

Thematic Article

# Happiness, trust, and social relationships: The social dimensions of urban quality of life in Debrecen

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## Abstract

The study of happiness and quality of life in urban settings has become increasingly prominent in both international and domestic social science research. The quality of social relationships and the level of trust are among the key determinants of subjective well-being. This study aims to explore the relationships between happiness, trust, and social ties among the urban population of Debrecen, and to examine how these vary across different demographic groups. The analysis is based on a representative sample of 500 respondents from the “Debrecen 2025” survey, using questionnaire-based data collection. The findings indicate that the subjective well-being of Debrecen’s residents is generally favourable and closely associated with the quality of their social relationships. In particular, family and friendship ties, as well as levels of trust, show consistent associations with life satisfaction. At the same time, it is not the quantity of social ties, but their quality, that proves to be decisive. No significant gender differences were found, whereas notable variations emerge across age groups and levels of educational attainment: older individuals and those with higher levels of education tend to report higher levels of well-being and trust. The results confirm the importance of social capital in shaping urban quality of life and suggest that strengthening social relationships and fostering trust may play a key role in improving overall well-being.

*Keywords:* happiness; trust; social relationships; quality of life; urban context; Debrecen; social capital

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## Introduction

Research on happiness and quality of life has become a central theme in the social sciences over recent decades. The study of subjective well-being is particularly important in urban environments, where the majority of people live and where social relationships, trust, and community cohesion exhibit distinctive patterns. One defining characteristic of the urban context is that social relationships are often looser and less stable, while social coexistence relies more heavily on trust and the predictability of everyday interactions. This makes the examination of these factors particularly relevant for understanding urban quality of life.

Debrecen, Hungary’s second-largest city and the centre of the Northern Great Plain region, provides an excellent setting for examining the factors that contribute to happiness and life satisfaction among the urban population.

In the literature, urban quality of life is conceptualised as a complex, multidimensional construct which, in addition to economic, infrastructural, and environmental factors, increasingly incorporates dimensions of subjective well-being and social relationships (Ballas & Tranmer, 2012). Contemporary approaches emphasise that urban quality of life is not merely a function of material and physical conditions, but is closely linked to social capital, trust, and the quality of community relations. Within this framework, the present study focuses on the social dimensions of urban quality of life.

The international literature consistently highlights that the quality of social relationships, social capital, and levels of trust are key determinants of subjective well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Putnam, 2000). The happiness of individuals living in urban environments is a complex

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phenomenon shaped by multiple factors, including the strength of family and friendship ties, relationships with neighbours, levels of institutional trust, and the extent of community participation (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010; Helliwell et al., 2018; Ballas & Tranmer, 2012).

Trust plays a particularly important role in this system of relationships, as it forms a bridge between individual experiences and the broader social environment. It reflects both the quality of interpersonal relationships and trust in the functioning of institutions, thereby fundamentally shaping individuals' sense of security and the predictability of everyday life.

Research on happiness is relevant not only from a scientific perspective but also from a public policy perspective. International initiatives such as the OECD Better Life Index and the UN World Happiness Report emphasise that subjective well-being is a key indicator of social progress. Urban planning, community programmes, and efforts to strengthen social cohesion are all areas where these findings have important practical implications.

The aim of this study is to explore the relationships between happiness, trust, and social relationships among the urban population of Debrecen. The analysis is based on a representative sample of 500 respondents from the "Debrecen 2025" survey.

In line with the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: The quality of social relationships is positively associated with subjective well-being.
- H2: The level of trust is positively associated with happiness and life satisfaction.
- H3: The quality of social relationships shows a stronger association with subjective well-being than the quantity of social ties.
- H4: No significant differences are expected between men and women in terms of happiness and social relationships.
- H5: A non-linear relationship exists between age and subjective well-being.
- H6: Higher educational attainment is associated with higher levels of well-being, stronger social relationships, and greater trust.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Concepts of Happiness and Subjective Well-Being**

Research on happiness and subjective well-being has developed continuously since the 1960s. Since Diener's (1984) seminal work, subjective well-being has typically been conceptualised as comprising two main components: affective (emotional) and cognitive (evaluative) dimensions. The affective component refers to the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions, whereas the cognitive component reflects overall life satisfaction.

