

Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-Being in Cities

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

for Ensuring Well-Being in Cities

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Foreword

In a time marked by macro-level threats such as wars, disasters, and crises, along with the severe rise of poverty, is it naive to bring ‘well-being’ in cities into the discussion? On the other hand, what do the voices of ‘we will heal,’ raised by the survivors from Antakya after the devastating February 6 earthquakes, tell us as they collectively mourn the loss of their city? Contrary to the approach that individualizes healing and views well-being as a concept solely related to personal development, disconnected from community dynamics, as the Center for Spatial Justice-CSJ (Mekanda Adalet Derneği-MAD), we invite everyone to reflect on the impact of cities on the health and well-being of society, and to engage in discussions and advocacy on the politics of well-being.

This report, prepared as part of the “Right to the City and Well-Being Policies for Fa-

irer Local Government” project supported by the Consulate/Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands’ MATRA Fund, explores how urban policies in Turkey can be more restorative and supportive of well-being. We assess the health impacts of urban policies through the concept of well-being and discuss how a public-health and well-being centered approach can be integrated into both the creation and implementation of urban policy.

In our 2021 report, *Urban Transformation and Well-being in Istanbul*, we took the first step in introducing the concept of “well-being” into urban studies. We examined the relationship between urban transformation processes and social well-being, providing local governments with policy recommendations for prioritizing well-being in these processes. Drawing from those insights, this report broadens our focus, emphasizing the

need for municipal services to be designed with a more integrated approach. Rather than quick fixes for everyday issues through populist policies, we stress the importance of embedding a well-being perspective across all policies as part of a broader political vision and commitment.

We present this report as a guide for political parties and municipalities to reshape urban policies during and after the 2024 Local Elections, and consider it a starting point for a discussion on the layered impacts of these policies on city residents. We hope the framework proposed here will be integrated not only into the programs of local government leaders but also embraced by citizens and civil society organizations alike.

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On behalf of the Center for Spatial Justice,
Bahar Bayhan



Photograph: Sena Nur Gölcük

Executive Summary

In contemporary Turkey, cities have become spaces where complex, layered issues emerge, exacerbated by ineffective urbanization and governance processes. Social challenges—such as the destruction and losses in disasters, heightened social conflict driven by waves of migration, hate and political pressure targeting diverse identities, as well as deepening poverty and deprivation—are tied not only to large-scale policies but also to approaches and policies at the local level. This conventional model of governance and urbanization, which disempowers residents and fails to develop comprehensive solutions for problems and needs, has an often-overlooked yet significant impact: the deterioration of public health. The loss of life and trauma resulting from disasters, anxiety stemming from inequality and injustice, increasing suicide rates due to financial hardship, and chronic illnesses linked to

inadequate housing conditions are just a few examples illustrating the link between urban issues and public health. How our cities are managed and designed determines societal well-being.

Health is not merely a concept related to illness. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health not merely as the lack of disease, but as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. This perspective on well-being offers a comprehensive and holistic framework for understanding health, extending it beyond a medical or biological phenomenon. It recognizes health as a social construct, encompassing individuals' and communities' living conditions, opportunities, rights, and a perspective on justice. Well-being is inherently local and contextual, shaped by social, cultural, political, economic, ecological, and spatial factors. This social

understanding reframes health issues, avoiding the notion that their roots lie in individual deficiencies, and emphasizes the importance of not only treating illness but also protecting health and taking preventive measures. In essence, the well-being approach highlights the need to transform conditions that harm health and to develop mechanisms that support it.

Evaluating cities from a well-being perspective reveals the layered complexity of urban issues, exposing the need for a multidimensional approach in policies aimed at addressing these challenges and meeting community needs. This perspective also underscores that urban policies should not merely sustain survival conditions but should fulfill the requirements for a dignified and fulfilling life. In this regard, local governments—responsible for the management and design of cities—are pivotal actors whose urban policies can profoundly influence public health, either positively or negatively.

This study is not the first to address the impact of urbanization on public health. In Turkey, the number of municipalities joining the Healthy Cities Association (HCA), established to promote the WHO's "healthy cities" approach, is on the rise. While the healthy cities approach emphasizes reducing inequality and injustice in urban areas, it is implemented in Turkey through isolated projects rather than being integrated

across all municipal policies. As a result, the urban policies developed by municipalities to address urban issues and meet community needs can adversely affect various social groups, further deepening existing problems. For example, urban transformation processes—often seen as key to earthquake-resistant cities—are, in reality, irreversibly damaging existing residential areas. In poorer neighborhoods, these processes lead to the breakdown of social and economic solidarity, exacerbating poverty and deprivation. Ultimately, these disruptions harm community mental health, in some cases with fatal consequences.

Urban policies need to be evaluated through a well-being perspective, and this approach should be integrated into the development of local policies. This perspective emphasizes that the process is just as important as the outcomes, urging municipalities not to limit their approach to health within the confines of health departments or by simply expanding health services. Instead, it calls attention to the importance of intersectionality and a holistic framework across all policies.

A well-being approach in urban policies raises the question, "Whose well-being?" especially in cities with diverse, multi-identity, and multicultural populations that also serve as habitats for non-human life. When city administrations view well-being solely as "individual well-be-

ing,” there’s a risk that policies will reflect exclusionary, conflict-driven attitudes toward social groups marginalized or unwelcome by the majority. For this reason, the proposed framework is rooted in the protection of human rights and a rights-based approach. Additionally, it recognizes that urban society consists not only of humans and advocates for the right to life for all life forms within the city.

A key concept underlying the well-being approach in urban policies is the “right to the city.” While not a legal term, the right to the city is recognized in international agreements and has found a place within the visions of central and local governments. For municipalities, acknowledging this right is a prerequisite for fostering community well-being. It creates space for residents to engage socially, assert their stake in their cities and their right to participate in decision-making, cultivate a sense of belonging, and collaboratively shape urban life around shared aspirations.

The *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-being in Cities* report outlines 15 principles designed to help local governments connect their decision-making and policy development processes with public health and well-being and embed a well-being approach across all policies. These principles, shaped by a literature review and findings from inquiry meetings and work-

shops, are not meant to serve as a ready-made policy list. Instead, they highlight essential considerations to prioritize during decision-making and policy formulation.

1. Participation and Deliberation

Participation is a key factor in realizing well-being and the right to the city. Local governments are responsible for establishing the active participation of citizens—each with unique needs and perspectives—in urban policy. Recognizing and enabling citizens’ say over urban spaces and including them in decision-making processes not only strengthens individuals’ sense of responsibility but also fosters a sense of belonging, which directly impacts their mental, physical, and social well-being. For this reason, individuals, communities, and rights-based local organizations must be seen as central actors in urban governance, planning, budgeting, and design. Citizens should be viewed not only as subjects who voice their needs and demands but also as agents who actively participate in decision-making and execution. One such tool is negotiation-based conflict resolution, which strengthens active participation mechanisms, allows individuals to be acknowledged as legitimate political actors in the city, and positively supports social well-being.

2. The Right to Use

Local governments should prioritize the public good in urban policies, ensuring that all city residents have the right

to access and use resources and spaces. Focusing on the value of use rather than commercial gain enhances community well-being. Distributing resources equitably based on the right of use, rather than on commercial interests, supports income equality and contributes to overall well-being. Building fairer cities is possible by safeguarding the common good and the right of everyone to use and experience urban spaces.

3. Public Benefit

In line with a well-being perspective, local governments should aim to ensure the fair distribution, use, and protection of urban resources for the benefit of the public. This concept of public benefit refers not to the interests of public institutions but to the collective good of all residents living together.

4. Ecological Perspective

Today, neoliberal economic policies push the planet’s boundaries, intensify the multiple crises of our time—especially the climate crisis—and make clear the urgent need for cities to transform toward ecological and social resilience. The state of the climate, planet, biodiversity, and ecosystems is closely tied to the mental, physical, and social well-being of urban

residents. Therefore, local governments must ground urban policies in an ecological perspective. For current and future well-being, urban policies should avoid damaging ecosystems, maintain a balance between conservation and use, and focus on ecological resilience and adaptation to potential climate impacts.

5. Gender Perspective

To promote well-being in cities, urban policies must account for the role of gender inequality. Local governments should design their policies, services, and practices with gender sensitivity, creating safer, more livable, and equitable cities for women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Given the unique vulnerabilities and diverse urban needs of women and LGBTQ+ communities, it is essential to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead develop tailored policies that address these specific experiences.

6. Inclusivity and Pluralism

To ensure social well-being, local governments must base all urban policies and services on inclusivity and pluralism. Every individual—regardless of culture, beliefs, lifestyle, or intersecting identities—should be recognized and given equal access to opportunities and resources.

Policies designed solely around the needs of the general population or majority hinder true inclusivity. Therefore, to foster well-being, it is crucial for local governments to adopt a pluralistic approach that respects the representation and voices of minority and vulnerable groups.

7. Community and Solidarity-Based

Urban policies must support individuals' ability to form and sustain communities. People's relationships and interactions with others and with their surroundings are key determinants of social well-being. Developing strong connections to one's environment and fostering social relationships empower individuals and help them become more resilient to the challenges of urban life. Therefore, to enhance social well-being, urban policies should create conditions that encourage solidarity-based community skills and promote social integration.

8. Rights-Based

A fundamental principle for establishing well-being in cities is a rights-based approach that respects the right to life for all residents, both human and non-human. Building urban policies around respect for human rights, and ensuring their realiza-

tion, moves beyond passive, charity-based approaches that foster dependency and instead promotes individuals' and communities' sense of social justice and self-empowerment. In addition to fundamental human rights, a rights-based approach includes recognizing the right to life for all living beings within the city and encompasses the right to the city itself. This approach is essential across all activities of local governments—from decision-making and services to planning, projects, and participation processes.

9. Integrated

To establish well-being in cities, local governments must design urban policies in an integrated manner, linking various decisions, actions, and processes to ensure consistency. An integrated perspective acknowledges the multidimensional nature of urban challenges and recognizes the need for solutions and services that are intersectionally designed. Structuring policies in this integrated way allows for an understanding of the interconnected conditions that either support or undermine urban well-being.

10. Accessibility

Local governments should consider social, physical, and economic accessibility

in their decision-making methods, urban policies, and service delivery. Designing urban policies with accessibility as a core principle helps reduce social inequalities, supports vulnerable groups in establishing independent lives, and promotes social justice, thereby actively supporting the improvement of overall well-being.

11. Sustainability

Local governments should aim for urban policies and services that meet today's needs and demands while preserving the social, economic, and environmental conditions that sustain well-being into the future. This sustainability approach involves building structures that ensure the longevity of these conditions and implementing policies that have a long-term perspective and are designed to last. In this way, urban policies can support current well-being while securing it for future generations.

12. Transparency and Accountability

Ensuring transparency and accountability in the planning and implementation of urban policies allows local governments to foster a sense of trust in urban life. It provides residents with the opportunity to oversee municipal activities, and strengthens individuals' and communities' sense

of responsibility toward the city. Thereby, it helps guarantee the fair distribution of resources and services and prevents favoritism in city governance.

13. Equality and Coexistence

Embracing the values of equality and coexistence in urban policies lays the groundwork for establishing social well-being. By preventing divisive practices that urban policies may unintentionally create, this approach reinforces a foundation for a fairer and more inclusive urban life.

14. Restorative

To foster well-being, it is essential for local governments to recognize and initiate processes to address past mistakes, misconduct, and injustices. Adopting a restorative approach in urban policies requires taking action toward collective care and the revitalization of urban life.

15. Resilient

Resilient urban policies are designed to prepare for, adapt to, and respond to challenges such as natural disasters, pandemics, and sudden influxes of migration.

Designing policies with resilience in mind mitigates risks, hazards, and damage while ensuring a fair transition through changing conditions, ultimately supporting the community's future well-being.

Centering these guiding principles in decision-making and policy development will help transform conditions that negatively impact urban well-being and foster mechanisms, decisions, and policies that support it. Rather than serving as a ready-made list of policies, these principles should be viewed as a guide to assessing the impact of policies on well-being. Recognizing that urban policies may need to be tailored to local differences and contexts, it is essential to consider the interconnections among these principles and to carefully plan their practical application. This approach represents a crucial step toward putting the framework proposed in this report into concrete action.

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Cities in Transformation, Well-being in Flux

Cities can be seen as spaces where diverse social groups coexist, marked by historical and cultural layers and rich in shared resources essential to the revitalization of everyday life—such as transportation, healthcare, education, and housing. Although cities still hold the potential for liberation, self-realization, encounters with difference, and access to cultural, economic, political, and social opportunities for a better life, they also continue to be places where numerous complex issues persist.

Today, around 58% of the global population lives in cities, a figure projected to rise to 68% by 2050.⁶ Cities are becoming spaces where populations concentrate, construction booms, consumer zones expand, and fast-paced lifestyles multiply—ultimately making it increasingly difficult to maintain a good quality of life. In Turkey, urban areas are seeing a rise in poverty, rapidly escalating housing and living costs, widespread job insecurity, and significant gaps in urban infrastructure and services. Access to essential public services is often inequitable, while opportunities for a livable physical and social environment are dwindling. Social and spatial conflicts and segregation have surged to unprecedented levels, alongside growing violence toward women, LGBTQ+ communities, animals, and ecosystems. Cities are also increasingly vulnerable to crises and disasters. Urban residents face intersect-

ing inequalities based on class, ethnicity, race, belief, gender, sexual orientation, body, age, and species. As these identities intersect, inequalities become more layered and severe.

