APRIL 4-5, 2019

Infrastructure and Happiness Conference

Colony Ballroom, Stamp Student Union, University of Maryland, College Park
Abstract

Our world is undergoing seismic changes. Continually expanding cross border migration, rising income and wealth disparities across nations and within national urban and rural populations, environment-related risks, as well as the rapid pace of technological change challenging definitions of community and identity are demanding that we rethink national development objectives historically driven by economic growth and establish objectives which are driven by what matters most – our happiness.

Over the last 40 years, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and other social scientists have refined ways to define and measure happiness. Now, governments around the world are aspiring to measure happiness within their own populations and develop in a way which leads to its improvement.

With urban populations set to increase by 2.4 billion people by 2050, a significant number migrating from rural areas, new development in cities may provide the greatest potential for improved global happiness. Many complex processes must be envisioned and coordinated to plan, develop, and operate any city, let alone one which improves happiness sustainably and inclusively, not just within the city, but the surrounding rural regions, also.

The path forward will require the integration of ideas from different disciplines – such as urban planning, sociology, psychology, economics, technology, finance, and politics – as well as collaboration between agents from different sectors –government, industry, academia, and civil society.

To create a rich dialogue layering, debating, and, at times uniting, these diverse perspectives, we will bring together decision-makers and thought leaders from these disciplines and sectors to synthesize strategies for achieving happier cities.

Follow the conference online using the hashtag: #bahaichair
Conference Schedule of Events

Thursday, April 4, 2019

9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.  Registration

10:00 a.m.–10:20 a.m.  Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi and Mr. Joe Reeder  
Opening Remarks

10:20 a.m.–11:20 a.m.  Ms. Aubrilyn Reeder, United World Infrastructure  
Building Happier Cities

11:20 a.m.–11:45 a.m.  Coffee Break

11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.  Mr. Ricardo Alvarez, Research MIT Senseable City Lab  
Digital Lifestyles and Future Cities

12:45 p.m.–1:45 p.m.  Lunch

1:45 p.m.–2:45 p.m.  Dr. Carrie Exton, OECD  
The OECD Approach to Measuring Well-being: Why Measurement Matters

2:45 p.m.–3:45 p.m.  Dr. Lok Sang Ho, Chu Hai College of Higher Education, Hong Kong  
Non-physical Infrastructure for Building a Better World

3:45 p.m.–4:00 p.m.  Coffee Break

4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.  Dr. Carol Graham, Brookings, University of Maryland  

5:00 p.m.–5:15 p.m.  Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi  
Closing Remarks
Conference Schedule of Events

Friday, April 5, 2019

9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.  Registration

10:00 a.m.–10:20 a.m.  Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi  
Opening Remarks

10:20 a.m.–11:20 a.m.  Dr. Carol Ryff, University of Wisconsin  
Happiness as Realization of Human Potential: Core Obstacles

11:20 a.m.–11:45 a.m.  Break

11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.  Mr. Houssam Eloka, Happy City  
How can our cities make us happier?

12:45 p.m.–1:45 p.m.  Dr. Rodrigo Marquez, UNDP Chile  
Happiness as a Goal of Development?

1:45 p.m.–2:45 p.m.  Lunch

2:45 p.m.–3:45 p.m.  Dr. Jenny Roe, University of Virginia  
Urban Nature and the Happiness Hypothesis

3:45 p.m.–4:00 p.m.  Break

4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.  Dr. Louise Lambert, Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology  
Beyond Building: Creating Homes with Human Value

5:00 p.m.–5:15 p.m.  Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi and Ms. Aubrylyn Reeder  
Closing Remarks
About the Speakers

**Mr. Ricardo Alvarez**  
Researcher, MIT Senseable City Lab

Ricardo Alvarez is a PhD Candidate for the City Design and Development Group in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning and also a researcher in the Senseable City Lab, both at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His research focuses on big data, the integration of large scale networked architectures of digital sensors and the use of A.I. in future cities.

