POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

For decades, discussions regarding sustainable development and sustainability have been fostering interdisciplinary research, policy development and strategies. Likewise, studies of happiness and well-being are stimulating considerable interdisciplinary research and generating interest with respect to policy and practice. Bringing these two fields together within the concept of sustainable happiness holds intriguing possibilities and the potential to contribute to individual, community and global well-being. O’Brien (2005) defined sustainable happiness as the pursuit of happiness that does not exploit other people, the environment or future generations. This concept is being used to generate awareness with respect to how individuals, communities and nations pursue happiness and the local and global consequences. The emphasis is on our mutual interdependence. It also recognizes that our pursuit of happiness is impacting people and the natural environment, across space and time.

Incorporating the concept of sustainable happiness into research, policy and practice will enhance efforts to create a more sustainable future and generate opportunities to leave a legacy of sustainable happiness. Examples are given with respect to urban planning, education and Aboriginal worldviews.

Key words: sustainable happiness, sustainability, infrastructures of well-being, we’lqatum, urban planning, education, Aboriginal worldviews
INTRODUCTION

Sustainable happiness is the pursuit of happiness that does not exploit other people, the environment or future generations (O’Brien, 2005).

Creating a higher quality of life requires us all – individuals and communities – to help create a new political, physical and cultural “infrastructure of well-being” (Gardner & Assadourian, 2004 p. 172).

Twenty years ago, the Brundtland Commission published its report, Our Common Future (WCED,1987), which outlined concerns about the trajectory of development and the harmful impact of those development patterns for all life on the planet, including life that was yet to be born. It coined the now famous definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 24). By 1992, world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro at the first United Nations conference that linked issues of environment and development, the Earth Summit. The 40-chapter Earth Summit document that emerged, Agenda 21, addressed the issues and plans for action around biodiversity, trade, debt, deforestation, poverty, education, agriculture, desertification, human settlements, consumption, and much more.

A parallel summit in Rio, the Global Forum, drew non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world. NGOs recognized that government treaties signed at the Earth Summit would represent a major step forward in political will, and yet it would be a baby step in comparison to what was required to transform the vastly unsustainable development policies and practices in place. Sequestered in tents for two weeks, NGO representatives hammered out their own “alternative” treaties with the vision that people from around the world could join hands and collaborate on shared action plans.

There was a surge of optimism and activity in the wake of the Earth Summit. Governments and NGOs alike began charting plans to build on the momentum created by this historic meeting. In Canada, every federal government department is now required to have a sustainable development strategy. The concept of sustainable development (SD) became the subject of academic and political discourse. Many authors accepted the three-pillar model of SD that includes economic, social, and environmental sustainability. As sustainability morphed and migrated through various disciplines and industries, we witnessed a significant shift toward interdisciplinary discourse and interdepartmental cooperation. Some authors also noted that SD was open to so many ambiguous interpretations that stakeholders who preferred the status quo could find ways to do so while using the rhetoric of sustainability (Daly, 1992; Robertson, 1992).
Nevertheless, sustainable development and sustainability have entered the language and politics of most nations, municipalities and communities of the North. It is less evident in popular language, though many individuals, at least, have grasped the concept of environmentally-friendly behaviour through recycling, reducing, and reusing.

Meanwhile, positive psychology and happiness studies have been realizing a far more rapid course, influencing work in economics, business, health, and social policy discussions. Radio shows, television broadcasts and a multitude of books about happiness are raising the profile of happiness studies. Research results on happiness appear to fire individual imaginations and penetrate the everyday preoccupations that operate like an energy shield against information overload. Conversely, environmental educators struggle to change unsustainable behaviour through public education, desperate to garner attention around pressing issues. It is challenging to counteract the social and cultural milieu of the consumer society. Worldwatch President, Christopher Flavin (2004), states that “the drive to acquire and consume now dominates many peoples’ psyches, filling the space once occupied by religion, family, and community” (p. xvii). The cost of this, “unbounded pursuit of consumption” Flavin writes, is huge.

Consumption today absorbs vast quantities of resources, many of which are being used far beyond sustainability levels. In just the last 50 years, global use of fresh water has grown threefold, while fossil fuel use has risen fivefold (p. ix).

Also, increasingly, our consumption patterns in the North are dependent on the availability of cheap labour in the South (Klein, 2000).

