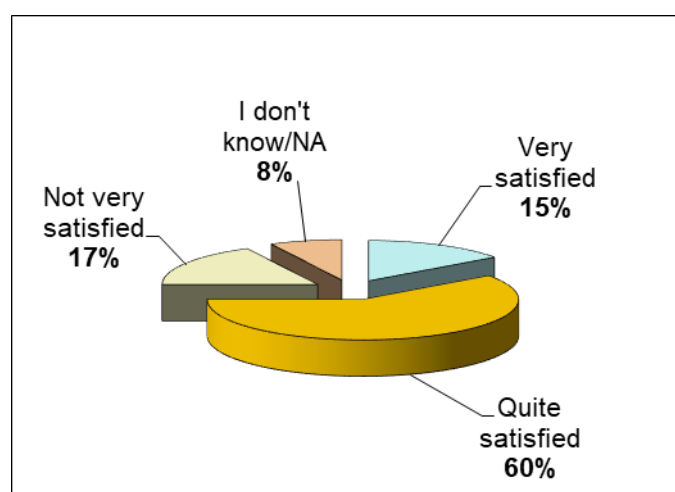
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Living conditions of Sulina city

This dimension includes a series of indicators designed to measure how people live, a living standard from an objective but also subjective perspective.

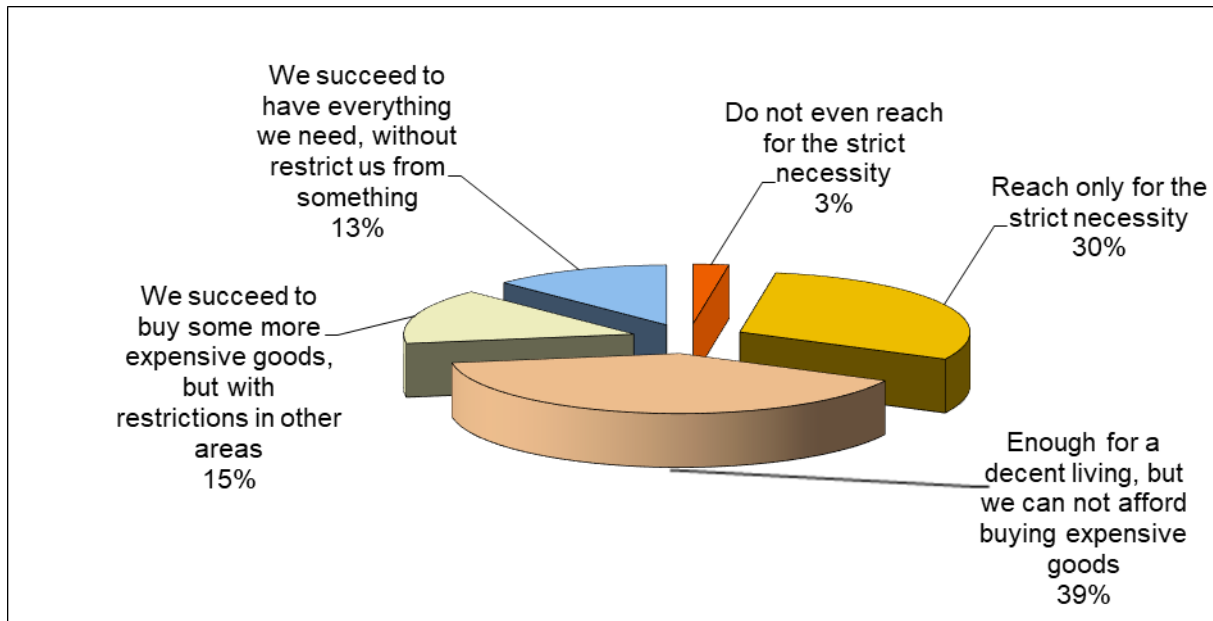
**Housing** is the main support element in the field of living conditions. There is a fairly high (60%) level of satisfaction towards housing (Figure 1) - 15% of respondents are very satisfied - the vast majority of the households from which the subjects come, owns the dwelling.

Regarding the number of household members, 65% said they had 3-5 members, 27.5% were 1-2 members and 10% more than 5 members. From the total number of people surveyed, 40% confirmed that they are carrying out livestock activities, saying they have cattle, poultry and pigs in their household.



