Panel ABSTRACT

Panel 33: Places of Well-being: Exploring Space and Relationality in Redefining the Concept of Well-being

Organizers: Danai Toursoglou-Papalexandrou, Dimitris Ballas, Elli Papastergiou

Abstract: In an ever-changing and hyperconnected global landscape, cities face multidimensional challenges that often escalate into crises. Urbanization, while a driver of economic growth and development, contributes significantly to environmental pollution and climate change. Simultaneously, cities suffer the implications of environmental degradation which increasingly disrupt daily life and exacerbate disparities in socioeconomic status, health, and well-being. Considering that the expansion of urban settings is deeply entwined with unequal power dynamics, structural oppression, and discriminatory practices, environmental degradation adds another layer to socio-spatial segregation. Unequal access to quality environments (e.g., green spaces), increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events, energy insecurity, etc., disproportionally affect the health and well-being of marginalized communities, such as refugees and migrants, people of color, ethnic minorities, women, and economically disadvantaged individuals. At the same time, it has been observed that these communities have the capacity to generate innovative processes towards equitable access and response. These challenges are deeply spatial and highlight a pressing environmental justice issue and a need for an integrative, multi-level understanding of well-being and its interrelationship with other factors. This session invites contributions that examine spatial and relational dimensions of well-being and the consequences of rising inequality, focusing on the micro-spatial and urban scales. We encourage both empirical and theoretical contributions, approaching subjective well-being from various perspectives, and employing methodologies ranging from quantitative analysis to qualitative, community-driven knowledge and participatory and memory processes. We particularly welcome multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary contributions that foster dialogue and knowledge exchange between the Global North and Global South.

SESSION SCHEDULE

18.09.2025 | Slot 4 | 2-0-4

Emma Lengle: Urban Planning as Care and of Care: Approaches to Ecosocial Inequities in Health and Well-being in Norwegian City Government

Nese Oztimur: Healing Through Place: Spatial Practices and Wellbeing Among Syrian Women in Istanbul

Elli Papastergiou: Is Simply Green Enough for Well-being? Unpacking the Complex Relationship of Urban Green Space and Subjective Well-being.

Marie Voerman: Community Empowerment and Resilience: Local Perspectives and Collaborative Public Health Interventions for Systemic Change in Ecosyndemic Neighbourhoods in the Netherlands – a Protocol Paper

SESSION PAPERS

Urban Planning as Care and of Care: Approaches to Ecosocial Inequities in Health and Well-being in Norwegian City Government

Emma Lengle

Based on 15 months of ethnographic research in a Norwegian city government, this article traces my interlocutors' attempts to mitigate the deadly consequences of contemporary urban life, while simultaneously negotiating futures of health equity through urban planning processes. I trace the practice of city "bureaucraft" (James, 2010) as local policymakers and politicians grapple with the implications of a move to expand public health planning to include metrics of well-being, as well as to integrate a relational approach to urban determinants of health. I propose a conceptualization of urban planning as the (re)organization of relations of care, a process which inherently affects both urban well-being and relationality, even when these notions are not explicitly centered in the crafting of city plans and strategies. This approach allows for ethnographic and theoretical engagement with the local governmental practices that produce, uphold and contest temporo-spatial dimensions of health inequity. Exploring urban planning as care and of care, this paper brings into dialogue key debates in the literature on care and ecosocial theory in medical anthropology and the literature on urban inequity and city planning in political anthropology. This nexus is particularly poignant in the context of the Norwegian welfare state, known both for its oil wealth and its eco-sustainability policy initiatives. The cultivation of quality urban green spaces in Norwegian cities is lubricated by an oil-fueled state budget. To this end, this paper asks what relations and spaces must be brought into dialogue for care-ful, equitable urban planning.

Healing Through Place: Spatial Practices and Wellbeing Among Syrian Women in Istanbul

Nese Oztimur

Turkey is currently the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, accommodating approximately 3.2 million registered Syrian refugees.

