

Do Americans Want Walkable Communities? Evidence from a National Survey

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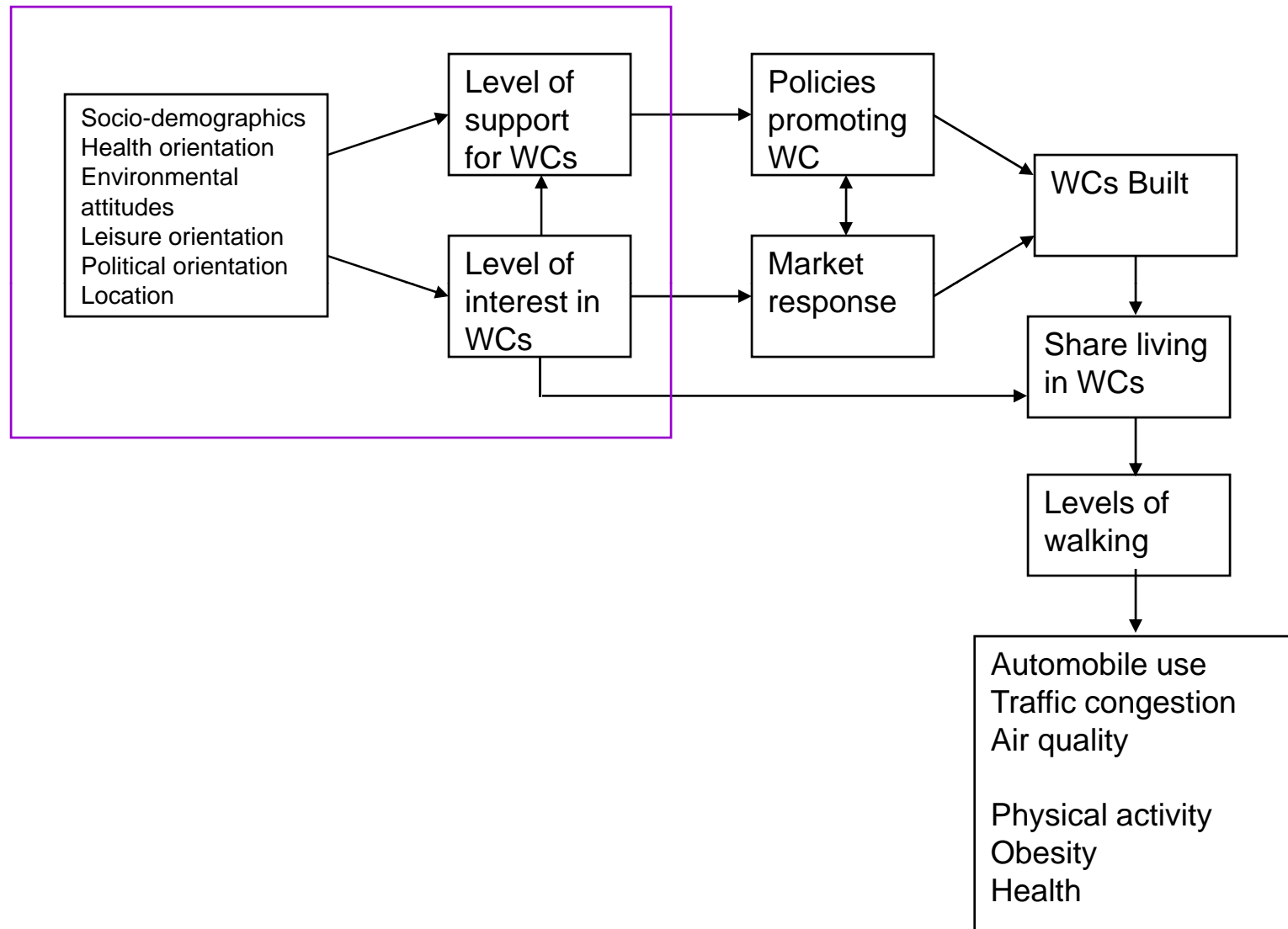
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Why does it matter?



