BONAVA

Homes & Neighbourhoods

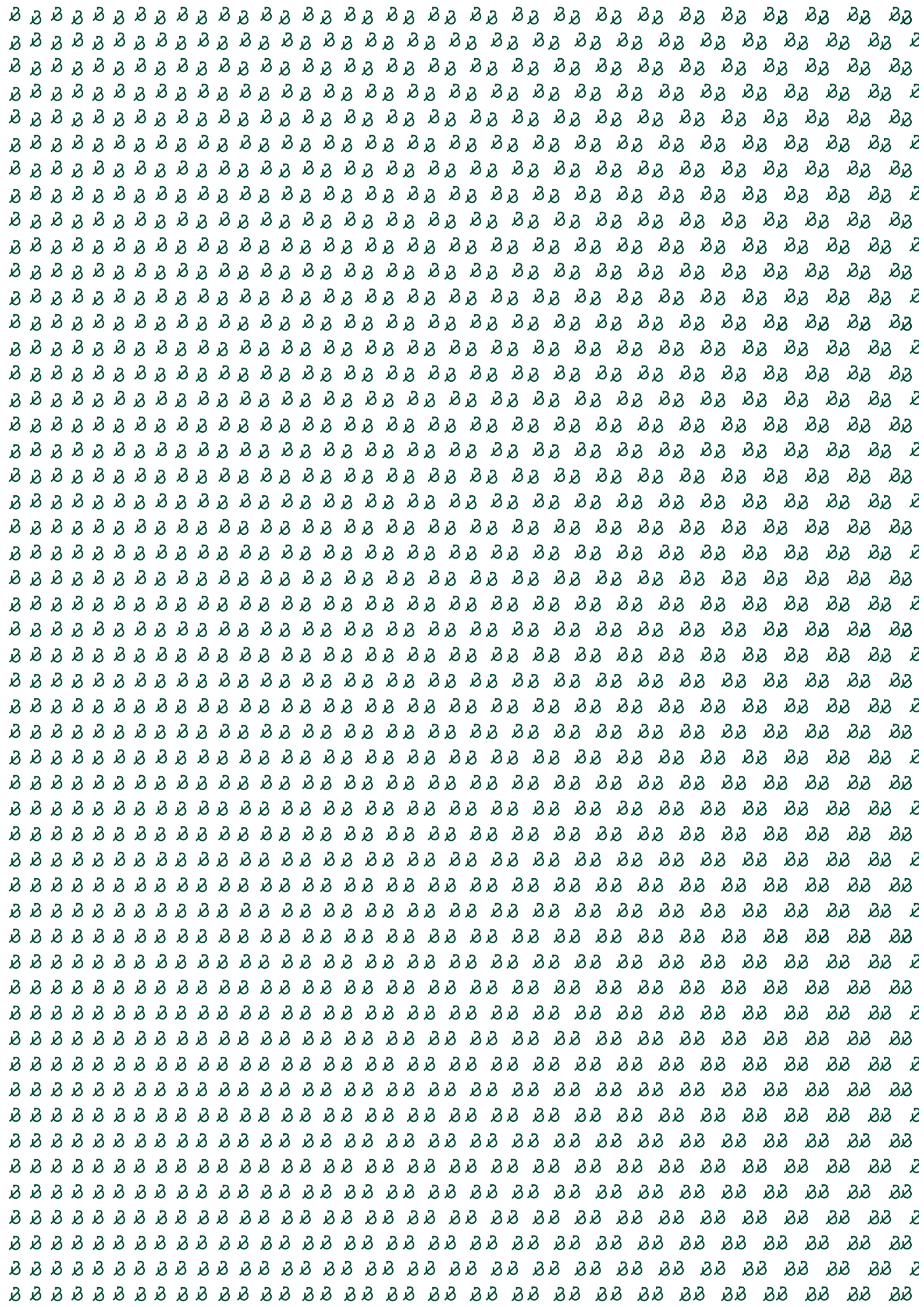# The Happy Neighbourhood Report 2019

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Our quest for happy neighbourhoods

For the last 50 years, society has been evolving at a rate previously unseen in human history. Post-industrialisation, globalisation, digitalisation – all have affected the way in which we communicate and relate to one another. With every technical advance, some social habits have been marginalised, which has had a profound effect on our state of mind, both as a group and as individuals. We may be richer, healthier, and better educated, but are we happier? And if not, why not?

At Bonava, we believe in happiness. Not purely as an abstract concept, but as a tangible quality to which we can aspire. In particular, we believe in happy neighbourhoods. When we look at the history of the last 50 years, we see a common thread running throughout – the decline of the neighbourhood.

Building methods and materials have evolved radically in recent years, but the philosophy of construction itself has not kept up. We have retained a mentality that designs buildings to protect us – to keep us private – but in doing so we have isolated ourselves. We need to rethink the very purpose of housing and the way in which we interrelate, not accepting the status quo but challenging ourselves to achieve more.

Neighbourhoods are not just a collection of houses – they constitute the very bonds that unite us, providing a context for us to interact, form friendships, exchange views, to live and to thrive. They are what people call home, and must therefore feel like home.

We're on a quest to understand how building the perfect neighbourhood can bring happiness to the many. As such, we started 'Happy Quest', an ongoing research project to discover what really brings happiness to people in their neighbourhoods – and how intelligent neighbourhood design can contribute to a fulfilled, healthy, and happy society. Above all, Happy Quest is about creating neighbourhoods that feel like home and that create a sense of belonging.

We'd like to share our findings with you.

The House of Happiness

At Bonava we're on a quest. Our goal? Happy Neighbourhoods. To create them, we must deeper understand what it means to be happy in a neighbourhood. We're therefore excited to introduce 'The House of Happiness' – a data-driven model that sets out the path to improvement.

Neighbourhoods matter

Your neighbourhood is your home. It is where you spend time with family and friends, meet new people and become part of a community. Your neighbourhood is where a good part of your free time is spent. As such, your neighbourhood plays a significant role in determining your happiness.

We're on a quest to design and build the happiest neighbourhoods in the world. To do so, we must first understand what makes a neighbourhood 'happy'. In 2017/18 – we asked about 8,000 people across our eight markets about their neighbourhoods: what they look like, what they wanted them to look like, and how happy they were in them. This led to the launch of the Happy Index, measuring the level of happiness across these neighbourhoods. The index is a way to measure our success and to make sure that our developments align with our quest. We also launched Bonava's Happy Neighbourhood Tool, designed to ensure that all our findings about what makes a neighbourhood happy are implemented across all our projects in a systematic and insight-driven way.

A happy neighbourhood means happy people

Among those who feel happiest in their neighbourhood

65%
feel very happy with life in general, while for people who are unhappy in their neighbourhood, only

23%
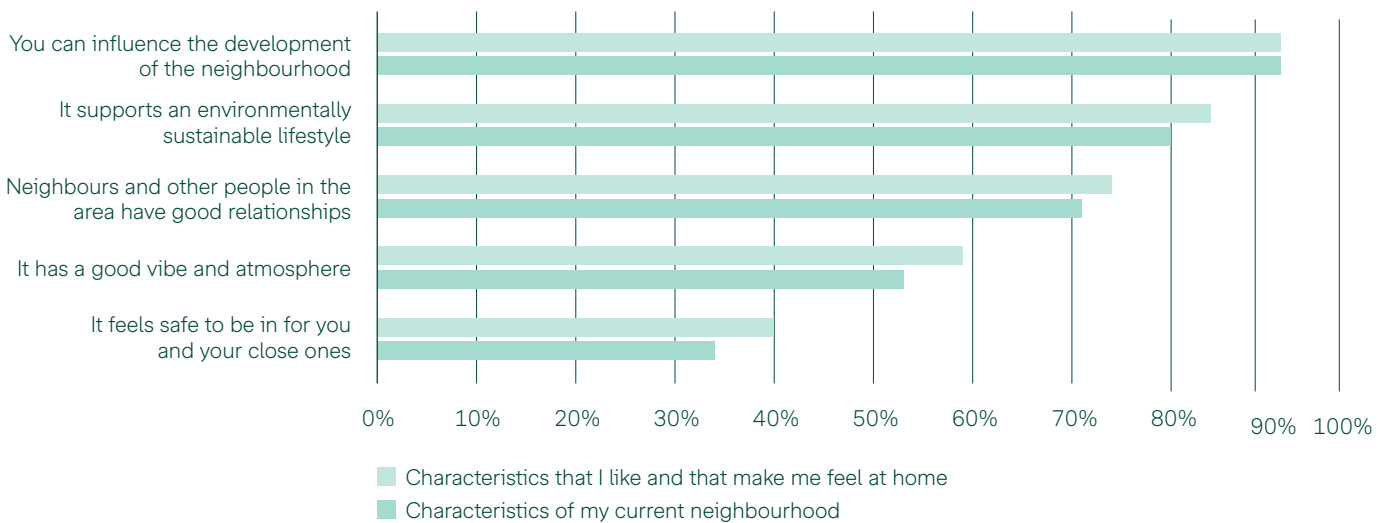feel very happy with life in general.

Tales of neighbourhood happiness

Now, in 2019, we've once again surveyed another 8,582 people across our 8 markets. The results indicate that achieving neighbourhood happiness is a gradual process. Factors contributing to neighbourhood unhappiness were daily irritants, such as distance from public transportation or grocery stores, or not having time to do laundry. Slightly happier respondents reported satisfaction with daily amenities but were instead missing the emotional benefits of culture and leisure activities in their neighbourhood. An even happier group had these functional and emotional elements in place, and therefore had a further set of aspirations – their needs were more social, with a desire to belong to the local community and to have a purpose in society.

People who are happy in their current neighbourhood long for a good vibe, good relations between neighbours and a sustainable lifestyle.

- You can influence the development of the neighbourhood
- It supports an environmentally sustainable lifestyle
- Neighbours and other people in the area have good relationships
- It has a good vibe and atmosphere
- It feels safe to be in for you and your close ones

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

- Characteristics that I like and that make me feel at home
- Characteristics of my current neighbourhood

People who are unhappy in their current neighbourhood do not only long for safety and a good vibe, but also functional needs such as being close to public transportation and grocery stores.

