

SMARTIER CITIES ARE HAPPIER CITIES



ROB BUCKLEY

EDITOR

robertbuckley@geoconnexion.com

SMART CITY PLANS CAN NOT ONLY MAKE URBAN AREAS BETTER PLACES IN WHICH TO LIVE, THEY CAN MAKE THEIR INHABITANTS HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER



One of the more controversial conclusions that prognosticators have drawn from the coronavirus pandemic is that the designs of cities are going to have to change forever. From roads and rail lines being given over to walking and cycling routes to high-density housing being deprecated in favour of homes with wide open spaces, their propositions are radical.

Nevertheless, as well as being expressions of an understandable subconscious fear of a lethal disease, these predictions are also signs of a more positive desire: that cities should be happier places to live in. Almost all the measures proposed generally have the beneficial side-effect of creating better living conditions for inhabitants. Want to help people be less sick? Give them better housing and municipal services.

Smart Cities have been a frequent topic of *GeoConnexion International* over the past few years, but while their many benefits have been discussed, happiness has never explicitly been one of them – happiness in and of itself doesn't seem to be something that governments at all levels perceive as a weighty enough ambition in which to invest money and resources.

Yet, some psychologists have argued for decades that the aim of government should ultimately be to 'raise the serotonin levels of the population' – that is, to make it happier – since that will, for example, cut crime. Happy people don't tend to commit crimes.

One government at least seems to have embraced this challenge. Happiness is the

stated end goal of all the initiatives Dubai has launched since the start of its Smart Dubai programme in 2013. It has even appointed the United Arab Emirates' first-ever 'minister for happiness and wellbeing'. Part of the programme is GeoDubai, a comprehensive scheme managed by Dubai Municipality's GIS Center to collect and provide all geospatial data and related services to government, educational and private entities in the entire UAE.

Interviewed by Mary Jo Wagner on page 38 of this issue, the GIS Center's director Maryam Obaid Almheiri says: "The Dubai government believes that geospatial data is one of the core elements of creating the happiest and smartest city in the region. Geospatial data is essential for effective urban planning, infrastructure, security and health, all of which contribute to smart services that make Dubai a liveable, sustainable, innovative and growing hub of happiness."

So whether we agree with the more radical predictions for other cities' future, it seems like there's one city at least that's already well on its way to being smarter – and therefore healthier and happier.

CORRECTION

In the article "Making a construction site 'bomb-proof'" in September's issue, we accidentally named Schneider Electric, rather than Schneider Digital, as the maker of the 3D PluraView monitor. Our apologies to both companies for the mistake.

Editorial:

Rob Buckley, Editor - GeoInternational
robertbuckley@geoconnexion.com

Peter FitzGibbon, Editor - GeoUK
peterfitzgibbon@geoconnexion.com
+44 (0) 1992 788249

Eric van Rees, News Editor
+34-958281507
ericvanrees@geoconnexion.com

Columnists:

GeoInternational

Louise Friis-Hansen, FIG

Daniel Katzer, Hinte Messe

Alistair Maclean, Quarry One Eleven

Simon Chester, OGC

GeoUK

Mark Poveda, Modern Surveying

Terri Freemantle, Observations

Seppe Cassettari, GEO:Innovation

Publisher:

Mai Ward

+44 (0) 1223 279151

maiward@geoconnexion.com

Advertising:

Micki Knight, Sales & Marketing Director

+44 (0) 7801 907666

mickiknight@geoconnexion.com

Mailing Address & Subscription Enquires:

GeoConnexion Limited,

PO Box 594, Cambridge,

CB1 0FY, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1223 279151

info@geoconnexion.com

subscription@geoconnexion.com

www.geoconnexion.com

Design:

Lucy Carnell

AT Graphics Ltd

www.atgraphicsuk.com

GeoConnexion International

ISSN: 1476-8941 is published by GeoConnexion Limited
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