




Editorial

From the Guest Editors: Happy and Healthy Cities

Marina Toger ^{1,*} , Karima Kourtit ^{1,2,3,4,5}  and Peter Nijkamp ^{2,3,4,5} 

¹ Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University, 75120 Uppsala, Sweden; k_kourtit@hotmail.com

² The Faculty of Management, Open University, 6419 Heerlen, The Netherlands; pnijkamp@hotmail.com

³ Centre for European Studies, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, 700506 Iași, Romania

⁴ School of Architecture, Planning and Design, Polytechnic University, Ben Guerir 43150, Morocco

⁵ Geography and Spatial Management, Adam Mickiewicz University, 61-712 Poznan, Poland

* Correspondence: marina.toger@kultgeog.uu.se

Cities in the 21st century are magnets for people and business. The urbanisation rate has rapidly risen globally in the past decades. Clearly, many people seem to love cities, as cities offer many amenities and opportunities. However, there is an increasing awareness of the shadow sides of the urban way of life, such as density externalities, poor quality of life, urban unhappiness, and anonymous lifestyles. Consequently, many multidisciplinary studies focus on urban liveability, well-being, safety, health, and happiness. These studies recognise that cities are engines of economic progress and shape favourable seedbed conditions for social interaction and human opportunities, clearly reflected in the increase in the number and size of large cities. However, many studies also address the negative externalities of cities, as modern cities are under stress, seen from the perspective of poverty, quality of life, environmental conditions, crime, or congestion. There is no doubt that cities in the urban century are a melting pot of conflicting interests. This has prompted an abundant literature on urban well-being in the social sciences, comprising a wide variety of methodological approaches, such as hedonic theory (based on subjective feelings), desire theory (based on what residents want), discrete choice theory (based on binary choices), contingent valuation theory (based on truly valuable attributes of a city), or urban happiness theory (based on local contextual factors shaping a high personal satisfaction).

Recently, we have witnessed a rising interest in happy cities. These are cities which have created favourable conditions (e.g., good quality of life, attractive neighbourhoods, accessible public space, community feeling) that are a stimulus for residents' happiness. Interesting examples can be found in studies on the geography of happiness, the economics of happiness, and the social psychology of happiness. The quantitative study of 'happy cities' is a rich source of new ideas and conceptualisations on modern city life and deserves more prominent attention in the international literature.

In addition to happy cities, the popularity of healthy cities also increases as a research topic; such cities offer sound environmental conditions (e.g., liveability, air and water quality, green spaces, safe neighbourhoods, climate neutral production and consumption, virus-resistant cities) and favour individual and group well-being (mentally and physically). The interest is rising in the conditions for—and impacts of—healthy cities, often in relation to the emerging need for urban climate adaptation strategies but also due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban inhabitants are now more aware of the risks of mass density, close physical proximity and intense spatial–social interactions in a compact urban space. The notion of the flight to the suburbs or to the countryside is widely debated. The city is no longer seen as a safe haven, and this may have consequences, not only for future urbanisation patterns but also for spatial leisure patterns and commuting patterns. The city in a modern age will only be able to maintain its magnet function, if it is able to shape the conditions for a happy and healthy urban life style.

This Special Issue was initially conceived before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to highlight ongoing research on happiness and health in relation to cities, urban



Citation: Toger, M.; Kourtit, K.; Nijkamp, P. From the Guest Editors: Happy and Healthy Cities. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 12817. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132212817>

Academic Editor: Marc A. Tosen

Received: 29 October 2021

Accepted: 3 November 2021

Published: 19 November 2021

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

well-being, and possibilities for sustainable cities. Later, when the pandemic started (beginning of 2020), the discourse sharpened on health and implications for well-being, with every eye turned to cities, making this Special Issue on “Happy and Healthy Cities” more relevant than ever, with its focus naturally shifting more towards urban resilience. The resulting Special Issue comprises papers on all these subjects, ranging from direct and indirect well-being indicators and its contributing factors to the effects of the pandemic. This collection of 11 novel studies comprises contributions from different parts of the world and is organised according to the following structure.