**Figure 1** Distribution of responses about the degree of satisfaction of subjects related to their houses

**Income evaluation.** Residents surveyed in Sulina consider their income *enough for ensure a decent living, but they can not afford buying more expensive goods* (39%) (Figure 2).

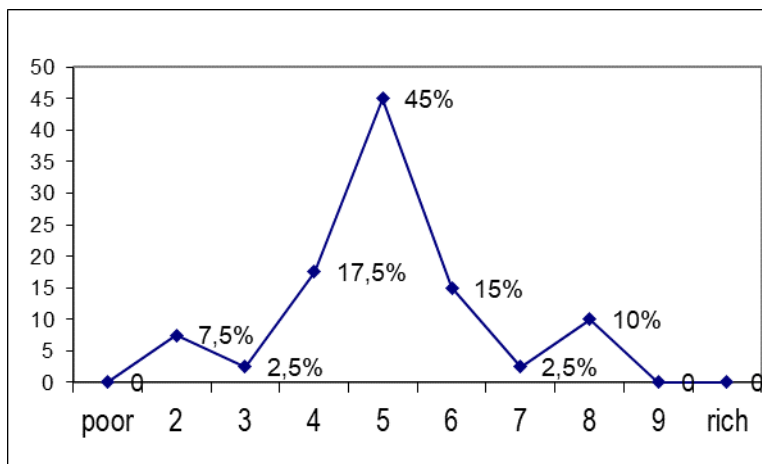


**Figure 2** Estimate family incomes related to needs

**Ensuring consumption needs.** 50% of people surveyed say they have not received products to meet their consumption needs, while 25% consider that products obtained in their household or received (from relatives, friends etc) provide them a quarter of consumption needs.

In terms of **income / expenditure ratio**, 52.5% of people surveyed say they fail to economize.

**Poor - Rich Scale.** On the poor - rich scale, 45% of subjects are considered to be positioned at the middle of the scale (step 5). Of the 55%, half said that the standard of living is between step 6 and step 9 (near wealth), and the other half (27.5%) is considered to be close to poverty (Figure 3).



