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DRS Biennial Conference Series

DRS2024: Boston

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Jun 23rd, 9:00 AM - Jun 28th, 5:00 PM

## Design for Wellbeing and Happiness

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## Editorial: Design for wellbeing and happiness

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**Abstract:** The influence of design on wellbeing and happiness in research is growing across various design domains, including products, services, systems, and environments. Despite the existence of theories addressing wellbeing and happiness, a challenge remains to bring them to life through applied design studies and reflections involving these domains, which we touch upon in this editorial. In this theme track, we focus on contributions from design in fulfilling the societal need to promote wellbeing and happiness, aligned with the conference theme: Resistance, Recovery, Reflection, Reimagination. The insights from the papers presented in this editorial underscore the complexity of designing for wellbeing, encompassing individual and community levels across various domains. Embracing a multidisciplinary approach, leveraging technology, deepening our understanding of human behavior, and exploring innovative interventions that enhance well-being reflect our growth as a Special Interest Group within the Design Research Society.

**Keywords:** design for wellbeing; design for subjective wellbeing; design for happiness

### 1. Introduction

SIGWELL is the Special Interest Group in Design for Wellbeing, Happiness, and Health in the Design Research Society. Within the SIGWELL community, there is a shared commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and leveraging the breadth of design research and practice with a view to uplifting individual and societal wellbeing, happiness, and health. We work across design domains that include products, services, systems, and environments.

The DRS 2024 marks a record for SIGWELL conference submissions; we have reviewed nearly 70 papers, accepted 21 contributions, and believe we should reflect on our growth. Before delving into the 21 articles in the following section, we will briefly revisit the two previous



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conferences held since the COVID-19 outbreak to understand the direction of SIGWELL's growth since then.

**At DRS 2020**, we identified two main topics in our editorial (Petermans et al., 2020). The first, centered around 'Co-creation for Wellbeing,' highlighted papers that explored self-training and activities aimed at fostering wellbeing through collaborative processes. These included investigations into self-therapeutic enablers, such as the 'Tune-in' project (Hwang & Lim, 2020), co-designing eHealth interventions for specific user groups (Austin et al., 2020), and examining the implications of digital volunteerism on wellbeing (Naqshbandi et al., 2020). The second theme, 'Impacts and Human-centeredness,' focused on the societal impacts of design and emphasized human-centric approaches. Papers discussed the role of artful design in subjective wellbeing (Atherton, 2020), presented solutions to reduce housing-related stress through empirical design research (Nicholas et al., 2020), and highlighted the importance of human-centered AI for societal wellbeing, emphasizing the need for collaboration between designers, technologists, and policymakers (Auernhammer, 2020). Together, these themes underscored the importance of multidisciplinary, collaborative, and human-centered approaches in designing for wellbeing and societal impact. Technology was a cross-cutting theme.

**Between our two previous conferences**, researchers have increasingly embedded the theoretical potential of design for wellbeing into concrete applications and scenarios. This progress marks the establishment of the field and its impact. Given the broad and universal relevance of the concept of wellbeing, a broadening and diversification of contributions should be expected. At **DRS 2022** (Petermans et al., 2022), this diversification, also marked by multidisciplinarity, was evident through the greater emphasis placed on technology, discussions regarding the needs of diverse user groups and ethical considerations, and a re-examination of design and research methods, as described next.

Several articles explored **technology** as a means to improve personal or societal wellbeing. For instance, we explored the examination of the impact of interaction design on user experiences in dating applications (Salaric et al., 2022) and to encourage positive behaviours that suit users' resources, goals, and preferences (Faulk et al., 2022). We have also seen studies on mood-tracking tools (Overdijk et al., 2022), VR/AR technologies for anxiety management (Javadi et al., 2022), the integration of emojis in health communication (Lin & Luo, 2022), and the design of compassion-based technological interventions for healthcare (Lusi et al., 2022). Nature's influence on relaxation and the design of digital nature with relaxing effects (Kim et al., 2022) completed the myriad of technology-related studies.

Addressing the **needs of diverse user groups and ethical considerations**, we have seen an examination of the experiences of patients with chronic conditions and their healthcare providers, underlining the significance of ethical considerations in designing for specific user groups (Kopanoglu et al., 2022). Ethical discussions extended to the design of dating applications (Salaric et al., 2022). Furthermore, employing methods that reveal nuances of human experiences was seen in wellbeing-driven design for school children (Stevens, 2022)

and concerns in understanding lived experiences in the design of medicalized wellness services (Park & Kim, 2022).

**Adaptation and response to external factors** were prominent themes, addressing how external influences, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have shaped design practices. For instance, issues discussed included adapting design cycles to mitigate risks exacerbated by the pandemic (Hermsen, 2022) and exploring the tactical use of visual communication strategies during crises (Lin & Luo, 2022). As noted in many papers, the pandemic also prompted methodological adaptations in research, such as online collaborations.

