

◇ Quality of Life and the Built Environment: ◎ Strategies for Urban Economic Development and ◇ Wellbeing

This short course delves into the intricate relationship between the built environment—encompassing housing, transportation, infrastructure, and urban design—and its impact on individual and community well-being. Drawing on the Beyond GDP Wellbeing Framework by the OECD, we will examine how various elements of the built environment have an impact on the experienced quality of life and its drivers, with a focus on key dimensions such as health, safety, social connections, and the local economy.

In this course, participants will learn to view the built environment through a well-being lens by discussing contemporary literature and societal problems in this field of study as well as the current state of the built environment and in Saudi Arabia and other countries, exploring its connections to well-being and economic development. Furthermore, we will highlight examples of integrated policy and planning approaches that promote well-being within the context of the built environment.

As such, this short course provides a starting point for further exploration of this relationship. The course concludes with a 2-day design lab in which students bring their learnings into practice.

Topics that will be discussed during this course include, but are not limited to:

- ◎ Quality of Life and well-being:
Theory and conceptualization
- ◎ Measurement of well-being
- ◎ Importance of culture for well-being
- ◎ Urban economics: The city through the eye of economists
- ◎ Economic diversification and urban development
- ◎ Spatial structure and well-being
- ◎ Urban design, aesthetics and well-being
- ◎ Housing and well-being
- ◎ Transportation and infrastructure and well-being
- ◎ Wellbeing and urban policy

Upon completion of the course, students will receive a certificate signed by Alfaisal University, the Quality-of-Life Program in Saudi Arabia and Erasmus University Rotterdam

Instructor: Prof. dr. Martijn Burger

Prof. dr. Martijn Burger is Academic Director at the Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organisation (EHERO), Erasmus University Rotterdam, Professor of Happiness Economics in the Faculty of Management Studies at the Open University of the Netherlands and visiting professor at the School of Economics at the University of Johannesburg. He obtained his Ph.D. in Economics (cum laude) from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Most of his current research focuses on happiness economics and urban and regional economics, including geography of happiness, worker well-being, and institutional and social conditions for economic development. In addition, he is current president (2023-2024) of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies, associate editor of the International Journal of Community Wellbeing and belongs to the top experts in quality-of-life studies and urban studies.



Course Program Overview (Preliminary)

No preparation for the lectures is necessary.

Background material is provided via an online platform.

Sunday December 29, 2024

09:30-10:00	Introduction to the course
10:00-11:30	Quality-of-Life and Wellbeing: Conceptualization and Measurement
11:30-12:15	Morning Break – Dhrur
12:15-14:15	Welfare and Wellbeing The importance of Economic Growth for Wellbeing
14:15-15:15	Midday Break – Asr
15:15-17:00	Drivers and Benefits of Wellbeing
17:00	End of Day

Monday December 30, 2024

09:30-11:30	Wellbeing and the Built Environment
11:30-12:15	Morning Break – Dhrur
12:15-14:15	How Economists See Cities: Economic Activities and Wellbeing
14:15-15:15	Midday Break – Asr
15:15-17:00	Travel, Access to Facilities and Wellbeing
17:00	End of Day

Tuesday December 31, 2024

09:30-11:30	Housing, Public Spaces and Wellbeing
11:30-12:15	Morning Break – Dhrur
12:15-14:15	Aesthetics, Safety, Noise and Wellbeing
14:15-15:15	Midday Break – Asr
15:15-17:00	Saudi Quality-of-Life Program 2030 Introduction to the Design Workshop
17:00	End of Day

Wednesday January 1, 2025

10:00-17:00	Design Workshop (with Morning Break – Dhrur and Midday Break – Asr)
Evening:	Optional “Open House”: Participants are invited to stay longer and contribute additional comments regarding proposed interventions.

Thursday January 2, 2025

10:00-13:30	Design Workshop (with Morning Break - Dhrur)
11:30-12:15	Midday Break – Asr
14:15-15:15	Presentations Design Workshop and Certificate Ceremony

Detailed Course Program (Preliminary)

Sunday December 29



Quality-of-Life and Wellbeing: Conceptualization and Measurement

In the first lecture, we explore the concepts of quality-of-life and well-being. The terms 'quality of life,' 'well-being,' and 'happiness' have distinct meanings. At times, they are used interchangeably to encompass all things of value, while at other times, they refer to specific qualities or attributes. In this first lecture, we explore how you can conceptualize these terms and, subsequently, how you can measure quality-of-life and well-being within a community. We also address to what extent there are cultural differences in the conceptualization, addressing that the academic field applies often a too Western point of view.