In a consumer society, where consumption and happiness are inextricably linked, it is understandable that individuals confuse the “path to the ‘good life’ as the ‘goods life’” (Kasser, 2006, p. 200). Municipal and national governments are embedded in these consumer societies and public policy grapples with meeting the goals for sustainability while enmeshed in public perceptions of happiness that are closely tied to consumption. For example, municipal planners know that denser land use planning and the reduction of car use is central to developing healthier communities. Canadian planners say, however, that many affluent suburban residents demand single-family dwellings on large lots with 3-car garages. And developers are happy to comply.

What’s to be done? In a world where global warming has begun (IPCC, 2007) and climate scientists are investigating both mitigation measures and adaptations measures, where human suffering has reached almost unfathomable levels, what difference could policies on happiness make? Are happiness studies merely a pleasant diversion from all the bad news and despair while the real work is being
done in the academic trenches of other disciplines? Perhaps that sentiment was best voiced by a transportation colleague who said, “I don’t care if people are happy, I just want them to get out of their cars!”

Speaking from fifteen years of work on sustainability, my perspective is that the pursuit of happiness must become an essential component of our discussions. Happiness is at the heart of who we are, what we do, as well as the decisions and policies we make. Our pursuit of happiness is changing the world, and clearly, not always for the better. Sustainability literature has only just begun to incorporate positive psychology (Starke, 2004; NEF, 2006). Conversely, few positive psychologists, with the exception of Kasser (2006) draw connections to sustainability, unless reference is being made to sustaining happiness, (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). The concept of ‘sustainable happiness’ is intended to strengthen the relationship between happiness and sustainability and to stimulate discussion in various domains. Another aim is to emphasize the interconnections across time and space that our policies and practices are having, as well as the tremendous potential for far more positive impacts.

**Sustainable Happiness, Quality of Life and Happiness**

Sustainable happiness is relevant to essentially every definition of happiness. If we are talking about the momentary pleasure of drinking a cup of coffee, for example, we can consider whether that cup of coffee is fair trade coffee. Has one’s momentary pleasure of coffee, (or anything else for that matter), come at the expense of someone else or the natural environment? On a daily basis, there are countless choices that individuals, organizations, and governments make which could contribute to sustainable happiness. Whether we look at one’s commute to work (the Texas working women studied by Kahneman & Krueger (2006) would likely have enjoyed their commute if it entailed a pleasant walk or cycle ride), an organization’s procurement policies, or a municipal plan for active transportation. All of these moment-to-moment, day-to-day choices have the potential to leave a legacy of sustainable happiness.

It may be helpful to conceptualize sustainable happiness within matrices that Veenhoven (2007) uses to distinguish happiness from other qualities of life.
Veenhoven’s matrix for quality of life concepts distinguishes between “opportunities for a good life” (chances) and “the good life itself” (life results). The matrix also differentiates between qualities that are external or internal to the individual. Using this classification, Veenhoven describes the top left quadrant, **livability of environment**, as a precondition for happiness and this quadrant could include such things as preservation of the environment and livable cities.

**Life-ability** addresses the capacity of the individual, potentially associated with health, energy, resilience, and the art of living.

**Utility of life** “represents the notion that a good life must be good for something more than itself. This assumes some higher values” (p. 5), which might be loosely interpreted as meaning of life.

It is in the bottom right quadrant, **satisfaction with life**, that Veenhoven locates the subjective experience of happiness that would include subjective well-being, life-satisfaction, and happiness.

Inserting the concept of sustainable happiness into each of these four quadrants provides additional insights. Turning to the top left quadrant (livability of environment), sustainable happiness implies that the preconditions for happiness must take into account the local and global environment, the impact to individuals and societies, and the long term relationship between the present actions and future sustainability. It would prompt us to ask questions such as the following: Does preserving our local environment have repercussions ‘downstream’ in other communities? Does the golf course, that so many of us enjoy, use pesticides? Does the livable city recognize the needs and aspirations of all sectors, particularly children? The conventional method of reducing traffic jams for example, is to build more roads, thus encouraging more motorized transportation that is harmful to human and environmental health. Evidently, livability that does
not incorporate sustainability may meet the needs of some while jeopardizing the preconditions for happiness of many others. Later in this paper, our trend as an urbanizing planet is discussed, emphasizing the significance of livable cities.

With respect to the top right quadrant (life-ability), sustainable happiness recognizes our interconnection with all life on the planet and a responsibility to future generations. Compassion is central to this and I would argue, a significant life-ability (see section regarding Aboriginal worldviews). Also, there is some evidence (Frumkin, 2001; Gilbert and O’Brien, 2005b) that walkable communities support greater physical activity and that obesity levels are higher in communities that are less walkable. Therefore, sustainability within the first quadrant also impacts life-ability.

