

# THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF RESIDENTS MIGRATING FROM THE MAINLAND TO THE ISLANDS: CASE STUDY OF BACH LONG VI ISLAND, VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article was to identify the factors that influenced the quality of residents' life in Bach Long Vi island, Vietnam. Survey data were collected from 63 households per total 150 household on Bach Long Vi Island, Vietnam. The research model was proposed from the studies of Quality of life (QOL). QOL is proposed as a multi- scale, multi-dimensional concept that contains interacting objective and subjective elements. The article relates QOL to the opportunities that are provided to meet human need in form of material well-being, community well- being, emotional well-being and health and safety well-being. Issues related to defining, measuring, and scaling those concepts are discussed. Policy implication will be showed to give conditions for maximizing QOL at individual and community in that island and all similar islands in Vietnam.*

**Keywords:** *Quality of Life, Bach Long Vi Island, Vietnam.*

## 1. Introduction

The term "quality of life" may have some similarities and overlaps but is not synonymous with several terms, including "well-being," "social indicators," and "way of life" among others (Andrews, 1980). Many authors in this area have adopted the phrase "level of well-being" as one that seems to show the QOL concept in short. However, the definition that will be referred to throughout this article is a somewhat broader one proposed by Rice (1984, p 157): The quality of life is the degree to which the experience of an individual's life satisfies that individual's wants and needs (both physical and psychological). Recent research on QOL has focused on two basic methodologies of measurement. One method utilizes quantifiable social or economic indicators to reflect the extent to which human needs are met. The other looks to self-reported levels of happiness, pleasure, fulfillment, and the like, and has been termed "subjective well-being".

A QOL assessment of small island inhabitants has often been approached by

analyzing levels of their social, economic, and cultural isolation, determined primarily by their geographical position: a sea-bounded landscape (Barrowclough, 2010, p. 28). However, based on states' development policies, construction of socio- economic infrastructure (social utilities, transport, electricity, and telecommunications) in recent periods have reduced life obstacles and limitations, improved connections between island and mainland at multiple aspects (in terms of increased accessibility of goods, services, as well as education and work opportunities and health care). Still, residents on a small and single island – like Bach Long Vi Island case, retains some characteristics that affect the overall quality of their lives. What is it that still shapes the specificity of the lifestyle of island populations, their customs and basic social values and their satisfaction of life?

## Study Area

Bach Long Vi Island, the selected island, is an offshore island with only one settlement, located in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin, Vietnam. The standard observation of the

impact of sea, which presents to an island's population both a physical and a psychological barrier that determines their daily living, and the analysis of the level of inter- island interaction and/or isolation of islands in relation to the mainland in various areas of life (King, 2009, pp.56- 9). The article mentioned binary relationships (island – sea and island mainland) through exploration of citizen's usage and sharing common natural capital (climate, soil, vegetation), as well as history, tradition, culture, and economic constraints. According to the classification scale of Lajić and Mišetić (2006) regarding the number of the inhabitants, Bach Long Vi is a medium island with about 700 inhabitants of 150 households, having small natural area about 3 km<sup>2</sup>. According to administrative unit, the island is a district of Hai Phong city, 110 km far from Hon Dau - Hai Phong. The main connection between the island and the mainland is by boat. Most of the island's residents are immigrants, 60% of whom are originally from Hai Phong.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The research methodology was

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Profiles (n=63)

Items	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	32	50.7
Female	31	49.3
<b>Age</b>		
Below 30	5	8
30-50	33	52.3
Over 50	25	39.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	52	82.5
Married	4	6.3
Widow	3	4.8
Divorce	4	6.3
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Unlettered	3	4.8
Elementary	12	19.0
Secondary school	16	25.4
High school	17	27.0
Intermediate level	2	3.2
University, college	13	20.6
<b>Income</b>		
Below 2.5 million VND	7	11.1
2.5 - 5 million VND	23	36.5

implemented through two steps: qualitative research and quantitative research. Qualitative research was conducted with a sample of 10 people. Quantitative research was carried out with a sample of 63 household per total 150 household by the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in March 2023. A personal interview survey method was applied: the researchers administered a questionnaire face-to-face in the participants' households. The participants were selected by combining the methods of intentional and non- proportional quota sampling. Such a method of sampling resulted in a total of 63 respondents, of which almost 90% lives in the island over 20 years. The sample evenly represents male (50.7%) and female respondents (49.3%). The respondents' age ranges from 19 to 65, divided into three groups: below 30; from age 30 to 50 and over 50. A significant proportion of participants fall within the 30-50 and over 50 age range (44.4% and 28.6% respectively). Almost of the participants are married or living with a partner.

