

Creating healthier communities

Teresa Lavin

Public Health Development Officer

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<http://www.publichealth.ie>

What is a healthy community?

A healthy community continuously creates and improves those **physical and social environments** and expands those **community resources** that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.

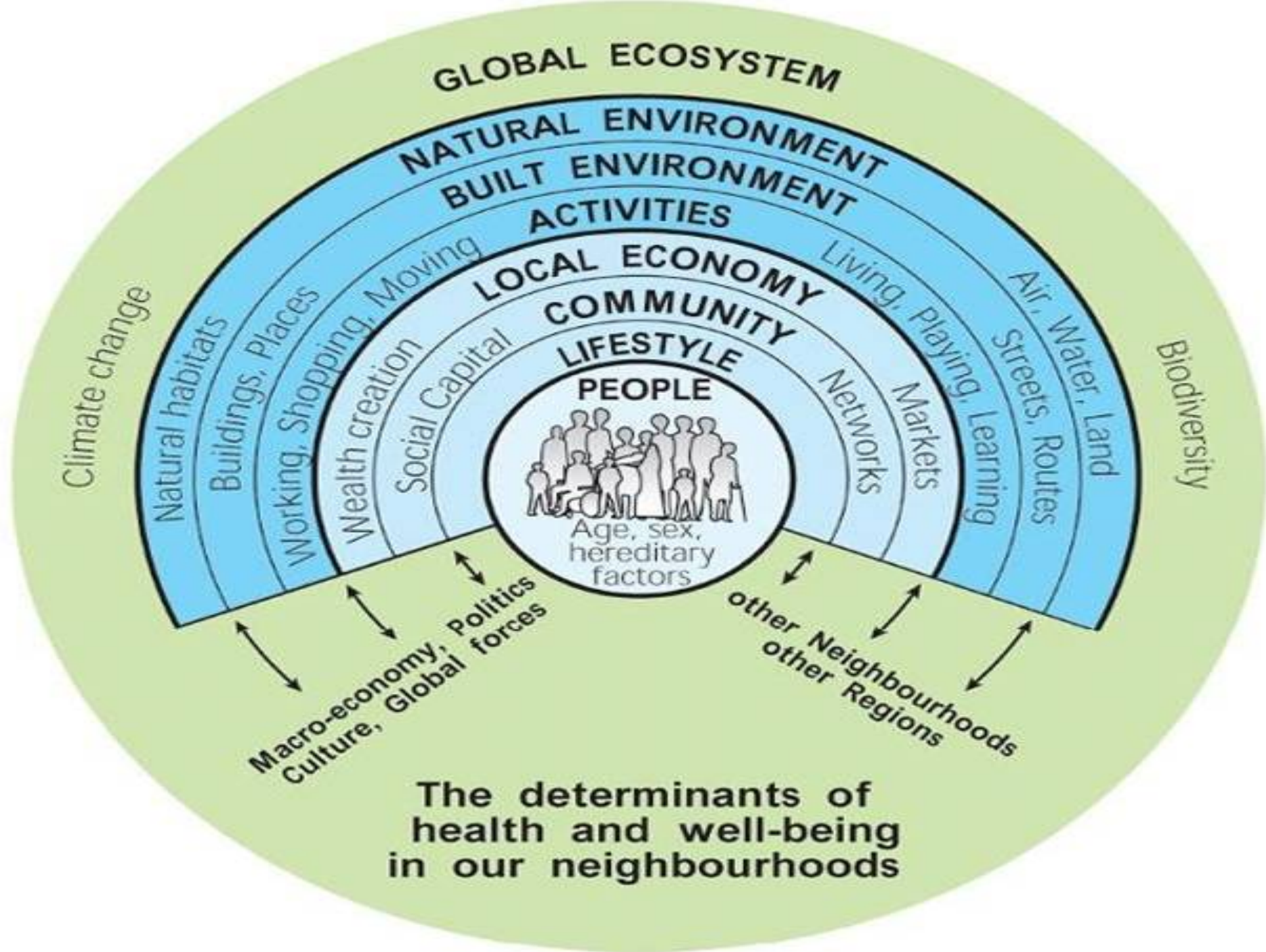
- CDC 2009

Different types of communities

Population density - Urban, suburban, rural

Geographical location – Access to resources

Age, ethnic and socioeconomic profile
- homogenous or mixed?



