

# **THE ROLE OF QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE GERMAN UPPER NECKAR AREA**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

**BOLTON BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

## 1. Abstract

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The purpose of this research project is to analyse the importance of 'quality of life' (QoL) for the recruitment and retention of high skilled employees in urban-rural areas, as these areas have issues with skills shortage – not least due to urbanization.

The research is conducted as a mixed methods approach by

- critically appraising the literature surrounding the topic
- semi-structured interviews with experts to win insights inductively
- an online survey based on the findings to gain quantitative data for triangulation, and to explore additional insights on and by the employees.

All three methods in combination reveal a complex and dynamic, partly unconscious, very individual set of drivers for the intention to join, to stay, or to change a place of living, or place of work. Even if some causalities like the influence of social contacts, family situation, existence of opportunities for professional development at the place of living, and more become apparent, the topic has to be treated in a more generalist way.

Hence, the result is a conceptual model of the position of QoL within a holistic system. This is seen both as a contribution to the discussion about the role of factors influencing employees, and as an impulse for public and private partners to conjointly work on the understanding, improvement, and marketing of urban-rural regions and their economy regarding QoL and the interconnections to other factors.

Especially as the influence of COVID-19 is rated high by both scholars and the respondents, investigation of trends in the field by a longitudinal design is recommended. Further research on detailed characteristics of perceptions, causalities, interdependencies, interferences, and further gaps in knowledge could improve understanding, and applicability of the concept.

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**Abbreviations**

5G .....	Fifth Generation technology standard for cellular networks
AI.....	Artificial Intelligence
BMI .....	Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community
BW .....	Baden-Württemberg
COVID-19 ..	Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
EPSC.....	European Political Strategy Centre
EU .....	European Union
FWA .....	Flexible Work Arrangements
GDP.....	Gross Domestic Product
HARP .....	Heightening your Awareness of your Research Philosophy
HLY.....	Happy Life Years
HR .....	Human Resources
HRM.....	Human Resources Management
IoT .....	Internet of Things
KSAOC.....	Knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics
n/a .....	Not available
NET .....	NeckarErlebnisTal
OECD.....	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PESTL .....	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Law factors
Pol.....	Place of work-life Interference
PoL.....	Place of Living
PoLC.....	Place of Living Changers
PoW .....	Place of Work
PoWC.....	Place of Work Changers
QBE .....	Quality-of-Business-Environments
QDA .....	Qualitative Data Analysis
QoI .....	Quality of work-life Interference
QoL .....	Quality of Life

QoW.....	Quality of Work
SHRD.....	Strategic Human Resources Development
SIE .....	Self-Initiated Expatriates
SME.....	Small and Medium Enterprises
STEEPLED..	Socio-demography, Technology, Environment, Economy, Politics, Law, Ethics, and Demography analysis
TPB.....	Theory Planned Behaviour
TRA.....	Theory of Reasoned Action
UNCTAD....	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WHO .....	World Health Organization
WHOQOL..	World Health Organization Quality of Life
WIF.....	Work-Interferes-with-Family
WIL.....	Work-Interference-with-Life
WLB .....	Work-Life-Balance

(For terms, see *Table 50 – Glossary in Appendices*)

## 2. Acknowledgements

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This research project tries to gain insights on quality of life (QoL) and its influence on both a geographic area, and on business development. The author took the risk of examining a very broad topic with hardly defined limits at the end of 2019 by choice.

There was no choice at the beginning of 2020: Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) brought massive changes to the world. Being part of a virus crisis task force, which meets seven days a week, meant the author having very limited time to finish the work. The additional, unreckoned influences had to be included into the study, too.

In this stress fields, the author likes to thank Ron Smith, Mathew Shafaghi, and Rolf Richterich from the University of Bolton for their patience, and their always very constructive feedback and support.

Moreover, Joachim Klein as a fellow student contributed his ideas and questions – both being brilliant and inspirational.

Six experts agreed to spend their time on answering the questions on the topic.

A very special thank goes to the Municipality of Sulz am Neckar, which enabled the author to begin studying again – and to finish, despite the disruptions at the end.

Lastly, it would not have been possible to study at all without the backing of the family.

A big thanks to all of you – and, stay healthy, which seems to become the new formula.

Frank Börnard

### 3. General overview

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*While leisure plays an increasingly important role in individuals' lives, little is known about its potential to influence career sustainability.*

Kelly et al. (2020, p. 1)

*COVID-19 will reshape our world. We don't yet know when the crisis will end. But we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different.*

Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union (European Union External Action, 2020)

This thesis is written under unique circumstances: COVID-19 brought the biggest challenge ever (e.g. Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, 2020; KPMG, 2020; Moody's, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020) to the globalized, digitized, mobile world which is dependent on networks, free flow of people and goods, just-in-time delivery, global supply chains, and other contemporary, seemingly reliable achievements taken for granted.

Early in 2020, climate change and forced migration were seen as the key issues to solve (European Commission, 2019a; Jones, 2019); skills shortage, digitization and disruptive changes were considered to be the most important tasks to deal with (e.g. Fasse, 2019).

Prosperity and growth were still the unquestioned priorities and dictums of every action. For example, Peter Altmaier, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, stressed: 'No climate protection at the expense of jobs' (Drebes and Quadbeck, 2019).

But as soon as February, according to Sherman (2020) 'ninety-four percent of the Fortune 1000 are already seeing COVID-19 disruptions', Roubini (2020) diagnosed the 'deepest economic shock in history'.

### 3.1 Introduction

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the importance of 'quality of life' (QoL) and its position within a system of influencing factors for the recruitment and retention of high skilled employees in urban-rural (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014; Eurostat, 2013) areas.

### 3.2 Structure of the Dissertation

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The study starts with a description of the 'NeckarErlebnisTal' (NET; a part of the Upper-Neckar-region) which is seen as a typical case for an urban-rural area. It then focuses more generally in the literature research on trends in the job market. A simplified conceptual model visualises the underlying set of questions.

Finally, a mixed method approach (Saunders et al., 2016) is used:

- semi-structured interviews with experts to win insights inductively
- an online survey to gain quantitative data for triangulation, and for additional insights by and on the employees.

To evaluate the influence of COVID-19 (WYSE TRAVEL, 2020), interviews were repeated in part, two questions have been added to the survey.

After presenting and analysing the findings, a conclusion and recommendation completes the study.

### 3.3 Information on the Author of this Report

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The author works as a business developer and public service employee for the municipality of Sulz upon Neckar. He is a vice chairman of the association NET (see *Appendices*).

### 3.4 Information on NET

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The association was founded to promote tourism, leisure activities, and events within the urban-rural area, which is situated a one hour's drive south of one of the most attractive metropole areas in Germany, Stuttgart (Movinga, 2019; ZDF, 2019). NET's purpose is also to support business development by improving and communicating location factors. The three towns in NET (see *Appendices*) suffer from a high ratio of out-commuters, and from skills shortage.

### 3.5 Contribution to Knowledge

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On a more general level, employees today have more

- freedom to choose their place of living (PoL)
- bargaining power
- opportunities to develop.

Trends (Internet of Things, IoT; digital and remote work; restricted traffic; complex forms of commuting) have to be considered in to understand what drives especially skilled workforce to stay, join or resettle.

Knowledge on the influence of available information about QoL on such decisions, and the measurement of it contributes to science, as it may indicate and enable analyses of the allocation of employees (which may influence for example regional development strategies). Existing literature covers more generic and global trends in job mobility and migration, but not the influence of QoL on staying or joining Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in urban-rural areas. This type of areas covers a large portion of inhabitants (see *Appendices*).

QoL is often seen as a factor to be considered by industry and public to directly drive economic growth, regional development, or health (e.g. Fan, Goetz and Liang, 2016; Lee and Sirgy, 2004; Michalska-Żyła and Marks-Krzyszowska, 2018). But rarely as an argument for strategic human resource development (SHRD; Kelly et al., 2020) and, moreover, as an influencing factor which may in the 'locus dimension of causality' (Weiner, 2019, p. 604) motivate employees externally. The impact of QoL may overweight internal reasons, prerequisites, and attributes, like frequently experienced in the fundamental attribution error (Sanderson, 2010).

From an economy perspective, the usage of arguments regarding QoL to keep and win-over high-skilled employees might reduce costs and time for recruiting, and contribute to an improved quality and performance of the workforce as 'primary objectives' for 'scarce resources' (Lock, 2014, p. 6), but also to benefits for society. Hence, a first step could be made to a strategy orientated 'area competence check' similar to the 'Enterprise Competence Check' (ECC; Ortiz, 2017; Steinbeis UKC, 2020).



### 3.6 Contribution to Professional Practice

In the rapid and unpredictable changing process, communities seek to influence the allocation and relocation of both labour and jobs (see *Figure 1 – Goals of Communities Regarding Job and Labour Allocation*).

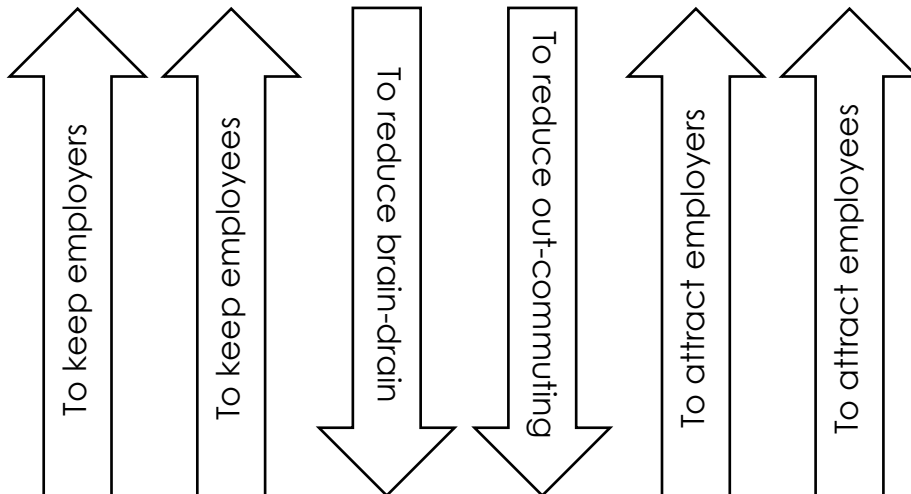


Figure 1 – Goals of Communities Regarding Job and Labour Allocation

Source: (Own work)

Regional marketing using information on QoL as a promotional tool may contribute to overcoming skills shortage, but also to attracting and retaining companies (see e.g. An et al., 2014; Clodnițchi, 2017; Curran et al., 2016; Crook et al., 2011; Döring et al., 2010; European Committee of the Regions, 2018; Florida, 2012; Gerhard, 2018; Krabel and Flöther, 2014; Lawton et al., 2013; Lee and Sirgy, 2004; Mohammadian and Rezaie, 2019; Nefedova et al., 2016). This is particularly important, as the issues and negative effects around commuting are in discussion (Jacob et al., 2019; Woods and Heley, 2017).

NET will profit directly by choosing appropriate arguments, and indirectly, as the cooperation with SMEs could be intensified, if NET can deliver effective arguments to partnering companies who can use them for recruiting. The latter potentially through using candidate personas as semi-fictional representations to target potential

employees (Courage, Baxter and Caine, 2015; Maurer, 2016; see *Appendices*) as they are successfully used for sourcing (McQuaig, 2020).

Research can deliver value for more than the Upper Neckar area, as the phenomena of urbanization and labour allocation are currently changing globally – and especially towns have to market themselves to ‘brain gain’ employees (Apolitical, 2018; Ceric and Crawford, 2015; European Committee of the Regions, 2018).

### 3.7 Scope of the Study

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This research project will focus rather on labour mobility than job mobility, as on the one hand multiple factors and their interconnections may contribute to the allocation of production facilities. On the other hand, the underlying process is seen as even more individual than the change of Place of Work (PoW). In many cases, relocation decisions are driven by complex networks, multinational companies, or political developments (e.g. Conroy et al., 2016; Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2019; Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, 2019; Pedersini, 2006; Piotti, 2007; Love and Crompton, 1999). The process is therefore usually concealed, hardly observable and in practice findings would be even less generalizable, and locally less influenceable than labour mobility.

If QoL is relevant and marketing is about decisions (Court et al. 2009) – and the choice of the place of living (PoL) is an important decision in life – understanding and communicating the differences between urban-rural and urban environments in such ways as regional and place branding is vital for towns (Donner et al., 2017). What is needed is information on the topic and its impact on the intention to stay or intention to leave of the employee.

Due to the limited scope, the impacts of commuting, new forms of work and production, and the allocation of jobs in urban-rural areas will be considered, but they are not the main focus of the study.

### 3.8 Research Questions

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- 1-What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to join SMEs in urban-rural areas?
- 2- What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to stay at SMEs in urban-rural areas?
- 3-How should local businesses and urban-rural areas respond to the challenges of attracting skilled employees regarding quality of life?

### 3.9 Research Objectives

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- 1-To critically review the demand for and supply of skilled workers in urban-rural areas
- 2-To assess the key factors which attract and keep skilled workers
- 3-To measure the importance of quality of life
- 4-To recommend a strategy for urban-rural areas to use information on quality of life as marketing tools to enhance the recruitment and retention of skilled employees

### 3.10 Research Ethics

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See *Appendices* for research ethics compliancy to University of Bolton Standards and checklist RE1.

### 3.11 Conceptual Framework Model

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The conceptual framework (see *Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework for the Research Project*) visualizes the main focus of the research project.

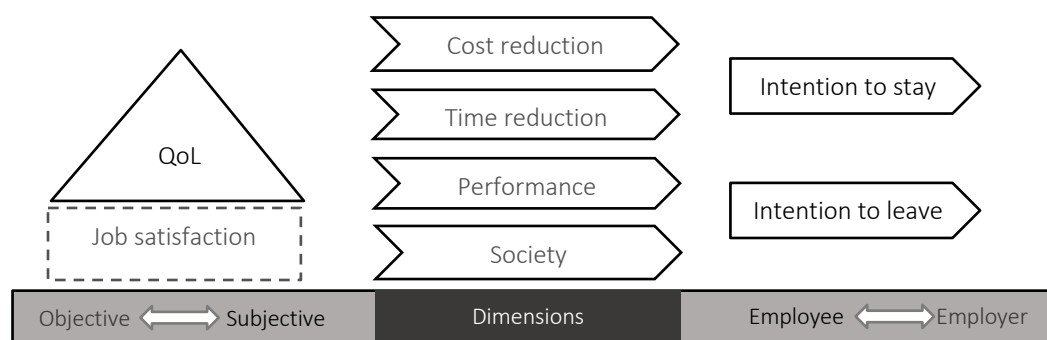


Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework for the Research Project

Source: (Own work)

The study should explore relations between QoL and job satisfaction in the dimensions objective and subjective on one side, and intention to stay and to leave (including those that leave other regions and can be attracted) for employees and employers on the other. It is not visualized as 'cause and effect' (Fisher, 2010, p. 141) with arrows from box to box, as in a postmodernist view, complex underlying social and value systems are assumed. In the centre of the research are employees with their subjective view on QoL.

#### 4. Literature review

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Due to developments in the micro-, meso- and macro-environment like demographic, technological, and structural change, international conflicts, climate crisis, forced displacement, and pandemics outbreaks, the worldwide economic system is under pressure (e.g. Bormann et al., 2018; Laudicina et al., 2019; Nuvolari and Russo, 2019; UNHCR, 2018; WHO, 2020a). Massive changes may increase labour mobility in all three forms (long-term labour mobility, cross-border mobility, and posting of workers; see Fries-Tersch et al., 2019, p. 18), but also may lead to an increase of job mobility (Love and Crompton, 1999; Kotler et al., 1993; Meier, 2017; Rabianski, 2007): some production facilities and companies will be placed where workers are living.

##### 4.1 Challenges in Urban-rural Areas

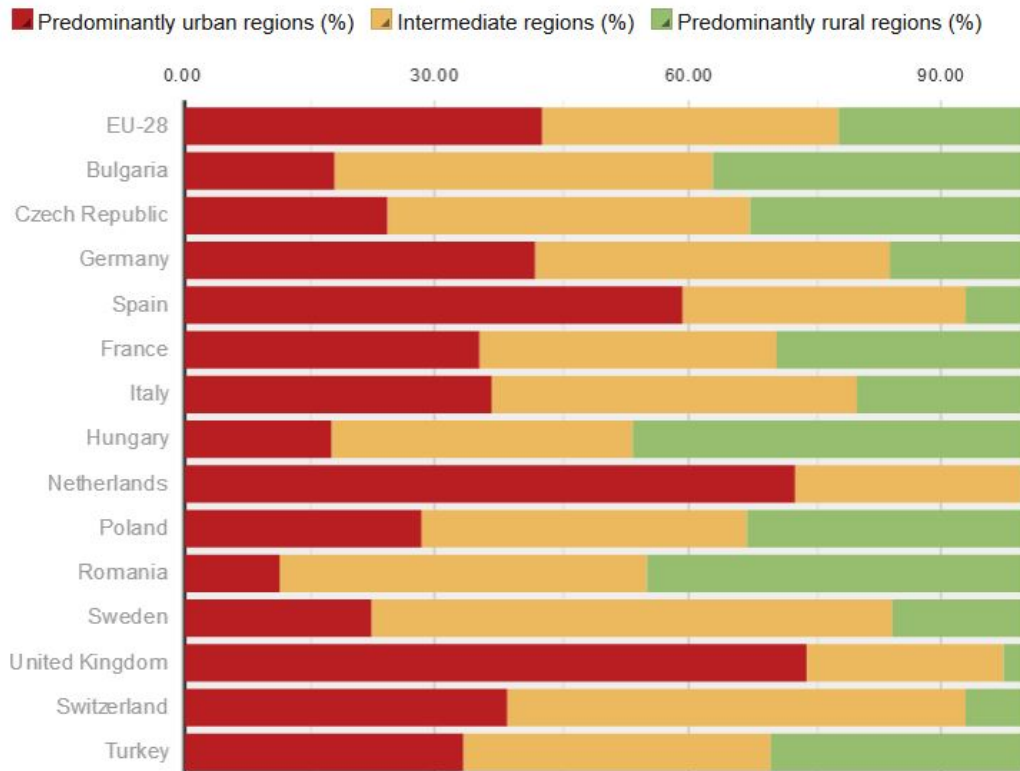
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Skills shortage is already one of the crucial bottlenecks for businesses (Krabel and Flöther, 2014; Horbach and Rammer, 2020). This relates especially, but not only, to Germany (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Housing, 2016), and to the state Baden-Württemberg. The latter is characterized by:

- a high demand for skilled, innovative employees (Baden-Württemberg International, 2016; Bosetti et al., 2015)
- a record low unemployment rate (Destatis, 2019a; Trading Economics, 2019a, 2019b)
- demographic change and an ageing society (Henger and Oberst, 2019).

Migration could contribute to a mitigation of these issues, as countries like Germany are seen as highly attractive (European Committee of the Regions, 2018; Mercer, 2019a, 2019b; Numbeo, 2019). The new 'Skilled immigration act' is expanding 'the possibilities for qualified professionals to come to work in Germany' (The Federal Government, 2020). But the preferred locations for academics and (especially) migrants/self-initiative expatriates (SIE) are mainly metropole areas (Bosetti et al., 2015; Ceric and Crawford, 2015; Facchini and Lodigiani, 2014; Fassio et al., 2019; Lawton et al., 2013; Sander,

2014; Silvano et al., 2015). On the other hand, rural areas are the home of about forty-two percent of the population in Germany and thirty-five percent of EU-28 (Eurostat, 2013; see *Figure 3 – Population structure by urban-rural typology*).



**Figure 3 – Population structure by urban-rural typology**

Source: (Eurostat, 2013)

As pull-factors, cities offer in regards to jobs diversity, higher wages, better advancement opportunities and easier professional development (Gil et al., 2014; Mohammadian and Rezaie, 2019; Mercer, 2019b), and as personal soft-location factors for example an urban environment with its leisure and social opportunities (An, Kang, and Lee, 2014).

Rural areas offer lower costs of living, less pollution, less traffic jams, lower noise, more nature experience, cultural heritage, convenient job locations, higher security, and affordable housing. Nonetheless, they face brain-drain and partly rural exodus or at

least rural-urban migration (Nefedova et al., 2016; Schumacher and Kunz, 2016). Hence, the urban concentration process intensifies (Gans, 2018).

Urban-rural areas combine the characteristics of both types, and the advantages and opportunities, for example by offering an urban-like infrastructure, or proximity and high-speed connections to the cities if necessary (Backman and Nilsson, 2018; Die Bundesregierung, 2017; Goncalves, J. et al., 2017; Graves, 2018; Khorasani and Zarghamfard, 2017; Möbert, 2017, 2018, 2019). But this rather leads to more commuting or ‘increasingly versatile and complex forms of job-related spatial mobility’ (Rüger et al., 2014, p. 221) than to a drop of skills shortage for companies in the urban-rural areas. ‘Cities and their surrounding countryside belong together’, states Gerhard (2018) and ‘the spectrum of change from rural to urban is discontinuous, lumpy, and multidimensional, and [...] it arises from underlying social processes’ (Iaquinta and Drescher, 2000, p.2).

The costs of mobility (ranging from environmental impacts to health) and initiatives to reduce them are subject to many studies (Agora Verkehrswende, 2017; Anenberg et al., 2019; Barslund and Busse, 2016; Behrmann, 2019; Carta and De Philippis, 2018; Dickerson et al., 2014; Ellis and Rocks, 2019; Li and Pollmann-Schult, 2016; Lorenz, 2018; Mauss et al., 2016; Stutzer and Frey, 2007), and high commuting rates are often seen as a threat to the cultural life, to citizen participation, to economy and to more factors of ‘dormitory’ towns (Helicon, 2018).

## 4.2 Chances for Urban-rural Areas

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Due to new digital opportunities like remote work, 5G, IoT, additive layer manufacturing, decentralized production, digital nomadism, artificial intelligence (AI), cognitive technologies, and automation, to name a few, there might also be 'counterurbanization' in the near future. Moreover, there are tendencies to see migration less static and 'once in a life'-decisions (see *Table 1 – Selected trends in rural-urban migration*):



Source	Trend	Description
Apolitical (2018)	Returners	High school graduates above the age of 30 return from big cities to rural towns
Graves (2018)		Millennials done with city life – they search for a cheaper live-style, space, or family friendliness
Abousleiman (2019); Bradford (2019); Cirillo et al. (2019); Deloitte (2019); European Commission (2018, 2019c); Fassio et al. (2019); Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (2019); Levels (2016); Mascheroni (2007); Mourtzis and Doukas (2012); Rauch et al. (2017); Reichenberger, (2018); Remoundou et al. (2016); Schmidt (2017); Thompson (2018)		Counterurbanization: The future is rural and live will become more locally focused
Iorio and Wall (2012, p. 1446); Liu and Cheung (2016); Schofield and Fallon (2012); Wang and Xu (2015, p. 242)		People develop and keep (increasingly over social media) a ‘sense of place’ as ‘meanings, knowledge, attachment, commitment and satisfaction that an individual or group associates with a particular place’. It lets more local people ‘with vision and experience in the outside world’, return to their birthplace.
Remoundou et al. (2016)	Counter-urbanization	Counterurban mobility and counterurbanization as resistance to crisis in the urban areas
Anenberg et al. (2019); German Partnership for Sustainable Mobility (2015); Umweltbundesamt (2019)		There is increasing criticism on the impact of commuting, pollution, and the negative influence of cities on health
Nefedova et al. (2016)	Mobility	Liquid migration between urban, rural-urban and rural areas, that questions the principle of ‘permanent place of residence’
Halket and Vasudev (2014, p.1)		Young households are more mobile than older households: they are more likely to move to a new home
Levels (2016); Mascheroni (2007); MBO Partners (2018); Reichenberger (2018); Thompson (2018)		Digital nomads often travel and at the same time work remotely; there are 4.8 million digital nomads in the US only; a speculative prognosis speaks of one billion by 2035
Bosetti et al. (2015); Ceric and Crawford (2015); Facchini and Lodigiani (2014); Fassio et al. (2019); Silvanto et al. (2015)	Migrants	Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), immigrants, and migrants as contributors to research activities, knowledge creation, and innovation
Swart et al. (2018); Labrecque et al. (2013)	Influence of communication	The ‘informed customer’ chooses places and social settings according to his or her preferences; ‘empowered customers’ have to be enabled with trustworthy facts, not by advertising
Guyter (2019); Shah (2012); United Nations Development Programme (1998)		There is a ‘globalization of customers’ regarding mobility: people follow trends in other countries
Chetty and Alathur (2018); Nowicka (2018); Pejchal (2018); Savimäki et al. (2018); Ueda et al. (2019); Wirz et al. (2018)		Hate speech (in social media) and the rise of populism, visible especially in social media, may slow down job mobility of skilled foreigners

Table 1 – Selected trends in rural-urban migration

Due to skills shortage issues and demographic developments with for example an ageing society, the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC, 2017, p. 18) states:

*'[...] Human capital is the one resource that can propel firms and economies to higher levels of productivity and competitiveness. Globalisation has fostered a global competition for talent, as knowledge economies increasingly rely on highly-skilled workers.'*

The developments presented above – in combination with rising prices for land in cities, peri-urban and even urban-rural areas – may force companies, too, to resettle, as Østbye et al. (2016) ask for the creative class: 'do jobs follow people or do people follow jobs?'

Florida (2012) claimed after interviews that 'people were not slavishly following jobs to places. Their location choices were based to a large degree on their lifestyle interests'. More recent studies on the millennials (KPMG, 2017, p.1) say that they '[...] hold more bargaining power than ever before in the labour marketplace'. Moreover, according Deloitte, to 'this generation of professionals' sense of loyalty has retreated as well' (2018, p. 27), and 'passive modes of transport (e.g., car, train) were found to be the least enjoyable activities carried out in the day' (Adam et al., 2018).

On the other hand, this trend might be diluted by the decreasing importance of a 'convenient location' of the workplace in Gen X and Y (Mercer, 2019b; see *Figure 4 – Why do employees stay at their company*) for employees who still need to be physically present at their employer.

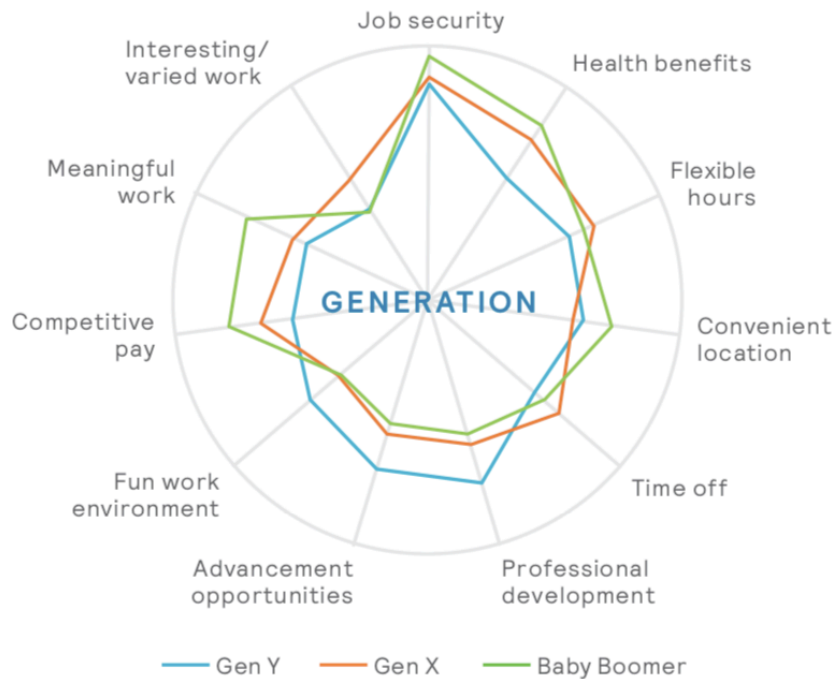


Figure 4 – Why do employees stay at their company

Source: (Mercer, 2019b)

In future research and SHRD, changes in culture and attitude (see *Figure 5 – Characteristics of different generations*) therefore may also have to be considered.

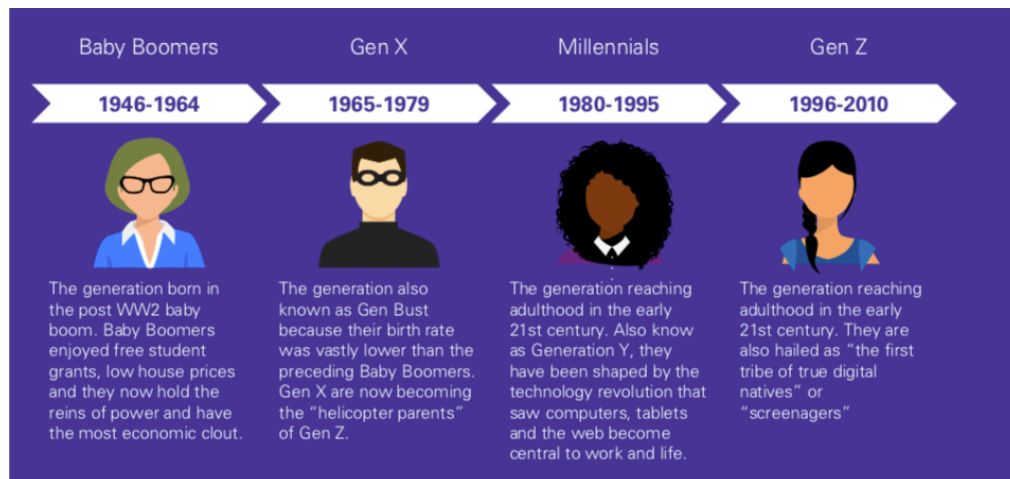


Figure 5 – Characteristics of different generations

Source: (KPMG, 2017)

The question, what drives the allocation of labour as a mobile factor (Clodnițchi, 2017) and also what might lead to regional immobility (Horbach and Rammer, 2020) – and if jobs therefore have to follow people, is of high importance.

In what matter QoL can be improved, for example by citizen participation (Constantinescu, 2019), or the contribution of external corporate social responsibility (Boulouta and Pitelis, 2014) by the economy, or enhancing leisure experience (Iwasaki, 2007), is beyond the focus of this study.

#### 4.3 Reasons for Labour Mobility and Immobility

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As will be discussed later, factors like quality of work (QoW; see e.g. Steffgen et al., 2015), QoL, worker commitment and loyalty, leadership style, perceived organizational support, pay, recreational infrastructure, sense of belonging, and many more may contribute to attracting and retaining skilled workers (Avolio et al., 2009; Böhnke, 2005; Brown et al., 2011; Othman and Lembang, 2017; Zhang, 2011) – or may be regarded as influential to their intention to stay and intention to leave (which in many cases does not lead to turnover; Arnold et al., 2016).

For the various reasons mentioned before, labour mobility is increasing worldwide. According to the OECD (Fries-Tersch et al., 2019), there are about nine point five million international movers in working-age (between 20 and 64 years old) employed or looking for work in the EU, accompanied by one point four million cross-border workers. The number of workers resettling *within* their country or region, and that of daily commuters exceeds this number by far: ‘More than twenty [per cent] of Europeans commute at least ninety minutes daily’ (SD Worx, 2018).

However, there are also mitigating factors for labour mobility like the inertia to change the workplace and regional immobility (Horbach and Rammer, 2020), or recently the rise of nationalism and populism (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2016, Broz et al., 2019; Wishlade, 2019; Boumans, 2017).

Various reasons lead to a lack of mobility and therefore labour shortage, which in the case of skilled employees might result in problems such as strong effects on the innovation activities and the innovations success of companies , which therefore struggle as (Horbach and Rammer, 2020, p. 16):

*‘current technological change (digitalization, technologies combatting societal challenges) tends to require a combination of different (scarce) skills so that a mere focus on academic skills is not sufficient.’*

Knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOC) are lacking. But turnover is not an easily available solution: Morrell et al. (2004) and Hom et al. (2012) argue that many employees are only willing to leave, if they are ‘shocked’ out of their job.

Contributing reasons and motivations for change may lie in Maslow’s hierarchical theory of needs (Rasskazova et al., 2016), or, as the OECD (2011, p. 57) puts it:

*‘Having a job that matches one’s aspirations and competencies and that pays adequate earnings is a universal aspiration of people around the globe.’*

Beyond work as a means of ensuring survival and a basic standard of living, it has additional meaning that has to be taken into account. According to Rasskazova et al. (2016, p. 542) self-determination theory

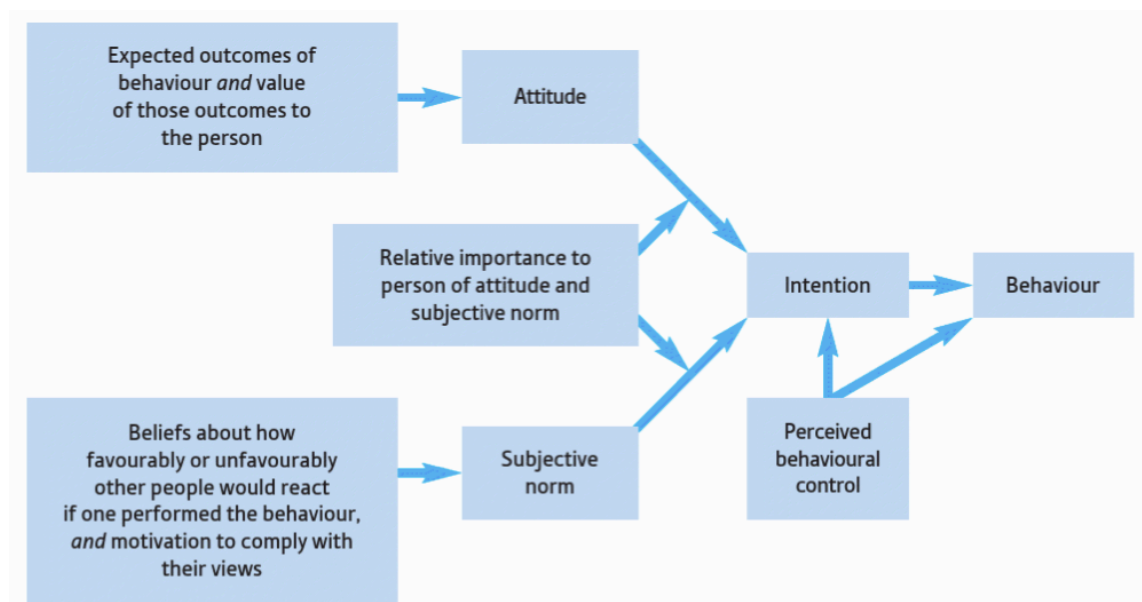
*‘is primarily concerned with psychological conditions, asking whether people’s social environments and their own personality structures support their movement towards greater integrity, wholeness, and growth’*

The phenomenological tradition of psychology might stress self-actualisation as ‘fulfilment of their potential’ (Arnold et al., 2016, p. 9) as an important reason.

