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Evaluating the Quality of Urban Streets: A Replication and Interrogation of the
Public Space Index in Los Angeles

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Abstract and Key Words

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in urban public spaces – their design, their effects on users and surrounding businesses, the people and purposes they should aim to serve – but there are no widely agreed upon methods for comprehensively evaluating these spaces, even while their perceived importance steadily rises in the eyes of city planners, local governments, and citizens. The tools that do exist to evaluate the quality of public spaces are either limited in scope or applicability, or simply remain undertested and thus are not yet proven to be reliable. Vikas Mehta's Public Space Index (PSI) uses a combination of purportedly easy-to-apply researcher-based observations and user-based surveys to accurately and quickly evaluate a range of characteristic qualities and the overall quality of urban public space, seeming to be very broad both in scope and applicability, but it has not been tested in a sufficient variety of contexts. This paper will apply Mehta's PSI to one class of public spaces in particular, namely streets, in order to test and help validate these claims, so that cities, communities, and interested parties can rely on the PSI to gain valuable and actionable insight into their streets. This takes place via a replication of the PSI through a study of South Alvarado Street and the Third Street Promenade, two dynamic streets in Los Angeles, and an interrogation of its worthiness through an analysis of literature on public space and streets, the utilization of a custom-built survey, and other methods.

Key Words: Public Space Index, Vikas Mehta, Public Space, Public Realm, Street Life, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Social Exclusion, Marginalization, Homelessness

In den letzten Jahren ist das Interesse an städtischen öffentlichen Räumen - ihrer Gestaltung, ihrer Auswirkungen auf die Nutzer, die umliegenden Unternehmen, die Menschen und die Zwecke, denen sie dienen sollen - wieder gestiegen. Es gibt allerdings keine allgemein anerkannten Methoden zur umfassenden Bewertung dieser Räume, auch wenn ihre wahrgenommene Bedeutung in den Augen von Stadtplanern, Kommunalverwaltungen und Bürgern stetig zunimmt. Die Instrumente, die es zur Bewertung der Qualität öffentlicher Räume gibt, sind entweder in ihrem Umfang oder ihrer Anwendbarkeit begrenzt, oder sie sind noch zu wenig erprobt und haben sich daher noch nicht als zuverlässig erwiesen. Vikas Mehta's Public Space Index (PSI) verwendet eine Kombination aus vermeintlich einfach anzuwendenden forschungsbasierten Beobachtungen und nutzerbasierten Erhebungen, um eine Reihe charakteristischer Qualitäten und die Gesamtqualität des städtischen öffentlichen Raums genau und schnell zu bewerten. Der Index scheint sowohl in Bezug auf Umfang als auch Anwendbarkeit sehr breit gefächert zu sein, wurde jedoch bisher nicht in einer ausreichenden Vielfalt von Kontexten getestet. In diesem Beitrag wird der PSI von Mehta insbesondere auf eine bestimmte Form des öffentlichen Raumes angewandt, nämlich auf Straßen. Damit sollen diese Behauptungen getestet und validiert werden, so dass Städte, Gemeinden und interessierte Parteien sich darauf verlassen können, dass der PSI wertvolle und umsetzbare Erkenntnisse über ihre Straßen liefert. Dies geschieht durch eine Replikation des PSI durch eine Studie der South Alvarado Street und der Third Street Promenade, zweier dynamischer Straßen in Los Angeles, und durch eine Überprüfung der Tauglichkeit des PSI durch eine Analyse der Literatur über öffentliche Räume und Straßen, den Einsatz einer speziell angefertigten Umfrage und andere Methoden.

Schlagwörter: Public Space Index, Index Öffentlicher Raum, Vikas Mehta, öffentlicher Raum, Straßenleben, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, soziale Ausgrenzung, Marginalisierung, Obdachlosigkeit

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Abbreviations

CIAM	Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne
COVID-19	Coronavirus Pandemic 2019
DTSM	Downtown Santa Monica Inc.
EQ	Experiential Qualities
PPEG	Place Performance Evaluation Game
PPS	Project for Public Spaces
PSI	Public Space Index

Introduction

Interest in urban public spaces has been building over the past several decades, with city officials, public planners, urbanists and urbanites of all stripes engaging on the topic (Akkar Ergan 2010, Hui 2018, Lydon 2012, New York City Department of Transportation 2015). While many types of public spaces exist, each with a range of attributes assigned to them, city streets stand out as a noteworthy topic of study. It is not uncommon for public streets to take up one-third or more of a city's total area, and therefore an even larger proportion of its public space – so by this simple fact alone streets stand to have “an immense impact on the rest” of the city (Jacobs 1995, 6). To say streets are important to the daily lives of its denizens is an understatement – in their barest acknowledged capacities, they help define how people move and connect to entertainment, family, friends, parks, shops, and work, while in their most expansive they are understood to be shaping how people interact with others, and helping to both reflect and define our very politics and societies (Gehl 2011, Southworth 2003, Zieleniec, 2018).

Figure 1: Pedestrianized Street



Illustration of Strøget, a famous pedestrianized street in Copenhagen (Jacobs 1995, vii)

“Some streets are better than others . . .”

Allan Jacobs begins his book *Great Streets* thusly (Jacobs 1995, 2). It is an uncontroversial and intuitive statement – of course some streets are better than others. But it also serves as a thought-provoking statement, inevitably conjuring up a string of questions. *What exactly makes some streets better than others? Better for who and for what? How can these characteristics, experiences, or qualities be measured and assessed?* Finding answers to these questions necessitates a rigorous and “constant search for objectivity” along with a dose of value judgements, in determining what to look for, how to look for it, and knowing when it has been found (Jacobs 1995, 9). It is undoubtedly a difficult task, therefore “few comprehensive instruments exist to measure the quality of urban space” today (Mehta 2014, 1). Vikas Mehta has attempted to tackle this important task with the introduction of his novel Public Space Index (PSI).

Mehta’s PSI works to empirically measure the quality of public urban spaces via five dimensions – comfort, inclusiveness, meaningful activities, pleasurability and safety – each of the ratings being a useful evaluation of that particular quality, with the combined score meant to represent overall quality (Mehta 2014). The PSI should reveal, for example, whether a public space is “physically or symbolically” inaccessible, or any other major issues it may have (Mehta 2014, 83). In this way the PSI is to work as an evaluation tool that cities and communities can use to focus their efforts, and in the end do a better job of thoughtfully designing, managing and renewing their public spaces (Mehta 2014). The PSI is not necessarily meant to provide exact prescriptions for what should be done in or to a space – it is not an “if this, then that” schema – but simply to provide reliable, informative, and actionable evaluations that can be used and interpreted to make better streets and other public spaces. And though it is not intended to produce a list of the highest quality streets or somehow rank them against one another, it does provide a platform for practical and theoretical reflection on what makes some spaces better than others, and on the values that guide the urban public realm.

Mehta acknowledges, though, that the PSI has not been thoroughly tested. The only uses of it as of yet have been Mehta’s own original study of four different types of public spaces in Tampa, Florida, a University of West Florida’s research team’s study of public parks in the northwest area of the state, and a master’s thesis study of four sites of various types in Lincoln,

Nebraska (Mehta 2014, Evans, 2019, Dietrich 2018). In addition to these, there was a study done in Australia, which built off the PSI in some ways and which Mehta published a short response to, which will be discussed briefly in the following sections (Zamanifard 2019, Mehta 2019). Therefore, further testing of the PSI is needed to assess “how it holds up” as an effective tool in different contexts before it is used to enact changes to the built environment in cities and impacts the lives of those who use those spaces (Mehta 2014, 84). To that end, this research utilizes the PSI to evaluate the quality of two street spans in Los Angeles, California, asking and answering:

What is the quality of the case streets in Los Angeles as public spaces, according to the Public Space Index?

The five dimensions of public space according to the PSI, inclusiveness, pleurability, and so on, have been mentioned above. These are assessed for the PSI through a mix of researcher-based observations and user-based surveys, which are scored and then weighted according to Mehta’s prior research. This takes place in the context of Los Angeles, which is quite different from the places the PSI has been used in previously. The two sites in Los Angeles also differ greatly from one another: a heavily-designed upscale pedestrian street located just blocks from the beach and the famous Santa Monica Pier, with a mix of local shoppers, tourists, workers, and people experiencing homelessness; and a bustling, primarily working class Latinx street near downtown Los Angeles and next to a large and storied park, where a series of street vendor protests recently won them the right to sell goods on the streets of the city. A full accounting of this method can be found in the methodology section. This process represents the replication portion of this project.

Executing a replication of the PSI is not enough to be assured of its efficacy, however. Before the PSI can be relied upon by practitioners and others, it must not just undergo further replications, but also critical interrogations of its effectiveness and values. Naturally these streets must also be understood outside the context of the PSI, if the evaluations of them are to be the vehicle for analyzing the efficacy of the PSI. So, the second research question this paper grapples with is:

How effective are the Public Space Index’s methods at evaluating the dimensional qualities and overall quality of urban streets across different contexts?

A short custom survey, which can be found in Appendix G, has been developed in order to help in the process of interrogating the effectiveness of the PSI. It aims to understand users' overall views of the case streets, the quality of these streets, as well as their conceptualizations of the role of the streets in their daily lives and as part of the public realm. This survey is administered to the same users that respond to the PSI. Along with semi-structured interviews, an extensive literature review, and a critical look at events in the areas and in Los Angeles as a whole, the results of the PSI are put into context with the custom survey, with an eye toward identifying potential discrepancies between the results of the PSI, the values that lay behind it, and the realities of the case streets themselves. A more detailed explanation of the methods and a full introduction to the two case study streets can be found in the methodology section.

Literature Review

Any attempts at understanding the efficacy of public space evaluations must be situated in the historical and theoretical backgrounds of the topic. This is of course a large body of work, and the literature review presented here constitutes a relatively brief, necessarily condensed consideration of these materials. First, some of the historical conceptions of streets as public spaces will be presented, then their production and what purposes they were meant to serve. This is followed by an overview of the evolution in thought that has led to a resurgence of interest in streets as public spaces, and some of the ongoing movements related to them. The literature review will be followed by a brief explanation of the importance of evaluating the quality of streets and a look at some of the various attempts to evaluate the quality of streets, including Mehta's Public Space Index.

Streets as Public Spaces: Historical Conceptions

City streets were once widely considered to be “public space, to be used by everyone” (Gössling 2016, 2). Public spaces, including streets, were used to serve a range of basic needs and as places to perform a variety of vital “political, religious, commercial, civic and social functions” (Mehta 2014, 55). Fulfilling these key capacities, streets thus served both as foundational building blocks of physical cities and as part of the bedrock of culture and urban life – what people do in cities and how they experience them. Indeed, streets and urbanity may be somewhat of a chicken-egg scenario, with Lewis Mumford citing the idea that the ancient Sumerian marking for the word market, a basis of ancient cities, resembles a Y, because they exist “as a juncture of traffic routes” that bring people together (Mumford 1961, 72).

Thoughts of early cities and public spaces inevitably bring to mind the example of the iconic Greek agora, a gathering-place, a place for business and trade, a place for religious ceremony and for democratic processes and law-making. Agoras acted as fundamentally democratic public spaces meant to be used for everything. But they were not all public square-type spaces, there were early agoras with “an amorphous and irregular form” that in many cases could “be little more than the widening of the main street, a Broad Way” (Mumford 1961, 149). And while the agoras themselves were physically open to everyone, participation in many of the activities there – particularly the exercise of democratic rights – was restricted to a small minority of people (Sennett 1994, 52).

The Romans were more structured with their streets than the ancient Greeks. Indeed, one of the Roman Empire's legacies is the infrastructure that it went to great lengths to build by exacting standards, like its straight paved roads with standard widths (Mumford 1961, 205-242). It derived an ideal urban form from the heavens but used grids of these streets to impose order on subjects, legitimate its rule, and even rationalize property rights (Sennett 1994, 101-120). Streets stood as impositions of economic, political, and religious values. Rome was cognizant of the various roles and functions that streets played, and there are clear instances of it catering its urban planning efforts in attempts to balance these roles. In Pompeii "an elevated sidewalk and stepping-stones" were installed so pedestrians could step over streets made muddy by carts and excess water, and in the city of Rome it was found that horse-drawn carts caused such constant traffic, so "one of Julius Caesar's first acts on seizing power was to ban wheeled traffic" from the city center at certain peak hours (Mumford 1961, 215 and 218).

In pre-Columbian Mesoamerica some cities had large avenues, used in part, like the Romans, to project power (Stanley et al. 2012, 1104). The metropolis of Tenochtitlan had an organized layout of "smaller canals and streets [that] alternated at right angles," and its principal streets served as some of "the only truly public areas" where people could come together, meet strangers, or engage in activities like people-watching (Hutson 2000, 135). Meanwhile in the centuries after the Roman Empire, streets were not valued highly in some of the foremost cities of Europe, like Paris. They were often narrow, with a chaotic layout, merely "the space left over after people asserted their rights and powers" (Sennett 1994, 193). The edges of these spaces in Paris eventually proved to enhance the commercial role of streets though, as counters and windows showed off wares, and "the development of this porous economic street" made for more dynamic spaces in the Middle Ages (Sennett 1994, 195). But these were not purely commercial streets either though, because "living, working and trading took place in the same building and street" as such spaces were shared and there was little spatial separation of uses (Karssenber 2016, 25).

Evolutions of Thought

European cities were quite crowded, dirty, and unhealthy leading up to the modern era. Over time, paved sidewalks for pedestrians became an expectation, as too did lighting eventually, though this infrastructural work and associated maintenance was expected to come from building

owners directly (Mumford 1961, 281-314). The functions of a city gradually became tied to “the healthy virtues of respiration and circulation” in peoples’ bodies, and many cities embarked on urban renewal and modernization schemes (Sennett 1994, 263). This had several ramifications. In the eighteenth century, more concerted efforts were made in cities to clean streets, dig sewers and gutters, install water pipes beneath streets, improve airflow by widening streets, and ease movement through the renewed construction of straight roads (Mumford 1961, 344-374; Sennett 1994, 255-281). It also helped lead to the late nineteenth century creation of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City ideal – communities planned and located rationally in order to put people back in close proximity with nature (Jacobs 1961, 3-28).

In Paris, Baron Haussmann famously enacted a large-scale overhaul in the mid-nineteenth century. He put heavy emphasis on the creation of grand boulevards, thus easing the crowded conditions of the streets and enabling better mobility, also working to improve sanitary conditions (Sennett 2018, 21-62). While these were physical alterations that did improve hygiene and mobility, they were very much social and moral judgements as well, and they were not the sole motivations at play in the renovation of Paris. Over the previous decades, Paris had been rocked by periodic revolts, where anti-regime actors had barricaded the narrow and twisting streets with ease. Wide, straight streets were more difficult to barricade, especially when lined “with housing that catered to the new middle classes” who had more to lose in societal unrest, and with street side “café spaces [consisting] of small, circular tables fit for one or two persons” so that there were fewer congregations of strangers discussing the news of the day and learning from one another (Sennett 2018, 32).

While there were other notable city planners of the day that did not necessarily abide by these principles, the “more people-oriented urbanist” Ildefons Cerdá being the prime figure in Spain, for example, Haussmann’s influence prevailed more generally, with “emphasis on free flow [becoming] the guide for big-city planners” in western Europe and the United States, as people came to expect more rapid, unimpeded mobility down the boulevards (Sennett 2018, 36-37). And Ebenezer Howard’s subordination of culture, social relations, and other more experiential aspects of life to the supposed rationality of the urban planner also proved quite influential in the twentieth century (Jacobs 1961, 17-20). This changed the way people moved about their streets and viewed them. Cities started to spread out more, with a spatial “separation of functions and new city areas” also leading to an increase in traffic and increased competition

for road space (Karssenberg 2016, 26). Of course none of the people who were alive in this era are still around, and cities have since expanded and continued to morph, but the physical structures of cities that reflect “decisions made long ago, values formulated and achieved, remain alive and exert an influence” to this very day (Mumford 1961, 113). And the lessons remain too – Haussmann’s efforts in Paris are just one famous instance of a reorganization of “urban infrastructure and urban life with an eye to the control of restive populations,” an idea David Harvey ties to later urban highway construction through and around minority neighborhoods in the United States (Harvey 2012, 117). So, this proved to be a watershed moment in urban history that has echoes to the present, as these values were embedded into the built environment, and lived on in planning schema.

Despite all these changes, it can be said that for the moment, streets still generally stood as “an integrated system of movement and social and economic life” in the early nineteenth century (Karssenberg 2016, 22). Though in the United States there remained a “delicate and sometimes unstable” balance between street uses (Norton 2007, 332). This tenuous balance between uses could not long survive. As travel speeds accelerated with streetcars, and especially the introduction of personal automobiles, so too did the trend of giving over streets to motorized vehicles. The way streets were viewed changed remarkably. And the heavy emphasis toward accommodating rapid personal transport mobility in ever-larger quantities came at the expense of other purposes. The automobile rapidly and drastically shifted priorities and the dynamic of the street, displacing children, pedestrians, street vendors, and others to the margins (Norton 2007, 332). In this way the other purposes of streets – the civic, social, political, and religious facets of public life they had fostered – were shunted elsewhere.

Los Angeles in particular has long been used as “a punch line for car-based planning and traffic” – the city’s traffic problems are no secret (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016, 48). A large amount of people living in and around Los Angeles have relied on personal automobiles to get them to all the different places they need to go, because the city is sprawled out across hundreds of square miles. People often do not live close to the places they shop, eat, work, study, get entertainment, and so on. Los Angeles became “the most fully zoned American city in the early 1900s” and U.S. zoning oriented “toward more use-separation” over the course of the century – so it was often the case that homes actually were not allowed to be close to the other places people go (Hirt 2010, 5). As streets were given over to cars, one consequence is that the

activities of its Broadways and Main Streets have been supplanted by places like shopping malls, where private control and management can exclude unwanted activities (Bannerjee 2001). With this privatization of public spaces, vital activities that once took place in the public realm have moved “to private or virtual realms . . . privatized and parochial spaces” over the course of the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Mehta 2014, 55)."

Yet Los Angeles is not alone in all of this, as the rise of the automobile and the fall of public space has all been part and parcel of a much larger trend in cities toward large-scale plans, privatization of public services and a focus on economic factors as planners focused simply on how “to better organize the circulation of people and goods” (Vasconcellos 2004, 5; Jacobs and Appleyard 1987). With a supposed emphasis on rationality on the part of planners, these shifts did not naturally occur, nor did they take place in a vacuum.

The Charter of Athens was an important development in this time, stemming from the meeting of planners and urbanists at the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1933. It established “a new urban design manifesto” for what cities should look like (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, 113). CIAM heavily embraced the idea of the primacy of functionality in planning. They supported the notion that cities and their forms should be determined by function and decided that there is a “clear urban toolkit the urbanist can use” no matter the particular city (Sennett 2018, 75). Civic, cultural, and other local contexts became less important. Separation of uses in cities took place in part because these “developments placed order above complexity” and subordinated the way people experience cities and relations in them to grand visions and plans of efficiency (Sendra and Sennett 2020, 75).

In the cities of the United States these shifts have been particularly acute. In a society that “put little value in the public realm” in the first place it seems it was easy to do “away with sacred places, places of casual public assembly, and places of repose” from many public spaces (Kunstler 1993, 40 and 119). Since then, streets have, by and large, “been designed to keep traffic moving but not to support the life alongside it” (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016, 1).

By the mid-twentieth century, with the influence of CIAM and others, “public and private organizations and their associated professionals had lost interest in the public space” in large part (Akkar Ergan 2010, 4). In general, public spaces, acknowledgement of their status as integral to life beyond automobile-based mobility, and the public’s right to the city had been allowed to

languish (Zieleniec 2018). It has been said of this time that “Virtually no strategic planning has been carried out by the public sector regarding what sorts of open space priorities should be set (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993, 158). Jan Gehl colorfully wrote that “if a team of planners at any time had been given the task of doing what they could to reduce life between buildings, they hardly could have achieved more thoroughly what has inadvertently been done” (Gehl 2011, 48). Simply put, decision-makers unilaterally made choices that were dominated by purely functionalist notions without care for “psychological and social aspects” of how people view and use their public spaces (Gehl 2011, 13 and 45). As Richard Sennett might explain it, there was an overwhelming focus on the *ville* at the cost of the *cite* – the city versus the life, perceptions and experiences that take place in it (Sennett 2018). In sum, all of this led to an “overall decline of the public realm and public space” as cities became places of predetermined and segregated functions (Banerjee 2001, 12).

Yet this narrow focus and shift to privatization of public space has had further ramifications on society. Anna Loukaitou-Sideris completed some particularly relevant research on the privatization of public space in Los Angeles. It represented an early attempt to empirically measure the qualities and characteristics of public space in an expansive way (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993). For the study, she interrogated the use of three plazas in the downtown area of the city and probed their control and management. These were spaces Jan Gehl might cite as “public spaces in private buildings” – part of the trend toward privatization that has detracted from the public life in cities and which helped create what Mike Davis deems “Fortress Los Angeles” (Gehl 2011, 125; Davis 1992, 155-180). Loukaitou-Sideris concluded in part that the privatization of public spaces does not represent a simple change in delivery method, but that it is rather a deeply impactful “process in which the meaning and purposes of public open space are redefined and reshaped in the context of changing socio-economic and political relationships” (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993, 160). Private production and control over public spaces do not just amount to a change in service providers, in other words. People’s views on public spaces are malleable. And changes in the space and how its controlled have the capacity to help change what people expect, how they act, and what they then want to see from these spaces that collectively form an enormous portion of their environment.