Since the 2000s, cities have increasingly experienced a layered process of ecological, social, and cultural *urbicide* (the deliberate destruction of urban life). In this neoliberal and patriarchal wave of dispossession, the construction industry has become the dominant force in shaping and governing cities, often at the expense of public welfare. This process has inflicted wounds that go beyond physical transformation. The bonds that people have with one another, with non-human life, and with their environment have weakened; urban nature, culture, and memory are being erased; and city dwellers are being separated from the skills, practices, and relationships essential for a just and good life. Spaces for encounter, dialogue, and negotiation are diminishing. Despite this bleak picture, movements advocating for the right to the city—working to create opportunities for coexistence and make spaces more livable—are on the rise.

The most significant yet often invisible and unmeasurable impact of the complex, multi-layered issues in cities is the deterioration of public health and overall well-being.

The most significant yet often invisible and unmeasurable impact of the complex, multi-layered issues in cities is the deterioration of public health and overall well-being. According to the WHO, health is not simply the absence of illness but a state of complete mental, physical, and social well-being.⁷ When cities are evaluated through a well-being lens, it becomes evident that the decline in public health is multi-layered and driven by complex dynamics. For instance, groups facing eviction are simultaneously deprived of their basic housing rights, separated from neighborhoods where they feel a sense of belonging, and forced into substandard, unsafe housing that is often misaligned with their socioeconomic conditions. This layered housing crisis creates anxiety and stress, leading to mental health issues that, in turn, affect physical health. Additionally, poor housing conditions (such as damp, flood-prone, or earthquake-vulnerable homes) pose direct threats to physical health. In short, as dissatisfaction with urban living grows, there is an increasing need for a societal recovery process.

Macro-level issues that disrupt societal well-being, such as poverty, housing needs, and a lack of preparedness for disasters and crises, are as much related to the decisions and policies of the central government as they are to the urban policies of local governments. When local administrations overlook dynamics of

inequality in their services and approach social needs with a blanket perspective, well-being is undermined. Yet, municipalities are key actors at the local level, capable of initiating recovery and supporting well-being. Traditional approaches—characterized by short-term, populist, project-based, and entrepreneurial policies—often appear to address urban issues but instead intensify them, impacting the well-being of different social groups in various ways. For instance, hobby gardening initiatives, intended to encourage urban agriculture, can lead to the irreversible displacement of traditional market gardeners. Similarly, gender-based transit card policies in public transportation may pose a risk for LGBTQ+ communities and expose them to potential discrimination. Therefore, local governments must adopt principled and integrated programs that prioritize well-being in their urban policies.

While “a participatory governance approach” is often reflected in the political rhetoric and strategy documents of local governments,⁸ its practical application in daily life is much harder to discern. Rights-based local solidarity networks, organizations, and collaborations with civil society—which are essential for fully implementing participatory mechanisms—are seldom seen. Yet, local governments should not ignore the demands emerging from movements advocating for the right



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to the city. Participation is not merely a symbolic process of gathering opinions through tools like surveys. On the contrary, participation signifies the responsibility of local governments to create spaces and develop conditions that enable residents not only to participate but also to become active agents and foster solidarity within local communities.

One of the major issues globally is that widely accepted principles and goals of urban governance often remain confined to strategic plans without translating into action. According to a report by the Public Expenditure Monitoring Platform in 2015, the primary reasons for this include limited budgets for local governments compared to central administration, a lack of spending plans aligned with identified needs, goals, and principles, the outsour-

ing of municipal services to companies prioritizing commercial interests, and insufficient funding for social expenditures and urgent needs such as earthquake risk mitigation.⁹

The *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-Being in Cities* report aims to highlight the relationship between individual and societal well-being and urban policies. It outlines key principles that local governments should consider in their policy development and decision-making processes to protect and enhance well-being. The report emphasizes the importance of being process-oriented in addition to focusing on needs, data, and outcomes/effects. It underscores that not only quantitative metrics but also the quality and manner in which processes are carried out play a decisive role in public health and well-being.

For a fairer urban life that supports societal well-being, the report stresses the need for local governments to focus not only on delivering specific services but also on assessing the impact of these services in light of the identified guiding principles.

In the following pages of *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-being in Cities*, the key concepts of well-being and the right to the city—identified as central to the project—are explained, along with how these concepts relate to each other and to local government policies.

In the following pages of *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-being in Cities*, the key concepts of well-being and the right to the city—identified as central to the project—are explained, along with how these concepts relate to each other and to local government policies. The section *The Role of Local Governments in Supporting Well-being* identifies issues within the current policy-making and decision-making processes of local governments in Turkey and examines their impact and responsibility concerning public health and well-being. The *Methodology and Findings* section presents findings on urban policy practices that support community well-being, drawn from a review of national and international literature, two inquiry meet-

ings, and a workshop conducted as part of the project. The *Guiding Principles* section outlines 15 guiding principles developed based on literature review, inquiry meetings, and workshop findings.

A Measure of Livable Cities: Well-being

The concept of well-being¹⁰ can be defined as the result of individuals feeling good, satisfied, and adequate across physical, mental/emotional, and social dimensions. In its broadest sense, well-being refers to people's capacity to lead healthy, creative, and fulfilling lives.¹¹ Well-being is both more than and distinct from happiness and quality of life, as it encompasses not only being satisfied and happy with life but also personal growth, self-actualization, and contributing to society through these processes.¹²

The WHO defines health not merely as the absence of illness and disability but as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.¹³ Developed in 1948 in the aftermath of World War II, this definition, although debated in some aspects today,¹⁴ diverges from medical approaches that link diseases and health issues solely to individual physical attributes. Instead, it underscores the significance of social and environmental conditions as determinants of health.

Grounded in the outcomes of the 10th Global Conference on Health Promotion in 2021, the legacy of the 1986 Ottawa Charter, and previous global health promotion conferences, the WHO's *Geneva Charter for Well-being* (2022) underscores the urgent need to create sustainable “well-being societies” focused on health equity for present and future generations—without exceeding ecological boundaries.¹⁵ According to the Charter, well-being societies must provide individuals with the foundations necessary to live healthy and fulfilling lives, regardless of where they reside. This calls for a health vision that integrates mental, physical, and social well-being. Well-being societies are defined as communities that embody human rights, social and environmental justice, solidarity, gender and intergenerational equality, and principles of peace. This vision also imagines an ecological way of life rooted in reciprocity and respect between humans and non-human beings, as well as reconciliation with nature. As outlined in the Geneva Charter, well-being societies consider the well-being of not only humans but also the planet itself.

The *Health in All Policies* (HiAP) approach was developed to embed an inclusive perspective on public health into policies and decision-making processes. Informed by the principles of the Alma Ata Declaration, the Ottawa Charter, the final report of the Commission on Social

Determinants of Health, and the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health, this approach emphasizes that health protection and promotion extend beyond the provision of healthcare services. It underscores that all government policies can impact health and may contribute to health inequities. HiAP is a collaborative approach that aims to improve health by integrating a health perspective into decision-making processes across sectors and policy areas.¹⁶ In this respect, HiAP supports shaping urban policies to actively protect and promote health and well-being.

Prioritizing well-being is a political choice; when integrated into public planning, spending, budgeting, and management processes, indicators of community well-being improve.

Prioritizing well-being is a political choice; when integrated into public planning, spending, budgeting, and management processes, indicators of community well-being improve. Inclusivity, equality, and direct participation are fundamental conditions for promoting and enhancing well-being and public health on a holistic scale.

Today, two mainstream approaches to well-being are widely recognized. The first, objective well-being, emphasizes

quality-of-life indicators such as income and housing, along with fundamental conditions like education, health, and social networks. The parameters of well-being outlined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) exemplify this approach.¹⁷ These parameters are divided into two categories: current and future well-being. For current well-being, the following dimensions are highlighted: **(1) Income and Wealth, (2) Work and Job Quality, (3) Housing, (4) Health, (5) Knowledge and Skills, (6) Environmental Quality, (7) Subjective Well-being, (8) Safety, (9) Work-Life Balance, and (10) Social Connections, (11) Civic Engagement.** For future well-being, the focus shifts to: **(1) Natural Capital, (2) Economic Capital, (3) Social Capital, and (4) Human Capital.**

The second approach, *subjective well-being*, emphasizes the personal and emotional dynamics in individuals' lives, focusing on the spiritual or psychological aspects of well-being. According to the WHO, social (objective) well-being is not simply the sum of individual well-being; rather, it is a holistic concept that evaluates human development across physical, psychological, social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. The WHO stresses that well-being and a quality life for individuals are achievable only within the context of a community.¹⁸

In *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-being in Cities*, the well-being framework focuses on the interaction between personal and social well-being, especially in relation to policies shaping urban spaces and the right to the city. It uses Amartya Sen's *capability approach*,¹⁹ which posits that a primary factor in well-being is whether individuals can be the main agents in their own lives. For individuals to fully assume agency, they must develop the skills, actions, abilities, potential, and opportunities necessary to pursue their valued goals.²⁰ Essentially, this approach highlights the tension between individuals' current circumstances and their aspirations and goals for their own lives.

People always aspire to live in better conditions and develop desires toward this goal. According to Sen's approach, achieving a better life requires first improving individuals' capabilities to realize the life they aspire to. What fundamentally determines individuals' well-being is the enhancement of their existing personal resources and capabilities.

In short, an individual's well-being is determined by the extent to which they can realize their potential. Achieving well-being depends on the conditions and opportunities available for individuals to fulfill that potential. This report argues that, for well-being to be fully established, it is not enough for individuals to have



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agency only in their personal lives; they must also be able to act as agents within urban life—participating in governance, decision-making, and production.

The Right to the City for a Shared and Just Life

The *right to the city* extends beyond access to urban services or basic human rights provided by local governments. It entails the right to collectively participate in transforming the city around shared de-

mands. First introduced by Henri Lefebvre in 1968 and later expanded by David Harvey, the concept of the right to the city embodies the struggles of urban social movements worldwide.²¹ It refers to residents reclaiming urban space for its use value, assuming responsibility for urban life, and reimagining and recreating the city collectively. The right to the city envisions transforming urban spaces through collective demands, pointing toward a new urban imagination. It encompasses the rights of all inhabitants to access, occupy, and reclaim their cities, liberating them from

market and political power dynamics, and shaping them into fairer, more inclusive, safe, and sustainable environments to be collectively governed and enjoyed by all.²²

The right to the city offers a grassroots framework for rethinking cities and urban life based on principles of social justice, equality, democracy, and sustainability. By addressing urban issues that a basic human rights perspective may overlook, it has gained a place in international agreements and in the visions of central and local governments. For instance, Goal 11 of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals is dedicated to "Sustainable Cities and Communities." Similarly, the "New Urban Agenda" adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) emphasizes building the right to the city and improving urban quality of life, particularly in the context of gender equality.²³

According to Article 2 of the *World Charter on the Right to the City*, a document endorsed by institutions such as the United Nations, Habitat, and UNESCO, and discussed at the World Social Forum since 2001 before reaching its final form in 2005, the right to the city is defined as "the equitable use of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, and social justice."²⁴ This right, as outlined, is a collective one that legitimizes the struggle

of urban residents—especially vulnerable and marginalized groups—for a livable and adequate standard of life, free use of urban spaces, and the right to self-governance.²⁵ In line with the Charter, the right to the city encompasses the right to a healthy environment; access to, and protection of, natural resources; participation in urban planning and governance; and the preservation of historical and cultural heritage. The core principles of the right to the city, as outlined in the *World Charter on the Right to the City*, include the following:

1. Full implementation of democratic citizenship and urban governance;
2. Social and rights-based utilization of the city and urban property;
3. Equality, not discrimination;
4. Careful protection of vulnerable groups and individuals;
5. Commitment of the private sector to social objectives;
6. Development of solidarity economies and innovative taxation policies.²⁶

In the joint UNESCO-UN Habitat project for the Fifth World Urban Forum, the right to the city is defined across five key pillars:

1. Freedom, independence, and the privileges of urban life;
2. Transparency, equality, and meritocracy in urban governance;

3. Participation in and respect for local democratic decision-making processes;
4. Recognition of diversity in economic, social, and cultural life;
5. Reduction of poverty, social exclusion, and urban violence.²⁷

Evidently, the core philosophy of the right to the city is to ensure that all urban residents have equitable access to the opportunities urban life offers and to establish active citizen participation in shaping urban spaces to achieve this goal. Therefore, the right to the city is a key concept for fostering well-being in urban life, to promote the demand for well-being as a shared social goal, and addressing inequalities in well-being observed across different groups.