Prior to MIT, he worked for five years in the Mexican Federal Government as a founding member of ProMexico (the country’s trade and investment promotion Federal Agency) where he was Senior Advisor to the CEO, Managed International Operations for North America, Europe, Africa and the Middle East and headed the Innovation and Strategic Projects Office. Before that he worked in the private sector in the retail, financial and media industries, both as an entrepreneur as well as corporate.

Ricardo Alvarez is an international speaker, having presented at conferences and given lectures about technology and innovation in several countries across America, Europe, Asia and Australia. His speaking engagements have included The World Congress on Information Technologies, the Astana Economic Forum, The Thomson Reuters Trust Women’s Conference in London, the Harvard 22nd Technology Conference, MIT’s EMTECH, MIT’s Enterprise Forum, Bonus Creative Week Austin, Picnic Festival Amsterdam, Vancouver International Film Festival, NASDAQ (Closing Bell), IT Bangalore, Japan Aerospace Expo and the Council of the Americas, among others.

In addition to his studies at MIT he holds a Masters in International Management degree from Thunderbird and a Bachelors in Industrial and Systems Engineering degree from the Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey.

**Digital Lifestyles and Future Cities**

Digital technologies are revolutionizing cities in the 21st century. Old infrastructure systems are now being transformed into informational infrastructures, that can help us shed new light on urban dynamics and design new experiences for urbanites. The Senseable City Lab explores this phenomena by proposing new ways of understanding the city and reframing this knowledge into new design possibilities for the cities of tomorrow. In this talk we will discuss some of our research projects that blend a mixture of urban IoT, big data and A.I. into new urban synthesis, with the ultimate goal of improving life and enjoyment of the city.

**Mr. Houssam Elokda**  
Director of Operations and Masterplanning Lead, Happy City

Houssam Elokda is the Operations Manager and Masterplanning Lead for Happy City. Houssam has a passion for creating urban plans, policies and designs that boost human happiness. He brings an evidence-based approach that helps governments, developers and non-profit clients maximize urban health and happiness. Houssam has led complex masterplanning and policy projects in diverse settings that range from the rural Nova Scotian Town of Bridgewater to metropoles like Dubai, Cairo and Vancouver. He also led the creation of the National Housing Strategy for the United Arab Emirates and produced innovative research on transportation planning and design in developing countries. Houssam is a gifted communicator who uses keynotes and workshops to educate people around the world on the urban design and wellbeing connection.

**How can our cities make us happier?**

Our cities influence the way we move, feel and behave. The world has figured out how to build bigger cities with taller buildings, faster mobility options and awe-inspiring structures. But we have yet to fully understand how to build happier cities. By 2050, 2.4 billion people will live in cities, how can we make sure this urban growth doesn’t come with a massive decrease in global happiness? Happy City has spent over a decade researching how urban design and architecture influences our happiness and health. We’ve found clear connections between the way we design and the way people feel. We have been advising governments, municipalities and developers around the world how to design for happiness. We will share the learnings and stories we have collected in this keynote.
Dr. Carol Graham
Senior Fellow/Professor, Brookings Institute/University of Maryland

The American Dream is in tatters. The metrics that I use to demonstrate this are distinct from those usually used to measure on inequality. I use well-being data to highlight inequality in hope and aspirations. The high costs of being poor in the U.S. are more evident in stress, insecurity, and hopelessness than in material deprivation. Inadequate access to health insurance and stable employment – the “infrastructure of human capital” – play a role, but so do the gaps between the lives of the rich and poor. This leads to more inequality in the future, as those who do not believe in their futures are unlikely to invest in them. The markers are evident in income and education data; in differences in mortality, marriage, and incarceration rates; and other signs of societal fragmentation. My research matching metrics of well-being and ill-being with the patterns in rising premature mortality highlights the important role the metrics can play in identifying and monitoring trends in life satisfaction, hope, desperation, and misery. Remarkable levels of optimism among poor blacks contrast with desperation (and pre-mature mortality) among poor whites. I also explore the role of optimism and resilience in explaining better outcomes over time, and the role of interventions in which hope is an important channel in improving economic outcomes.