Hedonic and eudaimonic approaches emphasise different aspects of well-being. The hedonic perspective focuses on subjective happiness and pleasure (Kahneman et al., 1999), whereas the eudaimonic approach highlights self-realisation, personal growth, and a meaningful life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Both perspectives are essential for a comprehensive understanding of well-being, particularly in the context of urban quality of life, where both subjective experiences and the sense of meaning are key factors.

### **Social Relationships and Happiness**

Social relationships play a central role in human happiness. Diener and Seligman (2002) showed that very happy individuals almost without exception have strong social ties. Family relationships, friendships, and romantic partnerships all contribute to subjective well-being (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Social relationships influence happiness through multiple mechanisms. On the one hand, they provide emotional support in stressful situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985); on the other, they contribute to identity formation and provide meaning in life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social integration and a sense of belonging are fundamental human needs (Berkman et al., 2000).

In urban environments, social relationships exhibit distinctive patterns. Individuals living in large cities often have broader but weaker social networks than those in smaller settlements (Fischer, 1982). The quality of neighbourly relations is particularly important for urban quality of life (Helliwell et al., 2018).

These findings suggest that social relationships are not only crucial for individual well-being but also constitute a fundamental component of urban social functioning.

## **Trust and Social Capital**

Trust is a central element of social capital and a key factor in the functioning of modern societies. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding and bridging social capital: the former refers to ties within homogeneous groups (e.g. family and close friends), whereas the latter refers to connections between different social groups. Both forms contribute to well-being, but bridging social capital is particularly important for social cohesion and the functioning of democratic institutions.

The literature also distinguishes between different types of trust. Interpersonal trust refers to trust in known individuals (family members, friends, neighbours), whereas generalised trust refers to trust in strangers and in society more broadly. Institutional trust refers to trust in institutions such as government, the legal system, and public services (Uslaner, 2002; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Research has shown that all three types of trust are positively associated with subjective well-being, although their relative importance varies across social and cultural contexts.

Trust reduces uncertainty in social interactions, enhances predictability, and contributes to social stability (Fukuyama, 1995). In urban environments, where individuals frequently interact with strangers, generalised trust is particularly important. High levels of trust facilitate cooperation, reduce social conflict, and contribute to the overall quality of community life (Putnam, 2000).

## **Demographic Factors and Happiness**

The impact of demographic factors on subjective well-being is complex and operates across multiple dimensions. In the following, we examine the roles of gender, age, and educational attainment.

### *Gender and happiness*

Gender differences in happiness are complex and often inconsistent. Some studies suggest that women report higher levels of subjective well-being on average (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009), while others find no significant differences (Dolan et al., 2008). Women often exhibit stronger social embeddedness, which may positively influence their well-being (Umberson et al., 1996). At the same time, they may display greater emotional variability, which can affect the measurement of subjective well-being. Gender differences are also context-dependent, with smaller differences observed in more egalitarian societies.

### *Age and happiness*

The relationship between age and happiness often follows a U-shaped pattern: well-being is relatively high in young adulthood, declines in midlife, and increases again in older age (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; Stone et al., 2010). However, this pattern is not universal and is influenced by cultural factors. Explanations for the midlife decline include work-related and family stress, career uncertainty, and adjustment to ageing. The increase in well-being in later life may be linked to improved emotional regulation, more realistic expectations, and stronger social relationships (Li & Fung, 2013; Poulin & Haase, 2015).

