

## **POPULATION DYNAMICS AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN EUROPEAN CITIES**

Cities have mainly been seen as winners over other types of territories in every aspect of economic and social life. Nevertheless, in developed countries, when observing different dimensions of subjective well-being (SWB), urban areas usually present lower levels than their rural counterparts. Additionally, we can observe high levels of heterogeneity among cities; for example, while 59 per cent of the population in Copenhagen reports being very satisfied with their lives, this is reported only by the 24 per cent in Paris. Several studies have tried to explain this rural-urban paradox, as well as the heterogeneity in SWB; however, the results are far from conclusive.

Concerning population growth, developed countries like the ones in Europe present, in general, a stagnant or sometimes decreasing trend. However, when observing closer, we observe two different scenarios: the population in rural and non-metro regions is negative, while it is positive in urban and capital metro regions. Some meaningful research has been done in order to observe the relationship between depopulation and rising discontent. Meanwhile, little has been said about the increasing population in cities and their relation with SWB, under the assumption that continuous migration to cities may reflect their attractiveness and their higher quality of life.

Therefore, this work aims to address this by answering the following question: Does increasing levels of population in cities negatively affect the average levels of SWB (proxied by life satisfaction)? Using data from the Quality of Life in European Cities survey conducted in 2015, 2019, and 2022, we explore two competing hypotheses: firstly, that population growth in cities may negatively impact SWB due to strains on resources and infrastructure. Secondly, that the heterogenous socio-demographic composition of urban population growth affects SWB outcomes observed in cities.

We firstly examine the potential effects of population growth on life satisfaction, drawing upon the concept of “assimilative capacity”, typically used in environmental sciences, that sees cities as ecosystems with thresholds beyond which population growth may outstrip the city's ability to maintain a certain level of per capita amenities. Second, we delve into this relationship with a special focus on inequalities: while the better-off sector of the population may not be negatively affected by this trend, those in a vulnerable socioeconomic position might be touched by it, and, therefore, they will present lower levels of life satisfaction.

Finally, we explore the effect of population growth on individuals with a different migration history by comparing stayers and migrants. In particular, we test whether immigrants' SWB might be higher than the residents, given that the former recently chose their destination, while the latter is not more compared to stayers who perceive a decline in their accustomed to their surroundings.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the drivers and consequences of urbanisation on SWB, offering valuable insights for policymakers to inform targeted interventions aimed at improving the well-being of urban residents.