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## Indicators for rural wellbeing and quality of life: Insights from the GRANULAR Project

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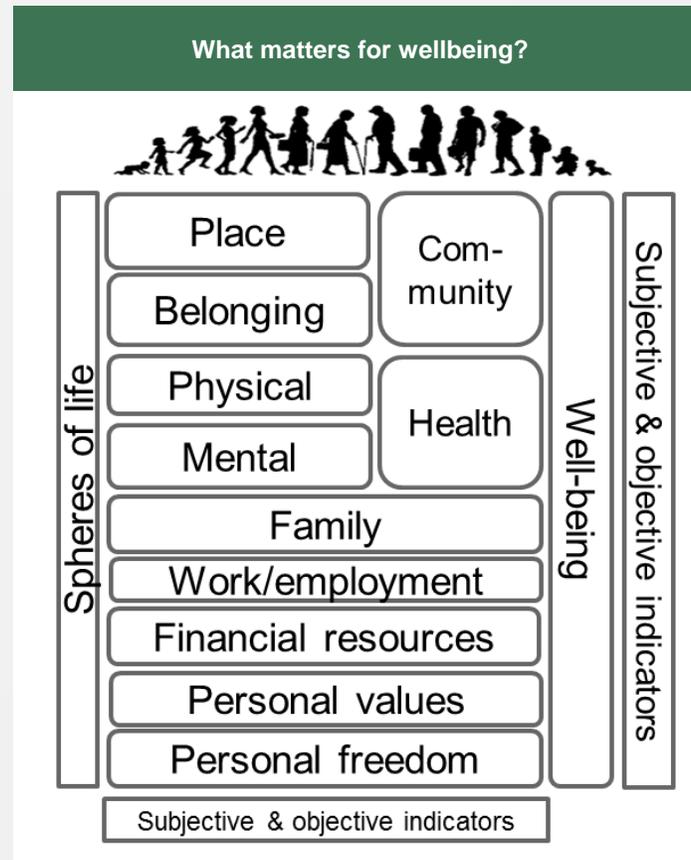
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# GDP DOES NOT CAPTURE WHAT MATTERS IN RURAL AREAS

Rural quality of life depends on more than economic performance