Characteristics that I like and that make me feel at home
Characteristics of my current neighbourhood
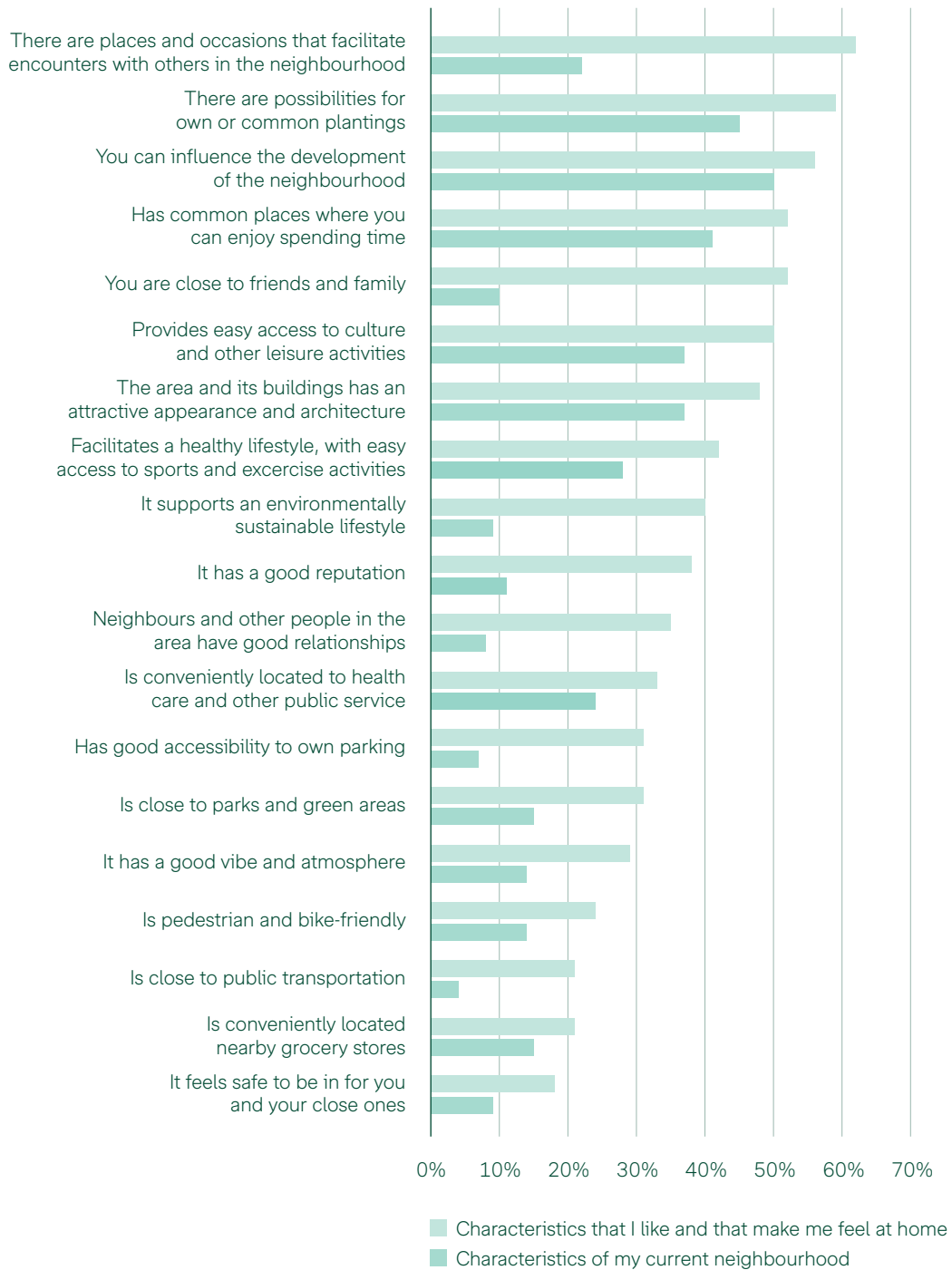
Introducing The House of Happiness

Our study indicated that neighbourhood happiness develops through a series of building blocks. This process is incremental, with each step building upon the previous one. In this sense, it relates to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a leading explanatory model for human development and motivation. Maslow's theory is visualised as a pyramid and defines human needs from the bottom up, ranging from basic to physiological to self-fulfilment. Each layer consists of a set of components that are necessary building blocks for the next layer.

The same principle applies to happiness in neighbourhoods, so we created a four-floored virtual house that we named The House of Happiness. The house defines happy neighbourhoods in terms of four elements: functional, emotional, community, and purpose. This report will follow the logic of the house floors from the bottom up, with each chapter discussing one floor.

Functional elements of a neighbourhood:

Functional needs in a neighbourhood are essential requirements in Bonava's markets in 2019. Functional needs are defined as factors that enable a hassle-free lifestyle. Their value derives from a combination of a neighbourhood's functional elements such as transportation, healthcare, nutrition, location, and education.

Emotional elements of a neighbourhood:

Once functional needs are satisfied, emotional needs take precedence and dominate behaviour. Emotional needs enable a healthy lifestyle, with their value deriving from a combination of factors such as personal safety, emotional safety, health and well-being, and access to nature, culture and leisure activities.
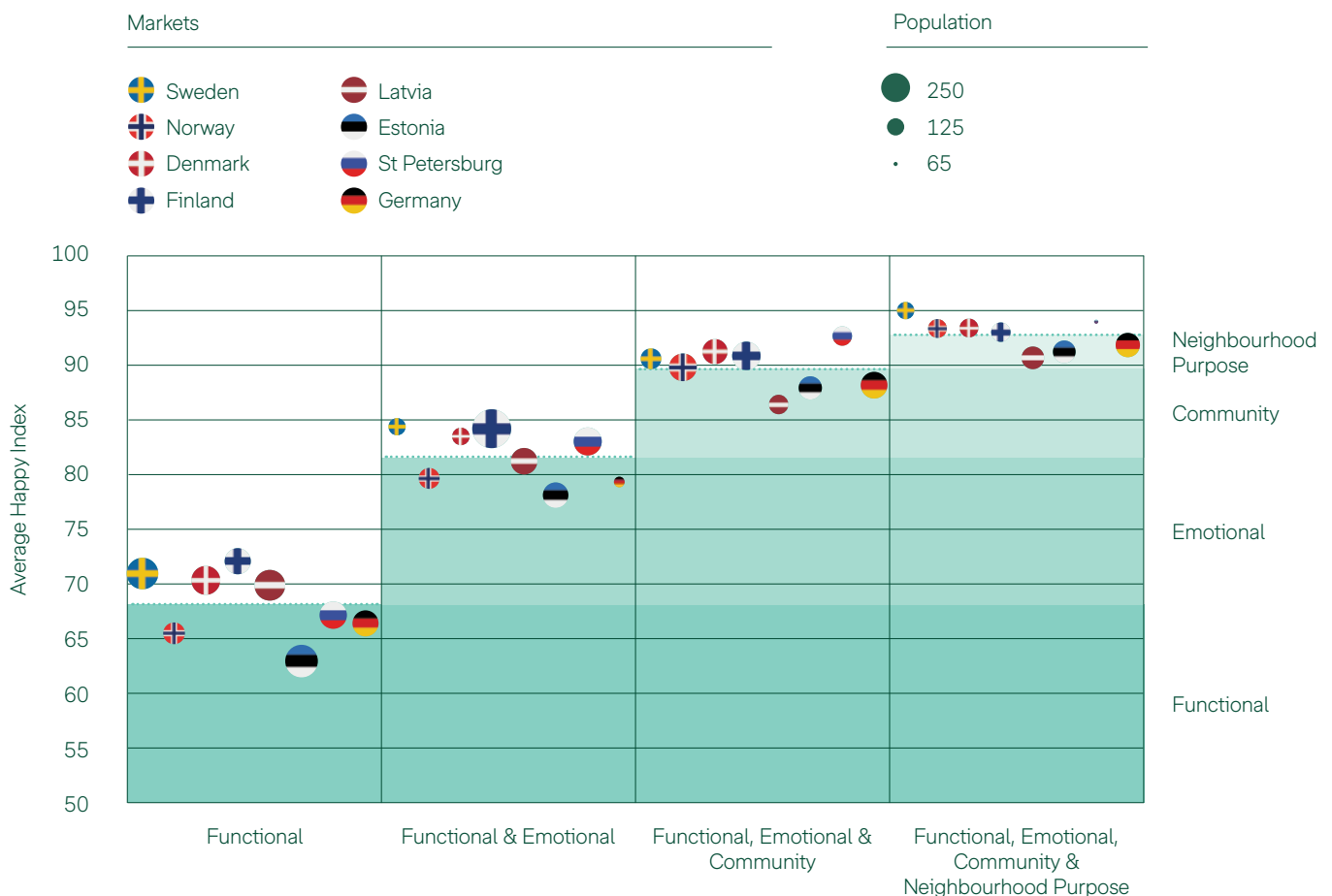
Community elements of a neighbourhood:

Fulfilled functional and emotional needs allow a shift of focus to the third level. This layer comprises interpersonal values and a sense of belonging. Satisfying these community needs enables a social lifestyle, the value deriving from a combination of community elements such as friendships, family, love, and a sense of belonging.
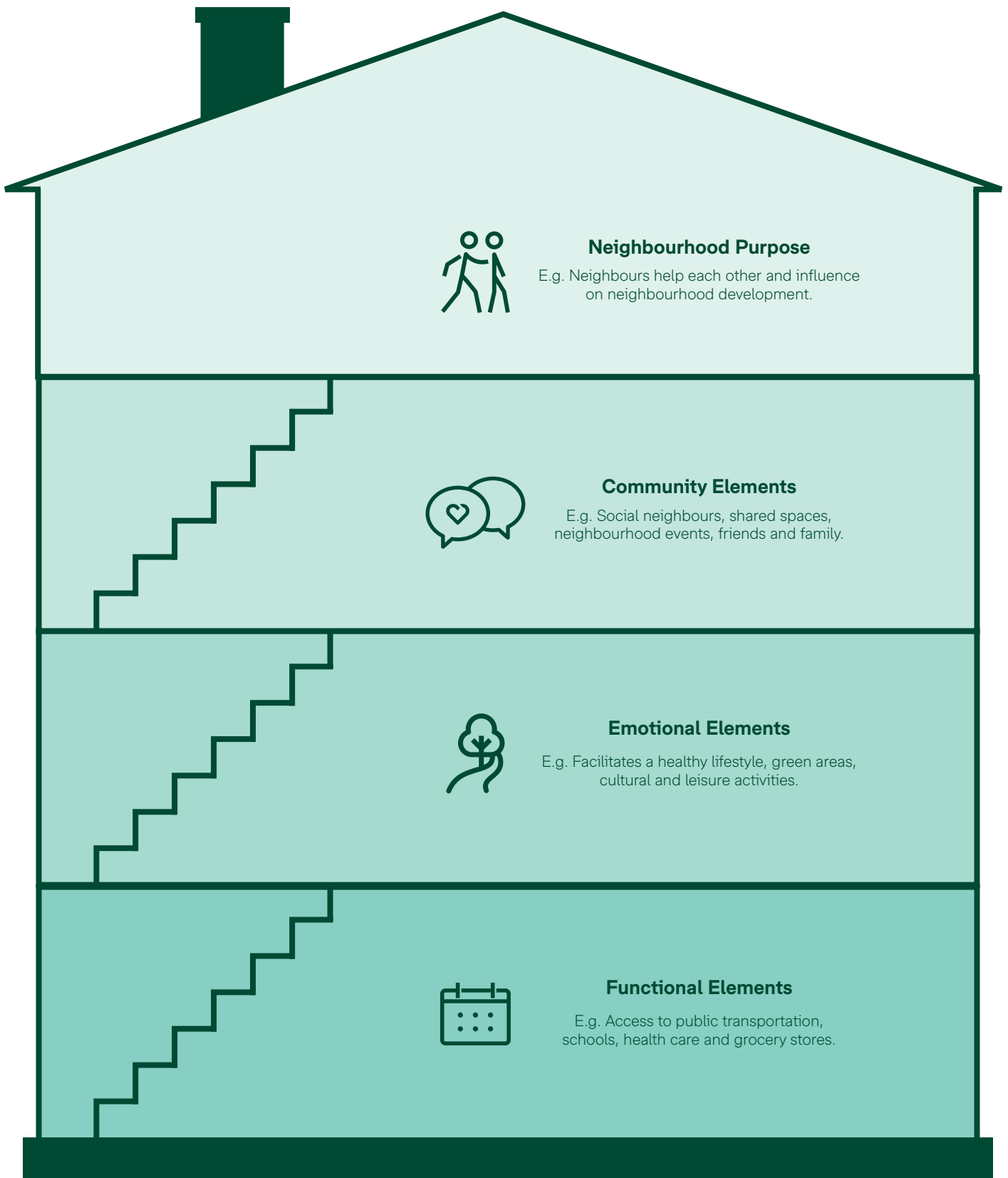
Neighbourhood Purpose:

Once a neighbourhood satisfies the requirements of the first three levels, the fourth and final level of neighbourhood needs becomes even less individual and more interpersonal. This level relates to purpose creation – having an impact on others as well as on the community. Here, a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood leads to an ability to create such a sense for others. The purpose layer enables self-transcendence, its value deriving from a combination of elements such as helping others, living environmentally friendly, and contributing to a better neighbourhood. The most important element for neighbourhoods reaching this level is the creation of purpose. In these neighbourhoods, individuals feels that their actions have a positive impact on the community.

Each layer builds on questions from our study. Through the data, we identified four groups, helping us examine and compare happiness levels across neighbourhoods that met one, two, three or all four different layers of The House of Happiness. The four layers and the questions supporting each layer were identified through studying what enabled the next layer. For example, and to our surprise, feeling safe in a neighbourhood is not a basic need in 2019 but rather the foundation and a catalyst for a social neighbourhood. The result indicated that the more layers a neighbourhood fulfilled, the higher the level of neighbourhood happiness. This was true for all our markets.

The House of Happiness

Neighbourhood Purpose

E.g. Neighbours help each other and influence on neighbourhood development.

Community Elements

E.g. Social neighbours, shared spaces, neighbourhood events, friends and family.

Emotional Elements

E.g. Facilitates a healthy lifestyle, green areas, cultural and leisure activities.

Functional Elements

E.g. Access to public transportation, schools, health care and grocery stores.

Happy neighbourhoods
need four elements

The House of Happiness is useful in two ways. One, it is visual proof that building neighbourhoods requires a bottom up approach. Building on a solid foundation, a neighbourhood should enable fulfilment on every level of the house. Second, it informs our Happy Index as a guide that can show us how to build neighbourhoods with the best possible prerequisites for happiness. Through The House of Happiness, we've also learned that building happy neighbourhoods is about more than physical design. Happiness in neighbourhoods builds on hierarchical structure in which physiological, emotional, and social structures all play important roles at different stages but are all equally important in the final equation. Employing The House of Happiness model lets us be smarter in how we develop our neighbourhoods. It also expands our role from housing developers to developers of something greater. We lay the foundation for health, relationships, communities, a sense of belonging and become a catalyst for purpose creation. We're not driving this change but are laying the groundwork for neighbourhoods in which people can thrive and be happy.

"Happiness is not a goal, but a lifestyle and a routine where you, for example, always need to see to your most basic needs: get enough sleep, eat healthily and exercise on a regular basis. Don't do one meaningful thing, but live a meaningful life. Let flow, play and social interactions be a part of your routine. Happiness is not a quick fix, but a way of life."
–Sabina Renck, positive psychology expert

In this report we will share the findings of our quest for happy neighbourhoods. We'll look at the Happy Quest quantitative results from people living across our eight markets, research, and literary reviews. We'll also look at qualitative interviews with the following experts and examine their views on our findings, alongside their own conclusions.

The experts

Ina Remmers,
Co-founder of German digital neighbourhood
network Nebenan

Nebenan.de is a Cyberhood network that helps
neighbours to connect in real life. Through
the website, residents can communicate,
plan and share both items and experiences.
Remmers sees digitalisation as an opportunity to
decrease loneliness and increase happiness in
neighbourhoods.

Kyle McKinley,
Program Manager of The Belonging Project at
Stanford University

McKinley is leading "The Belonging Project at
Stanford" - a broadly-engaged, multidimensional
effort to promote emotional health and personal
well-being through connection with the communi-
ties of the campus, as a sense of belonging is crucial
for satisfaction with life on campus.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,
Distinguished Professor of Psychology
and Management,
Founder and Co-Director, QLRC

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is Claremont Graduate
University's Distinguished Professor of Psychology
and Management. He is also the founder and
co-director of the Quality of Life Research Center
QLRC, a non-profit research institute that studies
positive psychology, the study of human strengths
such as optimism, creativity, intrinsic motivation,
and responsibility. He is well-known for recognizing
and naming the psychological concept Flow.

Sabina Renck,
Coach, speaker, podcaster and commissioner for
Global Happiness Organization

Positive psychology expert working as a personal
development coach. Renck also co-founded and
ran the first ever happiness science podcast "På tal
om lycka" that invited scientists and researchers to
discuss the different aspects of happiness.

Scott Cloutier,
Senior Sustainability Scientist, Julie Ann Wrigley
Global Institute of Sustainability and Assistant
Professor, School of Sustainability

Cloutier is a teaching professor on the subject of
happiness and well-being in neighbourhoods. Scott
currently leads the Sustainable neighbourhoods for
Happiness™ (SNfH) project – a multi-year research,
teaching and applied sustainability solutions effort
to improve neighbourhood well-being and the
happiness of residents living therein.

Tim McCarthy,
Managing principal, Hart Howerton

Hart Howerton is a team of planners, architects,
landscape architects and interior designers
headquartered in New York and San Francisco.
McCarthy is leading corporate research into healthy
neighbourhoods and has established 9 design
principles for success in their creation.

Everyday convenience

In The House of Happiness, we've identified the four layers of needs required to maximise a neighbourhood's happiness. To reach the higher levels, lower ones must first be satisfied. In order to live a happy life, it is therefore crucial that practical routines are first established. Functional convenience is the cornerstone when building happy neighbourhoods – but it has the strongest effect on happiness when combined with emotional and social aspects.

Practical and emotional needs

There is no normal everyday life – there are as many variations as there are people. We do however know that everyday requirements such as having time for laundry, cooking and cleaning are universal. These are what we call functional needs. Incorporating these into everyday life is essential for building a solid foundation for health and happiness.

In our study, we found that the least happy group struggled more with functional activities than happier groups did. Being unable to juggle daily life can be frustrating, especially at a time when services in general are becoming simpler and more effective as a result of digital innovation. Functionality is taken for granted in 2019 and being unable to manage daily tasks can feel like failure.

Although not struggling with practical activities does increase well-being, it should be regarded more as a necessary foundation for happiness, upon which to build. The next layers in The House of Happiness cover emotional and social needs. Our study indicates that these are increasingly becoming part of everyday life and that there is a growing need to fit them into the weekly life puzzle. Nowadays, people worry more about having time for activities that promote self-actualisation, rather than running errands and organising their children's free time. Four of the top five everyday tasks that cause anxiety when not achieved relate to social and emotional activities.

Everyday convenience is the foundation of happiness
Q: Which of the following things do you struggle to fit in to your everyday life?

