

Designing for Happiness

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## DESIGNING FOR HAPPINESS

### **Abstract**

*“If city planners and developers paid more attention to the growing body of knowledge about happiness, they could create cities that enhance the contentment of those who live in them.” –Charles Montgomery, Author of Happy City, Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design (Ehrenhalt, 2014)*

According to the fourth annual World Happiness Report by the New York Times, Denmark is the happiest country in the world, closely followed by Switzerland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Chan, 2016). The United States ranks as the 13<sup>th</sup> happiest country. I believe that a major factor of the happiness of these European countries is contingent upon the design of cities and city systems. While I am abroad in Europe this summer, I plan to document and analyze different elements of design in European cities and compare these elements with American design, to better understand the intersection of urban systems and happiness. My research is driven by two questions:

1. What are the causes of happiness disparity between countries?
2. How does design, in general, influence happiness on a global scale?

I am interested in a comparative analysis of design of city systems in America and Europe, and how it correlates to happiness and well being. My proposed research is congruent with what we will be researching on our Building Community Resilience in Denmark and the United Kingdom study abroad trip with scales such as happiness, urban planning, and accessibility and affordability of certain goods or actions. This project will begin in mid-May, when I will travel to Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and possible other European countries independent from my study abroad trip. I will continue this data collection when I meet up with the other students from ASU in Denmark and the United Kingdom.

### **Methods**

I will be taking a mixed methods approach to my research by using a combination of:

## DESIGNING FOR HAPPINESS

- 1.** \_\_\_\_\_ Qualitative methods: Observational data will be collected in many ways including but not limited to sketches, photography, writing, and possibly film depending on collaboration with other students' research projects.
- 2.** \_\_\_\_\_ Wearable Technology: I have received permission to use wearable technology to collect biostatistical data. For example, I will use technology that measures a human's electrodermal activity (EDA), as an indicator of the emotions a person experiences in certain settings. Specifically, I will ask human subjects to wear the technology while participating in certain activities and actions abroad, in differing settings. Use of this technology will help me better understand how design influences human well-being from a more objective perspective.
- 3.** \_\_\_\_\_ GIS (Geographical Information Systems): GIS will be used in collaboration with other students by mapping out different socioeconomic, racial, and income-differing areas in our research travels. The use of GIS will allow me to map happiness scores versus other variables to draw connections and differences.
- 4.** \_\_\_\_\_ Surveys and interviews: I will collect data via a survey tool created by Dr. Hobdod and Dr. Cloutier. The tool includes questions on urban agriculture, food availability, food access, networks, household insecurity and coping strategies, scalar resilience, happiness, and demographics. By collecting information through these surveys, I will be able to have a broader database for analyses.

Limitations will depend on rules on photography, or simply cultural differences. Different social norms of Europeans may prevent or hinder the rate of data collection. The timeline of the analysis of the data collected abroad is to be determined and will depend on the amount of time, space, and analysis tools that are provided when traveling.

### **Expected Outcomes**

## DESIGNING FOR HAPPINESS

The proposed research will strengthen my research skills and expand my knowledge as a design student interested in the user experience, happiness, and well-being. I also hope to provide American designers a better understanding of what certain European countries are doing to improve quality of life of their citizens. Happiness could be influenced by varying the atmosphere around us and help us to move toward a sustainable, more cohesive society. The redesign of public spaces may be a constructive change for many people, differing in gender, race, social class, and more. Finally, I will produce at least one academic journal article and, potentially, a practitioner's guide from my research.

## DESIGNING FOR HAPPINESS

*References*

Chan, S. (2016). Denmark Ranks as Happiest Country; Burundi, Not So Much. Retrieved March 19, 2016, from

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