Moreover, there may be several social influences on job decisions like increasing social status or following what Kulkarni and Nithyanand (2013) call a ‘smart herd’ (e.g., uncertain people follow others in their location decisions).

A social scope will the influence of consider family ties (Keeney et al., 2013). Kattenbach et al. (2014) point out that 'due to technological changes, organizational restructuring, layoffs, and demographical developments, individuals are increasingly pushed and pulled into a changing career world', and on the other hand that individuals have more freedom to change (or not to change) their PoW and PoL.

For 'understanding, predicting, and changing social behaviour' (Ajzen, 2012, p. 454), scholars have amongst others developed a framework called Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; see *Figure 6 – Theory of planned behaviour*) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).



**Figure 6 – Theory of planned behaviour**

**Source:** (Arnold et. al, 2016, p. 219)

TRA adds the aspect of behaviour, represented by intentions, to TRB. It is according to Arnold et al. (2016, p. 219)

*'assumed that actions are best predicted by intentions, and that intentions are in turn determined by a person's attitude and their perception of social pressure.'*

But both Rynes et al. (2004) and Arnold et al. (2016) ask, if the influence of those factors can be measured, as ‘for example, in Western culture we may be unwilling to admit that the opinions of other people influence us, even if they really do’ (ibid., p. 221).

Another question they put about is, if pay has not to be seen as the main motivator. Both researchers and participants try to avoid such findings and therefore influence the results – but studies by Rynes et al. (2004) and Arnold et al. (2016) suggest that it is the major reason. Therefore, external factors may outperform perceptions and intentions as in the fundamental attribution error (Sanderson, 2010).

In contrast, according to Steffgen et al. (2015), considering just ‘salary, job security and fringe benefits’ is simplifying and ‘seems to be too narrow’ (ibid., p. 14989).

Congruously, some instruments to measure QoW like ‘Quality of Employment Indicators’ or ‘Quality of Work in Flanders’ consider both social dimensions at the PoW, and Work-Life-Balance (WLB; ibid., p. 14990).

Regarding this research project, Work Interference with Life (WIL, Keeney, 2013) is to be considered, although ‘a person's orientation toward nonwork roles is multi-dimensional’ (Hall, 2013, p. 539) and complex. For example, based on the analysis of more than 450,000 responses to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (Kahnemann and Deaton, 2010, p. 16489):

*‘high income buys life satisfaction but not happiness, and [...] low income is associated both with low life evaluation and low emotional well-being’*

Peruniak (2010, p. 3) stated that ‘the concept of quality of life is seldom addressed directly in the career development literature’, and Kelly et al. (2020) recently asserted that ‘while leisure plays an increasingly important role in individuals' lives, little is known about its potential to influence career sustainability’. This might be due to the fact that research in the past often related career development, retention, loyalty, intention to stay or leave and more to QoW, and stated that

*'firm-based factors had a significantly more pronounced impact on the ultimate decision than individual-based factors.'*

(Huang et al., 2006, p. 491)

Hence, Backes-Gellner and Tuor (2010, p. 285) proposed the augmented concept of 'employer signalling', advising economy to reliably promote appealing, high-quality workplaces to 'improve recruitment success and thereby gain a competitive advantage on tight labor markets'. Part of the concept is to make non-observable characteristics and qualities visible (e.g. 'challenging jobs, good long-term career prospects [...], company longevity, [...] existence of a works council'; *ibid.*, p. 273).

Hom et al. (2012) have introduced two dimensions in which the 'proximal withdrawal states' typically ante cede turnover: the 'desired employment status' (if employees are willing to stay or leave) and 'perceived volitional control'. The latter is of special importance for this thesis, as it incorporates external influences like QoL. This includes for example social interaction as a factor supporting, inhibiting, prevenient, or eliminating the possibility to change.

To stay in the nomenclature, the individual mediator(s) between QoL and QoW which may have an impact as and on an underlying structure are called Quality of Interference in this study (QoI; see *Table 2 – Definition and Impact of QoI*).



<b>Definition</b>	QoI is seen as the quality of the interconnection between QoW and QoL – for example WLI, WLB.
<b>Practical examples</b>	QoI could be the perceived quality of multiple means of transport, but progressively also of virtual places (e.g. Zoom-Meetings), or of other connections.
<b>Impact</b>	As these intermediators may cause stress, but also could be experienced as beneficial, they might also be drivers of the intention to join, stay, or to permanently, regularly, or temporary change places.

Table 2 – Definition and Impact of QoI

Source: (Own work)

The dimensions of QoI could be classified by the PESTL or STEEPLED ‘checklist-type framework’ (van den Born et al., 2012, p. 812; see *Table 3 – Dimensions of QoI*). Seen from today, they are all influenced by COVID-19 (e.g. cost for travel; income; safety; restrictions).

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Political</b>	Skilled immigration act; Subsidies for commuting; Cycle highways; Programmes for digital infrastructure; International conflicts; Stability
<b>Economic</b>	Rising cost for commuting; Financial aspects of home office; Time aspect of new work models with COVID-19
<b>Societal</b>	Parental leaves; Smart herd; Allocation of migrant communities; voluntary work; cultural dimensions
<b>Technological</b>	Remote work; decentralized, distributed manufacturing; IoT; Additive Layer Manufacturing; AI
<b>Legal</b>	Labour protection law
<b>Environmental</b>	Issues with commuting and transport; Land consumption; urban sprawl
<b>Ethics</b>	Precarious work; result oriented work environments; aspects of posting of workers
<b>Demographics</b>	Flexible work; Senior care

Table 3 – Dimensions of QoI

Source: (Own work; Barslund and Busse, 2016; Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, 2019; European Commission 2018, 2019c; Goetz et al., 2004; Habibi and Asadi, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; International Labour Office, 2014; Kulkarni and Nithyanand, 2013; Labour Mobility Initiative, 2018; Mourtzis and Doukas, 2012; Rauch, Dallasega and Matt, 2017; Steen, 2013)

Summarizing the existing literature, a complex set of influences can contribute to individual decisions for turnover – and every employee is triggered differently.

Hence, Tassinopoulos and Werner (1999, p.2) state that labour mobility and migration 'constitute a complex phenomenon. Its analysis is proving increasingly to be interdisciplinary'.

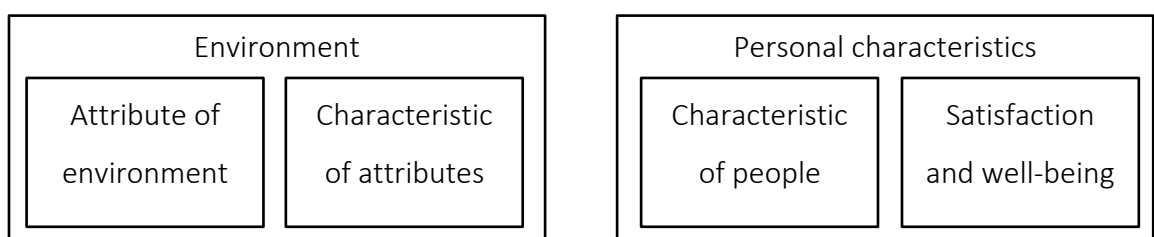
#### 4.4 Definitions of Quality of Life

Definitions of QoL are partly compressed like Constantinescu (2012, p. 75) stating:

*'QoL can be defined as the individual's subjective perception on objective conditions related to welfare and standard of living.'*

But there is an underlying complexity: Peruniak (2010, p. 34) lists fifteen main disciplines that have contributed to the formal study of QoL, for example philosophy, education, health care and medicine, recreation and leisure studies.

According to Rapley (2003), there are hundreds of definitions of and thousands of articles about QoL in scientific literature. They can be subsumed in the conceptualisation by Rogerson (1999, p. 978) shown in *Figure 7 – Concept of Quality of Life*, subdivided in environmental and personal characteristics, and moreover be measured and analysed objective and subjective (see *Table 4 – Pillars of the Quality of Life*).



**Figure 7 – Concept of Quality of Life**

**Source:** (Rogerson, 1999, p. 978)

Quality of Life	
Objective pillar	Subjective pillar
Welfare	Well-being
Living standard	Satisfaction
Way of life	Happiness
Living conditions	Delight

**Table 4 – Pillars of the Quality of Life**

**Source:** (Sóres and Pető, 2015, p. 811)

Sóres and Pető (2015; based on Michalkó, 2011) stress, that QoL ‘is a joint dimension of objective factors determining human life and their subjective reflections’ or ‘perceptions’ (Böhnke, 2005).

*Table 5 – Definitions of Quality of Life* lists a selection of common definitions from a range of disciplines, areas of focus, and approaches.

Institution	Scope	Definition
University of Toronto (2011)	Health	'The degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life.' (based on Allardt: Having – loving – being)
Peruniak (2010)	Psychology/ Career development	A value-based concept which does not lend itself to knowing entirely through traditional, logical, positivist means. Intuitive, meditative, narrative-metaphorical, historical, ecological, and personal-social methods have important roles here as well.
Kahnemann and Deaton (2010)	Psychology	Emotional well-being refers to the emotional quality of an individual's everyday experience—the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger, and affection that make one's life pleasant or unpleasant. Life evaluation refers to the thoughts that people have about their life when they think about it.
Veenhoven (2005)	State/ Social	Happy-Life Years (HLY): How long and happy people live.
Commission of the European Communities (2009)	Politics	Income, public services, health, leisure, wealth, mobility and a clean environment as a means to achieve and sustain.
European Commission (2015)	Urban development	The overall satisfaction of respondents with living in their city.
Chen and Rosenthal (2008)	Location theory/ Business	The amount of real wage workers is willing to forgo for the opportunity to locate in the more attractive area; Quality-of-business-environments (QBE) as 'the amount of additional input costs an employer is willing to incur to locate a worker at a given site'.
Burnett et al. (2017)	Location theory	McBucks Index: relative number of McDonald's to the relative number of Starbucks within a geographic area. Lower values signalling a higher quality of life.
Rapley (2003)	Research	Everything from the relative 'liveability' of towns, cities and nations to the aims and effects of social policy, from the relative benefits of differing models of human service provision to the individualized outcomes of a vast number of medical and psychotherapeutic practices.

Table 5 – Definitions of Quality of Life

The summarizing conceptual framework on QoL (see *Figure 8 – Conceptual Framework of Quality of Life*) is simplified, yet acknowledges the complexity of the subject of this research project. It incorporates mainly job-related factors as a base and QoL as a 'roof' or extension on that foundation.

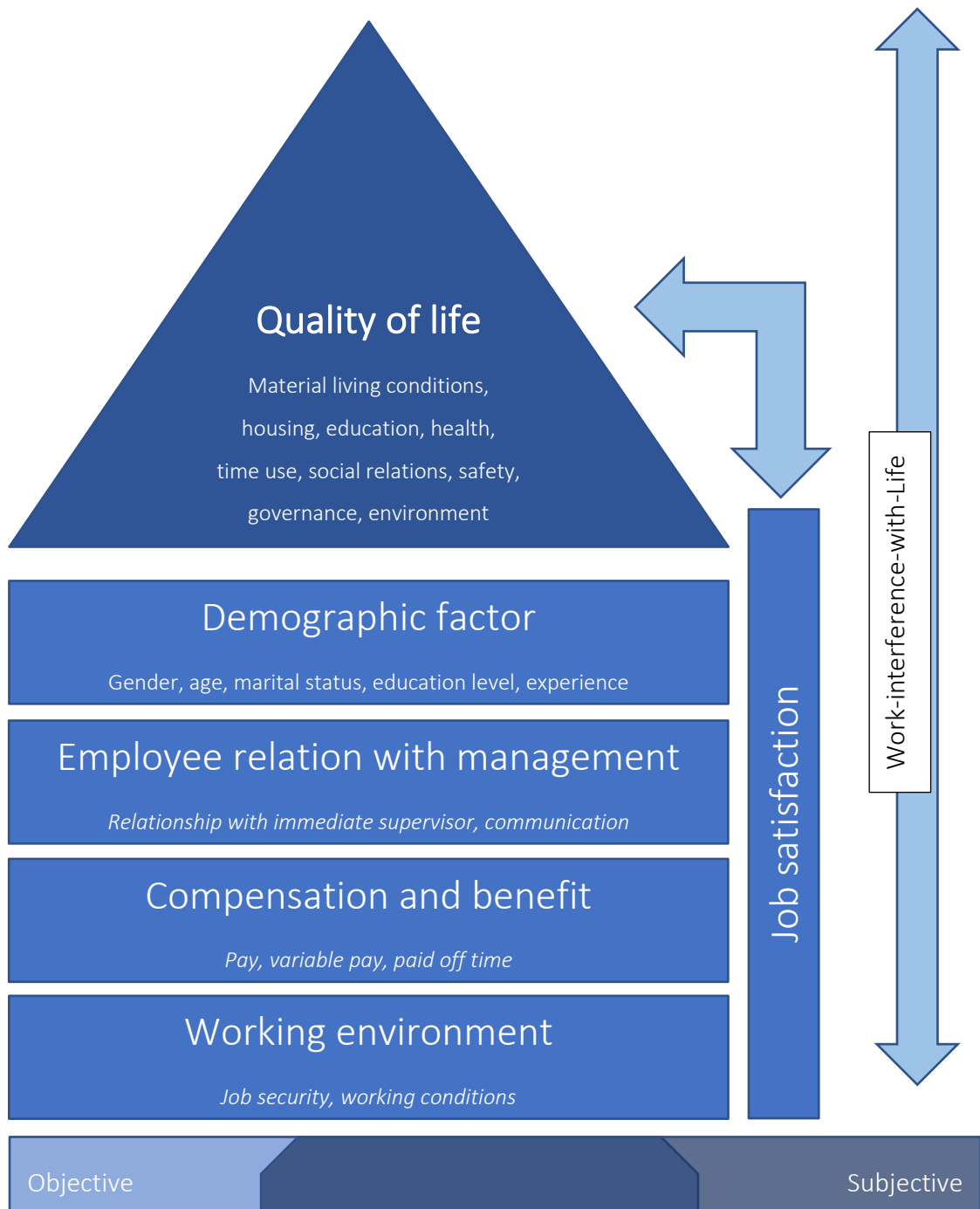


Figure 8 – Conceptual Framework of Quality of Life

**Source:** (Own work; based on Eurostat, 2019a; Keeney, 2013; Teoh et al., 2011, p. 599)

In literature, QoL is almost always analysed mainly in the non-work environment. In the German language, there is the term 'Arbeitswelt' (world of labour) that – especially as it has no antonym – suggests work even being a separate world.

In the contrary, employees do not experience job and free time as separate worlds: In reality, 'work and life are intertwined, even amalgamated, so that [some workers] cannot or do not want to distinguish and disentangle work and life' – which leads to debates on the term 'work-life-balance' (Eikhof et al., 2007, p. 326). Therefore, WIL (Keeney et al., 2013) is visualized here to show the relationship between work and life – both influencing each other and being actively mastered by the individual.

In some cases, the individual is not able to manage the relationship. For example, in the 'intent to quit model' (Ruževičius, 2014, p. 327) the

*'work-to-family conflict has a negative impact on one's job satisfaction (and concurrently on one's contentment with life), which means that the working conditions do not make it possible to properly carry out the family commitments. Therefore, the individual is dissatisfied his or her job, and at the same time, with such a life in general.'*

However, QoL can be examined and promoted (at least in the sense of a marketing tool) separately (European Committee of the Regions, 2018).

The numerous definitions of QoL appreciate the extensive interdependent set of factors regarding the field of study. For this research project, a pragmatic approach is needed, to find a set of key arguments or influencing factors employees agree on when deciding on their place of living.

According to Böhnke (2005, p. 4) 'perceptions and evaluations structure life chances and the coping strategies of individuals'. In this sense, QoL 'should be based on a set of attributes of places' (Rogerson, 1999, p. 977). Indicators that matter have to be

identified as ‘essential communication tools’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2009, p.5; European Committee of the Regions, 2018).

#### 4.5 Measuring the Importance of Quality of Life

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Until the 1960’s, QoL was largely measured by Gross National Product (GNP), with mostly focusing on basic needs (Böhnke, 2005). The ‘Social Indicator’-movement proposed ‘broader indications’ (Veenhoven, 1996, p. 1), as further ‘indicators, components or domains of both societies’ and individuals’ (Rapley, 2003, p. 28) may influence QoL.

Due to the broad range of influencing factors and the complexity, definitions of QoL today reach from seemingly simple, but intuitively comprehensible and ascertainable indices like ‘McBucks’ (Burnett et al., 2017) or Happy-Life Years (HLY; Veenhoven, 2005) for comparing regions or states and identifying issues, to complex measuring systems (see *Table 6 – Measuring Quality of Life*).

Institution/Term	Factors
Mercer (2019): Quality of Living Ranking	Recreation, Housing, Economic Environment, Consumer goods availability, Public services and transport, Political and social environment, Natural environment, Socio-cultural environment, School and education, Medical and health considerations
European Commission (2015): Quality of Life in European Cities	Satisfaction with: INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES: Overall; Public transport; Health care services; Sports facilities; Cultural facilities; Educational facilities; Streets and buildings; Public spaces; Availability of retail shops; PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT THEIR CITY: Employment opportunities; Housing situation; Presence and integration of foreigners; Safety and trust; City administrative services; CITY IN RELATION WITH ENVIRONMENT: Air quality; Noise level; Cleanliness; Green spaces; Fight against climate change; PERSONAL SITUATION: Life in general; Place; Financial situation; Personal job situation
Eurostat (2019a,b,c) / Quality of Life	Material living conditions; Housing conditions; Employment; Education; Health; Time use; Social relations; Safety; Governance; Environment
Numbeo (2019)/Quality of Life Index	Purchasing power, pollution, house price to income ratio, cost of living, safety, health care, traffic commute time, climate
World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL; 1995, 2019a,b,c)	Physical Health, Psychological Level of Independence, Social Relations, Environment, Spirituality/Religion/Personal beliefs
Rogerson (1999): Attributes of City Rankings (Literature review)	Environment/Pollution, Atmosphere/Peace and Quiet, Climate, Lifestyle opportunities, Employment, Retirement, Housing Costs and Access, Health Care/Public Health, Crime/Public Safety, Transport/Traffic flow, Education Provision/Levels, Recreation, Economy/Business climate, Arts/Cultural diversity, State taxes/Development Aid, Commercial space, Proximity to suppliers/market, Food costs/Cost of living, Political Involvement, Wages
Rapley (Literature review; 2003)	Objective social indicators (Life expectancy; Crime rate; Unemployment rate; Gross Domestic Product; Poverty rate; School attendance; Working hours per week; Perinatal mortality rate; Suicide rate), Subjective social indicators (Sense of community; Material possessions, Sense of safety, Happiness, Satisfaction with 'life as a whole', Relationships with family; Job satisfaction; Sex life; Perception of distributional justice; Class identification; Hobbies and club membership)
Veenhoven (2005): Happy Life Years	The best measure of health in nations is how long people live and that the best measure of happiness is self-reported satisfaction with life-as-a-whole (length of life drawn from civil registrations of birth and death with data on overall appreciation of life as assessed in surveys)

Table 6 – Measuring Quality of Life

Ever since, the approach of measuring subjective well-being has been questioned, as there are biases and irrational perceptions, moreover results are not comparable and



cannot be generalized (Böhnke, 2005). Rapley (2003, p. 10) even argues that ‘QoL has become an increasingly slippery or complex construct over the course of its use’.

According to Böhnke (2008, p. 189), differences between countries can be explained by ‘economic performance, the social security level, and the political culture in a country—all in all, general conditions that enable people to live a respectable life’. But the importance of well-being of the individual is generally higher in countries in ‘rich and stable countries’.

But Veenhoven (1996) points to the problems of measuring only objective factors: If better availability or quality of services, education, or financial means contributes to well-being or not, depends highly on the needs, priorities, or the situation of the individual (Eurostat 2019c). It is not a predictable, straight-forward behaviour in a (job) market where the returning homo oeconomicus (Ramazotti, 2019) as an individualist chooses his path in a one-time decision process. The potential employee depends on the internal and external attribution of his perceptions the socio-economic environment and for example the embeddedness into it (Belkin et al., 2020; Duroy, 2016; Grund et al., 2017; Meuer et al., 2019; Saleem et al., 2020).

For example, SIE not only voluntarily and independently from an employer decide to migrate, but they also often plan for ‘post-expatriation’ to return to their home country (Ceric and Crawford, 2015). According to Inglehard (2014):

*‘Emancipative values change people’s life strategy from an emphasis on securing a decent subsistence level to enhancing human agency. As the shift from subsistence to agency affects entire societies, the overall level of subjective well-being rises.’*

Hence, it is doubted (see e.g. Peruniak, 2010) that there is a universal, generalizable way to measure QoL in all dimensions mentioned above (subjective, objective; Campbell, 1976) and perspectives (employer, employee).

#### 4.6 Existing Data on Quality of Life

Literature research has so far shown that there are numerous rankings, partly with longitudinal studies over a longer period of time, but all with a regional focus on country or city comparison (see *Table 7 – Selected Happiness and Quality of Life Rankings*).

Publication	Institution	Focus
Happy Planet Index	New Economics Foundation (2019)	How well nations are doing at achieving long, happy, sustainable lives
OECD Better Life Index	OECD (2017, 2019)	Compare well-being across countries
Quality of Life Index	Numbeo (2019)	An estimation of overall quality of life
Quality of Life Ranking	CEOWORLD (2019)	Which countries are the absolute best to live in for both business and life
Quality of Living Ranking	Mercer (2019b)	Assists organizations to compensate employees fairly when placing them on international assignments
World Happiness Report	Helliwell et al. (2019)	Satisfaction with the nation as a whole

Table 7 – Selected Happiness and Quality of Life Rankings

Whereas city rankings show bigger differences, on a national scale the satisfaction with life especially in the EU is at a high and comparable level in most countries (see *Figure 9 – Average Rating of Satisfaction in Europe*; the red line indicates EU28 average = 7,0).

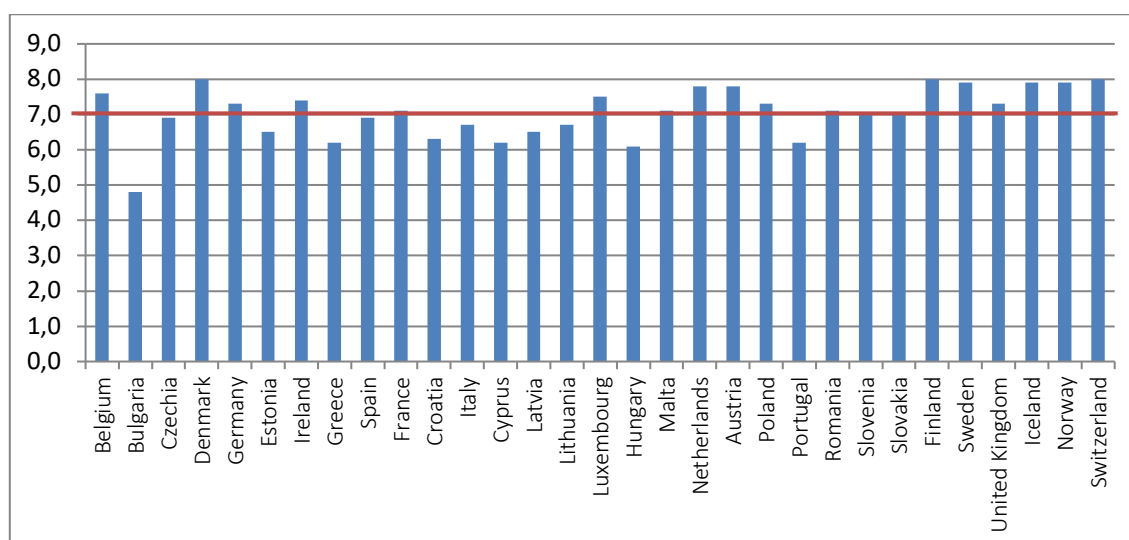


Figure 9 – Average Rating of Satisfaction in Europe

Source: (Eurostat, 2019d)

As Table 8 – Gap Analysis Data on QoL shows, both a focus on urban-rural areas (not only in the case of NET), towns, and the distribution of subjective and objective influencing factors for employees and employers within the countries and between areas is missing.

Data on QoL	Existing	Required for marketing NET	Gap
Countries	Y	Y	N
Cities	Y	N	N
Areas (e.g. NET)	N	Y	Y
Towns	N	Y	Y
Subjective requirements of skilled employees	N	Y	Y
Objective requirements of skilled employees	N	Y	Y
Y=Yes; N=No			

**Table 8 – Gap Analysis Data on QoL**

**Source:** (Own work)

#### 4.7 Quality of Life as Part of Place Branding

Constantinescu (2012) stressed the importance of the QoL concept for marketing – the subjective perception drives decision making processes. This is especially influential for the discipline which is concerned with society's issues: social marketing. Nonetheless, scholars have begun to discuss the interference only since the late 1990s.

According to Vuignier (2016, p.7), place branding and place marketing are 'aimed at improving place quality', therefore QoL is part of the strategic marketing approach (see top right in *Figure 10 – The Diversity of Place Branding Research*).

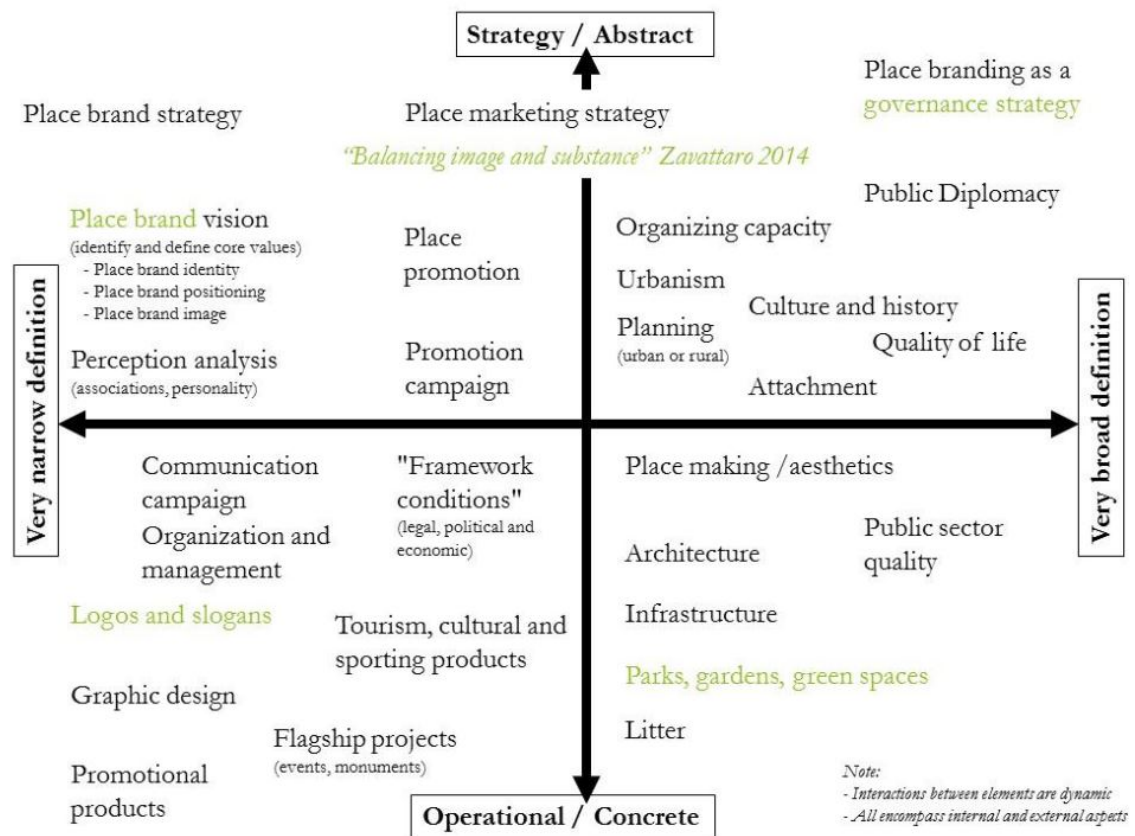


Figure 10 – The Diversity of Place Branding Research

Source: (Vuignier, 2016, p. 37)

Hence, QoL is often mentioned in city rankings (Rogerson, 1999) for example by consulting and news agencies, diverse publications, and even official statistics of governments (see e.g. Baden-Württemberg State Ministry, 2020, Numbeo, 2019; Mercer, 2019b; OECD, 2019; Papadopoulos, 2019; USNews, 2019). Data of those publications is used by (Rogerson, 1999, p. 969):

*‘professionals concerned with the promotion of cities, with the selling or property in these cities, and with the construction of the city environments which are being assessed.’*

Rogerson (1999, p. 969) argues that QoL in form of rankings ‘has been viewed as part of the profile of a competitive city’ but QoL is since the 1990s also used as a marketing argument to enhance selective migration of skilled workforce from cities into rural-

urban areas. By some scholars, QoL has been identified as one of the most important influences (see also 'BrainFlow' project: European Committee of the Regions, 2018). For urban-rural areas, addressing the brain-drain and actively win-over talents to stay or settle, is vital to keep communities alive regarding economy, environment and social structures development (Mohammadian and Rezaie, 2019). The European Committee of the Regions (2018, p.2) recommends amongst others to:

- become aware of the brain drain problem
- coordinate players and the synergy of resources to focus on talent-based growth strategies
- identify key driving sectors for retaining/attracting talent
- stimulate the absorption of talent from outside
- work on the removal of structural impediments/barriers
- public authorities to seek cooperative and/or shared solutions

In the first usage of the term 'quality of life' in scientific literature exactly 100 years ago, Pigou (1920, p.14 f.) connected it to the 'surroundings of work', to job satisfaction, the influence of people on others, and to family. Amongst others, Pigou cited 'Muckergee' (presumably: Mukerjee, 1916), who wrote about farm workers in India that

*'the collaboration of the family members not only economises expenses, but sweetens labour. Culture and refinement come easily to the artisan through his work amidst his kith and kin'*

Pigou (1920, p. 15) added that 'Thus, the industrial revolution, when it led the cottager from his home into the factory, had an effect on other things besides production.' This balance, interference, and intermixture between work and personal life is of ongoing interest 100 years later, as 'one cannot separate both of them and has to give time and efforts to both' (Munjal, 2015). Numerous aspects are in discussion, still including 'Work-Interferes-with-Family' (WIF) and 'work-family conflicts' (Halinski and Duxbury, 2020, p. 149 f.). As solutions to these conflicts, companies for example have to

implement 'Flexible Work Arrangements' (FWA; e.g. Shockley et Allen, 2007) to reach a compatibility between both spheres.

Some scholars therefore claim that in addition to QoW, the personal sphere of QoL becomes more and more important to Small and Mediums Enterprises (SME) as an argument for recruiting and retaining skilled workforce (An et al., 2014; Clodnițchi, 2017; Curran et al., 2016; Döring et al., 2010; Johnston and Huggins, 2016; Lawton et al., 2013; Mercer, 2019b; You and Bie, 2016).

On the other hand, according to Vossen's (2019) research, it is in doubt, if for example Florida's findings on new and differing needs of the creative class and high skilled workforce are relevant for the German market. According to Vossen, hard location factors seem to be 'much more important than tolerance, openness or amenities' (ibid., p. 1359).

After conducting the literature research, for this study it is assumed that it is not a dichotomous question of addressing either QoL or QoW, either soft or hard location factors, either PoL or PoW, but to recognize and appreciate the position and role of QoL within a system of influences and opportunities.

## 5. Research Methods

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As mentioned above, scholars detected a lack of knowledge on the topic of this study (Kelly et al., 2020). Hence, despite the risk of the undertaking, a broad approach is used to gain insights, ‘including spanning multiple knowledge domains’ (Bateman and Hess, 2015, p. 3653). Based on the research question, the research objectives, and the literature research, in this chapter the research method will be developed, discussing the ontology, epistemology and methodology for the project (see *Figure 11 – Developing a Methodology*).

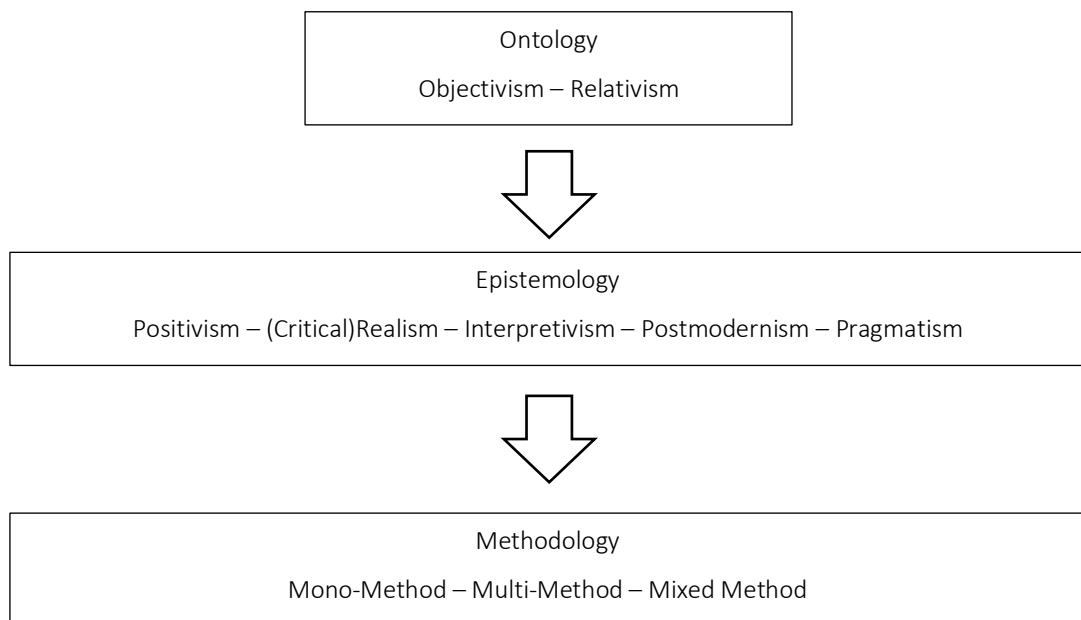


Figure 11 – Developing a Methodology

**Sources:** (Own work; based on Bryman, 2012; Dieronitou; 2014; Guba, 1990; Saunders et al., 2016)

### 5.1 Research Philosophy

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According to Dieronitou (2014) there are two main concepts, **ontology** and **epistemology**, to be considered to develop a methodology for a research project.

*Ontology* as the knowledge of existence (from Greek ‘on’, ‘to exist’) in social research is often split into two positions like ‘objectivism’ and ‘constructionism’ (Bryman, 2012),

the latter also seen as ‘relativism’ (Guba, 1990) or ‘subjectivism’ (Saunders et al., 2016). In objectivism, an objective reality and social entities are assumed to exist independent from social actors and the researchers observation (Bryman, 2012), whereas in relativism reality can be interpreted in multiple different ways depending on the context, perceptions and activities of social actors (Bryman, 2012; Guba, 1990).