Establishing Well-being and the Right to the City

The close relationship between urban environments and individuals' mental, emotional, and behavioral states has been recognized for a long time.²⁸ Many issues arising in modern urban life—such as inequality, segregation, crises, and transformation processes—deeply impact the well-being of both individuals and society. Given that over half of the global population currently resides in cities, it is inevitable that one of the primary factors influen-

cing well-being is the urban policies that govern city life. Thus, societal well-being cannot be established without considering urban dynamics and challenges. In fact, there is a direct connection between public well-being and urban policies. Nearly all aspects of urban life—from physical conditions to its social, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions—are linked to well-being. Cities that prioritize well-being create an urban life in which residents are satisfied to live and share, open to encounters and dialogue, responsive to needs and aspirations, and able to feel a sense of belonging, to claim spaces beyond mere ownership, and to participate in shaping the city through democratic processes.

When considering urban well-being, it is essential to emphasize the built environment's comprehensive influence on public health and overall well-being.²⁹ However, well-being in urban spaces extends beyond the built environment; it includes multiple social, cultural, economic, ecological, and psychological layers. Research has shown that every aspect of urban life plays a significant role in the mental, physical, and social well-being of individuals and communities, from collective participation in decision-making (for all ages, including children) and the presence of parks and green spaces in residential areas to affordable or free access to essential services—such as healthcare, clean water, air, food,



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safe housing, transportation, education, sports, and cultural resources.³⁰ Consequently, who manages urban spaces, under which policies, and how, are all critical factors. For instance, housing policies and their implementation have been found to directly impact the well-being of urban communities.³¹

Considering the right to the city and well-being perspectives together enables a deeper understanding that goes beyond superficial approaches. This combined perspective reveals, for instance, that viewing housing merely as a physical shelter is insufficient. It underscores the

importance of recognizing housing as a right while also focusing on the quality of available housing. Housing options that individuals are forced into due to low cost yet fail to meet basic human living standards can be seen as a violation of the right to the city. The issue is not simply access to housing, but access to healthy, affordable, and livable housing. In this context, well-being can be promoted through access to affordable, community-oriented housing that fosters social ties, a sense of belonging, and connection to nature. Prioritizing well-being and the right to the city within housing policies and urban transformation projects is therefore crucial. In short,

local governments should aim not only to increase housing stock but also to ensure the quality of housing and to promote fair conditions in access to housing as a means of supporting community well-being.

Research on the determinants of urban well-being identifies four key dynamics: individual, social, psychological, and spatial factors.³² In measuring well-being, environmental factors from external sources—such as population density, income levels, crime rates, distribution of green spaces, noise sources, and air pollution levels—are significant. Subjective indicators of urban health and well-being, on the other hand, are based on the mental, physical, and social aspects of individuals' health and emotional states.³³ In this context, urban environments with high population density, increased insecurity and anxiety due to crime, and elevated levels of noise and pollution can be said to negatively impact well-being.

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In addition to patterns affecting individuals' psychological states, there are also

determinants that impact physical health in urban settings. For example, studies have found a link between noise from urban traffic congestion and hypertension; similarly, air pollution has been shown to correlate with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.³⁴ For these reasons, local governments in major cities worldwide have prioritized pedestrianization projects to reduce traffic density.

Air pollution, caused primarily by exhaust emissions, gases from waste incineration facilities, and various industrial pollutants, leads to long-term health problems for urban communities. According to the Right to Clean Air Platform's report, air pollution contributes to illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and COPD, while also negatively impacting mental health and sleep patterns.³⁵ The mortality rate for diseases linked to air pollution is alarmingly high. As noted in the report, in 2021 alone, 4,848 people in Istanbul, 2,853 in Ankara, and at least 42,000 across Turkey lost their lives due to air pollution-related illnesses.³⁶

Research highlights the importance of public spaces—especially green areas and parks—as key determinants of urban well-being.³⁷ Green spaces offer individuals more opportunities for social interaction with nature compared to other environments, providing much-needed respite within the oppressive, concrete-dominant

ted urban landscape. However, highly urbanized metropolises often lack sufficient public green spaces. For instance, Istanbul ranks last among world cities, with only 2.2% of green space per capita.³⁸ This issue warrants attention not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality. The accessibility of green spaces for all members of society is as critical as the amount of green space available per person.

Cities in Turkey often fall short in providing high-quality, accessible green spaces that are designed to accommodate non-human life and address inequalities related to gender, sexual identity, body, and age. Many green spaces and parks are artificially created with non-ecological materials, resulting in standardized and overly artificial designs. Instead of simply multiplying identical “park” spaces, it is essential to consider the needs and principles guiding their design and creation. The goal is not just to increase green spaces, but to expand quality green spaces. For instance, parks with concrete surfaces and landscapes that exclude non-human life and hinder interaction may appear suitable for human use but, in practice, contribute to the urban heat island effect, ultimately harming public well-being in the medium to long term.

Despite the many challenges and issues they present, cities also hold the potential to positively impact well-being, even

if temporarily or partially. For example, urban features such as coastlines, beaches, islands, rivers, lakes, groves, forests, parks, historic cinemas, train stations, agricultural lands, public squares, and iconic accessible transportation options like ferries, trams, and trains continue to benefit community well-being. Additionally, the coexistence with companion species³⁹—such as cats, dogs, birds, and plants—creates natural, public, and cultural spaces and connections that enhance urban life. For this reason, it is essential to protect these spaces, relationships, and resources together with their users and residents.

Another factor that enhances quality of life and promotes mental, physical, and social well-being in cities is the capacity of urban spaces to support mobility and walkability. Studies have shown that individuals living in cities with high mobility options, walkability, cycling infrastructure, and abundant green spaces experience greater personal well-being.⁴⁰ Cities that offer ample opportunities for movement encourage healthy and active lifestyles.

Another factor that enhances well-being in urban environments is the sense of belonging. Policies should be developed to strengthen residents’ connection, attachment, and memory associated with their neighborhoods and cities. One of the keys to a fulfilling urban life is fostering a sense

of belonging to a place. The loss of spaces we feel connected to negatively impacts our mental, physical, and social well-being, as social bonds are intertwined with spatial relationships. A sense of belonging strengthens the feeling of safety and security in a city. To cultivate this attachment, people need a sense of security, sufficient leisure time, the freedom to move, and access to public spaces where they can build connections and engage. To truly know and form an attachment to a place, individuals must first have the opportunity to go there and use those spaces. However, barriers like physical infrastructure, economic constraints, and patriarchal, restrictive social relations can limit access. For this reason, ensuring that transportation options are affordable and accessible to all segments of society is among the factors that significantly impact well-being.

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Belonging to a city is shaped not only by the freedom to move within it but also by the ability to use it in meaningful ways. For a strong sense of urban belonging, cities must be designed and planned based on their use value⁴¹ and public interest.

When urban spaces are developed with a focus on use value, they become accessible to a broad range of people. Public spaces planned in this way support encounters and the transmission of collective memory and knowledge, thereby fostering urban attachment and ultimately enhancing well-being. Conversely, shaping urban spaces primarily around consumption and exchange value—excluding grassroots actors from transformation processes, standardizing spaces, or erasing sites of collective memory—undermines urban well-being and prevents individuals from forming a sense of belonging to the city. Drastic changes to a place can have profound, often underestimated effects on individuals’ mental and social worlds.

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Compared to many political events, city residents are often far more sensitive to the loss of a street, square, or building;⁴² altering the city’s appearance or function without regard for community needs can profoundly disrupt public well-being. Residents form close bonds with places they use daily, such as a familiar train station, a favorite cinema, an old tea garden, well-trodden streets, squares, parks, or even a simple bench with a view of the sea.

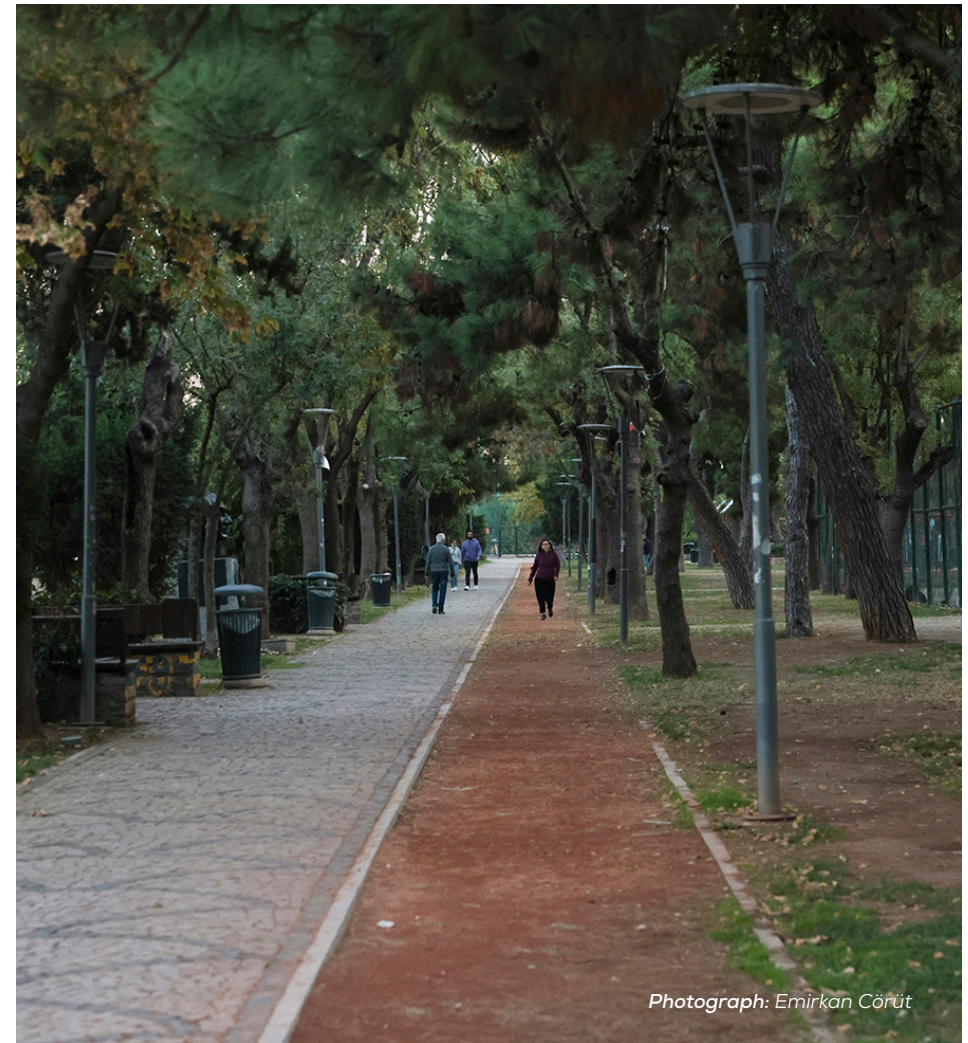
These places represent personal and collective memories, experiences, and urban identity. For individuals and communities to maintain well-being, they need the continuity of spaces that evoke attachment and belonging. When these places are eliminated or transformed through top-down decisions, it disrupts not only the physical space but also the personal and collective memories associated with it.

This is precisely why urban movements in Turkey have been on the rise over the past 20 years. In this period, the right of individuals and communities to act as political agents in the city's transformation has been taken from them. Consequently, the destruction of public spaces linked to collective memory has inflicted harm on physical, mental, and social well-being. Local governments play a fundamental role here; they must restore the right of individuals and communities to have a say in their living spaces. Article 13 of the Municipal Law defines "citizenship rights" as follows: "Everyone residing in a district is a citizen of that district. Citizens have the right to participate in municipal decisions and services (...) and to be informed about municipal activities."⁴³ Although residents' rights to participate in decision-making are enshrined in law, they are not adequately implemented in practice.

In contrast, following the rise of urban movements—especially since the

first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001—cities worldwide have introduced various participatory mechanisms in urban governance. These mechanisms go beyond merely expressing opinions; they aim to directly involve residents in decision-making, project development, planning, budgeting, and design processes. Moreover, it is expected that socially-oriented municipalities establish cooperation and dialogue with rights-based grassroots urban movements.

Just as the factors determining each individual's well-being are unique, the dynamics that shape the well-being of each neighborhood and city differ as well. Therefore, understanding urban well-being requires a strong focus on locality. Generalizing specific needs and demands often leads to unintended negative outcomes. What constitutes injustice and inequality should be identified within the specific context of each city through public reasoning and discussion. In other words, determining which valuable capabilities or urban privileges people lack—and discussing the most suitable actions to address these injustices—should be a collective responsibility of social actors. Considering the right to the city alongside the capability approach underscores the importance of cultivating a public reasoning process where different perspectives are actively listened to, contributing to a fairer urban life.⁴⁴ Thus, rather than a one-size-fits-all



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solution, we need an adaptable perspective that respects varying notions of well-being across different locales. It is essential to remember that well-being varies by factors such as age, gender, education, income, ethnicity, and belief, and it can be as collective as it is individual, with distinct local dimensions.

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Putting the idea of a fairer urban life into practice can begin with an assessment of the current state of well-being among city residents. What kind of life do urban residents lead? Do they have sufficient opportunities to access a range of valuable resources, capabilities, spaces, and activities? Achieving this requires fostering individuals' agency, supporting their ability to act, and ensuring that diverse voices are more widely heard.