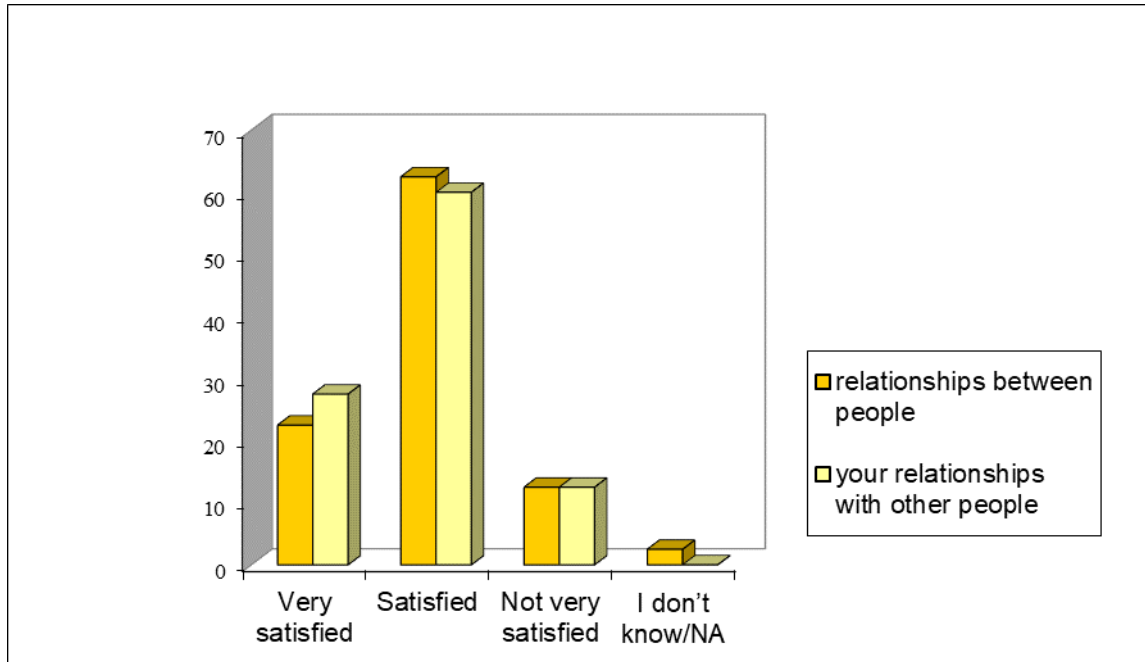
**Figure 3** Poor - Rich Scale

Another dimension of the standard of living is represented by the goods that benefit the household. The statistical analysis of the data collected on the ground shows that the housing of all the surveyed inhabitants are equipped with color television and running water, and more than half of the subjects declared that they own goods such as: automatic washing machine, refrigerator, cassette player, library with over 100 books, computer, cable network, mobile phone and fixed telephone.

## 2. Social environment

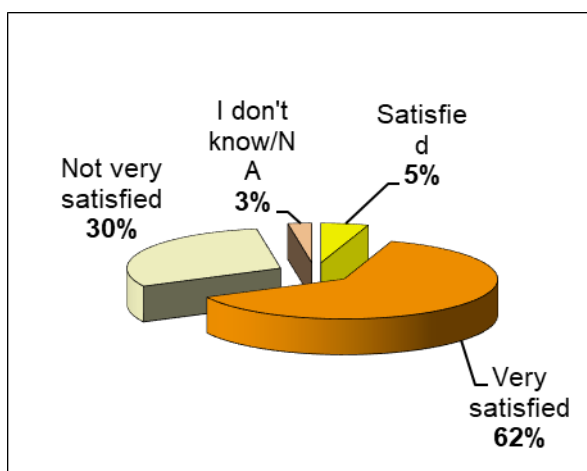
Evaluating the different components of the social environment creates a picture of the structural conditions that people are offered to society so that they can have a quality life.

**Neighbour relationships.** The main support elements are neighborhood relations. Gathered data indicates that people appreciate interpersonal relationships as satisfactory (Figure 4), the respondents being satisfied with both the community relations in general and the relationships they have developed with the rest of the locals.



**Figure 4** Distribution of responses regarding the degree of satisfaction with inter-human relationships

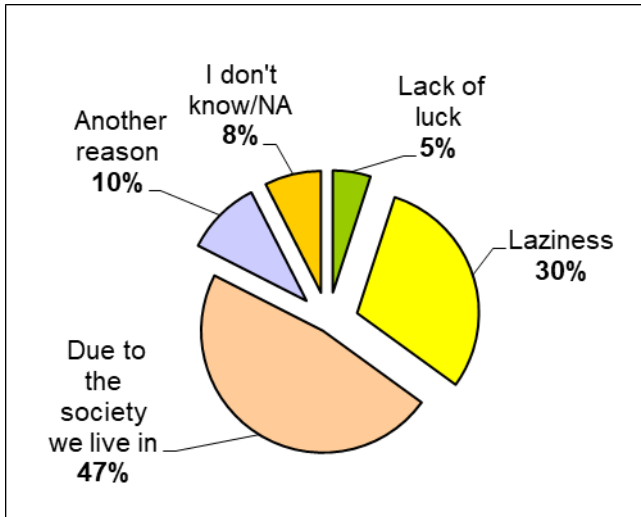
**Healthcare,** as a component of the social environment, is assessed by most subjects as positive (Figure 5). It is important to note that people can take as their reference in their assessments primarily the primary care that most people have frequent contact. It can count on the most personal relationship that people develop with medical staff, how they deal with their current health problems.



**Figure 5** Distribution of responses regarding healthcare

Another dimension of a decent standard of living refers to **leisure and recreational activities**, these activities being those that facilitate social integration. About half of the subjects are not too pleased with the conditions offered for leisure, while 33% say they are quite satisfied.