*Epistemology* (from ancient Greek ‘epistame’, knowing something very well; Dieronitou, 2014) asks the question for the nature of the knowledge that research could and should gain and communicate. Saunders et al. (2016) list five major philosophies: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders, 2016, p. 135). They are discussed in the following, with a special focus on

- the two extremes of positivism and pragmatism, as this research project is positioned on the scale between them,
- and on the pragmatic approaches as the study is seen as applied science.

**Positivism** is often related to using techniques from natural sciences to create accurate, precise knowledge by observation of the ‘posited’ – that is ‘given’ – reality (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2016). Discovered hypotheses are tested in a deductive and objective way to become explanations and universal laws. Data and phenomena that cannot be measured or sensed are not seen as scientific knowledge.

For this project, there are issues stressed by for example Peruniak (2010), and by Fisher (2010) with the following positivist assumptions (see *Table 9 – Issues with Positivism*):

Assumption	Relevance to research project
Research is objective	In an axiological sense values, intentions and more will influence the outcome
Aspects of human activity can be observed	Reasons, motivation, intentions are not visible – but crucial for behaviour
Knowledge is presented in general laws	Universal laws predict average, but not individual behaviour (e.g. intention to leave; relocation)

**Table 9 – Issues with Positivism**

**Source:** (Own work; based on Fisher, 2010)



**Realism** adopts key assumptions from positivism like that it is impossible to measure social behaviour in the same way as phenomena in natural sciences, but promotes the attempt to be as objective as possible and to recognize the issues with subjective findings. One strategy is doing qualitative research and adding quantitative research (Fisher, 2010). Realists accept that there might be complementary or contradictory explanations.

**Critical realism** according to Fisher (2010) and Saunders et al. (2016) add to the realist perspective an invisible, directly non-accessible layer, which contains the mechanisms and structures that influence what happens in the observable reality and events. Moreover, processes are seen as depending on the context and social constructions. Therefore, knowledge is seen as provisional.

**Interpretivism** is according to Fisher (2010) the contrasting epistemology to positivism, as it sees research mainly subjective and differentiates between observable objects and people who construct reality and create meaning (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 140) by social action. According to Fisher (2010, p. 22-23), reality is formed by 'the compromises and agreements that arise out of the negotiations' (see *Figure 12 – Socially Constructed Reality*).

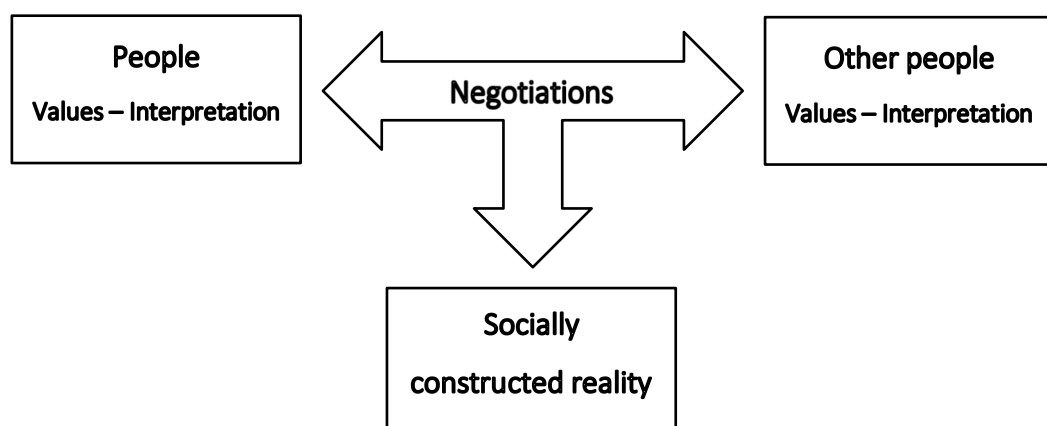


Figure 12 – Socially Constructed Reality

**Source:** (Own work; based on Fisher, 2010)

Saunders et al. (2016) note that interpretivism seems to fit the purpose of research in complex, diverse, individual business contexts, as it can deliver deep insights and unique findings. On the other hand, there are multiple levels of subjective interpretation which might add biases and axiological implications to the findings listed by Fisher (2010, p. 31): Researchers interpret the interpretations of participants and

*‘there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher’s interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline.’*

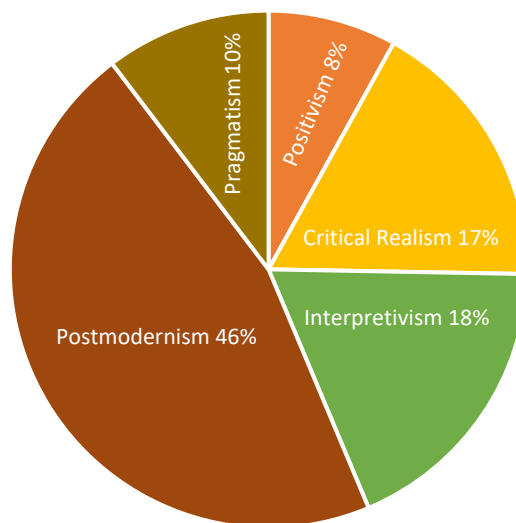
Moreover, there are practical issues for this research project. Amongst others, the researcher has to be empathetic and see the world from a participants point of view (Saunders et al., 2016) – which is hardly possible as the group in focus is likely very diverse, for the quantitative part large, remote, and biased (e.g. regarding the importance of financial compensation discussed in the literature review).

**Postmodernism/Poststructuralism** questions objective explanations even more than interpretivism, as the world is seen as characterized by flux and change, and former systems like beliefs, governments, catch-all parties and more have lost their dominance (e.g. Kitschelt, 2004; Schein, 2019). People’s interpretations therefore are seen as fragmented, and unique perspectives are the norm – expressed in language which could be interpreted in different directions (Fisher, 2010). Object of the studies are rather processes, power relations, or perspectives than entities and rules.

**Pragmatism** ‘sees knowledge as a tentative hypothesis about what our actions should be’ (Baker and Schaltegger, 2015, p. 266) and in its extreme form ‘asserts that concepts are only relevant where they support action’ (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008). In this sense, pragmatism uses multiple methods, concepts, philosophies, and approaches to solve a practical problem (Saunders et al., 2016).

Crowther and Lancaster (2008) therefore call it a ‘problem centred’ and ‘practical research’, where the production of knowledge is not the main focus, but ‘solutions to real life management problems’ (ibid., p. 34).

According to the Heightening your Awareness of your Research Philosophy (HARP) tool (Saunders et al., 2016; see *Figure 13 – HARP-Test for Research Philosophy*; and *Appendices*), the author of this research project clearly prefers the last approach, with tendencies to interpretivism and critical realism.



**Figure 13 – HARP-Test for Research Philosophy**

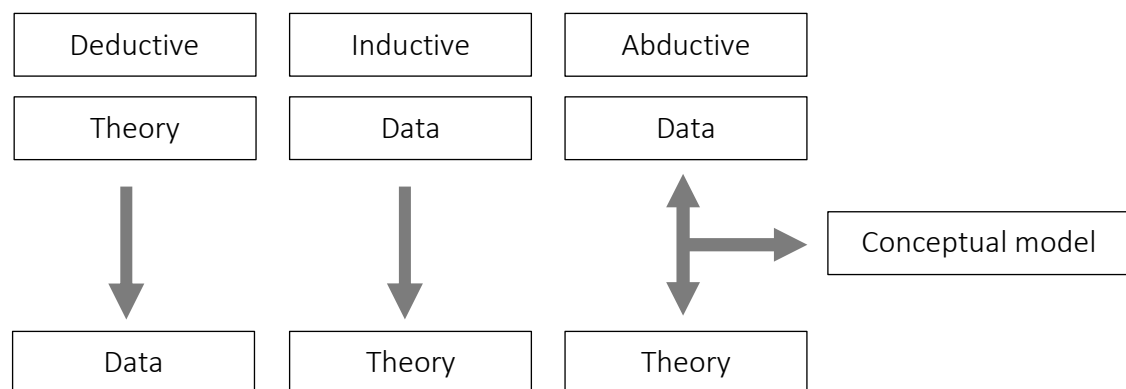
**Source:** (Own work; based on Saunders et al., 2016)

Although the production of knowledge is an aim of this research project, the objectives point to solving practical problems. The approach is therefore pragmatic, albeit considering the limitations of such a philosophy. Namely that overstressing the need for a usable outcome may supersede substantial results like – in the extreme – QoL in reality being meaningless for labour and/or job allocation.

## 5.2 Research Approach

Literature research has shown that there is no existing model on the influence of QoL on recruiting and retention, especially not for the NET, which could be tested

deductively (Saunders et al., 2016) – it has to be developed. Hence, resulting from the research question, the objectives, and the literature research, this project will initially be inductive – epistemologically gaining knowledge on the topic by observing and exploring reality (Crowther et al., 2009). The aim is to ‘identify patterns and relationships to build a theory’ (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 52). In a positivist sense (ibid., p. 122 ff.), research will identify some observable and measurable facts. But the meaning of those facts for the individual might differ strongly. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider the ontological orientation and discover the reasons, mechanisms, motivations and intentions behind the observed phenomena (Crowther et al., 2009) and likely come to an abductive approach (Suddaby, 2006) to form new ideas (Peirce, 1903) about the relations between QoL and labour mobility, and delivering a conceptual model (see *Figure 14 – Approaches to Theory Development*) for both science and application.



**Figure 14 – Approaches to Theory Development**

**Source:** (Own work; based on Saunders et al., 2016)

### 5.3 Research Strategy

Saunders et al. (2016) list eight strategies to choose from: Experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, and archival research to collect and analyse data. But they also state what already became obvious by the discussion above: there are ‘open boundaries’ (ibid., p.178). This research project will therefore mainly use elements of a case study (here: NET) and an online survey (self-completed

questionnaires; Saunders et al., 2016) to reach more people in a larger area with acceptable costs (Bryman, 2012).

#### 5.4 Research Choices and Methods

The methodological choice resulting on a predominantly postmodernist philosophy and an abductive approach will be a sequential exploratory research design (Saunders et al., 2016). Mixed methods with first doing a qualitative and subsequently a quantitative study will be used for triangulation and to come to a deeper understanding of the relations or, as Brannen (2007, p. 182) puts it, 'a more holistic picture of people's understandings'.

Even if purists promote either quantitative or qualitative studies only (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007; Kelle, 2008), and situationalists recommend the usage of one of the methods depending on the study, pragmatists see the best outcome in combining methods (see *Figure 15 – Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*). This is considered more dynamic, interactive, and iterative (Saunders et al., 2016).



Figure 15 – Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

**Source:** (Own work; based on Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005)

#### 5.5 Research Techniques

Interviews using an interview guide (Bryman, 2012) with experts will be executed to 'see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective' (King, 2004, p. 11), to gain insights or 'discover what is happening' (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 174), to clarify the research question and objectives, and to design a questionnaire for an online survey.

Three categories of interviews are usually listed: structured, unstructured (open) and semi-structured (Brinkmann, 2013; Fisher, 2010). Structured interviews allow comparisons of data from the respondents. But they lack the opportunity to gain knowledge additional to the already identified. Unstructured interviews aim to start a conversation without clear focus.

Parker (2004) argues that neither the pure structured, nor the pure unstructured form exists in reality, but only types within the continuum between the theoretical extremes. Therefore, interviews in qualitative research are (ibid., p. 5)

*‘always ‘semi-structured’ because it invariably carries the traces of patterns of power that hold things in place and it reveals an interviewee’s, a co- researcher’s, creative abilities to refuse and resist what a researcher wants to happen’.*

Moreover, for exploratory research projects, according to Kallio et al. (2016), semi-structured are an easy, flexible and regularly used way to gain data about perceptions of participants. They are reciprocal – the interviewee is able to influence the focus and the interviewer is able to react to the respondents answers. Hence, the researcher may accordingly improvise on sub-questions to discover additional knowledge (Brinkmann, 2013; Galletta, 2012).

However, Rubin and Rubin (2011 , p. 129) warn that a guide is necessary to avoid losing the focus, and to show professionalism. The downside is that respondents may answer less spontaneously and less detailed.

Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2954; p. 2959 ff.) identified in their systematic methodological review five phases of preparation for an interview guide shown in *Table 10 – Preparing an Interview Guide*:

	Phase	Relevance to the research project
1	Identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for the first part of the research to gain a deeper understanding of the complex topic
2	Retrieving and using previous knowledge	Literature research has shown various definitions on the demand of skilled workforce and the role of QoL
3	Formulating the preliminary semi-structured interview guide	The preliminary interview-guide is exhaustive, but loose and flexible to facilitate rich data and avoids influencing answers
4	Pilot testing the guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot testing has shown that there are redundancies in the interview guides – but these redundancies were kept as they lead to additional data especially on QoL due to different focusses of participants on the topic</li> <li>• Pilot testing has shown that ‘awareness’ of QoL might be a relevant topic of research. A question regarding this was added (question 4d)</li> </ul>
5	Presenting the complete semi-structured interview guide	

Table 10 – Preparing an Interview Guide

**Source:** (based on: Brinkmann, 2013; Kallio et al., 2016; Turner, 2010)

According to Brinkmann (2013, p. 59), a way to ensure covering all objectives during the interview and keep track of the progress is to use a two-column design for the questionnaire (see *Table 11 – Research Objectives and Interview Questions*).

	Objective	Questions
1	To critically review the demand for and supply of skilled workers in rural-urban areas	<p>a. <b>How would you describe the supply and demand of skilled workforce in general?</b></p> <p>b. Could you describe differences in the supply and demand of skilled workforce you experience in different branches or specific jobs?</p> <p>c. Could you identify specific meanings of the supply and demand of skilled workforce for businesses in rural-urban areas or does the area not matter?</p>
2	To assess the key factors which attract and keep skilled workers	<p>a. <b>What are the most important reasons regarding their workplaces to attract and keep skilled workforce?</b></p> <p>b. <b>What are the most important reasons regarding their environment to attract or keep skilled workforce?</b></p>
3	To measure the importance of quality of life	<p>a. <b>How does QoL influence or not influence attracting and keeping skilled workforce in general?</b></p> <p>b. How would you define QoL?</p> <p>c. How would you describe the role of QoL for attracting and keeping skilled workforce in rural-urban areas?</p> <p>d. What factors matter most/more?</p> <p>e. Could you give me examples?</p>
4	To recommend a strategy for rural-urban areas to use information on quality of life as marketing tools to enhance the recruitment and retention of skilled employees	<p>a. <b>Could rural-urban areas use QoL as an argument to gain or keep skilled workers or should they focus on something else?</b></p> <p>b. Who do you think works on solving these issues?</p> <p>c. Could you give me an example? / What do you think is necessary to make use of QoL as a marketing tool for the area?</p> <p>d. To what extent do skilled workers know about QoL in this area?</p>
		<b>Bold</b> = Central question

Table 11 – Research Objectives and Interview Questions

Source: (Own work; based on Brinkmann, 2013)

The questions will be accompanied by some remarks on the five phases listed by Fisher (2010, p.185; see *Table 12 – Additional Information for Participants*).



	Phase	Keywords
1	Explain the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher is familiar with experts</li> <li>• Research project is part of the studies of Master of business administration at the Bolton Business School</li> <li>• Topic: The Role of Quality of Life For Economic Development of the German Upper Neckar Area</li> <li>• Interview with experts to gain additional insights and prepare for a quantitative study</li> </ul>
2	Offer confidentiality, anonymity and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidential and anonymous if desired</li> </ul>
3	Explain the timing of the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 30 minutes</li> </ul>
4	Do the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See questions above</li> </ul>
5	Close with thanks – ensure there is an opportunity for follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study will be accessible to respondents and possibly public</li> </ul>

**Table 12 – Additional Information for Participants**

**Source:** (Own work; based on Fisher, 2010)

Even if in a phenomenological sense the author will reflect on his position and try to avoid influencing the outcome by carefully creating and using an interview guide, the results will be ‘coloured’ (ibid., p. 12) by for example the relationship to the participants, presuppositions (as the author has interests in seeing QoL as an important influence), or culture. Therefore, after information-seeking questions, from a critical-realism standpoint a quantitative online-survey for triangulation and to gain additional insights on the employees will follow. This is thought to deepen the knowledge, discover ‘particular relationships between variables’ (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 182), enhance the acceptance of the findings for the stakeholders (industry, municipalities and more), to test reliability, to validate the data, and to find further areas for research. It is not thought to be representative, as there will always be numerous, hermetic combinations of partly conflicting factors driving the individual decision for brain drain and brain gain like family ties, (inequal) pay, conflicts.

Regarding biases, the author attempted to avoid what Brinkmann (2013, p. 37) calls ‘the interviewer’s effects on coloring [sic!] interviewees’ reports of their reality’. Not least by being aware of the differences between interviews as a research instrument (theory) and social practice (reality) shown in *Table 13 – Interviewing as a Research Instrument and as Social Practice*.

Conception of interviewing	Research instrument	Social practice
Conception of interview data	Interview data as resource	Accounts, interview data as topics
Standard analytic focus	Lived experience— the “what”	Situated interaction— the “how”
Typical interviewer style	Receptive	Assertive
Main challenge	Validity of interviewee reports	Relevance of interviewee accounts
Paradigmatic background	Grounded Theory and more	Discourse analysis, Conversation Analysis and more

**Table 13 – Interviewing as a Research Instrument and as Social Practice**

Source: (Based on: Brinkmann, 2013, p.37)

To minimize interviewer and interviewee’ bias (Saunders et al., 2016), written (see *Appendices* for invitation template) and verbal information on the topic before the interview will be kept short. Questions will be presented as neutral as possible, letting the experts tell their views on the more general theme of demand and supply at the beginning of the interview. The interviewer will try to avoid leading the experts at the early stages to QoL to see, if the participants intend to address the topic actively.

## 5.6 Reliability and Validity

According to Saunders (2016, p. 202), ‘reliability and validity are central to judgements about the quality of research in the natural sciences and quantitative research in the social sciences’, but in interpretative approaches ‘where reality is regarded as being socially constructed and multifaceted’ (ibid., p. 205) they are ‘considered as philosophically and technically inappropriate’. Moreover, ‘qualitative research is not necessarily intended to be replicated because it will reflect the socially constructed interpretations of participants in a particular setting at the time it is conducted’ (ibid.). In the case of this study, both findings from expert interviews and from participants of the survey are thought to be not representative, and therefore generalisable in the sense of high validity.

However, recommended strategies like involving more than one researcher and analyst (Saunders, 2016; see *Table 14 – Strategies to avoid threats to reliability*) and utilising software tools (MAXQDA, Lamapoll) to increase the quality are used.

Threat	Interviews	Strategy in Survey
Participant error	Planning: for example, sufficient time slot; Interviews will be executed in experts’ offices to reduce distraction; answers will be kept anonymous	Answers will be kept anonymous; short questionnaire; using two languages to choose from
Participant bias		
Researcher error	Using more than one researcher for interpretation; audio recordings; using software assisted analysis; triangulation with literature research	Triangulation with interviews; standardised questionnaire; test re-test
Researcher bias		

**Table 14 – Strategies to avoid threats to reliability**

**Source:** (Own work based on Saunders, 2016)

To ensure quality, alternative criteria designed for interpretivist research (Saunders, 2016, p. 205 f.; see *Table 15 – Usage of Alternative Quality Criteria*) will be used.

Criterion	Definition and techniques	Fulfilment in this study
<b>Dependability</b>	Making changes to the approach transparent	Describing the influence of findings on the process
<b>Credibility</b>	Matching the description of participants views with the intended message	Checking data with participants and additional researcher; analysing negative cases by triangulation
<b>Transferability</b>	Allowing readers to judge the generalisability	Full documentation of questionnaires, context, findings and interpretation
<b>Authenticity criteria</b>	Fairness by describing different influences, focus and opinions	Documentation of interest of the author in the findings; capturing and respecting views from a broad spectrum of participants

**Table 15 – Usage of Alternative Quality Criteria**

**Source:** (Own work; based on: Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lincoln et al. 2011; Saunders, 2016)

As for the quantitative survey, the rivalling objectives of validity and reliability on one side, the willingness to participate and to fully answer the questionnaire (completion rate) to test the data and deliver additional insights on the other is to be discussed. According to Bosnjak and Galesic (2009, p. 349), there is ‘a strong [negative] effect of the stated length’. Brosnan, Grün and Dolnicar (2018, p. 39) add amongst other issues the effects of ‘fatigue and boredom’ to the disadvantages of longer questionnaires. Moreover, due to the very individual influences on the views and interpretations of questions on QoL and QoW, replicability with other samples is impossible. Therefore, the questionnaire will be kept as short as possible with accepting lower reliability.

## 5.7 Time Horizons

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A longitudinal design would have advantages: for example, trends could be analysed over a time span. But apart from the practical issue of a given timeframe, a cross-sectional approach will enable the researcher to identify variation in a large number of respondents (Bryman, 2012) in the quantitative part using questionnaires.

## 5.8 Sample Selection

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According to Saunders et al. (2016), it is necessary to select a sample, as it is from a cost and practicality perspective not sensible to collect and analyse data from the entire population. In this research project, a sampling frame can hardly be defined, for example by age, education, or region. On the other hand, it is impossible to address the target population of academics in Germany (approximately nine million; see Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019).

But even a sufficient sample and a low margin of error would according to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 276 f.) not allow generalization of findings on statistical grounds. Moreover, as Bryman (2012) points out, factors like the heterogeneity of the population have to be considered: Regarding for example only the sphere of jobs in Germany, there are 326 recognised occupations requiring formal training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2019) and more than 20,000 degree programmes (German Rectors' Conference, 2020), most of them working at one of the approximately three point five million SMEs (Institut für Mittelstandsforschung, 2017).

In summary, as discussed above the underlying system are presumed to be complex and dynamic (see e.g. Ajzen, 2012; Arnold et al., 2016; Hom et al., 2012; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Keeney et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2020; Rynes et al., 2004; Steffgen et al., 2015; Tassinopoulos and Werner, 1999).

Therefore, based on Saunders et al. (2016), the following logic is presumed:

*Data cannot be collected from the target population -> A sampling frame is not available -> There must be no statistical inferences made from the sample -> The sample must not proportionally represent the population -> There are no relevant quota variables available -> The purpose is not just exploratory -> There is no clear focus for selecting the sample -> Ease of access is important -> Credibility of findings is not important*

They recommend 'convenience sampling' in this case – choosing participants for the quantitative online survey at random, although it is 'prone to bias'. Only people who are reachable and want to take part will answer the questionnaire. As this research project is exploratory, the results may both lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon, and initiate further research using methods that offer more credibility and representativity. For a non-probability approach, Saunders et al. (2016, p. 297) advise a sample size of twelve to thirty participants considering a heterogeneous group.

This research project aims at achieving six interviewees and 100 respondents for the quantitative part – both to enhance credibility and to enlarge the range of findings. To address mainly skilled employees, the following methods will be used (*Table 16 – Tools to address Target Group*).

Target group	Characteristics/Influence on Findings	Method/Tool to address
Students	On job search; presumably high job mobility	Surveycircle research community)
Dual students	Students with fixed contract and perspective to stay at current employer; presumably middle job mobility	Direct messages via Xing and LinkedIn (career-oriented social networking sites) and existing contacts of the author
Professionals	Academics with fixed contract; presumably middle job mobility	
Others	Random participants	Facebook Add via own company

**Table 16 – Tools to address Target Group**

**Source:** (Own work)

## 5.9 Procedures and Methods of Analysis

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Procedures and methods are discussed in one common section, as the research project is seen as an explorative and iterative process (Crowther and Lancaster, 2008; DiMaggio, 1995). Data in its raw form has little meaning (Saunders et al., 2016), therefore it has to be processed and analysed. The interviews will generate extensive data in the form of audio-recordings, verbatim transcriptions, and additional notes. As video-recordings might confuse or put off participants, the author will not use them nor will he code volume or breaks in a 'very detailed conversation analytic approach' (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 61).

To handle the data, it will be coded and further processed by qualitative data analysis (QDA). This includes identifying rather global themes and specific topics using thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012), with coding, in-vivo-coding, and analytic memo-writing (Saldaña, 2014). The resulting findings will be interpreted to develop the questionnaires for the quantitative part (see *Figure 16 – Step Model of Deductive Category Application*).

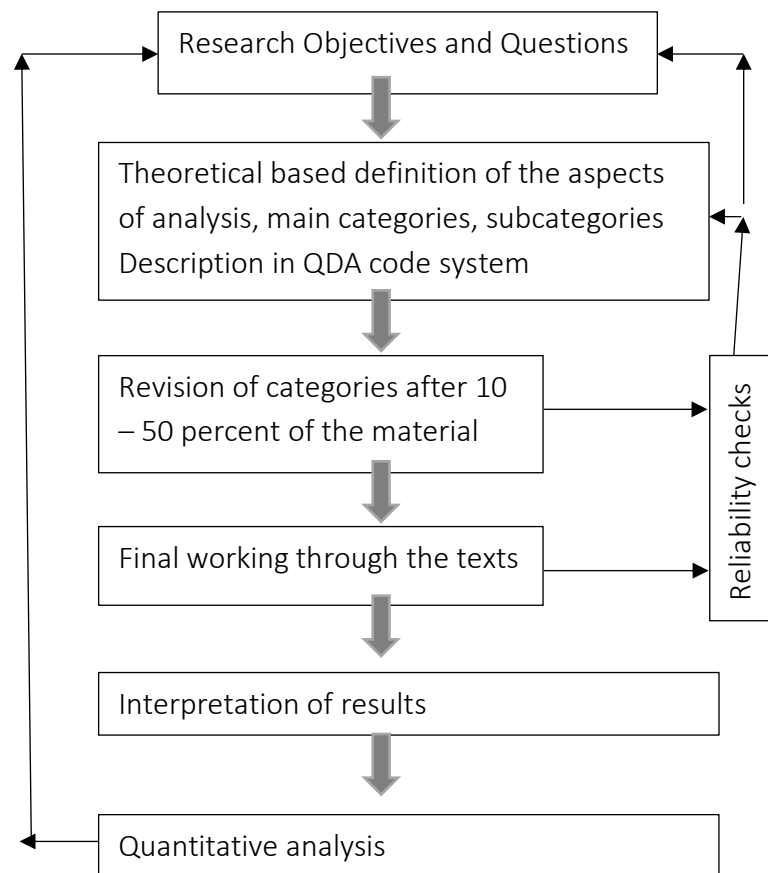


Figure 16 – Step Model of Deductive Category Application

**Source:** (Based on Mayring, 2000, p. 4)

The interviews are designed for ‘obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3) and, in sense of grounded theory, to develop theoretical understanding based on the findings (Brinkmann, 2013). As the interviews are semi-structured, questions are standardised, and respective aspects of the answers are structured. Therefore, the coding is considered both

- concept-driven or deductive (analysing data using codes derived in advance by the researcher from the questions)
- data-driven or inductive (adapting the coding system by interpreting data from the interviews; see Brinkmann, 2013).



As Mayring (2000), Brinkmann (2013) and Roberts et al. (2019) recommend, the coding system or template will be founded on literature research, and then in iterative steps be revised and refined by template analytic technique after coding fifty percent of the data.

To enhance reliability, results of the author's coding procedure will be compared with results from a neutral researcher or 'third party consultant' (Turner, 2010, p. 759) to review the codes in the sense of consensus coding (Richards and Hemphill, 2017). This technique is considered to be 'more rigorous, but more time-consuming form of final coding' (ibid., p. 13). As Roberts et al. (2019, p. 1) point out, the themes or codes have to be relevant 'specific to the research focus, the research question, the research context and the theoretical framework' and research has to be open to critique. In the case of this study, consensus coding is also thought to further clarify the topic at an early stage by an additional feedback loop and peer debriefing (Janesick, 2015) or what Roberts et al. (2019) call 'intercoder review and code testing' to reduce researcher bias. Findings from the interviews will result from interpretation of the words and observations.

As Charmaz (in: Brinkmann, 2013, p. 100) puts it, 'memo writing is the pivotal intermediate step between coding data and writing the first draft of the analysis.' Therefore, memos are used to identify and summarize statements.

The quantitative online survey will be grounded on the findings and deliver mainly ranked (ordinal) data, coming from scales of categorical data on the themes explored before. The theoretical foundation for the online survey will 'emerge from the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation' (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 570). Lamapoll will be used to develop and to analyse the questionnaires regarding correlations of values and coded demographic attributes.

## 5.10 Triangulation

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Using mixed methods, the analysis based on the comparison of the results and findings of both proposed approaches, triangulation or cross-checking of social phenomena, will enable better credibility (Bryman, 2012). Different perspectives and approaches may lead to mutual reinforcement, corroboration (Saunders et al., 2016) or contradictions – hence, ‘the outcomes of mixtures of methods are not always predictable’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 640), which fits the exploratory approach with avoiding predispositions.

## 6. Data Collection and Analysis

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Data collection and analysis comprise interviews with experts and a mainly quantitative survey (supplemented by an explorative, open question on the influence COVID-19).

### 6.1 Qualitative Interviews

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The experts who were asked to participate in the study represent a broad spectrum in the sense of ‘maximum variation cases in order to obtain information about the significance of different and perhaps opposing circumstances’ (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 58), ranging from regional institutions and municipalities, to professional education.

#### 6.1.1 Data collection

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Of twelve experts, six agreed to participate in audio recorded face-to-face interviews. This form is preferred by the author as it represent the ‘richest source of knowledge available’ (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 28). Transcription (including notes on nonverbal signs, gestures, stressing of words, and expressions of emotions) and translation followed instantly after the interviews. As three of the experts asked to stay anonymous, all data is kept as such and has been destroyed after the analysis.

### 6.1.2 Analysis of the Qualitative Interviews

The transcriptions of three hours of audio recordings (see *Appendices* for details on length) have been processed using a QDA software, MAXQDA, in seven steps (see *Table 17 – Analysis Process for Qualitative Data*):

Step	Explanation
Provisional code system	Formulating a code system based on research objectives and interview questions in a deductive way
Provisional coding	Assigning codes to texts for the first three interviews (multiple codes for a text are possible)
<b>Review and iterative loop</b> (after three interviews)	
Consensus coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding of the first three interviews through another researcher</li> <li>• Analysis of intercoder agreement (see Table 18 – Intercoder Agreement)</li> <li>• Discussion of disagreements, agreeing on coding</li> <li>• Adjusting the code system in an inductive way</li> <li>• Adjusting the interview guide</li> </ul>
Final coding	Assigning codes to texts for the first three interviews (multiple codes for a text are possible; for code system used see <i>Table 18 – Intercoder Agreement and Appendices</i> )
Memo writing	Formulating a system of memos to paraphrase and summarize addressed themes
Analysis	Analysing interviews and memos using MAXQDA and other methods

**Table 17 – Analysis Process for Qualitative Data**

Source: (Own work; based on Brinkmann, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Mayring, 2000; MAXQDA, 2020a; Richards and Hemphill, 2017; Roberts et al., 2019; Turner, 2010)

The first process used has been coding, which Fisher (2010, p. 199 f.) describes as

*‘identifying themes, dividing the research material into chunks or units (and excluding the great bulk of the interview material that you decide is of no value) and allocating the units to the themes.’*

*Figure 17 – Example of Coding* visualizes the classification of text (right) in codes (far left) and memos.

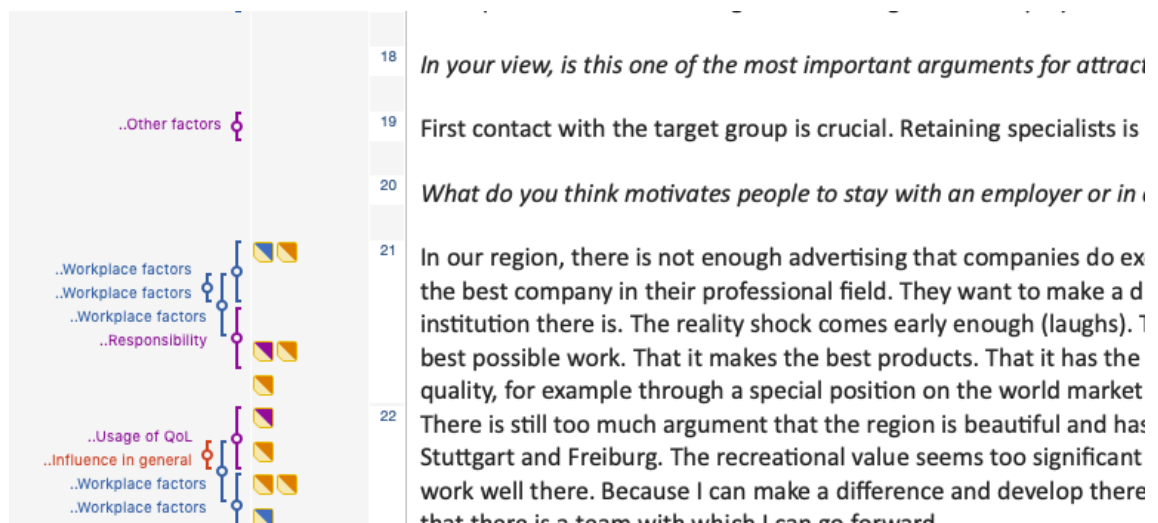


Figure 17 – Example of Coding

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

In the review and iterative loop, a second coder was asked to replicate the procedures independently. After agreeing on the different decisions, the differences shown in *Table 18 – Intercoder Agreement* have been eliminated.

Code	Agreements	Disagreements	Total	Percent
Demand regarding branches	1	2	3	33,33
Demand regarding regions	2	1	3	66,67
Influence in general	2	1	3	66,67
Other factors	2	1	3	66,67
Responsibility	2	1	3	66,67
Usage of QoL	1	2	3	33,33
Pro rural-urban	3	0	3	100,00
Pro urban	2	0	2	100,00
QoL factors	3	0	3	100,00
Supply and demand in general	2	0	2	100,00
Workplace factors	3	0	3	100,00
<Total>	23	8	31	74,19

Table 18 – Intercoder Agreement

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

### 6.1.3 Results of Qualitative Interviews: Codes

The codes represent the themes addressed in the interviews on an abstract level. This allows to show the sequence of themes (influenced by the questions asked by the interviewer) in a so called ‘Document Portrait’ (MAXQDA, 2020b; for an example see *Figure 18 – Document Portrait of an Interview*; for details see *Appendices*).

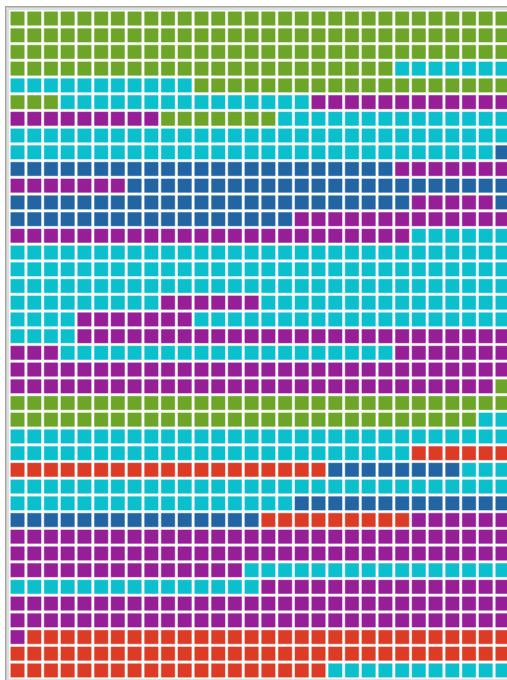


Figure 18 – Document Portrait of an Interview

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

The colour scheme used is listed in *Table 19 – Colour Scheme used for Coding*.






