HEALTH, WELLBEING AND HAPPINESS:
From Local Action to Global Change

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Social Futures Institute
University of Teesside
30th June – 1st July 2008

CONFERENCE REPORT

Hartlepool Primary Care Trust
Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust
North Tees Primary Care Trust
Redcar and Cleveland Primary Care Trust

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In the 18th century, philosopher Jeremy Bentham argued that one of the main aims of government should be to bring as much happiness to as many people as possible. But what is happiness? In the last 50 years people in Western countries have become much richer, work less, have longer holidays, travel more, live longer and are healthier, but they are not happier. Yet some studies of less affluent Asian, African or South-American countries suggest that people who live in less secure environments, are less wealthy and have poorer health are reported to be more happy than Westerners claim to be.

Health, Wellbeing and Happiness: from Local Action to Global Change was an international conference which brought together leading social scientists, humanities scholars, and local and national practitioners to present and evaluate contributions to the rapidly growing academic field of health, wellbeing and happiness studies. Questions that were explored at the conference included:

**What is happiness?** Can we construct meaningful statistical indicators of happiness and life satisfaction?

**Measures of happiness and policy:** Can subjective well-being indicators help shape policy? And what does satisfaction with different domains of life imply for policy-making?

**What makes us happy?** What do we know about the factors determining happiness and what don’t we know? How can government policy contribute to happiness?

**Health and Wellbeing:** Health and wellbeing is taken to be an essential element of the good life and a necessary condition for happiness. Is the good life limited only to able bodied people with good health? How can sport increase children, young peoples and adult’s lives?

**Guest Speakers**

The conference was formally opened by Professor Cliff Hardcastle, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Teesside. Professor Hardcastle welcomed the delegates to Middlesbrough and said that he was pleased that so many people from so many different countries had come to Middlesbrough to explore the understanding of happiness in relation to health and wellbeing.

The conference then welcomed one of its four distinguished guest speakers: Dr Dimitris Ballas, Senior lecturer in Geography at the University of Sheffield who delivered his lecture entitled ‘Happy People or Happy Places? Exploring geographies of happiness in Britain’. This lecture was sponsored by Ignite and was chaired by Professor Robin Bunton. The lecture explored the efficacy of statistical measures of happiness cross-nationally.

Our second guest speaker, Professor Michael Murray from Keele University, addressed the conference with his lecture, ‘Using community arts to promote health and wellbeing.’ His lecture was sponsored by NERIP and was chaired by Mark Dooley, Senior Lecturer at the University of Teesside’. The aim of his paper was to reflect on some of the assumptions underlying community arts and he considered the need for community arts to be connected with broader theories of social change. In particular, the paper considered the role that the arts can play in promoting critique and challenge to established orthodoxy and of enthusing people to engage in social change.

Our third guest speaker, Dr Iain Wilkinson, Senior lecturer at University of Kent, presented his keynote speech, ‘Recovering the sociological imagination: the unhappy science’. This address was sponsored by Middlesbrough Council and was chaired by...
Jonathan Roberts of the University of Teesside. Dr Wilkinson examined the contribution of sociological theory and research to the understanding of well-being. Against a backdrop of dramatic images of third world poverty and social dislocation, Dr Wilkinson explained how sociology could contribute to the understanding of social phenomena beyond the experience of the individual researcher.

Dr Daniel Nettle, Reader of Psychology from the University of Newcastle closed the conference with his keynote speech entitled ‘More than pleasure, less than virtue: getting a grip on happiness’. This address was sponsored by the Association of North East Councils and chaired by Dr Michael Sheard. Dr Nettle reflected on the key messages which had arisen from the conference and concluded the event by contextualising happiness within the language of evolutionary psychology. He questioned why individuals succumbed to increasing pressures to work hard to achieve a kind of wellbeing that was defined by other people rather than themselves.

Debate

The conference featured 30 academic papers, which covered a range of issues surrounding health, happiness and wellbeing. The themes included: work, global health, wealth, misery and boredom, measurements of happiness, consumerism, leisure, laughter, pleasure, family, education, and environment.

A key aim of the conference was to work with public sector delegates to identify key issues which may impact upon current strategic planning and practice in the North East and beyond. In order to do this, the conference included four open forum debates.

One forum, “Give us back our game: sport and community.” was an all day event that asked what role football can play in helping children and young people achieve a sense of wellbeing. Sponsored by Soccer Coaching International this forum attracted panel and audience members, including FA Football Development managers and academics from the USA.

The other three forums included: Art, Culture and Social Wellbeing, sponsored by the University of Teesside; Young people and positive well being, sponsored by Hartlepool Primary Care Trust; and Community empowerment: is it good to talk? Sponsored by Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust.

Art Events

The conference featured a number of art exhibitions and social and cultural events.

The first exhibition presented pictures from a competition sponsored by IGNITE for primary and secondary schools in the Tees Valley. Children were invited to capture the theme of the conference by creating collages, paintings and drawings to show what makes them happy.
Beaumont Hill School from Darlington were awarded first prize, winning the competition by entering 35 colourful, inspiring and imaginative pictures. The young people’s work was exhibited at the conference and the young people came along to be presented with their prize of £500 which was donated by IGNITE.