For a fairer urban life, two core concepts within the frameworks of well-being and the right to the city can serve as guides for local governments: (1) creating conditions that enable individuals to become political agents, and (2) developing spaces for dialogue and exchange.⁴⁵ To counteract urban fragmentation, destruction, and segregation, and to foster more equitable urban policies, it is essential to bring residents together, encourage the sharing and listening of diverse perspectives, and create opportunities to collaboratively address shared challenges.⁴⁶

In this regard, local urban policies should prioritize the well-being of city residents over financial and individual interests. Building fairer urban policies requires decision-making processes that center not on economic, political, or individual stakeholders, but on those groups deprived of various capabilities and opportunities in urban life, making them the primary

actors in planning and decision-making mechanisms.

Local governments have the potential to play a major role in reshaping urban relationships, facilitating dialogue among all residents, and providing alternative spaces that empower vulnerable groups to act as agents.⁴⁷ At this point, a focus on both the "healthy cities" approach and the concept of "healthy urban planning" becomes relevant. According to Jason Corburn's recount of Trevor Hancock and Len Duhl's 1986 definition, healthy urban planning involves "... the development of social resources and the continuous creation and improvement of physical and social environments that enable people to fulfill their life functions and support each other in reaching their full potential."⁴⁸ However, even with healthy cities, inequalities can persist. Corburn notes that despite interventions aimed at improving the fundamental determinants of health, certain spatial and racial inequalities remain. He thus points out the limitations of addressing urban issues and inequalities as though repairing a broken machine, as urban life cannot be predicted or managed with mechanical precision. On the contrary, urban life is filled with unpredictabilities and uncertainties, making it difficult to generalize phenomena or approach issues from a single perspective. From this viewpoint, Corburn emphasizes the necessity of viewing cities as complex networks of relationships.⁴⁹

As Corburn notes, "no place is entirely bad, no matter how challenging the conditions; people are incredibly creative in their survival strategies and can persevere in unexpected ways"—a resilience often overlooked by decision-makers and experts.⁵⁰ For this reason, it's essential to connect the creative power of local, grassroots, or neighborhood-based social movements with the decision-making authorities.⁵¹ For cities that support well-being, local governments must be aware of established concepts, yet remain attentive to the needs of local communities, creating space for grassroots creative practices and taking responsibility for establishing the conditions necessary for meaningful change.

The Role of Local Governments in Supporting Well-being

Local governments, as the administrative bodies closest to communities and individuals, are responsible for providing services directly impacting public health and well-being, including housing, transportation, infrastructure, social care, planning, and sociocultural activities. In this regard, they play a crucial role in supporting the well-being of all city residents.⁵² Legally, Article 38 of the Municipal Law No. 5393 mandates that local authorities and affiliated bodies “take necessary measures to ensure peace, well-being, health, and happiness” for the community. Additionally, Article 9 of the same law lists among their core responsibilities improving neighborhood quality of life, fostering collaboration among local institutions, and identifying common needs with the voluntary participation of neighborhood residents.⁵³ Within this framework, local governments, through their services and urban development approaches, act as key influencers—either positively or negatively—on the well-being of city residents.

The *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* (1986), which emphasized the importance of social determinants in health and focused on reducing health inequalities through these factors, marked a significant transformation and paradigm shift in public health. Following this, the WHO stressed the need to improve the conditions of shared spaces where people live, study, and work to promote health and

well-being. The *Healthy Cities Network* project, launched in 1988 as the first example of this approach, outlined the following goals: **(1)** Creating environments in which all citizens would be happy to live by sharing experiences on building healthy, clean, and safe urban spaces; **(2)** Developing joint projects in areas such as health, transportation, and environment to provide an equal and high-quality living environment, based on equality and without discrimination based on religion, language, race, culture, class, or beliefs.⁵⁴

In Turkey, the inclusion of public health in local government programs dates back to the 1990s. In 1992, the WHO designated Bursa, İzmir, and Çankaya in Ankara as pilot municipalities for the *Healthy Cities Network* project, and efforts to establish the Turkish Healthy Cities Association (SKB) began in 2003. Today, a total of 139 city and district municipalities in Turkey are members of the SKB. Despite this high membership, it remains uncertain whether the Healthy Cities Movement has effectively supported public health and well-being in Turkish cities. This is because the current application of the healthy cities approach is based on a one-dimensional view of health, falling short of developing comprehensive solutions for cities' complex and multi-layered health impacts. For instance, while increasing green space is promoted as a beneficial, health-oriented public policy, there is little discussion

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about where this green space is created, what it replaces, or who actually benefits from it. This outcome-focused approach often overlooks potential harm in the process. Therefore, local governments should adopt a well-being perspective to approach health in a holistic manner. Furthermore, local administrations sometimes view health promotion narrowly, as solely the provision of healthcare services. In contrast, a well-being perspective considers the interplay of social, cultural, economic, ecological, spatial, political, and individual factors that affect health.

Cities must undoubtedly support a quality, accessible healthcare system. However, the focus here is not so much on “how the healthcare system functions” as on the impact of the physical environment and social relations on public health.⁵⁵ The design of urban spaces plays a significant role in shaping people’s well-being and related behaviors.⁵⁶ For example, the freedom to move within a city is often beneficial to individuals and a healthy activity in itself. However, without “the construction of accessible, enjoyable, and safe paths” for walking or other forms of movement, this positive behavior cannot be widely adopted.⁵⁷ The responsibility for creating the necessary conditions in urban life to

promote well-being thus falls within the domain of local governments.

Local governments must optimally utilize the tools at their disposal to address the “persistent inequalities that have become endemic in urban life,” advance spatial justice, and promote well-being.⁵⁸ However, their role in supporting well-being extends beyond urban design alone. Every stage—from planning, decision-making, and participatory mechanisms to project development and budgeting—must be addressed individually and integratively, with careful attention to the complexities of urban life.

In establishing an approach to well-being in urban areas, it is also useful to consider the concept of social municipal governance. This approach opens urban life—starting at the smallest units, like neighborhoods and streets—to public involvement in governance and decision-making. In this model, municipal activities are organized around the shared interests of residents, prioritizing grassroots social needs over profit and competition.⁵⁹ The main features of social municipal governance include: public management of essential urban services like water, energy, transportation, healthcare, and sanitation;

municipal responsibility for social housing and public health initiatives; recognition of cultural, social, and sports activities as fundamental rights essential to well-being, with accessible and inclusive provision by the municipality; and addressing issues such as daycare, preschools, educational support for low-income groups, vocational training, and shelters and care for those in need, along with support for employment and unemployment.⁶⁰ In summary, social municipal governance is “an integrative, socially just approach to urbanism that avoids any form of discrimination, promotes equality, rationality, and avoids exacerbating poverty and deprivation.”⁶¹ Unlike a model that focuses on isolated projects addressing immediate issues and promotes mayoral candidates as political figures with personal performance-based promises each election cycle, a structural, comprehensive, and integrated program will clearly contribute to supporting well-being in urban areas.

Methodology and Findings

To establish the study's foundational framework, regular meetings were held with project leaders and advisors from various fields, such as public health and urban sociology, to explore and connect the concepts of well-being and the right to the city. Simultaneously, a critical literature review was conducted on these concepts, examining both theoretical literature and reports prepared by national and international organizations. To identify elements that characterize well-being-oriented cities, two inquiry meetings were held with representatives from civil society organizations and field experts. Finally, a workshop was conducted with representatives from rights-based civil society organizations and advocates of the right to the city to discuss the barriers and potentials affecting well-being in urban environments.

In this study, the concept of well-being was examined not only through the OECD's well-being parameters and the WHO's definition but also in relation to Amartya Sen's *capability approach* and the idea of the right to the city. Accordingly, fostering individuals' agency in urban life by equitably supporting their economic, political, cultural, and environmental capabilities at both local and personal levels is seen as essential to enhancing foundational aspects of well-being—including housing and working conditions, productivity, work-life balance, civic participation, social and

cultural life, safety, and health—in a holistic way.

The concept of the right to the city was approached as a struggle for individuals and communities to reclaim their say over their lives and urban spaces, rebuilding the city based on its use value. In this study, the right to the city was considered a vital component of well-being, highlighting the need to protect this right to support the well-being of individuals and communities within urban settings.

The literature review revealed a direct relationship between urban phenomena, with their complex layers, and well-being. Numerous aspects—ranging from the built environment and social, cultural, and economic life to the quality of urban services and the approaches to managing, designing, and executing city functions—have been found to impact residents' well-being positively or negatively. In this study, the approaches to well-being and the right to the city were connected to measures such as individual agency (both in personal life and within the city), a sense of belonging, access to livable and fair conditions, and resources that enable desired capabilities.

As a result of the inquiry meetings and workshop, the goal was to develop a local understanding of well-being that inherently includes the right to the city. In

this context, well-being was found to be closely linked not only to equitable access to livable housing, safe, eco-friendly, and affordable transportation, free and quality healthcare, clean air, food and water, a fulfilling educational experience, and socio-cultural life but also to aspects such as inclusive public spaces, the ecological character of the city, active participation in city governance and production, a sense of belonging, freedom of movement, the city's use value, and opportunities for collective action. The project highlighted the connection between well-being and how the city is experienced, managed, and created. Well-being, it was concluded, is shaped not merely by quantitative measures but by the quality of opportunities in urban life, individual and community agency, lived experiences, and the value of these elements.

Based on findings from the inquiry meetings and workshop, guiding principles were developed for local governments to consider in order to ensure urban policies promote well-being and uphold the right to the city.

Findings from Inquiry Meetings

To develop a local, project-specific framework aimed at enhancing well-being in Turkish cities, we held two inquiry meetin-

gs on June 22 and July 26, 2023, with participants including representatives from civil society organizations, experts, and independent researchers.

In the first inquiry meeting, participants were asked about the issues and opportunities they identified in urban life, how they related these to health and well-being, and what role urban policies could play in overcoming barriers to well-being. *Participation* was highlighted as the most critical factor influencing well-being. Participants also noted that factors such as ownership, belonging, inclusivity, freedom, use value, cooperation, and a sense of cohesion significantly shape well-being.

Among the negative factors affecting urban well-being, participants pointed to the rural-urban divide and migration toward rural areas, the fast pace of urban life, top-down and rushed project approaches by municipalities, feelings of insecurity linked to gender inequality, chaotic and overcrowded transportation, lack of walkability in many areas, insufficient inclusivity, limited grassroots involvement in participation processes, loss of belonging and sense of ownership due to urban transformation projects, the disappearance of public spaces that encourage encounters, processes of alienation from urban spaces, layered dispossession, neglect of cultural and historical preservation,

and the inadequate planning of open and accessible spaces that could be embraced by human and non-human residents alike.

Among the positive factors influencing residents' well-being, participants highlighted several factors including better economic opportunities and higher-quality educational, cultural, health, and social resources in cities; greater potential for collective participation and organization; the freedom to walk in places such as parks, waterfronts, and coastlines; and the possibility of engaging in the creation and production of the urban environment.

Among the recommendations for creating cities that prioritize well-being were the following: undertaking activities that enhance individuals' sense of belonging to their surroundings to foster well-being in daily life; carefully planning urban transformation projects to minimize potential adverse effects before and after their implementation; increasing spaces for encounters, dialogue, and collaboration; ensuring urban life is safe for everyone; enhancing opportunities for freely walking in the city; preserving individuals' practices and experiences in shaping, creating, and producing urban spaces; designing public spaces based on their use value, open to the good life, unique interventions, and creative practices of both human and non-human urban inhabitants;

developing new and high-quality participation tools that go beyond simple idea collection; establishing platforms for dialogue, negotiation, and consensus that empower city dwellers as active agents rather than passive participants; protecting the cultural, public, and historical life of cities, as well as intra-urban agricultural production; creating collaborative models for decision-making, design, and production; implementing participatory budgeting practices; ensuring participation processes are inclusive and diverse, conducted in a non-discriminatory manner, rooted in human rights, and prioritizing vulnerable groups, starting from the neighborhood and street level; fostering approaches that provide space for rights-based advocates to act as decision-makers; developing policies to strengthen connections between cities, spaces, humans, and non-humans; supporting existing community dynamics within urban life and facilitating the formation of new ones; providing training on participation; undertaking efforts to enhance individuals' urban capabilities, sense of wholeness, and skills; and establishing citizens' assemblies.

In the second inquiry meeting, participants discussed visions of cities that prioritize well-being, the obstacles to achieving cities that contribute to well-being, potential opportunities, and proposed solutions.

Participants described **cities that prioritize well-being** as those that provide services and spaces free from the political pressure and divisions caused by Turkey's political climate; feature bureaucracies and services that are non-ideological, impartial, and not personalized; offer spatial and social environments as well as organizational capacities that enable gathering and interaction; ensure everyone has access to the physical resources of the city; are not governed with a uniform or one-size-fits-all approach; make the needs of all city residents visible; include diverse identities in decision-making mechanisms; guarantee access to clean and safe water and air for everyone; keep water and coastal areas open to all; promote a sense of fulfillment in life; actively combat the climate crisis and build resilience; protect non-human life, biodiversity, and wildlife; offer sufficient, high-quality, and accessible spaces for rest and relaxation; foster social harmony; enable people to connect with one another, their environment, and the unique history and culture of the place; remind residents of their interdependence; facilitate encounters among individuals and with other living beings; multiply opportunities for free gatherings; promote a perspective of shared coexistence among all living beings and differences; create or support commons-based spaces; provide free cultural and artistic events and venues that bring people together; offer safe and vibrant streets that everyone can share;

establish a fair and free life for all living beings and people; and emphasize collective well-being.

