Urban Density and Social Trust

“community lost”

or “eyes on the street”?
Urban Community amid Crisis

• “Caremongering”

• Local parks, corner stores, community centres, libraries, among other “third spaces.”

built environment  social trust

Source: Allen McInnins, Montreal Gazette
Research Questions

1. Are there identifiable spatial patterns of trust?

2. How does trust relate to the distribution of amenities (e.g., libraries, parks, grocery stores, jobs, etc.) and to the urban design (pedestrian intersections)?

3. How do the contextual elements interact with individual predictors of trust (e.g., informal ties and voluntary associations)?
Hypotheses

Trust is *spatially concentrated*

*Proximity to amenities* and *pedestrian intersections* fosters informal *social ties*

*Amenities* create opportunities for community *participation*
Defining Trust

• Trust as a foundational **social orientation** between the **individual** and **others**: **rational** and a **relational**

• **Social conditions of trust**
  • **In-group / out-group** distinctions: **generalization** mechanism
  • Participation in **voluntary associations**
  • Informal **social ties** (extended networks)
Data

General Social Survey (2008 & 2013)

- Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau, and Edmonton
- Respondents aged 18+
- Grouped at CT and CMA levels

Proximity Measures Database

- Dissemination Block level
- Based on gravity model
Variables

Outcome variables
• Trust in strangers (reported trust)
• Likelihood of a stranger returning a lost wallet (wallet vignette)
• Trust in strangers minus trust in neighbours (trust difference)
• Likelihood of stranger minus likelihood of neighbour returning wallet (wallet difference)

Predictors (level of analysis)
• Number of acquaintances (individual)
• Associational membership (individual)
• Amenity density (CT)
• Intersection density (CT)

Controls
• Population density (CT), length of residence, visible minority, education level, age, and gender
Proximity to Amenities
Proximity to Amenities

Amenity Density
- 0 – Low
- 1 – Medium
- 2 – High
Proximity to Pedestrian Intersections
Models

For each outcome \(y\):

\[ y_{ij} = (\beta_1 + \zeta_j) + \beta_2 acq_{ij} + \beta_3 memb_{ij} + \beta_4 amen_j + \beta_4 dens_j + \beta_p x_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}, \]

where \(i\) denotes individuals nested in a \(j\) census tract; \(\beta_2 acq_{ij}\) through \(\beta_p x_{ij}\) are covariates; \(\beta_1 + \zeta_j\) is a CT-specific intercept; and \(\epsilon_{ij}\) is a respondent-specific error component.

Note: Referential equation.
Findings

Spatial patterns of trust

- Reported trust (map): fair spatial concentration (Moran’s $I = 0.11$ [p<0.01])
- All other outcome variables (Moran’s $I \approx 0.10$ [p<0.01])

Mean trust in strangers

- 0.000 to 0.671
- 0.671 to 1.058
- 1.058 to 1.414
- 1.414 to 1.836
- 1.836 to 2.682
Reported Trust

- (+) associational membership
- (+) density of amenities
- (+) interaction terms including amenity density
- Controls: (+) age, (–) visible minority, (–) education, and (-) gender
Wallet Vignette

- (+) individual-level predictors
- (+) interaction term (acquaintances * amenities)
- Controls: (+) age, (−) visible minority, (−) education, and (−) gender
Radius of Reported Trust

- (−) acquaintances
- (+) associational membership
- (+) density of amenities and pedestrian intersections
- (+) interaction terms
- Controls: (−) age, (+) population density, (−) old timer, (−) visible minority, (−) education, and (−) gender
Radius of the Wallet Vignette

- (+) acquaintances
- (+) density of amenities and pedestrian intersections
- (−) interaction term: membership * density of amenities
- Controls: (+) population density, (−) old timer, and (−) age
Conclusion and Policy Implications

Trust is unevenly distributed in cities

Access to amenities predicts higher levels of outward trust

Cities and Provinces can foster amenities through policy (e.g., TSNS)
Thank you!

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Reported Trust by Metro Area
Wallet Vignette by Metro Area
Radius of Reported Trust by Metro Area
Radius of the Wallet Vignette by Metro Area
Multiple Correspondence Analysis of Proximity Measures