### *Educational attainment and happiness*

Educational attainment is generally positively associated with happiness, although this relationship is partly indirect. Higher levels of education are linked to better labour market outcomes, higher income, and improved health (Cuñado & de Gracia, 2012). Education is also closely related to social capital: individuals with higher levels of education tend to have broader social networks and higher levels of trust (Huang et al., 2009). In addition, education fosters both cognitive and non-cognitive skills that support problem-solving and coping with stress. Gesthuizen et al. (2008) showed that the impact of education on social capital depends on the broader social context, particularly the characteristics of the welfare system.

Based on the review of theoretical and empirical research, it can be assumed that social relationships, trust, and demographic factors jointly shape the subjective well-being of urban populations. These considerations provide the foundation for the hypotheses formulated in the introduction.

## Methodology

### Sample and Data Collection

As part of the “Debrecen 2025” research project, a questionnaire survey was conducted in the city of Debrecen in spring 2025 with a sample of 500 respondents. The sample was designed to be representative in terms of gender and educational attainment, as well as across the city’s districts. The age distribution of the sample was weighted based on the 2022 census data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH).

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Sampling was carried out using the random walk method, ensuring the random selection of households. Within households, respondents were selected using the Leslie Kish grid.

### Variables and Measurement

#### *Happiness and life satisfaction*

Life satisfaction was measured using a single-item question on a 0–10 scale (“All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?”). The happiness index was constructed from three components: life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and optimism.

#### *Social relationships*

The social relationships index was constructed from four dimensions: the quality of family relationships (0–10), the quality of friendships (0–10), the number of friends (winsorised at the 95th percentile), and the quality of neighbourly relationships (0–10).

#### *Trust*

The trust index was constructed based on four items measuring different dimensions of trust (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.785$ ): general interpersonal trust, institutional trust, trust in neighbours, and trust in strangers. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

### Data Cleaning and Index Construction

The number of friends was treated using a winsorisation procedure at the 95th percentile (30 individuals), meaning that extreme values were capped at this upper threshold in order to reduce their potential influence on the results.

The trust index was calculated as a weighted average of four items, meaning that each item contributed to the composite measure with a different weight. Missing data were handled using listwise deletion; that is, only complete cases were included in the analyses.

### Statistical Analyses

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 27.0 statistical software. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, independent-samples t-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to describe the sample and examine relationships between variables. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## 4. Results

### Descriptive statistics

The sample consisted of 500 respondents, of whom 51.2% were women and 48.8% were men. The mean age was 47.3 years ( $SD = 17.2$ ). The distribution of educational attainment was as follows: primary education (18.4%), secondary education (52.6%), and tertiary education (29.0%) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=500)

Variable	Category	N (weighted %)	Mean (SD)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	244 (48.8%)	-
	Female	256 (51.2%)	-
<b>Age</b>	18–29 years	89 (17.8%)	47.3 (17.2)
	30–44 years	142 (28.4%)	
	45–59	134 (26.8%)	
	60+ years	135 (27.0%)	
<b>Educational attainment</b>	Primary	92 (18.4%)	-
	Secondary	263 (52.6%)	
	Higher education	145 (29.0%)	

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the main indicators of happiness, social relationships, and trust. The average level of life satisfaction among Debrecen residents was relatively high ( $M = 7.40$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) on a 0–10 scale.

The mean value of the happiness index was 7.28 ( $SD = 1.52$ ), indicating a generally positive overall assessment. In terms of distribution, 42% of respondents reported being very happy, 46% fairly happy, 10% not very happy, and only 2% very unhappy.

**Table 2.** Happiness, social relationships and trust – descriptive statistics (N=500)

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Min	Max	Median
<b>Happiness and quality of life</b>					
Life satisfaction (0–10)	7.40	1.66	0	10	8.0
Happiness index (0–10)	7.28	1.52	1.67	10	7.5
Sense of happiness (0–10)	7.35	1.71	0	10	8.0
Optimism (0–10)	7.09	2.03	0	10	7.0
<b>Social relationships</b>					
Quality of family relationships (0–10)	8.12	2.01	0	10	9.0
Quality of friendships (0–10)	7.68	1.89	0	10	8.0
Number of friends (winsorised)	8.45	7.82	0	30	6.0
Neighbourly relations (0–10)	6.84	2.34	0	10	7.0
Social relationships index (0–10)	7.77	1.48	2.08	10	8.0
<b>Trust</b>					
General interpersonal trust (1–5)	2.89	1.08	1	5	3.0
Institutional trust (1–5)	2.76	1.02	1	5	3.0
Trust in neighbours (1–5)	3.24	1.15	1	5	3.0
Trust in strangers (1–5)	2.41	1.01	1	5	2.0
Trust index (1–5)	2.82	0.89	1	5	2.8