Factors negatively impacting well-being in urban life were identified as the hierarchical structure and “strongman” mentality within local governments; the patriarchal, sexist, racist, and conservative perspectives in urban policies; institutional corruption; ghettoization in urban life; the lack of sustainability of good practices in urban policies; unjust, inequitable urban planning driven by corporate interests; gentrification and displacement processes; the lack and superficiality of participatory mechanisms in decision-making processes; and the invisibility and lack of representation of diverse perspectives and identities.

To overcome obstacles to well-being and incorporating the right to the city into urban policies, “participatory processes” was emphasized as a key approach. While often rendered an empty signifier due to overuse, participation was highlighted as needing to go beyond access to services and decision-making mechanisms, encompassing involvement in the processes of making and creating the city. Participants stressed the necessity of viewing city residents not merely as consumers or participants but as active agents of execution. It was noted that individuals collectively engaged in the pro-

duction of space could thereby strengthen their connection to the city and enhance their skills in urban practices. It was also emphasized that rights-based actors and ideas must be central in participatory processes, such as city councils, and that non-rights-based actors or perspectives should not be included. Participants pointed out that merely creating spaces for interaction is insufficient; these spaces must be festive, inclusive, and commons-oriented. The importance of approaching urban life and relationships with care, repair, and strengthening in mind was underscored. The need to counter broken connections with networks of relationships and new forms of collaboration was highlighted. The discussion stressed the necessity of a data-driven policy and planning approach at the neighborhood or even street scale. It was noted that urban life, public spaces, and urban services—particularly during nighttime—require more meticulous planning. Ensuring the visibility of invisible groups and amplifying unheard voices in urban policies was deemed essential. Participants also expressed that practices considered “best examples” in certain contexts might not necessarily be beneficial for everyone and need to be reconfigured based on local circumstances. The importance of creating spaces for encounters that focus on local needs while bringing together similarities and differences was highlighted. Municipalities were urged not to overlook conflicts

while working to foster public solidarity. The need to revive and promote skills such as negotiation, democratic conflict resolution, connection-building, mutual recognition, empathy, taking responsibility for shared spaces, re-establishing peace, and collaboratively remaking the city was emphasized. Accordingly, local governments were called to take responsibility for establishing structures for collaborative urban construction, supporting local and rights-based solidarity initiatives, developing commons-oriented practices, facilitating the formation of communities, and fostering democratic conflict resolution and negotiation skills.

In summary, the idea emerged from the inquiry meetings with experts and advocates that demanding cities that support well-being is, in itself, a struggle for the right to the city. In Turkey, it was concluded that well-being is shaped by elements such as participation in processes that rebuild and co-create the city; diverse forms of belonging and ownership; the use value of the city; inclusivity; collectivity; spaces of encounter that bring together differences and similarities; opportunities for care, repair, and collaboration; pluralism; accessibility; and democratic conflict and reconciliation.

Findings from Workshops

On September 26, 2023, a workshop was held at Postane, bringing together 26 participants, including representatives from rights-based civil society organizations and advocates of the right to the city. During the workshop, participants discussed the barriers, potentials, and policy recommendations for supporting well-being in urban spaces.

In the first session of the workshop, a roundtable discussion focused on the question, “What should cities that prioritize well-being look like?” During the second session, participants were divided into groups to explore two key questions: “What are the barriers and potentials in achieving cities that contribute to well-being?” and “What urban policies could be developed to overcome these barriers or transform potentials into opportunities?” The third session concluded with presentations and reflections from all participants.

In the inquiry meetings, several key characteristics were identified as determinants of cities that promote well-being: participation in the collaborative reshaping of the city, diverse forms of belonging and ownership, use value, inclusivity, collectivity, spaces for encounters that bring together differences and similar-

ties, opportunities for care, maintenance, and cooperation, pluralism, accessibility, and democratic conflict and reconciliation. Workshop participants added further elements, emphasizing urban capabilities and opportunities for self-actualization, freedom of expression, agency and subjectivity, direct democracy, nonviolence and safety, coexistence, freedom, equality, physical and mental health, social empowerment, and solidarity.

In the second session of the workshop, **the “obstacles” to achieving cities that contribute to well-being** were outlined as follows: repressive government policies; conflicts between central government and local authorities; issues of meritocracy within governance; local governments’ inability to move beyond a hierarchy of urgencies; decision-makers prioritizing personal interests; hierarchical structures, lack of coordination, and poor planning in local governance; failure to plan cities that cater to diverse needs; cities focused solely on growth and construction, neglecting mental, physical, and social well-being; housing issues; limited active participation in decision-making processes and lack of dialogue platforms; the ineffectiveness and dysfunction of city councils; failure to address animal rights as a political issue, with hate and violence directed at urban animals; policies and practices focused solely on assigned gender; solutions for accessibility⁶² issues not grounded in a ri-

ghts-based approach; physical barriers in the city; poor quality of urban spaces; homogenization of urban residents, disregarding diversity; residents’ alienation from their cities; lack of localization; growing class segregation and related tensions; poor quality of working conditions; lack of intersectionality in urban policies; resistance to change in urban life; top-down rather than grassroots urban policies; loss of neighborhood culture; limited freedom of movement in urban life; and the inability to exist freely in terms of both physical presence and identity.

The existing potentials to support well-being in cities were identified as follows: the persistence of informal networks, urban practices, and ways of being; the wealth of resources and tools available to local governments to improve urban life; the existence of city councils, even if rendered ineffective in practice; a culture of solidarity, generosity, and volunteerism within society, especially in times of crisis; the experience and collective potential of environmental justice, feminist, and LGBTQ+ movements; the benefits of technology, such as social media, in building urban opposition; and the availability of petitions, complaints, and monitoring tools to participate in decision-making processes.

Participants offered the following recommendations **for urban policies that promote well-being and the right to the city:**

1. Develop policies and active citizenship mechanisms that integrate community voices in participation processes, ensuring representation from all segments of society.
2. Establish a legal basis to implement city council decisions, replace limited representation systems to ensure all groups in society are represented, and make city councils functional and independent institutions.
3. Reconfigure municipal councils to serve as mechanisms for active participation in urban governance.
4. Local government actors should avoid polarizing language and practices that lead to racism, sexism, discrimination, or speciesism.
5. Urban policies should be developed based on the right to the city.
6. Bridge the gap between urban policies and practical implementation.
7. Create spaces for grassroots organization and expand dialogue platforms at the neighborhood and street levels.
8. Independent units and local actors should vote on municipal budgets.

9. In service and policy implementation processes, include the individuals and communities affected by decisions in the decision-making process.
10. Allow residents to have a voice in organizing and transforming urban space, seeing them not just as participants but as active agents who demand, object, decide, and execute.
11. In planning, designing, and preserving urban and public spaces, focus on use value, public benefit, and residents' needs, demands, and objections.
12. Urban planning and policy should go beyond a human-centered approach, considering the lives of all living beings in the city.
13. Avoid an "able-bodied" focus in urban planning and implement accessible city policies.
14. Implement gender-sensitive urban planning, budgeting, and policies.
15. Prevent environmental degradation and gentrification in urban transformation processes.
16. Local governments should monitor the impact and process of projects post-implementation.
17. Plan essential units such as health centers, mobile toilets, and nursing booths in public spaces for emergency needs.
18. Ensure project partnerships are based on merit rather than political alliances, treating all institutions equitably without political instrumentalization.
19. Following the 2021 amendment to Article 4 of the Animal Protection Law No. 5199, local governments must establish shelters or animal hospitals to ensure the well-being of animals in the city.
20. Shift social support services (e.g., in-home care for the elderly and disabled, financial aid) from charity-based to rights-based practices, framing them as "budgets allocated for participatory urban policies."
21. Increase spaces for interaction and encounter between various community members and other living beings, creating spaces to foster mutual support and solidarity.
22. Transform underutilized cultural and industrial areas, if functionally obsolete, through participatory processes and in collaboration with rights-based local solidarity groups, prioritizing use value, as seen in the example of Müze Gazhane.
23. Resolve issues where citizens lack points of contact for asserting their rights, expanding communication mechanisms. Adapt communication methods to accommodate different languages and needs, considering accessibility.
24. Activate Local Equality Action Plans.
25. Develop policies to restructure the relationship between city governance, citizens, and civil society, establishing communication bridges. Transform established centers into hubs of informational resources.
26. Strengthen coordination among municipal departments to enable comprehensive urban policies, ensuring departments work collaboratively.
27. Address the housing problem by developing policies that encompass its physical, economic, and social dimensions.
28. Expand opportunities for cultural presence and visibility in urban housing.
29. Integrate environmentally sustainable spatial planning approaches into new planning processes, focusing on socio-ecological resilience to address climate change and disasters like earthquakes.
30. Strengthen individuals' access to rights mechanisms.
31. Shift the approach to public health in local governments from solely treatment-focused to include preventive healthcare services.
32. Expand free services in food, transportation, healthcare, culture, arts, and education to reduce economic poverty and promote well-being.
33. Develop policies to strengthen residents' connection, sense of belonging, and memory of their neighborhoods and the city.
34. Implement projects to improve the quality of working life.
35. Increase residents' mobility.
36. Prevent homogenization in urban life and public spaces, which can lead to residents' alienation from their environments.
37. Ensure the protection of the city's cultural, tangible, and intangible heritage, along with urban memory, in collaboration with its users.



Guiding Principles

Based on research conducted within the project, the following guiding principles were established to help local governments consider community well-being when shaping urban policies. Rather than providing a ready-made list of policies, these principles emphasize key considerations for decision-making and policy development processes. Recognizing that urban policies may vary based on local contexts and unique characteristics, these guiding principles should be viewed as a framework for policy development. They should be understood as an interconnected whole, with each principle relating to the others to achieve meaningful and concrete outcomes.

Each principle begins with a summary paragraph defining the concept, followed by a “How?” section that explains its connection to urban policies and community well-being. The examples of good practices from international municipalities included in some sections do not represent a comprehensive well-being approach but serve as illustrations of specific applications that embrace each principle.

1. Participation and Deliberation

Participation is a key factor in achieving both well-being and the right to the city. Local governments are responsible for enabling active participation in urban policy-making for citizens from all backgrounds. Recognizing and establishing the right to have a voice in urban spaces, along with being part of decision-making, strengthens individuals’ sense of responsibility and reinforces their connection to the city, positively impacting their mental, physical, and social well-being. Therefore, individuals, communities, and rights-based local organizations should be regarded as primary actors in urban management, planning, budgeting, and design processes. Residents and communities should not merely express their needs and demands but be seen as agents who make and execute decisions. Municipalities must create democratic mechanisms, tools, and conditions for inclusive participation. Negotiation-based processes, such as conflict resolution, can strengthen these participation mechanisms and allow individuals to become recognized political agents in the city, thereby positively contributing to social well-being.

How?

The capacity of individuals to be active agents in their own lives and in urban life

is a primary factor in determining well-being. Community participation is a key factor in the OECD's well-being parameters, while Amartya Sen's capability approach also highlights the importance of individuals' agency for establishing well-being. In this regard, active citizen participation in urban governance fosters stronger connections to space, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of responsibility—all essential to building well-being.

According to the “citizenship rights” outlined in the Municipal Law, all urban residents are considered citizens of the place where they live. These citizens have the right to participate in municipal decision-making processes, access services, stay informed about municipal affairs, and benefit from the administration's resources and services. While local governments in Turkey increasingly prioritize participatory processes, there remains a need to enhance the ways these are implemented.

To build a fairer urban life, local governments must design participatory processes that are fully democratic and inclusive, preventing the emergence of new inequalities, conflicts, or divisions. It is essential that the voices of marginalized individuals and social groups are safeguarded in these processes, ensuring that larger groups do not dominate. Who is included, who has an equal voice, and which ideas are represented are all criti-

cal. Mechanisms and ideas that perpetuate discrimination, ableism, speciesism, violence, sexism, or hate speech should have no place in participatory processes. Instead, local governments should create space for grassroots individual and community-based demands rooted in democratic and just approaches. Participation should be structured horizontally, protecting diversity while fostering common ground, considering not only humans but non-human life as well, and grounded in principles of gender equality and shared coexistence. Local governments have a primary responsibility to foster inclusivity in participation by embracing a deliberative approach, establishing a basis for partnership, dialogue, consensus, and agreement across different groups.

Utilizing city councils more effectively could serve as a strategic tool in building participatory processes. However, for this to be successful, decisions made in city councils need to have legal standing with the municipality. Additionally, city councils require a broader representation of society's diverse groups, and their economic and political independence must be ensured.

Municipal administrations should broaden their view of participatory processes beyond merely “gathering opinions.” More functional mechanisms and collaboration-based tools are necessary to

incorporate local demands into the design and implementation stages of urban policy.

Being part of urban governance is not a right exclusive to individuals. Rights-based local communities, solidarity groups, grassroots organizations, and civil society organizations also have a voice in city management and participation processes. Local governments should adopt a deliberative approach toward grassroots expectations and demands when designing urban policies. Instead of a top-down, authoritarian approach to policy-making, dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution should be prioritized.

