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Concept and Factors Affecting Well-Being as Perceived by Bangkok Homebuyers

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Abstract

This exploratory study aims to: [1] explore how the Bangkok home buyers define the notion of well-being and [2] identify the built environment and socioeconomic attributes that the home buyers perceived as factors contributing to the state of well-being. Research data is collected from thirteen focus group discussions. Results from this research indicated that the informants perceived well-being as a highly positive feeling derived from having good physical and mental health. Factors contributing to well-being included living in a good environment and friendly community, encompassing a comfortable and convenient lifestyle, safety, and appealing built environment design.

Keywords: Well-being; Built Environment; Bangkok; Home Buyer

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The concept of 'well-being' has not only been theorized since ancient Greek but has also been measured and researched by various disciplines worldwide. Simon & Baldwin (2021) highlight the importance of accounting for cultural diversity when defining and measuring well-being. Different cultures may have different values, beliefs, and practices that shape their understanding of what constitutes well-being. Therefore, a well-being definition inclusive of different cultures can provide a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the concept. (well-being is culturally specific) Resulting of COVID-19 pandemic situation during 2020-2022, medical experts forecasted that the virus mutation would continue for decades. At the same time, new normal behaviors arise, such as spending more time at home for work and recreation. To get along with this new normal, Bangkok Metropolitan Development Plan focuses on making Bangkok a compact and smart metropolis with sustainable and livable for all. Therefore, the development plan should promote holistic, sustainable well-being. The objectives of this study include: [1] establishing a research model of the environmental design factors affecting the

perception of well-being in the context of the Bangkok Metropolitan area, [2] informing the authorities and real estate sector on the built environment and socio-cultural factors affecting perceived well-being

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Well-being

Well-Being has a more comprehensive meaning than the Quality of Life, which revolves around assessing life satisfaction in each person's physical and mental conditions (Meiselman, 2016). Whereas well-being comprises various dimensions, including positive feelings, function well, mental health, psychological, social, and spiritual (Simons, 2021; Stewart, 2021; Pinto, Fuminelli, Mazzoc, Caldeira, and Martins, 2017; Teghe & Rendell, 2005). Furthermore, the housing condition profoundly impacts the residents' well-being (Aliu & Adebayo, 2010).

World Health Organization describes 'well-being' as a "resource for healthy living" and a "positive state of health" that is "more than the absence of an illness" and enables us to function well; psychologically, physically, emotionally, and socially. In other words, well-being' is described as "enabling people to develop their potential, work productively and creatively form positive relationships with others, and meaningfully contribute to the community" (Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project 2008)

According to Dodge (2012), the concept of Hedonic and Eudaimonic traditions (Waterman,1993) are present in the meaning of well-being. That is, when humans in the complete Well-Being condition physically and emotionally encounter obstacles in life, their minds will be able to recover faster than people with a lesser degree of well-being.

Simons (2021) describes, "Well-being is a state of positive feelings and meeting full potential in the world." It can be measured subjectively and objectively using a salutogenic approach that focuses on understanding the factors that promote health and well-being rather than solely identifying and treating illness or disease. This approach emphasizes identifying and promoting positive health resources and coping mechanisms rather than treating symptoms or managing the disease. It views health and well-being as a dynamic process that involves the interplay between individuals and their social, cultural, and physical environments. The goal of the hedonic approach is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Dodge, 2012). It is often associated with pursuing material wealth, status, and other external markers of success. In contrast, the eudaimonic tradition (Waterman,1993) focuses on personal growth, meaning, and purpose in life and emphasizes constructs such as self-actualization, personal growth, autonomy, and potential fulfillment. The goal of the eudaimonic approach is to cultivate a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and it is often associated with activities such as community service, creative expression, and personal development.

2.2 Dimensions of Well-being

Well-being is an integrated concept comprised of three major areas: mental and physical health (WHO,1948), psychology (Ryff,1989; Waterman,1993), and sociology (Keyes,1998; Veenhoven,2008). Based on the study of well-being in these three areas, well-being is categorized into four dimensions of well-being as follows:

2.2.1 Physical well-being (WHO,1948; Lebel,2012; Simons,2021) is the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows getting the most out of daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress. It includes caring for the body and recognizing that daily habits and behaviors significantly impact overall health, well-being, and quality of life.

