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# table of contents

#### Presentations

1. 2.

Silvia Viviani Mario Spada

3.

On Cities, Public Space and Happiness

Pietro Garau

### 06 | Introduction

06 Happiness and public space
Marichela Sepe

07 **Principles for urban happiness** *Marichela Sepe* 

## 10 | Papers

10 Notes for a Decalogue of the happy city

Serafina Amoroso

14 Artistic actions for a happier Venice

Violeta Pires Vilas Boas

17 The archeological heritage of Reggio Calabria: a social net of fruition

Salvatore Borruto

20 Happiness and urban design

Else Caggiano

21 Parental Advisory. Experience is the Content!

Salvatore Carbone, Sara Omassi

25 Trigger the everyday public space, experience the happiness

Lijing Chen

29 Public spaces design for urban regeneration

Giulia Chiummiento, Federico Orsini

A place that makes you happy: challenging models in public space

Fabio Ciaravella

35 The Happy City as Multifactorial Synergy

Maria Lodovica Delendi

37 Happitecture: Zen, Otherwhere and Space Design in eThekwini, South Africa

Ionathan Edkins

The satisfaction of the environmental requisite for the urban quality city as strategy of planning to regenerate the metropolitan city

Delia Evanaelista

43 Landscapes Recyclable: New forms for the project of the contemporary city

Francesca Fasanino

47 Superelevata Foot[Prints]. Recycle, reuse, urban happy mood

Sara Favargiotti, Jeannette Sordi

There is not a continent, country or culture: the agreeability in the public spaces is a search of the human being

Maria José Gomes Feitosa

53 W.W.W. Waste Worth and Wellness

Gabriele Fiocco

54 Upgrading Urban Areas as Public Green Areas to Promote People's "Good Living"

Caterina Gattuso, Philomène Gattuso

Life in between buildings: Soft places in the threshold between public and private domain

Francesca Genise

Public Space as Landscape Experience of Happiness: A Surprise Public Garden amidst Water and Large Blocks of Woodland

Julia Georgi, Christos Constantinides, Anna-Maria Vissilia

Behaviour maps: X-rays of places indicating time quality and urban happiness

Barbara Goličnik Marušić, Damjan Marušić

All just for fun nothing for fun. A bridge contest in Piazza Maggiore, Bologna

Luca Guardigli, Stefano Lamborghini, Luca Venturi

70 Is Britain's emphasis on safety and security creating an unhappy society?

Simon Andreas Hansen

75 Being happy outside the traffic jams: Moral climate and its impact on transport network modeling within the cities after state socialism

Mark Kleyman

79 Gross Urban Happiness for the Global City

Alessandro Marata

82 Urban regeneration and liveability trough a sustainable approach and a new system of public spaces

Assunta Martone, Marichela Sepe, Serena Micheletti

The Re-appropriation of Public Space as a passage to happiness

Nicolas Mitzalis

Taif Municipality's Steps for Happier, Healthier and Livable. Communities: The Case of Al Hada and Ash-Shafa, Saudi Arabia

