

# **FACTORING HAPPINESS INTO URBAN PLANNING**

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# **STRUCTURE:**

**1. What We Think We Know About Happiness and Necessary Conditions**

**2. Seattle Area Happiness Initiative**

**3. How Research Findings May Be Applied to Urban Planning**



**Aristotle: “Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.”**

**U.S. Declaration of Independence:  
“...unalienable rights ... life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness....”**

## **SOME DEFINITIONS OF HAPPINESS:**

- How people subjectively evaluate their lives**
- Satisfaction – with life, relationships, setting, etc.**
- Positive and negative emotions**
- Meaning – including job satisfaction**
- Deep engagement – with activities pursued**
- Confidence and resilience**



**Each definition assumes basic material needs are being met**

**How to weight / assess relative contribution?**

**How to measure wellbeing?**

**But – competence levels (eg. IQ) and Gross Domestic Product confront similar challenges**



**- Considerable recent empirical work at developing an understanding and creditable metrics**

**- Role of positive psychology**

**- Some factors are age-specific**

**- Some factors operate throughout life**

# **FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HAPPINESS THROUGHOUT LIFE --- FOUR CATEGORIES**

## **1. Health**

- Increasing self-reported ill health**
- Public sector responses to drug use, obesity, smoking**
- Access to affordable health care**



## **2. Arts and Culture – personal engagement contributes to:**

- Self expression**
- Mindfulness**
- Sense of accomplishment, competence**
- Social networks**





### **3. Environment – settings in which people live and work**

- Exposure to nature and vegetation**
- Minimal air and noise pollution**
- Environmental conservation**
- Community gardening**
- Visual pleasure and excitement**



## **4. Community – sense of belonging**

- Social contacts / networks**
- Positive social context – norms, familiarity**
- Low crime, fear of crime**
- Agency in shaping environment**

# **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HAPPINESS AT VARIOUS LIFE STAGES:**

**Childhood and Family – eg. Child care**

**Youth and Education – eg. Problem solving skills**


**Working Years – eg. Life-work balance**

**Older Age – eg. Social connectedness,  
independence**

**... Happiness as “U-Shaped curve” by age**

# SEATTLE AREA HAPPINESS INITIATIVE

- Initiative of Sustainable Seattle
- From 2011, with Take Back Your Time
- Modeled on Bhutan / Victoria, BC efforts to replace GDP with Gross Domestic Happiness

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- First Phase: Survey of factors and their ranking (rating?)**
  - Second Phase: Identify and assess domains (groups of factors) influencing happiness**
  - Broad Participation: 500 responses initially**
  - Seattle City Council endorses / commits to use results in decision making**

# 10 HAPPINESS DOMAINS

- 1. Mental Wellbeing: optimism, positivity, purpose, sense of accomplishment**
- 2. Material Wellbeing: financial security, meeting basic needs**
- 3. Work: productivity, achievement, autonomy, sense of fair payment for services**
- 4. Time Balance: sufficiency of time to complete tasks, leisure time, enjoyment of activities**
- 5. Community: volunteer time, safety, trust in strangers**
- 6. Social Support: family and friends, feeling lonely, cared for or loved**



**7. Health: energy levels, performance of everyday activities, exercise**

**8. Governance: confidence in government, involvement, influence**

**9. Environment: access to nature, pollution, conservation and preservation efforts**

**10. Education, Arts & Culture: access, participation and spectatorship in sports and cultural activities.**


**Plus: “Overall Satisfaction With Life”**



## **Revised Survey (Happiness Alliance)**

- Five-point Likert Scale**
- 25,500 respondents, non-random**
- Reported average: scale of 0 - 100**



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- Seattle initiative used as pilot for other communities**
  - Domains as organizing device highlights complexity of dealing with happiness**
  - Design of valid metrics still work in progress**
  - Early form of humanistic substitute for GDP ... a misleading economic measurement that says little about wellbeing**

# APPLICATIONS OF HAPPINESS RESEARCH IN URBAN PLANNING

*Some ways ... not yet a model or valid metrics*

**Planning focuses on physical features of the city and its infrastructures**

**--Thus Environmental Domain is important area of contribution**

# 1. ENVIRONMENTAL DOMAIN

- **Environmental quality: noise, air quality, vibration, odor – especially with denser developments**
- **Reducing time spent commuting ( and walkable communities)**
- **Urban design for aesthetic pleasure**
- **Greenery and natural areas**
- **Public art**
- **Way-finding**
- **Inclusionary zoning**

## **2. COMMUNITY DOMAIN**

- Social gathering places – community centers, business districts, “third places”**
- Traffic calming – green streets, complete streets**
- Foster neighborhood organizations – localized planning committees**
- Avoid displacement**
- Etc.**

### **3. HEALTH DOMAIN**

- Infrastructure for walking, biking, outdoor sports and exercise**
- Personal security – visibly open, safe routes to schools, good lighting**
- Eliminate “food deserts”, foster farmers’ markets**
- Community gardens**
- Access to health services**

## **4. GOVERNANCE DOMAIN**

- Direct engagement in planning process**
- Political voice contributing to self determination, sense of effectiveness**
- Active outreach – inclusive of all groups**
- Develop socio-political competence**
- Constituency building, ownership of plans and results**

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS



- Subjective sense of happiness important
- Range of recent definitions of happiness
- Progress in identification of factors / domains contributing to happiness
- Seattle Area Happiness Initiative – a start at assessing, raising as issue, GDH vs. GDP
- Application of this intelligence to urban planning complements current practices – contributions to social welfare
- Developing metrics of happiness and weights on factors are works in progress



**A major purpose of this inquiry:**

**To cause happiness to become a major, explicit end of urban planning.**

**Thank You**