How Happy Is Your Neighbourhood?

Happiness determines success, says PD Expert Paul Krismer on pages 38-39. But what determines happiness? While studying life satisfaction levels in comparatively sized regions across Canada, John Helliwell, CPA (Hon.), and two fellow researchers uncovered some interesting patterns. The trio reviewed data from 1,216 neighbourhoods across the country (776 urban and 440 rural), and here's a snapshot of their findings:[1]

Canadians' satisfaction with life
(average on a 0-10 scale)

All neighbourhoods: **8.04**
Rural neighbourhoods: **8.15**
Urban neighbourhoods: **7.97**

How does your neighbourhood compare? Check out the study's interactive map at **lifesatisfaction.ca**.

4 of Canada's 5 happiest regions are rural
(average on a 0-10 scale)

1. Neebing, ON: **8.94**
2. Shippagan, NB: **8.69**
3. Channel-Port aux Basques, NL: **8.63**
4. Hope, BC: **8.62**
5. St. Anthony, NL and Souris, PEI: **8.58** (tie)

How happy are we compared to other countries?

Canada made the top 10 in the United Nations' 2019 *World Happiness Report*, ranking ninth out of 156 countries (2016-2018).[2]

Most significant contributing factors to the urban-rural happiness gap:

~Sense of community belonging~
~Years of residency~
~% of income spent on housing~
~Population density~
~Commute time~

| There's a stronger sense of community belonging in rural neighbourhoods | Rural neighbourhoods have a higher % of long-term (>5-year) residents | Urban residents are more likely to spend >30% of income on housing costs | Population density is 100 times higher in cities than in rural areas | Commute times tend to be shorter in rural neighbourhoods |

- In urban neighbourhoods, income and unemployment levels correlate to levels of community belonging. Not so in rural communities.
- Residents of urban areas are more likely to have moved recently than residents in rural areas.
- Even the least happy rural communities have a stronger average sense of community belonging than the happiest urban communities.

- Newcomers to Canada are more likely to settle in large cities and urban areas.
- Higher population density means greater proximity, but this does not translate into a greater sense of community belonging.
- People in rural areas are more likely to live and work in the same neighbourhood.
- On average, commuting takes seven fewer minutes in rural communities (15 minutes versus 22 minutes).

[1] J. Helliwell, H. Shiplett, C.P. Barrington-Leigh, "How Happy Are Your Neighbours? Variations in Life Satisfaction Among 1200 Canadian Neighbourhoods and Communities," PLoS ONE *14(1): e0210081*, 2019. (***https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210091***)
[2] J. Helliwell, R. Layard, J. Sachs, World Happiness Report 2019, *New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019.*