Hisham Mortada, Mohammed Almokharrij

99	Public sculpture, a preservation tool identity of the city	152	The exhibition
	Mohamed Ali Msolli	152	Happiness, or how to learn by playing with the space
99	City and Public Space as Happines Project  Eva-Leticia Ortiz	154	Mariella Annese, Milena Farina  Regeneration of a resilience city – the Vela case study
101	Participated anamorphic art against the suburb	154	Delia Evangelista
	degradation in contemporary cities Alessandra Pagliano, Mariano Marmo	156	<b>Happy places</b> Agnese Follari, Arianna Fuccio, Rita Iervolino
105	New temporary perspectives for urban spaces Alessandra Pagliano, Angelo Triggianese	158	Upgrading Urban Areas as Public Green Areas to Promote People's "Good Living"
107	What makes people happy? The case of social housing in Brazil  Adriana Portella, Inês Quintanilha, Andressa Rocha, Ellen Antonello,Sinval Cantarelli Xavier	160	Caterina Gattuso, Philomène Gattuso  Soft places in the threshold between public and private domain  Francesca Genise
111	<b>The city sick sickens</b> <i>Maria Quarto, Annamaria Kisslinger, Donatella Tramontano</i>	162	Public Space as Landscape Experience of Happiness: A Surprise Public Garden amidst Water and Large Blocks of Woodland Julia Georgi, Christos Constantinides, Anna-Maria Vissilia
115	<b>Public Space and Happiness in the Urban Environment</b> <i>Nasim Razavian</i>		
120	Influence of urban space in the happiness of citizens Rita Monfort Salvador	164	<b>Wall of happiness</b> Nasim Razavian
122	Interpreting communitarian tourism in the context of some integrated experiences in Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica Carlos Alberto Cioce Sampaio, Talita Cristina Zechner, Christian Henríquez, Luzia Neide Coriolano, Simone Calistro Fortes Bortolossi, Alan Ripoll Alves	166	The Urban Eutopia in Casal di Principe-Casapesenna-San Cipriano (Campania-Italy). Nature wins on built: from waste to resource  Maria Maddalena Simeone, Luisa Mauro, Valentina Grasso, Germano Sessa
130	The people-oriented approach to public spaces: The case of Adelaide  Marichela Sepe, Assunta Martone, Serena Micheletti	168	The possibility to perceive different sensations coming by the environment provides a feeling of happiness  Mariarosaria Perna, Anna Pirozzi
135	Happiness in Urban Spaces induced by 'Anomalous Objects' Sundas Shahid, Javairia Shahid	170	Green Bridge in Via San Giacomo dei Capri Roberta De Risi
136	Happiness and Public Space Ann Sharrock, Ian Fisher	172	Taif Municipality's Steps for Achieving Happier, Healthier and Livable Communities: The Case of Al-Hada and Ash-
138	bu.giardino, collaborative writing about/for Public Space: towards urban hAPPiness for all		Shafa, Saudi Arabia Mohammed Almokharrij, Hisham Mortada
142	Cesarina Siddi Smart Governance: urban regeneration and integration	174	SUPERELEVATA FOOT[PRINTS. Recycle, Reuse, Urban Happy Mood
	policies in Europe. Turin and Malmö case studies Chiara Testoni, Andrea Boeri	176	Sara Favargiotti, Jeannette Sordi
148	The restauration of culture heritage improves happiness  Zhang Wei, Chen Lijing	176	Piazza Maggiore, Bologna Luca Guardigli, Stefano Lamborghini, Luca Venturi
		177	City Happiness. Work in progress Giuseppina Giugliano, Sara Iaccarino, Michele Letteriello, Roberta Nivuori

Indice autori 178

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### **Gross Urban Happiness for** the Global City

Alessandro Marata

#### The paradox of happiness

Half a century ago Richard Easterlin gave the definition of his famous paradox that, beyond a certain threshold of wealth and well-being, the level of happiness of man stops increasing. Indeed, by the paradox, happiness begins to decrease. The causes are to be found in a number of factors that are inherent in the complexity of life and mind of man.

Ten years have passed since overtaking the city of man on the campaign. Today more than half of the inhabitants of planet Earth live in urban areas and the phenomenon is growing fast. Among a few decades two thirds of the world population will be people and will live in large numbers in urban areas of large metropolis with frayed borders and un-

In many cases the urban metabolism, of which we are the cells, proves to be very ill. Pathologies seem, at times, incurable: traffic, air pollution, widespread crime, new forms of anti-social. And these are only the most obvious diseases. As regards the traffic remember some significant data and, once again, apparently paradoxical. Vehicles can get to occupy, in the most dramatic cases, more than half of urban open spaces; the majority of the car is parked and only a small part is in motion; the average use is of a maximum of two hours per day; almost always the only seat occupancy is to the driver; the average speed of displacement, given the time for the search of the parking, is very low, so as to be comparable, on paths of medium length, to that of the bicycle; the cost is much higher than that resulting from the use of public transport. In many cases, traveling on foot, by bicycle, on public transport, is not only healthier, but also cheaper and faster. It is no longer then only a matter of philosophical view of life; It is a fact which translates into greater efficiency. And greater happiness.

#### The principle of public happiness

The economist and Nobel laureate David Kahneman, about homo tecnologicus, reminds us that happiness depends not only wealth, but also the possibility to decide on

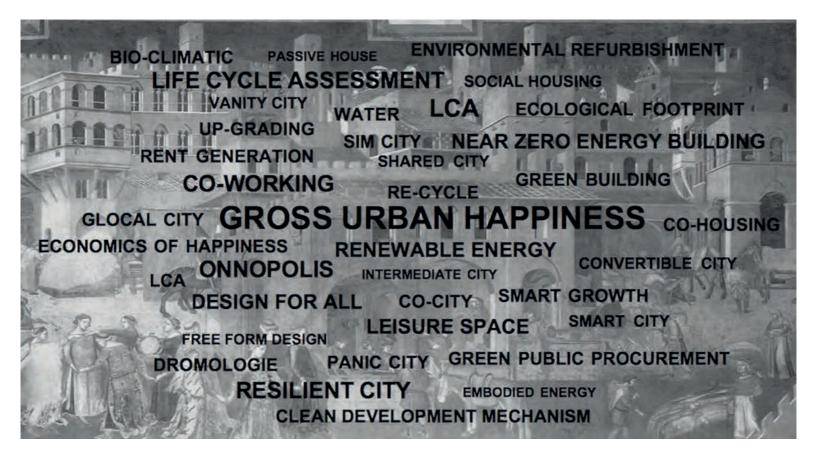
many issues that affect our lives. It is able to decide at the basis of direct democracy. Kahneman, continuing the work of Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria, redefines the concept known as the Enlightenment principle of public happiness. Where it participates more people declare more satisfaction. The philosopher Philip Pettit strengthens this argument: the two classical concepts of freedom it adds a third (negative freedom, I can do everything that the law does not prevent me, for example, be rude, positive freedom, I can not do everything I want although not a crime, but some of the things I want). The third concept of freedom is the possibility of participation in public life.

