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Walkable neighbourhoods and community engagement: is there a relationship?

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**PURPOSE:** We examined data from the Physical Activity in Localities and Community Environments (PLACE) study to determine whether more-walkable neighbourhoods are associated with higher reported levels of social and community engagement.

**METHODS:** The PLACE study used a stratified design to select neighbourhoods classified by Geographic Information System methods as high or low walkable in Adelaide, Australia. The Walkability index was derived from objectively measured physical environment attributes (dwelling density, street connectivity and net retail area). The sampling frame was constructed from private household addresses. Participants were 2194 residents, aged 20-65, who completed a mailed questionnaire on individual, social and environmental factors. Social and community engagement measures included interaction with neighbours, sense of community, informal social control and social cohesion. Walking for transport and walking for recreation (self-reported) were hypothesised as mediators of possible relationships between Walkability and indices of community engagement. Multilevel regression models were used to examine the relationships between Walkability, walking behaviours and community engagement, after controlling for sociodemographic factors.

**RESULTS:** No significant statistical relationships between Walkability and interaction with neighbours, informal social control or trust/social cohesion were found. A weak relationship (b=-0.004; t=-2.0; p<.05) with sense of community was found; however, this was not mediated by walking for transport or for recreation.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Walkable neighbourhoods may not be more sociable. Interventions promoting social engagement through the built environment may not be transferable between neighbourhoods without modification for differing local factors, which may include the characteristics of residents.