	Colour	Code: Participant is talking about...
	Green	Demand and supply of employees
	Light blue	QoL
	Dark Blue	QoW
	Red	Influence of QoL on employment
	Purple	Strategy

Table 19 – Colour Scheme used for Coding

Moreover, a comparison of the interviews has been used (MAXQDA, 2020c), shown in *Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.* Figure 19 – Document Comparison Chart.

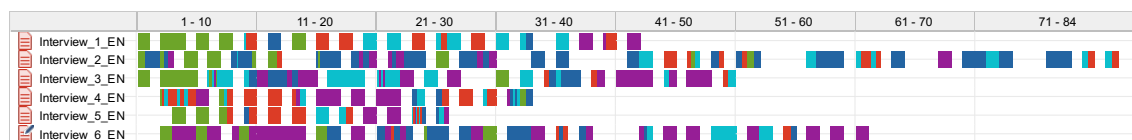


Figure 19 – Document Comparison Chart

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA; for a larger version see *Appendices*)

Both document portraits and document comparison chart show that (apart from the basic structure given by the questions) the experts put their emphasis on different topics. Therefore, a broad spectrum of viewpoints has been covered – as intended in the survey design.

Moreover, the participants largely followed the given structure of the interview.

Lastly, Figure 20 – Code Matrix Browser visualizes

*‘which codes have been assigned to which documents [...] documents are listed in the columns while codes are listed in the rows. The symbols at the conjunction points represent the number of coded segments that are coded with a particular code. The larger the symbol, the more coded segments are assigned to the code in question.’* (MAXQDA, 2020d).

Note that code groups like ‘Demand’, ‘Key factors’, and ‘Influence of QoL’ always count ‘0’ if included codes like ‘Supply and demand in general’ and ‘Demand rg. Regions’ are expanded.

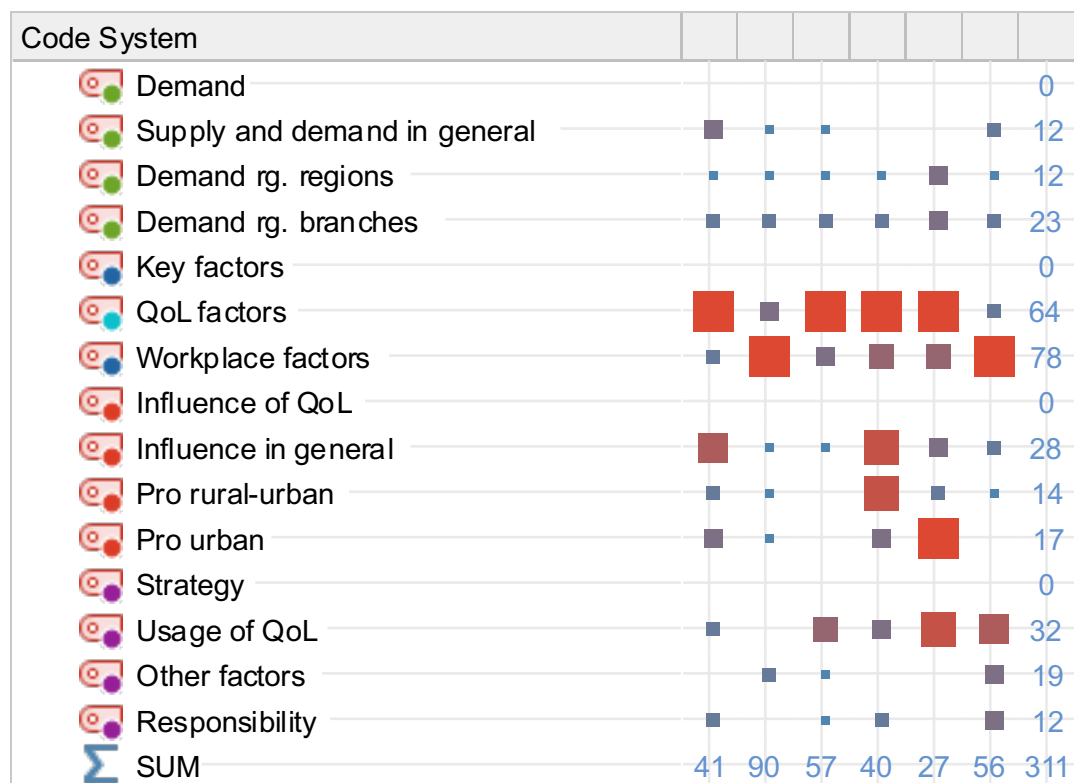


Figure 20 – Code Matrix Browser

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

Both document portraits and code matrix browser show that participants stressed either the importance of QoL or that of QoW ('Workplace factors') in regard to key factors. They listed slightly more often a positive influence of the QoL in urban areas on recruiting and retaining than in urban-rural areas. However, this simple form of content analysis (Fisher, 2010) is subjective and it does not indicate that the urban areas are considered more attractive than urban-rural areas.

#### 6.1.4 Visualization of Word Frequencies

In addition to the codes, word clouds show the most common words in the interviews (MAXQDA, 2020e). To visualize the frequency, the following word clouds have been filtered and adjusted:

- A stop list excludes insignificant words like ‘a, as, and, the...’ (see *Appendices*)
- Plural forms and similar words like ‘specialist’ and ‘specialized’ have been merged

The result is visualized in *Figure 21 – Word Cloud for Qualitative Interviews*.



Figure 21 – Word Cloud for Qualitative Interviews

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

As the three most common words, ‘region’, ‘people’ and ‘company’ were actively asked in the questions and therefore used even more often as anyway usual in everyday language, an additional stop list has been defined to exclude the three terms. *Figure 22 – Word Cloud excluding Most Common Terms* shows the result.





Figure 22 – Word Cloud excluding Most Common Terms

**Source:** (Own work; using MAXQDA)

Overall, the topics of interest have been addressed by the experts – with QoW-related themes ('Arbeitswelt', world of labour; see 4.4 Definitions of Quality of Life) clearly overweighting the QoL-dimension. Nonetheless, the latter factors (especially 'family') are part of the spectrum.

### 6.1.5 Additional Insights

Besides the audio recordings and transcriptions, the following observations have to be considered (*Table 20 – Additional Insights on Interviews*):

	Insight
1	None of the experts actively defined QoL. Additional questions were necessary to get information on the topic.
2	There has been confusion on the definitions of 'urban', 'urban-rural' and 'rural'. This matches for example with the ambiguous German definition of 'Stadt' (from a settlement larger than a village to a metropole). People from the same size of town classified their area as 'rural', 'urban-rural', or 'urban'.
3	Experts (on the area) mainly referred to personal experience, single cases or characteristics of special groups (such as engineers from Spain, workers from Romania, refugees from Syria, or students, industry employees) when asked about the influence of QoL on intention to join, to stay, or to leave.
4	In context of the interviews, the ease, ways, and quality of commuting have been topics in addition to the commuting distance.
5	Also, WLB and QoL have been addressed (maternity leaves and more).

Table 20 – Additional Insights on Interviews

### 6.1.6 Memos

322 analytic memos (or topics; Bryman, 2012) have been generated in a first step to summarize findings and insights. *Figure 23 – Example for Memos* shows an example of text (middle) with codes (far left) and a memo (right).

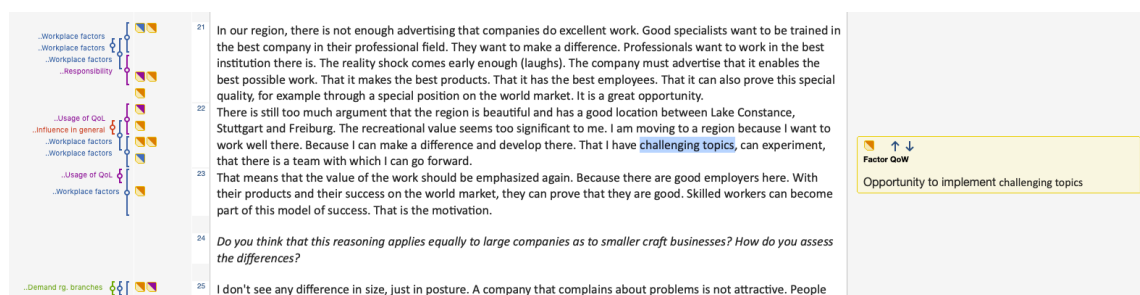


Figure 23 – Example for Memos

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

The memos also indicate the 'negative cases', which have to be considered to avoid confirmation bias, and to systematically include and examine 'a variety of different interpretations instead of just sticking to one single reading (hypothesis) that is to be

confirmed (or falsified)' (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 118). Moreover, analysing them may enhance the credibility (Saunders et al., 2016).

Most of the memos (see Table 21 – Overview on Generated Memos) found in the interviews have been on QoL and QoW. Experts agreed on the varying influence of these themes, therefore negative cases could not be identified regarding them.

In regard to demand/supply and strategy, experts had a predominantly clear view, but objections. Therefore, on these two topics, negative cases are represented by the listed objections in the passages below (see *Table 22 – Experts' View on Demand and Supply* and *Table 25 – Experts' Statements on Strategy* in the respective section).

Theme	Memos
Demand and Supply	20
Key factors: QoL	138
Key factors: QoW	102
Strategy	62
<Total>	322

**Table 21 – Overview on Generated Memos**

**Source:** (Own work; using MAXQDA)

### **Demand and Supply**

All participants largely agreed on the existence of a skills shortage in general, similar to the literature review (see *Table 22 – Experts' View on Demand and Supply*).

No.	Statement	Listed objection
1	There is a shortage in certain branches and jobs	
2	There is no shortage in low qualification jobs	In all levels of qualification/education
3	There is a shortage of skilled workers	Enough supply of skilled workers
4	In some branches, lateral entry is an option	
5	Metropolitan areas have more influx	

Table 22 – Experts' View on Demand and Supply

**Source:** (Own work)

Conflicting statements were given on the concrete impact on the industry and branches in the region, on the lack of KSAOC, and regarding the supply of low qualified workers.

Moreover:

1. Skills shortage is seen especially as a problem regarding the following occupations (according to ISCO-08; International Labour Office, 2012):
  - a. health, teaching, information and communications technology professionals
  - b. health associate professionals
  - c. personal services and personal care, food processing and related trades workers
2. Medium-sized enterprises are said to meet their demands on apprentices and prospective specialists with partly barely acceptable deductions on the five core skills for employment and education, for example listed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (2013):
  - a. Communication
  - b. Numeracy
  - c. information and communication technology
  - d. problem solving
  - e. working with others

**Key factors: Quality of Life and Work**

For further building of thesis's on QoL and QoW, as a basic structure Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used to reduce complexity of the answers and offer an overview. Despite critic on the lack of empirical evidence and over-simplification amongst other usages, according to Huitt (2007), Maslow's hierarchy can be utilized to categorize information individuals seek at certain stages of their development. Moreover, the approach of this study is mainly on the complex phenomenon of motivation – and therefore similar to Maslow's intention.

Note that the classification is neither seen as selective, nor objective. Listed in *Table 23 – Experts' View on QoL* and *Table 24 – Experts' View on QoW* are the topics addressed, not the respective opinion on their influence, as all participants agreed on the existence of specific, individual and partly subconscious needs (similar to the literature review).

During the interviews, basic needs were rarely actively addressed by the participants. Further enquiries led to listing of some topics and in four cases to the statement that such needs are considered to be given and a natural part of living in Germany and parts of Europe.

Need	Topics addressed
<b>Self-actualization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities (humanities, medicine etc.) vs. technical and economic universities</li> <li>• Clubs, Associations</li> <li>• City life</li> <li>• Ability to change (dependent from changing branches, technology, profession etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom (of speech; democracy)</li> <li>• Accessible housing</li> <li>• Openness (Making friends is easy)</li> <li>• Opportunities to meet (locals, make friends etc.; places, events, clubs)</li> <li>• Leisure opportunities in general</li> <li>• Used to area, habituation (rural; urban; seaside; mountains etc.)</li> <li>• Education (schools)</li> <li>• Sports</li> <li>• Cultural variety (cinema, theatre, opera)</li> <li>• Engagement in the community</li> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Shopping</li> <li>• Further education</li> </ul>
<b>Love and belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People from metropolitan areas struggle in rural or urban-rural areas</li> <li>• Outgoing people</li> <li>• Friendliness</li> <li>• Knowing each other</li> <li>• Opportunities to learn and speak German</li> <li>• Traditions, culture (negative vs. positive?)</li> <li>• Family (integration; interests; reason to stay)</li> <li>• Partner (integration; opportunities in job/professional)</li> <li>• Children (reason to stay)</li> <li>• Existing community (e.g. of migrants of the same origin)</li> <li>• Young people show swarm behaviour (they prefer locations which are established within their peer group)</li> <li>• Short (or acceptable, preferred) distances</li> <li>• Feeling at home</li> <li>• Gastronomy</li> <li>• Commitment to family-run business</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Transparency (manageable, clear, accustomed to community in town)</li> <li>• Medical care</li> <li>• Childcare / fostering</li> <li>• Playgrounds</li> <li>• Nature</li> <li>• Reviews</li> <li>• Home owning</li> <li>• Shops</li> <li>• Gardening</li> </ul>
<b>Physiological needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health (good air)</li> <li>• Public transport</li> </ul>

Table 23 – Experts' View on QoL

Source: (Own work; based on Huitt, 2007)

Need	Topics addressed
<b>Self-actualization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful business</li> <li>• Being part of excellent teams</li> <li>• Opportunity to experiment</li> <li>• Feeling significant</li> <li>• Freedom of choice</li> <li>• Future orientation</li> <li>• Fast career making</li> <li>• Employer offers jobs or experience in other countries</li> <li>• Interesting job for curriculum vitae</li> </ul>
<b>Esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible working hours</li> <li>• Company car for private use</li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> <li>• Company image</li> <li>• Well-known products</li> <li>• Exclusive facilities (office, conference rooms, canteen)</li> <li>• Up-to-date training</li> <li>• Vicinity of professional training</li> </ul>
<b>Love and belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family driven business</li> <li>• Company outings, parties</li> <li>• Support on integration</li> <li>• Flat hierarchies</li> </ul>
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good and stable employers</li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Sports offers</li> <li>• Health courses</li> <li>• Good working conditions</li> <li>• Respectful communication by employers and amongst colleagues</li> <li>• Salary</li> <li>• Accessibility (public transport, by foot, by bicycle, by car)</li> <li>• Unlimited contracts</li> <li>• Distance to home</li> <li>• Good communication (e.g. website)</li> </ul>
<b>Physiological needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job safety</li> </ul>

Table 24 – Experts' View on QoW

Source: (Own work; based on Huitt, 2007)

### Strategy

Most participants had a clear position about the necessary strategy to cope with the demand of skilled employees (see *Table 25 – Experts’ Statements on Strategy*). Partly, these statements have been contradictory.

No.	Statement	Listed objection
1	People choose jobs, not regions	People choose jobs near their home
2	People are not interested in their direct surroundings apart from basic needs	
3	Information on QoL around employers can easily be found online	Finding information is tricky and time consuming
4	Employers should not inform on the region or area but on themselves	
5	Local activities like sponsoring, open days, factory tours are important for employers	
6	Tourists, business travellers, families can be addressed as future employees	
7	Information should be presented by local institutions	Information should be presented by towns
8	Communities (family, nationality, friends, relatives) influence decisions on job and place of living	Swarms (young people; talents; professions) influence decisions on job and place of living
9	Social media is an important source for information	
10	Websites are an important source for information	
11	Recommendations are an important source for information	
12	Reviews are an important source for information	People know about the companies and surroundings
13	Relocation package by the employer includes support in regard to integration within local community	

**Table 25 – Experts’ Statements on Strategy**

**Source:** (Own work)



### 6.1.7 Triangulation with Literature Research

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Triangulation has been used to find corroborations, elaboration, complementarities, similarities and contradictions (Lund, 2012) in the results of:

- literature research
- coding
- memos
- original audio recordings
- notes on expressions and stresses.

Based on the research question and objectives, and the themes (Demand and Supply, Key factors, Strategy; for details see *Appendices*), the topics addressed have been listed. The third and fourth column show, if the topic has been addressed by literature respectively experts. The fifth column indicates, if experts have objections, contradictions or doubts on the topic. The sixth column lists comments on the objections, the seventh column general comments. Key topics are summarized in the following *Table 26 – Key Topics extracted from Expert Interviews* (for the complete table see *Appendices*).

Theme	Topic	Mentioned by			Remarks on...	
		Literature	Experts in general	Expert objections	Objections	General
<b>Demand/Supply</b>	Global trends (e.g. climate crisis, digitalisation)	x	x	x	Slight doubts on the influence on recruiting and retention	
	Increased job mobility	x	x	x	Strong influence of inertia to change PoL	
	Decreasing job mobility	x	x	x	Strong disposition of high potentials to change for career	
	Skills/KSAOC shortage in some branches and jobs	x	x			
	Migration as a solution	x	x	x	Slight doubts on the willingness to leave PoL	
	Counter urbanization	x	x	x	Strong objection due to intention to stay in PoL	
	Decreasing loyalty to employer	x	x	x	Contradictory statements	
	Inertia to change place of living	x	x	x	Disposition of high potentials to change PoL for career	
	Inertia to change place of work	x	x			Agreement on people being shocked out of PoW
<b>Key factors</b>						
<b>QoL</b>	Urban environment	x	x	x	Slight indications for negative cases	
	Cost of living	x				Not mentioned apart from housing
	Pollution	x				Mentioned as 'high air quality'
	Traffic	x	x			Mentioned as an issue in urban areas
	Nature experience	x	x			
	Cultural heritage	x				

Theme	Topic	Mentioned by			Remarks on...	
		Literature	Experts in general	Expert objections	Objections	General
	Convenient job location	x	x			Mentioned as ambiguous: distance should be balanced
	Security	x	x			
	Affordable housing	x	x			
	Accessible housing		x			Mentioned as representative home
	Infrastructure	x	x			
	Vicinity of cities	x	x			
	Social processes	x	x			
	Cost of mobility	x	x			Mentioned as time to commute
	Recreation	x	x			
	Public transport	x	x			
	Sports facilities	x	x			
	Educational facilities	x	x			
	Health care	x	x			
	Cultural facilities	x	x			
	Retail shops	x	x			
	Diversity	x	x			
	Safety	x	x			
	Air quality	x	x			
<b>QoW</b>						
	Interesting/varied work	x	x			
	Meaningful work	x	x			
	Competitive pay	x	x	x	Slight objection that meaningful work and work-life-balance might be more important	
	Job security	x	x	x	Mentioned as decreasing factor due to full employment and mobile/remote work	

Theme	Topic	Mentioned by			Remarks on...	
		Literature	Experts in general	Expert objections	Objections	General
	Health benefits	x	x			
	Flexible hours	x	x			
	Convenient location	x	x	x	Mentioned as decreasing factor due to mobile/remote work	
	Professional development	x	x			
	Job safety		x			Mentioned as an increasing issue with jobs being unhealthy (Gastronomy, Health care, medical care)
	New digital opportunities	x	x			
<b>Strategy</b>	Work on the removal of structural impediments/barriers	x	x			Strong agreement
	QoL as an argument for marketing	x	x	x		Rarely actively mentioned
	Regional/local branding	x	x	x	Some objections as employer branding is more important	Rarely mentioned
	Firm-based factors have more impact than individual-based factors	x	x	x	Contradictory statements	
X=Yes						

Table 26 – Key Topics extracted from Expert Interviews

Source: (Own work)

### 6.1.8 Impact of COVID-19 on the Findings

On 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, WHO (2020b) announced ‘COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic’ for Europe, three weeks later (Sandford, 2020):

*‘[...] half of the world's population, have now been asked or ordered to stay at home by their governments to prevent the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus.’*

News agencies, governments, institutions, and industry expect huge influences on the whole society, economy, environment – the world and life as such (e.g. Blankrome, 2020; Bennett and Grant, 2020; BBC News, 2020; Politico, 2020; Davies, 2020; Legrain, 2020, OECD, 2020; Orlik et al., 2020; UNCTAD, 2020, World Economic Forum, 2020; WYSE TRAVEL, 2020). Therefore, participants were asked for their expectations on the influence of the pandemic on their future. *Table 27 – Influence of COVID-19 on QoL and QoW (Experts)* summarizes the answers.

Statements	Influence on QoL	Influence on QoW
1	More, stronger solidarity	More home office
2	Intensified focus on local resources	More rapid digitalisation
3	Telemedicine	Less business travel
4	Care offers for children	Focus on safety and health
5	Care offers for elderly people	Job security
6	Focus on social values (family, friends, relationships)	Possibly less personal contact
7	Need for security (health, job, basic services, education)	Supply of jobs uncertain
8	Consumption	Less permanent jobs / fixed contracts
9	Standard of living	‘Homecomers’ (people leave formerly striving, well-paying industries to work in other sectors)
10	Financial concerns	Higher demand in health, care, IT
11	Back to nature	Decline in for example automotive sector
12	Fear	Uncertain developments in sectors like tourism, gastronomy,
13	Rise of fake news, conspiracy theories	More flexibility
14	Rising impact of media	Less globalization
16	Urbanization might come to an end, to a standstill or reverse	Job-seeker-market might switch (more demand than supply)
17	<b>Highly dynamic, massive, unforeseeable developments</b>	

Table 27 – Influence of COVID-19 on QoL and QoW (Experts)

Source: (Own work)

Experts agreed on a highly unpredictable future which will demand more flexibility in both fields and in the QoL.

As an example, in the region, expectation of companies in the tourism sector have risen to record levels in January (Industrie- und Handelskammer Schwarzwald-Baar-Heuberg, 2020). Three month later, the sector came to an almost complete standstill (DIHK, 2020). Worldwide, many companies in tourism are facing bankruptcy (Quinn, 2020). Therefore, experts and literature research indicates a strong influence of COVID-19 – not only for health workers, families worldwide, remote and home office workers, regarding psychological stress, employment status, safety and more (see e.g. Brosens, 2020; Chandy, 2020; European Automobile Manufacturers' Association, 2020; Horesh and Brown, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2020a, 2020b; Lee, 2020; McKinsey, 2020; Morikawa, 2020; Reed, 2020; Wu et al., 2020).

#### 6.1.9 Summary and Conclusion on the Qualitative Interviews

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The postmodernist approach of this study assumed complex underlying social and value systems with a world in flux. Therefore the 'shock' of COVID-19 does not question the findings, but support the dynamic nature of the topic.

Based on the findings, there is a further developed conceptual model as a hypothesis on QoL and QoW for the following quantitative survey, complemented by a separation of the professional and personal sphere into two sub-categories (*see Figure 24 – Conceptual Model for the Hypothesis*).

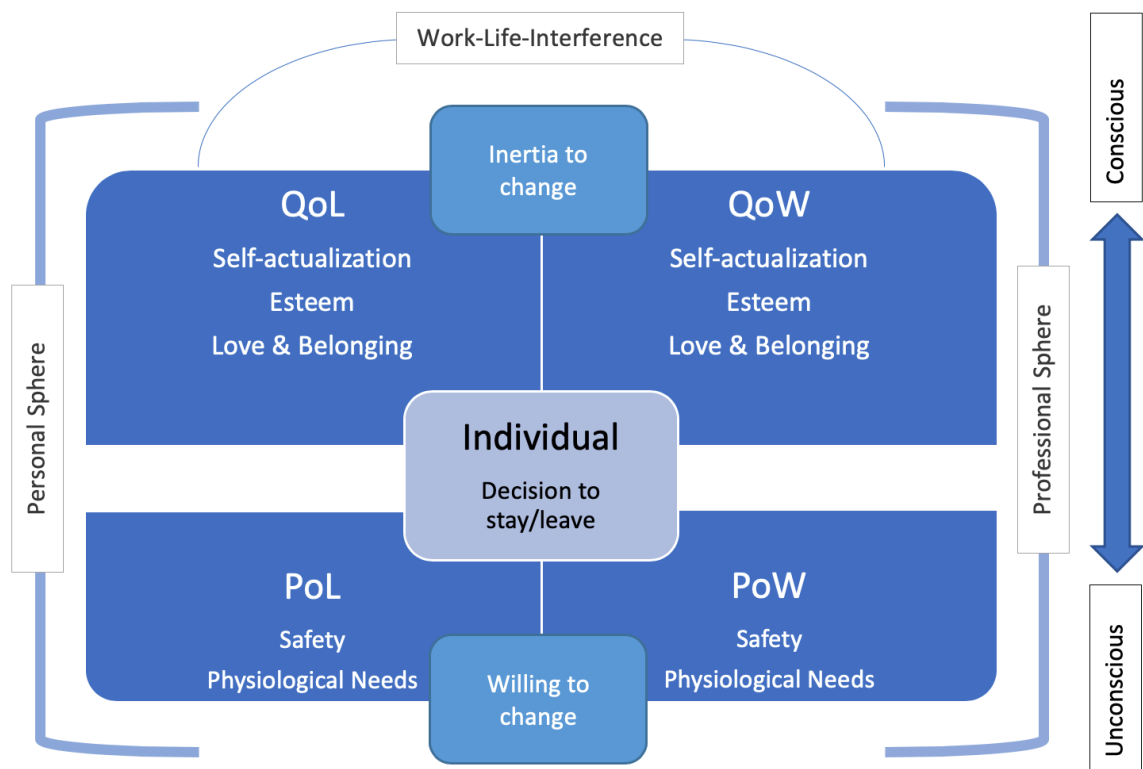


Figure 24 – Conceptual Model for the Hypothesis

Source: (Own Work; using Huitt, 2007)

Most participants saw basic requirements (safety and physiological needs) fulfilled in Germany and partly in most of Europe. These qualities are connected to the question, *where* people live, the physical aspects. As they are seen as to be given, they are seldomly mentioned (see e.g. *Table 23 – Experts' View on QoL* and *Table 24 – Experts' View on QoW*) and rather unconscious qualities of both PoL and PoW.

More conscious in the interviews and in literature are qualities connected to the question of *how* people live and work – according to Maslow love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (see also Inglehard, 2014). These qualities, representing the social aspect, have been mentioned most often in context to QoW and QoL (see e.g. *Figure 22 – Word Cloud excluding Most Common Terms*).

Literature and participants show a corroboration in regard to the role the individual for the decision to stay or to leave: There is an inertia to change, if basic needs (PoL and PoW) are fulfilled and life-work-interference is as desired or at least acceptable. This is the question of *who* drives the decision.

Therefore, the questionnaire for the online survey is based on *Table 29 – Data Requirements*.

	Research Question	Experts' Answers
1	What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to join SMEs in urban-rural areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, people tend to stay near PoL if it delivers the demanded QoL</li> <li>• People from urban areas refuse to enter urban-rural areas</li> <li>• High potentials change their PoL to get better QoW</li> <li>• Lack of Universities might trigger decision to leave</li> <li>• Younger people are more mobile</li> <li>• People from metropolitan areas struggle in Urban-rural and rural areas</li> </ul>
2	What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to stay at SMEs in urban-rural areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QoL is the main reason to stay</li> <li>• People accept to commute to stay at their PoL</li> <li>• Work-life-interference is of increasing importance</li> <li>• Swarm behaviour (family, peers, people from the same background etc.) influences intention to stay</li> </ul>
3	How should local businesses and urban-rural areas respond to the challenges of attracting skilled employees regarding quality of life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm-based factors (PoW/QoW) are more important than PoL/QoL</li> <li>• Local businesses should market themselves instead of PoL/QoL</li> <li>• Better information on QoL and PoL might be necessary</li> </ul>

Table 28 – Experts' Answers to Research Questions

Source: (Own work)



	Investigative questions	Variables required	Detail in which data is measured
<b>Demand</b>	How much does skills shortage affect certain branches and jobs?	Opinion of employees and employers on skills shortage; <i>Who</i> is the participant: Profession; Level of education; How easy would it be to find a new job; <i>Where</i> does he live? Size of town; distance from birthplace	Estimation (scale); Selection of demographic data
	In what measure is mobility a solution for demand?	Opinion on willingness to change; acceptable distance to PoW	Estimation (scale)
<b>Key factors</b>	What are the most important factors at the PoW?	Selection of factors	Selection list
	What are the most important factors at the PoL?	Selection of factors	Selection list
	Will COVID-19 lead to highly dynamic, massive, unforeseeable developments?	Opinion on influence; examples	Likert scales; text
<b>Strategy</b>	Where do people inform themselves on the qualities above?	Selection of media	Selection list
	Do participants consider to be informed sufficiently?	Opinion on information delivered by town, employer, region	Likert scales

Table 29 – Data Requirements

Source: (Own work; based on Saunders et al., 2016, p.448)

## 6.2 Quantitative Online Survey

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The survey was performed from 26<sup>th</sup> March till 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020 as a self-completion online questionnaire. It has been subdivided into five section plus an additional section on the topic of the influence of COVID-19 (see *Table 30 – Sections of the Questionnaire*), as there might be both a bias and hints to future developments on the views of participants.

Section	Heading	Questions
1	Demographic Data	Q1-Q6
2	Place of Living and Place of Work	Q7-Q10
3	Attitude to Change	Q11-Q14
4	Requirements on PoL and PoW	Q15-Q16
5	Marketing Strategy	Q17-Q18
6	Change due to COVID-19	Q19-Q20

**Table 30 – Sections of the Questionnaire**

**Source:** (Own work)

The participants have not been asked to rate the importance of QoL, as both literature research and experts' views have shown that there is no common, generally accepted and understood definition of the term. Instead, questions regarding QoL topics have been integrated into the questionnaire.

### 6.2.1 Data Collection

In total, 224 people visited the survey's landing page on Lamapoll (see *Table 31 – Number of Participants in Survey*), mostly from personal contacts and the Surveycircle community. Although 962 people saw the Facebook add, 381 read the text, nine shared the add, only two decided to participate (an influence of COVID-19 on the participation of professionals is assumed and partly confirmed by some people addressed – they were struggling keeping their businesses).

Target group	Methods/Tool to address	Visitors	Participants
Students	Surveycircle (community for online research)		47
Dual students/ Professionals	Direct messages via Xing, LinkedIn (career-oriented social networking sites), and existing contacts of the author		69
Others	Facebook Add via own company		2
		224	<b>118</b>

**Table 31 – Number of Participants in Survey**

**Source:** (Own work; data from Facebook Adds Manager; Surveycircle)

118 respondents took part in the survey, with a dropout rate of 15 percent. However, the dropout analysis shows that 112 or more participants responded to each question from Q1 to Q18. The second last question (on the influence of COVID-19: Q19) lists ninety-eight respondents; the dropout rate mainly refers to the last question (Q20), marked as 'optional', which asked via a free text field for impressions on the impact. It was answered by twenty-four respondents.

In the median, it took participants four minutes fifty seconds to finish the questionnaire – slightly below the five minutes stated in the introduction text of the questionnaire. The following *Table 32 – Structure of Respondents* shows the differences between the structure of the population in Germany, German employees, and respondents in the sample. Mainly, the proportion of females is higher in the sample. As expected, the proportion of young academics is high. Especially the craftsmen ('Gesell\*in', 'Meister\*in') – the most common qualifications in Germany – are missing.

Characteristic	Germany	German employees	Sample
Proportion of Females	51%	49%	65%
People living in urban areas (> 10.000 inhabitants)	77%	n/a	73%
People living in villages < 5.000 inhabitants	15%	n/a	13%
People <20 years old	16%	Ca. 2%*	3%
People 21-40 years old	20%	Ca. 24%*	79%
People 41-60 years old	24%	Ca. 38%*	15%
Living alone	28%	n/a	32%
Living in Partnership	72%	n/a	64% (4% 'Prefer not to say')
Without Qualification	25%	18%	1%
Bachelor	2%	21%	44%
Master, Diploma	15%		19%
Crafts (Meister, Geselle)	48%	61%	0%
n/a= not available			

**Table 32 – Structure of Respondents**

(all numbers are rounded; \*=different age group definitions are used)

**Sources:** (Demowanda, 2017; Destatis, 2019b; Institut für Arbeit und Qualifikation der Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2019; Statista, 2011; Statista, 2018a; Statista, 2018b; Zech, 2018)

The impact of the mix in the sample will partly be discussed in the following analysis.

### 6.2.2 Analysis of the Survey

References on possible correlations are in focus of the survey and more relevant than overall findings. Therefore, the correlations will be evaluated section by section, and question by question in the following.

#### Section 1 – Demographic Data

*Q1: What is your gender?*

This question was asked to evaluate influences of the gender on findings. Sixty-five percent answered 'female', thirty-five percent 'male'; no one answered 'divers' or 'prefer not to say'. Some prominent findings are listed in *Table 33 – Differences by Gender*.

	Question	Female	Male
Q2	Living in villages < 2000 inhabitants	4%	10%
	Living in towns (2001 – 20.000 inhabitants)	26%	32%
	Living in cities >100.000 inhabitants	39%	46%
Q4	Living on their own	39%	29%
	Living with children	4%	20%
	Living with (step)father/mother	13%	15%
Q5	Working in administration	4%	0%
	Working in IT	5%	17%
Q7	Working in home office	3%	10%
Q11	Ease of finding a new job at PoL	2.7	2.8
Q12	Ease of change PoL	3.1	3.3
Q13	Change preference: PoW	74%	74%
	Change preference: PoL	26%	26%
Q14	Acceptable commuting distance: 0 km	3%	3%
	Acceptable commuting distance: >0 – <10 km	11%	8%
	Acceptable commuting distance: 0-50 km	82%	88%
Q16	Very important or important for QoL: Urban Environment	65%	58%
	Very important or important for QoL: Appropriate Housing	90%	81%
	Very important or important for QoL: Sports facilities	57%	68%
	Very important or important for QoL: Educational facilities for respondent	58%	35%
Q18	Satisfaction with information on PoW	3.5	3.3
	Satisfaction with information on PoL	3.5	3.2
Q19	Impact of COVID-19: QoL is slightly or much more important	57%	46%
	Impact of COVID-19: QoW is slightly or much more important	35%	17%

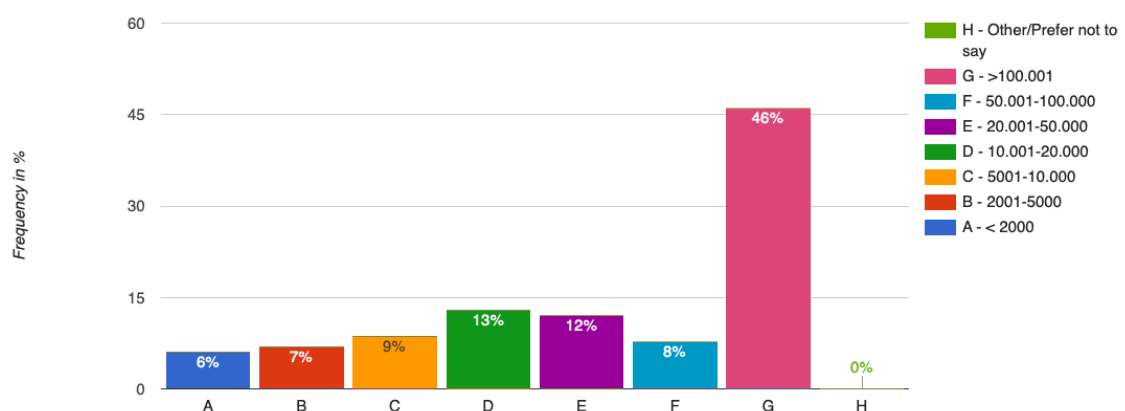
**Table 33 – Differences by Gender**

**Source:** (Own work)

Living conditions (size of town/city; partnership; children) differ in the sample. The distribution of females and males in the branches is quite similar with few exceptions. What is very similar, is the subjective estimation on the ease of finding and the will to change PoL and PoW, and the attitude to commuting. The biggest differences are in the importance of educational facilities for the respondent him- or herself and the impact of COVID-19.