Health Impacts of the Built Environment
a review



Prepared by
Teresa Lavín
Claire Higgins
Owen Melville
Angela Jordan

Institute of Public Health in Ireland
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Buildings – focus on housing

Public spaces – including parks

Networks

The built environment

A red crosshair graphic consisting of a horizontal line and a vertical line intersecting on the right side of the slide.

The built environment encompasses all buildings, spaces and products that are created or modified by people.

It impacts on both indoor and outdoor physical environments as well as social environments and subsequently our health and quality of life.

Srinivasan et al, AJPH 2003

Early 20th century



Main causes of death:

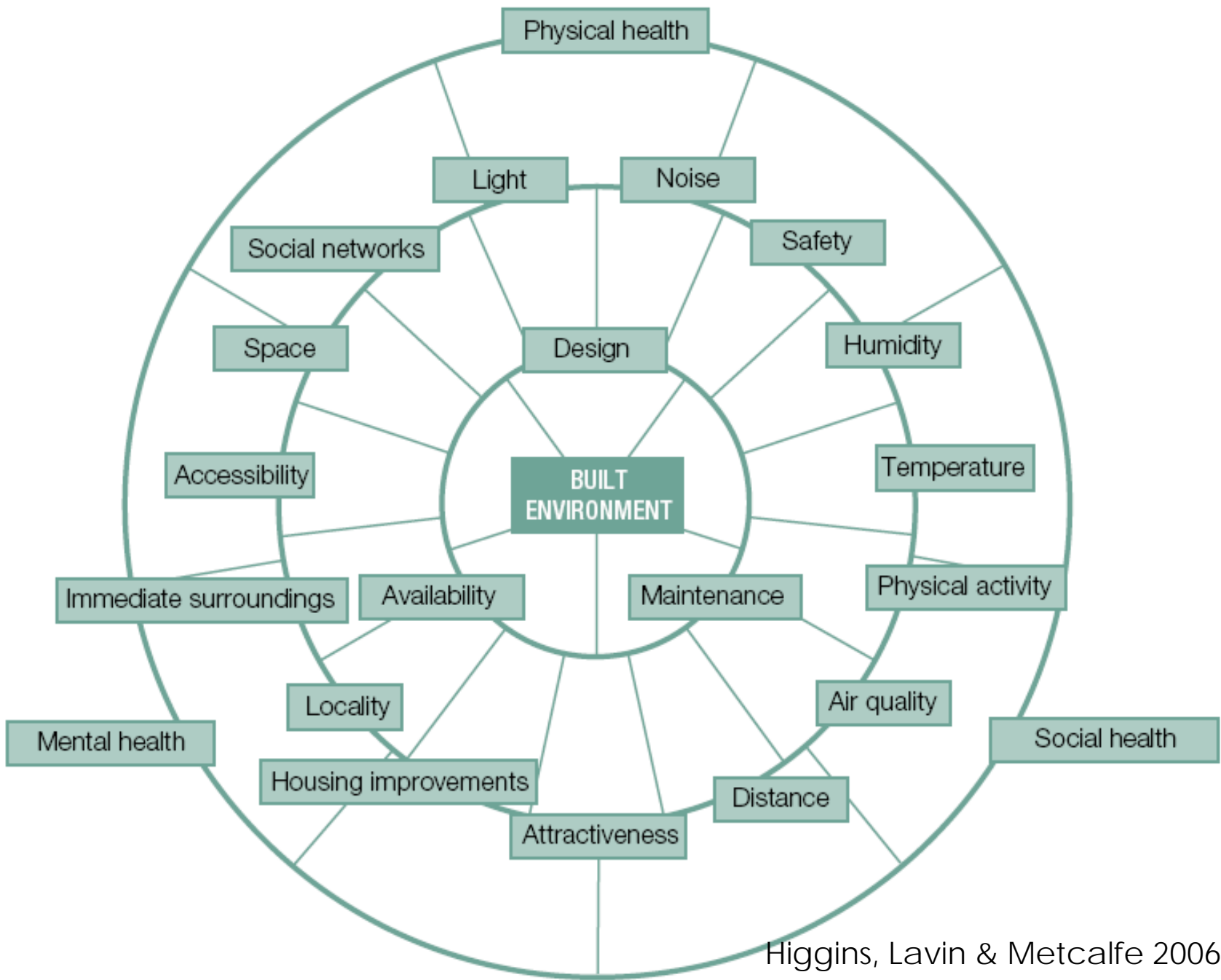
- Infectious disease
- Injuries
- Respiratory disease

