The Role of Perceived Social and Physical Environments on Older Adults´ Social Interactions

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Key Findings - 1

Social environment is more important than the physical environment for predicting older adults’ social interactions.
Key Findings - 2

Important (neighbourhood) “third places” for predicting older adults’ social interactions are:

• Cafes/bars/restaurants
• Shops
• Natural environment
• Public open spaces, and
• Footpaths
Challenges of an Ageing Society

Face-to-face social interactions reduce loneliness and increase wellbeing of older adults.
Social and Physical Environments

Importance of social and physical environment?
Methodology

Community Wellbeing and Responding to Change Survey (n=476)

- Social interactions
- Social environment
- Physical environment
Methodology
Methodology

- Multiple regression analysis

Community Wellbeing and Responding to Change Survey (n=476)

- Social interactions
- Social environment
- Physical environment
Survey Results

• 56.7% 65 years old or older
• 52.5% female
• 57.6% retired
• 88.7% homeowners
• 67.8% lived in separate house
• Majority were very satisfied or satisfied with their physical mobility (81.3%) and health (74.0%)
• Respondents spent 5.3 days (during daytime) in and around their suburb
Survey Results

• Majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their social and physical environment (means of the measures > 3)

• Community wellbeing had a mean of 4.3

• 81.0% of older adults strongly agreed or agreed that their suburb was suitable for older adults
**H1**: Higher perception of the **social environment** is positively associated with greater amount of frequency of local social interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>R-squared</th>
<th>Change in $R^2$</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>0.0575</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in community groups</td>
<td>0.1985</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community wellbeing</td>
<td>0.3049</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community spirit</td>
<td>0.3975</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community inclusion</td>
<td>0.4059</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of trust</td>
<td>0.4042</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H2: Higher perceptions of the local (physical) environment is positively associated with greater amount of local social interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>R-squared</th>
<th>Change in R²</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General appearance</td>
<td>0.4049</td>
<td>0.0007</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>General environment</td>
<td>0.4054</td>
<td>0.0005</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.4022</td>
<td>-0.0032</td>
<td>0.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>0.4026</td>
<td>-0.0028</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>0.4023</td>
<td>-0.0031</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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</table>
Third Places for Social Interactions

Are Third Places positively associated with more frequent social interactions?
Methodology – Extend Multiple Regression Analyses

Survey (n= 476)

Community Wellbeing and Responding to Change

- Social interactions
- Social environment
- Physical environment
- Social interactions in third places
### H3: Higher perceptions of social interactions in third places are positively associated with more frequent social interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third place</th>
<th>R-squared</th>
<th>Change in R2</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cafes/bars/restaurants</td>
<td>0.4370</td>
<td>0.0347</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shops</td>
<td>0.4520</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural environment</td>
<td>0.4601</td>
<td>0.0081</td>
<td>0.003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public open space</td>
<td>0.4676</td>
<td>0.0075</td>
<td>0.018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community places</td>
<td>0.4723</td>
<td>0.0047</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>0.4708</td>
<td>-0.0015</td>
<td>0.769</td>
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<td>Public transport stops</td>
<td>0.4744</td>
<td>0.0036</td>
<td>0.844</td>
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<tr>
<td>Footpaths</td>
<td>0.4888</td>
<td>0.0144</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Significant?
Discussion

• **H1**: Participation in community groups and safety

• **H2**: Perceived physical environment had minimal impact for social interactions

• **H3**: Community places, services and public transport stops were not significant for predicting social interactions in Melbourne
Conclusions

• Perceived social environment is relatively more important than physical environment for predicting older adults’ social interactions

• But neighbourhood third places, such as cafes/bars/restaurants, shops, natural environment, public open spaces and footpaths are important for older adults’ social interactions
Future Work

- The role of physical environment needs further investigation – next phase of this study
- Digital communication and social media aspect also needs further investigation
Thank you