*Q2: Where do you live?*

Q2 ('How many inhabitants has the city or town you are currently living in approximately?') was asked to evaluate the influence of the size of town/city the respondents currently live in on their preferences. In the sample, forty-six percent live in cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants (see *Figure 25 – Survey Results: Size of Town/City*).



**Figure 25 – Survey Results: Size of Town/City**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

As *Figure 26 – Way of Living by Size of Place* visualizes, in the sample more women than men live in cities. Respondents living with their parents or children live in smaller towns (colours represent sizes of below 20,000, between 20,000 and 100,000 and above 100,000 inhabitants).

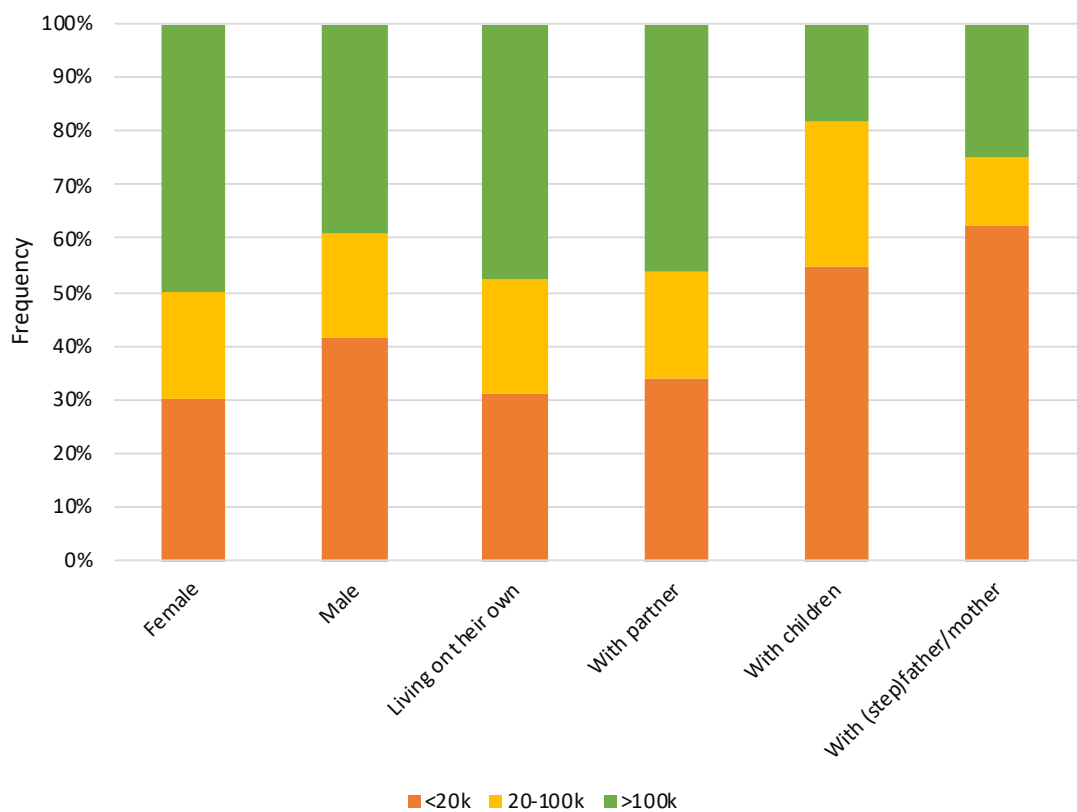


Figure 26 – Way of Living by Size of Place

Source: (Own work)

In the sample, people living in cities prefer lower commuting distances up to five or ten kilometres (marked on the x-axis), whereas people in towns accept long distance commuting above twenty or even above fifty kilometres (see *Figure 27 – Commuting Distance by Size of Place*).

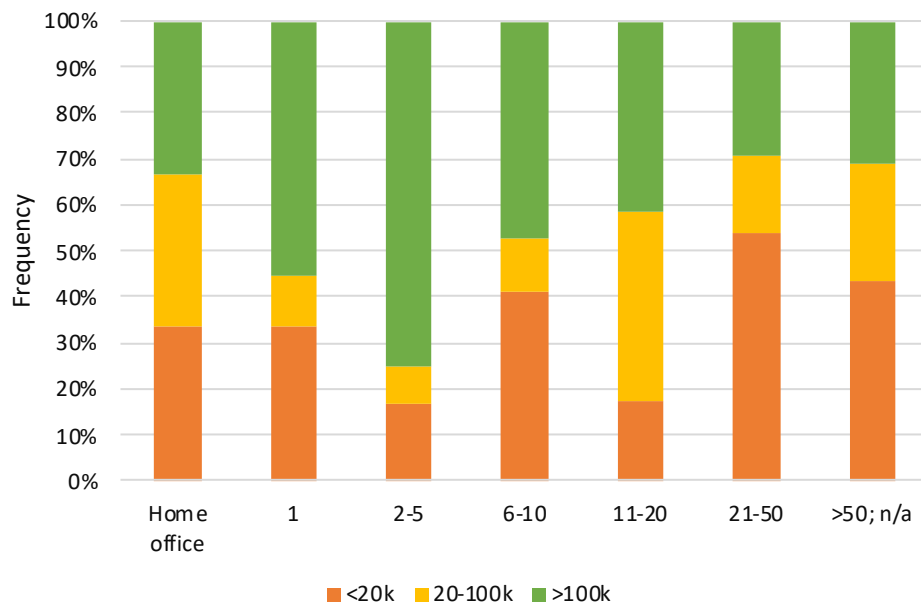


Figure 27 – Commuting Distance by Size of Place

Source: (Own work)

*Figure 28 – Distance from Birthplace by Size of Place and Figure 29 – Greatest Distance of PoL to Birthplace ever by Size of Place* visualizes the number of respondents (x-axis) who live (or have once lived) a range of kilometres (y-axis) away from their birthplace. Many people in the sample who live in cities come from far away birthplaces.



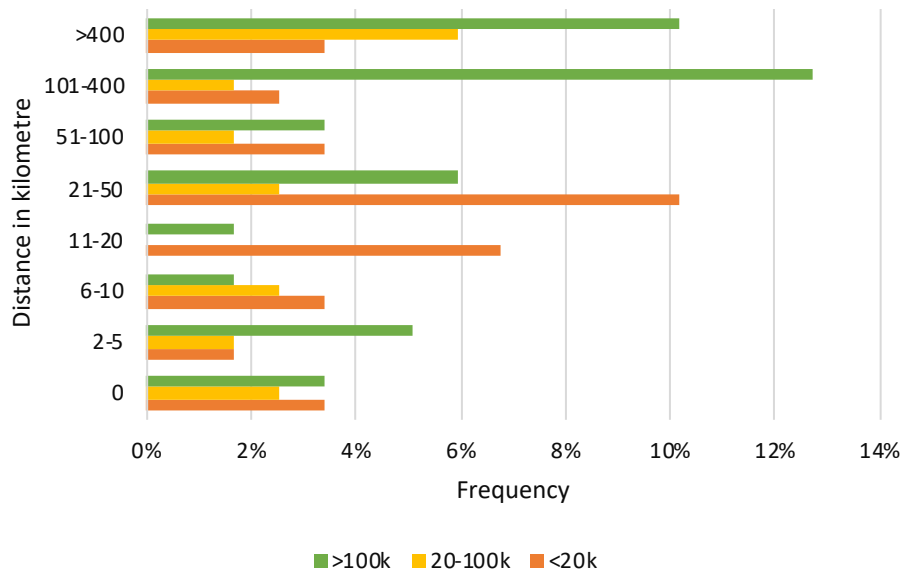


Figure 28 – Distance from Birthplace by Size of Place

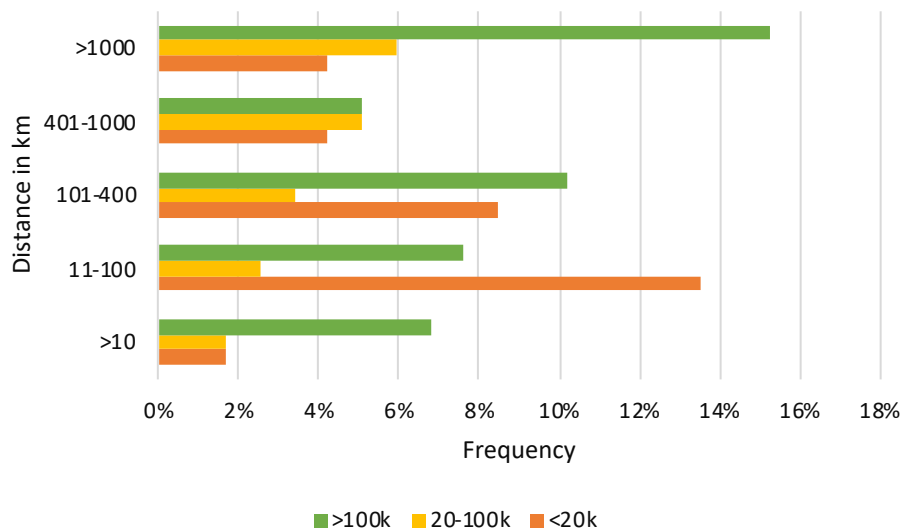


Figure 29 – Greatest Distance of PoL to Birthplace ever by Size of Place

Source: (Own work)

As expected by experts in the interviews, people in cities tend to value family-driven businesses lower than others. Important for them is public transport, a successful employer, and a modern workplace. As Q3 will show, a correlation to the age group influences the results (e.g. on the rating of 'friendly contacts' and a 'modern

workplace'), too (see *Figure 30 – Important and very important Factors of QoW by Size of Place*).

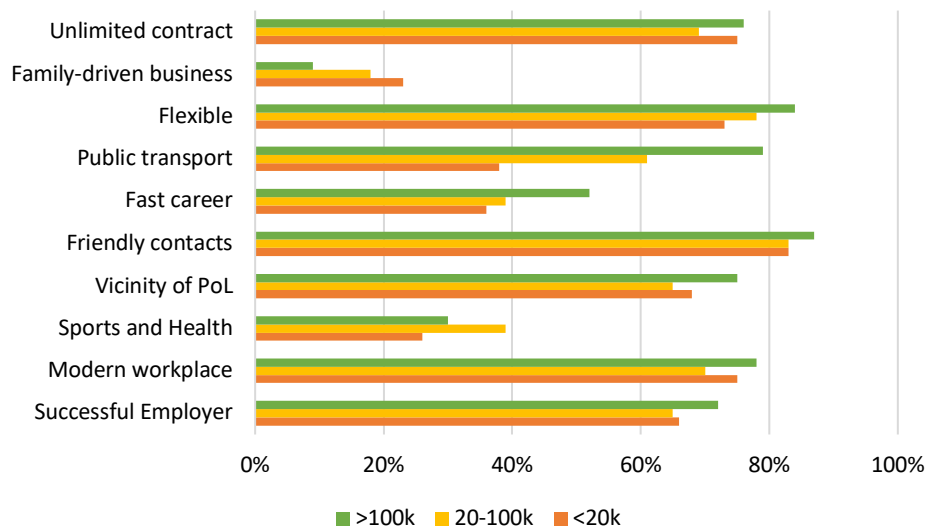


Figure 30 – Important and very important Factors of QoW by Size of Place

Source: (Own work)

Figure 31 – Ease of Changing PoW and PoL by Size of Place shows a rating on a scale from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very hard) on questions Q11 and Q12 (see Table 34 – Question Q11 and Q12).

	Question
Q11	No matter if you yourself intend to change your job, to stay at your employer or if you are on job search and more: How easy would it be for you to find a new, appropriate job near your current place of living?
Q12	If you yourself would change your job: How easy would it be to permanently change your current place of living

Table 34 – Question Q11 and Q12

As can be expected, the respondents from smaller towns find it harder to change both.

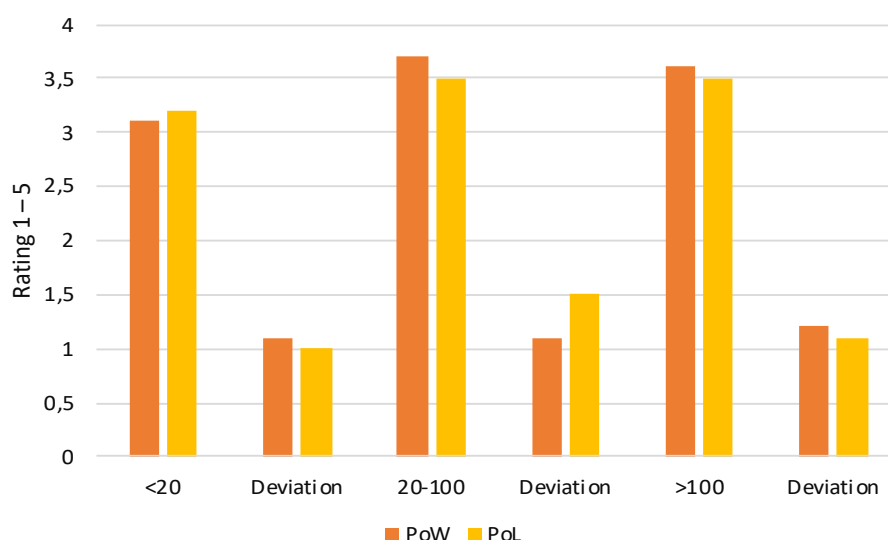


Figure 31 – Ease of Changing PoW and PoL by Size of Place

Source: (Own work)

Figure 32 – Differences in Preferences PoL >20.000 vs. <20.000 shows differences between respondents living in smaller towns and villages (<20,000 inhabitants) and those in bigger towns and cities on QoL (Q16; see Table 41 – Question 16). Presented are the differences in percent of the respective addition of ratings ‘very important’ and ‘important’.

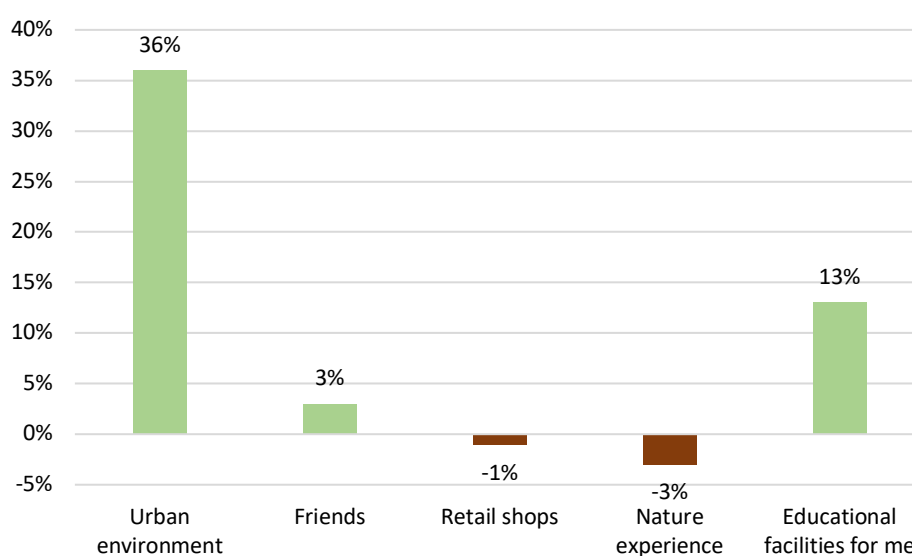


Figure 32 – Differences in Preferences PoL >20.000 vs. <20.000

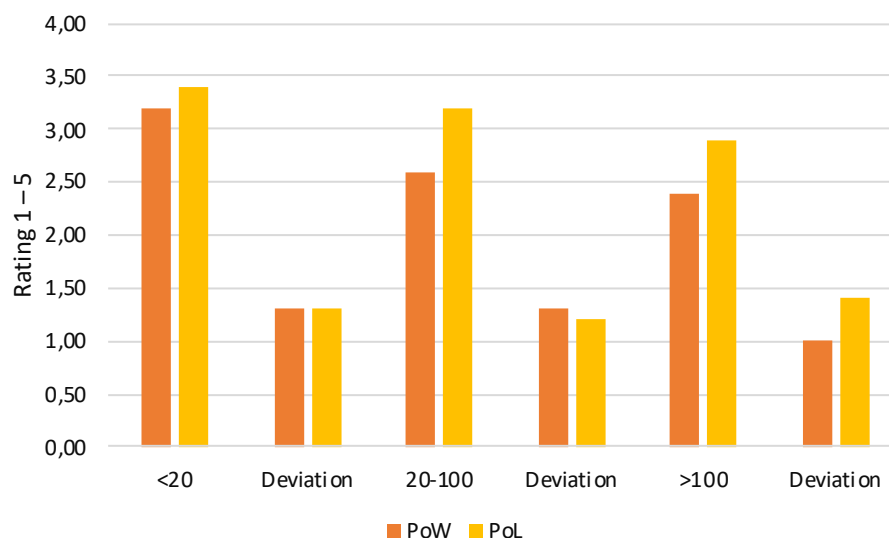
Source: (Own work)

Respondents living in bigger towns and cities rate 'nature experience' and 'retail shops' slightly less and 'friends' slightly more important. Significant is the difference regarding 'educational facilities' and 'urban environment'.

*Figure 33 – Satisfaction with Information on PoW/PoL by Size of Place* shows on a scale from 1 (Very poor) to 5 (very well), how good people in different living situations rate their grade of information about their PoL and PoW according to Q18 (see *Table 35 – Question 18*). In this sample, people from smaller towns and villages saw themselves better informed.

	Question
Q18	How well did I feel informed about my place of work?
Q18	How well did I feel informed about my place of living?

**Table 35 – Question 18**



**Figure 33 – Satisfaction with Information on PoW/PoL by Size of Place**

**Source:** (Own work)

*Q3: What is your age group?*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, almost two thirds of the sample belong to the age group twenty-one to thirty years old (see *Figure 34 – Age Groups of Sample*).

The numbers in the other age groups besides thirty-one to forty are very low (see *Table 36 – Numbers in Age Groups*). Hence, there is no adequate sample, and correlations between age groups and other findings are not presentable. To show at least some vague correlations, the sample is divided into the group below and the group above thirty in the following.

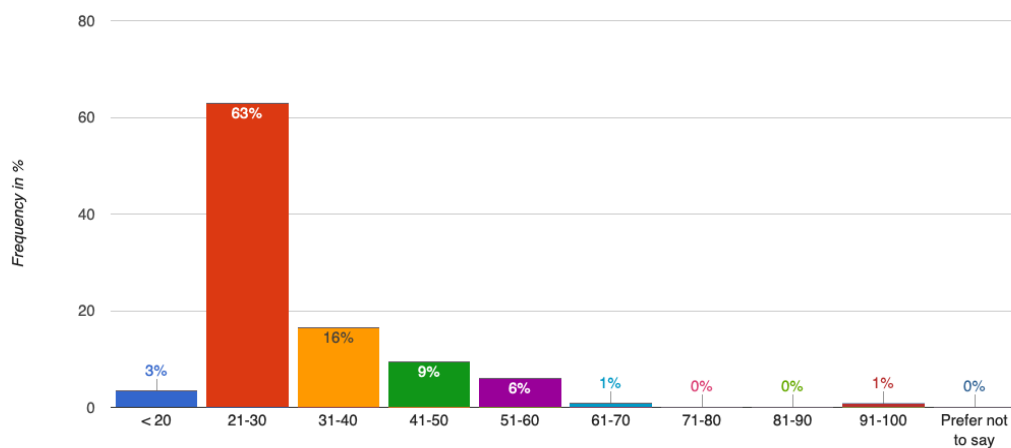


Figure 34 – Age Groups of Sample

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Age Group	<20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
n	4	73	19	11	7	1

Table 36 – Numbers in Age Groups

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

As *Figure 35 – Way of Living by Age Groups* shows (considering the limitations mentioned above), people below thirty in the sample tend to live more often with their (step-)parents, none of them had children.

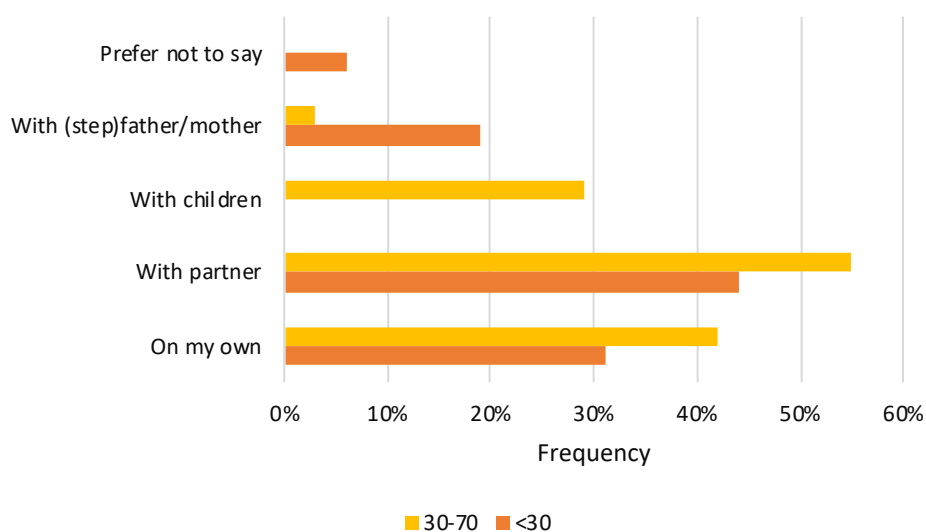


Figure 35 – Way of Living by Age Groups

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Answering Q11 and Q12 (see *Table 34 – Question Q11 and Q12*), people below thirty in the sample tend to find it easier to find a new PoW and PoL on a scale from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very hard; see *Figure 36 – Ease of Changing PoW/PoL by Age Groups*).



Figure 36 – Ease of Changing PoW/PoL by Age Groups

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

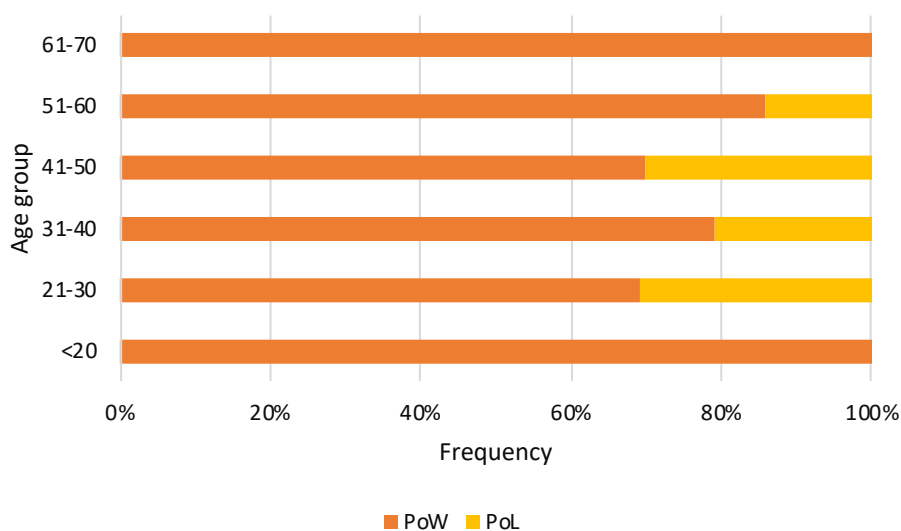
Respondents of all age groups rather prefer to change their PoW than their PoL (see *Table 37 – Question 13*).

	Question
Q13	What would you change first: place of living or place of work? Apart from the easiness to find a new job or a new permanent place to live: If you had to make the choice between either changing your place of living or your place of work – what would you change first? Options: PoW / PoL

**Table 37 – Question 13**

**Source:** (Own work)

Within the limitations mentioned above, especially people below thirty in the sample find it easier to change their PoL (see *Figure 37 – Preference to Change PoW/PoL by Age Group*). But this might also be influenced by other factors like the current PoL: fifty-six percent of the age group below thirty live in cities (> 100,000), only ten percent of the people above thirty.



**Figure 37 – Preference to Change PoW/PoL by Age Group**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

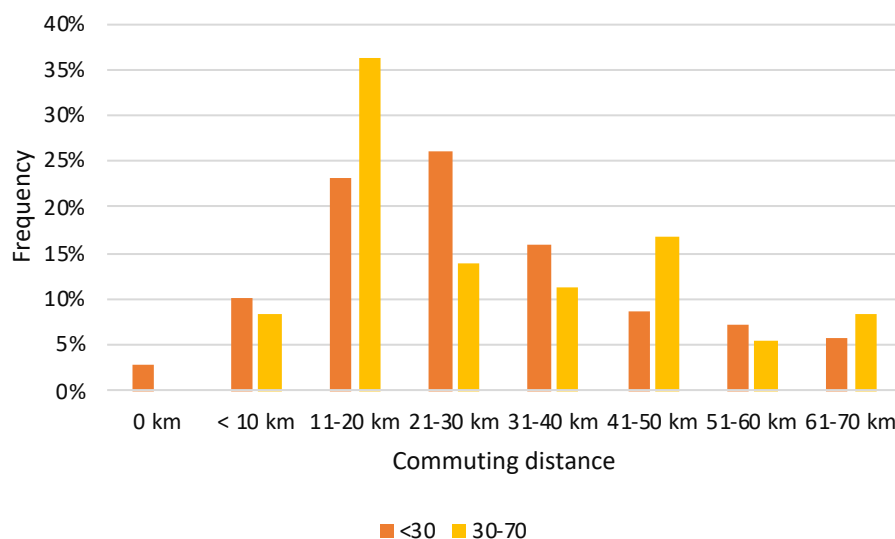
The same limitations have to be considered regarding Q14 (see *Table 38 – Question 14*).

	Question
Q14	What do you think about commuting? If you have to commute daily to your place of work: what is the acceptable distance (single distance)?

**Table 38 – Question 14**

**Source:** (Own work)

*Figure 38 – Acceptable Commuting Distance by Age Group* shows no clear difference between age groups (n above fifty kilometres is below five).



**Figure 38 – Acceptable Commuting Distance by Age Group**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

As *Figure 39 – Important and very important Factors of QoW by Age Group* (frequencies added up) shows, people below thirty in the sample tended to rate the importance of ‘family-driven business’ and ‘benefits like sports an health courses’ lower, while rating especially ‘public transport’ (given the limitation regarding their main PoL mentioned above) and ‘friendly contacts with colleagues’ higher than the older group. For details on the question see *Table 40 – Question 15*.



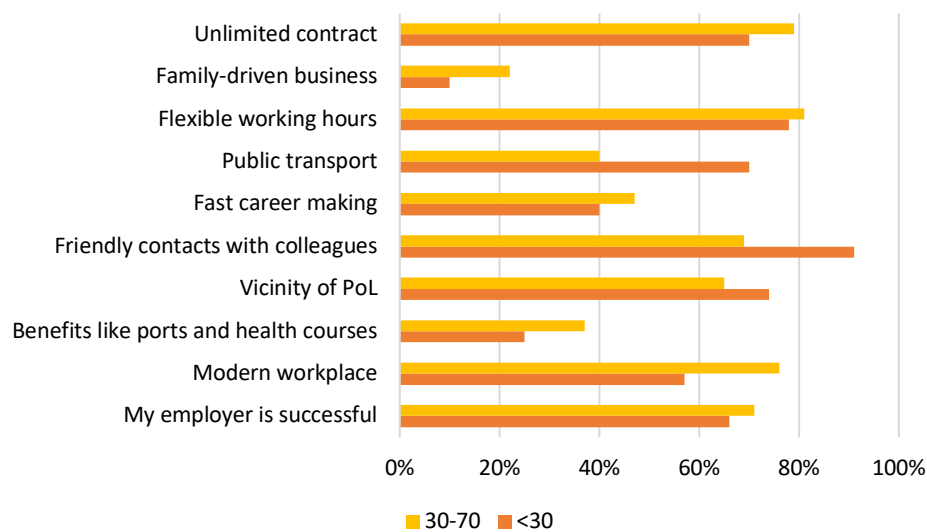


Figure 39 – Important and very important Factors of QoW by Age Group

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Figure 40 – Important and very important Factors of QoL by Age Group (frequencies added up) shows the group below thirty to rate 'retail shops' and 'vicinity of cities' to be more important. For details on the question, see Table 41 – Question 16.

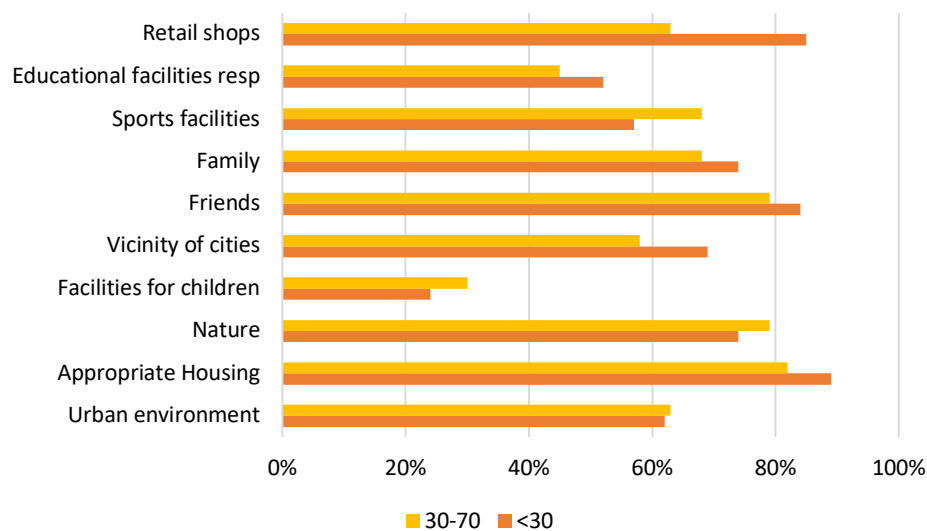
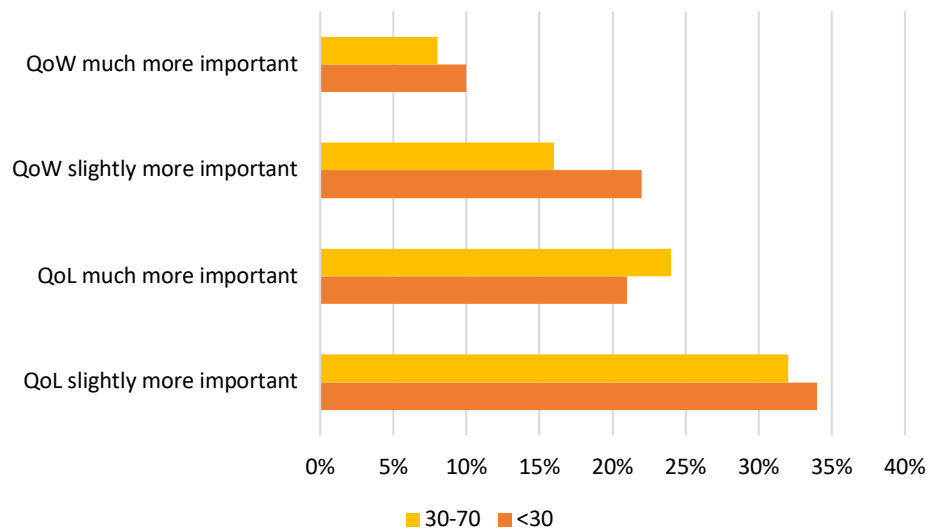


Figure 40 – Important and very important Factors of QoL by Age Group

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Regarding the change due to COVID-19, the younger age group puts a stronger focus on the importance of QoW in comparison to the older group, while both groups overall rate the importance of QoL significantly higher (*Figure 41 – Change due to COVID-19 on QoW and QoL by Age Groups*; for details on the question see *Table 42 – Question 19*).



**Figure 41 – Change due to COVID-19 on QoW and QoL by Age Groups**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q4: How do you live?*

*Figure 42 – Way of Living of Sample* shows that the sample differs from the population in Germany, which has for example 21.7 percent singles and 29.1 percent in partnership without children (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2012; for details on the question see *Table 39 – Question 4*).

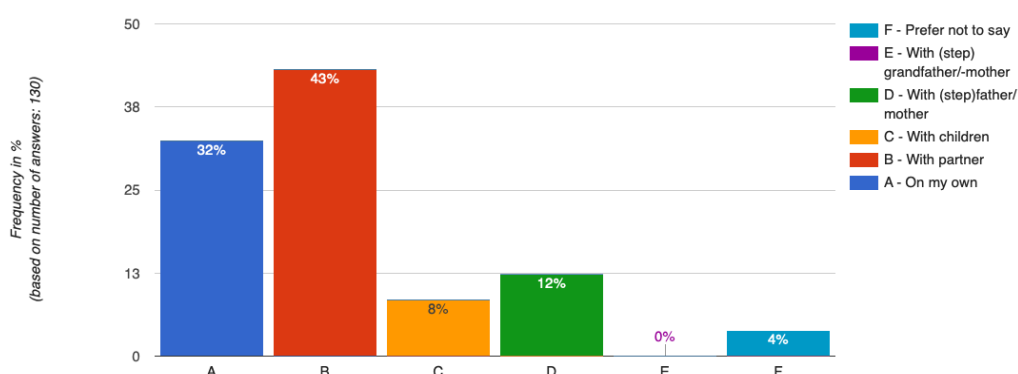


Figure 42 – Way of Living of Sample

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

	Question	n
Q4	Please specify, who is living with you in your place of living (multiple answers possible)	
Options:		
	On my own	42
	With partner	56
	With children	11
	With (step)father/mother	16
	With (step)grandfather/-mother	0
	Prefer not to say	5

Table 39 – Question 4

Source: (Own work)

Regarding Q11 and Q12 (see *Table 34 – Question Q11 and Q12*; scale ranging from 1=Very easy to 5=Very hard), especially the (young) people living with their (step)parents rate it harder to change their PoW, whereas respondents with children find it harder to change their PoL (see *Figure 43 – Ease of Changing PoW/PoL by Way of Life*) – with the limitations, for example low number of cases.