As discussed in this section, we have revised key areas of focus based on our exploration of editorials and papers from previous conferences. In the following section, we will examine the studies showcased by the 2024 contributions. Instead of focusing on high-level themes, we will concentrate on insights and shed light on trends, challenges, and opportunities in designing for wellbeing and happiness.

## 2. Summary and insights from the 2024 papers

Some insights can be drawn from the papers in our theme track in 2024. Although each paper is explicitly connected to one insight to preserve this document's brevity, we recognize they overlap and provide more meaningful takeaway messages than reflected in this short editorial.

**Underexplored everyday life contexts still present opportunities to design for wellbeing.** Two papers have illuminated this insight. Choo et al. (2024) delve into the realm of music's potential to enhance wellbeing in everyday contexts, while Ji et al. (2024) shed light on the challenges young adults face in aligning health aspirations with immediate food choices.

**Understanding experiences at work can support us in designing interventions to promote wellbeing through and beyond the built environment.** This insight emerged across four papers. Van den Heuvel and Lallemand (2024) offer insights into office design for health and wellbeing, complemented by Chen and Ji's (2024) exploration of strategies addressing overtime culture and Fayyad et al.'s (2024) systematic review of interior design's impact. Alternatively, Ganci (2024) critically examines faculty wellbeing in corporate academia, in reimagining the curriculum vitae.

**Wellbeing interventions can be made accessible and impactful for larger populations by leveraging technology to integrate positive activities into everyday life.** One paper has shed light on this insight. Wiese et al. (2024) leverage consumer technology to integrate positive activities into everyday life as a means to make wellbeing interventions more accessible and impactful for larger populations.

**Digital environments can be redesigned to improve wellbeing.** This insight resonated in two papers. Salaric et al. (2024) investigate desired interaction qualities for fostering intimacy online, while Kim et al. (2024) explore how virtual learning environments can positively influence wellbeing when aligned with natural elements.

**Recognizing individuals' diverse and unique needs and preferences allows for the creation of inclusive design solutions.** This insight was uncovered in four papers. Bi et al. (2024) offer insights into designing public spaces for solitude. Motta et al. (2024) explore the experience of urine home monitoring. Karaoğlu et al. (2024) discuss designing a crossover picture book for older adults in care homes, while Ibanez-Arricivita et al. (2024) focus on the aesthetic customization of prosthetics.

**Sensory and multimodal experiences are still relevant sources of wellbeing that can be explored in design research.** Three papers have delved into this insight. Parisi et al. (2024) offer insights into creating serene experiences through textiles. Shawgi (2024) explores the lived experience of women with a 'dys-appearing' body through materials. Additionally, Papp-Schmitt et al. (2024) delve into the embodied experience of using exoskeletons.

**Designers can discover fresh avenues to enhance wellbeing by venturing into novel design territories.** Two papers have addressed this insight. Karaturhan et al. (2024) delve into the potential of conversational agents in fostering reflection in domestic environments. Venere Ferraro et al. (2024) explore the future of digital care.

**Integrating positive and environmental psychology insights can lead to comprehensive design frameworks that address mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing in interconnected ways.** This insight emerged across two papers. Shen (2024) presents a framework for integrating self-tracked data through the lens of Positive Psychology, while Kowalski and Yoon (2024) reflect on the intersection of sustainable behaviours and wellbeing through the daily practices of young adults.

**Measuring wellbeing in design research is still a challenge, and technology has the potential to help us overcome it.** This insight resonated in one paper. Hermsen and Pijnenborg (2024) explore methodologies for measuring mental wellbeing in design research through a qualitative 'provotyping study.'

From understanding everyday life experiences to leveraging technology and fostering trust in online interactions, the diverse array of insights highlights the complexity of designing for wellbeing and happiness. The insights drawn from the 21 papers also underscore the multifaceted nature of design for wellbeing and happiness, encompassing individual and community levels and beyond. Additionally, the papers covered a myriad of design domains, including products, services, technologies, environments, and more. Embracing these insights can guide the development of inclusive, impactful interventions that enhance wellbeing across various contexts and populations.

### 3. Conclusion

Revisiting the past two conferences and the papers published in 2024 has helped us reflect on the direction of our growth as a special interest group. The main issues in our growth include advancing multidisciplinary approaches to design, embracing pluralistic approaches to leveraging technology, deepening our understanding of human behaviour and needs, and exploring innovative solutions to create impactful interventions that enhance wellbeing

across diverse contexts and populations. Moving forward to the next DRS conference, we aim to foster steady and consistent development within our community, grounding our discussions on these issues to embrace our shared interests and expand upon them. We are committed to continuing to promote venues to foster our dialogue through publications and specialized academic events.

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