Advancing Inclusive
Happiness, Culture, and Sustainable Urbanisation in the MENA Region

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An interactive discussion with authors from the textbook Positive Psychology in the Middle East / North Africa Research, Policy, and Practise
Dr. Louise Lambert, Ph.D. is a Registered Psychologist and Professor with almost 20 years experience in counselling, mental health, not-for-profit organisations, higher education and research, and primary healthcare. She works with the UAE University’s (UAEU) Emirates Center for Happiness Research and is Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology. Her three evidence-based positive psychology intervention programmes include: ‘Happiness 101’ Programme used in clinical settings, Workplace Character Strengths Programme for teens, young adults and entry-level employees being trialled in Saudi Arabia, and University Intervention Programme. Kuwait Ministry of Education has adopted her AlNowair’s Bareec positivity school programme.

Co-Editor with Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi
*Positive Psychology in the Middle East / North Africa Research, Policy, and Practise*

**From the Introduction**

In 2015, we launched the first issue of the Middle East Journal of Positive Psychology with the intent of developing an indigenous positive psychology across the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. We felt it was imperative to do so, not only to counter the indiscriminate use of Western positive psychological models and interventions in the region, but equally, to encourage the growth of this new science of wellbeing by offering a platform for regional research to be showcased. As our work grew, it became clear that more was needed to help the field prosper; in particular, a focus on science was missing with many consultants speaking louder than academics and setting the dominant tone for the field by focusing on the “positive”, but overlooking the “psychology”. This book grew out of those concerns.
Aziz Mulay-Shah former Canadian diplomat, is Managing Director of Global Communications Agency (GCA), a well-being policy advisory firm, specialising in commercial happiness audits across the UAE and GCC region. GCA also develops social impact investment strategies for Corporate Social Responsibility projects in the Gulf, Canada and MENASA region. He favours a holistic approach when advising his clients in which he combines policy planning, implementation and evaluation to address challenges relating to international assistance and humanitarian aid, strategic political communications, and coalition building. His goal is to create new civic models and enhanced communities, whether local, regional or international.

**Commercial Life: The Private Sector’s Contribution to Wellbeing**

The global attention paid to wellbeing and happiness shows no signs of abating. In this chapter, we propose including measuring Commercial Life and its related social interactions, emotional experiences and long-term psychosocial outcomes, as one component of a nation’s wellbeing. Thus, we highlight the importance of the consumer experience, employee wellbeing, and product/service innovation possibilities that can contribute to greater social, environmental, and individual wellbeing and draw upon various theories in positive psychology to inform our approach.
Dr. Mansoor Anwar Habib is a Family Medicine and Occupational Health Consultant with du. Joining in 2009, he established two staff clinics and a wellness department where he treats patients, tackles occupational health complaints, manages chronic disease and implements prevention strategies. He restructured du’s entire wellness department and launched a dedicated executive wellness programme with KPIs. He was recognised with the ‘Idea Arabia’ award by the Dubai Quality Group and in 2016. Since 2012, he has been the Regional Chair of the International Association of Worksite Health Promotion, and Chair of the Workplace Wellness Taskforce Group with the Dubai Chamber.

**Positivity at Work: It’s Not a Contradiction!**

While the benefits of greater organizational positivity are gaining popularity, the means to increase it are less well known. In this chapter, we posit that positivity increases productivity, profits, employee engagement, and commitment, and reduces turnover and sick leave. Positivity is an evidence-based pathway for broadening perspectives, ideas, and actions with a demonstrable effect on building psychological resources useful to employees. Insights include how HR personnel and managers can use the science of positive psychology to increase positivity in the workplace through social capitalization, health initiatives, expression of gratitude, acts of kindness, character strengths, and undertaking a Best Self exercise.
Muna Odeh is a Palestinian Jordanian now living in Dubai (UAE) and a graduate of the American University of Sharjah (Sharjah, UAE). She received her Bachelor’s degree in International Studies with a minor in Psychology and currently works in media content analysis. Her interests are positive psychology, media psychology, identity development and creative writing. She takes great interest in considering how a positive Islamic identity can be developed, by young adults in particular, given contemporary media portrayals.

The Life of PII: Developing a Positive Islamic Identity

Although religion is one factor that provides a sense of belonging and purpose to many people, the development of a religious identity has not been explored as much as other social identities. In this chapter, we begin by providing an overview of Islam and wellbeing, including a mapping of the VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues to verses from the Quran that form the basis of a framework of Islamic virtues. We review frameworks of identity development, including stages of the development of faith. We also look at the link between religious identity and wellbeing and provide a proposed model of religious identity development for what we term, a “Positive Islamic Identity.”
Aubrilyn Reeder supports United World Infrastructure’s (UWI) Urban Ecology initiatives, including Happier Cities. She has presented this work at international conferences, such as the International Gross National Happiness Conference in Bhutan. She was a judge for the Happiest Communities designation at the most recent Gulf Real Estate Awards. She has over 15 years of experience working with communities to improve educational and livelihood opportunities including designing and managing training programmes for the Supreme Education Council of Qatar, leading curriculum and leadership training development programmes for over 1000 schools in India, and working with migrant farm workers in the United States.

**Happiness and the Built Environment**

There is growing interest in the physical and natural settings that support physical, social and psychological wellbeing and happiness. 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 might be harnessed to enable improved happiness. This chapter will explore relationships which exist between some of wellbeing factors and the built environment.

Further, it includes interviews highlighting the work of private sector companies in the UAE which have considered happiness and wellbeing objectives for their built spaces.
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