The OECD Approach to Measuring Well-being: Why Measurement Matters

In 2011, the OECD launched the Better Life Initiative: a project to help develop the international evidence base on well-being, and to support the OECD’s mission to promote better policies for better lives. This presentation will introduce the OECD’s conceptual framework for well-being, and describe our measurement approach. It will share some illustrative findings from the latest edition of our How’s Life? report, the Better Life Index website, the regional well-being database, and recent papers on countries’ experiences with well-being metrics, including their policy applications. It will discuss five ways in which well-being measures can support better decision-making, through: 1) providing a more complete picture of people’s living conditions and the resources that sustain well-being over time, 2) highlighting inequalities and the diversity of people’s experiences, 3) fostering public debate and engagement about what matters most to well-being, 4) supporting strategic alignment, priority-setting and accountability, and 5) appraising and evaluating the impact of policy on people’s lives.
Non-physical Infrastructure for Building a Better World

Infrastructure is of two kinds: physical infrastructure, and non-physical infrastructure. We are more familiar with the former, because we usually use the term to refer to such things as airport, roads, ports, bridges, reservoirs, power plants, power grid, hospitals, etc. Infrastructure takes time to build, and once built, offers many benefits in terms of transportation, communication, power supply, water supply, healthcare etc. But infrastructure also constrains, because they do not easily adapt to changing situations, and they form part of the environment in which we live and thus condition our thinking and our lives. Non-physical infrastructure mainly refers to institutions, and includes laws, norms and customs, organizations and cultural heritage. Like physical infrastructure, they both facilitate and constrain. This talk will focus on non-physical infrastructure because of its paramount importance. Indeed, even the construction of physical infrastructure is conditioned by non-physical infrastructure. Prof. Ho will explore what kind of soft infrastructure is most conducive to furthering happiness.

Beyond Building: Creating Homes with Human Value

Enlightened builders get it – physical spaces - like homes - are not mere boxes in which to insert humans for profit. But still too many fail to recognize and take seriously their role of building homes in which humans can thrive. Listen to this psychologist/‘box-dweller’ make a case for more human housing from her own lived experience in the United Arab Emirates, as well as from the literature on wellbeing. She also explores the influence of the built environment in the context of the workplace on human productivity and wellbeing, prompting the larger question: What more can builders, developers, even urban planners do to ensure infrastructure leads to wellbeing and does not undermine it.
Happiness as a Goal of Development?

Can happiness be a goal of development? Can and should public policies propose the happiness of people? This question forces us to think about what it is that really matters to us as a society. It forces us to rethink what we understand as development and how to achieve it. It also forces us to take into account that, along with the material dimensions of life, there is also the subjective dimensions, that is, the dreams, fears, hopes and discomforts of people, which must be taken into account. The findings of our research indicates that generating conditions for all people to have the same chances of pursuing and achieving happiness is a task of society as a whole, and therefore cannot be left to individual action. That individual search should be supported with social conditions that make it viable. We are convinced that public policies can generate better social conditions to achieve happiness by creating an enabling environment to develop individual and social capabilities. Of course it is not an easy task. It takes imagination, courage, perseverance and leadership to innovate.

Dr. Rodrigo Marquez
Coordinator for the Human Development Report, UNDP Chile

Since 1995, Dr. Rodrigo Marquez has worked as an expert for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He has been a member of the team in charge of the National Human Development Report for Chile. In this position, he co-authored the eleven National Reports. In December 2016 at the UN headquarters in New York, the Chilean report received, for the third time, a Global award for the Excellency in Human Development Reporting. Dr. Marquez completed his undergraduate studies at Universidad de Chile, obtaining a Degree in Sociology in 1994. In 2000 he attend summer school at Oxford University. His graduate studies were completed at Leiden University (Netherlands), where he obtained a Doctoral degree in Sociology in 2010. Dr. Marquez has been a visiting scholar at different graduate and post-graduate programs in Chile and abroad. Since 2003 he has been the Chair and Professor of Sociology of Development at the School of Sociology at “Universidad de Valparaiso”, Chile. From 2006 – 2008 he was also the first Director of the Sociological Investigations Center (CIS), at the same University.