Places of Exclusion

Some of the questions raised by Loukaitou-Sideris' research on public plazas in Los Angeles are crucial for critically analyzing ways of evaluating public space. Her research makes it clear that when considering the quality of public spaces, it is necessary to question who public spaces are meant to serve, or to put it more pointedly perhaps, who are they meant not to serve. A significant proportion of the public space users she interviewed, up to 45% in one of the "Fortress" plazas, found solitude "the most appealing characteristic" of that place (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993, 155). Of course a public space does not necessarily need to be crowded to be good, but these were privatized public spaces, where the managers could control users and restrict activities like protesting, and it is quite telling that that "safety, order and the banning of 'undesirables' ranked as positive attributes" among the people allowed to use the spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993, 154-155). Undesirables in this case was quite an expansive term, including criminals, people experiencing homelessness, street vendors, performers, and youth (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993). This illustrates Richard Sennett's point about the urban changes made earlier to the streets of Paris by Haussmann having "marked a turning point when people on the street . . . assumed that they had a right to be left alone . . . people came to want to be protected by silence, shielded from the intrusion of strangers" (Sennett 2018, 28).

These sentiments are often expressed not through simply choosing places where one can find this solitude, but through purposeful design and active exclusion. A full accounting of the complex issues surrounding this cannot be provided here, but the sentiments expressed by a large portion of Loukaitou-Sideris' respondents illustrate one aspect at the heart of public space discussions, that of contestation over it. As Don Mitchell wrote, who should be counted among "the public" has been a fight for inclusion only "won through constant social struggle" (Mitchell 1995, 116). In World War I Europe many women worked to break the rigid idea that a woman's place was at home and transform their accepted societal capacities, in part through their mere presence on city streets, and also by their management of said streets, active resistance to re-subordination, and participation, often in leading roles, in political marches through city streets (Jerram 2011, 101-172).

This fight for acceptance in public spaces has clearly been the case in Los Angeles too. Andrea Gibbons, in a historical study of racial segregation in Los Angeles over the past century,

relates attempts to legally restrict Black homeownership as it being “clear that “Negroes” in public spaces “at all hours of the day and night” cannot be borne by whites, that whites object to Black visibility itself” (Gibbons 2018, 28). And while legal victories may come in courtrooms, much of the fight takes place in public spaces themselves. Though the United States has made much progress since the 1920s and the legal victories of the 1960s, in the 2020s exclusion – particularly racial exclusion – certainly remains an issue in the public realm, as the running Black Lives Matter protests have made explicit. While coverage of the protests has largely focused on police discrimination against African Americans, the movement is intimately tied to public space and public street spaces. The lethal policing of African Americans on the streets of the United States is seen by many as “assaults on black placemaking” (Hunter et al. 2016, 2). A full treatment of this topic is not possible here, but these issues of contestation are bound up with modern developments around public space, because they are about how public spaces affect people, who has a say in making spaces in the city and determining what those spaces should be for – which are in and of themselves major developments in the conceptions of public spaces.

Modern Developments in Conceptions of Public Spaces

In the latter half of the twentieth century, a handful of urbanists – such as Donald Appleyard, Jane Jacobs, William H. Whyte, Kevin Lynch, and Jan Gehl, to name just a few of the foremost – started pushing for a shift in thinking regarding the way streets and other public spaces are viewed. Their contributions to the field were monumental, but summarizing them, perhaps overbroadly, they recognized that these spaces are not static, interchangeable, value-neutral infrastructure, should not be treated as such, and that it is detrimental to do so. Indeed, they recognized that “streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs” and so are inextricably tied to living (Jacobs 1961, 30). The streets that help manifest the public realm are not only where people travel but should be made to be social spaces again, where people can relax, meet other people, shop, and form community bonds, among other vital activities (Mehta 2007, 166). Simply put, public spaces are where life happens in a city, these places cannot be purely functional, and everyday people should have a hand in determining what these spaces are like.

Over time these views have gradually caught on, and the trend toward increased attention and care for streets as multi-use public spaces has accelerated in the twenty-first century. A

review of each of their contributions to the topic at hand cannot be listed, but one author credits Appleyard, for example, with “the replacement of a strictly technical and economic view – of roads . . . with a social and political view,” a critical step toward more modern urban planning, and another said these urbanists helped lay the basis for identifying the “critical ingredients of good public spaces” which is necessary for evaluating those spaces (Vasconcellos 2004, 4; Francis 1998, 57). Their work represents a stronger tendency toward more people-centered principles, summed up by Gehl’s exhortation to “Take good care of the people and the life between the buildings” (Gehl 2011, 1). But this shift has taken place slowly and has not been a complete nor a unified transformation of thought.

Focus on streets as objects of technical importance and study has not totally ceased. The Complete Streets movement is notable here, having an expanded scope of interest from simple traffic throughput to being concerned with designing streets to “safely accommodate all road users, regardless of mode of travel or ability” (Hui 2018, 74). Complete Streets entail a wide range of possibilities depending on local context. Many proponents of Complete Streets also tout the benefits it has to people and their experiences on the street, but that is not considered central to the undertaking. Los Angeles implemented a Complete Streets program in 2015 in accordance with its Vision Zero aims to end deaths related to traffic accidents (Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti 2018). Its design guide is hundreds of pages long, and does briefly touch on topics like street art, which is related more to peoples’ enjoyment of a street, but the guide’s main aim is to “promote the major tenets of Complete Streets—safety and accessibility” (Los Angeles City Planning n.d.). While Complete Streets and its focus on a more broad-based view of transportation via walking, transit, and biking certainly represents improvements over exclusively prioritizing a technically-focus on speed and throughput for cars, and judging the quality and effectiveness of streets based on the number of cars that utilize them – it still lacks the larger aforementioned view shift of roads not being “strictly technical and economic” (Vasconcellos 2004, 4).

Placemaking has also become a prominent strain of thought in the public space sphere, stemming to a large degree from the work of William Whyte. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS), which explicitly aims to build on his work, defines placemaking not just as the act of building better public spaces, but building space that “facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support

its ongoing evolution” – in other words, it is heavily focused on people, their “health, happiness, and well-being” as it relates to public space (Project for Public Spaces 2007). Placemaking stands in stark contrast to top-down urban planning, as it is meant to be a process that heavily involves the public, or even is community-led in a bottom-up fashion. But placemaking has also been subject to some criticism, for being relatively and “troublingly silent on public space’s crucial role as a political space” (McCann 2020).

There are other concepts driving changes to streets – Livable Streets, Streets for All, Sustainable Streets, Vision Zero, Walkable Streets – but they are all in turn driven by a progressive increase in understanding around the value that streets as public spaces can provide, and more firm beliefs that they should be shared and accessible to all. And there is a wealth of these benefits. Streets that have pedestrians on them tend to be safer places and provide more of a sense of ease, and they are places where people can meet people and children can learn (Jacobs 1991, 29-88). There is evidence that people are more sociable and have more tight-knit communities on streets with fewer cars, as there is less noise and pollution to make the street unpleasant, and it is safer to use (Appleyard 1972). They are places people can walk, exercise, and get sunshine and fresh air, which all have health benefits. Streets are the basis for creating a connected and useable city, and can have environmental benefits, support a productive economy, “and promote quality of life, equity and social inclusion” (Mboup 2013, 31). People can meet, exchange individual ideas, and learn on streets, as well as protest, demonstrate, and make their collective voices heard – certainly these are inherently beneficial in a democratic society. Streets are integral to the oeuvre of cities, they are part of where people live, creatively express themselves, and make the city their own and not just a functional background (Zieleniec 2018). In the context of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), they have been crucial for peoples’ mental health (Schuff 2020). Simply, what takes place on streets, the “life between buildings comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive,” they help make life worth living in a city (Gehl 2011, 14).

Public Space Evaluations

Evaluating Streets

Streets can bring all the benefits previously described, better quality of life, better health, stronger and inclusive communities, the surety of safety in public, serve as a place for learning, a canvas on which to express oneself, and more, to cities and their denizens (Garau 2015). Though many modern movements in the urban planning sphere are geared toward bringing these more experiential benefits over simple motorized mobility, that does not mean all streets are doing so, especially in the United States. As the history of streets and conceptions of them clearly show, “there is nothing normal or inevitable” about the spatial separation of uses that has helped deaden the life between buildings in cities around the United States, but it is so firmly entrenched that often streets are not even meant to address such issues – and they may not be equipped with the zoning to facilitate such things (Hirt 2010, 8). Just because shared conceptions of what streets are for and who they are for has shifted, does not mean the reality on the ground has as well. Therefore, it is vital to have methods of evaluation to boost our understandings, improve the built environment, and better enable the public realm as well as the people in it to thrive.

Criteria are needed to execute evaluations though, and here research by Zamanifard et al. is particularly instructive, as it represents an attempt to categorize the expected functions of good public spaces in the modern day (Zamanifard 2019). They distill from the literature four functions, that urban public spaces serve as stages for “individual development and pleasure . . . use of all members of the society . . . gathering, vigil, sociality and collective events . . . demonstration of art culture and politics” (Zamanifard et al. 2019, 345). These functions are interpreted by different academics, practitioners, and theorists to be expressed through various qualities. So, building proper evaluative tools is no simple task. To ensure that public street spaces, which have the potential to bring so many benefits to users, are open to all potential users and do transfer those potential benefits, it is vital to evaluate them, and to do so in a responsible manner. There are, of course, disagreements on how this is best done.

There are many different methods of evaluating streets – technical and economic measures, researcher observation and analysis, the perceptions of its users – and also varying sets of criteria to be looked at – ease of mobility, time spent lingering, how much interaction takes place, and on. The study by Zamanifard et al. includes a fairly comprehensive look at the variety

of research that has been done on evaluations of public space quality (Zamanifard 2019). A full accounting of these evaluation methods is not repeated here, but it is useful to briefly consider some other examples, as well as the method Zamanifard et al. propose. Their study found that “objective measurements and expert-centred methods constitute most of the existing evaluations” of urban public spaces (Zamanifard 2019, 341). Some of these are measures and methods that members of the general public would likely find to be most familiar to them.

There are several evaluation systems whose scores are used by the general public, that remain focused on streets as objects of technical focus, with Walkscore.com likely providing the most prominent in the United States. The company determines 0 to 100 ratings that comprise any given address’ Walk Score, Transit Score and Bike Score. The Walk Score is based on the existence of amenities within 400 meters and certain metrics around density and block length. The Transit Score is calculated “based on the frequency, type of route, and distance to the nearest stop on the route” (Walk Score, n.d.) In formulating the Bike Score, bicycle infrastructure, topography, frequency of use and “road connectivity” are used (Walk Score, n.d.). Only certain selected data points are taken into account when creating the scores, which has some benefits. This method has the advantage in terms of speed – the company can make rapid evaluations, as data can simply be collected and input, versus directly observing streets and learning about the experiences of the users. Their scores simply do not consider such things as whether diverse groups of people are using the street, if people feel safe there, or how the street is experienced. So even though people may extrapolate from these scores how good or bad it may be to live in a certain location, it is still a very technically focused evaluation tool, that on a theoretical level, is deeply rooted in functionalist conceptions of streets.

Quite different from that are user-centered and experience-centered evaluation tools. PPS, known for its role in the bottom-up placemaking movement, built “a tool for evaluating any public space,” called the Place Performance Evaluation Game (PPEG) – which despite being called a game, is meant to be productively used both by residents and experts (Project for Public Spaces 2016). To conduct a PPEG, a small group of people go to a public space for several hours, analyze its attributes relating to sociability, access and linkages, comfort and image, and uses and activities, then informally interview someone in the space. This method, while simple and accessible, seems to lack empirical elements or reliability. PPS states that one does not “need to know anything about the city at all” in order to evaluate a space (Project for Public Spaces n.d.).

And the diversity of ratings that come out of a PPEG are considered to be a positive attribute, a sign that the public space and its people are dynamic (Project for Public Spaces n.d.).

PPS has had clear success over the years with its community-based approach to placemaking, but it does not provide a reliable evaluation tool with clear metrics. That can be considered in and of itself to be a clear rejection of more technical measures and ways of thinking about public spaces. It focuses instead on perceptions of how the spaces are used and experienced, and it puts its full faith in members of the community or its observers to evaluate such things. In these ways PPEG does provide a good entry-level way to educate people about public space, explore the possibilities in their communities, and bolster placemaking efforts. But despite appearing at least on a state's website as an auditing tool, without any discernible data, it can often be difficult to get official buy-in regarding potential large-scale changes to public spaces, and eschewing experts entirely also has potential consequences, as will be discussed later (New Mexico Department of Transportation, n.d., Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016, 251-264).

Naturally more community-led or community-oriented projects have emerged in recent years, especially with the rise of placemaking. Indeed, cities often put a priority now on getting public input and buy-in on projects that alter public space. This follows with theories about placemaking practices and leans toward the public's right to the city. Though this is also sometimes taken to an extreme. In Los Angeles, construction and maintenance of streets is overseen by a convoluted slew of private and public actors, and while they have some Livable Streets-type programs, the city also asks residents that if they want to see changes made, to navigate the system themselves to provide "DIY Services" – thus largely shifting responsibility to business owners and residents who have the capital and know-how to navigate the system (Great Streets Los Angeles 2017).

The research from Zamanifard et al. somewhat bridges the gap between the PPES and the PSI – the full details of which can be found in the following section. It builds off the PSI, creating a tool that analyzes urban public spaces through the dimensions of comfort, diversity and vitality, image and likeability, and inclusiveness. These dimensions are drawn from the existing literature and the work of urbanists who clearly conceive of public spaces as being places "for individual development and pleasure" by all people in society, where gatherings and other social activities can take place, and where "art, culture and politics" can be demonstrated (Zamanifard 2019,

345). But the study refocuses in order to incorporate more of users' perceptions, and in doing so proposes an evaluation tool that takes more stock of the experiential qualities (EQ) of public spaces, their "management, control, publicness and diversity of users" (Zamanifard 2019, 345). Thus, the index works to promote "the users' voice in planning and designing public spaces" (Zamanifard 2019, 361). It largely takes experts out of the evaluation equation, except in the formulation of said evaluation tool, though they acknowledge that "syntheses of methods that include assessments of experts and ordinary users" provide better evaluations (Zamanifard 2019, 341). The results of this method wholly reflect the views of its users – albeit mediated through the "expert measurement criteria" – though not all of its users as "rough sleepers or people with mental illnesses" were kept from participating in the initial surveying "for ethical purposes" (Zamanifard 2019, 341). This can be seen as a valuable method that adds to the toolbox of methods for evaluating the quality of public spaces, especially given that EQ and user-centered methods are lacking. But while it seeks answers to whether users perceive a public space as being multicultural, whether they feel welcome there, if its financially accessible, and more, it does not actually assess whether the space is objectively fulfilling those criteria, which is problematic.

Loukaitou-Sideris' research illustrates the danger of relying wholly on users to evaluate the quality of their surroundings. Public spaces, and more specifically, what activities are found to be acceptable in them, and who they are for, are constantly contested. People can be quite self-interested, and oftentimes "do not discuss the higher purpose of streets as much as they fight over their own turf" (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016, 251). If users of a public space are surveyed on how they view it, but the space is exclusionary or not welcoming to some, the results would reflect those exclusionary viewpoints in a positive manner. And as Zamanifard et al. point out, if someone has negative experiences of a space, they may choose to no longer visit, and thus would not appear in any surveying efforts (Zamanifard 2019, 361). But can a public space be considered good if it is meant to exclude some, or even the exclusion of others is what makes it be considered good by its users in the first place, as was the case in Loukaitou-Sideris' findings? Modern concepts of public space and the public realm would answer that in the negative.

So despite the widespread interest in improving the quality of streets with an eye toward expansive notions of the "social, cultural, environmental, psychological, physiological and economic well-being of individuals and communities" which they affect, which constitute the

modern view of public spaces, there are relatively few established ways to measure such things, though there are certainly tools that attempt to do so in various ways (Zamanifard 2019, 344).

Overview of Mehta's Public Space Index

That is where Vikas Mehta comes in, building on the work of Kevin Lynch, Stephen Carr, Jan Gehl and others in suggesting “a theoretical framework to evaluate public space” across five dimensions that captures the modern conceptions of the essential roles and purposes of public space, and in putting forward the PSI to practically gain empirical insights on those key areas (Mehta 2014, 57). The working theoretical framework he uses in order to do so is that “good public space is accessible and open, is meaningful in its design and the activities it supports, provides a sense of safety, physical and environmental comfort and convenience, a sense of control, and sensory pleasure (Mehta 2014, 57). Although the PSI contains variables that touch on concrete things like building façades and the various physical elements on a street, those are considered because of how they affect people using the street, so it is fundamentally a person and experience-oriented evaluation method and also pays attention to EQ.

Since the term “public space” is used in different ways and with differing definitions, it is necessary to note that this paper follows the definition that Mehta uses, namely that public space is determined by “the access and use of the space rather than its ownership” and that artifacts in the space and the things that form the edges of that space, such as façades, are included (Mehta 2014, 54). A typical shopping open-air shopping mall, for example, though privately-owned, would therefore be counted as a public space for the purposes of the PSI.

The first of the five PSI dimensions is comfort – which refers to “physical comfort and convenience and environmental comfort” specifically, because if people are comfortable in a public space, they are more likely to go there and engage in activities (Mehta 2014, 60). The next is inclusiveness, measuring the accessibility of the space to people and how well the space supports their activities, because public spaces places exist both “for the collective voice and shared interests” to be enjoyed by a community, but also to act as the place “where the differences and conflicts of various groups play out” (Mehta 2014, 58). The third dimension is meaningful activities, which is a complex dimension that is concerned with sociability and usefulness, broadly. Public spaces are meaningful when they “satisfy basic needs” by having entertainment and shopping amenities, support cultural and symbolic activities like protesting,

and allow for socialization, because this aids people in having shared experiences, building attachment and belonging, and generally build culture and community (Mehta 2014, 59). Pleasurability is another dimension, with Mehta's variables in this category aimed at imageability – in other words the ability to provoke a strong mental image – elements on the street that are human scaled, sense of enclosure – “a room-like quality that evokes a feeling [sic] of being ‘inside’” – as well as attractiveness and sensory complexity (Mehta 2014, 69). The fifth dimension is safety, determined by users' “ability to feel safe from the social and physical factors” in the space because the perception and reality of safety can be a delicate balance to achieve, but is a foundation for good public spaces and the people in them (Mehta 2014, 60).

There are forty-two variables that must be assessed when using the PSI to evaluate the quality of streets – though for other types of public spaces there is a slightly different set of variables that are used. The majority of the variables, 69% of the total, are visually assessed by the researcher(s) during repeated site visits across both a range of days and at a variety of times of day and night. The remainder of the variables, 31% of the total, are assessed by obtaining ratings from the street's users, but this is necessarily limited to pedestrians, as surveys are conducted by hand on the sidewalks. The variables were given weights based on prior theoretical developmental studies – both by Mehta and by others – and an extensive literature review (Mehta 2014, 70). Mehta acknowledges that the weighting could be altered based “on what is expected from a particular public space” but that would not help produce a tried and true tool that can be used on public spaces all over, and instead he has aimed to produce a “generally agreeable weighting” (Mehta 2014, 70).

When evaluating streets, the researcher-rated variables are combined to produce 60% of the weighting of the final scores. Many of the researcher-rated variables are objective measures – tallying up the people in a space to determine if it is a diverse grouping, for example. Meanwhile, the user-rated variables are more about perception and experience and make up the remaining 40% of the weighting. In this way the PSI works to balance and incorporate the views of users, but also attempts to provide more objective measures through the researcher. Unlike Zamanifard's tool, Mehta's PSI is not interested in finding out whether people believe the street is diverse, for example – instead it works to clearly establish whether it is or is not, with counts of the people that are there. The variables in each of the five dimensions are weighted and added up, with each dimension having a numerical rating between zero and thirty, then the five dimension

scores are added up and, being weighted equally, converted “to achieve a final PSI out of 100” (Mehta 2014, 71). The full list of these variables, as well as their weightings, can be found in Appendix A. A five-sided polygonal radar graph, seen below in Figure 2, can then be used as an easy visual aid to show the relative strengths and weaknesses of each case street.

Figure 2: Public Space Index Radar Graph



A blank radar graph presenting how results for the five dimensions of the Public Space Index can be displayed (Mehta 2014)

Before diving into this paper’s application of the PSI, it is important to recognize that each of the five dimensions, as well as the forty-two variables they are composed of, and the weighting assigned to them are inherently value judgements – as is the choice to have the researcher-rated variables comprise the majority of the survey both by number of variables and by weighting. They reflect no immutable laws of nature. If they were wont to committing evaluations of their streets, people in the past may have valued evaluation methods that prioritized dimensions of public space around religious symbolism, senses of awe and order, hygiene, rationality, ability to blockade it in defiance of authorities, ability to march soldiers and fire cannons at those resisting the authorities, and so on. It would clearly vary based on time, location, class, and more. So, the specific dimensions of the PSI, which together are deemed to constitute quality, and that these methods and others try to evaluate, are simply reflections of

what can be said is valued by current Western-centric society. These values are important building blocks for the PSI. Therefore it is vital to interrogate what lies behind the dimensions and their variables, and what views are being inputted, as Loukaitou's study of public spaces in Los Angeles in the early 1990s showed, "Safety, order and the banning of 'undesirables' ranked as positive attributes among users" (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993, 155). This must be done to see whether the dimensions and variables are truly representative of the ideals behind them, and much of the discussion will focus on this task.

