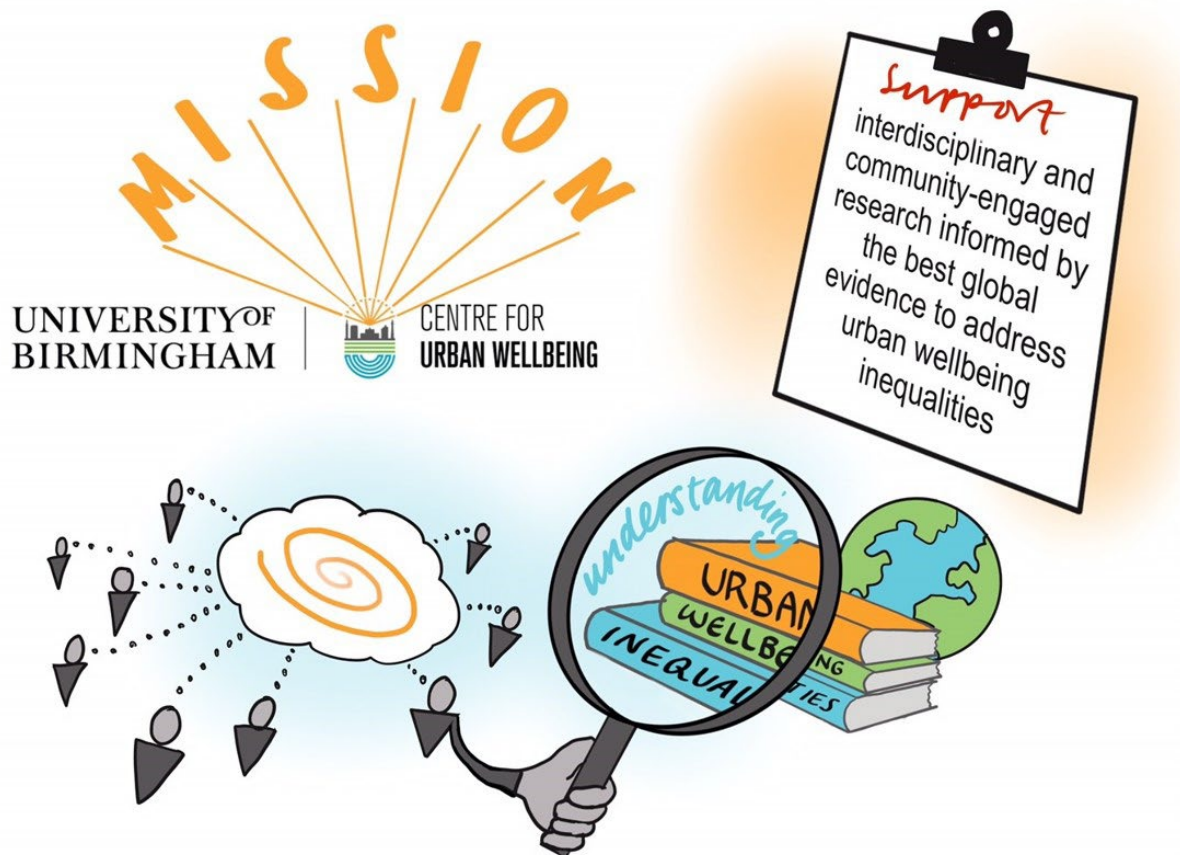


Centre for Urban Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027

Strengthening collaboration, supporting more equal places



Mission

The Centre for Urban Wellbeing was established in 2020 at the University of Birmingham to support interdisciplinary and community-engaged research informed by the best global evidence to address urban wellbeing inequalities.

About

The University of Birmingham was England's first civic university, and in 2019 committed to a new Civic University Agreement in partnership with local government and other partners. This agreement enhances its contributions to meeting the social and economic needs of the city and wider region. The Centre for Urban Wellbeing initiated in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences to lead transformative research in sustainable and inclusive wellbeing. Since its inception the Centre has grown to include all our Colleges, acting to provide the infrastructure need to create new opportunities for collaboration, to enhance an interdisciplinary research culture and capacity for producing new thinking on wellbeing, and to open as space for engaging with policy-makers, practitioners and communities on issues that matter to them.

Goals

- 1 Produce insight on the multi-dimensional characteristics of wellbeing**

- 2 Advance understanding of local and global conditions needed for people to thrive**

- 3 Shed light on community approaches to addressing wellbeing inequalities**

- 4 Create new knowledge on urban wellbeing through creative dialogue across disciplines**

- 5 Engage with policy makers to enable co-produced research which can influence urban wellbeing strategies**


RESEARCH THEMES



Recent activities in numbers (2021-22)



Responding to urban wellbeing inequalities: the key challenges for research

With rising levels of regional and spatial inequalities and an increase in interest in urban-rural differences in wellbeing and the future of cities, urban wellbeing is an important research agenda. Understanding and tackling urban wellbeing inequalities is key to this. Urban wellbeing inequalities can take many forms – from basic income inequalities, to health and housing inequalities, to differences in experiences of and access to green spaces and quality urban environments.

There are social and spatial inequalities in the subjective experience of wellbeing, and divergences in terms of opportunities to be represented in the cultural, political and civic institutions of a city. These inequalities can be gendered, racialised, social, spatial, and others. Making places more equal and equitable can improve social and health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Existing approaches to addressing urban inequalities – whether through policies driven by new evidence and data, place-based agendas based on regeneration and urban renewal, behavioural interventions based on lifestyle factors, or long-term responses to crises – have had limited effect. There are also gaps in terms of how successful initiatives promoting urban wellbeing could be transferred between different kinds of towns and cities, how lessons can be learnt from successes and failures, and how exciting, aspirational visions can be put into practice. We need to better understand how local and regional leadership, community involvement and national strategies can intersect to produce new imagination, insight and influence in order to support and shape future cities in which diverse communities can thrive.

