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Examining the Relationships between Trails, Social Capital and Health in Cuba, New Mexico to Inform a HIA

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Abstract

Health Impact Assessments (HIA) have been conducted throughout the United States, but few have been conducted in rural communities, specifically on the development of trails. This study explores the relationship between trails, social capital, quality of life and health to determine if trail building in the small, rural, tri-ethnic community of Cuba, NM is associated with increased social capital and thereby increased health. First, a systematic literature review of the benefits of social capital on health and in relation to trails was conducted addressing the importance of social capital for a community. Second, STEP-HIA survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for percentages of people indicating if they walk with family/friends and gain both social and health benefits from the trails. Third, qualitative interview data from key stakeholders were examined in NVivo analyzing the relationship between physical activity, access to trails and social support. Overall, these results show the potential of trails to increase social capital and health in Cuba, NM. This information will be incorporated in a HIA to influence decision makers regarding the location of new trails in and around Cuba, and specifically for access to the Continental Divide Trail (CDT). These findings can then be used as evidence to plan the development of trails in other communities, particularly in rural areas surrounded by Public Lands.

What is a HIA?

HIA: Health Impact Assessment

"A systematic process that uses an array of data sources and analytic methods and considers input from stakeholders to determine the potential effects of a proposed policy, plan, program or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA provides recommendations on monitoring and managing those effects."

—National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences

Methods



- Literature Review:** Social capital, Trails, Walkability
- Qualitative Data (Analysis in NVivo):** 52 semi-structured interviews
Themes searched: Physical activity, Access to trails, Walking-hiking group
Key words searched: Social, Trails, Walking
- Quantitative Data STEP-HIA Surveys:** Descriptive statistics
Survey Locations: Community events
Survey Count: 33

Results

1. Systematic Literature Review: n=21

Social Capital: "Networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1996).

Project definition of Social Capital: General relationship of trails to the network of social connections that exist between people and their shared values and behavioral norms

Primary Findings:

- Increased trust leads to increased health (Kawachi, Kennedy & Glass, 1999)
- Social support in coping with diseases (Jones et al., 2008)
- More walkable communities leads to increased social capital (Leyden, 2003)
- Trails develop cohesion in neighborhoods (Corning, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2012)

2. Qualitative data: n=52

"Social connection is another part of well-being, so it is a double whammy—you feel better from walking and you have had some social interaction in a positive way"

—Walking Group Member



"I walk and socialize. In a community like this where we have long cold winters and we don't have access to social stuff to socialize with other people, we get enclosed and then we get the depression, and we don't realize it is a disease. And we don't do something about it and we go to the other side where you are just feeding the depression"—Walking Group Member

3. Quantitative data: n=33

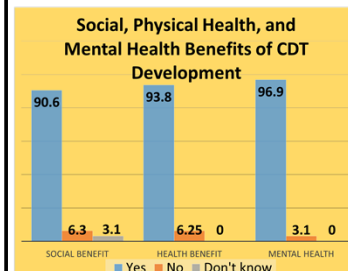


Figure 1. Percentage of people responding yes or no to if they think the development of the CDT will bring social, physical health, or mental benefits to the Village of Cuba

Percentage Responding "Yes" to All Three Benefits

■ All Yes ■ Yes/No/Don't

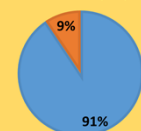


Figure 2. Percentage of people responding yes for social, physical health, and mental health benefits

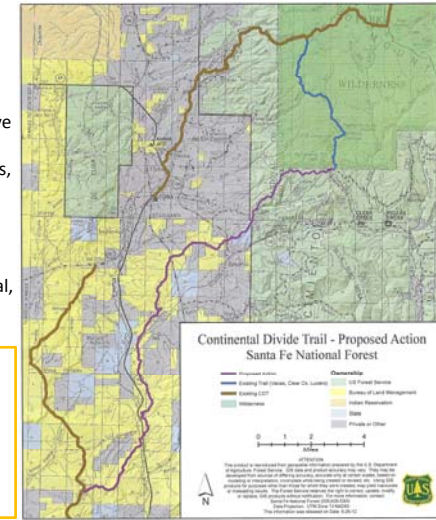
100% of people responded "yes" to CDT benefiting Cuba, NM

Conclusions

The development of trails in Cuba, NM is supported by:

- Literature Review
- Qualitative data: Positive relationship between walking, social networks, and health
- Quantitative data: Community in and surrounding Cuba believe trails bring social, mental, and physical health benefits

Recommendation:
Propose that 12 mile gap in CDT be built with consideration for ease of access to the community in and surrounding Cuba



Future Directions

- Analyze qualitative data based on gender, age, occupation, etc. to determine factors as to who specifically walks/ hikes
- Analyze social capital in terms of Bourdieu's definition: the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network (Bourdieu, 1992)
- Multivariate analysis for survey questions

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