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Page last updated at 01:06 GMT, Thursday, 28 August 2008 02:06 UK

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Britain's happiest places mapped

By Matt McGrath
BBC World Service environment reporter

The most sparsely populated county in Wales is where you will find Britain's happiest place, say researchers.

Powys tops the list of 273 districts, with Edinburgh apparently the most miserable place in Britain.

Eight of the top 10 districts with the highest levels of wellbeing are in Scotland or the north of England.



Edinburgh is famous for its comedy festival and impressive castle

But the team from the Universities of Sheffield and Manchester stress that happiness is more a product of personal circumstances than physical location.

Using data from the British Household Panel Survey, where people were asked about their sense of wellbeing, the researchers were able to draw up a map of happiness down to district level across England, Scotland and Wales.

After adding in factors such as employment, health and educational qualifications, the team found that the area of Brecknock, Montgomery and Radnor in Powys was the happiest place.

Manchester came second, followed by West Lothian. Macclesfield, Nottingham and Falkirk were all in the top 10.

The London borough of Sutton was one of the few places in the south of England to do well.

Edinburgh, despite its cosmopolitan reputation and internationally acclaimed fringe festival, was bottom of the list.

The former coal mining district of Rhondda Cynon Taff in south Wales was second from bottom, while Swansea and Doncaster also did poorly.

Small differences

However, the researchers stress that the variations between different places in Britain are not statistically significant.

Factors such as social cohesion seem to be more important than location. Researcher Dr Dimitris Ballas, a senior lecturer in Geography from the University of Sheffield, said: "One of the advantages of our method is that it takes into account both people and places.

"For instance, with unemployment we can say that people who are unemployed are on average happier in an area of high unemployment compared to being unemployed in an area where everyone else around you has a job.

"This highlights the issue of social justice and cohesion."

Another important factor in determining happiness was the length of time that a person spent living in a place.

Staying in an area for five years or longer was an important indicator of well being, said the scientists.

According to Dr Ballas, the state of interpersonal relationships was also seen as highly important.

And this was more often the case in

MOST CHEERFUL PLACES

1. Powys
2. Manchester
3. West Lothian
4. Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and Monklands
5. Macclesfield

Source: *British Household Panel Survey*

LEAST CHEERFUL PLACES

1. Edinburgh
2. Cynon Valley and Rhondda
3. Amber Valley and north east Derbyshire
4. Clydesdale; Cumnock and Doon Valley; Kyle and Carrick
5. Swansea

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areas which were there was less inequality between people.

"From what I've seen so far my view is that if an area is more socially cohesive it increases your chances of having good quality of interpersonal relationships and a good social network.

"If you live in an area which is very unequal and polarised then you are less likely to have good social networks and friends.

"To what extent we can talk about happy people or happy places? Is it the place or the people? My guess would be it's a bit of both.

HAVE YOUR SAY

It's no coincidence that the happiest area in the survey is the least overcrowded

"The variance that is attributed to the place you live in is perhaps higher than our research suggests, your immediate surroundings are very important in terms of happiness.

CR, Dorset

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"But we don't have data on neighbourhoods yet."

The research was presented at the annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society and the Institute of British Geographers.

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