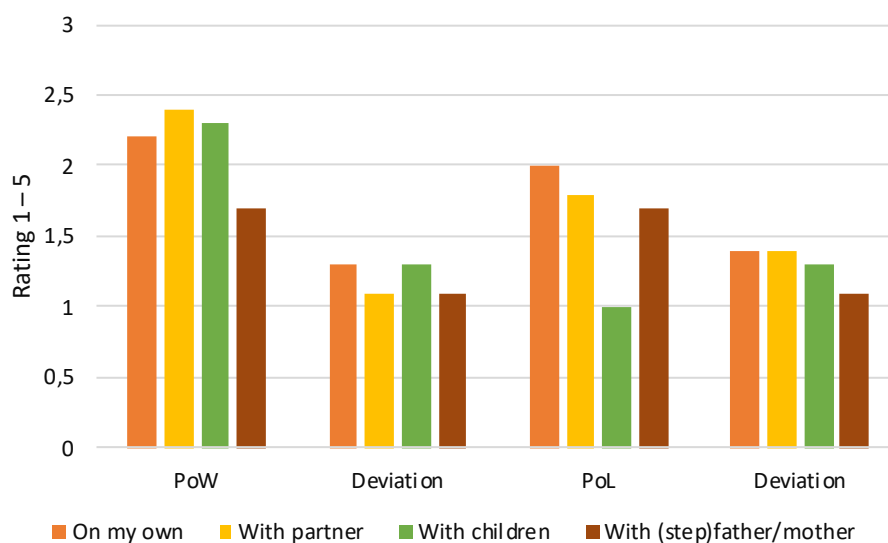


Figure 43 – Ease of Changing PoW/PoL by Way of Life

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Hence, the preference to change rather PoW than PoL is distinct at respondents with children. In the sample, most respondents prefer to change their PoW (see *Figure 44 – Preference to Change PoW/PoL by Way of Life*).

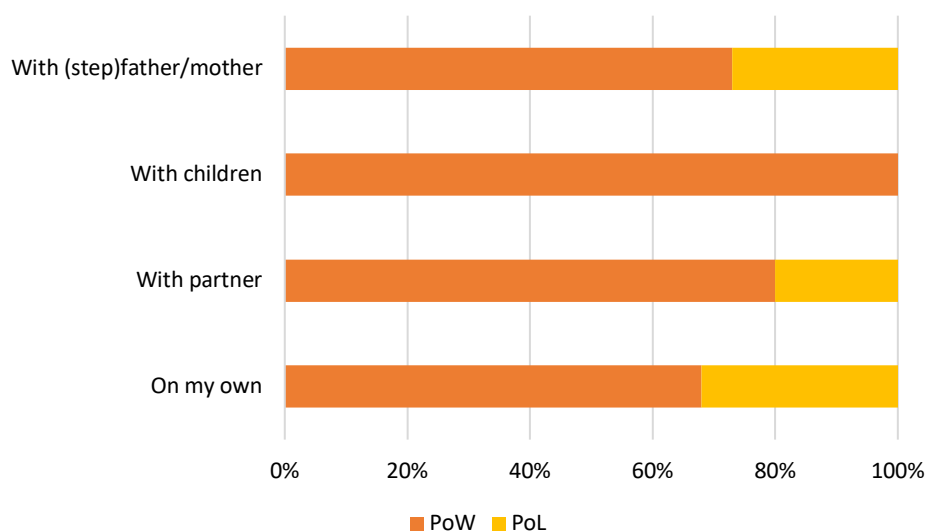
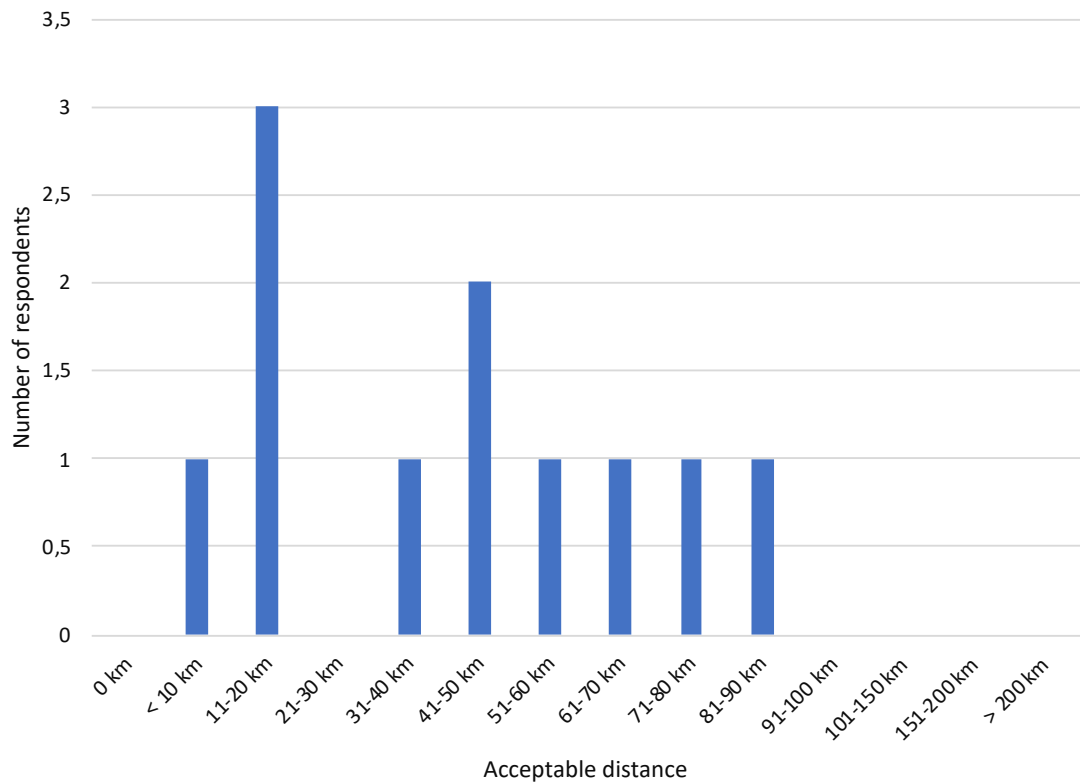


Figure 44 – Preference to Change PoW/PoL by Way of Life

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

There is no clear correlation between having children and the accepted distance of commuting in the sample (all options between ten and ninety kilometres, in ten kilometre steps, were mentioned once or twice; see Figure 45 – Acceptable Commuting Distance for People with Children).



**Figure 45 – Acceptable Commuting Distance for People with Children**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q5: In which section do you work?*

To evaluate a possible influence of the branches and jobs of respondents on the importance of QoW and QoL, only dimensions above ten voters have been considered (see *Figure 46 – Important Factors of QoW by selected Branches* and *Figure 47 – Important Factors of QoL by selected Branches*). In the sample, respondents working in the industry-sector rate the importance of the vicinity of PoW lower, 'flexible working hours', 'modern workplace' and 'successful employer' are important to them. Regarding

PoL, 'nature' and 'family' are less important to the group in industry. Regarding 'facilities for children', the respective number of respondents is too low to draw conclusions.

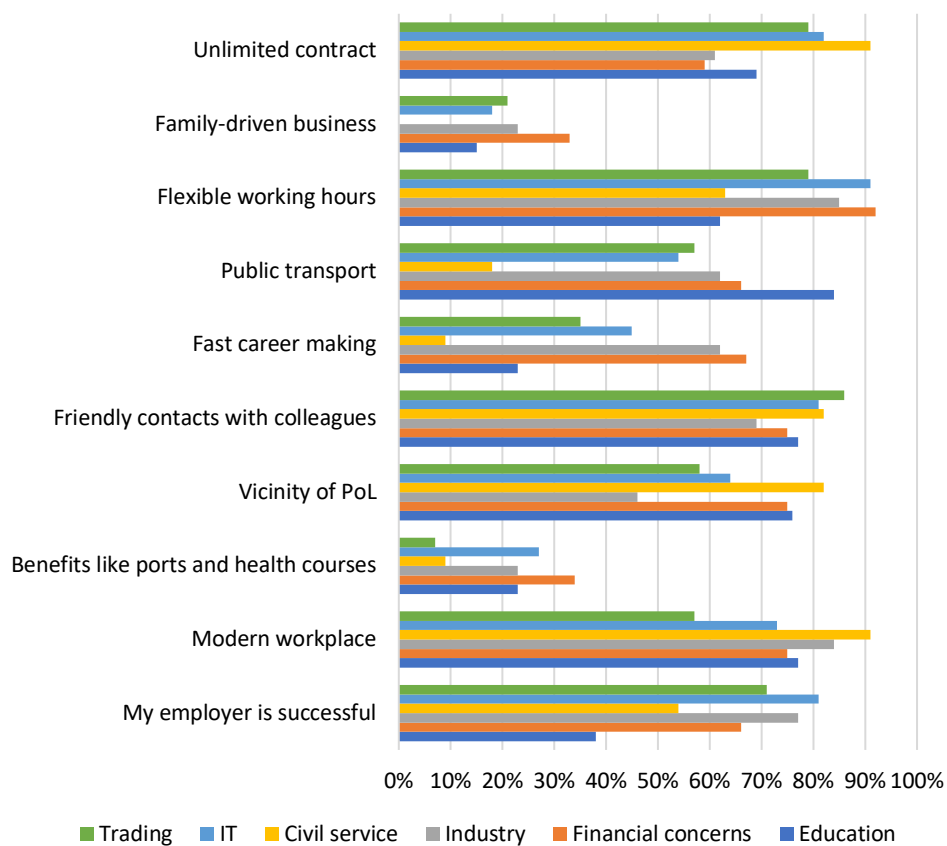


Figure 46 – Important Factors of QoW by selected Branches

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

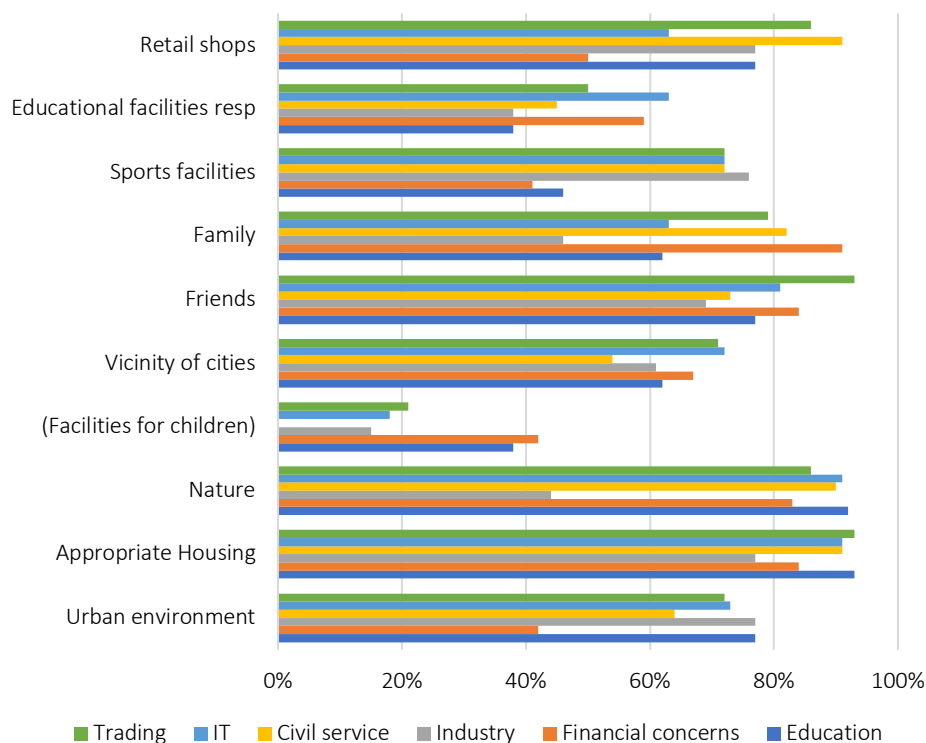


Figure 47 – Important Factors of QoL by selected Branches

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Q6: Please select your highest educational degree

Respondents in the sample are mainly high qualified (Bachelor; Diploma/Master; Abitur = diploma from German secondary school qualifying for university admission or matriculation), as Figure 48 – Highest Educational Degrees of Respondents shows.

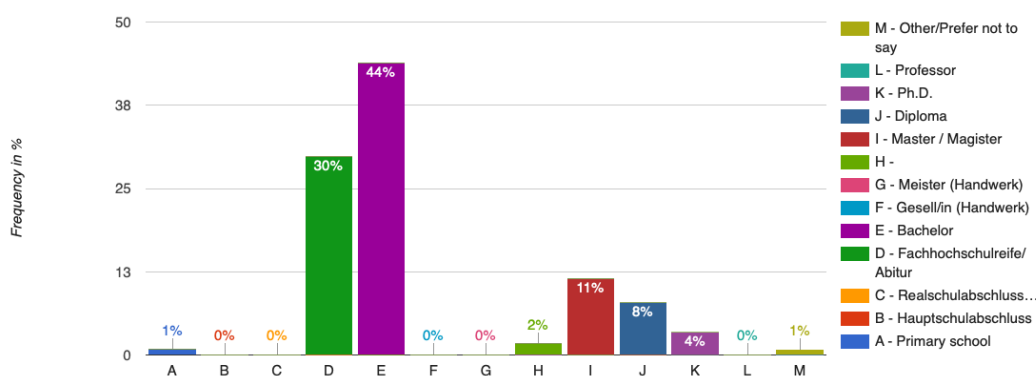


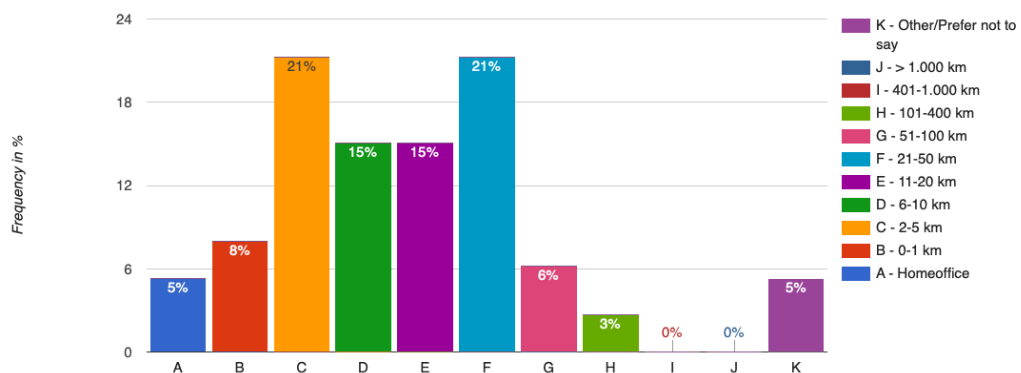
Figure 48 – Highest Educational Degrees of Respondents

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

## Section 2 – Place of Living and Place of Work

*Q7: How far away from your place of work do you live?*

The first question in the second section of the questionnaire shows that most people in the sample live in a range of no more than fifty kilometres from their PoW (see *Figure 49 – Distance to PoW of Respondents*).



**Figure 49 – Distance to PoW of Respondents**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q8: How often do you work in your home office?*

The question on the frequency of working in home office should enable to evaluate differences, if respondents work more or less often at home. Only one respondent does remote work once, five others four or five days a week. As the numbers are too small, they are not further analysed.

*Q9: How far do you live from your birthplace?*

As *Figure 50 – Distance from Birthplace of Respondents* shows, the whole range is covered from people living at their birthplace to others living more than 1,000 kilometre away.



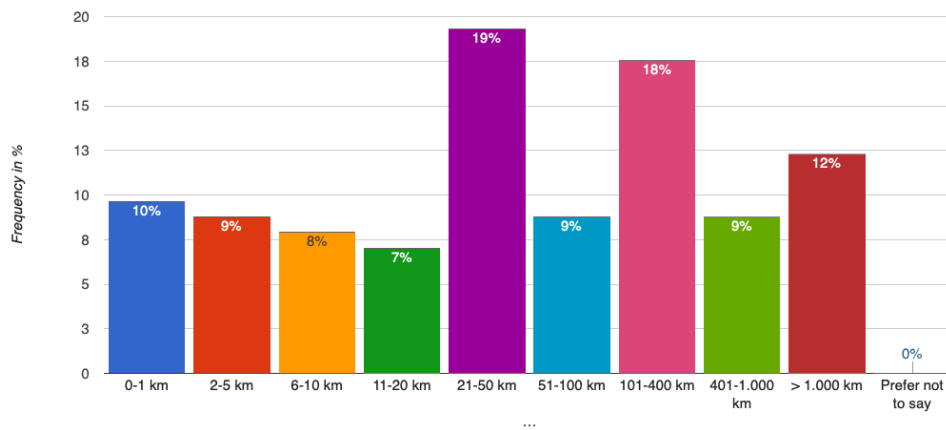


Figure 50 – Distance from Birthplace of Respondents

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Q10: How far have you ever lived away from your birthplace?

As Figure 51 – Distance from Birthplace in Life shows, more than forty percent of respondents used to live more than 400 kilometres from their birthplace at least once in their life.

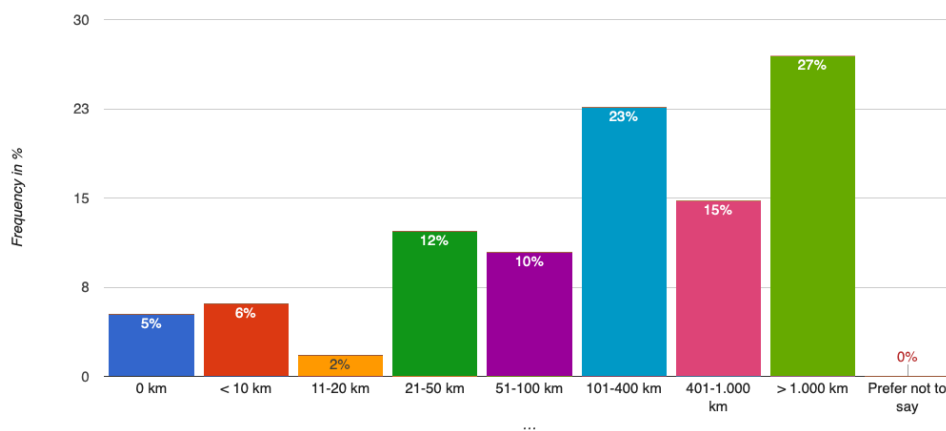


Figure 51 – Distance from Birthplace in Life

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

As Figure 52 – *Influence of Distance on Preference to Change* shows, there is a strong influence of the distance on the preference to change either PoL or PoW (Q13):

- the left half shows the answers of people who currently live a certain distance away from their birthplace
- the right half shows answers of people who have lived a certain distance away once in their life

People living or having lived more than 1,000 and between 101 and 400 kilometres from their birthplace seem (in this sample) to consider changing their PoL more often than others.

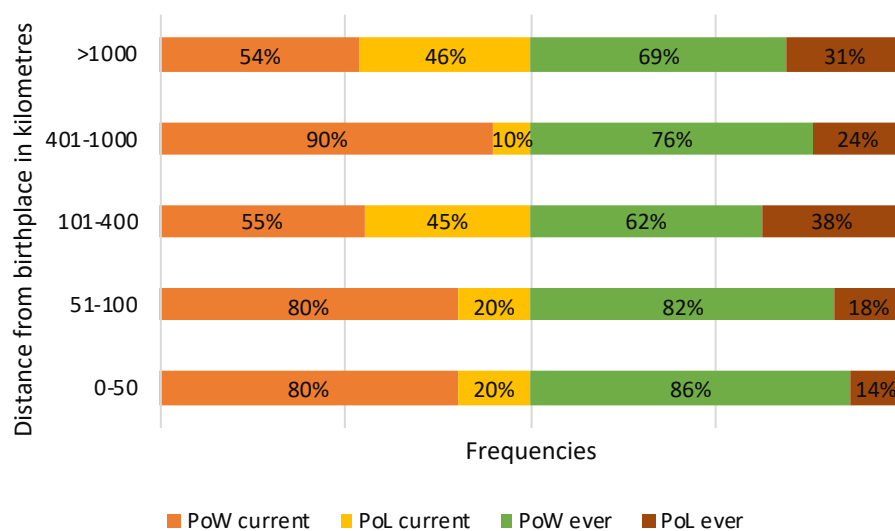


Figure 52 – Influence of Distance on Preference to Change

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

### Section 3 – Attitude to Change

To visualize the respondents' attitude to change PoL and PoW (see Table 34 – Question Q11 and Q12), data has been aggregated by multiplying the average answers (Very easy = x -4; easy = x -2; Neutral = x 1; Hard = x 2; Very hard = x4). The majority of respondents finds it harder to change the PoL than PoW, many estimate it being easy to find a new PoW at the PoL (see Figure 53 – *Ease of finding new PoL and PoW*).

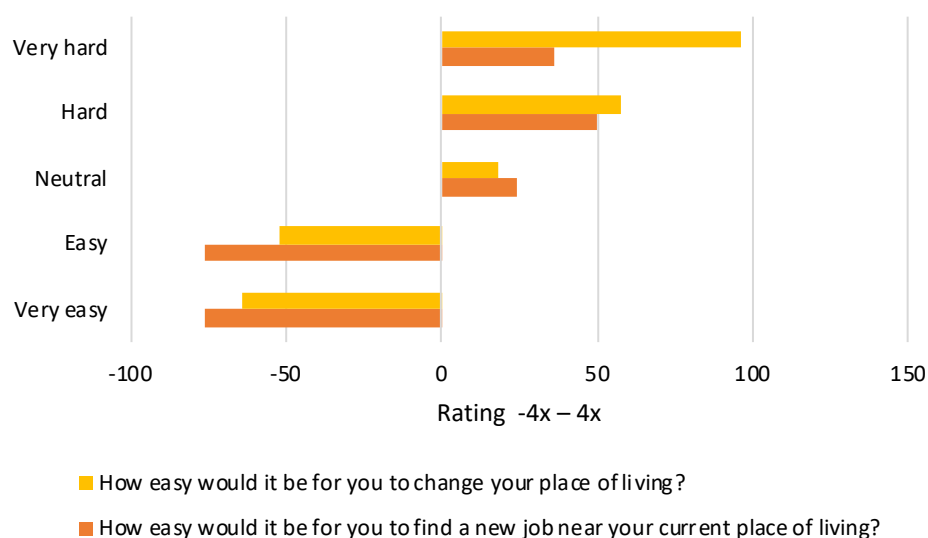


Figure 53 – Ease of finding new PoL and PoW

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Q13: What would you change first: place of living or place of work?

Figure 54 – Preference on Changing PoL and PoW shows a very clear preference of the respondents on Table 37 – Question 13: the majority prefers to rather change PoL than PoW.

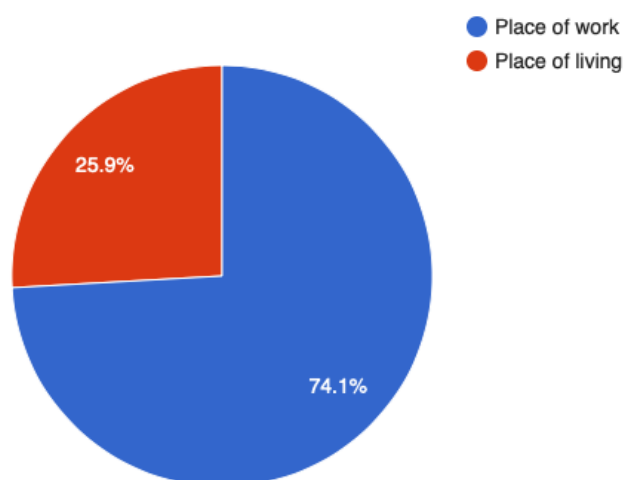
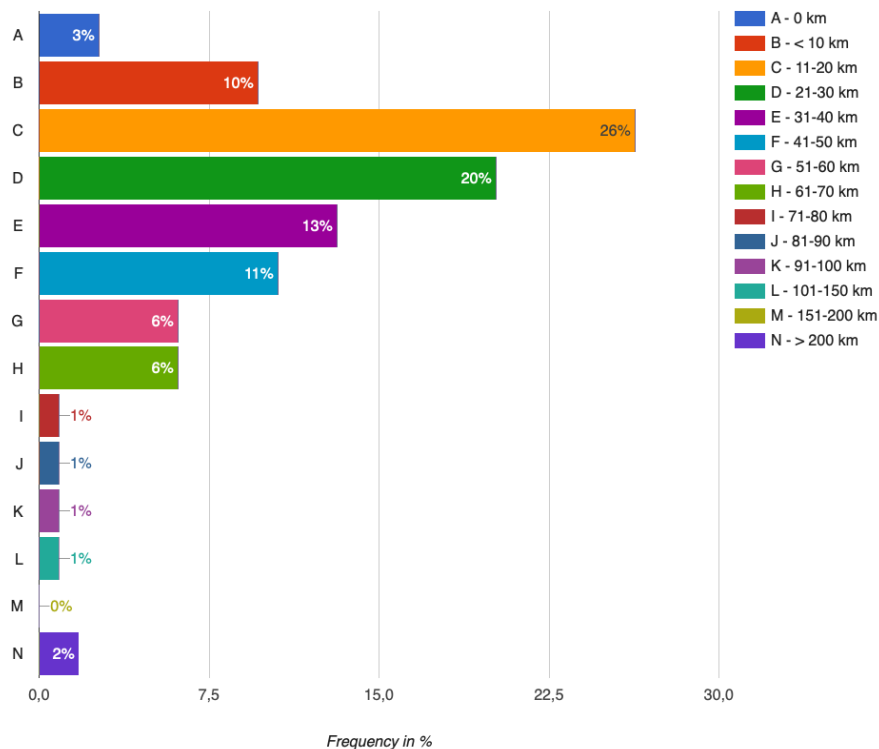


Figure 54 – Preference on Changing PoL and PoW

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q14: What do you think about commuting?*

As *Figure 55 – Acceptable Commuting Distance for Sample* shows, the answer of the majority of respondents on *Table 38 – Question 14* is a distance below seventy kilometre, with almost sixty percent preferring less than thirty kilometres.



**Figure 55 – Acceptable Commuting Distance for Sample**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

#### **Section 4 – Requirements on PoL and PoW**

*Q15: Please rate the following points on the place of work*

The answers on Q15 (see *Table 40 – Question 15*) regarding the PoW show that the sample is not very interested in sports and health courses and working in family-driven businesses (see *Figure 56 – Preferences at PoW of Sample*). Fast career making is not a top priority either. Differences in groups have been discussed above, which also applies to Q16.

	Question
Q15	<p>Please rate the following points on the place of work. When you think of your place of work: How important are the following factors for you?</p> <p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My employer is successful</li> <li>• Benefits like sports or health courses</li> <li>• Vicinity of workplace to place of living</li> <li>• Friendly contacts to colleagues</li> <li>• Fast career making</li> <li>• Accessibility of my place of work by public transport</li> <li>• Flexible working hours</li> <li>• Family-driven business</li> <li>• Unlimited contract</li> <li>• Modern workplace</li> </ul>

Table 40 – Question 15

Source: (Own work)

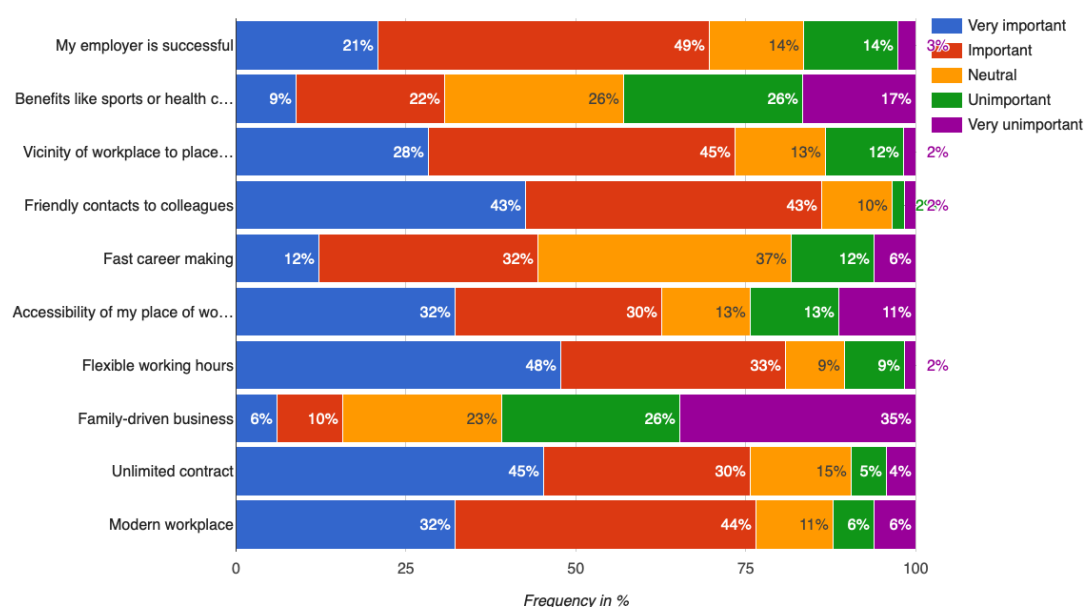


Figure 56 – Preferences at PoW of Sample

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q16: Please rate the following points on Place of living*

In the sample, regarding Q16 (see Table 41 – Question 16) especially facilities for children and personal education are not in the focus (see Figure 57 – Preferences of PoL of Sample). Very important are appropriate housing and friends at the PoL.

	Question
Q16	<p>Please rate the following points on the place of living. When you think of your place of living: How important are the following factors for you?</p> <p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban environment</li> <li>• Nature experience</li> <li>• Facilities for children</li> <li>• Vicinity of cities</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Sports facilities</li> <li>• Educational facilities for me</li> <li>• Retail shops</li> <li>• Appropriate housing</li> <li>• Family-driven business</li> <li>• Unlimited contract</li> <li>• Modern workplace</li> </ul>

Table 41 – Question 16

Source: (Own work)

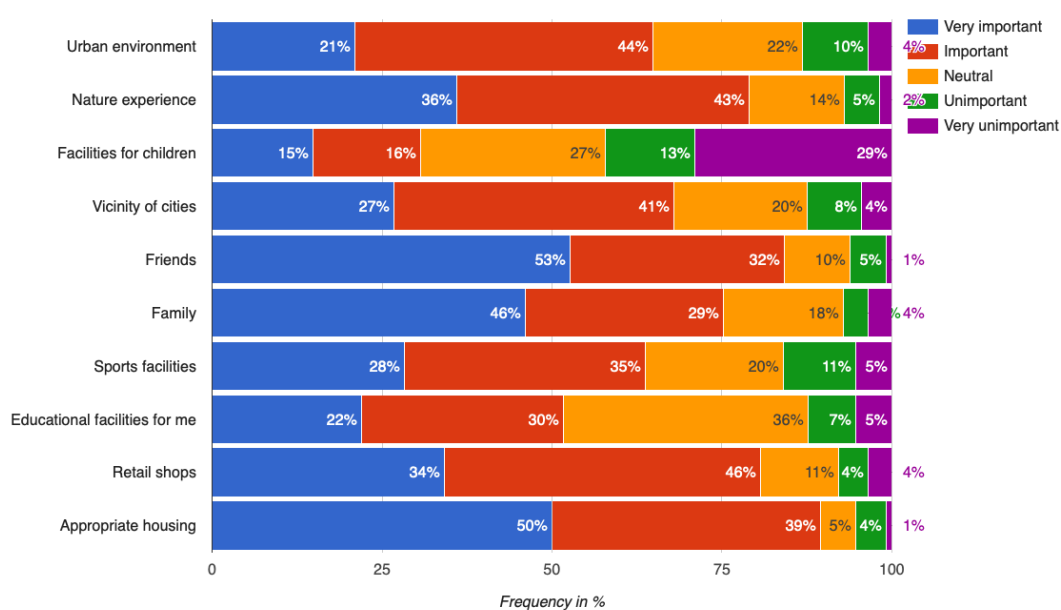


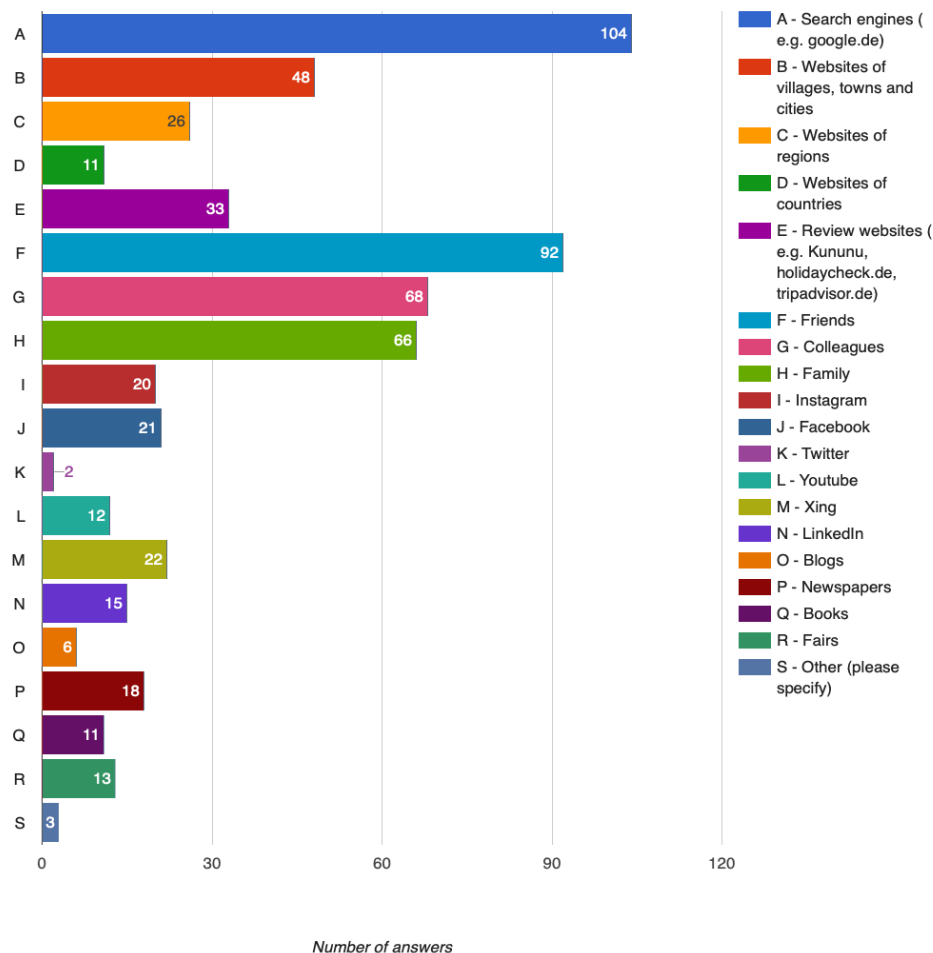
Figure 57 – Preferences of PoL of Sample

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

## Section 5 – Marketing Strategy

*Q17: Where do you get your information from?*

Answering Q17, almost all respondents named ‘Search engines’ like google their top source, followed by ‘friends’, ‘Colleagues’ and ‘Family’ (see *Figure 58 – Information Sources of Sample*).