The replication and extension of Mehta's PSI study conducted by researchers at the University of West Florida, who limited their study to public parks in Pensacola Florida, noted that there were some issues around researcher consistency in rating the pleasurability dimension. They suggested that the particulars of the variables in this dimension "might require coders to have a more theoretical grounding in the urban planning literature on public space" and that these indicators "be further specified" (Evans 2019, 134). It is an assumption on the part of the PSI that researchers can be knowledgeable and objectively rate the variables assigned to them, an issue that can be somewhat alleviated through looking for the statistical reliability between researchers' scores, as the Evans study did, and through the use of multiple, diverse researchers. This topic will be revisited in the discussion section.

Methodology

Public Space Index Basics

Much of the fieldwork involved in this project went toward reproducing Vikas Mehta's PSI methodology, as this research is meant to cross-test his index in different contexts. As previously explained, the PSI evaluates the quality of public spaces through a mix of user surveying and researcher observations and counts. It judges the space on five dimensions, which are then combined to produce an overall evaluation. While the forty-two variables that comprise the five dimensions have been assigned different weights by Mehta, the five dimensions are not given priority over one another. The scope of this research paper does not include any attempt to reproduce or evaluate the foundational studies that went into the formulation of these weightings, and so uses the same weightings that Mehta laid out.

Both case study sites were visited across a range of times and days of the week, with a researcher-based survey being completed on each visit. The researcher observed the street and accordingly assigned a whole number rating between zero and four on twenty-nine factors covering a range of issues, such as the diversity of users, availability of food, availability of seating, lighting quality, and presence of memorable architecture. Users of the streets were canvassed and were asked to fill out a thirteen-question survey on a range of variables focused on their perception. These surveys can be found in in Appendices C and E. The results of both the researcher and user surveys are weighted according to Mehta's prior research and tallied up to produce final PSI scores for the streets.

Site Selection

Los Angeles is a highly diverse and famously sprawling city that hosts innumerable contexts for the PSI to be tested in. Physically far and culturally quite different from other places the PSI has been tested, and as the epitome of a car-centered city, intended for rapid (in theory) personal mobility, it seemed a perfect testing ground for determining the usability of the PSI. Mehta's approach to site selection in Tampa detailed that the chosen streets were in mixed-use urban areas, and that they were public spaces in usage, if not in ownership, as noted in the last section. The lengths of the street spans that Mehta assessed are approximated at 200 meters, but for this study a range of street spans were considered from roughly 200 to 1200 meters (Mehta

2014, 71). Longer street spans were considered because it seemed prudent to avoid arbitrarily choosing a single section of a street if it is seen to function in a cohesively whole and connected manner. Analyzing a longer, but coherent, span, is likely to produce a better overall representation of the qualities of this type of street and get a better cross-section of its users. To put these lengths in relatable terms, they represent five to fifteen-minute walks for an average person who is physically abled. After consideration of a number of options around the city, the Third Street Promenade (“the Promenade”) and a span of South Alvarado Street (“Alvarado”) were chosen as the study sites – sites far apart but linked by the storied Wilshire Boulevard that once served as “America’s first great highway strip” (Kunstler 1993, 211). And it must be stated that though this research endeavors to evaluate the quality of these two streets as public spaces, and while insights might arise from comparisons of the corresponding sets of results, it is not the intent of this study to directly compare the quality of these streets.

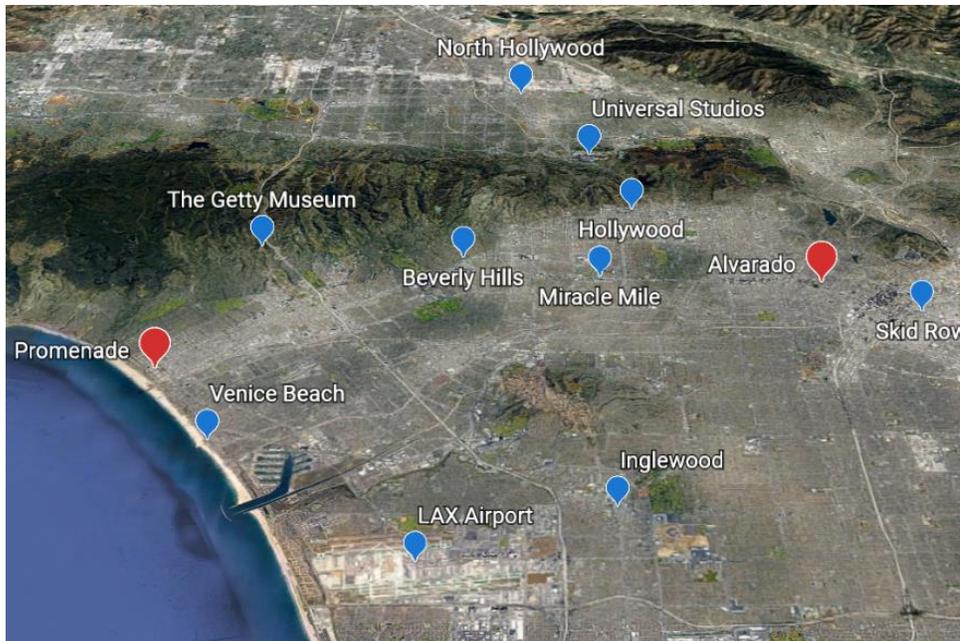
Users are defined here broadly and simply, as people present in the space. This is intended to include people working in shops, people experiencing homelessness, people volunteering for charitable causes, people protesting, people shopping, and people simply sitting in or moving through the space. Those who manage the space via their stores and the most marginalized people on the street are not excluded, as has been done elsewhere (Zamanifard 2019, 341).

Introduction to the Study Sites

The Promenade is on the western side of Los Angeles, and in actuality lays within the city of Santa Monica, one of several wealthy enclaves. Santa Monica is bounded on three sides by the city of Los Angeles, and by the Pacific Ocean on the fourth side. It is part of Los Angeles County, and colloquially is treated as part of Los Angeles, so it will be treated and referred to in this paper as such. The Promenade is approximately 600 meters (over a third of a mile) in length and 25 meters (80 feet) in width, capped on one end by Broadway and the upscale, open-air, Santa Monica Place mall, and a transition into a more residential street beyond five-lane (seven if parking lanes are included) Wilshire Boulevard on the other end. It is located several blocks from the Ocean Front Walk and the picturesque Santa Monica Pier. The Promenade has been a pedestrian-only street since 1965, but it is intersected by two streets, both of which allow cars, the four-lane (six with parking) Arizona Avenue and four-lane Santa Monica Avenue (Ginsberg 2019). It has undergone several renovations since that time, including the construction of city-

owned parking structures on the backside of every block, just behind the buildings of the Promenade but remaining out of sight. Although there are plenty of bus lines serviced by the city and the county, as well as a light rail station that runs connects it with downtown Los Angeles, the area surrounding the Promenade is not particularly dense, so these parking structures help enable the Promenade's success as a pedestrian-only street.

Figure 3: Case Study Sites in Map of Los Angeles



Study sites situated with locational aid markers (Source: Google Maps)

While the Promenade does not entirely consist of large chain stores, places such as Midnight Special, “a community center as much as a bookstore” that existed there for decades, have long been priced out by the likes of Apple, Brookstone, J. Crew, Lululemon and others (Pulido, Barraclough, and Cheng 2012, 311). The picturesque street is a hotspot for tourists, but also serves as a go-to for locals seeking coffee or brunch, a place to hang out on their lunch break, and as a nice dinner spot. Though it can be quiet during the day, there is typically a steady flow of shoppers. Two movie theaters, the occasional stage for a live performance, and buskers of all sorts spaced widely down the street provide for its entertainment options.

Figure 4: View of the Promenade



Dinosaur-shaped greenery that doubles as a water feature, located at one end of the Promenade. (Source: Author)

Though it is a public pedestrianized street, management and operation of the Promenade has been outsourced from the city of Santa Monica to a non-profit group called Downtown Santa Monica, Inc. (DTSM). It has a CEO and is guided by a board of directors, some of which are appointed by elected officials, some directly elected only by local property owners (DTSM, n.d.). The groups' annual reports, which themselves are sponsored largely by private real estate companies, provide a good deal of insight into their activities. DTSM employs Hospitality and Quality of Life Ambassadors – or “blue shirts,” for their distinctively colored polo shirts – who are tasked with keeping “an acute eye on the public realm” (DTSM 2019, 11). Part of their duties are “to respond directly to calls from stakeholders, proactively engage in homeless outreach” as well as to “kindly notify patrons of quality of life violations such as smoking, scooting or biking on the Third Street Promenade, sleeping on public property, and filming without a permit” which they do tens of thousands of times a year – in 2020 they tallied responding to over 52,000 “public space violations” of various kinds (DTSM 2019, 10; DTSM 2020, 23). In this way they serve to play a role similar to that of community policing. And this is outsourced to another company, for-profit, entirely, which runs these types of ambassadorial programs at similar locations across the country, in order to allow DTSM “staff to focus on the bigger picture needs of serving the

stakeholders” in the area (DTSM 2020, 23). The Promenade has largely been celebrated as a public space, but it is also clearly an example of one of the ways in which public space has been privatized and subjected to private management and control, a topic which comes up again in the final discussion section of this paper.

Though the helpfulness of Walk Scores are limited, as discussed in the previous section, they are known to and used by many people, and may provide an idea of the area to readers familiar with these scoring systems, so will be noted here (Steuteville, 2016). An address toward the center of the study site has most recently received a Walk Score of 95, a Transit Score of 77, and a Bike Score of 83.

Alvarado runs for approximately 3.3 kilometers (2.1 miles) from the 101 Freeway in the north to Hoover Street in the south, and is located northwest of downtown Los Angeles and LA Live, where the Staples Center, the Nokia Theater, the Convention Center, and other upscale dining and entertainment options are located. An approximately 1-kilometer section in the middle was chosen as a study site, going from 6th Street in the north to Olympic Boulevard in the south. As its name suggests, the Westlake neighborhood in which the study site is in, was just within the western bounds of the historical city center. Alvarado acts as the southeastern border to the large MacArthur Park, which contains a lake, music pavilion, scattered trees, and where a large number of people experiencing homelessness can typically be found. MacArthur Park opened in the late nineteenth century, becoming in the early twentieth century the centerpiece of an area that served as a posh suburb, with boaters on the lake in MacArthur Park, then later as a refuge for Jewish immigrants (Meares 2018, Decker 1986). There are few physical reminders of this past, just Langer’s Jewish deli, and the façades and signs for several buildings, including the Westlake Theater that was used as the location for a swap meet for many years. In the 1980s the area started receiving a large influx of “refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua” (Pulido, Barraclough, and Cheng 2012, 77).

A number of streets intersect this section of Alvarado, incidentally including Wilshire Boulevard. Despite the fact that both the study sites are connected via Wilshire Boulevard, Alvarado is not close to the Promenade, being some 23 kilometers (14.3 miles) down the road. A plaza around a metro station entrance, filled with stalls of city-sanctioned street vendors also borders Alvarado. Two lines run through this metro station, stretching from the downtown Union

Station up to North Hollywood and over to Westwood, respectively. The skyscrapers of downtown Los Angeles loom to the east, physically close but feeling like they are a world away, and the ground rises more gradually to the west, with Wilshire leading into the heart of bustling Koreatown. To the north, Alvarado rises sharply up a hill, to the south it more gradually drops down into a quieter mixed-use area. An address toward the center of the study site has most recently received a Walk Score of 94, a Transit Score of 83, and a Bike Score of 71. Retail options include chain stores like 99 Cents Only and Boost Mobile but largely tend toward standalones, like the pharmacy Botica del Publico and a slew of other local shops and restaurants.

Figure 5: View of MacArthur Park



View of MacArthur Park from Wilshire Boulevard, with Alvarado on the far left side (Source: Author)

Street vendors are a constant on Alvarado, both inside the metro plaza and down the road, from early in the morning to late at night, mostly selling food and daily household goods. On the weekends there is a large increase in vendors as more families come outside, many visiting the park, and a sort of flea market takes place on the border between Alvarado and MacArthur Park. The street vendors are much more prominent than in many other areas in the city. Alvarado has been a site of consequential street vendor protests in recent years as they fought for formal recognition and acceptance. One research and advocacy organization that was involved in the protests estimates that there are as many as 50,000 street vendors across the city (Inclusive Action for the City 2019, 2). The area as a whole is also somewhat well-known as a hotbed of

political activism. The People’s Guide to Los Angeles notes the neighboring MacArthur Park as a “frequent site of political protests and marches” (Pulido, Barraclough, and Cheng 2012, 71).

Figure 6: View of Alvarado



Street and storefronts on the quieter section of Alvarado to the south end of the study site (Source: Author)

Using the Public Space Index

In mid-December 2019, the researcher traveled to Los Angeles and began conducting fieldwork, which lasted until mid-January. Over the course of approximately five weeks, the case sites were visited repeatedly – with 9 recorded visits to Alvarado and 8 recorded visits to the Promenade. There, the researcher observed and interviewed people on the street to obtain their ratings, at times spread throughout the day and week. The weather was generally quite agreeable, with temperature ranging from approximately 12 to 22 degrees Celsius (54 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit), no to low levels of wind, and while sometimes overcast never raining. On the first fieldwork day at the Promenade there was a small Christmas market on one block that was on its last day and in the process of closing, but otherwise there were no special events, protests, or otherwise atypical circumstances at the sites on the fieldwork days.

The researcher approached a large number and range of people – individuals, pairs, and groups of all genders, ages, races, physical capabilities and apparent classes – apprising them of

the researcher's status as a graduate student conducting a survey on the street and its activities, and asking for their consent to participate. This was done in English, Spanish, and when pressed with questions in Spanish, occasionally Spanglish. On several occasions the researcher was approached by curious street users, and these were offered the same explanation and opportunity to take the survey. The PSI was always administered first, followed by the custom survey and then general demographic information. Respondents were told that additional comments on any question or topic were welcome. Sometimes the researcher asked the questions and filled out the survey, and other times respondents asked to fill it out themselves.

The researcher made repeated observational visits to each of the streets to fill out the researcher-based side of the PSI, nine to Alvarado and eight to the Promenade, and differences between the visits were certainly noted. But the researcher attempted to come at each observational foray with a clean slate for the street, and previous ratings did not affect the next round of ratings. Even though bollards or some other such design elements that discourage the use of space may not have changed, the rating for that variable may well change from visit to visit, because as Mehta stated, these are determined through a process of researchers "observing the space and the interaction between the space and its occupants" – this does change and so does the perception of such factors (Mehta 2014, 70).

Custom Survey

As described in the previous section, the custom survey was administered directly following the PSI, and all respondents completed both surveys, so the practicalities of this merit no further elaboration. The construction of the custom survey does require some elaboration, however. Much consideration was given to how best to interrogate the quality of Mehta's PSI. One method that was considered was to fully evaluate the same case study streets as prescribed by several other evaluation tools, some of which have been discussed in the literature review section, and then compare results. Due to this project's status as a solo research endeavor, a simpler method was chosen. A custom survey was created, with just 11 questions. The full list of questions as they appeared in the survey, along with the demographic questions, can be found in Appendix G. While more questions may have been of use, the rationale was to keep this to the minimum number of questions necessary, to be able to go through the surveys with respondents

in five minutes or less. In reality, application of the surveys did typically take a good deal longer, though the researcher did not time these encounters.

Instead of using dozens of user-rated and researcher-rated variables which are then weighted and added, as with the PSI, users were asked directly to rate the overall quality of the street along the five primary dimensions which Mehta utilizes. Additional questions were asked for contextualization and to help understand the users' conceptualizations of the street and how it might factor into their daily lives. For example, users were presented with a list of potential uses of the street, including an option to mention other uses, and asked what ways they used it, and what were the uses of the street they personally find to be acceptable. They were also presented with a short list of options for who they might run into on the street commonly, whether it be friends, colleagues, etc. They were asked about the likelihood of introducing the street to others or making plans with others to be there. And finally, they were asked what they like best about the street, and what they would most like to change about it.

Other Methods

The researcher conducted one semi-structured over the phone in order to supplement the data and research. The interviewee was selected due to their knowledge and ability to speak on relevant topics from a range of viewpoints. More experts from a range of backgrounds and viewpoints were contacted, but the researcher was not able to obtain interviews. A short introduction to the interviewee is provided here, as his insights will be interspersed throughout the remaining sections of this paper when relevant, but the full transcribed interview can be found in Appendix J.

Lexis-Olivier Ray (Lex) is a young African American journalist and photographer local to the Westlake area of Los Angeles, whose work has focused on “on cannabis, cops, homelessness, food injustice, gentrification and other social topics” (Ray, n.d.). In 2020 much of his reporting has centered on how the unhoused communities of the city have been faring during the COVID-19 pandemic and how street vendors have coped with city restrictions. Additionally, he has put himself on the frontlines to document the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter protests – even capturing photographs of a police officer’s assault of himself. Lex’s on-the-ground and up-to-date expertise proved to be of great value, especially given the fluid circumstances.

On several occasions during site visits, the researcher spoke in-person with police officers or other city employees who did not wish to be surveyed or formally interviewed with their names attached to the conversation, but were still willing to speak candidly about the street anonymously. One of these was a Downtown Santa Monica Inc., employee, who as a matter of course interacts with users of the Promenade and also its management, and so their insight also proves quite useful in understanding the workings of the street. The researcher took notes during these conversations, and any information stemming from these will be noted as coming from such conversations.

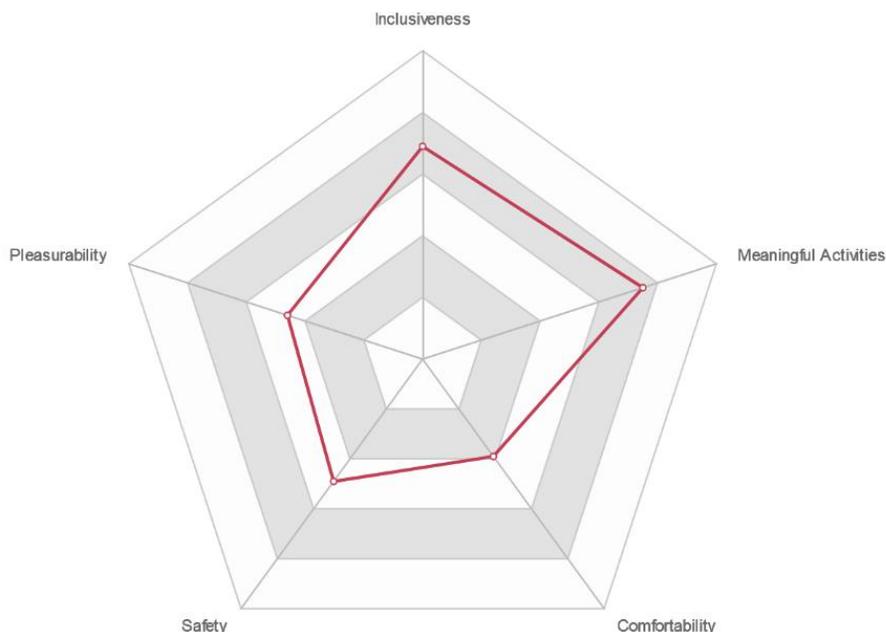
Additionally, several follow-up visits were conducted in June and July 2020 to see what impact the COVID-19 pandemic and the civil rights-related protests were having or not having on the case streets, but these were not rigorous research visits, and the health and safety of both the researcher and of users, no surveying took place. Therefore, any observations from these instances will only be included as anecdotal-type evidence.