5 - 7 million VND	12	19.0
7 - 10 million VND	7	11.1
10 - 15 million VND	9	14.3
Over 15 million VND	5	7.9
Length of stay		
Over 20 years	57	90.5
Below 20 years	6	9.5

The questionnaire focused on aspects, such as satisfaction with life in general, health, sense of safety, environment, public transport, lifestyle and other aspects of island life (Podgorelec & Klempić Bogadi, 2013). A five-order scale whereby higher values imply higher levels of satisfaction was applied to measure how satisfied each respondent was with the environment in which he/she lives. The overall assessment of the quality of life was examined using a five-point scale, from very poor (score 1) to excellent (score 5). Data obtained was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Statistical methods, used to analyse the data, varied from multivariate analyses, such as factor analysis in determining the dimensionality of life satisfaction, to regression analysis, used to verify the effects of contextual variables in respect to satisfaction and quality of life.

### Dimensions of Life Satisfaction and Assessment of Quality of Life

The first aspect of data collection related to satisfaction with transport and with one's own safety and was defined as satisfaction with infrastructure and services within a community (Community services and infrastructure, see Levangie et al., 2009). It was expected that people's satisfaction with transport would be related to the distance from their island to the mainland as well as to the quality of transport connections, i.e. to the type of maritime transport, to the frequency of connections between the island and the mainland throughout the year. The results show that the majority of respondents (84.3 % for intra-island transport and 61.9% for mainland-island transport) rated the quality of intra-island transport and the connection between the island and the mainland as good.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Table 2: Respondents' satisfaction on transportation

Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
intra-island transport		
Excellent	6	9.5
Good	53	84.1
Average	3	4.8
Poor	1	1.6
mainland-island transport		
Excellent	4	6.3
Good	39	61.9
Average	17	27.0
Poor	3	4.8

This perception of the people comes from the fact that there have been significant investments and changes in infrastructure compared to the period when they first migrated to the island. In Bach Long Vi district, there are 06 main roads with a total length of 16.7 km and the widest road is 5.5 m. Besides, Hai Phong City has deployed the Hoa Phuong Do public service ship to serve the military and people on the island free of charge using the city budget with a frequency of 3 trips/month. "Previously, traveling between the island and the mainland was very difficult, but with the attention of the authorities at all levels, the Hoa Phuong Do ship came into operation. We were very happy to see that the ship traveled quickly and safely, contributing to improving the lives of the people on the island." (Do Van Hong, residential area number 3, Bach Long Vi district).

When mentioned to the feeling of safety, respondents rated it equally positively. “No theft or any other form of crime”, “we don't lock our doors at night” are responses to security. They only expressed concerns about natural disasters and disputes if they occurred while participating in fishing grounds.

The second dimension, including satisfaction with the community and with the usage of leisure time, is called community social wellbeing (Community social well-being, see Levangie et al., 2009), and is an important aspect of quality of life, especially in small communities.

Table 3: Respondents' satisfaction on community well-being

Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
level of satisfaction of spiritual needs		
Excellent	9	14.3
Good	30	47.6
Average	22	34.9
Poor	2	3.2
level of satisfaction of cultural and artistic events		
Excellent	1	1.6
Good	8	12.6
Average	50	79.4
Poor	4	6.4
level of satisfaction of clean water and electricity supply		
Excellent	2	3.2
Good	33	52.4
Average	25	39.6
Poor	3	4.8

On the island, there are works that meet the spiritual needs of residents such as pagodas, and Ca Ong and Saint Tran Temples. The island also has parks and entertainment areas for residents. However, due to the remote distance from the mainland, cultural and artistic activities do not take place regularly, usually only held 1-2 times per year; there are no diverse types of entertainment for many ages. Spiritual ritual practices also do not take place regularly.

The current water demand for domestic use and ice production for ships entering the anchorage area in the port is an average of 500 m<sup>3</sup>/day, peaking at 600 - 700 m<sup>3</sup>/day. In 2030, the total population on the island is expected to be about 2,489 people. The water demand for domestic use is calculated at 200l/person/day and night. The total amount of water used for domestic use is about 498 m<sup>3</sup>/day and night. The total water demand on the island is about 822 m<sup>3</sup>/day and night (Le Van Huong, 2020). Currently, the fresh water on the island is only temporarily sufficient for the people and meets a small part of the needs of fishing boats. The source of fresh water exploited on the island is still too little compared to the demand, it is necessary to conduct drilling to find more underground water sources or invest in seawater filtration equipment.

The last aspect is satisfaction with education and health, including quality of education and health services, resilience to natural disasters, epidemics, emergency response capacity.