In local government policies and practices, varying interests and expectations can lead to conflicts. Ignoring these conflicts may silence the most vulnerable groups, suggesting a hierarchy in which some needs are prioritized over others. For example, local authorities' efforts to transform Yedikule Gardens—an area that embodies a thousand years of Istanbul's history—into a park met with strong opposition from both the gardeners, who sustain a unique local culture and profession, and city activists. Similarly, plans to convert the historic Haydarpaşa Train Station into a hotel, shopping mall, museum, or commercial space were opposed by residents, who value its place in the city's collective memory. In such cases, local

governments must use negotiation tools and remain open to dialogue with grassroots voices. Otherwise, the connections and sense of belonging that residents have with urban spaces risk being damaged, curtailing opportunities for residents and communities to act as active agents in city governance and undermining overall social well-being.

Urban policies should be designed through negotiation-based processes that start locally. This approach means establishing participatory and deliberative tools in the early stages, rather than only after policies are implemented. Developing negotiation-based relationships and spaces is essential to fostering democratic and active participation. A deliberative approach involves listening to grassroots objections, demands, and critiques regarding the decisions, implementation, impacts, and outcomes of current urban policies. It also means creating open forums and dialogue-based bridges that welcome diverse perspectives and provide inclusive spaces for discussion.

In summary, there is a need to expand the understanding that urban spaces are shaped not only by decision-makers, managers, planners, or architects, but also by the experiences, everyday practices, and social relationships of local actors. Local governments should adopt this view and design their urban policies accordingly.

Recognizing that active, horizontal participation practices play a critical role in determining social well-being is essential. From a right-to-the-city perspective, local governments should aim to create more equitable participation and deliberation mechanisms for the stages of urban reshaping—such as planning, budgeting, decision-making, project development, and design. These mechanisms should be based on clear principles, sustained and reciprocal, and developed in collaboration with rights-based urban movements at the local level.

Participatory Budgeting Porto Alegre, Brazil

Participatory budgeting, initiated in 1989 by Brazil's Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT) in Porto Alegre, is a local governance approach where the municipality allocates a portion of its budget for direct citizen decision-making. This approach established a participation plan that included low-income residents, non-citizens, and youth, allowing city residents to actively engage in deciding how the city's budget would be spent, thus better addressing their needs and priorities.

In the participatory budgeting process, residents attend neighborhood and district meetings where they propose projects tailored to their local needs. Proposed projects are reviewed by the local government or a participatory budgeting council, which assesses factors such as budget, feasibility, and community benefit. A budget forum is then formed to vote on the projects, with representatives selected from those who attended the neighborhood meetings. The projects that receive the most votes are allocated funding. To increase resident involvement, neighborhoods with higher

meeting attendance are allowed more representatives in the budget forum.

In Turkey, participatory budgeting was first introduced in 2007 as a pilot program in Çanakkale under the Local Government Reform Support Project. Today, this method has spread to various municipalities, although there remains a need to develop new tools to ensure the process is more pluralistic, inclusive, and accessible.

2. Right to Use

Local governments should prioritize the public interest in urban policies, ensuring that all city residents have the right to access and use resources and spaces. Emphasizing the value of usage in experiencing the city contributes to the community's overall well-being. Distributing resources fairly based on usage rights—rather than on commercial interests—helps address income inequality and supports the advancement of social well-being. Fairer cities can be built by upholding the common good and guaranteeing everyone's right to use urban spaces equitably.

How?

Use value refers to the benefits provided by urban spaces and living opportunities based on experience, focusing on common needs and benefits accessible to all, rather than on consumption or exchange value. This approach emphasizes a

form of collective ownership grounded in the right to use, distinct from traditional ownership models. For urban well-being to be established, urban development, services, and public spaces must prioritize use value over consumption and profit. Use rights are frequently compromised during profit-driven urban transformation and renewal projects, which can evolve into gentrification, limiting access to spaces or neighborhoods to only the privileged. Such transformation initiatives fail to prioritize equal access for local residents and citizens.

A foundational condition for urban well-being is the collective and democratic use of the city, infrastructure, cultural and social resources, and other amenities—and, critically, sharing these spaces inclusively. The principle of contributing to the common good through the fair distribution, sharing, and equitable access to public spaces, services, and opportunities emphasizes use value. Safeguarding the right to use and contribute to the common good should be integral to urban policies focused on establishing urban well-being.

Social Housing Program Vienna, Austria

The Vienna Municipality's social housing programs are among Europe's most comprehensive, ensuring affordable and quality housing for city residents. This program is a key factor in Vienna's reputation as one of the "most livable cities in the

world," with nearly 20% of the population living in social housing. The main goals of Vienna's social housing initiatives are to provide affordable housing for low-income households, reduce poverty and social inequality, encourage urban renewal, and foster a sustainable and livable city. Social housing units in Vienna are built and managed independently of the private sector by the municipality, and rent is set according to tenants' income levels. Access to social housing is determined by specific criteria, including income limits, length of residence in Vienna, and family size. Residents in social housing benefit from a range of social services, such as childcare, elder care, and counseling. Vienna's social housing programs encompass various types to meet different needs: municipal housing built and managed by the municipality, financed by rental income; social housing associations that are non-profit organizations funded through state subsidies; and private rental units constructed by the private sector but supported by government incentives. Together, these components create Vienna's robust social housing landscape.

Paris Breathes: Reclaiming Public Spaces Paris, France

Since 2016, the "Paris Breathes" initiative by the Paris Municipality has set out to reclaim public spaces by closing selected streets to vehicular traffic on specific days and times, allowing citizens to actively use these areas. On these car-free streets, bicycles, skateboards, and rollerblades are permitted, aiming to create active and safe spaces for pedestrians while also reducing air pollution. In Turkey, a similar approach was adopted through the "One Day a Month, Streets for Us" events organized by the Streets Belong to Us Association in collaboration with local municipalities from 2007 to 2019. However, this effort has yet to become a permanent municipal practice.

3. Public Benefit

Local governments should aim to ensure the equitable distribution, use, and preservation of urban resources with a focus on public benefit and the well-being of the community. Public benefit, in this context, is not about advancing the interests of public institutions themselves but rather safeguarding and promoting the shared welfare of all residents.

How?

Public benefit must be constructed with a focus on the common good of both the community and the ecosystem. Legally, one of the primary objectives in local governments' policies and planning activities is to achieve public benefit. However, the term "public benefit" often carries a degree of ambiguity, which can, in some cases—especially in large-scale, capital-driven projects—be leveraged to justify practices that may, in reality, undermine the welfare of both the community and the environment. This makes it critical to assess how public benefit is enacted, whose interests it serves, and the impacts it produces.

It is misguided to assume that every initiative contributing to the urban economy inherently serves the public good. Policies structured to prioritize the exchange value of urban land in a way that

monopolizes urban profit fundamentally disrupt public well-being and violate the right to the city. Moreover, the concept of public benefit should not be limited to human access and usage alone. For instance, forests, wetlands, farmland, mountains, groves, and coastlines should be preserved even if they are not directly accessible to people. Protecting the existence of these areas, even if not for human use, upholds the public good by supporting the ecosystem as a whole and thus contributes to collective well-being.

4. Ecological Perspective⁶³

Today, as neoliberal economic policies push planetary boundaries, the compounded crises of our era—particularly the climate crisis—highlight the urgency for transforming cities to be ecologically and socially resilient. The conditions of our climate, planet, ecosystems, and all living beings directly impact the physical, mental, and social well-being of urban populations. Consequently, local governments must center ecological perspectives in urban policy. Building policies that avoid ecosystem harm, maintain a balance between preservation and use, and are aligned with climate adaptation and ecological resilience is critical to sustaining well-being now and in the future.

How?

Whether directly accessible to people or not, all urban ecosystems (such as seas, coasts, forests, meadows, and agricultural lands) are integral to the well-being of cities. Prioritizing the health of urban ecosystems is essential for cultivating well-being in urban life. Urban policies need not be defined solely through human-centered or economic benefit. Local governments should consider whether their actions align with the benefit of the ecosystem, recognizing that supporting ecosystem health is, in itself, a form of public good.

As stated explicitly in Article 56 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, "everyone has the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment." The well-being of people and non-human life in urban areas is directly connected to ecological and climate-related dynamics. Access to essentials like clean water, food, clothing, energy, and safe shelter are core factors shaping individual and community well-being. The ability to engage with natural resources and the quality of these resources impact mental, physical, and social well-being. Additionally, urbanization, urban policies, municipal management practices, and the environmental costs of these projects have layered effects on well-being. While access to nature influences immediate well-being, the utilization

of natural resources and the distribution of environmental impacts shape future well-being. For these reasons, local governments are responsible for embedding ecological sensitivity and approaches in urban policy-making.

The realities of climate change, disasters, food crises, and pandemics—core aspects of the ecological crisis—underscore the need to move beyond human-centered definitions, thinking, and construction of cities. To this end, local governments should design urban policies that prevent ecological degradation, protect the city's ecosystems, and simultaneously strengthen the community's connection to nature. For instance, incorporating ecological infrastructure into the design of transportation, housing, and infrastructure projects, as well as public spaces and green areas, can offer numerous ecological benefits, such as reducing urban heat island effects and preserving biodiversity.

Neighborhood plans should promote ecological living by enabling free movement, walking, and cycling, while integrating urban gardens, high-quality and extensive green spaces that support life for all beings, and units for waste, food scrap recycling, composting, and water treatment. Given that urban culture in Turkey is closely intertwined with companion animals like cats, dogs, and birds, urban policies should account for their well-being

as well. Plans should include feeding and care units in every neighborhood to ensure safe and adequate living conditions for animals in the city. Local governments are thus responsible not only for the welfare of human residents but also for the well-being—and dignified treatment—of animals living within urban environments.

Urbanization, industrialization, and the reliance on fossil fuels have led to rising air pollution, distancing cities from ecological sustainability and negatively impacting well-being. In Turkey's three largest cities, air quality is not consistently monitored, and sufficient data on this issue is lacking.⁶⁴ According to a Greenpeace Mediterranean report from 2023 analyzing PM10 (Particulate Matter 10) data from air quality monitoring stations, Iskenderun in Hatay—one of the areas hardest hit by the February 6 earthquakes—was identified as having the highest levels of air pollution in Turkey.⁶⁵ Following closely was the Göztepe district in Kadıköy, where pollution linked to urban transformation activities appeared nearly as severe as that from post-earthquake debris. The Turkish Medical Association (TTB) also highlighted the irreversible health impact in earthquake zones, noting that asbestos released during debris removal and deposited in natural areas has degraded air and soil quality, posing a serious health risk to those compelled to remain in these areas.⁶⁶

Pollution in urban life extends beyond air contamination. The contamination of soil and water by industrial and household waste represents another facet of ecological degradation. The mucilage problem in the Marmara Sea exemplifies this phenomenon. The inadequacy of ecological treatment facilities in cities, combined with the often unregulated discharge of gaseous, liquid, or solid waste, transforms life into an ecological disaster. Proactive efforts by local governments, particularly in implementing advanced biological treatment facilities, would significantly enhance the well-being of all living beings.

An ecological perspective in urban policies is not sufficient on its own; this approach must be applied across all layers of urban life. Local governments should implement informational and educational initiatives to raise ecological awareness within communities. Starting at the neighborhood level, urban life needs to be restructured based on principles that respect ecological living, prioritize biodiversity, promote practices of care and repair, and envision a model of coexistence.

Local governments should contribute to building cities that, rather than depleting their surroundings and all forms of life, are self-sufficient in water, food, energy, health, and housing resources. These cities should strengthen local characteristics and interspecies cooperation, address

socio-ecological injustices, and avoid causing harm to ecosystems.

Rotterdam Climate Adaptation Strategy Rotterdam, Netherlands

As Europe's largest port city, Rotterdam has taken a proactive stance on addressing climate change risks. The city's Climate Adaptation Strategy, adopted in 2008 and revised in 2013, forms the backbone of its adaptation planning. The strategy's core objectives include establishing a robust defense against flooding, stormwater accumulation, and sea-level rise, while making urban spaces resilient to climate change. Key goals also include enhancing urban resilience through integrated planning, boosting the economy, improving quality of life, and fostering innovation to increase biodiversity. Rotterdam's success in climate adaptation is driven by strong partnerships between local government and stakeholders, a commitment to long-term planning and implementation, and substantial financial investment in adaptation measures.

5. Gender Perspective

To enhance well-being in urban settings, gender inequalities must be taken into account when formulating city policies. Local governments should design policies, services, and initiatives that are sensitive to gender dynamics, making cities safer, more inclusive, and fairer for women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Since these groups face unique vulnerabilities and have distinct urban needs, it is essential that policies do not attempt to homog-

enize identities; instead, dedicated and tailored approaches are necessary to address these diverse requirements effectively.

How?

Current macro and micro policies that overlook gender-based differences, injustices, and inequalities tend to exacerbate the vulnerability of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in nearly every aspect of urban life, reinforcing discrimination. Today, a significant portion of the inequalities, rights violations, discrimination, and violence in urban settings stems from gender inequality, often related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Fundamental human conditions such as living without violence, access to clean water, nutritious food, adequate housing, freedom of expression, visibility, freedom of movement, sufficient time for rest and leisure, political participation, employment opportunities in public and private sectors, self-actualization, and access to mental, physical, and social health services all reveal deep inequalities tied to gender and sexual orientation. Overlooking these inequalities and the intersections between them, especially in policy-making processes, intensifies stressors like anxiety and worry for women and LGBTQ+ individuals, limits their safe access to essential services, and undermines their mental, physical, and social well-being.