Results and Discussion of the Public Space Index Replication

Results

As the intent of this paper is to both replicate and interrogate the PSI, there are several related but still somewhat distinct topics to be discussed. Therefore, this section simply focuses on the reproduction portion of this research. The basic results of the PSI for both Alvarado and the Promenade are first presented, and then a discussion of these results takes place, including a few loose recommendations to improve these spaces that naturally follow from the PSI results, as can be found in the other PSI evaluations that other researchers have carried out (Dietrich 2018, Evans 2019). Note that the scores cited below in the text are rounded to the nearest whole number for ease of communication. A comprehensive table with the full sets of results can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 7: Graph of PSI Results for Alvarado

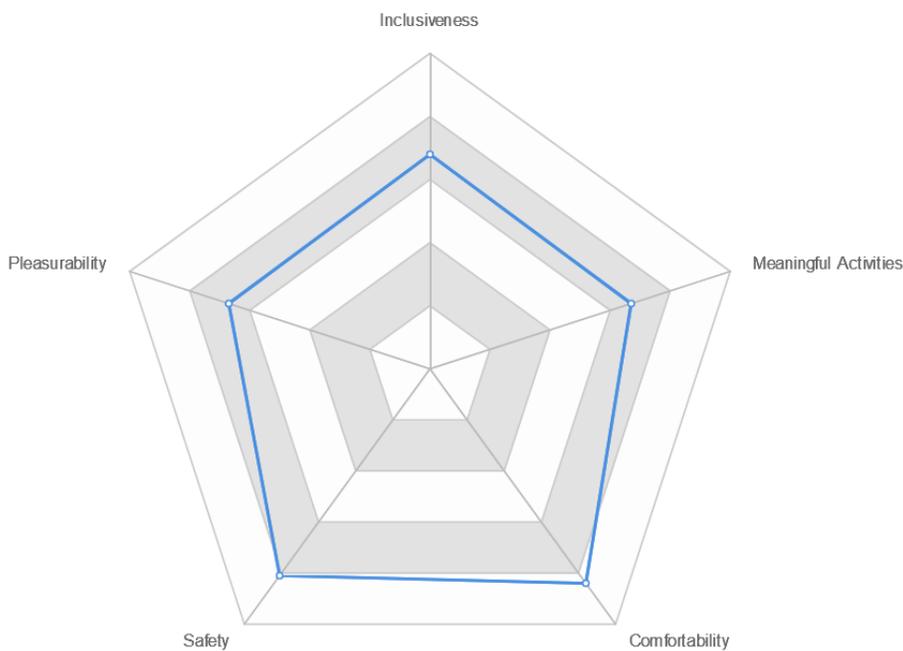


Results of the Public Space Index for Alvarado (Source: Author)

Alvarado received an overall rating of 56 out of 100 on the PSI, which is not a particularly good score as compared with the Promenade and with other public spaces that have been assessed via the PSI by other researchers (Mehta 2014, Dietrich 2018, Evans, 2019). As can

be seen on the accompanying radar graph above, Alvarado received its highest marks by far on level of meaningful activities, with a score of 75, and inclusiveness, with a score of 69. It received much lower marks on safety (49), pleasurability (46), and comfortability (39). Over the course of this PSI evaluation, nine researcher-based surveys were taken, and sixteen user-based surveys were conducted. The demographics of these respondents can be found in Appendix I, and the scores for each of the variables can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 8: Graph of PSI Results for the Promenade



Results of the Public Space Index for the Promenade (Source: Author)

The Promenade received an overall PSI rating of 73 out of 100, making it a relatively high-scoring public space as compared to Alvarado and to other public spaces that have been assessed with the PSI by other researchers (Mehta 2014, Dietrich 2018, Evans, 2019). As the accompanying radar graph shows, the Promenade scored highest on comfortability and safety, with scores of 84 and 81, respectively. These were followed by more middling marks on inclusiveness (68), level of meaningful activities (67) and pleasurability (67). For this evaluation, eight researcher-based surveys were taken, and sixteen user-based surveys were conducted. The

demographics of these respondents can be found in Appendix I, and the scores for each of the variables can be found in Appendix B.

Discussion of Results

From the overall PSI score, it can be inferred that there is much left to be desired from Alvarado as a public space. Comfortability was its lowest rated attribute, with no real positive variables in this dimension. Exploring the street's attributes and elements, this is not a surprising result. There is very little in the way of seating on the street, if one does not pay for food – mostly Mexican and Central American-fare. Some of the restaurants have a small amount of outdoor seating, one of the food trucks regularly found on the south end of the study area sets up a folding table and chairs on the sidewalk for their customers, and many of the street vendors bring chairs for themselves. But otherwise there are just a handful of covered bus benches, and one uncovered bench. Most of the people grabbing a meal from the street vendors either take it to go or eat quickly standing up, chatting with the people around them. The lack of seating on Alvarado may be partially explained through the relatively narrow width of the sidewalks, as well as the presence of neighboring MacArthur Park and the wealth of seating options which it provides. There is also relatively little in the way of climactic comfort on the street – the city-maintained trees have been trimmed back so heavily that they cannot provide shade, though the researcher was not able to determine when this trimming had occurred. Los Angeles' Controller did put out a report in early 2019 aimed at addressing shortfalls in the city's street tree maintenance, so perhaps this will be improved upon in the future to provide a more comfortable environment for pedestrians (Galperin 2019).

Alvarado also received low marks on its physical condition and maintenance, which was rated by users for the comfortability dimension, and by the researcher for the safety dimension. Many shopkeepers and street vendors were observed regularly tidying up their own areas. But piles of trash left around street side trash bins and general uncleanliness on the streets and sidewalks was regularly observed at all hours. More frequent rounds by the street cleaning trucks, increased trash pickups, and perhaps one or more dedicated sanitation workers seem like relatively easy fixes that would greatly improve conditions on the street and users' perceptions of the street. One surveyed user of Alvarado who sleeps in MacArthur Park passionately talked about the area and its people, but lamented the lack of cleanliness, which to him makes the space

less attractive. Given the large number of unhoused people in the area, hiring several of them into this type of role also seems like a natural possibility to explore. A proposal for a pilot program to try this out in Los Angeles was introduced by a city Councilman several years ago, but the proposal has since ground to a halt in the face of resistance due to budgeting and labor questions (Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, 2019).

The user-rated variable where Alvarado performed the worst was perceived nuisance noise, from traffic or other sources. Sometimes people play music or set up speakers to play a local Spanish-language radio station at a border between the park and Alvarado – however people seem to enjoy this aspect of the street’s soundscape. It was observed that there is often a great deal of noise coming from cars stuck in traffic congestion on the street, which is typically most pronounced at the intersection with Wilshire Boulevard. This is at its worst during the morning and evening rush hours, which despite having the word ‘hour’ do not generally denote specific one-hour spans in Los Angeles, as they have stretched into far longer ‘rushes’. It was also observed that the street can also be quite heavily trafficked after games or events at the nearby LA Live music and sports venues. It may well be worth it for the city to attempt tackling several issues at once here after executing a traffic and parking study of the area. Conversion of the street to being one-way for traffic would add a driving lane through the removal of the center turning lane, and subsequently a lane could be turned over to other uses. Removal of one or more parking or driving lanes are potential options as well, or conversion of some lanes to bus-only lanes during peak hours. This may reduce congestion on the street and thus some nuisance noise.

The priority given to automobiles – almost all personal cars, as there is only currently one bus line going down the street – is clearly having a negative impact on other users’ experience and enjoyment of the street. Stripping some of the roadway of cars and turning it over to other uses could enrich Alvarado as a public space. Street vendors have done a good job at activating marginal spaces on Alvarado that they have appropriated and protested for their right to vend on. Some of the more popular food carts earn lines with over a dozen people in them at a time, and the friendly faces manning them are regular staples of the street. Given more space to utilize, more of Los Angeles’ estimated 50,000 street vendors, and others, like the families who sell goods on the weekend at the border between the street and the park, may be able to further enliven and enrich the space, especially now that such activities have been decriminalized in California (Inclusive Action for the City 2019, 1-2). Furthermore, the city could add some

greenery and local art, and work to improve the climactic comfort of the street with the added space. This would serve to improve Alvarado's pleasurability ratings, which were negatively impacted by the street's lack of attractiveness, imageability, and sense of enclosure, which lead to it not having much of a room-like quality. It is already a lively and welcoming place, but these adjustments could help make the space stick in user's minds, feel more at ease there, and build relationships to and in the space.

Figure 9: Street Vendors on Alvarado



Street vendors (L) and a restroom/sanitation station (R) on the sidewalk, with MacArthur Park in the background (Source: Author)

Alvarado received poor scores from users regarding its physical condition, maintenance and lighting. The researcher PSI variables came away with similar overall ratings, with particularly low scores for lighting quality after dark and physical condition. Despite the poor quality of lighting at night, the area does remain lively for a couple hours after nightfall, and many street vendors stick around past the evening rush. The city would do well to increase the lighting to make it a safer and more welcoming place at night.

Alvarado scored well on the level of meaningful activities dimension, somewhat paradoxically as users did not perceive the space as being particularly suitable in terms of layout or design for a range of activities and behavior. There is an enormous variety of businesses and

other uses of the space, and a high availability of food – most of it observed to be priced quite reasonably. While the street is fairly unremarkable as Los Angeles streets go in terms of design, the exception perhaps being the diagonal crosswalks on certain corners, the space has proven to be quite flexible for its users. Some shopkeepers tie tarps between the front of their stores and trees or artifacts on the far edge of the sidewalk to create shade and protection for their wares. Data show a high space flexibility for users, a large range of behaviors, and good accessibility. There was a good deal of personalization of the buildings and elements observed on Alvarado, such as with the tarps previously mentioned, the spray-painted murals in some adjoining alleys, some unique signage, and a relatively small amount of graffiti. During the December holidays, a local dentistry office was observed to be throwing a holiday party with live entertainment in their parking lot adjoining Alvarado. There were perhaps upward of one hundred people there, mostly families. While no other big events like these were witnessed during site visits, it seemed to underscore the idea that people make the most of the spaces on and adjacent to the street.

Alvarado received generally good marks on inclusiveness for the PSI. Counts showed a high level of age and gender diversity, with a large mix of primarily Hispanic, Black and Asian users. One young Black man who was trying to get people leaving the metro plaza to sign a petition, perceives Alvarado as being very safe from crime during the day and after dark, but he still feels somewhat unsafe “from the police” presence. Overall, however, respondents did not perceive surveillance or police as infringing on their privacy, and there was a mixed but positive view toward them being there. Additionally, there are not many signs aimed at excluding people or behaviors.

Alvarado is well connected physically and visually to the areas around it, notably there being no barriers between it and the metro plaza, and a very porous connection to the park. People were observed to move freely between these areas at most hours. While this study has certainly shed light on Alvarado as a public space and certain salient issues in the area, it became clear that it would be quite beneficial to also apply the PSI to the metro plaza and to MacArthur Park, to see how the scores align or differ, and whether one area potentially makes up for shortfalls in another, such as on the seating issue previously mentioned. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of the area’s public spaces and of what needs to be improved.

Figure 10: Alvarado Storefront with Makeshift Tarp Overhang



A makeshift shelter made from a tarp being used to cover commercial goods. (Source: Author)

The people on Alvarado were friendly overall, and many users who were actively working still took the time to participate in the surveying, though they were also sure to pause answering questions from the researcher when they had potential customers in sight. While shopkeepers and street vendors were sometimes reluctant to participate, there were a couple of occasions where one choosing to participate made others nearby interested as well. Most of them are there every day, and if not friends, at least know and are friendly with one another.

Alvarado seems like it sees successes in some dimensions despite its overall setup, not because of it. That should not be a discouraging notion however, as it is easier to foster meaningful activities, third places, and everything that is working in a space culturally than it is to create it out of whole cloth. This is because “the bonds of community cannot be conjured in an instant, with a stroke of the planner’s pen” (Sendra and Sennett 2020, 2020, 24-25). The street manages to satisfy a lot of the basic needs of the community, a critical piece of being a good public space. Some improvements to maintenance for and appearance of the street could do a great deal for this central place in the community.

PSI results indicate that the Promenade is found to be exceedingly comfortable and quite safe. Even a quick visit to the street makes this plain to see. The street is impeccably maintained and well-lit, with the highly recognizable blue-shirts who work for Downtown Santa Monica Inc., the group that manages the area on behalf of the city, frequently seen walking around the area cleaning and checking in on things. There is an abundance of seating, both provided by businesses and free-to-use seating like park-style tables and benches and Adirondack chairs painted in a variety of bright colors. This makes for many spots from which one can people-watch, eat a snack, read a book, or wait for someone who is in one of the shops that line the street. Neither the palm trees nor jacaranda trees provide much shade, but there are plans in place aimed at improving this aspect of the street (RCH Studios 2019, 95). There is a high variety and density of sidewalk elements that include drinking fountains, small sculptures, trash bins, lampposts whose bottoms are painted teal, and picnic tables, which serve to create a comfortable environment. In contrast to Alvarado, there was no trash buildup observed on the Promenade. There are several water features centered in the street, and large metal dinosaur sculptures covered in greenery. And there is relatively little nuisance noise from the intersecting streets, with most noise coming from speaker systems in shops or musicians performing on the street. All of this serves to make the Promenade a comfortable space for people to use.

Most users also felt quite safe on the Promenade. The visible presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, DTSM “blue-shirts” and the occasional police patrol seemed to act to reassure people – though one respondent said he had not even noticed those things until asked about them. There are metal bollards that block automobiles from entering the Promenade – though they can be lowered for emergency vehicles and deliveries – from the intersecting streets, and the entire space in those intersections is marked differently so people feel at ease crossing at any part of it, all of which work to give people a solid sense of safety from traffic. While not a pressing need, this could be further improved upon by making the crosswalks into raised speed tables.

Users perceive the street as attractive, interesting, open and accessible, useful, and suitable for activities, but simultaneously feel less able to participate in activities, which came as a slight surprise. The chairs, benches, tables are all able to be moved, but the researcher never observed any in the process of being moved or any that had been moved out of their observed “normal” placement. There just did not seem to be much in the way of spontaneous activities or

interaction. The presence of the blue-shirts monitoring the streets may factor in with what people felt comfortable doing. But this did negatively impact the streets inclusivity score. The researcher's counts of the Promenade found it to be somewhat lacking in class diversity, as the majority seemed to be upper or upper middleclass users, and people who appeared to be on break from their jobs on the Promenade. But data did not show a lack of gender, age or racial diversity. People of color who responded to the survey generally related their view of the Promenade as an inclusive street.

Figure 11: The Promenade at Night



Lights on the Promenade as seen at night (Source: Author)

As previously mentioned, there are a huge variety of elements on the street to engage the eye that work to make it a comfortable and pleasurable street. But while some are quite functional, like the informational maps that can be found on every block and which provide estimates of how many minutes it takes to walk to various destinations, others seem more ornamental than functional. These include such things like the bicycle racks that were observed to typically remain empty. This is likely attributable to the prominent signage posted on poles that prohibit bicycling on the Promenade, among other activities such as skateboarding and smoking. Signage restricting activities negatively impacted the street's inclusiveness score. The message sent by providing bike racks but prohibiting bicycling is an odd, disjointed choice, though some

bicyclists were observed to be using the Promenade – mostly in the early hours – so it is unclear what level of impact the signage actually has on mobility choices in the area. DTSM could resolve this in a number of ways, by painting a clear bike lane on one side of the road and asking bicyclists to keep to that, simply prohibiting speeds above a certain level, or only restricting bicycling at peak pedestrian hours. There are also notices prohibiting people from laying in front of stores overnight – a clear attempt to keep people experiencing homelessness away.

Efforts to keep away people experiencing homelessness is likely due to the Promenade's status as generally a middle to upper class shopping-focused street, and that shows in its more lackluster results in the level of meaningful activities, tied with pleasurability as its lowest scoring dimension. Though there was lots of seating, there was little observed in the way of gatherings. Some people would gather around performers briefly, and some around the picnic-style tables, but spontaneous interaction was really only observed at the person-sized chessboard – community gathering third-places were severely lacking. A few users were observed tossing an American football around, but this was a rare occurrence, and they simply seemed to be testing out their new purchase. There are a great many food options of varying types, though some are on the more costly side – especially for one elderly lady who lives in supportive housing nearby. Though it was a nice place for her to walk, with less pressure from cars and no crowded sidewalks during the day. The extra space evidently provides the street with some base flexibility due to the lack of cars – there is simply more space for other activities – and street performers were observed to take up a good deal of space without impacting pedestrian flows.

Users of the street were regularly observed taking photos of the Promenade itself, indicating a good level of imageability, which is also reflected in the data. The building façades have a varying range of permeability, but are not well articulated, and feel disjointed. There was no personalization of the buildings' storefronts observed during the formal site visits, however it was observed that in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests some of the stores that used plywood to board up their fronts were stamped, tagged or had flyers, and some of the stores that did not board up placed messages of support in their windows. While there are many other elements on the street that help make up for the areas it lacked, this did result in a middling pleasurability score.

The people on the Promenade were generally willing to engage about the street and take the surveys, once they were sure the researcher was not trying to sell them something or solicit them for money on behalf of a charity. Drawing from the opinions elicited from them for the PSI, as well as the researcher ratings, there are few major deficiencies evident. It is plain to see that a lot of thought and effort has gone into making the Promenade into an enjoyable place to use and experience. Pedestrianizing in the 1960s put it in an early wave of efforts focused on good experiences for street users, but much has changed since then – one user remarked that though they enjoy the Promenade, it feels “dated.” DTSM has the resources to analyze and address any problems, and clearly hopes to stay proactive in this area. Indeed, DTSM has a placemaking committee, and is currently working with RCH Studios, KPFF, and Gehl People to overhaul the Promenade to further improve user experience (RCH Studios 2019).

Interrogation of the Public Space Index

Custom Survey Results

The purpose of this section is to simply present the results of the custom survey. Again, please note that the scores cited in the text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and comprehensive tables with all the results of this survey can be found in Appendix F.

Figure 12: Graph of Alvarado Custom Survey Results

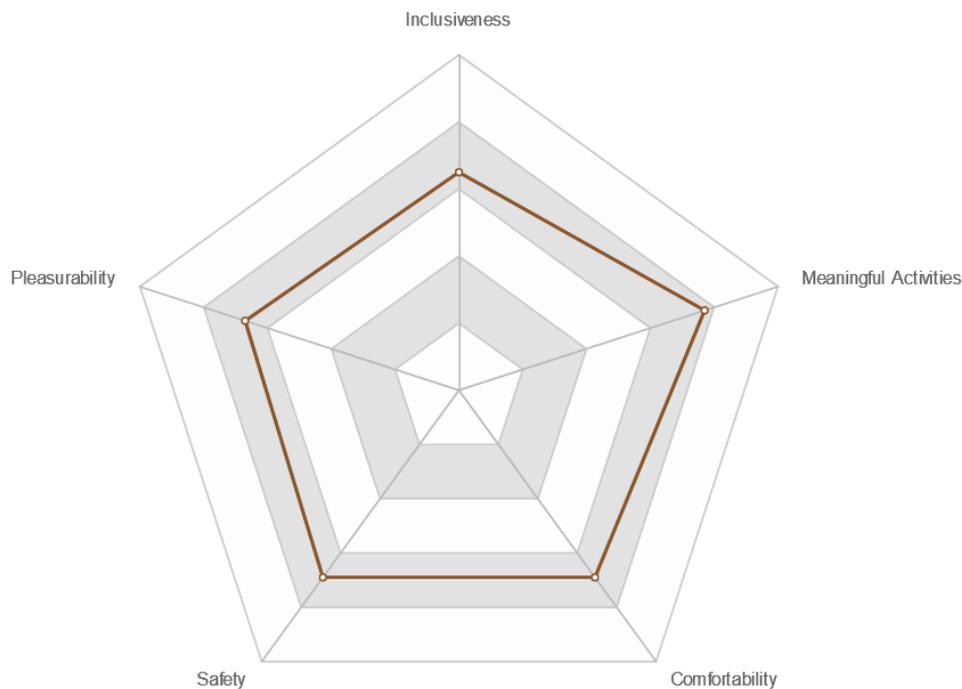


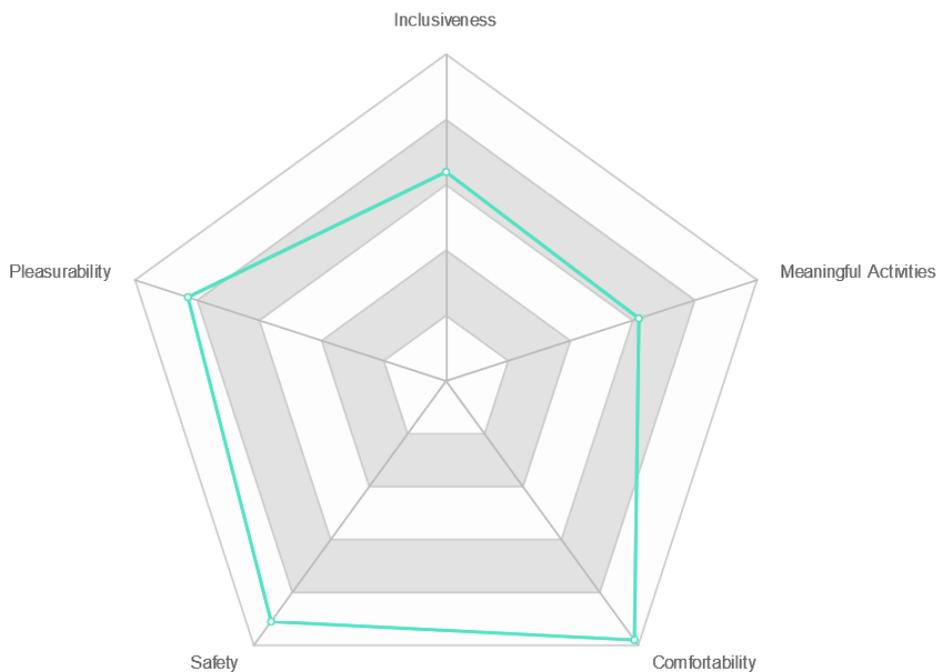
Figure 7. Visual display of the results of the custom survey for Alvarado (Source: Author)

On the custom survey, Alvarado received an overall score of 69 out of 100. The street hit its high-water mark on the meaningful activities dimension, with a score of 77. The rest of its scores were quite consistent with one another, with comfortability and safety both receiving a 69, pleasurability a 67, and inclusiveness a 65.