Legend:
- Very happy in general
- Unhappy in general
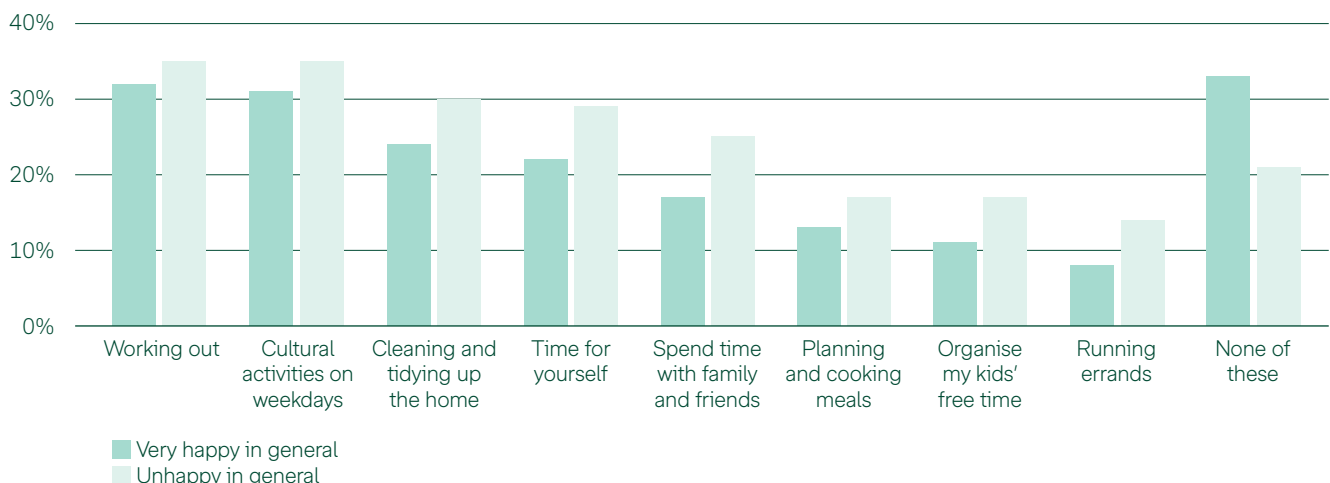
The asset-based approach to convenience

For everyday convenience to generate happiness in 2019, it should address not just functional but also emotional needs. Across our 8 markets, emotional needs (having time for culture and creativity) can be considered universal. However, every neighbourhood is different – there are several variations within each of these emotional activities and therefore the solutions will be similarly varied. Neighbourhood professor Scott Cloutier explains the importance of creating tailored solutions for each neighbourhood by introducing the asset-based approach, where solutions are less generic and more contextual:

"It's all about going into a community and identifying a community's assets rather than its problems. It's sustainable to take this problem-oriented approach that boils back to the idea that anything you see in the world is just a mirror of ourselves. So, this asset-based approach goes into a community asking – What are the assets of the community?"

The asset-based approach incorporates neighbourhood needs without compromising already existing resources and principles. How can we use this to enhance satisfaction with functional, emotional and social needs in neighbourhoods? Our study shows overlapping interest for emotional and social activities and sharing. The same chores that people are anxious to fit into daily life are the same things that people prefer to share with others. A shared neighbourhood gym, communal rooms for social activities, a workshop, planting areas and more – these are the perfect solutions when it comes to satisfying emotional and social needs in everyday life.

Diversifying the range of activities

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a renowned psychology professor with special expertise in happiness and the benefits of practicing skills. Like professor Cloutier, Csikszentmihalyi highlights the importance of diverse activities when appealing to individual differences. While Cloutier assumes that expertise and interest already exist in the neighbourhood, Csikszentmihalyi states that it is also crucial to encourage new interests:
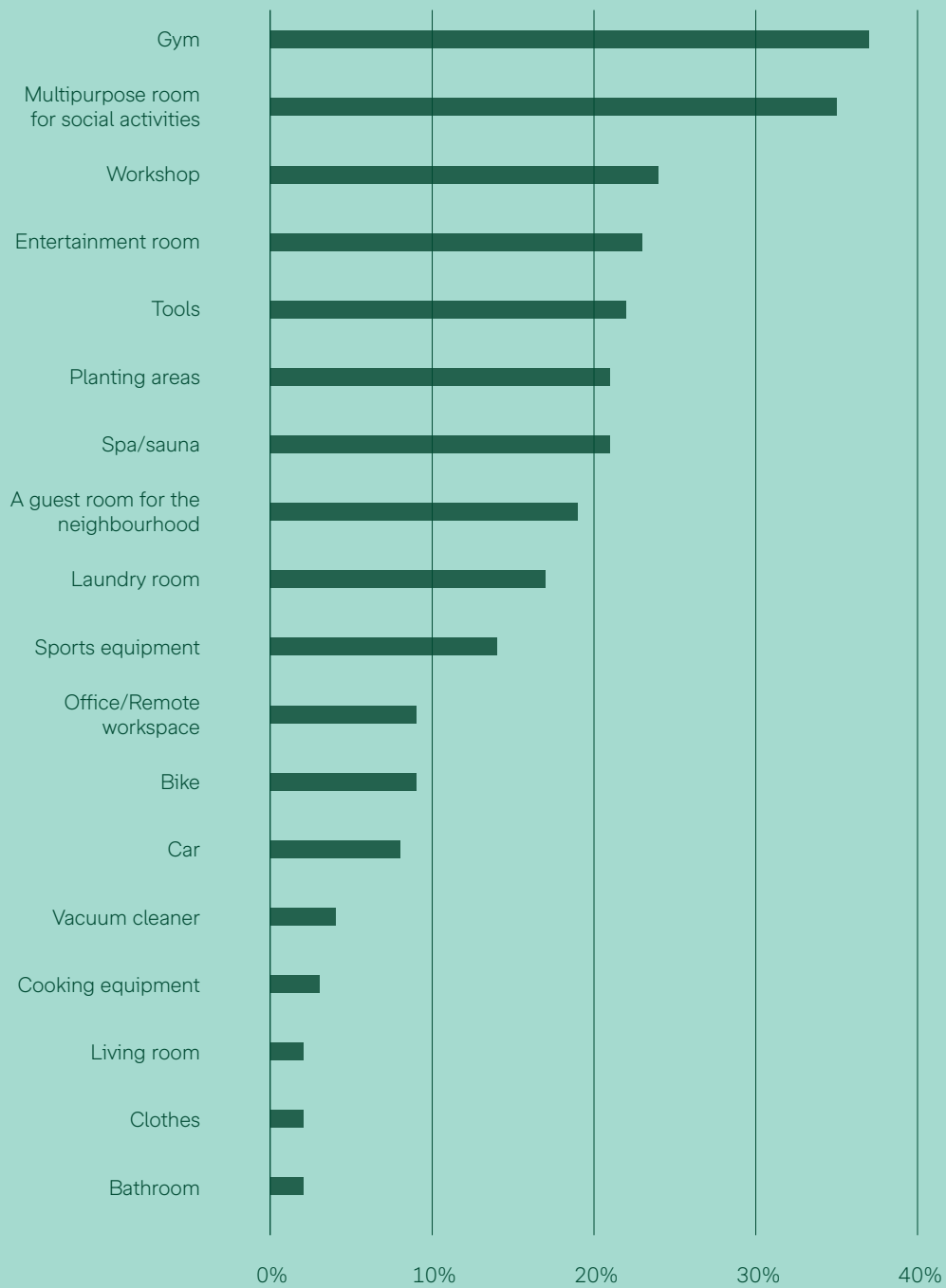
" Nowadays, a good neighbourhood is where you can do art and sports and theatre, and you end up practising a few different skills – I think that what we aspire to, is to have cities which are sufficiently differentiated."

By enabling a variety of hobbies and activities, a neighbourhood can increase the likelihood of satisfying everyday needs for the many.

People want to share emotional and social spaces rather than functional ones
Q: Which of the following options would you be interested to share
with people who live in your neighbourhood?

Category	Percentage
Gym	
Multipurpose room for social activities	
Workshop	
Entertainment room	
Tools	
Planting areas	
Spa/sauna	
A guest room for the neighbourhood	
Laundry room	
Sports equipment	
Office/Remote workspace	
Bike	
Car	
Vacuum cleaner	
Cooking equipment	
Living room	
Clothes	
Bathroom	

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Run your errands then run for fun

Ideally, neighbourhoods should be environments that encourage a smooth and pleasant everyday life. They must primarily make it easy for people to satisfy functional needs. Running errands, doing grocery shopping and laundry are universal tasks that few can avoid – having these facilities in place is taken for granted. Time spent on these activities, however, is ideally very short, since focus can then shift to emotional activities. Emotional activities can boost happiness to a level that simply meeting functional needs cannot.
In The House of Happiness, moving up a level from meeting purely functional needs requires a neighbourhood that enables individuals to actualise their interests and hobbies. Whether it is training for a marathon, planting cactuses or developing a passion for art, non-functional activities elevate a sense of happiness. Since every neighbourhood is unique, the activities and solutions that fulfil emotional and social needs must also vary.

Holistic health

To be healthy is to be happy.
Contemporary neighbourhood happiness
is complex – to better understand it we
must approach it in a holistic manner,
incorporating all four levels of
The House of Happiness.

Health status 2019: It is holistic

Today, health is often synonymous with happiness. Health and happiness are rising on the public agenda, with a healthy life frequently considered equally or even more important than financial and professional success. There is, however, a factor historically missing from the happiness equation: healthy neighbourhoods. Home is where the heart is – and from where health and happiness spring.

How to be happy? Conventional health recommendations often involve breaking unhealthy habits and creating better ones. Although regular visits to the gym and a balanced diet are important building blocks for good health, there is more to it. We know that people adapt to their surroundings, meaning that behaviour is often formed by copying the lifestyles of those around us. This is why neighbourhoods are so important in developing happiness. We are experiencing an era in which people aim at elevating their physical and mental well-being to a level far beyond that required for simple medical stability. What role can neighbourhoods play?

Healthy environments, happy lives

Hart Howerton is a market leader for healthy neighbourhood development in the US. The company's architects, planners, landscape architects, and interior designers have brought an interdisciplinary perspective – "Designing Complete Environments" – to some of the world's most sensitive environments. Managing Principal at Hart Howerton, Tim McCarthy, explains that their design considerations are a natural response to the holistic development of health:

"People are increasingly recognising that health is a much more integrated conversation and that all of those historically separated modalities of health and well-being, which include mental health, spiritual health and mindfulness, all of those things are collapsing into the same conversation. Naturally, we need to learn from this development and use it when designing our neighbourhoods."