Saskia Sassen and Karima Kourtit (Contribution 1) start from overviewing the well-being-related issues surrounding urbanisation and continue to discuss how cities react to shocks such as the pandemic disaster and various strategies for coping with its effects. They continue with a discussion on citizen science and smart cities and finish with putting their trust in urban resilience. They predict that cities will bounce back from this disruption as they did in the past and will prevail and flourish because people would not give up the freedom of social interactions that cities offer. However, they also call for the development of intelligent tools for ‘resilience agglomeration’ by embracing digital technologies as a part of the UN’s ‘battle for a sustainable future’ that needs to be fought in cities.

Christina Kakderi, Nicos Komninos, Anastasia Panori, and Eleni Oikonomaki (Contribution 2) also discuss these topics by focusing on the specific challenges that the pandemic prompted through a thorough review of three ecosystems: (1) central business districts, (2) urban transport and mobility, and (3) tourism and hospitality. In contrast to the first paper (Contribution 1), they emphasize the urban exodus and the extensive disruptive damages of the pandemic, and they caution that the pandemic might have been a preview for the possible disastrous effects of climate change. However, they then converge to a similar direction, concluding that a holistic approach is needed with technological and ‘intelligent’ solutions to tackle the coming challenges.

The next paper by Philip Morrison (Contribution 3) takes us back to the general discussion of happiness in cities but zooms in on the question of ‘Whose Happiness’ and ‘in Which Cities?’. In support of the so known urban well-being paradox, Morrison shows a lower well-being in developed countries for large urban metro residents versus other residents. In addition, surprisingly, agglomeration growth appears to lead to reduced well-being in developed countries unrelated to whether people’s socioeconomic status is improved or not, which is interesting because cities generate in general economic productivity. Morrison also shows heterogeneity in well-being inside the agglomeration.

In the next paper, Michael Mehaffy (Contribution 4) highlights the importance of public space in providing the well-being of citizens. He overviews the concepts of well-being and happiness as well as health in relation to public space in the urban context and presents a careful reading of the UN’s New Urban Agenda in light of the latest scientific discourse. He then lists and analyses the 50 indicators related to the liveability of cities that need to be measured and calls for the further development of tools and interventions to help and guide policy making.

One of the indicators proposed by Mehaffy is measured in the next paper: Umut Türk, John Östh, Marina Toger, and Karima Kourtit (Contribution 5) assess one of the indicators that could serve as a proxy for potential well-being—a human development index (HDI) on a super-local level as an indicator of welfare. They test the indicator against the pedagogical performance of young pupils and find it useful and effective and suggest using it as a policymaking tool for measuring human potential, as well as assessing inequality at a detailed spatial level to detect differences that might be obscured by aggregation to larger areas such as municipalities.

The next paper by Alina Irina Popescu (Contribution 6) addresses urban well-being by assessing the quality of urban life and the role of urban innovation in improving it. She combines objective and subjective indicators of well-being to assess the contribution of city innovation using data from the European Patent Office. She finds that most technological developments took place in information communication technologies, and she

highlights the IoT and other smart city technologies as the main tools to be developed and implemented for improving urban quality of life.

Alina Maria Pavelea, Bogdana Neamtu, Peter Nijkamp, and Karima Kourtit (Contribution 7) critically examine the role of places that attract the creative class for the well-being of citizens in large urban areas. They found that the strongest explanatory variable for welfare in various locations in Romania is path dependency (previous levels of development), rather than the creative class when socio-economic controls are included. Moreover, the variables for different tolerance types were producing mixed results, as did the inclusion or exclusion of or restriction to largest cities, changing the results from supporting to contradicting the Creative Class Theory. They conclude that even though the presence of creative individuals is correlated with the four T's, tolerance, talent, technology, and territorial assets, that does not mean improved welfare, and this finding thus has serious implications for policies.

The next two papers are related to urban resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic theme covered by this Special Issue raised by the first two contributions. Ignat Raluca and Constantin Marius (Contribution 8) analyse entrepreneurial resilience during the COVID-19 crisis in Romania's wealthiest urban areas, assessing entrepreneurial resilience as an indicator of healthy cities. They compare the wealthy urban agglomerations to other areas of entrepreneurial importance using a composite indicator for wealth, well-being, and happiness. They highlight the difference between entrepreneurs that harness opportunities rather than innovate by necessity, the former being more resilient. They find that in the wealthier and more developed areas, entrepreneurial resilience is lower than in less developed areas.