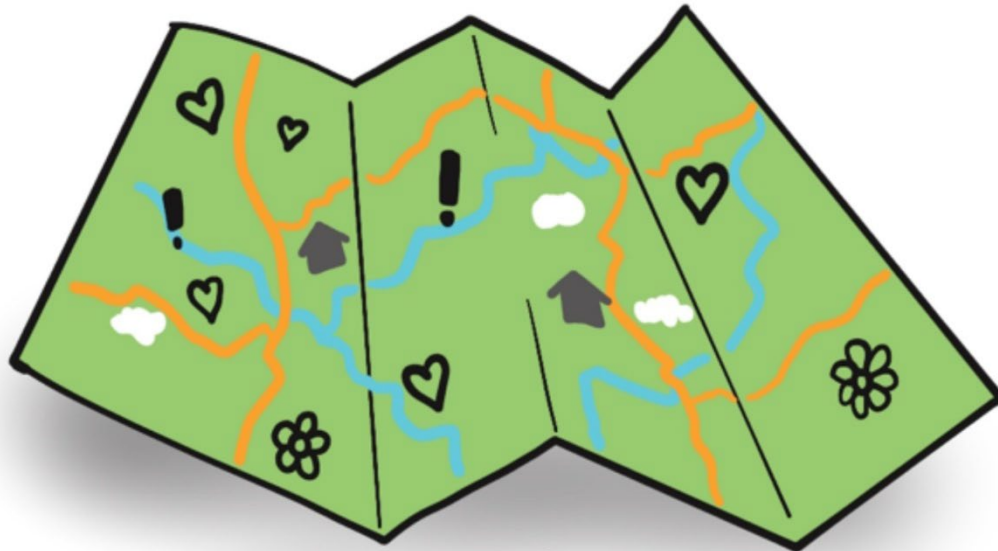
We will also provide a historical and theoretical forum in which to ask fundamental questions about what constitutes ‘wellbeing’ itself: how we begin to conceptualise the very nature of wellbeing in all its contingency and diversity, and how racial, social, and ableist biases have informed assumptions about what wellbeing is will be core concerns for the Centre to address.



implementing action based on wellbeing metrics

Research and evidence on wellbeing metrics have gathered significant pace in the past decade. Wellbeing based frameworks for public policies have been growing in influence. There are many wellbeing indicators, measurements and indexes used to understand and implement change – all of which need to be practical, easily accessible and relevant to the area. At the same time, technological developments mean that recording, monitoring, locating and potentially engineering personal wellbeing experiences have become ever more possible, for example, through e-health and biosensing technologies.

Attempts to sell data analytics services, urban wellbeing management programmes and experiments remain in need of ethical scrutiny. Working directly with communities can identify meaningful and relevant indicators to overcome the ‘expert’ bias, where citizens, public officials, and experts in the same community may see the relative importance of indicators quite differently. There is a clear case for all stakeholders to be involved in defining and applying measurements, particularly citizens often ignored due to the resources needed to collaborate well.



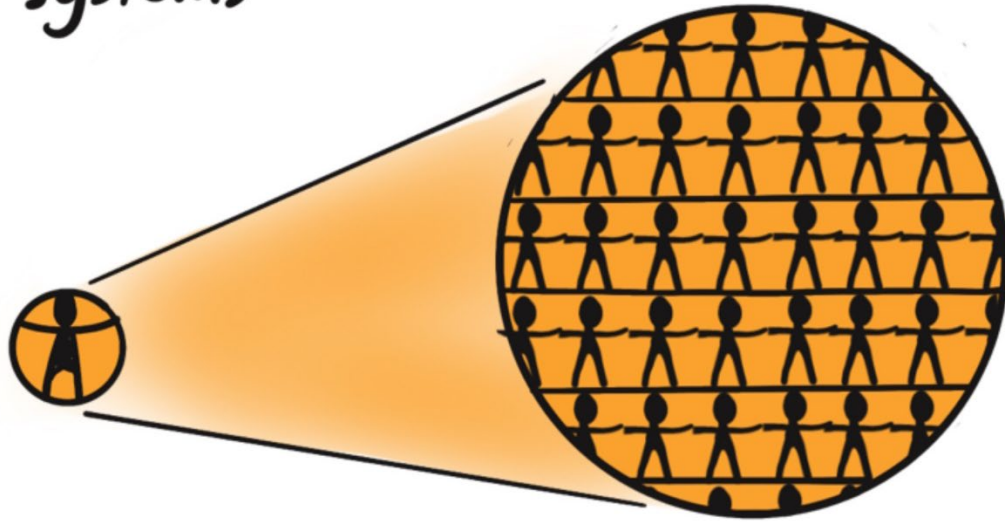
place-based legacies & innovations

The UK has a long history of spatial planning, regional economic policy interventions, and area-based regeneration programmes, with recent emphasis on place-based R&D and innovation. This clearly positions economic growth as the catalyst for urban and regional development, job creation and wellbeing to be achieved through paid work. The Covid-19 pandemic plunged de-industrialised regions into a severe economic recession, exacerbating low productivity rates, increasing rates of unemployment and high levels of deprivation. Regional inequality, income and occupational polarisation are known to threaten the health and wellbeing of the wider population, and the sustainability and stability of economies.