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Source: Own illustration, inspired by findings reported in Layard (2005): Happiness – Lessons from a new Science.



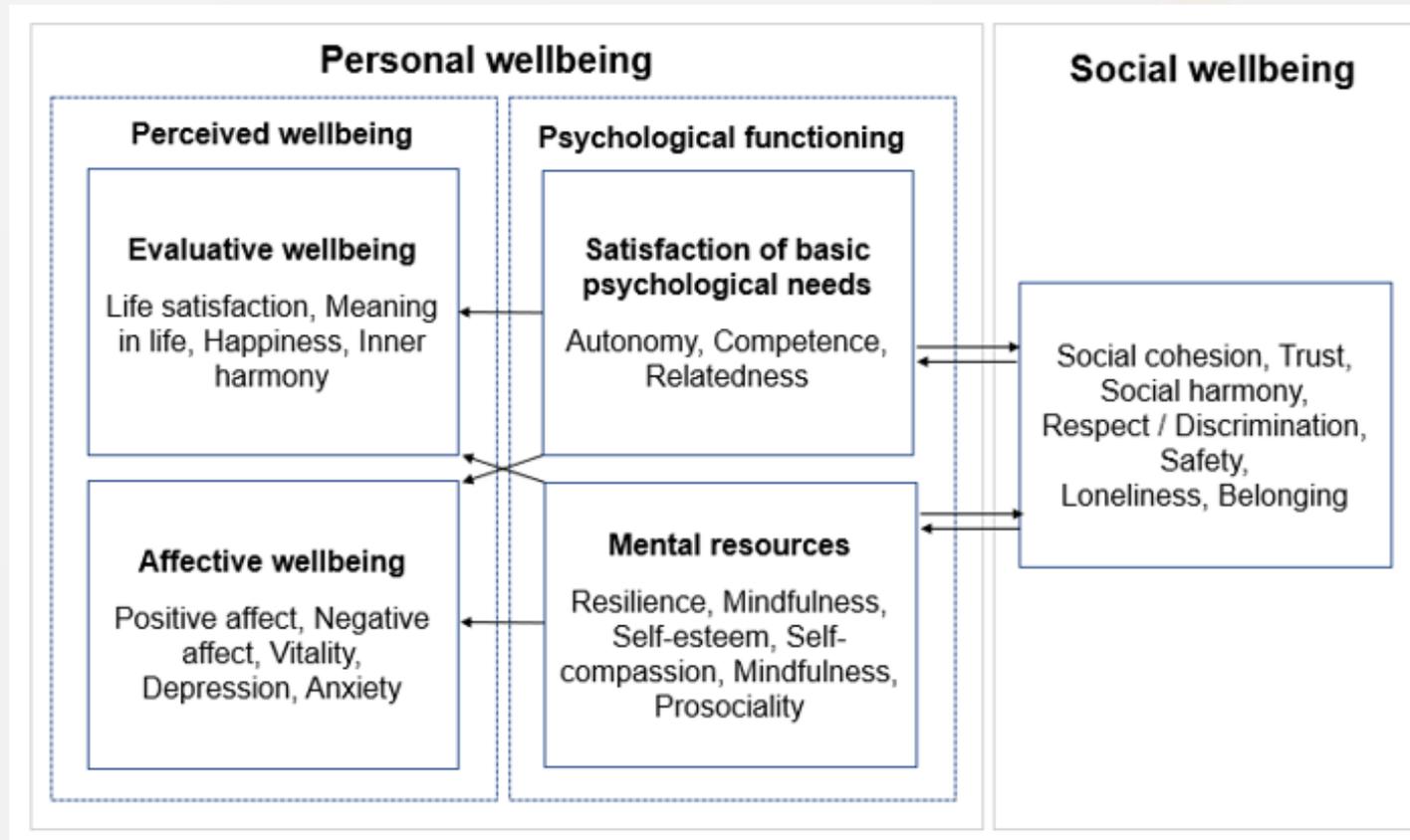
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# WELLBEING IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Life satisfaction, mood, resilience, trust and belonging all matter