Almost all respondents found shopping to be an acceptable use of the street, and most believed street vending to also be acceptable. Just over half found working, recreational activities, and people-watching to be acceptable activities. Half were alright with leisure activities and protesting. Just over one-third were okay with street performances and Occupy-type

demonstrations taking place on Alvarado. Respondents stated they used the street in much fewer ways, however, the details of which can be seen in Appendix F. Over two-thirds of respondents said they were moderately or very likely to make plans with friends or introduce others to the street. Asked about who they interact with on Alvarado, half said they interact with strangers and run into friends, just under half meet new people, a third run into neighbors, and under a quarter run into colleagues or associates. Nine of the sixteen respondents chose to make negative mention of the physical maintenance, cleanliness, safety or lighting of the street when asked more open-ended questions about how they viewed the street, far more than any other topics they brought up. On the more positive side, users who responded when asked an open-ended question about what they liked most often talked about the people and activity of Alvarado. Six of the respondents said they have spent a large amount of time living in another country, though three more declined to answer the question.

Figure 13: Graph of Promenade Custom Survey Results



Results of the custom survey for the Promenade (Source: Author)

Through the custom survey the Promenade received an overall score of 80 out of 100. The street received a near-perfect score in the comfortability dimension with a 98. This was followed

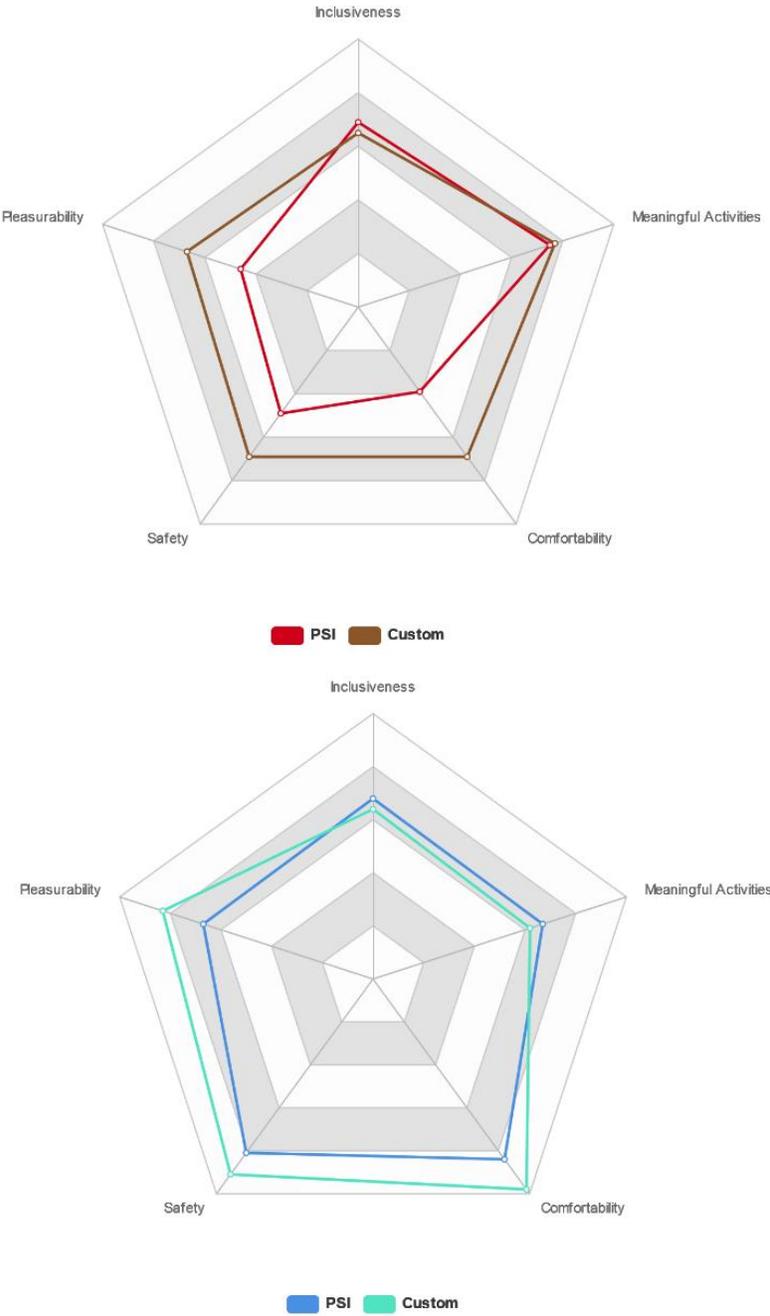
at a distance by safety (91), and then pleasurable (84). It scored lowest on inclusiveness (64) and level of meaningful activities (62).

All respondents found shopping to be an acceptable use of the street, with most finding leisure activities, people-watching, working, street performing, street vending, and recreational activities to be acceptable. Just under half of the respondents believed begging or protesting to be acceptable, and fewer than a quarter would be alright with Occupy-type demonstrations on the Promenade. As can be seen in the accompanying chart, respondents used the street in far fewer ways however, though. Over two-thirds said they interact with strangers on the Promenade, and just under two-thirds said they run into friends. Half said they meet new people, and just under a third said they run into neighbors and colleagues. There were no unifying set of answers when asked open-endedly about what changes users wanted made on the street, but a full quarter of respondents negatively commented on the presence of people experiencing homelessness. Several people talked about the stores and restaurants being either too expensive or over-priced for what they are, and one wanted more small businesses that could be provided by allowing food trucks or a farmer's market, though there is already a farmer's market that takes place twice a week on an adjoining street. Over 80% of respondents said they were moderately or very likely to introduce the Promenade to others or to make plans in that space. Half of the respondents said they have spent a large amount of time living in another country.

Comparison of Survey Results and Further Discussion

As the replication part of the research around the PSI has been detailed, as have the basic results of the custom survey meant to help interrogate it, it is necessary to critically compare these sets of results to identify any top-level discrepancies and discuss potential explanations. This is followed by a more detailed dive into what was found about the quality of these two public street spaces, including relevant observations, explanations and interview linkages, as well as what the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the PSI are, and how the questions around values and contestation in the literature review are relevant here. This is followed by a short demographic breakdown, and finally come several other potential recommendations for strengthening the PSI going forward. This is concluded by a short review of the challenges and limitations that presented themselves during this study.

Figure 14: Graphs Comparing Survey Results for Case Streets



Results of both the PSI and custom surveys for Alvarado (top) and the Promenade (bottom)
 (Source: Author)

The radar graphs seen above in Figure 14 present how Alvarado and the Promenade scored with Mehta’s PSI versus their scores on the custom survey. These PSI scores represent the collective input of dozens of users and the results of many site visits and direct observations by the researcher, with over forty variables being judged and weighted. Meanwhile the custom

survey scores on the graph represent the responses of those same users when they were asked outright how they perceive those respective streets to be in terms of comfortability, inclusiveness, and so on. As can be seen on both radar graphs, the ratings for inclusiveness and meaningful activities aligned quite closely across the PSI and custom survey for both the case streets. In every other dimensional evaluation, the score given by respondents in the custom survey outstripped the PSI scoring, from as little as 10 points out of 100 to as much as 30 points. The overall score from the custom survey on Alvarado was 12 points higher than the PSI, and for the Promenade it was 10 points higher. While the difference between dimensional ratings are not enormous, it is important to ask, are these gaps problematic for the PSI?

Determining the efficacy of the PSI is not a straightforward endeavor, but the results, while quite different for three of the dimensions, are also not contradictory, and thus the gaps seen are not inherently problematic. For both evaluations, Alvarado was rated most highly on level of meaningful activities, and lower on all other dimensions. Meanwhile the Promenade was rated most highly on comfortability and safety going by both evaluations, and lower on all other dimensions. These are trends that held through both sets of results, and so users seemed to recognize these respective strengths of the streets. Though this is merely speculative, respondents perhaps defaulted to a generally positive answer when not asked specific questions to make them think critically regarding certain aspects of the street. There is also the role of the researcher in the PSI results to consider. The researcher is tasked with observing the spaces along with the artifacts, activities, and people in them, which may tend toward the production of more critical, but honest reflections when combined with the users' ratings on specific aspects of the street. The results are interesting, but more research and comparisons such as these would have to be carried out to see if these assumptions and trends hold.

Yet the custom surveying also revealed or more fully revealed important aspects to the discussion of these streets that the PSI did not. For Alvarado, PSI data showed that the physical condition, maintenance, and lighting were certainly weaknesses for the street. But asking people open-endedly through the custom survey what they most want changed, revealed that these were the users' predominant concerns over the street. It simply mattered the most to them, despite the fact that nuisance noise was the lowest user-rated PSI variable. In the custom survey only one respondent specifically addressed the noise as being what they wanted changed the most. A white man in his early 40s who lives in the neighborhood, and who was taking a break from

volunteering for a non-profit providing services for people experiencing homelessness at MacArthur Park, did suggest that lanes be adjusted on Alvarado so that the street is one-way, thus perhaps cutting down on gridlock and traffic, and their associated noise. But most respondents really just wanted the street to be cleaned up and better taken care of.

The PSI revealed that Alvarado is inclusive and has a good deal of meaningful activities, but the custom survey certainly produced more flavorful insights on the topic. A 76-year-old Latino man from Mexico who still works as a street vendor said he is a fan of “la actividad comercial.”¹ A 33-year-old Hispanic security guard said what he likes most is that “the culture is very diverse” on Alvarado. And a 43-year-old Chinese American man who was eating lunch and waiting for his turn to use the showers that are brought on a weekly basis to the edge of MacArthur Park that borders Alvarado loved that there is a “festive atmosphere almost all the time.” Regrettably the researcher did not do audio or visual recordings when surveying, but if this had been done, the more open-ended questions about what they like and dislike and who they meet on the street, would surely have been seen to provide the most lively – though also lengthiest – responses.

The PSI results show the Promenade to be a quite good street, with inclusiveness and meaningful activities receiving relatively lower, but not bad, scores compared to its other dimensions. The Promenade has been undergoing study by others, part of the city’s “Promenade 3.0” updating efforts. After initial studies in 2018, interventions were conducted, like the observed giant chess set and some of the colorful seating, which remained present, and quite popular with users, during this researcher’s observations. The studies went in-depth, and indeed much of it is linked to the research presented here through the PSI – analysis of things such as façade permeability, demographics, who people interact with on the street, and what people do (RCH Studios 2019). It noted a lack of diversity in the cost of food and retail too, a finding also made in the course of this research which will be addressed shortly (RCH Studios 2019). The resultant designs look quite good, and some of the recommendations to the city seem aimed at increasing the Promenade’s inclusiveness and level of meaningful activities, two of its biggest shortfalls as found through the PSI, and so the plans also aim to purposely create spaces and chances for spontaneous interactions (RCH Studios 2019). Yet there do not seem to be any

¹ Translation: “the commercial activity.”

inclinations or suggestions in the plans toward loosening restrictions on street performers, for example.

During the course of the custom surveying, one local man who has spent time living in several western European countries expressed the ideas that the Promenade is overdesigned, lacking any sort of spontaneity, and largely catering to white upper-class people. While this notion was only clearly expressed by one respondent, much of it rings true. According to the DTSM employee spoken with during the course of observations, people are permitted to busk on the street, but they must apply for permits from the city and cannot perform in the same spot for more than two hours at a time. Santa Monica's website states that while they believe "that street performers enhance the character of the City . . . gathered crowds can cause serious safety problems" (City of Santa Monica, n.d.). The application process requires provision of official identification, several passport-sized photos, a fee, a description of the performance "in detail" as well as a description of anything used during the performance, if applicable (City of Santa Monica, n.d.). All this despite the fact that custom surveying revealed that street performers are seen quite favorably and as an acceptable activity for the street. And while the PSI hinted at issues around who and what activities the street caters to, especially with its lack of community-gathering spots, the extent would not have come to light in this research had it been limited to a simple replication of the PSI.

It can be seen that the PSI certainly reveals a lot of information about streets as public spaces and provides for digestible figures and graphs, but there is also a lot that it does not pick up on. This is tied to the dimensions of the PSI, and more explicitly, the variables chosen to express them. As discussed earlier, these stem from the body of modern research and literature on public spaces, and broadly from the values and purposes of streets that are generally agreed upon. But that does not mean they truly and justly express the base values underlying them.

One issue with the PSI that presented itself in the course of researching is that around accessibility. Both Alvarado and the Promenade had a plethora of eating options available and a high variety of businesses. And there are researcher-scored categories on physical accessibility, as well as the availability of food, and the variety of businesses and other uses of the space, and seating available for people who are not purchasing items. But the PSI does not ask the researcher to consider the accessibility of these eateries and businesses in terms of their costs. While an

exhaustive comparison of pricing remains outside the scope of this paper, basic observations led to the conclusion that the Promenade is, in general, a much more expensive place to eat and shop than Alvarado. If a place has few or no low-cost options, it may tend toward being a more exclusive space, or impact who is gathering and for how long. Including formal cost analyses would go against the tenet of the PSI as a “good yet simple evaluation [instrument]” (Mehta 2019, 366). But it would be simple enough for some of the named variables above to be tweaked to include observable cost accessibility.

Related to cost is a deeply impactful topic relevant to most cities these days – the topic of gentrification. As with much of downtown and central Los Angeles, the Westlake neighborhood as a whole has seen increasing levels of gentrification in recent years. However, there was little evidence of this readily apparent from observations on Alvarado. This observation was backed up by journalist Lexis-Olivier Ray, who stated that while “it is gentrifying . . . nothing like the gentrification rates that we’ve seen in” other neighborhoods of the city” (Appendix J). A pair of young women from Eastern Europe who have also lived in Southeast Asia were searching for an apartment nearby, and said during the custom survey that they didn’t like the abundance of street vendors, while a young African American man who was there petitioning said he didn’t approve of the “commercialization” of some of the approved street vendor stalls in the metro plaza which had Western Union logos on them – but otherwise no users brought up topics that could be reasonably placed in the realm of gentrification. For its part, Santa Monica is looking to rezone the area around the Promenade in order to have more diversity of uses, and while gentrification may not be as much of a concern there further consideration for how this topic could be brought into PSI is merited, as it can have a deep impact on who gets to use a public space and who the experiences on it are designed around (Pauker 2020). Yet while Alvarado has escaped much of the contestations that are often connected to gentrification, the area is still subject to fierce contestation.

Lex noted that the metro plaza adjacent to Alvarado has been “a heavily controlled area” in terms of vendor permitting and police enforcement against people experiencing homelessness, but that there are “just a few steps down, vendors that are unpermitted” and that with the draw of MacArthur Park the area becomes “this melting pot of people” (Appendix J). While the researcher never directly observed untoward behavior toward people experiencing homelessness on Alvarado, the unhoused communities of Los Angeles and their advocates have been engaged

in a fight for “their community . . . sense of pride, humanity, and the right to public space” for decades as the city of Los Angeles has prioritized the needs of others over them (Gibbons 2018, 167). Lex related that part of this is expressed in “huge debate at city council meetings, on both sides [the city is] getting calls, mothers with kids taking their kids to school and the sidewalk being obstructed. And then people from the other side,” people who have no other place to go or put their things (Appendix J). This conflict over people existing on the streets has generally resulted in a practice known as “street sweeps” in Los Angeles, made in the name of sanitation and public safety concerns, where the property of people experiencing homelessness is subject to confiscation and destruction. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city briefly halted street sweeps and installed handwashing sanitation stations on sidewalks for people experiencing homelessness on Alvarado and elsewhere, but the needs of the unhoused community have received relatively little care from the multitude of city departments that have responsibilities – street sweeps quickly started back up again, and the sanitation stations have been neglected because, according to Lex, “there just wasn’t a system for rolling them out, and then maintaining them . . . holding the company that is in charge of them accountable,” as the city had outsourced that work (Appendix J).

Street sweeps have also been explicitly tied to public space in Los Angeles – as in a notice from a city councilmember that he is working to ban tents and other things in areas that have “homeless facilities” because “neighborhoods that provide solutions to homelessness deserve to have their public spaces returned to them” (Buscaino 2020). Not only does this represent an oversimplification of issues around homelessness, it is a clear expression of how some people have restrictive views toward who is included as a member of the public and so who that neighborhood’s public spaces are for and not for. Custom surveying would seem to back up this notion – though in any future research, surveys should work to distinguish between people experiencing homelessness and people who are actively seeking money from passersby to provide further clarification on the issue. Fewer than half of the surveyed users found begging to be an acceptable activity on the Promenade. And people do face restrictions on this, as they are restricted from panhandling within 30 feet of an ATM, according to the DTSM employee. Additionally, most of the stores have notices on the front of them prohibiting people from staying in front of them overnight, an example of which can be seen below on Figure 15.

The custom survey produced insights into the larger issues around people experiencing homelessness as well though. One middle-aged white man was playing on the giant chessboard on the Promenade with a group of people, all of whom he had just met, and was eager to talk to the researcher, so he was seemingly friendly to strangers. After engaging in conversation it could be observed that he was drinking a tall can of beer out of a paper bag – such an out of the ordinary activity for the Promenade that it must be noted here – and he commented that he wanted any “bums” on the street to be “constrained.” He claimed to be fine with people experiencing homelessness but was strongly against so-called “bums” – who he perceived as people who treated the Promenade as their living room. A young white local man who works as a hypnotist and was taking a break from shouting at passersby to record videos with him at his “Star in my TikTok Stand,” expressed that while people experiencing homelessness have a right to be there just like anybody else, he believes that they “intrude” and are a nuisance noise-wise.

Figure 15: Storefront Notice on the Promenade



Sign seen on many storefronts on the Promenade, reading: “NOTICE – Sitting or lying in this entrance between the hours of 11:00 P.M. and 7:00 A.M. is prohibited – Municipal code section SMMC 4.08.097(a)” (Source: Author)

Overall, the PSI showed the Promenade has middling but positive levels of class diversity, when counts of users are taken. But there were always at least several people who were experiencing homelessness spread throughout the Promenade at any given time during site visits, especially on the northwest end of the street. There were also people wearing what the researcher might venture to deem “homeless chic” – people who appeared to be experiencing homelessness at first glance, with baggy, ripped, dirty-looking clothing, but which on closer observation was actually designer wear in fact, displaying a strong and revealing divide between users of the street.

A Downtown Santa Monica Inc. employee indicated that while the Promenade is “technically public,” there are restrictions, as discussed earlier with topics such as bicycling, busking, and sleeping in front of stores overnight. Though they “want to encourage loitering” with the many free-to-use chairs, it is “so people will sit, and buy more.” As one surveyed user put it, they perceive the Promenade as being “designed for people to shop.” When asked about whether the researcher could remain on the street late at night, the employee hesitated, and noted that when stores close, the bright and welcoming furniture is piled up and tied together - it is meant to provide a strong visual indicator that it is time to leave the Promenade. So, while there is nothing that is readily and physically identifiable as “hostile architecture” and there are few if any design elements that discourage the use of space, the space is still symbolically and functionally made hostile to some and at certain times. At that time, people experiencing homelessness are expected to move to nearby shelters or “designated areas,” which when asked about the employee declined to elaborate upon. The PSI simply does not capture these acts of exclusion.

Some of the exclusion is not so passive. The “blue-shirts” who work for DTSM can go relatively unnoticed by the average user of the Promenade, but they make themselves known to some people, as groups of them have different jobs in the space. While DTSM promotes its outreach to people experiencing homelessness, its CEO puts it in terms of “continuing to manage antisocial behavior” (Pauker 2020). DTSM receives its funding through special taxes raised due to the area’s status as a Business Improvement District (City of Santa Monica, 2020). Local activists and unhoused people in Los Angeles have tied BIDs – as well as their ambassador and security teams – to exclusion and mistreatment of unhoused people, as well as street vendors (Henderson 2020). Helping people experiencing homelessness or making sure public space is

welcoming to them simply is not the job of the private organization that manages the Promenade. This helps illustrate some of the corrosive effects of privatizing the management of public space, which as discussed is not so simple as who runs a space, but also has deeper impacts on who is allowed to be there, what is allowed to take place, and also on people's very expectations for public space. While the Promenade's management may not outright consider certain people as being undesirable, there are clearly behaviors which it deems undesirable, and it works to cater to a creating a certain type of experience of public space.

Figure 16: Armored Police Vehicle on the Promenade



Armored police vehicle parked next to the Promenade, in early January 2020 (Source: Author)

An older African American man on the Promenade stated that he was fine with the street being used for any activities, barring occupations of the space, but with stipulations – that people begging not be “rowdy,” that street vendors be organized, and that protestors not interfere with normal activities. Overall, fewer than half of the surveyed users found protesting to be acceptable activities for the Promenade, with just three respondents being alright with an Occupation-type demonstration. And traditionally, the Promenade has not traditionally seen much in the way of protesting, excepting some semi-regular small anti animal cruelty protests. This may be related to what can be a heavy police presence even on normal days in the area, as the armored vehicle parked at one of the Promenade's intersections helps illustrate, seen below – this was months prior to the unrest tied to the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter protests. During those protests in

the spring of 2020, the Promenade and its immediate environs were subject to protests, acts of vandalism, looting, and an even heavier police presence than normal. On the morning of June 2nd, just days after some stores were broken into on and around the Promenade, a curfew was set for much earlier in the day than in the county as a whole. The researcher observed police approach a group of young African American adults, just feet away, telling them they would need to vacate the area shortly, while ignoring the presence of the white researcher. There was more focus on protecting property and the ability to shop than there was on the right of people, particularly African Americans, to exist safely in public spaces, and to participate in democratic behavior – some of the concepts at the core of the PSI.