However, the evidence on the effectiveness of place-based approaches to alleviating economic decline and supporting recovery and resilience is highly contested. Researchers have argued that place-based policy strategies are insufficient to generate high quality, meaningful work and guarantee a high quality of life for all. If equality and sustainability were placed more centrally as key performance indicators for place-based R&D, then we could begin to see better and fairer outcomes in terms of improving the foundations of community wealth-building, solidarity, ecological assets, and valuing core economic functions in local areas.

Place-based developments could use data and innovation more effectively if repurposed towards wellbeing goals. [Arts and creative programmes](#) can also be place-based to improve social and economic outcomes and reduce wellbeing inequalities, where the conditions for partnership and collaboration are appropriate and where the economic and social value of cultural work, skills and people are acknowledged, financed and sustained [insert link: [Meta-evaluation of place-based programmes | Arts Council England](#)]

scaling up person-based interventions to change whole systems

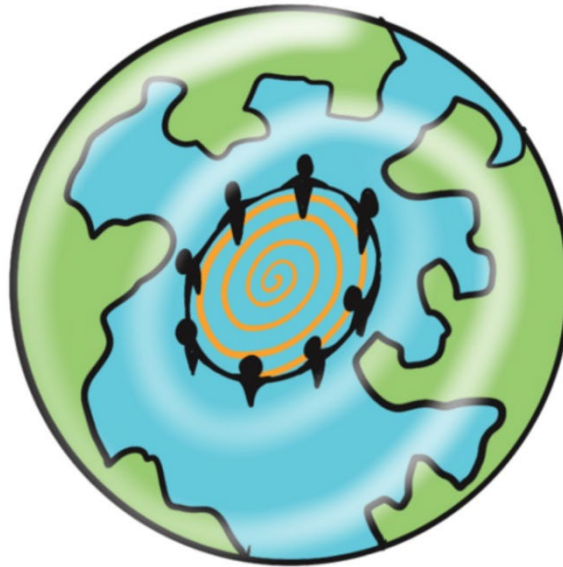


There is an urgent concern for the health and wellbeing of individuals in the burgeoning mental health crisis, lack of access to mental health services, and both physical and mental health inequalities exposed and exacerbated by Covid. However, there remains frustration with a lack of effective lifestyle interventions and narrow behavioural change programmes aimed at improving individual wellbeing.

We need to join up what is known about effective initiatives to generate scalable insights to address inequalities. Despite a huge amount of available data and analysis, much remains unclear about what is needed to see transformative change and action on urban wellbeing inequalities.

A holistic urban wellbeing strategy, informed by transdisciplinary approaches to evidence gathering, analysis and community involvement, is needed to address persistent and cross-sectoral challenges facing cities today. Public health and health policy researchers now frequently refer to the importance of whole-systems based interventions which aim to change different aspects of a system simultaneously to achieve more sustained forms of change, increase capacity and resilience in the system – recognising feedback loop, non-linear relationships and interconnections.

supporting collective, inclusive & sustainable wellbeing futures



There are clear opportunities to inform current innovations and experiments in urban governance. Local and regional authorities are beginning to experiment with a more diverse range of economic models which are primarily focussed on repurposing local economies towards securing community wellbeing.

Coventry City Council has sought out evidence on the potential impact of Covid on their low-carbon commitments, and has a policy on social value. Birmingham City Council has a mentally healthy cities strategy which is focussed on prevention, early intervention, closing inequalities and mobilising arts and culture based interventions.

Solihull Council have worked with the West Midlands Combined Authority on developing an Inclusive Growth Outcomes Framework informed by Doughnut Economics. This is based on meeting social needs without exceeding planetary boundaries – in order to ensure their strategy holistically meets basic living standards, environmental targets, and improves economic opportunities, health inequalities, and community participation.

Birmingham City Council and other Black Country local authorities have also established Anchor Networks, to work with large, localised and stable institutions which play a pivotal role in the locality and sustaining wellbeing, particularly in the immediate response to Covid.



imagining & understanding wellbeing in context

Taking a deeper perspective on the definitions, narratives, experiences, uses and fraught nature of wellbeing is needed to advance understanding of wellbeing as both an object of research investigation and a target of public policy and practice. How wellbeing has been articulated and re-envisioned over time will be crucial to understanding how we imagine its constitution and enhancement in the present.

Furthermore, wellbeing cannot be fathomed in purely empirical or quantitative terms; perspectives on the phenomenology of human flourishing and urban belonging from philosophy, history of emotions, and literary and cultural studies will therefore be essential to apprehending the ontology and contestability of wellbeing in different historical contexts.

Cultural narratives that help us to particularise the multifariousness, uneven distribution, and experiential unpredictability of wellbeing will contribute to the ongoing work of elaborating the sources of evidence and analysis required to close the gap between inclusive growth policies, shared wealth, gender and ethnic gaps across a range of socio-economic metrics, and ultimately to shape more equal cities.

CUWb provides research briefings which evaluate how community wellbeing metrics can be best used in closing these gaps, to provide decision-makers with accessible resources, opportunities to share knowledge about the state-of-the-art and creative thinking to embed this evidence in its historical context and future possibilities – taking the long view and directly addressing areas of debate and conflict in the rapidly evolving field of urban wellbeing research.

We can also draw out key lessons from cities across different global contexts using findings from comparative international urban research and historical analysis of cities, human and environmental development, health and wellbeing conducted across the university.