Local governments play a crucial role in preventing gender-based discrimination and promoting equality in urban settings. They should develop policies that enable everyone to live openly and safely, realize their potential, establish self-confidence, and achieve social harmony. However, achieving well-being on an urban scale may require different approaches for diverse gender identities. Both women and LGBTQ+ individuals have distinct conditions that contribute to their well-being, and these can vary within each group. Gender identity and sexual orientation-based inequalities, when compounded with other forms of inequality, lead to deeper issues. Being a migrant woman or an unemployed LGBTQ+ individual, for example, creates new and unique challenges due to intersecting identities such as ethnicity and socioeconomic class. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the specific vulnerabilities within each group and avoid conflating the distinct circumstances of various experiences among women and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Urban planning, design, and the production of spaces should be seen as tools for promoting gender equality. Municipal administrations must implement gender-sensitive urban planning and budgeting in collaboration with local stakeholders and rights advocates. Gender-responsive urban planning encompasses many dimensions. Women and

LGBTQ+ individuals are among those most impacted by global economic forces that erode rights through low-cost and unpaid labor, poverty, the dynamics of the ecological crisis, and the unequal distribution of urban services and resources. Urban policies should be developed with an awareness of these disparities, paying particular attention to who uses urban services, who is included or excluded by them. Ensuring equal representation and establishing open communication networks throughout all urban governance processes—such as the design, budgeting, implementation of policies, and creation of new service units—is critical.

Gender- and sexual orientation-based inequalities persist not only in public spaces but also in the workplace and private spheres. Municipal administrations should ensure gender equality in employment across all levels. Local governments can play a role in preventing the privatization of care work that, due to gender norms, often falls to women as unpaid labor. They can do this by creating, expanding, and publicizing local care services. In global cities, this approach is exemplified by the increased availability of free or affordable, quality and reliable childcare centers, and care facilities for the elderly and disabled at the neighborhood level.

Economic, ecological, and political crises are felt most acutely by vulnerable groups, particularly women. Mechanisms

must be developed to prevent public services from being cut during economic crises and to avoid shifting essential public services to unpaid household labor.

An additional layer of gender inequality in urban settings involves housing issues. According to Article 14 of Municipal Law No. 5393, “Metropolitan municipalities and municipalities with populations over 100,000 are required to establish shelters for women and children.” Yet, many municipalities do not fulfill this responsibility. Expanding violence-free and secure shelters for women and LGBTQ+ individuals under threat of violence is a critical issue that municipalities must prioritize. Meeting housing needs for local governments extends beyond merely providing shelters. It includes ensuring livable, accessible, and safe housing infrastructure, planning housing accessibility with a gender-sensitive approach, and addressing the needs of those deprived of housing rights due to gender or sexual orientation discrimination.

For local governments to create gender-sensitive urban policies, they must produce gender-focused data and identify issues, demands, and needs arising from different localities at the grassroots level. Drawing from the *Charter for Women’s Right to the City* prepared in 2004, tools should be developed to ensure the equal and direct participation of women and LGBTQ+ indi-

viduals in city governance, planning, investment decisions, and budget oversight. Urban policy-making should allow for the active involvement of women and LGBTQ+ communities in shaping the city’s policies.

One of the key factors shaping well-being from a gender perspective is mobility within the city. Women and LGBTQ+ individuals often face constraints in moving freely due to safety concerns, poverty, labor exploitation, and time demands. Local governments are expected to develop projects that enhance mobility options and accessibility within the city. Ensuring access to public transportation in every neighborhood, along with safer and more convenient urban transit, especially at night, is essential. Examples of supportive measures include accessible and secure transportation options for women and LGBTQ+ individuals, the expansion of neighborhood childcare centers, collective kitchens, and similar practices that share the burden of care work. Additionally, making self-fulfillment spaces—such as public and well-equipped sports facilities, cultural centers, vocational or artistic courses, and nature interaction spaces—both accessible and responsive to community needs is vital.

Local governments have extensive means to make cities safer by addressing gender-based violence through public and private educational initiatives. Training

and awareness-raising programs should be provided both for municipal employees and for residents.

Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Vienna, Austria

In Vienna, discussions on gender-sensitive urban planning began in 1991 with the photo exhibition “Whose Public Space? Women’s Everyday Life in the City.” That same year, the city established the Coordination Office for Women’s Issues and Equal Opportunities (MA 57), followed by the launch of the *Frauentelefon* (Women’s Helpline) in 1994 and a 24-hour emergency line (*Frauennotruf*) in 1996. In 1998, Vienna founded the Planning and Building Coordination Office for Women’s Daily Needs and Special Requirements, and by 2008, it had supported around fifty pilot projects focused on gender-equitable urban planning. In 2005, the Gender Mainstreaming Project Office was launched to further support this initiative. Throughout the 2000s, gender equality became a city-wide strategy in Vienna, particularly focusing on spatial development. During this period, Vienna took significant steps toward addressing gender inequality by implementing around sixty pilot projects guided by gender planning specialists and fostering collaboration across administrative levels.

6. Inclusivity and Pluralism

To foster societal well-being, local governments must base all urban policies and services on inclusivity and pluralism. Every individual, representing diverse cultures, beliefs, lifestyles, and intersecting identities, must be recognized and ensured equal access to opportunities and resources.

Urban policies designed solely with the general public or majority in mind hinder the achievement of true inclusivity. Therefore, local governments should adopt a pluralistic approach that prioritizes the representation and voice of minority and highly vulnerable groups, playing a critical role in establishing well-being for all.

How?

Cities are not made up of homogenous populations. Rather, they are spaces where diverse and intersecting identities coexist, shaped by individuals and communities with varying backgrounds. Therefore, a city is not only a place of consensus and harmony but also of divergence and conflict. Urban life offers opportunities for encounters that may lead to either dialog or discord. Divisions in cities are not limited to gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity; individuals and groups often embody multiple identities simultaneously. However, local governments often lean toward policies and services designed with generalized assumptions, focusing primarily on the needs of the majority. This approach risks excluding vulnerable minority groups, leaving them adversely affected by majority-centric policies and implementations. From this perspective, well-being cannot be defined solely according to the general population. Urban policies must be inclusive and pluralistic to account for the well-being of all residents, ensuring

that diverse needs and differences are acknowledged and addressed.

In line with the concept of inclusivity, it is not individuals or communities that should adapt to the structure of the city or its local governments, but rather local governments that should align with the diverse residents who inhabit the city. Cities should be designed to embrace this diversity. The well-being of individuals and communities who feel excluded or disconnected from the city cannot be cultivated if these groups feel at odds with local authorities. In healthy cities, people should feel visible, heard, and a true sense of belonging to their surroundings.

To promote social well-being, local governments should implement the principle of inclusivity by particularly highlighting the presence of invisible and vulnerable social groups. City policies should recognize diversity without enforcing uniformity, acknowledging that needs and demands may vary. It is essential to consider the layered vulnerabilities faced by individuals with intersecting identities—such as disabled children, refugee women, or Black LGBTQ+ individuals. Local government policies should embrace social diversity across intersections of class, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, body type, and age, and work to foster acceptance and recognition of these differences.

In implementing inclusivity, local governments should go beyond merely acknowledging diversity; they should actively work to foster coexistence among various communities, cultures, and perspectives. This involves enhancing the ability to collaborate across differences and conflicts, promoting a collective capacity for cooperation.

7. Community and Solidarity-Based

Local governments should design urban policies that support individuals’ ability to build community. The relationships people form with each other and their surroundings are crucial in shaping societal well-being. Cultivating strong bonds and social networks within one’s environment not only enhances individuals’ lives but also helps them build resilience against the adverse conditions of urban living. Therefore, to foster societal well-being, urban policies must establish conditions that promote solidarity-driven community skills and enable meaningful social interactions among residents.

How?

Urban life presents a range of economic, cultural, and psychological challenges, and one of the primary dynamics that sustains individuals through these difficulties is the formation of social connections. Feeling part of a community with strong, solidarity-based and supportive social networks deeply impacts individuals' well-being. Belonging to various communities and engaging in supportive social networks provide individuals with opportunities for self-actualization and skill development, enhancing self-confidence, emotional resilience, and their sense of agency. Therefore, urban policies must be community-oriented and designed to protect solidarity-driven communities. However, communities consist not only of people but also include non-human beings like plants and animals, which are integral to the community fabric. Urban policies should be crafted with this broader, inclusive perspective.

A community-centered approach by local governments positively influences participation processes as well. Individuals who cultivate a sense of community awareness and capability are generally more inclined to engage in urban governance. Thus, community-based urban policies encourage local communities, solidarity networks, and rights-based organizations to have a voice and active role in

urban life. It is essential to recognize that rights-oriented, community-minded, and action-ready groups exist in many areas, feeling a responsibility toward their cities and engaging in processes. These groups often bring forth specific local demands that are otherwise challenging to identify through conventional fieldwork or surveys.

Local governments, when designing urban policies, should aim to reinforce rather than disrupt grassroots solidarity networks, strengthening the communities that bring people together. At its core, for the well-being of both human and non-human communities, local governments must foster environments in cities where collaboration and solidarity can naturally flourish.

Community-Led Initiatives Berlin, Germany

Community-Led Initiatives (CLI) in Berlin consist of various groups formed by neighborhood residents to make positive impacts within their communities. These groups actively address local challenges and implement improvement projects. The origins of CLI in Berlin trace back to the resistance against urban renewal projects of the 1960s. Today, these initiatives continue to grow, offering creative solutions to local issues and enhancing the city's livability. Among the most common CLIs are neighborhood associations (formed to gather and address community needs), temporary-use initiatives (repurposing public spaces and unused buildings), social enterprises, and urban gardens (promoting food production and community gathering spaces). Examples of CLIs in Berlin include

Prinzessinnengärten, a temporary use initiative that transformed an abandoned area in Kreuzberg into a garden where residents can grow food and socialize; Stadtkantine, a social enterprise in Neukölln offering affordable meals made from surplus food; and Görlitzer Park, a large park in Kreuzberg where residents can relax and socialize, with spaces managed by various CLI groups.

8. Rights-Based

Establishing well-being in urban settings requires prioritizing a rights-based approach that respects the right to life for both human and non-human residents. Building urban policies grounded in human rights, fostering an environment where rights are actualized, and moving beyond a passive, need-based model toward one that nurtures individuals' and communities' sense of social justice and self-empowerment can significantly enhance well-being. This approach not only upholds basic human rights but also encompasses the protection of all living beings' right to life, embodying the essence of the "right to the city." A rights-based perspective is essential across all aspects of local governance—from decision-making and service provision to planning, projects, and participatory processes—ensuring that every element reflects this commitment to inclusivity and justice.

How?

Urban life can create layered inequalities, leaving vulnerable groups facing various forms of poverty and deprivation. Local governments must improve conditions that disrupt overall community well-being by providing social assistance. However, policies and services should go beyond a purely need-based approach that risks trapping people in disempowering conditions, aiming instead to uphold a dignified right to life and a rights-based structure. Urban policies should strive for sustainable, lasting improvements to conditions. The political instrumentalization of social assistance by local governments is one of the most significant barriers to establishing a genuinely rights-based approach in policy.

Based on the right to the city approach, individuals sharing a common urban space must have equal rights. Access to clean water, food, clothing, energy, preserved green spaces, quality education, accessible cultural life, social engagement, freedom of movement, free healthcare, livable housing, participation in urban life, and a voice in decision-making—all of which mean being part of the city's management, design, and production—are rights that belong to everyone living in the city. Therefore, rights-based approaches should be regarded as foundational to local governments' urban policies.

9. Integrated

To establish well-being in urban areas, local governments need to design urban policies in an integrated manner, creating connections across decisions, actions, and processes to ensure coherence. Addressing policies with an integrated perspective recognizes the multidimensional nature of urban challenges, emphasizing the need for solutions and services that take an intersectional approach. Developing policies in an interconnected way allows the recognition of conditions that either harm or support urban well-being as parts of a continuous chain.

How?

An integrated perspective highlights the importance of coordination between departments and services within local governments. Instead of isolated, one-size-fits-all policies, it emphasizes the need for interconnected approaches that bridge individual policies to create a cohesive whole. This approach does not imply a centralized management model; rather, it calls for enabling different departments to better identify local needs and demands, ensuring these are addressed through coordinated policies.

According to an integrated approach, the city is viewed as a complex whole, accommodating diverse groups and multiple

layers of needs. Rather than addressing interconnected urban issues from a single perspective, an integrated approach can be the key to generating effective solutions. Embracing this approach in urban governance contributes to well-being by ensuring that multifaceted policies are sustainable and responsive to the complexities of urban life.

Local governments can utilize the Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach as a tool to incorporate the impact on health and well-being across all policies. This approach advocates for long-term, systematic planning in which all sectors—both health-related and non-health—work in coordination to shape the factors influencing health. While many major cities worldwide have implemented this approach, there are currently no examples of its application in Turkey.