Table 4: Respondents' satisfaction on education and health

Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
Education		
Excellent	4	6.3
Good	23	36.5
Average	19	30.2
Poor	17	27
Health		
Excellent	5	7.9

Good	21	33.3
Average	25	39.7
Poor	12	19.1

The district medical center is 1.300 m<sup>2</sup>, with 3 doctors, regular medical examination and treatment equipment, and coordination with the 952 Navy Regiment Infirmaries. In 2011, the island's Medical Center was upgraded to a hospital with more than 20 beds, complete equipment and regularly welcomed volunteer doctors to the island to examine and treat residents living on the island. In case of emergency, helicopters will be used to transport patients because there are not yet modern medical facilities and equipment like on the mainland. This was also a major concern of the respondents (about 58.8% rated poor and average level).

The island has 1 kindergarten and 1 primary school including 2 one-story buildings and 1 two-story building with a total of 10 classrooms. Pupils graduating from primary school on the island are transferred to secondary school at Do Son, Hai Phong boarding school and are awarded scholarships. However, the quality of human resources and teaching and learning conditions on the island are not really good compared to the mainland. In particular, the fact that children must leave home and their parents early (after finishing primary school) to go to the mainland to continue studying are limitations that need to be overcome soon, meeting the aspirations of ensuring the social life of island residents.

#### **Comparison of the Quality of life on Islands Versus the Mainland**

To determine the quality of life on an island, perceptions of its quality of life were compared to those on the mainland. Slightly less than half the respondents (46.8%) considered that island people live much better, or to some degree better, than those on the mainland. About 18% of respondents made no difference, while the remaining (35.5%) felt that people on an island live worse or much worse than those on the mainland.

When considering the push and pull forces that create incentives for residents to migrate to the island (Everett S. Lee, 1966), job

opportunities, higher income, and abundant resources are considered among the factors promoting migration. Bach Long Vi Island has great appeal to workers involved in the field of fishing and fishery logistics services. Bach Long Vi is located in the key fishing ground in the Northern region, with fish reserves of up to 80 thousand tons. This fishing ground annually attracts a large number of fishing boats from the northern and central coastal provinces to fish. Since the completion of the southeast port, the number of fishing boats has grown rapidly, leading to the demand for fishing logistics services (gasoline, oil, food, fresh water, ice, boat repair, purchasing seafood caught by fishermen, resting, sheltering from storms, etc.). This opens opportunities for economic development and employment in the field of fishing logistics services on Bach Long Vi Island, creating a place to attract people to migrate to the island. According to statistics, in the period 2012-2022, each year more than 40 thousand fishing boats docked at Bach Long Vi port to exchange goods, take shelter from storms, and refuel (Bach Long Vi District People's Committee, 2023). Bach Long Vi Island has become an attractive destination for workers in trade, repair, fishing, etc. Therefore, although not enjoying policies from the State and local authorities under the migration program, many households still migrate to Bach Long Vi Island to seek employment and trading opportunities.

The reasons for people migrating to the island are diverse, but economic reasons account for a large proportion of migrants. Reasons such as going to the island to do business is easier, suitable for fishing, trading, and repairing electricity and mechanics, doing business in the countryside is difficult so going to the island to find new job opportunities (accounting for more than 52.8%). With the motivation to go to the island to seek opportunities to improve their income and livelihood, most islanders are quite satisfied with the standard of living on the island compared to the mainland. However, because

most islanders still have relatives on the mainland and children from grade 5 have to move to boarding school on the mainland, most islanders still have close ties with relatives on the mainland.

Those who rate life on the island as worse than on the mainland mainly comment on the aspect of meeting the quality of education, health care and spiritual and cultural life. The quality of infrastructure and human resources in health care and education on the island cannot be equal to that on the mainland.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results gained from this research showed that satisfaction with island life and evaluation of its quality is not directly related to the size of an island (community), whether its area or population size is large or small, but to involve restrictions on natural and economic resources, level of transport connection to the mainland and social life services.

Although the majority of residents of Bach Long Vi Island are satisfied with life on the island and determine that economic life is associated with island economic development, at the same time, Bach Long Vi island has also been focused on investing in physical infrastructure. However, to ensure and improve the quality of life of island residents, it is still necessary to focus on overcoming a number of problems: (i) Focus on ensuring residents' livelihoods; (ii) invest, upgrade and complete essential works such as electricity, roads, schools and stations, ensuring to meet living, learning and production needs; (iii) have special policies to attract more quality human resources to work on the island; (iv) pay attention to and increase the frequency of organizing cultural, artistic and sports programs and activities; (v) research to build inter-level schools (primary, secondary and high school) for children of islanders.

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