Our approach



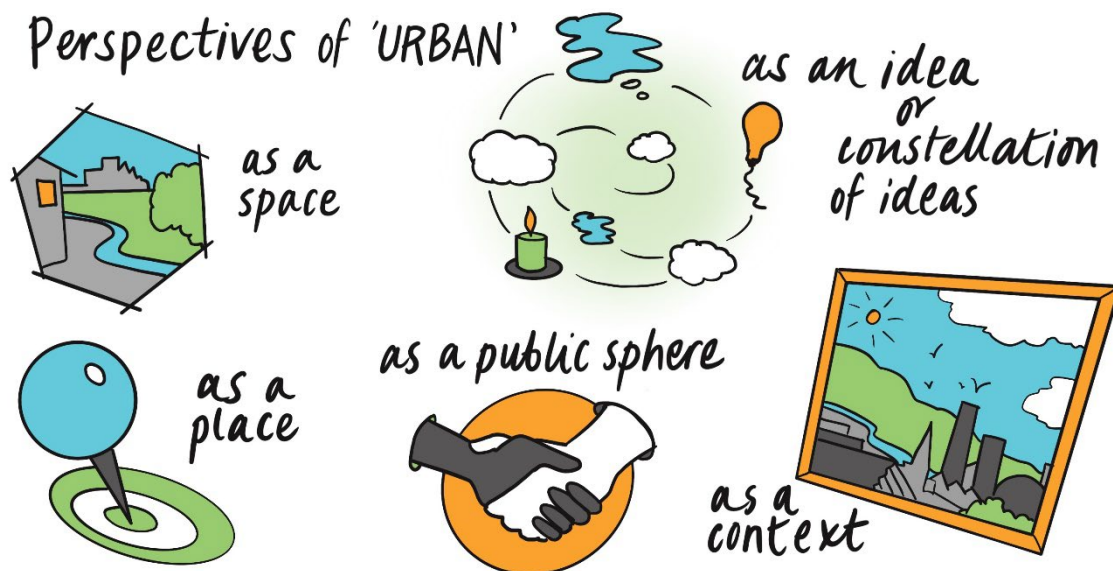
CUWb has developed a distinctive approach to understanding how wellbeing is experienced, practiced and shaped. We treat wellbeing not only as property of individuals, but of publics, places and communities, and that our research is aimed at involving people in both advancing understanding and shaping the cities in which wellbeing is experienced to make places which are more equal.

"We see wellbeing as both located in place and as a public matter. It is collective rather than individualised, political rather than neutral, and distributed in spatially uneven ways because of existing inequalities. It is also both embodied – concerned with feelings, identities, social difference and cultural norms, and environmental – related to the world around, to others, and to the public expression of feelings." Co-Director, Dr Jessica Pykett

We also recognise the divergent focus on wellbeing as either a place-based, regional economic problem, or a person-based individual, behavioural problem can seem to work at odds with each other. This requires that attention is paid to neglected dimensions of urban wellbeing:

- How people interact with their environment
- How people are invited (or compelled) to recognise the possibilities of and limits to their own personal and collective wellbeing. How people practice wellbeing in their everyday lives
- Inequalities in wellbeing within urban environments
- People's diverse aspirations for and interpretations of wellbeing

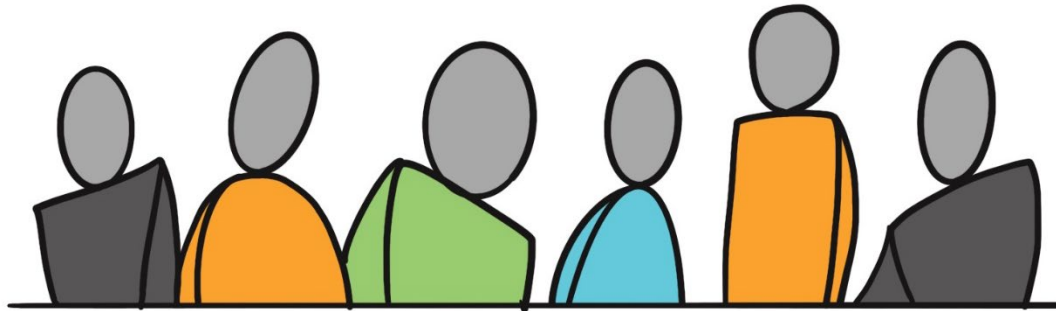
- What we already know about the social conditions required to thrive
- The basic connections between economic policy, environmental policy and unsustainable levels of consumption
- The ways in which people, community and the urban are connected
- Improving the wellbeing of marginalised groups
- The sustainability of wellbeing over the long-term
- How public bodies, voluntary and community organisations, and communities interact to address wellbeing
- Engaging and enabling institutions in their next steps towards applying the insights from urban wellbeing research and partnering with urban wellbeing researchers



By defining wellbeing through the concept of the urban we bring together multiple perspectives of the urban:

- The urban as a **space** (of working, living, playing, leaning),
- The urban as a **place** (of belonging, meaning, attachment, cultural significance),
- The urban as a **public sphere** (of governance, civil society, global collaboration)
- The urban as a **context** (social, economic and health inequalities).
- The urban as an **idea** (as a constellation of ideals and compromises; and an unequally distributed or unevenly developed set of resources for imagining habitation and belonging)

RESEARCH PARTNERS



Principles of partnerships

We seek to advance a wide understanding of the range of approaches which are potentially more effective in addressing ongoing wide gaps in life expectancy, employment, subjective experiences of wellbeing, and quality of life between regions and neighbourhoods. These include more ambitious community-based approaches, influencing national policy change and potential ‘upstream’ solutions. These need to be rooted in supporting the development of long-term strategies which have clear next steps for resourcing and implementation.