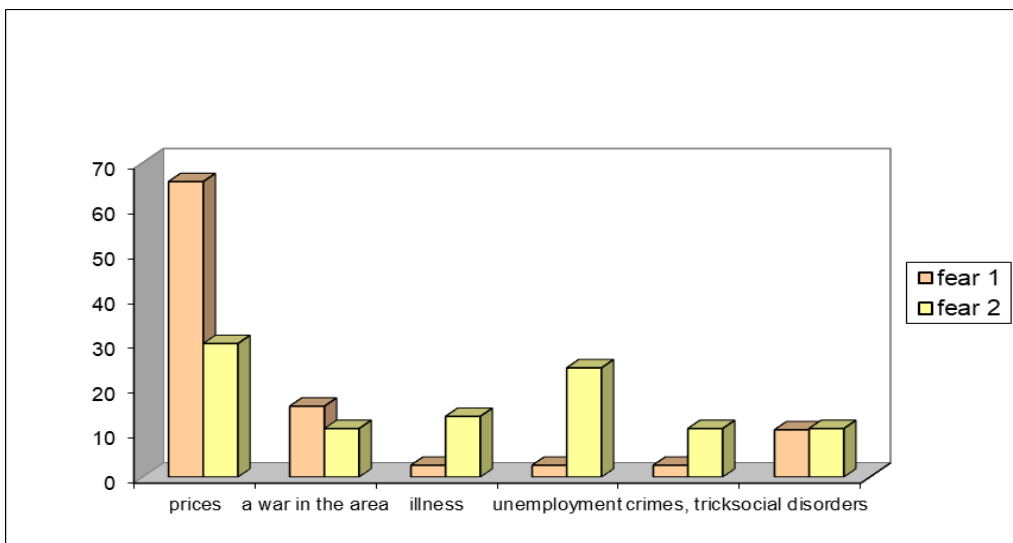
People's perceptions of **the poverty causes** are influenced by their own economic situation. The more a person faces greater economic difficulties, the more likely he is to regard poverty as a result of social injustice and less likely as a result of laziness or lack of will (Figure 6) Thus, almost half of respondents considered that poverty is due to *the society we live in* (47%). 35% of the respondents in Sulina cited the personal causes, 30% of whom considered poverty as a result of *laziness* and 5% put poverty on account of *lack of luck*.



**Figure 6** People's perceptions of the poverty causes in Sulina

Another included indicator relates to perceiving **the causes of prosperity** in Sulina. The subjects of the research were asked to answer the question: *How do you think succeeded most of the people who made fortune in Sulina? By ... (a single answer)*. After analyzing the results, it appears that 40% of the subjects believe that the existence of rich people is due to *the relationships* they have (Figure 7). The second identified reason is *labor and personal quality* (20%), and another reason refers to *breakdown of law* (18%).

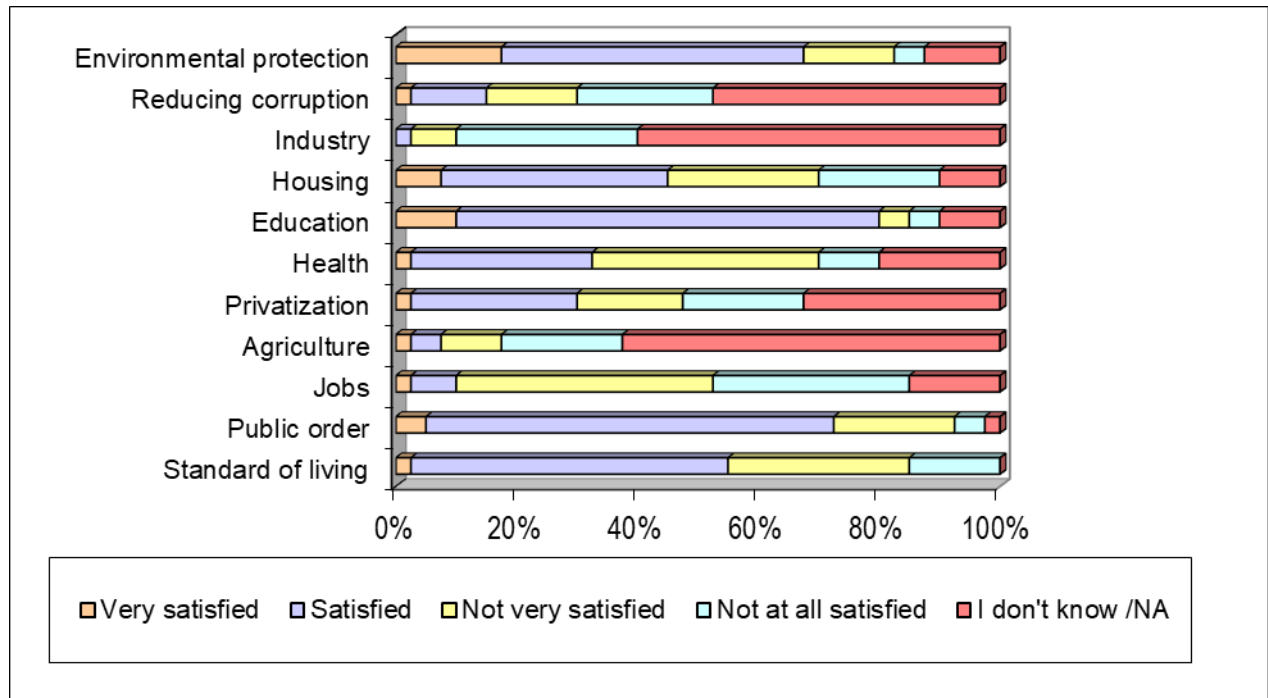
**The fears of the population** bring to attention important social issues, especially those on prices and taxes. The main fear (fear 1) mentioned by the vast majority of respondents is the illness (66%), followed by rising prices and taxes (fear 2) - Figure 7.



