

Draft proposal for the ERSA 57th Congress

Session S7: Regional and Urban Perspectives on Individual Well-Being

Title: Urban (area's) Appeal & Well-being

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Several regional studies are devoted to understand socio-spatial inequalities and result from different scientific approaches (geography, sociology, economics, political sciences, philosophy). If many of them consider income (Fleury *et al.*, 2012), socio-professional categories, gender or production system as a main input, few take into account well-being (for example, Tovar and Bourdeau-Lepage, 2013). When this happens, they focus on urban dwellers and overlook rural areas where social inequalities are obvious. To address this issue, a research project (the Brise project¹) has been launched, focusing on the socio-spatial inequalities in both urban and rural areas through a well-being assessment. The study deals notably with the Rhône-Alpes region, located in the south-eastern part of France. Populated by around 1,3 million inhabitants, the Greater Lyon heads the regional urban network and attracts international economic fluxes. Nevertheless, rural municipalities account for 70% of its area and 19% of its population.

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Well-being is a polysemic and a non-consensual notion. It corresponds to a speculative reality which is based on objective and subjective approaches. The former is established on aggregated statistical data and indicators while the latter relies on individual declarations (Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014). The subjective well-being arises from the cognitive sciences (Diener, 1984; Deci and Ryan, 2008), which had added, in its assessment, the measure of physiological states such as happiness and satisfaction. In this study, well-being is considered through a geographical approach, focusing on Man's place in his natural and social environment. Three dimensions characterize this Man, also called *homo geographicus* (Sack, 1997; Pumain and Racine, 1999): an ecological one (Man interacts with his environment); a spatial one (Man occupies a space that he modifies in view of his activities) and an ontological one (Man maintains a social and an emotional relationship with his territory). In this geographical approach, the territory is considered as the support in which the *homo geographicus* evolves, builds and projects himself. It influences his behaviour, his life satisfaction and therefore his search of well-being (Bailly, 1984). This quest is also one of the driving forces of the *homo qualitus* (Bailly and Bourdeau-Lepage, 2011) who is more and more making his desire for nature one of the key element of his own well-being. Thus, in addition to measuring subjective well-being, our study also tries to understand how this assessment is triggered by the desires of the *homo qualitus* and anchored in the territory of the *homo geographicus* we both embodied.

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¹ The Brise project (Well-Being, Rural Territories Attractiveness and Socio-Spatial Inequalities) is funded by the PSDR 4 project (For and On the Regional Development). See : <https://www.psd.fr/PSDR.php?categ=103&lg=FR>

Urban territories make an excellent case study because of their deep duality. In one hand, they concentrate people, activities and services while they expose their inhabitants to their disturbances. In the other hand, they are facing the challenge to be more resilient and sustainable (Toubin *et al.*, 2012) by making available new or restored environmental amenities, mainly in the inner city, whereas they try to stop the fragmentation of their surrounding natural landscapes by containing the urban sprawl. These issues are reflected in gradual social reconfigurations, which ask the well-being of those who live in the urban centre and also in the peripheral areas. What are their relations to their “urban territory”, their neighbourhood and what is its influence on their life satisfaction? Are there singular determinants of well-being in urban territories? Can “well-being oases” be drawn in urban areas? By contrast, can “pockets of ill-being” be identified? What are their impacts to the attractiveness of the cities?

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To answer these questions, a methodology has been built in order to measure the subjective well-being of some inhabitants of the Rhône-Alpes region (Bourdeau-Lepage and Carré, 2015). First, a set of thirty criteria has been developed, resulting from a bibliographical analysis. They concern socio-economical (employment, income, housing, accessibility...) socio-cultural (social activities, civic participation...) and environmental indicators (exposition to natural hazards, presence of environmental amenities...). Each one has been translated into an illustrated pack of cards, in order to be presented to local inhabitants during field surveys.

For the purposes of this study, we focus on two districts of the Greater Lyon: the first (the 6th district of Lyon) is characterized by high incomes and a predominance of upper classes whereas the second one (the 7th district) is more heterogeneous from a sociological point of view. Field surveys have been conducted on these two territories during the spring of 2017. The individuals encountered first choose ten cards among the thirty. Then, they prioritize them and assign a note to each of the ten cards they selected. Thus, the constitutive elements of well-being are hierarchized and weighted following the statements of individuals. This results in a local-based indicator of subjective well-being, adaptable to socio-professional categories, gender or age.

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This presentation will therefore present the first results of the field surveys deployed in these urban areas, as well as the detailed methodological process. It will also focus on the interactions between the declared well-being and the investigated territories in two ways. The first is to understand how individuals interact with their own territory and community: this can be done thanks to the location-based questionnaires and some dedicated criteria relative to the qualification of the surrounding environment, social activities, the territorial anchorage or the civic participation. The second way of questioning the link to the territory is to compare the declared well-being between the chosen municipalities. An analysis will therefore be carried out in order to identify common and local-based determinants of well-being. More generally, this study is aimed to bring valuable information to the associated practitioners about the necessity to lead differentiated policies in order to enhance the well-being and improve the attractiveness of their territories.

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