Surveyed users' views toward using Alvarado for protests were also not very positive overall, but as mentioned previously street vendors there did successfully run a campaign for the legalization of street vending. They fought for decriminalization, protesting on Alvarado and elsewhere, and finally “after nearly a century of legislation” prohibiting it, won the legal struggle and can now get permits for street vending (Ray 2020). Los Angeles’ “street vendors have a long history of being excluded from the public discourse” and only with great effort managed to win the fight (Kwan 2020). It can be seen though that many of the street vendors on Alvarado are treated as second-class businessowners. They have been left behind by the city in the COVID-19 pandemic. Lex addressed one angle of this issue, noting that after “essentially banning street vending for months” due to health concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic, “the city announced the Al Fresco program, which was a system that basically allows restaurants to quickly get permits, the ability to vend outside.” Meanwhile street vendors have had difficulties getting the new permits that are now necessary, and police have cracked down on enforcement against them on Alvarado and across the rest of the city, even in Santa Monica (Ray 2020, Sharp 2020).

Los Angeles is altering its streetscapes and turning over parts of streets to other purposes besides cars, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the focus seems to be on how many streets can be declared “open” or “slow” and marked on a map, and on how many restaurants can be loaned some of the public realm for the Al Fresco program – a sort of semi-privatization of public space that prioritizes actors with larger economic power. This leaves behind long marginalized, overlooked, and vulnerable people. In the end, opening streets to more activities does not help create streets that represent quality public space if minority residents or people

experiencing homelessness “will be harassed by police—or threatened by their fellow residents—for using them” (Walker 2020). It is important to keep in mind that “there is no single public in public space. While some people can pick and choose when to be public, some are excluded from publicness and others have dangerous publicness forced upon them” (McCann 2020).

The PSI cannot and should not be expected to capture all the elements at play on a street, as it is simply an unrealistic expectation. But issues around people experiencing homelessness, street vending, protesting, race, gender, and the like, all drive at the heart of the PSI and its values of public spaces being democratic, meaningful, responsive, and safe for everyone. It is evident that execution of the PSI does not provide enough insight into these areas though. Mehta writes that the PSI “captures the pulse of a society’s cultural and political attitudes (Mehta 2014, 84). Perhaps this is true in more than one way, unfortunately. The prevailing powers in American culture and politics simply do not place high enough stock on people experiencing homelessness, the rights of protestors to use public spaces, the safety of people of color in public, nor the people lacking economic power who stand on street corners selling food – and by no means is that a complete list.

Despite these criticisms, the PSI does not broadly seem like a bad platform from which to evaluate the quality of our public street spaces. Mehta fully acknowledges that “the themes and variables in the PSI must be understood as somewhat open-ended to include other variables if needed” depending on cultural context and “changing need and focus on aspects of public space” (Mehta 2014, 84). As the literature review helped illustrate, these things do change over time, and changes in public space can also change what people expect from them. There are no Haussmann-esque figures in this day and age, nor is anybody so empowered to unilaterally affect changes to streets, which can have such major impacts on a city’s residents. But urban planners still create and alter public spaces, maybe not directly causing users to have negative sentiments towards others in these spaces or find activities unacceptable, as the custom survey revealed them having, but certainly affecting the ways these spaces are built and managed affects how people perceive the purposes and meanings of these spaces and help propagate these attitudes. And just as “the ability to define an activity as desirable or undesirable or define a “great place” or a “sketchy place” is a form of power that planners exert unthinkingly” so too can public space evaluators (Koh, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial that the tools that are to be applied in cities around the world for evaluating public space are held to the highest of standards, and the roles of the

researchers in this considered as well. But just as there are perils in relying fully on planners and experts, there are also perils in relying fully on users to provide evaluations as many placemaking efforts entail, as this research has made clear.

Mehta states forthrightly in presenting the PSI that “good public space is responsive, democratic and meaningful” (Mehta 2014, 53). But the key role of contestation, and public space’s role as a place to come together to freely engage and learn, does not seem to factor in very much into PSI evaluations. Alvarado and the Promenade are generally seen by users to be diverse and inclusive places, but what happens when the users who are relied upon for their input on a space have narrow views of what is acceptable to take place in that space? The researcher observed a diverse range of activities and behaviors on both streets, but users by and large did not perceive people exercising their democratic rights as acceptable, nor, as has been related, were they very accepting of the presence of people experiencing homelessness – some of the most marginalized and in-need people in society. Judging streets and formulating plans for them on the basis of these responses is surely responsive, and democratic if theirs is the majority opinion?

Mehta briefly touched these issues several years after his publication of the PSI, noting that relying solely on user input can produce results that are skewed from the reality of a space, because these street “surveys can only include people using the space” and their views (Mehta 2019, 366). Thus, the evaluation of public spaces that are working to exclude people would not necessarily produce results that show that exclusion, or do not reflect it in a negative manner. As mentioned, people often are not as concerned over “the higher purpose of streets as much as they fight over their own turf” (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2016, 251). Asked about comfortability, they are likely speaking to their own comfort, and may not be considering a lack of public seating or a hard-to-navigate sidewalk that perhaps dissuades the elderly or disabled from using the space.

Therefore, it seems to be a strength of the PSI that it takes into account both the perceptions of users and the critical evaluations of experts, to produce evaluations that more accurately portray the street. Urbanists have a responsibility to “go against the will of the people” when necessary, as when they push for exclusionary public spaces, mindful that while there is “no straightforward way to translate justice into physical form” there are innumerable ways to translate injustice into physical form, which can endure for generations and self-perpetuate

(Sennett 2018, 3). Especially given the custom survey results showing many users have restrictive views of what is acceptable on the street, this is a strong argument in favor of the PSI's incorporation of researcher ratings in the evaluation criteria. But while it does work to strike a balance between these, it is not enough.

One of the most prominent themes of 2020 has been a push to acknowledge, listen to, and act on voices that have gone unheard or unheeded. Given this and given parallel themes that emerged in the course of this research, it seems prudent to suggest amending the PSI to be more responsive to these voices in particular. These may vary across different neighborhoods, cities, and countries. First, researchers executing the PSI should make every effort to identify and include people who are marginalized and look into whether there are people being purposely kept from the space. Every care should be given to be sure this is done with sensitivity, but “marginal user groups such as rough sleepers or people with mental illnesses” should not be excluded from surveying efforts (Zamanifard 2018, 341). Leaving people unheard makes it all the more likely they “remain invisible to society” and treated as being outside it, as seems to be the case with street sweeps in Los Angeles (Mitchell 1995, 115).

Additionally, the public-facing portion of the PSI survey should be available in any languages commonly spoken in an area the PSI is being conducted, so as to accommodate comfortable participation for as many people as possible. When feasible, researchers who speak non-predominant languages should be included as well. The variable on the presence of posted signs aimed at excluding people or behaviors could be expanded to take in local policies, police practices, or other factors. A researcher-observed variable on the presence of hostile architecture or hostile actions should be considered for inclusion. While there are many meaningful activities that can take place in a public space, they are political spaces – either through the presence of protests and democratic exchanges, or through the suppression or unacceptability of such, and there is a need to consider how this can be reflected in the PSI. These are surely not sufficient measures, but future research could be directed at identifying and incorporating other best practices and alterations to the PSI to make it more adept in these matters.

Demographic Breakdowns

Performing demographic breakdowns of results is one way to increase the effectiveness of the PSI, and may reveal underlying issues connected to race, gender, or any other category. Breaking down the results by demographics can help identify if people of varying backgrounds perceive or experience the street in different ways. Though the results do become somewhat less reliable when sample sizes are reduced.

When the results of the PSI on Alvarado are broken down by gender, the final score varies quite little, with a score of 56 from men and 55 from women, but a factor to be considered in there being just a minor difference is the modulation provided by the researcher ratings. The ratings given by men gave Alvarado higher scores for all dimensions except for safety, which women rated slightly higher. The largest variable scoring difference came from a disparity in how they rated their perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities going on in the space, with women feeling less able in this respect. There were also minor differences in how white people and people of color perceived Alvarado. The racial breakdown provided slightly larger rating disparities, with PSI scores totaling 53 from white people and 56 from people of color when only scores from those users are combined with researcher ratings. The largest difference was in the comfortability dimension, stemming from a gap in how the physical condition and maintenance of the street was perceived – hardly anybody viewed it positively, but it was perceived most negatively by white people.

The results of the custom survey, when broken down by gender, point toward women generally finding the street to be more agreeable than men do, a divergence from the breakdown of results of the PSI. The only dimension that was rated higher by men than women was the level of meaningful activities, and it was a relatively slight difference. Overall women gave the street a 75 out of 100, whereas men gave it a 65. Compared to people of color, white people gave higher ratings to Alvarado on all dimensions except inclusiveness, which both groups rated equally. This led to overall ratings of 64 from people of color and 73 from white people.

As on Alvarado, the final PSI score for the Promenade when broken down by gender was slightly higher from men than women, at 74 to 72. Again, the largest variable scoring difference came from a disparity in how the genders rated their perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities going on in the space, with women feeling far more restricted than men. Differences

in scoring on other dimensions were relatively minor, with men giving higher ratings on level of meaningful activities, comfortability, and safety, and with women giving it a higher rating on pleasurability. There was just a one-point difference in final scores when considering the racial breakdown, with a 74 from people of color and 73 from white people. The largest variable scoring difference came on perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities going on in the space, with white people feeling more able to do so, but the inclusiveness dimension still earned a higher score overall from people of color.

For the custom survey, the biggest and only notable rating discrepancy between respondents when broken down by race also came on the variable perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities, with white people giving the Promenade a higher rating than people of color. The overall ratings were a 79 for people of color and 80 for white people.

These breakdowns help show that the public spaces of the case study streets are perceived somewhat differently by people in different groups, especially when considering people's perceived abilities to conduct and participate in activities. Though the latter point represents just a single variable among dozens, the results bring up deeper questions. Can these spaces still be considered inclusive if large groups of people do not feel able to participate in activities there? What does it mean to have a high level of meaningful activities if, again, not everyone feels able to participate in those? What does it say about their comfort level in the spaces?

To illustrate with a more clear-cut example, a hypothetical survey of users of a street wherein twenty men say the street is very safe and twenty women say the street is mostly unsafe, would still return a PSI rating of mostly safe, even though there are clearly major safety issues – or at the least, perceptions of major safety issues – of the street that must be addressed. Overall, no other glaring problems are discernable from the demographic breakdowns of the data from these streets. And while large problems around race did not seem to emerge in the course of the research of these streets, this is an important step for future research with the PSI to take, especially given the society-wide discourse on racial justice in the public realm. This should be a standard practice, and it need not complicate execution of the PSI overmuch, as top-level results can still be reported as the overall results. Demographic differentials only need be brought up when large discrepancies arise, pointing to issues affecting certain subsets of people, which may

compromise their ability to use a public space in the same ways or with the same levels of assurance in their comfort and safety, that other members of the public can.

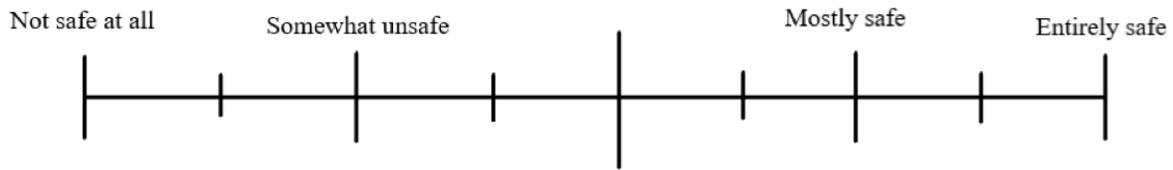
Other Considerations

The final and dimensional PSI scores are functional reflections of Alvarado and the Promenade, as they reflect a good mix of both user's perceptions of the street and more objective researcher observations. But a comparison of the PSI and other research undertaken for this project do show that more work is needed to make the PSI more cognizant of marginalized people and groups in the variables it uses, and to somehow account for users whose wishes run counter to the core values of the PSI. This will have to be an iterative process, but a necessary one if the PSI is to live up to its aspirations and for it to be relied upon as a good tool going forward.

More broadly, the PSI does seem to be a relatively quick and cheap method of analysis, over the course of which a relatively nuanced understanding of the street can be gained. Costs were minimal, limited to the printing of paper surveys – though the survey could be administered via alternative methods, such as a tablet, distribution of QR codes, or some other method along such lines – transportation to the sites, and the occasional snack, as well as the necessary time.

The way options are presented on the PSI user and researcher-facing surveys could be altered to make room for more nuance. In the course of administering the user-facing survey, respondents often verbally expressed neutral or tepid feelings toward a variable, and though they had the option of not answering, felt forced to choose between one side and another. There is a lot of figurative ground between whether a space feels “somewhat unsafe” and “mostly safe” though, for example, if one is considering whether to let a child walk to a store or the bus stop alone, or if a woman is deciding whether or not to order a rideshare at night instead of walking home. Therefore, it could be beneficial to present the options as a spectrum, with regular tick marks and labels for some of them. An example of the form this could take can be seen in Figure 17 below. The scoring system need not change as a result, as data can still be input on a range from zero to three, though the number tied to each label might change – in the example below each tick mark represents .375 of movement from 0 to 3 from left to right, so “somewhat unsafe” would be a .75 instead of 1 and “mostly safe” would be a 2.25 instead of 2. This is just one option for allowing respondents to more precisely relate their perspective.

Figure 17: Potential Rating Scale



Visual of a potential rating option spectrum (Source: Author)

Karl Dietrich noted in his PSI study in Lincoln that the terms in the user surveys could be better calibrated “so the public knows exactly what they mean,” a suggestion that this researcher seconds after having to explain terms and concepts many times in the course of surveying (Dietrich 2018, 68). Building on the trajectory of making the PSI more accessible, the creation of a visual PSI guide should be considered by future researchers. The index is supposed to be usable not only by city planners, agencies and urbanists, but also by non-expert “citizens” who want to evaluate and “demand definitive changes” to their public spaces, but they may be hampered in this pursuit by the inaccessibility of certain terms or concepts in the researcher-based survey (Mehta 2014, 85). The PSI study by Evans et al. noted that the pleasurability dimension in particular “might require coders to have rather more theoretical grounding in the urban planning literature (Evans 2019, 134). This is currently the case, as while the density and variety of street and sidewalk elements are quite clear and understandable factors, variables like façade permeability and sense of enclosure are more ambiguous. But these difficulties may extend, to a degree, to other dimensions. It is unrealistic to expect non-urbanists to do deep dives into background literature before using the PSI, so if the goal is to make the PSI usable by as many people as possible, the production of a small pictorial guide with a diverse range of examples for each category may be helpful in getting some of these concepts across.

The issue of pollution or environmental conditions did not come up in the process of surveying users, but naturally a comparison on this issue arose during the researcher’s repeated site visits made to observe heavily trafficked Alvarado and the pedestrian-only Promenade. In these visits, Alvarado was observed to be seemingly more polluted than the Promenade, with cars, trucks, and buses making it less pleasant to breathe. One of the most salient current issues about streets is the pollution that vehicles emit, and if it is not already, the related issue of sustainability is bound to be a prominent concern for all cities going forward due to climate

change. Roads laden with traffic and heavy congestion can produce a perceivable difference in air quality, which have the potential to impact both a person's health and their enjoyment of a street. The PSI does not take this into account, though perhaps it may be a factor in users' ratings of a street's attractiveness. The index naturally cannot include variables on everything, but it does include variables about lighting quality, noise from traffic, and safety from traffic, and this is a factor that plays both into a street's safety, pleasurability, and comfortability. So due consideration should be given to if and how this factor could be included as well. The matter of how air quality could be taken into account by the PSI is not so simple, as localized pollution data is often quite sparsely available, and unlike many other variables direct and nuanced objective observation is not easy, unless pollution levels are extremely high. A question could be included asking users about how they perceive the air quality, with options ranging from "not polluted at all" to "very polluted." It could fall under the comfortability dimension, but arguments could also be made for it being assigned to the pleasurability or safety dimensions instead.

Challenges and Limitations

As a precautionary safety measure, the researcher did not walk around Alvarado on the visits that lasted much past sunset. On those occasions the researcher either drove around or was driven around the street until notes on all variables could be sufficiently taken. This made counts somewhat more difficult, but by no means impossible. These steps were taken because Alvarado and its environs were previously known to the researcher to be a reputedly dangerous area, partly stemming from the abduction and murder of one of their high school peers from a nearby street. A very brief analysis does offer some support for the safety precautions that were taken. In the monthlong span in which the researcher visited Alvarado and the Promenade, December 18th to January 18th, there were two reported assaults on the Promenade, one being with a deadly weapon (Central Square Tech, n.d.). Meanwhile in the same time period on Alvarado, there were eleven reported assaults, ten being with a deadly weapon, as well as one reported homicide (Central Square Tech, n.d.). This being a diversion from the standard methodology, it is necessary to note. But it is likely that the effect this had on the results are negligible, as the safety section of the researcher-based survey rated the lighting quality, physical condition and maintenance, and the visual and physical connection and openness to adjacent spaces, and did not directly assess safety or perceived safety.

There was also the matter of survey accessibility to all demographics. The researcher does not speak Spanish with advanced fluency, and so was not necessarily able to answer all questions from all users to the same extent or as satisfactorily. Though copies of the survey were available in both English and Spanish, and verbal introductions about the survey and its purpose were given in the appropriate language. While the researcher did not seem to encounter street users who only spoke languages other than English or Spanish, and thus unable to accommodate at all, this was certainly a possibility.

One limitation is the self-selection of those people who chose to take the survey versus those who rejected the opportunity. People just getting off a long shift at work, and perhaps are headed to a second job or home to care for their family, are probably less likely to stop and talk. And many people experiencing homelessness, for example, turned down the researcher's attempts to speak with them, indicative of the distrust between that community and others due to their mistreatment. One man who was experiencing homelessness was hesitant to take the survey, eventually choosing to do so after several minutes of conversation and a careful review of – and sometimes with specific questions for – each and every question. He expressed mistrust of being asked questions, what his answers would be used for, who would hear them, and if any change would come of them. He seemed quite aware of the disconnect that Lex spoke about, how in “all the decision-making involving the unhoused communities, they are completely left out of the process.” This could not be controlled for, however, and the researcher simply made strong efforts at generally finding a mix of people, and in particular finding people experiencing homelessness who were willing to engage.

A natural limitation of the PSI, as briefly mentioned previously, is that it can only be used to survey people that are using the street. There may be people who do not feel a street is safe and so avoid using it as much as possible, or who perceive the street as being too loud, so unattractive, uncomfortable, or non-inclusive that they similarly avoid using the street. Additionally, there are those, people experiencing homelessness come first to mind, who can be made entirely unwelcome in the space.

One last limitation is the fact that this was a small independent study. When laying out the details of the PSI, Mehta called for at least two researchers to carry out the PSI in a given space. The possibility of a second researcher was not available for this solo research project (Mehta

2014, 71). To help remedy the lack of additional researchers to statistically average the results with, the number of site visits for a researcher was increased. The study as it was originally conceived of and designed included two additional sites, in the Spanish capital of Madrid, and to have a broader focus on the cross-cultural applicability of the PSI in these cities. The events of 2020, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, made on-the-street surveying in Madrid or further surveying in Los Angeles impossible. While the researcher believes they spent enough time at the Los Angeles sites to get a solid sense of familiarity with the sites, and surveyed a good cross-section of users to get reliable data, it needs be said that adjustments that had to be made to the focus of the paper in relatively short order, and that may be reflected in the final paper to an extent.

Conclusion

The way streets feel, look, and function – and who they are for – are impositions of values on a contested public realm. It is critical to acknowledge this, and analyze the values being transmitted in and through public spaces, and likewise in and through the evaluations of public spaces. The various roles streets can play as urban public spaces are numerous, as are the potential benefits they can bring to their users. That is why it is encouraging to see recognition of this grow, and concurrently, recognition that we need effective ways to evaluate our streets and other public spaces, like the Public Space Index, that are focused on people and their experiences of the public realm.

The aim of this paper was to both evaluate the quality of public space on two streets in Los Angeles and to interrogate the quality of the evaluation tool itself. Testing the PSI in two different contexts in Los Angeles proved successful. Replication of Mehta’s PSI there yielded scores of 73 for the Promenade and 55 for Alvarado, and dimensional scores that largely made sense in their given contexts. Therefore, the index has indeed provided a way to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these streets in a relatively quick and intuitive manner. As it stands, the PSI is certainly a useful tool for community members, planners, students, and others.

Interrogation of the PSI did yield questions over its current ability to capture certain problematic aspects of the case streets though. As has been discussed, Alvarado and the Promenade have problems with the inclusion of groups like street performers, street vendors, and people experiencing homelessness, and women feel less able to participate in activities on these streets. Though protests do take place on occasion, there is little to be said for these streets as places for democratic debate or action. There seems little consensus overall between the views of surveyed users toward what should be accepted on the streets, and the values contained within modern conceptions of who and what streets should be for. It is unlikely that this is unique to these two case streets – much of the same would probably be found in public street spaces across the city, but that does not mean they should not be grappled with. A good tool for evaluating the quality of public space should reflect weaknesses specific to the street, as well as more systemic issues seen in public spaces. But it is also clear that there is room for the PSI to evolve and accommodate analysis of such factors.