**Figure 58 – Information Sources of Sample**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

*Q18: How well do you feel informed?*

As *Figure 59 – Satisfaction with Information on PoL and PoW* shows, most respondents feel well or very well informed. Data has been aggregated by multiplying the average answers (Very poor = x -4; Poor= x -2; Neutral = x 1; Well = x2; Very well = x4).

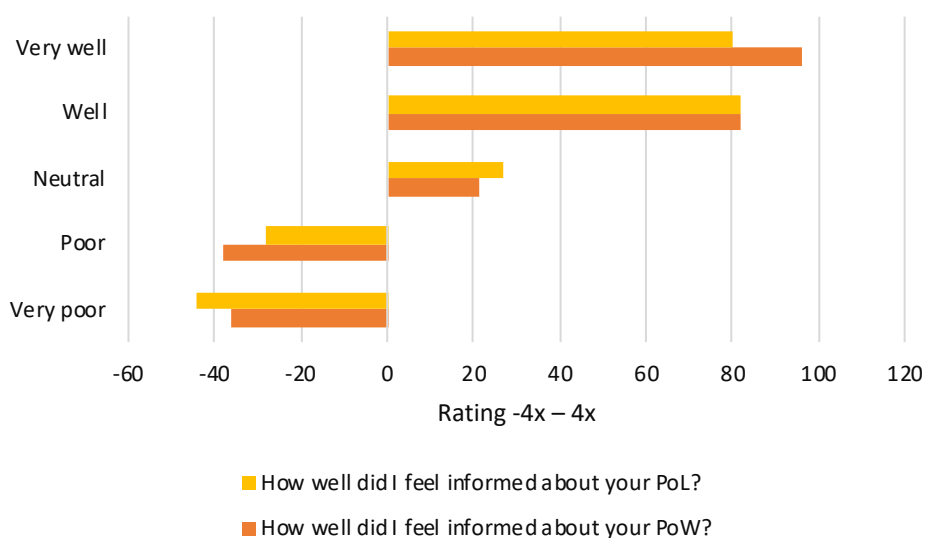


Figure 59 – Satisfaction with Information on PoL and PoW

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

## Section 6 – Change due to COVID-19

### Q19: Change of Opinion

Asked Q19 (see Table 42 – Question 19), the majority of the respondents in the sample see a growing importance of PoL (see Figure 60 – Influence of COVID-19 on Sample).

Less estimate more significance of PoW, with nearly twenty percent rating the relevance of PoW 'less important' or 'unimportant' due to COVID-19.

	Question
Q19	Change due to COVID-19: Considering the latest developments on COVID-19: Has your opinion on the following topics changed: Quality of life (e.g. health care services, recreation, safety, retail shops, friends and family) Quality of work (e.g. interesting/varied work, competitive pay, flexible working hours, vicinity to place of living, job security).

Table 42 – Question 19

Source: (Own work)



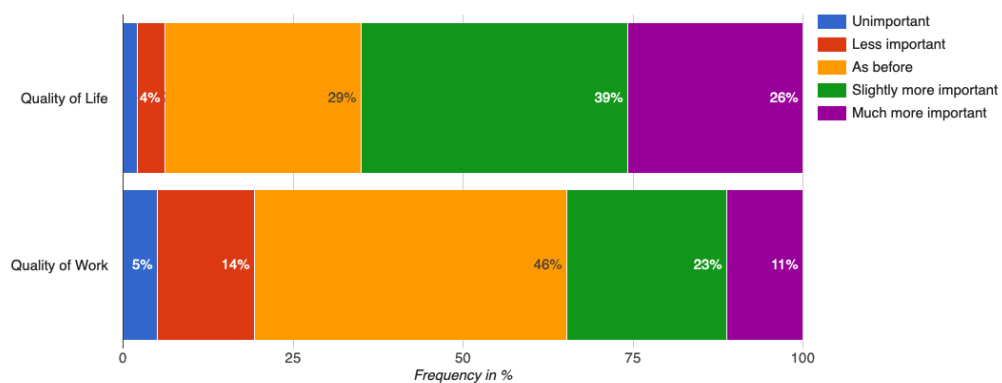


Figure 60 – Influence of COVID-19 on Sample

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

### Q20: What has changed due to COVID-19?

Both experts (see Table 27 – Influence of COVID-19 on QoL and QoW (Experts)) and respondents views on the influence of COVID-19 on the topic have been processed using MAXQDA, as Q20 (see Table 43 – Question 20) is seen qualitative.

	Question
Q20	If you like, please comment in how far you see changes coming in your quality of life and quality of work. Your answer may be an important contribution to necessary changes.

Table 43 – Question 20

Source: (Own work)

The colour scheme used is analogue to *Table 19 – Colour Scheme used for Coding*. It is listed in *Table 44 – Colour Scheme used for Coding of COVID-19 Answers*.




	Colour	Code: Participant is talking about...	Topic addressed
	Green	Demand and supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less Jobs</li> </ul>
	Light blue	QoL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreasing Standard of Living</li> <li>• Work-Life Interference</li> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Digitization</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Social Contacts</li> <li>• Nature</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Counter-Urbanization</li> </ul>
	Dark Blue	QoW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Digitization</li> <li>• Home Office</li> <li>• Job Security</li> </ul>

Table 44 – Colour Scheme used for Coding of COVID-19 Answers

Source: (Own work)

As *Figure 61 – Document Comparison Chart COVID-19 Topics* shows, both groups focused their answers mainly on QoL, as the rating in Q19 lets expect.



Figure 61 – Document Comparison Chart COVID-19 Topics

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

While experts addressed some topics coequally and took a look into the foreseeable future, respondents talked mainly about 'Home Office' and current problems. Respondents from both groups mentioned a possible counter-urbanization, more flexibility at the PoW (remote work, digitization, less travel) and a range of topics regarding work-life interference (see *Figure 62 – Code Comparison COVID-19 Topics*).

However, the term is listed separately, as most answers could not be clearly subsumed (respondents may have talked about private life, work life or the intersection).












Code System	Experts COVID19	Respondents COVID19	SUM
 Demand and Supply			0
 Less Jobs			10
 QoW			0
 Flexibility			2
 Innovation			2
 Digitization			6
 Home Office			9
 Job Security			6
 QoL			0
 Decreasing Standard of Living			2
 Work-Life Interference			1
 Childcare			2
 Stress			1
 Digitization			3
 Innovation			1
 Social Contacts			5
 Nature			3
 Health			6
 Security			7
 Counter-urbanization			5
 SUM	34	37	71

Figure 62 – Code Comparison COVID-19 Topics

Source: (Own work; using MAXQDA)

Table 45 – *Influence of COVID-19 on QoL and QoW Triangulation* shows a comparison of topics addressed by experts and respondents to the questionnaire, with strong validation marked Green, weak marked Blue and no comment on the topic marked in Red. The number (twenty-four) and quota of respondents (twenty-one percent) is low, therefore the findings are not seen as representative. Having not addressed topics the experts mentioned does not imply the topic to be irrelevant to the sample, as the context and questioning (by sending a separate email to experts and including Q19/20 in the questionnaire) might have influenced the outcome as well as Q20 being the only input-question. Respondents spend a median of two minutes (range: six seconds to twenty-three minutes) answering Q20, therefore the available time frame or the attention span of the individual might also be seen as an influencing factor.

Statements	Influence on QoL		Influence on QoW	
	Experts	Respondents Validation	Experts	Respondents Validation
1	More, stronger solidarity	Strong	More home office	Strong
2	Intensified focus on local resources	Strong	More rapid digitalisation	Strong
3	Telemedicine	None	Less business travel	Weak
4	Care offers for children	Weak	Focus on safety and health	Strong
5	Care offers for elderly people	None	Job security	Strong
6	Focus on social values (family, friends, relationships)	Strong	Possibly less personal contact	Strong
7	Need for security (health, job, basic services, education)	Strong	Supply of jobs uncertain	Strong
8	Consumption	Weak	Less permanent jobs / fixed contracts	Strong
9	Standard of living	Weak	'Homecomers' (people leave formerly thriving, well-paying industries to work in other sectors)	Weak
10	Financial concerns	Strong	Higher demand in health, care, IT	Weak
11	Back to nature	Strong	Decline in for example automotive sector	None
12	Fear	Weak	Uncertain developments in sectors like tourism, gastronomy,	None
13	Rise of fake news, conspiracy theories	None	More flexibility	Strong
14	Rising impact of media	None	Less globalization	None
16	Urbanization might come to an end, to a standstill or reverse	Weak	Job-seeker-market might switch (more demand than supply)	Strong
17	Highly dynamic, massive, unforeseeable developments			Weak

Table 45 – Influence of COVID-19 on QoL and QoW Triangulation

Source: (Own work)

### 6.2.3 Characteristics of Respondents preferring to change PoL

Respondents who would rather change their PoL than their PoW (nearly twenty-five percent of respondents; in the following PoL-Changers = PoLC in contrast to PoW-Changers = PoWC) might indicate characteristics for people who follow jobs – even if it is from the design of the questionnaire not indicated, for example

- If respondents would accept to leave the region, they currently live in
- If they would consider joining SMEs in urban-rural areas.

#### Demographic characteristics

As *Figure 63 – Demographics Characteristics of PoLC and PoWC* shows, they more frequently are below thirty years old, more often single, have no children and slightly more often have an academic degree.

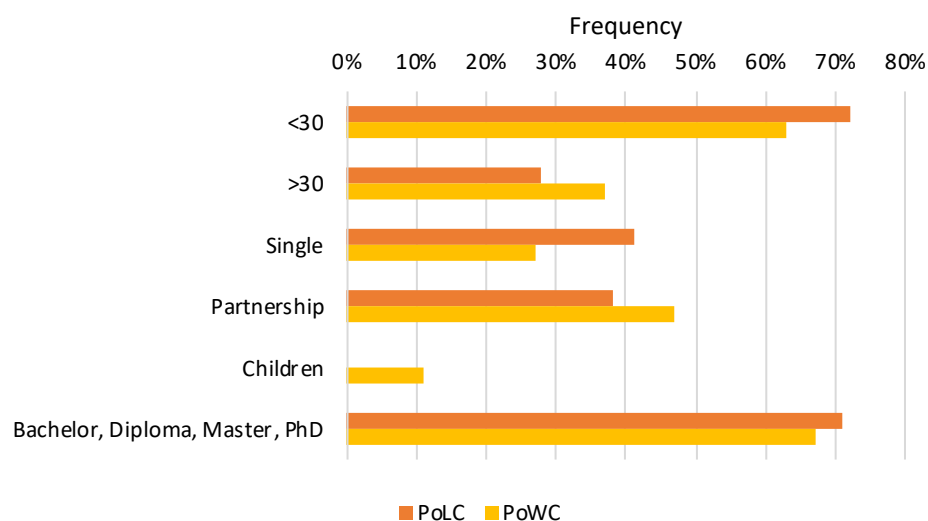


Figure 63 – Demographics Characteristics of PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

As *Figure 64 – Current distance to place of work of PoLC and PoWC* and *Figure 65 – Past distance to place of work of PoLC and PoWC* visualize, PoLC significantly live and have lived in a greater distance to their place of birth than PoWC.

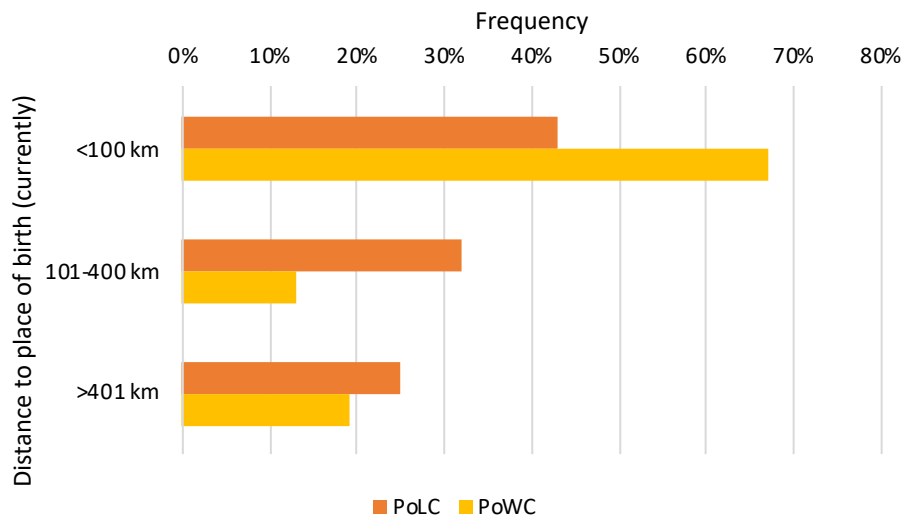


Figure 64 – Current distance to place of work of PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

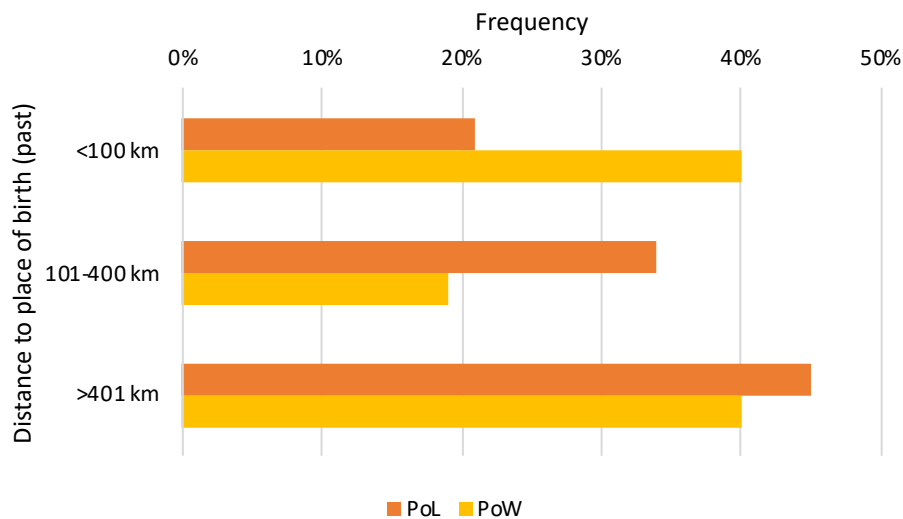


Figure 65 – Past distance to place of work of PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

PoLC do not find it 'very easy' to find a new PoW near their PoL, and tend to find it easier than PoWC to find a new PoL (see *Figure 66 – Ease of finding new PoW and PoL by PoLC and PoWC*).



Figure 66 – Ease of finding new PoW and PoL by PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

PoLC prefer shorter commuting distances than PoWC (*Figure 67 – Acceptable commuting distance by PoLC and PoWC*).

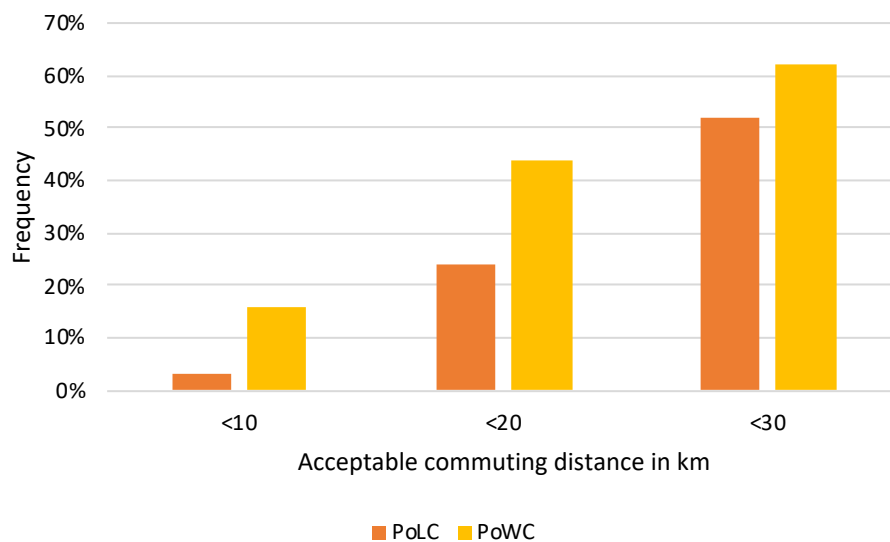
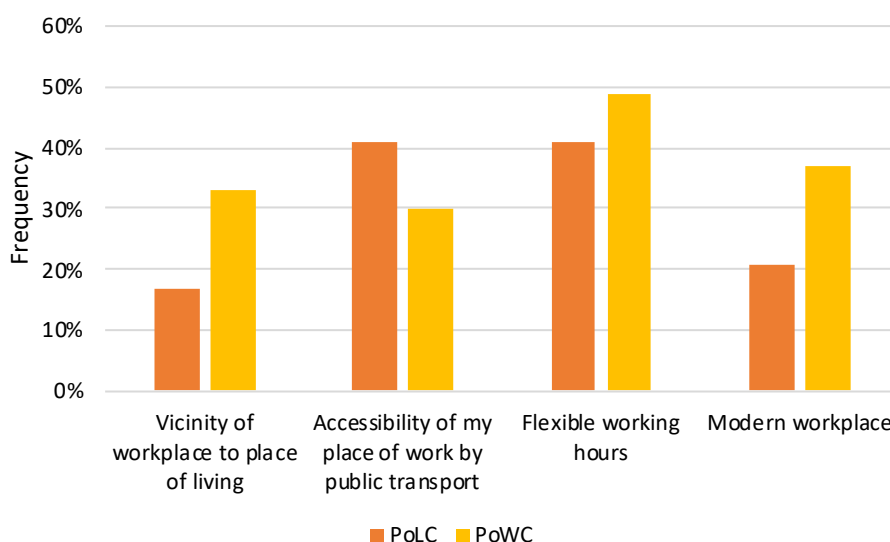


Figure 67 – Acceptable commuting distance by PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Regarding QoW, PoLC rate 'vicinity of workplace to place of living' and 'modern workplace' significantly lower, 'flexible working hours' slightly lower, and public transport accessibility slightly higher than PoWC (answer 'very important' on Q15; see *Figure 68 – QoW preferences of PoLC and PoWC*).



**Figure 68 – QoW preferences of PoLC and PoWC**

**Source:** (Own work; using Lamapoll)

Lastly, PoLC rate most factors on QoL lower than PoWC. Especially, 'urban environment', 'friends', 'family', 'sports facilities', and 'retail shops' are rated significantly less often 'very important' (answering Q16; see *Figure 69 – QoL preferences of PoLC and PoWC*).



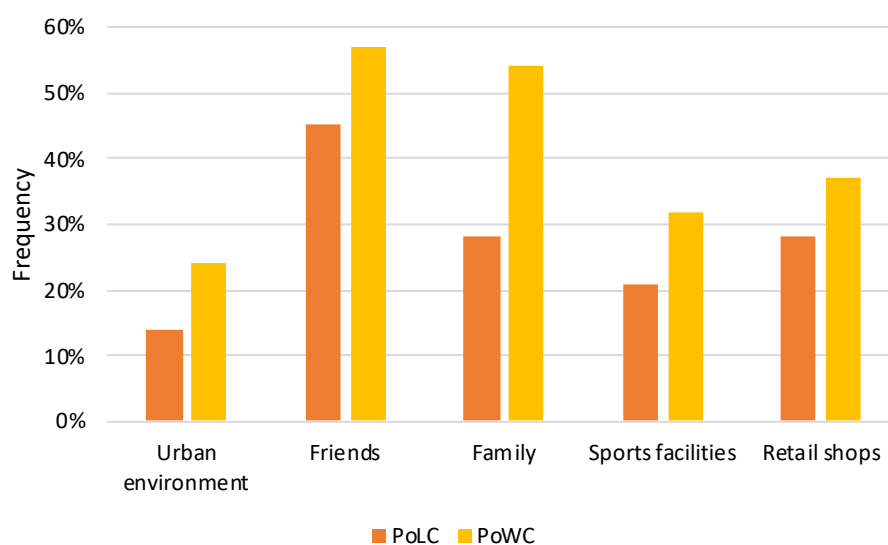


Figure 69 – QoL preferences of PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

The differences on QoL factors are put into perspective, if the answers 'very important' and 'important' are summed up – the differences nearly diminish. The exception is the factor 'family', as *Figure 70 – Importance of 'family' for PoLC and PoWC* shows: PoLCs rate it significantly lower in total.

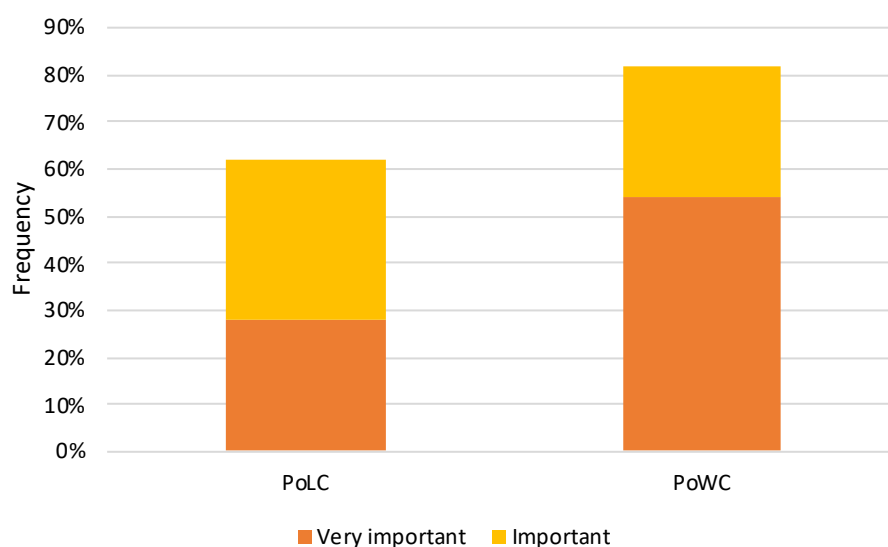


Figure 70 – Importance of 'family' for PoLC and PoWC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

PoLC as potential employees could in theory be addressed by SMEs to join their company. In the sample, they rate 'family' and 'friends' less important, while seeing less opportunities near their PoL. In majority, they are young and mobile, do not prefer urban environment. The key issue is (see *Figure 71 – Professions of PoLC*) that twenty-four percent of the respondents work in IT and industry, while significantly more (forty-eight percent) have jobs in education, healthcare, social sector, and civil service.

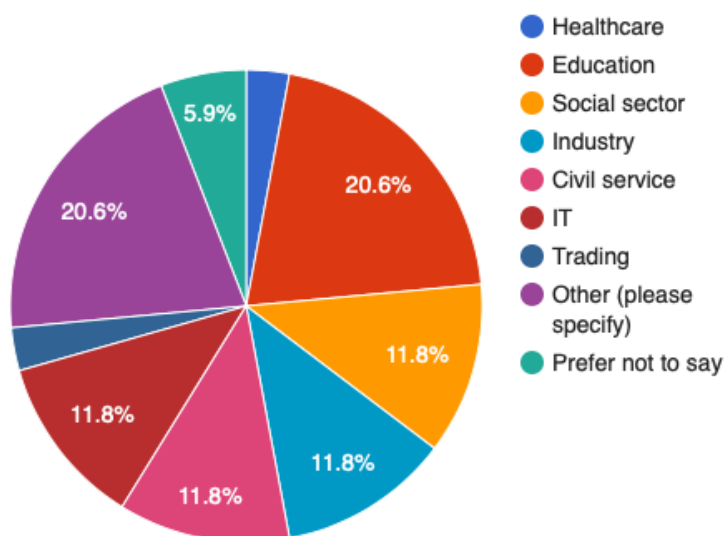


Figure 71 – Professions of PoLC

Source: (Own work; using Lamapoll)

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

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The aim of this research project was to analyse the importance of QoL for the recruitment and retention of high skilled employees in urban-rural areas. Those employees are still a limiting factor – as they contribute both to the compensation of shortages for example due to demographic change and an ageing society by restocking the workplaces, and they are necessary for innovation processes in a world in change.

### 7.1 Key findings

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Regarding the research question and objectives, despite the influence QoL is rarely addressed in literature, it is strong. The majority of respondents has a consolidated sense of place, and therefore searches PoW in acceptable distance to their PoL. The decision to join is affected by social contacts. It depends partly on QoL (e.g. flexible working hours; commuting distance), which also applies to the individual's decision to stay. Young respondents without children and without strong family bonds tend to accept changes.

### 7.2 Overall conclusions

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The author was aware of the difficulties of such an enterprise, as:

- there is no common definition of QoL
- the underlying system was highly dynamic, uncertain, concealed, and partly unconscious, even before COVID-19 brought a shock to the world
- broader projects have a lower probability of success (Bateman and Hess, 2015).

The presumptions of a changing world pay off, as the result is not a set of causalities, correlations, corroborations, and contradictions. Instead, the findings are some insights on the research questions, and a dynamic understanding resulting from iterative analyses. In other words, new ideas about the relations between QoL and labour mobility have been developed, out of which a conceptual model for further discussion emerged.

After conducting the literature research, it is assumed that it is not a dichotomous question of addressing either the sphere of subjective and objective QoL or QoW, either soft or hard location factors, either PoL or PoW, but to recognize and appreciate the position and role of QoL and the individual person within a system of her perceptions, of conscious and unconscious influences, and of perceived opportunities.

As *Table 46 – Triangulation of Data Collection* shows, the respondents largely support the statements by the experts in the interviews. Topics regarding QoL have been rated very high. Moreover, the acceptance of commuting with sixty percent preferring up to thirty kilometres is high. This – in combination with the preference to rather change PoW than PoL – indicates a strong influence of QoL on the intention to stay.

Experts' seem to judge right saying that respondents search PoW directly at or near their accustomed and/or preferred PoL – and social contacts play an important role in choosing the employer. Hence, the influence of QoL (including social networks) is important for the decision to join and to stay – but rather in an area than at an employer.

Respondents in cities prefer shorter commuting distances, accept high distances from their birthplace to live in cities, find educational facilities for themselves important, and they value the urban environment very strongly.

	Research Question	Data from Experts	Data from Survey participants
1	What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to join SMEs in urban-rural areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, people tend to stay near PoL if it delivers the demanded QoL</li> <li>• People from urban areas refuse to enter urban-rural areas</li> <li>• <b>High potentials change their PoL to get better QoW</b></li> <li>• Lack of Universities might trigger decision to leave</li> <li>• Younger people are more mobile</li> <li>• People from metropolitan areas struggle in urban-rural and rural areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is seen more difficult to change PoL by R</li> <li>• R prefer to rather change PoW than PoL</li> <li>• R with children have a higher intention to stay</li> <li>• R in urban areas prefer shorter commuting distances</li> <li>• R accept long distances to relocate in cities</li> <li>• R in cities value education facilities</li> <li>• Young R are more mobile</li> <li>• Urban environment is important to R in larger towns and cities</li> </ul>
2	What impact does 'quality of life' have on employees' decisions to stay at SMEs in urban-rural areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QoL is the main reason to stay</li> <li>• People accept to commute to stay at their PoL</li> <li>• Work-life-interference is of increasing importance</li> <li>• Swarm behaviour (family, peers, people from the same background etc.) influences intention to stay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R rate QoL factors on average higher than QoW</li> <li>• Acceptance of commuting is high</li> <li>• Flexible working hours are rated high</li> <li>• Family and friends belong to the most important information sources</li> </ul>
3	How should local businesses and urban-rural areas respond to the challenges of attracting skilled employees regarding quality of life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm-based factors (PoW/QoW) are more important than PoL/QoL</li> <li>• Local businesses should market themselves instead of PoL/QoL</li> <li>• <b>Better information on QoL and PoL might be necessary</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies should market firm-based factors in priority – acceptance of commuting is high, knowledge on PoL/QoL sufficient</li> <li>• Information is seen as sufficient; main sources are search engines and social contacts</li> </ul>
		Red = not supported	R = Respondent

Table 46 – Triangulation of Data Collection

Source: (Own work)

The analysis of the survey indicates a high influence of QoL, as in this study important bonds like social contacts, family, and children are seen as part of it. The motivation of employees is in this sense attributed to the environment (Heider, 1958) or external.

### 7.3 Revised conceptual model

It is supported that the conceptual model (see *Figure 72 – Revised conceptual model of qualities*) regarding QoL, QoW, PoL, and PoW has to be seen as being dynamic. The weighting of the spheres highly depends on the individual, its origin, presence, and expected future, with considering subjective and objective factors influencing it. Although the classification into Maslow's hierarchy of needs is very rough, it is supported by the findings:

- in the 'higher spheres' QoL and QoW, social contacts, relations, and influences are rated very high
- the 'unconscious' world of basic needs is taken for granted, but still important – at least as a hygiene factor or external driver (e.g. forced migration).

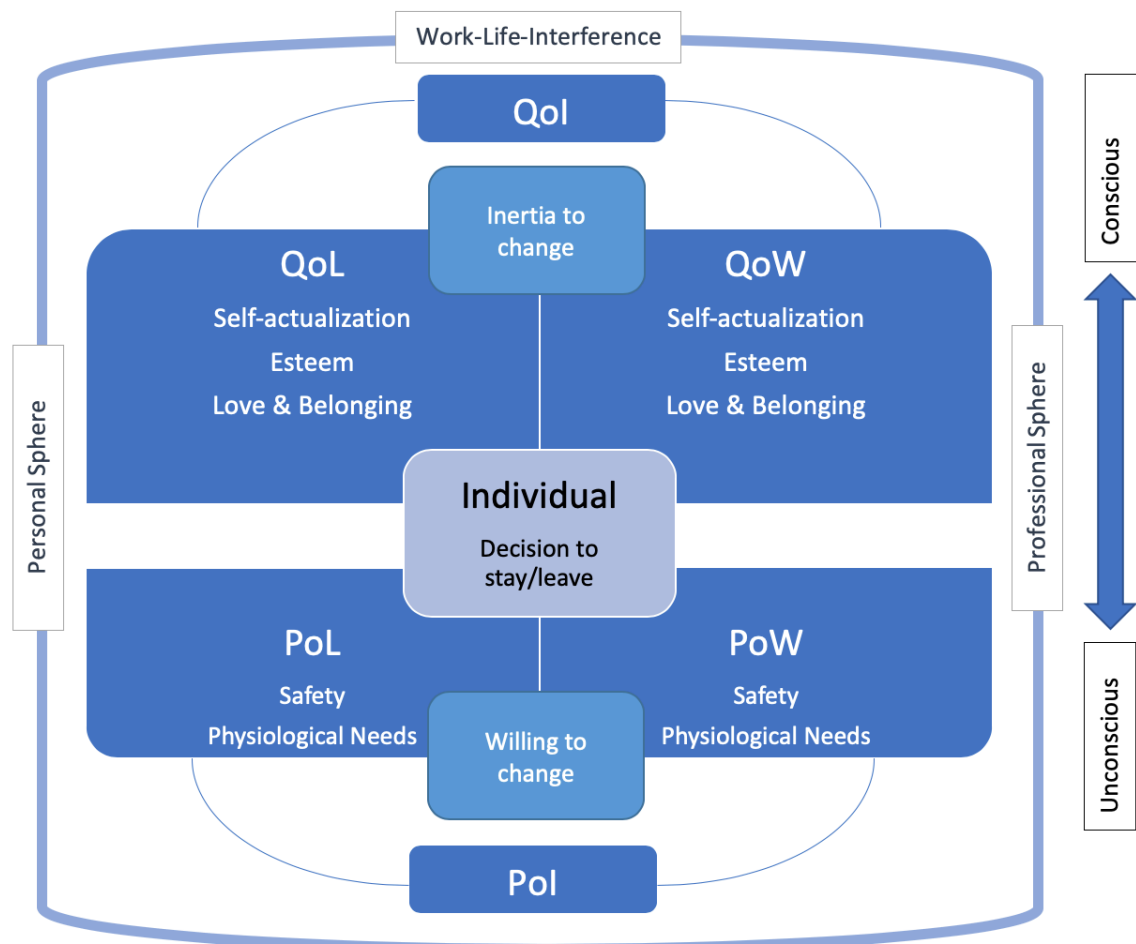


Figure 72 – Revised conceptual model of qualities

Source: (Own Work; using Huitt, 2007)

Depending on the individual, the respective influences and interactions vary. As pointed out using the example of PoLC and PoWC, the personal circumstances, perceived and aspired situation (children; satisfaction with private and professional life; opportunities; perspectives and more) affect the intention and disposition for a permanent (job, profession, PoL) or regular (e.g. commuting) transition. Hence, both inertia and willingness to change may be triggered by every element of the sphere, and their position in the model has to be adjusted from case to case.

#### 7.4 Consequences

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The findings have the following impact:

##### 7.4.1 Place Branding

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To reduce cost and time in hiring and retention, to improve performance, and to contribute to the development of the society, companies, institutions responsible for developing urban-rural areas, and citizens have to avoid the seemingly simple and 'fundamental attribution error' that individuals simply choose jobs or a place of living by their internal, rational decision making in the sense of a 'returning homo oeconomicus'. Instead, a better understanding of the holistic system driving decisions including non-observable factors has to be explored. Qualities of life, work, and their interference have to be signalled, as potential employees do value those qualities (i.e. characteristics) and rather strive for them than searching for places (i.e. locations).

##### 7.4.2 Marketing Strategies

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Marketing as a holistic process starts with developing and in many cases continuously customizing the product, and proceeds by ensuring an attractive price, finding the right channels (place), training actors (people), improving processes, delivering an attractive experience of the physical evidence, and promoting all those factors. Neither institutions, nor employers, nor citizens alone have the knowledge and the resources to fulfil this extensive workload by their own. Hence, economy, urban-rural areas

(administration, associations, organizations), and citizens have to join their forces in a participative process, to address:

- the comparatively small, but yet existing group of potential employees willing to change PoL and PoW, and convince it to join
- the larger group of people that has an inertia to change (expressed positively: sense of place) to become and stay conscious of observable and non-observable strength of the qualities.

SMEs have to focus on their own qualities, but as part of the system, they have to both care for and communicate about (and with) their environment. In this context, candidate personas could be used as semi-fictional representations to target potential employees (see *Appendices*).

Even if COVID-19 has a very strong influence, it is in this model rather an accelerator than a disruptor to the continuous improvement process.