Who we partner with and why

- Local authority managers and cabinet members (e.g. climate change, public health, planning, communities, sustainable finance),
- Community and voluntary sector leaders (e.g. social enterprises, research foundations)
- National and Regional government departments’ scientific advisors and knowledge networks

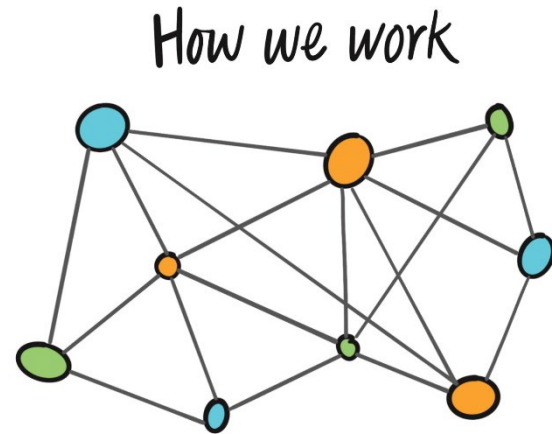
“The Centre is open to new ways of working – this means recognising the value of co-production and resourcing contributions from research participants and partners” Victoria Boelman, Research Director, The Young Foundation

- Global business organisations and initiatives promoting sustainable, equitable and healthy cities

How we work with partners

To capture 'whole-system' expertise and knowledge, more participatory and empowering approaches are needed. We have experience in action research, community engagement approaches, and diverse forms of research evaluation:

- co-production
- Deliberative policy analysis
- Social innovation research
- service-user journeys
- asset-based community development
- policy engagement
- design and participatory techniques
- Participatory, realist, reflective and process evaluation techniques
- secondary analysis of large datasets
- trial design and evaluation
- qualitative interviews and focus groups



These can be used to create interactive spaces where new forms of shared knowing, robust relationships and consensus building are co-produced. The Centre evaluates the impact of these approaches, methods and tools on abilities and resources for thinking and acting strategically, creatively and collaboratively, including how local solutions can be realised, sustained and transform systems-level factors and structural forces.

These approaches, methods and tools, usefully accompanied by evidence and literature reviews, and theoretical developments, can provide partners with the conceptual and methodological tools needed for defining their visions, developing strategies and learning key lessons across different institutions, sectors, local or national contexts to shape successful approaches to implementation of key findings from interdisciplinary wellbeing research.

Working across the University

The Centre acts as a co-ordinating hub for wellbeing researchers across the university, supporting and collaborating with other centres of excellence to forge new synergies and enable cross-sector working. We do this to develop a thriving and interdisciplinary wellbeing research culture, to foster connections between urban and wellbeing research across a range of scales and contexts, and to provide a platform for research users to connect with a wide range of academics.

[Birmingham Institute for Sustainability and Climate Action](#)

Aims to facilitate, connect and deliver world-leading, transdisciplinary research on sustainability and foster climate action – leading to better livelihoods and a more sustainable environment in a rapidly changing world.

[Birmingham Leadership Institute](#)

Providing new insights from leadership research and reflection-on-practice, delivering leadership education, training and development, open access leadership resources and participating in public debate.

[Centre for Human Brain Health](#)

Advancing understanding of what makes a brain healthy, how to maintain health, and how to prevent and reverse damage.

[WM RED](#)

Supporting inclusive economic growth in the West Midlands and across the UK.

[European University for Well-Being \(EUniWell\)](#)

EUniWell unites 7 diverse universities and 102 associate partners drawn from 7 distinct regions of Europe. It presents an action-oriented response to well-being, grounded in research expertise, educational leadership and civic engagement to meet the challenge set out by the Council of the European Union and the OECD.

Members of the Centre for Urban Wellbeing (Human Geography) collaborated on a new module on 'Urbanity and Well-Being' with the University of Florence (Architecture and Regional Design) and Leiden University (Urban Planning). The module is co-designed with the involvement of current undergraduate students, alumni, careers advisors and public and private sector employers.

[Institute of Applied Health Research](#)

Tackles global health challenges, prevents disease and improves healthcare using research and methodological innovations.

[UK Collaboratorium for Research on Infrastructure and Cities \(UKCRIC\)](#)

A national collaboration of 15 universities driven by research in four Scientific Missions, each working to develop and deliver breakthrough research for the benefit of society.

As Executive Manager of UKCRIC, Dr Joanne Leach works across the Centre for Urban Wellbeing and IAS-IGI Resilient Cities theme to mobilise opportunities for collaboration on UKCRIC's Scientific Missions. These are designed to facilitate the delivery of interconnected, integrated and transdisciplinary research programmes and projects and are:

- Infrastructure and urban systems for one planet living. Accelerating sustainability through substantial advances in responsible consumption, resource efficiency and sustainable growth and helping the UK meet its carbon targets.
- Transformational infrastructure and urban systems for a changing world. Pioneering methods in infrastructure and urban systems design to meet the challenges of climate change, changing patterns of use, societal expectations and emergent technologies.
- Ownership, governance and business models for infrastructure and urban systems. Developing innovative models for coping with greater system interdependencies, changing patterns of use and new, disruptive technologies while at the same time delivering social justice and affordability.
- Infrastructure and urban systems as drivers of equity, inclusion and social justice. Providing the underpinning, transdisciplinary research platforms for forging healthy, happy and productive lives for all through urban design, planning, policy and infrastructure (led by the University of Birmingham).

[Institute for Local Government Studies](#)

The leading academic centre for research and teaching on local governance and public management.

[Institute for Mental Health](#)

Working with NHS partners to understand the causes of poor mental health and develop effective treatments and services.