To level up their expertise on the subject of healthy neighbourhoods, 2014 saw Hart Howerton initiating a collaboration with the Centre for Design and Health at the University of Virginia. This resulted in a report consisting of 9 design principles that promote health and happiness in neighbourhoods. These now provide a guide for each new neighbourhood project that Hart Howerton leads.

9 design principles that promote health and happiness in neighbourhoods

1) **Smart location.** Locate new development near existing development or infrastructure, especially transit.

2) **Nature is integrated.** Preserve sensitive and natural habitats within and around the community. Integrate natural areas with the larger open space network.

3) **Mix uses.** Provide a mixture of uses that satisfies different needs and social groups within a relatively compact area.

4) **Mix it up.** Create residential developments that include a variety of housing types and tenure. Encourage attainable housing for all community members of all backgrounds and ages.

5) **Circulation alternatives.** Offer alternatives to driving.

6) **Pride of place.** Provide a variety and range of linked gathering places to promote enabling environments for social interaction and activity.

7) **Provide access to healthy foods.** Encourage healthy eating habits by establishing nearby farms, integrating demonstration gardens and providing healthy shopping at farmers' market or corner stores.

8) **Enable lifelong learning.** Foster opportunities for intellectual growth and exchange over the course of life, including the provision of educational facilities within walking distance of residences.

9) **Sustainable development.** Integrate sustainable development at all scales, including urban form, mix and location of uses, walking networks, sustainable infrastructure, social programs and building technologies.

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Natural happiness, naturally

Our neighbourhood study shows similar results that also support this holistic view of health. When describing characteristics of a residential area that people believe best enable a healthy lifestyle, access to gyms or a balanced diet did not appear in the top three. Instead, proximity to nature, a quiet environment, and proximity to water took the top spots. Further investigation of our study indicates that the presence of natural elements in a neighbourhood has a positive impact on both physical and mental well-being.
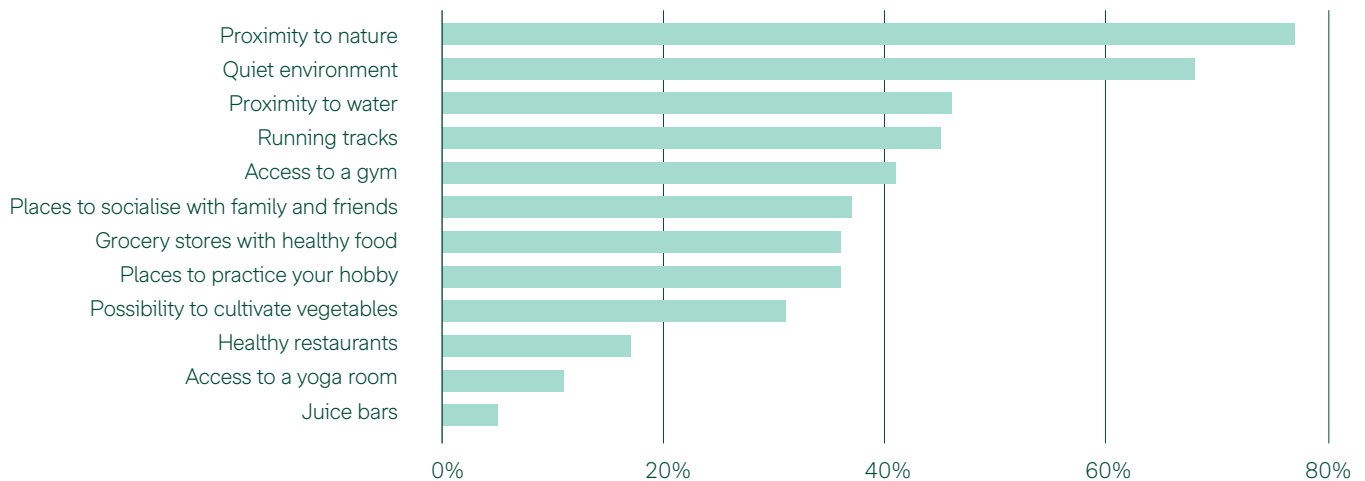
The issue of nature might seem surprising in a discussion of health but judging by our study's results, its importance is only increasing. The topic of nature and well-being has in fact received enough attention to earn its own term: Biophilia. Biophilic frontrunner

Terrapin Bright Green states that Biophilic design can reduce stress, enhance creativity and clarity of thought, improve our well-being and expedite healing. It is about recognizing the effect that the presence of natural elements such as greenery, water and organic shapes has on human well-being. According to McCarthy, nature in neighbourhoods is important for improved brain activity:

"[...] in the context of how we as a society measure progress, things are changing from a quantitative-based measurement, to a qualitative-based measurement and along those lines, being in a natural environment helps to improve the quality of cognitive thought."

Healthy neighbourhoods are green, blue and quiet

Q: Which of the following do you think are characteristics of a residential area that enable a healthy lifestyle?

Characteristic	Value
Proximity to nature	~76%
Quiet environment	~68%
Proximity to water	~45%
Running tracks	~44%
Access to a gym	~41%
Places to socialise with family and friends	~36%
Grocery stores with healthy food	~35%
Places to practice your hobby	~35%
Possibility to cultivate vegetables	~31%
Healthy restaurants	~17%
Access to a yoga room	~11%
Juice bars	~5%

Proximity to parks and green areas increases both physical and mental well-being

Among those who feel most satisfied with their mental well-being,

74%

live close to parks and green areas, while for those who are least satisfied with their mental well-being, only

57%

live close to parks and green areas.

Among those who feel most satisfied with their physical well-being,

75%

live close to parks and green areas, while for those who are least satisfied with their mental well-being, only

61%

live close to parks and green areas.

Designing for holistic health

Our own study and the experts concur – it seems certain that physical environments can in fact improve health. This implies that neighbourhoods should be able to do the same. Our study shows that people who live in neighbourhoods that facilitate a healthy lifestyle are more satisfied with both their mental and physical well-being.

Healthy neighbourhoods expert Tim McCarthy is confident that physical and mental well-being correlate and that this

is probably why the 9 design principles have proven to be so successful. A neighbourhood that encourages healthier lifestyles will foster physical well-being – as a result, it is more likely to report healthier mental fitness.

Free time activities are another happiness factor that require some material support from the neighbourhood. In our study, this happiness component relies on accessibility to culture and other leisure

activities that improve the quality of life. A lack of experiences that engage people creatively seems to correlate with lower degrees of happiness. For improved mental well-being in neighbourhoods, it is hence beneficial if people are given the opportunity to observe, participate, or create something themselves on a regular basis. This raises emotional satisfaction and enables individuals to climb higher in The House of Happiness.

A neighbourhood that facilitates a healthy lifestyle improves both mental and physical well-being

Legend:
- Satisfied with physical well-being
- Satisfied with mental well-being

Healthy neighbourhoods are holistic

Legend:
- Very satisfied with mental well-being
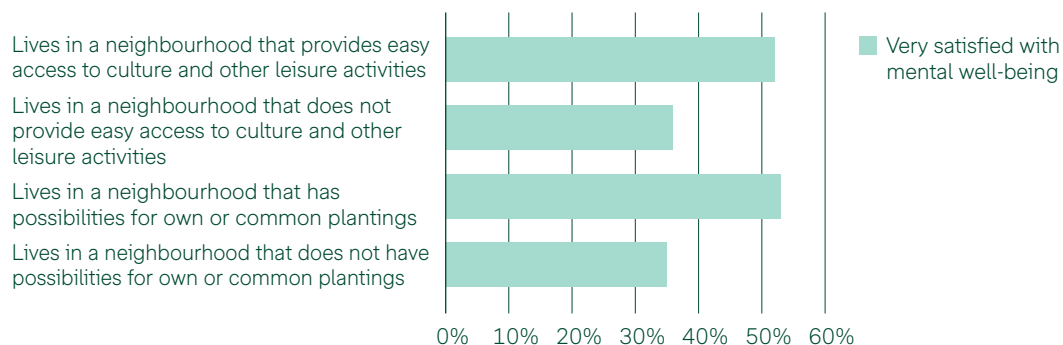
Holistic health goes beyond emotional needs

As health is becoming an increasingly holistic issue, synonymous with both happiness and well-being, it is no longer only a purely emotional need, but rather reaches through all floors in The House of Happiness. To feel healthy, physical and mental well-being are important factors, but they are also connected to satisfying community needs and the need for a purpose.

Loneliness

Historically we have designed neighbourhoods with all four floors of The House of Happiness in place but in modern times we have neglected the last two layers. In a world where social isolation and loneliness is on the rise, the neighbourhood provides the perfect place to turn the trend around, increasing togetherness and happiness using the tools from the top two floors in The House of Happiness.

To be lonely is to be far from neighbours

The concept of loneliness first emerged in the 16th century as a way of describing people who had strayed too far from society. This was considered dangerous, since they could no longer be placed under the protection that the neighbourhood provided. Interestingly, one 17th century glossary defined 'loneliness' as being 'far from neighbours'.

In the 21st century, loneliness is a widespread issue that is classified as one of our most serious public health problems. Loneliness is strongly linked to depression, sick leave, and suicide. Loneliness alone costs the Swedish Government 13 billion SEK per year, and in Germany two thirds of the population perceive their country as having major problems with loneliness. Political responses to the issue are now being seen as an attempt to tackle the problem, the UK parliament appointed the world's first Minister of Loneliness in 2018.

Building loneliness

This trend of mounting loneliness has various causes, often related to urbanisation and digitalisation. There is also the cultural legacy of war, with house design being predicated upon protection rather than socialisation. Neighbourhood professor Scott Cloutier explains how we have become captivated by historical constructions:

> "[...] and about the walls around our houses. They were built in the time during the Cold War and shortly after WWII when everyone was a little scared of the idea of who was looking at them and who could see them when they were outside. So what we designed back then is a lot of places that intentionally isolate us, and now we're actually suffering from it because we're isolated from the communities that we're a part of."