The consequence for marketing is that it is necessary to take the whole marketing mix (Perreault and McCarthy, 2002) into consideration:

- from the 'product' (PoL and PoL are perceived being attractive, showing 'quality')
- over the price to pay to commute from a PoL to a PoW
- the promotion ('trustworthy facts' are presented to the target group; Swart et al., 2018; Labrecque et al., 2013)
- to placement (in this case the place of information, as PoL and PoW are seen as immobile) of the facts

*Table 47 – Marketing mix for QoL* shows a proposed marketing mix resulting on the findings.



Marketing mix	Practical implication
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PoL, QoL, PoW, QoW are (by the target group perceived as) attractive</li> </ul>
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PoI and QoI are (by the target group perceived as) acceptable</li> </ul>
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influencing factors and investment in them are marketed</li> </ul>
Placement (of information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about quality is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conscious (e.g. to management of the PoL and PoW)</li> <li>visible (e.g. search engines)</li> <li>actively communicated (e.g. to existing employees: word-to-mouth within family, friends, colleagues)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Physical evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employer and regional branding</li> </ul>
Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interaction of citizens, employees, employers, candidates, institutions</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training of actors</li> </ul>

Table 47 – Marketing mix for QoL

**Source:** (Own work; based on Booms and Bitner, 1981; Perreault and McCarthy, 2002)

## 7.5 Limitations

There are limitations and vagueness due to the composition of the sample, the very individual preferences, and the influence of the latest developments regarding COVID-19 mentioned above. Hence, findings were not intended to be generalizable, nor representative, or replicable.

## 7.6 Further research

The investigation of trends in the field by a longitudinal design is recommended. Moreover, deeper research on detailed characteristics of perceptions, causalities, interdependencies, interferences, and further gaps in knowledge could improve understanding and applicability of the concept.

Although NET has been used as a case study, detailed insights on the area have not been in the centre – as the potential of new, additional skilled workers lives outside the region. Nonetheless, knowledge on the QoL in NET could contribute to more effective development of strategies.

Also, a broader approach with data from a larger, potentially international sample could explain relocation, but also possible tendencies and trends, for example to stay for a certain time abroad or return to the place of birth, to follow a ‘smart herd’ and more.

Lastly, the QoI/Pol sphere or place of interference and its role, and the candidate personas (see *Appendices*) are not exactly defined.

The key question is, if in a conjoint approach an 'area competence check' can be developed to become aware of the local QoL and enhance it.

## 8. Appendices

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### List of Appendices

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Appendix 16 – Respondents answers on Q20

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## Appendix 1 – Current jobs of the author

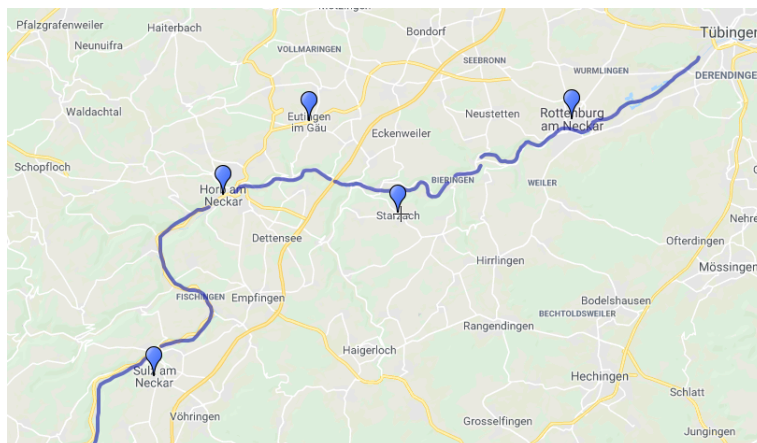
The author of this report currently has three jobs (*Table 48 – Jobs of the Author*):

Job Title	Task of the author
Business Developer (Part time, 50%)	Acquire business customers who buy land in a business park. Includes being member of the competence board of the regional association for business development.
Chief of Office for Culture, Public Relations, Tourism (Part time, 50%)	Event management, press work, social media, tourism marketing, presentations, and more; Includes being chairman of NET and member of the board of the local tourist association
Director Steinbeis Consulting impulses.ideas.innovations (self-employed)	Business consulting; assistance at local Business School Alb-Schwarzwald; tourism marketing

**Table 48 – Jobs of the Author**

## Appendix 2 – Information on NET

NET covers an area of roughly fifty kilometres with three towns and two villages, interconnected by a high speed railway track, a highway, and Autobahn A81 (see *Figure 73 – Geographical area of NeckarErlebnisTal*; Börnard, 2019).



**Figure 73 – Geographical area of NeckarErlebnisTal**

Source: (Google, 2019)

As Table 49 – *Commuting in Selected Towns in the Region Compared to State of BW*

shows, the towns in NET (in bold: Horb, Rottenburg, Sulz) suffer from a high ratio of out-commuters compared to other towns in the region. Two main reasons are the high QoL in the towns on the one hand (as an incentive to live there) and (as drivers of commuting) the high-speed infrastructure on the other with excellent interconnections by train and car to the metropolitan area of Stuttgart with higher diversity and wages, better advancement opportunities and easier professional development (Gil et al., 2014; Mercer, 2019a; Mohammadian and Rezaie, 2019).

Town	Inhabitants	Companies	Workplaces	In-commuters	Out-commuters	Ratio of Out-Commuters
<b>Rottenburg</b>	<b>43,278</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>9,544</b>	<b>5,188</b>	<b>13,001</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Horb</b>	<b>24,665</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>7,720</b>	<b>4,360</b>	<b>7,264</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>Sulz</b>	<b>12,092</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>4,091</b>	<b>2,337</b>	<b>3,514</b>	<b>67%</b>
Oberndorf	13,803	375	6,786	4,495	3,475	60%
Rottweil	24,915	795	12,343	8,337	5,940	60%
Schramberg	20,985	574	12,022	7,466	4,250	48%
Tuttlingen	34,586	1,060	25,244	15,634	5,115	35%
State of Baden-Württemberg	11,023,400		5,400,000		3,100,000	

**Table 49 – Commuting in Selected Towns in the Region Compared to State of BW**

**Sources:** (Bauer-Hailer and Winkelmann, 2015; Statistisches Landesamt, 2018; Landesschau Baden-Württemberg, 2018)

Moreover, the area faces the same problems as the state of Baden-Württemberg (BW) as a whole: According to BW-Jobs (2019), ‘especially skilled employees with average and high qualifications are in great demand’.

## Appendix 3 – Glossary

Term	Explanation
Brain gain	Relocation of skilled workers. Regions try to win over them and to avoid the opposite, 'brain drain'.
COVID-19/ SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome, rated as pandemic.
Enterprise Competence Check	Standardized test to check competencies of employees and the organization
Job mobility	In this study: moving jobs to employees (Meier, 2017)
Labour mobility	Movement of employees to jobs
Place branding	Marketing activities to build an image of a place (or area, region, city)
Rural exodus	Brain drain from rural areas to cities
Skills shortage	Lack of skilled workers
Urban-rural area	In this study a rural area next to metropolises. Sometimes also seen as the relationship between urban and rural areas.

Table 50 – Glossary

## Appendix 4 – Research Ethics

**RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLIST****Form RE1**

This checklist should be completed for every research project which involves human participants. It is used to identify whether a full application for ethics approval needs to be submitted.

**Before completing this form, please refer to the University Code of Practice on Ethical Standards for Research Involving Human Participants.** The principal investigator and, where the principal investigator is a student, the supervisor, is responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in this review.

***This checklist must be completed before potential participants are approached to take part in any research.***

**Section I: Applicant Details**

1.	Name of Researcher (applicant):	Frank Börnard
2.	Status (please click to select):	Taught Postgraduate Student
3.	Email Address:	fb4ocd@bolton.ac.uk
4a.	Contact Address:	Berliner Strasse 34, 72172 Sulz, Germany
4b.	Telephone Number:	00491714811227

**Section II: Project Details**

5.	Project Title:	MBA Dissertation
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**Section III: For Students Only:**

6.	Course title and module name and number where appropriate	MBA Research Methods, Dissertation
	Department:	Business Administration
7.	Supervisor's or module leader's name:	Ron Smith
8.	Email address:	r.smith2@bolton.ac.uk
9.	Telephone extension::	

**Declaration by Researcher (Please tick the appropriate boxes)**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have read the University's Code of Practice
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The topic merits further research
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have the skills to carry out the research
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The participant information sheet, if needed, is appropriate
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent, if needed, are appropriate
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The research is exempt from further ethics review according to current University guidelines

<b>Comments from Researcher, and/or from Supervisor if Researcher is Undergraduate or Taught Postgraduate student:</b>



**Section IV: Research Checklist**

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box:

	YES	NO
1. Will the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or who may be unable to give informed consent (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, emotional difficulties, problems with understanding and/or communication, your own students)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Will deception be necessary, i.e. will participants take part without knowing the true purpose of the study or without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants may find sensitive (e.g. sexual activity, own drug use)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Will drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, alcohol, nicotine, vitamins) be administered to or ingested by participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Will blood or tissues samples be obtained from participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Will pain or more than mild discomfort be likely to result from the study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11. Will participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time be withheld or not made explicit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12. Will participants' anonymity be compromised or their right to anonymity be withheld or information they give be identifiable as theirs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13. Might permission for the study need to be sought from the researcher's or from participants' employer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If ALL items in the Declaration are ticked AND if you have answered NO to ALL questions in Section IV, send the completed and signed Form RE1 to your Departmental Research Ethics Officer for information. You may proceed with the research but should follow any subsequent guidance or requests from the Departmental Research Ethics Officer or your supervisor/module leader where appropriate. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students should retain a copy of this form and submit it with their research report or dissertation (bound in at the beginning). MPhil/PhD students should submit a copy to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees with their application for Registration (R1). **Work which is submitted without the appropriate ethics form will be returned unassessed.**

If ANY of the items in the Declaration are not ticked AND / OR if you have answered YES to ANY of the questions in Section IV, you will need to describe more fully in Section V of the form below how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. **This does**

**not mean that you cannot do the research, only that your proposal will need to be approved by the Departmental Research Ethics Officer or Departmental Research Ethics Committee or Sub-committee. When submitting the form as described in the above paragraph you should substitute the original Section V with the version authorized by the Departmental Research Ethics officer.**

If you answered YES to **question 14**, you will also have to submit an application to the appropriate external health authority ethics committee, after you have received approval from the Departmental Research Ethics Officer/Committee and, where appropriate, the University Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix 5 – Issues with the Languages

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**a) Region vs. area**

According to OECD (2020b) there is no clear definition of the term ‘region’. The institution itself ‘classifies regions as the first administrative tier of sub-national government (for example States in the United States, Provinces in Canada, or Régions in France)’. In contrast to this definition, the term is not defined precisely in Germany (Weber, 2014), and in daily use often connected to ‘homeland’ or ‘landscape’ (Spektrum, 2011) or, by institutions, to describe their area of administration. Hence, in the German questionnaires, the term ‘Region’ has been used to describe the area in question, whereas in this report the term ‘area’ is used to distinguish between state and the territory in question (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014).

**b) City vs. town**

There is no clear differentiation between city and town in Germany. Every settlement with more than 2,000 inhabitants is called ‘Stadt’, differentiated in:

- Kleinstadt (<20,000)
- Mittelstadt (>20,000 – 100,000; the term is seldomly used)
- Großstadt (>100,000)

(Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2018)

## Appendix 6 – HARP test

No.	HARP Statement	Score
<b>Your views on the nature of reality (ontology)</b>		
1	Organisations are real, just like physical objects.	1
2	Events in organisations are caused by deeper, underlying mechanisms.	2
3	The social world we inhabit is a world of multiple meanings, interpretations and realities.	3
4	'Organisation' is not a solid and static thing but a flux of collective processes and practices.	3
5	'Real' aspects of organisations are those that impact on organisational practices.	1
<b>Your views on knowledge and what constitutes acceptable knowledge (epistemology)</b>		
6	Organisational research should provide scientific, objective, accurate and valid explanations of how the organisational world really works.	1
7	Theories and concepts never offer completely certain knowledge, but researchers can use rational thought to decide which theories and concepts are better than others.	3
8	Concepts and theories are too simplistic to capture the full richness of the world.	2
9	What generally counts as 'real', 'true' and 'valid' is determined by politically dominant points of view.	2
10	Acceptable knowledge is that which enables things to be done successfully.	-2
<b>Your views on the role of values in research (axiology)</b>		
11	Researchers' values and beliefs must be excluded from the research.	2
12	Researchers must try to be as objective and realistic as they can.	3
13	Researchers' values and beliefs are key to their interpretations of the social world.	2
14	Researchers should openly and critically discuss their own values and beliefs.	3
15	Research shapes and is shaped by what the researcher believes and doubts.	3
<b>Your views on the purpose of research</b>		
16	The purpose of research is to discover facts and regularities, and predict future events.	2
17	The purpose of organisational research is to offer an explanation of how and why organisations and societies are structured.	2
18	The purpose of research is to create new understandings that allow people to see the world in new ways.	3
19	The purpose of research is to examine and question the power relations that sustain conventional thinking and practices.	3
20	The purpose of research is to solve problems and improve future practice.	1

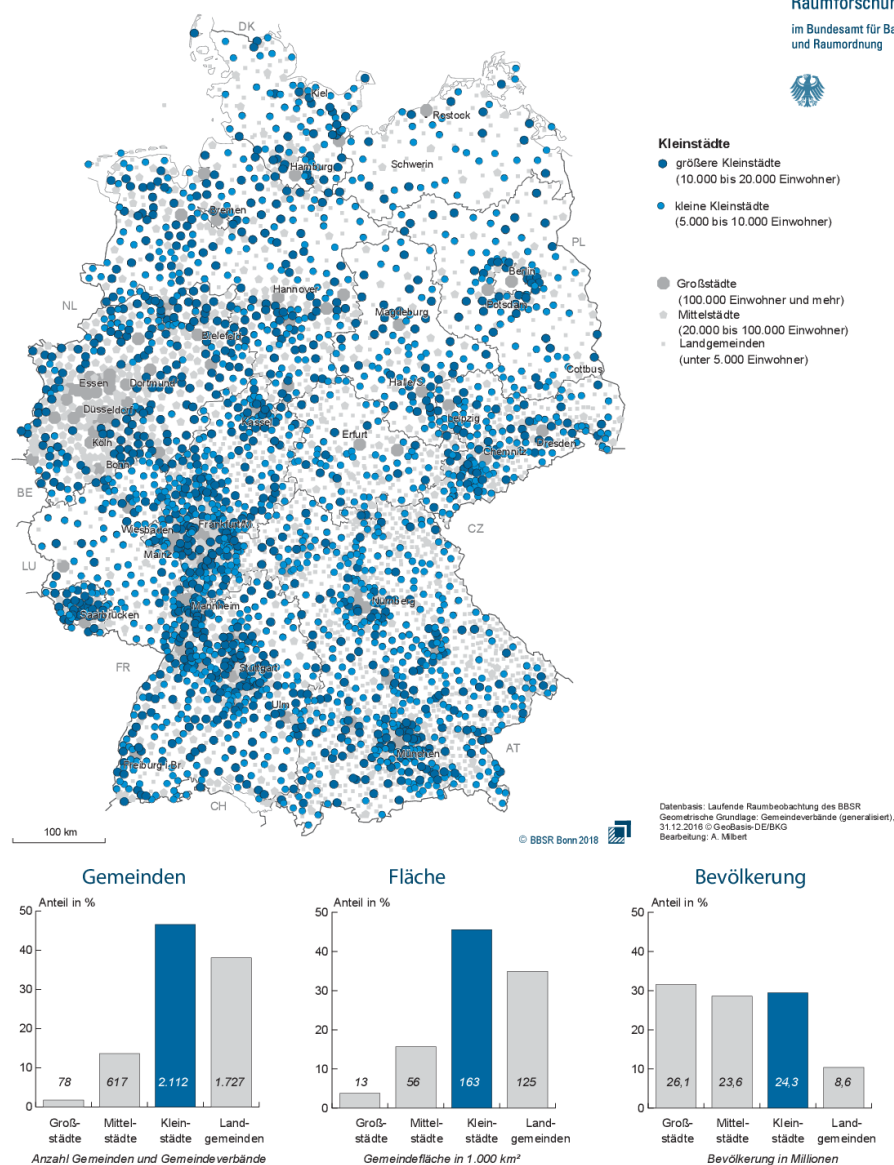
Your views on what constitutes meaningful data		
21	Things that cannot be measured have no meaning for the purposes of research.	-2
22	Organisational theories and findings should be evaluated in terms of their explanatory power of the causes of organisational behaviour.	2
23	To be meaningful, research must include participants' own interpretations of their experiences, as well as researchers' interpretations.	3
24	Absences and silences in the world around us are at least as important as what is prominent and obvious.	3
25	Meaning emerges out of our practical, experimental and critical engagement with the world.	3
Your views on the nature of structure and agency		
26	Human behaviour is determined by natural forces.	3
27	People's choices and actions are always limited by the social norms, rules and traditions in which they are located.	3
28	Individuals' meaning making is always specific to their experiences, culture and history.	3
29	Structure, order and form are human constructions.	-1
30	People can use routines and customs creatively to instigate innovation and change.	3
Results		
Positivism	Q1,6,11,16,21,26	7
Critical Realism	Q2,7,12,17,22,27	15
Interpretivism	Q3,8,13,18,23,28	16
Poststructuralism/postmodernism	Q4,9,14,19,24,29	40
Pragmatism	Q5,10,15,20,25,30	9

Table 51 – HARP Test Results

Source: (Saunders et al., 2016)

## Appendix 7 – Small towns in Germany

## Kleinstädte in Deutschland



[www.bbsr.bund.de](http://www.bbsr.bund.de)

Figure 74 – Small towns in Germany

Source: (BMI, 2019a)

## Appendix 8 – Surveycircle

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Surveycircle calls itself the 'Largest Community for Online Research' (Surveycircle, 2020a)

Moreover:

'SurveyCircle is a research platform based on the principle of mutual support. It helps people find participants for their online surveys and online experiments outside their own circle of friends. In addition, SurveyCircle gives everyone a chance to experience and support current online research projects by participating in them.

Main functionalities for Survey Managers:

- Find participants for online surveys and online experiments

Main functionalities for Research Enthusiasts:

- Experience and support current research projects by participating in online studies
- Support research projects of friends: Collect points for them and help them attract even more participants'

(Surveycircle, 2020b)



## The Role of Quality of Life for Economic Development of the German Upper Neckar Region

Dear (Expert for Regional Development/QoL),

in addition to being a business developer, I am a Master's student at the University of Bolton (UK). For my dissertation I am conducting telephone-interviews as part of a research project. The goal is to increase the understanding of the role of quality of life for economic development of the German Upper Neckar Region.

As an expert in this region and on the topic, you are in an ideal position to give valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview takes around 30 minutes and is semi-structured. I am trying to capture your thoughts and views. Your responses to the questions will be kept anonymous. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed and translated, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2020. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed. Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of factors attracting and keeping skilled workforce.

If you are willing to participate please suggest a day and time between 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of February that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via mail [fb4ocd@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:fb4ocd@bolton.ac.uk) or my tutor Ron Smith via [r.smith2@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:r.smith2@bolton.ac.uk).

Thank you very much

**Frank Börnard**

MBA Student at the University of Bolton (Off Campus)

Berliner Straße 34 • 72172 Sulz am Neckar

For information on the University of Bolton visit [www.bolton.ac.uk](http://www.bolton.ac.uk)

For information on the program see [www.stz-mgmt.de](http://www.stz-mgmt.de)



## Appendix 10 – Codes for Qualitative Interviews

Code	Subcodes	Explanation
Demand		To critically review the demand for skilled workforce in urban-rural regions
	Supply and demand in general	How would you describe the supply and demand of skilled workforce in general?
	Demand regarding regions	Could you identify specific meanings of the supply and demand of skilled workforce for businesses in rural-urban areas?
	Demand regarding branches	Could you describe differences in the supply and demand of skilled workforce you experience in different branches or specific jobs?
Key factors		To assess the key factors which attract and keep skilled workers
	QoL factors	What are the most important reasons regarding their environment or quality of life to attract, keep or expel skilled workforce?
	QoW Factors	What are the most important reasons regarding their workplaces to attract and keep skilled workforce?
Influence of QoL		To measure the importance of quality of life
	Influence in general	To what extent or in which respect does QoL influence skilled workers decision to come to, leave or stay in the region?
	Pro rural-urban	What might be the factors that speak for the rural-urban region?
	Pro urban	What might be the factors that speak for a metropolitan area?
Strategy		What might experts recommend as a strategy for region branding
	Usage of QoL	Could rural-urban regions use QoL as an argument to gain or keep skilled workforce or should they focus on other topics? Could you give me an example? What do you think is necessary to make use of QoL as a marketing tool for the region?
	Other factors	Influence of other attributes than QoL to promote the region.
	Responsibility	Who do you think works/should work on solving these issues?

Table 52 – Codes and Subcodes for Qualitative Interviews

Appendix 11 – Length of Interviews

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Interview	Time in Minutes:Seconds
L	30:01
1	31:04
6	45:35
2	48:19
E	18:23
M	18:02
<Total>	03:11:24

**Table 53 – Length of Interviews**

Source: (Own work; using ExpressScribe)

Appendix 12 – Document Portraits

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Figure 75 – Document Portrait Interview 5

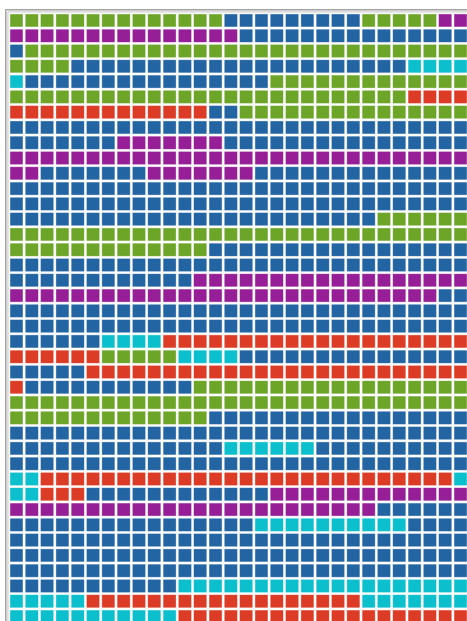


Figure 76 – Document Portrait Interview 2



Figure 77 – Document Portrait Interview 3

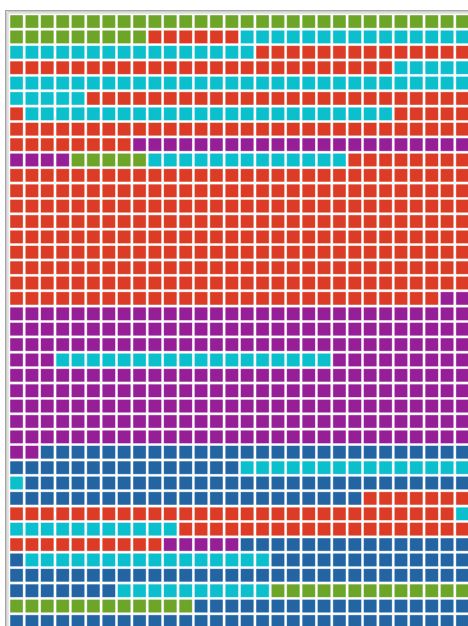


Figure 78 – Document Portrait Interview 4



Figure 79 – Document Portrait Interview 6

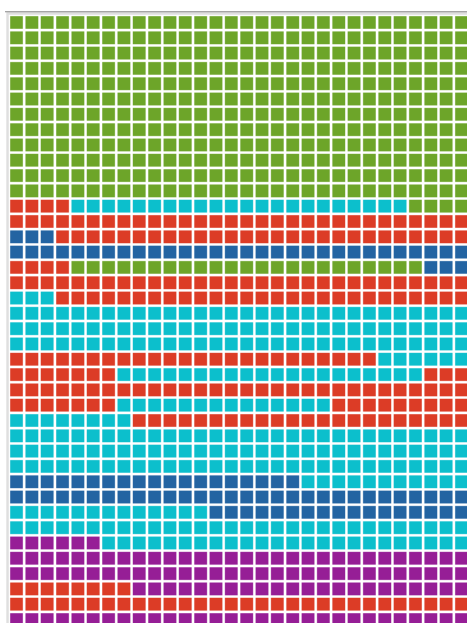


Figure 80 – Document Portrait Interview 1

## Appendix 13 – Document Comparison Chart

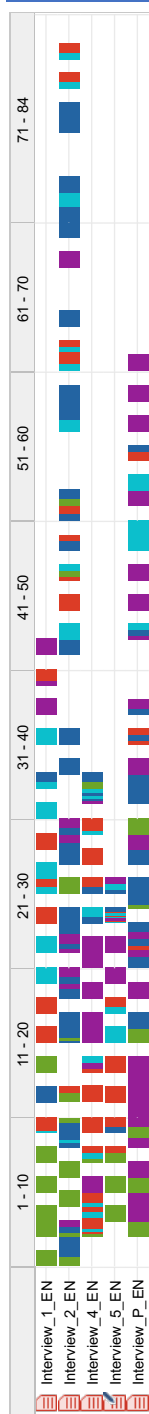


Figure 81 – Document Comparison Chart

Appendix 14 – Stop List

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Why, –, years, yes, you, your, And, Another, Anything, Are, A, Also, An, By, Can, Coming, Could, As, At, Because, But, Even, Every, For, Good, Do, Each, Errm, Especially, I, If, In, He, Here, How, However, Many, More, No, Not, Is, It, It's, Larger, Or, Other, Otherwise, Our, Of, Offer, On, One, Sure, That, That's, The, Regarding, She, So, Some, This, Those, Through, To, Then, There, These, They, When, Where, Which, Who, Today, We, Well, What, You, a, able, about, Why, With, Would, Yes, again, all, almost, already, across, actors, actually, address, another, any, anything, applies, also, am, an, and, around, as, ask, assess, apply, are, areas, argument, because, become, been, between, at, back, basically, be, can, cannot, case, centers, bring, but, by, came, convey, conveyed, convince, could, changed, come, comes, coming, decisions, definitely, describe, different, criteria, currently, day, decision, don't, due, each, else, do, does, doing, don, every, everyone, example, extent, enough, errm, especially, even, focus, for, four, from, fact, factor, factors, find, great, greater, had, hand, get, go, going, good, here, high, higher, how, has, have, he, hear, important, in, into, is, however, I, if, impact, larger, less, like, longer, it, it's, just, know, make, makes, many, matter, look, looking, lot, main, most, much, must, my, mean, medium, member, more, often, on, one, only, no, not, of, offer, out, over, own, part, or, other, otherwise, our, really, receive, regarding, s, point, possible, provide, rather, sized, so, some, someone, say, see, she, should, still, such, sure, t, something, sometimes, specific, stay, the, their, them, themselves, take, than, that, that's, they, thing, think, this, then, there, therefore, these, today, too, topic, up, those, through, time, to, we, well, what, when, us, very, want, was, will, with, within, would, where, which, who

## Appendix 15 – Triangulation Literature Research vs. Experts' Views

		Literature	Experts in general	Expert objections	Remarks on...	
					Objections	General
Demand/Supply	Global trends (e.g. climate crisis, digitalisation)	x	x	x	Slight doubts on the influence on recruiting and retention	
	Increased job mobility	x	x	x	Strong influence of inertia to change PoL	
	Decreasing job mobility	x	x	x	Strong disposition of high potentials to change for career	
	Skills shortage in general	x	x	x	Some objections that there is a problem in general	
	Skills shortage in some branches and jobs	x	x			
	Migration as a solution	x	x	x	Slight doubts on the willingness to leave PoL	
	Brain-drain	x	x	x	Strong objection due to intention to stay in PoL	
	Counterurbanization	x	x	x	Strong objection due to intention to stay in PoL	
	Decreasing loyalty to employer	x	x	x	Contradictory statements	
	Increased bargaining power of employees	x	x			



	Inertia to change place of living	x	x	x	Objection due to disposition of high potentials to change PoL for career	
	Inertia to change place of work	x	x			Agreement on people being shocked out of PoW
Key factors						
QoL	Urban environment	x	x	x	Slight indications for negative cases	
	Cost of living	x				Not mentioned apart from housing
	Pollution	x				Mentioned as 'high air quality'
	Traffic	x	x			Mentioned as an issue in urban areas
	Noise	x				
	Nature experience	x	x			
	Cultural heritage	x				
	Convenient job location	x	x			Mentioned as ambiguous: distance should be balanced
	Security	x	x			
	Affordable housing	x	x			
	Accessible housing		x			Mentioned as a representative home
	Infrastructure	x	x			
	Vicinity of cities	x	x			
	Social processes	x	x			
	Cost of mobility	x	x			Mentioned as time to commute
	Recreation	x	x			

	Public transport	x	x			
	Sports facilities	x	x			
	Educational facilities	x	x			
	Health care	x	x			
	Cultural facilities	x	x			
	Retail shops	x	x			
	Diversity	x	x			
	Safety	x	x			
	Administrative services	x	x			
	Air quality	x	x			
	Cleanliness	x				
	Peace	x	x			
	Taxes	x				
	Health	x				
QoW	Interesting/varied work	x	x			
	Meaningful work	x	x			
	Competitive pay	x	x	x	Slight objection that meaningful work and work-life-balance might be more important	
	Fun work environment	x	x			
	Advancement opportunities	x	x			
	Job security	x	x	x	Mentioned as decreasing factor due to full employment and mobile/remote work	
	Health benefits	x	x			
	Flexible hours	x	x			
	Convenient location	x	x	x	Mentioned as decreasing factor due to mobile/remote work	

	Time off	x	x			
	Professional development	x	x			
	Job safety		x			Mentioned as an increasing issue with jobs being unhealthy (Gastronomy, Health care, medical care)
	New digital opportunities	x	x			
	Social environment	x	x			
Strategy	Become aware of the brain-drain problem	x	x			Rarely mentioned
	Coordinate players and the synergy of resources	x	x			Strong agreement
	Identify key driving sectors for retaining/attracting talent	x	x			Mentioned once
	Stimulate the absorption of talent from outside	x	x			Some agreement
	Work on the removal of structural impediments/barriers	x	x			Strong agreement
	Public authorities to seek cooperative and/or shared solutions	x	x			Rarely mentioned
	QoL as an argument for marketing	x	x	x		Rarely actively mentioned
	Improving hard location factors	x	x			Rarely mentioned
	Regional/local branding	x	x	x	Some objections as employer branding is more important	Rarely mentioned;
	Firm-based factors have more impact than individual-based factors	x	x	x	Contradictory statements	
X=Yes						

Table 54 – Triangulation Literature Research vs. Experts' Views

## Appendix 16 – Respondents answers on Q20

- 
- back to the real value of life
  - Feeling of wanting to be more in nature
  - If my company goes bankrupt i'll starve, so there's that.
  - The importance of the possibility of the home office has increased
  - The current time requires our discipline and perseverance. I succeed very well. We have been very well for many years and now we have to go through this difficult time and hope that we will stay healthy. Working in home office was a bit difficult at the beginning, but we are now well equipped at home. Our private lives are limited to short hikes, yoga, meditation, reading and television. I find time to ponder, reflect and for myself. Hopefully nature can recover now and climate change can be stopped. The earth needs it so badly. I pray that we will weather this crisis well, that it will make the world a better place, end the wars and narrow the gap between rich and poor.
  - The residential attractiveness of a village or country and nature increased significantly.
  - The Corona Virus creates great uncertainty. Possibly I would take that into account when looking for a job. However, the event is so rare that I tend to do private pension provision and everything in my job continues to run as usual.
  - Finding a job after graduation can be more difficult
  - little has changed for me, since I had previously worked very irregularly and had not worked for a long time. since 11.3. in self-quarantine and have enough to do with the conversion and meanwhile enough reserves to no longer have to work. however, for many colleagues, the situation is a threat to their existence. especially for those without saved and with comparative low prices.
  - Home office becomes an integral part of the world of work, and digitization (especially expansion of infrastructure) is extremely expanded.
  - I am currently on short-time work and the company is likely to go bankrupt soon as we have recently expanded.
  - I think that the topic of home office is becoming more important
  - In this situation, I realize how insecure life and jobs can be. The situation helped me to focus on the essentials in life (family, friends, gratitude, etc.).
  - In terms of digitization, there will now be forced measures and further developments. I don't think that working environments and living environments will fundamentally change significantly in the long term. People forget too quickly and return to old habits. However, it shows that large societies can move and reorient very quickly, if need be. It is up to us to benefit from the events in the long term.
  - More home office. New Products. Medical care is moving into focus.
  - After the pandemic, mobile working will also remain interesting for job profiles that have never worked from home before.
  - I am currently completing my master's degree and many companies do not accept applications for jobs.
  - Online offers are becoming more important in both areas.
  - Since Corona it has been more important that the work can also offer home office.
  - Less business trips. My wife is now spending more time with the children. Stress from closed kindergartens and schools.

- If you live as a single in a small apartment, home office becomes very tiring in the long run, because you can no longer separate work and private life.
- Feeling of togetherness

## Appendix 17 – Candidate Personas

Characteristic: Confident local		
	Name	Michael
	Age	31
	Job	Craftsman
	Skill set	Secondary education Apprenticeship, nine years of professional experience
	Income	32,000 €
	Family at PoL	Parents, brother, girlfriend
	Hobbies	Soccer, Fasnet (regional carnival tradition), fire brigade
	Goals for job	High quality craftsmanship, reliability, accuracy
	Goals for free time	Fast car, holidays, relaxing
Acceptance to commute		30 km/day (one way)
Goal	Keep at PoL/PoW	

Table 55 – Candidate Personas: Confident Local

**Source:** (Own work; based on: Courage, Baxter and Caine, 2015; Photo: Keith Johnston from Pixabay)

Characteristic: Return to settle		
	Name	Sebastian
	Age	27
	Job	Engineer
	Skill set	MSc, four years of professional experience
	Income	42,000 €
	Family at PoL	Married, first child expected
	Hobbies	Family, sports, Photography
	Goals for job	Autonomy, modern workplace, challenging work
	Goals for free time	Family, house, garden, DIY, safety
Acceptance to commute		50 km/day (one way)
Goal	Win back for PoL/PoW	

Table 56 – Candidate Personas: Return to Settle

**Source:** (Own work; based on: Courage, Baxter and Caine, 2015; Photo: Tawny van Breda from Pixabay)

Characteristic: Mobile entrant		
	<b>Name</b>	Robert
	<b>Age</b>	24
	<b>Job</b>	Student, part-time worker
	<b>Skill set</b>	Bachelor, two years of professional experience
	<b>Income</b>	17,000 €
	<b>Family at PoL</b>	None
	<b>Hobbies</b>	Gaming, Party, Cycling
	<b>Goals for job</b>	Entry in interesting job, professional development opportunities
	<b>Goals for free time</b>	Travelling
	<b>Acceptance to commute</b>	10 km/day (one way)
<b>Goal</b>	Win for PoW (temporarily)	

Table 57 – Candidate Personas: Mobile Entrant

**Source:** (Own work; based on: Courage, Baxter and Caine, 2015; Photo: Michelle Maria from Pixabay)

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