



For Immediate Release

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The Denver Theatre District Releases “Happy City Denver” Experiment Report in Partnership with “Happy City” Author Charles Montgomery

DENVER (Nov. 15, 2018) – Art can play a role in combating social isolation, according to a recently released experiment [report](#) conducted during “[Happy City Denver](#).”

Produced by [The Denver Theatre District](#), inspired by Stuart Semple and Charles Montgomery, and with artistic direction by [Black Cube](#), “Happy City Denver: Art for the People” was a six-week citywide art intervention (from May 18 through June 30, 2018) with the purpose of breaking down personal, emotional and social barriers, while nurturing individual and collective well-being.

Canadian journalist Charles Montgomery’s influential publication, “Happy City” questions the intersection between urban design and the science of happiness. In response, and as one component of a comprehensive project, “Happy City: Art for the People” provided unexpected art experiences in public spaces with the hope of inciting curiosity and encouraging togetherness. Overall, the project invoked the question – can a city be happy?

As part of the citywide art installation, The Denver Theatre District, with support from Community First Foundation, hired Charles Montgomery’s team to conduct two social [experiments](#) around happiness. One experiment studied Stuart Semple’s “Emotional Baggage Drop,” and considered how the installation influenced residents’ perceptions of emotional support, social connection and subjective wellbeing in the moment. A second experiment, “Multi-modal Altruism,” sought to understand how using different modes of transportation can influence people’s generosity, trust in strangers and stress levels.

“The Denver Theatre District partnered with Charles Montgomery and his team to generate quantitative data that would delve deeper into the effectiveness of our Happy City Denver initiative. We believed it was essential to have some way of measuring the impact of the project,” said David Ehrlich, The Denver Theatre District executive director. “We hope the initiative and the experiment results lead people and cities to think deeper about how arts and culture can support mental wellbeing and initiate complex conversations.”

“Emotional Baggage Drop” participants were less likely to report feeling that they had friends or family to rely on for emotional support. This was particularly evident among male participants. People who participated in the installation were more likely to report being optimistic about the future than non-participants. Additionally, among participants living in Denver, nonparticipants were found to be more trusting in fellow Denver residents than participants.

“Many cities are facing an epidemic of loneliness. But our study of Stuart Semple’s ‘Emotional Baggage Drop’ suggests that art can break down personal, emotional and social barriers. Art really can help build the happy city,” said Charles Montgomery, founding principal of [Happy City](#).

In the case of the “Multi-modal Altruism” experiment, participants were intercepted during their commutes and given an opportunity to donate up to \$10 to a good cause. The average donation was \$6.70, indicating a relatively high degree of generosity. Participants using transportation modes, where they had agency over their travel (walking, biking and driving) were more generous than those using modes where they did not (bus and light rail). When controlled for income, people riding bicycles were most generous, followed closely by pedestrians and drivers.

“We were surprised to find that Denverites who commute by bicycle, foot or by car demonstrated higher levels of generosity, even when we controlled for income,” said Mitchell Reardon, senior lead of [Happy City](#). “We need to study this further, but our results seem to suggest that people who feel the most control over their journey behave more altruistically at journey’s end.”

“Happy City Denver” brought together seven artists’ perspectives to address ideas of happiness and community wellness, in order to imagine a more connected society. The installation sites were located throughout Denver, and included streets, alleyways, billboards and video screens, among others. Collectively, more than 10,500 people visited the installations, and the artworks in public spaces (billboards, video screens and the Ear to Ear publication) are estimated to have garnered nearly 3.2 million impressions.

“Happy City: Art for the People” was a result of collaboration among a number of funding partners, including Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, Community First Foundation, Denver Arts & Venues, Downtown Denver Business Improvement District, Downtown Denver Partnership, McWHINNEY, P.S. You Are Here, Sage Hospitality and VISIT DENVER.

To view the full experiments report, visit <http://bit.ly/HappyCityResearch>. For the “Happy City Denver” media kit, including images, visit <http://bit.ly/2I3G3DP>.

About The Denver Theatre District

The Denver Theatre District (DTD) enlivens a 16-block area of downtown Denver through interactive, immersive and experimental art and culture events and experiences. It provides creatives with a downtown platform and financial support for sharing their work. The DTD is a private non-profit funded through a revenue share collected from advertising on static and LED screens located throughout the District. The Denver Theatre District invests its outdoor media revenues in cultural and art-based experiences, most of which are free to the public. This model is the first of its kind, setting an example for cities nationwide in how to leverage private revenue streams to fund public art and activity. For more information about The Denver Theatre District, visit the [website](#) or follow the DTD on [Facebook](#) and Instagram (@DenverTheatreDistrict).

About Black Cube

Black Cube is a nonprofit, experimental art museum that operates nomadically. Without the traditional boundaries of a physical building, Black Cube exists primarily through partnering with artist fellows to commission popup art experiences. Black Cube describes itself as an unconventional museum pursuing the most effective ways to engage audiences while supporting individual artists with critical professional guidance. For more information, visit <http://blackcube.art/>.

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