[Resilient Cities - Institute for Global Innovation](#)

Reassessing the concept of resilience and its measurement as it is applied to cities undergoing transition.

[Third Sector Research Centre](#)

The UK's leading centre for civil society research.

[Work Inclusivity Research Centre](#)

Critically engaged study of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in employment, guided by principles of social justice.

Working across the region

A number of research programmes and partnerships at the University of Birmingham demonstrate the way in which its civic university commitments are addressing urban wellbeing inequalities. The University is part of a regional partnership of 8 universities co-ordinated by Midlands Innovation. The [Inclusive Transformation](#) theme is committed to developing solutions to improve wellbeing and prosperity, including tackling community poverty, improving educational outcomes and the impacts of financial exclusion – themes pursued by our Recovery and Renewal theme. A [Health Inequalities Policy Commission](#) is delivering important work on how Covid-19 has intensified health inequalities and what inequalities are emerging in order to identify key recommendations for the Midlands region, which is being supported by our Wellbeing Economies theme.



Source: Wikimedia Commons 2010

The UK government's regional strategy announced in the 2022 Levelling up white paper [\[link\]](#) provides a potential opportunity for the Centre to contribute to improving wellbeing and closing the gap between areas of high and low wellbeing as central overall goals of it's the Government's medium-term 'missions'. The Research & Development mission includes an Innovation Accelerator investment for the West Midlands to mobilise private sector and public research investment on the future of mobility and data-driven population health. Researchers within our Community Health theme are focused on addressing health inequalities, for instance through active ageing and shaping age-friendly cities.

Several local authorities across the Midlands region declared a climate emergency in 2019 and have task forces

working on the becoming carbon neutral, and there is a need for research and action to support business, housing and land developers to achieve net zero goals and regenerative forms of production, waste, resource and energy use. The Centre's Sustainable, Liveable and Resilient Cities theme examines the priorities needed across urban infrastructures. Centre members work with the UK Collaboratorium for Research on Infrastructure and Cities (UKCRIC) [\[link\]](#) which delivers breakthrough research across infrastructures and urban systems to achieve one planet living, develop governance, transformative environmental and technological change, equity, inclusion and social justice.

Research Priorities

A collaborative research agenda developed with community stakeholders

During 2021 we used an expert based futures ‘Delphi’ method to co-produce a research agenda for the Centre. This method is widely used in management, urban and regional planning, bioethics and increasingly in public health research. It is a group communication process which is useful for involving stakeholders and research partners. The main aim of a Delphi consultation is to achieve a relative consensus from a range of expert stakeholders through repeated survey rounds, periodically sharing results with participants.

We developed a set of 79 research statements following in depth engagement and discussion groups with the CUWb Advisory Group, Policy Fellows, previous surveys of urban policy futures produced by our academic members, and relevant open funding calls. We carried out 3 consultation rounds including 2 online surveys with 28 participants and a workshop with 26 stakeholders and academics. The online survey produced a ranking of the 10 most agreed upon statements which was reduced to the top 5 priorities by discussion followed by an anonymous vote. These original priorities will necessarily evolve as the activities of the Centre develop, and they are intended to work in conversation with the research themes according to the expertise, interests and trajectories of Centre members.

Top 5 co-produced research priorities

- From 79 to 5 statements
- 3 round process, Mar-Jul 21
- 28 participants

1. Healthy living environments including mental wellbeing, stimulating, safe environments and social interaction
2. Income inequalities including access to finance, early years care, education and employment
3. Evidence to inform incorporating wellbeing into urban planning strategies (eg tackling loneliness, energy use, air pollution)
4. Access to and use of nature and green spaces, and tackle land ownership inequalities
5. Challenging the underlying economy and its assumptions including growth of consumption and production at all costs



Research Themes

Our inaugural research themes of Community Health, Imagining Wellbeing, Recovery and Renewal, Sustainable Cities and Wellbeing Economies are developed from the expertise of our academic members. In this section we set out how each of these themes addresses the top 5 research priorities established through our engagement with stakeholders and research partners.

“The Wellbeing Economies theme is committed to understanding and addressing income inequalities. Low absolute and relative income drive low subjective wellbeing. We must do more when it comes to sub-group differences in initiatives that aim to improve subjective wellbeing, including according to income and other factors like age, disability and ethnicity. Our theme is committed to actions that identify and address inequalities in subjective wellbeing according to income and other factors. In 2021, we hosted a seminar series with topics that addressed these priorities (e.g. ‘Mental health and wellbeing ‘poverty’), and in 2022, we are bidding for funding to capture inequalities in workplace wellbeing.” Dr Laura Kudrna, Co-Director and Wellbeing Economies Lead



There has been long standing interest in place-based factors shaping health and wellbeing, in social and spatial determinants of health inequalities, and in mobilising community based solutions to ill-health. We bring together multiple social, psychological, medical, lifestyle and environmental dimensions to understand disease prevalence, and conversely, the living conditions which enable people to thrive. Systems, complexity and relational approaches to public health are growing in influence, and there is an increasing interest in the legacies of discrimination and marginalisation on shaping the health of communities.

We focus, therefore in a holistic sense on the conditions, activities, resources and capacities of specific social groups to secure good health and wellbeing. We explore activities including health promotion, preventative action, protection and interventions. How can communities organise to shape mental and physical health, what is the role of the voluntary and community sector in addressing inequalities in community health and wellbeing, and what settings, spaces and places can support good health?

