ABSTRACT. Durban, the busiest port and second largest industrial hub in South Africa, has a developmental vision that sees its residents living in ‘acceptably serviced housing’ and enjoying a ‘generally high quality of life that can be sustained’. This vision is in response to South Africa’s transitional aspirations to move from an inequitable apartheid state to a democratic society with greater socio-economic parity. Since 1998 the eThekwini Municipality, which is the local authority responsible for the city of Durban, has conducted annual surveys to monitor the changes in the quality of life of Durban’s people. Structured questionnaire interviews were administered in 14 300 dwellings between 1998 and 2005. The samples drawn each year were representative of the city’s demographics and covered a wide range of housing types. Results indicate that parity of life satisfaction between race groups is as far apart in 2005 as it was in 1998. The paper undertakes trend analysis, from a local government perspective, of key objective and subjective variables in the surveys. It identifies the domains that have the greatest impact on satisfaction with life, and reports the salient issues for black householders, who have the lowest level of life satisfaction.

KEY WORDS: Durban, quality of life, South Africa, trends

1. INTRODUCTION

Following South Africa’s first national and provincial democratic elections in 1994 local government elections were held in 1996. This election established the Durban Metropolitan Council, now called eThekwini Municipality, and comprised six Local Councils and a coordinating Metro Council. These seven Councils developed a developmental vision, which included the...
statement “with its residents living in acceptably serviced housing, and with a generally high Quality of Life that can be sustained.”

In motivating for the Municipality to allocate funding for this project it was contended that understanding community aspirations and development agendas through quality of life research would allow the Municipality to establish development programs that would most effectively meet the expressed needs of the people. This research program provided a means of complying with the South African Municipal Structure Act of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, which require community participation in defining development agendas at the local government level.

The success of Councils’ implementation of development programs would need to be monitored over time so that changes in peoples’ perception of their Quality of Life could be assessed and to make information available to guide policy makers regarding those actions, which make the most significant improvement in the quality of life of the people.

The Municipality agreed to fund annual research beginning in 1997. A Quality of Life Project Steering Committee was established and coordinated two further committees, one comprised of academics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the second committee comprised officials from Municipal service delivery units. The work of these committees ensured that the research instruments and methodologies were of a high academic standard and were appropriate to service delivery in a Municipal context.

The pilot phase of the project used focus group workshops, in-depth and structured interviews in order to determine the key issues of residents. As in the Sustainable Communities Program (Grunkmeyer and Moss, 2002) this pilot research set out to discover the relevant objective and subjective factors through dialog with communities. The questionnaire that was designed in the pilot survey was then modified to ensure that issues important to communities and to local government service providers were accommodated. This paper will discuss the results of the structured household interviews.

2. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

There has been a tendency to equate progress in service delivery with the quantity of additional units of services delivered to an area. Wee (2000), has raised the concern that objective indicators of the quality of a place are not sufficient to reflect the quality of life in a locale. In response to this concern, this research has drawn on the experiences of the South African Quality of Life Trends Project (Møller, 2004) and the Detroit Area Study (Marans and Couper, 2000). The Quality of Life Project in Durban is owned and driven