2.2.2 Mental well-being (WHO,1948; Waterman,1993; Lebel,2012; Ryff,2014; Ruggeri,2020) is a dynamic and psychological state in which an individual can develop potential, work productivity and creativity, strong and positive relationships with others, and contribution to the community.

2.2.3 Spiritual well-being (Wills,2009; Pinto,2017; Coppola,2021) is the feeling connected to a higher power, a sense of meaning or purpose, or feelings of peace or transcendence. It is a double complementary feeling: that of being alive and that of being complete.

2.2.4 Social well-being (Keyes,1998; Teghe,2005; Simons,2021) refers to the social well-being construct as positive social health or wellness, which is conceived as mainly representing public phenomena. From this standpoint, well-being is focused on adults' social duties and how they balance individual and social worlds.

More literature needs to study how these dimensions intertwine and relate to each other. This study aims to untangle these dimensions and identify how potential home buyers perceive them to affect their well-being.

2.3 Factor influencing Well-being

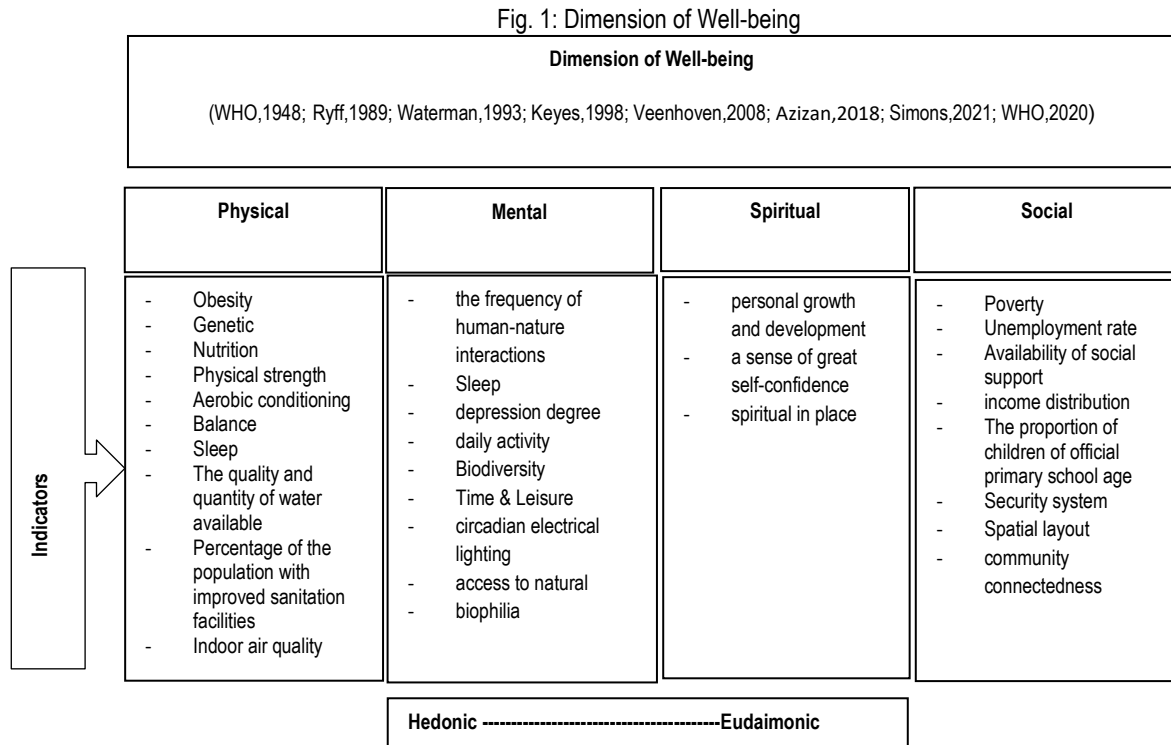
There has been an attempt to define well-being in the broader context. For example, Cummins (2006) developed the National Well-being Index (NWI), which covers well-being in six domains: (1) satisfaction with the economic situation of the country, (2) state of the environment, (3) social conditions, (4) satisfaction with national or local government, (5) satisfaction with business and (6) security. However, NWI is developed to measure well-being at the national level and needs more measurement in a personal context.

