ABSTRACT. This paper examines the variations in the quality of life at the relatively
neglected inter-urban scale in a developing nation. Based on a sample survey of 3800
heads of households in Nigerian cities ranked into three categories: large, medium and
small, the study found that level-of-living is related to city size, with the residents of
large cities having a higher quality of life than those in the medium and small cities.

Studies on level-of-living or quality of life have usually been approached on
three levels: interregional or international, intraregional and intraurban. There
have been very few studies on the interurban levels. This is a curious omission
when it is realized that a controversy ranged not too long ago in the literature
on the ‘optimum’ city size (Spengler, 1967; Alonso, 1971; Richardson,
1973, 1976; Mera, 1973). The key issue then and as of now, is essentially
the question of the size of a city that is the most conducive for the realiza-
tion of man’s ‘pursuit of happiness’.

Although Nigeria, like many other developing nations, still has the majori-
ity of her citizens residing in the rural areas, the rate of urbanization as well
as the total population growth is one of the highest in the world. If we adopt
20 000 as the minimum population of an urban centre, then the proportion
of the total population living in Nigerian cities in 1921 was 4.8 per cent. This
had risen to 10.2 per cent by 1953 and to 19.2 per cent by 1963 (Table I).

In 1921, there were 16 cities with 20 000 and above in population. In 1963,
the number of such cities had risen to 183. Whereas there were only two
cities (Lagos and Ibadan) with a population of 100 000 and above in 1931,
the number of such cities had risen to 24 by 1963. The rates of growth of
Nigerian cities have not been uniform as major cities have recorded and are
still recording the highest rate, and the number of cities with 500 000 and
above in population had risen from only two in 1963 to about fourteen in
1984 (Salau, Forthcoming).

Thus, one may legitimately ask whether the overall trend of city growth
and population distribution is conducive to the national development goals. Many studies have indicated that Nigeria's urbanization is characterized by high polarization, with the concentration of major urban centres in the southwestern, southeastern and northcentral parts of the country (Ajaegbu, 1976; Ekanem, 1972; Salau, forthcoming). Another feature of the urbanization process is the relative paucity of medium-sized cities. Population projections seem to indicate that the major cities are likely to become larger as they are capturing an increasingly higher proportion of rural-urban migrants. This is to be expected as these cities receive a disproportionate share of the nation’s resources in terms of public expenditure on infrastructural facilities and public services (Aluko, 1971; Okowa, 1984).

Intuitively an assumption can be made that the quality of life in the medium-sized and small cities may be better than in the major cities. This is actually in line with empirical evidence which shows that the major cities in particular are faced with housing shortage and overcrowding, high rate of unemployment, increasing environmental degradation and high incidence of criminal activities (Onokerhoraye, 1977; Sule 1981; Salau, 1985). Nevertheless, the fact that migration continues unabated into large cities and at a higher rate than for the medium and small cities may be an indication that the perception of the residents of the major cities as to their quality of life is different and perhaps more positive than ‘neutral’ observers think.

Therefore, the major objective of this study is to examine the variations in the quality of life at the relatively neglected inter-urban scale in Nigeria. The question is whether the quality of life of the residents of the major cities is any better or worse than those of the medium or small cities.