Evidence of Support

- In a 2000 national survey, 47% of respondents strongly supported and 30% somewhat support policies to improve the walking environment, even if it meant less money for highways (Belden Russonello & Stewart 2000).
- In 2000 election, 533 state or local ballot initiatives in 38 states focused on “issues of planning or smart growth” and 70 percent of these were approved by voters (APA 2002).
- Between 1999 and 2001, 27 governors made specific planning and smart growth proposals, and 17 governors issued 19 executive orders related to planning and smart growth (APA 2002).
- In 2004, support for smart growth translated into the election of “a slate of leaders who strongly support smart growth” (Smart Growth America 2005).

Evidence of Interest

- Buyers of existing homes especially favored characteristics of walkable communities, yet the demands of these buyers are not being met by new housing construction (Myers and Gearin 2001).
- Significant gap between preference for transit- and pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods and the characteristics of available neighborhoods especially in Atlanta (Levine 2002).

2003 Porter Novelli Survey

- 5,873 respondents from 10,000 surveys mailed to nationally representative sample
- Dependent variables:
 - Support for walkable communities
 - Desire to live in walkable communities
- Independent variables:
 - Socio-demographics: e.g. age, gender, education, marital status, race/ethnicity, renter status, children
 - Scales for: health orientation, environmental attitudes, leisure orientation, political orientation, and location
 - Perceived benefits of walkable communities characteristics
 - Personal importance of walkable communities characteristics

Walkable Communities Description

“In recent years, there has been a greater interest in developing communities with a town design in place of today’s suburbs. Such communities have a **town center** that is surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The town center has small shops, restaurants, government buildings, churches, and **public transit (bus, rail) stops**. Residential neighborhoods are **clustered** around the town center, providing **easy access** to work and shopping. Each neighborhood has a **variety** of housing types (apartments, townhomes, single family homes) and houses are built on **smaller lots** and are closer to the street...”

Walkable Communities Description

“...Streets are designed to accommodate cars, **pedestrians**, and **bicyclists**. In residential areas streets are **narrower, slower and quieter** with sidewalks, trees and on-street parking. In commercial areas, sidewalks are **wide and comfortable**, streets are lined with trees, and parking lots are less conspicuous. The community includes a **network of parks and trails** for walking and biking. It also has a **clearly defined boundary** in order to preserve open space for parks, farmlands, and forests.”