**Figure 7** The main fears of the population

### 3. Political environment

Most respondents consider that the direction towards which things are going in Romania is wrong (62.5%) being dissatisfied with the political life in the country as well as in Sulina. The residents favorably appreciate the City Hall's activity (Figure 8), especially in areas such as public order, housing, education, environmental protection.



**Figure 8** Distribution of responses regarding Sulina City Hall activity

40% of the surveyed population thinks their lives and families are into a very small extent influenced by the decisions of local and central authorities (eg. some people said *we would suffer from the increase in local taxes and fees... would decrease the family budget and, implicitly, our daily living standard*).

In order to capture an overview of living conditions and living standards in Sulina, locals were asked to find the most appropriate word to characterize the general situation in the city. In this sense, 57.5% of them appreciated an unsatisfactory / dissatisfied status of their living standard (Table 1), while 42.5% of the subjects are more optimistic about the general situation in the locality.

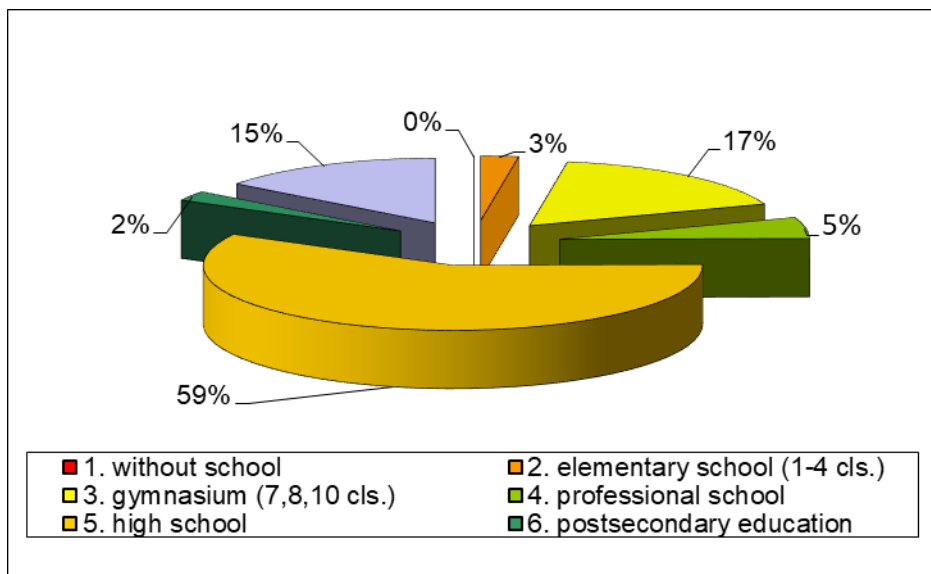
**Table 1** Sulina City general situation

Negative views (57.5%)	Positive views (42.5%)
poor living standards	constant
interest groups	incoming
stagnation (no enterprise)	good direction, tourism is growing
low level of development, chaos	good situation
all are expensive	satisfying
the lack of jobs	decency
unsatisfactory	good
low living standards	quiet
unsatisfactory service chapter	better
chaotic	satisfying
poverty	pretty good
bad life	acceptable
gloomy	quiet and good life
poverty	good

terrible	satisfying
unsatisfactory	things are getting better
it's not good	pretty good
living below people	
lack of jobs	
excessive prices	
poor supply	
chaotic	

#### 4. Professional life

The distribution of the active population according to the level of education highlights the fact that the majority (59%) are graduates of high school education and 15% are with higher education (Figure 9).