There is an easy fit between sustainable happiness and Veenhoven’s ‘utility of life’ (bottom left quadrant). Recognizing the relationship between one’s pursuit of happiness and the well-being of the natural environment, the well-being of distant neighbours and children ten generations from now can readily give one’s life a sense of higher purpose. Additionally, it may assist individuals to recognize that even in the most mundane choices of their life they may choose to make a positive contribution. Travel choices, the clothes one buys, the food we purchase, and so on, all have a connection to happiness – beyond our own.

Considering the bottom right quadrant (satisfaction with life), sustainable happiness reminds us that our subjective well-being and life satisfaction are intricately linked to that of others. If individuals can recognize this interconnection and interdependence, my hope is that we would accelerate our efforts towards a more sustainable future. It is also possible that if individuals can embrace and practice sustainable happiness that it would improve their own life satisfaction as it would most certainly influence consumption patterns and one’s perception of materialism which appear to be linked with well-being (Kasser, 2006).

Veenhoven (2007) unfolds his fourth quadrant (Satisfaction with life) from Scheme 1 into an additional matrix seen below.
The **Pleasure** quadrant refers to the momentary experience one has that may come from “delight in a cup of tea at breakfast, the satisfaction of a chore done or the enjoyment of a piece of art” (p. 7). **Domain satisfaction** incorporates the “enduring appreciation of life-aspects” and may include marriage or job satisfaction. Veenhoven notes the relationship between domain satisfaction and the momentary pleasures or “instant satisfactions” that may contribute to it. **Top-experiences** are likely to be short-lived ‘peak-experiences’ of bliss.

Veenhoven’s definition of happiness resides in the bottom right quadrant, this “enduring satisfaction with life-as-a-whole” (p.8). He adds that “overall happiness is the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her own life-as-a-whole favourably. In other words, how much one likes the life one leads” (p.8). Again, sustainable happiness can be integrated into all of these categories. Many “instant satisfactions” are connected to the well-being of others. As noted earlier, that cup of tea we enjoy at breakfast could either have contributed to the sustainable livelihood of the tea labourers, if I am drinking fair trade tea (and the environment would also have been safeguarded), or I may be contributing to the exploitation of both the labourer and the environment. It could also be argued that our instant satisfactions would be enhanced if individuals, communities and nations were to pursue happiness sustainably. For example, my pleasure with riding a bicycle is likely to be greater if the air is not polluted and if those who have created the bicycle path/lane have done so with an eye to creating visual delight.

There is also a nice fit between Veenhoven’s view of the preconditions for happiness (Scheme 1), domain satisfaction (Scheme 2), and sustainable happiness. One example would be the choice have, (and the opportunity to choose), a sustainable livelihood. With respect to satisfaction with marriage, livable communities can contribute to this. Ideally, livable communities would
support a greater work-life balance through choices for less stressful commutes, teleworking, and opportunities to live closer to one’s work. All of this affords more time for couples and families to interact. Likewise, knowing one’s neighbours can contribute to social support (Freeman, 2001). Livable communities would also provide access to active living, again providing the infrastructure for daily physical activity and stress reduction.

There are some fascinating complexities with respect to sustainable happiness and top experiences. I would simply be hazarding a guess, but my hunch is that in a world in which sustainable happiness was recognized and practiced individuals would be socialized towards the experience and expression of greater compassion. We might conjecture that there would be more top experiences or possibly that our daily experience would come closer to a top experience, a state that is described later in this paper through the Mi’kmaq word we’lquatum.

Ultimately, I believe, that sustainable happiness would enhance individual experiences of happiness without detracting from the ability for all individuals to experience Veenhoven’s final quadrant (Scheme 2). Furthermore, by acknowledging our interdependence, we may find that the preconditions for happiness are augmented. An intriguing possibility is that if we embrace sustainable happiness in policy and practice that this would also foster greater creativity and productivity of consumer goods and infrastructure that leave a footprint of delight (O’Brien, 2006).

What if humans designed products and systems that celebrate an abundance of human creativity, culture and productivity? That are so intelligent and safe, our species leaves an ecological footprint to delight in, not lament? (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p.16).

The remainder of this paper examines applications of sustainable happiness within urban planning, education and culture.

**SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS IN POLICY AND PRACTICE**

**Sustainable Happiness and Urban Planning**

Sometime in 2008, the world will cross an invisible but momentous milestone: the point at which more than half the people on the planet – roughly 3.2 billion human beings – live in cities (Flavin, 2007, p. xxiii).

Urbanization is increasing and with it, interest in creating sustainable, livable cities. Efforts to address the needs of urban populations and the accompanying demands on the environment have led to creative and collaborative initiatives
regarding energy use, housing, waste management, transportation, health facilities, and much more. In recent years there has been a growing recognition that how we build our cities has a significant impact on human health. A Canadian Medical Officer of Health commented that we have been creating “obesogenic” environments (MHLC, 2004). In recent years, it is increasingly common to see transport planners, public health officials, and urban planners attending the same conferences.

Perspectives from positive psychology have yet to influence transport and urban planning policy and practice. There is one notable exception – during his tenure as mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, chose to “plan for happiness” (O’Brien, 2005). He also focused on the needs of children. Meanwhile, research on children’s health and transportation (O’Brien, 2001) has examined the needs and aspirations of children in the context of urban planning. This research brings us full circle, back to happiness. Children’s view of transportation (when walking to school) reminds us that transportation is not only about “moving people and goods.” It is about wonder, discovery, joy and happiness (O’Brien, 2005).

Peñalosa initiated the first car-free day in Bogotá. He created urban infrastructure and public space that gave priority to children and to those who don’t own an automobile.

We had to build a city not for businesses or automobiles, but for children and thus for people. Instead of building highways, we restricted car use. ... We invested in high-quality sidewalks, pedestrian streets, parks, bicycle paths, libraries; we got rid of thousands of cluttering commercial signs and planted trees. ... All our everyday efforts have one objective: Happiness (Peñalosa & Ives, 2002).

Part of planning for happiness, involves planning with respect.

All this pedestrian infrastructure shows respect for human dignity. We’re telling people, ‘You are important—not because you’re rich or because you have a Ph.D., but because you are human.’ If people are treated as special, as sacred even, they behave that way. This creates a different kind of society (Peñalosa & Ives, 2002).

During a recent interview Peñalosa talked about his belief that we should strive to create “Cities of Joy.” He writes about cities of the ‘Third World’ but those of us in ‘developed’ countries could also ponder the relevance of his words.
If we in the Third World measure our success or failure as a society in terms of income, we would have to classify ourselves as losers until the end of time. Given our limited resources, we have to invent other ways to measure success, and that could be in terms of happiness. It may be in how much time children spend with their grandparents, or the ways in which we are able to enjoy our friendships, or how many times people smile during the week. A city is successful not when it’s rich but when its people are happy (Peñalosa in Walljasper, 2004).

Peñalosa’s focus on children and happiness led him to create “infrastructures of well-being.” Similar accomplishments are being reported through work on child-friendly cities. More than 800 municipalities are now registered on UNICEF’s Child Friendly City web site in Florence. In Canada, our Centre for Sustainable Transportation has developed Child- and Youth-Friendly Land Use and Transport Planning Guidelines (Gilbert and O’Brien, 2005a).

Prior to Enrique’s tenure as mayor, his brother, Gil Peñalosa, was the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. Gil continues his work these days in Canada and around the world, promoting walking, cycling, trails and public parks. He noted the following application of sustainable happiness:

In my work I see this concept of Sustainable Happiness as very relevant in all areas … While I was Commissioner of Parks & Recreation in Bogotá I took a dying program of less than 13K and expanded it to over 91K of road closures every Sunday and attracted over 1.5 million people every week to walk, run, bike or skate [Ciclovia]. Despite the multiple issues happening in the country, this was the safest and most enjoyable place. On average, people were doing 50 minutes of physical activity but stayed on the Ciclovia for over 4 hours, enjoying other people's company. Obviously this is very respectful of people, the environment and future generations (G. Peñalosa, 2007).

Further evidence for the value of creating “infrastructures of well-being” are found in the Delightful Places Survey (O’Brien, 2006). Working with the National Center for Bicycling and Walking in the US, O’Brien (2006) developed a Delightful Places Survey to explore links between well-being and the urban and non-urban areas that respondents experience as “delightful.” It was an exploratory survey that involved 200 responses. The activity that was associated most often (80%) with a delightful place is relaxation. As one survey respondent stated,

*Delightful places are best incorporated into routine experiences and not once in a while places to enjoy. Relaxation in a city needs to be*
almost like routine treatments – once a year is helpful but not lasting. A little pleasantness almost every day starts to have a cumulative and positive effect.