On the personal level, Wills (2009) presented the Personal Well-being Index (PWI) to measure well-being on the personal level. PWI focuses on well-being in eight domains: Eight domains (1) satisfaction of standard of living (SOL), (2) health, (3) achieving in life, (4) personal relationships, (5) safety, (6) community connectedness, (7) future security and (8) spirituality. However, the PWI framework does not present the interaction between people and their surroundings.

The OECD framework The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014) has developed a framework to measure well-being in a comprehensive and multidimensional way. The framework consists of three main dimensions and ten domains: 1) material conditions (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, and qualities of housing), 2) quality of life (health status,

education skills, environment, civic engagement, and governance, social connections, personal security) 3) quality of opportunity (life satisfaction, work-life balance, education and skills, and social mobility) Furthermore, the measurement of well-being can be identified as an indicator. Fig.1 compares both measurements related to various literature, including indicators to measure well-being and factors to affect well-being.

There is a debate about whether well-being is subjective, objective, or both. Therefore, it is essential to untangle well-being based on the buyers' perception of well-being. Therefore, this study aims to explore well-being to determine the degree of each dimension that the potential home buyers perceive to affect their well-being and to identify factors that the potential home buyers perceive to affect their well-being according to the indicator framework.



(Source:) Authors,2023

3.0 Methodology

Focus group is predominantly regarded as an effective method to elicit the meanings of a good life or well-being (Sollis, Yap, Campbell, & Biddle, 2021). This qualitative research collected data using focus group discussions with 78 informants. Informants were potential home buyers selected from field research. By snowball technique, thirteen focus group discussions of six informants in each group were held to collect data on informants' understanding of well-being and features promoting well-being. During 5-8 September 2022, 8 focus groups of informants (Table 2) who frequently use automobiles and public transportation were held. During 25-28 November 2022, 5 focus groups of informants (Table 3). The public train (MRT, BTS) was frequently used as their primary transportation. Each focus group discussion last about 1 hour.

Qualifications of the selected informants included 40 females and 38 males, aged 18-53 years old, with an individual income of 25,000- 200,000 Baht/month and household income of more than 100,000 Baht/month. Each focus group consisted of homogenous informants of age, residence type, and transportation mean (Table 2,3). Each focus group was moderated by an expert moderator with over 15 years of experience. The questions asked in the focus group were on the perception of present residential, the importance of ways of life and lifestyles, and the understanding or perception towards well-being. In addition, content analysis was applied to interpret and analyze the data.

Table 2. Focus group discussion informants (Group A)

Focus group discussion during 5-8 September 2022 (Frequent automobile and public transportation users)	Age	Intent to buy property type	Personal income (baht/month)
Group A			
A1	41-53	Single house	50,000-100,000
A2	41-50	Condominium	50,000-100,000
A3	27-37	Condominium	50,000-70,000
A4	41-53	Townhome	50,000-100,000
A5	26-39	Townhome	50,000-70,000
A6	29-40	All type	50,000-100,000
A7	26-47	All type	100,00-150,000

A8	24-26	All type	35,000-70,000
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Table 3. Focus group discussion informants (Group B)

Focus group discussion during 25-28 November 2022 (Frequent mass rapid transit user as main transportation) Group B	Age	Marital status	Personal income (baht/month)
B1	18-22	Single	15,000-35,000
B2	23-39	Single	100,000-150,000
B3	28-38	Single	45,000-150,000
B4	27-38	Marriage no kid	35,000-75,000
B5	28-37	Marriage with kids	36,000-130,000

Figure 4: Photos of Focus group discussion; Group A (5-8 September 2022) and Group B (25-28 November 2022)



(Source:) Terra Media and Consulting, 2022

4.0 Findings

Data was collected from 13 focus groups. The focus groups were divided according to their data collection period. Data from group A (n=48) was collected in early September 2022. Informants in Group A were frequent automobile and public transportation users as their primary mode of transportation. Data from Group B was collected in late November 2022. The informants in Group B are frequent public transportation users as their primary mode of transportation. The objectives of the focus groups are [1] to understand the informants' perception of well-being and [2] to find the built environment and socio-cultural factors affecting the perceived well-being.

