

# WHICH ASPECTS OF THE PERCEIVED URBAN ENVIRONMENT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SELF-RATED HEALTH AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE CITY OF GRAZ (AUSTRIA)?

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**Background and aims:** Neighborhood characteristics have been shown to be associated with health and health-promoting behavior. The aim of our study was to identify perceptions of the urban residential environment and their association with physical activity for specific purposes and with self-rated general health.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey of inhabitants of Graz (a mid-sized Austrian city) aged 15–60 years was conducted in 2005. Self-reported data were obtained by means of computer-assisted telephone interviews. Participants (n=997) completed structured interviews including Likert-type scaled questions on neighborhood conditions, physical activity for specific purposes and self-rated general health. The questions concerning the neighborhood were factor-analyzed in order to generate primary measures of perceived neighborhood characteristics.

**Results:** We found that a perceived high socio-economic quality of the residential environment is associated with higher levels of self-rated health and leisure time physical activity. The better self-rated health among individuals who were more satisfied with their quarter is not due to increased levels of sport and exercise. Both, sport and satisfaction with environmental quality are independently linked with self-rated health.

**Conclusions:** Our results suggest that a high level of satisfaction with the individual's local infrastructure may urge the residents to engage in higher levels of physical activity for transportation, whereas the preferred mode of transportation may be gender-specific: men tend to use the bicycle while women walk. We found no clear relationship between satisfaction with the individual's social cohesion in his quarter and his/her physical activity. The results of our study may serve as a basis for devising structural preventive measures in urban environments (urban planning and design).