In terms of social relationships, the quality of family relationships shows the highest average values, followed by friendships, while neighbourly relations are rated somewhat lower. The number of friends displays considerable variation, indicating substantial differences in the size of individuals' social networks.

Trust indicators suggest a moderately low overall level of trust. Trust in neighbours is the highest among the different dimensions, whereas trust in strangers is the lowest. General interpersonal trust and institutional trust fall between these two extremes. The average value of the trust index is 2.82 on a 1–5 scale.

### Relationships Between Subjective Well-Being, Social Relationships, and Trust

Table 3 presents the correlations between happiness, social relationships, and trust.

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix – happiness, social relationships and trust (N=500, weighted data)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Life satisfaction	1							
2. Happiness index	0.916***	1						
3. Family relationships	0.290***	0.301***	1					
4. Friendships	0.283***	0.295***	0.412***	1				
5. Number of friends	0.198***	0.211***	0.156***	0.289***	1			
6. Neighbourly relations	0.215***	0.228***	0.298***	0.356***	0.187***	1		
7. Social relationships index	0.358***	0.374***	0.721***	0.768***	0.543***	0.674***	1	
8. Trust index	0.279***	0.291***	0.245***	0.268***	0.176***	0.312***	0.358***	1

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients, weighted data. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The results indicate that subjective well-being is closely related to both social relationships and trust.

Life satisfaction is significantly and positively associated with all examined dimensions of social relationships: family relationships ( $r = 0.290$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), friendships ( $r = 0.283$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), number of friends ( $r = 0.198$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and neighbourly relations ( $r = 0.215$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that multiple forms of social ties contribute to subjective well-being.

The composite social relationships index shows a moderate positive association with both life satisfaction and the happiness index, indicating that the overall quality of social relationships is closely linked to well-being.

Trust is also positively associated with both life satisfaction and happiness, and is moderately related to social relationships, suggesting that trust and social embeddedness are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Significant positive correlations are also observed among the different dimensions of social relationships. The quality of family and friendship ties is moderately strongly correlated ( $r = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that individuals with strong family relationships also tend to have strong friendships. Neighbourly relations are likewise positively associated with both family ( $r = 0.298$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and friendship ties ( $r = 0.356$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

A particularly important finding is that the quality of relationships shows a stronger association with subjective well-being than the number of relationships. This suggests that the qualitative and emotional aspects of social ties play a more important role in shaping well-being than the mere size of one's social network.

### Summary Evaluation of the Hypotheses

H1 (Quality of social relationships → subjective well-being):

The results support the hypothesis. The quality of social relationships shows a consistent and significant positive association with subjective well-being across multiple indicators.

H2 (Trust → happiness and life satisfaction):

This hypothesis is also supported. The trust index is positively associated with both life satisfaction and the happiness index, indicating that trust is an important component of subjective well-being.

H3 (Quality > quantity):

The results support this hypothesis. The quality of social relationships shows a stronger association with subjective well-being than the number of social ties, highlighting the importance of relational quality over network size.

Overall, the findings suggest that subjective well-being is closely linked to individuals' social and trust-based embeddedness, providing a foundation for the subsequent analyses, particularly those focusing on demographic differences.

### Gender differences

Table 4 summarises the gender differences observed in the dimensions of happiness, social relationships and trust.

