

SYDENHAM STREET REVIVED: A PUBLIC SPACE EXPERIMENT

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Sydenham Street Revived (SSR) was a citizen-led urban experiment conducted in 2015 that aimed to test the idea of permanently pedestrianizing a section of Sydenham Street in the heart of downtown Kingston (Figure E1). By installing a temporary public space in this location, organizers hoped to demonstrate that transforming this area into a permanent public space would create a successful public space that would be a benefit to the community (Figure E2). Using video footage, photographs, and observations recorded before and during the project, this report analyzes the use of the space in order to evaluate the claim that the SSR project created a successful public place.

Research Questions

1. Did the SSR project create a successful public space on Sydenham Street?
2. What are the important lessons from SSR project for a permanent public space on Sydenham Street?

METHODS

Two methods were used to conduct this research: a qualitative observational survey based on Project for Public Spaces *Place Diagram* evaluation tool, and quantitative data collection that involved counting both the number of pedestrians passing through the space and the number of people sitting in the space. Together, these methods were highly complementary and helped address one another's weaknesses. Using these methods, an analysis was conducted which was used to inform a number of recommendations for a permanent public space on Sydenham Street.

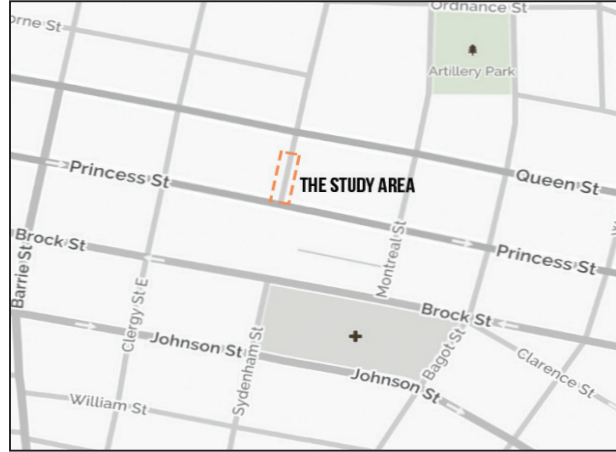


Figure E1: The location of the study area in downtown Kingston, ON (Mapquest, 2016).



Figure E2: The Sydenham Street Revived pop-up park.

KEY FINDINGS

The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) defines successful public spaces as places that are accessible, comfortable, social, and active. At the beginning of this research an additional test was established for measuring the success of the SSR project: did more people choose to use the space while it was a pop-up park?

The qualitative observational survey based on the PPS evaluation criteria revealed that the SSR project positively influenced almost all aspects of the sociability of the study area and increased the number of different types of uses activities that occurred there (Table E1). It also improved the physical comfort of the space. The SSR project was also found to have had some negative effects on the space. Accessibility was reduced, changing the functionality of the space for people with special needs and making it less convenient as a movement corridor.

Table E1: Qualitative Observational Survey Summary.

QUALITATIVE OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY SUMMARY				
ACCESS & LINKAGES		BEFORE	DURING	CHANGE
Accessible	1. There are no fences or other barriers.			No change
	2. The space functions for people with special needs.			Decrease
	3. People can use a variety of transportation options – bus, car, bicycle, etc. – to reach the space.			No change
	4. The space does not use design to deliberately exclude certain users or types of use.			No change
Connected	5. The space is well-connected to the surrounding urban fabric.			No change
	6. The space can be seen from a distance.			No change
	7. The interior of the space is visible from the outside.			No change
	8. From inside the space it is possible to perceive human activity beyond the edges of the space.			No change
Convenient	9. The space is easy to get to.			No change
	10. Paths through the space take people where they want to go.			Decrease
USES & ACTIVITIES		BEFORE	DURING	CHANGE
Active	11. People are using the space.			No change
Rating Scale				
		● Strongly Agree	◐ Agree	◑ Uncertain
			◒ Disagree	○ Strongly Disagree

