Built environment factors such as housing and neighborhood have direct influence on residents' overall well being

Considering the rapidly growing urban population of the world, cities and citizens are facing many different challenges. In response to these challenges, research on living quality and well-being in urban settings have increased tremendously in the last decade and many urban scientists have tried to address and investigate living issues in urban contexts. Despite the growing number of studies, there are still very few studies that provide a comprehensive framework to measure residents’ wellbeing and the majority of studies focuses on a single urban life domain. In my PhD research I developed a model to better understand citizen’s well-being, with an explicit focus on the role of the built environment, by including the life-domains of housing, neighborhood, transport and job.

My research showed that income well-being, health well-being and social well-being are the most important determinants of quality citizen’s well-being, respectively. This means that physical factors have less impact compared to the aforementioned domains, which is in line with the findings of psychological and happiness research. Moreover, transport is the only domain with an indirect influence on well-being. All in all, as the four major urban life domains that we investigated have significant influence on citizen’s well-being, we can conclude that our results confirm the relevance of the conceptual framework underlying this thesis.

During my PhD research I developed a comprehensive model of Quality of Urban Life (QOUL), by expanding and integrating concepts that have been suggested over the last few decades. To operationalize the conceptual framework, we focused on four main urban life domains: housing, neighborhood, transport and job. We collected our data through an online questionnaire distributed among households in four neighborhoods in the city of Eindhoven. We used different types of models to analyze the complex relationships embedded in the developed theoretical framework and the estimation results of the models lead to the following conclusions:

First, in the housing well-being model, satisfaction with ownership, type of house and design are the most important predictors of overall housing satisfaction. Also, lack of safety/security facilities, and living in low cost rental houses significantly and negatively influence residential satisfaction of households. Households with higher income and longer residency have higher satisfaction compared to others.

Second, in the neighbourhood well-being model, social aspects such as neighbourhood attachment and safety feeling turn out to be more important than environmental and physical aspects. From neighbourhood services, only grocery shopping is found to be influential. We found that both walking and biking conditions significantly influence overall neighbourhood satisfaction, with satisfaction with walking being more important. Our results also show that single people have lower neighborhood attachment compared to others, which negatively influences neighbourhood satisfaction.

Third, in transport well-being model, we found that traveling in peak hours is the main predictor of travel satisfaction. More specifically, rush hours avoidance has a positive and significant effect on travel satisfaction. Mode choice and accessibility satisfaction both directly and significantly influence transport well-being. Considering that individuals’ characteristic directly influence commuting choices,
which in turn influence travel satisfaction, our results show that younger people and males are more likely to travel during peak hours, and therefore they have lower travel satisfaction compared with other groups. Moreover, our results show that teleworking and work flexibility in the Netherlands provide opportunities for employed people to avoid peak hour commuting, which consequently leads to higher travel satisfaction.

Fourth, in the job well-being model, the results indicate a strong influence of work conditions satisfaction on overall work satisfaction. Satisfaction with quality of work from the work condition category is found to have a strong influence on work satisfaction. Satisfaction with privacy in the work space and satisfaction with travel time to work are other important factors influencing job satisfaction.

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