How does one create a delightful place (apart from those that exist naturally)? Respondents generally noted the very things that are recommended for livable communities.

Create a walkable city (like Vancouver), and limit cars inside the perimeter. Include wide sidewalks, good transportation options, plant trees and flowers, good lighting for night time accessibility, create lots of little neighbourhood areas with all services needed within the neighbourhood. Create multiple-use buildings.

Provide more cycling/walking trails in other natural areas close to cities.

Governments would have to share this vision and listen to key stakeholders who want cities to be planned to incorporate bike paths, parks and wonderful meeting places along already existing waterways, etc.

The feelings associated with a Delightful Place were also quite telling. (Respondents were permitted to check more than one option).

Table 1. Feelings Associated with a Delightful Place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you feel in this delightful place?</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel relaxed</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more connected to myself</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected to nature</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel energized</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel at home</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected with other people</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel connected to a spiritual essence</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One woman wrote, “I feel like a good mom, hopeful for my son’s future.”

We also asked people to outline the best indicator of a Delightful Place. We kept this question open-ended to gather divergent views. Many comments referred to the feelings invoked by the place: relaxing, an experience of peace or freedom,
happiness, calming, joy, or a place that allows one to pause and enjoy life. Physical attributes of the place were also mentioned: beauty, lots of children, presence of happy people, nature, no auto traffic, quiet. Some suggestions were very precise: 24-hour mass transit; quantify how many people utilize the place. Some people described the lingering impact of visiting a Delightful Place.

A delightful place is an area/place you return to over and over and always leave with a smile and a sense of connecting with something bigger than you.

A place that makes you feel energized, calm, in tune with life and people.

A place where I can’t stop smiling.

An ability to return to this place in one’s mind and find an inner peace, even when one is many, many miles away.

Peñalosa’s accomplishments, child-friendly cities, and indications from the Delightful Places survey suggest that when we bring happiness together with sustainability we create happier, healthier cities. It is too early to say with certainty, but it is possible that further efforts to link happiness with sustainability will result in greater political and personal “buy in.” Layard, (2005) reminds us that “people prefer to risk high probabilities of large losses in order to avoid the certainty of much smaller losses” (p. 144). And yet, many environmental messages imply that we have to live with less, aiming to provoke emotional reactions that will prod us to change our unsustainable behaviour. Peñalosa managed to convince people to live with less road building because he provided more of something that improved the quality of life – and was also more sustainable. Child-friendly planning is appealing to municipal staff, politicians, parents, and children because it reinforces the well-being of children (rather than focusing only on getting people out of their cars).

Sustainable happiness is a concept that has the potential to enhance urban planning policies by raising the profile of happiness and well-being, but linked to sustainability. Currently, public happiness may be an inherent intention of many politicians and planners, but it is not explicit. Consequently, the question of whose view of happiness is driving the vision for our cities tends to be unexamined. Are we incorporating the aspirations of children? Usually, not. Are we catering to the “happiness” of car drivers? Most often, the answer is yes. Without more explicit discussions regarding public happiness there continues to be tension between sustainability objectives and meeting the more public demands that are embedded in a consumer society view of happiness. Ironically, a consumer society view of happiness does not always support the
preconditions or experience of happiness that the consumer seeks. More significantly, such a view has the serious and long-term consequence of affecting the sustainability of the planet.

Efforts to raise awareness regarding sustainable happiness will no doubt require attention to formal, non-formal and informal education. This is the subject of the following section.

**Sustainable Happiness and Education**

2005 marked the beginning of the UN Decade of Education and Sustainable Development (2005-2014). The rationale for this is contained in the following words:

> There can be few more pressing and critical goals for the future of humankind than to ensure steady improvement in the quality of life for this and future generations, in a way that respects our common heritage – the planet we live on. ...Education for sustainable development is a life-wide and lifelong endeavour which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to us all, or it will not belong to anyone (UN Decade of Education and Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

Fifteen years ago, Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 (UN, 1993) outlined a plan of action regarding education and sustainable development. Unfortunately, progress with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been very slow. In a survey of current practice, a UN report noted that,

> There is an urgent need to re-examine the nature and structure of schooling in a more critical way to address [ESD] in its broadest context (i.e. school organizational principles, operational practices, school grounds management, and curriculum content). We are faced with a paradox: Is education the problem or the solution in working toward a sustainable future? At current levels of unsustainable practice and over consumption it could be concluded that education is part of the problem. If education is the solution then it requires a deeper critique and a broader vision for the future. Thus, whole systems redesign needs to be considered to challenge existing frameworks and shift our thinking beyond current practice and toward a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2005, p. 59).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the many barriers to shifting education systems, frameworks and practice. However, one barrier that is noted in the above document and is supported by my experience with teachers, is that
sustainable development and sustainability are not well understood by many educators, regardless of whether we are referring to elementary, secondary or post-secondary levels of education. On the other hand, when I introduce sustainable happiness to teachers attending courses at Cape Breton University, they readily see connections within their personal lives and the subjects they teach. They are eager to learn more about positive psychology and its applications in the classroom.