**Figure 9** Distribution of answers regarding the last graduate school

**Satisfaction with the job** is an important indicator in the subjective evaluation of the occupation and is influenced by both the individual's personal experience and the aspirations regarding his/her own job. The analysis of the results, taking into account the socio-demographic variables, shows an obvious link between the type of occupation and the satisfaction with the job. Higher qualification activities make individuals more satisfied, while heavier, unskilled jobs are more unsatisfactory. 57.5% of those surveyed declare that they are *quite satisfied* with their job while 12.5% admit that they are *not too satisfied*.

At the question *Do you want to change your job in the near future?* only 12% of respondents responded affirmatively, arguing that the current job is poorly paid. Given the loss of the current job, 32.5% of the surveyed population would undergo a re-qualification course while 37.5% consider the current qualification is sufficient (Figure 10).

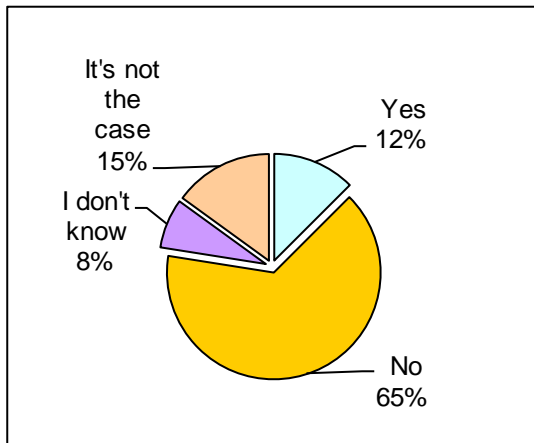


Figure 10 Responses regarding changing jobs

### 5. Personal life

**The state of health** is appreciated by the vast majority of respondents, either satisfactory, good or very good, most of them claiming that in the last year only occasionally took medicines or consulted a doctor (Figure 11). It is important to note that people can take as their reference in their assessments primarily, the primary care that most people have frequent contact. It can count on the most personal relationship that people develop with medical staff, how they deal with their current health problems. It can also be said of the stability of the time assessments that people make to receiving healthcare, especially in recent years.

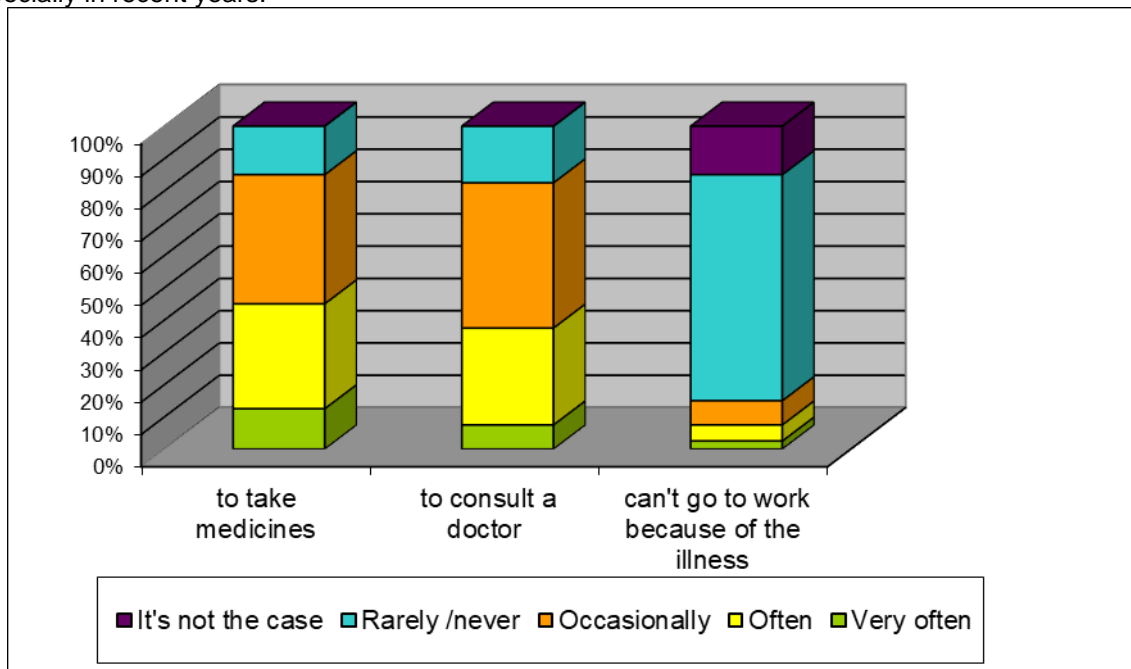
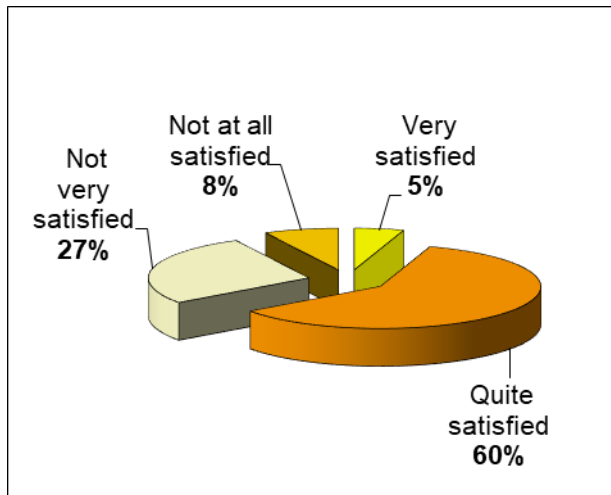


