

Neighbourhood Walkability and Quality of Life: The Mediating Role of Place Adherence and Social Interaction

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Abstract : The relation between walkability, place adherence, social relations and quality of life was explored in a Polish context. A considerable number of studies have suggested that environmental factors may influence the quality of life through indirect pathways. The list of possible psychological mediators includes social relations and identity-related variables. Based on the results of Study 1, local identity is a significant mediator in the relationship between neighbourhood walkability and quality of life. It was assumed that pedestrian-oriented neighbourhoods enable residents to interact and that these spontaneous interactions can help to strengthen a sense of local identity, thus influencing the quality of life. We, therefore, conducted further studies, testing the relationship experimentally in studies 2a and 2b. Participants were exposed to (2a) photos of walkable/non-walkable neighbourhoods or (2b) descriptions of high/low-walkable neighbourhoods. They were then asked to assess the walkability of the neighbourhoods and to evaluate their potential social relations and quality of life in these places. In both studies, social relations with neighbours turned out to be a significant mediator between walkability and quality of life. In Study 3, we implemented the measure of overlapping individual and communal identity (fusion with the neighbourhood) and willingness to collective action as mediators. Living in a walkable neighbourhood was associated with identity fusion with that neighbourhood. Participants who felt more fused expressed greater willingness to engage in collective action with other neighbours. Finally, this willingness was positively related to the quality of life in the city. In Study 4, we used commuting time (an aspect of walkability related to the time that people spend travelling to work) as the independent variable. The results showed that a shorter average daily commuting time was linked to more frequent social interactions in the neighbourhood. Individuals who assessed their social interactions as more frequent expressed a stronger city identification, which was in turn related to quality of life. To sum up, our research replicated and extended previous findings on the association between walkability and well-being measures. We introduced potential mediators of this relationship: social interactions in the neighbourhood and identity-related variables.

Keywords : walkability, quality of life, social relations, analysis of mediation

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