

Walk places, meet people and build social capital

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People who live in walkable communities are more civically involved and have greater levels of trust than those who live in less walkable neighborhoods. And this increase in so-called 'social capital' is associated with higher quality of life, according to Shannon Rogers and her team from the University of New Hampshire in the US. Their research, looking at the social benefits of walkability in communities, is published online in Springer's journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

A walkable community provides residents with easy access to post offices, town parks and playgrounds, coffee shops, restaurants, barbershops and club meeting venues. The ability to walk to these important locations in one's home neighborhood has been linked to a higher quality of life.

Social capital, a measure of an individual's or group's networks, personal connections, and community involvement, brings benefits such as reduced [isolation](#), career connections, and neighborhood safety. What Rogers and her team's work suggests is that it is these benefits - facilitated by living in a walkable community - that enhance an individual's quality of life.

For their main study, the authors selected two municipalities in the state of New Hampshire. Ten neighborhoods were chosen in each of the cities and a total of 700 residents took part in the survey. They were asked about the number of locations they could walk to in their community to assess the level of walkability, as well as their trust in the local

community, participation in community activities and socializing with friends - all measures of social capital.

On the whole, the more walkable neighborhoods scored higher on every measure of social capital than the less walkable neighborhoods. The authors found that individuals in more walkable neighborhoods tended to have higher levels of trust and community involvement, whether that was working on a community project, attending a club meeting, volunteering, or simply entertaining friends at home. Residents in the more walkable neighborhoods also reported being in good health and happy more often than those in the less walkable neighborhoods.

The authors conclude: "Walkability has been linked to quality of life in other studies. Walkability may also enhance social capital by providing the means and locations for individuals to connect, share information, and interact with those that they might not otherwise meet. The links we found between walkability and measures of social capital in this study provide further evidence for the consideration of social capital as a key component of [quality of life](#)."

More information: Rogers SH et al (2010). Examining walkability and social capital as indicators of quality of life at the municipal and neighborhood scales. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*
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