Figure 11 Responses regarding the last year's health

**Family relationships** are a dimension of personal life that the vast majority of the population positively assesses: 69% of the subjects said that they helps more with relatives.

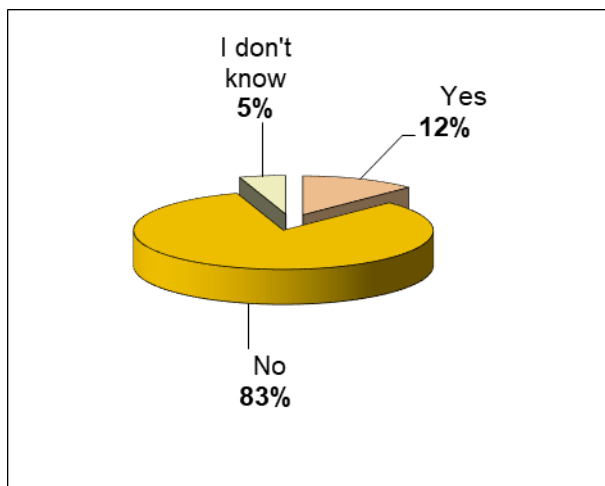
**Satisfaction with everyday life** surprises the state that is the result of all the conditions people experience in their lives (Figure 12). The data show that more than half of the respondents are satisfied and very satisfied with their standard of living (65%), while 35% are not very satisfied or not at all satisfied.





**Figure 12** Distribution of responses regarding the degree of satisfaction with the way of living

Although about 40% mentioned a low level of satisfaction with everyday life, at the question: *Do you want to move with residence to another locality in the next 5 years?*, a percentage of 83% of the subjects said that they did not want to move from Sulina and 12% answered yes, mention that their standard of living is satisfactory (Figure 13).



**Figure 13** The possibility of moving with residence to another locality in the next 5 years

## CONCLUSIONS

The data presented are a function of the objective life conditions, and on the other hand they depend directly on the expectations, preferences, values, needs, motives, people's states of mind. Thus, under similar conditions, people can relate differently according to their aspirations. Research results outline through aggregation a coherent picture of the living conditions of human groups and communities and society as a whole.

Based of statistical data interperatation it is emphasise that **the quality of life in Sulina is ranked with medium level**, with few support elements and many critical areas, especially regarding economical and social facilities.

The fears of the population bring to attention important social issues, especially those on prices and taxes.

The attitude of the population towards the future changes in the life of the city differs according to the social-demographic factors. An appreciable influence on the estimation of the situation is the age: young people between the ages of 18 and 35 - 37% consider that they will live better over one year.

The satisfaction of Sulina's residents toward political life and the assessment of the country's leadership is almost absence, being higher among people with a minimum level of education and among older respondents.

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