21st century

Main causes of death & illness:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Obesity
- Depression





Health impacts



Focus on:

- Green spaces
- Street design

How do these affect peoples opportunities to:

- be physically active
- to develop social networks

Being physically active is good for you...

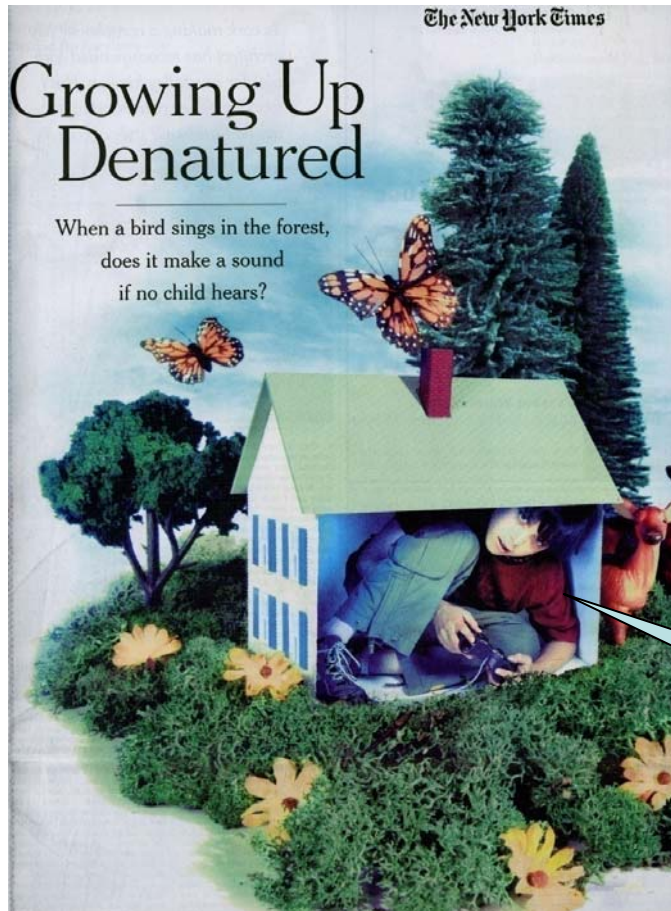
- Can help to prevent and manage many life-threatening illnesses including heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- Improves musculoskeletal health and reduces the risk of osteoporosis, back pain and osteoarthritis
- Improves mental health and reduces the risk of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem
- The best way to be physically active is to incorporate it into our everyday lives
- BUT physical activity is being engineered out of our everyday lives

The importance of social networks



- Social networks and health
 - Reduces psychological stress
 - Boosts immune system
- “From 1985 to 2004 the number of people saying there is no one with whom they discuss important matters nearly tripled”
 - Social isolation in the US, 2006

Green spaces – factors affecting use



- Less green space in poorer areas
- May be available but poorly designed or maintained

'I like to play indoors 'cos that's where all the electrical outlets are.'

Green spaces that encourage physical activity and social interaction

- Availability – less than 10 mins from residential areas
- Design – designed to suit a range of users
- Maintenance – good upkeep

Streets



Increased use of car for short journeys e.g. travel to school

- Crime & fear of crime
- Risk of road traffic injuries
- Convenience

Streets that encourage physical activity & social interaction



- Mixed use and pedestrian oriented
- Availability of cycle and pedestrian lanes, preferably separated from other road users
- Attractive, well maintained streets and street furniture
- Design features that minimise crime/ fear of crime
- Traditional grid system/ distorted grid

Making the healthy choice the easy choice

“It is unreasonable to expect people to change their behaviours when the environment discourages such changes”

Schmid 1995

