

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.

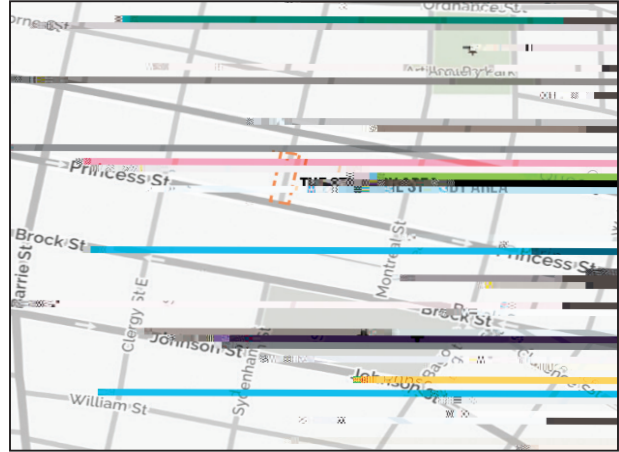


Figure E1: The location of the study area in downtown Kingston, ON (Mapquest, 2016).

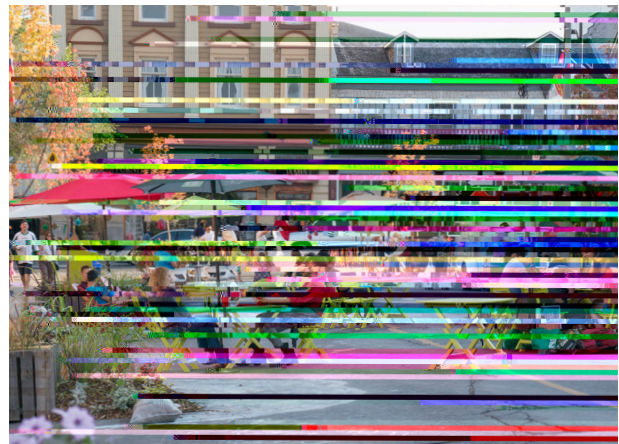
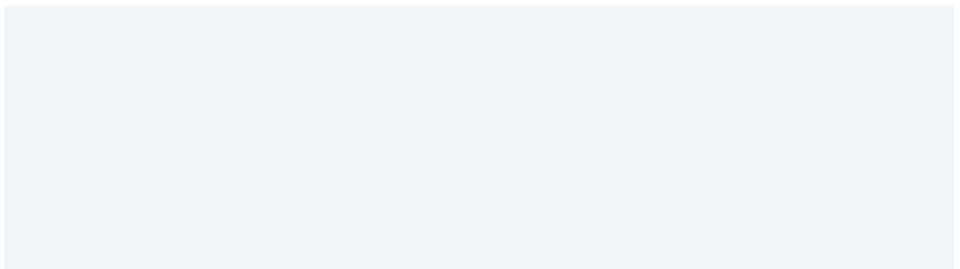


Figure E2: The Sydenham Street Revived pop-up park.



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 it (Figure E4).