How do we envision the experience of wellbeing and the systemic factors that either inhibit or facilitate it? How has wellbeing been conceptualized over time? And what can historical, political, and creative narratives about human flourishing, attachment, welfare, or comfort tell us about the private and communal sustainability of wellbeing? Can those disciplines traditionally disposed to interrogate notions of self-care, amelioration, happiness, or therapeutic rejuvenation now reimagine their own engagement with the paradigms, representations, and lived realities of wellbeing in an age characterised by personal precarity, unequal support systems, vulnerable institutions of care, economic anxiety, environmental degradation, and geopolitical division? Tackling such questions in collaborative and interdisciplinary ways, the 'Imagining Wellbeing' strand will bring together researchers from across the Humanities and Social Sciences, in order to address how we might rearticulate wellbeing and its ontological and sociocultural conditions of possibility.



Communities are becoming a popular policy focus for improving wellbeing. However, the effects of spatially targeted interventions are much debated, as well as the definition of communities itself. What makes a strong community, how can trust, mutual support and belonging be fostered, and who might be excluded from particular communities? The Community Renewal and Recovery theme examines the complex ways in which wellbeing takes shape in diverse places and spaces and how the notion of community is mobilised in wellbeing policy and practice. How do wellbeing relationships between communities, local authorities and third sector organisations develop, and how are communities engaged, represented and involved in decision-making around

wellbeing? In the wake of the Covid pandemic, we aim to identify new ways of addressing structural wellbeing inequalities within and between communities.

Healthy living environments, income inequalities and green space: researchers from INLOGOV and Human Geography are leading an interdisciplinary network on asset-based approaches to social prescribing including academic partners from Strathclyde University and

Bangor University and practice partners from The Active Wellbeing Society Birmingham, The Wirral ABCD Network and Gwent Public Health. Researchers from the Third Sector Research Centre have produced a series of Local Trust commissioned studies that monitor and evaluate community responses to the pandemic.

Evidence: researchers in Social Policy and the Institute of Applied Health Research are collaborating on an impact evaluation framework for measuring wellbeing, using the capabilities approach. Researchers in City-REDI and INLOGOV are studying the relationship between wellbeing and transport in terms of measurement and policy.

Evidence continues to mount on the intimate relationship between built form and the opportunities afforded those who live and work in cities, in health, wellbeing, employment, education. Researchers within the Sustainable, Liveable and Resilient Cities theme are focusing upon how urban communities experience the built form and how this interacts with the city's sustainability, liveability and resilience priorities. The three guiding questions are: To what degree is wellbeing "baked" into the urban fabric? What does this mean for urban sustainability, liveability and resilience? What are the implications for urban design and regeneration practices?



Through UKCRIC, the Sustainable Cities theme has a unique opportunity to work at the national scale to transform how research into infrastructure and cities is conceived, conducted and funded, with access to UKCRIC's national network of academics, industry partners and policymakers. The Sustainable Cities theme is also linked with the University of Birmingham's IGI Resilient Cities theme, which, motivated by the challenge of increasing global urbanisation, is seeking to understand how cities confront diverse and interlocking forces that can subject their population to distress such as economic and social change or pressures placed upon infrastructure and environmental resources.

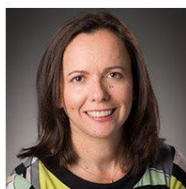
"The close alignment of the Centre's top five priorities and UKCRIC's Scientific Missions opens the door for strengthening links between UKCRIC and the Centre. I will be capitalising upon my recent appointment as Executive Manager of UKCRIC to develop opportunities for research collaboration and sharing." Dr Joanne Leach, Sustainable Cities lead



Economic growth has long been the benchmark of social progress. It is increasingly accepted, however, that economic growth alone fails to capture what it means for individuals and communities to be doing well. The Wellbeing Economies theme researches what drives alternative measures of social progress. We study what affects subjective assessments of people's feelings and experiences, objective capabilities and functioning, and wellbeing inequalities. Recognising that wellbeing is best understood in context, we focus on local and global place-based geographies, institutions like schools and workplaces, and choice architecture. Ultimately we aim to impact on policies that shape individual and community wellbeing.

Research themes

Prof Afroditi Stathi
*Life & Environmental
Sciences*



Community Health

- Preventing systematic health inequalities through community organisation

Prof David James
Arts and Law



Imagining Wellbeing

- Rethinking historical, political and creative narratives of wellbeing

Dr Koen Bartels
Social Sciences



Recovery and Renewal

- Engaging communities in decision making around wellbeing

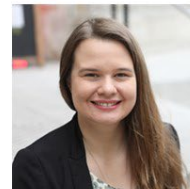
Dr Joanne Leach
*Engineering and
Physical Sciences*



Sustainable, Liveable and Resilient Cities

- Shaping urban form, infrastructures and built environment

Dr Laura Kudrna
*Medical and Dental
Sciences*



Wellbeing Economies

- Driving alternative measures of social progress

Current Projects

Welsh Government Environmental Behaviours network: [Jessica Pykett](#), LES has delivered 2 knowledge exchange sessions on ethics and behavioural forms of expertise, sustainable futures and climate action.

[“Different People, Same Place](#): Understanding and modelling the relationship between individual and place-based community wellbeing” – [Laura Kudrna](#), MDS (2021-22), with What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

“Social Prescribing, Assets and Relationships in Communities (SPARC): Coproducing Shared Responsibilities for Wellbeing” – [Koen Bartels](#), COSS with Gwent Public Health, The Active Wellbeing Society Birmingham, and Wirral ABCD Network, Unis of Bangor and Strathclyde.