**Table 4.** Gender differences in subjective well-being, social relationships and trust

Variable	Men (n=244)	Women (n=256)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
<b>Happiness and quality of life</b>					
Life satisfaction	7.38 (1.68)	7.42 (1.65)	-0.29	0.774	-0.02
Happiness index	7.25 (1.54)	7.31 (1.50)	-0.45	0.651	-0.04
<b>Social relationships</b>					
Family relationships	8.02 (2.08)	8.21 (1.95)	-1.05	0.295	-0.09
Friendships	7.54 (1.95)	7.81 (1.83)	-1.58	0.115	-0.14
Number of friends	8.92 (8.15)	8.02 (7.50)	1.28	0.202	0.11
Neighbourly relations	6.71 (2.41)	6.96 (2.28)	-1.18	0.239	-0.11
Social relationships index	7.80 (1.52)	7.75 (1.45)	0.38	0.707	0.03
<b>Trust</b>					
Trust index	2.79 (0.91)	2.85 (0.87)	-0.75	0.452	-0.07

Note (1): Weighted independent samples t-tests. None of the differences are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Based on the results, no statistically significant differences between men and women can be identified for any of the indicators examined. Differences in subjective well-being are negligible, and a similar pattern is observed for social relationships and trust. Effect sizes are consistently small ( $|d| < 0.20$ ), indicating that gender differences are marginal.

### Hypothesis testing

H4 (No significant gender differences in subjective well-being, social relationships, and trust):

The hypothesis is supported. No statistically significant differences were found between men and women across any of the examined dimensions, and effect sizes indicate negligible differences. The results are consistent with findings in the international literature (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009; Umberson et al., 1996), which indicate that in developed societies, gender differences in subjective well-being and social relationships are typically small or insignificant.

### Age differences

Table 5 presents the differences between age groups in terms of happiness, social relationships and trust.

**Table 5.** Age differences in happiness, social relationships and trust

Variable	18–29 years	30–44 years	45–59 years	60+ years	F-value	p-value	$\eta^2$
	(n=89)	(n=142)	(n=134)	(n=135)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
<b>Happiness and quality of life</b>							
Life satisfaction	7.45 (1.58)	7.12 (1.72)	7.38 (1.68)	7.78 (1.52)	3.82	0.010*	0.023
Happiness index	7.38 (1.45)	7.02 (1.58)	7.29 (1.52)	7.56 (1.45)	3.15	0.025*	0.019
<b>Social relationships</b>							
Family relationships	8.24 (1.89)	7.89 (2.15)	8.15 (1.98)	8.35 (1.92)	1.42	0.236	0.009
Friendships	7.92 (1.75)	7.45 (1.98)	7.68 (1.89)	7.82 (1.85)	1.68	0.170	0.010
Number of friends	10.15 (8.42)	8.24 (7.68)	7.89 (7.52)	7.68 (7.45)	2.21	0.086	0.013
Neighbourly relations	6.45 (2.28)	6.58 (2.41)	6.89 (2.35)	7.32 (2.22)	3.24	0.022*	0.019
Social relationships index	8.19 (1.38)	7.54 (1.52)	7.65 (1.48)	7.79 (1.45)	4.82	0.003**	0.028
<b>Trust</b>							
Trust index	2.68 (0.85)	2.71 (0.89)	2.84 (0.91)	3.05 (0.87)	4.15	0.006**	0.024

Note: Weighted one-way ANOVA. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .  $\eta^2$  = effect size.

Significant differences can be observed between age groups in terms of life satisfaction and the happiness index, indicating that subjective well-being varies across different stages of the life cycle.

Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD) indicate that the over-60 age group shows significantly higher levels of satisfaction and happiness than middle-aged groups, particularly those aged 30–44.

In the area of social relationships, age differences present a mixed picture. While there are generally no significant differences in the quality of relationships, younger age groups show more favourable values on the overall social relationship index. In contrast, the quality of neighbourhood relationships improves with age, which may indicate a strengthening of local embeddedness.

