

Wellbeing and Place is an edited collection presenting empirical and theoretical discussions that tease out the ways that 'wellbeing' can be interpreted in and through place. The contributors to the collection are drawn from a range of backgrounds (examples of these include geography, anthropology, health, planning and social work) and the variety of topics, methods and theories included is reflective of this.

From the outset, the editors signal the challenges associated with collating work in this field: wellbeing as a term is broadly understood and often liberally applied in different contexts. This volume signals some key shared understandings of what the term wellbeing promotes. Throughout the piece, the authors move away from financial or material wealth as the key components of a 'good life', promoting the importance of holistic understandings of the term. This encompasses more than physical health, extending to include, for example emotional, social, spiritual and embodied notions of wellbeing.

Conradson opens the edited chapters (Chapter 2) with an excellent review of historical accounts of wellbeing. He explores (for example) regional variations of wellbeing, health-giving environments and the impact of political agendas on wellbeing in different places. These are all themes which are taken forward by the chapters that follow; with case studies offered at national levels, through to rural/urban settlements and everyday spaces (for example the therapeutic offerings of a spa).

An overarching theme which is discussed throughout the book is that of diversity; essentially the benefits that a place affords one individual may not be experienced by another. Thus many authors centre the importance of local-level understandings, and even local definitions, of wellbeing (although a strength of all of the chapters in the collection is the detailed context that each puts forward to situate their discussions). For example, Muirhead, in his chapter on environmental volunteering (Chapter 9), offers examples of the emotional responses of volunteers to the natural environment which differ according to past experiences, showing the importance of relational and temporal understandings of the term. This is something that Scott, in her chapter on sustainable communities (Chapter 12) later calls for directly, in her appeal for a consideration of wellbeing as a dynamic discourse.

The chapters do reflect a heavy bias towards examples drawn from the United Kingdom (this is noted up front by the editors during their introduction). Three chapters of the fourteen consider contexts of those living in less developed environments [10, 11, 13]. They extend the discussions put forward by earlier chapters in the volume, showing how essential an understanding of local and national beliefs are in relation to policy making and that wellbeing is shaped by cultural beliefs and practices of 'how to be well'. Shaaf (Chapter 10), for example, uses the case study of a village in Northeast Thailand to explore the impact of national policies which seek to modernise rural ways of life in the area. Whilst government policy promotes a transition to more modern lifestyles, older inhabitants of the village in particular are disengaged through attempts to continue practising their traditional beliefs and traditions.

These themes are extended in Calestani's chapter (Chapter 11), which focusses on city residents in Bolivia, and Gibson's chapter (Chapter 13) which discusses Aboriginal identities as played out through an affinity with a local river. The participants of this research considered how their identities, formed through the practices of eating, drinking and social activities were all related to the river and its offerings. Local white people did not share these beliefs and practices, and where conflicts arose between cultural values those of the Aboriginal tribe were often overlooked. Indeed, modernisation (cotton farming and irrigation upstream) was considered to have had a detrimental effect on the river, and on the wellbeing of the Aboriginal people concerned.

Whilst earlier related work on wellbeing has generally drawn upon quantitative data sources, more recent contributions have moved towards capturing the subjective accounts of wellbeing qualitatively. Qualitative methods (generally focus groups and interviews) of data collection enhance the depth of reflection from those offering primary research findings in this collection. These methods enable intimate accounts of social relations, emotions and embodied experiences which, through place, have the potential to enhance or reduce wellbeing. However, at times the evidence (interview quotes) offered to illustrate the findings is a little sparse – this is a shame given the depth of interviews, observations and group work which is described and this is perhaps one addition that would have enhanced the reading experience.

Other chapters develop analyses of existing datasets, highlighting their usefulness in drawing out disparities in seemingly homogenous groups (for example Beck's chapter (Chapter 3) on access to green spaces in the UK, and a chapter by Riva and Curtis (Chapter 4) which signals the 'hidden' disparity of wellbeing in rural areas). The challenges of working with patchy datasets are also well-documented, signalling the need for more cohesive approaches to the collection of national and local wellbeing data within the UK.

In summary this book is an engaging read for both established and developing researchers, as well as professionals in both health and social care contexts. It has not been possible in this review to distil the full range of themes that the book offers but readers will find that the contributions uncover a range of interactions that occur between people and place, and the positive or negative impact on wellbeing that can result.