So, if the design of our buildings communicates that neighbours are not to be trusted, how does this affect social interaction? Increased loneliness and decreased interaction between neighbours are two trends that have developed simultaneously. It is fair to claim a link between the two, since encounters with neighbours have a greater effect on well-being than people think. Scott Cloutier, neighbourhood happiness professor at Arizona School of Sustainability, explains that neighbours tend to have a positive effect upon us, simply because our brains are biologically programmed to believe that the neighbourhood is crucial for survival. Prior to the modern era, neighbourhoods provided a social security net for rural societies. Neighbours looked after each other's livestock and shared food in difficult harvest times. These basic social constructions were necessary in order for society to function.

Neighbourhood isolation does indeed make people lonelier and less happy. Hart Howerton's Tim McCarthy also advocates against the tendency for senior citizens to lead solitary lifestyles, as it increases the risk of alcoholism and obesity. Amongst younger neighbours, Cloutier believes that smartphones are partly responsible for decreased daily interaction:

> "Part of the problem is that we spend so much time in our heads. So much time just processing mentally what is next and then we have phones and other technologies that can keep us locked into that. We're not really thinking about how we connect and why we should connect."

Even though no one factor is solely responsible for making people lonelier, it is important to understand how multifaceted the issue really is. Only with greater knowledge can we confidently pave the way for improvement.

Paving the way for social neighbourhoods

We need to disregard what defensively designed buildings encourage us to do and instead socialise with (and trust) those around us more. While the negative effects of loneliness are obvious, we have found that neighbours are a powerful tool in their prevention. Our neighbourhood research suggests that interaction with neighbours, and neighbourhoods that have places and occasions that facilitate encounters with others, are happier places.

Perhaps the solution to loneliness is literally just around the corner.

Building communities

Every layer of The House of Happiness so far has increasingly focused on social needs. Today, a sociable everyday life is becoming increasingly important and socialising in general an essential ingredient for holistic health. The third layer in The House of Happiness examines this topic and discusses how to build successful communities with a solid sense of belonging.

A social solution

Given that loneliness is rising and neighbourhood interaction is decreasing, we face a choice. We can either continue to delve into the negative effects that these two trends have on physical and mental well-being or contribute to a solution. We know that neighbourhoods with greater social interaction do in general produce happier people. Concurrently, positive emotions have great potential to spread and proliferate in neighbourhoods, as happiness expert Sabina Renck explains:

"Emotions and happiness spread effectively through networks, disregarding the fact that relations may be distant or very personal. Neighbours can sometimes have an even greater effect on happiness than close friends living far away, simply because you see them every day."

To understand how social interaction between neighbours can be encouraged, we must first understand what enables it. According to our House of Happiness, both functional and emotional needs must be satisfied.

A social neighbourhood is a happy neighbourhood

In neighbourhoods where neighbours and other people in the area have good relationships

63%

are very happy with life in general, while in neighbourhoods where neighbours do not have good relationships, only

30%

are happy with life in general.

Foundations of a community

Feelings of safety are vital for socialisation to occur. Scott Cloutier, Happy Neighbourhood Professor at the Arizona School of Sustainability, agrees that a lack of physiological safety hinders social connection:

"Safety is obviously super important for connection and social connectedness. I think the idea of safety is that if you feel safe and your body is telling you that you are safe – you're going to feel like you're able to go out and connect."

When the body is signalling a 'lack of safety', one is simply not able to go out and connect. Safety is also about psychological safety, i.e. there is no threat to you simply because of who you are as a person. Therefore, welcoming diverse backgrounds and values becomes as crucial in neighbourhoods as it is in any community. The Belonging Project at Stanford University is an initiative to increase the sense of belonging at campus, aimed at driving an increased sense of well-being and happiness. Program manager Kyle McKinley argues that safety is an important keyword. In the project, they aim at creating an environment that allows and encourages

people to be themselves and express their values. Their level of safety should not be contingent upon aspects of social identity.

With this element of safety in place, something else is still missing. In order for people to socialise, there must also exist some common ground that supports reciprocal exchange of values and conversation. This could be the neighbourhood itself – and the fact that the people in the neighbourhood have chosen the same place to spend their lives. Cloutier believes this to be a catalyst for neighbourhood relationships to emerge:

"Belonging to a place where
everyone has chosen to
be is a hugely important
connector."

Overlapping activities create purpose

In addition to sharing a physical space, overlapping activities raise the probability of a social neighbourhood and sense of belonging. McKinley explains this in terms of 'belonging to several domains'. In this context, a domain refers to a field or cluster of activities that binds people together due to aligned interests. Relevant examples could be gardening, history or cooking. For people in social communities, it is important that the sense of belonging bridges several domains, so as to decrease fragility if one domain were to change or disappear, as well as to increase happiness and a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

Much of the Belonging Project's work therefore centres on spreading the sense of belonging across many different domains and aspects of life. Even if you don't feel part of a larger group or context, there will be other interests and hobbies within that context to fill that gap. Creating overlapping domains of belonging also facilitates contact with other domains of belonging, where you can interact with new people.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, professor and positive psychologist, agrees and underlines the conviction that it is essential that a neighbourhood provides possibilities for people to develop skills through activities. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that the essence of a neighbourhood is as a place for human skills to be developed and shared with others:

> **"When people use their skills it makes them feel happier. So, a neighbourhood that has a lot of natural challenges like places to sprint, to run, to climb, would appeal to young people who have developed those skills – having the opportunity to use those skills is important to them. To others it may be to sing or paint, and others will not have found their skill yet, so the neighbourhood should be a place to find new skills as well."**

To illustrate the potential of overlapping skills and activities, just imagine the magic of combined knowledge. The merging of two separate fields often proves successful when solving complex problems. Social contexts are no different. An example of how overlapping domains can contribute to neighbourhoods is the trend of 'plogging'. It is a mixture of the Swedish words for jogging and picking up trash, and the activity is doing just that. Working out is often solely of benefit to the individual, but in combination with a sustainable interest, can become an action for a better neighbourhood and natural environment. McKinley also describes this as an opportunity for individuals to express values and actualise their aspirations:

> **"If you provide spaces for people to express themselves in their communities then that becomes a place of belonging in their community."**
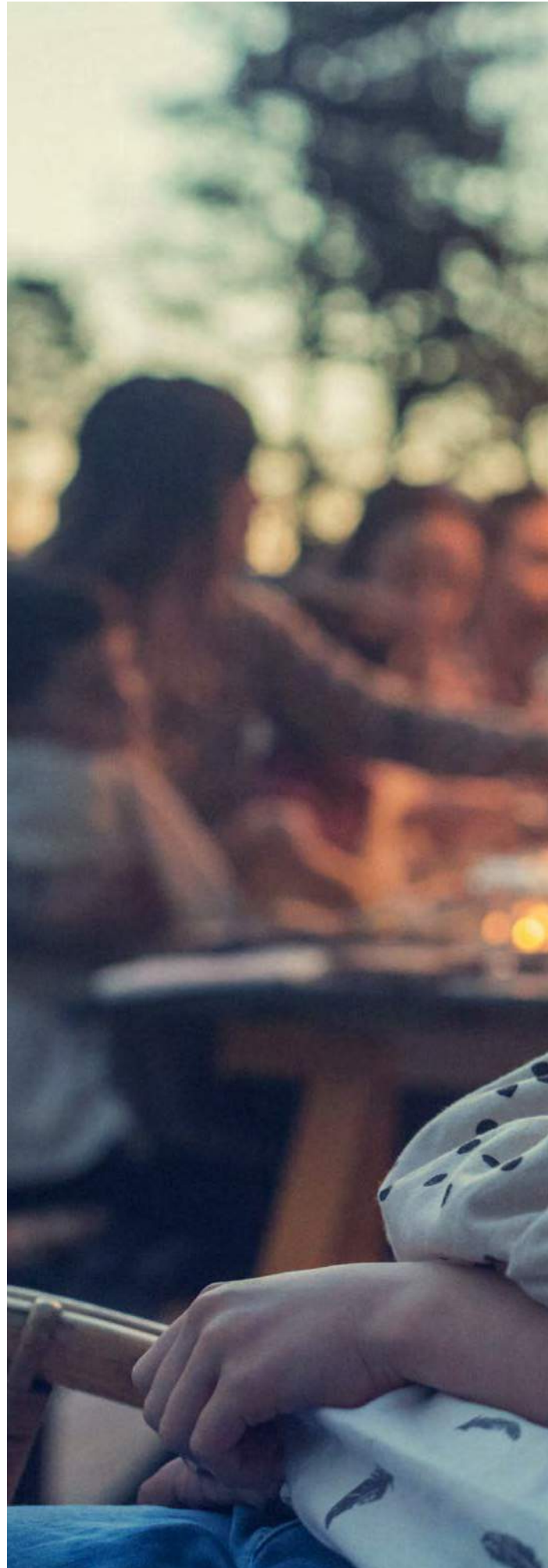
Belonging has many roots

A sense of belonging then seems like a magic wand that enables neighbourhood health and happiness to flourish. In order for it to become prominent throughout the neighbourhood, the belonging should bridge several domains and activities. When socialisation occurs across multiple groups, the sense of belonging is less fragile. It can also lead to innovative solutions that benefit the individual, the community, and greater society. How can belonging to several domains be encouraged? Neighbours are key.

Tools for neighbourhood interaction and domains of belonging

Third places

Third places are mutual spaces outside of the home, workplace and school. These shared spaces exist for people to be active, social and creative in. In neighbourhoods, these activities are important for creating a sense of belonging. The importance of third places is emphasised both by people in our study as well as by experts. Third places according to Scott Cloutier are important for connection:

"It's super important for people just to have a place where they can connect, have dialogue, express themselves and share values."

