

SPACE FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:

An Exploration of the Social Pathways between Public Space and Health

Alexis Kane Speer^{1&2}, Masood Zangeneh³, Amina Jabbar³, Hilary Gibson-Wood^{2&3}, Brenda Ross¹, Dr. James Dunn^{2,3&4}



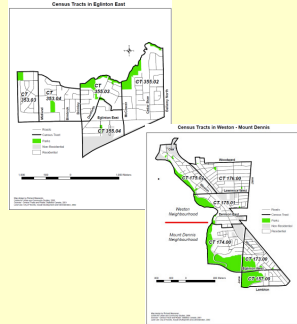
Background

There is an increasing awareness that neighbourhood attributes of social, economic, service and built environments influence health.

Objectives

This study's objective was to investigate the relationship between access to public space and self-rated health status, specifically those aspects of public space which foster place attachment and may address urban health concerns in multicultural communities.

It investigates the relationship between access to public gathering spaces and self-reported health with indicators of community life as the intervening variables.

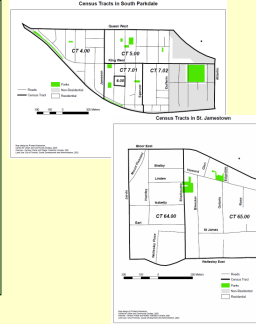


Study Neighbourhoods

Each of the four neighbourhoods represent a different type of built form:

- St. Jamestown (urban high-rise)
- South Parkdale (urban low-rise)
- Weston-Mt. Denis (aging suburb)
- Eglinton East (sprawling suburb).

Two of the neighbourhoods (Weston-Mt. Denis & Eglinton East), are City of Toronto "priority" neighbourhoods



Key Findings: 'Environmental' Health Priorities

	Eglinton East	South Parkdale	St. Jamestown	Weston-Mt. Denis	Total
Neighbourhood Environmental Health Priority Issues					
Recreational/Community Centre Issue	50% (14)	45.7% (21)	22.9% (11)	35.4% (17)	37.1% (63)
General Public Space Quality Issue	21.4% (6)	30.4% (14)	41.7% (20)	39.6% (19)	34.7% (59)
Green Space Issue	25.0% (7)	19.6% (9)	31.2% (15)	16.7% (8)	22.9% (39)
Other Environmental Issues	**	13.0% (6)	22.9% (11)	14.6% (7)	15.9% (27)
Total	100% (28)	100% (46)	100% (48)	100% (48)	100% (170)

In a sub-analysis of environmental issues:

86.5% (147) of the 170 respondents who named at least one 'environmental issue', named at least one 'public space issue' and some respondents named multiple 'public space issues' (18.7% all respondents).

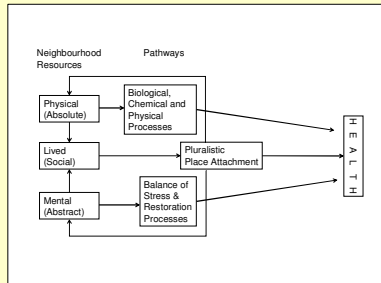
Variations were found in the types of 'public space issues' that were named:

Women and foreign-born respondents reported more issues related to green space and general public space quality, compared to men and Canadian-born respondents; who reported more issues related to recreational facilities and community gathering spaces.

Theoretical Model

The investigation was framed by a model that conceptualized the pathways between the lived experience of space and health as influenced by the physical and the mental dimensions of space. The lived dimension of space impacts an individual's likelihood of establishing place attachment. The model also emphasized that there are many different ways to experience the same space.

The Healthy Production of Plural Public Space



Methods

A randomly-selected sample of 785 households were surveyed across four low-income Toronto neighbourhoods in the fall of 2007.

The survey instrument was a thorough but short assessment of the general and mental health status of neighbourhood residents aged eighteen and above.

Survey topics included demographics, availability, perceptions of the availability and quality of community public spaces, social support, social capital, sense of community, neighbourhood health priorities, and health outcomes like self-rated health, mental health and instance of chronic disease.

Overall Key Findings

Indicators of both physical space (e.g. perceived availability of neighbourhood public spaces) and mental space (e.g. perceived level of safety of neighbourhood) were related to lived space (e.g. satisfaction with neighbourhood public spaces). There was a relationship between the lived dimension of space and health, its greatest impacts being on mental health. Mental health appears to also be the outcome most affected by indicators of place attachment.

Several of these relationships were found more commonly in the densest populated of the four neighbourhoods. Variations were found between foreign- and Canadian-born residents, which suggest that each subgroup valued different elements of public space.

When respondents were asked an open-ended question to name up to three of 'the greatest priorities for improving the health of residents' in their neighbourhood 'health care issues' were the most commonly cited health priority in all neighbourhoods (reported by 32.2% of all respondents), followed by 'environmental issues' (reported by 22.0% of all respondents).

Variations were found by neighbourhood, gender and country of birth: with 'environmental issues' reported at higher rates among respondents who: resided in Eglinton East, South Parkdale and Weston; were woman and were born outside of Canada.

Survey Respondents

Out of a sample of 785, respondents were...

- 46.1% male 53.9% female
- 9.9 average years in neighbourhood
- 43 years average age
- 38.7% born in Canada
- 78.2% had completed high school
- 25.1% had an annual income below the LICO

Conclusions

Overall, the results support elements of the study's theoretical model and suggest that there is a relationship between public space, place attachment and health.

Mental health appears to be the outcome most affected by indicators of place attachment.

Several of the aforementioned relationships were found more commonly in St. Jamestown (urban high-rise built form) of the four neighbourhoods.

Urban subpopulations reported different neighbourhood health priorities and their specific issues related to public space.

Planners and health care professionals should ensure that neighbourhood services and amenities meet the needs of local populations by involving residents in the design and management of their local public spaces.