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust, which challenged the public to capture an image of something that makes them smile! This resulted in a collection of imaginative and joyful photographs.

Also featuring at the conference was the book launch of “Learning through Play”, by Paul Cooper.

A wine and cheese reception, sponsored by Soccer Coaching International, allowed delegates to participate in a range of cultural and social events.

Delegates joined in with the collective production of a mandala (a huge floor painting made from salt and spices). The mandala is a meditative and contemplative space created by the collective expressions of many people. With the help of artist Adrian Moule, delegates were encouraged to bring their own ideas and aspirations to the mandala, resulting in a tree of beans, spices and happiness!

Our second exhibition entitled, “Show Me Happy,” was a result of an initiative of the

Delegates also enjoyed their participation in a body drumming event run by Tim Coyte of Tees Valley Arts. Tim took the delegates through the musical process of making
rhythm by stamping, clapping, snapping, and slapping their body and a drum.

Other artwork exhibited included work from professional glass artist Karin Walland. Karin’s work included specially designed pieces that incorporated the themes of the conference.

The conference dinner was hosted by local Italian restaurant, Al Forno. This evening event gave delegates the chance to network and raise their levels of happiness by dining and dancing along to a local ceilidh band!
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**CONFERENCE PAPERS**

**WORK**

**Happy in your job? Multicultural competence and self efficacy in the international workplace?**
Stewart Martin, University of Teesside.

Companies’ welfare measures for employees’ wellbeing
Felix Behling, University of Essex

Balancing towards sustainable happiness at work
Huub van Wersch, Academic Medical Hospital Amsterdam

**GLOBAL HEALTH, HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS, WEALTH AND HAPPINESS**

Would communism reduce crime and increase happiness
Mark Cowling, University of Teesside

Positive approaches to the development of health and social care in complex systems
Steve Onyett and Karen Linde, University of Teesside

Public participation, older people and health and wellbeing
Eileen Fairhurst and Marilyn Fitzpatrick, Manchester Metropolitan University

Wellbeing is associated with lower morning cortisol levels
Romano Endrighi, Samantha Dockray and Andrew Steptoe, University College London

**MISERY, BOREDOM AND MOANING**

Happy to avoid risk: The absence of loss aversion – context dependency of choice risk
Paul van Schaik, Peter Kussev, Peter Ayton and Nick Chater, University of Teesside

A sociology of happiness? The contribution of Sociology to the study of happiness, pleasure and wellbeing
Mark Cieslik and Steven Miles, Nottingham Trent University and University of Liverpool

Happiness as a public good: rethinking individualism
Jennifer Wilkinson, University of Sydney

**MEASUREMENTS OF HAPPINESS**

Measuring student wellbeing: A set of observational and self report instruments
Chris Goldspink, University of Surrey

Relatively happy: lessons on measuring happiness
Chris Wiltsher, Campaign to protect Rural England, North East regional group

Exploring the relationship between health and happiness: results from analysis using HODaR
Claara Mukuria, John Brazier and Alicia O’Cathain, University of Sheffield
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Re-evaluating our conception of wellbeing in a life events study Richard A. Burns and Michael A. Machin
University of Southern Queensland

Questioning happiness? Problematising the survey measurement of happiness Laura Hyman,
University of Surrey

CONSUMERISM; LEISURE

Gambling on happiness: a moral conundrum Carolyn Downs, Manchester Metropolitan University

‘Tuning in’ to good health: the role of music making in promoting health and wellbeing Judith Milne and Colin Westerman, University of Teesside and Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Trust

LAUGHTER, EXCITEMENT AND PLEASURE

What ‘moves’ people towards well-being? Longing for authenticity as a driving force among participants of an alternative dance form Ineke Vergeer, University of Durham

It’s not just a laughing matter: uses of laughter in epilepsy talk Stephanie Kilinc, Sue Becker and Carol Campbell, University of Teesside

FAMILY, EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIPS


Schooldays – the happiest of your life? Janet Shucksmith, University of Teesside

The joyful school Jane Anderson, Wellbeing Co-ordinator, Gateshead Council

Gender, emotions and the ageing body Wendy Martin, University of Reading

Finding happiness in translation – gaining a sense of productivity and belonging whilst seeking asylum Claire Smith, University of Teesside

Parental Influences on the flow experience in talented youth football soccer players Laura Fleming, University of Teesside

ENVIRONMENT; SUSTAINABILITY

Happiness, social wellbeing and community hubs Ryan Woolrych and Judith Sixsmith, Manchester Metropolitan University
Understanding health and wellbeing in the context of urban regeneration in the North East
Lesley Geddes, M Lhussier and B Watson, Northumbria University

‘It’s a bit like a sort of site’ – Gypsies, Travellers and the use of transfer procedures to recreate
traditional residence patterns within social housing
David Smith and Margaret Greenfields, Buckinghamshire New University

Local government, sustainable places and the wellbeing power,
Laura Braybrook and Eileen Lepine,
University of the West England

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our conference sponsors:

Association of North East Councils
Hartlepool Primary Care Trust
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Middlesbrough Council
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North Tees Primary Care Trust
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University of Teesside