They also increase the sense of community on a larger scale:

"Third places are hugely important to happiness and well-being. They connect us to a larger community, but they also connect us to nature – nature in a bigger sense and at larger scale. They provide access to different ways of knowing and being, and different cultures and forms of expression. Third places could be used strategically between communities, between neighbourhoods, between buildings or complexes."
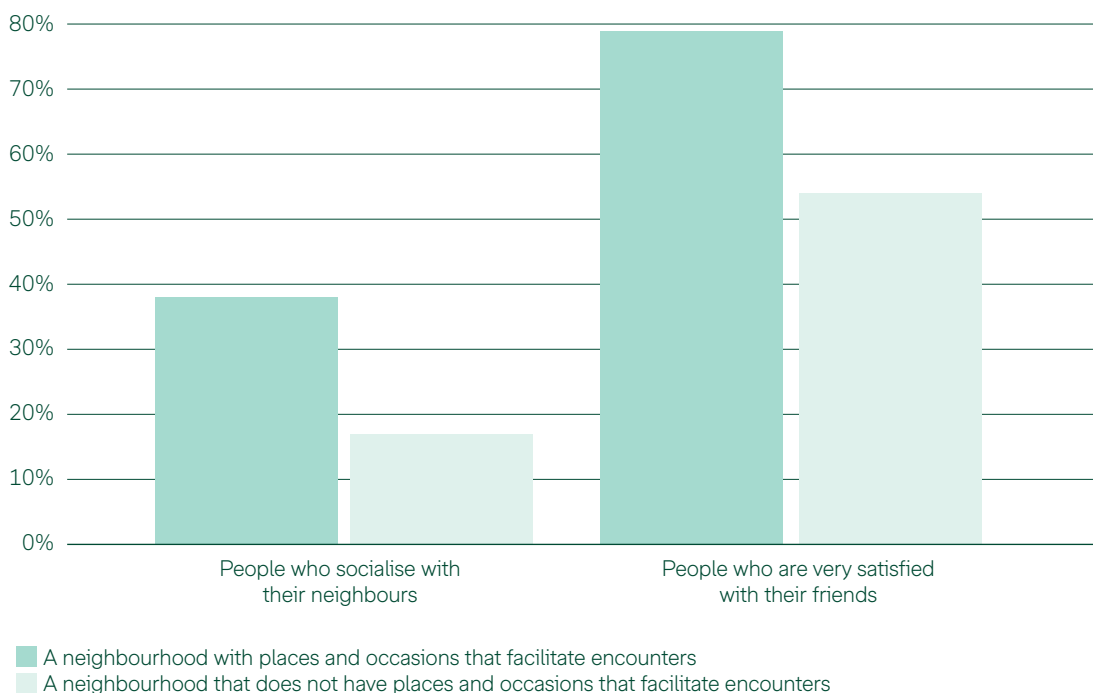
Although The Belonging Project works along similar guidelines, McKinley adds another layer to take into consideration:

"Their shared spaces need to be inclusive and accessible. They should not leave out any group but instead welcome all."

This highlights the need for specific spaces where people can come together in unpredicted and modular ways. Third places in neighbourhoods should therefore not all be predetermined or defined, but open for individual interpretation and creativity. This allows individuals to feel free to define their own expertise and role in the community – happiness expert Sabina Renck agrees that these conditions are necessary for building social communities:

"Spontaneous social interaction is one of the pillars of a community – conditions that allow and encourage it are crucial."

Neighbourhoods with third places are twice as social

Legend:
- A neighbourhood with places and occasions that facilitate encounters
- A neighbourhood that does not have places and occasions that facilitate encounters

Categories:
- People who socialise with their neighbours
- People who are very satisfied with their friends

Sharing economy

The sharing economy is a democratised marketplace of collaborative consumption. It is a system in which assets or services are shared between, for example, neighbours and that increases neighbour interaction and catalyses social neighbourhoods. Sharing of items and services is also important in the development of a more sustainable society as it reduces consumption. Ina Remmers from Nebenan.de provides her take on this:

"Families are great at sharing, especially all of the children's belongings. They grow out of their toys and clothes so quickly that it's easier to pass them on to neighbours, rather than throwing them away or tucking
them in the cellar. It's also more time efficient than selling things on eBay, and in neighbourhoods, giving them away creates feelings of doing something good for the community. Sometimes people publish an item on eBay, but at the same time on Nebenan.de and say: "but for my neighbours I can give it away for free."

"Sharing in neighbourhoods also means giving things away. This is a way for new relationships to emerge, because as a thank you, people often bring a cake or homemade marmalade. It's great to see this happening repeatedly, to witness the kindness that neighbours show each other."

Effect in numbers:

27% of people socialise with their neighbours, **while for neighbours who share:**

47% of people who have lent something to a neighbour socialise with their neighbours

47% of people who have borrowed something from a neighbour socialise with their neighbours

51% of people who have bought something from a neighbour socialise with their neighbours

54% of people who have sold something to a neighbour socialise with their neighbours

Cyberhoods

A cyberhood is an online rendezvous for neighbours and the social networking trend is gaining popularity across the world. Cyberhoods make the tricky parts of having neighbours easier and focuses on all the benefits. Cyberhood expert Ina Remmers describes the effect she has seen on neighbourhoods:

"Online communities make it easier to take the first step into the offline community. It's also a psychological thing, because when you ask for something in a Cyberhood, only those that are willing to help say yes. If you ring doorbells, there will be people that for example do not want to lend their drilling machine and this creates an
awkward moment. These days, people avoid social situations where they risk receiving a no. Online lowers the hurdle to initiate social contact with the neighbours."

"The great thing about online neighbourhood platforms is that they build bridges from online to offline. Unlike other social networks, that attract all the attention to the online community and leave no time for offline social contact, Cyberhoods promote face-to-face interaction. Through the online network neighbours can connect, but everything thereafter means that you will have to meet offline, even if it's just to borrow something."

A unified sense of belonging

Once neighbourhoods have fulfilled the first three layers in The House of Happiness, the fourth and final level of neighbourhood happiness appears upon the horizon. At this level, purpose creation becomes part of the neighbourhood, and strengthens the sense of belonging to the community as a whole. Quite often, just a few people are key drivers behind this movement, positively influencing the neighbourhood and everyone in it.

Neighbourhoods that foster purpose

Happy neighbourhoods support a hassle-free daily life and are safe, sustainable, and social. Such neighbourhoods also encourage diversity of both people and activities. Furthermore, they also connect individual neighbours within a larger context and a higher purpose. Globalisation and social media can easily lead to feelings of a fast-spinning world in which we are unable to act or make a difference. In neighbourhoods, however, the local perspective is key. Neighbourhoods are ecosystems of their own, where each neighbour is an important actor. When a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood is experienced, the benefits are mutual – it makes the individual happier and creates confidence in the social network. With a sense of belonging in place, each neighbour is able to make a difference to better the whole neighbourhood. This is why local is the new global.

For this to happen, the sense of belonging should bridge multiple different domains of groups and activities. It is therefore important that a neighbourhood supplies its people with material and spaces that allow for hobbies and activities. Ultimately, however, it is the people themselves who bring initiatives and energy to the neighbourhood, while the surroundings are merely tools to provide a happy context. Happiness expert Sabina Renck describes the feeling of making a difference locally:

"Living sustainably with habits such as recycling evokes feelings of purpose. A lifestyle that positively influences the shared neighbourhood, country and planet contributes to the prosperity of being a part of a sustainable community. It's good for oneself as well as the neighbourhood."
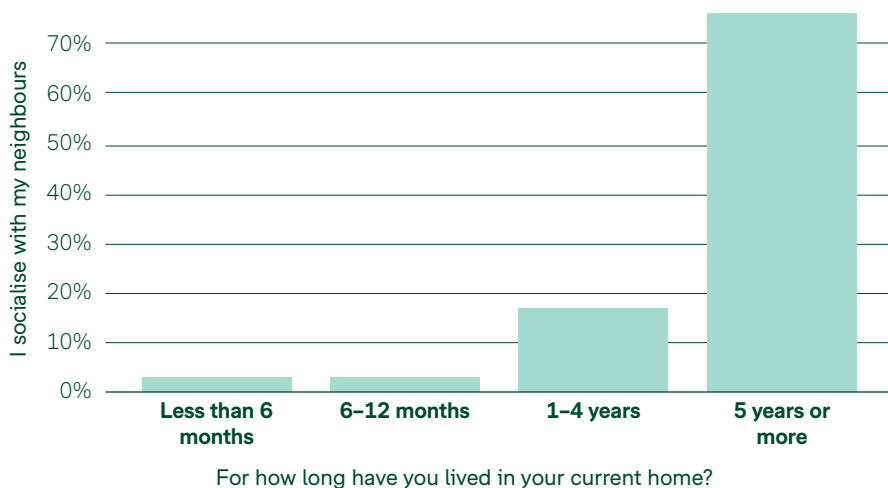
Neighbourhood hosts

People who are satisfied with their functional, emotional and community needs also have the capacity to take care of their neighbours, as well as the neighbourhood itself. These people want to ensure that others also share this sense of belonging. We call these people "neighbourhood hosts". This is not a new phenomenon. Happy neighbourhood professor Scott Cloutier mentions "community connectors" and "regenerators", referring to the people who have an important role, either by connecting neighbours through arranging social events, or by offering their expertise or professions to help out in the neighbourhood.

In our study, we were not surprised to find that hosts have often lived in a neighbourhood for longer than the average neighbour. Neighbourhood professor Scott Cloutier asserts that these people are the catalysts of neighbourhood purpose:

"How do we empower communities' regenerators? You know the folks in the neighbourhood that bring people together and care for the neighbourhood. The people that know everybody, host community dinner nights, people who are healers, yoga teachers or gardeners. There is a person in our neighbourhood, and he is a regenerator in the sense that he cares for trees in the community. So how do we empower him? How do we provide resources for him and make him feel appreciated? He ties our community together under one purpose, our neighbourhood."

People tend to copy behaviour from those around them – this is why community hosts and diversification are so important for happy neighbourhoods. The community hosts teach other neighbours to be social, to take care of the shared neighbourhood and to continue to create a purpose for the neighbourhood as a whole.

Time facilitates neighbourhood hosts

I socialise with my neighbours (y-axis: 0% to 70%)

- Less than 6 months: ~3%
- 6–12 months: ~3%
- 1–4 years: ~17%
- 5 years or more: ~75%

For how long have you lived in your current home?

