

Research Theme 2015-2017

Framing Livability

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About SCI Research Themes

The Sustainable Cities Initiative selects *Research Themes* that coordinate grant funded research, experts-in-residence, student research, lectures, and public outreach along a timely topic related to sustainability and the built environment. Deeply intertwined with the mission of SCI, the *Research Themes* leverage the university to help advance sustainability goals with a focus on translating research into practice. *Research Themes* are developed with non-academic partners and targeted professional audiences to answer relevant, cross-disciplinary needs. The activities in these themes are meant to address the large gap that often exists between policy makers, city officials, practitioners, and academics.

By leveraging the resources and capacity of the University of Oregon and SCI we can provide unification, direction, and an in-depth understanding of the relationship between research, policy, and community education.

SCI Research Theme: Framing Livability

Many sustainability-related goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions (including carbon) or protecting the natural environment often do not resonate with the general public. As a result, the efforts of public agencies to create more sustainable development based on these goals often fail to garner public support. This has created a situation in which the success of sustainability goals and initiatives is sometimes more dependent on effective communication strategies than on a project's sustainability merits or on an agency's technical capacity.

Though difficult to define, livability is a concept related to sustainability, encompassing similar tenets of responsible and equitable resource use. Although sustainability and livability are deeply intertwined, the general population often does not perceive them equally. Sustainability is a politicized term and is sometimes misinterpreted to suggest a reduction in personal freedoms and access to resources and property. Livability, however, is more human-centric, focused on quality of life issues related to the built environment, economics, and cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities. Due to its human-centered focus on quality of life, livability may be a basis for catalyzing greater changes in behavior and decision-making on the part of the public.

While livability holds potential as a new means of framing and cultivating buy-in for complex development projects, it is a vague concept with multiple definitions that vary depending on the demographics of the audience and geographic location of the development project. Given its breadth, it is unclear what aspects of livability connect best with different populations, and which aspects would be most effective in eliciting public support.

Recognizing this need, SCI at the University of Oregon and the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication's (SoJC) faculty specializing in strategic communication have developed a series of research projects, public presentation, and avenues of education to delve into the concept of livability for 2015-2017. By defining livability and establishing clear, concise metrics to explore new ways of communicating sustainable principles that emphasize public health and financial benefits in addition to environmental

considerations, **our work seeks to answer how sustainability-focused community development efforts can be communicated in the most effective way to garner public support.** By merging the resources, expertise, and energy of SCI and SoJC, we are fostering a heightened and engaged understanding of livability, its opportunities for communities, and a lasting cross-disciplinary partnership within the University of Oregon.

Projects for the SCI Research Theme: Framing Livability are organized around two subthemes: Defining Livability and Communicating Livability.

Subtheme 1: Defining Livability

This subtheme is focused on answering key questions:

What is livability?

How have agencies framed livability?

How does incorporating livability principles into planning projects affect the outcome and funding of those plans?

By defining livability, SCI researchers will set the stage for how to message and communicate the concept. The subtheme of 'Defining Livability' involves academic research to set the baseline for how livability is currently understood, how this understanding varies among diverse populations, and to explore the concept's capacity for use in project development.

- **Livability Literature Review:** SCI faculty along with an SCI Graduate Student Fellow are performing an extensive literature review to explore and outline the current meanings of livability and its relation to public health, sustainability and transportation and development projects. This project directly seeks to answer what livability is, and how have agencies currently used the term in their development work.
 - o **Audience:** This study is targeted for use by academics in future livability-related research and by practitioners or professional organizations engaged in transportation and development projects such as Smart Growth America or Transportation for America.
 - o **Resources:** The SCI Research Director oversees the Fellow, and SCI provides Fellow funding.
 - o **Outreach:** SCI will publish this literature review as a white paper to be distributed to SCI partners and through the SCI website. This document will also be incorporated in the UO library system as a resource for future researchers. SCI will hold a webinar/seminar to disseminate the information to community partners broadly.
- **Transportation Research and Study:** Dr. Rebecca Lewis and Dr. Robert Zako are studying the outcomes of transportation projects in states and metropolitan areas that rely on livability-related performance measures and assesses whether the incorporation of these principles influences the types of projects funded. This project addresses how incorporating livability principles into transportation plans impacts outcomes and funding sources.
 - o **Audience:** This study targets both academic and practitioner audiences. This study will be of interest to national organizations such as Transportation for America, the National Resources Defense Council and to statewide and regional transportation and planning agencies like the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Portland Metro.
 - o **Resources:** Dr. Lewis and Dr. Zako are overseeing this study through SCI, have received project funding through NITC and are working with SCI Law Fellows to complete this project.
 - o **Outreach:** The research team will create a Best Practices Toolkit as part of the core research. The toolkit will be a practical set of recommendations or best practices of use to federal / state DOTs and MPOs, as well as to those NGOs seeking to influence these public agencies. Findings will be presented at practitioner and academic conferences like the Transportation Research Board annual conference, the American Planning Association National Conference, and the American Collegiate Schools of Planning Conference. The research team will present findings at a webinar/seminar targeting a broad practitioner audience. The research team will produce academic journal articles to be submitted to planning and transportation journals.