Marina Toger, Karima Kourtit, Peter Nijkamp, and John Östh (Contribution 9) analyse the next changes in mobility during the pandemic in Sweden, where the policies aimed at controlling the spread of infection were relatively mild. They find a significant reduction in activity spaces, indicating people's choices to limit their mobility and to follow the government recommendations. The changes were heterogeneous in space which relates to inequality (a known factor in potential well-being). Analysed together with socio-economic variables of various locations, they confirm that in areas with predominant low education levels there was less reduction in activity spaces, possibly explained by the types of jobs that do not allow for telecommuting.

Enayat Mirzaei and Dominique Mignot (Contribution 10) continue the mobility topic related to another indicator mentioned by Mehaffy (Contribution 4), namely, active modes of transport such as cycling that promote health in urban areas. However, this paper can also be viewed as assessing the health of the urban area by looking at the modal choice of the study participants vis-à-vis the urban morphological characteristics as well as behavioural choices, such as hedonistic preferences. Counter-intuitively, the likelihood of choosing walking or cycling for utilitarian trips was more affected than hedonic trips by the sense of place and safety perception and other characteristics of the urban space. In addition, travel habits had a significant influence on modal choice, and mixed land uses increased the tendency to walk or cycle in support of previous research.

Hanxue Wei, Lucien C. Wostenholme, and John I. Carruthers (Contribution 11) address another of the issues mentioned by Mehaffy about measuring the degrees of multifunction in urban settings, by looking at the effects of urban village policy performance in Seattle as compared to other types of planning in terms of redevelopment. They find that urban village policies negatively affected redevelopment, except in hub urban village areas, which is counter-intuitive, as the policies were aimed at generating urban growth. In addition, the marginal effects of belonging to an urban village appeared to be small.

To conclude, this Special Issue of *Sustainability* presents an original collection of evidence-based—mostly quantitative—studies on new analytical challenges thematically related to Happy and Healthy Cities. The original and cross-disciplinary papers in this Special Issue cover various approaches to happiness and health in an urban setting, starting from the concepts themselves and the theories around them, critical review papers,

policy studies addressing urban sustainability and resilience challenges, analytical case studies and comparative studies, and empirical applications that measure components and important factors that affect the well-being of urbanites or the successful improvements of urban space. The all-encompassing theme that returns in many of the articles is the role of digital technologies, urban analytics, urban innovation, and the so-called smart city solutions in tackling disruptions and shocks and suggesting tools for improving the urban resilience and well-being of urbanites.

Funding: There was no external funding for this editorial introduction.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Sassen, S.; Kourtit, K. A Post-Corona Perspective for Smart Cities: ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?’. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 9988. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Kakderi, C.; Komninos, N.; Panori, A.; Oikonomaki, E. Next City: Learning from Cities during COVID-19 to Tackle Climate Change. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 3158. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Morrison, P.S. Whose Happiness in Which Cities? A Quantile Approach. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 11290. [[CrossRef](#)]
4. Mehaffy, M.W. Health and Happiness in the New Urban Agenda: The Central Role of Public Space. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 5891. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. Türk, U.; Östh, J.; Toger, M.; Kourtit, K. Using Individualised HDI Measures for Predicting Educational Performance of Young Students—A Swedish Case Study. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6087. [[CrossRef](#)]
6. Popescu, A.I. Long-Term City Innovation Trajectories and Quality of Urban Life. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 10587. [[CrossRef](#)]
7. Pavelea, A.M.; Neamtu, B.; Nijkamp, P.; Kourtit, K. Is the Creative Class a Game Changer in Cities? A Socioeconomic Study on Romania. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 5807. [[CrossRef](#)]
8. Raluca, I.; Marius, C. Multidimensional Facets of Entrepreneurial Resilience during the COVID-19 Crisis through the Lens of the Wealthiest Romanian Counties. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 10220.
9. Toger, M.; Kourtit, K.; Nijkamp, P.; Östh, J. Mobility during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Data-Driven Time-Geographic Analysis of Health-Induced Mobility Changes. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 4027. [[CrossRef](#)]
10. Mirzaei, E.; Mignot, D. An Empirical Analysis of Mode Choice Decision for Utilitarian and Hedonic Trips: Evidence from Iran. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6896. [[CrossRef](#)]
11. Wei, H.; Wostenholme, L.C.; Carruthers, J.I. Planning and Markets at Work: Seattle under Growth Management and Economic Pressure. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 7634. [[CrossRef](#)]