10. Accessibility

Local governments must consider social, physical, and economic accessibility in decision-making processes, urban policies, and service delivery. Designing urban policies with an emphasis on accessibility is essential for reducing social inequalities, supporting vulnerable groups in building independent lives, and establishing social justice—thereby fostering the well-being of all residents.

How?

Making urban life and municipal services accessible and usable for everyone plays a vital role in fostering well-being. Increasing levels of accessibility across social, cultural, physical/spatial, economic, political, and ecological dimensions creates positive indicators for the well-being of vulnerable communities.

Accessibility is often defined in terms of removing physical/spatial barriers within cities, primarily focusing on accessibility for individuals with disabilities. While this is a crucial aspect, it represents only one dimension of accessibility. Ensuring accessibility in urban policies requires, in the broadest sense, questioning who is unable to benefit from the city's opportunities and why.

The design of streets, housing, parks, cinemas, and other public and private spaces in cities is typically based on norms suited to a standard, able-bodied form, which restricts the basic right to move freely and safely in urban spaces for individuals with differing needs, such as people with disabilities, children, and the elderly. As a result, cities not only fail to meet conditions conducive to well-being but also further marginalize vulnerable groups. For this reason, urban design must take into account the diverse capabilities of different bodies. Moreover, it is not only the

physical layout of urban spaces that should be accessible but also the provision of urban services and the structure of urban policies. For example, individuals—whether young, elderly, or women, regardless of socioeconomic background—should have the opportunity to engage in essential cultural, artistic, and athletic activities or to participate in the workforce, with ease of access for everyone.

To establish well-being in cities, essential urban rights—such as access to clean water, food, and air; adequate housing; transportation; health; social and cultural environments; and education—must be accessible to all individuals and groups. Urban policies that embrace and implement the principle of accessibility empower vulnerable groups, including those affected by class, ethnicity, race, belief, gender, physical ability, or age, to engage more fully in social life. Ensuring access in urban policies fosters social justice and a sense of cohesion, enabling diverse communities to participate in social, cultural, economic, and political life. This strengthens marginalized communities, offers a foundation for fostering belonging, enhances satisfaction with urban life, and builds opportunities for social solidarity.

11. Sustainability

Local governments should design urban policies and services that meet current needs while also preserving and enhancing the social, economic, and environmental conditions that support well-being. This involves creating enduring structures that promote the common good and ensuring that effective policies are sustainable over the long term. To achieve this, policies must be planned with a long-term perspective and supported with continuity, thereby safeguarding well-being for both today and the future.

How?

Adopting the principle of sustainability in urban policies can significantly enhance mental, physical, and social well-being. Sustainability can be seen as ensuring the continuity of the planet, of all living species, and of equitable interspecies coexistence. This approach is embedded in both macro and micro policies. A common critique of sustainability is that without fundamental changes in the capitalist system's core mechanisms, true sustainability cannot be fully achieved. However, there are actionable steps that can support sustainable well-being.

Local governments have the capacity to shift from a model of urban development that depletes ecosystems and life to

one that fosters interspecies well-being. By emphasizing policies that prioritize the common good and ecological sustainability, local governments can make sustainable improvements in mental, physical, and social well-being. Beyond ecological and environmental sustainability, efforts should focus on sustaining and embedding well-being as a fundamental aspect of urban life.

Transforming urban life into a resilient form that minimally impacts its environment and natural resources, and largely supports self-sufficiency, benefits both present and future well-being of society and the planet. However, the approach to sustainability extends beyond environmental preservation alone. To truly support well-being, urban policies must foster sustainable practices by incorporating gender-sensitive and ecological urban planning, inclusive and rights-based approaches, active participation mechanisms, eco-friendly infrastructure and energy systems, and spaces that promote interaction. Additionally, it is essential to protect and enhance public spaces embedded in urban memory, cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible), fundamental urban rights and services, as well as local urban practices, ensuring their sustainability for the long term.

12. Transparency and Accountability

For local governments to build trust in urban life, they must ensure transparency and accountability in planning and implementing urban policies. By providing spaces for residents to oversee and evaluate municipal actions, local governments help foster a sense of responsibility toward the city among individuals and communities. Transparency and accountability also work to guarantee fair distribution of resources and services while preventing favoritism within urban governance.

How?

One of the essential factors for achieving well-being through urban policies is the transparency and accountability of local governments in their decisions and actions. Every piece of information, activity, and decision related to urban governance should be openly and clearly communicated to the public. Transparency and accountability are prerequisites for ensuring democratic participation in city policies. When residents are informed about decisions that affect urban life, it strengthens their sense of responsibility toward the city and enhances their capacity to hold local authorities accountable.

Transparency alone is insufficient; local governments must also prioritize

building residents' capacity to demand accountability. Residents should be seen not only as voters during election periods but as active stakeholders in daily urban governance. Local governments are responsible for guaranteeing transparency in all aspects of urban life, while residents can uphold accountability by monitoring municipal activities, participating actively in engagement mechanisms, and engaging in advocacy. This collaborative approach between local governance and community oversight contributes to a stronger sense of civic duty and fosters shared responsibility.

13. Equality and Coexistence

Adopting the values of equality and coexistence in urban policies lays the groundwork for establishing social well-being. This approach serves as a fundamental pillar, preventing divisive practices that urban policies might cause and strengthening the vision of a more just urban life.

How?

Local governments should embrace the principle that all residents are equal within their city, as stipulated in "citizenship rights," which define everyone as a "citizen of their place of residence." This

approach can be reinforced in urban policies to ensure that equality and coexistence are embedded in urban governance. Local governments hold the capacity to foster or hinder equality and co-living through the policies they enact. Thus, cultivating a culture of equality and coexistence is essential for establishing well-being within the city.

While past policies may have inadvertently eroded these values, leaning toward conflict, division, or polarization, the culture of coexistence is not foreign to Turkey. Local governments can revitalize this tradition by strengthening social cooperation through urban policies that embrace and reinforce collaborative practices. Initiatives that engage diverse groups, respect cultural differences, and encourage mutual understanding can effectively support a co-living culture, enabling a more resilient and inclusive urban community. By embedding equality into local governance, cities can cultivate an environment where all residents feel a shared responsibility and benefit from a collective sense of belonging.

The principle of equality and coexistence is essential in preventing all forms of discrimination. This perspective enables municipalities to envision and apply a model of interspecies coexistence that is not solely human-centered. If local governments actively promote these princi-

ples, society can recognize once more that city life is not only about living alongside those who are similar but also about coexisting with diverse beings. Such a framework encourages inclusivity for groups often marginalized under the label of “minorities,” such as migrants, people of various ethnic backgrounds and genders, individuals with disabilities, and animals, enabling them to be recognized as integral parts of urban society. By embedding the principles of equality and coexistence in urban life, municipalities can support relationships of “public friendship,”⁶⁷ fostering a shared culture of well-being where diverse groups come together to create a common, thriving environment. This culture contributes profoundly to social well-being and the shared pursuit of a good life, irrespective of differences.

Golden Valley Equity Plan
Golden Valley, Minnesota, United States

In 2016, the Golden Valley city administration joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) program to address and mitigate the inequalities and barriers faced by communities such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). As an outcome, the Equity Plan was launched in 2018, with primary goals to ensure economic well-being for all residents, promote active participation in urban decision-making, guarantee equal distribution of resources and services, and foster diversity and equality within the city. To support the plan’s implementation, the City Council established multiple working groups in 2019. The main components of the Equity Plan include: developing solutions to involve historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged

communities in the city’s procurement and hiring processes; providing equal economic opportunities to all residents, regardless of historical or socioeconomic background; offering equitable access to city services and resources to everyone, irrespective of social identity; taking concrete steps to support communities that have been deprived of essential needs like education, housing, and employment. The action plan outlines specific roles and responsibilities for transitioning to fairer policies, mandates training for city staff on cultural competency and unconscious bias, and includes regular data analysis to identify inequities. Additionally, to gather public feedback and promote equality, the city plans to hold neighborhood forums and community meetings regularly.

14. Restorative

For the well-being of urban life, it is crucial for local governments to initiate processes that recognize and address past injustices, missteps, and inequities. Adopting a restorative approach in urban policies requires collective efforts toward the care and regeneration of urban life, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and renewal across the community.

How?

Embracing well-being as an outcome of urban policies encourages a holistic integration of inclusivity, dialogue, accessibility, sustainability, active participation, a culture of coexistence, and a sense of belonging. It supports principles such

as rights- and community-based approaches, the right to use and benefit from urban spaces, public interest, transparency, accountability, and ecological and gender equity perspectives. When well-being becomes an integral part of urban policy, it redefines city policies beyond merely providing infrastructure. Given the existing destructive processes and harmful policies, urban life requires active care and restoration efforts. Addressing urban issues is no longer sufficient; it is essential to restore and heal the impacted aspects of urban life. Correcting ongoing and historical missteps in urban decision-making and mitigating their adverse effects are necessary steps toward building fairer cities.

The restorative approach also encompasses collective care relationships, and local governments bear responsibility for fostering these connections. Although practices of caregiving have been rendered invisible within capitalist and patriarchal social structures, they must be brought back into focus. Local governments should center questions such as, “How can we better care for ourselves, for life, for our cities, and for non-human beings?” Addressing this requires moving beyond a framework that separates humans from nature or views non-human beings as mere resources. Cities’ relationships with their environments must be reevaluated in this light. For instance, as cities increasingly become unsustainable and deteriorate

well-being, the trend of migration from urban to rural areas has intensified, leading to development pressures on rural spaces.

Instead of an urban model that exploits rural life, cities should be reimagined with consideration for non-human beings, agricultural production relations, and the well-being of rural areas. It's essential to recognize the interdependence of all entities in life and the ecosystem, extending an ethic of care and restoration beyond the human world. City policies that prioritize well-being need to adopt an approach of "looking after and repairing the Earth."⁶⁸

15. Resilient

In urban policies, resilience refers to the capacity to prepare for, adapt to, and respond to situations and changes such as disasters, pandemics, and rapid or sudden migration. Designing resilient urban policies involves reducing risk, danger, and damage factors, and facilitating a fair transition in response to changing conditions, ultimately promoting the well-being of communities in the future.

How?

Today, not only cities but the entire planet and all connected life are subject to the shifting impacts and damage of crises and disasters. Cities are both impacted by the-

se crises and, due to rapid, unplanned, and unequal urbanization dynamics, are often contributors to these crises. Under these conditions, building resilience within urban life—and, by extension, urban governance—has become essential. A resilient urban system is "one that can transform itself to continue providing essential services as conditions change." This entails an adaptive approach in urban policy that supports sustainable development and ensures continuity in the face of both gradual and sudden changes.⁶⁹

In Turkey, cities and the urban policies shaping city life are highly vulnerable to crises and disasters arising from events such as pandemics, wars, climate-induced extreme weather events, and earthquakes. This vulnerability stems not from the unpredictability or extraordinariness of these events but rather from the inability of urban policies to adequately respond to them. The loss of life from disasters and crises, the trauma endured by survivors, the struggles faced in maintaining day-to-day life, and the dynamics of marginalization and division that foster social conflict are all examples of how these events impact community well-being. Resilient policies developed by local governments at the community level can mitigate the negative effects that disasters and crises have on well-being.

Local governments must implement preparation, planning, and reinforcement measures "before" climate-related and seismic disasters occur. Building an ecologically and socially resilient urban life requires not only scaling down or slowing urban growth but also implementing initiatives aimed at "reversing the impacts of disaster-driven inequalities and socio-ecological injustices."⁷⁰ According to this approach, resilience involves acknowledging that the future may not be ideal or certain, but committing to reducing existing inequalities to make the world a more livable place.⁷¹ Enhancing resilience in urban life supports well-being. Including the community in preparedness efforts, and ensuring they understand and embrace preventative measures, builds public trust in local governance. It also fosters a sense of belonging, empowerment in influencing the city's future, and collective responsibility.

Conclusion

The *Guiding Principles for Ensuring Well-being in Cities* report aims to invite local governments to focus on well-being and the right to the city in shaping urban policies, while encouraging city residents and civil society actors to evaluate their cities through a lens of health and well-being.

This report sets forth guiding principles for local governments to integrate the health and well-being of the public into urban policy. By embedding well-being as a core value across all policies, these principles serve as a framework for assessing the impact of local government actions. Rather than offering a ready-made policy list, these guidelines are intended as a tool for measuring policy effectiveness and impact.

The report is grounded in the idea that health issues cannot be addressed solely through healthcare services, emphasizing the need for a well-being approach within urban policies. Rather than focusing on *what* municipalities should do, it aims to define a framework for discussing *how* actions should be taken. For instance, while increasing green spaces in a city may

seem beneficial for health and well-being, questions like “How will this affect existing social life and ecosystems?” and “How can everyone’s access rights to these spaces be ensured?” reveal the underlying layers that impact well-being. The report underscores that the process of policy and implementation design itself plays a role in influencing public well-being. It suggests that incorporating the proposed guiding principles into decision-making and policy development can help modify urban processes that negatively impact well-being and promote mechanisms, decisions, and policies that support it. Additionally, the report aspires to inspire civil society organizations to investigate and monitor the effects of local government policies on public health and well-being.



Endnotes

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