Subtheme 2: Messaging Livability

Subtheme 2 of Framing Livability is focused on answering key questions including:

What aspects of livability resonate most with different populations?

How can this information best inform public agencies on effective communication strategies?

Answering these questions leads to how best to message the livability framework established in Subtheme 1 and produce strategic communication deliverables that can be disseminated through a broad range of agencies. Subtheme 2 uses outreach and education to discover how to communicate and frame livability principles for community understanding and approval.

- **Powell/Division Messaging Study:** Overseen by Dave Remund and Kelli Matthews from the School of Journalism and Communication, a team of planning and strategic communications researchers is conducting formative research (Phase 1) and developing, testing, and refining messaging. This research uses Powell/Division Transportation Corridor in Portland, Oregon as a case study (Phase 2). This project examines how different populations understand livability, and how this information translates into messaging techniques that can be used by public agencies. This research is outlined as follows:
 - Phase 1 (Formative Research)
 - > Field observations to inform design of intercept survey.
 - > Intercept surveys to identify central topics/themes for focus groups.
 - > Focus groups to garner deeper insights, related issues, hidden factors, etc.
 - > Content analysis of past and current public outreach materials
 - > Content analysis of visible signage in the neighborhood to measure and identify current message exposure.
 - Phase 2 and 3 (Message Design and Testing)
 - > Developing and designing proposed messages based on formative research
 - > Mobile/web surveys to validate initial findings from Phase 1 research and determine preferred communication tactics for campaign-based messages
 - > Experiment to test pilot messages that reflect the real world and are generalizable to the large population beyond the pilot area.
 - **Audience:** City of Portland, Portland METRO, TriMet, and other major metropolitan city government agencies undertaking development projects.
 - **Resources:** NITC funding and a partnership with the City of Portland are supporting this project.
 - **Outreach:** The initial findings of the study will be published through SCI's website, and will be presented at conferences and other venues. The research team will present findings at a webinar/seminar targeting a broad practitioner audience. Local dissemination will also be coordinated with partner governmental agencies throughout the Portland region.
- **Expert in Residence:** SCI's Expert in Residence (EIR) series is a yearly event where an expert in a selected topic is invited to the UO for several days to engage with both the University and professional community through public lectures, targeted projects, class visits, and meetings. The 2015-2016 visiting EIR will be a leader in communicating livability.
 - **Audience:** This series is targeted at practitioners, in this case communication firms, or members of city government who are responsible for leading planning and transportation projects, garnering public support for them, or communicating with the public about these projects. The EIR is also targeted at students in planning, journalism and communications, public administration, urban design, and public policy.
 - **Resources:** This program is largely funded through philanthropic support from EHDD, along with other philanthropic sources and is overseen by SCI. The EIR is run in partnership with various public and private entities throughout the state.