Dr. Marquez has also worked as an International Consultant and a Human Development Advisor in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia. He has collaborated with UN agencies including UNICEF, ILO, and ECLAC, among others; as well as with other multilateral organisms like OAS and NGO’s like the Ford Foundation. Dr. Marquez is also a member of the Human Development and Capabilities Association (HDCA)

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Ms. Aubrilyn Reeder
Senior Manager Urban Ecology, United World Infrastructure

Aubrilyn Reeder supports Urban Ecology initiatives at United World Infrastructure (UWI), including Happier Cities. She has presented this work at international conferences, such as the International Gross National Happiness Conference in Bhutan and the FIABCI International Real-Estate Congress in Dubai. She was a judge for the Happiest Communities designation at the most recent Gulf Real Estate Awards and has recently written a chapter on Happiness and the Built Environment for a text addressing Positive Psychology.

Ms. Reeder has over 15 years of experience working within communities to improve educational and livelihood opportunities including: designing and managing training programs for the Supreme Education Council of Qatar, leading curriculum and leadership training development programs for over 1000 schools in India, and working with migrant farm workers in the United States. She began her career with Teach for America, working with children in under-resourced public school systems.

Ms. Reeder earned a Bachelor of Arts in Cognitive Science from the University of Virginia (USA) and a Master of Education from Harvard University (USA).
**Building Happier Cities**

There is growing interest in the physical and natural settings that support physical, social and psychological wellbeing and happiness. In fact, the World Happiness Report has become especially relevant in emerging markets, keen to balance economic growth with social development and environmental sustainability. Matched with population growth in cities and demand for new urban development, this presents an opportunity for public and private sector actors to consider how the built environment, and its associated policies and services, might be harnessed to enable improved happiness. This presentation will briefly describe key factors which impact the subjective wellbeing measure used to rank countries in the World Happiness Report and explore relationships which exist between some of these factors and the built environment. Further, it will include case studies highlighting the work of private sector companies which have embraced the United Arab Emirates’s aspiration for happiness and which have set wellbeing objectives for their built spaces.

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**Mr. Joe Reeder**  
Senior Manager Urban Ecology, United World Infrastructure

Joe Reeder oversees the legal and policy aspects of UWI’s strategic relationships with governments and multi-lateral organizations. Over Mr. Reeder’s distinguished career as an attorney and law firm regional manager, his clients have included countries and international corporations. He has also served as the 14th Undersecretary of the United States Army, responsible for budget deployment, long range planning, readiness and financial management. Additionally, he chaired the Panama Canal Commission for 4 years during its transition from the United States to Panama. He currently advises the Panama Canal on its USD 6 billion infrastructure expansion, as a member of its International Advisory Board.

Mr. Reeder earned his Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, his Doctorate of Jurisprudence from the University of Texas at Austin (USA), and his Master of Laws from Georgetown University (USA).

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**Dr. Jenny Roe**  
Director of the Center for Design + Health, Co-Director of the Healthy Cities Lab, University of Virginia

Dr. Jenny Roe directs the Center for Design + Health at the University of Virginia. She is an environmental psychologist who explores how our interactions with the world shape our health, wellbeing and behaviors. She specializes in understanding how access to restorative environments in our cities create and sustain our health and wellbeing. Her mission is to conduct the best possible research that identifies solutions to today’s urban health challenges including aging, obesity, anxiety and stress. This includes multi-disciplinary collaborations amongst experts in public health, medicine, urban design, environmental sciences, geography and psychology. She carries out applied research that aims to advance health, wellbeing and social justice through the design of healthy, inclusive and resilient cities.

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**Urban Nature and the Happiness Hypothesis**

