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.
**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.*

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

*Rating Scale*  🌝 Strongly Agree  🌝 Agree  🌝 Uncertain  🌝 Disagree  🌝 Strongly Disagree
### QUALITATIVE OBSERVATIONAL SURVEY SUMMARY

#### Fun
12. The overall design of the space is imaginative or exciting, or there are playful or fun elements within the space. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

#### Vital
13. There is a mix of different land uses. - ![No change](Rating Scale)
14. Many different types of activities are occurring. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
15. People are using the space throughout the day. - ![No change](Rating Scale)

#### Special
16. People are stopping to look at and/or take photos of the space. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

#### SOCIABILITY

**Interactive**
1. People are watching other people. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
2. People are stopping to talk to other people. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
3. There are groups of people occupying the space. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

**Diverse**
4. People of varying ages are using the space. - ![No change](Rating Scale)

**Stewardship**
5. People are actively caring for the space, e.g. by picking up litter when they see it. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

**Friendly**
6. People are exchanging greetings and seem to know one another. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

#### COMFORT & IMAGE

**Safe**
7. It is easy to see inside the space from outside. - ![No change](Rating Scale)
8. There are no dark or hidden areas. - ![No change](Rating Scale)
9. There are plenty of "eyes on the street". - ![No change](Rating Scale)
10. The space gives the overall impression of safety. - ![No change](Rating Scale)

**Maintained**
11. The space is clean and free of litter. - ![No change](Rating Scale)
12. The built environment is well-maintained. - ![No change](Rating Scale)

**Sittable**
13. There are many places to sit. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
14. There are different types of places to sit. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
15. People can choose to sit in the sun or the shade. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)
16. Seating can be moved around by users. - ![Increase](Rating Scale)

**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 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.