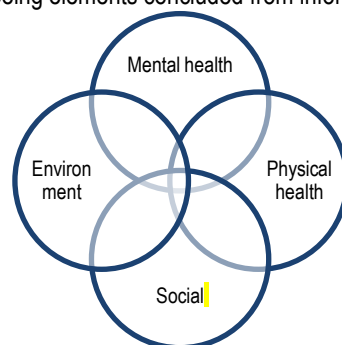
4.1 Meaning of Well-being

(n=78) Informants with different demographic and lifestyles agreed on four main elements of well-being (Figure 5); 1) physical health, 2) mental health, 3) living in a suitable environment resulting in relaxation, being close to nature, comfortable and convenient transportation, and 4) social is the uncontrollable factor that the informants worried. The (n=10) informants agreed that well-being ensues happiness, so one will have more time for self-development and social contribution. As they said:

"Recently, we spent more time with family; before the pandemic (COVID-19), we spent most of our time at work and barely saw parents or siblings, so we want to have a house that can accommodate the family and have more relationships with them, we can directly talk to each other anytime without telephone or Line, now we get used to being together". (Group A4)

The informants' aged 22-26 years old (n=15) expressed that "well-being is related to work-life balance and financial status." They believed a work-life balance would provide good working conditions, high income, and time for connecting with nature. In addition, they believe good governance and reducing income inequality would improve their well-being. (Group A8).

Figure 5: Well-being elements concluded from informants' perception



(Source:) Authors, 2023

Figure 5 shows the well-being elements concluded from the informants' perception: physical health, mental health, social, and environment. They anticipated moving into a new home as moving to a better living environment where their family's well-being could prosper and flourish.

4.2 Dimensions of Well-being

Physical, mental, and social dimensions of well-being were mentioned across all groups of informants. Physical and Mental well-being were frequently mentioned. The informants emphasized that the project design and amenities must incorporate and provide physical and mental well-being dimensions. The social dimension of well-being was perceived as significant. The informants anticipated their new housing project to provide better neighbors, surroundings, and community.

4.2.1 Physical well-being is physically healthy without severe illness or chronic illness. Living close to nature positively affects physical health, surrounded by comfortable facilities and convenient transportation in daily life.

"We had a better live-in convenient location with less difficulty when shopping or going to the hospital." (Group A1)

4.2.2 Mental well-being is the beginning of bliss. Blissful means are mentally healthy with temperate ready for a new day. Living in a suitable environment makes one feel relaxed. –

"Well-being is mentally healthy without stress and happily being home with family" (Group A4) –

"Yes, it is blissful when we are well-being" (Group A8) –

"Thinking of a good environment, I am thinking about the happiness of family members when they stay in a good environment." (Group A2)

4.2.3 Social well-being is living in a friendly community. It is the element that the (n=14) informants worried about the most because one of the problems that make people move to other locations in the unfriendly neighbors directly affects blissfulness and the environment.

"Friendly community is the same as a good environment. If the neighbors fight each other all the time, it degrades the environment, so it is not just atmosphere but social that connects to well-being". (Group A4)

4.2.4 Spiritual well-being refers to feeling a sense of purpose and fulfillment and having a positive outlook on life—the ability to cope with challenges and adversity. The informant with high income (n=1) expressed the relation between spiritual condition and well-being.

"Having a high level of well-being would amplify their spiritual energy, enhance their life force, and be able to handle the intense crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic" (Group A2)

The informants mention four dimensions of well-being in this order (from the most frequent to the least frequent): 1) physical well-being, 2) mental well-being, 3) social well-being, and 4) spiritual well-being.