QUALITATIVE OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY SUMMARY				
<i>Fun</i>	12. The overall design of the space is imaginative or exciting, or there are playful or fun elements within the space.			Increase
<i>Vital</i>	13. There is a mix of different land uses.			No change
	14. Many different types of activities are occurring.			Increase
	15. People are using the space throughout the day.			No change
<i>Special</i>	16. People are stopping to look at and/or take photos of the space.			Increase
SOCIABILITY		BEFORE	DURING	CHANGE
<i>Interactive</i>	1. People are watching other people.			Increase
	2. People are stopping to talk to other people.			Increase
	3. There are groups of people occupying the space.			Increase
<i>Diverse</i>	4. People of varying ages are using the space.			No change
<i>Stewardship</i>	5. People are actively caring for the space, e.g. by picking up litter when they see it.			Increase
<i>Friendly</i>	6. People are exchanging greetings and seem to know one another.			Increase
COMFORT & IMAGE		BEFORE	DURING	CHANGE
<i>Safe</i>	7. It is easy to see inside the space from outside.			No change
	8. There are no dark or hidden areas.			No change
	9. There are plenty of "eyes on the street".			No change
	10. The space gives the overall impression of safety.			No change
<i>Maintained</i>	11. The space is clean and free of litter.			No change
	12. The built environment is well-maintained.			No change
<i>Sittable</i>	13. There are many places to sit.			Increase
	14. There are different types of places to sit.			Increase
	15. People can choose to sit in the sun or the shade.			Increase
	16. Seating can be moved around by users.			Increase
Rating Scale Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree				

To be considered successful, the SSR project needed to attract more users. Despite the fact that three key generators of foot traffic - car parking, passenger drop-offs, and the Starbucks coffee shop (which closed shortly after the project began) - were excluded or missing during SSR, pedestrian counts during the project remained comparable to or better than the counts taken before the project (Figure E3). Stationary activity counts (the number of people observed sitting in the space) also quintupled during SSR. These results prove that the changes to the space made it a more attractive place for people to both visit and stay (Figure E4).

Combined, the findings of both analyses support the claim that SSR project created a successful public space. A limitation of this research is that the SSR project took place at the end of summer, making it difficult to draw conclusions about use at other times of the year. A second, longer pilot project would address this limitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Consider a flexible street design.** The public space within flexible streets can be expanded or shrunk as needed or desired. A flexible design could be used as a platform for piloting different and longer closures of Sydenham Street.
2. **A continuous, barrier-free surface.** Flexible streets are generally characterized by no or minimal curbs, which increases flexibility and improves accessibility.
3. **Places to sit.** Stationary activities are made possible when there are places to sit. To make the space more inclusive, seating should be public.
4. **Opportunities for public and community-created art.** Art enlivens public space and gives people a reason to connect with one another.
5. **Connect the grid.** Areas with a high degree of connectivity support walkability. An opportunity exists to create a mid-block walkway that could connect both sides of Sydenham Street.

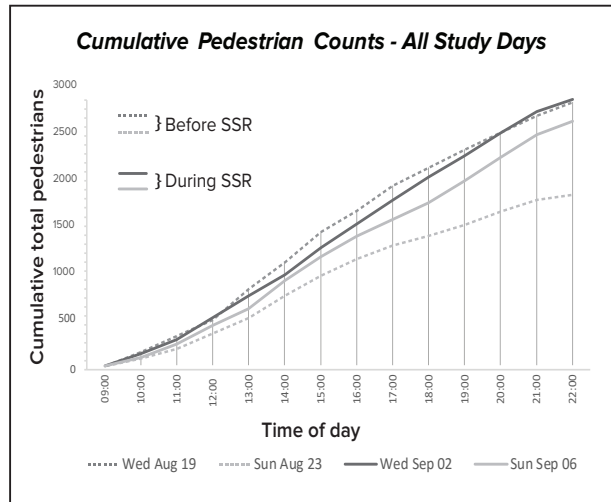


Figure E3: A graph of the cumulative pedestrian counts for all of the study days.

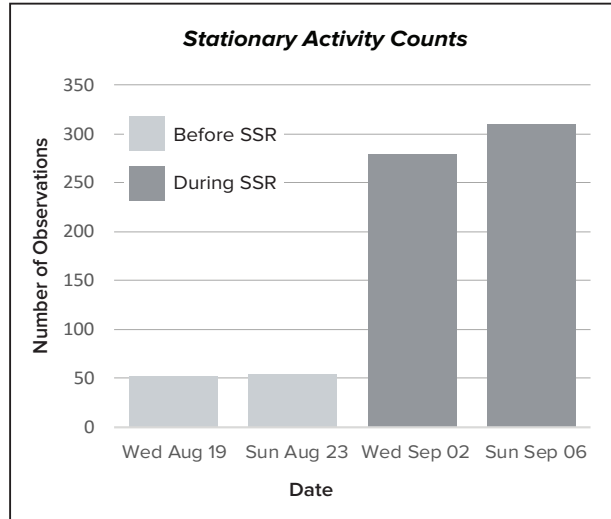


Figure E4: A graph of the stationary activity counts for all of the study days.