

# Northumbria Research Link

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# Northumbria University

**Themes of interest:** [Connectivity in Design: a 'joined-up' approach to Health and Wellbeing.](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the social distancing and 'lockdown' measures that have been implemented in response, have refocused the attention of many on the importance of connections to human health. This includes not only the social connections which have been shown to prevent mental health problems (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010) but also connections to nature which have been shown to result in decreased physical discomfort (Lohr & Pearson-Mims, 2000) and improved mood (Shibata & Suzuki, 2004), and material connection and sensory stimulation from our environment (Heerwagen, 2012).

Furthermore, the levels of disruption we have experienced to the economy, to education, and to social and cultural activities, have demonstrated how human health and wellbeing is implicitly intertwined with many other aspects of our lives, and should not be treated as an isolated issue. In the goal to prevent outbreaks of infectious diseases, the built environment shares common origins with public health, that can be traced back centuries (Hu and Roberts, 2020).

The important role that architecture can play in facilitating social connections, connections with nature, and relationships with the environment through sensory stimulation and variation are well established (Heerwagen, 2012). Meanwhile, at an urban scale street network connectivity is associated with pedestrian movement and active commuting (Ozbil et al., 2011; Ozbil et al., 2020). Most recently, connectivity in the built environment has taken a digital turn, with the emergence of smart cities and the Internet of Things (IoT) promising to render our built environment ever more efficient, sustainable, and responsive (Hamed S. Alavi et al. 2019).

This theme invites papers examining the theme of connectivity across healthcare and the built environment. Papers may include, but are not limited to, studies of the health and wellbeing implications associated with:

- networks to facilitate active transport;
- human-building interactions;
- designing to facilitate social connections/connections with nature;
- connections with other priority agendas in the built environment.

## Northumbria Research Overview

Researchers at Northumbria University' [People and Place Research Group](#) are working on topics related to health and wellbeing in the built environment across a range of different scales (from detail design and materiality, to urban design and street planning) and life stages (from infancy through to the ageing population). These topics include:

**Urban Design for Active Commuting:** Investigating the association of quantitatively and qualitatively measured neighbourhood design with children`s physical activity (PA) and identifying the impacts of this association on physical health (BMI) and mental wellbeing in school children. [Recent output](#).

**Health, Wellbeing, and Sustainability Co-benefits:** This research explores the mutual benefits, impacts, and interactions between designing sustainably and designing for improved health and wellbeing (e.g. increased daylighting, improved energy efficiency, better access to nature). [Recent outputs](#) have reflected on how these relationships might change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Human-Centered Architecture and Designing for Inclusion:** This research explores the role of Experience-Centered Architecture in domains of health and well-being, ageing and accessibility, design for longevity, and smart environments. [Research](#) is driven by working with a range of stakeholders and refining research methods through working with building users.

**Age-Friendly Housing Design:** This research is grounded in the experience of Architects involved in the innovative design of age-friendly housing, to provide a theoretical understanding of how Architect`s agency and process influence a design output reflecting a more connected society which meets the needs of all, regardless of age or ability. [Recent output](#).

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