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Source: Figure adapted from Martela, Delle-Fave et al. (2023): ESS Round 12 module proposal «Personal and social wellbeing »



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# RURAL ADVANTAGES EXIST, BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE

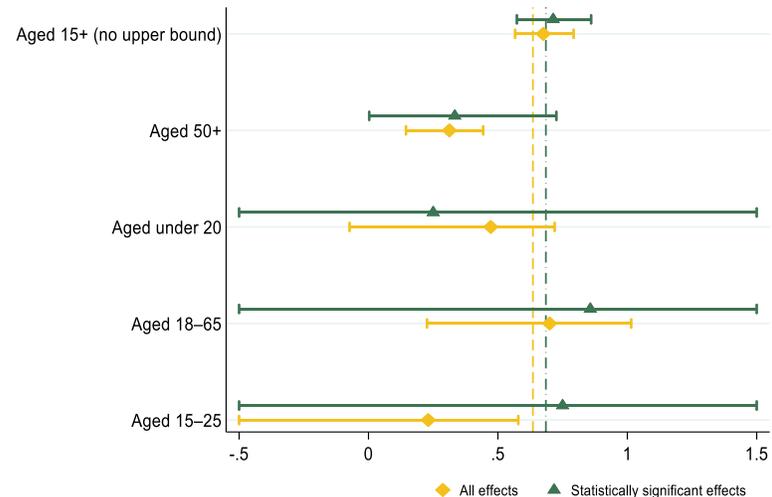


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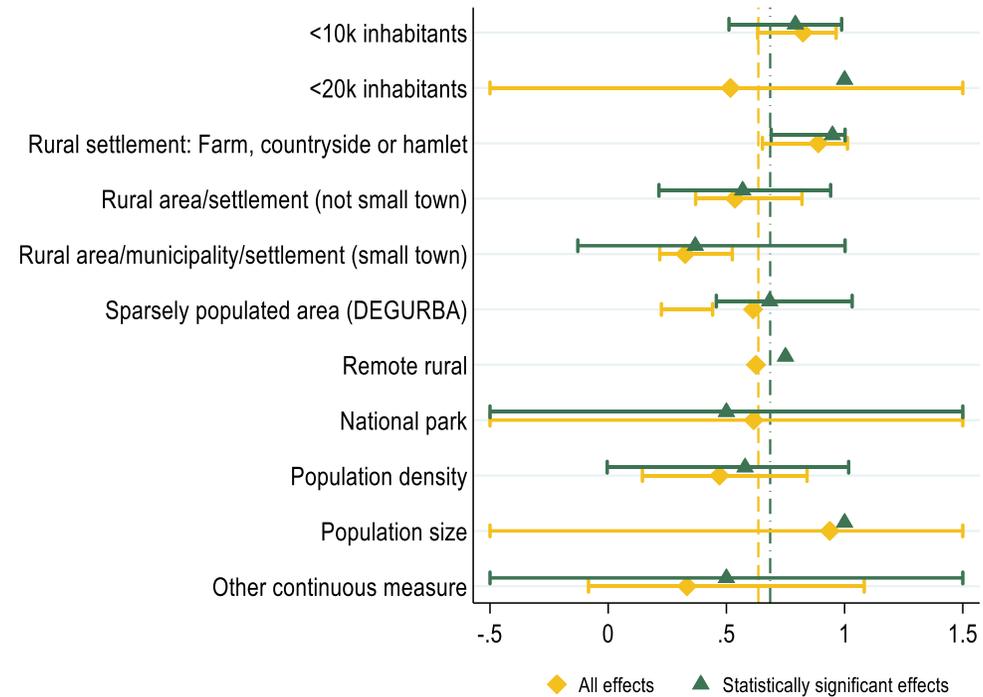
## Higher rural wellbeing is not observed across all groups

- 63% of reported effects indicate higher rural subjective wellbeing
- less evident for younger and older age groups (below)
- and depends on how “rural” is defined (right)

### Rural wellbeing advantage by age of population



### Rural wellbeing advantage by rural definition



Source: Knies & Hopkins (2025): Wellbeing and Quality of Life in Rural Europe. GRANULAR. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17864862>. Chapter 2



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# RURAL ADVANTAGES EXIST, BUT NOT EVERYWHERE



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## Different dimensions of wellbeing peak in different settlement types

- Villages and countryside do not score highest on every dimension and in every region of Europe

Which settlement type has the highest wellbeing?



Source: Knies & Hopkins (2025): Wellbeing and Quality of Life in Rural Europe. GRANULAR. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17864862>. Chapter 3. Results based on population estimates from the European Social Survey 2012.



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# LOCAL CONTEXT STRONGLY SHAPES WELLBEING



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## Neighbourhood conditions explain part of the rural advantage

- Rural advantage becomes smaller once local conditions are included

Comparing neighbourhood characteristics shows:

- Rural wellbeing more strongly linked to neighbourhood type
- Urban wellbeing more strongly reduced by deprivation and service access
- Local context matters, but in different ways

Raw rural advantage in life satisfaction: 0.15  
Effect after accounting for neighbourhood and individual factors

Rural-urban only	0.15
+ <i>neighbourhood type</i>	0.07
+ <i>area deprivation</i>	0.05
+ <i>individual characteristics</i>	0.09

Source: Knies & Hopkins (2025): Wellbeing and Quality of Life in Rural Europe. GRANULAR. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17864862>. Chapter 4. Results based on population estimates from Understanding Society (v20) for Great Britain 2009-2023.



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# RURAL DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES TRADE-OFFS