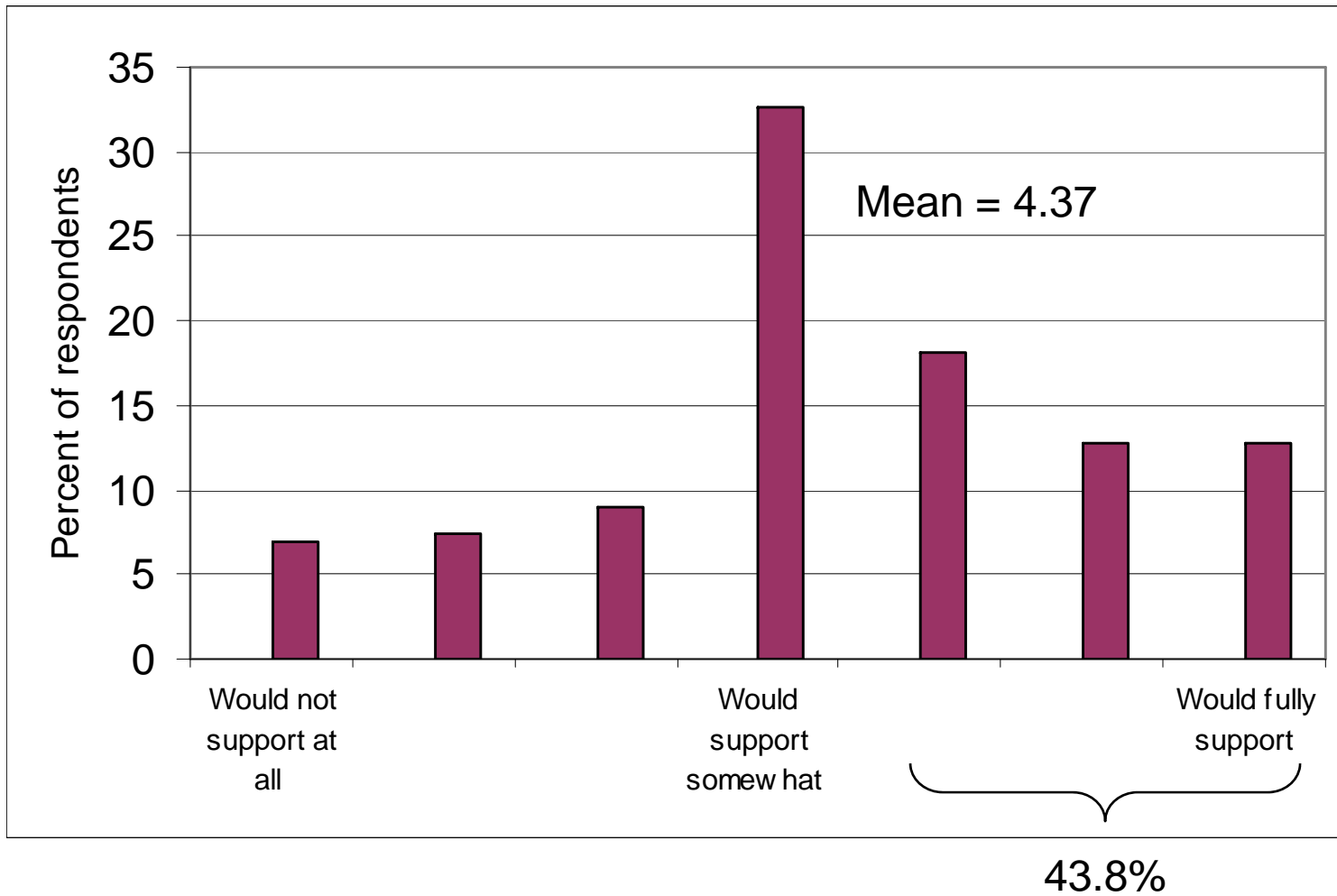
Walkable Communities Questions

- Support:
 - “How much would you support the development of communities like this in your area?”
 - 1= would not at all support, 7 = would fully support
- Interest :
 - “If there were communities like this available in your area, how much would you want to live in one?”
 - 1 = definitely not, 7 = definitely would