#### **Ethical issues**

The German philosopher Hans Jonas, in his essay The principle of responsibility. Ethics for technological civilization, watched as the man he had become more dangerous because of the nature of what nature was for him. Jonas stood in the middle of the principle of hope of Ernst Bloch and the principle of despair Gunther Anders: in this way trying to combine in a single model universalist ethics and the political-economic realism.

Umberto Galimberti writes, in Ethical issues. New behaviors, that today, in the age of technology, act and make are very important words for the destiny of ethics and the fate of man. The technological man is less and less able to react and take actions in view of a purpose chosen by him. E 'increasingly required to perform the actions described and prescribed, of which may not even know what the aims and, in the case know them, he does not however be liable. In this way those who work is only responsible of the conditions of his work, not its purpose. This mode, which is defined by the technological culture button pushing, subtracts the ethical principle of personal responsibility. When asked "How did he feel when you dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima?" the pilot replied: "Nothing. That

The jurist and philosopher Norberto Bobbio observed that, with the passing years, his writings were increasingly characterized by something that could be described as a curvature of ethical thought. In his essay In Elogio della Mitezza remembered as Aristotelian ethics, understood as a discussion of the virtues, had almost completely disappeared today.



Gross Urban Happines

Bobbio drew then the ethics of Kant. eminently ethic of duty. In the contemporary world the ethics of duty has become synonymous with ethics of rights and rules.

The modern concept of sustainability bases its foundation on the ethical concept of rights and duties to the point that its definition more concise and effective states that sustainability is achieved when we are able to satisfy our needs without diminishing the ability, for our children, to meet them. That is to say, it is our duty to act without limiting the rights of others, present and future.

#### Sustainable issues

Finally we reached the age of what we might call an operational alliance between nature and technology. Environmentally sustainable technologies, working for the environment and not against it, starting to be considered finally a cultural value. To understand this type of thinking we need to consider the architecture according to a holistic view of an organization whose whole is a whole greater than the sum of its parts, which is able to recognize, metabolize, empathize with the environment and its resources and that helps us to be aware and to reflect on the environmental limits such as diminishing resources, waste disposal, the progressive and rapid increase of the sources of pollution.

If Jonas defends the right ethical nature, Serres does more. In his book The natural contract he give nature the status of legal entity: if we want life to continue, we must reverse the traditional anthropocentric perspective and take a natural contract, in which the two subjects are man and nature. These are the basics of deep ecology that wants to establish rules, rights and duties. The important thing is that this base will not give in to the sirens of the antihumanism and anti-modernism. Italy has a profoundly unscientific and therefore the danger is real. No coincidence Umberto Veronesi has proposed an Alliance for Science and a *European Authority*.

Willard Quine said: attention, tradition, sometimes, provides values that allow you to avoid having to decide.

This fact, combined with the traditional italic Akrasia, the weakness of the will (Aristotle again), that drives us to make, sometimes, choices at odds with what we think is good for us, has caused and continues to cause a lot of damage in Italy.

Avishai Margalit in his essay The Decent Society, argues that contemporary society, even before that right, must avoid to humiliate and embarrass its members. It must be so, even against those who are not yet, but it will be, holders of rights.

#### Towards a sustainable and ethical urbatettura

The issue is serious. Obesity or, at best, the overweight, a problem that is worrying, in different ways, almost all of the so-called industrialized countries. The question is obviously ironic and perplexing, considering the persistent imbalance at the dawn of the third millennium, the distribution of the resources of the planet. This fact means that even today, in many parts of the world, the main daily problem is to have a proper nutrition, to have little to eat. Many researches are warning that continuing with the current rates, within a few decades the majority of adults in developed societies pass from simple overweight to obesity, which is no longer simply an aesthetic feature of our body, but it is a metabolic disease and social. And what is worse is that it is sure that this phenomenon also affects children.

The comments on the increase in body weight combined with those on laziness induced by lifestyle, lead us to be able to say that we live in obesogenic environments. The sedentary lifestyle that characterizes the hours dedicated to studies, leisure and work lead us to think that you get fat not only in relation to what and how you eat. The discouragement of physical inactivity could then become a priority in the design of public spaces and private. The slim city we recently read in the print media and on the internet is nothing more than a model city that stimulates, promotes and facilitates the movement. It makes, therefore, happier.