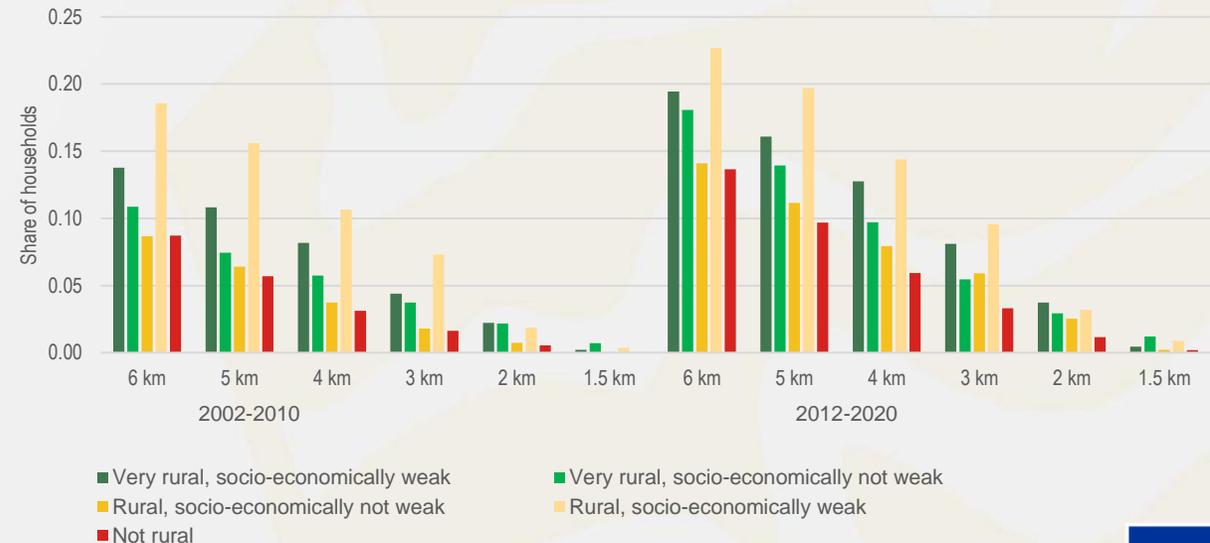
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**Average wellbeing effects are generally small, but exposure intensity may matter**

Exposure has increased substantially, but short-term wellbeing effects on residential non-movers remain limited on average

- No evidence of adverse average change in mental health-related quality of life (SF12 MCS)
- Turbine density is associated with lower mental health-related quality of life at some radii (up to 4 km) (SF12 MCS)
- Evidence on close-proximity effects for physical health-related quality of life is suggestive (SF12 PCS)

Share of households with wind turbine(s) within 6 km of their residential home in Germany 2000-2020



Source: Knies & Hopkins (2025): Wellbeing and Quality of Life in Rural Europe. GRANULAR. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17864862>. Chapter 5. Results based on German Socio-economic Panel (v39).



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# BETTER INDICATORS CAN SUPPORT BETTER RURAL POLICY

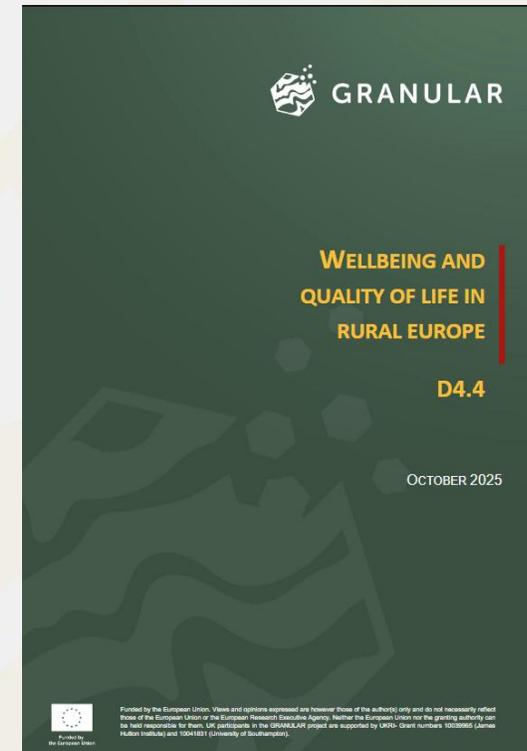


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## Measuring wellbeing helps capture what matters in rural areas

- Wellbeing cannot be captured by economic indicators alone
- Rural wellbeing depends on who we study, what we measure, and how we define place
- Granular and place-sensitive evidence helps reveal what matters

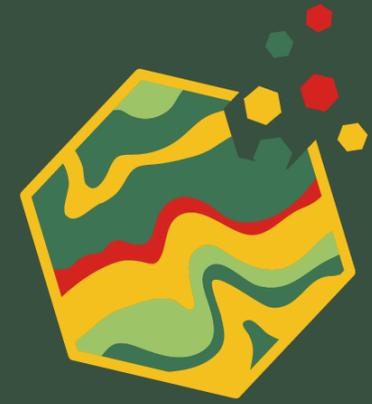
**Implication:** Rural policy needs indicators that reflect diversity, local context, and quality of life



Source: Knies & Hopkins (2025): Wellbeing and Quality of Life in Rural Europe. GRANULAR.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17864862>



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