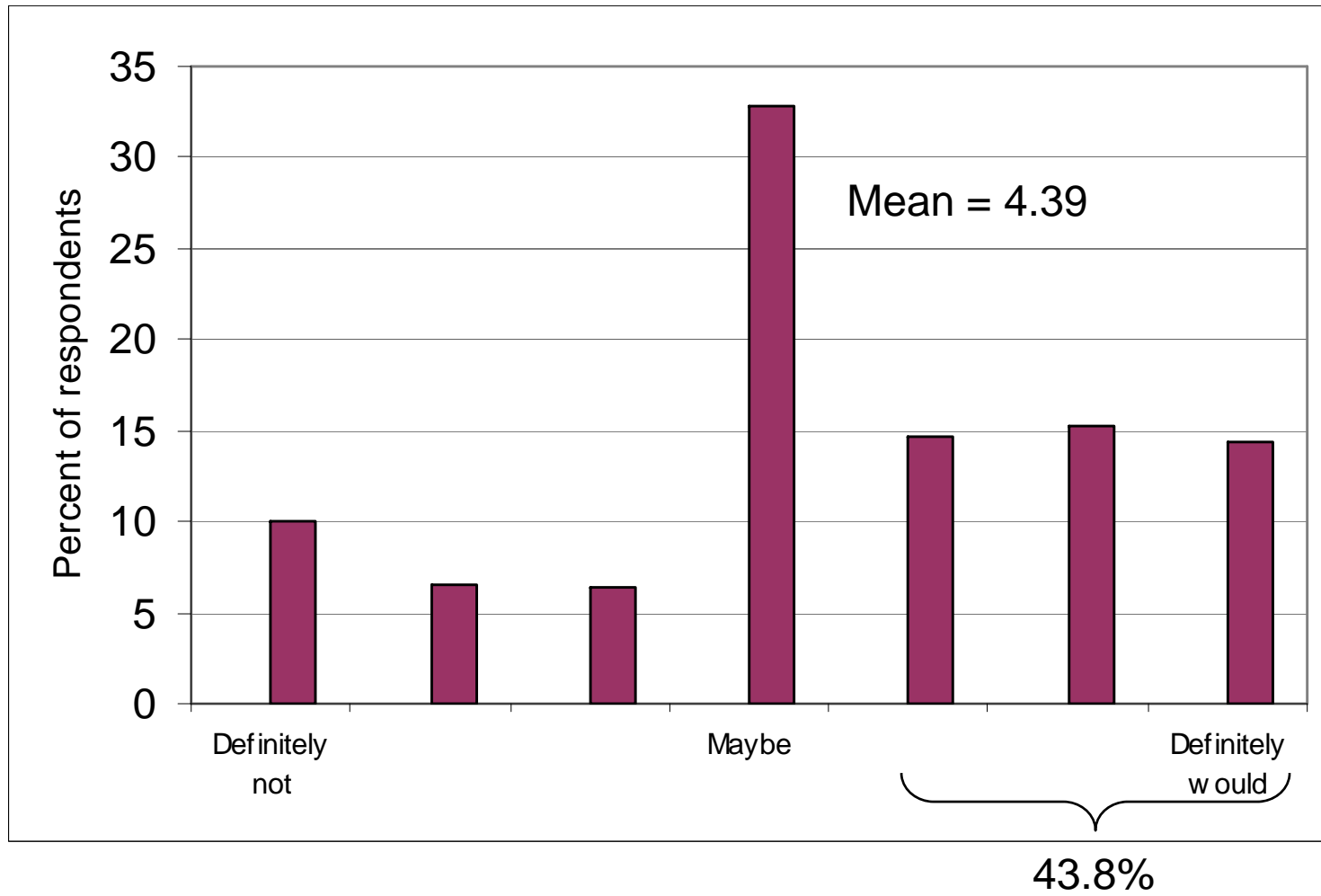
Walkable Communities Questions

- Perceived Benefits:
 - “How likely do you think it is that a community like this would... Enable people to walk or bike to work”, etc.
 - 1=very unlikely, 5 = very likely
- Personal Importance:
 - “How personally important is it to you to... Be able to walk or bike to work”, etc.
 - 1=not at all important, 5=very important

Distribution of Support for WCs



Distribution of Interest in WCs



Analysis

- Models
 - with socio-demographics only
 - with socio-demographics and one other set of independent variables
- Evaluation
 - p-values for coefficient for each variable
 - squared part correlation for each variable
 - adjusted R-square for each model
 - change in R-square versus socio-demographics only model

Results 1: Top 3 Characteristics of Respondents Associated with Support

Variable	Coefficient*	Squared Part Correlation
Importance of Environment	0.166	0.0243
Rural Location (self-reported)	-0.144	0.0196
Race/Ethnicity is White	-0.122	0.0139

*All coefficients shown are significant at 5% level

Results 2: Characteristics of Walkable Communities Associated with Support

Variable	Coefficient*	Squared Part Correlation
Crowding Scale	-0.176	0.0292
Kid-Friendly Scale	0.211	0.0240
Environment/ Commute Scale	0.129	0.0088
Walking Scale	0.115	0.0077

*All coefficients shown are significant at 5% level

Conclusions

- Rural residents on average do not support walkable communities; there is no difference between suburban and urban residents on support.
- Perceived lack of space reduces support but perceived quality of kids environment increases support; these characteristics dominate over others.
- Strong support overall suggests that policies that promote walkable communities are politically viable.