Significant age-related differences can also be observed in the trust index. The 60+ age group shows a significantly higher level of trust than younger age groups, which is consistent with international findings indicating that trust generally increases with age (Li & Fung, 2013; Poulin & Haase, 2015).

### Testing the hypothesis

H5 (Age: non-linear, U-shaped relationship):

The results clearly support the hypothesis. In the case of life satisfaction and the happiness index, the pattern of age differences suggests that subjective well-being does not change linearly with age. The lower values for middle-aged groups, along with the more favourable indicators for younger and older age groups, outline an U-shaped relationship. This pattern is consistent with findings in the international literature (Stone et al., 2010; Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008), which suggest that the trajectory of subjective well-being over the life course often follows a U-shaped curve.

Beyond age differences, it is also worth examining how other dimensions of social position – particularly educational attainment – structure the phenomena under investigation.

### Differences by educational attainment

Table 6 presents differences by educational attainment in the dimensions of happiness, social relationships and trust.

**Table 6.** Differences by educational attainment

Variable	Primary	Secondary	Higher education	F-value	p-value	$\eta^2$
	(n=92)	(n=263)	(n=145)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)			
<b>Happiness and quality of life</b>						
Life satisfaction	6.95 (1.85)	7.32 (1.62)	7.82 (1.52)	8.45	<0.001***	0.033
Happiness index	6.88 (1.68)	7.22 (1.48)	7.68 (1.42)	7.92	<0.001***	0.031
<b>Social relationships</b>						
Family relationships	7.85 (2.18)	8.08 (2.01)	8.42 (1.85)	2.45	0.087	0.010
Friendships	7.32 (2.05)	7.62 (1.88)	8.05 (1.75)	4.68	0.010*	0.018
Number of friends	6.85 (6.92)	8.24 (7.68)	9.95 (8.42)	4.25	0.015*	0.017
Neighbourly relations	6.58 (2.45)	6.78 (2.35)	7.12 (2.22)	1.68	0.187	0.007
Social relationships index	7.15 (1.62)	7.68 (1.45)	8.38 (1.32)	18.95	<0.001***	0.071
<b>Trust</b>						
Trust index	2.58 (0.95)	2.78 (0.88)	3.05 (0.82)	7.82	<0.001***	0.030

Note: Weighted one-way ANOVA. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .  $\eta^2$  = effect size.

Based on the results, educational attainment is associated with significant differences across several dimensions. A clear positive pattern can be observed in the case of subjective well-being indicators; groups with higher educational attainment are consistently characterised by higher levels of satisfaction and happiness.

A more nuanced picture emerges with regard to social relationships. While significant differences can be observed in the overall social relationship index according to educational attainment, these differences are less clear-cut in certain qualitative dimensions of relationships. At the same time, the quality of friendships and the size of the social network show more favourable values among those with higher levels of education.

A clear pattern is also observable in the dimension of trust, with higher educational attainment being associated with higher levels of trust. This suggests that education strengthens not only subjective well-being but also certain elements of social capital.

The results are consistent with the international literature, which suggests that higher educational attainment is generally associated with higher levels of social capital and trust (Huang et al., 2009; Gesthuizen et al., 2008).

### Testing the hypothesis

H6 (Education → higher well-being, social relationships, trust):

Based on the results, the hypothesis was partially confirmed. Higher educational attainment is clearly associated with higher levels of subjective well-being and trust.

However, in the case of social relationships, the effect is more nuanced. While it is evident in the aggregate indicators and certain dimensions, no significant difference is observed across all aspects of relationship quality.

This suggests that the effect of educational attainment is primarily mediated through certain dimensions of well-being and social capital, and has a less direct influence on all aspects of social relationships.

Overall, the results reflect the classic effect of social status, whereby groups with greater resources tend to exhibit more favourable well-being and relationship indicators.

### Summary evaluation of the hypotheses

The results of the empirical analyses are summarised in Table 7, which provides an overview of the tested hypotheses, their main empirical findings, and their level of support.