4.3 Factor influencing Well-being

During the pandemic, people spent more time and had to do more activities at home. As a result, the family members became closer and spent more time together. This increasing togetherness affects the perception of home from "a place to sleep" to "a central place in everyone's activities." Therefore, the informants have expressed their desire to purchase a new house to enhance their well-being. The new home and its amenities would assist in bringing their family closer. Additionally, a few informants (n=5) revealed that the residential project indicates their social status. The (n=78) informants agreed that the four features of new residence enhancing the well-being of every status and lifestyle were comfortable living, convenient lifestyle, safe environment, and appealing design.

4.3.1 Comfortable living factor connected with applicable airy buildings, smart homes, and public areas of green space. These comfortable living designs make residents feel blissful and well-being. - "Smart home saving energy by using solar cells for airflow systems and airy buildings enhance the feeling of being close to nature when the house cool, we feel blissful."

4.3.2 Convenient indicators included a convenient location near the main road, close to the public transport system, and a community mall; these lifestyles affected self-satisfaction. - "Convenient transportation is concerned when going out for business, shopping mall or hospital, the location we live should not be far away from a community mall." "Yes, we need privacy, but we also need safety and being near private and public services."

4.3.3 Safe Environment, the safety of lives, and high property standards are necessary. Security guards and technology such as closed-circuit cameras can keep residential safety and privacy. - "I see safety as the priority of a community; if possible, residents should be screened." "Living in a good and safe society, we could sleep well without worry and free from noise pollution; it is a well-being."

4.3.4 Appealing design could reflect residential characteristics and social status. - "I want a modern house with contemporary feeling and private area, a house that can show off to colleagues and friends."

All informants from the 13 focus groups agreed they spent more time at home and were looking for new accommodations and a good environment. Therefore, findings from this study about well-being and factors of well-being could be synthesized as the four factors. The factors represent the built environment factors. The convenient indicators are objective perspectives. Comfortable and appealing are subjective perspectives. A safe environment is both an objective and subjective perspective.

Results from this study showed that potential home buyers in Bangkok perceived well-being as a positive feeling of physical and mental health and living in a socially sound community. Empathy and social sharing shall follow when well-being is fulfilled. The potential home buyers seek four well-being factors in the residential project: comfortable living, convenient lifestyle, safe environment, and appealing design. In addition, potential home buyers viewed "moving to a new house" as the opportunity to move to a better environment that enhanced and improved their and their families well-being.

5.0 Discussion

Well-being is a positive state of health and positive relationships with others, meaningfully contributing to the community (World Health Organization, 1948). Well-being is also mentioned as the hierarchy of development from physical, mental, and social well-being to spiritual well-being. Beginning with good physical well-being, followed by feeling good about oneself, is positive mental. When persons have mentally stable because they are in a good environment and living in a friendly community where residents depend on and honor each other when living in a good environment, they will be happy to share with others. This notion of well-being is in agreement with Gorman (2010).

Potential home buyers in Bangkok perceived the built environment as one of the factors related to well-being. They anticipated that buying a new house would allow them to live in an environment that enriched four dimensions of their well-being: mental, psychological, social, and spiritual. Furthermore, the results from this study show that the built environment should be included as another dimension of well-being. Including the built environment would provide more understanding of the objective and subjective perspectives of well-being.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This research aimed to substantially represent the characteristics and overarching perception of Bangkok home buyers toward well-being and environmental factors affecting this notion. Results from this research indicated that the informants perceived well-being as a highly positive feeling derived from having good physical and mental health. Factors contributing to well-being included living in a good environment and friendly community, encompassing a comfortable and convenient lifestyle, and safe and appealing design of the built environment. Understanding of perceived well-being from Bangkok's potential home buyers could be used to inform city development policies toward sustainability and real estate investors for appropriate design. Factors emerging from this study will also be used as variables for further systematic studies of well-being in the context of the Asian urban area.

This initial research finding indicates how limited researchers know of the urban dwellers in this part of the world, their perceptions, and their preference toward the built environment. Systematic and broader studies on different socioeconomic backgrounds are required to substantially represent the characteristics and overarching perception of Bangkok home buyers toward well-being and related environmental factors.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to Environmental Design and Real Estate Development studies.

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