The fourth floor

Reaching the fourth and top floor in The House of Happiness, the focus shifts to purpose and value creation. Here, people are content with their daily life in terms of functional, emotional and community needs, and hence elevate their happiness levels by making other people happy. In neighbourhoods, this means that a few people take on the role as hosts or purpose creators. They spread happiness by arranging activities that make the community a better place. This behaviour then creates a sense of pride for everyone in the community, and in turn strengthens the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Consequently, happiness levels increase for everyone.

The next step on our quest

So, what have we learned from the 3 years of our quest for happiness?

We've learned, above all, that humans are complex creatures – that happiness means different things to different people, but that we all share certain basic needs and desires. The House of Happiness lets us visualise these needs – as a housing developer, it is natural that we think in blocks. By identifying the process by which people attain happiness in their day to day lives, we can contribute to a safer, better and enriched society – one where we can celebrate social diversity while embracing our shared aspirations.

For us at Bonava, developing the perfect neighbourhood is an ongoing quest. Little by little, we learn how to better provide communities with perfect environments in which to attain happiness. This is not a quest with an end, but rather one where, by listening to our customers and their needs, we can incrementally improve not just their daily tasks, but provide a stepping stone for a better, healthier, and happier lifestyle. We started with bricks and mortar, but our ambition is to do so much more, building neighbourhoods and communities as

well as homes. As designers, engineers, and developers we approach problems pragmatically.

One insight that this quest has given us is that when neighbourhoods become communities, they can tackle societal issues such as loneliness. The cornerstone and catalyst for community development is for people to feel safe in their neighbourhood. While many have interpreted this insight as a need for gated communities, our research shows that the opposite is true. Walls have historically led to a decrease in neighbourhood interaction - neighbourhoods instead need blurred boundaries that invite people in. That is why we will continue to develop neighbourhoods with open doors - when neighbours become friends, it not only increases neighbourhood happiness but also contributes to solving societal issues.

This insight, alongside others with which The House of Happiness has supplied us, will now become part of our Happy Neighbourhood Tool, ensuring that we implement our new findings across our projects in a systematic and insight-driven way.

Method & bibliography:

The House of Happiness

The Happy Quest survey - The Happy Quest survey was conducted by Cliente on behalf of Bonava. The results are based on questionnaires completed by 8,582 people in Germany, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Estonia and Latvia. The respondents comprise a representative section of the population aged 25 years and older. The results are from 2019 and are compared with results from 2017.

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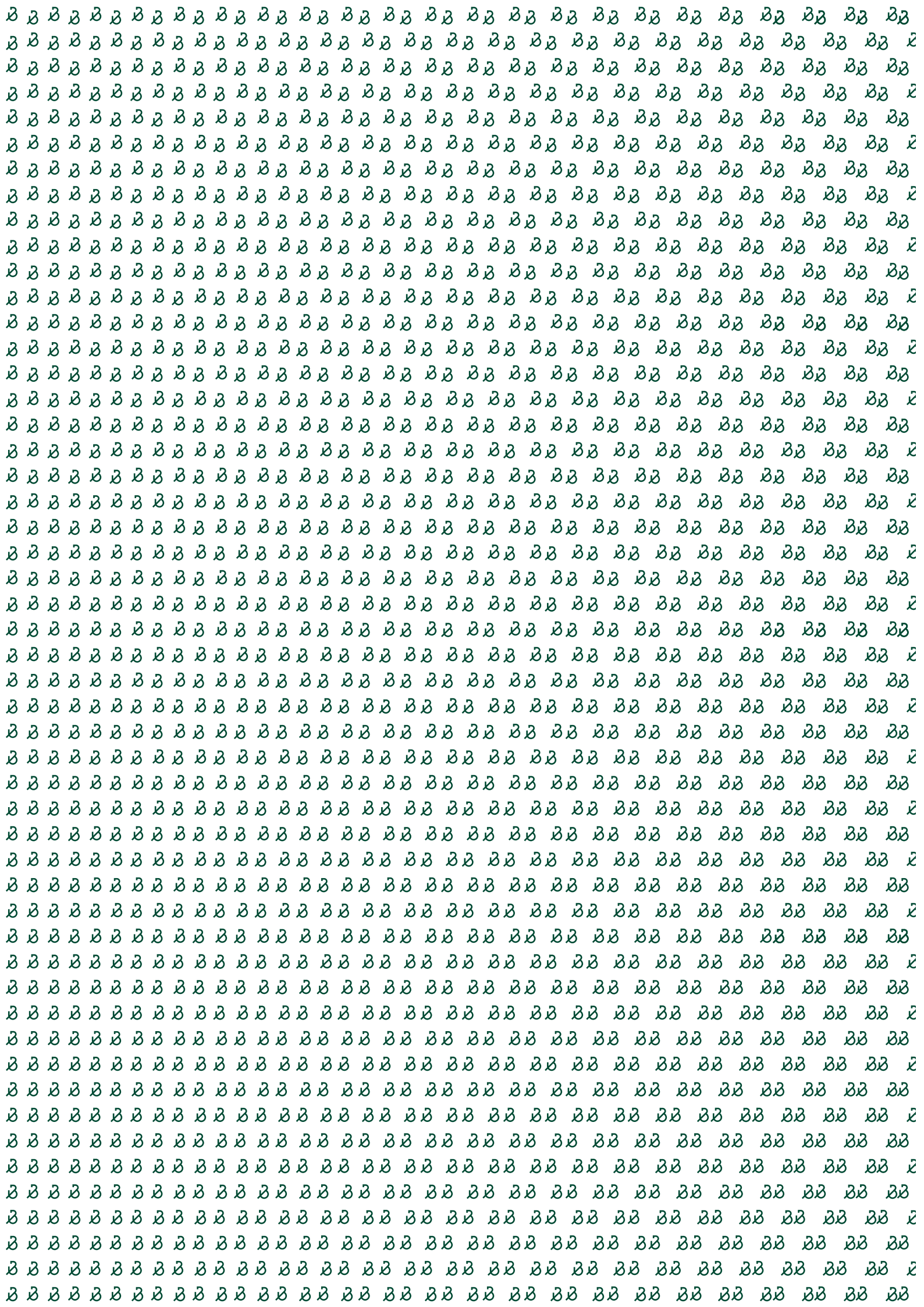
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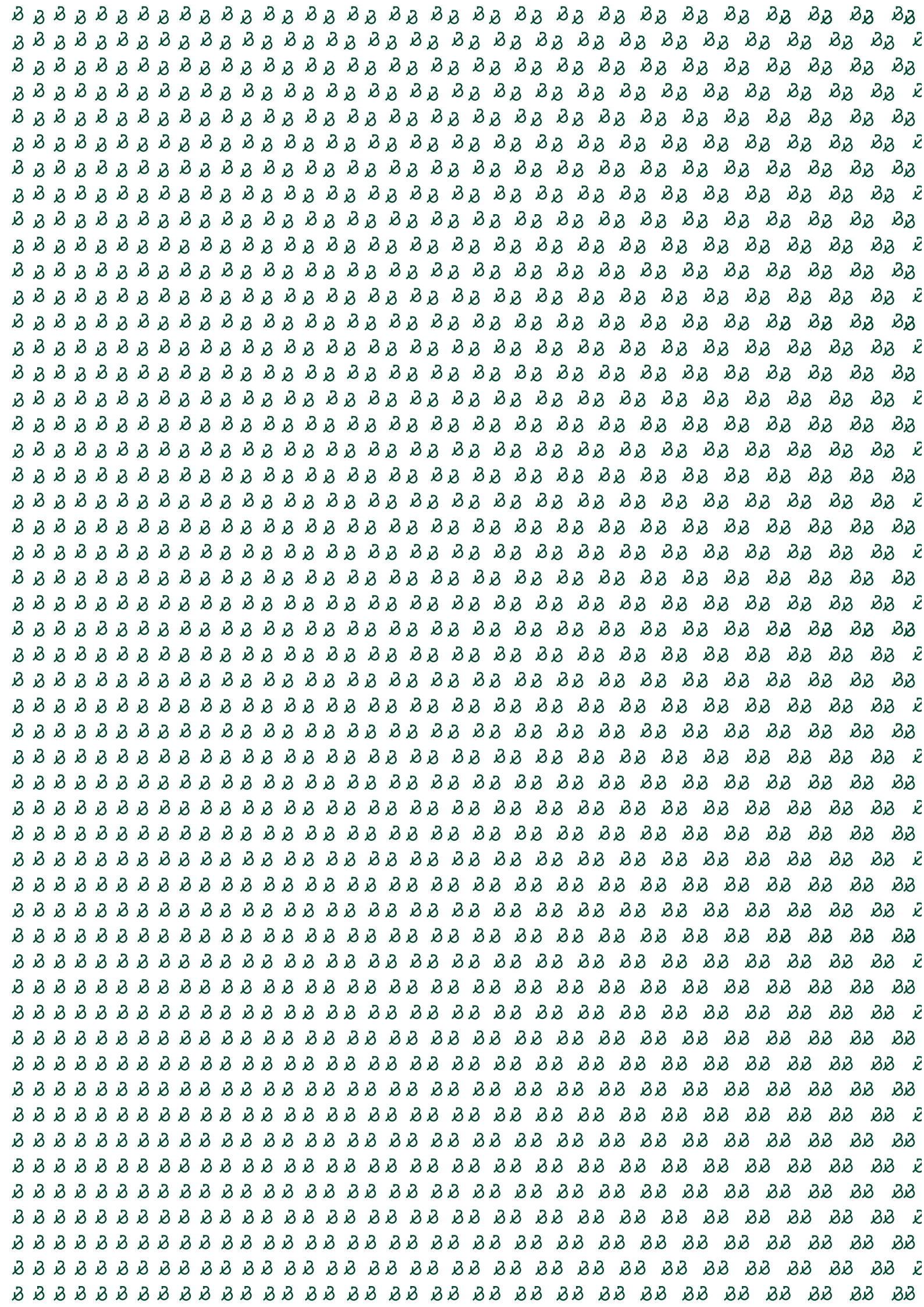
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Our vision is to create happy neighbourhoods where people have the highest quality of life