Noddings (2003) has recommended that, “Happiness should be the aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness” (p.1). In order to ensure collective happiness and the sustainability of the environment we depend upon, we could modify Noddings’ recommendation: sustainable happiness should be the aim of education and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness that does not exploit other people, the environment or future generations. We are in the preliminary stages of exploring this at Cape Breton University. In the coming year, our faculty of education will be offering a course in sustainable happiness (pending approval). Teaching modules are being developed and tested by teachers and applications with aboriginal communities are also being discussed (the latter is described more fully in the next section).

Similar to Kasser (2006) we advocate activities that assist students to articulate who and what teaches them about happiness. What are the informal and non-formal sources of education on happiness? Do different people and information sources teach different values? The aim is to create a ‘happiness literacy’ that can be used to assess and appreciate competing values. Young students are also encouraged to become happiness researchers themselves asking parents, and elders about their views of happiness. Our teachers are challenged to identify how they can leave a legacy of sustainable happiness and what barriers exist for doing so. We consider how those barriers could be overcome and what reinforces our mistaken pursuit of happiness through over consumption.

Personal happiness is such an important individual goal that it is quite remarkable that our understanding of how to pursue it has been left, for the most part, to informal and non-formal education. In the absence of formal instruction, many of the default informal lessons come from advertising such as the luxury car ad that placed the following banner above the car's image, “Happiness: Starting at $35,000.” Gilbert (2007) describes the pervasive association that is made between happiness and consumption.

Economies thrive when individuals strive, but because individuals will only strive for their own happiness, it is essential that they mistakenly believe that producing and consuming are routes to personal well-being (p. 242).
According to McDonough and Braungart (2002) we need to consume less of some things but also to produce goods and systems that are less wasteful. Educational institutions have an untapped potential for generating much greater creativity and innovation toward sustainability. Furthermore, one of the barriers to living sustainably is the lack of sustainable choices for consumers. Policy makers have a role to play through providing incentives for these products and educating consumers about sustainable lifestyle choices.

When individuals or communities seek to enhance their quality of life, they may be handcuffed by the set of choices available to them. Organic produce, reusable beverage bottles, or mass transit obviously cannot be bought if they are not offered for sale. The rules and policies that determine the set of choices available, such as oil subsidies that make fossil fuels cheaper than wind power, zoning laws that encourage sprawling development, or building codes that frown on the use of recycled materials, are essentially the “infrastructure of consumption” (Gardner and Assadourian, 2004, p. 172).

In summary, unless education embraces sustainability in general and sustainable happiness in particular, we will not prepare our students for a sustainable future. Furthermore, delinking happiness from over consumption is essential if formal education aims to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. It is imperative that educators and their students understand how our actions impact the rest of the world, how to think critically about existing practices, what career choices will lead toward sustainable happiness, etc. My contention is that our pursuit of happiness lies at the heart of who we are and what we do. Unless we understand how to pursue this sustainably then teachers and students will not grasp the possibilities for sustainable livelihoods, sustainable lifestyles and a sustainable future.

The best example I know of that links happiness with sustainability education is the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, India. Its internationally acclaimed education process focuses on providing the kind of education that rural communities require in order to create sustainable communities. Local villagers receive training as “barefoot” solar engineers, handpump mechanics, teachers, midwives, health care practitioners, groundwater technicians, and communicators (videography, photograph, street theatre, and puppetry). The entire campus is solar powered and rainwater is harvested on the roof of each building. A biogas plant creates the energy to power a small refrigerator in the infirmary. Village women learn traditional handicrafts to augment their income. Sustainable agriculture is taught and practiced. Children attend night schools that are lit with solar lamps made at the Barefoot College. (For further information see www.barefootcollege.org/).
Teams of experts from the College are also training organizations in other countries and UNESCO featured the Barefoot College in its Innovations in Education Series (O'Brien, 1996).

