

## **ERSA 2023 – Alicante (Spain) – August 28 – September 1, 2023**

Call for Abstracts:

Special Academic Session (SAS) of *The Regional Science Academy (TRSA)*

and the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS)

on the theme of:

### **THE GEOGRAPHY OF HAPPINESS: THE URBAN PARADOX IN WELL-BEING, SATISFACTION AND CITY LOVE**

**Wednesday, August 30, 2023, 11:00-18:00**

Organisers:

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Over the past decades we have witnessed an increasing scientific interest in measuring subjective well-being – also known as happiness or life satisfaction – in public policy, welfare theory and popular culture. In 2012, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted even a resolution that governments should seek to increase the subjective well-being of their citizens. Along these lines, one of the key objectives of the 2020 European Strategy is the promotion of subjective well-being research. However, subjective well-being as a policy issue is not confined to national governments, in that several regional and local authorities have also started to implement subjective well-being in policy initiatives. At the same time, the rising public appreciation of subjective well-being is evidenced—amongst others—by the widespread media attention to rankings of places on the ‘happiness ladder’ as well as by the fact that subjective well-being is currently rated the second most important component for a better life in the OECD Better Life Index, mattering more than topics such as education, income, and civic engagement. Most well-being studies focus on specific population groups. However, the geography of well-being or happiness is still underinvestigated (e.g. at an intra-city level)

As the geography of happiness bridges the fields of regional science/geography and happiness studies, we organize this year two sessions at two major conferences: the Annual Meeting of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS), which will be held from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2023 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and the Annual Meeting of the European Regional Science Association (ERSA), which will be held from the 29<sup>th</sup> of August until the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2023 in Alicante, Spain. These special sessions, in conjunction with *The Regional Science Academy (TRSA)*, may act as a bridge between these conferences. Based on the contributions to the special sessions at these conferences,

we intend to prepare a special issue in peer-reviewed journals like *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *Sustainability*, or *Applied Geography*.

We welcome contributions around two main themes: (1) *unravelling the urban paradox* and (2) *loveable and liveable cities*. **We strongly welcome scholars to participate in both the ISQOLS and ERSA conference, but it is of course also possible to have only a contribution at one of the two conferences.**

**Submissions ISQOLS conference:** <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=isqols2023>. Submission deadline: January 15<sup>th</sup> 2023. When submitting choose the 'Geography of Happiness and Well-Being' Symposium. General information about the conference can be found on: [www.isqols.org](http://www.isqols.org). The conference will be held in-person. In case you already submitted an abstract to ISQOLS and you would like to participate in the special session, please send a mail to Martijn Burger ([mburger@ese.eur.nl](mailto:mburger@ese.eur.nl)).

**Submissions ERSA conference:** General information about the conference and submission of the **Abstract (deadline: 28 February 2023)** can be found on: <https://ersa.eventsair.com/ersa2023/>. During the ERSA conference, we will have a hybrid session. In case you would like to submit a paper or have questions please send an e-mail to Karima Kourtiti ([karima.kourtiti@ou.nl](mailto:karima.kourtiti@ou.nl)). You will receive a mail when information about submission to the special session becomes available on the conference website.

## 1. Unravelling the Urban Paradox

One of the central themes in the debate on the subjective well-being and location concerns the urban happiness paradox. In Edward Glaeser's seminal work on 'The Triumph of the City', it has been argued that the city makes us richer, smarter, greener, healthier and happier which explains the tremendous growth of cities all around the world. The benefits of urbanization are, amongst others, the convenience of goods and services and the availability of jobs and educational facilities. Despite the increasing popularity of cities as places to live, higher degrees of urbanization are generally linked to lower levels of subjective well-being in the Western world. Although more and more people opt for an urban life above a rural life, people are on average less happy in large cities compared to smaller cities or villages. In this regard, it can be questioned why so many people are migrating towards cities, while people in less developed countries are generally happy in urban areas.

Although research has shown that people living in larger cities are generally less happy compared to people living in smaller cities or villages in the Western world, there is still a lot unknown about the main drivers behind this urban-rural dichotomy. While some researchers suggest that urban-rural differences in subjective well-being are driven by negative agglomeration externalities, other studies point more towards a selection of unhappy people into cities. If there is a structural effect caused by negative agglomeration externalities, urban-rural differences in subjective well-being can be explained by city characteristics negatively affecting subjective well-being. One can think here of typical urban problems – like crime, congestion and inequality – causing lower levels of individual subjective well-being. If there is a selection effect, urban unhappiness can be explained by selective migration patterns of people with lower levels of life satisfaction in large cities (e.g., singles, unemployed, and ethnic minorities), while smaller cities, suburbs or villages attract people with higher levels of life satisfaction (e.g., retired and people with young children). At the same time, the heterogeneity of the relationship between place of residence and subjective well-being should be acknowledged. Not all aspects of the living environment are important for everyone's happiness, and accordingly, different kinds of people fit best in different kinds of living environments.

## 2. Loveable and Liveable Cities

Several attempts seeking to create systematic measurements of well-being or 'broad welfare' (or 'beyond-GDP') indicators at various geographical scale levels can be found in the recent empirical literature showing a wide range of well-being indicators, such as the OECD Better Life Index, the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), the UN World Happiness Index, the Happy Planet Index, the Global Liveability Index or the Beyond-GDP Index. All such indicators are empirically very useful and also appropriate for comparative quantitative research. A limitation of most indicators is however, that the place-specific elements in these measurement schemes are weakly developed. In other words, the micro-geography is largely missing in these well-being calculation frameworks. Given the rising interest in sub-local quality of city life ('the resident as a villager in a large city'), it is a challenge to develop a measurement framework for place quality that takes into consideration the human living conditions in cities, preferably at the level of districts or neighbourhoods, that are in accordance with welfare, inclusiveness and sustainability factors.

The above considerations have recently led to the development of new operational measures for well-being of citizens, in particular the concept of '*city love*'. This concept refers to the operational appreciation of citizens for their urban environment; it comprises both satisfaction and attachment to urban life. The '*city love*' indicator is the result of two underlying constituents of city life. In the first place, the attractiveness of cities is shaped by its physical and material appearance, in particular, built environment, infrastructure, amenities, urban green etc. This is called the '*body*' of the city. The quantitative representation of the city's body is also called the '*human habitat*' index. In the second place, a city derives its attractiveness by its intangible assets, such as atmosphere, historical places, local pride, and symbolic structures. This is called the city's '*soul*'. The relevant quantitative index here is sometimes called '*feelgood*' index. To assess the city love at neighbourhood level, we need multivariate measurable indicators on both the body and the soul in a microcosmic context. Neighbourhood love – at the intra-city level – refers to the love of residents for urban neighbourhoods or localised communities in cities (the microcosmic city) in relation to social capital. Social cohesion in urban neighbourhoods is related to bonds and social support or community systems that create a sense of social linkage and place-based cultural identity. In the latter case, indicators like mutual interaction, community communication, shared language or joint cultural bonds, are used. These are sometimes summarised in a '*social bonds*' index. In the special sessions on the geography of happiness in a broad context we seek to have quantitative studies on the above novel research challenge.