The research presented here is a contribution to the ongoing conversations around public space evaluations, and hopefully it represents forward progress in improving the PSI, making it a more accessible and reliable tool for others, and helping to ensure streets – public spaces that thread our cities and communities together – are justly shared, and that their benefits are accessible to all. It is an iterative process that does not end here. This research was possible because of the work done by Vikas Mehta to build the PSI, and the foundations laid by others before him. As the PSI is tested in a larger variety of contexts and by more researchers, it will become easier to use and compare results with prior studies. While the legal responsibility for altering public spaces generally lays with the cities, part of the placemaking and right to the city movements are the involvement of the community. Hopefully the PSI will be found useful and utilized by a range of local actors to improve public spaces for their communities going forward.

Closing Materials

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Appendix A: Public Space Index

Aspect of Public Space	Variables	Weighting	Scoring Criteria	Measuring Criteria
Inclusiveness	Presence of people of diverse ages	0.4	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Presence of people of diverse genders	0.4	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Presence of people of diverse classes	0.4	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Presence of people of diverse races	0.4	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Presence of people with diverse physical abilities	0.4	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Control of entrance to public space: presence of lockable gates, fences, etc.	1.0	3 = none 2 = low 1 = medium 0 = high	Determined by observations
	Range of activities and behaviors	1.0	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts of activities, behaviors, postures
	Opening hours of public space	1.0	0 = very limited, fewer than ten hours 1 = open at least ten hours	Determined by signs indicating such and / or security guards, guides, etc.

			2 = open most hours 3 = no restrictions	asking people to leave
	Presence of posted signs to exclude certain people or behaviors	1.0	3 = none 2 = somewhat 1 = moderately 0 = very much	Determined by number of signs, their location, size and the verbiage
	Presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc. intimidating and privacy is infringed upon	1.0	3 = not at all 1 = somewhat 1 = moderately 0 = very much	User's subjective rating
	Perceived openness and accessibility	2.0	0 = not at all 1 = some parts / at some times 2 = mostly 3 = completely	User's subjective rating
	Perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities and events in space	1.0	0 = cannot in most 1 = only in some / at some time 2 = in many 3 = in almost all / all	User's subjective rating
Meaningful Activities	Presence of community-gathering third places	2.0	0 = none 1 = one 2 = two 3 = few	Determined by observations of businesses or other specific places that act as community gathering places
	Range of activities and behaviors	1.0	0 = very limited 1 = low 2 = medium	Determined by observations using counts of

			3 = high	activities, behaviors, postures
	Space flexibility to suit user needs	1.0	0 = none 1 = somewhat flexible 2 = moderately flexible 3 = very flexible	Determined by observing any modifications made by users over time
	Availability of food within or at the edges of the space	2.0	0 = none 1 = one 2 = two 3 = several	Determined by observations using counts
	Variety of businesses and other uses at the edges of the space	1.0	0 = none 1 = very little 2 = moderate 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Perceived suitability of space layout and design to activities and behavior	2.0	0 = not suitable at all 1 = somewhat suitable 3 = moderately suitable 3 = very suitable	User's subjective rating
	Perceived usefulness of businesses and other uses	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = somewhat 3 = moderately 3 = very much	User's subjective rating
Comfort	Places to sit without paying for goods and services	2.0	0 = none 1 = few 2 = several in some parts of space 3 = several in many parts of space	Determined by observations using counts
	Seating provided by businesses	1.0	0 = none 1 = few	Determined by observations using counts

			2 = several in some parts of space 3 = several in many parts of space	
	Other furniture and artifacts in the space	1.0	0 = none 1 = few 2 = several in some parts of space 3 = several in many parts of space	Determined by observations using counts
	Climactic comfort of the space – shade and shelter	2.0	0 = not comfortable 1 = somewhat comfortable in some parts of space 2 = comfortable in some parts of space 3 = comfortable in most of the space	Determined by observations
	Design elements discouraging use of space	1.0	3 = none 2 = one or two 1 = few 0 = several	Determined by observations
	Perceived physical condition and maintenance appropriate for the space	2.0	0 = not at all 1 = somewhat 2 = mostly 3 = very much	User's subjective rating
	Perceived nuisance noise from traffic or otherwise	1.0	3 = none 2 = very little 1 = moderate 0 = high	User's subjective rating
Safety	Visual and physical	1.0	0 = almost none or very poor	Determined by observations

	connection and openness to adjacent street/s or spaces		1 = somewhat tentative 2 = moderately well connected 3 = very well connected	
	Physical condition and maintenance appropriate for the space	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = somewhat 2 = mostly 3 = very much	Determined by observations
	Lighting quality in space after dark	1.0	0 = very poor 1 = many parts not well lit 2 = mostly well lit 3 = very well lit	Determined by observations
	Perceived safety from the presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc. providing safety	1.0	3 = very much provide a sense of safety 2 = provide some sense of safety 1 = not at all 0 = make me feel unsafe	User's subjective rating
	Perceived safety from crime during daytime	2.0	0 = not safe at all 1 = somewhat unsafe 2 = mostly safe 3 = very safe	User's subjective rating
	Perceived safety from crime after dark	2.0	0 = not safe at all 1 = somewhat unsafe 2 = mostly safe 3 = very safe	User's subjective rating
	Perceived safety from traffic	2.0	0 = not safe at all 1 = somewhat unsafe	User's subjective rating

			2 = mostly safe 3 = very safe	
Pleasurability	Presence of memorable architectural or landscape features (imageability)	1.0	0 = none 1 = very few 2 = moderate 3 = several	Determined by observations
	Sense of enclosure	1.0	0 = very poor sense of enclosure 1 = moderately well enclosed 2 = good sense of enclosure 3 = very good sense of enclosure	Determined by observations
	Permeability of building façades on the streetfront	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = some parts somewhat permeable 2 = moderate permeability 3 = very permeable all along	Determined by observations
	Personalization of buildings on the streetfront	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = some parts somewhat 2 = moderate personalization 3 = very personalized all along	Determined by observations
	Articulation and variety in architectural features of building façades on the streetfront	1.0	0 = poor articulation and variety 1 = somewhat articulated 2 = moderate articulation	Determined by observations

			3 = very well articulated	
	Density of elements on sidewalk/street providing sensory complexity	1.0	0 = none or very few 1 = few 2 = moderate 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Variety of elements on sidewalk/street providing sensory complexity	1.0	0 = none 1 = very little 2 = moderate 3 = high	Determined by observations using counts
	Perceived attractiveness of space	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = somewhat 2 = moderate 3 = very much	User's subjective rating
	Perceived interestingness of space	1.0	0 = not at all 1 = somewhat 2 = moderate 3 = very much	User's subjective rating

(Mehta 2014)

Appendix B: Public Space Index Results

	Alvarado			Promenade		
	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Initial</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Initial</i>	<i>Final</i>
Inclusiveness						
Presence of people of diverse ages	0.4	2.22	0.89	0.4	2.38	0.95
Presence of people of different genders	0.4	2.67	1.07	0.4	2.88	1.15
Presence of people of diverse classes	0.4	1.33	0.53	0.4	1.63	0.65
Presence of people of diverse races	0.4	1.78	0.71	0.4	2.13	0.85
Presence of people with diverse physical abilities	0.4	1.89	0.76	0.4	1.50	0.60
Control of entrance to public space: presence of lockable gates, fences, etc	1	1.78	1.78	1	1.75	1.75
Range of activities and behaviors	1	2.11	2.11	1	2.00	2.00
Opening hours of public space	1	2.78	2.78	1	2.00	2.00
Presence of posted signs to exclude certain people or behaviors	1	2.00	2.00	1	1.00	1.00
Presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc. intimidating and privacy is infringed upon	1	2.00	2.00	1	2.50	2.50
Perceived openness and accessibility	2	2.07	4.13	2	2.63	5.25
Perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities and events in space	1	1.94	1.94	1	1.85	1.85
<i>Aggregate Score</i>	10		20.69	10		20.55
<i>Index Rating for Inclusiveness (out of 100)</i>			68.98			68.49

Meaningful Activities						
Presence of community-gathering third places	2	2.22	4.44	2	0.63	1.25
Range of activities and behaviors	1	2.11	2.11	1	2.00	2.00
Space flexibility to user needs	1	2.56	2.56	1	1.38	1.38
Availability of food within or at the edges of the space	2	2.78	5.56	2	2.88	5.75
Variety of businesses and other uses at the edges	1	2.56	2.56	1	2.38	2.38
Perceived suitability of the space layout and design to activities and behavior	2	1.88	3.75	2	2.44	4.88
Perceived usefulness of businesses and other uses	1	1.63	1.63	1	2.44	2.44
<i>Aggregate Score</i>	10		22.60	10		20.06
<i>Index Rating for Meaningful Activities (out of 100)</i>			75.32			66.88
Comfortability						
Places to sit without paying for goods and services	2	0.78	1.56	2	3.00	6.00
Seating provided by businesses	1	1.22	1.22	1	2.63	2.63
Other furniture and artifacts in the space	1	1.44	1.44	1	2.50	2.50
Climactic comfort of the space - shade and shelter	2	0.89	1.78	2	1.88	3.75
Design elements discouraging use of space	1	1.78	1.78	1	2.88	2.88
Perceived physical condition and maintenance	2	1.38	2.75	2	2.75	5.50

appropriate for the space						
Perceived nuisance noise from traffic or otherwise	1	1.19	1.19	1	1.88	1.88
<i>Aggregate Score</i>	10		11.72	10		25.13
<i>Index Rating for Comfortability (out of 100)</i>			39.05			83.75
Safety						
Visual and physical connection and openness to adjacent street/s or spaces	1	2.11	2.11	1	2.13	2.13
Physical condition and maintenance appropriate for the space	1	0.67	0.67	1	3.00	3.00
Lighting quality in space after dark	1	1.00	1.00	1	3.00	3.00
Perceived safety from presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc. providing safety	1	2.06	2.06	1	2.40	2.40
Perceived safety from crime during daytime	2	1.50	3.00	2	2.63	5.25
Perceived safety from crime after dark	2	1.31	2.63	2	1.96	3.93
Perceived safety from traffic	2	1.63	3.25	2	2.25	4.50
<i>Aggregate Score</i>	10		14.72	10		24.20
<i>Index Rating for Safety (out of 100)</i>			49.05			80.68
Pleasurability						
Presence of memorable architectural or landscape features (imageability)	1	0.78	0.78	1	2.13	2.13
Sense of enclosure	1	0.44	0.44	1	1.75	1.75

Permeability of building façades on the streetfront	1	1.44	1.44	1	1.75	1.75
Personalization of the buildings on the streetfront	1	2.00	2.00	1	0.00	0.00
Articulation and variety in architectural features of building façades on the streetfront	1	1.11	1.11	1	1.38	1.38
Density of elements on sidewalk/street providing sensory complexity	1	1.89	1.89	1	2.25	2.25
Variety of elements on sidewalk/street providing sensory complexity	1	2.00	2.00	1	2.88	2.88
Perceived attractiveness of space	2	1.31	2.63	2	2.69	5.38
Perceived interestingness of space	1	1.63	1.63	1	2.56	2.56
<i>Aggregate Score</i>	10		13.92	10		20.06
<i>Index Rating for Pleasurability (out of 100)</i>			46.39			66.88
<i>Total Score for all aspects of public space</i>			83.6375			109.9997
<i>Average (out of 100)</i>			55.76			73.33

Appendix C: Public Space Index User Survey – English

User Number	Location	Date	Time

1. The presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc on this street intimidates me and/or infringes upon my privacy:
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Moderately
 - d. Very much

2. I perceive this street to be:
 - a. Not at all open and accessible
 - b. Partly open and accessible/open and accessible at some times
 - c. Mostly open and accessible
 - d. Completely open and accessible

3. My perceived ability to conduct and participate in activities and events in this space is:
 - a. I cannot conduct and participate in most activities and events
 - b. I can conduct and participate in some activities and events or at some times
 - c. I can conduct and participate in many activities and events
 - d. I can conduct and participate in all or almost all activities and events

4. I perceive the spatial layout and design suitability for activities and behaviors to be:
 - a. Not suitable at all
 - b. Somewhat suitable
 - c. Moderately suitable
 - d. Very suitable

5. I perceive the usefulness of businesses and other uses of this space to be:
 - a. Not at all useful
 - b. Somewhat useful
 - c. Moderately useful
 - d. Very useful

6. I perceive the physical condition and maintenance of this space to be:
 - a. Not at all appropriate
 - b. Somewhat appropriate
 - c. Mostly appropriate
 - d. Very appropriate

7. I perceive the nuisance noise from traffic or other sources on this street to be:
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Very little
 - c. Moderate
 - d. High

8. I perceive the safety from the presence of surveillance cameras, security guards, guides, ushers, etc providing safety to:
 - a. Very much provide a sense of safety
 - b. Provide some sense of safety
 - c. Not at all provide a sense of safety
 - d. Make me feel unsafe

9. I perceive the safety level from crime on this street during daytime to be:
 - a. Not safe at all
 - b. Somewhat unsafe
 - c. Mostly safe
 - d. Very safe

10. I perceive the safety level from crime on this street after dark to be:
 - a. Not safe at all
 - b. Somewhat unsafe
 - c. Mostly safe
 - d. Very safe

11. I perceive the safety level from traffic on this street to be:
 - a. Not safe at all
 - b. Somewhat unsafe
 - c. Mostly safe
 - d. Very safe

12. I perceive the attractiveness level of this space to be:

- a. Not at all
- b. Somewhat
- c. Moderate
- d. Very much

13. I perceive the interestingness of this space to be:

- a. Not at all
- b. Somewhat
- c. Moderate
- d. Very much

Appendix D: Public Space Index User Survey - Spanish

Número de usuario	Ubicación	Fecha	Hora

1. La presencia de cámaras de vigilancia, guardias de seguridad, guías, porteros, etc. en esta calle me intimida y/o infringe mi privacidad:
 - a. Para nada
 - b. Algo
 - c. Moderadamente
 - d. Mucho

2. Yo percibo que esta calle es:
 - a. Nada abierto ni accesible
 - b. Parcialmente abierto y accesible / abierto y accesible en algunos momentos
 - c. Principalmente abierto y accesible
 - d. Completamente abierto y accesible

3. Mi capacidad percibida para conducir y participar en actividades y eventos en esta calle es:
 - a. No puedo conducir y participar en la mayoría de las actividades y eventos
 - b. Puedo conducir y participar en algunas de las actividades y eventos o algunas veces
 - c. Puedo conducir y participar en muchas de las actividades y eventos
 - d. Puedo conducir y participar en todas o casi todas las actividades y eventos

4. Percibo que la disposición (acomodo) espacial y la idoneidad del diseño para actividades y comportamientos son:
 - a. Para nada adecuado
 - b. Algo adecuado
 - c. Moderadamente adecuado
 - d. Muy adecuado

5. Percibo que la utilidad de las empresas y otros usos de esta calle es:
 - a. Para nada útil
 - b. Algo útil
 - c. Moderadamente útil
 - d. Muy útil

6. Percibo que la condición física y el mantenimiento de esta calle son:
 - a. Para nada apropiado
 - b. Algo apropiado
 - c. Mayormente apropiado
 - d. Muy apropiado

7. Percibo que el ruido molesto del tráfico u otras fuentes en esta calle es:
 - a. Nada
 - b. Muy poco
 - c. Moderado
 - d. Alto

8. Percibo la seguridad de la presencia de cámaras de vigilancia, guardias de seguridad, guías, porteros, etc. que brindan seguridad:
 - a. Proporcionan una sensación de seguridad
 - b. Proporcionan cierta sensación de seguridad
 - c. No proporcionan una sensación de seguridad
 - d. Me hacen sentir inseguro

9. Percibo que el nivel de seguridad del crimen en esta calle durante el día es:
 - a. Para nada seguro
 - b. Algo inseguro
 - c. Mayormente seguro
 - d. Muy seguro

10. Percibo que el nivel de seguridad del crimen en esta calle después del anochecer es:
 - a. Para nada seguro
 - b. Algo inseguro
 - c. Mayormente seguro
 - d. Muy seguro

11. Percibo que el nivel de seguridad del tráfico en esta calle es:
 - a. Para nada seguro
 - b. Algo inseguro
 - c. Mayormente seguro
 - d. Muy seguro

12. Percibo que el nivel de atractivo de esta calle es:

- a. Nada atractiva
- b. Algo atractiva
- c. Moderadamente atractiva
- Muy atractiva

13. Percibo que lo interesante de esta calle es:

- a. Nada interesante
- b. Algo interesante
- c. Moderadamente interesante
- d. Muy interesante

Appendix E: Public Space Index Researcher Survey

Location	Date	Time Range	Climate	Other

Meaningful Activities

Variable	Notes	Scoring Criteria	Measuring Criteria
Presence of community gathering third places		0 none 1 one 2 two 3 few	Observations of businesses or other specific places that act as community gathering places
Range of activities and behaviors		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using count of activities, behaviors, postures
Space flexibility to suit user needs		0 none 1 somewhat flexible 2 moderately flexible 3 very flexible	Observing any modifications made by users over time
Availability of food within or at the edges of the space		0 none 1 one 2 two 3 several	Observations using counts
Variety of businesses and other uses at the edges		0 none 1 very little 2 moderate 3 high	Observations using counts

Inclusiveness

Variable	Notes	Scoring Criteria	Measuring Criteria
Diverse ages		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts

Different genders		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts
Diverse classes		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts
Diverse races		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts
Diverse physical abilities		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts
Control of entrance to public space: lockable gates, fences, etc		0 high 1 medium 2 low 3 none	Observations
Range of activities and behaviors		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using count of activities, behaviors, postures
Opening hours of public space		0 very limited <10 hrs 1 at least 10 hours 2 open most hours 3 no restrictions	Determined by signs indicating such, security guards, guides, etc asking people to leave
Presence of posted signs to exclude certain people or behaviors		3 none 2 somewhat 1 moderately 0 very much	Determined by # of signs, their location, size & verbiage

Comfort

Variable	Notes	Scoring Criteria	Measuring Criteria
Places to sit without paying for goods and services		0 none 1 few 2 several in some parts of space 3 several in many parts of space	Observations using counts
Seating provided by businesses		0 none 1 few 2 several in some parts of space 3 several in many parts of space	Observations using counts
Other furniture and artifacts in the space		0 very limited 1 low 2 medium 3 high	Observations using counts
Climactic comfort in the space - shade and shelter		0 not comfortable 1 somewhat comfortable in some parts of space 2 comfortable in some parts of space 3 comfortable in most of the space	Observations
Design elements discouraging use of space		3 none 2 one or two 1 few 0 several	Observations

Safety

Variable	Notes	Scoring Criteria	Measuring Criteria
Visual and physical connection and openness to adjacent street/s or spaces		0 almost none or very poor 1 somewhat tentative 2 moderately well connected 3 very well connected	Observations using counts
Physical condition and maintenance appropriate for the space		0 not at all 1 somewhat 2 mostly 3 very much	Observations using counts
Lighting quality after dark		0 very poor 1 many parts not well lit 2 mostly well lit 3 very well lit	Observations using counts

Appendix F: Custom Survey Results

	Alvarado		Promenade	
	<i>Average Rating</i>	<i>Final Rating*</i>	<i>Average Rating</i>	<i>Final Rating*</i>
Perceived Level of Inclusivity	1.94	65	1.91	64
Perceived Level of Meaningful Activities	2.31	77	1.87	62
Level of Comfort	2.06	69	2.94	98
Perceived Level of Safety	2.06	69	2.72	91
Perceived Level of Pleasurability	2	67	2.5	83
<i>Total Score for all aspects of public space</i>				
<i>Average (out of 100)</i>				
Likelihood of Introducing Space to Others, etc.	2	67	2.38	79
	<i>Acceptable uses</i>	<i>Uses in this way</i>	<i>Acceptable uses</i>	<i>Uses in this way</i>
Shopping	15	10	16	15
Working	9	9	13	4
Recreation	9	5	10	3
People Watching	9	5	14	12
Leisure/Hanging Out	8	5	15	11
Begging/Giving to	6	1	7	4
Street Performing/Watching	6	2	13	8
Street Vending/Purchasing	11	7	12	5
Protesting	8	3	7	0
Occupying	6	1	3	0
Volunteering (written-in answer)			1	1
Exercising (written-in answer)			1	1
	87	48	112	64
		55%		57%
<i>Run into/interact with</i>				
Neighbors	6		5	
Friends	8		10	
Colleagues/Associates	3		5	
New people	7		8	
Strangers	8		11	

<i>What changes would they like to make to the street? (categorized)</i>		
Relocate people experiencing homelessness		3
Add affordable food/retail options		2
Allow/increase things/activities (farmers market, food trucks, spontaneous activities)		2
Add more lights at night	1	1
Increase shelter from climate		1
Build more public restrooms		1
Decrease retail turnover		1
Get rid of street performers		1
Increase security	3	
Increase cleaning/maintenance	6	
Add gate between street and park	1	
Decrease traffic	1	
Decrease commercialization	1	
Remove street vendors from sidewalks	1	
<i>What they like best about the street</i>		
Pedestrianization/Layout		5
Comfortable/Convenient/Accessible	1	2
Good amenities/shops/commercial activities	1	4
Safe/good security	1	1
Performances		1
Spots to sit		2
Cleanliness/maintenance		1
Design/Aesthetics		1
Lighting		1
Noise level		1
People/diversity	2	1
Free to use/can engage with people		1
Festive Atmosphere	1	
Space for activities	1	
Plants	1	

*Average rating over total maximum of 3, put on a 0-100 scale.