[Improving your Local Area](#): Citizen science for age-friendly cities using Our Voice photovoice app developed to assess health inequalities and barriers – [Grace Wood](#), LES with Afroditi Stathi, Jessica Pykett, - stakeholder engagement with Neighbourhood Networks, Adult Social Care, Public Health at Birmingham City Council; Discover Together workshops; Citizen Science Appraisal Tool; participation in the Forum for Global Challenges, May 2022.

Euniwell: [Urbanity and Wellbeing](#) module co-produced with Universities of Florence and Leiden to launch 2022-23.

Active ageing and health inequalities: BBSRC – MRC 2022-24: [‘AcTivity Targeting Inequalities \(ATTAIN\) Network](#) – understand and overcome barriers to physically active living in under-represented communities (Afroditi Stathi, Leigh Breen).

Workplace wellbeing: National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) 2021-23: ["A mixed-methods evaluation of cross-regional workplace health initiatives](#) including a cluster randomised controlled trial (cRCT) of a behaviour change intervention” ([Laura Kudrna](#), MDS).

Insightful social housing allocations ESRC IAA user engagement project 2022: working with Clarion – the UK’s largest social housing provider to build a trauma informed approach to social housing allocations ([Hannah Absalom](#), Jessica Pykett, LES).

Imagining Wellbeing Symposium: – ‘Writing the ‘good city’ – coping, restoration and repair in urban environments’ will take place in Birmingham November 2022 ([David James](#), CAL).

[Thriving Places Index](#): - working with our partners, Centre for Thriving Places on advancing their flagship annual measures of wellbeing across UK local authorities. ESRC IAA bid under review.

Our Values

The Centre shares knowledge and develops research for the mutual benefit of the members and the wider society and community of which we are all a part. We are informed by the following values developed by the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences:



Our Sustainability Commitments

Our approach to researching wellbeing is intrinsically linked with place and environment – environmental stress and resource exploitation damage public wellbeing, while living in balance with nature can support personal wellbeing. Pursuing equality and inclusion, investing in education and decent work and encouraging responsible forms of consumption and production can not only enhance our environments and wellbeing, but can create meaning, value and opportunities to play an active role in shaping sustainable futures. These goals require strong civic institutions, acknowledgement of interdependence, and global commitments to tackling injustice, inequalities and poverty.



2022-2017 Road Map

Goal 1: Advance understanding of local and global conditions needed for people to thrive

We will build on our local research with communities and engagement with Advisory Board members to:

- LONG TERM: Establish key insights and cross-sector/global/locally relevant lessons to inform and scale-up urban wellbeing visions, strategies and next steps for implementation
- MID TERM: Co-ordinate community engaged research proposals in partnership with advisory board members and community organisations
- SHORT TERM: Develop our research themes in light of co-produced research priorities

Goal 2: Produce insight on the multi-dimensional characteristics, experiences and narratives of wellbeing

We will build on our previous research briefings to:

- LONG TERM: Influence research funder agendas to widen the scope of wellbeing research and place-based approaches to Research and Innovation
- MID TERM: Apply for research funding to advance conceptual models, interdisciplinary approaches and community engagement methodologies
- SHORT TERM: Establish the sustainability of the Centre e.g. through publicity in alumni magazine and seeking alumni funding

Goal 3: Shed light on community approaches to addressing wellbeing inequalities

We will work with our Visiting Fellow to:

- LONG TERM: Provide a research environment which enables sustained and meaningful engagement with community and voluntary sector organisations
- MID TERM: Share methodologies, skills and guidelines on researching wellbeing published in accessible formats (video, blogs, briefs); develop a community involvement policy
- SHORT TERM: Involve community organisations in our events and explore options for developing a lived experience panel with support from UoB Public Engagement team

Goal 4: Create new knowledge on urban wellbeing through open dialogue across disciplines

We will extend our wellbeing in policy seminar series to:

- LONG TERM: Organise interdisciplinary conference on wellbeing research and practice
- MID TERM: Develop a repository of research outputs from across UoB relevant to urban wellbeing inequalities (or commission a report following the model of the UOB Addressing the Climate Challenge report)
- SHORT TERM: Host monthly cross-theme events and re-advertise benefits of Centre membership; appoint deputy theme leads

Goal 5: Engage with policy-makers, practitioners and communities to enable co-produced research which can influence urban wellbeing strategies, programmes and activities

We will develop our policy fellowships scheme and continue our engagement with policy makers:

- LONG TERM: Propose a community-engaged policy commission on future cities and their urban wellbeing strategies to articulate Centre's unique model; formalise external affiliate membership
- MID TERM: Collaborate with other UoB research centres and institutes, Public Affairs, Strategic Projects and Birmingham Global teams on opportunities to design impactful research which will influence urban wellbeing policies.
- SHORT TERM: Extend our policy network beyond regional focus by inviting policy-makers to our cross-theme seminars, attracting national urban wellbeing champions and cross-promoting activities through our advisory board and external partners

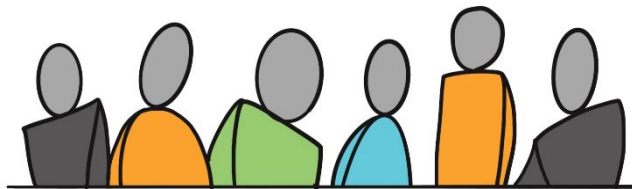
Get involved

If you are interested to find out more about the Centre for Urban Wellbeing, to be updated about our activities, attend an event or partner on research, then we have the following opportunities:

- collaborate on research funding bids
- join as an academic associate
- apply to become a policy fellow
- apply to be a visiting fellow for 3 months or 1 year
- offer a student placement at your organisation
- subscribe to our [monthly newsletter](#)



Contact details



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Credits

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