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The role of time in healthy living environment networks: current research and future directions**

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Background:

Societal challenges in the context of healthy living environments are complex, requiring networked collaboration from heterogeneous actors. As it takes time before environmental investments accrue health effects, long-term networks emerge with dynamics that are unpredictable. Recent literature gives reason to believe that time plays an important role in managing networks, and can potentially help understand the dynamics in healthy living environment contexts. This study aims to identify gaps in how the literature reports on the role of time in healthy living environment networks. We identify avenues for future research.

Methods:

A scoping review of the literature yielded 27 papers published between 2012 and 2022 about collaborative practices for a healthy living environment. We collected data on general characteristics, and references to time in relation to the context, collaborative process, and outcomes of networks described in each paper.

Results:

The majority of the literature does not report on temporal dimensions in networks for a healthy living environment. In the literature that does include references to time, temporal dimensions remain an implicit and passive variable. For example, studies describe the evolution of environmental or health problems and their time horizon. If temporal dimensions are manifest in descriptions of the collaboration itself it mostly concerns the evolution of processes, their time horizon, and references to tempo. Strategic use of timing and adaption, as well as realizing long-term impact are the most important dimensions in terms of network actions.

Conclusions:

No studies systematically analyze the role of time. Future research should fill this gap to enrich our understanding of how, when, and why time shapes networked governance and outcomes for a healthy living environment. Applying these concepts further can help to develop new steering tools for practitioners involved in collaboration.

Key messages:

- The role of time in governance of healthy living environment networks remains limitedly studied.
- Future research should study the (strategic) role of temporal dimensions in healthy living environment governance.