However, as often happens when you want to promote a concept objectively dense of positive and interesting, you can fall into the trap of oversimplifying solutions and propose trivial things or, at worst, real errors: propose narrower streets and wider sidewalks, houses without elevators, less remote controls. televisions, air conditioners and fast food. Not only with the promotion of small good practices that you can fix it. We will not live better demonizing the conveniences that the progress we make available. This practice can at best reach the aim of making the city, but not to fix it. The good practices are important from the point of view of quality, but often insignificant from the quantitative point of view.

Better design spaces of the city would improve the quality of life of the average citizen. The quality of life which tend not only the physiological, but also psychological. A really important first step would be to remove, as far as possible, the car from our life. Certainly it is not possible for everyone: it is obvious. All the considerations on which we are thinking is based on a statistical basis. Nothing personal. There is no doubt that the pedestrianization of urban spaces produces welfare from multiple viewpoints. Aside from the obvious incentive of the movement, it induces sociability among individuals, reduces air pollution and the phenomena of petty crime; if combined with the small retailers also promotes the diversification of trade.

Pedestrianize space can also help characterize the Ecological Footprint in a positive environment in which we work, live and play. Walk or bike means having a perceptual experience of the world really complete: all

five senses are involved and they are with human rhythms. The dynamic perception of space has written very well and the French philosopher Paul Virilio, to describe this new concept coined the term dromology. And Zygmunt Bauman, in his description of the liquid society, explains accurately the effects of the increasing speed of the factors that characterize modern life. The polish sociologist shows that these effects impoverished, slowing it down, the sedimentation process of understanding, learning and development of our experiences. The subsequent result is a general impoverishment of the stratification of our wisdom, which tends to remain superficial.

About slim city, you can find some interesting example, because somewhere something has been done. There are cities like Oslo Norway, Germany's Munster, the Swedish Malmo offering, with success, models that go in this direction. The case of Malmo is particularly symbolic, because in 2000 he built a great neighborhood where the car is banned in everyday life and it is mainly for well-defined needs arising from the emergency and to the transfer of goods. In this place, the term sustainability has been declined in all its many virtuous aspects: environmental, social, economic and, we might add, metabolic.

The buildings have been designed and manufactured to the highest principles of bioclimatic architecture for which they have a limited energy consumption so they do not need to connect to public networks. Some produce more energy than they consume. The separate collection of household waste is through a collection system pneumatic underground. The purification of water is achieved through phytoremediation. Roofs and facades are solar collectors and photovoltaic cells. The outdoor areas, all pedestrians, are perfect in every detail and offer citizens a great deal of places to stop and talk, walk and jog, play: in a word, to socialize. An urban paradise that is the dream of every architect who puts as priority values of professional ethics and environmental sustainability. They are unfortunately not able to provide data on the weight of the population. I watch and wonder: Malmo is certainly a slim city, but its inhabitants are leaner than average? In Oklahoma City, one of the twenty cities fattest of America, the mayor said that one of his goals would be to lose four hundred

tons to its inhabitants by 2008. The objective is not so strange when you consider that the theme of 'Obesity, malnutrition and overnutrition, it has become one of the hot topics in the electoral programs of the American primaries. In London it is proposing to set up cooking classes in elementary schools and to cut free care to those who are obese for too much food. They were even established prizes to those slimming. Medical treatment for diseases caused by overweight are, in fact, a significant cost to the community: one might suggest the slogan that people get fat also depletes you. In London it is also born a new figure who provides advice on alternative pedestrian paths; It cost ten million pounds, but did fall by twelve percent car use and increase of thirty one bicycle: money well spent. In Europe, including Italy, they are valuable programs and the promotion of VeloCity. In Trento, the Archdiocese has promoted a waiver Lenten car, a sort of ecological fasting. A religious act when viewed from the perspective of the distorted reflection on the social role of the car, but also ethically if aimed at promoting best practices useful to safeguard the environment in which we live. Happiness in the sacrifice.

It seems incredible, but there is also the other side of the coin. There is a part of the blogosphere called fatosphere. It 'a community that claims the thought fat positive arguing that the overweight hurt. Puts, of course, also questioned the assertion, proposed by all the media advertising, that being thin means being more beautiful. It seems that this activity counter is steadily increasing. The human being is really fun and unpredictable.

My innate optimism leads me to say, to conclude these brief considerations, that man has always solved its problems and then will do it again. The remedies described can have a significant effect in the solution of the issue of overweight in any case, at present and in the light of what is observed, it seems to continue its relentless rise? The problem of obesity is likely to be solved, but I'm not so sure that the roads are indicated as effective, although they are useful and should be pursued with tenacity, determination and severity. I tend to think more realistically that obesity will perhaps defeat, in most cases, chemically: a pill colored with miraculous powers. We can not forget that man is the only animal bad, envious and self-defeating.

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