

Media Relations

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Carsey Institute: Granite Staters in More 'Walkable' Neighborhoods Have Higher Levels of Trust, Community Involvement

DURHAM, N.H. – New Hampshire residents who live in more “walkable” neighborhoods – safe and well-lit communities that allow residents to walk to shops, parks, schools, and restaurants – are more trusting of neighbors, involved in their communities more, and generally are more happy than those in less walkable areas, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The new research is presented in the Carsey brief “Walking Builds Community Cohesion: Survey of Two New Hampshire Communities Looks at Social Capital and Walkability.” The authors are Shannon Rogers, assistant professor of environmental science and policy at Plymouth State University, an ecological economist in the university’s Center for the Environment and senior fellow in the Environmental Leadership Program; Kevin Gardner, professor of civil engineering at UNH, senior fellow at the Carsey Institute, member of the UNH Environmental Research Group, and associate director of the NH EPSCoR program; and Cynthia Carlson, assistant professor of environmental science at New England College and a senior fellow in the Environmental Leadership Program.

According to the researchers, higher levels of social capital are found in areas that are perceived to be more walkable, as measured by the number of places people can walk to in their community. Walkability is influenced by concerns of safety, access, time, and health, and by physical characteristics such as proximity, scale, and aesthetics.

They also found that neighborhoods with higher incomes have both more walkable neighborhoods and higher social capital. Researchers used measures of community involvement and trust to assess social capital.

The research is based on the results from a door-to-door survey of 700 respondents in Portsmouth and Manchester. Neighborhoods were chosen based on levels of socioeconomic diversity and varieties of types of living environments, from compactly built areas to suburban and sprawling areas.

“Given the link between walkability and greater social capital, and in turn the link between social capital and numerous positive outcomes, refitting communities with greater walkability can have short- and longer-term payoffs. Individuals with stronger levels of social capital have been shown to live longer and happier lives with reduced transaction costs for many daily activities,” the researchers said.

“A more walkable community can reduce time traveled in the car and thus leave more time for other activities within the family or community,” they said.

This research has been funded in part by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Fellowship Program. Support also was provided by the UNH Environmental Research Group and the Natural Resources and Earth Systems Science Program. The full report is available at <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publication/1062>.

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GRAPHIC

Residents who perceive their community to be walkable have higher levels of trust and community involvement.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/walkability.jpg>

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The following researchers are available to discuss this research: Shannon Rogers, shrogers@plymouth.edu and 603-535-2216; and Kevin Gardner, kevin.gardner@unh.edu and 603-862-4334.

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