This study will focus on How Syrian refugee women in Istanbul reconstruct wellbeing

through embodied and sensory engagements with their everyday urban environments. Focusing on urban public spaces—including parks, playgrounds, seaside beaches, mosque gardens, and fresh food markets—the study examines how refugee women develop affective, corporeal, and spatial attachments to these sites, positioning them as potential spaces of healing and relational belonging. Drawing on Wilbert Gesler's (1992) concept of 'therapeutic landscapes' and informed by Doreen Massey's theorisation of space as relational and dynamically produced, the research investigates how place-based wellbeing and identity are continuously co-constructed through collective practices, social interactions, and multi-sensory experiences within contexts of displacement.

The study is combining in-depth interviews with thirty Syrian refugee women from various neighbourhoods in Istanbul and participant observation of their informal gatherings in public settings.

This paper argues that these seemingly ordinary urban spaces function as sensory and therapeutic ecologies—micro-environments shaped by affect, movement, materiality, and relationality. Through everyday spatial and sensory practices, Syrian refugee women collaboratively generate environments that mitigate uncertainty, foster a sense of safety, enhance agency, and contribute to the cultivation of wellbeing amidst the layered complexities of forced displacement. In doing so, the study offers a critical intervention into debates in medical anthropology, migration studies, and urban space, highlighting the significance of non-clinical, embodied, and socially embedded forms of wellbeing and health.

Is Simply Green Enough for Well-being? Unpacking the Complex Relationship of Urban Green Space and Subjective Well-being.

Elli Papastergiou

It is well-established that urban green spaces (UGS) are fundamental elements of livable and healthy environments. They are associated with environmental and social determinants of physical and mental health, as well as with enhanced social connection. Therefore, the range of direct and indirect benefits that UGSs provide to urban populations can be decisive in improving their subjective well-being (SWB). The study of the UGS-SWB nexus has surged over the recent years -particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic- reflecting a growing appetite for understanding the nuances of this relationship for informed policy-making and urban planning. However, even if we tend to agree that the "greener the better," several key questions still need to be addressed. To this end, the present research systematically reviewed 63 empirical studies published from 2013 to 2023, synthesized knowledge, and developed a comprehensive framework for studying the associations of urban green spaces with subjective well-being. The proposed framework identifies three core components (individuals, UGS attributes, and the broader spatial context) interconnected by exposure processes and pathways of influence. This structured approach acknowledges the complex nature of the UGS-SWB relationship and emphasizes the need to look beyond linear interpretations. The principles of the proposed framework informed the design of a case study in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, including a research instrument to collect primary data. The collected data were analyzed along with secondary sources using econometric methodologies, with preliminary findings presented herein.

Community Empowerment and Resilience: Local Perspectives and Collaborative

Public Health Interventions for Systemic Change in Ecosyndemic Neighbourhoods in the Netherlands – a Protocol Paper

Marie Voerman

This protocol paper sets out the concept and design of a dissertation research on community empowerment and resilience in ecosyndemic neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. 'Ecosyndemic neighbourhoods' are defined, here, as neighbourhoods with adverse social and environmental contexts where there is disproportionate clustering of non-communicable diseases and synergistic interaction of these diseases which exacerbate health problems of inhabitants.

In this research, we consider how communities and environments relationally shape one another in ecosyndemic neighbourhoods and what can be done by community members to empower themselves against ecosyndemic conditions and minimalize ecosyndemic risk on a local level. We also consider how community members fit into larger complex systems around health and environment and what needs to be done systematically for empowerment, resilience and minimalization of ecosyndemic risk.

To do so, we collaborate with community members in an iterative study involving (a) mapping of the neighbourhood and communities through photovoice, (b) in-depth study and analysis of local understandings of ecosyndemics through fieldwork and interviews, and (c) intervention development and evaluation for empowerment and resilience through communal model building and ripple effect mapping.

For in-depth research of both ecosyndemic contexts, as well as on underlying social mechanisms complexly shaping and being shaped by this ecosyndemic context – we adopt the theoretical lens of 'intersectional ecosyndemics'.

Through this study, we hope to collaborative gain knowledge on community perspectives on ecosyndemic neighbourhoods, as well as develop and argue for sustainable interventions for systematic empowerment of communities in ecosyndemic neighbourhoods and prevention of ecosyndemic risk more generally.