Appendix G: Custom User Survey (with demographic questions)– English

User Number	Location	Date	Time

1. I perceive this space to have a:
 - a. High level of inclusivity
 - b. Moderate level of inclusivity
 - c. Low level of inclusivity
 - d. Very limited level of inclusivity

2. I perceive that:
 - a. Many meaningful activities can and do take place in this space
 - b. A moderate level of meaningful activities can and do take place in this space
 - c. A low level of meaningful activities can and do take place in this space
 - d. Hardly any meaningful activities can or do take place in this space

3. In this space I feel:
 - a. Very comfortable
 - b. Moderately comfortable
 - c. Somewhat uncomfortable
 - d. Not at all comfortable

4. In this space I feel:
 - a. Very safe
 - b. Mostly safe
 - c. Somewhat unsafe
 - d. Not safe at all

5. I find this space to be:
 - a. Very pleasurable
 - b. Moderately pleasurable
 - c. Somewhat unpleasurable
 - d. Not at all pleasurable

6. I have used this space in these ways: (select any)
 - a. Shopping/Dining
 - b. Working
 - c. Playing/recreation
 - d. People-watching
 - e. Leisure/Hanging out
 - f. Begging/Given to a beggar
 - g. Performed/Watched a performance
 - h. Street vended/Bought from a street vendor
 - i. Protesting
 - j. Occupying

7. I find the following to be acceptable uses of this space: (select any)
 - a. Shopping
 - b. Working
 - c. Playing/recreation
 - d. People-watching
 - e. Leisure/Hanging out
 - f. Begging
 - g. Street performances
 - h. Street vending
 - i. Protesting
 - j. Occupation-type demonstrations

8. How likely are you to introduce this space to others/make group plans in this space?
 - a. Very likely
 - b. Moderately likely
 - c. Somewhat unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely

9. When using this street I:
 - a. Run into neighbors
 - b. Run into friends
 - c. Run into colleagues/associates
 - d. Meet new people
 - e. Interact with strangers
 - f. Not applicable

10. (Optional) What changes would you make to this street?

11. (Optional) What do you like most about this street?

How old are you? _____

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Other _____

What is your race? _____

Why are you on this street?

I live here

I work here

I live and work here

I'm visiting here

_____ (Other - please specify)

Have you spent a large amount of time living in another country? If so, which one/s?

How frequently do you visit here?

Once a day or more

Few times a week

Few times a month

Only occasionally

What is your occupation?

Appendix H: Custom User Survey (with demographic questions) - Spanish

Número de usuario	Ubicación	Fecha	Hora

1. Percibo que esta calle tiene un:
 - a. Alto nivel de inclusividad
 - b. Nivel moderado de inclusividad
 - c. Nivel bajo de inclusividad
 - d. Nivel muy limitado de inclusividad

2. Percibo que:
 - a. Muchas actividades significativas pueden y tienen lugar en esta calle
 - b. Un nivel moderado de actividades significativas puede y tiene lugar en esta calle
 - c. Un bajo nivel de actividades significativas puede y tiene lugar en esta calle
 - d. Ninguna actividad significativa puede o tiene lugar en esta calle

3. En esta calle me siento:
 - a. Muy cómodo/a
 - b. Moderadamente cómodo/a
 - c. Algo cómodo/a
 - d. Nada cómodo/a

4. En esta calle me siento:
 - a. Muy seguro/a
 - b. Mayormente seguro/a
 - c. Algo inseguro/a
 - d. Nada seguro/a

5. Esta calle me parece:
 - a. Muy placentera
 - b. Moderadamente placentera
 - c. Algo desagradable
 - d. Para nada placentera

6. He usado esta calle de las siguientes maneras (seleccione cualquiera):

- a. Compras/Comer
- b. Trabajar
- c. Jugar/recreación
- d. Mirar gente
- e. Diversión/Pasar el rato
- f. Pedir limosna/Dar limosna
- g. Ver o hacer un performance
- h. Ser vendedor ambulante o comprarles
- i. Protestar
- j. Ocupando
- k. _____ Otro - por favor especifique

7. Considero que los siguientes uso de esta calle son aceptables: (seleccione cualquiera)

- a. Compras/Comer
- b. Trabajar
- c. Jugar/recreación
- d. Mirar gente
- e. Diversión/Pasar el rato
- f. Limosna
- g. Actuaciones callejeras
- h. Vendedores ambulantes
- i. Protestar
- j. Otras demostraciones
- k. _____ Otro - por favor especifique

8. ¿Qué posibilidades hay de presentar esta calle a otros / hacer planes grupales con amigos en este espacio?

- a. Muy probable
- b. Moderadamente probable
- c. Poco probable
- d. Nada probable

9. Cuando uso esta calle:

- a. Me encuentro con vecinos
- b. Me encuentro con amigos
- c. Me encuentro con colegas/socios
- d. Conozco gente nueva
- e. Interactúo con extraños
- f. No aplica

10. (Opcional) ¿Qué cambios le harías a esta calle?

11. (Opcional) ¿Qué le gusta más de esta calle?

¿Qué edad tiene? _____

¿Cuál es su género?

Masculino

Femenino

No binario

Otro _____

¿Cuál es su raza? _____

¿Por qué está usted en esta calle hoy?

Vivo aquí

Trabajo aquí

Vivo y trabajo aquí

Estoy visitando

Compro/Como aquí

_____ Otro - por favor especifique

Ha vivido por un periodo largo en otro país? Si es así, en cuál (es) país(es)?

¿Qué tan seguido visita este lugar?

Una vez al día o más

Algunas veces a la semana

Algunas veces al mes

Solo ocasionalmente

¿Cuál es su ocupación?

Appendix I: Demographic Information of Survey Participants

		Alvarado	Promenade
Age	<i>18-24</i>	3	2
	<i>25-34</i>	3	2
	<i>35-44</i>	5	3
	<i>45-54</i>	2	2
	<i>55-64</i>	0	4
	<i>65-74</i>	0	2
	<i>75+</i>	2	1
	<i>Unanswered</i>	1	0
Gender	<i>Female</i>	5	6
	<i>Male</i>	10	10
	<i>Unanswered</i>	1	0
Race	<i>African American or Black</i>	2	2
	<i>Asian</i>	1	3
	<i>Caucasian or White</i>	3	9
	<i>Hispanic or Latinx or Mexican American</i>	8	2
	<i>Unanswered</i>	2	
Language of Survey	<i>English</i>	9	14
	<i>Spanish</i>	7	2
Frequency of Visiting	<i>Once a day or more</i>	6	5
	<i>Few times a week</i>	2	2
	<i>Few times a month</i>	1	4
	<i>Occasionally</i>	3	5
	<i>N/A</i>	4	0

Purpose on the Street	<i>Live there</i>	4	3
	<i>Work there</i>	4	2
	<i>Live and work there</i>	3	1
	<i>Visiting/Shopping/Errands</i>	4	7
	<i>Petitioning/Volunteering</i>	1	1
	<i>People Watching</i>	0	2
Occupation	<i>Hairstylist</i>	1	
	<i>Petitioner</i>	1	
	<i>Security guard</i>	1	
	<i>Non-profit organization</i>	1	
	<i>Homeless</i>	2	
	<i>Street vendor (licensed)</i>	1	
	<i>Street vendor (unlicensed)</i>	1	
	<i>Salesperson</i>	2	
	<i>Librarian</i>	1	
	<i>Housewife</i>	1	1
	<i>Student</i>	2	1
	<i>N/A</i>	2	
	<i>Street Performer/Artist</i>		2
	<i>Retired</i>		4
	<i>Unemployed</i>		1
	<i>Professor</i>		1
	<i>Marketing</i>		2
	<i>Businesswoman</i>		1
	<i>Logistics</i>		1
	<i>Executive Assistant</i>		1
	<i>Lawyer</i>		1
Lived in other countries? (if so, which?)	<i>No</i>	7	8

	<i>Yes, Ukraine, Russia, Thailand, India, and Vietnam</i>	1	
	<i>Yes, Mexico</i>	3	1
	<i>N/A</i>	3	
	<i>Yes (did not list a country though)</i>	1	
	<i>Yes, Guatemala</i>	1	
	<i>Yes, "Asian countries"</i>		1
	<i>Yes, Sweden, Spain, Singapore and Argentina</i>		1
	<i>Yes, France, Denmark, Sweden, England</i>		1
	<i>Yes, Spain</i>		1
	<i>Yes, South Korea</i>		1
	<i>Yes, India</i>		1
	<i>Yes, New Zealand</i>		1

Appendix J: Interview Transcript - Lexis-Olivier Ray

July 29, 2020

[Please note: interview transcript has been lightly edited for clarity]

Joshua Blatt (Josh): I gave you a bit of an overview of what my project is, but I'll expand on that for just a minute before diving into questions. This academic Vikas Mehta created the Public Space Index. Basically it's meant to evaluate the quality of public space, with the baseline that good public space is accessible and open, it's meaningful in its design and activities it supports, it provides a sense of safety, physical and environmental comfort, convenience, sense of control and sensory pleasure. He has upwards of 40 variables, some are observed and scored by researchers like me, some are rated by users of streets in a survey. In the end you get scores of these categories and an overall score. It's not meant to capture everything about a space, but it's meant to be a good framework for evaluating our public spaces, public realm, and in turn the fostering of public life. Everyone is supposed to use it, or be able to use it, from cities down to community groups and students. It's not meant to provide exact prescriptions in or to a public space, but simply provide reliable and somewhat actionable evaluations. And I'm testing it out and trying to critically evaluate, partially through my own custom survey, and partially through interviews like these. The index itself includes questions on surveillance and policing, and my custom survey also asked people how they used the study streets, and what they view acceptable uses of those streets to be – so if it's okay for homeless people to use it, or for people to protest or occupy the space, or do street vending there. So those stood out to me as issues you might be able to speak on. But I welcome insight on any subject really. So I just wanted to give you a better idea of how I was approaching things.

Lexis-Olivier Ray (Lex): Yeah that's helpful.

Josh: Okay, so back in December and January I spoke at length to people who lived on the street, and I got three of them to participate in my surveys. You've done a lot of reporting on people experiencing homelessness and how they're treated. As someone who has been out there much more than me, looking at sanitary facilities, sanitation sweeps, the city's responses, all that. Just starting broadly on people's attitudes toward the unhoused, their experiences, what has stood out to you in Los Angeles? I've read some of your articles, but just speaking informally I guess, what have been the most impactful pieces of it?

Lex: So yeah, I've done a lot of reporting on, well there was one story on these Facebook groups, and anti-homeless vigilantism. One thing that's really stood out is just how organized people are about displacing the homeless. I also did another story about anti-homeless planters. And you know, stuff that you see or maybe hear about, but to actually see emails and correspondence between house residents, and how they view the homeless, and the homeless situation in Los Angeles, is pretty eye-opening. Just how much time and effort people spend to displace people than maybe offer them services or get to know them. And then I've seen the other side too as well, not necessarily stuff that I've written about, but just through my reporting, I've seen and interacted with a lot of organizers and people who are working with the unhoused communities and advocating for them. So I've seen both sides and they both really stand out.

Josh: Right, I grew up here, I always knew Los Angeles had housing issues, and I knew many people had issues with the unhoused. Visiting Skid Row, and especially places like Venice Beach, it was of course always brought to the forefront. But I came back after a number of years, and it's really driven home just how many people are experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, the extent of the situation I guess, how poorly view and treat them, how the city acts or fails to act. So have you noticed, especially with COVID-19, have you noticed any attitude shifts, or real on the ground shifts. In the last years, or just in the past few months?

Lex: Yeah I have. At the start of the pandemic the city council decided to basically hold the sanitation sweeps that they were doing. So I've noticed that some encampments have not experienced sweeps for months or weeks, which is a huge change from when they were happening, sometimes multiple times in one week. You know, in March or before that. So I think encampments kind of build-up in certain places, parks or [unintelligible]. I've also seen how the city has failed to respond to the immediate needs of the unhoused community during this pandemic, and also the more general needs, that they've needed for a long time.

Josh: What seems to be your understanding of the hold up, in terms of getting the handwashing stations refilled, fulfilling those immediate needs? Is it a lack of caring, a lack of money, is it just that priorities are elsewhere?

Lex: I think that mainly that there was no plan really, to implement this system. So it sounds like a great idea, and there is some money there, they're not that expensive. There just wasn't a system for rolling them out, and then maintaining them, and holding the company that is in charge of them accountable. It's complicated there's a lot of different departments involved. The city didn't come up with a plan that really suits the needs of the unhoused community.

Josh: Alright. So last year, I believe, you had a pretty cutting quote in one of your articles. "If I'm evicted onto the streets I will die because of greed." That was placed along with the number of unhoused people dying on the streets of LA. And that it's a death sentence especially for elderly people of color. And then you have this quote from councilman Mitch O'Farrell, "the reality is we have sensitive areas to consider, and as city leaders, we must strike the balance between the needs of those experiencing homelessness and keeping our public spaces safe and accessible." So I guess, broadly, where have you seen the city come down on that balance between they want public spaces to be nice for everyone, except for homeless, and trying to also help the homeless? Does that make sense?

[Article referenced: Ray 2019]

Lex: Yeah, the sanitation sweeps are the prime example. It's a huge debate at city council meetings, on both sides they're getting calls, mothers with kids taking their kids to school and the sidewalk being obstructed. And then people from the other side. And especially before this pandemic, they would lean toward the side of the housing community, and prioritize their needs over the unhoused community. There's been a lot of situations firstly with enforcement, I think just today actually they voted to continue to enforce the areas around the bridge housing sites, which they suspended for a while. So when it comes to daycares and schools and certain areas, they want to protect those areas, and who can be there.

Josh: Sure. So I'll circle back a little bit to homelessness I guess. But you've also been covering the recent protests. And my study streets are South Alvarado and the Promenade, but I'm also looking at more contextual stuff. Do you think some of the protests took place maybe on specific streets or specific areas quite purposefully to send a message, Santa Monica, the Grove, Beverly Hills? If so, what kind of messages were being sent, to whom, were people talking about this, did you overhear talk from the city about this?

Lex: Yeah people were talking about it. I was talking about it with a coworker of mine. May 30th Pan Pacific Park protest, which turned out to be one of the largest and most significant. But going into that me and him were discussing how we wanted to cover it. We were talking about how it was a little bit odd how they decided to meet there and have a protest there. I think in retrospect, like you said, brought up that it makes a lot more sense now, but going into it, we were both a little bit confused about why they had it there and not somewhere else. And I hear other people talking about the city, yeah I'd say I had a conversation too with someone in my neighborhood how they thought that it would be unlikely that the protests would make it to the Westlake Carson park area. He said that it had something to do with the gangs maybe, and how the protesters would experience more resistance maybe, more conflicts. Just because people that live in the neighborhood, their position on things. I haven't heard too much about it, but those two instances stick out.

Josh: Some say that police help shape urban spaces by enforcing "the existing order of the city" how they see fit, and so the lethal policing of black Americans and people of color is seen by some as "assaults on black placemaking." Do you think the protests tie into this idea, and to what extent? Did it seem like a factor to you?

Lex: Sorry can you just explain that further? I'm not sure exactly.

Josh: So there's something called placemaking, and this is just a general reference to it not an exact definition. Actually this is right from Wikipedia, "placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health happiness and well-being." So the idea that police can change the place by enforcing or not enforcing certain laws or how they patrol the place. In some theories, their policing is an assault on community's making the place how they would like it to be. Does that make sense? So the question was do you think the protests tie into this idea, to what extent, are the Black Lives Matter protests in part a placemaking movement?

Lex: Yeah I think so, if I understand the question correctly. I think that, yeah it's interesting that people are protesting about police violence, and we've seen so much police violence in these protests, and it really just emphasizes the point that for a lot of people they feel that the police aren't protecting them, and are actually hurting them and causing violence. I'm not sure if that answers your question directly, but.

Josh: No that's fine. Some of these are very broad, some are a little bit more pointed I guess. The next one I have is, first I'll ask the question, then I'll expand on it a bit. Do you think there is a discrepancy sometimes between the values people might say they have, the values they say they might prefer, and the values reflected in the spaces they use, or their own practices? There's a professor at UCLA's Luskin Center who wrote about the privatization of public squares in downtown LA back in the 90s. And she found that safety order and the banning of undesirables ranked as positive attributes among users in a couple of those spaces. And many of them also just liked that the squares were sparsely used. So with cities taking, or seeming to take more interest in what the public has to say about projects, getting more user input, how do you think these competing interests in a way are chosen between. The spaces should be, because they're public spaces, be open accessible and inclusive, versus you start actually getting public input, and many people don't want certain people using a space, or using it in a certain way. How do you see the city choosing between these competing interests and values?

Lex: Yeah I see that happening. Not so much in terms of space and who can access that. But recently the city announced just a couple days ago that they're expanding this community policing program that they established in Watts a couple years ago, as housing developments over there torn down, Christian(?) gardens, and they announced they were going to expand it to the entire department. And they were doing this, and they made a big deal about it at this press conference as a way to update the public on what they're doing to reform the LAPD. So to them, they're expanding this policing program, but people are asking for the police to be defunded, but they're actually expanding the police programs rather than taking away from it. And they justify this actually, ironically, from UCLA, and research funded by millionaires and people that definitely have a political stake. And they surveyed the community, and supposedly this is what the community wants, the community in Watts, the people that participated in the survey were paid, I understand, and it was supposed to be this program, poor people black people, which are the people that are calling for the police to be defunded, this is not what they imagined.

Josh: So broadly, when decisions are being made in LA by the city, which voices or categories of voices do you think are going heard and unheard, what have you seen and experienced?

Lex: I mean, that's one of things about all the decision making involving the unhoused communities, they are completely left out of the process. There's advocates and organizers and stuff that speak on their behalf, but it is very rare that the people making the decisions actually have conversations with people that are unhoused. There's disconnect between a lot of things. I think a lot of it is just city leaders and people that don't have the on the streets experience, making decisions. It's kind of wild. Sometimes I wonder how these people sleep at night, just [unintelligible]. I just can't believe that they're okay with letting things going on with this, especially with unhoused folk. Once you get out on the street and get talking to people, it's hard not to sympathize and want to listen more, and see things from their perspective.

Josh: Yeah absolutely, so the study I'm basing this off of, Vikas Mehta's PSI, there were some researchers in Australia who expanded off it, and they specifically said in their study that they did not speak to homeless people, and did not include them in their surveying. Which I did not understand, so I made a point of very purposely going to speak with some. It's not as big of a focus in my research, but I also touch on street vendors. And you have some recent reporting on that. So what does it say that the city is strict with street vendors, often not the wealthiest of business owners. And in theory they're doing already what a lot of restaurants and stores are trying to do, go outside. So how do you see that being reconciled? How have they been coping?

Lex: Yeah it's been really interesting. After banning, essentially banning street vending for months, the city announced the Al Fresco program, which was a system that basically allows restaurants to quickly get permits, the ability to vend outside. And that's what they've done, what they've done since creating a moratorium on street vending is they've created I believe a fund that provides relief for street vendors, and just my experience has been noticing how they've backed off a lot with citations and monitoring street vendors. But that's stopped completely, just go down [?]. The biggest thing is they're still a little open, getting permitted and that process for them is difficult for them to navigate. That is still a big barrier for a lot of street vendors.

Josh: Ok, so I mentioned, I'm looking at South Alvarado and the Promenade, I just wanted to ask broadly, do you have any location-specific or thoughts on these places, and the intersection between public space and homelessness or the protests, or anything else you've been working on?

Lex: Yeah Alvarado, the Westlake-MacArthur Park stuff, metro stop, has been really interesting. Because you have street vendors there, and the information(?) transit hub of course. An interesting thing about the street vendors there is that area, once you come out of the metro stop, the area that has been permitted by the city, and those vendors, as I'm sure you know, spaces from the city it's all organized. But it's also a heavily controlled area, just the permitting structure with the city, the street vendors in that area with the yellow tents. But also because it's metro property, I've seen a lot of enforcement over there. I've seen cops just walk up to unhoused people or seemingly unhoused people, and ask them to leave, citing that it's private property, and there's no loitering or something like that. So it's a highly regulated area, and surveilled and controlled within it. But you also have this melting pot of people passing through MacArthur Park, those who live there, street vendors permitted by the city, and then just a few steps down, vendors that are unpermitted. So I think that's one of the things that draws me to the area, there's a lot going on. You see different interactions with street vendors, homeless, police.

Josh: Westlake to my understanding has been subject to a lot of gentrification in recent years, but at least in my eyes, South Alvarado hasn't seemed to be heavily gentrified yet. Do you think that's the future of the area, or what do you see going on there going forward, if you have any thoughts on it?

Lex: Yeah I mean it's definitely happening, it is gentrifying, but like you said, at least right now, South Alvarado, you know nothing like the gentrification rates that we've seen in like Highland Park or Venice. But I have been wondering how the pandemic is going to affect Westlake. I know there's been a lot of cases there, it's definitely impacted the community it's considered a high-risk community. Last time I was there there were signs all over the place, people were masked up. And then also I've noticed a lot of police, arrests, signs, buildings that are coming down. So I don't know man, it's tough to say. But it seems like it's heading in the direction of what's going up, people being displaced. Also I know a lot of people that live there, that live in [unintelligible] or motels or [unintelligible] so I wonder about those communities as well.