The groundbreaking and very practical accomplishments of the Barefoot College do not tell the whole story. If one has the opportunity to spend sufficient time at the Barefoot College it becomes evident that it has created a “community of joy.” Conducting participatory research with the Barefoot College over the course of one year I observed the fact that it was the most remarkably creative environment I had ever experienced. I wondered if it had been a magnet for creative people. I was informed by the staff that it was the Barefoot College culture that had changed them. The majority of staff originated from surrounding villages and found that the organization fostered creativity and reduced their fear of making mistakes, releasing them to experiment with new ideas. One staff member commented, “at the Barefoot College, the only limit is your imagination. Ideas can grow here!” (Bhanwar Ghopal, 1995).

Adapting an education process from rural India to countries of the North would require considerable modifications. However, the basic principles prevail. We need to orient our education and training toward sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles. Our institutions ought to reflect sustainable practices. There needs to be consistency and integrity with respect to what we teach, how we teach, and the buildings within which we teach. My view is that this will not only contribute to a sustainable future but to sustainable happiness as well.

Sustainable Happiness and Aboriginal Worldviews

What can Aboriginal people contribute to our understanding of happiness and what can sustainable happiness contribute to Aboriginal communities? These are questions that we are starting to investigate at Cape Breton University. For the past decade, our Integrative Science department has been working with Aboriginal communities, scholars and students using an approach to science that recognizes the merits of Western science and Aboriginal worldviews. The predominant Aboriginal community in Cape Breton is Mi’kmaq. Albert Marshall, a Mi’kmaq Elder, has developed a concept called Two-Eyed Seeing to reinforce the benefits of respecting Western and Aboriginal worldviews.

Two-Eyed Seeing is and has to be the guiding principle for your journey while you are here on Mother Earth or Turtle Island. Two-Eyed Seeing refers to learning to see from your one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from your other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing … and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all (Mi’kmaq Elder, Albert Marshall, 2006).
Utilizing this Two-Eyed seeing principle, we wondered if there is an Indigenous correlate to the Western definition of sustainable happiness. Elder, Murdena Marshall, who is both a native speaker of Mi’kmaq and a spiritual leader in her community saw the connection with compassionate interdependence. She replied,

Compassionate interdependence (love) is the main ingredient of wellness and the first of the seven Sacred Gifts offered to humans. This gift is unconditional; you are surrounded by it and thus have no choice in accepting it … you just have to learn how to manifest it (Mi’kmaq Elder, Murdena Marshall, 2006).

Albert Marshal believes that their Mi’kmaq language has a word that reflects sustainable happiness at the individual level – we’lqatum.

We’lqatum, within the context of the Two-Eyed Seeing approach is the state of being that an individual achieves when using the Indigenous eye’s “compassionate interdependence” together with the Western eye’s “sustainable happiness.” We’lqatum is when everything around you is in a state of harmony; the social, economic, environmental, and spiritual milieu is happily balanced … there is no negativity (Mi’kmaq Elder, Albert Marshall, 2006).

Albert Marshall explained that the state of we’lqatum can be envisioned beyond the level of the individual: at the level of Mother Earth (inclusive of all beings) and then it is called we’lqaqnik.

Lindsay Marshall, the Associate Dean of the Mi’kmaq College Institute at Cape Breton University is leading our research team to explore the applications of combining sustainable happiness with Aboriginal worldviews. When given the definition of sustainable happiness, Mr. Marshall responded,

Sustainable happiness! That’s the way I, as a young Mi’kmaq person, have always thought our traditional knowledge encouraged me to try to lead my life. I just never thought about it in terms of those words before. Two-Eyed Seeing would enable others to understand this. We truly need to incorporate these deep understandings within policies for our people and our communities (Lindsay Marshall, Associate Dean, Mikmaq College Institute, 2006).

Our research is just beginning and the conceptual model below (Figure 1) is guiding our work in this area. It indicates that our work is housed within the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and will draw from
both the Mi’kmaw concept of *we’lqatum* and sustainable happiness. The eyes in the diagram represent the Two-Eyed Seeing approach we will use. Mi’kmawey Debert and Science Witisi are collaborators on this project. Mi’kmawey Debert is a community and land-based project to develop an interpretation centre and exhibits at the oldest directly dated archaeological site in Canada and the organization (led by the Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaw) is interested in using sustainable happiness in its cultural interpretation centre. Science Witisi aims to use Two-Eyed Seeing to acquaint Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students with the lessons that can be learned from the land.