**Table 7.** Summary of the testing of research hypotheses

Hypothesis	Main findings	Decision
H1	Positive relationship between social relationships and well-being	CONFIRMED
H2	Positive relationship between trust and well-being	CONFIRMED
H3	The quality of relationships is more strongly linked to well-being than the quantity	CONFIRMED
H4	There is no significant gender difference	CONFIRMED
H5	Non-linear (U-shaped) relationship between age and well-being	CONFIRMED
H6	Higher educational attainment is associated with greater well-being and trust, but has a differentiated effect on social relationships	PARTIALLY CONFIRMED

Of the six hypotheses, five were fully confirmed empirically, while one was partially confirmed. In the case of Hypothesis H6, we found significant differences by educational attainment in both subjective well-being and trust; however, the quality of social relationships did not show consistent differences across educational attainment groups.

The results suggest that subjective well-being is fundamentally structured by social and trust-based embeddedness, as well as by various dimensions of social status.

### Interpretation of the main findings in the urban context

Our research confirms that the quality of social relationships and the level of trust are closely linked to the subjective well-being of Debrecen's residents. The average level of life satisfaction is moderately high by international standards and is consistent with patterns observed in other Central European cities (Plačková et al., 2023).

The strength of the link between social relationships and well-being supports the findings of previous research (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004), and suggests that both family and friendship relationships play a decisive role in shaping individual well-being.

Trust is also closely linked to well-being, yet it is at a relatively low level in the population studied. This duality – a strong association alongside a relatively low overall level – suggests that trust may be a key factor in subjective well-being, and increasing it could hold significant potential for improving the quality of urban life. The observed pattern is consistent with the trust deficit characteristic of the Central and Eastern European region (Glatz et al., 2020).

### Demographic differences

The absence of gender differences in well-being and social relationships may at first appear surprising, yet it is consistent with international findings suggesting that in developed societies these differences are often negligible (Dolan et al., 2008). This may suggest that in urban environments, men and women have access to similar resources and social support structures.

Age differences follow a well-known U-shaped pattern in the international literature, with middle-aged people characterised by lower well-being indicators, while younger and older age groups are in a more favourable position. The stronger neighbourhood ties among the older age group suggest that the role of local embeddedness becomes more important with advancing age.

The impact of educational attainment is clearly evident, with higher levels of education being associated with more favourable well-being and trust indicators. This reinforces the relationship between human capital and social capital, and suggests that education is not merely an economic resource, but also a key determinant of social embeddedness and trust.

### Urban context and social capital

Debrecen, as a regional centre, provides a unique urban environment for the study of social relations and trust. The relatively high level of neighbourly relations suggests that the city's size still allows for the survival of local communities, in contrast to larger metropolises (Fischer, 1982).

At the same time, the relatively lower level of trust draws attention to the limitations of social capital. This pattern is consistent with the characteristics of the Central and Eastern European region, where historical and

institutional factors influence trust relationships in the long term (Glatz et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Pose & von Berlepsch, 2014).

From an urban policy perspective, this suggests that both the physical and social environments play a key role in the development of social relationships and trust. The quality of public spaces, the services available, and measures to strengthen social cohesion can all contribute to increasing well-being.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight that subjective well-being is closely linked to individuals' social and trust-based embeddedness. The quality of social relationships and the level of trust emerge as key determinants, while educational attainment plays an important structuring role in shaping these patterns.

The results confirm that well-being is not merely a function of individual characteristics, but is deeply embedded in the structures of social relationships and social capital. The U-shaped pattern observed across age groups, together with the inequalities associated with educational attainment, suggests that well-being is shaped both by life-course dynamics and by social position.

From an urban policy perspective, the findings emphasise the importance of strengthening community ties and trust. Measures that support social cohesion, improve the quality of community spaces, and enhance institutional trust may all contribute to improving the quality of urban life.

Overall, the results underline that urban well-being is not solely an economic or infrastructural issue, but fundamentally a social phenomenon rooted in patterns of connection, trust and social embeddedness.

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