

Happy communities; direct and indirect effects of social interaction

Organizers:

Aleid E. Brouwer, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

Eveline S. van Leeuwen, Department of Spatial Economics, VU University, the Netherlands

Heike Delfmann, Department of Business Administration, NHL Applied University, The Netherlands

Wellbeing is becoming more and more acknowledged as an affluent characteristic of (economic) systems. For individuals to experience wellbeing within their (daily) environment social interaction is regarded as being of key importance. As such, social networks are the key to a healthy and resilient society as they are channels of information, values and behaviors (Golub and Jackson, 2010). They carry information about products, jobs, and other places of residence; but also influence decisions to move out, volunteer, become educated; be entrepreneurial and social networks drive (political) opinions and attitudes towards other groups.

A first important question is where social interaction is initiated and takes place. Public spaces, well managed and maintained, can increase social interaction and social capital (Lenzi et al., 2013). What is the relationship between local public services and facilities and active social interaction in a neighborhood or town?

For example, in ageing and care, how are the levels of social interaction determined by the number of amenities and functionalities within the daily living environment of elderly and does this have an effect on the amount of (informal care) needed? Or, *ceterus paribus*, how does the same phenomenon affect happy communities in areas facing population decline? Does decline in the amount of social interaction have an effect on the happiness of communities?

In addition, an important indirect effect of social interaction relates to the influence on the willingness of people to participate in their (local) society. An important question is how much and which forms of interaction and participation are available and supported by (local) citizens (Arnstein, 1969) and how these levels of agency will lead to more happy communities?

In this session, we want to elaborate on the importance of social interaction in providing happy communities, such as neighborhoods, towns and entrepreneurial activity. Apart from looking at direct effects on happiness and satisfaction, we also encourage submissions on indirect effects such residential mobility and civic engagement.

Related topics:

- Declining populations
- Ageing society
- Participatory society
- Bottom-up activities
- Public services
- Social networks
- (sustainable) entrepreneurship
- Vulnerable groups

References used

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- Lenzi, M., Vieno, A., Pastore, M., & Santinello, M. (2013). Neighborhood social connectedness and adolescent civic engagement: An integrative model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 34, 45-54.