- o **Outreach:** EIR events including – public lectures, meetings, and class presentations – are the primary vehicle for outreach.
- **Livability Case Study Research:** : An SCI journalism and communications graduate student Fellow is developing case studies from around the country to study best-management strategic communication practices that contextualize and infuse livability into community planning and development projects. This project examines communication practices that are the most effective in different cities around the country, and how agencies have employed these strategies.
 - o **Audience:** This study will be used by academics in future research, and by practitioners or professionals such as organizations like Smart Growth America or Transportation for America.
 - o **Resources:** SCI and a journalism professor oversee the Fellow, and provide necessary funding.
 - o **Outreach:** SCI will publish this literature review as a white paper to be distributed to SCI partners and through the SCI website. This document will also be incorporated in the UO library system as a resource for future researchers. The School of Journalism and Communications will incorporate this research into their coursework and/or research inventory. Findings from this research will be presented at webinar/seminar that targets UO and broader practitioner audiences.
- **Ballot Initiative Research:** An SCI planning and public administration graduate Fellow is inventorying transportation ballot initiatives in Oregon to analyze the language and content of successful and failed ballot initiatives in Oregon over the last 20 years. The inventory will focus on active transportation and transit projects that relate to sustainability and livability goals. This project examines how effective ballot initiatives were worded, marketed, and communicated.
 - o **Audience:** This study will be used by academics in future research, and by practitioners or professionals such as organizations like Smart Growth America or Transportation for America. This research is also of interest to practitioners responsible for drafting ballot initiatives.
 - o **Resources:** The SCI Research Director will oversee the Fellow, and SCI is providing funding.
 - o **Outreach:** SCI will publish this literature review as a white paper to be distributed to SCI partners and through the SCI website. This document will also be incorporated in the UO library system as a resource for future researchers. Findings from this research will be presented at webinar/seminar that targets UO and broader practitioner audiences.
- **Communicating Livability Courses:** Overseen by Kelli Matthews from the School of Journalism and Communications, students in Journalism courses pair up with real clients through coursework at the UO to engage in applied work regarding communication strategies for livability. These courses range in focus and scope, and enable students to research and create deliverables to serve the needs of real agencies. These projects directly seek to answer how messaging techniques can be formulated for local public agencies. Available courses with which to match anchor clients with students are as follows:
 - > J352: Strategic Writing and Media Relations
 - > J452: Strategic Public Relations Communications
 - > J453: Strategic Public Relations Planning & Case Studies
 - > J454: Public Relations Campaigns
 - > J494: Strategic Communications Research
 - > J408: Event Planning
 - > J480: Topics Classes
 - o **Audience:** These classes are used by professionals or practitioners in Eugene, such as Lane Transit District (LTD), or Better Eugene-Springfield Transit (BEST), and also directly educate students at the University.
 - o **Resources:** SoJC and the partner client provide funding, and classes are overseen by Kelli Matthews, instructor and public relations area director.
 - o **Outreach:** SoJC promotes partnerships, and students present findings to the client in formal meetings or events at the end of the term.



Major Research Theme Activities

Description	Outreach	Timeline	Who is involved?	Who is the audience?
Livability Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · White paper · Seminar/webinar 	August 2015-March 2016	SCI Research Director, SCI Fellow	Academics, NGOs
Achieving Livability Goals through Transportation Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Best Practices Toolkit · Academic Publications · Academic Conferences · Practitioner Conferences · Seminar/webinar 	August 2015-December 2016	Robert Zako, Rebecca Lewis, Transportation for America, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental & Natural Resources Law Center, SCI Law Fellows	NGOs, State Transportation Agencies, MPOs, academics
Powell / Division Messaging Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Policy Briefs · Academic Publications · Academic Conferences · Practitioner Conferences · Seminar/webinar 	August 2015-December 2016	Dave Remund, Kelli Matthews, Deb Morrison, Nico Larco, City of Portland, Portland METRO, Graduate Students, Undergraduate Students	City of Portland, Portland METRO, TriMet, major metropolitan city government agencies, academics
Expert in Residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Public Lectures · Public Meetings · Class Presentation 	Spring 2016	External Expert in Residence, SCI Faculty and Staff, Local Partners	Local agencies, UO faculty and students, community members
Livability Case Study Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · White paper · Seminar/webinar 	August 2015-March 2016	Dave Remund, Kelli Matthews, SCI Fellow	Academics, Local agencies, NGOs
Ballot Initiative Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · White paper · Seminar/webinar 	August 2015-March 2016	SCI Research Director, SCI Fellow	Academics, Local agencies, NGOs
Communicating Livability Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Final class reports · Student presentations 	September 2015-June 2016	Kelli Matthews, School of Journalism and Communications, community partners	Professionals and practitioners (for example, Lane Transit District (LTD) and Better Eugene-Springfield Transit (BEST))