Figure 1. Conceptual model for investigation of sustainable happiness and *we’lqatum*.

One of the most hopeful goals of our research project is to engage Aboriginal youth with their Elders in discussions about happiness – honouring both traditional Aboriginal worldviews and the non-Aboriginal values that the youth are exposed to daily. Mi’kmaw Elders believe that their youth experience a cultural crisis because of the challenges involved in straddling the two cultures. Over the coming years we will discover whether our hopes are realized.

It is interesting to note that there is a similarity between the Mi’kmaw view of *we’lqatum* and the Dalai Lama’s equation for happiness with its emphasis on compassion. Canadian, Victor Chan spent several years accompanying the Dalai Lama on world travels and eventually co-authored a book (H.H. Dalai Lama & Chan, 2004) with the Nobel Peace laureate. Chan recounts a conversation with the Buddhist leader. He asked, “You have been a Buddhist monk all your life.
Let’s not talk about difficult things like nirvana and enlightenment. But what do you want to achieve?” (p.250). Without hesitation the Dalai Lama replied,

To be happy. My practice helps me lead a useful life. If I can give some short moment of happiness to others, then I feel that my life has achieved some purpose. This gives me deep mental satisfaction – this feeling always comes if you serve others. So, when I help others, I feel happy. For me, the most important thing is human compassion, a sense of caring for one another (p.250).

The Dalai Lama explained to Chan that he has a formula for happiness.

**Happiness = Emptiness + Compassion.**

As a non-Buddhist, Chan sought to understand the part of the formula that challenged him, the concept of ‘emptiness.’ Eventually he came to the following explanation:

Emptiness is just another way of saying that things are devoid of individual, inherent existence. It says that, in the final analysis, nothing - people, thoughts, cars - can exist independently on its own. ... It highlights a simple but ultimate truth: interdependence rather than independence defines our lives and everything around us. None of us is an island. The world is a vast web of intertwined events, people and things (p.134).

Reformulating (and perhaps Westernizing) the equation then, we have **Happiness = Interdependence + Compassion.** This sounds very much like a suitable formula for sustainable happiness and *wełqatum.*

**CONCLUSION**

Should local and national policy makers consider happiness in policy and practice? Yes, but if they are not considering sustainable happiness then our progress will fall far short of what is needed for equity and sustainability of all life, both today and in future generations.

Layard (2005) recommends J. Bentham’s principle of the Greatest Happiness as a policy goal. Bentham’s view was that “all laws and all actions should aim at producing the greatest possible happiness” (p. 111). Applying this to both the personal and public domain, Layard states that “any decision, public or private, should be judged by its impact on the happiness of all those affected by it, each person counting equally” (p. 112). Sustainable happiness is consistent with this
view though it explicitly brings future generations and the natural environment into consideration, thus extending the scope of the Greatest Happiness.

This paper has also discussed Veenhoven’s distinctions regarding quality of life and happiness. Integrating sustainable happiness into our deliberations regarding the preconditions for happiness, externally and internally, and the experience of happiness or life satisfaction, enhances the opportunities for generating greater happiness for all and of doing so within the carrying capacity of the planet.

Gilbert (2007) writes about the errors that individuals make in predicting what will bring happiness to our ‘future selves.’ Perhaps these human qualities are at work when we repeatedly ignore the warnings about the fate of the planet and dire predictions of a planet that is warming. “When we imagine future circumstances, we fill in details that won’t really come to pass and leave out details that will” (Gilbert, 2007, p. 263). Furthermore, we imagine a future that is essentially a projection from present circumstances (Gilbert, 2007). It appears that not only are we making poor decisions about happiness for our future selves, but also the happiness of others. In our musings about the future, how many of us are imagining a world in which severe weather events are the norm, rising sea levels have destroyed entire island states, the ‘cheap oil’ has run out, and fresh water is the new resource that nations battle over? Given these limitations in individual projections and resistance to behaviour change, local and national policies must demonstrate greater leadership, guiding us toward a more sustainable future.

We know that learning how to live sustainably is not an option. It is an imperative if we are to survive. Individually and collectively our pursuits of happiness have contributed to an unsustainable trajectory resulting in massive environmental failure and enormous human suffering. Happiness research can encourage a broader view of happiness by making this connection with sustainability. Sustainability research could be augmented through happiness literature, particularly with regard to fostering sustainable behaviour. Together, we can contribute to policy discussions that work towards sustainable happiness.
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