Contact with urban nature has been intrinsically linked to wellbeing for centuries. From the 1800s, policy makers and planners began to perceive the health-related benefits of urban green space, a key driver in the creation of some of our cities’ best loved parks, including Central Park in New York City. The Garden City movement of the early 20th century, pioneered by Ebenezer Howard in the UK, continued to keep health central to neighborhood planning, inspiring similar developments around the world. But subsequently, over time, these ideas got forgotten, and it’s only now, in the last 30 years, that interest has returned, accompanied by a powerful body of evidence making the case for the wellbeing benefits of urban greening. This presentation will explain why urban nature has such a positive effect on our emotional and social wellbeing and sets out the theory pertaining to an urban nature happiness hypothesis. It sets out some simple steps as to how we can maximize access to urban nature in our cities to improve happiness, health and social equity drawing on some of the author’s pioneering research in this field.
Dr. Carol Ryff
Director, Institute on Aging, and
Hilldale Professor of Psychology,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dr. Carol D. Ryff is Director of the Institute on Aging and Hilldale Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her model of psychological well-being has been translated to more than 35 languages and is widely used (750+ publications). She studies how psychological well-being varies by age, educational status and cultural context as well as by the challenges and transitions of adult life. Whether well-being is protective of good health is a major interest, with numerous findings linking different aspects of well-being to morbidity, mortality, biomarkers (neuroendocrine, immune, cardiovascular) and neural circuitry. A guiding theme is resilience – how some are able to maintain, or regain, well-being in the face of adversity and what neurobiology underlies this capacity. Dr. Ryff directs the MIDUS (Midlife in the U.S.) and MIDJA (Midlife in Japan) longitudinal studies, both of which have become major forums for studying health and aging as an integrated biopsychosocial process.

My approach to happiness is built on ideas from developmental, existential, and humanistic psychology as well as Aristotle’s writings about eudaimonia (achieving the best that is within us) as the highest of all human goods. I have developed tools for assessing this kind of happiness, and have studied it extensively in a national longitudinal study known as MIDUS (Midlife in the U.S.). Our findings show that aspects of eudaimonic well-being are undermined by lack of access to life opportunities (e.g., educational attainment) as well as by related stress exposures. Well-being is also strongly tied to health, such as length of life, risk for disease, and physiology (stress hormones, inflammatory markers, cardiovascular risk factors). A critical question for infrastructure going forward is how can it be conceived and implemented to maximize the realization of personal potential across all segments of society and not just among privileged elites. The role of the arts and humanities in nurturing eudaimonic well-being will also be considered, again with emphasis on what such linkages imply in terms of optimal or ideal infrastructures.
The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland is an endowed academic program that advances interdisciplinary examination and discourse on global peace. While drawing certain initial insights from religion, the program aims to develop a sound scientific basis for knowledge and strategies that lead to the creation of a better world.

Viewing humanity as a collective and organic whole, the Chair’s incumbent, Professor Hoda Mahmoudi, and the program’s faculty explore the role that social actors and structures play in removing obstacles and creating paths to peace. Central to this focus is creating a body of rigorously derived and tested knowledge that can be applied to foster the emergence of a just, secure, and sustainable international order, one that addresses the social, material, and spiritual progress of the global community.

The Bahá’í Chair promotes the vision for world peace through an intensive learning process focused on five central themes.

- Structural Racism and the Root Causes of Prejudice
- Human Nature
- Empowerment of Women and Peace
- Frontiers of Global Governance and Leadership
- Overcoming Challenges in the Globalization of the Environment

Through an active program of research and publication, the Bahá’í Chair and its affiliated faculty collaborate with a wide range of scholars, researchers, and practitioners. Professor Mahmoudi recognizes the value of a broad concept of peacemaking—which she refers to as a “worldview approach”—that addresses the many underlying issues involved and employs perspectives from diverse cultures. In particular, the Bahá’í Chair is committed to forging international research partnerships that significantly expand and enrich the prevailing, Western-oriented model of peace education. In particular, the Bahá’í Chair is committed to forging international research partnerships that significantly expand and enrich the prevailing, Western-oriented model of peace education.

From L-R: Professor Hoda Mahmoudi, Emily Gorey, ’19, Dr. Kate Seaman

Upcoming Events

**April 9th**

2 p.m.–3:30 p.m.
Banneker Room, Stamp Student Union
University of Maryland College Park

**The Impact of Global Economic Governance on Low and Mid-income Countries**

**April 23**

7:30 p.m.
Colony Ballroom, Stamp Student Union

**How Deep the Rabbit Hole Goes’: The Alt-Right’s Infatuation With Stoic Philosophy**

Dr. Donna Zuckerberg
Founder and Editor in Chief of Eidolon