Welfare and Wellbeing | The Importance of Economic Growth for Wellbeing

Having defined wellbeing, we provide an overview of the existing literature on measuring progress “beyond GDP”, making a case to focus on wellbeing as key outcome measure to gauge this progress – arguing it is important to distinguish between welfare and wellbeing (see Figure below). We first recall briefly the limits of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or economic progress as a measure of human progress. We then review the main schools of thought on how to conceptualize and measure progress, focusing on (1) the economics-based school, (2) the ethics-based school, and (3) subjective well-being-based school. Subsequently, we discuss how the different schools of thought can be linked and why it is important to not only focus on maximizing economic growth, but also how economic growth can go hand-in-hand with other factors important for people’s wellbeing.

Drivers and Benefits of Wellbeing

In this lecture, we discuss the most important psychological theories related to wellbeing, explaining why some people are happy, while others are not. We will see that besides economic factors also non-economic factors such as health, religion and social relationships play an important role and that these factors differ across individuals and space. Subsequently, we move towards explaining spatial differences in wellbeing: to what extent are differences driven by spatial sorting of people or by the built environment? We end the class by discussing the feedback loop: how higher levels of wellbeing result in better economic performance and increasing stability in a country.



Detailed Course Program (Preliminary)

Monday December 30



Wellbeing and the Built Environment

Improving the quality of life in urban areas is an increasingly important challenge for city planning. However, the relationship between the built environment and people's well-being remains insufficiently explored. This lecture examines various pathways through which the built environment influences wellbeing. Seven pathways are discussed: (1) work and economy, (2) travel and infrastructure, (3) leisure and amenities, (4) social connections, (5) housing and neighborhood quality, (6) emotional reactions, and (7) health.

How Economists See Cities: Economic Activities and Wellbeing

Economists view cities as more than just physical structures like buildings and streets; they see them as dynamic ecosystems of economic activity, where individuals and businesses collaborate to generate opportunities, wealth, and innovation. In this lecture, we look at the importance of density and diversity for urban economic development. However, is what is good for economic development also good for wellbeing? Subsequently, we look at how diversification of the urban economy can help to improve wellbeing in the future and what it means for Saudi Arabia.

Travel, Access to Facilities and Wellbeing

We end the second day of the course with exploring two pathways how the built environment affects wellbeing: travel and accessibility, touching upon topics like facilities, public transportation and mobility. Why is walkability of a city important and to what extent is it good to mix activities in neighborhoods and how can this be applied to the Saudi Arabian context?



Detailed Course Program (Preliminary)

Tuesday December 31



Housing, Public Spaces and Wellbeing

Affordable housing is important for wellbeing and often a reason for lower wellbeing in large cities. However, not only housing itself plays a role but also the quality of public and communal spaces for residential complexes. How can you stimulate social cohesion in neighborhoods through the built environment while respecting privacy? Can you have residential neighborhoods that are pleasant to live in, but also fulfill an economic function? How can you make sure that every user is satisfied?

Aesthetics, Safety, Noise and Wellbeing

Daily experiences also contribute to our wellbeing and cities can be designed in such a way that they foster physical health, mental health and social relationships. In this last lecture before the design workshop, we show daily experiences in the built environment can foster our health and relationships. Can aesthetically pleasing buildings, noise reduction and well-maintained and tidy urban spaces help to improve quality-of-life and wellbeing in our cities?

Saudi Quality-of-Life Program 2030

This lecture introduces the Saudi Quality of Life Program on which the Design Workshop will be based. The Quality-of-Life Program is a key initiative aimed at achieving Saudi Vision 2030. Launched in 2018, its goal is to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and families in Saudi Arabia. This is accomplished by creating, supporting, and introducing new opportunities that encourage greater participation in cultural, recreational, sports, and tourism activities for citizens, residents, and visitors. These efforts not only improve the quality of life but also create job opportunities, diversify the economy, and elevate the global ranking of Saudi cities.

Design Workshop

Planning a Neighborhood to Improve Wellbeing and Stimulate Economic Development

In this design workshop you will combine knowledge from this course to plan the development of a neighborhood in Riyadh. Building on the themes discussed in the course, the workshop has the aim to develop in small groups design solutions for a site to enhance both its economic function and residential wellbeing. Groups of students can choose from two sites to work on.

Optional:

- Site visit
- Go into neighborhoods and talk with citizens
- Street design game, where students have to redesign a whole street

